

## **EARLY MODERN WORKSHOP: Jewish History Resources**

**Volume 4: Jewish Consumption and Material Culture in the Early Modern Period, 2007, University of Maryland**

### **The Phoenix, the Exodus and the Temple: Construction of Self Identity in the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam in the Early Modern Period**

Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

**ABSTRACT:** This presentation investigates the symbols of the Sephardic congregation in Amsterdam, mainly the Phoenix and the Pelican that symbolize the resurrection of Jesus in catholic Christianity, alongside the unique exegesis by several congregants of the Exodus narrative. The analysis of the symbols, images and the architecture of the congregation's synagogue, shows that they had played a major role in the construction of the "new" identity of the congregation. By utilizing them the congregation established the "resurrection" narrative of the Sephardic Jewry and its new beginning in Amsterdam. The rich cultural background of these symbols and images, both in the Iberian world and in the Netherlands, enabled the community's members to interweave their Iberian-Christian past with their Jewish present and to integrate into the Dutch society of the Early Modern period.

#### **This presentation is for the following text(s):**

- Praises Which Zealous [Men] Dedicated to the Wonderful Memory of Abraham Nunez Bernal, Who was Burned Alive Sanctifying the Name of his Creator in Cordova on May 3rd 5415 [=1655]
- Sermons Which were Delivered by the Talented Gentlemen of the Kahal Kadosh [=holy congregation] Talmud Torah, in this city of Amsterdam, in the happy opening, and public celebration of the building that was dedicated to God, as a house of prayer, for which festivities commenced on Sabath Nahamu. . Year 5435 [=1675].

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### **Praises Which Zealous [Men] Dedicated to the Wonderful Memory of Abraham Nunez Bernal** **An Introduction**

Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

The book *Praises that zealous [men] dedicated for the pleasant memory of Abraham Nunez Bernal, who was burned alive sanctifying the Name of his Creator in Cordova on May 3rd, 5415* that was published in Amsterdam in approximately 1655, includes many poems in Spanish written by elite members of the Sephardic community in the city. The book was dedicated to the memory of two *Conversos*, relatives of a community member in Amsterdam, that were sentenced by the Spanish Inquisition and burned at the stake in Cordoba.

In the following poems (as well as others in this book) the legendary phoenix is used as a metaphor for the martyrs, who chose to die while keeping their Jewish faith. This symbolic Martyrdom associated with the phoenix was widespread in the writings of the members of the community. The phoenix appears in other texts and images of the community in several contexts symbolizing martyrdom, resurrection and revival.

#### **Bibliography**

- Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation. Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, Indianapolis 1997. (general)
- Yosef Kaplan, *Bom Judesmo: The Western Sephardic Diaspora*, in: David Biale (ed.), *The Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, Vol. 3, New York 2002. (general)
- H. den Boer, 'Exile in Sephardic Literature of Amsterdam', *Studia Rosenthaliana* 35 (2001), pp. 187-199.
- A.K. Offenber, 'Jacob Jehuda Leon (1602-1675) and His Model of the Temple', in: J. van den Berg & E.G.E. van der Wall (eds.), *Jewish-Christian Relations in the Seventeenth Century. Studies and Documents*, London 1988, pp. 95-115.

J. Poesch, 'The Phoenix Portrayed', *The D.H. Lawrence Review* 5 (1972), pp. 200-237.  
Leo and Rena Fuks, The Inauguration of the Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam, Netherlands, in 1675, *Arquivos do centro cultural português*, vol XIV Paris 1979.

**Websites including relevant images:**

Dedication of The Portuguese Synagogue Drawn by Romeyn de Hooghe :

<http://www.jtsa.edu/library/exhib/sanctuary/01.shtml>

The Portuguese Synagogue Drawn by Emanuel de Witte (and more):

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam\\_Esnoga](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam_Esnoga)

The official website of the synagogue:

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### **Praises Which Zealous [Men] Dedicated to the Wonderful Memory of Abraham Nunez Bernal, Who was Burned Alive Sanctifying the Name of his Creator in Cordova on May 3rd 5415 [=1655]**

**Elogios Que zelozos dedicaron A La Felice memorià de Abraham Nunez Bernal, Que fue quemado vivo santificando el Nombre de su Criador en Cordova a 3 de Mayo 5415  
1655 ?**

Translated by Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

[p.40]

By Mr.

Daniel de Ribera

[...]

[p.41] The frustrated tyranny

was there offended

seeing that from dust and nothingness

Abraham obtained immortal life;

and amidst the great flame

his truth was so consumed

that without difficulty

(like pure gold in the crucible)

he turned from earthly (being) into the sun,

from sun to Divinity.

