

CRÍTICA BIBLIOGRÁFICA

Joseph and the Schwab Tradition ¹

I

Unlike the Yosef ["Muy apuesto... como rosas e flores"] of the fourteenth-century *Coplas*, but very much like Abraham Geiger, Moritz Steinschneider, Adolph Neubauer and Solomon Schechter, Moïse Schwab had physical problems, particularly with his eyes. In 1908 readers of the *Revue des Études Juives* were given a report on Schwab's surgical operation for "affaiblissement de la vue."² This raises again the question of contingencies in the history of research, but it is directly relevant to the field of Josephine studies, as his article produced problems and possibly delays in the course of the research which led to the present-day revival of studies on Joseph literature.

Schwab began as secretary to S. Munk who rose to fame by identifying the Malagan Avengebrol and who translated the Cordovan sage's *Guide of the Perplexed* into French. He could well have seen himself as someone interested in medieval Hispano-Jewish culture. Moïse Schwab was also one of the early readers of Judeo-Spanish manuscripts.

The general opinions about Schwab seem to be disturbingly polarized. Was he the self-sacrificing individual, emblematic of a tradition of communal and scholarly service? Or was he someone about whose work one could only say that it exists and that it is neither useful nor comprehensible? One has to admit that his cryptic (and sometimes contradictory) descriptions of some manuscripts did not lead to a corpus of research on others. Encyclopedia articles monotonously repeated each other, remarking that he had made mistakes in his work on the Yerushalmi. This is the case with the article on Schwab by "F. T. H." in *The Jewish Encyclopedia* from New York as well as with the article by "C. S." in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (*sv*) from Jerusalem –sixty years later– where the formulation is "His great erudition was not always matched by equal exactitude." The problems with his studies on the Hebrew epigraphy of Spain meant that Cantera Burgos and Millás Vallicrosa had to produce –not a revision, but– a new book. All the same, and taking these repeated critiques as an evident point of departure, one would also have to point out other aspects which are not usually repeated.

¹ *Las Coplas de Yosef: Entre la Biblia y el Midrash en la poesía judeoespañola*. Estudios, edición y notas de Luis GIRÓN NEGRÓN y Laura MINERVINI (Madrid: Gredos, 2006).

² *REJ* 55 (1908), p. II.

Thus, for example, in 1910, in his study of –what we now know as– the *Coplas de Yocef*,³ he noted the Talmudic / Aggadic / Midrashic sources or antecedents (Berakhot, Sota, Shabbat, Hagiga, Sanhedrin, Erakhin) Zohar, Yalqut, as well as the usual medieval exegetes. The realization of the “hidden learning” of the fourteenth-century Judeo-Spanish *Coplas*, sometimes imagined to be destined to a public of “les femmes et les ignorants” is, therefore, an aspect which methodologically is highly indebted to Schwab. He was also the first, apparently, to note that the later *Coplas de Yocef* [*Ha-Šaddiq*] should not be confused with this poem. This has been a difficult lesson and I. M. Hassán has pointed to examples of confusionism and “embrollos.” In addition, it has to be noted that despite the critiques, the production of alternatives is not very evident and, where it occurs, it takes a very long time indeed. Such unusually prolonged hiatuses between the work and the alternative may well suggest that there were real challenges in the materials. In some cases, the critics, e.g. Georges J. Weill, are not known to have produced an alternative.

Speaking of the manuscripts of the Consistoire collection and their cataloguing, G. J. Weill writes: “le premier catalogue fut publié... en 1902. Malheureusement Moïse Schwab pris par multiples occupations et manquant de formation en codicologie [!] hébraïque ne publia qu’une suite...de notices brèves et souvent inexactes, par ordre alphabétique d’auteurs. Ce catalogue n’a aujourd’hui que le seul mérite d’exister...” Weill does not recatalogue Hebrew character manuscripts but rather the non-Hebraic materials [i.e. “les manuscrits Judaica”] because of “l’influence des travaux de Simon Dubnow” in 1979.⁴

It is thanks to works such as those of I. Hassán that we have an inkling of the problematics of Schwab’s edition of the “quatrains judeoespagnols” and other examples of the Joseph tradition. We still do not have all the basic facts, but we can see clearly how Schwab seems to inaugurate a line of studies which exhibit an unusual lack of transparency. Some of the problems appear as extremely simple and elementary, but have very powerful effects and indeed are still unsolved. The basic question of producing research which may be verified by others, i.e. where following the same steps will lead to the same conclusions, is the key to the problematics created by Schwab. The Parisian did not note the shelf mark of “les plats de reliure couvrant des manuscrits de la BNP.” Who discovered these? Schwab’s answer is: “on a decouvert.” What is the shelf mark? He replies: “en une dizaine d’exemplaires.” What size were they? “Deux feuillets qui contiennent seize quatrains en judeoespagnol.” It is not difficult to see why they could not be located. He did not write whether the text he was editing was printed or manuscript. He did not discuss whether the presentation of the text as “quatrains” was his own idea or whether they were arranged as such in the original. The transcription was not his own: “voici la transcription due aux bons soins de L. Barrau-Dihigo.” This⁵ brief line has wider implications for linguistic and literary studies.

³ “Quatrains Judeo-espagnols,” *Revue Hispanique* XXIII (1910), pp. 321-326.

⁴ *Catalogue des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque* (Paris 1979), p. 15.

⁵ Apparently unnoticed here, with the significant exception of p. 357 [“en colaboración con Barrau Dihigo”] but generally cited, according to tradition, as Schwab.

Its interest for the history of interdisciplinary studies may be realized once we recall that Barrau-Dihigo was no newcomer to medieval linguistic documents. Ten years earlier, for example, he had studied the “Chartes de l’église de Valpuesta.”⁶ It also draws attention to the platform of the publication of the “quatrains”; not the *REJ* but the *Revue Hispanique* being edited by Foulché-Delbosc.

