

Kabbalistic Traditions in the Castilian Vernacular: R. Moshe Arragel's Glosses to the Alba Bible¹

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Kabbalah “en español”

Kabbalistic literature, which emerged for the first time in Provence in the second half of the twelfth century, experienced a major development in the following centuries in the Iberian Peninsula, first to the north in Catalonia, and later further south in Castile. Kabbalistic texts were typically composed in Hebrew, or Aramaic, as is the case of the most important kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*² (Damsma). During the Renaissance period, kabbalistic works provoked the curiosity of Christians, which gave impetus to the translation of kabbalistic materials into other languages, most frequently Latin, and their reformulation into a brand of “Christian kabbalah” (Huss 2016; Campanini 2020). It is not until the seventeenth century, between 1620-1632, in the Sephardic diaspora of Amsterdam, that we find for the first time kabbalistic treatises composed directly in Castilian language; namely, the works *Puerta del cielo* and *Casa de la divinidad* by a Jewish kabbalist born to a converso family, Abraham Cohen de Herrera³ (Beltrán, Krabbenhof).

Already in the thirteenth century, Castilian king Alfonso X (r. 1252-1284) is reported to have sponsored the translation of kabbalistic literature. The notice is found in an often-cited remark in *Libro de la caza* (*Book of Hunting*, composed ca. 1325-1326) by Infante Don Juan Manuel, the nephew of king Alfonso X:

¹ I would like to express my deep gratitude to Javier del Barco (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid) who kindly shared with me a copy of the edition of the Biblia de Alba by Paz y Meliá.

² The *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor*, the most important work of medieval kabbalah, is mainly (but not only) a mystical commentary on the Torah composed in pseudo-epigraphic form and ascribed to the second century c.e. Palestinian Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai. Scholars agree that at least a significant part of the “zoharic literature” was composed in Castile at the end of the 13th-beginning of the 14th century by R. Moses de León and his circle (Scholem 1995, 156-204; Liebes 85-138).

³ Abraham Cohen de Herrera was born in Florence ca. 1562 to a converso family. He studied kabbalah in Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik) with Israel Sarug, disciple of Isaac Luria, and later settled in Amsterdam until his death in 1635. Between 1620 and 1632 he composed in Castilian the two mentioned kabbalistic treatises, which reinterpret Lurianic kabbalah in Neoplatonic key.

<p>Entre muchos conplimientos et buenas cosas que Dios puso en el rey don Alfonso, fijo del sancto et bienaventurado rey don Ferrando, puso en el su talante de acresçentar el saber quanto pudo, et fizo por ello mucho; assí que non se falla que, del rey Tolomeo acá, ningún rey nin otro omne tanto fiziesse por ello como él. Et tanto cobdiçió que los de los sus regnos fuessen muy sabidores, que fizo trasladar en este lenguaje de Castiella todas las sçiençias, tan bien de theología como la lógica, et todas las siete artes liberales, como toda la arte que dizen mecánica. Otrosí fizo trasladar toda la secta de los moros, porque paresçiesse por ella los errores en que Mahomad, el su falso propheta, les puso et en que ellos están oy en día. Otrosí fizo trasladar toda [la] ley de los judíos et aun el su Talmud et otra sçiençia que an los judíos muy escondida a que llaman Cabala. Et esto fizo porque paresç[ie] manifestamente por la su ley que toda fue figura d'esta ley que los christianos avemos, et que también ellos como los moros están en grant error et en estado de perder las almas (Juan Manuel, 1:519-520).</p>	<p>Among the many accomplishments and virtues that God granted to King Don Alfonso, son of the holy and blessed King Don Fernando, was his willingness to augment wisdom as much as possible, and he did much to that effect. So much, that nobody, king or not, is comparable to him in that regard since the days of King Ptolemy until our days. And he was so intent on making his kingdom's inhabitants wise that he commanded to translate into the language of Castile all the sciences, including theology, logic, all the seven liberal arts, and all the art called mechanics. He also commanded to translate all [the documents of?] the sect of the Moors, so that the mistakes into which Mohammad, their false prophet, led them, and in which they are today, would become apparent to all. Also he commanded to translate all the Law of the Jews, and their Talmud, and another very secret science that the Jews have, and that they call Kabbalah. And he did that so that it would be manifest that their Law only prefigured the law that we Christians have now, and that they are like the Moors in great error, and at risk of losing their souls.⁴</p>
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Don Juan Manuel describes how the Castilian king commissioned the translation of “all of the Jewish law, and their Talmud, and another very secret science the Jews have which they call Kabbalah.” Unfortunately, he does not specify into which language were these translations commissioned, and no trace of these planned Alfonsine translations of the Talmud or the kabbalistic literature has reached us.⁵ Their polemical intent, however, is made very clear by Don Juan Manuel: to prove that Jewish law is a mere prefiguration of Christian law.

As is well-known, king Alfonso undertook a massive translation enterprise from Arabic and Hebrew into Latin and Castilian, which often resorted to Jewish translators (Baer 1992, 1:124-130; 257-258; O’Callaghan 1993, 247-256). This ambitious cultural policy, according to some scholars inspired by Islamic models, has been related to the king’s aspirations to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire (Menocal 2006). It entailed a major shift: the vernacular Castilian became not only a literary language, but the official language of the kingdom (Márquez Villanueva 2004, 18). The translations sponsored by

⁴ Translation into English is mine.

⁵ According to N. Roth, “this testimony is probably reliable” (Roth 1985, 440-441). Against Roth, I think it is quite plausible that despite the possible initial intention to produce a complete translation of the Talmud and of the kabbalistic literature of the time, the project never materialized.

the king enjoyed a greater degree of freedom, at least in some respects, than previous translations into Latin, mostly sponsored by (and closely monitored by) Church authorities (Menocal 2006, 197).

The cultural relevance of translations came hand in hand with a heightened valuation of esoteric lore in Castile. Secrets, most of all secrets preserved and transmitted in ancient languages, became a marker of prestige. By presenting themselves as possessors of these type of secrets, Castilian Jews were able to build for themselves symbolic and cultural capital, as it has been recently stressed by Lachter (2014, 4).

