

The *Declaración* by Maestre Juan el Viejo

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Resumen. La Declaración de Maestre Juan el Viejo es una obra inédita del s. XV adscribible al género de la polémica judeo-cristiana. No se trata de una miscelánea indefinida, sino de un texto muy estructurado en torno a un capítulo específico de los Salmos, el salmo 72, que es comentado versículo a versículo. Su fecha no puede ser anterior a la del Memorial. Considerarla como “típica” evoca toda una problemática, surgida en el siglo XIX, acerca de las tipologías conversas. La mayoría de las fuentes cristianas del tratado parecen convencionales e incluso formularias. La mayoría de los lectores de Juan evitan analizar lo que es la característica más sostenida de sus obras: el elemento arameo y hebraico, aquello que Juan denomina como los sabidores. Es posible que haya un problema de fuentes intermediarias no reconocidas, pero también hay una práctica proto-filológica en un autor que evita recurrir únicamente a traducciones bíblicas y que confronta diferentes versiones. Su interpretación mesiánica/cristológica parece tradicional pero es coherente con las preocupaciones de sus contemporáneos. Detrás de sus argumentos y formulaciones se puede discernir ecos de lo que él denomina como una vida dedicada al estudio de la “Vieja ley”.

Palabras clave: Conversos; Polémica judeo-cristiana; Salmos.

[es] La *Declaración* de Maestre Juan el Viejo

Abstract. The *Declaración*, by the converso Juan el Viejo, is an unpublished fifteenth century work in the genre of the Judeo-Christian polemic. It is not an indistinct miscellany but a highly structured work on a well defined text: Psalm 72, which it interprets verse by verse. The *Declaración* cannot be earlier than the same author’s Memorial. Views of Juan as “typical”, as a “type”, recall some of the problematics of converso typology since the nineteenth century. Most of the ideas from Christian sources in Juan seem to be conventional if not formulaic. Most readers of Juan avoid dealing with – the major consistent trait of his works– the Aramaic and Hebrew components; what Juan calls the “sabidores”. While there is the problem of unacknowledged intermediate sources there is also a proto philological bent in an author who avoids drawing purely on biblical translations and who confronts different versions. His Messianic/Christological bent is part of a tradition of reading that particular text but it coheres with his contemporaries’ predilections. Behind his arguments and formulations it is possible to detect unsuspected echoes of what he calls a life spent studying the “Old law”.

Keywords: Conversos; Judeo-Christian Polemic; Psalms.

Sumario. 1. Introduction. 2. The Author. 3. The converso. 4. Metamorphoses. 5. Conclusion. 6. Bibliography.

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fervoroso converso, que emplea en todos sus escritos el habla castellana, tan elegante y esmerado como el de los prelados y eruditos que florecían a la sazón en la corte de Castilla: sencillo, castizo, menos intrincado que el de los latinistas, podía no obstante ser de todos fácilmente comprendido².

1. Introduction³

Once shunned as an age of decline, the late medieval period now moves to the center of the attention of historians facing the challenge of increased texts and documents. In the case of medieval Hispano-Jewish history, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries offer an embarrassment of riches in terms of evidence, texts and documents concerning Judeo-Christian disputations and polemics. We are beginning to realize more fully the significance of their variety and the differences amongst them: some are public, others private, some ideas seem exclusive to men, others are voiced by women also⁴, some near the dialogic imagination⁵ others tend towards the monologue and authority. Some appear in exegesis and age-old genres, others are expressed in vernacular poetry, in parody, satire (and, a little later, *literatura de cordel*), in epistles⁶ or in non-textual modes. Visual representations, for example, are themselves divisible into several discrete types including caricatures but also expensive oil paintings, retablos, MS illuminations or ivories⁷. Some evidence suggests that polemics were present in the field of theatre long before the well-known cases of the Siglo de Oro. Some are by unknown authors, others are by individuals of documented power in their society. Some have had intellectual influence, while others have not been followed. Some have been the subject of interest and analysis since at least the nineteenth century, others are the product of more recent original discoveries. To establish some kind of “place”, character or *persona* for the converso Maestre Juan el Viejo de Toledo and his unpublished polemic *Declaracion* against this background of diversity and contradiction is the purpose of the following lines⁸.

² Amador de los Ríos, *Estudios históricos*, pp. 430-436.

³ Abbreviations: BNE = Biblioteca Nacional de España; BUS = Biblioteca de la Universidad de Salamanca; HSA = Hispanic Society of America; RAH = Real Academia de la Historia.

⁴ Gutwirth, “Gender, History and the Judeo-Christian polemic”, pp.257-278; Ram Ben-Shalom, “Between official and private dispute”, pp. 23-72

⁵ For the significance of dialogue in an Hispano-Jewish text such as the *Shevet yehuda* see Gutwirth, “The expulsion”, pp. 141-161; for other specific dialogic texts see for example *idem*, “Pero Ferruz” pp. 43-67; Martínez de Bedoya, *La segunda parte del “Scrutinium scripturarum”*. The archetypal dialogic text is of the twelfth century: Yehudah Ha Levi’s *Kuzari*. For the value of later readings of it see Shear, *The Kuzari*.

⁶ Gutwirth, “Pablo de Sta Maria”.

⁷ Relevant to the late Middle Ages is an ivory at the Wallace Collection (inv. S246), a *Diptych with scenes of the Passion* from late 13th century France. One of its panels depicts the figure of Synagoga in the conventional fashion with blindfold, holding the Tablets of the Law and symbolizing the polemical theology of supersession. At the Toledo Cathedral treasure, an ivory [formerly part of a diptych] depicting Synagoga with a broken staff has been dated to the fifteenth century. For this last example see Estella Marcos, *La escultura de marfil*, pp. 216-217, fig. 49.

