

Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid

Master (Maese, Maestro) Alfonso

DATE OF BIRTH Approximately 1260-70
PLACE OF BIRTH Unknown, but probably Burgos
DATE OF DEATH Approximately 1345-47
PLACE OF DEATH Unknown, but probably Valladolid

BIOGRAPHY

Little is known about the early life of Abner of Burgos, but on the basis of information in his *Moreh tsedek* ('Teacher of righteousness', now extant only in Castilian as *Mostrador de justicia*), it is estimated that he was born into the Jewish community in or around Burgos sometime between 1260 and 1270. Judging by his works, it is assumed he received some sort of Jewish education in Hebrew, Torah, and Rabbinical writing.

He recounts his conversion to Christianity in fascinating detail in the opening to his *Moreh/Mostrador*, where he mentions the failed messianic movements of Ávila and Allyón of 1295, events that he says occurred 'some 25 years' before, thus placing his dreams, if they occurred, around 1317-20 and his conversion shortly after. Before publicly converting, he wrote an anti-Jewish treatise, the *Sefer milhamot Adonai* ('Book of the wars of the Lord'). According to the copy seen by Ambrosio de Morales in the 16th century, Abner/Alfonso himself translated the text into Castilian as *Libro de las batallas del Señor* at the request of Doña Blanca of Portugal (d. 1321), thus dating the work and its translation to 1320-21. According to polemicist Alonso de Spina, who records passages of the *Sefer* in Latin in the *Fortalitium fidei*, Abner/Alfonso was a doctor who treated Jews for distress after the events of 1295, and, according to Spina's account, Abner/Alfonso claimed in the *Sefer* that this marked the beginning of his process of doubt of his ancestral faith and conversion to Christianity. Abner/Alfonso's mention of medicine and medical authors in his writing lends further credence to the hypothesis that he was trained in medicine and worked as a doctor before converting. Pablo de Santa María claims in his *Scrutinium scripturarum* that Abner/Alfonso was 60 years old when he converted (p. 533), which, if true, would put his birth in the early 1260s.

Although much of this information is based on Abner/Alfonso's own testimony, which is admittedly colored by his strategic polemical bias in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, a few facts of his life can be gleaned from other sources. After his conversion, Abner moved to Valladolid and adopted the name Alfonso of Valladolid, taking a position as sacristan of the Collegiate Church of Valladolid. Mention of one 'Master (Maese) Alfonso' (a name given to him regularly in other sources) can be found in the records of the church from between 1324 and 1341, and mention of one 'Juan Alfonso, son of Master Alfonso' can be found in 1348 (Rucquoi, *Valladolid au moyen âge*, p. 638). The astronomer Isaac Israeli claims in his work *Yesod 'olam* ('Foundation of the world') that Abner/Alfonso wrote a letter to the Jews of Toledo in 1334 accusing them of miscalculating the date of Passover. Abner/Alfonso is also credited with persuading King Alfonso XI to issue an edict in 1336 (preserved only by Spina, but alluded to by the Hebrew poet Samuel ibn Sasson) banning the *Birkat ha-minim* prayer ('Benediction concerning heretics,' part of the Jewish *'Amidah* prayers), and Abner/Alfonso may have debated publicly with Jews over this issue.

After his conversion, Abner wrote a number of anti-Jewish polemical works in Hebrew (some preserved in a manuscript owned and annotated by Venetian Rabbi Leon of Modena), and many of these survive in Castilian translation. After the *Sefer milhamot* and *Moreh/Mostrador*, these include: three anti-Jewish polemical letters (surviving in Hebrew and Castilian), possibly composed between 1225 and 1235; the *Teshuvot ha-meshuvot* (*sic* in the manuscript; 'Response to the apostasies', surviving only in Hebrew), which is a response to the Jewish responses to his letters, probably from the 1330s; *Libro de la ley* ('Book of the law', surviving only in Castilian), probably from the 1330s; and two works written against his former 'good friend' Isaac Pollegar: the first is a philosophical anti-Jewish discussion of determinism called *Minhat kena'ot* ('Offering of zeal', now surviving only in Castilian as *Ofrenda de zelos* or *Libro del zelo de Dios*), probably from the late 1330s or possibly the early 1340s (based on Abner/Alfonso's claim in it about composing an earlier work already in the 'time of old age'); the second is Abner/Alfonso's last known work, the *Teshuvot la-meḥaref* ('Response to the blasphemers', surviving in Hebrew and Castilian, often called *Respuestas al blasfemo*), probably from the early 1240s. At least ten other Hebrew works by Abner/Alfonso are known of but now lost, and at least four more surviving works are attributed to him but are still of uncertain authorship. These disputed works include the *Sermones contra los judíos e moros* ('Sermons against

