

VINCENT FERRER'S TREATISE ON THE UNIVERSAL:
A NOTE ON THE LATIN AND HEBREW TRADITION
OF THE TEXT

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According to his biographers, while in Lleida as a teacher of logic (1370-1372), the famous Valencian preacher Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) wrote two philosophical works: the *Treatise on Suppositions* (*Tractatus de suppositionibus terminorum*) and the treatise generally known as the *Solemn Question Concerning the Unity of the Universal* (*Quaestio sollemnis de uniate universalis*).

The former work is found in three manuscripts and has been published twice: first, by Pierre Henri Fages (Ferrer 1909-1911: I), and then, in a critical edition, by John A. Trennman (Ferrer 1977). A copy of the latter text is found in only one manuscript also edited twice, by Fages (Ferrer 1909-1911: I) and by Trennman (Ferrer 1982). Neither of these two editions, however, took into account the existence of another version of Ferrer's treatise on the universal, found in a Late-Medieval Hebrew translation, which was discovered only at the end of the last century (Zonta 1997).

The evident similarities and differences between the Latin and Hebrew versions of Vincent's treatise on the universal have been noted on various occasions (Zonta 2010), but no clear explanation of how the text evolved has been given. Very recently, during the preparation of a definitive critical edition of all the extant versions of Ferrer's treatise on the universal (Ferrer 2010), some new passages of the Latin text, quoted, both explicitly and implicitly, by a Late-Medieval philosopher and theologian have been identified. Here, we will try to give a concise description of the textual tradition of Vincent Ferrer's work and solve the main question concerning its transmission drawing on all the extant data.

Ferrer's treatise on the universal is substantially transmitted by three different textual witnesses, being two manuscripts and one printed edition, as follows:

1. The manuscript of Vienna, Dominikanerkonvent, n. 49/271, folios 237r-241v, copied in the fifteenth century, which includes the Latin text divided into four sections. The title of this text is: *Question Concerning the Unity of the Universal*, by Master Vin-

cent, *Friar of the Order of the Preachers (Quaestio Magistri Vincentii, fratris Ordinis Praedicatorum, de unitate universalis)*. We shall call it «v»;

2. The manuscript of Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, parmense 2631, folios 126v-144r, which includes a Hebrew translation of Vincent Ferrer's work¹ under the title *Solemn Tractate Concerning the Universal (Ma'amar nihbad ba-kolel)*.² The translation, made by an anonymous author, who should very probably be identified with the late fifteenth-century Argonese Jewish philosopher 'Eli Habllo,³ not only bears a partially different title with respect to the Latin text; it is larger than the latter and its structure is different, since its first parts, absent from the Latin, deal with the general, much discussed question of the universal as such. (This fact seems to be in accordance with the distinct title given to it by the translator.) However, it includes the whole contents of v, although in a partially different order. We shall call this Hebrew version «b»;

3. A work by the Dominican friar and theologian Petrus Nigri (Peter Schwarz),⁴ *The Shield of the Thomists (Clipeus Thomistarum)*, which was first published in Venice in 1481. This book includes a literal quotation of Vincent Ferrer's work under the title *Tractate Concerning the Unity of the Same Universal (Tractatus de unitate ipsius universalis)*, Nigri 1481: f. 70ra, which has no correspondence in v but almost literally corresponds to a passage of the first section of h; moreover, it includes some other passages, where the name of Vincent Ferrer is not explicitly mentioned, but which correspond more or less literally to some points common to v and h. We shall call this series of passages «m».

