

FMR

International

English Edition



No. 56

*Ephemera
A Tenebrous Touch
The Duke Consort
An Illustration of Tolerance
Landscape in Perspective*

Franco Maria Ricci



The world's foremost publisher of illuminated manuscripts

This article has been reproduced for your information and pleasure.

For copyright reasons we have to visibly watermark the images and reduce the quality. We hope this does not detract too much from your enjoyment of the article.

Facsimile Editions Limited
40 Hamilton Terrace
London NW8 9UJ
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7286 0071

Fax: +44 (0) 20 7266 3927

www.facsimile-editions.com

An Illustration of Tolerance



La Biblia de Alba

by
Jeremy Schonfield

The Castilian Bible
by Jeremy Schonfield

The year 1492 was a crucial year for Spain and Europe. Not only was it the year of the discovery of America but also the persecution of the Jews throughout all the Catholic kingdoms.

Five hundred years later, this sad anniversary is commemorated by the publication of a facsimile edition of the greatest testimony to tolerance, the Biblia de Alba.

Commissioned by an ecclesiastic and compiled by a rabbi, it is a rare example of interfaith collaboration in a century of fanaticism.

What one scholar has described as “the single most important Bible in any vernacular language produced during the Middle Ages” has just appeared in a lavish and complete facsimile edition with a substantial companion volume. In this, specialists from various fields describe and analyse the historical setting, art and scholarship of the *Biblia de Alba*. Here, its editor Jeremy Schonfield summarizes their contributions. When five centuries ago this year, Spanish monarchs signed an edict to expel from Spain its centuries-old Jewish community, they could scarcely have foreseen that it would one day be formally retracted amid expressions of official regret.

This quincentenary is of more than merely historical interest, however, since descendants of those Jews who were exiled, still bearing names such as “Toledano”, “Valencia” or “Sevilla”, continue to transmit with pride the culture of their ancestors. They preserve “Ladino” (a version of the Castilian then spoken) as a living language, sing folk and liturgical melodies from pre-expulsion Spain, and feel justifiable pride in their association, however remote, with a community whose contributions to Jewish culture were perhaps unique. For instance, the finest post-biblical Hebrew poetry, important contributions to philosophy, every major codification of Jewish learning since the *Talmud*, and key-works of classical Kabbala derive from the communities of Sepharad, as Spain was called. Jews were

established in the Iberian Peninsula perhaps by the first century of the Christian era and were therefore in a position to witness both the end of Roman rule and the advent of Christianity – the latter ultimately to bring about their banishment several centuries later. During this time Jews had to manoeuvre bravely to defend their fluctuating rights, for what was vouchsafed by one ruler might be arbitrarily annulled by another. The final decline was characterized by a slow deterioration between 1391 and 1492, a period that saw few signs of hope, except for one brief gap of tranquillity.

Church and government policy suddenly united in about 1419 in an almost unprecedented resolve to abolish anti-Jewish measures that had intensified over several years in Spain. This sudden and unexpected reversal of the trend produced, moreover, a unique document that survives to this day. It reflects with great immediacy the efforts made by enlightened individuals to bridge the social, cultural and religious gap separating Jews from Christians in medieval Spain. It also illustrates the wealth of intellectual and artistic opportunities that could flow from their decision to collaborate.

This document, which has just appeared in a lavish and complete facsimile edition, is a 1,026-page large-format Castilian Bible with 325 illustrations and some 6,300 glosses on the text. The translation was made directly from the Hebrew original. Illustrated and commented manuscript Bibles are not in themselves great rarities, but this

particular volume is unique on two counts. Firstly, although its illustrations were apparently executed by Christians – since Jews would be forbidden to depict God in any form, and many of the images here show a divinity with distinctly Christian characteristics – the artists had access either to Jewish models which have not survived or were briefed on specifically Jewish interpretations of biblical scenes. The depiction of Cain killing Abel by tearing his throat out, for instance, is most likely drawn from *The Zohar* – the kabbalistic work based on biblical commentary that was written in Spain. But there are many other scenes which show a familiarity with Jewish texts that would have been inaccessible to anyone without deep and specialized knowledge of the texts. This phenomenon is encountered only here, many of the 325 images having no known model or imitation.

But the commentary is also unique in the Middle Ages, since it is a Jewish gloss, compiled by a rabbi, Moses Arragel of Guadalajara. This work reflects not only the views of classical commentators and “modern rabbis”, but compares them with Christian views wherever these differ.

Such a record of interfaith collaboration – for the rabbi was supervised by a Franciscan and a Dominican – is the outcome of unique circumstances. It was commissioned by Don Luis de Guzmán, Grand Master of the Chivalric Order of Calatrava which was engaged in the reconquest of Southern Spain from the Muslims. Guzmán was allied with the most powerful leader in Castile, Don Alvaro de

Title page

This opening page of the Biblia de Alba includes a scene from the commissioning of the manuscript: Don Luis De Guzmán, Master of the Order of Calatrava, despatches messengers with a letter to Rabbi Moses Arragel, requesting him to translate into Castilian and write a commentary; fol. 1v.

Biblia de Alba, 1430, 405 x 295 x 110 mm.

Luna. But he was a significant figure in his own right, inspiring fierce loyalty in his knights, who opposed the king to have him elected Grand Master. The Order also developed a reputation for favouring the Jews who lived on its lands. But the Bible commentary in particular may have been intended to achieve nothing less than the transformation of relations between Jews and Christians in Spain, by providing a clear summary of Jewish doctrine for Christians in the vernacular, that would nevertheless avoid giving offence to the Church.