the Jews and Muslims'); the *Libro de las tres creencias* ('Book of the three faiths', also called the *Libro declarante*); a Hebrew work of mathematics called *Meyasher 'aḳov* ('Straightening the curve'); and a single Hebrew poem. Abner/Alfonso has also been listed, probably incorrectly, as a possible author of the *Tratado contra las hadas* ('Treatise against fate'), a work found in the Escorial manuscripts of the *Libro de las tres creencias*. The works pertaining to Christian-Muslim relations, either in their comments about Muslim philosophers or in their polemical comparisons of Muslims and Jews, are the *Moreh/Mostrador*, the *Teshuvot la-meḥaref*, the *Minḥat*, and the attributed works *Sermones* and *Libro de las tres creencias*. Abner/Alfonso has also been loosely associated with a 14th-century translation into Latin of the so-called *De animae beatudine*, attributed to Ibn Rushd.

The philosopher Moses Narboni claims to have seen Abner/Alfonso 'at the end of his days', a meeting that, if true, would have occurred between 1345 and 1347, according to the known chronology of Narboni's travels in Iberia. The exact time or place of Abner/Alfonso's death is unknown, but can be estimated to be around this time or shortly after.

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Primary

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- Moses Narboni, 'L'épître du libre-arbitre de Moïse de Narbonne', ed. and trans. M.R. Hayoun, *Revue des Études Juives* 141 (1982) 139-67
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Secondary

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Moreh Tsedek; Mostrador de justicia, "Teacher of righteousness"

DATE Approximately 1321-24
ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Hebrew

DESCRIPTION

This is the earliest surviving and most important work of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid. The authenticity of the work is not doubted, as it is referred to by numerous later writers, and in other works by the same author. Originally composed in Hebrew, it was translated into Castilian in the 14th century, very possibly by Abner/Alfonso himself. (He translated his earlier work, the now lost *Sefer milḥamot Adonai*, into Castilian himself in the years preceding the composition of the *Moreh/Mostrador*.) Based on the few fragments of the *Sefer milḥamot* that survive in Latin citations of the 15th-century polemicist Alonso de Spina, the content of the *Moreh/Mostrador* seems to recycle material from the earlier work (a practice that Abner/Alfonso would repeat in his later works with content from the *Moreh/Mostrador*). This makes it all the more likely that Abner/Alfonso was responsible for the surviving Castilian translation. The work is among the longest anti-Jewish polemical works composed in the Middle Ages, comparable to the length of the *Pugio fidei* of Raymond Martini. The work survives only in Castilian translation as *Mostrador de justicia*, and is known from a single long manuscript containing 330 folios, over 700 pages in the printed edition.

The work is a text of anti-Jewish polemic (virtually unique among medieval Christian polemics because it was composed in Hebrew) that takes the common form of an extended 'dialogue' between a Christian 'teacher' (*mostrador*, a translation of the Hebrew *moreh*) and a Jewish 'rebel' (*rebelle*, a translation of *mored*). After an introduction in which the author recounts his conversion to Christianity in a fascinating

