



Hamsa

Journal of Judaic and Islamic Studies

9 | 2023

Dossier em Honra à Professora Filomena Barros

Toledot Yeshu as a framework of identity resistance

The Portuguese case: Text and context (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries)

José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/hamsa/4209>

DOI: 10.4000/hamsa.4209

ISSN: 2183-2633

Publisher

CIDEHUS - Centro Interdisciplinar de História Culturas e Sociedades da Universidade de Évora

Electronic reference

José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim, "*Toledot Yeshu* as a framework of identity resistance", *Hamsa* [Online], 9 | 2023, Online since 19 November 2023, connection on 02 February 2024. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/hamsa/4209> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/hamsa.4209>

This text was automatically generated on February 2, 2024.



The text only may be used under licence CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. All other elements (illustrations, imported files) are "All rights reserved", unless otherwise stated.

Toledot Yeshu as a framework of identity resistance

The Portuguese case: Text and context (sixteenth–seventeenth centuries)

José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva Tavim

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I am indebted to Daniel Barbu for all his patient help, especially by providing supporting bibliography.

This work is financed by national funds through FCT – Foundation for Science and Technology, I.P., in the scope of the projects UIDB/04311/2020 and UIDP/04311/2020.

Introduction

- ¹ References to the Jewish story of Jesus or *Toledot Yeshu* (as it is commonly known) in documents relating to Jews, in the Jewish sources themselves,¹ and in the writings of Christian authors who integrated the narrative (or part thereof) in their anti-Jewish polemics² provide clear evidence of its circulation in the Iberian Peninsula already in the Middle Ages. As far as we can tell, when the Jews used *Toledot Yeshu* in medieval times, the narrative served mainly as a means for persuading their co-religionists to stand firm in their socio-religious identity by “corrupting” Christological theology, that is, by highlighting the ridiculousness of the Christian story of Jesus, from his birth of an immaculate virgin to his death on the cross.³
- ² The true extent of the use and knowledge of the narrative within the various Iberian Jewish *milieux* in the early modern period, however, remains poorly understood. In the case of Portugal, we are lucky enough to have so clues indicating its use among the first generation of New Christians (Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity in 1497) who were prosecuted by the Inquisition. Although the title *Toledot Yeshu* itself is never

mentioned in the trials, and the portions of its content were likely considered just a set of blasphemies by the inquisitors – who did not understand that it was a story with some degree of uniformity – they continued to be used as an affirmative tool among New Christians to deny the truth of Christianity and at the same time confirm their “true,” that is the Jewish versions of the life of Jesus. This is why the *Toledot Yeshu* is described by David Biale as a “counter-history” of the Gospel narrative.⁴ As we shall see, its knowledge and use among Iberian Jews established in Morocco is also attested as late as the seventeenth century.

- 3 This paper seeks not only to reveal evidence of the utilization of *Toledot Yeshu* by Portuguese New Christians but also to consider the place of this story in the set of narratives used by the literate Jewish elites seeking to understand the fate of their people within the framework of the historical diachrony determined by the divine plan.

Sources and Individuals

- 4 We can find many expressions attacking the foundations of Christianity in sixteenth century trials by the Portuguese Inquisition against Jews who had converted to Christianity in Portugal and Spain but were residing in the former country. Some of these are succinct but very cutting, sometimes even extreme.
- 5 Thus, for instance, Galaor de Vilhagra, a resident of Bragança (in Northern Portugal) who had been baptized in Fonte Roupel, in Castile, was accused by the Inquisition of Évora in 1547 of having said that Jesus was born in a manger amidst turds and that the Law of Jesus was like a wooden spoon, dictated by two thieves and two whores.⁵ Isabel Lopes, from Torrão, imprisoned by the Inquisition of Évora in 1559, was accused of having claimed that the Jews had not killed Jesus, but rather their sins, and also that he was just a man: therefore, he had died for his sins and not that of all mankind.⁶ A famous doctor and botanist, Garcia da Orta (1501–1568), was also accused by his brother-in-law, Leonel Peres, of having said that Christ was not the son of God and that the Jews had not killed him. According to his brother-in-law, Garcia also said that Christ had died of old age and that he was the son of Maiã (Myriam) and Joseph.⁷
- 6 What can be said of these sibylline insinuations? What are their origins? Their laconism leads only to suspicions. Were these small oral mentions or forebodings based on oral or written knowledge of *Toledot Yeshu*, maybe even just parts of the story? Galaor de Vilhagra’s scatological remark can perhaps be linked to a passage of the Babylonian Talmud, *Gittin* 56b–57b, telling the story of Onkelos, who wished to convert to Judaism and invoked the spirits of Emperor Titus, Barlaam, and Jesus through necromancy to know their opinion. All three are now in hell (Gehenna), where they suffer different types of torments. Jesus, in particular, is chastised with boiling excrement, a punishment which, as suggested by Thierry Murcia, likely reflects the idea that Christianity is a new form of idolatry, since it has turned a man into God, and its believers prostrate before human figures. Given the association of idolatry, sexuality, and scatology in rabbinical teachings, feces come to represent the teachings of Jesus and of the Christian religion he has founded. In the Talmudic story, however, Jesus acknowledges his faults and reveals his vanity.⁸ The “source” of Galaor’s invective needs not be the Talmud, and his remark may reflect knowledge of other anti-Christian texts or narratives, based on *Toledot Yeshu* or similar polemical traditions to which he could have had access in one form or another (written or oral).⁹ It should be noted that

in one of the many extant versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, the so-called Huldricus text, published by J.J. Ulrich in 1705, Jesus's body is buried in a sewer so as "to fulfill the words of the sages, 'all who mock the words of the sages shall be sentenced to boiling excrement', a clear reference to *Gittin* 56b-57b.¹⁰ We shall return to the case of Galaor de Vilhagra below.

