

A GOST, A CONVERSO AND A POEM: A LETTER TO GONZALO
DE LA CABALLERÍA BY SHELOMO BEN REUBEN BONAFED*

Un fantasma, un converso y un poema:

Una carta de Shelomo ben Reuben Bonafed a Gonzalo de la Caballería

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Resumen: En este artículo propongo analizar un poema de Shelomo ben Reuben Bonafed (s. xv) dirigido a Vidal/Yosef ben Labi, ya convertido bajo el nombre de Gonzalo de la Caballería. El análisis de estos versos muestra cómo Bonafed, discípulo del círculo de poetas de Zaragoza, jugó un importante papel en la re-inención de la literatura hebrea que se había iniciado años antes con sus maestros y cómo Bonafed consideraba la lengua hebrea y la literatura secular producida en esta lengua como depositarias de la identidad cultural «hispano-hebrea» de la que él se sentía heredero y adalid.

Abstract: In this paper I propose to analyze a poem by Shelomo ben Reuben Bonafed, a renowned Hebrew poet who lived in the kingdom of Aragon during the first half of the 15th century. Analysis of this poem will allow us to see how Bonafed, a disciple of the circle of poets of Zaragoza, played his part in a re-invention of Hebrew literature that had been initiated a few years earlier by his masters, Shelomo de Piera and Vidal/Yosef ben Labi. Bonafed thought that the Hebrew language and Hebrew poetry were the depositaries of a «Hispano-Hebrew» cultural identity of which he felt himself to be a part.

Palabras clave: Shelomo Bonafed, Literatura hebrea, Gonzalo ibn Labi, Aragón, siglo xv.

Key words: Shelomo Bonafed, Hebrew literature, Gonzalo ibn Labi, Aragón, fifteenth century.

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In *Múltiples Moradas*, his well-known collection of essays on comparative literature, Claudio Guillén made a call for the need to investigate «with exactitude the processes of invention of national literatures» within each of the European languages (i.e. in the fields of Hispanists, Germanists etc).¹ Although in his essay Guillén focussed

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1. See Guillén, 1998: 313-314.

mainly on the period after the mid-18th century, I believe that the same need can be said to exist for the 15th century, especially if in carrying out such research we replace the rather Victorian concept of «national state identity» with the more medieval one of «national cultural identity». The 15th century saw the emergence of the pairing of national author/national literature² which would later evolve into that of literature (language)/nation. The same century witnessed a proliferation of texts tying national or cultural identity («Hispanic», «Italian» etc) to a language, and to literary production written in that language.³ This same period also saw a «renaissance» of literature in Hebrew within the Hispanic territories, especially in the kingdom of Aragon, and this literature, as we will see, was regarded by its authors as an element of socio-cultural cohesion.⁴

Numerous studies have demonstrated the ways in which human societies in their different cultures have constructed their identities or have created them by using literature and language as an effective tool for modelling those identities.⁵ With this idea in mind, the poetry of Shelomo ben Reuben Bonafed can also be read in its historical, social and literary contexts in an effort to understand the way in which the poet constructs, manipulates and uses literature as a tool for the construction of identity.

In this paper I propose to analyze a poem by Shelomo ben Reuben Bonafed, a renowned Hebrew poet who lived in the kingdom of Aragon during the first half of the 15th century.⁶ Analysis of this poem will allow us to see how Bonafed, a disciple of the circle of poets of Zaragoza, played his part in a re-invention of Hebrew literature that had been initiated a few years earlier by his masters, Shelomo de Piera and

2. See Gómez Moreno, 1994: 133 and ff.

3. Numerous examples could be cited, but among the best-known are the *Prohemio* and *Lamentación de España* by the Marquis of Santillana, or the *Triunfo del marqués de Santillana* written by his secretary Diego de Burgos after his death.

4. I have borrowed this concept from the article by Itamar Even Zohar: Even Zohar, 1994: 360.

5. See Anderson, 1991; Guillén, 1998: 299; and Even Zohar, 1994: 357-377.

6. The poem was edited by Schirrmann together with other poems and prose texts dealing with the conflict between Shelomo Bonafed and the *aljama* of Zaragoza in Schirrmann, 1946: 31-34. The poem was partially translated into Spanish in Sáenz-Badillos, 2000: 200-201.

Vidal/Yosef ben Labi.⁷ Bonafed thought that the Hebrew language and Hebrew poetry were the depositaries of a «Hispano-Hebrew» cultural identity of which he felt himself to be a part. For him, this identity stood in clear opposition to the emerging vernacular literature, and the Hebrew language and its poetry were also the depositaries of a Jewish religious identity which was then redefining itself in the face of the threat of religious conversions. A reading of Bonafed's poem will enable us to see how, in the period after the Disputation of Tortosa, the poet sought to maintain contact with those Jews who had already converted to Christianity and to try to prevent new conversions among the young of the Jewish elites by using Hebrew poetry and the Hebrew language as an identifying bond, both cultural and religious, with elite *conversos* like Gonzalo de la Caballería,⁸ to whom the poem is addressed.

None of this took place in a vacuum; nor was it self-generated from within the Jewish community itself. It developed in a complex world that was enormously diverse in social, cultural and religious terms: the world of the kingdom of Aragon during the first half of the 15th century.

Before analyzing the poem, I would like to comment briefly on two events in Bonafed's life which marked his poetry and which are crucial to an understanding of the author and the work which is the focus of this paper. These two events are the Dispute of Tortosa (1413-1414) and the confrontation between Bonafed and the *aljama* of Zaragoza which occurred twenty years after that religious dispute.

The Dispute of Tortosa⁹ was ordered and directed by Pope Benedict XIII, with the approval of the king Fernando I, and was able to reckon with the collaboration of the converso Jerónimo de Santa Fe. The event was organized with the purpose of converting the Jews of the kingdom of Aragon to Christianity by means of argument, and it was a key milestone in the mass conversion of Jews which had started to take place in huge

7. This man's full name was Vidal Yosef ben Labi de la Caballería or Vidal Yosef ben Benvenist ben Labi de la Caballería. After his conversión he took the name of Gonzalo. Bonafed addresses him in this poem as Gonzalo ben Labi or simply Labi, using just the Hebrew part of his whole family name.

8. Bonafed refers to him as Gonzalo ibn Labi, using his Christian name and the Hebrew section of his family name excluding the title «de la Caballería».

9. For this dispute see Pacios López, 1957, and Baer, 1998: 611 and ff.

numbers since the unrest and massacres of 1391, although at first only among the lowest social classes.¹⁰

Many intellectuals and members of Jewish elite society converted at about the time of the Dispute of Tortosa, and one of the best-known figures to do so was Vidal Yosef ben Labi de la Caballería. Vidal, who adopted the name Gonzalo after his baptism, was a convert of special interest to the king himself¹¹ and is known to have converted during the period of the Dispute.¹² Much, though not all, of his family seems to have converted with him,¹³ as did many members of his household, among them the renowned poet Shelomo de Piera,¹⁴ founder of the literary movement known as «the circle of poets of Zaragoza».¹⁵

It is likely that Shelomo Bonafed was himself part of this group of writers or poetic school, founded several years before his conversion by Shelomo de Piera, and which also included de Piera's disciple Vidal/Gonzalo ibn Labi de la Caballería, as well as other poets like Vidal Benveniste. It was a literary movement which sought, like that of the *Consistori de la Gaya Ciencia* within the Provençal poetic tradition, to revive the Andalusí Hebrew literary tradition and create a «neo» Andalusí literature written in the Hebrew language.¹⁶

Bonafed was a witness in Tortosa to the conversion of many of those whom he considered the depositaries of the Jewish culture of his time as embodied in Hebrew poetry. Among these men were two of its major literary referents and intellectual bulwarks: Shelomo de Piera and Gonzalo ibn Labi. It is hardly surprising that as a result of this traumatic experience Bonafed, who held on to his Jewish faith, should have suffered some sort of a crisis or breakdown, during which he gave up writing altogether. After a year, as Bonafed himself records, he managed to recover and went

10. See Baer, 1998, especially pp. 531-733 and Gutwirth, 1993: 97-121.

11. Vendrell Gallostra, 1950: 349-66.

12. The classic study of the Caballería family is in Vendrell Gallostra, 1943: 115-154. For Vidal ben Labi=Gonzalo de la Caballería or ben Labi see especially Targarona - Sáenz-Badillos, 1998-1999: 173-205.

13. The mother of Gonzalo ben Labi, Doña Tolosana, never converted. See Blasco Martínez, 1991: 77-120. (see especially p. 88-93), and Targarona, 2007: 211-224.

