

THE *VISIÓN DELEITABLE* UNDER THE SCRUTINY OF THE SPANISH INQUISITION: NEW INSIGHTS ON CONVERSO LITERATURE

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Abstract

This article deals with a famous work on philosophy written by Alonso de la Torre and its fate in the Western Sephardi diaspora. Torre most probably was a converted Jew; he wrote his book half a century after Spanish Jewry underwent a dramatic transformation due to the terrible massacres of 1390 and 1391 in the major cities of Spain and the ensuing conversions of many persecuted Jews. The intolerance that would ultimately lead to the Edict of Expulsion of the Jews of 1492 - and so to the origin of the Judeo-Spanish speaking communities in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire - profoundly changed Spain's cultural landscape, ending a centuries-long period of mutual cultural interaction. Yet, paradoxically, with the massive influx of the so-called Conversos into Spanish society, Christian culture also underwent changes, absorbing new experiences and influences. The *Visión deleitable y sumario de todas las ciencias* by Torre is a didactical work on philosophy and religion that had enormous success in Christian Spain, in spite of its large debt to the *Guide of the Perplexed* by the Jewish sage Maimonides. Reprinted many times in Catholic Spain, this work was also published in Italy and the Dutch Low Countries, in the communities of those Iberian Conversos who returned to Judaism. There has been huge speculation as to how the *Visión deleitable* was interpreted by both Christian and Jewish readers. Through a hitherto unstudied report by the Spanish Inquisition and an examination of the editions printed in the Western Sephardi diaspora (Ferrara and Amsterdam) I will offer some fresh reflections on the fascinating reception of this text in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The edition of *Visión deleitable*, published twice in the Netherlands in the 17th century, testifies to the enduring success in Jewish and Converso circles [5] of a work written two centuries earlier by Alfonso de la Torre as a primer of religious and moral philosophy. Since it became known how its text was largely indebted to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, many scholars have speculated on its intriguing 'Jewish content'. A hitherto unattended report on this book by the Spanish Inquisition reveals how the work was read by Catholic clergymen, thus offering more insight into its religious doctrines as perceived in its day.

In the following pages I shall briefly summarize the general content of the *Visión deleitable*, in order to explore in greater depth a question which in my opinion has hitherto not been sufficiently dealt with: the fate of the *Visión deleitable* in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, notably in Converso circles.² I will present some details concerning the

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² On this aspect García López (1991), Salinas Espinosa (1997) and Girón-Negrón (2001) seem somewhat unconcerned. The Ferrara edition is reported untraceable by García López (in fact there are at least three extant copies, two of them in major libraries - see below), and the latter have apparently taken for granted the former's assertion. The same goes for Francisco/Josepho de Cáceres' 1623 edition, mentioned by all three as printed in 1626 (García López 1991: 33; Girón Negrón 2001: 214, 215; Salinas Espinosa 1997: 180). To make things

important 1554 Ferrara edition that, oddly enough, has been completely ignored in recent studies, although the existence of at least one copy of this edition was public knowledge.³ The core of my article, however, is a close analysis of that part of the text published by Francisco de Cáceres in 1623 (reprinted in 1663) which I consider essential in regard to the question of a peculiarly ‘Jewish’ or ‘Converso’ reception of *Visión deleitable*.⁴ I will present and comment upon a report on *V.* written by Spanish Inquisitorial censors, showing that this document is unique in what it reveals about the impact of the text on trained Catholic theologians, and possibly also disclosing its ‘heterodoxy’. Finally, I will reflect on the reception of the Amsterdam editions of *V.* and provide information on *C.*, showing that the stereotype labelling of the latter as an ‘exiled Spanish Jew’ is an oversimplification, and that some of the details of his biography constrain us to reconsider the thrust of his writings.⁵