The correspondences between v, h and n can be summarized in the following table:

1. The authorship of the work is attributed to *bakama FRY nigra' VYSSYN*, lit. «a (or: the) wise Fyē (or: Fery) called Viceris» (Parma manuscript, folio 126v, lines 26-27). There is no doubt about the latter name (the Catalan version of «Vincent»). Some doubt could be cast upon the exact meaning of the former one; however, it seems not too far-fetched to think that it renders the Catalan pronunciation of the surname of Vincent Ferrer. (The alternative hypothesis, namely that it corresponds to the Medieval Catalan pronunciation of the term «friar», *fr̄a* or *fr̄ave*, seems to be linguistically groundless.)
2. For the contents of this manuscript, see the description in the catalogue of Hebrew manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma (Richler 2001: 359, n. 1316). The manuscript was apparently copied after 1477, probably within the end of the fifteenth century; it is not an autograph by 'Eli Habllo himself.
3. In fact, the Parma manuscript contains a great number of translations by 'Eli Habllo. It also includes the philosophical correspondence between the Jewish translator Abraham Bibago and Moses Arodi which was seemingly forwarded to Habllo.
4. Born around 1435 in Bohemia, Schwarz entered the Order of Preachers in 1452 and began his education in Leipzig. He studied at a number of different European universities such as Montpellier and Salamanca, and was the most distinguished Hebraist in German regions during the fifteenth century. Schwarz composed various exegetical as well as anti-Jewish works, namely, his *Tractatus contra iudeos* (1475) and a revised version written in German, *Stern der Messias* (1477). From a philosophical standpoint, however, his principal work was the universalist until his death in 1483. As its title indicates, it was a defence of the Thomist position against those who opposed it, amongst whom Schwarz considered, along with William of Ockham, the enigmatic Johannes Catalanus (or Canonicus)—identified with Joan Marbres, who lived between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries. For this work and its philosophical implications, cf. Hasek (1920: 49-55) as well as, more recently, Bonino (2002).

Vincent Ferrer, <i>Quaestio sollemnis de unitate universalis</i> , ms. of Vienna, Dominikanerkonvent, n. 49/271, ff. 237r-241v, paragraph numbers according to Ferrer 2010 (Latin)	Vincent (Ferrer), <i>Ma'amar nihbad ba-kolel</i> , ms. of Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, parmense 2631, ff. 126v-144r, paragraph numbers according to Ferrer 2010 (Hebrew version)	Petrus Nigri, <i>Clipeus Thomistarum</i> , Venetis, apud Raynaldum de Novimagio, 1481 (Latin passages)
A «disputed question» on whether the universal does not exist outside the soul (§ 2-30, ff. 127r-131r). This question includes	A «disputed question» on whether the universal exists in the soul (§ 32-45, ff. 131r-132v).	The same explanations of the «real universal» are found here (ff. 70ra and 70ra-70rb). They are explicitly taken from Vincent Ferrer's work.
A «disputed question» on whether the unity of the universal is real (§ 1-83, ff. 237r-241v). This question includes:	A «disputed question» on whether the universal is one with its individuals (§ 46-51, ff. 132v-136r).	
a) twelve arguments in favour of the theory that the unity of the universal is real (§ 2-17, ff. 237r-238r); they correspond to those found in point c) of the Hebrew version of this question;	a) twelve arguments in favour of the theory that the unity of the universal is not real (§ 88-100, ff. 137r-139v);	Arguments 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 of point a) of the Latin = arguments 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 of point c) of the Hebrew are found here too (ff. 66rb-v2), without any explicit reference to Vincent Ferrer.

b) twelve opposing arguments, according to which the unity of the universal is not real (§ 18-49, ff. 238r-239v); they correspond to those found in point a) of the Hebrew;	b) two propositions about the fact that the unity of the universal is not real, but rational (§ 101, ff. 139v-140r);	Arguments 1, 9, 10 of point b) of the Latin and of point a) of the Hebrew are found here too (ff. 67b-v, 68ra-1b); no explicit reference to Ferrer is given.
c) solution of the question, affirming that the unity of the universal is not real, but rational (§ 50-56, ff. 239v-240r); the corresponding arguments are found in point b) of the Hebrew;	c) thirteen arguments by means of which logicians contend that the unity of the universal is real (§ 105-117, ff. 140v-142r);	
d) a refutation of the above twelve arguments of point a) (§ 57-81, ff. 240r-241v); it is identical to that found in point d) of the Hebrew.	d) a refutation of the above thirteen arguments (§ 118-131, ff. 142r-144r).	The refutation of the above six arguments, also found in the Latin and in the Hebrew, is given here (ff. 68vb-69ra); there is no reference to the direct source.
Conclusion: while the universal's nature is real, its unity is not (§ 82, f. 241v); echoed in point d) of the Hebrew.	Conclusion: the universal is one and exists in our soul only (§ 132-133, f. 144r).	

