

## Don Mosse: Royal Surgeon and Poet of the *Cancionero de Baena*

*Don Mosse. Cirujano real y poeta del Cancionero de Baena*

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### Resumen

El poema de Don Mosse ibn Zarzal –en contraste con otros– ofrece una fecha precisa: el nacimiento del infante Juan –después Rey Juan II de Castilla-León– [6/3/1405]. También raro es el fenómeno de un poema oficial, cortesano, judío después de 1391. La atención de Juan Alfonso de Baena y de la reina Isabel al cortesano, científico, poeta Don Mosse y su obra puede inspirar contribuciones en dos campos. El primero sería el interés por poetas individuales en la obra colectiva *Cancionero de Baena* (CB). El segundo concierne a la cultura y literatura romance de las comunidades Hispano-Judías –especialmente su milieu cortesano y científico– de la baja edad media. Se arguye que el poema refleja la biografía, período y contexto familiar del poeta. Su compromiso con las ciencias y la poesía no se oculta en el texto. Como en otros casos de la época, no hay contradicción. En su caso la distancia se entiende mejor prestando atención a la dinastía Ibn Zarzal, su entorno y su preocupación por la retórica, particularmente la epideictica.

**Palabras clave:** Cultura judeo-romance. Judíos cortesanos. Siglo xv. Ciencia y poesía. Relaciones entre judíos y musulmanes. Familia Ibn Zarzal.

### Abstract

Don Mosse ibn Zarzal's poem offers –unusually for poems of that period– a precise date: the birth of the infante Juan –later King Juan II of Castile-León– [6/3/1405]. It is also rare as an example of Jewish official, courtly texts in the romance after 1391. Baena's and Isabella's attention to the courtly scientist/poet Don Mosse and his work, therefore, may inspire contributions to two areas. The first is that of the trend towards examining individual poets in the collective *Cancionero de Baena* (CB). The second is that of *romance* (rather than Hebrew) literature and culture emanating from the Hispano-Jewish communities –and more specifically the courtly scientific milieu– of the late middle ages. It is argued that, once analyzed, the poem may be seen as reflecting the biography, period and family context of the poet. His engagement in science and poetry are not erased in the poem. There is no contradiction between the two fields. The distance is bridged by the Ibn Zarzal dynasty's concern with rhetoric, particularly epideictic.

**Keywords:** Judeo-Romance culture. Court Jews. Fifteenth century. Science and poetry. Jewish-Moslem relations. Ibn Zarzal family.

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...esta composicion segun se mira esta por fenecer. De su lectura se viene en conocimiento de lo bien que sabia escribir Don Mosse en versos de arte mayor porque hasta en estos parece que es mas levantado su estilo i mas perfecto su lenguaje. Lastima es en verdad que no tengamos otras obras del mismo autor i hechas en el mismo genero de verso...

Adolfo de Castro (Cadiz, 1847)

I

The Charter House of *Santa María de Miraflores* is a monastic complex on a hill, east of the city of Burgos. Founded in 1441 by King Juan II, it is considered a jewel of late gothic art. The aisleless church has a polygonal apse covered in star vaulting. In front of the high altar, Gil de Siloé's masterpiece is the sepulcher of Juan II and Isabel de Portugal, in the form of a star of eight points obtained by the intersection of a rectangle and a lozenge. One of its scholars has called Queen Isabella's memorial to her father Juan II «*la gran empresa política, religiosa y artística de su reinado*» (J. Yarza Luaces:2007). The star is the main unifying conceit of an artistic whole which includes numerous subordinate themes. This great political, religious and artistic project, on which Isabella invested time (1489-1493) and, as art historians remind us, a great deal of money, then, was based on one image: that Juan II was like a star. It was not Isabella's invention. Of course, the astral image –the analogy of kings to heavenly lights– was in place long before the Roi Soleil. Vague, diffused similarities could be found everywhere, as in Sánchez Arévalo, who (writing long after don Mosse, under Juan II's son, Enrique IV, ca. 1463,) states that the king is like a sun, as Joaquin Yarza Luaces points out<sup>1</sup>. And yet, Isabella's expensive and technically demanding grandiose monumental project would hardly refer to some improvised, little thought out, vague image. It seems that for this precise identification of Juan II with a star, no better source has been found

1. J. Yarza Luaces (2007): «La forma de estrella de su perfil ha hecho a algunos pensar en la estrella de David, aunque aquí no encuentra justificación. Pensemos que, por otra parte, no deja de coincidir con lo que hubiera sido la proyección de una bóveda estrellada sobre un plano, con el sentido cósmico que ello implica, además de ser una estrella. En alguno de los tratados sobre Juan II, como el de Sánchez de Arévalo de 1463, *Una apología de la monarquía*, al referirse a la conquista de Gibraltar alude a él con la frase: “en Occidente se ha levantado el sol de justicia y de la fe”».

so far by scholars of Isabella than the poem on the birth of Juan II beginning «*Una estrella es nascida/ En Castilla rrelucientes*»<sup>2</sup>.

Queen Isabella's decisions, her option for creating such an ambitious project are, then, a reaction, a part of the history of reading Don Mosse's composition. Another reaction or option (the one that matters most) was that of Alonso de Baena. Thanks to decades of recent intensive research on *Cancioneros* in fifteenth century Castile, we are now more aware than ever that there are differences between *Cancioneros*, and conscious about the importance of inclusion and exclusion. Baena's and Isabella's attention to the courtly scientist/poet Don Mosse and his work, therefore, may inspire contributions to two areas. The first is that of the trend towards examining individual poets in the collective *Cancionero de Baena* (CB). The second is that of *romance* (rather than Hebrew) literature and culture emanating from the Hispano-Jewish communities and more specifically the courtly scientific milieu of the late middle ages.

It may therefore be helpful to produce a reading of the neglected poem. Needless to say, Don Mosse was not included amongst the *Claros varones* nor in the *Semblanzas*, and some kind of biographical background still needs to be reconstructed. This raises the question of family, in the sense of the link between family and intellectual/cultural trends. These trends themselves are not a given and they need to be reconstructed on the basis of contemporary evidence. The four themes (text, context, family, cultural frame) will engage the following lines.

## II

The first trend would be perfectly well understood by those familiar with the last century of multiple efforts to comprehend, analyze and study other poems of the same group of panegyrists, poems composed on the same date, place and occasion, such as those of, say, Diego de Valencia, Fray Bartolomé García de Córdoba, Imperial or others. Indeed, the other official poems for the particular state occasion of the birth of Juan II have attracted attention for a number of reasons. The focus on such members of don Mosse's «group» as Micer Francisco Imperial for example, appears not to reflect purely a specific interest in poems on Juan II's birth nor in the *Cancioneros* «for their own sake». Rather, the attention is closely related to other issues, such as Dante's influence, and by implication and extension, cultural relations between Italy and Spain circa 1405, and, thus, the road to Renaissance humanism and Spanish «Europeanism». This means that the real objective is, in brief, Spain's entry into modernity or, conversely, its belatedness.

Don Mosse's relevance to these questions is not evident on a first encounter. His one poem –with an opening quatrain and three eight-line stanzas i.e. barely four stanzas in

2. «The star referred to is surely *Una estrella es nascida En Castilla rrelucientes*» (P.K. Liss:2003).

the critical, modern editions<sup>3</sup>— can not bear comparison in length to Imperial’s composition on the same theme and occasion.

