

Illuminations I: Lights, Material Culture and the Society of Spectacle in the Late Middle Ages.

Iluminaciones I: Luces, cultura material y sociedad del espectáculo en la Baja Edad Media.

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Abstract:

A feature of modernity is the visit to the synagogue –not for fulfilling religious obligations but rather– to gaze, experience or as one seventeenth century visitor put it “for observation sake”. This we call “the synagogue as spectacle”. In the Middle Ages there were visits but of a markedly different character. The fifteenth century is a point of transition. The lights of the synagogue are a central part of the spectacle. Their symbolism and meaning is rich in variations which are frequently constructed and reconstructed. There seems to be more evidence for contributions to the Synagogue lights than to those of the Midrash but the latter is also represented. The corpus of testimonies from the fifteenth century showing benefactions for illuminations is immense. Women are prominent. The drive to contribute cuts across differences of gender, socioeconomic status, professions, locality.

Key words: Medieval synagogues; Womens patronage; Medieval Spain; Material culture.

Resumen:

La visita a la sinagoga para observar –más que para cumplir con una obligación– es un rasgo de la modernidad. Había visitas en la edad media pero eran marcadamente diferentes. El siglo XV es un momento de transición. Las luces eran una parte central del espectáculo. Su simbolismo y significado era rico en variantes que se construían y reconstruían frecuentemente. Parece haber más evidencia para las contribuciones a la sinagoga que al Midrash. El corpus de testimonios que muestran las benefacciones para mantener las luces es muy nutrido. Las mujeres tienen un protagonismo especial. El deseo de contribuir está por encima de diferencias de género, clase socioeconómica, profesiones, localidades.

Palabras clave: Sinagogas medievales; Mecenasgo femenino; Judíos de España; Cultura material hispano-judía.

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«...*E cuatro amadores de candelas en manera que todo hombre al jetar de la aladma... e de amatar las ditas candelas ...tema de la dita aladma e faga e diga uerdat e lealdat...*»

Ordinaciones de la alcabala de la aljama judía de Huesca del año 1389 (M.A. Motis Dolader, 1990:11).

1. For observation sake

In *Jean Santeuil*¹—blueprint for Proust's *A la recherche*—there is an episode of memory where the adult author remembers his childhood. The eponymous hero had quarreled with his parents, smashed a vase of Venetian glass and awaits anxiously his mother's reaction. She, however, kisses him and whispers: «*Ce sera comme au temple le symbole de l'indestructible union*» (*It shall be as in the Temple; the symbol of the strong union*)².

Implicit in the powerful Oedipal scene—the reader suspects—is a basic event: a memory of a visit by the daughter of the Weils and her son to a wedding ceremony at a synagogue. It is a visit unrelated to the desire to fulfill a liturgical obligation. The synagogue here is closer to what may be termed spectacle. My half nod to Debord (1977) does not imply wholesale adoption or appropriation of the Manifesto. It cannot as the approach to Hispano-Jewish cultural practices in the age of the transition from medieval to modern cannot be the same as that to the Paris of the Situationists. And yet in the study of various medieval and early modern phenomena such theories of spectacle are influential and sometimes acknowledged. What I retain is the link between representation and social relations implied in the ideas that in societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of spectacles and that the spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images.

Behind Proust's implied reminiscences of the synagogue, and, ultimately, behind Ravel's or Bloch's³ similar—but musical—representations; or even Mme. De Stael's

1. Written after *Les plaisirs et les jours*, between 1895-99, it was first published in 1952, thirty years after Proust's death, by Bernard de Fallois.

2. M. Proust, *Jean Santeuil*. Paris, Gallimard, 2001, p. 269.

3. The trend towards reconnaissance, ultimately depending on observation and listening is common to Marcello, Ravel, Debussy, Bloch, etc. despite their different biographies. The visit in order to listen, rather than to perform a commandment, is not a product of the late modern period. It could be traced back to the early modern period, to the early sixteenth century. The more broadly remembered case is that of the visit to the Ferrara synagogue recounted by the humanist Franciscus Tissardus who was learning Hebrew from a local Rabbi. In his *Grammatica Hebraica et Graeca* (Paris, 1508) he expresses his critique of the “noise” or cacophony. On Tissard, see Samuel Kerner (1980:7-14). What has not been realized is that these are not fresh, spontaneous, new and original reactions, circumscribed to what is now France or Italy and to the conventional dates of the “early modern” period. More than a century earlier, ca. 1400, the idea of Jewish noise/music had already been amplified in literary/poetic mode, in Spain. Tissard can now be seen as re-

(1766-1817) pages on the Frankfurt Shul⁴, there is a common basic step. That is, visits/ observations of customs of the Synagogue. It is a visit in which the Synagogue is not approached for worship or to fulfill a commandment or religious obligation. The space/ building is not viewed purely as a place of holiness. On the other hand, neither is it seen as a place of evil. Rather, the spirit of the visit is one of reconnaissance and discovery or search for experience, aesthetic or otherwise. This kind of approach to the synagogue could be seen as part of the processes of modernity, if not their very icon. There is no lack of evidence for the phenomenon of gazing at the synagogue or its lights in early modern Europe.

Albrecht Altdorfer's (c. 1480-1538) *The Entrance Hall of the Regensburg Synagogue*, is an etching of 1519. It precedes Rembrandt van Rijn's etching and drypoint, sometimes called *Jews in the Synagogue*, which is of 1648. From the top floor of his house in Vlooienburg, Rembrandt had a view of the Sephardi community's synagogue and he could carry out observations. These occur in the same century of those of Pepys and Evelyn, the famous diarists. Both visit and direct their gaze towards Sephardi synagogues. On August 20th, 1640, Evelyn writes that he arrived in Amsterdam and continues: «*I procur'd to be brought to a Synagogue of the Jewes it being then Saturday... whose [...] Lamps [...] afforded matter for my wonder and enquiry*»⁵.

