Sephardi Family Life in the Early Modern Diaspora
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This fascinating collection of essays illuminates the diversity of the post-Inquisition Sephardi Jewish experience through the lens of domestic life. Julia R. Lieberman and a team of international scholars explore both daily and dramatic aspects of Jewishness within diverse types of Jewish families in Italy, Holland, and across the Ottoman Empire, breaking new ground on important and often understudied chapters in early modern Jewish social history.

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries some Jews—and some crypto-Jews—correctly assessed the bleak future of Iberian Jewish life and set off for whichever locations were currently allowing Jewish immigration. In August 1492, following the Expulsion of “all Jews and Jewesses,” the last professing Sephardi Jews left Spain. They joined brothers and sisters who preceded them to form new, distinctive, and often vibrant Jewish communities. Sephardi Jewish families who relocated into the Ottoman Empire arrived at their new homes with understandings of Jewishness, gender role construction, family structure, community organization, and relationship with outside cultures that differed substantively from those in many Ashkenazi societies. Many Jews who had lived in Spain and Portugal, for example, had adopted prevalent cultural attitudes toward women’s appropriate roles, which were in general fairly restricted. (In contrast, from the Middle Ages onward Ashkenazi women played important roles as brokers for Westernization; through their marketplace activities, these women helped to move European Jews toward the gradually emerging middle class.)

Some of the Sephardi Jews who emigrated immediately before and after the expulsion were deeply religious Jews who lived according to rabbinic dictates in their new homes. Sephardi scholars—who had long been among the intellectual stars of rabbinic thinking and writing—continued with their scholarship. The Jewish communities they created continued to develop in particularistic ways, as transplanted Jews interacted with the cultures of their new neighbors.

Later emigrants of Jewish background from the Iberian Peninsula to Western countries brought with them yet another approach to Jewishness, profoundly
influenced by the repressive socio-religious and political conditions they had endured. The years of anti-Jewish riots and cataclysmic persecution that precipitated the conversion of some of the most distinguished, well-educated, and affluent Sephardi Jewish families—frequently thousands at a time—also had an impact on their relationship to Jews and Jewishness. Those crypto-Jews who remained in Spain and Portugal even after the Expulsion often lost touch with evolving halakhic developments in rabbinic Judaism. Some were suspicious of halakhic rules and norms they encountered when they eventually emigrated and made contact with traditionalist Sephardi Jews whose religious and cultural lives were more established. Conflicts sometimes erupted between earlier and later emigrants. Even for those who shared religious intensity, important customs often differed significantly.

Nowhere were those arguments more significant, contentious, and fraught with religious and social significance than those cases that focused on the roles of women, the rites of marriage, and the structure of the family. Court cases, responsa literature, letters, memoirs, sermons, and other sources reveal stories that are compelling, some intriguing, some pathetic, with details of licit and illicit loves, children born and named in the synagogue and those born out of wedlock and deprived of primogeniture, fortunes made and stolen and squandered. Status within the Jewish community and peoplehood often hung in the balance for the individuals involved—and communal power hung in the balance for rabbis and leaders who provided conflicting sources of authority.

Sephardi Jews were often skilled merchants, and some were involved in trade across national borders. Repeated rupture had created a sophisticated, enterprising approach to existence. For a segment of the Sephardi population that emigrated from Spain and Portugal, this cosmopolitan lifestyle was a doorway to the gradual influences of modernity, and these Jews themselves played indirect (and sometimes direct) roles in societal changes. This was especially true in Western European countries, where acculturated Sephardi Jewish merchants were key players, and often had substantial social interactions with their Protestant neighbors. The extent of those porous boundaries—and the reason why they alarmed devout Jewish rabbinic and communal leaders—is sometimes revealed in discussions about ritual events, such as parties (vegia) the night before the circumcision of a Jewish son, ostensibly a vigil to ward off evil spirits, which were attended by Christian as well as Jewish men, who indulged together in drinking and ribald jokes.

The lives of their wives and daughters in Western European Sephardi families, while often quite sequestered, were profoundly affected by the economic
status of the family. Women in more affluent families often were able to find opportunities that opened new horizons for them. In these settings, women continued the business activities of deceased husbands, ran their own businesses, acquired real estate, and sometimes participated in philanthropic activities. Among those who had emigrated earlier and remained connected to halakhic Jewish lifestyles, poorer and/or more pious women especially worked in and sometimes headed up Jewish communal enterprises, such as caring for the ill or preparing dead women for burial. Women among the later émigrés, which included many former crypto-Jews, however, were less familiar with communal norms of gemilut hasidim (compassionate deeds for society’s most vulnerable) and often eschewed such menial and, to them, unpleasant work.

As we approach these captivating materials, we live in an era when many Jews are discovering multicultural Jewishness—the diversity of Jewish life around the world. This seems the perfect moment to publish this treasure trove of Jewish social history. For many Ashkenazi Jews, the Sephardi Jewish experience—aside from the Spanish Inquisition—has virtually been as remote and unknown as the dark side of the moon. This collection of essays not only reveals important chapters in Jewish life, but also illuminates the Jewish experience as a whole as modernity dawned and changed the terms forever. This book is an exciting new addition to the HBI Series on Jewish Women, which has as its mission supporting fresh ways of thinking about Jews and gender worldwide.

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This book is a collection of essays dealing with Sephardi Jewish family life in the early modern period. It includes studies dealing with Sephardi communities formed after the expulsion from Spain in 1492, when Spanish Jewry was forced to disperse in numerous directions. In that catastrophic year, many Spanish Jews made the painful decision to go into exile instead of abandoning Judaism and traveled tortuous and dangerous routes by land and sea. Many of them found temporary refuge in places such as the kingdoms of Navarre in northern Spain, Portugal to the west, the region of Provence in southern France, and various cities in Italy and northern Africa. Most of the exiles eventually made it to Mediterranean countries recently conquered by the emerging and expanding Ottoman Empire. Because of the eastern route that these exiles followed, historians call the communities under Ottoman rule “Eastern Sephardi” communities. From most of these temporary places of refuge, the Spanish exiles were soon forced to leave again shortly after their arrival. In 1497, those who went to the nearby kingdom of Portugal were forcibly baptized by royal decree, together with the indigenous Portuguese Jews, and became “New Christians.”

While many Jews chose to leave Spain in 1492, a large number converted to Christianity in order to remain in their country of birth. This group joined the ranks of other so-called Spanish New Christians who were, in fact, descendants of those who had originally converted to Christianity in 1391, when violence forced many to accept Christianity. But neither those who converted and remained in Spain, nor those who went to Portugal and were forcibly baptized, integrated into the larger society that, for centuries, continued to label them and their descendents New Christians, “conversos,” “marranos,” or tornadizos (turncoats), as opposed to Old Christians: Spanish or Portuguese Christians who supposedly had no Jewish (or Muslim) blood.

The expulsion from Spain not only dispersed Iberian Jewry as a collectivity, it also had a tremendous impact on individual households as frequently members of the same family went in different directions. As historian Haim Beinart has demonstrated, between the date of expulsion, 1492, and 1499, a number of
Spanish Jews who went to Portugal and Morocco felt compelled to return to Spain and convert to Christianity. Most of the returnees from Portugal were among those who had left property behind and had something they wished to recover. In many cases they were sons and daughters whose parents had died in Portugal, or women who became widowed in exile and sought to recover their parents’ or husbands’ property, even their dowries, and return to their places of origin in Spain. Before the expulsion they had belonged to a cross-section of Jewish society whose livelihood depended on agriculture and landowning in an expansive geographical area in Castile. As they had run out of financial resources in Portugal, they saw no other option but to return to Spain.1

Migration of conversos in large numbers to the Ottoman Empire was gradual and took several decades.2 It started in the 1480s, when small numbers of converso families from the regions of Valencia and Aragon moved to places such as Valona in Albania, the Holy Land (under the Mamluks), or Salonica (Thessaloniki), where they reverted to the Judaism they or their parents had abandoned in 1391 or thereafter.3 In 1492, right after the expulsion, some Spanish exiles arrived in the port city of Salonica, but the majority of them found temporary shelter elsewhere and only gradually made it to Ottoman-ruled lands. At first they settled in port cities of the southern Balkans and western Anatolia, such as Salonica, the empire’s capital Constantinople (Istanbul), and Adrianople (Edirne). In the two main centers, Constantinople and Salonica, Spanish exiles organized their communities in two different ways, and these two models were followed by other Sephardi communities.

In Salonica the exiles found basically no other Jews, as the Ottomans had transferred the indigenous Jewish population, mostly Romaniots and some Ashkenazim and Italians, to the capital and to other centers; those Iberians soon formed the majority of the Jewish population. They faced tremendous challenges reconstructing Jewish communal and family lives in small groups, without any organized Jewish leadership or others to guide them in their new environment, but soon the Sephardim imposed Castilian usages and customs, and the Salonica model of communal organization was followed by other Balkan communities.

In Constantinople, the situation developed differently, as the Iberians found an indigenous population of Romaniot and other Jews, well organized and with their own customs and traditions. Although each indigenous group formed separate communities according to their country or city of origin, the local communities together formed a majority that dictated the standards for all. The communities in Anatolia and the provinces of the East adopted the Con-
stantinople model of communal organization. Soon friction arose between the local Romaniots and Ashkenazim and the new but far more numerous Iberian exiles, as the locals wished to impose their will and the Iberians wanted their autonomy.

Spanish Jews arrived in Ottoman lands in terrible condition, and very few had intact families. Some had left behind spouses, husbands or wives who had made the choice to convert to Christianity, while others had lost some or “all of their children along the way, due to death by disease, hunger or seizure by the authorities.” But life went on and, as one of the essays in this collection will demonstrate, Iberian Jews began to intermarry with the indigenous Romaniot Jewish population soon after their arrival. This situation created tensions between religious leaders whose perspectives differed. This included attitudes toward women and sexual morality. Although we do not possess direct women’s voices, rabbinic responsa of this early period give us glimpses of women as mothers, wives and brides, as well as insights into a patriarchal Jewish society where women’s roles were always dictated and controlled by men.

Throughout the sixteenth century, Iberian New Christians continued to migrate to Italy, the Ottoman Empire, or the New World. In 1536 the Portuguese Inquisition was established and New Christians began to leave Portugal as soon as they had the opportunity to do so, usually through their mercantile activities. Some New Christians also reached the New World after the expulsion and there they continued to live as Catholic Christians but some practiced some form of Judaism (crypto-Judaism) in the privacy of their homes.

At the end of the sixteenth century, new developments in international commerce, as well as a new pragmatic attitude toward elite Jews in general and toward New Christian merchants in particular, presented Iberian New Christians with the opportunity to start a new life in settlements throughout port cities in Western Europe. The most important of these new settlements, in Livorno, Amsterdam, and Hamburg, were founded at the turn of the seventeenth century by New Christian international merchants originally from Portugal and Spain but frequently arriving from other settlements as far flung as the colonial empires in the New World and Africa. Soon after, these New Christians adopted rabbinic Judaism and the Western Sephardi communities were born. Although these communities organized themselves in different ways than the Eastern Sephardi communities, the Western communities relied upon the Eastern Sephardim and employed them as teachers, rabbis, and in other religious functions. One significant contrast with the Eastern Sephardi communities was the distribution of power between rabbis and the Mahamad or lay leaders. In the
newly established Western Sephardi communities, decisions affecting family life and attitudes toward women and children were mostly made by the Mahamad, with the consent of rabbis, but were not necessarily based solely on halakhah (Jewish law) and traditions. As several of the essays in this volume will reveal, in these communities, women continued to play important roles in the domestic realm as mothers and wives, but they were invisible in anything that might have been considered public life. Even in Amsterdam, the most important of the Western Sephardi communities, where religious and secular education of males was so highly valued, we have found no signs of efforts to educate females in the difficult tasks of returning to Judaism and keeping a Jewish household.7

The essays in this volume all deal with aspects of the Sephardi household and the lives of women, children, adolescents, and slaves. By focusing on how daily Jewish family life was reconstructed after the expulsion from Spain in 1492, the essays help the reader see the expulsion and the long-term consequences of the expulsion on ordinary people—women, children, and adolescents—who are seldom the subject of discussion in books dedicated to the history of the Sephardim. Conversely, by focusing on issues of the household, the reader will learn about how the Sephardi way of life and culture evolved outside its original Iberian setting and was also preserved throughout the centuries. For an educator who teaches Sephardi studies often covering large chronological and geographical segments, this book is a dream come true, as its collective narrative will help students see the field of Sephardi studies from a gender and women’s studies perspective.

These essays are by scholars from a variety of countries, including Israel and the United States, as well as two European countries; they are trained in a variety of disciplines including religion, history, gender studies, and literature. Four of the essays were originally written in English while two of them were translated: Ruth Lamdan’s essay was originally published in Hebrew and Cristina Galasso’s was published in Italian.

The chronological point of departure for the volume is 1492, the year when Iberian Jews went into exile, leaving behind many of their brethren, who converted to Christianity and later re-embraced Judaism. All the essays focus on the early modern period: the sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century. Although other books that study Iberian Jewry after the 1492 expulsion tend to separate the two diasporas, Eastern and Western, and thereby emphasize their differences, the original idea for this book was to gather studies dedicated to both Eastern and Western Sephardi communities and to see them side
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by side with their similarities and differences. We anticipate that this decision to include both diasporas will interest a variety of readers. Professors of gender and women’s studies from both a Jewish and non-Jewish perspective will find the essays of interest for their courses because they collectively demonstrate the experience of Sephardi women across a long period of time and a vast geographical expansion. Scholars interested in the history of the (Ashkenazi) Jewish family of the past will also find the essays useful because they demonstrate how the practice of rabbinic Judaism differed depending on the medieval milieu in which Jews lived. Finally, readers interested in Sephardi Jewry in general will find that the book tells the Sephardi story from a gender-conscious perspective. The book is divided into three parts.

Part 1 deals with communities formed shortly after the expulsion from Spain in 1492. Chapter 1, by Hannah Davidson, “Communal Pride and Female Virtue: ‘Suspecting Sivlonot’ in the Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire in the Early Sixteenth Century,” is a study of rabbinic responsa addressing the challenges brought about by intermarriage between members of the Romaniot and Sephardi communities. One case in which Jewish law clearly mandates that local custom determine correct practice is the custom of sivlonot, the giving of gifts by a groom to his bride-to-be. The question of the marital status of a bride who had received sivlonot was discussed in the early sixteenth century by rabbis, Sephardi exiles and Romaniots. The questions under consideration in these responsa reflect the realities of the social integration of two disparate communities, with different customs, who were intermarrying. The Romaniot Jews in Istanbul gave sivlonot (gifts from a groom to his bride) after the kidushin (preliminary marriage ceremony) and thus considered any woman who had received sivlonot to be legally wed. The custom of the Sephardi Jews who predominated in Salonica and Adrianople was to give sivlonot before the kidushin and, therefore, the receipt of sivlonot was not considered proof that the woman was legally bound. Problems arose when a member of one community became engaged to a member of another community and gifts were sent between one city and another. The responsa highlight the differences in both custom and halakhah and the tension felt by rabbinic leaders of both communities, who sought to preserve their own traditions while acknowledging the customs of the other community.

Chapter 2, by Ruth Lamdan, “Mothers and Infants as Seen by Sixteenth-Century Rabbis in the Ottoman Empire,” is also based on responsa literature from Sephardi communities in Egypt, Eretz-Israel, Salonica, and Istanbul. The sixteenth century is a period distinguished by its many expectations and the
hope for national and personal resurrection to be realized by means of the new generation. The traditional role of women within the family—to bear healthy children, preferably males—was more sensitive and emotionally charged than ever before. Hebrew sources regarding women and children are extremely scant. In the sixteenth century, personal stories and details of the lives of Jewish women can be found mainly in halakhic legal sources, in the accounts related in the responsa literature in the context of lawsuits involving women. This chapter studies some of the individual cases discussed in sixteenth-century halakhic literature and will try to delve more deeply into the relationship between mothers and their offspring and the approach of the leading sages of the times—almost all of whom are of Sephardi descent—to the maternal bond. Through the halakhic discussions the chapter will refer to issues such as pregnancy and birth, breastfeeding, and guardianship of children.

The three chapters in part 2 focus on family life in Western Sephardi communities—Amsterdam, Hamburg, Livorno and Pisa. These merchant communities, populated with former New Christians originally from Spain and Portugal, were founded at the turn of the seventeenth century. These chapters also touch upon the London Sephardi community, as well as converso communities, including the one in Antwerp and those in the Hispanic New World under Catholic Spanish or Portuguese control, where Jewish life was carried on under the pretense of Catholicism.

Chapter 3, “Religious Space, Gender and Power in the Sephardi Diaspora: The Return to Judaism of New Christian Men and Women in Livorno and Pisa,” by Cristina Galasso, presents some results, in the form of suggestions and hypotheses, on New Christian men and women who arrived in Livorno and Pisa in the seventeenth century and returned to Judaism. Before arriving in Tuscany or in other “lands of Judaism,” where they could profess their faith without fear, many of the conversos had remained secretly attached to Judaism, observing traditional Jewish practices and beliefs in the safety of their homes. The public return to the Jewish faith of conversos coming from Iberia was called “coming to Judaism.” It signified a restoration of blood ties uniting the “children of Israel” and the public acceptance of Jewish law under rabbinic control. As we shall see, conversos were reconverted in different ways according to gender, and this led to a redefinition of space and religious power, and also identity.

Chapter 4, by Julia R. Lieberman, “Childhood and Family among the Western Sephardim in the Seventeenth Century,” focuses on family life in three Western Sephardi communities—Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Livorno—with
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an emphasis on children. This chapter will explore the Western Sephardi household: the roles assigned to husbands and wives, and how life-cycle events that involved children were celebrated. These events include birth, circumcision, naming the children, redemption of the first born, the bar mitzvah, which Western Sephardi referred to as a child “entering the observant’s guild,” as well as the system of apprenticeship in adolescence. Throughout the essay, two questions will be addressed: First, to what extent did Sephardim view their children as individuals different from adults? In other words, in what way were children recognized as having their own specific needs? Second, what roles were children assigned in the Sephardi family? If we consider childhood as an idea formed in the minds of adults, then what was the relationship between the idea of childhood among the ex-conversos and their own collective Jewish identity, an identity that was also in the process of being reconstructed?

Chapter 5, “Sephardi Women in Holland’s Golden Age” is written by Tirtsah Levy Bernfeld. It was not easy to approach the Sephardi women of Holland’s Golden Age. As he toured Amsterdam, an English traveler was greatly surprised that Sephardi men kept their wives restrained essentially as prisoners. This image stood in striking contrast to the so-called great freedom of movement of Ashkenazi and non-Jewish females who were present all over the streets of Amsterdam and were active in many aspects of the economic, social, and intellectual life of the Republic.

Was the contrast really so great? Did the position of Dutch Sephardi women really differ so much from the women around them? This chapter examines the different identities of Sephardi women—discerning their financial status and whereabouts, educational background, work, family life, social activities, and Jewish identity. Various sources allow a view behind the scenes and help to unveil different aspects of the position of Sephardi women within their own community and in relation to the wider world. Thus, this chapter contributes to the investigation of the history of gender issues among the Dutch Sephardim in early modern times, a field in need of deeper exploration.

This book concludes with part 3. In this part, David Graizbord writes on “Researching the Childhood of ‘New Jews’ of the Western Sephardi Diaspora in Light of Recent Historiography.” Recent decades have seen historians’ fascination with cultural anthropology yield fruitful approaches to the history of identity formation. Within the subfields of medieval and early modern Jewish history, scholars have produced important studies of childhood and family life in Ashkenazi and Italo-Jewish communities. For their part, scholars of early modern Sephardim in the West have contributed important analyses of communal
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and ethnic formation. However, those works have seldom focused on problems of early socialization. In this chapter Graizbord will approach that lacuna by relating what he considers to be a key insight from recent, anthropologically informed historiography on early modern Ashkenazim to Western Sephardi cases. After providing some background on the history and phenomenology of New Christians, he draws those cases from the history of communities of “New Jews” (New Christians who opted to embrace Judaism) in seventeenth-century France and the Netherlands.

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Notes


Sephardi Family Life in the Early Modern Diaspora
Introduction

What Is a Family?

When we talk today about “the family,” we mean something very different than the concept that existed in the medieval and early modern periods. The Latin term *familia*, which was adopted in many European languages to designate a set of parents and their children (for instance, as in an “English family”), originated in Roman times and culture, and it was used to refer to various overlapping concepts. One of the meanings of *familia* was a derivative of *famulus*, the cohort of slaves and servants that constituted part of the patrimony owned by the master of the *domus* or house. It was later extended to include descendents living under the authority of one person, the paterfamilias; and, finally, *domus* also denoted the family members living in it.1 Similarly, in the Hebrew Bible, the term “family” also was a word with more than one meaning: “To found a family was ‘to build a house’ (Deut. 25:10). The bayit (‘house’) was a subdivision of the mishpahah (‘clan, family [in the larger sense],’ Josh. 7:14).”2 At the center of the family, both in its Latin and Hebrew original meanings, the figure of the paterfamilias or the father stands out as the owner of wealth and power over all of the people dependent on him, although not all of them were related by blood or kinship.3

In Spanish the term *familia* (family) was defined in the medieval legal code, *Las Siete Partidas*, as a word referring to “the master, his wife, children, and servants.”4 Four centuries later, in 1611, the dictionary *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* gives a similar definition under the entry *familia*:

[family means] the people that a master feeds [nourishes] in his house, and from this he took the name of father of families; it derives from the Latin name *familia* . . . [which] among the ancients it only included slaves, having originated from the Oscan *famel* . . . But now this name [*familia*] not only includes the
parents, grandparents and other descendents . . . but also the master and his wife, his children, servants, and slaves.\textsuperscript{5}

This concept of the family, as comprising not only our contemporary view of “a family” (a set of parents and their children), but also other individuals living in the household (not necessarily related by blood), has been amply documented by historians of family as evident in the past. In the words of David Gant, for centuries the word \textit{family} was used to designate “a relationship not of a biological nature, but one of belonging and dependency to the superior individual who was legally termed the paterfamilias,” and although by the end of the Middle Ages the term “family” began to appear on some documents as referring to the conjugal family, even in the mid-eighteenth century the term \textit{family} often included all “those living in the same household.”\textsuperscript{6}

\textit{Research on the History of the Family}

The history of the family is a relatively new field of research that started only in the 1950s but has advanced significantly in recent decades. Interest in exploring family life of the past was initiated by a small group of French historians who, in the 1940s, founded the new branch of historical research that became known in the 1950s as \textit{historical demography}. Among the most important of these French pioneers interested in the history of the family was Louis Henry, who was credited with devising the technique known as \textit{family reconstitution}. By studying data provided by French Catholic registers, demographers were able to calculate birth, marriage, and death rates, as well as to advance their study of fertility. To the credit of these pioneering studies, the lives of ordinary people, including women and children of all socioeconomic backgrounds, became a subject of historical study, instead of the previous focus on only male elites.\textsuperscript{7}

In addition to the demographic approach to the study of the family, other historians followed the approach known as the history of mentalities or attitudes (\textit{mentalités}). This approach was initiated by the French historian Philippe Ariès in his \textit{Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family}, originally published in 1948.\textsuperscript{8} By studying a variety of cultural artifacts—paintings and portraits of children, toys and games, as well as written documents, such as manuals of etiquette, personal letters, diaries, and memoirs—Ariès explored sentiments and feelings of emotional attachments between spouses and children, and their development over a long period of time. He concluded that the idea of childhood did not exist until the seventeenth century, and that it was a
result of the emerging concept of the nuclear family and the contemporary pedagogical system that separated children into age groups. His support of the evolutionary view of the family as characteristic of Western tradition was rejected by his peers, including anthropologists and demographers. These peers were in the process of proving the opposite theory, that is, the long history of the nuclear family. Ariès’s conclusion, that in the past parents did not love their children, has been widely rejected. Three other major books followed Ariès’s: In 1975 Edward Shorter published The Making of the Modern Family; in 1977 Lawrence Stone published The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England 1500–1880; and in 1979 Jean-Louis Flandrin published Famille, parenté, maison, sexualité dans l’ancienne société. Even today, Ariès’s book continues to have a great impact on studies of childhood and the family.

In 1965 Peter Laslett published The World We Have Lost, a book that preceded other collaborative works by Laslett and the group of demographers known as the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, but it shares some of the same premises as the subsequent studies. Laslett’s study of the English family in the seventeenth century demolished the evolutionist view of the family—from large and complex in the past to a nuclear one in modern times—and replaced it with a new theory based on his demographic research. The English family, to the extent it was documented, was nuclear and consisted only of the conjugal couple and their children. Marriage took place at a relatively late age for women (the average age was twenty-four) and for men only about four years later (at age twenty-eight). The late age of marriage limited the number of children a couple could have, and, because life expectancy was short and many children died during childhood, families were not very large and most grandparents did not live to see their grandchildren. In addition to the nuclear family, a majority of households included other members not related by blood and consisting of young servants and apprentices and other temporary residents or “journeymen.” Quite often, also, a significant proportion of the population did not marry.

In the mid-1960s, John Hajnal published the revolutionary essay “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective,” which divided Europe along an imaginary line known as the “Hajnal line,” one that separated Eastern and Western Europe. On the eastern side of the line, Hajnal found what he referred to as a non-European pattern of marriage, characterized by marriage at a young age for both men and women, and where marriage was basically universal and most persons married. In contrast, in Western Europe (which covered most of Europe), he found what is known as the “European marriage pattern,” where people
married at a relatively late age (men at 26 and women at 23 or 24) and a large number of persons (10 to 15 percent) never married at all.\textsuperscript{12}

**The Mediterranean Family**

In contrast to the areas of Northern Europe favored by the studies of Hajnal, Lastlett, and the Cambridge Group, and where the model of the *Western family* predominates, scholars of the Mediterranean countries are far more reluctant to apply the contrasting, unifying term *Mediterranean family*. Instead, the evidence has so far demonstrated that there is no one type of household formation in Mediterranean countries but, rather, various systems, depending not only on the individual countries but also on the subregions of each one. Some commonalities that apply to the Mediterranean family are cultural components, such as the concepts of honor and shame, which were shared by both Christian and Islamic societies.\textsuperscript{13} In Christian Mediterranean countries, family relations were dictated by a combination of civil Roman law and the Christian Church laws (canon law), as opposed to the customary Germanic law prevalent in northern European countries. In Ottoman Europe, that is, the territories in southeastern Europe under the control of the expanding Ottoman Empire, Islamic law, with its different concepts of polygyny (more than one spouse) and divorce, applied to marriage and family relations among Muslims. Although religious minorities, such as Eastern Christians and Jews, retained their own self-government, they were culturally influenced by the surrounding Islamic society.\textsuperscript{14}

**The Spanish Christian Family**

In the Iberian Peninsula, historians have also identified such a wide variety of family types that speaking of the *Spanish family* is impossible. In the words of the Spanish historian Francisco Chacón Jiménez, “Just as there is no one Mediterranean family [but rather various], there is no one Spanish type of family.”\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, some broad generalization is needed, and the Peninsula is usually divided into two parts.\textsuperscript{16} In Northern and Eastern Spain, the predominant type of family formation was a stem or complex family with a chosen heir who, upon marriage, continued to co-reside with his or her parents to keep the patrimony together or to provide support as they grew older. Under this type of
family formation, non-heirs had limited ways to find partners of equal social
standing, and so some (more or less depending on the region and social class)
remained celibate or entered the Church as clergy.\textsuperscript{17} In the vast majority of the
Peninsula, the Castilian inheritance system was the norm; inheritance was di-
vided equally among all children (male and female), and the type of family was
nuclear. The Castilian partible inheritance system followed rather complicated
formulas. A portion of the estate was called the \textit{legitima} or fair share, which was
to be distributed among the \textit{herederos forzosos} or rightful heirs. The \textit{legitima}
was first divided into three parts—two of them were distributed equally and
the last part, referred to as the \textit{mejora} (from the verb \textit{mejorar}, to improve or
benefit), went to a chosen heir. Even in regions where the predominant type of
family was complex, some portions of the population followed the Castilian
partible inheritance system and lived in nuclear families. In the absence of wills
at the death of parents, the inheritance was equally divided among all children,
male and female.\textsuperscript{18}

The Castilian system of inheritance also resulted in diverse family types, de-
pending on the region. In a study of the region of Cuenca, for example, which
was under the Castilian system, Reher has concluded that few persons had wills,
and there was no indication of families favoring one child at the expense of
others. Dowries to daughters generally were insignificant and given only to
help them set up their own households.\textsuperscript{19}

In a study of families in the early modern period in Granada, also under the
Castilian system of inheritance,\textsuperscript{20} the findings were rather different from those
of Cuenca. Although, in principle, the egalitarian system of inheritance was the
norm, families in Granada used the \textit{mejora} in order to favor one child, who
could end up with over half of the estate, as he or she would also inherit his or
her \textit{legitima}. As demonstrated by Casey, in Granada the medieval custom of
dividing the patrimony, when land was plentiful during the Reconquest and
fortunes could be made quickly, began to give way after 1500 to a new system,
the so-called \textit{mayorazgo} or primogeniture—“the concentration of the inheri-
tance on the head of just one son, usually the eldest, while the younger siblings
were encouraged to fan out into the service of the state and the Church.”\textsuperscript{21}

The creation of a \textit{mayorazgo} allowed families to gradually move up on the
social scale from the professional middle class to the patrician elite. The process,
however, required the participation of all family members; the child entrusted
with the \textit{mejora} often had to postpone marriage or remain celibate forever,
contribute payments to the dowries of his sisters (which often lead to long-
term family debt), and build up a network of contacts to provide opportunities
for siblings left out of the inheritance. Some who married and had children had to be content with the promise that their first child would be the designated heir to the *mayorazgo*. Others would have to enter the Church and withdraw claims to the family patrimony. Daughters were either provided with a huge dowry to marry off well, at the expense of bringing debt to the family, or they entered a convent with only a modest dowry. In the public eye, a family under the *mayorazgo* system lived a costly life that befit their newly acquired elite social class. Casey calls these families “nobles of the doubloon” and refers to them as a new society in need of status.

**Spanish Legal System**

What is common to all regions of the Iberian Peninsula, since the Middle Ages, is its Roman Justinian legal system that regulated family relations. In the medieval and early modern periods, the Spanish family was patriarchal: a domestic group presided over by the male in his roles as husband and father. The male was invested with the authority to govern and direct all domestic matters on behalf of all family members. The wife and children were in a clear position of dependence and obedience in relation to the husband and father. In addition to marriages sanctioned by the Christian Church, a civil union called the *barraganía* existed and continued to exist even after the Counter-Reformation. Children born of this civil union were considered natural but not illegitimate. As the husband, the male had authority over his wife based on the belief that “[a] woman’s nature [was] weaker than the male’s.” With small regional variations, the husband had the authority to administer his own patrimony as well as his wife’s and her dowry; although, at the dissolution of the marriage, he was obligated to return the wife’s patrimony and dowry to her or their children.

In relation to his children, the father was invested with the authority of *patria potestad*, which gave him the right to “moderately punish his children” and to authorize the marriage of his sons and daughters. Non-married children were under the authority of their fathers until the age of twenty-five, when they reached the age of majority. In the early modern period, the father, but not the mother, was invested with *patria potestad*—in contrast with the medieval period when this authority had been shared with the mother. The father was also responsible for the education and care of his children and for providing dowries for his daughters.
Introduction

In conclusion, in Mediterranean Christian Spain, from the medieval to the early modern periods, families structured their households in a variety of ways that differed from other Western European countries. Two systems of inheritance, partible (egalitarian) and non-partible, determined whether a given family would form a nuclear or a complex household. But by the end of the Middle Ages, under the emerging system of *mayorazgo*, there was a tendency to favor one child to provide care for parents or to accumulate wealth, resulting in families where all members, single and married, formed a complex and intertwined web of relationships. Also, the Iberian family was ruled by a paterfamilias who was charged with legal responsibilities as well as with rights to control the lives of those living under his roof. As we will try to demonstrate now, the Iberian Christian way of viewing the institution of the family was shared with the Iberian Jews until the expulsion of 1492. After this date, the exiles of 1492 coming from Spain and the New Christians who returned to Judaism at the end of the sixteenth century retained much of this cultural heritage.

Medieval and early modern Ashkenazi family life and parenthood, as well as childhood, have been the subject of a number of recent publications. Overall these works reflect the view that Jewish societies of the past were not isolated islands but rather that they interacted with their hosting Christian communities and were influenced by them while preserving their Jewish identity. Ivan G. Marcus has called this interaction “inward acculturation” to differentiate it from modern “outward acculturation.” It refers to how medieval Ashkenazi Jewry negotiated with the hosting Christian majority, rejecting some of its customs while adapting others, and then transmitting them to future generations who, with time, came to regard them as part of Jewish tradition. Elisheva Baumgarten’s studies of medieval northern France and German Ashkenazi family life and parenting have also demonstrated the Jewish and Christian daily interactions that took place, mainly among women. Christian women lived inside Jewish homes as servants and as wet nurses; families of both faiths lived in the same neighborhoods and spoke the same vernacular language to communicate with one another; medical techniques and beliefs about childcare were shared by Jewish and Christian parents.

Although, to my knowledge, there is no comparable major study of the interconnectedness of Jewish and Christian family life in medieval Iberia, studies of medieval Iberian Jewry demonstrate that indeed Iberian Jewry shared many commonalities with the hosting majority and was influenced, first by the Muslim and then by the Christian ways of life.
Recent studies on Jewish communities in the Kingdom of Aragon, which in the Middle Ages included the region of Catalonia, have demonstrated the commonalities between the ways families dealt with their patrimony in both Christian and Jewish societies. In Barcelona, medieval Jewish families had a strong preference for keeping their patrimony together when parents died, similar to preferences in Christian society. Spanish Jews also gave charitable gifts during their lifetimes and made charitable bequests to the poor on their deathbeds, motivated by the belief that giving to charity would protect them in the afterworld. Although, in principle, giving to charity is a commandment or mitzvah, the study by Galinsky has demonstrated that the popularity of funding the hekdesh or charitable trust was parallel to the contemporary Christian way of bequeathing to the poor by way of the Church. These studies have also demonstrated the influence that Roman law, with its concepts of a universal heir and a unilateral testament, had on the Iberian Jewish world.

Nonetheless, it is also important to point out the distinctiveness of Jewish laws and tradition in matters of the family and its patrimony. In Jewish law, the first son born to the father, even if he is not the first son born to the mother, is entitled to a “double portion” of inheritance from his father’s estate. Such a double portion equals the inheritance of two ordinary heirs. A daughter is entitled to her father’s inheritance only if she is the sole survivor. If a father is survived by one or more sons, the daughter is excluded from the inheritance, but she is entitled to receive maintenance until the age of majority, when she will receive a dowry.

A father is obligated to provide his daughters with a dowry, if his means permit, to cover a year’s raiment. Upon the death of her husband, a widow is entitled to maintenance and to the return of her dowry, but she does not inherit from her husband. A male is considered a minor until he turns thirteen and a day and a female until she turns twelve, and a father is not allowed to marry off his son or daughter until they are of age. However, in the case of the daughter, the father is permitted to arrange her marriage while she is a minor and without her consent. Some Talmudic sages recommended that fathers marry off their children at a young age, although they also opposed the marriage of girls before they attained intellectual and emotional maturity. In the medieval period, these Talmudic ideas were translated as a license for parents to arrange the marriage of their sons and daughters while they were very young children. From the tenth through the thirteenth centuries, child marriage became a very
frequent phenomenon in Jewish societies existing in a Christian or Islamic milieu, especially in Muslim Spain.\footnote{34}

From a gender-sensitive perspective, another important characteristic of the Iberian medieval family was the attitude toward bigamy, the possibility of a man marrying two Jewish wives, and, further, concubinage (in Spanish, barraganía), the tolerant social attitude toward a man who chose to have a non-Jewish woman at his disposal and even to have children with her.\footnote{35} Although scholars have at times clarified that bigamous marriages did not take place frequently—mostly because it was expensive for a man to have more than one wife—the fact that Iberian Jews had such a tolerant social attitude toward bigamy in general and toward child marriage in particular had long-lasting consequences into the early modern period.

**The Eastern and Western Sephardi Diasporas**

A survey of studies on the Eastern and Western Sephardi family, although not very extensive (numerically) in English and other European languages, offers us the opportunity to compare and contrast how the two diasporas reorganized family life outside the Iberian Peninsula.\footnote{36} Some parallels between these two societies are seen in the resilience they collectively demonstrated to ensure that the Iberian Jewish tradition survived outside the Peninsula, and in the pervasive importance of the family unit and kinship. But this survey also reveals the differences between the two societies that ensued. One of the most obvious differences relates to the size of the communities. The Eastern Sephardim encompassed large numbers of exiles arriving in the Ottoman Empire after 1492, in difficult conditions and settling in numerous centers. The Western Sephardim encompassed a much smaller movement of New Christians, from the turn of the seventeenth century, returning to Judaism in three major centers: Amsterdam, Livorno, and Hamburg, and also in London in the mid-1600s, as well as those centers in southern France, where the open practice of Judaism was not permitted. For example, in Constantinople (Istanbul), which became one of the three major centers where Iberian Jews found refuge, there were 2,500 to 3,000 Jewish households before 1492, and in 1535, after the arrival of the Sephardim, the number of households swelled to over 8,000. In contrast, in Amsterdam, the largest of the Western Sephardi communities, there were about 800 individuals in the 1610s and about 3,000 in the 1690s.\footnote{37} Another major difference in how each Sephardi Diaspora developed was a result of the
environment in which they settled. The Eastern Sephardim settled in Ottoman lands and were influenced by Islam, on the one hand, and by the other Jewish cultures they encountered, mainly the Romaniots, on the other hand. In contrast, the Western Sephardim settled in Christian European countries, where no other Jewish communities existed.

The Eastern Sephardim

When the exiles of 1492 arrived in Ottoman lands, they created numerous communities (*kehelim*) named after their original Iberian provinces, and even named after their original towns. One common characteristic of these numerous *kehelim* was their autonomy from one another and from the indigenous Jews (mostly Romaniots but also some of Italian and Ashkenazi origins). At first, the Spanish exiles arrived mostly with broken families or as individuals and very rapidly reconstructed their lives—quite often by intermarrying with Romaniot Jews—putting aside for some time the importance of *yihus* or lineage. However, Spanish and Portuguese families soon became prominent, so that lineage, wealth, and the extended family again became a central factor in arranging marriages, as it had been in Spain before the expulsion. The type of family that emerged by the mid-sixteenth century was one with values from the old Iberian social order, patriarchal and hierarchical, but one that readapted by subscribing to new values compatible with the Muslim environment they encountered.

To understand the family unit from a gender-based perspective, two characteristics of sixteenth-century Eastern Sephardi families are important: the continued practice of fathers arranging marriages for their sons and daughters at a very young age, “girls generally from the age of 12, but sometimes as early as 8 or 9, and boys between ages of 13 and 16,” and the tolerant social attitude toward having more than one wife. In fact, the medieval Iberian custom of marrying young children intensified among the Sephardim in Ottoman Islamic countries after the expulsion from Spain. The main reasons that fathers arranged marriages for their young daughters (in some cases while they were still babies), were socioeconomic: a desire to provide their families with financial security, and a lack of awareness of the physical and emotional needs of their daughters. Child marriage among the Eastern Sephardim continued to be a socially accepted norm until the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Similarly, in these communities, there were frequent cases of bigamous marriages, and even polygamous ones. This social view of marriage was prevalent
in spite of the ambivalence that rabbis felt toward a man marrying more than
one wife and toward protecting the wife. As a result, the custom was amelio-
rated by the so-called “monogamy clause” in the ketubah. This clause was added
by some fathers when they married off their daughters, so that in the event the
husband decided to take a second wife, the first wife had to give her consent.
Nevertheless, the clause was also limited with the qualification that if the wife
failed to bear children after a stated number of years, the husband was then
entitled to take a second wife without her consent. The Eastern Sephardim also
continued to uphold yibum (levirate marriage), instead of halizah (the cere-
mony that set the woman free to marry someone other than her brother-in-
law), if her husband died without issue. Marriage for young people was entirely
up to their parents, and secret betrothal, without the consent of parents, was
punished with herem (being banned from the community). A ruling against
secret betrothals by the influential Sephardi Rabbi Joseph Caro, for example,
demonstrates that he considered such a marriage as disrespectful to the bride.41

The Western Sephardim

On July 30, 1591, Granduca Ferdinando I signed, in his palace in Firenze, the
document that is widely known as La Livornina, a charter that invited Iberian
New Christian international merchants and others to settle with their families
in Pisa and Livorno (in the Tuscan Italian region).42 Although Iberian mer-
chants initially preferred the old city of Pisa over the small fishing village that
was then Livorno, by the middle of the seventeenth century the reverse was
ture, and Livorno became an important Western Sephardi community at the
expense of Pisa. Jewish life was soon organized, and, by 1599 in Livorno, there
already existed a synagogue (probably from 1594) in the home of Abram Israel,
located in the Via Ferdinanda.43 By 1622 the community consisted of 750 indi-
viduals, and by 1645 the number had climbed to 1250.44

The origins of the Hamburg and Amsterdam communities also go back to
the 1590s, when small groups of New Christian merchant families began arriv-
ing in these two northern port cities.45 In Hamburg the group of interrelated
Portuguese families grew to about twenty households by 1610, and shortly after,
in 1612, they negotiated a contract with the Hamburg Magistracy that allowed
them to stay and carry on trade activities. Although they were not allowed to
practice Judaism in public until 1652, they could do so in the privacy of their
homes, and soon three congregations existed that gathered in private homes:
Keter Torah, Talmud Torah, and Neveh Shalom. In 1652 the three congregations merged into one, Bet Israel. By 1646 the community had grown to about one hundred families or about five hundred individuals.

The first records of Jewish life in Amsterdam are from 1603, and by 1610 the first congregation, Bet Yahacob, was already founded. Two other congregations followed: Neveh Shalom, founded in about 1612, and Bet Israel, founded in 1618. In 1639 the three merged into one, Talmud Torah. Similar to the Pisa and Livorno communities, Hamburg preceded Amsterdam and was, at first, preferred by Portuguese merchant families, but restrictions and high taxes imposed on merchants in Hamburg reversed the trend, and, by about the 1630s, Amsterdam emerged as the leading community, both as a mercantile center and a religious community.

In contrast to the centers founded by the exiles of 1492—formed in a rather haphazard manner as individuals or broken families reached their final destinations in parts of the Ottoman Empire—the Western Sephardi settlements soon developed a network of social institutions that aimed to organize family life. Two institutions that shaped how and when young people set up their own households were the so-called “dowry society,” which provided dowries to orphans, poor non-orphans, and young women, and the Father-of-Orphans society, which was known in Hebrew as Aby Jetomim. This institution financed the education of young orphan boys, including the cost associated with learning trades by apprenticeships at the homes of senior masters.

The first dowry society was founded in 1613 in Venice; it was followed by a second one in Amsterdam, in 1615, and another in Livorno, in 1644. These three sister societies tacitly divided the geographical area from which they recruited young female dowry recipients. The Livorno and Venetian societies provided dowries to young women living in Italy and the Levant, while the Amsterdam society was supplied with brides mostly from southwestern France, near the Spanish and Portuguese borders. A recent study comparing these three institutions showed that the Venetian and Livorno societies were more similar to each other than to the one in Amsterdam. What made the Amsterdam dowry society unique was, above all, the emphasis placed on Iberian Sephardi ethnicity. That is to say, Amsterdam attracted females who were still living outwardly as Christians in southwestern Catholic France. All three dowry societies provided dowries to Iberian females between the ages of 16 and 40 who were related by blood to community members, as well as to those not so related, thereby making marriage possible for orphans and poor girls whose families may have been unable to provide them with dowries. The Livorno society also
awarded dowries to Jewish servants, if they first provided services for a period of six years. But these institutions also exerted a great deal of social control and, above all, promoted female dependency. By providing unequal dowries to relatives versus non-relatives of community members, they reinforced socio-economic class differences, and by setting up restrictions, such as the number of years a young woman was required to serve as a domestic servant before applying for a dowry, they promoted dependency on a particular paterfamilias or head of household.

As a counterpart to the dowry societies, the Western Sephardim also founded the Aby Jetomim (Father-of-Orphans) society in Amsterdam in 1648. This institution admitted male orphans of about ten years of age, who continued living with their mother or other relatives. They were provided with funding to cover food, clothing, and medicine, when needed, for a period of three or more years. At thirteen, the institution paid the cost of indenturing them as apprentices in the homes of Jewish or non-Jewish masters of trades, such as a lapidario (stone cutter), tailor, or other (typically clothing-related) profession. Aby Jetomim also funded the education of orphans who went on to become rabbis, among them the well-known Rabbi David Nunes Torres. A sister institution, “Sahare Ora va-Avi Jetomim,” was founded in London in 1704. Although the London society was founded in overt imitation of the Amsterdam Aby Jetomim, the main difference between the two was that in London, orphan boys between the ages of seven and fourteen lived in an orphanage. It appears that both Aby Jetomim societies were well regarded by their respective communities-at-large, but they acted independently of the control of the Mahamad.

Although it could be argued that the concern for orphans and the poor, males and females, is rooted in the Jewish tradition of zedakah and care of the less fortunate, it also seems evident that the Western Sephardim were continuing social practices prevalent in the contemporary Iberian Catholic world from which they originated. The contemporary Iberian dowry societies and the institution known as Father-of-Orphans were well-established parts of the Iberian social fabric. Poor orphan girls were provided with dowries by institutions founded by royal orders, and the Father-of-Orphans was a position often filled by Catholic clerics charged with the authority to indenture orphan boys as apprentices who would learn trades. Historians of Spanish society and the family see these institutions as an integral part of the concept of patria potestad, understood not only as the authority of the head of the household, the paterfamilias, but also extending to other “fathers,” members of the Catholic clergy, as well as the King himself.
The dowry and the Aby Jetomim societies among the Western Sephardim were not only institutions of Iberian Catholic import. More importantly, these institutions were the result of the evolution of family structures in Iberia throughout the sixteenth century. By controlling male and female youths under the care of these institutions—as servants or apprentices—the age at first marriage was raised in Catholic Iberian society as well as among the Western Sephardim. In recent studies on the Amsterdam and Livorno communities, it was shown that the age at first marriage was higher among the Western Sephardim compared with the Ashkenazi communities and with the Eastern Sephardim.53

The Converso Family in Iberia and Beyond

In addition to the Western Sephardi settlements in Livorno, Amsterdam, Hamburg, and London, the Western Sephardi Diaspora also consisted of Portuguese and Spanish New Christian merchants living in Iberia as well as in other European centers where the public practice of Judaism was not allowed, such as in the Hispanic New World, Spanish Holland (Antwerp), and in communities of southern France: Bordeaux, Bayonne, and Peyrehorade.

Most if not all that scholars know about Iberian converso family life after 1492 is through Inquisition trials.54 Gitlitz has studied documents from Spain and Portugal as well as from the Hispanic New World and has demonstrated how converso lives and Jewish practices changed after the expulsion of their Jewish brethren in 1492. Before the expulsion, Spanish and Portuguese conversos interacted with the Jewish community and their practice of Jewish rites was informed by normative Judaism. After 1492, they could no longer interact with a practicing form of Judaism and they lived in a constant fear for their lives under the Spanish and Portuguese inquisitions. This permanent threat, as well as a lack of contact with normative Judaism, resulted in the practice of a distorted Judaism that scholars call “crypto-Judaism.” Melammed has reconstructed the lives of Spanish conversas through Inquisition trials from before and after 1492. The most significant change in crypto-Jewish families was reflected in the role of women, which became central to the practice of Judaism, as the family—the realm of women—was the only space where Jewish rites could be practiced.

The New Christian merchant communities in Southern France have been aptly described by Jonathan Israel as serving as a bridge between Iberia, on one side, and Western Sephardi communities on the other. Although in Catholic
Southern France, New Christian merchant families could not publicly practice Judaism, they did not live under the threat of the Iberian Inquisitions.55

A recent study by David Graizbord showed how the practice of Jewish rites in these communities—daily prayers, festival celebrations, and life cycle events such as weddings and circumcisions—differed from crypto-Jewish practices in Iberia and were, in fact, based on normative Judaism.56 Although Graizbord’s study does not deal directly with the role of women in the Jewish family in these communities, indirectly it can be derived that institutions such as those educating Jewish children, which had been the responsibility of women in crypto-Jewish families, were now the responsibility of males, as happened in Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Livorno.

In conclusion, this survey of how the Eastern and Western Sephardi communities organized family life after the expulsion of 1492 has demonstrated some differences, as well as similarities, between the two diasporas. The exiles of 1492, or the Eastern Sephardim, had been influenced by Muslim and Christian medieval social attitudes, for example, toward bigamy and child marriage, as well as ways to deal with their patrimony when parents died. The Muslim environment in which this first Diaspora settled, under Ottoman rulers, continued to reinforce some of these social attitudes. Child marriage, for example, not only continued to be accepted, but intensified after the expulsion, and bigamy continued to be viewed as an accepted social norm. In contrast, when New Christian merchants founded Western Sephardi communities at the turn of the seventeenth century, they brought with them attitudes toward family structure that reflected their previous lives as Christians in sixteenth-century Iberia as well as their particular experience as conversos or crypto-Jews. From their Iberian Christian experience they were influenced by the concept of patria potestad, of Roman origins, which regulated family relations all over Iberia. This patriarchal concept of authority extended to other new institutions such as dowry societies, and societies dedicated to the care and protection of male orphans that were founded in Iberia throughout the sixteenth century. Age at first marriage was higher in communities such as Amsterdam, as compared to the Eastern Sephardi communities. Regarding the status of women overall, the Iberian influence had contradictory results. On the one hand the Iberian systems of inheritance did not make differences based on gender. Whether Iberian Christian families opted to favor one child or treat all of their children equally with regard to inheritance had more to do with regional customs than with the gender of their children. As some of the essays included in this volume will demonstrate, Western Sephardi women in general had a great deal of control over their
inheritance. Wealth, however, did not give these Western Sephardi women any advantage in terms of their religious standing, as compared to their Eastern Sephardi counterparts. When ex-New Christians collectively re-entered Judaism, the community took over some of the functions that were part of the family and had been previously in the realm of women in crypto-Jewish families.

Notes


5. Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española (1611; reprinted in Barcelona: S.A. Horta, 1943), 584.


Introduction

1989), is an example (among others) of scholars also interested in the history of mentalités.


15. Casey, La Familia en la España Mediterránea, 35.


17. Ibid., 61.

18. Ibid., 67–68.

19. Ibid., 50–52.


21. Ibid., 80.


23. Ibid., 39.

24. Ibid., 39.


27. Baumgarten, 7–8.

29. Klein, 61.
30. See Galinsky, 438–439.
31. Burns, 2, 23.
32. See Ben-Zion Scherenschewsky’s entry under “First Born” and Shmuel Shilo’s entry under “Succession: Primogeniture and Inheritance Rights of Daughters.” The Principles of Jewish Law, ed. Menachem Elon (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1975), 434 and 447–450, respectively.
39. Ibid., 130. Rozen, 114 and ff., also addresses the topic of child marriage.
43. Ibid., 116.
44. Ibid., 141.
51. See the publication *Sermon, oracion y problematico dialogo que se hizieron en la celebridad de la fundacion de la Santa y Pia Hermandad de Sahare’ ora, ‘vaavi ietomim* (London: n.p., 5463 [1703]). Although I have not been able to locate the original Spanish *haskamot*, they are present in English in subsequent revisions: Shaare orah ve-avi yetomim: *Laws of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews’ Orphan Society for Educating, Maintaining, Clothing, and Apprenticing Orphan Children* (London: Wertheimer, Lea and Co. Printers, 1885).
53. For Amsterdam, see the study by Jona Schellekens, “Determinants of Age at First Marriage among Jews in Amsterdam, 1625–1724,” *Journal of Family History*, 24 (1999):
For Livorno, see Galasso, “Sono il loro,” 470. This topic will be dealt with in the essay by Lieberman in this volume.


55. Israel, *Diasporas within a Diaspora*, 245.

Reconstructing Sephardi
Family Life in the Ottoman Empire

THE EXILES OF 1492
"Suspecting Sivlonot" in the Jewish Communities of the Ottoman Empire in the Early Sixteenth Century

Hannah Davidson

The expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula resulted in the abrupt transplantation of a strong and vibrant cultural community. The generation of the expulsion grew to maturity in Spain, nurtured in a vital and thriving culture as members of an intact community on its native soil, a community that had long instilled in its members an intense pride in its antiquity and its unique cultural achievements, a community whose continuity seemed assured. The exiles found themselves suddenly refugees, torn from their native soil, their communities, their homes, their synagogues, their family members. In their new homes, the Iberian exiles encountered indigenous Jewish communities with their own rich cultural heritage and local customs that differed from the customs of the Iberian newcomers. Over time, the Iberian Jews and their descendants revealed a remarkable ability to maintain their distinct Sephardi culture and identity and even, in many cases, to assimilate local Jews into Sephardi culture. However, the exiles themselves, those who underwent the trauma of the initial forced transplantation, could not have foreseen the ultimate tenacity of Sephardi culture. The challenge that lay before this generation was to maintain Sephardi culture and identity in the immediate aftermath of the destruction and catastrophe of the expulsion, and in the midst of indigenous and intact local Jewish communities. For this generation, the continuity of Sephardi culture could not be assumed, it had to be ensured.

Most Spanish exiles found refuge in the Ottoman Empire, where they were welcomed by the caliphate and settled en masse in areas emptied of their former
Jewish population by a deliberate policy of resettlement. Thus Sephardi communities were primarily established in cities from which the indigenous Romaniot (Greek-speaking) Jewish community had been relocated. Iberian Jews soon formed the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population in several cities including Salonika and Edirne, while Istanbul, to which the Romaniot Jews had been relocated, maintained a strong Romaniot community alongside the newly formed separate and distinct Sephardi communities.1 The Sephardim and Romaniots were bound to each other by larger ties of Jewish identity, and contact between them was inevitable. While Jewish law served as a unifying factor in contact between the two communities, in cases where the law was determined by local custom, friction arose.2

One such case in which Jewish law clearly mandates that local custom determine correct practice is the custom of sivlonot, the giving of gifts by a groom to his bride-to-be. Jewish law delineates three stages in the marriage process: the shidukhin, or engagement, in which the parties agree to the marriage and its financial terms; the kidushin, or formal consecration ceremony, during which the groom presents the bride with a ring (or any other item of monetary value) after which the couple is considered legally bound (though they are as yet not allowed to live together); and nisuin, during which the couple stand together under the marriage canopy (hupah) and may thereafter begin their married life. (Kidushin and nisuin are now performed together). The Talmud discusses the question of whether the sivlonot are given before the kidushin or afterward and if they may thus be taken as proof of the kidushin having taken place, in the event that either party wishes to break off the match. In other words, is a bride who has received sivlonot to be considered legally wed and thus in need of a divorce in order to marry another man? The matter was determined to be dependent on local custom. In places where sivlonot were given after the kidushin ceremony, a bride who had received them was to be considered legally wed.3 The question of whether to “suspect” sivlonot as proof of kidushin was discussed extensively by Jewish scholars throughout the Middle Ages.4

The Romaniot Jews in Istanbul gave sivlonot after the kidushin and thus considered any woman who had received sivlonot to be legally wed. The custom of the Sephardi Jews who predominated in Salonika and Edirne was to give sivlonot before the kidushin, and therefore the receipt of sivlonot was not considered proof that the woman was legally bound. Problems arose when a member of one community became engaged to a member of another community, and gifts were sent between one city and another. Local customs having been
designated as the decisive factor under Jewish law, the question confronting this generation of scholars was “Which local custom?”

The question of the marital status of a bride who had received sivlonot was discussed in the early sixteenth century in the Ottoman Empire by three Sephardi exiles, Yaakov Ibn Habib, Moshe Aroquis, Avraham Ibn Yaish, and the rabbi of the indigenous Romaniot Jewish community of Istanbul, Eliyahu Mizrahi. Their “responsa,” legal questions and answers, delineate the differences in custom and law between the two communities and reveal the tension felt by rabbinic leaders of both communities who sought to preserve their own traditions. The questions posed in the responsa reflect the realities of the process of
social integration of these two initially disparate communities. The responsa also reveal the attitudes of the authors toward women, the role of women in the betrothal process, as brides and as mothers, as well as other aspects of betrothal customs, such as the role of the matchmaker, the age of the marriage partners, and changes within the marriage ceremony itself.

Communal Pride: Yaakov Ibn Habib and Moshe Aroquis

In 1509 a Jewish couple in Edirne became engaged, the groom presented his fiancée with sivlonot, they broke off the engagement, and she returned the gifts. A local rabbi, an exile from Castile, ruled that an official writ of divorce (“get”) should be granted to the woman to eliminate any doubt concerning her marital status resulting from her receipt of the sivlonot. However, his decision was opposed by two eminent Sephardi rabbis, Shlomo ben Hayim Zaken and Avraham Saba. He then asked the legal opinion of Yaakov Ibn Habib, the leading rabbinic authority in Salonika. In his responsum, Ibn Habib affirms that, according to the Sephardi tradition (literally “the custom of the lands where we lived”), there was no need for concern that a woman who received sivlonot should be considered a married woman. Nevertheless, he strongly objects to the overruling of the decision requiring a divorce, in the belief that the common people should not perceive division and factionalism among the rabbinic leaders.

Ibn Habib then places the matter before him into the larger context of the preservation of Sephardi tradition in the wake of the expulsion and in the face of local rabbinic authority: Since the expulsion the Sephardim have not been able to publicly affirm their customs. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that they have settled near Istanbul, a great and beautiful city, known for the wisdom of its sages. Ibn Habib reveals toward the end of the responsum that he himself has never been to Istanbul. Nonetheless, his awe for what he calls the “great city” permeates the responsum. Ibn Habib is unstinting in his praise for the greatest sage of the city, Eliyahu Mizrahi. He describes Mizrahi as a lion rising from the East (a play on the meaning of his name) toward Edirne, the community of his correspondent. Ibn Habib has heard from his correspondent of Mizrahi’s erudition and strength of character, and his determination to impose the custom of Istanbul with regard to sivlonot on this peripheral community as well. Ibn Habib’s reverence for Mizrahi’s intellectual acumen is compounded by feelings of his own intellectual inadequacy and the loss of
three great rabbis and teachers of Castile who passed away just before the expulsion. These great teachers could have responded effectively to the Romaniot challenge. However, Ibn Habib and his colleagues, their pupils, are unequal to the task. Their intellectual inadequacy is exacerbated by the harsh circumstances of the exile. Ibn Habib describes metaphorically the relative cultural position of the two communities. While the Romaniot scholars are securely settled in their “courts” and “castles,” the Sephardim are dwelling in tents like nomads in the desert, hungry and thirsty for Torah. Their situation is the result of wandering and unrest, which have left them unable to effectively teach or give judgment.

Ibn Habib recalls having heard in his youth the opinion of the rabbis of Castile that a woman should not be considered married as a result of the receipt of *sivlonot*. He takes it upon himself to thoroughly research the matter in the Jewish legal literature, to elucidate and support the opinion of the Castilian rabbis, so that it will not be forgotten by their heirs. Ibn Habib’s purpose in addressing the question of *sivlonot*, restated throughout the responsum, is to strengthen, renew, and preserve the Sephardi tradition.

Ibn Habib begins his legal discussion of the case with two general observations. His first observation is that, with regard to *sivlonot*, local custom is a crucial factor in determining judgment in each case. His second observation is that, in order to properly understand this legal point, it is first necessary to distinguish between marriage customs at the time of the Talmud and contemporary customs. In an effort to make this distinction, Ibn Habib provides valuable information about marriage customs in Spain before the exile. Whereas in the time of the Talmud, the initial engagement or *shidukhin* was merely an agreement to marry, in Spain this agreement was made under oath as a legally binding contract, formalized by the exchange of an object (*kinyan*) with a sum of money set as collateral in a written document. Given the binding nature of this agreement, a groom did not suspect that it would be broken by the other side and thus did not hesitate to invest money in the relationship by sending *sivlonot* to his future bride. After the announcement of the engagement, the couple would exchange gifts. In the event that the wedding was called off, the *sivlonot* would be returned to the groom. Two customs were followed with regard to the actual marriage ceremonies. The minority would perform the *kidushin*, the legal betrothal, in which the groom gives a ring to the bride and declares her to be consecrated to him, immediately after the *shidukhin*. The majority would perform the *kidushin* together with the *nisuin* (the seven blessings) under the hupah (marriage canopy). Whenever it was performed, the
Kidushin was a public ceremony. Anyone found to have performed kidushin privately was punished. Ibn Habib later quotes a responsum of Yom Tov Ishbili (the “Ritva,” 13–14th c. Aragon), which explains that Sephardim do not suspect kidushin on the basis of sivlonot because any previous kidushin would be public knowledge.

Having established that where the custom is to give sivlonot after kidushin, the receipt of sivlonot can be taken as proof of kidushin, and that in Spain a minority of the population followed this practice, Ibn Habib discusses the opinions of the great medieval Spanish authorities in Jewish law, Nissim Gerondi, Shlomo ben Aderet, and Moshe ben Nachman (Nachmanides, the Ramban). On the basis of this discussion he draws the conclusion that when the reason for performing kidushin before the hupah is the unwillingness of the groom to send sivlonot to a woman who is not legally bound to him, then the receipt of sivlonot may be taken as proof of kidushin. However, when the kidushin are performed early for external reasons, the receipt of sivlonot is not proof of kidushin.

In Spain, the minority who performed kidushin before the hupah did so for fear of a broken engagement and never out of reluctance to risk money on sivlonot, because the binding nature of the shidukhin in Spain eliminated any source of concern. Therefore, concludes Ibn Habib, “we the Sephardim do not suspect kidushin on the basis that sivlonot have been given.”

Later in the responsum, Ibn Habib uses this distinction to explain the difference in custom between Istanbul and Castile in historical terms. In both cases the final legal decision was the natural and logical response to historical social practice. In Istanbul, people hesitated to invest money in a relationship that had not yet been formalized, and thus gave sivlonot after kidushin. In this context the giving of sivlonot does imply proof of kidushin. In Castile, however, the terms of the engagement were so binding that there was no risk in giving sivlonot before kidushin. In this context sivlonot cannot be taken as proof of kidushin. This is the reality to which the Sephardim are now accustomed. Later, he reiterates this conclusion, emphasizing that the matter in its essence is a question of group mentality. “We” the Sephardim think differently on this subject than “they” the Romaniois. “The conclusion from all this is that our thinking is not like the thinking of those who suspect with regard to sivlonot, nor is their way our way.” The question of sivlonot is for Ibn Habib a means to establish and assert Sephardi communal identity.

