

Hasdai Cresques's Impact on Fifteenth-Century Iberian Jewish Philosophy and Polemics

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ashf.88093>

Recibido: 04 de mayo de 2023 / Aceptado: 06 de junio de 2023

ENG Abstract: Hasdai Cresques was a major Jewish thinker, author and communal leader at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, whose works are studied closely in the academic world. Nonetheless, his impact upon the traditional Jewish community has been almost non-existent. He never finished his legal opus, which might have made an impression on traditional Jews. His extant philosophical writings are difficult to follow; only one of two vernacular anti-Christian polemics survives, in a Hebrew translation/paraphrase. Although Cresques was well remembered in the century after his death, one can already detect during this period the reasons for his subsequent neglect. An examination of the fifteenth-century reception history of Cresques's oeuvre demonstrates the extent to which his polemical, dogmatic and philosophical stances were mostly rejected by those who followed him, including his close students. It is not surprising, then, that in subsequent centuries, Cresques's memory was almost erased from Jewish communal consciousness.

Keywords: Jewish Philosophy; anti-Christian Polemics; Jewish Dogmatics; Fifteenth-Century Spain; Cresques Reception History.

ES El impacto de Hasdai Crescas en la filosofía y la polémica judía ibérica del siglo XV

ES Resumen: Hasdai Crescas fue un importante pensador, autor y líder comunitario judío de finales del siglo XIV y principios del XV, cuyas obras son estudiadas con detalle en el mundo académico. No obstante, su impacto sobre la comunidad judía tradicional ha sido casi inexistente. Nunca terminó su obra legal, la que podría haber tenido impacto en los judíos tradicionales. Sus escritos filosóficos conservados son difíciles de seguir; solo sobrevive una de las dos polémicas anticristianas vernáculas, en una traducción/paráfrasis hebrea. Aunque Crescas fue bien recordado en el siglo posterior a su muerte, ya en este período se pueden detectar las razones de su posterior olvido. Un examen de la historia de la recepción de la obra de Crescas en el siglo XV demuestra hasta qué punto sus posiciones polémicas, dogmáticas y filosóficas fueron mayoritariamente rechazadas, más allá de que tuvo partidarios, fundamentalmente entre sus alumnos más cercanos. No es de extrañar, entonces, que en los siglos posteriores, la memoria de Crescas fuera casi borrada de la conciencia comunitaria judía.

Palabras clave: Filosofía judía; polémicas anticristianas; dogmática judía; España en el siglo XV; historia de la recepción de Crescas.

How to Cite: Lasker, D. J. (2024) "Hasdai Cresques's Impact on Fifteenth-Century Iberian Jewish Philosophy and Polemics". *Revista Anales del Seminario de Historia de la Filosofía*, 41 (1), 213-219.

Among the many philosophical works written by Jewish thinkers in the Middle Ages, one can distinguish those compositions which have been important enough to be considered canonical. There is, however, a difference between the canon of medieval Jewish philosophy as seen inside the academia

and the canon of medieval Jewish philosophy as seen inside the traditional Jewish community. The academic canon can be determined by examining histories of Jewish philosophy written since the middle of the nineteenth century in the context of secular scholarship. The traditional Jewish canon can

be determined by examining the number of printed editions produced over the past 500 years, as well as the lists of condemned books issued by a number of anti-rationalist traditional Jews, most noticeably by Hasidic leaders. A book which was rarely printed could not be said to be part of the traditional canon, and if the book was virtually unknown, no one would bother to proscribe reading it.

Although some works are part of both the academic and the traditional canon, like Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*, there are still marked differences between the two canons. Thus, in the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy, one does not have to be a rabbinic Jew in good standing to make the list. One could be a Karaite (Aaron ben Elijah of Nicomedia); an excommunicated heretic (Spinoza); or even an apostate (Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi or Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid). Some of the thinkers on this list were mostly unknown to the traditional Jewish community and had little or no impact on it. Thinkers made it onto the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy if they interested the scholars, especially if the academic researchers considered their thought innovative, unusual or original. The Jewish community's self-understanding of its major thinkers, what could be called the traditional canon, consisting only of observant, rabbinic Jews, was not as important to the scholars as their own judgments concerning the worth of particular treatises. In similar fashion, scholarly histories of medieval Jewish philosophy, based on the academic canon, have rarely had much of an impact beyond the gates of academia.¹

