CHAPTER 4

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

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Auctoritas in Medieval Polemical Argumentation

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

Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture

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

Nec inde auctoritas illis Libris minuitur, quod a Judaeis non intelleguntur; imo et augeatur: nam et ipsa eorum caecitas ibi praedita est. Unde magis non intellegendo veritatem perhibent testimonium veritatis, quia cum eos libros non intellegunt a quibus non intellectu praedita sunt etiam hinc eos veraces ostendunt.²

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

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

By the turn of the twelfth century, precisely when these images began to evolve from static typology to active polemic, leading eventually to the depiction of synagogue's humiliation and defeat, the stability of this ineradicable notion began to falter. Although many factors have been suggested to explain what precipitated this change, evident in iconography as well as in papal legislation, one key circumstance was a growing crisis in the understanding of authoritative authority, of textual auctoritas. An auctor or written authority, distinguished from a mere author, is not only one who is responsible for a text out, more often, someone who is to be believed and quoted. The auctor possesses auctoritas, the authority to speak truly, the wisdom to speak well, and the credibility to be trusted as a source. As Alastair Minnis explains, the two essential elements of medieval auctoritas are intrinsic worth and authenticity. To have intrinsic worth meant that what one said or wrote did not contradict Christian doctrine; to have authenticity indicated that an auctor was connected with an ancient and true source. As every discipline had its own auctores—grammar had Priscian and Donatus, rhetoric had Cicero, dialectic had Aristotle, Porphyry and Boethius, etc.—so the auctoritas for biblical exegesis and, by extension, polemical writing was derived from the sources viewed as most ancient and true, the Bible, whose auctor was none other than God himself. In most pre-twelfth-century sources, as Minnis explains, the relative importance of the human author was eclipsed by the divine auctor, and if a writer expressed a truth, it was attributable to the auctoritas inherent in his sources, not from his own authority. For this same reason, the authority of scripture was derived above all from the absolute supremacy of its divine author and there was in traditional polemical writing, following Augustine's firm distinction between authoritative and apocryphal scriptures, a total confidence in the power of biblical auctoritas to justify true arguments. Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173) pushed this confidence to its limits, proclaiming that "Suspecta est mihi in his certissimis quibus non conformar Scripturum auctoritas, nec Christum in sua clariificatione recipio, si non assistant ei Moyses et Helyas... ad comprobandum reuolutionis suae ureritatem, non solum figurative, sed etiam aperte, Scripturae exhibeat auctoritatem" (Every truth that the authority of scripture does not confirm is suspect to me, nor do I accept Christ in his glorification if Moses and Elijah do not stand behind him...let [Jesus] present the authority of scripture not only figuratively but openly to prove the truth of his revelation). Even in the Latin protocol of the Barcelona Disputation of 1263 between the Aragonese R. Moses ben Naḥman of Gerona (Naḥmanides, d. ca 1270) and the Dominican convert Paul Christiani, the anonymous author affirms, "Autoritas mentiri non posit" (Authority may not lie). Beneath the surface of this longstanding faith in the proof of auctoritates, however, the concept of auctoritas as a source of authority in polemical writing was undergoing a significant upheaval. In nonpolemical exegesis, this took the form, as Minnis has shown, of a shift in the understanding of the human and divine auctores and a rise in the relative importance of the former. In polemical writing, this involved an uncertainty over the power of biblical auctoritas in dealing with non-Christians, and an increase in the perceived power of ratio, reason. A clear example of the preference of reason over authorities in a polemical context can be found in the writing of Peter Abelard (d. 1142), in whose Dialogue Between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian, the Christian remarks:

In quolibet disputatisio conflictu firmior est rationis veritas reddita quam auctoritatem ostensa. Neque enim ad fidem asserendum referat quid sit in rei veritate, sed quid in opinionem posit venire; et de ipsius auctoritatis verba plerque questiones emergunt, ut de ipsi prius quam per ipsa iudicandum sit.

