

Between Court and *Call*: Catalan Humanism and Hebrew Letters¹

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When Catalan poet Solomon de Piera, already over seventy years old, converted from Judaism to Christianity around 1410, his many sorrows only increased. Old, ill, and alone, he sent a poem to his former student, Vidal Benveniste Ben Labi, claiming that his only legacy would be through his poems. When de Piera compared his soul to the forgotten prostitute of Tyre, who in Isaiah 23:16, is told to “skillfully play many songs so that you be remembered,” Benveniste responded with a poem in turn, mockingly urging him to “Rise, whore, take up your lyre—and sing your songs if you can, for hire.” (Vardi 1:4 and 3:14; Cole 303 and 307).² In this bitter exchange, poetic innovation and clever allusion serve as the weapons in this battle over conversion, waged in the chaotic years between the mass Jewish conversions of 1391 and the aggressive preaching blitz of Dominican friar Vicente Ferrer two decades after that led to even more conversions.

This literary response to the changing atmosphere of the crown of Aragon in the early fifteenth century, both within and beyond its *calls* (Jewish neighborhoods), might be taken as a sign of the resurgence of Hebrew writing that also included the masterful poetry of Solomon Bonafed and Vidal de la Cavallería. Many have in fact been tempted to call the fifteenth century a renaissance in Sephardic literature, insofar as it marks a wave of rich new poetic activity after a period of stagnation and conventionality. Even though the Hebrew poets of the fifteenth century are considered to be inferior epigones compared to those of the so-called “Golden Age” of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and to be limited in their development compared to the Italian Jews of the period, Jewish writers in Aragon were not without a new spirit and vision.³ Compared to the decline in Hebrew poetry during century following the upheavals of the Christian reconquest of most of southern Iberia in the mid-thirteenth century, the years around the turn of the fifteenth century were witness to a rebirth of activity that aimed to approximate, although it did not ever surpass, the poetic and literary caliber of the Golden Age.

What might be said, however, if we place such Hebrew writing, especially in Aragon, not in the context of earlier and later Hebrew writers but in the context of other contemporary literary currents outside Hebrew, and in particular of the nascent humanism of turn-of-the-century writers such as Bernard Metje? On what grounds do we consider these Jewish and non-Jewish writers, living in the same period and in close proximity, only as part of separate literary traditions? If we adhere to divisions according to language, how do we characterize those Catalan Jewish writers from this period who did write in Romance? Should we distinguish between “Jewish” texts written in Romance and “Romance” texts that happen to be penned by Jews? Also, is it legitimate to evaluate the “humanist” or “medievalist” tendencies of such texts by Jewish writers only according to the criteria used for non-Jewish humanist writers of the period, or can these Jewish writers, like Jewish authors of the Italian Renaissance, be said to cultivate a separate tradition, humanist or otherwise?⁴

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² London, British Museum Add. 27.168, fol. 95v. On this poetic exchange and its editions, see Targarona and Scheindlin (70 n. 57).

³ For a comparative assessment of the poets of the period, see Scheindlin 1997.

⁴ For a useful synthesis of the problem raised by these questions, see Wacks (178-182). This essay follows Wacks in attempting to address what he calls “a substantial lacuna in the study of the Hebrew literature of Christian Iberia, namely the recognition and systematic examination of the relationship between Hebrew literary practice and

The goal of this paper is to explore some of these questions by asking how Jewish writing in the crown of Aragon from the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries might relate to the emergent humanist literary tradition, and how elements of humanism—or what is generally considered humanism in Christian texts of the period—might be understood in contemporary Jewish texts. I will consider a few textual examples from the Catalan and Hebrew writing of Ḥasdai Crescas (ca. 1340-1410/11), the Hebrew poetry of Zaragozaan poet Shelomo Bonafed (fl. ca. 1390-1440), and the anti-Christian and anti-*converso* writing of Profiat Duran, also called Efodi (ca. 1350-ca.1415). In surveying these texts, I will question the place (or absence) of certain elements normally associated with Catalan Humanism (language, classicism, innovative form, authorial voice, etc.) in contemporary Jewish writing.

My goal here is not to claim that Jewish writers of the period should be considered humanists—such a claim would stretch the definitions beyond their usefulness—but rather to point out a number of characteristics in their writing that, in contemporary Christian writers, are associated with the emergence of humanism. I do not mean to offer an exhaustive study of any of these texts or writers, which have been amply studied elsewhere. I do wish, however, to introduce these Jewish writers into the discussion of Catalan humanism and its context, a discussion that is currently limited to Romance and Latin sources, by bringing together a number of observations about the intersection of each with wider intellectual and literary trends in the Crown of Aragon. As in the study of Jews of the Italian Renaissance, the model of Christian humanism in Aragon is mostly insufficient as a standard by which to evaluate Hebrew sources, despite the intersections of these traditions. At the same time, however, I would argue that this incommensurability is not sufficient grounds for the treatment of these literary traditions in isolation from one another. My larger aim is thus to question the categorical divisions by which such writers are separated and studied. Recalling the truism that categories cannot tell us much about the things they categorize that we do not already know, I insist that the study of late-medieval Catalan writing (and Iberian Romance writing in general) is much enriched by a broad purview that looks beyond the arbitrary and often anachronistic boundaries of language, genre, and disciplinary field.

