

ASTROLOGY, KABBALAH AND MAGIC IN ALFONSO
DE LA TORRE'S *VISIÓN DELEYTABLE*:
HISPANO-JEWISH CONTEXTS*

Astrología, Cábala y Magia en la *Visión Deleytable* de Alfonso
de la Torre: Trasfondo hispano-judío.

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Resumen: *Visión Deleytable*, un tratado de filosofía escrito por el bachiller Alfonso de la Torre, constituye el testimonio más importante de la influencia del racionalismo maimonidiano en la España del siglo XV. Este artículo analiza el trasfondo hispano-judío en el intento de De la Torre por conciliar astrología, magia y Cábala con la filosofía religiosa de Maimónides.

Abstract: *Visión Deleytable*, a treatise on philosophy written by Alfonso de la Torre, offers the most important witness to the fate of Maimonidean rationalism in 15th century Christian Spain. This paper analyzes the Hispano-Jewish contexts for a revealing aspect of *Visión Deleytable*'s insertion in the medieval Aristotelian tradition: De la Torre's efforts to reconcile astrology, magic and Kabbalah with the Maimonidean frame of his religious philosophy.

Palabras clave: Alfonso de la Torre. Astrología. Magia. Cábala. España. Siglo XV.

Key Words: Alfonso de la Torre. Astrology. Magic. Kabbalah. Spain. 15th century.

Between 1430 and 1461, an obscure figure close to the court of John II of Aragon penned an introductory philosophy textbook in Spanish entitled *Visión Deleytable de la Filosofía y las Artes Liberales, Metafísica y Filosofía*

*. This essay represents a revised version of a lecture delivered at the first session of the Howard Gilman International Colloquium "The Spanish-Jewish Cultural Interaction" at Harvard University (December 3rd, 1995). That lecture fused, in turn, two smaller subsections of our doctoral dissertation (Girón Negrón 1997).

Moral. The author, Alfonso de la Torre, had been requested to write this treatise by the prior of Navarra Juan de Beamonte, who served the Navarran crown prince don Carlos de Viana. The curricular scope of Alfonso de la Torre's primer, in the encyclopedic tradition of the Isidorian *recopilatio*, is quite ambitious. With superb pedagogical skill and literary finesse, De la Torre weaves an elaborate allegorical tale about the Intellect's journey up the mountain of philosophical knowledge. This fictional scheme acts as a foil for lucid and lively disquisitions on a wide range of staple philosophical problems from the Medieval repertoire: the existence of God and the divine attributes, eternity of the world vs creation *ex-nihilo*, Providence, miracles and the theodicy, the immortality of the soul, the nature of prophecy, the possibility of metaphysical knowledge, ethics, human destiny, the scope of reason and the contemplative ideal. Disparate sources from the Greek, Islamic, Jewish, and Christian philosophical traditions are unevenly interwoven in De la Torre's eclectic exposition of his religious *Weltanschauung*. He learns logic from al-Ghazali. His liberal arts curriculum is mostly drawn from St. Isidore. His philosophical ethics are from Aristotle, with a smattering of Aquinas and pseudo-Senecan materials. To prove the soul's immortality he resorts to Albert Magnus. His philosophical theology follows Maimonides' *Guide* and references to Kabbalah are discernible throughout¹. As he explains it: "...non me moverá más la verdad dicha por boca de cristiano, que de judío o moro o gentil, sy verdades sean todas, nin negaré menos la falsya dicha por boca de uno que por boca de otro" ("the truth coming out from the mouth of a Christian will persuade me no more than that of a Jew or a Moor or a Gentile, if they all be truths, nor will I negate the falsehood of one more than the other" [VD p. 146])². The author of *Visión*, according to the proem, had set out to

1. The pioneering studies on *Visión Deleytable*'s sources are two essays by J. P. Wickersham Crawford (1913a, 1913b). For a fuller treatment of *Visión*'s sources, see Luis M. Girón Negrón (1997).

2. All citations of *Visión Deleytable* (from now onwards *VD*) will be from García López's edition (1991). Direct quotations from *VD* will be identified by page number. Specific sections will be identified by reference to the book and chapter numbers (e.g. *VD*

dispel conventional errors, disclose universal truths and elucidate by demonstrative means the philosophical perplexities of his Navarran addressee. He offered at the same time a mystico-intellectualist theory of human perfectibility anchored in Maimonides' prophetology and his philosophical conception of *imitatio Dei*. De la Torre's pedagogical efforts, albeit synoptic and encyclopedic, are met with unexpected but enormous popular success. Notwithstanding the aura of clandestinity with which the author envelops this work, a textbook presumably commissioned for the private instruction of a Christian aristocrat, *Visión Deleytable* becomes a Spanish "best-seller" within a couple of decades. Its extant manuscripts, numerous reprintings and early translations find an avid readership in Hispano-Christian (and even some Jewish) circles and particularly among the conversos, circulating widely in Spain, Italy and the Netherlands throughout the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries³.

Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión Deleytable* offers the most important witness to the Hispano-Christian fate of Maimonidean rationalism in the 15th century. A literary gem in its own right, it was also –until recently– a neglected source in the scholarly literature whose study could fill important lacunae in our knowledge of Alfonso de la Torre's Spain and the variety of Hispano-Christian and Hispano-Jewish responses to the philosophical tradition.

In this paper, I will examine the Hispano-Jewish contexts for a revealing aspect of *Visión Deleytable*'s insertion in the medieval Aristotelian tradition:

1,20 refers to chapter 20, book 1). All translations are mine.

3. There are fifteen manuscripts and four printed editions of the *Visión* dating from the 15th century: the latter include incunabula from Burgos (1485), Tolosa (1489, 1494), and a Catalonian translation from Barcelona (1484). De la Torre's *Visión* gained even greater circulation during the 16th and 17th centuries –Sevilla (1526, 1528, 1538), Ferrara (1554), Venice (1556), Frankfurt (1626), Amsterdam (1663)– especially among Jewish and converso circles in Italy and the Netherlands. For a detailed description of the extant manuscripts and printed editions, see García López's introduction to his critical edition. For supplementary materials on *Visión*'s circulation and editorial fate, see Concepción Salinas Espinosa (1997: 176-183), and Girón Negrón (1997: 212-218).

De la Torre's idiosyncratic efforts to reconcile astrology, magic and Kabbalah with the Maimonidean frame of his religious philosophy.

I

Maimonides stands out among medieval Jewish philosophers in his unequivocal rejection of astrology and magic (Lerner 1968; Langermann 1991). In his celebrated epistles to the Jewish communities of Yemen (Halkin 1952) and Montpellier (Marx 1926), he adduces Scriptural prooftexts and philosophical arguments to condemn all theories on the astral predetermination and predictability of human events as idolatrous and non-scientific. In MN (*Moreh Nebukhim*) 2,24, he even aligns himself with Averroes and al-Bitruji and their exceptional repudiation of Ptolemaic astronomy as a true representation of the arrangement and motions of the heavenly spheres (Sabra 1984; Gruenwald 1991). Though acknowledging the physical influence of the spheres on the sublunar world, he categorically rejects the astrologers' claims as illegitimate. Sympathetic magic, such as talismanic medicine and the quasi-magical use of religious objects, does not fare any better in Rambam's eyes. The discussion on Sabean beliefs in MN 3,29 –part of a broader argument against idolatry and his preface to the Guide's excursus on the *ta'ame ham-mitzvot*– likewise singles out for explicit condemnation the full gamut of astro-magical practices documented in his Nabatean source (Twersky 1980: 479-484).