*Una estrella es nascida  
en Castilla reluciente:  
con placer toda la gente  
roguemos por la su vida.  
De Dios fué mui venturoso  
aquel dia sin dubdanza  
en cobrar tal alegranza  
deste rei tan poderoso:  
por merced del pavoroso  
este gran señor cobraste,  
Castilla, que deseaste  
noble rei é generoso.  
De reyes de tal natura  
cierto en toda partida,  
de realeza complida  
non nasció tal criatura.  
Con beldad é fermosura  
non es visto en lo poblado,  
nin tan bien aventurado.  
¡Dios le dé buena ventura!  
N’ Aragon i Catalueña  
tenderá la su espada,  
con la su real mesnada:  
Navarra con la Gascueña  
tremerá con gran vergüeña  
el reino de Portugal  
é Granada otro que tal  
fasta allende la Cerdeña.*

The various specific thematic, prosodic, imagery studies on, say, Imperial have no real equivalent in readings of Don Mosse’s poem on the same theme: (the future) Juan II’s birth in 1405. Also, Imperial’s «Dezir» has attracted more interest, at least partly, because the biographical data is available for Imperial and suggests personal involvement in what appears as a public statement for a royal occasion. Indeed he had lost his office of Admiral and the poem was a unique opportunity for regaining it<sup>4</sup>.

3. The rubric to the poem reads: «Este dezir fizo don Mossé, çurgiano del rey don Enrique, quando nasció el Rey nuestro señor en la çibdat de Toro». B. Dutton – J. González Cuenca (1993:230); J. M. Azáceta (1966, vol. II, 453-454).

4. C. I. Nepaulsingh (1997).

The most surprising fact is the inclusion of the Jew in the *Cancionero* –most of whose poets are Christians (New or Old). To be sure, there are some (much weaker?) precedents in Galaico-Portuguese *Cancioneiros* with their «don Vidal, judío de Helvas». It is also true that this is the age when the number of Hebrew words (seen as a trace of contacts with Jewish culture) in Castilian poetry rises to its height. Even without a word count, the magnitude of the phenomenon may be gauged from the frequent search, neither successful nor yet fully resolved, for the meaning of these Hebrew words in *Cancionero* poetry. The presences of themes of (New) Christians judaizing in the *Cancionero de Baena*, similarly, are not a recent discovery. They are well known and frequently rehearsed, particularly in the field of satire and invective, since, at least, Kayserling's work of the 1850s and even earlier. But don Mosse's poem is unrelated to the «satire and invective» mode nor is he a New Christian. Given the interest in the *Cancionero de Baena* exhibited by scholars of Jewish or converso culture and history to our own day, this may need some elaboration. Since, at least, the mid nineteenth century (and probably before then) the satiric (generally anti-Jewish) poems of the *Cancionero* have been seen as evidence for historical trends: whether the presence of judeoconversos at court, the deteriorating situation after 1391, the religious stance of the judeoconversos<sup>5</sup>.

While all of this is true, the fact remains that the poets of the CB who use «Hebrew» or refer to Jews and Judaism are on the whole (at the very least) nominally Christians. Fourteen years after 1391, the existence of an official poem, on the state occasion, explicitly and officially penned by a Jew is nothing less than a historical affirmation of continuity after 1391.

### III

The theory of Kayserling, according to which Mosse could have been a converso has no basis in the evidence. It is possible that Kayserling's 1850s' reading depends on the popular assumptions of the 1850s about absolute decline after 1391, as well as the lack of immediately transparent Jewish elements in the poem<sup>6</sup>. In discerning such elements, in don Mosse's composition, as in the case of other hypersemantic, poetic texts, a single word, category or concept may be key. This means that attention to such categories is needed. The mention of God in the poem is therefore of interest. The *Pavoroso* of the poem would today be understood as *atemorizado*. That is its sense in a roughly contemporary text: the translation of the *Historia de Jerusalem*: «...el maldicho Caim tiene la cabeza tenblosa & el corazón pavoroso, temiendo el día & la noche, non crey-

5. The presence and, indeed, extraordinary rise of the number of Hebraisms in the satiric texts produced in fifteenth century Castile becomes clear by a cursory glance at the precedents, e.g. the case of an earlier text, the *Disputa de un cristiano y un judío* of the high middle ages. An early study is that of A. Castro (1914). To be sure, some of these Hebraisms have given rise to publications, but their study is not always as intense and precise as that of other *Cancionero de Baena* languages –English, Arabic).

6. On the question of «decline» see E. Gutwirth (1992).

endo su vida»<sup>7</sup> or in: «Bienaventurado el omne que siempre está pavoroso d'esto, mas el que de yerta voluntat fuere contra esto, en mal caidrá»<sup>8</sup>. But it could also mean: that which causes *pavor*. Don Mosse is clearly referring to God; the God of those who fear God as the cause of fear. While commonplace in Jewish thought (cf. Deut. 10:20) this usage is by no means unparalleled in Christian texts, as becomes clear when attending to genres such as hagiography, as in Berceo's *Vida de San Millán*<sup>9</sup>. In the CB itself there is a poem in which we also find «pavoroso» in this sense<sup>10</sup>. The very mention of God introduces us to the artful constructions of poetic ambiguity even in the fraught field of religious difference.

Don Mosse, a scientist/courtier, part of the Hispano-Jewish communities of the fifteenth century, who was a physician in an age of astrological medicine<sup>11</sup> was creating a public discourse. This is not a «technical» horoscope. He avoids univocal allusions to «purely» Jewish belief and follows through the construction of spaces of ambiguity. In fact, the *romance* resonances of *estrella* and *reluciente* are more numerous and are stronger in Christian texts than in the Jewish biblical *romanceamientos*. Nevertheless, this engagement with the science of the stars (astronomy or astrological medicine) by the surgeon/poet seems to be the background to references –in the poem– to «*estrella*»; «*ventura*»; «*dia*».

The realm of the military –in a poem to a (future) Christian King– enters the poem with «*mesnada*». It is not particularly rare and the link between King, knights and *mesnada* seems to have been almost mechanical and lexicalized in late medieval texts<sup>12</sup>.

7. M. T. Herrera y M. N. Sánchez (2000).

8. Prov. 29/14. See *General Estoria. Tercera Parte. Libros de Salomón: Cantar de los cantares, Proverbios, Sabiduría y Eclesiastés* (P. Sánchez-Prieto Borja; B. Horcajada Diezma:1994).

9. B. Dutton (1992:138, 42): «*El mont' era espeso, el logar pavoroso, era por muchas guisas bravo e perigloso...*».

10. It may be worth recalling that Keyserling, despite his influence in some circles, was not the originator of interest in these texts. In the eighteenth century, Rodríguez de Castro had already paid attention to conversos in the *Cancionero de Baena* and categorized the «*escritores rabinos españoles*» and printed the text as his poem: «*Por una floresta estraña/ yendo triste, muy pensoso./oi un grito pavoroso*». J. Rodríguez de Castro, *Biblioteca española: Tomo primero, que contiene la Noticia de los Escritores Rabinos Españoles ...* Imprenta Real de la Gaceta, Madrid, 1781, p. 277. Today that poem is ascribed to Garçi Ferrández. See B. Dutton; J. González Cuenca (1993).

