Jewish Writings on Art in Fifteenth-Century Castile

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RESUMEN

Escribir acerca de arte (prescriptiva, comentarios, evaluaciones, etc.) no es algo que asociamos con los estudios acerca de intelectuales judíos medievales. Tomando como punto de partida que, como la categoría de representación, el concepto de figura es relevante tanto en el arte como en los textos, este artículo trata de acercarse a las actitudes judías hacia el arte expresadas por escrito en, por ejemplo, el caso de las relaciones entre el traductor castellano cuatrocentista Arragel (y otros como Duran, Bonafed o Yocef ibn Saddiq) y los artistas según sus escritos. La cuestión de la iconoclastia, el iconoclasmo o el anicomismo no es lo único relevante. Una de las alternativas a los problemas de la hermenéutica sería la de concentrarse en el contexto histórico-cultural, es decir en la historia de las relaciones entre patronos (cristianos y nobles) y clientes (judíos, estudiosos) en épocas y áreas precisas.

PALABRAS CLAVE


ABSTRACT

The activity of writing about art (prescriptions, commentaries, evaluations, etc.) is not prominent in discussions of medieval Jewish intellectual life. Departing from the realization that, like representation, figura is common to art and to writing the article attempts to reconstruct the fifteenth century Hispano-Jewish written attitudes to art and the painters and vice versa as in the case of Arragel (and also others such as Duran, Bonafed, Yocef ibn Saddiq). These relate on occasions to iconoclasm but cannot be exclusively reduced to this one issue. Other questions impinge on the subject. One way out of the hermeneutical impasse would be to see them in a historic-cultural context: that of the history of relations between (Christian, noble) patrons and (learned, Jewish) clients in precise areas and periods.

KEY WORDS


The late middle ages in Spain produced neither a Vasari nor an Interián de Ayala nor their Jewish equivalent. If they had, the following lines would be less relevant. As it is, it suffices to glance at a recent useful anthology of c. fifty-one Jewish texts on the visual arts to realize the poverty of the medieval material in comparison with that of other periods. It is, possibly, this very dearth which leads to pleas for granting autonomy to the visual, in histories of medieval Jewish art. The issue becomes of wider significance if we recall the recent thesis of Pereida, who argues that the spectacular rise in quantity of Christian devotional art in fifteenth century Spain is a reaction to Jewish iconoclasm transmitted by the conversos. It is this perspective—of consciousness of the dearth of writings on art—which leads to a rereading of the corpus of texts on iconoclasm of the type included in the Católica impugnación. Talavera would be speaking for a whole society preoccupied with Jewish iconoclasm.

I

The best known and most frequently reprinted representation of a medieval Jewish translator is the illumination which appears near the Prologue, at the beginning of Arragel’s Biblia (Maqueda, 1422-33). It has features which recall the composition scheme of “presentation scenes,” a motif of ancient lineage well studied for Chris-
tian art. Some of the details have attracted attention leading to various hypotheses about its relations to reality. The attitudes of the illuminators/painters to the translator would be reflected in details such as the kneeling position, the “Jewish badge” or distinctive sign, even the beard and the folds of the cape have been searched for historical significance. The very size is seen as significant: only a few illuminations—in that large codex of more than 300 miniatures—take up a whole page, as does this particular illumination. And yet, everyone agrees that such features of fifteenth century realism as the attempts to characterize individuality or psychology by means of facial expressions—i.e. what we expect from Jorge Inglés or the Hispano Flemish school—are absent in this work. The presentation can hardly have taken place at the time of the book’s completion. Despite the relatively meagre data on don Luis de Guzmán, it is known that he was engaged in the battlefield at the time. The question of realism and representation, thus, confronts us at the very beginning of this fifteenth century Castilian work in a way that, again, recalls the lack of contemporary texts explaining this type of painting and supporting the numerous and contradictory interpretations.

II

Arragel’s Prologue contains a section [chapter xii] which may be seen as a written essay on iconoclasm. As he asserts with characteristic hyperbaton: “figuras... non... poner... lycenciado seria.”