14. For this author see Targarona, 1998: 541-51.

15. For this movement see Targarona, 2002: 249-268.

16. For the possible relation between the two movements see Scheindlin, 1997: 36.

back to writing in Hebrew with renewed energy and a clear purpose, that of trying to prevent further conversions of young elite Jews, as well as trying to persuade those such as Gonzalo who had already been baptised to return to their former religion. The weapon chosen for this task was, as I have already explained, Hebrew poetry. In this way Bonafed sought to stand up to the Romance literature written by conversos which in his view led its authors to run the risk of being assimilated within Christianity and Romance and classical culture.

Twenty years after the Dispute of Tortosa, Bonafed found himself in Belchite, a town close to Zaragoza where he had taken refuge after fleeing at the end of a bitter confrontation with the leaders of the Jewish community of Zaragoza and their rabbi. The powerful *aljama* of Zaragoza and its leaders, who had moved to fill the power vacuum created by the conversion of dignitaries like Vidal/Gonzalo de la Caballería, had elected a new rabbi from Sicily who was not at all to Bonafed's liking, and as a result of the confrontation Bonafed chose to exile himself in Belchite. From his new home, the poet composed a series of letters and poems in about 1445¹⁷ which were directed against the *aljama* of Zaragoza and its rabbi. These writings were addressed to those friends Bonafed still had in the city, who were asked to make sure the works were distributed there.

One of these texts was the poem which is the concern of this study, and it was accompanied by a poem addressed to Moshe ben Eleazar, another of Bonafed's allies in Zaragoza, mentioned by Bonafed in verse 16. Bonafed states in the introductory text which stands at the head of his poem that he wrote the work in Belchite and that it is addressed to «Gonzalo ibn Labi». He says that he composed it because there had fallen into his hands a poem entitled «My throat is dry from crying out»¹⁸ by Ibn Gabirol, an 11th century Andalusí author. In this well-known work, Gabirol had made bitter complaints about the community of Zaragoza,

17. This date appears in another of the poems published by Schirmann that is included in the «cycle» of writings on Bonafed's disagreement with the *aljama* of Zaragoza. See Schirmann, 1946: 48, Poem 8. In verse 4 the following words appear: In the year of: «Then we will raise up to the mountain of/The Lord the powerful patrons of generous souls»: $\text{בְּעֶצְמָה רִוְחָם נִדְבָּה נְדִיבִים אֲזוּ בְעֵלְהָ הַר ר' אֶל שָׁנָת}$

18. The poem is edited in Hebrew in Schirmann, 1954-60, I: 207-210, and translated into Spanish in Sáenz Badillos - Targarona, 1988: 119-121.

who had forced him to flee the city. Bonafed writes that after reading Gabirol's poem he decided to speak out in a similar way against the Zaragozans of his own day, whom he immediately identified with those of Gabirol's lifetime, and to this end he composed a poem closely resembling that of Gabirol, and using the same rhyme scheme and metre. However, as we will see, Bonafed's work turned out to be rather more than a poem of complaint against a community that had treated him badly.

Let us now consider the content of Bonafed's poem. As the author says, it is constructed «in the exact image» of a famous *qasida* of complaint written by Gabirol against the Jews of Zaragoza. The custom of poetic imitation or response was typical of Andalusí literature (*mu'arada*) and also occurs in Romance literature and other literatures of the period. However, Bonafed's poem is a far from conventional *qasida*¹⁹ and its structure is completely different from that of Gabirol, despite the fact that it has some features in common with it, such as the mono-rhymed nature of the poem or its polythematic make-up. Yet Bonafed's choice of the classic *qasida* form and his re-working of Gabirol's poem are significant to his pursued aim of investing the work with «classical authority». His is a new poem «dressed up» in a classical disguise, that of the *qasida*, and linked to a chosen «classical» author, Shelomo ibn Gabirol. Bonafed's aim was to turn the new poem into a «classical model» full of cultural and religious authority.

The poem begins in the first person, in the voice of Bonafed himself (verses 1-14), complaining about a «lost people», the Jews of Zaragoza, who had strayed from the right path because of an «evil shepherd», the Sicilian rabbi Yeshua ibn Galuf. Bonafed declares in these first verses that his intention in composing this poem was that of «proclaiming his outrage and his anger» against the people of Zaragoza who had treated him so badly and amongst whom he could find no-one who could understand his art.

Bonafed felt that he was alone. All those who might have understood his poetry were «dead», he wrote, and the «saints of the world» did not understand his poems. In writing these words Bonafed was anticipating

19. For the Arabic and Hebrew *qasida* respectively see Gruendler, 2000: 21-231 and for the Hebrew *qasida* see Alfonso, 2003: 127-150.

the appearance in his poem of a dead figure from the past whom he intended to resuscitate: Shelomo ibn Gabirol. He was also making reference to the conversos, one of whom was Gonzalo ibn Labi, the man to whom the poem is directly addressed. In other words, Bonafed sought not only to awaken a truly dead man, Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, but also one who had died at the baptismal font, Gonzalo.

Bonafed also records that his loneliness and anxiety were only alleviated by God, to whom he had turned in the hope of consolation and salvation, given that God alone could assist him. In this first part of the poem two of the four main protagonists of the work are therefore presented i.e. God and Bonafed, and the poet hints at the later appearance of the other two fundamental figures in it, Shelomo Ibn Gabirol and Gonzalo ben Labi.

Between verses 14 and 20, Bonafed introduces the names of the two addressees of his letters. One is Moshe ben Eleazar, a Jew of Zaragoza to whom Bonafed writes from Belchite and to whom he was also to write a second poem, and Gonzalo ben Labi, to whom the current poem is addressed. Bonafed declares that although no-one now listens to him, two famous figures yet remain who can still understand his poetry: Moshe ben Eleazar (Moshe) and Gonzalo ben Labi (Labi). One was a converso and the other was still a Jew. But Bonafed has to clarify that although his friend Gonzalo has converted and cut himself off from his former colleague, although, as he writes, «exile has separated us / and it has moved my landmark» (verse 18), he still appreciates his friend and «knows his robe». This is a Biblical reference to the story of Yehuda and Tamar. When Yehuda lies with Tamar he leaves his robe with her as a token of his love and she later presents it as proof of her innocence when she is accused of adultery after becoming pregnant as a result of her encounter with him. In this way Bonafed alludes to the «Jewishness» of Gonzalo, who is Judá=Yehudah i.e. a Jew, and hints that Gonzalo will eventually recognise his robe, or his religion and culture, which he has left as a token with Bonafed/Tamar.

Bonafed is confident that Gonzalo will return to his Jewish faith and declares the impossibility of going on without him. But in the next verse another section of the poem begins in which Bonafed displays the arms he will use to convert Gonzalo back to his former «culture» and «religion».

Between verses 21 and 26, Bonafed describes the appearance to him of the deceased Shelomo ibn Gabirol. This was not a vision in dreams, but a full-scale apparition fulfilling all the thematic assumptions of a celestial revelation charged with religious references: Shelomo Ibn Gabirol appears as an archangel,²⁰ with a sword in his right hand and bolts of lightning emerging from his mouth. It is a terrifying image which resembles such accounts of religious apparitions as the one given by Vicente Ferrer.²¹ Ferrer explains how one of the ways of telling the difference between a true apparition and a false one is that the former causes fear in the observer. As a result of this, the being who makes such an apparition will move to calm the terror he has caused:

«Peace be with you ben Reuben, beloved/of my delights, my joy/fear not, for I have come to your aid/with my power and my strength».

The words pronounced by Shelomo Ibn Gabirol in Bonafed's poem thus reflect the model of Biblical apparitions as laid out by Vicente Ferrer.

Shelomo ibn Gabirol's appearance in the poem follows the format of a religious apparition, but in this case the appearance was made by a poet, albeit a poet to whom Bonafed attributed quasi-divine powers. Shelomo ibn Gabirol was the bearer of two essences which were in fact one and the same, and to which Bonafed wants Gonzalo to make a return: Hispano-Hebrew culture and the Jewish religion which Gonzalo had abandoned twenty years earlier.

The poem continues until the end in the voice of Ibn Gabirol, but it is a voice which is identified with that of Bonafed. Ibn Gabirol at first addresses himself to Bonafed, calming him and declaring the reason for his appearance: to help him against his enemies, the Jews of Zaragoza, with whom Shelomo ibn Gabirol had already clashed in the past. The first part of this speech, between verses 27 and 34, is given over to placing both voices on the same level in such a way that they become one and the

20. Some fifteenth-century saints are also represented as warriors, e.g. Saint George or Santiago=Saint James. See Roig, 1991.

