

LATE MEDIEVAL JEWISH  
IDENTITIES

IBERIA AND BEYOND

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## CHAPTER 4

### POLEMICAL STRATEGY AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORITY IN ABNER OF BURGOS/ALFONSO OF VALLADOLID

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#### ***Auctoritas in Medieval Polemical Argumentation***

*The question of the representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority*

Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

In 414 Augustine, bishop of Hippo (d. 430), famously wrote in a letter to Bishop Paulinus of Nola that the Jews under his control should be protected as a “testimonium scripturarum” (a testimony of the scriptures), as a witness of the old Mosaic law, “ut christi nomen... tanta auctoritate praepolleat” (in order that the name of Christ... be distinguished as superior by such authority).<sup>1</sup> This well-known notion that the Jews themselves, as a “living incarnation” of the old law, lent authoritative testimony to the truth of Christianity by virtue of their own erroneous hermeneutics grants a foundational importance to Jewish error in the revelation of Christian truth. Augustine sees instances of alleged Jewish blindness and obduracy not only as examples of their sin or as a foil to the perceived self-understanding of Christians, a perspective of Christian exegesis since the first century, but he also grants a functional, active role to Jewish error in Christian soteriological history. Augustine’s words in 16.21 of *Contra Faustum* allude to this paradoxical identity:

Nec inde auctoritas illis Libris minuitur, quod a Iudaeis non intelleguntur; imo et augetur: nam et ipsa eorum caecitas ibi praedicta est. Unde magis non intellegendo veritatem perhibent testimonium veritati, quia cum eos libros non intellegunt a quibus non intellecturi praedicta sunt etiam hinc eos veraces ostendunt.<sup>2</sup>

In this logic, by not recognizing the authority of Jesus to interpret the law, they actually affirm it, granting authority to Christianity through the testimony of their disbelief.

Augustine’s paradoxical ideas on Judaism as a theological “witness” to Christianity formed part of a stable and widespread notion of what Jeremy Cohen and others have

termed the “hermeneutical Jew,” the view of Judaism understood in terms only of Christian exegesis that, as a cornerstone of Christian self-understanding, remained virtually unchallenged and unchanged until the end of the eleventh century.<sup>3</sup> As historian Amos Funkenstein, among others, has remarked, Christian polemic against Judaism before the twelfth century was predominantly an exercise in defining Christian doctrine rather than a real confrontation with Judaism or Jews. It was not missionizing polemic meant to convert Jews or even to refute Judaism on its own terms, but a form of theological apologetic that functioned to articulate the nature of Christian belief against the backdrop of a constructed infidelity.<sup>4</sup> Augustine’s theological hermeneutic elaborated on and solidified the stereotypical, imaginary view of the exegetical difference between Jews and Christians that had already been expressed by early figures such as Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), Tertullian (d. ca. 225), Origen (d. ca. 254), and Jerome (d. 420). Medieval texts that built on this foundation responded not to Judaism as it was practiced by living Jews, but to an imaginary Judaism as it existed within the terms of Christian salvation history, as the negative exegetical correlative of Christian figuralism. It was this hermeneutical construction of Judaism that determined the nature of medieval anti-Jewish polemic for over a millennium and inspired the ubiquitous images in manuscripts and sculpture of an upright *ecclesia* triumphant over a blind and crestfallen *synagoga*.<sup>5</sup>

By the turn of the twelfth century, precisely when these images began to evolve from static typology to active polemic, leading eventually to the depiction of *synagoga*’s humiliation and defeat, the stability of this inveterate notion began to falter. Although many factors have been suggested to explain what precipitated this change, evident in iconography as well as in papal legislation, one key circumstance was a growing crisis in the understanding of argumentative authority, of textual *auctoritas*.<sup>6</sup> An *auctor* or written authority, distinguished from a mere author, is not only one who is responsible for a text but, more often, someone who is to be believed and quoted. The *auctor* possesses *auctoritas*, the authority to speak truly, the wisdom to speak well, and the credibility to be trusted as a source. As Alastair Minnis explains, the two essential elements of medieval *auctoritas* are intrinsic worth and authenticity. To have intrinsic worth meant that what one said or wrote did not contradict Christian doctrine; to have authenticity indicated that an *auctor* was connected with an ancient and true source. As every discipline had its own *auctores*—grammar had Priscian and Donatus, rhetoric had Cicero, dialectic had Aristotle, Porphyry and Boethius, etc.—so the *auctoritas* for biblical exegesis and, by extension, polemical writing was derived from the source viewed as most ancient and true, the Bible, whose *auctor* was none other than God himself. In most pre-twelfth-century sources, as Minnis explains, the relative importance of the human author was eclipsed by the divine *auctor*, and if a writer expressed a truth, it was attributable to the *auctoritas* inherent in his sources, not from his own authority.<sup>7</sup> For this same reason, the authority of scripture was derived above all from the absolute supremacy of its divine author and there was in traditional polemical writing, following Augustine’s firm distinction between authoritative and apocryphal scriptures, a total confidence in the power of biblical *auctoritas* to justify true arguments.<sup>8</sup> Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) pushed this confidence to its limits, proclaiming that “*Suspecta est michi omnis ueritas quam non confirmat Scripturarum auctoritas, nec Christum in sua clarificatione recipio, si non assistant ei Moyses et Helyas . . . ad comprobendam reuelationis suae ueritatem, non solum figuratiue, sed etiam aperte, Scripturae exhibeat auctoritatem*”

(Every truth that the authority of scripture does not confirm is suspect to me, nor do I accept Christ in his glorification if Moses and Elijah do not stand beside him . . . let [Jesus] present the authority of scripture not only figuratively but openly to prove the truth of his revelation).<sup>9</sup> Even in the Latin protocol of the Barcelona Disputation of 1263 between the Aragonese R. Moses ben Nahman of Gerona (Nahmanides, d. ca. 1270) and the Dominican convert Paul Christiani, the anonymous author affirms, “*Autoritas mentiri non possit*” (Authority may not lie).<sup>10</sup>

Beneath the surface of this longstanding faith in the proof of *auctoritates*, however, the concept of *auctoritas* as a source of authority in polemical writing was undergoing a significant upheaval. In nonpolemical exegesis, this took the form, as Minnis has shown, of a shift in the understanding of the human and divine *auctores* and a rise in the relative importance of the former. In polemical writing, this involved an uncertainty over the power of biblical *auctoritas* in dealing with non-Christians, and an increase in the perceived power of *ratio*, reason.<sup>11</sup> A clear example of the preference of reason over authorities in a polemical context can be found in the writing of Peter Abelard (d. 1142), in whose *Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, the Christian remarks:

In quolibet disputationis conflictu firmiter est rationis ueritas reddita quam auctoritas ostensa. Neque enim ad fidem astruendam refert quid sit in rei ueritate, sed quid in opinionem possit venire; et de ipsius auctoritatis uerbis plerumque questiones emergunt, ut de ipsis priusquam per ipsa iudicandum sit.<sup>12</sup>

When arguments similar to Abelard’s based on *ratio* appeared around the turn of the twelfth century in works by other writers such as Gilbert Crispin (d. 1117), Odo of Cambrai (d. 1113), and Petrus Alfonsi (converted 1106), polemical writing not only betrayed a new doubt over the foundation of *auctoritas*, but also evinced a new awareness of the disparate natures of the hermeneutical and contemporary Jews and a concomitant need to update the former to accord more accurately with the growing complexity of the latter as they were perceived in Christian understanding.<sup>13</sup> This imperative is especially evident in the mid-twelfth-century polemics of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny (d. 1156), who argues that contemporary Jews can be considered as less-than-human beasts because they lack the reason to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Peter’s condemnation of perceived Jewish irrationality constitutes part of his effort to bring the image of the contemporary, “real” Jew into harmony with the common image of the Jew as one who disbelieves authorities, the image that had long defined the hermeneutical Jew of traditional polemic. More importantly, it reflects the twelfth-century process of expanding the very concept of authoritative proof to include more than biblical *testimonia*.<sup>14</sup> By the turn of the thirteenth century, Alan of Lille (d. 1202) likewise remarked in his polemic against heretics, Jews, and Muslims that the instability in *auctoritas*, which has a “nose of wax” that can be “bent” to different purposes, should be counterbalanced by reason.<sup>15</sup>

