

## **The Rejudaization of Portuguese Jewry And Communal Tendencies toward Conservatism in the Early 17<sup>th</sup> Century**

Roth, Cecil. *A Life of Menasseh ben Israel: Rabbi Printer, and Diplomat*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1934. Selections from pp. 100 – 103.

Not long before [1651], Menasseh had been entrusted with a literary task of an unusual nature. The Marranos who arrived in Amsterdam almost daily from Spain and Portugal were entirely ignorant of the traditions and practices of Jewish religious observance... save for confused recollections handed down through generations of subterfuge, or vague conceptions based upon biblical reminiscence. When they formally reentered Judaism, it was necessary for them to learn their new religion from its rudiments upwards... There were indeed several admirable compendia of Jewish law in Hebrew. But the new arrivals were, almost without exception, entirely ignorant of that language... A handbook of practice in some tongue more accessible to them was therefore an absolute necessity, [which led Menasseh to compose the Portuguese compendium] entitled *Thesouro dos Dinim*... Before long it had become authoritative. The claims which the author makes for it, of clarity and simplicity, are justified; and the arid details of ceremonial law are frequently enlivened and ennobled by some shrewd aphorism indicating the ethical value of each practice. Generation after generation of Marranos recently arrived from the Peninsula learned their Judaism from this succinct compilation, which was republished, in a single volume, as late as 1710.

Bodian, Miriam. *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997. pp. 114 – 155.

Whether supporting “Portuguese” or rabbinic norms, the members of the Mahamad showed themselves to be deeply conservative in spirit. They worked to create a traditional, ethnically tight-knit society that was both an enclave of social values and a bastion of traditional Jewish thinking. They cultivated an ideal with roots in Iberian converso society, but adapted it in a way which must have seemed natural to them in the new conditions of the diaspora. The ideal cultural type that emerges was very complex indeed, yet coherent and reproducible. In Amsterdam and Hamburg, there were many who seemed to represent this ideal. They were, of course, men. Each was an important figure in a far-flung family-cum-commercial network, possessed of a coat of arms or even an aristocratic title, was a regular synagogue goer with a prestigiously located seat, and played an active role in communal affairs. Such a person, be his name Belmonte, Texeira, Pinto, Curiel, Azevedo, Senior Coronel, or any number of others, had achieved the pinnacle of success in the “Portuguese” diaspora.