Catalan Humanism and Catalan Language

The citing of such unlikely examples in a discussion of humanism in general and of Catalan humanism in particular might at first seem surprising. After all, Jewish writing of the period seems on the surface to share little in common with the most obvious examples of Catalan literature such as *Lo Somni* (1398-9) or the mid-fifteenth-century chivalresque *Curial e Güelfa*. In her summary of humanist tendencies in these and other texts, Julia Butiñá posits a number of elements that are often invoked as markers of this tradition in Catalonia: the attention to and scrutiny of classical sources, an interest in innovation and novelty, a more robust dialogue between the author and his traditional authorities and between individualized fictional voices, and a mixture of traditions (popular and cultured, Biblical and classical) (2002a, 92-3).⁵ Most of these characteristics are defined by, in Eric Lawee's words, "an abiding concern with the inheritance of the past" (169), above all the ancient past.

Such elements—although not undisputed as markers of humanism—are easy to trace in the Catalan writing around the turn of the fifteenth century.⁶ The convert to Islam Anselm Turmeda

vernacular Romance culture" (200). One recent comparative treatment considering this relationship is Gómez Aranda.

⁵ On the characteristics of humanism in the Iberian Peninsula more generally, see Coroleu; Lawrance; and Gómez Moreno.

⁶ A trenchant debate has surrounded the characteristics of what might constitute "Catalan Humanism" at the turn of the fifteenth century. While Butiñá's assessment (2002a, 92-3) seems to express a mainstream view, critics such as Lola Badia have expressed strong dissent. See, for example, Badia (1980) and her later unambiguous reprisal (1996). For an overview of the debate and a defense of a traditional view, see Vilallonga; Butiñá (2003); Butiñá and Cortijo (2009 and 2011); and Cortijo and Jiménez Calvente.

(‘Abdallāh al-Turjumān, ca. 1352-ca. 1423-32) is best known for his *Disputa de l’ase* (1417-18), a text that is referenced (as by “il saraceno Abdallah” based on “antichi testi degli arabi”) by none other than Pico della Mirandola in the opening line to his *Discorso sulla dignità dell’uomo* (3). Turmeda appears as a personage in his own text arguing, in a highly original dialogue modeled on a medieval Arabic source, for the supremacy of mankind in God’s creation. In Metge’s *Somni*, the poet himself, who is the center of a dialogue with the deceased King Joan I of Aragon, emerges in his particularity in the opening sentences of the work: “Poc temps ha passat que estant en la presó [...] un divendres, entorn mija nit, studiant en la cambre hon yo havia acostumat estar [...] me vénch fort gran desig de dormir” (27). In addition to his meeting with the king, the first-person voice of the author maintains a dialogue with the classical mythological figures of Orpheus and Tiresias. The turn to classical sources is even more obvious in Enrique de Villena, best known for his allegorical *Els dotze treballs d’Hèrcules* (1417), which he also translated into Castilian. While such texts have, with good reason in my opinion, been considered part of a single nascent humanist tradition, the Jewish writers in their midst, equally prolific and, in many ways, equally innovative, have not entered into such estimations.

On what grounds might poets such as Solomon de Piera and Solomon Bonafed, or philosophers and polemicists such as Profiat Duran—all living and active in the crown of Aragon during the years of humanism’s first flowering in Christian texts—be studied apart from their Christian contemporaries? One obvious factor is that of language: these writers wrote principally (or in some cases, exclusively) in Hebrew, not Catalan. Yet if we were to adhere to such purely linguistic distinctions, we would also have to exclude from consideration most of the work of Enrique de Villena, among others. Apart from his first Catalan version of *Els Dotze treballs*, virtually all of Enrique’s works were penned in Castilian. He undertook the first Castilian translation of the *Aeneid* (the first into any Romance language), completing the first three books, but also completed the first Castilian translation of Dante’s *Commedia*. The humanist tendencies that found greatest expression in Catalan texts were by no means limited to them.⁷

By the same token, we cannot limit our purview only to Romance sources, for these Jewish writers did not limit themselves to writing in Hebrew, a fact easily overlooked because most examples of such writing have been lost. Solomon Bonafed, for example, claims that he sent to de Piera a rhyming literary epistle (now lost) in Catalan, following the model of rhymed prose in Hebrew. (Schirmann 12; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 353-4). The convert Vidal Ben Labi (Gonzalo de la Caballería, to whom Bonafed also sent poems in Hebrew, discussed below), imitated a Latin poem in Hebrew, and, in addition to his translation of a medical book from Arabic to Hebrew, seems to have translated two texts by Cicero from Latin to Castilian.⁸ Such translation activity among Jews of the period was not uncommon. In 1412, one Samuel Benveniste, whose name is also cited by Profiat Duran, translated *De Consolatio Philosophiae* of Boethius into Hebrew on the basis of the Catalan translation made earlier by Pere Saplana and revised by Antoni Ginebreda.⁹

Most important among examples of Jewish writing in Catalan is that of the philosopher from Barcelona, Ḥasdai Crescas, who is known to have penned not one but two anti-Christian polemics “in the language of his country” (*leshon arzo*), that is, Catalan (1990, 33).¹⁰ While Crescas’s original Catalan versions are regrettably lost, both texts are known through the remarks

⁷ See Butiñá, 2002b; and Cortijo & Jiménez Calvente.

⁸ On his translation of Arabic medical material, see Steinschneider, 762. On his translation of Cicero, see Alvar and Lucía Megías, 67-8. On his use of a Latin model, see Bernstein, 355.

⁹ On the Catalan translation of Boethius, see Alvar and Lucía Megías, 109-111. Of the same generation as Ginebreda is Azaria ben Joseph Ibn Abba Mari (Bonafoux Bonfill Astruc), a Catalan Jew who was forced to immigrate to Italy (sometime between 1414-1420) after refusing conversion from Vicente Ferrer, and who then translated *De Consolatione Philosophiae* of Boethius from Latin into Hebrew. On both Hebrew translations, see Zonta 2010; On Azaria’s, see also Zwief 1999.