- 7 Both Galaor de Vilhagra and Garcia de Orta had roots in neighboring Spain, which may suggest that their comments reflect the climate of strong identity resistance in Spain before the expulsion decree of 1492 when episodes of violence against Jews, aggression, forced conversion, and even annihilation of entire communities occurred.¹¹
- 8 In the 1540s, a group of New Christians was imprisoned in the jails of the Inquisition of Évora. While imprisoned, they exchanged opinions on many matters, including religion. The names of the prisoners were Salvador Vaz, from Lisbon,¹² Francisco Aires and Henrique de Miranda da Torre, from Bragança, Francisco Mendes, called Beicinho (Small Pout) and Nuno Rodrigues, both from Vinhais near Bragança, Luis de Carvajal and João Dias de Odemira. Each of these men reflected upon their socio-religious condition while in jail. Little did they know that their conversations were spied upon and recorded. Henrique de Miranda da Torre's thus allegedly told Salvador Vaz (in Castellano, hinting at his likely Spanish origins) that "it would be better to be in Castile, the lesser of two evils, and to run away from these men and these gentiles."¹³ Despite having a Portuguese mother and a home in Bragança, Francisco Aires was born in Medina del Campo, which is in Castile.¹⁴ Nuno Rodrigues, for his part, was born in Campo Maior, a town close to the border with Spain.¹⁵ Salvador Vaz, we are told, knew the meaning of a few Hebrew words and chanted: "Thovejeno Adonay Aloeno (...), which means Adonai, my God."¹⁶ This dispersed data points to the strong ties connecting this group of men to the North of Portugal and neighboring Castile. Castile was also the birthplace of Luis de Carvajal,¹⁷ the ancestor (possibly the grandfather) of the renowned governor of Nuevo León, also named Luis de Carvajal y de la Cueva (1539–1590).¹⁸ Besides Salvador Vaz, it seems that only one other prisoner João Dias de Odemira, who came from the Alentejo region, in the South of Portugal¹⁹ – but nonetheless actively took part in the conversations of his cellmates from Trás-os-Montes – was not of Castilian origin.²⁰
- 9 Let us consider in more detail the case of Francisco Aires. Baptized in Lousã (Portugal), Aires belonged to the first generation of Jews who had become Christians on Portuguese soil. He later settled in Trás-os-Montes and lives in Bragança as a landowner. He was however accused by the Inquisitors (based on testimonies) of spreading the rumor that Jesus was a sorcerer and a conjuror, who was crucified on a cross made of wicker, a charm-proof material, or on a cabbage stalk. Allegedly, Aires also claimed that Christ had stolen the flag bearers (*semíforos*) in the Jerusalem Temple and made small birds out of plaster. He also denied Jesus's, saying that he was but a "dead man" (*homem morto*) and that all Christian things were nothing but wind (*falar em cousas de cristaãos que eram cousas de vento*).²¹ These motifs reflect the knowledge of *Toledot Yeshu*. The mention of the *semíforos* in Francisco Aires's account likely refers to the story of Jesus's theft of God's Ineffable Name – *Shem ha-Meforash* – to perform miracles, as we know them from the various versions of *Toledot Yeshu*.²² Aires could of course have had access to a Christian version of *Toledot Yeshu* since parts of the narrative were cited by Raymundus Martini in his *Pugio Fidei adversus Mauros and Judaeos* (c. 1280),²³ and later copied verbatim by the Franciscan friar Alfonso de Espina

in his widely diffused polemical work, *Fortalitium Fidei*, first published in 1470.²⁴ However, Paola Tartakoff has also shown that *Toledot Yeshu* circulated orally and transversely across the Jewries of late medieval Aragon.²⁵

The man Yeshu

- 10 To understand the utility of this fragment of a *Toledot Yeshu* narrative for one of the New Christians imprisoned in Évora, we need to consider the discursive practices of the other participants in the conversation as well, based on the use of other narratives that reveal the mythic narrative of the *conversos* concerning Jesus and their “inclusion” in the Christian World. Although in different forms, and with varying degrees of hostility towards Jesus Christ and Christianity it should be noted that all the participants essentially regarded Jesus as a mere man. For some, like Francisco Aires, he was an abominable sorcerer and conman, whose behavior was in tune with the modest conditions of his birth; for others, *conversos* prisoned in Évora Inquisition, he was on the contrary a rather extraordinary man, whose aura derives from his identification with God – a reminiscent of other “mysterious” oriental characters. This should perhaps not come as a surprise if we consider that considering that both Christian and Jewish cultures were to some extent permeable to edifying narratives that had “traveled” from the East and had been adapted to their new cultural context. And indeed, the Évora trials testify precisely to that process of appropriation and accommodation.
- 11 During a session held on May 31, 1546, João Dias testified about a conversation with his cellmates concerning “the captivity of the New Christians and their exile.” Dias stressed in his testimony that “all of them (all of his cellmates) had participated in the discussion.” However, he only recounted what Luis de Carvajal had said on the expulsion of the Jews from France and their migration to the Iberian Peninsula, or, in his words, “how the Jews had come from France and spilled into Castile and Portugal”.²⁶ According to the story told by Luis de Carvajal, the French king had decided to expel all the Jews from his kingdom, but his personal begged him to reconsider. As the monarch remained adamant, the Jewish physician made a merciful request: he asked the king to walk with him into a field located two shots of crossbow away. The king had accepted his request, after which the physician returned home, dug a hole in the ground, and jumped inside wearing a coarse cloth (an *argal*).²⁷ He stayed there, covered in ashes, for three days. At the end of this three-day fast, the king summoned the Jew, who left his hole in the ground and went barefoot to the field where he was to meet the monarch. Both men walk away from the crowd, two shots of crossbow away from everyone else. Suddenly a man appears, wearing only a small cloth (*panetes*) around his waist, displaying an open wound on the right side of his chest, holding a cross in his hand, and carrying a small bundle of wood on top of his head. The king begins to tremble in front of this apparition, but the physician tells him “Sire, fear not!” and insists that they should ask the ghost who he is. “Jesus Christ” replies the latter. The king then asked what he was doing, walking in tatters, and carrying a bundle of wood on his head. And Jesus replied:

I am here to pay a great penance given to me by God our Father to carry this small bundle of wood with which I immolate myself twice a day for every evil committed against the Jews, for every evil committed for my sake by the gentiles against the Jews.