Ibn Habib reveals a profound love for the Sephardi tradition and nostalgia for the study of Torah in Castile, mingled with the realization that this study had in fact been somewhat limited in scope. At the beginning of his discussion
of the marriage customs of Castile, Ibn Habib appeals directly to his correspondent to recall the customs of his youth: “Do you not know, have you not heard, the scholar, my brother, who was born and raised in Castile . . . .”20 With the exile, personal memory of the way things were done has become an important resource. Shared experiences and memories create a bond of brotherhood between two exiles. (It can be assumed for lack of other references that the correspondent was not in fact Ibn Habib’s brother.) This bond is referred to again at a later point in the responsum when Ibn Habib addresses his correspondent directly and explains that he decided to include the opinion of the great Sephardi sage, Moshe ben Nachman (the Ramban), for two reasons, one internal and intrinsic to his argument, and the other purely personal. Ibn Habib writes that he has included the words of this great sage “because my heart told me that you, scholar, brother, would rejoice to return to the days of your youth and remember the way that we learned the [works of the rabbinic sages] together with the words of the Ramban.”21

However, immediately after this appeal to nostalgia, Ibn Habib points out the inferiority of the cultural resources available in Castile as compared to the resources available in his new home: “The matter is easily understood because we have before us books of Tosafot (commentaries to the Gemara written by scholars of medieval France), which we acquired upon arrival in this area, which is full of books and authors, may God make them increase. My heart is hollow within me because in the days of my youth I had in my hands only a small fraction, two or three crumbs of the table of contents.”22 Shortly afterward he mentions a responsum of Yitzhak Alfasi, which he found in a book printed in Italy, another example of a source—this time within the Sephardi tradition—that became available to him outside of Spain.23

At the end of the responsum, Ibn Habib notes that he has written his analysis of the legal question at hand on the basis of the books in his suitcase, in other words, the books he brought with him from Spain, another reference to his experience of exile and wandering. After seventeen years, his books are still in his suitcase, whether literally or figuratively. He is still a wanderer, unsettled in his new home. His library, and perhaps by inference his scholarship, has been brought from afar. Now, as he has finished writing, he has become aware that in the possession of the local scholars there is a new book, Terumat haDeshen, which contains a responsum on the subject of sivlonot. Ibn Habib does not name the author, but describes him as a competent modern scholar. The responsum itself he dismisses as excessively strict, perhaps the basis for the local strictness. He has found in it nothing that contradicts his own arguments and
several details that may substantiate his arguments. (Ibn Habib appears to be revealing the frustration of a scholar who discovers relevant source material after the completion of a monograph!)

_Terumat haDeshen_ is a collection of responsa written in Germany in the first half of the fifteenth century by Israel Isserlein, a leading rabbinic scholar. By the early sixteenth century the book was not new and not unknown. The fact that Ibn Habib became aware of an important scholarly work only upon his arrival in Salonika and only from the local Romaniot scholars says a great deal about intellectual ties between Ashkenaz and Sepharad in the fifteenth century and indicates a certain cultural isolation within the Jewish communities of Spain. Ibn Habib is clearly cognizant of this fact and troubled by it. His specific reference to his discovery of the book among the local scholars and his distinction between it and the books in his suitcase reveals that he is uncomfortable with his previous ignorance of the work. Ibn Habib is perhaps subtly revealing to his readers, the Sephardi community, his own growing awareness of a parochial aspect to pre-exilic scholarship in Spain.24 These references to the books in which he found his sources are as extraneous to Ibn Habib’s argument as his reminiscences of learning Torah in Castile. Both reflect the inner emotional turmoil of Ibn Habib, pained by a profound sense of the loss of his intellectual milieu and by indications of its deficiencies, and increasingly aware of the richness of the new world he has found himself in. These feelings are inextricably bound to the issue of sivlonot, centered as it was in the conflict between the Romaniot and Sephardi traditions.25

Ibn Habib relates at length an incident that occurred in Salamanca over forty-five years earlier. (Before the exile, Ibn Habib headed the yeshiva of Salamanca, and thus can be presumed to be a reliable source of information on events that occurred there, even if they preceded his tenure at the academy.)26 A young man became engaged to a girl and sent her sivlonot, after which the engagement was broken. The head of the local yeshiva, the renowned scholar Yitzhak de Leon, considered the leading authority on Jewish law of his generation, and one of the three intellectual giants of the last generation in Spain mentioned by Ibn Habib at the beginning of the responsum, rendered a strict judgment and required that the woman be given a get, a formal bill of divorce, in order to be considered a free woman.27 The elder sages of the community disagreed with him. They decided to attend the fair at the nearby town, Medina del Campo, where the great scholars of the generation gathered to discuss Jewish law. The assembled scholars discussed the matter, ruled unanimously that from that day forward there would be no suspicion of kidushin on the basis of
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sivlonot, and ordered the leader of prayers at the fair to publicly announce their decision. According to Ibn Habib, this decision was a compromise, for even according to those who took the stringent view of the law, after the public pronouncement that no suspicion would arise from the giving of sivlonot, the whole country became, in legal terms, a place in which everyone gives sivlonot before kidushin, and thus no suspicion need arise in the future from the receipt of sivlonot.

Ibn Habib recounts that the great sage Yitzhak Aboab had originally supported the legal position of Yitzhak de Leon, although later, like everyone else, he accepted the judgment of the assembly of rabbis. At this time, though he was already a man of thirty and considered a great scholar, he was not yet married. After two years, at about the same time that he became the head of the yeshiva of Buitrago, he was offered a match with the daughter of one of the prominent families of the town. This girl had previously been engaged to another scholar and had received from him sivlonot, but on their wedding day the couple had quarreled and parted. Rabbi Aboab married this girl and no questions were raised about her receipt of sivlonot from her previous fiancé. Many years later, the wife of Yitzhak de Leon passed away and he married a learned woman from a prominent family in Toledo, who also had been previously engaged to another man from whom she had received sivlonot.

Ibn Habib concludes from this narrative that the actual practice of two of the greatest rabbis of the generation before the exile constitutes a legal precedent of not “suspecting sivlonot.” Anyone who raises suspicions concerning a woman who has received sivlonot slanders these great rabbis, the “pillars of the exile.” Ibn Habib raises the possibility that the Sephardi rabbis who opposed the strict ruling of his correspondent in favor of the traditional Sephardi practice did so out of respect for these late Sephardi rabbis.

At this point Ibn Habib further clarifies that his objective in writing this responsum is neither to render a specific judgment in the case, nor to establish future practice, nor even to maintain adherence to Sephardi traditional customs in the face of conflicting local practice. Ibn Habib’s stated purpose is to research and investigate the Sephardi legal tradition, both textual and practical. In essence he is writing the responsum in order to affirm the continuity of the Sephardi legal tradition. It is the process of his dialectic, his legal discussion as a Sephardi, of Sephardi sources and oral traditions, and not the end result of his reasoning that is important to Ibn Habib. By the very act of writing this responsum he is asserting the independence of Sephardi rabbis in legal decision-making and affirming the internal autonomy of the Sephardi rabbinic leadership.
Having affirmed the continuation of the “process,” Ibn Habib is willing to compromise with regard to actual practice. Ibn Habib thus arrives at the crux of the legal issue before him: should the Sephardi exiles, strangers in a new land, follow the local customs or adhere to their own traditions? There was ground to compel the exiles to follow the Romaniot customs, for according to a basic principle of Jewish law a stranger in a foreign land is obliged to follow the customs of the local Jewish community. This leads Ibn Habib to a poignant and trenchant observation of the plight of the exiles:

After we were exiled for our sins and came to seek shelter under their roofs, a collar has been placed around our necks and we are compelled to follow their customs, and if from the beginning we cease to maintain a tradition, its memory will be lost from the face of the earth and it will lose all viability and relevance because if the foundation falls so will the building, for the sages have declared that the law is determined by the custom of the place and if there is no place, there can be no custom.30

In these words, Ibn Habib encapsulates the uniqueness of the phenomenon of the expulsion from Spain within Jewish history and the enormity of the dilemma facing the first generation of exiles. Of the many expulsions of Jews throughout the Middle Ages, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain was unique in its scope. For the first time in Jewish history all the bearers of a unique cultural tradition and ethnic identity were expelled simultaneously from every place in which that tradition and identity were indigenous. No place remained in which the traditional local custom was Sephardi. The vast majority of the exiles found refuge in established Jewish communities rich in their own traditions. By following Jewish law and adopting the customs of their new neighbors, the Sephardi exiles would be committing cultural suicide. There would be no place left in the world in which the Sephardi tradition would be maintained. The loss of the physical Jewish communities of Spain would mean the loss of their cultural tradition. Without the “place” there would be no “custom.” This, then, was the dilemma facing Ibn Habib: adherence to the legal principle of conforming to local practice versus the survival of the Sephardi cultural tradition.31

Ibn Habib then addresses the specific situation and rules that any Jew who comes to settle in any of the cities surrounding Istanbul, including Edirne, the home of his correspondent, must conform to the practice of the community in which he has settled. Ibn Habib thus defines Istanbul as a major cultural center with clearly defined traditions and customs, and Edirne as its periphery
and cultural satellite. He compares the Istanbul of his day to the city of Babylon in the time of the Gemara, which was the center of authority, being the home of the Exilarch. This would appear to be an allusion to the fact that Istanbul was the home of the chief Romaniot rabbi, Eliyahu Mizrahi. In such a situation, the residents of the smaller peripheral city must conform to the practices of the big city. Furthermore, the exiles are obligated to adopt the practice of the community in which they have settled, even if it is stricter than the practice in Castile.32

Ibn Habib was influenced in his decision not only by the legal principle of adopting local custom. He was also keenly aware of the social position of the Sephardim in their new homes. He refers to them specifically as exiles and emphasizes their status as newcomers and strangers seeking refuge. He describes them figuratively entering the gates of the city and huddling in the shade of the rafters. Seventeen years after the expulsion, Ibn Habib still perceives the exiles as unsettled strangers. In this inferior and unstable situation, the Sephardim cannot but accept the stricter practice of their new neighbors. Ibn Habib quotes from the Talmud the story of a rabbi from the land of Israel who came to Babylonia and there ate food that was permitted in his homeland but forbidden in his new community. His behavior is justified by the assumption that he planned to return to his home. Ibn Habib points out that this excuse cannot apply to the case of the Sephardi exiles, subtly but poignantly reminding his readers that their exile is permanent. He ultimately justifies his position by finding support for the strict interpretation of the law within the Sephardi tradition itself, in the opinion of Moshe ben Nachman.33

Having established the principle that the Sephardim are obligated to accept the stricter practices of their new communities, Ibn Habib finds a legal loophole with which to except the specific case of sivlonot. In his own words “the sages have allowed for the possibility, for us, coming from the exile of Castile, to maintain our tradition not to suspect sivlonot.”34 According to Ibn Habib, newcomers are obligated to conform to the stricter practices of their new home with regard to forbidden activities. However, they are free to follow their own customs with regard to monetary matters. Ibn Habib places sivlonot in the latter category, thus allowing the continuation of the Sephardi tradition concerning sivlonot. Though they are strangers in their new communities, the Sephardim may maintain the tradition to which they are accustomed, as it is a purely monetary matter.35

To further elucidate his point that in monetary matters newcomers may follow their own traditions, Ibn Habib brings another example of a difference in
practice between the Romaniots and Sephardim in the realm of marriage customs: the *nedunyah* (dowry). According to Ibn Habib, a Jewish wife in Istanbul had control over her dowry inasmuch as her husband could not use it without her consent. In Castile, the husband controlled the dowry as though it were his own. Ibn Habib praises the custom of Istanbul (which he terms the “Romaniot custom”) as “grounded in wisdom and knowledge.” Nevertheless, he maintains that it is the prerogative of the Sephardim to maintain their traditional practice in their new home, because it is a monetary matter and not a prohibition. With regard to the Jewish community in Istanbul, Ibn Habib concludes that although the exiles are wanderers who have come to dwell as a minority in the great city, they are entitled to continue their traditional practice of both *sivlonot* and *nedunyah* because these are monetary matters.

With regard to Edirne, the city from whence the question had been sent, Ibn Habib reaches a different, more far-reaching conclusion. He declares that Edirne can be considered a new community without a fixed custom, in which most of the residents know from whence they came. In this case, the custom of the place of origin of the majority of the inhabitants is followed. Ibn Habib states categorically that in Edirne the majority of the Jewish residents are from “the kingdom of Spain.” (It is interesting to note that after referring exclusively to “Castile” throughout the responsum, Ibn Habib now refers to the entire political entity as “Spain.”) After earlier defining Edirne as a satellite city of Istanbul, the seat of Romaniot scholarship and leadership, Ibn Habib now reveals that the majority of the Jewish community there is Sephardi. This assessment corresponds to what we know of the Ottoman resettlement policy by which cities were emptied of their inhabitants, who were then relocated, and repopulated with new residents. This, then, is the crux of the problem: an overwhelmingly Sephardi community existing under the aegis of the Romaniot leadership and scholarship. Ibn Habib’s solution is to affirm in principle the hegemony of the Romaniot leadership while finding a back door through which Sephardi independence can be maintained. By defining the Jewish community of Edirne as a new community without fixed customs, populated mainly by Spanish exiles, Ibn Habib recognizes the reality created by the Ottoman resettlement policy. By ruling that in such a situation the custom of the place of origin of the majority, Spain, should become local custom, Ibn Habib lays the cornerstone for the continuity of the Sephardi tradition. Cities like Edirne (and Salonika, the home of Ibn Habib), depopulated of their native Romaniot inhabitants and repopulated by exiles, became in effect the “places” in which Sephardi custom was the local custom, the “*minhag hamakom*.”
Having laid the foundation for Sephardi juridical independence, Ibn Habib repeats his earlier caveat that he has merely written a scholarly discussion of the subject and is not rendering a judgment with any practical implications on the matter at hand. He declares that he is reluctant to permit that which may be forbidden and again indicates approval of his correspondent’s earlier decision, which required the woman to receive a get. Ibn Habib thus implicitly acknowledges the principle that sivlonot can be considered possible proof of betrothal. Having clearly stated throughout the responsum that it is his opinion that sivlonot do not constitute proof of kidushin, his protestations of doubt here are not to be taken at face value. Neither intellectual doubt nor fear of sin prevent Ibn Habib from rendering judgment in accordance with the Sephardi tradition. His motives are political, and his means to achieve them subtle. Ibn Habib concludes his responsum with the remark that having already received judgment on this matter from Eliyahu Mizrahi, “the sage who has acquired wisdom, the perfect scholar,” his correspondent should never have consulted him, but merely followed the word of Mizrahi, as the authoritative rabbinic judge of the community. Ibn Habib closes his responsum as he began it with expressions of reverence and awe for Eliyahu Mizrahi and recognition of his authority over all the Jewish communities of the area. He concedes judgment in the case at hand to the Romaniot position, and acknowledges the hegemony of the Romaniot leadership. Yet at the same time, by writing a learned responsum based upon the Sephardi tradition, in which he lays the legal foundation for Sephardi juridical autonomy, Ibn Habib affirms the continuity of Sephardi scholarship. The pain of the exile, and the feelings of loss, dislocation, and transience that permeate the responsum, coupled with recognition of the breadth of Romaniot scholarship and strength of its leadership, compelled Ibn Habib to concede to the Romaniot position in the issue at hand and to affirm its authority in principle. However, his intense love for the Sephardi tradition compelled him to ensure its continuity.

Another responsum in the same case was written by the Sephardi scholar Moshe Aroquis, also of Salonika. From his responsum, we learn that the woman whose marital status was under consideration was the daughter of a distinguished man, Moshe Pinto. Because of the controversy concerning her marital status, the young lady in question had acquired the unfortunate status of an “agunah,” a woman legally bound to a man with whom she is not living, and prohibited from marrying another. Aroquis reveals empathy for this woman’s plight, describing her as an outcast among women, destined by a rabbi’s strict opinion to remain childless and single until her hair turns grey. He is
apparently referring to the correspondent of Ibn Habib, who had ruled that the young lady must receive a divorce in order to remarry.

Aroquis writes his responsum in refutation of this strict opinion. Like Ibn Habib, he begins by reviewing the literature on the subject, emphasizing the opinions of the Sephardi scholars, Nissim Gerondi, Shlomo ben Aderet, and Asher ben Yehiel, and lavishly praising their erudition. His conclusion is that none of these great scholars suspected *kidushin* on the basis of *sivlonot*, and that furthermore the last generation of scholars in Spain, from whom the current generation learned, continued this tradition both in their judicial rulings and their own practice (possibly a reference to the marriages of the two scholars mentioned by Ibn Habib). Reverence for the previous generation and loyalty to them is the driving force behind Aroquis’s argument: None who come after them (until the coming of the Messiah) are their equals in Torah, wisdom, or piety. Those who dispute the opinion of these great scholars are in effect mocking them and their ancestors and making *mamzerim* (illegitimate offspring) out of the children born in subsequent marriages to women declared single by these rabbis. Aroquis asks rhetorically how anyone could differ from the opinion of these great scholars, even if they were to say that right is left, and all the more so when they say that right is right.

Aroquis next makes an emotional appeal to the Sephardi community, reinforcing communal identity by invoking the pain of the exile and recalling the threat of forced conversion that confronted the exiles before they found refuge in the Ottoman Empire. He assures the exiles that their travails have not diminished their communal strength, their vitality, or their ability to maintain the legal tradition of the sages of Spain. Their right to maintain their legal traditions stems from two sources: they are in the numerical majority in their new land and they have come with a valid legal tradition, fortified by generations of practice. Furthermore, other refugee communities in the area are adopting Sephardi customs with no objection, and it is therefore entirely appropriate that the Sephardim themselves retain their own traditions. Aroquis praises God that in the Ottoman Empire the Sephardim are superior both in quantity and quality. In a brazen, crass, and chauvinistic manner, he declares that the Romaniots are vastly inferior to the Sephardim, and that there is thus no reason why the Sephardim should fall into error by following their disparate local customs.41

Aroquis then raises as a theoretical objection to his position the legal principle cited by Ibn Habib, that a newcomer must follow the stricter custom of his new home.42 Aroquis argues that the Romaniot custom to be strict with regard
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to *sivlonot* is invalid because it is based on the erroneous assumption that there are places in which it is the custom to give *sivlonot* after *kidushin*. According to Aroquis, in every Jewish community known to him the custom is to give *sivlonot* before *kidushin*. In Spain it was the custom to send *sivlonot* before *kidushin* and this practice is known to all members of the local Sephardi community, young and old, male and female.

Ultimately, Aroquis concludes that the law is not determined by reasoning but by tradition, passed down from generation to generation by the competent authorities. As to the question of whose tradition is to be followed, Aroquis leaves no doubt. The Sephardim, along with the other communities who have joined with them, are the majority. To them alone the land has been given, they are its glory and splendor and beauty, illuminating the land and its inhabitants, and those who let them in may leave. Aroquis then switches to the first person plural, directly addressing the Sephardi community: “All of these places can be considered ours and it is fitting for the minority, the original inhabitants of the land, to look to our religious customs and follow them and not create factions within the community.” Aroquis does not desire cultural autonomy or equality, but hegemony. He does not want the Sephardim to fit in as equals with the Romaniots. He wants them to take over.

It is important to understand Aroquis’s words in the context in which they were written. Aroquis is not describing a current situation of Sephardi cultural hegemony. At the time of his writing, the daughter of Moshe Pinto had been left an *agunah* in conformity with local Romaniot custom and rulings. Aroquis writes from anger at the “victimization” of a Sephardi girl, anger above all that the fate of a Sephardi was being determined by non-Sephardi authorities and practices. His extreme expression of Sephardi superiority was the response to an overwhelming feeling of inferiority and suppression. The disparity between the numerical strength of the exiles and their judicial impotence inflamed his passion. Aroquis’s language is extreme because his words are an emotional plea to his brethren intended to galvanize them to action. He is calling upon the Sephardi community to assume a position of hegemony, to turn their numerical superiority into communal authority and to assert themselves as lords of the land in the religious and cultural sphere. We know that his vision became the reality, yet to his contemporaries, filled with the same fears and doubts that permeate the responsum of Ibn Habib, Sephardi cultural survival, let alone hegemony, must have seemed like a pipe dream in the face of an uncertain future.

Aroquis ends with a heartfelt plea to other scholars to free the young lady from her plight. As in the beginning of the responsum, Aroquis reveals a genuine
concern for the welfare of the girl herself, for the human aspect of the case and not merely its cultural and communal implications. While both respondents use the question of the marital status of the daughter of Moshe Pinto as a springboard for voicing their opinions on larger questions, Aroquis is aware that as learned opinions are being exchanged, a woman remains in legal and social limbo, her personal status unclear and her life interrupted. He expresses sympathy for her plight and tries to arouse the empathy of his readers, though one may suspect that his larger motives in doing so were political and that his ultimate goal was not to free the girl, but to arouse Sephardi passion in opposition to Romaniot authority. Ibn Habib, in contrast, does not mention the human aspect of the case, perhaps because he does not intend to deal with the specific case at all, and has concurred with the stringent judgment of his correspondent, that the young woman should be required to receive a get. Ibn Habib is willing to sacrifice the daughter of Moshe Pinto to the cause of acknowledging the authority of the Romaniot rabbinate.45

Clearly for both Ibn Habib and Aroquis, the question of sivlonot was not just another legal problem. This was an issue that aroused in both men strong feelings of communal pride and deepest fears of cultural extinction. Ibn Habib and Aroquis agreed that Sephardi culture must be preserved and its communal independence asserted and that numerical superiority provided the legal, moral, and practical basis for attaining this independence. The two scholars were as one in their reverence for the previous generation of Sephardi scholars and the Sephardi tradition as a whole.

Nonetheless, the two responsa differ vastly in their assessment of the relative strengths of the Sephardi and Romaniot cultures, the ultimate goal of the reemerging local Sephardi community, and the correct approach in realizing this goal. As we have seen, Ibn Habib was in awe of the great Romaniot sage, Eliyahu Mizrahi, recognized his authority, and acknowledged the fact that Romaniot scholars possessed books that were unavailable in Spain. He perceived the Sephardim as unstable and unsettled, huddling in the rafters of the Romaniot homes. His concern was for the continuity of Sephardi culture and his means of ensuring this survival were subtle and politic. Aroquis, by contrast, asserted not only the greatness of the Sephardi tradition but its superiority over Romaniot culture. His goal was Sephardi cultural hegemony. Perhaps Ibn Habib, as a more prominent scholar, was better able to assess the true quality of Romaniot culture and, as a communal leader, was more keenly aware of the need to proceed with caution and act with finesse in relations with the Romaniot community.46
Although the opinion of the Romaniot chief rabbi, Eliyahu Mizrahi, was cited by Ibn Habib and clearly influenced the decision of his correspondent, the responsa of Ibn Habib and Aroquis in the Pinto case record a legal controversy within the Sephardi community between Sephardi scholars. Mizrahi himself was not a party to the correspondence. When the question of “suspecting sivlonot” arose somewhat later in Istanbul, it triggered a direct confrontation between Mizrahi and the Sephardi scholar Avraham Ibn Yaish. Ibn Yaish wrote two responsa in the same case, which were rebutted by Mizrahi. The date of these responsa is unknown, though the death of Eliyahu Mizrahi in 1526 provides a terminus ad quem. The first question was tersely worded and included only a vague outline of the case, while the second question provided more details, apparently in an attempt to either appeal the first decision or clarify it in light of new information about the case.

The first query sent to Ibn Yaish, although providing little information, asked big questions: A man in Istanbul, where the receipt of sivlonot is considered proof of kidushin, became engaged to a woman in Salonika, where the receipt of sivlonot is not considered proof of kidushin. The man sent his bride sivlonot and afterward the engagement was broken off. Should we suspect that kidushin had in fact taken place and that the couple are legally tied because the sivlonot were sent from Istanbul, where sivlonot are considered proof of kidushin? What would the judgment be in the opposite situation, if the sivlonot had been sent from Salonika to Istanbul?

Ibn Yaish reviews the history of the controversy in Jewish law and cites the statement of Eliyahu Mizrahi that there was an agreement among the sages of the land, with almost the status of a communal ordinance, that any woman who had received sivlonot would be considered legally wed. The opinion of Ibn Yaish is that the custom of the place of receipt of the sivlonot, in other words the home of the bride, determines whether they will be regarded as proof of kidushin. He bases his opinion on the reasoning behind the varying customs with regard to sivlonot and offers a psycho-historical explanation for the origins of the differing customs. Like Ibn Habib, Ibn Yaish posits that those who give sivlonot only after kidushin do so in order to eliminate the risk of the bride breaking off the engagement after receipt of the sivlonot and thereby causing the groom monetary loss and embarrassment. Those who give sivlonot before kidushin do so because they are not concerned with the possibility of a broken engagement. Ibn Yaish’s insight is that the potential behavior and trustworthiness
of the bride is at the heart of the issue of the timing of the *sivlonot*, and that therefore the custom of the home community of the bride is the decisive factor in each case.

According to Ibn Yaish, local custom has developed in accordance with the mentality of the women of each community; because each community has determined its custom based on its assessment of the character and behavior of its women. In communities in which the women regard the unilateral termination of an engagement as reprehensible and immodest, an act tantamount to licentious behavior that will cause them shame and opprobrium, they are unlikely to break off an engagement. In these communities, bridegrooms, assuming the risk of a broken engagement to be small, are willing to take the risk of presenting expensive gifts to their fiancées and give *sivlonot* after the engagement but before the *kidushin*. On the other hand, in a society in which the breaking off of an engagement is considered a light matter and perfectly acceptable, men are reluctant to risk financial loss by investing money in a relationship that might end. They therefore do not give *sivlonot* until after *kidushin*, when the woman is legally wed to them and unable to end the relationship unilaterally.51

Though he worded his remarks in purely neutral terms, it is clear that Ibn Yaish was referring to two specific communities, the Sephardi community, in which engagements are taken seriously and thus *sivlonot* precede *kidushin*, and the Romaniot community, in which an engagement can be broken lightly and therefore *sivlonot* are only given after the legally binding *kidushin*. In his description of the mentality of those who break engagements lightly, he is in effect casting aspersions on the character and morality of the Romaniot women. Ibn Yaish’s remarks are general, without reference to specific incidents, and it is difficult to determine whether he was writing from personal observation of this community, from existing stereotypes or preconceptions within the Sephardi community, or merely theorizing. It is interesting to compare his analysis to the far more plausible explanation of Ibn Habib, that the legally binding nature of the engagement (*shidukhin*) in Spain, and not the frame of mind of the women, provided bridegrooms with enough peace of mind to send *sivlonot* before *kidushin*. Like Ibn Habib, Ibn Yaish explains the historical development of the custom as a response to a group mentality, which is then reinforced by the custom itself. Ibn Yaish’s discussion must be understood in the context of a society in which marriages were arranged for children by their parents, with little or no consideration for the personal feelings or preferences of the bride and groom. A young woman (or man) who refused to enter into the marriage arranged by
his parents rejected parental authority and caused his family embarrassment and possible financial loss.52

His remarks are significant for what they reveal about the author’s attitudes toward women and sexual morality. Particularly revealing is the connection between the breaking of an engagement and sexual immorality, which Ibn Yaish attributes to the community that does not suspect sivlonot (the community following the Sephardi custom). In the scenario presented by Ibn Yaish, a woman who broke off an engagement would be shamed, but not because she had broken her word and revealed herself to be unstable or unreliable. The woman who breaks off her engagement “will become an object of shame and disgrace, as though she had committed a serious act of sexual indiscretion (pritzut gedola) and had left the path of modesty (tzeniut).”53 According to Ibn Yaish, communities in which women can be relied upon not to break engagements are by definition communities in which the women have a reputation of modesty. In one of these communities, if a groom were to agree to give sivlonot only after kidushin, the family of the bride would be insulted and consider his offer a slur upon the character of their daughter. Ibn Yaish claims to have heard of such a case. Throughout his discussion, Ibn Yaish juxtaposes the modest woman (“tznuia”) who will not break off an engagement with the licentious woman (“prutzah”) who will do so.

Why should breaking off an engagement be considered an act of immodesty tantamount to a serious sexual indiscretion? The answer perhaps lies in Ibn Yaish’s discussion of those communities where breaking off an engagement is considered socially acceptable (communities that suspect sivlonot, in accordance with the Romaniot custom):

There are other places where even if a woman breaks off an engagement it will not be considered a matter of great disgrace because people say that it would be worse for her to marry a man whom her heart does not desire, and they fear the gentiles, lest this cause girls to stray from the correct path. The woman herself is not concerned that people will say that she broke off an engagement because in that place they are already accustomed not to take much notice of this.54

In these communities the act of breaking off the match is not justified in terms of the non-binding nature of the agreement, nor explained on the basis of financial considerations. The bride’s behavior is assumed to be motivated solely by her personal feelings and accepted by others on that basis. In these communities, breaking the engagement is considered to be only mildly reprehensible because it is deemed to be worse for a woman to marry a man she does
not desire. In addition, there is the fear that a woman facing the prospect of an unwelcome match, or already unhappily wed, will become involved in licentious behavior outside the Jewish community. It is not clear whether this implies formal conversion and abandonment of the Jewish community or merely association with undesirable elements in the surrounding society. From the use of the conjunctive “and,” it would appear that Ibn Yaish attributed to this society a genuine recognition of a woman’s right to marital happiness unrelated to the fear that she will ultimately behave in even less appropriate ways if forced to marry a man she does not want. Nonetheless, the concern that an unhappy woman is at risk of leaving the fold and engaging in undesirable behavior outside the Jewish community was clearly an important factor in acknowledging her feelings. In this climate of opinion, the individual woman is not afraid to break off her engagement, because others have done so before her without censure.

In both of the scenarios described by Ibn Yaish, the bride is motivated to break off her engagement by her desire for romantic or sexual happiness. Ultimately, her behavior is determined by the mores of the society around her. In the first scenario, the decision to dissolve her engagement would be considered by her society an act of immodesty tantamount to an actual act of sexual indiscretion because, like such an act, it is motivated by romantic or sexual desires that are allowed to override other considerations. By acting on the basis of her own feelings and making her desires paramount, the woman is behaving immodestly. In the second scenario, the society around her similarly understands the underlying motivation of her desire to end the engagement. In this case, however, her society acknowledges her feelings and perhaps even legitimizes them.

We must ask to what extent Ibn Yaish’s remarks reflect the social reality of his time and accurately portray different types of behavior and attitudes prevalent in the Jewish communities of his day. Even if Ibn Yaish was merely theorizing in an attempt to support his opinion that the custom of the community of the bride determines each case, he nonetheless derived his theories from the society around him. Were there women who broke off engagements on the basis of their personal desires? Were there voices that acknowledged that a woman’s right to marital happiness should outweigh other considerations, if only for pragmatic reasons, and other voices that severely censured a woman who acted, even within the parameters of the law, on the basis of her personal desires? Were these disparate voices divided along communal lines, with Sephardim maintaining a high ground of sexual morality, and the Romaniots showing more
leniency, as Ibn Yaish’s words would imply? Though he did not name the respective communities, in discussing the historical origins of the disparity in customs, Ibn Yaish did imply the moral superiority of Sephardi women over Romaniot women. Communal pride remained part and parcel of the *sivlonot* issue for him, as it had been for Ibn Habib and Aroquis. It is unclear whether his remarks were based on self-serving theorization and generalizations or reflect genuine differences in attitudes between the communities. However, the control exercised by Romaniot women over their dowry (*nedunyah*) referred to by Ibn Habib would indicate that Romaniot women enjoyed more independence than their Sephardi counterparts and corresponds to Ibn Yaish’s remarks about their relative freedom to exercise control over their choice of marriage partners.57

Ibn Yaish perceived Romaniot women as less modest than their Sephardi counterparts, a distinction he used to explain differing attitudes toward the breaking off of an engagement. This perception may reflect a higher level of autonomy granted to women in Romaniot communities, as seen in the control of a wife over her dowry. Ibn Yaish viewed a unilateral decision by a woman to dissolve a match for personal reasons to be an expression of sexual immodesty. Sexual modesty as understood by Ibn Yaish clearly involved the subjugation of personal feelings and desires to communal or familial obligations.

The second responsum of Ibn Yaish was apparently in response to a second question about the same case that included many more details.58 A Jewish man in Salonika betrothed his daughter to a man living in Istanbul. They appointed two arbitrators to determine the date of the marriage, the size of the dowry, and the amount of the marriage contract, and they agreed to delay the *kidushin* until after the arbitration. In the meanwhile, the groom sent *sivlonot* to his fiancée, as the custom in Salonika was to send *sivlonot* before *kidushin*. The father of the bride then moved his family to Istanbul. Upon their arrival, the mother of the groom went to visit her prospective daughter-in-law and gave her as a present a gilded comb. The groom himself sent a young boy to the house of the bride with presents, a pair of ladies’ shoes and candy, without specifying for whom the gifts were intended. The delivery boy handed them to the mother of the bride. Afterward a quarrel broke out between the two parties, the arbitrators refused to settle upon the conditions of the marriage as they saw that the match was not to succeed, and the marriage was called off. Although the groom did not claim that he had sent the *sivlonot* as *kidushin*, other people raised the question of whether the giving of the *sivlonot* rendered the bride a married woman in a legal sense, because the groom was from Istanbul, where the *sivlonot*
were considered to be indicative that *kidushin* had taken place. Furthermore, the question was raised if either the comb that the mother of the groom gave to the bride or the shoes and candy that the groom sent to the bride’s family should be considered *sivlonot*. The groom maintained that the gifts he had sent were intended for his fiancée. The bride’s family maintained that the gifts were not intended for her, but for her mother, in return for a gift that she had sent the groom. They cited as proof the fact that the shoes were too large for a young girl.\(^{59}\)

The wording of the responsum reflects a patriarchal society in which a man betrothed his daughter to another man and made all prenuptial arrangements and agreements. However, the mothers of the young couple played a limited role in the engagement by presenting gifts to their prospective in-laws. We can only speculate as to the motives of the mother of the groom in visiting her prospective daughter-in-law. It would appear from the wording of the responsum that this was not an established custom. Was she vetting her, satisfying a natural curiosity, or simply being courteous? Was the gift of the comb merely a gesture of goodwill, or was it intended to establish a quasi-legal bond between mother and daughter-in-law that paralleled the intensive negotiations being conducted between the male members of the families? The presents sent by the bride’s mother to the groom may have been in response to this previous gift. The bride and groom themselves were both minors; the bride did not yet wear an adult shoe size and the young couple themselves would appear never to have met.\(^{60}\) Both the arrangement of the match and its dissolution were conducted by their fathers. Nonetheless, their voices are heard in the responsum. The bride herself, in addition to her parents, is quoted denying having personally received gifts from the groom. The groom himself is described as the active party in both sending the gifts and affirming that he sent them to the bride specifically.

Ibn Yaish responded that neither the *sivlonot* sent to Salonika nor the gifts given in Istanbul could be considered as proofs of marriage because both parties had agreed to postpone the *kidushin* until the finalization of the financial arrangements. Because no agreement was ever reached as to the terms of the marriage, the couple had not yet formally agreed to marry and were never properly engaged. *Sivlonot* are considered as proof of marriage only in the case of a couple who have formally agreed to marry. In addition, Ibn Yaish reiterates his position that because the *sivlonot* were given in Salonika, a city where everyone gives *sivlonot* before *kidushin* and no one considers them as proof of marriage, they cannot be considered proof of marriage even if the groom was in Istanbul, for it is the custom in the home of the bride that determines the mat-
ter. He further notes that because the gifts exchanged in Istanbul were between the families of the couple, and not the couple themselves, they were not in fact *sivlonot* and could not be considered as either constituting *kidushin* or as proof of it having occurred.61

It is important to note that in this second responsum dealing with the actual details of the case at hand, the morality or virtue of the bride is not an issue. Ibn Yaish’s discussion of feminine virtue in the earlier responsum provided the theoretical underpinnings for his ruling that the custom of the home of the bride is the determining factor. In this responsum, Ibn Yaish reiterates his previous position without reintroducing his sociological explanation. In the actual case at hand, the engagement had not been broken by the bride, and thus her motives and virtue are not relevant to the case. As a jurist, Ibn Yaish acknowledges the autonomy and credibility of the women involved in the case. He rules that the mother of the groom cannot be considered her son’s agent in the gift of the comb without explicit proof, and accepts the fact that she acted of her own volition. He notes that if anyone may be considered an agent in the giving of gifts, any engaged woman could become married by the receipt of a gift from a third party. He similarly rules that the groom’s claim that the gifts he sent to the home of the bride were intended for her personally could not be accepted without confirmation from the bride. Ibn Yaish maintains that a woman’s inherent status as free to marry cannot be taken from her without proof, certainly not on the word of the man who claims to have married her. Thus, in the absence of witnesses, the bride’s claim that she did not receive gifts from the groom determines her freedom.62

In his rebuttal to Ibn Yaish, Eliyahu Mizrahi maintained that the intentions of the groom upon sending the *sivlonot*, and not the custom in the home of the bride, are the decisive factor in determining the legal implications of the *sivlonot*. Since a man can be assumed to act according to the custom of the place in which he resides, the custom of the community of the groom determines whether they are to be taken as proof of marriage. Mizrahi considers the *sivlonot* sent from Istanbul to be clear proof of *kidushin* and rejects the agreement between the two parties not to perform *kidushin* until after the negotiations as proof that *kidushin* did not take place. Mizrahi suspects that the groom sent his mother to give the comb to the bride as *sivlonot*. He cites the fact that in most cases the parents of the groom send the *sivlonot* on his behalf. According to Mizrahi, it was common for the mother of the groom to personally take the *sivlonot* to the bride on behalf of her son, a practice he considers a modest and dignified alternative to the practice of sending the *sivlonot* with a group of
people in a noisy, ostentatious fashion. He supports his contention with observations about the mother-son relationship in his time. Due to the intimacy of their relationship, young men confide in their mothers (and not their fathers) in nuptial matters and rely upon them to make secret deliveries to their fiancées. Mizrahi perceives the mother of the groom as her son’s confidante and trusted agent in sending *sivlonot*. Ibn Yaish perceives her as autonomous, acting of her own volition. Both rabbis perceive the mother of the groom as acting outside the jurisdiction of her husband.

The responsa of Ibn Yaish reveal very different patterns of acculturation and demographic change from those portrayed in the responsa of Ibn Habib and Moshe Aroquis. Ibn Habib described Istanbul as a great city exerting influence over its satellite communities, including Edirne. Though the Sephardim of Edirne constituted a numerical majority, they did not have communal autonomy. In contrast, Ibn Yaish, in his first responsum, explains that Istanbul stands alone in its adherence to the Romaniot practice. Edirne, like Salonika, follows the Sephardi practice and does not appear to be under the hegemony of Istanbul. In his second responsum, Ibn Yaish clarifies that the prevalent custom in Istanbul with regard to *sivlonot* is the Sephardi custom of giving *sivlonot* before *kidushin*. Only a minority of the Jewish population of Istanbul give *sivlonot* after *kidushin*. Because of the possibility that the minority custom was followed, and the impracticality of investigating each case separately, the giving of *sivlonot* in Istanbul can be considered proof of *kidushin*. Thus, the only difference between the practice in Salonika and in Istanbul is that in Salonika the Sephardi custom was practiced exclusively, whereas in Istanbul it was practiced by the majority, with a minority holding out and maintaining the Romaniot custom. This would indicate that by the time of the responsum, Sephardi Jews either constituted a numerical minority in Istanbul, considered to be the stronghold of the Romaniot population, or that a significant number of the Romaniot population had adopted the Sephardi custom. Perhaps the explanation is to be found in the phenomenon described above by Moshe Aroquis, that other communities were adopting Sephardi traditions.

Likewise, Ibn Yaish describes widespread intermarriage among the three largest Jewish communities. On a regular basis, men from Istanbul become engaged to women in Edirne and Salonika and send them *sivlonot*, while men from Edirne and Salonika become engaged to women in Istanbul and send them *sivlonot*. This fluidity would indicate either a significant Sephardi population in Istanbul or a high rate of intermarriage between Romaniots in Istanbul and Sephardim in the other cities.
Ibn Habib and Aroquis addressed the issue of *sivlonot* as a test case for the preservation of Sephardi tradition. The legal issue was discussed within the context of the integration of the Sephardim into their new communities. Though they responded to the challenge in very different ways, both Ibn Habib and Aroquis were clearly threatened by the strength of the Romaniot rabbinate. For Ibn Habib and Aroquis, the question of suspecting *sivlonot* exemplified the precariousness of the continuity of Sephardi culture. The entire question of *sivlonot* was viewed in terms of intercommunal struggle, and specific allusions to both communities of origin abound.

In contrast to Ibn Habib and Aroquis, Ibn Yaish does not make use of the terms “Sephardim” or “Romaniots.” He differentiates between the custom of Istanbul and that of Salonika, in other words, between cities, not between ethnic communities. Within Istanbul, he merely describes two groups of people, the majority who give the gifts before *kidushin* and the minority who deliberately insist upon giving *sivlonot* only after *kidushin*. This wording may be an indication that the division in practice was no longer drawn entirely along ethnic lines, with many Romaniots adopting the Sephardi custom. He explains that the reason for considering the receipt of *sivlonot* in Istanbul as possible proof of marriage in general is that it is impractical to determine on an individual level to which group each couple belongs. These remarks would indicate a high level of assimilation between the Sephardi and Romaniot communities in Istanbul, or possibly the adoption of the Sephardi practice by a significant part of the Romaniot community and other communities. It would appear, then, that the majority were a heterogeneous mix of Sephardim, Romaniots and others following Sephardi tradition, and the minority a homogenous group of Romaniots clinging tenaciously to their tradition in the face of the Sephardi onslaught. Ibn Yaish determined that in the case before him, the groom, who had already sent *sivlonot* to Salonika before *kidushin*, could be assumed to adhere to this custom and not the minority custom in Istanbul. The responsum of Mizrahi is similarly free from any reference to specific communities of origin.

The reality described in the responsa of Ibn Yaish is in practice a complete Sephardi cultural hegemony with a minority of the population in Istanbul adhering to Romaniot custom, which nonetheless gives that city the status of a city in which *sivlonot* are suspected. The numerical majority of Sephardi Jews outside of Istanbul and the adoption of Sephardi traditions by other communities attested to in the earlier responsa had produced a situation of Sephardi hegemony. Those maintaining the Romaniot tradition were an isolated minority. The continuity of Sephardi culture in general, and its tradition with regard
to sivlonot in particular, was assured. In this context, Ibn Yaish felt no need to assert the predominance of the Sephardi custom. Ibn Yaish did not view the issue of sivlonot in terms of the continuity of the Sephardi tradition, because the Sephardi tradition had become dominant. The question of what was to be the local custom with regard to sivlonot, which had troubled Ibn Habib and Aroquis, had been resolved. Everywhere except Istanbul, the “custom of the place,” the minhag hamakom, was Sephardi.

Nonetheless, the unique legal status of Istanbul as a city in which sivlonot are suspected, the blurring of communal lines within the city, the fluidity in population between the major cities, and frequent marriages between residents of different towns created legal problems. In this new reality, Ibn Yaish and Mizrahi were faced with a new question: Which city, the home of the bride or the home of the groom, would determine practice regarding sivlonot? In addressing this new question, the focus of the respondents shifted from determining the decisive cultural tradition, Sephardi or Romaniot, to determining the decisive role in the transfer of sivlonot: giving or receiving, groom or bride, male or female. According to Ibn Yaish, the question of whether sivlonot are to be suspected is decided according to the practice in the home of the bride, because basic assumptions concerning the character and behavior of the bride determine the intentions and behavior of the groom. Sivlonot thus became for Ibn Yaish a women’s issue. He ascribes the historical origins of the variant traditions to the sexual morality of the women in each community. He likewise posited that the expectations and behavior of contemporary grooms in intercommunal marriages are determined by these same assumptions of female behavior in the opposite community. Any individual bride is presumed to act in accordance with the mores of her community, and any groom will act in accordance with his perception of the women in the bride’s community. This nexus between tradition, communal mores, and feminine virtue forms the basis of Ibn Yaish’s decision on the matter of sivlonot. In his rebuttal, Mizrahi accepts the basic framework of the question as presented by Ibn Yaish, yet argues instead that the behavior and intentions of the groom are presumed to be in accordance with the custom of his city, and not his perception of the societal norms in the community of his fiancée.

Communal Pride and Feminine Virtue: The Case of Jamila

A responsum of Eliyahu Mizrahi on the suspicion of sivlonot in another case of a broken engagement provides us with a test case of the issues raised in the
previous responsa. A widow by the name of Jamila became engaged to a man by
the name of Shlomo through the intercession of Don Shemuel Ben Benbenest.70
Jamila agreed to the match and shook hands with Don Shemuel to signify that
the match had been made. Two or three hours later, Shlomo sent Jamila two
scarves or veils to replace her widow’s garments. Shlomo claimed that Jamila
accepted the veils from the hands of his messenger, a woman by the name of
Palomba, but returned them to her to be replaced by better quality veils more
befitting her dignity. Jamila, however, claimed that she had no intention of ac-
cepting the veils from Palomba because her discussions with Don Shemuel were
conditioned upon the approval of the leaders of the Sicilian community. How-
ever, the leaders of the Sicilian community did not approve of the match and
therefore she also withdrew her agreement to it. When Don Shemuel heard that
Jamila had gone back on her word, he went to her and chastised her, reminding
her that they had shaken hands on the agreement. She replied that although
at the time of the agreement this condition was not mentioned, nevertheless,
everything she said on this matter from the beginning to the end was based on
this assumption, and therefore, there was no need to mention it at the time of
the final agreement. When Don Shemuel heard this, he released her from her
bond and told her that she was free to act as she saw fit. Some time afterward,
Jamila became legally betrothed to another man (by kidushin). At this point,
Shlomo brought two witnesses to testify that Jamila had accepted the two veils
as sivlonot in her own hands and afterward handed them to Palomba to be al-
tered. The question includes the testimony of these two witnesses who, after the
engagement was broken off, went with Palomba to Jamila’s house to reprimand
her for breaking off the match. According to the witnesses, Jamila initially de-
nied receiving sivlonot. When Palomba recounted how Jamila had received
from her the sivlonot, asked her whether they befitted her dignity, and then re-
turned them to her for alteration, Jamila fell silent, and afterward said “so what”
and “I don’t want him.”71

Mizrahi declared Jamila free of any connection to Shlomo and legally be-
trothed to her new husband. He based his decision on the strength of her claim
that she did not receive sivlonot from Shlomo, a claim that in his mind was
bolstered by her subsequent dissolution of the engagement and betrothal to
another man. He similarly accepted her claim that her agreement to the match
was conditioned upon the approval of the elders of her community, and that
their disapproval forced her to break her agreement. In this judgment, Mizrahi
affirmed the credibility and reliability of the testimony of a woman with re-
gard to her marital status. We have seen above that Ibn Yaish made a similar
pronouncement, when he declared the bride a free woman on the basis of her own testimony. In that case, Mizrahi had ruled differently, declaring the bride to be in need of a divorce on the assumption that the groom’s mother had acted as his agent in bringing sivlonot to the bride. It is difficult to reconcile these two judgments. Nonetheless, despite the disparity in the rulings of Mizrahi, both he and Ibn Yaish recognized the inherently free marital status of a woman and her right to testify with regard to her own marital status.72

Before examining this responsum further, it is important to establish the communal identity of the main characters involved. Jamila was of Sicilian extraction. At the end of his responsum, Mizrahi refers to her as a “woman by the name of Jamila Siciliana,” and it would appear that “Siciliana” was an appellation denoting place of origin and not a proper family name. Sicily was under the dominion of the Crown of Aragon, and the expulsion of the Jews from Sicily followed shortly after their expulsion from Spain.73 The matchmaker, Don Shemuel Ben Benbenest, who still bore his Spanish title, was from an important Sephardi family that settled in Salonika after the expulsion, where he was an influential member of the community.74 The origin of the prospective groom, Shlomo, is unclear, though his agent, Palomba, bears an Italian or Spanish name. The man to whom Jamila is ultimately betrothed is referred to by Mizrahi as “Yehuda Portugez” (“the Portuguese”). Again, it would appear that the second name was a designation of his place of origin and not a family name.

As a widow, Jamila was acting as an independent woman with regard to her remarriage. She did not negotiate directly with the prospective groom, but with a matchmaker, Don Shemuel, whose interest in the matter is unclear and was possibly professional. Don Shemuel and Jamila sealed the agreement with a handshake, a traditional means of solemnizing a formal engagement.75 It would appear that in this final agreement Don Shemuel was acting as the proxy for Shlomo because it was deemed to be immodest for the couple to meet directly and shake hands. When the engagement was broken, Don Shemuel specifically mentioned the handshake as an indication of the finality of their agreement. Apparently Don Shemuel had no qualms about negotiating directly with a woman or shaking hands with her. Similarly, the match was officially broken through the intermediacy of the matchmaker; it was Don Shemuel who formally released Jamila from her agreement. As in the previous case, there is no indication of any direct contact between the bride and groom either in the negotiations preceding the match, the finalizing of the agreement, the giving of the sivlonot, or the dissolution of the engagement.
The responsum, as a record of a dispute between two parties, contains two conflicting explanations as to why Jamila did not keep the garments and why she broke off the engagement. Jamila’s story was that she acted out of deference to the opinion of the elders of her community. The exact reason for her deference to communal leadership in this matter is not specified. We may surmise that her decision was motivated by communal allegiance and genuine reliance upon the decisions of its elders or a sense of obligation to act in accordance with their wishes. According to her version of events, she never accepted the sivlonot because the match was never really finalized.

Shlomo claimed that Jamila accepted the garments from Palomba as sivlonot, but, disappointed with the quality of the veils, she returned them to be exchanged for ones more suited to her dignity. Jamila’s alleged disappointment in the veils was crucial to Shlomo’s case as an explanation of why, having received sivlonot, she did not keep them in her possession. Shlomo was also clearly insinuating that Jamila’s disapproval of the quality of the sivlonot was the real reason behind her subsequent decision to end the engagement. According to Palomba, Jamila asked her if she thought the veils to be “befitting her dignity.” Though Palomba answered in the affirmative, Jamila then returned them to her to be suitably altered.

Jamila’s reaction to the veils can be interpreted in several ways. Jamila may have been insulted by the low quality of the gifts she had received, perceiving a real or intended slight to her honor. Jamila’s disappointment in the sivlonot may also have irrevocably damaged her opinion of Shlomo. She may have perceived him as cheap or gauche or lacking good taste. (One can tell a lot about a man from the gifts that he gives.)

Another personal motive that could be ascribed to Jamila is disappointment with the financial or social position of the groom and concern for her own future social status. According to the testimony brought by Shlomo, Jamila clearly stated that she considered the veils unbefitting to her status. The quality of the gifts would have reflected poorly on the financial and social position of the groom.

Though not implied in the text, it is possible that Jamila was disappointed by the very nature of the sivlonot. As we will learn in a later responsum of Mizrahi, sivlonot were usually jewelry. In another responsum Mizrahi defined sivlonot as objects of beauty sent by the groom to his bride for her to adorn herself with, as it is the way of the world for husbands to spend as much money as they can afford to buy beautiful things for their wives to wear. In the event of the death of either party or the dissolution of the match by either party, the sivlonot must
be returned to the groom or his heirs. The exception to this rule is *sivlonot* of clothing, which will wear and fade and is not returned to the groom. The veils may have been intended as preliminary gifts to enable Jamila to take off her widow’s clothes and assume her new status as an engaged woman, and would have been followed by gifts of jewelry later. On the other hand, it is possible that Shlomo sent clothes because he could not afford jewelry, a possibility that would certainly have occurred to Jamila. Jamila emerges from the portrait painted by Shlomo as a proud woman, sensitive to a real or implied slight to her dignity, or a snob, or possibly both. In any case, her decision was personal and emotional. A witness quotes her exclaiming in frustration: “I don’t want him!”

Discerning fact from fabrication on the basis of the information presented is difficult. Shlomo’s version is buttressed by the witnesses he brings to a subsequent conversation between Jamila and Palomba in which Jamila allegedly revealed her personal dissatisfaction with the groom. Shlomo’s version of events is plausible, and it is possible to conclude that her disappointment in the value of the *sivlonot* and thus in the groom himself prompted Jamila to cancel the match, a decision which she later explained by the more honorable excuse of needing the approval of her communal leaders (approval that could have been sought in the earlier stages of the negotiations). On the other hand, it is important to emphasize that Jamila won her case. Without witnesses, and despite the testimony brought against her, she succeeded in convincing two eminent personalities, Don Shemuel and Eliyahu Mizrahi, of the veracity of her story. Mizrahi ruled in her favor on the basis of the credibility of her testimony. Jamila’s ability to convince her contemporaries is some indication of the inherent credibility of her story. It is also an indication of the willingness of the male establishment to accept the testimony of a woman with regard to her own marital status.

It is possible that Jamila acted from a combination of both motives: at first rejecting the veils for their quality and later, upon hearing the advice of the elders (and possibly after informing them of the poor quality of the *sivlonot*), rejecting the match. It is more likely that one of the two litigants was lying, which one we are unable to determine on the basis of the evidence before us. This does not detract from the importance of this document as a record of social history. Lies are usually scenarios deemed to be believable and thus reflect the liar’s perception of social reality. We can perhaps learn more from lies than from truths about social mores. Even if Jamila did not need the approval of the elders, she considered such a need to be plausible and even honorable in the eyes of her society, and was correct in her assessment, because both Don Shem-
uel and Mizrahi accepted her excuse. Either Jamila’s communal identity and her respect for the opinion of its elders was the motivating factor in her decision, or she successfully played the communal identity card as a means to extricate herself from the match, fully cognizant of the importance of communal identity and obedience to communal authority in the society around her. Similarly, even if he fabricated the testimony against her (possibly with the collusion of Palomba), Shlomo considered Jamila’s alleged concern over the value of the veils to be plausible. Apparently in his society great importance was attached to the monetary value of the sivlonot.

We have before us a practical example of the theoretical case discussed by Ibn Y aish: An agreement to marry has been made by two parties, and the groom invests money in the match by sending sivlonot. The bride, after receiving sivlonot, breaks off the engagement, leaving the groom at a financial loss and humiliated. This case conforms to the second scenario described by Ibn Y aish, a society in which breaking off an engagement was clearly unacceptable. Jamila was severely chastised for her decision by Don Shemuel, Palomba, and the two witnesses. However, the case of Jamila conforms more closely to the model of Spanish societal norms presented by Ibn Habib, namely that the stigma against breaking an engagement in Sephardi society was the result of the legal force of the engagement contract. Jamila and the matchmaker made a legally binding agreement that the match between her and Shlomo would take place. They solemnized this agreement with a handshake, which is twice referred to as having the legal status of a kinyan. Jamila is censured by the matchmaker, the two witnesses, and Palomba because she went back on her word and broke the agreement. Both Don Shemuel and Palomba specifically mention the severity of breaking an agreement solemnized by a handshake.

In his theorizing, Ibn Y aish explained the woman’s change of heart as a matter of the heart. In the case before us there does not appear to have been any direct contact between the bride and groom. Never having met Shlomo, Jamila’s motive in rejecting him could not have been romantic. Nonetheless, according to the version of events presented by Shlomo, Jamila rejected Shlomo for personal reasons. The exchange of sivlonot through an intermediary, the only contact between the couple, went badly, leaving the bride determined to end the match. Yet Jamila could not officially explain her decision on the basis of these personal considerations and found legal recourse in claiming the existence of a pre-condition to the agreement. Jamila ultimately ascribed dissatisfaction with the groom not to her own heart but to the minds of her communal elders. Breaking an engagement after the handshake was clearly unacceptable.
in Jamila’s society. For a woman to do so, of her own volition, out of personal considerations was apparently even less acceptable.

Though the case of Jamila conforms to some extent to the model of the “Sephardi” society presented by Ibn Yaish, the association made by Ibn Yaish between sexual morality and a woman’s breaking an engagement is not reflected in this responsum. Though Jamila is harshly criticized for her behavior by both Don Shemuel and Shlomo’s witnesses, no aspersions are cast upon her sexual morality, nor is she accused of a lack of modesty. She is chastised solely for breaking a commitment. The only motives ascribed to her, by insinuation, are pride and snobbery.

The responsum reveals a high level of cross-cultural influence and intercommunal fluidity, which indicates a blurring of intercommunal boundaries. The origins of the parties involved are not presented as significant to the case, and neither their location nor the local customs are mentioned in either the question or the responsum. This lack of background information is in stark contrast to the responsa of Ibn Habib and Aroquis, in which the communal origins of the parties involved are emphasized, and to the responsa of Ibn Yaish, in which locality and local custom are emphasized. Clearly the case before us conforms to the model of the “Sephardi” society as described by Ibn Habib, Aroquis, and Ibn Yaish. Yet, according to these scholars, it is precisely in this society that sivlonot are not suspected as being proof of kidushin. As all three scholars emphasized, the Sephardi mentality does not suspect sivlonot. Although there is no definite indication in which city this case took place, the involvement of Don Shemuel would seem to place the events in Salonika, a city with a Sephardi majority in which sivlonot were not suspected, according to Ibn Yaish. It is clear that the bride was Sicilian and the matchmaker and possibly the messenger of the groom were of Sephardi origin, and thus presumably not accustomed to legal significance being attached to the receipt of sivlonot. Why, then, is Jamila accosted by an acquaintance (one of the witnesses) who, after censuring her behavior, tells her that, having received sivlonot from Shlomo, she is now to be considered legally wed to him? Was he a Romaniot imposing his views on a Sicilian woman, or do his words reflect the influence of Romaniot belief on the Sephardi population? Furthermore, the legal question at the heart of this case is whether Jamila personally accepted the veils as sivlonot from Shlomo, and, if so, if she is to be considered legally wed to him as a result. Yet this question is of no legal significance unless one accepts the Romaniot position that receipt of sivlonot can be taken as proof of kidushin, because the local custom is to send sivlonot after kidushin. In a society truly conforming to tradi-
tional Sephardi custom, this legal question would never have been asked. It is clearly not coincidental that the query was sent to the foremost Romaniot scholar of the day, for it is a question of relevance only under the assumption of the Romaniot position that sivlonot are proof of kidushin.

Why, then, did Shlomo bring this case against Jamila? His origins are not specified, which is in itself indicative of how marginal communal origin had become to the issue of sivlonot. Does his concern for the issue of sivlonot indicate a Romaniot origin? Yet, he chose a Sephardi as his agent for negotiating the marriage agreement and chose as his agent for sending the sivlonot a woman with the distinctly Latin name of Palomba, who, after the dissolution of the match, remained on his side, vociferously defending his claim and chastising Jamila. It would appear that Shlomo was either a Romaniot with close ties to the Sephardi community, or a Sephardi who was sufficiently aware of Romaniot custom to realize the potential of using the claim of sivlonot for vengeance or the extortion of money in exchange for a get.

Moreover, Jamila, who claimed to be dependent on the approval of the elders of her Sicilian community, negotiated with a Sephardi matchmaker apparently unaffiliated with the Sicilian community and in the end married a Portuguese man, a match that presumably was approved by the Sicilian elders. At the time of the query, Jamila was betrothed to her second husband by kidushin but apparently not yet married (under the hupah). They seem to have acted according to what Ibn Habib described as the minority custom of pre-exile Spain, performing kidushin immediately after the shidukhin and the nisu in at a later date, as opposed to the majority custom of combining the two ceremonies. It is also possible that, though neither the bride nor the groom were Romaniot, they were influenced by the Romaniot custom of performing kidushin and nisu in separately, another possible indication of Romaniot influence on Sephardi practice. In any case, the incident raises questions as to the point at which the two ceremonies were finally combined in the Sephardi community.

We have examined a legal case based upon Romaniot custom, presented to a Romaniot sage, in which a Sicilian woman becomes engaged to a man of unknown communal affiliation, through the intermediacy of a Sephardi, and subsequently marries a Portuguese. Though the details of the case reveal a blurring of communal boundaries, communal identity, and affiliation, Jamila's own communal allegiance, her alleged dependence upon the approval of the elders of her community, forms the legal crux of this case. Like the responsa discussed above, this responsum also reveals a nexus between communal allegiance and
feminine virtue. They are the two points of the axis upon which this case revolved. While Jamila wrapped herself in the mantle of deference to communal leadership, her adversaries cast aspersions upon her character, openly accusing her of the dishonor of breaking her word, and subtly accusing her of pride and snobbery. In the case of Jamila, the issue of *sivlonot* had lost its broader cultural and communal significance and devolved into a question of the moral character of the bride-to-be.

*Toward a Comprehensive Solution: Avraham Ibn Yaish and Eliyahu Mizrahi*

At some point, apparently toward the end of Mizrahi’s life in 1526, Ibn Yaish consulted him directly on the definition of *sivlonot* and communal regulation of the *sivlonot* issue. In doing so, Ibn Yaish echoed the deference shown to the great sage by Ibn Habib. Ibn Yaish addresses Mizrahi as the “*gadol hador*” and “*harav hamuvhak*,” terms denoting the highest rabbinic authority of the time. He presents himself as a servant or son who is seeking instruction in the matter of *sivlonot*. In his question to Mizrahi, unlike in his own responsa, Ibn Yaish addresses the *sivlonot* issue from the communal perspective. He explains that because the Sephardim were not accustomed to suspecting *sivlonot*, and he is a stranger in this land, he is unfamiliar with the laws concerning *sivlonot*, and would like Mizrahi to clarify aspects of the law that are unclear to him, so as to prevent him from making an error in judgment if a case should ever come before him. He has consulted other scholars but received conflicting answers. In this introduction, Ibn Yaish adopts the same posture as Ibn Habib toward Romaniot custom: As strangers in the land, the Sephardim are obligated to follow the customs of the land, and therefore Ibn Yaish is asking Mizrahi to teach him these customs. Throughout the responsum, Ibn Yaish addresses his questions to Mizrahi as a disciple addressing his master (“teach me, my master”). However, despite the reverential tone of his address, the actual content of Ibn Yaish’s letter is a direct confrontation with Mizrahi on the salient points of the *sivlonot* controversy that he had raised in other responsa. Ibn Yaish describes the enforcement of the suspicion of *sivlonot* in Istanbul, where only a minority give *sivlonot* after *kidushin*, as a stringency upon a stringency that encroaches upon the inherent status of a woman as single and free to marry. He describes the decision to consider gifts of food as *sivlonot* (apparently a reference to Mizrahi’s ruling in a previous case) as very strange.
After raising several technical questions as to the circumstances in which a gift may be considered *sivlonot*, Ibn Yaish turns to what was clearly his main objective, the proposal of possible solutions to the problem. Ibn Yaish first suggests that either the bride declare upon receipt of the *sivlonot* that these gifts are not being accepted as *kidushin*, or a communal ordinance be made within the Sephardi community imposing a fine on anyone who does *kidushin* without a quorum of ten men and the cantor of the community. Ibn Yaish’s final suggestion is that a communal agreement be made, with the penalty of a fine, that no man perform *kidushin* without first sending *sivlonot*, thus giving the entire city the legal designation of a place where *sivlonot* are given before *kidushin*. Unlike in his previous proposal, Ibn Yaish does not suggest that this ordinance be confined to the Sephardi community. This is understandable, because by its very nature, for the agreement to have any legal effect, it would have to include the entire Jewish population of Istanbul, especially the minority of Romaniots who were tenaciously adhering to their tradition. This solution to the problem involves the imposition of a communal ordinance that would require the Romaniot community to abandon their practice in favor of the Sephardi tradition. The proposed agreement is reminiscent of the ordinance made more than half a century earlier by the assembly of rabbis in Spain, mentioned by Ibn Habib. The proposed ordinance is in direct contradiction to the agreement or quasi-ordinance cited by Ibn Habib in the name of Mizrahi, according to which a woman who has received *sivlonot* is to be considered legally betrothed and in need of a *get*. The reverential tone of the letter, though possibly sincere, was clearly designed to ameliorate the enormity of the concession Ibn Yaish was asking Mizrahi to make.

