Ellen D. Haskell

Mystical Resistance

UNCOVERING THE ZOHAR'S CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRISTIANITY

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For John, Ezra, and George

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Hebrew and Aramaic Transliterations

IN ORDER TO make this material accessible to nonspecialists, I have adopted the following simplified transliteration system. In cases where well-known spellings like "Kabbalah" and "Balaam" do not match this system, I retain the common usage.

Consonants

‘	*Alef* (except at beginning and end of words, where absent)
b/v	*Bet*
g	*Gimel*
d	*Dalet*
h	*He*
v	*Vav*
z	*Zayin*
ḥ	*Ḥet*
t	*Tet*
y	*Yud*
k/kh	*Kaf*
l	*Lamed*
m	*Mem*
n	*Nun*
s	*Samekh*
‘	*Ayin* (except at beginning and end of words, where absent)
p/f	*Pe*
tz	*Tzade*
q	*Quf*
r	*Resh*
sh/s	*Shin*
t	*Tav*

Vowels

a *Qamatz, Pataḥ, Ḥataf pataḥ*
e *Sheva* (silent *sheva* is unmarked), *Tzereh, Tzereh yud*, S*egol, Ḥataf segol*
i *Ḥiriq, Ḥiriq yud*
o *Ḥolam, Ḥolam vav, Ḥataf qamatz*
u *Shuruq, Qubutz*

Mystical Resistance

Introduction—The Zohar beyond Theology

UNCOVERING A WORK OF RESISTANCE

THE LATE-THIRTEENTH-CENTURY JEWISH mystical classic *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor) took shape against the backdrop of rising anti-Judaism in medieval Spain. This study argues that the Kabbalists who composed this collaborative work actively encountered Christian theological concepts, Christian literature, Christian art on the outside of churches, and conflicts between Christians and Jews. In response, the mystics crafted subversive narratives that bolstered Jewish identity by countering Christian claims. Interpreting the Zohar in this manner reveals not merely a theological masterpiece, but a rich hidden transcript of Jewish resistance to Christian power.

Why read this mystical text as a minority's comment on its majority environment? The Zohar's authors developed their theology at the epicenter of increased religious intolerance in Europe. The growth of Christianity's missionizing orders, the 1215 Fourth Lateran Council's attempts to define and police Christian society's boundaries, and the Spanish Reconquista's goal of Christianizing the Iberian Peninsula all heightened tensions between Christians and Jews. This was particularly true in northern Spain and southern France, the birthplace of the mystical tradition known as Kabbalah, where Christian friars implemented innovative missionizing strategies. Their new tactics included enforced Jewish attendance at public religious disputations and the seizure, trial, and censorship of Jewish books. As Christians gained knowledge of Jewish literature, they began to craft polemic works that used Jewish texts to "prove" Christian claims.

Likewise, Jews developed greater knowledge of Christianity and produced their own responses. The Zohar exemplifies this process.

Scholars have long suggested the Zohar's potential as a resource for understanding Jewish responses to an Iberian context. As early as the nineteenth century, William Bacher observed that the Zohar contained anti-Christian material, while in the mid-twentieth century Yitzhak Baer wrote that the Zohar's pages "abound in cultural allusions which can be satisfactorily explained by referring them to the reigns of Alfonso X and Sancho IV."[1] Baer believed that the Zohar's pseudepigraphic veil was woven deliberately thin to communicate timely messages to medieval readers.[2] Elliot Wolfson, Daniel Matt, and Hartley Lachter have connected the Zohar to medieval power and polemics, while Arthur Green, Peter Schäfer, Yehudah Liebes, Daniel Abrams, and Gershom Scholem have investigated religious influence between Kabbalah and Christianity.[3] Political theorist Javier Roiz has suggested that the medieval Kabbalists' writings "imply an anthropological criticism of Western power."[4] For the most part, however, these scholars have focused on the theology of the Zohar, the history of its revision, its intellectual milieu, and the degree to which it was influenced by Christian ideas. This project builds upon their work by revealing the strategies and specific arguments that the Zohar's authors used to contest Christian power.

The Zohar's Art of Resistance

James C. Scott has written, "Until quite recently, much of the active political life of subordinate groups has been ignored because it takes place at a level we rarely recognize as political."[5] He explains, "Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."[6] This transcript, produced by a dissident subculture, is "the portion of an acrimonious dialogue that domination has driven off the immediate stage."[7] In every aspect, the Zohar embodies such a hidden transcript. As such its very composition constitutes an act of resistance and rebellion.[8]

Sefer ha-Zohar was composed mainly during the last quarter of the thirteenth century in Castile, then disseminated as a pseudepigraphic text attributed to the second-century sage Shimon bar Yoḥai, a character who appears in the work as the leader of a mystical brotherhood of rabbinic sages.[9] It was written in a distinctive style of Aramaic that both reinforced its supposedly ancient character and connected it to other medieval eso-

teric works.[10] Its character is lengthy, convoluted, and heavily symbolic, encompassing many different genres and literary strata, in part because it is the product of group authorship. Presumably, its authors comprised a brotherhood resembling the rabbinic group described in the Zohar's narrative sections. Scholars do not agree on the authorial group's composition, or even on whether there was more than one such group, though they generally do agree that figures like Moses de León and Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla contributed to the work.[11]

The Zohar's group authorship, its authors' peripatetic lifestyles, its obscure Aramaic language, its symbolic style, and even its pseudepigraphic attribution to a second-century sage all reflect the characteristics of a dissident subculture's efforts to engage in self-expression beyond majority surveillance.[12] Likewise, the Zohar's many calls for secrecy, its narrative hesitancy to reveal divine mysteries, and its curses of those who reveal its teachings to noninitiates exemplify the self-policing such groups must undertake for their safety.[13] Subversive allusions to Christian sacred narratives also correspond to the characteristics of hidden transcripts.[14] Beyond this, the work's diffuse thirteenth-century organization mimics folk narratives with "multiple existences" that engage changing cultural concerns.[15] Folk narratives, like hidden transcripts, often are instruments for defending minorities' self-understanding from majorities' impositions.[16]

Of course, reading the Zohar as a hidden transcript is not a straightforward project. The work's mystical narratives and theological expositions are allusive and deliberately obscure. Yet these stylistic features provided the Kabbalists with a forum for making daring assertions not easily accessible to the friars who studied and censored Jewish texts.[17] Hiding subversive ideas from Christian authorities was important for the Zoharic Kabbalists, who wished to avoid violent confrontations with the majority group; the Zohar was intended for a Jewish audience.[18] Kabbalah's complex, sophisticated imagery supplied fertile ground for Jewish insubordination, allowing the Zohar's authors to express dissatisfaction about the deterioration of previously stable Jewish-Christian relations while ensuring that those not indoctrinated into their system missed such hidden messages. As Scott writes, "The social spaces where the hidden transcript grows are themselves an achievement of resistance; they are won and defended in the teeth of power."[19] The Zoharic authors sought and won a space for resistance within the pages of their elaborate text.

What are the Zohar's main techniques for engaging Christianity? Much as in Maimonides' *Guide for the Perplexed*, where the philosopher protectively disguises esoteric knowledge by dispersing it throughout his masterpiece, the Zohar hides its subversive anti-Christian discourse throughout its many sections.[20] While this dispersal may relate to the text's complex redaction history, these citations are also intentionally allusive—they direct through indirection.[21] Terms common to many Zoharic passages, such as "Other," "Other God," "Other Side," "Esau," "Edom," and "Alien God," signal to readers that in addition to learning theological insights they should prepare to interpret Kabbalistic material through an anti-Christian lens.[22] Sometimes these terms emerge from scriptural citations. Exodus 34:14, "For you may not bow down to an Other God," for example, appears in many anti-Christian passages. Often, these signaling terms pair with aspects of Christianity that the Kabbalists found problematic. A diatribe against "an Other God" who "is emasculated, and never has desire, and does not make fruits," but who nonetheless might "pollute all the world," in Zohar 1:203a–b, for example, thinly veils a critique of Christian celibacy that also condemns Christian conversion tactics, as shall be seen in chapter 2.

Terms that Jews and Christians held in common but to which they ascribed alternate meanings, such as the "Kingdom of Heaven," alerted readers to appreciate a passage as polemic.[23] For example, the Zohar contests the Kingdom of Heaven's Christian meaning as a salvific future that excludes Jews by reclaiming it as a reference both to accepting Jewish law—"the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven"—and to the Kabbalistic divine presence Shekhinah, also known as "the Kingdom."[24] In other cases the Zohar's allusive language requires knowledge of Christian imagery and ritual. When the text mentions "sorcerous divinations of the bird" that involve offering incense at an altar with "abominable bread," contrasted with the ancient biblical showbread of Exodus 25:30 (Zohar 3:192a), it is clear from the context—as shall be seen in chapter 4—that the text refers to the Holy Spirit, which Christians often depicted as a dove, and to the celebration of the eucharist.

Finally, the Zohar repurposes biblical characters to engage Christianity when features of their stories make them suitable candidates to advance the Kabbalists' cause. In such cases, the characters' presentations depart from traditional biblical and rabbinic literature sufficiently to draw readers' attention.[25] For example, Rachel's painful death in childbirth becomes a vehicle for undermining Christian teachings on the Passion of Christ

in Zohar 1:174a and beyond, while the gentile prophet Balaam figures as a counterpart to Christ in order to destabilize Christian ascension narratives in Zohar 3:193b–194b. These characters' transformations will be addressed in chapters 1, 3, and 4.

Using such techniques, the Zohar's authors created a hidden space from which they contested Christendom's dominance and its increasingly oppressive rule. Within this space, they produced a great work of theological creativity that challenged the public Christian transcript of Jewish subordination and upheld their own versions of Jewish identity and self-definition. Both James C. Scott and Leo Strauss, in his defining study of writing under persecution, describe this process as an art—a creative work articulated "between the lines" of text at the intersection of public and private, power and powerlessness, subservience and defiance.[26] Yet it is within this ambiguous space that the Kabbalists upheld their hope for a better future, reassuring themselves that "the Other Kingdom of Idolatry" may have "rulership in this world, but he has nothing at all in the world that is coming" (Zohar 1:204b).[27]

The Zoharic writers' models for resistance were the very Talmudic rabbis whose names they adopted in their narratives. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin have observed, teaching Torah under Roman rule required its own hidden transcript.[28] They write, "rabbinic culture has always been a diasporized and dominated culture, one that subsisted within political and social conditions in which another culture was dominant and hegemonic."[29] Like Jewish literary production in medieval Spain's censorship regime, teaching Torah under Roman rule involved "doing what we do without getting into trouble and using evasiveness to keep doing it."[30] Indeed, both the ancient rabbis and the Zoharic Kabbalists understood themselves in opposition to Rome, whether configured as the Temple-destroying Empire or as Western Christendom, whose Pope issued edicts from that ancient city.

Jews and Christians in Thirteenth-Century Spain

While the following chapters contain further detailed references to the Zohar's historical environment, it is helpful to review briefly the main challenges that the thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalists faced. I recount these facts not to revisit the old lachrymose view of Jewish history that en-

visioned Jews in perpetual conflict with Christians, but rather to identify the Zohar as an unusual response to unusual events.[31]

During the thirteenth century the Fourth Lateran Council attempted to regulate Christian society, and the missionizing Dominican and Franciscan orders grew. Jews living among their Christian neighbors found themselves serving as conveniently located Others against whom the Christian community could define itself. Public religious disputations, enforced attendance at Christian sermons, and trials and censorship of Jewish religious texts became new means by which the Church consolidated its identity as a community of the faithful.[32] Some of the most notable incidents in these new Christian efforts took place in northern Spain and southern France, where Kabbalah developed.

Forcibly proselytizing Jews became an important activity. King James I of Aragon enacted laws compelling Jews to attend mendicant sermons in 1242 and 1263. After the 1263 Barcelona disputation between the Kabbalist Naḥmanides and the Dominican friar and convert from Judaism Paulus Christiani (Friar Paulus), this same King James appointed a panel of Dominicans to seize Jewish books, check them for blasphemy, and censor them. Jews who refused to give up their texts could be fined and their books burned.[33] James also empowered Friar Paulus to continue missionizing Spanish Jews after the disputation ended.[34] By an edict of 1278, Pope Nicholas III assigned Dominican and Franciscan friars the official duty of working to convert the Jewish community.[35] As part of this project, King James II of Aragon granted Ramon Llull permission to preach in Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath in 1299. Royal law compelled Jewish attendance at these sermons, and Llull extended his license into a call for debate in Jewish homes.[36] Both Jews and Christians discussed these events and similar occurrences in polemic literature.[37]

In addition to these missionizing innovations, new strategies for argumentation and debate also emerged in the thirteenth century. The most significant tactical development was using rabbinic literature to support Christian claims. This strategic appropriation of Jewish texts began as early as the twelfth century with Alan of Lille and received elaboration throughout the thirteenth century in Spain by such famous figures as Raymond de Peñafort (ca. 1175–1275), who established Dominican schools that taught Hebrew as a tool for religious disputation; Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, archbishop of Toledo from 1209 to 1247 and author of the polemic text *Dialogue on the Book of Life*; Paulus Christiani, who famously

debated and persecuted Jews in the mid- and late thirteenth century; and Raymond Martini (ca. 1215–1285), author of the influential anti-Jewish treatise *Pugio fidei* (The Dagger of Faith) and supervisor of the Dominican Hebrew-language school in Barcelona.[38]

The thirteenth century also saw Christian repression of Jewish texts. The Maimonidean controversy, a vast conflict regarding Moses ben Maimon's application of philosophical ideas to Judaism, erupted in 1232 and was accompanied by pro-Maimonidean accusations that mendicant friars had burned Jewish books at anti-Maimonidean prompting.[39] A 1239 papal bull from Gregory IX ordered Jewish books confiscated and was accompanied by a threat from King Louis IX of France that Jews who refused to give up their books would be killed.[40] The 1240 Parisian Talmud trial resulted in the burning of more than ten thousand Talmudic volumes in 1242.[41] The years 1244 and 1255 witnessed further Talmud confiscation and burning.[42] In the Barcelona disputation's aftermath between 1263 and 1268, Dominicans headed a campaign to seize and censor Jewish books, including condemning Naḥmanides' account of the disputation to the flames.[43] These persecutions had worldly royal incentives as well. In 1273 King James raised money by charging Jews for individual "blasphemies" found in appropriated texts.[44] Sometimes not just books, but living Jews also were burned, as in 1278 when Pope Nicholas III condemned to the stake forcibly converted French Jews for the crime of reversion to Judaism.[45]

Christian Actions, Jewish Perceptions

Scholars disagree about the motivations behind such anti-Jewish developments. Some understand them as part of a strategic attempt either to convert Jews or to expel and eradicate them from the Christian West; others see thirteenth-century missionizing as an internally directed activity staged for Jewish witnesses but ultimately encouraging Christians to participate in their own continuous conversions, in which they turned and returned to Christ throughout their lives.[46] Similarly, some understand what appear to be Christian proselytizing campaigns as attempts to control Christian interactions with non-Christians and defend the faith.[47] Still others link these shifts to the twelfth-century Christianization of reason and knowledge, or suggest that the thirteenth-century Christian world embraced a

hegemonic public philosophy focused on a new concept of a protonational territorial homeland that brought Christians into conflict with Jews.[48]

Perhaps the most helpful way to understand the thirteenth century's coercive debates and sermons is as powerful rituals of subordination designed to reinforce the public transcript of Christian dominance and Jewish subservience. Such rituals' messages were intended for and easily read by both groups. This approach assimilates the various scholarly explanations, since it affirms that Christians' missionizing activities had both internal *and* external goals. Scott explains that such rituals are "a means of demonstrating that, like it or not, a given system of subordination is stable, effective, and here to stay" and that these displays "may achieve a kind of *dramatization* of power relations."[49] Regardless of what Christians told themselves about these events, violently coercing Jews to listen to sermons and legislating friars' access to conversion dialogues in Jewish homes were clear displays of Christian power and Jewish subordination that reinforced the majority's desired status quo.

