



Petrus Alfonsi
and his *Dialogus*
Background, Context, Reception

Edited by

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Ryan Szpiech

«PETRUS ALFONSI ... ERRED GREATLY»:
ALFONSO OF VALLADOLID'S IMITATION
AND CRITIQUE OF PETRUS ALFONSI'S *DIALOGUS*

There was once a Jew, a member of one of the medieval Jewish communities that grew in the north of the Iberian Peninsula after the conquest of Muslim cities by the Christians. This Jew was educated in his faith and pious in his dedication to his traditions, but well into his adult life, in the midst of persecutions, he began to worry about the trials of his people. After a series of dreams he had while sleeping in the synagogue, he began to search the Bible and books of Hebrew and Arabic philosophy and religion for answers to his questions. After many years of searching and debating the issue within himself, he finally vowed to convert to Christianity, and to write a book in defense of his new faith and in condemnation of his old. His book took the form of a dialogue between a doubting Jew and a faithful Christian, and one can easily imagine that these two voices were meant to represent the convert's two selves, the former infidel and the present believer.

There is much to this story that could sound like a description of the Aragonese convert Petrus Alfonsi, who converted in 1106 in Huesca: it is the story of a Jew from Sepharad who converted to Christianity in one of Iberia's Christian kingdoms, a former Jew who was educated in his ancestral faith, zealous in his new one, knowledgeable in Arabic and Hebrew philosophy, and who later became an ardent anti-Jewish polemicist. It is the story of a converted Jew who tells of his conversion in the opening lines of his attack on his former faith, a Jew who, after his conversion, changed his city of residence and, like many converts, changed his name. It is the story of an ambitious author who explores his

faith in a dramatized debate with his alter ego, represented in the personas of a Jew and Christian. It is the story of a well-known figure whose anti-Jewish polemical text was read by many and was a work that enjoyed a unique impact among later writers, being cited and copied by polemicists for centuries and showing an influence well into the sixteenth century.

This is not, however, the story of the Aragonese convert Petrus Alfonsi, but of the Castilian Jew Abner of Burgos (ca. 1265/70–ca. 1347), converted around the age of fifty to Christianity, over two centuries after Petrus. Like Petrus Alfonsi, Abner took the name Alfonso upon conversion, and is best known as Alfonso of Valladolid. He fictionalized his conversion story, just as Petrus Alfonsi fictionalized his, in the first-person opening of his lengthy anti-Jewish polemic, *Teacher of Righteousness* (*Moreh Šedeq*), composed in Hebrew shortly after his conversion. The text, which now only survives in a contemporary Castilian translation called «Mostrador de justicia», is one of the longest anti-Jewish polemical works written during the Middle Ages – over six times as long as Petrus Alfonsi’s *Dialogus*, longer even than Ramon Martí’s *Pugio fidei* – yet it remains one of the least explored.

Despite the similarities between Abner/Alfonso and Petrus – enough to move one critic to dub Abner/Alfonso «un equivalente castellano de Pedro Alfonso»¹ – the two lived two centuries apart, and the connection between them, if any, is not at all clear. Various scholars have asserted that Abner/Alfonso drew from Petrus, and given the similarities between them, this is not an unreasonable assertion, but very few have begun to substantiate this connection by providing details from the *Teacher* itself, or other works by Abner/Alfonso². It is the goal of this article to

1. C. Sainz de la Maza, «De Pedro Alfonso a Abner-Alfonso: orto y cénit converso de la apologética antijudía medieval», *Dicenda. Cuadernos de Filología Hispánica*, 15 (1997), 271–88, at 279.

2. Among the fullest comparisons to date is Sainz de la Maza, «De Pedro Alfonso a Abner-Alfonso», 279–81, who does offer some concrete points of comparison and does cite Abner/Alfonso’s reference to Petrus in the *Teacher of Righteousness*. Nevertheless, this study does not elaborate the comparison in detail. D. Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics Against Christianity in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed., Oxford 2007, 122, also offers some proof. One more recent study that offers some further comparison between the fictional

explore the connection between Petrus Alfonsi and Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid by looking at the latter's direct reference to the former and also by considering the numerous occasions of un-credited borrowing and imitation by Abner/Alfonso. Based on this material, I will suggest that Abner/Alfonso's *Teacher of Righteousness* is in fact directly responding to Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus*, but because of the author's desire to construct a polemic in Hebrew intended for a Jewish readership, Abner/Alfonso does not praise Petrus Alfonsi or fully admit his debt to him. Instead, he criticizes and rejects him, and uses a host of philosophical proofs and Talmudic citations to distance himself from the arguments of the *Dialogus*, even as he draws directly from them.

Strategy and Sources in the Teacher of Righteousness

To understand the place of Petrus Alfonsi among Abner/Alfonso's sources in the *Teacher of Righteousness*, it is necessary to say more about the nature and language of the text, and to understand the place of Jewish and Christian sources in its arguments. After becoming Christian publicly around 1320, Alfonso spent the remaining decades of his life engaged in religious polemic with his former community of Jewish friends and students. Although he wrote primarily in Hebrew, his texts were also translated into Castilian, at least partly and possibly entirely by Abner/Alfonso himself³. Some of these texts have survived both in original Hebrew and translated Castilian form, some in

strategies used by Abner/Alfonso and Petrus is R. Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative: Reading and Religious Authority in Medieval Polemic*, Philadelphia 2013, 145-49. Other studies offer passing but unsubstantiated suggestions. See, in addition, I. Resnick, who states plainly that the *Dialogus* «utilized by Abner de Burgos (Alphonse of Valladolid; ca. 1270-1347) in his *Mostrador de justicia*», and offers a few remarks on that influence. See Resnick, 28. Also J. Tolán, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, Gainesville 1993, 118; and Y. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, Philadelphia 1978, 1,343.

3. On the question of Abner/Alfonso's translation of his own work, see Mettmann's introduction to his edition of the *Teacher* (Alfonso of Valladolid, *Mostrador de justicia*, ed. W. Mettmann, Opladen 1994; 1996), 1,8; and R. Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative* (cit. n. 2), 255, n. 8.

only one or the other, and his writing now exists in a tangled miscellany of languages and versions, including some fifteenth-century citations in Latin as well. The *Moreh Şedeq* / *Mostrador de justicia* (Paris, BnF, ms. espagnol 43, fols. 12r-342v), written around 1321-1322, is the earliest, longest, and most important of Alfonso's works to survive, serving as a source for material used and rewritten in his later texts. It is arranged into a short initial section covering two folios, and ten principal chapters of varied length (two are, in fact, each longer than the entire *Dialogus* of Petrus Alfonsi). Each chapter consists of a back-and-forth discussion between a Jewish disputant, called the «Rebel» («Rebelle»), and a Christian, called the «Teacher» («Mostrador»). In the printed edition of the text, each statement or response by the Teacher or Rebel has been taken to mark a separate section division, which vary from a few lines to many folios in length. On the whole, the passages attributed to the Christian Teacher are much longer than those attributed to the Jewish Rebel (for example, the longest is over twenty-five folios in length). Despite the fact that the responses of the Rebel are comparatively short (the longest, near the end, is itself a few folios long), these responses are frequently much longer and more combative than is normal for anti-Jewish polemical dialogues and are often full of interesting details that reflect the author's learning and background. The central topic of the *Mostrador de justicia* is, in keeping with the polemical arguments of the thirteenth century, the Messiah and the possible references to him in biblical, rabbinical, and medieval Jewish writing. Like Dominican polemicists of the later thirteenth century, Abner/Alfonso maintains that Jewish sources identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah awaited in the Jewish tradition, and that Jews have misunderstood and misrepresented their own sources regarding this tradition.