The first Castilian vernacular text known to us that makes specific references to kabbalistic traditions is *Mostrador de Justicia* (*Teacher of Righteousness*), by the Jewish convert into Christianity Abner de Burgos/Alfonso de Valladolid (ca. 1270-ca. 1347). Abner was a Jewish doctor from Burgos who underwent a long process of doubting the Jewish faith, and who ultimately converted to Christianity publicly in 1321. After his conversion, he spent the rest of his life polemizing against his former co-religionaries (Baer 1:327-54; Szpiech 2006; Szpiech 2012; Sainz de la Maza 1990).

Even though Abner/Alfonso wrote in Hebrew, not all his writings have reached us in their original form: some have come down to us in Hebrew, others in Castilian translation, yet others in fragmentary citations in Latin (the complex linguistic aspects of Abner/Alfonso's works are discussed in Szpiech 2016; Alba & Sainz de la Maza). We do know that Abner/Alfonso personally translated into Castilian one of his works, *Libro de las batallas de Dios* (*Book of the Wars of the Lord*), but we do not know with certainty whether this is also the case with the rest of his translated writings.

His magnum opus *Mostrador de Justicia* has been preserved only in its Castilian version, copied in a unique manuscript (Paris BNF ms. Esp. 43). Probably this Castilian text is a translation from a lost original Hebrew, but we do not know conclusively whether Abner/Alfonso himself translated it or not (Szpiech 2006, 325 note 38).

Abner/Alfonso extensively resorts to Jewish sources, and a Jewish style of argumentation, to persuade Castilian Jews to accept the Christian faith. To this effect, he employs kabbalistic concepts, which he reinterprets in the light of Christian doctrines: "Abner began with a critique of the rationalist interpretation of Judaism cultivated by the Jewish intellectuals who were his friends –and for this he found ample support in cabalistic doctrine" (Baer 1992, 1:335). For instance, Abner/Alfonso finds echoes of the Christian dogma of the Trinity in references to the upper triad of the sefirot mentioned in kabbalistic sources; and for the incarnation in the kabbalistic idea of the Shekhinah or divine presence.

In the Castilian text of *Mostrador*, we can see at play the effort to render into Castilian technical terms specific to the kabbalah. The lore of kabbalah is called "Cabala," and its practitioners are called "mecubalim," simply transliterating the Hebrew terms "qabbalah" and "mequbbalim." Other technical terms are properly translated into Castilian, such as the ten sefirot, which are most often called in a particularly felicitous rendering "los cuentos de los mecubalim" (Alfonso de Valladolid 1:165).

Szpiech has concluded that "a much fuller study of all of Abner/Alfonso's works together is still necessary to realistically assess the extent of the importance of kabbalistic ideas in his writings but Jewish mysticism does not seem essential to his argument, as rabbinic literature and Aristotelian philosophy are" (Szpiech 2006, 553). Abner/Alfonso's references to kabbalah are very biased, in line with his clear polemical intent: he is a convert who intends to delegitimize his former faith in the eyes of his new co-religionaries.

References to Kabbalistic Traditions in the Alba Bible

Despite a span of more than a century between them, the Castilian renderings of kabbalistic terms in Abner/Alfonso are the only precedent I have been able to find with regards to the kabbalistic doctrines expressed in Castilian language in the Alba Bible, composed between 1422-1430.⁶ In this case, their author is a prestigious Castilian rabbi whose religious affiliation was never in question, R. Moshe Arragel of Guadalajara.

The Alba Bible is one of several medieval Bibles in the Castilian vernacular that were produced in the Iberian Peninsula between the 13th and the 15th centuries. As Avenoza has noted, the vernacular versions of the Bible in medieval Castile stand out because most of them (11 out of 14) were done directly from the Hebrew Masoretic text, and not from the Latin Vulgate, as one may have expected (Avenoza 2012, 293).

Avenoza refers to “the varied interests of their [the Castilian Bible’s] owners, from liturgical use in the synagogue or by Christian preachers to the concept of them as a luxury item, a sign of power or source of knowledge for the lay readers or the high nobility” (Avenoza 2012, 290). The latter seems to be the specific case of the Alba Bible, preserved in a codex that certainly is a luxury item commissioned by a powerful personality, the Grand Master of the Order of Calatrava, don Luis González de Guzmán.

The Alba Bible is a Castilian translation of the Hebrew Bible composed by R. Moshe Arragel between 1422 and 1430, accompanied by illuminations (about 300), extensive glosses (about 6300), and introductory prologues. The glosses compile the Jewish exegetical commentaries of the Bible, and they were meant to pay particular attention to those produced after Nicholas’s of Lira’s *Postillae* (1233-1331), which had been recently translated into Castilian, between 1420-1427.

Don Luis de Guzmán commissioned Arragel to work on this translation and commentary of the Bible under the close supervision of three churchmen, the Franciscan friar Arias de Enzina and the archdeacon of Toledo, Vasco de Guzmán, and the Dominican Juan de Zamora. Arragel reluctantly accepted the task after some negotiations, documented in letters exchanged between Arragel and the commissioners and reproduced in the introduction to the work, which show the asymmetry in the power balance between the parties. The end-result was a luxurious and unique codex currently in possession of the Spanish nobiliary House of Alba, from which it takes its name.

The outstanding iconography of the illuminations of the Alba Bible, which combines Christian artistic motifs and Jewish exegetical elements, has up until now attracted most of the scholarly attention dedicated to this work (Nordström, Fellous). The emphasis on iconography also applies to the study of kabbalistic doctrines reflected in the Alba Bible. Until recently, discussion of kabbalistic traditions in the Alba Bible focused exclusively on a particularly gruesome illumination that shows Cain murdering Abel by

⁶ The Alba Bible was the object of a limited edition of 200 copies in 2 vols. published by the Duke of Alba for the Roxburghe Club between 1918-1920, containing a transcription of the text by Paz y Meliá, at the time director of the Manuscripts Division at the National Library in Madrid (Lazar, 158). This edition is difficult to find, and its shortcomings have been noted by scholars (Lazar, 158). In 1992, a facsimile edition accompanied by an excellent companion volume of studies was made (Schoenfield 1992). A new digital edition is currently being prepared by a team of researchers that includes Luis Girón Negrón, Enrique Arias, Francisco Javier Pueyo Mena and the late Ángel Saenz Badillos for the Brill series *Heterodoxia Ibérica* (for a description of the project, see Girón Negrón & Arias 2012).

