Reception Studies: Biblical and Eastern Antiquity in the Portuguese travellers' writings (16th-17th centuries)

Ever since ancient times, there are records of pilgrimages between Portugal and the Holy Land – this was especially true during Modern Age. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the adventurous spirit of Modern Man and the expansion of the Portuguese power into some Eastern areas resulted in the augmentation of the journeys and pilgrimages' records written by the Portuguese travelling to Jerusalem. For the most part, these men's travel diaries were extremely exhaustive regarding practical information about the journey, the preparation required, what they had witnessed or to whom they had spoken. In fact, descriptions of these contemporary themes held special interest, as these men aimed to create a document that would help and even encourage people to undertake journeys of this kind. However, these manuscripts contained more than trivial information and journey advice: in these writings, travelers also expressed their understanding about the Ancient History of the Near East, especially that concerning the Biblical history and the sacred places of Christianity. Nevertheless, in these same writings, several references to an extra- Biblical antiquity were found – most often, the references formulated were either about Mesopotamian or the Egyptian worlds, due to the geographic proximity; however some authors also mention – although less common - Greek and Roman Antiquity and the religious system practiced by each of these four civilizations. It is in these references to the extra-Biblical Antiquity that this paper will focus on. It aims to comprehend what motives these extremely faithful men had, which lead them to make such allusions to an extra-Biblical reality, as well as to evaluate what their perceptions about other religious systems were, and how they could associated them to the history of Christianity. Overall, this study pretends to contribute to the discussion around the Reception of Antiquity during the 16th and 17th centuries, providing elements for several investigations that allow to better understand the mentality of the Modern man, in addition to their knowledge about the past.

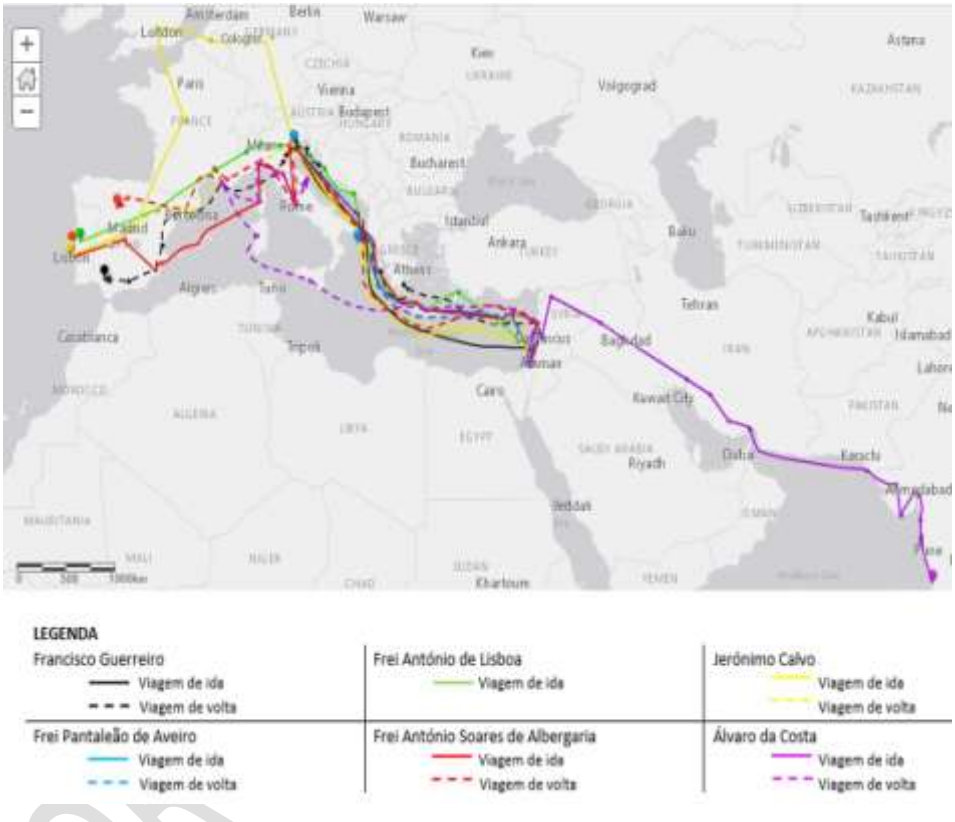
Keywords: Portuguese travelers; 16th – 17th studies; land routes; Jerusalem; Biblical History; reception of Antiquity

