
Polyglot Orientalist-Translator Joseph Benoliel: A Study of His Hebrew Translations for the Lisbon 1892 International Congress of Orientalists

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As a field of study that developed under a philological impulse, Orientalism created its own sites of knowledge exchange and sociability, well-illustrated by the International Congresses of Orientalists (1873–1973). This article focuses on Hebraist and Arabist Joseph Benoliel (1857–1937) who published two Hebrew translations within the orientalist congress that was supposed to have taken place in Lisbon in 1892. These translations will be examined peritextually so as to analyse the orientalist translation paradigm followed to voice otherness considering the (con)texts selected for translation, to unveil perceptions about translation, and inquire into a discursive form of knowledge as subordinated to an epistemological or hermeneutical agenda. To this end, the article is structured as follows: first, I will outline Benoliel's life narrative to shed light on his polyglot background; second, I will formally describe the translations he prepared for the Lisbon congress in which Hebrew is the privileged target language; third, the peritextual analysis of these texts will be discussed against the voices paratextually framing them. The last part reviews the implications of Benoliel's idiosyncratic translation strategy under the idea of a translational epistemology, or hermeneutics, in that Benoliel openly relies on the use of the Bible as intertext.

Keywords: Lisbon Congress of Orientalists; Joseph Benoliel; Hebrew translations; peritext; biblical intertext

Introduction

Orientalists' nineteenth-century rapport to the Orient has predominantly been textual. Comparative philology has played a key role in their expansive approach to the languages and literatures of the East, particularly in their search for a common linguistic origin in ancient written records that could help trace the genealogy of Indo-European languages and the evolution of human history and civilization overall (see, among others, Mallette, 2010, or Ahmed's overview and critique of the method of comparative philology). After Edward Said's 1978 assault on Orientalism, its primary association with philological scholarship became lost; the orientalist is no longer viewed as the specialist or scholar learned in classical languages and literatures of the East. The underlying political entanglement of this linguistic knowledge which was put at the service of the European imperial enterprise from the late eighteenth century drew the lines for equating Orientalism with a flawed discourse, a Western epistemic manipulation of the East. As a modern field of study that matured in the second half of the nineteenth century under that originary philological impulse, Orientalism created its own sites of knowledge exchange and sociability, well-illustrated by the International Congresses of Orientalists. These congresses took place from 1873 to 1973 usually in European capital or university cities with the purpose of gathering a community of scholars to discuss the Orient and orientalist knowledge practices. Perhaps not unexpectedly, translation was one of the accepted formats of research presentation at those scientific events.

Under the label of the International Congresses of Orientalists there were, from 1873 to 1973, 30 sessions. To these should be added the Lisbon congress of 1892: although it was eventually cancelled, the majority of the papers prepared for the occasion were published. Portugal counted about 30 presenters in total at these congresses with 42 published papers, of which nine consisted of translations preceded by a commentary

and were often annotated. Eight were printed under the aegis of the Lisbon congress[1] along with other 24 national (monographic) contributions. The texts selected for translation ranged from oriental literatures, namely in Gəʿəz (Pereira, 1892; Pereira, 1892–1900) and Arabic (Lopes, 1892; Benoliel, 1898a), to travelogues documenting the Portuguese presence in Asian territories (Paiva e Pona, 1892) and empirical records of cultural (specifically Chinese) difference (Cinatti, 1892a; Cinatti, 1892b). Bearing in mind that translation yields the power to fabricate cultural images, insofar as it is 'one of the most obvious forms of image making, of manipulation, that we have' (Lefevere, 1990, pp. 26–27), this article will examine the peritext of two translations prepared for the Lisbon congress by Hebraist and Arabist Joseph Benoliel, a Jewish orientalist based in Portugal. My purpose is to use that framing device to scrutinize the orientalist translation paradigm followed to voice otherness considering the (con)texts selected for translation, to unveil perceptions about translation, and inquire into a discursive form of knowledge as subordinated to an epistemological agenda. This way, I aim to contribute to the discussion of the Portuguese orientalist translation practice, which is underrepresented in mainstream research in translation history and Orientalism at large, by drawing on textual objects that to the best of my knowledge have never been studied.

Following the recent trend in translation studies of bringing in translators' biographies to better understand their working practices and approach(es) to translation,[2]

[1] This figure should be complemented with the handwritten manuscript of Júlio Rey Colaço's 1892 unpublished translation of Arabic literature that is preserved at the Geographical Society of Lisbon under the name of Jules Rey: *Traduction française pour le Congrès international d'orientalistes de Lisbonne du mois de septembre 1892 de quelques-uns des premiers chapitres de l'ouvrage arabe du Cheikh Chehab-ed-Din-Ahmed El-Abchihy intitulé* El Moustertref fî kulli fenn moustadhraf *et composé vers la fin du XIV siècle*.

[2] Jeremy Munday (2014) has been one of the many spokesmen for this more humanized historiographical approach to translation by encouraging the production of microhistories of translations and translators, in his case very much based on the use of archive materials (including translators' personal papers, that is, drafts, manuscripts, correspondence) and their construction in the light of translators' life trajectories and interpersonal networks. This approach is a logical outcome of a research methodology that has developed more extensively since the 2000s (e.g. Adamo 2006; Pym 2009) and to which the so-called 'translator turn', more straightforwardly voiced by Andrew Chesterman (2009), has contributed.