A textual comparison of the above three witnesses (v, h and n), both in their general structure and in their philological details, suggests that they are substantially independent from each other, although they derive from the same source. This conclusion results from the analysis of some variant readings, both on the microscopic and macroscopic level. One of the most important proofs of this might be given by a comparison of argument n. 8 (§ 12-13), about the reality of the unity of the universal, and its refutation (§ 74), as found in the Latin text of the Vienna manuscript, with the Hebrew version (where, according to the alternative ordering of the arguments, it appears as n. 9), and with Petrus Nigri's quotation (where it appears as n. 4). The argument states that, if the unity of the universal was not real, the diversity existing between man-in-common and donkey-in-common would not be a real diversity either; but this is false, since, if it were true, it would lead to an infinite regress.

Vincent Ferrer, <i>Quaestio sollemnis de unitate universalis</i> , ms. of Vienna, Dominikanerkonvent, n. 49/271, f. 237v	Vincent (Ferrer), <i>Ma'amar nihelbad ba-kolel</i> , ms. of Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Parmense 2631, f. 143v (English translation of the Hebrew version)	Petrus Nigri, <i>Clippeus Theonistarum</i> , Venetiis, apud Raynaldum de Novimagio, 1481, f. 66va
§ 12 Octavo sic: tunc diversitas quae est inter hominem et asinum in communi non erit realis, cum ipsa sit communis omnibus individuis contentis sub illis naturis in communi. Sed hoc est falsum, quia tunc esset processus in infinitum.	§ 113 Ninth argument: if such were the case, the diversity that exists between man-in-common and donkey-in-common would not be a real diversity; since it is common to all the individuals which belong to these two natures, i.e. man-in-common and donkey-in-common; but this is false, since, if it were true, it would lead to an infinite regress. In fact, the diversity attaching to donkey-in-common is not really identifiable with the diversity attaching to man-in-common, since, in your opinion, individuals are not really one and the same as the nature they hold in common. Thus, if the latter diversity is not really one and the same as the former, it is different from it. [...]	Quarta ratio: si unitas inter Sorren et Platonem non est realis, tunc sequeretur quod diversitas, quae est inter hominem et asinum in communi, non erit realis, cum ipsa sit communis omnibus individuis contentis sub illis naturis, scilicet sub homine et asino in communi, sed hoc est falsum.
§ 13 Quod probro, quia haec diversitas asini in communi non est una realiter cum diversitate hominis in communi, quia individua eorum realiter non identificantur in natura communi. Ergo, si haec diversitas non est idem realiter cum illa, igitur est diversa. [...]		Consequencia probatur, quia si nihil commune erit reale, sequitur quod cum illa differentia sit communis omnibus individuis, quod etiam non erit realis.

The coincidences and differences between the three versions do not present a clear-cut picture: at first sight v and h offer a very similar text in this passage; yet h is in accordance with n against v when adding the explanatory clause «i.e. man-in-common and donkey-in-common» (n: «scilicet sub homine et asino in communi»). In addition, while leaving aside the idea of an infinite regress, which is present both in v and h, n adds another explanatory clause at the very beginning, namely «si unitas inter Sorren et Platonem non est realis» which finds some parallel in h's «if such were the case», but is completely absent from v.

