

## ALFONSO DE ZAMORA AND EDWARD LEE

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Hebrew MS 1229 (old pagination f. 247v, new pagination f. 241v) of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris contains a colophon which may be of interest for the history of the circle of “New Christian” hebraists in Spain in the third decade of the xvth century.

The MS itself is the first part or grammatical part of David Kimhi’s *Mikhlol* with a Latin translation.

As M. Zotenberg informs us in the Catalogue “la copie a été exécutée par le célèbre Alphonse de Zamore, sur l’avis de maître Pablo Nunez Coronel, pour Edouard Leon ambassadeur d’Angleterre auprès de Charles Quint. Elle a été terminée le 2 novembre 1527”.

The colophon, in Alfonso’s hand, consists of two parallel columns, one in Hebrew and the other in Latin.

The Latin column reads as follows:

scriptus est liber miclol (i.e. comprehensorius)  
hic pro principe (pro duce) sapienti domine eduardo/  
leo legato fideli regni angliae ad dominum  
nostrum/ cesarem id est  
carolum regem hypanie (sic) et rome magnificentem  
fidem nostram sanctam et consumatus est in die septima (sabbato) duobus diebus  
(secundo)/ mensis  
novembris per/ manum alfonsi de Zamora in opido  
(sic) alcala de henares in anno mille (i.e. millesimo)  
et quingentesimo et vigesimo septimo numero  
salutis nostri cum consilio etc. / benedictus  
dans lasso virtute et cui non sunt vires robore  
multiplicabit / benedictus dominus in eternam amen  
et amen.

A few remarks on the text might be in order.

Alfonso de Zamora was a member of the group of converso linguists at the Complutensian University founded by Cisneros at Alcalá which included men such as Vergara and Pablo Coronel. He has been the subject of studies, notably by Neubauer and Perez Castro.<sup>1</sup>

His interest in the study of language is a characteristic of some members of the generation of conversos of the time which included the author of the first grammar of the Castilian language, Nebrija. He may have shared in another characteristic of converso mentality which has been emphasized in a very different context by A. Castro.<sup>2</sup> One of this author's observations on the *Quijote* is to the effect that Cervantes depicts a character's attitude to ham as related to his condition of converso. In other words, eating ham is a "salvoconducto", a social weapon against being a victim of disdain. The need for such "social weapons" seems to be a characteristic of converso mentality traceable to the early xvth century.

It may be submitted that this feature can explain a peculiarity of the colophon. One might maintain (though not without a degree of naivete, it would seem) that it is pure coincidence that the work was finished precisely on the Jewish Sabbath in which, as was known to the Inquisition, writing is forbidden. But it would be harder to explain that Alfonso explicitly mentions that it is the "seventh day" and moreover, sees the need to add the word "sabbato" over the words "die septima". It would seem that Alfonso was acutely aware of his condition of converso and that this awareness explains the insecurity over the reader's opinion of his orthodoxy. The case might be akin to that of another converso, Luis Coronel, of the family of the Chief Rabbi Abraham Seneor, and member of Charles' V court in Flanders, of whom it is reported that "he used to say that he never preached a sermon without having had it written first, so that they should not accuse him of anything, as he was one of those "recently converted".<sup>3</sup> Of the same family was Pablo Coronel, collaborator of Alfonso in the Hebrew part of the Complutensian Bible and holder of the Chair for Scripture at Salamanca.

His relationship to Alfonso, as seen from the colophon, is not entirely unambiguous. As the Hebrew section of the colophon informs us, the book was written “by the counsel of the perfect scholar Don Maestre Pablo Nunez Coronel”. The words “by the counsel of” or “with the advise of” might mean that Pablo collaborated with Alfonso or that he advised him to do the translation. The Hebrew section contains a small eulogy of Pablo: “a perfect man and upright and one that fears God and escheweth evil whose name is throughout the land ...” (Job, 1/31; Joshua, 6/27).

The Latin text, however, stops after the word “consilio” and omits all reference to Pablo, leaving a small lacuna in the text (there are no signs of erasure).<sup>4</sup> One can almost see Alfonso pausing and deliberating whether to translate his remarks about Pablo, finally deciding against it.

We learn, also from the colophon, that the “Miclol” was written “pro ... duce sapienti hominem Eduardo Leo legato fideli regni anglie ...”. It would seem that the recipient of the work, unidentified in the catalogues was none other than Edward Lee (1482?-1544). Fellow of Magdalen College Oxford (1500) (later prebendary of York and Westminster and Archbishop of York in 1531). He had been to Spain in 1525 with Sir Francis Pointz on an embassy to the Emperor,<sup>5</sup> at which date he, no doubt, made the acquaintance of Alfonso. The treatise may have reached him in time to make use of his Hebrew for the propaganda warfare against Catherine of Aragon.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless this was not his motive for wishing to learn Hebrew. One should rather see it as part of the general interest in Hebrew in England where Hebrew printing had been introduced in 1524.<sup>7</sup>

Finally one might add that it would be wrong to see in the use of such a grammar book (written in the xiith c.) an example of the “cultural belatedness” of Spain postulated by Curtius. Even after the criticisms of Profayt Duran and the appearance of Eliah Levita’s grammar, humanist hebraists (e.g. Sebastian Munster) continued to use the Miclol.<sup>8</sup>

Humanism did not exclude mediaeval thought.

4. A. peculiarity unnoticed by Zotenberg, Neubauer, Pérez Castro (in their above mentioned works).

5. cf. DNB s.v. Lee.

6. For the use of Hebrew evidence in the arguments around the validity of Catherine of Aragon’s marriage cf. Kaufman, “Jacob Mantino”, *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 27, (1893), p. 49; J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII*, (London 1968), ch. 7, p. 164-167.

7. On the interest in Hebrew cf. R. Loewe, “Hebrew books and Judaica in mediaeval Oxford and Cambridge”, in ed. J.M. Shaftesley, *Remember the days*, (London 1966); idem, “Jewish scholarship in England” in ed. V.D. Lipman, *Three Centuries of Anglo-Jewish History*, (London 1961), 125-148 idem, “Hebraists, Christian” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, (Jerusalem 1972).

8. E.R. Curtius, (transl. W.R. Trask) *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, (N.Y. 1953), 541-543. Ample bibliography on the forms of learning Hebrew is given by S. Baron, *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, XIII, (NY 1969), 390-397. See also C. Carrete Parrondo, *Hebraístas judeoconvertidos en la Universidad de Salamanca*, (Salamanca 1983). Recent notes on various aspects of Alfonso de Zamora en un comentario a los Profetas posteriores de don Isaac Abravanel *Sefarad* XLVII (1987) 227-243. C. del Valle “Notas sobre Alfonso de Zamora” *Sefarad* XLVII (1987) 173-180.