

## Triumfos del Águila: History and Epideictic Rhetoric in Penso's Address to Jan III Sobieski (1683)

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### Abstract

This study examines *Triumfos del Águila* by Joseph Penso de la Vega, a significant yet underexplored work written to commemorate King Jan III Sobieski's victory at the 1683 Battle of Vienna. As a Jewish Baroque literary creation, the work blends history and epideictic rhetoric, offering insights into Hispano-Jewish culture and Sephardi literary traditions. While emphasizing classical influences like Petrarch, Penso employs intricate metaphorical structures and erudite allusions, indicative of the Baroque style. The study highlights the dual identity of Amsterdam Sephardim, torn between Jewish heritage and their converso past, and how this manifests in Penso's panegyric to a Catholic monarch. Additionally, it contextualizes *Triumfos del Águila* within a broader literary reaction to the Ottoman siege, positioning it among contemporary European encomia and triumphalist writings. Penso's engagement with visual motifs and classical rhetoric underlines his innovative synthesis of Jewish and European literary traditions. This paper underscores the work's importance in understanding the cultural dynamics of the 17th-century Sephardic diaspora, linking it to long-standing traditions of panegyrics dedicated to Christian rulers. Furthermore, it advocates for a reassessment of Jewish literary contributions to early modern European intellectual history.

**Keywords:** Joseph Penso de la Vega, Sephardi Culture, Baroque Literature, Panegyric Traditions, Battle of Vienna

### Introduction

The Battle of Vienna, at Kahlenberg Mountain, ended on 12 September 1683, in the victory against the Ottoman forces which had besieged the city for two months. The victors were the Holy Roman Empire (notionally led by the Habsburg king) and the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, under the command of King Jan III Sobieski. The swift European literary reactions to this specific historical event include a book (1683) of more than 120 pages by the Jewish author, active in Livorno/Amsterdam, Josseph Penso de la Vega: *Los triumphos del Águila y eclipses de la Luna / que en reverente panegirico consagra al Invicto Rey de Polonia Don Josseph de la Vega, por la memorable victoria que alcanço contra la Potencia Ottomana su valor, librando de su formidable*

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*sitio a Viena*. Amsterdam: Jahacob de Cordova.<sup>2</sup> The work, which has not yet been the object of sustained analysis, is significant for reconstructing, not only the reaction to the specific historical event and its perception by Hispano-Jewish or Western Sephardi readers, but also for an understanding of Penso de la Vega's thought, aesthetic and practices of composing his literary works, and, by extension, something about the state of Sephardi culture at that time and place.

## Translation

As it is well known, scholars do not dismiss translations as banal. Amongst other reasons, this is because translations constitute prime evidence of an author's reception history. In the case of Josseph Penso de la Vega (d. 1692) we are not surprised by the frequently repeated mentions of the existence of translations of his *Confusion de confusiones*<sup>3</sup> published in Amsterdam, 1688, famous as the first description of the [Amsterdam] Stock Exchange. Although the work of this Jewish Baroque author *par excellence* (Bnaya, 2008) is highly rhetorical and literary, its financial subject is thought to be relevant and it has certainly attracted the broadest audience of all his books. Anyone, since the nineteenth century, who has braved reading the texts of the prolific author, whether his Hebrew prose, his unedited prosimetries<sup>4</sup>, unpublished Hebrew poetry, (unstudied) Portuguese sermon or his Spanish books, knows that simplicity and ease of reading are not their hallmark. If we add the fundamental Baroque quality-what to readers today may seem at first sight as- the extravagant excess of his attempts at word play, erudite allusions and analogies to ancient Greco-Roman and biblical texts, we realize that any translation of a Penso work is a laborious and admirable achievement that requires skill. It also attests to the text's *fortuna*, its attraction or success even if unnoticed today. That is why it is worth mentioning [although completely against the convention of writings on him] that – apart from the *Confusion* – the only other composition by Penso which has been translated is precisely our subject here, the earlier (1683) *Triunfos del Águila* (Święcicki, 1883).<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, a comparison with the critical heritage on the later *Confusion* shows clearly that Penso's earlier *Triunfos* have barely elicited critical work. Partly, this might be explained by the attitudes to the literary type of the panegyric in general. Indeed, it has been argued – although not in a Sephardi context – that a Romantic perspective has marginalized the genre because it was felt that it was not “authentic”. It is only in recent years that the panegyric in Spanish is beginning to be taken seriously:

La razón principal de este desconocimiento no se le escapa a nadie: durante más de dos siglos los prejuicios decimonónicos contra las composiciones de alabanza han pesado no poco en nuestro

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<sup>2</sup> All page references are to this edition. For the historical background see e.g. Baer, M. D. (2011); Barker, T. M. (1997); Stoye, J. (2011); Waissenberger, R. (1983); Ferenc Tóth, (2018); Friedrich Edelmayer: (2018); Anna Kalinowska, (2018); Yasir Yilmaz (2018).

<sup>3</sup> For discussions on the subject of his fame and further references to publications on him see, amongst others, Gutwirth, Eleazar (1994, 2001, 2004), Further work on Confusion in Smith-Ruij, (2024); Cardoso (2002).

<sup>4</sup> For his animal fables, see Meir Bnaya (2006).

