



The Unknown Jewish Artists of Medieval Iberia

..... Vivian B. Mann

It is often said that only with the Emancipation in the nineteenth century did Jews become artists. A related assumption is that most medieval Jews earned their living by lending money or by pawnbroking. Many of those who admit Jews functioned as artists in the medieval period assume that the writing and decorating of Hebrew manuscripts was the only artistic genre they practiced; very few have had a broader view.¹ History books devoted to the Jewish experience have long contributed to misconceptions about the existence of medieval Jewish art since they often group artists who produced significant medieval genres—silversmiths, weavers, or painters of manuscripts and altarpieces—with craftsmen like shoemakers and tailors.² None of these statements is accurate for the kingdoms of medieval Spain, since they are based on a narrow view of the Jewish community, and on a similarly narrow definition of medieval art.

During the medieval period, most of the Jewish population lived in Muslim lands, rather than in countries ruled by Christians. Mark

¹ The subject of this essay was first discussed by Franz Landsberger almost seventy years ago: "Jewish Artists before the Period of Emancipation," *Hebrew Union College Annual*, 16(1941): 358-59.

² Mark Wischnitzer, *Jewish Crafts and Guilds* (New York: Jonathan David, 1965).

Cohen has compared the legal and economic status of medieval Jews who lived as *dhimmis* under Muslim rulers, that is. people of the Book who were considered to have a revealed Scripture, with those living under Christian rule in Europe – who were viewed as rejecting the truth of Christianity.³ The greater consistency by which Islamic law treated the *dhimmis* contributed to the continuity of Jewish life in Muslim lands; in many countries their history stretches from antiquity to the mid-twentieth century. In contrast, the frequent changes in the law and status of Jews in Christendom yielded greater uncertainty and more frequent persecutions. As a result the range of Jewish artistic activity in the medieval world varied from country to country and was determined by the laws of the predominant religion and the rulers who governed in its name. As William Brinner has written about Islamic countries, “In the absence of European-type guilds...there was a great deal of cohesion and cooperation within trades and professions; thus at all levels Jews interacted with their Muslim.... counterparts.”⁴ The same was true in medieval Spain, whose art created under Christian rule was, to a great extent, based on the arts practiced under Muslim rulers—the weaving of textiles, woodworking, calligraphy, silversmithing, and jewelry making—with the addition of art required by the Church.

In considering the historical question of whether Jews were artists in late medieval Spain, one must first consider the genres of art that were important at that time. In most Christian lands, in addition to painting and sculpture, the so-called “decorative” or “treasury arts” were prominent. The distinction between the so-called “fine arts” and the “decorative arts” was a product of the later European Renaissance, and related to a shift in emphasis on the artist’s skill and away from the contractual definition of his work—of its subject, media, and composition.⁵ In the Middle Ages, the designers and weavers of textiles, jewelers, and silversmiths were praised for their

³ Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent & Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), chs. 3 and 4.

⁴ William Brinner, “The Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Communities in Egypt,” in *Fortifications and the Synagogue: The Fortress of Babylonia and the Ben Ezra Synagogue, Cairo*, ed. Phyllis Lambert (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), 14–15.

⁵ Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 23.

skill, the beauty of their compositions, and the colors they used; they were artists on a par with painters and sculptors. The medieval illuminator who decorated manuscripts with elaborate miniatures was equal to the artist of panel paintings or frescoes. Archival records mention Jews as practitioners of these arts and also as painters.⁶

Occasionally the same artist worked in more than one genre. For example, an atelier active in fourteenth-century Barcelona under the leadership of the artist Ferrer Bassa (d. ca. 1348), known for a long time as the Workshop of San Marco, produced manuscripts in both Hebrew and Latin as well as *retablos* or altarpieces.⁷ In a 1348 edition of Maimonides' great philosophical treatise *The Guide to the Perplexed* from Bassa's workshop (Copenhagen, Royal Library, Cod. Heb. xxxvii), Christian illuminators worked together with a Hebrew scribe responsible for the text. One miniature of the Maimonides manuscript featuring the Four Beasts of Ezekiel's vision (fol. 202r) demonstrates the passage of Christian iconography to a Jewish work.⁸ The composition, developed initially in Byzantium to encompass the symbols of the Four Evangelists, migrated to the West and appears in works like the English *Bury Bible* of the twelfth century. In the Hebrew text from Barcelona, they represent their original literary source, the Four Beasts of the heavenly chariot.

The existence of the San Marco atelier is of great significance when considering the genesis of the illuminated haggadot produced in Barcelona and its environs during the second and third quarters of the fourteenth century. These haggadot have always been viewed as a unique phenomenon within Spanish Jewish art, whose origins ca. 1300 have never been satisfactorily explained.⁹ When their biblical

⁶ Asunció Blasco Martínez, "Pintores y Orfebres Judíos en Zaragoza (Siglo XIV), *Aragon en la Edad Media*, VII (1989): 113-31; Encarnación Marín Padilla, "Varia," *Sefarad* XLVII, 1(1987): 183 presents the case of two Jewish painters, Isaac Avençur and Moses Beçudo, who apprenticed to a Christian painter in 1470 in order to learn the art of applying gold leaf.

⁷ Pioneering work on the San Marco workshop was done by Millard Meiss: "Italian Style in Catalonia and a Fourteenth-Century Catalan Workshop," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 4 (1941): 45-87.

⁸ For the miniature in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, see Vivian B. Mann, Thomas Glick and Jerilynn Dodds, *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain* (New York: George Braziller, 1992), fig. 51.

⁹ For a recent iconographic study of six of the manuscripts, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, *Illuminated Haggadot from Medieval Spain: Biblical Imagery and the Passover Holiday* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

and genre scenes are viewed in the context of altarpieces, and their style is considered, the place of the haggadot within Spanish art becomes more apparent.

An early Spanish haggadah, a late thirteenth-century “Hispano-Moresque” manuscript in the British Library (Or. 2737, fig. 1) is related stylistically to scenes from the Life of Christ on a fragmentary late thirteenth-century Iberian altarpiece now in The Cloisters (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.62 a, b and 1977.94, fig. 2) and to similar *retablos*. In these works, the scenes are set in architectural frames, often of deep red, above which are rubrics indicating the content of the scene (Latin on the altarpiece; Hebrew in the haggadah). The languages of these rubrics, assuming they served as instructions to the artists, indicate that both Jewish and Christian artists were active in producing Hispano-Moresque works.¹⁰

The action takes place against blank backgrounds, with only the minimal props required by the narrative. Terracotta red, green, and ochre are the dominant colors on both works, and they appear saturated rather than shaded. Often, the size of key figures, like Jesus in the altarpiece, is enlarged to indicate a subject’s importance. Still, stylistic differences between the two works indicate that more than one artist was responsible for the haggadah and the *retablo*.

Another comparison between a Christian and Jewish work of the same date could be made between the most lavish Passover manuscript of the period, the Golden Haggadah in the British Library (Add. 27210) of around 1320 (fig. 3), and a second *retablo* in the Cloisters, one dedicated to Saint Andrew (Metropolitan Museum, 25.120.257; fig. 4). Five scenes of the Creation story appear in the Golden Haggadah: Adam Naming the Animals occupies one frame and the remaining four are combined in a single frame. The sequence reads chronologically from right to left, the direction in which Hebrew is read: Adam Naming the Animals (Gen. 2: 20), the Creation of Eve (Gen. 2:21–22), the Temptation of Eve (Gen. 3:1–5), the Man and his Wife with Loincloths (Gen. 3:7) and God (in the guise of an Angel) Reproaching Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:16–18). In

¹⁰ That they were not titles for the finished miniatures is indicated by the discrepancies between the texts and the subjects depicted.

the second, composite frame, the figure of Eve is shown tempted by the Serpent and simultaneously covering herself with a loincloth, while Adam both covers himself and raises his head as the angel reproaches him.¹¹ The rubric for the second frame, “Adam and his Wife were Naked,” refers to the episode of the Man and his Wife with Loincloths. The *retablo* originally included seven Creation scenes, but the location of the last three is unknown. With one exception, each of the altarpiece scenes is given its own pictorial space: God Creates the Creatures of the Waters and the Birds (Day 5; Gen. 1:20–23), the Creation of Man (Day 6; Gen. 1:26–27), God Casts a Deep Sleep on Adam (Gen. 2:21), God Presents Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:22), God Commands Adam and Eve Not to Eat from the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:16–17), the Temptation and Reproach (Gen. 3:1–6; 11), and the Expulsion (Gen. 3:24). All of the *retablo* and haggadah scenes are set against gold diapered backgrounds with the foregrounds made up of landscape elements: earth and stylized trees. The patches of earth on the *retablo* are composed of stylized forms stacked up against one another, while in the haggadah the landscape is a continuous, shaded mass. On the altarpiece, God dominates through his size or his appearance in a mandorla; in the haggadah scenes he is absent. Despite differences in iconography and figure style between the haggadah and the altarpiece—the *retablo* figures are more linear—there are striking similarities between the two works, in particular their devotion of considerable space to the story of Creation and their emphasis on a few important figures in scenes that are set against a gold diapered background and anchored to a foreground of earth and stylized trees.

