My friend Professor Benjamin Kedar once told me that the great historian Shelomo Dov Goitein used to say that every one of the scholarly works that he wrote contained at least one cardinal error. This admission by a historian whose monumental research will continue to arouse admiration in coming generations expresses a feeling that is familiar to ordinary historians like myself, and I assume that it is as well to the participants of this conference. I confess that I have often had occasion to regret the flaws that I now find in my publications, not only trivial mistakes or conjectures that were refuted by sources that were unknown to me at the time of writing, but also, and mainly, errors deriving from flawed judgment, from groundless assumptions, or from ideological views that found their way into my scholarship without my being aware of it.

With your permission, I would like to present some “critical thoughts” about my book *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, which I have prepared for this conference and written from a distance of more than thirty years. This book was first published in Hebrew by the Magnes Press of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1983 and was largely based on my doctoral dissertation, which I completed in 1978.¹ An English translation was published by Oxford University Press in the Littman Library of Jewish Civilization series in 1989. It was translated by the English scholar and polymath, Professor Raphael Loewe.² The book was published in Portuguese in 2000 by the Imago publishing house in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.³ In contrast to the English edition, which I went over meticulously (and I frequently had to disagree with the learned and opinionated translator), the Brazilian publisher did not allow me to read the full translation in advance. The editor at the publishing house claimed that they had already published translations of books more important than mine, including books of the Bible, and they had never encountered objections from the authors (not even from those of the books of the Bible, I assume). I made corrections and additions to the English edition as well as to the manuscript of the

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¹ Yosef Kaplan, *Mi-natsrut le-yahadut: Hayaw u-foalo shel ha-anus Yitzhak Orobio de Castro* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1982).
² Yosef Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism: The Story of Isaac Orobio de Castro*, trans. Raphael Loewe (Oxford: The Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1989).
³ Yosef Kaplan, *Do Cristianismo ao Judaísmo: A História de Isaac Orôbio de Castro*, trans. Henrique de Araújo Mesquita (Rio de Janeiro: Imago Editora, 2000).

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110576191-002
French translation, which was completed in 1997, though, apparently, it will never be published despite the many hours I invested in examining it.

But what led me to deal with Isaac Orobio de Castro in the first place? Why in particular did I write my doctoral dissertation about him? In the curriculum of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in the late 1960s, little attention was paid to the Sephardic Diaspora after the expulsion from Spain. The Early Modern period also had little place in the courses offered by the Department of Jewish History (as it began to be regarded as a distinct period in European historiography only in the 1950s; and in Jewish historiography this of course took a few more years). The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were swallowed up in the long Middle Ages. In the Department of History, it was possible to study the period of the Reformation under the excellent historian, Yehoshua Arieli, but, for example, no courses were offered on the history of Spain and Portugal, and among the prominent scholars in the Department of History there was no expert in the history of Spain and Portugal. In the Department of Jewish History some courses and seminars were offered, dealing with various aspects of the Early Modern period (without reference to that concept), but they mainly focused on the Jews of Poland and Lithuania, or those of Central Europe.

The history of Spanish Jewry in the Middle Ages, by contrast, thrived at the Hebrew University from the outset, as the first historian to receive a position at the new university on Mount Scopus, both in European medieval history and in Jewish history, was Yitzhak (Fritz) Baer, the great historian of the Jews of Christian Spain. Haim Beinart, Baer’s student, continued in the tradition of his teacher, but he concentrated mainly on study of the conversos, the Inquisition, and the expulsion from Spain. Baer, who wrote a monumental History of the Jews in Christian Spain, did not deal with Spanish Jewry after the expulsion and did not write about it, beyond a brief study on Isaac Abravanel’s historiographical and political concepts and a few general remarks on “Marranos” in his controversial book, Galut [Exile], which was first published in German, in 1936. This book, which is characterised by fierce ethnocentrism, was written under the influence of the tragic events in Germany at that time, when quite a few of Baer’s professors joined the Nazi Party. I heard from my own

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4 See some interesting remarks about the beginnings of a notion of a distinctive “early modern” period of European history in John Huxtable Elliott, History in the Making (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), 58–60.

5 On his impact on Jewish historiography, see David N. Myers, Re-inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 129–150.

6 Yosef Kaplan, “Haim Beinart and the Historiography of the Conversos in Spain,” in Exile and Diaspora. Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart, edited by Aharon Mirsky, Avraham Grossman and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1991): 11–16. His last book was a detailed study of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain; see Haim Beinart, The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain (London and Portland, Oregon: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001).