The refutation is as follows:

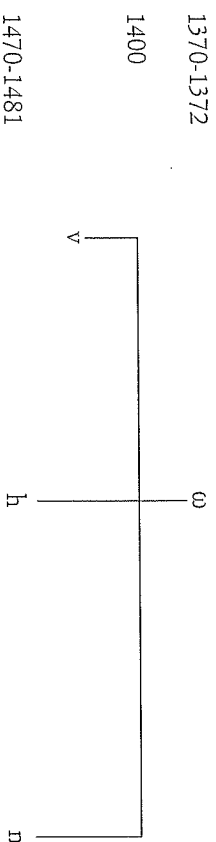
Vincent Ferrer, <i>Quaestio sollemnis de unitate universalis</i> , ms. of Vienna, Dominikanerkonvent, n. 49/271, f. 241r	Vincent (Ferrer), <i>Mad'amar nitehad ba-kolel</i> , ms. of Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, Parmense 2631, f. 143v (English translation of the Hebrew version)	Petrus Nigri, <i>Clippus Thomistarum</i> , Venetis, apud Raynaldum de Novimagio, 1481, f. 69ra
§ 74 Ad octavam rationem dicendum: concedetur prima consequentia, et cum dicitur quod hoc est falsum, negatur. Cum dicitur quod illae duae diveritates distinguenterur per alias duas, dico quod se ipsis distinguenterur.	§ 127 To the ninth argument, I reply as follows. As regards the statement that «the diversity», etc., it is conceded; as regards the statement that «this is false», I say that it is true as far as species is concerned; as regards the statement that «such kinds of diversity differ in the same way as do the kinds of diversity which», etc., I say that such kinds of diversity differ in terms of their species rather than in terms of other kinds of diversity.	Ad quartam, negatur consequentia quia non valet: unitas hominis et asini non est realis, igitur nec diversitas, quia diversitas eorum est realis, sed unitas est rationis.

Here again, the three extant texts seem to come out of the same lost archetype, possibly the original text. Both v and n condense the text considerably as against h, which offers a much more explicit argument.

Obviously, the three testimonies either truncated their text (as is clear from the refutation given in the Latin text of the Vienna manuscript, which is barely understandable), or adapted it (as it seems to have been done in particular by Petrus Nigri, who, having dropped the idea of infinite regress, gives his own solution to the problem), or even rendered it into another language (as is evidently the case in the Hebrew version), so that the contents of all of these Latin texts can only be reconstructed from a tentative comparison of all of these texts. This fact might be considered a case of what philologists use to call a «diffraction in *absentia*», that is to say, a case where a word or even a more or less longer section of a lost original text, due to its difficulty, was altered in different ways by the various copyists (or translators), so that we can at this juncture only provide a tentative reconstruction of the word or sentence through a detailed philological comparison of the different extant texts.⁵

5. See about this Avalle 1978: 56-60. Here, the «diffraction» should be due to the presence of a sort of *lectio difficilior* in Vincent Ferrer's text, which the Hebrew translator only was able to render into his language more or less literally.

The above example, together with the other similar passages which we have tried to analyze in a philological way elsewhere (Fidora – Zonta 2012), suggests that the textual history of Vincent Ferrer's text, according to the so-called «most economical hypothesis»,⁶ was as follows: The author wrote the original text of his work in form of a sort of «treatise on the universal as such», according to the common usage of many philosophers of his time. This text was reworked and abreviated by a copyist — this might be the «shorter version» found in v —; then, the original text was employed by Petrus Nigri as one of the sources of his book (n) and, in the same period, was rendered into Hebrew by 'Eli Habillo (h). If this hypothesis is true, the original text, now apparently lost, can be reconstructed only through a complete comparison of its extant witnesses. The *stemma codicum*, which would schematize the textual history of Vincent Ferrer's work, would be as follows:



Sigla: w = original text of Vincent Ferrer's *Treatise Concerning the Universal*, now lost; v = «shorter version» of the treatise, written in Latin during the fifteenth century, and preserved in the Vienna manuscript; n = quotations of the original text of the treatise, preserved in Petrus Nigri's *Clippus Thomistarum* (Venice 1481); h = Hebrew translation of the original text, by 'Eli Habillo, preserved in the Parma manuscript.

