

prose but still maintains the play's foreign elements, thereby engaging with linguistic and codeswitching wordplay, emphasizing the humor of the play, and deciding, therefore, to give priority to making sense whenever jokes don't work in translation. The result is a smooth, funny, and clever translation. Minimal clarificatory footnotes during the bilingual edition makes the reading smooth. The rich introduction frames the bilingual edition well for the reader and offers ideas for the potential staging of the play. Hegstrom and Larson have done a superb job bringing Azevedo's play to life, and scholars, students, directors, actors and lovers of Golden Age *comedia* can now enjoy a play and playwright, neither of which will ever again fall into oblivion.

Steven Nadler. *Menasseh ben Israel: Rabbi of Amsterdam*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018. ix + 298 pages. 1 b/w illustration. \$26.00. Review by WILLIAM E. ENGEL, THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH: SEWANEE.

Steven Nadler has written an accessible account of the rabbi and literary entrepreneur, Menasseh ben Israel, who led the rapprochement between Christians and Jews during the seventeenth century (71). Navigating between Catholic inquisitions (seeking refuge beyond the reach of Lisbon's *autos-da-fé* with his father, who had been tortured three times) and Protestant sectarian concerns (which made the status of Jews in Holland always potentially precarious), Menasseh emerged as a preeminent writer, printer, bookseller, and publisher whose commentaries, translations, and Hebrew devotional manuals set the standard of the age (123).

Early on Menasseh recognized a need for books to advance Jewish literacy, especially among those who recently had fled to the Dutch Republic from lands where the Inquisition had forced their conversion to Christianity and otherwise denied them the right to observe and practice their ancestral religion. One of his goals, therefore, was to help these mostly Portuguese Jews now living in Holland (many of whom had been dubbed New Christians) rediscover—or learn for the first time—their sacred heritage. In the early 1630s he published “no fewer than five Spanish and Hebrew prayer books; two of the

Hebrew Bibles” (59), and the weekly scriptural readings (*humash*) with a collection of biblical paraphrases and interpretations dating back to the first century (or Targum, referring to collected arguments and explanations) and the five biblical books used on days set aside for feasts and fasts (*megillot*). Menasseh also brought out his own *Tratado del Temor Divino* [*Treatise on the Fear of God*], and a compilation of selections from the sixteenth-century kabbalistic work known as *Reshit Hokhma* (*The Beginning of Wisdom*) translated into Spanish (59); and, perhaps most impressive of all, a two-volume annotated Mishnah, the oral tradition of Jewish law (*halakha*) presented in a systematic order for study by repetition originally redacted by Judah the Prince in the second century.

For two decades Menasseh’s print shop remained a hub of intense intellectual activity and its importance to the spread of Jewish literacy was enormous—not just for Holland, but also for the far-flung continental Jewish communities, as well as for European humanists and Christian theologians. In addition to his own works, Menasseh published an astonishing array of books including a collection of Hebrew blessings according to both central European (Ashkenazic) and eastern European (principally Polish) ritual; several Sephardic prayer books in Hebrew (following the traditional observances of North African and Iberian Jews); a bilingual Hebrew and Spanish book of the daily prayer service (*siddur*); several Hebrew Psalters; two Bibles in Hebrew with vowels (an innovation, since biblical Hebrew consists principally of triconsonantal root words); and a volume of daily prayers and readings from the Bible, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. Moreover, in 1635 “he published the *Zekher Rav*, an orthographically idiosyncratic retelling of the story of creation in verse—all the Hebrew word root are used only once—by the physician and philologist Benjamin ben Immanuel Mussafia” (90). Consistent with his effort to honor and preserve the traditions of Jews living in diaspora, he brought out an edition of Aisik Tyrnan’s book describing the seasonal religious customs in Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine, Bohemia, Moravia, and Germany. He also published books on the interpretation of dreams and an edition of Solomon Ibn Verga’s “chronicle of the ‘various calamities, martyrdoms, dispersions, accusations, and exiles’ of the Jews since the time of Solomon’s Temple” (90). From here it was a short step to becoming a

retail bookseller, and his presence at the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1634 gave Menasseh “entrée to the large market for Jewish books in eastern Europe” (91). As a result of his entrepreneurial skill and network of connections in the print trade, he received orders from two German booksellers for three thousand copies of the Pentateuch (the Greek name for the torah) with commentary written by the celebrated medieval French rabbi known familiarly as Rashi (91).

But Menasseh was not only adept at biblical commentary and Hebraic philology; he also could read, write, and speak Latin, and his own books are filled with the usual citations one would expect from any humanist author of the period—references to the Greek and Latin classics, Church Fathers, medieval and early Renaissance commentators, as well as occasional allusions to recent developments and discoveries in the natural sciences. As a result it was Menasseh, and not the chief rabbi of Amsterdam, who was selected to deliver the welcoming address (later published in Dutch, Portuguese, and Latin versions) when Henrietta Maria, queen consort of Charles I of England, visited the Netherlands with her daughter, Mary, who had come to see her future husband Willem, the son of the Prince of Orange (109). Menasseh was in the thick of things, well-educated and aspiring toward both a life of service in his community and financial stability, even investing—and losing—money in a trading scheme in South America (101).