¹⁰ For a recent consideration of the Catalan spoken by Jews of the period, which does not seem to have differed significantly from that spoken by Christians, see Feliu and Ferrer.

of Castilian Jew Joseph ben Shem Tov (c. 1400-1460), who translated one of them. The first, known as *The Refutation of the Christian Principles* (Heb. *Biṭṭul Iqqarei Ha-Nozerim*, from ca. 1398), survives within Shem Tov's Hebrew version and presents philosophical arguments against Christian beliefs. The second, mentioned by Shem Tov in his commentary on *The Refutation*, was made up of a rejection of Christian ideas based on a reading of New Testament sources.

From Call to Court

Crescas's Catalan works were written around the very moment when Bernard Metge penned his renowned *Lo Somni*, and both writers worked in close proximity to each other in and around Barcelona. Crescas had been associated with the royal court of Aragon since the accession of Joan I (r. 1387-96) in 1387 (when he was given the title of *familiar* to the court), and while there he came in direct contact with Bernat Metge. Following the riots and forced conversions of 1391, Metge penned a letter on behalf of the king praising the governors of Barcelona for protecting the Jewish quarter during the riots. Historian Yitzhaq Baer argues that in addition to having good relations with members of the aristocratic house of Queralt and members of the clergy and the royal chamber, "Hasdai [Crescas] was in good standing with the poet Bernard Metge, the responsible author of the documents issued by the royal seal for the protection of the Jews" (2:469 n. 7).¹¹

Metge and Crescas continued to work in the same court under Martin I (r. 1396-1410) and his wife Violant de Bar, during which period both wrote their best-known works. Their names also coincide on at least one known archival document—an order by Violant regarding the repayment of a loan from a Jew. The bill of loan, originally written in Hebrew, was translated into Catalan by Crescas and signed by Metge as public notary and their names appear together on the document.¹² As Warren Harvey concludes from this, the two figures knew each other and communicated with each other in Catalan (1986, 141-2; 1990, 54). Even more importantly, Harvey has shown the similarity of their respective philosophical ideas, demonstrating the impact of Metge's conception of the soul in *Lo Somni* on that of Crescas in his later philosophical work *Or Adonai (Light of the Lord)* and even finding expression of that impact in part in Crescas's own Catalan polemic (1986, 146-53; 1990, 58-64, 67 n. 28).¹³ Equally interesting and suggestive is the specific reference to Crescas in the writing of Enrique de Villena, who describes a personal conversation with him.¹⁴ Considering such parallels, it is hard to deny that, as Daniel Lasker has affirmed, "Crescas' thought was not created in an intellectual vacuum. It was part and parcel of early modern European thought" (2001, 235). Yet despite such

¹¹ On archival documents relating to the connection between Metge and Crescas and to Metge's role in the royal decrees dealing with protection of the Jews, see Baer, 2:103 and 2:469-70 n. 7; Harvey 1986, 140-3; 1990, 53-5; and Emory, 331. For an overview of scholarly efforts to show textual connections between Duran and the Christian world, see Zwiep 2001, 237-8.

¹² Arxiu de la Corona d'Aragó, Cancelleria, Reg. 2058, fol 19r-v: "Mandavimus ipsum albaranum interpretari et in cathalano vulgari redigi per Atzay Cresques judeum Barchinone expertum in talibus, quiquidem Atzay in conspecto fidelis secretarii nostri Bernardi Medici et quorundam domesticorum nostrorum albaranum predictum duxit interpretandum." See Harvey 1990, 65 n. 7.

¹³ For example, Harvey discusses Crescas's statements about the "land of the living" after death and the nature of eternal life. See Hasdai Crescas 1990, 88 and 1992, 77 and 129 n. 91, and the discussion in Harvey 1986, 145 n. 17, 149 n. 37 and 1990, 63, 66 n. 17, and 67 n. 28. For a general consideration of the culture of the chancery in this period, see Trench and Canellas, 21-27.

¹⁴ In his *Tratado de fascinación*, Villena describes speaking directly with Crescas, stating, "Maestro Hasdai Crescas, que fue en este tiempo, me contó que viera..." (1:335). Villena also describes speaking to Rabbi Zerahyah Ha-Levy (Ferrer Saladin) of Zaragoza, who succeeded Crescas as Chief Rabbi there. On these and similar references, see Carr, 46-8.

facts and arguments, Crescas and his works, including his Catalan writing, have been systematically excluded from virtually all histories of medieval Catalan literature.¹⁵

Although little considered, such an intersection between Metge's and Crescas's ideas should not come as a surprise since, as Zonta notes, "Jewish thought in the fifteenth century was, of course, heavily influenced by the parallel development of Humanism in Christian thought" (2006, 25), and the intersection of Crescas and Metge offers a possible example of how that might have happened. One distinctly humanist tendency that may have been part of this influence was a deeper reflection on the nature, quality, and transmission of texts and manuscripts, the first sparks of which can be seen in some Aragonese Jewish writers around the turn of the fifteenth century. As Zonta explains, in the translation of Aristotle to Hebrew undertaken at this time, Jewish philosophers, beginning in Italy, began to work "not from the old-fashioned medieval Latin versions by William of Moerbeke, but also from contemporary Humanistic translations (e.g. by Leonardo Bruni)" (2006, 18).¹⁶ This concern with sources and the transmission of texts from antiquity became more acute in the fifteenth century, and in this context Crescas, despite his overall medievalist philosophical training and outlook, might be seen as a precursor to the humanist writings of later figures such as Isaac Abravanel (1437-1508), Judah Messer Leon (ca. 1420/25-ca. 1498) and Judah Leon Abravanel (Leone Ebreo, ca. 1465-ca. 1523), all of whom settled for a time in Aragonese Naples.¹⁷