Introduction: the Portuguese Travellers in the Middle East

This paper's content was developed alongside with my Master degree dissertation in Modern History. In both of them, I take as a basis the writings of six Portuguese travellers and pilgrims that, during the 16th and 17th centuries, went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem and left written records of their journey: Pantaleão de Aveiro (journey: 1563-1566), António Soares de Albergaria (journey: 1552-1558), Jerónimo Calvo (journey: 1614-1617), António de Lisboa (journey: 1507-1509/1510), Francisco Guerreiro (journey: 1588-1589) and Álvaro da Costa (journey: c.1608).

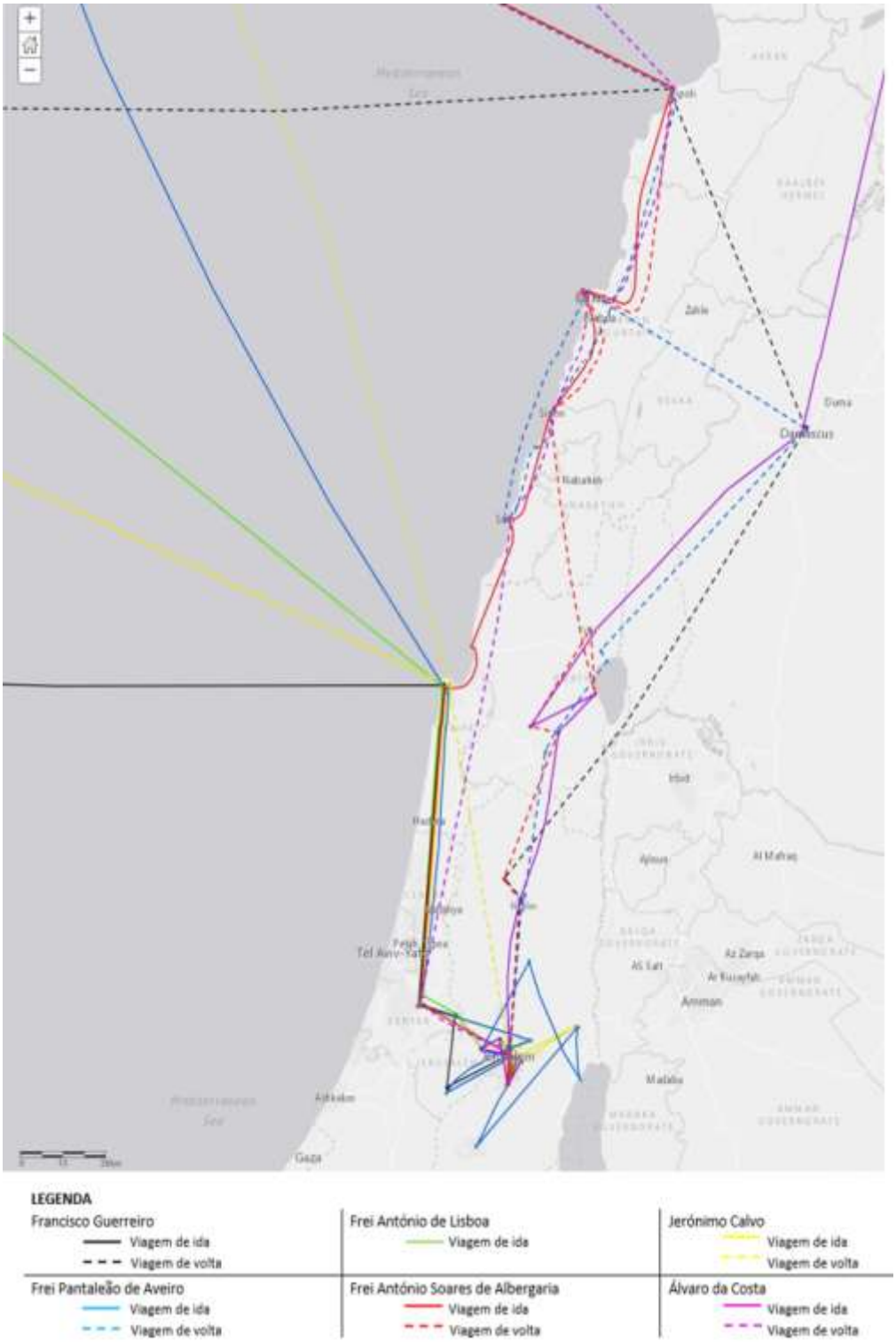
I intend to analyse the perceptions and several visions that these men had from the Ancient Period, especially concerning the religious context. My focus are the religious expressions in the Syro-Palestinian coast, however this research led me to distend my study to other religious realities, as you shall see.

