

# After Conversion

*Iberia and the Emergence of Modernity*

*Edited by*

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# Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish Legions: Sephardic Legends' Journey from Biblical Polemic to Humanist History

*Adam G. Beaver*

## Hebrew Antiquities

There was no love lost between the Enlightened antiquarians Francisco Martínez Marina (1754–1833) and Juan Francisco de Masdeu (1744–1817).<sup>1</sup> Though both were clerics – Martínez Marina was a canon of St Isidore in Madrid, and Masdeu a Jesuit – and voracious epigraphers, their lives and careers diverged in profound ways. Masdeu was an outsider in his profession: expelled from the Iberian Peninsula along with his fellow Jesuits in 1767, he spent most of the last fifty years of his life in Rome. There, substituting the descriptions and sketches forwarded by sympathetic amanuenses in Spain for the ancient remains he would never see firsthand, he continued to pursue his research in Iberian antiquities in open opposition to the state-sanctioned projects conceived and carried out by the prestigious Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid. Martínez, in contrast, was the consummate insider, inhabiting the very centers of power denied to Masdeu: a member of the liberal parliament of 1820–23, he was also an early member, and eventually two-time president, of the Real Academia which Masdeu scorned. It was almost certainly as a staunch defender of the Real Academia's massive research projects – especially its official catalogue of ancient Iberian inscriptions, which Masdeu proposed to better with his own inventory – that Martínez Marina acquired his palpable distaste for Masdeu, his methods, and his ideological commitments.

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1 On Martínez Marina and Masdeu, see Roberto Mantelli, *The Political, Religious and Historiographical Ideas of J.F. Masdeu, S.J., 1744–1817* (New York, London: Garland Publishing, 1987); María Concepción Castrillo Llamas, 'D. Francisco Martínez Marina: el hombre y su obra', *Medievalismo*, 2 (1992): pp. 219–25; Enrique García Hernán, 'Construcción de las historias de España en los siglos XVII y XVIII', in *La construcción de la Historia de España*, (ed.) Ricardo García Cárcel (Madrid: Fundación Carolina, Centro de Estudios Hispánicos e Iberoamericanos, Marcial Pons, 2004), pp. 127–94.

Martínez Marina was especially skeptical of the orientalist dimension of Masdeu's scholarship, and particularly of his handling of the 'ancient' Hebrew inscriptions which the Jesuit claimed could be found throughout the Peninsula – including, most famously, a pair of fragmentary tomb inscriptions unearthed in the late fifteenth century near the Jewish cemetery in the Aragonese town of Morvedre.<sup>2</sup> While Martínez Marina was inclined to date the Morvedre inscriptions to the Middle Ages, Masdeu (who may have been in the majority) claimed to have proof that they were quite a bit older – indeed, that they dated back to the tenth century BCE and the reign of the biblical king Solomon, demonstrating that Iberia's Jewish population was the oldest in the world outside of Palestine. For Martínez Marina, such claims were emblematic of Masdeu's gullibility; for Masdeu, Martínez Marina's refusal to accept them smacked of snobbery.

Their rivalry finally boiled over in 1799, when Martínez Marina published a scathing review of Masdeu's *Historia crítica de España* (20 vols., 1783–1807)<sup>3</sup> in the Real Academia's annual *Memorias*.<sup>4</sup> In the course of some 150 pages, Martínez Marina accused his exiled counterpart – as well as the Cordoban franciscans Pedro and Rafael Rodríguez Mohedano, co-authors of a popular *Historia literaria de España* (10 vols., 1769–91)<sup>5</sup> – not only of misreading the Morvedre inscriptions, but also of willfully misinterpreting the Bible, falsifying material evidence, and corrupting the very moral fabric of Spanish history with 'puerile stories and the crudest fables' lifted from medieval Jewish propaganda.<sup>6</sup> Masdeu and the Mohedanos, Martínez Marina fumed, had done more than try to pass off some medieval Hebrew inscriptions as proof that Solomon had established tributary settlements in the peninsula. Channeling 'the ridiculous tales of fifteenth-century Spanish rabbis' like Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508), they had tried to make the whole of ancient Iberia into a Jewish colony, positing that the city of Toledo itself – the spiritual capital of Spanish church and

2 On the Morvedre inscriptions, see Jordi Casanovas Miró, *Real Academia de la Historia. Catálogo del Gabinete de Antigüedades. Epigrafía hebrea* (Madrid: RAH, 2005), pp. 105–10; David Malkiel, 'The Artifact and Humanism in Medieval Jewish Thought', *Jewish History*, 27 (2013): pp. 21–40.

3 Juan Francisco de Masdeu, *Historia crítica de España, y de la cultura española en todo género* (Madrid: Antonio de Sancha, 1783–1807).

4 Francisco Martínez Marina, 'Antigüedades hispano-hebreas, convencidas de supuestas y fabulosas. Discurso histórico-crítico sobre la primera venida de los judíos a España', *Memorias de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 3 (1799): pp. 317–468.

5 Rafael and Pedro Rodríguez Mohedano, *Historia literaria de España*, (Madrid: García, 1769–91).

6 Martínez Marina, 'Antigüedades hispano-hebreas', p. 384.

nation – had been founded by the Jews whom the ancient king Nebuchadnezzar II (r. ca. 605–562 BCE) carried off from Jerusalem into the Babylonian Captivity (ca. 597–539 BCE) described in 2 Kings 24 and 2 Chronicles 36. If these Jewish fictions were to be believed, Nebuchadnezzar – or, in some versions, his ally or subordinate Pirrus – brought his Jewish captives not to the shores of the Tigris and Euphrates, but rather to the Pillars of Hercules, where he set them the task of subjugating ancient Iberia's Phoenician colonies. Afterwards, the story went, the Jews were permitted to settle in the Iberian heartland, where they left behind traces of their habitation not only in the physical fabric of *Toledot* and its environs, but also in the alleged Hebraic roots of Spanish language and culture.

To be fair to Masdeu and the Mohedanós, Martínez Marina was quick to note that they were only the latest in a very long line of Christian historians to perpetuate the legend of Iberia's Israelite conquerors. The majority of his review, in fact, is dedicated to his exhaustive efforts to trace Nebuchadnezzar through Spanish historiography, beginning in his own time and ending when the trail ran cold during the reign of Felipe II (r. 1556–98). It was then, Martínez Marina announced, that a circle of *érudits* gathered around the famed orientalist Benito Arias Montano (1527–98) – a circle which included fray Luis de León as well as the historians Esteban de Garibay and Juan de Mariana – boldly transplanted the myth of Toledo's Jewish foundations from Sephardic commentaries into mainstream humanist historiography.<sup>7</sup> It was an improbable finding, to say the least. This moment, so deeply marked by Counter-Reformation, Inquisitorial censorship, and the obsession with *limpieza de sangre*, would not seem to be the likeliest place to find Christian scholars rummaging in medieval Hebrew sources in the hope of finding evidence of Spain's Jewish origins.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, within a generation of the Nebuchadnezzar legend's first appearance in Christian historiography in the mid-sixteenth century, the Inquisition attempted a clean sweep of Spain's Christian hebraists, prosecuting or otherwise

7 The first Christian author to treat Nebuchadnezzar's conquest at length was Benito Arias Montano in his *Commentaria in dodecim prophetas* (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1571), pp. 462–64; from there the subject was picked up by Luis de León, Esteban de Garibay, Juan de Mariana, as well as dozens of other authors through the seventeenth century. See Dominique Reyre, 'Topónimos hebreos y memoria de la España judía en el Siglo de Oro', *El Crítico*, 65 (1995): pp. 31–53; Andrés Moreno Mengíbar and Juan Martos Sánchez, 'Mesianismo y Nuevo Mundo en fray Luis de León', *In Abdiam Prophetam Expositio*, *Bulletin Hispanique*, 98 (1996): pp. 261–89; Francisco J. Perea Siller, 'Benito Arias Montano y la identificación de Sefarad. Exégesis poligráfica de Abdías 20', *Helmántica*, 51 (2000): pp. 199–218.

8 Lu Ann Homza, *Religious Authority in the Spanish Renaissance* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 77.

cowing not only Luis de León and Arias Montano, but also Gaspar de Grajal, Alonso de Gudiel, Francisco Sánchez de las Brozas, and Martín Martínez de Cantalapiedra in a clear demonstration of how easily philological interest in Sephardic materials could be construed as 'judaizing'.<sup>9</sup>

Even so, it remained indisputable that between the second half of the sixteenth century and Martínez Marina's own day a wide array of Christian scholars – some of them hebraists like Arias Montano, but many more of them exclusively Latinate or Castilian authors like the historian Garibay and even the dramatist Pedro Calderón de la Barca – decided to graft a story about the ancient Israelites from the Sephardic commentary tradition onto the narrowing trunk of foundation myths deployed by the Hispanic Monarchy.<sup>10</sup> This seemed to call for an explanation, but Martínez Marina – who, like most eighteenth-century Spanish intellectuals, approached the vast corpus of medieval Sephardica as if it were the password-protected archive of an alien civilization – ultimately found himself at a loss to explain what Nebuchadnezzar might have meant to Spaniards, whether Christian or Jewish, in the years around 1500.<sup>11</sup> In the past several decades, however, a number of historians have reopened Martínez Marina's question, lavishing fresh attention not only on these Hebraic legends, but also on the other, similar, instances of 'oriental' origin myths which cropped up with notable frequency in late sixteenth-century Spain – including, most famously, the *Plomos* (Lead Books) of the Sacromonte and the related 'false chronicles' promoted by slippery figures like Jerónimo Román de la

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- 9 Carlos Carrete Parrondo, *Hebraístas judeoconversos en la universidad de Salamanca (siglos xv–xvi). Lección inaugural del curso académico, 1983–1984* (Salamanca: Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca, 1983); Fernando Domínguez Reboiras, *Gaspar de Grajal (1530–1575). Frühneuzeitliche Bibebwissenschaft im Streit mit Universität und Inquisition* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1998); Miguel de la Pinta Llorente, *Procesos inquisitoriales contra los catedráticos hebraístas de Salamanca. Gaspar de Grajal, Martínez de Cantalapiedra y Fray Luis de León* (Madrid: Monasterio de El Escorial, 1935–46).
- 10 Pedro Calderón de la Barca, *Origen, pérdida y restauración de la Virgen del Sagrario*, in *Obras completas*, (ed.) Luis Astrana Marín (Madrid: Aguilar, 1945), vol. 1, pp. 1021–49, esp. p. 1024. On the Habsburg Monarchy's promotion of an approved canon of origin myths, see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).
- 11 For a melodramatic account of the neglect of Hebrew studies in eighteenth-century Spain, see Antonio María García Blanco, *Biografía de Antonio María García Blanco, o sea, Historia compendiada de los conocimientos hebreos en España* (Madrid: Tomás Rey, 1869). Among the most significant exceptions to this general pattern of neglect one must count Francisco Pérez Bayer (1711–94) and José Rodríguez de Castro (1739–89); see Aurora Rivière Gómez, *Orientalismo y nacionalismo español. Estudios árabes y hebreos en la Universidad de Madrid (1843–1868)* (Madrid: Instituto Antonio de Nebrija, 2000), ch. 1.

Higuera (d. 1611).<sup>12</sup> These historians have tended to explain Spanish humanists' unexpected quest for exotic, Near Eastern origins in two distinct ways.

First, there are those who, looking outward from the Iberian Peninsula, have glossed these legends as typical examples of late Renaissance monarchies' pervasive, aggressive quest for national – perhaps even nationalistic – myths of origins older, and hence more prestigious, than the Roman or Trojan origins that had satisfied their fifteenth-century predecessors.<sup>13</sup> It was precisely this quest that Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) would later pillory, borrowing a term from Diodorus Siculus, as *la boria delle nazioni* (the conceit of nations).<sup>14</sup> According to this interpretation, the appeal of legends like that of Nebuchadnezzar's conquest to Felipe II and his court humanists lay not in their Jewishness, but rather in their assertion of the extreme antiquity of the Hispanic Monarchy. If true, after all, the alleged arrival of ancient Israelites in Spain by the early sixth century BCE would make Spain the first territory within Europe to have received knowledge of the True God – a fact which might further be spun into proof that the Spaniards had become a new Chosen People, destined to spread word of the Gospel throughout their New World empire.<sup>15</sup>

If this first school of thought insists upon the national (or proto-nationalist) nature of these myths at the expense of their Jewishness, the second school

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- 12 David Nirenberg, 'Mass Conversion and Genealogical Mentalities: Jews and Christians in Fifteenth-Century Spain', *Past and Present*, 174 (2002): pp. 3–41; Juan Gil, 'Judíos y conversos en los falsos cronicones', in *Inquisition d'Espagne*, (ed.) Annie Molinié and Jean-Paul Duviols (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003), pp. 21–43; A. Katie Harris, *From Muslim to Christian Granada: Inventing a City's Past in Early Modern Spain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Mercedes García-Arenal and Fernando Rodríguez Mediano, *The Orient in Spain: Converted Muslims, the Forged Lead Books of Granada and the Rise of Orientalism*, (trans.) Consuelo López-Morillas (Leiden: Brill, 2013); García-Arenal and Rodríguez, 'Les antiquités hébraïques dans l'historiographie espagnole à l'époque moderne', *Dix-septième siècle*, 66 (2015): pp. 79–91; Katrina B. Olds, *Forging the Past: Invented Histories in Counter-Reformation Spain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
- 13 For the wider European context, see Anthony Grafton, 'The Identities of History in Early Modern Europe: Prelude to a Study of the *Artes Historicae*', in *Historia: Empiricism and Erudition in Early Modern Europe*, (ed.) Gianna Pomata and Nancy G. Siraisi (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2005), pp. 41–74, esp. p. 55; Eric W. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), pp. 416–17.
- 14 Giambattista Vico, *New Science* (New York: Penguin, 2013), p. 45 [I.1.53].
- 15 See Chapter 3 by Valeria López Fadul in this volume; Olds, *Forging the Past*; Mateo Ballesster Rodríguez, *La identidad española en la Edad Moderna (1556–1665). Discursos, símbolos y mitos* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2010); Julio Caro Baroja, *Las falsificaciones de la historia (en relación con la de España)* (Barcelona: Seix Barral, 1992).



has adopted essentially the contrary perspective. Looking inward rather than outward, privileging the unstable religious politics of the post-1492 Iberian Peninsula and the New Christian backgrounds of many of the individuals responsible for propagating these Hebraic or Arabic origin myths, these historians interpret their positive portrayals of ancient Israelites or Arabs as strategic responses to the social pressures inflicted upon Spain's Converso population in an age of increasing intolerance and persecution. According to this line of thought, it was *precisely* the Jewish content of these legends about Solomon and Nebuchadnezzar that recommended them to their almost exclusively Converso publicists; consequently, they must be understood as a subtle attempt to subvert or contravene the majority preference for cultural and religious homogeneity – a kind of highly intellectualized, antiquarian complement to more obviously political anti-*limpieza* treatises penned by the Franciscan Gaspar de Uceda in 1586 and the Dominican Agustín Salucio in 1599.<sup>16</sup> Histories written in this vein typically take care to establish the somewhat ambiguous Jewish origins of scholars like Arias Montano in an effort to prove a direct correlation between one's interest in these legends and one's sense of 'Converso identity'.<sup>17</sup>

Each of these explanations has considerable merit, and I, too, have argued elsewhere for connecting the myth of Spain's Israelite settlers with the emergence of a supra-regional, 'national' sentiment in the sixteenth-century Peninsula.<sup>18</sup> But they also miss something of vital importance by virtue of their method, which typically considers the Nebuchadnezzar myth's afterlife in the histories and commentaries of early modern Christians in isolation from its medieval, Sephardic origins, as if it were enough simply to know that the legend was 'Jewish'. To presume that one can ask what the Nebuchadnezzar

16 Juan Gil, 'Judíos y conversos'; Stefania Pastore, *Il vangelo e la spada. L'inquisizione di Castiglia e i suoi critici (1460–1598)* (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2003). For Uceda, see Elvira Pérez Ferreiro, *El tratado de Uceda contra los estatutos de limpieza de sangre* (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 2000); for Salucio's *Discurso acerca de la justicia y buen gobierno de España, en los estatutos de limpieza de sangre y si conviene, o no, alguna limitación a ellos*, see Israel Salvator Révah, 'La controverse sur les statuts de pureté de sang. Un document inédit', *Bulletin Hispanique*, 73 (1971): pp. 263–306.