7 Yitzhak Fritz Baer, Galut (Berlin: Schocken, 1936).
teachers that they took part in a seminar given by Baer on Kol Sakhal (The Voice of a Fool), though it is very doubtful whether he offered it more than once.

When I started studying at the Hebrew University in the early 1960s, Baer had already retired and had decided several years earlier to concentrate on the Jews of the Second Temple and Mishnaic periods. In 1965, I took a seminar with Haim Beinart, and he actually taught about the Sephardic Diaspora after the expulsion, mainly in the sixteenth century. In that seminar I wrote a paper on Isaac Cardoso and his book, Las Excelencias de los Hebreos, several years before the publication of Yerushalmi’s monumental study. In that year I also discovered the wonderful Harry Friedenwald collection in the National Library, a collection of Jewish books about medicine, which included dozens of books written by Jewish physicians, not all of which were about medicine. The collection of course included books by conversos from Spain and Portugal. I still remember the excitement that seized me during the first hours I spent in the reading room of that collection, an experience that left a great impression on me. I can recall my surprise at finding the eulogy written by the physician Fernando Cardoso (that is, Isaac Cardoso—at the time he was still living as a Christian in Madrid), on the death of the famous playwright, Lope de Vega, who was a friend of his. Lope de Vega is known for his venomous anti-Semitic opinions. Yet I had found a text by a marrano, who was later to return to Judaism and finish his life in the ghetto of Verona, who was a close friend of Lope de Vega’s and even lamented his death. I sat with Dr. Yehoshua Leibowitz, that great and modest scholar, the cousin of the famous Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and translated the Spanish text into Hebrew. He explained patiently that, according to Cardoso’s account, who was present at Lope de Vega’s death, it could be surmised that he died of a heart attack. This was an exceptional experience for me, the triumphant feeling of a student at the start of his path, who had discovered secrets of the heart of the greatest of Spanish playwrights.

8 Baer attributed this work to “an unknown author, who apparently belonged” to Uriel da Costa’s circle. On this fascinating book see Talya Fishman, Shaking the Pillars of Exile: “Voice of a Fool,” an Early Modern Jewish Critique of Rabbinic Culture (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
9 Israel Jacob Yuval, “Yitzhak Baer and the Search for Authentic Judaism,” in The Jewish Past Revisited: Reflections on Modern Jewish Historians, edited by David N. Myers and David B. Ruderman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 77–87.
10 Yshac Cardoso, Las excelencias de los Hebreos (Amsterdam: David de Castro Tartas, 1679).
11 Fernando Cardoso, Oración fúnebre en la muerte de Lope de Vega (Madrid: por la viuda de Iuan González, 1635).
12 See, among others, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, “Lope de Vega y los judíos,” Bulletin Hispanique 75, no. 1 (1973): 73–112; Joseph H. Silverman, “Perduración del paradigma antisemita medieval en el teatro de Lope de Vega,” in El teatre durant l’Edat Mitjana i el Renaixement, edited by Jesús Francesc Massip (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1986): 63–70; Alexander Samson, “Antisemitism, Class and Lope de Vega’s ‘El niño inocente de la Guardia,’” Hispanic Research Journal 3.2 (2002): 107–122; Ingrid Simson, “Un ejemplo de antisemitismo en el teatro de Lope de Vega: ‘El Brasil restituido,’” in El olivo y la espada. Estudios sobre el antisemitismo en España (siglos xvi–xx), edited by Pere Joan i Tous and Heike Nottebaum (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer / Romania Judaica 6, 2003): 229–242.
Every day that I spent in the Friedenwald Collection provided me with new discoveries. I found many books in Spanish and Portuguese there, as well as books in Latin and other languages. Among other things I came upon a fine copy of De veritate religionis Christianae amica collatio cum erudito Judaeo by Philip van Limborch, and this was the first time I encountered the name of Isaac Orobio de Castro. A short time afterward I wrote a paper on the dispute between Limborch and Orobio de Castro during a seminar given by Professor Shmuel Ettinger. At that very time I became acquainted with the book by I. S. Révah, written in 1959, about Spinoza and Juan de Prado, and soon afterward I read the articles by Révah on the crisis of faith in the Sephardic community in Amsterdam in Spinoza’s time, and with great enthusiasm I followed the reports published by this diligent and tireless scholar every year in the annual of the Collège de France. These publications contain vast amounts of information about the intellectual ferment in Amsterdam, about Uriel da Costa, and of course fascinating information about Baltasar Orobio during his time in Spain. I decided to focus on this man’s life and literary works and to find the connection between the student who studied at the Madre de Dios College in Alcalá de Henares and the Jew who disputed with the Arminian theologian, Philip van Limborch. By means of this research I wanted to open up a window into the world of the “Marranos” of the seventeenth century and that of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam, about which I knew very little. It should be mentioned that Révah himself also knew very little about the Amsterdam community, and not until the last decade of his life did he become acquainted with a small part of the archive of the Sephardic community, which only became accessible to scholars at that time.

