



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.*

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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.



ROOM 11

The Expulsion

At the endings of the 15th century, in Catalonia, the amount of people who had converted to Christianity had increased a lot. Nevertheless, the majority of those who had converted to Christianity continued living in the Catalan cities and villages, and maintained a close relationship with their former co-religionists. That was, according to the inquisitors, a great danger since it still allowed unconverted Jews to indoctrinate and remind the converts of the old practices of the religion that was now prohibited for them. Thus, they could frequently and easily proselytise the converts.

With this foundation as a basis, and promoted by inquisitor friars, the Catholic Royalty signed on 31 March 1492, an edict which gave the Jewish population in all their kingdoms three months time to embrace the Christian faith. If said term arrived and they persisted in their “mistaken” faith, they would have to leave the cities, villages and towns where they had been born and where they had lived for generations.

In Girona, the courts received a letter dated 20 April 1492 in which King Fernando, referred to the edict of expulsion of all

the Jews and Jewesses, and ordered the courts to protect all of them during the time of their exit, to avoid attacks and excessive acts of violence.

At the beginning of July of that year, the Jewish community of Girona put the synagogue, the ritual bath, the children’s school, the meeting place, the butcher’s and the slaughter house up for sale. Everything was sold for the pittance of 30 pounds of common currency. The old sites, which for so many centuries had lodged ancient prayers and rituals, were turned into just another part of the urban, and Christian, tangle of the city of Girona.



■ Jewish People was expelled from several parts of Europe during the medieval centuries. *Sarajevo Haggadah, fol. 14r. Catalonia, s. XIV. Facsimile. MHJ, Girona.*

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The persecutions

The attacks of 1391 and the prohibitions and orders to deprivation induced the majority of Jewish population to accept the baptism to try to overcome the life and the goods, and to live with certain, almost always fictitious, calmness. The lay people had to be confronted to new although not smaller difficulties. They were badly seen and worse accepted by the Christian society, which often accused them of opportunism and falseness. The Jewish community, on its part, accused them of having betrayed the faith of their ancestors. Still to make it more difficult, since they received a formation insignificant and in a complete way insufficient in subjects of religion and Christian tradition, they committed errors of practice, of thought or of doctrine, so they continued behaving consciously or unconsciously according to the law and the Jewish tradition in which they had appeared and grown.

To control that population the Tribunal of the The Inquisition, a repressive organism that according to its creators was destined to safeguard the pureness of the Christian faith, was created in 1480. The inquisitorial system, the deployment of one authentic “repressor machinery” and the persecutions that were unchained created situations

of authentic terror and fanaticism. The sentence could be of different ways; the maximum sentence was to die in the bonfire. When the person had avoided the city, sentence was dictated *in statue*, what consisted in burning a doll of straw that represented the condemned one. There were also the different *penitenciamientos*, punishments and humiliations that entailed the confiscation of goods. Any person that fell in the hands of the The Inquisition remained marked forever, and not only she, but all its family, even the descending generations.

Joana Libiana was daughter of a converted family from Gerona. On the 23rd of February 1496 she was taken in Barcelona together with

her sisters Marquesa and Caterina. They had been accused of carrying out Jewish practices in secret and of following “The Law of Moses”: the shirt being changed on Saturdays, not eating pork, or celebrating some Jewish holidays as Passover, the New Year or Yom Kippur. They suffered hard interrogations, and ended up confessing. All the furniture goods and properties were confiscated them, and were excommunicated and confined in life imprisonment.



■ Jueus cremant a la foguera. Extret del libre *Il capello a punta*, pàg. 38, imatge 18.



ROOM 12

The Exile

At the beginning of August 1492, small groups of people began to leave from the Catalan villages and cities. They had decided to remain true to the Jewish faith and take the path of exile. It was long and difficult, and full of misfortunes, dangers and uncertainties.

Most of the exiles from Girona and its surrounding areas went to the Rosellon (southern France). Some who reached Perpignan were: Astruc Abraham, Leon Aninai, Mosé Vidal, Samuel Salamó and Esdras Bellshom, who had been secretaries in the synagogue of Girona. They arrived with the Scrolls of the Law and sacred books and objects that they had been able to take from the synagogue. At the beginning of September 1493, the king of France gave the counties of Rosellon and the Cerdagne Valley to the King of Castile and Aragon. As a consequence, King Fernando extended the edict of expulsion to all the Jewish people of his dominions. All the Jews and Jewesses from Perpignan, Cotlliure, Elna and Millas were expelled. At the beginning of

October, a group of 39 Jews left the port of Cotlliure; counted among them were members of the old lineages from Girona such as the Piera, Nissim or Asdrai families.

Some of those exiled from Catalonia settled down in Livorno, Naples or Rome, where the “Catalan” memory of a part of the Jewish community lasted until the end of the nineteenth century. Others went to more distant places like the Balkan coasts or some cities of the Ottoman Empire, where they were heartily welcomed because they were seen as a new source of wealth and prosperity. So began the Judeo-Catalan community of Salonica, which kept some cultural remembrances and specific traits until its destruction at the hands of Nazi barbarism.

Today, there are few remains of the Catalan Jewish people who had to leave that which had been their land for so many centuries. Even so, we maintain its memory and its legacy because they comprise part of the essence and essential intrinsic wealth of our past, our history and our memory.



■ Representation of a ship. *Wood painting. MNAC, Barcelona.*

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