17 Kevin Ingram, 'Historiography, Historicity and the Conversos', in *The Conversos and Moriscos in Late Medieval Spain and Beyond, vol. 1: Departures and Change* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 335–56, esp. p. 348. See Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths*, pp. 120–21, for further examples and a critique of this 'Inquisitorial approach'.

18 Adam G. Beaver, 'From Jerusalem to Toledo: Replica, Landscape and the Nation in Renaissance Iberia', *Past and Present*, 218 (2013): pp. 55–90.

legend signified to a sixteenth- or eighteenth-century humanist without also knowing in some detail what, exactly, it meant to its Jewish creators pre-1492 is to imply that the cultural and intellectual products of Al-Andalus, and of Sephardic Judaism in particular, presented to early modern Christians as a buffet of tropes, ideas, and legends unmoored from the deeply-rooted structures and patterns of thought that had given them their original meanings. It is, in other words, to embrace a model of religious conversion in which the new convert packs his language, his textual traditions, and all of the other intellectual trappings of his former life into a single box, labels it 'Judaism', and delivers it to his Christian neighbors at the church door.

Of course, we know that this is not a viable way to think about cross-cultural reception. For that reason, this article will follow Nebuchadnezzar's Jews back to their origins in eleventh-century Al-Andalus in order to build the case for a third, radically different explanation for the improbable popularity of these seemingly 'judaizing' legends in Counter-Reformation Spain. The resulting story is a story about the consequences of interlocking conversions: a human story about the role of polemic and rapprochement in transmitting and preserving the cultural patrimony of Sepharad, and an intellectual story about the hidden continuity of pre- and post-1492 Iberian traditions of polemic and biblical exegesis. The tale of Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish legions is a story not about nations, genealogical pride, or the Inquisition, but about the way in which Iberian Jews and Christians saw themselves as allies in rescuing the Bible – not once, but twice; first from Islam, and then, from the Reformation.

### Doubting the Bible in Al-Andalus

The precise origins of the myth of Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish legions are not entirely clear, and may always remain just beyond the scholar's grasp. It is, however, clear that the search for such origins must begin not in fifteenth- or sixteenth-century Castile, with Martínez Marina's perfidious 'rabbis', but rather in medieval Al-Andalus, among members of the Arabized Jewish elite. By the ninth century, at least some of these Andalusí Jews had begun to claim that they were descended from refugees from the royal or Davidic tribe of Judah who had fled Palestine for Iberia in 70 CE in the wake of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. While the chronology undergirding this genealogical claim is plausible, syncing up well with the available textual and archaeological evidence, the boast of Davidic descent was controversial even in its own time, and put Iberian Jews at odds with their coreligionists in the Near East, whose

communal identity was deeply invested in their rival claim of Davidic ancestry for the Jewish exilarch in Baghdad.<sup>19</sup>

Iberian Jews defended their genealogical boast by recourse to the authority of the biblical prophecy of Obadiah – one of the so-called Minor Prophets of the Hebrew Bible – and his ambiguous reference to a tribe of Jewish exiles ‘in Sepharad’ (Obadiah 1:20) who upon their return were to repossess the cities of southern Judea taken from them by the wicked Edomites. This prophecy was (and still remains) one of the most opaque in the Hebrew Bible, its meaning depending heavily upon which exile one believes it describes as well as the locations to which one believes its numerous obscure toponyms – including the elusive Sepharad – refer. The Jews of Al-Andalus seized upon this ambiguity, arguing that the Edomites were the Romans of 70 CE, that the exiles from the cities of the south were the tribe of Judah, and that Sepharad was an alternative name for the Iberian Peninsula.<sup>20</sup> While modern scholars tend to consider this conjecture unfounded, placing Sepharad instead in Asia Minor, the Jews of medieval Iberia did have at least one authoritative piece of evidence on their side – that is, the ca. first-century CE Aramaic paraphrase of the Prophets, Targum Jonathan – which (also for unknown reasons) rendered the Hebrew ‘Sepharad’ into Aramaic as ‘Ispamia’, easily assimilable to the Latin ‘Hispania’.<sup>21</sup> By the standards of medieval etymology, this evidence was too compelling to dismiss, and Iberian Jews became Sephardim.

Initially, Iberian Jews’ Muslim neighbors demonstrated little interest in disputing this Sephardic myth of origins, in spite of its bold presumption of Davidic ancestry. In fact, the ruling Umayyad dynasty may have encouraged its Jewish subjects’ biblical-genealogical pretensions, as a buttress to its own claims of genealogical superiority vis-à-vis its Abbasid counterpart in the East.<sup>22</sup>

19 Arnold E. Franklin, *This Noble House: Jewish Descendants of King David in the Medieval Islamic East* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 41–43.

20 María Rosa Menocal, *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (Boston: Little Brown, 2002), p. 78.

21 Eduard Lipiński, ‘Obadiah 20’, *Vetus Testamentum*, 23 (1973): pp. 368–70; Leivy Smolar and Moses Aberbach, *Studies in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* (New York: Ktav, Baltimore Hebrew College, 1983), p. 122.

22 Gabriel Martínez-Gros, *L'idéologie omeyyade. La construction de la légitimité du Califat de Cordoue (X<sup>e</sup>-XI<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 1992); Janina M. Safran, *The Second Umayyad Caliphate: The Articulation of Caliphal Legitimacy in Al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 2000). It may be significant that one of the earliest Sephardic texts to mention Obadiah 1:20 in support of a claim of Davidic ancestry is a diplomatic letter sent by the ‘Umayyads’ Jewish vizier Ḥasḏai ibn Shaprut (ca. 915–ca. 970). See Joseph the Khazar and Ḥasḏai ibn Shaprut, ‘Khazar

That changed, however, in the eleventh century, as the 'Umayyad caliphate centered in Cordoba tottered and then collapsed under pressures both internal and external, Muslim as well as Christian.<sup>23</sup> The political consequences of the civil war are relatively well-known: it is in the wake of Cordoba's collapse that Al-Andalus disintegrated into the so-called *Ṭawā'if* (party kingdoms) whose fractiousness helped to facilitate the unusually successful period of Christian reconquest in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>24</sup> But the fall of Cordoba also entailed a rebalancing of cultural influence within the Peninsula's three faith communities, as the old Muslim families of the ruling elite found themselves replaced in several instances by Jewish viziers, the most famous example of which is the well-known Hebrew poet Samuel ibn Naghrīla of Granada (aka Samuel ha-Nagid, 993–after 1056).<sup>25</sup>

This was a severe blow to the former 'Umayyad or 'Amirid elite, a group which included the young polymath Muḥammad 'Alī ibn Ḥazm (994–1064).<sup>26</sup> The fall of Cordoba had profound personal consequences for Ibn Ḥazm, who was transformed from the privileged son of the toppled caliph's trusted vizier into an itinerant scholar-in-exile forced to seek protection in Almería and Mallorca, while Jews like Ibn Naghrīla – whom Ibn Ḥazm had known in his youth – took his place atop the social and political hierarchy. Ibn Ḥazm responded to this dramatic fall from fortune in a way familiar to intellectuals of all times and places: by writing a devastating book. In this case, his book – originally entitled *Izhār tabdīl al-yahūd wa-l-naṣārā li-l-tawrāt wa-l-injīl* (Exposure of Jewish and Christian Falsifications in the Torah and Gospels) before it grew into *Al-ḥisāl fi l-milal wa-l-'ahwā' wa-l-niḥal* (The Book of Opinions on Religions, Sects, and Heresies) – aimed to prove that the Judaism of his Sephardic rivals

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Correspondence', in *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Sourcebook, 315–1791*, (ed.) Jacob R. Marcus (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1938), pp. 227–32; Norman Roth, 'Ibn Shaprut, Ḥasdai', in *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia*, (ed.) E. Michael Gerli (New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 420–21.

23 Peter C. Scales, *The Fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba: Berbers and Andalusians in Conflict* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

24 Brian A. Catlos, *Muslims of Medieval Latin Christendom, c. 1050–1614* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), ch. 1.

25 Ross Brann, *Power in the Portrayal. Representations of Jews and Muslims in Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Islamic Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

26 On Ibn Ḥazm, see Camilla Adang, Maribel Fierro and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba: The Life and Works of a Controversial Thinker* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Miguel Asín Palacios, *Abenḥázam de Córdoba y su historia crítica de las ideas religiosas* (Madrid: Tipografía de la Revista de archivos, 1927).

was an illegitimate and corrupted shadow of its Mosaic original, an obsolete husk long since superseded by Islam.<sup>27</sup>

Taking his cue from earlier generations of Muslim polemicists like ‘Alī ibn Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (fl. ca. 850), who had shown the way to use the Jews’ own scripture as a source for anti-Jewish polemic, Ibn Ḥazm trained his considerable critical faculties on the Hebrew Bible.<sup>28</sup> Like his forbears, Ibn Ḥazm identified three types of passages with the potential to embarrass and undermine his Jewish rivals. The first comprised those which could be construed as hidden prophecies of the arrival of Muḥammad and the abrogation (*naskh*) of Jews’ special covenant, including both predictions of the fall of Israel (like the oft-polemized prophecy in Genesis 49:10 that the scepter would one day depart David’s tribe of Judah) and intimations of the rise of Islam to replace it (like the mentions of Ishmael’s future greatness in Genesis 17:20 and 16:9–12).<sup>29</sup> The second comprised ‘indecent’ events or passages which seemed to call into question the Bible’s suitability as a book of divine revelation. Why, Ibn Ḥazm asked, would a putatively holy book contain so many episodes of rape, incest, drunkenness, and murder?<sup>30</sup> Finally, there were the biblical narrative’s countless logical, chronological, and geographical inconsistencies and contradictions, an especially rich vein which Ibn Ḥazm, who knew the Torah reasonably well, mined as comprehensively as any modern biblical critic.<sup>31</sup> While he unfailingly noted the most glaring ruptures in the Torah’s narrative fabric – the fact that Moses’ death, for example, is narrated in the course of a book (Deuteronomy) which he is supposed to have written<sup>32</sup> – he reserved a special relish for the smallest of details, like the fact that manna was descri-

27 Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*, pp. 55–56; Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 26; Ghulām Haider Aasi, *Muslim Understanding of Other Religions: A Study of Ibn Ḥazm’s Kitāb al-faṣl fi l-milal wa-l-’ahwā’ wa-l-niḥal* (Islamabad: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Islamic Research Institute, 1999).

28 Camilla Adang, ‘Medieval Muslim Polemics against the Jewish Scriptures’, in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, (ed.) Jacques Waardenburg (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 143–59; Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabbān to Ibn Ḥazm* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). For Muslim polemicists’ knowledge of the Hebrew Bible, particularly via Arabic translations, see Sidney H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the ‘People of the Book’ in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

29 Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba*, vol. 2, p. 291.

30 Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba*, vol. 2, pp. 265–74.

31 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 123.

32 The claim of Moses’ authorship appears in Deuteronomy 31:24; his death is recorded in Deuteronomy 34:5.

bed as being white in Exodus 16:31 but yellow in Numbers 11:7–8, or the fact that Lamech's son Jabal is described in Genesis 4:20 as the first man to herd livestock in spite of the fact that his ancestor Abel was said to have been a shepherd in Genesis 4:2.<sup>33</sup> As a pioneer of the Zāhirite school, known for its exceptionally unforgiving and unsentimental textual criticism, Ibn Ḥazm considered it patently unacceptable that a text purporting to be a single-authored, faithful record of divine revelation should be marred by so many careless mistakes, edits, and seemingly inexplicable perspectival shifts.<sup>34</sup>

Up to this point, Ibn Ḥazm's method of cataloguing the the Hebrew Bible's textual flaws followed closely earlier qur'ānic and polemical traditions which saw the Hebrew Bible as a pastiche of malicious falsification (or *tahrīf*) and accidental corruption designed to conceal its original, proto-Islamic content.<sup>35</sup> Where Ibn Ḥazm departed from this polemical tradition was in his determination to form a detailed theory as to the historical circumstances in which the Bible's original text had been lost and altered.<sup>36</sup> If their silence with regard to the Bible's history is any indicator, most of Ibn Ḥazm's fellow polemicists simply assumed that the Bible's corruption had happened gradually and haphazardly, through a mixture of isolated accidents and acts of sabotage whose individual histories were beyond recovery. The *Book of Opinions*, by contrast, reveals a thinker convinced that the apparent chaos within Jewish scripture was too systematic, and too profound, to be the product of centuries of gradual distortion. The accumulation of all of these textual problems – not only the vulgarities and jarring discontinuities, but also the alleged absence of more proto-Islamic content – persuaded Ibn Ḥazm that the Hebrew Bible known to eleventh-century readers was not merely a distorted version of the original, but an outright forgery. He was prepared to prove, he boasted,

33 Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba*, vol. 2, p. 302, pp. 246–47.

34 Ignaz Goldziher, *Zahiris, Their Doctrine and their History: A Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), p. 56, p. 112, pp. 144–45.

35 Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism*, ch. 5; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 21–23; Sabine Schmidtke, 'Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī on the Torah and its Abrogation', *Mélanges de l'Université Saint Joseph*, 61 (2008): pp. 559–80; Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'On the Qur'ānic Accusation of Scriptural Falsification (*tahrīf*) and Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 130 (2010): pp. 189–202; Schmidtke and Adang, 'Mu'tazilī Discussions of the Abrogation of the Torah: Ibn Ḥallād (4th/10th century) and His Commentators', *Arabica*, 60 (2013): pp. 701–42.

