

Translating Translations: the case of the Carvajal manuscripts

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The lives of Luis de Carvajal, *el mozo* and his extended converso family have been studied by scholars throughout the 20th and into the 21st century. The Carvajal family story was documented through the numerous public documents relating to Luis' uncle and namesake who was appointed governor of the territory of Nuevo Reino de León in the Northeastern corner of modern-day Mexico and the extensive records of the two Inquisitorial investigations into Luis and his wider familial circle in 1589 and 1595.*

In addition, Luis composed a fascinating autobiographical narrative of his spiritual wanderings and struggles. A transcription of this document was made by the Mexican historian Alfonso Toro for his personal use while writing the first major history of the family —*La Familia Carvajal*— and it is thanks to this copy that scholars such as Toro, Martin A. Cohen, Miriam Bodian, Lúcia Costigan and myself have been able to explore Carvajal's life and religious ideas.¹ However, the full extent of Carvajal's literary output was beyond the reach of scholars because in 1932 the original manuscript of Carvajal's eclectic religious writings was stolen from the Mexican national archives —the Archivo General de la Nación.²

In the Fall of 2016, thanks to the keen eye and probity of Mr. Leonard Milberg — a collector of Americana and Judaica— this collection of unique manuscripts composed by Luis de Carvajal between his two Inquisitorial trials (1589-1595) was recovered and returned to the Mexican authorities. Before their return to Mexico, Mr. Milberg had the manuscripts digitized at Princeton University and a full digital version is available to all, online via the Princeton Library website.³ For this act of scholarly rescue and the democratization of access afforded by the digitization of the text Mr. Milberg should be applauded.

With the full manuscript we can go beyond the *Vida* and explore new horizons in Carvajal's religious thought which I believe are relevant for scholars of New World

* The trial records of Luis de Carvajal, *el mozo* and his uncle the Governor have been transcribed. See "Processos de Luis de Carvajal, Gobernador" (Toro, 1932); and Obregón, 1935.

¹ The pioneering scholarship of Alfonso Toro (*La Familia Carvajal*) and Martin A. Cohen (*The Martyr*) lay the groundwork for all subsequent scholarship on the Carvajal family. In addition, Seymour Leibman's investigations and translations of Carvajal's writings have also added to our understanding of this fascinating family. Miriam Bodian's chapter on Carvajal in her *Dying in the law of Moses* (2007) explores the roots of his intellectual and religious world view, particularly as it relates to martyrdom. Lúcia Helena Costigan contextualizes Carvajal's life and writings within the context of Iberian intellectual culture in her, *Through Cracks in the Wall: Modern Inquisitions and New Christian Letrados in the Iberian Atlantic World* (2010). I explore questions of family and self-fashioning in the case of Carvajal in chapters three and four of my *Narratives from the Sephardic Atlantic* (Perelis, 2016).

² The saga of the resurfaced manuscripts is told with typical flair by Ilan Stavans who according to his — "The Return of Carvajal" (2019) played a central role in the caper!

³ Carvajal, Luis de, *Luis De Carvajal Manuscripts*. Mexico, .159.
<https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/10013425>

religiosity, Colonial Latin American culture and Crypto-Judaism. The full manuscript gives us access to the ideas of an original religious thinker and point to how his wider crypto-Jewish circle engaged in Judaizing practices.

Luis de Carvajal, el mozo wrote a series of religious works after his first arrest for Judaizing in 1589. The most well-known of these texts is his spiritual autobiography which recounts his discovery of Crypto-Judaism as a teenager in Spain and then his subsequent religious exploits and personal vicissitudes while living out the rest of his life in New Spain. In addition to his spiritual autobiography, Carvajal composed prayer poems in Spanish, a compendium of the 613 commandments along with his own commentary, and a meditation on the Ten Commandments, a small calendar of Jewish holidays and much more. With the recovery of this manuscript in 2016, almost nine decades after its mysterious theft from the National Archive of Mexico/Archivo General de la Nación, I and my colleagues Jesús de Prado Plumed and Ignacio Chuecas have begun a careful analysis of this text with the goal of producing a critical and annotated edition, translation into English and a series of historical, literary and linguistic studies. Our project will look at Carvajal as an original New World religious thinker whose ideas developed within the rich intellectual world of the Colonial Americas, in the exchange of ideas and peoples of the Atlantic world, and as part of wider early modern trends. The goal of the project is to better understand and make accessible Carvajal's religious creativity and the world where it unfolded.