⁸ For further introductory remarks on polemics and conversos see García-Arenal and Pereda Espeso “Confesionalidad y disidencia religiosa”, pp. 109-148; García-Arenal, “Introduction”, in *After conversion; idem*, “Introduction”, in *Interreligious*, pp. 1-13.

2. The Author

Until relatively recently, references to Maestre Juan el Viejo de Toledo came mainly from the field of cataloging and bibliography. That is to say that, apart from descriptions of the physical MS codices, they transmit the older bibliographers' views as far back as the seventeenth century. Even Baer relies on Nicolas Antonio (1617-1684) as an authority⁹. It would be interesting to ponder whether, in any other scholarly field, seventeenth century bibliographers are still considered the ultimate authorities on fifteenth century authors and texts. Although concerned with the *Memorial* and not the *Declaración* they may be mentioned as the author is the same.

This has involved numerous bio-bibliographic problems on the one hand and less attention to content on the other hand. Some of these problems affect the more basic, elementary data: he is said to have been born in Villamartín, as if there were only one Villamartín, when in fact there were a number of settlements with that name (e.g. near Cádiz, Orense, Palencia, Leon, Burgos). This could be iconic of the approach to the subject. Again, despite fantastic elucubrations on medieval nicknames, "El Viejo" does not imply that there is a Juan "el Mozo" or "el Joven" proving the existence of two authorial Juanes. The problems are evident in the numerous speculations, such as for example: his being the father of the translator of the *Guide*, Pero Díaz de Toledo (born ca. 1410, possibly in Seville) (fathered by Juan at the age of more than 60?); his relations with Enrique de Villena, or Jerónimo de Santa Fe; his being the dedicatee of Botarel's commentary on *Sefer Yesira. Memorial*, the title of one of his works, is not, as imagined, an invention of the bibliographers. In his *Declaración* he refers explicitly to his other work as *Memorial*¹⁰.

We do know that in 1411 he was present –on the occasion of Vicente Ferrer's sermon on circumcision– in San Martín de la Vega, which he seems to see as Toledan. He also notes in the *Memorial* that the Jews of Toledo were present. Allusions to his old age (*el Viejo*) are part of the self presentation of the author¹¹. In the *Declaración* he tells us explicitly and repeatedly that he is old. Indeed, he expects to die soon: "Partiendo mi alma de aqui a poco tiempo segund mi edad"¹². This frequent mention of his age makes one wonder how this writing on age coheres with other writings of the period. A famous fifteenth century verse about (his near contemporary, the Aragonese poet) Solomon de Piera's conversion produces other texts about conversos "age"¹³. There are certain similarities to Villasandino's treatment of the converso Shmuel in his poem in the *Cancionero de Baena*¹⁴. The invective, based on age, in the poem against De Piera is paralleled by the attention to Shmuel's age in Villasandino's

⁹ Baer, *A History*, vol. 2, p. 476: "Maestre Juan el Viejo de Toledo's book is in the National Library in Madrid, MS. no. 9369 (Bb 128)". For further information on Maestre Juan, see Antonio, *Bibliotheca Hispana Vetus*, vol. 2, p. 209: "Maestre Juan's book was written in 1416".

¹⁰ All references are to the Hispanic Society MS HC380/502: Maestre Juan el Viejo, *Declaración del salmo 72 Que es venido nro Salvador*. My thanks to the Hispanic Society of America.

¹¹ One wonders whether the nickname "el Viejo" is not a later response to his focus on his advanced age in his *Declaración* rather than a real name.

¹² HSA, MS HC380/502, ff. 160r-v.

¹³ Baer, *A History*, vol. 2, p. 216: "The daughter of Tyre hath been forgot. Such is the fate of the harlot. She seizeth the drum and cirleth the town and hopeth thereby to come into renown: Even so thy soul which whoreth and strayeth away from God, and disobeyeth. Therefore art thou forgot forever, *Thy seventy years have been as never*. Take thee thy harp, O whore, and walk the city; perchance thou shalt be hired–out of pity!"

¹⁴ *Cancionero de Baena*, nº 140.

dino's invective: "fuestes judio quarenta años o mas"¹⁵. The question of age is also interesting because Villasandino is –and presents himself as– "old" in his poetry and raises the question of self-invective, irony and realism.

Declaración here is not the usual "Declaration" but rather *aclaración* i.e. interpretation or commentary without particular connotations of polemics¹⁶. At this date, this usage is reminiscent of the language of the *biblias romanceadas* (depending ultimately on access to the Hebrew) such as the fifteenth century *Biblia romanceada* at the RAH on Dan: 4:1: "Respondio el rrey & dixo: O baltasaçar el sueño & su Declaración non te turben. Respondio Belthasaçar & dixo: O señor el sueño sea a tus aborresçedores & su Declaración a tus enemjgos". What Belshazar sought was an interpretation of his dream, a *Declaración* and not a Declaration or polemics.

The *Declaración* is sometimes dated to 1400¹⁷ while the *Memorial* is ascribed to 1416. What can be said with certainty is that the *Declaración* cannot be earlier than the *Memorial*. The *Declaración* is not mentioned in the *Memorial*. The *Memorial* is mentioned in the *Declaración* as a previous, concluded work by the author:

E qualquier que quisiere vera muchas pruebas e muchas autoridades ansi de los dichos de nuestro Señor Jesu Christo en los santos evangelios como en las obras que obro e los Milagros que fizo. Eso mesmo de los Sabidores mesmos del Talmud en como el rey mesias habia de ser verdadero Dios e verdadero ome nascido de la Virgen (...) Vealo en el libro del Memorial¹⁸.

Or, elsewhere: "E en el memorial fable que significaba este candelero"¹⁹.