But Guzmán's commission, for whatever reason, failed to achieve the fame intended for it. The manuscript was never copied or made known. Indeed it virtually disappeared for some two centuries. It even disappeared from the collection of its patron – if it ever reached him, which is uncertain – and was rediscovered in the cell of a Jesuit by the Inquisition, by which it was confiscated in 1622. Perhaps it was banned as much for its beauty and value as for fears concerning the possible sedition of its contents.

It was presumably soon found to be harmless enough, for in 1624 the Grand Inquisitor, Don Andres Pacheco, made a gift of it to the greatest political figure in Spain at the time, the count-duke Gaspar de Guzmán Olivares. It may well be relevant that the count-duke made moves at this time to have Jews restored to Spain, arguing this on the basis of the economic benefits they would bring – a policy that was not calculated to endear him to Pacheco who was famed as a hounder of Judaizers. The

count-duke was also a descendant of Don Luis de Guzmán, the Grand Master of Calatrava who had commissioned the manuscript. The Inquisitor may well have had in mind more the suitability of giving what amounts to a Jewish work to a proponent of the value of a Jewish presence in Spain. Was Don Andres Pacheco thus perhaps subtly indicating his support for his idea?

Fittingly, a manuscript originally produced at a time of change in Jewish-Christian relations was later brought out of obscurity in order to play a part in a further move towards amity. The facsimile edition of 1992 with its salutation from His Majesty King Juan Carlos appears, no less suitably, as part of the quinqucentennial commemoration of the expulsion of 1492, a time of reconciliation between Spaniards and the descendants of the Jewish exiles from the Iberian Peninsula.

Spanish Jewry's attachment to their land has proved more durable than that of perhaps any other exiled community in Jewry's long history of banishment.

The reasons for this survival should be sought not only in the richness and intensity of Sephardi cultural life, which might have given it the impetus to survive even after its uprooting, but in the courageous resistance to oppression which was perfected in Spain from the earliest years of their settlement. The first Jews of Spain were well treated by the Roman rulers. When the Visigoth royal court abandoned their Arian beliefs in order to ally themselves with followers of Rome in 586, however, pressure on Jews to

Facing page

God is here enthroned over the Mount of Olives, which has been rent in two during Israel's victory against her enemy Gog at the end of time. Israelites meanwhile prepare to burn a pile of weapons gathered outside the walls of Jerusalem. The scene illustrates texts from Ezekiel XXXIX and Zechariah XIV, which are brought together in the Jewish liturgy for Tabernacles, so serve here as evidence of Rabbi Moses Arragel's involvement in determining the subjects illustrated in the Biblia de Alba; fol. 342

Following pages

p. 96

The illustrations on this folio depict further scenes from the troubled reign of King David, described in II Samuel XX. Above, David's ten concubines are confined and dressed in black as a punishment for failing to keep guard (vv. 3); in the centre David's General Joab kills Amasa, whose beard he pulls, and pursues the rebel, Sheba, who flees on horseback (vv. 8-10); below, Joab lays siege to a city until a woman promises to bring him the head of the traitor Sheba. She is shown here with it in her hand. (vv. 15-22); fol. 224v.

p. 97

The caption to this detailed depiction of a medieval siege reads: "How Jerusalem was lost and the people of Israel became captives". It illustrates a vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel IV: 1-8) but, like many other scenes in the manuscript, may have been as much of topical interest as a work of piety; fol. 321 r.

la bamilia
et ppha
del mont
zia por me
nos casone
mogenro
judios po
non real



entre el ter enlo en el terlan y temo el ver
aglas diez mugeres manadas q' ocheres que
arado sus palas en la gran dir: pulo las en un
cabaen guardadas y allu las manueu: con
das nense abolu y elouueron als enacra
das fustel d'ia q' mueren:



duo el ter amalla ve y luanne ales ture
nep ayuda en elos mofes y mofas amale

que amalla y a ngregar anda y turo de mas
del plato q' le luanne y aguar: **Primo** ad a ables
quante ro non en dinda yingo q' agora el pe
or nrolo estanes con este lico fue de heer que
estauues con abole mra agora tura elos
similares de m lener uab y figne lo and q' fule
alpinas abduer mofadas y le per d'ia y
de vider a uer mra de mofes y fule y en
pos ellos en a uab y d'ereu: **Secundo** ad a
uene luter velle d'ereu y fenda y y mof los
bureingues y fuleu d'ereu y aguar albu
fue de mofes y fuleu d'ereu y aguar albu
puder q' estau en gela y mofa tura de mofes
ro gela y mofa tura de mofes y fenda y y mof los
vellos y colome d'ereu y mofa tura de mofes
lo luanne en mofes y mofa tura de mofes



en mofa tura de mofes y mofa tura de mofes
lo luanne en mofes y mofa tura de mofes

y mofa tura de mofes y mofa tura de mofes
lo luanne en mofes y mofa tura de mofes

en mofa tura de mofes y mofa tura de mofes
lo luanne en mofes y mofa tura de mofes

en mofa tura de mofes y mofa tura de mofes
lo luanne en mofes y mofa tura de mofes



[illegible][illegible]

raturus rex & laqueis rex & ceteron esse
 & tediis sus hoc scilicet n. asenaron sicut &
 gulten & pelaron sobrelli: ¶ Et ceterum
 les & gulten asose al real q. q. asenaron
 talgal & asenaron sicut non nos & sicut
 pares & tu mano q. to fuerit sicut su
 le asos libere & nos sicut talgal q.
 de mas sicut q. se huiusmodi sicut non
 tediis los reyes de e more q. habytanen
 & moue ¶ Et sicut asose al real q.
 tedi la gente & armis conit & tedi
 los q. de mas fuerit conit ¶ Dico al sicut
 asose non non mas tenet & allos q.
 & re los dare en poder conit asos non
 se re punim delinte & los asos sicut
 sicut moue tedi la mode pto asos
 tal: ¶ Et ceterum los & sicut aut los
 sicut & sicut & mas conit moue mas
 q. allos en gulten & sicut allos
 de & un leon q. sicut leon de reon
 mas conit sicut asos & sicut maque
 ¶ Et asos sicut asos sicut & sicut
 por la herna de leon heron & sicut
 sicut sobrelli gulten pto asos
 los asos sicut asos por tal q. non
 & mas fue & sicut de la gente q. non
 la pto q. los q. mouen los q. de
 sicut & sicut:

Como dice gano amagueda: clonona:

[illegible][illegible]

qual del
 m' aff' co
 v'len' tal
 f'ra p
 f'ra not
 to p
 la p
 ap
 m
 a p
 q
 a m
 to p
 a a
 d
 p
 si
 no
 d

[illegible]



convert to Christianity gradually increased. Those who refused to do so were ordered to be exiled in 613. But already at this date a response to enforced baptism appeared which would become characteristic of Sephardim over the centuries: they accepted, but dissimulated. These Jews made unwilling and resentful "Christians" who had every reason to welcome the invasion of Southern Spain by Muslims in 711. Their support placed them in a position of comparative privilege vis-à-vis their Christian neighbours.

The Muslim rule of Spain involved Jews in an empire stretching to the old Jewish cultural heartland in Babylon in the East. It provided them with a degree of social freedom to which they were unaccustomed, and access to power, occasionally at a high level. Muslim society enabled Jews to explore and exploit their specifically Hebrew culture in an increasingly sophisticated multi-lingual setting. They wrote religious and secular poetry of unprecedented intensity in Hebrew, as well as carrying out original work in philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy, in both Arabic and Hebrew. The reign of Abderrahman (912-961) of Córdoba, in particular, saw in Andalusia, Granada and Southern Castile one of the most culturally active periods in Jewish history since the fall of Jerusalem.

The Muslim invasion had a beneficial effect also on the living conditions of those Jews who remained in the Christian north, since they began to be seen as allies in the *reconquista* that was unleashed on the south from about 1060 and continued in

parallel to the Crusades, to be completed only in 1492. Jews were now encouraged to resettle in the Spanish cities after their capture from the Muslims. They farmed the land alongside Christians and set up trading networks.

It was this period that also saw the flourishing of Toledo as a centre of translation, in which Jews were instrumental in making available Classical and Arabic texts to the world of Latin scholarship of northern Europe, and thus, indirectly, in making possible the later development of Western culture. By tending to avoid Latin, which was identified with the Church, and preferring Castilian, they were among the earliest literary users of the Spanish language. But Jewish fortunes in Christian lands were on the turn.

Jews had benefited from Christian support most actively when they had played a role in the reconquest. When this was approaching completion, their importance to the national interest was reduced, and the old misgivings were free to re-emerge. Theological hatred of Judaism had never entirely vanished, and it now made more frequent and violent appearances. An outbreak of the blood-libel in Saragossa in 1250 indicates the popular and irrational nature of this wave of Jew-hatred. This was popular rumour confected in Norwich, England in 1144, according to which Jews use the blood of a Christian child as part of their Passover celebrations. But it had support in higher places too. King Alfonso X (Alfonso the Wise, 1221-1284) oversaw the compilation of *Las Siete Partidas* in about 1263, a code of laws

Preceding pages

p. 98

The Biblia de Alba is rich in battle scenes, many of which contain contemporary details. Here, the Israelites can defeat the Amalekites (Exodus XVII: 8-13) only while Moses' arms are raised. Joshua and Hur have seated him on a stone to support him while the battle rages below; fol. 70v.

p. 99

During the Israelite conquest of the Promised Land the battle against the Amorites was remembered chiefly for the miracle – for which perhaps Joshua is here shown praying – that the sun and moon should stand still (Joshua X: 9-14). The reconquest of Spain may have helped inspire the illustration of this victory. Interestingly the Amorites were chased to "Makkedah", which Arragel elsewhere in his book identified with the town of Maqueda in which he lived; fol. 172r.

Facing page

After King Saul had been killed by the Philistines, David was anointed his successor by the tribe of Judah. But Saul's son was preferred by the other Israelites. Here, twelve men from each side fight over the succession, while Saul's general Abner flees on horseback, killing his pursuer Asahel, who was loyal to David and "as light of foot as a wild doe" (II Samuel II: 1-23); fol. 213 v.

which although it promised Jews freedom from forced conversion, did so in order to win them over to Christianity by the influence of reason. They were also obliged to wear a distinctive badge.

Later in his life he was patron of a collection of over 400 scurrilously anti-Jewish fables in praise of the Virgin entitled *Cantigas de Santa Maria*.

Increasing pressure was now put on Jews to justify their faith. A public disputation was held in Barcelona in 1263 to which the greatest Spanish rabbi of his time was summoned to defend Jews against the assertion that the *Talmud* accepts that the Messiah had already come. Nahmanides or Ramban (1194-1270) was intellectually the superior of his apostate adversary Pablo Christiani and the Dominicans and Franciscans who supported him. King James I assured the rabbi complete freedom of expression, which he used while the disputation lasted to turn the tables on his accusers. He argued, doubtless against his own scruples, that the rabbinic legends on which the Christian case was based were not doctrinally authoritative, and that messianic beliefs are to a great extent matters of private conscience.

