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SOTERIOLOGIAS IDENTIDADES E SALVAÇÃO

ORGANIZADORES:

CARLOS ALMEIDA, FILIPA ROLDÃO, CATARINA ALMEIDA



CENTRO DE HISTÓRIA DA UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA



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TRANSACÇÕES COM O SAGRADO:

*A construção política da experiência religiosa
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Abstract

The present article will discuss the practical disposition through which the leaders of the Portuguese Nation of Hamburg understood and oriented their relationship between the religious and the political domains, in the second half of the seventeenth century. In doing so, its main goal is to assess the social, religious, and political constraints of ruling agents in their task of leading the community, and how the latter came to incorporate new understandings of the surrounding reality into the traditional moulds of the past. As this article will show, the art of governance in the Portuguese community of Hamburg was as much dictated by religious considerations, as by economic and pragmatic concerns, being the result of a vast array of attitudes towards greater regulatory capacity, legitimacy, and authority.

¹ This work was supported by the Rothschild Foundation (Hanadiv) Europe, under Grants No 065/15, and 130/14; and by the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), under Grant No 57130097.

Keywords

Sephardic Diaspora, Jewish Community, Hamburg, Portuguese Nation, Governance

Resumo

O presente artigo discute a disposição prática através da qual os líderes da Nação Portuguesa de Hamburgo compreenderam e orientaram a sua relação entre os domínios religioso e político, na segunda metade do século XVII. O seu principal objectivo será assim avaliar os condicionalismos sociais, religiosos e políticos dos líderes congregacionais na sua tarefa de governar a comunidade e a sua incorporação de novas concepções nos moldes tradicionais do passado. Este artigo demonstrará que a arte da governação na comunidade portuguesa de Hamburgo foi ditada tanto por considerações religiosas, como por preocupações económicas e pragmáticas, sendo estas o resultado de uma vasta gama de atitudes no sentido de uma maior regulamentação comunitária, legitimidade e autoridade.

Palavras-chave

Díaspóra Sefardita, Comunidade Judaica, Hamburgo, Nação Portuguesa, Governação

Relationship between secular and religious power

As its sister communities in Amsterdam, Livorno, and London, the Portuguese Jewish community of Hamburg was founded upon the initial experience and idea of *marrano* Judaism that took root in Venice, at the end of the sixteenth century.² Its political heritage, however, can be said to have its roots in a constellation of traditions and customs, characterized as much by their affinity with contemporary merchant practices, ethics, and political organization, as with distant cultural wisdom, arising from Portuguese medieval practices of Jewish communal administration.³

The pre-eminence of political and economic considerations in the art of governing of the Portuguese Jewish Diaspora assumed proportions of particular controversy, mainly in respect to the nature of its relationship with

2 Yerushalmi 1981, 195-206; Ravid et David 2001; Pullan 1983; Ruspio 2007.

3 Such is the case, for example, of lawsuits, which according to Ferro (1979, 28-30), date back to the Iberian medieval period. See also Wilke (2009, 43-49).

religious tradition and authority. Traditionally, in sixteenth-century Ottoman, Balcanic, and North-African Jewries, the figure of the rabbi (or *bacham*) was associated with a type of practical authority that still held effective power in crucial areas of communal administration.⁴ Contrarily, in the context of the Portuguese Nation, the *bacham*, served an exclusively ritualistic and symbolic purpose, being its range of action circumscribed to the expectations and volitions of the ruling secular class, through which the former was hired and disposed of, just as with any other communal employee.

This phenomenon is particularly explicit in the protocol books of the Portuguese community of Hamburg, in the passages dealing with the relationship between the *bachamim* and the Mahamad – the secular leadership of the community and its main political authority.⁵ Although the influence of the Mahamad was theoretically undisputed, the evolution of the *ascamot*, that is, of congregational statutes, demonstrates how this power was negotiated or even contested on behalf of the rabbis of the community. Thus, in a period assailed by a wave of transgressive behaviour such as the one seen during the year of 1659, the Mahamad accepted, without much resistance, a claim on behalf of the rabbis for more influence on legal matters.⁶ Conversely, in another case registered years later, the *bachamim* were stripped of some of their prerogatives, after having openly confronted the authority of the Mahamad, and sent, against its will, a commission to the syndics of the neighbouring Jewish community of Altona.⁷ Spearheaded by Jacob Sasportas and Moses Israel, the two rabbis of the Portuguese community at the time, this episode provoked an institutional crisis, resulting in the deliberate delay of religious duties in the Bet Din, synagogal services, and in the educational institutions of the community, most conspicuously in the Talmud Torah.⁸

The plasticity of power relations between, on the one side, the secular government, and on the other, the religious leadership, was in this way defined

4 Ben-Naeh 2008, ch. 4-6.

5 Staatsarchiv Hamburg [StAHH], Jüdische Gemeinden 993, Protokollbuch (1652-1682), Vols. I-II (cited hereafter as “*Livro da Nação*”).

