CHAPTER FOUR

THE *QUAESTIO DE UNITATE UNIVERSALIS*

TRANSLATED INTO HEBREW:

VINCENT FERRER, PETRUS NIGRI AND ‘ELI HABILLO—

A TEXTUAL COMPARISON

Alexander Fidora and Mauro Zonta

1. INTRODUCTION

Until the end of the twentieth century, the complete and original Latin text of Vincent Ferrer's philosophico-theological work, usually known as the *De unitate universalis*, composed in Lleida in around 1370–1372, was thought to have been passed down on folios 237r–241v of a unique manuscript from Vienna, Dominikanerkonvent 49/271, dating back to the fifteenth century.

This text, discovered and first published by Pierre Henri Fages in 1909,1 was re-published in a first critical edition by John A. Trentman in 1982.2 Apparently, neither Fages nor Trentman noticed the fact that, only a century after its compilation, passages from Vincent Ferrer's work were cited by the German Dominican philosopher and theologian Petrus Nigri (Peter Schwarz) in his work *Clipeus thomistarum* (*Shield of the Thomists*), first published in Venice in 1481.3

In addition, in 1995, Mauro Zonta found—on folios 126v–144r of ms. Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, parmense 2631 (formerly De Rossi 457)—and briefly examined a Hebrew translation of a work ascribed to the Dominican friar named Vincent. The existence of this translation, made by an anonymous author, who should very probably be identified with the late

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fifteenth-century Aragonese Jewish philosopher ‘Eli Habillo,⁴ had first been discovered by Moritz Steinschneider in 1893. Steinschneider ascribed the work to the famous thirteenth-century French Dominican friar Vincent of Beauvais,⁵ not noticing that the title of the Hebrew translation of the work, Maʾamar nikhbad ba-kolel, i.e. “honourable discourse concerning the universal”, was almost identical—as first pointed out by Zonta—to that given to the Latin text of the Quaestio de unitate universalis by another Dominican friar, namely, Vincent Ferrer.⁶

Alexander Fidora and Mauro Zonta have recently re-edited the Quaestio de unitate universalis together with the Maʾamar nikhbad ba-kolel.⁷ At first glance, the Hebrew text in the Parma manuscript does not agree with that of the Latin text preserved in the Vienna manuscript, since the former contains large sections which are absent from the latter. However, there is at least one citation in the Clipeus thomistarum which makes reference to these sections of the Hebrew version which are otherwise lost in Latin.⁸ In fact, a more detailed examination shows that the Quaestio de unitate universalis and the Hebrew version are partially identical, leading to the hypothesis that the Hebrew translation of the Latin text may represent a more complete redaction of Vincent Ferrer’s work which is now lost.

The differences and coincidences in structure and content between all three testimonies, namely the Latin text as transmitted by the Vienna manuscript, the Clipeus thomistarum by Petrus Nigri and the Hebrew translation, can be summarized as in Table I, which also shows that the texts are arranged in a different sequence with varying numeration of the arguments. On the following pages, we offer a transcription and detailed philological analysis of those arguments which are available in all three witnesses. Thus, we shall present and discuss 1) the extreme realist arguments in favour of

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⁴ In fact, the Parma manuscript contains a great number of translations by ‘Eli Habillo. It also includes the philosophical correspondence between the Jewish translator Abraham Bibago and Moses Arondi which was seemingly forwarded to Habillo.

⁵ See Moritz Steinschneider, Die hebraischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher (Berlin: Kommissionsverlag des Bibliographischen Bureaus, 1893), 489.


⁷ Vincent Ferrer, Quaestio de unitate universalis — אסאם נךבד בקאל (Maʾamar nikhbad ba-kolel), ed. Alexander Fidora, Mauro Zonta (Santa Coloma de Queralt: Obrador Edèndum/UAB/URV, 2010).

⁸ Namely the explanations concerning the “real universal”, cf. Table I. This passage has been analysed in detail by Zonta, “The Original Text of Vincent Ferrer’s Tractatus de unitate universalis”. 