When arguments similar to Abelard's based on ratio appeared around the turn of the twelfth century in works by other writers such as Gilbert Crispin (d. 1117), Odo of Cambrai (d. 1113), and Petrus Alfonsi (converted 1106), polemical writing not only betrayed a new doubt over the foundation of auctoritas, but also evinced a new awareness of the disparate natures of the hermeneutical and contemporary Jews and a concomitant need to update the former to accord more accurately with the growing complexity of the latter as they were perceived in Christian understanding. This imperative is especially evident in the mid-twelfth-century polemics of Peter the Venerable, Abbess of Cluny (d. 1156), who argues that contemporary Jews can be considered as less-than-human beasts because they lack the reason to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Peter's condemnation of perceived Jewish irrationality constitutes part of his effort to bring the image of the contemporary, "real" Jew into harmony with the common image of the Jew as one who disbelieves authorities, the image that had long defined the hermeneutical Jew of traditional polemic. More importantly, it reflects the twelfth-century process of expanding the very concept of authoritative proof to include more than biblical testimonia. By the turn of the thirteenth century, Alan of Lille (d. 1202) likewise remarked in his polemical against heretics, Jews, and Muslims that the instability in auctoritas, which has a "nose of wax" that can be "bent" to different purposes, should be counterbalanced by reason. This shift in the durability of auctoritas in polemical writing was accompanied, not coincidentally, by a shift in the representation of non-Christian sources, and by the middle of the thirteenth century, a new challenge faced polemicians beyond that of simply choosing reason over scriptural authority. The disparity between the traditional images of Judaism in polemical writing and the growing contemporary
knowledge of Jewish texts and beliefs grew more pronounced as the image of a new Talmudic rather than strictly Old Testament Jew was disseminated through the efforts of converts such as Nicolas Donin at the Talmud Trial in Paris during the fifth decade of the thirteenth century and by Paul Christiani at the Disputation of Barcelona and at another harangue in Paris a decade later. These events marked a new awareness that the disparity between theological ideas of Jews and the reality of Jewish belief and practice was manifest above all in the differences between what Jews and Christians held to be authoritative proof texts. In the "expansion" of authority, as Gilbert Dahan has called it, polemicists began to conceive of auctoritas and auctoritates in an entirely new way, including not only biblical testimonia or philosophical reason, but the new, original source material from Judaism and Islam as well. Rather than condemning the foreignness of such sources as a sign of Jewish or Muslim infidelity, a view that can be seen in early twelfth-century polemics such as the Dialogue against the Jews of Petrus Alfonsi, polemicists sought instead to appropriate it as a source of Christian truth, providing decisive proof that Christianity was attested to not only in its own sources, but even those considered authentic by its enemies. In the words of Dominican missionary Riccoldo da Monte Croce (d. 1320) in his Contra Legem Saracenorum (Against the Law of the Saracens), "Numquam est tam validum et robustum testimonium doctrinae vel vitae quam cum ille laudanda loquitur qui ingerere crimen conatur" ("Never is there so valid or strong a witness in doctrine or in life as when he who tries to make an accusation speaks praise.").

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

By expanding the traditional canon of auctores and so redefining the very nature of auctoritas in polemical writing, polemicists were brought face to face with a perplexing paradox: rabbinical writing in Hebraic and Aramaic and original Islamic sources in Arabic possessed the positive and commanding quality of authenticity, but they most certainly did not contain "intrinsic worth" for polemical authors. Much that directly contradicted Christian doctrine was vitally present in the very sources polemicists sought to employ. While polemicists such as Martini sought to mitigate this conflict with claims that proofs of Christian truths were preserved by in Arabic and Hebrew sources without the knowledge of Muslims or Jews themselves, a more integral defense against the instability of authoritative proof in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the invocation of the endorsing testimony of converts, both actual and fictional. With the voice of the convert, polemicists aimed to penetrate the shell of symbolic difference encasing the volatile authorities of the putative infidel and so to bridge the widening gap between authenticity and intrinsic worth in their polemical arguments. This appeal to the alleged expertise of the convert was already evident in the twelfth century—even before non-Christian sources began to be used as proof texts for Christian arguments—in the Petrus Alfonsi’s Dialogue, which begins with Alfonsi’s affirmation that he was converted only after “arriving...to a great height” in his knowledge of Judaism. Likewise, the author of the anti-Jewish Opusculum de conversione sua (often called Herman Judah of Cologne, the “erstwhile Jew”), describes himself as “the strongest assailant of [Jewish] paternal traditions...
Jew of the Jews. 24 Both texts illustrated not only the twofold method of proof, natio ne
et auctoritate (by reason and by textual authority), but also narrated the personal experi-
ence of conversion, which enabled the alterity of the most authentic proof texts to be
transformed into the expert knowledge of the faithful convert. 25

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

Auctoritas, Authenticity, and Authorship in Abner of
Burges/Alfonso of Valladolid

Abstrinam ertm bin ich treu. Ich bis du, wenn ich bin ich bin. (Only as an apostate am I faithful; I am you
when I am myself)

Paul Celan, "Lieb der Freue" ("Praise of Distance")

