

Ryan Szpiech

## ***The Book of Nestor the Priest and the Toledot Yešu in the Polemics of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid***

The polemical writings of the Castilian Jewish convert Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid (d. c. 1347) can be considered uniquely valuable from a variety of perspectives: they contain many citations and references not found in other texts of the period; they include texts written in both Hebrew and Romance and so constitute a point at which these Iberian intellectual traditions overlap; they take a variety of textual forms, including polemical dialogue, exegesis, philosophical argumentation, and first-person testimony recounting the author's conversion to Christianity; and they make reference to contemporary events, shedding light on Jewish and Christian religious life in the first half of the fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> While scholars have been exploring this corpus of writings for over a century now, it continues to yield new and valuable information about a host of topics, including Jewish-Christian debate half a century before the calamitous riots of 1391, the history of Romance Bible translation, and the transmission of Hebrew and Arabic philosophical texts in Castile, among others. However, many questions remain to be explored.<sup>2</sup>

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1 For the historical background of Iberian Jewry in the fourteenth century, see Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 1:306–78 and 2:1–94. For a more recent treatment of Jewish-Christian relations, see Mark D. Meyerson, *Jews in an Iberian Frontier Kingdom: Society, Economy, and Politics in Morvedre, 1248–1391* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), especially 210–62; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), especially 69–124; Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), especially 63–80; Tartakoff, “Testing Boundaries: Jewish Conversion and Cultural Fluidity in Medieval Europe, c. 1200–1391,” *Speculum* 90 (2015): 728–62; and Maya Soifer Irish, *Jews and Christians in Medieval Castile: Tradition, Coexistence, and Change* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 151–261.

2 For information about Abner's surviving writing, see, Dwayne E. Carpenter, “Alfonso de Valladolid,” in *Diccionario filológico de literatura medieval española. Textos y transmisión*, ed. Carlos Alvar and José Manuel Lucía Megías (Madrid: Castalia, 2002): 140–52; Ryan Szpiech,

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One of the points on which Abner/Alfonso's writings offer valuable insights is the circulation of contemporary texts participating in Jewish-Christian debate. This article will consider a handful of unique citations preserved in the Castilian translations of Abner/Alfonso's work that offer such insights. These citations include *The Book of Nestor the Priest*, a twelfth-century Hebrew polemic written from the perspective of an alleged convert to Judaism, and the *Toledot Yešu*, the scurrilous anti-biography of Jesus that circulated in numerous versions across many centuries, beginning at least in the ninth, but possibly earlier. An examination of these little-known references will contribute to our understanding of Abner/Alfonso's use of sources and will also shed light on the circulation of Hebrew and Aramaic polemical writing in Iberia in the later Middle Ages. The Castilian citations of both the *Nestor* text and the *Toledot Yešu* have been largely overlooked by scholarship on these texts, and thus a study of these passages will contribute new information about the circulation and impact of Hebrew polemics in fourteenth-century Iberia.

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"Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History. Volume 4 (1200–1350)*, ed. David Thomas, Alex Mallett, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012): 955–76; and below, nn. 7–13. On the specific events leading up to 1391, see Philippe Wolff, "The 1391 Pogrom in Spain. Social Crisis or Not?," *Past and Present* 50 (February 1971): 4–18; Maya Soifer Irish, "Toward 1391: The Anti-Jewish Preaching of Ferrán Martínez in Seville," in *The Medieval Roots of Antisemitism: Continuities and Discontinuities from the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Hess (New York: Routledge, 2018): 306–19; and Maurice Kriegel, *Les juifs à la fin du Moyen Âge dans l'Europe méditerranéenne*, new augmented ed. (Paris: Hachette, 1994), especially 206–15; Emilio Mitre Fernández, *Los judíos de Castilla en el tiempo de Enrique III: El pogrom de 1391* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1994); and Benjamin Gampel, *Anti-Jewish Riots in the Crown of Aragon and the Royal Response, 1391–1392*, paperback ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018). On fourteenth-century Jewish-Christian debate in this context, see the appropriate passages in Daniel J. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2007), starting with 14–15, and throughout. On Abner/Alfonso's work in the context of 1391, see Ryan Szpiech, "On the Road to 1391? Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid on Forced Conversion," in *Forced Conversion in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam: Coercion and Faith in Premodern Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Mercedes García-Arenal and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan (Leiden: Brill, 2019): 175–204. On his work in the context of Romance Bible translation, see Szpiech, "Translating between the Lines: Medieval Polemic, Romance Bibles, and the Castilian Works of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid," *Medieval Encounters* 22 (2016): 113–39. On his work in the context of philosophical translations from Arabic, see Szpiech, "In Search of ibn Sina's 'Oriental Philosophy' in Medieval Castile," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 20 (2010): 185–206, and Ruth Glasner and Avinoam Baraness, *Alfonso's Rectifying the Curved: A Fourteenth-Century Hebrew Geometrical Philosophical Treatise*. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 8–9 and 16–30.

## Abner/Alfonso's Works

In order to understand the place of these Castilian references in their historical context, it is necessary to give a brief survey of the nature and extent of Abner/Alfonso's corpus of writings. It is estimated that he was born in c. 1260–1270 and that he was over forty years old – perhaps over fifty – when he converted to Christianity around 1320.<sup>3</sup> He is known to have written various philosophical works before his conversion, but none of these has survived. Following his turn to Christianity, after which he moved from his native Burgos to Valladolid and changed his name from Abner to Alfonso (perhaps taking the name of King Alfonso XI), he embarked on a polemical career spanning over two decades. Between the early 1320s and the mid-1340s, he wrote a number of polemical works – all in Hebrew – attacking Judaism and arguing in favor of the truth of Christianity and the identity of Jesus as the Messiah hoped for in Jewish tradition. Around the time of his conversion, he wrote what seems to be his first Christian work, *Sefer Milḥamot Adonai* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), which he translated into Castilian at the behest of the *infanta*, Doña Blanca, lady of the monastery of Las Huelgas in Burgos. Given that Blanca died in 1321,<sup>4</sup> we know this work was written by this date, although the translation could conceivably have been completed after her death. The title *Sefer Milḥamot* reproduces the title of Jacob ben Reuben's twelfth-century anti-Christian polemic, and Abner/Alfonso may have been directly responding to that work, although some scholars question this.<sup>5</sup> While

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<sup>3</sup> Pablo de Santa María states that Abner/Alfonso converted when he was sixty years old (*Scrutinium Scripturarum* [Burgos: Philippum Iuntam, 1591], 521), implying that his birth was around the year 1260. On Abner/Alfonso's biography, see Ryan Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 146–47; and Szpiech, “From *Testimonia* to Testimony: Thirteenth-Century Anti-Jewish Polemic and the *Mostrador de justicia* of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), 307–24.

<sup>4</sup> For documentation confirming this date, see Araceli Castro Garrido, ed., *Documentación del monasterio de Las Huelgas de Burgos (1307–1321)* (Burgos: Garrido Garrido, 2002). Flórez gives the incorrect death date of 1331 rather than 1321, and he was followed by Yitzhak Baer, among others. See Carlos Saínz de la Maza, “Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio del manuscrito ‘Lat. 6423’ de la Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana” (PhD diss., Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1990), 191, n. 90, who points out the error. The other sources on Doña Blanca all concur on the correct date of death.

<sup>5</sup> There is no explicit mention of ben Reuben or his work in any of Abner/Alfonso's writing, but there are examples of his arguments in some places. The Nestor reference (discussed below, pp. 280–83) stating that the sins against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven cited above can be found, as Stroumsa and Lasker point out (see Daniel J. Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest* [Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1986], 1:145; and see below, n. 31), in ben Reuben's

neither the original Hebrew version nor the Castilian translation are extant, fragments of the work have survived in Latin translation in quotations in the *Fortaliti-um fidei* by the fifteenth-century Franciscan Alonso de Spina.<sup>6</sup> Based on what can be gleaned from those fragments, there seems to be a substantial overlap between this lost work and the next work that Abner/Alfonso composed, the *Moreh Sedeq* (*Teacher of Righteousness*), which today survives only in a contemporary Castilian translation under the title *Mostrador de justicia*.<sup>7</sup> In his work *Even Boḥan* (*Touchstone*) from ca. 1380/85, the fourteenth-century polemicist Shem Tov ibn Shaprut responded at length to Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milḥamot* in a number of additional chapters added to the text a decade and a half after its initial composition (ca. 1400).<sup>8</sup> Some of these passages are also repeated or reworked in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, further suggesting continuity between the two texts.

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polemical *Sefer Milḥamot* as well. See Jacob ben Reuben, *Sefer Milḥamot Adonai*, ed. Judah Rosenthal (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1963), 153. Heinrich Graetz first discussed this question in *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart*, vol. 7 (Leipzig: Leiner, 1863), 451–52, arguing that the parts of Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milḥamot* preserved in De Spina's *Fortaliti-um Fidei* do not support the idea that Abner/Alfonso was responding to ben Reuben's work by the same name. Isidore Loeb ("Polémistes chrétiens et juifs en France et en Espagne," *Revue des études juives* 18 [1889]: 221), who adopts Graetz's other conclusions, shows that this is impossible as ibn Shaprut responds to the *Mostrador* in previous books of the work (e.g., even in book 1 of the *Even Boḥan*), stating that he is refuting a work he had not previously known. Rosenthal, who edited the work of both ben Reuben and Abner/Alfonso, also accepts that, based on the *Fortaliti-um*, Abner/Alfonso's alleged response to ben Reuben was not the *Sefer Milḥamot* and instead proposes Abner/Alfonso's "Malliciones de los judios" (Jacob ben Reuben, *Sefer Milḥamot*, p. xx, n. 56). Carlos del Valle Rodríguez, who edited the known fragments of Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milḥamot*, rejects any connection to ben Reuben and calls Rosenthal's alternative proposal "gratuitous" ("El Libro de las batallas de Dios, de Abner de Burgos," in *Polémica judeo-cristiana. Estudios*, ed. Carlos del Valle Rodríguez [Madrid: Aben Ezra, 1992]: 103, n. 77).