This shift in the durability of *auctoritas* in polemical writing was accompanied, not coincidentally, by a shift in the representation of non-Christian sources, and by the middle of the thirteenth century, a new challenge faced polemicists beyond that of simply choosing reason over scriptural authority. The disparity between the traditional images of Judaism in polemical writing and the growing contemporary

knowledge of Jewish texts and beliefs grew more pronounced as the image of a new Talmudic rather than strictly Old Testament Jew was disseminated through the efforts of converts such as Nicolas Donin at the Talmud Trial in Paris during the fifth decade of the thirteenth century<sup>16</sup> and by Paul Christiani at the Disputation of Barcelona and at another harangue in Paris a decade later.<sup>17</sup> These events marked a new awareness that the disparity between theological ideas of Jews and the reality of Jewish belief and practice was manifest above all in the differences between what Jews and Christians held to be authoritative proof texts.<sup>18</sup> In the “expansion” of authority, as Gilbert Dahan has called it, polemicists began to conceive of *auctoritas* and *auctoritates* in an entirely new way, including not only biblical *testimonia* or philosophical reason, but the new, original source material from Judaism and Islam as well.<sup>19</sup> Rather than condemning the foreignness of such sources as a sign of Jewish or Muslim infidelity, a view that can be seen in early twelfth-century polemics such as the *Dialogue against the Jews* of Petrus Alfonsi, polemicists sought instead to appropriate it as a source of Christian truth, providing decisive proof that Christianity was attested to not only in its own sources, but even those considered authentic by its enemies. In the words of Dominican missionary Riccoldo da Monte Croce (d. 1320) in his *Contra Legem Sarracenorum* (*Against the Law of the Saracens*), “Numquam est tam validum et robustum testimonium doctrine vel vite quam cum ille laudanda loquitur qui ingerere crimen natur” (Never is there so valid or strong a witness in doctrine or in life as when he who tries to make an accusation speaks praise).<sup>20</sup>

This turning to the sources of one’s opponent is exemplified in the polemics of the Dominican Raymond Martini (d. after 1284) who, in his *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (*Muzzle for the Jews*) in 1267 and his monumental *Pugio Fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*) in 1278 elaborated on Paul Christiani’s approach in the disputation of Barcelona, and amassed an arsenal of Talmudic and midrashic sources that he saw as useful in proving Judaism to be in error and, he believed, in finally convincing Jews to convert to Christianity (figure 4.1). In the polemical arguments of Christiani and Martini,<sup>21</sup> argumentative authority became associated not only with tradition, but also with a mastery of foreignness and difference. In the second half of the thirteenth century, polemical *auctoritas* became associated with alterity. For the first time since Augustine, the *auctoritas* lent to pro-Christian arguments by Jewish disbelief became manifest not only in the imagined and unchanging characteristics of the hermeneutical Jew, but in the actual Jewish texts, postbiblical *auctoritates* that included citations from the Targumim, the Talmud, early midrash as well as later medieval Jewish authorities.

By expanding the traditional canon of *autores* and so redefining the very nature of *auctoritas* in polemical writing, polemicists were brought face to face with a perplexing paradox: rabbinical writing in Hebrew and Aramaic and original Islamic sources in Arabic possessed the positive and commanding quality of authenticity, but they most certainly did not contain “intrinsic worth” for polemical authors. Much that directly contradicted Christian doctrine was vitally present in the very sources polemicists sought to employ.<sup>22</sup> While polemicists such as Martini sought to mitigate this conflict with claims that proofs of Christian truths were preserved by in Arabic and Hebrew sources without the knowledge of Muslims or Jews themselves, a more integral defense against the instability of authoritative proof in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the invocation of the endorsing testimony of converts, both actual and fictional. With the voice of the convert, polemicists aimed to penetrate the shell of symbolic difference encasing the volatile authorities of the putative infidel

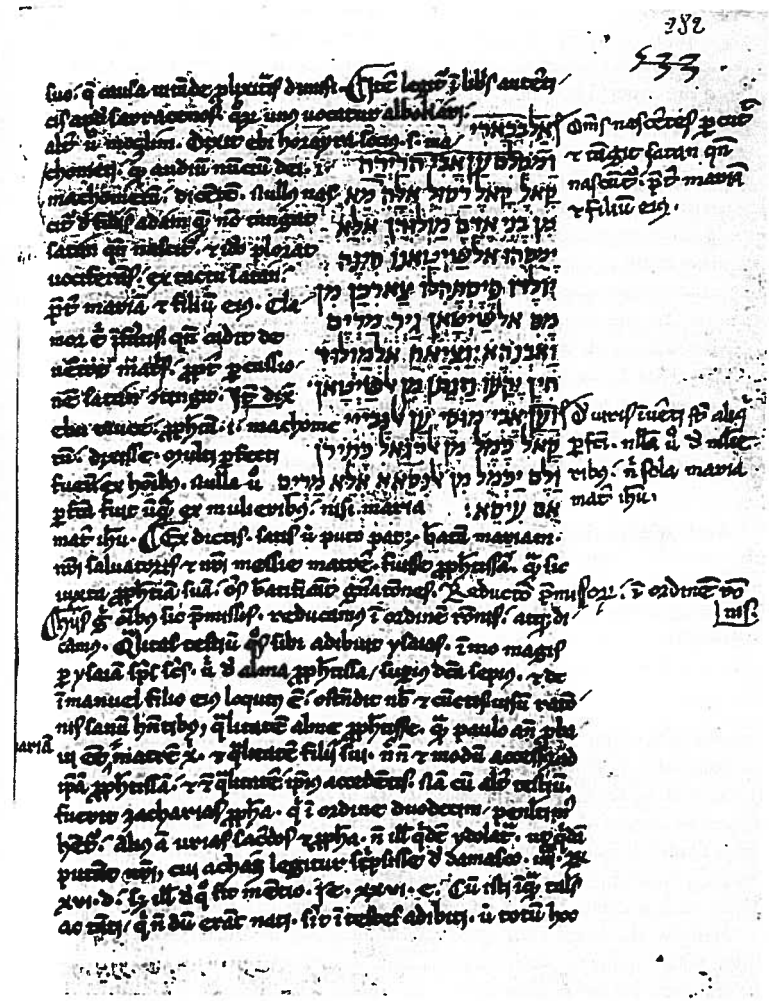


Figure 4.1 Raymondus Martini, *Pugio Fidei*, fol. 282r. Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris, MS 1405 (photo: Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève).

and so to bridge the widening gap between authenticity and intrinsic worth in their polemical arguments. This appeal to the alleged expertise of the convert was already evident in the twelfth century—even before non-Christian sources began to be used as proof texts for Christian arguments—in the Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogue*, which begins with Alfonsi’s affirmation that he was converted only after “arriving . . . to a great height” in his knowledge of Judaism.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, the author of the anti-Jewish *Opusculum de conversione sua* (often called Herman-Judah of Cologne, the “erstwhile Jew”), describes himself as “the strongest assailant of [Jewish] paternal traditions . . . a

Jew of the Jews."<sup>24</sup> Both texts illustrated not only the twofold method of proof, *ratione et auctoritate* (by reason and by textual authority), but also narrated the personal experience of conversion, which enabled the alterity of the most authentic proof texts to be transformed into the expert knowledge of the faithful convert.<sup>25</sup>

The seed and center of the "expansion" of traditional notions of argumentative authority lies in the more intensive appeal to authenticity, specifically authenticity in difference. By showing that Christianity can be proven on the basis of even the most authentic Jewish or Muslim sources, and by justifying the right to use those sources by documenting their conversion experience and their new understanding of multiple traditions that resulted therefrom or, in Martini's case, through exhaustive and punctilious translations provided alongside original texts, polemicists moved closer and closer to what they perceived as the authentic Jewish or Muslim perspective and authority. In Martini's words in the *Pugio Fidei*, speaking about original postbiblical Jewish sources from Talmud and midrash, "Nihil tam validum ad confutandam Iudaeorum impudentiam reperitur, nihil ad eorum convincendam nequitiam tam efficax invenitur." (Nothing is found to be so useful for confuting the impudence of the Jews, nothing so effective can be found for convincing of their ignorance.)<sup>26</sup>

#### **Auctoritas, Authenticity, and Authorship in Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid**

*Abtrünnig erst bin ich tren. Ich bin du, wenn ich ich bin. (Only as an apostate am I faithful; I am you when I am myself)*

Paul Celan, "Lob der Ferne" ("Praise of Distance")

The development of a jargon of authenticity both through citation of foreign texts and the invocation of the testimony of converts as a solution to the crisis of *auctoritas* in polemical writing reached a high-water mark in the writing of the Castilian polemicist Abner de Burgos (d. ca. 1347), known after his conversion around 1320–21 as Alfonso de Valladolid. Following his conversion, Abner-Alfonso spent the nearly three decades until his death engaged in religious polemic with his former community of Jewish friends and students. Abner-Alfonso wrote at least ten works of polemic, most or all in Hebrew, the longest and most important being his *Moreh Sedeq* (*Teacher of Righteousness*), which today survives only in a contemporary Castilian translation as the *Mostrador de justicia*. Abner-Alfonso drew from this text as the basis of most of his later polemical writing, much of which was also translated into Castilian, including a series of polemical letters to various Jews and a long polemical response to his former student, Isaac ben Polgar, the *Teshuvot la-meharef* (*Response to the Blasphemer*).<sup>27</sup>

What is remarkable about Abner-Alfonso's work in comparison with other anti-Jewish writing is that he is no longer, like most Christian polemicists before him, writing for a Christian readership but, on the contrary, he composed his works explicitly for Jews to read. The fact that he wrote virtually all of his works in Hebrew is manifest proof that it is more than a mere trope of polemical rhetoric when he claims in the *Mostrador*, "Quisse componer este libro . . . por mostrar la ffe çierta . . . a los judios, que la avien mester" (I wanted to compose this work . . . in order to demonstrate the true faith . . . to the Jews, who have need of it), a claim he repeatedly emphasizes throughout the text.<sup>28</sup> By contrast, Martini's *Pugio*, which is

often described by historians as a "manual" for Dominicans to use in their debates with Jews, bears no marks of being intended for a direct Jewish readership, and its vituperative tone and frequent critical commentary further evince its author's lack of concern about the possible rhetorical demands of directly addressing Jewish readers in a polemical vein. Correspondingly, Martini's impact on subsequent Jewish writing seems very limited, while over a dozen Jewish writers took to refuting or directly addressing Abner-Alfonso's arguments in the centuries after his death.<sup>29</sup> Few other anti-Jewish polemical texts—not even Alfonsi's immensely popular *Dialogues*—ever enjoyed the Jewish readership marshaled by Abner-Alfonso's texts.