<sup>5</sup> Julijan Adolf Święcicki seems an interesting personality for his place and date. He was the author of a work on Jewish literature (*Historia literatury żydowskiej*) and was also a Hispanist who translated Golden Age classics (Lope, Tirso, Alarcón) into Polish.

campo de estudio, relegando al silencioso olvido un notable conjunto de textos o arrinconándolos en una posición marginal... (Jesús Ponce Cárdenas, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

This rests on a better acquaintance with the writings on rhetoric of the Renaissance humanists and their later followers, as well as their distant, ancient, Classical ultimate antecedents. This critical neglect and lack of analysis is behind the need to attend in the following lines to Penso's *Triunfos del Águila* dedicated to Jan III Sobieski, King of Poland and Grand Duke of Lithuania.

## Triunfos

The titles of Baroque panegyrics – such as the *Triunfos* – mention the main metaphor of the book and not the object of the panegyric. The *águila* of the title is the symbolic visual device of Jan III. *Triunfo*, the first part of the title of Penso's composition, is a category denoting a genre, which we find in the titles of numerous literary works of Amsterdam Sephardim in Spanish. They go from the triumph of popular government<sup>7</sup> to the triumph of Portugal amongst numerous others. At first, they seem to appear as unprecedented Christian concepts in seventeenth century Amsterdam Sephardi thought and mind set. Such *triumfos* and panegyrics by Jews to Christian personalities bring up again the question of whether the Sephardim of Amsterdam (many of whom had a converso, Catholic background for generations) had an untraditional, reconstituted mentality in which the Jewish and the Christian cultures were in constant conflict, split into two *Gespleten zielen*, *Gespaltene Seelen* or *Almas en litigio* rather than being in contact with the centuries-old internal traditions.

“Triumph” is indelibly associated with the last work by Petrarch. Penso mentions him explicitly: “cante por este segundo Midas el Petrarca” (p. 5). This does not imply necessarily a contact with the Tuscan text. The *Triumph* had a Spanish *fortuna*.<sup>8</sup> In our context, one cannot ignore the Sephardi attitude to Petrarch. The best-known case is Solomon Usque's translation into Spanish of the Sonnets, a work he dedicated to Alejandro Farnese, Prince of Parma and Piacenza: *Los sonetos, canciones, madrigals y sextinas del gran poeta y orador Francisco Petrarca, traducidos de Toscano por Salvsque Lusitano* (Venecia, 1567). Amatus Lusitanus mentions fondly the translation and the translator. Pyrrhus Lusitanus/ Flavius Eborensis is also a Jew who composed poetry in the mid-sixteenth century,<sup>9</sup> though not in Hebrew or Spanish but in Neo-

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<sup>6</sup> Amsterdam Jews expressed their ideas, of course, in Aramaic, Hebrew, Spanish and Portuguese. For the relevance of texts in Spanish to Amsterdam Jewish thought in the seventeenth century see an example in Yosef Kaplan (1978).

<sup>7</sup> Miguel de Barrios, *Triumpho del Gobierno Popular, y de la Antigüedad Holandesa* 1683; idem, *El Duelo de los Applausos, y Triumpho de los Triunfos, retrato de Guilielmo III, Monarcha Britanico. Panegyrico en la entrada que hizo en el Haya*. Hayae Comit, 1691; idem, *Triumpho epitalamico de los Señores Abraham Suaso y de Doña Sara Suaso; Aplauso armonico á Salomon Juda Leon* 1686; Manuel de Leao, *...Triumpho Lusitano, Applausos festivos, sumptuosidades regias nos augustos Desposorios do Inchyto D. Pedro Segundo com a Serenissima Maria Sofia Isabel de Baviera, Monarcas de Portugal*. Brussels 1688. David Cohen Azevedo, *Triunfos da virtude: Sermão á occasião do natalicio de Guillermo V., Príncipe de Orange*. Amsterdam, D. de Meldola, 1788.

<sup>8</sup> For the Sephardi *Nachleben* of the *soneto al itálico modo* see, for example, the case of the sonnets published in seventeenth century Smyrna (1659) studied in E. Gutwirth, (2022). For the Hispano-Christian *fortuna* see Anne J. Cruz; Javier Lorenzo, (2020). For the completely different question of the Hebrew *fortuna* of the sonnet see e.g. Bregman, Dvora, and Ann Brener (1991).

<sup>9</sup> For his possible relevance to Sephardi culture see E. Gutwirth's study of his links to the hispano-Jewish tradition (2023).

Latin. Further research might recover the precise traces of Petrarchism in his work, which (like the Italian poet's) is also intensely concerned with exile. Somewhat earlier, we have the case of the poem by Moses Remos which Israel Abrahams named "prothanation" (Abrahams, 1926). Written in contemplation of death, (Schirmann, H. & Fleischer, E. (1997) it lists – one by one – the fields of knowledge which will be diminished by his passing. They give the impression of a procession of abstract entities. It has therefore been compared to a triumph (Gutwirth, 2011). Finally, we have the description of Doña Gracia with her forty ladies-in-waiting and their entry into Constantinople in the 1540s. The *Viaje de Turquía* refers to them as a Triunfo:

Pues judíos me decid que se huyen pocos! No había más que yo no supiese nuevas de toda la cristiandad, de muchos que se iban desta manera a ser judíos o moros, entre los cuales fue un día una señora portuguesa que se llamaba doña Beatriz Méndez, muy rica, y entró en Constantinopla con cuarenta caballos y cuatro carros triunfales llenos de damas y criadas españolas. No menor casa llevaba que un duque de España y podíalo hacer, que es muy rica, y se hacía hacer la salva... (*Viaje*, cap. De las mujeres).