- 12 The king then turns towards the Jew and asks: “Will you not show me your God?” The physician nodded but said it was necessary to walk a further two shots of a crossbow, which they did. The air and earth were suddenly shaken by thunder and lightning, which inspired great awe in the French king. But the Jewish physician told him not to fear, as it was nothing, and that no one who had ever seen God had lived to tell the tale. The king then said he had seen enough, and “por amor daquilo” (*for the sake of that*) he would let the Jews remain in his kingdom for another seven years until they could sell all their belongings.²⁸
- 13 Many elements of the curious account of the Jews’ expulsion from France in fact recall those of another celebrated narrative, namely the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, a story largely diffused in late medieval Spain via popular works such as the *Flos Sanctorum*, or “Lives of the Saints.” Thus, for instance, the story of the physician hiding in a hole, the account of his intimate dialogue with the king, or the sudden demonstrations of God’s power all evoke this narrative, with the usual caution of adapting a fictitious tale to the factual context of the Jews’ expulsion from France in the late fourteenth century.²⁹
- 14 The Indian origins of the Barlaam and Josaphat story were well known. And the integration of this narrative within a Christian context may also well be explained both in light of its virtues included in the “oriental” narrative, but also because of the similarity of some of its teachings with those of Christ himself. This purged and Christianized adaptation of the life of Siddhārtha Gautama, *i.e.* the Buddha, likely derives from the *Lalitavistara* – a Sanskrit Sutra from the third or fourth century CE, first translated into Persian and then into Syriac, before making its way into the Latin world³⁰ – as was already recognized by the Portuguese chronicler Diogo do Couto in the early seventeenth century.³¹ The story of Barlaam and Josaphat had a specific goal in its original Oriental context: it aimed to show that learning can push man beyond the borders of material comfort and bring him to focus on spiritual things and the celestial city.³² Marie Campbell has shown how elements of the Barlaam and Josaphat story, such as the “Three Teachings of the Bird” (or Nightingale), also entered Jewish folklore in the Middle Ages.³³ As we know, the story was translated from Arabic into Hebrew in the thirteenth century by the Aragonese scholar Abraham ben Hasdai, under the title *Ben Ha-Melech veba-Nazir*, and thus well-known also among Jews.³⁴
- 15 What interests us here is the figure of Jesus as it appears in Luis de Carvajal’s story. Jesus is never described as the son of God, and the use of the expression “Our Father” seems to refer in general terms to the “father” of all humanity. He appears as a Man “stripped” of all vanity, who follows God’s order and immolates himself every time Christians harm Jews. This leads us to assume that this is a very Jewish Jesus. When the king asks the physician to see the God of the Jews, the latter dissuades him from doing so, what seems to refer to the intrinsic relationship between God and “his” people. Introducing the story of the king and the hermit into his ontological reflection on the fate and exile of the Jews as determined by God, Carvajal is not only humanizing Jesus; he is also providing a strikingly positive figure of the man Jesus, which in fact contrasts with the negative image of him found in anti-Christian traditions such as *Toledot Yeshu*.
- 16 However, the latter image, expressed (as seen above) by his fellow prisoner Francisco Aires, somewhat mitigates Carvajal’s lucubration, in the context of increased inquisitorial pressure. In a later session of his trial, Luis de Carvajal asks to be taken to the king of Portugal under protection, so that he can tell all the bishops that the

Christian Law is false and that the Mosaic Law is true.³⁵ Luis also tells the “bachelor” (*bacharel*) Manuel Álvares – who was his procurator – that, by carrying a cross on his back, Jesus Christ was in fact doing penance for all the evil committed against the Jews.

³⁶

- 17 The trials of these men belonging to the first generation of converted Jews may showcase the panoply of multifaceted references permeating the Jewish communities of the Iberian Peninsula on the eve of their destruction, and which many Spanish Jews had transported with them to Portugal (and into their New-Christian identity). Some of these belong to an old-age tradition of countering Christianity – stories such as *Toledot Yeshu* – while others witness the influence of alternative traditions, such as the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, which Jews could also adapt and “update” according to their preoccupations.

Repeating, Competing, and Entertaining

- 18 In his seminal study *Zakhor*, Yosef Haym Yerushalmi drew attention to the two major channels through which memory is conveyed in the Jewish context: rituals and narratives.³⁷ These two channels intersect in the Jewish calendar which serves not only to remember but above all to re-live the events that have determined the fate of the Jewish people. The reuse, transformation, and adaptation of traditions such as *Toledot Yeshu* or the story of Barlaam and Josaphat, by Jewish converted to Christianity, in a specific context, reflects a similar pattern of repetition.
- 19 Luís de Carvajal considered Portugal to be “the end of the trials and tribulations for the Sons of Israel.”³⁸ This sheds light on a theme we encounter also in Samuel Usque’s *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel*, a work printed in Ferrara in 1553. Usque, however, stated on the contrary that the salvation of New Christians could only be achieved in the Diaspora and not in Portugal, where there could they live freely as Jews.³⁹
- 20 Let us return to the case of Galaor de Vilhagra, in 1547. António de Valença, a physician established in Mogadouro – who had been known as Moisés prior to his baptism in Miranda do Douro in 1495 and was arrested for his apocalyptic views – was considered by the Évora’s inquisitors to be Mogadouro’s chief dogmatist. One João Fernandes Pinheiro, from Vinhais, had accused him of denying Christ’s divine character and messianic nature. Valença insisted that the true Messiah would descend from the house of David, while the anti-Christ would come from the tribe of Dan and will destroy the world. He also believed that Jewish Law would soon replace Christianity and that by the 1550s, everyone would become a Jew. Unsurprisingly, Valença also denied Mary’s virginity. It was also said that he had prophesied that Prince John (1537–1554) would be the last king of Portugal following the death of his father, John III (ruled 1521–1557). Like Galaor de Vilhagra, he identified the Law of Christ with a wooden spoon and went as far as to say that Christ was born in a manger in Bethlehem, surrounded by turds.⁴⁰
- 21 António de Valença was prosecuted by the Inquisition of Évora between 1544 and 1548. The accusations against him refer to the same tropes discussed above, when comparing the Jewish Law and the Christian Law, as Luís de Carvajal, who was also imprisoned in Évora more or less at the same time;⁴¹ and the allusions to Christian Law as a wooden spoon and to Christ’s birth in a manger, amid turds, are found also in the depositions

