

FOR A STUDY OF PORTUGUESE JUDAISM  
IN MEXICO  
DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD

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I have often signalled incidentally the problem of Judaism in Mexico during the colonial period and the value of studying it<sup>1</sup>. The subject has already been elaborated by the Brazilian scholar Mr. Argeu Guimarãis, but since he was residing then in Colombia, he focused his research almost exclusively on South America<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, the late J. Lúcio de Azevedo, in his otherwise classic volumen on the portuguese “new christians” only skimmed the issue<sup>3</sup>. Writing as well almost twenty years ago, he was unaware of the insightful texts which we now possess. Even more so should we say of the precious but much earlier work of José Toribio Medina on the Mexican Inquisition<sup>4</sup>. It is true that recently Mr. Rafael Heliodoro Valle dedicated a special article on the Jews of Mexico<sup>5</sup>. He did it with the approval and sense of life which are characteristic of him. However, he did not go further than “sampling”, as the pedagogues of today say. We can therefore affirm that the subject remains whole, and for many reasons it is also impossible for me to offer the reader a methodical and detailed study on the judaizers of New Spain. I had to be content with compiling an inventory of the main printed materials which are now at our disposition and of making some passing conclusions. I will insist mostly on the Portuguese Jews, who seem to have been the most numerous and the most interesting. I hope to awaken the interest of another researcher who has more time to give to a research that no doubt contains instructive discoveries<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin hispanique*, XXXVII, 1935, p.83 et XXXVIII, 1936, p.53. See also my note *Influences portugaises au Mexique durant la période coloniale*, in *Revista da Faculdade de Letras* (Lisbon), IV, 1937, pp.272-273.

<sup>2</sup> ARGEU GUIMARAIS, *Os Judeus portugueses e brasileiros na America hespanhola*, in *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, XVIII, 1926, pp.297-312.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lucio de AZEVEDO, *Historia dos christãos novos portugueses*, Lisboa, 1921-1922, pp. 233-235 and pp. 438-440. We can make the same observation on Simon DUNBOW, *Die Geschichte des judischen Volkes in der Neuzeit*, vol. VI, Berlin, 1927, pp. 442-449.

<sup>4</sup> José Toribio MEDINA, *Historia del Tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en México*, Santiago de Chile, 1905.

<sup>5</sup> Rafael HELIODORO VALLE, *Judéos en México*, in *Revista chilena de historia y geografía*, vol. LXXXI, september-december 1936, no. 89, pp.215-236.

<sup>6</sup> There should be made an comparable study for Brazil, which was already started by J. Lucio de AZEVEDO, *Christãos novos*, pp. 224-230. As for Mexico, the inquisition archives should be searched: *Primeira visitação do Santo Oficio*



The printed sources which should be used for the study of Portuguese Judaism in Mexico are constituted mainly by the trials of the Holy Office. Except for a collection published in 1906 under the direction of Genaro Garcia<sup>7</sup>, these inquisitorial documents are known by us, either in part or in full, only recently.

Actually, the earliest publication of this kind of pieces dates only from 1932. It is the volume named *Los judíos en la Nueva España*, whose printing was overseen by Mr. Alfonso Toros. It is of capital importance. But in spite of its title, it does not concern only on the judaizers, some texts relate to the Inquisition in general. On the subject that is of our interest we must mention:

1. A list of heretics and judaizers pursued by the Holy Office (p. 7-13). External dates: 1521-1599.
2. A series of pieces relative to the imposition of the *sambenitos* which span from 1574-1632 (p.15-82). We find mentions and even lists of Portuguese judaizers, with indications mentioning their place of birth: many are natives of Fundão and from S. Vicente da Beira. There is reason to note the following localities: Alvalade (Alvala), Braga, Castelo Branco, Covilhã (Cubillana), Escarigo, Freixo de Espada a Cinta, Guarda, Lamego, Lisbon, Mogadouro, Portimão, Porto, Sarzedas (Cercedas la Salceda ?), Selorico, Sertã, Tôrre de Moncorvo, Vilaflor, Vinhais, Viseu (Bisseo). It must be noted that many individuals described are as Portuguese, but were born in Spain, for example in Benavente, or the Carvajal family in San Martín de Trevejo in the current province of Cáceres<sup>9</sup>, or even in Seville, Moron or Teba<sup>10</sup>.

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*as partes do Brasil, Denunciações da Bahia*, 1591-93, S. Paulo, 1925. *Id.*, *Denunciações de Pernambuco 1593-95*, S. Paulo, 1929. *Id.*, *Confissões da Bahia 1591-92*, Rio de Janeiro, 1935.

<sup>7</sup> Genaro GARCIA, *La Inquisición en México*, México 1906. See especially doc. V, pp. 84-110, relating to the *auto de fe* of December 8 1601. And doc. XV, pp.152-162, listing various judaizers condemned in 1647.