36 Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, pp. 26, 40, 68; Martin Whittingham, 'Ezra as the Corrupter of the Torah? Re-Assessing Ibn Ḥazm's Role in the Long History of an Idea', *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World*, 1 (2013): pp. 253–71, esp. p. 254.

with the same certitude with which one can say that yesterday came before today, that the Jews' Torah comes neither from God nor from the teaching of any Prophet. Nor is it even the work of a wise author who fears untruth, or of someone who knows arithmetic well enough to avoid erring in calculations so simple that they could be done correctly even by a child who knew simply how add, subtract, divide, and call things by their names.<sup>37</sup>

This accusation, of course, begged a serious question: who, then, was this author – this 'godless, mocking forger, who wished to con the Jews and play tricks on them', this 'idiot, a lunatic imbecile ... oblivious and ignorant in matters of astronomy, geography, arithmetic, and theology' – who had rewritten the Torah? How had he managed to replace the authentic text with his own fantasy?

Here Ibn Ḥazm adapted another idea which he had discovered in the work of earlier polemicists like Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī (ca. 893–956). In his *Murūj al-dhahab wa-ma'ādin al-jawhar* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems), al-Mas'ūdī had pointed to the Babylonian Captivity as a likely moment when the Jews had lost access to the Torah, albeit only temporarily, as their priests allegedly had removed the Torah scrolls from Solomon's Temple and buried them in a well to protect them from Nebuchadnezzar's invading forces.<sup>38</sup> In al-Mas'ūdī's rendering, the Torah was then recovered from its hiding place essentially intact by Ezra, whom the Bible (2 Ezra 8) describes as taking it upon himself to re-establish the Mosaic Law among his fellow Israelites freshly liberated from the Babylonian Captivity by the Persian king Cyrus. As Ibn Ḥazm seems to have known, however – perhaps from a parallel tradition of Christian polemics about Ezra – there was an alternative version of Ezra's post-exilic activity available in the apocryphal book of 4 Ezra. In this version, the fleeing Israelites had failed to conceal the lone copy of the Torah kept in the Temple, where Nebuchadnezzar had found it and destroyed it; Ezra, as a result, had not merely 'restored' the Torah, but in fact had re-written it entirely from the fragmentary and often contradictory memories of his fellow Israelite exiles.<sup>39</sup>

37 Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba*, vol. 2, p. 256.

38 Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn al-Mas'ūdī, *Les prairies d'or*, (ed. and trans.) Charles Barbier de Meynard and Abel Pavet de Courteille (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1861–77), vol. 1, pp. 117–18.

39 This radical claim about the discontinuity of the Mosaic version of the Torah had been picked up in antiquity by a small group of anti-Christian polemicists like the Greek

This hypothetical Babylonian destruction fit perfectly with Ibn Ḥazm's sense that the Hebrew Bible had been lost and rewritten by a single, shameless forger rather than merely gradually altered, and he readily adopted it as his own, narrating in extensive detail exactly how it was that the Israelites had come to accept Ezra's idiosyncratic attempt to reproduce the Torah as the authentic text of revelation.<sup>40</sup> By the time the Jews were released from the Babylonian Captivity and returned to Jerusalem some six decades later, he argued, the entire Torah had been so forgotten that no one recognized just how badly Ezra had botched his reconstruction.<sup>41</sup> In fleshing out the counter narrative of 4 Ezra in such vivid and plausible-sounding detail, Ibn Ḥazm raised the Babylonian Captivity to the central, defining event in the history of the Jewish people. Rather than one exile among many, it became the moment at which the Jews permanently lost not only their political power, fulfilling the prophecy of the passing of the scepter in Genesis 49:10, but also their sacred text. Whether or not he had intended it, Ibn Ḥazm had not merely calumniated his Jewish rivals: he had opened the door to rewriting the history of Second Temple Judaism.<sup>42</sup>

### The Sephardic Response

Ibn Ḥazm's trenchant philological and historical critique did not catch his Jewish counterparts entirely by surprise. Rabbinical authors – often in dialogue with Christians, pagans, and Ibn Ḥazm's Muslim predecessors – had

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philosopher Porphyry. In his late third-century polemic *Against the Christians*, Porphyry wrote that 'nothing has been preserved of Moses, as all his writings are said to have been burnt together with the Temple. And all those which were written under his name afterwards were composed inaccurately one thousand one hundred and eighty years after Moses' death by Ezra and his followers'. See Menahem Stern (ed. and trans.), *Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–84), vol. 2, p. 480.

40 Asín Palacios, *Abenházam de Córdoba*, vol. 2, p. 350ff.

41 It should be noted that modern historians have regarded Hobbes and Spinoza as radical and progressive for taking up the same theory several centuries later; yet Ibn Ḥazm quite clearly anticipated – via the transmission of Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164) – many of their ostensibly novel criticisms. Noel Malcolm, 'Hobbes, Ezra and the Bible: The History of a Subversive Idea', in *Aspects of Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 383–431; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 74. See also, however, the critique of Whittingham, 'Ezra as the Corrupter', pp. 264–67.

42 Brann, *Power in the Portrayal*, pp. 55–56; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds*, p. 26.



already explored and exposed many of the Hebrew Bible's textual problems and inconsistencies long before the eleventh century, beginning at least as early as Justin Martyr's second-century dialogue with Trypho the Jew.<sup>43</sup> Moses' untimely death in Deuteronomy, for example, was the subject of discussion in Tractates Bava Batra 15a and Menachot 30a of the Babylonian Talmud (third–fifth century), in the course of which it was decided that Moses could be credited with writing *most* of the Torah, and Joshua with the final section of Deuteronomy corresponding to Moses' decline, death, and the immediate aftermath.<sup>44</sup> Nor were they surprised to find a Muslim author marshaling their own Scripture to prove the obsolescence of Judaism in favor of Islam: this, too, was a tactic with which Jewish polemicists had wrangled at least a century prior to Ibn Ḥazm.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, Ibn Ḥazm's proposed theory of Ezran forgery and the sixth-century BCE passing of the scepter did pose an unusually direct challenge to a Sephardic intelligentsia accustomed to thinking of Ezra as one of the trustworthy custodians of scripture, and of themselves as the continuators of Davidic genealogy. Within a century, Ibn Ḥazm's assault on the Bible elicited a number of responses from Sephardic authors determined to defend the integrity of their textual and genealogical traditions. The majority of these responses embraced one of two strategies. The first of these, expressed most cogently in the works of the Abraham ibn Da'ud (ca. 1110–ca. 1180) and the Barcelona rabbi Solomon ibn Adreṭ (1235–1310), challenged Ibn Ḥazm on his own terms by amassing historical and philological evidence suggesting that the Babylonian Captivity had not seriously threatened the Torah, and that the much-maligned Ezra had, in fact, merely restored and disseminated it without introducing new

43 Irven M. Resnick, 'The Falsification of Scripture and Medieval Christian and Jewish Polemics', *Medieval Encounters*, 2 (1996): pp. 344–80; William Adler, 'The Jews as Falsifiers: Charges of Tendentious Emendations in Anti-Jewish Christian Polemics', in *Translation of Scripture: Proceedings of a Conference at the Annenberg Research Institute, May 15–16, 1989*, (ed.) David Goldenberg (Philadelphia: Annenberg Research Institute, 1990), pp. 1–27. For Justin Martyr, see Justin Martyr, *Dialogue avec Tryphon*, (ed.) Philippe Bobichon, 2 vols. (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires de Fribourg, Éditions Saint-Paul, 2003).

44 Isidore Epstein and Maurice Simon (eds.), *Soncino Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*, 30 vols. (London: Soncino Press, 1994).

45 David E. Sklare, *Samuel ben Hofni Gaon and his Cultural World* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 28–29, 52ff; Sklare, 'Responses to Islamic Polemics by Jewish Mutakallimūn in the Tenth Century', in *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, (ed.) Hava Lazarus-Yafeh et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), pp. 137–61.

or corrupted material.<sup>46</sup> In his *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* (Book of Tradition) and *al-'Aqidah al-rafi'ah* (The Exalted Faith), both completed in the 1160s, Ibn Da'ud presented compelling arguments that the extraordinary continuity of the Jewish tradition coupled with the doctrine of public witness guaranteed the authenticity of Ezra's Torah. 'Let us assume that Ezra came from Babylonia and wrote an altered Torah – then why did the people thank him for it?', he asked. 'And why was it obeyed near and far? ... [W]e have never heard of anyone who blamed Ezra in any way'.

The tradition concerning an event that is reported to have taken place publicly before a great body of men, which originated, so to say, under the control of public opinion, without having been disputed by contemporaries, and has descended with an uninterrupted continuity, possesses an argumentativeness which can not be controverted even by the professional logician.<sup>47</sup>

Ibn Adret, while recapitulating many of Ibn Da'ud's arguments with regard to the continuity of Jews' textual and exegetical traditions, was even more cutting, labeling Ibn Ḥazm an ignorant person's idea of a learned person before turning his Muslim antagonist's arguments back against him.<sup>48</sup> Why, he wondered, if Ezra and his fellow Jews had gone to so much effort to forge the Bible, would they have included all of the embarrassing moral lapses of their kings and prophets that Ibn Ḥazm considered proof of the text's corruption? Weren't these scandals actually proof of the Hebrew Bible's unfiltered authenticity?<sup>49</sup>

46 On Ibn Da'ud, see Resianne Fontaine, *In Defence of Judaism: Abraham ibn Daud. Sources and Structure of ha-Emunah ha-Ramah*, (trans.) H.S. Lake (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1990); Abraham ibn Da'ud, *Sefer ha-Qabbalah. The Book of Tradition*, (ed. and trans.) Gerson D. Cohen (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005); Fontaine, 'Abraham Ibn Daud's Polemics against Muslims and Christians', in *The Three Rings: Textual Studies in the Historical Dialogue of Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, (ed.) Barbara Roggema et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 19–34. On Ibn Adret, see Camilla Adang, 'A Jewish Reply to Ibn Ḥazm: Solomon B. Adret's Polemic against Islam', in *Judíos en Tierras del Islam. Intelectuales musulmanes y judíos en contacto, Al-Andalus y el Magreb*, (ed.) Maribel Fierro (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, CSIC, 2002), pp. 179–209; Harvey J. Hames, 'A Jew Amongst Christians and Muslims: Introspection in Solomon ibn Adret's Response to Ibn Ḥazm', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, 25 (2010): pp. 203–19.

47 Abraham ibn Da'ud, *The Exalted Faith (Sefer ha-Emunah ha-Ramah)*, (ed. and trans.) Norbert M. Samuelson and Gershon Weiss (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986), ch. 5.

48 Adang, 'A Jewish Reply', p. 186.

49 Adang, 'A Jewish Reply', p. 187.

Though these philological and historical arguments in defense of Ezra addressed several aspects of Ibn Ḥazm's criticism, other Sephardic authors feared that Ibn Ḥazm's treatment of the Babylonian Captivity and Ezra's 'restoration' of the Torah was too compelling to leave the Torah unguarded in the hands of their Near Eastern forebears. These authors pursued a second strategy, in which they obviated the need to defend Ezra from Ibn Ḥazm's attacks by replacing (or, more accurately, supplementing) him with a hypothetical tribe of primordial Sephardim who *also* had preserved the purity of the Torah through the Babylonian Captivity and passed it on to their Iberian descendants. According to this theory – which formed the kernel of the Nebuchadnezzar legend – at some point during the Babylonian Captivity an elite phalanx of Jews hailing from the royal tribes of Judah and Benjamin had managed to separate themselves from their lesser coreligionists and enter the ranks of Nebuchadnezzar's armies, whence they were deployed to the Iberian Peninsula. Once there, they never returned to the Near East, instead founding temples like the 'ancient' Tránsito synagogue in Toledo and rabbinical academies in places like Lucena known for their deep and unbroken tradition of Torah scholarship.<sup>50</sup> The combination of their early dates of foundation and their independence from Ezra's efforts to restore the Torah in Jerusalem was interpreted as proof that *their* scrolls had remained pure, untouched by both Nebuchadnezzar's violence and Ezra's editorial interventions.

An early iteration of this alternative genealogy appears in the *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-mudhākara* (Book of Conversation and Discussion) penned by the Granadan poet and grammarian Moses ibn Ezra (ca. 1057–after 1138), in a chapter devoted to the 'superiority of the diaspora that is in Al-Andalus above all other [Jews] with regard to the composition of poetry, prose, and Hebrew letters'. Arguing that 'there can be no doubt' that the tribes of Judah and Benjamin 'were the most knowledgeable about proper usage of the language and of the transmission of the divine law', Ibn Ezra set about proving the Sephardim's descent from those royal tribes by collating the old Sephardic standby – Obadiah 20's 'Jews in Sepharad', now tacitly 'redated' to apply to the diaspora of 586 BCE rather than 70 CE – with additional evidence about Nebuchadnezzar's captives drawn from Ezra 2:1 and Nehemiah 7:6.<sup>51</sup> Subsequent authors added still more textual evidence linking Nebuchadnezzar and his captives with the Iberian Peninsula, the prime example of which came from the Hellenized Jew Josephus (37–100 CE). In both his *Jewish Antiquities*

50 Pedro de Alcocer, *Hystoria, o descripción de la imperial cibdad de Toledo, con todas las cosas acontecidas en ella, a donde se tocan, y refieren muchas antigüedades* (Toledo: Juan Ferrer, 1554), fols. xiv r–xv r.

51 Moses Ibn Ezra, *Kitāb al-muḥāḍara wa-l-mudhākara*, (ed. and trans.) Montserrat Abumalham Mas (Madrid: CSIC, 1985), vol. 2, pp. 59–61.