against Galaor de Vilhagra in 1547. These repetitions may reflect the fact that all these men were arrested together or that they shared the same traditions.

- 22 But as in the case of the repetition of the phrase regarding Israel's "tribulations", we must stress that this is an ancestral practice whose usefulness is resistance, sometimes adaptive, to the extent that this is possible.
- 23 What about *Toledot Yeshu*? Daniel Barbu has noted, referring to the late medieval and early modern German context that "the story, and its collective and repeated performance, also contributed to nurturing the Jews' feeling of exclusion from the Christian narrative and inclusion in a Jewish one".⁴² This suggestion seems to be corroborated in the context under review here by an important case in front of the Lisbon Inquisition in the seventeenth century. The case in question is a trial against a Jewish doctor from Fez, Isaac Almosnino, accused of uttering blasphemies in Goa, the capital of the Portuguese State of India, in 1617.⁴³ He was transported to Lisbon together with his brother Abraham – accused of the same crime – the following year, as both were suspected of having been baptized Christians. Due to the lack of evidence, they were released from prison, conveyed to Morocco by boat, and banned from entering Portugal or its colonies ever again. But what were the "blasphemies" the two brothers were said to have uttered?
- 24 While in India, Isaac and Abraham were both staying in the house of Robert Shirley, the ambassador of the Shah of Persia and their patron.⁴⁴ On 21 January 1617, a certain João Álvaro Ferraz, an Old Christian, appeared in the *Casa do Despacho da Inquisição* (the Inquisition Dispatch Bureau) in Goa to testify against both Jews. João, 40 years old, was born in Mozambique, and married in Ceylon. Being dependent on Robert Shirley to travel to Portugal and realizing that the Almosnino had great influence over the ambassador, he had not come of his own free will to denounce their blasphemies to the Inquisition of Goa, and so he asked the inquisitors to show mercy for his weakness. Meeting with the Jews at the window of a *logea*, they began to despise the Inquisition, saying that it only served to not know the truth. They also mocked the flag of Mercy and the clerics, saying of one of them "how much did God owe him?" And on another, because he was black, that among the Jews they chose the most suitable gentlemen. Then, João Álvaro Ferraz claimed that about forty days earlier, while dining at the ambassador's residence, the Jews began saying that:

Christ was a Jew like them and a less of a good man than they were, and he was an idolater, stirring and confusing the people, and seeing that this was already beyond remedy because the Jews had thrown him out of the Temple, had then formed the Law, and had been its Author. Then, seeing that the Jews wanted to arrest him, with words of sorcery he ascended so high that he could fall into another land where the Jews did not exist, and be freed from them. And that Judas, who knew more than Jesus, had climbed higher and pissed on his head and made him fall, and then the Jews took hold of him, bound him, and hanged him on a tree, which he was able to break with his words. And when the Jews saw that they could not hang him on a tree because all would break, on the advice of an old Jew, they hanged him on a very thick cabbage stalk, and he was hanged there until he died. And (he also said) that it was funny to say that he had been crucified and had risen again.

(...) And against the Most Purest, Our Lady, Mother of God, Holy Mary, they said that she was a good woman, who had become pregnant one night by an idolater, her neighbor, and relative, who then claimed that she had copulated with Joseph, with whom she had never had intercourse, being in blood that night. When Joseph understood that she had betrayed him, he departed and left her alone.⁴⁵