11. An old tangential question may be recalled at this point. The Prologue to the *Heshev ha-Ephod* by Profayt Duran (1395) dedicates the work to «Moshe». It was frequently assumed –without basis, as the name Zarzal is not mentioned– that this was our don Mosse. The *Jewish Encyclopedia* article on Duran –digest of scholarship ca 1908 but highly influential on later opinions– asserted that «In 1395 Duran compiled an almanac in twenty-nine sections entitled “Heshev ha-Efod”, ... dedicated to Moses Zarzal, physician to Henry III, King of Castile». This would mean that a work dealing with the stars was somehow linked to don Mosse. While the argument was never convincing, it has now been clearly discarded even if there is no edition of the work. See Maud Kozodoy (2015: 26, 84-85, 226). Already in 1870 Steinschneider had questioned it: «die kombination mit Zarzal ist zu wenig begründet» (1870:109, n. 3).

Nonetheless, Duran, in other writings of his, addresses prominent individuals whose fame is attested elsewhere [e.g. Crescas, Zarc]. Would he have dedicated such a sustained work to just any undocumented «Moshe»; someone, moreover, who did not need further identification because at that date and place his first name was enough to identify him even though it is not an uncommon name amongst Jews? Similarly one cannot overlook now the coincidence of themes (i.e. the stars) between Duran's work and Moshe's poem. That medicine and astronomy were connected at this time barely requires discussion. See the case of the eye doctor of Juan II of Aragon cited below.

12. See. G. Tilander, H. Ohlssons Boktryckeri (1956:59) «*Mesnadero es qui es del linage de los ricos omnes, al menos que descienda dent por padre, en el linage del qual padre non puede omne saber que aia seydo alguno uasaillo*

And yet the biblical reminiscences of *mesnada* cannot be ruled out. Political readings are not a new idea. José Amador de los Ríos y Serrano had already comprehended that there are certain affinities or parallels amongst the various poems about the birth of Juan II, despite the great differences in length<sup>13</sup>. His readers would have understood that this similarity of final results had something to do with a pre-established model. The poets created variations but did not impugn the model. Certain motifs had to be mentioned by all of them. Others had to be silenced. This is the period which followed a number of defeats, such as Aljubarrota (1385). The Reconquista was not advancing and the victory at Higuera (July 1431) was still in the future. The political atmosphere is that of a kingdom which feels surrounded or besieged by enemies at its borders<sup>14</sup>. Mosse's poem seems, on a first reading, an expression of the court's ideals of conquest and expansion of Castile. He seems to see the ideal king of Castile as someone who fights the Muslims of Nasrid Granada and achieves domination over Aragon but not over France. Since Amador, or since the age when the poem was read as a desire for national unity (by Graetz<sup>15</sup>) there have been changes in the perspectives. This could explain two points which have been noted in the poem. The apparently bellicose reference to Portugal is seen now as a reflection of the tensions between the two courts<sup>16</sup>, rather than as a reflection of a personal, subjective, individual ideology of don Mosse himself. The allusions to Navarre and Gascuña could also be observed from a political frame, that is the history of problems which accompany the age of Enrique III as a minor (L. Suárez, 1952). Amador's political readings of the nineteenth century have had followers who produce equally political readings, which see the poem as a political manifesto or as reflections of militancy or military policy<sup>17</sup>. Interesting therefore is the mention of

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d'otro si non del rey o del fillo del rey o de cuende qui descende de linage del rey, o de obispo o d'otro prelado de iglesia...». See also the paragraphs on Joseph in M. Lazar (1965, #24): «...Acoytadvos e yd pora mio padre e dezidle qual merced me a Dios fecha, que so senor en casa de Pharaon, sos su mano, e venga aca con toda su compaña; estara en tierra de Gossen ... e adozid vuestros fijos e toda vuestra mesnada...».

13. As Amador wrote in the 1840s: «...el converso Juan Alfonso de Baena; el ya citado don Pedro Velez de Guevara; Fray Bartolomé García de Córdoba; don Mossèn Aben Zarzal, fisico del Rey don Enrique, ya siguiendo las huellas de Alvarez de Villasandino, ya imitando las imitaciones de Imperial, respondian todos a aquella suerte de llamamiento, manifestando, al consignar su dolor y al dar rienda suelta á su esperanza, que si yacia decaído en medio de la inacción y del refinamiento cortesano el noble espíritu de la nacionalidad...» (1864. Vol V, p. 332).

14. Enrique III's epitaph composed by Villasandino confirms this: «*My nonbre fue don Enrryque, / Rey de la fermosa españa: / Todo onbre verdat publique / Syn lysonja por fazaña / (...) Con esfuërço é loçania / E orgullo de coraçon, / Fuy Rey de grant nombradia / De Castilla é de León. / Puisse freno en Aragon / En Navarra é Portugal, / Granada miedo mortal / Ovo de mi essa ssazon / Reçelando mi opinion*». (emphasis mine).

15. «Moses Zarzel (Qargal) (*sic*), who celebrated in rich Spanish verse the long wished for birth of an heir to the Castilian throne, borrowing the beauties of the neo-Hebraic poetry to do honor to the newly-born prince, in whose hands, he prophesied, the various states of the Pyrenean Peninsula would be united» (H. Graetz 1967, vol. 4:190). The idea of a link or «influence» tying romance to Hebrew literature seems to be already present in these examples of nineteenth century historiography.

16. «...en el decir de don Mossé, cirujano de Enrique III, se llega a insinuar que *tremará con grant vergüeña el reino de Portugal*, una evidente demostración del grado de ruptura existente entre ambas cortes...» (C. Olivera Serrano 2005:361).

17. A random but comprehensible example would be Raul Guillermo Rosas Von Ritterstein (2007): «Tanto el judío don Moisés como el mucho más famoso Alfonso Álvarez de Villasandino coinciden en la postura política: Navarra, la

Castile by don Mosse. The poetic «I» sees Castile as a unified entity, the sum of all those who are surrounded by the regions on the frontier. The element of literature, whimsy or fantasy may be recalled: Crown and nobility in fifteenth century Castile were less united in reality than in the poem and indeed, the fifteenth century is sometimes seen as the age of civil wars. Others have succeeded in discovering a generic framework. In general, underlying these panegyrics to the birth of Juan II, there seems to be a generic logic: that of the dantesque comedies<sup>18</sup>.

#### IV

«Aragón, Catalueña, Navarra, Gascueña, Portogal, Granada, Çerdeña»: the seven toponyms are crowded within the strict confines of the rhyming scheme and the octosyllabic discipline of don Mosse's poem. So that, one wonders whether the exclusive focus on the political/military message (a message common to so many practitioners of the dantesque comedy) may not obscure and obfuscate the underlying assumptions of literary theory at this date and place. These geographic allusions by don Mosse produce an effect of familiarity with the geography of hispanic borders. When concentrating on texts from such courtly poetic circles –after protracted discussion on the subject of Petrarca<sup>19</sup>– one cannot ignore the similar procedures of his Sonnet 116, in e.g. its Castilian fortuna: «*Non ha así Po çiertos, Arno, Adige o Tebero., /Éufrate, Tirge, Nilo, Hermo, Indo e Gange.,/Tanay, Istro, Alpheo, Garona, el mar que quebranta/Ródano, Hiberno, Rassena, Albia, Era, Hebro...*» In the analysis of other, different poets, it has been fully understood that at this time, in don Mosse's peninsula, there is an interest in geographical allusion; in demonstrating that the poet had read geographies and in «una esigenza di storicismo per cui ogni evento ha il suo luogo»<sup>20</sup>.

