

# WORKSHOP

## Isaac Orobio: The Jewish Argument with Dogma and Doubt

The Amsterdam physician Isaac Orobio de Castro (c.1617-1687) is renowned as the sharpest pen among the early modern defenders of Judaism against Christian proselytizing. His Spanish clandestine polemics, copied and collected among the Sephardim, did not fail to leak out into the non-Jewish world and arm the most radical Enlightenment philosophers for their attacks on Christianity. Voltaire found this Jewish author "profound, yet never obscure, a man of refined literary taste, of a pleasant wit and impeccable manners." Orobio's polemical writings owe much of their quality to his transcultural experience. Born as Baltasar Álvares in Bragança (Portugal) to Christian parents of Jewish ancestry, he achieved a brilliant career as a court physician and university professor in Spain and France, but broke with his double life when he publicly became a Jew. With solid academic erudition and skilled baroque rhetoric, Orobio translated Jewish religious positions into the philosophical language of the day. This Jewish apologist constantly fought in two directions - against Christian dogma and Spinozist doubt. The workshop will assess the impact of Jewish criticism on the early modern quest for philosophical certainty and religious pluralism.

**Thu, 25/02/2016**

**Maimonides Centre for  
Advanced Studies**

**Schlüterstraße 51, 20146 Hamburg  
(Seminar Room/5<sup>th</sup> Floor)**

**Convenor: Carsten Wilke**

### PROGRAMME

**09:15 – 10:15**

**GUIDED VISIT at the State and University Library of Hamburg  
Polemical Manuscripts of the Portuguese Jews**

Hans-Walter Stork (Hamburg State and University Library)

**10:30 – 11:00**

**OPENING ADDRESS**

Luísa Pais Lowe (Consul General of Portugal in Hamburg)

**WELCOMING REMARKS**

Giuseppe Veltri (Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies,  
Hamburg)

**11:00 – 13:00 SESSION 1**

Chair: Michael Studemund-Halévy (Institute for the History of the  
German Jews, Hamburg)

**"From Christianity to Judaism" Revisited: Some Critical  
Remarks after Forty Years of its First Publication**

Yosef Kaplan (Hebrew University Jerusalem)

**The Literary Profile of Isaac Orobio de Castro**

Harm den Boer (University of Basel)

**14:00 – 16:00 SESSION 2**

Chair: Paolo Luca Bernardini (Università degli Studi dell'Insubria)

**Clandestine Classics: Isaac Orobio's Polemical Works and the  
Generic Traditions of Sephardi Anti-Christian Literature**

Carsten Wilke (Central European University Budapest)

**From Apologetics to Polemics: Isaac Orobio's Defences of  
Judaism and their Use in the French Enlightenment**

Adam Sutcliffe (King's College London)

**16:30 – 18:30 SESSION 3**

Chair: Sina Rauschenbach (University of Potsdam)

**Reading Orobio in Nineteenth Century England: The  
Missionary**

Alexander McCaul's "Israel Avenged"

David Ruderman (University of Pennsylvania)

**DISCUSSION: Isaac Orobio's Place in Early Modern Thought**

The event is open to the public, with advance registration via e-mail.

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