Map I | Itinerary of the Portuguese travellers, between Europe and



Source: Author's map

Map III | Itinerary of the Portuguese travellers, between Europe and Asia



Source: Author's map

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It should be noted that five of these travellers were part of the clergy and had a religious education; nevertheless, the only layman whose written record I analysed, D. Álvaro da Costa, was quite devoted. Therefore, all of these men had a great knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, in which they firmly believed. The manuscript of Álvaro da Costa differs from the other five writings also because he was the only men who travelled from the East to Jerusalem, since he served the Portuguese State in India and Persian Gulf (see Map I); the other authors depart from Portugal/Europe, aiming to reach Jerusalem.

In the Syro-Palestinian coast there are clear similarities between the routes of these travellers (see Map II), once in this area all journeys were arranged and led by a guide.

Even though the journeys were decades apart, generally all of these men were shown the same places and told the same stories and local traditions, as evidenced by their texts.

Modern Accounts: Biblical or Extra-Biblical Antiquity?

Noah, the first character that must be analysed, acquires great relevance in the Bible. In agreement with the Sacred Scriptures, Noah was responsible for the preservation of human and animal life on Earth, during the Flood: he built an Ark where, at the behest of God, he sheltered his family and the various animal species at the time of the catastrophe (Gen. 6-9). The Bible is quite clear regarding the geographical references in this episode: "and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat[1]" (Gen 8-4). Frei António Soares de Albergaria (a Portuguese religious that travelled between Portugal and Jerusalem in 1552-1558) goes further and even indicates the Anti-Lebanon Mountain as the place where the Ark was built, and where Noah would have lived, again, after the Flood. He added that "que jaz aquy emterrado [Noé] pelo qual os mouros tem seu jazigo por mosqueta. Diziaõ me que mostra sua cova ser grande homem, e perto de gigante[2]" (Pereira 2005, 113). In fact, ever since the 10th century, al-Mukaddasi, a geographer, mentioned a tradition that placed Noah's tomb in *Karak Nuh*, a small town in Beqqa, at the foothills of Mount Lebanon (Donzel, Lewis, and Pellat, 1997). The tomb structure, which still exists today, is about thirty meters long and three meters wide. With this in mind, it is possible that Frei Albergaria recorded this local tradition in his account. On the other hand, the assumption that Noah was a giant man may come from the idea expressed in Gen 6, 4: "The Nephilim[3] were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of man and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, the men of

[1]Mount Ararat is a volcanic formation, with c. 5000 meters above sea level in the far east of the present-day Turkey, close to the border with Armenia and Iran.

[2]Translation: "lies here buried [Noah] for which the Moors have their deposit as a mosque. They told me that his grave shows he is a big man, and close to a giant"

[3]The word "Nephilim" is loosely translated as "giant".

renown", and although there are no certainties that Noah was indeed a giant, this concept is also not refuted.