Alfonso de la Torre's otherwise faithful exposition of *Moreh Nebukhim* placidly ignores, on the other hand, Rambam's emphatic repudiation of astrological and magical beliefs. On the contrary, De la Torre seems quite eager to suggest obliquely that astrology (and even some Kabbalistic magic) is a demonstrative science fully compatible with his philosophical theology⁴.

Let us consider the following examples from different sections of *Visión*.

4. In her recent book, Salinas Espinosa duly notes De la Torre's departure from Maimonides on this revealing point (1997: 58-9). However, she ignores the late medieval Hispano-Jewish context for this discrepancy and the role that De la Torre ascribes to astrological beliefs to be examined below.

In his initial exposition of the liberal arts, a section otherwise indebted to Isidore's *Etymologies*, Alfonso de la Torre disregards both the Isidorian distinction between astronomy and (judiciary) astrology and the latter's concomitant rejection⁵. Instead, he insinuates in the title of this section that astrology, the allegorical maiden of the 7th mansion guarding the liminal threshold to the castle of Truth, is a full branch of natural philosophy whose secrets can be disclosed through demonstrative reasoning. *Visión*'s chapter on logic also adduces "astrologia por la mayor parte," along with metaphysics and natural philosophy, to exemplify a field of knowledge based on propositions that are necessarily true⁶. De la Torre further seems to respond to Avicenna's position on the imperfection of astrological knowledge from the 10th book of *al-Shifa'*: *al-'Ilahiyyat* as summarized by al-Ghazzali in the *Maqasid*⁷, obliquely supporting Avicenna's astral reinterpretation of Islamic predestinarism, while decrying the Avicennian critique of astrological knowledge as non-demonstrative speculation.

5. *Etym* 3,27 (De differentia Astronomiae et Astrologiae). The astronomy/astrology divide, mostly disregarded in medieval Spanish science from Alfonso X's time onwards, may have found its earliest formulation in Isidore (Pines 1914: 343-9).

6. "Estas propusyones ya dichas, eceptas las famosas, que consisten en la opinión syn prueba, todas cabsan conclusyón verdadera de neçesydad, e lo contrario sería mentiroso e ynposible. E éstas usan la geumétrica, arismétyca, e la músyca e la astrología por la mayor parte, e la filosofía natural e la metafisyca" (*VD* p. 120).

7. Cf. Avicenna's classical (and influential) formulation of his *apologia pro astrologia* (*al-Shifa'*: *al-'Ilahiyyat*, eds. Mohammad Youssef Moussa, Suleiman Dunya and Sa'id Zayed, 2 vols. [Cairo, 1960] 2: 439-440). Al-Ghazzali's summary of Avicenna's position in the Latin translation—part of a broader discussion on the knowledge of particulars—runs as follows: *Sententia quinta est quod deus altissimus sicut scit genera et species, similiter scit possibilía qua contingunt, quamvis nos nesciamus illa, sicut possibile interim dum scitur esse possibile, non potest sciri an contingat, vel non contingat Quoniam igitur est ipse sciens ordinationes causarum, et occasionum, profecto est eciam sciens ipsa causata unde astrologus qui comprehendit aliquas causarum essendi aliquid, et non omnes, non mirum si iudicet esse aliquid opinando; possibile est enim ut id quod scit, contingat inpediri ne fiat, quia in eo quod dixit non comprehendet omnes causas; hoc autem non potest esse, nisi propter remocionem eorum que accidunt*" (Muckle 1933:70).

Like Abraham bar Hiyya in his *Epistle on Astrology*, Alfonso de la Torre also adduces the astrological expertise of Abraham, a well known Rabbinic tradition (Tosef., Kiddushin 5,17) that Isidore himself quotes from Flavius Josephus (*Etym* 3,25), to distinguish between judiciary astrology as a valid science practiced by the Patriarch and the illicit astrology of the Chaldeans forbidden by the Law⁸. This argument, echoed in the *Libro de astrologia* ascribed to Enrique de Villena (Cátedra 1983: 120), enables him to counter the Isidorian and Avicennian invectives against astrological speculation. Abraham's astrological knowledge also provides another un-Maimonidean proof-text for a quintessentially Maimonidean teaching. De la Torre mentions it for the first time to illustrate the necessity of intellectual perfection in the attainment of prophecy. Subsequently, he even upholds astrological divination as a licit form of magical activity ("E el devinar en las estrellas lícito es, si es a buen fyn..."—*VD* p. 206). Such a vindication of astrological practice, with the authoritative support of Abraham's example, thus becomes implicitly linked both to Maimonides' explanation of the prophetic ability to foresee the future as an intellectual strengthening of a natural faculty of divination (*MN* 2,38) and to Kabbalistic magic (see below).

De la Torre's defense of astrology as a demonstrative science buttresses the moderate conception of astral determinism insinuated in his elaborate review of Maimonides' discussion on Providence from *MN* 3,17-18.

This illuminating section (*VD* 1,24-25) deserves a closer look.

Maimonides prefaces his philosophical analysis of divine Providence as "consequent upon the intellect" (נמשכת אחר השכל) with a synoptic review of four erroneous opinions: the Epicurean (that all events are contingent), the Alexandrian-Aristotelian (that Providence only extends to the

8. *VD* 1,28 (p. 203-204) & 2,22 (p. 338). The story of Abraham as an astronomer and a natural philosopher was also known in Medieval Spain through Alfonso X's *General Estoria*, whose editors followed the Latin version of Josephus' *Antiquities* (Fraker 1996). See also Julio Samsó's introduction to Cátedra's edition of *Tratado de Astrologia atribuido a Enrique de Villena* (1983: 42-43).

sphere of the moon), the Asharite (absolute determinism) and the Mutazilite (that divine justice extends to all creatures, human or not)⁹.

De la Torre also begins his discussion on Providence with a critical evaluation of four erroneous conceptions, three of which are from Maimonides' list: the Epicurean, the Asharite and the Aristotelian. The Mutazilite excursus, though, is omitted and instead, De la Torre indulges in an extensive discussion of astrological determinism (the position of those who "niegan la Providencia de Dios encomendando todas las cosas a los fados"—*VD* pp. 177-179). His exhaustive and colorful analysis of this position, a veritable catalogue of popular astrological beliefs, ends with a summary reiteration of Maimonides' argument against Asharite determinism: that their belief is untenable because it makes all things necessary and denies free will, negating the Biblical and rational foundations for moral action¹⁰.

De la Torre does make an important concession to the will's power to overcome the *fados*, especially in the second part of *Visión*¹¹. Astral influences

9. For a nuanced analysis of Maimonides' multifaceted discussion on Providence throughout the *Guide* (3,17-18; 3,22-23; and 3,51), see Raffel (1987: 25-71).

10. The account of astrology that prefaces De la Torre's repudiation of this opinion is particularly telling. His claim that astrology originates among the Chaldeans and the Egyptians, followed by the Romans, echoes Isidore's account of the history of astronomy (*Etym* 3,25). Yet, unlike Isidore, De la Torre also proves to be better acquainted with the basic premises of judiciary astrology: "E esta gente ha fecho libros en que toman los nascimientos de los reynos o de las setas o credulidades e dizen cuánto ha de durar; e también fizieron libros donde consyderan las natividades de los omnes e dizen, segunt su opinión, que éste nasció en tal planeta, e en tal sygno, e en tal conjunción, en tal opusyción, en tal asçendente, e en tal declinación, e bevirá tanto, e será tal cosa o tal, avrá tal arte o tal ofiçio o tal ventura, e aquéstos son llamados generáticos. E ay, entre los sobredichos matemáticos, otros libros de las elecciones de los actos voluntarios por do so rigen" (*VD* p. 178).