One image on the Saint Andrew altarpiece, a combination of the Creation of the Creatures of the Waters and the Birds on Day 5 with the Creation of the Beasts and Cattle on Day 6, may be related to the same scene in another haggadah manuscript from fourteenth-century Iberia found in Sarajevo.¹² In both images, the creatures of

¹¹ This composition, showing Adam and Eve hiding their genitals with large leaves and standing on either side of the Tree of Knowledge around which the serpent coils, is known as early as the fourth century and ca. 1000 in Spanish art. (See an engraved bowl in Jeffrey Spier et al, *Picturing the Bible: The Earliest Christian Art* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007], fig. 4).

¹² Cecil Roth, *Sarajevo Haggada* (Belgrade: Beogradski Izdavač-Grafički Zavod, 1975), 2.

the water are seen swimming, while above them are birds, cattle, and wild animals. The role of God in the haggadah Creation scene is symbolized by a cone of gold rays emanating from the heavens. On the *retablo*, God is anthropomorphic and ensconced in heavenly clouds.¹³ The image of the second day when the earth was separated from the firmament is shown in a similar way in the Sarajevo Haggadah and in the Harburg Pamplona Bible, a manuscript commissioned by King Sancho the Strong of Navarre (1194–1234).¹⁴ The representation of the earth as a sphere in these miniatures also appears on two capitals of the twelfth-century Puerta del Palau of Valencia's Cathedral.¹⁵ Another parallel between the Pamplona Bibles and the haggadot occurs in the scene of the Crossing of the Red Sea, in which the water is depicted as a series of bands.¹⁶ These interlocking relationships between art created under Christian auspices and the haggadot represent artistic interchange between Jews and Christians. Two other types of cross-cultural relationships remain to be discussed: the work of Jewish artists for the Church and the depiction of Jews by Christian artists.

Our knowledge of the role of Jewish artists in medieval Spanish art is based on three types of evidence: works signed by Jewish artists; works whose nature presumes Jewish authorship; and texts mentioning or describing works made by Jews. An example of the first type is the illuminated Hebrew manuscript. The decorative scheme of biblical manuscripts produced in Spain can be traced back to those produced in the Land of Israel and Egypt during the tenth and eleventh centuries. One form of manuscript decoration is micrography, the use of the written word to create designs, a

¹³ In the early twelfth-century Creation Tapestry in Girona cathedral, the fifth day is similarly depicted: at bottom are the creatures of the water, above are the birds craning their heads toward Jesus enthroned at center. Missing are the wild animals in the zone of the birds that appear in both the haggadah and the *retablo* scene.

¹⁴ François Boucher, *The Pamplona Bibles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pl. 3. The two scenes of Adam and Eve in the manuscript are not comparable to those under discussion here.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the creation cycle in the Sarajevo Haggadah and its iconographic relationship to both earlier and later manuscripts, see Herbert R. Broderick, "Observations on the Creation Cycle of the Sarajevo Haggadah," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 3(1984): 320-32.

¹⁶ Boucher, *Pamplona Bibles*, pl. 118; Bezalel Narkiss et al, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts in the British Isles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), fig. 294.

technique that can also be seen in slightly later Qur'ans. Another type of decoration is the carpet page, miniatures whose composition imitates those of textiles and was probably intended as a replacement for cloths placed between miniatures to preserve them, which appears in both Hebrew and Islamic manuscripts. The usual motifs of these carpet pages are geometric or floral, but the manuscript known as the First Leningrad Bible, created in 929 by Solomon ben Levi ha Bouya'a in Egypt, introduces a new composition which was repeated in Spain until the Expulsion. It is a page of the Temple Implements, which became a sign for Spanish Jewry of the hope and belief in the rebuilding of the ancient center of Jewish worship.¹⁷ That similar decoration exists in the Hebrew Bibles and Qur'ans of Spain, as it had in the Maghreb, must have been due to cooperative relationships between Jewish and Muslim artists and the result of interreligious partnerships. Maimonides (1135-1204) discussed one such example in a responsum:

What does our Master say with regard to partners in a workshop, some being Jews and some Muslims, exercising the same craft. The partners have agreed between themselves that the [gains made on] Friday should go the Jews and those made on Saturday to the Muslims. The implements of the workshop are held in partnership; the crafts exercised are in one case goldsmithing, in another the making of glass.¹⁸

Maimonides allowed the arrangement as long as the Jewish craftsman did not benefit from revenues earned on Saturday. That inter-religious ateliers existed in Christian Iberia as well is proved by the San Marco workshop whose creations included both Latin and Hebrew manuscripts and altarpieces.

Some of the works produced in the 200 years before the Expulsion of 1492 are known only from documents. A unique, surviving contract written in Majorca in 1335 between the patron, David Isaac Cohen, and two fellow Jews, Abraham Tati and Bonnim Maymo,

¹⁷ Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, Ltd., 1969), 42.

¹⁸ S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society. The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza. Vol 2: The Community* (Berkeley, : University of California Press, 1999), 296; see also Cohen, *Under Crescent & Cross*, 95-96.

stipulates that Maymo will provide three books with illuminated letters: a Bible with gold letters, Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*, and a second Maimonidean treatise.¹⁹ Maymo was a minor at the time that the contract was written, which explains the involvement of Tati who was a silk maker. Other Spanish Hebrew manuscripts have colophons naming their creators. In 1260, Menahem ben Abraham Ibn Malik recorded in the colophon of his manuscript that it was finished in Burgos in 1260 (Jerusalem, National Library, Ms. Heb. 4°790).²⁰ It is the first Spanish Hebrew Bible whose decorative scheme of carpet pages both reflects the earlier manuscripts from the Land of Israel and North Africa and presents a model for those produced until the Expulsion. The floral motifs of the carpet pages are drawn from Islamic art like stucco work; they are surrounded by large and small framing inscriptions. In 1299, Joseph the Frenchman worked as an illuminator for the scribe of the Cervera Bible, leaving a colophon in zoomorphic letters, a feature derived from Latin manuscripts (Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, Ms. Hebr. 72, fol. 449).²¹ This text served as a model for the colophon of the Kennicott Bible illustrated by Joseph Ibn Hayyim in 1476.²² Another signed manuscript is the Farhi Bible written between 1366 and 1382 by Elisha ben Abraham ben Benveniste ben Elisha, called Crescas (Jerusalem: Sassoon Collection, Ms. 368).²³ It includes the double page of Temple Implements seen in the First Leningrad Bible, and in later Hebrew Bibles from Spain.

Some Jewish artists undertook to work on manuscripts for Christian patrons. Vidal Abraham illuminated a Book of Privileges for the government of Majorca in 1341. Fragments of it still exist, showing that the artist created large initials (some with gold), smaller ones of red and blue ink, plus chapter markings,²⁴ a decorative

¹⁹ J. N. Hillgarth and Bezalel Narkiss, "A List of Hebrew Books (1330) and a Contract to Illuminate Manuscripts (1335) from Majorca," *Revue des Études Juives* 3 (1961): 304-08, 316-320.

²⁰ Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts*, 50-51.

²¹ Joseph Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), pl. 8.

²² Gutmann, *Hebrew Manuscript Painting*, fig. 9.

²³ Bezalel Narkiss, *Decorated Hebrew Manuscripts* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing, 1984), 98-99 (Hebrew).