More than much as gloriously

(he) bravely entered the contest

and from the burning sacrifice

came out a prodigious phoenix;

So proudly and so piously

did he wish to burn himself

that in the self-sacrifice

between fire and devotion  
produced note and admiration. [...]

[p.49]

By Mr.

Semuel de Crasto

Here lives a divine,  
the zeal and the fortitude,  
the constancy and the firmness  
of the noble celestial award;  
He, who through the right path  
like the phoenix, was burned  
from where he was resurrected,  
leaving his fame (behind) in the world,  
Another Elijah, who in the flame  
triumphantly went up to the sky.

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### **Elogios Que zelozos dedicaron A La Felice memoria de Abraham Nunez Bernal, Que fue quemado vivo santificando el Nombre de su Criador en Cordova a 3 de Mayo 5415**

**Praises Which Zealous [Men] Dedicated to the Wonderful Memory of  
Abraham Nunez Bernal, Who was Burned Alive Sanctifying the Name of his  
Creator in Cordova on May 3rd 5415 [=1655]  
1655 ?**

Prepared by Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

[p.40]

Del Señor

DANIEL DE RIBERA

[...]

[p.41] Diosse allí por offendida

La tiranía frustrada

Viendo que del polvo y nada

Saca Abraham immortal vida;

Y entre la llama crecida

Tanto apuró su verdad.

Que ya sin dificultad

(como oro limpio en Crizol)

De terreno passó a Sol,

De Sol, á Divinidad.

Mas que Mucho si glorioso

Entró al certamen valiente,

Y del sacrificio ardiente,

Salió Phenix prodigioso;

Tan ufano y tan zeloso

Deseó de se abrasar.

Que en el se sacrificar

Entre el incendio y desvelos  
Dió que notar que admirar. [...]

[p.49]

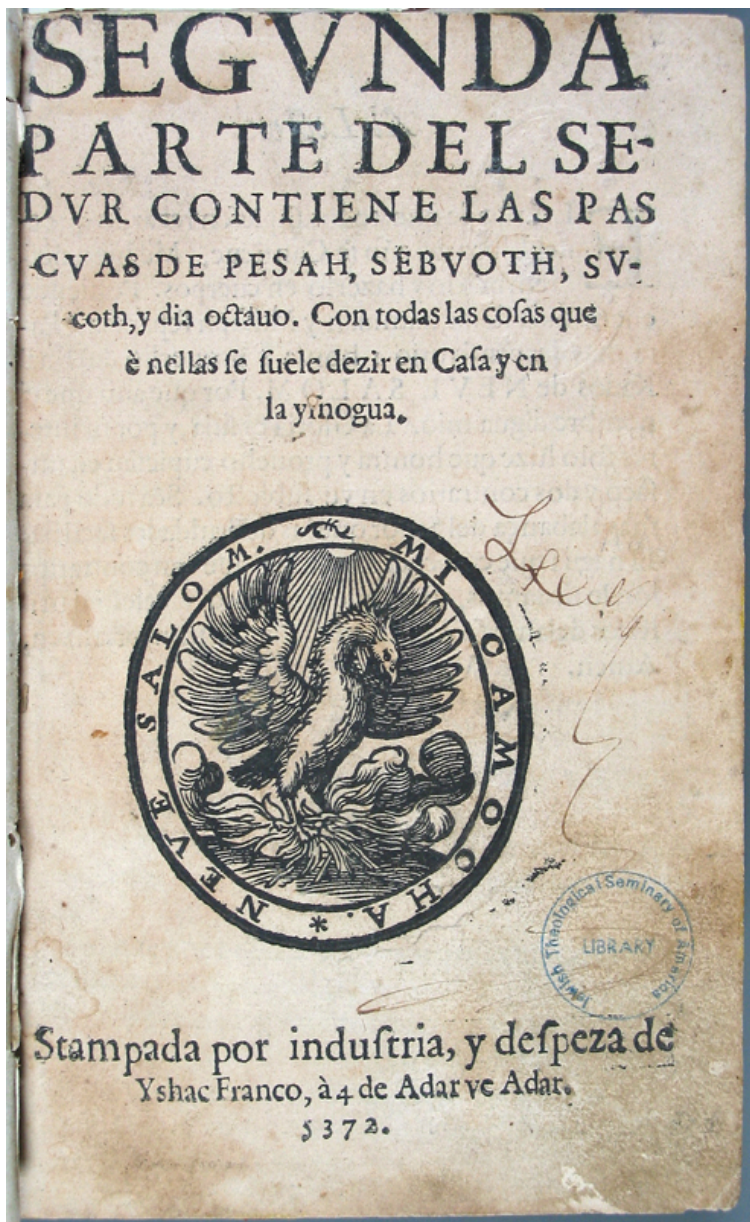
Del Señor

SEMUEL DE CRASTO

Aquí vive un ser divino,  
El zelo y la fortaleza,  
La constancia, y la firmeza,  
Del celeste premio digno ;  
El que por justo camino,  
Como el fenix se abraso,  
De a donde resucitó,  
Dexando en el mundo fama,  
Otro Elias, que en la llama  
Triumphando al cielo subió.