<sup>6</sup> The extant citations are edited and translated in del Valle Rodríguez, "El Libro de las batallas de Dios de Abner de Burgos."

<sup>7</sup> The *Mostrador de justicia* survives in a single manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Espagnol 43, fols. 12r–342v, and it was edited by Walter Mettmann (Abner de Burgos, *Mostrador de justicia*, ed. Walter Mettmann, 2 vols. [Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994–1996]).

<sup>8</sup> On ibn Shaprut, see Samuel Krauss, *The Jewish-Christian Controversy. From the Earliest Times to 1789. Volume 1: History*, ed. and rev. William Horbury (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 1:241–42; William Horbury, "The Revision of Shem Tob ibn Shaprut's 'Eben Boḥan,'" *Sefarad* 43, no. 2 (1983): 221–37; Norman Frimer and Dov Schwartz, *The Life and Thought of Shem Ṭov Ibn Shaprut* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1992); Loeb, "Polémistes chrétiens," 219–30; Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500*, trans. James Manley (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 151–55; and Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, *La piedra de toque*, ed. and trans. José-Vicente Niclós (Madrid: CSIC, 1997). On ibn Shaprut's response to Abner/Alfonso, see the remarks in Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought*, 28–29, 33–37.

The *Moreh/Mostrador* is divided into ten chapters and takes the form of a polemical debate between a Christian character, the “Teacher” (*Moreh*), and a Jewish antagonist, the “Rebel” (*Mored*). It sets out to

mostrar la ffe cierta, e la verdat e la justicia en ella, a los judios, que la avien mester [. . .] e para rresponder a todas la contradicones e las dubdas o las más dellas, que nos pueden ffazer todo judio rrebelde e contradezidor a las nuestras palabras.

(show the correct faith, and the truth and justice in it, to the Jews who have need of it [. . .] and to respond to all the contrary statements and doubts, or most of them, which every rebel and contrary Jew can make to our words).<sup>9</sup>

In concrete terms, the work presents Christian responses to Jewish arguments against Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the incarnation, and the identity of Jesus as the true Messiah. It is not only Abner/Alfonso’s earliest surviving work, as well as his longest (extending to nearly 400,000 words), but it is also his most elaborate, including the greatest number and variety of source citations and the most developed exposition of his arguments.<sup>10</sup> Apart from this work, he also composed a philosophical treatise on determinism and free will entitled *Minḥat Qena’ot* (*An Offering of Zeal*), which also only survives in Castilian under the title *Ofrenda de zelos* (or *Libro del zelo de Dios*). Another very short work based on the *Moreh/Mostrador* called the *Libro de la ley* (*Book of the Law*) survives only in Castilian, and it is not clear whether it is a translation of a Hebrew original or whether it was originally composed in Romance.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to these exclusively Castilian works, one long work and three letters also survive in both Hebrew originals and Castilian translations. The long work, a response to an attack by Abner/Alfonso’s former colleague Isaac Pollegar, is titled *Tešuvot la-Meharef* (*Responses to the Blasphemer*), known as *Respuestas al blasfemo* in Castilian. The three letters that survive in both Hebrew

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<sup>9</sup> Abner de Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid, *Mostrador de justicia*, fol. 13r/1:15, hereafter denoted as *Mostrador*. All citations from the *Mostrador* will provide the folio number of the manuscript followed by the volume and page of Mettmann’s edition.

<sup>10</sup> For a full study of the *Mostrador de justicia* in the context of medieval polemical writing, which includes a full bibliography of relevant sources, see Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, chapter 5.

<sup>11</sup> The *Libro de la ley* is also found in the same manuscript as the *Mostrador*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Espagnol 43, fols. 1r–10v, and was also edited by Walter Mettmann (Abner de Burgos, *Ofrenda de zelos [Minḥat Qēna’ot] und Libro de la ley* [Oplanden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990], 87–118). This same edition, 13–86, includes the *Ofrenda de zelos*, a text preserved in Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Lat. 6423, fols. 1r–41r.

and Castilian have no titles.<sup>12</sup> Finally, another work entitled *Tešuvot ha-Mešubot* (*Responses to the Apostasies*), which constitutes a reply to the responses to the three letters, survives only in Hebrew.<sup>13</sup> A number of other Hebrew works, including a mathematical work entitled *Meyaššer 'Aqov* (*Straightening the Curve*) and an untitled poem, have been attributed to Abner/Alfonso with some probability.<sup>14</sup> Debate continues surrounding the possibility that he was the author of a few other Castilian works, including the *Libro de las tres creencias* (*Book of the Three Faiths*) and *Sermones contra los judíos y moros* (*Sermons against the Jews and Moors*), although recent work has called these attributions into serious

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**12** The Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana manuscript that contains the *Ofrenda de zelos*, MS Lat. 6423, also contains the Castilian translation of the *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*, called *Respuestas al blasfemo* (fols 41r–89r), as well as that of the three polemical letters, fols. 90r–98r, all of which is found in Hebrew in Parma, Biblioteca Palatina de Parma, MS 2440 (“De Rossi 533”). The Hebrew *Teshuvot* was edited, translated, and studied at length in a doctoral dissertation by Jonathan Hecht, “The Polemical Exchange between Isaac Pollegar and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid according to Parma MS 2440: *Iggeret Teshuvat Apikoros* and *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref*” (PhD diss., New York University, 1993). Also of relevance is Shoshanah G. Gershenzon, “A Study of *Teshuvot la-Meḥaref* by Abner of Burgos” (Ph.D. diss., Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1984). The Castilian version was edited by Walter Mettmann as *Tēšuvot la-Mēḥaref. Spanische Fassung* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998). For a full study of MS Lat. 6423, including an edition of the whole manuscript, see Sainz de la Maza, “Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio.” For full bibliographical information about Abner’s surviving writing, see Carpenter, “Alfonso de Valladolid,” and Szpiech, “Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid.”

**13** The text is found in Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440, fols 110r–137r. Judah Rosenthal edited the text under the title *Sefer Teshubot haMeshubot*. Although there is some confusion over the title, Benjamin Richler, *Hebrew Manuscripts in the Biblioteca Palatina in Parma. Catalogue. Paleographical and codicological descriptions by Malachi Beit-Arié* (Jerusalem: Jewish National and Univeristy Library, 2001), p. 404a, gives the same title as Rosenthal. I have confirmed through an examination of the manuscript that the text clearly reads תשובות המשובות and not תשובות התשובות.

**14** First published as *Mēyaššer 'āqōb*, ed. G. M. Gluskina (Moscow, 1983). For a new edition with an English translation and study, see Glasner and Baraness, *Alfonso's Rectifying the Curved*. On the question of authorship, see also Gad Freudenthal, “Two Notes on the ‘*Sefer Meyasher 'akov*’ by Alfonso, alias Abner of Burgos.” [Hebrew] *Kiryat Sefer* 63:3 (5750–51/1990–91): 984–6. Rpt. and trans. in Gad Freudenthal, *Science in the Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Traditions* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). IX. On the poem attributed to Abner/Alfonso, see A. M. Haberman, “Rabbi Abner’s Confession of Sins” [Hebrew], in *Sefer Yovel li-Khevod ha-Rav Doktor Šimon Federbuš*, ed Y. L. ha-Kohen Maimon (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1961): 173–99.

doubt.<sup>15</sup> The titles of at least ten more Hebrew works that are attributed to Abner/Alfonso are known, but all are now lost.<sup>16</sup>

While Abner/Alfonso pursued some purely philosophical questions relating to free will and determinism, above all in his *Minḥat Qena'ot*, virtually all of his writing after his conversion was engaged in religious polemic, and his relationship with rabbinical, exegetical, philosophical, historiographical, or mystical sources is based on specific and utilitarian needs related to his larger polemical argument. Despite Abner/Alfonso's deep debt to the philosophical ideas of Maimonides and his effort to blend ideas from philosophy, mysticism, and exegesis, his relationship to polemical sources and ideas is also important for his overall project in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, as well as in his later writings. Certainly, he cites fewer polemical sources than philosophical texts, and fewer philosophical texts than biblical and talmudic sources. Nevertheless, Shalom Sadik has persuasively argued that Abner/Alfonso's most important and influential sources were philosophical, supporting the theory that he had a fundamentally Neoplatonic worldview.<sup>17</sup> A consideration of Abner/Alfonso's sources shows that his use of earlier Christian polemical texts was minimal compared to his use of Jewish anti-Christian sources. For the most part, Abner/Alfonso deliberately avoids using non-Jewish sources, and when he does, they mostly come from classical and Arabic philosophical authors who had already been translated into Hebrew and who were known to the Jewish intellectuals

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15 Carpenter has published the text as *Text and Concordance of Libro de las tres creencias*, *Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid Ms 9302*, ed. Dwayne E. Carpenter (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993). On the debate surrounding its attribution to Abner/Alfonso, see Walter Mettmann, "El *Libro declarante*, una obra falsamente atribuida a Alfonso de Valladolid," in *Homenaje a Alonso Zamora Vicente*, 5 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1988–1996): 3: 71–76. Szpiech, "Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid"; and Carlos Sáinz de la Maza, "La reescritura de obras de polémica antijudía: El *Libro de las tres creencias* y unos 'sermones' sorianos," *Cahiers d'études hispaniques médiévales* 29 (2006): 151–72, which establishes the *Libro* and the *Sermones* as parts of the same work. Most recently, Carlos Sáinz de la Maza and Amparo Alba, "Citas bíblicas en el *Libro de las tres creencias* atribuido a Alfonso de Valladolid," in *Perspectivas bíblicas en la literatura española*, ed. Shai Cohen (Granada: Editorial Universidad de Granada, 2019): 13–48, provide a very convincing demonstration that the *Libro* is not the work of Abner/Alfonso.

