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## Mortimer, Favell Lee

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■ Wisnefsky, M. Y. (trans./ed.), “Atone With Bricks and Mortar” [from the teachings of R. Yitzchak Luria] (2004; www.chabad.org).

Joshua Schwartz

See also → Passover Haggadah; → Seder Olam Rabbah

## Mortar (Vessel)

→ Mortar, The (Place)

## Morteira, Saul Levi

Born into a distinguished Italian Ashkenazi family, Saul Levi Morteira (1596–1660) was educated in Venice where he studied with the multi-talented rabbi Leon Modena (1571–1648). He accompanied to Paris the distinguished converso physician Elijah Montalto (1567–1616), who served in the court of Queen Marie de Médicis. When Montalto died unexpectedly in 1616, Morteira arranged for the funeral in the nearest Jewish cemetery, recently established by the small but growing Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam.

Asked to remain in Amsterdam, Morteira married a Portuguese immigrant, and was soon preaching in Portuguese, the only language the congregants understood. The audience for his sermons was extremely unusual. Many were highly talented international merchants and highly respected physicians. After leaving Portugal, where all Jews had been forced to convert to Christianity in 1497, they had decided to move to Amsterdam and live as Jews, but they had very little knowledge of what this meant. Morteira realized that he had to teach the congregants not only the Hebrew Scripture, but also rabbinic and medieval Jewish literature. The weekly sermon was the most important tool for Morteira and other Amsterdam rabbis as educators.

Morteira's sermons were organized in what appears to be a unique manner. Starting in September of 1619, he began each sermon with the first verse in the traditional Torah reading (*parashah*). The following year, he focused on the second verse of the *parashah*, and so forth. This biblical verse was followed by a passage from the rabbinic literature, and then an introduction, but a considerable portion of each sermon was devoted to a detailed discussion of the biblical verse, which served as the fundamental building block. There is frequent discussion of exegetical problems in the theme-verse, as noted by Rashi (1040–1105) and other biblical commentators. The biblical exegesis frequently leads to contemporary rebuke of inappropriate behavior. Morteira followed this procedure until his death in 1660.

Two of Morteira's students selected the texts of one sermon on each *parashah* and published the collection in 1645. Recently, the Hebrew texts of 550

sermons by Morteira were discovered in the Budapest Rabbinical Seminary, with microfilms now in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem.

Two other students of Morteira became significantly more famous than their teacher. Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657) is best known for his meeting with Oliver Cromwell in an effort to reverse the 1290 expulsion of British Jews. As leading rabbi in Amsterdam, Morteira was chosen to deliver the memorial eulogy following Menasseh's death in November 1657, at age fifty-three, on his way back to Amsterdam following the apparent failure of his effort.

Morteira's best known pupil was Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), whose father was a leader of Morteira's congregation. Spinoza undoubtedly listened to Morteira's sermons as he was growing up, but eventually he repudiated the world view of his teacher, denying the divine character of the Bible. As a result, Morteira played a leading role in the excommunication of the twenty-four-year old Spinoza in 1656. For many scholars, this is the only thing for which Morteira is known.

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Marc Saperstein

## Mortimer, Favell Lee

Favell Lee Mortimer (1802–1878) was a bestselling children's author in the moralistic tradition who authored nineteen publications for children about the Bible and the world. Born at Russell Square, London on July 14, 1802 to Quaker parents David Bevan (1774–1847) and Favell Bourke (1780–1841), Mortimer (née Bevan) was educated at home and, after a conversion experience to Evangelicalism, assisted in running parish schools on her father's estates starting in 1827. Her first and most successful work, *The Peep of Day, or, A series of the earliest religious instruction the infant mind is capable of receiving* (1833), was printed by the Religious Tract Society in at least thirty-five different translations (MacFadden: 221). In this work and its sequels, *Line upon Line* and *Precept upon Precept*, Mortimer uses simple language and

footnotes to retell Bible stories with an educational and conversational tone. Favell was married for a short period to Rev. Thomas Mortimer on April 29, 1841 until his death in 1850 and had no children. She died at the age of seventy-six in Runton, Norfolk in August 1878.