The development of a jargon of authenticity both through citation of foreign texts
and the invocation of the testimony of converts as a solution to the crisis of auctor-
tas in polemical writing reached a high-water mark in the writing of the Castilian
polemicist Abner de Burgos (d. c. 1347), known after his conversion around 1320-21
as Alfonso de Valladolid. Following his conversion, Abner-Alfonso spent the nearly
three decades until his death engaged in religious polemic with his former community
of Jewish friends and students. Abner-Alfonso wrote at least ten works of polemic,
most or all in Hebrew, the longest and most important being his Morte de los
Mortstodor de justicia. Abner-Alfonso drew from this text as the basis of most of his
later polemical writing, much of which was also translated into Castilian, including a
series of polemical letters to various Jews and a long polemical response to his former
student, Isaac ben Poig, the Techuwot le-meharef (Response to the Blasphemers). 27

What is remarkable about Abner-Alfonso's work in comparison with other anti-
Jewish writing is that he is no longer, like most Christian polemists before him,
writing for a Christian readerhip but, on the contrary, he composed his works
explicitly for Jews to read. The fact that he wrote virtually all of his works in
Hebrew is manifest proof that t is more than a mere trope of polemical rhetoric
when he claims in the Moststodor: "Quisse componer este libro...por mostrar la fe
cierta...a los judios, que la avem mester" (I wanted to compose this work...in
order to demonstrate the true faith...to the Jews, who have need of it), a claim he
repeatedly emphasizes throughout the text. 28 By contrast, Martini's Pugio, which is

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

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

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

"Hay libros que el rebelle judio podrá tomar pruebas dellos para contra nos los chi-
trianos; e que el mostrador christiano non deve tomar pruebas dellos contra los judios; e
estos son los libros que son abstenidos entre los christianos e no entre los judios." [There
are books that the Jewish rebel can take proofs from against us the Christians, and
that the Christian teacher should not take proofs from against the Jews. These are
the books that are authentic among the Christians and not among the Jews.]

"Habent verba sua, Christiani, quibus judaeos incommensurabiliter molestant" [The
Christians have their words, with which they torment the Jews incommensurably].
By the same token, only the Christian teacher can cite those books authentic among the Jews.\textsuperscript{33} From the very beginning of his text, the issue of authenticity is key to Abner-Alfonso’s conception of authoritative proof, and he strives to cite from only those works he believes his Jewish reader will consider authentic.

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

Caté la premia de los judíos, el mi pueblo donde yo era, que son en esta luenga cap-tividad quebrantados e quebrantados e angustiados en flecho de los pechos, el pueblo que descendieron de la su orna e del su loco que sostenían, e non an ayuda nin fuerza en ssy. E acaesió un dia, pensando yo mucho en este pleito, que entre a la signoria con gran lloro e amargura de mi corazón, e fíx plegarias a Dios… E de la gran coya que tenía en mi corazón e de la lazería que avía tomado cansé e adormeçime; e ey en vision de suenno un gran onme que me dizia: “Por qué estás adormecido?” Entiende estas palabras que te fábulo, e párte enfieisto, que yo te digo que los judíos están desde tan grand tiempo en esta capitivity por su locura e por su nezsepaid e por menga de “Mostador de Justicia” donde conoscan la verdad.\textsuperscript{34}

Three years later, he claims he saw the same man in another dream, “e dixé como sannuado: ¡Hata quándo, pereçoso, dormirás? ¿Qué te levantará de su suenno? Ca los pecados de todos los judíos e de sus fijos e de sus generaciones tienen a cuestas!” (and he said to me, as if angry, “How long will you sleep, slugabed? When will you arise from your sleep? For you are responsible for the sins of all the Jews and their sons and their offspring.”)\textsuperscript{35}

Like Hermann Judah in the Opusculum de conversione sua, Abner-Alfonso describes his conversion as a long hermeneutical struggle, and just as in Hermann’s text, this struggle serves a rhetorical goal in the construction of his polemical argument. That goal is not the same as that of the Opusculum, however, because the intended audience is different. What in the Opusculum clearly serves to reinforce Christian pretensions to a spiritualizing hermetic view—thus distinguishing both Herman and his Christian reader from the Jews—in Abner-Alfonso’s text serves to illustrate the experience he long shared with other Jews in their common time of stress, framing his dream experience as interwoven with real historical events such as the failed messianic movement in Avila in 1295.\textsuperscript{36} The frame of this first-person narrative not only describes Abner-Alfonso’s conversion and defines the whole anti-Jewish polemic that follows it both historically and textually in terms of this shared struggle against Christian antagonism; it also makes the implicit suggestion that both voices in the text, the Jewish rebel (rebelse, rebel) and the Christian mostador (teacher), are Abner-Alfonso’s own. Given the frame of his own conversion story and the dominant claim to a pseudo-Jewish identity throughout the text, this reading, quite appropriate for Abner-Alfonso’s polemic, cannot be claimed for earlier anti-Jewish polemical dialogues.\textsuperscript{37} Unlike the voice of Trypho in the Dialogue of Justin Martyr or Moses in the Dialogue by Alfonsi, or Leo in the Disputatio of Odo of Cambray or Saul in the Scrutinium Scripturarum of Pablo de Santa Maria (d. 1435), Abner-Alfonso’s rebel is not an empty cipher that stands for the Jewish self but speaks only as a counterpoint to the arguments of the Christian. Rather, the rebel in the Mostador actually interacts with Abner-Alfonso’s attempted self-representation to his readers as a former Jew whom they personally knew. Unlike the hermeneutical Jew of most polemical texts, Abner-Alfonso’s rebel is designed, within the context of his own personal testimony of suffering, doubt, and conversion, as the mouthpiece of his own authentic pre-conversion self, meant to appeal to his reader on a personal, emotive level rather than simply on a textual, polemical one.