biting his throat (the image is in fol. 29v of the codex). In 1967, Nordström related this image to a Zoharic passage (*Zohar* I:54b): “As Cain was killing Abel, he did not know how his soul would expire, [and he bit him in the neck like a snake], as the Companions have established”⁷ (Nordström, 59). In 1987, Franco Mata (1987, 72-73) noted that a similar representation appears in a relief in the choir screen of the Toledo cathedral, produced at the end of the fourteenth century. The same shocking motif reappears in two other Castilian churches, most likely following the Toledan model.⁸

There are textual sources other than the *Zohar* that could be connected to this motif, such as the apocryphal text *Vita Adae et Evae*, which was very popular and knew many versions into European vernaculars in the Middle Ages, though none is known from the Iberian Peninsula (Murdoch, 38). In it, Eve has a dream vision of Abel’s blood spurting out of the mouth of Cain (Dupont & Philonenko 1987, 1771-1772). A similar, though perhaps less specific motif is found in Jewish rabbinical sources: “Cain inflicted many blows and wounds upon his brother Abel because he did not know whence the soul departs, until he reached his neck” (BT Sanhedrin 37b; see other references in Ginzberg V, 139-140).

The illuminators of the Alba Bible, working in Maqueda, may have copied the depiction in the Toledo cathedral (a mere 40 km away), they may have followed indications of Arragel, perhaps inspired by the *Zohar* text, or they may have been a convergence of these two factors. As Nickson indicates in what is the most detailed study on this motif, it is practically impossible for us to know whether the depiction of Cain biting Abel’s neck in the Alba Bible, or that in the Toledo cathedral, for that matter, originates in the *Zohar* or not. As he puts it, “it may not be possible to pinpoint an exact visual or textual source for the two images under discussion” (Nickson 2012, 52).

Regarding the text of the glosses, the first research on the kabbalistic traditions presented in it has been carried out recently by Girón Negrón, who in one article published in Spanish and dedicated to the aspects of pragmatic linguistics in the Alba Bible discusses in detail Arragel’s gloss 480 to Genesis (Girón Negrón 2017). In his analysis, Girón Negrón stresses Arragel’s antagonistic attitude towards kabbalah. In what follows, I will complement Girón Negrón’s analysis of this gloss, and present two other glosses to the Alba Bible which also refer to kabbalistic traditions, but in a more positive or nuanced manner.

Levirate Marriage and the Kabbalistic Secret of Gilgul (Gloss 480 to Genesis)

The biblical law of levirate marriage (Deut. 25:5-6) determines that if a man dies without children, one of his brothers (in case he has them) is obliged to marry his widow to “keep his name alive,” that is, to engender children that will continue his brother’s

⁷ Nördstrom credits Prof. F. Rundgren with making the connection between the image and the Zoharic passage (Nördstrom 59, note 1). The recent critical edition of the *Zohar* by Daniel Matt omits the crucial part between square brackets (Matt I, 306). An additional Zoharic passage relevant here, and not mentioned by Nordström, is *Zohar* II:231a-b: “We have found in ancient books that when Cain killed Abel he bit him with bites like a snake till he plucked out his soul and killed him” (Matt VI, 330).

⁸ They are the choir stalls of the cathedral of Cuenca (1454), nowadays at the Collegiate Church of San Bartolomé de Belmonte (Cuenca), where they were transferred to in the eighteenth century, and the choir stalls of the Burgos cathedral, from the beginnings of the sixteenth century (Nickson 2012, 45 note 22; Franco Mata 2010, 121).

lineage. A possibility for the brother to decline the performance of this commandment is provided by the ceremony of *ḥaliṣah* or “removing of the sandal” (Deut. 25:7-10), in which the brother of the deceased submits to what was intended to be a form of public humiliation, so that he can be released from his obligation. Since both options, to uphold or to decline the levirate marriage, are given by the law, there existed a great diversity of opinions, depending on geographic areas, historical periods, and personal judgement, regarding whether levirate or *ḥaliṣah* was to be preferred (Grossman, 92-93). The practice of levirate declined over the Middle Ages, and today its practice has been abandoned in Judaism.

When practiced, levirate marriage opened sensitive issues, particularly when the brother of the deceased was already married, in which case it led to polygamy. In Islamicate settings, polygamy was socially accepted, but when Jewish communities lived in Christian environments, polygamy was at least a contentious, if not directly a forbidden practice. The great legal authorities of medieval Iberian Judaism, such as Alfasi, Maimonides, Naḥmanides, and Shelomoh ben Adret favored levirate, despite the obstacles it entailed in terms of social acceptability, economic burdens, and possible domestic conflict, maybe because of their greater familiarity with polygamy in Islamicate societies (Grossman, 97).

The commandment of levirate, problematic as it was, could well be explained by economic or sociological reasons, such as not wanting to leave a childless widow in a situation of penury and isolation after the death of her husband. But kabbalists saw a secret reason behind it, related to their belief in reincarnation or transmigration of the soul (known in Hebrew as *gilgul*)⁹: according to them, in levirate marriage the soul of the deceased brother is channeled by the living brother into the body of the widow, who would conceive a child carrying not only the name of the dead, as the Bible says, but also his very soul. This interpretation of the meaning of this commandment was esoteric, not meant to be openly explained (and most certainly, not meant to be explained openly in the vernacular language that even the non-Jews could understand).

We find an example of this cautious attitude in Naḥmanides, who in his commentary on Gen. 38:8 (“Then Judah said to Onan, “Join with your brother’s wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law, and provide offspring for your brother”) refers to a great secret concerning human reproduction contained in this biblical passage. In his characteristically discreet manner (Halbertal, 83-92; Wolfson 1989), Naḥmanides does not explicate the actual content of the secret at all:

The subject is indeed one of the great secrets of the Torah concerning human reproduction, and it is evident to those observers who have eyes to see, and ears to hear. The ancient wise men who were prior to the Torah knew of the great benefit in marrying a childless dead brother’s wife, and that it was proper for the brother to take precedence in the matter, and upon his failure to do so, his next of kin would come after him, for any kinsman who was related to him, who would inherit his legacy, would derive a benefit from such a marriage. And it was customary for the dead man’s wife to be wed by the brother or father or the next of kin in the family (Naḥmanides, 469).

⁹ For a useful overview of this topic in Judaism, see Alba 2011.