Arragel’s “essay” on iconoclasm is to some extent related to the Maimonidean Thirteen Principles he had mentioned in the same Prologue. But, by 1433, such Jewish iconoclasm or Maimonideanism can hardly be said to be specifically Maimonidean given the wide influence of—and opposition to—Maimonides in late medieval Spain. On the other hand, Maimonides the halakhist—with his numerous legal distinctions and qualifications of iconoclasm and intricate arguments about visual representation—is not mentioned here. Nor are Maimonides’ earlier (Talmudic, Geonic) sources on this complex legal/halakhic question referred to by Arragel in the Prologue. Heir to a culture which included, amongst other components, various Neoplatonic texts as well as a rich Hispano-Jewish tradition of engagement with such precise visual hermeneutics as those of the (ultimately Hellenic/Hellenistic) treatises on physiognomy, (and some recently noticed practices of ekphrasis) Arragel’s texts or iconoclasm or aniconism cannot be taken simplistically as being fully transparent. Indeed the Master had not asked him to paint images of God, and Arragel’s argument moves between the painting of God and other types of representation. In this essay he argues: “muchas veces... dezoy a los reuernudos maestros theologos christianos que estas ystorias se fazen en los templos e libros porque la popular gente se impresionen en Dios auer [...].” He is echoing an idea which may be described as a convention or commonplace of the Judeo-Christian polemic even before the rise of the converso population in 1391. Thus, for example, in the polemical text composed c. 1370 by an anonymous Castilian and copied in the fifteenth century and preserved in MS 1344 of the Biblioteca de Palacio we read:

[fol. 81r:] Dize el judio Yo dudo contra vuestros usos sobreste fecho porque fazedes imagines contra el mandamiento de Dios que mando en la ley que non fizesen imagines segund que dize el verso:”Non faras a ti adoladizo ninguno de lo que es en el cielo de suso nin de lo que es en la tierra de yuso nin de las cosas de las aguas non los honrraras nin los adoraras (Ex. 20:4) Porque veo yo que vosotros cristianos que sodes contra la voluntad de Dios e por ende me paresce que servides los idolos de los gentiles que otro tiempo adoraron....Pongo que los letrados de vuestra Ley e sabidores sepan e crean lo que vos dezides pero los onbres simples cristianos non diran eso que vos dezides sinon creean que las imagines que son aquel-las mismas a cuya figura son fechas [...].

III

The relations between figures in painting and in language are not merely conceptual. Maimonides was indeed pre-occupied with the question of figurative, anthropomorphic language. Arragel does indeed cite him. But, to understand the difference it may be useful to recall how (chronologically and geographically) close Arragel was to the Saragossan controversy (1380’s?) on vernacular (i.e. Ibero-Romance) translations of Hebrew biblical texts. The problem was treated in a number of epistles (Crescas, R. Nissim, R. Isaac bar Sheshet, etc.) and—according to the contemporary texts—also engaged wider groups in the community. The issue at stake was whether the vernacular translation of the Hebrew Book of Esther could be used in reading to women so as to fulfil the commandments of Purim. The problem was the case of texts whose original meaning was unclear (e.g. *ahashdarpanim bne ha-pahot*) but when translated into the vernacular offered an unambiguous, univalent but also unfounded signification. That is the problem of Arragel as translator, but also as “critic” of the work of art, which also opts for one, unambiguous rendering where there is no such assurance in the text. Thus, for example, in the case of Judges 14: “e toda la gente de la tierra entranon en la foresta e auia miel por el suelo del campo,” the illumina-

tion has two armies facing each other in late medieval battle dress and armour. In the foreground we see three cylindrical containers of which one is spilled.

The illuminators opted for one interpretation of the text; that the honey was on the ground because one of the three containers/hives had fallen. Arragel’s stance towards this unambiguous interpretation by the artist is not one of unqualified support: “E aua miel: vnos dizen que el pintor fizo. Otros dizen ser esta fostra vn grand cañaveler de cañas.”

Maimonides—working on a Hebrew text and discussing such language-specific concerns as homonymia, roots, morphology of Hebrew verbs, nouns, etc.—did not have the same questions and methods as Arragel even when both are concerned with the figurative. These are very practical and unavoidable problems for Arragel. He articulates them explicitly. The Prologue does prefigure some of these practical problems. Thus he asserts: “en el regno de el ronpietado lo dieron. Dixole Samuel para se yr e e asiole dela falda del su manto e ronpiose. Dixole Samuel para se yr e e asiole dela falda del su manto e ronpiose.”