Because of this, the instances when the teacher directly addresses the rebel function as dramatic moments in the internal dialogue of Abner-Alfonso’s trajectory of faith, a trajectory whose “real,” historical veracity is indistinguishable from its textual, fictional presentation in the Mostador itself. Thus when the teacher states, “ahora tú, hermano judío, ten mientes a estas palabras… e tu corazón pon a mi entendimiento” (now you, brother Jew, pay attention to these words… and put your heart according to my understanding),\textsuperscript{40} it is as if the reader listened in as two sides of Abner-Alfonso’s own authorial persona debated the decision to convert, a decision that is rendered more difficult by the constant counterarguments and lengthy statements of doubt proffered by the Jew. Abner-Alfonso’s conversion narrative thus functions both as a device to lend the authority of authentic testimony to his polemical arguments and as a model for the Jewish reader to follow in his own imagined debate of doubt and faith. On a textual level, the parallel between public and private experience, outer and inner man, rebel and teacher, are expressed as the parallel between the imaginary edifice of the polemical dialogue and the intended real effect of persuasion and conversion. Abner-Alfonso’s pre-conversionary otherness becomes
indistinguishable from the alterity that authenticates his polemical authorship, an otherness he establishes not, like Raymond Martini, simply by citing foreign texts, but by recounting his own conversion story in dramatic terms and by elaborating on his own experience of doubt and fear.

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

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

Abner-Alfonso claims that his dream was so distressing to him, he tried to forget it completely, vowing to disremember his dreams and remain “in the faith in which I was born, just as my father and my grandfather and all my ancestors remained.”43 His appeal to the faith of his forefathers takes on greater meaning when he is told by the voice in his dream that he is “responsible” for the spiritual welfare of other Jews as well as his own. Like a prophet, Abner-Alfonso must choose to heed the revelation sent him by God and to present it to his Jewish brethren or face his own damnation because his own future salvation depends on theirs.45 Abner-Alfonso thus becomes the teacher of righteousness himself, the “mostrador de justicia donde [los judios] conoscan la verdad” (the teacher of righteousness from whom [the Jews] may know the truth). His dream vision is the vehicle by which he authenticates his new understanding of his ancestral tradition as not just his own interpretation, but his direct summons to prophecy by God.

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

In addition to his own self-presentation as a prophet and savior, he implores his Jewish readers to explore their own doubts and to question their faith by suggesting that they too are “responsible” for other Jews. He explains that a man should not remain doubtful in his religion because such unexplored doubt “es engranjo del alma para él e para su simiente e para todos los que le siguen, ellos e sus filhos e filhos de sus filhos fasta siglo, e que todo Israel son fieadores unos por otros” (is a deception of the soul for him and for his offspring and for all those who come after him,
intended to directly wheedle a Jewish audience rather than insult it as an insensate straw man. If Abner-Alfonso is indeed evoking the standard trope of the stubborn hermeneutical Jew, then his depiction can at best be received by his readers as simply another polemic written from a Christian rather than Jewish perspective. At worst, the invocation of the image of a stubborn Jew—ostensibly in an effort to be “authentic” in his depiction of the rebel—only presents a model of resistance to Abner-Alfonso’s own Christian arguments. Put in the context of Abner-Alfonso’s use of his own conversion story—full of doubts, struggles, and a long transformation—he conflates the parallel textual representation of himself as both Jewish in his experience and knowledge and Christian in his anti-Jewish arguments and conclusions. In this way, he subjects the foundation of authority in his text—his own depiction of his prophetically inspired conversion experience—to the very rhetoric of authentic “Jewish doubt” that he uses as a tool of persuasion. The distrust the rebel shows toward the teacher as a trope of feigned authenticity, stating his fear of being deceived by the Christian, ironically becomes the pitfall of his own argumentation, the petard with which he hoists his own authority. Abner-Alfonso’s authorial effort to present himself from two perspectives—both Christian and Jew, both convert and converter, both prophet and follower, both disciple and master—calls into question the authenticity and the authority of each “self” in these pairs of roles.