Don Mosse's practices of combining and condensing geography and narrative may well recall other cases from his own historical community. Indeed, if we look at the

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Gascuña, Catalueña, Aragón, Portugal, Cerdeña, son todas tierras extrañas y enemigas sin distinción alguna, y deben ser refrenadas, golpeadas con la espada, del mismo exacto modo que se ha de proceder contra el reino de Granada, el sitio último del enemigo secular. A estas interesantes opiniones se suma otro escrito de Álvarez de Villasandino en el cual se invierte la idea anterior, puesto que esta vez es Castilla la víctima de la codicia, casi nos atreveríamos a llamar «separatista» y por tanto ingrata, dado el carácter de los versos: «*Non reçeledes la tal dylatoria /Pues todas las tierras allende Adamuz /En ancho, en luengo, fasta en Bytorya/ Todos cobdiçian rrasgar su capuz (...)*».

18. As Guillermo Fernández Escalona (1993) has explained: «...las comedias buscan una verdad salvadora,... corregir el desorden de la realidad moral y política ajustándolo al orden ideal. Propio de estos poemas es ofrecer la imagen redentora de un personaje al que las fuerzas sobrenaturales reservan la tarea de adecuar el mundo a su deber ser. En la mayor parte de las comedias, ... lo sobrenatural se presenta como elegido para poner orden en la realidad caótica y ajustaría a las directrices del mundo ideal. Tal es el papel del recién nacido Juan II en los decires de Imperial y Diego de Valencia, de los regentes y del propio Juan II («de Castilla la su rredemcion») en Ruy Páez de Ribera, de Iñigo López en la Coronación, de los Trastámara de Aragón en la *Comedieta de Ponza*, de Alvaro de Luna en el *Laberinto de Fortuna*, de Alfonso Carrillo en las comedias de Pedro Guillen de Segovia, y de Isabel y Fernando en fray Iñigo de Mendoza. Poco importa que los personajes exaltados lo sean por intereses contrapuestos: ... en el fondo, todas las comedias dantescas coinciden en atribuirles idéntica misión». See also E. González Quintas (2002:195 ff).

19. Derek Carr (1981).

20. Cited by J. Weiss (1991).



fourteenth century Mallorcan maps of Abraham Cresques or his family, we notice, once we get past the painting, coloring and the cartography, a multitude of brief texts which, although certainly not poetic or within a prosodic scheme, exhibit this condensed «geographic» text production in the form of map rubrics to places, rubrics which could be brief stories composed in the *romance*. Thus, for example, one notes the case of India in the Catalan Atlas: «... know that the men and women of this country when they die are incinerated at the sound of musical instruments with great joy. But the parents of the dead cry and sometimes the wives of the dead throw themselves into the fire but the husbands never throw themselves into the wife's pyre...».

Given the historical background of don Mosse in fifteenth century Hispano-Jewish communities, yet other possibilities may be taken into consideration, when reading the geographic components of the poem. The recent search for «geographic» texts in Hebrew from fifteenth century Hispano-Jewish communities focuses on a putative distinction between literary and historical compositions. The distinctions certainly apply and are undeniable. But they are far less rigid or hermetic than expected. Once examined, both, literary and historical writings on «place», in Hebrew, appear as stylized and densely allusive. This is obviously the case with the imaginary travels in the *Ahituv-We-Salmon* but also in the Hebrew chronicle of the earthquakes near Gerona. Both come from the Crown of Aragon and from the age of Don Mosse: first half of the fifteenth century. In addition to the prose texts, such toponymic listings may be found in Hebrew poems. An example would be the case of the *Ish Mahir* or «*Speedy/Diligent/Expert Man*» by the poet—originally also from Castile, also interested in medicine and the stars and roughly contemporary with don Mosse—Ishaq Alhadeb. In it, he describes himself as diligent. In a kind of *vanto* or listing of *tutti l'arti*, he creates a sustained poetic Hebrew description of trades or professions. He offers, by way of conclusion, a list of toponyms of the places he has visited<sup>21</sup>. So that, again, the (geographic) emphases in the poem are not amenable to strict delimitations along religious lines.

## V

The *estrella* of Don Mosse's poem has no monocultural resonances. Neither can one reduce to a particular «source» don Mosse's *reluciente*; that is, the association of *birth*, star and a supernatural light. More immediately relevant are the occurrences of such concepts in texts emanating from Don Mosse's period, such as late medieval hagiographic texts in the *romance*. The anonymous *Vida de Sto. Toribio*—to take an almost random example from the same area, period and cultural, linguistic tradition—links birth, star and light when writing about the saint's birth<sup>22</sup>. More widely known was the

21. E. Gutwirth (2011a and 2012).

22. «*Santo Turibio bienaventurado era de Lonbardia de una noble e muy fructuosa çibdad que llaman Turrino e era de linaje de reyes; e su padre avia por nonbre Tus e su madre avia por nonbre Mars e era muy devota muger. E quando era preñada dél vénole en revelación por gracia del Espíritu Santo tres vegadas en tres noches que del su vientre salía*

analogy to Jesus. We find it in another medieval *romance* text, a *Sermonario*<sup>23</sup>. Some elements come from the most widely known text of the period (Matthew 2)<sup>24</sup>. So that, as in other cases, comprehending Jewish literature in a Christian, *romance* context depends on locating spaces of ambiguity which are not explicitly «secular» but neither are they particularist or polemical. But, in don Mosse's composition, the star is at the *beginning* of a poem which *ends* with a «prophecy» or rather a wish for defense. Such a structure echoes Numbers, 22<sup>25</sup>.

As we are dealing with a poem by a member of fifteenth century Hispano-Jewish communities, we may be helped by remembering that the most elementary –but also fundamental– step in writing Hebrew poetry in the Hispano-Jewish communities is the choice of a passage or fragment from the Hebrew Bible. Once we understand that these basic steps are neither astrological nor political, we can advance in the reading of the poem. As a poetic conceit, the reference to Balaam implies a certain analogy, correspondence or identification with the biblical precedent. It could well allude to don Mosse's position or rhetorical view of himself as a (poetic) prophet who foretold the future. Again, the analogy to Enrique III's court astrologer/ physician/ surgeon –or someone engaged in the type of medicine strongly influenced by astrology practiced in the peninsula circa 1405– who predicts future events about the infante Juan, would be clear. If we accept this tacit (but not unusual in a fifteenth century poetic context) implicit allusion to Balaam in the poem<sup>26</sup> we might be able to discern some further resonances. As will be recalled, the biblical story (Numbers, 22) is set at the end of the forty year wanderings in the desert «in the plains of Moab on this side of the Jordan by Jericho»<sup>27</sup>.

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*una estrella, la qual resplandecía por todas las partidas del mundo, e avía muy grand luz e claridad*». C. Fernández González (1999:32).

23. «...E así parece que el Señor que quiso resucitar e levantarse así como (el) estrella se levanta deyuso de tierra e sube sobre el horizonte. Et por tanto dezimos e cantamos en la madre Santa Iglesia en la bendición del çirio, en tal día como ayer, diciendo: 'Hec nox est et qui verus ille lucifer Christus'». M. A. Sánchez Sánchez (1991:730. Sermones de commune).

24. «Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him».