At the same time, however, the very fact that Ibn Yaish saw the issue of *sivlonot* as a communal problem requiring a solution on a communal level indicates the tenacity of Romaniot tradition in this matter. If, as Ibn Yaish maintained, (like Ibn Habib and Aroquis before him) Sephardim do not suspect *sivlonot*, and the Sephardim and those who followed them outnumbered the Romaniots, there should not have been a “problem” of *sivlonot*. Clearly society at large, including the Sephardi community, had been influenced by the Romaniot mentality on this issue, if only because they feared that their daughters could be made *agunot* at the hands of unscrupulous men and indifferent rabbis. Ibn Yaish began his list of proposed solutions by raising the theoretical question of how to advise a man with an engaged daughter who fears that the “suspicion of *sivlonot*” will be raised. Apparently the case of the daughter of Moshe Pinto, which had so affected Moshe Aroquis, had made an impact on
the Sephardi community as a whole, reinforced by subsequent cases of “suspic-
ion of sivlonot.”

Mizrahi opens his response by addressing Ibn Yaish as his beloved friend,
an appellation that apparently reflected both the warm tone of the question
and a sincere friendship between the two men. In his response, Mizrahi clearly
affirms the traditional Romaniot position: The prevalent custom is to send siv-
lonot only after kidushin, and thus the receipt of sivlonot can be taken as proof
of kidushin. Mizrahi’s response provides details of current customs in the giv-
ing of sivlonot. Mizrahi perceives a certain flexibility in the social and legal
norms regarding the contents of the gifts and the details of the manner of giving
them. Some grooms send the sivlonot by messenger with noise and fanfare.
Others bring them quietly by themselves to their fiancées without any wit-
nesses. Both customs are acceptable. He confirms that it was customary to give
jewelry but reaffirms his position that gifts of fruit or other foods are also to be
considered sivlonot.92

Mizrahi then addresses the proposals raised by Ibn Yaish for the regulation
of the sivlonot issue. He discounts the legal efficacy of most of the suggestions
made by Ibn Yaish. He does, however, accept the final suggestion offered by Ibn
Yaish: If all the Jewish communities of the country agree that everyone, without
exception, will only send sivlonot before kidushin, there will no longer be any
reason to suspect kidushin when sivlonot have been sent.93 Whereas Ibn Yaish
did not specify the scope of the communal agreement, Mizrahi clarifies that it
must include all the communities of the country, not only Istanbul. In agreeing
to Ibn Yaish’s proposal, Mizrahi made a huge concession to Sephardi tradition,
revealing a willingness to abandon the Romaniot custom in the interests of
communal unity and regulation. Mizrahi made a conscious decision to repeal
the previous communal agreement upon which he had based his earlier rul-
ings. It could be said that in deliberately advocating a proposal known by him
and others to have been adopted in Spain, a proposal now raised by a Sephardi
scholar and which would impose Sephardi custom on the Romaniot com-

Mizrahi’s proposal reveals the largesse and self-confidence of a recognized
communal leader striving to accommodate all members of the extended Jewish
community for the sake of peace and unity. On the other hand, it could be
argued that his desire to compromise was born of weakness, of his awareness of
the growing isolation of the Romaniot community in the face of the reemerg-
ing, numerically superior Sephardi community and those who were joining them. Mizrahi’s agreement to the proposal may well have been a concession to a new reality in which only a minority of the population of Istanbul followed the Romaniot tradition.94

According to Eliyahu HaLevi, a younger colleague of Mizrahi and Ibn Yaish, the death of Eliyahu Mizrahi in 1526 prevented the promulgation of this ordinance and cast the entire matter into a state of confusion. It is understandable that the promulgation of an ordinance eradicating a Romaniot tradition would have been possible only under the authority of the great Romaniot sage. HaLevi vowed later to complete the task and bring the Jewish community of Istanbul into line with all the other Jewish communities who had long since ceased to “suffer under the burden of the sivlonot” (a play on the double meaning of the word in Hebrew).95

Ibn Habib’s politic approach of overt reverence for Mizrahi and recognition of his authority, combined with a subtle assertion of Sephardi autonomy, was continued by Ibn Yaish with great success. The autonomy of the Sephardi peripheral communities cautiously asserted by Ibn Habib had transformed within seventeen years to the hegemony of the Sephardi tradition in the heartland of Romaniot culture, Istanbul. The vision of Aroquis had been realized in an astonishingly short period of time. Eliyahu Mizrahi, the great lion rising from the East in Ibn Habib’s imagery, whose opinion had rendered the daughter of a distinguished Sephardi family an agunah, accepted, less than seventeen years later, the proposal of a Sephardi scholar for a compromise solution that would impose Sephardi practice on the Romaniot population. Nonetheless, the Romaniot community maintained its autonomy: Ibn Yaish felt it necessary to consult Mizrahi before undertaking communal regulation of the sivlonot issue, and in the absence of the great Romaniot sage, he was unable to resolve the issue.

By piecing together details gleaned from the responsa on sivlonot, a picture emerges of the process of getting married in a Sephardi community in the Ottoman Empire in the early sixteenth century. Negotiations were held between the bride and groom’s families, possibly with the help of outside agents, arbitrators, or matchmakers. When a financial understanding was reached, a formal and legally binding agreement would be made between the two parties that the marriage would take place. The agreement would be given legal validity by a handshake between the two parties. After the formal agreement to marry, the groom sent the bride sivlonot, gifts of jewelry or clothing, or, more rarely, food.
The *sivlonot* were often sent with a pomp and fanfare followed by a large and noisy crowd. They could also be sent quietly, by means of a single messenger or agent appointed by the groom. This agent could be a woman, possibly the groom’s mother. The value of the *sivlonot* was in accordance with the social and financial status of the groom and his bride. There is no indication of any direct contact between the bride and groom throughout this process. Sometime after the receipt of the *sivlonot*, the marriage ceremony, which combined *kidushin* and *nisuin*, would be performed under the hupah. The Romaniot custom would differ in that after an informal agreement to wed had been made, instead of making a legally binding contract to wed, the couple would become legally betrothed through *kidushin*, *sivlonot* would be sent, and then, some time afterward, the couple would wed under the hupah.

As jurists, all of the respondents accorded to women certain basic rights and revealed an inherent respect for their credibility and reliability. Ibn Habib praised the merit of the Romaniot practice of affording women control over their dowries. Both Ibn Yaish and Mizrahi perceived women as autonomous agents and credible witnesses and accepted the testimony of women with regard to their own personal status.

The picture of the larger Jewish community that emerges from these responsa is of a new community in transition, coalescing from disparate components into an essentially cohesive unit. It was a fluid society both demographically and culturally. Families moved from one city to another and marriages were made between people from different cities. Despite strong ties to the community of origin, people of different communities married each other and were influenced by each other’s customs. Sephardi custom was dominant, yet the recurrent raising of the “suspicion of *sivlonot*” itself reflects the influence of Romaniot mentality on the society at large. With the salient exception of Moshe Aroquis, the respondents revealed a high level of genuine respect for the scholars and traditions of the other community and a strong and overriding desire for intercommunal cooperation and unity.

Throughout the responsa, the theme of communal identity is interwoven with the themes of the virtue of women and their rights within the process of matchmaking. Moshe Aroquis and Yaakov Ibn Habib used the plight of the daughter of Moshe Pinto as a platform from which to launch the resurgence of the Sephardi community. Aroquis’s outcry at the denial of her right to marry was intended to galvanize his community into asserting its supremacy. Ibn Yaish compared the laxity within Romaniot society, with regard to ending engagements, to the severity within his own Sephardi society, a comparison that
he related to the relative modesty of the women in each community. He used this comparison to explain differences in custom between the two communities and to propose a solution to the conflicts arising from intercommunal marriages. Jamila was either persuaded by communal disapproval to withdraw from a marriage agreement, or used reliance on communal approval as an excuse to extricate herself from a match she had rejected for personal reasons. The motives and rectitude of her behavior were challenged by her peers and former bridegroom until they were finally condoned by Mizrahi. Ultimately, Ibn Yaish, arguing that the Romaniot stringency regarding sivlonot infringed upon the inherent right of a woman to marry, persuaded Mizrahi to accept an intercommunal resolution to the “suspicion” of sivlonot.

Notes

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3. Talmud Bavli, Kidushin 51a.

4. For a concise review of the discussion in the Middle Ages and an analysis of the controversy concerning sivlonot in Italy between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Roni Weinstein, Marriage Rituals Italian Style (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 262–310.

5. It is interesting to note that the controversy over sivlonot in Italy reached its peak in the 1520s, contemporaneous to the responsa discussed here, and, similar to the responsa discussed here, it arose in the context of intercommunal conflict between the indigenous community and new immigrants. Weinstein, 303–310.

6. Ibn Habib was born in Zamora, Castile between 1440 and 1450. He served as the head of the yeshiva (Talmudic academy) of Salamanca, one of the largest yeshivot in Spain. After the exile he went to Portugal and then to Salonika by 1501, where he served as rabbi of the Congregation of the Exiles until his death in 1515/1516. Joseph Hacker,


8. Ibid., 74.

9. Eliyahu Mizrahi was born in Istanbul (then Constantinople) in 1450. He was of native Romaniot descent. After the death of Moshe Capsali in 1498, Mizrahi became the foremost rabbinic authority in the Ottoman Empire. He died in 1526.


14. The fusion of *kidushin* and *nisuin* into one ceremony began in France and Germany in the eleventh century, from whence it spread to Spain, Provence, and Northern Italy during the course of the twelfth century. In Southern Italy, Byzantium, Israel, and North Africa the ceremonies remained separate. The greater legal force given to the *shidukhin* is generally explained as a natural result of the combination of *kidushin* (legally binding betrothal) and *nisuin*. At the end of the eleventh century, Judah of Barcelona quoted in his *Sefer haShtarot* an example of a written contract for a *shidukhin* agreement that stipulated a fine as penalty for breach of contract, which could be extracted by recourse to the non-Jewish authorities. Ze’ev Falk, *Jewish Matrimonial Law in the Middle Ages* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 36, 86–87, 93–95.


16. Ibid., 72. This responsum further adds to our knowledge of marriage customs in the Jewish communities of Spain. Ishbili mentions two Romance terms for “bride,” “es-
“panza” and “novia,” used imprecisely by the Jews of Spain in his day (13–14th century) to designate an engaged woman who had not yet accepted kidushin.

17. Ibid., 69.
18. Ibid., 73–74.
20. Ibid., 67.
21. Ibid., 71.

22. Zera Anashim, 71. Israel Ta-Shma explains that the Tosafot’s method of interpreting the Gemara was in contradiction to the method of studying Gemara of the great teachers of fifteenth-century Spain mentioned by Ibn Habib (including Itzhak Aboab and Itzhak De Leon, among others). These scholars therefore deliberately ignored the commentary of the Tosafot and emphasized the commentaries of the Ramban. The Sephardi exiles became acquainted firsthand with the commentaries of the Tosafot from their contact with Romaniot scholars, who were deeply influenced by Ashkenazic scholarship. Ta-Shma cites this passage from Ibn Habib to illustrate his remarks. Israel Ta-Shma, “The State of Talmudic Studies in Fifteenth Century Spain,” in Jews and Conversos at the Time of the Expulsion, ed. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1999), 52, 61–62 (in Hebrew).


24. Zera Anashim, 75.

25. Ibid., 71. Hacker writes that the amassing of books in the Ottoman Empire after the exile led to intellectual cross-fertilization among the various immigrant groups. He attributes this mainly to the influx of books brought by the Spanish exiles. He documents other examples of exiles carrying their books with them (or attempting to). Hacker, “Intellectual Activity,” 104–105.

27. Ta-Shma, 57.
28. On Aboab, see Gross, 11–12.
29. Zera Anashim, 73.
30. Ibid.

31. Ibid. On the pride felt by the Iberian exiles for their tradition, and scholars and the importance they ascribed to maintaining these traditions despite the injunction to follow local tradition, see Joseph Hacker, “Pride and Depression: Polarity of the Spiritual and Social Experience of the Iberian Exiles in the Ottoman Empire,” in Culture and Society in Medieval Jewry: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Haim Hillel Ben...
Sasson, ed. Menahem Ben Sasson et. al. (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1989), 570 (in Hebrew).

32. Zera Anashim, 73–74.
33. Ibid., 73.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid., 73–74.
36. Ibid., 74.
37. Hacker, “The Sürgün System,” 34–35. Hacker mentions Edirne as a place, like Istanbul, where the Romaniot population remained strong and continued to determine public practice (Hacker, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century,” 111). He brings no evidence for this. The words of Ibn Habib, Aroquis and Ibn Yaish (see below) contradict this and reveal Edirne to be a community in which the Sephardim achieved numerical superiority and cultural supremacy by the early sixteenth century.
38. Zera Anashim, 75.
39. Hacker uses this responsum, among others, to examine the leadership of Ibn Habib. Hacker concludes that Ibn Habib’s authority did not extend beyond Salonika, and that outside his own city, Ibn Habib conceded authority to the Romaniot rabbinate, especially in the area of Edirne, because of its proximity to Istanbul. Hacker, “Ibn Habib,” 120. As my analysis has shown, Hacker’s conclusion is only partially correct. Though Ibn Habib does, at face value, concede authority to the Romaniot rabbinate, with great subtlety he lays the foundation for Sephardi autonomy, specifically in Edirne and its environs. Hacker writes that the judgments of Ibn Habib in the matter of sivlonot, among others, were not accepted because they contradicted Romaniot practice. Even within Salonika, Ibn Habib’s authority was limited to the Sephardi community and not all his rulings were accepted even by them. Hacker draws the general conclusion that in the first two decades of Sephardi settlement in Salonika, the Sephardi rabbinate had only a limited local jurisdiction. Yet their judgments became tools in the hands of the next generation of Sephardi scholars in Salonika who extended their influence to other localities and communities (Ibid., 122–123).
40. Zera Anashim (44), 75. See Hacker, “The Sephardim in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth Century,” 111, and “Pride and Depression,” 570–572. Hacker remarks that in Aroquis’s words the local population does not exist and the injunction to follow local custom is not mentioned. These remarks do not reflect the content of the responsa as a whole, as my analysis will show.
41. Zera Anashim, 87. On the attitude of cultural superiority adopted by the Iberian exiles toward their new neighbors, and the conversion of these neighbors to Sephardi practice, see Minna Rozen, “The Self-Definition of Iberian Jews in the Ottoman Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries,” in In the Mediterranean Routes: The Jewish-Spanish Diaspora from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries, Minna Rozen (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1993), 9–12 (in Hebrew). Rozen quotes this passage from Aroquis as an expression of Sephardi superiority. The other emigrant groups that adopted Sephardi practice were apparently from southern France and Italy. Ibid., 10. See also, Minna Rozen, “Individual and Community in the Jewish Society of the Ottoman Empire: Salonica in

42. *Zera Anashim*, 87.

43. Ibid., 88–89.

44. Ibid., 89. After briefly discussing the responsa of Ibn Habib and Aroquis, Freimann compares the Sephardi hegemony over the local population described by Aroquis to the situation in the Jewish community of Sofia. Avraham Freimann, *The Procedure of Betrothal and Marriage from the Canonization of the Talmud to Today* (Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1948), 154–156 (in Hebrew).

45. Ibn Habib’s seeming indifference here to the plight of this young woman is reminiscent of his stringent ruling in the case of widows legally tied to their apostate brothers-in-law in accordance to the law of levirate marriage. See *Zera Anashim* 53, 89–90, and my article: Hannah Davidson, “Exile, Apostasy and Jewish Women in the Early 16th Century Mediterranean Basin,” *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 6 (2008), 133–162.

46. Hacker writes that Aroquis was influenced primarily by the increasing numerical strength of the Sephardi emigrants and explains the moderation and prudence of Ibn Habib as the products of his personality and contact with Romaniot scholars. Hacker, “Ibn Habib,” 121–122, n. 10.


50. Ibid., 45.

51. Ibid.

52. Avraham Grossman has found that despite the Talmudic injunction not to arrange a marriage for a daughter until she is old enough to declare whom she wants to marry (Talmud Bavli, *Kidushin* 41a), it was customary for Jewish parents in the Middle Ages to find partners for their children without consideration for the desires of the young people themselves. Exceptions can be found in *Sefer Hasidim* and in Renaissance Italy. Avraham Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle*
In her discussion of betrothal in Jewish society in Istanbul in the sixteenth century, Rozen concludes that “love and passion existed, but were not viewed as necessary or important issues when the marriage of a son or daughter was being considered,” (Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years*, 129). On sanctions against breaking off engagements in medieval Jewish society, see Grossman, 88–98. The case before Ibn Yaish was an arranged marriage. For further details, see below.


54. Ibid.

55. Ibid. Ibn Yaish was possibly influenced by the opinion of the Babylonian Gaonim who considered the interference of a woman in the choice of her marriage partner to be an act of indiscretion: “There is no licentiousness (*pritzut*) or impudence (*hutzpah*) among the daughters of Israel such as to express their opinion and say ‘I want so-and-so.’ Rather, they rely upon their fathers.” Grossman, 98 (my translation).

56. The basis for this fear can be heard in the words of a young woman, imploring her lover to marry her, who threatens that if he does not remove her from her father’s house she will run off with a non-Jew. The story is related in a responsum of Eliyahu Mizrahi. Eliyahu Mizrahi, *Mayim Amukim* (Berlin, 1798), (31), 17.

57. Zera Anashim, 74. See above.


59. Ibid., 49.

60. They are described in the responsa as “*katan*” and “*na’ara k’tana*.” The delivery boy who is described as “*na’ar ehad katan*” is also described as being about nine years old. The bride and groom may have been older but they were clearly children. On the age of marriage in Istanbul in the sixteenth century see Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years*, 114. On child marriage in other Mediterranean communities in the sixteenth century see Ruth Lamdan, “Child Marriage in Jewish Society in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Sixteenth Century,” *Mediterranean Historical Review* 11, 1 (1996): 37–59.


62. Ibid.

63. Ibid. (19), 52–53. Also see Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years*, 127. Rozen writes that the question at hand was whether sending presents by the mother indicated less of a commitment and concludes from this that pre-marital negotiations were often conducted by the mother. I would disagree both with this understanding of the question and the conclusions drawn from it. Rozen provides a partial English translation of the responsum. Ibid., 362–365. Mizrahi’s words would seem to imply that relationships, possibly secret, between engaged couples were normative in Romaniot society.

64. *The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi*, 45.

65. His observations conform to what we know from other sources about the decentralization of leadership in the Jewish communities of the Levant in the sixteenth century, namely the weakening of the power of the Istanbul rabbinate and the ascendancy of the new immigrant communities in the Balkans. See Mark Alan Epstein, “The Leaders-


67. According to Hacker, the Spanish exiles became a majority in Istanbul by the beginning of the sixteenth century. Nonetheless, the Romaniot community there remained strong and assimilated to Sephardi culture at a slower rate than in other communities. Hacker, “The Sürgün System,” 34.


69. Freimann cites evidence of Romaniot adherence to the “suspicion” of *sivlonot* in Edirne in the seventeenth century and evidence that in Istanbul the suspicion of *sivlonot* was long regarded as a particular Romaniot tradition. In subsequent Jewish legal literature, Istanbul was regarded as a place where *sivlonot* were suspected. However, Freimann remarks that in addition to the Romaniot communities throughout the country that adhered to their tradition regarding *sivlonot*, the entire city of Istanbul, including all of its communities, maintained this tradition (Freimann, 156–160). This is contradicted by the words of Ibn Yaish, quoted by Freimann on the following page. Freimann failed to distinguish between the legal status of Istanbul as a place where *sivlonot* are suspected and the actual practice of most of its residents.

70. Istanbul, 1560. The name appears as Ben Beset in the 1938 edition. See below n. 72.


72. Ibid., 236–239.


74. Don Shemuel was the son of the influential Don Meir Benbenest. He was about twenty-five years old at the time of the exile. In Salonika he engaged in trade and intellectual pursuits and was the owner of an extensive and famous library. Shlomo Avraham Rosanes, *The History of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire* (Tel Avir: Dvir, 1930), 1: 81–82 (in Hebrew). Benayahu, 269, n. 1. Schmelzer, 265.

75. On the history of the custom of shaking hands to ratify an agreement to marry in both the Jewish and European traditions, see Falk, 88, 99–109. Grossman stresses the gravity of the obligation made by a handshake in medieval Jewish society. See Grossman, 92.

76. According to Rozen, communal leaders would arrange matches for people with no parents or close relatives (Rozen, *A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years*, 127). Though as a widow, Jamila arranged the match for herself, perhaps she nonetheless felt compelled to rely upon their final judgment, in accordance with this tradition.

77. *The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi* (69), 236. (Shlomo is in fact described as “poor” by one of the witnesses, though this could have been said to elicit sympathy, and the meaning may be “unfortunate.”)
78. See below n. 82.
79. Mizrahi discussed sivlonot briefly in a responsum concerning a different type of prenuptial gift, the gifts given by the father of the bride to his son-in-law. Mizrahi addressed a long-standing question in Jewish law: in the event of the untimely death of a bride without children, must the groom return to her father the wedding gifts that he received from him? His discussion of this question also reveals the tension between the Romaniot and Sephardi traditions and the need to establish new communal norms in light of current demographic changes. Mizrahi proposes a Greek etymology for the word “sivlonot,” presumably in order to emphasize the importance of Romaniot tradition on the subject. The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi (16), 42–43. For a discussion of the return of wedding gifts in the event of the death of the bride, in general (though not the responsum of Mizrahi), see Rozen, A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years, 124–126. Simha Assaf, “The Family Life of the Jews of Byzantium,” in The Jubilee Volume of Professor Shmuel Kreuss (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1937), 174–175 (in Hebrew).

80. Rozen accepts Shlomo’s version of events and mistakenly identifies Yehuda Portugal as the rejected fiancé. Rozen, A History of the Jewish Community in Istanbul in the Formative Years, 128, n. 16, 141.

81. The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi (69), 237, 238.
82. With regard to Ibn Yaish, see below.

83. Rozen describes Jamila as an “Istanbuli widow,” though it is not clear on what basis (Rozen, 141). The “suspicion of sivlonot,” which is at the heart of the case, is more appropriate to the context of Istanbul, for the reasons described in the responsa of Ibn Yaish.

84. The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi, 236.
85. The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi, 236, 239.
86. The question of Ibn Yaish appears in another edition of the responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi (Mayim Amukim, [Berlin: 1778] [38], 23a–b). In The Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi, only the responsum of Mizrahi appears immediately after the first responsum of Ibn Yaish on the question of sivlonot discussed above, and under the same caption (question number 17), 46–49. (Freimann, 156–160.) Evidence that the death of Mizrahi in 1526 prevented the promulgation of the ordinance discussed in the responsum suggests that Ibn Yaish sent his question to Mizrahi in the year or so prior to Mizrahi’s death. See Freimann, 159.
87. Mayim Amukim, 23a.
88. This later proposal had a long legal history both in Spain and Byzantium. See Freimann, 95.
89. Mayim Amukim, 23a–b.
90. The scholars of Medina del Campo took a more direct approach to the problem (according to the account of Ibn Habib) in that they agreed simply not to suspect sivlonot without requiring every groom to give sivlonot before kidushin. Zera Anashim, 72. Ibn Yaish’s proposal was designed to create a new legal reality.
91. Mayim Amukim, 23a.
92. Responsa of Eliyahu Mizrahi (17), 46–49.

94. A similar communal ordinance had been in effect in Italy since the late fifteenth century, as attested to by Joseph Colon in a responsa on the subject of *sivlonot*. Weinstein, 271. It is very likely that Mizrahi was influenced by Italian practice.

95. Eliyahu HaLevy, *Zakan Aharon* (Istanbul, 1734) (150), 83. Freimann, 159. None of Mizrahi’s students and successors, including Eliyahu HaLevy, attained his stature or level of authority. Hacker, “Chief Rabbinate,” 253. Hacker cites Freimann, yet concludes that Istanbul adhered to the “suspicion of *sivlonot*” in accordance with the ruling of Mizrahi (Ibid., n. 140 and 141). The opposite is true. The death of Mizrahi prevented the reversal of the custom.
Following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, many Jewish communities settled in the eastern Mediterranean Basin, within the far-reaching boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. During the course of the sixteenth century, Jews of diverse ethnic origins made their way to this region: Sephardi, Maʿarvim (from the Maghreb, North Africa), Ashkenazim, Italian, Romaniot (originally of Byzantine origin, whose language was Greek), and so on. In Syria, Egypt, and Eretz-Israel, they encountered their local brethren, the Mustʿarbim—who spoke Arabic and looked and behaved like Arabs. Integration among the communities and ethnic groups was not a simple matter, and over time many demographic, social, and familial changes took place. Toward the end of the century, the Sephardi influence grew, and most of the groups were either absorbed into those communities descended from the Iberian Peninsula, or, at the least, acknowledged their cultural, economic, and numerical superiority.¹

The exiled Sephardic community was distinguished by its many expectations and the hope for national and personal resurrection, to be realized by the establishment of a new generation. The traditional role of women within the family—to bear healthy children, preferably males—was more sensitive and emotionally charged than ever before. Many exiles lost their children during the course of their wandering. In the written records that survived, we sense the yearning for sons who would perpetuate the family dynasty, which was often brought to an abrupt halt due to the hardships of the expulsion, and there is a markedly profound concern for the fate of the children, in view of the distressing times. These fears continued to affect the second and third generations of exile.²
However, the sources describing the anguish of expulsion and its results are strictly male, and although perpetuation of the family is a principle objective of matrimony, and Jewish society is greatly concerned with every detail regarding the birth of healthy offspring, the Hebrew sources regarding women and children are extremely limited. Only a few of the documents preserved from the Ottoman Empire include letters written by or dictated by women, mainly in the absence of a husband. These letters primarily contain complaints about their economic straits and separation from their married children. Information concerning women’s experiences and family life is particularly scanty. Sermons, letters, and travel diaries were all written by men, and made very little reference to women or children. Even personal lists that have been preserved on the births and deaths of children contain no reference to the mother.\(^3\)

Consequently, in the sixteenth century, personal stories and details of the lives of Jewish women can be found mainly in halakhic (legal) sources, in accounts related in the responsa literature in the context of lawsuits involving women.

Using some selected examples of cases discussed in halakhic literature, I will try to delve more deeply into the relationship between mothers and their offspring, and the approach of the leading sages of the times—almost all of Sephardi descent—to the maternal bond. I am referring to controversial issues, some of which were purely theoretical halakhic discussions, in which the voice of the women is detectable only between the lines.\(^4\)

**Pregnancy and Birth**

In view of the reality of the sixteenth century, every pregnancy and birth caused great apprehension. Aside from frequent miscarriages resulting from the tender age of the mother-to-be, the very act of childbirth constituted mortal danger. R. David ben Zimra (Radbaz, 1479–1573), a Spanish expellee and one of the greatest sages in Egypt and Eretz Israel in the sixteenth century, noted that: “The death of women in childbirth is a daily occurrence in Egypt.”\(^5\) R. Shemuel de Uzida of Safed wrote about the anguish of labor: “Sometimes the [woman giving birth] will scream so hard that she can bear no more and she will die, and the time of birth and death are as one.”\(^6\)

A rare description of a woman in childbirth surrounded by her friends, who encourage her and pray for her with great fervor, is found in a question addressed to the R. Yom Tov Zahalon of Safed. The mother-to-be and the women
surrounding her cried out to God, which led to the question of whether they had taken the Lord’s name in vain. Zahalon permitted women to cry out the name of God in times of distress, saying: “Clearly one should not object to . . . women who alleviate their suffering with their words and their prayers . . . and encourage her with their prayers . . . How can one object to her calling out passionately to God? . . . Especially the midwife, on whom she depends to soothe her. But one should caution her [the midwife] to cleanse her hands of the blood, if possible.” In this case, reality prevailed over halakhah.

The preoccupation with magical powers and various folk beliefs, as well as the use of Torah scrolls as folk remedies for women experiencing difficulties in giving birth, aroused a controversy between halakhic authorities from the East and the West. Indeed, aside from the legal literature, compilations of magic formulas and incantations for “childbirth,” “pregnant women,” “nursing women,” and others are among the sole sources relating to these feminine subjects. Collections of folk remedies prove that they were widely used, often by Jewish, Muslim, and Christian women. They all used incantations and similar remedies to protect themselves from the many dangers that accompanied every pregnancy and birth.

A question presented to the renowned Sephardi sage, R. Yosef Caro of Safed (c. 1488–1575), contains a description of an amulet meant to ease childbirth—a golden coin bought by a Jew from a Muslim in the coin market, engraved with the image of a Christian woman in childbirth. The naked image on the coin provoked the question as to whether a Jew is permitted to look at it. The question contains a graphic description of the amulet: “A distinct image of a woman seated on a chair, with her hands raised above her, like a pregnant woman approaching childbirth, crying out in pain, and in her womb is drawn a fetus, with his right hand on his heart, and to his left, the shape of a cross, surrounded by a distinct Greek inscription . . . interpreted by those who know Greek: Lord, help whoever bears or wears me.” In this case, the rabbi prohibited the use of the amulet, even as an ornament, although he usually did not object to folk beliefs.

The first days and weeks of a newborn’s life were also prone to danger, and the public was in need of folk remedies and medicines. The prominent Kabbalist R. Hayim Vital (1543–1620) wrote in his medical writings: “Regarding Lilith, who kills infants on the eighth day after their birth . . . an endless number of times, thousands of times [!], I have written [amulets] known to benefit the world. Indeed, only once it happened that a child remained healthy for twenty days after birth and on the twentieth night he choked and didn’t suckle at all . . .
He stayed that way for four days and then died. I didn’t know if the reason was that the amulets were not absolutely perfect, or whether the mother [who bore the amulet] went out and left the child alone, and harm befell him. I also made an effort then, and placed a small boy’s sexual organ in the newborn child’s mouth immediately at birth before he began to suckle.  

Another phenomenon concerning the pregnant woman, not only in Jewish society, is the public involvement in every stage of the pregnancy, the birth, and all the accompanying intimate details. The woman is surrounded by female relatives and neighbors from the beginning of her pregnancy until the end; she consults them and is helped by them. Not only the midwife and the friends, but the entire community is brought up-to-date about every detail, and, if necessary, can testify as to the length of pregnancy and the age of the child. In Jewish society, this public involvement has great importance, from a halakhic point of view, in establishing the age of a girl who was married at a young age, in cases where yibum (levirate marriage) or halizah (release from levirate marriage) is required, as well as for decisions in matters of inheritance. Following are a number of examples:

A question regarding a yevamah (a woman in need of levirate marriage) from Safed reveals that the woman gave birth to her child after her husband’s death, but, unfortunately for her, the infant lived less than thirty days. There were scholars who claimed that in the absence of living offspring, she still required yibum or halizah. Unfortunately, the names or whereabouts of the husband’s brothers were not known, and although the widow had searched and made many efforts, she was not able to establish contact with them. After twelve years of desertion (aginut), the rabbis were ready to reconsider the case in an attempt to find a dispensation for her, and enable her to remarry. In order to do so, it was necessary to prove that the infant that she bore after the death of his father was carried to term, and could be termed “living offspring” (zera shel kaima) and was not born prematurely. To this end, testimonies were gathered from women, neighbors, and relatives, who knew every detail of her pregnancy and could determine exactly how much time had elapsed from the beginning of pregnancy until the birth: “And all the women said that the birth took place in the ninth month of gestation, that she immersed herself during the Shavuot festival, and gave birth eight or fifteen days before Purim, which was calculated as the middle of Sivan to the end of Shevat, totaling eight and a half months, and the newborn had fingernails and hair, and suckled from the women.”

A very complex case took place during an epidemic, and is described in the responsa of R. Shelomo ha-Cohen (c.1520–1601), the rabbi of the Castilian
congregation of Salonika: A woman gave birth to a girl one day after the death of her husband. From the answer, we learn that the woman’s father arranged in advance for witnesses to be present at the birth, so that his daughter would not require *yibum*: “I heard that the midwife testified before rabbis and dignitaries that at the time of the girl’s birth, many people gathered there, and in their presence, and that of the midwife, R. Mordecai Kalai, may God protect him, proclaimed: ‘Behold, my daughter has given birth to a girl, therefore she is released from *yibum.*’”\(^{15}\) Unfortunately, both mother and child also died in the epidemic, and consequently a dispute developed over the inheritance, between the maternal grandfather, Mordecai Kalai, and the child’s uncle, R. Shem Tov Luzio, brother of the deceased father (*yavam*). In order to determine who was the legal heir according to halakhah, it was necessary to prove that the newborn child was fully formed at birth, had hair and nails, and could be considered “living offspring,” and the court heard testimonies as to the baby’s stage of development at birth.\(^{16}\)

Deliberations to determine the term of gestation of a child, or, more precisely, of a girl, are found in the responsa literature mainly in cases involving the possibility of retroactively annulling marriages arranged by the father before his daughter reached maturity.\(^{17}\) An effort was made to determine the exact age of a young girl from Safed, who, in accordance with her father’s last will and testament, was married off to her cousin despite her mother’s objections. The mother tried to annul the marriage, claiming that her daughter was a minor when the ceremony took place, and that she had the right to refuse when she reached maturity. R. Moshe Trani (Mabit) thoroughly examined the testimonies that were brought before him regarding the time of birth of the girl, and displayed great proficiency regarding infant development. While questioning one of the witnesses, who stated that he recalled that during the epidemic of 1563 the child was seven or eight months old, he commented: “How do you know that she was seven or eight months old? Is it because you saw that her mother suckled her? She might have been a year and a half old, for sometimes an infant looks as though he is seven or eight months old and is actually a year old, or more, according to his frailty, or the small size of his body!” He added, “Sometimes age cannot be determined by the size of the infant, [it depends on its] state of health or illness, or according to the physique of the father and mother, short or tall, fat or thin. No one can know the precise age of the infant except his father and mother, who know the day of his birth, or neighbors and acquaintances who know the precise day or month of his birth.”\(^{18}\)
Many Sephardic sages were involved in the case that took place in Chios (Greece), in which a young girl was betrothed to three different men, and the quandary had to be resolved. Many witnesses were brought from Rhodes, Bursa, Nicosia, Tira, and other cities in the Ottoman Empire, in order to verify the exact age at the time of betrothal, and it became clear that, at least at the time of the first betrothal, she was a minor.  

Additional sources confirm that observations and thorough investigation of neighbors and relatives attest to their intimate involvement and crowded living conditions.

**Nursing**

Legal sources also provide information about nursing mothers and the period of nursing. The period of breastfeeding, as established by Jewish (and Muslim) legal sources, is twenty-four months, and is derived from an awareness of the importance of nursing to the infant, and the bond that it creates. Accordingly, and out of concern for the nursing infant, married women could postpone engaging in sexual relations with their husbands during the period of nursing, or could use birth control in order to prevent pregnancy while breastfeeding. Widows or divorcées who were nursing were forbidden to remarry until the end of the twenty-four month period, lest they become pregnant and their milk cease or become turbid, in which case they would have to wean the infant prematurely. In such cases it was feared that the new husband would not provide a child who was not his own with special food.

This halakhic prohibition raised many questions, and most of the cases described in the responsa literature came to light when divorcées or widows wished to remarry as soon as possible. The mothers were not always willing to wait until the end of the “official” nursing period, nor were the intended grooms always willing to wait until the women had weaned the infant. “Real life” stories and the answers of the halakhic authorities on these matters inform us of the diversity of approaches to such matters, and the desire not to interrupt the flow of life for two years.

From a formal legal point of view, there is almost no dispute over the ban on breastfeeding mothers marrying during the period of nursing. R. Yosef Caro was incensed at one of the sages who permitted a nursing mother to marry a man with whom she was already having sexual relations: “I say that he can make neither head nor tail of it . . . and this is groundless . . . Just because she is noisy
and defiant, the court [bet din] should not acquiesce to such a transgression . . . The scholar who permitted a whoring mother to marry while nursing—this is a flawed ruling, and all compassionate men whose hearts have been touched by God should rebuke him until he never again permits such a thing!”

However, things were not so simple and straightforward. Scholars were asked, for example, about cases where a man makes a match with a nursing mother, or is betrothed to her but avoids engaging in sexual relations. R. Moshe Trani admitted that he had many reservations on the subject. When matters such as these were brought before him, he tried to extend the period of engagement until the end of the nursing period, and when he was not explicitly asked about it, he tended to turn a blind eye to the transgression, “but I would caution them against making the matter public and counsel the groom not to enter her house under any circumstances.” On the other hand, R. Yom Tov Zahalon, when asked whether a man is permitted to marry by proxy a woman who is still nursing the child of another man, absolutely forbade this, despite the fact that she was living far away from him and there would be no physical contact between them.

One way of circumventing this halakhic ban was to hire a wet nurse for the infant, thereby relieving the biological mother of her responsibility and theoretically freeing her to remarry.

However, the option of hiring a wet nurse was also a source of controversy. R. David ben Zimra wrote, in one of his responses, “You should have known that regarding the widow and divorced woman, there are differences of opinion among later authorities: If she gave her child to a wet nurse, is she required to wait twenty-four months or not? . . . And some of the latter [authorities] agreed that even if she gave the child to a wet nurse immediately at birth, and he did not know her, she is still required to wait twenty-four months.” R. Eliyahu Mizrahi of Istanbul (1450–1526), after reviewing different opinions on this matter, ruled: “Who is he . . . that can rely on those unfounded opinions that permit betrothal or marriage without waiting the twenty-four months when the child nurses.”

The opposition in principle to the hiring of a wet nurse arose out of concern for the child’s well-being. The assumption was that a hired wet nurse might eventually change her mind after the infant had grown accustomed to her, and her refusal to continue to nurse him would cause him physical and emotional hardship. There was a fear that even if the wet nurse vowed not to go back on her word, as she was a married woman subject to the authority of her husband, he could rescind her vow.
In Ashkenazi Jewish society, which was rooted in the Christian-European world, various solutions were found to allay these fears. In medieval Europe and at the onset of the modern era, it was customary among the affluent classes to entrust their nursing infants to the care of a wet nurse, whether in their own home or in the home of the wet nurse. It was not taken for granted that mothers would breastfeed their children themselves; women of the aristocratic and middle classes avoided doing so, which evidently had an influence on the Jewish community. It appears that despite the official prohibitions that were issued from time to time, Jewish families often hired wet nurses, including Christians (although theoretically they too could be released from their obligation by the authorities). Nevertheless, unlike Christian society, the wet nurses in Jewish society resided solely in the family home, where their behavior and diet were scrupulously monitored. This method enabled the husbands of married mothers to continue to observe the commandment “be fruitful and multiply” during the period of nursing.

The use of wet nurses was also quite common among Jewish families in the Christian lands of the Ottoman Empire, especially in Greece. But in the eastern lands, on the other hand, most Jewish women tended to breastfeed their own children. Similar to women in Muslim society, Jewish mothers who wished to ease their situation were helped by neighbors and family members who were themselves nursing, a practice that did not exist in Christian European society. The use of a hired wet nurse was not openly acknowledged as a means of facilitating the life of the mother, or as a way to enable her to engage in sexual relations without fear, but only as a last resort, when the new mother was ill, or had no milk and could not nurse, or when the mother died in childbirth.

When a wet nurse was engaged for reasons other than the above, it was generally done in order to circumvent the halakhic ban on marrying during the nursing period. There is a difference of opinion among the decisors about someone who is already betrothed to a nursing mother, and scholars were asked to grant retroactive approval to marriages performed—whether intentionally or out of ignorance—prior to the end of the nursing period.

In cases where it was not possible to engage a Jewish wet nurse, and since a Muslim wet nurse was not an option, some widows and divorcées who wished to circumvent the halakhic obstacle acquired a female slave. Since the slave was bound to her owners and could not change her mind about nursing, there was no need for concern for the development and life of the infant.

Thus, for example, the family of a woman who bore a child four months after the death of her husband made considerable efforts so that the mother
would not form an emotional bond with him: “And during labor, before the child was delivered, [they] made loud, shrieking noises, so his voice would not be audible to his mother, and immediately purchased a female slave to nurse him so he would not nurse from his mother, in the hope that perhaps she would not be required to wait twenty-four months . . . for [legally] she will not be considered ‘nursing another man’s child’ since she had never nursed him at all.”38 Despite the objection on principle of the rabbi who ruled, R. Meir Gavion of Egypt (c. 1545–1622), in the end the “deception” succeeded and the woman was permitted to marry. Evidently, the flexibility shown in this case stemmed mainly from the fact that the family was wealthy and influential, and had already succeeded in obtaining a dispensation from another authority.

In another case, we are told of Reuben, who bought a nursing slave from Simeon and, in order to conceal the transaction from the Muslim authorities, pretended that the payment was given as a loan. The two secretly wrote a bill of sale according to Jewish law.39

A variety of additional problems arose regarding divorced women who were nursing their infants. From a halakhic point of view, a divorced woman was not obliged to breastfeed her baby, and if she preferred to leave him with his father, the choice was hers. Indeed, R. David ben Zimra testified that the phenomenon of women leaving their babies with their fathers was very common: “Every day we see cases in which women ‘throw’ their children at their fathers, especially when they wish to remarry.”40 However, the halakhah says that if the divorced mother has already begun to breastfeed, and the infant recognizes her and is attached to her, the well-being of the child requires that the mother continue to nurse, even if she has to be compensated for doing so.41

In a complex dispute over a bill of divorce that was sent to a woman in Salonika on condition that she receive none of her husband’s money or assets, it was claimed that a certain sum that she had received was apparently intended “to provide her with generous maintenance so that she would have a plentiful supply of milk for nursing his son; this was the practice with every nursing woman, whose nourishment was supplemented to increase her milk supply.”42 And a prolonged dispute between a couple in Gaza ended with a compromise, in which the husband promised to pay his divorced wife ten silver coins (muayyadis) every week until their common child was weaned.43

However, divorced couples were not always able to reach understanding and agreement. Rabbinical authorities deliberated over the question of the stage at which the infant “recognizes” his mother and she can be compelled to nurse him, and concurred that there could be no hard and fast rules in such cases.
Some are of the opinion that the newborn recognizes his mother—meaning he becomes dependent on her—at the age of fifty days, whereas others think that the age is three months. Nonetheless, reality has proved that a newborn may refuse to nurse from anyone except his mother even in his first day of life, as noted by the Radbaz after a personal inquiry, and, in such cases, the mother should be required to nurse him even if he does not know her.

There are occasions when the period of nursing lasts longer than twenty-four months, as we learn from another question presented to the Radbaz. An infant was weak and sickly, and there was concern that if he was weaned by his mother, his life would be in danger. The child refused to nurse from another woman, so a wet nurse was out of the question. Could the mother claim that she wished to marry even though she was still nursing? Since the wording of the question does not make it clear whether she was divorced or widowed, the rabbi ruled: “If the child has a father, we oblige him to compensate her with money until the child recovers and can be weaned. If he has no father, or his father is a poor man, it is considered a mitzvah for the public to provide for her until she consents to nurse and save a soul, and if she does not, she will be permitted to marry without weaning him because of the danger entailed. And if she [still] does not agree, we compel her to nurse him, because it is a mitzvah that she has to observe, and his life depends on her and her alone, and she is to be paid a wage [for this]. All this depends on the doctors’ opinion, and [is to be obeyed] only if they say that if she weans him his life will be in jeopardy.” In his responsum, the Radbaz displays flexibility and suggests several alternatives, even permitting the mother to marry during the period of nursing.

Things did not always go smoothly in the case of widows either. In Salonika a debate arose regarding a poverty-stricken widow who had no means of support and asked her brother-in-law Reuben to find a wet nurse for her child, or to pay her wages for nursing her son by herself. R. Shemuel de Medina (Rashdam, 1505–1589) ruled: “There is no doubt that the widow is not required to nurse her son without payment; the subject has been debated in Salonika, and it was agreed that she should be paid a wage for nursing. However, it appears that in this case the orphan has no assets with which to pay her, therefore it is seemly that the wage be paid by communal charities because the child has no father and no assets. However, as the infant has a paternal uncle . . . the uncle is required to provide for his care . . . As to whether the uncle is required to give him to his mother to be nursed—it is very simple, for several reasons: One, it is our custom that a child is with his mother until the age of six . . . Moreover, since [in any case] it would be necessary to pay for another wet nurse, why
should the mother not receive the same wage, which would be better for the child.”

Another widow from Salonika was left with a three-month-old infant, and sued her late husband’s adult sons for wages for breastfeeding, in addition to her ketubah. R. Yosef ben Lev (Rival, 1500–1580) ruled that although she was a widow and not a divorcée, there was no reason why she would not be entitled to this addition.

There is no doubt that when the bonds of marriage had ended, many women felt that it was the responsibility of the family of the child’s father to provide for his welfare and his nourishment (nursing). From their point of view, nursing the child prevented them from rehabilitating their lives by remarrying quickly; therefore, they felt they were entitled to payment or compensation for their services as long as they continued to nurse.

Sometimes the family was unable to reach an agreement with the mother, and she absolutely refused to nurse her child.

Two situations—each one different from the other—are described in a responsum of R. David ben Zimra. In one case, a divorced woman gave her newborn child to her ex-husband immediately upon birth and remarried. This was somewhat justified, because the baby had a father who would provide him with nourishment. However, the second case was particularly grave: a pregnant woman was separated from her husband, who refused to divorce her; she refused to nurse the son that was born after their separation—perhaps out of anger towards her husband—and abandoned him to the care of the community. How was she judged?

“Since she is a ‘rebellious wife’ (moredet), with no means of support and none of the stipulations of her ketubah because her husband refuses to divorce her, the court or the husband’s family, and not she, is responsible for the care of the child until the husband comes to take him. And if she wishes to nurse him and receive a wage—this takes priority and the husband is obliged to pay her a wage for nursing . . . for it is clear that the mother will care for her child better than others . . . And if she receives a wage and still does not want to nurse, though [in any case] she cannot marry . . . this is real cruelty, and I fear that she is of the Gibeonites, for the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are merciful people.”

The optimal situation was that the woman whose husband refused to divorce her, who was considered a “rebellious wife” according to the rabbinical authorities, relented and agreed to nurse her son. If she refused, even when offered a wage, then she displayed “Gibeonite” (Gentile) qualities, the opposite of what is expected from a Jewish mother.
Custody of Children

In contrast to nursing mothers who attempted to evade their maternal duty in order to remarry sooner, many court cases tell of the struggles of widows against their late husband’s family, who wished to gain guardianship of the orphans and oversee their property, and those of divorced women who requested that their children be allowed to remain with them, and had to contest their ex-husbands for the right. The families were intensely involved in all the processes, particularly grandparents, who were prepared to care for their grandchildren and raise them, and paternal uncles, who were potential heirs. The majority of the halakhic debates focused on guardianship of boys, because of the precept “the rightful place of a daughter is with her mother,” whereas a son remained with his mother until the age of six. Nevertheless, as we shall see, it was not uncommon for the husband’s family to claim custody of girls as well as boys under the age of six. Families found a variety of pretexts to appeal the guardianship—and retroactively, the financial and educational conduct—of widows, even when this was stipulated in the husband’s last will and testament.

A question posed to R. Meir Gavizon tells of a widow who had custody of her children, and whose virtuous conduct was beyond reproach. When she wished to collect her ketubah from the assets that remained in her hands, an attempt was made to divest her of her property, on the grounds that after collecting the ketubah money, she intended to remarry, which would harm her children. R. Meir Gavizon, and other posekim who agreed with him, ruled that there was no reason to divest the mother of her guardianship, and if she wished to marry, “it may be even better for the orphans.” Moreover, when a widow who remarried was sued by her late husband’s family to relinquish her young son because, as they put it, “they do not wish him to be dependent on others,” it was to her advantage that she married a respectable man who could teach her son Torah. In contrast to his rulings in other cases, R. David ben Zimra decided that the son should not be taken from his mother, and ruled: “A son who needs his mother is like a daughter.”

Another widow, the mother of three small children, wished to raise them herself and sued her husband’s brothers for maintenance. The brothers were not obliged to provide for the orphans, but they agreed to raise them and supply all their needs on condition that the mother forfeited her right to them. According to R. Yom Tov Zahalon, “It is fitting to take them from their mother and bring them to their uncles, who will provide for them at their own expense.
and not use up their [the children’s] inheritance . . . and, on top of this, the uncles will raise them to study Torah, which a woman is unable to do.”

In his ruling, Zahalon completely ignored the halakhic rule that orphans are not to be left with potential heirs “on account of an incident.” Another sage, R. Isaac di Molina of Egypt, did rely on this rule and rejected a request to remove a six-year-old boy from his mother’s custody. The child’s uncle claimed that he wished “to keep an eye on him and educate him in Torah and mitzvoth . . . and a woman will not control her life once she remarries, so how will she raise the orphan properly?” The rabbi ruled that it is better to leave the boy with his mother than with other relatives, men and women alike, especially since “a minor is not to be entrusted to relatives who are his potential heirs, and this orphan will [better] remain with his mother until he reaches maturity and is well versed in Torah and good deeds.”

When a husband left a will, the situation was much clearer. Such was the case brought before R. Itzhak Adrabi of Salonika, in which the husband stipulated that his wife, the mother of his son, “would be the boy’s guardian for as long as she lived, and no one could protest this, and if, God forbid, the boy should die, no other heir could claim anything from my wife, mother of the boy, during her lifetime, and upon her death, her property would be divided according to her wishes.” Moreover, the status of women guardians was more secure when they were appointed by, or received official recognition from, the Muslim court, as evidenced in records of the Shari’a court in Jerusalem.

Most of the disputes over the custody and education of children arose when mothers wished to change their place of residence. However, this subject prompted disagreement among the elder sages in Salonika, and each case had to be debated on its own merits.

In one case, the widow of R. Hayim Lindo was left in the city of Skopia (Skopje) with her young son. She wished to return to her original home in Salonika, together with her son and her parents, and to take with her the inheritance that her late husband had left. The move was met with opposition by the child’s paternal uncle, who would inherit the property in the event that something happened to the orphan, and therefore demanded to oversee the inheritance. Community leaders requested the opinion of R. Shemuel de Medina, who ruled that the widow could not be forced to remain in Skopia, especially since “Salonika is a big God-fearing city, where Jews constitute the majority of the population, and where there are academies (yeshivot) and schools (Talmud Torah) unequalled in the world . . . and since the child’s mother wishes to live in Salonika with her son, no one can object to her moving, with the property, to Salonika.”
In another case, R. Shemuel de Medina and R. Yosef ben Lev had a difference of opinion regarding a nursing widow in Larissa (Greece), who wished to take her daughter and return to her family in Salonika. This was in contradiction of her husband’s will, prior to his death, that his brother in Larissa would be the guardian of the child, and in time would marry her off to his son. The uncle-guardian claimed that “the orphaned niece is important [dear] to him and to her grandmother, he did not want her to be taken to another city because of the perils of the journey and because of the change of air, lest the tender child, who is still being nursed by her mother, receive a blow during the journey and perish, God forbid.”

In his lengthy and reasoned responsum, R. Shemuel de Medina ruled that “the woman does not have the power to remove her daughter from the place of her birth and her [father’s] family . . . especially since she is comfortable with her grandmother, her father’s mother, in the city where her father’s brother dwells, in proximity to the boy to whom she is betrothed, in accordance with her father’s instructions, and moreover will be close to her property. It is my opinion that the court of the city can prevent her from leaving the city until the child is weaned, when the twenty-four month period of nursing has elapsed.” After that, he ruled, the child will remain with her mother only if she agrees to dwell in the city, and if she does not wish to do so, the court of the city will award the child to her paternal grandmother. The question was also sent to R. David ben Zimra, who ruled similarly to the Rashdam, adding that the child’s well-being required that she remain near her father’s family, who would supervise her upbringing and the sexual behavior of her mother in the future.

However, R. Yosef ben Lev took an opposing stance: A nursing widow can do as she wishes, and no court has the power to compel her and her child to remain with the husband’s family.

Differences of opinion such as these were taken into account when R. Mordecai Halevi of Egypt ruled on the case of a father, Hayim Bon Senior, who requested that his daughter, who was being raised by her maternal grandmother in Alexandria, be returned to him. The grandmother and the mother’s family—also a Sephardi family, Villalobos—rejected the father’s demand for various reasons and refused to send the girl to him, despite his many efforts to bring her to him safely: “He arranged that a trustworthy man would make sure that the girl was accompanied on her way by reliable and honorable women . . . and promised to hire a reputable woman to care for her.” R. Mordecai Halevi expressed his confidence that if the Rashdam was asked about this matter specifically, he too would agree to remove the child from her grandmother and send
her to her father, who was known as a decent and trustworthy man, and was entitled to raise his daughter.

Another father, widowed by one of his wives, who entrusted her four children—including two nursing babies—to the care of his second wife, won his case against the maternal grandparents, who wished to raise the children. It was proved that the father and his wife took good care of the children and were capable of raising them properly.66

In a similar case, in which it was clear that the father, a poverty-stricken widower who worked hard to make a living, would have to leave his sickly son to be cared for by neighbor women, it was decisively ruled that the child would remain with his maternal grandmother “for she would be more merciful toward him than others.”67

Despite the precept that “all may compel [his or her family] to go up to the Land of Israel . . . [this applies to] both men and women,”68 a mother’s wish to do so with her children was usually met with fierce opposition from the families. The Radbaz ruled that a father was entitled to prevent his divorced wife, who was nursing, from going with her baby to Eretz Israel, even though the journey from Egypt to Palestine did not entail any danger. He also provided the husband with a number of additional claims:

He could say, I fear even the slightest chance of danger; and also could say, when the infant is with me here, if he falls ill, I will try to provide all his needs; and also, when he is with me here in the city, I can bring him sustenance; and, if you are here, when the time comes and he no longer needs his mother, I will take him to me, but if you go to a far away place, who will bring him? . . . Therefore, if she wishes to go to Eretz Israel, let her give him to his father. To make things clear: [the above ruling is the right thing to do] when the infant does not know her, but if he [already] knows her, she cannot give him to his father without endangering him. But, if he does not know her, or the period of nursing has passed, then the decision is in her hands: she may give him to his father [and go to Eretz Israel] or stay . . .69

As we have seen in similar cases, the well-being of the newborn and infant is of the utmost importance, but as soon as he no longer needs his mother, there is no reason for him to remain with her. She may go to Eretz Israel, but alone.70

A heartbreaking case involved the fate of the grandchildren of R. Moshe Trani, when his daughter-in-law, the widow of his son Nathan, wished to leave Safed and take her children to another country. The renowned grandfather
gave the following reasons, some rational and some halakhic, for preventing this:

For the children are young and he worries lest, God forbid, disaster might befall them on the journey. He also claimed that sooner or later, the mother would marry and the orphans would be under the patronage of a stranger [literally: under a strange people] and he would not be able to watch over and help them. He also noted that according to the Torah, he is obliged to educate them and instruct them in the Torah . . . and that one of them is almost five years old, ready to begin Torah study and already knows some of the weekly portions. Who will teach him and instruct him if he is taken away from here? . . . And the other [younger] child, if he is taken to a far away place, when he is ready to learn Torah and mitzvoth, who will educate him if not his father’s father? . . . And all the more so, to take them out of Eretz Israel to a foreign land, and there is more risk to children than to adults in such a journey.71

Between the lines of this personal responsum, one can discern the internal anguish of the Mabit, the grandfather. He concludes with a recommendation that the court in Safed oblige the widow to remain in the city at least until the young infant is weaned. His love and concern for his grandsons are weighed against his understanding of the hardships entailed in separating them from their mother. Only at the end of his responsum does he give vent to his personal feelings. “The children are my children and the sorrow is my sorrow,” he writes, “and may the Lord instill in their hearts love and fear of Him and make the remainder of our days better than the past ones.”

Notwithstanding the struggle of mothers to receive guardianship of their small children, there are cases in which mothers forfeited custody of their children. R. Shemuel de Uzida noted that in some cases “the birth of children can bring misfortune” and one should not rejoice too much over children born to destitute parents.72 There were indeed mothers who were unable to provide for their children on their own.

A question referred to R. Eliyahu ben Hayim in Istanbul tells of a poverty-stricken widow who wished to return to her father’s house, but her family insisted that she come alone and refused to accept her child. The rabbi was asked whether she could cease nursing her child, because, as her husband did not leave her anything, she had no other solution but to return to her family. The rabbi ruled: “We did not find any [halakhic] mention of the mother’s obligation to care for her sons. Although it was said that when the infant knows her, she should be obliged to nurse and be paid for it, she is not obligated to do so
[by halakhah], but out of concern for the child. Regarding the wage—why should the court not compensate her if the child has no father?”73

Three outstanding rabbis in Salonika, R. Shelomo ha-Cohen, R. Shemuel De Medina, and R. Itzhak Adrabi, were consulted in the case of a poor woman who gave away her child. We are told that “Reuben, a poor beggar, left his wife, who had born him a daughter and went to Egypt. When the mother saw that she was unable to provide for her child, she cried out bitterly. The Lord sent to her a man whose sons and daughters had died and she gave the child to the man, who, together with his wife, undertook to raise the girl and marry her off . . . ”74

The father returned when the girl was nine years old, and was grateful for the devoted care the adoptive parents had given his daughter. Another woman, the mother of a four-year-old boy, agreed that his uncle would go with him to Eretz Israel, where he would look after him and give him the best education.75 In both cases, the mothers, who were unable to raise their infants, entrusted them to others who could give them better lives, better opportunities.

A letter sent from Jerusalem by the leaders of the community tells of a “bitter and unhappy” deserted wife (agunah) whose husband abandoned her three days after she bore him a second daughter “and the woman and her two daughters were left naked and destitute, with no means of support . . . alone and forsaken . . . because there was nothing left to provide for her.”76 The community leaders asked about the whereabouts of the father, because, according to rumor, he had taken a second wife in another city. If the rumor was true, his daughters would immediately be sent to him from Jerusalem. Another mother returned her two daughters to their father because she had quarreled with her new husband. After she had separated from this husband, she requested that they be returned to her. R. Moshe Trani ruled in her favor: “The precept that a daughter remains with the mother does not imply that the mother is closer to her daughters or loves them more than the father, but for the benefit of the daughters, who will learn good behavior from their mother . . . All the more so if the daughters say that they suffer in the house of their father, who has another wife, and wish to return to their mother. In this case, the father is not entitled to keep them against their will.”77 This is the only responsum in which the voice of the daughters, who have grown and can offer an opinion, is taken into account.

Most women who remarried secured the rights of their small children in advance, set aside part of their ketubah payment, and made it a condition that their new husband would care for the children and provide for them until they reached the age of thirteen (bar mitzvah), or until they married.78 In the soli-
tary case in which a woman who remarried ensured the rights of her daughter and then changed her mind—perhaps under the influence of her new husband—the Radbaz decreed: “Not all the women are as cruel as she who wishes to expropriate the rights of her daughter!”

The above examples demonstrate that there is no uniformity in rulings regarding child custody, and this fact underlines the gap between halakhic theory and daily reality, and is an indication that the best interest of the child calls for compromise and flexibility in interpretation of strict rules.

The rabbinic-halakhic literature provides us with some insight into the personal lives of Jews in the Ottoman Empire during the years after the expulsion from Spain.

Despite the high rate of parturient and infant mortality, which characterized the era, along with the prevalence of epidemics and the death of children during the wanderings following the Iberian expulsion, parents and close relatives supported women and mothers-to-be and displayed great concern about children’s education and future. Pregnancy and childbirth were accompanied by greater apprehension than usual, and families took a variety of measures to prevent disasters, and grieved bitterly over every death. Hebrew sources totally reject the theory of Phillip Ariès and others, regarding the emotional imperviousness of parents toward their young children, which is rooted—in their opinion—in the high rate of infant mortality in the Middle Ages. While the halakhic sources presented here do not make explicit reference to the era, which was distinguished by the desperate anticipation of national and familial resurgence, they enlighten us about close family ties and concern for the future of children. The sages of the Ottoman Empire, most of them of Sephardi origin, clearly made distinctions between the individual cases brought before them, and it was not uncommon for them to display commendable flexibility and great consideration for the needs of the child and his bond with his mother. In this spirit, R. David ben Zimra stressed that “not all children are alike, and not all places are alike,” therefore, despite halakhic precedents, each case must be considered individually.

Information about women who refused to nurse their children and bond with them is not indicative of a widespread phenomenon. As I have shown, most of them did so in order to be able to remarry sooner. In a world of men, where a woman’s social and economic status depended on her father, brother, or husband, this urge to remarry soon and be protected can be understood. Others,
such as the “Gibeonite” woman, refused to nurse in order to anger husbands who had harmed them. Some refrained from maternal nursing because they wished to become pregnant sooner, and in these cases, the use of hired wet nurses does not indicate indifference, but rather the opposite—concern for the infant. 

In Muslim lands, especially those where Arabic was spoken, maternal nursing was preferred. The permanent use of a hired wet nurse was not considered desirable or acceptable, and, in any case, was only an option for wealthy families and did not suit the circumstances of most Jewish families. Even among the communities from Europe, both Ashkenazi and Sephardi, avoidance of maternal nursing was frowned upon, and triggered legal and familial disputes.

It is safe to assume that the practice of polygamy contributed to the infrequent use of wet nurses in Muslim lands because it enabled men to have sexual relations on a regular basis without “jeopardizing” the milk of their nursing wives. In fact, polygamy in Islamic countries existed not only among the Must’arab Jews, but also among the newly arrived Sephardim and Ashkenazim, and the sages displayed exceptional flexibility, permitting polygamous marriages even when there was a regulation or prior stipulation in the marriage contract prohibiting it. The Radbaz attested to the frequency of the phenomenon: “Here [in Eretz Israel and Egypt] there is no ban of Rabbenu Gershom [an Ashkenazi rabbi who issued an edict against polygamy, which was accepted by all Ashkenazi communities in the eleventh century] and no decree . . . and no custom; on the contrary, it is the custom to marry several women.” It is likely that the ease with which the rabbis released the husbands from their oaths and commitments was rooted, inter alia, in the great importance that Jewish society attributed to the birth of living children. Many sages in Eretz Israel and its environs frequently married more than one woman, sometimes in a polygamous marriage and sometimes immediately after being widowed or divorced, in the hope that the offspring from late marriages would be granted long lives.

Due to the nature of responsa literature, which deals with legal issues and marital problems, we have no way of knowing what the norms were regarding custody of children, but it appears that the cases in which women voluntarily relinquished their children were the exceptions to the rule. In many of the cases, mothers who demanded custody were prepared to challenge family members who wished to take the children away from them. It might have seemed that most of the sages in the sixteenth century tended to grant custody of young children to the father or his family, especially in the case of sons, because of the great importance they attributed to their future education. Mothers are fre-
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Mothers and Infants as Seen by Sixteenth-Century Rabbis in Eretz Israel and Egypt, in *Turkey: The Ottoman Past and the Republican Present*, ed. Michael Winter and Miri Sheffer (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 2007), 171–193. I wish to thank the editors for their permission to translate and expand the article; trans. Zelda Katz.