More recently there has been a turn towards the study of the contents, cultural significance and history of religious ideas of the *Memorial*²⁰. This has been followed somewhat later by further attention to the contents and, some months ago, by a recent edition of the previously unpublished text of the *Memorial*²¹. They are worthy of mention because they contrast with bibliographies by attending to the subject matter of Juan el Viejo's work. Although not generally concerned with the *Declaración*, attention to such recent studies may inform us as to the directions of research on Juan. J. San José Lera²² sees the antagonistic marginal glosses in the Salamanca MS²³ of the *Declaración* as typical of negative attitudes to theology written in the vernacular, while Juan el Viejo's expressions of self-doubt are taken literally –not as expressions of *humilitas*– and interpreted as the vernacular theologian's awareness of limitations. That is to say that Amador's approach –comparisons between Juan and the "latinistas"– is being revisited or revived. Nevertheless, these vernacular glosses to Juan's work, while certainly antagonistic as rightly noted by San José Lera, seem to

¹⁵ *Idem*.

¹⁶ Gómez Canseco, "En torno a la atribución", pp. 39-52. Francisco de Borja has no polemical intentions in his commentary.

¹⁷ Acosta Elías, "*El Memorial*", p.18. The thesis is about the *Memorial* not the *Declaración*.

¹⁸ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 137r.

¹⁹ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 146r.

²⁰ Gutwirth, "The *Memorial*", pp. 129–134.

²¹ Acosta Elías, "*El Memorial*".

²² San José Lera, "Límites ideológicos".

²³ BUSA, MS1736.

lack substance, whether theological or otherwise²⁴. For Adeline Rucquoi, there is an “obsession” with original sin in fifteenth century Spain. It leads to thinking about the original *macula* and *limpieza*²⁵. Juan’s *Memorial* is, for her, a prime representative. In the artwork of Toledo’s Cathedral²⁶, following St. Michael, Seth looks at Eden, where he sees a tree with an infant in its branches and a head in its roots. This feature is linked by Tom Nickson to Juan’s *Memorial*, where the child in the tree prefigured Christ. For Robinson, who tries to reconstruct the *ambiente* from which sprang a *retablo*, Juan represents “the Converso Viewer”²⁷. The converso Juan el Viejo de Toledo argued that baptism could wash away the sins of idolatry and pays important attention to the Descent into Limbo.

3. The *converso*

These approaches see Juan as representative. Such views of Juan as “typical”, as a “type”, recall some of the problematics of converso typology since the nineteenth century. They show how difficult it is to accept one converso, such as Maestre Juan, as “typical” of the (possibly 200000) conversos. Socio-economic aspirations, Averroism, *credo quia absurdum* are some of the best known, different and differing theories of the causes of conversion and converso typologies. It has been argued that on the basis of such methodologies it could be shown that there is continuity in their writings and critiques of religious authority with similar ideas current in their original Jewish communities²⁸. Other typologies refer to southern vs northern conversos, to other regional differences²⁹, to the gender factor³⁰, to “generations” and dates of conversion. The problem is exacerbated by the question of the status of sources which present themselves as “testimonies” of observers of fifteenth century conversos. Two opposed examples may suffice: Andres Bernáldez and don Ishaq Abravanel.

Bernaldez’ image oscillates between that of a folksy southerner or as having some kind of grand project of religious meaning of history. Gil’s analysis³¹ may lead to a more down to earth, realistic perspective. He draws attention to Bernáldez’ inspiration in the notarial work of his father. Bernáldez claims to know “the converso type” in all its manifestations, from religious faith down to odors and food preferences. Research has shown the highly derivative quality of such “knowing” and such “testimonies” and the importance of taking into account the factor of the textual sources available to him. It concludes that literary, theological and political motivations,

²⁴ “esto es mucho decir”, “no dice tal sino...”, “esta no es sana doctrina cristiana”, “no se puede hazer tal”, “que no”, “decir otra cosa es desatino”, “es muy falso”.

²⁵ Rucquoi, “Mancilla y limpieza”, pp.113-135. She notes that “sin ser teólogo, en 1416 ya, en su *Apología del cristianismo contra los judíos*, maestre Juan el Viejo de Toledo había dedicado largos párrafos al tema de la «mancilla» del pecado”, BNE, Mss. 4306, ff. 13v, 49, 50v-51.

²⁶ Nickson, “Toledo Cathedral”, pp.71-89.

²⁷ Robinson, “Preaching to the converted”, pp. 112-163.

²⁸ Gutwirth, “*Conversions to Christianity*” pp. 103-121.

²⁹ For regional differences in the insertion in fraternities and guilds of the judeoconversos see the work of Narbona, “Oficios y conversos”.

³⁰ Gutwirth, “Gender, History”, pp. 257-278.

³¹ Gil, “Escribanos historiadores”, pp. 1167-1175.

rather than the observation of reality, can explain his attitudes to conversos and to Jews³².

His contemporary, don Isaac Abravanel, again, writes as an observer and witness to converso fate but, as Ben Shalom has explained, he is motivated by messianic beliefs rather than the observation of reality³³. Carlos Sainz de la Maza has uncovered intricate variants of converso “types”, particularly in the converso treatises of the Salamanca MS³⁴, –possibly from the circles of Alvaro de Luna– edited by Lazar³⁵. Thus *e.g.*, one treatise is basically a “conversion” of the ancient Jewish *Ethics of the Fathers* where the Jewish character of the ancient treatise is “converted” mostly by the simple expedient of erasing the names of the rabbinical authors/authorities of the dicta. This shows the existence of yet another type of converso who acts unlike the others. And yet this “conversion” of texts by (partial) erasure of sources or authors is quite common in the *Declaración*. That is to say that, long before the sixteenth century, this is a procedure which exists amongst conversos.