Alfonso de la Torre and his *Visión deleitable*

Long neglected by scholarship, Torre’s primer of religious and moral philosophy, written around 1440 at the request of a Christian nobleman and not in fact intended for wide circulation, was to enjoy considerable popularity both in and outside of Spain. Ever since the hispanist Wickersham Crawford (1913) revealed that Alfonso de la Torre’s *Visión delectable* was largely indebted to non-Christian sources, particularly Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, scholars have speculated on its intriguing ‘Jewish content’. With the long awaited critical edition of *V.* by García López (1991), the careful studies of the author and his work by Salinas Espinosa (1993; 1997) and the recent impressive monograph published by Girón-Negrón (2001), along some very fine articles published before and after these dates (Bataillon 1951; Fraker 2005; Márquez Villanueva 1997; Wickersham Crawford 1913), we are [6] now far better informed on the specific cultural and religious context that is reflected in Torre’s work. The large extent to which the Bachiller was imbued by contemporary Jewish religious philosophy - as well as Christian scholasticism - has now been firmly established, although there seems to be little agreement on the degree to which the Jewish learning exhibited by Torre was a more widely shared experience in late medieval Christian Spanish culture or,

worse, even the evident error of conceiving the 1663 edition to be printed together with *Memoria de los 613 preceptos de la Ley* by Solomon Sasportas is repeated by all three, all on the basis of a volume in the Biblioteca Nacional wherein the two works are only bound together. Girón-Negrón remarks that ‘Hans den Boer’ seems unaware of Sasportas’ inclusion in *V d[sic]*, although in my work (1996) both titles are mentioned with the correct signature R/6584 of the Biblioteca Nacional.

³ See Yerushalmi (1989: 94-95), who mentions a copy in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The Biblioteca Nacional of Lisbon has at least one copy and another copy is in the Biblioteca Universitaria Alessandrina of Rome.

⁴ Hereafter I shall refer to Francisco/Josepho de Cáceres as ‘C.’ and to *Vision deleitable* as ‘U’.

⁵ I am greatly indebted to Herman Prins Salomon for his careful reading and correction of my text.

rather, peculiar to Conversos such as our author. Despite some careful analysis there is no consensus on the religious ideas of *V.*, either to be read as a 'Jewish/Converso' text with a Christian surface, or as a Christian work typical of an early Renaissance culture that besides its leaning on Classical sources also incorporated oriental - Jewish and Muslim - sources.

However, it is now generally agreed that although not original in its contents, Torres's primer on religious and moral philosophy cannot be merely regarded as a proof of Spain's cultural backwardness as posited by Curtius ([1948] 1984) and others (Wickersham Crawford 1913), but rather as a splendid piece of philosophical prose in the vernacular, set out in an attractive and efficient way and directed to a lay readership.

With superb pedagogical skill and literary finesse, Torre weaves an elaborate allegorical tale about the Intellect's journey up to the mountain of knowledge. In a visionary dream, the personified Intellect (*Entendimiento*) receives philosophical instruction from the allegorical representations of Reason (*Razón*), Nature (*Natura*), Wisdom (*Sabieza*), Truth (*Verdad*), the Liberal Arts and the Cardinal Virtues. This fictional scheme acts as a foil for lucid and lively disquisitions on a wide range of staple philosophical problems from the medieval repertory: the existence of God and the divine attributes, eternity of the world versus creation *ex nihilo*. Providence, miracles and the theodicy, the immortality of the soul, the nature of prophecy, the scope of reason, ethics, human destiny, the possibility of metaphysical knowledge and the contemplative ideal (Girón-Negrón 2001: xiii).

V. is a well-structured text, where the whole display of 'medieval' encyclopedic knowledge is no longer presented as a loose enumeration (here, of sciences, virtues, ideas and doctrines), but carefully selected and arranged (Salinas Espinosa 1997) to guide the reader towards a precise goal: the perfection of his knowledge in order to reach his ultimate good, the intellectual apprehension of God and His actions (cf. Girón-Negrón 2001: 181).