In this context, Abner-Alfonso's engagement with the crisis of textual authority and the issue of authenticity is even more crucial for his arguments than for any previous polemicist. In terms of his polemical stance and the content of his arguments, he can be directly linked with the tradition of conversion narratives of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as with the appeal to argumentative authority in thirteenth-century polemics based on postbiblical literature. Abner-Alfonso does in fact take up many of the same theological questions as Christiani at the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263, even actually quoting from the Hebrew *Vikkuaḥ* of Nahmanides.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, his work has many striking similarities to Martini's *Pugio* in topic, sources, and massive extension, a fact all the more striking when one notes that Abner-Alfonso shows no evidence of familiarity with Martini or his text.<sup>31</sup> Abner-Alfonso's arguments, however, are of a very different sort from Martini's or Christiani's, and he employs a number of rhetorical strategies that set him apart from the tradition that preceded him. Besides the use of Hebrew, the most outstanding difference is the style which, rather than scholastic and philosophical like Martini's, is rambling and discursive, tacking one argument on top of another in a style evocative more of midrashic commentary than Christian polemic.<sup>32</sup> This deliberate inattention to rigid order served as an essential part of Abner-Alfonso's strategy of speaking directly to his Jewish reader in what he understood to be an "authentic" Jewish style.

The preponderance of what Jonathan Hecht has called Abner-Alfonso's "ease of presentation in his Hebrew works that is appealing to the Hebrew reader" is reinforced in the text by the explicit and deliberate avoidance of Christian sources.<sup>33</sup> While citing over two thousand different verses taken from every book of the Hebrew Bible and avoiding the Vulgate, he adduces, like Martini, hundreds of citations from the Targumim, Talmud (both Yerushalmi and Bavli), hundreds more from both aggadic and halakhic midrashim, as well as numerous major and minor Hebrew exegetes, philosophers, grammarians, and polemicists. By contrast, he brings in fewer than ten medieval Christian writers in only a sprinkling of citations and quotes the New Testament only one-fortieth as often as the Hebrew Bible.<sup>34</sup> Abner-Alfonso explains the rationale for his avoidance of Christian works in the first chapter to the *Mostrador*, where he explicitly discusses the question of what constitutes authoritative proof in polemical argumentation.

"Hay libros que el rrebellé judio podrá tomar pruebas dellos para contra nos los christianos; e que el mostrador christiano non deve tomar pruebas dellos contra los judios; e estos sson los libros que sson abtenticos entre los christianos e non entre los judios." [There are books that the Jewish rebel can take proofs from against us the Christians, and that the Christian teacher should not take proofs from against the Jews. These are the books that are authentic among the Christians and not among the Jews].

By the same token, only the Christian teacher can cite those books authentic among the Jews.<sup>35</sup> From the very beginning of his text, the issue of authenticity is key to Abner-Alfonso's conception of authoritative proof, and he strives to cite from only those works he believes his Jewish reader will consider authentic.

Part and parcel of his attempt to demonstrate his argumentative authority by evaluating his arguments on the basis of their authenticity is his own first-person voice in the text. He begins the *Mostrador*, which takes the form of a dialogue between a Christian "teacher" and a Jewish "rebel," by describing how he suffered along with his community of the Jews of Castile and recounting what he claims is the story of his conversion (figure 4.2). The importance of this opening passage merits a full citation:

Caté la premia de los judios, el mi pueblo donde yo era, que sson en esta luenga captividad queixados e quebrantados e angustiados en ffecho de los pechos, el pueblo que descendieron de la ssu onrra e del ssu loor que ssolian aver, e non an ayuda nin ffuerça en ssy. E acaesçió un dia, penssando yo mucho en este pleito, que entré a la signnoga con gran lloro e amargura de mi coraçon, e ffiz plegarias a Dios... E de la gran coyta que tenia en mi coraçon e de la lazzeria que avia tomado canssé e adormesçime; e vy en vision de ssuenno un grand omne que me dizia: "Por qué estás adormesçido?" Entiendo estas palabras que te ffablo, e párate enffiesto, que yo te digo que los judios están desde tan grand tienpo en esta captividad por su locura e por su nesçedad e por mengua de "Mostrador de Justícia" donde conoscan la verdad.<sup>36</sup>

Three years later, he claims he saw the same man in another dream, "e díxome como sannudo: '¿Hata cuándo, pereçoso, dormirás? ¿Quándo te levantarás de tu ssuenno? Ca los peccados de todos los judios e de ssus fijos e de sus generaçiones tienes a cuestas'" (and he said to me, as if angry, "How long will you sleep, slugabed? When will you arise from your sleep? For you are responsible for the sins of all the Jews and their sons and their offspring.")<sup>37</sup>

Like Herman Judah in the *Opusculum de conversione sua*, Abner-Alfonso describes his conversion as a long hermeneutical struggle, and just as in Herman's text, this struggle serves a rhetorical goal in the construction of his polemical argument. That goal is not the same as that of the *Opusculum*, however, because the intended audience is different. What in the *Opusculum* clearly serves to reinforce Christian pretensions to a spiritualizing hermeneutic—thus distinguishing both Herman and his Christian reader from the Jews—in Abner-Alfonso's text serves to illustrate the experience he long shared with other Jews in their common time of stress, framing his dream experience as interwoven with real historical events such as the failed messianic movement in Avila in 1295.<sup>38</sup> The frame of this first-person narrative not only describes Abner-Alfonso's conversion and defines the whole anti-Jewish polemic that follows it both historically and textually in terms of this shared struggle against Christian antagonism; it also makes the implicit suggestion that both voices in the text, the Jewish *rebelle* (*rebelde*, rebel) and the Christian *mostrador* (teacher), are Abner-Alfonso's own. Given the frame of his own conversion story and the dominant claim to a pseudo-Jewish identity throughout the text, this reading, quite appropriate for Abner-Alfonso's polemic, cannot be claimed for earlier anti-Jewish polemical dialogues.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the voice of Trypho in the *Dialogue of Justin Martyr* or Moses in the *Dialogue* by Alfonsi, or Leo in the *Disputatio* of Odo of Cambrai or Saul in the *Scrutinium Scripturarum* of Pablo de Santa María (d. 1435), Abner-Alfonso's rebel is not

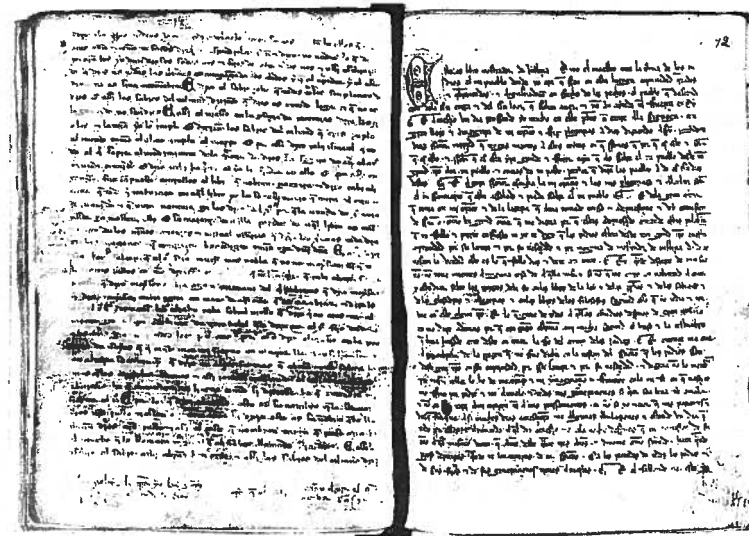


Figure 4.2 Abner de Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid, *Mostrador de justicia*, fol. 12r. Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds espagnols MS 43 (photo: BnF).

an empty cipher that stands for the Jewish self but speaks only as a counterpoint to the arguments of the Christian. Rather, the rebel in the *Mostrador* actually intersects with Abner-Alfonso's attempted self-representation to his readers as a former Jew whom they personally knew. Unlike the hermeneutical Jew of most polemical texts, Abner-Alfonso's rebel is designed, within the context of his own personal testimony of suffering, doubt, and conversion, as the mouthpiece of his own authentic pre-conversion self, meant to appeal to his reader on a personal, emotive level rather than simply on a textual, polemical one.