16 For information about Abner/Alfonso's possible lost works, see Szpiech, "From *Testimony* to *Testimony*," 585–92.

17 Shalom Sadik, "The Trinity and Determinism in the Philosophy of Abner of Burgos" [Hebrew] (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2011). On Abner/Alfonso's Neoplatonic thought, see especially 190–94, and also Sadik, "Is 'R. Abner' Abner of Burgos?" [Hebrew], *Kabbalah* 22 (2010): 331–48. On the influence of Abner/Alfonso's philosophical views, see, for example, Sadik, "Rabbi Hasdai Crescas' Critique of Aristotle and the Lost Book of Abner of Burgos" [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 77 (2008): 133–55.

of Spain and Provence. With a wealth of citations, he shows a profound knowledge of major rabbinical themes and ideas in the Talmud and major midrashim and also of other examples from many periods of Jewish writing, including major works by Sa'adyah Gaon, Moses ben Samuel Gikatilla, Maimonides (including Maimonides's legal discussion of commandments), David Qimḥi, Rashi, Abraham ibn Ezra, and numerous others, as well as works of medieval historiography such as the *Sefer Yosippon*, ibn Daud's *Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah)*, and even apocalyptic works such as the *Sefer Zerubavel*. He also cites directly from twelfth-century Jewish anti-Christian literature such as Joseph Qimḥi's (d. 1170) *Book of the Covenant (Sefer ha-Berit)* and from thirteenth-century polemics such as Nahhmanides's Hebrew account of the disputation of Barcelona in 1263. Because of this plethora of citation and allusions, Abner/Alfonso's work is an unexploited treasure trove of references to rabbinical literature and medieval Jewish writing.

Abner/Alfonso's relationship to these polemical sources from the Jewish tradition is, in this context, of critical importance not only for a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of his source material, but also for a fuller understanding of the circulation of these texts in the later Middle Ages. The remainder of this study will focus on Abner/Alfonso's use of two particular texts, the *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer (Book of Nestor the Priest)* and the *Toledot Yešu (Life Story of Jesus)*.<sup>18</sup> Scholars have studied both works – which, given their multiple versions and complicated transmission histories, might be termed “textual traditions” rather than single works – yet Abner/Alfonso's Castilian citations of both have not been thoroughly analyzed in scholarly literature. A study of Abner/Alfonso's citations of both works in the *Moreh/Mostrador* yields new details about the reception of both in fourteenth-century Iberia and provides a good example of the wide variety of sources preserved in Abner/Alfonso's unique corpus.

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**18** The critical edition of the *Nestor* texts, as well as a full critical bibliography, are available in Lasker and Stroumsa, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*. The first modern edition of the *Toledot Yeshu* was by Samuel Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu nach jüdische Quellen* (Berlin: S. Calvary, 1902). The definitive edition, including a study of all relevant textual traditions and variants, is Michael Meerson and Peter Schäfer, eds., *Toledot Yeshu: The Life Story of Jesus. Two Volumes and Database*, 2 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). See also Yaacov Deutsch, “New Evidence of Early Versions of ‘Toledot Yeshu’” [Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 69 (2000): 177–97, on the oldest manuscript tradition.



## The “Book of Lies” by “Nestor the Apostate”

Among the many references to medieval polemical literature that Abner/Alfonso included in his writing are a handful of citations of a book he calls “El libro de las mentiras” (“The Book of Lies”) by one “Niztor el Tornadizo” (Nestor the Apostate/Renegade). Elsewhere, he names it the “libro de Niztor el clérigo” (“book of Nestor the priest”), suggesting that he is referring to the *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*, a twelfth-century Hebrew text written in the Iberian Peninsula, which was based on the earlier Arabic text *Qiṣṣat Muğādalat al-Uṣquf* (*Account of the Disputation of the Priest*). As Daniel J. Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa point out in their edition of the versions of this work, the *Qiṣṣat* dates from the ninth century, representing the earliest surviving Jewish polemical treatise attacking Christianity. The Hebrew version (*Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*) expands and reworks the Arabic text, and it is in this expanded form that Abner/Alfonso read the work.<sup>19</sup>

All signs confirm that Abner/Alfonso knew only the Hebrew version of the text. Not only does he cite the work according to its Hebrew title as the *Libro de Niztor el clerigo* (*Book of Nestor the Cleric/Priest*) instead of using the Arabic title, but he also twice refers to the text as the “Libro de las mentiras” (“Book of Lies”), a title that could be understood as a response to the term that the Hebrew *Nestor* uses to refer to the Gospels, the “Book of Your Error” (*sefer ʔaʔutkhem*). Stroumsa and Lasker point out that this language is used in the Hebrew version to translate something called *inḡīl* (“gospel”) in the Arabic version, which can be taken as a sign of the transformations of the text when translated in a Christian-majority context. Although it seems certain from his direct citations that Abner/Alfonso knew the Hebrew text first hand, it is impossible to tell which of the four surviving manuscripts his source copy was most aligned with, if any.<sup>20</sup>

Abner/Alfonso mentions Nestor’s polemic five times in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, though nowhere else in his surviving works. None of these references has been specifically identified, and in fact, only a few scholars have even mentioned their existence. Carlos Sáinz de la Maza drew attention to the citations, but his

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<sup>19</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:14. See also the proposal by Harvey J. Hames in his review of Stroumsa and Lasker’s edition (*Jewish Quarterly Review* 91, nos. 3–4 [2000]: 471–74) that the work originated as an internal Christian polemic written by a Nestorian. On the influence of the Nestor text on polemics, see Joel E. Rembaum, “The Influence of *Sefer Nestor Hakomer* on Medieval Jewish Polemics,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 155–85. For additional analysis of the narrative structure of the *Nestor* text, see also Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative*, 108–14.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the four Hebrew manuscripts of *The Book of Nestor*, see Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, 1:93–95.

article came out before the *Nestor* text had been edited and its versions collated and studied. Although Abner/Alfonso's references present numerous differences from existing versions of the Nestor texts, most of them can now be identified. For example, in chapter 2 of the *Moreh/Mostrador* (dedicated to proving that the coming of the Messiah would introduce a new law), section 19 (dedicated to examples of figurative language), the Teacher and the Rebel debate the meaning of biblical words. The Teacher responds to an assertion made by the Rebel in the previous section that the words of the law cannot be changed:

E non dize en el Evangelio, como tú dix[i]este otrossi, e que te ffizo errar Niztor el Tornadizo en el “Libro de las Mintiras,” que escribió a los judios, de que dixiera que todo el qui tolliere la menor **cosa** de todos los dichos de Moysen será llamado menguado en en el regno del çielo. Ca non dixo assi, mas dixo que “todo el qui tolliere aun el menor destes **mandamientos**, mingüado será llamado en el regno del çielo.”<sup>21</sup>

(It does not say in the Gospels, as you said – for Nestor the Apostate made you err with the “Book of Lies,” which he wrote for the Jews – that anyone who removes the smallest **thing** from all the sayings of Moses will be deficient in the Kingdom of Heaven. It does not say this, but instead says that [Matt 5:19] “anyone who removes the least of those **commandments** will be held as deficient in the Kingdom of Heaven.”) [emphasis in bold is mine]

At first glance, it might seem that this passage is a better representation of the Arabic version of the text than the Hebrew version because that version actually quotes Matt 5:19, including the specific phrase that “whoever abolishes any of its commandments [Ar. *waṣāyā*] and performs other commandments will be called ‘deficient’ in the Kingdom of Heaven.”<sup>22</sup> However, if we start not with the words of the Teacher, but with those of the Jewish Rebel to which he responds, we can see an even closer parallel with the words of the *Nestor* text and a closer resemblance to the Hebrew version. In section 18 (just before the above passage), the Rebel says:

Dize en el uuestro Euangelio que dixo Jhesu, el uuestro Cristo, que él non veno para minguar nin desatar nin mudar de la Ley de Moysen e de los prophetas nin vna letra nin un punto, ssinon que vino para conplir los dichos de la uerdad. E dixo otrossi: “El çielo e la tierra pasarán, e los dichos de Moysen non pasarán ninguna cosa fasta que todos ssean conplidos.” E otrossi dixo que todo qui passare vna cosa de todos los dichos de Moysen, pequenna nin grande, será llamado pequenno e mingüado en el rregno del çielo.<sup>23</sup>

(It says in your Gospel that Jesus, your Christ, said that he did not come to diminish or undo or change the Law of Moses and of the prophets by one letter or dot, but rather that he came

<sup>21</sup> *Mostrador*, 70v/1:130.

<sup>22</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, §35, 2:36 (trans. 1:58–59).