I will in the next section outline Joseph Benoliel's life narrative and trajectories before examining, in the second part of the article, his translational contributions to the Lisbon congress that exemplify a restricted field of knowledge and book production (Bourdieu, 1993). What is distinctive about Benoliel is that Hebrew was his privileged target language, his source languages ranging from Portuguese to Arabic. His polyglotism makes him a singular case study in Portuguese orientalist scholarship. The third part of the article engages with literature on translation history to discuss the peritexts of Benoliel's translations as pointing towards an idiosyncratic translation strategy ultimately grounded in the biblical intertext. Considering Derrida's essay 'Des tours de Babel', the last part reviews the implications of that intertextual strategy under the idea of a translational epistemology, or hermeneutics, as subscribed to by the translational peritext.

The orientalist-translator: Joseph Benoliel and his biographical background of polyglotism

Joseph Benoliel was brought up in a multilingual context. Born in Tangier in 1857 to an Israeli Sephardic family, shortly before the 1859–1860 Hispano-Moroccan war they sought refuge in Spain, hence Spanish was Benoliel's first tongue together with Hebrew. Back in Tangier with the end of the war, he developed his Arabic in the streets of Morocco. After finishing school, he continued his education at the École normale israélite orientale in Paris sponsored by the Alliance israélite universelle (AIU). While in the capital, he eagerly learnt French and deeply immersed himself in studies of the classics, the Bible in particular.

Upon completing his studies, 18-year-old Benoliel became an instructor at the AIU network of schools. He was first placed in Jaffa, Israel, then Palestine and, back to Morocco, Tangier and Mogador. Around 1881, allegedly due to health problems, Benoliel

moved to Portugal where he settled in making a career out of his émigré condition. By drawing on his linguistic skills, he managed to obtain a position at the Lisbon National High School teaching both Arabic and Hebrew. In 1887–1888, he became part of the board of directors of the French course offered at the Marquês de Pombal Industrial School. By that time, he had already published a collection of Spanish translations of Jewish religious texts, *Porat Ioseph* (Loeb, 1888, p. 299). On March 17, 1888, Benoliel was authorized to run an open course of Hebrew language at the school for advanced studies *Curso Superior de Letras*. He would voluntarily ensure the teaching of this Semitic language for the three following years until 1891. Simultaneously, he was also responsible for establishing the chair of Vulgar Arabic at the Lisbon Academy of Free Studies (*Academia de Estudos Livres*).

In 1892, Benoliel got involved in the Lisbon Congress of Orientalists by setting out to prepare a body of what appeared to be five works for presentation. A handwritten note in unidentifiable calligraphy, most probably by Benoliel himself, was found among the papers on this specific event belonging to the perpetual secretary of the Geographical Society of Lisbon, Luciano Cordeiro (1844–1900).[3] That loose note details the following 'Hebrew and Arabic' works for the Lisbon congress: (1) Luqmān's fable collection, with the Arabic text followed by Portuguese and Hebrew translations and a dictionary at the end with around 1,500 meanings of words and phrases contained in the Hebrew text; (2) sixteen stanzas from Camões' *The Lusiads* on the episode of Inês de Castro; (3) a study of the semiological function of digraphs in Hebrew; (4) a transliteration project for Semitic languages (Hebrew and Arabic); and (5) the Portuguese translation of Arab al-Idrisi's geography, specifically the section regarding Portugal, to be commented upon

[3] These papers are stored at the archive of the Geographical Society of Lisbon (Luciano Cordeiro, *Correspondence 1892*, box 2).

with the addition of historical and linguistic notes. Only the first two of these works were published: *Inês de Castro. Épisode des Lusiades. Traduction en vers hébreux revue par Mr. Le Grand-Rabbin L. Wogue* [Inês de Castro. Episode from *The Lusiads*. Translation in Hebrew Verses Revised by Chief Rabbi L. Wogue] and *Fabulas de Loqmán: vertidas em Portuguez e paraphraseadas em versos hebraicos. Revistas pelo Grão-Rabbino L. Wogue* [Luqmān's Fables: Transposed into Portuguese and Paraphrased in Hebrew Verses. Revised by Chief Rabbi L. Wogue]; the former was printed in 1892 and the latter in 1898, without, however, including any kind of dictionary. The whereabouts of the other writings are unknown, although at the end the note does clarify that the first work was ready for printing whereas the remaining ones needed to be completed. The front page of the two published works presents Benoliel as an affiliate of the Lisbon Geographical Society, the host institution to the Lisbon congress under whose tutelage both works were published. Benoliel was also a corresponding member of the Spanish Royal Academy, in whose journal he published on the Judeo-Spanish ḥakitiya dialect, and furthermore became a member of the *Sociedade Camoniana*, a Portuguese society created in 1880 in homage to the early-modern national poet Luís de Camões (c. 1524–1580), who lived for nearly fifteen years among oriental landscapes.

A naturalized Portuguese citizen, Benoliel was actively engaged in Portuguese socio-political life and the Israeli Community of Lisbon, of whose ruling board he was a member. The Hebraist had even written protest poetry in French against the British Ultimatum in 1890, a political event that came to decry Portugal as a colonial power. This alignment of Benoliel with the national outrage at a time of patriotic exaltation came apparently with the bonus of a literary prize by the Toulouse Académie Mont-Réal (Cordeiro, 1892, p. vii; Pereira, 1894, p. 22). In 1921, Benoliel returned to his affective base, Morocco, as Portuguese consul to El-Ksar, and until his death in 1937 he stayed in

Tangier. During that time, he presided over the Jewish Community of Tangier, thereby playing a significant role in the revival of Jewish culture.