After writing the seminar paper on Cardoso, I was asked to translate part of his apologetic book on the “virtues of the Jews” from Spanish into Hebrew for the Dorot (Generations) series published by the Bialik Institute publishing house in Jerusa-

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13 The book was printed in Gouda in 1687. On the argument between Limborch and Orobio de Castro, see Peter T. van Rooden and Jan W. Wesselinus, “The Early Enlightenment and Judaism: The ‘Civil Dispute’ between Philippus van Limborch and Isaac Orobio de Castro,” Studia Rosenthaliana 21 (1987): 140 – 153.

14 I. S. Révah, Spinoza et le Dr Jean de Prado (Paris-La Haye: Mouton & Co, 1959); I. S. Révah, “Aux origines de la rupture spinozienne: nouveaux documents sur l’incroyance dans la communauté judéo-portugaise d’Amsterdam à l’époque de l’excommunication de Spinoza,” Revue des études juives 123 (1964): 359 – 431; I. S. Révah, “Aux origines de la rupture spinozienne [II]: Nouvel examen des origines, du déroulement et des conséquences de l’affaire Spinoza-Prado-Ribera,” Annuaire du Collège de France 70 (1970): 562 – 578; Annuaire du Collège de France 71 (1971): 574 – 589; Annuaire du Collège de France 72 (1972): 641 – 663. A volume including Révah’s studies on the “Marranos” and the intellectual ferment among the Sephardim in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, was edited by Henry Méchoulan, Pierre-François Moreau and Carsten Lorenz Wilke: I. S. Révah, Des Marranes à Spinoza (Paris: Vrin, 1995).

15 See Richard Henry Popkin, “Intellectual Autobiography,” in The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin, edited by Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), 103 – 149, here 121.
My translation was published with my historical introduction in 1971. At the end of that introduction I added a sentence stating that when I received the final page proofs of the book, I also received the excellent book by Yosef Haiym Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, which had appeared very recently.¹⁷

Yerushalmi’s book made a huge impression on me. I read it breathlessly. A short time afterward, in the spring of 1972, I held my first conversation with him. He was visiting Israel at the time, and I went to Haifa to meet him. At the start of our meeting, I had the feeling that Yerushalmi was examining me very closely. Our conversation lasted several hours, longer than had been planned, and it sowed the seeds of a friendship that lasted for nearly forty years, until his death.

Without any special effort, readers of my book will feel the clear and unequivocal influence of Yerushalmi’s book on my study of Orobio. Both books are occasionally mentioned as parallel works on the lives and thought of two Portuguese New Christians who were raised in Spain and educated at universities there at the time of that country’s political crisis and who later returned to Judaism and joined one of the Jewish communities in the Western Sephardic Diaspora.

At the Hebrew University I was privileged to study with excellent historians, but the two teachers whose influence on me was decisive were Jacob Katz and Shmuel Ettinger. From the former I acquired tools for the sociological analysis of traditional and pre-modern societies, and from Ettinger an acquaintance with the intellectual currents of Europe in the Early Modern period. He is also the one who introduced me to Richard Popkin’s *History of Scepticism*, a book that influenced me no less than that of Yerushalmi.¹⁸ I met Popkin for the first time in Amsterdam in 1974, and my connection with him, which continued until his death, was extremely precious to me. Thanks to Popkin, I met a number of scholars in the United States and Europe who dealt with various aspects of the intellectual history of the Early Enlightenment. Along with him, and with Henry Méchoulan from Paris, we organised an international conference on Menasseh Ben Israel and his world.¹⁹ I met with Popkin frequently until his final years and the conversations with him were always challenging.

I was familiar with the manuscripts in the Ets Haim Library before visiting Amsterdam, thanks to the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts at the National Library in Jerusalem, one of the central institutions for Jewish Studies throughout the

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¹⁶ Yitzhak Cardoso, *Ma’lot ha-‘Ivrim: Perakim*, trans. Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: The Bialik Institute, 1971).

¹⁷ Yosef Haim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto. Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (New York and London: Columbia University Press 1971).