Nadler did well to pitch his book about such a fascinating figure to a wider audience than the scholarly community narrowly defined, and it is right at home in Yale’s “Jewish Lives” series of interpretative biography. The result is an engaging life and times treatment of a pivotal figure of pan-European humanism during the Dutch Golden Age. Nadler’s decades of researching and teaching the history of philosophy, Jewish studies, and the humanities are put to good use throughout. For example, an appendix redresses the mythology surrounding Rembrandt’s relationship to the Jews in general and Menasseh ben Israel in particular, casting new light on the core assumptions covered in his earlier monograph, *Rembrandt and the Jews* (2003). Also, Menasseh’s relationship to the Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam bears comparison to that of his contemporary, Baruch Spinoza; for, although Menasseh periodically was threatened with the writ of

herem (or shunning, being absolutely ostracized from the life of the Jewish community), “Spinoza received the harshest expulsion ever issued” which never was rescinded (103). Spinoza’s condemnation, incidentally taking place a year before Menasseh’s death, is the central theme of Nadler’s earlier prizewinning *Spinoza: A Life*, reviewed in this journal (Fall-Winter 2000). Nadler’s previous work ably prepared him to sketch out Menasseh’s role, not just in Amsterdam’s Jewish life where he served as a rabbi and gained renown as a printer and public intellectual, but also in the larger context of early modern intellectual history. Menasseh was the most celebrated popularizer of Judaism of the period, whose writings and face to face entreaties eventually, if posthumously, led to the readmission of Jews into England (217).

Cromwell and his coterie of closest councilors were disposed positively toward the plea Menasseh put forward in his letter to Parliament that later circulated as a pamphlet. The Lord Protector apparently found lodgings and approved funds for Menasseh’s sojourn in London, during which time he attended meetings of Samuel Hartlib’s circle, and visited progressive scientists including Henry Oldenburg (later corresponding secretary of the Royal Society) and Robert Boyle, author of *The Skeptical Chemist*, who “dropped by Menasseh’s house” when he was in Amsterdam (210). Nadler makes a solid case for the extent to which the English and Dutch Millenarians, and especially the so-called Fifth Monarchists who maintained that the Messiah “will gather *all* twelve tribes ‘from all quarters of the earth’ and bring them to Jerusalem . . . successor to the kingdoms of Babylonia, Persia, Macedonia, and Rome” (141), saw the Jews as an opportunity rather than a problem (137). Especially informative is this regard is Nadler’s sustained discussion of Menasseh’s deft threading of the theological needle when asked by Christians for a rabbinic opinion on reports from the New World that the “Lost Tribes of Israel” had been found. The testimony of Antonio Montezinos (also known as Aaron Levi, a converso from Portugal) became a cornerstone of later discussions of this matter, speculating that the “Sons of Israel,” by way of central Asia, “eventually made their way across the Pacific (or a land bridge) to South America” (141). This opened the door to all manner of speculation, including the larger concern of whether or not inhabitants of the New World were descendants of Adam and Eve.

The renowned humanist jurist Hugo Grotius, who briefly served as governor-general of the Dutch East Indies Company (85), thought they were, “suggesting that their ancestors were the Vikings” (131). The educational reformer Samuel Hartlib, to whom Milton dedicated his 1644 treatise “Of Education,” was among the philosophers and scientists who maintained that the coming of the Messiah “would not happen until one very important and necessary condition was met: the conversion of the Jews” (135). This view had the felicitous result, no matter what the motive, of eliciting more pacific overtures toward the Jews—at least in northern Europe and in England.

As this brief rehearsal of some of the paradigm-shifting questions posed during Menasseh’s lifetime makes clear, there is plenty to engage scholars of seventeenth-century religious studies and intellectual history in this biography which is written in a conversational and often exuberant prose style, replete with exclamation points, italics to convey emphasis, colloquialisms such as “chutzpah” (26), and modern expressions like “the Counter-Remonstrants were not fans” (111). Academics will welcome Nadler’s unencumbered end notes and nineteen-page bibliography of works mainly in English but also in Latin, Italian, French, Spanish, Dutch, German, and—with titles transliterated—Hebrew. Much like Menasseh himself, and also displaying obvious enthusiasm for his topic, Nadler has struck a balance without shortchanging either specialists or general readers. Moreover, with uncanny prescience, Nadler has written a compelling story about how a minority and historically migrant population can come to converse with and even find a place to live peaceably among people who are themselves striving to come to grips with their own already conflicted sense of civic pride, religious identity, nationalist self-definition, and ascendant role in a rapidly expanding and ultimately unpredictable global marketplace. Nadler’s is a very timely book indeed.