For Jews, the change in their fortunes occasioned a crisis of conscience. From having been widely accepted in a multi-faith society in which it was fashionable to espouse the prevailing rationalism of Classical thought, they found themselves rejected on the basis of their partially formulated messianism. The philosopher Maimonides had earlier sought to reconcile reason with faith and to interpret the irrational

allegorically, for the benefit of the cultured upper echelons of Spanish Jewry. But his compromise produced a backlash even in Maimonides' lifetime. The kabbalists of Southern France now explored pietistic notions that drew Spanish Jews away from the fields of thought they had favoured previously, such as the sciences, law, philosophy and poetry, and offered an escape from day-to-day reality. The mysticism that developed in Castile provided hope in a better future, and access to a dimension more desirable than that in which they lived. Indeed, the source-text for most later Jewish mysticism appeared in the 1280s in Spain. *The Zohar* or "Book of Splendour", exemplifies the inner flight from the wave of hatred against Jews of the later twelfth century. Nahmanides' Bible commentary similarly argues consistently against the literalism of earlier authorities, and applies the name of Edom, an enemy-nation of the Israelites, to the Church of his time.

The decline had set in. Instability was in the air as Inquisitors investigated converts, and Judaizers were burned. In 1321, Abner, a Jew of Burgos, converted and led a movement of opposition to Judaism. The next blow was the Black Death, which began in 1348 and for which Jews were blamed although they were among its victims. Jews suffered also in the civil war of 1366-1369 from taxation and death in siege, and then were made to bear the blame for the devastation the war brought on the economy of Castile.

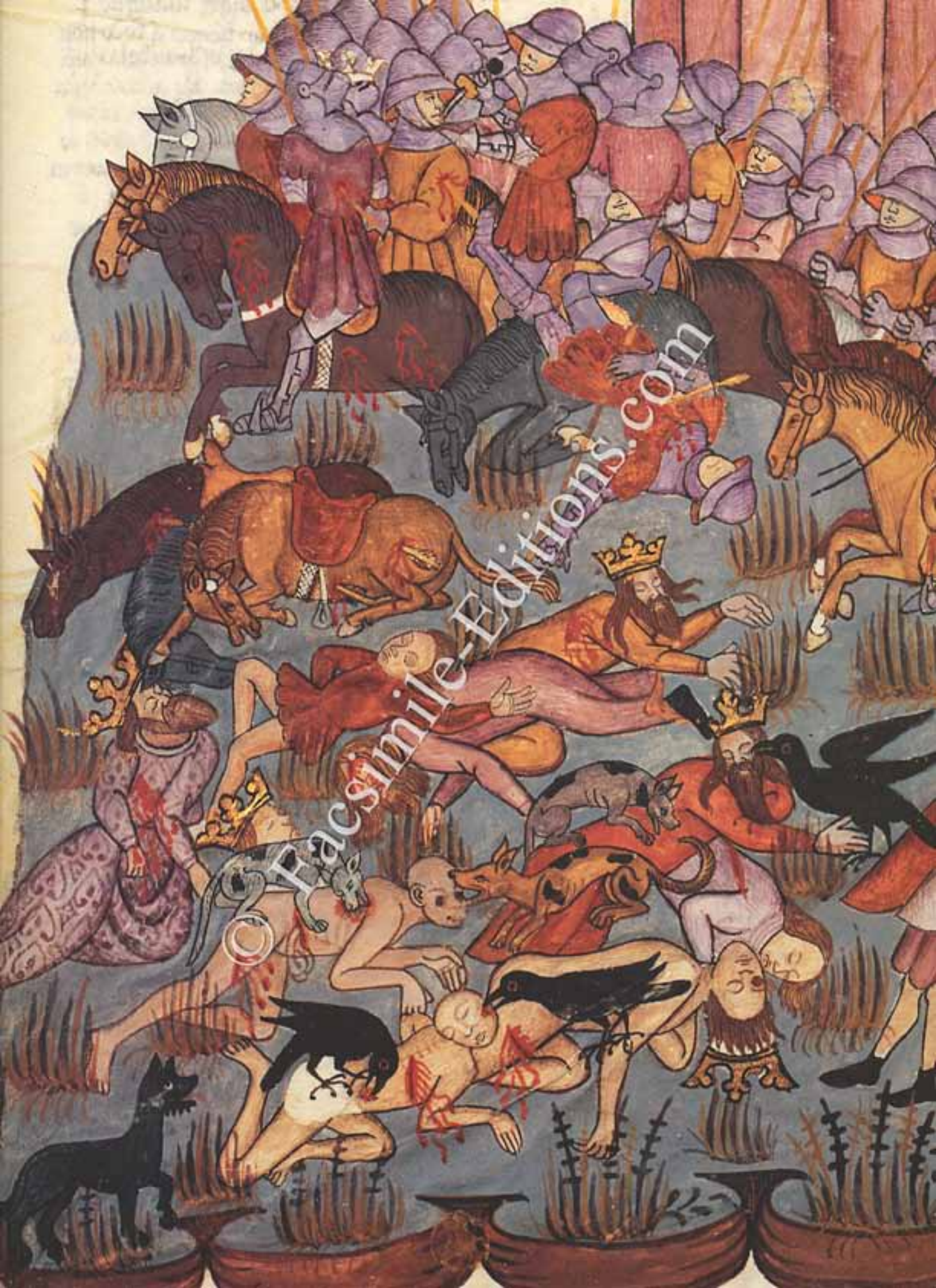
A popular preacher, Ferrant Martinez, began to preach