21. Christian, 1981: 200: «And notice that one day Zacharias went to the Temple to pray, and when he was praying the Angel Gabriel appeared to him on the altar, and Zacharias was terrified. "Fear not, Zacharias". You see that the doctrine is correct that when the good angel or a soul appears to a person, at first they make him terrified, because the flesh cannot bear so much; but then they console him (aconsole); hence, "Fear not"».

same. Bonafed and Ibn Gabirol, both of whom had confronted the «evil» population of Zaragoza, become from this point on the one voice that will pronounce, at the end of the poem, a speech of affirmation of the Jewish faith. Shelomo Ibn Gabirol is Shelomo Bonafed and Shelomo Bonafed is Shelomo Ibn Gabirol:

They thought that you were me and they hated you / in my place. They saw that you were my equal in poetry, / of equal worth and of the same age, / that my name was within you and that, in this generation, / you had achieved such greatness as me. / They thought that I had risen from / the grave and that the Šeol had opened (verses 30-33).

Between verses 34 and 39, the lyrical voice of Shelomo Ibn Gabirol continues to be directed at Bonafed, singled out and separated by Gabirol from the evil inhabitants of Zaragoza whom the poet-archangel says that he will annihilate.

From verses 40 to 46, Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, after singling out Bonafed and the just individuals who show him respect and courtesy, launches into accusations aimed at the inhabitants of Zaragoza, whom he now addresses. The voice of Shelomo Ibn Gabirol/Bonafed pours out a series of accusations against the Zaragozans as if the two poets were the same person. Through the voice of Shelomo Ibn Gabirol, Bonafed accuses the Zaragozans of various errors or failings, the first of which is genealogical. Bonafed accuses them of being people of dubious origin, claiming that they are Christians or Muslims who have disguised themselves as Jews. This is the same sort of accusation or insult as that commonly found in song-poetry where the Jewish convert to Christianity hides his true (Jewish) form beneath the disguise of his Christianity.²²

Bonafed/Gabirol also accuses the Zaragozans of being traitors, of having sold him and then boasted about humiliating him. Finally, he also accuses them of having caused death to the prophets. It should be remembered that Bonafed considered the prophets to be poets²³ and that

22. See, for example, the series of poems by Juan Poeta and Gómez Manrique in which each of the two authors attacks the other by making allusions to the alleged converso origins of his opponent: Gómez Manrique, 2003: 331-348. See also the following studies: Cantera, 1967: 71-111 and Martínez Bogo, 2002: 387-401.

23. See poem *zekor ha-shir* fol. 33r-34v and published in Kaminka, 1928.

he was probably accusing the Zaragozans of disdain towards all those who wrote Hebrew poetry in general and his own work in particular.

In verses 47 to 56, Bonafed gives up a considerable section of the work to praising himself (Gabirol=Bonafed) and his poetry (Hebrew poetry) in the face of the opposition of the ungrateful, ignorant and evil members of his generation. The defence made here by Bonafed is not only a defence of his own poetry since, given that he speaks in the voice of Shelomo ibn Gabirol, he is also defending Hebrew poetry in general. Bonafed considers it a good sign that such ignorant and evil people should feel disdain for his work, because this is further proof that they are fools and that he is a great poet. Bonafed boasts of how he remained «pure» after living with them in Zaragoza and of how his «honour» and «reason» had remained intact. With constant references to his «holy» genealogy, Bonafed/Gabirol boasts that he has not «changed», in a possible reference to the fact that he had not converted to Christianity, nor had been absorbed by the corrupt community of Zaragoza during his time in the city.

The last section of the poem, between verses 57 and 70, is an interesting one in which Bonafed/Gabirol places his hopes in God and in his faith, since only He is capable of saving the poet from all evil. This is one of the longest sections in the poem and concentrates on enumerating divine qualities based on theological principles in language appropriate to a philosopher.

All of these elements which appear in the different sections of the poem [sic]: the apparition of Gabirol invested with religious and cultural authority as a kind of saint-angel-prophet; the identification of Gabirol with Bonafed and of the enemies of both men as one and the same group; the fact that the poem is addressed to a man who had converted twenty years earlier and the theological-polemical final speech make Bonafed's poem a discourse charged with proselytising intentions, both religious and cultural. This poem is also a vindication of Hispano-Hebrew culture in the face of the emerging converso and Jewish culture written in the Romance language. Bonafed not only wishes to attract Gonzalo back to Judaism, he wants him to «return» to the culture within which Bonafed believes that everything that is good about Judaism is born, and which differs from other Jewish cultures such as that of Sicily, the original home of the rabbi against whom Bonafed struggles in these writings, or that which can be found among the Jews of Zaragoza he has just left behind. Bonafed sees

himself as a judge and a part of an Hispanic Jewish cultural elite which runs the risk of being absorbed by Romance culture. Conversion to Christianity and acculturation are the «monsters» that Bonafed wishes to face up to through his poem. The acculturation of the Aragonese Jews and their absorption by other non-Hispanic Jewish cultures, such as that of Italy as represented by the Sicilian rabbi, is in Bonafed's view an evil comparable to that of conversion to Christianity and the fact that he seeks allies among the conversos to assist in the struggle with his Jewish enemies demonstrates this aspect of his work: Bonafed looks for support from Gonzalo ibn Labi, a Hebrew poet and a converso belonging to one of the most noble and ancient families of Zaragoza, against a Jewish enemy, Yeshua ibn Galluf, the Sicilian rabbi in Zaragoza, a man who in Bonafed's eyes represented complete ignorance and otherness.

This poem is thus an exemplar of the complex, diverse and changeable atmosphere in Jewish Aragonese society during the first half of the 15th century. Jewish religious and cultural identity varied and re-adapted itself to new realities, transforming and adapting itself [sic] and generating frictions such as that which can be perceived in this poem and in Bonafed's work more generally.

I would now like to analyze some aspects of the poem which will help to clarify the literary and cultural context in which Bonafed's poetry is located.

The first striking and distinctive motif in the poem is that of the apparition of Shelomo Ibn Gabirol. It is important to highlight that there were numerous 15th century accounts of religious apparitions,²⁴ including those of angels and archangels, to mention the figure most closely resembling Gabirol as he is presented by Bonafed. Examples might include the vision of Joanne of Arc when she was called to her mission, or the previously cited Biblical example glossed by Vicente Ferrer which sought to enable observers to distinguish between true and false apparitions by describing the characteristics of the former.

Bearing in mind that Bonafed's intention is to «reconvert» Gonzalo ibn Labi, at least within the reality of his poem, it is worth quoting here some of the words used in the sentence of the tribunal which judged Joanne of

24. See Christian, 1981.

Arc and which dealt with the underlying dangers of the propagation of visions. For this tribunal, the danger of apparitions lay in the fact that from a vision and its propagation might derive «the seduction of peoples, the inception of new sects and many other impieties that subvert the Church and Catholics».²⁵ This makes it clear that the use made by Bonafed of the apparition in his poem was not unusual in the culture of his time and that those entrusted with the task of protecting the faith saw a danger in the uncontrolled use of such apparitions, i.e. in their use by those outside the Church.

It was with the intention of preventing «fraudulent» visions, i.e. those which escaped the Church's control, that an attempt was made to catalogue and investigate the defining features of a true apparition. In the sermon given by Vicente Ferrer²⁶ in which he spoke of an example of a Biblical vision, that of Zaccharias, the father of John the Baptist, a number of guidelines were specified for recognising when a vision was a true one.²⁷ According to Ferrer, the authenticity of the apparition was guaranteed by the fact that the angel needed to calm Zaccharias's fears, for only a true vision was capable of generating so much terror.

Bonafed seems to have taken such elements into account. In the poem, Gabirol dedicates a couple of verses to presenting himself and calming the fear that his vision has caused in Bonafed:

Creating thunder with his voice he said: / «Righteousness and strength are mine,²⁸ / Peace be with you, ben Reuben, my dear beloved, / my joy, / fear not, for I have come to your aid / with my power and strength» (verses 24-26).