Similarly he writes on another Biblical passage that of a whole cultural tradition on the figurative.

“nihamthy” que puse a Saul por rey e “nihamty” quería dezir arrepentir me quiero o sso repiso o sso ymagin en Dios diga segund que esto mas prolixa e marauillar que passion de arrepentir o consolar o ymaginar en Dios diga segund que esto mas prolixa e claro mente posimos en la ystoria de Noy.

The problem of “poner a Dios ojos e manos” was announced in the Prologue, discussed in the story of Noah and in various other verses and glosses such as this specific passage. The problem belongs, according to Arragel, in the field of the functions of the romançadores.

IV

On the same page, the Paz y Melia edition reproduces the illumination where the rending of king Saul’s mantle is depicted. The rubric reads: “commo Samuel la ropa a Saul rompio en q el regno de el ronpietado lo dieron.” (“ron” and “pien” are separated by the head/crown of Saul; i.e. they were added after the painting had been done). In the miniature, the tearing is done from the shoulders. The biblical verse in Judges xv reads [fol. 204]”

Arragel writes: “el pintor ystoriador yerro esta ystoria en Dios ninguna pasion corporeal poner nin dezir que enel romance de los tales pas sos se deuen los romançadores atentar e veer que dezir e so protestacion de corregimiento e non por voluntad yerrar e si ende yerro es anularlo el ebrayco dize en ystoria de Noe.

The kind of close collaboration between Hebrew scribe and miniaturist that we find in such late medieval Aragonese cases as the Sarajevo Haggadah —where the Hebrew letter, without noticeable break, turns into a figurative painting—will not be found in the Arragel Bible. The lamed which turns into a fleur de lis, the final khav which sprouts vine leaves or becomes the tongue of a dragon or the tail of a stork are not a feature of Arragel’s Biblia. The argument that scribe and painter are one and the same person, raised for the Sarajevo Haggadah precisely because of this close coordination, cannot be made for the Arragel case. But there are relations between the author/scribe and the artists. In some cases we have to acknowledge that the
coordination failed and that we don’t know the reasons. In
Genesis, for example, the rubric states: “figura del
mouimiento e de las andas do pusieron a Joseph” but the
painting was not carried out. On fol. 76 verso part of the
text is missing and it begins: “de oro fino las faras.” On
Genesis 19:32 the rubric reads “figura de como estaua
enbriagado e las dos fijas cada una con su copa en la mano”
[fol. 38r], i.e. the rubric creates a program for the painters.
In this case it was not carried out.

This would mean that the coordination was, to say the
least, not always perfect. It was, therefore, not simply a mat-
ter of “collaboration”. But this is not always the case. In Isa-
iah 20:2-3 [fol. 273b], Isaiah is depicted barefoot and naked,
except for a loin cloth, holding a pilgrim’s staff. The paint-
ing faces the gloss, where the text explains the picture and
why “anduvo […] desnudo et descalço.” The underlining of
the first three lines in red ink is part of this cooperation,
manifest in the organization of space no less than in the con-
tent of the gloss. In Deuteronomy 5:6-16 [fol.141r.] the Ten
Commandments are written in gold letters, arranged in two
columns, framed in a decorative golden rectangle. In the
text of the gloss, Arragel refers to this depiction as the “diez
mandamientos […] segund los ebreos.”

Some of the glosses are directly and explicitly con-
cerned with explaining and commenting on the works of
art rather than the biblical text itself. In some cases, this is
almost formally announced. E.g “esta es la glosa de la
figura e estoria que se sigue en esta colunpa. Deves saber
que Salamon edifico su casa donde el estaba judgando
[…]” [p. 746]. Or, elsewhere, [fol. 236], “e asy es compli-
da la glosa de la ystoria magna del tenplo que queda en
esta otra colupna passada a Dio gracias.” Solomon’s
throne and the Temple are two paintings which he treats in
this fashion. He devotes to them longer and more formally
noticeable essays or brief treatises. What may need
emphasis is that behind the apparently simple romance
essays on the paintings there is a familiarity with dispersed
and sometimes intricate texts in Hebrew and Aramaic on
these aspects of antiquity. They are the subject of interpre-
tation through centuries and by the fifteenth century they
require options or selections from these interpretations.
Identifying such options may be a challenging task. It
seems that a modern complete analysis of all the panels of
the “ystoria magn del tenplo” [referred to on fol. 236] is
still a desideratum especially if we bear in mind that these
themes continued to be studied after the completion of the
Talmud. Arragel invests his efforts in creating a series of
written comments and compositions on the visual art.