That author employs the concept of *triumfo* to describe Doña Gracia's chariots and the entry [*Carro triunfal*] into Constantinople of the (formerly conversa) descendant of the Hispano-Jewish dynasty of *francos*, the Benvenistes. We have then, the testimony of a contemporary, also from an Iberian culture, also in Constantinople, who employs an Ibero-Romance language, who knows how to interpret Doña Gracia's behaviour without the difficulties which might be encountered by someone unfamiliar with that precise culture and period. Most significant, perhaps, is that we still find, again – more than a century later – in Sephardi Amsterdam, the publication of a book with the title *Carro Triumphal* (Gutwirth, 2020). It may be described also as concerned with a military victory. In an Amsterdam Sephardi milieu, *carro triumphal* was evidently not an ephemeral, incomprehensible formula. That is to say that there is a Sephardi history of interest in, and acceptance of the revival of the ancient Roman concept. In other words, in practice, despite the popularity of Van Praag's theory of split personalities, in this case we have no clear "division of souls"<sup>10</sup>, no clear conflict between a putatively unprecedented and Christian concept which appears suddenly amongst the Sephardim of the seventeenth century on the one hand and a Jewish tradition on the other, but, rather, an ambiguity between the Christian Spanish fortuna and the Sephardi fortuna of a Petrarchan sensibility.

## Sources

Cataloguers, bibliographers (since Nicolas Antonio) tended to produce global evaluations of Penso's works without – as mentioned above – contact with the global output of the prolific Amsterdam author. This is not surprising, amongst other reasons, given the above mentioned challenging role of Baroque erudition in his style. The study of Penso's sources and of Penso's

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<sup>10</sup> Although his idea is frequently mentioned, it has not been noticed that Van Praag's colorful formulation seems to allude to the concept and its wording in a theatre play, namely Alfred Karl Röttger *Gespaltene Seelen. Ein Kammerspiel*. München: Müller-Verlag, 1918. p9: "Wir sind gespaltene Seelen, Als wär'n wir Kinder, aller Umwelt fremd/Ha, brüllend weh tut Einsamkeit. Du kamst/Und warst bei mir die Kindheit lang ich /Im Winkel saß, durch Garten strich und Park /Und meiner Träume Wahrheit suchte; denn wir sind /Wie Brüderchen und Schwesterchen in feindlich fremder Welt." Jonas Andries van Praag (1948); idem, (1950).

treatment of these sources, that is to say the history of reading, is recently gaining prominence, as witnessed by the progress made on the Italian aspect or the question of the *Autos*<sup>11</sup>

In the *Triumpho* he occasionally mentions a source explicitly and even proudly. This is the case of *Il Cannocchiale Aristotelico* by Emanuele Thesauro – which he is said to have translated into Spanish but not printed. Its main concern is the invention and wit of ingenious metaphors. It is believed to be one of the most important statements of poetics in seventeenth-century Europe. Penso refers to him as “Aristoteles de Turin y Tertuliano de Saboya” (p. 112) or “...el canoro insigne Thesauro aquel cisne en su Cannochiale” (p. 41). So that Thesauro poses no great challenge to those who seek, for the first time, the *Triumpho*'s sources as he is mentioned so openly and clearly. Penso's unconcealed admiration for Thesauro prepares us for the intricacies of his Baroque rhetoric and stylistics. Given the lack of critical work on the *Triumphos* (where authors are mentioned by one last name and the titles of their works are left out) such attention to sources is fundamental in order to understand the character of the book. Elsewhere, he writes: “Pondere Textor la antipatia que tiene el aguila con el ciervo” (p. 19). He is referring to the French humanist rhetorician, Jean Tixier de Ravisi. Recent research reveals that, as Ravisius Textor, he was highly influential on Spanish culture and literature of the Golden Age. His influence has been discerned in mainstream famous works such as Lope's *Dorotea* (Trueblood, 1958). He was considered a model of epistolography amongst other genres (Calvente, 2006; Parrado, 2019; Parrado, 2017). He may be significant for the comprehension of Penso's work. It has recently been argued that

the Oficina, as its name implies, is a writer's workshop containing a wide assortment of classical instances easily applicable for poetic adornment or rhetorical support, with the accent on the singular and the strange. The material is conveniently broken down into categories and indexed (Trueblood, 1958).

The easy application of Classical allusions by readers of Ravisius or similar reference works and poliantheas might go some way towards explaining, at least partly, the plethora of Classical references in Penso and his contemporaries.

Penso's creation of the role or character, - i.e. the persona – of the Sephardi Jewish author as panegyrist of the Catholic Polish monarch, is prudent. Penso does not write as a Christian. Here, silence, though not sufficiently noted, is the most eloquent expression and rhetorical tool. There are probably not that many contemporary works in peninsular Spanish in comparable genres which omit mentions of Christ, the Virgin, the Saints, etc. Neither does he flaunt his Judaism. He presents and identifies himself, not by religion, but as “hispano”: “solemos dezir los hispanos” (p. 31) or, elsewhere, “al cristal llamamos luna los hiberos” (p. 26). He supports the view of Sephardi identity as linked to language. When referring to the Bible, he uses terms which would be acceptable to both, Jews and Christians, such as “cronologia sacra” or “el historiographo sacro” (p. 14). Hebrew is “el sacro ydioma”. Here the question of sources is symptomatic and revealing. One feature which is characteristic of his *Triumphos* is the very frequent appeal to biblical Hebrew etymologies and words: e.g., amongst numerous other examples, “eres Josue...que significando Salvador en la divina lengua...” (p. 15); “neser

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<sup>11</sup> On Thesauro in other, different writings by Penso, see Meir Bnaya (1994). For the Italian factor see Valentina Nider, (2010); Nider, (2019); For another work of his, published in the same year, see, for example, Tapsir Ba, (2019); for the *Autos* see Forteza-Rey, (1996); On the *Autos* in Sephardi libraries see Swetschinski, (2000).

significa en la sacra lengua Aguila” (p. 38); “escudo en el sacro ydioma es magen” (p. 33); “bilha que significa en el ydioma hebreo confusion sobresalto” (p. 62).