The Kabbalists themselves believed that they were the targets of powerful conversion pressures. When Zohar 1:204a–b warns its readers that, "when this side [i.e., Christendom] rules in the world, it is necessary for a person that he not be seen in the street," it addresses a real threat of violence in a time of persecution.[50] Jews forced by armed soldiers to attend anti-Jewish sermons in their own synagogues likely failed to appreciate Christian notions of ongoing self-conversion. Though the underlying causes of such activities were complex, their victims understood themselves to be under attack.[51] Whether or not modern scholars find that thirteenth-century Spain embodied a "persecuting society," the Zohar's authors clearly believed that it did.[52]

Castile and "Current" Events

Since the most dramatic thirteenth-century anti-Jewish activities happened in Aragon and adjacent areas of southern France, it is reasonable to ask what Castilian Jews knew about such events and whether they found them alarming. Aragon's extensive royal archives provide better documentation than those of Castile.[53] Yet King Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284) engaged in and supported similar activities to those of his Aragonese and French brethren; Castilian persecutions did happen during the Zoharic authors' time.[54] In 1279, during a financial dispute

between Alfonso X and the Infante Sancho, a Jewish tax-farmer was dragged to death in Seville and another was hanged.[55] From 1280 to 1281, Alfonso X ordered Castilian Jews arrested and held hostage until they paid ransom to the Crown; several prominent Jews were tortured, pressed toward conversion, and even killed.[56] Toledo's Jewish community shrank dramatically, and its aged leader Todros ben Joseph Abulafia—the very person upon whom the Zohar's Rabbi Shimon may have been based—pleaded for the prisoners' release.[57] Since much of the Zohar's composition occurred between 1280 and 1286, its authors would have known about these events.[58]

Disputes from the Maimonidean controversy and records of Kabbalah's emergence demonstrate that the Jews of Castile, Aragon, and southern France communicated extensively. During the phase of the Maimonidean controversy that began in 1232, both pro- and anti-Maimonidean Jews sent messengers and letters to Spain seeking support.[59] The influential Naḥmanides tried to enlist Jewish leaders of Aragon and Castile as anti-Maimonideans.[60] David Qimḥi traveled from Narbonne to the Castilian city of Ávila, sending messages from there to Toledo to evoke pro-Maimonidean sympathy; Judah and Abraham ibn Ḥasdai of Barcelona sent letters to Castilian and Aragonese Jews for a similar purpose.[61] The controversy's next phase in the early 1300s also involved communication between France and Spain.[62]

Kabbalists communicated over long distances as well. The Castilian mystic Isaac ben Jacob ha-Kohen, who wrote Kabbalah's first comprehensive treatise on evil, claimed to have studied in Arles with a master from Damascus.[63] Isaac the Blind famously sent a letter from Provence to Girona rebuking his former pupil Ezra for exposing Kabbalistic secrets in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs*.[64] Isaac of Acre traveled to both Aragon and Castile, where he reportedly encountered the Zoharic author Moses de León in Ávila shortly before his death.[65] Naḥmanides' response to the Barcelona disputation sought to alert Jews of Paulus Christiani's work in Aragon, Provence, and beyond.[66] Such regional travels and communication networks demonstrate that not only were thirteenth-century Jews in southern France and northern Spain aware of current events, they also sought to affect each other's opinions from afar. The elaborate roadways that developed to service pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries made such travel and communication practical endeavors.[67]

The Kabbalists' Knowledge of Christianity

The Zohar's authors knew a great deal about Christianity. Their subversive reinventions of Christian stories required extensive knowledge of the majority religion. During the thirteenth century, Spain's Jewish community became familiar with Christian theology through public and private debate, polemic literature, and visual media such as sculpture and painting on the outside of churches. Of course, this was not the first time that Jews had become familiar with Christian doctrine and lore. The traditional rabbinic literature that thirteenth-century Jews read was also deeply familiar with the New Testament and early Christian theology. The ancient rabbis whose works comprise the Oral Torah were especially knowledgeable about the gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John.[68]

Medieval Jewish writers engaged in a tradition of anti-Christian polemic that emerged in southern France as early as the first half of the twelfth century. The mid-thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalists Ezra and Azriel of Girona were familiar with this literature.[69] The Dominican Raymond Martini's *Pugio fidei* preserves similar Jewish polemic traditions, and the Zohar's authors may have known Martini's text as well.[70] Jewish polemic literature from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Europe often discussed Christian theology and New Testament narratives, containing numerous quotes and translated passages from the gospels themselves.[71] For example, the Provençal work *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (Wars of the Lord) (ca. 1170) by Jacob ben Reuven contained a groundbreaking Hebrew translation of the gospel of Matthew derived from the Latin.[72] Jacob apologized for including the Christian work, but believed it was important for Jewish self-defense.[73]

Sefer Nestor ha-Komer (The Book of Nestor the Priest), a work widely read by medieval Spanish Jews, contained allusions, paraphrases, and quotations from all four canonical gospels, as well as Christian apocryphal traditions popular in the early Middle Ages.[74] This polemic, derived from an earlier Judeo-Arabic treatise, was reworked for a Reconquista audience and became a popular and important source for new anti-Christian compositions by the twelfth century.[75] The compilation *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) also brought together several Jewish sources from the Kabbalists' milieu; it appeared as an anonymous work in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, possibly in Germany.[76]

These last two texts corroborate evidence for the Kabbalists' familiarity with Christian doctrine. Both works were broadly known, and they frame

the core Zoharic material's composition chronologically with *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* at one end and *Nitzaḥon Vetus* at the other. When both texts discuss an aspect of Christian theology, then it is likely that the Zohar's authors were aware of that theology as well. Beyond this, scholars have shown that the Kabbalists who wrote the Zohar possessed an intimate knowledge of the gospels of John and Luke and the book of Acts, as well as broader aspects of Christian thought.[77]

Chapters and Topics

The following chapters present several different Zoharic responses to Christianity, dealing with topics as diverse as disputations, conversion, sacred narratives, and public art. Chapter 1 demonstrates how the Zohar's reinvention of the matriarch Rachel intervenes in topics from Jewish-Christian disputations. It introduces a Zoharic interpretation of Rachel's death that invokes Christ's Passion to refute Christian claims of Jesus' divine and messianic status, reclaim authority for the twelve tribes of Israel from the twelve apostles, reassert Jewish law's continuing validity, and redefine Christianity's Kingdom of Heaven as a signifier of Jewish identity. Each Zoharic argument hinges on the Kingdom of Heaven, a term important to both Jews and Christians since antiquity. The chapter also discusses how correlating the feminine Rachel with the masculine Christ complicates modern assumptions regarding gendered symbols. Modern scholars have sought symbolic correspondence between figures of the same gender, but medievals privileged typological likeness instead.

Chapter 2 discloses the sense of threat that permeated Spanish Jews' lives, inspiring the Zohar's dramatic abnegations of Christian sacred stories. It explains how the Zohar deploys its rhetoric of the Other Side's evil powers to defame Christians and those who associate with them, using demonic terminology to reflect on what happens when Jews become Others. Indeed, the terms "Other," "Other Side," "Other God," and "Kingdom of Idolatry" permeate the Zohar's anticonversion teachings. Not coincidentally, they are also key terms in the Zohar's discourse of resistance to Christian power. Using these coded words, the Zohar condemns Christian dominion, gives advice regarding Jewish behavior under Christian oppression, and imagines a future when Christendom's rule will give way to Jewish empowerment. This rhetoric responds to Christian missionizing, the threat of religious conversion, and the damage to Jewish communities

associated with a group of prominent converts who traumatized the Jews of Spain and France during the thirteenth century. The chapter also discusses anticonversion teachings that critique Christian celibacy, which the Zohar explains as a divine strategy for Christian containment.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how the Zohar reinterprets the biblical gentile prophet Balaam as a Christ figure to challenge Christian claims regarding Jesus' death and ascension, as well as to critique Christian ritual practices such as the relic cult and the celebration of the eucharist. Attacking Christ's ascension was critical to Judaism's defense against Christian religious domination since, for Jews and Christians alike, the ascension represented physically the claim of Jesus' divinity. The Zohar addresses these claims by crafting a new version of Jesus' ascension and death that reverses Christian tropes.

Chapter 3 shows how the Zoharic authors adapt Balaam traditions from ancient and medieval Jewish sources, in which Balaam does not represent Jesus but does highlight Jewish concerns regarding gentiles to construct a character that is neither fully Christ nor fully Balaam, but a Balaam reinvented to intersect with Christianity. It identifies two texts known in Spain during the Zohar's composition, the medieval midrash Numbers Rabbah and the anti-Christian folk narrative *Toledot Yeshu* (The Generations of Jesus), as the Zoharic Balaam's main sources. The theme that ties these works together is a villain who flies and falls—the perfect vehicle for critiquing Christian ascension theology.

Chapter 4 presents the Zohar's version of Balaam's death, which the Kabbalists reinvented to contest Christian narrative and ritual practice. In the Zohar, the gentile prophet deceives his followers by claiming to be more than he is, flies into the air to escape Jewish authority, is brought down and killed by righteous Jews, and goes unburied until his bones become magical serpents. Much as in chapter 1's Rachel narratives, the Zoharic Balaam uses comparisons with Christ to critique and negate Christian claims. Interactions between the Zoharic story and Christian teachings emerge from subversive allusions to New Testament narratives, such as the Stilling of the Storm.

Chapter 5 demonstrates that the Church's monumental public sculpture that arose in Spain in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was an important source for the Jewish mystics' knowledge of Christianity as well as a tool of Christian oppression. It argues that, as with other forms of Christian discourse, the Kabbalists who composed the Zohar actively "read" Christian public art and responded to these visual "texts" by craft-

ing narratives that subversively commented upon their sources to bolster Jewish faith and undermine Christian claims. Thirteenth-century Spain was home to overlapping sacred geographies in which Jewish literary production, Christian pilgrimage routes, and Christian artistic development converged. In this environment, both explicitly and implicitly anti-Jewish artworks comprised an important public transcript of domination that was legible to all members of society who viewed them. The invasion of increasingly grandiose messages of Christian dominion into the visual space in which medieval Jews conducted their daily lives prompted response from the Zohar's authors, who strove to create a space for Jewish solidarity and resistance.

This chapter also focuses on Church tympana that existed or were created during the Zohar's composition, tying them to its Kabbalistic commentary. It examines both the mystics' reactions to Christian art's prevalence and how the Kabbalists incorporated Christian artistic motifs into their subversive stories. Themes from previous chapters reappear, including claims of the Israelite tribal ancestors' replacement by the twelve Christian apostles, controversies surrounding the ascension story, and contentions regarding the fate of Jesus' body after his death. The book concludes by reconsidering the Zohar's implications for understanding Jewish resistance to Christian domination.

A Note on Terminology

When referring to Christianity's central figure, contemporary Jews often prefer the name Jesus to Christ. This is understandable, since Christ means messiah and is therefore a name, a title, and a theological claim at once. In the following pages, I use the term Christ not to assert the Christian understanding, but instead to emphasize the Zohar's own creative theology. Historically, many Jewish texts defined Jesus as a human, heretical Jew, rather than as Christ, the messiah and divine person of the Trinity. Both the Babylonian Talmud and the anti-gospel *Toledot Yeshu* adopted this strategy. The Zohar deploys a different tactic by divorcing Jesus from Judaism and associating him with an Other God altogether—that is, when it is not arguing that divinity and humanity cannot coexist in the same being.

Claiming that Christians worship an Other God may seem to grant Christian theology unexpected legitimacy, but it also allowed the Kabbalists to stress their struggle's escalated stakes. The Zohar's authors believed

that they were locked in conflict with powerful cosmic forces—not with the human Jesus and misguided Jews, but with an alien supernatural being and its followers. Rather than explaining Christianity as a perplexing offshoot from Judaism, they portrayed it as a different, competing religion, with a different, competing god. Often, that religion called its god Christ. So does this book.

I

Contesting the Kingdom of Heaven

RACHEL AS COUNTERPART TO CHRIST

IN *SEFER HA-ZOHAR* (The Book of Splendor), the matriarch Rachel's death in childbirth (Genesis 35:16–19) is given unusual treatment.[1] The Zohar's authors interpret Rachel's departure from the world as a critical moment for Jewish self-definition. Rachel's bearing of Benjamin completes the twelve tribal ancestors and manifests the Divine Presence in the world, establishing the Kingdom of Heaven among the Israelites. The matriarch's suffering and death necessarily precede these events. This interpretation of Rachel's death is distinct from earlier Jewish literature and borrows elements from Christianity, including the themes of suffering, death, purification, divine manifestation, and establishment of the Kingdom of Heaven.[2] Yet the Zoharic Kabbalists do not embrace these Christian themes. Instead, they cite them subversively, using Rachel's death to rebut claims of Jesus' divine and messianic status, to reclaim authority for the twelve tribes of Israel from the twelve apostles, and to redefine Christianity's Kingdom of Heaven as a signifier of Jewish identity.[3]

> *Sefer ha-Zohar* 1:174a
>
> Why did Rachel die immediately [after Benjamin's birth]? . . . So that *Shekhinah* [the Divine Presence] could be crowned as is fitting, and so that [She could become] the "happy mother of children" (Psalm 113:9). . . . And with him She [*Shekhinah*] began to be established among twelve tribes, and with him the Kingdom of Heaven began to be made manifest on earth. And this secret: For every beginning that comes to be made manifest is difficult, and therefore there is in it a judgment of death, and from there it is settled. . . . Come and

> see: Every beginning is severe, and afterwards gentleness. . . . And in the time to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare to arouse in gentleness against the rest of the peoples who worship the stars and the planets, and afterwards He will overpower them with harsh judgment.[4]

In this passage and others, the Zohar's authors deliberately incorporate Christian ideas into the Rachel narrative in order to critique the majority religion. Although these writings do not name Christ, strong similarities between the Zoharic Rachel's story and that of Jesus encourage readers to compare and evaluate the two narratives in relation to each other, thus comparing and evaluating Jewish and Christian theological claims. This covertly critical narrative constitutes what James C. Scott has called a hidden transcript—"a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."[5] Even the Zohar's character selection alerts thoughtful readers to search these narratives for messages about religions in conflict. Rachel, who is famous for stealing and degrading her father's idols (Genesis 31:19–35), highlights tensions between religious systems and acts on behalf of "correct" religiosity. Reading the Zohar's Rachel texts while considering the Zohar's late-thirteenth-century context reveals a subtle but strategic critique of medieval Western Christianity's anti-Jewish polemic, which developed in innovative and aggressive directions during the Zohar's composition.

