

THE MUSICAL BOOK:

JUDEO-ANDALUSI HERMENEUTICS IN THE *LIBRO DE BUEN AMOR*

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Since the middle of the last century, the fourteenth-century *Libro de buen amor* (*LBA*) has been at the center of several critical debates regarding the nature and extent of Western and Semitic (i.e., Arab or Hebrew) “influences” in Castilian society and culture. In these debates, the work and its author – Juan Ruiz, about whom we know next to nothing besides what is left to us in the folios of the *LBA* – is the emblematic representative of fourteenth-century Castile and Castilians.¹ Claims about the extent to which Juan Ruiz was familiar with, or perhaps even participated in, non-Castilian-speaking linguistic communities, non-Christian confessional communities, and/or non-“Spanish” ethnic communities have often been conflated with more universalized claims regarding fourteenth-century identity – themselves often tinged with modern national biases.² The *LBA*’s prose prologue, opening

¹ On the identity of Juan Ruiz see, Francisco J. Hernández; Hamilton, *Representing Others* 178 n3; Francisco Márquez Villanueva “La nueva biografía”.

² While Américo Castro (369-98) and María Rosa Lida de Malkiel (“Nuevas Notas” 22-31; *Dos obras maestras españolas* 30-35) found in the *LBA* traces of the Arab and Semitic *risalat* and *maqamat*, other critics, such as Otis Green (1:53-55), and G. B. Gybbon-Monypenny (63-67) turned to the Latin and European vernacular traditions to explain the work’s enigmatic thematic and structural forms. Echoes of these original positions also undergird more recent claims

verses and the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans are the focus of most of the critical claims regarding hermeneutics and authorial intent, and yet, simultaneously offer the best examples of the work's ambiguity and of the author's often contradictory claims regarding its meaning(s).

One of the most perplexing aspects of this opening material occurs in *copla* 70, when the book itself assumes the first-person narration that up to that point is identified exclusively with the voice of the author:

De todos instrumentos yo, libro só pariente:
bien o mal, qual puntares, tal te dirá çiertamente.
Qual tú dezir quisieres, ý faz punto, ý, ten te;
si me puntar sopieres, siempre me avrás en miente. (*copla* 70)³

The voice of the author-narrator, breaking with the authoritative frame constructed up to that point and addressing the audience directly, becomes that of the book itself, the “yo, libro”, which then compares itself to an instrument. The book's meaning and lessons will depend on the knowledge of the reader as interpreter; that is, this book/instrument will emit different sounds when played skillfully than when *puntado* by someone ignorant. Juan Ruiz masterfully plays with the multiple meanings of *puntar* and *instrumento* so that *instrumento* can be read as a musical instrument and *puntar* as the act of plucking a stringed instrument such as a harp or *vihuela*. Alternatively, *instrumento* could refer to the medieval scribe's writing instrument and *puntar* to both scribe and reader's act of punctuating the text – given that scribes, in an effort not to waste valuable parchment or paper often left the task of punctuating to the individual reader.

regarding the author's intentions and hermeneutic strategies made by those who see in Juan Ruiz's stated claims to truth traces of the Latin church father Augustine (Brownlee, De Looze, Spitzer, and Gerli, “Vías de interpretación” and “The Greeks, the Romans, and the Ambiguity of Signs”) and, in the work's deliberate ambiguity, a reflection of Latin reading practices (Brown 116-44; Dagenais 80-108). Similarly, those who position the *LBA* and its author as a product of Andalusí society and literary forms revive Castro and Lida de Malkiel's arguments concerning the author's intellectual indebtedness to motifs and forms originating in the Arabic and Hebrew literary traditions of the Iberian Peninsula. They also find the work's ambiguity contains the specter of Arabic and Hebrew rational philosophy as articulated in the works of Averroes and Maimonides (Márquez Villanueva, *Orígenes y sociología*; Wacks 181-93; Hamilton, *Representing Others*, “The *Libro de buen amor*” and “Rereading the Widow”).

³ Unless otherwise noted, all citations from the *LBA* are from Gybbon-Monypenny's edition.



None of the modern editions of the *LBA* gives a concrete contemporary fourteenth-century analogue to the unique and enigmatic metaphor of the talking instrumental book. Furthermore, several critics have questioned whether the instruments to which the book compares itself are in fact musical ones. In this study I claim that Juan Ruiz's metaphor of the book as a musical instrument and the reader as a musician or *intérprete* in *copla 70* is analogous and possibly intellectually indebted to poems included in medieval Franco-Iberian Hebrew manuscript copies of Maimonides's most influential work, the *Guide of the Perplexed*. These poems similarly compare the *Guide* to stringed instruments and its readers to the players of those instruments.

***Copla 70* and its commentators**

Copla 70, which is found in the *LBA manuscripts G* and *S* and the Portuguese fragments (*P*), has been the object of critical commentary in some of the twentieth century's most important studies of the *LBA*, including Américo Castro's *España en su historia*, María Rosa Lida de Malkiel's "Nuevas notas", and Leo Spitzer's "En torno al arte del Arcipreste de Hita", as well as the subject of no fewer than five articles since 1977 – a modern exegesis that speaks both to the difficulty of the stanza's language as well as to its importance in the interpretation of the *LBA* itself.

Castro (408-10), Louise O. Vasvári ("De todos instrumentos" 1770), Ottavio di Camillo (241-45), Ana María Álvarez Pellitero, and Luis Jenaro-MacLennan ("*Libro de buen amor* 69-70") have all pointed out *copla 70*'s relationship to the surrounding *coplas*, emphasizing the formal and thematic similarities of *copla 69*, that speaks of the hidden meanings of the *Libro*'s "coplas pintadas", and *copla 70* where the use of *puntos* and the act of *puntar* builds on *copla 69*'s imagery.⁴

Several of the more recent critical claims regarding the meaning of *copla 70* hinge on what exactly *puntar* and *instrumentos* denote in this context. Lida de Malkiel ("Nuevas Notas" 31) and Julio Cejador y Frauca (34) maintain

⁴ The extant manuscripts *G* and *S* differ in their use of some of the key terminology, in both *coplas*, particularly in 69 with the variant readings *falsedat/fealdat* (69b) and *puntos/vientos* (69c). For a comparison of the readings of *G*, *S* and *P*, see Jenaro-MacLennan 351.

that they are terms taken from contemporary musical practice, while critics such as Jenaro-MacLennan (351-55), Mauricio Molho (320 n6) and di Camillo (240-42) assert that such a reading is a deceptive *lectio faciliior*, and both *puntos* and *instrumentos* refer to other now lost scribal and poetic practices.