5. Ben (Ibn) Zimra David (Radbaz), Responsa, II, no. 695 (Warsaw, 1882) (hereafter Radbaz, Responsa). The high rate of mortality is mentioned in a lawsuit submitted by Simeon against Reuben, who impregnated his slave and demanded compensation, not just because of her reduced ability to work, but because of the reasonable fear that she would die during childbirth (Trani Yosef [Maharit], Responsa, I, no. 98 [Lemberg, 1861] [hereafter Maharit, Responsa]). See also Ben Lev Yosef (Rival), Responsa, II, no. 22 (Jerusalem, 1959/60) (hereafter Rival, Responsa).

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A Separate People, 84). For more references see Trachtenberg, Jewish Magic, 36–37, and in the studies mentioned above in endnote 9.


13. See BT Yebamot, 41b; Maimonides, The Book of Women, Laws of Ishut, 18, 15. According to Maimonides, in the case of a man who died and left a pregnant wife, if her child is born alive, even if he dies during his first hour of life, she is released from yibum and halizah. But, according to other traditions, if the newborn dies during the first thirty days, it is assumed to be stillborn and the woman still requires halizah (but not yibum). Cf. discussion in Gavizon Meir, Responsa, II, no. 64 (70) ed. Eliy Shochetman (Jerusalem, 1985) (hereafter Gavizon, Responsa). See also Jacob Bazak, “The Legal Status of the Fetus in Jewish Halacha and in Israel Law,” Jewish Law Association Studies VIII (1996): 3–4.


16. See BT Baba Mesia, 37b. Maimonides says that if the mother died first, and the child died later, even though he was born prematurely, so long as he lived one instant after his mother’s death, he is his mother’s heir, and transmits his inheritance to his heirs from his father’s family (The Book of Civil Laws, Laws of Nakhalot, 1,13). Cf. Avraham De Boton, Lehem Rav, Responsa, no. 189 (Krakow, 1885; reprint: Jerusalem, 1968) (hereafter De Boton, Lehem Rav); Yehiel Bassan, Responsa, no. 5 (Lemberg, 1904) (hereafter Bassan, Responsa).

17. A father may marry off his minor daughter. A girl is considered “minor” until the age of twelve. If a girl has no father, and was betrothed while she was still a minor, she can exercise mi’un (refusal) when she reaches adulthood and then her betrothal can be annulled (BT Yebamot, 107a–b, 112b and parallel versions; Maimonides, The Book of Women, Laws of Ishut, 3, 11–13; 4, 7–8; Laws of Gerushin, 11, 1–11). On the definition of childhood and maidenhood see Rozen, “The Life Cycle”; Samuel S. Kottek, “On Children and Childhood in Ancient Jewish Sources,” Koroth 9, nos. 5–6 (1987): 114–126. Encyclopedia Talmudica (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia Institute, 2000), Vol. IV, s.v. G’dolah: 31–41. See, for instance, the cases discussed in Radbaz a., Responsa, III, no. 1039 (613); Yaaqov Castro, Ohaley Yaaqov, Responsa, 27 (Livorno, 1783) (hereafter Castro, Ohaley Yaaqov); Rival, Responsa, I, 17; Yaaqov, Berav, Responsa, 18 (Venice, 1663) (hereafter Berav, Responsa).

18. Mabit, Responsa, III, no. 54. See also: ibid., I, no. 88; Castro, Ohaley Yaaqov, no. 62.

19. Sheleomo ha-Cohen, Responsa, I, no. 28; Shemuel de Medina (Rashdam), Responsa, Even ha-Ezer, no. 88 (Salonika, 1862; reprint: New York, 1959) (hereafter Rashdam, Responsa); De Boton, Lehem Rav, no. 24; Bassan, Responsa, no. 120.
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20. For instance: Shelomo ha-Cohen, Responsa, I, nos. 23–24; Radbaz, Responsa, I, no. 55; VI, no. 2182; Yom Tov Zahalon, Responsa, I, no. 8 (Jerusalem, 1968) (hereafter Zahalon, Responsa); Bezalel Ashkenazi, Responsa, nos. 6, 19 (Lemberg, 1904); Maharit, Responsa, I, nos. 40–41, 50; II, Even ha-Ezer, no. 42; Castro, Ohaley Yaakov, nos. 16, 26, 56; Hiyya Rofeh, Sefer Ma’aseh Hiya, no. 8 (Venice, 1652); Rival, Responsa, I, 14.


22. This was contrary to the custom of medieval Ashkenazi society, in which many widows refrained from remarrying, lest this be detrimental to their children. See Avraham Grossman, Pious and Rebellious: Jewish Women in Europe in the Middle Ages (Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center, 2001), 227 (in Hebrew). In Ottoman Jewish society many women married more than once. Divorcées and widows, even mothers of small children, hastened to remarry (Lamdan, A Separate People, 200–201; Rozen, Istanbul, 142–145, 181–182).

23. Yosef Caro, Responsa Beit Yosef, no. 19 (=Laws of Ketubot, no. 1) (Salonika, 1598) (hereafter Caro, Responsa Beit Yosef).

24. Mabit, Responsa, II, unnumbered responsum following no. 209.

25. Zahalon, New Responsa, no. 43.

26. The right of women of means to hire a wet nurse is based on halakhah: “These are the works which the wife must perform for her husband: grinding flour and baking bread and washing clothes and cooking food and giving suck to her child . . . If she brought him in one bondwoman she need not grind or bake or wash; if two, she need not cook or give her child suck . . .” (Mishnah, Ketubot, 5, 5). See discussion in Caro, Responsa Beit Yosef, Laws of Ketubot, no. 15. Cf. Giladi, Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses, 104; idem, “Breast-Feeding,” 114; Rozen, Istanbul, 180.


31. For example, a Jew from Monastir (Bitola) wished to cancel his vow to go up to Eretz Israel because his small son was accustomed to a hired wet nurse, (Shelomo ha-Cohen, *Responsa*, II, no. 45; also Rashdam, *Responsa, Even ha-Ezer*, no. 88; *Torat Emet, Responsa*, no. 60). An answer of R. Eliyahu ben Hayim (Adrianople and Istanbul, ca. 1530–1610) tells of a widow who was a wet nurse in the home of a married Jewish man. She became pregnant after the father of the infant raped her at knifepoint (Eliyahu Ben [Ibn] Hayim, *Responsa*, no. 17 [Istanbul, c. 1603]). A question addressed to R. Shemuel Kalai of Arta (Greece) dealt with the case of a widow who gave his daughter away to a Gentile wet nurse. This was considered an act of cruelty, and it was ruled that the daughter be entrusted to the care of her maternal grandmother (*Mishpetei Shemuel, Responsa*, no. 90 [Venice, 1600]). See also the case in Rival, *Responsa*, III, no. 98.

32. A few examples: Radbaz, *Responsa*, I, nos. 360, 551; III, 408; Mabit, *Responsa*, I, no. 165; *Mayim Amuqim, Responsa*, I, no. 10; Maharit, *Responsa*, I, nos. 130, 134. Also in the following references.

33. For example, regarding the infant who died a few days after birth (above, footnote 15), there was testimony that the entire neighborhood joined together to help the mother, who was apparently very weak. Used fabric was collected to diaper the child, and the neighbor women nursed the child jointly (Mabit, *Responsa*, II, no. 166). A report from Salonika tells of a woman who simultaneously nursed her own daughter and another infant who was one year older (*Divrei Rivot, Responsa*, no. 185.)

34. Shahar, *Childhood*, 65.


36. It is unlikely that a Muslim woman would work as a hired wet nurse in the home of Jews, especially due to the legal and social consequences stemming from nursing relations in Islam. See Giladi, *Infants, Parents and Wet Nurses*, 68–114; idem., “Breast-Feeding,” 115; idem., “Some Notes.” However, there were some exceptional cases. See Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, I (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 127; Shahar, *Childhood*, 65.

38. Gavizon, *Responsa*, no. 33. See also the editor’s notes there and in the Introduction, 51–52.

39. Radbaz, *Responsa*, IV, no. 1121 (48). See also no. 1157 (86), where the Radbaz recommends that a pregnant slave, who converted to Judaism, serve as a wet nurse in a Jewish family.


42. Eliyahu Mizrahi, *Responsa*, no. 87 (Jerusalem, 1938).


44. BT *Ketubot*, 59b–60b.

45. Radbaz, *Responsa*, VII, no. 15: “And we examined him time after time and he does not want to suckle—even though he is just a newborn, she is forced to nurse him so as not to endanger him.”


50. It was said, regarding the Gibeonites, that “[they] were not of the people of Israel but of the remnant of the Amorites” (II Samuel, 21:2).

51. In order to cope with similar situations, the Iberian exiles in Fez (Morocco) adopted a rule in 1550 stating that “[a nursing mother] may not cast off her newborn child and is obligated to nurse the infant from the day of his birth for twenty-four continuous months, whether it is a boy or girl, and she will be paid half of the wages paid to a wet nurse who gives milk to others.” See *The Taqanot of the Jews of Morocco*, introduction S. Bar Asher (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 1977), no. 25 (in Hebrew). Apparently a less specific rule adopted shortly after the expulsion from Spain was not effective (ibid., no. 10).

52. In the case of divorce the father must maintain his son until the age of six, and then can refuse to pay support if the son still remains with his mother (BT *Ketubot*, 65b, 102b–103a; Caro, *Shulhan Arukh, Even ha-Ezer*, 2, 7). For a case in which the father
received custody of his seven-year-old daughter, because it was proved that his ex-wife was a prostitute and the girl might follow in her footsteps, see Radbaz, Responsa, I, no. 263.

53. “Women, slaves, and minors may not serve as guardians. But if the father of the orphans chose to appoint one of these, he has every right to do so” (BT Gittin, 52a). See also Caro, Shulhan Arukh, Hoshen Mishpat, 290, 1 and 2; Encyclopedia Talmudica (Jerusalem: Talmudic Encyclopedia Institute, 1974), Vol. II, s.v. Apotropos: 553–554; Rozen, Istanbul, 180–183.

54. Gavizon, Responsa, I, no. 16. See also: Alashqar, Responsa, no. 28; Divrei Rivot, Responsa, no. 166.

55. Radbaz, Responsa, I, no. 429. On the other hand, a divorced mother was forced to return her daughter to her father after becoming pregnant out of wedlock once again (ibid., no. 263), and in a family dispute in Rhodes, the court removed a boy from the custody of his mother, who had remarried, and he was sent to the home of a guardian (ibid., III, no. 890 [449]).

56. Zahalon, New Responsa, no. 232 (and no. 16).

57. “There was a case in which the heirs killed the son [even] on the eve of Passover” (BT Ketubot, 102b).

58. Abraham David, “R. Isaac di Molina,” Qiriyat Sefer, 44 (1969): 553–559 (in Hebrew). In deliberations in the lawsuit of a brother who wished to gain guardianship of his young sister, R. Yaaqov Berav ruled that the girl should be transferred to her brother, since girls do not inherit, so the rule that orphans are not left with potential heirs does not apply in her case (Berav, Responsa, no. 19). See also the case described by R. Eliyahu ben Hayim (Mayim Amuqim, Responsa, II, no. 40).

59. Divrei Rivot, Responsa, no. 120. See also Maharit, Responsa, II, Hoshen Mishpat, no. 79; Mabit, Responsa, II, nos. 29, 193; Yoshiyahu Pinto, Nivhar mi-Kesef, Responsa. Even ha-Ezer, no. 72 (Aleppo, 1869); Zahalon, New Responsa, no. 69; Alsheikh Moshe, Responsa, nos. 128, 130 (Jerusalem, 1975) (hereafter Alsheikh) (cf. Zahalon, Responsa, no. 263; Galante, Responsa, no. 125); Caro, Avqat Rakhel, no. 158.


62. Rashdam, Responsa, Even ha-Ezer, no. 123.

63. Radbaz, Responsa, I, no. 360.

64. Rival, Responsa, I, no. 58.

65. Darkhei No’am, Responsa, Even ha-Ezer, no. 38.

66. Ibid., no. 26.

67. Radbaz, Responsa, I, no. 123.
68. BT *Ketubot*, 110b.

70. The situation is different in the case of a deserted wife (*agunah*) who wished to go to Eretz Israel with her son. It was ruled that as long as she is not legally a widow, no one can prevent her from doing so. In addition, the child’s grandfather, who lived in Eretz Israel, would be better able to teach him Torah than his paternal grandmother, “for she is a woman” (Alsheikh, *Responsa*, no. 38). Another answer by R. Moshe Alsheikh, tells of a widow who returned to her father’s house with her young son, but when she remarried, his uncle took him to his house (ibid., no. 70).


72. In a sermon, quoting the verse “blessed shall be the fruit of your womb” (Deut. 28:4), he wrote: “The man who has sons and cannot feed them would not wish the Almighty to give him sons” (Uzida, *Sermons*, 152). See also ibid., 133–134.

73. Ben Hayim, *Responsa*, no. 95 (in the second part of the answer, unnumbered).

74. Shelomo ha-Cohen, *Responsa*, I, no. 6; Rashdam, *Responsa*, Even ha-’Ezer, no. 206; *Divrei Rivot, Responsa*, no. 366. The case became complicated when it was necessary to annul the marriage of the girl, and this is the focus of the halakhic debate.


78. Radbaz, *Responsa*, III, no. 897 (456); Caro, *Avqat Rohel*, no. 102; Mabit, *Responsa*, I, no. 161; II, nos. 45, 220; III, nos. 176, 121; Zahalon, *Responsa*, I, no. 233; De Boton, *Lehem Rav, Responsa*, no. 58. An Ashkenazi divorcée, who remarried in Jerusalem, left all her property to her husband “on condition that he will be like a father to my son, Joshua, and do whatever is needed for a baby, and will look after him and take care of him until he is thirteen” (Zahalon, *New Responsa*, I, no. 54). Cf. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, III, 234.


82. See Goldin’s conclusion, “Jewish Children,” 104.

83. His response in Berav, *Responsa*, no. 61; Radbaz, *Responsa*, I, no. 374. See also Ruth Lamdan, “Polygamy in Jewish Society in Palestine and Egypt in the Generations following the Expulsion from Spain,” in *Daniel Carpi Jubilee Volume* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv


86. See, for instance, Radbaz, Responsa, III, 851 (408). Cf. BT Sanhedrin, 22b.

87. A familiar phenomenon on other subjects as well. See Lamdan, A Separate People, 186, 190, 264–265.
II

Western Sephardi Households

WOMEN, CHILDREN, AND LIFE-CYCLE EVENTS
In this essay I will present some results in the form of suggestions and hypotheses from a larger study on “New Christian” men and women who arrived in Livorno and Pisa in the seventeenth century and returned to Judaism. The privileges granted by the Livornine induced descendents of conversos to forsake the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the sixteenth century and create, first in Pisa and then in Livorno, important Jewish communities primarily composed of those wanting to return to the public practice of Judaism. Before arriving in Tuscany or in other “lands of Judaism,” where they could profess their faith without fear, the conversos had often remained secretly attached to Judaism, observing traditional Jewish practices and beliefs in the safety of their homes. Over time and the passage of generations, however, the tension between Judaism and Christianity, which is one of the hallmarks of Marrano religiosity, caused these practices and beliefs to undergo transformations, hybridization, and syncretism.

Marranism was not only a complex religious phenomenon but, above all, a social system based on three closely connected elements: the construction of a network based on business relationships, religious complicity, and family ties; endogamous marriage; and the centrality of domestic and family space. With particular emphasis on the latter, I will demonstrate how the passage from the secrecy of crypto-Judaism to normative Judaism and communal life redefined the roles of gender, power, and religious space.
As Cecil Roth observed in 1932 in his renowned *The History of the Marranos*, in crypto-Judaism it is significant that women took a prominent part in the initiations to Judaism in several known cases, showed an especial familiarity with the prayers, and were in some instances peculiarly meticulous in their observance.4 Recent studies on the religiosity and lifestyle of crypto-Jews have shown that as women took on a crucial role in the construction and transmission of Jewish traditions, there was a corresponding privatization of ritual and practice, the development of a domestic religiosity.5 As Renée Levine Melammed emphasizes in her study of Castilian crypto-Jews between the fifteen and sixteenth centuries, traditionally the women had kindled lights on Friday evening, prepared Shabbat meal, baked matzah,6 and observed the dietary laws and the like: Now these observances would become the major symbols of crypto-Judaism.7 According to Jewish tradition, men are obliged to observe the commandments, pray at least three times a day—preferably in synagogue and in the presence of ten adults (minyan)—as well as study the Torah and oversee their sons’ education. The responsibility for principal religious functions and duties as well as the administration of justice also fall to men. The center of male religious activity, therefore, is outside the home and revolves around such institutions as the synagogue, the religious schools, the confraternities, and the courts.

After 1492 these spaces, and, consequently, most religious functions and customs men traditionally oversaw, disappeared. Even their sacred books were taken from them. The People of the Book became a people without books, and oral transmission came to be the principal carrier of Jewish knowledge.8 Accordingly there was a drastic contraction of public and institutional religious life in converso communities that continued to remain attached to Judaism. The spaces where men could exercise their authority and display their religious identity dried up, resulting in a diminution of male power. The domestic sphere, where women had always been in charge, became the center of crypto-Jewish life. Those Jewish customs and norms that had traditionally been in the domain of women (such as diet, Shabbat, the ritual bath) became crucial in crypto-Jewish life because they were the only ones that could be maintained and transmitted to the next generation—or to anyone, for that matter—who had never entered a synagogue or received a Jewish education in a yeshivah.9 A similar phenomenon can be found in another community of New Christians, the Moriscos of Spain. The Morisco home was, as was the Marrano home, “a bas-
tion of cultural resistance where women played leading roles in preserving tradition and resisting Christian hegemony.\textsuperscript{10}

The long clandestine existence of crypto-Jews and their descendents brought an end to the public display of Judaism and a corresponding increase in the importance of home and family: The house replaced the synagogue, becoming the temple of crypto-Judaism. Domestic space became the only space where conversos could construct—both physically and spiritually—live, and transmit their religion. The family, especially the woman in her role as mother and wife, provided the motive and strength for the maintenance of and connection to one’s faith. Home and family were the spaces of unveiling, where men and women could reveal their true identity and practice the faith of their forefathers, sheltered from prying eyes and protected by the family bond.

Domestic rituals performed on Shabbat and the major holidays were the heart of Marranism, and the responsibility of celebrating them fell to women. They prepared food, washed clothes and dishes, and lit candles.\textsuperscript{11} Crypto-Jewish women learned to observe the Laws of Moses as children from their mothers and other female relatives. Sarah, alias Eleonora Nunez, a Marrana arrested by the Holy Office of Pisa in 1671, told the inquisitor that when her parents died she was taken in by a maternal aunt who taught her at twelve “how to behave and what to do in order to be able to observe Mosaic law.”\textsuperscript{12} Sarah demonstrated not only a fervent belief in, but also a profound knowledge of, Jewish law when she appeared before the Inquisition of Pisa, which described her as “Woman and Rabbi.”\textsuperscript{13} To the inquisitor’s question of what constituted Judaism for both men and women, she replied: “Mosaic law demands that men be circumcised, observe the Sabbath and all the commandments. Of women it demands cleanliness, the timely lighting of Sabbath candles, and the blessing over flour for bread.”\textsuperscript{14}

When she reached adulthood, Sarah married her cousin and moved from Murcia to Osuna. There she met Francesca di Melia, a widow originally from Portugal, who introduced her into the company of crypto-Jews, to whom the widow opened her home and “advised as to . . . the days on which they were to fast [e.g. Yom Kippur].”\textsuperscript{15} After her husband’s death at the hands of the Inquisition, Sarah and her three children moved to Livorno. Her two daughters married and successfully integrated into the Livorno Jewish community, whereas her son chose instead to convert to Catholicism, a decision that led him to confess his crypto-Jewish past and resulted in his mother’s arrest.

As Sarah testified, some authoritative crypto-Jewish women in both Iberia and the New World governed communities as “women rabbis” (or “dogmatists,”
as inquisitional sources occasionally referred to them) who “were at one and
the same time initiators, officiants, and spiritual guides.”16 These women led
prayers and fasts, delivered benedictions on holidays, indoctrinated the young,
prepared the dead for burial, and advised group members on how to conduct
themselves in daily life.17 Some of them even had leading roles in the messianic
movements sweeping the crypto-Jewish world during the sixteenth and seven-
teenth centuries. Indeed, at the end of the fifteenth century and in the early
years of the sixteenth, two conversas in Castille, Inés de Herrera and Mari
Gómez de Chillón, announced the coming of the Messiah and the return of
conversos to the Promised Land.18 Later, in the 1640s, crypto-Jews living in
Mexico believed that Juana Enriquez, the wife of Simon Vaez Sevilla, whose
house the inquisitors called a synagogue, was the Messiah’s mother because it
was rumored that his arrival was imminent and that he would be born on
American soil to a woman of the Enriquez family.19

Crypto-Jewish religiosity was “other” vis-à-vis rabbinic Judaism, which the
descendants of conversos almost entirely ignored. It developed as a result of the
concentration of traditional Judaism into a few essential rituals that were trans-
mitted by word of mouth, in conjunction with a concurrent Catholic upbring-
ing and attendance at Christian sites and rituals (although conversos often
tried to resist by means of simulation). Marranism was profoundly stamped by
Catholicism and Iberian folklore, and by rituals that developed from its status,
as an oral and domestic religion. These rituals helped maintain the bond with
Jewish tradition but, conversely, also transformed and adapted Marranism to
new demands and functions.20

In the 1630s in the Mexico City home of Duarte de León Jaramillo, a crypto-
Jew, a significant, albeit extreme, expression of Marrano religiosity took place.21
The day after inquisitors arrested his wife, Duarte took his three daughters and,
in the presence of their brothers, undressed them to the waist, bound them and
tied their wrists, and cut a piece of flesh “as big as a mezzo reale” (a coin) from
their shoulders to “signify they were Jewish.” Then he roasted the pieces of flesh
and together with his son Francisco, who, according to Jewish custom, had been
circumcised at birth, ate them.22 Francisco related this extraordinary episode to
the Inquisition in Mexico City in 1646, as did his sisters when they were arrested
in 1657. Duarte’s son stated that his father had said that “their mother was im-
prisoned and punished because the sign of the Law was not on her children.”23
 According to the inquisitors of Mexico City, Duarte was not alone in practicing
this “particular ceremony”: It was widespread among crypto-Jews who lived
there in the 1630s and 1640s. It represented a type of “female circumcision” per-
formed on daughters “in recognition of Mosaic Law.”24 Although we cannot find other examples of this practice, it is certainly plausible that “a life of secrecy . . . and the obsession with transmitting an uncertain identity”25 led some crypto-Jewish groups to believe that circumcision, the symbol of a complete and irreversible attachment to Judaism, should be extended to women as well, especially in groups led by “dogmatists,” as was the case of Duarte and his followers.26

As we will see, circumcision, a crucial rite of converso reaffirmation of Judaism, continued to be a source of salvation and authentic affirmation of faith and identity, becoming more important in Marrano culture than it had in traditional Judaism.

Crypto-Judaism revolved around the dichotomy of pure/impure, which, in Judaism, is primarily the concern of the domestic sphere, and the rituals of which are overseen by women. Crypto-Jewish culture attributed a new importance and meaning to the care of the body (the ritual bath after menses and
childbirth, the cleaning of clothes and undergarments) and to diet (the observance of fasts and dietary laws, the preparation of food for the holidays). To maintain the purity and cleanliness of one’s body, bed, clothes, and food meant more than merely practicing Judaism and respecting the rites that permeate daily life, a time and space that is foreign to that of Christians. For the crypto-Jew it signified ridding oneself, one’s family, and one’s home of the contamination of forced conversion, a consequence of continual contact with Christians, their sacred objects, and their space.

All crypto-Jews, men as well as women, lived in state of perpetual niddah (impurity). By analogical extension, their continual apostasy rendered them as impure as a Jewish woman’s body during her menstrual period and after childbirth. Accordingly, crypto-Jews conferred new significance and power to the rites of purification connected to the state of niddah, particularly to the ritual bath (mikveh) that purifies the female body: In the confusion and despair that characterized the crypto-Jewish culture, the continued observance of family purity may have assumed special significance as rituals of cleansing and purification became contextualized by the sin of apostasy.

Observance of the holidays also assumed special significance, especially those that recalled purification, atonement, salvation, or return, or celebrated people and moments of Jewish history comparable to the crypto-Jewish experience. Two such holidays were Yom Kippur and Purim. The latter, in particular, acquired centrality and meaning unknown to traditional Judaism. Purim represents a kind of carnival with its masked disguises, games, and banquets. Moreover, it is preceded by a fast, a cornerstone of Marrano religiosity. Purim is also called the Festival of Esther because it celebrates a woman who saved the Jewish nation in the time of King Ahasuerus. The story tells of how Esther convinced her husband, the king, to stop a planned massacre of the Jews ordered by his minister Haman, whom the king then condemned to death. Esther was a Jew who had hidden her true identity from her husband. Through prayer and fasting she was able to receive God’s favor and save her people. Purim is a “masked” holiday in every sense of the word: One wears a mask, Purim tells the story of a Jew who hid her real identity, and the spiritual and divine aspects of the story remain hidden. Indeed, the name of God does not appear in the Book of Esther, making it unique among all the books of the Bible. Moreover, the name Esther derives from the Hebrew word haster, which means to hide.

Although the story of Esther, a secret Jew, revisits the crypto-Jewish experience, it is her role as protagonist that accounts for the centrality that she and Purim have acquired in crypto-Jewish religiosity. Moreover, the so-called Scroll
of Esther (megillah), the text read on Purim, was traditionally the only Jewish book that women could read in public. Therefore, the festival of Esther is not only important in crypto-Jewish life, it is also imbued with a double valence: It contains all the basic elements of Marranism (salvation, secrecy, simulation, fasting, women protagonists) while simultaneously legitimizing women, allowing them to read a sacred text and be the carriers of religious knowledge.

The myth of Esther assumed so much power in crypto-Jewish culture that she became one of the key figures in syncretic crypto-Judaism. In his recent book *La fede del ricordo*, Nathan Wachtel recounts the story of Theresa Paes de Jesus, a crypto-Jew arrested with her two children by the Inquisition of Rio de Janeiro in 1718. To the inquisitor’s question about whom she prayed to, she replied:

> When I was observing the law of Moses, I recited the Our Father and the Ave Maria, commending myself to queen Esther because they told me that she was Our Lady, that Moses was our God and she his mother. I thought that Jesus Christ was the same person as Moses, son of queen Esther, that he was king of the Jews, adored by Jews and Christians alike.

In Theresa’s prayers, Queen Esther was the mother of Jesus/Moses: The two figures had merged into one. This identification appears to be the result not only of a formidable syncretism, the consequence of imbibing for centuries a culture that developed on the fringes of two identities, but it also provides the answer to a profound dilemma that characterizes crypto-Judaism. Esther was a crypto-Jew who married a gentile. Her marriage to King Ahasuerus symbolized the fate of many conversos. New Christians who were without a solid network of relationships in the crypto-Jewish community were left with only one possible choice—marriage to an “Old” Christian. The story of Esther, however, provided conversos with an example of a crypto-Jewish woman who, although married to a gentile, kept her faith and her loyalty to the Jewish people intact. She was not only a good Jew, but a veritable heroine. Still, the story of Esther did not clarify a crucial point of crypto-Jewish life. Were the children of mixed marriages between New and Old Christians Jewish, and were they Jewish if both their mother and father were New Christians?

Rabbis have spent untold hours discussing the problem of the religious affiliation of the descendents of conversos. Are they Jewish or not, given that they were uncircumcised, baptized, the offspring of Catholic marriages, and raised in such a way that they were only vaguely acquainted with their true origins and the Jewish faith? Should their reentry into Judaism be considered a reintegration
or a conversion? Were they apostates or “repentant” Jews “who have come to find refuge under the wings of the Shekinah or the divine presence to observe again the laws of the Torah?” In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries most rabbis agreed with Maimonides that the conversos, that is, the anusim (those who have been forced) and their descendants, were Jews because, although forced into conversion, they remained secretly faithful to Judaism. However, with the massive diaspora of Iberian Jews in the beginning of the seventeenth century, rabbis more and more frequently voiced the opinion that the descendants of Marranos were not real Jews because they had lost respect for Mosaic law and, moreover, it was impossible to establish with certainty their Jewish roots.

The public return to the Jewish faith of conversos coming from Iberia was called “coming to Judaism.” It signified a restoration of blood ties uniting the “children of Israel” and the public acceptance of Jewish law under rabbinic control. As we shall see, conversos were reconverted in different ways according to gender, and this led to a redefinition not only of space and religious power but of identity.

“Coming to Judaism,” or the Return to the Synagogue

Juan Pacheco de León, alias Salomon Mochorro, a Spanish crypto-Jew who had reverted to Judaism in Livorno and was later arrested by the Inquisition of Mexico City in 1642, described the Jewish community of Amsterdam to his cellmate after the latter asked what kind of life the Jews there led:

It’s a big city with a Jewish quarter of more than 12,000 married men belonging to the Nation. Nothing similar to what we’re subjected to here takes place there; everyone lives as he wishes.

Don’t they have a church for their ceremonies? [asked his cellmate]

Yes, of course, it is very beautiful, big and well appointed. During our holidays the men and women sit separately, and the children, both male and female, have their own area because the young are instructed, shown what they must observe, and are read the Law.

For Juan, alias Salomon, being a Jew no longer constrained by secrecy and persecution meant that he could return to being a man among men, counted again among his “Nation,” and at last show his true identity in the synagogue, the heart of the community. The synagogue in question was a magnificent place
where men and women sat separately, not together as they did in the secret temple of the crypto-Jewish house. Children learned Jewish law in the synagogue, listening to the Torah portion and to the rabbi’s teachings. As Yosef Kaplan, who is among the first to study the social impact of the return to Judaism of conversos in Amsterdam, has stressed, “The synagogue of the organized community took the place previously occupied by the crypto-Jewish home, which had served as a ‘clandestine temple’ for secret converso ceremonies.”

The synagogue was where Jewish identity was constructed. It was so central to the crypto-Jewish return to Judaism that during the seventeenth century, conversos who did not publically re-embrace the Jewish faith were called “Jews without synagogue,” an expression that was added to those of “Jews without halakhah” and “Jews without Judaism.”

As the Sephardi communities from Iberia were in the process of reclaiming their Jewish identity, one of their first initiatives was to define religious and public space. The synagogue again became the center of community life, taking the place of the crypto-Jewish home, the secret temple of the conversos. In Livorno, as in Amsterdam or London, the establishment of the community coincided with the construction of the synagogue. Unlike the places of worship in medieval Jewish settlements, a prayer room in the house of a rich merchant, the synagogue of Livorno, as the crypto-Jew Juan Pacheco remembered it, was a grandiose, sumptuous, and visible edifice. With its “monumental, imposing dimensions and beauty,” the Livorno synagogue became, in terms of size and importance, one of the principal buildings in the city and the second synagogue in Europe after that of Amsterdam. The latter, in particular, drew its inspiration from Solomon’s Temple of ancient times, a biblical revisiting dense with meaning because, as Daniel Swetschinski wrote: “In building the Esnoga based on the model of Solomon’s Temple, the Jews of Amsterdam created for themselves a place of collective memory, a concrete link to biblical history.”

The Esnoga of Amsterdam, a model for the Livorno synagogue, revolutionized synagogue architecture. The synagogues of Livorno and Amsterdam were the first to have galleries in the sanctuary, a design probably borrowed from Christian churches. “Unlike what was typically found in other countries, and especially Italy, the galleries on the second floor accommodated both men and women.” Thus the women’s section was not on a higher floor but in a part of the sanctuary facing the center aisle, separated from the men’s area by a mehitzah made of wood.

In addition to the synagogue, other spaces and institutions bore witness to the construction and subsequent public display of Jewish identity: the cemetery,
the religious school, and the tribunal. Sacred space once again became public space, visible to all and controlled by men. The creation of a synagogue and of community spaces and institutions returned men to a position of authority and visibility, whereas it drastically reduced domestic and private space and resulted in a reevaluation of women’s place and power in the sacred sphere. The return to the public avowal of Judaism was characterized not only by respect for religious orthodoxy, of which the crypto-Jews had been completely ignorant, but also by the removal of some important religious functions from the home to the synagogue and from the family to the community. The process by which ex-conversos established Jewish communities is diametrically opposed to the one that had allowed crypto-Jews to survive and transmit a sense of belonging to Judaism to their descendents. This created strong tensions between the new Jewish families and the community because “the family . . . was not willing to renounce its previous functions and the Sephardi Jewish congregation . . . was intent on the institutionalization of Jewish life within the community.”

In fact, all the Jewish communities originating in Iberia issued dispositions with the goal of institutionalizing religious life and marking precise boundaries between the sacred/public/male sphere and the private/domestic/female one. The same community statutes of the Sephardi Jews of Livorno and Pisa that guaranteed the uniqueness and centrality of the synagogue as a place of religious practice and life also prohibited synagogues with rites other than the Spanish, as well as praying in yeshivot and private homes on holidays. Education, too, was taken from the domestic space and out of the hands of women. In fact, from as early as 1664 all male children from six to fourteen years old were required to attend the Talmud Torah, the religious school of the Livorno Jewish community. Moreover, engaging private tutors was prohibited until “the Talmud Torah reached the perfection required of it and the children progressed in their learning of God’s law.” The importance of an institution such as the Talmud Torah can been seen in the preamble to the school’s statute, approved in 1676, in which the leaders of the community wrote that “we are unanimous in our desire to maintain and advance the Talmud Torah so that it will be one of the main bulwarks of our preservation.”

Marriages, births, and deaths were also subject to community control: In order to be considered valid and binding, marriage and birth certificates had to be registered with the community registry even if they were previously drawn up by a Christian notary. When couples from Iberia first arrived in Livorno, they had to remarry according to the Jewish rite. During the wedding ceremony the husband had to place “under his tallit his wife and any male or female chil-
children who were born in the country of his persecution, and from that moment he declared his children legitimate, because it was believed that if he failed to perform this ceremony, the children would be considered bastards, not heirs.”

The quote is from the rabbi of Constantinople, Moshè Benveniste, who describes and explains the ceremony in a responsum he issued in 1655. The responsum is particularly interesting because it squarely faces the thorny issue of converso matrimonial practices, which provoked discussions and tensions throughout the Sephardi diaspora during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In fact the Livorno Jewish authorities asked Rabbi Benveniste whether it was possible to force a man who had married his widowed sister-in-law to divorce her because she had children with his brother (in defiance of the rules of levirate marriage). The woman in question had left Spain and arrived in Livorno several years earlier with her husband and two daughters in order to “put herself under the wings of Divine Providence,” that is, to return to Judaism. After her husband died she married his brother, contravening the Jewish law that allows a man to marry his sister-in-law only if she is a childless widow. The heads of the community wrote the rabbi of Constantinople that the issue was crucial because: “if one were to accept the principle that after the Marranos placed themselves under the protection of the Divine Presence, their wives, including those with children, were permitted to remarry even their husbands’ brothers, it could only lead to our destruction.”

As the governor of Livorno, to whom the married couple appealed, observed, this case was not atypical in Livorno and other Jewish communities of Iberian descent. Marriage between blood relatives has always been a hallmark of Sephardi matrimonial practice. The crypto-Jewish experience served to reinforce the need to allow women and patrimony to change hands only within the clan, and encouraged an amplification and intensification of marriages between relatives, and therefore, of some marriages that Jewish law had not anticipated, such as to an uncle’s widow or to a brother’s widow even though she had children. The need to reestablish respect for orthodoxy and to ensure that such illegal marriages did not continue led the Livorno Jewish community to not only excommunicate and exile said couple but also to approve a deliberation in 1659 that threatened the same punishment for whoever entered into marriage with a brother’s widow, if that marriage had produced children, or with the widow of an uncle, whether maternal or paternal.

Other measures were aimed specifically at delegitimizing female religious practices that had developed in crypto-Judaism and invaded traditional male spaces and learning. Accordingly, in 1655 the Jewish community of Livorno
prohibited recitation of prayers for the dead at home in memory of a deceased woman “as it was the custom to do,” especially the so-called hashkavah and prayers recited on the seventh day, the first month, and the first year of a relative’s death. The ordinance stated precisely that these prayers were to be recited in synagogue or at the community cemetery. As Renzo Toaff highlights, the ordinance pertained only to deceased women: Prayers to commemorate the death of a man were permitted at home. This would suggest that the aim of the prohibition was not to remove a religious ritual, specifically the commemoration of the dead, from the domestic sphere, but rather to keep it under male control by not allowing its execution outside the community. Most likely the real concern was that women in mourning might participate in funeral services—which were traditionally the purview of ten adult men—and recite prayers like the kaddish. The duty to commemorate the dead in synagogue or at the cemetery, or in public and institutional spaces, excluded women from rituality, and therefore, attacked all female religious forms that undermined orthodoxy and, concomitantly, male authority.

It was common for women in crypto-Jewish communities to prepare male and female corpses for burial, and to recite prayers during the period of mourning and on the anniversary of deaths because they could do so inside their home without creating suspicion, whereas, had men interrupted their daily routine it would not have gone unnoticed. Therefore, crypto-Jewish life necessitated women’s participation in funeral services, a practice that with time became so established that it survived, at least in part, in ex-converso communities. The return to Judaism transformed the Marrano tradition and adapted it to normative Judaism, reestablishing the division between the sexes. Women were only allowed to take part in services for the dead when the deceased was a woman. In 1661, a woman was actually designated to recite kaddish by the deceased herself. In her will, Ricca Mochora Santigiana, a Livornese Jew of Iberian origin, requested that her aunt Sara recite kaddish at her funeral instead of, as custom dictated, a male family member.

Why didn’t the heads of the Livorno Jewish community explicitly forbid women to pray for the dead? Evidently such a prohibition would not have found unanimous rabbinic acceptance in the community, or, for that matter, in communities outside Livorno. In the late seventeenth century the Jewish community of Amsterdam asked the German rabbi Yair Bakhprakh (1639–1702) whether a daughter of a deceased man could say kaddish for him. An Amsterdam Jew who died leaving only daughters had, in fact, asked that for twelve months after his death a group of ten men meet in his house and listen to his daughter
recite kaddish. Rabbi Bakhrakh replied that, based on Jewish law, there were no grounds for preventing her from reciting kaddish, provided it was in the presence of a minyan, but that it would be better to deny the man’s request so as not to weaken the communal observance of tradition. Today this responsum is still cited by supporters of women’s right to recite kaddish, and also by those who, quoting the rabbi’s last remarks, would limit that right to the home, denying women the right to say kaddish in synagogue.

Thus, if an important community like Amsterdam discussed the possibility of a daughter saying kaddish for her father, how could the Livorno community forbid a woman to recite it for another woman, especially when it had become commonplace, as the ordinance of 1655 would have us believe, and, moreover, when Jewish law itself doesn’t explicitly forbid it? As Ricca’s will of 1661 demonstrates, the Livornese Jewish authorities preferred to adopt an indirect measure that was not at first effective in combating a practice steeped in Marrano culture.

Cutting all ties with crypto-Judaism and adhering to normative Judaism was expected of all conversos, both men and women, if they wanted to be integrated into communal life. But the majority of communal attention and control was focused on men and their journey back to Judaism. Indeed, for a converso, returning to Judaism meant exhibiting his faith in a public, male space. Only then could he enjoy the privileges and powers bestowed on him by his religion and his community. Seventeenth-century Sephardi communities all passed dispositions that, in addition to punishing Marranos who were not distancing themselves from Marranism and making the definitive passage to Judaism, tended to institutionalize and sanctify religious life, particularly those rituals that marked the converso’s entrance into the community.

In Livorno, as in Amsterdam, whoever went to Western places where Judaism could not be practiced (namely Spain and Portugal), that is, where one could not openly practice Judaism, could not, on his return, hold public office, be called to read the Torah in synagogue, or pronounce the ha-gomel, the blessing pronounced in public for someone who has escaped from danger. Although the prohibition doesn’t explicitly and exclusively pertain to men, it was clearly intended to punish them, since it targeted powers and functions reserved for them. In Amsterdam the transgressor actually had to take part in a ceremony in which he asked “forgiveness from God and the Holy Torah while standing at the aron in front of the entire congregation.”

The statutes of the Hebrà para Cazar Orfas e Donzelas, the confraternity responsible for supplying dowries for the Jewish women of Livorno, also
decree expulsion for any member who stayed in Iberia for longer than a year, considering him “as if he were dead.” In the nineteenth century the governor of the community was more forthcoming about the reasons for such treatment: The confraternity’s statute of 1833, although noting that “today the public display of our religion is permitted and established in the Kingdom of Portugal,” stated that “it would be the equivalent of an absolute, albeit informal apostasy” to establish one’s domicile in countries where “the Jewish religion is absolutely forbidden, not only in public but in private and where there is no nearby city with an established kehillah [community] that holds services and has a cemetery to be buried in.”

The community authorities were not alone in requesting that their members practice Judaism openly and ritually. Often men made it a provision of their testaments that male relatives residing in Iberia “come to Judaism,” that is, openly declare their faith, or, should they already live as Jews, not convert to Catholicism if they hoped to receive a share of the inheritance.

Similar conditions were, on the other hand, never imposed on crypto-Jewish women, whether from the community or the family. The return of women to Judaism was not marked by special forms of control or ritual, with the exception of the ritual bath (tevilah), which was, however, also contemplated for men and which will be further examined shortly. The religious practices and functions that women were expected to perform remained substantially the same ones they had performed for generations, but as the crypto-Jews returned to Judaism these practices and functions lost the centrality ascribed to them by their former life. The institutionalization of religious life, the return of men to the public religious arena, and the regulation of domestic religiosity led the New Christian women who reverted to Judaism to again respect orthodoxy and to definitively abandon the crypto-Jewish experience of which they had been the protagonists.

For men, “coming to Judaism” had a precise meaning. It referred to a “ritual of return” spelled out in a series of rituals and formal acts, first among which was circumcision (milah), “the portal of the Lord through which enter the righteous and the sign of the pact with the people of God,” as Rabbi Aboab wrote. For conversos, circumcision “was a particularly crucial rite of passage—not merely an act of compliance with Jewish law, but a ritual replete with powerful symbolic meaning. In the converso imagination, circumcision took on a transcendental transitional significance, perhaps akin to that of a Christian sacrament.”

When speaking of circumcised Jews, a converso of Portuguese origin who lived in Florence in the first decades of the seventeenth century said, “[Y]ou have experienced a joy that we have not, and for this you are better than us.”
Religious Space, Gender, and Power in the Sephardi Diaspora

Circumcision represented not only an act of sincere adherence to Judaism and an open break with crypto-Judaism, it also conferred a greater status on the converso than that suggested by Jewish law. In London, Jews who were not circumcised could not be buried in the community cemetery and, as in Amsterdam, were not allowed in the synagogue. An uncircumcised man could not touch the scrolls of the Torah in Livorno, even though Jewish law allowed it, because “such were the times that it was considered inappropriate.” In fact, the rabbis of Livorno deemed it necessary to distinguish between circumcised and uncircumcised Jews in order to prevent the latter from touching sacred objects, because only in this way would they submit to the “Covenant with Abraham.”

On the other hand, this attitude toward the uncircumcised and their concomitant exclusion from the sacred sphere, particularly from reading, even touching, the Torah, found justification in the Zohar (Book of Splendor), the principal text of Sephardi mysticism and the most important work of Jewish kabbalah. In the Zohar there is, in fact, an obvious connection among circumcision, vision of God, and Torah study, deriving from the concept that “the mystical experience involves a type of sexual union between the initiate and the divine.” The Zohar clearly states that only the circumcised can study the Torah because “the Torah is the name of God, and the study thereof involves unification with the name. Only one who is circumcised can be united with the name, and hence only such a person can study Torah.”

The secrets of the Torah, similar to the vision of God, are not accessible to the uncircumcised since the opening of circumcision is an opening of the flesh that is, at the same time, an opening within the divine. When the foreskin is removed and the phallus uncovered, then the corresponding limb above, the divine phallus or Yesod, likewise is uncovered. In this uncovering the secret of God is disclosed. The hermeneutical process is a structural reenactment of circumcision, involving as it does the movement from closure to openness.

For many conversos circumcision was akin to an authentic rebirth in which one found salvation and the remission of all sins. This belief, although extraneous to traditional Judaism, found some support even among rabbis, who hoped to encourage men to be circumcised. On the other hand, rabbis strongly condemned the “false idea . . . that until a man was circumcised he was not a part of Israel, that his sins were not sins and his transgressions had no weight.”

According to the Venetian rabbi Samuel Aboab, this idea was dangerous as well as “wrong and contrary to the principles of our blessed faith, because it is
clear that even if one has sinned, one remains a Jew” regarding all the punish-
ments and prohibitions, “because circumcision is a commandment of the Torah
like all the others . . . therefore whomever belongs to the people of Israel and is
not marked by this sign cannot, because of its absence, consider himself free
from obeying the other commandments of the Torah.”

Circumcision was the culminating act on the path to reconversion, though
other steps had to be taken. In fact, in addition to submitting himself to the
milah, the converso had to regularly attend both synagogue and yeshivot, read
the sacred texts under the guidance of a rabbi, and perform the tevilah, the
ritual bath for those wishing to convert to Judaism. Most rabbis, at least until
the sixteenth century, agreed that only conversos whose maternal line con-
tained Old Christians and were, therefore, not Jewish according to Jewish law
had to undergo the tevilah. Nevertheless, during the seventeenth century the
rabbinic authorities began to impose the tevilah on all descendents of conver-
sos who returned to Judaism, because they held that it was impossible to es-
ablish descendence with certainty and therefore the conversos had to undergo
a formal conversion. This was the result of the long debate on the religious
identity of conversos that engaged rabbis for more than two centuries and that
in time became part of a wider attempt to redefine the identity of those who
took part in the Sephardi diaspora. To consider conversos apostates rather than
penitent Jews was to make more definitive the difference between those “inside”
the community and those “outside” it. Additionally, it conferred on the latter a
specific religious identity that was other than Christian.

The tendency to sanctify circumcision also led to increasing control over the
most profane and popular celebrations that, since medieval times, had been
held on the eve of a baby’s circumcision, such as the vigils in the parents’ home,
great parties at which women played a key role. During these vigils (called
hadas or villas by Spanish Jews, Wachnacht by central European Jews, and
veglie by Italian Jews) relatives and friends, particularly women, visited the
newborn and mother and then wiled away the night dancing and singing, eating
sweets and fruit. Giacob Sulema, a Pisan Jew, held a memorable vigil in his
home in 1666 that was attended by a large number of Jews and Christians, some
of whom wore masks. The guests danced until late in the night to the accom-
paniment of a spinet and guitar and partook of bottarga, cardoons, celery,
olives, capers, and almonds. However, as Elliott Horowitz has observed, in
the course of the seventeenth century, and especially during its last decades, the
vigils acquired more sanctity and solemnity, and the role of mothers, and of
women in general, was progressively reduced. Jewish authorities in Italy and
other European countries sought to eliminate profane and joyful aspects from the vigils, transforming them into events with a more sacred and masculine character. As the statutes of the Jewish community of Livorno of 1673 and of 1687 demonstrate, the vigils gradually became evenings of study and Torah reading; limits were set on food and drink as well as on music and dancing. Over time the number of participants was also reduced: Christians could no longer attend, and the only people admitted, besides the circumciser and rabbi, were the godfather, close relatives, and neighbors living on the same floor. The day after the vigil, the circumcision took place, followed by a dinner celebrating the fulfillment of the precept that only men attended. Women did not partake of the dinner and were offered instead only fresh and candied fruit.

The passage from the secrecy of crypto-Jewish life in the Iberian Peninsula and the Hispanic New World to the public practice of normative Judaism in Livorno, Pisa, and other “lands of Judaism” resulted in the restructuring of boundaries between the sacred/public/male sphere and the private/domestic/female one. The home and the family, the domestic sphere where crypto-Jewish women had been in charge, and the only place where conversos could secretly practice Judaism, was replaced by the synagogue, the religious schools, the confraternities, and other spaces and institutions that were subject to community control. “Coming to Judaism,” as the return to the Jewish faith of conversos was called, was experienced differently by men and women. For men, “coming to Judaism” had a precise meaning; it referred to a “ritual of return” spelled out in a series of rituals, the first of which was circumcision. Women who reverted to Judaism continued to perform the same functions they had performed for generations, but these practices and functions lost the centrality ascribed to them by their former crypto-Jewish life.

Notes

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3. On the meaning of the word “religiosity,” with particular reference to the Marrano experience, I refer to Nathan Wachtel: “With this word (religiosity) I do not intend to suggest a religion with a clearly defined theology, but instead a group of concerns, practices, and beliefs that come together in a composite of variable, even contradictory, elements, and whose diversity does not exclude a kind of unity, a generic style that allows one to identify it with a term of its own, specifically Marrano,” Wachtel, La fede, xii.


6. The unleavened bread made with flour and water that Jews eat on Passover and that recalls their slavery in Egypt and their precipitous exodus, when there was no time for the bread to rise.

7. Melammed, Heretics, 32.

8. Cf. ibid. As Joseph Hayim Yerushalmi has shown, conversos received most of their post-biblical knowledge of Judaism from Christian sources and from the sermons that accompanied autos-da-fé. According to Yerushalmi, in fact, “the problem was not they knew nothing of Judaism, but that what they knew was often a pastiche of fragments inherited from parents, gleaned haphazardly from books, disorganized, with significant gaps, sometimes distorted.” Joseph Hayim Yerushalmi, The Re-education of Marranos in the Seventeenth Century, The Third Annual Rabbi Louis Feinberg Memorial Lecture in Judaic Studies, Judaic Studies Program, University of Cincinnati (1980), 1–16, 7; Joseph Hayim Yerushalmi, From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso. A Study in Seventeenth-Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 64.

9. Hebrew word for “to sit down” (pl. yeshivot) that describes a rabbinical school for young men where they study the Talmud.


13. Ibid., 354.


15. ADPi, *Inquisizione*, n. 15, c. 55r.


17. Ibid., 63 and passim.


19. Wachtel, *La fede*, 158, 263–264. It was a widely held opinion among crypto-Jews that the Messiah would be one of them, a converso. Sabbatai Zevi’s followers used this argument to justify his conversion to Islam. As the noted Sabbatian, Abraham Cardoso, whose brother Ishac authored *Excelencias de los Hebreos*, wrote, “the Messiah is destined to become a Marrano [‘anus’] like me!” because “the essence of the mystery is that we are all obliged, according to the Torah, to become Marranos before we go out of exile, because as it is written in the Torah: You will serve foreign gods, gods of wood and of stone.” Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court*, 281–282.


21. Wachtel, *La fede*, 153–154. Duarte had arrived in Mexico City from Spain sometime in the beginning of the seventeenth century, and in the 1620s married Isabel Nunez, whose mother was the famous Marrana, Justa Mendez. The Inquisition arrested him in 1634–35, along with his wife and other crypto-Jews, and condemned them to a few years in prison. His brother, Abram Antunes de León lived in Pisa in the first half of the seventeenth century, made his will there in 1646, and died the following year. Abram alluded to his brother in his will, saying that he had sent him goods to Mexico but Duarte had not yet paid him all he owed. In the event that Abram died before Duarte settled his account, he wanted half of the money to remain with Duarte and the other half to go to the daughters of his sister, Isabel Rodrigues. Abram’s will revealed a tight network of family ties and economic interests stretching from Italy to Spain, from the Low Countries to
France, and all the way to the New World. This network consisted, in part, of conversos who, like Duarte’s brother, never openly re-embraced Judaism, but had relatives and business contacts in the Jewish communities of the Sephardi diaspora. Abram’s wife, Sara Antunes, made her will in Pisa in 1648 when she was already a widow. Both wills are in the archive of the Livorno Jewish community. See Archivio della Comunità Israelitica di Livorno (subsequently ACIL), Wills, n. 39.

22. The circumcision Duarte performed on his daughters is also mentioned elsewhere, see Seymour B. Liebman, Fede, fiamme e Inquisizione: Gli ebrei nella Nuova Spagna (Firenze: Cultura della pace, 1993), 63–64. Some crypto-Jewish groups in Spain and the New World performed circumcisions on male children in the first days of life or even later. However, in some instances the foreskin was cut longitudinally instead of in a circular manner, in order to trick future inspectors in case of arrest, cf. ibid., 66–63; Ioly Zorattini, “Derek,” 205–209; Wachtel, La fede, 100–101.

23. Liebman, Fede, 64.
24. Wachtel, La fede, 152.
25. Ibid., 154.

26. Duarte’s wife was, in fact, the daughter of Justa Mendez, who, together with Leonor Nuñez, offered spiritual guidance to the crypto-Jews of Mexico City in the first decades of the seventeenth century, cf. ibid., 154.


33. The myth of Esther appears again in the story of Sabbatai Zevi, one of the most important messianic movements of the Sephardi Diaspora. Abraham Cardoso, in fact, likens the figure of Zevi to that of queen Esther, since she was “condemned for having married an idolatrous gentile, which the Torah severely prohibited, but the sages who


38. Wachtel, *La fede*, 131. Juan Pacheco de León, alias Salomon Mochorro (Macho\r\nro), is a fascinating figure. After having been raised as a Jew in Livorno, he chose to return to crypto-Judaism, following the example of his father. He was, in fact, born in\r\n\nAntequera, Spain around 1609, and when he was two his father, David, alias Antonio\r\nFar\n\nfan y Navaez, brought him to Pisa and then to Livorno (indeed in 1616 a David Machorro resided in Pisa, see Michele Cassandro, *Aspetti della storia economica e sociale degli ebrei di Livorno nel Seicento* [Milano: A. Giuffrè, 1983], 66, 160; Toaff, *La Nazione*, 145). Around 1629 he sailed for Mexico, seemingly in search of his father, who he had no news of since his arrival there several years before. Once in Mexico, Salomon discovered that his father was dead, and he began to associate with the famous crypto-Jewish merchant Simon Vaez Sevilla, whose mother-in-law, Blanca Enriquez, cleared the way for his entrance into the local crypto-Jewish community. In 1642 he was arrested by the Inquisition, reconciled in 1650, and condemned to eight years in prison. Salomon was accused of being a “rabbi and dogmatist” who “taught the said Law of Moses so that he would show off his knowledge of it” having grown up in Livorno “where those who practice the Law of Moses do so publicly and circumcise themselves.” See Boleslao Lewin, *Singular proceso de Salomón Machorro (Juan de León) israelita liornés condenado por la Inquisición, México, 1650* (Buenos Aires: n.p., 1977), 154, 158. As he stated during his trial, Salomon had left his mother, a brother and a sister in Livorno. Indeed, one finds in the State Archive of Livorno his brother Jacob’s 1641 petition to inherit their father’s estate despite being only seventeen and a ward, because he is married. Jacob’s petition states that his father died intestate when Jacob was a little more than one, cf. Archivio
di Stato di Livorno (subsequently ASLi), Governatore e Auditore, suppliche civili, n. 2604, c. 133.


40. The word used to indicate the juridical tradition of Judaism.


46. Karwacka Codini and Sbrilli, “La sinagoga,” 53. Note from Julia R Lieberman, editor of this volume: Galasso’s essay here and below is unclear and regretfully I was unable to consult her. In the Amsterdam synagogue inaugurated in 1675, the women’s gallery is supported by columns, on a higher level than the main sanctuary.

47. Cf. ibid.

48. Kaplan, Familia, 135. Kaplan underlines how the criticisms that the conversos acted against the Jewish authorities of the Sephardi communities “reverberated against Judaism itself, which became the prevailing object of their doubts. The anusim’s preference for private, interior identification, in contrast with public display, created a fertile ground for anatomical doctrines like sabbatianism or deism and rationalism.” Yosef Kaplan, “Devianza e punizione nella dispora sefardita occidentale del XVII secolo: I por-

49. Toaff, *La Nazione*, 500. In 1599 the Livornese Jews of Italian and German origin tried to open another synagogue, provoking a strong reaction from the heads of the Sephardi community, who asked the Grand Duke to intervene. The Duke denied their request, and from then on the singular nature of the Sephardi synagogue was never in doubt. In Siena and Florence, where Sephardim were in the minority, Jews of Iberian extraction made a similar request. However, it took until 1636 for them to obtain permission to establish their own synagogue in Florence, cf. Cristina Galasso, “Nasce questa avversione da un punto di religione per una parte e di superbia per l’altra: Ebrei italiani e sefarditi a Livorno tra Sei e Settecento,” *Annali dell’Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento* 29 (2003): 119–153.

50. Toaff, *La Nazione*, 500, 568. A similar ordinance is in the hashkamot of the London Jewish community of 1664, see ibid., 283.

51. Ibid., 338. The children from six to fifteen in the Pisa Jewish community also had to attend religious school ibid., 517–518.

52. Ibid., 339. It was only in 1771 that children were guaranteed a public education, cf. ibid., 340.


54. Ibid., 701. In 1693 Pietro Antonio Barbarico, alias Angelo da Ancona, a Livornese Jew who had converted to Catholicism, denounced three Livorno Marrano families to the Holy Office. He described this very ceremony to the Inquisition, stating that these New Christians “already married in Spain remarried in Livorno according to the Jewish rite, during which husbands, wives, and children are placed under a large tablecloth that they call the tallit, which signifies the legitimacy of the children, who would be considered illegitimate were it not for this ceremony,” ADPi, *Inquisizione*, n. 25 (unnumbered cards).


57. A report from the governor of Livorno to the Grand Duke in 1658 about the responsum refers to the marriage between Jacob Mesquita and his sister-in-law Rachel, the daughter of Esther Nasiera. According to the governor, the marriage created a scandal in the Livorno Jewish community. It was a long and complex matter that ended only in 1658–1659 when the two were excommunicated and exiled, see Archivio di Stato di Firenze (hereafter referred to as ASF), Mediceo del Principato, n. 1816, insert 5 (unnumbered cards). On matrimonial practices in the Sephardi world and particularly on levirate marriage and bigamy, see Cristina Galasso, “‘La moglie duplicata.’ Bigamia e levirato nella comunità ebraica di Livorno (sec. XVII),” in *Transgressioni, seduzioni, concubinato, adulterio, bigamia, (XIV–XVIII secolo)*, ed. Silvana Seidel Menchi and Diego Quaglioni, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 417–441, 429 and passim; Cristina Galasso, “Matrimoni e patrimoni nella comunità ebraica di Livorno (sec. XVIII),” *Materia Giudaica* 8/1 (2003):
191–197. Another crucial aspect of marriage, which the Sephardi communities often debated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries because it had repercussions in the system of control over marriage patterns, is the one regarding consent. For a more thorough examination of this subject, see, Cristina Galasso, “Autorità paterna, matrimoni e conversioni tra leggi ebraiche, regole canoniche e privilegi della Toscana granducale (secoli XVII–XIX),” in *I tribunali del matrimonio (secoli XV–XVIII)*, ed. Seidel Menchi, Silvana and Diego Quaglioni (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 2007), 289–325.


60. A Sephardi term to indicate the so-called *hashkarat nesamot*, the prayers for the dead. In the Sephardi rite the *hashkavah* is recited at the cemetery as part of the funeral service and in synagogue on Saturdays and on holidays after the Torah scrolls have been returned to the ark, and when requested by a child of a deceased when he has finished reading the Torah. It is also recited on Yom Kippur, when all those who have died during the past year are recalled by name. In some ex-converso communities a special *hashkavah* is recited in memory of those who died in the Inquisition’s fires for having “sanctified the name of God,” cf. Alan Unterman, *Dizionario de usi e leggende ebraiche* (Rome-Bari, 1994), 235–236; *Hashkavah*, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-Rom Edition, Judaica Multimedia (Israel) Ltd. 1997; Y. Meir, “Hasharat nesamot,” in Roth, *Inquisition*; in Miriam Bodian, *Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation: Conversos and Community in Early Modern Amsterdam*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 80.

61. Toaff, *La Nazione*, 571. The prohibition is inserted in chapter 49 of the community statutes of 1655 that deal with behavior in synagogue and on some religious festivities. The penalty for transgressors was excommunication and a fine of 20 ducats.


64. ACIL, *Testamenti*, n. 139.


66. Cf. ibid., 284 and passim.

67. For the Jews of Livorno the exclusion was for two years (see cap. 25 of the statutes of 1655), whereas for those in Amsterdam is was for four, cf. Toaff, *La Nazione*, 287, 561; Kaplan, “Devianza,” 175; Kaplan, “Gli ebrei,” 149; Yosef Kaplan, “The Travels of Portuguese Jews from Amsterdam to the ‘Land of Idolatry’ (1644–1724),” in *Jews and Conversos: Studies in Society and the Inquisition*, ed. Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), 197–224. Additionally, Jews in Livorno who went to the port to collect those arriving “from the West,” that is, from the Iberian peninsula, were excommunicated. The goal of the disposition, however, was to safeguard new arrivals from inquisitional control and avoid future accusations of apostasy, Toaff, *La Nazione*, 563.


70. Toaff, La Nazione, 267 (n. 67). It is interesting to observe that when the confraternity was founded in 1644 the statutes made no mention at all of the possibility that a member might go to Iberia. This only became punishable in statutes written subsequent to 1655, after chapter 25 was added to the community statutes, cf. ACIL, Opera Pia Moar Abbetulot, n.L8.

71. Toaff, La Nazione, 267.

72. Cf. Galasso, Alle origini, 83–84; Kaplan, “Familia,” 133–134; Bodian, Hebrews, 139.


74. Bodian, Hebrews, 97; cf. Yosef Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: the Shaping of a Jewish Identity,” Jewish History 8/1–2 (1994): 27–41, 31 and passim. Baruch Spinoza in his Tractatus theologico-politicus (Amsterdam, 1672) wrote that the Jews “are separated not only because of their external rituals, which are different from those of all other peoples, but also because of circumcision, to which they remain religiously attached . . . I am sure that the importance of circumcision for Jews is such as to persuade me that this ritual alone is enough to guarantee the eternal survival of the Jewish people,” Kaplan, “Devianza,” 196.

75. ADPi, Inquisizione, n.9, c. 479v. (1624). These words were pronounced by Luigi Nuñez da Costa, according to what the noted converso Simon Rodriguez Navarro alias Simon de la Pas alias Samuel Abudiente said in 1624 to the Inquisitor of Pisa. The latter described his passage to Judaism in Livorno: “The way I returned to Judaism was they put a cloth at my neck and tefillin on my head and a book in my hands from which I don’t remember what they read, they made me look at my fingernails and they circumcised me. At my circumcision I didn’t have a godfather because it was done in secret,” ADPi, Inquisizione, n.9, c. 469r. On Simon Rodriguez Navarro, see Toaff, La Nazione, 193, 365.

76. As Yosef Kaplan has observed, the Sephardi authorities considered the circumcision of conversos “on the one hand a sign of the sincerity of their intention to return to Judaism, and on the other hand a means of preventing their return to ‘Lands of idolatry,’ since it put their lives in jeopardy,” Kaplan, “Gli ebrei,” 148.