The Polemics of Profiat Duran

This focus on language and the transmission of sources is particularly evident in one of Ḥasdai Crescas's contemporaries, Profiat Duran (ca. 1350-ca. 1415), a descendant of Perpignan Jews who was also known as Isaac ben Moses Levi and, after being forcibly converted in 1391 or 1392, as Honoratus de Bonafide. Duran also served as astrologer to King Joan I and, like Crescas, was named *familiar* to the court. He is known for his skill in Latin and his extensive familiarity with Christian sources. While a Christian, he was the author (under the pen name by which he is now commonly known, "Efodi," a Hebrew acronym for "En (or Ani) Profiat Duran") of the widely-known satirical letter "Al tehi ka-avotekha" ("Be Not Like Your Fathers") from ca. 1394-5, a scathing Hebrew attack on Christian belief called *Kelimat ha-Goyim (Reproach of the Gentiles)* from ca. 1396, and a philosophical grammar of the Hebrew language known as *Ma'aseh Efod (The Making of Efod)* from 1404, among other works.¹⁸ While there is no doubt that Duran's writings were popular among Italian Jews in subsequent periods—from Judah Messer Leon in the fifteenth century to Simone Luzzato in the seventeenth—the possible humanist, or proto-humanist, characteristics of Duran's own work have been less explored.¹⁹

¹⁵ The names of Profiat Duran, Ḥasdai Crescas, Solomon Bonafed, Solomon de Piera, or any of the other major Jewish writers of late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Aragon cannot be found in any major history of Catalan literature, from Riquer (1964 and 1972), Molas and Romeu i Figueras, or even, more recently, Alemany Ferrer or Broch. On the definition of "Catalan literature" in Riquer and other literary historians, see King, 43-55.

¹⁶ On Hebrew use of Bruni's and John Arguropolou's translations of Aristotle, see Zonta 1996, 273-4; Tirosh-Samuelson 1997a, 559-60; and 1997b, 365 n. 58.

¹⁷ Harvey notes Crescas's conception of love, drawn from a critique of Aristotle and Plato, is directly echoed by Leone Ebreo in his *Dialoghi d'amore* (1998, 114-17). On Messer Leon's reception of the writing of Crescas and other Aragonese Jews in Naples in the later fifteenth century, see Tirosh-Samuelson 1991, especially p. 84. On Abravanel's humanism, see Gutwirth 1998a; and Lawee, 44-5, 169-87.

¹⁸ On the dating of these works, see Netanyahu, 221-6. For a detailed consideration of Duran and his work, see Kozodoy 2006.

¹⁹ Arthur Lesley 1992, 49, has noted the direct use of Duran's grammar by later Italian thinkers, calling it "readily adaptable to the task of integrating the diverse elements of the new northern Italian Jewish communities...the result was a new and distinct Italian Jewish culture, which innovated several genres of Hebrew composition, notably rhetorical and ethical." Similarly, Klaus Hermann has noted that, "Within the Renaissance culture and its Ciceronian ideal of the Latin language Profiat Duran's *Ma'aseh Efod* could easily form the Jewish counterpart to this contemporary stream: the Hebrew Bible functions as the Jewish equivalent of classical literature." (30). Bonfil 2001,

One of Duran's most strikingly original views was to approach his critique of Christian ideas through a critique of its textual tradition.²⁰ In *Reproach of the Gentiles*, which is dedicated to Ḥasdai Crescas, Duran devotes the last of twelve chapters to explain “the errors of Jerome the corrupter” in his Latin translation of the Hebrew Bible. Rather than focusing on theological arguments only, Duran pays close attention to the language of the translation, arguing that Jerome erred in various ways and this has corrupted Christian tradition: “When I went over Jerome the corruptor’s translation of the Holy books and I stopped to see the ambushes of his corruptions and his errors, I saw that they are numerous, some in simple passages, others in complex ones and transitional ones, others in grammar and syntax—and in all of these categories they are innumerable.” (Profiat 1981, 64; Cohan 75). Duran contrasts the Christian corruption of the text through Jerome to the Jewish preservation of the text. Among the many copies of the Hebrew Bible of Jews in different regions, “there are not found among them the replacement (*hiluf*) of even a single letter” because the Jewish sages took care “that there not occur any corruption (*shibush*) in them over time.” (Profiat 1981, 65).

This focus on the problem of errors in scribal copies and in translation bears a curious similarity to the anti-Christian arguments of Anselm Turmeda’s *Tuhfat al-adīb fī al-radd ‘alā ahl al-ṣalīb* (*Gift of the Lettered One for the Refutation of the People of the Cross*), written after his conversion to Islam and his composition of the *Disputa de l’ase*. Turmeda makes the claim, albeit from a Muslim perspective rather than a Jewish one, that “those who wrote the four Gospels...falsified the religion of Jesus and added things to the word of God, or they cut, falsified, or modified it...” (276-9). While it is highly unlikely that Turmeda would have known Duran’s argument (although he claims he could read Hebrew well), the parallel is curious, and in Duran’s case, the argument stands out as even more innovative.²¹ His concern with ancient sources and manuscript transmission seems to have been an integral part of his critique of Christian belief. In commenting on Duran’s innovative approach, David Nirenberg has argued that, “Duran borrowed extensively from Christian Humanist strategies for establishing pure archetypes of texts and concepts through critical study of manuscript transmission and corruption” (38-9). Whether we accept this assessment or not, it is certain that, like Crescas, whom he personally knew, Duran was also surely influenced by the Christian milieu in which he was forced to work.