Jenaro-MacLennan asserts that the imagery of *puntos*, *coplas* and *instrumentos* in *coplas* 69 and 70 relate to the *ars punctandi*, the Italian scribal practice of adding punctuation to legal and juridical codices (“*Libro de buen amor* 69-70” 357-64).⁵ Vasvári, Molho and Álvarez Pellitero are more comfortable than Jenaro-MacLennan with the possibility of multivalence in the passage and with the idea that the author may be utilizing the terms *puntar*, *punto* and *pintadas/puntados* precisely because of their rich semantic possibilities. For Vasvári, *puntar* (70b) and *puntos* (69c) also refers to the penis and form part of a ribald riddle taken from the oral tradition (“De todos instrumentos” 1774-75). On the other hand, Molho posits the origins of the image of the *LBA*’s talking book as the Latin riddle tradition that entered into the medieval oral tradition “y se ha mantenido en el folklore hasta la actualidad” (321). Molho offers analogues of other talking inanimate objects, including a talking lamp, scissors, and wheat (320-21), but finds no existing example of a talking book. Instead, he hypothesizes what riddle *copla* 70 would answer.

These attempts to resolve the difficulties presented by the “yo, libro” of *copla* 70 turn to Western cultural contexts for an explanation; however, the critics either offer no analogue (in Molho’s interpretation, merely suggesting that it may have existed), or require the reader to overlook the verse’s immediate meaning of *instrumentos* as musical in favor of a more esoteric meaning (sexual in the case of Vasvári; legal in the case of Jenaro-MacLennan). While such readings may in fact have been included in the range of possible meanings conceived of by the author, the most obvious and explicit meaning, that the *instrumentos* are musical and that *puntar* refers to the act of playing

⁵ Pepe Rey, although not having direct knowledge of Jenaro-MacLennan’s argument, supports the claim that the instruments in 70a are legal documents (5). He argues that the *puntos* of *copla* 70 cannot be interpreted as musical because the *coplas* of the *LBA* are not accompanied by musical notation (6) but further argues that Juan Ruiz does use *puntos* in other *coplas* to refer to the chords played on a stringed instrument such as a guitar (6-7).



them, is echoed in contemporary Iberian textual tradition in both Romance and Hebrew.⁶

In roughly contemporary Castilian texts such as the *Libro de Alexandre*, the author clearly relates *puntos* to music “Sé por arte de música por natura cantar; / sé fer sabrosos puntos, las voces acordar” (*copla* 44ab). This also occurs within the text of the *LBA* itself, in *coplas* 1228 and 1231, where “el corpudo laúd, que tiene punto a la trisca” (1228c) and in which the *vihuela* is described as having “bozes dulzes, saborosas, claras e bien *puntadas*” (1231c). In these examples *puntar* and its derivatives *puntos* and *puntadas* clearly pertain to the vocabulary of music – and thus the musical nature of these terms cannot be excluded as a possibility in *copla* 70. The examples from the *LBA* and the *Libro de Alexandre*, in which *puntar*, *puntos*, *puntadas* are specifically related to stringed instruments, offer further evidence from Castile that resonate with the example of the lyre and lute from the Hebrew tradition.

Before turning to the Hebrew tradition we may ask why such fuss over a few words in a single *copla*, when in fact there are many obscure passages in the *Libro de buen amor*? The answer lies in the importance of *copla* 70, in the interpretation of the book as a whole. The book (and the language for which it is a *sinecdoque*) has the power to produce multiple meanings, according to the understanding, the experiences and the abilities of the reader. This idea is echoed in the *coplas* of the entire first section of the *Libro* and in the prose prologue, where the narrator explains that some will use this book in order to sin and others to “obrar bien” (110). The idea is reiterated in *coplas* 64-69 where the Archpriest tells us how the book speaks to all (“a todos habla”, *copla* 67a), whoever they may be, but that only the intelligent (“los cuerdos”) will understand it well, while rash young men (“los mançebos livianos”) will not understand its hidden meanings (“razones encubiertas”, *copla* 68a) or its painted stanzas (“coplas pintadas”, 69b) except as lessons of inordinate desire (“el loco amor”). The same theme appears in the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans that precedes *copla* 70; its two interlocutors’ oral debate

⁶ For a discussion of the type of music alluded to in *copla* 70, whether medieval polyphonic or popular melodic music, see Rey.

produces multiple interpretations, anticipating the *LBA*'s claims in *copla* 70 that the *Libro* speaks well or poorly according to the merits or intentions of its readers. Even the *coplas* that immediately follow *copla* 70, in which Juan Ruiz interrogates Aristotelian philosophy with his own comic exegesis, invite the reader to question the way in which the text should be read.

The hermeneutic function stressed in the *LBA*'s opening material from the prose prologue to *copla* 73 has been the focus of contemporary studies such as those of Gerli, Dagenais, Brown and Brownlee, who show how Juan Ruiz uses the metaphor of the book as instrument to very cleverly comment upon the underlying problem of the entire *LBA* – how the reader should interpret the lessons on love presented by the Archpriest. This focus on interpretation is at the heart of the Judeo-Andalusi literary tradition, which in this context has received scant critical attention by Hispanists. Not only is the role of the reader and his/her intentions central to the debate about reading that lay at the heart of the so-called Maimonidean controversy, but the very image of the book as an instrument that produces sound according to the abilities of the person playing/reading is, as mentioned, also part of the textual tradition of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed*.