25. *Biblia Escorial I-j-4: Pentateuco ad loc «E alço su enxemplo, e dixo: dicho de Bilhan, fijo de Bahor, e dicho del omne del ojo çerrado; Dicho del que oye los dichos de Dios, e sabe el saber del alto; e la vision del abastado vee, echado e descubierto de ojos. e veolo, e non agora; mirolo, e non de çerca; e armarsea vna estrella de Jacob, e leuantarsea tribo de Ysrrael, e llagara los condados de Moab, e desfara todos los fijos de Sed. E sera Edom eredada, e sera heredat çehir de sus enemigos; e Ysrrael ganara averio. E apoderarsea de Jacob, e perdera el rremanesçido dela villa. E vido a Amaleque, e alço su enxemplo, e dixo: el primero delos gentios, Amaleque, e su fyn fasta ser perdido...»*.

26. Fifteenth century Castilian poets were inspired by the Bible in general and also by this particular pericope. It can hardly be doubted that the Balaam section in Numbers is the prototype of the talking mule in «Quexos de vna mula que avía empenado Juan Muñiz a D. Pedro de Aguilar e después ge la desempeñó» by Anton de Montoro in the same century. This may have been obscured by the analogies (e.g. Menéndez y Pelayo) to *animalia* in poetry in general. The allusions to the Bible which are openly acknowledged as such are a small minority of the scriptural allusions in fifteenth century Spanish poetry.

27. «... 2 And Balak the son of Zippor... Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel... 5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam ..., saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: I pray thee, curse me this people;

A reading of the story, then, leaves the reader with inescapable memories of the plain sense and the theme of constant, repeated request, payment and patronage of the text to be said by Balaam. The basic lesson –for anyone even remotely aware of the story– would be that there are texts which are «requested» and then requested again and again, ordered or «paid for»; therefore texts which are said and yet not said; texts where there is no clear «authorship». On reading the poem by the «new Balaam» these themes and resonances can hardly be missed. The Balaam story provides a coherence and a resonance to the poem.

The poem begins with the announcement of a birth, its alleged subject being an infant, who, in his present state cannot possibly «subdue» other kingdoms. Comparisons to other members of this specific group may take us further. Don Mosse's poem is not as «messianic» as that of another member of the group, Imperial, who alludes to apocalyptic messianic images from the New Testament and Greco-Roman antiquity. In Imperial's Italianate hyperbole, the infante Juan is «like Alexander», «like Cesar» and there is also an additional allusion to empire in the reference to imperial robes<sup>28</sup>. The Christian concern with the Apocalypse is marked in other poems of the *Cancionero de Baena* and seems to reflect the directions of spirituality at the court. No such references can be found in Don Mosse's poem.

## VI

Less than two decades had passed since the events of 1391. There are those who are so certain that Judeo-Christian dialogue at court had ceased after that year, that they claim to be able to date undated poems on the basis of such a belief. And yet, unlike so many other undated fifteenth century poems, there is not the slightest doubt about the (post-1391) date (1405) of don Mosse's *Dezir*. His inclusion in the group of Diego de Valencia, micer Imperial, and others is therefore doubly significant and so is the ceremonial quality of the poem: it is for a royal occasion.

Therefore, the question of the background or historical context (*before* the infant Juan II's birth and reign) arises. To understand the presence of the Jewish surgeon/poet at the post-1391 Castilian court, late medieval notions of lineage, family, dynasty as a factor at the late medieval Castilian court are highly relevant. Rather than reconstruct a long list of Jews at court in the fourteenth century, we may concentrate on the specific subject at hand: Jewish scientists at court. In this particular royal family, we need not

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... for I wot that he whom ... thou cursest is cursed. 7 And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand;.. 12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. ... 15 And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. 16 And they came to Balaam, and said to him, ... 17 For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people... And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him».

28. Nepaulsingh (1997) pointed out the two references to emperors (Charlemagne and Cesar) and one to the «vestido imperial».

go further than the case of don Juan Manuel and his assertion about his physician and his family. Less than a century before don Mosse, in *El libro de los castigos* (or *Libro enfenido*) Juan Manuel –regent of Castile– addresses his son, Don Fernando, and admonishes him: «If you are looking for a physician let him be of the lineage of Don Zag who was my father’s physician and my physician too»<sup>29</sup>. There is a symmetry here: the option for medicine in the Jewish family mirrors the Alfonsine family’s choices of physicians. In the same family, in Aragon, recourse was had to a «*juheu estrolench e torcimany de casa del senyor Rey*» i.e. Jacob Corsino who served Pedro el Ceremonioso (ca. 1380). These are random examples that could be multiplied and that show that supply mirrors demand. In other words, patronage of science and scientists in late medieval Spain may need to be understood by taking this family, dynastic factor into account. This pattern repeats itself after 1391, with the dynasty of the ibn Zarzals. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the Trastamaras or descendants of Enrique II, who depended on radical change –fratricide and regicide– for power, kept to tradition and continuity by maintaining the ibn Zarzals in their court. Of course, the case is not unique and it excites comments in parallel situations –e.g. the Canciller Ayala who had managed to serve both, Pedro I and Enrique II–. Don Mosse and his presence or position at court cannot be understood in isolation from the history of the Hispanic/Iberian phenomenon of Jewish scientists at court.

The appointments of the ibn Zarzals by Pedro I, Juan I or Enrique III constitute one aspect of the phenomenon. But it is preceded by the Ibn Zarzals earlier decision to opt for a family policy or tendency in education: scientific learning. So that there are at least two contexts that need examining: options for particular branches of learning in Hispano- Jewish communities and consequent, following, later, royal, courtly appointments of such Jewish scientists to courtly office.

In the first case, it has been argued<sup>30</sup> that the two are related and that behavior or policy in the context of royalty and nobility (i.e. the decisions to appoint Jewish scientists) is a factor in the Jewish option for certain branches of learning or professional life such as medicine, astrology, composition or translation of scientific works. It is this educational and professional option, within certain Hispano-Jewish families, which allows and explains the phenomenon of scientists who are Jews at court in these positions. In recent work it has been argued that while one should not forget Jewish religious arguments to legitimize –or apologize for– the study of the sciences (astronomy / astrology, medicine and others) there are also hyperbolic, rhetorical elements in these legitimizations. The historical factors (i.e. why do Jews choose –or are able– to opt for a scientific education) are a different question and they need to be taken into consideration. These would include the question of demand and supply in specific areas and circles as well as dynasties, early education, the access to languages and translations,

29. See the critical edition of *El libro de los castigos* (R. Ayerbe-Chaux, 1989:122-123).

30. On the dynastic factor in Hispano-Jewish options for scientific study see E. Gutwirth (1992a & 2011).

the presence of instruments and libraries/books at early stages of education in Jewish families: these are not explained by the later appointments made by Castilian royalty alone. The demand for Jewish scientists in Christian Iberian courts may therefore need to take into consideration the dynastic factor. Mosse's family history –at least what we know of it– confirms this pattern. His father, like him, served the royal court<sup>31</sup>.