The Rabbinic Rachel

In order to understand how *Sefer ha-Zohar* deals with thirteenth-century Christian claims, it is necessary to look at how rabbinic literature prior to the Zohar interprets the matriarch's death. According to the biblical account, "Rachel was in childbirth and she had difficult labor. And it was at the most difficult part of her childbearing that the midwife said to her, 'Do not fear, for this is also a son for you.' But as her breath departed, for she was dying, she called his name Ben-oni [son of my suffering], but his father called him Benjamin [son of the right hand]" (Genesis 35:16–19). In its biblical context, this narrative presents the matriarch's suffering with emotional complexity, relating Rachel's intense pain during childbirth, her death, and her ultimate defeat in having the name she chooses for her son removed from him.

Yet, like most biblical texts, Genesis 35:16–19 leaves important narrative details unstated. The classical rabbinic interpreters were most concerned with the "why" of Rachel's death. Rachel is the only matriarch to die in this painful way, and although childbirth was a risky endeavor before modern

medicine, the Genesis narrative in general asserts God's control over the Israelite ancestors' fertility. It is God who opens and closes the matriarchs' wombs, and presumably it is also God who grants easy or difficult childbirth. Rachel's unusual case seems to imply that her death may not be accidental. Interpreters took it upon themselves to discover why her birthing experience was presented so differently from those of other matriarchs.

Genesis Rabbah, redacted in the first half of the fifth century, compiles rabbinic traditions from the fifth century and earlier about the book of Genesis.[6] These traditions explain Rachel's death as an unfortunate side effect of her piety.

> Genesis Rabbah 74:5
>
> "And Rachel stole the teraphim [that were her father's]" (Genesis 31:19). Yet her intention was for nothing other than the sake of heaven. She said, It is wrong that we leave and abandon this old man in his moral corruption.

> Genesis Rabbah 74:4
>
> According to Rabbi Yosi, she [Rachel] died because of the curse of the ancestor [Jacob]. As it is said: "Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live" (Genesis 31:32). And it was "like an error that goes forth from before a ruler" (Ecclesiastes 10:5).[7]

In these teachings, Rachel's theft of her father's household gods results in her death. Although she steals the images with the best intentions, seeking to eradicate her father's religious error, her efforts do her no good. Unaware of his beloved Rachel's role in the idols' disappearance, Jacob denies his household's involvement in the theft and curses the thief in a show of sincerity. The patriarch's curse is potent and eventually finds its mark, with tragic effect. The Genesis Rabbah narratives portray Rachel's death as an unfortunate accident, and also provide a cautionary tale about deploying curses. These rabbinic interpretations lack any implication that Rachel's suffering produces beneficial effects, and they also lack any hint of divine manifestation. Instead, the rabbis present her death as a tragedy that should never have happened.

However, Rachel's righteousness and her role as the favorite of Jacob's two wives also feature in the rabbinic writings. Her reward for these virtues is that all of the people of Israel are called by her name and by the names of her descendants. In this way, she becomes known as the "Es-

sence of the House," and thus the foundational principle of the House of Israel. The rabbis define Rachel's status as "essence" through wordplay on her previous childless state.[8]

> Genesis Rabbah 71:2
>
> Rabbi Yitzḥaq said, Rachel was the essence of the house, as it is said: "But Rachel was barren (*aqara*)" (Genesis 29:31). [Which means that] Rachel was the essence (*iqrah*) [of the house].[9] Rabbi Abba bar Kahana said, The majority of those who surrounded [Jacob's table] were of the essence of Leah. Therefore, they made Rachel the essence [of the house]. "But Rachel was barren." [Which is to say that] Rachel was the essence of the house (*iqar ha-bayit*). Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman said, Because of the things [that] are said of Rachel, therefore [the people of] Israel are called by her name.[10] As it is said: "Rachel weeping for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15). And not only [by] her name, but also by the name of her son. As it is said: "Perhaps the Lord of Hosts will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:15). And not [only] by the name of her son, but also by the name of her son's son. As it is said: "Ephraim is a precious son to me" (Jeremiah 31:20).

In this text, the rabbis draw on Psalm 113:9, "He sets the barren woman in her house (*aqeret ha-bayit*) as the happy mother of children," to describe the once-barren Rachel. A rabbinic play on words transforms Rachel from *aqeret ha-bayit* to *iqro ha-bayit*, the Essence of the House, corresponding to her transition from barrenness to fertility. While the thirteenth-century Kabbalists who composed the Zohar were less interested in the idea of Rachel's death as an accident stemming from Jacob's curse, they retained the idea of Rachel as Essence of the House and transferred this role from the matriarch to the feminine Divine Presence, known as Shekhinah.[11] The Shekhinah then manifests at Benjamin's birth and the matriarch's death to signify the House of Israel's completion.

The Zoharic Rachel

In the Zohar, Rachel's death supports an assertion of Jewish identity that addresses and negates Christian claims common at the time of its composition. Rachel's death prompts the Shekhinah's manifestation as the

Kingdom of Heaven, which represents God's Divine Presence among the Israelites for eternity. One of Kabbalah's most significant and mysterious theological innovations, this feminine aspect of God mediates between the divine and human worlds. While the motif of the Shekhinah accompanying Israel in exile pervades rabbinic literature, the Kabbalists assigned feminine gender to this aspect of God, along with a role in channeling blessings and divine energy from God to the world and from humanity to divinity in a cycle that is ideally ongoing.[12]

In addition to Zohar 1:174a, presented above, the following Zoharic passages demonstrate the Kabbalists' reinterpretation of Rachel to counter Christian themes. Among the many names and symbols associated with Shekhinah, the most relevant ones for this study include Lower World, Essence of the House, *Malkhut* (Kingdom), and *Malkhuta de-Raqia* (Kingdom of Heaven).[13] These terms allow the Zoharic authors to link Rachel, the Shekhinah, and Christ thematically. They also allow them to critique the Christian Kingdom of Heaven and assert Jewish identity by emphasizing divine connection, prayer, and law.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:158a–b

> For all those twelve tribes are themselves the adornment of the Lower World. And when Benjamin was born, Rachel died, and this Lower World took her place. . . . For when Benjamin was born, Shekhinah joined Herself with all those tribes and took the House with all of them. And Jacob knew, in the secret of wisdom, that when twelve tribes were completed, the Shekhinah would adorn herself and join with them, and Rachel would die, and She would take the House. . . . And then Rachel was purified and She [Shekhinah] took the house with all of those tribes and became the Essence of the House.[14] . . . Jacob said, Behold, the time has arrived for twelve tribes to be completed. And truly the World that is above will descend to the House to join with them and this poor woman will be superseded before it.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:160b

> Come and see: "*Elohim* remembered Rachel. And *Elohim* listened to her and opened her womb" (Genesis 30:22). . . . Jacob knew that she was fit to complete all of those tribes and would not endure in the world. . . . He [God] said to him [Jacob], Until now Rachel was with

> you—Essence of the House. From here and from now on, I will be with you and I will take the House with you, with twelve tribes.

In these teachings and in Zohar 1:174a, Rachel's painful death and her son Benjamin's birth stimulate the Divine Presence to manifest among the twelve tribes of Israel. This occurrence suggests a divine plan, since Jacob has prior knowledge of the event, distinguishing the Zohar's interpretation of this story from earlier rabbinic interpretations. The Zohar implies that Rachel's death is for the greater good, since it brings about God's permanent indwelling among the Israelites. Even the matriarch's suffering, to which the Zohar alludes by using the term *be-qashyav*, recalling Rachel's difficult labor in Genesis 35:16 (*va-teqash be-lidtah*) and Genesis 35:17 (*ve-ha-qeshotah be-lidtah*), is significant because it paves the way for divine gentleness. Zohar 1:174a states: "For every beginning that comes to be made manifest is difficult (*be-qashyav*), and therefore there is in it a judgment of death, and from there it is settled. . . . Come and see: Every beginning is severe, and afterwards gentleness." Shekhinah's divinity supersedes Rachel's humanity, and the Divine Presence assumes Rachel's rabbinic role as Essence of the House—the spiritual core of the Israelite ancestors. This event is understood as the emergence of the Kingdom of Heaven into the earthly realm among its rightful recipients, the Israelites.

This series of narratives addresses three main thirteenth-century arguments against Judaism. First, the Christian community asserted that the messiah, a being both divine and human, had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, who had suffered and died for humanity's salvation. Second, they claimed that this messiah's coming invalidated Jewish law as no longer necessary in the postmessianic world. Third, they claimed that since Jews denied these messianic developments, God had rejected them and excluded them from present or future salvation.[15] These Christian claims are addressed in Naḥmanides' report of the 1263 Barcelona disputation, in Solomon ibn Adret's text countering the claims of an anonymous Christian scholar, in Raymond Martini's *Pugio fidei*, in Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's *Dialogue on the Book of Life*, and in other places as well.[16] Underlying these assertions was the old supersessionist argument that Christians, embodying the New Israel, had replaced Jews in a privileged relationship with God. Indeed, thirteenth-century European Christians considered Rachel and

her older sister Leah typological antecedents to the Church and the synagogue, using them as symbols for representing and reinforcing Christian supersessionist claims that the younger religion had precedence over the older.[17] The Zohar's Rachel narratives deal with each of these common Christian claims.

Assertions of Jewish law's invalidity and divine rejection of Jews in favor of Christians relate directly to the term "Kingdom of Heaven." In the Zoharic narrative, this term names the Divine Presence as it manifests itself in the world among the twelve Israelite tribal ancestors. However, the term is an important one in both Jewish and Christian literature prior to the Zohar, and the Zoharic authorship takes its multiple meanings into account while interpreting Rachel's story. Concepts like the Kingdom of Heaven that both religions held in common were fruitful sites of debate for medieval theologians who wished to counter each others' claims.[18] In Christian interpretation of the New Testament's gospels, the Kingdom of Heaven signifies an exclusively Christian salvific future that comprises a new world of Christian redemption. Jesus holds authority over the Kingdom, and accepting his role as Christ determines who does or does not gain admittance to it. There, the twelve apostles sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Pharisees—and by implication Jews—are barred from this perfected future.

> Matthew 19:28
>
> Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."[19]

> Luke 22:28–30
>
> You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

> Matthew 23:13
>
> But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you lock people out of the kingdom of heaven. For you do not go in yourselves, and when others are going in, you stop them.

Each of these passages emphasizes Christ's authority over the Kingdom of Heaven, and thus defines the Kingdom as Christian. The passages also engage the Hebrew Bible's teachings on the twelve tribes of Israel, comprising an effective argument about God's rejection of Jews and Christian dominance. Christ's twelve apostles are placed in positions of power over the twelve tribes of Israel, and Pharisees, who represent all Jews, are demeaned and excluded. The gospels of Luke and Matthew are among the Christian writings that appear to have been best known to rabbinic Jews and Spanish Kabbalists. One Zoharic passage even quotes the gospel of Luke.[20]

By generating a narrative in which the Kingdom of Heaven serves not as an exclusive Christian salvific domain, but rather as a divine manifestation that confirms God's association with the Jewish ancestors, the Kabbalists reclaim the Kingdom of Heaven from the twelve apostles and return it to the twelve tribes of Israel. Returning the Divine Presence to the tribes in the past implies God's connection with Jews in the present and future as well, a connection made in Zohar 1:174a, in which God's future judgment on star-worshippers serves as a code for God's judgment of the gentiles: "And in the time to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare to arouse in gentleness against the rest of the peoples who worship the stars and the planets, and afterwards He will overpower them with harsh judgment."

Elsewhere, the Zoharic authors make this connection even more explicit by drawing on traditional rabbinic connections between Esau, Edom, Rome, and Christianity.[21] In the following passages the Zohar returns the Kingdom of Heaven to Jews for eternity and identifies the Kingdom of Idolatry—a code word for Christendom—as an oppressive ruler whose dominion may encompass the present, but will not extend into the future. As the gospels' Kingdom of Heaven excludes Jews, so the Kabbalists' Kingdom of Heaven excludes Christians. These texts use the Kingdom of Heaven to represent God's idealized relationship with Jews both in previous eras and in a time to come.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:177b

> Come and see: "And these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom." (Genesis 36:1). . . . As it is written: "Esau—that is Edom" (Genesis 36:1). . . . For the time had not yet arrived for the Kingdom of Heaven to rule and to unite with the children of Israel. . . . And

> when it settled, it settled on the smallest of all the tribes, which was Benjamin. . . . Afterwards the Kingdom came to its place and was established with itself, never to be removed.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:204b

> "And you shall be holy because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45). Who is I? This is the Blessed Holy One, the holy Kingdom of Heaven. The Other (*aḥra*) Kingdom of Idolatry is called Other (*aḥer*), as it is written: "For you may not bow down to an Other God, for the Lord's name is Zealous" (Exodus 34:14). And come and see: I—Rulership of this world and the world that is coming, upon which all depends. Other (*aḥer*) side—defilement, Other (*aḥer*), the Other (*aḥra*) side from the side of defilement. And his rulership is in this world, but he has nothing at all in the world that is coming.[22]

These Zoharic texts provide an effective counterargument to Christian claims about Jewish exclusion from salvation by establishing Israel in a position of holiness and literally "Othering" Christianity, which is associated with Esau, Edom, idolatry, and the forces of evil that the Zohar refers to as the "Other Side" (*sitra aḥra*). Here, Christian dominion in *this* world is understood as an evil reality, but not as a reality that will continue eternally. Instead, the Zohar argues that it is the Jewish Kingdom of Heaven that will be important in the future, including the messianic age. The following chapter will explore this interesting passage more fully.

The Shema and the Kingdom

Framing their argument about Jewish divine connection in terms of the Kingdom of Heaven also allows the Kabbalists to make strong claims about the ongoing relevance of Jewish law. The Kingdom of Heaven is associated with the Shema prayer, which is the central declaration of Jewish faith, and reciting the Shema is traditionally understood as a prelude to accepting Jewish law. Significantly, the Shema is always already a prayer about the Kingdom. It begins, "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4), followed immediately by the response, "Blessed be the Name of the Glory of His Kingdom forever and ever." As early as the Mishna's redaction around 200 C.E., the ancient rabbis associated reciting the Shema with acknowledging God's ultimate authority and connection

to Israel.[23] This speech act was called "accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven," and it was considered a necessary precedent to "accepting the yoke of the commandments," which referred to a person's adherence to Jewish law and ritual. The Shema's role in acknowledging divine authority and law made it a strong marker of Jewish identity.