The relevance of this distinction to the case of Hasdai Cresques is obvious. Although Cresques has a central position in the academic canon of medieval Jewish philosophy, he has been a virtual unknown to the traditional community.² Although, in his time, Cresques was an important communal leader and a central figure in Iberian Jewry after the riots of 1391, he was subsequently forgotten by most Jews. It would seem that if one wanted to be remembered as a Jewish philosopher, it is recommended that one do something else as well: be a halakhic expert like Saadia Gaon or Maimonides; a biblical exegete like Abraham ibn Ezra or Gersonides; or a poet like Judah Halevi or Solomon ibn Gabirol. In addition, one should also write in Hebrew or have one's works translated into Hebrew as soon as possible after they were written. Thus, if Cresques had completed his promised halakhic work and been recognized in the traditional Jewish community for his legal acumen, his philosophical work would undoubtedly have had greater resonance in the community. And although he wrote his *Or Hashem* ("Light of the Lord") in Hebrew, his very

difficult, abstruse style did not help him; in contrast, his student, Joseph Albo, who was a much less important communal leader and who left little legacy other than his *Book of Principles*, did make it into the traditional Jewish canon, probably because of the clarity of his language and the simplicity of his thinking.³

Hasdai Cresques's descent into virtual oblivion did not happen overnight. In fifteenth-century Sepharad, Cresques's reputation remained intact, even as his views were often attacked. There were three aspects of Cresques's legacy in the last Jewish century in Spain: Cresques as polemicist, Cresques as dogmatist and Cresques as philosopher. The present article will review these three aspects of Cresques's intellectual achievement as seen by his own community in the nearly 100 years after his death. The discussion is not meant to be exhaustive and discuss every fifteenth-century Sephardic thinker; undoubtedly one could bring other examples, but the general picture is not expected to change as a result.

Let us begin with Cresques's anti-Christian polemics. It is often forgotten that Cresques wrote two vernacular polemical treatises, an apparently unremarkable one based on exegetical arguments relating to the Hebrew Bible, and a philosophical one, which we now know as *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, even though it is doubtful that that was Cresques's original name for this treatise. We are familiar with the philosophical treatise because Joseph ben Shem-Tov translated it in 1451; we are not familiar with the exegetical one because no one bothered translating it. Joseph ben Shem-Tov admits that he was too lazy to render the work into Hebrew since the book's argumentation was rather standard in Jewish anti-Christian polemics and those looking for such arguments already had a large number of possible books in Hebrew from which to choose. The originals of both works are lost, leaving for posterity only Ben Shem-Tov's translation/paraphrase of the philosophical refutation.⁴

We know all this because Joseph's translation activity included some important editorial comments. In the introduction to the edition which we possess now, Joseph remarks that, because of its brevity, depth and the vernacular language, the benefits of Cresques's original polemic were lost on his contemporaries. When Cresques composed this work in approximately 1398, his target audience were highly assimilated Jews (and not, as one often hears, the Christian nobility);⁵ and apparently these assimilated

¹ See D. J. Lasker, "The Canon of Medieval Jewish Philosophy", *Review of Rabbinic Judaism*, 6:2/3 (December 2003), pp. 317-328.

² This is true despite the fact that the current standard edition of Cresques's *Or Hashem* was edited by Rabbi Shlomo Fisher of the strictly Orthodox community in Israel; see H. Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem*. Ed. S. Fisher. Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990. Despite this fact, one would hardly expect a conference about Hasdai Cresques to take place in a strictly Orthodox environment, but the conference at a secular university in Barcelona, at which this paper was first presented, seems totally appropriate.

³ Ignorance of Cresques extends beyond the traditional community: The street named after him in Tel Aviv has transmogrified, first into Hasdai Mi-Cresques and then into Hasidei Caracas (the pious of Caracas). There is now a street named after Cresques in Jerusalem, named so during the last major Cresques conference held in Jerusalem in 2011. Neither the Jerusalem nor the Tel Aviv Cresques Street is a major, important thoroughfare.