In the case of the royal motivations and intentions, then, these courtly Jewish presences can be explained by Spanish royal traditions which were centuries old. But, in the case of don Mosse, these motivations inscribe themselves in a more specific, late medieval Iberian historical framework of individuals who, like don Mosse, were Jews, scientists, astrologers, physicians and connected to the royal court and composed texts in the *romance*. This specific peninsular framework is best known from (but by no means limited to) three cases: Abraham Ibn Zarzal, Guedella and Cresques Abnarrabi, the Leridan optician or eye doctor of Juan II of Aragon. Both Guedella and Cresques are well known because of recent scholarly treatments. Guedella, as will be recalled, had a hand in determining the date of the coronation of King Duarte (1391-1438, king of Portugal [1433-38]), and in the horoscope in Portuguese of Prince Henry the Navigator (4 March 1394 – 13 November 1460). Russell's work on Henry the Navigator (P. Russell, 2000) is the culmination of life long study of the relevant area and period and has led to renewed interest in the subject. The background to the royal biography is a centuries-old scholarly tradition. It debates the questions of modernity which –as has been seen– are also relevant to the group of creators of *dezires* on Juan II's birth. Is Henry a navigator, a scientist, a humanist precursor looking forwards to the future and modernity or is he a belated figure, the last of the crusaders in the medieval chivalrous tradition? These are the questions facing this scholarly area. Russell takes into consideration the astrological factor. In historical terms and in practice, this means looking at the astrologer (a field relevant to Abraham and Mosse ibn Zarzal) as a factor in the policies of a king and, therefore, a kingdom, in late medieval Iberia. The astrologer in question is a Jew, Abraham Guedalla, who writes in Portuguese and is proficient in matters concerning Africa and astrology whose family or who himself opted for scientific education and studies.

In the case of Cresques Abnarrabi, and the text [a letter] which he composed in the romance and signed on 28/9/1468, again, one could make a case for scholarly interest in him extending as far back as 1874, in Vignau's work in the *RABM*. However, a more recent point of reference is to be found in the memories –by Jean Patrice Boudet (2006:315)– about the Paris Seminar of Beaujouan in the 1980s who so carefully read –albeit from another, different perspective, that of history of science– the text of the composition in the *romance* written by Cresques. The Jewish courtier's *romance* epistle recounts the astrological issues in the surgical operation on Juan II's eyes and discusses a future operation. Here again, the Jewish opinion or decision on matters astrological/

31. For the father-son relation see the notes on Cuenca infra.

medical appears to have wide ranging repercussions and effects. The case of Abraham aben Zarzal predates all these<sup>32</sup>.

## VII

The need to take into account dynastic/family history in analyses of Hispano-Jewish scientists of the middle ages, particularly at the level of the court or other Christian institutions, has become apparent in recent decades. Mosse's family history –at least what we know of it– confirms this pattern. Like him, his father –don Abraham<sup>33</sup>– served the royal court. Don Abraham ibn Zarzal belonged to the group of court astronomers/astrologers of Pedro I. He hailed from Granada, where he had been in the service of Muhammad V. The best known episode of his biography and most frequently repeated anecdote takes place in 1369, two months before Montiel and the death of the king (23/3/1369). It is at this time that Pedro I, King of Castile, summons Moses' father and asks: how is it that the astrologers had predicted his successes, conquests and his regaining the Holy House in Jerusalem, when, in fact, he had had such a disastrous trajectory. The Jewish astrologer, Mosse's father, Abraham ibn Zarzal responds by an exemplum: if a man goes into a hot bath in January will he not sweat? That is to say that despite the astrological, planetary situation, there is room for free will and certain actions change the outcome.

The story sounds too didactic to be authentic. It could belong in a type of story concerned with predictions and how to formulate them prudently, whose ultimate prototypes might go back to the age of stories about Croesus and the oracle. It has indeed been doubted. The main source is Cuenca, the *Despensero* of the Queen, doña Leonor, wife of Juan I, someone who served the party which used the argument of Jewish influence at court in Pedro's age to justify what the Middle Ages defined as regicide<sup>34</sup> (and fratricide) and legitimize the illegitimate brother. The *Summario de los Reyes de España*<sup>35</sup> –published in the eighteenth century– became a source of Larra<sup>36</sup> but also of Graetz (through Amador?) with all that this implies about the relations between

32. In addition to the reconstructions below see R. Arie's portrait (1992): «Au temps des Nasrides, sous Muhammad V, un eminent médecin juif, Ibrahim Ibn Zarzâr attira de nombreux disciples non sans exciter la jalousie du praticien de Grenade, Muhammad al-Saqûri. Sa réputation lui valut d'être appelé à la cour de Fès en 1358 pour y soigner le sultan marinide Abû Inân. En 1359, à la suite du coup d'état qui entraîna l'exil de Muhammad V au Maroc, Ibn Zarzâr se réfugia à la cour de Pierre Ier de Castille qui le tint en grande estime».

33. See the references to Cuenca *infra*.

34. M. Eisner (2011), R. von Friedeburg (2004).

35. J. Rodríguez de Cuenca, *Summario de los Reyes de España por el despensero mayor de la reyna Leonor*. Madrid, 1781, p. 61 ff. See also J.P. Jardin (2013).

36. On the novel about the court of Enrique III, see for example W. C. Ríos-Font (1997) who addresses the question of the Jew's letter in the novel. The *Tractado de adivinança* by Lope de Barrientos may conceivably be relevant for understanding the romantic novelists: it admits the «*ciencia e consideración de las estrellas*» as argued by A. Llosa Sanz (2006), but it would be difficult for a treatise of the 1430s to be an inspiration for a poem of 1405. In more general terms Larra, not unlike Scott raises questions about the relations between the historical novel and history writing, the theme of e.g. Harry E. Shaw (1985).

nineteenth century fiction and historiography. Jean-Pierre Jardin, who has produced the edition of the *Sumario*'s section on Ibn Zarzal, sees its anecdote as part of a wider frame, namely Cuenca's wish to present his opinions –the official version– or memory of Castile's recent past as a response to problems of the 1390s<sup>37</sup>. The story, arguably, inscribes itself also in an overlooked current of writings about good and evil counselors and, within this, in the topos of the Jew as evil counselor, which has been detected in the treatment of the Jews in chronicles and other texts from late medieval Castile (E. Gutwirth, 1984).

Little is known of Cuenca's life from independent sources and such ignorance –in the case of a royal or noble courtier/chronicler– may itself be significant. Even Amador, who toiled to disseminate Cuenca's Ibn Zarzal story, did not completely trust him, as he believed that Cuenca's chronicle tended more towards the panegyric than Ayala. Despite some readers' (e.g. Cantera) impression that references to Jews in Castilian chronicles are «impartial», it has been argued that the representation of Jews in Castilian chronicles should be seen as part of broader political, theological and literary frameworks (E. Gutwirth, 1984). Following in this line, the general intuitions of Amador have been now replaced by analysis which explains exactly the precise contemporary (1390s?) issues which were projected by Cuenca to the large canvas that goes from Covadonga and Pelayo to the reigns of Juan I and Enrique III. Jean-Pierre Jardin has noted these and summarized the tendency of the chronicle as «defending the indefensible». Centering Abraham, Don Mosse's father, one courtier, a Jew, in the narrative of the legitimate king's downfall would be part of this tendency of the chronicle as a whole. And yet, despite these partisan constructions, there is no doubt as to the existence of Abraham ibn Zarzal, to his being the father of don Mosse, to his close connections to the king and the nature of the astrologer's advice. It concerned military activity and questions of royal policy.