To be sure, as is common knowledge, by this time – 1680s – there were numerous Christian Hebraists and others who could and did refer to Hebrew words and etymologies, whether Hebrew etymologies of words in other languages or the etymologies of Classical, Biblical Hebrew. One single – but mainstream Spanish and seventeenth century – example from Penso's age could be the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española*, the lexicon or Thesaurus of the Spanish language, composed by Sebastián de Covarrubias (1611). In his prologue, he describes his personal beliefs and opinions about Hebrew and etymologies:

...hasta agora durase la noticia destas etimologias, no teniamos para cansarnos en buscar otras: pero despues del diluio cón la confusión de lenguas se olvidò aquella; quedando en sola vna familia, que Dios reseruò de las demas, ...para vsar de misericordia cón el linage humano, haziédose hombre, descédiéte de Abrahám, Isaac, y Iacob : los quales se llamaron Hebreos, y su lengua Hebrea: en esta hablò Dios a Moyses, y le escriuio las Tablas de la Ley : y en esta escriuio el mesmo Moyses los libros del Péntateuco, y en ella vaticinaron los Profetas... (Prologue).

Throughout the *Tesoro*, he explains Spanish words by adducing Hebrew etymologies of various types:

ABAD. Este nombre es Hebreo...ab vale tanto como padre...ABDALA, vale sieruo de Dios, Arabigo corrompido del Hebreo Hebed vale seruus... ABEJA: Hebreo Deborah, del verbo ...Dabar, que vale hablar , ... y así es simbolo de la eloquencia (Tesoros, sv.).

Nevertheless, there is an intensity and frequency of the feature in Penso's *Triumphos* which would give pause for thought to his contemporaries. Similarly, there is a certain agility and originality to his mastery of rhetorically relevant Hebrew and etymological examples. In any case, Penso's Hebrew etymologies are more scholarly than those of Covarrubias.

While he may ostentatiously mention his European contemporary and near contemporary readings, he hides Jewish sources on which he depends. Thus, in a work which opposes Jan III Sobieski's “eagle” to the Ottoman “moon”, he expands poetically/rhetorically on the concept of “moon”:

...es bien notable la contrariedad que usa el sagrado texto en su formacion pues que llamando al principio luminar grande al sol y luminar grande a la luna... sigue luego diziendo que dio Dios al luminar grande la presidencia del dia y al luminar pequeño la presidencia de la noche...como habiendole dado el titulo de grande le aplica agora el titulo de pequeño? (p. 56)

This is an ancient exegetical topic. In the Babylonian Talmud (b. Hullin 60b) the notion concerns the (Gen 16:1) biblical verse's “The great luminaries”. The Talmud explains – “They were created of equal size, but that of the moon was diminished because she complained and said, ‘It is impossible for two kings to make use of one crown’.” Here, Penso silences the Talmudic source (or its medieval tributaries) of the idea he reproduces. Elsewhere he probably cites Leon Hebreo without acknowledgement: “[E]xageren los mas finos amantes su amor desvelandosse en provar que se transforman en el amado objeto los amantes” (p. 19). He mentions some sources which reveal his readings of historical works: “[C]omo publica Pedro Voelkeren el historiografo del Ymperio” (p. 70) referring to Giovanni Piero da Voelkeren, author of the *Assedio di Vienna, scritto da Giov(anni) Piero da Voelkeren, volgarizato per Ani Bulifon* published by Voigt in Vienna in 1683 and in Napoli, 1684, translated from Latin into French and Italian and printed in numerous editions. This fact does not support the opinions and beliefs in a Jewish disinterest in history, particularly non-Jewish history.

## Panegyric

Readers of the *Triunfos del Águila* might be struck by the apparently non-traditional tenor of Jewish Baroque-literary works of encomia to non-Jewish, Christian dignitaries of high rank, monarchy and nobility. One does not need to duplicate the two centuries of writings about the beginnings of Jewish modernity to understand that such universalism and modernities would – at first glance – seem to contradict the periodization of Jewish modernities beginning in the eighteenth century, with the German Jewish *Aufklärung*, *Enlightenment* or *Haskala*. There is some justification for this. The basic popular belief or assumption is that prior to the *Aufklärung*, Jews had lived in enclosed communities with little contact with the wider Christian world; there were barriers rather than expanded encounters between religions. But what could be a more solid example of contact and encounter than the torrent of seventeenth century Western Sephardi compositions, largely by returning conversos, in the genre of panegyrics and encomia to Christian monarchs and nobility.<sup>12</sup>

There is also the question whether such beliefs in Jewish isolation are symptomatic of a wider neglect of the element of history,<sup>13</sup> e.g. long term continuities in traditional societies (Aers, 1992). Indeed, could an acknowledgement of history recover a Sephardi tradition of interest in – and panegyric and encomia to – monarchs, nobility and other highly placed Christian dignitaries? or is it an exclusive feature of a community only recently returned from its peninsular Catholic past, unaware of Jewish traditions? These historical roots of a phenomenon of such weight and extension, in such a traditional society could be rather profound and need to be taken into consideration.