⁴ All references to *The Refutation* will be to D. J. Lasker, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles by Hasdai Crescas*. Albany: SUNY/Albany Press, 1992. The mention of the second treatise is on p. 84. The text of Joseph ben Shem-Tov's Hebrew version of *The Refutation* is found in H. Cresques, *Bittul Iqqarei Ha-Nozrim*. Ed. D. J. Lasker. Ramat Gan/Beer Sheva: Bar-Ilan University Press/Ben-Gurion University Press, 1990; second printing, 2002.

⁵ Arguments for the claim that *The Refutation* was written for a Jewish audience is provided in both D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*,

Jews could not read sophisticated philosophical argumentation in Hebrew. Fifty years later, those Jews who remained loyal to Judaism had not, in Joseph ben Shem-Tov's words, "been accustomed to study science except in our holy language." It is possible that since Joseph was a Castilian, perhaps Cresques's Catalan was also beyond Joseph's cohort's linguistic abilities for that reason as well. Whatever the case, Joseph took it upon himself to translate this polemic into Hebrew, but even that was not good enough as he comments:

Since, however, believers have been removed and men of science have been lost, only those who do not know the law of the God of the land have been left. They were not able to derive from it the secrets of existence and divine mysteries, because of the brevity of his language and his excessive use of indirect allusion.⁶

The bottom line was that Joseph went back to the drawing board and produced a paraphrase rather than a direct translation, and he included notes to help his woefully undertrained contemporaries to understand what Cresques was writing.

If Cresques's Catalan original was beyond mid-fifteenth-century Castilian Jews; and if Joseph ben Shem-Tov's first effort to render the book into Hebrew was inappropriate for his target audience, whose philosophical training was deficient; we might ask whether the second Hebrew version was any more successful. The second translation is still a dense attack on Christian doctrines based on Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, hardly an easy read. Did fifteenth-century Iberian Jews read Cresques's *Refutation* and did it make much of an impression upon those who read it? The question is not whether the composition was successful in preventing Jewish conversion to Christianity, since we have no way of checking whether any polemical treatise had an impact on actual behavior. But we can ask about resonances of *The Refutation* in subsequent Jewish literature.

We do know of at least one Iberian thinker who read and cited Joseph ben Shem-Tov's translation of the *Refutation*, and that was Don Isaac Abravanel, at the end of the fifteenth century, who, unlike Joseph's contemporaries, was eminently qualified to read the book. Abravanel cites the work at least twice, emphasizing that Cresques wrote it in the language of his country and, in his day, it was available in Joseph ben Shem-Tov's translation. In a citation in *Shamayim hadashim* ("New Heavens"), a book devoted to the question of the creation of the world, Abravanel cites approvingly Joseph's estimation that the *Refutation*, which, as noted, we usually date to 1398, was written after *Or Hashem*, completed apparently in 1410 before Cresques's death. Joseph had proposed a different order of composition because, in the *Refutation*, Cresques adopts Averroes's arguments against eternal creation in his rejection of the eternal generation

of the Son, whereas he criticizes such arguments in *Or Hashem* in the context of the discussion of eternal creation of the world. Joseph ben Shem-Tov, and Abravanel in his wake, assumed that after Cresques had written *Or Hashem*, in which he advocated eternal creation of the universe, he became familiar with Averroes's critique of eternal creation and, thus, was able to adopt his arguments to polemicize against the Christian doctrine of the generation of the Son.⁷ In contrast to Joseph and to Abravanel, some modern scholars have assumed the opposite trajectory, namely that in his youth Cresques objected to eternal creation and then adopted it in *Or Hashem*.⁸ Nevertheless, the use of contradictory arguments in two different compositions is not necessarily a sign of the author's changing his mind but is probably a function of a polemical license which allows an author to use arguments against opponents, even if he did not necessarily agree with those arguments.

Abravanel's second citation of Cresques's *Refutation* is in his Commentary to Isaiah 52, the beginning of the central "Suffering Servant of the Lord" passage. Abravanel cites Cresques's arguments against original sin and the redemption from it by means of the incarnation of the Son. If the Christian doctrine of vicarious atonement is baseless, according to Abravanel, then the Suffering Servant could not, as Christian exegetes would have it, have referred to a God-man Messiah.⁹

In addition to these direct citations, did the *Refutation* have an impact on Jewish anti-Christian polemics in fifteenth-century Sepharad, a century of intense inter-religious strife? Joseph ben Shem-Tov, as noted the translator of Cresques's *Refutation*, also wrote a commentary to Profiat Duran's *Epistle Be not like your Fathers*, in the introduction of which, he describes six polemical methodologies. The fifth one is described as follows:

[This] is the method of one who intended to raise objections against each of the principles of belief, called roots 'articulos'. He thought it proper first to set forth the premises which are admitted by both parties, and those about which they disagree. These polemical treatises lead to either positive or negative conclusions. This is the way of the sage, Rabbi Hasdai Cresques, of blessed memory, in a treatise which is composed in the vernacular concerning this. It is a

⁶ *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10; and *id.*, "R. Hasdai Crescas' Polemical Activity in Light of the Medieval Jewish-Christian Debate", in E. Eisenmann and W. Z. Harvey (eds.), *Or Ha-Shem from Spain. The Life, Works, and Philosophy of Rabbi Hasdai Crescas*. Jerusalem: Shazar Center, 2020, pp. 146-150 (Hebrew).

⁶ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁷ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, pp. 40-43; I. Abravanel, *Shamayim hadashim*. Rödelheim: Wolf Heidenheim, 1828 (reprinted Jerusalem, 1966/67), p. 28a. For Cresques's discussion of eternity, see Hasdai Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem, op. cit.*, pp. 297-309; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord (Or Hashem)*. Trans. R. Weiss. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, pp. 262-271.

⁸ S. Rosenberg, "The *Arba'ah Turim* of Rabbi Abraham bar Judah, Disciple of Don Hasdai Crescas", *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, 3:4 (1983/84), p. 527; cf. also H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique of Aristotle*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929, pp. 16-18. For another discussion of changes in Cresques's views over the years, see N. Ophir, *R. Hasdai Crescas as Philosophic Exegete of Rabbinic Sources*. Diss., Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1994 (Hebrew).

⁹ I. Abravanel, *Peirush al nevi'im aharonim*. Jerusalem: Torah va-da'at, 1955/56, p. 242; reference is to D. J. Lasker, *Refutation, op. cit.*, pp. 33-36.

very valuable treatise; may God, may He be exalted, reward him for it.¹⁰

In this context, Joseph does not mention Cresques's other polemical treatise, the one based on biblical prooftexts (methodology number one in Joseph's taxonomy); nor does he give any other examples of polemicists who adopted Cresques's method. Despite Joseph's silence concerning other treatises which followed this fifth method of polemics, can we find Iberian polemicists who were influenced by Cresques's polemical method in his *Refutation of the Christian Principles*?

The interplay of polemics and dogmas was a common theme in fifteenth-century Jewish literature in Iberia, the best example of which is probably Joseph Albo's *Book of Principles*.¹¹ As noted, Albo was Cresques's student, but he did not accept many of the central features of his teacher's thought. In addition, it is the Jewish principles of faith which are at the center of Albo's work, not the Christian ones, even in the chapter (3:25) devoted to explicit anti-Christian polemics (in contrast to the implicit critique which is found throughout the book). That chapter shows the imprint of Profiat Duran's *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, rather than that of Cresques's *Refutation*.¹²

Another treatise from Iberia, if we accept Harvey Hames's analysis, is devoted to Christian and Jewish dogmas, namely, *Hoda'at ba'al din*, the "Confession of the Litigant", attributed to a David Nasi of Crete.¹³ This small composition is divided into two parts. The first takes Maimonides's thirteen principles, as encapsulated in the hymn *Yigdal Elohim Hai*, and demonstrates how each principle is supported by citations from the New Testament. The second part takes Christian principles, as encapsulated in an anti-Christian parody of *Yigdal*, and demonstrates that New Testament verses testify to the falseness of these principles. The list of Christian principles is apparently based on Profiat Duran's discussion in *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, a treatise which is specifically mentioned along with *Mahaziq Emunah* of Mordecai ben Joseph of Avignon,¹⁴ and *Ezer ha-emunah* of Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas.¹⁵

In addition, the argumentation is purely exegetical based on New Testament verses, not philosophical based on Aristotelian philosophy. There does not seem to be any influence here of Cresques' *Refutation*. In general, I think that one can see that Profiat Duran's polemical treatises, especially *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, had a much greater impact on subsequent Jewish anti-Christian polemics, in Iberia and outside it, than did Hasdai Cresques's *Refutation*. This can be seen as well in a comparison of the number of surviving manuscripts of the two treatises.¹⁶