On the one hand, Benoliel was primarily a poet who published his poetry mostly in French and also in Hebrew and later in Portuguese. The volume *Echos da Solidão* (1897), for example, includes not only his own compositions as a tribute to the epic and lyrical poet Camões, but also translations of the Bible and Arabic poetry. Indeed, his work would, perhaps obsessively, revolve around these topics – the Bible, Camões' *The Lusiads*, and Arabic literature – that are implied in his textual choices for translation. On the other hand, Benoliel helped develop Hebrew and also Arabic studies in Portugal by acting as a literary translator, who seems to have translated for pleasure and as a means of both studying and celebrating the literatures he cherished. Nonetheless, as a translator Benoliel was not as prolific or compulsive as some of his peers, and his input into Portuguese Hebrew studies has been overlooked.

This orientalist profile sheds light on the repertoire Benoliel selected for translating as a tribute to the International Congress of Orientalists that was scheduled from September 23 to October 1, 1892, in Lisbon. The congress was called off shortly before; the official discourse evoked sanitary precautions against a cholera outbreak in Europe. A simultaneous congress was, however, being prepared in London under the leadership of the German-born philologist and Sanskritist Max Müller (1823–1900), and it thrived as the only session for that year of 1892.[4] What cannot however go unnoticed is Müller's inaugural address to that orientalist congress in which he calls on 'Oriental scholars', his use of 'oriental' being synonymous with 'orientalist', as 'men who have shown that they are able at least to publish texts that have never been published before,

[4] On the non-official discourse, which reports a schism within the orientalist community around the academic monopolization of orientalist knowledge and whose discussion would take us beyond the scope of the present study, see e.g. Rabault-Feuerhahn, 2010.

and to translate texts which have never been translated before' ([1892], p. 9). Benoliel was one of those men.

Joseph Benoliel's translations to the Lisbon Congress of Orientalists

As a Jewish émigré in Portugal, polyglot in Spanish, Hebrew, Arabic, French, and afterwards in Portuguese, Benoliel prepared two translations for the 1892 Lisbon 'pseudo-Congress', which were respectively published in 1892 and 1898 by the national printing press. These translations would later be cited by Benoliel as proof of his language skills when requesting a teaching position, for either Arabic or Hebrew, at the *Curso Superior de Letras* from royal architect Possidónio Narciso da Silva (1806–1896),[5] who enjoyed the necessary political influence to grant him this wish, although it was never fulfilled. These translated works constitute a relevant case study for at least two reasons: first, Hebrew stands out as the main target language, that is, Benoliel did not translate into the idiom of the reception context; second, for both translations Benoliel explicitly declares having used the biblical text – the Old Testament – as intertext, which obviously impacts on their reception and his own understanding of translation. This is all the more significant considering that French orientalist Joseph Halévy (1827–1917) carefully stressed that late nineteenth-century Hebrew writers were avoiding 'pastiches bibliques' [biblical pastiches] (1898, p. 379). This is to say, contrary to Benoliel, Hebrew writers were distancing themselves from classical Hebrew.

Inês de Castro. Épisode des Lusiades consists of the Hebrew verse translation of the Inês de Castro episode (canto III, stanzas 120–135) from the epic poem *The Lusiads* (1572), which Barreto (1998, p. 284) describes as a work on Asian Portugal. Benoliel's

[5] See the unsigned and undated letter preserved in the Possidónio da Silva collection at the Lisbon National Archive of Torre do Tombo: *Correspondencia Artistica e Scientifica Nacional e Estrangeira com J. Possidonio da Silva. 1890-1891*, vol. XXII (in-8), doc. 2081/4569 bis. A chair of Arabic would eventually be created, but was attributed to David Lopes, who was responsible for it from 1914 to 1937.

book opens up with a sonnet in French, 'Madame', written by Benoliel as a poet, who dedicates it to the Portuguese Queen D. Amélia (1865–1951). Peritextually, the book presents itself as a French edition: the information displayed on the cover is in French, the foreword is written in French, and the Portuguese source text and its Hebrew translation are preceded by a French version of the same literary episode. The use of the French language might have been instrumental to target a wider readership, French yielding the status of the language of elite culture in nineteenth-century Portugal but also of international diplomacy and scientific communication. Until the Second World War most of the Jewish diasporic community in Europe was based in France, where many Portuguese publications circulated as a result of institutional bibliographical exchanges.

The prefatory note to *Inês de Castro* is authored by Portuguese historian Luciano Cordeiro, then executive secretary to the central organizing committee of the Lisbon congress. Dated August 16, 1892, which shows it was common practice for conference works to be printed before the event actually taking place, the foreword welcomes Benoliel's Hebrew translation as the first of any fragment of *The Lusiads*. Not only does Cordeiro contextualize the historical event that was at the origin of the lyrical episode selected for translation,[6] but he also presents the translator by tracing a short biography in which he highlights Benoliel's devotion to biblical studies. The need to provide biographical data suggests that at the time Benoliel would have been little known, a supposition that is corroborated by the quotation of a third testimony to his expertise, that of renowned philologist Gonçalves Viana (1840–1914). The biographical note allows Cordeiro to emplace Benoliel with the Jewish diaspora of which he was a product, besides translating for that same diaspora. Altogether Cordeiro's preface contributes to the credibility of the translation and its agent, in addition to inscribing Benoliel in the

[6] In his zeal as historian, Cordeiro provides a brief genealogy of Inês de Castro.

Portuguese orientalist community by casting him as 'un de nos compatriotes' [one of our compatriots] (1892, p. v).[7]

Fabulas de Loqmán only saw the light of day six years later in the context of the celebrations of the fourth centenary of Vasco da Gama's discovery of the sea route to India (1497–1498), which is narrated in *The Lusiads*. Three other works by Benoliel were published therein, namely one collection of French and Spanish translations of Camões' poetry (*Lyricas de Luiz de Camões com Traducções Francezas e Castelhanas*), a critical study of *The Lusiads* (Benoliel, 1898b), and an autograph poem in honour of the national symbol of that maritime-commercial expedition (*Vasco da Gama: poemeto*).