Because of this, the instances when the teacher directly addresses the rebel function as dramatic moments in the internal dialogue of Abner-Alfonso's trajectory of faith, a trajectory whose "real," historical veracity is indistinguishable from its textual, fictional presentation in the *Mostrador* itself. Thus when the teacher states, "agora tú, hermano judio, ten mientes a estas palabras... e tu coraçon pon a mi entendimiento" (now you, brother Jew, pay attention to these words... and put your heart according to my understanding),<sup>40</sup> it is as if the reader listened in as two sides of Abner-Alfonso's own authorial persona debated the decision to convert, a decision that is rendered more difficult by the constant counterarguments and lengthy statements of doubt proffered by the Jew. Abner-Alfonso's conversion narrative thus functions both as a device to lend the authority of authentic testimony to his polemical arguments and as a model for the Jewish reader to follow in his own imagined debate of doubt and faith. On a textual level, the parallel between public and private experience, outer and inner man, rebel and teacher, are expressed as the parallel between the imaginary edifice of the polemical dialogue and the intended real effect of persuasion and conversion. Abner-Alfonso's pre-conversionary otherness becomes

indistinguishable from the alterity that authenticates his polemical authorship, an otherness he establishes not, like Raymond Martini, simply by citing foreign texts, but by recounting his own conversion story in dramatic terms and by elaborating on his own experience of doubt and fear.

The dialogue form, which is so ubiquitous in anti-Jewish polemic as to be a commonplace, here takes on a new rhetorical significance because it mirrors in the text the real confrontation that took place within the experience of the author (leading up to his conversion) and that takes place again as that author confronts the reader with polemical arguments. In terms of Minnis's explanation of authority, Abner-Alfonso must prove for his Jewish readership, as author and as character of his own narrative, both his own intrinsic worth in presenting what are to appear as ostensibly "realistic" Jewish arguments against Christianity from a pseudo-Jewish perspective, as well as his authenticity as one who still honestly shares the Jewish tradition. As he repeatedly says in the text, citing the Talmudic dictum, "hoda'at ba'al din ke-me'ah edim dami" (the testimony of the litigant is like a hundred witnesses), "el otorgamiento del qui es parte del pleito vale tanto como cient testigos" (the endorsement of one who is part of the litigation is worth a hundred witnesses).<sup>41</sup> Abner-Alfonso serves in his text as his own key witness for both prosecution and defense.

Abner-Alfonso's former student Isaac ben Polgar saw this dangerous appeal of Abner-Alfonso's literary, confessional approach. Speaking about Abner-Alfonso's conversion in a letter of refutation to him, he maintains, "From the day your sins enticed you to do this, you do not have permission to repent openly or to speak or make claims except by the teachings of the faith to which you have turned" (figure 4.3).<sup>42</sup> Here Polgar raises the question of who has *reshut* (permission) to make claims like Abner-Alfonso's, recognizing that the question of who could be seen as an authority was central to Abner-Alfonso's polemical argument. Abner-Alfonso presents his own doubt during his conversion experience as a strategy to gain authenticity, even portraying himself not as a Christian convert but as a pious and faithful Jew who resisted the temptations of other faiths. In his conversionary dream, Abner-Alfonso's conversion is represented as something forced upon him against his will, suggesting not only that his dream was somehow divinely inspired, but also that as such it constitutes a real prophetic revelation. This rhetoric of doubt is identified as a threat by Polgar, who likewise bars Abner-Alfonso from "repenting openly" over his apostasy except in Christian terms.<sup>43</sup>

Abner-Alfonso claims that his dream was so distressing to him, he tried to forget it completely, vowing to disremember his dreams and remain "in the faith in which I was born, just as my father and my grandfather and all my ancestors remained."<sup>44</sup> His appeal to the faith of his forefathers takes on greater meaning when he is told by the voice in his dream that he is "responsible" for the spiritual welfare of other Jews as well as his own. Like a prophet, Abner-Alfonso must choose to heed the revelation sent him by God and to present it to his Jewish brethren or face his own damnation because his own future salvation depends on theirs.<sup>45</sup> Abner-Alfonso thus becomes the teacher of righteousness himself, the "mostrador de justicia donde [los judios] conozcan la verdad" (the teacher of righteousness from whom [the Jews] may know the truth). His dream vision is the vehicle by which he authenticates his new understanding of his ancestral tradition as not just his own interpretation, but his direct summons to prophecy by God.

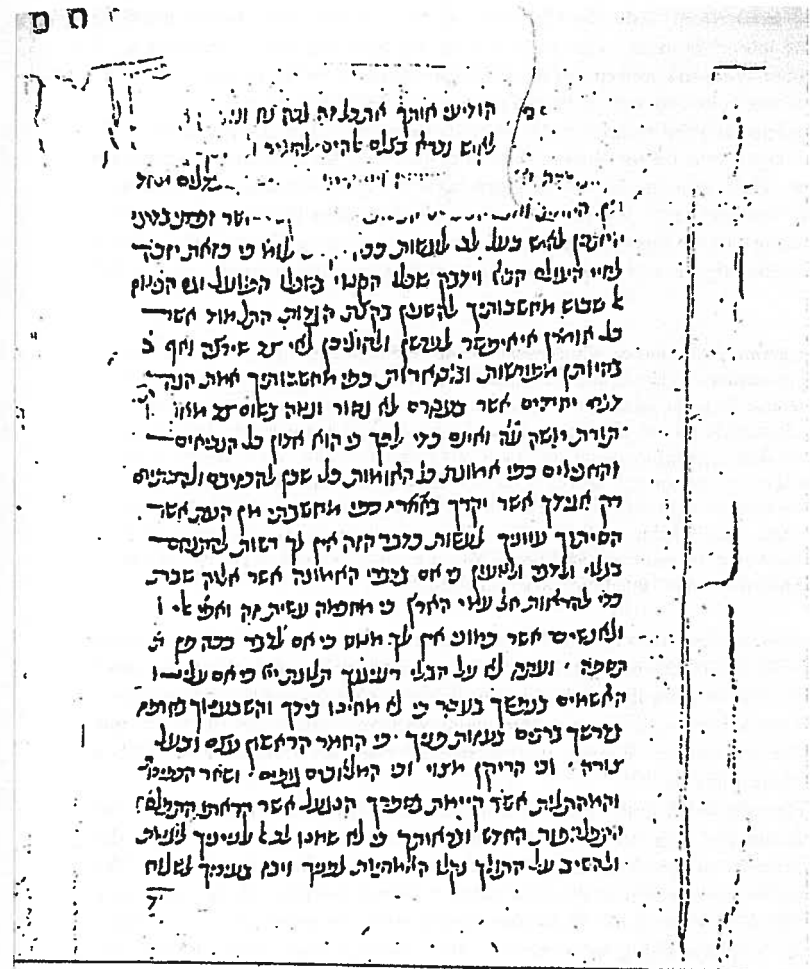


Figure 4.3 "Untitled Polemical Letter of Isaac ben Polgar to Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid," fol. 6b. Biblioteca Palatina di Parma (su concessione del Ministero per i Beni e le Attività Culturali), MS Parm. 2440 (photo: Biblioteca Palatina).

In addition to his own self-presentation as a prophet and savior, he implores his Jewish readers to explore their own doubts and to question their faith by suggesting that they too are "responsible" for other Jews. He explains that a man should not remain doubtful in his religion because such unexplored doubt "es enganno del alma para él e para su ssimiente e para todos los qui dél ssiquieren, ellos e sus fijos e fijos de sus fijos fasta siglo, e que todo Israel sson fiadores unos por otros" (is a deception of the soul for him and for his offspring and for all those who come after him,



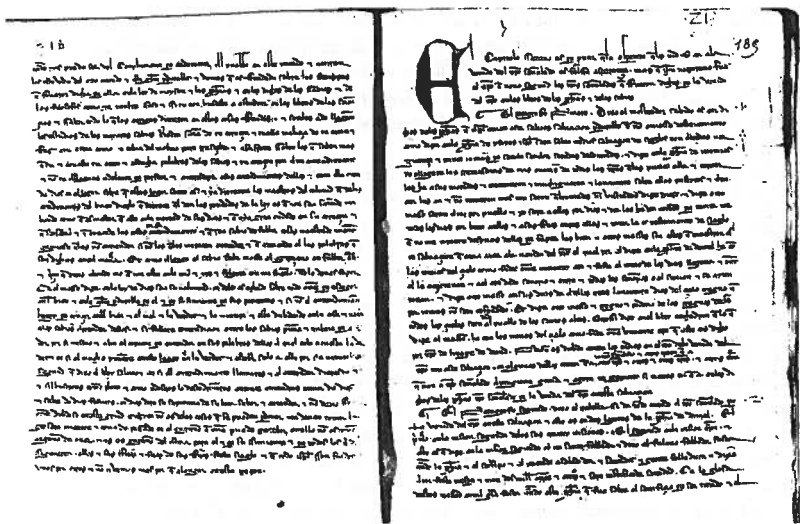


Figure 4.4 Abner de Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid, *Mostrador de justicia*, fol. 184r. Bibliothèque nationale de France, fonds espagnols, MS 43 (photo: BnF)

them and their sons and their grandsons forever. All of Israel is faithful one through another).<sup>46</sup> (figure 4.4). Paraphrasing Ezekiel 37.25, (“and they shall dwell therein, they, and their children, and their children’s children, forever”), Abner-Alfonso here plays on a sense of generational continuity within Jewish tradition in order to make one’s decision not to convert have negative ramifications for generations of one’s offspring. The notion that “all Israel is faithful one through another” suggests that if Jews do not resolve their own doubts by following his advice and example, their children and future progeny will suffer due to their forefathers’ sin of inertia. Through a roundabout and paradoxical logic, Abner-Alfonso’s appeal to generational continuity in terms familiar to Jewish tradition makes following Christianity the greatest form of Jewish piety. Through a series of subtle steps, Abner-Alfonso transforms apostasy from appearing as a divisive and destructive force into the only step capable, in his eyes, of preserving true Jewish belief in Christian society.