11. "E çierto es que los sygnos e costelaciones e planetas han poderío, como tú dizes, para disponer la materia...Enpero aquestas pasyones non pueden costreñir nin forçar el ánima del omne, ca la virtud corporal no puede syno sobre otro cuerpo, e al omne finca libertad de fázér lo que quiere" (*VD* p. 292). Cf. *ST* p. 1, q.115, a.4 for the Thomistic formulation of this idea ("...*plures hominum sequuntur passiones, quae sunt motus sensitivi appetitus, ad quas cooperari possunt corpora caelestia: pauci autem sunt sapientes, qui*

do not fully determine human action. Yet his explicit repudiation of astrological determinism is partially compromised by the ensuing exposition of his own views on divine Providence. Leaving Maimonides' intellectualist conception of individual Providence in *MN* 3,18 aside for the moment, Alfonso de la Torre proceeds with an eclectic explication of natural Providence and the remote coefficient of divine will in world events, partly based on Rambam's analysis of divine causality in *MN* 2,48 and leading to a moderate vindication of the astrological *fados*¹². His position: that Providential care over the totality of events in the sublunar world as decreed by God in the Eliadean *illo tempore* is effected *grosso modo* through the joint mediation of chance, human will and –De la Torre's variant on Rambam's list of causes– the stars (“la virtud de las estrellas”). The totality of events in the sublunar world can not be strictly reduced either to divine predestination, blind fortune, astral influence or voluntary actions, but rather to a combination of different causes all of which can be retraced back, however mediated, to the divine will (*VD* pp. 180-188). *Natura* in particular–the *fados* which are the “ligamiento de cabsas” also effected by the circular motion of the heavenly spheres–stands as the sole Providential mediator between the divine Creator and the

huiusmodi passionibus resistant. Et ideo astrologi ut in pluribus vera possunt praedicere, et maxime in communi. Non autem in speciali: quia nihil prohibet aliquem hominem per liberum arbitrium passionibus resistere”).

12. Of course, Alfonso de la Torre is not rejecting here the Maimonidean ideal of human perfection through knowledge that undergirds the intellectualist conception of individual Providence in *MN* 3,18. On the contrary, intellectual perfectionism lies at the core of *Visión Delectable*'s allegorized ruminations. Even De la Torre's story of the leper who is moved to conceive a deformed child by an astral power in the same chapter (pp. 186-187) can be construed as a parable on our intellectual failure to resist the strong, but non-coercitive influence of the stars and planets. His pivotal accounts of the soul's immortality, Maimonidean prophethology and the human perfections will anchor him with equal gravity in Rambam's intellectualist theory of individual Providence. But still, De la Torre's consistence with Maimonidean intellectualism does not answer our present question. His deliberate omission of Rambam's thesis in *MN* 3,18 in a chapter on Providence prefaced by the *Guide*'s excursus in 3,17 requires elucidation.

sublunar order¹³. The “fados” are the stewards of Creation (“mayordomos de la Creación” to use a Cervantine epithet for “nature” that Bataillon deems traceable to De la Torre [1950]). They are like faithful bailiffs paying other workers to execute royal orders and take care of the king’s affairs in the latter’s absence (a cosmological simile deeply reminiscent of Shem Tov ben Joseph ben Shem Tov’s analogy for the mediation of divine causality in his commentary to *MN* 2,48). This naturalist conception of Providence is further developed in *VD* 1,30; 1,34 and 2,12¹⁴, where the causal concatenation of astro-heavenly influxes is fully identified with the order of nature, subsuming key areas of human behaviour under the Providential pale of a moderate temperamental determinism which is astrally-based.

Despite Maimonides’ trenchant opposition, De la Torre’s attempt to reconcile the former’s natural philosophy with his astrological notions is not without important precedents in the Jewish philosophical tradition (Barkai 1987). The general belief in the influence of stars on human actions in the sublunar world had already been espoused with varying degrees of reservation by some of the leading pre-Maimonidean figures in medieval Jewish thought: nōt only Abraham ibn Ezra and Abraham bar Hiyya, whose theories and practice of astrology are well known and influential¹⁵, but also the likes of

13. Green has suggestively noted the scholastic roots of Nature as mediator between God and Creation ciphered by the idea of *natura naturans* (1964: 2/76-92). He mentions De la Torre in this context (1964: 2/81-2) and also documents an interesting precedent in De Lille’s *Anticlaudianus* (1964: 2/78). It is important, though, to note two things: 1. The inadmissibility of miracles in De la Torre’s naturalism sets him at a distance from this scholastic tradition; 2. The actual terms *natura naturans/natura naturata* do not appear in *Visión*, which probably was a deliberate omission.

14. *VD* 1,34 is also *Visión*’s source for Solomon ibn Verga’s important citation of De la Torre on Providence (1947: 160). Ibn Verga’s citation from Alfonso de la Torre appears in *VD* p. 242.

15. For a general overview of Jewish astrology and astronomy, see Barkai (1987) and Alexander Altmann’s and Arthur Bein’s respective articles on astrology and astronomy for the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. Bar Hiyya, one of the first to expound Ptolemaic astronomy in Hebrew, adduces Talmudic prooftexts to defend astrology as a predictive science –the highest achievement to which astronomy can aspire. He only sets Israel apart from the

Yehudah Halevi (*Kuzari* 4,9)¹⁶, Solomon ibn Gabirol (*Keter Malkhut*) and Abraham ibn Daud¹⁷.

A century after Maimonides, an intra-Judaic controversy on astrology and determinism was ignited by the anti-Jewish missionary efforts of the converso Abner de Burgos and his polemical exchange with Yitzhaq Policar (Baer 1981: 257-282). It is in the aftermath of these acerbic exchanges that we find some 14th and 15th century Hispano-Jewish precedents for Alfonso de la Torre's profession of astrological and deterministic beliefs in a Maimonidean context. Abner de Burgos himself, in chapter 7 of *Minhat Kena'ot* on the knowledge of particulars, goes so far as to assert explicitly that determinism, which he conceived astrologically, was the esoteric doctrine of *Moreh Nebukhim*¹⁸. The Tudelan preacher and Kabbalist Joshua ibn Shu'eib,

inexorable grip of the stars on other nations (cf. Abraham bar Hiyya's letter to Yehudah Barzilai published by Z. Schwartz in the *Festschrift Adolf Schwartz* [Vienna, 1917] 23-26). Abraham ibn Ezra, the Tudelan sage mainly responsible for the vindication of astrology in Medieval Jewish thought, went further in describing the extent to which human actions (and even thoughts) of Jews and non-Jews alike were subject to the decrees of the stars. He only takes exception of those who, like the devout Jews in possession of the Torah, clung to God with unswerving faith through their religious observance. E.g. Ibn Ezra's commentary on Exodus 33:23. On the role of astrology in Ibn Ezra's philosophy, see Langermann (1993).

16. Halevi acknowledges the astral influence on the sublunary world but denies, like Avicenna, any astrological claim to a precise knowledge of its extent. It has even been argued that Halevi repudiates some of the philosophical tendencies of his time because of the role they ascribe to astrology as a primary means for the naturalistic explication of religious practices (and even religious pluralism) –an idea also found in Ibn Ezra's writings (Langermann 1993).