Contrary to the 1892 translation, *Fabulas de Loqmán* is peritextually shaped for a Portuguese-language audience, and the preface is authored by Benoliel himself – and no longer by a figure of authority in the local scientific milieu. In the preface, the protégé of Luciano Cordeiro rhetorically situates himself within the Portuguese orientalist scholarship and community, and rhetorically employs an assertive 'I' pronoun. Yet, he practises what one could call an ethos of modesty, in that he overtly shares the credit for his translation. Although by then Benoliel's command of the Portuguese language would have been nearly proficient, he asked philologist Gonçalves Viana to revise his Portuguese renderings: 'A minha traducção portugueza, revista pelo illustre e polyglotta e meu excellente amigo Gonçalves Vianna, ha de ainda resentir-se de muitas pechas inevitaveis' [Revised by the notable and polyglot and my excellent friend Gonçalves Viana, my Portuguese translation suffers yet from many flaws] (1898a, p. viii). In line with this defensive statement, which ascribes any translation faults to Benoliel himself (the use of the first-person singular pronoun is particularly telling), Halévy in his review

[7] All quotations from Cordeiro's foreword were translated into English by Erin Floyd. The remaining translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

of Benoliel's rendition categorized the translator's use of footnotes to summon the biblical intertext as a work of 'candeur' [candour] (1898, p. 378). Just as with the translation of *Inês de Castro* and other previously translated works (Benoliel, 1898a, p. 139, n. 1), the Hebrew text was likewise revised by Rabbi Lazare Wogue (1817–1897), a well-reputed Paris-based professor of theology, religious history and biblical studies with whom Benoliel (1898a, p. xi) maintained a close friendship, to whom he refers as his master, and to whose late memory he dedicated *Fabulas de Loqmán*. By resorting to a collaborative approach, Benoliel reinforced the acceptability and credibility of his translations into his 'acquired' languages as well as his orientalist capital as a translator.

The Arabic fables of Luqmān, a legendary sage who deserved special mention in the Koran (Benoliel, 1898a, p. vii), are presented in Benoliel's book as established in Cherbonneau's 1847 edition of the fables alongside two translations, respectively into Portuguese and Hebrew. According to Benoliel, his is the first translation of those fables into any of those languages and, more broadly, into a Western idiom. The reason for translating is explained on the basis of the fables' inherent literary value and on a didactic intent, in that these classics of proverbial wisdom were used to teach Arabic in European countries. This way, Benoliel would ultimately be preparing a literature textbook for Arabic language learners.

Only the Hebrew translation is annotated in both publications. In *Fabulas de Loqmán* translator's footnotes locate the books or episodes of the Old Testament, the Book of Job in particular, that constitute intertextual references and sometimes also include explanatory comments on lexicon. By contrast, *Inês de Castro* concentrates the translator's voice in a Notes section, in which Benoliel states that he used the biblical text as a source of inspiration and then proceeds with identifying per stanza and per line the sections of the Bible that inspired him. No actual verse at the origin of the pastiche is

transcribed in either translation; only the identification of the biblical chapter and the corresponding verse numbers are provided. *Fabulas de Loqmán* further incorporates at the end an appendix that adds an autobiographical note to the book. It comprises several poems written by the poet Benoliel (in Arabic, Portuguese, and Hebrew) and others from his translator's portfolio. Altogether they highlight Benoliel's linguistic skills and aptitude for literary creativity beyond translation.

Regardless of the chosen target language, the primary target audience of both works were Portugal-based scholars and the orientalists intending to participate in the Lisbon orientalist congress of 1892. Both works were prepared to be consumed and discussed by a specialist audience, hence subject to the scrutiny of oriental language experts and circulating within a restricted field of production. As Bourdieu stressed, this field lays down 'its own criteria for the evaluation of its products, thus achieving the truly cultural recognition accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors' (1993, p. 115). With this in mind, I would like to shed light on the criteria for translating for an audience of specialized clients and competitors such as the ones who would have attended the failed Lisbon congress.

The translations and their peritexts

What kind of translation paradigm does the orientalist-translator comply with? What kind of tributes do the translational peritexts embed? I would like to seize on these two related questions to uncover incongruities and hypothesize about the role of the Bible as a translational intertext.

Unsurprisingly, common to Benoliel's and other contemporary Portuguese translations from oriental languages, such as those directly carried out by his cohorts Esteves Pereira (1854–1924) from Gəʿəz, Vasconcelos Abreu (1842–1907) and Sebastião

Dalgado (1855–1922) from Sanskrit, or David Lopes (1867–1942) from Arabic, is the evocation of literalness. Although the concept of literalness is nearly as old as that of translation, its advocacy cannot be divorced from the perception of translation as language improvement and as a philological tool for granting access to the Orient(al) that was expected to be conveyed with precision.