against the Jews in 1378, and anti-Jewish laws were passed in 1380, partly on the basis of Abner of Burgos' writings. Suspicion of Jews increased, and particularly of converts whose sincerity was often questioned. The mood was ripe for the explosion of violence in the summer of 1391. Ferrant Martinez' preaching had a popular following, and the death of John I of Castile in 1390 weakened public order. When rioting began in Seville, it was permitted to spread throughout Spain, leaving communities destroyed or impoverished, with thousands killed and some 200,000 forcibly baptized. Despite attempts to re-establish communities, many were beyond help. The last Jews left Barcelona in 1395. Jews returned there legally only comparatively recently. Among the converts of this period was a member of a distinguished Jewish family, Solomon Halevi (1350-1435), who was baptized with his children (his wife followed later), and became bishop of Burgos in 1415. Pablo de Santa Maria, as he was then called, collaborated in compiling an infamous series of anti-Jewish laws that were passed at Valladolid in 1412, under the patronage of the Dominican preacher Vicente Ferrer (c. 1350-1419). Ferrer's concern was that converts – referred to as *conversos*, or "New Christians" – should be sincere in their new faith. So many were now to be found in positions of responsibility that there were fears for the Christian basis of society. It was felt, doubtless quite rightly, that lukewarm, ill-informed and insincere *conversos*, were

unlikely to be better Christians than they had been Jews. Crypto-Judaism had been a solution to forced conversion since the earliest years of Spanish Jewry, and it was no less so now. Mistrust grew among Christians towards the New Christians. Professing Jews were seen as a contaminating influence on New Christians, and as the reason that New Christians became disaffected. The Statutes were accordingly intended both to encourage more Jews to convert (by excluding them from the professions that made it possible for them to pay their extortionate taxes), and to separate Jews from New Christians. They were compelled to wear humiliatingly rough clothing, a Jewish badge, and to leave their beard and hair unkempt and untrimmed. They were also to be removed from the Jewish quarters where New Christians continued to live. Ferrer's methods, despite his disclaimers, leaned more to coercion than persuasion. He was known to hold sermons in synagogues, in the course of which he consecrated the buildings as churches. One of his converts was Joshua Lorki, who had been deeply impressed by the baptism of his friend Pablo de Santa Maria, and who, after his own baptism, took the name Jeronimo de Santa Fé. In August 1412 he gave the antipope Benedict XIII a collection in Hebrew and Latin of rabbinic texts that he claimed were Christological. Jeronimo wished to hold a disputation at his birthplace, Alcañiz, but when the Jewish leaders there sought to enlist their greatest scholars, Benedict XIII felt obliged to invite all the Jews of Aragon.

Following pages

The Battle of Gog and Magog, near Jerusalem, shows dead kings being eaten by birds and animals while the battle rages. It is based on Ezekiel XXXIX: 1-5, 17-20. War was seen as an honourable and valuable pursuit in medieval Spain, which helps explain the particular relish with which the artists depicted battle scenes in this Bible; fol. 341v.





The call went out in November 1412 to send scholars in January 1413 to "receive instruction" at Tortosa. King Ferdinand I had reached the throne only with Ferrer's help, so gave his approval to a disputation that would be very different from that of Barcelona. There was no freedom of speech at Tortosa. The rabbis, who included no one of Nahmanides' standing or brilliance, were initially cowed by what amounted to a show-trial. They were kept far from their homes for months on end, exposed to the bullying of Christians who did not understand the Jewish faith and openly twisted their arguments against them. When, at one of the sixty-nine meetings, Jewish onlookers proclaimed that their representatives had accepted the Christian messianic doctrine, Jews flocked for baptism despite the rabbis' denials. This was the success the Christians hoped for. Detailed replies were presented by the Jews to a host of challenges, including the absurd notion that since the *Talmud* itself confirms Christianity, Jews are unfaithful to their religion if they fail to accept baptism. But such successes merely glossed over the damage to Jewish morale.

What emerged from this crude confrontation between the Jewish and Christian views of messianism, in which humiliation took the place of rational debate, was a new strain in Jewish philosophical thinking. Piety and attachment to traditional texts were intended to strengthen the victims of "debate" of the Tortosa kind, and to reinterpret such trials as augurs of the Messiah. Mass conversions, book censorship and still further

discriminatory statutes reduced and compromised the Jews of Christian Spain as perhaps never before.

At this moment of deepest despair for the depleted communities, good fortune suddenly struck. Ferdinand of Aragon died, and antipope Benedict XIII was disgraced, as the Church schism was resolved. The political scene was transformed by the arrival of the new king of Aragon, Alfonso V (1416-1458), and the coming of age (at fourteen) of John II of Castile in 1418, neither of whom had any interest in anti-Jewish measures. Pope Martin V was also keen to reverse Benedict's edicts and, when Vicente Ferrer died in 1419, the laws of Valladolid and of the post-Tortosa period were repealed. Astonished Jews received back their confiscated books and property, and had their rights restored, including the end of the obligatory conversionist sermons.

The sudden reversal of Jewish circumstances had a sound economic notice, for Jews were seen as an industrious and skilled segment of the population. Without them the country would continue to languish in the sorry state to which it had declined since the civil war and plagues of the previous century. But the theological rift would have to be bridged if their potential was to be realized.

It was at this time that Don Luis de Guzmán commissioned what is known today as the *Biblia de Alba*. Rabbi Moses Arragel had probably been orphaned in the riots of 1391 and had left his home town of Guadelaajara for the smaller town of Maqueda at

the time of the statutes of Valladolid. The Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava, which ruled the area, probably commissioned him to prepare this manuscript in order to demonstrate the rehabilitation of Jewish culture. Although he was merely following in the footsteps of many others in commissioning a translation from a Jew, the request for the commentary makes this book unique at almost any time. Moses Arragel was fully aware of the danger in which he might place himself by accepting, and argued on several grounds against the project. He would be obliged, he said, to translate certain texts differently from St. Jerome in the Latin Vulgate, the authoritative version used by the Church, and feared being charged with Judaizing. The manuscript was to be illustrated, he said, but depictions of God were strictly forbidden by the Ten Commandments. Moreover, his commentary would present points of view that were contrary to Christian doctrine and had been ridiculed at Tortosa. As a result, the rabbi said the Bible would be of no use to the Grand Master.