Part of the transcriptions produced an unreadable text,⁷ so that further linguistic or literary study was not encouraged. It took the better part of a century to produce some kind of alternative or at least a clear statement of some of the problems of these barely sixteen lines. His work on the Alphabet of Ben Sira⁸ is similarly instructive. He called it “Les Sentences de Ben Sira en version espagnole [!]” and only recently E. Romero has clearly articulated some of the problems in her own work on Schwab’s texts.⁹

Nevertheless if one attempts to contextualize him in his time, that is, if we were to undertake a survey of the fate of some similar collections, it would soon become apparent that Schwab’s achievements in identification whatever one’s critiques- could not even be approached, let alone paralleled. Descriptions such as “Ladino 2ff” are not “better” than Schwab’s work, they are simply not alternatives.

Today’s literary studies have confirmed the decision to take seriously the notion of a Hispanic “Joseph literature” as a point of departure for scholarly inquiry. The study of such a Joseph literature has taken different directions: oral, medieval and Golden Age. In the latter, the earliest seems to be the *Tragedia Josephina* by Miguel de Carvajal, a five-act drama which was placed on the *Index* in 1559 and whose Hebrew character version was unknown until discovered in the Cairo Genizah. Like the *Coplas*, the *Tragedia* is, of course, part of this Joseph literature. Like the *Coplas*, it attracted attention in the *Encuentros de las Tres Culturas*. At the second one (1983) Joseph Silverman delivered a paper on “Jews and Judaism in Carvajal’s *Tragedia Josephina*.”¹⁰ It is worth recalling it briefly, amongst other reasons, because it was not published in the *Actas*. Silverman begins by recalling the *Tragedia*’s rarity and inclusion in the *Index*. He contrasts its rarity with its intrinsic worth and qualities invoking Gillet, whose thorough study of the *Tragedia*

⁶ *Revue Hispanique* VII / 23-24 (1900), pp. 272-389.

⁷ See an example on p. 225, n. to 14b, where Barrau-Dihigo – Schwab read “qu’esto como oros” rather than “questo [*quisto* = ‘querido’, ‘deseado’] como oros” as the editors now explain.

⁸ *REJ* 54 (1907), pp. 107-112

⁹ “Queremos subrayar que la edición de Schwab es desastrosa y que sus lecturas del texto aljamiado están plagadas de errores e invenciones, dejando el texto ininteligible,” cf. Elena ROMERO, “Versiones judeoespañolas del libro hebreo medieval. ‘Los relatos de Ben Sirá,’” in *History and Creativity*, ed. T. ALEXANDER et al. (Jerusalem 1994), 177-187, p. 180.

¹⁰ I cite from the typescript which the author kindly presented to me. See also *Tragedia Josephina*, by Micael de Carvajal, edited by Joseph E. GILLET. Elliott Monographs, no. 28 (Princeton 1932).

had led him to the conclusion that “nowhere yet in modern Europe had [passion] risen to such fullness of power and to such nearly tragic dignity” [as in the *Josephina*]. Silverman, however, criticizes Gillet who researched European literature on the Joseph theme rather thoroughly but “Oddly it seems never to have occurred to him that Carvajal was [...] privy to Jewish folklore.” Speaking of the additions to the biblical story –Joseph’s lament on the grave of his mother Rachel, the play’s emphasis on Joseph’s extraordinary beauty, the elaborate development given to Potiphar’s wife’s seduction– Silverman asserts: “The episodes mentioned all come from a single source, the *Sefer Ha-Yashar* [...] an anthology of Jewish folklore compiled in Spain in the thirteenth century” (p. 5). Gillet, according to Silverman, had only consulted Ginzburg’s *The Legends of the Jews*, hence his odd conclusions.

González Llubera in 1932-1935 could not have known about the aljamiado edition of the *Tragedia Josephina* from the Genizah but, on the other hand, he drew attention, in the context of Joseph literature or versions, to a catalogue published in Amsterdam 1866, *Notice de la bibliothèque de S. Sarphati*

The latter contained a reference to a manuscript dated 5446 which included a *Comedia de la vida y sucesos de Joseph* by Ishaq Matitia Aboab, a work “which has remained unpublished in a MS” as the great Catalan scholar asserted in 1935, drawing the public’s attention to Aboab’s text.¹¹ Despite these two published references to Aboab’s *Comedia*, no prints of the original ensued as far as I know.

The question of Midrash raised by Schwab, Gillet, Silverman, and others deserves to be briefly mentioned to understand the direction of today’s studies on Judeo-Spanish literature in general and Girón-Negrón and Minervini’s study of the *Coplas* in particular. Midrash / Aggadah –to put it briefly and imprecisely– was, in the Middle Ages, sometimes and in certain situations, something of an embarrassment. This is what leads to the possibly apologetic stance in thirteenth-century Catalonia, namely that they were “sermões” (Nahmanides) or the argument in the fifteenth century (at Tortosa) that *sunt sermocionalia*. Some fourteenth-century Hispano-Jewish authors claim to be moved to write books because “we are mocked by the Gentiles” for the “irrational” Midrash. The converso Alfonso de Zamora in his *Iggeret* also ridicules the midrashim.¹²

In the nineteenth century there was pioneering and important work on Midrash, indeed, work at the very origins of the *Wissenschaft*. Nevertheless, even Zunz accepts or includes notions about persecutions (which explain the rise of Midrash) and mentions (amongst others) the role of “an easier way to obtain honours” as a factor in the success of Midrash in the first millennium.¹³

¹¹ *A Medieval Spanish Poem in Hebrew Characters*. Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Ignacio GONZÁLEZ LLUBERA (Cambridge 1935), p. XII, n. 1.

¹² E. GUTWIRTH, “Inquisition, Theology and the *Lozana Andaluza*,” in *The Roman Inquisition, the Index and the Jews*, ed. S. WENDEHORST (Leiden - Boston 2004), pp. 71-106.

¹³ “Derekh qalah yoter linhol kavod”: Leopold ZUNZ & Hanokh ALBECK, *Ha-Derashot be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem 1954, 2nd ed.), p. 33.