<sup>8</sup> *Los judíos en la Nueva España*, Selección de documentos del siglo XVI correspondientes al ramo de Inquisición. México, 1932, XXIX p.372 (Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, XX).

<sup>9</sup> On the north-east of Hoyos. The text (p.60) places this locality in Portugal, but it must be by mistake.

<sup>10</sup> On the invasion of Spain by the Portuguese, see the document produced by J. Lucio de AZEVEDO, *Christãos novos*, pp. 462-463, and Albert GIRARD, in *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, 1933, pp.572-574. Same situation in America (cf. *Revista de Historia*, Lisbon, XIII, 1924, pp.234-235).

3. An extract of the inquisitorial trial of the Portuguese Francisco Teixeira (Tejera), accused of blasphemy (p.189-194). Date: 1564. This Francisco Tejera, a natural of Ande<sup>11</sup> in Portugal, was in charge of overseeing the herds of a certain Lope de Sosa, who was himself possibly of Portuguese origin. He had left Algarve six years earlier, on a Portuguese ship bound for Las Palmas, where he embarked towards America on another Portuguese ship belonging to a certain Francisco de Lucena. It is not proven that he was Jewish.
4. A summary of the trial initiated against the judaizer Pedro Fernandes de Alvor, from Vila da Praia in the Azores (Graciosa) (p.195-197). Date: 1538.
5. A summary of the trial initiated against Francisco Millán, a New Christian from Utrera in Andalucía, son of a Portuguese man who had resided in Lisbon and made a business trip to Azemmour (p.199-203). Date : 1538 (cf. Robert RICARD, *Azemmour et Safi en Amérique*, in *Hespéris*, XVII, 1933, p. 92-95).
6. The complete text of the trial against initiated for judaizing practices against Luis de Carvajal “el Viejo”, conqueror and governor of Nuevo Reino de León (p. 205-372). Date: 1598-1590. The accused was from Mogadouro, the family place of origin, but the Carvajal had moved posteriorly to Benavente in the kingdom of León. This trial, which confirms the existence in Mexico of an important colony of Portuguese Jews, shows that many of these had first left Portugal to go to Andalusia, particularly in Seville, and had gone on to America only after a more or less prolonged stay in southern Spain. Luis de Carvajal had part of his family in Mexico, the rest was either in Spain (Castille or Leon), or in Portugal or somewhere in the Portuguese empire. Carvajal had married in Seville a Portuguese woman native of Lisbon. He had himself lived in that city as well as spent thirteen years in the Cape Verde archipelago as an officer of the king of Portugal. His testimony indicates that the people of Mogadouro were in constant relation with Sahagun, Benavente and Salamanca<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> I was unable to identify this toponym. We can presume a reading error from Arade. But this word is not the name of a locality and designates the river Portimão.

<sup>12</sup> The Mexican magazine *Investigaciones históricas* (vol. I, no.1, October 1938, p.90) announced an upcoming book being prepared by the north-american historian J. LLOYD MECHAM on Luis de Carvajal “el Viejo”.

The extensive trial of Luis de Carvajal “el mozo”, nephew of the governor, forms a natural complement to the preceding one<sup>13</sup>. It is important to specify that there are exactly two trials, one from 1589-1590, the other from 1595-1596, because the young man being accused of judaizing activities, practically refused to give in and was pursued a second time as relapsed. The first trial ended with a relatively mild condemnation, and the second resulted in the execution of the accused. A nephew of the conqueror of Nuevo Leon, he was born in Benavente to Portuguese parents: but they had come to establish themselves in Medina del Campo when he was only eleven years old. In his second trial he denounced a certain number of Portuguese which we find generally on the lists published in the book by Mr. Alfonso Toro. To the places of origin that we find mentioned here we must add S. João da Pesqueira, to the east of Lamego, and Santa Comba Dão. Furthermore, the lists and the second trial of the young Carvajal allow us to get an idea of the professions practiced by the Portuguese Jews. The merchants dominate, big traders or small peddlers, trading between México and the mining centers such as Sultepec (east of México), Pachuca, Taxco, Tlalpujahua (east of Michoacan), and Zacatecas. A passage specifies that Sebastião Rodrigues traded products originating from Castille and China. We note however two doctors, the uncle and nephew Manuel and Antonio de Morales, and a few artisans: three *plateros* (silversmiths), two soap makers, two tailors, one shoemaker, and one cutler. We are not surprised to find that all these Portuguese judaizers are hardly settled in one place. They travel constantly to go about their business or to flee persecutions and find a safer residence: one merchant left for Macao, another we do not know if he went back to Spain or if he went to Salonica. Two brothers of the accused managed to find refuge, one of them, Baltasar, in Italy, the other, Miguel, in Salonica where he became a great rabbi and a famous doctor. However, we do not see clearly in which measure the knowledge of Hebrew had survived in these circles, which yet harbored a fervent religious passion. But in many among them the use of Portuguese had remained parallel to Castilian. The second trial contains a few phrases in Portuguese<sup>14</sup>, we find also a sort of hymn in verse and a translation, also in verse,

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<sup>13</sup> *Procesos de Luis de Carvajal (el mozo)*, México, 1935, XII, p. 537

(Publicaciones del Archivo General de la Nación, XXVIII).