There is another aspect of Cresques's polemical methodology which should be examined, namely the assertion that although reason cannot prove the truth of a particular religion, it can demonstrate that a religion is refuted by reason and therefore not possibly true. This methodology, based on Averroistic principles,¹⁷ is summarized in the introduction to the *Refutation*; 1) "faith will not force the intellect to believe something which leads to a contradiction;" and 2) "one cannot imagine that the divine power is able to contradict either the first intelligibles or the derivative principles which have been clearly and absolutely demonstrated since they derive from the first intelligibles."¹⁸ In other words, a religion which contradicts reason cannot be a divine religion, presumably eliminating Christianity from contention without having to prove the truth of Judaism, only that it does not contradict reason. Although Jews used philosophical arguments against Christianity from the inception of the Jewish critique of Christianity in the ninth century, this Averroistic framework was new in the late fourteenth century. It can be seen as well in the works of Joseph Albo, Abraham Bibago, Elijah del Medigo (who was not Iberian), and others.¹⁹ Was Cresques the innovator of this argument or only part of the trend? I tend to think the latter, since other polemicists who adopted this framework use language which does not seem to fit in with Cresques's *Refutation*.

In addition, Cresques's use of the vernacular was not unique. A decade or two before him Moses ha-Kohen of Tordesillas also wrote a vernacular polemic because he felt his target audience would not understand him if he wrote in Hebrew, even though he also wrote a much longer Hebrew polemic. One can assume that the conversos at the end of fourteenth century were assimilated linguistically into Iberian society. Fifty years later, those Jews who had not converted were not as assimilated, which is the reason Joseph ben Shem-Tov had to translate the *Refutation* into Hebrew for them. One hundred fifty years after that, as descendants of conversos fled from Spain and Portugal to Italy and Holland, the vernacular polemic came into

¹⁰ Joseph ben Shem-Tov, *Commentary on the Epistle; Be Not Like Your Fathers*, in the edition of Profiat Duran's *Epistle*, published by the Akademon, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1969/70, on the basis of Adolf (Zev) Poznanski manuscript, National Library of Israel, ms. Heb. 8° 757, p. 24. The *Epistle* itself can be accessed in F. Talmage, *Polemical Writings of Profiat Duran*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center/The Dinur Center, 1981 (Hebrew), pp. 73-83.

¹¹ J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim: Book of Principles*. Ed. I. Husik. 4 vols. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946.

¹² J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim*, *op. cit.*, vol III, pp. 217-245; for Duran's *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, see F. Talmage, *Polemical Writings*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-69.

¹³ D. D. Nasi, *Hoda'at Ba'al din*. Frankfurt a. M.: H. L. Brönnner, 1866; for its possible Iberian provenance, see H. J. Hames, "And on this Rock I will Build my Community": Jewish Use of the Gospel in Fifteenth-Century Spain", in M. M. Tischler and A. Fidora (eds.), *Christlicher Norden, Muslimischer Süden*. Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2011, pp. 215-226.

¹⁴ See Y. Engelberg-Cohen, *Machazik Emunah, the Reinforcer of the Faith: Rabbi Mordechai ben Joseph's Polemical Work*. Diss., New York University, 2003.

¹⁵ See Y. Shamir, *Rabbi Moses Ha-Kohen of Tordesillas and His Book 'Ezer ha-Emunah - A Chapter in the History of the Judeo-Christian Controversy - Vol. II*. Coconut Grove: Field Research Projects, Florida, 1972.

¹⁶ There are approximately ten extant manuscripts of Cresques's work; see H. Cresques, *Bittul*, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26. For the dozens of manuscripts of *Kelimmat ha-goyim*, see the on-line catalogue of Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in the National Library of Israel.

¹⁷ See D. J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends in Jewish-Christian Polemics in the Late Middle Ages", *Speculum*, 55:2 (1980), pp. 294-304.

¹⁸ D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁹ See D. J. Lasker, "Averroistic Trends", *op. cit.*, and *id.*, "Averroism, the Jewish-Christian Debate, and Mass Conversions in Iberia", in R. Haliva et al. (eds.), *Averroes and Averroism in Medieval Jewish Philosophers*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2024, pp. 185-197.

vogue, since these New Christians were not able to read Hebrew at all.²⁰ In sum, then, Hasdai Cresques's innovative anti-Christian polemic, the *Refutation of the Christian Principles*, does not seem to have had an impact on other Iberian Jewish polemicists.