**Archive:** Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, University of Amsterdam. exemplar RON A-5479  
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### **Sermons (Amsterdam, 5435/1675) An Introduction**

Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

The description of the newly built Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam appears in the prologue to a collection of sermons, which were delivered during the celebration of the inauguration of the synagogue in 1675. The prologue, that was composed by the publisher David de Castro Tartaz, describes the circumstances that led to the erection of the new synagogue and the preparations that were undertaken in order to fulfill the project. The author describes the interior design of the synagogue and comments on various aspects of the celebrations. In this account, as well as in other sermons in the collection, there are several references to the resemblance between the synagogue and the Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed, the synagogue's architecture was influenced by a renowned seventeenth century model of the Temple, and this similarity conceals the hope of the congregates for individual and communal redemption as "New Jews" in Amsterdam.

### **Bibliography**

- Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation. Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, Indianapolis 1997. (general)
- Yosef Kaplan, *Bom Judesmo: The Western Sephardic Diaspora*, in: David Biale (ed.), *The Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, Vol. 3, New York 2002. (general)
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Netherlands, in 1675, *Arquivos do centro cultural português*, vol XIV Paris 1979.

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**Sermons Which were Delivered by the Talented Gentlemen of the Kahal Kadosh [=holy congregation] Talmud Torah, in this city of Amsterdam, in the happy opening, and public celebration of the building that was dedicated to God, as a house of prayer, for which festivities commenced on Sabath Nahamu. . Year 5435 [=1675].**

**Sermoes que pregaraõ os Doctos Ingenios do K.K. de Talmud Torah, desta Cidade de Amsterdam, No alegre Estreamento, & Publica celebridade da Fabrica que se consagrou a Deos, para Caza de Oraçaõ, , cuja entrada se festejou em Sabath Nahamú Anno 5435  
1675**

Translated by Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

### Prologue for the Reader

[...] [p.iii] The entire prayer was accompanied by hymns and the most famous songs, and for the imitation of the inauguration of the sacred Temple, which lasted eight days of festivities, always with the same solemnity, each day accompanied by a sermon given by the most talented scholars of the congregation, which are offered to you here. Friend Reader, here you will see the fruit of our distinguished Nation<sup>[1]</sup>, you will see the noble our Haham<sup>[2]</sup> as Master, giving beginning to elegance so conceptual and [you will see] his worthy disciples praying with elegance of concept. I attest to you, kind reader, that it [=this celebration] seems more like the days of Passover [celebrated] with liberty in the Temple than celebrations of captivity in a Esnoga [=synagogue]<sup>[3]</sup>. I beg you not to thank this work [=book], which is not mine, but I only desired to inform you about this good, because I regard you highly. And because you see the image of the Esnoga<sup>[4]</sup> without understanding its architecture, I want in sum to give you pleasure, by explaining to you its models.

To portray for you, discreet reader, all the details that magnificently constitute it, would be impertinent to the report. I [can] only assure you that it is the most illuminative of

the city, spacious and bright inside, perfect and striking from the outside, surrounded by a beautiful patio with galleries surrounding it like a wall. In it, is the residence of the nobles of the Mahamad<sup>[5]</sup>, six rooms for the school, two for the Hazanim [=Cantors] and one for the guardian, all in the front. Beside are corridors with columns for passage which include the Esnoga's length : 130 feet, width 100 feet, (and) its height from the ground till the vault [= vaulted ceiling] [is] 70 feet. It has three doors, and an admirable view from the the main entrance, due to the three vaults that form the whole building. And these [vaults] at the sides are supported by walls, and these in the middle [are supported] by four pillars of stone. Each one has a gallery for the women to sit, which is supported by six columns in each part.