6 Martins 2019a, 214-15.

7 Martins 2019a, 221-23.

8 On Sasportas and his relationship with Portuguese leaders, see Goldish 2012 and Dweck 2019.

not solely on the degree of authority and influence possessed by the leaders on both side of the aisle, but equally and most prominently, by the nature of the socioeconomic circumstances at hand. In this way, the process of power transference could be one of conflicting nature, or conversely, characterized by harmonious cooperation in view of common goals. As exemplarily defined by Abraham Gabay Isidro, a rabbi from the Portuguese community of Surinam, in an attempt to describe the complex and mutually dependent relationship between the two bodies: “What is a mahamad without its hakham, and a hakham without its mahamad. Like a body without a soul that is dead, and in order to live they must be united . . . The hakhamim are the eyes of the congregation, and the mahamad its arm. Who will be able to see more and better, the eyes or the arm, and how will these arms succeed in their work when they lack eyes for guidance”.⁹

The curtailment of rites, customs, and traditions: the trend towards sacralization and refinement

Another area of influence of secular power into the sphere of the sacred refers to religious tradition, specifically to the repression and *ad-hoc* amendments of Jewish ritual practices, considered too “archaic” and “outdated” to be observed by the Portuguese congregation. Progressively proscribed from the repertoire of ritual practices, whether inside the synagogue or outside its limits, the Portuguese leadership stood firm in its decision to expurgate all remnants of what they called “barbaric” vestiges, reaffirming theirs as a new era of “civilised” and “sophisticated” people. This heightened sense of self-perception, already analysed by Yosef Kaplan in one of his previous studies, assumes a new prevalence in the world-view of Portuguese Jews, stressing a rupture between an obsolete and repulsive past, and an aesthetically refined present where to be and appear civilised came to assume an important new

9 GAA PA 334, n.º 1028-1029, fol. 59; Oliel-Grausz 2008, 157.

facet of Portuguese self-fashioned identity.¹⁰ Reflecting not only the profound cultural transformations operated during the period, but as well a whole new conception carefully centred on the cult of image and the ostentation of luxury, this phenomenon was the product of a distinctly Iberian socialization, where Christian aristocratic ideas of *grandeza* and honour were carefully cultivated.¹¹

At the spiritual level, this transition was accompanied by a sacralization of the main religious sites of the community in an effort to bring back *gravidade* and *serenidade* to its rightful place. It was in the synagogue, the centre of Jewish life and activity, that this phenomenon was most conspicuously felt, as an attempt to counteract moral depravity and excessive behaviour. New dress codes were enacted prohibiting the use of jewellery, and certain types of clothes like short sleeves and trousers.¹² Particularly targeted in these new enactments were women and children: the first for their exuberant and immodest choice of clothes; the second for their inappropriate behaviour and attitude during synagogal services. Men too were targeted, although less overtly, mainly through the interdiction of boot spurs, snuffing of tobacco, and the use of other inappropriate equipment during religious services. The distinction between the realm of the sacred and the profane became clearer, as new laws were introduced prohibiting the discussion of matters relating to business and professional activity, further restraining the laws predicted in the *halakha* (body of Jewish religious laws).¹³ These more pragmatic measures had the intent, together with others of more aesthetic leanings, to reappropriate the synagogue as the bastion of religious values and the site, by definition, of spiritual contemplation, where reverence for the holy was to be preserved at all costs against the ongoing erosion of traditional values.

10 Kaplan 2001, 21-40.

11 Tavim 2019; Bodian 1997, 85-95; Studemund-Halévy 2000, 16-22. For a gendered perspective on this lifestyle, see Tavim 2017.

12 *Livro da Nação*, I, 213, 301, 389.

13 *Livro da Nação*, I, 213, 301, 389.