Noah's own character, as well as the Flood episode, might raise some questions related to extra-Christian traditions: the Mesopotamian region is particularly rich in narratives similar to the biblical Flood. *Ziusudra* is the equivalent character to Noah in the Sumerian tradition; in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the survivor of the flood is *Utnapistim*; the Akkadian epic text *Atrahasis* is named after the hero surviving the catastrophe; also Berosus[4] presents a narrative of the Flood, which certainly derives from the Sumerian version, since the hero of the episode is *Xisuthros.*

In this region, similarly to what happened in the Nile area, inundations were seen as a natural and recurring event linked to river floods - and although these floods did not have a devastating scale, nor would they jeopardize the cultural continuity of civilization, it is plausible that this phenomenon prompted local narratives about great floods and the reason for them.

There are other traditions that mention floods: in Greek mythology, there are descriptions of Deucalion story, son of Prometheus, who survived the flood in an ark and, after nine days and nine nights, landed at Mount Parnassus (Lamas 1972, III:122–26). In the Indian world, the flood tale is associated with the figure of Manu, who survived the Flood on a large ship, that had been sent to him by Vishnu, one of the main Hindu gods (Lamas 1973, VI:84–86).

Some of these traditions comprehend the flood as a phenomenon used to limit population growth (as is the case with *Atrahasis*), others understand it as a way of punishing humanity for its wickedness and disobedience (as is the case of the Genesis, and Greek mythology), others still recognise this tale as belonging to a series of cycles that form the world (in the Hindu view).

We agree with Stephanie Dalley when she states that these diluvian stories can derive from a tradition that arose in Mesopotamia, and which was retold for more than two thousand years, along the great Asian caravan routes. Along these routes it was also translated and adapted, according to the conditions and beliefs of each community (Dalley 1991, 7). This gave rise to numerous versions of the same narrative, more or less coincident with each other, whose common points are a man, an ark / ship, and the divine will as a vital element for the survival of humanity.

Since the early days of Christianity, this episode has been interpreted by theologians and religious, namely Tertullian and Saint Jerome (authors who were still widely quoted in the Modern Age), who characterized Noah's ark as the Church (Cross and Livingstone 1997): just as the ark was the only form of salvation for the mankind during the flood, the Church is also the only form of salvation for the soul, meaning an eternity in full. Apparently, this was still a vision cultivated among travellers of the 16th and 17th centuries, as Frei Albergaria shares the idea that "no sacrifício de Noe [Gn 8, 20] foi ho cordeiro significado que avia d'tirar os peccados do mundo[5]" (Pereira 2005, 113), in an

[4]Chaldean priest and writer (IV-III B.C.) Berosus wrote, "History of Babylon", in Greek; this work was lost and survives only through secondary sources and citations of the classic authors.
[5]Translation: "In Noah's sacrifice [Gen. 8: 20] the lamb was meant to take away the sins of the

interpretation that recognises the mercy of God as the saviour of humanity, just as the Christian religion has a salvific nature.

The second character whose behaviour must be analysed is Samson. Samson it is not a crucial character in Biblical history as are the Apostles, for instance. Nevertheless, he is an extremely peculiar character.

Samson's story is written in the Bible in Judges 13-16. Samson was a Nazirite[6], consecrated to God from his birth, to whom God gives a mission: "for behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines." (Jd 13, 5). For this purpose, God grants him extraordinary strength as well as other traits: "Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah, and they came to the vineyards of Timnah. And behold, a young lion came toward him roaring. Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon him, and although he had nothing in his hand, he tore the lion in pieces as one tears a young goat. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done." (Jd 14, 5-6). "And he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, and put out his hand and took it, and with it he struck 1,000 men." (Jd 15, 15). "So Samson went and caught 300 foxes and took torches. And he turned them tail to tail and put a torch between each pair of tails." (Jd 15, 4).

world"

[6]A Nazirite is a Jew who is consecrated to God, throughout his life or only during part of it. Before their vote, the Nazarites must follow special precepts, namely the prohibition on drinking alcohol and eating unclean meats, as well as the prohibition on cutting their hair.

Figure I - Albrecht Dürer, Samson Rending the Lion, c. 1497–98

Source: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/24.63.111/

This character has a tragic end. After marrying Delilah, a Philistine woman, she persuades him to reveal the secret of his strength. When Samson concedes her wish and reveals his secret to her, Delilah denounces it to the Philistines, who successfully fulfil the task of cutting is hair. With his hair now cut, the strength, given to him by God, escapes his body. This is advantageous for the Philistines as, in such manner, they are able to blind Samson, who is later condemn him to forced labour.