Most of the ideas from Christian sources in Juan seem to be conventional if not formulaic, a sensation reinforced by the studies mentioned above, which scrupulously refer to their antecedents or sources. Mostly, they avoid dealing with –the major consistent trait of his works– the Aramaic and Hebrew components; what Juan calls the “*sabidores*”. To be sure, from a distance, the act of drawing on Hebrew and Aramaic biblical, postbiblical and medieval Jewish texts in anti-Jewish polemics by *ca.* 1416 might seem less than novel. The well-known and frequently studied precedents in Petrus Alphonsi, the *Extractiones*, the *Pugio* or Alfonso de Valladolid do offer a general sense of tradition. Indeed, Baer had drawn attention to Abner of Burgos as a source of Pablo of Burgos³⁶. Sadiq has studied intensively Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid and also his relation to the *Pugio*³⁷. So that there would seem to be a reason to see Juan’s precedents as constituting a tradition of converso anti-Jewish polemics. In the *Memorial* he refers once to Petrus Alphonsi “el gran sabidor”. He also refers once to Tortosa.

Nevertheless, Juan does not refer to converso polemicists as his masters; there is no acknowledgement in the *Declaración* of such a tradition, nor particularly prominent or noticeable citations from it by name or title. His way of referring to Tortosa does not sound like the words of someone who is informed about the theological arguments at its sessions let alone like a disciple of Ha-Lorqi. In addition, the present day direction seems to focus on more specific questions.

One of the specific features is the presence of Juan’s works in the libraries of significant personages and institutions. The data could have been known early on. Clemencin’s *Elogio* had already mentioned an item in the library of Isabel la Católica: “63. Otro libro pequeño en papel de romance de mano que es una obra de maestre Juan el viejo: las cubiertas blancas”³⁸. Paz y Meliá published an inventory of the library founded by the Count of Haro in 1455³⁹. It included Maestre Juan el Vie-

³² Gutwirth, “The Jews in 15th century Castilian chronicles”, pp. 379-396.

³³ Ben Shalom, “The typology of the converso”, pp. 281-292.

³⁴ Sainz de la Maza, “Abot de los conversos”, pp. 86-104.

³⁵ Lazar, *Sēfer Tešubāh*.

³⁶ Baer, *Historia*, vol. 2, p. 421.

³⁷ Sadiq, “Crescas’ Critique of Aristotle”, pp. 133-155; *idem*, “Al ha-shimush shel Avner mi-Burgos”, pp. 93-122; *idem*, “The definition of place”, pp. 233-246; *idem*, “Les opinions du rebelle”, pp.119-131; *idem*, “Abner de Burgos and the Transfer”, pp. 95-112.

³⁸ Clemencin, *Elogio de la Reina Católica*.

³⁹ Paz y Meliá, “Biblioteca fundada por el Conde de Haro”, pp. 255-262.

jo's work. In 1443, the Monastery of San Pablo in Valladolid achieved a copy of a book by him by order of fray Juan de Santa Maria⁴⁰. To be sure, the protagonism of the monastery is associated with the converso Juan de Torquemada's slightly later (1445-1468) and tireless efforts to reconstruct it. But at the same time we might ask whether this sense of the monastery's significance was developed from one day to the next. In any case the evidence does not support the narrative that the books were read only by his children. There are certain references to books and reading in the *Declaración* which go beyond the commonplace. He refers to his own books of "the Talmud" and how he gave them to his sons because he is old and no longer needs "the Talmud". This ambiguous attitude is not the expected way of addressing a main source of his writings, a source authored by those he calls *sabidores*.

This is somewhat reminiscent of Pablo de Sta Maria's pronouncement in Hebrew that he is no longer interested in (or has no time for) writing in correct Hebrew. Evidently their historical situation in fifteenth century Spain mandated some kind of negotiation between twin and conflicting aims. One was a claim to preeminence or superiority in exegesis and polemics because of Aramaic/Hebraic, Talmud and Midrash mastery (obtained in their Jewish phase from Jewish teachers) while the other was a vociferous repudiation of their previous faith⁴¹. Elsewhere, Juan asserts the value of reading and study as if these were Christian religious precepts or duties as in Deut. 6:7: "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way". This notion of "teach them (...) talk of them" seems to be echoed in Juan's assertion: "Yo *fablando e estudiando* en la su sta fe...". He avers that while he is engaged in writing and study *el mensagero*/death will not trouble him.

His emphasis on messianism could be interpreted in a number of ways. The messianic idea and its calculations, from at least the eleventh century and onwards, is one of the most studied aspects of the history of Jewish thought in medieval Spain. In contrast with such an exceedingly broad canvas it is possible to argue for a historical context closer to Juan's period and activities. Visual materials such as the illuminations of—mostly late medieval—Hebrew/Jewish MSS from Spain containing representations of Temple utensils are routinely interpreted as showing the messianic yearnings of the period. Of a similar period is the focus on the issue of whether the Messiah had arrived or not, at the disputation which was carried out at Tortosa, San Mateo and Peñíscola beginning on 7/2/1413. Equally relevant is the continuity of these ideas amongst the conversos, documented well into the 1500s.

Juan says that he writes for his children. They are Christians—as can be seen from the contents of his work. He is teaching them how to respond to the Jews. That is to say that, at least according to his words, this is a work written for a defined public

⁴⁰ See the colophon of BUS, MS 1736: "Este libro mando faser frey Juan de Sta. Maria frayre del monasterio de Sant Pablo de Valladolid et acabose a doce del mes de junio ano de mil e quatrocientos et quarenta e tres anos". See Acosta, "El Memorial", pp. 40-41.