Discipline and dissent: transgressive behaviour and heterodoxy

In quite a different fashion, the same leadership that took under its wing the refinement of old “archaic” traditions, saw itself urged to preserve moral rectitude and institutional authority in a time much assailed by political and religious convulsions. The fragmentation of western Christendom and the revolution of scientific knowledge had provoked, by the second half of the seventeenth century, a feeling of profound instability in the old-world order. In order to preserve the sense of social order in a time of weakening religious authority, the Mahamad was forced to radicalise its stance on all forms of religious deviance, harshening its position towards transgressive behaviour and adopting a much stricter attitude regarding disciplinary measures.

The progressive solemnity with which public rituals were infused was intended, thus, as part of a greater political endeavour set to sharpen the boundaries between those affiliated to the congregation and those who led a marginal life at its margins. The latter, which chose not to adhere to the community or to partake in any of its religious activities, nor even to acknowledge their Jewish affiliation, where, for all matters, still socially active in its midst, representing their existence a considerable threat to the integrity of the community.

Some studies have already emphasized the dysfunctional relationship between these individuals and the many communities among which they lived in, characterizing their situation as a rational and conscient choice rather than resulting from mere chance or arbitrariness. Termed as “atheists”, “deists”, or “karaites”, their common denominator consisted in their shared heterodoxy *vis-à-vis* the rabbinical Jewish tradition of which the Portuguese communities were the perceived embodiment.¹⁴ When the famous apostate Uriel da Costa presented his views against the leaders of the Portuguese community of Hamburg, he did so arguing in favour of a non-confessional Judaism, a Judaism

14 Révah 1959; Popkin 1981; Saperstein 2008, 313-34; Kaplan 2018, 393-400.

liberated from its links to Pharisaic tradition and uprooted from the constraints of the Oral law and tradition.¹⁵ In a similar vein, the assertions made by Juan de Prado and Baruch Espinosa, both renegades of the Portuguese community of Amsterdam some decades later, serve as a testimony for the development of a new system of values based in a reformulation of the relationship between the individual and the divine.¹⁶

As a means to identify and repress these “Jews without synagogue”, as termed by Yosef Kaplan in allusion to their detachment to Jewish law and existence at the margins of the community, the Mahamad saw itself forced to issue dispositions with the intent of containing the dissident voices within its borders.¹⁷ This was achieved through all kinds of ways, notably, by further restricting censorship laws already in use, by resorting to communal excommunication (also known as *herem*), and by making use of new political concepts designed to preserve the unity and order of the congregation, matter to which we shall return more ahead in the present work.

Transacting with the sacred: critics to the polemical judicial reform

The practical disposition through which the Portuguese leaders understood and oriented their relationship between the religious and the political impacted at all levels of communal administration. As merchants and bankers of international level, profoundly rooted in the aristocratic circles and court etiquette of their time, their conception of leadership had its *raison d'être* in motivations others than those advocated by rabbinic tradition, and its main foundation, the divine law.¹⁸

In that respect, many of the communal institutions sought to ensure, under the external appearance of religious conformity (the use of *kinyan*,

15 Costa 1996.

16 For Juan de Prado, see Muchnik 2005. For Espinosa, see Smith 2007.

17 Kaplan 1992, 84-85.

18 For this topic, see the still relevant contributions from the sociologist Norbert Elias (1983; 2000).

the mediation of *dayanim*, among many others),¹⁹ the satisfaction of customs and regulations inherent to the governing merchant class and their utilitarian principles. This meant, by its necessary corollary, that all precepts of *halakha* relative to the functioning of the *bet din* (the religious court) were subject to political and economic considerations of the ruling elite – the Mahamad – and that this body was the sole warrant of authority on all matters relating to justice inside the congregation.²⁰ Possibly for that reason, the system of financial benefits that underpinned the functioning of communal justice was, not rarely, subject to fierce criticism from community members, being denounced for its faulty administration and corrupt mechanisms, many of which contrary to religious law.

This economic reason of state attained its high point in 1673, year which saw the appearance of a critical treaty by Mose Gideon Abudiente, a member of the Portuguese community of Hamburg, against a judicial reform that had just been ratified into law.²¹ The treaty, addressed to the Portuguese syndics, called into question the legality of the payment that was made to the *dayanim* (the Jewish-religious judgeship) for the performing of their services as judges inside the community; and moreover, stressed the many scruples which arose from the prohibition of teaching the Oral Law, and of what Abudiente called the “*julgar-se por premio*” (“Judging by merit”).²² The critique apparently centred on the legal interpretation of the *sobad* (literally: the gift) given by the Portuguese *parnassim* which, in the context of a courtroom could assume dimensions of a bribe rather than of a mere reward, thus constituting a type of corruption on part of Portuguese authorities.