Later kabbalists will show less restraint than Nahmanides, explaining more openly the nature of the secret contained in levirate marriage.¹⁰ By the end of the thirteenth/beginning of the fourteenth century the *Zohar* provided, in the words of Daniel Matt, “the first extensive treatment of the subject [of *gilgul*, reincarnation or transmigration of the soul] in Jewish literature” (Matt V, XI). The language employed in the *Zohar* is rather poetic and not completely straightforward, as we can see in the following lines:

A spirit leaving this world who has not grown or spread in this world undergoes rolling and finds no rest, comes revolving into the world like a stone in a sling, until it finds a redeemer to redeem it –by that very vessel that he used, to which he clung with his spirit and soul, and who was his mate, spirit with spirit—and that redeemer builds it as before (*Zohar* 2:99b; cited according to Matt V, 38).

In the following pages, the *Zohar* extensively develops the topic of this “redemption” effectuated by the brother (who is the “redeemer,” *go’el* in Hebrew), who clings to the “vessel” formerly “used” by his sibling, that is, his widow. The spirit of the deceased brother leaves a trace in the body of his former wife, which joins the embryo created by the union of the brother and the widow. The *Zohar* discusses in detail further questions of great complexity that arise in connection with this explanation, such as how to articulate the simultaneous presence of two “spirits” in the child, that of the deceased brother and that of the living brother.

In gloss number 480 to Genesis, commenting on the above-cited verse of Gen 38:8, Arragel brings up his explanation of the kabbalistic understanding of levirate marriage:

<p>Quier dezir quel fijo que nasçiese, que ouiese nonbre del finado. En fecho del acuñadar, digo casar omne con su cuñada non auiendo su hermano fijos, fazen dello los macubalym de los judios muy grand secreto. Entienden estos sabios que los omnes aca mundanales que son a manera de eslaunos enclauijados vnos con otros, e son en opinion estos que estos eslaunos son encasados e trabados con las animas synples çelestiales, e que cada omne aca es vna rrama de vn arbol de almas que es en el çielo, e el que fina syn fijos, que es tajado desta rrama e desde tronco; e que esto es lo que David significo en vn verso que dixo : “ahe que heradat de Dios son los fijos e por eçio [ello?] le dan fruto de vientre [Psalm 127 :3],” e dizen que muriendo syn fijos mengua su anima desde arbol; e dizen que sallendosele la su anima, que ge la lieuan los demonios por que non</p>	<p>It means that any child that would be born would take the name of the deceased. Regarding the deed of levirate marriage [literally, “brother-in-lawing,” <i>acuñadar</i>], by which I mean that a man marries his sister-in-law if his [deceased] brother did not have any children, the kabbalists (<i>macubalym</i>) among the Jews make of it a great secret. These sages understand that men in this world are in the manner of links of a chain enchained with one another, and they opine that these links are embedded and intertwined with the simple heavenly souls, and that each man down here is a branch of a tree of souls that is in heaven, and he who remains without children is cut off from this branch and from this tree. And this is what David meant in a verse that says: “children are the inheritance of God and the price of the good fruit of the body” (Ps. 127: 3). And they say that if one dies</p>
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¹⁰ For a list of reference to levirate marriage and reincarnation, see Matt V, 38, note 108.

<p>ouo ventura de egualar las rramas terrenales con las çelestiales. Otros son en la çiençia de la cabala que mas menuzan la rrazon, e dizen que la ymagen de Dios es ymagen casy de omne, segun dixo : fagamos omne a nuestra forma, etc., pues el que engendra hijos multiplica la ymagen de Dios, e por la contra, que non aueindo hijos, pena mucho en el otro mundo; e que mandara Dios al hermano acuñadar su cuñada porque de todo en todo semeja que tornnan al hermano a este mundo. En esta gisa la muger del omne es su media carne, e juntandose anbos dos, que la alma del hermano, que non quieren acogerla en parayso, que asienta en la sperma de su hermano que cayo en la bulua de su mesma muger, e tornnan lo a este mundo. Otros dizen que las almas son ramas de vn arbol del qual dependen las animas; el omne que non faze hijos que es asy como rrama seca que non lleua fruto e es como maldicha; pues sy el hermano, que es su propia carne, en su mesma muger faze alguna criatura, ellos cunplen lo quel menguo e tornase rrama con fruto; pero quanto yo, non puedo tragar las dichas opiniones, porque non son concordades con ninguna filosofia nin tehologia. E non se al en ello, saluo que yo creo ser vn grande secreto en la ley en el qual poco sin dubda oy alcançamos.</p>	<p>without children, one's soul is diminished from the tree; and they say that when his soul departs, the demons take it because he did not have the chance to equate the earthly branches with the heavenly branches. There are others in the science of kabbalah that give an even more refined reason, and they say that the image of God is image almost of man, as it is said: "let us make man in our image, etc." (Gen. 1:26), thus he who engenders children multiplies the image of God, and on the contrary, by not having children, he has great sorrow in the other world; and that God commanded the brother-in-law to marry his sister-in-law because it seems that in every respect, they return the brother to this world. In this manner, the wife of a man is half his flesh, and by joining together, the soul of the brother, which is not accepted in paradise, settles in the sperm of his brother that falls in the womb of his own wife, and they return him to this world. Others say that the souls are branches of a tree from which souls hang; the man who does not make children is thus like a dry branch that does not carry fruit and is like damned and if the brother, who is his own flesh, makes a child in his own wife, they fulfill what he diminished and he becomes a fruitful branch. But as far as I am concerned, I cannot swallow the abovementioned opinions, because they do not agree with any philosophy nor theology. And there is nothing in it, except that I believe it is a great secret of the law which today is for the most part out of our reach.</p>
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Translating the biblical verse "join your brother's wife and do your duty by her as a brother-in-law" as "e acuñadala e confirmarás el nonbre de tu hermano," Arragel concurs with other Romance-language Bibles in employing the denominative verb "acuñadar," derived from the noun "cuñado," "brother in law."¹¹

This passage stands out because of how clearly and openly it explains the deep reason on account of which the levirate was instituted, according to the kabbalists

¹¹ According to a search on the website www.bh.bibliamedieval.es, Escorial 19, Escorial 5/Escorial 7, Santillana and Ferrara also employ the verb "acuñadar".