<sup>23</sup> *Mostrador*, 67r, but cf. Mettmann's emendations – incorrect in my view – on 1:122.

to fulfill the words of truth. It also says, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but the words of Moses will not pass away in any way until all of them be fulfilled.” And it also said “anyone who should deviate in any way from all the words of Moses, small or large, will be called small and deficient in the Kingdom of Heaven.”)

In the first part of this passage, the Rebel paraphrases Matt 5:18 (“Until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished”). In the final portion, he also paraphrases Matt 5:19 (“Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven”).

Neither the Greek original nor the Vulgate rendering of Matt 5:19 names Moses, mentioning only “these commandments.” However, both the Arabic and the Hebrew versions of the *Nestor* text name Moses, and thus Abner/Alfonso’s rendering of this phrase is also telling. The Rebel’s mention of “anything from all the words of Moses” (“vna cosa de todos los dichos de Moysen”) closely matches the words of the Hebrew Nestor, “even one word of Moses’s words” (“davar eḥad me-divrei Mošeh”). By contrast, the corresponding Arabic passage, which only appears in some of the manuscripts, renders this as “a word of Moses’s **commandment**” (“kalimat min **amr** mūsā”).<sup>24</sup> A close comparison of details like these confirms, perhaps not surprisingly, that Abner/Alfonso made use of the Hebrew *Book of Nestor* and not the Arabic *Account of the Disputation*.

The second reference to Nestor in the *Moreh/Mostrador* similarly derives from the Hebrew text. The Christian Teacher claims:

Quando dixo que él non vinia para desatar la Ley nin los dichos de los prophetas, non lo dizia por los mandamientos çerimoniales, como lo tenia Niztor el Tornadizo e los judios que ssiguen a él.

(When [Jesus] said that he did not come to undo the law or the sayings of the prophets, he was not speaking about the ceremonial commandments, as was maintained by Nestor the apostate and the Jews who followed him.)<sup>25</sup>

Rather, he concludes:

Estos uierbos sson dichos en la Ley por dar a entender que de parte de los mandamientos morales durará para siempre jamas e de parte de las ceremonias abrá acabamiento.

(These words [of Jesus] are said regarding the law in order to mean that, in terms of moral commandments, it will last forever, but in terms of ritual practice, it will come to an end.)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Book of Nestor*, §70–71, 2:49 and 102 (trans 1:113).

<sup>25</sup> *Mostrador*, 71v/1:132.

<sup>26</sup> *Mostrador*, 72r/1:133.

In both sections of the *Book of Nestor* that refer to Jesus's claim that he did not come to annul the law or the sayings of the prophets (sections 34–35 and 70–71 respectively), reference is also made to practice in worship. In section 34, for example, the text asks, “How can you worship someone who does not have [his own] religious practice?”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, in section 71, it asks, “If you say that Jesus told the truth because he did not change anything in the words of Moses, where did God command [you] to worship three [persons]?”<sup>28</sup> In both places where the abrogation of the law is mentioned, the *Nestor* text discusses the importance of upholding not only traditional belief, but also accepted religious practice. Abner/Alfonso, by contrast, in arguing that only the moral law was to be preserved whereas ritual practice was to be abrogated and changed, stresses one of the key themes of chapter 2 of the *Moreh/Mostrador*; namely, “para prouar que auia a sser Ley nueua a la venida del Christo” (“to prove that there was to be a new law upon the coming of the Christ”).<sup>29</sup>

The next reference to *The Polemic of Nestor* in the *Moreh/Mostrador* presents an equally interesting example of Abner/Alfonso's intimate awareness of the details of the text. In chapter 5, which presents an apologetic defense of the doctrine of the Incarnation, the Jewish Rebel questions the notion presented in the Gospels (Matt 12:32; Mark 3:28–29; Luke 12:10) that every sin, including blasphemy “against the Son of Man,” will be forgiven, except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. “This,” he says, “es locura e necedad” (“is insanity and foolishness”). He explains:

Ca ssi el Padre e el Ffijo perdonaren, e el Spiritu Santo non perdonare, pues luego ponedes a Dios dos uoluntades e dos pensamientos, la vna que perdona, e la otra que no perdona, e es contra la unidat de Dios.

(For if the Father and Son forgive but the Holy Spirit does not forgive, you attribute to God two wills and two thoughts, one that pardons and the other that does not pardon, and this goes against the unity of God.)<sup>30</sup>

An attentive reading of the biblical verses in question indicates that the Rebel's argument changes the role played by the persons of the Trinity from being the object of blasphemy to being the active judge of it, and this is what the Teacher rejects. The Rebel's reading can, in fact, be found precisely in the Hebrew version of *The Book of Nestor*, which in section 28a reads:

<sup>27</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, §34, 2:118 (trans. 1:105).

<sup>28</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, §71, 2:125 (trans. 1:113).

<sup>29</sup> *Mostrador*, 43v/1:73.

<sup>30</sup> *Mostrador*, 141v/1:274.

It is written in your erroneous book that he who curses the Father can be pardoned and he who curses the Son can be pardoned when he regrets, but he who curses the Holy Spirit cannot be pardoned either in this world or in the world to come. [. . .] Where did this man go, the man who was pardoned by part of the divinity and not by another part?<sup>31</sup>

*Nestor's* presentation of the theme from the Gospels that a sin against the Holy Spirit is unpardonable introduces the notion that the different persons of the Trinity are responsible for pardoning sins committed “against them.” Thus, a sin against the Father or Son will be pardoned by the Father or Son respectively, and a sin against the Holy Spirit will not be pardoned by the Holy Spirit. In this way, the text introduces the notion of that a man can be “pardoned by part of the divinity and not by another part.” This extended meaning is repeated by the Rebel in the *Moreh/Mostrador* (although without reference to the *Nestor* text), prompting the Teacher to insist:

Non es fallada esta palabra en el Evangelio assi como tú dixiste, mas que Niztor, clerigo ereje, la assacó de su coraçon e la escrivió en el “Libro de las mintiras” que conpuso para reprehender a los christianos.

(This verse [lit. “word”]) is not found in the Gospels in the way you said it. Rather, Nestor, a heretical priest, took it from his heart and wrote it in the “Book of Lies” that he wrote to rebuke the Christians.)<sup>32</sup>

In the *Moreh/Mostrador*, Abner/Alfonso thus makes reference to the Hebrew *Book of Nestor* in the words spoken by the Christian Teacher and also makes use of the arguments therein to help supply the words of the Jewish Rebel to which the Teacher responds.

The Christian Teacher does not only refute the argument by saying that Nestor invented it; he also elaborates on why he believes that it is based on an incorrect interpretation. He says:

Mas aunque fuesse el entendimiento de aquesta palabra segund lo escriuió Niztor el clérigo, que fabló en rrazon de las perssonas, podremos adobar aquella contradicion en esta manera.

(Although this may be the understanding of this verse [Matt 12:32] according to Nestor the priest, who spoke about the persons [of the Trinity], we can correct that contradiction in this way.)

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<sup>31</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, §28a, 2:98, 116 (trans. 1:103–4). As Stroumsa and Lasker note in their commentary (1:145), this argument appears in Jacob ben Reuben’s *Sefer Milḥamot*.

<sup>32</sup> *Mostrador*, 141v/1:274. Cf. 142r/1:275.

Moreover, he maintains:

E quando el omne peca contra el Padre e contral Ffijo e contra el Spiritu Santo, e que se repintió de todos los otros peccados, non es a dezir que las dos perssonas le perdonaron, e la tercera non le perdonó, en guisa que ouiesse dos uoluntades e dos pensamientos, o tres: las dos que perdonasen e la una que non perdonasse, como tú dixiste, sinon que de una parte le será perdonado al pecador, e dotra non le será perdonado.<sup>33</sup>

(When man sins against the Father and against the Son and against the Holy Spirit and repents for all other sins, we cannot say that two persons pardon him and the third does not pardon him, as if he had two wills and two thoughts, or three, two that pardon and one that does not pardon, as you said, but rather that the sinner will be pardoned for one thing and will not be pardoned for the other thing.)

This argument insists that the persons of the Trinity do not act independently of one another to pardon or condemn. Rather, all three, as persons of a single God, must act in consort as one.

The passage in *The Book of Nestor* to which this responds contains another argument, which is not directly mentioned in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, but which the Teacher's subsequent words nevertheless seem to be addressing. In *The Book of Nestor*, the following issue is presented: "If God is angry at him [the blasphemer] for cursing the Holy Spirit, then I can show you that the Spirit is more precious to the Lord than the Messiah, since pardon is mentioned for cursing the Messiah but is not mentioned for cursing the Holy Spirit."<sup>34</sup> In the *Moreh/Mostrador*, just after mentioning Nestor, the Teacher presents an extended argument in which he explains why the Gospels say that a sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgiven. He argues that this sin is the result of doubting Providence and that such a doubt is a result of a limited understanding of cause and chance. The skeptical belief that all is due to chance and not Providence is a sin into which men can easily fall, even after recognizing the belief as a sin and trying to leave it behind in repentance. His long explanation of this cycle of sin merits a full citation:

E es esto, que sabido es por lo que ya diximos que la perssona del Spiritu Santo es uoluntad e la entencion diuinal en todas las cosas, e que las causas que decenden de Dios son muchas e demudadas unas dotras e encubiertas mucho de los omnes, e que fallauan con esto justos que an [sic in MS, error in edition] bien e justos que an mal, e malos que an bien e malos que an mal, e tenian que es accidente esto e yerro e discordia en las costumbres de Dios. Judgaron segund esto que no tien Dios mientes en estas cosas baxas, sino que uienen por auentura e ascidente, ssin entencion de Dios, o que uien[en] por necessidad, e que no

<sup>33</sup> *Mostrador*, 142v/1:275–76.