These visits, then, lead in some cases, to creative, artistic productions and representations whether literary, visual or musical. In 1611, there appears a prose composition in English entitled Coryate's *Crudities*. Written by the son of a parson from the village of Odcombe in Somerset, it provides us with yet another literary recreation, in English prose, of a visit to the Synagogue of Venice in 1608: «*I observed some fewe of these Jewes especially some of the Levantines to bee such goodly and proper men ...indeed I noted some of them to be most elegant and sweete featured persons, which gave me occasion the more to lament their religion*». Coryate is still aware of religion and difference, but this is not the main tenor of the narrative. Not all aspects of perception are subordinate to religion (B. Ravid, 1997). These seventeenth century examples do

enacting, following, repeating belatedly, the affectations of a Castilian courtier. What is of interest is the metamorphosis or slow transition –often subtle and almost imperceptible– from religious to non specifically religious reactions. For the question of “Jewish noise”, see E.Gutwirth (2007a: 43-67).

4. *Deutschlandreisen* (1804/04 - 1807/08). «*I strongly desired to witness their rituals, to hear their singing and to comprehend their mysteries.... You could hear one man howling, another braying and another bellowing. Such a cacophony of discordant sounds do they make! Weighing this with the rest of their rituals, I was almost brought to nausea...*». Madame de Staël, *Über Deutschland*, ed. Monika Bosse. Frankfurt, Insel Verlag, 1985. She makes similar remarks about Christian sights.

5. On December 3, 1659, Pepys writes: «*Being this morning for observacion sake at the Jewish Synagogue in London I heard many lamentacions made by Portugall Jewes for ye death of Ferdinando ye Merchant who was lately cutt by the same hand with myself of ye Stone...*» (Wilfred Samuel, 1935). Years before Samuel, Hyamson had already drawn attention to such visits. He notes that on October 14, 1663, Samuel Pepys and his wife and his friend Mr. Rawlinson paid a visit and adds the evidence of the autobiography of Henry Newcome, M.A., in 1686, on June 26: «*We went to the Jews' Synagogue. I could not have believed, but that I saw it, such a strange worship, so modish and foppish*». Of course, the writers minimize the main aspect: their investment in, and decision to visit and watch. Instead, they concentrate on writing about the polemics as do some of their modern readers (H.S.Q. Henriques 1905).

not surprise us because they are reenacting earlier gestures. A famous precedent for foregrounding experience could be that furnished by Montaigne's *Journal de voyages* (1581). It too presents an account of observations of a circumcision ceremony, as a byproduct of human curiosity⁶. The contrast with the visits of the medieval monks and preachers or even the notaries could not be clearer. This differs from the case of the villagers of Alariz who, before 1289, would go to see the Jews' «*rogas e festas*» in order to «*prender e moestar*» and to create «*desaguisados*»⁷. It is not the perception of the synagogue –reflected in the *fueros*– as a place where the Jews could meet to make their judicial oaths about loans (*Libro de los fueros de Castilla*), nor in the *Siete Partidas* in the second half of the thirteenth century (a house of God which must be limited) nor that of the Council of Zamora (1313) with its condemnations of the size and refurbishings of the buildings, nor Ferran Martínez' (1378 and onwards) perceptions of the Synagogues as Satanic and as potential building materials to be appropriated for the *fabrica* of the churches of the archbishopric of Seville. Similarly negative, satanic perceptions of the synagogue are developed later, in the theological realm, by Jaume Pérez de Valencia in the second half of the fifteenth century⁸. Such clear distinctions between medieval and modern are welcome precisely because the question of the origins of modernity in the Christian attitudes to the Jews of Europe in Jewish history are problematic and by no means a matter of consensus.

2. Iberia

This (early) modern approximation to the landscapes of spirituality could be termed a perception of “the Synagogue as spectacle”. The beginnings of such aspects of modernity could be traced to almost a century before Montaigne, to the 1490's. Rather than Italy or France, the early location could be the Iberian peninsula. Indeed, long before Rembrandt, Coryate, Pepys and Evelyn or Montaigne, the Bavarian Hieronimus Munzer traveled to Lisbon in 1494/5. He visited –and created a prose account and description of– the Great Synagogue of Lisbon at that date. The impression of its magnificence is clear in this narrative.

These aspects of modernity imply that the Synagogue is a cultural creation not limited to the realm of the textual and ritual. Attention is directed to a number of features such as lamps as mentioned above. This can help us understand the experience of

6. From the large corpus of Montaigne scholarship, one may focus on Élisabeth Schneikert (2006). For her, the circumcision is experience and the text bears a relation to it comparable to that of the fall from the horse and its description. Both are cases of the link between experience and writing; between reflection and self knowledge. Montaigne himself describes the circumcision (not as the custom of an opponent religion nor as that of the true religion nor his own religion but) as one of the ancient human rites.

7. José Amador de los Ríos (1984, II:75-76 note 2; 553-554). There is another version in Alfredo Cid Rumbao, (1984: 64-65).

8. For the emphasis on the spatial turn in late medieval Spain see for example E. Gutwirth 1994 y 2000. See also M. Peinado, 1993.

liturgy. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, scholarly approaches to the history of liturgy, strictly bound and overdetermined by the presuppositions of philology or Alterthumswissenschaft (in the case of Zunz) would reinforce the male worshipper's particular focus on the Hebrew, textual aspects of the liturgy such as *piyyut* or sermons. Today, it is possible to attend to other forms. In certain cases and in defined areas this has been researched and is perfectly understood⁹. The significance of such non textual phenomena as the organization of synagogal interior space, for example has been clear to scholars from architecture or art history. Nevertheless, there lingers the assumption that the concentration on the male is justified because of the mass of texts –whether liturgical or paraliturgical, prose or poetry– were mostly written by men and a putative lack of (or challenging access to) evidence for a female presence or for a female component in the male spaces of synagogal worship. Therefore, our focus here is on illumination in general, including women's contribution and involvement in this, as part of the pattern and model of Jewish women's patronage of Jewish culture¹⁰. Indeed, to resume the early modern thread, Coryate's attention is directed towards this feature of the synagogal spectacle. He is minute in his focus and centers apparently marginal [non-textual] details: «They have a great company of candlestickes in each Synagogue made partly of glasse and partly of brasse and pewter which hang square about their Synagogue. For in that forme is their Synagogue built: of their candlestickes I told above sixty in the same Synagogue». What is relevant here is his attention to the lighting, the placing and materials of the candelabra, their number. But Coryate, in early seventeenth century Venice, is reenacting the gazing gestures of Munzer in 1490's Lisbon. Munzer says that «ten enormous candelabra are alight there. Each has about fifty or sixty lights. Apart from these there are many other lamps. The women sit separately in a place which is also illuminated profusely by lamp»¹¹.