Even if it is not possible to establish the existence of a direct contact between Petrus Nigri and 'Eli Habillo, it is surprising that the sole evidence of the reception of Vincent Ferrer's treatise on the universal should be none other

6. The concept of «the most economical hypothesis» is usually employed by philologists who are trying to reconstruct the history of a text and have not found any clear and sure proof of the relationship between the different copies of the text itself. In this case, they suggest to reconstruct a *stemma codicum* in its simplest way, in order to avoid additions to the already known data about the textual history. On this issue, see again Avalle 1978: 82-84. In the case of Vincent Ferrer's work, one can obviously suggest also a different textual history: v might be a copy of an original, now lost, «short version» by Ferrer himself; h and n might be copies of a lost «long version» of the same text. But if so, we should add to the above *stemma* another point, which would include the original «short version»; and this addition would be in contrast with the rule of «the most economical hypothesis».

than that of a Hebraist and a Jewish translator. In fact, it is plausible that Petrus Nigri read Vincent's text during his stay in Salamanca where he learnt Hebrew from a Jewish teacher who taught the children of the Jewish community (Waldé 1916: 70). In this context, it is worth noting that Petrus Nigri, while examining the nature of *vox*, a key concept for nominalism, explicitly connects his discussion of universals to a Hebraic context. He does this, in Question 18 of the *Clipens*, by raising the issue that, as such, a *vox* or word – the Latin word «homo», for example – does not possess a universal meaning, since in Hebrew the *vox* (or word) «homo» does not signify the rational nature that is man.⁹ We know that there was a manuscript of Vincent Ferrer's *Tractatus de suppositionibus* (since lost) in Salamanca,⁸ so there is no reason not to think that it might have been accompanied by his original treatise on the universal. Might the text on universals, then, have circulated around the Iberian Peninsula within a particular Judaeo-Christian setting alongside other texts, such as the works of Joan Marbres,⁹ quoted abundantly by Petrus Nigri and which Hablillo had also begun to translate?¹⁰

There can be no doubt that texts like the treatise on the universal may serve as an important key to reconstructing the specific Jewish-Christian milieu which gave rise to the Hebrew translations of the fifteenth century. One very promising way of doing so is to trace the paths of reception of groups of less well-known Latin texts in both the Latin and the Hebrew world and to see when and where their paths cross, as in the case of Vincent Ferrer, Petrus Nigri and 'Eli Hablillo. Vincent Ferrer's treatise not only offers a well-argued solution to one of the central problems in the history of Graeco-Latin philosophy that attracted the interest of both Christian and Jewish scholars, but also a highly interesting case of multilingual textual transmission and of the importance of this very phenomenon for modern editing and interpreting of medieval texts.¹¹

7. Nigri 1481: f. 62rb: «[...] illa vox 'homo', quae significat rationalem naturam in lingua latina, non significat eadem in lingua hebraica. Igitur non esset idem universale in lingua latina et in lingua hebraica, quod est valde inconveniens.»

8. Cf. Robles' introduction in Ferrer 1996: 45, which includes information concerning the existence of a manuscript of the *Tractatus de suppositionibus* in Salamanca at the end of the sixteenth century.

9. For this figure, Canon of Tortosa and lecturer in Toulouse, cf. Carreras i Arrau 1999: 1943; II: 558-560.

10. Cf. 'Eli Hablillo's introduction to his translation of Antonius Andreae's *Quaestiones super XII libros metaphysicorum* (quoted from Zonta 2006: 182-183): «Some years ago, I began to translate the questions of John the Canon (*Canon Qaloni*) regarding the *Physics* [...]. However, at the beginning of my translation I encountered many difficulties I was unable to resolve. [...] Consequently, I did not finish my translation.» We point out, in passing, that included in Joan Marbres' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, which formed the object of Schwarz's criticism (see above n. 4) and Hablillo's interest, is an important discussion on the status of universals. The relevant passages are published in Kraus 1937: 57-63.

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ABSTRACTS