Long before “modernity” and even before the supposedly expanded boundaries of the age of “Discovery”, in the second half of the thirteenth century, the Toledan poet, Todros Ha-Levi Abulafia composes at least two encomiastic poems addressed to the Christian King of Castile, Alfonso the Wise.<sup>14</sup> This interest in, and concern with, Christian kings is manifest also in the following century. Despite the commonplaces about Jewish lack of interest in history in general and Christian history in particular, a historical work depending on historiography in the *romance* was composed by Joseph ibn Waqqar. Joseph was a personality of mainstream Jewish intellectual history. This history of the Christian Kings of Castile was written by this Jewish intellectual from Castile in the second half of the fourteenth century at the request of ibn Khatib, who, in his turn, would offer it to the king of Morocco. Ibn Khatib praises the

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<sup>12</sup> Amongst many others, one thinks of Miguel (Daniel Levi) de Barrios, *Aplauzos Academicos e relacao do felice successo da celebre victoria do Ameixial. Oferecidos ao excelentissimo Senbor Dom Sancho Manoel, Conde de Villafior...* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Velsen, 1673). A similar impugnation of the isolationist thesis of Sephardi barriers depends on reading a Western Sephardi text. The classic study by Loewe of the Spanish *Suplemento* explains that the Jewish situation is invariably one of delicate balance: it is therefore essential that Hayon's doctrine be unequivocally repudiated, since any endorsement thereof would render Jewry unfit to form an integral element in European society (indigno de constituir una parte de la Sociedad Civil de las discretas y politicas naciones de la Europa). Such integration is presupposed by Nieto as a natural and desirable state of affairs. This is an “innocent” and therefore trustworthy revelation of Western Sephardi social/cultural highest ideals. See Raphael James Loewe, (1981).

<sup>13</sup> The problem has been dealt with in other cultures, in some ways, in Aers, David's article with the ironic and significant title: “A Whisper in the Ear of the Early Modernists.”

<sup>14</sup> Poems number 714 and 715 in the 1932 Hebrew edition of David Yellin are treated by Aviva Doron, (1999, 1998) whose work on the poet emphasizes links to surrounding Christian culture in the *romance* rather than isolation.

Jewish courtier and describes him as the most appropriate person for the task of writing about the history of Christian kings of Spain. Ibn Waqar's source, according to Melchor Martínez Antuña, is the Alfonsine *Estoria de España*.<sup>15</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Jewish surgeon of King Enrique III, don Mose Abenarzal, is the author of an encomiastic poem in the *romance* dedicated to the recently born Don Juan, the future King Juan II of Castile. The Jewish physician, Xateui, devises a Hebrew poem, praising the wisdom of the *Relator* of the royal court of the kingdom of Castile-Leon, don Fernan Diaz de Toledo (d.1457). Profayt el Naci, in the first half of the fifteenth century, addresses a prose essay on fiscal matters to secular and ecclesiastic noble personages from Castile. Its literary/rhetorical features of encomium have recently been studied. Don Ya'acov Saddiq was a philosopher and also the physician of don Lorenzo Suárez de Figueroa, Master of the knightly Order of Santiago. He authored a translation for him: the *Libro de los dichos de sabios y philosophos* (1402) in Uclés.<sup>16</sup> The encomiastic character of Don Ya'acov Saddiq's work is patently clear:

...son los príncipes llamados fundamento del pueblo, que ellos lo traen sobre sy asy commo el fundamento trae la casa; que por el prouecho del pueblo son establecidos e son reyes e príncipes e señores llamados e son muy altamente honrrados e de grandes rendiçiones e despensas. E después esperan en el çielo ser coronados e gualardonados...

Later texts in the *romance* of Portugal or Castile by don Ishaq Abravanel or Abraham b Samuel Zacut could also be brought to reinforce the argument of the presence of a Hispano-Jewish tradition of praise, paeans and accolades, in both the *romance* and in Hebrew, addressed to Christian dignitaries, nobility and monarchs in the Middle Ages and beyond, before Penso's seventeenth century.

Printed later, in 1553, the Ferrara Bible is sometimes described as the first Spanish translation of the Hebrew Bible for use by Sephardic Jews. It is not, but it was funded and translated by Sephardim who had returned to Judaism and composed an encomiastic dedication, in one issue/printing, to Ercole II d'Este, the Cristian Duke of Ferrara. An additional example could be the Dialogues of Love. That is to say, *Los Diálogos de amor de Mestre León Abarbanel médico y filósofo excelente. De nuevo traduzidos en lengua castellana, y deregidos a la Maiestad del Rey Filippo. Con privilegio della Illustrissima Señoria*. This translation was published together with Daniel Arón Afia's, *Opiniones sacadas de los más auténticos y antiguos philosophos que sobre el alma escribieron*. The Sephardi character of both works published together in 1568 in Venice is clear. Both works have strong affinities with Renaissance Humanism. The translation is the work of Gedella ibn

<sup>15</sup> Antuña, 1933; Stearns, 2004. While the fourteenth century Jewish interest in, and aptitude for, histories of Christian kings is not in question, the identification of this personality is not yet quite certain. See Goldstein-Chabasl, 2023. They place Joseph in Cordoba. See also Paul B. Fenton (2015) who frames him in the contemporary currents of philosophy and kabbala.