Under penalty of *beracha*,²³ the treaty would be summarily banned by the Mahamad, who, after careful deliberation by the main *yeshivah* of the congregation, would exempt communal leaders from any irregularities or faults

19 *Kinyan*: a symbolic formal act by which a commitment is sealed. The *dayanim* are the body of judges presiding over the rabbinical court of the community.

20 Ruderman 2010, 65.

21 The context of this judicial reform is described in greater detail in Martins (2019b, 26-27).

22 *Livro da Nação*, II, 79.

23 Term that meant literally "blessing", and was used as a euphemism for punishment. It consisted generally in the expulsion or temporary isolation of the individual from the rest of the community.

in this area.²⁴ The fact that the Mahamad had deliberately prohibited the study of this particular aspect of the oral law is most revealing, for it attests to how far the Portuguese leadership was committed to go to protect the favourable status quo in matters of communal justice. As so often used by Portuguese leaders in opposition to inconvenient religious laws, it was necessary to preserve the “commercial custom” at all costs, which translates, in the current case, to their wider economic and political interests.

Two concepts of governance

At the doctrinal level, these transactions with the sacred were codified in conceptual terms under the form of two equally suggestive terms, representing both of which modalities of action and inaction in the political administration. The first one termed “conservation” (or *conservação*), was understood as a set of principles leading to the preservation of the political body, and implied a reaction against all destabilizing phenomena.²⁵ This terminology was especially found in the Iberian literary genre known as *espelho de príncipes*, and as such, was much in vogue in texts advocating princely virtues and political rightful action.²⁶ *Dissimulação*, on its turn, suggested conformity or political inaction in the face of disrupting elements. In this sense, it implied adaptation as a necessary and fundamental component of political bodies, when dealing with threats outside the range of possibility or action.²⁷ In that respect, it served as an indicator of periods of communal crisis, consisting all the while as the main propellant in the transition towards social change and innovation.

It is under the lenses of these two concepts that one must understand some of the most significant differences at the level of the political praxis in the Portuguese communities of the Diaspora. It is, for example, of “conservation”

24 *Livro da Nação*, II, 79.

25 Kaplan 1999, 45-46.

26 Lloyd, Burgess, Hodson 2007, 445; see also Botero 1619, 5-6, 16,15; Saavedra 1920, 165.

27 Too much dissimulation could lead to institutional mismanagement, such as when the Mahamad accused the previous governments of being too indulgent on disciplinary, economic, and fiscal matters (*Livro da Nação*, I, 342, 193, 352).

that we speak of when the *parnassim* of Hamburg issue a reform of the judicial system towards greater interference of the government in family matters.²⁸ By transferring many of the privileges relating to marriage, wills, and inheritance to the realm of the state, the latter was effectively performing a necessary step in the pursuit of conservation, whereby it secured the distribution of assets and the centralization of collective wealth into the hands of the “general good”, or *bem geral*, as it was termed.

Similarly should be understood the practices of “dissimulation” operated by the Portuguese *parnassim*. The most relevant of which having to do with the process of democratization of the electoral system, which, after its inauguration in 1662, gave way to a new institutional framework characterized by wide-ranging communal constituency.²⁹ Paradoxically enough, the new system allowed, after its establishment, for the development of political structures that challenged the very foundations of communal authority, being ultimately perceived as a threat to the communal stability. Rejected by the Portuguese syndics as a “ridiculous mode of election which nowhere among us is used”, the democratization constituted, in effect, an innovation in the Portuguese communities of the Diaspora, especially when considering the two remaining cases of London and Amsterdam, where electoral systems were based in the perpetual cooptation of the ruling elite.³⁰ Only reluctantly did the leaders of the Hamburg community accept the democratic transition, dissimulating their preference in favour of the prevailing popular opinion and thus, acting under the tenets of majority rule. Constituting the biggest example of political dissimulation in the history of the community, the democratic regime established in Hamburg prevailed over more than 20 years before it was rejected in favour of the old oligarchic rule.

28 *Livro da Nação*, I, 342, 193, 352.