The attitude was not completely unanimous. Other types of critiques do exist and they come from unexpected quarters. A letter from Vienna by the editor of *Beth Talmud*, Isaac H. Weiss, to Schechter in 1887 refers sardonically –it seems– to the authors working on Midrash “in the last ten years.” The letter, sent on the publication of Schechter’s work on *Avot de Rabbi Nathan*, refers to these anonymous authors as the “composers of footnotes... [referring] to Midrashim, little and great” [“meḥabre he’arot we-he’arot le-midrashim qetanim ‘im gedolim”].¹⁴ The question is whether twentieth-century Modernism, with its new respect for the logic of the dream, the unconscious, the surreal, the mythical, wrought a completely new mind set. It is against this background that the initial gestures of Schwab become significant.

To be sure, Schwab’s references were not complete and one doubts whether there is, at the moment, a possibility of such completeness, even if there are thematic, literary studies which take Midrashim into account such as Marc Bernstein’s Berkeley 1992 thesis on Joseph.¹⁵ Nevertheless, one should bear in mind two points. The first has been succinctly summed up by James Kugel in a prologue to the facsimile reprint¹⁶ of the much loved English multivolume work translated from Louis Ginzburg’s German original and indexed by Henrietta Szold. According to him, to many readers this became *The Legends of the Jews*. The second is that new Midrash texts or fragments are being found and neglected genres e.g. the Tosefta – Targum are being recognized.

In 1959, part of the *Coplas* were made available to a larger public amongst the *Textos lingüísticos del medioevo español*¹⁷. The authors-editors, D. J. Gifford and F. W. Hodcroft, thank González Llubera and thus make explicit the links in this “chain of tradition.” This work was followed, a year later, by another publication in which the *Coplas* reappear as “dialectología,” Manuel Alvar’s widely studied work.¹⁸ The once immensely popular *Antología de la literatura española* by J. M. Díez Borque, on the other hand, was published in 1977 and worked under different assumptions. Rather than “pure language,” he chose to provide, as an example of “Poesía en el siglo XIV,” two types: “mester de clerecía” and “poesía didáctica.” Under the first, “mester de clerecía,” he introduced *Las Coplas de Yocef* and he chose Schwab’s fragment of doubtful provenance, rather than the Cambridge manuscript available in at least two editions by the exiled Catalan scholar, González Llubera. This insured an ensuing interest in Schwab which, however, has not yet led to a full contextualization of the work of the Parisian scholar and disciple of, secretary to, Munk.

The full revival of the Schwab – Grünbaum tradition might possibly be traced to the years immediately following Díez Borque’s textbook. In the early 1980’s, apparent contingencies criss-

¹⁴ Y. KAVKOV, “Iggerot Isaac Hirsh Weiss li-Shneur Zalman Schechter,” *Bitzaron* 35-36 (1987-88), pp. 70-81.

¹⁵ *Coplas*, ed. GIRÓN-NEGRÓN – MINERVINI, pp. 367-368.

¹⁶ L. GINZBERG, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. I. With a new introduction by J. R. Kugel (Baltimore 1998).

¹⁷ Oxford 1959.

¹⁸ M. ALVAR, *Manual de dialectología hispánica: el español de España* (Barcelona 1960).

cross the historiography of the subject. I. Hassán's work on Joseph, although following on that of Attías, and, more closely, on his own doctoral dissertation on the *Coplas de Purim*, and although not medievalist in focus, attended not only to Schwab but also to the Viennese Grünbaum and his 1896 *Chrestomatie* (mentioned by Schwab) as one of the founders. In a paper entitled "¿Una versión completa? de las Coplas de Yocef publicadas fragmentariamente por González Llubera," delivered in October 1982 at the first *Encuentro de las Tres Culturas*,¹⁹ I. Hassán drew attention to Max Grünbaum's *Chrestomathie* and the "confusa presentación tipográfica del autor"; the "error de presentarla [i.e. la "edición de las Coplas de Toledo"], como incluida en una hoy perdida edición de Roscas de Purim" (p. 297 and n. 10). This was particularly interesting because it showed that even González Llubera could be unreliable when following Grünbaum. He wrote about "el insignificante fragmento publicado por Grünbaum" and contrasted it with Schwab's sixteen quatrains edited in 1910. He identifies Schwab's with the same poem as González Llubera's thanks to the Vatican MS, a Neofiti codex, and announced that "desde hace más de un año [...] vengo trabajando en la transcripción del texto aljamiado y preparando su edición." He called all these an "embrollo de versión." In a paper delivered some months later, on 16-18 December 1982, entitled "Las *Coplas de Yosef* sefardíes y la poesía oral," Iacob M. Hassán mentioned Schwab as the initiator of this type of study as well as the discovery and work on the Vatican MS "tal como ha quedado de manifiesto al haberse descubierto en la Biblioteca Vaticana un manuscrito, también aljamiado, que contiene lo que parece ser la versión completa del poema medieval y en cuya transcripción vengo trabajando" (p. 1 of the typescript). Dr. Hassán himself preferred not to publish all of his papers on the editions of texts "de tema josefino." The reason had to do with what Hassán called "ediciones fantasma." At subsequent *Encuentros* one could see J. M. Pedrosa who was already then working on the Josephine tradition which would lead to contributions such as those on the "Mancebo enamorado" or the "Pozo Airón."²⁰ Grünbaum and Schwab therefore may well be said to have started a tradition which still impinged on studies in the 1980s. A transcription appeared in California, edited by M. Lazar with the technical help of Robert Dilligan in 1990.²¹ These texts conform the precedents of the bulk of Girón-Negrón and Minervini's book (pp. 124-193) or, rather, of what they call an "edición bilingüe" of ca. 310 *Coplas* of mostly four verses each. An "aparato crítico" takes up pp. 195-211 and the jewels in the crown are the notes on pp. 213-326 with an almost Rashi-like, word by word commentary and the linguistic study on pp. 83-121.

