

# ARTIS

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## Hebrew illumination in Portugal during the 15<sup>th</sup> century

PTDC/EAT-HAT/119488/2010 (March 2012 – September 2015)

### Research goals and methodology



Bifolium decorated in Lisbon, c.1480-85, inserted in a Hebrew Bible copied in San Felices de los Gallegos in 1462. Copenhagen, Royal Library, COD. HEBR. IV, ff. 221v-222r.

By the late fifteenth century, Portugal was one of the most important Jewish artistic and cultural centers in Europe. However, the relevance of Hebrew artistic heritage in late medieval Portugal did not found an adequate answer in terms of scientific research. On the one hand, it is a theme totally absent from Portuguese art history. On the other, international experts in Hebrew illumination usually referred these manuscripts as a mere continuation of the Sephardic Illumination carried out on other areas of the Iberian Peninsula. The two major studies on Portuguese Hebrew illumination, published in France in the 1970s, not only present completely divergent conclusions, but they also have ignored the broader artistic environment of production.

This project goal was to analyze the identity of the Portuguese Hebrew illumination of the fifteenth century, frequently denominated as the “Lisbon School”, and to discuss the artistic interaction between Jews and Christians in Portugal. In terms of methodology, this project was based on three propositions: a) the collation of the ornamental and iconographic language of the Christian and Hebrew Portuguese illuminated manuscripts from the fifteenth century; b) the codicological and palaeographical study of the Hebrew manuscripts from the fifteenth century already identified as Portuguese or those that are suspected to be of Portuguese origin; c) identification of the authors and recipients of the Portuguese Hebrew manuscripts of the fifteenth century, frequently identified in the colophons, together with the crossing of information with their contemporary Portuguese documents in order to reconstruct the links that bonded those people to the society of that period.



Two folios from a Hebrew Bible copied and (partially) decorated in Lisbon, c.1490. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Hebr. 15, fols. 9v and 524r.

### Research team

This research project financed by FCT (101.800,00€) gathered a team with complementary competencies, with researchers from five different units and one a consultant from Israel. This team included art historians, codicologists, and historians.

Research units: ARTIS FLUL; Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas “Alberto Benveniste”, FLUL; Instituto de Estudos Medievais, FCSH; Centro de Estudos Clássicos, FLUL; Centro de História, FLUL; Hebrew University (Jerusalem).



### The corpus



Type A frame. Siddur copied and decorated in Lisbon, 1484. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Hebr. 592, f. 413v.

During the last third of the fifteenth century there was a large increase in the production of decorated Hebrew manuscripts in Portugal. These manuscripts present a great homogeneity in their decorative grammar and a strong component of filigree decoration (handmade with a pen), complemented with miniature brush painting with foliated motifs. Although it is an eminently aniconic decoration, it admits the presence of some animals, particularly birds.

These manuscripts can be clustered into four groups. The first consists of manuscripts bearing a specific type of full-page decorative frame, Type A, used alone or in conjunction with other types of full-page frames. This phyto-zoomorphic frame has a late-Gothic language, which is repeated without significant variations in several manuscripts of this group. It is also quite common the presence of dragons and lions, that sometimes «regurgitate» the branches that structure the frame.

Type B frame is formed by finely drawn rinceaux, mostly in black ink plotted against a neutral natural background created by the parchment, or against a colored background. When the background is colored, usually in magenta, the rinceaux are drawn in gold. Another noteworthy feature is the use of filigree designed in pale purple penwork, combined with fillets or letters painted and burnished in gold. This filigree penwork can be either confined to rectangular frames, for delimiting the titles or the first words of the books, or it can be developed more loosely on the margins of the folios.

There are two more full-page frames which are also characteristic of this group. The first, Type C, is distinguished by the green or gold background on which several acanthus scrolls with large blossoms are painted. The second, Type D, presents a strong chromatic density on the background and its decorative motifs, in a very pasty painting, resemble Italian illumination from Ferrara.

The second group of manuscripts has a simpler ornamental decoration, usually based on the exclusive use of Type B frames or filigree penwork in purple. These manuscripts appear to be more recent when compared to the first codices of the previous group, but with fewer technical resources and modest materials.

The third group presents full-page frames, Type E. These consist of thick abstract vegetal curls, delimited by double lines, painted over a green and / or blue background. This type of frame is rarer and does not appear in any of the previous two groups. It is therefore an independent decorative solution endowed with an idiosyncrasy that was not yet recognized in full by the literature.

Finally there is also the group composed by non-illuminated manuscripts, but which are decorated with geometrical micrography in the Masorah, including triangles, circles and oblique lines, something which remains constant since the earliest manuscripts.



Type C frame. Hebrew Bible copied and decorated in Lisbon, 1482. British Library, Or. 2627, f. 136v.

### Selected publications

#### BOOKS

AFONSO, L. U.; MOITA, T. (eds). – *Sephardic Book Art of the 15th century*. Turnhout: Harvey Miller, 2016 (under preparation).  
AFONSO, L. U.; MIRANDA, A. (eds). – *O livro e a iluminura judaica em Portugal no final da Idade Média*. Lisboa: Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, 2015 (ISBN: 978-972-565-552-8).  
AFONSO, L. U.; PINTO, P. M. (eds). – *O livro e as interações culturais judaico-cristãs em Portugal no final da Idade Média*. Lisboa: Cátedra de Estudos Sefarditas, 2014 (ISBN: 978-989-90236-6-8).

#### BOOK CHAPTERS/PAPERS

AFONSO, L. U.; MOITA, T. – Tradition and modernity in Portuguese Hebrew illumination of the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. A. Miguélez Caverro (ed.), *Portuguese Studies on Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts. New approaches and methodologies*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015, pp. 169-189.  
AFONSO, L. U.; MOITA, T.; MATOS, D. – La Biblia de Coimbra y la «Escuela Andaluza» de miniatura hebreaica. *Archivo Español de Arte*, vol. 88, n. 349 (2015), pp. 53-68.  
MOITA, T. – Italian connections: as cereaduras acânticas dos manuscritos hebraicos portugueses e sua eventual relação com a iluminura napolitana. *Cadernos de História de Arte*, 2 (2014), pp. 182-188.  
MOITA, T. – A Iluminura Hebraica Portuguesa: estado da questão. *Cadernos de História de Arte*, 1 (2013), pp. 53-73.  
RAMOS, J. A.; AFONSO, L. U.; MOITA, T. – A Bíblia de Cervera: um manuscrito sefardita iluminado (1299-1300?). *Cadernos de Estudos Sefarditas*, 14 (2015) (forthcoming).

### Website

<http://hebrewilluminationinportugal.weebly.com/>

### Knowledge Transfer

EAJS Congress 2014 Paris, 20-24 July

Série monográfica «Alberto Benveniste» 74 6

O livro e a iluminura judaica em Portugal no final da Idade Média

O livro e as interações culturais judaico-cristãs em Portugal no final da Idade Média

Luís Urbano Afonso Paulo Mendes Pinto (orgs.)

O LIVRO e a ILUMINURA JUDAICA EM PORTUGAL NO FINAL DA IDADE MÉDIA

EXPOSIÇÃO 25 FEVEREIRO - 15 MAIO 2015 BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE PORTUGAL

SEPHARDIC BOOK ART of the 15th century

25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> OF FEBRUARY 2015 LISBOA, BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE PORTUGAL