Mishna Berakhot 2:2

Rabbi Joshua ben Qarḥah said: Why was the Shema [section of the Shema prayer placed] first, and the If You Heed [section of the Shema prayer placed] after it? Rather, so that he accepts upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven first, and afterwards accepts upon himself the yoke of the commandments.

The midrashic text Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:31 further clarifies that the specific section of the Shema prayer called the "Kingdom of Heaven" is the statement, "The Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Deuteronomy Rabbah, a text probably redacted between 450 and 800 C.E., has a close connection to the Kabbalists, in that Naḥmanides may have been the first Spanish Jew to quote it.[24] In the following passage, the rabbinic authors connect this prayer and its name to Judaism's defining moment—receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai. Since the term "Torah" also refers to the teachings of Jewish law, this text draws an even clearer connection between Jewish identity, the Shema prayer, Jewish law, and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Deuteronomy Rabbah 2:31

"Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deuteronomy 6:4). . . . And Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: And if one is reciting the Shema and is walking, he must accept the Kingdom of Heaven while standing. And which [part of the Shema prayer is called] the Kingdom of Heaven? "The Lord is our God, the Lord is One." And when did Israel merit to recite the Shema? Rabbi Pinḥas bar Hama said: Israel merited to recite the Shema from the giving of the Torah [at Sinai]. You find that the Blessed Holy One first opened at Sinai with this word. He said to them: "Hear O Israel!" (Deuteronomy 5:1), "I am the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 5:6). And they all answered and said: "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one." And Moses said, Blessed be the Name of the Glory of His Kingdom forever and ever.

Inspired by their use of *Malkhut* and Shekhinah as cognomens, as well as by an interpretive tradition of reading Glory (*Qavod*) and Shekhinah as equivalents, the Zoharic authors associate the phrase "Glory (*Qavod*) of His Kingdom (*Malkhuto*)" with the Shekhinah.[25] In the following passage, they connect the Shema prayer *as* the Kingdom of Heaven with the Shekhinah in order to stress Jewish relationship with God, uphold Jewish hope for future salvation, and affirm Jewish law's ongoing practice.

Sefer ha-Zohar 2:160b–161a

> At the hour that a person comes to receive upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, then the Shekhinah comes and rests upon his head and establishes upon him like a witness. . . . The Shekhinah comes and rests upon his head and blesses him with seven blessings and calls out of him: "And He said to me, you are my servant Israel, in whom I am glorified" (Isaiah 49:3).[26]

This Zoharic teaching implies that each Jew reciting the Shema prayer reenacts the Shekhinah's original establishment among the twelve tribal ancestors of Israel. Her attendance upon the medieval Zohar-reading Jew engages Her not just in the distant ancestral past but also in the thirteenth-century present, affirming God's ongoing relationship with Israel and anticipating God's association with Israel in the future, as described above in Zohar 1:177b and 1:204b.

Significantly, this Zoharic formulation of the Shekhinah resting on the Kabbalist's head and proclaiming Isaiah 49:3 engages Christian accounts of the Holy Spirit's descent in the form of a bird at Jesus' baptism. "And when Jesus had been baptized . . . suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matthew 3:16–17).[27] Both the Zohar and the New Testament use the same literary formula: "You are my X in/with whom I am Y." Elsewhere, the Zohar deals more closely with Christian ritual as "sorcerous divinations of the bird," as shall be seen in chapter 4. Medieval Jews were aware of Christian baptism, its theology, and its associated textual bases. The polemic work *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest), a text known in thirteenth-century Spain, cites this same baptism narrative and formula, while the anti-Christian compila-

tion *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) asserts that Jesus replaced circumcision with baptism, linking the topic thematically to the debate regarding Jewish law.[28]

Through reinterpreting Rachel's story and the Kingdom of Heaven, the Zoharic Kabbalists counter three Christian arguments common in their cultural environment. First, they deny the claim of Jewish separation from God by showing the Kingdom of Heaven manifesting among the Israelite tribes. Second, they refute the claim of Jewish exclusion from future salvation by defining the Kingdom of Heaven as a critical and active component of a Jewish past, a Jewish present, and a Jewish future. This Jewish future either excludes gentiles, as in Zohar 1:204b: "And his rulership is in this world, but he has nothing at all in the world that is coming"; or it punishes them, as in Zohar 1:174a: "And in the time to come, the Holy One, blessed be He, will prepare to arouse in gentleness against the rest of the peoples who worship the stars and the planets, and afterwards He will overpower them with harsh judgment." And third, the Kabbalists counter the claim of Jewish law's invalidity by reminding their reader that accepting the yoke of the eternally significant Kingdom of Heaven leads to accepting the yoke of the commandments, which affirm Jewish law and ritual practice. What at first seems to be a clear, if unusual, reinterpretation of a biblical story is revealed as a well-constructed and coherent counterargument to key thirteenth-century Christian claims against Judaism. By applying such historical definitions—and Kabbalistic redefinitions—to a term held in common by both Judaism and Christianity, the Zohar's authors extract the Kingdom of Heaven from its Christian usage and reestablish it as a signifier of Jewish faith, practice, and identity.

The topic of Jewish law's ongoing relevance was a particularly important one for medieval Jews, and appeared often in polemic works. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* questions, "Did he not say in your erroneous book: 'I have not come to abolish but to fulfill.' " The second part of the statement is a truncated reference to Matthew 5:17.[29] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* also employs Matthew 5:17, but further explores the relationship between the Jewish commandments and the Kingdom of Heaven: "The heretics defiantly say that . . . Jesus . . . gave them a new Torah, the abomination of their baptism instead of circumcision, and Sunday instead of Sabbath. The answer is: With these words they contradict their own Torah, for it is written in the book of their error that Jesus himself said, 'I have not come to destroy the law of Moses or the words of the prophets, but to fulfill them. Heaven

and earth shall pass, but not a thing shall pass from the words of Moses. Whosoever therefore shall destroy one thing of the words of Moses shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 5:17–19)."[30]

This type of argument, in which Christian scripture is used to counter Christian claims, is similar to many of the Church's techniques for debating Jews—particularly those that gained significance during the thirteenth century. *Nitzaḥon Vetus* also links the debate over Jewish law to the Kingdom of Heaven's Jewish meaning: "We shall not abandon our Torah, which was given to us through Moses to the accompaniment of thunder and lightning in the presence of all living creatures, for the sake of your Torah, which was given to you in secrecy and silence. . . . Consequently, we could say that sinful men simply made it up for the purpose of throwing off the yoke of the kingdom of heaven and of the commandments so that they might eat pork, drink wine of libation, and commit adultery."[31] Such polemic writings from before, during, and after the time of the Zohar's composition reveal the mystical work's teachings on Rachel and the Kingdom of Heaven as components of a sophisticated and ongoing debate between medieval Jews and Christians.

Rachel and the Messiah

In order to understand how these passages from *Sefer ha-Zohar* address Christian messianic claims, it is necessary to return to the figure of Rachel herself. Her presence is essential to the Kabbalists' assertions of Judaism's vitality and validity, because she provides them with the opportunity to rework the foundational Christian narrative of a human being whose death marks the beginning of a new relationship between people and the divine. It is as though the Kabbalists have searched among the biblical figures and deliberately chosen one whose tale of suffering and death can mirror Jesus' Passion.

In taking a traditional Jewish narrative and adapting it along unique and significantly Christian thematic lines, the Kabbalists alert the Zohar's attentive readership that they are addressing Christian faith claims. The text indicates this in a very rabbinic manner, using a method similar to the *mashal/nimshal* structure of a rabbinic parable, in which first the parable (the *mashal*) is given, and then its interpretation (the *nimshal*) is provided. The two sections rarely mesh smoothly. Instead, their juxtaposition produces cognitive dissonance, which opens space for reflection, analysis,

and critique.[32] Ancient rabbinic parodies of Christian texts and Hellenistic narratives employ a similar technique, in which the source text is implied but left unstated.[33] Such parodies assume that the audience is familiar enough with the parodied source narrative that the subversion is recognizable.[34] Scholars have proven that medieval Jews were acquainted sufficiently with Christian foundational texts to parodize them and create counternarratives.[35] The most famous example of such literature is *Toledot Yeshu*, which parodies the gospels' stories of Jesus' life.[36]

The Zoharic authorship employs a similar strategy, though in this case without the characteristic humor of parody.[37] Rather, the Rachel narratives offer a subtle appropriation and simultaneous subversion of Christian ideas.[38] In it, the Kabbalists invoke a well-known target narrative, while leaving it unstated—the Passion and resurrection of Christ. The reference is subtle, and it is left to the strong, knowledgeable reader to recognize the text's underlying meaning. Presented in an allusive way, Jesus is everywhere and nowhere in the Rachel story. Pointed similarities allow the Kabbalists to invoke Christ namelessly, while differences between Rachel and Christ offer targeted critiques of Christian claims about Jesus' identity, the meaning of his death, and the nature of Divine Presence.

The similarities between the New Testament's Christ and the Zoharic Rachel are many. Both figures suffer greatly before they die, Jesus through crucifixion and Rachel through a painful and fatal labor. Both are situated among twelve figures, with Christ among his twelve apostles and Rachel among the twelve sons of Jacob who are the tribal ancestors of Israel. Both figures die for a greater purpose, a point Zohar 1:174a makes by referring to difficult beginnings that allow for future gentleness. Jesus dies for the salvation of his followers, while Rachel dies to make way for God's permanent presence among the Israelites.[39] As Jesus' suffering and sacrifice redeem the Christian community, Rachel's suffering and death act as preludes to redemptive divine gentleness toward the Jewish community. In John 16:20–22, a gospel familiar to the Kabbalists, Jesus even compares his approaching death to childbirth, in which great pain is followed by great joy.[40]

Both figures' deaths inspire divine manifestation, with Christ's preceding his resurrection, ascension, and transmission of the Holy Spirit (as in John 20:20–22) and Rachel's making way for the Kingdom of Heaven, God's indwelling among the Israelites. Just as Jesus purifies and removes the sins of those who accept him, Rachel's death is described as a purification in Zohar 1:158b: "And then Rachel was purified and She [Shekhi-

nah] took the house with all of those tribes and became the Essence of the House." Furthermore, both Christ and Rachel allow access to the Kingdom of Heaven—Christ through his authority over the Kingdom's admittance, and Rachel by opening the way for the Kingdom to enter the world. Finally, both figures are considered uniquely suited to their tasks: Jesus as the unique son of God, born of a virgin, and Rachel as uniquely fit to complete the tribes, as in Zohar 1:158a–b: "And Jacob knew, in the secret of wisdom, that when twelve tribes were completed, the Shekhinah would adorn herself and join with them, and Rachel would die, and She would take the House." Both figures' unique fitness for their tasks also requires their respective deaths. Zohar 1:18b even depicts Rachel's suffering during labor using the crucifixion-like imagery of three angels stationed around her in a formation recalling the apex and side beams of a cross: " 'And she [Rachel] had difficult labor' (Genesis 35:16)—Michael on this side, Raphael on that side, and Gabriel on another side."[41] Each of these similarities, which the Zoharic authors generate through their unusual Rachel interpretations, helps to indicate the Zohar's conversation with the Christ narrative.[42]

While these similarities are interesting, the differences the Zoharic narratives generate between Christ and Rachel are even more thought-provoking. Many of these differences and the critiques they present relate not only to Christian messianic claims, and claims about the person of Jesus in general, but also to broader issues of incarnational theology, a key item of thirteenth-century anti-Jewish polemic and internal Christian debate.[43] For example, Christ manifests divinity, while Rachel dies to make way for it. As a dying human woman who is superseded and replaced by a divine manifestation, Rachel acts as a foil to Jesus' ambiguous—to Jews, anyway—mingling of humanity and divinity within one person. The text implies that while suffering and death may precede the greater good of divine manifestation, the line between humanity and divinity cannot be crossed, as medieval Christian theology seemed to imply. According to the Zohar, dying for the greater good also does not divinize the one who suffers. The Shekhinah may take Rachel's place and join with the earthly tribes, but that "poor woman" (as Jacob calls her in Zohar 1:158a–b) is still dead. She is not resurrected to new life. Her situation is unambiguous in this critical regard.

Significantly, problematizing Christian claims regarding Jesus' coexisting human and divine natures was an important aspect of medieval Jewish polemic. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* in particular seems to relish

critiquing the claim that Jesus was both divine and human. "If you will say . . . the divine nature shone upon the human nature by a unification of the divine to the human, and that the Messiah rose to the heavens with two perfect, non-deficient natures; then [tell me now]: whence did he carry up his food and drink to the heavens, since the human nature cannot live without eating and drinking? In addition, the place where food and drink are ingested is the place of gas and flatulence and the place of excrement, and a human being has need of a toilet. If you say he neither ate nor drank, you will be going back on your previous words in which you said he [lacked] nothing of our [human] nature."[44] In a more restrained manner, *Nitzaḥon Vetus* inquires, "You have said that the father, the son, and the holy spirit are one entity. . . . But how is it possible for the son to be like the father and the holy spirit when he ate and slept and grew tired and was afraid?"[45]

Furthermore, dying during the act of giving life juxtaposes Rachel's human fertility with Jesus' celibacy, a state the Zoharic authorship considered troubling and unnatural.[46] The Roman Church instituted clerical celibacy in the twelfth century, and the Kabbalists reacted to this development with great consternation.[47] For example, the anonymous thirteenth-century Kabbalistic work *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (The Holy Letter) is devoted to justifying marital sexuality and providing instructions for enhancing the sex act's holiness and efficacy in producing holy children. The Zohar's critique of Christian celibacy will be further explored in chapter 2.

Rachel and Shekhinah's Zoharic roles as Essence of the House of Israel also counter Jesus' Christian role as savior of the House of Israel, while Shekhinah taking the House from Rachel provides a further forum for Christological critique. In Christian tradition, the House of the Lord can refer both to the Church and to Heaven. When Shekhinah takes Rachel's place as Essence of the House, she locates the House firmly among the Israelites rather than with the Church. Locating the Kingdom of Heaven in the present, physical world, rather than in the salvific future, provides a similar critique. In this way, the Kabbalists' narrative logic allows them to reclaim their identity as the true House of Israel from Christians.

Finally, Rachel has Jewish messianic implications that help to counter Christian claims of Jesus as the messiah. In Jeremiah 31, Rachel's weeping for her children and refusal to be comforted immediately precede a divine pronouncement that her children, the Israelites, will return to their own country and to divine favor. "A voice is heard in Ramah . . . Rachel weeping for her children. She refuses to be comforted for her children, who are not.