Despite his blindness, Samson performs one last altruistic gesture: “Then Samson called to the LORD and said, "O Lord GOD, please remember me and please strengthen me only this once, O God, that I may be avenged on the Philistines for my two eyes." And Samson grasped the two middle pillars on which the house rested, and he leaned his weight against them, his right hand

on the one and his left hand on the other. And Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then he bowed with all his strength and the house fell upon the lords and upon all the people who were in it. So the dead whom he killed at his death were more than those whom he had killed during his life." (Jd 16, 28-30)

Figure II - Heinrich Aldegrever, Hercules Slaying the Lion of Nemea, 1550

Source: National Gallery of Art, Washington DC. https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.3462.html

Currently recognised as a legendary character, several authors have attributed to Samson's narrative similarities with the stories of Hercules and Enkidu, a character from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In Greek mythology, Hercules also kills a lion with his bare hands. In addition, he is equally betrayed by his wife and his death is also predetermined by himself. Furthermore, the work that

Samson was subjected to at the time of his arrest, at the behest of the Philistines, suggests a parallel with the tasks that Hercules had to complete at the behest of Euristeu(Gray 1987, 112).

It is suggested, therefore, a Greek influence in the Hebrew tradition of Palestine, in the period of Judges (c. 1255-1050 BC), which, although contested by some authors, is corroborated by archaeological records that attest the contact between Mycenaean communities and the Syrian-Palestinian coast area. Othniel Margalith even claims that the decorated Mycenaean pottery found in archaeological excavations in these areas, as well as the copies produced locally, may have been a vehicle of transmission of these Greek legends that have influenced local stories (Margalith 1987, 70).

Other authors identify similarities between Samson and Enkidu[7]: both are men of great stature, known for their physical strength and their long hair; both were seduced by women, in order to diminish their strength; and both suffered premature deaths. Furthermore, during a fight between Enkidu and Gilgamesh, according to the narrative, the door jambs would have been destroyed and the walls would have shaken, alike to the events occurred in the story of Samson, who, in his final gesture, destroyed the pillars of the Philistine structure, causing the ruin of the building's walls (Wood-Langford 2009, 67–68).

Others associate this figure with the solar deity, making a connection between Samson and Beth Shemesh, the "Temple of the Sun", located near Samson's hometown, Zora. Mobley, however, believes that there is not enough data to establish a link between these two authorities(Mobley 2006, 6–7). On the other hand, some theologians consider Samson as one of Christ's prefigurations. "Sansón abriendo las fauces del león es el simbolo de Cristo derrotando a Satanás. (…) El Arrancar las Puertas de Gaza, es el símbolo de la Resurrección. El Sansón místico de J. J. Courvoisier (Bruselas, 1638) asimila los amores de Sansón con Dalila a los de Jesús con su Iglesia" (Réau 1999, 1:280).

That said, and despite all subsequent conjectures surrounding this figure, Portuguese travellers do not comment on the origin of this character. By analysing their texts, a probable conclusion arises: they did not acknowledge Samson as a mythological being, but as a real man, who had been a judge of Israel for twenty years (Jd 16, 31), and who was born of a barren woman, to whom God had granted the grace of having a child (Jd 13, 2-5).

It seems appropriate to also analyse geographical references, that are not located in the Holy Land, but which are often mentioned in the Bible, namely Babylon. In 16th-17th centuries, the location of the Babylon was unclear, since the city was only identified in archaeological excavations in the 19th century, however due to the proximity to Baghdad, it was often assumed that these cities were coincident. Nevertheless, by the early 17th century, some travellers already claimed that Baghdad and Babylon were not the same city, as is the

[7]Legendary Mesopotamian hero. This character has a central role in the Epic of Gilgamesh and is presented as a friend and pair of Gilgamesh (although in some Sumerian poems he appears as his servant).

case of Pedro Teixeira[8], a Portuguese traveller who explored the Middle East, and stated that "para entender que es cosa muy diferente una de outra; bastará saber que Babilonia estava sobre el Rio Eufratres; y Bagadad está sobre el Tigris[9]" (Carreira 1990, 108).