We may turn now to dogmatics. As is well known, Cresques took issue with Maimonides's thirteen principles of faith, both in terms of content, e.g., he did not accept that there is a commandment to believe in God; and in form, namely that Maimonides did not posit a hierarchical difference among those principles. In contrast, Cresques argued that one cannot be commanded by God to believe in God; and that one must distinguish between roots, cornerstones, true beliefs and open questions. Thus, belief in the existence of God is a prerequisite for a divine religion, unlike, for instance, a belief in creation of the world. Judaism, and other divine religions, presuppose the roots of God's existence, unity and incorporeality. Cresques's cornerstones: God's knowledge of particulars, providence, God's power, prophecy, choice and purposefulness of the law are not necessary dogmas of Judaism, but rather beliefs the acceptance of which makes it possible to believe in revelation in general. The true beliefs are those doctrines which Judaism actually teaches, denial of which makes one a heretic. The open questions are just that – issues about which there is no clear guidance in the tradition and about which different opinions are allowable.²¹

We see, then, that Cresques's analysis of the beliefs of Judaism differs greatly from that of Maimonides. Yet, when we look at the many discussions of dogmas in fifteenth-century Iberia, which should be understood in light of the Jewish-Christian encounter,²² Cresques was pretty much ignored. Joseph Albo mentions his views, but does not advocate them, choosing instead the three central roots posited before him by Simon ben Zerah Duran, namely existence of God, divine revelation, and reward and punishment. Each one of these principles has subordinate true beliefs, conscious denial of which would make one a heretic with no place in the World to Come. Since the chronological relationship between the works of Duran and Cresques is unclear, it is hard to determine whether their hierarchical presentations of the principles are related.²³

Albo mentions his teacher a number of times, sometimes explicitly when he agrees with Cresques that the coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, and the immutability of the Torah are not separate principles of Judaism; or implicitly, when he writes that there is an opinion that the principles of Judaism are six, argues against those six principles as not sufficient for defining a divine religion, or makes the distinction between principles and true beliefs. Apparently, when Albo is critical of his teacher,

he does not mention his name specifically; when he agrees with him, he is happy to cite him as an authority.²⁴ Abraham Bibago (or Bivagch), writing around 1480, mentions in passing Cresques's view of the six principles of religion without attributing this view explicitly to Cresques. He rejects both Cresques's six principles and Albo's three, but he sees some value in Albo's presentation of the three principles as a summary of Maimonides's thirteen principles.²⁵

Bibago's discussion of the principles of Judaism and his defense of Maimonides had a great impact on Isaac Abravanel, yet in contrast to both Bibago and to Albo, Abravanel had no scruples about mentioning Hasdai Cresques by name. Abravanel was not Cresques's student, and, when he was born in Portugal in 1437, Cresques, who was from faraway Aragon, had already been dead for over two decades. In his semi-defense of Maimonides's principles, *Rosh Amanah*, Abravanel analyses both Albo's and Cresques's disagreements with Maimonides and offers refutations of their positions. Despite his defense of Maimonides, Abravanel was uncomfortable with the choosing of some beliefs as cardinal principles at the expense of other beliefs, and he taught that if one were to choose principle beliefs, the only true principle would be creation of the world. Yet, he saw pedagogical value in Maimonides's thirteen principles, value which would be lost if one were to accept Cresques's or Albo's critiques.²⁶

We see, therefore, that Cresques's critique of the Maimonidean principles, and their substitution with a totally new framework of discussion, did not have resonance, even among his students and the generations who lived after him in Iberia. In addition, those who are familiar with the Jewish prayer book know that there are two renditions of Maimonides's thirteen principles intended for daily recitation, but no rendition of Cresques's principles. That represents the ultimate victory of Maimonides in the realm of dogmatism.

What about Cresques's innovative and creative philosophy, a philosophy which is at heart a conservative reaction to Maimonides and Gersonides, and, thus, could be expected to be popular in fifteenth-century Sepharad? Here, too, the naysayers outnumbered those who adopted Cresques's philosophy. When Harry Wolfson wrote his classical book on Cresques a hundred years ago, he thought that Cresques had changed the whole direction of philosophy, and the abandonment of Aristotelianism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, by mostly non-Jewish thinkers, gave support to Wolfson's theory.²⁷ Since then, however, the research of such scholars like Zev Harvey has demonstrated that Cresques was not as original a thinker as Wolfson supposed, and he had

²⁰ D. J. Lasker, "Polemical Activity", *op. cit.*, pp. 146-149.