Thus says the Lord: Restrain your voice from weeping and your eyes from shedding tears, for there is reward for your labor, declares the Lord, and they shall return from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. And the children will return to their country" (Jeremiah 31:15–17).

The rabbinic commentators associate this prophetic pronouncement with the Israelites' future redemption. Genesis Rabbah 82:10 explains that Jacob chose his wife's burial place on the way to Efrat because he foresaw that Jerusalem's future exiles would pass that way and that the matriarch would intercede for their redemption. Zohar 2:8a–b expands on this motif, narrating a scene in which the messiah, after entering a supernatural palace filled with images of the nations harming Israel, sees Rachel weeping before God and is aroused by this pitiable scene to weep in turn.[48] This messianic distress inspires God to wreak vengeance on the nations that caused Rachel's suffering, evoking a vengeance upon Christendom echoed in the Zoharic passages cited above that connect the Kingdom of Heaven with Rachel's death. Chapter 5 further explores this passage and its relation to Christian public art.

Although the scenario presented in Zohar 2:8a–b resembles Christian themes with its male messiah and weeping matriarch acting as intercessor, Rachel's role in the messianic drama is instrumental. While the Zohar's Rachel seems to experience her own version of the Passion, she is not read as a messianic figure herself. By juxtaposing their interpretation of the Rachel story with the gospel narratives, the Kabbalists use the matriarch to critique Christian messianic claims, providing subversive rereadings of Christ's essence and death that stage counterarguments to beliefs at the core of the Christian worldview. These subversive citations allow the Kabbalists to imply that Christians at best have misunderstood the meaning of their central religious story and at worst have framed their faith around an impossibility.

Finding the Weakness

Perhaps the Zohar's authors felt empowered to produce such strong critiques of Christianity because many of the issues central to Christian and Jewish polemic debate, such as incarnational theology and the precise nature and role of the Virgin Mary, were also being debated during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Western Church.[49] Jews aware

of these debates may have deliberately exploited areas they perceived as weaknesses within Christian thought. As Rachel Fulton notes, "Jews insisted that the doctrine of the Incarnation was nothing short of an insult to God and that the height of the insult was the suggestion that God had not only confined himself within a woman's womb but also (horrible for them to think!) come forth through her 'shameful exit.' . . . The more disgusting the Jews found this idea, the more Christians found themselves forced to defend it."[50] As early as the twelfth century, Church authorities attempted to control the credentials of those permitted to dispute with Jews as a means of limiting Christian theological disharmony, as well as limiting the potential appeal of Jewish ideas to less educated or less faithful Christians.[51]

At the same time that the Church sought to unify and extend its power, it ran into conflicts with members and communities who preferred more autonomy. The thirteenth century saw struggles within the Roman Church and between religious and secular authorities for power over territories and peoples, including the Church's power over Jews, formalized at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.[52] Although the council itself attempted to define membership in the Christian community and to unify Christendom, it also focused on how the Church community should deal with non-Christian minorities.[53] Structural conflict between Roman authority and local Church authorities that sometimes adopted stricter positions against Jews than did popes was another issue with which the thirteenth-century Church contended.[54] An increase in the number of possible ways to be Christian also characterized the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as the growth of new religious orders such as the Dominicans made medieval Christianity increasingly complex.[55] Tensions arose between the popes and the scholars at the University of Paris.[56] Indeed, during the thirteenth century some Christians advocated for a council to rule the Church, rather than a single pope.[57] These types of challenges for the Western Church remained relevant throughout the thirteenth century.[58]

Such power struggles were especially common in Reconquista Spain, which dealt with concerns beyond community consolidation and conformity. Spanish religious and political leaders occasionally used their context of conquest to remain aloof from broader Church doctrines and authority, and Jews served as convenient foci for such power struggles. For example, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, archbishop of Toledo from 1209 to 1247, maintained such good relationships with his city's Jews that local Christians complained about him to Church authorities. He defended To-

ledo's Jewish community from Lateran IV's regulations regarding dress codes and taxes for Jews.[59] Rodrigo also disputed with several popes over the extent of his authority in Spain, which he wished to model after the powerful Visigothic archbishops, rather than after the Roman Church's thirteenth-century mode of more limited clerical authority.[60] King Alfonso X of Castile (1221–1284), who ruled during the Zohar's earliest stages of composition, surrounded himself at court with more Jews than any other Spanish king and often exempted Jews in his community from Lateran IV's dress codes.[61] On the other hand, both of these leaders composed works that included anti-Jewish polemic.

The Church's thirteenth-century attempts to maintain its power in the face of internal struggles also included missionizing to Jews. Such missionizing may well have been staged for a Christian audience, intending to unify the Christian community, with Jews as unfortunate bystanders.[62] Even Christian understandings of the nature of their Jewish debating partners fluctuated at this time. Jeremy Cohen has suggested that the emerging mendicant friars engaged in a deliberate campaign to redefine medieval European Jews, relocating them outside the boundaries of the Church's ancient Augustinian definition, which viewed Jews as remnants of the past who would remain in the world in a suffering and demeaned state until the second coming of Christ, at which point they would finally see their error and convert. Excluding medieval Jews from the Augustinian definition also excluded them from the institutional protections associated with that definition.[63]

Given this state of affairs, the Zohar's subversive rereading of Christianity may be seen in part as a strategic attempt to exploit theological and social fractures that Jews observed within the surrounding majority community. Observing these fractures may even have encouraged Jews in their efforts to critique and counter disunified Christian claims.

Shekhinah and Jesus versus Shekhinah and Mary

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the Rachel narratives' engagement with Christianity is their correlation of the matriarch and the Shekhinah with the masculine Christ figure, rather than with the female Virgin. Arthur Green and Peter Schäfer have noted the interesting correspondence between the Christian Virgin Mary and the Jewish Shekhinah, and

attributed the two figures' similarities to Christian influence upon a developing Jewish theology.[64] While some scholars object to the idea of a connection between Mary and Shekhinah, others see a close relationship between the Christian figure whose popularity grew so rapidly during the eleventh and twelfth centuries and the Jewish figure that became a focal point of Kabbalistic theology in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[65] Indeed, strong evidence from both Jewish and Christian communities reveals that these figures are important sources for understanding the complex interplay of influence between medieval European Jews and Christians. Christian texts often link Mary to Jews, either as a teacher of Christian truth to Jewish individuals or to foil broader Jewish denial of Christian faith claims.[66] Earlier scholars have demonstrated polemic conversations between Jews and Christians that concerned the Virgin directly and that occurred during Marian theology's period of intense development.[67] As Miri Rubin notes, some Christian polemicists defined Jews as those who "failed all Marian tests," and who "openly injured her in word, thought, and gesture."[68] Likewise, earlier scholars have shown that the medieval Kabbalists, whether they found Mary's role appealing or opposed her cult polemically, were aware of the Virgin's popularity and theological importance to Christians.[69]

However, the additional correlation between Shekhinah and Christ implies a need to reevaluate the relationship between gender, religious symbolism, and interreligious influence in medieval Europe. As the Zohar's rereadings of Rachel make clear, the premodern Kabbalists' creative use of symbolism differs from modern expectations regarding gender. Rachel and Shekhinah's textual function as correlates of Christ demonstrates neither a masculinization of Rachel nor a feminization of Jesus, but rather a medieval perception of common religious typologies that transcends modern assumptions regarding the importance of gender boundaries.[70] Looking to the Kabbalistic Shekhinah as a figure for comparative study need not mean looking only to the Virgin Mary as her correlate. While conceptual commonalities between Mary and Shekhinah have been well documented by scholars, there are also similarities between Shekhinah and Christ that bridge conceptual gaps where Shekhinah and Mary differ.

The Shekhinah is one of Kabbalah's ten *sefirot*, aspects of God that represent qualities of action and emotion, combining earlier Jewish literary symbols to form a diagram of divine inner being. In this sense, She is more like Christ, who is included in the Trinity, than like Mary, who is simply an exalted human. Also like Christ, Shekhinah is the

aspect of God most often associated with dwelling among humanity. For these reasons, typologically associating Christ with Shekhinah may have seemed like a natural choice to the Kabbalists. Although associating female figures with female figures and male figures with male figures may seem natural to moderns, scholars like Caroline Walker Bynum have noted that medieval Europeans had more fluid notions of gender than do today's Westerners, perceiving the body generatively, rather than sexually, and conceptualizing women as men with an inverted, "outside-in" physiology.[71] For example, medieval Christian writers often described Jesus with feminine characteristics.[72] The point is not that conceptual links between Mary and Shekhinah are insignificant, but rather that it is important to extend the locations in which scholars seek for Christian symbols that may interact with Kabbalistic figures and theology.

Evidence for medieval spiritual typologies that transcend gender is found in Christian associations between Abraham and Mary. In the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Homilies of Amadeus of Lausanne, twelfth-century authors who preceded the Zohar's composition, Abraham and Mary are presented as corresponding figures.[73] The central feature linking the two personalities is not their gender, but rather their identity as willing sacrificers of beloved children for God.[74] In many of these interpretations, Mary serves as the Christian fulfillment of the redemption originally promised to Abraham, while the two figures are linked by the common themes of sacrifice and submission to the divine will.[75]

This long-standing Christian association between Mary and Abraham is an important component of the Christian supersessionist argument. As Cleo McNelly Kearns writes, "Mary's response to the call of the divine brings closure to the great 'here I am' of Abraham, replacing or completing him typologically as founding father of Israel with herself as the founding mother of the Church. In doing so, this response offers to Judaism a dangerous supplement indeed."[76] Medieval Jews do seem to have been aware of this Christian expropriation of Jewish identity and its relationship to the theme of parents sacrificing children. The midrashic text *Aggadat Bereshit*, which was redacted around the tenth century, contains an anti-Christian argument dealing specifically with the topic of child sacrifice. In this work, the Jewish authors claim that if God had compassion on Abraham, not wanting to pain the patriarch through the loss of his son Isaac, then God deliberately causing himself a similar pain by sacrificing his *own* son seems all the more unlikely.[77] Although the Jewish text maintains gender

correlation between the father-figure of Abraham and the father-figure of a masculine God, the text demonstrates a Jewish awareness of the sacrificial motif in Christian interpretation.

This sacrificial motif is also engaged in the Zohar, where the Kabbalists offer their own "dangerous supplement" to the Christ narrative. By linking Jesus and Rachel in a common typology that centers on sacrifice, suffering, and divine manifestation, they are able to make an argument about Jewish identity while countering Christian claims of Jewish replacement. In the Zohar, Rachel is not Christ's fulfillment. Rather, she expropriates a New Testament typological figure into a Jewish context, setting a newly interpreted, retroactive precedent for later Christian events. The nature of this constructed precedent serves as a means of prenegating the Christian narrative of the Passion, while including the feminine Shekhinah allows this typology to extend and encompass aspects of the Christ narrative dealing with divine manifestation and resurrection. The Zohar's portrayal of Jacob as one who willingly sacrifices a beloved wife for the greater good of his people (as in Zohar 1:158a–b and Zohar 1:160b) also reflects and engages the Marian typology of one who willingly sacrifices a beloved son. It is only through an awareness of medieval thinkers' willingness to cross gender boundaries for the purpose of maintaining religious typologies that the Rachel narratives can be appreciated to their fullest extent: as strategically targeted reinterpretations meant to counter Christian claims and so to undermine Christianity's reading of Judaism as a religion both divinely and politically disempowered. Instead, the Rachel narratives seek to place Jews in a direct divine relationship that will ultimately result in future political restoration.

Strategy and Self-Definition

The Zohar's Rachel narratives make arguments for Jewish identity and theology that address the Christian polemics of their day—polemics that were critical to the thirteenth-century public transcript of Jewish subordination.[78] Yet these narratives' messages, while clear upon reflection, are not straightforward. They comprise a subtle hidden transcript produced in the fertile ground of the Kabbalists' dissident subculture. Earlier scholars have noticed similar strategies' prevalence among medieval Jews. For example, Ivan Marcus has posited a model of medieval Jewish "inward acculturation," in which a minority group adapts its majority culture's traditions in "inverted and parodic ways," fusing them with the minority's

internal traditions to create social polemic.[79] Israel Yuval has noted that Jewish interpreters engaging with Christian symbols tend either to destroy the sanctity that Christians attribute to their symbols or to appropriate and adapt them for Jewish purposes.[80]

The Zoharic Rachel narratives redeploy the thirteenth-century Christian strategy of reading Jewish texts to uphold Christian claims by inverting this structure to read Christian texts for Jewish support. Doing so, they subversively adopt and adapt Christian symbols, including Christianity's suffering messiah. Their tactics are part of what Homi Bhabha describes as "a strategy of subversion . . . a form of power that is exercised at the very limits of identity and authority, in the mocking spirit of mask and image."[81] Such power struggles are inevitably also political. As Edward Said writes, "These processes are not mental exercises but urgent social contests involving . . . concrete political issues. . . . In short, the construction of identity is bound up with the disposition of power and powerlessness in each society."[82] Medieval Jews lacked the power to challenge Christian dominance in a material way. Instead, the Zohar's authors sought to erode Christian power within the Jewish community by redefining Jewish understandings of that power, thus altering Jewish responses to it.

It is perhaps helpful to understand the Zohar's hidden transcript of resistance to Christianity as the type of social action Judith Butler refers to as deconstruction. Butler explains, "To deconstruct the concept . . . is not to negate or refuse. . . . To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power."[83] Rather than negating or dismissing the Christian majority's foundational claims, the Zoharic authors call into question the very notion of Jesus as a subject, opening him and his story as sites of unanticipated meanings. These new meanings challenge the Christian majority's use of Christ to justify continued oppression of Jews and in doing so work to destabilize existing Christian power structures.[84] As noted above, some of these structures were rather fragile during the thirteenth century and may have presented themselves to medieval Jews as useful instabilities to exploit.

In this way, the Kabbalists use the majority's own strategies and signs of power to destabilize Christian dominance. Mingling the character of Jesus with that of Rachel, they undermine his existence as a central Christian figure, disassembling his understood meaning and redeploying its traces as signifiers of Jewish power, identity, and hope. In

effect, the Rachel narratives highlight Jesus in order to designate him as the site of an intense cultural debate that engages issues of both religious and political power.[85] While invoking Christ's dramatic story, they remove him from the story itself. Applying this understanding of deconstruction allows a clearer view of the Kabbalists' purposefully subversive relationship to Christian theology as they sought greater religious, social, and intellectual independence from a dominant majority whose authority was all too often oppressive.

2

Cleaving to the Other Side

CONVERSION TO CHRISTIANITY

THIS CHAPTER INVESTIGATES the perspective of *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor) on some of the most pressing issues of its time: Christian missionizing, the threat of religious conversion, and the extraordinary potential for damage to the Jewish community associated with prominent thirteenth-century converts.[1] Examining the Zohar's discourse on these interrelated problems provides insight into an aspect of Jewish-Christian interaction that evoked powerful anxieties among Spain's medieval Jewish communities. Zohar 1:203a–b states, "An Other God is emasculated, and never has desire, and does not enlarge, and does not make fruits. For if he did make fruits, he would pollute all the world."[2] The Zohar's authors witnessed alarming trends in Christian conversion strategies and responded by aligning converts firmly with the evil powers of the Other Side—powers that, while not fruitful themselves, enlarged their domain by recruiting followers.