The orientalist paradigm of translation has been more thoroughly discussed by Douglas T. McGetchin (2009) as targeting scientific accuracy – literalness being a means towards this end – when oriental language experts are both the agents of translation and its intended audience. McGetchin's discussion is based on the Florist/Anti-Florist controversy that assaulted the Paris Société Asiatique in the 1820s and set in opposition the partisans of a more 'fanciful, artistic approach to Oriental texts' and those who 'wanted scientific precision and accuracy in translation to be of primary importance' (2009, p. 44). The latter translational approach would thrive among orientalist scholars, who would roughly argue for letting the Orient speak as much as possible by itself, that is, literally. Of course, as, for example, Douglas Robinson points out, 'strict literalism' is also a mechanism of 'self-protection (if I translate word for word, no one can accuse me of either distorting the original or of making the original accessible to "the wrong kind of reader")' (2018, p. 59). Translating literally could therefore avoid potential criticism for not being proficient, expert, or orientalist enough. Literalness could, on the contrary, support the proto-colonialist inclination of the European scholar (the orientalist) over the object of translation (the East). In this sense, Wang Hui has put forth a more dysphoric view of this paradigm as imposing 'painfully and pedantically literal [translations] and loaded with an awesome exegetical and critical apparatuses', which would sometimes be appropriated by the orientalist translator as 'a colonizing space where cultural differences are interpreted as signs of the inferiority of non-Western cultures' (2009, p. 201). In the

case of Benoliel, he only advocates literalness when translating into a Western language or tradition (i.e. Portuguese); as an *oriental* orientalist, he has direct knowledge of both the Hebrew and Arabic Orient to which he originally belonged and has the skills to translate it into its – or his – own terms. To him, an oriental target language such as Hebrew instead required accuracy or faithfulness to a specific textual model, the Bible.

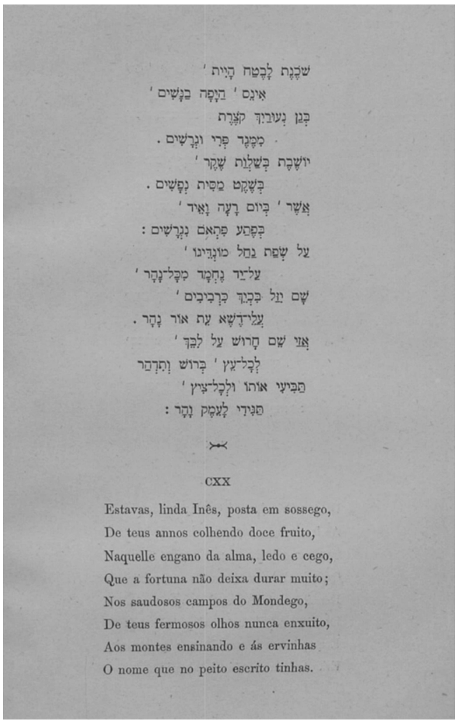
The literal translation paradigm, or norm, then praised by the orientalist community, is voiced by Cordeiro when in his foreword to *Inês de Castro* he comments on translation with the paradigm of faithfulness to the original text in mind. When referring to the collective decision of supplementing the edition with a French version of the selected epic episode, Cordeiro (1892, p. iv) highlights the difficult task of choosing one from the numerous existing French translations of *The Lusiads*. The historian explains having opted for Jean Dupperon de Castera's prose version (1735), since it was the first into French just as Benoliel's was the first into Hebrew. Cordeiro additionally provides two other criteria foregrounding his choice, that of 'une fidélité et d'une exactitude relatives' [relative fidelity and exactitude] (1892, p. iv). The 'relative' adjective certainly reinforces Cordeiro's suspicion that translations could never live up to the so-called original; this derogatory view of translation as untrustworthy or inferior is more salient when he states that the Camonian stanzas 'n'ont jamais été traduites d'une manière pleinement satisfaisante' [have never been translated in a fully satisfactory manner] (1892, p. iv).

Benoliel's translation, even if partial, is by contrast remarked upon as unprecedented. Here two rhetorical moves become apparent: on the one hand, Cordeiro shows surprise for this being the first Hebrew translation of the classic; on the other, he puts forward several difficulties that may account for the lack of Hebrew translations into Portuguese. These difficulties boil down to the excellence of the source model, an

argument that Theo Hermans (1985, p. 106) has shown to be common to the Renaissance discourse about translation. To this inherent excellence, the historian adds the unequal agedness of and distance opposing source and target languages – Renaissance Portuguese *versus* classical Hebrew – that belong to different family branches (Cordeiro, 1892, p. iv). Benoliel is surreptitiously extolled for facing the natural gap caused by the evolution of languages.

Attuned to the idea of a translational faithfulness to the source text, Cordeiro envisages translating into Hebrew as a 'conscious' and 'scrupulous reproduction' of a pre-existing textual model that is elevated to the status of 'le plus bel épisode d'un poème moderne, [...] où le grand Camões a accumulé tout ce que le style a de charmes' [the most beautiful episode of a modern poem, (...) in which the great Camões incorporates all of the charm that style has to offer] (1892, p. v). The graphical display of the texts composing the 1892 trilingual edition contradicts, however, this notion of faithfulness to a noble original. Castera's translation is provided first and is followed, in a separate section, by the Hebrew version placed at the top of the page and accompanied with the corresponding Portuguese source stanzas on the lower part of the page (see Fig. 1). Visually this order reverses the Western conventions for bilingual publishing, according to which the source text is placed on even page (on the left), and hence first, and the translation on uneven page (on the right), hence after. This textual display[8] is nonetheless closer to the reading direction of Semitic language books, therefore it seems to have been prepared for *oriental* orientalists in counterpoint to the peritext.

[8] It is also found in Jules Rey's manuscript referred to in the first footnote: the French translation is presented first, on the top of the page, followed by the Arabic source text.