¹⁸ Its first version was published under the title Richard Henry Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960).

¹⁹ Yosef Kaplan, Henry Méchoulan and Richard Henry Popkin eds., *Menasseh ben Israel and his World* (Leiden, New York, København and Köln: E.J. Brill, 1989).
world. The entire collection of manuscripts in the Ets Haim Library was microfilmed, along with most of the Hebrew manuscripts that are dispersed all over the world.

In 1973–1974 for the first time I was able to devote an entire year to work in libraries and archives in Europe. I lived in Amsterdam most of the time and worked in the wonderful municipal archives, as well as in the Biblioteca Rosenthaliana, of course, but especially in the Ets Haim Library. Jorge Luis Borges wrote that he imagined paradise as a kind of library (Yo, que me figuraba el Paraíso/ Bajo la especie de una biblioteca).²⁰ What the Argentinian author imagined became an actual experience for me in the Ets Haim Library. During that year, I was almost the only scholar who worked in that enchanted library, and, since the members of the congregation asked me to fill in for the librarian who left in the middle of the winter, I could enter it every day of the week without the strict restrictions that were always imposed on visitors. I also went to London and Oxford that year. I examined manuscripts and, in the British Library, I perused Orobio’s medical work on bloodletting.²¹ This made me realize that he had been part of a scientific dispute with about a dozen other physicians. I went to the municipal archive in Antwerp, and I worked in the Royal Archives and Royal Library in Brussels. I also went to the Benedictine monastery of Montserrat, near Barcelona, and in its library I found a copy of Alonso de Zepeda’s book on Raymundus Lull.²² I spent two weeks in Paris and examined the manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale and I stayed in Madrid for a month working in the Historical Archive and in the National Library, with a number of excursions to Cuenca, in order to read the relevant Inquisition files. For an Israeli graduate student for whom European libraries and archives were inaccessible, this was a fabulous year full of surprises and discoveries.

Yerushalmi’s book served as a model and also set high standards for me, which I doubt that I met. But the influence of Yerushalmi’s book also had negative consequences: I was caught up in Yerushalmi’s model and did not succeed in freeing myself from it, as is necessary for critical research. One of the serious flaws in my book is that it is written entirely from the perspective of Jewish History, which, for historians like me who grew up in what is usually called the Jerusalem School, means: the History of the Jewish People. I wrote my book as if the story of the New Christians was only a chapter in the history of the Jewish people. I have no doubt that this story is also part of Jewish history, but it belongs to other histories as well. The passage From Christianity to Judaism or From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto, was of

²⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, “Poema de los dones,” in El hacedor, Obras completas 1923–1972 (Buenos Aires: Emecé editores, 1974), 809.
²¹ Orobio de Castro, Controvertitur utrum materialibus morbis in choantibus sanguinis missio revulsiva iuxta Hippocratis et Galeni dogmata per distantissimas venas effici debeat (Seville: apud Ignatium de Lyra, 1653).
²² Alonso de Zepeda, Defensa de los términos y doctrina de S. Raymundo Lullio sobre el misterio de S.S.S. Trinidad, contra cierto rescribente judío de la Sinagoga de Amsterdam (Brussels: en casa de Baltasar Vivien, 1666).
course a well-traveled path; however, other options existed: they were no less available and, as it happens, equally well-traveled. Isaac Orobio’s Jewish identity was not embedded in him at birth, and he might not necessarily have clung to it of his own free will. It was acquired and constructed as a result of complex and interwoven historical and cultural interactions. Other New Christian intellectuals—physicians, jurists, and philosophers like Juan de Prado and Orobio de Castro—chose other options rather than returning to Judaism. While I was aware of the other options and did not completely ignore their existence, I did not consider them with the proper seriousness. Orobio de Castro’s path to Judaism was not marked out, nor was it, of course, inevitable.