17. Cf. *Emunah Ramah* 2,1, where he affirms that the positions of the stars were assigned at the moment of Creation, enabling astrological predictions.

18. Abner of Burgos 'Ofrenda de Zelos' (1990: 39-58, esp. 53-58 [24c-28a]). He argues that Maimonides' exoteric exegesis of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart and the Egyptians fate in Exodus, "aquellas palabras de rabbi Mosse en esta rrazon, non las tenia él por pruebas manifiestas ni abundables, ssinon desviamientos para amanssar e acallantar los dicipulos ... E esto es como lo que escribió en comienzo de su libro "Mostrador de los Desacordados", que son falladas en sus palabras contradiciones .. que eran por meester de hablar en rrazones profundadas convinientes para encubrir algo dellas e descubrir lo al" (pp. 57-8). Somewhat reminiscent of Abner, a modern scholar has also argued that determinism

Abner's contemporary and a disciple of Rashbah, echoes the former's position in a couple of interesting *derashot* on divine Providence, *Tazri'a* and *Devarim* (Horowitz 1989: 67-83), that resonate vividly with De la Torre's discussion. Therein, one can also find the vindication of a moderate astrological deterministic position couched in a selective review of *MN* 3,17. Ibn Shu'eib even goes over the Maimonidean list of errors about Providence in *MN* 3,17, substituting the Mutazilite opinion by a detailed excursus on astrological determinism –just like De la Torre¹⁹. Also in the 14th century, Ibn Ezra's Castillian supercommentators follow suit in their attempts to harmonize the exegete's astro-magical allusions with Maimonidean teaching (see below). And Gersonides himself draws both from Maimonides and Ibn Ezra, with sovereign disregard for the former's rebuff of astrological beliefs, to accommodate an astral determinism barely mitigated by a partial concession to reason and free will in his discussion of dream, divination and prophecy in *Milhamot Ha-Shem* 2,2.

In the first half of the 15th century, critics and defenders of Maimonidean rationalism alike are haunted by the question of determinism and its relationship to astrology. A case in point is provided by Albo's discussion *contra astrologia* in *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 4,4 –the follow-up to his chapters on God's knowledge of particulars and freedom of the will. After rebutting several deterministic arguments against the reality of contingency, including that of his teacher Hasdai Crescas whose Avicennian position may have been influenced by Abner de Burgos²⁰, Albo puts the astrological determinists to task, marshalling philosophical and scientific arguments from Maimonides, Yitzhaq Policar and others to criticize not only the extreme views of the "astrologers and star-gazers" but also the less radical ones of the

was the esoteric teaching of the *Guide* (Altmann 1974).

19. See, for example, the introductory passage from *Devarim* in *Derashot al ha-Torah* on the various opinions about Providence (1990: 416).

20. *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* 4,1. On Crescas' deterministic position and Albo's repudiation, see Seymour Feldman (1984). On Crescas' possible indebtedness to Abner de Burgos, see Y. Baer (1940).

“Philosopher” himself in his *libri naturali*. Closer, though, to De la Torre is the interesting case of Abraham Bibago. Bibago also engages the problem of astrology at length in a careful defense of Maimonides’ intellectualist theory of Providence –*Derekh Emunah* 1,3– that resonates with *Visión Deleytable*. While rejecting a radical astrological determinism and fully embracing Maimonides’ intellectualist position, Bibago links his analysis of divine causality and the *Meteorologica*’s conception of the heavenly bodies to a naturalist theory of Providence that is mirrored by De la Torre’s coefficient causality argument. Indeed, he also argues that those who do not enjoy the Providential overflow of the divine intellect are left at the mercy of chance and the stars (*DE* 2,5,58b and 1,3,16c), thereby extending, as does De la Torre, Rambam’s view on the suffering of the righteous in *MN* 3,51 to accommodate the notion of astral influence. Bibago, unlike De la Torre, does reject judiciary astrology, adducing sophisticated astronomical counterarguments such as the constant mutability of the heavens as demonstrated by the 11th century Andalusian astronomer Ibrahim Abu Ishaq al Zarqali (*DE* 1,3,20a). He also goes farther than Rambam in his dismissal of Talmudic passages that seem to support astrological belief, although Bibago’s philological quibbling on the Talmud’s ambiguous meaning of *mazal* as a natural cause²¹ chimes with De la Torre’s remarks about the nuanced distinction between *fado*, *fortuna* and *caso* in his Latin sources (*VD* p. 292). But even Bibago’s arguments against those Jewish thinkers who explicitly imputed astrological beliefs to Maimonides²² indirectly confirm our first hypothesis: that there was a

21. *DE* 1,3,20d.

22. *DE* 1,3,19d. In there, Bibago first quotes *MN* 2,12, where Maimonides states that the overflow of the spheres and the heavenly intellects act upon the sublunar world in direct proportion to their relative distances, adding how ומהנה נכנס משפטי כוכבים. However, Bibago hastens to note that this does not imply Maimonides’ belief in astrology, as many have contended. It only shows Rambam’s scientific understanding of astral influence on the physical world and how he understood the impact of the spheres’ proximity and remoteness on sublunar conditions such as heat, cold, wetness and dryness (the sublunar phenomena that Bibago had earlier explained drawing from *Meteorologica* –*DE* 1,3,19c).

contemporary Hispano-Jewish context for Alfonso de la Torre's attempt to harmonize astrology with Maimonidean thought²³.

II

Alfonso de la Torre's vindication of astrology is linked to a parallel conception of talismanica and Kabbalistic name magic that also deserves closer attention²⁴. In *VD* 1,28, an eclectic discussion on angels, demons and

23. Our discussion here has focused solely on the dissemination of astrological ideas in Jewish philosophical sources. There is another important context for the dissemination of astrology (and magic) in medieval Christian Spain that we can not broach in here but which should not go unmentioned: the popularization of Islamic astrology in Christian Spain going back to the cultural initiatives of the 12th century Toledan "school of translators" and their successors (Christian and Jewish) at the court of Alfonso X a century later. The Arabic astrological and magical works translated at the Alphonsine court (including the *Ghayat al-hakim-Picatrix*, Ptolomeus' *Tetrabiblos* with 'Ali b. Ridwan's commentary, the *Libro de las formas & ymagenes*, the *Lapidaries*, the *Libro de las cruces* and the *Libro conplido en los iudizios de las estrellas* by "Aly Aben Ragel" [probably Abu l-Hasan 'Ali ibn abi r-Rijal as-Saibani]) provided not only a theoretical framework for a Hispano-Christian vindication of judiciary astrology but also a detailed guideline for the scientific practice of astrological speculation and astral magic. These Arabic works in translation are still circulating and influential in 15th Spain century (cf. Enrique de Villena and his *Tratado de astrologia*). For an interesting case study on the Hispano-Christian fate of the Islamicized Ptolomeus in the late Middle Ages, see Luce López-Baralt (1989). On Alfonso X's patronage of astrology and his contribution to the dissemination of Islamic science in Christian Spain, see Márquez-Villanueva (1994: 183-209, 249-262).