- 25 The witness said that he was scandalized by the Jews' words and walked away, so they said nothing more. These, given of João's attitude, tried to make him uncomfortable with the ambassador, who from then on became more distant. João also added before the inquisitors that the one who uttered the blasphemies was Isaac – the older brother – and that Abraham limited himself to confirm.
- 26 The Almosnino brothers sought to convince a man to abandon Christianity, apparently thinking that he was a *converso*, mentioning some episodes from *Toledot Yeshu*. Thus, they told him that Mary had been raped by one man that in the *Toledot Yeshu* could be Joseph Pandera, and that Judas, ascending to Heaven with Jesus, “profaned” him with urine and was thus able to bring about his downfall.⁴⁶
- 27 Is this source reliable? What does it mean: did the witness João Álvaro Ferraz actually transmit what he and the inquisitors consider only blasphemies said by the brother Almosnino? Much has already been written about the critical apparatus needed to read inquisitorial sources and not confuse what is plausible with what is true, which implies taking into account a multiplicity of “noises” such as the interpretation and culture of the inquisitors who judge, the pressure on the witness to say what is intended to be accused, and the games of omission and recreation of those as a defensive attitude, as well as the pretensions and pressures on the accusatory and accrediting witnesses.⁴⁷ In the case of the source in question, we have no other information about the testimony João Álvaro Ferraz. As far as we know, Ambassador Robert Shirley himself never referred to this episode, although he wrote two works of geopolitical content: *Peso de todo el mundo* (1622) and *Discurso sobre el aumento de esta monarquía* (1625).⁴⁸ However, we can advance with some favorable evidence about the rehabilitee of the testimony: as in the case of the testimonies of the New Christians arrested in the Inquisition of Évora, the inquisitors never showed signs that they perceived that these were extracts from the *Toledot Yeshu* – which would raise the level of incriminating evidence – and the same happened with João Álvares Ferraz, mentioning them only as horrible blasphemies, but with a degree of gravity similar to other blasphemies. On the other hand, it was an Old Christian who memorized the history of the Almosnino brothers, who, as far as we know, had no access (or interest in accessing) to Jewish culture: he was not even a person who belonged to cultural circles. On the other hand, as Margit Frenk shows, we must take into account that in the Early Modern Age the memorization of this and other stories was recurrent when an important part of the population did not know to read and when individual reading was not yet dominant.⁴⁹ It will not come as a surprise that the Old Christian João Álvares Ferraz imprinted in his memory a story that had “scandalized” him so much – to use his words.
- 28 This accusation reveals how much Jews belonging to the Iberian cultural universe, but born outside of Europe, in North Africa, continued to use and read *Toledot Yeshu* in the seventeenth century. Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer give us information about the circulation of an extract of the *Toledot Yeshu* in North Africa, in the nineteenth century, which allows us to think about this phenomenon in the long term.⁵⁰
- 29 In all likelihood, they viewed the Jewish Jesus story as a strong instrument of persuasion, through which one could perhaps be convinced of returning to his “original” Jewish identity. Unfortunately, the Almosnino were mistaken concerning their interlocutor's identity, and the latter in fact became a whistleblower.

Conclusion

- 30 A question we need to ask is whether people like Francisco Aires or the Almosnino had the intention to introduce what they think was a new narrative to the *converso* mainstream, to dissuade them from being Christians (or from believing in the Christian religion), or merely using fragments of the Jewish Jesus story as a kind of “sign” of a shared identity, a secret “pact” uniting Jews and Crypto-Jews? This second option is more likely as we know also from Spanish inquisitorial sources that many Iberian converts did preserve partial knowledge of the story.⁵¹ Some, such as Francisco Aires and the Almosnino brothers, seem to have known the story fairly well, or at least well enough to orally reproduce important parts of the *Toledot Yeshu* narrative; others, such as Garcia da Orta or Galaor de Vilhagra, were only able to utter short but persuasive slogans ultimately referring to the Jewish Jesus story.
- 31 At any rate, even these fragmented utterances of the *Toledot* story seem to have served, along with other remnants of a Jewish heritage, as a kind of sign of recognition among Jews and Crypto-Jews established in Portugal and in the colonies of the Portuguese empire. Why the enduring impact of this tradition? One may argue that albeit its shocking character, or precisely because of its shocking character, the Jewish story of Jesus was particularly persuasive. As noted by recent commentators, *Toledot Yeshu* was also an entertaining narrative, which certainly further helped the mess coming through.⁵² But as we have seen, its use in the Portuguese context also invites us to consider particular moments of fraternization, as shown by the case of Francisco Aires from Bragança and of the Almosnino brothers, Isaac and Abraham, from Fez.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ABRAHAM, Richard, *A Portuguese Version of the Life of Barlaam and Josaphat. Paleographical Edition and Linguistic Study*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1938.
- BAER, Yitzhak, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Philadelphia, The Jewish Publication Society of America, vol. 1, 1996.
- BALASSE, Céline, 1306. *L'expulsion des juifs du royaume de France*, Brussels, De Boeck, 2008.
- BARBU, Daniel and DAHHAOUI, Yann, “Un manuscrit français des Toledot Yeshu. Le ms. lat. 12722 et l'enquête de 1429 sur les juifs de Trévoux,” *Henoch* 40, n.º 2 (2018), pp. 223–288.
- BARBU, Daniel, “Feeling Jewish: Emotions, identity, and the Jews’ inverted Christmas,” in *Feeling Exclusion. Religious Conflict, Exile and Emotions in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Giovanni Tarantino and Charles Zika, London and New York, Routledge, 2019, pp. 185–206.
- BARBU, Daniel, “Some Remarks on *Toledot Yeshu* (*The Jewish Life of Jesus*) in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal for Religion, Film and Media* 5, n.º 1 (2019), pp. 29–45.
- BEN-SHALOM, Ram, “The Converso as Subversive: Jewish Traditions or Christian Libel,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50, n.º 2 (1999), pp. 266–272.