Arragel went still further. He described the corruption of Spain's rulers and the neglect of their duties, and said how they had harmed the population, including a now downtrodden Jewry that had once been the glory of the Diaspora. But Arragel's written response served only to confirm to Luis de Guzmán that his was a man with sufficient learning, courage and clarity of mind to perform the task as he wished. Collaborators were named – the Dominican Vasco de Guzmán and the

Franciscan Arias de Ençinas, cousins of the Grand Master – who would contribute Christian interpretations where these differed from Jewish ones, indicate the subjects of illustrations and review Arragel's drafts as these were completed. Now that Arragel had implicit approval for his statement that he would not veer from the Thirteen Articles of Faith as defined by Moses Maimonides, he felt free to continue but with reservations. He saw to it that the correspondence connected with the commissioning was copied into the opening folios of the manuscripts, so there could be no doubt about his criteria of their approval. He also included an introduction and a unique glossary of theological terms, in which he not only interpreted Jewish and Christian terminology but proposed an ecumenical vocabulary that appears radical even today. He employs the term *cristo* to refer to the Jewish *mashiah* (the etymology of both words is "anointed"), *catholica fe* to refer to "perfect health", and *egleja de Dios* for "congregation of God", arguing that although the use of these terms makes them appear Christian, they could equally serve for Jewish relations by a formidable feat of diplomacy. He understood the effect of centuries of interfaith combat on the connotations of key terms, and sought an intellectual no-man's land in which relations would not be threatening.

The definitions are, however, not invariably designed for Don Luis de Guzmán himself. Some Hebrew terms were left untranslated, and some Latin ones analysed more elaborately

Following pages

In this complex narrative illustration, Jerusalem has crumbled at Nebuchadnezzar's assault. To the left, Zedekiah, the last king of Judea, emerges from an escape tunnel, to be found by stag-hunters, and brought, past where his sons are being killed, to kneel before the Babylonian king enthroned to the right (II Kings XXV: 1-7); fol. 264 r. Detail.

admiralltrauan tomaron **E** los braleros
e acencarios e escudillas asy lo q era de oro
e vino lo q de plata era todo lo tomo este pñ
e pe **E** las dos columnas del mar e los ca
piteles e vasos q salamon fizo en el templo del



tra de hemath ⁊ leuo catiuo el trey de iuda
de sobre su tra. Et sobre la otra gente que
quedaua en las villas de iuda aqellos q auia ⁊
derado el mesmo nabuch pulo por mayoral
sobrellos a yodeliam fijo de abicham fijo de



1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100. 101. 102. 103. 104. 105. 106. 107. 108. 109. 110. 111. 112. 113. 114. 115. 116. 117. 118. 119. 120. 121. 122. 123. 124. 125. 126. 127. 128. 129. 130. 131. 132. 133. 134. 135. 136. 137. 138. 139. 140. 141. 142. 143. 144. 145. 146. 147. 148. 149. 150. 151. 152. 153. 154. 155. 156. 157. 158. 159. 160. 161. 162. 163. 164. 165. 166. 167. 168. 169. 170. 171. 172. 173. 174. 175. 176. 177. 178. 179. 180. 181. 182. 183. 184. 185. 186. 187. 188. 189. 190. 191. 192. 193. 194. 195. 196. 197. 198. 199. 200. 201. 202. 203. 204. 205. 206. 207. 208. 209. 210. 211. 212. 213. 214. 215. 216. 217. 218. 219. 220. 221. 222. 223. 224. 225. 226. 227. 228. 229. 230. 231. 232. 233. 234. 235. 236. 237. 238. 239. 240. 241. 242. 243. 244. 245. 246. 247. 248. 249. 250. 251. 252. 253. 254. 255. 256. 257. 258. 259. 260. 261. 262. 263. 264. 265. 266. 267. 268. 269. 270. 271. 272. 273. 274. 275. 276. 277. 278. 279. 280. 281. 282. 283. 284. 285. 286. 287. 288. 289. 290. 291. 292. 293. 294. 295. 296. 297. 298. 299. 300. 301. 302. 303. 304. 305. 306. 307. 308. 309. 310. 311. 312. 313. 314. 315. 316. 317. 318. 319. 320. 321. 322. 323. 324. 325. 326. 327. 328. 329. 330. 331. 332. 333. 334. 335. 336. 337. 338. 339. 340. 341. 342. 343. 344. 345. 346. 347. 348. 349. 350. 351. 352. 353. 354. 355. 356. 357. 358. 359. 360. 361. 362. 363. 364. 365. 366. 367. 368. 369. 370. 371. 372. 373. 374. 375. 376. 377. 378. 379. 380. 381. 382. 383. 384. 385. 386. 387. 388. 389. 390. 391. 392. 393. 394. 395. 396. 397. 398. 399. 400. 401. 402. 403. 404. 405. 406. 407. 408. 409. 410. 411. 412. 413. 414. 415. 416. 417. 418. 419. 420. 421. 422. 423. 424. 425. 426. 427. 428. 429. 430. 431. 432. 433. 434. 435. 436. 437. 438. 439. 440. 441. 442. 443. 444. 445. 446. 447. 448. 449. 450. 451. 452. 453. 454. 455. 456. 457. 458. 459. 460. 461. 462. 463. 464. 465. 466. 467. 468. 469. 470. 471. 472. 473. 474. 475. 476. 477. 478. 479. 480. 481. 482. 483. 484. 485. 486. 487. 488. 489. 490. 491. 492. 493. 494. 495. 496. 497. 498. 499. 500. 501. 502. 503. 504. 505. 506. 507. 508. 509. 510. 511. 512. 513. 514. 515. 516. 517. 518. 519. 520. 521. 522. 523. 524. 525. 526. 527. 528. 529. 530. 531. 532. 533. 534. 535. 536. 537. 538. 539. 540. 541. 542. 543. 544. 545. 546. 547. 548. 549. 550. 551. 552. 553. 554. 555. 556. 557. 558. 559. 560. 561. 562. 563. 564. 565. 566. 567. 568. 569. 570. 571. 572. 573. 574. 575. 576. 577. 578. 579. 580. 581. 582. 583. 584. 585. 586. 587. 588. 589. 590. 591. 592. 593. 594. 595. 596. 597. 598. 599. 600. 601. 602. 603. 604. 605. 606. 607. 608. 609. 610. 611. 612. 613. 614. 615. 616. 617. 618. 619. 620. 621. 622. 623. 624. 625. 626. 627. 628. 629. 630. 631. 632. 633. 634. 635. 636. 637. 638. 639. 640. 641. 642. 643. 644. 645. 646. 647. 648. 649. 650. 651. 652. 653. 654. 655. 656. 657. 658. 659. 660. 661. 662. 663. 664. 665. 666. 667. 668. 669. 670. 671. 672. 673. 674. 675. 676. 677. 678. 679. 680. 681. 682. 683. 684. 685. 686. 687. 688. 689. 690. 691. 692. 693. 694. 695. 696. 697. 698. 699. 700. 701. 702. 703. 704. 705. 706. 707. 708. 709. 710. 711. 712. 713. 714. 715. 716. 717. 718. 719. 720. 721. 722. 723. 724. 725. 726. 727. 728. 729. 730. 731. 732. 733. 734. 735. 736. 737. 738. 739. 740. 741. 742. 743. 744. 745. 746. 747. 748. 749. 750. 751. 752. 753. 754. 755. 756. 757. 758. 759. 760. 761. 762. 763. 764. 765. 766. 767. 768. 769. 770. 771. 772. 773. 774. 775. 776. 777. 778. 779. 780. 781. 782. 783. 784. 785. 786. 787. 788. 789. 790. 791. 792. 793. 794. 795. 796. 797. 798. 799. 800. 801. 802. 803. 804. 805. 806. 807. 808. 809. 810. 811. 812. 813. 814. 815. 816. 817. 818. 819. 820. 821. 822. 823. 824. 825. 826. 827. 828. 829. 830. 831. 832. 833. 834. 835. 836. 837. 838. 839. 840. 84