(ca. 93) and *Against Apion* (ca. 100), Josephus bowdlerized a cryptic reference to Nebuchadnezzar's conquests stretching 'to the Pillars' which he had found in the *Indika* of the Greek chorographer Megasthenes (ca. 350–290 BCE) to claim that 'in the fourth book of his *History of India*', Megasthenes 'attempts to show that this king surpassed Heracles in bravery and in the greatness of his deeds, saying that he subdued the greater part of Libya and Iberia'.<sup>52</sup> The claim was duplicitous – Megasthenes, it would be discovered in the seventeenth century, had said no such thing – but Sephardic authors eager to place their ancestors on an even plane with Ezra were not likely to ask questions.<sup>53</sup>

Though the search for authorities with which to bolster this 'discovery' of a previously unknown community of Israelites weathering the Babylonian Captivity in Iberia might strike the modern critic as a flight of pure fancy, in its context it was also a radical act of exegetical and historiographical revisionism – a reimagining of biblical and post-biblical history which undermines Yosef Yerushalmi's well-known assertion that medieval Jews failed to develop a historiographical tradition beyond the accepted narrative found in the Bible.<sup>54</sup> In this sense, the Nebuchadnezzar legend was the perfect rebuttal to Ibn Ḥazm's attack. Having merged their own myth of noble origins with the very history with which Ibn Ḥazm proposed to discredit the Bible, Iberian Jews vested themselves with the authority to state, categorically, that the Hebrew Bible had *not* been lost in the destruction of the Temple, but rather had traveled

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- 52 Josephus, *Against Apion*, in Henry St John Thackeray (ed. and trans.), *The Life. Against Apion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), pp. 283–85 [book I.144]. See also Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, (ed. and trans.) Ralph Marcus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930–65), vol. 6, p. 221 [book X.227]. The original reference contorted by Josephus can be found in Megasthenes, *Historia Indika*, in *Ancient India as Described by Megasthenes and Arrian*, (ed.) J.W. McCrindle (Calcutta and Bombay: Thacker, Spink, 1877), pp. 30–174, esp. p. 109. On Megasthenes' confusion about Nebuchadnezzar and 'the Pillars', which he may have drawn from Berossus the Chaldean's work, see Russell E. Gmirkin, *Berossus and Genesis, Manetho and Exodus: Hellenistic Histories and the Date of the Pentateuch* (New York: Tandt Clark International, 2006), pp. 257–58.
- 53 José Ramón Ayaso Martínez, 'Antigüedad y excelencia de la diáspora judía en la Península Ibérica', *Miscelánea de estudios árabes y hebraicos. Sección de hebreo*, 49 (2000): pp. 233–59. To be fair, Josephus was not the only one to read too much into Megasthenes' vague geographical reference – Strabo (64 BCE–ca. 24 CE) also wondered whether Megasthenes' pillars might refer to Gibraltar rather than the more realistic Bosphorus. See Strabo, *Geography*, (ed. and trans.) Horace Leonard Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960–70), vol. 7, p. 9 [book xv.1.60].
- 54 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982); Robert Chazan, 'The Timebound and the Timeless: Medieval Jewish Narration of Events', *History and Memory*, 6 (1994): pp. 5–34; Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 10–11.

safely with them to the Iberian Peninsula, where it never ceased to circulate. The most consistent inference drawn from this legend, unsurprisingly, was the broad consensus, well-documented in the work of Jewish scholars well into the early modern period, that the particular Sephardic recension of the Hebrew text of the Bible was the purest and best. As Elijah Levita (1469–1549) later observed, ‘Most of the correct codices I found to be Spanish, and it is upon these that I relied’.<sup>55</sup>

### From Al-Andalus to Christian Spain

As Al-Andalus, already weakened by the fall of the ‘Umayyads, crumbled still further in the face of Aragonese and Castilian armies in the thirteenth century, the center of gravity of Sephardic population (and culture) shifted northwards into the Peninsula’s majority Christian lands, and focused especially on Toledo, which had been won from the Muslims in 1085. While many Jews regarded this demographic and cultural change as an expulsion from Paradise, many others initially expressed hope that their conditions might improve among the Christians of Castile and Aragon.<sup>56</sup> As Ora Limor has noted, ‘[t]he Jewish pronouncement ‘[better] under Edom than under Ishmael’ is voiced repeatedly in a variety of Jewish sources, indicating that Jews preferred to live among Christians than among Muslims’.<sup>57</sup> Nebuchadnezzar came north with the Sephardim who streamed into Toledo, his Israelite captives’ legendary role in founding the city colouring the pride which the city’s swelling Jewish community developed in its towers and synagogues. In the early thirteenth century, in a likely echo of the Nebuchadnezzar legend, poet Judah al-Ḥarizi (1165–1225) repurposed Psalm 122:4 to describe Toledo in terms formerly reserved for Jerusalem: ‘the royal city, clothed with the grace of majesty and having culture

55 Christian David Ginsburg, *The Massoreth ha-Massoreth of Elias Levita, being an Exposition of the Masoretic Notes on the Hebrew Bible* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader and Dyer, 1867), p. 93. For further examples see Teresa Ortega-Monasterio, ‘Spanish Biblical Hebrew Manuscripts’, *Hebrew Studies*, 45 (2004): pp. 163–74, esp. pp. 163–64.

56 Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, (trans.) Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971 [1966]), vol. 1, pp. 59–64. For a more recent perspective on the meaning of this transition, see Jonathan Ray, ‘Between the Straits: The Thirteenth Century as a Turning Point for Iberian Jewry’, *Journal of Medieval Iberian Studies*, 4 (2012): pp. 101–05.

57 Ora Limor, ‘The Erection of Essential Boundaries: Christians and Jews’, in *The Cambridge History of Christianity. Vol. IV: Christianity in Western Europe, c. 100–c. 1500*, (ed.) M. Rubin and W. Simon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 135–48, esp. p. 136.

as her ornament, that the nations and princes may be shown her beauty ... For there have the tribes gone up, the tribes of the Lord.<sup>58</sup>

It was in places like Toledo, often described as a laboratory of interfaith or multicultural encounter, that Nebuchadnezzar embarked upon his gradual and asynchronous transformation from a figure of Jewish-Muslim polemic into the figure of Judeo-Christian interaction, negotiation, and filiation that so vexed Francisco Martínez Marina.<sup>59</sup> Interestingly, religious conversion between Judaism and Christianity was largely immaterial to the early phase of this transformation. Eventually – after 1492, when the Catholic Monarchs' expulsion of flesh-and-blood Jews from the Peninsula briefly made the study of Hebrew a safer proposition – it was precisely a generation of Converso hebraists that undertook to persuade their Old Christian students and colleagues that the Nebuchadnezzar legend and the literalist, historicizing, geographically expansive style of interpretation which Sephardic commentators had developed around it deserved a place within the expanding repertoire of Christian exegetes.<sup>60</sup> Prior to 1492, however, the Nebuchadnezzar legend seems to have aroused little sympathy among the Converso intellectuals best positioned to render the sources and the stakes of the legend visible and intelligible to Christian audiences. Instead, learned converts like Ramón Martí (d. after 1287) and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid (ca. 1270–ca. 1347), who built second careers as zealous anti-Judaic polemicists by claiming to expose the corruption within Sephardic thought and practice, wrenched the Nebuchadnezzar legend from its hermeneutical context and held it up before their Christian audiences as an example of their former coreligionists' stubborn messianism and repellent genealogical pride.<sup>61</sup> In a withering letter addressed to the rabbi Abner Ab Serenga, preserved in manuscript in both Spanish and Hebrew versions, for example, Alfonso scolded those Jews who refused conversion that 'they should not deduce from the verse in the prophecy of Obadiah which says 'The captivity of the people of the sons of Israel who [occupied the land] from

58 Judah al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*, (ed. and trans.) D. Simha Segal (Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), p. 345. See Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture in Transition: The Career and Controversies of Ramah* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 3.

59 On Toledo, see for example Menocal, *The Ornament*, pp. 142–46.

60 For the full panorama of Sephardic exegetical traditions, see Ángel Sáenz-Badillos and Judit Targarona Borrás, *Los judíos de Sefarad ante la Biblia. La interpretación de la Biblia en el Medioevo* (Córdoba: El Almendro, 1996).

61 On Abner/Alfonso, see now Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), ch. 5.

Canaan to Sarefat and the captivity of Jerusalem which is in Sefarad' that ... 'Sefarad' is 'Spain'. 'They make a point of saying that this verse gives the Jews of ... Spain hope for their salvation', he continued, 'but this is a lie': while Spain, he noted, is due West of Jerusalem, authorities as diverse as Numbers 34:3, Shlomo Yitzchaki (aka Rashi, 1040–1105), and the aforementioned Abraham ibn Da'ud clearly proved that Sepharad is 'south of the Mediterranean and south of Jerusalem'.<sup>62</sup>

Converso authors' efforts to subvert the Sephardic interpretation of Obadiah found a receptive audience among a Christian population in the grips of what Robert I. Burns has called the 'dream of conversion', willing as never before to pressure and harass its Jewish minority in pursuit of baptisms.<sup>63</sup> While not all historians who treat the centuries of Jewish life leading up to the expulsion of 1492 are equally lachrymose, it is undeniable that this pressure occasionally exploded in fits of cataclysmic violence like the wave of pogroms that swept across the Peninsula in 1391.<sup>64</sup> As Christian sentiment turned strongly against the Jews, several Sephardic authors responded by combing the dominant Christian narrative of the Peninsula's ancient history for lacunae into which they could insert their ancestors, a historiographical sleight of hand which would allow contemporary Iberian Jews to counter the claim that they were 'Christ-killers' by showing that their ancestors had left the Holy Land long before the Crucifixion.<sup>65</sup> The Nebuchadnezzar genealogy, and the timeline of Iberian Jewry embedded within it, was particularly valuable because it placed the Sephardim in the Iberian Peninsula in the sixth century BCE, long before the alternative (post-Crucifixion) date of 70 CE.

The innocence of Toledo's putative Israelite founders was the motive force behind forgeries like the letter which the city's Jews were said to have sent in the first-century CE to their co-religionists in Jerusalem, copies of which were circulated by Jews in the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>66</sup> The letter, written originally

62 Amparo Alba and Carlos Sainz de la Maza, 'La primera epístola de Alfonso de Valladolid', *Sefarad*, 53 (1993): pp. 157–70, esp. pp. 164–65.

63 Robert I. Burns, 'Christian-Islamic Confrontation in the West: The Thirteenth-Century Dream of Conversion', *American Historical Review*, 76 (1971): pp. 1386–1434.

64 Mark Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

65 For a parallel strategy among German Jews, see Joseph Shatzmiller, 'Politics and the Myth of Origins: The Case of the Medieval Jews', in *Les Juifs au regard de l'histoire. Mélanges en l'honneur de B. Blumenkranz*, (ed.) Gilbert Dahan (Paris: Picard, 1985), pp. 49–61, esp. p. 58.

66 Biblioteca Nacional de España [BNE], ms. 838, fol. 3r–v: 'Carta que fiz traducir de caldeo en latin e romance el noble rey don Alfonso que la vila de Toledo conquiro e yaze en el armario del aiuntamiento de Toledo'. The text of the letter was first printed by the royal

in Aramaic, was supposed to have been discovered in Toledo in 1085, when Alfonso VI of Castile (r. 1072–1109) retook the city from its Muslim defenders. Signed by 'Levi the archpriest, and Samuel, and Joseph, gentlemen of the Jewish community of Toledo' and addressed 'to the very high priest Eleazar, and to Samuel, Canut, and Annas, and Caiphas, gentlemen of the Jewish community of the Holy Land', the letter urged the Jews of Jerusalem to send their Iberian counterparts information about the splendid man rumored to be the Messiah and warned them that 'we will never be made to consent to his execution, neither by counsel nor by our will' – a convenient fiction communicating the not-so-subtle idea that Iberian Jews remained non-Christian purely by historical accident beyond their control.<sup>67</sup> In the hands of the converso bishop Alonso de Cartagena (1385–1486), this historical accident was not even accidental, but rather the working out of a providential plan to provide the Gothic *natio* of Spain's Old Christian inhabitants with an unspoiled Israelite 'partner' with whom to conceive a new Chosen People.<sup>68</sup>

Less messianic, though more credible, were the means by which the Jewish statesman and exegete Isaac Abarbanel (1437–1508) chose to insinuate Nebuchadnezzar's Jews into an otherwise Christian vision of Iberian history. Abarbanel expertly grafted the legend's Sephardic content onto an existing tradition of historical writing running back as far as the Toledan chronicler Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada (ca. 1170–1247), according to which the Peninsula had once been ruled by a mythical 'Pirrus' (not to be confused with the Greek Pyrrhus of Epirus), nephew of Hercules and son-in-law of the eponymous Hispan.<sup>69</sup> Rather than crediting Nebuchadnezzar with visiting Spain – a visit

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historian Prudencio de Sandoval, OSB (1533–1620); see Prudencio de Sandoval, *Historia de los Reyes de Castilla y de León* (Madrid: Benito Cano, 1792), pp. 232–34. There is a nineteenth-century edition, from which I quote, in José Amador de los Ríos, *Historia social, política y religiosa de los judíos de España y Portugal* (Madrid: Turner, 1984), vol. 1, pp. 504–05.

67 For more on the letter and its context, see Rica Amran, 'Mito y realidad de los conversos castellanos en el siglo xv. El traslado de una carta-privilegio que el rey Juan II dio a un hijodalgo', in Elena Romero (ed.) *Judaísmo hispano. Estudios en memoria de José Luis Lacave Riaño* (Madrid: CSIC, 2006), vol. 2, pp. 593–605; Nirenberg, 'Mass Conversion', p. 28. This kind of forgery was not unknown elsewhere in Europe: for the Jews of Regensburg, see Shatzmiller, 'Politics and the Myth', p. 58.

68 Bruce Rosenstock, 'Alonso de Cartagena: Nation, Miscegenation and the Jew in Late-Medieval Castile', *Exemplaria*, 12 (2000): pp. 185–204.

69 Robert B. Tate, *Ensayos sobre la historiografía peninsular del siglo xv* (Madrid: Gredos, 1970), pp. 20, 68. On Abarbanel, see Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher*, 5th ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).



whose absence from all of the major biographical sources on Nebuchadnezzar (Berossus the Chaldean, Diocles, Philostratus, Tertullian, Eusebius, Marcus Antonius Sabellicus, Alexander Polyhistor, Clement of Alexandria, and Suidas) would later bother eagle-eyed critics like Bernardo de Aldrete (1565–1645)<sup>70</sup> – Abarbanel preemptively suggested that Pirrus might have aided Nebuchadnezzar in his siege of Jerusalem, prompting the Babylonian king to reward his Iberian lieutenant with a portion of the Jewish captives. Thus, Abarbanel asserted in his commentary on the Minor Prophets,

It was Pirrus who brought to Spain the inhabitants of Jerusalem who belonged to the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Simon, the Levites, and the Priests, a great multitude who came with him of their own volition. He lead them across the seas to the kingdom of Spain in ships, establishing them in two provinces. One is the province known today as Andalusia, in a city which in those days was a great Jewish metropolis which they called Lucena, a name which has endured to the present ... The second province was the land of Toletula (Toledo). Perhaps it was the Jews who named the city Toletula, because they had wandered (*tiltul*, wandering) from Jerusalem to here, since the Christians had previously called it Pirrizuela, and not Toletula like its Jewish residents. In the same manner I think that they called the city next to Toletula Maqueda, after the city of Makkeda that existed in the Land of Israel. And they called another city, also near Toletula, Escalona, after Ascalon in the Land of Israel. It is possible that those cities were similar to the others in the Land of Israel, and therefore they gave the other cities near Toletula Israeli names, too.<sup>71</sup>

Though he wrote exclusively in Hebrew, it is easy to see why Abarbanel would come to be admired by hebraists of all confessions, Christian as well as Jewish, for his ability to synthesize rabbinical and Christian traditions and methods.<sup>72</sup> In the case of the Nebuchadnezzar legend, Abarbanel carefully interleaved the Sephardic interpretation of Obadiah with a fundamentally Christian vision of Iberian antiquity. Abarbanel's ancient Israelites came as subdued immigrants rather than conquerors, their presence within the Peninsula enriching, and not threatening, Christian narratives about the origin of Spain.

Even more syncretic was the version of Pirrus' star turn which Abarbanel's contemporary Shlomo ibn Verga (ca. 1460–1554) included in his apologetical

70 Bernardo de Aldrete, *Del origen y principio de la lengua castellana, ò Romance que oy se vsa en España* (Rome: Carlo Vulliet, 1606), pp. 308–10.