Bonafed makes the pseudo-religious apparition of ibn Gabirol in the poem a means of «seducing» Gonzalo and returning him to the Jewish faith, and he does it in a poem apparently destined to be a complaint against the «evil inhabitants of Zaragoza», but one in which he constructs an entire re-converting apparatus based on the holy/angelical apparition of Shelomo ibn Gabirol and Hebrew poetry as the depositary and transmitter of the essences of Jewish-Hispanic cultural (and religious) identity. One is

25. See Christian, 1981: 203. citing in turn Tisset, 1960-1971: I 340-341.

26. The sermon is cited in Christian, 1981: 200 reproduced in note 21.

27. See note 21.

28. Isaiah 45,23.

inevitably reminded of pictorial representations in which the Archangel Michael or Saint George are painted with an illuminated aureola and a sword in their hand, ready to slay a dragon or the devil. These representations were part of the visual universe of 15th-century Jews and can also be considered part of the visual referent of these verses. One example which might be cited is the illustration which appears on fol. 467 of the Bible of Arragel,²⁹ which shows the Archangel Michael and the Archangel Gabriel according to Christian iconography.³⁰ It is worth emphasising that these particular images illustrate a passage from the Book of Daniel, always a «favourite» among the conversos. The illustration in the Bible of Arragel includes a group of individuals who accompany Daniel and have to cover their eyes in terror.

Another factor which distinguishes the apparition of Ibn Gabirol in Bonafed's poem and which links it to the general phenomenon of apparitions is that it occurs while the poet is awake and not in his dreams. In accounts of conversions a dream is usually the prelude to a revelation,³¹ and a vision will take place within an onirical space. For instance, it is a dream that sets off the conversion of Alfonso de Valladolid as related in his famous *Mostrador de Justicia*,³² and this is just one possible example among many using such a framework for a revelation, locating the scene on a different plane from that of reality.

In the case of Bonafed's poem, what we have is a narrative of apparition which places the whole discourse of the poem in a completely real sphere and withdraws it from the plane of the onirical. This may have been another spur to creation on Bonafed's part, an artefact to be used against Gonzalo's conversion i.e. against the well-known topos of the message-revealing dream. Bonafed resorts to a superior authority, the apparition, which invests his message with a prophetic status.

29. See Fellous, 2001: 186-187.

30. Numerous Christian paintings and sculptures of the archangel Michael date from this period. See for example the oleo paint preserved in the Prado Museum (Madrid) made by Maestro de Zafra in 1495-1500 or the oleo paint in Fundación Lazaro Galdiano San Miguel Arcangel, made by Juan de la Abadía, el viejo in the second half of the fifteenth century.

31. For conversion narratives see García Arenal, 2001 and Sainz de la Maza, 1992.

32. Sainz de la Maza, 1992.

I have so far been discussing the «religious» or even Jewish-proselytising dimension of the apparition of Shelomo ibn Gabirol, but there is another dimension less highly charged with a sense of religious identity and which responds to interests that had more to do with Hispano-Hebrew cultural identity, although the latter can clearly not be disassociated completely from the former. The «apparition» of a «classical» poet to the author of a work and his inclusion as a character in the plot of that work were not unknown phenomena in European literature.³³ Indeed, this technique of the «vision» is described by authors like Maximiliaan P. A. M. Kerckhof as one of the «favourite» techniques of the 15th century.³⁴ Perhaps the most famous instance, and one which in Bonafed's lifetime had already achieved the status of cultural icon, was that of the apparition of Virgil in Dante's «Divine Comedy». This work is very likely to have been familiar to a man like Bonafed, who is known to have studied Latin with a priest.³⁵ There had been a 14th century verse translation of Dante's work into Catalan,³⁶ and Dante was often cited and imitated by the Marquis of Santillana and other literary figures of the period.³⁷ It is perhaps worth pointing out that the figure of Virgil also had both a religious and a cultural dimension. The interpretation of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue as a pre-figuration of the coming of Christ made it possible to place him in Purgatory along with other pre-Christian Old Testament figures, especially prophets.³⁸ Virgil appears in just such a

33. Apart from Dante, there are numerous examples, many of them from the mid-fifteenth-century, in which the visions of «classic» poets proliferate. Many of these were inspired by Dante e.g. Diego de Burgos's *Triunfo del Marqués de Santillana*: Diego de Burgos, 2008: 1-86. Electronic edition: <http://parnaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Revista/Revista12/Santillana.pdf>. In this work the author is guided by Dante to witness the rising to the heavens of the Marquis, who is praised by every historical figure ever to have existed.

34. Juan de Mena, 2009: XII.

35. See Sáenz Badillos - Prats, 2003: 15-27.

36. The Marquis of Santillana refers to this translation in his *Proemio*: Santillana, 2003: 653. The translation was carried out by Andreu Febrer, a Catalan troubador from the second half of the fourteenth century.

37. For example, poems such as *El Triunfo* by Diego de Valera or *La coronación* by Juan de Mena, clearly inspired by Dante's plot.

38. For the religious dimension of Virgil's work and the *Theología Poética* see Granada, 1983: 41-64. It should be remembered that, as we will see further on, in Bonafed's view the prophets were poets.

location in the medieval play *Ordo Prophetarum*, together with David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Moses etc.³⁹ The double religious and cultural dimension of Virgil (poet-prophet) has much in common with the double religious-cultural dimension which Bonafed gives the figure of Shelomo ibn Gabirol. It should be remembered that Virgil's work was known in Spain by Bonafed's time,⁴⁰ and the poet's name appears in the *Libro del Buen Amor* and many other writings.

The narrative device of the apparition of a classical figure is not, to my knowledge, particularly common in Hispano-Hebrew literature, or at least not in the terms deployed in Bonafed's poem. However, it is certainly a highly effective argument and one that is often used to reclaim a classical inheritance within a culture, which, as we will see, wishes to build up a literary pantheon of its own to embody its cultural or even national essence.

In Ángel Gómez Moreno's book on the Spain and Italy of the humanists, the author includes a special chapter on «Los autores patrios, antiguos y modernos» [«Local authors, ancient and modern»]. In this chapter Gómez Moreno shows how the «appropriation» by various authors of other classic or ancient authors in the process of constructing the different Hispanic identities was a widespread phenomenon throughout the Middle Ages, and was particularly noticeable in the 15th century. The «Spanishing» process applied to classical authors such as Seneca or Lucan is patent in many different 15th century authors, and even some contemporary Italian writers recognise the «Spanishness» of these authors. A place was sought for other universal figures in this sort of discourse, and attempts were made to find a Spanish place of birth for men like Aristotle⁴¹ or even the Prophet Mohammed.⁴² Thus was the construction undertaken of a pantheon of past cultural authorities as representatives of a separate Hispanic culture, as occurs in the Marquis of Santillana's *Lamentación de España*,⁴³ Juan de Mena's *Coronación*⁴⁴ or

39. For Virgil as a literary character see Baquero, 1984: 9-26, especially p. 11.

40. Enrique de Villena translated the *Aeneid* into Castilian Spanish in 1428. See Rubio Fernández, 1984: 27-57.

41. Note 195 on p. 136.

42. In p. 136.

43. *Lamentación de España*: See Marqués de Santillana, 1988: 411-413.

the *Triunfo del Marqués de Santillana* written after the Marquis's death by his secretary Diego de Burgos.⁴⁵ It is not surprising, then, that Hebrew poets of the period should have sought to build their own pantheon of cultural authorities like Ibn Gabirol or Yehuda ha-levi, who are treated as founding figures of Hispano-Hebrew culture in early 15th century Aragon, and neither is it surprising that the literary technique of the «vision» should have been used for such purposes.

Another of the elements in Bonafed's poem which contributes to the poet's construction of Gabirol as a «lay saint» is that which appears in verse 39, in the speech made by Gabirol/Bonafed against the evil ones of Zaragoza and in support of the few good men left among them:

For this reason, the forgotten people of God⁴⁶ / kneel down and give thanks before my statue (verse 39).

The reference to a statue (*pesel*) which seems to represent Shelomo ibn Gabirol and before which the just people forgotten by God «kneel» to give thanks places us in a visual referent highly appropriate to cultural images of the 15th century.

We can understand this reference in its religious dimension, in which the figure of Gabirol is compared with that of a saint with an image which is venerated like those of Christian saints i.e. by means of a statue that is worshipped. The association between apparitions of saints and pre-existing images (statues or paintings) which take on new leases of life thanks to the phenomenon of their apparition is well documented in the 15th century.⁴⁷ The same century also saw what has been called an «iconographic explosion»⁴⁸ that was accompanied by a theological discussion on the subject which had a direct effect on the *converso* community.⁴⁹

44. Juan de Mena, 2009.

45. Diego de Burgos, 2008: 1-86. Electronic edition: [http://parnaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Revista/Revista 12/Santillana.pdf](http://parnaseo.uv.es/Lemir/Revista/Revista%20Santillana.pdf).