first-person narrative, the manuscript offers a detailed summary of the contents of the work, which is followed by ten chapters, each covering a separate topic relating to Christian-Jewish polemical arguments. The text draws its proofs predominantly from biblical and rabbinical sources, largely avoiding Christian texts and showing relatively little knowledge of Christian writing in Latin. The ten chapters of the text, which vary considerably in length, treat the following questions: the foundations of polemical argument and the use of textual authorities; the need for Christ's new law to replace that of Moses; a defense of the notion that Christ died to atone for the sins of Adam; a defense of the Trinity; a defense of the Incarnation; proof that the Jewish hope for the future Messiah is false; the miscalculations of Jews concerning the coming of the Messiah and the four kingdoms of history, following the book of Daniel (Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Edom/Rome); proof that the Jews will not return to Israel or leave the captivity of exile; and proof that the Christians are the 'new Israel' and have received God's favor. The anti-Jewish polemics and pro-Christian apologetics closely resemble the arguments of late 13th-century attacks, such as those of Raymond Martini and those presented at the 1263 Disputation of Barcelona by the convert Paul Christiani, although Abner/Alfonso's arguments are both more detailed and less systematic than either of these. While Abner/Alfonso refers directly to the Disputation of Barcelona and the Hebrew account by Naḥmanides, he never names Martini, and his knowledge of Martini's work is, despite similarities, not yet certain. A close comparison of their sources is necessary to evaluate Abner/Alfonso's possible knowledge of Martini's polemics.

Despite its size and its wide impact on later polemicists, both Christian and Jewish, the content pertaining to the question of Christian-Muslim relations is spare and the actual references to Muslims or to Islam are very few. The work includes roughly 100 citations of material from Arabic texts written by Muslim philosophers (including Ibn Rushd, Ibn Bājjā, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ṭufayl, and others) used to bolster Abner/Alfonso's pro-Christian and anti-Jewish arguments. In themselves, these references constitute a fascinating source of information about the translation and dissemination of works of Arabic philosophy in Hebrew translation among Iberian Jewish intellectuals in the 14th century. Most interesting in this respect are the references to 'Ibn Sīnā's oriental philosophy', all of which can be shown to derive from Abner/Alfonso's misreading of Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqzān* in Hebrew translation. Although his knowledge of Arabic seems elementary at best (though this too is hard to confirm

or deny), he does show awareness of various works of Arabic philosophy and medicine, and mentions Sufism in a positive light.

Even more importantly, however, Abner/Alfonso's references to Arab philosophers form part of a wider set of references to Muslims in comparison with Jews. As Abner/Alfonso asserts in a few different passages, 'the faith of the Moors is not as bad as the faith of the Jews'. The reason for this is that Muslims 'do not have all the alterations and discord and bad customs' that the Jews are alleged to have. Moreover 'the act of sodomy, which the Moors allow, is not as bad as what the Jews allow, letting the woman [be taken] in that other part which is not customary' (f. 332v/ed. Mettmann, ii, p. 427). Abner/Alfonso even goes as far as to assert that Muslims, because they receive Jesus as a prophet, are to be called 'Nazarenes, which is to say [they are] Christians' (f. 233r/ed. Mettmann, ii, p. 203). Statements such as these are tucked into a few places within a much larger work dedicated predominantly to the refutation of Judaism on the basis of rabbinical sources.

SIGNIFICANCE

The *Moreh/Mostrador* was immensely significant as an anti-Jewish polemical text, receiving many responses by later Jews defending Judaism and attacking Christianity. Similarly, its ideas were important for the two most important Christian polemicists of the 15th century, Alonso de Spina and Pablo de Santa María, whose works were repeatedly published and widely read in the early modern period. Nevertheless, Abner/Alfonso's ideas about Islam in particular seem to have had little lasting impact or significance. Their importance lies in epitomizing an important, temporary shift in Latin Christian polemical attitudes towards Islam in the late 13th and early 14th centuries in which negative attacks occupy less space and importance than passages invoking the name of Islam or citing the Qur'an itself as a 'witness' to Christian beliefs within arguments against Jews. A similar attitude can be found in certain contemporary anti-Jewish passages by Raymond Martini, Alphonsus Bonihominis, and Nicholas of Lyra, despite their own anti-Muslim rhetoric.