This is nowhere more evident than in Duran’s famous epistle, “Al tehi ka-avotekha” (“Be not like your fathers”), written to David Bonet Bonjorn, a convert like Duran, but one who allegedly intended to embrace his new faith.²² The text is a scathing satire ostensibly praising its addressee for his new beliefs.²³ By inverting the Jewish virtue of faithfully upholding the faith of one’s

170-71, has also noted how seventeenth-century Venetian rabbi Simone Luzzatto (d. 1663) drew directly from Duran’s categorization of Jewish society into Talmudists, philosophers, and Kabbalists laid out in the introduction to the *Ma’aseh Efod*. Gutwirth 1989, 60, likens Duran’s epistles “to the ‘humanist letters’ (of which Petrarch’s are a prime example) that were treated as literary works intended to give evidence of scholarship and win the consideration of those they addressed.” On Duran’s categories in the *Ma’aseh Efod*, see Gutwirth 1991.

²⁰ For a consideration of the polemical and philosophical arguments in the text, see Cohen; and Lasker 2007, 74-6, 90-92, 136-50, and elsewhere (see index).

²¹ In the *Cobles del Regne de Mallorca*, he says of himself, “O de les tres lletres mestre! Lo morsic vos és tot clar/ e en l’hebraic sòts molt destre” (1927, 121).

²² Frank Talmage calls Bonjorn “the protégé of Pablo de Santa María—the former Solomon ha-Levi” (1999, 286), a figure who was the father of Alonso de Cartagena, one of the prime movers of humanist thought in Castile in fifteenth century (Fernández Gallardo, 175). Duran, Bonjorn, Pablo, and Alonso (then a small child) all converted around 1391. On the intersection of Catalan humanism with that of the rest of the peninsula, see Butiñá 2008; and Cortijo & Jiménez Calvente.

²³ The sixteenth-century publisher of the text, Isaac ben Abraham Akrish (in *Iggeret Ogeret*, Constantinople, ca. 1577) asserts that Christians misunderstood this text and called it in Latin *Alteca Boteca* (a garbling of the Hebrew title *Al tehi ka-avotekha*). On Akrish’s publication, see Heller, 2:662-3. Akrish’s introduction, which is the oldest reference I know of to this Latinized title and history of reception (and he gives no specific example from earlier

fathers and transmitting it to one's sons, Duran mocks Bonjorn in false agreement. "One thing has become clear to me: that the heritage of your ancestors was a deplorable mistake." (Profiat 1981, 73; Kobler 277, with my changes). The letter is punctuated by his repetition of the title: "Be not like your fathers (*Al tehi ka-avotekha*), who believed in one God from whose unity they had removed any plurality [...]. Be not like your fathers, who by close scrutiny tried to find a deep philosophical meaning in the account of creation [...]. Be not like your fathers, upon whom the holy Torah of Moses was bestowed as heritage and possession" (Profiat 1981, 74-77; Kobler 277-9). This repetition is skillfully woven with another: "Be not like your fathers [...] they have erred indeed [...] But not you! (*ve-atah lo khen*)...Be not like your fathers [...] who tried to penetrate to the foundations of truth. But not you!" (Profiat 1981, 74-5; Kobler 277-8). This harsh critique voiced through false praise, mixing traditional elements of religious polemical argument with a careful attention to rhetoric and style and a mocking satirical tone, is unique in the context of Christian-Jewish polemical writing, which often tends to be intellectual or exegetical in content, formulaic in style, and often without nuance in tone.²⁴

This combination of traditional and innovative elements resembles that found in parts of Duran's own *Reproach of the Gentiles*, but with one important difference: Whereas the latter offer an example of the use of a traditional form (polemical treatise) to express innovative ideas (textual criticism of Scripture), the former represents the expression of traditional ideas (arguments from Jewish-Christian disputation) in an innovative form (a satirical letter). Duran's letter, while not humanist in its ideas, does resemble in its form some Christian sources of this period. This form of writing would become especially popular among Christian humanists as they rediscovered and translated Greek and Latin satirical texts, (Butiñá 2002a, 98; Kozodoy 2011, 196). As Maud Kozodoy observes, such a parallel, while not evidence of borrowing by Duran, cannot be discarded in considering the context of his satire (Kozodoy 2011, 186).²⁵ To affirm this connection in no way undermines his originality as a thinker or his unwavering commitment to Judaism, but is, rather, to stress the importance of situating his writing in its wider cultural context. It is logical to understand his writing in the context of the ongoing Jewish-Christian polemical contest in Aragon such as finds expression in the writings of Francesc Eiximinis (1327-1409) or San Vicente Ferrer (1350-1419), and that would culminate in the Disputation of Tortosa in 1413-1414.²⁶ It may also be appropriate, however, to explain some aspects of his argumentation through its parallels with the inchoate humanism of some of his Christian contemporaries, even if his own writing, despite its innovations, cannot be considered humanist.²⁷

writing as evidence), was reprinted with Duran's text in Geiger, 3 (not paginated). Duran's epistle has been edited by Talmage (Profiat 1981, 73-83). Various translations are available, including a partial English translation in Kobler, 1:276-282, and a full Catalan translation in Feliu. For a study of the text, see Kozodoy 2011 and 2006, 120-133; and Talmage's comments in Profiat 1981, 25-6, 28-30. For a listing of the editions and translations of the text, see Kozodoy 2006, 343-4.

²⁴ For a consideration of the tone and style of Duran's letter in the context of those of other types of polemical writing, see Lasker 1999, 256-8.

²⁵ "Although anti-Christian polemic would seem an improbable place in which to find influences from the Christian literary tradition, in this case the improbable is made less so by the fact of Duran's contact with the court and his demonstrable awareness of Latin scriptural and scholastic texts" (Kozodoy 2011, 186).