At the same time, Torre's eclecticism, or rather his combination of a naturalist, Muslim-Jewish dimension - that already contains a 'conflicting' assimilation of Jewish Neoplatonic and hermetic thought (cabala, cf. Salinas Espinosa 1997) - with Christian teaching is somewhat unsettling, as a recent article by Fraker skillfully points out (2005). Fraker concludes that Maimonides 'leads our bachiller deep into the waters of rationalism' (ibid.: 230) [7]. Of course, Torre's ideal of human perfection in total dedication to philosophy and truth follows Aristotle and Maimonides and conflicts with the Christian view and its insistence on Divine Grace. Another important issue treated in *V.* reflects the Jewish sage's view on the restricted ('not all- pervasive') role of Providence (Fraker 2005: 230), Torre's treatment of prophecy again rests on human perfection rather than on Revelation or Divine Grace, and his view on angels as spiritual beings rather than human-like creatures also clearly conflicts with Christian doctrine.

The bachiller is not consistent in his views, though: he feels the need to reconcile the

Christian interpretation of rebelling and guardian angels with the incorporeal nature he defends, and only succeeds halfway (Fraker 2005: 230-231; Giron-Negrón 2001: 148). Furthermore, the author in some passages expresses his rejection of the naturalistic vision of a God who after creating nature has a constrained influence, thereby aligning himself again with the prevailing Christian theologians on the unrestricted power of God's will, and showing his familiarity with the Scotist vs. Nominalist debate. However, 'it is impossible to associate his argument solidly with either school' (Fraker 2005: 232). Fraker concludes from *V.* (his 'very poverty of theological reflection') and some scarce biographical details on Torre, that the latter was a Bachelor of Arts rather than of Sacred Theology and finally surmises that he must have had a form of double citizenship: raised in Judaism, although apparently not familiar with Hebrew, he ended up as a Christian whose loyalty towards the new religion cannot be established (2005: 238).

The *V.* thus stands as a paradoxical work, conceived as a philosophical cento for a Christian nobleman, leaning on both Jewish and Christian ideas, and soon widely read by 'anonymous' readers of both religions, even circulating in translations in Italy and France. We should now turn to the editions of *V.* published outside Spain, supposedly for the Jewish/ex-Converso milieu.

The Ferrara Edition of *Visión deleitable*

The Ferrara 1554 edition of *V*

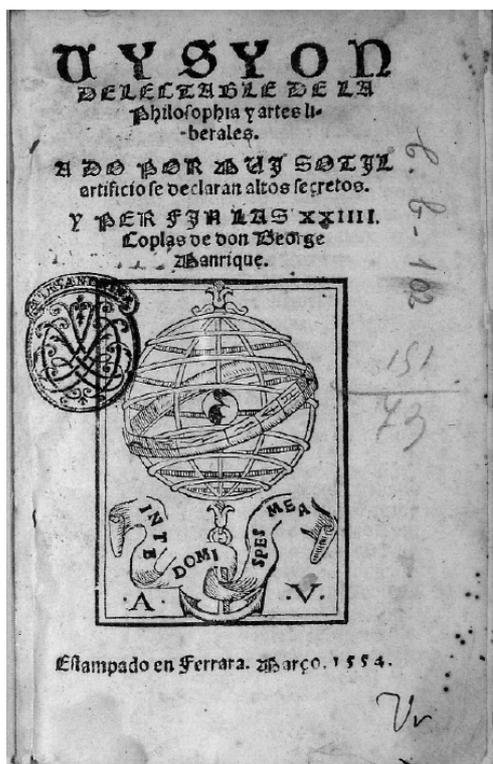


Figure 1. The edition of *Visión deleitable* printed by Abraham Usque at Ferrara in 1554. At the end, the *Coplas a la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique are included.