<sup>16</sup> The Babylonian Talmud, at Berakhot 58a, exhorts those who see a gentile king to pronounce a specific blessing: "One who sees kings of the other nations of the world recites: Blessed...Who has given of His glory to flesh and blood." In general, on the antecedents, in medieval Spain, of Sephardi seventeenth century Jewish attitudes to Christians, see Gutwirth, Eleazar (1985). This was followed later by a number of authors including, e.g., Assis, Yom Tov (1992); Eric Lawee, (2018). On don Mosse, see E. Gutwirth, (2019); on Profayt el Naci see idem, (2000); on Xateui, see idem, (1986); for the encomium of don Lorenzo Suárez de Figueroa see idem, (2021).



Yahia who, like Afia, was an exile from Portugal in Ottoman Saloniki. It is preceded by an encomiastic dedication to the King and Emperor Felipe II (Novoa, 2015).<sup>17</sup>

Al muy alto y muy poderoso sennor, Don Felipe. Por la gracia de Dios, Rey d'Espanna, de las Indias, islas y tierra firme, del mar Oceano, de las dos Sicilias, de Gerusalém y Católico defensor de la fee. Guedella Yahia Salud y perpetua felicidad. Muchos son los que en estos tiempos (muy alto y mui poderoso sennor)... y no me parece que viene fuera de propósito dedicar el casto subgepto de amor a Príncipe casto, pensamientos celestiales a Príncipe que es ornado de celestiales virtudes, altísimos entendimientos a Príncipe lleno de altísimos conceptos...

So that from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century and beyond, there was a long standing, rich, extremely well documented [as shown here], solid, Sephardi tradition of panegyrics or literary works dedicated to royal and noble Christian personalities. This tradition was encomiastic and continued in the sixteenth century despite the well-known expulsions, the conversions and the conversos' past. In the case of Ibn Yahia's work, with its encomiastic dedication to the King-Emperor Felipe II, it is noteworthy that the work enjoyed a favorable reception amongst Jewish readers, as Novoa has shown. There was no *litigio* between the work of universalism and panegyric to Christians - sometimes Iberian – and the Jewish readers. Therefore, in view of such *longue durée* continuities, a cultural feature such as the panegyric to Christian monarchs and nobility amongst Amsterdam Sephardim in the seventeenth century including those by Penso de la Vega cannot be deemed an unprecedented or unexpected break with the past.

There may be also some further historical background to the work. In general, historians seem to have perceived Jan III's relation with the Jews as relatively positive. This might help to understand, at least partly, Penso's decision, in Amsterdam, to praise the King of Poland, leading to a publication of more than a hundred pages.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Jan III's reputation as erudite, patron of the arts, interested in philosophy, might have been a further incentive.<sup>19</sup> Behind the Battle of Vienna there may be a background of about two centuries of relations between the Ottoman Empire and the House of Habsburg and its allies (including Holland as mentioned by Penso alongside a long list of other allies). But Penso shows no particular interest in this and presents his text as a reaction to a concrete and specific historical event: the Battle of Vienna.

Penso's project, if taken out of context, may have seemed bizarre, hence the lack of attention, study or critical analysis of the *Triumphos*. But an additional historical context may be reconstructed. To achieve this one needs to be aware of broader, non-Sephardi, non-Jewish trends. Smieja describes the literary reactions as "the extraordinary news that spread all over Europe causing countless pamphlets, poems and plays to be written" (Smieja, 1983). If seen in this light the *Triumphos* becomes more comprehensible. Anders Ingram has referred to these publications as bombastic triumphalism and posturing. According to him, the siege of Vienna generated a higher volume of English writing than any other seventeenth-century event

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<sup>17</sup> See James Nelson Novoa, (2005) & (2006) According to Novoa, the Sefardi author employed both the language and rhetoric of Italian Humanism in a work which found broad acceptance in multi-lingual Jewish contexts where it was well-received by Jewish readers.

<sup>18</sup> For this King's relations with the Jews see e.g. Bar-Itzhak, H. (2004); Kaźmierczyk, (2002); Kizilov, Mikhail, (2008); Antony Polonsky, (2019).

<sup>19</sup> For the King's nonmilitary but scientific and artistic patronage see Marta Gołabek, (2011).

involving the Ottomans (Ingram, 2014).<sup>20</sup> Cécile D'Albis is precise in her study of this literature on the battle of Vienna which she characterizes: "le flot des nouvelles et des commentaires est immense et inédit". She notes that it comprises about 400 publications and refers to it as an *événement médiatique*. Particularly relevant to Penso's panegyric is her comment on the celerity of the writings: "Ce qui nous frappe, c'est à la fois l'abondance et la rapidité avec laquelle les nouvelles circulent: avant la fin septembre, des récits du siège, de ses célébrations, des poèmes, des louanges, des traités, etc., sont déjà publiés et copiés dans tous les principaux centres d'édition en Europe (D'Albis, 2013)." The victory of Jan III occurred around mid-September and a number of writings in Spanish, including Penso's, appeared before the end of the year 1683.

Pedro de Arce's play *El sitio de Viena* would be an example, if not a model, for such encomiastic compositions in Spanish published, like Penso's, in 1683, near the time of Sobieski's victory. Another example would be Jerónimo Teulada, *Triunfos de la Aguila Imperial el ... Emperador Leopoldo Primero y sus auxiliares sobre el cerco de Viena contra el exercito del Gran Turco y sus aliados ...* whose title is so close to Penso's. It was dedicated "al muy Ilustre Sr. Don Ioseph de Cardona...Gentilhombre de la Camara...del Sr Emperador Leopoldo I..." and published in Valencia by Vicente Cabrera, also in 1683. The ecclesiastical approbation mentions that the author is *in Homero*, and that *es singular la eloquencia desta Oracion ...pruevas ingeniosas... llenas de recóndita erudición, y no es poca fortuna del Militar esfuerso, aver merecido tan diestro, y eloquente Panegyrista...* That is to say that what may appear at first sight as quirks of Penso's individual style and his *recóndita erudición* are in fact following the dictates of the period's epideictic rhetoric of the prose panegyric, including eloquence, *ingenio* and *recóndita erudición*.