Despite this evidence, D. Álvaro da Costa believes that he is, in fact, in Babylon. This leads him to consider a series of events that, according to the Bible, took place in that city. This is the case with the story of the division of the languages. According to the Bible (Gen 11: 1-9), this episode explains not only the existence of several languages all over the world, but also the dispersion of people throughout all inhabited lands. This event is associated with the construction of the so-called Tower of Babel: "And they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly." And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth." (Gen 11, 3-4). "And the LORD said, "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech." (Gen 11, 6-7).

It is plausible that this episode and the construction of a tower with these characteristics were inspired by ziggurats[10], large constructions, frequent in the Mesopotamian region. It is even suggested that this episode may be related to the Etemenanki ziggurat, in Babylon, whose literal translation of its name is *home of the foundation of heaven and earth* (Cornelli 2012, 19). Because they were such imposing constructions, it is not surprising that these ziggurats could influence the literary narratives of the Israelites. According to Speiser(Speiser 1999, 74–76), however, what inspired this biblical theme in the first place was not monumental architecture, but literary tradition, since the author finds parallels between the text of Gen 11, 3-4 and the *Enuma-Elish*:

> For a whole year they made bricks for it.
> When the second year arrived,
> They had raised the top of Esagila in front of (?) the Apsu;
> They had built a high ziggurrat for the Apsu.(Dalley 1991, 262)

Samuel Noah Kramer also finds passages analogous to the issue of languages' confusion in "Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta":

[8]Pedro Teixeira travelled between Goa and Antwerp in 1604-1605. He went up the Persian Gulf, passing through Baghdad and Aleppo, where he took a boat towards Europe.

[9]Translation: "To understand that they are different cities, it should be considered that Babylon was on the Euphrates River; and Baghdad is on the Tigris".

[10]The ziggurats were temples built in height and in a rectangular or quadrangular shape. Sanctuaries were erected on its top where, it was believed, the tutelary god of the ziggurat was present. These buildings existed in most major Mesopotamian cities and were dedicated to several major gods. See Paul J. Achtemeier and Society of Biblical Literature (eds.). 1996. "Ziggurat", in The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary, São Francisco, HarperCollinsPublishers.

Enki, the lord of abundance, (whose) commands are trustworthy,
The lord of wisdom, who understands the land,
The leader of the gods,
Endowed with wisdom, the l[ord] of Eridu,
Changed the speech in their mouths, [brought (?)] contention into it,
Into the speech of man that (until then) had been one.(Kramer 1968, 111)

It is understood, therefore, that it was not only the Israelites who believed that the confusion of languages was instigated by God. The Sumerians also admitted that there had been a time when all mankind had spoken the same language and that Enki, the Sumerian god of wisdom, had confused the languages.

These texts, although with significant differences, demonstrate that the concepts and terminology of this biblical episode, in particular, coincide with the literary accounts of the Mesopotamian region, as well as with their practices (Marshall 1997, 16). It is suggested, therefore, that this is another example of a tradition that was possibly spread throughout the area of the Near East and transformed according to the religious system of each community.

Finally, it is imperative to analyse an episode that belongs to the New Testament, and that is one of the best known by the believers: the Last Supper.

The episode of the Last Supper consists of the description of the last dinner that Jesus had with his Apostles, before his death. However, when analysed in detail, it verifies/ proves to be a very interesting and meaningful episode, since it allows the connection with other religious expressions of Antiquity.

In the 16th century, Portuguese travellers report that they were not allowed to enter the Holy Cenacle (Guerreiro 1734, 15–16). At that time, the building where this dinner would have taken place had been turned into a mosque since Muslims believed that this was the place of King David's grave.

Today, it is believed that the tomb of David is located in the Church of Mount Zion, in a Byzantine chapel that, during the 12th century, was incorporated into a church built by the Crusaders (Limor 1998, 453). However, this information was not always true: in the Byzantine era, the Christian tradition placed David’s tomb in Bethlehem (Limor 1998, 455).