²¹ For Cresques's dogmatics, see M. Kellner, *Dogma in Medieval Jewish Thought*. Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986, pp. 108-139.

²² See D. J. Lasker, "Principles of Religion, Interfaith Polemics and Communal Leadership in Fifteenth-Century Spain", in N. Ilan et al. (eds.), *Studies of Leadership Phenomenon in Jewish Communities during the Middle Ages. A Jubilee Festschrift on the Occasion of the Seventieth Birthday of Prof. Menachem Ben-Sasson*. Jerusalem: Magnes, 2023, pp. 329-342 (Hebrew).

²³ See M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 83-107; 140-156.

²⁴ See, e.g., J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim, op. cit.*, vol. I, pp. 36, 61, 200; vol. II, pp. 106-108; vol. III, p. 148.

²⁵ See A. Bibago, *Derekh Emunah*. Constantinople, 1522 (reprinted, Jerusalem: Sifriyyat Mekorot, 1970), p. 102b; for Bibago's discussion of the principles of Judaism, see M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 165-178.

²⁶ See I. Abravanel, *Principles of Faith (Rosh Amanah)*. Trans. M. Kellner. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982. For Abravanel's relation to Cresques, see p. 269 index, s.v. "Crescas, Hasdai". Abravanel's theory of principles of Judaism is discussed as well in M. Kellner, *Dogma, op. cit.*, pp. 179-195.

²⁷ H. A. Wolfson, *Crescas' Critique, op. cit.*, pp. 34-37; 114-127.

Christian contemporaries who were also attacking Aristotelianism and influenced those Christian thinkers who came after them.²⁸ So, Wolfson's grandiose portrayal of the Jew Hasdai Cresques as the thinker responsible for non-Aristotelian philosophy and physics in the early modern period, at a time when anti-semitism and prejudice against Jews and Judaism were rampant, was probably exaggerated.²⁹ What, however, can be said about Iberian Jewish philosophers who came after Cresques?

We can begin with Cresques's own circle of students. This circle was active in editing his works and propagating his thought. Yet, as Ari Ackerman, who has studied this circle, has remarked: "None of them accepted wholesale [Cresques's] revolutionary scientific, philosophic and theological conceptions." Nonetheless, in Ackerman's evaluation, "they discussed, developed, and – to a certain degree – internalized (far more than among other subsequent Jewish philosophers)".³⁰ The most prominent of these students, who are not exactly household names in either the Jewish tradition or academia, was Joseph Albo, who, as pointed out, generally cited Cresques by name only in the few instances where he agreed with him. Albo's thought is an attempt at synthesizing all the various trends of Jewish philosophy which preceded him (in addition to proposing a theory of principles of Judaism as a method of attacking Christianity and maintaining Jewish identity and solidarity). Cresques's role in this synthesis is minor. A good example of Cresques's impact on one aspect of Albo's thought was the latter's definition of time, as Zev Harvey has demonstrated.³¹

If even his students were not convinced by Cresques's revolutionary thought, we should not expect very much sympathy on the part of non-students, and, indeed, we do not find much in common between Cresques and his fifteenth-century Iberian successors. Some of them were aware of his thought, however, as seen in a comment by Joseph ben Shem-Tov in the section of the *Refutation* in which Cresques attacks the doctrine of positive divine attributes as a stand-in for the Christian trinity. Just as in the case of Averroistic arguments against eternal creation, adopted in the *Refutation*, but rejected in *Or Hashem*, here, too, there is an ostensible contradiction between the treatises. Joseph ben Shem-Tov remarks on the contradiction concerning arguments for and against eternal creation, and, as mentioned, he solves the dilemma by positing a change in Cresques's mind caused by reading Averroes. In the case of positive,

