

JEWISH LIFE IN RECIFE

MINUTE BOOK OF CONGREGATION ZUR ISRAEL OF RECIFE

***The Minute-Book of Congregation Zur Israel* of the Jewish Community of Recife was drafted between 1648 and 1653. It provides unique historical evidence of the Jewish past in Brazil and sheds light on the backgrounds of the 23 individuals who arrived in New Amsterdam in 1654.**

The Minute Book consisting of 28 pages, was written in early 17th century Portuguese interspersed with many words in Hebrew and Ladino. It sets forth regulations concerning the many aspects of daily and religious life including:

- Membership in the community
- Election of officers
- Religious services and education
- *Aliyot* – “Those to be honored with an *aliyah* (called to the Torah) were chosen by lot.”
- Seats in the synagogue: “No one was permitted to change the seat assigned to him in the synagogue... No mention is made of women in the assignment of seats.”
- Finances, debts and taxes
- Social Welfare - Support of the poor – was the responsibility of the *Mahamad*.*

- **Justice and law enforcement**
- **Education: Recife had a Talmud Torah School for small children and a Gemara School for older boys.***
- **Funds for Eretz Israel: Sabbath Nahamu , (the Sabbath after Tish'ah B'Av) was the day on which pledges were made for donations to the Holy Land.***

171 signatures are legible in the Minute Book: They represent the only existing authentic documentary evidence concerning the number and names of the members of the Jewish community of Brazil from 1648 to 1653.

The first names of the Brazilian Jewish men were all Hebrew names such as Abraham, David, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aron, Benjamin, Daniel. Mathathias and Samuel. Their family names fall into four categories:

- **Hebrew names: Aboab, Baruh, Cohen, Gabay and Levy**
- **Christian names, mostly Portuguese or Spanish: Castro, Diaz, Fonseca, Navarro**
- **One Hebrew and one non-Hebrew name such as Cohen Henriques or Jesurun Coelho**
- **Hebrew names followed by the name of the country such as Gabbay de Moroc or Ysrael de Piza**

Many members of Congregation Shearith Israel can trace their family ancestry to Recife, Brazil.

(*The Records of the Earliest Jewish Community in the New World by Arnold Wiznitzer)