²⁴ Hillgarth and Narkiss, "A List of Hebrew Books (1330) and a Contract to Illuminate Manuscripts (1335) from Majorca," 305.

scheme common to both Hebrew and Christian Bibles.²⁵ Another, more specialized, work by a Majorcan Jewish scribe and artist was the Catalan Atlas drawn and illustrated by Abraham Cresques (1325-1387) in 1375; it was recorded as having been in the library of Charles V of France five years later.²⁶ The numerous illustrations of human figures, animals, flora and cities appearing throughout the map are akin to manuscript decoration. Two letters of 1381 written by Juan, the Infante of Aragon, mention “Cresques the Jew, a leading master of maps of the world and of compasses.” In 1422, Rabbi Moses of Arragel was asked by Don Guzman, Master of the Order of Calatrava, to translate the Hebrew Bible into Castilian, and to produce commentaries and illustrations for the text.²⁷ Rabbi Moses demurred, citing the biblical prohibition against images. To accommodate the rabbi, Don Guzman hired Christian artists from Toledo to produce the miniatures. The history of the commission is related in a lengthy preface to the text of the Bible. When finished, the manuscript included 334 miniatures that were modeled on a manuscript from the Cathedral in Toledo, which is astonishing testimony to the Christian preservation of a large body of scenes from the Hebrew Bible.²⁸ In effect, Rabbi Moses and the Christian illuminators with whom he worked formed a mixed shop, such as Fernand Bassa’s atelier.

In the second quarter of the fourteenth century, acting to implement the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 requiring congregants to see the moment of Transubstantiation

²⁵ See for example, Sonsoles Herrero Gonzáles, *Códices Miniados en el Real Monasterio de Las Huelgas* (Barcelona: Lunewerg, 1988), Fig. 71, for a Christian Bible from Burgos of the twelfth century, and New York Public Library, *Tesoros de España. Ten Centuries of Spanish Books*, exhibition catalogue, 1985, 48.

²⁶ Jean Michel Massing, “Abraham Cresques : Catalan Atlas,” in *Ca. 1492. Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson (Washington: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 1991), no. 1 (there the older literature).

²⁷ Moses of Arragel, trans., *La Biblia de Alba*, ed. Jeremy Schonfeld (Madrid, 1992), there the older bibliography. The iconography of the scenes was discussed by Carl-Otto Nordström, *The Duke of Alba’s Castilian Bible: A Study of the Rabbinical Features of the Miniatures* (Uppsala: Almqvist and Wiksells, 1967).

²⁸ An earlier example of the Christian transmission of biblical iconography are the hundreds of scenes in the eleventh-century Pamplona Bibles, some of which preserve the compositions of wall paintings in the Dura Europos Synagogue, dated ca. 244 CE. (Boucher, *The Pamplona Bibles*).

during mass, Spanish churches moved their paintings off the altar to a position behind it. The *retablos*, as they came to be called, were thereby freed from the spatial constraints of ordinary altarpieces, and grew in size, often reaching the height of the church vaults, as at Teruel and Ejea de los Caballeros. This new art form allowed for many more panels and subjects surrounding the central depictions of saints or holy figures. The artists responsible for creating *retablos* were challenged to provide more complex iconographic programs than before, and the manner in which they met this challenge forms part of the present discussion.

Notarial documents dating from the fourteenth century reveal the existence of several Jewish painters who worked on large-scale projects for Christian patrons, often involving Christian religious themes. One such artist was Abraham de Salinas who signed a contract with the See of Saragossa in 1393 to produce a *retablo* on the theme of the Life of the Virgin.²⁹ Another contract records the employment of Bonafós Abenxueu, a Jewish silversmith, to create a frame for Abraham's retable that was to include six cartouches with scenes of the Annunciation to Mary. From the notarial texts, we know that Abraham de Salinas painted at least four *retablos* for the churches of San Felipe and La Puebla de Alborton in the See of Saragossa, but he may also have produced others whose records are lost. That Abraham de Salinas was given the commissions just mentioned, including repeat commissions from the same churches, testifies both to the fact that he was esteemed as a painter, and that he was able to produce various Christological themes that satisfied his patrons. Abraham's commissions suggest that Jewish artists knew visual models of Christian iconography.

Other painters of altarpieces were conversos. Born and educated in the Jewish community, they later converted to Christianity, taking their Jewish educations with them. Among them were two brothers, Juan and Guillén de Levís, whose family name indicates a Jewish origin. Nothing is known of Guillén until the 1380's, when he is listed as a painter. Juan is undocumented until 1402 when he is similarly listed. The lack of early records is an indication of Jewish

²⁹ Martínez, "Pintores y Orfebres Judíos en Zaragoza (Siglo XIV)," 115-18.

origins.³⁰ Juan de Leví created a *retablo* for the tomb of the bishops of Tarazona, Pedro and Fernando Perez Calvillo, brothers who succeeded one another in office.³¹

In the church of Rubielos de Mora is a *retablo* dated ca. 1420 that may be a work by a member of the de Levís atelier. The proportions of the panels and the Gothic framing devices are similar to those of the Tarazona altarpiece, and the palette appears similar: for example, red clay earth is used in outdoor scenes.³² The facial type of Jesus in the scene among the doctors at Rubielos is similar to that of St. Prudencio in the scene of his consecration in Tarazona. Both have pudgy faces, arched eyebrows, small eyes and mouths, features that appear to sit on the surface rather emerging from the planes of the face. Their idealization contrasts with the Jewish figures in the scene of Jesus among the doctors, whose faces are individualized by features such as large noses. The Jews hold books with accurately formed Hebrew letters that suggest the texts were written by someone who had studied the Hebrew language, not surprising if the painter came from the de Leví's atelier. The *sottobanco*, the lowest register of the altarpiece, at the eye level of the viewers, is devoted to the depiction of twelve Hebrew prophets, an unusually large number on one *retablo* and a reflection of the significance of prophetic writings in Christian attempts to convince Jews to convert. Other converso artists who painted altarpieces were Nicolás and Bonanat Zahortiga, who were active in the first quarter of the fifteenth century.³³ Among their works is a large *retablo* for the collegiate church of Santa María de Borja.

³⁰ María Teresa Ainaga Andrés et al., *Retablo de Juan de Leví y su restauración: Capilla de los Pérez Calvillo. Catedral de Tarazona* (Saragossa: Felix Arilla, 1984), 11 and 30, n. 10; Judith Berg Sobré, *Behind the Altar Table: The Development of the Painted Retable in Spain, 1350-1500* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989), 93. n. 31. The existing biographical information on the Perez Calvilla brothers begins only at the point of their service to the church, which raises the possibility that they, too, were converts. It is well-known that conversos often had dealings with one another, and a similar sense of fraternity may have led Bishop Fernando to commission the altarpiece for his brother's tomb from Juan de Leví in 1408.

³¹ Ainaga Andrés, et al., *Retablo de Juan de Leví y su restauración*, 11

³² Ainaga Andrés, et al., *Retablo de Juan de Leví y su restauración*, 37.

³³ On the Zahortigas, see José María Azcárte, *Arte gotica en España (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2007, 343; Berg Sobré, Behind the Altar Table, 18 passim; F. Olivan Bayle, Bonanat y Nicolás Zahortiga y la pintura del siglo XV* (Saragossa: Ayuntamiento de Zaragoza, Comisión de la Cultura, 1978).

Jews were also subjects on Spanish *retablos* in scenes that were sometimes laudatory and in others depicted persecution: representation of biblical worthies like King David or the Prophets; portrayals of libels like the desecration of the host; forced baptism; and scenes from early and contemporary church history. A scene expressing the uneasy relationship between Jews and Christians in the late Middle Ages is the Disputation between Moses and St. Peter, a predella panel of an altarpiece dedicated to the Mother of God painted for the Monastery of Santes Creus by Pere Serra, Guerau Gener, and Lluís Borassa in the early fifteenth century.³⁴ The subject is based on actual debates between Church prelates and rabbis, in which Jews were forced to participate. An unusual feature of the painting is that Moses holds a decalogue with accurately written Hebrew inscriptions, while Peter's scroll is blank, an indication that the artist did not know Latin, but did know Hebrew and was Jewish.

