



ROOM 10

The Antijudaic violence

The Jewish communities that lived in Christian territory were quite often minorities and segregated. The idea of a supposed perfect life together of cultures is erroneous, and what took place was more like coexistence between two communities: the Jewish and the Christian, who lived in the same time and physical space: the cities, towns and villages of medieval Catalonia.

First there were the accusations, which spread throughout all of Christian Europe. The Jews were accused of poisoning sources of drinking water or cause terrible epidemics like that of the plague that battered Europe in 1348. They were also accused of performing ritual sacrifices to harm Christianity such as using communion wafers, in the least serious cases, or the sacrifice of Christian children in the worst cases.

Likewise, as a result of the accusations and anti-Judaism opinions, negative and defamatory physical stereotypes spread: supposedly, Jews and Jewesses had long and aquiline noses, pointed ears, and eyes with a diabolic appearance; they were even said to have had demonic horns and tails! These defamatory stereotypes lasted in Spanish society until well into the twentieth century and meant a prolongation, up until only a few years ago, of medieval anti-Judaism.

The relationship between the Jewish population and its Christian surroundings were more and more difficult, and more and more often tainted with violence. In Girona, the violence had already begun at the end of the thirteenth century.

In 1331 an important attack took place that was stifled thanks to the intervention of the public authorities. But the great attack, the most violent one and that with the most terrible consequences,

was the one of 10 August 1391. Groups of armed people entered the Call and caused 40 deaths. Because the Jews and Jewesses were under Royal protection and jurisdiction, they were sent protection. The municipal authorities, to comply with the Royal mandate, protected the Jews and Jewesses by locking them up in the Gironella Tower, where they were shut up under terrible conditions for more than 17 weeks. Many people decided to convert to Christianity in the face of the incessant threat and violence. Some other people decided to leave the city for never being back again.



■ Burning books prohibited by the Church. *Pedro de Berruguete, s. XV. Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.*

PUT IT BACK IN ITS PLACE, THANK YOU



Disputations

A very common and extended practice among the Christian society was that of calling for public debates, called “Disputas“, in those that were confronted expert in the Jewish Law with wise and Christian theologians. In fact, they were strategies of dialectic attack of the Church, which wanted to prove publicly that the Judaism was a wrong religion. The debates were always organized by the Christians. And the Jews were forced to be present and to expose publicly different theological questions of the Law of Moses in the face of the arguments and critiques of the Christianity. Often, the subject of the discussion and point more important of the debate was the arrival of the Messiah. The environment was never even nice neither respectful towards the Judaism, and the disputes almost always took place in the middle of a strong pressure.

The map of the wall shows the most important Disputes of the medieval Europe: Paris, in 1240, that treated about the Talmud and concluded with the public burning and the prohibition of Talmudic books; Barcelona, in 1263, in which participated Moshe ben Nahman of Gerona, and that treated the subject of the messianism of Christ in a large way; and the longest and most pungent, Tortosa, in 1414, that meant the conversion of more of the half of Jewish population| of the Crown of Aragon.

It was promoted for by Benedicto XIII, the Papa Luna, that called into his palace of Tortosa to the more distinguished rabbis of the Catalan communities and Aragoneses of the period. The Dispute lasted more than one year, and provoked

an enormous intellectual and moral exhaustion among the Jewish personalities that were, obligatorily, present. One of the few that did not accept the Christian baptism was Bonastruc Desmestre, rabbi of Gerona, and possibly descendant of Nahmánides, who in spite of the pressure at which he was submitted went back to Gerona and remained faithful to the Judaism up to the moment of his death.



■ El diable encega els jueus. Extret del llibre *Il capello a punta*, pàg. 91, imatge 48.