This brings us to the next point. Most of the readers of the *Cancionero de Baena* will naturally see Don Mosse in the context of the court. From such a perspective, don Mosse would be an isolated, minority occurrence in a Christian court. But Don Mosse, unlike 19th century *Cancionero* readers and their followers, may not have seen himself in this light, as «one out of sixty». Don Mosse's relations with the court do exist, no doubt, but so does the evidence for belonging to the Hispano-Jewish communities of fifteenth century Spain and to a Jewish family or rather to a particular intellectual dynasty as has been seen above. Such a change of perspective has little to do with Hebraisms, literary evaluations and *Cancionero* MSS, however important. They concern the historical context. They reveal the one sided quality of approaches which see

37. J. P. Jardin (2000a & 2000b). Diego Catalán (1966:95, n.306) had very assured opinions (but no evidence) about Cuenca: «El contenido de la obra y el estilo de su prosa no dejan lugar a dudas: El despensero de la reina doña Leonor era judío (y no converso), al igual que aquel su amigo don Abrahen Aben Zarzal, médico («que agora es») de Enrique III». See also Oscar Perea Rodríguez (2013).

the royal appointment or the presence of Jews at court as the prime or only question. The education or tradition in Hispano-Jewish communities which explains their entry into fields such as science or medicine as well as the culture from which the poem is produced is marginalized by such points of view. His belonging to the community was not only an intellectual question. A spatial/economic approach may clarify this. If we accept the premise (see above) that toponyms are significant, we could ponder on the documented *barrera de Aben Zarzal* in Cordoba towards 1370. But don Mosse did not own the houses or rooms, *casas*. He rented them from the cabildo for about 85 maravedies. They seem to have been transferred or rented later, in 1387 by Pedro Ruiz, *alguacil de la juderia*. Similarly, his *tienda* by the *Puerta del fierro*, was not owned by him but rented from the cabildo and shared with Benito Gonzalez, *alguacil*<sup>38</sup>. Later, he seems to be in Segovia. The basic steps are the identification of Mosse with the Moses ibn Zarzal of the archival records which document his renting of houses in Rehoyos street of Segovia around the time of the poem. Neither has been widely discussed in the literary critical tradition.

The identification with Mosse Zarzal has not been impugned and the *Sumario*'s chronological reference to don Mosse as living in Cuenca's own time, as being the son of Abraham ibn Zarzal –the King's, don Pedro's astrologer– and being present at court is strong evidence. One cannot deny that there is something problematic about the work of the *benemerito*, father Fita, who, for different reasons tried so hard to advance information on subjects which we could link to the poem. According to him «En Segovia (calle de Rehoyo), y no en Carmona, residía D. Mosé Abén Zarzal durante los años 1389, 1400 y 1409, según aparece de los documentos que he publicado en el tomo IX del BOLETÍN, páginas 316 y 349». The documents he published in volume IX, however, are interpreted there differently: one Jewish physician is identified with Alguadex<sup>39</sup> and not with Zarzal.

Nevertheless, if we understand the documents correctly, in his real experience –as opposed to the appearances or image presented by the editorial arrangements of Baena's Cancionero–, Don Mosse would not be surrounded by Diego de Valencia, Villasandino or Imperial. Rather, his neighbours would be an *alfayate*, an *aljofarero*, or a *labandera*, i.e. the neighbours mentioned by the archival records preserved in the Segovian *Libro de Mayordomias* for the *cal de Rehoyo* as presented by Fita (1890:346):

... en la próxima cal de Rehoyo, que ha conservado el nombre, suenan Salamón de Castro alfayate de lienços, Don Yacó Adoroque, Don Yacó de Ayllón, Don Abrahán Adeador, Sanctó Daza peligero, Don Mosé Sarza y Don Yacó Jujulem

38. Iluminado Sanz Sancho (1989). «Mosé aben Zarzal vive junto Corral Cárdenas, col. Sta. Maria, arrienda casa-tienda en Pta. fierro col. S. Salvador» (I. Sanz Sancho 1994:155); «Ferran Sanchez Alegre arrienda casas en calle aben zarzal en 1485» (I. Sanz Sancho 1994:162).

39. Fidel Fita (1890): «...En la Correría cerca de las Carneçerías ... el físico, de quien cabe sospechar si por ventura fué el famoso Don Mair, médico del rey D. Enrique III...».



*en las casas dó solía morar Ysrael, Don Yudá Levi texedor hijo de Don Zag, Don Loçar çapatero, la labrandería Doña Urosol, y Abrahán Trifá. Suena en fin Doña Vellida, mujer que fué del aljofarero...*

Also archival, but more recent, are the finds of documents concerning later Abenzarzals who are conversos in Seville e.g. Juan Fernández Abenzarzal<sup>40</sup>. There is, of course (and as in other cases) no absolute assurance that they belong to the family of don Mosse. Nor is this familial issue the concern of the documents' editors who make no mention of the courtiers Mosse or Abraham. But the name has not been documented as a common one and Seville reminds one of the family's putative Andalusian origins. This (possibly) third or fourth generation of Abenzarzals does not appear as interested in the stars or in the court. They are *cambiadores*.

If we accept this change of perspective we might reformulate the task of research as: where does the dynasty obtain its inspiration? what are the possible historical and intellectual contexts which explain the consistent direction of their thought, preoccupations, concerns? Abraham ibn Zarzal's role in the dissemination of the «Jewish Aristotle» myth (M. Steinschneider 1893:271/2) in late medieval Spain deserves separate treatment but alerts us to what is at stake in such questions. If we accept such questions, the Muslim/Arabic factor could then be taken into consideration. Ibn Khaldun, universally recognized as a major and original protagonist of intellectual history in the fourteenth century can hardly be dismissed as an epigone. He does not really fit in the common old stereotypes of late medieval decline. His contacts, ties and friendship with the Abenzarzal dynasty can be explained neither in terms of common religion nor of family relations. Despite the negative factors, it could be argued that it may be useful to observe the type of relations between ibn Zarzal and ibn Khaldun revealed by the evidence:

«...ibn Khaldun referred to...ibn Zarzar...from whom he had received a letter confirming this prediction (about 1383) ....Zarzar who was instrumental in presenting ibn Khaldun to Pedro in 1363 was apparently the only Jewish scholar with whom ibn Khaldun had established (while still in the Maghreb) a close bond of friendship which endured all through the years and remained so deeply seated in ibn Khaldun's memory that he was reminded of the views of his Jewish friend in his interview with Tamerlane forty years later» (W.J. Fischel, 1952:56).

Naturally, these facts lead us to think about matters other than religious polemic: the common basis for dialogue, the affinities in the realm of thought, attitudes and mind set. These might lead to a fuller understanding of the intellectual dynasty of the ibn

40. A. Collantes de Terán Sánchez (1984:375). One should also mention «Rodrigo de Zarza reconciliado» in 1494 and *guarda de los almojarifes* in 1502 and Andres de la Zarza who went to the Indias and returned in 1523. Violante de la Zarza married «Alonso arrendador» in the documents studied by J. Gi (2000: 5, 499).

