

International Workshop: **Shaping Identities Through Polemics – The Jewish Portuguese Nation in Amsterdam (17th and 18th Centuries)**

24 October 2024 – University of Potsdam, Am Neuen Palais 10, Potsdam. Room 1.08.0.58.

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Early modern European scholars of all religious affiliations produced an immense corpus of texts dealing with the faiths of the “others” and their sacred books. The wide majority had a polemical attitude: their declared goal was to disprove the legitimacy of the other religions and present their own as the “one true faith”. Beside the eristic nature of polemical texts, recent research also emphasises constructive aspects of late antique, medieval and early modern polemics. Despite their hostility towards otherness, such polemics were often successful in creating and sharing knowledge about other religions. Moreover, since “all determination is negation”, polemical texts – by describing the “errors” of others and their deviancy – helped establish the contents and borders of what each group considered orthodoxy. Therefore, polemical texts had the fundamental function of shaping common social and religious identities.

This crucial effect of polemical literature is particularly evident in the Sephardic community of Amsterdam. By disproving Christianity and its theology, Sephardic Jews not only stressed the differences between them and the different Christian denominations; they also dealt with their own Christian past as *conversos* on the Iberian Peninsula and with their relatives still living – at least officially – as Christian “idolaters”. Beside the inter-religious dimension, the Jewish polemical production in Amsterdam had an inner-Jewish facet: Sephardic scholars also engaged in polemics against a broad spectrum of what they considered deviant versions of Judaism (like Sabbatianism and criticism of rabbinic tradition).

The international workshop “Shaping Identities Through Polemics”, hosted by the University of Potsdam and the Selma Stern Zentrum, aims at investigating the prolific production of polemical texts among Sephardic scholars living in Amsterdam during the 17th and 18th centuries. The contributors will examine methodological issues that arise in working with polemical literature and contemplate some of the major research questions. They will also explore what Jewish authors in Amsterdam knew about the Jewish and non-Jewish “others”, how they portrayed them and how they used polemical texts to shape religious and social identities.

Shaping Identities through Polemics

The Jewish Portuguese Nation in Amsterdam (17th and 18th Centuries)

Programme

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| 10:00 - 10:15 | Sina Rauschenbach Davide Liberatoscioli | Greetings and Opening Remarks |
| 10:15 - 11:15 | Mónica Colominas Aparicio | Through the Lens of Exception: Rethinking Methods in the Study of Muslim Polemics in Late Medieval Iberia |
| 11:15 - 11:30 | | Coffee |
| 11:30 - 12:15 | Davide Liberatoscioli | The polemical Works of Abraham Gómez Silveira |
| 12:15 - 13:15 | | Lunch |
| 13:15 - 14:00 | Francesco Testa | Elijah Montalto's <i>Tratado</i> and the critique of original sin |
| 14:00 - 14:45 | Ran Segev | Shaping Identities through Polemics: Human-Animal Boundaries in 17th-Century Sephardic Amsterdam |
| 14:45 - 15:15 | | Closing Remarks |