I believe I managed to prove that he was already an active Judaiser in Spain, performing certain commandments that indicate strong, even exceptional commitment to Judaism, commitment above and beyond the ordinary, almost passive commitment shown by most of the conversos of his time, even those who belonged to a group of loyal Judaisers. His father, Manuel Álvares, was also an active Judaiser, and Isaac (Baltasar) was circumcised as an adolescent at his father’s initiative. Orobio took part in Jewish prayers and ceremonies from his youth and he also served as the leader of a group of Portuguese New Christian Judaisers in various cities in Andalusia. Judging by rather clear indications, which I pointed out in my book, he even wore ritual fringes, a custom that was extremely rare among Iberian New Christians. According to his testimony before the Inquisition in Seville, he observed Jewish customs for no less than twenty-four years! Similarly, I took note of the subversive element that was expressed in some of his actions and is hinted at, for example, in the long poem that he wrote in 1637, at the age of twenty or twenty-one, about the epidemic of plague that broke out in Málaga in that year:

La Causa innensa, y causa no causada,
Por delitos humanos ofendida....
Rigrosa permite, que influencia
Castigue tanto error con pestilencia.²⁶

²³ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 7.
²⁴ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 79 – 92.
²⁵ See Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid, Sección Inquisición, leg. 2987, fol. 2v: “testificación [...] de un Armenio que en traje de tal andauavendiendo ropa por las calles (de Cádiz) y en una de ellas este Reo le metió en una casa puerta y apartándolo a solas le preguntó con todo secreto si era judío porque el traje que traya era muy semejante a los judíos y aviéndole dicho el Armenio que era Cathólico Christiano, este Reo le respondió: no rezeles ni temas que yo soy Hebreo y sigo el mismo camino y para que lo creas alzando la ropilla le mostro cosido a su jubón una señal redonda como de terziopelo o raso verde y que le dio tres reales... pidiéndole y encargándole que no dixese nada a nadie...”; cf. Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 84 – 85.
²⁶ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 15 – 24; Yosef Kaplan, “El testimonio de Baltasar Alvarez de Orobio sobre la peste de Málaga en 1637,” Helmantica 29 (1978): 212–231.
In this poem, which is shot through with Catholic symbols, Orobio included several subversive lines containing a subtle but rather clear hint of his hidden Jewish faith, his belief in “the cause of causes” free of all Catholic symbolism, and, in contrast, the “errors” of Christianity, about which he would write at length years later in the anti-Christian polemical works that he composed in Amsterdam. Similarly, I pointed to certain books he kept separately from the other books on his shelves, that is, the books he consulted frequently. Among others, these included *Flos Sanctorum* [The Flower of the Saints] by Alonso de Villegas Selvago, a work that was very popular among the *conversos* at that time, because it describes the lives of the saints who were active before the advent of Jesus, which is to say, the heroes of biblical Judaism, from the patriarchs to the prophets. Under the regime of Inquisition censorship, this book, along with others like it, became a source from which New Christians drew religious inspiration, as can be learned from quite a bit of testimony before Inquisition tribunals and from works written after their authors openly returned to Judaism.

I also paid attention in my book to the occasions when he went out of his way to emphasise his loyalty to Christianity. For example, in a medical debate on the appropriate part of the body to which bleeding should, when necessary, be applied, which occurred between 1652 and 1653, Orobio was the only one among the twelve participating physicians who concluded his words with a dedication to the Holy Trinity and the Virgin Mary. I argued that these words and similar expressions in his writings were part of the Christian veil in which he enveloped himself so that his Christianity would not be in doubt.

But is that explanation sufficient? Is it convincing? Were all the paintings on decidedly Christian themes that decorated the walls of his home in Cádiz, pictures of the Virgin Mary, of Jesus and John the Baptist, of Mary Magdalene, of Saint Thomas and so on, meant only as camouflage? Was the painting of Jacob wrestling with the angel the only one that expressed authentic and true inner belief? And did it necessarily have the meaning for him that we attribute to it? What can be learned from the fact that, when he lived in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, he married Isabel Pérez de la Peña, a woman who did not belong to the *nação* and who was the daughter of Old Christians not from *converso* stock? Did not willingness to marry a woman who was not from the *converso* ethnic group indicate assimilation in Andalusian Christian society, or willingness to break through the social barriers that separated New Christians from Old Christians, and perhaps even the desire to merge into Christian society? And perhaps one ought to credit Baltasar Orobio’s confession before the Seville Inquisition in January 1656, when he claimed that for five years he had ceased to observe Jewish ceremonies, having been convinced by the writings of Pablo de Santa

27 Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 76–77.
28 Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 67–75.
29 Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 76.
30 Kaplan, *From Christianity to Judaism*, 67.
María, who restored him to Christian faith? Is there any connection between this turnabout, if it indeed occurred, and his marriage to Isabel?³¹ Do the three questions he asked Rabbi Mosseh Refael d’Aguilar during his first days in Amsterdam about the meaning of el Burguense’s biblical exegesis not show that he was still in doubt about the Christological interpretations of the author of Scrutinium Scripturarum and was unable to free himself of the influence of the apostate from Burgos?³² His unequivocal words to Juan de Prado appear to contradict such a possibility, but perhaps he did not write the full truth then? In his letter to Prado he showed extraordinary expertise in the biographies of converts from Judaism such as Pablo de Santa María and his descendants as well as Sixtus of Sienna.³³ What does this interest in their lives testify to? Is it not possible that these converts became for him, at a certain stage, perhaps after he married a Christian woman, a positive reference group? Even if matters are far from being unequivocal, there was still good reason to ask these questions. When I reread my text with the perspective of years, it appears to me that I refrained from asking all the relevant questions because I was caught up in a certain conception. I avoided problematising this subject and others, though this is the supreme duty of the historian, and today I deeply regret it.