3. Illuminations

A case in point could be that of a house in early sixteenth century Toledo. It belonged to someone who may be termed the founder of a dynasty of Toledan intellectuals¹². This founder was a converted Jew, formerly named Abulafia. From the Inquisition file, we know that Abulafia's neighbor, Pedro de Segovia, although uninvited, could not resist trespassing into the house of Samuel Abulafia [=Diego Gómez de Toledo]. He asserts this in his testimony before the Inquisition in 1510. The reason was that Abulafia

9. E. Gutwirth, 2007b. For the approach to liturgy see e.g. Gutwirth, 1998.

10. Gutwirth, 2007b. See also Dr. Emese Kozma's contribution (2016: 87ff).

11. Jerónimo Munzer, *Viaje por España y Portugal*, ed. Manuel García Moreno. Madrid, 1951, p. 61. J. García Mercadal, 1952. Ludwig Pfandl (1920).

12. Intellectuals including such individuals as Alvar Gomez de Castro (who was probably a relative), i.e. the famous latinist *clerigo* [b. Santa Olalla 1515- d. Toledo 1580] and author of a biography of Cardinal Cisneros, holder of the Chair of Greek at the Complutensian, who corresponded with such scholars as Antonio Augustin. Certain Toledan physicians were undeniable scions of the family. José Carlos Gómez-Menor Fuentes (1972, 1973 y 1974).

had, in his house, on Fridays «*en un palacio-sala grande encendidas ciertas candelas puestas en una almenara e colgada de un cordel de cáñamo...*» The neighbor was so observant and possessed such a good memory that he remembered the material of the cord from which the lamps were hanging. The neighbor, who had been watching the illuminations from outside «*entró para poder mejor ver lo susodicho*»¹³. Ricardo Muñoz Solla's study of Caracena recounts how on the 16/9/1498 a witness remembered how one day he went up in the house of the converso Fernand Lopez and the converso was positioned on a window of the synagogue which was adjacent to his house and he was listening to the prayers and murmuring to himself (R. Muñoz Solla, 2001). In Liria the window between the women's and the men's section was about a *palmo* [20 or 21 cm] and had bars, but this did not impede the desire to look in. In Teruel some [non-Jewish] women were listening and watching the synagogue through the windows in the second half of the fifteenth century (J. Castaño, 2010). None of these documents mention coloured lights or crystal.

The lights of a Synagogue of Toledo –later to be turned into a Church– attracted Blanca Ramírez, a conversa. Her servant, Ana Díaz accused her to the Inquisition c. 1523. One accusation was that on Friday nights they had in their house, a «*candil con cinco mechas*» (lamp with five wicks); another that «they went frequently to the Synagogue she doesn't remember whether they were barefoot ...and in the synagogue they saw many *candiles* burning» (F. Baer, 1929-1936, II #396). Around 1485/6, similarly, Fdo. Husillo, vecino de Toledo, with another converso had gone to the synagogue to watch the lighting: « *fueron a la synoga la noche del ayuno mayor a ver los candilejos*» (F. Baer, 1929-1936, II #397, 460. From Halle MSS). According to a testimony of 5/1492, Juan and Jayme de la Cavalleria «*querian yr a mirar*» (wanted to go to watch) the synagogue¹⁴. Jaime de la Cavalleria said «*entremos a mirar a esta sinoga-...sintieron como cantavan los judios*». In both, Castile and Aragon, contemplating the candles seems plausible and sufficient reason for looking at the Synagogue. But «*yr a mirar*» in fifteenth century Spain has a context. *Ir a mirar*, as a motivation for visiting and gazing, recalls the *Victorial*. Written as a chronicle praising the knightly deeds of Don Pero Niño, Count of Buelna, (1378-1453), it recounts its hero's anchoring at Málaga during the truce and visit to the houses of the Genoese, to the Tarazona and to the *judería*. They are on the same footing; as things “they went to see”: «*Aquella tarde troxeron el adiafa muy honrosamente en muchas zabras guarnidas de paños de oro , é seda , é con muchos atavales , é otros estrumentos: é los que quisieron entraron en la cibdad, é fueron á la casa de los Ginoveses, é á mirar la Juderia, é la tarazona*»¹⁵.

13. J.C. Gómez-Menor Fuentes, 1973; P. León Tello, 1973.

14. F. Baer (1929-1936, II #397). There is of course a large corpus of studies on “the gaze” since the 1970s. It may well arise from previous concerns and categories in anthropology (e.g. “face to face” societies) or literary studies (e.g. the “punto de vista”). For an attempt to integrate these into the research on the culture of late medieval Hispano-Jewish communities in their historical context see E. Gutwirth, 2010.

15. See Gutierrez Díaz de Games, *El Victorial*. Rafael Beltrán Llavador, ed. Salamanca, Universidad, 1997, p. 382. The events seem to have taken place around 1404. The Synagogue is not mentioned.