- BIALE, David, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity. The *Sefer toledot yeshu* and the *Sefer zerubavel*," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, n.º 1 (1999), pp. 130–145.
- CAMPBELL, Marie, "The Three Teachings of the Bird," in *Studies in Biblical and Jewish Folklore*, ed. Raphael Patai, Francis Lee Utley and Dov Noy, Bloomington, Bloomington University Press, 1960, pp. 97–107.
- CARPZOVI, Jo. Benedicti, ed. by, *Raymundi Martini Ordinis Praedicatorum Pugi Fidei Adversus Mauros et Judaeos*, Leipzig, Friederich Lankis, 1687 (1280).
- CARVALHO, Augusto da Silva, "Garcia d'Orta," *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* 12 (1934), pp. 61–246.
- COSTA, Palmira Fontes da, ed. by, *Medicine, Trade and Empire. Garcia de Orta's Colloquies on the Simples and Drugs of India (1563) in Context*, Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 2016.
- COUTO, Diogo do, *Da Ásia*, Lisbon, Edição da Livraria Sam Carlos, vol. 7 (1616).
- CUFFEL, Alexandra, "Between Epic, Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis: Jesus as Antihero in *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech, New York, Fordham University Press, pp. 155–170.
- DAHAN Gilbert and ELIE, Nicholas, eds., *L'Expulsion des Juifs de France, 1394*, Paris, Cerf, 2004.
- DEUTSCH, Yaacov, "The Second Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited. A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Scäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, pp. 283–295.
- EINBINDER, Susan, *No Place of Rest. Jewish Literature, Expulsion and the Memory of Medieval France*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009.
- FICALHO, Conde de, *Garcia da Orta e o seu Tempo*, Lisbon, Imprensa Nacional – Casa da Moeda, 1983.
- FRENK, Margit, *Entre la voz y el silencio*, Alcalá de Henares, Centro de Estudios Cervantinos, 1997.
- FUNKENSTEIN, A., *Perception of Jewish History*, Berkeley – Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1993.
- GARCÍA-ARENAL, Mercedes, "Los judíos de Fez a través del proceso inquisitorial de los Almosnino (1621)," in *Entre el Islam y Occidente. Los judíos magrebíes en la Edad Moderna*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal, Madrid, Casa de Velásquez, pp. 153–187.
- GINIO, Alisa Meyùhas, *La forteresse de la foi. La vision du monde D'Alonso De Espina, moine espagnol (?-1466)*, Paris, Les Éditions du Cerf, 1998.
- GINZBURG, Carlo, *Storia notturna – Una decifrazione del sabba*, Turin, Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1989.
- GUTWIRTH, Eleazar "Gender, History, and the Judeo-Christian Polemic," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1996, pp. 257–278.
- HABERMANN, A.M., ed., *Ben ha-Melech veha-Nazir*, Tel Aviv, Mahbarot Lesifrut, 1950.
- HASSELHOF, Görgé, and FIDORA, Alexander, ed., *Ramon Martí's Pugio Fidei. Studies and Texts*, Santa Coloma de Queralt, Obrador Edendum, 2017.
- HORBURY, William, "A Critical examination of the Toledoth Jeshu", Ph.D. diss., University of Cambridge, 1970.

HORBURY, William, “The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*,” in *Toledot Yeshu (“the Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited. A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, pp. 49–60.

LEROY, Beatrice, *L’Expulsion des Juifs d’Espagne*, Paris, Berg International, 1990.

LUCAS, Maria Clara de Almeida, *A literatura visionária na Idade Média Portuguesa*, Lisbon, Instituto de Cultura e Língua Portuguesa, 1986.

MARTINS, Mário, *Estudos de Cultura Medieval*, Braga, Verbo, 1969.

MEA, Elvira de Azevedo, *A Inquisição de Coimbra no século XVI. A Instituição, os Homens e a Sociedade*, Oporto, Fundação Engenheiro António de Almeida, 1997.

MEERSON Michael and SCHÄFER, Peter, *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus*, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, vol. 1, 2014.

MURCIA, Thierry, “B.Gittin 56B-57A : L’épisode talmudique de Titus, Balaam et Yeshu en Enfer – Jésus et l’insolite châiment de l’excrément bouillant,” *Revue des études juives* 173, n.^{os} 1–2 (2014), pp. 15–40.

MURCIA, Thierry, *Jésus dans le Talmud et la littérature rabbinique ancienne*, Turnhout, Brepolis, 2014.

PEREIRA, Francisco Maria Esteves, “A História de Barlaam e Josaphat em Portugal. Estudo de crítica e de história literária,” *Boletim da Segunda Classe da Academia das Ciências de Lisboa* 10 (1915–1916), pp. 346–383; *idem, ibidem* 11 (1916–1917), pp. 2093–2167.

PUPPO-WALKER, Constantino Enrique, *A Critical Edition of the Old Portuguese Version of Barlaam and Josaphat*, Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1967.

RÉVAH, Israel Salvator, “La famille de Garcia de Orta “, *Revista da Universidade de Coimbra* 19 (1960), pp. 407–420.

RIVKIN, Ellis, “The Utilization of Non-Jewish Sources for Jewish History,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 48 (1957–1958), pp. 183–203.

SALOMON, Herman Prins, “Les procès de L’Inquisition Portugaise comme documents littéraires ou du bon usage du Fonds Inquisitorial de la Torre do Tombo”, in *Estudos Portugueses: Homenagem a António José Saraiva*, Lisbon, Instituto de Cultura Portuguesa – Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 1990, pp. 151–164.

SHERLEY, Sir Antony, *Peso de todo el mundo (1622). Discurso sobre el aumento de esta monarquia (1625)*, ed. and studies by Ángel Allosa, Miguel Ángel de Bunes and José Antonio Martínez Torres, Madrid, Ediciones Polifemo, 2010.

SOBRAL, Cristina, *Adições Portuguesas no Flos Sanctorum de 1513 (estudos e edição crítica)*, Lisbon, Centro de Estudos de História Religiosa – Universidade Católica Portuguesa, 2000.

SUÁREZ, Luís, *La Expulsión de los Judíos de España*, Madrid, MAPFRE, 1992.

TARTAKOFF, Paola, “The *Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon”, in *Toledot Yeshu (“the Life Story of Jesus”) Revisited. A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson and Yaacov Deutsch, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011, pp. 297–309.

TARTAKOFF, Paola, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Medieval Crown of Aragon*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

TAVARES, Maria José P. Ferro “Características do messianismo português,” *Estudos Orientais* 2 (1991), pp. 245–266.

TAVARES, Maria José P. Ferro, "Judeus e conversos castelhanos em Portugal," *Anales de la Universidad de Alicante* 6 (1987), pp. 341–368.

TAVARES, Maria José P. Ferro, "Para o estudo dos judeus em Trás-os-Montes, no século XVI," *Cultura, História e Filosofia* 4 (1985), pp. 371–417.

TAVARES, Maria José P. Ferro, *Los judíos en Portugal*, Madrid, MAPFRE, 1993.