In this paper I will explore the challenges of translating a text which is itself the work of subtle and sophisticated translation and transformation of ideas and words into the idiosyncratic book that Carvajal has crafted. How does one render a verse that is originally from the Hebrew Bible but Carvajal probably knew from the Catholic Mass or the Vulgate? When is Carvajal translating and when is he creatively crafting new meanings and how should that be reflected in the translation? How does Carvajal come to use Hebrew words without fluency in the language or access to books in Hebrew? This paper will explore some of these questions and consider different approaches to their resolution.

Carvajal begins his autobiography with this Biblical invocation:

EN EL N.e .D. A. S. S.r D LOS

.EXERCITOS.4

In the Name of Adonai Sabaoth Lord of Hosts

Carvajal makes ample use of abbreviations and initials throughout his writing and this line is no exception. *Adonai* is one of the few Hebrew words that many Conversos continue to use generations after their conversions. But could it be that Carvajal knew of this Hebrew word for God from Christian sources?

“Lord of Hosts” has roots in the Hebrew prophets. Is that where Carvajal found this powerful Divine name? and is the “.S.” of that phrase Sabaoth or Señor?

He might have subversively lifted this invocation from the Mass:

⁴ I wish to thank Prof. Ignacio Chuecas Saldías for sharing with me his meticulous and well-informed transcription of the manuscript.

SANCTUS, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.

While this line comes straight from Isaiah (6:3), its centrality in the Mass would have made this Hebrew word well known, not only to Carvajal but to his fellow conversos who did not read Latin with his level of mastery. He might have learned that the Jews of the “lands of liberty”⁵ also use this line in the “kedusha” prayer which is the highlight of the public service. In choosing this invocation might Carvajal be re-Judaizing the verse of the Latin mass? In translating this passage I chose to keep the Hebrew terms as they appear in his phrasing to highlight his linguistic choice. By maintaining the Hebrew, the translation also points to the diglossia that is weaved throughout the text.

Early in his narrative, Carvajal describes the moment his family revealed their Jewish secret to him. It was:

un dia señalado que es el que llamamos de las perdonanças dia s.to y solemne entre nofotros a diez dias de la luna septima, (1)

a special day that we call “of pardons”, a holy and solemn day for us, the tenth day of the seventh moon.

By maintaining the plural- “de las perdonanças” Carvajal follows the Biblical and rabbinic usage of referring to the day as יום הכפורים. This might point to an oral tradition which translated the Hebrew into Spanish, almost in the calc style of many Ladino translations.⁶ I see this as possibly having an oral Jewish source -as opposed to a salvaged Jewish source that Carvajal reformats from Christian texts- because when the Vulgate refers to this Holy Day it calls it: *Dies propitiationis* (Leviticus 23:28). The Latin does not maintain the plural form of the Hebrew.

These are just a few examples where the text of Carvajal’s manuscript requires a translation of a translation. However, now I would like to turn to one page in that leather bound journal that I find to be particularly fascinating and that despite its simplicity raises significant questions -both theoretical and practical- of translation. What follows is not a definitive treatment but rather a reflection on the act of translation and what that translation can help us uncover about this text and the wider intellectual and social networks it was a part of. I will discuss the choices I made for rendering the text into contemporary English and what is lost in the process.

The reader first notices the columns: two main columns, sectioned off to show the distinct categories of information they contain. The script is Latin but the words belong to Hebrew, the forbidden language of the Jews. There are numbers as well, some in the “Arabic style” 1,2,3,4 and others written out to phonetically match 1 to 10 in Hebrew, with

⁵ Carvajal uses this term to refer to Jews living in open Jewish communities, far from the Inquisition’s grasp such as Italy or the Ottoman Empire. The Jews of Amsterdam called those places where they could not openly practice Judaism as the “Lands of Idolatry”. See Kaplan 1985, 197-224.

⁶ The translator of the Escorial Bible renders this phrase in a similar way as “dia de perdonanças”. The Escorial manuscript did not circulate widely nor was it ever printed, but it might point to a wider discursive mode that Carvajal had access to in an indirect fashion. (Hauptmann & Littlefield 1987, 207)

the pronunciation of an Iberian Jew of the 16th century who probably spent some time in Italy. This page is a Jewish calendar listing the major Jewish holidays and the Christian date upon which they fall over two years. In another column we find the name of the Hebrew months.⁷

Questions to consider when approaching this text:

- What might be the source for this calendar?
- How did Carvajal access this information?
- Does this text come up in his trial? Do the Inquisitors refer to this calendar and does Luis shed any light on its composition or use?
- What might his form of transliteration of Hebrew tell us about his sources and his linguistic influences?
- In translating this text, how foreign and how accessible do I wish to render the original?