1

¶ Abbae deus cilla quier
deus feda y falgina na ho
na heria el mero.



than a Christian would require, leading one to hypothesize that Moses Arragel had in mind a wider readership. He mentioned Jewish readers in his introduction, hoping they would not be offended by the Christian interpretations he included, but he also seemed to address New Christians, crypto-Jews, Jews on the brink of conversion and ill-educated Jews in contact with Christian society, perhaps in an attempt to reverse some of the damage done at Tortosa. The *Biblia de Alba* was conceived as an interpretation of Jewish tradition for Jews and non-Jews alike, in the Spanish tradition of Jewish translation, and based on the structure of rabbinic Bibles, in which the main text is accompanied by a substantial network of glosses. In his commentary he also addressed the issues raised at Tortosa, systematically presenting the Jewish view on controversial issues as though he were correcting the impression of Judaism's defeat.

Some of Moses Arragel's more private and subversive thoughts, however, he saved for oblique references in his gloss, where they would be recognized only by those expecting to find them. The definition of "Antichrist" in the glossary, for instance, mentions the son of a demon clothed in human form and sent to persecute Israel which would be swept away by the Messiah. A Jew would recognize in this a coded reference to the Church, although Arragel carefully avoided making specific criticisms of this kind, and would doubtless have been prevented from doing so by his collaborators had he wished to do so.

Arragel's overt intention was to summarize rabbinic Bible interpretation. But he included material from Talmudic literature and a wide range of medieval writings, to some of which Christians had never before had access. Arragel also provided insights from other fields, especially philosophy, which helped establish the unspoken proposition that Judaism is compatible with wider culture, including Classical thought. It has been noticed that he tended to employ Latinisms in his Castilian, as though to identify his work with medieval scholasticism. Some of his preoccupations mirror ideas popular in non-Jewish writing of his time.

Moses Arragel's approach was little less than revolutionary in Christian terms. Jewish sources had been used by early Church Fathers in search of more authentic understandings of aspects of the Hebrew Bible. This they referred to as the "Old" Testament, a term which implied the Christian view that its value lies in its prefiguring of the New Testament. For Jews the Hebrew Bible, and the Pentateuch in particular, is eternally valid as revelation. Certain texts in it provoked violent controversy, none more than those taken by Christians to refer to Jesus Christ and by Jews to a future Messiah, such as *Isaiah* VII: 14 or XI: 1-6. Jewish refusal to accept the enquiry, and persecution was not far behind. The most popular Christian commentary of the Middle Ages was that of Nicholas de Lyre (c. 1270-1349) who based it on the authoritative Jewish gloss of Rashi (1040-1105). But some Christians found this range

Facing page

The siege of Jerusalem by the kings of Israel and Syria (Isaiah VII: 1) is seen by Christians as a metaphor for the Immaculate Conception, seen here announced to the left (vv. 13-14) by Isaiah kneeling before King Ahaz and pointing to the "young woman" – the term that Jewish tradition prefers over "virgin". Moses Arragel tactfully refrained from expanding on this fundamental difference between Judaism and Christianity; fol. 267v.