(transliterated here as “*macubalym*”): the transmigration of the soul of the deceased brother into the body of the child born to his former wife and his brother. Reincarnation of the soul is already present in what is arguably the first document of kabbalah, the *Book Bahir*, which surfaced in Provence in the twelfth century, although in this book it is not explicitly related to levirate (Scholem 1990, 188-193). The image of the “tree of souls that is in heaven” is also found in the *Bahir*, reflecting the borrowing on the part of kabbalists of a gnostic motif (Scholem 1990, 71-80; Wolfson 1994). According to our usual imaginal topology, in which heaven is upward, the tree would be “upside down,” that is, its roots are in heaven and its branches hang down towards our world. Human souls are intertwined to the branches of this tree of souls, and when one dies without children, it is as if his branch were cut off, and his soul taken by the demons. It is interesting to note that in the zoharic discussion of *gilgul*, the discourse opens precisely with a reference to this “tree of souls”:

Since we have begun to reveal, now is the time to reveal that all souls (*nishmatin*) issue from a grand and mighty tree of that river issuing from Eden, and all spirits (*ruh̄in*) issue from another, small tree (*Zohar* 2:99b; cited according to Matt V, 37).

Arragel is aware of the existence of differences of opinion among the kabbalists (“there are others in the science of kabbalah”) and introduces a second interpretation related to the “image and likeness” between God and human. God made human in his image and likeness, and for the human to fail to engender children is a failure to uphold and multiply the image of God. By not having children, the soul has great sorrow in the other world (it wanders about in sorrow, not being accepted in paradise). Levirate is meant as a remedy for all these miseries of childlessness: it equates, in every respect, to reviving the dead brother. The widow is “half the flesh” of the deceased, according to a kabbalistic conception already found in the *Bahir*, that states that the wife is a limb of the husband’s body (Scholem 1990, 141). In levirate, the wandering soul of the deceased settles in the sperm of his brother and comes back to the world in the womb of his former wife. Arragel introduces a third variation on this issue, according to which levirate would provide a way to “revive” a dead bough of the tree of souls, making a dry branch fruitful.

The passage ends with a shift into the first person, in which Arragel directly addresses his (Christian) reader, a pragmatic element that has been duly stressed by Girón Negrón in his analysis of this passage. Arragel declares his own antipathy for the kabbalistic doctrines that he just presented: “pero quanto yo, non puedo tragar las dichas opiniones, porque non son concordades con ninguna filosofia nin tehologia” (but as far as I am concerned, I cannot swallow the abovementioned opinions, because they do not agree with any philosophy nor theology). According to Girón Negrón, “Arragel positions himself in the midst of an intra-Jewish debate concerning the thorny relationship between philosophy and kabbalah, championing the former against the latter, as a staunch advocate of Maimonidean rationalism” (Girón Negrón 2017, n.p.).¹² Girón Negrón is right to indicate that the straightforwardness of Arragel is remarkable, mostly because he is addressing a Christian reader. However, it is interesting that Girón Negrón completely disregards in his analysis the sentence that closes the passage, and in which Arragel somewhat reverts to an esoteric stance: “E non se al en ello, saluo que yo creo ser vn grande secreto en la ley en el qual poco sin dubda oy alcançamos” (and there is nothing in it, except

¹² The English version of this citation is mine.

that I believe it is a great secret of the law which today is for the most part out of our reach). Whereas I would not contest that Arragel's general stance is certainly closer to "Maimonidean rationalism" than to kabbalistic esoterism, I will argue in what follows that his attitude towards certain strands of kabbalah may be more nuanced than the total antagonism that Girón Negrón finds in this gloss.

The Association of the Divine Names Elohim and Adonay with the Attributes of Mercy and Judgement (Gloss 368 to Genesis)

Arragel refers to the "Jewish science called kabbalah" commenting on the biblical verse "may God (Elohim) give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" (Gen. 27:28), which he renders into Castilian as "dete el Señor del rruçio de los çielos e de la grosura de la tierra." The context of this verse is Isaac's blessing of Jacob under the assumption that he is blessing Esau. Arragel focuses here on the fact that this biblical verse employs the name Elohim to refer to God:

<p>Elohym e Adonay son dos prinçipales nonbres de Dios, e Adonay en la çiençia, en judios llamada cabala, significa misericordia, e Elohym sygnifica justiçia; e aqui dixo el ebrayco : dete Elohym del rruçio de los çielos, quiere dezir : esta bendiçion tu aueras sy fueres bastante para ellos con justiçia, e por la contra. E el Maestre pone que este dezir : dete Dios etc., non es nota de bendiçion, ca el rruçio en toda parte va, ca sy dixera que le diese Dios mucho rruçio, o que le viniese en tienpos nesçesarios, segund dize en las generales bendiziones : e dare vuestras pleas en sus oras, fuera nota de bendiçion; por ende dize el Maestre que es nesçesario que este dezir : dete el Señor etc. que rresponde a lo ante dicho que dixo : veo el olor de mi fijo como el olor del canpo que lo bendixo el Señor, e que quiere asy dezir que Dios lo auia bendezido en el canpo en aquel su ofiçio, conuien saber : en la çaça, que non murio nin le vino mal ninguno, que asy lo bendixiese en este rruçio, e en lo al que se sigue. E aplico este bendiçion al rruçio por ser sienpre durable e que nunca seca.</p>	<p>Elohim and Adonay are two main names of God, and Adonay in the science called kabbalah by the Jews means "mercy," and Elohim means "judgement;" and here the Hebrew [text] says: "may the Lord give you of the dew of heaven" (Gen. 27:28), which means: this blessing you will have if you are enough for them with justice, and on the contrary [you will not have it if you are not enough for them with justice]. And the Master writes that this saying: "may God etc." is not an indication of blessing, because the dew goes everywhere. Had it said, "may God give you a lot of dew," or "may it come to you in times of need," as it says in the general blessings: "and I will give you your rain in its time" (Lev 26:4), it would be an indication of blessing. Therefore, the Master says that it is necessary to say [understand] that "may God give you etc." responds to what is mentioned before: "I see the smell of my son like the smell of the field that God blessed." And it means, therefore, that God had blessed him in the field, in his profession, that is, in hunting, as he did not die and no harm came to him, and thus He blessed him in this dew, and in what follows. And he applied this blessing to the</p>
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	dew because it is always permanent, and it never dries.
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This gloss begins by explaining that kabbalists associate the divine name “Adonay” to the attribute of mercy (*raḥamim*), and the divine name “Elohim” to the attribute of judgment (*din*). The association of the different divine names with the different divine attributes (or *sefirot*, in the kabbalists’ terminology) was indeed typical of kabbalah, and it was disseminated in kabbalistic “handbooks,” such as for instance the classic manual *Gates of Light* by Castilian kabbalist Joseph Gikatila (1248-after 1305):

Behold, the Name that is known as Elohim is the Name that has been appointed for judgment. This appellation is encoded in the verse “judgment is for Elohim” (Deut. 1:17). When He, may He be blessed, performs an activity from the realm of judgment, He is called Elohim. Now, know and see that this realm is called the left side, and this side’s cognomen in the Torah is Elohim, for that side is the side of judgment. This Name judges all who traverse the world with the appropriate judgments, whether they be positive or adverse, for life or for death (Gikatila, 247-8).