Playing the *Guide* / Harping on the *Moreh*

In two manuscripts currently housed in the Oriental Collection of the British Library, Regium 16-A-XI and Harley 5525, Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* is accompanied by poems comparing it to a musical instrument. In order to understand the attitude expressed in these poems, a brief discussion of Maimonides's *Guide of the Perplexed* and the controversy it elicited in the Jewish communities of Iberia and France is merited. The *Guide* is addressed to readers baffled by the conflict of natural philosophy – or rather, Aristotelian rationalism – and religious beliefs, traditions and writings, especially the Scripture and its exegesis in the Jewish tradition, the Midrash. The *Guide* is the most important of Maimonides's religio-philosophic works. It best represents his goal of reconciling philosophic reason, which originated in the classical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle and later developed in medieval Muslim philosophy, with Jewish religious intellectual traditions (Caputo 19-



52; Ivory). Arab philosophers who dealt with metaphysics realized its danger and spoke in their treatises of different types of readers and students, among them, women, children and less intelligent people for whom the study of philosophy and metaphysics would be harmful, or worse, destructive to their religious faith, since they were incapable of reconciling rational philosophy with their religious traditions, especially the apparently illogical aspect of the Scripture (Fakhry 187-239). As James A. Diamond asserts, Maimonides, imitating the rabbis in the Midrash, addresses his work to readers of various levels and abilities, offering *exempla* to the least capable readers who should not attempt philosophical inquiry, while hiding in the *exempla* more profound lessons directed toward his real audience, those sophisticated readers who understood the apparent contradiction between philosophy and theology (1-11). Maimonides denied this contradiction, explaining that the biblical and Midrashic texts must be read by the wise and understood allegorically – their literal meaning being only for those incapable of rational thought. Clearly this orientation to Holy Scripture and the rabbinic tradition evoked strong sentiment in the Jewish community. This is reflected in the textual transmission of the *Guide*, which often includes all manner of pro- and anti-Maimonidean literature associated with the controversy it evoked, including the two Hebrew poems that I discuss below (Silver; Einbinder *Trial* 14-20; Lehmann).

“Emet *Moreh*” is the first poem that compares the *Guide* to a musical instrument. Although it has survived in the Hebrew tradition and has been edited and published in at least two nineteenth-century collections of poems on the subject of the *Guide* (Eleazar Ashkenazi’s *Divrei Hakhamim* and Moritz Stenishneider’s *Kovetz al yad*), it remains anonymous. The musical instrument in the poem is a *kinnor*, a biblical Hebrew term used for the lyre:⁷

⁷ Joachim Braun notes that the *kinnor* is mentioned in several biblical books, including Genesis, 1 and 2 Samuel, Kings, Psalms, Job, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. “The *kinnor* is a central organological concept in the Old Testament. . . . the term appears in literary sources long before the Old Testament was written: *kinaratim* (pl. of *kinaru*: ‘lyre’) – are first mentioned in a document of the 18th century BCE found at Mari (now Tell Hariri, Iraq). . . . Although the Septuagint and the Vulgate show uncertainty regarding the translation of the term, and despite the centuries-old tradition of depicting, both in writing and iconography, the *kinnor* as the ‘harp of David’, modern scholars are in no doubt that the instrument was in fact a lyre. . . . The identification of the *kinnor*

The truth of the *Guide* is a truth such that the ways its bows are
 sounded (are) like a *kinnor* (lyre).
 Its strings are tightened / strung according to wisdom.
 But when the fool who does not know how to play comes,
 He plays it and destroys the strings / corrupts its excellences.⁸

אמת מורה אמת קרך ככנור
 יתריו בו לפי חכמה קשורים
 ובא פתי ולא ידע לנגן
 ובגן בו והשחית היתרים

Fig. 1. Transcription of *Regium* 16-A-XI, f241^r.

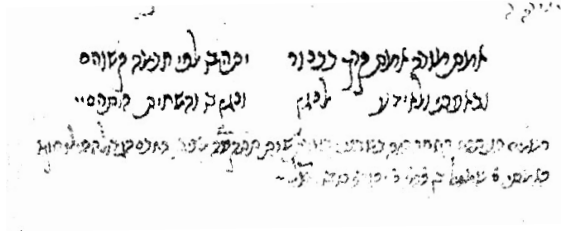


Fig. 2. *Regium* 16.A.XI, f241^r. Copyright the British Library. All rights reserved.

as a lyre is confirmed by archaeological evidence: more than 30 depictions of lyres date from the period relevant to the biblical scriptures in ancient Israel/Palestine, while not a single find has been discovered relating to any other kind of string instrument” (par. 16-19).

⁸ All translations are my own, with many thanks to Jonathan Decter, Racheli Morris, and Hadas Livnat for their assistance with the translation of this poem. In my translation I have opted to substitute *dalet-resh-kaf* for the *kof-resh-kaf* in the manuscript, since no logical reading of *kof-resh-kaf* made sense in the context of the poem (nor could any Hebrew root *kof-resh-kaf* be found). Because the text is not vocalized in the manuscript, several passages are ambiguous and lend themselves to multiple meanings, including the *yeter* of lines 2 and 4, which may be a play on the different meanings that include “string”, “excess” or “excellence”. Similarly the verb *hishhit* in line 4 means “to destroy”, but it also means “to corrupt” or “pervert”. Jonathan Decter kindly offered a preliminary and self-admittedly approximate vocalization, which is included in the Appendix.



It is included in Regium 16-A-XI, a fourteenth-century Iberian manuscript of the *Guide of the Perplexed* that contains other texts and scribal evidence that may help in identifying the poem's creator and its intended readership. In all likelihood the manuscript precedes the *LBA* by some twenty years if the date included by the scribe, Marheshwan A.M. 5068 (1307 A.D.), is accurate. This poem accompanies a copy of the Hebrew translation that Samuel Ibn Tibbon made of the *Guide* c. 1190 (Margoliouth 3:214) and follows the transcription of part of the letter that Maimonides wrote to Ibn Tibbon about his translation (fol. 241). It is one of the four poems included in the manuscript that both attack and praise the *Guide*. The other are two poems attributed to the thirteenth-century poet Meshullam Dapiera, "Yirbu Mzimotei ve lo nigmaru" on fol. 2^r (Brody numbers this poem as 44 in Dapiera 99) and "*Moreh Nebukhim* hahares" on fol. 3^r (Dapiera 39, Ashkenazi 78-79); the fourth is an anonymous poem in praise of the *Guide*, "Nefesh hasid" on fol. 242 (Margoliouth 215). The inclusion of these four poems shows that the "Emet *Moreh*" was part of a larger corpus of poetry comparing the *Guide* to a musical instrument. It also indicates that the copyist was familiar with this corpus, which he considered part of *Guide's* contemporary exegesis; that is, he includes it along with other exegetical material such as Maimonides's own comments on the Hebrew translation.

