

OLD PORTUGUESE IN HEBREW SCRIPT:
CONVENTION, CONTACT, AND CONVIVÊNCIA

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This dissertation explores the process undertaken by medieval writers to produce Portuguese-language texts using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Through detailed philological analyses of five Judeo-Portuguese texts, I examine the strategies by which Hebrew script is adapted to represent medieval Portuguese in the context of other Roman-letter and Hebrew-language writing. I focus on the writing system in order to challenge the conception of such texts as marked or marginal, a view that misleadingly equates language and script. I argue that the adaptation of Hebrew script for medieval Portuguese is neither derivative of Roman-letter writing nor entirely dependent upon the conventions of written Hebrew. Nor is it an adaptation performed anew by each writer and influenced primarily by spoken language. The perspective I adopt thereby rejects the premise that the patterns manifested in this unconventional orthography are *ad hoc* creations by its writers, that it requires extra effort from its readers, or that it is less "native" than the dominant, more conventionalized, Roman-based adaptation that normally bears the title "written Portuguese."

In the first chapter I introduce the phenomenon of adaptation of scripts in the context of linguistic borrowing and conventionality in writing, and the uniqueness of Hebrew script in this field. In chapter 2, I present a survey of adaptations of Hebrew script for languages other than Hebrew, from biblical Aramaic to late-nineteenth-century English, leading to a more detailed

analysis of the Judeo-Portuguese writing system in chapter 3. In chapter 4 I present a new critical edition of a handbook for manuscript illumination. Chapter 5 presents a 27-page excerpt of a previously-unpublished 800-page astrological treatise. Chapter 6 presents editions of three shorter texts, vernacular rubrics from two Hebrew prayer books and a short medical prescription. Chapter 7 summarizes the archaic and vernacular features attested by the texts in chapters 4-6. In the final chapter, I offer a proposal for a Judeo-Portuguese "alphabet," along with a sketch of some further problems of adaptation and interpretation that arise from the process of editing Hebraicized texts and of transforming them from manuscript to computer screen.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Devon was born and raised in Montreal (Canada), where he learned French and Hebrew before he knew it, but had to wait until his undergraduate years at Oberlin College to learn enough Yiddish to decipher his parents' covert dealings. At Oberlin he earned his Bachelor's degree with an Honors thesis on genetic metalanguage in Modern Hebrew Linguistics. After earning his Master's degree in Linguistics at Cornell in 2000, Devon fled to France for two years, where he taught English at the University of Paris XII, took courses in Yiddish, Judeo-Spanish, and Judeo-Arabic at *Langues'O*, and sat for a drink at more than 300 different cafés.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I came to Cornell directly from Oberlin College, where I had spent my senior year working on an Honors Thesis. Since I had written most of it after applying to graduate school, I was sure it would evolve into my Ph.D. dissertation. Yet my attention was soon diverted by Carol Rosen's course on the history of the Romance languages. When we were asked to produce our own editions of some lesser-edited medieval Romance texts, without hesitation my mind turned to Judeo-Romance. I stumbled onto references to two Portuguese *mahzorim*, along with a longer Portuguese text about inks and dyes. Not being able to decide on one, I wound up working on both for the course and for the anthology of Romance philology that we co-edited. Yet even after my A-exam I wasn't sure how this would turn into a dissertation, and while living my post-A-coma in France I put off going to see a couple of other manuscripts in the same mould.

When I did finally travel to Oxford in the winter of 2002 and reported back that there was an unpublished 800-page text waiting to be edited, it was Carol who encouraged me go at it in the style of our previous work together and "call it a dissertation." Since then, as chair of my committee, Carol has been exceptionally helpful and supportive of a project that in many ways lay beyond any single living person's expertise. From the "secret seminar" in the semester after my return from France to the many, many hours spent poring over more astrology than either of us would ever need to know, this dissertation simply would not have been possible without her guidance, enthusiasm, and vast repertoire of Romance-language insight.

I am also extremely grateful to the other members of my committee, who have likewise been enormously supportive and (I think) intrigued by my work. From my first days at Cornell, Wayne Harbert has always made himself available to talk about my latest musings and to read anything I'd actually managed to get on paper, including very early – and very late – drafts of some of these chapters. Moreover, life in Ithaca would have been decidedly less enjoyable without our weekly *grwp sgwrs cymraeg*. John Whitman has also provided a great deal of intellectual encouragement; a course of his in my second year was as close as I came to reviving my Oberlin thesis, while his seminar in the Fall of 2004 more or less spawned the first two chapters of this dissertation. In addition, Gary Rendsburg has been an engaged member from outside the Linguistics department, turning me on to many resources in *Judaica Romanica* and beyond that found their way into my work.

Most of the primary research for this dissertation would not have been possible without access to the manuscripts at several libraries in Europe. I'd like to thank the staff of the Oriental Reading Room of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, who helped me with my first foray into manuscript research in the summer of 1999, and again in the winter of 2002. I'd also like to thank the staff of the Cambridge University Library and the Brotherton Library at Leeds University, who enthusiastically answered my cryptic emails and seemed to await my arrival that same winter with baited breath. Particularly helpful was the staff of the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma (Italy), where between my broken Italian, their broken English, and some common ground in French, we got the job done. The same goes for the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon, where my brief visit in April 2002 was nothing if not a homecoming and a test of linguistic nerve. I am also grateful to the staff at several libraries in Paris who helped

me in my search for even more bizarre texts: Bibliothèque Médem, l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, and the Oriental Manuscripts division of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. In my second year in France I also attended Jewish language courses at *Langues'O*, and I'd especially like to thank Marie-Christine Varol, whose Judeo-Spanish class and enthusiasm for all things Sephardic were inspiration to try to make this dissertation much broader than it could ever be. Moreover, her technique of getting her students to speak French like a Turkish Jew in order to overcome their native accents in speaking Judeo-Spanish inspired me to try the same in my French teaching at Cornell.