<sup>34</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor*, §28a, 2:98 (trans. 1:104).

es el poder del omne en su mano. E por esta parte de lengua mala pecan contra [142v] el Spiritu Santo e blasfeman a Dios e pierden fiuza en él. E por ende todo qui ha tal enfermedad como ésta en su alma ffincada e pierde fiuza en Dios, aquél fallará sienpre las cosas segund natura del sser quel rrecentarán ssu dolencia el enfforçarán para confirmar aquella mala opinión. E por esto non se le guisa fazer penitencia dello e, aunque alguna uegada se rrepienia daquella mala opinión, tornará de cabo en ella. [. . .] Enpero, si caesciere quando fiziere penitencia dello que muera e uaya deste mundo ante que torne a pecar otra uegada, non conuiene a dezir que non será perdonado, mas abrá perdón ssin dubda deste peccado como [de] los otros.<sup>35</sup>

(It is known from what we have said that the person of the Holy Spirit is the will and divine intention in all things, and the causes that come from God are many and very different one from another and quite hidden from men. Because of this, men find just men who do good and just men who do evil, and wicked men who do good and wicked men who do evil, and they hold this to be an accident and an error and contradiction within the customs of God. They judge for this reason that God does not pay attention to these lower things, but instead that these things come through chance and accident, without God intending them, or that they happen by necessity and that man's power is not in his own hands. In this kind of evil talk, they sin against the Holy Spirit and blaspheme God and lose faith in him. And anyone who, losing faith in God, has a sickness like this lodged in his soul will always find things in a way that adds to his pain and reinforces it to confirm that bad opinion. For this reason, there is no way for him to do penance for this, and although he might repent of that evil opinion at some point, he will return to it in the end. [. . .] But if it happens that he should die when he does penance for it, leaving this world before he turns back to sin again, it is not right to say that he will not be pardoned, but rather, he will undoubtedly receive pardon for this sin as for others.)

With this argument, Abner/Alfonso explains his interpretation of the logic behind the claim that a sin against the Holy Spirit is unforgivable. As he also argues elsewhere, the limited understanding of human beings explains – and to a large extent mitigates – their erroneous beliefs and sins. He inverts the literal meaning of the Gospel passages and affirms that no sin is truly unforgivable, thus rejecting the claim that any of the three persons in the Trinity has precedence over the others.<sup>36</sup> Although he does not mention *The Book of Nestor* in this explanation, his argument does directly counter the accusation put forth there that for Christians, “the Spirit is more precious to the Lord than the Messiah.”

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<sup>35</sup> *Mostrador*, 142r–v/1:275.

<sup>36</sup> As Sadik has argued, Abner/Alfonso's trinitarian view can be explained according to the Neoplatonic notion that “layers” of the world correspond to or reflect layers in the Godhead. The relations within the Trinity correspond to these divine layers. See Sadik, “The Trinity and Determinism in the Philosophy of Abner of Burgos,” 41–99.

## From *the Book of Nestor* to the *Toledot Yešu*

The four explicit references to the *Book of Nestor* identified above, along with the implicit allusions to it, show that Abner/Alfonso had direct access to a copy of the Hebrew text. A fifth and final reference to Nestor in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, however, does not actually relate to the *Book of Nestor*, but instead seems to derive from the *Toledot Yešu* tradition, a collection of numerous independently circulated stories about the life of Jesus written to parody and denigrate Christian belief. This raises interesting questions about Abner/Alfonso's sources and suggests that a full consideration of his references to Nestor cannot be considered in isolation from a careful evaluation of his use of the *Toledot Yešu* as well. Such an evaluation is not a simple matter, however, because these references are not at all straightforward. As we will see, Abner/Alfonso cites or refers to two different versions of the *Toledot Yešu*, a fact that sheds important light on the history of the complicated transmission of the text in Europe. Moreover, these references in the *Moreh/Mostrador* have been overlooked by the majority of scholars dealing with the *Toledot*, making their study all the more important.

The reference to Nestor that can be connected with the *Toledot Yešu* appears in chapter 7 of the *Moreh/Mostrador*. This chapter aims to prove that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied by Jewish prophets and sages. An important part of this argument hinges on the timing of Jesus's life in the wider chronology of Jewish history, and the two versions of the *Toledot* text that Abner/Alfonso mentions represent two different possible chronologies. He presents these chronologies in the context of a variety of other possible theories:

Mas los más de los judios contaron esta captiuidat en que agora son desde el tiempo que fue el Tenplo quemado en tiempo de Titus, que fue treynta e cinco annos despues de la muerte de Jhesu Nazareno. [ . . ] E algunos dellos dixieron que nasció Jhesu Nazareno en tiempo del rrey Yanay. [ . . ] Asi lo dize en el libro 'Çeder Cabala.' [ . . ] E otros dizen que fue Jhesu en tiempo de la rreyna Elena, madre de Costantin Çesar, e que ella le mandó matar. Assi es escripto en el libro que es publicado entre los judios del fecho de Jhesu Nazareno. E otros dellos dizen que esta rreyna Elena falló la cruz en que fue puesto Jheso, despues de dozientos annos de que él fue muerto. E otros dellos dizen que Tiberio Çesar le mandó matar al pedimiento de los judios, e porque murió su ffija [*sic* in MS, error in edition] de Tiberio con el concibimiento quel ffizo Jhesu sin ayuntamiento de uaron. Assi lo dize en el libro que es conpuesto en lengua caldea del fecho de Jhesu, fijo de Pandera, que enbió Rrabi Ssimon Quefa a Rrabi Natan Rressucita a Babilonia, e esto fue en tiempo de Erodes. [ . . ] E algunos dellos dizen que sus diçiplos de Jhesu furaron el cuerpo e lo touieron ascondido más de dozientos annos. Assi lo dize en el "Libro de Niztor el clérigo."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Mostrador*, 201r–v/2:137. This passage is transcribed in Saínz de la Maza, "El *Toledot Yesu* castellano en el Maestre Alfonso de Valladolid," in *Actas II congreso internacional de la*



(Most Jews count [the time of] this captivity they are now in from the time that the Temple was burned in the age of Titus, which was thirty-five years after the death of Jesus of Nazareth. [ . . . ] Some of them say that Jesus of Nazareth was born in the time of King Jannaeus. [ . . . ] It says so in the book *Sefer ha-Qabbalah*. [ . . . ] Others say that Jesus lived in the time of Queen Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, and that she ordered him to be killed. Thus is it written in the book published among the Jews about the “Deeds of Jesus of Nazareth.” Others of them say that this Queen Helena found the cross that Jesus was put onto two hundred years after he died. And others of them say that Emperor Tiberius ordered him to be killed at the request of the Jews, and because his daughter died after the conception that Jesus brought about without the help of a man. It says so in the book written in Aramaic about “The Deeds of Jesus, Son of Pandera,” which Rabbi Simon *Kepha* sent to Rabbi Nathan *de-Šušita* in Babylonia, which was in the time of Herod [ . . . ] and some others say that the disciples of Jesus stole his body and kept it hidden for more than two hundred years. It says so in the “Book of Nestor the Priest.”)

The first source mentioned in this passage is Abraham ibn Daud’s *Book of Tradition*, which affirms as an “authentic tradition from the Mishna and the Talmud” that Jesus lived during the reign of King Jannaeus (d. 76 BCE).<sup>38</sup> Abner/Alfonso makes use of ibn Daud’s text on numerous occasions in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, including in his discussion of the history of the Karaites in Castile.<sup>39</sup> The next source is connected to the theory that Jesus lived “in the time of Queen Helena,” the mother of Constantine (d. 330 CE). The text that relates the story of Helena, discussed below, is referred to as the book “of the Deeds of Jesus of Nazareth,” a direct reference to one popular version of the *Toledot Yešu* that circulated widely in various versions in the Middle East and Europe.<sup>40</sup> The third chronology places Jesus in the

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*Asociación Hispánica de Literature Medieval (Segovia, del 5 al 19 de Octubre, 1987)*, ed. José Manuel Lucía Megías, Paloma García Alonso, and Carmen Martín Daza (Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, 1992): 2:802–3, and noted by Daniel Barbu, “The Case about Jesus: (Counter-) History and Casuistry in *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *A Historical Approach to Casuistry: Norms and Exceptions in a Comparative Perspective*, ed. Carlo Ginzburg and Lucio Biasiori (London: Bloomsbury, 2019): 90, n. 49.

**38** Abraham ibn Daud, *The Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah): A Critical Edition with a Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. Gerson D. Cohen (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1967), Hebrew, 15 (trans. 21).

**39** On these references to ibn Daud, see Ryan Szpiech, “L’hérésie absente: Karaïsme et karaïtes dans les œuvres polémique d’Alfonso de Valladolid (m. V. 1347),” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 182 (2018): 191–206. For a consideration of Karaites in Iberia, see Daniel J. Lasker, “Karaism in Twelfth-Century Spain,” *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 1 (1992): 179–95.