Zarzals and, therefore, of don Mosse's poem. If we ask: what does the friendship and affinities between ibn Khaldun and Abraham ibn Zarzal mean in intellectual terms? The first element in an answer would be the question of horizons, vision and parameters of thought. In the case of ibn Khaldun's «horizons» the problem is not the lack of studies but quite the contrary. In the case of the Ibn Zarzals, however, it is precisely this lack of attention that constitutes the major obstacle and it is therefore incumbent to attend to the evidence. Despite the paucity of the evidence, something may be learnt from the *Dispensero* of Queen Leonor discussed above. To be sure, Juan Rodriguez de Cuenca is indeed an author whose texts need to be read with caution. His ideological, stylistic, and literary preoccupations impinge on his credibility. His readers, after the eighteenth century edition of his chronicle, may not have been as aware of such issues. Mariano José de Larra could be said to have created *his* fantastic Jewish astrologer/magus at Enrique III's court by accepting and then dilating, amplifying and romantically exaggerating what was already there in Cuenca. In this sense he may not be as different from historians who read Cuenca uncritically and ascribe to the Zarzals excessive centrality and power. Avoiding that extreme position does not need to lead to a total pyrrhonism. The Abenzarzal's (father and son) concern with the royal politics of Castile seems clear. Cuenca may have exaggerated, but he does not amalgamate all Jewish courtiers into an homogeneous «Other». He was not likely to confuse a *juglar/esa*, or a *recaudador* with an astrologer/advisor or «consultant» on politics. Nor is Cuenca the only source on Abraham Ibn Zarzal's life and works.

Abraham Ibn Zarzal's labors as scribe/ copyist of astronomical works have apparently not been preserved. But an astronomical MS codex was studied by Levi della Vida<sup>41</sup> in the Barberini collection at the Vatican Library. It has preserved a marginal note which states that the table on the anomalies of Mercury's movement has been confronted with the copy made by Ibrahim Zarzal. Similarly, the Epistle prognosticating events relative to the decline or change of a dynasty –which Zarzal composed ca. 1360 and sent to Ibn Khaldun– if it existed, does not seem to have survived, but it is referred to explicitly in Ibn Khaldun's autobiography. So that there is reference to at least two works on the science of the stars and prognostications which were linked to the father of the author of the «estrella» poem, but have not survived.

The anecdote in Cuenca leaves little doubt as to Zarzal and Pedro's common interest in the epistemological possibility of knowledge and prognostications about the rise and decline of kings and kingdoms. In addition, the narrative raises questions of such «rise and decline» without appeal to Divine Providence. That is to say that observations or explanations of history may be focused on human or non-divine factors and natural philosophy.

A common basis also exists obviously in the philosophical tradition, common to (and partly commonplace among) both Jewish and Muslim readers, that goes from Aris-

41. G. Levi della Vida (1933). J. Millás (1943-50: 349/50).

tote to Averroes. Ibn Khaldun, similarly, gives examples for some of his political ideas which are taken from yet another source which would have been common to both: the Old Testament (W. J. Fischel 1956). The biblical history of Moses serves ibn Khaldun to discuss demography and that of Ham, climatology. Most noteworthy is ibn Khaldun's dependence on a source which was standard reading matter for Jews in medieval Spain, in Arabophone areas and elsewhere i.e. the medieval chronicle known as Yosippon<sup>42</sup>. If Cuenca's story gives us an inkling of Don Pedro and Abenarzal's shared interest in the good or bad fortune of kingdoms, in the case of ibn Khaldun, the concern with the rise and decline of kingdoms or civilizations is evident from the *Prolegomena*. Without duplicating the immense corpus of studies on it, we notice the preoccupations as expressed in the themes of its chapters. Thus in the third part of the *Prolegomena* we find, in chapter fourteen, that, like men, the state has a natural life cycle or, in chapter seventeen, that there are stages in the development of the dynasty or, in chapter fourteen, that excessive severity contributes to the destruction of the kingdom<sup>43</sup>. As Hayden White (1959) noted: «For Ibn Khaldun, the higher style of life which is traditionally associated with urban culture is at once the telos of civilization and the cause of its decline». Or, elsewhere: «'Asabiyah, the cohesive principle, is reserved only for the uncorrupted desert folk; for civilizations, Ibn Khaldun reserves decline».

Finally, there is the question which interested all these Hispano-Jewish courtiers who, like don Mosse, produced texts in the *romance* of late medieval Castile. It is evident from their communications –generally preserved in short prose compositions (dedications, orations, epistles, prologues, occasionally poems)– with royalty and nobility in the Iberian peninsula: how should a Jew address Christian authorities in the *romance*?. This is a question which is common to authors from Shem Tov de Carrion (in his famous lines about the rose and the thorns) to Arragel, Zacut, Abravanel and others (E. Gutwirth, 2000). Cuenca's story has a particular point: how to blame (in the *romance*) the King himself –rather than his advisors, including Ibn Zarzal– for his own downfall without actually saying so. Evidently, Ibn Khaldun does not and cannot provide a model for such a particular, specific question or variant. Nevertheless, the basic problem of how to address individuals –who may not be their equals intellectually, but– who have military and economic superiority (i.e. kings and the military) preoccupied ibn Khaldun also. To understand this one would have to attend to non-Iberian phases of his life and writings.

During Ibn Khaldun's sojourn in Egypt (W. J. Fischel, 1952) he was asked by Sultan Faraj of Egypt to accompany him to Damascus. Tamerlane's war party was moving toward Damascus. The sultan stayed in Damascus two weeks, and returned because of a revolt in Cairo. Ibn Khaldun left Damascus and went to Tamerlane's camp where he stayed for more than a month. There he met Tamerlane, communicating through

42. S. Sela (2009). Yosippon as a source for ibn Khaldun is the subject of Fischel's investigations (1954).

43. Immanuel Koplewitz (1966), «Prologue».

an interpreter, Abd al-Jabbar al-Khwarizmi (d. 1403)<sup>44</sup>. Ibn Khaldun left an account of the conversations. Tamerlane was interested in ibn Khaldun's views about «predictions of things to come» (W. J. Fischel, 1952:49). Geography –the configuration of the Maghreb– was also a theme. For readers of ibn Khaldun, the lesson was that geography was of interest to powerful rulers and that those interested in entering their service should make it clear that they are in command of this subject. This needs to be kept in mind when reading Don Mosse's composition and the geographic facet pointed out above. Like Pedro and the ibn Zarzals, so ibn Khaldun too, talked about the stars and politics. As Fischel points out, the practice of predictions of dynastic changes was widespread in the Maghreb and known as *hidthan*. Its books were called *malhama*. Ibn Khaldun, prudent as usual, ascribes its origins to Jewish converts (W. J. Fischel, 1952:55). Ibn Khaldun applies the prediction he had learnt in the Maghreb to Timur's rise in history. He writes: «So now on account of my fears it occurred to me to tell him something of it by which he would be diverted *and might become kindly disposed toward me*» (W. J. Fischel, 1952:36) or «*Because of this fear I composed in my mind some words to say to him which by exalting him and his government would flatter him*» (W. J. Fischel, 1952:35. Emphases mine).

The remarkable collection known as *Cancionero de Baena* has occupied numerous scholars who have nevertheless paid little attention to this poem. Its brevity, esthetic and apparent conventionality may have been factors. At the same time, paradoxically, this brief text led to sustained imaginary amplifications such as those of Larra but also some in an historiographic mode. Here an attempt has been made to transcend these approaches in two ways: by paying attention to the components of the text on the one hand and on the other by trying to reconstruct a history. This last task involves recognizing the significance of the dynastic factor in the educational processes of such traditional societies. This, in turn, leads to a search for the intellectual and political presuppositions of that age and social strata. Medical astrology, Biblical models, linguistic and cultural resonances come to the fore.

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44. W.J. Fischel (1967). See also W.J. Fischel (1952:48).

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