Once again, I emphasise: Orobio’s path from Christianity to Judaism was neither necessary nor marked out in advance. Why, when he decided to leave Spain, did he choose to live in Bayonne and Toulouse in France, for two years?³⁴ If the desire to live a full Jewish life was what impelled him to leave Spain, why did he stay in France for such a long time, where he was forced to live as a Catholic at least in the public sphere? It is known that in Bayonne he attended church in the parish of Saint-Etienne d’Arrie Labourd and even served as godfather at the baptism of a baby, a member of the nation portugaise, who received the name of Baltasar.³⁵ Further,

³¹ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 85–87.
³² Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 114–115.
³³ See Isaac Orobio de Castro, Carta Apologética al Doctor Prado, in Révah, Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado, 137–138: “Mis doctos Hebreos Paulo Burgense y Sixto Senense no fueron brutos, sino muy hombres, pues se dejaron arrastrar de las cosas humanasy dejaron la Ley de Dios. El primero en un mismo día fue bautizado en la Cathedral de Burgos, ordenado en presbytero y constituido Obispo de Cartagena, que era entonces el principal y mas rico de España, luego Ayo del Príncipe, Governador del Reyno, Arzobispo de Burgos, Patriarcha de Aquileya. Juntamente con su bautismo le hizieron [un hijo] Arzobispo de Santiago, otro de Segovia, otro Capitan General en Aragón, y todos poderosos. Y esto todo a un pobre Haham que salió de la miseria a una opulencia casi real, pues el Rey Catholico Don Fernando fue nieto de su hija cassada con el Almirante de Castilla, cuya hija casó con el Infante de Aragon, de cuyo matrimonio salió el Rey Don Fernando. Sixto era un mozo hebreo, buen estudianente mas no docto, ni tuvo tiempo para esto; acudía mucho al convento de dominicanos, persuadióle un frayle, hizole christiano, diole el habito. Estudió como christiano, mas apenas conservó noticias de la lengua hebrayca. El frayle, su maestro, fué Papa, engrandeciole lo que pudo, y él a sus parientes.”
³⁴ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 96–103.
³⁵ Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 97.
there is no doubt that his stay in Toulouse, where he taught at the university, required regular attendance of Catholic religious ceremonies.

It is known that, among the nation portugaise in southwestern France at that time, there were quite a few individuals who observed Jewish ceremonies and attended Jewish prayers in private and that the Christians around them knew of this. They also maintained close connections with the community in Amsterdam. But Orobio did not stay in Bayonne. Rather, he continued on to his post in Toulouse and to the connections he managed to cultivate with de Condé, and de Conti, according to what he wrote to Prado in 1664. While he was in France, not only did he take part in public disputes (y disputé en quantos actos públicos se hizieron en mi tiempo en Tolosa), he was also proud of his success in intellectual circles (me oyan con gusto y aun con aplauso) and among his closest friends were archbishops, bishops, and consummately learned men (tambiién Arzobispos, Obispos y hombres consumados en las sciencias fueron mis íntimos amigos). What does this show about his sojourn in Toulouse and about his chosen life as a Christian, at least in the visible sphere, when he had the rather simple alternative of reaching Amsterdam as quickly as possible in order to become a Jew openly? The trip from southwestern France to Amsterdam at that time took a matter of days, a couple of weeks at most, and this was all that separated him from open and full affiliation with the Jewish people. What stopped him from making that trip?

One may surmise that he and his father, who had settled in France earlier, were delayed by various personal reasons. Economic considerations most likely played a decisive role for the father, Manuel Álvares, who had lived in France for many years before his son and the rest of his family arrived. But from the standpoint of the Jewish religion and of rabbinic Law, teaching at the University of Toulouse could not justify postponing a resumed adherence to Judaism. Orobio de Castro knew this very well, even before arriving in Amsterdam. He did not have to be well versed in the writings of Maimonides’ Mishneh Torah to understand the significance of the delay, from free choice and not out of duress, in “the lands of idolatry.”