**40** On the important early circulation of the text in Judeo-Arabic, see Miriam Goldstein, “A Polemical Tale and Its Function in the Jewish Communities of the Mediterranean and the Near East: *Toledot Yeshu* in Judeo-Arabic,” *Intellectual History of the Islamic World* 7 (2019): 192–227, especially 193, where she notes that the earliest attested versions of the Helena narrative are in Judeo-Arabic manuscripts dating from the eleventh century; see also the lists in

time of Emperor Tiberius (d. 37 CE), which is linked to a different version of the *Toledot Yešu* tradition preserved in Aramaic and Judeo-Arabic. Finally, the last chronology mentioned here, which is attributed to the *Book of Nestor*, claims that Jesus's followers hid his body for 200 years after his death.

Abner/Alfonso mentions and contrasts these two different versions of the *Toledot Yešu* in two further places in the *Moreh/Mostrador*. He repeats that the first work, which he calls the “Story of Jesus of Nazareth” (“recontamiento de Jhesu Nazareno”), claims that Jesus lived “in the time of Queen Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine.” This version of the text, he adds, is “more widespread among the Jews” (“más publicado entre los judíos”) than the version linking him with Tiberius.<sup>41</sup> About this second version, he states:

En la “Passion de Jhesu ben Pandera,” que enbió Rrabi Ssimon Quefa a los ssabios e a Rrabi Natam Rresucita a Babilonia, se prueua que Jhesu Nazareno e Ssant Johan Baptista fueron en tienpo de Tiberio Çesar, que ffue en tienpo de Erodes.

(In the “Passion of Jesus, Son of Pandera,” which Rabbi Simon *Kepha* sent to the sages and to Rabbi Natan *de-Şuşıta* in Babylonia, it is proved that Jesus of Nazareth and Saint John the Baptist lived in the time of Emperor Tiberius, which was the time of Herod.)<sup>42</sup>

Two chapters later, he once again contrasts these two *Toledot* texts, repeating their chronological differences and reiterating their different languages. First, he mentions the “book that they composed about the ‘Deeds of Jesus of Nazareth,’ which they say occurred in the time of Queen Helena,” to which he contrasts “the other book, which they composed in the language of Jerusalem about ‘Jesus, Son of Pandera,’” which says that he lived in the time of Emperor Tiberius.<sup>43</sup>

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Goldstein's earlier study, “Judeo-Arabic Versions of *Toledot Yeshu*,” *Ginzei Qedem* 6 (2010): 9–42; and Alexandra Cuffel, “Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis: Jesus as Antihero in *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *Medieval Exegesis and Religious Difference: Commentary, Conflict, and Community in the Premodern Mediterranean*, ed. Ryan Szpiech (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015): 155–70.

<sup>41</sup> *Mostrador*, 231r/2:199.

<sup>42</sup> *Mostrador*, 231r/2:199.

<sup>43</sup> “Enpero que los judíos tienen libros que dan testimonio de muchos miraglos que fizo Jhesu Nazareno, que non conuien a dezir por ellos que ffueron por aventura e por ascidente. [. . .] E esto assi como el libro que conpusieron ssobre la ‘Ffazienda de Jhesu Nazareno,’ e que dixieron que acaesció en tienpo de la rreyna Elena. E assi el otro libro que conpusieron en lengua de Jherusalem de ‘Ffazienda de Jhesu, ffijo de Pandera,’ e que dize que ffue en tienpo de Tiberio Çesar. Ssinon que dizen los judíos que él ffazia todos aquellos miraglos por ffuerça del *Sem ha-meforas*; e algunos dellos dizia[n]: por ffuerça de los dia[b]los, que los conjuraua por fuerça de *Ssem ha-meforas*, e non con voluntad de Dios” (“But the Jews have books that give testimony to many miracles that Jesus of Nazareth did, about which one cannot say it was by chance or ac-

The *Toledot Yešu* circulated in many versions, in over one hundred manuscripts, in Aramaic, Hebrew, Judeo-Arabic, and other languages. Scholars have organized the versions according to the figure that presides over Jesus's trial. The most widespread group, corresponding to what Di Signi refers to as the "Helena group" (*il gruppo "Elena"*), tells of an encounter between Jesus and Queen Helena – that is, Helena Augusta, the mother of Constantine the Great – in the fourth century CE.<sup>44</sup> It was from this group that many Hebrew versions from the later Middle Ages were derived. The most recent collators and editors of the Hebrew and Aramaic texts, Meerson and Schäfer, denote the Helena group as "groups II and III," where "group II" contains those versions in which Helena "plays a commanding role" and "group III" versions are those in which the Jewish sages actively conspire against Jesus and his followers.<sup>45</sup>

The "Helena" tradition of the *Toledot* associated with manuscripts in "group II," which circulated widely in Judeo-Arabic in the Middle East and in Hebrew throughout Europe, was known to the thirteenth-century Catalan polemicist Ramon Martí (d. after 1284), who provided a long citation of it, along with a Latin translation, in his *Pugio fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*).<sup>46</sup> Similar references that could

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cident. [. . .] And this is so in the book that they composed about the 'Deeds of Jesus of Nazareth,' saying that it happened at the time of the Queen Helena, and in the other book that they composed in the language of Jerusalem about the 'Deeds of Jesus, son of Pandera,' which says that it was in the time of Emperor Tiberius. But the Jews say that he did all those miracles by the power of the *Shem ha-meforas* [Divine Name], and some say by the power of devils that he conjured by the power of the *Shem ha-meforas* and not with the will of God") (*Mostrador*, 282r/2:322). This passage is transcribed in Sainz de la Maza, "El *Toledot Yeshu* castellano," 804.

<sup>44</sup> Riccardo Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto* (Rome: Newton Compton, 1985), 33–40. The figure of Empress Helena was sometimes conflated with that of Helene of Adiabene, a convert to Judaism in the middle of the first century who was queen of Adiabene in Assyria. The textual traditions referring to Helena are, as Galit Hasan-Rokem notes, multiple and ambiguous, constituting "a hermeneutical palimpsest in the heart of the text." See Hasan-Rokem, "Polymorphic Helena – *Toledot Yeshu* as a Palimpsest of Religious Narratives and Identities," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 256–57.

<sup>45</sup> Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:36. A few scholars have criticized Meerson and Schäfer's groupings, arguing that they oversimplify matters and overlook various hybrid versions. See Barbu, "The Case about Jesus," 89–90, n. 48; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "Review of *The Life Story of Jesus: Two Volumes and Database*, vol. 1: *Introduction and Translation*, vol. 2: *Critical Edition*, edited by Michael Meerson, and Peter Schäfer," *Asdiwal* 11 (2016): 226–30.

<sup>46</sup> Ramon Martí, *Pugio fidei adversus mauros et iudaeos* (Leipzig, 1687; repr. Farnborough: Gregg, 1967), part 2.8.6, pp. 362–64. See also the manuscript in Paris, Bib. Ste. Geneviève MS 1405, fols. 63v–65r; Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:12. See also Ruth Mazos Karras, "The Aerial Battle in the *Toledot Yeshu* and Sodomy in the Late Middle Ages," *Medieval Encounters* 19 (2013): 493–533; and for the Judeo-Arabic circulation of the text, see Goldstein, "A Polemical

be associated with the “group II” strain also show up in Inquisitorial documents from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries<sup>47</sup> and papal and royal documents from the fifteenth century,<sup>48</sup> and they probably provided a source for contemporary literary narratives as well.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, the older tradition, describing an encounter between Jesus and Emperor Tiberius (d. 37 CE), corresponds to the tradition denoted by Meerson and Schäfer as “group I” or “early Oriental A” and by Riccardo Di Segni as the “Pilate” recension.<sup>50</sup> This set of versions circulated in Aramaic and Judeo-Arabic and seems to have been known to the Christian polemicist Agobard of Lyon (d. 840), who provides the earliest known Christian reference to the text.<sup>51</sup> A third group, known as the “Herod” group, only appears

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Tale,” and Cuffel, “Between Epic Entertainment and Polemical Exegesis.” There is no evidence that Abner/Alfonso knew or made use of Marti’s text.

**47** Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 121–24; Tartakoff, “The *Toledot Yeshu* and the Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon,” in *Toledot Yeshu* (“*The Life Story of Jesus*”) *Revisited*, 297–309. Yitzhak Baer, *Die Juden im christlichen Spanien*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1929), also published examples of testimonies about Mary’s adultery and Jesus’s sorcery that would seem to derive from the *Toledot* tradition. In April 1305, a Jew named Isaac de Salema (Açac de Çalema) publically denounced Jesus and Mary: “Dixo mal de sancta Maria e de Jesu Cristo, su fillo, non en desputacion, que el ovies con ninguno Cristiano, mas en danario e publicament [sienes] miedo ninguno [. . .] es cosa tan esquivia e de tan grant blasfemia, que non se puede contar nin oyer sienes lagrimas.” In this version, Jesus “fue grant encantador [a]ssi e traydor feyto en adulterio.” See Baer, *Die Juden*, 1:185–86 (#157).

**48** Daniel Barbu notes that Benedict XIII shows knowledge of the *Toledot* tradition in the bull *Etsi doctoribus gentium* (1415) and that it was subsequently referred to by Ferdinand I of Aragon. See Barbu, “Some Remarks on *Toledot Yeshu* (The Jewish Life of Jesus) in Early Modern Europe,” *Journal for Religion, Film, and Media* 5, no. 1 (2019): 32, n. 9.