Nevertheless, Ora Limor states that, at least since the 4th century, there was a ceremony dedicated to King David, which took place in the church of Mount Zion, celebrated annually on December 25th. As claimed by the author, “the liturgical *memoria* (the memorial service) led to the establishment of a physical *memoria* (the tomb)”(Limor 1998, 461) thus suggesting the phenomenon of “migrating tradition”, according to which traditions are changed in compliance with the liturgy and, later, fixed in the place where said liturgy was celebrated. In this way, the tradition of the Byzantine period, which placed the tomb of David in Bethlehem, underwent changes and, eventually, both Muslims and Jews accepted the location of David's tomb on Mount Zion, a tradition that still remains rooted today (Limor 1998, 462).

There is little information in the Holy Scriptures regarding the location of the Last Supper: “And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." (Mk 14, 13-15; Lk 22, 10-22). There is no information about who was the man carrying a jar of water, or where the house would be.

Nowadays it is believed that the Holy Cenacle is located in the building of Mont Zion, which according to tradition, houses the room where King David's tomb is, on the ground floor, and exactly above, on the upper floor, the room where Christ had his last supper. This information is in line with what travellers stated in their texts, although the representations of this building are much older, dating back to (at least) the 6th century, with the map of Madaba.

Aside from this issue, this episode was celebrated for the solemn moment when “Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Mt 26, 26-29). St. Paul’s letters (1Cor 11, 23-29) and the Acts of the Apostles (Act 2, 42-47) make it clear that, with these words, Jesus instituted the celebration of a ritual “as an anticipation in this life of the joys of the banquet that was to come in the Kingdom of God” (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1993, «Eucharist»). In this way, Jesus instituted the celebration of the Eucharist. The masses evoke the Last Supper at the time of communion, where consecrated hosts are distributed by devotees, symbolizing the body and blood of Christ, through transubstantiation.

At the end of the 19th century, T.W. Doane, in his work *Bible myths and their parallels in other religions (...)* writes about the origins of the Last Supper(Doane 1882, 305–15) and states that, in some Ancient cultures, bread and wine were ingested as a symbol of the body and the blood of the gods. According to him, the inhabitants of Tibet and Tartary[11], who followed the Grand Lama (Buddhism), offered to their God a sacrament of bread and wine. In the Indian subcontinent, according to the Vedic conception, soma is the personification of the fermented juice of a plant that can be compared to the Greek *ambros*[12], to the Polynesian *kava*[13] and, especially, to the *haoma*, in

[11]Tartary corresponded to the territory of central and northern Asia, which extended roughly from the Caspian Sea and the Ural Mountains to the Pacific Ocean; it was inhabited by people of Turkic and Mongol origin.

[12]In the Greek myths, *ambros* or *ambrosia* is the food or drink of the gods, which was known to confer longevity or immortality. See Simon Hornblower et al. (eds.). 2012. “Ambrosia”, in The Oxford Classical Dictionary, 4th. ed, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

[13]*Kava* is the name given to the euphoric behavior caused by the ingestion of a drink made from the roots of the pepper plant, in most of the islands of the South Pacific. The consumption of this drink took place in a ceremony on special occasions, namely the preparation for a battle,

Zoroastrianism. The haoma is a plant from which juice is extracted, and consumed during the Yasna ceremony, a sacrifice in honor of all deities, in which the plant itself is considered Zoroaster, son of the Creator, Ahura Mazda. From this Yasna ceremony derived the ceremonial banquet of Mithraism, in which wine took the place of *haoma*, and instead of being dedicated to Ahura Mazda, it was dedicated to Mithra. "The early Christian leaders noticed the resemblances between the Mithraic meal, the Zoroastrian haoma ceremony and the christian Eucharist; and between Mithraism and Christianity, to some extent, there was mutual influence and borrowing of respective beliefs and practices. But Mithraism's antecedents were different, being Iranian and Mesopotamian with a Vedic background before it become part of Hellenistic and Christian world (c. 67 BC to about AD 385)." (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1993, «Sacrament», 789)

On the other hand, Greek and Roman cultures also celebrated their gods with the use of wine and alcoholic beverages. The worship of Dionysus (or Bacchus), god of wine, was the most popular at that time (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1993, «Alcohol and Drug Consumption», 199–200). Prodicus (Greek philosopher, b. 5th century) states that the ancients considered divine everything that was useful to humanity. In this way, bread was revered as the goddess Demeter, and wine as Dionysus (Müller 1878, 181).