4. Narratives

Any historical approach to such material culture issues needs to reconstruct a context and in the case of fifteenth century Spain, this means also devoting attention to the neighbors, i.e. to Christian practices of illumination on the European continent. The resonances of such illuminations for the Christian neighbors may be multiple but they are neither infinite nor inscrutable. There are historians who have argued that such medieval resonances may be studied and who see some definite results from such a study. The ambiguity of darkness allows –in medieval literary narratives– the development of stories of substitutions and tales of mistaken identity (staples of the period’s culture of narrative) which contrast with the luminous tales of aristocratic illumination. An example comes from the book for the education of his daughters composed by the Chevalier de La Tour Landry (1371)¹⁶. To insult a maiden, a knight (in the book) accuses her of going into “the dark bedrooms” of men. For Danielle Regnier-Bohler (1988), lights designate sexual legitimacy. They also seem to accentuate the polarization between town and country. Mazzi’s studies of Tuscan inventories (c.1400) show that, out of 60 inventories, 48 have no mention of lamps (*lucerna*). The candle of tallow is prevalent. In town [Florence, c. 1400] a variety of lamps are mentioned in the inventories (M.S. Mazzi, 1980a, 1980b). The burgher’s lamps illuminate the bedrooms (more frequently) and less so the halls or salons and rarely the kitchen. Against such a fifteenth century background, Pedro de Segovia and the many parallel, documented incidences of the curious Old and New Christian Iberian attraction towards Jewish practices of illumination, some of which have been mentioned above, become more understandable.

The phenomenon of Christian gaze directed towards Jewish lighting could be of interest for other reasons. Indeed, Jewish lighting practices in medieval Europe are sometimes believed to arise out of direct influence of the Christian Church or stimulated by the example of the Church (S. Baron, 1945, II, 134). While rarely worked out or evidenced, the hypothesis seems to rest on the belief in the transition from the ancient, Near Eastern, practices of lighting by oil lamps (e.g. in the Temple) to that effected by means of candles. Similarly, the sheer intensity and the profusion of lights and attachment to practices of illumination seem to invite such an explanation. It is evident that more research is needed. Indeed a random example could be the case of Elbogen, who had asserted that before the seventeenth century there was no textual testimony to the practice of *ner tamid* –that is, the “eternal candle” placed before the Ark in the Synagogue. Ta-Shma has questioned this assertion. For him the point is of interest because the lighting is part of the various features which had to be worked out juridically / halakhically in the medieval practice of the general principle that the Synagogue was a *miqdash me`at* (a small or minor Temple). A large number of texts attest to the *ner*

16. First translated from the French in the reign of Henry VI, *The Book of the Chevalier de la Tour Landry* was the manual of deportment for young women of high birth in France, England, and parts of Germany.

tamid practice before the seventeenth century, to its relation to *miqdash me'at* or Temple symbolism and, most significantly, to a medieval view of the Hanukkah candles, *ner tamid*, and Sabbath candle as three interrelated symbols. The (mostly Ashkenazi and Provençal) texts –up to the early fourteenth century– assembled by Ta Shma are not entirely relevant here, but they reinforce the view that illuminations do have profound resonances and one of these is the memory of the Temple and, more precisely, the constructions of sanctity. For Ta-Shma, in opposition to Baron, these not only preclude Christian influence but are directly opposed to Christian notions of sanctity and impurity (I. Ta-Shma, 1976 [=1992] and 1995).

Such resonances were constantly recreated and reinforced¹⁷. Creative narratives of symbolism were constantly produced. An Iberian case in point would be the homily collection of Joshua Ibn Shoaib. In his sermons he frequently refers to *minhagim*, that is to say, customs current amongst the Jews of his time and place: fourteenth century Navarre. One may note here his interest in candles. He provides a reason for a feature of the Hanukkah candles. Relying on Rabbinic Aggadot, he focuses on the timing, and more precisely, on the custom of lighting the candles at the end of sunset. [17Ac] The “pillar of fire” in the desert appeared when the “pillar of cloud” had disappeared (C. Horowitz 1989:115, n.124). The candle, then, is now associated with pre-Temple history and

17. In other, different contexts and sharply distant fields and epochs, it has been perfectly understood that what I call narratives or ideologies and the material and historical research cannot be separated. In the case of Baroque Synagogues, for example, this has been maintained by Sergey R. Kravtsov (2005), who argues for the relation between architectural typology and spirituality (Messianism or eschatology). Helen Rosenau's work on later Sephardi synagogues (H. Rosenau, 1940) had already paid some attention to the questions of “light and shade” or questions of the shadowed zone in contrast with the light which floods the Shrine. This play of light and shadow comes (not from lamps but) from windows. While in our case of the illuminations, the evidence may be searched for in documents (frequently transcribed without minimal awareness of their significance) and in the narratives of meaning, there are cases where the exact opposite is the problem. Thus, the theme of the symbolism of twelve synagogal windows has been amply researched, particularly as regards the readings [including legal ones, by Caro, etc] of the famous thirteenth century Castilian Zoharic passage [in Pequede] noted by Scholem and his followers [also Zimmels and others]. What may need separate treatment is the historical evidence for the real, material “working out” in medieval Spain of such symbols. For historical cases of material representation of symbols such as “twelve” see for example the Saragossan events of the 1480s in E. Gutwirth (1984). A footnote by Serrano y Sanz (1918:ix n.1) though apparently unnoticed may be relevant: “Don Diego de Espés, en su *Historia eclesiástica Cesaraugastana*, hizo una pequeña descripción de la sinagoga: «El edificio era como templo de tres navadas, aunque pequeñas, con sus pilares; las naves de los lados algo bajas, la de medio más alta, y la techumbre con muchas labores y con unos morteretes dorados. Al cabo, hacia mediodía, havia un altar en la pared, labrado de labores mosaicas; al Septentrión havia un candelero grande, pintado, con siete candeleros, y encima un pulpito pequeño para hacer sus lecciones y ceremonias. Tenia a los dos lados seis puertas pequeñas, por donde debian entrar a la sinagoga, o para otras ceremonias de que aquel pueblo abundaba; y a una parte, una puerta grande. En lo alto de las paredes, a donde hacian asiento las navadas, por todo el ámbito de la sinagoga, por la parte interior; havia unas letras grandes coloradas y azules, hebráicas, que devia de ser toda aquella inscripción algún salmo de David, o lugar de algún profeta, acomodado al propósito de su Templo». Also: “En el año 1557, el P. Francisco Estrada, de la Compañía de Jesús, adquirió, por mediación de D. Diego Morlanes, el edificio de la sinagoga, donde en 1569 se comenzó á edificar la iglesia de San Carlos, que perteneció á los jesuitas hasta al año 1767, en que fueron expulsados, como tres siglos antes lo habían sido los judíos...” The unexplained crux, of course, is the “six little doors”. Cf. a Zohar passage: “In the opening in the middle of the chamber, on the outer side, there are six openings connected with the chamber. They all hold on to it. Here there are windows open on the side of the holy light. These places are made for the kings of the other nations, who did not oppress Yisrael and always protected them. They are honored because of Yisrael, and enjoy, in the darkness where they sit, the light shining from the side of holiness, as it is written «All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory»” Zohar Pekudei (Zohar II 267b:8-10).