Another subject that I ought to have reexamined is the tolerant and universalistic attitude toward the salvation of the soul, which lay behind both the questions Orobio addressed to Rabbi Moshe Refael d’Aguilar and the dispute between Prado and Or-

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36 There is a very rich and exhaustive bibliography on this topic. See, among the most recent studies, Gérard Nahon and Michèle Escamilla, “Matines juives à Bayonne au XVIIe siècle au filtre du Saint Office,” in Non solo verso Oriente: Studi sull’ebraismo in onore di Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini, edited by Maddalena Del Bianco Crotzzi, Ricardo Di Segni and Marcello Massenzio (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2014): 295 – 343.

37 Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 103 – 104.

38 Orobio, Carta Apologética, in Révah, Spinoza et le Dr. Juan de Prado, 136; Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 103, n.37.

39 Kaplan, From Christianity to Judaism, 96.

40 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Yesodei ha-Tora, V, 4.
obio. This entire topic deserves thorough revision in light of the interesting work of various scholars, especially the historian Stuart Schwartz, who demonstrated convincingly that the saying “Each person can be saved in his or her own religion” (Cada uno se puede salvar en su ley) was quite common among men and women of various social strata in the Iberian world as well as in the Spanish colonies in the Americas.\^41\^\^ Prado and the converso sceptics were less radical than we thought, considering the cultural milieu in which they were active. On this matter I was far more moderate and cautious than others, who tried to find the source of individualism among the conversos, along with modern rational thought, deism, enlightenment, and much else. Let me cite Schwartz’s excellent book, All Can Be Saved:

the idea that such deism and skepticism might be a peculiarly Converso phenomenon, born of their experience of doubt, debate, dissimulation, and pressures upon their belief systems has been contested ... Even a scholar of the Sephardic community in Holland like Yosef Kaplan notes that such ideas were also circulating widely among the Christian population as well in the seventeenth century.\^42\^\^ It seems to me that, after the breast-beating I have shared with you, the time has come for me to respond, at least a bit, to the principled criticism that others have leveled against my writing, and which I reject. The most essential objection raised against me relates to the question of “return to the bosom of Judaism.” How could I have claimed, they object, that Orobio and other New Christians who became Jewish in the seventeenth century returned to Judaism? How could they return to an identity they had never had? How could they return to something which not even their parents or grandparents possessed? I allegedly applied the Talmudic maxim, “an Israelite, although he sinned, is still an Israelite” (Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 44a) to a complex historical situation. However, it seems to me that, in this case, I was not the one who fell into a trap: my critics did as well. In the communities of the Western Sephardic Diaspora in the seventeenth century the Jews considered conversos who adhered to Judaism to be people returning to the bosom of either the Torah or Israel. I was not the one who invented this definition. Were they not regarded as “the seed of Israel who returned to the bosom of the Torah,” they would have been treated as proselytes. However, the conversos who became Jewish were never regarded as proselytes and the process of joining the Sephardic communities did not require conversion. Moreover, the communities also accepted the claims of those who said they were descended from kohanim (priests) or Levites. For male conversos, the process of joining the community included circumcision, after which the circumcised man received a Jewish name; this process did not include the ritual immersion that is required by the conversion ceremony. The adherent, after recovering

\^41\^ Stuart B. Schwartz, All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).
\^42\^ Schwartz, All Can Be Saved, 60.
from the operation for a few weeks, would come to the synagogue, wrap himself in a prayer shawl for the first time in his life, put on phylacteries, and publicly recite the *Hagomel* blessing for recovering from danger. For women *conversos*, the act of joining the community was validated by the announcement of their Jewish names in the synagogue. Most surprisingly, they refrained from meticulously examining the mother’s origins. In fact, I did encounter instances toward the end of the seventeenth century in which investigations were made regarding the origins of the adherent. However, the information supplied by some of the witnesses did not refer at all to the Jewish origins of the mother but to the adherent’s membership in the *nação*. Apparently this testimony was accepted. For example, it seems that in the Sephardic community of Amsterdam, Isabel Pérez was never asked about her origins, though, as noted, she came from a family of Old Christians. Upon joining the Jewish people, she received the name Esther, which was very common among the women in these communities, because of the special status of Queen Esther among the “Marranos” (for Esther “did not tell of her nation or her birth”). Nor were the two sons and the daughter she bore to her husband, Isaac Orobio, regarded as converts: they, too, were accepted as returning to the bosom of Judaism and no obstacles were raised to their becoming Jewish.