77. Cf. Bodian, Hebrews, 113. There was even a converso in Amsterdam between 1617 and 1618 who was circumcised after he died and consequently buried in the Jewish cemetery, cf. ibid., 113, 192 (n. 71).

78. Cf. ibid., 112; Toaff, La Nazione, 101–102 (n. 13); Yerushalmi, The Re-education, 3–4. The Pisa Jewish community forbid non-circumcised Jews from laying tefillin, but the rabbi, Jacob Senior, was in favor of it, cf. Toaff, La Nazione, 103–104 (n. 20). In 1693 the previously cited neophyte Pietro Antonio Barbarico (cf. ibid., n. 53) denounced a converso to the Inquisition of Paris stating that the said converso lived in Livorno with
his family “as a Jew, taking part in all Jewish ceremonies except reading the sacred Scripture, which he is forbidden to do because he is not circumcised,” cf. ADPi, Inquisizione, n. 25 (unnumbered cards).


81. Ibid., 211.

82. Ibid., 214.

83. Yerushalmi, From the Spanish Court, 200.

84. Ibid., 190; cf. Kaplan, “Devianza,” 172; Bodian, Hebrews, 98, 189 (n. 9).

85. This is how Moshe Raphael, the rabbi of Amsterdam described the return to Judaism of Abraham Israel Pereyra: “First he began to regularly frequent the yeshivot to listen attentively to the instruction and to study the books of his faith.” Instead, this is how Pereyra addressed a converso intending to return to the Jewish faith: “The moment you leave the synagogue and arrive at home you must take the Bible and read it . . . fix an exact time in one of the yeshivot, since this is the real remedy and you will learn this way . . . and thus you will enjoy the perseverance and attention you dedicate to reading the Bible and studying other books, and I studied like this at yeshivah Torah or under the guidance of our faithful minister of religion, the noble hakham Ishac Aboab,” Kaplan, “Gli ebrei,” 154.

86. The origin of the tevilah is unclear but it appears to have become part of the conversion ceremony of both men and women around the second century. Shaye J. D. Cohen has hypothesized a link among the appearance of the ritual bath in the conversion ritual, women’s ability to convert to Judaism autonomously, that is without having to marry a Jew, and the development of the matrilineal principle in Judaism, cf. Shaye J. D. Cohen, “The Origins of the Matrilineal Principle in Rabbinic Law,” Association of Jewish Studies Review 10 (1985): 19–53.


According to Wilke, even the Sephardi apologists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries interpreted converso adherence to Judaism as a conversion rather than a return to the faith of their ancestors. In fact, these apologists continually invoked a biblical precedent in Abraham, who rebelled against his father and recognized the oneness of God, refusing idolatry and, when already an old man, undergoing a circumcision to mark his pact with God. For Wilke the figure of Abraham, who replaced that of Esther in the converso imaginaire, indicated a break with the Marrano past.


91. The custom of holding a nighttime vigil seven days after the birth of a child survived in Marrano culture, but the crypto-Jews transformed it into a celebration of the mother and the newborn, or the labor and the birth, not of the circumcision. The descendants of conversos rarely circumcised their sons, and even when they did it was too difficult to perform at birth. Thus, some crypto-Jewish groups held a hadas even when a girl was born, cf. Melammed, Heretics, 24; Horowitz, “The Eve,” 558.

92. Traditionally this was the way to ward off demons, particularly Lilith, from the baby, cf. Horowitz, “The Eve,” 561, 580 (n. 37).

93. On the custom of holding masked vigils, such as, for example, those that took place in the Ancona Jewish community, see ibid., 566.

94. Cf. ADPi, Inquisizione, n. 19, cc. 1224r–v.

95. In the seventeenth-century ordinances that controlled these vigils mentioned the father’s house, whereas earlier documents spoke of the “mother’s house,” an indication of the greater visibility afforded to men, particularly fathers, in these celebrations, cf. Horowitz, “The Eve,” 559–560, 571. See also the statutes of the Livorno Jewish community in Toaff, La Nazione, 559, 589.


97. As Horowitz stresses, the Zohar was the source of the tradition of holding study vigils on the eve of a circumcision. The Kabbalist Aaron Berechia de Modena, Leone Modena’s cousin, specifically referred to the Zohar when he proposed in his ma’avar Yabboq (1626) that some rituals, including nighttime vigils before a circumcision, be reformed. Horowitz, “The Eve,” 558, 562–563.

98. Cf. Ibid., 560–562, 569–570; Toaff, La Nazione, 298–299. The lengths to which the Livorno Jewish authorities went in containing the earthly aspects of the vigils is evident in a 1677 ordinance declaring that in order to avoid unpleasant accidents during the dancing, the floors of houses holding vigils and marriage feasts must be shored up. Additionally, a 1694 disposition on games made particular reference to games that men and women played at home during vigils, Toaff, La Nazione, 606, 634.


100. As some seventeenth-century depositions from the Inquisition of Pisa show, Christian men and women attended not only vigils but circumcisions as well, cf. ADPi,
Inquisizione, n. 16, cc. 452r–v. (1656); n. 18, cc. 173r (1663), cc. 1224r–v. (1666); n 19, c. 152r., 153r–v., 208r. (1667). This caused great consternation among ecclesiastic authorities in Pisa and Livorno, who often presented the problem to the Holy Office of Rome, cf. Archivio della Congregazione per la dottrina della Fede, Stanza Storica, HH, 2d, cc. 739r, 879r.

This chapter focuses on family life in three Western Sephardi communities—Amsterdam, Hamburg, and Livorno—with an emphasis on children. These merchant communities, populated by former New Christians originally from Spain and Portugal, were founded at the turn of the seventeenth century. I will begin this essay by exploring the Western Sephardi household and the roles assigned to husbands and wives. Next, I will explore how life-cycle events that involved children were celebrated; these events include birth, circumcision, naming the children, redemption of the first born, and, as well, the bar mitzvah, which Western Sephardim then referred to as a child “entering the guild of commandment observers.” I am also interested in parents’ attitudes toward their children from birth to adolescence, as well as the attitudes toward breast-feeding and religious education. The sources I have gathered consist of printed books and manuscripts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; these include sermons, prayer books, family memoirs, genealogies, ethical wills, and archival sources such as communal registers. My study also builds on demographic data about family life that has been collected by other researchers. Although the majority of the sources come from Amsterdam, I also have studied materials from Hamburg and Livorno, where Jewish life was permitted, and I touch upon Antwerp, where, under Catholic Spanish control, Judaism was practiced under the pretense of Catholicism. It was not uncommon for these merchant families and their children to live in places where they could not openly practice Judaism and then later move to places where they could. Thus the line separating converso life—with Jews pretending to be Christians—from Jewish life was at times rather thin. I will address two questions throughout
my essay. First, to what extent did Sephardim view their children as individuals different from adults; in other words, in what way were children recognized as having their own specific needs? Second, to what roles were children assigned in the Sephardi family? If we consider childhood as an idea formed in the minds of adults, then what was the relationship between the idea of childhood among the ex-conversos and their own collective Jewish identity, an identity that was also in the process of being reconstructed? I believe that exploring Sephardi attitudes toward children will also shed light on how their Jewish identity took form.

The Structure of the Western Sephardi Family as Reflected in the Thesovro dos dinim by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel (Amsterdam, 1647)

To get close to the experience of children, we must begin by understanding how the Western Sephardim organized family life once they returned to normative Judaism. Our most important and, to my knowledge, only rabbinic source for the structure of the family among the Western Sephardim is the book by Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel, Thesovro dos dinim (Treasury of Jewish Laws), which was published in Amsterdam in 1647.1 This important book has not received much attention by historians, perhaps because, as its title indicates, it has been considered merely a derivative explanation of halakhah (Jewish law and tradition). Nonetheless, and as I will demonstrate, the book is a unique source of information, because its primary focus is family life; it teaches readers how to celebrate life-cycle events in accordance with halakhah, and prescribes proper and expected behavior among family members. In addition, it addresses not only the Amsterdam community but also the scattered network of Western Sephardi communities. Menasseh also mentions aspects of his own family and professional life, such as the marriage of his daughter Gracia Abarbanel, which took place while he was writing the Thesovro, and he relates the difficulties he encountered finding time in his busy schedule to write it. Thus the book is not merely a set of prescribed rabbinic rules, but rather it seems to represent Menasseh’s own teachings and lifestyle.2 More importantly, in the introduction Menasseh also addresses women as potential readers, calling them the very “noble and honest Senhoras of the Portuguese Nation,” and expresses his desire to persuade them to read his book on the laws (dinim) that pertain to good governance of the household. Although he does not quote specific contempo-
rary sources, as he addresses women he evidently is motivated by a desire not only to emulate other writers, who have produced comparable works in Italian and in Yiddish (which he calls *lengua tudesca*), but to surpass them. Menasseh tells his female readers:

> if the reading of good books, is the most honest entertainment that one could spend time on, . . . [you ought to] put down the other secular books, if you are reading them, and read the sacred ones, . . . mainly on Shabbat and festivals . . . [as] if you do so, and you follow what I am telling you here you will enjoy the glory of the matriarchs, Sara, Rivca, and Rachel . . . Because if other Hebrew nations entertain their households daily with a [new] book, it is only expected that among us [of the Portuguese Hebrew Nation] in your honor something [comparable] should be written . . . as befits to [your] wit and virtue.3

Menasseh’s sensitivity to the importance of women in the domestic world is rather unusual among his contemporaries, and his statement that “no other [writer] has preceded me”4 has some validity. A search for what was done or written to educate New Christian women reveals the lack of attention given to them. One wonders how rabbis and other communal leaders expected women to make the transition from life in Portugal or Spain, which lacked direct contact with normative Judaism, to the complexities of running a Jewish household after re-embracing Judaism.5

Nevertheless, it is important to clarify what I believe Menasseh implies by saying that the *Thesovro* is partly an unprecedented novelty. The book is not original, if by that we mean it was written with ideas conceived by Menasseh. He borrows from Maimonides’s medieval work *Mishneh Torah* (Repetition of the Torah); from the more recent work by Joseph Caro, *Shulkhan Arukh* (The Prepared Table), which was published in 1565; and from Talmudic sages and the Bible. Menasseh’s originality is that he selected and gathered all these sources to end up with a book that is quite accessible to the average reader, and that focuses solely on domestic daily life.

Although Menasseh does not openly acknowledge non-Jewish sources, he refers to a “gentile philosopher”6 who is, in fact, Aristotle. The *Thesovro* presents a view of the household rooted in contemporary Iberian social values. This is evident in the intertwining of certain terms and concepts that Menasseh borrows from non-Jewish sources together with others from the Jewish tradition. For example, the subtitle of the book informs the reader that it includes all the laws (*dinim*) necessary to (the governing of) a perfect economy. The word *economia* (as in the English word, economics) is of Greek origins,7 and in classical
Greek and Latin texts it always referred to the proper management of the household. In contemporary Iberia, the term *economics* was frequently used to refer to the management of the household and its rule by the paterfamilias, and there was a tradition of moral texts written for the purpose of advising men on how to marry and on the proper way to conduct themselves as paterfamilias. In Lisbon in 1651, a publication titled *Letter to Guide Married Men* offered advice and guidance to men in a style very similar to that used by Menasseh in the *Thesovro*. Similarly, in Spain there was a tradition of Catholic priests authoring catechisms to instruct the paterfamilias on how to conduct himself in his role as head of the household. The similarities among such catechisms, the *Letter*, and some sections of the *Thesovro* are striking. The term *economics* was also applied to the management of more complex forms of social relationships. According to James Casey, a historian of the Spanish family and history, “Economics was considered essentially as a branch of [Christian] theology whose responsibilities it was to set out the guidelines of a ‘moral commonwealth.’”

The *Thesovro* is organized into three domains that coincide with the three parts of the classical household and come from the tradition originating with Aristotle and other classical authors, which continued as a legacy in the Iberian tradition. The first domain is the “Conjugal Part,” which consists of two parts—one on marriage and one on women—including the laws of *niddah* (family purity). The second domain, or the “Paternal House,” is one that includes all the commandments relating to a father and son, such as circumcision and redemption of the firstborn son, as well as the laws of inheritance (Menasseh never refers to unmarried daughters, except in reference to marriage). Finally, in the third tractate, “On Ownership,” Menasseh includes commandments dealing with domestic possessions: slaves, animals and birds, and material possessions. Menasseh’s understanding of *economics*, or the proper rule of the household, was not an isolated example among the Western Sephardim, as can be demonstrated by another Portuguese work written about forty years later by Rabbi Selomo de Oliveira (also of Amsterdam), where a very similar concept of the household is presented: “the [physical] place that serves to provide bread, fire, protection from rain, wind, cold and heat, is called the house and it is made up of four people: husband, wife, son, and servants.” Writing in 1689, Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca expresses a similar understanding of social organization. “Moral philosophy,” he says, “consists of three regiments or governments: ethics, to guide the individual; *oeconomics*, to govern the family; and politics, to govern the republic.” This view of social organization coincides partly with the recent findings by the historian Yosef Kaplan, which led him to conclude
that when ex-New Christians became “New Jews” they tried to preserve their previous Iberian family structure, such as their practice of endogamy, in order to safeguard their social order; otherwise it would have endangered their economic resources, mainly among the well-to-do families.\(^{16}\)

In principle, the Western Sephardi family was a nuclear family composed of a husband, wife, and their children (what we consider a “family” today), but other individuals living under the same roof, at that time, also were considered “family.” In a seventeenth-century letter written by Rabbi Immanuel Aboab to a friend at La Bastide, Aboab referred to a Portuguese family that escaped, in 1614, from the Inquisition to Bordeaux (in southern France). The family consisted of the entire household—the parents and their children, the husband’s mother, a wet nurse, two servants, and one slave.\(^{17}\) In recent studies, historians have amply documented the prominent presence of African slaves and servants among contemporary Spanish and Portuguese families, including converso families, as well as among the Western Sephardim. In Livorno, slaves originating from North Africa and Turkey were owned or, more often, temporarily rented by Jewish families. In addition to their functional service (they did all forms of housework), slaves also were used as symbols of socioeconomic status.\(^{18}\) The Sephardi household also included servants, females and/or males. In the Hamburg community, household servants were Ashkenazim, while in Amsterdam servants were a more varied population, including Dutch non-Jewish girls but also blacks, moriscos, and mulattos, as well as Ashkenazim.\(^{19}\) Apparently, it was only in Livorno that domestic servants were young girls of Iberian origin (often children as young as eight or nine years of age), who arrived with their families and ended up serving in the homes of other Iberian Jews; however, some servants were Christian girls. The social difference between domestic slaves and servants among the Western Sephardim was rather subtle, but female servants, in general, had a greater chance of marrying at a relatively young age than did slaves. Rather often, slaves were donated as part of the patrimony from parents to their children.\(^{20}\) The presence of young males serving outside their homes as apprentices and learning business skills was also common, which we will demonstrate later.\(^{21}\) Finally, there is also ample evidence of other individuals, usually adult males, lodged in private homes, sometimes for extended intervals.\(^{22}\) Therefore, we may conclude that a Sephardi household in the Early Modern Period consisted of a nuclear family, parents and their young children, as well as other individuals—some related by blood but others not so related. This type of household was hierarchical, with the paterfamilias at its center and all other individuals dependent on him for survival. Although the
Western Sephardi household may have had parallels with the contemporary Ashkenazi one, it was much more similar to the contemporary Iberian Christian one. Compelling evidence for this similarity with the Iberian counterpart is found in Sephardi wills where, quite often, legacies are left to domestic servants and other individuals who had been part of the household for a long time.

Marriage and the Conjugal Household

Menasseh describes four possible types of marriage, rejects the first three, and concludes that only the fourth is the ideal marriage. The first type is motivated by greed (avaria) on the part of the groom, in order to obtain wealth by marrying a wealthy woman. “This type of marriage [he says] is the most common in our times,” but it cannot end well as wealth can disappear and, with
its disappearance, the love between wife and husband will also end. Marriage between members of the same socioeconomic class is therefore recommended by Menasseh: “It is a prudent commandment to look for comparable quality in a marriage.”

The second type of marriage is one based on honor; that is to say, when a man marries a woman because of the fame and reputation that he will gain from her relatives. This marriage also has little chance of success as inequality in nobility and birth (nobreza e nascimento) will soon lead to disagreements. The third type of marriage is one based on the beauty of the body; that is to say, the woman’s beauty. He quotes the rabbinic treatise Ta’Anit: “Young man . . . do not fix thine eyes upon beauty, but consider the family.” This marriage, says Menasseh, is called a marriage of pain (dor) because of the sure pain it will bring to the life of the husband—given the transitory nature of beauty, it will soon end as a result of a possible illness, disaster, or natural aging. Finally, the ideal marriage, according to Menasseh, is one based on prudence; that is, the marriage to a woman who possesses qualities such as virtue, honesty, and prudence.

Menasseh explains the biblical and rabbinic traditions that give parents legal rights to marry off their children and select their partners, with the consent of their sons and daughters. In fact, parents and community leaders in Western Sephardi communities had a great deal of control over the marriage of their children. In Amsterdam, throughout the seventeenth and part of the eighteenth centuries, a marriage that took place without the knowledge of the bride’s family was penalized with herem (a ban) by the lay leaders of the community. Menasseh also recommends that marriage take place at about age eighteen for men and age thirteen for girls, as customary in Jewish tradition. To compensate for the girl’s young age—that is, not yet being mature enough to govern a household—Menasseh recommends that the newly married couple reside in the parents’ home until they are ready to set up their own household. Allusions in the text suggest that an early age of marriage, as well as a relatively small difference in age between the partners, was mostly an ideal that did not necessarily reflect reality. Furthermore, the text also indicates that marriage often was decided on the basis of financial interests relevant to both families, and that these marriages frequently did not end well. According to Menasseh, when a young man marries an older woman because of financial reasons, he runs two risks: (1) that a short time later, what originally seemed appropriate would turn into hatred, and (2) he might never have children, who would reinforce conjugal love and carry on his legacy. Vice versa, when an older man
marries a young woman, there also are risks associated with the age difference. In the same manner that the planets Saturn (the Roman god of harvest or time) and Venus (the goddess of love and beauty) are widely separated, two partners having widely different ages could not find compatibility. Menasseh says, “Proportional age will help preserve longer the love, purity and loyalty that well-married people need to proffer.”

The evidence available to us demonstrates that there was a wide range for the age at first marriage. Some marriages indeed took place while the girl was very young and the man older, and in some cases much older. On average, though, marriage at a relatively late age, for both men and women, seemed to have occurred often. Recent demographic studies dealing with age at first marriage for Jewish men and women in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century have found that, during the period 1625–1649 (and throughout the seventeenth century), the mean age at first marriage was 29 for men and more than 24 for women, and that most newly married couples set up their own households and did not remain in their parents’ home. Nevertheless, even after marriage, family ties remained very important. Menasseh also alludes to the importance of family ties when he says that children should commonly follow the customs and virtues of their maternal uncles. He recommends marriage between blood relatives, as Jacob in the Bible did; in fact, uncles very often married their nieces, and marriage between two cousins was also very common. These endogamous practices added to the intertwined family relations characteristic of the Western Sephardim.

Some details of intimacy between parents and children are given as mitzvot (commandments), such as avoiding sexual relations between husband and wife in the presence of children from the time a child begins to talk. We learn contemporary customs in passing, such as when Menasseh instructs men how to say the Shemah while in bed, and he refers to the possibility of fathers sleeping in the same bed as their sons and daughters if they are past the age of thirteen.

When Menasseh addresses the specific responsibilities of the husband toward his wife, he does so by referring to emotions traditionally associated with males and females. He says uncontrolled use of force and power (mental or physical), on the part of the husband, will result in tears and resistance on the part of the wife; given that a woman easily cries; thus, a man who provokes his wife to tears can expect divine punishment. Instead of rigor and force, which will result in resistance from his wife, a man who rules over his wife with reason may see a positive result—that is, she will voluntarily accept his orders.
According to Menasseh, a man ought to control his wife not as a master who controls his slave, but rather as one with the soul of a wise man who controls his body. Menasseh does not question the right of a man to “dominate” his wife, but rather the manner of using such a “right.” Governance of the household should be shared by the husband and wife, and the husband should invest the wife with authority (to be used whether he is absent or present), over everything that is appropriate and convenient to her gender (*seu sexo*), so that she will be respected by her children and servants.

Menasseh starts his comments on the obligation of the wife toward her husband by discussing the power of a woman to turn a marriage into either one of happiness for the husband, by being the accomplished woman described in Prov. 31:10, or into one of unhappiness, by being the “more bitter-than-death” woman mentioned in Eccl. 7:26. A woman who wants to have a good marriage and fulfill her responsibilities ought to love, honor, and appreciate her husband as her master. Her husband’s customs, says Menasseh, should be like laws to rule her life. When her husband is good, she ought to imitate him, and when he is bad she ought to tolerate him. These admonitions to wives were, in all probability, based more on real experiences than on abstractions. On at least one specific occasion (June 1, 1633), Menasseh witnessed the release of a husband who had been incarcerated for badly beating his wife. The case merits attention, because it concerns well-known and respected members of Portuguese families, both in Amsterdam and in Hamburg. Jacob Justo (in Hebrew, Jacob ben Abraham Zaddiq) was a cartographer known for a map he created of the Holy Land that included a moving introduction in Hebrew dedicated to his own people. He was married to Gracia da Costa (Hebrew name, Rica Zaddiq), and both had resided in Hamburg before arriving in Amsterdam. The case documents show that Justo had had a history of ill-treating his wife, well before May 1633—when he was finally thrown in jail, condemned for one year, but then released a week later as requested by his wife. Although this is only one case of wife-beating, and probably an unusual one, Menasseh’s reminder to husbands, on at least one occasion, not to lay hands on their wives seems to indicate that wife-beating was not an unusual occurrence.

Some women are, according to Menasseh, like the moon—in that, the further it is from the sun, the brighter its light is, but as it approaches the sun, its light shines less. In the same manner, some women appear happy in their husband’s absence but melancholy and absentminded (“*suspensas*”) in their presence, although it should be the opposite. Among the tasks Menasseh assigns to women is feeding animals owned by the household, as an act of charity. So
saying, he reveals the popular belief that animals could serve the purpose of diverting death upon themselves when it arrives to take a human being.44

Sephardi homes, at least the homes of well-to-do families, were busy places where many communal activities took place and where there was probably little chance for quiet and privacy. For example, in Hamburg at the time Menasseh’s book was written, the three small congregations in existence still met daily in private homes, probably in attics.45 Communal meals also took place in the homes of lay leaders of the community, and frequently life-cycle family celebrations, such as weddings and circumcisions, filled the houses with adult guests. Finally, the house was also quite often a place to conduct business.

The conjugal household among the Western Sephardim was charged with various competing tasks, at least from our modern perspective of what constitutes family life. The house or physical space had to be shared with household members, such as servants, slaves, and other temporary residents or visitors.
who today would not be considered “family.” The house was also a place to conduct business, and a number of communal affairs and celebrations also took place in private homes. Furthermore, in the midst of the household, there was also the nuclear family—parents and their children with their own specific emotional and physical needs.

The Paternal Household

The title of the second part of the _Thesovro_, the “Paternal Household and the Responsibilities of the Father of the Family,” probably was inspired by the biblical Hebrew term “House of the Father,” but it also coincides with one of the three divisions of the classical household with its paterfamilias and his exclusive right or _potestas_ (_patria potestas_) over his children. This is also characteristic of Iberian and other Mediterranean households. The first chapter is dedicated to the paterfamilias, whose centrality in the household is described with the metaphor of the human brain as the center of perception and movement of the human body. Menasseh may have borrowed this metaphor from Galen’s medical concept of the human body. This metaphor was frequently used, at that time, to express the idea that men were naturally suitable for leadership.

In the same way that the brain, through the nerves, sends out the vital essence to all parts of the human body . . . so also does the paterfamilias as the head send customs and conditions to all members of the household.

After the chapter on the paterfamilias and his responsibility to set a good example for all members of the household, Menasseh includes commandments addressed to males as fathers: the rite of circumcision, the naming of the newborn boy, the redemption of the firstborn son, and the laws of inheritance. In Maimonides’s _Mishneh Torah_ these commandments are part of the section on marriage; in Caro’s _Shulkhan Arukh_, they are scattered here and there but shortly after the laws of parenting. Menasseh’s ordering of the household underscores the paterfamilias and his central role in the domestic world, similar to Aristotle’s concepts. The father’s responsibility to teach his son Torah is also mentioned in this section; the teaching of the Law (Torah) takes precedence over teaching a trade, as a trade will serve the son only for this world while Torah will serve him for this and the world to come. Nonetheless, Menasseh gives a far more detailed discussion on the education of [male] children in the _Thesovro_ published in 1645. In so doing, Menasseh delegates the responsibility
of teaching male children to the community at large, with the father only responsible for initiating the education of his son and for sending him to school.49

Childbirth

Due to the high rate of mortality associated with birth for both mother and child, the birth of a child in the seventeenth century was both a time of great joy and of great concern for the Sephardi families that are the focus of this study, as well as for contemporary Christian families. Medicine, as a science in the seventeenth century, was clearly of little help in saving the life of either the mother or the child, as demonstrated by some of the folk remedies used to (supposedly) shorten delivery time, ease labor, and protect both mother and child. In the “Tratado sobre medecina,” which was written by the physician Abraham Zacuto (known as Zacuto Lusitano, who died in Amsterdam in 1642) and subsequently copied by the calligrapher Benjamin Godines in 1690, some of these charms are listed: white diamonds from the Indian kingdoms of Monsul and Moabar were recommended to protect pregnant women and to ease labor; a mixture of green jasper bundled on the inside of the left thigh was believed to shorten labor; stones from eagles (found in their nests), if bundled on the woman’s left thigh, were supposed to ease labor, and the mixture was considered protective if bundled on the left arm of the baby.50

Two baroque poems by Daniel Levi de Barrios (1631–1701), which are dedicated to a father whose wife had died in childbirth but whose baby survived, give an idea of the contrasting feelings families might have felt when dealing, in short order, with the experience of birth and death. Barrios describes childbirth with the metaphor of the sea (el mar del parto [the sea of labor]), and the pain of the father as he watches the mother swim [for her survival] but instead reaches the end of the land [Finis Terra] and comes to the end of her life, while the child navigates and reaches hopeful land [the Cape of Good Hope].51

Among the laws for observing Shabbat, Menasseh included one chapter dealing with childbirth, the title being “On the Woman who has Given Birth and the One who is in Labor.”52 The woman in labor was considered a person whose life is endangered, and taking care of her had priority over the celebration of the Shabbat: “It is permitted to call the midwife to come from another town, to light the fire [to keep the woman warm], and to light a candle for her, even if she is blind.”53 According to Menasseh, the time of delivery began from the moment the woman broke water and was taken to the birthing chair by other
women, and it ended three days later. From the third day to the seventh, it
was up to the woman to express to others whether or not attending to her had
priority over observing the Shabbat. From the seventh to the thirteenth day,
Shabbat took priority over the health of the woman, even if she expressed her
needs; she was considered an ill person whose care should not take priority over
observing the Shabbat. In at least one occasion in 1631, in Amsterdam, the Ma-
hamad (seven lay leaders of the community) made a decision not to allow visits
to women who just gave birth until fourteen days after delivery.\textsuperscript{54} From this
ranking of priorities, one can conclude that the actual delivery and the three
following days were considered the most critical for the health of the mother. If,
during Shabbat, a woman died of childbirth, right before delivering the baby,
Menasseh’s instructions to husbands about saving the life of the child included
horrifying details for our twenty-first century sensibilities: The husband was
expected to open her up with a knife and take out the baby in order to save its
life.\textsuperscript{55} There are personal accounts of a birth in another contemporary docu-
ment, the memoirs written by Isaac de Pinto, alias Manuel Alvarez Pinto (born
in Antwerp, 1629; died in Amsterdam, 1681). He was born and raised in a family
of New Christians, returned to Judaism in Rotterdam, and then moved his
household to Amsterdam. He relates the events surrounding the birth of his
first son on August 18, 1652 in Rotterdam. Amid the joy and celebrations of the
birth of the child, the young mother, Rachel de Pinto Henriques, (referred to
by her husband as being of “tender age”), died on the seventh day after giving
birth, and her burial took place right after the circumcision of her newborn
son.\textsuperscript{56} Her death, as a result of childbirth, is representative of the vulnerable
situation mothers and newborns had to endure in the Early Modern Period.

In other families, the mother survived the experience of childbirth but the
child did not. In fact, babies frequently were stillborn, died right after birth, or
before they reached their first birthday. A baby born prematurely, in the seventh
or eighth month, without nails or hair was considered as if it were dead. If the
birth took place on Shabbat the mother was instructed to lie down beside the
newborn and to try to feed it, by breast or by hand, perhaps with the hope that
it might survive on its own, without any medical help.\textsuperscript{57} Sara Curiel (1652–1691),
who married her uncle, Isaac de Matatia Aboab (1631–1707), on October 23, 1666,
in Amsterdam, became pregnant six times, but only two of her sons, Matatia and
David, reached adulthood. Her first two pregnancies ended in miscarriages; the
first was a male stillborn between the third and fourth month of her pregnancy
(September 23, 1669), and the second, a full-term baby girl, was also stillborn
(April 19, 1671). One son, Moshe, born on September 24, 1678, lived only eighteen
days, and another, Immanuel, born on September 18, 1679, died eleven months
later on August 1680.\textsuperscript{58} We do not know details of how families coped with the
mixed emotions that the birth of a child and its proximity to death must have
imposed on them, but perhaps their sense of vulnerability led them also to ap-
preciate the joys of the celebrations surrounding a normal birth.

Some fathers recorded their children’s births, girls as well as boys, with in-
dications of the immense personal significance that these births had. Yehuda
Maccabeo, the well-known calligrapher of Amsterdam, recorded the birth of
two of his children at the end of a miniature handwritten book. When his
daughter, Sara Machorrro, was born at 4:00 p.m., May 27, 1638, he wrote: “May
God make her his servant, amen.” Later, a son, Mosseh, was born on October 8,
Shabbat, 1639 (coinciding with Yom Kippur); he then wrote: “May God make
him his servant and allow him to grow up.”\textsuperscript{59}

Rituals of Childbirth

\textsc{The Vegia}

The eve before the circumcision, the \textit{vegia} in Portuguese, was celebrated fol-
lowing the medieval custom known as the “\textit{hadas}” in Spanish or “fadas” in Por-
tuguese (fairies), a mixture of religious and superstitious beliefs associated with
the fear of evil spirits. The practice of the \textit{hadas} had continued on the Iberian
Peninsula among converso families, who celebrated it even under the threat of
the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{60} The vigil or \textit{vegia}, as celebrated in the seventeenth century by
Sephardi families, seems to have retained most of its medieval characteristics,
in spite of the efforts by religious and lay communal leaders to turn it into an
exclusively religious celebration. It took place at night, on the eve of the cir-
cumcision, in the home of the newborn, where guests (men and women), were
welcomed with fresh fruit, honey, and fruit compotes.

Elliott Horowitz has studied the custom as it evolved among Ashkenazi and
Italian Jews, from the Medieval to the Early Modern Periods. Horowitz points
to the medieval origins of the celebration, when the mixing of ages, genders,
and the sacred and profane were parts of daily life; he sees the Early Modern
Period as a time when popular religion was being replaced by the morality of
the official one.\textsuperscript{61} Horowitz’s conclusions are confirmed by the findings of
Renzo Toaff\textsuperscript{62} and more recently by Cristina Galaso (see her contribution to
this volume) in their studies of the Livorno community. As Toaff and Galasso
have demonstrated, in Livorno the eve of the circumcision was at first cele-

brated equally by men and women, including Christian neighbors, in the home of the newborn, with food, dancing, and singing. But by the last decades of the seventeenth century these celebrations had been curbed under the control of the Mahamad. The number of guests was limited, Christian neighbors were no longer present, and women’s roles diminished.

Menasseh discussed the *vegia* as one of the “customs and ceremonies to celebrate circumcision” and as mentioned in the Gemara and the Zohar: One celebration was a banquet or *seudat* mitzvah that was given only to males after the circumcision, and the other was the “universal custom to invite guests to the home [of the newborn] on the *vegia* and with immense jubilation to celebrate the mitsva.”63 The records from the Hamburg community show parallels with the situation in Livorno. The Mahamad limited the number of guests gathering for the *fadas* celebration (as well as for other popular celebrations) to twenty men and twelve women. This total number referred to the entire house; those who exceeded the number were fined with fifty “*risadores*” (reichsthalers).64

**CIRCUMCISION**

Although the *Shulkhan Arukh*, places circumcision and its rituals after the laws of charity, Menasseh places them under the “Paternal House” section, and he explains circumcision in thirty-one steps (or instructions) addressed to fathers on their paternal responsibilities regarding the circumcision of their sons.65 Other contemporary documents or family genealogies that have come down to us give the impression that circumcision was indeed a major event in the lives of the Western Sephardim, and that the event strengthened the bonds among members of the extended family and close friends.

Menasseh begins his instructions by explaining that circumcision is the first affirmative commandment given by God to Abraham, the patriarch, so that he could attain wholeness and perfection. As Abraham circumcised Isaac, the father is responsible for his son’s circumcision, but if the father does not fulfill his responsibility, the Senate (meaning the Mahamad) is obligated to do so. It is rather interesting that the lay leaders of the community are given this charge: “and each day that the father or the Senate delays the fulfillment of this mitzvah [the father or the Mahamad] is not observing this affirmative commandment.”66 The circumcision can be done by the father or by another person; Menasseh, in accordance with the Gemara, says that a servant, a woman, or a minor, in that order, can do it, but an adult Israelite has precedence over the others.67 That is to say, women, at least in theory, could circumcise the newborn if a male is not available. Many circumcisions were performed by a mohel, but,
according to Menasseh, performing the circumcision ought to be done as a mitzvah, and not for any other interest.  

We have sources confirming that some fathers circumcised their own sons. Isaac de Matatia Aboab, who we met before, circumcised his three sons: Matatia (born on November 15, 1672), David (born on November 17, 1675), and Moshe (born on September 24, 1678, but who died shortly afterward). In the genealogical book that was kept by the Belmonte and Fonseca families, where the birth of each child was meticulously recorded by successive generations of fathers, it was noted that sometimes the father circumcised his own sons. Abra- ham da Fonseca (1638–1711), who had a total of eleven children, circumcised two of his sons; the first of them was Aharon, his fifth son (born on the 13th of Nissan, in the spring, 5435 [1675]). Aharon’s two older siblings, Isaque, about six years old, and Angela, about four, were his godparents—a sign of the endogamy practiced by some well-to-do Sephardi families. Jacob, his ninth son (born on Heshvan, 5444 [November 17, 1684]) was also circumcised by his father. In this valuable genealogical book, kept for so many generations and by various branches of the original Belmonte family, we learn details of family celebrations associated with the birth of a child.

According to Lawrence A. Hoffman, in the Medieval Period the circumcision rite was moved from the home to the synagogue, and then back again to the home in the Early Modern Period. Menasseh advised fathers to do it diligently in the morning and independently of the time for synagogue prayers. In Amsterdam, sometimes the circumcision was done in the synagogue, but, at other times, it was done in the privacy of the home. Bernard Picart, in his book, first published in 1723, Les cérémonies et coutumes religieuses de tous les peuples du monde, also describes some circumcisions being performed at home and others in the synagogue; one of his engravings shows the ceremony taking place in a private home and in the presence of the mother, who is reflected in a mirror.

In Hamburg’s communal registers, references to circumcisions frequently describe attempts by the Mahamad to curb popular customs surrounding the ceremony. In some families it appears that the circumcision was performed in private homes (perhaps the mohel’s home) but not necessarily in the home of the newborn. In such cases, guests (men and women) would accompany the newborn from his home to the home where the circumcision would be performed, and back again to the child’s home. This custom was not viewed favorably by the Mahamad, and frequently they discussed ways to curb the number of people accompanying the newborn. In the spring of 1654, when the commu-
nity was already allowed to practice Judaism in public and the three congregations had merged into one, the group accompanying the newborn was limited to a total of thirty-two persons: twenty men and twelve women. However, in the same year, in the month of Tammuz (in the summer) Abraham Benveniste proposed to the Mahamad that only thirty-two men be allowed to attend the ceremony. The final decision was that the number of men could not be more than twenty, even if no women were part of the group. Several years later, in the summer of 1659, the Mahamad considered the matter of excluding women again, arriving at the same conclusion, which was announced in the synagogue—the group could not exceed a total of twenty men and twelve women. Additionally, in order not to provoke the locals (os da terra) with luxurious public gatherings, the Mahamad imposed a monetary penalty per each person above the allotted number. It is interesting to observe the arguing back and forth about the total number of guests and the excluding of women. By limiting the total number to thirty-two persons, the Mahamad, at least in this regard, was not excluding women. The number thirty-two had mystical significance: the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet plus the ten sefirot equals lev (heart) numerically.

In Jewish tradition, if two sons, born of either the same father or the same mother, died at the time of the circumcision, there was no obligation to circumcise a third son on the eighth day; rather, it could be done later, when the child was stronger. This custom was an attempt to prevent the death of the newborn. Circumcision consisted of three steps: milah, or cutting the foreskin with a knife (in Menasseh’s words, “cutting the entire prepuce”); peri’ah, or discovering the flesh; and metsitsah or the circumciser sucking the blood by mouth. In a later siddur, published in Amsterdam in 1687, this last step in the ritual was explained as necessary, and a circumciser who refused to do it would promptly be replaced by another individual. This observation brings to mind the negative reaction Uriel da Costa had to the circumcision rite, because, in his view, only the first part, milah, was needed. Perhaps other men also rejected performing the metsitsah part of the ritual. At the same time, one can only imagine the sense of awe and wonderment that those individuals who were born into Christianity on the Iberian Peninsula must have felt as they personally witnessed, for the first time, the circumcision of their own sons. With incredible attention to details, Menasseh prescribed how to conduct the ceremony, including the blessings to be said in Portuguese by the circumciser and the father, and the responses by all the participants: “In the manner that you [Lord] have permitted him to enter in the covenant, so he may enter in the study of the
Law [Torah], marriage and good deeds. Once the metsitsah was performed, the circumciser recited a blessing while dipping his finger in the mixture of wine and blood and putting some drops of the mixture in the mouth of the child.

During the circumcision ceremony, other attendants to the rite, relatives and friends, were given roles of honor. The role of godparents in the sources we have studied was more Iberian than Jewish. The godfather who, according to Menasseh, should be a deserving person, or “persona benemerita,” could be the father or the grandfather of the child. The godmother’s role was to carry the newborn from the crib (or from the mother) to the godfather and then back again to the crib or the mother. It should be added that the role of the godmother, in Catholic Spain, was to take the baby from the godfather after the baptismal ceremony. At times, the holding of the baby on the lap during the circumcision was done by the godfather, but, at other times, the father or another male relative had this honor while the godfather just stood on the side. These honor roles seemed to have been dictated by the preference of each family. In some families, all the roles remained within the close members of the family. Two chairs were needed for the ceremony: one for the godfather or the other individual holding the baby, and, another to his right, representing Eliahu the prophet, holding a Bible opened to Parashah Pinhas, Num. 25:10–13. A dish with sand was also provided to bury the foreskin.

In well-to-do families, the child received expensive gifts at the time of his circumcision. When David Franco Mendes was born on August 11, 1713, and was circumcised by his father, Abraham Franco Mendes, he received a gem set in gold from his godfather, who was his uncle Issaque. And when Abraham, son of Daniel da Fonseca, was born on November 11, 1714, his uncle and godfather, Aron da Fonseca, gave him a gem set in gold with diamonds, and his grandmother gave him a gold ring with diamonds.

Naming of the newborn, son and daughter
The ceremony of naming the newborn boy is mentioned by Menasseh as part of the circumcision rite, and this may have been the time when male children were named in some families. But in the Belmonte and Fonseca genealogy book, the ceremony of naming the child was frequently mentioned as being done in the synagogue, on the Shabbat after the birth of the child, when the father was given the right to the shurah; that is to say, the father had the right to distribute mitzvot (honors such as rolling up the Torah scroll or dressing it) among relatives and friends. The father was called up to the Torah, announced the name of the newborn to the congregation, and, in some cases, read appropriate biblical
verses. For example, on November 12, 1648, the Shabbat after Mosse Querido was born, his father, Aron Querido, was called up to the Torah and read Gen. 28:4 (part of that week’s parashah, Toledot), where Isaac blessed his son Jacob. In this instance, we learn that three other fathers also were celebrating the birth of their sons that day. Naming their children in the synagogue seems to have been a proud moment for fathers, as it was frequently recorded in family genealogies. In Hamburg, the shurah was also given to the father, who would bring the daughter to be named to the synagogue, but only close relatives (son or brother) were allowed to go up to the tebah (elevated area in the synagogue).

The naming of a daughter is not mentioned by Menasseh, but the blessing said by the father is included in the 1687 siddur mentioned before; it appears under two names—in Hebrew, zebed ha-bat, and in Portuguese, fadas. This last name, fadas (hadas in Spanish), or fairies, points to its medieval connection with the fear of evil spirits harming the newborn that we have seen in connection with the vegia. In the synagogue, where the naming of the newborn daughter took place, the father carrying the daughter was called “abi ha-bat” (in Hebrew, literally, “father of the daughter”). Fathers were in the habit of recording the naming of their daughters as part of their family genealogies, at times including expressions of the attendant joy. Abraham da Fonseca named his daughter Raquel Querida on April 21, 1672 in the synagogue “at six of clock in the morning.” On September 11, 1645, Aharon Querido recorded the naming of his daughter and the fact that she also had a godmother: “After seventeen years of marriage God gave me a daughter . . . may she live to be his servant . . . I named her Semha . . . and her godmother was my aunt Dona Ester Jesurun.” And when a daughter was born to Abraham da Fonseca on April 24, 1695, her father recorded, “I named her Hana, the same name as my cousin’s; may the Lord of this world allow her to grow for many pleasures and may we and others see her for generations.”

However, at the level of the community, the naming of a daughter, as well as anything related to females, was always subjected to restrictions. In Livorno in 1655, the Mahamad felt the need to add a new haskamah, or regulation, to rank priorities on the right to the shurah, which, in addition to the naming of a son or daughter, was also given to bridegrooms. The members of the Livorno Mahamad were concerned, in their words, “with the common good and the service to God,” and they made a decision to limit the number of people called to the Torah to ten people. They also prioritized celebrations when two or more celebrations coincided. As expected, male celebrations were given priority: A bridegroom’s shurah was given priority over the naming of a male newborn,
and both celebrations had priority over the naming of a newborn girl, which, in the best of circumstances, involved fewer persons being called up to the Torah (only seven persons). However, if the naming of a daughter coincided with a male celebration, honoring the bridegroom or the naming of a male, the father was simply allowed to announce the name of his daughter, and no one else was called up to the Torah.

REDEMPTION OF THE FIRSTBORN
In Biblical and rabbinic Judaism, redemption of the firstborn son, *Pidyon ha-ben*, is a commandment addressed to the father, who is to pay the priest a monetary fee to release his son from service to God so that he will lead the normal life of a Jew. But what the Bible defines here as “first born” is in relation to his mother. That is to say, that he is the first child [to open the womb] of the mother. Menasseh clarifies that the responsibility to redeem the son is the father’s, not the mother’s. In another later text by Rabbi David Pardo, *hazzan* of the London community, the fact that the father, not the mother, is the one to redeem the child is also clarified. Perhaps formerly New Christian Sephardi women had at some time contested this point.

Menasseh describes the rite as taking place in the privacy of the home, thirty days after birth, and requiring the presence of the parents and a priest or Cohen. No minyan or quorum is needed, but relatives and friends were invited to the ceremony. The ceremony—a speech act—requires the oral participation of the mother, although the redemption is done by the father. Holding the newborn in his arms, the priest asks the mother if the child is her firstborn; she must answer in the affirmative, and the priest then claims the child belongs to him. Then, the father expresses his desire to release his son. The priest takes the monetary compensation offered for the child’s release, and the ceremony concludes with the father’s blessing and the priest’s prayer. In 1714, when Abraham da Fonseca was born in Amsterdam, David ha-Cohen Belmonte traveled from Hamburg to Amsterdam for the redemption ceremony.

Care of Infants

SWADDLING
Sephardi women swaddled their infants just as contemporary Catholic, Calvinist, and Ashkenazi mothers did. Swaddling of babies for about the first two years of life, the period of breastfeeding, was a common practice. Swaddling
clothes, called *faja*, in Spanish, are described in the Livorno Statutes of 1693 as being customarily embroidered in gold or silver and excluded from the sumptuary laws. The child was wrapped from neck to feet, as it was believed that their tender bodies needed to be shaped while their bones were still young. The practice of swaddling has been highly criticized as a barbaric custom of the past, but seventeenth-century references to swaddling indicate that it was considered a sign of maternal care and protection of the infant. Menasseh referred to swaddling in passing, when he spoke about the outcast child (*o engeitado* in Portuguese or *mamzer* in Hebrew), referring to abandoned newborns found on the streets. He made a distinction between two possible reasons that a mother might abandon her child. If the child was found in a hidden place and it was suspected that the intention was to let the child die in order to hide an adulterous affair, the child, under halakhic laws was considered a “suspected” *mamzer*. But if the child was found in a safe place or a public square; or circumcised, partially clothed with a shirt (*co[m] algua kehima*), or well-swaddled, he says it was probably an indication of his mother’s inability to care for him and her hope that others would take pity on the child and would adopt it; in such a case, under Jewish law he was not considered a *mamzer*. If this outcast child was found in a public place where there were both Jews and Gentiles, Menasseh adds, the child was considered a halakhically [suspected] *mamzer*. This reference, above all, tells us that perhaps not all Sephardi children were welcome into this world; some children may have been abandoned by their mothers because of the shame their birth brought to light and others (the *expositos*) because their mothers did not have the means to care for them. In either case the newborn had very slim chances of survival.

**ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN**

The problem of illegitimate children, born out of wedlock to Sephardi men and Christian women, was rather acute in Amsterdam. Quite often it was the result of sexual relations with gentile maidservants while they were providing a service to unmarried men. There were also cases of sexual relationships with wet nurses while they were in service to the man’s family. Cases of illegitimate children came to light often, because the pregnant women wanted the Sephardi men to provide them and their children financial support, and Amsterdam civil laws made fathers accountable for such support. Each case of an illegitimate child presented its own complexities, but, overall, they all seemed to reflect a rather low view of women on the part of the Sephardi men who, more often than not, were in a position of authority over the women. One early case in the
life of the community was the one involving Francisco Lopes Pereira and Grietgen Willemsz. Their relationship lasted from at least 1606, when Francisco was about twenty years old, to 1613, when Willemsz was pregnant with Lopes’s second child and he was getting ready to marry another woman, Beatris Rodrigues. The case also involved his father, the Portuguese merchant Gaspar Lopes Homem, who was against their relationship; Lopes provided Willemsz with money to support their children.102

Another case involved Beltige Pelgrom (from Goch), a maidservant to David Abudiente (alias Ruy or Duarte Gomes); he was a member of the Bet Jacob congregation in Amsterdam. In May 1615, Pelgrom was pregnant with Abudiente’s child, and the two were disputing financial arrangements for her last months of pregnancy. Abudiente, it appears, had not denied responsibility for the pregnancy, had found a place to lodge her during the last months of her pregnancy, had provided her with some money, and had promised to pay for her living expenses and clothes for the expected baby. But, from her testimony and perspective, he was not paying as much as Pelgrom needed, and therefore a legal dispute ensued. In order to resolve the dispute in his favor, Abudiente found other men willing to testify that they had also slept with her. After the child was born on July 25, Pelgrom married a Christian man who, it appears, accepted her and her child. Abudiente, then twenty-two years old, found his own way out of the situation with the help of his relatives, as he was quickly married in June to his niece Branca, daughter of Fernão Alvares Melo, then barely a child of about fourteen years.103 Although one may argue that our twenty-first century sensitivities should not be applied to the seventeenth century, from a gender perspective it is obvious that these men used women, gentile as well as Jewish, for their own personal interests. Branca died of childbirth in 1624, when her third child was born and she was about twenty-three years old.104 Another case of a sexual encounter between a Sephardi man and his Christian maidservant resulting in pregnancy was the relationship between Joseph Cohen (alias Jeronimo Henriques) and his maid Janety Mathijs, from Bergen, Norway.105 In Hamburg, cases of outcast children (engeitados) were sometimes mentioned in the communal registers. Very little information was given in these entries; thus one can only conclude that the problem of outcast children also existed in Hamburg. References to an outcast child, probably a youngster referred to as “rapaz engeitado,” living with a Jewish woman, are two entries dated 18 Tishry and 28 Tishry 5420 [in the fall of 1640]. The Mahamad provided both woman and child with some help (probably food) for the High Holidays, but the entries also make clear that, shortly after the Holy Days, the Mahamad wanted to get
rid of the child. In another entry, on 25 Elul 5414 [1654], Selomoh Cohen was warned to pay support to “the woman with the outcast (engeitado) child.”

In Jewish law there is a clear distinction between an illegitimate child and a mamzer, the latter usually translated as “bastard.” A mamzer is a child whose mother and father are Jewish but are prohibited from marrying one another. Here is the definition given by Ben-Zion Scherescheswsky, in reference to the mother: “If she cannot contract a legally valid marriage to this man, but can contract a legally valid marriage to others, her offspring [from the former] is a mamzer.” Of course, a state of mamzerut carries a great social stigma for the Jewish child, as mamzerim (plural of mamzer) are only allowed to marry other mamzerim. Nonetheless, in the case of a male, his rights to inheritance are not diminished, including the double portion allotted to him, if he is the first born to the father.

In 1650 in Amsterdam, Sara Curiel, single, and a member of a well-known family in the Sephardi community, gave birth to a son she named Abraham. The alleged father was her uncle, Lopo Ramires (alias David Curiel), a well-known merchant who, at the time of the child’s birth, was married to an ailing woman, Rachel Curiel, with whom he had no children. Several months after the child was born, Lopo’s wife passed away, and shortly afterward he announced his engagement to another woman, his cousin Rachel Aboab. The Mahamad sided with Sara and tried unsuccessfully to force Lopo to marry her. Because Lopo denied being the father and refused to marry Sara, the case occasioned a responsa involving rabbis from Amsterdam and Italy who concluded that Lopo could not be forced to marry Sara against his will, and the wedding of Lopo and Rachel took place on June 19, 1651. As for the child, in view of Lopo’s persistence in denying that he was the father, the rabbis declared the child a shetuki or “doubtful” mamzer. Had Lopo admitted paternity, Abraham, the son, would have been his firstborn son and possessed a right to a double portion of Lopo’s immense inheritance. As Abraham grew up, his mother told him that Lopo was his father, but he was rejected by Lopo to the end of his life and explicitly excluded from Lopo’s inheritance. One interesting aspect of this case was that Lopo simultaneously appealed to both Jewish and non-Jewish laws, in order to get the best of both. First he appealed to the rabbis (and succeeded), asking for his right not to be forced to marry against his will. But, unable to convince the Mahamad and some members of his own family, he also appealed to the Court of Holland, which made him pay maintenance to the mother during her lifetime but, based on the opinions of the rabbis, upheld Lopo’s claim denying paternity of the child.
In medieval and early modern times, the custom among the well-to-do families was to send babies, shortly after birth, to a wet nurse living in the countryside. Arrangements between the family and the wet nurse were made by the father. Menasseh referred in passing to the length of time for breastfeeding by the mother as being at least twenty-four months, unless the mother did not have enough milk or, by choice, the child was sent to a wet nurse. It is important to note that not all families relied on wet nurses by choice. In the event of the mother’s death, the newborn had to be breastfed by another woman. When Isaac de Pinto’s wife died of childbirth, his memoirs related that his newborn son was cared for by a wet nurse, under the supervision of the child’s grandmother. A mother might also experience other problems, such as when she did not have enough milk, or, in the case of a premature baby, when she had to feed her baby with milk by hand while she was recuperating from childbirth and had no medical assistance. In other cases, Sephardi families relied on wet nurses because it was the custom of the times. In Amsterdam wet nurses lived with the family.

In Livorno it seems that families sent their babies away to a wet nurse. This custom, however, began to concern the leaders of the Livorno community and, at one point, efforts were made to convince young fathers of the need to keep babies at home and have mothers breastfeed them instead. A sermon by José Penso de la Vega, delivered in Livorno, sometime between 1675 and 1679, to a group of young men, and on the occasion of a wedding, was dedicated precisely to parenthood. Penso compared the father’s responsibilities to teach Torah to their sons to the mother’s responsibilities to breastfeed them. His sermon was an interesting sign of the emerging concern for the importance of the intimate bonds between mothers and young children. A similar concern for the relationship between mothers and sons was expressed by Menasseh, when he encouraged mothers to personally dress their young sons before sending them daily to school, instead of relying on servants.

The awakening of the concept of childhood among the Western Sephardim was a positive sign that the emotional and physical needs of young children were taken into account. Nevertheless, it also resulted in a strict separation of their adult parents in public and religious domains, to the detriment of women. This separation was mostly visible in relation to the great importance given to decorum in the synagogue. In Amsterdam, where the concern for order and etiquette in the synagogue was most obvious, males followed numerous rules regarding behavior, and seats were strictly under the control of the Mahamad.
In the women’s section, by contrast, seats were not assigned, and it appears that women were left to their own devices. In Hamburg, where more spontaneous forms of behavior seem to have occurred more often than in Amsterdam, the Mahamad set rather strict rules regarding children in the synagogue. Various haskamot specified the conditions under which children were allowed in the synagogue: only those aged five and wearing pants; younger children were allowed only if capable of sitting with other children, and capable of repeating the haftorah. (I assume all children chanted together from their seats, along with the baal-Torah, who chanted from the tebah.) If any adult brought a younger child, an action not expected of a “good Jew,” the Mahamad would tell both adult and child to leave the synagogue.117 This rule, it appears, contradicted the “good custom,” in the words of the Mahamad, of bringing young boys and girls to the synagogue to say the “birkat hagomel.” This prayer, traditionally said by someone called up to the Torah after escaping danger, was said in the synagogue by fathers and their children upon arriving in Hamburg (from Iberia), where they could safely practice Judaism. Also, young girls were named in the synagogue at that moment. But this custom was also restricted by orders of the Mahamad, who allowed them to say the blessing but then expected the children to leave the synagogue.118

Reaching the Age of Religious Majority

Corresponding to the evolution of the idea of childhood in the seventeenth century, religious rituals involving children began to be centered on the child. Among Christians, children began to receive lengthy religious preparation before they were allowed to take first communion, although in the Middle Ages that special preparation had not been required. Although first communion does not fully become a child’s festival until the nineteenth century, the celebration in the seventeenth century was well on its way to becoming the great festival that it is today, with its two-part celebration in the church and in the privacy of the home.119

In Jewish Ashkenazi societies, as historian Ivan Marcus has demonstrated, for a Jewish male, reaching age thirteen years and a day only became an elaborate rite of passage (becoming a bar mitzvah) sometime between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.120 But the origins of the bar mitzvah rite go back to the late Middle Ages, when some rabbis began to object to the idea of young children, before age thirteen, putting on tefillin in daily prayer. Up to the thirteenth
century, young children were permitted to perform adult male activities—putting on tefillin, being called to read Torah in synagogue, and fasting all day when so required by Jewish law—as soon as they were ready and even before they reached age thirteen. By the late fourteenth century in Germany, for a boy, turning thirteen years of age was increasingly associated with reading Torah in the synagogue for the first time.121 This gradual development of the bar mitzvah rite extended to Poland, Provence, and Italy. By the end of the fifteenth century, reaching religious majority was marked publicly by the thirteen-year-old putting on tefillin for the first time and being called to read Torah in the synagogue on the Sabbath immediately following his thirteenth birthday. The bar mitzvah rite of passage, as a moment when a child was recognized as an adult, reflected an evolving concept of childhood as a separate period of time when a child was permitted to be a child and not required to perform activities required of adults. Furthermore, according to Marcus, in Ashkenazi societies the bar mitzvah rite replaced the medieval custom of initiating a child to read the Hebrew alphabet.122

Among Western Sephardim we can observe, throughout the seventeenth century, an evolving trend to create a distinction between a minor boy, one not obligated religiously to fulfill the commandments, and a boy of age thirteen, one who was counted as part of a minyan or quorum and expected to fulfill his Jewish obligations as a male adult. Menasseh referred to meninos (young boys) and their religious education on various occasions. On explaining to adults how to say the Amidah, he addressed fathers and told them “and when boys reach nine years of age, their fathers are obligated to teach them [their sons] to say [the Amidah prayer].”123 The making of vows, promises, and swearing to the Lord entailed a specific age: twelve years and a day for a boy, and eleven years and a day for a girl (but not before). This specification depended on the child’s readiness (his or her understanding). On reaching thirteen years and a day, for a boy, and twelve and a day, for a girl, swearing and promises would count as those made by adults.124

Finally, regarding how to conduct Shabbat morning Torah services in the synagogue, Menasseh indicated that a menino (young boy) below age thirteen was permitted to chant the maftir (last portion of the parashah, or weekly reading of the Torah) and the haftorah (weekly reading from the Prophets) if he knew how to read it.125 Menasseh stated, “The Sefer Thorah is taken out and seven men read [their portion], then the maftir [portion] is read by the same one who reads the haftarah, who could be a boy who knows how to read it.”126 The evidence, then, seems to indicate that up to the time Menasseh wrote the
Thesovro, between 1645 and 1647, young boys chanted Torah in the synagogue as soon as they were ready to do it, and not necessarily upon turning thirteen years of age. By the 1680s, turning thirteen years of age had become the focus of attention and was clearly marked as an important time in the lives of boys, and the event was celebrated in the synagogue in the presence of the community and in the home among relatives and friends. The father’s public blessing thanking God for ending his responsibility for his son’s sins, not initially mentioned by Menasseh, was eventually included in the siddur of 1687 with the following instructions: “The . . . [father whose son] has reached thirteen years of age and has entered the responsibility to fulfill the commandments will say the [following] blessing: ‘Blessed be you Adonay our God who have freed me from the punishment of this one.’”127 In addition, rabbis or other adults began to write derashot (sermons) to be read by the boys turning thirteen, or the boys themselves began to produce their own derashot.

Two derashot by Rabbi Abraham Cohen Pimentel of Hamburg, published in 1688, each included, after the introduction, a brief discourse in which the boy talked about reaching religious majority. It is unclear who wrote the discourses inserted in the sermon, but the sermons were “composed” or written by Rabbi Pimentel.128 The first derashah was delivered the day his son, Isaac Cohen Pimentel, entered the “gremio dos observantes dos preceytos divinos” (literally, the guild of [commandant] observers), which coincided with the first day of Pesach. After introducing the theme of the sermon on the redemption from Egypt, the boy said:

Even if I fear to be judged for the daring act of putting myself on this divine altar, a place that does not concern me, given my tender age, all of the same there are reasons for disregarding these apprehensions; first of all I am responsible for giving thanks to God for the grace he is giving me to reach this day when I am turning 13 years of age and I enter the guild of those who observe his divine commandments; and at the same time that I am required to obey my elders who have asked of me to give this discourse, I will begin asking the required permission from the lords of the Ma’amad, and from the Hakham [rabbi] of this kahal [congregation], and from the [other] hakhamim [rabbis] and the baale Torah . . .129

The second sermon was delivered on the day a nephew of Rabbi Pimentel turned thirteen (his first name was not given), and it also included a very similar discourse, where the child expressed his innocence and timidity to be in “this divine altar” and where he thanked God for reaching thirteen years of age (the term “bar mitzvah” was never used) and entering the “guild of those who
were obligated to observe the commandments.\footnote{130} This image, of a child entering a guild where he will be trained to be a master of a trade, brings to mind the connections between guilds, where young males were trained by a master in a trade or profession, and Catholic brotherhoods in Spain and Portugal.

One sermon from Amsterdam, from 1690, indicated a similar setting, but, in this case, it was when a group of classmates turned thirteen years of age. The sermon was written, at least partly, by Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca, and read in front of the congregation at the afternoon Shabbat Minkhah service on the occasion of his grandson Isaac de David Aboab’s “entering the guild of those who observe the divine commandments.”\footnote{131} The sermon was preceded by a short “oration” by the grandson. As was the custom with other contemporary sermons delivered on Shabbat, it was based on that day’s parashah or biblical portion, Re’eh (Deut. 11:26–16:17); the theme of the verse was “See, I present you today a blessing and a curse,” and included a rabbinic commentary on the meaning of the Hebrew verb “re’eh” or see. After a brief interpretation, the child recited the following blessing: “Blessed be you, Adonay, God of Israel that gave me life and nourishment and have let me reach this moment.” Then the boy addressed the congregation, which consisted of the members of the Mahamad (lay leaders), the Talmud Torah School parnassim (lay school leaders), the hakhamim (rabbis), teacher, parents, uncles, and others attending the ceremony. At the end of the sermon, Isaac de David addressed his classmates and made a connection between the choice of “a blessing and a curse,” and he compared it to their stage in life—reaching religious majority:

Now, talking to my companions, my classmates, I notice the same verse [a blessing and a curse] as we ought to consider that until today we were not subject by obligation to the yoke of the commandments, but from now onwards, as we have turned thirteen years old, we are subject to the reward and the punishment, to the blessing and to the curse.\footnote{132}

Two sermons were delivered in the Amsterdam synagogue by the brothers Isaac Baruch Louzada (in 1686) and Shlomoh Baruch Louzada (in 1691).\footnote{133} It is quite evident that, in these cases, both brothers had received a thorough and personal preparation at home from their tutor, the well-known Hakham David Nunes Torres, who may have helped them write the derashot. The title of each sermon, Sermam de graças (Sermon of Thanks), referred to offering thanks to God for reaching the age of thirteen and for taking charge of their new responsibility to serve God.\footnote{134} The theme of the first sermon, by Isaac, emphasized youth (mocedade) as an in-between stage—no longer childhood but still not yet
adulthood. In the second sermon, by Shlomoh, he made a distinction between parents’ responsibilities to educate sons before and after the age of thirteen: “Until today [he said] my elders, had my education under their care (a seu cargo), but from today onwards, by request (por encargo).”135

The last derashah that we will refer to was written in Amsterdam by David Franco Mendes (1713–1792) and delivered in the synagogue in the summer of 1726, as he went “from the age of innocence to a state of responsibility upon entering the guild of those who are obligated . . . to observe [God’s] commandments and follow his divine rites . . . ”136 We have previously referred to David in reference to his circumcision. Later, as an adult, he became a well-known and influential member of the community and a prolific Hebrew poet and writer. The sermon has no obvious signs that adults helped with its composition, although perhaps he was guided by his teacher. The preserved manuscript was entirely handwritten in Portuguese using beautiful calligraphy (a craft that young boys had to master in the past), and it included frequent quotations of biblical and rabbinic Hebrew. Although the parashah of the day was Re’eh (Deut. 11:26), the theme of the sermon was based on the verse “What more can David say to you; You know your servant, my Lord, Hashem/Elohim” (II Sam. 7:20), and the rabbinic commentary was on the verse Yebamot 8, “An Israelite must possess these three virtues: compassion, modesty, and charity.” The theme was rather well developed, even to the end of the long sermon, and yet there were frequent spontaneous references to David’s personal life, his illness during childhood, and his brothers and close relatives—as one may expect of an adolescent, one no longer a child but not yet an adult.