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

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

The internal dissonance of Abner-Alfonso’s own rhetorical gambit, undertaken only a few decades after Ibn Adret’s remarks, cannot be considered apart from the tension inherent in the Christian appropriation and use of rabbinical sources in service of Christian truth as it developed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. There is, from the very beginning of this use by Petrus Alfonso and Peter the Venerable, through the uses by Paul Christiani and even more explicitly in the writings of Raymond Martini, a fundamental ambivalence about the real nature of such rabbinical sources, which are represented by these polemicists as simultaneously erroneous and truthful. In Martini’s words, “Lapiden enim prestium prudens nequaquam despicit licet inventus fuerit in draconis capite, vel bufovis” (for a wise man never despises a precious stone, even if it is found on the head of a dragon or a toad). For Abner-Alfonso, who offers his own rendition of this taken from Maimonides, the internal contradictions in the Christian appropriation of Jewish sources for Christological
purposes plays itself out dramatically in the appropriation of Jewish identity and experience for argumentative polemical appeal.50

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

Notes


2. The authority of those books does not diminish because they are not understood by the Jews. Rather, it increases, for this very blindness of theirs is foretold there. In not comprehending the truth they offer additional testimony to the truth because, when they do not understand those books in which it was predicted that they would not understand, they show them for that reason to be true.” “Contra Faustum,” 16.21, in Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum 25, ed. Joseph Zycha (Vienne: F. Tempsky, 1891), p. 464. On this passage, see the remarks of Fredriksen, “Excascati Occulta Justicia Dei,” pp. 317–18, and Augustine and the Jews, p. 277.

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8. In the City of God against the Pagans 15.23, trans. Philip Levine (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), p. 556, Augustine states that from the Fathers “usque ad nos auctoritas veracium scripturarum certissima et nostrissima successione pervenit” (the authority
of the true scriptures has been transmitted to us by a most certain and well-ascertained succession, while in apocryphal sources "propter multa falsa, nulla est canonica autenticitas" (because of many false things, there is no canonical authority in them). His words, distinguishing between authoritative scriptures and nonauthoritative apocryphal sources, were repeated by Isidore of Seville (d. 636) in the Etymologies, Hrabanus Maurus (d. 856) in De Universia, and Hugh of St. Victor (d. 1141) in his Epistola didascalica. On Augustine's concepion and use of autoria, see Karl-Hermann Lütke, "Autoria bei Augustin," Tübingen Beiträge zur Abtrettumusiifta 44 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1968).


12. "In every clash of disputation truth established by reasoning is more solid than the display of authority. For it is not that thing which is [certain] in point of fact that is relevant to strengthening a person's faith about something, but rather that which can be put as an opinion; and many questions arise about the wording of this authoritative text itself, so that a judgment needs to be made about them [the words] before it can be made by means of it [the proof text]." Peter Abelard, Collationes II, 78, ed. John Marenbon and Giovanni Orlando (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 98–99, with my modifications to the translation. In "de ipsis priuquam per ipsa." I read instead the proposition and ipsa as the autoria. Likewise, in the postlude to his Sic et Non, he invokes Augustine to distinguish between the authority of scripture and that of later tradition. On Abelard's discussion of authority, see Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authority, pp. 59–63.

13. Dahan, Les Intelлектuels chrétiens, pp. 423–27, summarizes the autoria/ratio dyad, which itself is abundant in the language of twelfth- and thirteenth-century polemics. In his Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), pp. 1–11, Daniel Lasker, in providing a useful distillation of this paradigm, adds a third category and more finely splits the category of rational polemics: arguments are either exegetical, historico/social, or rational, and rational arguments themselves can appeal either to "common sense" or to more strict philosophical arguments based on fixed categories and terms.