Despite its connections with earlier polemics, including the *Dialogus*, Abner/Alfonso's writing is unique among anti-Jewish texts in its language. The composition of the work in Hebrew, rather than simply the inclusions of quotations of Hebrew sources, distinguishes his work from the entire anti-Jewish polemical tradition in the Christian West, including the work of Petrus Alfonsi. Moreover, despite the fact that Abner/Alfonso was a

master of Hebrew style and thoroughly learned in Hebrew sources, his use of Hebrew as an anti-Jewish language was not due to his limited capabilities in other languages or his slow adjustment to the Christian culture he embraced but to the rhetorical strategy he employed throughout his writing. Unlike most other anti-Jewish writers, Abner/Alfonso wrote in order to be read by Jews, and it was from Jews that he received most of his abundant responses and counter-attacks. Beyond responses to or discussion of his work by at least a dozen later Jewish writers (more than any other Christian polemicist, including Petrus Alfonsi), he also was read and cited by the Christian anti-Jewish writers of the fifteenth century, including Solomon Halevi/Pablo de Santa María (and through him, Johannes Reuchlin in the sixteenth century), Joshua Halorki/Jerónimo de Santa Fe, and (like Petrus Alfonsi) Alfonso de Espina, all of whom cite passages of Abner/Alfonso's writing in Latin⁴. Through citations by these writers, all of whose works were published and distributed widely, Abner/Alfonso was best known to the Christian readers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While Petrus Alfonsi's writing enjoyed a very wide circulation among Christians both on its own and as part of other texts including Vincent de Beauvais' *Speculum historiale* (*Mirror of History*) and Espina's *Fortalitium fidei* (*Fortress of Faith*), it was little known among Jewish writers. Abner/Alfonso's writing, by contrast, because it survived in a variety of languages, achieved a more varied impact among both Jews and Christians. Indeed, few other Christian polemics, not excluding Petrus Alfonsi's immensely popular *Dialogue* or Ramon Martí's *Pugio fidei*, ever enjoyed the Jewish readership marshaled by Abner/Alfonso's texts⁵.

4. On citations of Abner/Alfonso in Latin, see C. del Valle Rodríguez, «El Libro de las batallas de Dios, de Abner de Burgos», in C. del Valle (ed.) *Polémica judeocristiana. Estudios*, Madrid 1992, 75-119. On references to Abner/Alfonso in Reuchlin, see D. O'Callaghan, *The Preservation of Jewish Religious Books in Sixteenth-Century Germany: Johannes Reuchlin's Augenspiegel*, Leiden 2013, 156, n. 239. On Reuchlin's citation of Petrus Alfonsi, see 156, n. 238.

5. The only Jewish text that seems to be responding to Martí's argumentation is that of the thirteenth-century Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret of Barcelona, whose *Peruše'i aggadot* presents an imagined literary polemical

Abner/Alfonso explicitly states his intention to speak to Jewish rather than Christian readers in the opening to the *Mostrador*: «I wanted to compose this book [...] in order to show the true faith, and the truth and justice in it, to the Jews, who have need of it, as I was told [in my dream], and in order to respond to all the counter-arguments and doubts, or most of them, that every rebel or contradictory Jew can make to our words»⁶. This intention determines his approach to Christian and Jewish sources, including, as I will suggest below, his use of Petrus Alfonsi's arguments. Abner/Alfonso's rhetorical strategy hinges on creating a rapport with his reader as a fellow Jew, one

dialogue with a Christian. For the text of the *Peruše*, see J. Perles, *R. Salomo b. Abraham b. Adereth: Sein Leben und seine Schriften*, Breslau 1863, Heb. sec., 24-56. On Ibn Adret's text read in the context of Martini's polemic, see J. Cohen, «The Christian Adversary of Solomon ben Adret», *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, n.s., 71.1 (1980), 48-55; T. Willi, «Die Perusche Aggadot des R. Salomo ben Adret», in I. Willi-Plein and T. Willi (eds.), *Glaubensdolch und Messiasbeweis*, Düsseldorf 1980, 85-100; and R. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response*, Berkeley 1989, 137-58. Among the writers to respond to Abner/Alfonso are Joseph ben Shem Tov, Moses ha-Cohen of Tordesillas, Shem Tov ibn Shaprut, Isaac Polgar, Moses Narboni, Joseph Shalom, Isaac Albalag, Isaac Israeli, Samuel ibn Sasson, Ḥayim ben Yehuda ibn Musa, Ḥasdai Crescas, and Judah Leon of Modena, as well as a number of sixteenth-century Italian Kabbalists. On the responses to Abner/Alfonso's work, see S. Gershenzon, «A Study of the *Teshuvot la-Meharef*», New York 1984, 26-32; C. Sainz de la Maza, «Alfonso de Valladolid: Edición y estudio del manuscrito Lat. 6423 de la Biblioteca Apostólica Vaticana», Madrid 1990, 247-77; J. 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-Meharef*», New York 1993, 35-49; R. Szpiech, «From Testimonia to Testimony: Thirteenth-Century Anti-Jewish Polemic and the *Mostrador de justicia* of Abner of Burgos/Alfonso of Valladolid», New Haven 2006, 329-50; and S. Sadik, «Is Rabbi Abner "Abner of Burgos"?» [Hebrew] *Kabbalah*, 21 (2010), 332-47.

6. «E por amor que las rrazones ssean más paladinas e manifiestas a quien quisiere saber la verdat en ellas, quisse conponer este libro, que lo llamé por nonbre «Mostrador de Justicia», por mostrar la ffe çierta, e la verdat e la justicia en ella, a los judios, que la avien mester, segund que me ffue dicho, e para rresponder a todas las contradiciones e las dubdas, o las más dellas, que nos pueden ffazer todo judio rrebelde e contrdezidor a las nuestras palabras». Paris, BnF, ms. espagnol 43, fol. 13r; *Mostrador de justicia*, ed. Mettmann, 1,15. All citations from the *Mostrador* will give the folio followed by the volume and page number from Mettmann's edition.

who thinks and writes as his readers do and who understands the challenges they face⁷. As an integral part of that strategy, Abner/Alfonso avoids associating himself with anything that might make his arguments seem unfamiliar or inauthentic. His choice to write in Hebrew embodies this approach, and this is further reflected in his discussion of his translation of his writing into Castilian. He specifies that in citing the Bible, «I did not take verses according to how they are translated to Latin among Christians, but rather according to how they are understood in the Hebrew language. This is because my words and arguments here are not with Christians, but with contrary Jews, for the sages do not have need of medicine, in the way the sick do»⁸.

This strategy went beyond his citation practice and choice of language. Beyond his use of Hebrew, Abner/Alfonso took decisive steps to express his arguments against Jewish interpretations of the Messiah in a way that would seem familiar to Jewish readers, appearing to resemble arguments like those found in original Jewish works that debate such questions from a non-polemical point of view. He deliberately eschews relying on non-Jewish sources in constructing most of his arguments, with the exception of classical philosophy (Plato, Aristotle) and Arabic philosophical sources (Ibn Rušd, al-Fārābī, Ibn Ṭufayl and citations from him erroneously attributed to Ibn Sīnā)⁹. These texts, however, were themselves not unfamiliar to Jewish readers, as many had already been translated into Hebrew and were known among intellectual Jews of Iberia and Provence. Most importantly, Abner/Alfonso draws from a staggering variety of Jewish works,

7. For a detailed discussion of this rhetorical strategy, see Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative* (cit. n. 2), 143–73.

8. «[...] non tomé los viessos ssegund que sson trasladados al latin entre los christianos, ssinon segunt que sson entendudos en lengua del ebrayco. E esto es porque mis palabras e mis rrazones aqui non son con los christianos, ssinon con los judios contradezidores; ca los sabios non an menester melezina, como lo an me[ne]ster los enfermos» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fols. 151v–52r / ed. Mettmann 2,28).

9. For a consideration of Abner/Alfonso's philosophical sources, see S. Sadik, «Rabbi Ḥasdai Crescas's Critique of Aristotelian Science and the Lost Books of Abner of Burgos» [Hebrew] *Tarbiz*, 77 (2008), 133–56; and R. Szpiech, «In Search of Ibn Sīnā's "Oriental Philosophy" in Medieval Castile», *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 20 (2010), 185–206.

showing a deep knowledge not only of rabbinical arguments in the Talmud and major midrashim, but also of other works from many other periods of Jewish writing, including works by figures such as Rashi, Maimonides, David Kimḥi, and Naḥmanides, other works of medieval philosophy and exegesis including Saadiyah Gaon, Abraham ibn Ezra and Moses Chiquitilla, polemical works by Joseph Kimḥi and Jacob ben Reuben, the *Seper Nestor ha-komer* (*Book of Nestor the Priest*), as well as material from the *Toledot Yešu*, works of medieval historiography such as the *Seper ha-Qabbalah* (*Book of Tradition*) of Ibn Daud and the *Seper Yosippon* (*Book of Josephus*), and even some apocalyptic works such as the *Seper Zerubbabel* (*Book of Zerubbabel*). Because of the abundance of sources cited and discussed, Abner/Alfonso's works, especially the *Mostrador*, are an important source of knowledge about the circulation of Jewish writing in the Middle Ages and are also an important testimony regarding the state of such texts in the fourteenth century in Castile. In some cases, Abner/Alfonso's texts preserve lost material or sources not found elsewhere, just as Ramon Martí's *Pugio fidei* did in the thirteenth century.