I first wanted the reader to see, and actually hear the words recorded in Carvajal's hand. I realized that this would be almost a direct transcription and not a translation. I needed to let go of that fidelity and delight in the peculiarity of Carvajal's calendar in order to produce something that was accessible and clear. I decided to translate the holidays and their dates in contemporary English. My goal was to give the reader direct access to the text. I rendered *Pesah* as Passover because it is a common cognate in American usage. However, I rendered *Succhoth* as Sukkot and not as Tabernacles (or Booths) nor did I translate *Shabuhod* as Pentecost or Feast of Weeks because these terms are arcane and don't explain the Hebrew original in a way that would be useful to a contemporary English reader. If I would keep *Shabuhod* or *Tishnabeab* I would preserve the particular orality of Carvajal's calendar, the way that these words capture the way the Hebrew words were pronounced, especially with the strong Portuguese influence. However, it would leave most readers confused.

Another intervention I decided upon was ignoring the notations written beside each holiday. What first seemed to me to be a "ta" which seemed to stand for "Fiesta" appears, according to my colleague Ignacio Cuecas to actually be a "+" or a "t" and an "a". Most Holidays have this annotation while others have numbers: 8 for Passover, 2 for Shavuot, 2 for Rosh Hashana and 9 for Sukkot. Might this refer to the number of days of each holiday? Then why does Hanukka go without this tag? I decided to leave this out until I better understand its function. I also left out the Hebraic prefix "le" that Carvajal maintains before each holiday. I decided to "translate" the numbers listed which refer to the day of the week the holiday begins: 1 is Sunday, 7 is Saturday, 4 Wednesday, etc. By translating these numbers into their contextual meaning the reader can understand the calendar but they lose out on seeing how this particular 16th century calendar might look. Again- by having the original side by side or at least accessible we can offer the curious (and serious) both experiences.

In the ideal version of this translation we would have the original manuscript image and the transcribed versions side by side the translation. In this fashion we can preserve both the idiosyncrasies of the text which reflect its humanity and creativity while still offering easy access to the reader looking for basic comprehension.

⁷ The Calendar is found on page 170 of the manuscript: <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/10013425>

When it came to the list of months, I decided to keep them in Carvajal's transliterated format and translate his Spanish months (and their initials) into English and when it came to the numbers from 1-10 in Hebrew transliteration I simply kept his version. In these cases I did not see any benefit to transliterating the Hebrew into "English" and preferred to keep the original so that the reader could see and almost hear how someone who only knew Romance languages could hold on to these Hebrew words.

There is a powerful act of resistance in this calendar. There is a rejection of hegemonic Catholicism; instead of saint days and Lent and Holy Week we have a small list of holidays and their dates. But by inscribing the holidays with their transliterated forms, we can see how a converso living in the "lands of captivity" far from the centers of Jewish life in the "old world" could strive to not only keep a Jewish holiday, but also say its name as other Jews do. To refer back to an earlier example, in his autobiography Carvajal refers to Yom Kippur as "de las perdonanças" —a fascinating Hebraicized translation in that he keeps the plural *perdonanças*/ pardons— that tracks with the plural form of *yom hakippurim*, which is often used.⁸ But it is a translation. Here in transliterating the spoken Hebrew and Aramaic words Carvajal asserts his right to speak in a language that is forbidden and that he was cut off from. But at least in this circumscribed space of the calendar he speaks Hebrew and allows his fellow crypto-Jews who might also read this document to speak like the Jews who live in the lands of Freedom.

⁸ Bottom of page 111 of pdf, p39 of manuscript: El dia de fu alumbram.to q_~_fue el .s.to de quipur. Referring to the day of his "enlightenment": "which was the holy day of "quipur".

Appendix A

A Hispanized Hebrew Calendar from Colonial Mexico by Luis de Carvajal, el mozo aka Joseph Lumbroso

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Esther | Wednesday. 22 February |
| Passover | Saturday. 25. March |
| Shavuot | Sunday. 14. May |
| [Fast of] Tamuz | Sunday. 5. June |
| [Fast of] Ninth of Av | Sunday .16 July |
| Rosh Hashana | Monday. 4 September |
| [Fast of] Gedaliah | Wednesday. 6. September |
| Yom Kippur | Wednesday. 14. September |
| Sukkot | Monday. 18. September |
| Hanukkah | Tuesday. 12. December |
| Esther | Wednesday. 14. March |
| Passover | Saturday. 13. April |
| Shavuot | Sunday. 2- May |
| Fast of Tamuz | Sunday. 24 July |
| Fast of 9th of Av | Sunday. 4. August |
| Rosh Hashana -- | Monday.23. September |
| Fast of Gedaliah- -- | Wednesday. 25. September |
| Yom Kippur | Wednesday. 2. October |
| Hanukkah- | Tuesday- 31- December |