V

To what extent is Arragel a spokesman with a consistent
message that represents Jewish and converso consistent
attitudes to art? The conversos Diego Arias Dávila—
founder of the dynasty—and his son Juan Arias Dávila
were patrons of the arts and crafts. The “techos polidos”
of the former’s residence in Segovia were no less
renowned than the preference for Renaissance architec-
ture of the latter’s remodelling of the castle in the episco-
pal village of Turégano. When, before 1466, a painter of
retablos approached Diego Arias and showed him his
painting, the latter replied with a quotation from a Psalm
and, addressing a Jewish friend of his who was present, he
concluded it in the Hebrew original. The tenor of the sto-
ry was iconoclastic, as were the expressions of women
conversas against religious imagery, well documented in
archival records from Castile of the later fifteenth and ear-
ly sixteenth centuries. But the latter did not use Hebrew.

Arragel was as familiar with the “iconoclastic” Psalm as
Diego Arias, but he does not mention it in his letter to don
Luis de Guzmán. In Belchite, in the 1440s (?), Shelomoh
ben Reuven Bonafed was proud of his text’s visual quali-
ty and refers to it as “creating by compass”. That is to say
that, within a broad and diffuse category of icono-
clasm, there is an extremely wide range of forms of
expression, ideas and attitudes.

The period from the c. 1280’s to the expulsions wit-
nessed what might be termed an explosion of the visual
arts among the Iberian Jews. Nothing remotely compara-
ble in quality or quantity can be documented for what
used to be called the “Golden Age”. Although a great deal
of research is still necessary, the predominance of Aragon
in the second half of the fourteenth century seems to
coincide with one of the golden ages of some dynasties of
Aragonese Jews; the De La Cavallería is the best known
one. The ensuing Castilian fifteenth century activities of
illumination seem to have had a direct influence on the
Lisbon ateliers. The patrons of these—richly illuminat-
ed—manuscripts are not outside the communal culture;
they are addressed in writing by the artists or scribes in
the most traditional terms expressing the wishes for a
continuity in learning the Torah within their families.

Finally, it may be recalled that the late Middle Ages are
the background to the composition and to the dissemina-
tion of the manuscript of the technical treatise on colouring
O livro de como se fazem as cores in Judeo-Portu-
guese aljamiá at Parma’s Palatina. A society/public of
Iberian readers of the Hebrew alphabet, who are interest-
ed in painting to such an extent cannot be significantly
described as iconoclastic.

These facts and texts, however briefly recalled here,
do not support arguments of a particularly strong or even
significant and coherent iconoclasm. They certainly don’t
suggest a homogeneous attitude to the culture of the visu-
al. Hebrew texts from fifteenth century Iberia seem to
refer to the contemporary Jewish custom of having paint-
ings in the home. In 1403, in the Prologue to the Ma’aseh

Efod, Durán elaborated on this question and constructed an ideology of patronage, where he sees the wealthy patrons amongst the Jews of Spain, throughout their history, as responsible in no small measure for the quality of their cultural achievements. The elaboration occurs in a passage of a section on education. He expresses the ideal that study should be by means of clear and richly decorated manuscripts; i.e. an ideal which requires support and patronage. And it is possibly such areas (history of patronage) that need to be addressed.

The Talmudic Safrro we-sayyfa, no less than arma virunque cano, associated arms and letters. This pairing, so well represented among Arabic, Hebrew, Latin and Romance literary texts, leads to the famous “arms vs letters” topos. It could be argued that the primal scene of presentation, the correspondence between don Luis and Rabbi Mosche, hence the whole Arragel project, is presented in these terms. Writing from the Toledan Monastery of San Augustin, seat of the court on April 5th, 1422, de Guzmán amplifies this pair. The “letters” are implied in the mention of the Bible (“en romance glosada e ystoriada” by someone who is “muy bastante”) which is necessary for “los tales como nos.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” (i.e. “arms”) One could trace the development of the pair also in don Luis’ allusions to Amadis or the “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.” The “tales” are those who are engaged in “perseguimiento” and “servicio” and other military deeds “que conuene a nuestros orden.”