MANUSCRIPTS

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EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

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Teshuvot la-meḥaref; Respuestas al blasfemo,
 'Response to the blasphemer'

DATE Uncertain; late 1330s or early 1340s

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Hebrew

DESCRIPTION

This is the last known text written by Abner/Alfonso, as is clear from its mention by name in most of his other major writings. Along with his earliest surviving work, the *Moreh tsedek/Mostrador de justicia* ('Teacher of righteousness'), it is also among his most important, for two reasons: it is his second longest surviving work (57 folios of Hebrew text, 48 in Castilian translation); and it is his longest and most significant work to survive in *both* Hebrew and Castilian versions. Because Abner/Alfonso frequently recycled and repeated arguments and even whole passages from his earlier writing in his later works, this text offers a small glimpse into the state of what parts of the original Hebrew of Abner/Alfonso's *magnum opus*, the *Moreh/Mostrador*, must have looked like. It also sheds some light on how the Castilian translations of his work correspond to the original Hebrew versions, often helping to clarify obscure turns of phrase in translation. Also important is the fact that the texts, which correspond fairly closely in most respects, survive in different manuscripts and the Castilian version can help shed light on some passages missing from the original Hebrew.

Like his earlier *Minḥat kena'ot/Ofrenda de zelos* ('Offering of zeal'), the work was written in response to his former 'good friend' Isaac Pollegar, who wrote various treatises against Abner/Alfonso's ideas, criticizing his belief in divine foreknowledge and predestination. It sets forth his refutations of Pollegar's critiques of Christian belief and what Abner/

Alfonso considers his over-dependence on Aristotelian philosophy. Abner/Alfonso defends Christian belief in the unity of God within the concept of the Trinity, attacks Pollegar's brand of Aristotelian rationalism, and defends belief in Jesus as the Messiah through the testimonies of rabbinical as well as biblical writing.

The content relating to Christian-Muslim relations is of a piece with that found in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, although less explicit. Abner/Alfonso occasionally invokes Muslim Arabic philosophers to support his Christological views, specifically asserting their support of the Trinity as he did in Book 5 of the *Moreh/Mostrador*. Citing 'the Arab philosophers, who are called Sufis', Abner/Alfonso claims that Islamic thinkers agree on the basic truths of Christianity. The point of such an argument, which is made more explicitly in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, is not – as it is among 12th-century anti-Muslim writers – to deride Islam, but rather to invoke Islam as part of a shared argument against Judaism. There is one significant passage where Abner/Alfonso discusses Islam directly, stating that al-Ghazālī 'hinted' obliquely at the truth of Christianity, but did not do so openly 'because he saw that it was not good and appropriate in the eyes of his Muslim coreligionists who were listening to him. For even though they believed in Jesus Christ... they did not want to accept the belief in the Trinity... this is because... Muḥammad their prophet, in all of his edicts, wanted to make a compromise between the edicts of the Jews and the edicts of the Christians and to take an intermediary path between them in order that neither these nor the others would be very far from turning to him' (BPP MS 2440, f. 21r, trans. in Hecht, *Polemical exchange*, pp. 170-71). This passage expresses a view similar to that of the *Moreh/Mostrador's* assertion that 'the faith of the Moors is not as bad as the faith of the Jews'. Despite these statements, however, the role of Islam in both the *Moreh/Mostrador* and the *Teshuvot* is minimal.

SIGNIFICANCE

On the whole, this work presents little material that is directly relevant to the discussion of Muslim-Christian relations, but it offers a fruitful companion to the arguments in the *Moreh/Mostrador*. Given that the *Teshuvot* offers a much more acerbic and concentrated attack on Judaism than the longer and more rhetorically sophisticated *Moreh/Mostrador*, the total lack of any direct criticism of Islam – even when mentioning Muḥammad's alleged desire for a 'compromise' between Christianity and Judaism – is in itself striking. Considering the seemingly benign place of Islam within Abner/Alfonso's thought, the text also bears on the question

of Muslim-Christian relations in providing grounds for comparison with the spurious works attributed to Abner/Alfonso, *Sermons against Jews and Muslims* and the *Book of three faiths*, in which Islam is attacked more directly. The *Teshuvot* is notably different from these texts in almost every way: in tone, source base, and certainly in attitudes toward Islam.