(Fig. 1), often considered a proof of the particular resonance of Torre's work in Jewish and/or Converso circles, is, in my view, a complex piece in the overall printed output in the Spanish and Portuguese languages of Abraham Usque and Yomtob Atias, because *V.*, despite its philosophical-religious leanings on Jewish sources, cannot be simply classified as a 'Jewish' work. Certainly, it is hard to overestimate the importance of Ferrara's Jewish press: the enterprise undertaken by Yomtob Atias and Abraham Usque was of particular importance to Iberian Conversos, [8] providing them with an essential library in their vernacular, ranging from the Spanish Bible, a series of prayer books, including the Psalms, and Samuel Usque's *Consolação às tribulações de Israel* (Roth 1943). It set the standard for the Sephardi presses at Venice and Amsterdam. Atias and Usque, however, did not produce exclusively for a Jewish audience. Their Spanish Bible circulated in copies intended for a Christian readership.⁶ More importantly, their printing house published a title with no Jewish or religious content at all, [9] a splendid piece of Portuguese literary fiction known as *Menina e Moça*, attributed to the still mysterious Bernardim Ribeiro.⁷ The question arises then as to whether we ought to position Torre's *V.* among the 'Jewish' works, specifically or at least mainly intended for a Jewish/ex-Converso readership, or whether the printers might have envisaged (reflecting their commercial interests as entrepreneurs) a general Spanish reading audience?

I do not find it easy to answer this question without stirring up a hornet's nest that has come down upon our ears *in re* almost every aspect of Converso culture (Round 1995). So, on the one side, it is clear that the 1554 edition follows the earlier editions published in Spain in its inclusion of the chapter on the tenets of the Holy Catholic Faith, which would seem unnecessary in a work solely intended for a Jewish audience. Moreover, the Ferrara edition includes a novelty with respect to the former Spanish editions in that it provides a poetic supplement, the famous 'Coplas por la muerte de su padre' by the 'Old Christian' nobleman Jorge Manrique, thereby perhaps reinforcing its attractiveness as a Christian text (see again

⁶ This assumption is rejected by Yerushalmi (1989: 88) who concludes that the extant copies contradict the existence of two different issues of one edition, a Christian and a Jewish one. I am, however, not entirely convinced by his argument that the choice of some textual variants, for instance *virgen*, *moça* or *ALMA* to represent Hebrew *ha Alma* (Is. 7:14), was determined solely to facilitate distribution of the Bible to ex-Jews/Conversos living in a Christian environment.

⁷ See, however, Salomon (2004: 216-217) on its potential attractiveness to exiled Conversos (returning or not to Judaism), much in line with Marcel Bataillon's suggestive idea of 'Jewish melancholy' in Iberian renaissance literature (Bataillon 1964).

fig. 1).⁸ The argument that such features could have been meant to distract the Inquisition (whether Roman, Spanish or Portuguese) does not seem convincing to me here. The obviously Jewish works issued from the Atias-Usque press were printed without concealment. Then again, if we were to consider Ferrara *V.* as a work targeting not Jewish readers but rather those Conversos still undecided about their religious future, one could argue that the ‘Christian appearance’ of the Ferrara edition would have facilitated circulation in Spain and Portugal. *V.*'s stress on an intellectual approach to religion rather than on faith would help to prepare Conversos for their return to Judaism as it acquainted them with some basic tenets of their religion, ‘delectably’ presented from and towards a layman’s viewpoint.

I can perfectly fathom the attractiveness of such a work for a Converso reader, but the question is whether the Ferrara edition was especially aimed at the latter. Even more questionable is any deliberate proselytizing attempt on the part of the publishers. For if such were indeed the case, one would have expected them to have filtered out of its contents contradictions that could lead to Christian conceptions, and, ergo, to confusion. Even admitting the necessity of the halfhearted confession of Christian Faith of chapter 15 (chapter 21 in Garcia López 2001) as a safe road to circulation in Spain and Portugal, there would have been no reason, I think, to maintain some, not very large, portions of Torre’s text that commented on Divine will or that lead to conflicting views on the material or spiritual nature of angels. Although I have not made a close comparison between the Bachiller's ‘original’ text and the 1554 Ferrara edition, my provisional conclusion is that the latter follows the Spanish incunabula and thus was not doctored to suit the needs of a Converso or Jewish readership. [9]

Francisco de Cáceres’ *V.* and the Inquisition

As I have already stated, in 1623, in an edition purportedly printed at Frankfurt, a certain Francisco de Cáceres presented himself as the translator of *V.* (Fig. 2).