⁴¹ See statements by Juan such as "por quanto los judios estan en esperança por esta postura enlo qual tienen locura" or "Pues para mjentes fijo como dixo aquí que aborresçera mj alma a vos. // Pues quando ellos andudiessen en la tierra delos sus enemigos los aujan de aborresçer dios // ca asi esta escripto /" or "los judios cegaron y no lo vieron conocer ni creer ni oy en dia lo creen por donde son perdidos y condempnados sus cuerpos y sus almas ca lo tiene bien claro en su ley mesma". Their conventional character does not disqualify them: on the contrary. For elements of anti-talmudic, and anti-midrashic criticism in the writings of some converts e.g. Alfonso de Zamora see for example Gutwirth, "Conversions to Christianity", pp. 97-121.

in a defined situation. He expects Jews to argue with his sons in the future, but *ca.* 1416 no such arguments had yet taken place: “[p]ara agora bien mjentes e entiende esta razon sobre dicha que es aquí es el fundimjento en que te has de fundar quando los judios te allegaren”. It is a text addressed to his sons by a father who intends to edify them. Dedicating or addressing treatises or writings to sons is by no means a “peculiar” custom of Jewish fathers. As this has been seen as a feature of Juan’s *Memorial*⁴² and it reappears in the *Declaración*, it is worth noting McKeown’s reminder: “A custom all but unknown to the Greeks was introduced by the Romans: Cato, Livy, the elder Seneca, Quintilian, Apuleius, Macrobius and even St Augustin dedicate books to their sons”⁴³. It was, of course, a medieval Jewish custom as well, and one need only mention the genre of *Ethical wills*, Samuel the Naggid’s poems addressed to his son Joseph or Nahmanides epistles to his sons in Spain. But there are also parallels much closer to the original community, age and area of maestre Juan in the genre of Hebrew epithalamia. Such is the case of Isaac b Solomon Alhadeb’s epistolary poems (*ca.* 1400?) addressed to his sons. In one of them, the son is advised to devote himself to learning. This includes a broad range of subjects from calligraphy to astronomy, Greek philosophy, poetry. He also advises him on honesty in commerce, avoiding gossip, cultivating modesty⁴⁴.

The subject of the *Declaración* is Psalm 72. Juan sees it as messianic: “Este rey es el rey mexias”. The Messia is the Christ. As with other royal Psalms, the messianic interpretation becomes clear when reading the numerous commentaries. As Marcel Poorthuis emphasizes, messianic readings of Psalm 72 constitute such an old tradition that they may antedate the rise of Christianity⁴⁵. It was a tradition of reading in antiquity and the Middle Ages. Juan’s statement “Romanzo el caldeo mas fermoso eres Rey Mexias” shows that he is aware of some very early predecessors.

Juan divides the *Declaración* into sections which correspond to the division of the Psalm 72 into verses. That is to say that he sees the verse division (whatever its date) as meaningful. But in the citation of other biblical books, he often refers only to the chapter but not the verse: “Profeta Joel cap 4 (...). Otrosi profeta Sofonias cap 3 (...). Profeta Micheas cap 6”⁴⁶. Sometimes, when citing a Talmudic passage, he refers to “Talmud” without following the medieval Jewish convention of giving the title of the chapter and the title of the Tractate. Thus, for example, one of his opening arguments is that the mention of Solomon at the beginning of Psalm 72 refers not to king Solomon but to God. He bases himself on “el Talmud” without specifying the title of the chapter or the Tractate:

dice el Talmud que en todo el libro del canticum do quiera que nombra salomon quiere decir el rey cuya es la paz el qual es Dios (...) en ese salmo mesmo en el titulo del en hebrayco comienza a Salomon Dios los juizios da al rey⁴⁷.

⁴² Gutwirth, “The *Memorial* of Maestre Juan el Viejo”, pp. 129-134.

⁴³ McKeown, *A Cabinet*, p. X.

⁴⁴ Sasson, “On «Two nuptial poems»”, pp. 85-86; Kahana, “Ish Mahir”, pp. 350-358. In his treatment of Alhadeb’s works he does not mention the wedding poem.

⁴⁵ Poorthuis, “King Solomon and Psalm 72”, p. 257. It is possibly interesting that in the Spain of those decades, Juan, Villena, and Matityahu were all directing their efforts at writing commentaries on a chosen, single Psalm.

⁴⁶ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 137.

⁴⁷ Taken from bShevuot 35b.

These inconsistencies lead one to wonder about intermediary sources⁴⁸. At the same time, he shows a proto-philological bent in some readings. There is a constant practice of translation into the *romance* of the Hebrew bible rather than versions. This extends to comparisons between Jerome's translation and implied commentary and that of Rashi on Ps 72:6⁴⁹:

Comiença el sexto verso descendera ansi como la llubia sobre el vellocino e ansi como las gotas que descendera a faltar la tierra el sol. Geronimo romanço ansi como la llubia sobre el vellocino e rabbi Solomon romanço sobre la yerba e el vocablo segund el ebrayco bien puede entender lo uno e lo otro⁵⁰.

Similarly, he confronts the Masoretic Text with the Vulgate: “este verso esta escrito en todos los salterios hebraicos non lo falle en los libros del latin”⁵¹. He does not specify when and where he examined “todos los salterios hebraicos” or whether he still had in his possession such “salterios hebraicos”. Here again, we find the intended message of his mastery and ability to access biblical/liturgical texts without openly admitting that the confrontation of (all the) Hebrew Psalters in Toledo *ca.* 1420 was not customary amongst Old Christians or latinists. But he certainly assumes the significance or importance of confronting different textual traditions. If we take him at his word, he has confronted different MSS of the Psalter, Hebrew and Latin in order to arrive at some conclusion about the original text.

4. Metamorphoses

In this vein one might attend to the metamorphoses of the source in the vernacular treatise. An example would be the case of *Midrash Qohelet*:

Dice en un libro que es llamado midras cohelet que el pecado de adam fue causa a que fuese todo el humanal linage condemnado por el e fase tal ejemplo ansi como si una muger que era encinta la pusieron en carcel e pario estando en la carcel e crio la criatura estando aun en la carcel e a cabo de tiempo paso el Rey por la puerta de la carcel e pasando el Rey comenzo a dar voces disciendo al rey senor yo aqui nasci aqui me crie yo que peque pues me tienen en la carcel dijo el rey por pecado de tu madre e ansi esta puesto adam en la carcel los fijos que del nascieron captivos nacieron⁵².