MANUSCRIPTS

MS Parma, Biblioteca Palatina – 2440 ('De Rossi 533'), fols 8r-65r (contains the Hebrew text of Abner/Alfonso's *Teshuvot*, preceded by Isaac Pollegar's text to which it responds, and followed by Abner/Alfonso's three polemical letters, a response to those letters by Joseph Shalom, and Abner/Alfonso's response to that response)

MS Vat – Lat. 6423, fols 41r-89r (contains a 14th-century Castilian trans. of the Hebrew *Teshuvot*, preceded by a Castilian trans. of the *Minḥat kena'ot* and followed by a Castilian trans. of Abner/Alfonso's three polemical letters)

EDITIONS & TRANSLATIONS

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Libro de las tres creencias; Libro declarante,
'Book of the three faiths'

DATE Unknown; estimated between 1280 and 1400

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Castilian

DESCRIPTION

This text consists of an extended analysis of each section of the Apostles' Creed into which are incorporated shorter defenses of Christian dogmas such the Trinity, the person of Christ, the sacraments, the Incarnation, and the divinity of Jesus. The text begins, on the basis of a dictum drawn from a Romance version of the collection of didactic proverbs *The distichs of Cato* (*Disticha Catonis*), by setting out to discover which sages from which religions should be believed. 'Those who are called Jewish sages have the Jews believe one way, and those who are called sages of the Moors [have the] Moors [believe] in another way, and the Christian sages [have] the Christians [believe] in another way.' Because of the relative nature of authority, the text presents proof-texts in multiple languages, including biblical citations in Latin, Castilian, and transliterated Hebrew. In a few selected places, the text also gives statements relating to Christian belief in transliterated Arabic alongside a Castilian translation. In all cases, as much in the Hebrew citations as in the Arabic, the transliterated texts are extremely corrupt but still can be deciphered with the help of the accompanying translations. For example, in discussing Muslim beliefs about Jesus and Mary, the text reads, 'They say that holy Mary – who conceived from the Holy Spirit, whom [the Muslims] call *Arohala* [i.e. *rūḥ Allāh*] – she gave birth to Jesus Christ, whom they call *Ahica Aduenj Mariem* [i.e. *ʿIsā ibn Maryam*]... In Arabic they say *aduenj Mariem aradayala anua araday la asmja* [i.e. *Ibn Maryam raḍiya llāh ʿanhu raḍiya llāh ismahā*], by which they say "Jesus Christ son of holy Mary, God bless him and of holy Mary, God bless her"' (MS 9302, f. 20r). Such examples of transliteration, which are much more abundant for Hebrew texts, seem to indicate a concern with the sound of the original rather than the spelling of the written text, although it is impossible to know for certain, given the corrupt nature of the copies in the extant manuscripts.

The question of authorship is a complicated one, and has yet to be settled. Menéndez Pidal ('Sobre la bibliografía de San Pedro Pascual') rejected the association of the text with San Pedro Pascual and associated it with Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid, on the basis of the two Escorial manuscripts. Carpenter (*Text and concordance*) tentatively attributed the text to Abner/Alfonso, while Mettmann ('*El Libro declarante*') argues against this attribution on the basis of various points. First, the only explicit textual attribution to Abner/Alfonso can be found only in BNM MS 9302, which Mettmann argues shares a source with the two Escorial manuscripts, and he thus concludes that the attribution is a

later addition into the manuscript tradition through the BNM manuscript. Second, he claims that there are notable differences in style between this work and Abner/Alfonso's other undisputed writings, above all in the citation of biblical material in Latin. Finally, he analyzes the statement that 'more than 1,300 years' have passed since Jews have remained in 'captivity' (MS 9302, f. 13r). Based on traditional rabbinical calculations of the duration of the four exiles (Babylonia, Persia, Greece, and 'Edom', usually understood as Rome, inclusive of the Roman Church), he calculates that the text must have been composed around 1270 or 1280, and came to be falsely attributed to Abner/Alfonso in the 14th century.