Although large-scale conversions were not widely known in thirteenth-century Spain, overwhelming Christian expansion was not an idle Jewish concern.[3] During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Christian attitudes toward mission and conversion increasingly focused on preaching to Jews and Muslims, an interest fueled by the Crusades and by a growing body of Christian polemic literature already in circulation.[4] Informal debates became common, as Christians and Jews increasingly were concerned to answer each other's challenges.[5] Such public encounters turned dangerous when Christian missionizing techniques became more formal and aggressive. In Spain and France during Kabbalah's development, these trends culminated in forced public disputations, of which the most famous were the 1240 Paris Talmud trial, the 1263 Barcelona disputation,

and the Paris disputation of 1269–1270. Former Jews instigated each of these large-scale, public confrontations.[6]

Christians legislated their conversion enthusiasm in ecclesiastical and royal decrees throughout the thirteenth century, escalating tensions between Jews and the Christian majority. In 1242 King James I of Aragon became the first European king to legally compel Jews to attend mendicant friars' sermons, renewing the order in 1263.[7] In 1278 Pope Nicholas III ordered Dominican preachers to convert Jews, adding, "Should it happen that . . . the Jews, like deaf adders, turn away from those deputized to perform this task and contemptuously flee from the call of the friars . . . the pope will ponder ways of dealing with the obstinate."[8] King Peter III of Aragon renewed James I's order compelling Jews to attend friars' sermons, and James II of Aragon demanded that Jews respond publicly to mendicants' challenges in 1296.[9] The possibility of converts reverting to Judaism also troubled thirteenth-century Christian authorities.[10]

Jewish sources prior to and contemporary with the Zohar reflect these trends. Jewish polemic began to flourish in the late twelfth century, and many of the new polemic works explained that encounters with Christians motivated their composition.[11] As early as the mid-twelfth century, Joseph Qimḥi's *Sefer ha-Berit* (The Book of the Covenant), composed in the southern French city of Narbonne, addressed converted Jews who polemicized against their former coreligionists.[12] A contemporary text from the same region, Jacob ben Reuven's *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (Wars of the Lord), sought to help Jews counter Christian conversion arguments.[13] The composition of Jewish polemic works continued in the thirteenth century and reflected both resistance to more aggressive missionizing and an increased Jewish sense of persecution. Meir ben Shimon of Narbonne's *Milḥemet Mitzvah* (Obligatory War), composed between 1245 and 1270, addressed the threat of new Christians proselytizing Jews through forced disputations and was framed as a countersermon following a Dominican address in the author's synagogue.[14] Another thirteenth-century French writer, Joseph ben Nathan Official, addressed converts to Christianity who polemicized against Jews in his *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqane* (The Book of Joseph the Zealot).[15] In Spain, Solomon ibn Adret (ca. 1235–ca. 1310), the chief rabbi of Barcelona, composed *Perushey Aggadot* (Commentary on the Aggadah) to defend Judaism from Christian attacks on Jewish law common in this period.[16] Meir ben Todros Abulafia (ca. 1165–1244), the chief rabbi of Toledo, composed poetry complaining of Christians: "You preach vanity and lies / And pronounce to me a name I know not / And proclaim glad tidings you never heard / To my face, always."[17]

The Kabbalists were not immune to these pressures. A new body of mystical literature that promoted the commandments and encouraged Jewish practice flourished from the late thirteenth through the fourteenth centuries.[18] Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, a Castilian Kabbalist long considered a Zoharic author, directed his early works toward Jews whose commitment to Judaism he understood as at-risk.[19] The Zohar's teachings against conversion belong to this broad trend of Jewish resistance to Christian missionizing pressure.

The Zohar on Conversion

Unlike explicit polemic works, the Zohar does not offer its critiques in plain language. Instead, it frames its criticism in a discussion of the evil powers known as the Other Side (*Sitra Aḥra*), using demonic terminology to reflect on what happens when Jews become Others. While the "Other Side" is a central term for the Zohar's theology of evil, and so engages topics ranging far beyond Christian oppression, within this broader category one subset of concerns involves Christians and their efforts to convert Jews.[20] Rather than postmodern injections into Zoharic language, the terms "Other," "Other Side," and "Other God" are keys to identifying and defining the Zohar's teachings on conversion.[21] They are also key terms in its discourse of resistance to Christian power. The following passage is the extended version of a text cited in chapter 1.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:204a–b

> For the Blessed Holy One seeks to sanctify Israel in everything, so that there will be nothing from the side of defilement with them at all. Come and see: When this side rules in the world, it is necessary for a person that he not be seen in the street, because he is able to cause injury and authority is given to him to destroy. And come and see what is written of Jacob: "And Jacob said to his sons, 'Why do you show yourselves?' " (Genesis 42:1).[22] For one should not seek to be seen before it [the side of defilement].[23] And therefore the Blessed Holy One cautioned Israel to sanctify themselves, as it is said: "And you shall be holy because I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45). Who is I? This is the Blessed Holy One, the holy Kingdom of Heaven. The Other (*aḥra*) Kingdom of Idolatry is called Other (*aḥer*), as it is written: "For you may not bow down to an Other God

> (*el aḥer*), for the Lord's name is Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). And come and see: I—dominion of this world and the world that is coming, upon which all depends. Other (*aḥer*) side—defilement. Other (*aḥer*). The Other (*aḥra*) side from the side of defilement. And his dominion is in this world, but he has nothing at all in the world that is coming. And therefore one who cleaves to this "I" has a portion in this world and in the world that is coming. And one who cleaves to that Other (*aḥer*) is lost from that world and has no portion in the world that is coming. But he has a share in this world, in his defilement, because that Other (*aḥra*) Kingdom of Idolatry has many shielded guardians (*tarisin gardinin*) who are given from it to rule in this world.[24] And because of this, Elisha *Aḥer* (Other,) who went down and clung to this level, was banished from that world that is coming and permission to return in repentance was not given to him, and he was banished from that world. And therefore he was called *Aḥer*. And therefore a person should seek to separate himself from all sides, so that he not be defiled by that side, to be found worthy in this world and in the world that is coming.[25]

This dense passage at first appears to be an exhortation to live a holy life that invokes the threat of divine rejection to communicate its urgency. However, it also hints at more timely messages for thirteenth-century readers. First, the passage's insistent repetition of Other/*Aḥer*/*Aḥra* draws several connections relevant to conversion. "Other" is defined as the Other Kingdom of Idolatry, as an Other god (using the Exodus 34:14 reference), as the Other Side of demonic defilement, as the specific heretical Other (Elisha ben Abuyah, known as Other/*Aḥer* in rabbinic literature), and as the general heretical Other who aligns himself with all of these things.[26] One who cleaves to this categorical set arouses the Zohar's ire—the passage fairly sputters with anger, declaring that such a person has no future beyond the present world, which is the site of the Other's power, and loses access to the future world, the site of the Holy Kingdom's power.

Thus, in addition to encouraging readers to lead a holy life, this text also condemns conversion, which it understands as rejecting holiness and future reward in exchange for the worldly Christian majority's powerful dominion. Yet understanding the specifics of the passage's anticonversion discourse requires further engagement with Jewish literature and the Zohar's cultural context.

Esau, Christians, and Foxes

One clue to reading Zohar 1:204a–b as an indictment of Christianity and conversion is its use of the terms "Kingdom of Idolatry" and "Other God." These phrases are closely connected with Esau, Edom, Rome, and Christianity in medieval Jewish writings.[27] Daniel Matt writes bluntly of several Zoharic passages, "Idolaters refers to Spanish Christians."[28] The polemic *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) also refers to Christians as ones who "hasten after another god."[29] Baḥya ben Asher, a thirteenth-century Kabbalist who may have been a Zoharic author, blames Edom for Israel's exile and the Temple's destruction in his polemic *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* (The Jar of Flour).[30] Though the biblical Edom predates Rome, Romans destroyed the second Temple, and the term's inclusion in this anti-Christian work makes clear where the author places blame. Medieval Spanish and southern French Jews used Edom primarily as a reference to the Christian Church, which they associated with the Roman Empire's brutality.[31] Indeed, from a medieval Jewish perspective there was continuity between the image-worshipping, hegemonic Roman Empire and the image-using, hegemonic Western Church based in Rome.[32]

Esau, Rome, and Christianity were demonized in pre-Zoharic Jewish literature as well, through connection with the wicked angel Sama'el, a spirit of violence and destruction who was described as the angel of Esau, Rome, and—by association—Christianity as early as the Talmudic period. The polemic *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest) makes an explicit connection between Satan (often understood as a name for Sama'el) and Christianity, stating, "I have read the Gospel a number of times and I have not found that God spoke to Jesus even once. Only Satan [spoke to him]."[33] Presumably, the text refers to the gospels' Temptation of Christ narratives, in which Satan speaks to Jesus.[34]

In the Zohar, Sama'el often appears as a demonic figure personifying the Other Side's forces.[35] For example, Zohar 3:192a–b represents Sama'el as the angel of Esau and Christianity. In this role, he explains that his angelic jurisdiction encompasses killing, wars, and violence.[36] As shall be seen below, violence was another characteristic that medieval Spanish Jews associated with Christians. The following passage makes the Zohar's connection between Esau, the Other Side, and an Other God more explicit through an interpretation of Jacob and Esau's reunion in Genesis 33.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:171b

> Rabbi Eleazar opened and said: "For you shall not bow to an Other God (*el aḥer*) for the Lord's name is Jealous" (Exodus 34:14). Now Jacob was the completion of the patriarchs, selected as the complete portion of the Blessed Holy One, with the closest relationship to Him, and was perfected above and below. How could he bow to that evil Esau, who is of the side of an Other God (*el aḥer*)? And one who bows to him, bows to an Other God (*el aḥer*). If you will say [that] it is because they said: In the time of the fox, bow to him, it is not so, for Esau was like an Other God (*el aḥer*) and Jacob never bowed to that side and to that portion. . . . And it is not written: And he bowed to Esau, but rather, when he saw that the Blessed Holy One was going before him, then he bowed to accept Him, so that he did not give honor by bowing to an Other (*le-aḥra*) outside of Him. And all was as is fitting.

This passage asks if the biblical narrative describing the patriarch Jacob's reunion with his brother Esau harbors a spiritual quandary. The Zohar explains that Jacob existed in a perfect relationship with Israel's God and confirms that Esau represents an Other, alien god. The problem arises from the narrative's assertion that Jacob, after leaving his people in safety, "went before them and bowed to the ground seven times until he drew near to his brother" (Genesis 33:3). In the passage's plain sense, Jacob bows to Esau to help alleviate negative feelings between them. For the Zohar, however, Jacob's bow could be interpreted as dishonoring the patriarch's relationship with God. The spiritual quandary hinges on the association between Esau and Christianity, which leads the Zohar to ask if Jacob's seven bows while approaching Esau should be read as idolatrous acts. Such acts would be particularly inappropriate for Jacob, the tribal ancestors' father and original recipient of the name "Israel."[37] Indeed, the Zohar's word for "bow" in this passage, *segeyd*, is associated with bowing in idolatrous worship, rather than legitimate prayer.[38] The Zohar solves the problem by explaining that the Bible never really declares that Jacob bowed to Esau. Since the object of Jacob's prostration is not explicitly stated, the text asserts that he truly bowed toward a vision of God.[39]

Before reaching this conclusion, however, the Zohar considers an alternative. Perhaps Jacob bowed to Esau because his brother was more powerful: "In the time of the fox, bow to him." This teaching derives from Bab-

ylonian Talmud Megillah 16b, where it refers to the reunion between the powerful Joseph and his brothers in Egypt.[40] However, elsewhere in the Talmud the fox represents Rome and its power over the rabbis. Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 61b describes Rabbi Aqiva's arrest and subsequent martyrdom, following a decree of the "Wicked Kingdom" (i.e., ancient Rome).[41] When asked in jail if he fears the Wicked Kingdom, Aqiva responds with a parable about a fox who tries to trick fish onto land by claiming the move will help them to avoid nets. The fish represent Jews, the water in which they swim the Torah, and the fox the Roman government whose decrees seek to make Jews abandon life-giving scripture.

The Zohar's question about bowing to the fox inquires into a Jew's appropriate behavior when confronting a power like Christendom whose dominion relies on both political and religious coercion. The text's explanation that Jacob's bow honors God while deceiving Esau provides a guideline for its medieval readership, suggesting that, in certain circumstances, submissive public behavior that satisfies a dangerous audience might be internally directed toward holiness, so that what appears as submission to a dominant power may not be submission at all. This teaching not only offers practical advice relevant to medieval Spanish readers, it advocates a strategy common to many oppressed peoples—dissembling to dominant rulers to preserve life and limb.[42]

Rulership in Which World?

Zohar 1:204a–b's statement, "His dominion is in this world," defines its earthly context as one in which the Other Side, Esau, and Edom are dominant, associating these terms with Rome and Christendom. Though the Zohar is a pseudepigraphic work set in the second century, this assertion is appropriate for both ancient Rome and the medieval Roman Church and its allies. Political subordination to a dominant culture whose center was in Rome linked the work's claimed authors with its true ones in a tradition of ongoing resistance.[43] Yet according to Zohar 1:204a–b, this Roman dominion will eventually end: "His dominion is in this world, but he has nothing at all in the world that is coming." The Other God's rule will be replaced by Jewish dominion: "Who is I? This is the Blessed Holy One, the holy Kingdom of Heaven . . . I—dominion of this world and the world that is coming, upon which all depends." The following passage shares this pronouncement of Israel's eventual supremacy.

Sefer ha-Zohar 1:163b–164a

Rabbi Abba said, Worthy is the portion of Israel, who are exalted over all idolatrous peoples, for their level is above, but the levels of the idolatrous peoples are below. These [Israel] are on the side of holiness, and those are on the side of defilement. These are on the right, and those are on the left.[44] When the Temple was destroyed, what is written? "He has withdrawn his right [hand] in the face of the enemy" (Lamentations 2:3). And therefore it is written: "Deliver your right [hand] and answer me!" (Psalms 60:7).[45] And the left was empowered and defilement was strengthened. Until the Blessed Holy One shall rebuild the Temple, and establish the world upon its foundations, and restore all things as is fitting, and the side of defilement shall be removed from the world. And behold, it is taught that it is written: "And I will remove the unclean spirit from the earth" (Zechariah 13:2). And it is written: "He will swallow up death forever [and my Lord God will wipe tears from all faces and remove the shame of his people from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken]" (Isaiah 25:8). And the Blessed Holy One will remain alone. As it is written: "And idols will vanish completely" (Isaiah 2:18). And it is written: "And the Lord alone will be exalted on that day" (Isaiah 2:17). Him alone, as it is written: "And no alien god with Him" (Deuteronomy 32:12). Because the host of defilement will be eliminated from the world. And nothing will remain above or below except the Blessed Holy One alone and Israel to serve Him—a holy people, and called holy.