46. Psalms 9,18.

47. Christian, 1981: 205.

48. See Pereda, 2007: 20.

49. Pereda, 2007.

But I am more interested in the cultural dimension of the phenomenon of the statue or represented image. In this respect it is important to emphasise that in the incipient humanism that was starting to emerge in the courts of Aragon and Castile there was great literary curiosity concerning the lives of illustrious figures of the past and in the panegyric portrait,⁵⁰ literary genres to which we must add an artistic interest in the pictorial and sculptural portraits of the same figures and in classical remains, among which portrait-statues were often found. Spain saw the appearance later than Italy of portraits of illustrious figures such as the first likenesses made of literary figures like the Marquis of Santillana⁵¹ or the medallion of Alphonse V,⁵² both of which date from this period. In Italy, there were very numerous examples: there were statues of Pliny the Younger and Pliny the Elder, considered illustrious sons of the town of Como and positioned at the door of its cathedral,⁵³ and 14th century Mantua saw the coining of a medal with the effigy of Virgil.⁵⁴ There was an increasing number of such examples throughout the 15th century and portraits of illustrious men of the Renaissance or the Middle Ages proliferated, such as those of Boccaccio, Dante and the classical poets. The emergence of an interest in the individual and the tie between classical figures and national identities match closely the use made by Bonafed of Ibn Gabirol in his poem and match also the reference to a «statue» of the latter which ought to be venerated. A statue of Gabirol may or may not have existed, but the striking fact is that Bonafed evokes it within this «construction» of Gabirol as a figure of reference in a Hispano-Hebrew «literature» which sinks its roots deep into antiquity, just like that of the Romance, and which has heroic figures of its own who are no less acclaimed than Virgil or Dante. Hebrew-language poetry also wants to create its champions, in the image of the champions who were being created by the infant literature of the vernacular languages, and to

50. For more on this subject see the chapter on biography and the galleries of illustrious men in Gómez Moreno, 1994: 227 and ff.

51. Portrait of the Marquis by Jorge Inglés for the *retablo* of the Virgin in the Hospital of Buitrago.

52. Relief work by the Italian sculptor Mino da Fiesole (1429-1484), or the portraits on coins and medallions.

53. Gómez Moreno, 1994: 233. Taken from Macek, 1965: 313.

54. Macek, 1965: 313.

whom statues, medallions and pictorial images were already being dedicated.

Another central element in Bonafed's poem and in his strategy for the reconversion of Gonzalo is that of the Hebrew language and Hebrew poetry, which lie behind the fabrication of the figure of Gabirol as a «hero» of the Parnassus of this literature and its language. The Hebrew language and the poetry written in it are, in Bonafed's hands, an instrument to be used to attract conversos back to their old faith, as he himself states in another poem addressed to the converso Isaac Adret:

Look at the fire of my words that burns on the glorious mount; / Prostrate yourself if you are afraid to come near.⁵⁵ / I capture the heart of the wise to such an extent that they ask / If there is a net⁵⁶ among the words that fall fruit of my lips.⁵⁷

According to Peter Burke, language is not a simple «reflection» of a society, but «an active force in society, a means for individuals and groups to control others or to resist such control, for changing society or for blocking change, for affirming or suppressing cultural identities».⁵⁸ Bonafed uses both the Hebrew language and the literary and cultural apparatus of Andalusí Judaism as a «means of affirming» Hispanic Jewish cultural identity in the face of the emerging converso identity, which used Romance or Latin. This seems to be a response to the use of Hebrew by some conversos (Abner de Burgos, Alfonso de Valladolid, Jordi de Sant Jordi) to attract former co-religionaries to Christianity. Alfonso de Valladolid wrote in Hebrew, although he also translated his own works into Romance. Hebrew, like any other language, is an instrument, a weapon that can be used by individuals or groups to promote their own interests, even when those interests conflict as in the cases of the conversos and the Jews.

The first half of the 15th century in Spain was, for Castile and Aragon, a period which saw the beginnings of the irruption of humanism, which then continued to develop slowly throughout the Iberian peninsula. One of

55. Exodus 34,30.

56. Psalms 21,3.

57. *'Al ĥug debareka*, fol 23v. Poem published in Gross, 1993: 53.

58. Burke, 1993: 26.

the main results of this movement was the massive translation of classic works into the vernacular, as well as the development of a vernacular literature. The role of Latin as a classical language and its adoption for use in the identity discourse of the humanist elites both in Italy and in Castile and Aragon were also important features of this period.⁵⁹ It is worth pointing out that in parallel with the process of vernacular re-creation of classical and Italian culture (through translations of Dante, Petrarch etc), the circle of Hebrew poets of Zaragoza decided to concentrate its efforts on recovering the Hebrew language and its literature, rescuing figures who began to assume the form of «classic» writers. The parallel between the Virgil of Dante's work and the figure of Shelomo ibn Gabirol as brought back to life in Bonafed's poem is illustrative in this respect. The «pre-philological» desire of the humanists to rescue from the shelves of European libraries the classics of Greece and Rome finds an echo in Bonafed's interest in recovering the work of Shelomo ibn Gabirol, although it is re-used and manipulated to serve his own interests, in this case the letter to Gonzalo.

The topos of poetry as a means of expressing wisdom and truth came up against its opposite, the common topos throughout the Middle Ages of poetry as deceit and artifice.⁶⁰ For Bonafed, as for other leading writers in Romance during his time, poetry was the most sublime literary form and a bearer of divine virtues which found its first and most valuable justification in the Bible itself. In the Prohemio of the Marquis of Santillana we see a similar defence of poetry, taken from the Etimologies of Saint Isidore,⁶¹ and which also appears in other works.⁶²

And thus, following the path of the Stoics, who with great diligence looked into the origin and causes of things, I dare to say that poetry came earlier

59. See Gómez Moreno, 1994.

60. For this topos in Andalusí Hebrew literature see Brann, 1987: 39-54 and Salvatierra, 2008: 165-8.

61. As Lida de Malquiel points out in her article, Saint Isidore was known for his defence of Biblical poetry and its originality and pre-eminence with respect to pagan letters: Lida de Malkiel, 1952: 341 and ff.

62. For example, Gómez Manrique in his *Esclamación e querrela de la Governación* talks about Biblical poetry in the same terms (see Gómez-Manrique, 2003: 579-580). For this subject see the article by María Rosa Lida de Malkiel cited previously.

and is of greater perfection and authority than loose prose. Isidoro Cartaginés, the holy archbishop of Seville, approves of this notion and gives evidence for it, and states that the first to make rhymes or song in metre was Moses, who in poetry sang and prophesied the coming of the Messiah; and after him, Joshua, in prise of the conquest of Gibeon. David sang in metre his victory over the Philistines and their return of the Ark of the Covenant and all five books of the Psalter. Thus it is that the Hebrews even dare to claim that we cannot feel the taste of its sweetness as well as they do. And Solomon cast his Proverbs in metric form, and certain parts of Job are written in rhyme, especially the words of comfort with which his friends reply to his complaints.⁶³

In this passage it is almost as if the Marquis of Santillana were challenging Bonafed's defence of the superiority of the Hebrew language and his ability to read the Bible in its original tongue. Putting to one side this anecdotal reflection, the same justification of the superiority of poetry over prose can be found in another well-known poem by Bonafed, in which he praises the qualities of poetry as the bearer of truth and rejects the claims of the topos of «deceitful» poetry,⁶⁴ justifying its superior status as a literary form by reference to its Biblical origin and citing exactly the same works as the Marquis of Santillana:

In truth, poetry is for man advantage and acquisition,
 She covers in virtues he who wears her cloaks.
 If it were not so, would David have been able
 To call himself «sweet singer»?⁶⁵

63. Marques de Santillana, 2003, 645: «E, así, faziendo la vía de los stoicos, los quales con grand diligençia inquirieron el origine e causas de las cosas, me esfuerço a decir el metro ser antes en tiempo e de mayor perfección e más auctoridad que la soluta prosa. Isidoro Cartaginés, santo arçobispo ispalensi, así lo aprueba e testifica, e quiere que el primero que fizo rimos o canto en metro aya seído Moisés, ca en metro cantó e profetizó la venida del Mexías; e, después d'él, Josué, en loor del vencimiento de Gabaón. David cantó en metro la victoria de los Filisteos e la restitución del archa del Testamento e todos los cinco libros del Salterio. E aun por tanto los hebraicos osan afirmar que nosotros no así bien commo ellos podemos sentir el gusto de la su dulçeza. E Salomón metrificados fizo los sus Proverbios, e a çiertas cosas de Job son escriptas en rimo; en especial, las palabras de conorte que sus amigos le respondían a sus vexaçiones».