In comparison to this banquet of Hebrew sources, Abner/Alfonso's use of Christian literature is very limited indeed. The historian of Iberian Jewry Yitzhak Baer went so far as to assert that, «the only explicit reference [to Christian theology] is to Augustine»¹⁰. Although this is not quite true – there are a few other Christian authors cited and discussed, but not many – it is certain that Abner/Alfonso ignores most Christian anti-Jewish writing. No mention is made, for example, of early authors like Tertullian, Origen, or Justin Martyr, or of writers like Isidore of Seville. Of those early Christian authors that are mentioned, references are to non-polemical works. For example, none of the ten references to Jerome in the *Mostrador* discuss anything but Jerome's translation of Hebrew words, seemingly ignoring his polemical writing altogether. Of the handful of references to Augustine, no mention is made of Augustine's extensive discussion of Jews or Judaism¹¹.

10. Baer, *A History* (cit. n. 2), 1,331.

11. Abner/Alfonso makes passing references to Augustine's ideas about signs (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 109r/ed. Mettmann 1,206), his explanation of the

The same can be said of his few citations of other Christian authors. His few passing references to writers like Boethius, Gregory the Great, and Bede all concern non-polemical material that is mostly unrelated to Christian-Jewish relations¹². Even more significantly, Abner/Alfonso entirely avoids mentioning any later polemicists like Agobard of Lyons, Gilbert Crispin, Rupert of Deutz, Peter of Blois, or Peter Damiani¹³. Some omis-

Eucharist (fols. 181v-2r/ed. Mettmann 2,93), and his conception of God and the Trinity (fol. 121v/ed. Mettmann 1,231 and 143r/2,7). These last citations are repeated almost exactly in *Libro de la ley* on fol. 5v and 10r, respectively, and in Abner/Alfonso's later *Tešubot la-meħaref* (*Responses to the Blasphemer*), in Hebrew (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440 (De Rossi 533), fols. 19b and 21b, ed. in Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange», 363 and 367, respectively, trans. on 165 and 173), and in the Castilian translation (*Tešuvot la-Meħaref: Spanische Fassung*, ed. W. Mettmann, Opladen 1998, fols. 49v and 50v).

12. For example, his two citations from Boethius (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 140r/ed. Mettmann 1,271 and fol. 119r/ed. Mettmann 1,226, a citation repeated on fol. 144r/ed. Mettmann 2,10) deal, not surprisingly, with strictly philosophical topics about the path to happiness. Abner/Alfonso's single mention of Pope Gregory I (fol. 41r/ed. Mettmann 1,68-69), does not relate to his ideas or policies about Judaism or mention his highly influential letter from 598 to Victor, Bishop of Palermo, later adopted by Pope Calixtus II and subsequent popes in the well known bull about the treatment of Jews, *Sicut Iudaeis*. (On this bull and its influence, see S. Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century I*, New York 1966, 92; and S. Grayzel, «The Papal Bull *Sicut Iudaeis*», in *Studies and Essays in Honor of A. A. Newman*, Leiden 1962, 243-80). Abner/Alfonso's mention of Bede (fols. 204v-208v/ed. Mettmann 2,373-81) discusses the latter's argument in *De ratione temporum* that the Sabbath was originally kept on Sunday, not Saturday, before the Torah was revealed on Mount Sinai. Despite Abner/Alfonso's intended use, this citation does not come from a polemical context. In fact, the only explicitly polemical reference drawn from a pre-twelfth century author is a reference to a legendary debate between Pope Sylvester I and a Jew, the so called *Actus Silvestri*, probably taken from Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*, chapter twelve.

13. S. Baron has noted that Abner/Alfonso was unaware of Agobard's discussion of the *Ši'ur qomah* («Measurement of the Height», i.e. height of the Divine Body), a text of Heikalot literature (i.e. about ascension to heaven, visions of the divine throne or chariot, and/or angels) that describes the secret names and dimensions of God's body, a discussion he certainly could have elaborated upon and that he would have found useful. See S. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols., New York 1965, 9,301, n. 19. For Abner/Alfonso's references to the *Ši'ur qomah* in the Mostrador, see Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fols. 17r and 85r/ed. Mettmann 1,22 and 1,159. In the *Tešubot*, see Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440 (De Rossi 533), fol. 22v, in Hecht, «Polemical Exchange» (cit. n. 5), 369, trans. on 178.

sions clearly stand out. It is noticeable, for example, that Abner/Alfonso does not mention the anti-Jewish polemic of Peter the Venerable of Cluny, *Adversus Iudaeorum inveteratam duritiem* (*Against the Inveterate Obduracy of the Jews*), which includes a rabbinical legend about third-century rabbi Joshua ben Levi's journey to Hell, not extant in any other source¹⁴. Abner/Alfonso, in fact, includes a different but comparable legend about Joshua ben Levi's alleged journey to Hell in his own writing, and one can assume that Peter's alternative version of the legend would have interested him as well¹⁵. Most egregious among Abner/Alfonso's omissions is the total lack of mention of Ramon Martí, with whose work the *Mostrador* has the most in common. Like Martí's *Pugio fidei*, the *Mostrador* is an attempt to prove that Jesus was the Messiah on the basis of Talmudic and midrashic sources. Abner/Alfonso does mention «these two great orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis [...] which are two great pillars to sustain the Law of the Christians and give it great honor» and he praises «the preaching and glosses that the wise friars demonstrate concerning the saying of the prophets and the confirmation of the true faith»¹⁶. Even so, no mention is made of Ramon Martí in particular, and the only explicit clue possibly linking their work is a single cryptic citation in the *Mostrador* from one «Rabbi Rachmon», an unknown figure thought by some to be a Jewish-sounding pseudonym that Ramon Martí invented for himself. The reference, however, is to a passage not found in any of Martí's exist-

14. See Peter the Venerable, *Adversus Iudaeorum Inveteratam Duritiem*, ed. Y. Freidman, Turnhout 1985 (CCCM 58), 163–66. For a discussion of Peter's use of this text, see D. Iogna-Prat, *Order and Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam*, Ithaca 2002, 309–11.

15. For Abner/Alfonso's story about Joshua ben Levi's journey to Hell, see Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 106v/ed. Mettmann. 1,201; and the Castilian translation of the *Tešubot la-meħaref* (the text is missing from the Hebrew manuscript), Vaticano, BAV, Lat. 6423, fol. 56r, ed. Mettmann, 53.

16. «Entonce se levantaron estas dos grandes ordenes de Santo Domingo e Ssant Françisco, que sson dos grandes pilares para sostener la Ley de los christianos e darle grand onrra [...] no a en el mundo propheta mayor que las predicaciones e las glosas que los sabios frayres muestran de los dichos de los prophetas, e confirmamiento de la fe çierta» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 235r/ed. Mettmann 2,207).

ing works¹⁷. Despite this possible point of intersection, comparison of sources and arguments by both writers seems to suggest that Abner/Alfonso did not draw his material directly from Ramon Martí and may not have ever read his writing¹⁸.

Abner/Alfonso on Petrus Alfonsi and the Trinity

In all of Abner/Alfonso's major works¹⁹, the only references to Christian philosophers or polemicists from the twelfth century or after are to Petrus Alfonsi, mentioned once in the *Mostrador*, and to Thomas Aquinas, mentioned three times²⁰. Although a single reference to Petrus Alfonsi does not seem like much, it stands out among the general dearth of named Christian sources²¹. Also striking about this single reference is the fact that

17. Abner/Alfonso mentions «Rabbi Rachmon» in the *Teacher* (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 128r/ed. Mettmann 1,245), in a messianic paraphrase of *Pirkei abot* 2,12. Martí does not include this citation, but mentions «Rabbi Rachmon» on pp. 676, 695, 720, 744, 794, 847, 854, 862, 868, 872, 877, 925, 928, and 955 of the 1687 Leipzig edition. See also Ch. Merchavia, «Pugio Fidei – An Index of Citations», in *Galut aḥar Golah. Meḥkarim be-Toldot Am Yisrael mugashim le-Profesor Hayim Beinart li-melot lo shivim shanah*, Jerusalem 1988, 203–34 at 206, for discussion of Rabbi Rachmon in the Paris manuscript.