24. The magical themes in *Visión Deleytable* have rarely been discussed in the scholarly literature. The only recent overview of De la Torre's magic (Garrosa Resina 1987: 359-361) ignores completely the explicit connections he draws between magic and Kabbalah, partly because the author handled a corrupted text of *Visión* that rendered "cavalla" as "tabla," partly because he also ignored another pivotal section that exemplifies the actual extent of Alfonso de la Torre's Kabbalistic literacy. The Kabbalistic allusions, on the other hand, have been noted by some scholars. Bataillon (1950), for example, highlights their importance in determining De la Torre's intellectual roots in 15th century Hispano-Jewish culture. F. Secret (1957: 39; 1964: 17) discusses De la Torre's Kabbalistic excursus against the polemical context of 15th century Hispano-Christian Kabbalah (cf. also Rico 1988: 101). None of these scholars, though, comment either on the connection between Kabbalah and magic or the latter juxtaposition with Maimonidean philosophy –he subject of our discussion.

prophetology, De la Torre offers a long reiteration of Isidore's invective against magical beliefs in *Etym* 8,8. The Isidorian catalogue of divinatory practices and its Thomistic recension (*Summa Theologica* p. 2-2, q. 95, a. 3) had become a basic reference for 15th century Spanish theologians who wrote against their popular diffusion²⁵. This section, though, ends with an exceptional proviso which calls for a lengthy quote:

“E todas son maldichas, mas el ayuntar de lo activo e pasyvo, e el esculpir de las piedras en tal o en tal sygno, e el devinar en las estrellas liçito es, si es a buen fyn e otrosy el pronusçiar de nonbres liçitos, que llaman cávalla, e costrefiñr los espíritus con aquella virtud, liçito es. Mientra el fyn sea bueno, bien puede el estrólago fazer una ymagen e esculpirla en el signo de escorpio para que sane los omnes de toda mordedura de syerpe. E liçito sería a un omne fazer una ymagen por quitar los lobos o la lagosta de una tierra. E los que dizen que esto non es posyble también confiesan que no saben nada. E para dezirte que ymágenes se podrían esculpir liçita mente en cada sygno e declararte quáles nonbres se podrían liçita mente nonbrar e cómo se devían escrevir e cuándo, e las ymágenes de que avía de ser cada una e cómo esculpida e cuándo, verlo has en casa de la naturaleza, lo de las ymágenes; en el espejo de la Verdad, lo de los nombres, ca son los mayores secretos después de la profecía” (*VD* pp. 206-7)²⁶.

Salinas Espinosa, on the other hand, devotes a section of her book on De la Torre to Kabbalah and hermeticism in *Visión Deleytable* (1997: 49-66). Therein, she examines De la Torre's Kabbalistic themes both as a Spanish precursor of Christian Kabbalah and in connection to Hermetic magic, even positing a textual parallel with the Latin Asclepius. However, she also ignores the immediate Hispano-Jewish context to be considered below for the integration of Kabbalah and hermetic magic with Maimonidean philosophy among the 15th century Spanish Maimonideans. On the general issue of magic and mysticism in Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem (1934) and Moshe Idel (1983b, 1987, 1995), esp. ch. 2-4 in the latter where he offers important background for a “magico-talismanic” model of Hasidic mysticism.

25. Cf. Fray Lope de Barrientos, “Tratado de la Adivinanza” (1927: 87-179), and Tostado's explication of *malefici* in a commentary on Exodus 22:18 (Cátedra 1989: 191-193). Cf. also Maimonides' catalogue of Sabeian idolatrous practices in *MN* 3,29 (where he quotes the Biblical listing from Deut 18:10-11).

26. It is interesting to note that Cáceres' translation of *VD* omits “costrefiñr espíritus” in reference to the pronunciation of divine names for magical purposes –the printed edition also has “tabla” instead of “cavalla”.

In this passage, De la Torre takes four exceptions to the impermissibility and uselessness of magical practices: “el ayuntar de lo activo y lo pasivo,” talismanica, astrological divination “a buen fyn” (discussed above) and “cávalla.” The most intriguing are the second and fourth, which he later merges: the sympathetic usage of astrological talismans in the Hermetic tradition of the *Picatrix* and the Spanish lapidaries of Alfonso X (“el esculpir de las piedras en tal o tal sygno” with the right “ymáginés”) is connected to the correct Kabbalistic pronunciation and writing of “permissible” divine names in order to invoke and constrain spirits (“e costreñir los espíritus ... con el pronusçiar de nonbres liçitos que llaman cávalla”)²⁷. Earlier on, dealing with arithmetic (*VD* 1,6), De la Torre had singled out the magical power of three sacred names that could serve as talismanic *segullot*: the Tetragrammaton, the name of 12 letters and the Great Name of 42 letters. He had also alluded to Kabbalistic numerology (*gematria*) as an exegetical tool, praising the esoteric knowledge and thaumaturgical power of the “mecubalim” and claiming that the secret of these three names stood next to prophecy as the greatest secret to be disclosed to the Intellect personified:

“E aún no sola mente en estas cosas ya dichas soy nesçesaria, mas aún en el estentyno del pecho mío yazen admirables e muy maravillosos secretos, ca por mí se alcança el cuento de las letras de las quales se costituyen e componen los nombres de quarenta e dos e doze e quatro letras, por la pronuçiación de las quales se alcançan maravillas no digno el omne para explicarlas, ca en mí es el cuento de la gramaturia, el qual contaron lo de mecubalim, e en mí son las profundidades de la cábala, en las quales es grant parte de profeçia” (*VD* p. 130).

Finally, positive references to sympathetic magic are also found in *Visión* that do not mention Kabbalah. For example, at the end of part I, De la Torre succinctly alludes to the marvelous secrets “en el escultura de las piedras” that God himself had graciously taught him (a suggestive reference left

27. On the Maimonidean repudiation of talismanica, see *MN* 3,29 (where Rambam denounces the talismanic drawing of spirits and demons among the Sabaeans as an idolatrous practice) and *MN* 1,63 (where the latter is conceived as a form of idolatrous prophecy).

unexplained)²⁸. Invoking a story that may be traced to Pedro Comestor's *Estorias scholasticas*, even Moses is described as an accomplished practitioner of talismanic magic, an anecdote that buttresses Maimonides' belief in intellectual perfection as a necessary requirement for a would-be prophet²⁹.

At one level, De la Torre's scanty allusions to *gematria* and Kabbalistic hermeneutics betrays the rudimentary nature of his acquaintance with classical Kabbalistic sources. Any 15th century Christian theologian could have gathered as much, for example, from the polemical writings of Hispano-Christian and converso apologists: Pedro Alfonso, Ramon Martín, Abner de Burgos, Pablo de Santa María, Pedro de la Caballería and Jerónimo de Santa Fe (even though *Visión* has absolutely no traces of the polemical use of Jewish Kabbalah to vindicate Christian doctrine associated with these authors, not to mention the later Christian Kabbalah of Pico della Mirandola [Secret 1957; 1964: 8-23])³⁰. The talismanic usage of divine names can even be traced to the Medieval sources of Hermetic magic in Muslim and Christian Spain. There are, for example, two notable allusions to Hermes Trismegistus in *Visión*, one

28. "E vido en otras piedras admirables virtudes que resçebían de los lugares e de las ynfluencias de las estrellas, e maravillóse el Entendimiento quando vido que las piedras que estavan mucho tiempo fuera de los lugares que fueron engendradas cómo perdían la virtud. E vido maravillosos secretos en el escultura de las piedras, e alabó a Dios que ge lo avía notificado" (*VD* p. 240).