However, this association well predates the kabbalists: it is found in some rabbinic texts, such as the midrash *Genesis Rabbah* (ca. 5th-6th centuries c.e.):

And Elohim (God) remembered Noah. R. Samuel b. Naḥman said: Woe to the wicked who turn the Attribute of Mercy into the Attribute of Judgment. Wherever the Tetragrammaton is employed it connotes the Attribute of Mercy [...]. Wherever Elohim (God) is employed it connotes the Attribute of Judgment (Midrash Rabbah on Genesis 8:1; cited according to Freedman & Simon, I, 262-263).

And most importantly, it is cited by Rashi (1040-1105), the most important Jewish biblical exegete, precisely in his commentary on the verse Gen 27:28:

What denotes the use here of the Divine Name Elohim which signifies God in his attribute of Justice? May He act in Justice! If you are worthy of it, may He give it to you (*'im ra'uy lekha yiten lekha*), and if not, let Him not give it to you. But to Esau He said (Gen. 27:39): “The fat places of the earth shall be thy dwelling”—whether you be righteous or wicked He will give you this (Rashi on Gen. 27:28; English version by Rosenbaum and Silberman, 126).

Arragel seems to paraphrase Rashi’s commentary: the expression “si fueres bastante para ellos con justicia,” which I find rather unclear in Castilian, is probably an attempt to render Rashi’s expression “if you are worthy of it” (*'im ra'uy lekha*). Tellingly, Arragel introduces the reference to the kabbalists, ascribing to them, and not to Rashi or to the rabbis, the association of the divine name Elohim to the attribute of justice. As we have seen, this association was already found in rabbinic sources, and in Rashi’s commentary: there was no need to mention the kabbalists, but Arragel chooses to do so. He also does not challenge

their position, which is in continuity with previous rabbinic stance; on the contrary, he seems to agree with them.

Arragel goes on to cite an authority, “el Maestre,” by which he means Nahmanides, a major rabbinic authority who also happens to be a kabbalist (in other passages, Arragel is more explicit and calls him “el Maestre de Girona,” see Lazar 1992, 171). Arragel here renders Nahmanides’ commentary on this verse:

The blessing is not that God give him of the dew of heaven for the dew descends in all places. Now had he said that God give him an abundance of dew, or that it come in its season, as in “I will grant your rains in their season” (Lev. 26:4) that would have constituted a blessing. Instead, its meaning is as follows: Since above he mentioned God’s blessing, *As the odor of a field which the Eternal hath blessed*, meaning “which God had blessed for my son”— that is, since God blessed him in the field by giving him success there in his hunt and by guarding him from death or any mishap — he now says, *So God give thee*, [as an additional blessing], *of the dew of heaven, and of the fat places of the earth*. It is thus a blessing of addition and abundance. (...) In my opinion the correct interpretation is that God’s gift is steady and there is never any interruption in it. [...] To Esau, on the other hand, he gave a blessing which mentions neither through a gift of God not with abundance. Rather he said, “For you too I have reserved a blessing after him: of the fat places of the earth and of the dew of heaven shall your dwelling be” (Gen. 27:39). That is, “as long as you dwell there,” thereby alluding that he will ultimately be destroyed and lost, for only as long as he will live will his lot be good (Nahmanides 1, 341-342).

Since the context of this passage is Isaac’s blessing of Jacob under the impression that he is blessing Esau and given the association of the two biblical brothers with the Jews and the Christians respectively, the exegetical commentary to this biblical passage may be understood as carrying a polemical intent. This is the case of Nahmanides, who at the end makes sure to explain that Isaac’s blessing of Esau is conditional, and he (that is, the Christians) “will ultimately be destroyed and lost.” The polemical intent is however absent in Rashi, who also refers to the blessing of Esau in Gen 27:39, but just says about it that Esau will receive the fat of the land, regardless of his own merit, whereas Jacob, on the contrary, will be evaluated according to justice. Arragel, who is obviously aware of Nahmanides’ commentary, which he paraphrases, omits any reference to the future demise of Esau/the Christians, and stops his gloss at the reference to the permanence and steadiness of God’s gift. It is not farfetched to suppose that Arragel avoided this polemical mention of Esau because his work had been, after all, commissioned by a Christian patron, and would be examined by Church authorities.

Gloss 36 to Joshua 5:14: The Angel Michael, Captain of the Lord’s Host

In gloss number 36 to the book of Joshua, commenting on the expression “captain of the Lord’s host (*šar ševa Adonay*)” in Joshua 5:14, Arragel adds a long explanation about this phrase, which he translates into Castilian as “príncipe de la caualleria del Señor.” According to the biblical text, after the death of Moses, in the days of the conquest of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, their leader Joshua had a vision of a man when he was

approaching Jericho. Joshua saw a man standing in front of him with a drawn sword in his hand. Puzzled by the mysterious figure, Joshua asked him whether he was a friend or a foe, to which the man replied identifying himself as “captain of the Lord’s host.” Joshua understood that he was in front of an angelic figure and prostrated himself to the ground. Arragel’s commentary goes as follows:

<p>Quería tanto dezir : non es asi como tu, Josue, dizes, que dubdas sy yo so contra vos otros, mas ante so yo príncipe de la caualleria de Dios que vengo agora aqui; conuiene de notar, sy este dezir que este angel aqui se ponía en posesion [sic] de príncipe de la caualleria del Señor, sy dizia que era el mayor de la caualleria de los angeles que ante nuestro señor Dios administran, e sy esto dizia, non lo al por vero, non menos real los señores doctores de la cabala, que es vna sçiençia que fabla en los thronos e grados de los angeles, e segund que han en memoria que este angel de quien aqui mençionamos e trabtamos era el angel Michael, e Michael non lo han en esta dicha sçiençia por el mayor de la caualleria de los angeles. Por lo qual los quorta a buscar otra glosa en esta parte, es de saber; que segund se dize en el Exodo, que los hijos de Israel son llamados la caualleria del Señor, e este Michael que aqui se llamo príncipe de la caualleria del Señor quería tanto dezir como que era el angel Michael, a quien los judios, que cauallerias del Señor eran llamados, son encomendados; e este glosa cobrara çertenidad por el Daniel a la fin del que dize : non quede conmigo saluo el angel Michael, vuestro príncipe, e en este Daniel lo llamo a Daniel [sic] el príncipe magno. E este fue el angel que nuestro Señor dixo al santo Moysen que enbiaria vn angel el qual rregimiento desde judayco pueblo fuese por el, e Moysen non se desto</p>	<p>This means : it is not as you, Joshua, say, because you hesitate whether I am with you or against you. But I am the captain of the Lord’s host and I come here now. It is convenient to indicate, if this saying that this angel here takes the position¹³ of captain of the Lord’s host, whether he said that he was the greatest of the host of angels that administer in front of God our Lord. And if this is what is meant, this goes against what the masters, doctors of the Kabbalah, which is a science that speaks about the thrones and the grades of the angels, and according to what they have committed to memory, this angel about whom we speak and discuss here was the angel Michael, and Michael is not considered to be in this abovementioned science as the greatest of the host of the angels. This impels them to search for another explanation for this passage, i.e., that according to what Exodus says, the sons of Israel are called the host of the Lord,¹⁴ and this Michael that here is called captain of the Lord’s host was the angel Michael, to whom the Jews, who are called host of the Lord, were entrusted. And this explanation is verified by [the book of] Daniel, at the end of which it is said: nobody stays with me, except for the angel Michael, your captain [Dan. 10:21], and in this Daniel he called Daniel [sic]¹⁵ the great captain [Dan. 12:1]. And it was this angel that our Lord told holy Moses that he would send an angel so that the Jewish people would rule through him [Ex. 23:20],</p>
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¹³ I believe that the word “posesion” in Paz y Meliá’s edition is probably a mistake; I translate as “position.”

¹⁴ There are several passages in Exodus in which the Israelites are called “host of the Lord,” such as Ex. 6:26; 7:4; 12:17; 12:41; 12:51; 38:8.

¹⁵ I think that there must be a mistake in Paz y Meliá’s edition of the text; it probably means “Michael” instead of “Daniel”.

<p>contento, e quiso que fuesen regidos por la presçiençia e preuidençia diuina, e non por angel alguno, e por tanto dixo aqui este angel a Josue : yo so prinçipe de la caualleria del Señor, conuiene saber, de los judios, e sso aquel al qual Moysen, el tu maestro, desecho del vuestro regimiento, e pues Moysen es ya muerto, yo vengo a en abto poner el mi benefiçio del regimiento de aquesta gente; e como esto sintion Josue, adoloro luego en que vio la razon muy çierta. Otros fazen glosa al dezir del angel : agora vengo, quasy que le dizia : para te çerteficar angel yo ser, consydera en tu auer muchas oras que estas aqui, e non viste ninguna cosa venir a ti en suçeçion de tienpo, segund se mueuen e fazen sus cursos las cosas corporales, mas yo agora vengo, e non viste enmy venir paso en pos passo, lo qual asy a ti asas deue ser çierta e buena señal yo angel de Dios ser. E para lo saluar demonio non ser, ya le mençiono el nonbre de Dios.</p>	<p>and Moses was not satisfied by this, and he wanted to be ruled by divine prescience and providence, and not by any angel [Ex. 34:9]. And thus, this angel said to Joshua here: I am the captain of the Lord’s host, that is, of the Jews, and I am the one whose ruling Moses, your teacher, declined. Since Moses is already dead, I come to actualize my benefit for the rule of this people. And as Joshua felt this, he worshipped him, because he saw that he was very right. Others explain the saying of the angel “now I have come” [Joshua 5:14] almost as if he said: to certify to you that I am an angel, consider that many hours you have been here, but you have not seen anything happen to you in temporal succession, as bodily things move and take their course, but “now I have come,” and you did not see in my coming any step after step, which should be a certain and good sign for you that I am an angel of God. And to assure that he was not a demon, he made sure to mention the name of God [TB Sanhedrin 44a].</p>
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The question here is whether this angelic figure which identifies itself as “captain of the Lord’s host” corresponds to the greatest of all angels, captain of the angelic armies, or rather to another angel, captain of a more mundane army, the contingent of the children of Israel. Arragel explains that the kabbalists identify this figure with the angel Michael, who according to them is not the greatest of all angels (this honor belongs most generally to Metatron,¹⁶ whom Arragel does not mention explicitly in this gloss). Thus, the kabbalists, according to Arragel, interpret “the Lord’s host” not as the angelic armies, but as the Israelites, resorting to the language of the book of Exodus, in which the Israelites are called “host of the Lord” on several occasions (see *supra*, footnote 12). Additional proof for the identification of the captain of the Lord’s host (understood as the Israelites) with Michael is found in the book of Daniel, in which Michael is called “the great captain/prince” (*ha-sar ha-gadol*). Michael is also understood as being the same angel previously sent to Moses (Ex. 23:20), and whose services Moses declined, because he only wanted to deal directly with God, given his great stature as a prophet (Ex. 34:9). As Joshua’s standing

¹⁶ The figure of Metatron as the highest of all angels, the one who serves next to the throne of God, is not biblical, but it appears in late-antique and rabbinic Jewish texts. Metatron is variously identified in different sources as, for instance, the Prince of the Divine Presence, the angel Michael, or as a transfiguration of the biblical patriarch Enoch after his ascent to heaven (Orlov). Metatron will become a very important figure in kabbalah, and in the Zohar, for instance, he will be understood as being clearly distinct from Michael (see *Zohar* 2, 159a as cited in Tishby II, 645).

is lower than that of Moses, he welcomes the help of Michael: this is the meaning of “now” in the angel’s expression “now I come,” meaning that before he came to Moses, and was rejected, now he comes to Joshua.