14. In his "Adversus ludicum invertere duticum" (Against the Invertebrae Oblubarin of the Jews), Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 58, ed. Yvonne Friedmann (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), p. 83, he urges the Jews to either "acquise to reasons" or "yield to authorities," asking his imagined Jewish interlocutor, "Cum ista omnia, O Judaei, et autoriataribus sacris, et rationibus invictis probata sint, quid sustinetis? Si Scripturis vestris fideliter datae, autoriataria cedit, si rationes aut rationales estis, rationes acquiseatis." (When all of these things, O Jews, are proven both by sacred authorities and by invincible reasons, what do you maintain? If you have faith in your authorities, yield to the authorities. If you are rational or reasonable, acquiesce to the reasons.) The Jews' perceived failure to do either prompts him to ponder their very humanity, stating, "Nescio plano utrum ludaeus homo sit, qui nec ratione humanae cedit, nec autoriataribus divinis et propriis acquiseat." (I do not know completely if the Jews who neither believe human reason nor accepts authorities divine and his own is a many.) See pp. 57–58, and cf. p. 125 with similar statements such as, "Videor michi, lude, toti autoriataribus, tantis rationibus satisficiens me, ut arbitro, super his, quae in quaestione proposita fuerint, omni homini. Quod si omni homini, tunc et tibi, si tamen homo es." (It seems to me, Jew, that with so many authorities and so many reasons, I have satisfied, I judge, those issues that have been put into question on these things.) On Peter's condemnation of Jewish irrationality, see Cohen, Living Letters, pp. 254–70. Funkenstein, "Basic Types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic," pp. 378–80, and "Changes in the Patterns," pp. 138–41, who has maintained that Peter represents a darker, more intolerant side of the new rationalist polemic with his argument that Jews were "less than human" because they did not accept rational arguments, has oddly skipped over the important role of authority in Peter's argument. Peter actually argues that Jews are "less than human" not only because they do not accept rational arguments appealing to ratio, but also because they reject the proof of biblical authorities.

15. "Qua autoriatarus cereum habet nasum, id est in diversum pontem festci sentent, rationi-bus roborandum est" (Since authority has a nose of wax, which is to say it can be bent into different meanings, it should be supported with reasons), "Contra haereticos" 30, in Patrologia Latina, ed. J.P. Migne. 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 310:33.


18. As part of the thirteenth-century interest in reading and censoring original texts of rabbinical literature as well as Islam, Dominican polemics, seemingly following the lead of Matteo General Raymond of Peñafort (d. 1275), started to appear. Most of these works were written in a half-dozen small groups in Spain and North Africa. "Studia linguarum" were founded in Mallorca in 1237, Tunis in 1242–1245 (Arabic), Murcia in 1266 (Hebrew
and Arabic), Barcelona in 1280 (Hebrew), Valencia in 1280 (Arabic), and Játiva in 1302 (Hebrew and Arabic). To call these clusters schools is perhaps inaccurate considering their small size, although this usage persists in critical literature. Robert Chazan in Doggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Resistance (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989), p. 5, has termed this new use of original source material the "new misionizierung strategy" of thirteenth-century polemics. Chazan, like most scholars, credits Peñafort as the prime mover behind the rise of language study among Dominicans in the later thirteenth century. Nevertheless, as he notes, there is little direct evidence showing Peñafort’s organization of the studia línguarum, even though other Dominicans in subsequent generations explicitly credited him with such involvement. On the studia, see José María Coll, "Escuelas de Lenguas Orientales en los siglos XIII y XIV," Analecta Sacra Tarraconensis 17 (1944): 115–38; 18 (1945): 59–99; 19 (1946): 217–40, and the full bibliography listed by Cohen, The Priests and the Jews, p. 107, n. 11. For a recent exploration of this issue and the extant sources, see Robin Vose, Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 104–15.

19. Dahlan. Les intellectuels chrétiens, p. 441. Raymond of Peñafort in his Summa de Penaentia, (Rome: Commentament pro religioso, 1976), p. 310, referring to the policy of Gregory the Great against forced conversions, explains, “Jews as well as Muslims should be provoked to take up the Christian faith auctoritasibus, rationibus et blandisimis” (by authorities, reasons, and blandishments). The authorities to be used are Hebrew and Arabic, not only Latin scriptures.


21. During the same decades, Raymond Lull (d. 1315), whose concern with authenticity in argumentative proof was very similar to that of contemporary Dominicans even though he rejected almost entirely the use of textual auctorialis, likewise evinced an acute concern with using argumentative proofs accepted by non-Christianists. While such proofs for Muslims could only be rational, he conceded near the end of his career that scholastic authorities might be more effective in arguing with Jews. On Lull’s conflicting opinions on the use of authorities in anti-Jewish polemics, see Thomas Burman, “The Influence of the Apology of al-Kindi and Contrastatas of the al-Racun Lull of Late Religious Polemics, 1305–1313,” Medieval Studies 53 (1991): 197–228.

22. This conflict between intrinsic worth and authenticity was similar to that faced by Augustine in his correspondence with St. Jerome over the latter’s decision to undertake the Latin translation of the Hebrew text in order to replace the Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint, which he saw as corrupt. On the conflict of opinion between Jerome and Augustine over the authority of the Septuagint, see Alfonso Furst, Augustina Briefwechsel mit Hieronymus (Munich: Aachendorfsche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1999), pp. 139–45; and Caroline White, The Correspondence (1944–1949) between Jerome and Augustine of Hippo (London: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), pp. 35–42.