Not surprisingly, the implications of this paradoxical conversionary appeal are problematic for the rhetorical coherence of Abner-Alfonso’s text, and this lack of coherence undermines the very claims of authenticity he is aiming to establish and exploit. Because an essential part of his appeal is his claim that he understands why Jews do not convert and also because he portrays the rebel as a symbol of Jewish uncertainty regarding Christian ideas, Abner-Alfonso is driven to envision some means of authenticating his arguments other than with textual *auctoritates*. The invocation of his own testimony to fill this void, however, is vitiated by his representation of the rebellious Jew as unconvinced by such Christian arguments, a representation itself inspired by Abner-Alfonso’s machinations towards authenticity. While the trope of Jewish blindness and obduracy is commonplace in other polemics written for Christian readers, the rebel’s doubt cannot be interpreted in this way in a text

intended to directly wheedle a Jewish audience rather than insult it as an insensate straw man. If Abner-Alfonso is indeed evoking the standard trope of the stubborn hermeneutical Jew, then his depiction can at best be received by his readers as simply another polemic written from a Christian rather than Jewish perspective. At worst, the invocation of the image of a stubborn Jew—ostensibly in an effort to be “authentic” in his depiction of the rebel—only presents a model of resistance to Abner-Alfonso’s own Christian arguments. Put in the context of Abner-Alfonso’s use of his own conversion story—full of doubts, struggles, and a long transformation—he conflates the parallel textual representation of himself as both Jewish in his experience and knowledge and Christian in his anti-Jewish arguments and conclusions. In this way, he subjects the foundation of authority in his text—his own depiction of his prophetically inspired conversion experience—to the very rhetoric of authentic “Jewish doubt” that he uses as a tool of persuasion. The distrust the rebel shows toward the teacher as a trope of feigned authenticity, stating his fear of being deceived by the Christian, ironically becomes the pitfall of his own argumentation, the petard with which he hoists his own authority.<sup>47</sup> Abner-Alfonso’s authorial effort to present himself from two perspectives—both Christian and Jew, both convert and converter, both prophet and follower, both disciple and master—calls into question the authenticity and the authority of each “self” in these pairs of roles.

Authorial uncertainty in the late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century Christian appeals to authenticity, though most evident in Abner-Alfonso’s *Mostrador*, was not unique to it and was detected by contemporary Jewish polemicists who came to understand that uncertainty as a strong point of defense against Christian claims. Such understanding is evident in the writing of the thirteenth-century R. Solomon ibn Adret (Rashba, d. 1310). In his polemical *Perushe aggadot*, seemingly written in response to Martini’s *Pugio*, he asks, regarding the citation of a Jewish text as proof by his imagined Christian interlocutor:

Who recounted this aggadic statement? A Jew or a Christian or a heretic who behaved like a Jew and believed like a Christian? Now if he was truly a Jew, then he did not make the statement in the fashion you indicate. For if so, he would not have been a Jew. If he was a Christian, then I need not believe in what he said regarding this matter, whatever he may have said. If he was a heretic, then neither we nor you need believe in what he said.<sup>48</sup>

The internal dissonance of Abner-Alfonso’s own rhetorical gambit, undertaken only a few decades after Ibn Adret’s remarks, cannot be considered apart from the tension inherent in the Christian appropriation and use of rabbinical sources in service of Christian truth as it developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There is, from the very beginning of this use by Petrus Alfonsi and Peter the Venerable, through the uses by Paul Christiani and even more explicitly in the writings of Raymond Martini, a fundamental ambivalence about the real nature of such rabbinical sources, which are represented by these polemicists as simultaneously erroneous and truthful. In Martini’s words, “Lapidem enim pretiosum prudens nequaquam despicit licet inventus fuerit in draconis capite, vel bufonis” (for a wise man never despises a precious stone, even if it is found on the head of a dragon or a toad).<sup>49</sup> For Abner-Alfonso, who offers his own rendition of this taken from Maimonides, the internal contradictions in the Christian appropriation of Jewish sources for Christological



purposes plays itself out dramatically in the appropriation of Jewish identity and experience for argumentative polemical appeal.<sup>50</sup>

Viewed diachronically in comparison with the other texts of the Dominican anti-Jewish polemical movement of the thirteenth century, Abner-Alfonso's texts represent not only the culmination of the rhetoric of conversion and the appeal to authenticity, but its final exhaustion in the paradox of individual identity and difference. The teacher himself reflects on the failure of his own method when he concedes at the end of the text of the *Mostrador*, "Yo non gané nada en todas estas disputaciones que escri[vi] contra ellos, mas que perdí en que me paré mal con todos los judios, e que los christianos non me lo tomarán a bien." (I did not gain anything in all these disputes that I wrote against them [the Jews]. Rather, I lost, in that I ended up badly with all the Jews and the Christians will not give me credit for it.) Caught in the liminal state between selfhood and otherness, Abner-Alfonso's aporia before the paradox of his own textual identity illustrates how the polemical argument of converts, although intended as the ultimate appeal to both authority and authenticity, is doomed to instability because it remains hidden behind the irresolvable ambiguity of words, remaining a temporal narrative couched in the terms of a shifting and split narrator. The polemicist's righteous truth, like the conviction of the convert, is his own *skandalon*, forever inscrutable because it is hidden behind the mask of the text, a figurative spirit behind the carnal letter, an authoritative certainty viable only for those who read with the zealous faith of a neophyte. In contrast with Augustine's stable notion of Jews as eternal witnesses, granting authority by their own disbelief, the internalized rebel Jew of the *Mostrador* undercuts the Christian claim to *auctoritas* in difference by making perceived Jewish disbelief either too Christian to be "authentic" or too "authentic" to be Christian. Like his fictional surrogate, Abner-Alfonso himself, by being forced to choose between authenticity and authority, forfeits both in the cultivation of his authorship.

### Notes

1. Augustine of Hippo, "S. Aureli Augustini Hipponiensis Episcopi Epistulae" 149.9, in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 44, ed. Alois Goldbacher (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1904), p. 356. The translation can be found in Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 39. On Augustine's influential concept of Judaism, see Cohen's discussion, pp. 19–71; Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Die Judenpredigt Augustins: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der jüdisch-christlichen Beziehungen in den ersten Jahrhunderten* (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1946); and also his "Augustin et les Juifs: Augustin et le judaïsme," *Recherches augustiniennes* 1 (1958): 225–41; Paula Fredriksen, "Excaecati Occulta Justicia Dei: Augustine on Jews and Judaism," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1995): 299–324, and *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).
2. "The authority of those books does not diminish because they are not understood by the Jews. Rather, it increases, for this very blindness of theirs is foretold there. In not comprehending the truth they offer additional testimony to the truth because, when they do not understand those books in which it was predicted that they would not understand, they show them for that reason to be true," "Contra Faustum," 16.21, in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 25, ed. Joseph Zycha (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1891), p. 464. On this passage, see the remarks of Fredriksen, "Excaecati Occulta Justicia Dei," pp. 317–18, and *Augustine and the Jews*, p. 277.