Another aspect of the celebration, at home and with parents and relatives, was reflected in two sermons by Isaac de Sola, both published in 1704. The first sermon was delivered in the house of the affluent merchant Yacob Nunes Henriquez, a relative of thirteen-year-old Isaac Henriquez Damesquita, a pupil of the preacher. The second sermon was delivered in the home of the bar mitzvah boy, Abraham Fereira, coinciding with Simhat Torah and with the honor of Abraham’s uncle having been the Groom of the Law. In the presence of relatives of the thirteen-year-old boys—grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts, brothers and cousins—the preacher, who had taught both boys, praised the parents and relatives who bore the cost of preparing the children, and of the celebrations.137

In conclusion, in the sources I have just studied, there is no evidence that these boys were called up to the Torah as they turned thirteen years of age. Nevertheless, turning thirteen was preceded by a thorough preparation that culminated in a formal ceremony in the synagogue, in front of the congregation;
the occasion was also celebrated at home, with a feast, with parents, relatives and friends. It is unclear, though, how widespread were these celebrations, as the only surviving sources are from boys from well-to-do families.

Religious Education

Among the Western Sephardim, an important manifestation of their evolving concept of childhood was reflected in the founding of the Talmud Torah schools that were characteristic of the communities in Hamburg, London, Livorno, and, of course, Amsterdam. The founding of Talmud Torah schools took place as soon ex-conversos began to organize communal life. For boys, the concept of childhood entailed a long period of time, when their first priority was to attend school with other children of about age five to fourteen. However, it is rather surprising that this concept of childhood did not extend to girls, as none of these communities provided them communal schooling. Taken from a pedagogic perspective, the attitude toward children, which favored boys and the upper social classes (such as merchants), coincides with Ariès’s thesis that, in the seventeenth century, male moralists and pedagogues, such as the Jesuits, were the ones to impose “the modern concept of childhood and the modern concept of schooling.” As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the Western Sephardim brought this pedagogic sensitivity to their new places of residence from their original Iberian background, and it transferred successfully to their newly forming collective Jewish identity. There is also some evidence that some families provided girls with private tutoring at home. Solomon Saruco, of Amsterdam, was hired in 1743 by the Suasso family to educate Don Aron Suasso’s eight children, four males and four females, at their home in The Hague. It is worth asking why the Western Sephardim did not have the insight to provide girls with a communal education. Both sides of their collective identity, Iberian and Jewish, would have permitted them to do so. Schools for girls existed in Spain and Portugal, and in some Jewish Ashkenazi communities girls also were educated by the community in both religious and secular studies. This question remains unanswered, but, to me, seems important as a reminder of the male-centered focus on family and communal life.

By the time Menasseh published the last part of the Thesovro, in 1647, the Talmud Torah School had been in existence for more than thirty years, and, in fact, Menasseh was a product of such. In the Thesovro, Menasseh does not include the education of sons under the “Paternal House.” Instead he dedicates a
chapter to boys, from about age three to six, who are under the Jewish responsibility to study Torah. Every male Israelite,” he says, “is obligated to study Torah, no matter whether he is poor or rich, young or old,” but “women, slaves and children [meninos] are ‘free’ from it.” A father is responsible for teaching Torah to his son as soon as he is able to speak, specifically, the following biblical verses: Tora ziva lanu Mosseh (Deut. 33:3) and the first verse of the Shemah (Deut. 6:4–9). The father is also responsible for teaching his son, at age three, the Hebrew alphabet. But, as the son reaches six years of age, Menasseh says, “the father is obligated to send his son to school.”

The responsibility to provide schooling to male children is addressed collectively to the community. “In any city or town where Israelites gather,” Menasseh continues, “the community is obligated to hire teachers, and refusal to do so should be punished with herem [ban], or even more, with the destruction of such city, as a community is [morally] sustained by the innocence of its pupils.”

Menasseh discusses the ideal teacher (an individual who fears God, is diligent and patient with his pupils); the ideal class size (twenty pupils, and no more than forty per class); when a new teacher is needed; the right of young children to attend school as taking priority over work and the right of young children to weekly rest (he recommends not introducing new teaching material on Shabbat but rather “to repeat previously studied lessons”); a full-time schooling schedule, with the exception of free Friday afternoons, Shabbatot, and festivals; and the right of children to a teacher who is not too harsh a disciplinarian, as affection between teacher and pupil is needed in order for learning to take place.

Adolescence and the Period of Apprenticeship

As the above sections have demonstrated, childhood among the Western Sephardim was a well-defined period that was enjoyed by many Sephardi children; for boys who were educated in the community’s Talmud Torah schools, it lasted until the time they reached religious majority at age thirteen. For the more affluent, as well as those who went on to become rabbis, their formal education lasted longer. It is more difficult to determine how the Sephardim viewed adolescence, and what happened to boys between the time when they finished school and the moment when they became financially independent and set up their own households. To become independent adults, adolescents needed to
learn a trade, profession, or business. In the Early Modern Period this was done in the form of an apprenticeship, when an adolescent worked under the supervision of an adult who took charge of teaching him a trade.

The best-known pioneering study of the system of apprenticeship (in England) in the Early Modern Period is included in the book *The World We Have Lost* by the historian Peter Laslett. Apprenticeship began for a boy at about thirteen or fourteen years of age and lasted for an average of seven years. He was sent from his family to the home of a master of the trade his family wanted him to learn, and there he was “clothed, educated and fed, obliged to obedience, and forbidden to marry.” In the words of Peter Laslett “[the world we have lost] was not paradise, no golden age of equality, tolerance or of loving kindness.”

Recent studies on two different regions of Spain, Murcia and Almería, have shown that the system of indenturing a youth as an apprentice was not much different in the Iberian world than in England. For many adolescents, apprenticeship turned into a period of abuse by the adults responsible for them. In Spain the best known example of this type of abuse appears in a work of fiction, in the picaresque novel *Lazarillo de Tormes* (published in 1554), whose protagonist is sent away by his poor mother, when nearly a child, to serve as a guide to an abusive blind beggar. Although this case is fiction, the reality was often not much different. It is hard to conclude which trade or profession was the harshest for such young children. The merchant profession, for example, required that the child travel great distances alone, quite often to other countries where he had to learn a new language. This was the situation for children of Portuguese converso families, who rather often, it seems, sent their young males to the homes of other converso merchants in Spain at a rather young age.

Among the Western Sephardim, various sources inform us about apprentices. First, there are several seventeenth-century manuscripts whose protagonists are apprentices. These works seem to be mostly based on reality but with a narrative somewhat fictional. The Spanish work known as “*Danielillo*,” part narrated, part dialogue, is a polemic work between Christianity and Judaism on the topic of the Messiah. The dialogue takes place in a Jewish merchant home, in Livorno, between Don Antonio de Contreras, defending Christianity, and “Daniel de Livorno,” a young apprentice defending the Jewish position. Danielillo is described by the narrator as a youth who, between the ages of fifteen and eighteen, was in the back of a store writing in an accounting book, and who became involved in the polemic defending the Jewish position that Christ is not the Messiah. This document tells us that young people were at times involved in disputes among adults of different faiths, in this case Catholics and Sep-
hardim. These youths subscribed to the militant view of religion that they were taught by their masters, a view taught to dissuade conversion.

Another manuscript, in the form of a memoir, is “Vida de Abraham Pelengrino” (The Life of Abraham Pelengrino, or Abraham the Wanderer). It is the story of a Portuguese Old Christian who converted to Judaism and eventually became a member of the Amsterdam Sephardi community. The protagonist seems to come from the pages of the book The World We Have Lost, as well as from a Spanish picaresque novel. The story begins in 1599, in Ponta Delgada in the Azores, and in the family of the Portuguese merchant Antonio Cardozo de Macedo. There, Antonio decides to send his elder son, Manuel, fourteen years old, to England in the care of a stranger, Mestre Gerden, to learn a trade related to dyeing woolen clothing. Manuel is first taken to Scotland, where, for two years, he attends school and learns English while observing others—as he says, practicing “their rites and ceremonies.” After Scotland he goes to London, where he purchases books on various religions and finally converts to Calvinism, as it appears to him to be the most rational religion. He serves four years in the home of a well-to-do master who treats him as one of his sons, until his real Portuguese father calls him home. When he returns to Portugal, as a young man of about twenty, he is jailed by the Portuguese Inquisition. In prison he meets others accused of Judaizing and eventually escapes and leaves his country again. After more travels and adventures, he joins the Sephardim and becomes one of them, known as Abraham Pelengrino (“The Convert” or “Wanderer”), first in the Hamburg Sephardi community and finally in Amsterdam, where he ends his days in 1659. This case illustrates, rather well, the vulnerable position in which young males were put when they were sent to fend for themselves, many miles away from their families, in order to learn a trade, and in some cases never to return to their homes.

Adolescents, as a source of trouble, are frequently mentioned in the Hamburg communal registers. Some arrived alone in the Port of Hamburg, originally coming from Iberia. These adolescents were rejected by the communal leaders for fear of the troubles they brought with them. The entries are short and no one seems to have contested their rejection. In 1668 a son of Moseh Zacuto, “an undesirable youngster (rapaz), arrived mischievous and agitated” in the community to stay with his grandmother, and the Mahamad ordered her to send the youngster back to his father. On another occasion, it came to the attention of the Mahamad that a group of Portuguese youngsters, who had arrived on their own in Hamburg, were found eating “hares and pigeons” (non-Kosher food) they had asked others to cook for them. The Mahamad ordered
them to leave Hamburg.\textsuperscript{158} There was also some mention, in the communal registers, of troubled youngsters (\textit{moços revoltosos}) who were sent to jail for a period of two to four weeks.\textsuperscript{159}

Although outright abuse of youths is not evident in any of the documents I have encountered from the Amsterdam Sephardi community, I have found evidence of what I call “benign neglect” or a lack of sensitivity to the emotional and social needs of youth. For example, when Hakham Joseph Salom, in 1619, was given a contract to serve as hazzan (cantor) and rubbi (the term used to refer to a teacher) for ten years, the Mahamad of the Bet Yaacob congregation included a clause committing Salom’s sons to take turns serving the community without a salary: “Joseph Salom . . . is obligated to provide monthly the service of one of his sons, the one the Lords of the Mahamad will consider more appropriate, without expecting any increase of salary [for his sons’ service].”\textsuperscript{160} Incidentally, several years later, in 1626, one of Joseph Salom’s sons, Salom ben Yossef, was hired as teacher of the Bet Israel congregation. Several reasons were given for his being offered the position: “being a ‘good Jew,’ [physically] strong for the job, and feared and respected by the youngsters.”\textsuperscript{161}

In Amsterdam, serving an apprenticeship was a common way of learning a trade, such as becoming a tailor (in Portuguese, \textit{alfaiate}), which sometimes took about three years,\textsuperscript{162} or becoming a diamond cutter (\textit{lapidario}), a trade that gave jobs to many Sephardim, or a barber. Even New Christian youths from Portugal were sent to Amsterdam to serve as apprentices. Apprenticeship was formalized with a written contract in which the father paid the master to train his son. The master, on his part, was obligated to lodge, feed, and clothe the youth. Quite often, problems resulted; for example, when a young male made the decision to marry before the end of his apprenticeship.\textsuperscript{163}

As we have demonstrated in the introduction to this volume, in 1648 in Amsterdam, a group of males founded the society Aby Jetomim (Hebrew for “Father of Orphans”), which took under its care the education of male orphans and arranged apprenticeship contracts between them and either Christian Dutch or, more often, Sephardi masters. The study of this institution gives us the opportunity to observe how the Western Sephardim viewed the needs of adolescents based on both Iberian as well as Jewish cultural influences. From Judaism the most obvious influence is that orphans were not placed as apprentices until they reached religious majority at thirteen years of age. Orphans provided services to the confraternity. When members passed away, orphans accompanied the procession from the home to the canal-boat and to the Bet Haim cemetery, situated within the village of Ouderkerk, along the river Amstel and a few miles
south of Amsterdam, for burial. In this, the confraternity appears to be more similar to contemporary Iberian guild-confraternities than Jewish institutions. Orphans were provided with clothing from the confraternity, not very different from clothing worn by adults and influenced by Iberian contemporary fashions. A number of entries in the Aby Jetomim registers refer to discipline of orphans. In some cases children were expelled from the confraternity before the three allotted years because of behavior problems, described as: naughty (travieso), incapable of subjugation (por nao se sujeitar), because he was out of control (desosegado) in talking to the administrators, and even for being evil (velhaco). The view of adolescence among the Western Sephardim differs from our concept today, but it was clearly distinct from childhood on one side and adulthood on the other.

The last source about apprentices that we note is one included in a manuscript written in the form of an ethical will by Isaac de Matatia Aboab (1631–1707), a well-known member of the Amsterdam community who we met previously in this chapter. The will was formulated originally to “indoctrinate his nephews and later [commended] to his sons for a life of virtue.” One section of the manuscript was addressed to fathers, advising them how to select professions for their male sons. A father who has many sons but not a great deal of wealth and no way to find an occupation for all (at home) was advised to direct some of his sons to letters (that is, to intellectual professions) and others to commerce. There was advice that sons who are to become merchants should be sent away (fora do lugar) for training to a merchant’s firm at the age of about sixteen and for a period of five to six years. The document then addressed the youths with a list of practical advice (aduertencias)—first for their service to merchant masters, and then for when they set up their own business firms. The advice included how to behave in order to be trusted by their masters (suffer patiently), and how to advance in the various stages of apprenticeship (first learn bookkeeping for several months, then learn to write business letters, and finally witness sales and purchases of properties).

This document, which originated in Antwerp—where the practice of Judaism was not permitted, and which also refers to England and Amsterdam—confirms some of the topics discussed in this chapter.

The Seigniorial Household

The third part of Menasseh’s Thesouro, the Seigniorial domain, deals with ownership within the household and consists of three subdivisions: (1) slaves,
household animals, and (3) trees and other material possessions. The introduction categorizing possessions is paraphrased from Aristotle’s Politics, where the classical author says that men’s possessions can be reduced to two types: animate and inanimate. Animate possessions are then subdivided by Aristotle into rational beings, such as male and female slaves, and irrational, such as birds and beasts. Inanimate possessions are of three types: fields, houses, and movables. Aristotle differentiates between domestic and non-domestic slaves, and he recommends a mild treatment of domestic slaves. Menasseh discusses only domestic slaves but alludes to Aristotle’s view on the treatment of slaves and, in fact, asserts the right to own them and treat them with harshness:

Even though a master has the right to treat slaves with harshness [says Menasseh], it is an act of charity to treat them well by word and deed; because if, as a master, a man is not obligated to respect his slaves, as a man [the master] is expected to treat them humanly.

Although no ill treatment of slaves is advocated and charitable treatment is expected, this section is troublesome from our twenty-first-century perspective. The fact that Menasseh has to reach out to non-Jewish classical texts (many centuries old) to find a way to justify the possession of human beings is rather problematic. After paraphrasing Aristotle, the chapter deals with the biblical commandment to circumcise slaves owned by Jews and their offspring. As stated in Gen. 17:27, Menasseh quotes, “[all the people born] in his [Abraham’s] household and purchased for money . . . were circumcised,” and if the master of the house does not circumcise his slave, the senate (meaning the Mahamad) will circumcise him. Although Menasseh does not extensively discuss the topic of circumcising slaves, more contemporary studies demonstrate that in seventeenth-century Amsterdam very few black slaves were circumcised, and in Livorno slaves were often rented, instead of purchased, to avoid the high cost of purchasing them, and/or to circumvent other halakhic responsibilities toward the possession of slaves.

The section dedicated to animals includes the biblical commandment of letting the mother bird go before taking the eggs from the nest (Deut. 22:6); explaining the difference between such birds and domestic ones such as pigeons, ducks, and chickens; the commandment to redeem the first issue of a male donkey (Ex. 13:13–14); the laws specifying the unblemished state of the offerings (Lev. 22–17 and Deut. 15:22); and the laws of the Omer (Lev. 24:14–15).

Under inanimate possessions, Menasseh includes the laws regarding trees in the Holy Land (Lev. 13:23); the prohibition of mixing seeds, trees, and vines
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(Lev. 19:19); sowing vineyards (Deut. 22:9); and differentiating between the laws that apply only to the Holy Land and those outside of it (Lev. 19:9).\footnote{175}

In the Thesouro, the section dedicated to Aristotle’s view of household moveables includes the laws on the mezuzah (Deut. 6:9 and 11:21) and of shaatnes, or the prohibition of mixing wool and linen (Lev. 19 and Deut. 22). In so doing, Menasseh offers interesting information on contemporary fabrics.\footnote{176} He also includes the “moral commandment,” as he calls it, to return a found object to its rightful owner (Deut. 22:1–4), which was customarily announced in the synagogue.\footnote{177}

This study has surveyed the Western Sephardi household with the main focus on children and their families in the seventeenth century in the Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Livorno communities. It has demonstrated that young children, from the time of birth, were deeply cared for in Western Sephardi families. The ex-New Christians who returned to Judaism in these communities were able to appreciate the moral and ethical values of rabbinic Judaism (for example, its respect for human life), as well as other contemporary values derived from the Catholic Iberian background—as seen in the importance of the religious rituals of childhood, for example, and the importance they attached to schooling and education. They saw no contradiction between their desires to reconstruct their collective Jewish identity and to preserve non-Jewish values, if they considered the latter values, in essence, at a higher level than traditional rabbinic ones. But it has also demonstrated that they preserved an Iberian view of social organization, family life, and customs that was extremely hierarchical. This hierarchy is mostly evident in the structure of their households, in order to preserve, above all, their desired social and economic ways of life. In the Western Sephardi household, the father continued to enjoy the absolute power of patria potestad, just as his Iberian Catholic father counterpart. This power, combined with the paternalism characteristic of rabbinic Judaism, gave him the means to control the lives of all other members of the household: wife; children until the age of twenty-five; servants until they got married, and at times beyond; and slaves, who, more often than not, remained part of the household patrimony from one generation to the next. Although it could be argued that the head of the household probably was compassionate, treated everyone well, and most, if not all, of his dependents may have felt content with their lot, it could also be argued that such extreme power in the hands of so few individuals resulted in silencing the voices of many other individuals.
The original research for this chapter was partially funded by a grant from the Maurice Amado Foundation. I wish to acknowledge appreciation for the grant.

1. Menasseh ben Israel, *Thesovro dos dinim ultima parte na qual se com[n]tem todos os preceitos, ritos e cerimônias q[ue] tocáo a hua perfeyta economica* (Amsterdam: Joseph be[n] Israel, 5407 [1647]). Two years earlier, in 1645, Menasseh had published the first volume: Menasseh ben Israel *Thesovro dos dinim que o povo de Israel he obrigado saber e observar* (Amsterdam: Eliahu Aboab, 5405 [1645]). It is subdivided into four books. Because I will be quoting from either of the two volumes of the *Thesovro*, for the purpose of clarity, I will indicate the year, 1645 or 1647.

2. *Thesovro*, 1647, 83. Menasseh also says here that he was in the process of writing the *Thesovro* in Latin.

3. Ibid. This dedication, without pagination, follows the dedication to the brothers Abraham and Ishac Israel Pereira. Menasseh may be alluding to another work (Leone da Modena, *Historia de Riti Hebraici* [Venice: n.p., 1638]) and to the contemporary growing Yiddish literature addressed to women, such as the *Tserene*, a collection of Yiddish homilies on the weekly Bible reading (published in 1600), and the various collections of *tkhines* or supplicatory prayers written for Ashkenazi women, sometimes by women themselves. If this is so (and the evidence seems to support my idea), it is an interesting piece of information on the impact that Ashkenazi Jewry had on the Western Sephardim. See the study by Chava Weissler, *Voices of the Matriarchs: Listening to the Prayers of Early Modern Jewish Women* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 6–8. See also Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, “Mujeres judías hispano-portuguesas en el entorno holandés de Amsterdam en el siglo XVII,” in *Familia, religión y negocio. El sefardismo en las relaciones entre el mundo ibérico y los Países Bajos en la Edad Moderna*, ed. Jaime Contreras et al (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes, 2002), 149–150, where she also quotes Menasseh.


5. In addition to the *Thesovro* by Menasseh, I have found only three other sources where women are addressed in Spanish or Portuguese. Yona b. Abraham Girondi, *Sendero de vidas*, trans. Yosef Shalom (Amsterdam, n.p., 1627); David Pardo, *Compendio de dinim que todo Israel debe saber y observar* (Amsterdam: n.p., 5449 [1689]); Abraham Vaez, *Arbol de vidas en el qual se contienen los dinim mas necesarios que debe observar todo Israel* (Amsterdam: n.p., 5452 [1692]).

6. *Thesovro*, 1647, 22, when Menasseh discusses the ideal age at marriage.

7. See the study by Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 17–18. Oecconomics comprised several ancient texts; among them the works by the Athenian Xenophon, (*Oikonomikos*), as well as works by Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero.

8. Francisco Manuel de Melo, *Carta de Guía de Casados* (Lisboa: Oficina Craesbeckiana, 1651). (I have used the recent edition by Daniel Neto Rocha, edição semidiplomática [Coimbra: Universidad de Coimbra, Centro de Estudos de Linguística Aplicada, 2007]). According to Melo, prior to its publication, it had circulated in manuscript form.
and had been criticized as being against women’s freedom; see the preface to readers [CGV1r].


11. *Thesovro*, 1647, 1–137. In this study I will not deal extensively with the part addressed to women.

12. Ibid., 138–179.


14. See the manuscript HS 48E32, in Amsterdam’s Ets Haim Library, “Ramelhete de flores, juntados e dispostos por ao H.H.R. Selomo de Oliveira a pedimento de seu afeiçãoado amigo Ishack de Matitya Aboab” (Amsterdam, 5457 [1687]), 41. At the end of the manuscript, as his source, Oliveira gives the book *Vision deleytable*. There is a contemporary translation from the Italian into Spanish that may have been Oliveira’s source: *Libro intitulado uision deleytable y sumario de todas las sciencias, traducido de italiano en español por Francisco de Caceres* (Amsterdam: David de Crasto Tartaz, 1663).

15. See Aboab’s introduction to the book by David Pardo *Compendio de dinim* (mentioned above).


17. See the document published by Cecil Roth in his study “Immanuel Aboab’s Proselytization of the Marranos,” *JQR* 23 (1932): 121–162; 135 and 146.

18. For the concept of the “casa” or household in Spain, see the study by Francisco Chacón Jiménez, “La familia en España: una historia por hacer,” in *La familia en la España mediterránea* (siglos XV–XIX), ed. James Casey and Chacón Jiménez et al. (Barcelona: Editorial Crítica, 1987), 13–35; 25–27.


21. We will discuss apprentices later under the section on “Adolescence.”

23. Thesovro, 1647, 10. In Carta de Guía de Casados [CG7r], three possible types of marriages are given: “Marriage of God, marriage of the devil, and marriage of death.”

24. Ibid., 11.

25. Ibid., 13. In Carta de Guía de Casados [CG7r], almost identical advice is given. Rodríguez Sánchez, in his study of the 1799 Catholic catechism that is mentioned earlier, includes a list of eleven conditions for a good marriage, some of them coinciding with those given by Menasseh; see Rodríguez, no. 2.

27. Ibid., 15–16.
28. Ibid., 17.


33. See the study by Jona Schellekens, “Determinants of Age at First Marriage among Jews in Amsterdam, 1625–1724,” Journal of Family History, 24 (1999): 148–163; 151. In the family genealogies that I will refer to later, it is also rather common to find records of celibate persons, both men and women.

34. Thesovro, 1647, 13. Isaac de Pinto, who I will discuss later, reports that when he married he went to live to the house of his father-in-law; see Herman Prins Salomon, “The ‘De Pinto’ Manuscript. A 17th Century Marrano Family,” SR 9 (1975): 1–62; 41.

35. See Thesovro, 1647, 82, based on Gen. 29:14 and Is. 58:7.
36. Thesovro, 1645, 34. The need for the father to sleep with his children could occur while the wife was niddah, or menstruating, and, according to Jewish law, not allowed to share the bed with her husband.

38. Ibid., 67.
39. Ibid., 68.
40. Ibid., 72–77.

41. This case has been documented in the study by M. Garel, “La première carte de Terre Sainte en Hébreu” (Amsterdam, 1620/21), SR 21 (1987): 131–139; the original documents have been translated into English by Odette Vlessing. There is also an entry in The Jewish Encyclopedia, vol. 7, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1954), 398; under “Justo (Zaddik), Jacob ben Abraham.”

42. See for example, Thesovro, 1647, 68.
43. Ibid., 72.
44. See Thesovro, 1647, 116.
45. See Julia R. Lieberman, “Sermons and the Construct of a Jewish Identity: The Hamburg Community in the 1620s,” JQR, 10 (2003): 49–72; 51. In Rotterdam in 1646, the synagogue was the attic of the home of David Namias, alias Joao Veiga, as reported by Isaac de Pinto; see Salomon, “The ‘De Pinto’ Manuscript,” 40.


dos [CG46v–47r], the same metaphor is used, although to refer to the relationship be-
tween the master of the house and female domestic servants.

48. Thesovro, 1647, 139.

49. See Thesovro, 1645, 92, and ff., where the education of male children is discussed under “Tratado do estudo da Divina Ley.”

50. See the manuscript EH 48 E32, “Tratado sobre medecina que fez o Doutor Zacuto para seu filho levar consigo quandose foy para o Brazil. Disposto e copeado por hordem de Ishac de Matatia Aboab. Escrito por Benjamin Godines” (Amsterdam: 5450 [1690]), 109.

51. See Daniel Levi de Barrios, Metros Nobles (Amsterdam: n.p., 1689), 110–111, Epis-
tolas 13 and 14: “Al Coronel don Nicolas de Oliver y Fullana, en el nacimiento de su hijo y muerte de su esposa Doña Juana . . . porque en el mar del parto que navega, / tu tierna esposa nada, y tu hijo boga. / O que pesar! O que plazer te agrega! / viendo que en Finis Terra ella se ahoga: / y el de Buena esperanza al Cabo llega.”

52. Thesovro, 1645, 261.

53. Ibid., 261. A woman giving birth taking precedence over the sabbath is already determined in the Gemara, masekhet Shabbat.

54. See SAA PA 334, No. 13, 31. I thank Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld for providing me with this information.

55. Thesovro, 1645, 262.

56. See Salomon, “The ‘De Pinto’ Manuscript,” 44 and 61. I have searched for Rachel’s birth date but without success; her husband, age 23, refers to her as of “such tender age” (de tao terna edade); they had been married for less than a year.

57. Thesovro, 1645, 262.

58. See the manuscript in the Ets Haim Library, HS 48 E27, “Liuro da nota de ydade,” by Isaac Matatia Aboab, started on February 1676; 11. The manuscript was studied and partially published by I.S. Revah, “Pour l’histoire des Nouveaux-Chretiens Portugais. La relacion généalogique d’I. De M. Aboab,” Boletim Internacional de Bibliografia Luso-

59. See the manuscript at the Hamburg University Library, No. 170 Levy 72, titled “Orden de vispera de Roshodes y el selihoth que es cuarenta dias antes del dia de las perdonãcas,” Amsterdam, VM.CCC.LXXXVI. An interesting way of writing the date fol-
lowing the Jewish calendar [5386] but given in Roman numerals; it corresponds to the civil year 1626.

60. The custom among converso families in Spain has been studied by Renée Le-
vine Melamed, “Noticias sobre los ritos de los nacimientos y de la pureza de las judeo-


63. *Thesovro*, 1647, 149.

64. See the manuscript “Livro da Vniao Geral da Naçao,” Hamburg Municipal Archives (from now on, “LVG”), 178–179.


66. Ibid., 141.

67. Ibid., 145.

68. Ibid., 141.


70. See the manuscript EH47 B4 (11) at the Ets Haim Library, “Genealogical work on the Belmonte and da Fonseca families from 1599 until 1728 by Jacob Belmonte and Abraham and Jacob da Fonseca, 18th century” (from now on, “Belmonte and Fonseca genealogy”), 23–24 and ff.; parts of the manuscript are included in the study by Richard J.H. Gottheil, *The Belmont-Belmonte Family. A Record of Four Hundred Years. Put Together from the Original Documents in the Archives and Libraries of Spain, Portugal, Holland and Germany as well as from Private Sources* (New York: Private Printing, 1917).

71. See the study by Lawrence A. Hoffman, *Covenant of Blood: Circumcision and Gender in Rabbinic Judaism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 193–198. In Ashkenazi communities, and probably in Spain, the mother was present at the circumcision at least until the eleventh century. Then circumcision was moved to the synagogue and only slowly returned to the home in the Early Modern Period.


74. See LVG, 21 for the first discussion of the matter.

75. Ibid., 153, when the Mahamad discussed the matter again and the monetary penalty was added; in the photocopy I was provided with, the amount of the penalty is unclear (50 marks?). It applied not only to circumcisions but also to weddings.

76. Benjamin Godines, *Orden de bendiciones. Y las ocaziones en que se deyen dezir con muchas adiciones a las precedentes impreciones, y por major dispuestas* (Amsterdam: Albertus Magnus, 5447 [1687]), 181. I have used the copy at the Asher Library, Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, Chicago.


79. Ibid., 145–146.

80. Picart, 182, explains the role of women, if the circumcision took place in the synagogue: “While waiting for the godmother at the synagogue, [the attendants] sang. The godmother, carrying the newborn in her arms and followed by other women, stopped at the synagogue’s door, where the baby was taken by the godfather and all the
attendants shouted ‘baruch aba’ [blessed be he who comes]” (translation into English is my own).

81. See Sebastián de Covarrubias Horozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611; repr Barcelona: S.A. Horta, 1943), 340, under “comadre” (midwife): “Llamanse comadres las que acompanan la criatura y la reciben de mano del padrino quando la sacan de la pila,” and crosslisted with “madrina” (godmother), 778.

82. The parashah emphasis on vengeance toward non-Jews has no doubt contributed to the disappearance of this custom in more modern times.

83. See Belmonte and Fonseca genealogy, 32.

84. Ibid., 32.

85. Ibid., 23.

86. See LVG, 177.


88. Belmonte and Fonseca genealogy, 18.

89. Ibid., 9.

90. Ibid., 24.

91. See the Livorno Haskamot from 1655, in Toaff, 564, haskama 37, and n. 15.

92. See Hoffman, 160.

93. Ibid., 179.


95. *Compendio de dinim que todo Israel deve saber y observar. Compuesto por estilo fasil y breve* (Amsterdam, n.p., 5449 [1689]), 282. Although published in Amsterdam, the book was written in London and for the London Sephardi Community.


97. Belmonte and Fonseca genealogy, 32.


99. See Toaff, 626.


102. Summaries of affidavits on the case are given in SR, 1969 (No. 197 and notes); 1972 (No. 660–661).


104. Even back then, men were aware of the fact that girls of such a young age were not adults. See, for example, *Thesovro*, 1647, 24, where Menashe suggests age thirteen for girls to marry, but adding, also, that parents need to keep them under their care at home, as at this age one cannot expect readiness to govern the household.
105. SR (1979): 234 (No. 1568 and No. 45).
106. LVG, 170 and 171.
107. LVG, 23.
110. In addition to the study by Hagoort, see also Leo Fuks, “Litigation among Amsterdam Sephardim in the Seventeenth Century,” in Aspects of Jewish Life in the Netherlands: A Selection from the Writings of Leo Fuks, ed. Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1995), 65–80. This study includes a partial translation into English, the responsa from the Venetian rabbi Isaac Luzzatto, in 1650, but makes no mention of the case from the perspective of the child. For the responsa on Abraham, the child, I have used the Portuguese manuscript, MS. 164, housed at the Klau Library, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. See also Swetschinski, 239.
113. See “The ‘De Pinto’ Manuscript,” 44, “So I returned home and left my son there with his wet-nurse to be cared for under the supervision of my mother.”
114. Thesovro, 1647, 262. If a premature child was born on Shabbat, with neither hair nor nails, it was considered as dead, and the mother was to either breastfeed or feed the baby by hand.
116. See Thesovro, 1647, 118.
117. See LVG, 344. See also other similar but less specific entries, 187, 208, and 362.
118. Ibid., 208, on 15 Sivan 5421 [1661]. What seems clear from this entry and the previous one is that fathers were in the habit of bringing boys and girls with them to the synagogue to say the prayer and name the girls and then they attempted to keep the children with them. By requiring the children to be able to chant the haftorah, the Mahamad made sure that this did not happen. Yosef Kaplan ([1993], 135) discussed the importance of the synagogue in the lives of the Western Sephardim, and proposed that “New Jews” gave the synagogue the same importance that the home had on the Iberian Peninsula, where the home was a “clandestine temple” in which conversos secretly practiced Judaism. Cristina Galasso, in her essay on the Livorno community (included in this volume), has demonstrated how the return to rabbinic or normative Judaism was experienced differently by men and women.
119. See Ariès, 121–127.
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122. Ibid., 126–127.


127. Clearly a word-for-word translation from Hebrew.

128. See Abraham Cohen Pimentel, *Questoens e discursos academicos, que compoz e recitou na ilustre academia Keter Thora* (Hamburg: n.p., 5448 [1688]), Sermon 5, 194–195, and Sermon 6, 203–204. The term “bar mitzvah” was never used in either of the sermons.

129. Ibid., Sermon 5, 195.

130. Ibid., Sermon 6, 203–204. See also Picart, 186, who describes the bar mitzvah ceremony in very similar terms: “religious majority is declared in the presence of a minyan or quorum; the father explains in detail how he has replaced his son’s responsibility and declares himself free of his son’s sins; the witness accepts the father’s release and the father says a prayer.” (Translation into English is my own.)

131. See the manuscript EH 48 E7, Ets Haim Library, “Sermao composto por o veneravel senhor H.H.R. Ishack Aboab para seu neto Yshack Aboab que darsou em Sabat a tarde no K[ahal] K[ados] de T[almud] [Tora] no dia em o qual emtou no gremio dos observantes seus perseitos divinos . . . o dedica ao illustre senhor Yshack Aboab de Matatia,” *Em Amsterdam*, 5450 [1690]. The custom among the Western Sephardim of naming children for their living relatives, and the fact that they also often married close relatives with the same last names, makes it rather difficult to identify them; in any event, here three well-known individuals are identified as relatives of the bar-mitzvah boy: Rabbi Isaac Aboab da Fonseca is named as the boy’s grandfather; the sermon is dedicated to Isaac Aboab de Matatia (probably his paternal grandfather), and Abraham Aboab da Fonseca is identified as his uncle (*seu tio*).

132. Ibid., see page 9 (my own pagination, as the manuscript lacks it).

133. They were published together, *Sermoens pregados na celebre esnoga de Amsterdam pellos estudiosos* and *Discretos mancebos Ishack and Selomoh . . . Louzada* (Amsterdam: Moseh Dias, 5451 [1691]). Each sermon has its own individual pagination.

134. See first sermon, by Isaac, 4, and second sermon by Selomoh, 4.

135. See second sermon, 2.

136. Ets Haim Library manuscript EH 48D41, “Sermao gratulatorio q resitey no K.Ks: do T.Tª de Amstm. Em 27 de menahem na parassa de Ree anohy, eauendo cumprido (em 21 d’) minhan no ANNO: 5486 Que corresponde aera vulgar 1727,” 2 (my own pagination). The *derashah* is mentioned in the introduction to the recent edition of his *Memorias* by the editors, see: eds. Lajb Fuks and Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, *Memorias do estabelecimento e progresso dos judeos portuguezes e espanhues nesta famosa citade de Amsterdam* 1772 (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); however, the editors are wrong to ascribe the poem (or
song) preceding the *derashah* to David Franco Mendes himself, as it is clearly stated that it was written by an older friend: “. . . un amigo suyo i mayor de sus genitores que es y sea Bto.”

137. See *Sermones hechos sobre diferentes asuntos compuestos y predicados por el docto ingenio Ishac de Sola* (Amsterdam: Moseh Diaz, 5464 [1704]), sermons five, 50–61, and six, 61–70. The exact dates when the sermons were delivered are not given.


140. Swetschinski, 88–89 and 284–285, has documented a general high level of literacy among Portuguese immigrants; based on the fact that some Portuguese, males and females, learned the Gothic (Dutch) script, he has concluded that some must have received a Dutch education. But the level of female literacy in Amsterdam later declined. Levie Bernfeld, 142–143 (see also her essay in this volume), has arrived at similar conclusions. Some of the women mentioned by Levie Bernfeld, Gracia Senior and the poets Isabel Enriques and Isabel Correa, were brought up (and supposedly educated) in Spain. For Gracia Senior and evidence of her residence in Madrid Spain before arriving to Amsterdam, see her last will, drawn on August 30, 1673, SAA PA 334 no. 826.

141. See the manuscript EH 49, B1, Saruco’s family genealogy, “Arvore de vidas e genealogia do muy docto e insigne HHR Israel Saruco,” The Hague, 1781, f 12. He tutored them for a total of eight years. Neither age nor other details are given.

142. Gluckel of Halmeln, 6, for example, received such an education.


144. Ibid., 92.

145. Ibid., 94.

146. Ibid., 94.

147. *Thesovro*, 1645, 93.

148. Ibid., 95–96.


150. Ibid., 3.


152. Fernando Montesinos, from Vila Flor, Portugal, was sent to Spain as soon as he turned sixteen, to peddle “threads and ribbons” for the family business, and he succeeded in having a business of his own. See López Belinchón, 37–38.

154. Also kept at the Ets Haim Library, EH 49 A15. Pelengrino (wanderer or traveler) here also could mean “convert.” Menasseh also uses the term “peregrino” to refer to converts to Judaism, see Thesovro, 1647, 173.

155. He was to learn the trade of dyeing blue woolen fabric with the herb “pastel,” which grew in Ponta Delgada, and he was taken to England, where the dyeing took place. See the dictionary Tesoro de la lengua, 856, the entry “pastel”—“Yerba conocida de la qual usan los tintoreros para el color azul de las lanas.”

156. Ibid., 7.

157. LVG, 382–383.

158. Ibid., 101–102.

159. Ibid., 297.


161. See Livro de Termos de Bet Israel, SAA PA 334, No. 10, 149.

162. See, for example, SR (1973): 270, No. 751, “Indentures of Apprenticeship for the Training to Become a ‘Kaffa’-Worker Concluded Between Duarte Saraiva and Nicolaes Godefroy.”

163. See SR (1985): 177, No. 2465, the dispute between Isaac Jédela and his master, diamond cutter, when Jédela wanted out of the contract.

164. See the “Register of the Aby Yetomim Society,” SAA PA 334, No. 1211, 4, 6. See also my forthcoming study, “Adolescence and the Period of Apprenticeship among the Western Sephardim in the Seventeenth Century” in El Prezente 4 (Moshe David Gaon Center for Ladino Culture: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, 2010).

165. Ariès, 268, claims this distinction did not happen until the eighteen century.

166. “Documentos para todo estado e ydade em particular para abituar bem os mosos desde sua moçidade a vertude. Feitos e juntados por osenhor meu pay osenhor Ishack de Matatia Aboab Primeyro para doctrinar seus sobrinhos e despois para exortar seus propios filos a vertude . . . Copiados por mi Matatia de Isaac Aboba. Em Amsterdam no anno de 5445 [1685].” From now on, “Documento.”

167. Marked as section 2 in the manuscript, 8–10; it appears to be from the period Isaac spent in Antwerp, 1653 to 1660, in the house of his uncle Lopo Ramires, as documented by Jonathan Israel, “Lopo Ramirez (David Curiel) and the Attempt to Establish a Sephardi Community in Antwerp in 1653–1654,” SR 28 (1994): 99–119.


172. Ibid., 180–181.
173. For Amsterdam, see Schorsch, 169 and ff. For Livorno, see Galasso, “Solo il loro servigio . . .,” 458, 463.
175. Ibid., 192–195.
176. Ibid., 201–207.
177. Ibid., 207–209.
It was not easy to approach the Sephardi women of Holland’s Golden Age. As he toured Amsterdam, an English traveler was greatly surprised that Sephardi men kept their wives restrained, essentially as prisoners. Had he gone to Hamburg, he would probably have noticed the same; there, Hakham Moses Israel ordained, in the 1660s, that Sephardi women should not go out unprotected unless to see a neighbor.

In Amsterdam, the position of women seemed quite similar to that of women on the Iberian Peninsula. They were mainly confined to their homes and families, a phenomenon influenced by Spain’s Arab heritage. The influence of Muslim culture could also be observed in the Levant; Jewish women in seventeenth-century Jerusalem were expected to stay at home. This image stood in striking contrast to the great freedom of movement of Ashkenazi and non-Jewish females, who were present all over the streets of Amsterdam and were active in many aspects of the economic, social, and intellectual life of the Dutch Republic.

Was the contrast really so great? Did the position of Dutch Sephardi women really differ so much from that of their surroundings? In fact, Amsterdam Sephardi women seemed to hide, not only behind their veils and facades but also behind a male identity. Often, their names did not appear in their own right; rather, they were also identified and registered as wife, widow, daughter, orphan, or mother/mother-in-law of a given man. If women’s issues among the Amsterdam Portuguese were at stake, the topic was dealt with through male eyes and perspectives.
Nevertheless, Sephardi women could be seen in the so-called Dutch Jerusalem. Charles Ogier must have observed them at close range when he noted the similarity of Sephardi women to other women in the city, except for the color of their eyes and their neat and aristocratic appearance. Many artists depicted them at home or in the streets, walking with their fans or pulled by horses while seated on the couches of their carriages.

The presence of Sephardi women can be felt even more in notarial deeds, including in last wills and inventories, letters, tax registers, lists of relief to the poor, criminal records, archives of Christian churches in the city, and in the administration of hevrot. There they appeared alive and well, with a broad spectrum of identities: rich and poor; single, married, and widowed; withdrawn in their mansions or in their little rooms, yet actively involved in business and social life; women living in an atmosphere of extravagance and those whose poverty spurred them to beg for help; honest women, but also madams living as thieves and prostitutes; senhoras who were very dedicated to Jewish life and those who were indifferent or even turned their backs to it.
This chapter examines the different identities of Sephardi women—discerning their financial status and whereabouts, educational background, work, family life, social activities, and Jewish identity. Various sources allow a view behind the scenes and help to unveil different aspects of the position of Sephardi women, within their own community and relative to the wider world. Thus, this chapter contributes to the investigation of the history of gender issues among the Dutch Sephardim in early modern times, a field in need of deeper exploration.\(^\text{10}\)

**Figures**

At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century, an organized Jewish community developed in Amsterdam, especially established for immigrants from Spain and Portugal, former New Christians or conversos who were transformed into “New Jews” in the city.\(^\text{11}\) Many had fled inquisitorial persecutions and a fearful existence on the Iberian Peninsula, and were attracted by the economic opportunities of the newly established Dutch Republic. The relative tolerance that was foremost in a city like Amsterdam was another asset; though, even here, there were restrictions.\(^\text{12}\) Soon, the Sephardi community built a reputation of wealth and benevolence that became well known all over Europe. It stimulated a large influx of Jews from different backgrounds and European Jewish centers. Some, in addition to the Sephardim, organized themselves; for instance, beginning in 1635, Ashkenazi Jews from the German Empire and Poland established a community of their own.\(^\text{13}\)

Among the Amsterdam Jews, the Sephardim had been a majority until the early eighteenth century, around 4,000 to 6,000 individuals. The number of Ashkenazim in the city surpassed that of the Sephardim, while growing from 3,200 individuals in 1700 to 15,000 individuals at the end of the eighteenth century. Starting as a small group, only 1.4 percent (3,600 persons) of the city’s population in 1650, the Jews of Amsterdam, at the end of the eighteenth century, formed about 10 percent (about 20,000 persons) of the total population.\(^\text{14}\)

It is difficult to assess the number of Sephardi women living in early modern Amsterdam. Strangely enough, we have more information on the number of poor women than on the rich ones. No internal tax registers containing names of women are available until the end of the eighteenth century, when 160 women (32 percent of the estimated total) were assessed for the internal *finta* tax.\(^\text{15}\) On the other hand, up to 83 percent of single women, or women listed as heads of
families, in the Amsterdam Portuguese community were given charity; as such, they were a majority as elsewhere in early modern Europe but a far greater one.\textsuperscript{16} Because the majority of the men listed in the tax registers were married,\textsuperscript{17} we can assume that the total female Sephardi population always formed a surplus among the Amsterdam Sephardi Jews, from the early 1600s until the end of the 1700s. The total female Sephardi population comprised hundreds of individuals, with, on average, one third to one half of them unable to survive without charity.

\textit{Migration and Family Structure}

Immigration into Amsterdam from Spain, Portugal, and France consisted of a large number of women, although it is difficult to give precise figures.\textsuperscript{18} Some had fled with their extended families accompanied by husbands, children, and sometimes even their personnel.\textsuperscript{19} Others came to Amsterdam by themselves or in the company of other senhoras, married women with their children, grandmothers with grandchildren, orphans on their own, widows with nieces—in short, broken families.\textsuperscript{20} This was the consequence of the unstable situation on the Iberian Peninsula, where New Christians, often separated from their loved ones, fled to escape the persecution of the Inquisition. Gracia Senior was very clear about this: She had come alone to Amsterdam because she feared the Inquisition.\textsuperscript{21}

Sometimes these women were preceded by their husbands.\textsuperscript{22} It could also be the other way around: Women fled alone, awaiting the possible arrival of their families while in a safe and protected place like Amsterdam. In 1621, for example, Ilona Gomes, the wife of Francisco Rodrigues d’Olivença, lived in Amsterdam in the house of Thomas Fernandes while her husband was still imprisoned in Portugal.\textsuperscript{23} Brites Tomas, dying and making her last will, also came to Amsterdam alone while her husband Luis Gomes de Aveiro still lived in Portugal.\textsuperscript{24}

Often, the ending was unhappy; in the community charity books, many women passed from “wife of” into “widow of,” although their partners never appeared in the community or city registers.\textsuperscript{25} Why, where, and in what situation did men who never arrived in Amsterdam stay behind? Was it by choice or under coercion? Or did these (former) partners settle down elsewhere? We can only guess their fates.

There was always the prospect of starting a new life in a promising city with a flourishing Jewish community like Amsterdam. There single women hoped to
enhance their chances of finding a Jewish partner, although that seemed easier than it actually was. The Sephardi community of Amsterdam often complained about the large number of poor females in their midst.26

Sephardi women arrived in the North not only from Spain, Portugal, or Southern France, but also from the Jewish world in Italy, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Levant. The latter displaced women also traveled to Amsterdam to flee wars, pogroms, poverty, epidemics, or just to look for better prospects. One woman came all the way from Oran, another from Venice.27 A third one arrived from Turkey together with her two children.28 Many women fled the Balkans during the war of the Holy League at the end of the seventeenth century.29

Besides Sephardi women arriving at the Amsterdam Portuguese community (alone or as heads of their families), many other women, poor and rich alike, were left alone in the city, their partners or children working outside of the Republic for a short or a long time. This was a quite common phenomenon in Jewish society elsewhere.30 While drawing up her testament, Sara Alvares declared she lived in Amsterdam, while her husband resided in London.31 Selo-moh Gomes Soares was in the West Indies when his wife Simha Salom, in Amsterdam, received a legacy from her mother.32 When senhora Rachel Montalta made an agreement with the kahal concerning a silver lamp, her husband Isaac Montalto was said to be in Berberia.33 Ribca Henriques Alvares never again saw her husband Moses Mesias, originally from Tetuan, when he left Amsterdam in 1730. The couple had gone through a personal crisis earlier. Six years later he was found dead in Safed.34

Sometimes Sephardi women were abandoned for no clear reason. Gabriel Alvares, for example, confessed in Amsterdam in 1655 that he married Hester Alvares in Tunis and left her in Livorno “without reason.”35 Bartholome Fernandez Torres must have fled to Amsterdam from Spain but apparently did not take his daughter (age nine) and possibly a former wife, who lived in Osuna in Spain.36 Joanna da Fonseca resided alone in Amsterdam for more than twenty years without her husband, of whom no traces could be found.37

All this coming and going influenced the composition of families among the Sephardim of Amsterdam; it clearly fluctuated.38 Imbalanced family structures, however, were not an exclusive situation reserved for the Amsterdam Sephardim. High mobility was normal in pre-modern and early modern society; women often stayed behind at the home base while their husbands or children left them for whatever reason, temporarily or forever.39
Many Sephardi women, in the absence of a male head of the family, were often left to the care and supervision of the Portuguese community, or to their relatives and friends. Thus, Amsterdam served as a safe home base upon which males could rely.

Under these circumstances, we come across much more strict preoccupation with and supervision of the well-being of Sephardi women than we would suspect in a free city like Amsterdam, apparently because we are dealing with a relatively small, tightly organized immigrant group with a cultural approach imported from the Iberian Peninsula. It could have been worse: In the Portuguese empire, married women were often put into institutions in the absence of their husbands!

The Sephardi community made sure, if necessary, that its female constituency had enough to eat; many women, in the absence of male partners, were listed on its charity rolls. Many Portuguese men who signed the statutes of the new community in Recife, Brazil, for example, left their female partners in Amsterdam to be provided for by the community. However, the Amsterdam Sephardi community and its members provided more than financial care. They, like their co-religionists elsewhere, also guarded moral standards, trying very hard to protect the honor of its female population because of the presence of so many single females.

There apparently was constant conflict regarding the supervision of Sephardi women. Some tried to escape continuous supervision and control by going to the synagogue at night, whereupon they were forbidden to attend evening or early morning services. The leaders of the Portuguese community, moreover, posted a guard at the entrance of the women’s synagogue to watch over and control their behavior. Scandals, however, were not confined to the precincts of the synagogue. Cases of adultery were frequent, often, but not always, caused by a husband’s absence.

Menasseh ben Israel’s warning in his Thesovro dos Dinim of the 1640s, apparently based on actual situations, admonished women to avoid being alone in the house with any man when their husbands were out of town. Beatris Fernandes, for instance, lead a “dishonorable” life in the absence of her husband, who had gone to Jerusalem. Rachel Boena ran away from home with a married man, her cousin who had converted to Christianity. She was pursued, but not caught, by her family. In 1714, the wife of the community’s hazzan appeared to have a relationship with another man. Consequently, the hazzan lost
his job. In the seventeenth century, mostly men were punished for adultery; but in the eighteenth century, women also were put into herem for breach of moral rules, pointing to a growing neglect of morality among Dutch Sephardim, both men and women.

Amsterdam Sephardim, including their female population, were also involved in cases of theft, violence, and murder. Some cases concerned conflicts inside the house; others were committed outside in the streets. In 1658 Rachel Abarbanel and her son were arrested because they were making mischief and were kicking windows near the Sint Antonispoort. Sara Abiatar was said to have murdered her children due to “poverty, grief and debt.” Other women stole or committed other types of crime. We meet them before Dutch Courts or in the prisons and workhouses of the Dutch Republic, but much less frequently than Ashkenazi or Dutch women. Yet, these and other cases prove once more that Sephardi women in Holland’s Golden Age were not as withdrawn, silent, and suppressed as described and depicted by observers.

**Living Conditions**

The extended family occupied an important place in Jewish society in general, as Grossman has argued. Moreover, more than in Northern and Central Europe, multigenerational families commonly lived together in Southern and Eastern Europe. Thus in Holland, the average household among the Sephardim consisted not only of the nuclear family but also of extended families. Often Sephardim, not having enough money to rent separate locations, were forced to live together in cramped units.

The well-to-do families, who had spacious homes, sometimes took in family members and friends, although a Hakham, such as Saul Levi Morteira complained about the empty houses of the rich and their lack of hospitality. A wealthy merchant, Josua de Prado, had only his mother with him in his large mansion. However, other houses must have been very crowded, such as the one into which Isaac Vaz Henriques and his mother moved—joining his sister, her husband, and their eight children.

Quite a few married women moved in with relatives or friends to await the arrival of their husbands. The daughter of Jeudah Piza, together with her two sons, stayed in her father’s house while her husband went to America. Widows and single women also joined other families; it was a matter of convenience or need—either in economic, social, or emotional terms, or a combination of all
these considerations. The deal was quite often, but not always, closed with a written contract—one having specific conditions, such as the yearly contribution to be paid by one party, and amenities, such as lodging, food, light, and servants, to be provided by the other.59

In addition to joining families headed by men, many Sephardi women, rich and poor alike, took in family and friends—males and females. Rachel Medina Chamis opened her house to and took care of her nephews and brother after the death of her sister-in-law.60 The widow of Raphael Mendes da Costa had Isaac Mendes da Costa living with her.61 Abigail Dias da Fonseca, also a widow, gave shelter to her friend Ester Rodrigues.62

Children arriving from abroad, alone or left to themselves because of the departure of their families, were often boarded with private families, mostly relatives or acquaintances. Upon arrival in 1618, Rachel da Fonsequa, who had neither father nor mother, was at first taken into the house of the widow of Jacob Levy, and later into that of Jacob Belmonte.63 Abraham de Leon had two boys in his house; their family had gone to Rouen.64 Even though Mazon Abanot (Nourishment for Girls), the girls’ orphanage founded in 1734, bought a house to take care of the orphan girls, the girls stayed there only during the daytime and spent the night with (host) families.65

As elsewhere in the Jewish world, newly married daughters and their husbands in Amsterdam would often make their first home in the parents’ house.66 A case in point was the daughter of Jacob Jeuda Leao.67 The mother of bride Ester da Fonseca, who was to marry with Aron da Fonseca, agreed to take the newlywed couple into her home for a period of three years “as is the custom among the Jewish nation.”68

Sephardi females also might live together with whichever family members were left: single mothers with their children and in-laws, grandmothers with their grandchildren, with sisters, and with other singles living by themselves. In 1650, the widow Sara Vaz left Seville with her daughter to live together in Amsterdam.69 The widow of David Rodrigues lived with her grandson.70 Three sisters moved in with each other: “Ester, Judit e Ribca Galenas tres irmans.”71 Four women from Spain also formed self-supporting units, living under one roof, as did the widow Sara Rodrigues de Guadeloupe and her sister.72 Even in institutions such as the Portuguese old-age home, women shared space: The widow Rachel Cotinho divided her single room there with her aunt (“moeije”) Ester Faije.73

Thus we notice Sephardi women joining relatives, friends, or anyone else in search of a home, sometimes in the beautiful mansions on the canals, more
often in the smaller houses on the main streets, in the side streets or in narrow alleyways, in rooms, or—quite rarely—in cellars. They mostly kept to a protective environment close to other members of their nação (nation), in the vicinity of the synagogue and Jewish life.74

Work

In accordance with the laws of the Dutch Republic, married women, unlike unmarried women or widows, were subordinate to the authority of a male.75 In Jewish law, it was the same. Thus, to govern assets or start legal procedures, the married woman was under the guardianship of her husband. Accordingly, in many documents we find Sephardi women placed under the supervision of a male representative.76 Rifca Dias da Fonseca, an old lady, sick in bed, was even prevented from answering a notary because no male person was present.77 Men would also authorize other males to head the family in their absence. Moreover, it appears that Sephardi widows or unmarried women, more than the Ashkenazi or non-Jewish ones, were accompanied or represented, in court and elsewhere, by males, or gave a male power of attorney to act on their behalf. Perhaps this occurred to preserve a woman’s honor and to follow the custom of affording protection toward Sephardi women as described above.78

On the other hand, we find many cases of married women, Jews or Gentiles, who, in the absence of their husband, were given the power of attorney to act in their husband’s place. Many Sephardi men did consider their female partners on an equal footing and, in accordance with Dutch law, did grant their wives the right to continue their businesses while traveling or to administer their inheritances after their death.79

Thus many Sephardi widows acted independently, without any male involved. For instance, Ester Cuzina, widow of Pero Gomes from Lisbon, settled the accounts with merchants in Amsterdam and Antwerp herself.80 The above-mentioned Gracia Senior, likewise a widow, managed her possessions in Portugal, Castile, Italy, Brazil, Flanders, and in Amsterdam by herself.81

The financial structure of the Amsterdam Portuguese community in the early modern period encompassed large differences in wealth, which became more pronounced during the eighteenth century. Thus, big gaps in affluence between rich and less fortunate Sephardi women can be demonstrated, and more so over time.82 We only have to look at the inventories of well-to-do women and compare them with those of their poorer counterparts to see the
difference. In fact, one would be amazed at the tremendous amount of jewelry and other silver and golden objects in the possession of Dutch Sephardim in the early modern period—many more objects than found among their non-Jewish neighbors. Notarial deeds give us an impression of the difference in value of dowries given to Sephardi brides from wealthy backgrounds compared with girls from the other end of the spectrum, who brought in next to nothing.

The wealthiest Sephardi women were decidedly not much inclined to work. In 1742 a large majority of them were registered as so-called “renteniers.” Though living off their capital, these rich Sephardi women, similar to those from the Dutch upper class, nonetheless were very keen to invest their money in bonds, houses, or industries. For them and their families, the accumulation and preservation of capital had proved to be an important tool in the fight for survival while building a new existence in a foreign country, restoring their lost status, or building a new one.

The Sephardi women who needed income to keep up with daily expenses were often involved in the so-called family economy, as was a common practice elsewhere. These women often shared their husband’s work. As customary in the past, we see these Jewish women beside their partners, being active in crafts, the medical profession, international trade, local industries, retail, and other work-related activities. One couple produced “Portuguese cards.” In the medical sector, a family-run enterprise was not uncommon. Surgeons engaged the help of their wives and daughters to assist women who needed medical treatment.

Many Sephardi women carried on the family business once their husbands had passed away, as did the widow of Jeuda Azulay, who dealt in tobacco. After the death of her husband, Sara Mendes da Silva instructed different ships to travel to Lisbon, Brazil, and Goa with sugar, tea, and silk. Johebed de Casseres took over the cotton trade business of her late husband, and Guiomar Henriques ran a business of international sugar trade established by her deceased husband Gabriel Correia. The widow of the pharmacist Isaac de Castro must have done pharmaceutical work in cooperation with her husband, and thus carried on the work after Isaac passed away. Among the Ashkenazi Jews of Amsterdam, the pattern was identical; these Ashkenazi women also continued their husband’s business in the latter’s absence or after his death, as did their Sephardi and Dutch counterparts.

Thus these women not only pursued income for their families, especially to support their children, but they often passed the work on to family members.
For instance, Sara de Fonseca helped her husband in his tobacco industry, and she continued to run the business for more than thirteen years after her husband died, giving employment to fourteen people and supporting two families, including that of her son.98 Clara Musaphia, like her husband before her, and her son afterward, traded in meal for, among other things, the preparation of matzot for the community.99 The widow of Abraham Nunes continued to supply the community with wax after the death of her husband.100 It seems plausible that she assisted her husband in his work because he was blind.101 After continuing the business for a few years, her son-in-law, Abraham Lopes Arias, took over; at that time, she seemed too old to work.102 Thus Sephardi widows often acted like others in their surroundings by keeping the work within the family and transmitting it to the next generation.103

Sephardi women, like others, also looked for branches of work to do in their own right.104 Some added to their income by running a shop;105 others handled retail products.106 One woman supplied the community with material for shrouds,107 and another owned a private pawn bank.108 Almost none would take up open-air work, as did their Ashkenazi female counterparts, who operated in markets in the streets, or went from house to house selling their second-hand clothes and other merchandise.109

Some Sephardi women made money by renting lodgings to refugees, travelers, or children.110 As an extension of domestic activity, a great deal of needlework was done at home, a work pattern matching that of other Jewish and Gentile women in the Dutch Republic and elsewhere in early modern Europe.111 Sephardi women were seen knitting at the doors of their houses, close to the light.112 Domestic inventories often included spinning wheels as well as pillows women used while knitting.113 The orphanage Mazon Abanot received income by having the orphaned girls sew or knit clothes ordered by persons from the greater community.114 We assume, however, that the manufacture of clothes was not done on any large commercial scale, as it was an officially forbidden craft for Jews. Wealthy Portuguese families mostly had their clothes made by Dutch tailors.115

Sephardi women also found work within the different branches of the Amsterdam Sephardi community. We generally find Sephardi women, born and bred in an observant Jewish milieu, working in those areas that demanded a solid knowledge of the Jewish law and dedication to an observant way of life.116 Ribca Salom Pardo, for example, a poor widow and daughter of Hakham David Pardo, took care of the mikveh.117 Abigail de Leon, daughter of Rabbi Jacob Juda Leon, helped with the Jewish ceremony surrounding the baking of kosher
Sephardi women also acted as midwives. One of them was Simca de Campos, the granddaughter of Hakham Isaac Uziel from North Africa. Others worked as assistants to the poor or were in charge of the communal pawnshop. Some were appointed as mortalhadeyras, making or repairing shrouds. Those who repaired shrouds also washed the corpses of female members. The day-to-day running of the many hevrot and yeshivot also called for a female staff, while, especially in the eighteenth century, institutionalized charities, such as the old-age home, the girls’ orphanage, and other charitable organizations, also provided work for women.

Many women were employed to care for the sick, dying, or elderly—much like elsewhere in the Jewish world and as conversas had acted on the Iberian Peninsula. We should not, however, overestimate the role of western Sephardi women who were active in caring for the old and the sick, especially in the seventeenth century. If a type of work became too hard or unpleasant, Sephardi women, the ex-conversas, generally turned their backs on it, in accordance with their Iberian preference. They brought with them, from the Peninsula to the Amsterdam milieu, a disdain for manual labor, an attitude they were disinclined to abandon. As a result, these tasks were mostly given to Sephardim from North Africa and the Levant, and to Ashkenazim, Italian Jews, Dutch Christians, and blacks. Pressing poverty in the eighteenth century, however, led some western Sephardi women to take this kind of work themselves.

Moreover, Portuguese Jews, the rich and the poor, liked to be served, and had a “passion for domestic servants,” as Bennassar has put it. In many cases, they even took their own servants with them from the Peninsula or from elsewhere. Thus, in most Sephardi households, domestic personnel consisted of Ashkenazi men and women, Gentiles, mulattos, moriscos, and blacks. If we do locate Sephardi women working for Portuguese families, they were mostly employed in higher positions, while a staff of other servants was below them in the hierarchy.

We do not meet too many Sephardi women at the margins of society. Only a handful were arrested and charged for prostitution, mostly out of sight of the Portuguese leadership. In Amsterdam, as in other places in the Dutch Republic, we come across prostitutes with Ashkenazi backgrounds more than once. Only a few Sephardi prostitutes could be found there. One of them was Gracia Baruch, who confessed that since divorcing from her husband David Athias in Amsterdam, she had made a living as a whore. We also meet a Sephardi madam who ran a brothel in her home, where Jews could meet “Christian women.” Very few Sephardi prostitutes ended up in workhouses. The above-
mentioned Gracia Baruch, however, was condemned to six years in Rotterdam’s workhouse to make “a living with her hands.”137

The pattern of economic activity of Sephardi women in Amsterdam was not a new phenomenon in Jewish history; it goes back to the Middle Ages and even earlier.138 We can observe the same pattern back on the Peninsula and in different parts of the Diaspora. In Spain and Portugal, conversas were also active in a variety of professions.139 There, they were used to acting on their own as well—taking care of their families and businesses while their husbands went on trips for prolonged periods.140 Sephardi women in southern France were also involved in business while their partners stayed behind on the Iberian Peninsula. In their new residences, they were independent enough to try selling their properties in Spain and Portugal, to collect their dowries, or to recover debts owed them.141 A woman in Bordeaux even lent money to individuals in Madrid.142 In Hamburg, as well, businesses were continued by women in the absence of their husbands.143 In the Ottoman Empire, too, Jewish women were involved in a variety of commercial enterprises, from the top to the bottom of the economic ladder.144

In short, the picture might be not as clear and obvious as that of the Dutch and Ashkenazi women, yet many Sephardi women in Amsterdam were very keen on earning a living or maintaining the value of their capital, in their own right or by assisting their partners, as they had done on the Iberian Peninsula and now continued in the Sephardi Diaspora.