While in the "Emet *Moreh*" of Regium 16.A.XI the term used for the lyre to which Maimonides's *Guide* is compared is the Hebrew *kinnor*, in the second poem, found in Harley 5525, the *Guide* is compared to a *nevel*, another Hebrew term used for a stringed musical instrument akin to the lyre.

A Guide, such that those who follow its paths / rules will be the
elect / chosen

In my opinion it is like the *nevel* (lyre)

A wise man who plays it makes it his own / accepts its logic

While a corrupt soul only destroys its string

Verily a fool comes near to play on it, shattering it to pieces
with his folly, like the destruction of a hoodlum.

מורה אשר מנו דרכיו גבהו דומה לעיני הוא אל הנבל
 חכם לנגן בו ינגן יאמץ רוח נבאה בל ישחת חבל
 אמנם אויל יקרב לנגן בו ינפ-- צנו בסלכותו כשבר נבל

Fig. 3. Transcription of Harley 5525, f17^r.

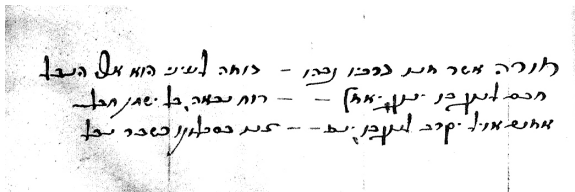


Fig. 4. Harley 5525 f17^r. Copyright the British Library. All rights reserved.

Here the *Guide* is described as being played (*lenegen*) like a lyre (*nevel*) with strings or chords (*hevel*) that can be destroyed.⁹ In this poem the wise man (*hacham*) and the fool (*avil*) offer a further point of comparison not only with he who knows how to play (*puntar*), mentioned in *copla* 70 of the *LBA*, but also with the wise/sane man (*cuerto*) and the young man (*mancebo*) that Juan Ruiz mentions in *copla* 68. But the comparison of the *Guide* to the musical instrument, the lyre or *nevel*, is most compelling. The term *nevel* is biblical, used to refer to the instrument played by David in the Psalms. This type of instrument, no longer considered a harp, is more likely some type of contemporary stringed instrument such as a *lyra*, *rebec* or fiddle.¹⁰ The

⁹ This imagery recalls that of the thirteenth-century poet Meshullam Dapiera, who in another poem also describes the *Guide* as having chords that are torn, “Listen to the words of one who wishes well of the *Moreh*, even if in his eyes there are many deficiencies. Who wishes for the cords (*hevel*) which are strong in it, even though in certain places the cords are weak” (Dapiera 90, Brody poem number 38; trans. Silver 187).

¹⁰ The Greek *lyra* had fewer strings, but was in use before the ninth century. The *rebec*, a European derivative of the Arab *rebab*, is found in Europe in the fourteenth century (Leipp 16-17). According to Braun, the term *nevel* is found in many biblical books, including: 1 and 2 Samuel, Kings, Psalms, 1 and 2 Chronicles and Isaiah. Recent evidence suggests that the biblical *nevel* was a lyre – a stringed instrument played with the fingers – and not a harp. “The translations given in



Maimonidean controversy that gave rise to this Hebrew poem was concurrent with the rise of troubadour lyric in the South of France, suggesting that the ancient Hebrew term *nebel* was being used by this thirteenth-century poet to describe not a biblical instrument, but a lyre/fiddle used by musicians in his environment.

This poem, like the “Emet *Moreh*” in Regium 16-A-XI, is included in the manuscript just before Maimonides’s *Guide* in the translation of Samuel ibn Tibbon. Margoliouth, basing his opinion on paleographical evidence, dates Harley 5525 to the fifteenth century,¹¹ unlike Regium 16-A-XI, which predates the *LBA*. However, a case can be made for an earlier date for the texts being copied. While the hand in which this poem is written indicates that it is a scribal addition to the *Guide*, perhaps from the sixteenth century, the fact that this same hand makes a series of textual emendations/corrections in the *Guide* suggests that the scribe was utilizing another version of the *Guide* as a model, and it is very possible that he was also copying this poem from that same, now unknown earlier version of the *Guide*.¹² However, the Harley 5525

the Septuagint and Vulgate are not consistent (*nabla*, *psaltiron*, *organon*, *kinira*, *lyra*, *kithara*). ... The function of the *nebel* was similar to that of the *kinnor* (significantly, the two instruments are nearly always mentioned together). Like the *kinnor* it was made of wood, but “unlike the *kinnor*, the *nebel* seems to have had 12 strings and was played with the fingers (Josephus, vii.12.3) rather than a plectrum. ... Although the instrument has been widely interpreted as a harp, this theory is not supported by archaeological finds as there is no evidence for any pre-Hellenistic harps in the territory of ancient Israel/Palestine. In the present state of research, the hypothesis put forward by Bayer is convincing: the *nebel* was a local form of lyre that underwent very little Hellenization, and had a resonator resembling the kind of leather bag used to hold fluids; it produced a loud sound, had more and thicker strings than the *kinnor*, was played without a plectrum and served as a tenor or bass instrument. The depiction of lyres on the Bar Kokhba coinage may be taken as iconographic evidence. Recently, a crucial proof of the interpretation of the biblical *nebel* as a lyre has come to light: a stone carving of the Roman period was discovered at Dion in Greece, showing the first instance of text and image side by side: a relief of a lyre next to the carved wording of a hymn of praise on the *nabla*” (Braun par. 26-29).

¹¹ Margoliouth describes the square block text as probably being from the fifteenth-century and of French origin, and the emendations being “a cursive Italian hand of the sixteenth or seventeenth century” (217).