64. See note 60.

65. 2Samuel 23,1.

- And since the reaches of poetry are so high,
 We give it the name of «ascensional song».
 Have those who build songs laboured in vain?
 Have they invented in vain their elegies and their instruments?
- 10 In his great wisdom Solomon placed his name
 In The Song of Songs and the Proverbs, his greatest works.
 But in Qohelet, in which there are no poetic words,
 he hid his name and started with his griefs.
 And when the Rock went out in campaign⁶⁶ against the Pharaoh,
 a song was intoned in the midst of his gathering.
 Deborah pronounced poetic words
 when Baraq rose up⁶⁷ like a flash of lightning with his troops.
 For his poetry was Asaf treated as a prophet, and was added
 to the Temple of God for the righteousness of his works of praise.
- 15 And all the books of the prophets have poetic expressions,
 to such an extent that to the people they seem to be troubadors.⁶⁸

It is hardly surprising then, that poetry was the vehicle chosen by Bonafed in his effort to re-convert his friends and reinforce his cultural and literary identity. This defence of poetry connects with the desire to tie the present of Bonafed's Jewish culture to a glorious past less far-off than that of the Bible that could also offer a Parnassus from which to take classic figures who embodied the power of this tradition and united it with the present, such as the figure of Shelomo ibn Gabirol. This was a phenomenon, as we have already seen, which was also taking place in the different Romance literatures of Spain and Italy.

The most striking element of the poem, and the one which gives it a certain unity, is the final theological speech.

In this part of the poem it might have been logical to expect an anti-Christian attack, such as that which appears in the letter and poem addressed to Jordi de Sant Jordi,⁶⁹ in which Bonafed launches into

66. Judges 5,2.

67. Judges 5,12.

68. Poem *zekhor ha-shir*, fol. 33r-34v. Ms. Oxoniense Mich 1984. Published in Kaminka, 1928: 35-38. verses 6-16.

69. The letter was edited in Talmage, 1979: 337-364. The poem has been published in Gross, 1993: 49-50.

polemics casting doubt on Christian principles like the incarnation of God in his son, the coming of the Messiah, the sacrifice of the son as the redeemer of mankind etc. However, in this poem what we find is an enumeration, which is almost a literal reproduction of that which appears in the *Guide for the Perplexed* by Maimonides, of the different qualities of God. This can be understood from a polemical point of view, but *a priori* does not seem to represent an attack on Christianity, and is, rather, a theological reflection concerning God. What we have, therefore, is a final section in which God is explained in Maimonidean or rationalistic terms, but without making reference to the thorniest anti-Christian apologetical arguments which are usually present in polemical texts, such as the holy trinity or the fulfilment or otherwise of the prediction of the coming of the Messiah. It is clear that many of these points enumerated by Bonafed can be interpreted in a polemical way, but they can also be seen as simply the declaration of faith of a moderate rationalist, like Bonafed, to another, like Gonzalo ben Labi. They work as a bridge between the two men. Bonafed does not want to engage in argument with a Christian, but to come to an agreement with a converso on an idea of God which united them and a common culture which also united them, as represented by Maimonides and Shelomo ibn Gabirol.

The whole of Bonafed's poem is a precise piece of equipment which seeks to achieve the effect of a re-conversion, or an affirmation of common Hispano-Hebrew culture. Each and every part of the poem, and all of them taken together, work perfectly to produce this planned effect on the converso Gonzalo ibn Labi, who is the man who must put it into operation simply by reading it. But this was not to come about in an isolated cultural framework. All of its many elements situate this type of literature in the period in which it was written and in the cultural context of the surrounding social majority. The poem recovers elements of Andalusí poetry and reshapes them, including elements from its own time and from the majority culture in which it was born, the culture of the kingdom of Aragon during the first half of the 15th century, with all its complexities and particularities. This culture was by no means alien to the poet or his poetry. Bonafed is a neo-Andalusí Aragonese poet of the 15th century and he has to be read within the parameters of his own time and not those of 11th century Andalusí literature.

ANNEX I

[1] During the few days that I lived among those weak Jews⁷⁰ of Zaragoza, they, with their wives,⁷¹ made the metal statue of a calf⁷² and changed their glory into the image of an ox,⁷³ a trickster, a despised being who is rejected by all men⁷⁴ called Yosef Yešua‘, may the Lord separate him unto evil!⁷⁵ He has come from Sicily and is ignorant of the way⁷⁶ in which the light of knowledge is parted.⁷⁷ However, the people who walk in darkness⁷⁸ honour him with their silver and their gold. They err in vision⁷⁹ and they have appointed him as their leader. When I realised that in the end there would be bitterness,⁸⁰ I left from among them,⁸¹ for all those who go to him⁸² flee from the presence of the Lord.⁸³ After I had settled in the town of Belchite, the Lord my God brought to me⁸⁴ a poem more precious than gold, fine gold⁸⁵ which was composed by the wise man R. Šelomo ibn Gabirol, in which he scorns this evil congregation,⁸⁶ for in those far-off days⁸⁷ they persecuted him and trod him down in his place of rest.⁸⁸ The

70. Nehemiah 3,34.

71. Numbers 25,18.

72. See Exodus 32,4...etc.

73. Psalms 106,20.

74. Isaiah 53,3. There are two interpretations of this expression. David Qimḥi says that it means: «he was less than a man», or the meaning of «he left men» is that «they did not want to have contact with him».

75. See Deuteronomy 29,20.

76. Also «path» or «trail».

77. Job 38,24.

78. Isaiah 9,1.

79. Isaiah 28,7.

80. 2Samuel 2,26.

81. In the Bible this expression is usually related to the idea of fleeing from an impious people, like those of Egypt or Babylon (cf. commentary by Ibn Ezra on Psalms 136,11): «and I left from among them: from Egypt».

82. 1Samuel 26,19.

83. Jonah 1,10.

84. Genesis 27,20.

85. Proverbs 8,19.

86. Numbers 14,35.

87. Literally «in the old days».

88. Judges 20,43. There are several interpretations of this, almost all of which coincide in understanding that *menuḥah* goes with a particle, either «be» or «me», since the meaning is otherwise not clear. Some commentators, such as Raši, have thought the verb means «catching or trapping», whereas others, like David Qimḥi, believe it means «tread», or allude to the translation of the Targum of Yonatan, where it is translated as

poem begins thus: «My throat is dry from crying out».⁸⁹ Then I awoke and said to myself: «I will also do the same with their malevolence and the malevolence of the souls of these sinners,⁹⁰ I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel».⁹¹ I composed this poem in the very image of its metre⁹² and I sent it to the wise man Gonzalo ibn Labi', may God protect him. I intoned my song and I said:

[2]

My desire is to bury my toil in my bosom⁹³ and
 my quill in the inkwell.⁹⁴
 [The quill]⁹⁵ will spread its wings towards the East, carrying
 southward my poem.
 Full of wrath it will call out the sin of a
 people lost⁹⁶ through the fault of an evil shepherd.
 It will proclaim my outrage and my anger,
 ignoring⁹⁷ my prudence and my good sense.
 5 And I said thus: Silence, my nightingale!
 Why are you to play my flute?
 And it ceased to instruct in the relief of my suffering.⁹⁸
 What have I to do with joy?
 Who from among the saints of the world
 understands my verses and my metre?
 Must I awaken the dead so that
 they see my outrage and my torment?
 If the sea of my deprivations grows rough,
 my Rock is my refuge and my fortress.
 10 If the night of my anguish grows long,
 my Light will guide me on the way.

tarad, «to bother». Others interpret both verbs as coercitative, encouraging others to carry out the action i.e. «inciting others to pursue him and inciting them to tread on him and trap him».

89. *Niḥar be-qor'i geroni*; published in Schirmann, 1956: I, 207-210.

90. Numbers 17,3.

91. Genesis 49,7.

92. It also uses the same rhyme scheme as Ibn Gabirol's poem.

93. Job 31,33.

94. Literally «my inkwell».

95. The quill, after being dipped in the ink, will become Bonafed's messenger.

96. «Errant» and «lost», in the sense of «being wrong».