71 Quoted in Haim Beinart, *Los judíos en España* (Madrid: Mapfre, 1993), p. 17.

72 Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent and Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

treatise entitled *Shevet Yehudah* (The Staff of Judah).<sup>73</sup> (The title will seem familiar as a direct reference to Genesis 49:10, whose prognostication about the passing of the scepter from Judah had so interested Ibn Ḥazm). Ibn Verga's recitation of the legend, also written and published in Hebrew, differs little from Abarbanel's; after explaining how Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem with the aid of King Hispanus of Sepharad and his son-in-law Pirrus, the text notes that Pirrus 'took some ships and carried off all of his captives to Sepharad – that is, to Andalusia – and also to Toledo, from which city they dispersed to other places, because they were so numerous that the country could not contain them all. Some of those deported Jews, who were of royal ancestry, went to Seville, and from there, others went to Granada'.<sup>74</sup> Where Ibn Verga did depart from Abarbanel was in a telling act of ventriloquism: in *The Staff of Judah*, Nebuchadnezzar's *res gestae* are narrated by an imaginary 'Thomas, who likely represents a Christian scholar, in conversation with 'Alfonso', an archetypal Iberian king. In what surely came as no surprise to Ibn Verga's Sephardic readers, the Christian Alfonso is unrelentingly hostile to the Jews of his kingdom. Thomas, however, has a much greater appreciation for Jewish culture, for – though he is, like Alfonso, a pious Christian – he has studied Hebrew learning, and has been persuaded not only of the falsity of Christian blood libels, but also of the Jews' wisdom, decency, and the antiquity of their royal bloodline.<sup>75</sup>

In many respects, these late treatments of the Nebuchadnezzar legend, with their seamless blend of Sephardic myth and Christian historiography, look like genuine attempts on the part of their Jewish authors to offer up ancient Sepharad as a possible site of Jewish-Christian rapprochement. Yet there is at least one insurmountable obstacle to seeing either Abarbanel's biblical commentaries or Ibn Verga's *Staff of Judah* as an intentional attempt to translate Jewish culture into a Christian idiom. It is, of course, the expulsion of 1492. By the time Abarbanel and Ibn Verga tried to find a place for Sephardic antiquity in Spain's distant past, both men were living in exile, writing for a community driven from its homeland. In Abarbanel's and Ibn Verga's retelling of the

73 Enrique Cantera Montenegro, 'Negación de la "imagen del judío" en la intelectualidad hispano-hebrea medieval. El ejemplo del *Shevet Yehudah*', *Aragón en la Edad Media: estudios de economía y sociedad*, 14–15 (1999): pp. 263–74; Yerushalmi, *Zakhor*, pp. 57–68.

74 Shlomo ibn Verga, *La vara de Yehudah* (*Sefer Šebet Yehudah*), (ed. and trans.) María José Cano (Barcelona: Riopiedras, 1991), pp. 48–49.

75 Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, *The Censor, the Editor and the Text: The Catholic Church and the Shaping of the Jewish Canon in the Sixteenth Century*, (trans.) Jackie Feldman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 175–79. See also Abraham A. Neuman, 'The *Shevet Yehudah* and Sixteenth-Century Historiography', in *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* (New York: American Academy for Jewish Research, 1945), pp. 173–253.

legend, Nebuchadnezzar's captives march through Iberian history not to sate the curiosity of Christian hebraists like the ersatz 'Thomas', but rather to soothe the anxieties and rally the spirits of their fellow Sephardic expatriates. The legend took on a newly consolatory air for the post-1492 Sephardic diaspora, reassuring its members of the nobility of their genealogy and the cultural attainments of their ancestors in the Iberian homeland which many had come to regard as a second Jerusalem.

In this alternately consolatory and defiant guise, the Nebuchadnezzar legend would enjoy a long afterlife among the Jewish intelligentsia of places like Venice and Amsterdam, where the Sephardic diaspora had been particularly successful in reconstituting itself as a separate community distinct from the typically less prosperous and less educated Ashkenazim of Central Europe.<sup>76</sup> Determined to perpetuate a sense of genealogical pride and communal cohesion among their fellow exiles, as well as to police the boundaries of their communities, the Sephardic diaspora's elite members took the legend – which had always faced outward, in some sense, having been honed over centuries of dialogue with Muslim and Christian polemicists – and turned it inward, making it a tool of collective self-discipline as well as self-fashioning.<sup>77</sup> Successive generations of literati like Immanuel Aboab (ca. 1555–1628), author of a 1629 treatise on *Nomología o discursos legales* (Nomology, or Discourses on the Law), and Isaac Cardoso (1603/4–83), author of a 1679 paean to *Las excelencias de los Hebreos* (The Excellences of the Hebrews), admonished their Sephardic readers that 'in the time in which Nebuchadnesar, King of Babylonia, defeated the Jews', their ancestors 'went ... to settle in the Region of Spain' as 'colonists' and 'built the city of Toledo, whose name, like the names of many places within its jurisdiction and surroundings, demonstrate that it was built and inhabited by Hebrews'.<sup>78</sup>

This final, post-expulsion incarnation of the Nebuchadnezzar legend is probably responsible for the tendency among modern historians to assume that the Nebuchadnezzar legend was never much more than a shallow genealogical

76 Jonathan S. Ray, *After Expulsion: 1492 and the Making of Sephardic Jewry* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

77 Yosef Kaplan, 'Political Concepts in the World of the Portuguese Jews of Amsterdam during the Seventeenth Century: The Problem of Exclusion and the Boundaries of Self-Identity', in *Menasseh Ben Israel and his World* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 45–62; Henry Méchoulan, *Hispanidad y judaísmo en tiempos de Espinoza. Estudio y edición anotada de La certeza del camino de Abraham Pereyra, Amsterdam, 1666* (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1987), p. 44.

78 Immanuel Aboab, *Nomología o discursos legales* (Amsterdam: n.p., 1629), p. 288. Cf. Isaac Cardoso, *Las excelencias de los Hebreos* (Amsterdam: David de Castro Tartas, 1679), p. 17.

boast – the Jewish ‘entry’, as it were, in the well-known Iberian sweepstakes of lineage and nobility that culminated so tragically (and, insofar as the Jews were eager participants, ironically) in the *limpieza de sangre* statutes later used to harry and disadvantage the Sephardim’s New Christian descendants.<sup>79</sup> (It was on this basis that Martínez Marina, writing in 1799, found his fellow Christians’ embrace of these legends so illogical.) Yet the seventeenth-century Sephardim are, at least in this regard, actually poor guides to their own intellectual heritage. Reducing the Nebuchadnezzar legend to a genealogical boast ignores the fact that, as we have seen, this alternative history of Sephardic settlement born in eleventh-century Al-Andalus was conceived originally to defend the integrity of a Hebrew text, not the status of a community of Hebrews. In this sense, the first phase of Jewish-Christian engagement with the Nebuchadnezzar legend, lasting from the decline of Al-Andalus down to 1492, tended to distort or obscure the legend’s origins in Muslim-Jewish debates about the Bible. Embroiled in a new kind of polemic with a new opponent – one less interested in attacking the Jewish Bible than in excising Jews from the body politic – the legend’s Sephardic expositors transformed it into a source of Sephardic ‘identity’, a prophecy of Jewish resistance and genealogical pride that was less appealing to Christian readers even as it became more commensurable or comprehensible to them. It would be the job of a second wave of Sephardic translators, then, working in the changed circumstances of a Spanish Catholicism threatened not by Jews but by Protestants, to make Nebuchadnezzar’s Jews a Christian preoccupation.

### Conversos and Christian Hebraist

Among the thousands of Spanish Jews cast into exile along with Abarbanel and Ibn Verga was the adolescent son of the Castilian rabbi Juan de Zamora. That son, Alfonso de Zamora (ca. 1476–ca. 1545), remained a Jew for another fourteen years, until in 1506, at the age of thirty, he converted to Christianity and returned to the land of his birth to assume the life of a scholar at the University of Salamanca. He quickly stood out. In a university known for the quality of its theologians, the young Converso’s facility in Hebrew and Aramaic was stunningly good – so good, in fact, that he was encouraged to stand for a

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79 Nirenberg, ‘Mass Conversion’, esp. the works cited on pp. 4–5; Danielle Rozenberg, *La España contemporánea y la cuestión judía. Retejiendo los hilos de la memoria y de la historia* (Madrid: Marcial Pons, 2010), pp. 36–37.

recently vacated chair in Hebrew a mere two years after he arrived at the university, in 1508.<sup>80</sup>

Salamanca's proposal to administer a meritocratic competition to fill a Hebrew professorship – not to mention the hope shared by many at the university that it would be won by a recent convert – would seem to give the lie to the uniformly gloomy picture of Spanish intolerance and anti-Judaism painted by an anglophone historiographical tradition which has been more interested in the Inquisition's war on 'judaizers' than in the nuances of Spanish humanism and hebraism.<sup>81</sup> It would be just as simplistic, however, to extrapolate from the fact that the theology faculty expected to find more than one candidate competent to teach Hebrew, and multiple students willing to learn it, that Salamanca was a 'progressive' university. The reality is more complex, and speaks to nothing so much as the flux and uncertainty which characterized the canons and conventions of biblical scholarship in the Renaissance. In and of itself, the study of Hebrew, one of the sacred languages of Scripture, was far from novel or progressive in early sixteenth-century Europe; it was, rather, a pursuit deeply ingrained within the Christian tradition, one sanctioned by St Jerome (ca. 347–420) – who believed that the Old Testament encoded a hidden *Hebraica veritas* (Hebrew truth), which revealed itself only to those willing to learn the language and exegetical traditions of the Jews – and sustained across the Middle Ages by distinguished (and unimpeachably orthodox) scholars like Hugh of St Victor (ca. 1078–1141) and Nicholas of Lyra (ca. 1270–1349).<sup>82</sup> Yet it is also true that the Christian hebraist project was being expanded and transformed in dramatic ways in precisely the years that Alfonso de Zamora was finding his way as a new convert in a society (and a university) dominated by

80 For Alfonso de Zamora's biography, see Federico Pérez Castro, *El manuscrito apologético de Alfonso de Zamora* (Madrid, Barcelona: CSIC, Instituto Arias Montano, 1950), pp. i–lx; Adolf Neubauer, 'Alfonso de Zamora', *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 7 (1895): pp. 398–417.

81 Homza, *Religious Authority*.

82 On Jerome and the *hebraica veritas*, see Megan Hale Williams, *The Monk and the Book: Jerome and the Making of Christian Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), pp. 81–95, 123–31; Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship and the Hebrew Bible: A Study of the Quaestiones hebraicae in Genesim* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), esp. pp. 80–81. On medieval Christian hebraism, see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); Aryeh Grabois, 'The Hebraica Veritas and Jewish-Christian Intellectual Relations in the Twelfth Century', *Speculum*, 50 (1975): pp. 613–34; Deborah L. Goodwin, *Take Hold of the Robe of a Jew: Herbert of Bosham's Christian Hebraism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Deeana C. Klepper, *The Insight of Unbelievers: Nicholas of Lyra and Christian Reading of Jewish Text in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

Old Christians. The first decades of the sixteenth century could be said to mark the expansion and elevation of Christian hebraism, previously a sidelight to the mainstream of theology and biblical exegesis, to the status of a semi-autonomous academic discipline, replete with the methodological preoccupations, innovations, and controversies which that status entails.<sup>83</sup>

Much of the impetus for this transformation in the stakes and ambitions of hebraic scholarship came from the adjacent world of classical scholarship, in which the humanists' faith in the power of philological analysis and historical context to illumine the meaning of even the most recalcitrant of ancient texts had been yielding fruit for the better part of a century.<sup>84</sup> Though the Church maintained that the Bible, as a record of divine revelation, was a special kind of text whose proper interpretation required the application of technical knowledge only available to doctors of Theology, by the early sixteenth century humanists like Giannozzo Manetti (1396–1459), Lorenzo Valla (1407–57), Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522), Pietro Galatino (1460–1540), Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536), and the Andalusian grammarian Antonio de Nebrija (1441–1522) had already offered persuasive demonstrations of the insights that could be gleaned from treating the Bible like any other ancient text, subjecting it to the same species of philological, grammatical, and historical criticism which they had honed on pagan sources.<sup>85</sup> For the hebraists

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83 For overviews of early modern Christian hebraism, see Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983); Allison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Stephen Burnett, *Christian Hebraism in the Reformation Era (1500–1660): Authors, Books and the Transmission of Learning* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); for its texture, see Anthony Grafton and Joanna Weinberg, *I Have Always Loved the Holy Tongue': Isaac Casaubon, the Jews and a Forgotten Chapter in Renaissance Scholarship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

84 On the humanist method, see Anthony T. Grafton, 'On the Scholarship of Politian and Its Context', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 40 (1977): pp. 150–88; James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 33–64. It should be said that Christian interest in Hebrew texts was also driven in part by a contemporaneous fascination with the mysteries of kabbalah, which I do not treat here; see Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

85 On Manetti's hebraism, see Giannozzo Manetti, *A Translator's Defense* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Christoph Dröge, *Giannozzo Manetti als Denker und Hebraist* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1987). On Valla's biblical criticism, see Jerry H. Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ: New Testament Scholarship in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. 32–69. On Reuchlin, see David H. Price, *Johannes*

among this group, this meant more than cultivating a more capacious and nuanced mastery of Hebrew language and grammar. It also meant expanding their knowledge of Jewish exegesis, by adding post-biblical Jewish sources like the Talmud, the *targumim*, and the commentaries of Rashi, David Qimḥi (1160–1235), Abraham ibn Ezra, and others to their reading lists;<sup>86</sup> cultivating a new familiarity with Jewish practice, by gathering ethnographical information about contemporary Judaism;<sup>87</sup> and, finally, situating the biblical text within its ancient Near Eastern context, by assembling fresh geographical, archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic, and even botanical and zoological data about the Levant.<sup>88</sup>

While it may have been possible, in theory, for Christian scholars to develop expertise in these areas by relying solely on the tools and testimony produced by other Christian authors, in reality most of what they wanted to know about the Hebrew language, the intricacies of Hebrew bibliography, and the evolution of Jewish culture and ritual would have remained impenetrable to them without the aid of teachers and amanuenses endowed with the kind of organic or intuitive knowledge of Judaism which comes from being raised within the faith.<sup>89</sup> This made Jewish converts to Christianity – of which Spain produced a seemingly endless supply between 1391 and the early sixteenth century – valuable partners in Christian humanists' quest for the *Hebraica veritas*, opening an

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*Reuchlin and the Campaign to Destroy Jewish Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Erika Rummel, *The Case against Johann Reuchlin* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). On Galatino, see Alba Paladini, *Il De arcanis di Pietro Galatino. Traditio giudaica e nuove istanze filologiche* (Lecce: Congedo, 2004). On Erasmus, see Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 112–93; Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy and Its Humanist Reception* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005). On Nebrija, see Carlos del Valle Rodríguez, 'Antonio de Nebrija's Biblical Scholarship', in *Biblical Humanism and Scholasticism in the Age of Erasmus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 57–72.