⁴⁸ An example comes from Montoza Coca's study of Martin Garcia's sermons. They are from the early sixteenth century, a time in which some believe that Christian Hebraists had full access to Aramaic and Hebrew sources. And yet as he clearly points out: “esta práctica de citar pasajes supuestamente a partir de la fuente original pero mediante una obra intermediaria también se aplica a las referencias que Martín García hace al Talmud. Ciertamente, el hecho de localizar primero los pasajes en el Pugio fidei o en la Victoria adversus hebreos nos ha facilitado en gran medida el poder localizar la fuente original. En este caso se trata de dos referencias a Rashi y otras dos al tratado Sanhedrin del Talmud de Babilonia”. Montoza Coca, “Los sermones de don Martín García”, p. XXXVII.

⁴⁹ See King James' Version “He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers *that* water the earth”.

⁵⁰ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 139r.

⁵¹ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 159v.

⁵² HSA, MS HC380/502, f. Fol. 138v. This may be a key to his way of operating and its stance towards tradition because he avoids previous interpretations (Marti, Abner) and produces a somewhat different translation into

Maestre Juan is citing ostensibly (but without specifying a particular section) from *Qohelet rabba*, a Midrash believed to have been edited in the 6th or 7th century. This Midrash reflects the challenge to understand the book of Ecclesiastes. It palliates the challenge by positing a central theme: the Torah of Moses. This central category is the only thing that makes the story relevant to the rest of the book:

Look at God's work – for who can straighten what He has twisted? (Ecclesiastes 7:13). When the Blessed Holy One created the first human, He took him and led him round all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him: Look at My works, how beautiful and praiseworthy they are! And all that I have created, it was for you that I created it. Pay attention that you do not corrupt and destroy My world: if you corrupt it, there is no one to repair it after you. And not only that – you cause the death of that just man [Moses]. An exemplum: to what can Moses our teacher be compared? To a pregnant woman who was incarcerated in a prison and there she gave birth to a son, she raised him there and died there. Some time later, when the king was passing by the entrance of the prison, the son shouted and said: My lord the king! I was born here! I was raised here! I don't know what is the sin that keeps me put in here. He answered him: Your mother's sin. It is the same with Moses, as it is written: Behold, the man has become one (Genesis 3:22) and it is written (also) Behold, your day of death is approaching (Deuteronomy 31:14)⁵³.

Juan simply excises the sections on Moses (or the mentions of his name) and trees which constitute the link to the rest and the coherence of story and book. The Midrash had referred to the death of Moses. Had he not misrepresented the source, his argument would have failed. But Juan retains the attractive *exemplum* which serves him theologically but perhaps also for literary reasons. Ecclesiastes was of interest in Medieval Spain. For ibn Ezra, this passage represents the influence of the stars on humans⁵⁴. Recently Marc Hirshman has studied a manuscript where the Midrash Qohelet stands side by side with the –also late medieval– commentary of R. Jacob Aljaeni, a scholar of the first third of the fourteenth century, active probably in Aragon despite the name. It may be noted that his text includes at least one code switching to Ibero-Romance⁵⁵. He uses a *la`az*: “sameah be helqo plager ali gre [placer alegre]”. Juan's invocations of Midrash tend to concentrate on stories which are not only apposite to his general theological intentions but also have a certain literary allure:

e dice sobre esto en un libro llamado bereshit rabba que pregunto un gentil a raby mair e dijo como puede ser que dios que dijo por si mesmo por ventura non finche mi gloria cielo e tierra se ascentare a fablar con Moises entre los cherubines sobre esto respondiolo raby mayr e dijo traedme espejos grandes e tragierongelos dijole

the vernacular.

⁵³ *Midrash Qohelet* on Ecclesiastes 7:13.

⁵⁴ Gómez Aranda, “The meaning of Qohelet”, p. 363.

⁵⁵ Hirshman, “Peshat and Derash”, pp. 397-406. In Hebrew polemical/exegetical literature of the period we find code switching to *romance* in the works of Içac Eli; Salamon Astruc Adret of Barcelona (and Cervera? ca 1369) and Shlomo ben Melekh: they all refer to Isaiah 52:15 “*yazeh*” and they all find that the best equivalent is “*fara parlar*”. See Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter*.

mirad vuestro rostro en ellos e mirose e facianle grande rostro e dijole pues traed espejos pequenos dijole mirad vuestro rostro e mirose e vido ser rostro pequeno Dijo ansi como vedes que este mudamiento non viene de parte que se mudo vuestro rostro nin en la calidat nin en la cualidat ansi dios de que esta en lugar grande o pequeno o en lugar o en muchos lugares el non se muda e el que pregunta como se encerro en el vientre virginal...⁵⁶.

Although he does not specify where in Genesis Rabbah is the text he translates, we may compare Genesis Rabbah 4:4:

Said he to him: Is it possible that He of whom it is written, Do I not fill heaven and earth? (Jer. xxiii, 24) spoke to Moses from between the two staves of the Ark ? Bring me a large mirror said he. When he brought it he said to him, ‘Look at your reflection and he saw it, large. Bring me a small mirror. He brought it. See your reflection in it. He saw it, small. If you, who are but flesh and blood, can change yourself at will, how much more so He at whose word the world came into existence!