⁸ Bataillon (1964: 52-53) presupposes the fondness of the Jews towards the Coplas, because of its variations on the ‘biblical’ *ubi sunt* theme.



Figure 2 Francisco de Cáceres presented his edition of *Visiñon deleitable* as a translation from the Italian. In fact, he used both a Spanish original and an Italian edition of the text. 'Frankfurt' is a false imprint; the work was really printed in Amsterdam by Paulus Aertsen van Ravestein.

Elsewhere, I have established that C.'s edition has a false imprint, and that his book issued from the presses of an Amsterdam printer, most probably Paulus Aertsen van Ravestein (1609-1657), who was active around the 1620s supplying the Sephardi Jews of that city. In this respect, it is interesting to note that in the same year, 1623, Ravestein printed a treatise on the immortality of the soul, *Tratado da immortalidade da alma* by doctor Samuel da Silva, the adversary of the Jewish 'freethinker' Uriel da Costa, who in turn had his *Exame das tradições phariseas* ('Examination of Pharisaic [11] Traditions') printed by the same Ravestein one year later (Da Costa, ed. Salomon and Sassoon 1993).

The publication of *V.* in the midst of a defiance of rabbinical authority and with the menacing clouds of disbelief hovering over the congregations of Iberian 'New Jews', is significant here, whether or not the author consciously intended his work as a participation in the controversy. One can but speculate on the added significance of *V.* in this respect, hypothetically positing it to have helped reinforce a philosophical, but pious, attitude among still hesitant new members of the congregation, confused by currents of radical scepticism.

C.'s edition has some particular features that set it apart from the earlier printed versions of *V.* Thanks to a brief but careful exploration by Muñoz Jiménez (1994), we now know that C.'s version is not the curious retranslation always thought of. While C. used Delphino's Italian version of *V.* (published in Venice at least seven times under the title *Sommario di tutte le scientie/scienze* during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries),⁹ Muñoz could

⁹ Known editions are of 1556, 1565, 1566, 1568, 1584, 1585, 1621 (Data from the Edit 16, Censimento

convincingly argue that C. must also have used one of the Spanish editions of *V.*, probably the one printed at Ferrara in 1554. C. had stayed for some time in Italy, possibly at Venice, so it is not surprising that he would have come across the work in its Italian translation. Why C. did not mention the original author of the work is still a matter for conjecture. Perhaps he had read and translated *V.* from its Italian version before arriving in the Dutch Republic, where he could have discovered the Spanish original. Moreover, he could have maintained the fiction of a translation to enhance the status of his work in a Christian environment by ‘profiting’ from the prestige of the noble Delphino family. I do not think that C. occulted the name of Alfonso de la Torre to dispel the suspicions of the Inquisition, as *V.* had circulated and could be still circulating in Spain without having been listed on any index of forbidden books. The active reception of Torre’s work by such authors as Pedro Mexía and Lope de Vega (Salinas Espinosa 1997: 186-188) points to its untroubled existence in inquisitorial Spain.

Now C.’s is not as ‘innocent’ as the earlier editions of *V.*, including the Ferrara one. In C.’s version, perhaps the most readable of all, the chapter on the Holy Catholic Faith has been left out. At this stage, I do not know whether C. intervened actively in other parts of the text in order to filter out Christian implications. I have noticed, however, one revealing detail: C. either omits or uses the word *curiosos* where Torre’s original reads *voluntarios*, in an allusion to the followers of Duns Scotus. I venture that C. was either unaware of the Christian theological implication of the term *voluntario* (a follower of Scotus and the doctrine of the absolute Will or Power of God, as opposed to the Nominalists or followers of Thomas Aquinas), or he was very much aware but filtered this ‘Christian’ notion out of his text. [12]