29. "E piensan que Muysén era un ydiota e era el más sabio onme que avía en Egipto, tanto que sabía en la escultura de las ymágenes más que onme del mundo a la sazón, ca él fizo dos anillos en el signo de géminis quando casó con la etiopesa, el uno de amor e el otro de olvidança" (*VD* pp. 203-4). This story, which De la Torre will repeat in *VD* 2,22, is retold in fuller detail in Villena's *Tratado de astrologia*, 121.

30. This is an important point that Salinas Espinosa fails to underscore in her attempt to connect De la Torre with the Christian Kabbalah of the Medieval Spanish and 16th century Italian schools (1997: 49-55): there is no Kabbalistic corroboration of Christian theological and creedal doctrines in *Visión*, the defining feature of Christian Kabbalah. De la Torre's positive appraisal of the "mecubalim" could also have made him, on the other hand, an easy target of criticism in Spanish anti-Jewish polemics –cf. Alonso de la Espina's rant against the Jewish "sect" of the "mecubalim" in his *Fortalitium fidei* (ca. 1458).

of which Salinas Espinosa suggestively connects to the Latin *Asclepius*³¹. The author of *Picatrix* himself ascribes such a view to Aristotle³², although De la Torre's imprecise allusion to a medico-talismanic prescription raises some questions about the full extent of his practical knowledge of this magical tradition³³. On the other hand, there are several magical treatises of enormous diffusion in 15th century Spain (*Clavicula Salomonis*, *Liber de Razel*), which also provide an immediate context for De la Torre's belief in the

31. In *VD* 1,6 (p. 130), "Trimigisto" is singled out as an ancient expert on the secret virtue of herbs ("Ca sy los omnes bastasen a perfecta mente me saber sabrían la virtud de todas las yervas del mundo, ca segúnt avemos fallado en los libros de los antiquísimos Acalo e Çeçina, Trimigisto e Soroastes, las fojas de las yervas todas son letras yndicativas de la virtud de las rayzes de aquéllas"). Later, in *VD* 1,25 (p. 185), his palace metaphor on the workings of Providence, De la Torre notes how "e aquesto dixo Hermes que era ymarmenes, e verdad dixo, que tanto quiere dezir como causas por las quales faze la providençia todo lo que se ha de fazer." On the *Asclepius*' parallel, see Salinas Espinosa (1997: 57).

32. *Picatrix*, I-v-37: "*Aristoteles dixit in suis libris ymaginum: melius et alcius quod habeat ymagine ex 7 planetis provenit, et durabilius est quando aspicit fortuna. Vult enim dicere protrahendo spiritus et virtutes celi in terra. Et iterum dixit quod sunt nomina spirituum que, quando quis ea invocet et ipsos trahere voluerit spiritus, quod descendat...*" (Pingree 1986: 23). In the Hebrew translation, "*nomina spirituum*" is translated as "*divine names*" (Idel 1995: 74).

33. In the quotation above, De la Torre advocates the sympathetic manipulation of an unidentified image sculpted under the sign of Scorpio to heal snake bites. *Picatrix* only has one talismanic recipe involving Scorpio to heal the sting of a scorpion (not a snake bite): see I-v-25. The elaborate recipe offers precise instructions on the materials ("lapide de bezahar," "annulo aureo"), proper time ("in hora Lune, ipsa existente in 2 facie Scorpionis, ascendente Leone, Tauro vel Aquario") and required steps (e.g. the consumption of incense) for the concoction of this healing amulet. The *Libro de las formas & ymagenes* (one of Alfonso X's lapidarian treatises), on the other hand, identify Aries and Sagitarius as the only two constellations that have the virtue to heal, respectively, the "ferida de serpiente o de qual quier animal ueninoso" (Aries) and the "ferida de animal toxicoso" (Sagitarius). The lapidarian prescriptions in this literature for the healing of snake bites do not match Alfonso's talismanic example either. Equally absent, finally, is another aspect of Scorpio's characterization in the Arabic, Hebrew and Latin astromagical treatises: its association with genital medicine (see Aurigemma [1957]).

talismanic coercibility of spiritual beings³⁴. It may also be noted that the Arabic tradition of talismanic magic mediated to Christian Spain by the cultural efforts of Alfonso X is still alive among Spanish Muslims and moriscos until the 16th century as evidenced in *aljamiado* literature (Labarta 1981, 1993). Finally, there is an important Hispano-Christian witness in De la Torre's time to the association of Kabbalah with talismanic magic in Crescas' circle: the semi-scientific treatises of Enrique de Villena. In his *Tratado de aojamiento*, Villena discussed the medicinal usage of Kabbalistic amulets which he had heard attributed to Nahmanides, R. Asher of Toledo, R. Yitzhaq Israeli and even from the lips of "maestro Azday Crescas, que fue en este tienpo nuestro" and "rabi Zaraya [Zerahya Halevi], a que dezian En Ferrer, que fue en este tienpo" (Villena 1917: 191, 193: cf. also Baer 1981: 2/753, n. 50). Villena's amateurish interests in Kabbalistic magic were superficial and his knowledge of it, second-hand. They nevertheless contributed to his exaggerated reputation in Hispano-Christian circles as an expert in science and magic (even Kabbalah), a reputation that made him a target of ecclesiastical censorship, culminating, albeit *post-mortem*, with the

34. The *Liber de Raziel*, for example, a collection of magical traditions purportedly taught to Adam's son by the angel Raziel, was, according to fray Lope de Barrientos, "más multiplicado en España que en las otras partes del mundo" (Barrientos 1927: 121). Barrientos, who burned Enrique de Villena's copy along with the other censored volumes confiscated from his library, noted how it abounded with magical incantations to coerce "los buenos ángeles para bien facer y a los malos para mal obrar" through knowledge of their names (1927: 116-122). Some Hispanists have wrongly ascribed this magical work to the 13th century Saragossan Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia (Russell 1978: 250). Although Abulafia—who used Raziel, his isopsephic name, to signify his attainment of prophecy—also wrote a treatise entitled *Sefer Raziel*, our magical work—M. Idel has noted—has "nothing to do with ecstatic Kabbalah" (Hasidism 381, n. 55). Still, our *Liber de Raziel* was the object of several translations (Latin, Hebrew, English, French) that circulated widely among Jewish and Christian intellectuals in the Renaissance—cf. Secret (1969) and Idel (1983b: 193-4). *Clavicula Salomonis*, another famous book on magic from Christian sources from the Middle Ages, also circulated widely in 15th century Spain (cf. Barrientos [1927: 122] and Thorndike [1958: 2: 280]—see also Idel [1983b: 194] on the Jewish reception of its Hebrew translation in the 16th century).

tragic burning of his magnificent library (Gascón Vera 1979; Torres Alcalá 1983). From this angle, he also offers a contemporary Hispano-Christian precedent for De la Torre's vindication of Kabbalistic magic.

All the preceding examples illustrate popular notions of magic and Kabbalah, and their relationship, in 15th century Christian Spain. Still, Alfonso de la Torre's specific allusions to Kabbalistic name magic and talismanica in the context of Maimonidean philosophy may have more immediate and significant Hispano-Jewish resonances in this turbulent period.

First, the identification of Maimonidean prophetology and the esoteric dimension of the *Guide* to the Kabbalistic secret of the divine names goes back to Abraham Abulafia and the ecstatic tradition of intellectualist mysticism that he ushers (Idel 1988a, 1988c)³⁵. Linking astral magic to the combination of Hebrew letters, and particularly to the conception of divine names as talismanic means to draw downward the spiritual influx of the astral bodies, also have important Medieval precedents among the Spanish Kabbalists influenced by Abulafia (Idel 1995: 156-160)³⁶.