²⁶ On Eiximinis's possible contact with Duran and Crescas, see Viera, 157. On the context of medieval Jewish-Christian debates and the ideas of Vicente Ferrer in the writing of Profiat Duran, see the notes by Niclós to his edition of Profiat Duran's *Teshuvot be-anshei aven* ("Replies to Impious Men") (Profiat 1999, 17 n. 5 and 52 n. 31).

²⁷ Both Baer (2:474-5 n. 41) and Talmage in his introduction to his edition of Duran's Hebrew writing (Profiat 1981, 16-20) suggest the possibility that Duran's ideas about the corruption of Christian scriptures may have been influenced by contemporary Christian dissenters such as John Wycliffe and John Hus. Gutwirth 1989, 59, and elsewhere, has reaffirmed the innovative nature of Duran's ideas and has aimed to situate them in the context of contemporary trends. In arguing against this connection, Cohen suggests instead that, "a more direct and significant source for Duran's innovative criticism was the Christian anti-Jewish polemic of the generations that preceded him"

The Poetry of Solomon Bonafed

It is ironic that Duran's attention to language, which as Eleazar Gutwirth argues, "points subtly forward to the scholarly assumptions of the sixteenth century rather than to medieval sources and antecedents" (1989, 59), was in fact born in the context of Jewish-Christian polemical debate, a debate defined more by medieval than humanist concerns. Yet this combined focus on language simultaneously from a theological/polemical and what resembles a proto-humanist/critical position appears not only in Duran's writing, but also in the poetry and letters of Duran's younger contemporary, Solomon Bonafed, who flourished in the first half of the fifteenth century. Bonafed was part of a group of poets calling themselves the *adat ha-nogenim* ("community of players/poets") centered in and around Zaragoza that included Solomon De Piera and Vidal Benveniste. In Arturo Prats's words, this group "would bring about a cultural revival by the end of the fourteenth century and, primarily, in the first decade of the fifteenth century...these poets...were the architects of a 'renaissance' of Hebrew poetry that created a new poetic universe based on the tradition of Hispanic Hebrew poetry" (2010b, 216).²⁸

Despite this "renaissance" of poetic writing in Hebrew, ben Labi and de Piera, among others of the group, converted to Christianity. Bonafed, who did not convert, responded to these troubling events in his poetry. In particular, he not only attacked his former coreligionists with satire and invective influenced by Christian models.²⁹ He also discusses the Hebrew language as a key marker of Jewish identity and a tool of defense against the pressure to convert. In a poem addressed to the convert Isaac Adret, for example, Bonafed writes, "If the way of your faith has become hid... / If Time has stripped you of your cloak, your truth... / accept the turban of my poem to cover yourself." (Gross, 53; Bejarano Escanilla, 1:335; Prats 2010b, 223). Describing himself as "He, the one who speaks to you in a pure language" (*be-safah berurah*), by which he means Hebrew, Bonafed aims "to stir up the heart of the well-born and honorable men by means of poetry and to drag their hearts with pleasing words set up in this knowledge" (Kaminka 10:293 and 12:40; Prats 2010b, 218-19). Hebrew is for him the foundation of all true understanding and the culmination of poetic greatness: "Poetry can say great words in all languages,/ but the holy language is the fruit of all its works" (Kaminka 12:37; Bejarano Escanilla 1:283; Sáenz-Badillos, 2000b, 351). Not only does he reflect on language and literature from an authorial perspective as a tool by which to influence his readers, he also sees poetry in Hebrew as a bastion of Jewish identity against the mounting pressures to assimilate and convert.

In his attention to the superiority of the Hebrew language, he nevertheless concedes that the Christians are superior to the Jews of his day in their cultivation of philosophy. "The path of Christians in logic is the correct path, even though their other ways are paths of death, but their paths in logic were distinct from ours." (Bejarano Escanilla 1:19; Sáenz-Badillos and Prats 17). As Duran does in his critique of Christian beliefs, Bonafed approaches the problem through the translation and transmission of sources. Christians have a superior cultivation of logic, he says, because their translation of Aristotle into Latin, following Boethius, is superior to that of Averroes, which is the source used by Jews: "They use the translation of Boethius, which follows Aristotle faithfully, while we are guided by the translation of Averroes...those who translated his writings to the holy language [Hebrew] changed and corrupted its meaning" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:21). This attention to the corruption of texts in translation and commentary

(80). Very recently, in her consideration of the possible sources and styles of Duran's letter "Be Not Like Your Fathers," Kozodoy, 2011, 201, offers the useful synthesizing suggestion that "we do not need to choose among alternative scenarios. Living at the intersection of late-medieval Jewish and Christian communities, Profiat Duran composed an epistle that drew – in form as well as in content – from both." My suggestion here does not insist on a specific source, Christian or otherwise, but instead aims only to justify the association of Duran's innovation with contemporary humanistic trends evident in the writing of his closest contemporaries in the crown of Aragon.

²⁸ For Bonafed's poems and an introduction to the bibliography of all published sources up to 1989, see the dissertation by Bejarano Escanilla. For more recent treatment, see Sáenz-Badillos, 2000b and Prats, 2010a.

²⁹ For a discussion of Bonafed's use of satire and interaction with Christian models, see Prats 2006, especially 81-7.

in the evaluation of philosophical learning, preferring a more ancient version over a more recent medieval commentary, reflects a view of textual authorities more akin to the world of the Jewish humanists of Italy than that of Maimonides or Averroes or their commentators.