Although Mettmann's hypothesis against Abner/Alfonso's authorship may be right, his arguments are problematic for various reasons. First, Abner/Alfonso himself rejects the typical four-fold rabbinical calculation of the Jewish exile, arguing instead that the last captivity was that of Greece, not Rome (see *Mostrador de justicia*, ch. 8, fols 236v-238v). As a result, the standard rabbinical calculations cannot be used to determine the date of the text since they might vary depending on the calculations accepted by the author. More appropriate for comparison is Abner/Alfonso's own explicit statement in the *Moreh/Mostrador* that 'more than 1,252 years have passed' in 'this captivity of Titus', apparently referring to the dispersion of the Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple under Titus in 70 (f. 266v). This dating seems logical for the composition of the *Moreh/Mostrador* in c. 1321-22 or 1323, and thus suggests that the claim of 'more than 1,300 years' could not have been made by Abner/Alfonso because it would date the text to after his death, unless it referred to the birth of Jesus rather than the destruction of the Second Temple. The standard rabbinical calculations do not figure here.

Second, the argument concerning the use of Latin in the text relies on a comparison of Hebrew originals or Castilian translations (themselves of uncertain provenance) with a text composed by all accounts in Castilian and with a strong oral character. There are no extensive Latin citations in Abner/Alfonso's Hebrew texts (although a few do appear in the Castilian translations), but these facts do not preclude there being such in a text composed in Castilian for a mixed audience. Within Abner/Alfonso's surviving corpus, however, there are no texts composed for certain in Castilian against which the use of Latin could be compared. The one text possibly composed in Castilian (*Libro de la ley*) offers no clarification of the question because it contains some occasional phrases in Latin like the Castilian version of the *Moreh/Mostrador*. Insofar as Latin does appear in a few places in these Castilian texts, the *Libro's* citations of

the Latin Vulgate are not entirely out of keeping with Abner/Alfonso's other writing: most of what little Latin can be found in the translations of his writing is, as it is in the *Libro*, drawn from ecclesiastical or scriptural rather than literary or academic sources and could easily have been familiar to him in his position as sacristan of the Collegiate Church of Valladolid. Similarly, the use of a few phrases of transliterated Arabic in the *Libro* offers no clarification, because Abner/Alfonso also includes a few words in Arabic in the *Moreh/Mostrador* (e.g. *çoffia*, i.e. *şūfiyya*, 'Sufis', 'Sufism', and his explanation of the word for 'soul' 'in the Arabic language', fols 91v and 94v).

Moreover, at the same time as Mettmann glosses over these points, his arguments give short shrift to the similarities between Abner/Alfonso's texts and the *Libro*. First, the *Libro* (fols 2r, 31v, etc.) shows a concern with the relative merit and argumentative force of 'witnesses' (*testigos*), a theme that dominates the first chapter of Abner/Alfonso's *Moreh/Mostrador*, and is especially evident in his rendition of the Talmudic dictum, 'The testimony of the litigant is worth 100 witnesses' (f. 32v). Second, the *Libro* approaches the question of religious difference from a relative perspective, conceding that each faith esteems its own teachers 'in one way' or 'another way'. This recognition of the relative weight of authority and tradition vaguely resembles Abner/Alfonso's attitude in his main writings. Third, the *Libro* argues in favor of the Trinity using arguments similar to those in the *Moreh/Mostrador* (e.g., seeing the Hebrew word *Elohim*, 'Lord', as a plural form). The principle polemical themes of the *Libro* can all be found in Abner/Alfonso's writing and, as in the *Moreh/Mostrador*, he gives a preponderate focus to attacking Judaism rather than Islam. To be sure, these issues are common to other polemical writing, but the presence of such similarities to Abner/Alfonso's own works gainsays Mettmann's assertion that the possibility of his authorship must be discarded out of hand (p. 75). Sainz de la Maza ('La reescritura de obras de polémica', p. 156 n. 13) judges Mettmann's dating of c. 1270 to be illogically early for the history of Castilian polemical writing, which seems to have lagged behind Aragon by a few decades in the use of non-Christian proof-texts and translations.