18. One such comparison has been offered by Robert Chazan on the basis of one of Abner/Alfonso's polemical letters (surviving in both Hebrew and Castilian). See R. Chazan, «Maestre Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Missionizing», *Revue des études juives*, 143 (1984), 83–94 at 85–86; and also Id., *Daggers of Faith* (cit. n. 5), 203–4, n. 44.

19. These include the *Mostrador de justicia*, the *Libro de la ley*, found in Castilian in the first folios of the manuscript containing the *Mostrador de justicia*, the philosophical work *Minḥat qena'ot/Offering of Zeal*, which survives only in Castilian, the *Tēšubot la-meḥaref/Responses to the Blasphemer*, which survives in both Hebrew and Castilian, three polemical letters in both Hebrew and Castilian, and Abner/Alfonso's responses to the answers to these letters, surviving only in Hebrew. On Abner/Alfonso's work, see Szpiech, *Conversion and Narrative* (cit. n. 2), 255 nn. 7–9; and D. Carpenter, «Alfonso de Valladolid», in C. Alvar and J. M. Lucía Megías (eds.), *Diccionario filológico de literatura medieval española: Textos y transmisión*, Madrid 2002, 140–52.

20. References to Thomas Aquinas are found in the *Mostrador* on three folios (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 102r/ed. Mettmann, 1,74; fol. 116r/ed. Mettmann 1,220; and fol. 147r/ed. Mettmann 2,17).

21. As Sainz de la Maza explains, the citation of Petrus Alfonsi «supone así un nexo de continuidad con la tradición apologética anterior, a la vez

Abner/Alfonso does not praise Petrus Alfonsi, but instead accuses him of making a mistake in his argument about the Trinity. In section 22 of chapter five of the *Mostrador*, a chapter discussing the Trinity, he names Petrus Alfonsi and the *Dialogus* (calling it the «el libro de las disputaciones» or «book of disputations»):

Pedro Alfonso – the one who wrote in the «Book of the Disputations» that the person of the Father is said to be the substance of God, and the person of the Son is said for his Wisdom, and the person of the Holy Spirit is said for his Will – erred greatly, because each of the three persons of God is the Substance of God, not only the person of the Father²².

Alfonso is here referring to the sixth *titulus* of the *Dialogus* where the voice of Petrus explains to Moses that the Trinity is made up of three persons. Petrus says: «I want to call the three persons «substance», «wisdom», and «will». Moreover, I name the first person «substance» for this reason: because wisdom and will are in it and come from it and it itself comes from nothing else. Although there are three persons, all are one substance»²³. As is clear here, Abner/Alfonso's allegations against Petrus Alfonsi are unfounded because they take the first sentence out of context. Abner/Alfonso neglects to explain that although Petrus first calls the three persons each by a different name, he then explains that all three are part of one substance. Petrus thus affirms explicitly what Abner/Alfonso accuses him of denying. As I will argue below, Abner/Alfonso knowingly makes this false charge in order

que atestigua el conocimiento de los *Dialogi* en Castilla a comienzos del siglo XIV.» See Sainz de la Maza, «De Pedro Alfonso a Abner-Alfonso» (cit. n. 1), 280.

22. «Mas Per Alfonso, el que escribió en el Libro de las disputaciones que la perssona del Padre es dicho por la sustança de Dios, e que la perssona del Ffijo es dicho por la su sapiencia, e que la perssona del Spiritu Santo es dicho por la su voluntad, erró mucho, porque cada una de las tres perssonas de Dios es sustança de dios, non que la perssona del Padre ssolamient» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 140r/ed. Mettmann 1,270).

23. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, t. 6 §4, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 606C: *Volo tres personas substantiam, sapientiam et uoluntatem dicere. Ideo autem personam primam substantiam appello, quia in ipsa et de ipsa sunt sapientia et uoluntas, et ipsa de nullo, quamuis tres persone omnes sint una substantia.*

to differentiate himself from Petrus and make his own very similar argument seem to stand apart.

Abner/Alfonso's concept of the Trinity has been the subject of various scholarly discussions, from Baer in the 1940s to Lasker in the 1970s and Hames only a few years ago²⁴. As most of these discussions suggest, Abner/Alfonso sought to distance himself from Petrus Alfonsi's notion of the persons of the Trinity as *substantia*, *sapientia*, and *uoluntas* («substance», «wisdom», and «will») (and possibly to distance himself from other Christian writers who had assigned a variety of characteristics to the persons of Trinity) by employing the Hebrew terms *ḥokmah* («wisdom»), *tebunah* («understanding»), and *da'at* («knowledge»)²⁵. He first introduces these terms by citing a Midrash on Psalm 50,1, which begins «God, God, the Lord» («El, Elohim, YHWH»), and in which R. Simlai explains that «God created the world with three names, corresponding to the three good attributes by which the world was created, namely wisdom (*ḥokmah*), understanding

24. Baer discussed the question in detail in his *A History*, 1,335 and 1,343-48, and in his article «The Use of Kabbalah in the Christological Thought of Abner of Burgos» [Hebrew] *Tarbiz*, 27 (1958), 278-89, in which he specifically treats the issue in the *Teacher* on 287-89. J. Hecht has included a discussion of Abner/Alfonso's conception of the Trinity in the *Tešubot* in Appendix 4 to his edition of the text (484-93). J. Diamond has presented the notion of the Trinity in the *Libro de la Ley* («El tema de la Trinidad en el Libro de la ley de Alfonso de Valladolid», *Sefarad* 57 (1997), 33-49). Following Baer's original arguments, Diamond argued that, in *El Libro de la ley*, the notion of concealment of Trinitarian ideas among the Jews is presented as the root of their exile and historical suffering. D. Lasker, in his extensive discussion of Trinitarian arguments in the medieval Christian-Jewish debate (*Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 45-104), similarly observed that «Western Jewish polemicists [...] often made reference to the Christian notion of Persons as attributes. This may be the case because this doctrine, or one very similar, was propagated among the Jews» (64). Most recently, see H. Hames, «It Takes Three to Tango: Ramon Llull, Solomon ibn Adret and Alfonso of Valladolid Debate the Trinity», *Medieval Encounters* 15 (2009), 199-224.

25. Augustine, for example, describes the Trinity as memory/*memoria*, will/*uoluntas*, and understanding/*intelligentia* in *De Trinitate* X,11-2. John Scottus Eriugena suggested essence/*essentia*, wisdom/*sapientia*, and life/*uita* (*Periphyseon* 1,13, PL 122, 455). On these and other interpretations of the persons according to attributes, see Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics* (cit. n. 2), 62-76.

(*tebunah*), and knowledge (*da'at*)»²⁶. Abner/Alfonso explains: «Thus it says in the book *Midraš Tehillim* [...] that God named that name three times, *El, Elohim, Adonay*, in order to make it understood that with these three names God created the world which stand for three persons or «three greater persons» with which he created the world. And these are wisdom, and understanding one thing from another, and knowledge»²⁷. Abner/Alfonso is here at pains to show that this notion is not derived from Christian sources, but is a thoroughly Jewish idea, albeit one passed on «in secret». He claims the Kabbalists of Castile hold the same view:

«The group called the Kabbalists associate plurality with God [...] but it was a secret hidden among them, which they were not to publicize to most people until they had well confirmed the unity of God»²⁸.

26. See *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. S. Buber, Vilna 1887, 279; *The Midrash on Psalms*, W. Braude (trans.), 2 vols., New Haven 1959, 1,468.

27. «E asi dize en el libro “Midras Tillim” [...] que nonbró aquel nonbre de Dios tres uegadas, *El, Elohim, Adonay*, por dar a entender que con estos tres nonbres crio Dios el mundo en derecho de tres personas o de tres perssonas mayores, que con ellas fue criado el mundo; e estas son ssapiencia, e entender una cosas de otra, e saber». (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 86v/1,162). This passage is repeated almost verbatim in the *Těšubot/Responses* (See Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440 (De Rossi 533), fol. 16r, and Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange», 355 and 146) and in this later version has been analyzed by Hames («It Takes Three» [cit. n. 24], 217). It is worth noting that most of Abner/Alfonso’s discussion of the Trinity in the *Těšubot* is found in expanded form in the *Teacher* (written years before). For example, Abner/Alfonso’s citation of Rabbi Simlai’s answer to the heretics about the creation of the world in Genesis Rabbah 8,9 and Rabbi Levi’s answer in Exodus Rabbah 29,1, which follows a few pages after the previous passage in the *Těšubot* (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440, fol. 17v/Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange» (cit. n. 5), 359 and 153, analyzed by Hames, «It Takes Three» (cit. n. 24), 219-20), are again found in fuller form in the *Teacher* (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, 75r-v/139-40). A comparison of the two texts, which has not yet been undertaken and remains a scholarly desideratum, intimates the likely form of the Hebrew original on which the *Mostrador* was based, and also illuminates many details in the *Těšubot*.