As a children's author and an educator, Mortimer's writing about the Bible is aimed to simplify complex stories for young minds in order to prepare them to read the Bible when they are older. In a preface to *Peep of Day*, Mortimer explains how she interprets the Bible for children by stating that the then-common practices of reading scriptures to children, memorizing catechisms, or giving lectures do not invite children to love God. Instead, Mortimer's approach is to use language a child can understand, avoid complicated details, and "infuse a principle of love" into her writing in order to prepare children for further religious instruction (Mortimer: x). In doing so, Mortimer frequently expresses how much God loves her readers and omits details that are too complex. For example, Mortimer's interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve in *Peep of Day* includes a moment where Jesus says that he is pleased with God's creation of Adam and Eve (Mortimer: 57). This version of the story also omits complicated details like the separate curses for Adam, Eve, and the serpent (Gen 3:14–19), instead summarizing by stating that Adam and Eve will die for being naughty. Overall, Mortimer's interpretation of the Bible is one in which the characters are made relatable and Bible stories serve as instruments to instruct children about right and wrong. Her interpretations are significant to biblical reception history in how early children's literature simplified Bible stories in the 19th century.

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Alissa Droog

## Mosaic

Tessellated mosaics are made by setting cubes of differently colored stone, glass, or ceramic – called *tesserae* (Lat. "dice") – into mortar to form images on floors, walls, or ceilings. They are thus closely integrated with their architectural context. The most celebrated examples on biblical subjects are in Italy (Rome, Ravenna, Venice, Sicily), Greece, and Turkey.

**1. Late Antique Jewish.** From the late 2nd to mid-7th centuries, synagogues in Israel showed an increasing penchant for rich figural iconography – biblical and pagan – drawing their style and some visual models from the surrounding Greco-Roman art. Floor mosaics unearthed from the early 5th-century synagogue at Huqoq depict Noah's ark, the

building of the tower of Babel, the drowning of Pharaoh's army, two Israelite spies returning from Canaan, Samson tying burning torches to the tails of foxes and carrying the gate of Gaza, and Jonah being swallowed by the sea-monster. Sepphoris Synagogue (5th cent.) contains mosaics of the hospitality of Abraham, the binding of Isaac, and the consecration of Aaron, while Beth Alpha Synagogue (6th cent.) has a folk-style binding of Isaac (Gen 22; just as Abraham is about to kill his son, the hand of God reaches down with the command "Lay not [your hand]," inscribed in Hebrew. The inscription beside the tree-caught animal reads, "He saw a ram.").

**2. Late Antique Christian.** Rome is home to some of the earliest surviving Christian mosaics. Perhaps the earliest, from the late 3rd century, is the one on the ceiling of the tomb of the Julii below St. Peter's; it shows a beardless man riding a chariot with rays behind his head, much like the sun-god Helios but here probably representing the risen Christ. The 4th-century mosaics of the church of Santa Costanza also feature pagan motifs – gardens, peacocks, grapevines, and amphorae – that become biblically allusive in their new context, in addition to the explicitly Christian subjects of the *Traditio Clavis* (giving of the keys of the church to Peter) and the *Traditio Legis* (giving of the new law).

Santa Maria Maggiore boasts the only surviving infancy of Christ cycle (ca. 432–40) in the monumental art of the pre-Iconoclastic period, including such scenes as the annunciation, the adoration of the Magi, the presentation in the temple, and the massacre of the innocents. Decorating the church's triumphal arch, the mosaics portray Mary as a Roman empress accompanied by a retinue of angels. Scenes from the books of Exodus and Joshua line the nave. (The apse mosaics are from a later period, ca. 1290–1305, and are by Jacopo Torriti.)

Other early Christian mosaics in Rome include those at Santa Pudenziana and Santi Cosma e Damiano.

**3. Byzantine Empire.** The art of mosaic reached its apogee during the Byzantine era (4th–15th cent.). Due to the materials and the skilled labor and time required, mosaic decoration was very expensive, much more so than fresco painting, but the Byzantine Empire was a wealthy theocracy that placed a high value on the visual aspect of church spaces.

Gold grounds came into use in the 6th century and superseded the typically white or blue backgrounds that came before. The gilded tesserae, made by sandwiching gold leaf between two pieces of glass, were set obliquely so that sunrays and the moving light of processional candles would catch the uneven surface and produce a rich flickering effect, suggesting divine light.

Many of the mosaics in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople – present-day Istanbul – were de-