with the formative biblical narratives of the desert wanderings and attendant miracles. In other words, they are linked to identity. Other associations would include “Shalom”; that is tranquility. In eleventh century France, Rashi, for example, formulates it thus¹⁸: [when the biblical verse in Lamentations reads]: «my soul has no shalom» “this means the Sabbath candle” because «where there is no candle there is no tranquility because he goes and stumbles in the dark».

The equivalence of candles and tranquility is not Rashi’s innovation. It brings us to the question of candles as central to the religion. Indeed the intensity and attachment to the custom in Spain (and, more precisely, amongst the fifteenth-sixteenth century conversas), who did not –and could not– fulfill many other obligations, implies selection. And this is the phenomenon worth noting here. As has been argued, this would not be noted by the nineteenth century compilation method, of viewing converso customs as “ritos y costumbres”, all of them as identical, interchangeable and as “shapeless” as the homogeneous “Other”. On the other hand, the view of these customs amongst conversos as “superstitions” or “folklore” is equally lacking in attention to the evidence.

The particular selection of the illuminations does not seem to be based on a juridically / halakhically informed assessment [by fifteenth and sixteenth century conversos and conversas] of hierarchies and degrees of obligation. Indeed the candles question is one of the more polemical areas of the commandments. The case of the Sabbath candles is a major stone of contention in the Karaite - Rabbanite polemic and this polemic quality seems to extend as far back as the Samaritan polemic. It left its imprint in a large number of texts, mostly Karaite, which return again and again to this question. It was, in fact, on the basis of such Karaite texts, (as well as polemical texts by Abraham Ibn Ezra from Tudela) that B. Klar was able to reconstruct a work by Saadyah Gaon, which he called the *Treatise on the Sabbath Candle*. And in these disquisitions on the Sabbath candle, the guiding principle which justifies, for the Rabbanites, what the Karaites consider a transgression, is the association of candle lights with the *tranquility* of living beings (B. Klar, 1954:242-258).

Associated with “tranquility” is the notion of “joy” as obligation. It is significant that when Asher, Rabbi in Toledo till his death in the 1320’s, deals with the question of illuminations during the Festivals, he refrains from adducing legal texts, Talmudic or later, as one would expect from a scholar of his stature. Rather, he refers to the idea of joy. The import of his verdict appears in the reply (Responsa 5/8) to a question put to him on the laws of kindling the festival lights. His view is that “joy” is equivalent to lights. His proof-texts are biblical. They comprise four citations of biblical verses where the notion/term “joy” is associated [e.g. by contiguity or by *parallelismus membrorum*] with the term “light”. These are as follows: «let the Lord be glorified with lights [be urim]» (Is. 24:25); «all the city of Susa shouted for joy. For the Jews there was light and joy» (Est. 8:16); «a harvest of light is sown for the righteous and joy for all good

18. In his commentary to bShab 25b. Cf B.M. Levin (1938).

men» (Ps. 97:11); and, finally, «...sounds of joy and gladness...voices of bridegroom and bride ...light of every lamp» (Jer. 25:10).

In a letter, before 1391, to the Játiva notable, Rabbi Pinhas bar Salmia, Isaac bar Sheshet writes about the significance of synagogal illuminations in a way which does not reflect a purely juridical or legal mind-set. For him, part of the “intention” or correct spiritual disposition or attitude in prayer –*kawanah*– is one of magnanimity; of “*harhavat ha-lev*” –a grandeur of soul. This term would not be found in the ancient sources but is commonplace in the age of the Hebrew transmission of ultimately Aristotelian texts in medieval Spain. He adds that this is the contrary of praying while standing in a place “which is narrow and dark”.

He also raises the question of region and geographic difference between Jewish communities. Indeed, if the field of illuminations was a site of polemics with the Samaritans in antiquity; with the Karaites in the early middle ages; by the twelfth century these differences seem to recede into the background. Abraham ibn Ezra, and, later, in the 1160's, Abraham ibn Dawd seem to have been two examples of Iberian Jews who responded creatively to the Karaite polemic. But after the twelfth century this does not seem to have been a major factor in Iberian Jewish cultures. On the other hand, the question of difference in custom seems to have been particularly lively in the area of illuminations. Such differences can be seen as remnants or traces of the earlier polemics.

This area seems to be a prime site for the creation of a “regional” i.e. Iberian, Hispanic, Sephardi identity which contrasted with the Franco-German, Ashkenazi one (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:6). Katzenellenbogen [d 1749] asserts that different methods of kindling Hanukah lights were due to different conditions prevailing amongst Ashkenazim and Sephardim (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:55). Isserles (1520-1572) raises the question of Sephardi vs Ashkenazi practice in the kindling of Hanukah lights; whether they should be kindled by the head of the family only or by all male members of the family. This case is stressed by the author of *Ture Zahav*, David ha-Levi Segal [c. 1586–1667] (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:109). In addition, the benediction for the lights on Sabbath eve was possibly a polemic against the Karaites and a difference between Ashkenazim and Sephardim (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:110). The question also arises concerning the benediction over kindling the lights on the eve of the Day of Atonement (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:187). There are also differences about kindling the twenty four hour light on the day of the death of a relative (H.J. Zimmels, 1958:205). According to Zimmels (1958:289), it was believed that in Spain, where Jews enjoyed complete freedom, the Hanukah lamp could be hung outside the house and indicate to passers-by how many days had passed. Differences in the *Havdalah* candle are well known. That is to say that –historically– the lighting of the candles, rather than an “essential” and “central” practice was one tinged by polemics and difference.