<sup>14</sup> *Nahó sabe o senhor mentir* (p. 324); *quem ora fora tu rapariga* (p. 331); *naon afurtase ele* (p. 365); and the following passage: “...le contó un cuento quel el dicho Hernando Cardoso le había contado, diciéndole que cuando era pequeño en Portugal, le había llamado un muchacho de judío, y yéndose él a quejar a su abuela, le dijo en portugués: *aboa aque le mechamou judeu* (= avoa, aquele me chamou judeu), y la abuela le respondió: *fillo ante Deus te o confirme*, que quiere decir: Dios te lo confirme en el cielo” (pp. 404-406).

of the Decalogue, written in a mix of Castilian and Portuguese which would probably be of interest to the specialists (p. 200-202). The volume ends with the text of the *Memorias* and the letters written by Luis de Carvajal, both in Castilian, and at the very end, by a paper written in a mixed language, where Portuguese predominates, but who seems to defy any satisfying interpretation in the way it is presented<sup>15</sup>.

The trial of the judaizer Tomás Treviño de Sobremonte<sup>16</sup> is not without parallels to that of the young Carvajal. It is also a double trial (1624-1625 and 1642-1649), because the accused also relapsed and was accused a second time as relapsed. Was Treviño a Portuguese? The trial presents him as such. However, he denies it: he was born in Medina de Río Seco, close to Valladolid, his father lived there already, and his grandparents were settled in Castille. Maybe he had Portuguese ancestry like the Carvajal from Benavente and so many others. His brother in law was named Francisco López Blandón, where it may be possible to see the Hispanicization of the very Portuguese name of Brandão. Treviño had settled in Oaxaca, then in México itself. He had a brother in Peru. It seems that he was a powerful businessman. It appears from certain passages in his trial that there was a small colony of Portuguese merchants, probably Jewish, in Veracruz and another in Guadalajara.

I will mention only for the record, the brief trial of Juana Tinoco (1640-1646) from which we learn little information<sup>17</sup>. The name seems Portuguese. But she was born in México, and the archives do not mention where here parents were from.

As a whole, the reading of these inquisitorial documents gives the impression of a true outbreak of Portuguese judaizers. It is not surprising then that a Mexican Dominican, with an apostolic soul, Friar Hernando de Ojea, mainly known as the author of a chronicle pertaining to his Order, had become worried about such a state of things. And it seemed serious enough to get him to publish in 1602, with Cristóbal Laso Vaca at Medina del Campo, an apologetic work destined for the conversion of Mexican Jews titled *La venida de Christo y su vida y milagros, en que se concuerdan los dos Testamentos divinos, Viejo y Nuevo*. This curious book is hard to find today, but Pérez Pastor has given a precise description in his

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<sup>15</sup> The life of Luis de Carvajal « el mozo » has been told by Mr. Pablo MARTINEZ DEL RIO, following the inquisitorial trials, in a volume titled *Alumbrado*, México, Porrúa, 1937, XIV, p. 197.

<sup>16</sup> *Causa criminal contra Tomás Treviño de Sobremonte, por judaizante*, 1625, in *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación* (México), vol. VI, 1935, pp. 99-148. 305-308, 420-464, 578-620, 757-777, vol. VII, 1936, pp. 88-142, 256-272, 402-436, 596-599. Vol. VIII, 1937, pp. 1-172.

<sup>17</sup> *Acusación contra doña Juana Tinoco por hereje, judaizante, apóstata, impenitente, etc.* (1640'1646). In *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación*, vol. VIII, 1937, pp. 224-232.

work on the printing press at Medina<sup>18</sup>. Father Ojea reminds the readers in the *Prólogo al lector*, then again in the sixth book, about the great number of judaizers in México and their discovery in 1594 by the Holy Office<sup>19</sup>. That is no doubt an allusion to the trials that ended in the famous *auto de fe* of 1596.

