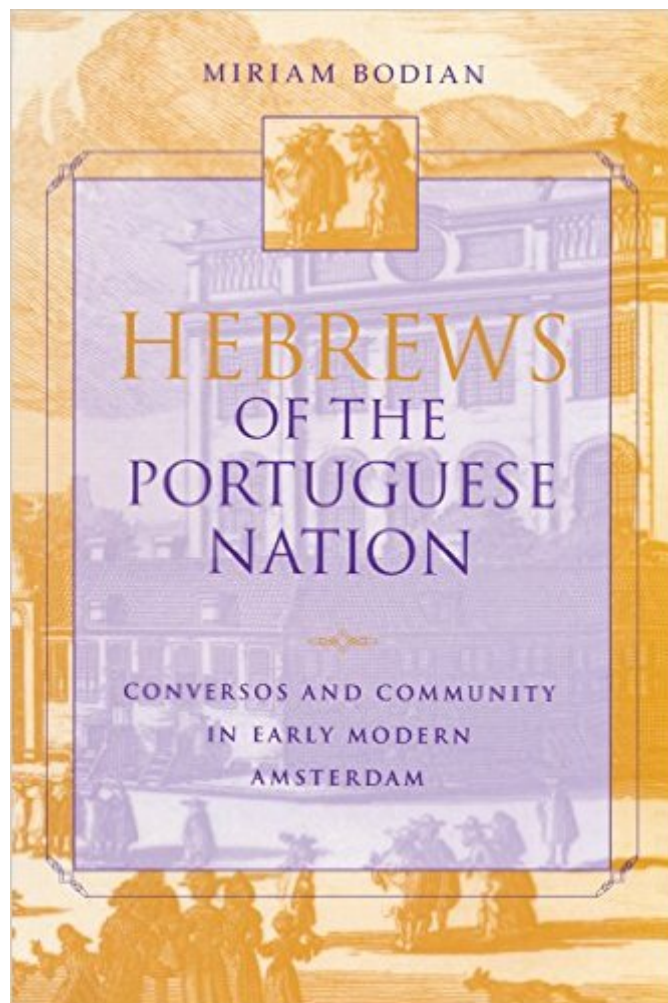


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Hebrews Of The Portuguese Nation: Conversos And Community In Early Modern Amsterdam (The Modern Jewish Experience)



Synopsis

"An engaging introduction to the tortuous plight faced by exiled conversos in Amsterdam and their methods of response. Choicet; In this skillful and well-argued book Miriam Bodian explores the communal history of the Portuguese Jews... who settled in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century."
Drawing on family and communal records, diaries, memoirs, and literary works, among other sources, Miriam Bodian tells the moving story of how Portuguese "new Christian" immigrants in 17th-century Amsterdam fashioned a close and cohesive community that recreated a Jewish religious identity while retaining its Iberian heritage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the last decade of the 16th and first decades of the 17th centuries, Spanish and Portuguese Conversos leave their homelands and come to Amsterdam seeking what author Miriam Bodian calls rejudaization, or what we, today, call conversion as a requirement for full participation in community life and benefits derived by being part of rabbinic Judaism. Affluent, educated, and willing to learn rabbinic Judaism, these Conversos are seeking to learn and to establish Jewish rituals and worship. For example, ex-Conversos seek religious aid from Uri Halevi, an Ashkenazi rabbi from Emden who establishes what is probably the first synagogue in Amsterdam in 1595. When Halevi starts circumcising Conversos, the Dutch authorities arrest him and charge him with circumcising adults who are presumably Conversos. However, Halevi is released and allowed to continue working with the Iberian ex-Conversos and with his help they are able to establish their own rituals by 1603. One

of the early Conversos who arrives in Holland is Isaac Pinto. He is overjoyed at having been given the opportunity to practice Judaism, the religion of his Iberian ancestors. Pinto not only learns Judaism, he studies Hebrew and established a synagogue, which he finances in its entirety during his lifetime. Although few of the ex-Conversos have the financial means that Pinto had, they actively participate in the Jewish community life of Amsterdam. However, as the 17th century starts passing, a new type of Converso who views Judaism as a practical necessity begin arriving in Amsterdam. Often times, this group of Conversos wanted to participate in the life of the synagogue and receive the benefits derived from being part of the Jewish community, but had no desire to undergo circumcision.

Bodian is a scholar, that has weighed the options of the sellability of books vs. insight into history, in this well chronicled book. The difference between the two is that, history can tend to be on the dry side when sticking to facts and reality. Vs. the other which, capitalizes on hype, therefore, diminishing the overall thoroughness of the scholarship. Bodian's insight into the phenomena of the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish conditions is right on. The Spanish and Portuguese Jews (S&P Jews) are a particular substrata of Sephardim that suffered a unrelenting persecution from the Catholic Church, otherwise known as: El Santo Oficio de la Inquisicion, The Spanish Inquisition. Many have tried to put this phenomena, The Jewishness of Crypto-Jews into perspective. Not only is it difficult, on a scholarly level, i.e., to provide a understanding to this aberration of Judaic history. But, the very phenomena of this tragedy, is stained with frustration. On behalf of the mainstream Jewish populace, when addressing the religious status of these isolated people. (I believe that their are political power issues at hand) And the Returness themselves, who want to be accounted as fully Jewish, and rightly so! Yes, there are provisions made in Judaism for Anusim (forced ones). However, doubt always lingers when people come out from nowhere (so it seems), and declares...I am Jewish. When, in all sincerity, they all but diapered from the radar of Rabbinical Judaism (in the eyes of some of the Rabbis). But in fact, they have in their hearts been living under religiously oppressive realities, trying to keep the flame of their Jewish souls intact, by whatever means possible. The S&P Jews, have always had to suffer with this stigma.

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