5. Evidence

Nevertheless, the area of illuminations was perceived by the informers or witnesses before the Inquisition and by the Inquisitors themselves, as “central signs” of adherence to an immutable Judaism. Hence the overwhelming, immense corpus of testimonies against judaizers who engage in these illumination practices in the archival documentation provided by Inquisition files of the fifteenth century and onwards. An historic approach however, emphasizes these activities as problematic acts of construction of identities. These could be religious, such as the rabbanite defiance against Karaite accusations of transgressive “modernity” and “un-Jewishness”. They could also be affirmations of hispanicity. Alongside these, there is the question of gender. The prominence of women in this field contrasts with the priorities of writing about it. The emphasis on the Hebrew texts of the liturgy in nineteenth and twentieth century research on synagogal liturgy has the practical effect of excluding women from research and scholarship on this area. It is therefore interesting to note the platform of B. M. Levin's classic study on Sabbath Candles. The volume is in memory of the great patroness of American academic scholarship on Jewish Studies in the 1920's and 1930's, Linda Miller. The impression is that the contributors had some sense of decorum and made an effort to produce scholarly studies which would have pleased the late patroness. The association of such synagogal and extra synagogal institutions with women does not rest on any notions of an exclusively feminine character of illuminations in Judaism. Rather, it rests on the fact that while other phenomena, e.g. textual, seem to be mostly male, this one is not. There is some justification and evidence for this in medieval texts¹⁹. Rabbenu Tam, the French Tosaphist/glossator of the 12th century polemizes against the “world asses” who teach that no blessing is required on the lighting of the candles. Apart from the legal argument, [which is irrelevant here], there are sections of his letter on the subject, which consist of personal invective and are more indicative of the personal feelings:

«...Be smart and keep silent and thus they will not ridicule you nor will the angels of peace punish you. And since the women pray [i.e. pronounce the blessing on the candles] in a whisper and their voices are not heard, therefore you have forgotten the custom...and our custom in “Babylon” is according to the sages of the Land of Israel...» (*Sefer Hayashar* [Berlin 1898] *Responso* 47 and 48).

Tam associates women with the correct custom and lack of attention to women with the incorrect halakhic custom.

19. The *Code* of Maimonides [Sabbath 5/1] states explicitly that the Sabbath candle is an obligation. Even if one has nothing to eat the obligation to spend on the candle still stands...It is an obligation on women and men. See B.M. Levin (1938:63).

While Inquisition records provide the most voluminous evidence for lighting practices, there are earlier non-Inquisitorial testimonies. The case of notarial records is an example. Regina or Reginona, from Inca in Majorca, leaves in her will of 24/3/1388, 10 sous for the lamps of the synagogue [not “for her soul” but “for the love of God”] (R. Burns, 1996:133). Bonafilia on 18/1/1370, in Puigcerda, leaves 10 sous for oil and she specifies that it is to be used for the lamps of the *scola*²⁰.

The differences between Iberian kingdoms, regions, between large and small towns, between rich and poor, men and women, famous and unknown are apparently of little direct relevance to the donors’ fundamental commitment to the communal institution. Thus, at Covarrubias, Burgos, Martin Sanchez de Salarena was accused, in 1491, that he used to go to the synagogue and there he would go up to the lamps and would light a candle (C. Carrete, 1985:170). In Teruel, in 1486, the conversa Brianda Besant was said to have been a leader of the conversos and hold services in her house and give oil to the synagogue (S. Haliczzer, 1990:213). In Valencia, c.1500, the family of the renowned converso philosopher Luis Vives, had a synagogue and at its center was a hanging lamp of brass sheets [*candelero o candil de laton*] with eight burning oil lamps; a table with four corners and, in the middle, on one side and on the other there were six lamps of wax candles (A. García, 1987:83-87). Maria Labadia wife of Martin Salvador “panicero” on Friday evenings put clean tablecloths on the table and two lamps hanging from a cord at the end of the table. She was therefore burnt in the 1480s. (H.Ch. Lea, 1907, I, 608). This “gazing at” –attention to materials, placement and numbers would reverberate throughout the centuries as has been shown²¹. The prominence of “six” and “four”, unexplained by Inquisition students, is not so unexpected for readers of Modena’s *Ritti*.

Juan Gonzalez de la Plaza “*recuero y tendero*” lived in the village of Agreda. He was poor. He used to visit Tarazona around New Year - Rosh Ha Shanah. He went to the synagogue to light candles in order to say the morning prayers [*matines*] of the Jews. Once he kindled candles for nine *maravedies* which he received from Jehudah Chico, on a Saturday which occurs only once a year, in which the Jews are accustomed to rise two hours after midnight and then go to the synagogue to pray «*y tener encendidas candelas de sevo*». On other Sabbaths, Jehudah Coculla paid him to kindle the *lamparas* of the Synagogue in the morning for the prayers. Other individuals who kindled Synagoga lamps were the [New] Christian town crier [*pregonero*] Martin and also Teresa. All these accusations were made in Tarazona and Agreda in 1490²². Juan de Iniesta, of the

20. R. Burns, 1996:119. See also E. Marín Padilla (1994): in 1448 Clara Almali leaves instructions for a *lampada de olio* to be maintained for a year after her death; Cinha [Simha] Baylo in 1462 leaves instructions for a lamp to be maintained for ten years after her death.