¹² The same hand makes a series of marginal comments alluding to ‘Arama’s *‘Akedah*, and Isaac ben Judah Abravanel’s commentaries. ‘Arama (b. 1420) was active in the Crown of Aragon –in Zamora, Fraga, and Tarragona– before moving to Naples after the 1492 Expulsion. Abravanel was born in Lisbon in 1437 and died in Italy in 1508 (Friedländer xxix). These allusions suggest that the person making the emendations pertained to, or had contact with, the circle of fifteenth-

poem, although clearly using the same image of book as instrument, cannot conclusively be determined to predate the *LBA*.

Although the Harley 5525 and Regium 16.A.XI poems share the image of the musical book and the reader as player, they differ from each other almost entirely with respect to their vocabulary and formal structure. This illustrates that in the Judeo-Spanish tradition no single poem was associated with the *Guide*, but instead scribes customarily chose from a corpus of such poems that warn about its interpretation. In these two poems the rhyme is different: the Harley 5525 poem rhyming in *-evel*, and Regium 16.A.XI in *-irim*. Also, both the metrical pattern and the vocabulary differ. The fool is an *avil* and *ruh neveah* in the Harley 5525 poem and a *peti* in Regium 16.A.XI. The instruments to which the *Guide* is compared are also different, a *nevel* or plucked lyre in the Harley 5525 poem and a *kinnor*, a stringed instrument played with a bow in Regium 16.A.XI.

Christopher Page notes that in the early fourteenth century, vernacular terms for contemporary instruments and practice such as *viella*, *rubeba*, and *quitarra sarracenic*a made their debut in Latin writings (52-54). By the period during which both the Regium 16.A.XI manuscript was copied and the *LBA* was composed, learned clerics such as Petrus de Palude had begun to hypothesize that the *vihuela* was the same instrument described in the Torah as a *kinnor* (55). Contemporaries of this Jewish poet, Provençal troubadours writing in the vernacular from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries often accompanied their own poetry with the *vihuela* (18-23). The late twelfth-century Catalan poet Guirat de Cabreira attacks a fellow troubadour for his inability to compose and to play the *vihuela* (18), relating the lack of such knowledge to poor training and a deficiency in the poet's familiarity with literary texts and traditions.

A similar ethics of interpretation is expressed in the Harley 5525 poem where the poet distinguishes between the wise person who understands the text/knows how to play the instrument and the fool who does not. The Regium

century Jewish intellectuals active in the Crown of Aragon and described by Eleazar Gutwirth (82-84). As Gutwirth shows, these intellectuals maintained active epistolary exchanges with Iberian Christian humanists and shared the latter's cultural milieu (80-87).



16.A.XI poem, though, seems to be referring to a fairly technical knowledge of how different types of bowing, in combination with the tautness of the strings, will produce either pleasant or unpleasant sounds. While this Hebrew poem relates the art of playing to that of correct interpretation (as in the *LBA*), other late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century exegetes and intellectuals began to relate the techniques used by good *vihuela* or stringed-instrument players to a grasp of Aristotelian rationalism. As Page points out, Albertus Magnus –one of the first Western scholastics to read and embrace Maimonides’s work– is one of a group of Aristotelian intellectuals, centered around the University of Paris in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, for whom skill in the playing of stringed instruments, “had become immersed in a savant ethos owing much to the recovery of Aristotle’s philosophy in the thirteenth century” (59). In his commentary on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, Albertus Magnus repeatedly uses the act of playing the *vihuela* as exemplary of various points made regarding the experience and communicability of principles.¹³

Page notes:

Albertus, following Avicenna, and sharing with him a rigorous Aristotelian terminology, classifies *viella*-playing as a *scientia*: a skill which rests upon a knowledge of principles, and since principles, by definition, are “intelligible things” (*intelligibilia*), fiddling can be taught. Hence Albertus’s careful choice of words “the science of arrangng strings *teaches* how to adjust”. (57-58)

According to this theory held by French Aristotelians, an imperfect grasp of the rational science of playing would manifest itself in improper adjustment – just what the fool is described as doing in the Regium 16.A.XI poem. Albertus’s treatment is one of several that illustrate the transition of *vihuela* playing (and the ways contemporaries conceived of that playing) from the courtly ethos of Occitan troubadours to the “philosophical pastime” of the urban, university trained clerics, a milieu in all likelihood much closer to that of both the scribe of Regium 16.A.XI and Juan Ruiz. Steeped in the philosophic writings of the Arabo-Andalusi and Judeo-Andalusi traditions (including Maimonides, whose *Guide* was available in Latin in the thirteenth century), the connection such clerics make between Aristotelian rationalism

¹³ See Albertus Magnus, *Beati Alberti Magni Opera Omnia* 7:4.

and the intellectual ability to produce “correct” interpretations is striking and highly suggestive both for the Hebrew exegetical poetry considered here and for the *LBA*.

Meshullam Dapiera and the Maimonidean Controversy

While these two Hebrew poems and *copla* 70 of the *LBA* may indeed point to a shared knowledge of the scholastic tradition relating the science of playing stringed instruments to Aristotelian rational philosophy, Regium 16.A.XI offers further clues concerning the Hebrew exegetical poetic tradition’s cultural milieu. In the manuscript’s colophon the name of the scribe has been erased, but it appears on folio 225 as Meshullam, possibly the Iberian poet Meshullam ben Shlomo Dapiera (1175-c. 1260) (*Margoliouth* 215).¹⁴ This Meshullam would make sense as copyist of a Hebrew translation of the *Guide*, given that he was “one of the leading anti-Maimonists of the first half of the thirteenth century” and “poetic champion of the Tsarfati rabbis [rabbis of France]” (*Lehmann* 133-34).¹⁵ However, Meshullam Dapiera is thought to have died sometime after 1260, and our manuscript is dated to 1307, making such an attribution doubtful. Nevertheless, the copyist who compiled the Maimonidean material and the poetry both attacking and praising it in Regium 16.A.XI would be someone whose intellectual profile was similar to Dapiera’s. As mentioned earlier, one of Dapiera’s poems is included on folio 2^r, tying this poet who wrote on the same subject to the manuscript, even if he is not the scribe, and hinting at the manuscript’s cultural context (*Margoliouth* 215).¹⁶

Dapiera is a fascinating intellectual best known for composing several poems on the *Guide* similar in nature to the “*Emet Moreh*” in Regium 16.A.XI and for being a member of a group of poets and intellectuals in Girona associated with Nahmanides (1194-1270), one of the most important of thirteenth-

¹⁴ Lehmann notes that “he was still active during the Mongol conquests of 1258-60” (134).