Representations of contemporary reality infiltrated historical scenes like the episodes from the lives of Jesus and early saints that surrounded the central image of the holy figure who was the focus of the altarpiece. For example, late medieval Jews appear in a presentation of Jesus in the Temple, part of the *retablo* in the Church of San Salvador in Ejea de los Caballeros painted by Blasco de Grañén and Martín de Soria beginning ca. 1440 (fig. 5).³⁵ In this painting, the primary Christian figures of Jesus and Mary are idealized in their form and dress and crowned by circular haloes whose shape symbolizes perfection. The Jewish figures of the narrative, Joseph and the High Priest, possessed of a lesser degree of holiness, wear cusped haloes above faces that are individualized and portrait-like in contrast to the ethereal, blemish-free figures of Jesus and Mary. The Jews' appearance also reflects discriminatory regulations enacted by the kings of Spain after the Lateran Council of 1215, which were

³⁴ Francesc Ruiz y Quesada, ed., *L'Art Gòtic a Catalunya. Pintura II: El corrent internacional* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2005), 44-45. The disputation scene is incorrectly labeled as a depiction of "Prophets."

³⁵ On the Ejea *retablo* María del Carmen Lacarra Ducay, *Blasco de Grañén, pintor de retablos (1422-1459)* (Saragossa: Institución "Fernando el Católico," 2004), 44-90; -----, "Retablo de San Salvador: Ejea de los Caballeros," *Joyas de un Patrimonio* (Saragossa: Diputación de Zaragoza, et al, 1990), 12-79. Some of the costs of the Ejea altarpiece was financed by a loan from Faym Baco, a Jew of Albalate de Cinca. (Archivo Parroquial de Ejea, *Sección Pergaminos*, s/n. Ejea, 19 de febrero de 1472).

intended to prevent sexual relations between Jews and Christians by marking the non-Christian. An influential law code of Alfonso X of Castile (1252-84) elaborates on this point:³⁶

Many crimes and outrageous things occur between Christians and Jews because they live together in cities, and dress alike; and in order to avoid the offenses and evils which take place for this reason, we deem it proper and we order that all Jews, male and female, living in our dominions shall bear some distinguishing mark upon their heads so that people may plainly recognize a Jew, or a Jewess.

Alfonso's father-in-law, James I of Aragon, decreed in 1263 that his Jewish subjects wear a dark cloak out-of-doors emblazoned with a rotulus³⁷ and, in 1412, Jews and Muslims were prohibited from trimming their hair and beards so that unkempt hair became a compulsory sign of alterity.³⁸ The imposition of these restrictions provoked the following response from the Spanish Jew Solomon Alami (1370-1420):

We have suffered measure for measure. Because we adopted their dress, they required different vestments so that we would seem to be strangers among them, and because we shortened the corners of our hair and beards, they forced us to let our hair grow as if we were plunged into deep mourning.³⁹

The presence of recognizable Jews in Christological scenes served to underscore the Christianity of holy figures, much as black figures in exotic clothes emphasized the European character of those who sat for portraits during the Renaissance. Differences in the clothing

³⁶ Jacob Rader Marcus, *The Jew in the Medieval World: A Source Book: 315-1791*. 2nd ed. (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1990), 39-40.

³⁷ For a discussion of clothing restrictions, see Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 156-64.

³⁸ Wild hair was a sign that also marked heretics in the *Bible Moralisée*, the large picture Bibles written and illuminated in the first half of the thirteenth century for the kings of France. Jews were often conflated with heretics. (Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisée*, [Berkeley, : University of California Press, 1999] 86-87.)

³⁹ Solomon Alami, *Iggeret haMusar [Treatise on Moral Behavior]*. The mention of deep mourning refers to the Jewish prohibition against shaving and haircutting while in mourning for a close relative.

or appearance of the Jews reinforced their Otherness. That these regulations were necessary suggests the visual homogeneity of the Spanish population, a homogeneity that required artificial means of differentiation.⁴⁰ In other words, Jews and Christians looked very much alike. On the Iberian Peninsula, sartorial differentiation had first been instituted by the Muslim rulers of Al-Andalus, to signify the subordinate status of *dhimmi* or protected minorities.⁴¹ Some articles of dress required by the Muslims, such as the *zunnar*, a rope belt, appear in the later Christian art of Aragon, for example, in a scene of the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna from the Temple. The designation of clothing as a symbol of minority status was part of a general medieval view of dress as denoting class or occupation and an individual's place in society.⁴² They were not "fashion" in the contemporary use of the term. The dingy clothing and wild hair of Jews were signs of their exclusion from Christian society and of their defeat by a victorious Christianity.

The presence of discriminatory markers on Jews in the Ejea Presentation of Jesus in the Temple are a contemporary intrusion into the subject, as is the setting of the scene in a Gothic building with detailed pier capitals. That the building is not a church but a synagogue is indicated by the Torah Case or *tik* that is on the altar. A cylindrical case of wood or silver to hold a Torah scroll upright in the synagogue first came into use during the eleventh century in the Maghreb in the same period that the Qur'an box became a feature of mosques.⁴³ It was used in Spain until the Expulsion, as

⁴⁰ Janina M. Safran, "Identity and Differentiation in Ninth-Century Al-Andalus," *Speculum* 76 (2001), 582.

⁴¹ Cohen, *Under Crescent & Cross*, 62-64; Safran, "Identity and Differentiation in Ninth-Century al-Andalus," 582-83. There is a noteworthy piece of clothing in the scene of Joachim and Anna (fig. 7). The *zunnar* or rope belt worn by Joachim was required of *dhimmi* or minority populations in Muslim lands from the ninth century on as a means of sartorial differentiation denoting their special status in Muslim society. In the mid-ninth century, the Abassid caliph al-Mutawakkil required a *zunnar* made of rope or cord, as well as a hood (*taylasan*) and a conical cap (*qalansuwa*). The caliph's specification that the *zunnar* be made of rope or cord marked a turning point in the meaning of the belt. Once a sign of honor, its material requirements transformed the *zunnar* into a sign of degradation, of second-class status.

⁴² Ann Rosalind and Jones & Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 54-55.

⁴³ Vivian B. Mann, "The Covered Gospels, the Torah Case and the Qur'an Box," *Art & Ceremony in Jewish Life: Essays in the History of Jewish Art* (London: Pindar Press, 2005), 177-94.

an alternative to textile coverings (mantles) for the Torah scroll. That the cylindrical case was understood as a Jewish appurtenance is explicit in a version of the "Presentation in the Temple" on the Retablo de la Gozos de la Virgin, dated ca. 1449/50 (Valencia: Museo de Bella Artes, n° Inv. 278) where the *tik* on the altar bears a band of Pseudo-Kufic Arabic script around its middle; the Kufic writing substitutes for Hebrew. A 1515 scene of Jesus among the doctors on the main altarpiece in the Real Monasterio de Santa María de Sijena in Aragon includes a partially open *tik* revealing two round-topped Tablets of the Law with five lines of "writing" on each, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. Another detail of the Ejea panel, Joseph's basket with two doves, the post-partum Temple offering of a woman of modest means, indicates that the architecture is meant to be understood as the Temple, although its form reflects contemporary synagogues. In other words, if the Jews of the late Middle Ages could be construed as representatives of Jews alive during the early history of the Church, by the same reasoning the contemporary Jewish house of worship could serve as a stand-in for the Temple of antiquity.⁴⁴ Another "Presentation of Jesus" in the Hispanic Society of New York includes further contemporary details: a curved circumcision knife and a beaker to hold wine blessed after the circumcision.

In fact, all scenes on the *retablos* that were supposed to have taken place in the Temple are shown in synagogue spaces: The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (sometimes represented as his Circumcision), the most commonly depicted Temple narrative; Jesus Speaking to the Doctors; The Annunciation to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist; and The High Priest Expelling Joachim and Anna from the Temple. All of these scenes are staged in Gothic buildings that are sometimes a combination of nave-like spaces and apses or are simply rectangular halls. One *retablo* includes another detail, an

⁴⁴ The one exception to the modeling of the Temple on local synagogues is a scene of the Presentation of Jesus on an altarpiece in Palencia, in which all the figures stand in a hexagonal structure with a domed roof. Medieval circular or polygonal structures were thought to imitate the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the most important Christian building in Jerusalem. (Richard Krautheimer, "Introduction to an Iconography of Medieval Architecture," *Studies in Early Christian, Medieval and Renaissance Art* [New York: New York University Press and London University Press Limited, 1969], 115-50.)

outside staircase leading to a second storey,⁴⁵ presumably providing access to the women's balcony found in several synagogues in Cordoba, Toledo (El Transito), and Hajar. The identification of these painted buildings as synagogue spaces depends on the placement of a *tik* or cylindrical case for the Torah on the altar and the absence of any Christian accoutrements such as a cross. In the "Expulsion of Joachim and Anna," a noteworthy detail is the decoration of the *tik* with a scarf or cloth, a custom still practiced in the Sephardi diaspora and in eastern Jewish communities today.