Second column:

| | |
|---------|-----------|
| Tysri. | September |
| Hesban | October |
| Quislev | November |
| Tebeth | December |
| Sebath | January |

| | |
|--------|---------------------|
| Adar | February |
| Baadar | Only in a leap year |
| Nisan | March |
| Yar | April |
| Siban | May |
| Tamuz | June |
| Ab | July |
| Elul | August |

Numbers- one- 10

Appendix B

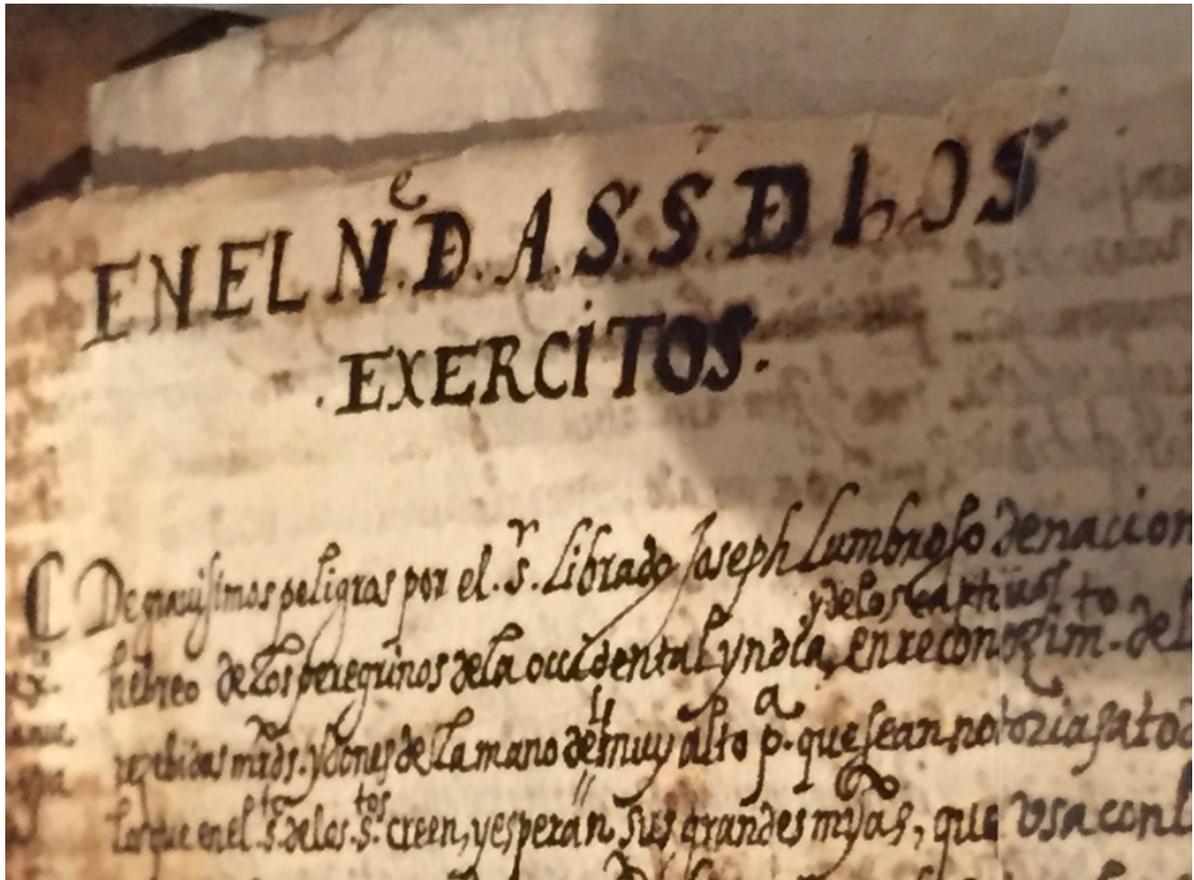
Image of the calendar from the digitized manuscript.

Link to Digitized Manuscript: <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/10013425>



Appendix C

Opening Invocation from the *Vida* of Luis de Carvajal, el mozo aka Joseph Lumbroso (image taken by author at the New York Historical Society 11/29/2016).



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