Sex, violence and the loving attention to the details of courtly ceremonial, accoutrement and paraphernalia (the painters seem to use any excuse for applying gold to depictions of crowns, for example) are features of this gallery of more than 300 art works. Such an aesthetic seems to be aimed less at the Rabbi, masters of theology and monks, than at the Master of the military Order by artists, who were better informed than we can ever be about his particular tastes. The usual perspectives of reading these paintings and texts in terms of overarching, timeless—but tired—schemes (Orient and Occident, Church and Synagogue) may not exhaust or explain fully such a concrete and culturally hybrid phenomenon. Arragel himself [fol. 14] speaks in more concrete and local terms of “nuestra Castilla” and local realities enter the text when mentioning the “dos en latin biblias” which may be found “en Madrit e en Cuellar” or, much more pointedly, when identifying his public by employing the vocative to address his public directly “la tu villa de Escalonca.” The movement between localities in such texts is reminiscent of the distances between Maqueda and Toledo (i.e. between the Rabbi and the painters), the absences and presences of don Luis and, in addition, the time factor: c. eleven years. It may suffice to recall the oscillating attitudes of the censor/collaborator Fr. Enzina who, at times is determined to be in control, but at other times is too busy to read the work. Numerous workshops, differences between draughtsmen, colorists, different scribal hands, different alphabets: given the facts, the last thing one can expect is consistency. It is from such a milieu—that of the noble households of Castile—and for such a milieu that there arise the negotiations of Arragel. This is also the context for his impossible—and yet necessary, indeed, essential—dreams: to translate the Bible into the romance and to write about art.

NOTAS

8 Although the references to the manuscript’s folios are generally from the facsimile, whenever possible I shall try to refer to the less inaccessible transcription by PAZ y MELÍA in Biblia-Antiguo Testamento-traducida del hebreo al castellano por Rabi Mosé Arragel de Guadalajara-1422-1433?-y publicada por el Duque de Berwick y de Alba, edición de A. PAZ y MELÍA and Julián PAZ, Madrid, 1920-1922.
9 The literature on Jews and Neo-Platonism is vast. See, for example, Paul B. FENTON, “Un monument de la pensée juive en terre tunisienne; le commentaire kairouanais sur le Livre de la Création”, Jufíj y musulmans en Tunisie; fraternité et déchirements, edition Sonia FELLOUS, Paris, Somogy, 2003, pp. 67-71. On attitudes to the visual


22 For Arias Dávila’s encounter with the painter of retablos see Eleazar Gutwirth, “Habitat and ideology; the organization of private space in late medieval juderías”, Mediterranean Historical Review 9,2 (1994), pp. 205-234. Although Durán’s is a fundamental text for understanding one type of written reactions to Jewish art, one may find others in the same cultural milieu [Iberian Jewish] of the fifteenth century. Two Hebrew chronicles contain passages which, it may be argued, show a similar attitude. Yosef ben Saddiq of Arévalo (around 1487) composed a work which dealt with mainstream Jewish concerns, such as liturgy. Its fifth chapter consists of a chronicle. In it, he writes: “[...] in the fourth year of his reign he [Alfonso X] ordered the Jewish sage Gudaial ben Moshe al-Kohen of Toledo to translate from the Arabic into the vernacular the honourable book composed by the sage Albuhatani Abd-Alrahman ben Umar Asufi which deals with matters of the stars and the zodiac and their figures according to the drawings of the heavens. The tables composed by this king about astronomy also were copied. And my eyes have seen this honourable book and I was saying: ‘Well, I know and I say that whoever has not seen this book has not seen a magnificent beautiful thing.’” Some decades later, the chronicler Abraham ben Shilomo writes: “[the king don Alonso] in the fourth year of his reign ordered Geras ben Monte the sage to translate from a foreign language into the vernacular the respectable book composed by the sage Abu Husayn ben Abdel Rahman ben Umar which deals with the stars and the zodiac and its figures according to their drawings in the sky. The king’s tables on astronomy were also copied. A sage from our country testified that he saw this book written in letters of pure gold and said that whoever had not seen this book had never seen a beautiful ornamented thing”; A. David has made the nineteenth century editions of the two chronicles available in facsimile: Two Hebrew Chronicles from the Generation of the Expulsion, Jerusalem, 1979 (hebrew).