3. For a discussion of this term and its relation to Dahan's concept of the "theological" Jew, see Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, p. 3, n. 3; Gilbert Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens et les juifs au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Cerf, 1990), p. 585; and Robert Markus, "The Jew as a Hermeneutic Device: The Inner Life of a Gregorian *Topos*," in *Gregory the Great: A Symposium*, ed. John C. Cavadini (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1995), pp. 1–15.
4. Amos Funkenstein, "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator* 2 (1971): 373–82, and "Changes in the Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Twelfth Century" [Hebrew], *Zion* n.s. 33 (1968): 125–44. Rpt. in English, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 172–201.
5. Examples are legion. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), not only accuses his interlocutor Moses of being "blind" (p. 149) and of trying to "explain [biblical] passages in an earthly manner" (p. 167); he also accuses the Jews repeatedly of "hardness of heart" (p. 42). Tertullian, *Adversus Iudaeos*, ed. and trans. Regina Hause (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 264, speaks of "durtia cordis vestri" (hardness of your heart). Origen, "Commentary on Matthew," in *Patrologia graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris, 1857–66), 13:939, speaks of "somatikoi Iudaioi" (material Jews). Jerome, *Comentarii in Esaïam* 3.8, ed. Marci Adriaen, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1963), 73:114, speaks of "caecitatem iudaeorum" (Jewish blindness). Such examples could be multiplied almost indefinitely, given the consistency of theme in the first millennium of *Adversus Iudaeos* literature.
6. Within the large bibliography on the twelfth-century shift in Christian attitudes toward minority groups, classic studies include R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1995); Gavin Langmuir, *Towards a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) and *History, Religion, and Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990); Lester Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); Funkenstein, "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics," pp. 373–82, and "Changes in the Patterns," pp. 125–44, among many others. On the shift in iconography, see Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1966), especially pp. 41–56; Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (New York: Continuum, 1996), pp. 31–74, and the bibliography provided there; and Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible moralisée* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), especially p. 2, and pp. 146–47, nn. 7–9. On the evolution in papal legislation, see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, 2 vols. (New York: Hermon Press, 1966; Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), and especially his "Popes, Jews, and Inquisition: From 'Sicut' to 'Turbato,'" 2:3–45; the documents in Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews: Documents, 492–1404*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988); Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 97–109; Kenneth Stow, "The Church and the Jews: St. Paul to Pius IX," revised English translation in *Popes, Church, and Jews in the Middle Ages: Confrontation and Response*, Part 1 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
7. *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), pp. 10 and 13.
8. In the *City of God against the Pagans* 15.23, trans. Philip Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 556, Augustine states that from the Fathers "usque ad nos auctoritas veracium scripturarum certissima et notissima successione pervenit" (the authority

- of the true scriptures has been transmitted to us by a most certain and well-ascertained succession), while in apocryphal sources "propter multa falsa, nulla est canonica auctoritas" (because of many false things, there is no canonical authority in them). His words, distinguishing between authoritative scriptures and nonauthoritative apocryphal sources, were repeated by Isidore of Seville (d. 636) in the *Etymologies*, Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) in *De Universo*, and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) in his *Eruditio didascalica*. On Augustine's conception and use of *auctoritas*, see Karl-Heinrich Lütcke, "Auctoritas bei Augustin," *Tübinger Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft* 44 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1968).
9. *Les Douze Patriarches ou Benjamin Minor*, critical ed. and trans. Jean Châtillon and Monique Duchet-Suchaux, introduction, notes, and index Jean Longère (Paris: Cerf, 1997), pp. 322–24.
  10. The text is found in Yizhaq Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yeḥiel of Paris and R. Moses ben Nahman," [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 2 (1930–1931): 186 [172–87].
  11. *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 73–159.
  12. "In every clash of disputation truth established by reasoning is more solid than the display of authority. For it is not that thing which is [certain] in point of fact that is relevant to strengthening a person's faith about something, but rather that which can be put as an opinion; and many questions arise about the wording of this authoritative text itself, so that a judgment needs to be made about them [the words] before it can be made by means of it [the proof text]," Peter Abelard, *Collationes* II, 78, ed. John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlandi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 98–99, with my modifications to the translation. In "de ipsis priusquam per ipsa," I read *ipsis* as the *questiones* and *ipsa* as the *auctoritas*. Likewise, in the prologue to his *Sic et Non*, he invokes Augustine to distinguish between the authority of scripture and that of later tradition. On Abelard's discussion of authority, see Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship*, pp. 59–63.
  13. Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens*, pp. 423–27, summarizes the *auctoritas/ratio* dyad, which itself is abundant in the language of twelfth- and thirteenth-century polemics. In his *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), pp. 1–11, Daniel Lasker, in providing a useful distillation of this paradigm, adds a third category and more finely splits the category of rational polemics: arguments are either exegetical, historical/social, or rational, and rational arguments themselves can appeal either to "common sense" or to more strict philosophical arguments based on fixed categories and terms.
  14. In his "Adversus Iudaeorum inveteratam duritiem" (*Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews*), *Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis* 58, ed. Yvonne Freidman (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), p. 83, he urges the Jews to either "acquiesce to reasons" or "yield to authorities," asking his imagined Jewish interlocutor, "Cum ista omnia, O Iudaei, et auctoritatibus sacris, et rationibus invictis probata sint, quid sustinetis? Si Scripturis vestris fidem datis, auctoritati cedite. Si rationales aut rationabiles estis, rationi adquiescite." (When all of these things, O Jews, are proven both by sacred authorities and by invincible reasons, what do you maintain? If you have faith in your authorities, yield to the authorities. If you are rational or reasonable, acquiesce to the reasons.) The Jews' perceived failure to do either prompts him to ponder their very humanity, stating, "Nescio plane utrum Iudaeus homo sit, qui nec rationi humanae cedit, nec auctoritatibus divinis et propriis adquiescit." (I do not know completely if the Jew who neither believes human reason nor accepts authorities divine and his own is a man.) See pp. 57–58, and cf. p. 125 with similar statements such as, "Videor michi, Iudae, tot auctoritatibus, tantis rationibus satisfecisse me, ut arbitror, super hiis, quae in quaestione proposita fuerant, omni homini. Quod si omni homini, tunc et tibi, si tamen homo es." (It seems to me, Jew, that with so many authorities and so many reasons, I have satisfied, I judge, those issues that have been put into question on these

- things.) On Peter's condemnation of Jewish irrationality, see Cohen, *Living Letters*, pp. 254–70. Funkenstein, "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," pp. 378–80, and "Changes in the Patterns," pp. 138–41, who has maintained that Peter represents a darker, more intolerant side of the new rationalist polemic with his argument that Jews were "less than human" because they did not accept rational arguments, has oddly skipped over the important role of authority in Peter's argument. Peter actually argues that Jews are "less than human" not only because they do not accept arguments appealing to ratio, but also because they reject the proof of biblical authorities.
15. "Quia auctoritas cereum habet nasum, id est in diversum potest flecti sensum, rationibus roborandum est" (Since authority has a nose of wax, which is to say it can be bent into different meanings, it should be supported with reasons), "Contra haereticos" 30, in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.P. Migne, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 210:333.
  16. Donin, who brought denunciations against the Talmud to Pope Gregory IX and later argued against the Talmud with R. Yeḥiel ben Joseph of Paris, was primarily responsible for the pope's orders to bishops and kings to confiscate "Jewish books" and censor any anti-Christian content, eventually leading to the burning of thousands of Hebrew books and copies of the Talmud in 1242 and again in 1244. On the "trial" and burning of the Talmud, see Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews*, 1:238–53 and 339–40; Isidore Loeb, "La controverse de 1240," *Revue des études juives* 1 (1880): 247–61; 2 (1881): 248–70; 3 (1881): 39–57; Judah Rosenthal, "The Talmud on Trial," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 47 (1956–57): 58–76, 145–69; Baer "The Disputations of R. Yeḥiel"; Chen Merchavia, *The Church Versus Talmudic and Midrashic Literature (500–1248)* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1970), p. 240. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 60–76, especially p. 61, n. 19; and more recently the articles in *Le brûlement du Talmud à Paris, 1242–1244*, ed. Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Cerf, 1999).
  17. The Latin protocol of the Barcelona Disputation can be found in "Quellen zu Disputation Pablos Christiani mit Mose Nachmani zu Barcelona 1263," ed. Heinrich Denifle, *Historisches Jahrbuch des Görres-Gesellschaft* 8 (1887): 231–34 [225–44], which also includes other relevant Latin sources; and Baer, "The Disputations of R. Yeḥiel," pp. 185–87. The Hebrew text of Naḥmanides can be found in Moses ben Naḥman, *Kitve Rabbeinu Moshe ben Naḥman*, ed. Ch. B. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1963), 1:299–320. An English translation of both texts is included in *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages*, ed. Haim Maccoby (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982). The main historiographical sources on the dispute include Isidore Loeb, "La Controverse de 1263 à Barcelona entre Paulus Christiani et Moïse Ben Nachman," *Revue des études juives* 15 (1887): 1–18; Yitzhaq Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schoffman, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 1:150–62; Cecil Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)," *Harvard Theological Review* 43 (1950): 117–44; Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, pp. 108–28; Robert Chazan, "The Barcelona 'Disputation' of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response," *Speculum* 52.4 (1977): 824–42; and *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1262 and its Aftermath* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992). On the later harangue in Paris, see Ursula Ragacs, "Die zweite Talmuddisputation von Paris 1269," in *Judentum und Umwelt* 71 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2001); and Joseph Shatzmiller, *La deuxième controverse de Paris: Un chapitre dans la polémique entre chrétiens et juifs au Moyen Âge*, Collection de la *Revue des études juives* 15 (Paris: Peeters, 1994).
  18. As part of the thirteenth-century interest in reading and censoring original texts of rabbinical Judaism as well as Islam, Dominican polemicists, seemingly following the lead of Master General Raymond of Peñaforte (d. 1275), studied Arabic and Hebrew in a half-dozen small groups in Spain and North Africa. "Studia linguarum" were founded in Mallorca in 1237, Tunis in 1242–1245 (Arabic), Murcia in 1266 (Hebrew

and Arabic), Barcelona in 1280 (Hebrew), Valencia in 1280 (Arabic), and Játiva in 1302 (Hebrew and Arabic). To call these clusters *schools* is perhaps inaccurate considering their small size, although this usage persists in critical literature. Robert Chazan in *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 6, has termed this new use of original source material the “new missionizing strategy” of thirteenth-century polemics. Chazan, like most scholars, credits Peñafort as the prime mover behind the rise of language study among Dominicans in the later thirteenth century. Nevertheless, as he notes, there is little direct evidence showing Peñafort’s organization of the *studia linguarum*, even though other Dominicans in subsequent generations explicitly credited him with such involvement. On the *studia*, see José María Coll, “Escuelas de Lenguas Orientales en los siglos XIII y XIV,” *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia* 17 (1944): 115–38; 18 (1945): 59–89; 19 (1946): 217–40, and the full bibliography listed by Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, p. 107, n. 11. For a recent exploration of this issue and the extant sources, see Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 104–15.