C.’s edition of *V.* is not presented as a Jewish text. The use of the false imprint, for which there was no necessity at Amsterdam in the 1620s, points to a projected widespread circulation of the edition. ‘Frankfurt’ with its international reputation was a suitable address for a work aimed at an audience in the Iberian Peninsula, or a Spanish-reading public elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, C. dedicated his work to the Portuguese ‘Prince’ Emanuel, the son of Antonio, Prior of Crato, who had unsuccessfully claimed the Portuguese crown. The dedication could have been another one of C.’s devices to make *V.* suitable and not suspect for a Christian public. But the particular choice of Emanuel might raise an eyebrow, though, in this context. To publish a work dedicated to a crown-pretender while the Spanish king was still reigning over Portugal was perhaps not the wisest strategy to promote undisturbed circulation in Iberia. There is perhaps another explanation for C.’s choice: Emanuel was a resident of the Dutch Republic, and one may conjecture that C. sought a

nearby Spanish-reading patron for his endeavour. Perhaps he even had a ‘Converso’ interest in Prince Emanuel, putting his hope on a successor to the throne who could bring about a favourable turn in the harsh treatment that had befallen the Conversos or *crístãos novos* of Portugal.

Those modern readers that have stressed the Jewish or ‘heterodox’ content of *V.* have wondered why the work was left largely untouched by Spanish Inquisitorial censorship, until C.’s ‘dechristianized’ version was finally - as late as 1707 - put on the Index of forbidden books.¹⁰ Why this negligence? One could speculate that the three Spanish editions published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries outside the Iberian Peninsula had such a limited circulation that the censors of the Holy Office were unaware of their existence. But would they also have been unaware of the earlier success of the work in fifteenth and sixteenth century Spain? We should recall the considerable evidence of its reception by sixteenth-century Spanish Christian readers, whether they consulted the fifteenth century editions printed in Spain or those printed in the ‘Marrano Diaspora’. Further arguments to account for apparent Inquisitorial negligence vis-à-vis *V.* could be the passiveness of the censors, the arbitrary nature of any form of censorship or even a positive appraisal on their part of the work’s religious and moral philosophy.

A unique document produced by the Spanish Inquisition in 1652 sheds quite another light on the question, though.¹¹ From the document we learn that a certain Father Juan Bautista Dávila had been warned about the circulation of the book by a ‘zealous’ person. Dávila, a well-known Jesuit scholar, author of a poem on the Passion of Christ, but also engaged in political discussions of his time on how to remedy the decaying Spanish monarchy, reported his findings on the work. [13]

From the outset, he recommends that the work be forbidden *in totum* (in its entirety). First, he recalls a rule of 1648 that forbade books published without mention of their author or printer, unless this silence was motivated by ‘humility’, or if the contents were inoffensive. Dávila concludes that with this edition, neither was the case: the name of the printer was not mentioned, the name of Frankfurt was not indicative of a good reputation either, and the author, who nowhere disclosed his religion, was presumptuous (*‘vanísimo’*). Davila’s general impression was that the work affected to be mysterious and prophetic to attract popular credulity. Subjects such as Divine Providence, the presence of evil in the Creation and

¹⁰ Salinas Espinosa (1997: 180), even mentions 1750, no doubt again copying Garcia Lopez 1991 (I, 33-34), who was unaware of L’s appearance in the 1707 Index (Den Boer 1995: 217).

¹¹ Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid. Inq. 4456/10. Censuras del libro ‘Visión deleitable y sumario de todas las ciencias’, 1652. This document was mentioned already by Paz y Melia (1947: 345), but surprisingly has not been published nor received any attention in *V* scholarship.

angelology were not suitable for treatment in the vernacular addressed to the common people.

Then Dávila starts to list detailed remarks on the text. He mentions no fewer than eleven, in his view heretical, propositions. Some of them reflect Dávila's annoyance with opinions which are only quoted but not sustained in *V*.; here Dávila's zeal is perhaps excessive. Others, on the other hand, reveal some real and fundamental differences between Christian and Jewish (Maimonidean) doctrines, such as those concerning the incorporate nature of angels, the naturalistic vision of Divine Providence - e.g. God does not bother about details - and the perfecting of the human's soul depending on the intellect's capacity rather than on Divine Grace. Father Dávila concludes: these propositions are erroneous, heretical and superstitious, and therefore the book should be prohibited in its entirety.