A scene of the Annunciation to Zacharias, the saint's father, of the impending birth of his son is at the top left on a *retablo* dedicated to St. John the Baptist now in The Cloisters in New York (No. 25.120.929; fig. 6). According to Christian lore, Zacharias was an ordinary priest in the Temple, but in an extraordinary scene on the New York altarpiece, Zacharias perform the duties of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the holiest day of the Jewish year. A priest holds a chain attached to the leg of Zacharias who entered the Holy of Holies alone, so that should he die or faint in the divine presence, his body could be retrieved. Small bells were sewn to the hem of the High Priest's skirt so that those outside would know that he was performing his duties and was not in distress. Yet, as in other *retablo* depictions of the Temple, there is a Torah case on the altar, which is a synagogue appurtenance. The service depicted in this extremely detailed and particularized scene is based on the Jewish mystical text the *Zohar*, which first appeared in Castile in the late thirteenth century. The wealth of detail suggests that the artist Christian Domingo Ram (a. 1464-1507) either consulted with a rabbi or had a Jewish assistant.

Recent excavations in the Murcian town of Lorca prove the accuracy of the synagogue architecture painted on *retablos*. In 2003, the remains of a synagogue were found near the local fortress, consisting of a vestibule leading to a rectangular hall whose perimeter is surrounded by stone benches. The ruins of the Torah ark are on one of the short ends and the center of the hall is filled with the remains of a reader's desk that was reached by a flight of steps. A

⁴⁵ Rosa Alcoy i Pedrós, *L'Art gòtic a Catalunya: I. De l'inicio a l'italianisme* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2005), 189.

painted version of this synagogue type appears in a *retablo* panel now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York (No. 32.100.423; fig. 7), where the scene is enlivened by Jewish worshippers seated along the walls and by Mary and Joseph watching Jesus ascend the steps of the *teivah* or reader's desk. The space is illuminated by glass "mosque" lamps and, in a case of life imitating art, a large cache of glass shards from "mosque" lamps was found beneath the *teivah* at Lorca and reconstructed.⁴⁶

The substitution of contemporary synagogue buildings for the ancient Temple in these works may have been due to the fact that the actual appearance of the Temple was unknowable to medieval men and woman.⁴⁷ Or the substitution may have been encouraged by a common Jewish usage that terms the synagogue a "small sanctuary" (*mikdash me'at*), a play on the name of the Temple in Jerusalem, the *beit ha-mikdash*, the House of Sanctuary. In medieval Spain, the phrase was used in the Hebrew dedicatory inscription of the Cordoba synagogue:

Isaac Mehab, son of the honorable Ephraim, has completed this lesser sanctuary (*mikdash me'at*) and he built it in the year 75 [1314-1315] as a temporary abode. Hasten, O God, to rebuild Jerusalem.⁴⁸

Of the architecture associated with Jewish life in the Crown of Aragon, the most common form still standing is the arcuated gate to the *judería*, the Jewish quarter. The use of this defining structure to situate an episode from fourth-century Christian history within the ambience of late-fifteenth-century Jewish life is evident in a portrayal of Saint Helena in the Holy Land questioning Judas, a Jew who claimed to have knowledge of the burial spot of the True Cross (fig. 8). The scene is part of an altarpiece devoted to the True Cross by Miguel Jiménez and Martín Bernat painted in 1485-1487 for the Parish Church of Santa Cruz de Blesa in Teruel. It is staged on local

⁴⁶ Juan García Sandoval, "El Resplandor de las Lámparas de Vidrio de la Sinagoga de Lorca. Estudio Tipológico," *Lorca. Luces de Sefarad*: 259-304.

⁴⁷ Walter Cahn, "Solomonic Elements in Romanesque Art," in *The Temple of Solomon: Archaeological Fact and Medieval Tradition in Christian, Islamic and Jewish Art*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Missoula: Scholar's Press, 1976), 58.

⁴⁸ For the Hebrew original, see Mann, et al, *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims and Christians in Medieval Spain*, 216.

Jewish turf, just inside the arcuated gate to an Aragonese *judería*, while the house behind is based on the architecture of Jewish houses still existing in former Jewish quarters. In this painting, the *judería* symbolizes the land of the Jews, the Holy Land.

The scene of St. Helena is also remarkable for its representation of fifteenth-century dress. The Jew Judas is dressed in the dark cloak mandated by decree of Pedro III of Aragon in 1263; his hair and beard grow wild because of the decree of 1412. But Helena and her ladies are dressed in rich silks and jewels. She wears a red gown with ermine cuffs and hem, a silk brocade cloak with gold threads and an elaborate crown. The lady directly behind her wears a diadem of bosses that imitate pearls. In the High Middle Ages, scarlet cloth gave status to the wearer and was reserved for the elite, and silk brocade was a mark of royalty.⁴⁹ Various sources indicate that wealthy Jews were capable of wearing clothing similar to the robes of royalty depicted on the altarpieces. According to the sumptuary laws passed at a meeting of Castilian Jews convened at Valladolid in 1432:⁵⁰

No woman unless unmarried or a bride in the first year of her marriage, shall wear costly dresses of gold-cloth, or olive colored material (a Chinese silk) or fine linen or silk, or of fine wool. Neither shall they wear on their dresses trimming of velvet or brocade or olive-colored cloth. Nor shall they wear a golden brooch nor one of pearls, nor a string of pearls on the forehead, nor dresses with trains on the ground more than one third of a *vara* in measure, nor fringed Moorish garments, nor coats with high collars, nor cloth of high reddish color, nor a skirt of *hermeia* thread...nor shall they make wide sleeves on Moorish garments of more than two palms in width, but they may wear jewelry like silver broaches and silver belts provided that there is not more than four ounces of silver on any of them.

⁴⁹ Françoise Piponnier & Perrine Mane, *Dress in the Middle Ages*, trans. Caroline Beamish (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 16, 20.

⁵⁰ Yolanda Moreno Koch, "De iure hispano-hebraico: Las Taqqanot de Valladolid de 1432. Un estado comunal renovador," *Fontes Iudaeorum Regni Castellae*, V(1987): 9-105. In 1456, the Jewish community of Morvedre passed sumptuary laws regulating Jewish women's dress and the amount of jewelry that could be worn in order to prevent ostentatious display that might lead to an increase in taxes. (Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain*, 89.)

Although not identified as such in the sumptuary laws, the bridal costumes described are similar to the royal dress of Helena and her courtiers. Nevertheless, the Jewish women in the open windows of the house in the background of the scene wear subdued dresses and headgear. The artist created a single, nuanced facial type and then used it for all four women, but varied their dresses, which have different necklines and trim and are of differently colored textiles. Emphasis is given to the rendering of the white silk sleeves that appear to be a separate garment worn together with the gowns, like those described in the sumptuary laws. Despite the rich details on these panels, there is an air of tension to the confrontation between Helena and Judas that is generated by the sober expressions of the figures. The depiction of the Christian Queen Helena interrogating the Jew, Judas, may have been intended to reflect the activities of the Inquisition, established in Aragon in the second half of the thirteenth century.

The identification of Jewish women in Christian art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries depends on their clothing and the narrative context in which they are seen, since they lacked the identifying beards of Jewish men and their hair was generally covered. One of the scenes from the Hebrew Bible, an Exodus from Egypt included in the *Retablo de San Bernardi i l'Angel Custodi* of 1462-82 (Barcelona: Diocesan Museum), is the work of a painter from the atelier of the Christian artist Jaime Huguet (fig. 9).⁵¹ The panel preserves the traditional v-shaped composition in which the drowning Egyptians appear in a lower corner, while the Israelites stride along the Red Sea, a composition that appeared in early Christian and Jewish art.⁵² A manuscript or copy book may have been the means by which this iconography was transmitted from the east to medieval Spain. Although the scene is composed traditionally, the Israelites are represented as contemporary Jews. The painter took great care to individualize their faces and to vary their dress. The foremost Jewish

⁵¹ Joan Molina i Figueras, "Al Voltant de Jaume Huguet," *L'Art Gòtic a Catalunya: Pintura III. Darreres manifestacions* (Barcelona: Enciclopèdia Catalana, 2006), 142-43.