29 Martins 2018, 106-107.

30 Martins 2018, 106-107.

Institutional centralization and extension of regulatory capacity

A final and important point to highlight is the set of limitations and shortcomings of the centralisation process initiated by the Mahamad after the congregational union of 1652.³¹ The curtailment of customs and traditions strongly rooted in the cultural heritage of the Portuguese, first as New-Christians, and finally, as Jews, was more difficult to impose in practice than on paper. Despite this fact, the Mahamad continued his fight against all forms of popular expression that were, in his opinion, likely to threaten the conservation and good governance of the community. Although such measures were adopted in other communities of the Portuguese Nation, in no other was their impact as profound and vast as in Hamburg. In fact, the development until then of distinct norms and practices within the same community (made possible in large part by the parallel evolution of different congregations), meant from the outset that any undertaking to homogenize religious practices would encounter strong congregational opposition.³²

Based on a strategic balance between dissimulation and periods of greater disciplinary severity, the Mahamad's response was guided by a firm and steady line of action: to pursue, at any cost, the centralising purpose over the whole community and to legitimize, for the first time in its history, an orthodoxy extending to all its members. Predictably and within a short time, areas such as education, marriage, divorce, married life, and family inheritance would become particularly contentious as their legal and rhetorical scope moved irretrievably from the family to that of the community.³³ Social, cultural and sexual barriers were erected at some of the major festivals and traditions, such as dances, music, and popular gatherings. Other festive occasions, such as circumcision, marriage, newborn naming, Purim, and Simchat Torah would be severely restricted and stripped of their most excessive, turbulent, and subversive components.³⁴

31 The unification of the three minor congregations into a single one, named Kahal Kadosh Bet Israel. See *Livro da Nação*, I, 5.

32 Martins 2018, 94-109.

33 Martins 2018, 245-58.

34 Lieberman 2011, 142-63.

In other more particular areas, the approach taken by communal leaders would be the precursor to a profound modernizing change, where progressively secularizing tendencies would gain ground in the face of old customs and traditions. This was the case, for example, with the lifting of the ban on razor shaving,³⁵ or the approach taken towards the issue of *acunbadar*.³⁶ Although rather circumscribed both in number and quality, these more liberal attitudes would testify to the strong links that united the Portuguese community to the wider Christian world and European culture of its time. On the other hand, they demonstrated the need felt by Portuguese leaders to integrate change and innovation as a necessary component of the political process.

Policy towards communal justice and social assistance

Largely dependent on the communal microcosmos where much of religious and social life took place, one of the ways used by families and individuals to bypass government interference in their private sphere would be through local justice. Benefiting from a legal context in which multiple jurisdictional frameworks limited the authority of communal justice, several members of the community were able to navigate, to their advantage, the complex legal and institutional web that existed in Hamburg and its neighbouring localities (e.g. among the local and appellate courts, one could find the *Niedergericht*, the *Obergericht*, the Admiralty, the *Reichshofrat* and the Chancellery of *Glückstadt*).³⁷ Such a situation illustrated that although constrained by religious, ethnic, and legal obstacles, some actors were able to creatively exploit the possibilities at their disposal, drawing considerable personal advantage and/or political influence. While both the pace of litigation and insubmission to communal justice showed signs of not slowing

35 Martins 2018, 265-66.

36 Term that designates the practice of marrying one's brother or sister-in-law, known as levirate marriage. On this issue in Hamburg, see Martins (2018, 251-53).

37 For a detailed description of each of these courts, see Martins (2018, 176-78).

down, the Mahamad sought to use its power to bind *jechidim* to communal jurisdiction (through the Bet Din, the Mahamad, or arbitration by *homens bons*).³⁸ In this regard, several measures leading to the reform of communal justice were implemented with the implicit aim of curbing high litigation rates, streamlining the functioning of justice, and strengthening its legal and disciplinary authority over community members. Criticized by some members of the Nation, who would see certain changes as an invitation to corruption and favouritism (as seen in the case of Mose Gideon Abudiente), such reforms would largely have the desired effect, considerably strengthening the authority of the community leadership in judicial matters.

On the other hand, the cooperation that took place between the Mahamad and State authorities in certain areas of communal justice was a key aspect in the administration of communal social welfare. Here, as in so many other communities of the Portuguese Nation, the leadership assumed an absolute responsibility in assisting the poor, sick and dying, a duty that was not only understood as a humanitarian imperative, but effectively as the result of pragmatic considerations associated with communal “conservation” and the preservation of good relations with the Senate.³⁹ In general terms, the organization of social assistance in the Hamburg community was based on the model practised in its Amsterdam counterpart, which in turn was inspired by the Jewish tradition and contemporary ideas and practices inherited from the Iberian Peninsula. Charitable institutions such as the Hebra and Guemillut Hassadim fulfilled an important humanitarian function by providing support to the sick and dying, while at the same time rehabilitating wide fringes of the population through voluntary work. Alongside these public institutions, a wide range of charitable activities was provided directly by the communal government. The criteria determining the allocation, destination, and volume of remittances followed a generally well-defined pattern: ethnic-religious and behavioural considerations outweighed all others, depending the merit both on

38 Translated literally to “good-men”, which designated originally men of the lower nobility. Here it means men of social standing, dedicated to the public service.