Despite his willingness to concede Christian superiority in the transmission and learning of Aristotle, Bonafed remains faithful to Hebrew as a superior language of poetry and of faith. Yet his attention to the Hebrew language as a marker of identity displays a meta-poetic awareness with a focus on human enjoyment and aesthetic use characteristic of humanist writers:

Remember poetry and do not forget its rewards [...]
 She gives glory to those who know her charm. Therefore,
 My friend put her earrings in your ears [...]
 In truth, poetry is for man's benefit and acquisition. (*'inyan ve-qinyan*)
 (Kaminka 12:35; Bejarano Escanilla 1:278; Prats 2010b, 220)

Bonafed's poetic images, especially in his love poetry, might be compared to those of contemporary Catalan poets (such as Jordi de Sant Jordi and Andreu Febrer), as Prats and Sáenz-Badillos have suggested.³⁰ In one famous line, Bonafed even claims to be following Romance models, which he knew well: "In Romance poetry my heart seeks advice with care, / and if the light shines, the Arab has pitched his tent there" (Patai 70; Bejarano Escanilla 1:265-6; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 352). At the same time, his focus on language and eloquence might also be likened, in some aspects, to that of Italian Jewish writers from later in the fifteenth century. For example, Bonafed's focus on Hebrew also extends to a poetic description of the Hebrew Bible in which "all the books of the prophets speak in poetry / to the extent that the prophets become troubadours in the people's eyes" (Kaminka 12:38; Bejarano Escanilla 1: 279; Prats 2010b, 220). This comparison bears a striking similarity to the arguments of Italian Jewish humanist Judah Messer Leon, who in his *Sefer Nofet Zufim* (*Book of the Honeycomb's Flow*), from ca. 1465-70, uses classical rhetorical authors to demonstrate the "Torah's pleasing words and stylistic elegancies" (i.13.13, 144-5) and to demonstrate why the "Prophets [are] by common consent held to be without peer among the orators of the Nations" (iv.68.1, 558-9). Bonafed's expression of parallel language and ideas in his poetry, albeit on a much smaller scale, not only suggests a common ground with other Hebrew writers of subsequent generations, but also sheds light on the literary and cultural currents that were spreading throughout the kingdom of Aragon during his career.³¹

The examples presented above from the writings of Ḥasdai Crescas, Profiat Duran, and Solomon Bonafed are obviously not meant to constitute an exhaustive list of all possible parallels between Jewish writing in the context of early Catalan humanism. One could add other poetic examples from Bonafed's own works, as well as other poets of his circle, or consider in more detail the content of Duran's and Crescas's work or that of numerous other texts from Jewish

³⁰ On Bonafed's similarities to Jordi de Sant Jordi, see Prats 2011, 158, Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 354, argues that Bonafed's "love poems can be a good example of the merging of such elements with others employed in the Romance (Catalan) lyric of the epoch." Sáenz-Badillos elsewhere also makes the following careful assessment: "En sus poemas de amor se entremezclan los motivos típicos andalusíes con elementos del amor cortés de procedencia feudal características de la poesía provenzal y cierto gusto por los continuos contrastes que, sin ser totalmente novedoso, resulta característico de la poesía inspirada por Petrarca" (2000a, 205). On Bonafed and Andreu Febrer, see 196.

³¹ Prats 2011; Gutwirth 1998b; Sáenz-Badillos, 2000b; and Targarona, all propose, with certain caveats, understanding Bonafed's poetic writing within the context of the cultural trends of the period, and this cannot exclude the emergence of a nascent humanist vocabulary. On Bonafed's connection with Italy and the currents of early humanism among his Christian contemporaries, see Sáenz-Badillos 2000a.

writers of the period. Such examples would, however, be superfluous to substantiate the point I am making here, which is that there are suggestive parallels in Jewish and Christian writing of this period in Aragon and that intertextual comparisons between them will surely enrich our understanding of both without questioning their core canonical significance within separate literary traditions. Such comparisons are, moreover, a natural way to approach these texts. Jewish writers were not exclusively confined to their own cultural world, nor were Christian writers universally unaware or uninterested in the Jewish writers in their midst. At the same time, such a reading allows more conceptual space for a critical treatment of writing by converted Jews that goes beyond the problematic categories centered on their purported Christian sincerity or Jewish steadfastness.

Hebrew Humanism?

To raise the question of the interpenetration, or at the very least the resemblance, of Hebrew and Romance or Jewish and Christian writing at the turn of the fifteenth century in Aragon is to raise another, more difficult question, one that goes beyond a simple description of parallels or contacts between writers. This question, which is already an active one in the study of Jewish culture in Renaissance Italy, concerns the legitimacy of applying a category developed principally to describe Christian writing to the description of texts by Jewish writers. Addressing this issue in Italian sources, David Ruderman has suggested that, “if one is not entitled to speak of a Jewish Renaissance, one might legitimately speak of a real impact of Renaissance culture on Jewish cultural processes and thought” (414). Despite the abundant evidence for such an impact presented by Ruderman and others, scholars such as Robert Bonfil (and even Ruderman himself) have repeatedly called for interpreting Renaissance Jewish culture in Italy “on its own terms...rather than in simple terms of response to external challenge” (Bonfil 1984, 79). In an attempt to meet this call, Hava Tirosh-Samuels and Arthur Lesley have argued in favor of exploring not the impact of Renaissance ideas on Jewish culture but what Lesley calls a “Hebrew Humanism,” in which Jews are seen to write about topics such as grammar, poetry, philosophy, or rhetoric with a distinctly humanist interest in historical tradition yet without losing a uniquely Jewish concern with religious tradition and revelation (Tirosh-Samuels 1988; Lesley 1982).³²