Finally, the rejection of the attribution of the work to Abner/Alfonso in BNM MS 9302 is too hasty. Accepting Mettmann's own manuscript *stemma*, it is possible to see the name of the author dropping out in an intermediate source (δ) shared by the Escorial manuscripts and not impacting MS 9302. The truncated state of the Portuguese and later BNM manuscripts sheds no light on the common source. Unless new

manuscripts are unearthed, there is not sufficient evidence either to accept for certain the attribution to Abner/Alfonso in MS 9302 or to discard it out of hand.

Despite all of this, there are, to complicate matters more, other issues that would support Mettmann's case against attributing the work to Abner/Alfonso. Unlike all of Abner/Alfonso's other undisputed writings, the *Libro* contains virtually no references to Rabbinical writing (only two vague references to the Talmud) or to Muslim or Jewish philosophers (the absence of Maimonides is particularly notable). The total lack of references to the philosophical questions that permeate his other major writings further underscores the patent differences between the *Libro* and the *Moreh/Mostrador*. Because of the many points where the *Libro* overlaps with the *Sermones contra los judíos y moros*, also attributed to Abner/Alfonso (for a consideration of these intersections, see the entry on the *Sermones* below), the question of Abner/Alfonso's authorship of both works seems inseparable, and arguments applying to one of the texts directly impact any reading of the other. As already noted, the attitude toward Islam is significantly more acerbic in the *Libro* (and in the *Sermones*) than in Abner/Alfonso's undisputed texts.

All of these points complicate rather than settle the question of authorship; the impression they leave is that the attribution of the *Libro* to Abner/Alfonso is probably spurious, as Mettmann asserted, although not for the reasons he offered. However, without any further data, a more certain conclusion can only be reached through an exhaustive comparison of word use, style, content, and sources across all of Abner/Alfonso's undisputed and attributed works, a task that remains a scholarly desideratum.

SIGNIFICANCE

The work is a unique example of late-medieval Romance polemical literature because it presents authoritative proof-texts in multiple languages. The text seems to have been reasonably well disseminated, judging by the various manuscript recensions (including Castilian, Aragonese, and Portuguese versions), as well as by the intersection and overlapping with the *Sermones*. Although the focus of the *Libro* is more apologetic than polemical and the majority of the polemical arguments are directed against Judaism rather than Islam, it contains numerous passages that bear directly on the question of Muslim-Christian relations. Abner/Alfonso praises Muslims for their faith in Mary: 'The Moors bless holy Mary and for this reason they have kings and princes and have a part

of honour in this world.' Despite this, however, the author stresses that Muslims have no hope of salvation without conversion: 'However, they do not have salvation in the next [world] because they do not want to believe in the salvation and birth or death or resurrection of the Son of God' (MS 9302, f. 20r). This statement contrasts sharply with the statements about Muslims by Abner/Alfonso in his *Moreh/Mostrador*, in which he asserts that Muslims 'are Nazarenes, which is to say, Christians'. While in the *Libro* (and the *Sermones*), the author affirms that both Muslims and Jews are equally in error, repeatedly grouping them together as those who 'deny' the truths he defends, Abner/Alfonso explicitly says in the *Moreh/Mostrador* that 'the faith of the Moors is not as bad as the faith of the Jews'. Differences such as these bear directly on the question of the attribution of the text to Abner/Alfonso.