39 On the topic of social assistance in Hamburg, see Martins 2019c, 189-218.

the origin and the attitude of the beneficiary, as well as on the degree of his or her need.⁴⁰

In addition to the communal pathway, a substantial portion of the aid to the poor was provided by private initiative. Within this group are, for example, the testamentary donations and the various deeds carried out by zealous members of the Nation which were generally, but not always, the domain of the richest and most distinguished members of the community. The charity promoted by private individuals was highly valued by the Mahamad, yet it failed to fill an important gap in the assistance provided by the community: the absence of charitable societies of independent or autonomous character. In fact, despite similarities with its Amsterdam counterpart, important differences in the type and quality of communal assistance provided in Hamburg should be nevertheless noted. Among these are, most notably, the highly centralising policies pursued by the Mahamad over the period in question, a practice that played a key role in the prevention of social structures capable of meeting the demands of communal welfare. Although other communities have been marked by the same dilemma characterized by a balance between religious autonomy and institutional supervision, the Hamburg community has taken a more radical approach than its counterparts. As part of its repressive policy towards dissent, all forms of sub-congregational organization involving a certain level of autonomy were viewed with suspicion by the community leadership and, at one time or another, actively pursued and discouraged. Such was the case, for example, with the Ets Haim brotherhood, but as well with the dissolving ex-congregations, the so-called *midrassim*, including a number of aborted attempts at founding brotherhoods and houses of study.⁴¹

Thus, unlike Amsterdam, where alongside the central government, several private institutions were instrumental in creating a fabric of social interdependence and solidarity, in Hamburg the aversion of the Mahamad to autonomous initiative created a vacuum increasingly difficult to fill, and even

40 Such considerations are present as well in the welfare system provided by Portuguese Jews in Amsterdam, as shown by Levie Bernfeld (2012).

41 *Livro da Nação*, I, 322, 394.

more so to finance.⁴² Unparalleled in any other community in the Western Sephardic Diaspora, this aversion to decentralization may be closely related, on the one hand, to the serious internal conflicts that marked much of the community's history in the second half of the seventeenth century.⁴³ On the other hand, the precarious political and legal situation of the community externally – dependent on the delicate balance of power between the Senate and the *Bürgerschaft*⁴⁴ – and on the other, a political and religious rift between some of the most prominent families of the community. Understandably, the impact of such situation on the self-confidence of the community led its leaders to compensate the deep instability through a more pronounced position internally, one that would stifle religious and political dissent at its very core.

Final remarks

In a concluding note, the concepts and practices of government that characterized the leadership of Portuguese Nation of Hamburg along the seventeenth century were as much a product of their time as a complex mosaic of traditions and customs coming from the period before the Iberian expulsion. Mercantilist in their world-view, secular leaders sought to regulate the influence of religious tradition and authority under the realm of a pragmatic approach to government, while depending at the same time, on the premises of divine law and on the charismatic influence of religious figures in order to legitimize their actions and reinforce communal cohesion. By its natural constraints, the strong links with the Christian world and European culture, and the markedly economic and diplomatic character of their activity, these were forced to integrate change and innovation as a necessary component of the political body. In this sense, Portuguese communities were precursors

42 The many important private societies in Amsterdam stand out in this respect: Ets Haim, Dotar, Aby Jetomim, Temime Darech, Maskil el Dal, Honem Dalim and Mazon Abanot. For more information on these institutions, see Bernfeld (2012).

43 On this aspect, see Whaley 1985; Kaplan 1994; Böhm 1994; and Braden 2001; as well as more recently, Martins 2018.

44 Hamburg's citizen council.

of a profound change towards modernization, where complex secularizing tendencies gained progressive ground in face of old customs and traditions. It is at the crossroads between the need to safeguard tradition and the necessity to welcome the new, that one should understand the complex and ambiguous process of government which stood at the heart of Portuguese contemporary leaders, be they secular or religious.

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