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Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste

Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa

Alameda da Universidade

1600-214 Lisboa

Telef. +351 21 792 00 00

cadernos\_sefarditas@letras.ulisboa.pt

<http://cadernos.catedra-alberto-benveniste.org>

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# Praying to the God of Israel according to the Portuguese Tradition (16th–18th centuries)

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**IGNACIO CHUECAS SALDÍAS**  
Universidad Finis Terrae

**SUSANA BASTOS MATEUS**  
CESAB-FLUL; CIDEHUS-UÉvora; CEHR-UCP

Praying to the God of Israel according to the Portuguese Tradition (16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries) is a project funded by the Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas Alberto Benveniste and is currently under development, with an expected completion date by 2022.

The project develops an unprecedented work regarding the identification, publication and analysis of manuscript prayer books (*siddurim*) belonging to the Judeo-Portuguese tradition that have been preserved, mainly as evidence, within inquisitorial trials and other repertoires. These are texts written in Spanish, Portuguese and Hebrew (including hybridizations between these languages) that were copied, stored and transmitted mostly by individuals syndicated as new Christians and accused by the Holy Office under suspicion of Judaism. These prayers not only contribute to our knowledge about Judaizing practices and devotional customs within this segment but also, at the same time, shed new lights on a relevant chapter in the development of private and synagogal liturgy according to the modality of the Judeo-Iberian tradition. Beyond complying with a simple work of editing and publishing, the researchers seek to clarify relevant moments such as the agencies of the actors involved, liturgical practices in clandestine environments, circulation of knowledge in the Iberian and colonial spaces, relations between Jewish communities of free lands and Judaizing circles, richness and plurality within the various traditions related to the Jewish

prayer orders. These are fundamental aspects in order to better understand the phenomena that characterized the reinvention of Western Judaism of Portuguese-Spanish roots during early modernity (16th-18th centuries) after the great crisis of the late medieval period.

At the same time, it represents an important challenge for the project to elucidate the multiple connections that link the textual material present in the inquisitorial documentation and other repertoires with the editions of the Spanish-Portuguese ritual used among the communities of the western Sephardic diaspora. From this aspect, it seems of fundamental importance to attempt an unprecedented research into the development and original characteristics inherent both in Spanish-Portuguese prayer books and in the liturgy according to the Judeo-Portuguese rite during early modernity.

A fundamental aspect of this research is represented by the linguistic complexities typical of the devotional literature of the Portuguese nation. Indeed, the medieval Iberian prayer books were written following traditional patterns (some of which were very old), mainly in Hebrew and Aramaic. In the late medieval period (14th-15th centuries) vernacular versions began to appear in *Sefarad* mainly in Castilian romance and Catalan. After the settlement of Judeo-Portuguese communities in Italy in the mid-16th century (mainly in Ferrara and Venice), Castilian versions of the *siddur* appeared, aimed at a public of mostly Portuguese origin. For a somewhat later period we have a couple of handwritten versions also in Portuguese. With the predominance of the Amsterdam community throughout the 17th century, the Spanish prayer book was somewhat canonized for liturgical use. During the eighteenth century, the first English versions appeared in the communities of London and New York, certainly fostered from the usual Spanish vernacular version. The project aims, therefore, to take into account the linguistic dimensions, understanding that they reflect a fundamental matrix to appreciate not only the complex identity of Western Judaism but also its indissoluble roots in the European culture of its time.