

Winter 2018

**Ben-Ur, "The Absorption of Outsiders:  
Gibraltarians and North Africans in London's  
Portuguese Jewish Community" (first page  
only).pdf**

Aviva Ben-Ur

# The Absorption of Outsiders: Gibraltarians and North Africans in London's Portuguese Jewish Community

Aviva Ben-Ur\*

In June of 1822, Judah Aloof, a native of Gibraltar and dues-paying member of the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue, Congregation *Sa'ar ASamayim* in London, was blessed with the birth of a son.<sup>1</sup> To mark the occasion, the twenty-one-year old Aloof requested that the President of the congregation confer upon him the honor (*misva*) of opening the doors of the armoire that housed the Torah scroll, so that it could be retrieved and read at the reader's lectern.<sup>2</sup> The congregation's President, however, denied the request, directing the Secretary to inform Aloof that persons who "refused to pay their accounts" would be barred from receiving honorary functions.<sup>3</sup>

Aloof was a *yahid*, a status conferred only upon Jews solvent enough to pay at least one Great British Pound, annual dues that entitled them to participate in congregational ballots and enjoy ceremonial honors. In Portuguese Jewish congregations throughout the Atlantic world, the honor of being called to the Torah was highly coveted and a public marker of social status.<sup>4</sup> Congregational affiliates who could not afford to pay the yearly levy were classified as

\* I thank Laura Lovett for helpful feedback on an early version of this chapter. I am also grateful to Miriam Rodrigues-Pereira, Honorary Archivist of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews' Congregation, the London Metropolitan Archives, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, and Curaçao's Portuguese Jewish community for facilitating access to their collections.

1 Judah Aloof's place of birth is indicated in *Mocatta v Mercado*, February 21, 1824, The National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNAUK), C 13/2186/27.

2 In Portuguese-inflected Hebrew, a synagogue honor is referred to as a *misva* (plural *misvot*) and the armoire as the *ehal*. Judah Aloof's birthdate of 1801 is recorded in Jewish tombstone inscriptions, *Genealogy and Family History*, <http://www.cemeteryscribes.com/getperson.php?personID=16803&tree=Cemeteries> (last accessed April 30, 2016).

3 Information pertaining to the excommunication case appears in *Minutes of Meetings of the Mahamad, 1822–1824*, London Metropolitan Archives, London, United Kingdom (LMA), LMA/4521/A/01/03/008, *passim*, and *Minutes of Meeting [sic] of the Mahamad, 1824–1826*, LMA/4521/A/01/03/009, *passim*.

4 See, for example, Arnold Wiznitzer, "The Merger Agreement and Regulations of Congregation Talmud Torah of Amsterdam (1638–39)," *Historia Judaica* 20 (1958): 109–132, 121–122.