23 For Duran’s views on visual art see e.g. Eleazar Gutwirth, “Religión, historia y las Biblias romanceadas.” Revista Catalana de Teología 13,1 (1998), pp. 115-133. For the references to paintings in the Jewish home in texts from Alami to Saba see, for example Eleazar Gutwirth, “Habitat and ideology; the organization of private space in late medieval juderías”, Mediterranean Historical Review 9,2 (1994), pp. 205-234. Although Durán’s is a fundamental text for understanding one type of written reactions to Jewish art, one may find others in the same cultural milieu [Iberian Jewish] of the fifteenth century. Two Hebrew chronicles contain passages which, it may be argued, show a similar attitude. Yosef ben Saddiq of Arévalo (around 1487) composed a work which dealt with mainstream Jewish concerns, such as liturgy. Its fifth chapter consists of a chronicle. In it, he writes: “[...] in the fourth year of his reign he [Alfonso X] ordered the Jewish sage Gudaial ben Moshe al-Kohen of Toledo to translate from the Arabic into the vernacular the honourable book composed by the sage Albuhatani Abd-Alrahman ben Umar Asufi which deals with matters of the stars and the zodiac and their figures according to the drawings of the heavens. The tables composed by this king about astronomy also were copied. And my eyes have seen this honourable book and I was saying: ‘Well, I know and I say that whoever has not seen this book has not seen a magnificent beautiful thing.’” Some decades later, the chronicler Abraham ben Shilomo writes: “[the king don Alonso] in the fourth year of his reign ordered Geras ben Monte the sage to translate from a foreign language into the vernacular the respectable book composed by the sage Abu Husayn ben Abdel Rahman ben Umar which deals with the stars and the zodiac and its figures according to their drawings in the sky. The king’s tables on astronomy were also copied. A sage from our country testified that he saw this book written in letters of pure gold and said that whoever had not seen this book had never seen a beautiful ornamented thing”; A. David has made the nineteenth century editions of the two chronicles available in facsimile: Two Hebrew Chronicles from the Generation of the Expulsion, Jerusalem, 1979 (hebrew).

28 Arragel’s text on one type of “arms”, i.e. hunting (replying to don Luis’ mention of the topic) with its pointed social critique of inequality and its advocacy of charity and compassion would become interesting when compared with Jewish involvement in hunting and the attitudes towards hunting and falconry in Hebrew texts, a subject which deserves separate treatment. One subtheme of these ‘hunt writings’ may be found in Moshe Arragel’s use, in his romance writings, of the Greco-Roman myth of the hunting of the lion of the Nemean forest (twelve labours of Hercules) and its fusion with the midrashim on Nimrod, the hunter, in a humanist mode. See for this, Eleazar Gutwirth, “Medieval Romance Epistolarity: The Case of the Iberian Jews”, Neophilologus 84, 2 (2000), pp. 207-224. Recently it has been argued that the hunt is a theme which is far more extensively and significantly treated in Jewish art than previously thought; see Marc Michael Epstein, Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature, University Press, Penn State University Press, 1997; Laura Paquin, “The Motif of the Hare in the Illuminations of Medieval Hebrew Manuscripts”, Materia giu-daica VII/2, (2002), pp. 273-282.

The historical context needs research. For our purposes here, one point may be emphasized: the attitude toward hunting and falconry was not homogeneous even among the Christians in Arragel’s Castile. Thus, for example, an anonymonous treatise from 15th century Castile, the Evangelista’s Libro de cetrería is an extremely humorous, relentless and corrosive attack on falconry, hunters and hunting literature. Paz y Meliá described it as doing for hunting what the Quixote did for knighthly tales. See José Manuel Fraideas Rueda, Literaturc cetrería de la edad media y el renacimiento español, London: QMW, 1998, 41ff.