Likewise, there were important Kabbalists among the Jewish supporters of medico-astrological talismans in early 14th century Catalonia. This was the case with the preeminent successor of Nahmanides as leader of Catalonian Jewry, Solomon ibn Adret. Albeit a critic of Abulafian Kabbalah, Ibn Adret followed his teacher Nahmanides on this score, espousing talismanic magic for medical purposes as an efficacious mean of astral manipulation (he had presumably allowed the preparation of a talisman of Leo to cure a kidney

35. Salinas Espinosa briefly notes the integration of Kabbalah and magic among Abulafia's followers (1997: 55). However, she is unaware of Abulafia's role as a Kabbalistic commentator of Maimonides' *Guide*, which is more relevant for the late Medieval attempts to reconcile magical-Kabbalistic ideas with Maimonidean philosophy.

36. This type of Kabbalistic magic is connected to an ancient Hellenistic notion of spiritual beings or forces – πνεύματα in Greek, רוחניות in Hebrew – fully developed in Arabic magical treatises that were independently influential on other Jewish thinkers (e.g. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov's *Sefer ha-Emunot*). On the history of this magical notion, see Shlomo Pines (1988). For another early Jewish precedent for this linking of astro-magic and letter-combination techniques, see Georges Vajda (1956).

disease). His defense of talismanic medicine figured prominently in a second dispute over Maimonidean rationalism involving the Jewries of Catalonia and Provence, as lucidly explained by Gregg Stern (1995) in his dissertation on Meiri.

Thirdly, as mentioned before, there is an important circle of Jewish Neoplatonists in the second half of 14th century Castille –the Spanish leaders of the “Ibn Ezra Renaissance”– that defended sympathetic magic and astrology, drawing connections to philosophy, and in some cases even to Kabbalah (Schwartz 1990/91). Ibn Ezra himself had already interpreted a number of passages from the Torah as subtle references to talismanica (e.g. his commentary on Gen 31:19 on the talismanic nature of the *terafim* that Rachel steals from her father). Influenced by Joseph ibn Wakkar, these Jewish thinkers (Samuel ibn Zarza, Samuel Franco, Samuel ibn Motot, Ezra Gatigno, Shem Tov ibn Major) wrote major supercommentaries on Ibn Ezra’s commentary on the Pentateuch that also contained important discussions on talismanic magic and astrology. Setting up the exegete on a par with Maimonides, they shared Ibn Wakkar’s belief in the compatibility of Maimonidean philosophy with Ibn Ezra’s interpretation of Scripture³⁷.

More importantly, there were some 15th century defenders of Maimonidean thought that explicitly adduced Ibn Wakkar’s authority in this philosophical context. This is the case with Abraham Shalom who quotes both Wakkar and Abulafia in an enthusiastic defense of practical Kabbalah, crediting, as does De la Torre, the joint efficacy of talismanic magic and the recitation of divine names to wield spiritual powers³⁸. Indeed, most 15th

37. Ibn Wakkar acknowledges Ibn Ezra’s “greater inclination” to astrology as the only thing that separates the exegete from Maimonides. Cf. the passage from the introduction to Ibn Wakkar’s main work quoted by Scholem from a partial Hebrew translation (1943/4: 155). However, glossing over Maimonides’ repudiation of astrology, he proceeds to argue for the latter’s agreement with philosophy and Kabbalah –cf. G. Vajda (1962: 115-297). On Ibn Wakkar and the circle of supercommentators that followed him, see Uriel Simon (1993). On the influence of these writings in Italian Kabbalistic magic, see Idel (1983b).

38. *Neveh Shalom* 5,4,64b-5. Shalom also adduces the sympathetic properties (סגולות) of certain stones and plants (במרחצבים והצמחים) –the scientific basis for the elaborate

century Hispano-Jewish philosophers affirmed the magical efficiency of the divine names as a type of miracle –Efodi, *Ma'aseh Efod* (p. 9); Albo, *SI* 1,18; Crescas, *OH* 4,10 (cf. also *VD* p. 340 on the notion of prophets as miracle-workers).

Fourthly, there may have also been a textual basis in the Spanish translation of the *Guide* for De la Torre's misguided perception of the "fundamental consistency between Maimonidean thought and what he knew as *cabala*"³⁹. In the Spanish translation of *MN* 3,51, Maimonides' exegesis of his palace metaphor, Toledo writes: "Sabe que los varones que son fuera de la cibdat, es todo aquel que non tien creencia de ley, njn tiene estudio njn cosa por via de cabala" (*Mostrador* 357). Another passage right below also reads: "E los que llegan ala casa e andan enderredor, stos son los talmuditas que tienen entendimientos verdaderos de partes de *cabala*" (*Mostrador* 357-8). "Kabbalah" in the Hebrew versions of these passages should be translated as "tradition." However, a Spanish gloss on the first passage notes how "*cabala*, es cosa rrescebida fijo de padre, e padre de abuelo, fasta Moysén." This gloss on the Spanish hebraism dovetails an important Kabbalistic idea: the oral transmission of the mystical secrets of the Torah in an unbroken chain from teacher to teacher that harkens back to Moses and the Sinaitic revelation⁴⁰. A reader of this text and its gloss who knew little or no Hebrew, such as De la Torre, could thus have found "evidence" in the Spanish *Mostrador* to conclude that Maimonides accepted the veracity of the (mystical) Kabbalah!

The thaumaturgical reference to the Kabbalistic coercion of spirits enjoys likewise some significant precedents. In De la Torre's angelological excursus

lapidarian theories that we find in Alfonso X's astromagical literature – to justify the magical efficiency of these Kabbalistic talismans – cf. Davidson (1964: 11-13). On talismanic magic in other 15th century Hispano-Jewish sources, see also Eliezer Gutwirth (1989).

39. This shrewd observation, and the accompanying evidence from the Spanish *Mostrador*, originate in one of Prof. Bernard Septimus' extensive comments on an earlier draft of our thesis.

40. Cf. Nahmanides' *Sermon on Ecclesiastes* (1964: 1: 190). On this Kabbalistic motif, see also Moshe Idel (1983c).

(*VD* 1,28), there is, for example, an intriguing passage on the nature of evil spirits which reads as follows:

“E cómo algunos dixeron que eran engendrables e corruptibles, e que nascían e que morían, mas pusieron la duración de su vida ser muy luenga porque eran muy conjuntos a la synplicidad, ca dixeron que era de la materia del ayre e del fuego. E pusieron que avían grant conosçimiento de las cosas naturales por la delgadeza de su espíritu e por la ligereza de la materia. E fizolos venir en aquesta opinión que veyan por espiriencia mágica qu’el fumo de una yerva les plazía, e ésta encendida luego venían ...E de la otra parte veyan que eran ynvisibles ... e para esto ovo en el mundo secretos los quales no es lícito el hablar dellos” (*VD* 200).

This conception of evil spirits as living admixtures of air and fire, invisible demons with subtle bodies susceptible to decay and attracted to aromatic substances is ultimately traceable to the commentary on Lev 17:7 by another major Kabbalist: the Geronese polymath Moses ibn Nahman⁴¹. Of course, this Nahmanidean borrowing is inconsistent with Maimonides’ demonology, especially the *Guide*’s conception of Satan as the evil inclination (*MN* 3,22) also quoted by De la Torre in the very same chapter! But De la Torre’s departure from his Maimonidean source could be pointing, yet again, to the plausible mediation of a contemporary Jewish scholar. After all, Nahmanides’ demonology proved influential among Hispano-Jewish philosophers in the 15th century, including the aforementioned Joseph Albo (*Sefer ha-’Iqqarim* 3,8) and the Abraham Shalom (*Neveh Shalom* 2,1,29a)⁴².