Also according to Doane, "The ancient Egyptians […] annually celebrated the Resurrection of their God and Savior Osiris, at which time they commemorated his dead by the Eucharist, cating the sacred cake, or wafer, after it had been consacrated by the priest, and become veritable flesh of his flesh. The bread, after the sacerdotal rites, became mystically the body of Osiris, and, in such a manner, they ate their god" (Doane 1882, 319). However, the issue seems to be more complex than the way in which it is presented by Doane. In c. 2400 BC, Osiris was simultaneously a god of fertility and the personification of the dead king. The annual sprouting of vegetation and plantations, during the floods of the Nile, is the most notable phenomenon associated with the growth forces inherent to the land, and it is believed to be linked to the manifestations of Osiris itself (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 1993, «Osiris»). Osiris (re)appears, therefore, closely linked to the fertility of the fields, and to the nourishments that come from them. Thus, bread and beer, products made from barley, are obtained "through the dead of the seed corn which is a manifestation of Osiris" (Frankfort 1978, 133) Osiris, himself, became the manifestation of the products/nourishments he protected. Thus, in celebrations associated with Osiris, bread and beer do not become divine through transubstantiation, nor after priestly rites, as in Christianity: there is a more complex mentality inherent to this phenomenon, which is present in the connection of a deity to a natural cycle and which can be found in polytheistic religious systems.

In fact, Doane explains this issue in a very simplistic way, probably

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the acclaim of a new chief, or an encounter with a god/gods in the scope of divination or prophecy. See "Kava", in The New Encyclopaedia Britannica. 1993. Vol. 6, 15th ed., Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica.

seeking to adapt the rite of the Egyptian practice and bringing it closer to the Christian Eucharist, in which the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ, through transubstantiation.

There are other authors who relate the Last Supper with the Passover meal, of Jewish tradition. The Synoptic Gospels suggest, through the chronological line, that the Last Supper would be a celebration of Pesach, contrary to what can be understood from the text of St. John. This question is not yet clear today, but in one way or another, theologians believe that the primary function of this episode would be to establish communion and unity among the participants of this meal, the disciples, who should perpetuate and expand the memory and the word of Jesus.

Conclusion

The first question to consider when making an analytical approach such as that presented in this article, is that the majority of Modern Age authors interpreted the Bible as the most important document, since it had been written by God's will. Hence, the authority of those texts not being questioned or contested; at the same time, everything that went against the teachings of the Bible was false, and what is not expressed in the Book is comprehended according to one's sensitivity – what happened essentially related with the local traditions.

On the other hand, there is a clear association between the references to characters, cities and/or places frequently linked with Biblical Antiquity, which may point into the direction of an extra-biblical Eastern Antiquity. Naturally, Portuguese travellers did not have such a vast knowledge of extra-Christian traditions as they did of biblical ones. It is therefore admitted that these travellers might have not been aware of the proximity of their religion's roots with those of other monotheistic religions, and even to the ancient pagan religions of that area. The connections that travellers established between these religious systems were limited to allusions and references made in the Sacred Texts about those regions where these "foreigner" faiths were practiced; furthermore, men of the 16th and 17th centuries were so imbued with their Christian spirit that to perceive those nuances and similarities between religions was by no means their priority.

Above all, it is clear that the bonds between the religions of the Near East area, whether monotheistic or polytheistic, have in common characters, heroes and even ideas. It is understood that these civilizations were in confluence through commercial and demographic exchanges and, therefore, that they are not watertight beliefs, but would evolve as new ideas, insights or perspectives which were later conveyed and transformed in order to adapt to another reality.

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