שֹׁכֶנֶת לָבֶטַח הָיִית ,
אִינֶס , הַיָּפָה בַנָּשִׁים ,
בְּגַן נְעוּרַיִךְ קֹצֶרֶת
מְמֶגֶד פְּרִי וּגְרָשִׁים .
יוֹשֶׁבֶת בְּשַׁלְוַת שֶׁקֶר ,
בְּשֶׁקֶט מַסִּית נְפָשִׁים .
אֲשֶׁר , בְּיוֹם רָעָה וָאֵיד ,
בְּפֶתַע פִּתְאֹם נִגְרָשִׁים :
עַל שְׂפַת נַחַל מוֹנְדֵּיגוֹ ,
עַל־יַד נֶחְמָד מִכָּל־נָהָר ,
שָׁם יִזַּל בִּכְיֵךְ כִּרְבִיבִים ,
עֲלֵי־דֶשֶׁא עֵת אוֹר נָהָר .
אֲזַי שֵׁם חָרוּשׁ עַל לִבֵּךְ ,
לְכָל־עֵץ , בְּרוֹשׁ וְתִדְהָר
תַּבִּיעִי אוֹתוֹ וּלְכָל־צִיץ ,
תַּגִּידִי לְעֵמֶק וָהָר :

CXX

Estavas, linda Inês, posta em sossego,
De teus annos colhendo doce fruito,
Naquelle engano da alma, ledo e cego,
Que a fortuna não deixa durar muito;
Nos saudosos campos do Mondego,
De teus fermosos olhos nunca enxuito,
Aos montes ensinando e ás ervinhas
O nome que no peito escrito tinhas.

Fig. 1 – *Inês de Castro* (1892, p. 1), the first page of the Hebrew translation.

This formal display further puts the translation and the Hebrew language under the spotlight, in addition to promoting the translator's linguistic proficiency, and eventually attaches less importance to the model. The Notes section corroborates this emphatic effect by exemplifying how the biblical intertext operates in the Hebrew translation.

A poignant result ensues. *Inês de Castro* rehabilitates the literary figure and authority of Camões who, it is said in the foreword, the translator, a poet himself, considers to be his master: '[C]e nouveau tribut offert à Camões [...], tribut d'hommage et de respect digne du maître qui l'a inspiré, traduction fidèle qui, au dire des connaisseurs, n'est nullement audessous du texte original' [This new tribute to Camões [...] offers a tribute of homage and respect worthy of the master that inspired it, a faithful translation, which, it is said by experts, is in no way lesser than the original] (Cordeiro, 1892, p. v). The historian points to the subalternization of translation suggesting either a belief in untranslatability or suspicion of translation, paradoxically deprecating the very

translation he sets out to promote. On the one hand, and in spite of being unfamiliar with the target language, the historian appraises the excellence of the translator on the basis of the excellence of the author, that is, on a strict hierarchical relation of dependence on the original that is discursively enmeshed in the metaphors of the master/genius and the disciple. On the other hand, Cordeiro describes Hebrew as eminently poetic, 'si riche de formes et d'images, si variée de rythmes et de cadences' [so rich in shapes and images, so varied with rhythms and cadences] (1892, p. iv). Yet, Hebrew was also, in Cordeiro's words (1892, p. v), an ancient, dead, incomplete, non-modern language. Theoretically this state of the language would be a hindrance to translating *The Lusiads*, an oeuvre crafted in vernacular Portuguese. Notwithstanding, not only does Benoliel translate into Hebrew but he also exploits the lyrical potential of this supposedly dead language. The fact that Hebrew serves as a target instead of a source language contradicts its death as announced by the historian. Cordeiro's conservative view of the Hebrew language prefigures some of the orientalist tropes that Edward Said would later postulate in *Orientalism*, specifically those of oriental stagnancy and decay.

In *Fabulas de Loqmán*, the traditional textual hierarchy for displaying source and target texts is restored with the Arabic text ranking first, followed by the Portuguese literal translation and the Hebrew free version. If one assesses the spatial distribution of these three texts, Portuguese stands out as the language of the middle. By occupying a position between Arabic and Hebrew, Portuguese alone sustains the claim for literalness and clears the way for the language in which the translator is more proficient and comfortable to dwell into free(r) renditions. Indeed, in his preface Joseph Benoliel distinguishes his translation strategies as per the target language. On the Portuguese rendition of the Arabic text, he states that he translated the content (meaning) as literally as possible, although formally he opted for following the rules of Portuguese prosody (Benoliel, 1898a, p. viii),

that is to say, for formal acceptability. The Hebrew target text is presented as a paraphrase instead:

> Para a paraphrase em versos hebraicos, desprendi-me da concisão demasiado arida da prosa arabe do texto e só aproveitei o assumpto e o conceito, revestindo-os de formas mais em harmonia com o caracter da lingua hebraica e com os predicados da poesia. (1898a, p. viii)

> [To paraphrase in Hebrew verses, I let go of the overly arid concision of the Arabic prose of the text and took advantage only of the subject and the concept, which I dressed in forms that are more harmoniously attuned to the character of the Hebrew language and poetry's predicates.]

The distinction between translation and paraphrase is grounded in a degree not only of literalness, but also of linguistic proficiency: Benoliel is more normative when it comes to his last acquired foreign language, which is also the language of the community to which he then belonged and which constitutes the primary target readership and immediate arbiter of his work. By contrast, creativity would surface in his language of native proficiency, of which the readership in Portugal was scant. In fact, in *Fabulas de Loqmán* he also writes a prologue that rehabilitates a hybrid verse invented by medieval Spanish Hebrew poets which, as he says, partially caused the extinction of 'genuine Hebrew poetry' and is a metrical counterpoint to the biblical verse (Benoliel, 1898a, p. x). One thus reads Benoliel's use of the biblical intertext here as an attempt to recover that genuine poetry. The formal proximity between Arabic and Hebrew as classical Semitic languages and Benoliel's greater proficiency in Hebrew compared to Portuguese might have made him more confident in moving away from strict literalness. This way, the

practice of paraphrase challenges the expected nineteenth-century paradigm of literalness that is even more complicated by the intertextual framework Benoliel set for translating.