Needless to say, the ancient source does not mention the virgin birth. A minute addition by Juan changes completely the meaning of the original text. Here again the *exemplum* by itself retains its literary allure, enhanced for certain audiences by the processes of vernacularization. Juan, who had begun by addressing the subject of names (when arguing that Solomon does not mean Solomon) towards the end returns to “names”. Indeed the theme of the mysterious “names” and Tetragrammaton might be seen as the grand culmination of his *Declaración*. He produces a disquisition on how to reconstruct the divine name of 72 letters. Before this, he discusses the Tetragrammaton⁵⁷. This is a crux of Christian hebraism⁵⁸. One recalls the strong distinction between a passive and an active Christian Kabbalah created by Scholem⁵⁹. Before the converso Heredia⁶⁰, who in 1487 expressed the view that the name of Jesus is linked to the Tetragrammaton, Christian Kabbalah had been passive –and it is apparently implied– medieval and Spanish. After Heredia it became active –creative?– Italian and modern. A corpus of modern studies attends to the Tetragrammaton not only in Isidore and Aquinas but also in Alphonsi, Ramón Martí, Lull, Arnau and others⁶¹. It is no coincidence that even Scholem acknowledged that it was a Spanish converso addressing –dedicating his work to– the Count of Tendilla, a scion of the House of Mendoza, who transfers the medieval Spanish interests to the Italian humanists.

From our perspective, however, the question would be how widespread and amongst whom was this interest in “names” manifest. Was it a mere marginal gloss

⁵⁶ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 140r-v.

⁵⁷ Gutwirth, “The Cuenca amulet”, pp. 453-463.

⁵⁸ Wilkinson, “First beginnings”, pp. 29-62; *idem*, *Tetragrammaton*; Buzetta, “Il simbolismo”, pp. 129-164; Wheeler, “Guillaume Postel”, pp. 244-263.

⁵⁹ Scholem, “Zur Anfänge der Christlichen Kabbala”, pp. 158-93; Idel, “Religion, Thought and Attitudes”, pp. 123-139.

⁶⁰ On Pablo de Heredia as a predominantly Hispano-Jewish (rather than Italian) thinker see Gutwirth, “From Midrash”.

⁶¹ On the Latin tradition see the note *supra*.

hidden in technical treatises accessible only to select minds or was it a wider cultural phenomenon that merits the concern of historians? Here we have to recall the recently published document of the late fifteenth century –independent of the “schools”– containing legal testimony about the Tetragrammaton by the conversos “maestre Juan, médico, e Alonso Peres, vecinos de la dicha cibdad de Avila”⁶². That is to say that two otherwise unknown conversos offer an explanation about the Tetragrammaton in a legal court. To be sure, the subject was an amulet, i.e. a type of text which had for long used the “Name/s”. But to the wearer of the amulets it was precisely the mystery of the concepts which assured efficacy.

This attentiveness to names was not a superficial phenomenon in Hispanic thought. It did not finish with the printing of Heredia’s work as incunable *ca.* 1487, but continued long afterwards in Spanish. Recently, an example was discussed: Juan de Caramuel’s *Declaración Mystica de las Armas de España* (Bruselas, 1636). In it, the industrious author discusses the Hebrew name of Jesus and its resonances saying “escriben los cabalistas y rabinos con cinco puntos este nombre”⁶³. In 1577, in a Sephardi milieu of returning conversos, that of the entourage of the Duke of Naxos, the circle of Belvedere in Constantinople, there appears the work known as *Ben Porat Yosef*. It purports to represent a Judeo-Christian disputation. The Jewish arguments intended to convince the Christian include the knowledge of divine and angelic “names”. Closer to Juan’s interest in names while writing in the vernacular, would be the interest in “names” by Enrique de Villena. In 1424, Enrique de Villena finished his treatise wholly devoted to the exegesis on the Psalm *Quoniam videbo*. It was partly an epistolary work addressed to Johan Ferrandes. After lengthy commentary he claims that he could have written much more about its mysteries especially since the *mequbalin* affirm that from every Psalm there comes a “name” of God including the name Sabaoth⁶⁴. The keen interest in names is not restricted, then, to one particular current of thought nor to one intellectual type⁶⁵. In the *Declaración* we find a type of approach which depends neither on the ignorance of users of talismans nor on scholastic speculations nor Kabbalistic theologoumena:

Dice en un libro llamado peçahim en aquel tiempo sera dios uno e su nombre uno por ventura antes de aquel tiempo, ¿no era dios uno? Respondio un sabidor que habia nombre rabbi nahamiam [!] e dijo (...) antes no nombraban (...) el Tetragrammaton con las letras que se escribe ca escribese con cuatro letras e son yod he hau [!] he salvo nombrando con otras letras como si esso fuse escrito con alef daled nun yod e venido el messias nombrarlo han con las letras mismas que se escribe el cual es el nombre santo de Jesus ca la j es en lugar del yod e la h en lugar del he... en la vieja ley este nombre santo no se nombrava por sus letras salvo una vez en el ano en el dia del ayuno mayor que bendecia el sacerdote mayor al pueblo⁶⁶.

⁶² Gutwirth, “The Cuenca amulet”, pp. 453-463.

⁶³ Caramuel y Lobkowitz, *Declaración mystica*, p. 200

⁶⁴ See Gutwirth, “Opera Digitorum Tuorum”, pp. 53-84.

⁶⁵ For Caramuel see Gutwirth, “Poetry, reading, and the trilingual question”, pp. 69-95. For the *Ben Porat Yosef* see *idem*, “Acercamiento al círculo de Belvedere”, pp. 107-134.

⁶⁶ HSA, MS HC380/502, ff. 156v-157r.