One of the many individuals praised in the *Triumphos* is Christina, Queen of Sweden (Pancorbo, 2019).<sup>21</sup> By the date of Penso's writing she had already abdicated (1654) (so that she no longer ruled as Queen of Sweden) and had settled in Rome. Christina's close connections with Jews were a matter of common knowledge. She was no stranger to Amsterdam's Jewish letters and Sephardi authors, as may be inferred from the fact that Menasse b. Israel tried to win her favor and patronage in the 1650s (Katz, 1983). Penso cites from a letter supposedly written by the Queen in praise of Jan III. If such a letter exists, or did so in the past, it is extremely unrevealing and Penso's citations from it give the impression – if not of banality – at least that it consists of purely conventional courtesies and polite phrases that could have been written by anyone. Penso refers frequently to this letter in the early part of his book and then, in the rest of the book almost not at all. Penso praises also a multitude of other personalities which are not mentioned in the title of the work and are not prominent in bibliographic studies:

...que biçarria no ostento en este combate el valeroso principe Waldek y todos los Generales y Coroneles del Ymperio donde luzio la briosa prudencia del Conde Caprara, del de Lesle, del de Rabbata, del de Dernewald, del de Palf, del de Gondola y del de Taff, del Baron de Mercí, del de Halleweil y del de Diephental con tal florida y ilustre juventud que vino para hallarse en esta batalla de España, Francia y Ytalia, Flandes, Holanda, Dinamarca y Suecia? Todos excedieron a sus propias esperanças en la disposicion Todos excedieron a sus mismos desseos en la generosidad (p. 107).

<sup>20</sup> Printed accounts of the siege appeared in great numbers depicting the epic scale and dramatic twists of these events. Ingram, Anders, (2014).

<sup>21</sup> For a hypothetical but possible explanation see Fernando José Pancorbo (2019).

## The Visual

The visual is prominent amongst Penso's concerns and also amongst his avowed sources, years before the *Confusion* (Nider, 2021).<sup>22</sup> He goes beyond the Renaissance's revival of *ut pictura poesis*. In fact, he constructs a metadiscourse on the theme. He elaborates poetically/rhetorically on terms connected with the subject. One could begin to approach the question by way of the mirrors. Espejo is a toponymic, the birthplace of his father, who had passed away in that same year (Copello, 2022). But it is also an attribute of the very subject of the whole work, i.e. Vienna "Viena es Espejo" (p. 27). It is also a metaphor of Empire:

...llego el sol que imprimiendo en un espejo sus resplandores haze que reverberen en otros muchos espejos sus reflexos... e iluminando a este sumptuoso Espejo del imperio quedaron iluminados tantos espejos con esta luz que no hay luz ni espejo aunque sea una luz del mundo por lo valeroso y un espejo de la sciencia por lo discreto... (p. 26).

Rather than traditionally investing in poetic descriptions of individual physiognomy, he directs his attention to authors who had written on themes close to his visual concerns. Comparing the shape of the Turkish halfmoon to the "C" of the Romans, he mentions "el doctissimo Tassoni" (p. 14). He must be referring to Alessandro Tassoni (1565–1635) the Italian poet and writer from Modena, best known as the author of the mock-heroic poem *La secchia rapita* (*The Rape of the Pail, or The stolen bucket*). This acknowledgement of influence in 1683 happens before the *Confusion*. An unforgettable character in it is the Conte de Culagna, described as "un cavalier bravo e galante, filosofo poeta e bacchettone."<sup>23</sup> We can see why Penso, the composer of panegyrics to a King, would read such a work. Elsewhere, he writes "pintando el Gamberti un águila que tenia aprisionado con las garras un halcón pintándolo circundado de sombras" (p. 49). He is alluding, no doubt, to the Jesuit **Domenico Gamberti**, author of *L'idea di un principe*, Modena, 1659, written as an encomium of Francesco I d'Este di Modona's son, Alfonso IV. The title itself is enough to understand why Penso, when writing a panegyric, would be interested in such a book and its engravings. Most scholarly treatments of this personality emphasize his importance in the political representation of nobility. (Ostrow, 2011, A.R. Venturi, 1991, 2008). His books read like panegyrics.

Elsewhere he affirms "Aresi pinto por símbolo de un príncipe valeroso un escudo" (p. 35); doubtless alluding to Paolo Aresi, author of *Delle sacre imprese* (Tortona: Pietro Giovanni Calenzano, 1630). He also mentions "eligió por divisa el Manzini" (p. 50) referring to the Bolognese poet and historian, influence on Poussin, who, in his treatment of Esther, characterized her and Ahashverus through metaphors alluding to her beauty and his majesty (Manzini, 1637; Sommer-Mathis, 2011; Unglaub, 2003). "[E]l cardenal Gonzaga tomo por empresa el águila" (p. 39) might possibly be Scipione Gonzaga, Prince of Bozzolo. Further examples of this visual turn might be "... puede ser que refiera el Cartari en sus imagenes que pintaron los griegos ... a quien adoravan por la luna con un instrumento en la mano..." (p. 69). We now know that Cartari's famous illustrated book on mythology published in Venice in 1571 by Valgrisi and Ziletti had drawings by Giuseppe Porta, (Salviati) (Pierluigi, 2005).