Lesley’s call for defining Jewish humanism in Italy according to its own characteristics rather than only in terms of a contemporary Christian Renaissance humanism is useful in addressing the question of how to discuss Aragonese Jews in the context of Catalan Humanism. In attempting to define the nature of Jewish Humanism without recourse to a model of “Christian impact,” one approach that scholars have turned to is to focus on, in Mark Meyerson’s words, “Jews’ selective adoption of humanist ideas and their adaptation of them for their own (Jewish) purposes” (10). In terms of the “Hebrew Humanism” of Renaissance Italy, this selective adaptation and eclecticism can be defined in part by the hybridity of Jewish cultural production. Adam Shear, for example, has observed that Judah Moscato (ca. 1530-ca. 1593) combined “medievalism, humanism, Jewish particularism, and Renaissance universalism. For Moscato, these categories were not mutually exclusive” (165). Similarly, Mauro Zonta has argued that “the new Humanistic trends in fifteenth-century Jewish thought did not hinder the development of a parallel Italian Hebrew Scholasticism...in some cases, the same person partook of both scholasticism and Humanism” (2006, 25 and 137-8). If we are to approach the question of humanism or proto-humanism among the Jews of Aragon, it must be through a similar lens that identifies the selectiveness of Jewish appropriation and adaptation of new values and ideas from their culture.³³

The poetry of Solomon Bonafed provides one example of just such a combination of tendencies and perspectives that seem thoroughly medieval and at the same time, post-medieval, a combination that, in an Italian context, scholars such as Lesley have deemed “Hebrew Humanism.” One such place where this combination is evident is Bonafed’s own meditation on

³² For a recent discussion of the problem, see Veltri 1-5, 39-59. For a discussion of the problem of defining “humanism” more generally, see Guowens.

³³ For a discussion of the overlapping of medievalist and humanist trends in non-Jewish writing, see Riquer 1969.

his role as a poet and on his place in a tradition of poets. While his poetry is classical and seems to share nothing formally with the innovations in form taking place in Romance-language verse, it also displays Bonafed's meta-poetic consciousness of himself as an author. For example, he states, "Those who are hungry for poetry will harvest my tomb's fields" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:300; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 347) and "The apostates fall slain before the sound of the flute/ of my poems" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:44). He also boasts of himself the best of the poets of his day: "What matter if my [fellow] poets are angry with me? I am the shepherd and they are a flock of sheep!" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:223; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 350). In these reflections, he ponders his relation to antiquity, affirming that "of the very ancient brook I drew out poetry" (Patai 70; Bejarano Escanilla 1:266; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 352) and "My poems are twins of the poetry of the elders" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:302; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 346). While this braggadocio is common in earlier medieval Hebrew poetry as well, it takes on in Bonafed a clearly historical character, one that is acutely aware of the past, not only as myth but also as history. Bonafed considers the place of his own time in the mundane chronology of ages.

At the same time, Bonafed sees himself not only as the inheritor but also as the rejuvenator of ancient poetic traditions that are now dying. In a letter to the convert Gonzalo de la Caballería (Vidal ben Labi), Bonafed famously describes an imagined encounter with the eleventh-century Andalusí poet Solomon ibn Gabirol (ca. 1021-ca. 1058), who appears to Bonafed in a dream vision:

And while I was speaking, behold, I saw
Gabirol rising up before me—
Awesome in might, he stood like an angel
Revealed there in the heights to me...

Gabirol criticizes Bonafed's contemporaries in Zaragoza and speaks of the anger of Bonafed's enemies against him, but praises Bonafed for his poetic greatness:

They saw that you were in fact my brother
In song's worth, for your words were fine;
My name is in you, and in this time
You've done great things, as great as mine. (Schirmann 31)³⁴

Not only does this scene evoke a strong likeness to Dante's vision of Virgil or Metge's vision of King Joan, Orpheus, and Tiresias. It also shows Bonafed's sense of his own identity as the greatest poet of his generation. He is, in his own words, "among poets like a rose among thorns, and old poetry / is renewed, the ancient one is harvested in the causeways" (Bejarano Escanilla 1:213; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 350). He is both the last of a long line and the first of his kind: "It is not a shortcoming that I am the last one who sings, but an advantage that I am the last one and the first one." (Bejarano Escanilla 1:302; Sáenz-Badillos 2000b, 346.) As Bonafed reflects on his own time in a tradition of ages, he also sees his own poetry and authorship, on which he explicitly reflects, as both the reviver of a lost art and the innovator of a new one.

While it would be incorrect to characterize Bonafed, Duran, or Crescas, or any other Jewish writer of the period as humanists *tout court*, I do believe that the parallels between these writers and their Christian contemporaries set many Jewish texts of this period apart from earlier Jewish writing in the Peninsula and situate them more logically in the wider literary currents of the crown of Aragon. In particular, the possible intersection of Catalan humanism with the writing of late-medieval Aragonese Jewish writing merits further consideration among historians of this literature who tend to treat Jewish culture as a hermetic tradition largely unconnected with cultural changes within Christian culture. At the same time, the flourishing of many forms of

³⁴ The original has been edited in Schirmann, starting at 31 (poem 4, lines 21-56), here lines 21-2, 30-31. This translation is from Cole, 317. See also Prats 2010a, 88-91; and Sáenz-Badillos 2000a, 201.

writing—poetry, philosophy, epistolary prose, including texts written in Catalan—by the Jewish contemporaries of Catalan humanist writers demands the attention of historians of Romance literatures. The Jewish writers of late-medieval Aragon are not only significant within the tradition of Iberian Jewish writers, but they are important contributors to a larger tradition of the late-medieval literatures (whatever the language, religion, or culture) of the crown of Aragon and the Iberian Peninsula more generally. While their writing is logically to be understood within its own Jewish cultural milieu and tradition, it undoubtedly also reflects in some cases the cultural trends of the wider society within which it was produced. The lack of intertextual comparison between the literatures of late-medieval Aragon segregates Jewish and Christian cultural production within overly limiting linguistic and confessional boundaries and impoverishes the study of both traditions.

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