In conclusion, permit me to share a personal experience from two years ago with you. My brother-in-law, who is an attorney in Amsterdam, told me that he had become acquainted with a judge named Richard Orobio de Castro. My brother-in-law told the judge about me, and he replied that he had read my book and would be pleased to meet me. On one of my trips to Amsterdam, in the winter of 2014, I called up the judge, who invited me to his home, at Herengracht 8. From the little that was known to me about the present day Portuguese Jewish community, it was clear to me that the judge had no connection with the Jewish life of the city. In my own mind I concluded that his ancestors had probably converted, as did many of the Portuguese Jews of Holland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, I was wrong. Not one of the judge’s ancestors had converted to Christianity. However, in 1908, his grandfather, Herman Arthur Orobio de Castro, the son of Dr. Samuel Orobio de Castro and Esther Henriques de Castro, had married Jacoba Louise van Loenen Martinet, the daughter of the Calvinist theologian and predicant Johannes van Loenen Martinet. The judge’s father was born of this intermarriage in 1909 and his name was Arthur Caesar Johannes Sebastian Christian Maximilian Orobio de Castro. He was a music teacher and pianist who also married a Calvinist woman in 1936, as did the judge himself in 1965. He received me with restrained courtesy. I drank tea with him in the living room of his large and splendid home, which was on one of the lovely canals of the city where the wealthy residents of Amsterdam used to live. Our conversation lasted for about an hour. The judge had prepared papers, files, articles he had clipped from the newspapers, and, of course, my book, which he said that he had read. “I wasn’t terribly interested in the theological disputes, but I was very curious about the story of his life.” I asked him whether he was in touch with Portuguese Jews. He answered that he had no connection with the Jewish community: *Wij zijn*
geintegreerd (we have integrated) he said, without further explanation. Among the papers that he showed me, I also found a booklet written during the Nazi occupation by Arie de Froe, a Dutch physician and anthropologist, in which he sought to prove that Portuguese Jews were not Semites, and their origins were purely Iberian. I was familiar with that publication from my time as the librarian of the Ets Haim Library. The author’s purpose was to save the Portuguese Jews from the tragic fate that struck the Jews of Holland during the Holocaust. ⁴³ Most likely this booklet was significant for the members of the Judge’s own family, but I refrained from asking questions that might embarrass me, perhaps, more than him. My host gave me a copy of the Orobio de Castro family tree, which was in his possession, going back to Isaac Orobio de Castro’s father and mother at the end of the sixteenth century.

There is, of course, no connection between the vicissitudes of this family in recent generations and the history of Isaac Orobio and the “Marranos” of the seventeenth century. However, the quiet assimilation, far from any drama and free of any theological explanations or religious intentions of any kind, made me ponder further the identity of New Christians in the Early Modern period. The vast majority of them integrated into Iberian society despite the Inquisition and the purity of blood regulations. In the end, the argument that Spinoza advanced in the third chapter of the Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, directed mainly against members of his former community, was wrong. Hatred was not what kept them Jewish. ⁴⁴ Most of them managed to overcome it and assimilate. The case of the great painter, Diego de Velázquez illustrates this very well. He managed to counterfeit his genealogy completely, a fact that was not discovered during his lifetime. Historians only discovered his ruse at the end of the twentieth century, which, of course, was too late to prevent him and his family from evading the purity of blood regulations and assimilating into Spanish society. ⁴⁵

In fact, the vast majority of Iberian conversos did assimilate into Christian society quietly and undramatically, like the members of the Orobio de Castro family in Holland during the twentieth century. The stubborn and bitter dispute waged by Isaac Orobio and other former “Marranos” against Christianity and scepticism must be understood against the background of this reality: in large part this was an existential dispute, which took place within the nação.

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⁴³ Ontjoodst door de wetenschap: De wetenschappelijke en menselijke integriteit van Arie de Froe onder de bezetting, edited by Hans Ulrich Jessurun d’Oliveira (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).
⁴⁴ Baruch Spinoza, Tractatus Theologico-Politicus, trans. Samuel Shirley (Leiden: Brill, 1989): “That they are preserved largely through the hatred of other nations is demonstrated by historical fact.”
⁴⁵ Kevin Ingram, “Diego Velázquez’s Secret History: The Family Background the Painter was at Pains to Hide in his Application for Entry into the Military Order of Santiago,” Boletín del Museo del Prado XVII, No. 35 (1999): 69–85.
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