¹⁵ Silver points out, however, that Meshullam Dapiera, “in his more controlled moments . . . was prepared to praise Maimonides’s piety and legal competence as well as some of his philosophic ideas”, offering quotes in praise of Maimonides from several of Dapiera’s poetry (184).

¹⁶ This poem can be found in Dapiera, 39 (Brody has given it the number 15) and Ashkenazi, 80.



century Iberian Jews (Schirmann 295-98; Fleischer 37).¹⁷ Like Juan Ruiz, what little else is known about Meshullam comes from his literary works (Lehmann 134). Peter Cole describes Dapiera's poetry as combining elements of Judeo-Andalusi and the Rabbinic traditions.

The fifty poems of Meshullam [Dapiera] that have come down to us are characterized by their density and at times obscurity, their supple manipulation of the *qasida* form, their innovative use of rabbinic as opposed to biblical diction, their complication of perspective, and –in their polemical mode– their subtle satiric strategies. (Cole 229)

One of these satiric strategies is, like the deceptive narrator of the *LBA* carefully claiming that some of the stories are not true (i.e., never happened to him), the adoption of “the distinctive *satiric* persona of the ‘lying poet’” (Brann 143).¹⁸ Peter Cole describes this strategy as the adoption of a mask “that allows him free rein to temporize in his verse” (143). According to Lehmann, this temporizing involved attacking not only Maimonides's *Guide*, but the Jewish rationalists who defended it, including even Nahmanides after the latter appealed to the rabbis of France to repeal their *herem*, or ban of the *Guide* (142-48).

Among Dapiera's known corpus of forty-nine poems, several deal with Maimonides' *Guide*. In the anonymous Regium 16.A.XI poem those who are unskilled are designated as *peta'im* (foolish ones) –a term favored by Dapiera, who used it to describe the “common believers”. Lehmann points out that Dapiera paints the *peti* as unsophisticated, simple (sincere) believers only thought to be fools by the *hachamim*, or manipulating rationalists (139). The juxtaposition of the *peta'im* (believers according to Lehmann) and the

¹⁷ On Dapiera's relationship to Nahmanides, see Fleischer 37; Moshe Idel 56; Silver 183. On Dapiera's sparse biography, see Silver 182 n3. Heinrich Gross believes Meshullam Dapiera is mentioned by Yedaya Bedersi under the name “En Vidas”. He maintains that Dapiera is of Spanish origin (146). Nahmanides, although sympathetic to the anti-Maimonideans, remained diplomatic as a peacemaker between those who supported the *Guide* and those opposed to it (Einbinder, *Beautiful Death* 87; Lehmann 142-48).

¹⁸ Dapiera declares himself the “lying poet” in one of his poems: “They asked me: O wise one, who is it that doesn't distinguish good from bad, who sings the praises of high and mighty, while his heart investigates and weighs the truth. I answered: It is I, my friends, I am the lying poet” (92; trans. Lehmann 137).

hachamim is also found in the Regium 16.A.XI poem (Dapiera 16:17).¹⁹ The use of these terms in a similar context indicates that the Regium 16.A.XI poem was in all likelihood composed by someone familiar with Dapiera's and the other anti-Maimunist poets' work. However, while Dapiera deploys these terms in an overt critique of the *Guide*, and one such poem is included in Regium 16.A.XI, the anonymous poem that uses the terms *peti* and *hachamim* and which compares the *Guide* to the *kinnor* is not clearly critical. Instead of attacking the *Guide*, this poetic voice states that the *Guide* as instrument will not respond fully to those readers who, like the *peti*, do not have the skill to correctly understand it (Margoliouth 215). In fact, the anonymous poem encapsulates the issue at the crux of the *Guide* and the controversy surrounding it.

Moritz Steinschneider includes both the anonymous poem in the Regium 16.A.XI manuscript and the anonymous poem in Harley 5525 with those of Dapiera and some seventy others under the rubric of "Against the *Guide*" (1-32).²⁰ These two poems, like others by Dapiera, belong to a small body of what Einbinder calls "satirical epigrams" (*Beautiful Death* 87). The existence of some seventy-seven poems on the *Guide* show us that poetry was cultivated as a genre for exegesis, at least in the case of the *Guide*.²¹ Lehmann pointed out that until 1981, critical appraisals of the Maimonidean Controversy suffered from "an almost exclusive focus on the ideological components of the pre- and anti-Maimunist positions" at the expense of the "specifically literary forms in which the controversy found its expression" (133). Einbinder has looked at other poems attacking the *Guide*, as well as rejoinders in defense of the *Guide* (Regium 16.A.XI contains both types). One of the most outstanding characteristics of these satirical poems is the fact that a number "address Maimonides' books, specifically the *Guide*, as personified objects of praise or wrath" (Einbinder, *Beautiful Death* 87). Einbinder singles out two poems by Dapiera. In the first the *Guide* is given a mouth which has talked too much:

¹⁹ For the complete poem see Dapiera, 16-18. He uses *peta'im* on line 10; *hachamim* on line 17.

²⁰ For detailed studies of this anti-Maimunist poetry see Lehmann; Einbinder *Trial*; and Fleischer.

²¹ There is a lesser-known tradition of Latin poetic exegesis that survives in various forms from the fifth through the thirteenth century studied by Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann.