In the final section of the gloss, the question of the angel’s legitimacy is posed: how does Joshua know that this is an authentic angel, and not some sort of ill-intentioned demon? Arragel brings one explanation, whose source I have not been able to locate thus far, according to which the angel’s bona fides is established by the fact that his appearance somehow suspends temporality and the natural order. Finally, he brings another, traditional explanation, according to which the fact that the angel mentions the name of God proves that he is not a demon. This second explanation is taken from the Talmud:

The stranger said to Joshua: “I am captain of the host of the Lord; I have now come.” The Gemara asks: But perhaps he was in fact a demon and he was lying? The Gemara answers: It is learned as a tradition that demons do not utter the name of Heaven in vain, and since this figure mentioned the name of Heaven, he must have been speaking the truth (TB Sanhedrin 44a).

Even though Arragel ascribes to the kabbalists the identification of the mysterious figure in Joshua 5:13 with Michael, this identification is also found in some of the most important Jewish exegetes, such as Rashi (see Rashi on Joshua 5:15). The identification of the angel that appears to Joshua with the angel that had previously appeared to Moses is also hinted at in rabbinic sources, such as the *Midrash Tanḥuma*:

Behold, I sent an angel before thee (Ex. 23:20). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: I will send an angel before you but not before them. Whereupon Moses replied: If you send it before me alone, I do not desire it. Rather “Let the Lord, I pray thee, go in the midst of us” (Ex. 34:9). Observe the difference between the early generations and the later ones. When the Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Behold, I will send an angel before you, he replied: I desire no one but You, whereas, when Joshua the son of Nun beheld an angel, he prostrated himself on the ground, as it is said: “And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and bowed down. And he said to him: Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?” (Joshua 5:13-14) (*Midrash Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu*, Mishpatim 18:1; English version from Berman 1996, 511).

The rabbinic comparison between Moses and Joshua regarding the fact that Moses did not require an angelic intermediary, whereas Joshua did, is certainly retaken in kabbalistic literature. It appears, for instance, at several places in the zoharic corpus:

Rabbi Yitṣḥak said: “I rose to open for my beloved, but my beloved had turned away, was gone.” This refers to the blessed Holy One; for throughout Moses’ life he wanted no angel or messenger to guide along with Him. Happy is his share, for the blessed Holy One concurred with the wish of Moses! After he died, what is written? “An angel of YHVH appeared to Joshua.” And it is written, “Joshua fell on his face to the ground and prostrated himself, and he said to him: what does my master say to his servant?” (Joshua 5:14).

Moses heard the holy voice of the supernal King and did not tremble –all the more so, an angel, whom he refused to consider in his heart or accept. Come and see what is written: “He replied: No, for I am the commander of YHVH’s army. Now have I come?” (Joshua 5:14) –in the days of Moses your master I came, but he did not accept me. (*Zohar* 3:286; cited according to Matt, IX, 759).

As in the case of the previous gloss, Arragel’s reference to the “masters, doctors of the Kabbalah, which is a science that speaks about the thrones and the grades of the angels” is intriguing, mostly because it is unnecessary: he could have said pretty much the same things, ascribing them to rabbinical sources. This way of proceeding seems like a deliberate move on his part to emphasize the continuity of kabbalah, or at least of certain of its doctrines, with the previous rabbinic tradition.

Concluding Remarks

The three references to kabbalistic doctrines in the Castilian glosses to the Alba Bible discussed here indicate to the existence of a restricted circulation of kabbalistic ideas in the Castilian vernacular. I have only examined three examples in which the references to kabbalah are explicit on the part of Arragel (he talks about “los macubalym de los judios,” “la çiençia en judios llamada cabala,” and “los señores dotores de la cabala”). With the announced publication of the critical edition of the text of the Alba Bible by Girón Negrón et al., we may well expect to be able to identify other passages in this work dealing with kabbalistic materials in Castilian. The fact that Arragel decided to include references to kabbalistic doctrines in his glosses shows that he considered them relevant enough to be included in a digest of biblical commentary for the usage of Christians.

The three glosses we have discussed show that Arragel’s attitude towards kabbalah is complex. In the case of the first gloss about the kabbalistic interpretation of levirate marriage, Arragel’s stance is for the most part critical, as Girón Negrón had very pertinently already indicated. The second and third glosses present a more interesting and nuanced stance on the part of Arragel. The association of the divine names Elohim and Adonay with the attributes of justice and mercy, and the identification of the angelic figure that appears to Joshua as Michael are two rabbinic ideas that are found in classical rabbinic sources, and that are later adopted and developed by kabbalists. Interestingly, Arragel deliberately chooses to present them as doctrines specific to kabbalah, despite the fact that he is perfectly aware of their perfectly mainstream rabbinic provenance. In these two cases, Arragel seems to agree with the doctrine that he ascribes to kabbalists, and he does not show any negative attitude towards them. This shows that his stance towards kabbalah in general is more nuanced than it may appear from the purely negative comments in the gloss on levirate marriage analyzed by Girón Negrón.

We should be careful to note that the fact that Arragel openly explained kabbalistic doctrines in the Castilian language does not mean that they reached large numbers of people. In fact, the opposite seems to have been the case: access to the Alba Bible, a luxury manuscript with a very limited circulation, was likely very limited. After the death of its commissioner Don Luis de Guzmán in 1443, the codex seems to disappear for almost a couple of centuries. Recent research indicates that during the fifteenth century aristocrats from the entourage of Castilian kings Juan II, Enrique IV, and queen Isabel I had access to

it (Avenozza 2012, 297). The Alba Bible fell in the hands of the Inquisition probably at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Interested readers who had the right contacts were able to consult the manuscript for their own research, as is shown in a document of the Inquisition from 1622 which reports that a Jesuit, Fernando Quirós de Salazar, had borrowed it from the Jesuit monastery of San Felipe in Madrid “for checking the meaning of ambiguous words in the Song of Songs on which he was writing a commentary” (Lazar 1992, 158). In 1624, the Grand Inquisitor donated it to Gaspar de Guzmán, Count-Duke of Olivares. In 1688, through the marriage of the Countess-Duchess of Olivares, Catalina de Haro y Guzmán, to the Duke of Alba, Francisco Álvarez de Toledo, the Bible came to be in possession of the House of Alba, where it remains today.

The kabbalistic traditions expressed in the Castilian vernacular in the Alba Bible constitute a fascinating chapter of kabbalah “en español,” of great interest to students of Jewish mysticism and of Spanish linguistics, but they represent a path not taken, a sort of anomaly that did not really enjoy much of a reception that ended up being forgotten with the passage of time.

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