In this passage, the Zohar reflects on the Temple's destruction as the point when Israel's power ends and its exile among the world's idolatrous peoples begins. The idolatrous people are again Christians, and Christianity's connection with the left-hand "side of defilement" is familiar from Zohar 1:204a–b. Also as in Zohar 1:204a–b the "side of defilement" is associated with an Other God, here the "alien god" of Deuteronomy 32:12. The passage asserts a triumphal, though chilling, vision of a world turned upside down in which those currently in power are eliminated while Israel's once-oppressed people fulfill their destiny by becoming empowered in turn and enjoying an exclusive relationship with God.

The Zohar's apocalyptic vision reverses a key Christian argument regarding Israel's subordinate role within Christendom—the idea that histo-

ry's own evidence demonstrated Jewish loss of divine favor.[46] The Zoharic authorship reinterprets this formula to understand Christian domination as a temporary situation that ultimately prepares Israel for future triumph. This type of vision is typical of oppressed subordinate groups. Such millennial narratives can be identified in almost every major cultural tradition with pronounced inequities of power and status.[47]

Similar teachings are found elsewhere in the Zohar. Zohar 1:172a contains a less menacing narrative in which Esau offers to divide the world equally with Jacob, but Jacob convinces Esau to rule first in the world, delaying his own power for the world to come. Zohar 1:170a depicts a gradual eschatological scenario in which Esau's originally strong light diminishes as Israel's is strengthened, with the result that Esau's light eventually vanishes. Chapter 1 explored Zohar 1:174a, which describes God judging the gentile nations while dealing gently with Israel; and chapter 5 presents Zohar 2:8a–b, which also describes an empowered Jewish future achieved at Christians' expense.[48] In Zohar 1:163b–164a, though the convert himself goes unmentioned, the forces with which he chooses to align himself and the consequence of his choice are further defined as the Zoharic authorship links terms and topics to build a discourse regarding Jewish-Christian relations.

Aḥer and Others

Zohar 1:204a–b deploys Aḥer, the prototypic heretical Other of the Babylonian Talmud, in theologically distinctive ways. Aḥer, whose very name means "Other," was known in the Talmud as Elisha ben Abuyah before his heresy. The most famous version of his story is Babylonian Talmud Ḥagigah 14b–15b's description of four sages who attempt a mystical journey to Pardes, which represents the heavenly realm. Aḥer numbers among the three whose attempts lead to demise, derangement, and degradation.[49]

Aḥer's sin in Pardes is "cutting the shoots" (*qitzetz ba-netiy'ot*), a term associated with apostasy in Jewish writings.[50] It is often explained as a critical misrecognition. Rather than affirming God's unity, Aḥer subdivides divinity.[51] Babylonian Talmud Ḥagigah 15a explains that when Aḥer saw the angel Metatron seated in heaven, he mistakenly believed that there were two heavenly powers.[52] Metatron was punished with a fiery scourge for not rising before the sage to indicate his lower status, but Aḥer's fate was more severe; he was barred from the world to come. The

sixteenth chapter of Third Enoch (the Hebrew Apocalypse of Enoch), a work associated with Merkavah mysticism, tells a similar story.[53] The Talmud makes clear from Aḥer's further adventures that he became a dualist. In Babylonian Talmud Ḥagigah 15b the ancient rabbis struggle with Aḥer's fate and question his rejection from the world to come. However, the Zoharic authorship condemns him without remorse. In the Zohar, Aḥer's name evokes eternal divine rejection and willful alignment with the forces of evil.

The Talmudic Aḥer would have presented himself to the Zohar's authors as a convenient character for referencing conversion. Aḥer's sin of "cutting the shoots" by incorrectly assuming multiple divine personages must have seemed an apt description of forsaking Jewish monotheism for Christian Trinitarian doctrine.[54] Medieval Spanish Jews certainly perceived Aḥer's sin this way. Writing in the 1320s or 1330s, the Castilian convert Abner of Burgos connected Aḥer's sin of miscalculating divine personages with Christian doctrine, but claimed that Aḥer's real sin was mistaking the Trinity for a duality. Abner was acquainted closely enough with Jewish mysticism to interpret the Trinity Kabbalistically, associating its various entities with the *sefirot Ḥokhmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Understanding), and *Da'at* (Knowledge).[55] Moses de León, one of the Zohar's main authors, was also aware of such Christian interpretations and argued against them.[56] Thus, while Abner's writing postdates the Zohar's main body, members of the Zoharic authorship were aware of similar theological appropriations, their relation to Trinitarian doctrine, and possibly their association with the heretical Aḥer. Significantly, Trinitarian doctrine was debated hotly between Jews and Christians during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, often featuring in disputations and polemic texts.[57]

Aḥer was also more broadly disparaged by medieval Spanish Jews. The anti-Maimonidean poet Meshullam da Piera refers to Elisha ben Abuyah in a satirical work as one of many sinners in hell.[58] Meshullam da Piera lived in Girona during the first half of the thirteenth century, when the town was also the location of an important Kabbalistic community.[59] The following passage, like Zohar 1:204a–b, broadens Aḥer from a specific heretical character into a generalized heretical Other: a Jew who has rejected Judaism. It is taken from the lengthy Zoharic section known as *Saba de-Mishpatim* (The Old Man of Mishpatim), in which a mysterious old man teaches the mystical companions.[60]

Sefer ha-Zohar 2:103a

> Come and see: It is written, "A river goes forth from Eden to water the garden" (Genesis 2:10).[61] This river never ceases from enlarging, and increasing, and making fruits.[62] But an Other God (*el aḥer*) is emasculated, and never has desire, and does not enlarge, and does not make fruits. For if he did make fruits, he would pollute all the world. And therefore, a person who causes that side to enlarge in the world is called evil and will never see the face of the Shekhinah. As it is written: "Evil shall not dwell with you" (Psalms 5:5). This person who rolls through transmigration, if he sins and cleaves to that Other God (*el aḥer*) who does not make fruits and does not enlarge in the world, therefore is called Other (*Aḥer*). And the name causes this for him: He is [who] he is, but he is called Other (*Aḥer*). Other (*Aḥer*) in reality!

In this passage, any man who cleaves to the emasculated god, referred to as an Other God (*el aḥer*), is named Other (*Aḥer*) by the Zohar, invoking the original Talmudic Aḥer's heresy, divine rejection, and renaming. Like Elisha ben Abuyah, one who cleaves to the Other God may still appear to be himself, but has changed his being "in reality" by choosing to become Other. As with the original Aḥer, becoming Other is associated with evil and exclusion from divine connection, since the Zohar claims that man "will never see the face of the Shekhinah (Divine Presence)," no matter how many transmigrations he experiences.[63] Absence from the Shekhinah's face places such Others in direct opposition to the Kabbalists, who understood themselves to constitute the Shekhinah's face and often thought themselves to be in this divine aspect's presence.[64]

The Emasculated Other God

Although *Saba de-Mishpatim* generally has not been understood to discuss the souls of those who convert *from* Judaism, this Zoharic section does expound extensively on the souls of converts *to* Judaism.[65] Therefore, a covert reflection on converts' souls is not topically out of context among the *Saba*'s teachings. Nor is such a reflection topically unusual for Jewish writings of the period, as shall be seen below. Beyond this, shared terminology with other anti-Christian passages in the Zohar, such as Zohar 1:204a–b (including references to the Other God and the label Aḥer

for wicked people), indicates that informed readers should be prepared to seek in this direction for interpretation. As in other places where the Zohar engages Christianity, here too it deals with the topic allusively. Such allusive reference may relate to the dangers that newly Christian converts posed for Jewish communities, a topic discussed later in this chapter.

Indeed, the character of the Other God to whom the Other person cleaves provides a clue that the Zohar is not only discussing the cosmic difficulties caused by divorce, remarriage, and levirate marriage—all topics addressed openly in *Saba de-Mishpatim*.[66] It is also, in a more indirect manner, discussing Christianity and conversion. As is often the case in this multivocal body of work, the text can be read on several different levels at once. For this study's purposes it helps to observe that the emasculated Other God who does not "enlarge" or produce fruits strongly resembles the celibate Christ and his monastic followers, who likewise—ideally—do not become erect, engage in sexual activity, or produce offspring.[67] The Roman Church formally instituted clerical celibacy in the twelfth century, and the Kabbalists reacted with consternation.[68] Classical Kabbalistic literature features several allusions to Jesus in connection with barrenness and lack of sexual completion, which the Kabbalists considered defective states.[69] The anonymous thirteenth-century Kabbalistic work *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* (The Holy Letter) devotes itself almost entirely to justifying marital sexuality and providing instructions for conceiving holy children.[70]

Responses to Christian celibacy appear in non-Kabbalistic works as well. In the Spanish convert Petrus Alfonsi's twelfth-century polemic *Dialogue with Moses the Jew*, the topic arises in a conversation regarding the trees of Isaiah 41:19. Petrus, one of the first converts to introduce the Talmud to Christians, claims these trees refer to Jesus. He explains to his Jewish opponent (personified as his former self) that evergreen trees are more precious than fruiting trees, implying chastity's superiority to procreation while praising Christianity's doctrine of eternal life.[71] That this medieval Spanish discussion includes terms similar to the Zohar's language of fruitfulness and lack thereof helps to clarify Zohar 2:103a's critique of Christian sexuality.[72]

Other medieval Jewish texts associate Christian celibacy with sexual deviance—a position rooted in the understanding that lack of "fruitfulness" does not necessarily indicate lack of sexual activity. Indeed, several medieval Jewish works disparaged professedly celibate Christian clergy as fornicators. Joseph Qimḥi, a twelfth-century author from Narbonne, wrote in his polemic *Sefer ha-Berit* (The Book of the Covenant), "It is well known

that your priests and bishops who do not marry are fornicators."[73] *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* complained that Jesus commanded Christians "to abandon reproduction . . . these practices are not present in the Torah of Moses, and God did not command them, but Jesus changed all these things."[74] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* likewise argued, "If the Christian priest is supposed to take the place of the Biblical priest, why doesn't he get married and have children like Aaron the high priest? Moreover, the first commandment given to Adam dealt with being fruitful and multiplying, yet you refrain from this and instead pursue fornication and wine, which capture your fancy."[75]

A similar complaint appears in the same text's critique of confession. "It was because of the fact that they wallow in fornication and yet their Torah forbade them from marrying that they agreed to require men to come and tell their sin and publicize their adultery so that they might know which women are having extramarital affairs. They then tell those women that they would like to do the same, and the women cannot deny them anything because the adulterer has already identified them."[76] The text suggests solving this problem by having women confess to nuns and men confess to priests, though it concludes, "neither alternative will really help, for only God himself can pardon and forgive."[77] Thus, Jewish critiques of Christian celibacy from the Zohar's milieu range from the claim that celibacy violates God's commandment, to the idea that celibacy encourages fornication, to the idea that the celibate priesthood is a convenient front for forcing women into illicit sexual activity.[78]

The Zohar's anticonversion argument expands on existing Jewish critiques of converts by turning them into criticism of Christianity as a whole. The Zoharic authorship suggests that, left to their own devices, the emasculated, not "enlarging," unfruitful god and his followers would presumably die out from lack of reproduction. The convert's great sin in becoming Other to Judaism is that he artificially swells the ranks of the Other God's infertile forces, which otherwise would be constrained by antiprocreative ideology and lack of sexual function. The Zohar understands Christianity's numbers as growing through recruitment and urges its readers to avoid being recruited. The connection between Christendom, the Other God, emasculation, infertility, evil, and polluting the world is also found beyond Zohar 2:103a, emphasizing these intertwined concepts' importance to the Zoharic authorship.

The Zohar's authors understood Christians to worship a castrated and unfruitful god, while Christians understood Jewish circumcision to be its own form of castration.[79] This divergence between the two re-

ligions may be relevant to the discussion below concerning converted Jews who joined the priesthood, exiting a Jewish culture of marriage and compulsive heterosexuality to enter one of celibacy and homosociality. Such converts, who were often public personages, were especially hostile to Judaism.

Sefer ha-Zohar 2:108b–109a

"If he comes by himself (*be-gapo yavo*)" (Exodus 21:3). What is "*be-gapo*"? We have learned [that] according to its translation [it means] "by himself." This is fitting, but behold, we have learned: The whole world does not stand except upon one wing (*gapa*) of Leviathan. And the secret is this: at the time that it [Leviathan] exists male and female, for male and female the Blessed Holy One created them. And everywhere that they went, the world quaked. And if the Blessed Holy One had not emasculated the male and cooled the female, they would have polluted the [entire] world. Therefore, they do not make offspring, and one who does not make offspring is in its wing.[80] . . . And therefore "he comes under its wing (*be-gapo yavo*)." And since he goes out in its wing, he is thrust to there and he does not enter into the [heavenly] curtain at all, and he is thrust [out] and is banished from that world. He goes out in its wing. He goes out in its wing in reality! Come and see: It is written, "Childless (*aririm*) they will die" (Leviticus 20:20). Written *aririm*; entirety of male and female.[81] He enters [the world] in the secret of the male, and he leaves [the world] in the secret of the female.[82] Entering in this one and leaving in that one. This is that place to which he cleaves in that world. For behold, the Blessed Holy One does not want one who has caused his own emasculation in this world to appear before him. Come and see from a sacrifice—for they did not sacrifice an emasculated animal before Him, and they took it away so that it would not be sacrificed before Him. And He decreed, and He said: "And in your land you shall not do it" (Leviticus 22:24). And so for all generations [it is forbidden] to emasculate creatures that the Blessed Holy One created in the world. For behold, all emasculation is of the Other Side (*sitra aḥra*).

This text, like Zohar 2:103a above, is from *Saba de-Mishpatim*. Its source text, Exodus 21:3, introduces *be-gapo* as a topic already related to marriage and sexuality. The verse refers to a Hebrew slave who comes to his master by himself (*be-gapo yavo*), without a wife. When he finishes his seven-

year term of service, he must depart as a single man (*be-gapo yetze*). The Zoharic interpretation deals, at least in part, with childlessness's chilling cosmic implications. The Zohar indicates that the childlessness to which it refers is a purposeful choice, rather than a senseless tragedy, since the individual described "caused his own emasculation." Thus, the childless character described in the passage becomes a vehicle for criticizing Christian clergy: the unfruitful servants of the emasculated Other God encountered in the previous passage. As in Zohar 2:103a, the text warns of beings whose reproductive fruitfulness must be limited so that they do not "pollute the world," as well as condemning those who join these evil forces.