Oh, *Guide to the Perplexed*, be silent and shut your mouth! These are things we have never heard before now. / Those who say Scripture is allegory, and its Prophet [a man of] dreams, shall bear their sin. (trans. Einbinder, *Trial by Fire* 18)²²

Another of Dapiera's poems similarly describes the *Guide* as a speaking book:

Now there is a book which speaks to him [the man 'who desires the absence of restraint' of the preceding line] in welcome trivial terms. (trans. Silver 187).²³

The exegetical poetry arising out of the thirteenth-century Maimonidean controversy is evidence of a Franco-Iberian tradition of Hebrew satirical poetry in which not only is the book (the *Guide*) given a voice, but as the Regium 16.A.XI and Harley 5525 poems illustrate, it is also compared to a musical, stringed instrument. These are close and extremely suggestive analogues to the enigmatic *copla* 70 found in the *LBA*, an Iberian work composed within a hundred years of the Hebrew poems.

Juan Ruiz might be alluding to this tradition of Hebrew poetry, specifically that of Judeo-Iberian moralists who engage with Maimonides's seminal work. Critics of the *Guide* such as Dapiera take issue not only with specific points made in the *Guide*, but with Maimonides's approach to Jewish Scripture and to the Jewish tradition.²⁴ Maimonides's reforming, or for some revolutionary, approach to tradition and exegesis served as the underlying driving force for the composition of the *Guide*. Diamond describes the *Guide* as "a

²² For the Hebrew version, see Dapiera 39 and Brody poem number 15.

²³ For the Hebrew version, see Dapiera 54, Brody poem number 24:18. This personification of the speaking book figures not only in the context of the Maimonidean controversy, but in the larger representation of Jewish books in general during the thirteenth century; Einbinder shows how Jewish scholars employed the motif of the personified book as an object of attack, but also as a model of martyrdom (*Beautiful Death*). The burning of the *Guide* at Montpellier in 1232 (at the instigation of Nahmanides's cousin, Yonah Gerondi) and later of the Talmud (witnessed by Albertus Magnus in Paris in 1243) inspired poems in which the burnt books are personified as sacrificed martyrs of the faith (Einbinder, *Beautiful Death* 87). Hayyim Schirmann posits that the burning of the *Guide* is a catalyst for Dapiera to change opinion and to switch to Maimonides's side (296). Lehmann thinks this is apocryphal (150 n25).

²⁴ For a detailed study of the specifics that anti-Maimonists such as Dapiera and Nahmanides leveled against the *Guide*, see Silver 158-98.

philosophical commentary that provides an exegetical master key allowing the devout Jew to read his sacred texts comfortably alongside the current philosophical *Sitz im Leben*, or cultural context (31). Maimonides argued for a more open, flexible reading of scripture that allowed the individual Jewish reader to fit scripture into his personal cultural context. Instead of literal or fundamental readings of sometimes obscure passages, Maimonides argued for context and posed that sometimes the biblical text is metaphorical and not meant to be read literally. The relativism or contingency suggested by such figurative readings of scripture was troubling to many Jewish religious scholars in Spain, Provence and France, as was the related notion suggested by Maimonides that such metaphorical readings were only one of the several possible meanings contained within the biblical text which, much like Maimonides's own work, was conscientiously designed to accommodate the varying skills of its many readers. Scripture (like Maimonides's own works) consisted of texts that could be read in different ways according to the differing skills and abilities of their readers (Ravitzky 300-07; Silver 188-90). Maimonides famously advocates including lessons in parables for the "common multitudes" incapable of understanding or lacking in the rational skills necessary for the more complex lessons of the Torah.²⁵ Accordingly, the author must deploy different techniques, such as allegory and metaphor, to communicate to readers of different abilities: "In speaking about very obscure matters it is necessary to conceal some parts and to disclose others ... In such cases the vulgar must in no way be aware of the contradiction; the author accordingly uses some device to conceal it by all means" (Maimonides, *Guide I, Introduction*, 18-19).²⁶

Maimonides's hermeneutics is one of multivalency – multiple meanings for multiple readers. This ethos echoes the interpretive strategies promulgated

²⁵ "As for the welfare of the soul, it consists in the multitude's acquiring correct opinions corresponding to their respective capacity. Therefore some of them [namely, the opinions] are set forth explicitly and some of them are set forth in parables. For it is not within the nature of the common multitudes that its capacity should suffice for apprehending the subject matter as it is" (Maimonides, *Guide III:27*, 510).

²⁶ Maimonides further notes that there are some "very obscure parables occurring in the books of prophets, but not explicitly identified as such". See Sara Klein-Braslavy for specific examples of how Maimonides applied his hermeneutic strategies to biblical parables.



in the *LBA*. The *LBA* iterates on several occasions that it, too, is written for different readers who will take away very different readings of it. The most famous is the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans that precedes *copla* 70, in which the public debate argued with gestures leads to radically different interpretations. As a transition between the *exemplum* and *copla* 70, Juan Ruiz informs us,

En general a todos fabla la escriptura:
 los cuerdos con buen sesso entenderán la cordura;
 los mançebos livianos guarden se de locura:
 escoja lo mejor el de buena ventura. (*copla* 67)

This *copla* recalls Maimonides's statement from the *Guide* about the understanding of the common multitudes. Parallels with Maimonides's hermeneutics continue, for, in the next *copla*, just as Maimonides maintains that those endowed with reason will ascertain the work's hidden meanings, Juan Ruiz asserts that he has concealed his lessons on "buen amor" in the book of the same name:

Las de buen amor son rrazones encubiertas:
 trabaja do fallares las sus señales ciertas.
 Si la rrazón entiendes o en el sesso açiertas,
 non dirás mal del libro que agora rrefiertas. (*copla* 68)

The nature of what must be concealed –the deeper philosophical truths unsuitable for the common multitude– was for Maimonides (and arguably for Juan Ruiz) the Aristotelian view of the natural world. Maimonides, although disputing some of Aristotle's claims regarding Creation and the nature of God, felt Aristotle's natural philosophy, particularly as expressed by his commentators, explained natural phenomenon in this world, and he is acknowledged by scholars as "the greatest Jewish Aristotelian" (Efron 91).²⁷ Juan Ruiz may not be known as Iberia's greatest Aristotelian, that honor probably going to Maimonides's contemporary, Averroes, with Maimonides himself coming in a close second place, but in the *LBA* Juan Ruiz does allude