21. Placement is important in Hanuka also. Thirteenth century authorities asserted that a man should enter his house in Hanuka while the mezuzah is on his right and the lights are on his left. Abraham ibn Yarchi was in Toledo by 1204. In more general terms, space may be relevant in cases such as lighting candles only at home or in the Synagogue as well. The latter was a custom which arose in Spain according to thirteenth century evidence. See Freehof (1962).

22. E. Marín Padilla (1986:144 n.443). One wonders whether the transcribers of the documents have considered the possibility that some of these are cases of *goy shel shabat*. J. Katz (1984) usually said [wrongly] to ignore evidence from Spain, does not seem to take such archival evidence into account.

village of Alfajarin, had converted, not in 1391, nor after the Tortosa Disputation, but at the age of ten, c. 1450-2. When he moved to the town of Alfaro, the domestic of a Jew used to come on Fridays and she would take oil from him for the synagogue. In Alfaro, around 1490, Rabbi Joshua [*rabi Osua*] showed the inquisitors «*una varilla de fierro con ocho crisoletas de fierro que se tienen a la dicha varilla*» ...the Jews kindled their little lamps [*candelillas*] with oil and wicks on the «*cerimonia del Anuca*» (M.A. Motis –J. García Marco –M.L. Rodrigo, 1994). Seignorial or royal domains do not exhibit differences.

The professions or vocations, similarly, seem to have little direct relevance to these practices. In a file from the end of the 15th century, Friar Juan de Madrid was accused of having judaized «*dando azeite del monesterio de Sisla para los judios en limosna para la sinagoga*» (Baer II, 477). In 1489, Gonzalo Perez Jarada, regidor of Trujillo, vo. de Illescas, gave a «*sayo*» to a Jew «*porque tuviese cargo de echar aseyte en la lanpara dela synoga*» (Baer II, 509 ff, #411). Alfonso de la Cavalleria, c. January 1486, is said by witnesses to have spent money on the Synagogue [of Saragossa?] (Baer II, 449 ff, #30). He was “vicecanciller del rey”. The famous Aragonese jurist Jaime de Montesa was accused of similar practices: «*la noche del sabado en una camara secreta [se fallo] una mesa parada ...con cuatro candiles limpios...*»²³. As in other cases we find the attention to the “private chamber”²⁴, the placement and the number. Pablo de Nuza is documented as a tailor and he gives oil to the Synagogue, according to fifteenth century evidence from the Darocan Inquisition (M.A. Motis –J. García Marco –M.L. Rodrigo, 1994:357). Diego Sanchez was a clerigo from the locality of Calamocha who gave oil to the synagogue in that region (M.A. Motis –J. García Marco –M.L. Rodrigo, 1994:452). Fco. Ramirez is accused of having donated oil and money to the synagogue [*dado oleo et dineros para olio a las lanpadas de la sinoga de los judios*] (M.A. Motis –J. García Marco –M.L. Rodrigo, 1994:317). He denied having kindled the lights [*encender crisoletas*] in his house, on Friday eve, to honour the Sabbath [*ha fecho encender una lantea*] on a «*tavhela*» for «*candiles*». A Hieronymite friar, a *regidor*, a tailor, a poor village dweller, a town crier, the King's Vice-chancellor, a famous Aragonese arbitrator and jurist –all have similar attachments to illuminations. Class, employment, wealth seem irrelevant.

Linguistic usage is rich in this area: in addition to *olio*, *candelas*, *varillas* there are *crisoletas*, *lampadas*, *lampadillas*, *candiles*, *candilejos*, *lantea* (M.A. Motis –J. García Marco –M.L. Rodrigo, 1994:357). It reflects the presence and variety of lighting practices, akin in some ways to the burgherly customs of late medieval Europe²⁵. An

23. Manuel Serrano y Sanz (1918) Doc 4, p. DIX: “...8/1487... sentencia contra Jaime de Montesa...”

24. On the private chamber see E. Gutwirth, (1994).

25. Some types of lamps (such as the *candiles de piquera*) are amongst the most commonly unearthed items at archeological excavations. They are not from Jewish, but from Islamic strata and usually dated to the X-XIII c. The difficulty has been to integrate the finds of medieval archeology into a coherent and informed history of Jewish illuminations. An additional problem raised by art historians, is whether the objects are genuine. Amongst numerous examples, one may mention Narkiss' comment on the medieval Girona lamp: “...was it made by an unskilled modern artisan under

examination of Navarre documents, shows, for example, that amongst the inventories of Moses Benjamin's possessions drawn on the 26/3/1432, there is an entry [#41] for one of the rooms which reads: “in another room [*en otra camara*]: 15 lamps of glass”. Elsewhere [item 37] we find: “*I candellon de fierro*” (J. Carrasco, 1993:222, no. 41 and item 37).

6. Material history. Supporting the synagogue

The constancy in the [New] Christian converts' preoccupation with acquiring lights shows continuity with Jewish customs. A glance at the responsa material shows that oil for lighting the synagogue and also for the school/*Midras* was regularly given by community members (S. b. Adret, *Responsa* vii, 268). The kindling of the lamp was perceived as a special privilege: the first to perform the rite was confirmed for life (S. b. Zemah Duran, *Responsa* ii, 106). In the fifteenth century, R. Shlomoh ben Simeon Zemah Duran opines that one should not reject marranos' gifts of oil, so as not to arouse their hatred (p.143, iii, 239 *passim*). The evidence for contribution by the conversos to lighting expenses is not exclusive, then, to Inquisitorial sources or notarial archives: it cannot be ascribed to distortions by the primary source. The cases of Aragon show little difference to those of Castile. Here, the local synagogues also depend on the contributions of conversos from different social backgrounds. The Synagogue of Cuellar was in receipt of contributions for its illuminations that came from an individual with a University education: the *alcaide* of the town of Cuéllar (Baer, II, #422, 522). These were given to the “*samas*” [as the Inquisition record tells us switching linguistic codes to Hebrew as is frequent in that type of evidence] don Ça Corral [i.e. don Ishaq Corral] (...*de casa del licenciado Diego de Alava alcaide de Cuéllar daban a don Ça Corral, samas de la synoga para azeite a la synoga*). The Jew Yuda Lozano converted to Christianity and adopted the name Antonio de la Torre. He remembered how, as a Jew, he had received donations of wax and oil for the synagogue of Cuéllar (Baer II 527).