**49** On the possible influence of the *Toledot* narrative on the thirteenth-century writer ibn Sahula, author of the story collection *Mešal ha-Qadmoni*, see Alexandra Cuffel, “Jesus, the Misguided Magician: The (Re-)emergence of the *Toledot Yeshu* in Medieval Iberia and Its Retelling in ibn Sahula’s *Fables from the Distant Past*,” *Henoch* 37 (2015): 4–16. It is interesting to note that the story analyzed by Cuffel has been identified as a likely source for the Castilian story of Don Yllán and the Deán of Santiago (#11 in Juan Manuel’s frame-tale collection *Conde Lucanor*). See David Wacks, “Don Yllán and the Egyptian Sorcerer: Vernacular Commonality and Literary Diversity in Medieval Castile,” *Sefarad* 65 (2005): 413–33. Both ibn Sahula’s text (c. 1285) and Juan Manuel’s text (c. 1335) were written in Castile during Abner/Alfonso’s lifetime.

**50** Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 30–33.

**51** On Agobard’s references to the *Toledot*, see Peter Schäfer, “Agobard’s and Amulo’s *Toledot Yeshu*,” in *Toledot Yeshu* (“*The Life Story of Jesus*”) *Revisited*, 27–48. On the Judeo-Arabic versions of this strain, see Goldstein, “A Polemical Tale,” 194, and Goldstein, “Judeo-Arabic Versions,” 20–21 and after.

in the eighteenth century, beginning with Johannes Huldreich's *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni a Judaeis Corrupta* in 1705.<sup>52</sup>

As is evident in the passage quoted above, Abner/Alfonso's citations in the *Moreh/Mostrador* draw from two different traditions, which seem to correspond to the Hebrew "group II" tradition about Helena and the Aramaic "Oriental" tradition about Pilate, respectively. Moreover, Abner/Alfonso recognizes the two stories as distinct versions of the same story, calling them by different titles and noting that they circulated in different languages. It seems that in his references to these two traditions in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, he repeats citations that he had already incorporated in his earlier work, the *Sefer Milḥamot Adonai (Book of the Wars of the Lord)*. In his early study of Christian anti-Jewish polemics, Isidore Loeb was among the first to point out that ibn Shaprut incorporated citations from Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milḥamot* that included two references to the *Toledot Yešu* tradition, citations which are found in Samuel Krauss's edition of the text and which have thus been known for over a century.<sup>53</sup> The first begins:

Behold, you will find many books in their possession, telling about these – about the secrets and miracles of Yeshu – such as the book that they composed as *Story of Yeshu ha-Notsri* who lived in the time of Queen Helene, and also the book that they composed in the language of the Palestinian Talmud as *Incident with Yeshu son of Pandera*, saying that he lived in the time of Teberinus Caesar.<sup>54</sup>

This passage mentions two versions of the text, one Hebrew version entitled the *Story of Yešu ha-Notsri (Ma'ašeh šel Yešu ha-Nošri)* and another in Aramaic entitled the *Incident with Yešu son of Pandera (Uvda' de Yešu bar Pandera)*. Horbury pointed out that the Hebrew version matches the content preserved in the Strasbourg manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire, MS 3974/Héb. 48),

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<sup>52</sup> Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 40–41. See Johann Jacob Huldreich, *Historia Jeschuae Nazareni a Judaeis Corrupta* (Leiden: Du Vivie, 1705). On the Huldreich edition, see also Adina Yoffie, "Observations on the Huldreich Manuscripts of the Toledot Yeshu," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011): 61–77.

<sup>53</sup> See Loeb, "Polémistes chrétiens," 221–26, and Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–47. These appear in English in Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:13–14. The text of ibn Shaprut's *Eben Bohan* has not yet been edited in full. The text can be partly accessed in Libby Garshowitz, ed., "Shem Tov ben Isaac ibn Shaprut's *Touchstone (Eben Boḥan)*, Chapters 2–10, Based on MS Plut 2.17 (Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana) with Collations from Other Manuscripts," 2 vols. (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974); Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, *La piedra de toque*; and Frimer and Schwartz, *The Life and Thought*. The portion responding to Abner/Alfonso is found in book 15 and has yet to be edited.

<sup>54</sup> Text in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–47; translation in Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:13.

which seems to be the same strain evident in Martí's *Pugio fidei*, although it must be noted that there is no evidence that Abner/Alfonso knew or directly quoted Martí's work.<sup>55</sup> The second text cited by ibn Shaprut describes how "Yešu ben Pandera" came to Emperor Tiberius, who asked:

"What are the things that you do?" (Yesu) said to them, "I am the son of God. I wound and I heal. And (if) someone is dead, I whisper to him and he will live. And (if) there is a woman who never gave birth, I make her pregnant without (the agency) of a man." (Tiberinus) said to them, "In this I will test you. I have a daughter who did not see a man yet. Make her pregnant!" They said to him, "Bring her to us." He commanded the servant, he brought her, they whispered to her, and she begot.<sup>56</sup>

The text of this tradition tells how the young woman did not give birth after her term, and Jesus proposed opening her belly to remove the child. When he did this, a stone was found instead of a child, and the girl subsequently died. While this ending is not recounted in the version of Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milhamot* preserved by ibn Shaprut, it is alluded to in the passage of the *Moreh/Mostrador* cited above, which states that some Jews "say that Emperor Tiberius ordered [Jesus] to be killed at the request of the Jews, and because his daughter died after the conception that Jesus brought about without the help of a man."

The "Early Oriental"/Tiberius tradition (which Abner/Alfonso himself identifies as being written in the "lengua caldea" and "lengua de Jheruslaem"; i.e., Aramaic) is the apparent source of another citation that does not explicitly mention Tiberius. In section 17 of chapter 7, the Teacher relates the following anecdote:

Ca quando era Jhesu Christo de .XX. annos, començó a mostrar sus ssignos e sus miraglos ante las gentes, como lo cuenta el libro que es publicado entre los judios de ffazienda de Jhesu, que diz que los judios peleauan con él quando amostraua rrazones de la Ley ante su maestro, e apusiéronle que merescia muerte por ello, e que se leuantó vno de los sabios, que dizen que auie nonbre Rrabi Ssimon ben Satah, que les dixo que bien auie ueynte annos que uino a él

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55 William Horbury, "The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*," in *Toledot Yesu* ("The Life Story of Jesus") *Revisited*, 54–55. On the question of influence between Martí and Abner/Alfonso, see Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain. Interaction and Cultural Change*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999): 179–94; Szpiech, "From *Testimonia* to Testimony," 368–424; and Szpiech, "From Convert to Convert: Two Opposed Trends in Late Medieval and Early Modern Anti-Jewish Polemic," in *Revealing the Secrets of the Jews: Johannes Pfefferkorn and Christian Writings about Jewish Life and Literature in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jonathan Adams and Cordelia Hess (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017): 228–42.

56 Text in Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*, 146–47; translation in Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yesu*, 1:13.

Rrabi Yohanán, marido de Maria, e quel dixo que era concebida Maria en adulterio. E desde entonçe ffluxo Jhesu de entre los sabios e ouo mester a fazer miraglos.<sup>57</sup>

(When Jesus Christ was twenty years old, he began to perform signs and miracles before the people, as is told in the book spread among the Jews about the “Deeds of Jesus,” which says that the Jews fought with him when he made arguments about the law in front of his teacher. They charged that he deserved death for this. One of the sages – whom they say was called Rabbi Simon ben Shetah – got up and told them that twenty [sic] years before, Rabbi Yohanán, the husband of Mary, had come to him and told him that Mary had conceived in adultery. After that, Jesus fled from the sages and had to perform miracles.)

Although the revelation of the scandalous details of Jesus’s conception by Simon ben Shetah is a feature associated with the “group II” (Hebrew) tradition,<sup>58</sup> Abner/Alfonso offers an interpretation that also links it with the “group I”/“Early Oriental” (Aramaic) tradition cited elsewhere, and this is underscored by his use of the Aramaic title, “Deeds of Jesus.” Other details from this version also seem to match the story Abner/Alfonso tells here. For example, one version of the “group I” texts relates:

When the sages of Israel were sitting in Tiberias [ . . . ], Yeshu walked to them and began to teach halakhah without permission. One (of the sages) answered and said, “You impertinent one [ . . . ] everyone who teaches halakhah before the rabbi is liable to death.”<sup>59</sup>

When Mary is called before the sages and accuses Yohanán of lying with her before marriage, Simon ben Shetah, Yohanán’s rabbi, stands up and defends him, saying, “Yohanán your fiancé was my student and it was some years ago that he came from Jerusalem to seek refuge under the wings of my house of study. He told me how the matter occurred.”<sup>60</sup> Through Simon’s testimony, the truth comes out that it was Joseph ben Pandera, a pimp who lived across the street, who raped Mary when she was betrothed to Yohanán. The rabbis and sages then spread the charge against Jesus and excommunicate him.

Abner/Alfonso, through the Teacher’s voice, is very critical of the details of both versions of the *Toledot Yesu* that he gives. Yet after he recounts the details about Simon ben Shetah, he adds the following curious remark, taking note of the confused chronologies in some of the *Toledot* versions:

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57 *Mostrador*, 211v/2:158–59. This passage is transcribed in Sainz de la Maza, “El *Toledot Yeshu* castellano,” 803.

58 Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:51, 57.

59 Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:188.

60 Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:189. Cf. details from a “group II” Italian version on 275–76.