The overt use of the Bible as a kind of translational template reinforces the translator's tribute to the ultimate target language. Through it Benoliel distils his biblical knowledge and frames translation as a personal worldview of literature in which the Bible stands out as the most poetic text. But does not the compliance with a pre-text act as a constraint upon translation, hence posing the question of how free Benoliel's Hebrew paraphrases actually were?

A translational epistemology, or hermeneutics: the Bible as template

Benoliel translated into his mother tongue, which is the tongue of the Genesis. As he himself mentions regarding the *Inês de Castro* translation, he made lexical choices, employed phrases and syntactic constructions that were borrowed from or inspired by the biblical text (Benoliel, 1892, p. 19). Benoliel's idiosyncrasy, all the more validated by his reviser and consultant Lazare Wogue, insinuates a Judeo-centric epistemological approach both to literature and translation that is grounded in the use of the Bible as a translational template irrespective of the literary object for translating, either sixteenth-century *The Lusiads* or the classical fables by the Arabic Aesop. By means of a patchwork of scriptural references, the source text and the target language alike are tied to the holy text and to a Judeo-Christian tradition that brings forth a textual collective memory bonding Western cultures.

The biblical memory the Hebrew language carries in itself evokes the story of *Babhel*, one of the foundational myths of translation thinking in the West (see, e.g., Placial's overview of 'Biblical Myths' in translation theories). In the recent book *Archaeology of Babel*, Siraj Ahmed (2018, pp. 24–37) explicitly links the late eighteenth-

century European visitation of the Babel to the search of humanity's oldest divine tongue and the disciplinary rise of philology. Against this backdrop, Benoliel's intertextual choice underwrites his philological concerns and is particularly appropriate for a discussion of Hebrew as both the pre-Babel and the Babel language, the written tongue in which the tower of Babel was constructed and deconstructed, at the exact time when God confused human languages. Employed in a post-Babelian translation the biblical intertext suggests a heightened conception of the target language as the language of God. This way, Benoliel seems to project some kind of mythical, primordial origins onto translation. In figuring translation as a search for, or itself as, the manifestation of the divine, the divine emerges fundamentally as a code – the pre-Babelic code or the code of human diaspora that certainly resonates with the idea of a united humankind, or universal humanism, and commonly shared literary heritage. Hence Hebrew as the language of the Scriptures enjoys the status of a sacred and blessed language, the language of divine authority, of truth. Through a classical idiom that encodes the Jewish historical memory, Benoliel pays tribute to the target language that is also ultimately a tribute to the source text – the Camonian model – and language. This tribute allows us to reconfigure translation as an act of reparation.

Commenting on Benjamin's 'The Task of the Translator' (1923), which envisages translation into one's mother tongue, Derrida introduces the idea of reparation by emphasising Benjamin's equation of that task with 'commitment, duty, debt, responsibility' (2007, p. 200). In fulfilling that task, Derrida continues, '[t]he translator is indebted [...]; and his task is to *render*, to render that which must have been given' (2007, p. 200; emphasis in the original). A tension emerges from the inner feeling of debt – and the frustrating realization that the debt can never be fully repaid – and the ethical responsibility or orientalist obligation of fulfilling a task, that of translation. Benoliel's

guilt is after all the guilt of being a polyglot, who would therefore be in a continual state of debt not only towards his idioms but also towards his masters – either literary (Camões) or scholarly/intellectual (Wogue). The responsibility Benoliel felt may be further explained within the frame of the young Hebrew literature that was starting to flourish by the late nineteenth century:

> [C]ette littérature est née à la fin du XIXe siècle, dans le cadre du processus de laïcisation des communautés juives en diaspora et du projet sioniste qui passait notamment par la rénovation de la langue hébraïque. (Sapiro, 2002, p. 82)
>
> [This literature was born at the end of the nineteenth century following the laicization of the Jewish diasporic communities and the Zionist project, which specifically involved the renewal of the Hebrew language.]

As part of the Jewish diasporic community, Benoliel capitalized the literary status of Hebrew via translation and gave visibility to it as both a literary and sacred language. As Pascale Casanova has noted, Hebrew is among the 'languages of recent creation (or recreation) [...] and, having no tradition of exchange with other countries, must gradually acquire an international existence through translation' (2007, p. 256). The existence it acquired in Portugal through Benoliel's translations did not actually imply a renewal of the language but the perpetuation or survival instead of the image of an ancient language expressing an intimate relation with a foundational discourse. Let us not forget that Halévy (1898, p. 379) in his above-mentioned review of *Fabulas de Loqmán* puts Benoliel's translational epistemology in terms of an outdated usage. Yet, the French critic redeems Benoliel's regressive practice, because the translator would have been part of an elite 'qui est capable de penser en hébreu, il n'a qu'à emboîter le pas et nous donner des

travaux originaux dans un style plus naturel et plus près des langues vivantes' [who is able to think in Hebrew and by acting accordingly provides us with original works in a more natural style that is closer to the living languages] (1898, p. 379). Despite the biblical resonance, Benoliel's translations were credited by his peers for reviving Hebrew as a living, literary language.

By openly casting the Portuguese epic and the Arabic fables under the light of the Bible, Benoliel imbues these texts with a strong Christian note, tone and style, thereby fashioning a semantic and lexical affinity that is absent from the source texts and overall displaying a domesticating strategy that makes both Hebrew and Jewish readers resonate affectively with the intertext and the target text alike. This totalizing effect of the influence of the Old Testament conflicts with the symbology of the tower of Babel, which, as Derrida reminds us, 'exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification' (2007, p. 191). To go back to Wang Hui (2009, p. 201), Benoliel's Hebrew paraphrase creates a colonial space where cultural and literary differences are assimilated with the biblical testimony to epitomize the Jewish culture and both its biblical memory and history.