Dávila adds an interesting personal note. He states that after he had written his findings on the work, he consulted some booksellers in Madrid showing them the edition, and they all agreed that it was a fake imprint, as the typeset was not from Frankfurt.

The document then continues with a brief note written by Brother Tomás de Herrera. He was commissioned by the censor (*'Calificador'*) to give his opinion; he totally agrees with Dávila in that the work should be forbidden as a whole, because apart from the things mentioned by the latter, *V* contains other, various matters worthy of censorship, which are very 'harmful for ignorant people'.

A last gathering of the document comprises the 'final judgement', this time by the appointed censor (*Calificador*), Fray Pedro Yáñez. He asserts peremptorily that the author 'must be a rabbi raised and integrated into Judaism, because he writes that when God saw that the world was lost, he gave Moses a Law so Holy and Blessed, that there could be no better'. Yáñez observes that regarding the state of Bliss (*'Bienaventuranza'*) the first to reach it after the angels (according to De La Torre) are the prophets. The text nowhere mentions other hierarchies nor does it refer to the Law of Grace. Not a word is spoken about our Lord Jesus Christ, nor about any Saint, nor about [14] the Gospels, 'these constituting the greatest benefice brought to us by Providence and Divine Goodness'. The author is 'thus a Jew and very much a Jew'. Yáñez makes some detailed remarks in the margins, which reveal his objection against the rationalistic outlook of *V*, for instance on the general, rather than the particular nature of Providence, the spiritual rather than the corporal nature of angels, thereby denying the angel's visit to the Virgin Mary and to the shepherds, etc. He concludes with disdain that the work is filled with errors - mixed and interwoven with 'some truths' - which it would need another book to write down. Therefore, the book should be forbidden in its entirety.

The report written for the Inquisition is conclusive and from a contemporary theological

Catholic viewpoint fully explains why the work was listed in the ensuing Index of forbidden books. That this Index was only published as late as 1707 has led researchers to think of a very belated detection and prohibition of *V.*, but one should recall that works exposed after the publication of one Index and before the publication of the next, were considered to be just as ‘forbidden’ as the ones listed in the published volumes. Booksellers were regularly informed of such additions.

Francisco de Cáceres and the Sephardi Community of Amsterdam

Let us now turn to the enigmatic translator or editor of *V.*, starting with his literary endeavours. The first known work to be written by him is the bilingual *Nuevos fieros españoles / Nouvelles rodomontades espagnoles* published in Paris in 1608. The book contains a list of *rodomontades*, a particular genre of facetiae or puns ridiculing the *miles gloriosus hispanicus*, a genre that would seem popular amongst nations contending with or suffering from the Spanish hegemony in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In this booklet, the author styles himself a ‘gentilhombre castellano’ (Castilian gentleman). One does not have to take this title for granted, given the satiric content of the work.

In 1612 the name ‘Francisco de Cáceres’ appears, alternating with ‘Josepho de Cáceres’, depending on the issue, as translator of *La Sepmaine*, the famous poem on Creation by Guillaume Salluste du Bartas. This Spanish work was printed between 1612 and 1613 in Amsterdam by Albert Boumeester, and is significant because of its dedication to ‘Jacob Tirado, *parnas de la nación portuguesa*’, that is, to the founder of one of the earliest congregations of the Portuguese and Spanish Jews of Amsterdam. C.’s prose translation of the poem is admired for its style, but a more striking feature of the translation is [15] the omission of overt Christian references, as noted by Méchoulan (1992). *Los siete días de la semana* is, therefore, like C.’s *V.*, a work which takes into account Jewish sensibilities without, however, any Jewish overtone. To be sure, this ambiguity made the work fit for a separate edition with the imprint of Antwerp and the name of Bellerus’ printing house to enable its circulation in the Spanish Low Countries. I shall not speculate on the possible interest of *Siete días* for a specifically Converso audience. This problem is much the same as the one we have discussed in relationship to *V.*