divine attributes, Joseph informs us that there were some scholars (*qezat maskilim*) who had objected to Cresques's theory of positive, essential attributes in *Or Hashem* by use of arguments which were very similar to those used by Cresques in the *Refutation*. Joseph does not tell us whether those objectors were familiar with the *Refutation*, only that their arguments against Cresques were similar to the ones he used in the polemical work. Who these scholars were is not made clear; but it does indicate that Cresques's philosophical work was read and criticized. For his part, Joseph does not recognize a contradiction, distinguishing between attributes, usually translated *te'arim*, and Persons of the Trinity, also often called *te'arim* in polemical literature. Joseph suggests that if Persons had been translated correctly as *parzufim*, there would not have been this confusion.³² Interestingly enough, the Hebrew *parzuf*, used in Rabbinic literature to mean face, is derived from the Greek *prosopon*, the term the Greek Church used for the Persons of the Trinity. It should be noted that even into the present, Jews and Christians have both had difficulty coming up with agreed upon Hebrew terminology for the basic Christian doctrines.³³

Among fifteenth-century Iberian philosophical critics of Hasdai Cresques, perhaps the best known is Abraham Shalom, even though his work *Neve Shalom* ("The Dwelling Place of Peace"), has not had much resonance, either in the traditional community or in academia. His philosophical work was published only once, almost 500 years ago (with two somewhat recent photo offset editions).³⁴ This treatise is devoted mostly to a defense of Maimonides against his two most prominent critics, Gersonides and Hasdai Cresques. Shalom adopts some of Cresques's conservative stances, but, in general he sides with Maimonides.³⁵ In mid-fifteenth century Iberia, Cresques's philosophy might have been alive, but it certainly was not doing very well.

This brief survey indicates that Hasdai Cresques's descent into relative oblivion already began in Sepharad in the century after his death. He had a reputation as a philosopher and polemicist, but not much more than that. There were no prominent followers who adopted either his philosophical or his polemical methodology. Originals of his vernacular compositions were lost; he was attacked rather than praised. By the time of the expulsion, not many Jewish thinkers mentioned him, other than Isaac Abravanel, who was critical of his dogmatics. Over the centuries, both *Or Hashem* and the *Refutation* were printed, but with little impact on the traditional community, leaving his legacy to the academia.

²⁸ See, e.g., W. Z. Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas*. Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998, pp. 23-29; id., "Bernat Metge and Hasdai Crescas: A Conversation", in F. Wallis and R. Wisnovsky (eds.), *Medieval Textual Cultures*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016, pp. 77-84; id., "Nicole Oresme and Hasdai Crescas on Many Worlds (with an Appendix on Gersonides and Gerald Odonis)", in R. Fontaine et al. (eds.), *Studies in the History of Culture and Science: A Tribute to Gad Freudenthal*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2011, pp. 347-359.

²⁹ On Cresques's attraction for Wolfson, see W. Z. Harvey, "Wolfson's Pragmatic Crescas", *Journal of Textual Reasoning*, 13:1 (2022).

³⁰ A. Ackerman, *Hasdai Crescas on Codification, Cosmology and Creation*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022, p. 65.

³¹ J. Albo, *Sefer ha-'ikkarim*, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 108-115; W. Harvey, "Albo's Discussion of Time", *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 70:4 (1980), pp. 210-23.

³² D. J. Lasker, *Refutation*, *op. cit.*, pp. 46-47; for Cresques's discussion of attributes, see H. Cresques, *Sefer Or Ha-Shem*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-115; H. Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-114.

³³ See D. J. Lasker, "Christian Concepts in Hebrew – The Trinity as an Example", *Leshonenu*, 75:2-3 (2013), pp. 239-250 (Hebrew).

³⁴ A. Shalom, *Sefer Neve Shalom*. Venice, 1574/75 (reprinted, Jerusalem, 1965/65; Farnborough: Gregg International Publishers, 1969).

³⁵ H. A. Davidson, *The Philosophy of Abraham Shalom: A Fifteenth-Century Exposition and Defence of Maimonides*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

Some segments of the traditional Jewish world have objected strongly to the academic study of Judaism for its critical approach to what are considered sacred texts. It is impossible to know how Rabbi Hasdai Cresques, a strong defender of the traditional Jewish world, would have reacted to *Wissenschaft des Judentums*. One thing is certain though. It is because of academic Jewish Studies that the name of Hasdai Cresques has not fallen into complete oblivion and the message he presented to Iberian Jewry in its hour of political and intellectual crisis has not been lost.

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