97. Literally «refuse permission» o «annul».

98. The nightingale of his poetry stopped singing i.e. Bonafed stopped writing.

- At dawn my Lord will send
 his mercy and I will forget yesterday.
 For a short time more I will bear the yoke of the evil ones.
 I trust in the salvation of my Creator.
 He will raise his voice and dissolve them,
 He will disperse the cloud of my obscurity.
 In this manner I spoke, unable to sleep and
 alone in the night,⁹⁹
- 15 until my heart told me that
 my voice was being heard.¹⁰⁰
 My voice is that of Mošeh, my friend,
 and my eyes those of Labi, my noble lord.
 Labi is the father of all pleasurable things,
 he appreciates and knows my robe.¹⁰¹
 Although exile¹⁰² has separated us
 and it has moved my landmark,
 it is towards him (Labi), in imagination and with desire,
 that I will run¹⁰³ with my letter.¹⁰⁴
- 20 Without him, do I have in the world anything
 That will cure my wound?
 While I spoke, there appeared ben Gabirol
 before me,
 powerful and awesome like an archangel,
 he rose up and stood before me,
 and with a sword in his hand and a bolt of lightning
 coming out of his mouth he wandered through my tent.

99. Literally «my night».

100. Bonafed's heart tells him that there is someone who listens to him. Literally «my voice has listeners».

101. See Genesis 38, 18 and 25. This is an item of clothing, the one which Judá left Tamar as a pledge. Commentators have agreed it must be related to the *šišiyot* because of the *ptil tkelet*.

102. Bonafed considers Gonzalo's conversion to be an «exile» and that there is therefore hope of a «return».

103. Literally «I will run with the race of my letter».

104. The Hebrew term *gelil* has several meanings. Schirmann proposes translating it as the circular orbits of the planets: «I run towards him as the planets run turning in circles», but it could relate to the letter the poet is writing. On numerous occasions Bonafed refers to letters as *megilah* and the term *gelil* derives from the same root and also means «roll».

Creating thunder with his voice he said:
 Righteousness and strength are mine,¹⁰⁵
 Peace be with you ben Reuben, my dear beloved,
 my joy,
 fear not, for I have come to your aid
 with my power and my strength.
 My friend, have they committed crimes against you, those
 who did the same to me, the evil ones of my community?
 Those people set traps for all men
 of pure heart, like a criminal enemy.
 Their parents are roots of broom¹⁰⁶ which
 tried to wrench my plant from out of the ground.
 30 They thought that you were me and they hated you¹⁰⁷
 in my place.
 They saw that you were my equal in poetry,
 of equal worth and of the same age,
 that my name was within you and that, in this generation,
 you had achieved such greatness as me.
 They thought that I had risen from
 the grave and that the Šeol had opened.
 Wait a little!¹⁰⁸, friend and I will return my revenge
 upon the heads of those who hate me.¹⁰⁹

105. Isaiah 45,23.

106. This plant appears twice in the plural in the Bible: in Job 30,4 as *šoraše retamim*, and in Psalms 120,4 as *gehale retamim*. According to David Qimḥi and Raši in «foreign» tongues this plant is the broom. In the *Maḥzor Vitry. Siman* 426 it is said that the roots of the broom are «Simply food for the evil». Several commentators speak of this plant's capacity for burning within while it remains intact on the outside (like the wrath of the murmurers which burns within them while they are apparently calm). Allusion is also made to the special ability of its roots to produce coals which give off more heat than is normal. In some passages this is compared to the heat of hell, as in the *Yalkut Šimoni*, Psalms, *remez עתה"ה*, in the section which interprets each of the words of verse 4 of Psalm 120, *šir ha-ma'alot*: «Arrows are fired from above and you fire them from below, for it is written: “Sharp arrows of the mighty (Psalms 120,4)” and by “arrow” is meant defamation, for it is written “Their tongue is as an arrow shot out out; it speaketh deceit” (Jeremiah 9,7)” and by “hero” is meant the Holy One, blessed be he, for it is written “And God shall go forth as a mighty man (a hero)” (Isaiah 42,13)”. “Coals of broom” (Psalms 120,4) means Inferno, Gehena». See *Miqra'ot Gedolot*.

107. Genesis 49,23.

108. Job 36,2. As interpreted by, among others, Rabbi Levi ben Geršon, henceforth Ralbag. Ibn Ezra has «surround» and «praise»: «praise me a little».

- 35 My friend, flee before I annihilate
 this numerous and wicked people.
 How is the mother-of-pearl to live
 in the mud,¹¹⁰ or the lily upon the thorns?¹¹¹
 Who can compare the moth with
 the Great Bear, or a fool with Orion,
 or the offspring of an ass or that of a camel
 with the son of *Gemalli* or of *Jogli*?¹¹²
 For this reason, the forgotten people of God¹¹³
 kneel down and give thanks before my statue.
- 40 To you I will relate my deeds and
 I will cast out my sandal at you.¹¹⁴
 Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan¹¹⁵ and people
 without name¹¹⁶ are in my palace,
 Moab and Agar¹¹⁷ with Hebrew clothing
 and Israelite names.
 Ziphim and inhabitants of Keilah,¹¹⁸ how

109. I will give my enemies what they deserve, payment for their evil actions.

110. Esther 1,6.

111. Isaiah 7,19.

112. In each of these verses there is play on the homophonic or near-homophonic words for moth and the Great Bear ('*Ayyiš y 'Aš*), Orion (fool, *kesil*), camel (*gemali*). Play is made of the similarity between two invented surnames which make reference to beasts and two famous descendants of Biblical sagas. One is Ammiel the son of Gemalli, an explorer of the land of Canaan from the tribe of Dan (Numbers 13,12) and the other is Bukki, the son of Jogli (Numbers 34,22), also of Dan, and who is described in the text of the Bible as a «prince» (*nasi'*).

113. Psalms 9,18.

114. Psalms 60,10...etc. In the verse, this expression makes reference to Moab (Christians). The text contains continual references to Christians (conversos?). David Qimḥi interprets as follows: «against Edom I will cast my sandal: they will be crushed by my foot».

115. Genesis 36,27. Descendants of Se'ir, the Horites, settlers of Edom. They appear together in the list of descendants of Esau (Edom, Christians).

116. Job 30,8 «nobodies». This same accusation against people who are not of a good family also appears in other texts of this group referring to the community of Zaragoza.

117. This is in fact *hagari*, an adjective that designates that which is Arabic and derives from the name of Agar, the slave of Abraham, who was the mother of Ismael. Bonafed accuses his opponents of being «false Jews» i.e. he considers them to be Christians and Muslims disguised as Jews.

118. Both towns are accused in the Bible of trying to hand David over to Saul (Psalms 23,1 and 19). The term is often applied to traitors.

- pleased you are to see me fall!
 Sycamore trees that grow in the vale,¹¹⁹
 How proud you are of my humiliation!
- 45 You have dealt death to the
 prophets, to Moses, Samuel and Eli.¹²⁰
 You spread out a cloud as a curtain to
 keep the gleam of my lamp from reaching you.
 Although the delights of my pipe
 and my lyre are praised among flutes,¹²¹
 it is a good omen and a
 sign of blessing that a people like this should curse me.
 Although these wicked troublemakers
 have snatched the necklaces of my reputation from me,
- 50 these fools will not be able to steal my honour from me,
 nor my intelligence.
 My intellect and my reason stayed within me
 and before me when I left.
 I hid my honey on my palate, my fragrance
 and my perfume in my basket.
 When I walk, the golden bell of my songs
 jingles upon the hem of my robe.¹²²
 When I walk, the greatness of my forefathers
 is the tassel¹²³ which hangs from the corner of my garment.¹²⁴
- 55 Although the fruit of my efforts has dried up
 among those wicked fools,
 my language will bring forth fruit even
 in old age¹²⁵ and I will yet produce my harvest.

119. 1Kings 10,27. According to the Biblical quotation this is an absurd comparison between the cedar, a noble timber, and a very common and vulgar tree or bush of low quality. Bonafed refers to the people, as vulgar and common as the sycamore, who grow proud and haughty as a result of Ibn Gabirol's humiliation.

120. Eli was high priest of the temple of Silo, and was also considered a prophet (see 1Samuel 1 and ff). Bonafed regarded prophets as poets: see, in this respect, the poem *zeḳor ha-šir*; fol. 33r-34v of the mss. Mich 1984 and published in Kaminka, 1928.

121. This instrument is associated with mourning in the Talmud, although this could be an error of transcription or interpretation: if the «yod» is removed, *ḥalalim* would mean «corpses».

122. Exodus 28,36.

123. Pun on «greatness» and «fringe»= *godel* and *gedil*.

124. Deuteronomy 22,12. In both verses reference is made to the good name of the family of Ibn Gabirol through Biblical allusions to religious precepts.