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Sermones contra los Judíos e Moros,
‘Sermons against the Jews and Muslims’

DATE Unknown; 14th or 15th century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Castilian

DESCRIPTION

This text, attributed to Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid but of uncertain and disputed authorship, survives in a single known manuscript copy. Some earlier critics (Falbel; Santiago-Otero; Dagenais et al.) have treated this text as a single work, while others (Sainz de la Maza) argue it consists of two sermons (Dagenais et al. see these as ‘sections’ of the same text), both incomplete but joined together without conclusion or transition, and both with the characteristics of texts constructed for oral delivery as sermons. These disparate opinions result in part from the uncertainty surrounding the relationship of the text to the *Libro de las tres creencias*, also of unknown authorship but attributed to Abner/Alfonso. The points of intersection and overlap with the *Libro* are abundant but do not follow any easily discernible order. In fact, it is not clear whether the *Libro* and the sermon (or sermons) all together form a larger, single work or whether the sermons are fragments based on the *Libro* (a more likely scenario). Because of these points, the questions of the authorship of both works (if they are indeed separate texts) must be answered together. (For a discussion of this issue, see the arguments presented in the entry on the *Libro* itself.)

What can be called the first sermon or first section (MS 25-H, fols 201r-202v) begins with an opening invocation and prayer, followed by the assertion that, ‘Among all of us Christians and Jews and Moors there is a great debate about the law of God, because you Jews say “We have a better law”, and you Moors say, “We have a better law”, and we Christians say that our law is better and truer than either of yours, and about this is the debate between us and you’ (201r). Each side is said to have an authoritative book, the Gospels, the Talmud and the Qur’an respectively, and ‘these three books are opposed one to another’ (201v). In order to decide who is right, God is invoked as the fair judge in whom all three sides believe. The author begins by claiming to present ‘the arguments’ (*razones*) of the Gospels (promising to later present the arguments in the Talmud and Qur’an), which correspond to the seven sacraments of the Church.

After 'proving' the first 'argument', the truth of the Incarnation, and after claiming that both Muslims and Jews deny this in 'their books', the author begins a discussion of the crucifixion and resurrection. This ends abruptly after only a few lines, and there then begins what can be called the second sermon, also clearly overlapping with the *Libro de las tres creencias*, calling itself the book 'of the three names' and the *Declara[n]te* (another name for the *Libro de las tres creencias*), as well as the *Monstra[n]te* and *Proba[n]te* (202v-203r). It is possible to see the text as a rewriting of portions of the *Libro* in many parallel sections and in its claim to have been written 'anew' (*nueuamente*), but its exact relationship to the *Libro* is still not clear. Through citation of the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, and Qur'an, the remainder of the text sets out to explain and prove the truth of the Christian sacraments, focusing in particular on baptism, eucharist, and penance, and then, in another section overlapping with the *Libro*, it begins to provide proofs of the Trinity, breaking off without conclusion.

SIGNIFICANCE

This text, along with the *Libro de las tres creencias*, displays the relatively rare practice of attempting to render passages from textual authorities (Talmud, Qur'an, Bible) in a multi-lingual format through citation in Latin and Romance alongside transliterated phrases and passages in Hebrew and Arabic (a similar practice can be found in the works of Raymond Martini). As in the *Libro*, the transliterations seem to be based on an oral rendering, perhaps copied from the pronunciation of a native assistant or informant. However, the exact nature of the transliterations, including their accuracy and their source, is impossible to determine because the passages were very probably corrupted through copying. While the focus of both sermons in this text seems to be primarily on Judaism and only secondarily on Islam, there is slightly more content dealing with Islam than in the *Libro*. In the sermons, Arabic is cited in transliteration, the Qur'an itself is named and cited, and the 'Moors' are discussed, all with greater frequency than in the *Libro*. In most cases, Islam is lumped together with Judaism, and the two are considered as partners in unbelief. Speaking directly to a Jewish and Muslim audience, the author states that in both the Talmud and in the Qur'an, 'you do not want to recognize or concede the truth' (202r). In contrast to the first sermon and to the *Libro* itself, the second sermon specifically addresses the importance of languages as a tool for persuasion, presenting its arguments 'in Hebrew and in Arabic and in Latin and in Romance, so that it can be understood

by educated Jews and Muslims and Christians' (203r). The association of language with confessional identity bears a strong resemblance to contemporary Dominican polemical writing such as that of Raymond Martini and Abner/Alfonso himself, but the joint condemnation of Muslims along with Jews is not in keeping with the latter's hierarchical characterization of Muslims as implicitly 'better' than Jews from a Christian perspective.

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