23. “Cum itaque divina misionaris insciuit ad tam excessum huius fidei gradum pervenissent, euis pallium fulsit et natus sum tunica inquisitatis et bapzatis sunt…” (“When I had arrived, with the help of divine mercy, to such a great height of this faith [Judaism], I took off the veil of falsity and was stripped of the tunic of iniquity and I was baptized.”) Diálogo contra los judíos, introduction by John Tolan, Latin text by Klaus-Peter Mieder, trans. Esperanza Ducay, coordination by María Jesús Lacarra (Huesca: Instituto de Estudios Albarracinos, 1986), p. 6.

24. “Quantus itaque putas tunum omnes, quæ aedentar, ludeos stupor abhorrerindicet, cum me paternarium traditionum suarum fortissimum viderent expugnatorum, quorum me fistelisimium, ut poe ludeos ex ludeis speraverat esse defensorem?” (Can you imagine how great a stuper of amazement then seized all the Jews who were present when they saw me, the strongest assailant of their paternal traditions, while they hoped that I, as a Jew of the Jews, would be their defender?) Hermannus quondam Judaeus, Opusculum de conversione sua, ed. G. Niemeier, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Quellen zur Gesetzgebung des Mittelalters 4 (Weimar: Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1963), p. 113. The debate over Herman’s real identity and existence is irrelevant here, because the appeal to the convert’s expert knowledge equationally applies in both cases to ‘real’ converts such as Peter Alfonso as well as “imagined” ones, such as Nostus the Priest (on whom, see note 25 below). For the debate, see Avrom Saltman, “Herman’s Opusculum de Conversione Sua: Truth or Fiction?” Revue des études juives 147 (1988): 31–56; Karl Morrison, Understanding Conversion (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 50–57, and Conversion and Text (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), pp. 39–75 cited text on p. 104; and Jean-Claude Schmitt, La conversion d’Hermann le juif: Autobiographie, histoire et fiction (Paris: Seuil, 2003), translated as The Conversion of Herman the Jew: Autobiography, History, and Fiction in the Twelfth Century, trans. Alex J. Novickoff (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

25. The strategic use of imagined conversion is evident in earlier polemics as well, such as the ninth-century collection of Arabic texts now known as the Qisas Muğādala al-Uqūf (Account of the Disputation of the Priests), trans. into Hebrew in slightly altered form as Šefer Nostor Ha-Komer, or The Book of Nostor the Priest. The author begins his anti-Christian polemic, which takes the form of a letter to his friend, by observing first of all that he converted to Judaism. The Judeo-Arabic version, vol. 2, p. 7, begins, “in kana baynaka wa-bayni min al-ilmî fl dini-l-maši šay’un lan īṣaši liyahi ghyānašt la min ḥubnîn wa-lā min ba’ādîn” (You and I, we have shared such knowledge of the religion of Christ as no one before us has achieved, nor will anyone after us). See vol. 1, p. 52. It is on this basis, as one who was intimately associated with Christians and Christianity, that the author then speaks against his alleged former religion. From the very beginning, the authority of the polemical author to defend Judaism is premised not on his knowledge of that religion, but on his familiarity and intimacy with the very thing he rejects. Similarly, the Hebrew text states, Nostor did not “enter the Jewish religion,” “ad ahet nansr ve-natan ‘im kol ḥakham še-ba-arelim ve-khol ha-nevi,n be-sifehem... ve-yavim ve-yada” et kol ‘a’tan ve-ba-lonqeh akhar hayah bokh. He had debated with every uncircumcised sage and every one who under- stood their books... So he understood and knew all their error and the darkness in which he had been.” See vol. 1, p. 95.


for I say to you that the Jews have been in this captivity for such a long time because of their folly and stupidity and for lack of a teacher of righteousness through whom they may know the truth.”


38. Abner-Afonso’s spiritual stresses seem to have begun originally with his experience of meeting and helping many Jews when the messianic hopes of many Jews of Avilá and Ayllón in 1295 turned out to be false. Much of the information about the event and its impact on Abner-Afonso come from fragments of his first now-lost work, *Sefor Milhamot Adonai* (Book of the Wars of the Lord), preserved in the *Scrinium Scripturarum* of Pablo de Santa María and the *Fortalitium Fidei* of Alonso de Spina. False prophets in both towns allegedly predicted that in the year 1295 (5055 AM), on the last day of the summer month Tammuz, the Jews would be called out of exile. After preparing themselves with penitence and alms, they assembled in the synagogue in white garments, as for Yom Kippur. According to Santa María, *Scrinium Scripturarum* (Burgos, 1591), p. 525, and De Spina, *Fortalitium Fidei*, 3.10 (Nuremberg, 1549), p. 172a, Abner-Afonso’s work related that crosses appeared on their clothing, and when they arrived home they found their garments there also marked. According to De Spina, some of these sought medical advice from Abner-Afonso, and this consultation seems to have been the source of his first doubt in his ancestral faith. Abner-Afonso compares his dream directly to these events in the *Mostrador*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r–14v ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, pp. 13–14.