¹⁹ *Encuentro de las Tres Culturas* I (Toledo 1983), pp. 283 ff.

²⁰ J. M. PEDROSA, "El pozo Airón: dos romances y dos leyendas," *Medioevo Romanzo* 2 (1993), pp. 261-275; IDEM, "La canción tradicional sefardí: 'El mancebo enamorado,'" in *History and Creativity*, pp. 159-174.

²¹ *Coplas de Yoçef*, in *Joseph and his Brethren: Three Ladino Versions*, ed. Moshe LAZAR (Culver City 1990), pp. 9-97.

II

What is the *Sitz-im-leben* of this poem? Are the *Coplas* a text for dramatic performance? Such questions are not approached nonchalantly in other cases of fourteenth-fifteenth-century Iberoromance texts. The examples of the Catalan and, later, Castilian translations or versions of *Hercules furens*, *Medea*, *Thyestes*, *Phoenissae*, *Phaedra*, *Oedipus*, and other texts of Senecan drama are discussed from this point of view by Blüher and other students of the theatre in Spain. They do not project to the past later evidence for performance, nor do they confuse different areas such as Italy or Spain.²²

In the case of the late medieval Hispano-Jewish communities, public of the *aljamiado* text of the *Coplas*, there are, if anything, more, rather than less, reasons for searching for medieval Iberian rather than later or non-Iberian cases. Medieval drama in general is closely linked to the Christian Church. In England, the *Everyman* plays and the cycle of Yorkshire have not only liturgical or topographic relations to it, but also content which aligns it with the teachings and beliefs of the Church. The cultural area of the Romania is no different, despite well-known exceptions.²³ But, in the Iberian Peninsula the ecclesiastic dimension is even more pronounced. Recent publications and collections of texts reconfirm and amplify this Church related, Christian character of the medieval theatre in Castile, Galicia, etc. Cátedra's discoveries in Madrid come from a particular provenance: conventual libraries (*Clarisas*).²⁴ These, similarly, are not secular or independent of an ecclesiastic environment. This is one case, therefore, where at least as much care as that accorded to the transcriptions is needed. The cases of dramatic works by seventeenth-century ex-*Conversos* in e.g. Amsterdam or the studies on the theatre of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century have very little

²² K. A. BLÜHER, *Seneca in Spanien: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Seneca-Rezeption in Spanien vom 13 bis 17 Jahrhundert* (München 1969).

²³ Studies and texts concerning medieval drama (from *Quem Quaeritis?* and onwards) conform a large and well established field in the case of Christian cultures. This is so amongst other factors because of the venerable age of the subject. See, for example, *Collection de Poésies, Romans, Chroniques, etc., publiées d'après d'anciens manuscrits et d'après des éditions des XV^e et XVI^e siècles* (Paris 1839-1841). In the very different case of Hispano-Jewish communities, finding the evidence tends to be a challenge. Some evidence for elements of the art in Hispano-Jewish communities concerns props, choreography, scenography, pageantry, body movements. See my "A Song and Dance: Transcultural Practices of Daily Life in Medieval Spain," in (ed. H. J. HAMES) *Jews, Muslims and Christians In and Around the Crown of Aragon* (Leiden 2003), 207-228.

²⁴ P. CÁTEDRA, "Fundación y dote del convento de la Visitación de Madrid de monjas clarisas," *Archivo Ibero-Americano* 47 / 185-188 (1987), pp. 307-329; Eva CASTRO (ed.), *Teatro medieval. I. El drama litúrgico* (Barcelona 1997); P. CÁTEDRA, "Poesía, liturgia y renovación del teatro medieval," en *Actas del XIII Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*. Madrid 6-11 de julio de 1998, coord. C. ALVAR EZQUERRA, F. SEVILLA ARROYO. Vol. 1 (2000), pp. 3-28.

to do with medieval drama. This is one case where appeal to “tradition” is extremely confusing and has no probatory or confirming value. Neither Amsterdam nor Salonika depended on a medieval tradition of Jewish dramatic texts.

The few discussions that have existed have not changed the picture. The ‘Eya velar’ question does not seem to have resulted in a consensus about thirteenth-century Jewish theatre. The late Prof. David Romano came to regret his initial belief in rabbinical actors in the Kingdom of Valencia in c. 1413. The Jewish ‘juglaresas’ and ‘juglares’ discussed by Menéndez Pidal –frequently on the basis of royal court records– are not the same as a Jewish dramatic “tradition.” Schirmann was highly conscious of the dearth of dramatic material in the literary production of medieval Jewish communities and lent unusual weight to apparently isolated cases of Hebrew dramatic works of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which are in any case later.²⁵

How, then, can one salvage González Llubera’s notion of the 1930’s,²⁶ that there is no difference between Spain and Provence and that despite the lack of evidence for the *Coplas* as a play for performance in medieval Hispano-Jewish communities, one can use the Provençal case (Caslari), or the eighteenth-century Purim play by Bermann of Limburg as a proof. McGaha’s recent attempt to salvage González Llubera –that the 1533 (?) Vatican MS (a late copy in any case) colophon’s date is not too far from Purim– seems unconvincing and is criticized by Girón-Negrón and Minervini.²⁷ It is incidentally somewhat curious that the assertions about the existence of a medieval Iberian Purim Spiel tradition are made about a fourteenth-century culture which did not seem to have a word for this “tradition.” That is why Yiddish */Purim Spiell/* is used. In addition, if we were to accept that comparative practices – valuable in so many other respects – can confirm such hypotheses, we would have to pay attention to the work on other Jewish Joseph literatures. Leaving aside the Judeo-Persian case, the most relevant parallel would be another Joseph composition, also late medieval, also discovered in Cambridge, also from the Genizah, namely CUL T-S 10.K.22. The Yosef Ha-Tsadiq Poem of the Cambridge Yiddish codex has been studied numerous times by different scholars, but here attention may be drawn to Khone Shmeruk’s study of the acrostic, which leads him to questions about the copyist or the author and his milieu. His conclusions are: “All of this demonstrates how little value the Spielmann theory has with regard to early Yiddish literature.”²⁸

²⁵ For further references see my remarks in *Zion* 62 (1997), pp. 79-87.