⁵² For the composition on the Via Latina fresco, see Kurt Weitzmann, *The Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to the Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), fig. 43; on the mosaic in Sta. Maria Maggiore, see Wolfgang Fritz Volbach, *Early Christian Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1962), fig. 129.

figures, representing Moses and Aaron, are thought to be portraits of the leading Jewish residents of Catalan town of Banyoles where the *retablo* first hung. The figure guided by the Guardian Angel is tentatively identified as Bonjuà Cabrit, who was doctor-surgeon to the Royal House of Barcelona.⁵³ He wears a striped garment over his head, probably a *tallit*, or prayer shawl, and a gold-bordered cloak, and carries a codex with gilt edges. Although most of the women leaving Egypt wear simple scarves over their heads, one near the end of the procession wears an elaborate headdress with chin strap that forms a roll around her head and has a protruding element at top dotted with pearls. Attention is drawn to this elaborately dressed woman by her bright red cloak, which visually links her to Bonjuà Cabrit, the man at the head of the procession who may have been her husband.⁵⁴ The same headdress worn in the Exodus is used on Christian sculptures and altarpieces to identify Jewish women, which indicates that this headgear was considered distinctive. It appears, for example, on a *retablo* panel of the Massacre of the Innocents dated 1390-1400, now in the Saragossa Museum,⁵⁵ and worn by a group of women on a fourteenth-century capital in the cloister of Barcelona Cathedral.⁵⁶ In Jewish art, such as the seder scenes in the Sarajevo Haggadah (Sarajevo, National Museum) and in the Sister of the Golden Haggadah (London, British Library, Or, 2884; fig. 13), the

⁵³ Bonjuà Cabrit is cited in legal records as possessing a copy of *Avicenna* that was stolen from Meir of Figueras, the son of a deceased physician. (Robert I. Burns, *Jews in the Notarial Culture: Latin Wills in Mediterranean Spain 1250-1350* [Berkeley, : University of California Press, 1996], 64.

⁵⁴ Her headdress that is similar to that worn by the mistress of the household in the seder scenes of the Sarajevo Haggadah, and the sister of the Golden Haggadah. See Roth, *The Sarajevo Haggada*, no pagination. Knowledge of this headdress spread to Germany by the beginning of the fifteenth century. In a scene of the birth of Mary on the Buxtehuder Altar, Meister Bertram painted the woman serving Elizabeth wearing a headdress with chin strap and circular element atop her head. (Jürgen Wittstock, ed., *Aus dem Alltag der mittelalterlichen Stadt: Hefte des Focke Museums*, no. 62 [1982]: 165, fig. 7.)

⁵⁵ Alfredo Romero Santamaría, ed., *Hebraica aragonalia: El legado judío en Aragón*, vol. 1 (Saragossa: Palacio de Sastago - Diputación de Zaragoza, 2002), 155.

⁵⁶ For the capital, see Elena Romero, ed., *La Vida Judia en Sefarad* (Toledo: Ministerio de Educacion y Cultura, 1991), 60.

Until early in the twentieth century, the Jewish women of Salonica wore headdresses whose constituent elements were similar to those depicted in Spanish art, but whose proportions were somewhat different. (Batsheva Goldman-Ida, "The Sephardic Woman's Head-Dress," in *From Iberia to Diaspora: Studies in Sephardic History and Culture*, ed. Yedida K. Stillman and Norman A. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 525-30.

women wear elaborate pleated headcoverings with a raised flower-like element in the center of the forehead.

The profound knowledge of Jewish beliefs and customs evident on the altarpieces could have been the result of the employment of Jewish artists or conversos on a project, but it also could have been due to the small size of villages like Ejea, whose parish churches commissioned *retablos* from major artists. In small towns and cities, the mingling of Jewish, Christian, and even Muslim residents was inevitable. At the time Blasco de Grañen and Martín de Soria painted its altarpiece, Ejea was home to some 250 Jews out of a total population of a thousand.⁵⁷ In addition, Jewish scholars became knowledgeable about Christian lore as the result of their own interest or out of the need to counter the claims made by Church spokesmen, often conversos, in disputations and conversionist sermons. They voluntarily attended sermons in churches and cathedrals,⁵⁸ where they could have been exposed to scenes from the Hebrew Bible on altarpieces and on sculpture. Christians attended sermons in synagogues out of curiosity, and their firsthand experience of Jewish houses of worship could have served as the inspiration for scenes on *retablos*. All the ways that Christians and Jews mixed in the fourteenth and fifteenth century, for business, as doctors attending patients, as workers and servants in each other's home, as artists and artisans, and as colleagues exploring intellectual issues, allowed exposure to each other's way of life and art.

But, we must ask: what was the effect of the art created during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on its viewers? The Jewish art remaining from Spain largely consists of manuscripts, although recent excavations have brought to light more ceremonial objects and visual culture.⁵⁹ Most of the illuminated manuscripts are bibles and haggadot, although other genres like philosophical and scientific treatises exist. Manuscripts were an art form that was enjoyed

⁵⁷ Miguel Angel Motis Dolader, *Los Judíos en Aragón en la Edad Media (Siglos XIII-XV)* (Aragón: Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, 1990), 52.

⁵⁸ Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 27 (2003): 30, 35.

⁵⁹ Angel Iniesta Sanmartin, et al, *Lorca. Luces de Sefarad* (Murcia: Industrias Gráficas Libecom, 2009); Isidro Bango Treviso, *Memoria de la Sefarad* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2002), 111-29, 142-57.

privately in the Middle Ages. The opposite is true of the Christian *retablos*. Altarpieces are definitely public art meant to teach, to inspire, and to invest the church with grandeur.⁶⁰ The artists' practice of populating scenes from the Gospels and the lives of saints with figures modeled on local Jews, who were dressed in costumes visible in the course of daily life, whose unkempt hair and beards were the result of royal edicts, must have had an effect on the worshippers standing before large and impressive altarpieces. These depictions attempted to brand contemporary Jewry with the guilt of their ancestors, who tormented Christ and the martyrs of the church.⁶¹ The portrayals were reminders of the Christian doctrine that the Jews of any era were equivalent to those alive during the early centuries of the Church. Jews were witnesses to the truth of Christianity and were, therefore, allowed to survive; still they embodied the guilt of their ancestors.

The negative message of historical scenes was compounded by representations of contemporary arenas of conflict between Jews and Christians. Two altarpieces from the Cistercian monastery of Vallbona de los Monges painted in 1349-50 with their scenes of the Desecration of the Host were expressions of anti-Judaism linking the Black Plague to Jewish transgressions.⁶²

Another arena of conflict was the conversionist sermon that became a popular tactic of Christians seeking to convert Jews after 1242, when James I of Aragon and other secular rulers permitted Christian missionaries to preach in synagogues.⁶³ Scenes of conversionist sermons appear on altarpieces dedicated to St. Stephen, who was known as a zealous preacher and died in Jerusalem ca. 35 CE. A *retablo* by Jaime Serra ca. 1385 shows St. Stephen in a Gothic building that might be a church or a synagogue, flanked by

⁶⁰ Michael Baxandall, *Patterns of Intention. On the Historical Explanation of Pictures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 106.

⁶¹ Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4.

⁶² Carmen Muñoz Párraga, "Los Judíos en Aragón: Del Mundo del Medioevo al del Renacimiento" in *Encrucijada de Culturas* (Saragossa: Tipolinea, 2008), 104. For the altarpieces, see Alcoy i Pedrós, *L'Art gòtic a Catalunya: I. De l'inicio a l'italianisme*, 127-29.

⁶³ See, for example, a discussion of medieval Jews' knowledge of Christianity in Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 324-329.

Jewish men who are reacting to his sermon (fig. 10). Interestingly, given the placement of the representation on an altarpiece, the Jews are shown responding in diverse ways to what they have heard. An elderly man in the right foreground holds his Bible or prayer book up to the saint and appears to argue with Stephen. Behind him is a man who covers his ears in order not to hear blasphemy, and between the two is a man tearing up his Hebrew book having been convinced by the saint to abandon Judaism. The same actions are repeated by the Jews standing at left. Similar responses are depicted in a scene of Jesus before the doctors on a contemporaneous *retablo* by Lluís Borrassà.⁶⁴ Unlike Jews' attendance at Christian sermons out of intellectual curiosity, these scenes record a different, malevolent purpose.