19. Dahan, *Les intellectuels chrétiens*, p. 441. Raymond of Peñafort in his *Summa de Paenitentia*, (Rome: Commentarium pro religiosis, 1976), p. 310, referring to the policy of Gregory the Great against forced conversions, explains, “Jews as well as Muslims should be provoked to take up the Christian faith *autoritatibus, rationibus et blandamentis*” (by authorities, reasons, and blandishments). The authorities to be used are Hebrew and Arabic, not only Latin scriptures.
20. *Contra legem Sarracenorum* 16, ed. J.-M. Mérigoux, *Memorie Domenicane* 17 (1986): 136 (1–144).
21. During the same decades, Raymond Lull (d. 1315), whose concern with authenticity in argumentative proof was very similar to that of contemporary Dominicans even though he rejected almost entirely the use of textual *authoritates*, likewise evinced an acute concern with using argumentative proofs accepted by non-Christians. While such proofs for Muslims could only be rational, he conceded near the end of his career that scriptural authorities might be more effective in arguing with Jews. On Lull’s conflicting opinions over the use of authorities in anti-Jewish polemic, see Thomas Burman, “The Influence of the *Apology of al-Kindi* and *Contrarietas alfolica* on Ramón Lull’s Late Religious Polemics, 1305–1313,” *Medieval Studies* 53 (1991): 197–228.
22. This conflict between intrinsic worth and authenticity was similar to that faced by Augustine in his correspondence with St. Jerome over the latter’s decision to undertake the Latin translation of the Hebrew text in order to replace the Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint, which he saw as corrupt. On the conflict of opinion between Jerome and Augustine over the authority of the Septuagint, see Alfonso Fürst, *Augustinus Briefwechsel mit Hieronymus* (Munich: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1999), pp. 139–45; and Caroline White, *The Correspondence (394–419) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 35–42.
23. “Cum itaque divine miserationis instinctu ad tam excusum huius fidei gradum pervenissem, exui pallium falsitatis et nudatus sum tunica iniquitatis et baptizatus sum...” (When I had arrived, with the help of divine mercy, to such a great height of this faith [Judaism], I took off the veil of falsity and was stripped of the tunic of iniquity and I was baptized...) *Diálogo contra los Judíos*, introduction by John Tolan, Latin text by Klaus-Peter Mieth, trans. Esperanza Ducay, coordination by María Jesús Lacarra (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Altoaragoneses, 1996), p. 6.
24. “Quantus itaque putas tunc omnes, que aderant, Iudeos stupor apprehenderit, cum me paternarum traditionum suarum fortissimum viderent expugnatorem, quarum me fidelissimum, utpote Iudeum ex Iudeis speraverant esse defensorem?” (Can you imagine how great a stupor of amazement then seized all the Jews who were present when they saw me, the strongest assailant of their paternal traditions, while they

hoped that I, as a Jew of the Jews, would be their defender?) *Hermannus quondam Iudaeus: Opusculum de conversione sua*, ed. G. Niemeyer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* 4 (Weimar: Böhlau Nachfolger, 1963), p. 113. The debate over Herman’s real identity and existence is irrelevant here, because the appeal to the convert’s expert knowledge appears equally in accounts by “real” converts such as Petrus Alfonsi as well as “imagined” ones, such as Nestor the Priest (on whom, see note 25 below). For the debate, see Avrom Saltman, “Herman’s *Opusculum de Conversione Sua: Truth or Fiction?*” *Revue des études juives* 147 (1988): 31–56; Karl Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 50–57, and *Conversion and Text* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 39–75 cited text on p. 104); and Jean-Claude Schmitt, *La conversion d’Hermann le juif: Autobiographie, histoire et fiction* (Paris: Seuil, 2003), translated as *The Conversion of Herman the Jew: Autobiography, History, and Fiction in the Twelfth Century*, trans. Alex J. Novikoff (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

25. The strategic use of imagined conversion is evident in earlier polemics as well, such as the ninth-century collection of Arabic texts now known as the *Qiṣṣat Muḥaddalat al-Uṣūf* (*Account of the Disputation of the Priest*), trans. into Hebrew in slightly altered form as *Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, or *The Book of Nestor the Priest*. The author begins his anti-Christian polemic, which takes the form of a letter to his friend, by observing first of all that he converted to Judaism. The Judeo-Arabic version, vol. 2, p. 7, begins, “in kāna baynaka wa-bayni min al-’ilmi fi dīni-l-masiḥi shay’un lam yašil ilayhi għaynunā lā min qablānā wa-lā min ba’dinā” (You and I, we have shared such knowledge of the religion of Christ as no one before us has achieved, nor will anyone after us). See vol. 1, p. 52. It is on this basis, as one who was intimately associated with Christians and Christianity, that the author then speaks against his alleged former religion. From the very beginning, the authority of the polemical author to defend Judaism is premised not on his knowledge of that religion, but on his familiarity and intimacy with the very thing he rejects. Similarly, the Hebrew text states, Nestor did not “enter the Jewish religion,” “’ad asher nasa’ ve-natan ‘im kol ḥakham she-ba-’arelim ve-khol ha-mevin be-sifrehem... ve-yavin ve-yada’ et kol ta’utan ve-ha-ḥosekh asher hayah bo” (until he had debated with every uncircumcised sage and every one who understood their books... so that he understood and knew all their error and the darkness in which he had been). See vol. 1, p. 95.
26. *Pugio Fidei* (Lipsiæ [Leipzig], 1687), p. 3.
27. Abner’s *Mostrador de justicia* is preserved in a single manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Esp. 43, folios 12r–342v and has been edited in 2 vols. by Walter Mettmann (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994–1996). The *Teshuvot*, preserved in Hebrew in a unique manuscript in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma, MS 2440/“De Rossi,” p. 533, folios 8r–65r, was edited and translated by Jonathan Hecht as “The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440,” (PhD diss., New York University, 1993). The text has been studied by Shoshanna Gershenzon, *A Study of the Teshuvot la-Mēharef by Abner of Burgos* (PhD diss., Jewish Theological Seminary, 1984). A Castilian version of the text, preserved in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana MS Lat. 6423, folios 41r–89r, has been published by Mettmann as *Tēšuvot la-Mēharef. Spanische Fassung* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), and also been studied and edited by Carlos Sainz de la Maza in his 1990 dissertation, *Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio del manuscrito “Lat. 6423” de la Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana* (Madrid: Editorial de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Servicio de Reprografía, 1990). For a more complete bibliography of Abner-Alfonso’s writing, see Dwayne Carpenter, “Alfonso de Valladolid,” *Diccionario filológico de literatura medieval española: Textos y transmisión*, ed. Carlos Alvar and José Manuel Lucía Megías (Madrid: Castalia, 2002), pp. 140–52. For