Five trusses of magnificent chandeliers hang, (with their golden drawing on the vault) and in abundance, that they reach the number of 800 candles. There is a Theba [=platform] made from very expensive Jacaranda<sup>[6]</sup> wood, with its [cover] copper needlework, adorned with [p.iv] metal. In front of [the platform's] corridor [that leads to] the corners with the pillars, is a curious chair of the Mister, our Haham [made of] the same wood. Opposite the admirable Hehal [=Holy Ark], completely made of wood of the most curious Jacaranda, (gifted by the very noble Mister Mosseh Curiel, with so much generosity, that he received everyone's applause, almost naming the work after him) so gorgeous, that it competes in artifice with the best of the entire building, completely covered with such curious decoration, that it properly looks like a Palace, and surrounded by admirable columns, decorated with unusual [plantlike] embossment, and the gallantness of its columns. Imitating the stone's tablet, there is a wooden [plate of] the ten commandments, so grand and costly, that it is illuminating the Gallery opposite it, which is surrounding it. [...] David de Castro Tartaz.

## Endnotes

<sup>[1]</sup>A term used by the western Sephardic Jews to signify the Iberian Jews together with the *Conversos*.

<sup>[2]</sup>A member of the rabbinical court.

<sup>[3]</sup>This term used not only as a synagogue in general, but frequently refers to the new synagogue of the community.

<sup>[4]</sup>Four pages of this book contain eight etchings of the synagogue.

<sup>[5]</sup>The term refers to the governing body of a community in the western Sephardic diaspora.

<sup>[6]</sup>Brazilian wood.

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**1675**

Prepared by Limor Mintz-Manor, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

[...] [p.iii] Toda a oraçaõ acõpanharaõ hymnos, & Cantos mais celebres, & por imitar o Estreamento do Sagrado Templo, se tomou 8 dias de festividade, sempre com a mesma solemnidade acompanhado cada dia de hum Sermaõ, dos Ingenios mais doctos de Cõgrega, q' saõ estes q' aqui te offereço, amigo Lector ahy verás o fruto de nossa Illustre Naçaõ, verás o Senhor nosso Haham como Mestre, dar principio a elegancia taõ conceptuozas, & seus Dignis Discipulos Orando conceptuozamenten elegantes: Certificote Benevolo lector q' mais parecoaõ estes dias Pascuas com liberdades de Templo, q' Festas de catividade em húa Esnoga, pessote me agradeças naõ o trabalho, q' naõ soy meu, senaõ o dezejo de te communicar este bem, & por que te concidero aynda algo escrupulozo, por que vés a pintura da Esnoga, sem entender sua architectura, quero em todo darte o gosto, explicandote seus modelos.

Pintarte discreto Lector, todas as particularidades, que a constituem Magnifica, seria impertinente a Relaçaõ, só te asseguro he do mais luzido da cidade, espacioza, & clara por dentro, perfeyta & vistoza por fora, circundada de hum fermoza Pateo com suas Galerias o modo de hum Muro que a arodea. neste está o apozento dos Senhores do Mahamad, seis Cazas dos Medrassim, duas para os Hazanim, & húa para o guardeaõ, tudo na dianteyra; Nos lados, corredores có Colunas para passear; Comprende a Esnoga de longo, 130. pees; De largo, 100. pees; De Altura, do chaõ athe a Abobeda, 70. pees; Tem tres portas, & da principal faz admiravel prespectiva, por que se notaõ tres

Abobedas, de que se forma todo o Edificio, as quaes, as dos lados se sestentaõ nas paredes, & a do meyo, em quarto Pilares de pedra; De cada lado tem húa Galeria para assento das mulheres, que sustentão seis Colunas de cada parte.

Pendem cinco andamios de magnificos Lampadarios, (com seus dibuxos dourados na Abobeda,) & em taõ boa cantidade, que fazem o numero de 800. luzes. Tem á Thebá de Pao de Jacarandá muy costozo, com seus lavores de Cobre, adornos de [p.iv] arame, seu corredor, & nos cantos com Pilares, em cuja dianteyra [esta] pegado do mesmo Pao o curiozo assento do Senhor nosso Haham; Defronte está o admiral Hehal, todo de Pao do mais curiozo de Jacarandá, (o qual prezentou o muy Nobre Senhor Mosseh Curiel, com tanta liberalidade, que em aplauzo de todos, foca quazi a obra em seu nome) taõ Sumptuozo, que compite seu artificio, com o melhor de toda Fabrica, todo forrado de taõ curiozo adorno, que propriamente parece Palacio, & arodeado de admiraveis Colunas, arameta com o bizaro de hum quadro, & o galhardo de suas Colunas, donde imitando as taboas de pedra, estão húas de pao com os déz Mandamentos, taõ grave & custozo, que enleva a adiante húa Galeria, que toda o arrodea. [...] David de Castro Tartaz.

**Publisher:** David de Castro Tartaz, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 1675

**Archive:** Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, Amsterdam. exemplar ROG A-757 (Ros. 20 F 15)

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