28. «La companna que sse nonbra *mecubalim* arriman pluralidat en Dios [...] ssinon que era poridat encubierta entrellos, que no la deuián publicar al comun de la gente ante que touiessen bien conffirmada la vnidad de Dios» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 88v/1,165).

Abner/Alfonso, both here in the *Mostrador* and in his repetitions of this exact argument in his later work *Tešubot la-meḥaref / Responses to the Blasphemer*, was not the first Christian polemicist to cite this Midrash. As Hames has shown, this text was debated by both Christians and Jews in the half century preceding his career, being proffered by Friar Paul at the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263 and by Ramon Martí in the *Pugio fidei*, as well as by Solomon ibn Adret in response²⁹. Despite this immediate tradition, it is important to see this original discussion of the Trinity in an even wider context of sources, one that links Abner/Alfonso with writers of the twelfth century as well. On the one hand, Abner/Alfonso's reading seems to follow the arguments from the Barcelona disputation along a different track than that of Martí and Ibn Adret. His discussion differs from Ramon Martí's, who also cites the Midrash on Psalm 50 in the *Pugio fidei*, listing the three properties as *sapientia*, *scientia*, *atque intelligentia*, but then, in explaining the same three words in Proverbs 3,19, translates them slightly differently and, on the basis of Genesis Rabbah, concludes they signify *sapientia*, *prudencia*, and *notitia*, respectively³⁰. On the other hand, within the context of the *Mostrador* where these arguments first appear, Abner/Alfonso's

29. For a study of these citations, see Hames, «It Takes Three» (cit. n. 24). Although Hames clearly shows the use of this passage at the Disputation of Barcelona and by Solomon ibn Adret, and offers interesting parallels suggesting Ramon Llull may have done so as well. Despite the similarities between certain points in their views of the Trinity, I am not yet convinced that Abner/Alfonso knew Llull's writing firsthand, although such a connection cannot be ruled out either.

30. He then concludes: *et nota quod ista glossa satis uidetur fidei Christianae conueniens excepto duntaxat quod tres diuinas proprietates quas ponit mundi creatrices dicit esse sapientiam, prudentiam, atque notitiam* (Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève MS 1405, fol. 132r/ed. Leipzig 494). It is worth noting that the passage cited by Martí and by Abner/Alfonso is actually found in the Babylonian Talmud, *Ḥagigah* 12a, and while Abner/Alfonso refers to the passage as being in *Genesis Rabbah* (where it is not found), and while Martí refers to the *Berešit Rabbati* of Moses ha-Darshan («Beressith rabba rabi moisi haddarsan»), only Martí mentions that this is found in *Ḥagigah* as well. Martí translates *ḥokmah*, *tebunah*, *da'at* as *sapientia*, *prudencia*, *scientia* (Paris, Sainte-Geneviève, MS 1405, fol. 133v/ed. Leipzig 504), while Abner/Alfonso again calls them *sapiencia*, *entender una cosa de otra*, *saber* (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, 135v/ed. Mettmann 1, 261).

statements about the Trinity and its possible misinterpretation go hand-in-hand with his later explicit rejection of Petrus Alfonsi's positions. Insisting that the Trinity consists of a unity of substance and rejecting those who confuse Trinity with multiplicity, he states:

It should not be said that God created the world through names or characters, as the ignorant believe, nor that He created it by means of anything, but rather than He created it with Himself, which is His substantiality and His truth. For He Himself is His wisdom, and He Himself is his understanding of one thing from another, and He Himself is His knowledge³¹.

Abner/Alfonso argues in favor of the unity of God's substance in opposition to the view of «the ignorant» (*los nesçios*) who see that as only one part of the Trinity. Abner/Alfonso later attributes this «ignorant» view directly to Petrus Alfonsi, and thus we can read his use of the terms «knowledge», «wisdom», and «understanding» from Midrash on Psalm 50 as an alternative to Alfonsi's «substance», «wisdom», and «will».

In addition to the explicit reference to Petrus Alfonsi cited above, there is a second citation in the *Mostrador* that seems to be taken from the *Dialogus*, despite the fact that it has gone unperceived by critics because it is misattributed to another author, Joseph Kimḥi. The Teacher states to the Rebel:

Your statement that the verse in Isaiah [11,6] that reads «The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid goat» is meant according to its literal sense, not figuratively or metaphorically, is [the same as] what Joseph Kimḥi wrote in his «Book of Disputations» which he wrote against the Christians. But he was

31. «Ca non conuiene a dezir que Dios crio el mundo con virtud de nombres e de caracteres como lo cudan los nesçios, nin quel crio con ninguna cosa, ssinon quel crio consigo mismo, que es ssu sustancialidad e ssu verdadera. Ca él mismo es la su sapiençia, e él mismo es el ssu entender vna cosa de otra, e él mismo es el ssu saber» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 87r/ed. Mettmann 1,163). This passage is identical to one included later in the *Tešubot* (Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440, fol. 16r/Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange» (cit. n. 5), 355 and 147, analyzed in Hames, «It Takes Three» (cit. n. 24), 217).

wrong without a doubt, although some sages of the Talmud wrote the same thing [...]»³².

Abner/Alfonso cites or names Joseph Kimḥi over a dozen times in the *Mostrador* (and also in a later letter), but virtually all his references are to Kimḥi's exegetical commentaries on the biblical books of Isaiah and Daniel. This is the only citation that seems to refer to Kimḥi's polemical text, the *Seper ha-Berit* (*Book of the Covenant*) – an anti-Christian dialogue between a Jewish «believer» (*ma'amin*) and a Christian «heretic» (*min*) – and it seems clear that he means this work because he specifies that it was written «against the Christians», thus excluding Joseph's other writing and also the Isaiah commentary of his brother David. In Joseph Kimḥi's *Book of the Covenant*, there is a discussion of literal versus allegorical interpretation, but the Jewish «believer» does not say what Abner/Alfonso claims he does, but instead asserts that the Torah is not to be taken altogether literally or figuratively³³. At the same time, the words attributed to Joseph Kimḥi are not far from an exchange found in the ninth *titulus* of the *Dialogus* of Petrus Alfonsi, where Moses claims that Isaiah 11,6 should be understood literally, stating, «there is something else that has not yet been fulfilled, which Isaiah prophesied would occur at the advent of the christ. For he said, “The wolf will dwell with the lamb [...]”» To this, Petrus responds, «O Moses, most foolish of all, do you understand that literally [*simpliciter*] as he has pronounced the prophecy?» Moses replies, «Yes, even so»³⁴. The fact that Abner/Alfonso's one direct citation of

32. «Esto que dixiste que el capitulo de Ysayas en que dize “Morará el lobo con el cordero, e el leon pardo con el cabrito yará” es segund su estoria llana, non semejanca nin metafora, escriviólo Rrabi Yocef Camhi en su “Libro de las disputaciones” que ffizo contra los christianos. Mas errólo ssin dubda, maguera que algunos de los sabios del Talmud lo dixieron assi (...)» Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 280v/ed. Mettmann 2,318.

33. Joseph Kimḥi, *The Book of the Covenant of Joseph Kimḥi*, trans. F. Talmage, Toronto 1972, 47-48.

34. «MOYSES. Item aliud, quod nondum est completum, quod in aduentu Christi prophetavit Ysaías, esse futurum. Ait enim: *Habitabit lupus cum agno* (...) PETRUS. Stultissime omnium, o Moyses, intelligis tu istam, simpliciter ut posita est, prophetiam? MOYSES. Etiam». Petrus Alfonsi, *Diálogo* 146, *Dialogus*, t. 9 §41-43, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 636C-D.