There are two unusual renderings of the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes that express a reconciliation of Jews and Christians, albeit in a Christian context. On the altarpiece of San Salvador in Ejea de los Caballeros (fig. 11) and on the Altarpiece of the Transfiguration painted by Bernat Martorell between 1445 and 1452, the stream of people approaching Jesus is made up of both Christians and Jews, the Jewish men identifiable by their dark cloaks and untrimmed hair and beards. This treatment of the subject reflects the teachings of ecclesiastics such as Abbot Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135-1202), who saw a future in which Jews and Christians would join as one flock.⁶⁵ On another *retablo* painted by Martorell ca. 1435-45 on the theme of St. John the Baptist, two scenes on the right present Christians and Jews acting together:⁶⁶ Both Christian and Jewish women attend Anna in a scene of the birth of the saint, and St. John preaches to a mixed group of Jews and Christians.

Joachim of Fiore was perhaps the first theorist of incremental progress ending in a "mutually beneficial union of Christians and Jews."⁶⁷ His ideas spread throughout western Europe in the books of his followers, among them Arnold of Villanova, influential in

⁶⁴ Elena Romero, *La Vida Judía en Sefarad*, 72.

⁶⁵ Robert E. Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 1.

⁶⁶ For an illustration see Francesc Ruiz i Quesada, ed., *L'Art Gòtic a Catalunya. Pintura II: El corrent internacional*, 239.

⁶⁷ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews*, 19 and 24.

Spain in the early years of the fourteenth century, and in writings of the Franciscan monk Francesc Eiximenis, born in Girona in 1327, who served Peter the Ceremonious of Aragon (1336-87) and other members of the royal family.⁶⁸ Eiximenis' writings, which spread Joachimite ideology throughout Spain, were written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. The Franciscan expanded Joachim's philosophy to include the concept that the "saints" of the Old Testament would be venerated along with those of the New: that is Saint Abraham, Saint David, Saint Isaiah and others.⁶⁹ A reflection of this syncretist vision may be the altarpiece scenes discussed above and the many portraits of Israelite kings and prophets on the *retablos*, although the prophets served a dual role as predictors of the coming of Jesus as the Messiah.

The record of Jewish life on the altarpieces of Aragon is a precious one. Manuscripts were the only art form Jews were allowed to take with them into exile in 1492, and the few genre scenes they contain yield only a partial glimpse of Jewish life. The figures that inhabit the miniatures of the preparations for and celebration of Passover in the haggadot are mostly stereotypical. But the larger scale of the altarpieces and the superior skill of their artists afford us actual, particularized portraits of Jews who lived in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and details of their dress and their surroundings. Some of the paintings include Jewish figures as part of the daily life of medieval Aragon, like the shoemakers of a *retablo* now in Manresa, or the Jew on horseback depicted behind the Virgin Mary in a Pieta by Barolomé Cárdenas of 1490.⁷⁰ A similar rider is shown leaving a city on an altarpiece in Palma de Majorca.⁷¹ Their inclusion on the *retablos* exemplifies the social interaction that characterized Iberian society, and which has been termed *convivencia*.⁷²

⁶⁸ Marjorie Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 221.

⁶⁹ Lerner, *The Feast of Saint Abraham: Medieval Millenarians and the Jews*, 110.

⁷⁰ For the shoemakers, see Vivian B. Mann, *Uneasy Communion: Jews, Christians and the Altarpieces of Medieval Spain* (New York: Museum of Biblical Art and D. Giles Limited, 2010), 81-85; for the horseman, see J. M. Martí Bonet, *La Cathedral de Barcelone* (Barcelona: Editorial Escudo de Oro and Arxiu Diocesà de Barcelona, n.d.), 111.

⁷¹ Montserrat Blanch, *El Arte Gotico en España* (Barcelona: Ediciones Poligrafa, 1972), 316.

⁷² Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier*, 174.

The broad nature of Jewish participation in the art of painting on the Iberian Peninsula is indicated by a treatise on colors, the *Libro de Como se Fazen as Cores*, written by Abraham Ibn Hayyim during the late thirteenth century.⁷³ Abraham wrote his manuscript in 1262 in Judeo-Portuguese, which presumes that there was an audience of other Jewish artists who could understand the text. At the time Abraham composed the twenty-eight chapters of his *Libro*, the first translations of early treatises describing techniques of painting, glassmaking and metalworking appeared. The number of color recipes in Abraham's book, which is greater than those found in the popular *Various or Divers Arts* by Theophilus, indicates that the author used an additional source for his own work.

Only one work of art produced by a Jew survives from the period of Islamic rule. It is an extraordinary work in silver with a Kufic inscription noting it was made for the caliph Alhakem, by the Jew Juden ben Bazla.⁷⁴ It is now in the museum of the Girona Cathedral. The prominence of Jews in silversmithing even after the *Reconquista* may be a heritage from their roles in areas previously under Muslim rule, since the *hadith*, the religious traditions of Islam, viewed metalworking as degrading and left it to Jews. Bonafós Abenxueu, who made the frame for the La Seo altarpiece by Abraham de Salinas, was a silversmith, one of the many Jewish silversmiths of Saragossa, who were numerous enough to support their own synagogue.⁷⁵ Confraternities of artists and craftsmen, both Jewish and Christian, organized to protect their religious concerns and for mutual support in areas of social welfare, were more numerous in Aragon than elsewhere in Christian Spain, and most Jewish confraternities were in Aragon, particularly in Saragossa.⁷⁶ The earliest recorded silversmith

⁷³ S. Blondheim, trans., "An Old Portuguese Work on Manuscript Illumination," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 19 N. S. (1928-29): 97-135.

⁷⁴ For a photograph, see Jerrilynn Dodds, *El Andalus* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 64-65; for the inscription see Gabriel Roura, *Larquet aràbiga d'Al-Hakam, Girona Carolíngia* (Girona: Diputació de Girona y Ajuntament de Girona, n.d.).

⁷⁵ Blasco Martínez, "Pintores y Orfebres Judíos en Zaragoza (Siglo XIV)," 120. The Jewish weavers' guild of Catalunya also had their own synagogue. (Wischnitzer, *A History of Jewish Crafts & Guilds*, 109.)

⁷⁶ Yom Tov Assis, ed., *The Jews in the Crown of Aragon: Regesta of the Cartas Reales in the Archivo de la Corona de Aragón. Part II: 1328-1493* (Jerusalem: Academon, 1995), vii. See Miguel Angel Motis Dolader, *Los Judíos en Aragon en la Edad Media (Siglos XIII-XV)*

in Morella, Aragon, was the Jew Mose Alafoydar, nicknamed “the Jewish silversmith” in documents of 1334–35.⁷⁷ Mose had two brothers, Salomon and Caquo, who were also silversmiths. The Santalineia family of silversmiths who flourished in Morella during the second half of the century were conversos. In the Valencian town of Morvedre, silversmiths were the foremost artists in the Jewish community. Their work was so highly esteemed that they established branch workshops in other locales to which they regularly traveled, and apprentices from other cities came to study with them.⁷⁸ Their knowledge of the forms of church vessels could have been acquired during the times that church silver was pawned with Jews or from works given to them as models for new commissions. In 1380, the sister of the Bishop of Tarazona and the sacristan of the church in Borja pawned a silver cross, a reliquary, a censer, and an incense vessel with its ladle of silver with the Jew, Yuçe Francés.⁷⁹

Visual representations of Jews as silversmiths under Christian rule appear in the *Vidal Mayor*, the law code of James I of Aragon dated to the second half of the thirteenth century.⁸⁰ Among the recorded cases are four involving Jews, each text accompanied by an illuminated initial. Jews are shown as silversmiths, as merchants of metalwork, as pawnbrokers (accepting metalwork as surety for a loan), and as litigants before the king in a case involving metalwork.

With the Expulsion of 1492, silversmiths were among those who sought refuge in North Africa, to the extent that Leo Africanus, in his description of Morocco published in 1556, wrote that the majority of the goldsmiths in Fez were Jewish. They also settled in Jerusalem, where they belonged to the same guild as Muslims.