Following pages

p. 112

When King Hanun of Ammon died, David sent mourners, whom Hanun's son humiliated and sent back, believing them to be spies. Above, they are seen half-shaven and with their garments half torn away. The Ammonites prepared a pre-emptive strike against David with their Syrian allies, but when the Israelites drove the Syrians off, they "returned to the city". The battle can be seen in the lower illustration. (II Samuel X: 1-14); fol. 217 v.

p. 113

At the siege of Thebez (Judges IX: 50-5) the town's stronghold, on the right, resisted capture. Abimelech, the Israelite general, is shown here by its walls, after a woman has dropped a piece of millstone on his head. He then begged his armour bearer to kill him with his sword so that he would not be remembered as having fallen by a woman's hand; fol. 186 r.

of citations too narrow, especially after the disappointing results of the disputations at Barcelona and Tortosa. Few were more outspoken in their criticisms than the apostate Pablo de Santa Maria, who had been directly involved in the Statutes of Valladolid and at Tortosa, and who argued that Nicholas de Lyre weakened his argument by omitting the views of Maimonides (1138-1204), Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164), David Kimhi (c. 1160-1235), Nahmanides (1194-1270) and Gersonides (1288-1344). When Don Luis de Guzmán commissioned Rabbi Arragel to include in his survey the “modern rabbis”, he might almost have been citing the views of Pablo de Santa Maria, who was at that time bishop of Burgos. Indeed, Pablo went on to complete a super-commentary *Additiones ad postillam Magistri Nicolai Lyra* in 1429, a year before Arragel drafted the colophon of his Bible. Pablo supplemented Lyre’s glosses with those same rabbis’ comments, and he may well have been aware of Arragel’s work, and have wished to pre-empt it with his own. Such a race for publication, if it took place, would exemplify the clash of attitudes between Jewish and Christian views of the rabbinic tradition.

For Christians to have described Judaism as the religion of “the letter” and Christianity as that of “the spirit”, was to display ignorance of the distinction between the “Written Teaching” of the Pentateuch, and the “Oral Teaching” developed through generations of rabbinic study and teaching. Christians wilfully and wrongly regarded Jewish

interpretation as literalist and closed, disregarding the kaleidoscopic vision of rabbinic debate that flourished in Spain. Arragel’s glosses in the *Biblia de Alba* were almost certainly intended by him, and perhaps also by Don Luis de Guzmán, to demonstrate the justice of the Jewish case without offending Christian dogma.

Rabbi Moses Arragel was thus in a true sense a defender of his faith, demanding that it be respected by those of other religions. In this he follows Jewish tradition. This sees in Christianity and Islam preparatory parts of the messianic scheme; it sees salvation as available to all those who practise non-idolatrous monotheism. This respect was not reciprocated, and Arragel’s vision never gained currency. It is likely that his book, left incomplete in a few details, spent the next 200 years in a monastic cell until it was rediscovered in 1622. It was perhaps never even read through completely until then.

The respite in which the *Biblia de Alba* was conceived and written was shortlived, and to revert to Jewish practice. When the children and grandchildren of *conversos* started to revert to Judaism, the sincerity of a large population group was placed in doubt. The fall of Constantinople to the Turks in 1453 awoke fears of inner vulnerability. Christians had turned with racist fury on New Christians in 1449, and in 1460 a book by Alfonso de Espina appeared called *Fortalitium Fidei* , “Fortress of the Faith”, in which he argued for the setting up of an effective inquisition. He also recounted the expulsion of the Jews from

Facing page

The vision of the Valley of Dry Bones shows Ezekiel kneeling before God amid the skeletons. In keeping with Arragel’s commentary, and perhaps following the rabbi’s instructions, the artists have shown the priest Ezekiel keeping his distance from the corpses which would render him ritually unclean – one of many specifically Jewish features of the illustrations in this Bible; fol. 339v.

Further reading

Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia 1961).

La Biblia de Alba (ed.) Jeremy Schonfield (Madrid 1992).

Encyclopaedia Judaica "Spain" (Jerusalem 1971) XV, cols. 220–244.

The Jewish World (ed.) Elie Kedourie (London 1979).

England, which was the course of action he now proposed for Spain. Further riots broke out in 1469 and 1473. The popular mistrust of *conversos* was such that the suggestion to expel the Jews was taken in hand.

The monarchs of united Spain, Ferdinand and Isabella, were exposed to popular pressure in 1477 to set up an inquisition. Two Dominicans began in January 1481 to investigate the beliefs and practices of New Christians. The use of cruel interrogation methods and torture was blatant, and within a short time thousands had been burned alive for crypto-Judaism, and many more "reconciled". When the Catholic monarchs entered Granada in January 1492 and completed the reconquest of Spain from Islam, enthusiasm for the expulsion of the Jews also became irresistible. The edict was signed on 31st March 1492. Jews left with what they could carry, losing valuables and selling property for a pittance. Roughly 100,000 left, the last departing on 31st July 1492, a date in the Hebrew

calendar close to the anniversary of the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem, which is still marked by fasting. The quincentenary of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain is an occasion for recalling the horrible cost of intolerance: the 31,000 people burned alive for Judaism by the Inquisition before its abolition in 1834, the countless others who suffered threats, exile, torture and every humiliation evil fancy could contrive in the name of an alien faith. Their forgiveness cannot even be sought. But the wisdom and humanity that saved Jewry from collapse can now be celebrated through the appearance of the *Biblia de Alba* in full facsimile.

Jeremy Schonfield

Jeremy Schonfield is a book editor and a lecturer in Jewish studies. He has been involved in a number of Jewish manuscript facsimile publications, and has most recently edited the facsimile edition of the Barcelona Haggadah (Facsimile Editions, London 1992).