Petrus Alfonsi refers to the *Dialogus* as the «Libro de las disputaciones» suggests that this reference to the interpretation of Isaiah may actually be a reference to Petrus Alfonsi as well. Elsewhere in the *Mostrador*, Abner/Alfonso uses the same title, the «Libro de las disputaciones», to refer to the *Wikkuaḥ* of Moses ben Naḥman (Naḥmanides), which describes the rabbi's debate with the converted Jew Pau Cristià at the Disputation of Barcelona in 1263. It is possible that this was a general title – perhaps *Wikkuaḥ* in the original Hebrew – by which Abner/Alfonso referred to a number of works describing a polemical debate between a Christian and a Jew, such as the *Wikkuaḥ* of Moses ben Naḥman, the *Dialogus* of Petrus Alfonsi, or the *Book of the Covenant* of Joseph Kimḥi. Given the similarity by which Abner/Alfonso seems to refer to these works, it is not hard to imagine how he also might confuse Kimḥi and Petrus Alfonsi on a particular exegetical point. Moreover, in both citations (including that point attributed correctly to Petrus Alfonsi and that seemingly misattributed to Joseph Kimḥi) Abner/Alfonso *disagrees* with the argument as it is presented, making the similarity between the two references to the «Libro de las disputaciones» all the more patent.

Although the unity of substance in the Trinity, examined above, is the most explicit point on which Abner/Alfonso differentiates himself from Petrus Alfonsi, there are other details that also seem to distance him from his predecessor. One less obvious point of contrast between the two is Abner/Alfonso's description of the Trinity in spatial terms according to its shape as represented in Hebrew letters. He asserts that the unity of substance in the Trinity is reflected in the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, the divine name in Hebrew (*yod-heh-waw-heh*). The Christian Teacher seems to follow the arguments of Petrus in the *Dialogus* when he argues that the Hebrew name for God, «Elohim», which is formed as a plural (ending in «-im») but which is grammatically singular, as well as other terms associated with the divine name such as «Adonai» and «El», all reflect the multiplicity of persons and singularity of substance in the Trinity³⁵. He explains:

35. Petrus Alfonsi presents this view in various places in the sixth *titulus* of the *Dialogus*. See, for example, *Diálogo*, 107-11; *Dialogus*, t. 6 §48, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 611A-B.

We can say that the name [El] indicates the only-born Son, by whom are created all things. And the name *Adonai*, which is the Tetragrammaton, indicates the person of the Father, who gives being to things from Himself. And the name *Elohim* indicates the person of the Holy Spirit, which proceeds as a relation between both [other] persons and shows both the others and itself as one. For this reason this name [Elohim] is plural in its ending, because it shows each of the three persons as one and [shows] each of them in their endings³⁶.

It is not only that the «grammatical plurality» of these names communicates the multivalent singularity of the godhead, but also that the letters themselves reflect the Trinity and its unity. He explains this by citing the practice, common in the Middle Ages, of writing the four letters of the Tetragrammaton with three yods (י״י), and again refers specifically to Midrash on Proverbs³⁷. He claims:

It can be said that, for the three names [El, Adonai, Elohim], which denote the three persons, three small letters were shown in the book,

36. «E conviene a dezir que el nombre [El] muestra sobre la perssona del Ffijo unigenito, el qual por él son criadas todas las cosas. E el nombre *Adonay*, que es *Tetragramaton*, muestra sobre la perssona del Padre, que da ser a las cosas de sí mismo. E el nombre *Helohim* muestra sobre la persona del Spiritu Sancto, que es *procedens* como rrelacion entre amas las dos perssonas e muestra sobrellas amas e sobre sí mismo en uno. E por esto es este nombre en su cabo en lengua plural, porque es mostrador sobre todas tres las perssonas en uno e sobre cada una dellas en su cabo. E asi el nombre es dicho en el ebrayco en lengua plural, porque muestra sobre aquella pluralidad, a el saber es como rrelacion entre el sabidor e la cosa sabida, e muestra los dos rrelativos consigo» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 87v/ed. Mettmann 1,163).

37. On the abbreviation of the name of God in Hebrew with three yods, see Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange» (cit. n. 5), 171, n. 381, which refers also to J. Lauterbach, «Substitutes for the Tetragrammaton, *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 2 (1930-1): 39-67 at 46, n. 22; and Moritz Steinschneider, «Miscelle», *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 40,3 (December 1895) 130-34. See also V. Apowitz, *Das Schriftwort in der rabbinischen Literatur*, Vienna 1906-15 (reprint New York 1970), 10. On the association of this practice with Abner/Alfonso, see Y. Baer, «The Use of Kabbalah» (cit. n. 24), 278-80 and especially 278-79 n. 2; and G. Freudenthal, «Two Notes on the *Seper meyašer 'aqob* by Alfonso, alias Abner of Burgos», [Hebrew] *Qiryat Seper*, 63,3 (5750-51/1990-91): 984-86 at 985. Freudenthal printed a translation of this short article in *Science in the Medieval Hebrew and Arabic Traditions*, Aldershot 2005, section IX.

each of which is called in Hebrew *yod*. They write two close to each other, and the third above both [others], as if it is between them. And thus the Jews read, in a way, three names, and these are: the name [made] of the four letters *yod, heh, waw, heh*, which shows in Hebrew the unity of substance which gives being to things; and the other name [Adonai, made of] another four letters *alef, dalet, nun, yod*, which shows the absolute multiplicity in the divinity through the [vowel point] *qamaṣ* [Ɀ] that is below it; and the name [in which] each letter is called *yod*, which shows the Trinity properly speaking³⁸.

Both the names *Yahweh* and *Adonai* are made up of four letters, and the vowel point *qamaṣ*, which appears under the *alef* and has a shape resembling a «T», reflects a Christian interpretation by likening the abbreviation of the divine name to a triune structure underscored by the shape of a cross³⁹.

Abner/Alfonso's discussion of the Trinity as revealed in the Hebrew letters of the name of God bears comparison to that of Petrus Alfonsi, who discusses the treatment of the name in a work he calls *Secreta secretorum* («On the Secrets of Secrets»)⁴⁰:

38. «E en atal guisa conviene a dezir que por los tres nonbres que muestran las tres personas mostraron en el libro nonbre de las tres letras pequenas, que cada una dellas ha nonbre en el ebrayco *Yod*. E escriben las dos una cerca otra, e la terçera ssobre amas, como que está entrellas. E por esto sson tres nonbres que los leen los judios en una manera, e estos son el nonbre de las quatro letras *Yod, He, Vav, He*, que muestra, segund ebrayco, la unidat de la sustancia que da el ser de las cosas, e el otro nonbre de otras quatro letras *Alef, Daled, Nun, Yod*, que muestra muchedunbre soluta en la divinidad por el punto *Cames*, que está yuso del, e el nonbre de las letras, que cada una dellas a nonbre *Yod*, que muestra la Trinidat propriamentre» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 87v/ed. Mettmann 1, 163-64). On a similar statement in the *Tešubot*, see Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440, fols. 21r-v/ed. in Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange», 367-68, trans. on 171-72; and Gershenzon, *A Study*, 133, n. 94. Abner/Alfonso's entire discussion of the Trinity can be found in *Tešubot* fols. 15b-21b, in Hecht 354-68 and 144-72. He ends this discussion by stating, «Whoever wants a longer explanation of this [...] will find it in the book *Teacher of Righteousness*».

39. This is one of various examples of Abner/Alfonso's use of the Hebrew letters of various words, including the Tetragrammaton, to interpret a Christian message in the Hebrew Bible. Abner/Alfonso elaborates these arguments in his later *Tešubot/Responses*. For example Parma, Biblioteca Palatina, MS 2440, fols. 20v-21r, 22v, 25r/ed. Hecht, «The Polemical Exchange» (cit. n. 5), 168, 171, 177, 186.