86 A. Houtman et al. (eds.), *A Jewish Targum in a Christian World* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Frank Manuel, *The Broken Staff: Judaism through Christian Eyes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

87 Yaacov Deutsch, *Judaism in Christian Eyes: Ethnographic Descriptions of Jews and Judaism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

88 Zur Shalev, *Sacred Words and Worlds: Geography, Religion and Scholarship, 1550–1700* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Andrew D. Berns, *The Bible and Natural Philosophy in Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

89 For the immense difficulty which Christian scholars faced in establishing 'bibliographic control' over the Jewish canon, see Anthony Grafton, 'The Jewish Book in Christian Europe: Material Texts and Religious Encounters', in *Faithful Narratives: Historians, Religion and the Challenge of Objectivity*, (ed.) A. Sterk and N. Caputo (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), pp. 96–114, esp. p. 106.

alternative pathway to those who wished to use their heritage for something other than purely polemical purposes. A number of Iberian Conversos of Alfonso de Zamora's generation left their mark as teachers and tutors to the major figures of sixteenth-century Christian hebraism, including Matthaeus Adrianus (b. ca. 1475).<sup>90</sup> After an itinerant career that saw him train almost all of the most important Northern European hebraists of his generation – including Johannes Campensis, Wolfgang Capito, Sebastian Münster, Johannes Oecolampadius, Conrad Pellican, and Johannes Reuchlin – Adrianus was lured to Louvain in 1517 by Erasmus and appointed the first professor of Hebrew at the vanguard Collegium Trilingue, established to produce exegetes in the humanist mold.<sup>91</sup>

Unfortunately for Alfonso de Zamora, Salamanca was no Louvain, and his colleagues were more skittish than was Erasmus about his Converso lineage. In spite of Zamora's superior qualifications, the professorship advertised in 1508 was given to an Old Christian theologian who knew so little Hebrew that the faculty, adding insult to injury, mandated that Zamora or some other '*tornadizo* (convert) who knows Hebrew' be enlisted to teach it 'to the Hebrew professor' at one-fifth the professor's salary. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Zamora was denied the chair again in 1511 – on this occasion by a rector who thought that Hebrew was best taught by a specialist in Greek – he resolved to depart, and accepted the offer of a position at the new University of Alcalá.<sup>92</sup>

Salamanca's loss was scholarship's gain. Alcalá, founded only a few years prior by the Archbishop of Toledo Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (1436–1517), was the kind of university which valued the full range of hebraic expertise possessed by Conversos like Zamora.<sup>93</sup> Supported by Cisneros' munificence and

90 Henry de Vocht, *History of the Foundation and the Rise of the Collegium Trilingue Lovaniense, 1517–1550* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1951–55), vol. 1, pp. 241–56, pp. 369–75, pp. 534–42; Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas Brian Deutscher (eds.), *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), vol. 1, pp. 9–10 (s.v. Matthaeus Adrianus).

91 Stephen G. Burnett, 'Reassessing the "Basel-Wittenberg Conflict". Dimensions of the Reformation-Era Discussion of Hebrew Scholarship', in Coudert and Shoulson (eds.), *Hebraica Veritas?*, pp. 181–201, esp. pp. 183–84; Vocht, *History of the Foundation*.

92 Zamora's tribulations in Salamanca are described in Pérez Castro, *El manuscrito apologético*, pp. xvi–xix.

93 On Cisneros and the University of Alcalá, see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasmus y España* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966), pp. 1–71; José García Oro, *El Cardenal Cisneros, vida y empresas* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1992); Erika Rummel, *Jiménez de Cisneros: On the Threshold of Spain's Golden Age* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), ch 4.



surrounded by eminent philologists like Nebrija, Zamora quickly established himself as one of the pre-eminent hebraists of the early sixteenth century. Much of the first decade he spent at Alcalá was devoted to the central publishing project around which Cisneros had organized the university, the *Biblia Políglota Complutense* (Complutensian Polyglot Bible). Modeled on the third-century *Hexapla* assembled by Origen of Alexandria (ca. 184–ca. 253) and brought up to date by the humanist vogue for philological criticism *ad fontes*, Cisneros' Polyglot was among the first, and arguably the most influential, of the Renaissance bibles to collate in parallel columns the various texts of the Catholic Bible – the Hebrew Old Testament, the Aramaic *targumim*, the Greek Septuagint, and the Latin Vulgate associated with St Jerome – and supplement them with glossaries and grammars.<sup>94</sup> Zamora, with the assistance of his fellow conversos Pedro Ciruelo (1470–1548), Pablo Coronel (ca. 1480–1534), and Alfonso de Alcalá (fl. 1520s), edited the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, edited and translated the corresponding *targumim* (some of which Cisneros subsequently elected to omit), and produced the Hebrew and Aramaic glossaries and dictionaries.<sup>95</sup>

The Complutensian Polyglot understandably tends to overshadow the teaching in which Zamora and his colleagues engaged at Alcalá, not least of all because in its early years Cisneros' university seems to have existed primarily for the purpose of providing the Polyglot's editors (and its printer, Arnau Guillén de Brocar [ca. 1460–1523]) with a source of income.<sup>96</sup> Yet the Bible which emerged from Guillén de Brocar's printshop was intimately related to its editors' classroom experience. As Jesús de Prado Plumed has observed, however much it may appear to be a stark monument of advanced philological

94 The literature on the Complutensian Polyglot is vast. For an overview, see José Luis Gonzalo Sánchez-Molero (ed.), *V Centenario de la Biblia Políglota Complutense. La universidad del Renacimiento. El Renacimiento de la Universidad* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2014); Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*, pp. 1–71; Bentley, *Humanists and Holy Writ*, pp. 70–111; Basil Hall, 'The Trilingual College of San Ildefonso and the Making of the Complutensian Polyglot Bible', *Studies in Church History*, 5 (1969): pp. 114–47. On Origen and the Hexapla, see Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

95 On the particular fate of Zamora's Targum edition, see Luis Díez Merino 'La Biblia Aramea de Alfonso de Zamora', *Cuadernos Bíblicos*, 7 (1981): pp. 63–98.

96 On the organization of teaching at Alcalá, see Antonio Alvar Ezquerro, 'Le modele universitaire de Alcalá de Henares dans la première moitié du XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle', in *Les origines du Collège de France (1500–1560)* (Paris: Klincksieck, Collège de France, 1998), pp. 231–46. On Guillén de Brocar and the history of printing at Alcalá, see Julián Martín Abad, *La imprenta en Alcalá de Henares (1502–1600)* (Madrid: Arco Libros, 1991).

research, the Polyglot was also fundamentally a teaching tool, designed by Cisneros and its editors to enable them to train future generations of exegetes in the cumulative tradition of biblical hermeneutics, the full array of oriental and ancient languages, and even a kind of primitive cultural literacy with regard to the geographies, cultures, and societies of the ancient Near East.<sup>97</sup> And train they did: for more than three decades, from his arrival in Alcalá to his final appearance in the Complutense's archives ca. 1545, Alfonso de Zamora anchored a rotation of hebraists, including the Augustinian Dionisio Vázquez de Toledo (1479–1539) and the Cistercian Cipriano de la Huerga (ca. 1514–60), which taught oriental languages to a parade of talented students. Several of their pupils – most notably Arias Montano and Luis de León – went on to win a place among the preeminent hebraists of the later sixteenth century.<sup>98</sup>

It would be a mistake to assume from the relative success which Zamora and his fellow converso professors enjoyed at Alcalá that they and their Hebrew curriculum achieved universal acceptance among the predominantly Old Christian students and administrators who hovered about the university in its early decades. In fact, if we are to believe the evidence preserved in one of Zamora's working notebooks from the 1530s, held in the Leiden University Library (ms Or. 645) and studied extensively by Carlos Alonso Fontela, Alcalá's converso faculty were never allowed to forget the precariousness of their status as hebraizing New Christians in an Old Christian world. Though formally a miscellany of notes, drafts, and even stray jokes, Zamora's notebook can also be read as a chronicle of the exhausting campaign which he and his peers waged to defend not only the sincerity of their own conversions, but also the legitimacy of their efforts to translate – or perhaps we should say to 'convert'

97 Jesús de Prado Plumed, 'La enseñanza del hebreo en Alcalá. La búsqueda complutense de Dios / Teaching Hebrew in Alcalá: The Complutense Search for God', in Sánchez-Molero (ed.), *V Centenario de la Biblia Políglota Complutense*, pp. 452–86, esp. p. 452.

98 On Vázquez de Toledo, see Quirino Fernández, 'Fray Dionisio Vázquez de Toledo, orador sagrado del Siglo de Oro', *Archivo Agustiniiano*, 60 (1976): pp. 105–98. On Cipriano de la Huerga, see Cipriano de la Huerga, *Obras completas* (León: Universidad de León, 1990); Sergio Fernández López, 'Arias Montano y Cipriano de la Huerga, dos humanistas en deuda con Alfonso de Zamora. A propósito de sus versiones latinas de la Biblia y el Targum', *Humanística Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, 60 (2011): pp. 137–59; Natalio Fernández Marcos and Emilia Fernández Tejero, *Biblia y humanismo. Textos, talentos y controversias del siglo XVI español* (Madrid: FUE, 1997), pp. 47–84; Gaspar Morocho Gayo, 'Humanismo y filología poligráfica en Cipriano de la Huerga. Su encuentro con fray Luis de León', *Ciudad de Dios*, 204 (1991): pp. 863–914.

– certain features of the exegetical practices of their Sephardic ancestors into a new kind of humanist hermeneutics suitable for Christian scholars.<sup>99</sup>

The petty slights and veiled accusations to which Alcalá's Conversos were subjected came from all quarters. In Zamora's case, some came directly from his pupils. It is hard to interpret the arrogance with which one of his mediocre students treated him after winning – over Zamora's opposition – a post at Salamanca, for example, as anything other than a gratuitous reminder that Zamora's professional opinion would always count for less than his students' unearned genealogical advantages.<sup>100</sup> Fortunately, many of these juvenile eruptions could be parried with a bit of winking humor: when roving bands of noble students began interrupting his lectures with some frequency, Zamora responded by preparing brief, scolding monologues in which he compared himself to a biblical prophet chastening the Israelites.<sup>101</sup> Far more serious, however, were the kinds of opposition mounted by Cisneros' successors in the Archbishopric of Toledo, who made numerous attempts to purge Alcalá's faculty of undesirables, and the Inquisition, whose constant vigilance of Alcalá's Conversos yielded several high-profile prosecutions, including that of Juan de Vergara (1492–1557).<sup>102</sup> Once again, Zamora's notebook offers poignant testimony of the impact of these various forms of harassment on the New Christian faculty. Scattered among various notes explaining how ordinary defendants could best confound the inquisitors – residue, undoubtedly, of the time which Zamora spent counseling rank and file Conversos on their legal troubles – one finds a list of strategies especially tailored to Zamora himself: a

99 Carlos Alonso Fontela, 'Anécdotas castellanas en escritura hebreaica. Apuntes paremiológicos conservados en las anotaciones hebreas de Alfonso de Zamora (ms. Leiden Or. 645)', *Sefarad*, 71 (2011): pp. 349–68. See also Alonso Fontela's transcriptions of various folios of the notebook at <<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/hebreava/ varia.htm>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

100 Leiden University Library [hereinafter LUL], ms. Or. 645, 110v; quoted in Moritz Steinschneider, *Catalogus Codicum Hebraeorum: Bibliothecae Academiae Lugduno-Batavae* (Leiden: Brill, 1858), p. 280; Carlos Alonso Fontela, 'Las anotaciones de Alfonso de Zamora en el manuscrito *Leiden University Library*, ms. Or. 645, f. 110v', 4–5. <<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/hebreava/02.Leiden.Or645.fol.110v.pdf>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

101 [LUL] ms. Or. 645, fol. 9r; quoted in Carlos Alonso Fontela, 'Las notas hebreas de Alfonso de Zamora conservadas en el ms. Leiden Or 645, D, f. 009r (olim 18r)', pp. 5–6. <<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/hebreava/Texto.11.pdf>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

102 The prolonged battle between the archbishopric and the university is narrated with extensive detail in A. Gómez de Castro, *De rebus gestis a Francisco Ximénio Cisnerio archiepiscopo toletano libri octo* (Alcalá de Henares: Andrés de Angulo, 1569), fol. 228rff. For Vergara's trial, see Homza, *Religious Authority*, ch 1.

kind of insurance policy in case the Inquisition ever were to accuse him of using his biblical studies as a cover for judaizing.<sup>103</sup>

As Zamora's keen sense of how to navigate the Inquisition suggests, Alcalá's Converso hebraists tended to be very astute about the resistance which they and their curriculum periodically encountered, recognizing that it was quite distinct from the generic anti-Judaic and anti-Converso animus which permeated Spanish society. Rooted not in social jealousy or genealogical chauvinism, scholarly hand-wringing about Christian hebraism was instead the expression of a more complicated anxiety about the relationship between language and religious praxis.<sup>104</sup> As Anthony Grafton has observed, even enthusiastic partisans of Christian hebraism read Jewish books through 'screens, woven of assumptions and prejudices' that made them into rather schizophrenic allies. On the one hand, they desperately wanted to know what was in Jewish commentaries, to harvest and absorb their insights into the often opaque and confusing text of their shared Old Testament. At the same time, however, they deeply mistrusted Jews, and feared the judaizing effect of engaging with Hebrew knowledge.<sup>105</sup> In those circumstances, what they desired more than anything else was proof that Hebrew learning could be separated cleanly from its Jewish context – that it could be 'colonized', made wholly the property of Christians, and passed along between generations without the intervention of ambiguously Jewish teachers like Matthaëus Adrianus or the Converso members of Cisneros' editorial team.<sup>106</sup> The goal of attaining independence from Jewish teachers is, in fact, already articulated clearly in Cisneros' own prologue to the Complutensian Polyglot: 'when we shrink from the disgust and outpou-

103 [LUL] ms. Or. 645, fol. 12r; quoted in Carlos Alonso Fontela, 'Las dos notas hebreas de Alfonso de Zamora en el ms. Leiden Or. 645, pars D, f. 012r', pp. 3–4. <<http://pendientedemigracion.ucm.es/info/hebra/Texto.7.bis%20.doc>> [accessed 10 March 2014].

104 For another permutation of this anxiety, with regard to the Moriscos' continued use of Arabic and what it might suggest about the sincerity of their Christianity, see Francisco Núñez Muley, *A Memorandum for the President of the Royal Audiencia and Chancery Court of the City and Kingdom of Granada*, (trans.) Vincent Barletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 91–93; Kathryn Woolard, 'Bernardo de Aldrete and the Morisco Problem: A Study in Early Modern Spanish Language Ideology', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 44 (2002): pp. 446–80.