- a full consideration of the lost works attributed to Abner-Alfonso, see Ryan Szpiech, "From Testimonia to Testimony: Thirteenth-Century Anti-Jewish Polemic and the *Mostrador de justicia* of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), pp. 585–92. On the basis of a sixteenth-century notice of Ambrosio de Morales in his *Viaje a los reinos de León y Galicia y Principado de Asturias*, ed. facsimile of E. Flórez (1765), (Oviedo: Biblioteca Popular Asturiana, 1977), p. 9, which lists evidence suggesting that Abner-Alfonso translated his earlier work, *Sefer Milhamot Adonai*, into Castilian himself at the request of Doña Blanca, *Señora* of the convent of Las Huelgas of Burgos, it has been generally accepted that Abner-Alfonso may have translated his later works as well. Barring the discovery of any further information, the question remains tantalizingly open, but given the nature of the texts and their translations and the dates of the manuscript sources, Abner-Alfonso's participation on some level in the translations of his work is probable.
28. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 13r/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 15.
  29. The only Jewish text that seems to be responding to Martini's argumentation is that of the thirteenth-century R. Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona, whose *Perushe Aggadot* presents an imagined literary polemical dialogue with a Christian. For the text of the *Perushe*, see Joseph Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adrath: Sein Leben und Seine Schriften* (Breslau, 1863), Heb. sec., pp. 24–56. On Ibn Adret's text read in the context of Martini's polemic, see Jeremy Cohen, "The Christian Adversary of Solomon ben Adret," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 71 (1980–1981): 48–55; Thomas Willi, "Die Perusche Aggadot des R. Salomo ben Adret," in *Glaubensdolph und Messiasbeweis*, ed. Ina Willi-Plein and Thomas Willi (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1980), pp. 85–100; and Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 137–58. Among the writers to respond to Abner-Alfonso include Joseph ben Shem Tov, Moses ha-Cohen of Tordesillas, Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, Isaac Polgar, Moses Narboni, Joseph Shalom, Isaac Albalag, Isaac Israeli, Samuel ibn Sasson, Hayyim ben Yehuda ibn Musa, Hasdai Crescas, and Judah Leon of Modena, as well as a number of sixteenth-century Italian Kabbalists. On the responses to Abner-Alfonso's work, see Gershenzon, *A Study of the Teshuvot la-Mel'aref*, pp. 26–32; Sainz de la Maza, *Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio*, pp. 247–77; Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange*, pp. 35–49; Szpiech, *From Testimonia to Testimony*, pp. 329–50.
  30. On Abner-Alfonso's use of Nahmanides, see Szpiech, *From Testimonia to Testimony*, pp. 564–68, 661.
  31. Abner-Alfonso's *Mostrador* is easily as long as Martini's *Pugio*, which runs in Latin text alone (including translations) to 258,000 words. If the Hebrew text is included in the count, the *Pugio* surpasses 300,000 words. Abner-Alfonso's *Moreh*, in the Castilian form as the *Mostrador*, runs over 350,000 words.
  32. This argument has been previously presented by Carlos Sainz de la Maza, "El Toledot Yeshu castellano en el Maestre Alfonso de Valladolid," in *Actas II congreso internacional de la asociación hispánica de la literatura medieval (Segovia, del 15 al 19 de Octubre, 1987)*, 2 vols. (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad, 1992), 2:800 [797–814].
  33. Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange*, p. 48.
  34. For a preliminary index of Abner-Alfonso's non-biblical sources, see Szpiech, *From Testimonia to Testimony*, pp. 643–67.
  35. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 27r–28v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 43.
  36. "I saw the burden of the Jews, my people from whom I am descended, who are, in this long captivity, oppressed and broken and burdened heavily by taxes, this people that has lost the honor and glory it once had, which has no help or strength in itself. And it happened one day, as I was thinking much on this plight, that I went into the synagogue with great cries and bitterness of heart, and I prayed unto the Lord... And in the great anxiety which I had in my heart and from the toil I had taken upon myself I grew tired and fell asleep. And I saw in a dream vision a great man who said to me: 'Why are you asleep? Understand the words I am speaking to you, and straighten up,

- for I say to you that the Jews have been in this captivity for such a long time because of their folly and stupidity and for lack of a teacher of righteousness through whom they may know the truth'."
37. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r–v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 13.
  38. Abner-Alfonso's spiritual stresses seem to have begun originally with his experience of meeting and helping many Jews when the messianic hopes of many Jews of Ávila and Ayllón in 1295 turned out to be false. Much of the information about the event and its impact on Abner-Alfonso come from fragments of his first now-lost work, *Sefer Milhamot Adonai (Book of the Wars of the Lord)*, preserved in the *Scrutinium Scripturarum* of Pablo de Santa María and the *Fortalitium Fidei* of Alonso de Spina. False prophets in both towns allegedly predicted that in the year 1295 (5055 AM), on the last day of the summer month Tammuz, the Jews would be called out of exile. After preparing themselves with penitence and alms, they assembled in the synagogue in white garments, as for Yom Kippur. According to Santa María, *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (Burgos, 1591), p. 525, and De Spina, *Fortalitium Fidei*, 3.10 (Nuremberg, 1494), p. 172r, Abner-Alfonso's work related that crosses appeared on their clothing, and when they arrived home they found their garments there also marked. According to De Spina, some of these sought medical advice from Abner-Alfonso, and this consultation seems to have been the source of his first doubt in his ancestral faith. Abner-Alfonso compares his dream directly to these events in the *Mostrador*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, pp. 13–14.
  39. This has been suggested in similar terms by Moshe Lazar, "Alfonso de Valladolid's *Mostrador de justicia*: A Polemical Debate between Abner's Old and New Self," in *Judaísmo Hispano: Estudios en memoria de José Luis Lacave Riaño*, ed. Elena Romero, 2 vols. (Madrid: CSIC, 2002), 1:121–34.
  40. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 42v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 71, and 184r–v/vol. 2, p. 98.
  41. BT *Gittin* 40b; *Kiddushin* 65b; *Bava Mešia* 3b. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 32v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 52. Interestingly, the word for litigation, *pleito*, is the same one he uses in his conversion account when "thinking on this conflict—*pleito*—I went to synagogue to pray..." See *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 13.
  42. "Min ha-'et asher hesitun onekha la'asot ka-devar ha-zeh en le-kha reshut lehitnašes ba-galui u-ledabber we-li'yon ki im be-divre ha-emunah asher eleha shavta." See Parma MS 2440/De Rossi, p. 533, 6b, in Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange*, p. 337. This letter is untitled in the Parma manuscript, but as Jonathan Hecht, p. 51, n. 7, noted, an expanded version of the letter contained in Isaac's longer work, *Ezer ha-Dat*, gives it the title *Tšshuvat Apikoros*, or *A Response to the Heretic*.
  43. Of all the critics who have considered Abner-Alfonso's work, only Sainz de la Maza has intimated the importance of Abner-Alfonso's dream vision in constructing this dramatic persona of authenticity. Carlos Sainz de la Maza, "Vi en visión de sueño: Conversión religiosa y autobiografía onírica en Abner de Burgos, alias Alfonso de Valladolid," *Compás de letras: Monografías de literatura española* 1 (1992): 186–208.
  44. "Non lo membraré más, e tollerle-he de mi coraçon e mi imaginaçion, e ffinçaré en la mi fe en que nascí, como fincó mi padre e mi abuelo e todas mis generaçiones, si quier sea bona fe o mala, e non cataré a mi coraçon nin a mis pensamientos, ca non so yo mejor que mis parientes." (I will not remember it any more, and I will remove it from my heart and my imagination, and I will remain in the faith in which I was born, just as my father and my grandfather and all my ancestors remained. No matter if it is a good faith or a bad one, I will not pay attention to my heart or my thoughts, for I am no better than my relatives.) *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 13.
  45. He explains, "convertíme... para salvar mi alma de los mis pecados e de los pecados de todos los judios, que tenia a cuestras ssi non descubriesse a ssus orejas lo que me

- mostraron del cielo" (I converted . . . to save my soul from my sins and from the sins of all Jews, for whom I was responsible if I did not reveal to their ears what was shown to me from heaven). See *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 13r/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 15.
46. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 184v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 2, p. 99; BT, *Shavuot* 39a.
47. "Yo [he] miedo de ti, digo verdat a Dios, que quiça me engannarás" (I am afraid of you—I tell God the truth—that perhaps you will trick me). See *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 42v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 71.
48. The original Hebrew reads: "Mi hayah ha-magid otah hagadah, isra'eli o nošri o min she-hayah noheg ke-isra'eli u-ma'amin ke-nošri? Im isra'eli hayah, be-emet lo' imro al ha-šad she-amarta, she im ken lo isra'eli hayah. Ve-im nošri, en li leha'amin bo be-mah she amar ba-zeh we-yo'mar ma she-yo'mar. Ve-im min, lo lanu u-la-khem leha'amin be-mah she yo'mar." See *Perushe Aggadot*, ed. Perles, in *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adreth*, Hebrew sec., p. 42. On this passage, see Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 154–57.
49. *Pugio Fidei*, p. 3. This passage is similar to an earlier passage from Martini's *Capistrum Iudeorum*, ed. Adolfo Robles Sierra (Würzburg: Echter, 1990), 2:282, where he notes that "Exterius etenim comedit, et interius proicit, qui sapienter comedit dactylos" (he who eats dates wisely consumes the fruit outside and spits out the seed inside).
50. "Yo me ayudo de la verdad de quien quier que la diga" (I help myself to the truth from whoever says it). See *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 32v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 52. This statement can be found in the works of various writers, and was written by Maimonides in the introduction to the *Thamāniyah fusūl (Eight Chapters)*, within his Arabic commentary on the Mishnah *Avot*. He says, "Wa-isma' l-ḥaqq min-man qālū-hu" (Accept the truth from whoever says it). See "*Eight Chapters*" of *Maimonides*, ed. Joseph Gorfinkle (New York: Columbia University Press, 1912), p. 6.

## SECTION III

## FEMALE IDENTITY