²⁶ *Coplas*, ed. GONZÁLEZ LLUBERA, pp. XXIX-XXXI.

²⁷ Girón-Negrón and Minervini’s argument is not very clear: “no es el diez de adar sino más bien el diez de ve-adar ese mes adicional” (p. 73, n. 112), but their general critique is by no means unjustified.

²⁸ Kh. SHMERUK, “The Hebrew Acrostic in the Yosef Hatsadiq Poem of the Cambridge Yiddish codex,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* III / 2 (1977), pp. 67-81.

III

Needless to say, despite the tradition, there is not much ground for comparison between Schwab, González Llubera, Lazar, McGaha, etc. and the present work. This is so, because of an unusual amount of scholarship and effort lavished by Girón-Negrón and Minervini on this late medieval Hispano-Jewish text. In the final analysis, it is so because of the degree of commitment to the composition. The initial step seems to originate partly in an aesthetic, perhaps even affective, conviction concerning its intrinsic qualities. This is not as commonplace as might be thought.

Here is where one may note the attitude to the *Coplas de Yosef* by Marcus,²⁹ who, in his article in *Sefarad*, saw them as a text for “women and the ignorant.” He was mirroring González Llubera. Llubera thought they were of no literary value; their phraseology was monotonous and not sufficiently picturesque. Deyermund thought their style was monotonous.³⁰ Hassán, in the early 1980s believed that such texts had been of interest to the few “iniciados.” On a different track was Nehama, who saw the *Coplas de Yosef* as a prime, early example of the cultural erosion wrought by the use of aljamia or by Hebrew script.³¹ Nevertheless, one of the towering factors, I suspect, is that of C. Crews. She fully believed in the importance of linguistic research, but was highly sceptical about attributing any literary value to Judeo-Spanish texts in communities where Hebrew, the language of sacred Scriptures and liturgy, held such a prominent status, where there was no graphic norm and no pride in authorship, many of the works being anonymous and obviously lacking a biography of the author.

The bio-bibliographical method has failed: as in the time of Schwab we still have no biography of the author, not even his name. A century after Schwab, we still ignore the place or title of the work. The paraliturgical filiation to Purim is still highly hypothetical or merely speculative. Attention to the public of the work and its quality is therefore the logical direction.

Is there evidence of a medieval Hispano-Jewish public for vernacular adaptations of sacred texts? Vernacular Scriptures are a sensitive issue in various cultures. Here one may recall a tradition of beliefs and opinions which, until recently, minimized the extent of a public and of such vernacular works or claimed to know for certain that liturgical/biblical texts needed no translation in medieval juderías; that translations could only be for conversos even when no evidence existed, etc. Here again, the Genizah has been instrumental in creating new directions. There are, of course, other sources. One important set of texts –by no means the only one– is that of a late fourteenth exchange of letters with R. Isaac bar Sheshet. There has been scholarly attention to this.³²

²⁹ “A-t-il existé en Espagne un dialecte judéo-espagnol,” *Sef* 22 (1962), pp. 129-149.

³⁰ See ed. GIRÓN-NEGRÓN and MINERVINI, *Coplas* for the attitudes of González Llubera and Deyermund.

³¹ See, particularly, note 10 of his “Cultural Erosion among Hispano-Levantine Jews,” in *Homenaje a Millás Vallicrosa* (Barcelona 1954), pp. 155-164.

³² I. BENABU, “A propos de l’ancienne Bible Judéo-espagnole: observations sur les nouveaux travaux en cours à l’Université Hébraïque de Jerusalem,” in *Actes du XVIIe Congrès international de linguistique et philologie romanes*, vol 9. *Critique et édition de textes* (Aix-en-Provence 1986),

On another level, one of the profitable results of reading Girón-Negrón and Minervini is that it raises the issue of the evident assumptions of previous studies –e.g. Marcus– as to the apparent lack of sophistication or lack of complexity of this late medieval Hispano-Jewish public. It now transpires that such attitudes are related to the history of the scholarship: the lack or, conversely, the finding of textual testimonia; to the complexities of medieval linguistic usage and the absence or creation of tools for its study, and to problematic translations, translations which will now have to be discarded or revised. Scholars –as should be clear from preceding lines– have taken about a century to fully comprehend and apply Schwab’s method in a systematic way. The results are a heightened awareness of the layers of reading or listening to such texts. Thus, for example, thanks to the commentary, it is now clear that what appears as simply one more word in a story, encapsulates the results of the anonymous author’s search, artistic selection and poetic “processing” – and compressing – of a vast library of midrashic and exegetic texts invisible to the untutored eye. Was the medieval public unaware of this? Or was the awareness of the resonances part of the reading / listening? In any case it is evident that the poetry works by condensation no less than by figures of *dilatatio* and repetition such as parallelism.

Here one may mention the question of parallelism because it transcends the artistry of this particular text, as it is a frequently noticed feature in critical discussions of vernacular literature by Jews ³³ (and sometimes conversos) at least up to the *Consolação às tribulações de Israel* of Usque. It is certainly a feature of the *Coplas de Yocef*, as Girón-Negrón and Minervini argue usefully and convincingly. But is it really the central or the only available poetic/ literary recourse? One suspects that, here again, the weight of tradition is a factor. Indeed, in the sixteenth century, Azariah dei Rossi ³⁴ succeeded in the task of finding a series of medieval texts which helped to show that medieval Jews were aware of biblical parallelism. What still needs to be emphasized is that these texts were mostly Hispano-Jewish. Given the importance of the Bible in such communities, the repercussions in their literary

pp. 269-278; E. GUTWIRTH, “Religión, historia y las Biblias Romanceadas,” *Revista Catalana de Teologia* 13 (1988), pp. 115-134.