105 Grafton, 'The Jewish Book', p. 98.

106 For the Christian 'colonization' of Jewish knowledge in antiquity, see Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

rings of the Hebrews', Cisneros promised, citing Jerome, 'assisted by these tools we do not have to consult their teachers.'<sup>107</sup>

Zamora and his fellow Converso hebraists flourished in large part by feeding this dream of an autonomous Christian path to the *Hebraica veritas*. Their efforts in this direction are visible in the prefaces to their scholarly publications, where they spoke of their intellectual project not as an attempt to reconcile or merge Christian and Sephardic perspectives, but rather to rescue Hebrew learning from Jewish scholars paradoxically incapable of appreciating it. As both Johanna Tanja and Lu Ann Homza have shown, Zamora and Pedro Ciruelo took similar approaches to appropriating and de-judaizing the Aramaic *targumim* and Septuagint Old Testament, respectively, in the manuscript editions and translations which they prepared for patrons in the 1520s and 1530s. While Zamora dressed his Aramaic text in Christian garb – reordering and renaming the books of the Hebrew Bible to match their conventional appearance in the Vulgate, dividing them into chapters, and vocalizing for them for less fluent readers according to the protocol established by the Complutensian Polyglot – Ciruelo tinkered with the historical synopsis of the Bible's Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek versions originally printed in the Polyglot, silently rewriting and clipping the biographical details of its ancient Jewish translators until they looked like model Christians.<sup>108</sup>

The lengths to which Zamora and his fellow Conversos went to develop a fundamentally 'colonial' vision of Christian hebraism is most visible, however, in the *methodus docendi* which they developed for their students at Alcalá. At its core was Zamora's uncompromising, and uncommon, insistence that his students attain native fluency in spoken Hebrew as well as its written grammar. This unusual expectation owed as much to Zamora's determination to separate the science of hebraism from its Jewish connotations as it did to any objective sense of how much Hebrew a Christian hebraist genuinely needed. In a 1526 letter ostensibly addressed 'to the Jews of Rome', appended to a revised and expanded version of the Hebrew grammar he had first prepared for the Complutensian Polyglot, Zamora was at pains to draw the attention of his Christian readers to a fortuitous vulnerability in the Jewish tradition – namely, that medieval and Renaissance Jews

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107 Quoted in Johanna M. Tanja, 'Brothers or Stepbrothers: Christianized Targum Manuscripts in the Sephardic Text Family', *Aramaic Studies*, 10 (2012): pp. 87–103, esp. p. 102 n.53. See also Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, 'Censorship, Editing and the Reshaping of Jewish Identity: The Catholic Church and Hebrew Literature in the Sixteenth Century', in *Hebraica Veritas?*, (ed.) Coudert and Shoulson, pp. 125–55, esp. p. 126.

108 Tanja, 'Brothers or Stepbrothers', pp. 91–96; Homza, *Religious Authority*, pp. 95–98.

did not know to provide the necessary organizing principles in accordance with the grammar of their language, and they confused their words utterly and they wrote many superfluous things without need to the point that no one could read them and understand them. ... And thus grammar was in their eyes a burdensome stone and became for them a heavy load. And therefore they learned their language according to habit.<sup>109</sup>

This disregard for the fundamentals of language, an unthinkable transgression for Christian humanists steeped in the classical *ars grammatica*, was further aggravated by the Jews' poor attention to spoken grammar and rhetoric; among the Jews of Rome, Zamora fumed, 'there is not found a single scholar who is able and knows how to speak your language [that is, Hebrew] grammatically as do today the believers in our faith, who speak the Roman language [that is, Latin] grammatically in accordance with the grammar texts that the early and later authors bestowed upon them'.<sup>110</sup>

This indictment of the Jewish grammatical tradition was, of course, disingenuous at best; Zamora was himself indebted to some of that tradition's illustrious practitioners, including David Qimḥi.<sup>111</sup> Rhetorically, however, it was a brilliant tactic for legitimating the project of Christian hebraism as implemented at Alcalá. Like the Nebuchadnezzar legend, which Zamora's ancestors had used to endow the Sephardic Bible with a direct link to ancient Israel, the Jews' alleged aversion to proper grammar and philology allowed Zamora to create a fictional disciplinary identity for Christian hebraism purged of Jewish influence. In Zamora's telling, properly-trained Christian scholars could understand and manipulate Hebrew texts in a manner genuinely independent of, and impervious to, the way that Jews understood them. This particular understanding of the Christian hebraist as a kind of grammatical and rhetorical virtuoso thus became the central conceit of the Complutensian training in oriental languages. Zamora's list of his own virtues, copied out in

109 Alfonso de Zamora, *Introductiones artis grammaticae hebraice* (Alcalá de Henares: Miguel de Eguía, 1526), fols. bb7v–bb8r. Quoted in Daniel Stein-Kokín, 'Polemical Language: Hebrew and Latin in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish-Christian Debate', *Jewish History*, 29 (2015): pp. 1–38, esp. p. 29 n. 99.

110 Zamora, *Introductiones*, fol. bb8r; quoted in Stein-Kokín, 'Polemical Language', p. 30.

111 Sergio Fernández López (ed.), *Los comentarios de David Qimḥi a Isaías, Jeremías y Malaquías*, (trans.) Alfonso de Zamora and Benito Arias Montano (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2011). BNE also preserves a manuscript copy of Qimḥi's dictionary (ms. 5454) in Zamora's hand.

the mid-1530s, suggests how he may have translated these expectations into a rubric for his students:

The ability to read without vowel points.

The ability to speak the [Hebrew] language as fluently as the vernacular.

The ability to teach from memory all twenty-four of the books [of the Hebrew Bible] and their deeds and histories.

The ability to speak *targum* [that is, Aramaic] as fluently as the vernacular.

The ability to write from memory, without consulting a book, any citation from the [Hebrew] language with its vowels.

The ability to write [the cursive forms of Hebrew script known as] *provenzal* and *mashk* and *provenzal* [sic].

The ability to [translate] on the fly a sentence from the [Castilian] vernacular into the language of the Hebrews or to *targum* [that is, Aramaic].

The ability to translate a letter from the [Castilian] vernacular into the language of the Hebrews or to *targum* [that is, Aramaic].<sup>112</sup>

This is a daunting list of expectations for any early modern Christian hebraist, to say the least; but it does provide some useful context for the somewhat unorthodox assertion, common among the dozens of scholars who passed through the lecture halls of sixteenth-century Alcalá, that the richness and sheer endurance of the Sephardic presence in the Iberian Peninsula was to be counted an asset rather than a liability to Spanish Christians. Whatever damage it may have done to the perceived purity of Spanish bloodlines or doctrine had been more than compensated by the extraordinary access which it had given Christian hebraists to the last living heirs of a tradition of grammatical and exegetical study unavailable anywhere else in Europe.<sup>113</sup>

Indeed, for many of these Alcalá graduates, the propitious placement of this reservoir of Jewish wisdom was anything but accidental. For them, the presence of figures like Alfonso de Zamora and Pedro Ciruelo at this key juncture in the history Christian hebraism was nothing less than an act of divine providence. As we have already seen, this was a view of Spanish history popular

<sup>112</sup> LUL, ms. Or. 645, 110v; quoted in Fontela, 'Las anotaciones de Alfonso de Zamora', pp. 4–5.

<sup>113</sup> Homza, *Religious Authority*, p. 90; Pedro de Alcocer, *Hystoria, o descripcion dela imperial cibdad de Toledo, con todas las cosas acontecidas en ella, a donde se tocan, y refieren muchas antigüedades* (Toledo: Juan Ferrer, 1554), fol. xiv; Arias Montano, *Commentaria in dodecim prophetas*, p. 464.

among earlier generations of Conversos like Alonso de Cartagena, and it found material support in the Nebuchadnezzar legend's postulation of a kind of sacred *translatio imperii* from the Near East to the Iberian Peninsula in the form of Pirrus' captive army.<sup>114</sup> It should be no surprise, then, that the Nebuchadnezzar legend was also highly visible in the curriculum followed by the early generations of Hebrew students at Alcalá. Among the heavily annotated codices which Zamora left behind in the university library is the first, two-volume printing of Isaac Abarbanel's commentary on the prophets, printed by Soncino at Pesaro in 1520.<sup>115</sup> In 1534 Zamora vocalized the first volume, containing Isaiah and Jeremiah, at the request of Juan Gil (aka Doctor Egidio, d. 1556), a member of the university's governing body, a fact which he recorded in a manuscript note on the final page.<sup>116</sup> He did not, however, vocalize the second volume, which contained the Minor Prophets, including, most importantly, Obadiah. The significance of this may be gleaned from the note about Doctor Egidio, as well as a second note – this one regarding the arrogant student who obtained a post at Salamanca – in Zamora's manuscript copy of David Qimḥi's dictionary.<sup>117</sup> In the first note, inscribed within the volumes of Abarbanel's commentary, Zamora declared his intention that Abarbanel be used as the language test for all candidates standing for the chair of Hebrew:

I hereby request of him [that is, Doctor Egidio], and of all those who should succeed him, a definitive and solemn oath in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer, such that, should it fall into his hand to judge like He does, ... they will not confer the professorship in this language to anyone who does not know how to read this commentary, to ensure that he is not able to trick the students who wish to study the said language.<sup>118</sup>

In the second note, Zamora made it clear that he followed through on his own recommendation, additionally specifying that the student should be required to work with the unvocalized text of the commentaries – including, again, the commentary on Obadiah at the center of the Nebuchadnezzar legend. 'Father Correa', the university librarian, Zamora recorded,

<sup>114</sup> See n. 69 above.

<sup>115</sup> These volumes are held in the Biblioteca Histórica de la Universidad Complutense de Madrid, signatures DER 686–687. On these volumes, see Carlos Alonso Fontela, 'Anotaciones de Alfonso de Zamora en un Comentario a los profetas posteriores de don Isaac Abarbanel', *Sefarad*, 47 (1987): pp. 227–43.

<sup>116</sup> Alonso Fontela, 'Anotaciones de Alfonso de Zamora', p. 228.

<sup>117</sup> See n. 111 above.

<sup>118</sup> Alonso Fontela, 'Anotaciones de Alfonso de Zamora', p. 228.



was told to give me a Commentary on the Prophets without vowel points so that I could lord it over [*vanagloriar sobre*] Sánchez and his partisans, who do not know how to read without vowel points; and he [the arrogant student, Sánchez] holds that unpointed commentaries are a massive labor [*trabajo de gran señor*], whereas for me it would be rather a spiritual rest and of little effort.<sup>119</sup>

It is difficult to evaluate to what extent Zamora and his fellow Converso hebraists were successful at executing the complicated gymnastics they had set for themselves – that is, whether it is really true that, as David Ruderman has argued, the generation of students whom they trained really did go off to careers in the universities, courts, and cathedral chapters of late Renaissance Europe and beyond as the first Christians who could claim to know ‘the Jewish tradition, especially the Hebrew Bible, better than the Jews themselves.’<sup>120</sup> What we do know with some certainty is that many of the Christian hebraists trained at Alcalá between the 1520s and 1550s departed the university familiar not only with the idiosyncratic Sephardic way of interpreting Obadiah and the Babylonian Captivity, but also with the valence of that legend – that it was an alternative guarantee, otherwise unknown within the Christian tradition, of the trustworthiness of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The proof of that claim lies in part in the idiosyncratic way in which those alumni reacted to the Protestant Reformation and the crisis which it spawned in the Christian hebraist community at mid-century.

### In the Shadow of Trent

It is a well-worn interpretation among scholars of Christian hebraism that the Protestant reformers, by insisting upon a doctrine of *sola scriptura* over and against the Catholic Church’s reverence for the intervening centuries of tradition and interpretation, imbued the Christian hebraist project of returning to the original, ostensibly unadulterated Hebrew text of the Old Testament with a legitimacy and importance which it could never enjoy in a Catholic world

119 BNE, ms. 5454; quoted in Francisco J. del Barco, *Catálogo de manuscritos hebreos de la Comunidad de Madrid* (Madrid: CSIC, Instituto de Filología, 2003–06), vol. 2, p. 171 [no. 104].

120 David B. Ruderman, *Early Modern Jewry: A New Cultural History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), p. 119.

which rallied around St Jerome's Latin Vulgate.<sup>121</sup> The reality, however, is somewhat muddier than that equation of Protestantism with hebraism and Catholicism with the Vulgate would suggest. For one thing, Catholic interpreters' reluctance to join their Protestant counterparts in abandoning the Vulgate was motivated at least in part by their dispassionate scholarly judgment – informed by their familiarity with post-biblical (that is, rabbinical) Hebrew literature, which Protestants deliberately ignored – that the 'original' Hebrew text of the Bible lionized by the Protestants was not nearly as venerable as they claimed.<sup>122</sup> While Protestant hebraists asserted that the so-called Masoretic text of the Hebrew Bible handed down by Jewish communities through the Middle Ages reflected the most ancient recension of Scripture, unperturbed by clumsy efforts to translate it into Greek or Latin, Catholics came to the conclusion that, in fact, the fourth-century CE Vulgate (and the ca. third-century BCE Septuagint on which it was based) were at least as venerable as the Hebrew of the Masoretes, if not more. At the center of this irreconcilable difference of opinion was the incipient early modern controversy over the Masoretic text's vowel points. Protestants generally insisted that the vowel points found in many medieval manuscripts were of ancient – even Mosaic – provenance, original to the Hebrew Bible; Catholics, in contrast, tended to side with the Jewish convert Elijah Levita (1469–1549) and his argument, expressed persuasively in his 1538 *Masoret ha-Masoret*, that the vowel points were in fact a late innovation of ca. 500 CE imposed upon a biblical text that had already evolved and changed (read: been corrupted) at the hands of its scribes and interpreters.<sup>123</sup> This did not mean, of course, that Catholic hebraists ceased to signal, Ibn Hāzīm-like, the presence of troubling inconsistencies and obvious errors within the Vulgate. But it did mean that most Catholic hebraists continued to believe that the Vulgate's version of the Old Testament was no less valuable than the Hebrew and Greek witnesses.

As the Reformation unfolded in the 1520s, 30s, and early 40s, the hebraists' and their analyses of the Vulgate's divergence from the ostensible *Hebraica veritas* of the Masoretic text migrated from the realm of academic debate into that of ideological controversy, as Protestants attempted to make Catholic scholars' greater esteem for the Vulgate into yet another object lesson in the

121 See, for example, Adam Sutcliffe, 'Hebrew Texts and Protestant Readers: Christian Hebraism and Denominational Self-Definition', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 7 (2000): pp. 319–37, esp. pp. 324–25.

122 Sutcliffe, 'Hebrew Texts', pp. 319, 327.

123 Ginsburg, *The Massoreth ha-Massoreth*; Gérard E. Weil, *Elie Lévitā, humaniste et massorète (1469–1549)* (Leiden: Brill, 1963).