41. Cf. Nahmanides’ commentary on Lev 17:7. The theory of demons sketched in *Visión* rehashes the main elements in Nahmanides’ conception of the Rabbinic אַיִרִים (their composition from air and fire, their invisibility, their subtleness, their perishability, even the necromantic reference). Salinas Espinosa recently suggested that this passage be connected to the author’s magical views on the Kabbalistic manipulation of Hebrew expounded elsewhere in *Visión* (1997: 51). However, she was unaware of its Hispano-Jewish origin in Nahmanides’ comment.

42. Finally, it may be noted that I have not located as yet another Spanish source from the 15th century documenting Nahmanides’ demonology (e.g. Moshe Arragel’s gloss on Lev 17:7 in the so-called *Biblia de Alba* –his explication on the אַיִרִים, which he renders as “diablos,” does not contain any references to Ramban’s account).

Finally, during the second half of the 15th century, an important school of *Kabbalah ma'asit* flourished in Spain before the Expulsion. This magico-Kabbalistic tradition also espouses the incantatory use of the Hebrew language and the divine names, aided by talismans and other magical devices, to bring down astro-spiritual forces and manipulate them in accordance with the Kabbalist's intention. This tradition is connected to a contemporary resurgence of Messianic fervor and the main source for its study is *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, a work of paramount significance for the history of Kabbalah as recently established by Moshe Idel in a series of essays (1981, 1983a, 1993). Its practitioners, following his description (1988b: 269), are particularly "interested in demonology and the use of coercive incantations to summon demons, angels, and even God" in order to hasten Messianic times. Albeit a later work, *Sefer ha-Meshiv* provides interesting parallels to some of the aforementioned Kabbalistic practices bolstered by De la Torre, for instance with its magical prescriptions for the correct recitation of the Great Name of 42 letters, a Kabbalistic method to clip the wings of the guardian angels of Christianity and Islam and usher the age of Redemption⁴³, resonating De la Torre's talismanic magic and the Kabbalistic usage of one same potent name in order to constrain presumably malignant spirits. Equally significant in *Visión Deleitable* is the explicit connection it draws between prophetic revelation and onomastic Kabbalah. De la Torre's suggestion evokes the pneumatic function of the recitation of divines names as a source of prophecy and revelation in *Sefer ha-Meshiv*.

Of course, unlike De la Torre, the Kabbalistic circle of the *Sefer ha-Meshiv* violently rejects Aristotelian physics and metaphysics as expounded

43. "By virtue of the power of the Great Name of Forty-Two Letters, I adjure you even against your will to have not the power to fly or do anything or to make any further accusation against the Israelite nation than you have done until now. I bind you and adjure you that you will have no more power to accuse Israel for all time. Rather, from this day forward, you will defend the Israelite nation ... so shall you and Rabbi Joseph do, both of you together ... and by this you will break the power of Samael and hasten the redemption in your time" (Idel 1981: 86).

by Maimonides (Idel 1993). This inconsistency is also revealing. De la Torre's selective borrowings from disparate sources do not always agree with his philosophical theology. His profession of Nahmanides' demonology, as noted before, is conspicuously un-Maimonidean. His Kabbalistic belief in the magical power of the Hebrew language is also incongruous with the Maimonidean views on its conventionality presented earlier on in the chapter on grammar⁴⁴. As the author's eclecticism demonstrates so clearly, unresolved contradictions almost inevitably ensue from inconsistent borrowings. Still, if the Kabbalistic-magical synthesis of *Sefer ha-Meshiv* reflects earlier Kabbalistic trends in 15th century Spain, these could provide yet another Hispano-Jewish context for the theme under consideration: Alfonso de la Torre's vehement defense of Kabbalistic name magic and the concomitant suggestion that the latter is a key to the "secrets" of prophecy which he learned from Maimonides.

III

A couple of brief remarks are finally in order.

First, since the 18th century, most of the Hispanicists that have paid scholarly attention to *Visión Deleytable* consistently identify its author with a native of the bishopric of Burgos who studied at the Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé, deeming him an inevitable product of Salamancan scholasticism⁴⁵. In light of our previous excursus and of other reasons we can not elaborate here, we are prone to accept, with some reservations, Marcel Bataillon's thoughtful suggestion: that, even as a student of San Bartolomé, Alfonso de la Torre's conception of philosophical learning, his un-Maimonidean dabblings in astrology, magic, and Kabbalah, and his implicit insertion in the intra-Judaic debate on the esoteric meaning of Maimonides' *Guide* bring him

44. See *VD* 1,3, pp. 111-2. De la Torre's departure from his Isidorian source in dealing with Adam's tongue in the grammatical lesson reflects Maimonides' defense of the conventionality of all languages, and Hebrew in particular, in his exegesis of Gen 2:20 in *MN* 2,30 –cf. Bernard Septimus (1994).

45. On the present state of biographical knowledge about De la Torre, see Salinas Espinosa (1997: 13-27) and Girón-Negrón (1997: 15-25).

closer intellectually to the learned 15th century “*aljamas*” of Tudela and Zaragoza than to the scholastic circles of Salamanca’s university⁴⁶.

Secondly, there is a more personal dimension to De la Torre’s astro-magical beliefs that a historian of religions could as well note in here. Judiciary astrology, sympathetic magic and onomastic Kabbalah represented efficacious means to manipulate linguistically the order of Creation and benefit from the natural influx of the heavenly *fados*. They offered ways to mitigate our sublunar vulnerability in a world susceptible to the catastrophic whims of nature and chance that De la Torre’s cosmology so vividly described⁴⁷. Such a defensive response to cosmological fears, which brings to mind the “terror of history” incisively evoked by Mircea Eliade (1954: 146-7)⁴⁸, could not have eluded the attention of his 15th century Spanish readers. It aligned them existentially.

46. See Girón Negrón (1997) and Bataillon (1950). Bataillon, of course, denied the identity of Alfonso de la Torre with the Salamanca bachelor on grounds that have proven inconclusive. We only claim that even if De la Torre went to San Bartolomé, which is the most likely but not an absolute certainty, his intellectual formation has deeper roots in 15th century Hispano-Jewish learning than ever acknowledged.

47. “Magic is the science of hope because it cultivates the human capacity to face the future –and all other forms of unknown, hidden reality. Magic allows hope to become a dominant, concrete force in structuring the world and restructuring time and space; through magic human hope allies itself with the forces that order the cosmos” (Lawrence Sullivan 1987: xi). For an anthropological appraisal of the whole issue of language and magic, see: Stanley Tambiah, (1985) and Kenneth Burke (1969).

48. Mircea Eliade makes a perceptive remark about the astrological dimensions of the Medieval cyclical theories as an atavistic expression of the myth of the eternal return that lends intelligibility to catastrophic events. His insight could also shed light on the Spanish receptivity to the allegories of Fortune as a cipher for chance and *fados* in 15th century literature.

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>VD</i>	Visión Deleytable
<i>DE</i>	Derekh Emunah
<i>MN</i>	Moreh Nebukhim
<i>SI</i>	Sefer ha-'Iqqarim
<i>MH</i>	Milhamot ha-Shem
<i>OH</i>	Or ha-Shem
<i>Etym</i>	Etymologiae

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