³³ It should be noted that this is not the thesis of S. KANTOR, “Parallelism in the *Proverbios morales* de Santob de Carrion,” *Circa 1492*, ed. I. BENABU (Jerusalem 1992), pp. 109-133; Carlos POLIT treats parallelism in “La originalidad expresiva de Sem Tob,” *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 12 (1978), 135-153. See also M. MORREALE, “Iniciación al estudio del paralelismo en los romanceamientos bíblicos medievales,” in *Estudios de Filología y Retórica en Homenaje a Luisa López Grigera*. Edición coordinada por E. ARTAZA et al. (Bilbao 2000) pp. 337-346. The *Crónica General* of Alfonso el Sabio contains formulations such as: “Las alcarrias de las peñas domólas con pueblos / et tornó en uvas sabrosas la dureza de la encina” (p. 680), or “el vito de ellos delgado comer / et aspereza de lana el vestido de ellos.” A. CASTRO, *España en su Historia* (Madrid 1983), p. 191, sees, in this use of parallelism, oriental resonances and proof of Hebrew sources or inspiration.

³⁴ Azariah dei ROSSI, *The Light of the Eyes*. Translated from the Hebrew, with an introduction by Joanna WEINBERG (New Haven 2001).

practice seemed clear. In the eighteenth century, Bishop Lowth took Rossi's idea and amplified it. In 1754 he was awarded a *Doctorate in Divinity* by Oxford University for his treatise on Hebrew poetry entitled *Praelectiones Academicae de Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum* ('On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews'). His work was translated into English and, thus, became a highly influential tool. Once we bear this in mind, we may wonder whether in parallelism we have really come across the essence of the medieval text or the essence of the tradition of some critics' approach to the medieval text.

IV

Not only the biography and name of the author, but also the date is somewhat problematic, hence vacillations such as "portaestandarte cuatrocentista" (p. 77) or "fines del siglo xiv o comienzos del siglo xv" (p. 78). As may be remembered, Herbert Loewe dated the paper of the Cambridge codex for González Llubera as between 1413-1473, but also between 1430 and 1450 (p. XIII). How far have we come since Loewe?

Like Loewe and González Llubera, some believe in continuing to identify watermarks in Hebrew manuscripts from Iberia by relying exclusively on Briquet³⁵ as they did, while others try to take into account more recent work and work on watermarks which is based on peninsular paper evidence (e.g., O. Valls i Subirà or M. del C. Pescador).³⁶ The problem of dating affects both manuscripts and prints. In the case of prints, the typography is one element which is not discussed here. It should be mentioned that it is complex and discrepancies are not unknown. As Offenberger recently reminded us, the dating of early Sephardi Hebrew prints has had a chequered career. The example he gives is that of Teicher. His great reputation and eloquent arguments notwithstanding, his dating and location of some early Iberian Hebrew prints are no longer accepted.³⁷ Another similar study in a different context asserts that:

Précisons toutefois à cet égard que cette méthode [comparaisons typographiques] sema une certaine confusion, du moins en ce qui concerne les traites talmudiques éditées en ce XVI^e siècle. En effet, des chercheurs qui se sont intéressés aux diverses éditions du Talmud publiées à la fin du XVI^e siècle [?] ont eu du mal à identifier

³⁵ Ch. M. BRIQUET, *Les Filigranes. Dictionnaire historique des marques du papier de's leur apparition vers 1282 jusqu'en 1600* (Genève 1907; Amsterdam 1968, repr.)

³⁶ E. GUTWIRTH, "Fragmentos de siddurim españoles de la Guenizá," *Sef* 40 (1980), pp. 389-401.

³⁷ A. K. OFFENBERG, "A first International Census of Hebrew Incunabula in Public Collections," in *Hebrew Studies*. Papers presented at a Colloquium on Resources for Hebraica in Europe, ed. D. R. SMITH and P. S. SALINGER (London 1991), 81-87; IDEM, "The first printed book produced at Constantinople (Arba'ah Turim, 1493)," *Studia Rosenthaliana* 3 (1969), ff: 96-112; IDEM, "Literature on Hebrew incunabula since the Second World War," *Hellings Festschrift*. Forty-Three Studies on Bibliography presented to Prof. Wytze Hellinga (Amsterdam 1980), pp. 363-377.

les différents traités ou fragments de traités qu'ils purent consulter, dans la mesure où ils n'en retrouvaient que des extraits; quand bien même ils retrouvaient un traité intégral, le lieu d'impression ne figurant pas forcément. D'autre part, les caractères utilisés dans les différents pays présentant de grandes ressemblances, puisque provenant parfois d'un même atelier, – en l'occurrence espagnol ou portugais – des erreurs d'identification pouvaient facilement être commises. C'est ainsi que certaines traités étaient identifiés comme saloniens alors que d'autres les considéraient comme fassis.³⁸

The question of dates is complex, as has been mentioned, but it is seen as relevant to the text's history. This is no history book, nor is it meant to be one. Given all the lacunae in the data mentioned above, one wonders whether it could be. But it raises historical or historiographic questions as to notions such as the view that in Al-Andalus, up to and including the time of Moses ibn Ezra, the courts were innocent of ambition and intrigues³⁹ but from around Shem Tov de Carrión, these – ambition and intrigues – characterized the different Christian courts. These Christian courts produce desolation.