The mention of both wax and oil leads us to thinking about the material aspects. The difference in today's degrees of attention to different aspects of the history of illuminations becomes clear, therefore, when we compare the juridical to the material culture aspects of this history. The lack of attention to the material culture and economic aspects

the guidance of a knowledgeable historian of Jewish art...who are we to believe...?” (Bezalel Narkiss, 1988). Leaving aside claims about hanukka lamps in Catalano-Aragonese or other excavations or Jewish glass, some lessons can be learnt nevertheless. Christians from the north bought lamps at border areas, e.g. Murcia, noted for their brisk trade. The outlines of the phenomenon were clear as early as Rodrigo Amador de los Ríos (1899:1). See now J. Zozaya (1990). The various appropriations of synagogal and private objects during the expulsions and earlier attacks on the juderías [which contemporary sources refer to as “robos”] make it difficult to believe that Jewish lamps can be used to locate Jewish settlements on the assumption that they did not move from their original owners' houses in five hundred years or more. An unusually clear and documented case of such appropriations comes from Bejar where ca. twenty lamps were taken from the synagogue during the expulsion (M. De Hervás, 2003:363-4). On the lamps found by archaeologists in the synagogue of Lorca, Murcia, see J. García Sandoval (2009).

by students of halakhic sources, does not stem from a lack of evidence. In fact, some of the earliest sources [Talmud] show an acute consciousness of these aspects²⁶. The material necessities are also evident in other texts. Lighting was a real communal necessity in the Synagogue [even if sometimes it developed into an apparently unnecessary *minhag*] but also in the *Midrash* or House of Study. There are no great distinctions between both institutions in this respect. A very concrete case of the problem of material need for lighting comes from the responsa of a scion of a Mallorcan rabbinical dynasty who emigrated to North Africa in 1391 and moved in the circles of the exiles from the peninsula around the first half of the fifteenth century (before 1444). It considers the problems of students who would sit up learning all night. Here candles are not “spectacle” nor ritual but linked to learning, study and scholarship. The letter was addressed by Simeon ben Zemah Duran to R. David ben R Samuel Halayo [or Halawa] in Breshk [-Algiers]. He was a frequent correspondent of R. Simeon who bore a name well attested amongst the communal elite of Aragonese Jewry. Its future students [especially when dealing with Halayo/Halawa materials] might benefit from understanding the value of evidence such as this. Duran, in his letter, uses the present tense referring to practices current in his time, practices with which he was familiar. The question was about the students' needs for lights in order to be able to study their books. The lamps made of *heres* [ceramics or clay- “it is well known that an old *heres* lamp is *ma'us*”] were not large enough²⁷. They adopted the device [already mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud and known in other cultures] of perforating an egg shell (Duran, *Responsa* ii, 217). The implication is that there are beautiful lamps as well. It is clear that they do not believe in a strict distinction between a functional object and the esthetic object.

The expenses for lighting begin, then, with the basic need of reading. Prayers at dawn or in the evening, but also night studies necessitated this. They are a constant outflow of resources. It is precisely this constancy of spending on illuminations in medieval Christian Spain, which allowed McKay to solve the problem of the value of money and its relation to prices in fifteenth century Castile. Some notion of the prices of the illuminations may be gathered from a source relatively near to Munzer's time. A letter of August 1513, from the King, orders the officers of Seville to buy –for the Bishop of Darien [today's Nicaragua] Juan de Quevedo– a long and expensive series of church supplies. These include numerous illumination devices, such as wax for the altars; oil for the lamps; 12 candelabra of brass; three lamps; three wooden candle holders, etc²⁸.

26. Peah 7,1 shows this awareness when reminiscing about the distant past when Sabbath lights were kindled only on olive oil. After the persecutions of Hadrian who destroyed the land, olive trees became scarce and they had to consider kindling lights with *neft* and *atran*. Maimonides laid particular emphasis on the obligatory quality of the commandment by referring precisely to this monetary aspect and codifying the obligation to buy the lights even if the resources are so scarce that there is no money to buy food. See Levin (1938:57).

27. Such lamps were in white and porous or red / orange [less porous] clay. Numerous remains of Islamic portable lamps have been found in excavations [see supra].

28. «Memorial de las cosas que ...los oficiales de Sevilla han de comprar y proveer para el Obispo fray Juan Quevedo... un quintal de cera para los altares 400; tres quintales de azeyte para las lamparas 1900; ...doze candeleros

The visual spectacle of the lights shows a marked difference in the “point of view”; that is, the early modern differs from the medieval and the moment of transition, roughly corresponding to the (long) fifteenth century, has been our focus here. I began with an internal source, a late medieval epigraph concerning the herem (alatma, niduy), a rite usually seen as the main instrument for maintaining *qehilla* discipline. The formulation of the authors of the ordinances makes it clear that they were perfectly well aware of the effect of lights and shadows upon the onlooker. Indeed, the gradual snuffing of the candles and the ensuing darkness would cause nothing less than truth itself. For the communal leaders in charge of drafting the *taqqanot* lights/darkness have meaning. The communal leaders had previously reflected on their significance as have so many of the sources adduced above. The varied implements of lighting contrast with the stories of meaning. The same material object can be understood in terms of both: agency and coded meaning. The brief but expressive phrase of Duran in the first half of the fifteenth century [“everyone knows that an old lamp of heres is maus”] shows that there were various considerations –such as esthetics- operating in the realm of illuminations quite apart from the strictly legal, juridical or halakhic ones. These results of considerations about the material objects reveal historicity, ideology, spirituality and social relations. In this case, the kindling of the lights reflect –amongst other matters– a cohesiveness which is surprising because it is frequently absent in the writings based on other partial factors such as demographics, politics, gender or class.

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