40. It is clear from Alfonsi's reference that the work he calls *Secreta secretorum* is not the same as the widely popular Arabic work *Secretum secretorum*

Petrus states, «If you pay attention and you examine that very subtle name of God [...] you will see that this same name is both one and three. But that one refers to the unity of the substance, whereas the three refer to the trinity of persons»⁴¹. In the twelfth-century manuscript of the *Dialogus* known as J1 (Cambridge, St. Johns College, E4, fol. 153b), this description is also

or *Sirr al-asrār* (See Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi* 220, n. 73). A. Büchler has proposed that the work mentioned by Alfonsi is a mix of other Jewish works such as the *Seper Yeširah* and the *Seper ha-Razim*, another work on alchemy. See «A Twelfth-Century Physician's Desk Book: the *Secreta Secretorum* of Petrus Alphonsi Quondam Moses Sephardi», *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 37 (1986), 206–12 at 206. S. Williams has taken issue with Büchler's proposal that the alchemical work might possibly be the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta Secretorum*, and thereby dismissed the latter's suggestions altogether. See S. Williams, *The Secret of Secrets. The Scholarly Career of a Pseudo-Aristotelian Text in the Latin Middle Ages*, Ann Arbor 2003, 64. See C. Sainz de la Maza, «Aristóteles, Alejandro y la polémica antijudaica en el siglo XIV», *El Olivo*, 10 (1986), 145–54, on Abner/Alfonso's own citations of a work he calls the *Secreta Secretorum*. In addition, although this specific question is outside the purview of this study, it is important to insist that the question of Alfonsi's use of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Secreta* is separate from the possible influence of the *Seper Yeširah* on the work that Alfonsi calls the *Secreta*. If such an influence is accepted, it allows another parallel between Alfonsi's and Abner/Alfonso's polemics, specifically in the latter's mention of the *Seper Yeširah* in the prologue of the *Mostrador* in discussing the various combinations of the letters in the Hebrew word *emet* (truth). See Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fols. 12v–131r/ed. Mettmann, 1,14. This discussion is notably similar to Alfonsi's discussion of the various combinations of the letters of the Tetragrammaton in book six of the *Dialogus* (*Diálogo* 104–13, *Dialogus*, t. 6 §48, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL157, 611A–B).

41. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogus*, t. 6 §48, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 611A: *Trinitas quidem subtile quid est et ineffabile, et ad explanandum difficile, de qua prophete non nisi occulte locuti sunt et sub uelamine [...]. Si tamen attendas subtilius et illud dei nomen, quod in secretis secretorum explanatum inuenitur, inspicias – nomen, inquam, trium litterarum quamuis quatuor figuris, una namque de illis geminata bis scribitur. Si, inquam, illud inspicias, uidebis quia idem nomen et unum sit et tria. Sed quod unum, ad unitatem substantie, quod uero tria, ad trinitatem respicit personarum* (*Diálogo* 110–11). On Alfonsi's notion of the Trinity, see Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi* 36–39 and 113–14. Abner/Alfonso's and Petrus Alfonsi's discussion of the Trinity and Tetragrammaton bear comparison to that of Pablo de Santa María, who names both earlier authors in his *Scrutinium Scripturarum* (Burgos 1591, on 525, 533, respectively). Pablo's discussion of rabbinical sources on the Trinity can be found in *Scrutinium*, 297–300. His discussion of the Tetragrammaton, which is drawn from his *Additiones* appended to Nicholas of Lyra's *Postillae* to the Bible (see *Additio* to Exodus 3, Nuremberg 1497, 1,94–96b), is found on 347–50.

accompanied by Alfonsi's famous inverted triangle containing the face of a lion and with a circle at each point containing two letters of the Tetragrammaton (here spelled IEVE, replacing *heh* with E) distributed as IE-EV-VE. As Tolan and others have suggested, this notion of the triune nature within the name is original to Petrus Alfonsi⁴². Although Petrus Alfonsi's argument was repeated by subsequent polemicists such as Petrus Blesensis (d. 1204), Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202) and Ramon Martí, none of these authors provide a sure link to Abner/Alfonso, despite certain similarities between their positions⁴³. Petrus Alfonsi is the *only* author who discusses this idea who is also explicitly named as a source in the *Mostrador*, and thus the similarities of their positions take on a greater significance⁴⁴. These thirteenth-century authors who refer to Petrus Alfonsi, moreover, all do so approv-

42. For the image of the figure and Tolan's remarks, see *Petrus Alfonsi* 39. For similar remarks, see G. Gertoux, *The Name of God. Y.eH.oW.aH, Which is Pronounced as it is Written I_Eh_oU_Ah. Its Story*, Lanham, Maryland 2002, 146. On Alfonsi's diagram, see also Mieth, «Der Dialog», xlviii-1; and Resnick's remarks 172-73, n. 24.

43. For example, Martí explains that, «*Indicatur, cum dicitur de Messia quod tres substantiae quae sunt in eo ab inuicem differentes, scilicet corpus, anima, et Dei sapientia [...] non sunt in Messia Deus, et homo, duae personae, sed una; nec duo messiae, sed unus*» («As it is said of the Messiah that there are three substances in him that are each different, namely body, soul, and the wisdom of God [...] God and man are not in the Messiah two persons, but one, nor [are there] two Messiahs, but one»). (Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 1405, fol. 238r/ed. Leipzig 685). This explanation is echoed very closely by Abner/Alfonso's discussion of Saint Thomas, where he asserts that, «E assi escrivió Ssanto Tomas que [...] assi como en Dios es una sustança e tres perssonas, de ssin que dé muchiguamiento en la ssustancia de la divinidad, assi, al contrario, ovo en el Christo una perssona e tres ssustancias, que sson la divinidad e la alma de rrazon e la carne umanal, de ssin que den muchiguamiento en la una perssona, que es la perssona del Christo» («Thus Saint Thomas wrote [...] that just as God is one substance and three persons, without there being multiplicity in the divinity, so [...] there was in the Christ one person and three substances, which are divinity and rational soul and human flesh, without there being multiplicity in the one person, which is the person of Christ»). (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 147r/ed. Mettmann 2,17).

44. For a general consideration of the Tetragrammaton and the history of its interpretation, see Gertoux, *The Name of God*, Part II, especially 135-95. Gertoux comments on Abner/Alfonso's vocalized spellings of YHWH in the *Mostrador* (157).

ingly, while only Abner/Alfonso offers any sort of critique⁴⁵. Just as Abner/Alfonso invokes but rejects Petrus Alfonsi's notion of the Trinity in favor of a structure built upon a Jewish notion of God's three names in the Midrash on Psalms 50, so he seems to allude to but again rejects Alfonsi's three-circle diagram of the Divine Name in favor of a three-*yod* abbreviation more common in esoteric Jewish writing, commentaries on the *Seper Yeşirah*, and Kabbalistic texts⁴⁶. Although their theories of the three elements of the Trinity are different, it is not improbable that Abner/Alfonso chose to form his theory in response to Petrus Alfonsi.

Besides these parallels in their views on the Trinity and the Tetragrammaton, there is other evidence showing that Abner/Alfonso made use of Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus* more than the single direct reference and other allusions to him in the *Mostrador* would suggest. One clue comes from fourteenth-century Jewish writer Shem Tov ibn Shaprut. In book fifteen of his anti-Christian *Eben bohan* (*Touchstone*, from the 1380s), Ibn Shaprut included a refutation of Abner/Alfonso's anti-Jewish *Seper milhamot Adonai* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), from ca. 1320 (now lost)⁴⁷. Ibn Shaprut states that in the *Seper milhamot*, Abner/Alfonso argued against twelfth-century Jewish polemicist Jacob ben Reuben by making use of an argument by Petrus Alfonsi. This discussion, based on an image in the eighth *titulus* of the *Dialogus*, maintains that the substances of the Trinity are like those of fire because, as he states, «the sun illuminates and heats simultaneously, while it does not heat in the same way as it illuminates»⁴⁸.

45. For example, Ramon Martí claims that Petrus: *luit in Yspania priusquam fieret christianus magnus rabinus apud iudaeos* (Paris, Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 1405, fol. 238r/ed. Leipzig 685). He then refers approvingly to Petrus Alfonsi's association of the three letters within the Divine Name (*yod-heh-waw*) with God's attributes (*middot*), but does not specifically mention of the latter's «substance, wisdom, and will» (or of Augustine's «memory, intelligence, and will»). See also above, n. 30.

46. For examples of the three *yods* in Kabbalistic writing and in commentaries on the *Seper Yeşirah*, see E. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton 1994, 252-64; and J. Dan, *The «Unique» Cherub Circle*, Tübingen 1999, 129.