²⁷ Also see Frank. On the importance of Aristotelian thought in Judeo-Iberian thought, see Arthur Hyman. According to Márquez Villanueva, Maimonides was a key figure in the translation of Averroist thought to the intellectual circles of Paris in the thirteenth century ("Nasçer e morir" 274-75).

to Aristotle's natural philosophy, most tellingly in *copla* 71, which follows the one in which the book assumes control of the narrative. Márquez Villanueva ("El caso del averroísmo popular español") and Francisco Rico ("Por aver mantenencia") have studied Juan Ruiz's relationship to Aristotle's natural philosophy: Márquez Villanueva in the context of the episode of doña Garoza, and Rico in the context of Juan Ruiz's allusion to Aristotle in *copla* 71, as well as the marked Aristotelian point of view regarding the role of sexual desire found throughout the text.²⁸ Neither Rico nor Márquez Villanueva, however, associate this material point of view with the hermeneutical strategies laid out in the opening material –the prose prologue or the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans– and underscored by *copla* 70. For Márquez Villanueva, the *LBA* reflects a popular (not learned) knowledge of Averroes's commentaries on Aristotle. He argues that Aristotelian radicalism (Rico's Aristotelian heterodoxy) –the seemingly irresolvable differences Aristotelian rationalism and empiricism offered to religious belief and theological explanations of natural phenomena, precisely what lay at the root of the Maimonidean controversy– did not penetrate the sleepy academic world of Castile that remained indifferent to the philosophy-theology issue until the end of the fourteenth century ("El caso del averroísmo popular español" 38).

Copla 70 shows that the tension between philosophy/Aristotelian materialism and theology may have penetrated earlier into Castile. While the surrounding *coplas* –including the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans and the claims about natural philosophy in *coplas* 71-73– all evoke the terms and concepts of debate also engaged by the Maimonidean controversy, it is *copla* 70 that most approximates the Hebrew textual tradition associated with the *Guide*. The image of the text as musical instrument suggests that Juan Ruiz may have been aware of thirteenth-century philosophic traditions, including both the scholastic tradition relating the science of string playing to Aristotelian natural philosophy and the Hebrew exegetical tradition associated with Maimonides's *Guide*. While the former seems to have

²⁸ Juan Ruiz informs us that "Que diz verdat el sabio [Aristóteles] clara mente se prueva: / omnes, aves, animalias, toda bestia de cueva / quieren segund natura compañía sienpre nueva" (*copla* 73abc). This is just the attitude Meshullam Dapiera objects to in his poetry with regards to Maimonides's Aristotelian philosophy that, in his opinion, equates man with the base animals.



been a French tradition centered around Paris, the latter was a more local, Provençal and Iberian tradition. *Copla 70* may have resonated with certain readers familiar with the Maimonidean controversy and with Judeo-Iberian Hebrew poetry (Jewish readers, of course, but also other learned Iberians), and the positioning of *copla 70* just before Juan Ruiz names Aristotle is not coincidental. Juan Ruiz often repeats that his book of good love will speak differently to different readers, just as Maimonides states in his *Guide*. While the *Guide* greatly differs in content and form from the *LBA*, both authors share a similar approach to interpretation. The two anonymous Hebrew poems in the Regium 16.A.XI and Harley 5525 manuscripts celebrate such a hermeneutical practice with the image of the musical book.

Conclusion

While in the *Guide* and the controversy it created, the hermeneutics at issue were confined to scripture –about how the words of God signify or translate for their human readers and how the exegetes of that scripture present it– Juan Ruiz recognized that the implications were broader, that it was not simply about biblical exegesis, but about all texts, including oral ones (such as we find in the *exemplum* of the Greeks and Romans), as well as about *auctoritas*, not simply that of God or the interpreter of the Bible. For Juan Ruiz this includes especially worldly authorities such as cultural norms or the accepted patrimony of Greece and Rome, or even that of the author of fiction himself. The anonymous Jewish authors (or tradition) examined in this study do not make this leap; their musical book is the *Guide* and as such they keep the debate about hermeneutic authority within the context of scripture and its exegesis implied by the cultural context; that is, the Maimonidean controversy. Obviously, Juan Ruiz’s talking book is not designed to guide its readers through the Torah, but instead plumbs the depths of its narrator’s pull toward earthly delights across a uniquely Iberian landscape. Yet Juan Ruiz’s narrative, which claims to contain lessons for young men (the “mañebos livianos” of *copla 67*) by nature of being almost the exact opposite of Maimonides’s religious guide for the faithful, stretches Maimonides’s claims regarding the nature of reading. The strategies and approaches Maimonides claimed for the Torah are deployed by Juan Ruiz for

worldly, human fiction, and we as readers are presented in this fourteenth-century text with the relativity of authority and, ultimately, of truth.

The existence of the two Hebrew poems comparing the *Guide* to a stringed instrument and the reader to the player supports the readings of Lida de Malkiel and Spitzer, among others, who asserted that in *copla* 70 Juan Ruiz is comparing the book to a musical instrument and reading to the act of playing. The relationship Western scholastics such as Albertus Magnus, who was himself heavily indebted to Maimonides and the *Guide*, made between Aristotelian rationalism and fiddle playing offers further suggestive support for such a reading, and for the possibility that such an image of hermeneutics comes from the Jewish tradition. Di Camillo critiques Lida de Malkiel for providing no support for such a reading “from her extensive knowledge of medieval Latin and vernacular texts” (248), but Latin and Romance vernacular are not the only two traditions to which Juan Ruiz had recourse, nor the only two that modern critics should consider. In light of recent studies (Michael, Wacks, Hamilton), it is time to include contemporary Iberian cultural traditions –including the Hebrew and Arabic– as part of Juan Ruiz’s cultural milieu.

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Appendix: Vocalized Hebrew transcription of poem found on Regium 16-A-XI, f241r

Vocalized transcription generously provided by Jonathan Decter.

אֶמֶת מוֹרָה אֶמֶת קִרְךָ* כְּכִנּוֹר
 יִתְרִיוּ בּוֹ לְפִי חֲכָמָה קְשׁוּרִים
 וּבָא פְתִי וְלֹא יָדַע לְנַגֵּן
 וְנָגַן בּוֹ וְהִשְׁחִית הַיִּתְרִים

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