Catholic reverence for tradition at the expense of Truth. In response, powerful constituencies within the Curia and the Roman Inquisition grew increasingly hostile towards Hebrew scholarship of all stripes, declining to distinguish between Hebrew scholarship (usually Catholic) which tried in good faith to adjust and improve the Vulgate translation and that (mostly Protestant) which was intended merely to impugn the Vulgate altogether. The result was a series of decisions taken in the 1540s and 1550s, many of them ambiguous and improvisational, which cumulatively looked as if they were meant to seal off hebraists' access to rabbinical and other Hebrew texts, or even to prohibit philological criticism of the Biblical text altogether.<sup>124</sup>

The first sign of this seemingly dramatic turn away from Christian hebraism came from the Council of Trent (1545–63), in the form of an April 1546 *Decretum de editione et usu sacrorum librorum* (Decree on the Publication and Use of the Scriptures) declaring that the Vulgate 'which has been approved by the long use of so many centuries in the Church, is to be held as authentic in public readings, disputations, preachings and expositions and that no one shall dare or presume to reject it under any pretense whatsoever'.<sup>125</sup> Many hebraists were unperturbed by this decree, noting both that its composition had been supervised by the avid orientalist and Vatican Librarian Marcello Cervini (1501–55, the future Pope Marcellus II), and that the decree's determination that 'Sacred Scripture, especially this well-known Old Vulgate edition, shall be published as correctly as possible' seemed like an open invitation to continued philological refinement and correction *e fontibus antiquis*.<sup>126</sup> Others, however, greeted this endorsement of the Vulgate with trepidation, speculating that its prohibition on 'rejecting' St Jerome's translation was a veiled reference to humanist philologists' willingness to advocate for alternative readings when appropriate. The pessimists, in the end, turned out to be the better prognosticators: seven years after the Tridentine Decree, the Roman Inquisition issued its infamous condemnation of the Talmud, sparking a bonfire of Jewish books in the Italian

124 For a sense of the Curia's investment in oriental scholarship and biblical humanism up to this watershed, see Alastair Hamilton, 'Eastern Churches and Western Scholarship', in *Rome Reborn: The Vatican Library and Renaissance Culture*, (ed.) Anthony Grafton (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 225–49.

125 The full text of the decree is available in *Concilium Tridentinum, diariorum, actorum, epistolarum, tractatum noua collectio* (Freiburg: Herder, 1901–2001), vol. 5, pp. 91–92.

126 On Cervini, see William V. Hudon, *Marcello Cervini and Ecclesiastical Government in Tridentine Italy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1992); Robert Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic and Kabbalah in the Catholic Reformation: The First Printing of the Syriac New Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 69–73.

Peninsula that all hebraists rightly regarded as an existential threat to their discipline.<sup>127</sup>

As Fausto Parente and others have noted, quite apart from its derisive reception by Protestants, Rome's drastic assault on the Jewish source materials so vital to the Christian hebraist enterprise prompted a crisis within the world of Catholic scholarship. Modern historians have tended to describe this crisis as a clash between two distinct camps. On one side, in the minority, were those (like the pioneering scholar of Syriac Andreas Masius, 1514–73) who believed that the Church had made a terrible mistake in separating Christian scholars and missionaries from rabbinical literature, on the purely pragmatic grounds that such a ban would set back Christian efforts to evangelize the Jews through informed disputation.<sup>128</sup> On the other side, in the majority, were those who assented to the Inquisition's perspective and, with a surprising rapidity, essentially abandoned the cutting edge of oriental philology to their Protestant counterparts.<sup>129</sup> While this decision to accept the Vulgate as an authority unto itself, largely immune from correction by the Masoretic text, was not wholly unjustified by objective assessments of their ages and origins, in the sixteenth century this assessment mattered much less than a second, more polemical justification: namely, that the Jews had deliberately corrupted the Hebrew text of the Bible, as well as the vast corpus of rabbinical commentaries which illuminated it, in order to obscure the truth of Christianity. In many ways, this accusation brings us directly back to the world of Ibn Ḥazm and Al-Andalus. Though the symmetry between Muslim and Christian ideas concerning their respective religions' abrogation of Jewish law is imperfect, many of the philological and historical tropes marshaled by Muslim polemicists – the logical and textual inconsistencies in the Torah, the uncertainty surrounding Ezra's 'restoration' of the Torah in the wake of the Babylonian Captivity, and so on – had, in fact, featured prominently in Christian polemics against Judaism

127 Kenneth R. Stow, 'The Burning of the Talmud in 1553, in the Light of Sixteenth-Century Catholic Attitudes Toward the Talmud', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 34 (1972): pp. 435–59; Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy, 1555–1593* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1977); Fausto Parente, *Les Juifs et l'Église Romaine (xv<sup>e</sup>–xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle)* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2007), pp. 301–62.

128 This was, essentially, another version of the justification for Hebrew studies first developed by Ramón Martí and revived by Johannes Reuchlin. On Masius, see Andreas Masius, *Briefe von Andreas Masius und seinen Freunden 1538 bis 1573*, (ed.) Max Lossen (Leipzig: A. Dürr, 1886); Henry de Vocht, 'Andreas Masius (1514–1573)', in *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1946), vol. 4, pp. 425–41; Wilkinson, *Orientalism, Aramaic*, 91–94; Parente, *Les Juifs et l'Église*, pp. 301–10.

129 Burnett, *Christian Hebraism*.

in the centuries before the rise of Islam, and merely awaited their humanist revival.<sup>130</sup> Insofar as sixteenth-century Catholicism can be said to have had its own Ibn Ḥazm, the most apt candidate would be the Flemish bishop Wilhelm Lindanus (1525–88), author of an influential 1558 manual on *De optimo genere interpretandi scripturas* (The Best Way to Interpret the Scriptures) which purported to prove Christian claims about the falsification of Hebrew scripture via the most sophisticated, up-to-date canons of humanist textual scholarship, including (for example) the collation of variant readings in the most ancient manuscripts.<sup>131</sup>

What is missed in this bipartite version of the Tridentine debate about hebraism – a version in which both sides, including the pro-hebraic faction, essentially admit *a priori* the corruption or perversion of Jewish sources before mounting their arguments for or against allowing Christians to read them – is the important fact that there was a third position in this debate, one which insisted unabashedly that the Jewish sources in question were no more suspect than those produced by Christian authors, and should be read with freedom not by polemicists, but rather by scholars in search of Enlightenment. Among the best-known advocates of this position is the rabbi-turned-Hebrew professor Johannes Isaac Levita (1515–77), a rare convert from Judaism who came to Catholicism via Protestantism. Levita is best known for his popular Hebrew grammar, which passed through five editions between 1553 and 1570, but he also published an early, and full-throated, rebuttal of Lindanus' attempt to prove the falsification of the Hebrew Bible, entitled *Defensio Veritatis Hebraicae Sacrarum Scripturarum, adversus ... Vilhelmi Lindani S.T. Doctoris* (A Defense of the Truth of the Hebrew Scriptures against ... Wilhelm Lindanus, Doctor of Theology) (1559).<sup>132</sup> Levita's *Defensio*, as Stephen Burnett has observed, became a favourite prop in later years for Protestant polemicists in their ongoing battle to impugn their Catholic rivals' adherence to the Vulgate, a fate which has served only to heighten the sense among historians of Christian hebraism that he

<sup>130</sup> See n. 43 above.

<sup>131</sup> Wilhelmus Lindanus, *De optimo genere interpretandi scripturas* (Cologne: Maternum Cholinum, 1558).

<sup>132</sup> Johannes Isaac Levita, *Defensio Veritatis Hebraicae Sacrarum Scripturarum, adversus Vilhelmi Lindani S.T. Doctoris, quos de optimo Scripturas interpretandi genre inscripsit* (Cologne: Jacob Soterem, 1559). On Johannes Isaac Levita, see Elisheva Carlebach, 'Jewish Responses to Christianity in Reformation Germany', in *Jews, Judaism and the Reformation in Sixteenth-Century Germany*, (ed.) Dean Phillip Bell and Stephen G. Burnett (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 451–80, esp. pp. 467–69; de Vocht, *History of the Foundation*, vol. 4, pp. 299–306.

can be bracketed as a statistically-insignificant outlier among Tridentine Catholic attitudes towards Hebrew.<sup>133</sup> Yet Levita was far from unique.

Among the Catholic hebraists prepared to make common cause with Levita were precisely the Iberian scholars trained by Alfonso de Zamora, his colleagues, and his heirs at the University of Alcalá. Though a modest handful of Spaniards rushed to the aid of the Roman Inquisition's campaign against Hebrew books, becoming self-designated propagandists for the dangers of Hebrew study – the list would include, most prominently, Francisco de Torres (1509–84), who advocated for the destruction of rabbinical literature in his *De sola lectione legis* (On the Mere Reading of the Law, 1555), and the Salamanca Graecist León de Castro (d. 1586), who nearly blocked the publication of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible in the 1570s – the lion's share of Spanish hebraists explicitly refused to toe the Roman line – including the Franciscan Andrés de Vega (1498–1549?), a Tridentine delegate who attempted in his 1548 *Tridentini Decreti de iustificatione expositio et defensio* (Explanation and Defense of the Tridentine Decree on Justification) to steer his fellow Catholics towards the most liberal possible reading of Trent's endorsement of the Vulgate, to Luis de León, who pungently told the Spanish Inquisition that he had been taught to

take from Jewish doctors things relating to the description of the Holy Land and its places, or the customs of that group [the Jews]. And when they offer some literal sense – some passage of Scripture of true and pure doctrine, and does not contradict the saints – one does not have to discount just because it came from [the Jews], because, as St Augustine teaches, the truth is good regardless of who says it.<sup>134</sup>

In fact, one can hardly open a biblical commentary penned by a Spanish scholar in the later sixteenth century without stumbling upon appreciative references to Abraham ibn Ezra, the rabbi Nahmanides (1194–1270), the traveler Benjamín de Tudela (1130–73), the polymath astronomer Abraham Zacuto

<sup>133</sup> Stephen G. Burnett, *From Christian Hebraism to Jewish Studies: Johannes Buxtorf (1564–1629) and Hebrew Learning in the Seventeenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 207 n. 20.

<sup>134</sup> Andrés de Vega, *Tridentini Decreti de iustificatione expositio et defensio* (Venice: Ad signum speis, 1548); Luis de León, 'Escrito que presentó fray Luis de Leon de su puño y letra, al tribunal de la Inquisicion de Valladolid, contestando á lo que se le preguntó en la primera audiencia. En Valladolid a 18 de abril 1572 años, ante los señores inquisidores licenciados Diego González é Realiego en la audiencia de la tarde', in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España. Vol. 10: Proceso original que la Inquisición de Valladolid hizo al maestro Fr. Luis de León, religioso del orden de S. Agustín*, (ed.) Miguel Salvá and Pedro Sainz de Baranda (Madrid: Viuda de Calero, 1847), pp. 184–203, esp. p. 196.

(1452–1515), and especially Isaac Abarbanel (or, as Arias Montano called him, ‘Isaac hispano’).<sup>135</sup> Benito Arias Montano – who, as we have seen, was the Christian exegete singled out by Francisco Martínez Marina as the first to offer Abarbanel’s canonical version of the Nebuchadnezzar legend his unqualified embrace – was particularly keen to filter and preserve the Sephardic exegetical tradition through his own commentaries, as well as the work that which stands as his masterpiece, the massive (and massively erudite) critical apparatus of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible.<sup>136</sup> Such was his commitment to the *Hebraica veritas*, in fact, that Arias Montano nearly sacrificed his hard-won reputation and career as an exegete and an orientalist in an ill-advised attempt to embarrass Lindanus in retribution for the Belgian bishop’s role in casting aspersions upon Arias Montano’s beloved Hebrew sources.<sup>137</sup>

### A ‘Sephardic Habitus’

For many of the scholars who have surveyed the landscape of biblical criticism in late Renaissance Spain, the willingness of scholars like Arias Montano and Luis de León to court accusations of judaizing in order to preserve the Sephardic commentary tradition has tended to awaken the genealogical mindset so common in the literature on early modern Spain. Were Arias Montano and Luis de León drawn to praise Hebrew sources and grant their *imprimatur* to Sephardic legends about Spain’s ancient Israelite colonies solely or even primarily, out of a lingering sense of genealogical pride, a desire to insert their Jewish ancestors into the earliest chapters of their merging national history? While recent research on the more spectacular frauds in sixteenth-century Spanish scholarship, like the Plomos del Sacromonte or the false chronicles

135 See Fernández and Fernández, *Biblia y humanismo*, for the texture of late Renaissance Spanish hebraism. For a comprehensive bio-bibliography of Spanish Christian exegetes, see Klaus Reinhardt, *Bibelkommentare Spanischer Autoren (1500–1700)* (Madrid: CSIC, Centro de Estudios Históricos, 1990–99).

136 Benito Arias Montano, *Antigüedades hebraicas. Tratados exegéticos de la Biblia Regia. Antiquitatum iudaicarum Libri IX: Apparatus Sacer*, (ed. and trans.) Luis Gómez Canseco and Sergio Fernández López (Huelva: Universidad de Huelva, 2013).

137 The Arias Montano-Lindanus affair has been ably reconstructed in Antonio Dávila Pérez, ‘La polémica Arias Montano-Wilhelmus Lindanus: Un nuevo documento (AGR I 115, No. 3714)’, *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, 49 (2000): pp. 139–66; Dávila Pérez, ‘*Regnavit a ligno Deus. Affirmat Arias Montanus; negat Lindanus*. Revisión de la polémica Benito Arias Montano-Wilhelmus Lindanus a la luz de nuevos documentos’, *Humanistica Lovaniensia: Journal of Neo-Latin Studies*, 58 (2009): pp. 125–89.

published by Jerónimo Román de la Higuera, have tended to find some evidence of genealogical or 'ethnic' motivation, in the case of Nebuchadnezzar's Jewish legions there is an alternative explanation.<sup>138</sup> It is an explanation that eluded Martínez Marina when he tried to look backwards from the eighteenth century, by which time the pitched battles over the legality of using rabbinical commentaries which unsettled Tridentine intellectuals had long since disappeared from memory. The mid-sixteenth-century crisis of hebraism made Spanish hebraists aware, perhaps for the first time, of the oddity of their perspective – of what we might call (paraphrasing Barbara Fuchs' work on 'maurophilia') the profoundly enduring 'Sephardic habitus' of Iberian attitudes to the Bible as compared to those of their fellow Europeans, Catholic as well as Protestant.<sup>139</sup>

This 'Sephardic habitus' did not require the bonds of biological genealogy; it need not be traced back to any particular scholar's status as a Converso, or descendant thereof. It was, rather, a legacy of the intellectual history of the Iberian Peninsula, a complicated tapestry in which the textual transmission of the Hebrew text of the Bible and its rabbinical apparatus had been interwoven with the secular history of Iberia's three faith communities centuries before by a figure – Ibn Ḥazm in particular, though one might call him the polemical Muslim in general – who also had vanished from the scene long before the historians of the eighteenth century, or the twenty-first, attempted to reckon with the role of conversion in producing the unique qualities of Iberian exegesis. In other words, when Arias Montano penned a lengthy commentary on Obadiah, relating the Nebuchadnezzar legend in intricate detail before concluding that the Jewish diaspora had constituted a mutual gift to Christians and Jews alike, an exchange of expertise in which Christians were the greater debtors, he was not necessarily striking a blow against the Inquisition on behalf of his fellow Conversos, but rather defending a particularly Iberian tradition of thinking about the authority and authenticity of the Biblical text against a Roman critique that must have read in the Iberian context not only as a harbinger of increasing Catholic anti-Judaism, but also as the continuation of a struggle for exegetical primacy begun in eleventh-century Al-Andalus.<sup>140</sup>

138 See n. 12 and 15 above.

139 Barbara Fuchs, *Exotic Nation: Maurophilia and the Construction of Early Modern Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

140 Arias Montano, *Commentaria*, p. 464.