47. On this work, see above, n. 4.

48. This is identified by Lasker, *Jewish Philosophical Polemics*, 122, and repeated by B. Hurwitz Grant, *Fidei Causa et Tui Amore: The Role of Petrus*

The *Seper milhamot Adonai* was the first work written by Abner/Alfonso after his conversion to Christianity. As some of the examples presented above make manifest, evidence of direct use of Petrus Alfonsi can be found in one of Abner/Alfonso's last known works as well, the *Tešubot/Responses*. One additional example from that work that does not directly support his anti-Jewish argument is found in a statement about Muslims. As part of Abner/Alfonso's depiction of Muslims as allies of Christianity in its argument against Judaism, he states, «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»⁴⁹. This statement seems to have its source in *titulus* five of Petrus Alfonsi's *Dialogus*, where he states that, «Muḥammad [...] wanted his law to be established as a mediator between the law of the Christians and that of the Jews»⁵⁰. Although it is not clear if this transmission was direct or by means of another work – which is not improbable, given the wide distribution and independent circulation of material from book five of the *Dialogus* – the link between the two statements seems certain.

Finally, a few other important stylistic and rhetorical similarities between the *Dialogus* and the *Mostrador* serve as further proof of borrowing or copying by Abner/Alfonso. Like Petrus Alfonsi, Abner/Alfonso presents himself from the beginning of his work as a converted Jew. Like Petrus Alfonsi, he opens his lengthy attack on Jewish ideas with a narrative of his own conversion to Christianity. Abner/Alfonso also structures his polemic not as an

Alfonsi's Dialogues in the History of the Jewish-Christian Debate, New Haven 1983, 221. See Petrus Alfonsi, *Diálogo* 120, *Dialogus*, t. 8 §4, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 618A.

49. Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 21r/ed. Mettmann 1,170–71. On this argument in Abner/Alfonso's writing, see R. Szpiech, «Alfonso of Valladolid/Abner of Burgos», in *Christian-Muslim Relations. A Bibliographical History IV: 1200–1350 C.E.*, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett, Leiden 2012, 955–76; and «Rhetorical Muslims: Islam as Witness in Western Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic», *Al-Qanṭara: Revista de Estudios Árabes*, 34,1 (2013), 153–85.

50. *Mahometum [...] mediaticem inter Iudeorum et Christianorum legem effici uoluit suam* (*Diálogo* 98, *Dialogus*, t. 5 §16, Ed. Cardelle *et al.* = PL 157, 602B).

ordered and scholastic *Summa*, but like Petrus Alfonsi, as a meandering discussion between Jewish and Christian voices. Most importantly of all – and this is the issue that links Abner/Alfonso to Petrus most directly – the Jewish and Christian voices in the text are explicitly meant to signify the two sides of the author's own persona. The *Dialogus* and the *Mostrador* are both marked among anti-Jewish treatises not only by their innovative arguments, but also by their striking use of a fictional framing device. In both texts, the author's conversion is embodied in the two fictional voices of the Jew and the Christian, and the polemical arguments are in both cases affected by the fictional guise in which they appear.

Interpreting Abner/Alfonso's Ambivalence Toward Christian Sources

Given Abner/Alfonso's clear engagement with Petrus Alfonsi, the question remains, why does he on the one hand model himself on Petrus and build his work partly in response to him, and at the same time criticize and reject his ideas, and hardly mention his name? The answer, I believe, is again found in Abner/Alfonso's language and intended audience. Because he was writing in Hebrew and not Latin for a Jewish rather than a Christian audience, he took every step possible to avoid associating himself with a Christian perspective that might turn his reader against him. In other words, he chose to ignore Christian writers largely for reasons of rhetoric. By omitting mention of Christian sources that, in the abstract, would seem to support his arguments, Abner/Alfonso seeks to paint his reading of sources as tacitly Jewish or sympathetic to a Jewish perspective, a strategy supported by his use of Hebrew and his own statements about his sympathy with his reader and his faith in the Talmud and important teachings of the Rabbis. He aims to transform the stark opposition between Christian and Jew, so common in theological dialogues, into an opposition between those who seek truth (such as himself) and those who merely follow tradition (such as, in his view, most Jews). The wealth and variety of his material support this shift in perspective by attempting to show not only

that his arguments make use of Jewish sources, but that they ultimately derive from them as well.

Thus, even though Abner/Alfonso draws from Petrus Alfonsi in his arguments and models his work partly on his predecessor's writing, he deliberately shuns associating himself with his model, either by misrepresenting him or failing to name him, in order to avoid making his polemic look like a Christian work. Besides writing in Hebrew and imitating a rabbinical style of writing in which arguments are distilled out of back-and-forth debate rather than presented according to an overweening scholarly order, Abner/Alfonso avoids showing his debts to Christian writers, above all to polemicists and converts like Petrus Alfonsi.

Petrus is, in fact, not the only polemical convert whose arguments he appropriates while at the same time eschewing his company. He similarly cites and rejects the ideas of the convert Nicolas Donin, who was primarily responsible for the attack on the Talmud that took place in Paris in the 1240s and that resulted in the burning of many rabbinical books. Abner/Alfonso was similar to Donin in many respects, just as he was similar to Petrus Alfonsi: both were converts, both were anti-Jewish rhetoricians, both later attacked the Jewish «blessing concerning heretics» or «*birkat ha-minim*» (charges that Abner/Alfonso brought before king Alfonso XI in the 1330s, provoking a royal ban on the prayer among Jews)⁵¹. But instead of defending Donin, as one might expect, Abner/Alfonso cites him and his actions as examples of heresy within Judaism, and rather than endorsing his attacks against the Talmud, he condemns them and attempts to present himself to his readers as a *defender* of the Talmud against such onslaughts. In the *Mostrador*, the character of the Christian Mostrador explicitly labels Donin as a schismatic Jew, one of many Jews who «deny their Talmud» and «demand of the bishops and other Christian princes that they burn that Talmud»⁵². Abner/Alfonso thus associates himself with Rabbi

51. On this attack in Donin and Abner/Alfonso, see Ruth Langer, *Cursing the Christians? A History of the Birkat HaMinim*, New York 2012, 85-87 and 89-91, respectively.

52. He states, «sson fallados en los judios muchos omnes que niegan el ssu Talmud dellos, con que niegan otrossi las perssonas de la Trinidad e el

Yeḥiel of Paris as one of the guardians of the Talmud and compares those readers who might disagree with *him* to the real-world assailants on rabbinical tradition. He also associates the destruction of the Talmud with the rejection of the Trinity. Abner/Alfonso has the same sort of relationship with Petrus Alfonsi and his work as he has with Donin and his legacy – following their lead, but also casting them as enemies of the Jews and painting himself as a true source of Talmudic secrets.

To be sure, this approach of tacitly imitating while publicly denying and critiquing his models is a dangerous one: Abner/Alfonso is walking a fine line between associating himself with the arguments of converts like Donin and Petrus Alfonsi and distancing himself from them in an effort to show that the Jews are in need, as he says in the introduction, of «a Teacher of Righteousness from whom they may know the truth»⁵³. The essence of his strategy, however, is to awaken in his Jewish reader a real sense of uncertainty and concern over the state of the Jewish community in Christian Castile and to present himself as one who can help unify and defend tradition. As the climax of the multipronged attacks on Iberian Jewry that ultimately began with Petrus Alfonsi and his work, Abner/Alfonso catalogues this history of taxes, Talmud burning, censorship, polemics, and disputations as proof that the Jewish reader personally needs to take action as he himself did. Through his rhetorical tricks and appeals, he aims to evoke the real struggles of contemporary Jews as they faced the mounting specter of conversion.

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when the *Dialogus* of Petrus Alfonsi was widely disseminated among Christian Latin readers, the *Moreh Şedeq* / *Mostrador de justicia* received its many responses from Jewish readers in Hebrew. Late-medieval Jewish readers, if they ever heard the name of Petrus Alfonsi at all,

enuestimiento de la diuinidat en al vmanidat, e demandan a los obispos e a los otros principes christianos que quemassen aquel Talmud». [«There are found among the Jews many men who deny their Talmud, by which they also deny the persons of the Trinity and the dressing of the divinity in humanity, and they demand of the bishops and other Christian princes that they burn that Talmud»]. (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 328v/ed. Mettmann 2,419).

53. «[...] “Mostrador de Justicia” donde conoscan la verdad» (Paris, BnF, esp. 43, fol. 12r /ed. Mettmann 1,13).

might easily have heard it though Abner/Alfonso's writing in Hebrew. Although that writing critiques and disagrees with Petrus's *Dialogus*, it could not avoid its influence. Ultimately, it seems, even among medieval polemicists, there is no such thing as «bad publicity», because Abner/Alfonso's alleged rejection of Petrus Alfonsi is itself a testament to the enduring legacy of the *Dialogus* even two centuries later, as Iberian Jews followed the long road to the conversions of 1391 and their disastrous aftermath.