TAVIM, José Alberto Rodrigues da Silva, "A 'Fantastic' Tale of the New Christians concerning the immigration of the Jews to Portugal," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin – Between Edom and Kedar. Studies in Memory of Yom Tov Assis (Part 2)* – ed. Aldina Quintana, Raquel Ibáñez-Sperber and Ram Ben Shalom, 11 (2015), pp. 151–168.

TEMKIN, Samuel, "The Crypto-Jewish Ancestral Roots of Luis de Carvajal, Governor of Nuevo Reino de León, 1580–1590," *Colonial Latin American Historical Review* 16 (2007), pp. 65–93.

TORO, Alfonso, *Los Judíos en la Nueva España*, City of Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982.

UHLIG, Marion, *Le prince des clercs. Barlaam et Josaphat ou l'art du recueil*, Genever, Droz, 2018.

USQUE, Samuel, *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel*, fac-similae Ferrara ed. from 1553, Lisbon, Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, vol. 2, 1898 [1553].

WACHTEL, Nathan, *La Logique des Bûchers*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2009.

YERUSHALMI, Yosef Hayim, *Zakhor. Histoire juive et mémoire juive*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

YUVAL, Israel Jacob, *Two Nations in Your Womb. Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006.

Manuscripts

Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (ANTT):

Inquisição de Évora (IE), procs. 2149, 6047, 6117, 6885, 8232, 8976, 11239.

Inquisição de Lisboa (IL), procs. 5393, 17064.

NOTES

1. R. Ben-Shalom, "The Converso as Subversive...", pp. 266–272; W. Horbury, "A Critical examination...", pp. 467–519; D. Barbu, "Some Remarks...", pp. 29–45.
2. Jo. B. Carpzovi, *Raymundi Martini...*, pp. 362–364; Y. Deutsch, "The Second Life...", pp. 288–289; G. Hasselhof, and A. Fidora, *Ramon Marti's Pugio Fidei...*
3. P. Tartakoff, "The Toledot Yeshu...", pp. 297–309; P. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew...*, 2012.
4. D. Biale, "Counter-History...", pp. 139–145. See also A. Funkenstein, *Perception...*, pp. 36–40.
5. ANTT, IE, proc. 2149, fol. 33v.
6. ANTT, IE, proc. 6885, fol. 13v–14.
7. I. Révah, "La famille...", p. 420; A. Carvalho, "Garcia...", p. 129. On Garcia de Orta see also C. Ficalho, *Garcia da Orta...*; P. Costa, *Medicine, Trade and Empire...*
8. T. Murcia, "B.Gittin 56B–57A...", pp. 15–40; T. Murcia, *Jésus dans le Talmud...*, chap. 14.
9. On scatological motifs in the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition, see D. Barbu, "Feeling Jewish...", p. 187; D. Barbu, "Some Remarks...", p. 37.
10. M. Meerson and P. Schäfer. *Toledot Yeshu...*, p. 316; D. Barbu, "Feeling Jewish...", p. 201, note 41.

11. Extensive bibliography may be found on the subject. See, among others, B. Leroy, *L'Expulsion...*; L. Suárez, *La Expulsión...*; Y. Baer, *A History of the Jews...*
12. Some “Autos de Sumários feitos a um Salvador Vaz” referring to the period (between 1545 and 1546) are in Lisbon (ANTT, IL, proc. 17064). It is not clear whether this is the same person as the one we find Évora.
13. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, fol. 57.
14. ANTT, IE, proc. 6117.
15. ANTT, IE, proc. 11239. I was unfortunately unable to read this document due to its poor state of conservation.
16. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, fol. 57v.
17. ANTT, IE, proc. 8976.
18. A. Toro, *Los Judíos...*, pp. 278–279; and S. Temkin, “The Crypto-Jewish Ancestral...”, pp. 65–93. One of his nephews also bore the same name.
19. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047.
20. At that time the jurisdiction of Évora’s Inquisition (in the south) was in Trás-os-Montes. See E. Mea, *A Inquisição de Coimbra...*, p. 67.
21. ANTT, IE, proc. 6117, fol. 3, 7v, 15, 89v–90v, 160. See also J. Tavim, “A ‘Fantastic’ Tale...”, p. 166. On Francisco Aires, see M. Tavares, “Judeus e conversos castelhanos...”, p. 358.
22. On Jesus’s miracles in *Toledot Yeshu*, see M. Meerson and P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu...*, 1, 64–75.
23. Jo. B. Carpzovi, *Raymundi Martini...*, pp. 362–364. See Y. Deutsch, “The Second Life of Jesus...”, pp. 288–289; G. Hasselhoff and A. Fidora, *Ramon Martí’s Pugio Fidei...*
24. On Alfonso de Espina, see A. Ginio, *La forteresse de la foi...*
25. P. Tartakoff, “The Toledot Yeshu...”, p. 303; P. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew...*, pp. 103–104, 121–123; and D. Barbu and Y. Dahhaoui. “Un manuscrit français...”, pp. 259–260.
26. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, fols. 44v, 94.
27. A kind of coarse textured mantle; see António de Morais Silva, *Grande Dicionário de Língua Portuguesa*, Lisbon, Editorial Confluência, vol. 1, 1949, p. 1097.
28. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, fol. 70–72v, for the deposition of João Dias; see also ANTT, IE, proc. 8976, fol. 38v–40, for the original version of Luis de Carvajal.
29. G. Dahan and E. Nicholas, eds., *L'Expulsion des Juifs...*; C. Balasse, 1306. *L’expulsion des juifs...*; S. Einbinder, *No Place of Rest...*
30. F. Pereira, “A História de Barlaam e Josaphat...”; M. Uhlig, *Le prince des clercs...* On the subject of the popularity of this story in Portugal, see also R. Abraham, *A Portuguese Version...*; C. Pupo-Walker, *A Critical Edition...*; M. Martins, *Estudos de Cultura...*; C. Sobral, *Adições Portuguesas...* One of the witnesses who testified in the trial ordered by the Inquisition of Évora against João Dias de Odemira, namely the old Christian Francisco Rodrigues, stated that João had read the *Flos Sanctorum*; ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, fol. 111.
31. D. Couto, *Da Ásia*, chap. 10.
32. M. Lucas, *A literatura visionária...*, p. 24.
33. M. Campbell, “The Three Teachings...”, pp. 97–107.
34. A. Habermann, *Ben ha-Melech...*, pp. 346–360.
35. ANTT, IE, proc. 8976, fol. 14 and 41.
36. ANTT, IE, proc. 8976, fol. 41v.
37. Y. Yerushalmi, *Zakhor...*, p. 27.
38. ANTT, IE, proc. 6047, p. 70–71v; ANTT, IE, proc. 8976, fol. 38–40.
39. S. Usque, *Consolação...*, vol. 2.
40. ANTT, IE proc. 8232, mostly fol. 2–3, 24–25, 58–59, 73v–78v, 94–94, 136, 166v–170, 180–190v. On António de Valença and his teachings, see M. Tavares, “Para o estudo dos judeus...”, pp. 381, 383–388; M. Tavares, “Características...”, p. 266; M. Tavares, *Los judíos...*, pp. 253–254.
41. On this trope in the Middle Ages see I. Yuval, *Two Nations...*, mostly chap. 6.