The inquisitorial trials also show that the Portuguese judaizers were dispersed across all of New Spain, and that they travelled elsewhere constantly for their business. We have seen that they were found in Veracruz, in Taxco, in Pachuca, in Guadalajara, in Oaxaca as well as México. However, a particularly notable centre seems to have been established in the north-east of the country around the governor Carvajal “el Viejo”, in the current states of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon. We find there another Portuguese, this one it seems was an authentic Christian, Gaspar Castaño de Sosa<sup>20</sup>. Without a doubt, in a recent publication, the existence of a serious Jewish influence in the region was not admitted<sup>21</sup>. It is certain that contemporaries exaggerated when they saw this region inhabited by Jews practicing their religion openly. It is certain also that we exaggerate when we attribute an Israelite ancestry to all inhabitants of Monterrey. But the fact that there was around Carvajal an important nucleus of “new Christians” seems to be unquestioned<sup>22</sup>.

The documents which I have tried to give a general overview not only provide an instructive information on the activities of the judaizers in México, they inform us also on the diaspora of Spanish and Portuguese Jews across the world and especially on the hidden life of Judaism in the Peninsula: the trial of Treviño, for example, is full of curious indications on the judaizers in the region of Valladolid. We remark on that note that other than a few exceptions, the Portuguese judaizers mentioned in the inquisition lists or in the trials of the young Carvajal, can be distributed by their origins in two big groups: one group corresponds to the north of Portugal with Braga, Freixo de Espada a Cinta, Lamego, Mogadouro, Porto, Tôrre de Moncorvo, Vilaflor, Vinhais; and a group corresponding to the centre with Castelo Branco, Covilhã, Escarigo, Fundão, Guarda, S. Vicente da Beira, Sarzedas, Selorico, Sertã, Viseu. Besides there is not a real solution to the continuity between both groups: Guarda is not so far from Traz-os-Montes and joins Lamego by Selorico and

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<sup>18</sup> Cristóbal PÉREZ PASTOR, *La imprenta en Medina del Campo*, Madrid, 1895, no. 252, pp. 322-324.

<sup>19</sup> For more details, I wish to point to my article *Fray Hernando de Ojea, apóstol de los judíos mexicanos*, in *Abside* (México), august 1937, pp. 21-28.

<sup>20</sup> On Gaspar Castaño de Sosa (Castanho de Sousa), cf. Vito ALESSIO ROBLES, *Francisco de Urdiñola y el Norte de la Nueva España*, México, 1931, pp. 95-124. N. 4, pp. 158-168 and p. 277.

<sup>21</sup> Santiago Roel, *Nuevo León, Apuntes históricos*, I, Monterrey, 1938, p. 24, n. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Vito ALESSIO ROBLES, *Saltillo en la historia y en la leyenda*, México, 1936, pp. 105-120, and *Bosquejos históricos*, México, 1938, pp. 95-107.

Viseu. We must only see a map to notice the existence of two distinct blocks of judaizers, one in Traz-os-Montes, the other more important, in Beira Baixa<sup>23</sup>. Curiously, it seems that these two blocks correspond in large part to the passive entry of Spanish Jews to Portugal after the expulsion decreed in 1492 by the Catholic Kings: following the columnist Bernáldez, the two largest groups entered Portugal one by Bragança and Miranda, that is exactly in the direction of Traz-os-Montes, and the other by Vilar Formoso, that is roughly in the direction of the lower Beira<sup>24</sup>. A certain number of Portuguese judaizers in Mexico originally come from judeo-spanish families established in Portugal; they would have then gotten back in touch overseas, with the homeland from whence they came.

Robert RICARD.

Bibliographical reference : Robert RICARD, « Pour une étude du judaïsme portugais au Mexique pendant la période coloniale », *Revue d'Histoire Moderne & Contemporaine*, 1939, vol. 14, no. 39, pp. 516-524.

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<sup>23</sup> On these two well-known blocks, cf. J. Lúcio de AZEVEDO, *Christãos novos*, pp. 335-336. On the Jews of Traz-os-Montes in particular, see Francisco Manuel ALVES, *Memórias arqueológico-históricas do Distrito de Bragança, Os Judeus no Distrito de Bragança*. 1925. General bibliography in J. LEITE DE VASCONCELOS, *Antroponímia portuguesa*, Lisbon, 1928, pp. 387-421; The Mexican documents do not specify if it is Selorico da Beira (B.B.) or Selorico do Basto (Minho). I decided somewhat arbitrarily on the first one because of the importance of the group from Beira Baixa. We find in my two lists part of the jewries indicated according to BRAAMCAMP FREIRE by J. Lúcio de AZEVEDO, *Christãos novos*, p. 44, n. 2; these two scholars mention among others, Selorico, but without specifying which one.

<sup>24</sup> BERNALDEZ, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, ch. CXI (B.A.E., vol. 70, Madrid, 1931, p. 652). Cf. AZEVEDO, *Christãos novos*, p. 21. In his *Etnografia portuguesa*, II. 1936, p. 245, Mr. LEITE DE VASCONCELOS reviews the Spanish origin of the Jews of Traz-os-Montes and Beira.