**Upbringing and Education**

Female activities in trade and crafts demanded an educated background. To our surprise, we did not find educational institutions for women among the Amsterdam Sephardim until the last part of the eighteenth century.145 This was largely due to the protected position of Sephardi women in the home, in keeping with the Iberian tradition.146 The general level of literacy among the Portuguese women, though, was quite high.147 Johebed de Casseres, who we saw continuing her husband’s business, knew how to write (signing the contract of her intended marriage at City Hall) and thus must have received an education earlier.148 The seventeenth-century Portuguese community could also boast of several female poets.149 Yet, there were girls from more moneyed or educated families, such as the Spinozas, the Pardos, or the Juda Leons, who did not even know how to write their first names.150 This was true particularly of Portuguese brides from poorer families.151
The more prosperous and educated Portuguese families probably hired tutors to teach their daughters at home, as was also customary in affluent Dutch circles—rich Dutch girls often attended a school as well. At home, these Sephardi girls must have learned at least how to read the Portuguese language, sew, and knit, and they were instructed “in the fear of God,” similar to the curriculum of the girls’ orphanage, Mazon Abanot. Some also learned to read and write in Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, and even Hebrew! Books and dictionaries in the above-mentioned languages were found in the inventories of their houses.

Music was perhaps part of the curriculum, as it was in well-to-do non-Jewish families. In the inventories of the Amsterdam Sephardim we find “clavecimbels,” and Francisca Duarte is said to have sung at meetings in the so-called Muiderkring (a circle of men of letters and musicians meeting around the Dutch poet and playwright P. C. Hooft since 1621 in the Muidererslot, a castle near Amsterdam).

Beyond that, some Sephardi women must have been trained for commercial and vocational work, privately and in small circles; thus, many could enter into trade, industry, and crafts as adults. An example is offered through the records of Clara and Rachel Belilhos (their father was a teacher at the Ets Haim [Tree-of-Life] yeshivah), who were taught to be printers through the instruction of the Hakham and were given the tools to print ketubot.

The situation of Ashkenazi women was somewhat different, although they were also educated at home, like the Ashkenazi girl who was trained as a “naaister” (seamstress). On the other hand, these Ashkenazi women seemed to have lived less protected and secluded lives than Sephardi women. Ashkenazi girls, for example, were also sent out of the house to learn a trade. This custom stands in contrast to that prevailing among the Dutch Sephardim. At least in the first decades of the seventeenth century, Sephardi girls were not supposed to go into the streets “according to the customs of Portugal” (as stated in 1622). Even though rules were not strictly adhered to, we have no proof of Sephardi girls sent out of the house to be taught a profession elsewhere.

The educational background of many Sephardi women also becomes clear when we see the tasks with which their spouses, sons, or other family members charge them, in the upbringing of children at home in the absence of males (in life or death). Francisco Lopes Suasso requested that his mother assist his wife in educating his children in the same manner he had done. Jacob Oeb, on his deathbed, allowed his wife Rachel Athias to stay in his estate on the condition that she would, herself, raise his son David until his marriage or he reached age twenty-five. In his last will, Joseph Mendes da Costa entrusted the upbring-
ing of his six children to their grandmother and aunt. Ester de Abraham Keyzer, widow of Guidon Labat, gave her sister instructions to care for her four children and take them into her house. This all proves that many Dutch Sephardi women did receive educations, general and professional. This not only enabled them to take proper care of their children, but also prepared them for pursuing a career.

**Family Life**

In most cases, Sephardi women were respected by their spouses, sons, or other family members, who, in their turn, commanded deference from their children toward their female guardians. Francisco Lopes Suasso commanded his children offer “love, obedience and much respect toward their mother.” Moseh Moreno Monsanto, after appointing his wife to guard his children and attend to their education, required complete obedience from the children toward their mother. The same pattern existed with Emmanuel Abenatar, who told his children to respect and obey their mother.

As elsewhere, Sephardi women must have played a central role within the family, not only on their own merits but also through their husbands, who gave their wives the legal instruments to do so. Various sources speak of a language of love and emotions, such as those exhibited by Manuel Levy Duarte and his wife Constantina Levy Duarte, who talked about their marital love, as did Aron de Pinto and Abigail Nunes Henriques.

Male partners often expressed warm feelings and appreciation toward not only their wives but also toward their mothers, other members of the family, and toward female friends. Francisco Lopes Suasso speaks of “his beloved wife” and also relates to his mother with tenderness, making sure she will live in his house. Joseph Mendes da Costa used the words “love and devotion” when he tried to define the attitude he demanded from his family, because they were charged with the education of his children. The cousin of Manuel Levy Duarte and Constantina Levy Duarte, Gracia Alvares, apparently was instrumental in the upbringing of their grandchildren. The couple, therefore, instructed the grandchildren to express their gratitude toward Gracia, and, as a gesture of appreciation, Manuel (once a widower) granted Gracia a yearly income, accommodation, and household effects.

Women also knew how to express their emotions in their own right. Gracia da Silva sent a letter of condolence to Ribca Medina Chamis in which she
expressed her regret on the death of Ribca’s sister-in-law and prayed God would help her brother and nephews overcome this “grande perda.”175 Rachel Belmonde left her niece money (in bonds), in light of the affection she felt toward her.176 Sara Soares Henriques was very sensitive toward her brother, requesting that he not accompany her corpse and not to say kaddish for her, because she was convinced such ceremonies would move him too much.177 Ester Arias expressed her gratitude for help and assistance from a male friend through a legacy.178 She also left a bedcover of yellow silk to a female friend (“vrintind”), the wife of Salomon de Jacob Belmonte, as a memento (“tot een gedagtenis”).179 Ribca Teixeira spoke to her adopted son with words of affection, saying she had always loved him very fondly and educated him with much care.180 This episode also shows the tenderness and emotions toward children in times of high infant mortality, which also affected the Dutch Sephardim.181

One should not take for granted that Sephardi men and women would always respect or tolerate each other. Jacob Justo, for example, beat his wife and locked her in the attic,182 and Joseph Montes assaulted the wife of Daniel Fresco.183 Moseh Moreno Monsanto was very bitter about the behavior of his daughter Rachel, born during his first marriage, and he did not want to deal with her any more.184 The other side of the coin shows Sephardi women as the initiators of decisive marital actions and not willing to be underdogs. Margareta Rodrigues, accompanied by her daughter and a black servant, left her husband and house, taking along most of the household effects.185 The wife of Jacob Pereira Bueno de Mesquita had enough of marital strife as well; she disappeared from her house and husband at night, taking along her little daughter.186

Dutch Sephardi women were, first and foremost, in charge of the household, like other women of the European bourgeoisie of their time in general, and the Iberian society in particular.187 The above-mentioned Rachel Medina Chamis, for example, registered her income and expenses meticulously, as she wrote it all down in a small booklet. We note the large operation she managed. She collected the rent from her houses and rooms; hired and paid her personnel, the butcher, the tailor, and the doctor; bought her food, clothes, wigs, and wood; and took care of the extended family present in her household.188 Another example is Isabel Alvarez, who took care of Aaron Alvarez in all that related to food, clothes, and accommodation, as instructed by Manuel Levy Duarte.189

Sephardi women seem to have been very dedicated to the life and well-being of their families, as they had been earlier on the Iberian Peninsula, where some even tried to liberate their imprisoned husbands by sending pleading petitions
to the Inquisitorial tribunal. In Amsterdam, their dedication is expressed in letters, in the wording of last wills, in direct cash gifts, or in natura like clothes or grants given through foundations.

Often, they seem to have been quite strong characters. Family members came to ask for financial help, if the women were rich enough to provide it. These, of course, were women of power, whose assets allowed them to have influence and make decisions, and who were aware, as were their male partners, of the importance of guaranteeing the family assets, status, and reputation. Often, they were involved in contracting marriages. Although Josua de Prado participated in family affairs by bequeathing his niece and nephew his house (including furniture, jewelry, and warehouses) on the condition that they would marry each other, his mother, Rachel de Prado, widow of Isaac de Prado, wrote much more emotionally and perceptively concerning this issue. She maintained she did not want to force anything upon anyone, but did so implicitly, including a legacy to her two grandchildren, then sixteen and nine years old, on the condition that they would get married—stipulations they obeyed.

There are references to ethnic-religious criteria that females were very keen and proud to preserve. Thus Dutch Sephardi women often made inheritance conditional on having children marrying members of the Spanish or Portuguese Jewish nation. Ribca Belmonte appointed as her heirs the child or children of her brother Samuel Belmonte, but only if such heirs entered into a legal marriage with a Spanish or Portuguese Jewish man or woman, and not with someone from any other nation. Rachel Medina Chamis, widow of Joseph Henriques de Medina, appointed her two nephews to be her sole heirs on the condition that they marry someone from the Portuguese Jewish nation. If not, they would be disinherited.

Sephardi women from less well-to-do circles seemed to be equally strong, fighting their way through life, trying to get dowries for their daughters in order to marry them off well, and arranging educational and work opportunities for their sons in the Dutch Republic or abroad. The source material for the less fortunate is somewhat less abundant and evident than what is available regarding the richer segment of the Dutch Sephardim.

**Social Activities**

The life of Sephardi women was not just restricted to family, education, and work. They also were active in the social life of the community—some in works
of benevolence, others in the literary academies (inside and outside the Jewish community), and perhaps in many more projects.

Many women were involved in charitable activities, eager to help the poor, obsessed by concepts of sin and reward, and keen on status and prestige. The conditions for bequests laid down in the last wills of Portuguese widows in early modern Amsterdam strikingly resemble those granted by widows among the Iberian elite, who were also very much inclined to make sure their name was immortalized, their family privileged and provided for, and the poor taken care of. Often, before they died women personally divided, instructed others to divide, or were told to divide money or goods among the poor.

The fact that Sephardi women were particularly sensitive to the honor of unmarried women, by providing dowries to girls through private gifts and foundations, is not so much an expression of their bond to Judaism as it is a manifestation of the southern European culture they internalized.

Charitable institutions that were established and administered—at least officially—by Sephardi women could not be found in Amsterdam. This phenomenon is quite unique in the Jewish world of this period, because in Italy, Germany, and also within the Ashkenazi community of Amsterdam, women established hevrot of their own. Also, in Dutch and European society at large, charitable organizations set up and administered by women were a normal phenomenon.

In many charitable organizations in the Portuguese community of Amsterdam, women could be members but had no right to vote, while financial matters always remained in male hands. Here again, we notice the influence of southern European society being transferred to the North; in Spain and Italy, especially, we find the same pattern. There, as among the Dutch Sephardim, women were involved in charitable organizations but, in most cases, had no part in initiating or administrating them.

The more well-to-do women joined hevrot solely for charitable purposes. It could also have been a matter of status. In cases of membership in the boys’ orphanage, for example, the corpses of the women would be accompanied to the cemetery by orphans and members, while prayers for their soul would be delivered in the yeshivah. For example, Gracia Senior, apparently very keen to be accompanied, mentioned her wishes on purpose in her last will. The presence of the orphans, accompanying Gracia’s corpse, implied that she used to be a member of the orphanage and that she had left legacies to each of the orphans and/or the orphanage at large. Her benevolence, evident and perceptible, enhanced her prestige. Yet membership of women in these types of organizations
remained generally rather low. However, we see more involvement of Sephardi women in organizations where, besides charitable activities, they also got something back in return for their membership—insurance in times of widowhood, assistance during illness and old age, or help with funeral procedures.

Here we realize the precarious situation of many middle-class Sephardi women in early modern Amsterdam, who, lacking the protective membership of guilds, were looking for other forms of insurance and protection and did not want to rely on communal sedaca, which was beneath their honor and self-esteem. This explains why the largest contingent of Sephardim in hevrot, such as Maskil el Dal (Enlightener-of-the-Poor) and Temime Darech (Straightforward-People), consisted of female members. These hevrot were mostly intended as mutual aid organizations, besides being a venue for studying the Holy Law and taking care of the poor. Some hevrot even had their own medical staffs. This indicates how intensely these women were looking for some sort of security.

Although the administration of organized charity was mostly the affair of men, charitable initiatives were, to a great extent, directed toward poor females, including unmarried women and widows. This was not only through the official channels of the Portuguese community but also through private organizations like Sidcat Nassim (Charity-for-Women), Mispat Abanot (Justice-for-Girls), and Parnasad Almanot (Livelihood-for-Widows), to name a few. Besides, many Dutch Sephardim left money in their wills or through other legal and financial instruments especially meant for women—in Holland and elsewhere in the Sephardi Diaspora, in the form of dowries or yearly allowances. Here we see an intense focus on the well-being of women, which existed in Southern Europe and carried over to Northern Europe.

Currently, information is scarce on other social aspects of Sephardi female activities within their Amsterdam community, though, as pointed out earlier, we know that women were actively involved in the literary academies. In pictures we see Sephardi women dancing in taverns. Apparently, they disguised themselves for Purim; the rabbanim talked about masquerades of men and women during that festival. Did they celebrate the shabbatot and holidays in the company of family and friends? We see them preparing for Pesach and celebrating a seder. They might have gone out to visit friends, as they were used to doing on the Peninsula, because there is talk of female friends. The wife of Antonio Alvares (alias Joseph Israel Alvares) must have been all dressed up and adorned with jewelry when she went out to meet acquaintances in the company of her husband. In his will, the latter did not grant his wife a chain with pearls, because it was only on loan for his wife to wear on social outings. We do not
know to what extent Sephardi women in Holland were instrumental in organizing musical evenings or other social events at home. Such events were certainly the custom among Amsterdam Ashkenazim. Sephardi women probably accompanied their husbands on their visits to theaters. Further research might give us insight into many more aspects of social life among the Dutch Sephardi women.

Identification toward Judaism

It is well known that it was chiefly women in converso families on the Iberian Peninsula who transmitted Jewish traditions from parent to child. Did Amsterdam Sephardi women become at all involved in normative Judaism or did they not take it all that seriously? Could we point to some development over time? Although there are some examples of female behavior that prove the opposite, the impression is often that of a strong dedication to Judaism, at least during the seventeenth century.

Upon arrival in the city, many Sephardi women expressed the desire to adhere to Jewish life freely, as can be deduced from the text on the tombstone of Sara Pereira: “I was born in Lusitania and prayed to God to be buried in a liberated country. And so I came 87 years of age, old and cripple, to enjoy the privilege I dreamt of.”

Some even seem to have mastered Hebrew in Amsterdam, as in the case of Sara Sarfatim. Her gravestone, engraved in Hebrew, tells how she studied the Holy Tongue and prayed the prayers aravit, shakharit, and minkhah every day. Dedication to Jewish tradition and legacy can also be found in the case of the widow of H. H. R. Abraham Gabay Yzidro, Sara, who made an effort to have the work of her late husband printed, in order to keep it for posterity and have children learn from it. In the “Dedicatoria,” she shows herself to be quite knowledgeable about Judaism and presents some verses from the Tanakh in Hebrew, though she writes the main text in Portuguese, apparently not knowing enough Hebrew.

Most of the New Christian women arrived in the Republic without a solid knowledge of an observant Jewish way of life, but we are not sure they all ended up mastering Hebrew or being as knowledgeable about Judaism as the aforementioned Saras. For Sephardi women, there were no study circles or institutes of Jewish Studies, such as those set up for adult men and boys. Yet in the end, in
Amsterdam they must have known enough to teach their children at home, as they had done earlier on the Peninsula.

In Amsterdam, they instructed their children, boys and girls alike, in the basic principles of Judaism, often as explicitly requested by their spouses. Moses Abarbanel instructed his wife to educate his children, among them several daughters, “in the fear of God and according to the Laws given through Moses to Israel.”²²⁵ Thus in many cases, the Jewish tradition was taken up again and carried on by men and women, stimulated by the first generation of Sephardim in the Dutch Republic. Emmanuel Abenatar told his children, boys and girls alike, to practice (at home) the Holy Law given by God on Mount Sinai with all soberness and mildness. By doing so, they would be ensured God’s blessings.²²⁶

Sephardi women could learn about Judaism through books written in Spanish or Portuguese—for instance, in Menasseh ben Israel’s Thesovro, where, in the last part, he addressed himself to the “very noble and honest senhoras of the Portuguese nation, who were arriving anew every day from Spain.” Therein, he taught them the basic laws of Judaism and moral precepts related to women.²²⁷ He admitted that he was very much aware of the absence of good instruction for women. For that matter, he urged the Sephardi women to read his work and get away from “idle books,” especially on the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays. In his book, Sephardi women could read about marriage and how to run a Jewish home. Not only Jewish law was prescribed, he maintained, but also moral precepts of which he told them to take good note. He instructed them how to keep a kosher household, ordered them to cover their hair, and to behave nicely and humbly toward their husbands. He taught the women certain prayers, all of them in Portuguese, apparently presuming that most of them had not and would not master Hebrew.²²⁸

We do not know whether there were female teachers of Judaism, at least not until the end of the eighteenth century, although there is mention of a mestra in the girls’ orphanage Mazon Abanot.²²⁹ Perhaps Sephardi women who reached Amsterdam from the Jewish Diaspora, and were born and reared in an observant Jewish milieu, took the responsibility to introduce the Portuguese ex-conversas into Jewish learning.

At any rate, women found their own ways to gather knowledge about Judaism. Abigail Dias da Fonseca, for example, invited the yeshivah Temime Darech to hold its meetings in her house and apparently listened to the discussions from behind a screen.²³⁰ Perhaps, besides the Thesovro of Menasseh ben Israel, Sephardi women also glanced at the Menorat Ha-Maor, which Isaac Aboab, in
fourteenth-century Spain, already intended for reading by women (and others), and which was made available in Spanish after 1629 under the title of *Almenara de la Luz*.

In their last wills, many Sephardi women tell us how proud they were to be Jews of the Portuguese nation, believing in the Law God gave Moses on Mount Sinai. When we read how often they pleaded with God to pardon them for their sins and prayed for salvation of their souls, we realize they were still carrying on aspects of Catholicism they supposedly left behind.

The words of Dutch Sephardi women show a strong identification with Judaism, but what about their deeds? Many left legacies to charity and religious brotherhoods in Amsterdam and beyond, showing solidarity with Jews, mostly of their own “Spanish and Portuguese Jewish nation,” not only in the city but also in other areas of the Sephardi Diaspora and in Eretz Israel. Johebed de Casseres, for example, seems to have been actively involved in the Amsterdam Portuguese community, being a member of Aby Jetomim (Father-of-Orphans) and Temime Darech. She also left money to the above-mentioned hevrot, Ets Haim, the poor, and the sedaca box of the Amsterdam Portuguese community. Her charity, however, did not stop at the Dutch borders, like that of many others, but had an international dimension. She left money to a poor family member in Bayonne, remembered the people in the Holy Land, and participated in the *mitzvah* to redeem Jewish prisoners worldwide through gifts to the Cativos foundation. Abigail Dias da Fonseca, in addition to leaving money for the sedaca box and other Amsterdam institutions—such as the yeshiva Ets Haim and the hevrot Aby Jetomim and Honen Dalim (Pitier-of-the-Poor)—also set up a dowry fund for poor girls, preferably of her own family or that of her husband, on the condition that they married a person of the Portuguese Jewish nation, somewhere in the Sephardi Diaspora. In doing so, she also stressed the importance of ethnic and religious values and made them concrete in the Republic and beyond.

Strong adherence to Judaism, actively practiced among Sephardi females in the Dutch Republic, can also be gathered from various documents, especially from those of the seventeenth century. Sephardi women often excluded family members from inheritance if the latter were not inclined to live in countries where Judaism could be professed openly. For some women, who were very serious in their dedication to Judaism, Amsterdam meant only an intermediate station, the ultimate goal being to settle down or be buried in the Holy Land. Felipa de Saa prepared to leave for Eretz Israel, leaving worldly goods like real estate in Portugal and jewelry in Amsterdam. Ester Pinta, widow of Jose
Pinto, wanted to be buried in the Holy Land together with her husband, and saved her money for that purpose.\(^\text{238}\) Probably under the influence of the appearance of the false messiah Sabbatai Tsevi, in 1666 Refi ca Barug prepared herself for a trip to Jerusalem.\(^\text{239}\)

Many were apparently filled with a hatred of the Christian faith, shouting and spitting from their windows, yelling at a Sephardi woman who left the community and went over to the Reformed Church, and blaming her for lowering herself to the level of a dog and the law of a dog.\(^\text{240}\) A handful of women ignored this pressure; for instance, Gracia Baruch, after her divorce from David Athias, left Amsterdam for Brussels to join the Catholic Church, although she knew this would gain little appreciation from her friends.\(^\text{241}\)

Sephardi women further proved their allegiance to Judaism by their attitude toward the synagogue and its services. They filled the synagogue with presents such as *Sifre Torah*, embroidered mantles, and silver objects including *rimmonim*, plates, and cans.\(^\text{242}\) They also made vows (promessas) during services and contributed money to cover the expenses for the building of the famous *Esnoga*.\(^\text{243}\) It was important to them that prayers for their deceased family members were delivered and candles lit, and they often set money aside for charity and for kaddish and *haskavot* prayers to be said upon their own deaths.\(^\text{244}\)

The eighteenth century offers us a somewhat different picture. Concepts of sin and reward are mentioned less; religion did not seem to play a prominent role in many cases. In different *derashot*, a Hakham, named Ayllon, deplored the appearance of his female subjects: “Instead of observing Jewish law, being decent and pure, today they lack all the virtues that crowned them earlier . . . you can see the hair of these women, while their dress is not decent either.”\(^\text{245}\)

Because of his plea, the leaders of the community tried to change the tide of further imitation of European trends, advising their male members to instruct their women and children to dress modestly, to tell their wives not to go into the streets with their hair uncovered, and to refrain from wearing clothes “prohibited by our Holy Law.”\(^\text{246}\) These admonitions were not very effective. Wealthy Sephardi women continued to dress according to the European fashion of their time. Many portraits from the eighteenth century show Sephardi women with low-necked gowns and uncovered hair, which would not get the approval of the Amsterdam hakhamim, and certainly not of the above-cited Hakham Ayllon.\(^\text{247}\)

Exceptions certainly existed. In the course of the eighteenth century, several Sephardi women held strongly to their Jewish faith, especially those who only recently had come as conversas from the Catholic world.\(^\text{248}\) In many other cases, however, the eighteenth-century Dutch Sephardi community bore witness to a
process of assimilation and acculturation among its women, especially among
the upper class. Often they freed themselves from precise adherence to obser-
vant Jewish laws. Others continued to live strictly according to Jewish tradi-
tion and committed themselves seriously to transfer this legacy to the next
generation.

It is difficult to find a common denominator for the wide spectrum of Se-
phardi women living in Holland’s Golden Age. How should we account for
their courage, strength, and entrepreneurship on leaving a country of birth,
making long-distance trips, and starting a new life in an unfamiliar environ-
ment and atmosphere?

Some lived in Amsterdam, not only with their extended families, but, more
often than not, alone—be they single, married, or widowed, sometimes head-
ing a household. Yet, in many cases, Dutch Sephardim, including the women
among them, gave protection and showed solidarity and responsibility toward
each other—sharing houses, inviting loners to join them, all of them living close
to the center of Jewish life and social action.

Some documents give us the impression of happy women, now that they
and their offspring were settled in a free world, proudly identifying with Juda-
ism and actively involved in community life. Yet there were also cases of Se-
phardi women who turned their backs on the Sephardi community, or were
dismissed by its lay and spiritual leadership because of improper behavior. The
latter built a new life outside the community borders, in the Dutch Republic or
beyond, disconnected from the Jewish milieu.

Many Sephardi women occupied influential positions in the family circle
and in the Dutch and international economy. Various sources make us realize
that, for a large group of Sephardi women, life in Amsterdam was not very easy.
Many had to work hard to make a living, often became dependent on charity,
and, sometimes, did not easily find a partner.

Because they were keenly aware of status and hierarchy, various distinctions
were made between rich and poor (with almost no process of upward social
mobility), but also between Sephardi women coming as conversas from the
Peninsula versus those arriving in the city from the Sephardi Diaspora—mostly
from North Africa, Italy, or the Levant. The permanent presence of women
from the Diaspora was not always guaranteed in Amsterdam; moreover, they
were often employed to care for the “upper-class ex-conversas” (even the now
impoverished among them) in less elevated jobs.249
In the meantime, the ex-conversa Dutch Sephardi females did not manage to break completely from their Iberian past, manifesting Iberian influences in their attitude toward physical work, charity, and in the way they often hid behind or let themselves be represented by male partners or friends, through whom they were also often controlled. Consequently, the lifestyle and behavior of these Sephardi women contrasted with their surroundings, at least for the first generation.

Even though, in the course of the eighteenth century, we find ample proof of an ongoing process toward acculturation, we can still detect, among the Sephardi women of Holland’s Golden Age, traces of their Iberian heritage—feelings of exclusivity and superiority, proud identification with their ethnic-religious origin, and dedication to the Jewish and social life of their community. These communal characteristics represented a specific subculture that gave these Sephardi women a distinction all their own.

Notes


Women and Entrepreneurship. Female Traders in the Northern Netherlands, c. 1580–1815 (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Aksant, 2007); for Ashkenazi women, see Willem F. H. Oldewelt, Kohier van de Personeele Quotisatie te Amsterdam over het jaar 1742, vol. II. (Amsterdam: Genootschap Amstelodanum, 1945), 73, 87, 88—where many Ashkenazi women appear as merchants; see further notarial deeds on Ashkenazi women operating independently as described below. The frequency with which Ashkenazi women appeared in court for crime, prostitution, and the like also tells something about the large freedom of movement enjoyed by Ashkenazi women in Dutch society: Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld, “Portugese joden en misdaad in de Republiek,” Pro Memorie 2, no. 8 (2006): 222; and 81.

7. See the welfare lists of 1700: SAA, PA 334, no. 176, 349, 1 Nisan 5460 [21 March 1700].


15. SAA PA 334, no. 30, 331, 14 Adar 5551 [18 February 1791]; ibid., no. 290, 1–30, 5551 [1791].


17. Ets Haim Library, Amsterdam, Manuscript 48 D 43: “Memoria de las personas que ay en la Nacion cazadas, en 19 de Sivan 5435 [13 June 1675].” Here, out of the 558 married persons, 300 were taxed for the internal *finta* tax; SAA PA 334, no. 174, 1033–1046, 7 Tishri 5435 [7 October 1674].


20. Antonia Nunes, spinster, came alone to Amsterdam from Viseu (SAA NA 5075, no. 611B, 589v–590, Not. Rutens, 6 August 1619); see also women coming to Amsterdam from Málaga (SAA PA 334, no. 215, 28, 26 Av 5424 [17 August 1664]).

21. SAA PA 334, no. 826, 1, 30 August 1673, last will of Gracia Senior, alias Doña Isabel Henriques, widow of Duarte Coronel Enriques.

22. See the case of Bartholomeus Rodrigues Henriques: SAA NA 5075, no. 2205, 357, Not. A. Lock, 2 September 1658.

23. Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam*, 161, n. 56; idem, 160. The husband involved here is David Mexia, who in 1618 was imprisoned by the Portuguese Inquisition.


25. See the case of Refica Gomez de Sevilla, who apparently arrived alone in Amsterdam in 1652, to be supported by the community till her death in 1659. Meanwhile, in 1656, she appeared to have become a widow without any trace of a husband (f.e. SAA PA 334, no. 173, 194, 214; and ibid., no. 174, 167, 303: years 5412–5419 [1651–1659]).

26. SAA PA 334, no. 1141, 90 and 92, 12 Adar 5378 [9 March 1618].

27. For the woman from Oran, see SAA PA 334, no. 216, 74, 28 Tevet 5432 [29 December 1671]; for Sara Cardoza and her two children arriving from Venice, see SAA PA 334,
no. 1142, 26, 23 January 5384 [1624]; ibid., 110/219, 5396 [1636]; ibid., no. 172, 4, 6, 10–11, 24, 35, 59, 64, 77, 82–83, and 85–86: years 5399–5400 [1639–1640].

28. SAA PA 334, no. 217, 5, 7 Hesvan 5437 [14 October 1676].


31. SAA PA 334, no. 119a, map 16, undated [apparently 1671], 486–487, 28 November 1671; ibid., NA 5075, no. 2237, 1105–1108, Not. A. Lock, written 28 November 1671; opened 23 December 1671, last will of Sara Alvares.

32. SAA PA 334, no. 667, 1, 7 December 1787.

33. SAA PA 334, no. 19, 216, 28 Kislev 5407 [6 December 1646].

34. SAA PA 334, no. 630, 20 January 1741. The crisis (“Geschillen”) took place during the 1720s.

35. SAA RA 5061, no. 310, 162v, 2 April 1655.

36. Last will of Abraham Israel Torres, alias Bartholome Fernandes Torres (SAA NA 5075, no. 2890, 17–19, Not. P. Padthuysen, 10 November 1661).

37. SAA NA 5075, no. 942, 295, 4 July 1633.

38. The number of persons within a family unit is counted on the basis of 8 pounds (livras: 327,45 gram) matzo flour per person (SAA PA 334, no. 10, 1, 5393 [1632–3]); see the case of Sara Lopes Pita (SAA PA 334, no. 172, 205, 5403 [1643]; ibid., 292, 5405 [1645]; ibid., no. 173, 213, 5412 [1652]; ibid., no. 174, 609, 5424 [1663]).


42. SAA PA 334, no. 1304, 10–14, 15 Kislev 5409 [30 November 1648]; Arnold Wiznitzer, “The Minute Book of Congregations Zur Israel of Recife and Magen Abraham of Mau-ricia, Brazil,” *American Jewish Historical Society*, vol. 42, no. 3 (March 1953): 217–302. The signature of Isaias Salom, for example, is registered in the Brazilian document. He left for Brazil in 1638 (SAA NA 5075, no. 1090, 72, Not. J. van de Ven, 27 May 1638). He appears on the *imposta* tax list of the Portuguese community in Brazil in 1649 (SAA PA 334, no. 1304, 10–14, 15 Kislev 5409 [30 November 1648]). Meanwhile, his wife and her “familia” (one daughter, apparently married in 1652), winning a dowry from a private dowry foundation (SAA PA 334, no. 173, 233, 28 Iyyar 5412 [6 May 1652]), are for years being supported in Amsterdam by the Portuguese community, as of 1647 until her death in 1675. In 1668 the mother Judica turned from “wife of” into “widow of” without Isaias being around (SAA PA 334, no. 173, 11, 28, 29, 214, 259: years 5408 [1647–1648], 5412–5413 [1652–1653]; ibid., no. 174, 6, 78, 21, 31, 48, 50, 77, 87, 119, 143, years 5413–5416 [1653–1656]; ibid., no. 215, 60, 63, 253, 290, 296: years 5424–25 [1664], 5428 [1668]; ibid., no. 216, 112, 186, 189: years 5432 [1672], 5435 [1675]), except for one time, in 1664 only (SAA PA 334, no. 215, 71, 16 Shevat 5424 [12 February 1664]).

43. For strict moral codes for women in the Ottoman Empire, see Dorn Sezgin, “Jewish Women in the Ottoman Empire,” 223–224; for New Christian women in the Iberian Peninsula isolated in and around their home, see Bernardo López Belinchón, *Honra, libertad y hacienda. Hombres de negocios y judíos sefardíes*. (Alcalá: Instituto Internacional de Estudios Sefardíes y Andalusíes, Universidad de Alcalá, 2001), 257–258.

44. SAA PA 334, no. 13, 86/43, 25 Tishri 5393 [10 October 1632]; ibid., no. 19, 62/147, 14 Adar 5400 [8 March 1640]; ibid., 214, 15 Elul 5406 [26 August 1646]; ibid., 479, Tisha be-Av 5420 [17 July 1660]; ibid., 754, 4 Hesvan 5437 [11 October 1676]; ibid., no. 24a, 11, 11 and 29 Tishri 5426 [20 September and 8 October 1665].

45. Menasseh ben Israel, *Thesovro dos dinim, ultima parte na qual se co[m]tem todos os preceitos, ritos e cerimônias a[ue] toca à hua perfeiya economica* (Amsterdam: Ioseph be[n] Israel, 5407 [1647]), 122–123. Two years earlier, in 1645, Menasseh had published the first volume, the *Thesovro dos dinim que o povo de Israel he obrigado saber e observar* (Amsterdam: Eliahu Aboab, 5405 [1645]).

46. SAA NA 5075, no. 913, 63v–64v, Not. B. Jansen Verbeek, 4 April 1631.

47. Oud-Rechterlijk Archief Rotterdam 15, no. 149, 249–262, 23 and 26 June 1734.

50. SAA RA 5061, no. 198, 22 May 1658.
51. SAA RA 5061, no. 393, 215v-217v, 11 April 1736; ibid., no. 631, 1 February 1736. On
infanticide in the Dutch Republic, see Sjoerd Faber, “Vrouwen van de rekening: kinder-
moordzaken ten tijde van de Republiek te Amsterdam en in Friesland,” in Soete Minne
en Helsche boosheid, ed. Gert Hekma and Herman Roo denburg (Nijmegen: Sun, 1988),
145–167; Sjoerd Faber, Kindermoord, in het bijzonder in de achttiende eeuw te Amsterdam
52. Levie Bernfeld, “Portugese joden en misdaad in de Republiek,” 208–234; Kaplan,
“Moral Panic,” 108–109. See also Archives of the so-called “Spinhuis” and “Werkhuis.”
53. Grossman, Pious and Rebellious, 47.
54. Michael Mitterauer and Reinhard Sieder, The European Family: Patriarchy to Part-
nership from the Middle Ages to the Present (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982), 31–32; for
conversos on the Peninsula living together in multigenerational families: Rafael Carrasco,
“Preludio al ‘siglo de los Portugueses’: La Inquisición de Cuenca y los judaizantes lusita-
55. Saperstein, Exile in Amsterdam, 193.
56. Last will of Josua de Prado, alias Anthonio de Prado (SAA NA 5075, no. 7490, 19,
57. SAA DBK 5072, no. 209, 56, 26 November 1693.
58. SAA PA 334, no. 973, 76, 27 Tevet 5525 [20 January 1765]; ibid., 80, 22 Iyyar 5528
[9 May 1768], and 22 Tammuz 5531 [4 July 1771].
59. Contract between David Mocatta Nunes and Rachel Keijser, who went to live in
two rooms in his house (SAA PA 334, no. 719, 136, 23 May 1777); for the contract between
Judica de Souza Machado and her son-in-law Isaac de Aron Henriques Moron, see SAA
PA 334, no. 726, 23 May 1752. Living-in-contracts were also made among Ashkenazim:
SAA NA 5075, no. 7533, Not. J. van Vilekens, 28 February 1710: Contract between Ari-
entje Moses, widow of Jacob Abraham Pollack and her son Isacq Jacobs Pollack.
60. SAA PA 334, no. 658, 1733–1739.
62. SAA PA 334, no. 700/SAA NA 5075, no. 2942, Not. P. Padthuysen, 30 March 1703,
last will of Abigail Dias da Fonseca, alias Beatris de Casseres, widow of Aron Dias da
Fonseca.
63. SAA PA 334, no. 1141, 84, 109, 127, 143, 164; years 5378–5382 [1618–1622].
64. SAA PA 334, no. 17, 20 July 5389 [1629].
65. SAA PA 334, no. 120, map 81, 879–886, 6 Shevat 5494 [10 January 1734].
66. For similar patterns in Jewish and Iberian societies of the medieval and early
modern period: Jacob Katz, Tradition and Crisis: Jewish Society at the End of the Middle
Ages (with an afterword and bibliography by Bernard D. Cooperman) (Syracuse, NY:
Syracuse University Press, 2000, 2nd ed.), 117; Casey, Early Modern Spain, 29; Grossman,
Pious and Rebellious, 147.
67. SAA NA 5075, no. 2210, 33–34, Not. A. Lock, 7 January 1661; 14 January 1661, 119–
121; ibid., PA 334, no. 24, 4 Kislev 5421 [7 November 1660]; for Ashkenazi couples just
married in Amsterdam, at first living in parents’ house (SAA NA 5075, no. 7668, Not. A. Tzeewen, 14 July 1735, marriage settlement between Kaatje Cohen and Isaak Andries Levy).

68. SAA NA 5075, no. 7667, Not. A. Tzeewen, no. 318, 4 June 1735.

69. SAA PA 334, no. 173, 112, Rosh Hodesh Tevet 5410 [5 December 1649]; ibid., 167, 5411 [1651].

70. SAA PA 334, no. 20, 1771, Rosh Hodesh Nisan 5454 [27 March 1694].

71. SAA PA 334, no. 174, 250, 5418 [1648], matzot; ibid., no. 215, 4, 5423 [1663], rental subsidy to “Galenas tres irmaas.”

72. SAA PA 334, no. 219, 91, 9 Hesvan 5453 [19 October 1692].

73. SAA NA 5075, no. 7566, no. 133, Not. J. van Vilekens, 21 September 1735.

74. On living of the Amsterdam poor in rooms of small alleys and passageways, see Tirtsah Levie [Bernfeld] and Henk Zantkuyl, Women in Amsterdam in de 17de en 18e eeuw, ed. Renée Kistemaker and Carry van Lakerveld (Purmerend: Amsterdams Historisch Museum and Muusses, 1980), 41–42, 47, 53–57.


77. SAA NA 5075, no. 66788, Not. J. Snoeck, 549, 20 November 1703.

78. There is an abundance of material to be found in the notarial records on this matter. For the Sephardim in early modern Amsterdam, see the case of Lianor Cardoso, widow of Matias Rodrigues, who gave power of attorney to her son Matias Rodrigues Cardoso to look after all her affairs concerning the estate of her deceased husband (SAA NA 5075, no. 646a, 287, Not. S. Cornelis., 9 November 1622; also published in SR 22, no. 1 [1988]: 66, no. 2733); when the latter left, he gave this power of attorney to his brother-in-law: SAA NA 5075, no. 646a, 381, Not. S. Cornelis., 6 February 1623; see also SR 23, no. 1 (1989): 116, no. 2807.

79. HGA, BNR 130, no. 318, Not. S. Favon, 12 March 1742, last will of Jacob Henriques and Sara Lopes d’Almeida, in which the couple gives authority to the surviving partner to administer their possessions; on Dutch law and inheritance, see Ariadne Schmidt, “‘Touching inheritance.’ Mannen vrouwen en de overdracht van bezit in Holland in de 17e eeuw,” Holland 33, no. 3 (2001): 175–189.


81. For the last will of Gracia Senior, see n. 21.


83. Compare the inventory of Rachel Cohen Belinfante on her bankruptcy with her meager belongings (SAA DBK 5072, no. 440, 178, 24 December 1743), or that of the poor Ester Barrocas (SAA PA 334, no. 218, 155–156/68–69, 25 Adar 5447 [10 March 1687]), with
that of Lea Abenacar, widow of Abraham de Meza Flores (SAA NA 5075, no. 7491, no. 75, 895–919, Not. J. van den Ende, 7 July 1710).


85. Isaac and Rachel de Prado gave one daughter a dowry of 30,000 guilders in cash and goods, the other one 46,000 guilders in cash and goods (SAA NA 5075, no. 3309, Not. H. Outgers, 27 January 1691). At the other extreme, others brought in very little: see the case of Eli de Medina (SAA DBK 5072, 208, 10 March 1692), and that of Abraham Bassan (SAA DBK 5072, no. 214, 11 March 1698).

86. 38 out of 42 Sephardi women were registered as “rentiers” (90 percent) (Oldewelt, Kohier 1742, vol. II, 78–79, 80, 83, 85–89, 93–97, 101, 104, 105–107). However, the withdrawal from active economic life of the elite among the Dutch Sephardim is in line with the general picture of the merchants in the Dutch Republic in the eighteenth century: see Jonathan I. Israel, The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477–1806 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), part 4, especially 1016–1017.


90. SAA NA 5075, no. 7573B, 96, Not. J. van Vilekens, 5 September 1740.
94. SAA NA 5075, no. 3280, no. 74, Not. H. Outgers, 21 November 1685. For the work of David de Casseres delivering material, among others for shrouds: SAA PA 334, no. 216, 145v, 17 Menahem-Av 5433 [30 July 1673]; ibid., 159, 4 Kislev 5440 [8 November 1679]; ibid., no. 217, 207, 13 Av 5440 [8 August 1680]; ibid., 256, 22 Tevet 5441 [12 January 1681]; ibid., 258, 28 Shevat 5441 [16 February 1681]; ibid., 259, 19 Adar 5441 [9 March 1681]; ibid., 264, 7 Iyar 5441 [25 April 1681]; ibid., 310, 19 Shevat 5442 [28 January 1682].
96. SAA PA 334, no. 222, 46–47, 12 Adar 5474 [27 Feb 1714]; for Isaac de Castro acting as a pharmacist, see SAA PA 334, no. 217, 490, 5 Av 5444 [16 July 1684].
100. SAA PA 334, no. 220, 40, 16 Nisan 5459 [15 April 1699].
101. SAA PA 334, no. 174, 540, 10 Shevat 5423 [18 January 1663]; on Amsterdam Sephardi women making candles from wax: Menasseh ben Israel, Thesovro dos Dinim, 1647, 89, 12 Tammuz 5407 [15 July 1647].
102. SAA PA 334, no. 25, 83, 25 Adar 5463 [13 March 1703].
103. Schmidt, Overleven na de dood, 143–150.
104. See the different articles in Women at Work in Spain.
105. For the shop of Rachel Preto, see SAA RA 5061, no. 312, 211–212, 20 February 1659.
106. Maria Luria and Maria de Soria, for example, delivered groceries to the shop of Josua Furtado: SAA DBK 5072, no. 213, 34, 10 June 1697.
107. SAA PA 334, no. 219, 30, 4 Nisan 5452 [21 March 1692].

109. SAA PA 334, no. 87, 1750; ibid., no. 20, 1753; on the sale of old clothes in the open air by Ashkenazim, see SAA, RA 5061, no. 693, 26 January 1737: Requestenboek Kleermakersgilde.

110. The widow of Salomon Farques took in Isaac Calvo in transit from Hamburg to Bordeaux (SAA PA 334, no. 215, 311, 13 Nisan 5429 [14 April 1669]; ibid., no. 216, 10, 27, 13 Nisan–23 Sivan 5430 [3 April–11 June 1670]; ibid., no. 174, 891, 7 Av 5430 [24 July 1670]).

111. Van Deursen, Plain Lives, 7–10; Bibi S. Panhuysen, “Gevestigden en buitenstaanders in de kledingsector: het Amsterdams kleermakersgilde, 1500–1800,” in Amsterdammer worden. Migranten, hun organisaties en inburgering 1600–2000, ed. Leo Lucassen (Amsterdam: Vossiuspers Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2004), 149–185; see also SAA NA 5075, no. 5061, no. 694, no. 29, 1747–1748. The same pattern can be found elsewhere in Europe and also in Spain, where women were spinning at home for the wool and silk industry (Casey, Early Modern Spain, 62). For similar activities for Jewish women in the Ottoman Empire, see Dorn Sezgin, “Jewish Women in the Ottoman Empire,” 220–221. In Amsterdam, Rachel de Andrade sewed clothes for Rachel Sega de Espanha (SAA PA 334, no. 217, 97, 14 Shevat 5438 [6 February 1678]). Sara Macabeu made shirts (see inventory of Jean Cardoso: SAA NA 5075, no. 2261B, 995, Not. A. Lock, 12 April 1661).

112. SAA PA 334, no. 244, 41v, 20 Sivan 5437 [20 June 1677].

113. For spinning wheels in private houses: SAA DBK 5072, no. 382, 167, 14 January 1678; ibid., no. 385, 201, 26 March 1680; for pillows to knit: SAA NA 5075, no. 2894, 1551, Not. P. Padthuysen, 24 February 1665; SAA NA 5075, no. 7490, no. 52, Not. J. van den Ende, 28 September 1708.

114. SAA PA 334, no. 120, map 81, 916, paragraph 7, 8 Adar I, 5494 [11 February 1734].


116. For the same phenomenon in the Ottoman Empire, Dorn Sezgin, “Jewish Women in the Ottoman Empire,” 222–223.

117. SAA PA 334, no. 24a, 64v, 13 Tishri 5444 [3 October 1683]; ibid., no. 175, 236, 1 Hesvan 5444 [21 October 1683]; ibid., no. 1052, 132v/121v, 5449 [1689]. According to Idaña, widows were usually appointed to take care of the mikveh (Benjamin N. Teensma, “Fragmenten uit het Amsterdamse convolut van Abraham Idaña, alias Gaspar Méndez del Arroyo (1623–1690),” SR 11 (1977): 134.

118. SAA PA 334, no. 174, 610, Rosh Hodesh Tevet 5424 [30 December 1663].
119. SAA PA 334, no. 1329, no. 162, carton 24. We also come across the profession of midwives among conversas at the Iberian Peninsula: Levine Melammed, “Castilian Conversas at Work,” 133.

120. Ribca Lopes Cardoso became such an assistant to the poor in 1736 (SAA PA 334, no. 25, 224, [s.d.] Tevet 5496 [December 1735/January 1736]); for a female administrator of the loan bank, see the daughter-in-law of Abraham Cohen de Lara, the widow of the hazzan ls. Cohen de Lara (SAA PA 334, no. 248, 214, 13 Nisan 5506 [3 April 1746]).

121. SAA PA 334, no. 218, 78, 18 Tishri 5446 [16 October 1685]; ibid., no. 25, 170, 10 Kislev 5488 [23 November 1727]; ibid., 209, 14 Hesvan 5492 [13 November 1731]; ibid., no. 912, 127–132, 16 Adar 5515 [27 February 1755], 11 Iyyar 5517 [1 May 1757], 13 Nisan 5518 [21 April 1758].

122. The widow of Jeosua Sarfatim put together the lists of members in preparation of the elections for the yeshivah Gemilut Hassadim (Benevolence), through a paid position (SAA PA 334, no. 1191, 124 and 131, [s.d.] 5449 and 5450 [1688–1690]).

123. For Mazon Abanot: SAA PA 334, no. 120, map 81, 890–919, 6 Shevat/8 Adar I 5494 [10 January/11 February 1734]; for Sidcat Nassim: ibid., no. 25, 212, 25 Tishri 5494 [4 October 1733]; ibid., no. 120, 951, articles 13, 17, 21 Hesvan 5517 [14 November 1756]; for Mishenet Zequenim (Support-for-the-Elderly): SAA PA 334, 1220, 24–25, paragraph 12, 12 Nisan 5511 [7 April 1751].


126. López Belinchón, Honra, libertad y hacienda, 256, 257.

127. For poor Sephardim from North Africa employed in sick care, see SAA PA 334, no. 24, 21, Rosh Hodesh Sivan 5424 [25 May 1664]; for Sephardim women from the Balkan active in this field, see the case of belograda Dona Jurada, who took care of a woman named “Cardosa” (SAA PA 334, no. 219, 172, 3 September 5454 [1693]); for Dutch Christian women at work assisting the sick, old, and disabled among the Amsterdam Sephardim, see the Dutch woman taking care of the Portuguese Dina Gher (SAA PA 334, no. 17, 49v, 25 September 5394/1633); for Ashkenazim working with the sick of the Portuguese community, see the example of Abraham Sacuto, who was cared for by a tuodesco (SAA PA 334, no. 216, 116r, 28 Elul, 5432 [20 September 1672]); for blacks and Italian Jews at work with the sick, see Florenca Negra, who took care of Doyrada; Natan Italiano helped Abram Geer (SAA PA 334, no. 217, 8, 11 Nisan 5436 [25 March 1676]); for the relation between blacks and Jews, also in Amsterdam, see Jonathan Schorsch, Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

128. SAA PA 334, no. 220, 95, 27 Adar II 5461 [6 April 1701]; ibid., 141, 1 Elul 5461 [4 September 1701].

129. Bartolomé Bennassar, The Spanish Character: Attitudes and Mentalities from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979), 103–106, 117–123. Also, New Christian women on the Peninsula in the early modern period had many servants at home (López Belinchón, Honra, libertad y hacienda, 252–253). In Amsterdam, Sephardi families often had more than one servant: the widow of Moses de
Chaves living on Herengracht, for example, had six servants (Oldewelt, Kohier 1742, vol. II, 85, no. 4194; 89, no. 4457; 98, no. 4919).

130. Rica de Leon, alias Maria Pereira, wife of Moses de Leon, alias Roque de Leon took the mulatta woman Angela (“Angela a mulata”) with her to Amsterdam (SAA NA 5075, no. 7533, Not. J. van Vilekens, 31 October 1710); see also n. 19; Jonathan Schorsch maintains that many Jews and conversos fleeing to eastern lands, especially after 1492, brought their black slaves with them (“Early Modern Sephardim and Blacks”) in Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times ed. Zion Zohar, (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 242. See also above n. 19.

131. For blacks put to work in the households of the Amsterdam Sephardim, see the black woman serving Immanuel Pinto (SAA PA 334, no. 217, 15, 10 Nisan 5436 [24 March 1676]); for a mulatta woman cleaning the women’s section of the synagogue, see SAA PA 334, no. 215, 216, 5 Tishri 5428 [23 September 1667]; for móriscos serving the Amsterdam Portuguese, see the case of Maria d’Avila, of the “Moriscan nation,” being the servant of Francisco Gomes Henriques (SAA NA 5075, no. 645b, 1204–1205, Not. S. Cornelis., 21 January 1621; also published in SR 18, no. 2 [1984]: 164, no. 2337). For Ashkenazi women working in the houses of the Amsterdam Sephardim, see the example of Anna Isaaks; she signed her name in Hebrew and was a maid for Manuel Aires (SAA NA 5075, no. 461, Not. Mathijsz., 297–298, 17 October 1619; also published in SR 16, no. 1 [1982]: 61, no. 1883). For Dutch Gentiles at work among the Dutch Sephardim, see SAA NA 5075, no. 942, 126, Not. D. Bredan, 9 February 1633: Annetje Andries, maid of Isaac Pallache; for servants among the Portuguese in Hamburg, see Studemund-Halévy, “Senhores versus criados da Nação,” 353–355, 358–359, 365.

132. Sara de Tavora, for example, was living and working in the house of Gracia Senior, but apparently did not do the heaviest work, since a “tudesquita” was employed there as a maid (last will of Gracia Senior, from 1673, cited in n. 21).

133. See the case of Rachel Jacobs: SAA RA 5061, no. 346, 94, June 1698.

134. See the cases mentioned in Kaplan, “Moral Panic,” 103–123. Hester Cordua was suspected of acting as a whore, although she denied it (SAA RA 5061, no. 405, 140–140v, 3 September 1744); on Gracia Moreno, see Kaplan, “Social Functions,” 129, 154 and SAA RA 5061, no. 310, 56v, 57, 63, 64v, 70v, 15 April 1654.


136. GAR, RA 5061, 40, 21 June 1695.

137. GAR, Oud-Rechterlijk Archief 15, no. 145, 86–87, 17 April 1715. She was dismissed and set free, though, after one year: ibid., 27 April 1717.


139. Levine Melammed, “Castilian Conversas at Work.”


142. Szajkowski, “Trade Relations,” 74.


148. SAA DTB 681, 92, 25 May 1651.


150. See the civil marriage contract of Isaac de Imanuel Baruch and Rachel Josephs Pardo. Joseph Pardo, student of the Jesiba de los Pintos, was the son of Hakham David Pardo and worked first as a hazzan of the Portuguese community in Rotterdam, and later in London (Jacob Zwarts, *Hoofdstukken uit de geschiedenis der Joden in Nederland* [Zutphen: W. J. Thieme and Cie, 1929], 95, 106, 110–111). His daughter signed her marriage contract only with the mark “a” (SAA DTB 687, 273, 10 November1668). Spinoza’s sister Miriam could not write either, at the time of the publication of the banns of her civil marriage (SAA DTB 681, 92, 25 May 1651).
marriage (Koenraad O. Meinsma, *Spinoza en zijn kring. Historisch-Kritische Studiën over Hollandsche Vrijgeesten*—with an introduction by Siegfried B. J. Zilverberg [Utrecht: Hes, 1980], 66–67 and SAA DTB 680, 243, 2 June 1650). The daughter of the famous rabbi and teacher R. Jacob Jeuda Leon Templo also could not sign her name (see, about her, in n. 118). She puts a mark as if to sign a notarial deed in 1661 (SAA NA 5075, no. 2210, 119–121, Not. A. Lock, 14 January 1661); also, the daughter of Dr. Benjamin de Sea could not write (SAA DTB 696, 86, 2 April 1688).

151. See Rachel Barocas de Brazil (SAA DTB 687, 365, 12 July 1669); Hester Baroccas Henriques (SAA DTB 686, 364, 16 July 1666); Benvenida Pereira (SAA DTB 700, 9, 27 October 1696).

152. Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 284–285, suggests the same; also, for Jewish girls in the Ottoman Empire, Dorn Sezgin, “Jewish Women in the Ottoman Empire,” 221; Howard Adelman observes the instruction of orphan girls taken into Jewish families in early modern Italy: see his “Servants and Sexuality,” 82.


154. SAA PA 334, no. 120, file 81, 19, 6 Shevat 5494 [10 January 1734]; Pescatello (*Power and Pawn*, 27–28) mentions the same subjects; “Christian dogma,” of course to be changed into “Jewish faith,” for education of girls at home in Spain, namely “the traditional household tasks, Christian dogma, and embroidery.”

155. For Maimonides in French, see Ribca Susarte, widow of Eliseu Pereyra (SAA PA 334, no. 518, 250, Not. Jan Snoek, 17 June–October 1722); Hana de Jacob de Moses Pereira, single, had about ten books, among which one Spanish Bible and one book on history (SAA PA 334, no. 787, 108, 111, Not. J. Klinkhamer, inventory of Hana de Jacob de Moses Pereira, 25 February 1788); Rachel Rodrigues left prayer books in Ladino and a Bible in French (SAA PA 334, no. 119b, 793, 14 June 1739); see also the household book by Rachel Medina Chamis, who wrote her notes in Portuguese and Dutch (see n. 60); for the Dutch dictionary, see the inventory of Rachel Rodrigues: SAA PA 334, no. 119b, 793, 14 June 1739; see also the introduction written in Portuguese by the widow of Abraham Gabay Yzidro, below; on the knowledge of Hebrew, see the case of Sara Sarfatim, below.


158. SAA NA 5075, no. 10704, Not. S. Dorper, 7 February 1741, the inventory of the late Levi Mordochay Cohen: “Voor de dogter naey leergeld f 7:16”; for the home education of a Jewish orphan as a servant girl in Italy, see Adelman, “Servants and Sexuality,” 82.

159. See the case of Rosie, an Ashkenazi girl, who was placed into another Ashkenazi family in town to learn the trade of a hairdresser (SAA NA 5075, no. 7566, Not. J. van Vilekens, 25 November 1735).

160. Handvesten ofte privilegien ende octroyen; mitsgaders willekeuren, costuimen, ordonnantien en handelingen der stad Amsterdam, 5 vols., ed. Hermanus Noordkerk and Johan Pieter Farret (Amsterdam: Van Waesberge & Schouten, 1748–1778), vol 2, 470–471, 15 June 1622. Here we also come across a custom apparently influenced by Islam.

161. See the introduction to the establishment of the girls’ orphanage Mazon Abanot (SAA PA 334, no. 120, map 81, 863, 6 Shevat 5494 [10 January 1734]); see above, the section on “Deviance.”

162. GAA, PA 996, no. 17, 7, Codicil Ab. Is. Suasso, alias Francisco Lopes Suasso, 18 September 1705.

163. SAA PA 334, no. 668, 149–158, Not. P. Padthuysen, 8 March 1700.


165. SAA PA 334, no. 719, Not. N. Wilthuyzen, 9 November 1774; see also SAA PA 334, no. 720, 286, 3 June 1776; ibid., 290, 19 March 1776.

166. For source, see n. 162.

167. Last will of Moseh Moreno Monsanto, Not. B. Baddel, 18 January 1655 (Ets Haim Manuscript 48 A6).


170. SAA PA 334, no. 518, 125, The Hague, Not. C. den Haan, 13 April 1699 (with an extension on pages 130–131, 15 February 1707), last will of Manuel Levy Duarte and Constantina Levy Duarte; see also the last will of Aron de Pinto and Abigael, alias Gracia Nunes Henriques (SAA NA 5075, no. 7493, 63, Not. J. van den Ende, 10 August 1717).

171. See n. 162.

172. See n. 164.

173. SAA PA 334, no. 518, 128–129.


175. SAA PA 334, no. 658: letter by Gracia (the name is not clearly written) addressed to Sra Dª Ribca Medina Hamis, The Hague, 27 August 1733.

176. SAA PA 334, no. 641, art. 12 (13), Not. C. van Achthoven, 3 March 1724: Copia Testamento van Rachel Belmonte, alias Schonenberg.


178. SAA PA 334, no. 632, 11 June 1745.
179. Ibid.
180. HGA, BNR 372, no. 2077, 16 January 1744, last will of Benjamin Teixeira and Ribca Teixeira.
181. See the financial registers of the community referring to the burial of many infants during the early modern period (for example, classified under “gastos gerais” in the livros longos: SAA PA 334, nos. 215–223). Saul Levi Morteira also refers to death of infants in a sermon held in Amsterdam (Saperstein, Exile in Amsterdam, 109–110).
183. SAA RA 5061, no. 211, 11 October 1695.
184. For source on Moseh Moreno Monsanto and his relation to his daughter Rachel, see n. 167.
186. SAA NA 5075, no. 7582a, Not. J. van Vilekens, 11 June 1748.
188. This booklet covered the years 1728–1730, 1732, 1735–1737, 1739 (for source, see n. 60); for a similar notebook of the Dutch woman Cornelia Maria Bors van Waveren (1697–1763): SAA PA 231, II, 749a; for Jewish women in the Middle Ages who kept track of the household budget: Grossman, Pious and Rebellious, 115.
189. For source, see n. 170.
190. López Belinchón, Honra, libertad y hacienda, 230.
191. SAA NA 5075, no. 7619, 26 May 1713, Not. A. Tzeeuwen, last will of Gracia Alvares: Gracia Alvares left her best clothes, four in total (“haar vier beste klederen”), to her daughter-in-law and her granddaughter. The widow of Don Francisco Manrique, Marie Anne Josephe Therese de Partes, also showed how much she cared for her family. She instructed her maid and left her money to take care of Marie’s brother-in-law, after Marie’s death. The brother-in-law seemed to be poor. Marie made this gesture out of generosity and affection toward her brother-in-law (HGA, BNR 130, no. 319, Not. J. Sijthoff, 27 June, 1746, last will of Marie Anne Josephe Therese de Partes, widow of Don Francisco Manrique). For foundations that gave priority to family members, see Levie Bernfeld, “Chosen Poor,” 189–214.
192. See the letter of Isaac Hamiz Vaz, written in London and sent to his aunt in Amsterdam, Rachel Medina Chamis, widow of Joseph Henriques Medina, in which he bids for help (SAA PA 334, no. 658, 17/28 May 1734, London; see also his letter dated 15 February 1734).
193. To guarantee the family assets, Brites Tomas, for example, demanded in her last will that her son-in-law should control the share belonging to her son, Antonio Gomes, who apparently was a spendthrift and not capable of controlling his possessions (SAA NA 5075, no. 646A, 574–575, Not. S. Cornelisz., 26 June 1623; also published in SR 24, no. 2 [1990]: 220–221, no. 2924).
194. In the well-to-do circles of early modern Europe, marriage was not only a love affair, but, above all, one in which the family assets, status, and reputation had to be
guaranteed, as it had been in the Middle Ages. For an overview of the attitudes toward marriage in that period, see Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe*, vol. 1: 1500–1800 (London: HarperCollins, 1995), 99–133, and literature mentioned in the annotated bibliography; see also Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 63, 148. For the policy in Spain, see Pescatello, *Power and Pawn*, 25; for the Dutch Republic, see Kooijmans, *Onder Regenten*, 119–206; for examples of this policy among the Amsterdam Sephardim, see the last will of Aron de Pinto and Abigail, alias Gracia Nunes Henriques (for source, see n. 170) Sara Lopes, a widow, gave money to her son on condition he would marry her niece (SAA NA 5075, no. 4120, 691–696, Not. D. van der Groe, 29 April 1686). For the change of a planned marriage strategy into a more affective choice of partners in Western Europe, in general, and the Jews of the western Sephardi Diaspora, in particular, in the course of the eighteenth century, see Kaplan, “The Threat of Eros,” 117–123.

195. See n. 56.
196. SAA NA 5075, no. 7490, Not. J. van de Ende, no. 18, 12 March 1708.
197. See, on ethnic-religious aspects of Sephardi identities, the different contributions in *Jewish Social Studies* 2009, 15, issue 1.
198. SAA PA 334, no. 641, Not. C. van Achthoven, 3 March 1724.
203. Rachel de Prado, Rachel Belmonte, and Abigail Dias da Fonseca each had their own dowry organizations; thus they were not only concerned about marrying off their own offspring, but also helped to settle poor orphans through marriage (for the last will of Rachel de Prado, alias Rachel Gabay Faro, widow of Isaac de Prado, see n. 196; for the source on the dowry foundation of Rachel Belmonte, see n. 176; for that of Abigail Dias da Fonseca, see n. 62). See also Tirtsah Levy Bernfeld, “Caridade Escapa da Morte: Legacies to the Poor in Sephardi Wills from Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam,” in *DJH* 3 (1993): 179–204; idem, “Financing Poor Relief.”
204. No woman was among the twenty founders of Dotar in 1615, although they were invited to become members if they were unmarried, widowed, or married with a husband outside of the Republic. The condition was that, in the case that a husband appeared, he would take over their place in the *hevrah* (SAA PA 334, no. 1322, especially chapter VIII, 13 Adar 5375 [12 February 1615]); consequently, female membership remained rather low: from 1615 to 1732, there were sixteen female members—the first one
entering in 1641—among a total of 532 (0.03 percent) (SAA PA 334, no. 1144, 21–40, years 5421–5491 [1661–1731]). Legacies of women to Dotar were not that frequent either (SAA PA 334, no. 1143, 48, 29 Av 5404 [31 August 1644]; ibid., no. 1144, 283, 20 Adar II 5440 [21 March 1680]). On the other hand, women seem to be very dedicated to the improvement and protection of young girls, also via private donations and foundations, as we have seen above; for Dotar, see also Israel S. Révah, “Le premier règlement imprimé de la “Santa Companhia de Dotar Orfans e Donzelas Pobres,” Boletim Internacional de Bibliografia Luso-Brasileira 4 (1963): 650–691; Miriam Bodian, “The Portuguese Dowry Societies in Venice and Amsterdam: A Case Study in Communal Differentiation within the Marrano Diaspora,” Italia 6 (1987): 30–61; Wilhelmina Chr. Pieterse, 350 jaar Dotar (Amsterdam: De Arbeiderspers 1965).