In regard to *Inês de Castro*'s translation, its embeddedness in the scriptural text is at odds not only with Benoliel's critical readings of other episodes of the Camonian epic, but also with the nineteenth-century reception of *The Lusiads* by other orientalists who, for instance, set it as a European stage of non-Christian mythology (e.g. Vasconcelos Abreu, 1892). In 1898 Benoliel himself wrote on the epic giant Adamastor, arguing, maybe not very convincingly, that this figure would have been based on the fisherman's tale of the *Thousand and One Nights*. Benoliel (1898b, p. 11, n. 1) even concedes that the name of the character might have been inspired by the Hebrew word *Adamah*, the son of

the Earth, and indeed the giant with a monstrous body identifies itself in the epic as one of the sons of Earth.[9]

By bending both translations to comply with the biblical text, the *oriental* translator ends up committing orientalist violence against the source text:

> O leitor poderá, auxiliado pelas notas e referencias, que acompanham todo o texto hebraico, verificar que, não só me abstive systematicamente (salvo em um ou dois casos) do que é costume chamar-se licenças poeticas, mas que, sobretudo, evitei com cuidado o estylo post-biblico. (Benoliel, 1898a, p. xi)
>
> [Assisted by the notes and references that complement the Hebrew text, readers will be able to confirm that, except for one or two cases, not only did I systematically abstain from what is commonly referred to as poetic license, but that I was also particularly careful in avoiding the post-biblical style.]

This passage verbalizes Benoliel's personal agenda of 'avoiding the post-biblical style' that is, nonetheless, grounded in a latent violence to liberate the biblical, pre-Babel and Babel universal language. This violence is mainly traceable in the explanatory notes to his 1898 translation. Two examples suffice to illustrate it:

> * תַּרְנְגוֹלֶת, gallinha, não é expressão biblica, mas rabbinica. (Benoliel, 1898, p. 38)
>
> [תַּרְנְגוֹלֶת, chicken, is not a biblical but rabbinic phrase instead.]

[9] Curiously, chapter 8 of Book Sixteen of Augustine's *The City of God* suggests a close link between the son of the Earth (*Adamah*) and the monstrous: 'Either the accounts of the whole nations of monsters are valueless; or, if there are such monsters, they are not human; or, if they are human, then they have sprung from Adam' (2010, p. 504).

> זְבוּב é propriamente mosca, e não mosquito, como no texto arabe está; na Biblia não tem termo equivalente bem determinado. No hebreu post-biblico dá-se-lhe o nome de יַתּוּשׁ. (Benoliel, 1898, p. 40)

> [זְבוּב is actually fly and not mosquito, as in the Arabic text. In the Bible it has no fixed, equivalent term. In the post-biblical Hebrew it is named יַתּוּשׁ.]

The first footnote showcases that Benoliel himself remarks when a non-biblical phrase is used as if he had betrayed his translation strategy; the second quotation confirms the deviations endured to comply with the biblical text. These examples can be construed in line with Derrida's anti-ethical 'colonial violence': 'Before the deconstruction of Babel, the great Semitic family was establishing its empire, which it wanted to be universal, and its tongue, which it also attempts to impose on the universe'; this 'can signify simultaneously colonial violence (since they would thus universalize their idiom) *and* peaceful transparency of the human community' (2007, pp. 193 and 199; emphasis in the original). Indeed, the quest for the divine language has always been a topic of interest within translation studies, particularly in connection with contexts where translation was instrumentalized to fulfil a colonial project, either in the European early-modern period (e.g. Rafael, 1993) or with reference to the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Oriental Renaissance (Schwab, 1984; e.g. Rangarajan, 2014). Paradoxical as it might be, as a construction of the linguistic superiority or imperialism of the Semites Benoliel's translation strategy nurtures, however, the dream of that human, universal community bonded by one single, intelligible textual memory and value. Put simply, Benoliel seems to find in intertextual translation the (pre-)Babelic memory of a universal people.

The biblical-centric shaping of translation serves as a distinctive mark of translatorship, thus informing what could be described as a translational epistemology, or

hermeneutics, that the Portuguese orientalist community did not comment on and to which Portuguese translation history has remained oblivious.

Conclusion

The case study of Joseph Benoliel pinpoints the presence of a discreet figure in the fin-de-siècle Portuguese scholarly and literary landscape, an *oriental* orientalist who took at great lengths his idiosyncratic approach to translation into Hebrew that tallies with an intertextual theory of translation grounded in a biblical bias. Anchored in epistemologies Europe-based readers were familiar with, his domesticating translation eventually reads as orientalizing otherness, either Western or Eastern, in that a Semitic Orient elevates itself by textually imposing its collective memory and history on other national/local literatures, one Western and one Maghrebian and Middle Eastern. The next stage for research would be to assess this case study against the Hebrew translation tradition or other Hebrew translations contemporarily produced in the Iberian or the broader European space.

Be that as it may, the biblical echoes in translation would also be a means of repairing an affective debt to the source text, either a canonical text of Portuguese language culture or classical Arabic literature. Since the Bible is a foundational text for Western readers, the Jewish community and orientalists alike, the analysed corpus of translations ends up conveying no actual emancipation from European epistemological or literary models. Joseph Benoliel dwells on a translational template that ultimately constitutes in itself a Western, or orientalist, form of knowledge.

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