Is late medieval Jewish literature an escapist literature which tries to forget such courts of “desolation?” The impression from a reading of these late medieval *Coplas* and the authors' commentary is that there is no such attempt to escape. Rather, there is an interest and even fascination with the court, with court life and with courtly dialogue. Both, the poet and his public cannot get enough details, however trivial, about the life at court. The poet rescues from oblivion, for his Judeo-Spanish audience, courtly items time after time. This thirst for the courtly leads to an investment in the imaginary of the court and anything that is connected to it. Particularly telling are the apparently marginal details which produce the effect of the real. The poet, always alert, spies out any detail which might later be served up as part of the courtly atmosphere. On *Copla* 130 – “Yosef fuera apartar su sierbo [...] / Dixole: Quieras matar [...] capones / como an de yantar todos esos varones” – the *capones* which will be killed for the *yantar* lead to the comment: “alimento exquisito apreciado por la nobleza” (p. 64). On *Copla* 215: “mercedes”: “se refiere...a la gracia o el favor que un rey hace a un vasallo” or, on 205c: the brothers are ready to fight without “lorigones,” emblematic components of the knight's apparel, reconfirming and adding to what has been noted about the presence of knightly concepts⁴⁰ in dated late medieval Jewish texts by known authors writing in the *romance* and in

³⁸ J. TEDGHI, “La contribution des juifs portugais à la création de l'imprimerie hébraïque de Fès au XVI^e siècle,” in *1492. L'expulsion des Juifs d'Espagne*, ed. R. GOETSCHER (Paris 1995), pp. 251-263: 255.

³⁹ The idyllic images of Jewish courtiership in Al-Andalus can be traced as far back as Abraham ibn Dawd in the 1160s when they were a novelty. More recently, arabists have argued for the need to nuance such images. See F. MAÍLLO SALGADO, “Los judíos en las fuentes andalusíes y magrebíes: los visires,” in Y. MORENO KOCH, R. IZQUIERDO BENITO (eds.), *Del pasado judío en los reinos hispanicos medievales* (Cuenca 2005), pp. 169-204.

⁴⁰ See my “Creative Ambiguities and Jewish Modernity,” in *Schöpferische Momente des europäischen Judentums*, ed. M. GRAETZ (Heidelberg 2000), pp. 63-74. For comparative purposes one

Hebrew. At court, the brothers speak Hebrew amongst themselves thinking that “los que allí estaban non sabían más que un canto” (p. 60). Equally telling is the construction of the courtly ambience in *Copla* 129: “A Binyamin catavan todos por piadad / A Agivto legavan la hermosa ciudad / al palacio entravan todos con omildad / y luego encorvavan todos a Yosef.” Girón-Negrón and Minervini remark on “la cuidada gradación de sus cuatro verbos” (pp. 56-57). Does the poem reconfirm the presence of a recently identified *topos* of the “anxieties of the courtier?” Here the main point would be that the study ⁴¹ of this *topos* in Jewish texts shows that it is part of the courtly taste. Although they seem to discard the *aurea mediocritas* of the Nicomachean Ethics as a factor, their analysis (p. 214, gloss to 1c) reconfirms the thesis of the importance of *mesura* (already in the *Partidas*) in late medieval Hispano-Jewish thought. The *Coplas* appeal to *mesura* about four times. In *Coplas* 131-137, the poet gives more attention to the courtly mayordomo than warranted by his sources. The poet, when describing the reunion between Joseph and his father, discards the biblical weeping and the Midrashic prostration in favour of a feudal “besamanos” (p. 304). How is the *imago regis* constructed in the *Coplas*? One example may suffice: when Joseph asks Pharaoh’s leave to absent himself from the court in order to visit his father, the ruler is not represented as hostile; of his own initiative –and according to tradition, Midrash and *romanceamientos*– the king / Pharaoh offers carts, but the poet adds: “de buena tanda” (p. 297).

To be sure, these are not the only layers. It is curious, for example, to note the imaginative recreation of the gifts chosen and sent by the hero, Joseph, from Egypt: the poet discards biblical bread, keeps aggadadic vintage wines; includes –like Arragel– textiles and adds a gift of fruit (p. 298): “y diez asnos cargados de frutas enviava.” The authors quite rightly focus on this departure, presumably because it is a clue to the *Coplas*’ own perceptions, desire and *imaginaire*. ⁴²

may mention the case of Christian literature, on which see, for example, A. GÓMEZ MORENO, “La caballería como tema en la literatura medieval española: tratados teóricos,” in *Homenaje a Pedro Sáinz Rodríguez*, vol. 2. Estudios de lengua y literatura (Madrid 1985), pp. 311-323, and A. GONZÁLEZ PALENCIA, “Huellas islámicas en el carácter español,” *Hispanic Review* 7 / 3 (Jul. 1939), pp. 185-204 especially pp. 202ff, on “espíritu caballeresco” in the Middle Ages, *Siglo de Oro* and in the Cuban War.

⁴¹ “Daniel 1/4 y las ansiedades del cortesano,” in J. CARREIRA et al (eds.), *III Simposio Bíblico Español. I Luso-Espanhol* (Valencia – Lisboa 1991), pp. 639-648.

⁴² *Coplas*, p. 298. In view of the puzzlement of the critics one may, nevertheless, suggest that there might have been, in medieval Spain, a tradition of praises of fruits and their value which is not purely a conventional component of the construction of the *locus amoenus*, as in Berceo on whom see Th. M. CAPUANO, “Agricultural Elements in Berceo’s Descriptions of Hayfields,” *Hispania* 69, no. 4. (Dec. 1986), pp. 808-812. The *Coplas*’ choice of fruits might, then, have another background. Al-Zuhri, in the twelfth century mentions the extraordinary beauty and quality of the fruits of Toledo. The thirteenth-century Granadine geographer, Ibn Said al-Maghribi cites Al-Hiyari’s description of the fruit trees and flowers – especially of the pomegranate trees – of Toledo. He also cites Ibn Bassal concerning a tree which has more than one kind of fruit. The Egyptian Al-Qalqasandi, in the fourteenth-fifteenth centuries, writes about the fruit trees of Toledo, particularly the pomegranate. See C. DELGADO VALERO, *Toledo Islámico* (Toledo 1987), p. 61ff. The valleys of Castile, according to the *Crónica General* “lievan muchos frutos et son abundados [...]”

Alongside “semicultismos” and “un puñado de palabras de origen [...] latino o griego que resultan desconocidas o poco frecuentes fuera del ámbito judío” there are elements considered “rústicos o vulgares” (p. 114). The authors find that some of the textual witnesses, admittedly later, contain incorrect vocalizations of the Hebrew (p. 109). The process in fighting of Joseph’s brother Simon is described as: “se lo sobaba cumo quien soba masa” (106b).