- In spite of all this, throughout all
 my vicissitudes I know my Maker is right.
 Every day I will relate his blessings, for He,
 in his piety, guides me.
 Awesome in negative praises,
 For his attributes in negation.¹²⁶
- 60 He is well known, but for His works,
 for his work is a lamp unto my feet.¹²⁷
 He exists and is necessarily existent,¹²⁸ He is One, Simple¹²⁹
 and intellect.¹³⁰
 He is one, but not a union.¹³¹ His actions
 Are marvellously innumerable.
 He is «First», but not the first
 in a series.¹³² He is the creator of time and the universe.
 He is eternal¹³³ and the cause of the existent, but not
 as cause and effect,
- 65 for all his creatures will come to an end, while
 my Creator lives¹³⁴ and is my redeemer.

125. Psalms 92,15.

126. This follows Maimonides in the *Guía de Perplejos* I, cap. 58, where he explains why God should only be attributed negative qualities: «Know that the description of God by negations is the only true way...; on the other hand, attributions made affirmatively involve the idea of association and imperfection, as we have explained». See in Moše ben Maimon, 2008: 157.

127. Psalms 119,105.

128. Moše ben Maimon, 2008, I, cap. 57. God's existence is necessary.

129. He is not composed of form and essence, but is indivisible. In Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 156, cap. 57: «(God is) truly simple and exempt from composition».

130. Chapter 68 of the Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 180-83, cap. 68, deals with the claim of the philosophers: «God is intellect, intelligent, the intelligible».

131. Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 156, cap. 57: «he is one but not for unity».

132. Reference is made to explanations in the *Guía de Perplejos* concerning the attributes of God. When it is stated in Isaiah 44,6, that God is the first and the last, according to Maimonides «it is to be understood that He is not subject to mutation, nor does anything new occur to him, but not that He enters in the sphere of time, so that it results that any analogy between Him and that which is not Him falls within time, so that He is “first” and “last”. That is to say, God is “first”, but does not become part of a “succession” and does not enter into the concept of time». (Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 156-57, cap. 57.)

133. «קדמון» also means «pre-existing», but is here used as in the Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 156, cap. 57, to mean «eternal».

He acts, but not necessarily, with the word, and
not instrumentally.¹³⁵

Distant he rides upon the clouds¹³⁶ and close he stands
before my wall.¹³⁷

He watches over and observes men, according to the Law he sees both
the individual and the generic.¹³⁸

In salvation I see my guiding light and always
I will trust in my God.

70 He will polish my soul¹³⁹ and his
vigilant eyes will contemplate my works.

ANNEX II

[1] עוד פֶּאֶשֶׁר הַתְּגוּרָתִי יָמִים אֶחָדִים עִם הַיְהוּדִים הָאֲמֻלִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּסִרְקֻסְטָה וְהֵמָּה
בְּנִקְלֵיהֶם עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסָּכָה וַיִּמְירוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדָם בְּתַבְנִית שׁוֹר הוּא אִישׁ בְּעַל תַּחְבּוּלוֹת גְּבוּזָה
וְחָדֵל אִישִׁים הַמְּכַוְנָה יוֹסֵף יִשׁוּעָה יְבַדִּילוּ ה' לְרַעַה שְׂבָא מְסִילִיא וְלֹא יָדַע אֵינָה הִדְרָה יְחַלֵּק
אוֹר הַיְדִיעָה וְהַעֵם הַהוֹלְכִים בְּחֻשָׁה מִכֶּסֶפֶם וּמִזָּהָבָם כְּבָדוּהוּ וְשָׁגוּ בְרוּאָה וְלֹרֵאשׁ עֲלֵיהֶם
נִתְנוּהוּ וְכִי רָאִיתִי כִי מָרָה תִהְיֶה בְּאַחְרוּנָהּ, יִצְאָתִי מִתּוֹכָם כִּי כָל אֲשֶׁר בְּנִחְלָתָם מִסְתַּפֵּחַ
מִלִּפְנֵי ה' הוּא בּוֹרַח וְאַחַר הַיּוֹתִי בְּבִלְגֵיט הַמְדִינָה, הַקְרָה ה' לִפְנֵי חֲרוּז יָקָר מִפּוֹ וּמְחֲרוּץ יְסֻדוֹ
הַחֲכָם ר' שְׁלֵמָה ן' גְּבִירוֹל לְחַרְף הָעֵדָה הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת כִּי רָדְפוּהוּ מִנוּסָה הַדְרִיכוּהוּ בִימֵי קָדָם
הַתְחַלְתוּ: "נַחַר בְּקֶרְאִי גְרוּנִי." אִז הַתְעוּרָתִי וְאַמְרָתִי אֲעֲשֶׂה כֵן גַּם אֲנִי וְאֵת רִשְׁעֵתָם וְאֵת
רוּעַ תְּכוּנַת הַחֲטָאִים הָאֵלֶּה בְּנִפְשׁוֹתָם אֲחַלְקֵם בְּנִעְקָב וְאַפִּיצֵם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֲעֲשֶׂה בְּדַמּוֹתוֹ כְּצִלְמוֹ
וּבְמִשְׁקָלוֹ זֶה הַשִּׁיר וְשִׁלְחָתוֹ לְהַחֲכֹם דּוֹן קוֹנְסָאֵלִיו ן' לְבִיא נ"ר וְאַשָּׂא מְשָׁלִי וְאוֹמֵר:

134. According to Maimonides in the Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 181, cap. 68: «This is why it is said “*Hay Y.*” “for the living God” and not “*Heye Y.*” “For the life of God”, for “his life” is nothing less than his “essence” as we have laid out...» Maimonides’s explanation can be taken to justify that «living» is not an attribute of God, but represents his «essence», for God can only have negative attributes.

135. Literally «without a tool».

136. Psalms 68,5. For Maimonides, this verse shows that God is the engine of the higher sphere and that it is He who causes the movement of the universe. See the interpretation Maimonides makes of this verse in Moše ben Maimon, 2008: I, 189, cap. 70.

137. Song of Songs 2,9.

138. In *El Eben Boħan de Šem Tob ibn Šaprut* (Šem Tob ibn Šaprut, 1997: 166, cap VI) there is discussion of opinions on divine wisdom covering the theme of providence and that of whether or not God knows beforehand what men are going to do and whether it can thus be concluded that freedom of will exists. According to Shem Tov, the opinion of the Torah, the Law, is that God sees everything, both the generic and the individual. Bonafed uses the same phrase in this verse.

139. To remove splinters or «buff».

		[2]
<p> קפצ'י ועטי בכלי ישא לדרום משלי תועה ברועה אוילי יניא עצתי ושכלי למה תחלל חילי תכלי ומה לי לגילי גבין משלי ושקלי לראות חמסי וחילי צורי מנוסי וחילי אורי יישר שבילי חסדו ואשכח תמולי אוהיל תשועת מחוללי יפיץ ענן מאפלי נודד ובודד בלילי הן שומעים יש לקולי עיני ללביא אצילי מוקיר ומפיר פתילי הפריד והסיג גבולי ארוץ מרוצת גלילי לתת ארוכה למחלי קם בן גבירול למולי נגלה ועמד זבולי מפיו יהלף באהלי אמר צדקות ועז לי דוד שעשועי וגילי באתי בכחי וחילי פושעי ורשעי קהלי אורב כאויב פלילי בקשו לשרש שתילי וישטמוה לרגלי בלשיר כערפי וגילי תעש גדולות כגדלי קמתי ונפתח שאולי על ראש משנאי גמולי </p>	<p> לטמן בחבי עמלי יפרש כנפיו לתימן יזעם ויגיד עון עם יגיד חמסי וכעסי ואמרה הס זמירי חדל להשפיל להיטיב מי מקדושים בתבל האם אעורר רפאים אם ים מצוקי יסער אם יארה ליל יגוני יומם יצוה אדני אשא מעט על מרעים ישלח דברו וימסם כזה וכזה אדבר ויענני לכבי קולי למשה ידידי לביא אבי הנעימות אם הנדוד בין שנינו אליו בציור וחשק בלתו היש לי בתבל עוד מדבר והנה איום ונורא פשנאן קרוב בידו וברק עושה חזיונים בקולו שלום לה בן ראובן אל תערץ כי לעזרה דודי האם פשעו בה עם זו לכל איש טהר לב שרשי רתמים אבותם חשבו בה כי אני הוא ראו היותה עמיתי ושמי בקרבה ובדור חשבו אשר מקברים פתר זעיר דוד ואשיב </p>	<p> 5 10 15 20 25 30 </p>

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