207. For women having no right to vote within the Dotar, see Dotar regulations: SAA PA 334, no. 1322, para. VI, 13 Adar 5375; see also the regulations of the Mazon Abanot orphanage (SAA PA 334, 196dd, 6 Shevat 5494 [10 January 1734]; ibid., no. 120, file 81, 892–919, 8 Adar Rison 5494 [11 February 1734]).


209. For participation of women in the membership of the boys’ orphanage, see Aby Jetomim: SAA PA 334, no. 1211, 26, 26v, 56–65 and 56, 5408–5462 [s.d.] [1648–1702]. According to the information we have, almost the same number of female members as male ones granted the boys’ orphanage a legacy (Wilhelmina Chr. Pieterse, Daniel Levi de Barrios als geschiedschrijver van de Portugees-Israelietische gemeente te Amsterdam in zijn ‘triumpho del gobierno popular’ [Amsterdam: Scheltema en Holkema, 1968], 118). Rachel Belmonte was a member of Mazon Abanot (for source, see n. 176); Abigail Dias da Fonseca was a member of the yeshivah Temime Darech: David Franco Mendes, Memorias do estabelecimento e progresso dos judeus portuguezese espanhoes nesta famosa citade de Amsterdam, edited with introduction and annotations by Lajb Fuks and Renate G. Fuks-Mansfeld, and a philological commentary, analysis, and glossaries by Benjamin N. Teensma (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 69.

210. For the last will of Gracia Senior, see n. 21.

211. Only 6 percent (20 women out of 347 members) participated, until 1642, in the loan-bank Honen Dalim (SAA PA 334, no. 1186, 2–2v, 5385 [1624–25] and Pieterse, Daniel Levi de Barrios, 106); for Dotar, see n. 204.

212. In 1683, Temime Darech had 200 female members from a total of 270 (74 percent). Also, in Maskil el Dal, female members were in the majority (54 percent in 1683:}

213. On organizations of the Amsterdam Sephardi community in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Jeremias M. Hillesum, “Vereenigingen bij de Spaansche en Portugeesche Joden te Amsterdam in de 17de en 18de eeuw,” Jaarboek Amstelodanum 1 (1902): 167–183; for Mispat Abanot: SAA PA 334, no. 195, 4 Elul 5490 [17 August 1730]; for Sidcat Nassim: SAA PA 334, no. 25, 212, 19 Kislev 5494 [26 November 1733]; ibid., no. 120, map 84, 943–953, 21 Hesvan 5517 [14 November 1756]; Franco Mendes, Memorias, 116; for Parnasad Almanot, see SAA PA 334, no. 27, 8–10, 7 Kislev 5527 [9 November 1666].

214. See the wills of Joseph Nahemias Torres (SAA NA 633, Not. S. Cornelisz., 26 October 1626–10 January 1627), Moses Curiel Rosado (SAA NA 1563, Not. J. Volkaertszt. Oli, 18 October 1678), Gracia Alvares (SAA NA 7619, Not. A. Tzeeuwen, 26 May 1723), and of Gracia Senior (see n. 21). See also the case of Maria de Conceiçao, now in Amsterdam, whose dowry was transferred from Portugal to safeguard the capital for her marriage (SAA NA 5075, no. 645a, 836–838, Not. S. Cornelisz., 3 October 1619; also published in SR 15, no. 2 [1981]: 252, no. 1865; also cited in Van Emden, Die mij gemaakt heeft tot een man, 13).


216. SAA PA 334, 118, I, 31, 10 Adar 5492 [7 March 1732]. Mentioned here are Jewish tavernas (“tavernas judaicas”); see also Kaplan, “Eighteenth-Century Rulings”; see also the drawing of P. Wagenaar in Mozes Gans, Memorboek, 216.

217. See the remarks of the Hakham in Hamburg, n. 2. On female friends, see Ester Arias, widow of Joseph Abraham Capadoce (SAA PA 334, no. 632, 11 June 1745). On the life of these well-to-do Portuguese women on the Peninsula, the account of Leonor Gómez (Madrid) indicates she was accustomed only to visiting marquesses and duchesses: López Belinchón, Honra, libertad y hacienda, 274–275.

218. SAA PA 334, no. 616, Not. S. Favon, 21 January 1694.


220. On Dutch Sephardim and their love for theatre, see Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans, 286–289, 312–313. The widow of Campos Perera had two chests at home, filled with Spanish comedy plays (SAA 5072, no. 448, 311–319, 26 September 1754).


222. SAA PA 334, no. 1329, 163, no. 124, 12 Shevat 5452 [30 January 1692].

223. SAA PA 334, no. 1329, 134, no. 10, 8ª de Sara Sarfatim q faleceo em 5 de Sivan 5457 [25 May 1697].

224. Abraham Gabay Yzidro once studied and lived in Amsterdam but moved later to Surinam and Barbados to become the chief rabbi there. His widow approached the Amsterdam Hakham Abendana de Britto in 1760 to publish the work of her late husband.

225. SAA PA 334, no. 613, Not. C. van Achthoven, 28 May 1722.


227. Moral teachings on women and marriage could also be found in European literature of the period. In 1625, Jacob Cats published his *Houwelick* in Holland, while one century earlier, in 1524, Juan Luis Vives published his *Institutione feminae christianae* in Spain.


229. SAA PA 334, no. 120, file 81, 896, para, 6, 8 Adar I 5494 [11 February 1734].

230. See n. 209.


232. Last will of Miriam Alvares, alias Miriam del Sotto (SAA PA 334, no. 628, Not. D. van der Groe, 29 August 1685); ibid., 5 September 1685; Levie Bernfeld, “Caridade,” 181.

233. Last will of Miriam Alvares (see n. 232): “emcomendando primeyram e antes tudo minha alma ao Sº Deus . . . pido perdão de meus pecados”; see also SAA PA 334, 518, 387–388, Not. J. Barels, 15 May 1731, last will of Judit Rodrigues Carrion, widow of David de Daniel Rodriguez; Judith Machado, widow of Samuel Abarbanel Souza in her will in 1733 asked for pardon of her sins, in the tradition of the wills of centuries before her (SAA NA 5075, no. 8830, Not. J. Barels, 29 October 1733); for a similar phenomenon in Venice, see Adelman, “Jewish Women and Family Life,” 154–155; see also Levie Bernfeld, “Caridade”; on the theme of repentance in the sermons of the Hakham of the Amsterdam Portuguese Jews, see Saul Levi Morteira, Saperstein, *Exile in Amsterdam*, index.


235. Last will of Abigail Dias da Fonseca (for source, see n. 62). For the ethnic component of marriage as a condition for inheritance, see earlier text; see also the wills in France in Nahon, “From New Christians to the Portuguese Jewish Nation in France,” 359; idem, “Pour une approche des attitudes devant la mort au XVIIIe siècle: Sermonnaires et testateurs juifs portugais à Bayonne,” *REJ* 136, no. 1/2 (1977): 3–123.

236. Last will of Ribca Carneira, who put, therein, the condition that her cousins would inherit, on their return to this country or any other country of the “Judesmo” (SAA PA 334, no. 19, 301–302, 8 Adar 5411 [1 March 1651]).


238. SAA NA 5075, no. 414, Not. N. Jacobs, 16 December 1636.


240. Sara Lumbrosa was the woman involved. She went over to the Reformed Church in 1657 and stayed there for ten years until 1666–1667 (SAA PA 376, no. 8, 210, 211, 215, 12 July, 19 July, 6 September 1657; ibid., no. 11, 249, 250, 252, 296, 21 and 28 October, 4 No-


242. See the last will of Ester Pinta (SAA NA 5075, no. 414, 542, Not. N. Jacobs, 16 December 1636). Ester left her community the wooden box, in her house, in which pieces for her synagogue (Bet Israel) were kept. She also granted the kahal other pieces, used in her synagogue for Yom Kipur and at the cemetery of Bet Haim. Dona Sara Cahanet bestowed upon the synagogue two silver pieces, a plate and can, to be used in the service for the cohanim (SAA PA 334, no. 1074, 1–2, 5404 [1644]). See also the pieces of Judica Coen Enriques and Sara Lopez Redondo, sold by the Portuguese community in 1676 (SAA PA 334, no. 19, 734, 736–737; 7 Kislev, 5 and 23 Tevet 5436 [25 November/22 December 1675; 9 January 1676]). Abigail Dias da Fonseca, on her deathbed, bequeathed the synagogue what she already gave in life, namely a Sefer Torah with embroidered mantles and silver rimmonim (for source, see n. 62); Ester Morena, widow of Jacob Morena also granted the Portuguese community a Sefer Torah with all the ornaments and silver rimmonim and two mantels—a white one with flowers and one with silk flowers, including the faxas (SAA PA 334, no. 24, 22, 23 Elul 5429 [19 September 1669]). On Sifre Torah in Portuguese households and other types of Judaica in early modern Amsterdam, see Swetschinski, *Reluctant Cosmopolitans*, 289; see also Julie-Marthe Cohen, “The Inventory of Ceremonial Objects of the Portuguese Jewish Community of Amsterdam of 1640,” *SR* 37, no. 1 (2004): 225–308. For donations of ceremonial objects by Ashkenazim, see idem, “Donation as a Social Phenomenon: Synagogue Textiles of the Ashkenazi Community of Amsterdam in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” *SR* 32, no. 1 (1998): 24–42.

243. SAA PA 334, no. 19, 623–626, 9 Kislev 5431 [22 November 1670]. Around 10 percent of the contributors were women (57 in total); see further, ibid., no. 172, 32, 28 Tishri 5400 [26 October 1639]; ibid., no. 175, 111, 1 Nisan 5440 [31 March 1680].

244. For gifts in exchange for saying the kaddish and hashkavot prayers, and the lighting of a ner tamid, see the following examples: Dona Sara Cahanet left money, among other things, for lighting a ner tamid (SAA PA 334, no. 19, 175/260, 23 Av 5404 [25 August 1644]); the heirs of Sara Dona Judica Miriam Soares granted a copper lamp for the same purpose (SAA PA 334, no. 323, 28 Iyar 5412 [6 May 1652]); Gracia Senior reserved an amount to pay the hazzan Faro, or in his absence, his son, Rubi Faro, to say kaddish (last will of Gracia Senior [see n. 21]).


246. For the address of the leaders of the Mahamad in the synagogue, see SAA PA 334, no. 21, 257, 8 Hesvan 5482 [29 October 1721]. Admonitions concerning immodesty of women were not new but have been expressed many times earlier in Jewish and Muslim societies, as opposed to the freedom of women in Christian Europe: Grossman, *Pious and Rebellious*, 102–122.

247. See portrait paintings of Rachel Texeira and Eliseba Lopes Suasso de Pinto in the period 1725–1750 (by J. Vollevens), and that of Rachel Dias da Fonseca in 1773 (by Benjamin Bolomey); see also Gans, *Memorbook*, 238–239.
248. See the case of Rica de Leon, alias Maria Pereira, wife of Moses de Lion, alias Roque de Leon (SAA NA 5075, no. 7533, Not. J. van Vilekens, 31 October 1710). Apparently, newly arrived in Amsterdam in 1710, she not only expressed her strong adherence to Judaism in her will, but she asked that a family member say kaddish after her death. She also insisted on the distribution of money from her capital to the poor of the Portuguese nation in Jerusalem, to the synagogue in Jerusalem, and a variety of other Jewish charitable goals, inside and outside the Dutch Republic.

249. Paloma Vidal, for example, a poor Sephardi woman who came from Belgrade with a small child, was paid by the Portuguese community to take care of Portuguese Jews who were receiving charity, in this case Moses Rodrigues and the family of the widow Milana (SAA PA 334, no. 219, 361, 11 Tishri 5458 [26 September 1697]; ibid., no. 220, p. 36, 1 Sivan 5459 [29 May 1699]; ibid., 10 Sivan 5459 [7 June 1699]); for Moses Rodrigues being paid by the Portuguese community for taking care of children or for hosting people (SAA PA 334, no. 219, 386, 3 Elul 5458 [10 August 1698]). The widow Milano was also assisted through charity (SAA PA 334, no. 176, 378, 2 Nisan 5461 [10 April 1701]). For Paloma Vidal on the charity lists of the community see SAA entry no. 334, no. 219, 2, 5451 [1690–1691].
III

Judeoconverso Families in the Diaspora

CULTURAL COMMUTING BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND JUDAISM
Recent decades have seen historians’ fascination with cultural anthropology yield fruitful approaches to the history of identity-formation. Within the subfields of medieval and early modern Jewish History, scholars have produced important studies of childhood and family life in Ashkenazi and Italo-Jewish communities. For their part, scholars of early modern Sephardim in the West have contributed important analyses of communal and ethnic formation. However, those works have seldom focused on problems of early socialization. Here I will approach that lacuna by relating what I consider to be a key insight from recent anthropologically informed historiography on early modern Ashkenazim to Western Sephardi cases. After providing some background on the history and phenomenology of New Christians or judeoconverts, a group whose significance to early modern Sephardic culture in the West was pivotal, I will draw those cases from the history of communities of “New Jews”—that is to say, New Christians who opted to embrace Judaism—in seventeenth-century France and the Netherlands.

Among recent books published in the Anglophone world, two of the most important that deal with the history of early acculturation among pre-modern Ashkenazim are Ivan Marcus’s Rituals of Childhood (1996) and Elisheva Baumgarten’s Mothers and Children (2004). Both works are painstaking reconstructions of social and religious practice. The authors argue compellingly that pre-modern Ashkenazic culture was an assemblage of various native and foreign
elements. To borrow the words of Moshe Rosman, this collage was like “a re-combinant DNA that originates from a widely available repertoire of building blocks, but achieves a unique character by virtue of the combining process.”

Marcus calls this phenomenon of cultural formation “inward acculturation.”

By this he means pre-modern Jews’ creative appropriation and adaptation of cultural material originating outside their corporate communities to shape unique forms of Jewish cultural expression. The examples I will supply in the second half of this analysis support a similar view of early acculturation among Portuguese and Spanish “New Jews” in the West.

Before presenting the examples, it is only prudent to provide some information regarding the history and phenomenology of New Christians, a group that provided the demographic and cultural backbone of the Western Sephardi communities with which this discussion is concerned.

**New Christian Childhood(s): How Useful Is the Evidence?**

For centuries, Iberians used (and still use) the terms “New Christian” and *judeoconverso* (“Judeo-convert”) to refer to Iberian Jews who were baptized in the late Middle Ages and, inaccurately, to the Christianized descendants of such converts. Between 1477 and 1537, the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions were established chiefly in order to prosecute *judeoconversos* who allegedly “Judaized,” that is to say, whom others accused of professing beliefs and exhibiting behaviors that the inquisitors rightly or wrongly considered to be “Jewish.” Whether inquisitorial definitions of Judaizing corresponded to reality or not, it is clear that at various levels of social interaction, “Old Christians”—as Iberians of non-Jewish and non-Muslim ancestry identified themselves in relation to *judeoconversos* and *moriscos*—generally tended to approach New Christians as treacherous “Jews.” This blanket imputation of “Jewishness” generated a myriad of accusations of crypto-Judaism. For their part, many of these accusations generated thousands of inquisitorial heresy trials over a period spanning slightly more than three and a half centuries (1478–1832). Another fateful result was the development and application, over a comparable period, of various forms of anti-converso discrimination. The most infamous were ad hoc, mostly private regulations known as “Statutes of Cleanliness of Blood” whose chief purpose was to disqualify or otherwise exclude people of *judeoconverso* (and Muslim) ancestry from prestigious posts, professions, and honors. Along with inquisitorial persecution, these and other inequitable measures account at least in part for
the fact that *judeoconversos*, irrespective of their religious beliefs and practices, developed historically as a cohesive, endogamous group apart from Old Christians.⁶

Much of what historians know about the family lives and childhoods of New Christians derives from the records of inquisitorial trials (*procesos*). However, it is difficult to find reliable information about the self-identity of New Christians in these documents, since the inquisitors controlled all the questioning and had a vested interest in producing certain kinds of “confessions”—ones that would lead to convictions. Indeed, the Holy Office subsisted largely from the confiscation of the goods of suspects, and possessed overwhelming power to generate incriminating testimony. For instance, all inquisitorial heresy trials operated on the basis of the presumption that those suspected of religious deviance were guilty (though inquisitors did occasionally take exculpating testimony into account, and interrupted inquests for lack of satisfactory testimony against defendants, or for political reasons).⁷ Inquisitors routinely treated testimony obtained through torture as admissible evidence if confirmed at a separate hearing. To advertise and magnify their power, they also shamed persons convicted of heresy and/or apostasy by having secular authorities punish these prisoners in public, and in the process publish the (true and/or concocted) findings of inquisitorial investigations.⁸

Despite the prejudiced nature of the *procesos*, though, do inquisitorial dossiers offer advantages in the historical reconstruction of Sephardi culture in the Iberian Peninsula that we do not obtain in the case of what one might call the “usual” sources for pre-modern Jewish history, such as rabbinical responsa, religious and scientific treatises, idealizing chronicles, poems, a few letters, and records of gentile legislation and polemical writings concerning Jews?

An argument in the affirmative might stress the following three factors: First, unlike early modern rabbis, inquisitorial deponents of Sephardi Jewish origin typically did not form part of an educated elite. And unlike Sephardi scholars of halakhah (Jewish law), these deponents were not trying primarily to arrive at legal decisions that harmonized the real and the ideal. Rather, the subjects were, by-and-large, ordinary people trying to make the best of difficult circumstances. In response to the inquisitors’ questions, these men, women, and children sometimes spoke in relatively open-ended terms about the realities of their daily lives and views of the world, including their theologically unsophisticated beliefs. “History from below” is difficult to build without such sources.

Second, several Spanish and Portuguese *judeoconversos* of the early generations (1391–1497) knew what it was to live as an openly professing Spanish or
Portuguese Jew. We can at least presume that many of the converts interrogated by Spanish inquisitors between 1478 and the 1520s and a few of the ones questioned in Portugal before, say, the late 1540s, remembered well their lives before baptism, even if the Holy Office’s functionaries distorted or misunderstood these *judeoconversos’* memories. In the later generations of inquisitorial deponents (1540s to 1700), as I will discuss below, there were even *judeoconversos* who related to the Holy Office how they had adopted and practiced rabbinic Judaism outside the Iberian Peninsula.

Third and most importantly, as I have noted elsewhere, the Spanish officers who interviewed inquisitorial deponents (unlike most of the Portuguese functionaries) consistently displayed an ethnographic curiosity that is relatively rare for the Early Modern Period. As a result, the investigations of the Spanish Holy Office occasionally yielded testimony that is not entirely formulaic. Here and there, we find in the *procesos* what Carlo Ginzburg has characterized as “gaps” between what the interrogators expected to hear and what their own notaries wrote that the deponents actually said (irrespective of the veracity or accuracy of the testimony). An instance of this may be the depositions that the Holy Office collected between 1499 and 1501 against the twelve-year-old *judeoconversa* “prophetess,” Inés of Herrera. She had allegedly experienced dream-visions of a messianic heaven in which *judeoconversos*, who had suffered so much on earth, enjoyed a place of special glory distinct from that of mere Jews. By describing her (relatively) unconventional visions, Inés and a few other New Christian messianists such as María García of Herrera, Isabel Rodríguez of Agudo, and Mari Gómez of Chillón provided far more than what one may call the “standard” evidence that inquisitors used to incriminate suspected Judaizers.

A more infamous example is the deposition of Andrés Nuñez, an abandoned *judeoconverso* child of around six years. In 1630, inquisitors interrogated the boy in Madrid about the allegedly heretical activities of his parents and their acquaintances, most of whom were immigrants or children of immigrants from Portugal. Perhaps inspired by anti-Jewish mythology that was widespread in the Spain of his time, the boy went well beyond boilerplate accusations that *judeoconversos* ate no pork, wore clean clothes on Friday nights, and so on. Specifically, he produced an unusual story about a secret Judeo-Portuguese “synagogue” in which his parents and their friends allegedly abused an effigy of the crucified Christ. The Holy Office initially met this tale with great doubt because the boy had contradicted himself and related many implausible details. Yet, when he added still other unexpected details—that the effigy had cried, bled, and begged for mercy—all doubt evaporated, and an inquisitorial “miracle tale”
and cause célèbre against the defendants, and by extension against the entire Portuguese New Christian community in Spain, was born: The affair of the cristo de la paciencia.\textsuperscript{13} I have treated the boy’s testimony and other examples of this phenomenon of inquisitorial “evidence”-gathering from young judeo-conversos in a brief work entitled “Converso Children Under the Inquisitorial Microscope in the Seventeenth Century: What May the Sources Tell us about Their Lives?”\textsuperscript{14} For purposes of the present contribution, suffice it to summarize some of the observations I make in that article:

Judeoconverso children wished to please their inquisitorial interrogators and often did this despite being reluctant to incriminate their own parents and other loved ones. As one teenaged deponent, María de Villareal, put it tearfully to the inquisitors, she would readily denounce her aunt as a “Judaizer,” as they had demanded, if only they would assure her that the denunciation would not result in the aunt’s death, and that the tribunal, after punishing the girl for her own crimes, would allow her to at least visit the aunt.\textsuperscript{15}

As the example of María de Villareal suggests, the testimony that New Christian children and teenagers provided was relatively artless, and therefore revealed much more readily than that of adults how the youths endeavored to do whatever they perceived the Holy Office demanded of them, even to twist the truth or lie altogether, in order to placate and impress their interrogators. The sensational testimony of Andrés Nuñez of the paciencia affair is another case in point.

Some judeoconverso children who felt oppressed by their parents, guardians, or other adult caregivers may have denounced them to the Holy Office for that reason, not necessarily because the caregivers in question were actually crypto-Jews. Denunciation allowed the accusing youths to emancipate themselves from the authority of their elder family members. Hence recourse to the Holy Office may be viewed as a convenient weapon in the youths’ intrafamilial power struggles. For example, in 1621 one judeoconverso teenager threatened to denounce his father to the Holy Office when the latter allegedly forbade him from participating in a sacramental procession.\textsuperscript{16} Eleven years earlier, another youth, who was employed as a servant to his uncle, denounced the older man, who had punished the boy for shirking work-related tasks. After incriminating the uncle and other family members, the boy promptly arranged to leave Castile for the Indies as a servant to another adult.\textsuperscript{17}

Studies of judeoconverso family life add several dimensions to this limited picture of New Christian childhood, although I have strong doubts that the evidence allows for a generalized picture of New Christian childhood. For instance, it is clear from analyses of various procesos, notarial data, and other
records that New Christians, especially those from Portugal, cultivated endogamous ties as a matter of course and formed tribal identities on the basis of these bonds. To put it differently, by securing social, political, and economic alliances, and widening the reach of judeoconverso networks across the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic, the Americas, and beyond, endogamous relationships and attendant business ties formed a solid matrix for the development of specifically ethnic forms of identification among judeoconverso children and adults. One clear and immediate sign of this is the fact that by the seventeenth century, New Christians referred to themselves by some of the ethnic designations that Old Christians had coined in order to identify and ostracize them, such as “people of the nation.” In the Dutch Diaspora they then created and adopted such conglomerate forms as “Hebrews of the Portuguese Nation.” That Old Christians were alarmed by the formation of judeoconverso ethnic alliances early on is evident, for example, in various pleas to the Portuguese crown that New Christians be forbidden by law to marry each other. Additional evidence comes from inquisitorial procesos, which recorded in great detail the family trees and personal associations of New Christians, not only in order to trace specific social networks of “heresy,” but to affirm the very premise, widespread in early modern Iberian society, that New Christians were prone to hereticize because of their ancestry and corresponding webs of familial ties. As the Portuguese inquisitorial formula for “spontaneously” confessing to Judaizing went, “the [suspect and his/her counterpart] acknowledged to each other that they were observers of the Law of Moses because they were related [or friends], and of the same [New Christian] nation.” Beyond the inquisitorial tribunals, Old Christian critics in Portugal and in Spain who opposed “mixed” (New Christian-Old Christian) marriages upheld this same premise, claiming that the children of such marriages tended toward Judaism. (Although many Portuguese New Christians preferred endogamy, several of them did marry into the Old Christian majority, especially in the first decades of the judeoconverso phenomenon in Portugal, when the crown formally outlawed discrimination against conversos. Intermarriage served as a way of diluting and eventually obscuring New Christian origins, and hence of escaping the stigma that attached to them.)

Accusations that mixed marriages often produced “Jews” inadvertently revealed a burning apprehension concerning yet another aspect of judeoconverso family life on which both the Iberian Inquisitions and various modern studies of New Christians and crypto-Judaism have focused, namely the central role of matriarchal figures—mothers, grandmothers, mature sisters, aunts, and so on—
in successfully constructing and transmitting a “Jewish” identity to the young
generations of New Christians. Accusations abound in inquisitorial procesos
to the effect that judeoconversa mothers and mother-like figures took on, in the
private confines of New Christian homes, the role of Judaic models, educators,
or initiators for children. According to a standard scholarly explanation, New
Christian women assumed these roles because “their religious lives were ex-
pressed primarily in the private sphere,” while those of judeoconverso men “took
place primarily in the public domain, [where the men] would have few oppor-
tunities for subversive religious activity open to them.” A typical (and totally
formulaic) accusation from early seventeenth-century Portugal reads:

[the defendant’s grandmother, now deceased] had taught him the belief in the
Law of Moses and its ceremonies, and . . . the confessant believed in it. [The grand-
mother taught him and his family] to refrain from eating the meat of a pig, hare,
rabbit, and of fish without scales, and to observe the Sabbath by refraining from
work, wearing a clean shirt. . . .

Though it is largely based on what one imagines were scripted depositions
such as the above—ones that deponents could nonetheless render extenuating
by shifting blame to deceased relatives—the picture of motherly judeoconversas
as “Judaic” initiators of children does at least have plausibility, particularly as
regards the early generations of New Christians. After all, much of what in-
quisitors regarded as solid evidence of “Judaizing” consisted of domestic cus-
toms and scruples that baptism alone did not necessarily eliminate among
the converts of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but which the Holy
Office tendentiously interpreted as Jewish “rites” or “ceremonies.” In a pre-
modern world that cultural anthropologists would characterize as “traditional,”
New Christian women may well have continued to uphold these supposed
religious markers for years, either with or without the intention of observing
Judaism. One Castilian woman who converted to Christianity in 1492 and was
accused of observing “Judaism” through her cooking and eating practices may
have underscored the latter possibility when she complained to her interroga-
tors that washing meat before preparing it was not “a Jewish ritual,” but mere
“cleanliness and proper diligence.” She also stated that, if she had ever eaten
meat without the permission of her doctor or priest on a day when doing so
was forbidden by the Church, this would have constituted a sin rather than a
heretical act. Even if the woman in question was actually a Judaizer who was
merely trying to discredit incriminating testimony, her arguments still point
out an inherent weakness in the Holy Office’s definition of heresy. Canon law
did not and does not obligate Christians to eat the fat of red meat, or pork, or to wear dirty clothes on Friday nights, and so on.

If we accept that the “crypto-Judaism” attributed to New Christians may have been an ethnological echo of their ancestors’—or their own—Jewish past, sustained in part by the inertia of deeply ingrained domestic customs within a traditional society, it stands to reason that at least some judeoconversas, in their capacity as homemakers, were in fact either unwitting or conscious transmitters of some cultural baggage that their children, grandchildren, nephews, and other young counterparts not only combined with other, Ibero-Catholic cultural material as they matured, but may have interpreted as “The Law of Moses,” and hence as an indication of theirs and their families’ deep-seated “Jewishness,” under the stress (and influence) of religious and ethnic persecution.29 Hints of cultural “syncretism” and sheer confusion among judeoconversos may signal that the socialization of New Christian children gave occasion to a cultural bricolage more random and extensive than the somewhat conservative “inward acculturation” Ivan Marcus has attributed to medieval Ashkenazim.30 One example that comes immediately to mind is that of the Castilian judeoconverso Periañez de Mesa. He testified in 1591 that “some parientas [women relatives] had taught him the Law of Moses and that he had observed it jointly with that of Our Lord Jesus Christ.”31

Were Mesa and other New Christians who testified about their childhood initiations into “crypto-Judaic” belief and practice telling the truth? Were they trying to blend incriminating evidence (“I observed the Law of Moses”) to appease their interrogators, with extenuating claims (“it was my parientas’ fault”) in an attempt to escape the harshest punishments? Are the unqualified categories of “truth” and “falsehood” even appropriate tools for the reconstruction of the complex phenomena of autobiographical narration concerning childhood that Mesa’s and other New Christians’ depositions represent? In my work, I have argued implicitly and explicitly that, given the basic uncertainty as to the reliability of inquisitorial “evidence,” the answers to these questions cannot be reached via totalizing assumptions and conclusions about the “Jewishness” of New Christians. Every case of New Christian identity must be approached in its own terms by analyzing the language of the relevant primary sources, and the historical circumstances that surrounded these sources, with care. What religion meant to the deponents is a far more important question than whether the behaviors to which they admitted fit preconceived inquisitorial or scholarly notions of “Judaism” and “Christianity.” Fortunately for the historian, there were circumstances reflected even in the procesos, and corroborated by Jewish
sources external to them, that defy the usual flimsiness of inquisitorial “proof” of wrongdoing because they pertain to Jewish life outside the Iberian Peninsula, and hence do not correspond neatly to inquisitorial preconceptions of New Christians’ Judaizing. I now turn to a selective discussion of those circumstances and that life.

Early Judaicization among “New Jews” in the Western Sephardi Diaspora

In reaction to ethnic and religious persecution, many New Christians chose to emigrate from the Iberian Peninsula when opportunities to do so arose. A significant exodus of Portuguese judeoconversos occurred between 1536, when the Portuguese Inquisition began its operations, and 1730, when the last major upsurge in anti-New-Christian persecution subsided in Castile. Once in exile, several hundred or perhaps a few thousands—though their proportion of the total number of judeoconverso émigrés is unknown—chose to attach themselves to existing Jewish communities of Sephardim, that is, Jews who traced their ancestry to the Iberian Peninsula through the momentous expulsion of 1492, or who had become integrated with the exiled Sephardi ethnos after 1492 by, among other things, adopting the Sephardi rite and accepting Sephardi communal authority in general. In the important cases of Amsterdam, Hamburg, London, and various cities in France, the emigrants founded entirely new Jewish communities self-consciously connected to the rest of the Jewish Diaspora yet displaying for some decades the idiosyncratic and incomplete understanding of normative Judaism that the Catholicized émigrés and their children possessed. All the same, by allying themselves with normative Judaism and striving to fulfill at least the rudiments of rabbinic halakhah, the judeoconverso émigrés who settled in established kehillot kedoshot (Holy Communities), and those who created altogether new kehillot, became “New Jews.” Often these subjects’ entry into Jewish communal life was relatively rapid and smooth. In other instances that entry was gradual, equivocal, and fraught with ambiguities and contradictions, even outright conflict. Of course, the phenomenon of individual and collective Judaicization does not even begin to explain what happened to judeoconversos who chose to blend into non-Jewish communities in places as diverse as France, Germany, and the Spanish and Portuguese Indies. We do not even know how many New Christians took this assimilationist path.
For decades, however, it is the “New Jews” of the Western Sephardi Diaspora who have attracted scholarly attention above all other judoconverso exiles. From the point of view of this discussion, it is crucial to highlight these judaicized former Christians, because from their experience it is possible to glean insights concerning the contexts and content of children’s acculturation as members of the Western Sephardi Diaspora in general, and of the self-styled Judeo-Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish “Nation” in exile in particular. I concentrate on two examples of “inward acculturation” below.

Before delving into the examples, a word on documentary sources concerning the history of New Jewish childhood is in order. A central problem in the historical reconstruction of that subject is that the sources are scant and usually opaque. This has forced students to rely on a few documents that were produced mostly in the Western Sephardi metropolis, Amsterdam, whose bustling Jewish community served as a cultural model for others in places as diverse as Bayonne, London, and Curaçao. Of those few documents, only an infinitesimal number treat or reflect intimate family life in the European communities “of the Nation,” much less provide information about childhood itself, in anything resembling anthropological detail. Some of the evidence found in these rare documents has been examined by my colleagues in this volume. In this chapter, I add to their insights by relying partly on details gleaned from Spanish inquisitorial documents. Yet, Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel’s Thesovro dos Dinim, (or Treasury of Jewish Laws), published in Amsterdam in 1647, and already discussed at some length by Julia Lieberman and Tirtsah Levie Bernfeld in their respective contributions to this volume, is perhaps the most significant of the handful of sources at our disposal. The Thesovro, again, is a compendium of rabbinic norms and associated Judeo-Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish customs. Its significance lies partly in the fact that it is intended as a comprehensive guide to all aspects of a Judeo-Portuguese community’s life, and, unlike inquisitorial sources, was produced from within that community.

New Jews: Two Cases of Inward Acculturation

The first example of “inward acculturation” on which I will focus is from the latter 1600s, when a few dozen subjects who had been reared as Jews outside of Spain and Portugal traveled there as merchants, were arrested under suspicion of Judaizing, and then testified before tribunals of the peninsular Inquisitions. In the process, several of these deponents supplied what I consider to be rea-
sonably credible information concerning their early education in communities of newly “Judaicized” judeoconversos abroad. All of the subjects, in fact, were children of expatriate New Christians. One such subject was the itinerant mercer Abraham de Paredes, whose story I examined in some length in another work. In 1679 Paredes deposed in Toledo as a suspected “apostate” from Christianity. Among other things, he declared that he had been born in the Gascon town of Peyrehorade to a family of Portuguese New Christians from Castile. He said that his parents had had him baptized as “Juan de Paredes” at a French parish, yet had introduced him to Judaism eleven years later by taking him to a makeshift synagogue that other Iberian expatriates frequented. Shortly thereafter they had sent him to study at the home of a fellow refugee from Spain. The tutor, who lodged at the home of a Frenchman, had taught Paredes to read and write from a series of books. Most of them were in French, and a few were in Castilian. I suspect that the latter included a Jewish primer—a so-called librito—that circulated widely in the western Jewish Diaspora of the mid-to-late 1600s. Introductory works of that kind were intended by their printers in Sephardi metropoles (such as Venice and Livorno) to show Hispanophone and Lusophone New Christians how to be proper rabbinic Jews; this meant, principally, how to worship the God of Israel in a communal setting.

Paredes testified, as one might expect, that his attendance at synagogue, and the lessons he had received at the home of his tutor, had “caused him” to become Jewish. He also mentioned that an emissary from Jerusalem had circumcised him, and implied that having undergone the surgery gave him added social stature among the newly minted Jews of his town. “It is known,” Paredes said, “that although all [the Judaizers in Peyrehorade] attend the [Jewish] congregation, there is a distinction, [in that] those who are circumcised enjoy more graces and privileges [than those who are uncircumcised].” Presumably the young man was referring to the fact that his community did not allow uncircumcised men to read from the scroll of the Torah during services, or to assist the Cantor in his duties, and so on.

Throughout his deposition Paredes did not substantiate the judeophobic stereotypes his interrogators held about how New Christians became Jews or of what Judaism meant to such renegades. In most of the hundreds of dossiers I have read from the 1600s that incorporate descriptions of “Judaic” initiations, judeoconversos repeat a variant of the Portuguese inquisitorial formula that I have already quoted above. In the Spanish variant, the suspects relate in almost identical language that as children they had been accosted “in a secluded place” (usually at home) by their respective mothers (if not both parents), or female
relatives, or close friends of the family, and told that it was necessary to observe “the Law of Moses [because it] was the good one and the true one, and the one that served to save [one’s] soul.”40 This refrain conformed perfectly to the classic inquisitorial view of Jewishness as a matter of faith, and Judaism as a doctrinal “confession” about individual salvation and perdition—in other words, as a kind of dark and inverted mirror of Christianity.41 It seems to me, furthermore, that the inquisitors had no such narrative formula upon which to rely in the case of judeoconversos and children of judeoconversos who had learned normative Judaism in exile. Of course, that Judaism was neither chimerical nor merely a negation of Christianity. Consequently, inquisitorial interrogations captured some accounts of “Judaicization” in the Sephardi Diaspora that ring authentic if not entirely accurate or spontaneous in all respects. It is worthwhile noting, for instance, the following details that Paredes volunteered:

[I] kn[o]w very little of the Christian doctrine, only a few words that [I] have learned in French from having heard the other boys in the school where French was taught [and] where the Catholic boys prayed [the Christian Doctrine] after [I] and the other observers [of the Law of Moses] left it. And I used to stay around [that school] a few times, and from what [I] heard, a few words have remained in [my] memory.42

Before [I] had the use of reason, about the age of ten or eleven, [I] was not observant of any [religious] law; [I] only dealt there with the French boys who were Christian, as with the Jews without learning either the Law of the evangelism, or that of Moses. . . .43

Here Paredes suggests, quite credibly, in my view, not only that he had existed in a kind of cultural limbo before his parents introduced him to rabbinic practice, but that even before his tutor had taught him to read and write the French language he had already become casually socialized into his family’s predominantly Christian milieu. This socialization appears to have occurred despite the fact that the family may have intentionally recused itself from Catholic practice, or at least did not impose it on the boy. However, Paredes said that some of his Iberian friends had even attended the French school for boys. One of them, Daniel Romano, allegedly maintained friendly relations with his French teacher, even though Romano and his parents were notorious “Judaizers” who attended the aforementioned makeshift synagogue.44

The picture of easy social intercourse between New Christians and their neighbors that Paredes paints here agrees with what we know of the town of Peyrehorade and the conditions under which expatriate Iberians and their Judaicized children lived there throughout the seventeenth century. Judaism was
illegal in French domains until the late 1700s, hence for decades New Christians in the Aquitainian southwest who wished to learn and practice it had to maintain the pretense of Christian propriety. The façade was perfunctory, however, since the French crown tolerated crypto-Judaism and welcomed the commercial activities of the “Portuguese Merchants.” At the local level, virtually everyone in Gascony and the Basque lands imputed Jewishness to the New Christians, and therefore approached the immigrants rather casually as “Jews.” In the end, this meant judeoconversos in southwestern France enjoyed a margin of freedom to transform themselves into communities of Jewish neophytes.

Paradoxically, the members of these nascent kehilot kedoshot depended for their economic viability on their ability to cross the border into Iberian lands to conduct business. Such travels forced the refugees and their French-born children—people such as Paredes—to be culturally malleable, in fact to commute between Judaism and Christianity, as I have explained at greater length in several works.45 Entering Iberia to earn a living, after all, meant having to at least interrupt the open observance of rabbinic Judaism and behave as Catholics did. Most of the expatriates had not yet fully internalized Jewish law; indeed, their observance of it was notoriously lax. Hence, cultural commuting was not a difficult proposition to them. It is instructive to remember that until the development of a judeoconverso Diaspora with strong ties to the Jewish world in the late 1600s, rabbinic law had never been essential to the collective solidarity of New Christians. They traced their ethnic bonds to the Iberian Peninsula, where not all of them were crypto-Jews (I would hazard, in fact, that as of the 1520s the majority were not). Once “Judaicized,” the marchands portugaises in exile and their families still retained considerable religious independence.46 Paredes admitted, for instance, that keeping Jewish fasts in southern Gascony was a matter of individual discretion, since no one was able to enforce their observance, not even emissaries from major Jewish communities.47 It is no surprise, then, that many Diasporic rabbis (let alone Frenchmen) treated the crypto-Jewish colonies in France as illegitimate.48

In seventeenth-century Peyrehorade, peaceful relations between Jews, Catholics, and Protestants prevailed, owing in part to the religious liberality of the region’s potentate, the Duke of Gramont. He invited judeoconverso merchants to settle there, along, it seems, with Huguenot congregations.49 Paredes and his family attended what by 1656 had become, with tacit official recognition, a public synagogue. The young merchant notes, in fact, that Jews and Christians did not live separately, but rather “mixed together, each believ[ing] in and liv[ing] by their [respective religious] law without getting into [the question of] whether
the other [law] was bad.” The point is that mutual tolerance among New Jews and Christians, mostly de facto but occasionally de jure as well, facilitated and probably spurred the kind of cultural borrowing, combination, and recombination that Marcus, Rosman, and others attribute to Medieval and Early Modern Ashkenazim. In the case of Peyrehorade, as we have seen from the case of Paredes, the result was a cohort of first-generation Jews, all of them Francophone and highly Catholicized, so to speak, who could easily and repeatedly cross the border into Spain and behave as Christians without an apparent sense of contradiction.

The borrowing and combining to which I refer is not at all surprising in the case of Judaicized New Christians. They were early modern Jewish history’s “cultural hybrids” par excellence. Various scholars, including contributors to the present volume, have noted their deep Luso-Hispanicity and the myriad ways in which they reformulated Judaism in an Iberian key, even as they internalized rabbinic norms in places like Livorno, Hamburg, London, and Venice. One of my favorite examples of this reformulation is Abraham Pereyra’s treatise, *The Certainty of the Path* (*La certeza del camino*), which was published in Amsterdam in 1666, at a time when Pereyra was the lay president of the organized Sephardi community. On one level, the book is deeply Iberian: Its chief concerns, impeccable Castilian language, and moralistic rhetoric are those of an educated Hispano-Catholic subject (though Pereira was of Judeo-Portuguese descent). The author attacks the human body as corrupt and wallows in remorse in a manner reminiscent of a Christian pietist preaching to ordinary sinners. Paradoxically, his objective here was to promote what in rabbinic discourse is called *teshuvah*—that is to say, a *rapprochement*, through atonement, with the God of Israel. Pereyra underscores, among other things, that it is incumbent upon proper Jews of the Spanish and Portuguese “Nation” to purge their polluted spirits of Christian idolatry, and bemoans the fact that he himself is an ignoramus when it comes to sacred Jewish knowledge, as he has only found the “good path” late in his life.

Pereyra’s community produced several educated men whose writing about the place of children in Sephardi society generally subscribed to the moralistic and guilt-ridden ethos that he articulated. But like *The Certainty of the Path*, such writing also revealed traces of what we may call cultural *collage*—the very same that Pereyra practiced unselfconsciously despite his earnest repudiation of all things Christian.

One such document is Rabbi Menasseh ben Israel’s *Thesovro dos Dinim*. As Lieberman points out, the work incorporates information that “seems [partly]
to represent . . . [Menasseh’s] own lifestyle” and is based on common practice in the Sephardi *kehilla* of Amsterdam.\textsuperscript{52} In other words, the *Thesovro* was not merely didactic. As concerns children, the compendium may even serve as something of a Sephardi counterpart to some of the rabbinic material that Elisheva Baumgarten examined for ethnographic detail in her work on child-rearing among medieval Ashkenazim.

Menasseh’s compendium refers to Sephardi children in passing, but in ways that are nonetheless significant. At one point, for example, the author mentions the problem of abandoned children, which we know plagued his community. Evidently many “respectable” Sephardi men were wont to impregnate their gentile servants. Menasseh, as we have seen in Lieberman’s contribution, tacitly acknowledged this, among other social problems. True to the conservative moralism that characterized the religious leadership of his community, he proposed to solve them by upholding well-established rabbinical norms. As regards infants found in the streets, for instance, he wrote in predictable agreement with Talmudic commentators that some of these children were to be presumed illegitimate and others legitimate depending on how and where the foundlings had been abandoned. He added, however, that in either case the foundlings were to be considered gentiles for legal purposes if the city where they had been abandoned was, like Menasseh’s Amsterdam, an ethnically and religiously diverse city, even if after being rescued the foundlings were reared as Jews.\textsuperscript{53}

Menasseh’s prescription, then, was one of many attempts by communal worthies to protect and separate their Holy Community from its profane environment. The very nature of Menasseh’s subject reveals a far from settled reality. Specifically, the attempt in actuality betrayed a weakness in the cultural boundaries that existed between Jews and gentiles in Amsterdam. Here Menasseh addressed problems arising from the fact that Amsterdam’s Sephardim and their mostly Protestant neighbors inhabited a shared cultural space. He viewed culturally indeterminate children as creatures of that space, people who emerged quite literally out of that common, public ground. He also knew that at least some of the foundlings were outcomes of the improper intimacy with which “Hebrews of the Portuguese and Spanish Nation” and gentiles interacted within that space. The potential for cultural pollution was, to him, consequently severe. In the worst case, he argued, even the ostensibly kosher body of a Sephardi child might turn out to be profane, and therefore endanger the physical and spiritual purity, hence the future, of the Judeo-Portuguese and Judeo-Spanish Nation. To him the taint of poverty and sexual impropriety that underlay foundlings’ entry into the social body of the Nation only underscored that ultimate of dangers.
Then again, Menasseh ben Israel did tolerate some degree of cultural promiscuity in connection to children. A case in point is his passing reference in the *Thesovro* to the *vegia*. As Lieberman explains, this was a customary celebration that Portuguese Jews held on the eve of circumcisions. In the *Thesovro*, Menasseh presents this festivity as a legitimate practice deriving its propriety from such authorities as the Talmud and the *Zohar*. What Menasseh does not say is that the *vegia* had no legal standing in Judaism, did not originate in official religion, and therefore was hardly the respectable buttress to rabbinic law that he probably wished it had been. The vigil’s actual source was medieval folklore and folk practice, much of it probably pagan. In the Middle Ages, Spanish Jews and *judeoconversos* had referred to the *vegia* as the celebration or vigil of the *hadas*, meaning “fates” or “fairies.” Its original purpose was to keep newborn children safe from the Evil Eye. By the seventeenth century, *vegias* (as the *hadas* vigils were known in Portuguese) had become full-fledged parties, complete with drinking and irreverent behavior that drew gentiles and Jews alike. Elliott Horowitz has traced the development of such vigils in the case of early modern Ashkenazi and Italian Jews. He finds that these ceremonies were instances of the unsanctioned mixing of the sacred and the profane, the Jewish and the foreign. Ostensibly, the purpose was to celebrate Jewish births and the commandment of circumcision; but then of course, to do so was strictly unnecessary since the more traditional banquet held *after* circumcisions served that purpose anyway. The drinking and drunkenness, the off-color jokes that some of the celebrants told, the sumptuary excess in which celebrants who happened to be wealthy often indulged, the presence of gentiles at the vigils—all of these aspects made Ashkenazi and Italo-Jewish authorities nervous. It is no surprise that, for their part, some Sephardi authorities attempted to curb the *vegia* among the Portuguese and Spanish Jews by, among other things, excluding Christian guests. Such was the case in seventeenth-century Livorno, for instance.

It is therefore puzzling that Menasseh ben Israel approved of the vigils in Amsterdam. I wonder if these ceremonies could have been very different among the notoriously cosmopolitan Judeoportuguese of the Netherlands than they were among Sephardim elsewhere. Were *vegias* in Amsterdam *not* culturally risqué? Menasseh’s approving reference to the *vegia* is especially surprising in light of the fact that in the *Thesovro* he inveighs against Portuguese Jews’ recourse to magicians, astrologers, and prognosticators.

The key to this puzzle, I suspect, is that non-halakhic ceremonies like the *vegia* were not mere excuses for something else, be it merriment, socializing
with gentiles, and conspicuous consumption by Jewish adults. All of these ostensibly wasteful and immodest practices were but outgrowths of a ceremony intended by Spanish and Portuguese “New Jews” and their immediate Jewish descendants to place a concern for their own children’s welfare at the center of the social life of the Ibero-Jewish ethnic group. By celebrating legitimate children in legally unsanctioned vigils, the members of the in-group were in essence daring to open themselves to a world that some of their leaders found threatening. Yet, the purpose of the opening was basically tribal. That purpose was to revel in children that New Jews knew were Israelites of Ibero-Jewish ancestry, and would therefore allow the quasi-sacred ethnos to continue as a genealogically and therefore spiritually inviolate entity. As an instance of “inward acculturation,” then, the vegia may well have been like the acculturative practices of border-crossing “Portuguese Merchants” in France, and like much else about the lives of Early Modern, Western Sephardim in the West. Celebrating the vegia domesticated what was foreign and “dangerous,” but was allowed to do so, paradoxically, because Ibero-Jews evidently felt confident that they could manipulate alien cultural material so that it would help to ensure their survival, both physical and metaphysical, as an integral “Nation.”

Notes


3. Moriscos, literally meaning “Moorish” in medieval Castilian, was the term applied from the mid-sixteenth century onward to Christianized descendants of Muslims, connoting if not denoting “[crypto-]Muslim,” though the medieval denotation remained in use, and still other usages emerged in relation to American and Southeast Asian natives. See L. P. Harvey, Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 2–10.

4. The Inquisitions treated Judaizing as a heresy of Christianity. The point was to discover and prosecute Christians who Judaized, not openly professing Jews, unless the latter aided and abetted Judaizing among the baptized.


7. Cf. Henry Ansgar Kelly, “Inquisition and the Prosecution of Heresy: Misconceptions and Abuses,” *Church History* 58, 4 (December 1989): 439–451. On page 444 Kelly dismisses the notion of presumptive guilt, asserting that “no one could be legally convicted of a crime without adequate proof.” Here, however, he is concerned primarily with the Roman or Papal Inquisition of the Middle Ages, not with the Iberian Inquisitions of the Early Modern Period. The latter did have reasonable rules of evidence, but their procedures and protocol clearly conveyed the assumption of the guilt of the accused. The prospects for exoneration were always very slim. Despite being given the opportunity to deny accusations and prove the enmity of accusing witnesses, the accused could be and often were subjected to torture if they denied the specific accusations lodged against them. The testimony of witnesses favorable to the accused almost never trumped incriminating statements by others, and the goods of suspects were confiscated well before the suspects were actually prosecuted.


15. The dossier in question is Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 188, expediente 8 (1718–21).
16. The dossier in question is Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 169, expediente 10 (1663–68).

17. The dossier in question is Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 152, expediente 1 (1621–22).

18. On this subject, see for example the collection Familia, religión y negocio: El sefardismo en las relaciones entre el mundo ibérico y los Países Bajos en la Edad Moderna, ed. Jaime Contreras et al (Madrid: Fundación Carlos de Amberes y Ministerio de Asuntos Exteriores, 2002).

19. On this subject, see for example Miriam Bodian, ‘‘Men of the Nation’: The Shaping of Converso Identity in Early Modern Europe” Past and Present, 143 (May, 1994): 48–76.


21. I have reproduced this language from memory—it is that common—but a look at any Portuguese processo against a suspected crypto-Jew from the 1600s should suffice to document the formula.

22. Araujo, 52, citing as an example Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisboa, “Tratado sobre os meios que se ofreceram a Sua Magestade Catholica para remedio do judaismo neste reyno de Portugal,” fol. 5.

23. On this subject, see for example María Jose Pimenta Ferro Tavares, Los Judíos en Portugal (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992), 176–181, especially 179. Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert estimates that at the opening of the seventeenth century, only “over half” of the twenty-thousand or so members of “the Portuguese Nation” (a common euphemism for the predominantly Luso-converso trading nation, including professing Jews and Christians) were New Christians. Id. A Nation Upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal’s Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492–1640 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10, 41.

24. See for instance Levine Melammed, Heretics or Daughters of Israel?


26. Arquivos Nacionais, Torre do Tombo, Inquisição de Évora, processo de André Soito, fol. 15, quoted in Araujo, 54. The translation is mine.


28. Ibid., 57. I am not as certain as the author of the transparency of the dossier, hence I would at least qualify the categorical conclusion (in 72, for instance) that López “was a crypto-Jewess.”

29. Here Brian Pullan’s observation seems apropos: “Crypto-Judaism . . . did not survive just as a consequence of the unfailing loyalty of Jews to Judaism. The inquisition had a part in the survival of secret Judaism, but it was not merely a crude and cynical forger of evidence. By the very questions it asked, by its Edicts of Grace, and by making the public aware of the possibility of secret Judaism, it helped to keep its memory alive. . . . It could also arouse curiosity about Judaism in persons who would not otherwise have seriously thought about it . . . It may also be that a sense of Jewishness, if not
a knowledge of Judaism, was kept alive by the Inquisition but also by other social devices [such as Statutes of Cleanliness of Blood] . . .” Id., 204–205.


31. Gitlitz, 96 n. 51, citing a dossier reproduced in Rafael Gracia Boix, Autops de fe y causas de la Inquisición de Córdoba (Córdoba: Diputación Provincial, 1983), 332. The translation, however, is mine.

32. On recent historiography concerning periodization and the numbers of judeoconversos tried in Spain, see for instance Ricardo García Cárcel and Doris Moreno Martínez, Inquisición: Historia critica, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Temas de Hoy, 2001), 197–205.

33. Jewish groups “Sephardicized” or partly Sephardicized in this fashion include Maghrebi Must’arbim and Romaniots in Ottoman Greece and Turkey.

34. Scholars such as Yosef Kaplan have used this term, which judeoconversos occasionally used as well, to denote New Christians who adopted rabbinic Judaism in exile. Cf. Daniel Swetschinski, Reluctant Cosmopolitans: The Portuguese Jews of Seventeenth-Century Amsterdam (London: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2000), 6–7.

35. For this and other reasons it would be precipitous to speak, as some scholars still do, of a deep-seated desire harbored by all or “the” New Christians to practice the faith of ancestors in freedom.


39. Paredes did not make clear, incidentally, whether he had been circumcised as an infant or in his teens, once he had become a cognizant neophyte.

40. See for example the sentence, itself based on the deposition of, Felipe Diaz Gutierrez, Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 142, expediente 2 (1636).


42. Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 158, expediente 2 (1674–1678), fols. 51v–52r.

43. Ibid., fol 57r.

44. Ibid., fols. 45v–46r.


47. “From the age of thirteen [the Judaizers of Peyrehorade] begin to observe the fasts of the Law of Moses . . . and these [faists] are voluntary; they are not observed perforce, and [observance] is left to the will of whoever wishes to keep them.”
Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 158, expediente 2 (1679–1680), fol. 41v. Paredes mentioned no emissaries, yet I am confident of my assertion regarding them. Jewish emissaries did arrive in Peyrehorade, and elsewhere in the French southwest. They presented fasting as a foremost Jewish duty. Perhaps they did this because they were former Christians themselves, people who held on to the crypto-Jewish emphasis on fasting. Else, the emissaries prescribed fasting because they were interested in purifying the New Jews, and therefore emphasized penitential aspects of rabbinic Judaism. It is conceivable that both reasons were at play. On the role and prescriptions of emissaries to the *marchands portugaises*, see for instance Graizbord, “Becoming Jewish in Early Modern France.”

48. Officially, the Jewish community of Amsterdam, the Sephardi metropolis of the 1600s and 1700s, approached France as a “Land of Idolatry” until the very late seventeenth century because the open profession of Judaism was illegal in France. See for instance Yosef Kaplan, “The Struggle Against Travelers to Spain and Portugal in the Western Sephardi Diaspora,” (in Hebrew), *Zion* 64, 1 (1999): 65–100. Rabbi Moses Raphael D’Aguilar’s reproofation of the French “New Jews” is illustrative of this approach. Yosef Kaplan, “Wayward New Christians and Stubborn New Jews: The Shaping of a Jewish Identity,” *Jewish History* 8, 1–2 (1994): 27–41; here 33.

49. That the Duke was notorious for his liberality toward New Christians is reflected, for example, in Archivo Histórico Nacional, Inquisición de Toledo, legajo 177, expediente 11 (1641–1678), fols. 124v–125r.


53. “An abandoned child found in the streets or in a place where it may be presumed that it was abandoned so that it would die, and in this way conceal adultery—such a [foundling] is to be considered illegitimate; but if it was found in a secure place, or in a public plaza, or circumcised, or with some nightshirt [kemiha; this could also mean a baked good], or well swaddled—such a child is not to be presumed to be illegitimate. Notwithstanding all this, if this abandoned [infant] was found in a city inhabited by Israelites and gentiles, [the infant] remains forever reputed to be a gentile in what has to do with the generations: If [later he or she] were to contract a marriage, it would be necessary to get a divorce because of the doubt as to whether [the foundling] is an Israeli” (emphasis added). Menasseh Ben Israel, *Thesovro dos Dinim* (1645–1647), part V, 79–80 (Bibl. Rosenthaliana, book 1859J47, at: http://cf.uba.uva.nl/en/collections/rosenthaliana/menasseh/). The translation is mine.


56. Lieberman, 14, n.13.

57. See for instance Ben Israel, part 2, chapter 22, 168–172.
Glossary

Names of hevrot are spelled according to the way most frequently used by the Sephardim.

The Hebrew sound het/khaf at the beginning of the word is represented by the letter “h.” If the sound is in the middle of a word, or at the end, it is spelled “kh.”

All words are Hebrew, unless otherwise specified.

anus (pl. anusim)  forced converts from Judaism to Christianity
aron  ark
abi ha-bat  father of the [newborn] daughter being named in the synagogue
Aby jetomim  Father-of-Orphans (name of a hevrah)
aginut  the state of being an agunah (see definition below)
agunah (pl. agunot)  a woman legally bound in marriage to a man with whom she is not living and unable to marry another
aravit  evening prayer
baal-Torah  chanter of the weekly portion of the Torah
bar mitzvah  a boy thirteen years and a day who is obligated to take on the Jewish obligations of a male adult
bayit  house
bet din  rabbinical court
bet av  house of a father
dayan  judge
derashah (pl. derashot)  sermon
Ets Haim  Tree-of-Life (name of a hevrah)
gadol hador  highest rabbinic authority
Gemilut Hassadim  Benevolence (name of a hevrah)
get  writ of divorce
ha-gomel  the blessing pronounced in public for someone who has escaped from danger
hakham (pl. hakhamim)  rabbi, scholar of Jewish law
halakhah  Jewish law and tradition
halizah ceremony  releasing a woman from yibum (see definition below)
harav hamuvhak  most authoritative Jewish scholar
haskavah (pl. hashkavot)  putting to rest; among the Sephardim a prayer recited by mourners
hazzan  cantor
**Glossary**

*hekedesh* charitable fund

*herem* ban

*hevrəh* (pl. *hevrot*) association

Honen Dalim Pitier-of-the-Poor (name of a *hevrəh*)

*hupah* marriage canopy

*kabbələh* tradition; Jewish mysticism

*kaddish* sanctified; prayer for the dead

*kahal* congregation

*kehıllot kedoshot* holy communities

*kətubəh* (pl. *ketubot*) marriage contract

*kiḍushin* preliminary marriage ceremony

*kinyan* symbolic transfer of an object to make an agreement binding

Ma-əravim Jews of North Africa

*maftır* last portion of the parashah or weekly reading of the Torah

*mamzer* (pl. *mamzerim*) child born of a union forbidden by the Torah

Maskil el Dal Enlightener-of-the-Poor (name of a *hevrəh*)

*matzah* (pl. *matzot*) unleavened bread

Mazon Abanot Nourishment-for-the-Girls (name of a *hevrəh*)

*metsitsəh* third step in a circumcision: sucking the blood by mouth (see also *milah* and *periah*)

*mikveh* ritual bath

*milah* circumcision; cutting the foreskin with a knife (see also *periah* and *metsitsah*)

*minhag hamakom* local custom

*minkhah* afternoon prayer

*minyan* quorum of ten men

Mishenets Zequenim Support-for-the-Elderly (name of a *hevrəh*)

*mishpakhəh* clan, family

Mispat Abanot Justice-for-Girls (name of a *hevrəh*)

*mitzvah* (pl. *mitzvoth*) commandment

*mi’un* refusal or protest

*mohel* circumciser

*moredet* a rebellious wife

Must’ərabim Jews of Arab lands

*nedunyah* dowry

*ner tamid* perpetual light

*niddah* menstruant woman

*nisuin* last of marriage ceremonies in which the couple stand together under the canopy

*parashah* weekly biblical reading

Parnasad Almanot Livelihood-for-Widows (name of a *hevrəh*)

*periah* second step in a circumcision: discovering the flesh (see *milah* and *metsitsah*)

Pesakh Passover

*pritzut gedola* a serious act of sexual indiscretion

*posekim* rabbinic deciders
Glossary

rabbanim  rabbis
rimonim  pomegranates; Torah ornaments
Rosh Hodesh  first day of a Hebrew month
rubí  teacher of Jewish school
sedáca  charity
seder  home service on the first night of Passover
Sefer Torah (pl. Sifre Torah)  Pentateuch
Shabbat (pl. shabbatot)  Sabbath
shakharit  morning prayer
Shavuot  Feast of Weeks; festival celebrated seven weeks after Pesakh
shidukhin  engagement
Sidcat Nassim  Charity-for-Women (name of a hevrah)
siddur  Hebrew prayer book
sivlonot  gifts from a groom to his bride
tallit  prayer shawl
Shekhinah  divine presence
Tanakh  Holy Scriptures
tebah  reader’s platform in synagogues
tefilín  prayer phylacteries
Temime Darech  Straightforward-People (name of a hevrah)
teshuváh  return; repentance
tevilah  immersion ritual bath for proselytes
Tosafot  commentaries to the Gemara written by scholars of medieval France
tzeníut  modesty
vegia (Port.)  vigil
yavam  a deceased father
yeshivah (pl. yeshivot)  rabbinical academy
yesod  the divine phallus in Jewish mysticism
yevamah  woman in need of levirate marriage
yibum  levirate marriage
yihus  lineage
Yom Kipur  Day of Atonement
zera shel kaima  living offspring; a child brought to term after the death of the father
Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used throughout this book’s endnotes and bibliography.

ACIL: Archivio della Communita Israelitica di Livorno
ADPi: Archivio Arcivescovile di Pisa
ASF: Archivio di Stato di Firenze
ASLi: Archivio di Stato di Livorno
DBK: Desolate Boedelskamer
DJH: Dutch Jewish History
EH: Ets Haim. Amsterdam
GAR: Gemeente Archief Rotterdam
JQR: Jewish Quarterly Review
LVG: Livro da Vntiao Geral. Hamburg Municipal Archives
HGA: Haags Gemeente Archief
NA: Notarieel Archief
Not.: Notaris
PA: Particulier Archief Amsterdam
RA: Rechterlijk Archief
SAA: Stadsarchief Amsterdam
SR: Studia Rosenthaliana
TVG: Tijschrift voor Geschiedenis
TVSG: Tijschrift voor Sociale Geschiedenis
Translations of full titles of Hebrew periodicals and journals referred to in this book

**Italia**: Studies and Research on the Culture and Literature of the Jews in Italy (Hebrew and Italian)

**Koroth**: A Bulletin Devoted to the History of Medicine and Science

**Michael**: Selections on the History of Jews in the Diaspora

**Pe’amim**: Studies in the Cultural Heritage of Oriental Jewry

**Qiriyat (Kirjath) Sefer**: Bibliographical Quarterly of the Jewish National and University Library of Jerusalem

**Sefer Assia**: Original Articles, Abstracts, and Reports on Matters of *Halacha* and Medicine

**Talpioth**: A Quarterly Dedicated to Hebrew Law, Philosophy, and Ethics

**Sefunot**: Annual for Research on the Jewish Communities in the East

**Zion**: A Quarterly for Research in Jewish History

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