41. BT *Gitin* 40b; *Kiddushin* 65b; *Bava Mezia* 3b. *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 32v ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 52. Interestingly, the word for litigation, *pleito*, is the same one he uses in his conversion account when “thinking on this conflict—pleito—I went to synagogue to pray.” See *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r–14v ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 13.

42. “Min ha-er asher hesitat na’aseh la’asot ke-devar ha-eseh en le-kha reshut lehitnai ha-galui u-ledabbi we-li-on ki im be-divre ha-emunah asher ehez sha’va.” See Parma MS 2440/De Rossi, p. 533, 6b, in Hecht, *The Polemical Exchange*, p. 337. This letter is untitled in the Parma manuscript, but as Jonathan Hecht, p. 51, n. 7, noted, an expanded version of the letter contained in Isaac’s longer work, *Ezer ha-Dat*, gives it the title *Teshuvot Abyron*, or *A Response to the Heretic*.

Of all the critics who have considered Abner-Afonso’s work, only Sainz de la Maza has intimated the importance of Abner-Afonso’s dream vision in constructing this dramatic persona of authenticity. Carlos Sainz de la Maza, “Vi en vision de suelos: Conversión religiosa y autobiografía onírica en Abner de Burgos, almirante de Valladolid,” *Complutenses Monografías de literatura española* 1 (1992): 186–208.

43. “Non lo memorábales, e tollero dele mi corazón e mi imaginación, e ffincarás en la mi fe en que nasíc, como fíncé mi padre e mi abuelo e todas mis generaciones, si quiero ser boa fe o mala, e non cataré a mi corazón nin a mis pensamientos, ca non so yo mejor que mis parientes.” (I will not remember it any more, and I will remove it from my heart and my imagination, and I will remain in the faith in which I was born, just as my father and my grandfather and all my ancestors remained. No matter if it is a good faith or a bad one, I will not pay attention to my heart or my thoughts, for I am no better than my relatives.) *Mostrador de justicia*, BnF MS esp. 43, 12r–14v ed. Mettmann, vol. 1, p. 13.

44. He explains, “convertirme... para salvar mi alma de los mis pecados e de los pecados de todos los judíos, que tenía a cuestas sin no descubriese a sus oreyes lo que me
mcstraron del cielo" (I converted... to save my soul from my sins and from the sins of
all Jews, for whom I was responsible if I did not reveal to their ears what was shown to
me from heaven). See Mosadr ad justicia, BNF MS esp. 43, 13e/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1,
p. 15.
39i.
47. "Yo [he] miedo de ti, digo verdad a Dios, que quizás me engañarás" (I am afraid of
you—I tell God the truth—that perhaps you will trick me). See Mosadr ad justicia,
48. The original Hebrew reads: "Mi hayah ha-magid otaot hagadah, isrâ'el o nosri o min
she-hayay noheg ke-isrâ'el u-ma'amim ke-nosri? Im isrâ'el hayah, be-emet o'imro al
ha-sad she-amara, she im ken lo isrâ'el hayah. Ve-im nosri, en li leha'amim to be-mah
she amar ba-zeh we-vo'mar ma she-vo'mar. Ve-im min, lo lanu u-la-keni leha'amim
be-mah she yo'mar." See Penukh Aggadot, ed. Perles, in R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adreth,
Hebrew sec., p. 42. On this passage, see Chazan, Doggers of Faith, pp. 154—57.
49. Pagio Fidei, p. 3. This passage is similar to an earlier passage from Martini's Capitum
Judaeorum, ed. Adolfo Robles Sierra (Würzburg: Echter, 1990), 2:282, where he notes
that "Exterius etenim comedit, et iterius proicit, qui sapienter comedit dactylos" (he
who eats dates wisely consumes the fruit outside and spits out the seed inside),
50. "Yo me ayudo de la verdad de quien quier que la diga" (I help myself to the truth from
whoever says it). See Mosadr ad justicia, BNF MS esp. 43, 32v/ed. Mettmann, vol. 1,
p. 52. This statement can be found in the works of various writers, and was written
by Maimonides in the introduction to the Thamâniyâh fustal (Eight Chapters), within
his Arabic commentary on the Mishnah Aseit. He says, "Wa-isra' la-baqq min-man
qââ-hu" (Accept the truth from whoever says it). See "Eight Chapters" of Maimonides,