E maguera que ya proué suso que aquel libro que tienen los judios de la ffazienda de Jhesu es errado e falsso, con todo esso bien puede ser que ouiesse y algunas cosas de uerdad con que afeytasen e aformosasen el su error, segund es tal el huso de los engan[n]adores de lo fazer asi. E non es dubda que los sabios de los judios en aquel tiempo catauan e pescudauan en rrazon de su concibimiento de Jhesu Christo, en que cudauan que era fornezino; sinon que aquel omne que dio testimonio dél non era Rrabi Ssimon ben Ssatah, aquél fue cunnado del rrey Yanay, mas fue otro omne quiça, que ouo nonbre otrosí Rrabi Simon ben Satah, porque ya prouamos que Jhesu Christo non fue en tienpo del rrey Yanay, sinon en tienpo del rrey Erodes.<sup>61</sup>

(Although I proved above that that book that the Jews have about the “Deeds of Jesus” is false and erroneous, nevertheless there might be some things in there that are true, which they used to disguise their error and make it more attractive, as is the custom of those who deceive. There is no doubt that the Jewish sages at that time examined and asked about the conception of Jesus Christ, whom they believed was a bastard. But that man who gave testimony about it was not Rabbi Simon ben Shetah, who was the nephew of King Jannaeus, but rather perhaps a different man also named Rabbi Simon ben Shetah, because we have already proved that Jesus Christ did not live in the time of Jannaeus, but rather in the time of King Herod.)

What is most striking about the Teacher’s explanation is not his attempt to patch up holes in the chronology, but rather his concession that although the *Toledot Yeshu* tradition is considered false in general, “there might be some things in there that are true.” Specifically, he affirms that the text is accurate when it says that the sages accused Jesus of illegitimacy. He curiously claims that “Simon ben Shetah” may be the name of multiple people and that the one referred to in the *Toledot* must be different than the man by that name who was the nephew of Jannaeus because “Jesus Christ did not live in the time of Jannaeus, but rather in the time of King Herod.” The fact that he mentions “Simon ben Shetah” while also affirming the story – indeed, saying that “there is no doubt” about it – that the “Jewish sages at that time examined and asked about the conception of Jesus Christ, whom they believed was a bastard” thus suggests that his references were drawn from the “group I”/Aramaic tradition. The story of the death of Tiberius’s daughter that he associates with the “Deeds of Jesus, Son of Pandera” that was “composed in the language of Jerusalem” shows Abner/Alfonso engaging in detail with this tradition of the text in order to support his preferred chronology of events. His willingness to accept part of the *Toledot* story while rejecting the rest demonstrates that he compared the details of the Aramaic and Hebrew versions and used only what served his anti-Jewish arguments.

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<sup>61</sup> *Mostrador*, 211v/2:158–59. This passage is partly transcribed in Sainz de la Maza, “El *Toledot Yeshu* castellano,” 804. On the confusion of chronologies surrounding Yannai, see Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:44.



Despite the important information offered by Abner/Alfonso's Castilian references in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, scholars of the *Toledot Yešu* have almost entirely overlooked them. Carlos Sáinz de la Maza was among the first to draw attention to Abner/Alfonso's references to the *Toledot Yešu* in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, and his study has not received the attention it deserves. The references were also listed, although not analyzed, by Walter Mettmann, the editor of the Castilian text.<sup>62</sup> Both note that Abner/Alfonso includes references to both a Hebrew and an Aramaic version, yet since their publications, more details have emerged about the *Toledot's* complex manuscript tradition. Mettmann, not knowing the details of this tradition of the stone-child that kills Tiberius's daughter, simply dismisses Abner/Alfonso's citation as "incomprehensible and probably corrupt."<sup>63</sup> Neither Di Segni, in his foundational study of the *Toledot* tradition (writing before Sáinz de la Maza's article and Mettmann's edition), nor Meerson and Schäfer (writing after both), mention these references. Similarly, the other scholars to mention ibn Shaprut's citations of Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milhamot*, including Samuel Krauss and Isidore Loeb in the nineteenth century and Yaacov Deutsch, John Gager, and William Horbury more recently, also fail to note them.<sup>64</sup> It was only recently that Daniel Barbu noted the citations in the context of a broader discussion of the manuscript tradition.<sup>65</sup> Di Segni laments that the "few summarizing lines" given by ibn Shaprut are all we possess of Abner/Alfonso's unique reference to the Aramaic tradition.<sup>66</sup> Meerson and Schäfer similarly affirm that ibn Shaprut's reference to Abner/Alfonso's *Sefer Milhamot* "is the only testimony to the acquaintance with the Aramaic *Toledot* in late-medieval Europe."<sup>67</sup> The references in the *Moreh/Mostrador* seem to call both

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62 Sainz de la Maza, "El *Toledot Yeshu* castellano."

63 *Mostrador*, 2:136, n. 448.

64 See Loeb, "Polémistes chrétiens," 43–70, 219–42; Krauss, *Das Leben Jesu*; Deutsch, "The Second Life of the Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited, 283–96; John Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Savior of Israel?," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited, 221–46; Horbury, "The Revision"; and Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*.

65 Barbu, "The Case about Jesus," 89, n. 48, 90, n. 49; Barbu, "Some Remarks," 30, n. 5, 32, n. 9. See also Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "The Christian Scriptures and *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Scriptures, Sacred Traditions, and Strategies of Religious Subversion: Studies in Discourse with the Work of Guy G. Stroumsa*, ed. Moshe Blidstein, Serge Ruzer, and Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018): 191–202.

66 Di Segni, *Il vangelo del ghetto*, 30. Di Segni also provides an incorrect date for the composition of the *Sefer Milhamot*, stating that it was written "around 1340" (21), whereas it is known that the work preceded the *Moreh Zedek* and was rather composed around 1320. On this dating, see Szpiech, "Translating between the Lines," 134.

67 Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:13.

of these assessments into question and add important information to our knowledge of the transmission of the different versions of the text.

An examination of these passages from the *Toledot Yešu* tradition does not only show Abner/Alfonso's engagement with two different textual traditions; it may also help to explain the details of his final reference to the book of Nestor, in which he claims that some Jews "say that the disciples of Jesus stole his body and kept it hidden for more than two hundred years. It says so in the 'Book of Nestor the Priest.'"<sup>68</sup> Although this passage cannot be found in the surviving Nestor texts, it does loosely overlap with some details found in the *Toledot Yešu* tradition. There are a number of facts that can be considered when comparing these two textual traditions. Firstly, many versions of the *Toledot Yešu* story contain details about the removal of Jesus's body after death, and a number of versions from the "group II" tradition in particular describe the plan to "steal Yeshu from his grave and hide him in another place."<sup>69</sup> Secondly, despite this similarity, Jesus's body is not hidden for long in the *Toledot* tradition, and it is paraded through Jerusalem and ridiculed. Thirdly, all "group II" versions of the *Toledot* text contain an additional narrative of the "Acts of Nestor," which is about a heretic who taught the Christians misleading and erroneous traditions and helped to shape Christianity as a new, false religion. Just as the *Toledot Yešu* tradition was made of a wide variety of texts that often circulated through multiple distinct channels, so it often circulated with – and was confused with – other Jewish polemical and apocryphal texts.<sup>70</sup> Abner/Alfonso's attribution of the body-theft *topos* to the *Book of Nestor* could potentially be a confusion of the Nestor legend in the *Toledot* with the *Book of Nestor*. Fourthly, however, the content of the Nestor passages in the *Toledot* is quite different from that of the *Book of Nestor*, and it does not discuss the hiding of Jesus's body.<sup>71</sup> Lastly, the *Nestor* text also mentions the legend of the discovery of the True Cross by Helena, the mother of Constantine, and specifically dates the discovery to 200 years after Jesus's death.<sup>72</sup> As noted in the passage cited above, Abner/Alfonso specifically refers to this legend, noting that some say "that this Queen Helena found the cross that Jesus was put onto, two hundred years after

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<sup>68</sup> *Mostrador*, 201r–v/2:137, cited above.

<sup>69</sup> Meerson and Schäfer, *Toledot Yeshu*, 1:281; see also 1:101–3 and 257.

<sup>70</sup> On the Nestor/Nestorius content in the *Toledot*, see Stephen Gero, "The Nestorius Legend in the *Toledot Yeshu*," *Oriens Christianus* 59 (1975): 108–20. On one example of the combination of the *Toledot* with other Jewish writing, see David Biale, "Counter-History and Jewish Polemics against Christianity: The *Sefer Toldot Yeshu* and the *Sefer Zerubavel*," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no. 1 (1999): 130–45.

<sup>71</sup> On the Nestor/Nestorius content in the *Toledot*, see Gero, "The Nestorius Legend."

<sup>72</sup> Stroumsa and Lasker, *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, §134, 2:128 (trans. 2:78).

he died.” Taking all these contradictory points into account, the most logical explanation seems to be that Abner/Alfonso combined the details of the Helena legend – in particular, the mention of “two hundred years” – with the theft of the body as described in the *Toledot* tradition.

In any case, it is clear that an analysis of Abner/Alfonso’s references to the *Book of Nestor* cannot be considered separately from his use of multiple manuscripts of the *Toledot Yešu* tradition. Both texts offer valuable testimonies regarding the circulation of anti-Christian polemical traditions in late medieval Iberia. The passages highlighted here are of singular value for the ongoing study of both the *Book of Nestor* and the *Toledot Yešu*, and they also make it evident that a full study of the transmission and influence of Jewish anti-Christian literature cannot ignore the valuable testimonies preserved in Romance and Latin traditions. Because Abner/Alfonso’s work engaged extensively with Jewish sources but also circulated among Christian readers in translation, it provides an important point of convergence of the Jewish and Christian intellectual traditions, one that continues to yield new insights and information on Jewish-Christian debate in the later Middle Ages.

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