His discussion of names –*pace* Caramuel– does not come from the twelfth century Kabbalah and its followers but from more ancient and accessible texts, i.e. bPes. 50a:

And the Lord shall be King over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One, and His name one: is He then not One now? – Said R. Aha b. Hanina: Not like this world is the future world. In this world, for good tidings one says, ‘He is good, and He doeth good’, while for evil tidings he says, ‘Blessed be the true Judge’; [whereas] in the future world it shall be only ‘He is good and He doeth good’. ‘And His name one’: what does ‘one’ mean? Is then now His name not one? – Said R. Nahman b. Isaac: Not like this world is the future world. [In] this world [His name] is written with a yod he and read as alef daleth; but in the future world it shall all be one: it shall be written with yod he and read as yod he. Now, Raba thought of lecturing it at the session, [whereupon] a certain old man said to him, It is written, le’alem. R. Abina pointed out a contradiction: It is written, this is my name, to be hidden; [and it is also written], and this is my memorial unto all generations? The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Not as I [i.e., My name] am written am I read: I am written with a yod he, while I am read as alef daleth.

Juan reduces the rich Talmudic passage into a proof of or apology for the old tradition of reading names contrary to how they are written. And yet there are passages where the personal amalgamates with the theological arguments. One such passage plays insistently on the word *castillo* (it may lead to surmise that his name was Castillo). The prooftext is from Isaiah 28⁶⁷. Juan translates “Isaias cap 28 dice el señor dios yo fare fundamento en sion de piedra la qual piedra sera Castillo fuerte”⁶⁸. He cites Rashi “ansi lo Declara Rabi salomon nin mas ni menos por el rey messias”. Rashi had indeed used the word *mivtsar* (not in the biblical text) “a castle” in his commentary. The “Castle in Zion” leads to one of the autobiographical passages in Juan’s works. Feeling that death is near, Juan thinks of his offspring and asserts that his legacy to his children is the Christian faith which he bestowed on them. He left them (the family name Castillo?) a Castle in Zion as well as books.

En este Castillo entiendo que sera amparada e defendida mi anima e en este Castillo he puesto a mis fijos entendiendo que ahi estaran salvos ca toda mi vida e jpendi en leer la santa escritura de la vieja ley e veo quell fin de todos los fines lo pone en la venida del messias e puesto que este fin alcance que entiendo que es ya venido ya non curo de lo que solia curar e trabajar e depase a mis fijos muchos libros del Talmud. Una piedra preciosa les dejo la qual es creer en nuestro senor jc que era el rey messias hijo de dios⁶⁹.

His statement “toda mi vida e jpendi en leer la santa escritura de la vieja ley” may deserve attention. Unlike so many other fifteenth century conversos who avoided

⁶⁷ KJV, Verse 16: “Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste”.

⁶⁸ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 154v.

⁶⁹ HSA, MS HC380/502, f. 155r.

reference to their Jewish past or referred to it furtively, Juan asserts it unambiguously. In one sense this is an affirmation of *autoritas/authority*, that is of superior mastery of the “*vieja ley*” in Hebrew and Aramaic which allows him to navigate its texts with agility for polemical and exegetical purposes. It is consistent with other statements in his works. But there may be further resonances to *toda mi vida*. The Mishna focused on this phrase. The first chapter of Mishna Berakhot [8] avers: [remember Egypt all the] “Days of your life”: these are the days. “All the days of your life”: these are the nights. Hakhamim say: “days of your life” [means] in this world. “All the days of your life” [means] in the next world. The Talmud⁷⁰ had drawn attention to the formulation in Proverbs 15:15 (KJV:) “*All the days* [of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast]” and commented upon it: “*All the days* [of the afflicted are evil:] that [refers to] the master of the *gemara*. But he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast” this [refers to] the master of the *Mishna*”. The expression seems to have borne connotations of the textual, of reading and learning. In general, the statement coheres with the view –mentioned above– of “learning as religious precept” or study as worship⁷¹.

5. Conclusion

Juan el Viejo does not, at first sight, belong in the universe of discourse of formally literary works such as *Auto de los reyes magos*; *Danza de la muerte*; Juan de Dueñas poem (*A una judia*) or the *Libro del alborayque*. And yet their ideas are clearly within a polemical mode. Juan el Viejo’s linguistic, stylistic and literary skills have been recognized long ago. His selection of long passages from Midrash and Aggada for translation may well respond to a literary bent and not only theology.

Juan integrates himself and his experiences into the age old tradition of polemics. In the midst of remarks on ancient texts and age old polemical arguments about religion and god, we find remarks on his library, his children, the Jews of Toledo who went to San Martin de la Vega, his old age; all of this in his time and his place, although he is ostensibly dealing with supra-temporal and supra-local matters.

Juan el Viejo’s “proto-philological” direction may be discerned in a number of ways. He is well aware of the version of Jerome but he is also aware of divergent readings –not always theologically relevant– in the Masoretic texts and he mentions them. He compares Jerome’s and Rashi’s readings. He claims to have searched and confronted MSS of Psalms in Hebrew and Latin. And yet within the field there is an anti-philological trend as well.

When evaluating the tendency towards kabbalah or tradition, one wonders whether the centrality of kabbalah to the convert’s thought might be a modern assumption. It has been observed –in the study of a different work by Maestre Juan– that he does not seem to be greatly concerned with a putative “philosophy against kabbalah” conflict. While the *Declaracion* does indeed treat the Tetragrammaton and the Name of 72 letters and places it at the culmination of the book, it does so by appealing to

⁷⁰ bBB 145 b.

⁷¹ This is the formulation made famous by a study which is not concerned with fifteenth century conversos Viviano, *Study as Worship*.

accessible ancient texts of the Babylonian Talmud which were part of the “curriculum” of average Jewish education in medieval Spain as elsewhere.

In Maestre Juan we find the attitude to study in an explicit mode. Indeed the importance of learning for the Christian is asserted not only by implication. His view that study will miraculously protect him from death or his proud assertion of having spent a life time in learning the “Old Law” or his designation of the Talmudic authorities as *sabidores* (despite the double edged quality of the designation) testify to an intense belief in the value of reading and intellectual pursuits which is known in other ages as *Study as Worship*.

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