42. Barbu, “Feeling Jewish...”, p. 198.
43. ANTT, IL, procs. 5393, 17064.
44. On the subject, see M. García-Arenal, “Los judíos de Fez...”, pp. 153–187.
45. ANTT, IL, proc. 5393, fol. 11v–15 (citation fol. 13–13v). Original: “Cristo fora um judeu como eles, e homem menos bom que eles, e que era um idólatra, e que fora um alvoroçador, e emborulhador do povo. E vendo-se já sem remédio, por os judeus o botarem fora do templo, formara então Lei e fora Autor dela, e que vendo que o queriam prender, com palavras de feitiçaria subira mui alto para daí cair em outra terra que não fosse dos judeus para ficar deles livre. E que Judas que sabia mais que ele subira mais alto, e lhe mijara na cabeça, e o fizera cair, e então lançaram mão dele os judeus, e o prenderam e enforcaram então, em uma árvore, a qual quebrara por palavras que ele dissera. E vendo os judeus que o não podiam então enforçar em árvore que não quebrasse, por conselho então de um judeu velho o enforcaram em uma couve mui grossa, e que nela o enforcaram e morreu. E que era graça dizer que fora crucificado, e ressuscitado.
- (...) E contra a Puríssima Virgem Nossa Senhora, Mãe de Deus, Santa Maria, disseram que ela fora boa mulher, e que emprenhara uma noite de um idólatra seu vizinho e parente, cuidando ela que tinha aquela cópula, e acesso com Joseph estando ela então com fluxo de sangue. E ao outro dia dizendo a Joseph, que nunca com ela tivera cópula, estando com sangue senão aquela noite, por onde Joseph entendera que ela lhe fizera traição, e com isso se fora e a deixara fora.”
46. Most of these elements seem to indicate knowledge of a text close to the so-called “Strasbourg” versions of *Toledot Yeshu*. For a recent English translation, see M. Meerson and P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu...*, vol. 1, pp. 168–174. On this text, see W. Horbury, “The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*,” pp. 49–60; and D. Barbu and Y. Dahhaoui, “Un manuscrit français...” pp. 258–259, note 125, who describe it as a sort of “canonical” version of the narrative in the late Middle Ages.
47. See E. Rivkin, “The Utilization of Non-Jewish Sources...”, pp. 183–203; C. Ginzburg, *Storia notturna...*; H. Salomon, “Les procès de L’Inquisition Portugaise...”, pp. 151–164; N. Wachtel, *La Logique...*
48. Sir A. Sherley, *Peso de todo el mundo* (1622)...
49. M. Frenk, *Entre la voz...*, mostly chapter 1.
50. M. Meerson and P. Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu...*, vol. 2, p. 7.
51. See E. Gutwirth, “Gender, History...”, pp. 257–278, with somewhat earlier examples.
52. See for instance A. Cuffel, “Between Epic...”, pp. 155–70; D. Barbu, “Some Remarks...”, p. 39.

ABSTRACTS

This essay focuses on extracts from *Toledot Yeshu* (Stories of Jesus) revealed in the trials of the Portuguese Inquisition from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Considering explicit and longer versions, as well as allusions that seem to point to the Jewish story of Jesus or other texts opposing Christianity, this paper aims to understand why they were used, and in what context, and explain their utilization across time. Additionally, it also seeks to highlight how extracts from *Toledot Yeshu* were used in speeches of identity defense that were part of the cultural heritage of Jews in the Iberian Peninsula on the eve of the general expulsions in the late fifteenth century.

Este artigo tem como objectivo analisar excertos das *Toledot Yeshu* (Histórias de Jesus) revelados nos processos da Inquisição portuguesa dos séculos XVI e XVII. Considerando versões explícitas e mais longas, bem como alusões que parecem apontar para uma história judaica de Jesus ou outros textos de oposição ao Cristianismo, este artigo visa entender os motivos do seu uso, e em que contexto, e explicar sua “utilização” ao longo do tempo. Adicionalmente, também pretende realçar como trechos das *Toledot Yeshu* foram utilizados em discursos de defesa identitária, que faziam parte do património cultural dos judeus na Península Ibérica nas vésperas das expulsões gerais no final do século XV.

INDEX

Palavras-chave: Toledot Yeshu, inquisição portuguesa, conversos, judeus, identidade

Keywords: Toledot Yeshu, Portuguese inquisition, conversos, Jews, identity

AUTHOR

JOSÉ ALBERTO RODRIGUES DA SILVA TAVIM

Centro de História, Faculdade de Letras, Universidade de Lisboa
tavim.jose@gmail.com