(Aragon: Caja de Ahorros de la Inmaculada, 1990), 152-60, for an analysis of Jewish artisanal trades and their integration into the Aragonese economy.

⁷⁷ Núria de Dalmasés i Balañà, “Approximación a la orfebrería morellana,” *La memòria daurada: Obradors de Morellas. XIII-XVI* (n.p.: Pliego Digital, 2000): 120.

⁷⁸ Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain*, 110, 129-31.

⁷⁹ Archivo Capitular de Tarazona, Protocolo de Lázaro de Larraz, 1380, fols. 22v.-23. For papal denunciations of pawning church vessels to Jews, see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, Vol. II: 1254-1314, ed. Kenneth R. Stow (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Wayne State University Press, 1989), 62-64.

⁸⁰ A. Ubierto Arteta, J. Delgado Echeverría, J. A. Frago Gracia and M. del C. Lacarra Ducay, *Vidal Mayor: Estudios* (Hesca: n. p., 1984), there the older literature; Mann, Glick and Dodds, *Convivencia*, fig. 1 and 24.

The responsa of Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Ibn Adret (1235–1310) reveals another *métier* of Jewish artists in medieval Spain. He wrote:

Those images of crosses that women weave in their silks [made] for non-Jews should be forbidden. Nevertheless, they can be deemed permissible because non-Jews do not worship their deity in this way. The [women] make nothing with their looms but [designs] for beauty in the manner of drawings. Even though the same images are worshipped on other articles, since it is not customary to worship them in this manner, [the images are] permissible.⁸¹

Ibn Adret's *responsum* is noteworthy for the information that the Jewish women of Toledo were weavers of deluxe silk textiles in the thirteenth century. Muslims had introduced the production of silk cloth to Spain in the early tenth century, three centuries prior to its manufacture in the rest of Europe.⁸² The silks produced by Muslims and Jews during the *Reconquista* were thought to be the finest in Spain, and were purchased and used by the Catholic kings and queens.⁸³ Jews also predominated in the production of silk in Sicily, which in 1282 became part of the Crown of Aragon. Jewish travelers, like Benjamin of Tudela in the twelfth century and Elijah of Ferrara in the fifteenth century, recorded the activity of Jewish silk weavers in many countries under both Christian and Islamic rule. The sum of all these accounts is that Jewish involvement in the weaving and trade of silk textiles was widespread in Muslim countries and in Christian Iberia.

Jewish artists and traders participated in transmitting artistic models and techniques from one land to another. In peaceful times, this cultural interchange took place as the result of trade. In the eleventh century, for example, a Jewish trader shipped Muslim prayer rugs from Kairouan to Iberia, according to a record found

⁸¹ Isidore Epstein, *The "Responsa" of Rabbi Solomon ben Adreth of Barcelona (1235-1310) as a Source for the History of the Jews of Spain and The Responsa of Rabbi Simon b. Zemah Duran as a Source of the History of the Jews in North Africa*, 2nd ed. (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1968), 14 and fn. 20.

⁸² Juan Zozaya, "Material Culture in Medieval Spain," in Mann, Glick and Dodds, eds., *Convivencia*, 159.

⁸³ Concha Herrero Carretero. *Museo de Telas Medievales : Monasterio de Santa María la Real de Huelgas* (Madrid: Patrimonio Nacional, 1984), for example, 54-55, 61, 83.

in the Cairo Geniza that is the earliest written documentation of prayer rugs.⁸⁴ Times of persecution, like the pogroms of 1391 and the Expulsions from Spain in 1492 and from Portugal in 1497, resulted in the migration of artists and the diffusion of artistic genres. For example, one third of the Jewish refugees from Spain who settled in Safed at the end of the fifteenth century engaged in the manufacture of wool and its weaving. They were familiar with textile manufacturing processes on the Iberian Peninsula, and encountered an established wool and silk industry in Safed on which they could build.

Other examples of cultural transmission by medieval Jewish artists are the introduction of Spanish weaves to Morocco, which were recreated on “Fez belts” well into the twentieth century, and the establishment of manufactories of majolica and *corami* (decorated leather wall hangings) in Italy, which bears discussion of its own.

The production of beautiful lusterware was an art form introduced by the Arabs to Spain. The wares excavated in *juderías* such as that of Teruel can be presumed to have been used by Jews, but these works cannot be differentiated from the pottery of other population groups, unless they are painted with Jewish symbols such as the Star of David and the *hamsa*.⁸⁵ Some medieval forms appear to have been made exclusively for Jews, like a dish from Teruel with five affixed containers that appears to have been a Seder plate.⁸⁶ Fragments of ceramic Hanukkah lamps found in the Jewish quarters of Teruel, Burgos, Saragossa and Lorca are the most commonly excavated Jewish type.⁸⁷ Another ceramic, a large platter with a prominent cavetto and deep center, bears a Hebrew inscription naming the three most important symbols of the ritual Passover meal, the Seder.⁸⁸ A similar plate appears in the Sister of the Golden Haggadah to hold *matzot* that a householder distributes.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ Richard Ettinghausen, “Introduction,” in his *Prayer Rugs* (Washington, DC: Textile Museum, 1974/5), 15.

⁸⁵ Isidro G. Bango Torviso, “El Menaje del hogar,” *Memoria de Sefarad*, 132.

⁸⁶ Mann, Glick and Dodds, *Convivencia*, cat. no. 85.

⁸⁷ Bango Torviso, *Memoria de Sefarad*, cat. nos. 139-142; Iniesta Sanmartin, et al, *Lorca: Luces de Sefarad*, 372-85. The Saragossa example is unpublished.

⁸⁸ Bango Torviso, *Memoria de Sefarad*, 171.

⁸⁹ Narkiss, et al, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts in the British Isles*, fig. 186.

By the mid-fifteenth century, these ceramics were imported into Italy from Majorca, which led to their being called majolica.⁹⁰ Some of the first workshops were established by Jews. In the ceramics centers of Savona and Albisole near Genoa, one of the first majolica factories was established by the Salomone family, who used the hexagram as their symbol from the late fifteenth century until the twentieth, long after the family had converted to Christianity.

Another art form that arrived in Italy with the expelled Sephardim was *corami*, or painted leather hangings that functioned much as did medieval tapestries. Hung on the walls, they protected inhabitants from cold and damp and provided a luxurious shimmering surface. The center of Renaissance *corame* production was Venice, and portions of two sets of these leather hangings made for the Scuola Spagnola in that city are still extant, one from the sixteenth century,⁹¹ in addition to others made for various patrons. The tradition of hanging *corami* in Sephardi synagogues can be seen in the decorated leather lining of the Torah ark in the Bevis Marks Synagogue of London, which was established by Sephardi immigrants. Jews in Rome both sold *corami* and rented them for special occasions.

In sum, Jewish participation in the artistic life of the Iberian Peninsula was significant and varied. Yet none of the historians concerned with the nature of Jewish–Christian coexistence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have analyzed the art of the period and the history of its production as a source for understanding relationships between Christians and Jews, or as evidence for knowledge of each other’s religious praxis. The fact that Jews worked as artists for Christians suggests they were knowledgeable about Christian history and beliefs, and that Christian artists demonstrated an intimate knowledge of Jewish life by setting scenes from the Gospels and Christian lore within Jewish architectural and ceremonial contexts. Sadly, the implications of these artistic themes have thus far been ignored.⁹² The failure to exploit this historical source may

⁹⁰ Harold Osborne, ed., *The Oxford Companion to the Decorative Arts* (Oxford and New York, 1985), 132-33.

⁹¹ Mann, *Gardens and Ghettos: The Art of Jewish Life in Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), cat. no. 102.

⁹² See, for example, a discussion of medieval Jews’ knowledge of Christianity in Robert Chazan, *Fashioning Jewish Identity in Medieval Western Christendom*, 324–29. Chazan

be due to a lack of knowledge of the art-historical methodologies necessary to an understanding of medieval works of art. With easier access to original sources made available by the computer and the internet, together with the traditional forms of scholarly exchange, we can examine the evidence anew and reexamine our assumptions regarding Jews and art in the Middle Ages.

confines his discussion to the evidence of polemical literature. See also Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 27:1 (2003): 23–72. Ben-Shalom discusses not only conversionist sermons and the well-known disputations at Barcelona and Tortosa, but also the various types of disputes which took place between Jews and Christians, some of them on a friendly plane.

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