As much as everyone mentioned above has made completing this dissertation possible, it's difficult to imagine even contemplating starting such a solitary project without other equally-deluded friends and peers for support, critique, inspiration, and comfort. On that score I cannot overestimate the role that Tanya Matthews has played in my time in and beyond Ithaca. I'm not sure how I'll get work done in the future without the prospect of sharing a table at the coffee shop with her. Another linggrad who has helped immeasurably along the way is Diego de Acosta, fellow luso-traveler and by far the most-cited non-tenured person in this dissertation. Marisol del Teso-Craviotto and Irene Mittelberg both started with me at Cornell in the Fall of 1997, and though Marisol managed to escape one year too soon, I certainly feel like we've graduated together. Other Ithaca and Paris connections who have helped at various times in various ways include Josep Alba-Salas, Edith Aldridge, Grace An, Kenneth Beirne, Marc Brunelle, James Cisneros, Réjane Frick, Mark Gray, Fred Hoyt, Andrew Joseph (thanks, Omar), Daniel Kaufman, Aaron Lawson (the noted Pomeranian philologist), Sara Pappas, Ruth Perez-Bercoff, Stanka Radovic, and Serge Ryniecki. I'd also like to thank

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My parents, Sheva and Ernie, have helped me in countless ways throughout my graduate school years, not least of which has been by curbing their desire to ask when it might all be over. I'd like especially like to acknowledge the role my sister Dara has played in getting me to this end of the process. I think it's fitting that my final gesture in this dissertation be the one thing for which I can't rightly ask her advice.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Ar.	Arabic	OED	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
BibH.	Biblical Hebrew		
Cast.	Castilian	OFr.	Old French
Cat.	Catalan	OHG	Old High German
Eng.	English	OIt.	Old Italian
Fr.	French	OPg.	Old Portuguese
fut.	future	OPr.	Old Provençal
Gk.	Greek	OSp.	Old Spanish
Gmc.	Germanic	perf.	perfect
Heb.	Hebrew	Pg.	Portuguese
imperf.	imperfect	pl.	plural
It.	Italian	PopL.	Popular Latin
JAr.	Judeo-Arabic	pres.	present
JPg.	Judeo-Portuguese	Pr.	Provençal
JSp.	Judeo-Spanish	Rom.	Romanian
MedL.	Medieval Latin	sg.	singular
MHG	Middle High German	Skt.	Sanskrit
ModE.	Modern English	Sp.	Spanish
ModFr.	Modern French	subj.	subjunctive
ModH.	Modern Hebrew	TLF	<i>Trésor de la langue française</i>
ModIt.	Modern Italian		
ModPg.	Modern Portuguese	VLat.	Vulgar Latin
ModSp.	Modern Spanish	Yid.	Yiddish

PREFACE

While living in France several years ago, I suffered an identity crisis of sorts. After repeated attempts to introduce myself to French people by pronouncing my given name *au naturel*, it became clear that very few people, peers and bureaucrats alike, could correctly make out this less-than-common name, and I often found myself identified as an all-too-common *David* or *Kevin*. In order to be sure my name would be written down correctly, I had to pronounce the second syllable in such a way that I became known as [dɛvœ̃n], [dœ̃vɔ̃n], or, worse yet, [dœ̃võ]. The net effect was to remind me of a tenth-grade French teacher who, with similar difficulty pronouncing my name *à l'anglaise*, could only refer to me as [møsyø divã], and as such unintentionally coined my nickname for that year: 'Mr. Sofa'.

In the end I resigned myself to this fate of misidentity, which I was able to attribute to the average francophone's inability to associate the unaccented vowel and weak word-final *n* in the second syllable of [dɛvɪ̃n] with a conventional way to spell that syllable in their writing system. And yet this was not the first time that writing my name had posed an orthographic problem. My second-grade class was once visited by a *sofer Stam*, a Jewish scribe trained in the calligraphic art of the sacred text. As a personalized sample of his work, he wrote each student's name in the script of a typical Torah scroll. My name materialized as רבן סטרולוביץ, or *dbn sṭṛwlwbyṣ* in letter-by-letter transliteration. To my eyes, however, something was amiss. Why had the five letters of my first name been reduced to three? And why had the final <tch> of my surname been fused into a single *ṣade*, a letter that I had been taught to read as [ts]?

Clearly there were French and Hebrew writers who had trouble producing a written form of my name that preserved its visual identity for me. In the case of the final consonant of my surname, the *sofer* did the best he could, since the Hebrew script had no letter that normally represented [tʃ] – nor, lest we forget, does the English-language use of Roman script, as the <tch> trigraph makes clear. Looking back, in fact, I should have been flattered that in spite of (or perhaps thanks to) scribal tradition, the *sofer* was more willing and/or able to adapt a letter of his script to this foreign sound than had been the officials at the port of Montreal who, upon hearing something that sounded like [vʰsróyləvɪtʃ] from my Romanian-Jewish relatives, proceeded to insert the *t* that anglicized the *s-r* cluster. From a strictly linguistic point of view, it seems impossible to say which script – and whose use of that script in particular – was better suited to spell my hybrid name. And yet both writers adapted the conventions of their respective writing systems to accommodate the written identifier of this North American anglophone. This is the issue that I take up in the pages that follow: the *convivência* that emerges when languages and scripts that are normally foreign to one another, in particular medieval Portuguese and the Hebrew alphabet, are made to cohabitate.