V

Is this composition evidence of late medieval cultural erosion and decline? Hassán believed that they belonged in a genre and that this genre was “una de las más destacadas muestras si no la que más de [...] las coplas.” The authors’ commentary on the concrete text reconfirms the view of late medieval Hispano Jewish culture and its “ímpetu renovador” (p. 70). Are these *Coplas* proofs of what used to be called “drying of the leaves of poetry” under adverse political conditions? The authors believe that the *Coplas* are “un poema de gran madurez, escrito con finura, sobriedad e inteligencia. Su lenguaje es exquisito [...] de suma precisión; su estructura narrativa cuidada y de gran coherencia [...] no se cierra a las expresiones pintorescas [...] es modelo de concisión narrativa [...] rebosa con [...] aciertos descriptivos y logrados efectos retóricos” (p. 53). The *Coplas* are the product of an individual; a “poeta habildoso de gran inteligencia y profunda conciencia estilística” (p. 79).

España es [...] deleitosa de fructas,” *Crónica*, p. 311, cf. CASTRO, *España en su historia*, p. 37; E. LÉVI-PROVENÇAL, *La Péninsule Ibérique au Moyen Age* (Leiden 1938). In addition, we may note that in the *Libro del cavallero Cifar* we find a perception of the value of fruits in which they are comparable to jewels and are fully integrated into a courtly atmosphere: “E otro día en la mañana fueron allí con ellos las dos donzellas & diéronles de vestir & agua a manos en sendos bacines de muy finas esmeraldas & los aguamaniles de sendos rubíes. E después desto viniéronse para una sala muy rica & assentáronse en un rico estrado [...] & vinieron delante dellos muchos hombres que plantavan árboles en medio del palacio & luego nascían & crescían & florecían & levavan fruto, del qual fruto cogían las donzellas & traían en sendos bacines dello al cavallero & a la dueña. Y creía el cavallero que aquella fruta era la más fermosa & la más sabrosa de todo el mundo” In the *Calila e Dimna* we read the story of the ‘religioso’ and the ‘ximio,’ where the fruits are also an object of desire: “en mi posada, que es en una isla donde ay muchos frutales et muchos buenos árboles, et saben muy bien [...] Et el ximio, en que oyó dezir de la fruta, ovo sabor della, et prísole grant cobdiçia, [...] Et en llegando çerca de la çibdat, [...] fuese el ximio et tornóse con fruta para él. Et comió el religioso della,” cf. ed. J. M. CACHO BLECUA & M. J. LACARRA (Madrid 1993), pp. 256ff. The fruits of Spain seem to have been part of its image not only in the laudation of Spain noticed by Castro (cf. supra). The experience of the fruits of Spain affected Van Eyck so profoundly that they led to discarding patristic exegesis and artistic conventions of representation of the fruit of the Garden of Eden and to his option for depicting the Iberian Adam’s apple in his Ghent altarpiece according to James SNYDER, “Jan van Eyck and Adam’s Apple,” *The Art Bulletin* 58, no. 4. (Dec. 1976), pp. 511-515. Finally one may recall that ca. 1549 Hernán Núñez appeals to the value and power of fruit when glossing the proverb “el rey fue viejo a Toro, y bolvió moço.” He explains: “Porque es ciudad abundosa de todas cosas y mayormente de frutas muy buenas y sabrosas.” See his *Refranes o proverbios en romance* (Madrid 2001).

Such judgements are the fruit of careful and sensitive readings of the *Coplas*. A random example of such readings might be the case of

Yosef ya callaba y fazer lo queria
y sus ojos alçaba allá donde se iba
y una fegura estaba allá donde jazía
que toda semejava al padre de Yosef.

[...] Este paralelismo sirve cabalmente su función narrativa. Estructura la atención del lector en yuxtaposición a la mirada de José y ambos siguen una misma trayectoria febril hasta su horizonte visual: ese *allá* indefinido donde se yergue la visión de su padre en inesperada sustitución del objeto que codicia.⁴³

VI

The *Biblioteca Románica Hispánica* was founded by Dámaso Alonso, a poet and scholar who was not insensitive to the value of reading aljamiado texts from Cambridge and elsewhere such as those of the jarchas, whose discovery he hailed and welcomed.⁴⁴ It is a fitting frame for this work. Today, when there is a vast – and growing – literature on the history of the discipline,⁴⁵ one needs to recall that it harks back to what are arguably some of the more inclusive and more original gestures of Romance Philology: Gaston Paris' inclusion of Darmsteter's studies in the first volume of *Romania*; Foulché-Delbosc's practical interest in Judeo-Spanish paremiology and systems of transcriptions; Meyer-Lübcke's inclusion of Hebrew and Jewish language etyma.

The question of the transcriptions in a field where one really has to come to terms with the fact that many – most? – texts are lacking in vocalization and diacritics, is sometimes considered problematic. Different and varying, numerous solutions [Foulché-Delbosc, González Llubera, Crews, Silverman and Armistead, Sephiha, Hassán, Riera i Sans, Lazar and many others] have been offered and the one here has the merit of being explained on pp. 117-121, where one also finds the observations on editorial decisions such as “se acentúan las palabras según el uso actual” (p. 121) or “tampoco se ha hecho distinción entre vocales largas y cortas” or “optamos por considerar estos casos de /u/ e /i/ finales como *lapsus calami*” (p. 89).

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⁴³ Ed. GIRÓN-NEGRÓN and MINERVINI, pp. 54-55.

⁴⁴ See, amongst others, D. ALONSO, “Cancioncillas «de amigo» mozárabes,” *RFE* 33 (1949), 297-349.

⁴⁵ See, for a recent example, H. U. GUMBRECHT, *Vom Leben und Sterben der großen Romanisten* (München 2002).