In 1616, C. had still another work printed, again in two different issues, one with ‘Amsterdam’ and one with ‘Francaforte’ on its title page. This booklet, *Diálogos satíricos*, was a partial translation of the *Dialoghi piacevoli* written by Niccolò Franco, but C. nowhere mentions that his was not an original work. Together with *Nuevos fieros españoles*, I cannot discover a special Converso or Jewish interest in the *Diálogos*; its moral satire does not seem

to affect religion nor allude to an Iberian political context. I would speculate that C.'s interest here was purely literary and/or commercial. Through the dedications of the *Diálogos* to the prominent Pedro Falghuery (Pietro Falgheri) and Juan Zamete (Jean Zамет), the latter whom he apparently served, we learn that C. had probably lived at Venice and Paris prior to arriving in Amsterdam. Printed in 1623, *V.* is the last known work by C. It was reprinted in Amsterdam in 1663, probably posthumously.

Who was this Francisco de Cáceres? I cannot agree with earlier scholars who affirmed that he was a 'Spanish Jew', and that he was indirectly related to Spinoza. As I have written elsewhere, all the Cáceres of early Sephardi Amsterdam have been indiscriminately regarded as members of a family of professing Jews (Den Boer 1990: 57-58). The Amsterdam archives have revealed that this is not the case. Francisco de Cáceres was a Spaniard born around 1572, who unlike many of the Iberian newcomers to Amsterdam was not actively involved in trade. Another Francisco de Cáceres, a Portuguese man from Oporto (b. 1574), was living at Amsterdam as a Jew and has been confused with our C. The Castilian Francisco was known as a teacher and interpreter of Spanish, French and Italian and appears in numerous documents as a witness, mediator or interpreter representing Portuguese merchants (professing Jews) before the municipal authorities. I have not been able to trace him under a Jewish name among the members of any of the early Sephardi congregations of the city (Den Boer 1990: 58-61). C. is not reported by the 'renegade' Mendes Bravo who denounced so many Spanish and Portuguese Jews of the Republic and Hamburg to the Portuguese Inquisition (Roth 1944). Some details point to an existence outside the Jewish community. From the Amsterdam archives we learn that he had a French wife, called Marguerite Verneau. The couple apparently lived far from comfortably in the [16] Dijkstraat, part of a quarter inhabited by both immigrant Iberian Jews and Christian natives of Amsterdam.

What then, is our conclusion as to *V.* published by Francisco de Cáceres? Its author- translator, undoubtedly an erstwhile Converso, now living in then again outside the Sephardi community of Amsterdam, or on its threshold, had at one time resided in Italy and France before finally settling in the Netherlands. There he made a career of exploiting his linguistic and literary skills. He was very much aware of the Iberian Jewish community surrounding him as his potential audience, and it was perhaps only his marriage with a French Christian woman that prevented him from total integration into its midst. Out of literary ambition, necessity or sincere moral and religious concerns, we do not know for sure, he wrote, translated or adapted a number of literary works into skillful Spanish. His *V.*, although probably not exclusively directed to an ex-Converso/Jewish audience, would prove immensely popular in the Western Sephardi diaspora.

Marcel Bataillon, in brief but seminal pages on *V.*, argued against the purported backwardness of Torre's work and sensed its unexpected modernity for Marranos, contemporaries of Spinoza, who fled the Church without however joining the Synagogue. I would like to extend his argument, suggesting that this many-sided text appealed to all kinds of readers in a confessional tumultuous period (the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). Salinas Espinosa rightly called attention to the emerging role of the lay reader as a key to the success of our somewhat dilettant philosophical primer. It is surely no coincidence that both a Jew converting to Christianity could reveal that he made his choice upon reading *V.* (Muchnik 2002: 582-584), nor that the aged Portuguese Jewish merchant Isaac de Matityah Aboab listed it as one of those works a pious Jew ought to read (Den Boer 1990: 57). At the end of the day, the fate of a work such as *V.* was determined by the free choice of individual readers.

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