Although, Penso may well have learnt rudiments of rhetoric at school, it is unlikely that these engravings, paintings or books of emblems were learnt at Jewish school in Amsterdam. More

<sup>22</sup> On "the visual" in other, but later works, see e.g. Nider (2021).

<sup>23</sup> For Tassoni in the later *Confusion*, see V Nider's article cited above Nider (2019).

credible as an explanation of Penso's visual turn could be the post-Alciato environment which may be understood from Carlisle's clear observation:

The emblem represents one of the primary artistic forms of the early modern period (c. 1500–1750) ... capable of effectively expressing complex ideas in a compact format, emblems were widely disseminated in both Latin and European vernacular languages; an estimated 6,500 emblem books, each volume featuring fifteen to 1,500 individual emblems, were published during the Renaissance... (p. 24).

Penso's visual concepts of 1683 may be placed broadly within an early modern, post-Alciato, intensely visual culture, focused on observation which expresses itself not only in art but also in the literary realm. Nevertheless, here again one may question the neglect of the history of such sensibilities and the belief in a conflict between the late medieval and early modern Sephardi attitudes to the visual. Penso's visual preoccupation is also reminiscent, *mutatis mutandis*, of some earlier features of Sephardi culture. Thus, for example, Solomon b Reuven Bonafed produced (in the 1440s) one of his most sustained poetic/literary cycles: the satires against the leaders of the community of Saragossa who had exiled him to Belchite. Here he employs notions of visual physiognomy which may be traced to medieval treatises with ultimately Classical (Greco-Roman) precedents. His explicitly avowed intention is to create *energeia*, presence; to place the image before the readers' eyes (Smith, 1985).<sup>24</sup> Today we may frame it in a late medieval Hispano-Jewish culture of "pictorialism" which affects literary practice. This "pictorialism" has been identified, recognized, and understood as a key to late medieval mind set in the study of other, (but contemporary) non-Sephardi, cultures and languages. It is sometimes understood as a device which recalls or recreates a representational work of art, actual or imaginary (Gutwirth, 2000; Fiero, 1975; Gabriele, 2016).<sup>25</sup> In addition, there are the explicit written praises of – or comments in Hebrew on – the book-art of works observed by fifteenth century Hebrew authors. These comments become valuable once we realize the notorious poverty of finds of Hispano-Jewish texts on art from the Middle Ages. In Maqueda, Moses Arragel, is not only known for the illuminations which accompany his text, but it has been recently argued and explained, he also composes in the *romance* of Castile a kind of visual art-critical discourse in conversation with the artists of the book-art of the Biblia de Alba around 1422-1433 which is something quite different from painting and closer to Penso's ideas. Similar are the ideas on the visual expressed by Joseph ibn Sadiq of Arévalo or Abraham b. Shlomo (Gutwirth, 2012).<sup>26</sup> Additional examples could be Solomon de Piera's choice of crystals for watching the stars as subject of a Hebrew poem or Moses Almosnino's attention to theoretical discussions on optics (Gutwirth, 2023).<sup>27</sup> Here, we may see these cases as providing a kind of traditional Hispano-Jewish genealogy for Penso's (albeit different) intense concern with *empresas*, *divisas*, *motes*, *emblemas* and *pintores*.

<sup>24</sup> On *energeia*/*evidentia* amongst poets and critics of the Spanish Golden Age and their sources, see Smith, Paul Julian.

<sup>25</sup> Eleazar Gutwirth, for Bonafed, "For the broader non-Hispanic background see Gloria K. Fiero.

<sup>26</sup> Eleazar Gutwirth, "Jewish Writings on Art in Fifteenth-Century Castile," 27-32; idem, "Cruzando sacras fronteras: sobre el manuscrito de Rashi," 67-76.

<sup>27</sup> On De Piera and Almosnino see Eleazar Gutwirth, "Illuminations II: Lights, Identity, and the Society of Spectacle in the Late Middle Ages" 57-75.

## Conclusion

Joseph Penso de la Vega could be seen as one of the most gifted writers of the Sephardic community in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, not all his works have been symmetrically studied. While some have garnered repeated attention, others have not. The *Triunfos del Águila* is an example of the latter. Its translation is an exceptional phenomenon linked to the bicentenary of the Battle of Vienna. The lack of attention may also be related to some wider problems. The popularity of the notion that the returning conversos of seventeenth century Amsterdam had a split personality, that they constituted *almas en litigio*, where their Catholic past struggled with their Jewish present, may be one of these. Another might be the occasional lack of acknowledgement or, rather, unawareness of history, i.e. of long term traditions in Sephardi culture.

A very visible theme in the book is that reflected in the title *Triunfos*. Evidently reminiscent of Petrarch's last work it draws attention to the ubiquity of its use in Sephardi book titles from Penso's Amsterdam. An examination of the evidence leads to noticing and reconstructing the Sephardi attitude to Petrarch. Similar in some ways is the clear epideictic rhetoric of panegyric by a Jew to a Christian in Penso's book. Is it a new synthesis? Research into Sephardi primary sources shows that, on the contrary, the tradition of Sephardi encomia to Christian individuals is particularly long standing and well evidenced.

One of the main tendencies in the Triumphs is that of pictorialism. It is present, of course, in the metaphors throughout Penso's book. It also seems to determine the selection of sources and references to authors and books. Here again, even if we ignore the commonplaces about Jews and the visual, it needs to be emphasized that pictorialism before the expulsions has only recently been found in Sephardi medieval culture. It enables us to recreate a genealogy for the sensibility that informs Penso's Triumphs.

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