The Zohar's teaching also draws on Babylonian Talmud Bava Batra 74b, in which God emasculates the primordial water-serpent Leviathan. This text worries that since God created all creatures male and female (reinforcing Judaism's views on heterosexuality as normative), these two giant creatures' mating would ultimately destroy the world through an excess of enormous progeny. The Talmud teaches that God castrated the male Leviathan and killed the female one. A similar tale follows regarding the male and female versions of the giant land animal Behemoth, in which God "cools" the female Behemoth, reducing her sexual urges.[83]

As in Zohar 2:103a, this text associates emasculation with the forces of the Other Side that the Zohar often uses to reference Christianity.[84] A person who chooses lack of sexual reproduction, imposing on himself the infertility associated with Leviathan, links himself inextricably to that Other Side by spiritually castrating himself. Also as in Zohar 2:103a, that person is excluded from divine company, this time by being condemned never to enter the heavenly curtain rather than being barred from seeing Shekhinah's face. However, entering the heavenly curtain can be understood as analogous to seeing Shekhinah, since in Zohar 2:99a–b (also part of *Saba de-Mishpatim*), curtains and veils are gradually withdrawn from the face of a maiden who symbolizes both Torah and Shekhinah.[85]

Again understanding celibacy and lack of procreation as castration and sexual deviance, the Zoharic authorship explains that such a person embodies a lack of gender balance so that, by placing himself under the authority of the demonic masculine, he comes ultimately under the demonic feminine's jurisdiction, represented by the monstrous male and female Leviathan. Like Aḥer, he is stuck with the side he has chosen. The passage concludes with the strong assertion that "all emasculation is of the Other Side," based on Leviticus 22:24, which forbids sacrificing an animal with mutilated or missing testicles. Extending this idea to human

beings who have "emasculated" themselves by choice through celibacy, the Zohar concludes that God rejects such people as well, since they have made themselves ritually unfit and so unacceptable to the divine.[86] The Zohar's demonization of Christian celibacy also counters the Christian clergy's understanding of themselves as living angelic lives, one aspect of which was avoiding sexual activity.

The Zohar's sexual modification of both the male and female Leviathan, which departs from the Talmudic source text by exchanging the female Leviathan's slaughter for the female Behemoth's sexual cooling, is also significant. As the earlier quotation from *Nitzaḥon Vetus* makes clear, medieval Jews were aware of nuns' roles—and lack thereof—within the Church. Although the sinner who sides with Leviathan in the passage is male, the Zoharic authorship's choice to alter the Talmudic version of the female Leviathan's death into a "cooling" reduction of sexual desire includes a critique of celibate nuns as well as of priests. Thus, while Zohar 2:103a directs its critique toward converts, Zohar 2:108b–109a focuses on a related argument regarding that which converts join: the Christian community itself.

Zohar 2:108b–109a goes beyond associating Christianity with castration and infertility to make a further argument about divine strategy regarding Christians. Zohar 2:103a claims that "an Other god (*el aḥer*) is emasculated, and never has desire, and does not enlarge, and does not make fruits. For if he did make fruits, he would pollute all the world." Zohar 2:108b–109a comparably explains of Leviathan that, "if the Blessed Holy One had not emasculated the male and cooled the female, they would have polluted the [entire] world." While the first passage blames the convert for being recruited by the Other Side and enlarging it without its producing fruit, the second implies that the Other Side's fruitlessness is part of a divine plan. The Zohar asserts that God intentionally made the Other Side infertile in order to prevent its breeding and filling the world. Using "Leviathan" and the "Other Side" as code terms for Christianity, the Zohar claims that Christian celibacy (read as self-castration) is actually a divine strategy for preventing Christianity from overtaking the earth. Thus, Christian celibacy figures as a divine plan for Christian containment.[87]

Similar Jewish concerns exist in non-Kabbalistic sources. *Nitzaḥon Vetus* expresses its dismay in terms similar to the Zohar's. " 'Woe unto them that join house to house' (Isaiah 5:8). You can explain this passage too as a reference to the worshippers of Jesus: They are the priests who

have taken all the land for themselves, who join house to house and lay field to field until they have no place remaining."[88] Although this polemic frames its argument in clearer terms, its concern that Christianity will expand "until they have no place remaining" relates to the Zohar's more complex worry that the nonreproducing Christian priests may expand until they have "polluted the [entire] world." The Zohar is further concerned that converts thwart the divine plan to emasculate the Other Side through institutional celibacy, causing expansion where God's will has restricted it.

Notably, similar ideas regarding nonreproductive sexuality as divine punishment for idolatry were discussed among Christians in the Zohar's cultural milieu. Thomas Aquinas, whose second regency at the University of Paris coincided with Paulus Christiani's 1269–1270 Parisian anti-Jewish disputation, also explored this theme. Following Paul in Romans 1, Aquinas believed that God punished certain ethnicities by distorting their sexuality. Paul claimed that God gave the gentiles of Abraham's time homosexual desires to punish them for misrecognizing divine truth and straying after idols.[89] In his commentary on Romans, Aquinas elaborated the idea of God rendering gentiles homosexual as punishment for idolatry.[90] Both Paul and Aquinas make arguments similar to the Zohar's; God strikes a group with nonheteronormative sexuality to ensure that it will lose worldly power or die out. Aquinas may or may not have been talking to Jews and converts, but the parallels between the two theories are striking.[91]

Conversion, Coercion, and Violence

Read in this context, Zohar 1:204a–b, the first passage presented, offers a strong argument against conversion to Christianity, which the text claims involves willful alignment with the Other Side and its Other God, thwarting a divine plan, exclusion from the Divine Presence, and exchanging a share in the world to come for power in this world. Such worldly power did not derive simply from belonging to the Christian majority; it also sprang from that majority's use of physical violence. The Zoharic authorship hints at such threats.

Zohar 1:204a–b cautions that, when the Other Side is at large in the world, a person "should not be seen in the street," emphasizing its message with the biblical quotation, "Why do you show yourselves?" (Genesis 42:1). In its original context, this statement means, "Why do you keep look-

ing [at each other]?" (Genesis 42:1) and begins the patriarch Jacob's exhortation that his sons should go quickly to procure food in Egypt. However, the Zohar interprets the prooftext to mean that Jews should hide from the Other Side when it is abroad. The Zohar also makes clear what danger being seen in the street entails, since "that Other (*aḥra*) Kingdom of Idolatry has many shielded guardians (*tarisin gardinin*) who are given from it to rule in this world."

Though a cursory reading of this statement might associate the "shielded guardians" that grant the Other Kingdom its power with demonic entities named elsewhere in the Zohar, conspicuous use of the loan word *gardinin*, derived from the Spanish *guardián* (a guard or warden), provides a clue that the text refers to armed soldiers, presumably of the Spanish kings or other local authorities.[92] Previous scholars have observed that *gardinin* and *gardina* are Spanish loan words, using this evidence to demonstrate the Zohar's linguistic creativity and thirteenth-century Castilian composition.[93] However, it is possible to offer a stronger reading. The Zohar, using coded language, warns its readers not to make themselves available in the street when the Spanish kings' forces are abroad in order to avoid violent encounters.

These cautions express the thirteenth-century Spanish Jewish community's real fears. Thirteenth-century Spanish Jews suffered forced religious debates and were subject to greatly increased Christian interest in conversion. Often, violent and aggressive threats accompanied these situations. In 1242 King James I of Aragon became the first European king to legally compel Jews to attend Christian sermons and listen to mendicant friars' preaching.[94] The letter announcing the decree specifically mentions the type of officers about which the Zohar warns. "We desire and hereby decree that, whenever an archbishop, bishops, or Dominican or Franciscan friars visit a town or a place where Saracens or Jews dwell, and whenever they wish to preach the word of God to the said Jews or Saracens, these shall gather at their call and listen patiently to their preaching. Our officers, if they want to attain our favor, shall, heedless of excuse, compel them to do this."[95] The pronouncement also forbade taunting converts on penalty of a financial fine.[96] The decree affirms the same situation to which the Zohar alludes, in which armed royal guards accompanying preaching Church officials forcefully compelled Jews to listen to Christian conversion discourses. For the Zoharic authorship, Christianity, worldly power, and the threats of conversion and violence intertwined.

This same King James I addressed the Jewish community during the 1263 Barcelona disputation between Naḥmanides, a Kabbalist and community leader, and the converted Dominican friar Paulus Christiani. Such royal addresses were rare, and likely cemented the connection between religious and political oppression in many Spanish Jews' minds.[97] The 1263 disputation also resulted in decrees to censor Jewish books, as well as an edict allowing Paulus Christiani to enter Jewish synagogues and homes, where Jews were required to respond "reverently" to his presence. Within a day, James modified his decree to declare that Jews could not be forced outside the Jewish quarter for preaching.[98] Presumably, the concern that violence would erupt if Jews were forced into public spaces to coerce conversion prompted this change. Indeed, the 1263 disputation never reached an official conclusion for this very reason; the king ended it early to quell the escalating threat of violence against Barcelona's Jews.[99] By 1268 James I also limited the number of men allowed into the Jewish quarter during conversion pushes, for fear that laymen accompanying the clergy would incite anti-Jewish riots in the quarter itself.[100] King James's decrees demonstrate that Christian conversion sermons aroused the ire of Christian laymen who attended such events and threatened violence toward the Jewish community.

Violence associated with religious disputations was not confined to Spain. When Paulus Christiani staged a disputation in Paris in 1269–1270, he accused Jews of torturing and killing Christ, adding to rhetoric previously tested in Barcelona and inspiring violence against Jews. In this instance, King Louis IX's royal guards prevented an impending riot. The Jewish Parisian disputants assumed Paulus's accusations were meant to cause anti-Jewish violence and accused him of organizing the debate with bloody intent.[101] Yet the royal edict related to this disputation instead assumed Jewish violence against Christian preachers. "You shall provide, moreover, for the protection and safety of the aforesaid friar as he shall require of you, so that no violence or injury or impediment be inflicted upon him or his circle."[102] This misidentification of debate violence's potential victims offers insight into the Christian public transcript of Jewish perfidy. Christian authorities expected Jews to seek violence against members of the Church in the present, just as they accused Jews of doing violence to Christ in the past.

According to another account, King Louis IX actively encouraged anti-Jewish violence. Book I of John of Joinville's *Life of St. Louis* tells, in a likely fictional account, of a knight who attacked a Jew traveling to a reli-

gious debate at the Cluny monastery. The knight knifed the Jew in the gut, declaring that learned men should debate with Jews, but unlearned men should defend Christianity by stabbing them. In the account, the knight's assertion wins Louis's approval.[103] The story discloses a double threat; Jews could be harmed both for refusing to participate in public debates *and* for agreeing to participate in them, where they became vulnerable to strong anti-Jewish emotions aroused among assembled crowds of Christian clergy and laymen.

The threat of Christian violence to Jewish communities persisted throughout the period of the Zohar's composition. In 1278, under King Peter III in Aragon, priests hurled stones at Jews from rooftops surrounding Girona's Jewish quarter.[104] In 1279 Peter ordered royal officials to prevent friars from entering synagogues with large retinues in response to Jewish claims that the friars were inciting violent thugs to disrupt services. These events may have accompanied interreligious debates.[105] The year 1279 also saw religious rioting in Huesca and Calatayud.[106] In 1296 King James II of Aragon reissued James I's edicts of 1242, compelling Jews to attend Christian preaching while physically threatening converted Jews whose conversion was deemed suspicious.[107] In 1297, Zaragoza's Jews complained that preaching converts urged lay Christians to attack the Jewish quarter.[108] Thus, while the Zohar was being written, both Jews and Christians responsible for public welfare feared the eruption of anti-Jewish violence, an all-too-common occurrence. Given these circumstances, the Zohar's caution against being seen in the street by the Other Side's armed guardians takes on new urgency.

Converts Great and Small

It is impossible to read the history of these threats to Spain's and France's Jewish communities without noticing the prominent role of converted Jews who became Christian churchmen. Of course, not all converts threatened Jews. Medieval Jews and Christians had many opportunities for social and cultural interaction.[109] David Malkiel writes that converts often "hurdled the Jewish-Christian divide with ease, as though they did not consider it terribly significant."[110] Reversions to Judaism happened, especially because converted Jews often became destitute once the Church seized their property.[111] Solomon ibn Adret, who was chief rabbi of Barcelona for fifty years during the thirteenth century, composed a responsum

complaining of a man who wandered from town to town, claiming Jewish identity in one place and Christian identity in another.[112] Similarly, a 1268 letter by Pope Honorius IV expressed concern that converted Jews were moving to different towns and reverting to Judaism.[113] The nature and frequency of daily interactions between Jews, converts, and Christians are hotly debated.[114]

Among Spanish rabbis, both Solomon ibn Adret and Yom Tov ben Avraham Asevilli considered conversion to Christianity a form of idolatry, while Naḥmanides considered converts worse than born Christians who simply followed the religion they knew.[115] Solomon ibn Adret urged Jews not to have mercy on converts.[116] Some of the most contentious issues surrounding converts related to marriage, wives, and children—topics with which the Zohar also frames its conversion discourse through its discussion of childlessness. The fate of converts' wives and children greatly concerned medieval Jewish communities, and many authorities declared that converts retained their Jewish status for marriage and inheritance rights.[117] Though Solomon ibn Adret suggested that Jewish wives flee converted husbands, such women remained married under Jewish law and were unlikely to receive divorce documents.[118] Some converted men took children with them, abandoning their wives altogether.[119]

Since such interactions between Jews, Christians, and formerly Jewish Christians were not unusual, the Zohar's concerns about conversion are understandable in part as reactions against a commonplace phenomenon that the work's authors hoped to discourage. Significantly, the Zohar's position counters a broader medieval Jewish trend to regard converts as sinful Jews, rather than as religious Others.[120] However, not all relations between Jews, Christians, and converts were amicable, even when the parties involved wished them to be. Danger posed by converts was physical as well as spiritual, since they could extort money from Jews, inform on them to Christians, and force them to attend sermons that exposed them to mob violence. Because Church authorities viewed converts interacting with Jews as heretical, even those who meant no harm could endanger Jews by drawing clerical attention.[121] It is evident that converts' social and religious identities were a fraught topic for thirteenth-century European Jewish communities, even in places where authorities considered relations between current and former Jews permissible. Indeed, given the confusion and danger such interactions inspired, the Zohar's authors may have perceived normalized relationships between Jews and converts as a particularly insidious threat.

Furthermore, some converted Jews did actively oppress their former coreligionists. The best known of these figures were converts who entered the clergy. Such men not only became Church authorities but also interacted with Christian rulers and their soldiers. Given the Zohar's complaints about the connections between conversion and worldly power, it is likely that such preaching converts are its critiques' main focus. While these figures comprised a small minority of converts to Christianity, they had great impact on Jewish communities, oppressing French and Spanish Jews in dramatic and damaging ways. These behaviors' public nature ensured that their impact spread far beyond the regions in which they occurred, raising Jewish concerns over a broad geographic area. Thirteenth-century converts were, for various reasons, especially interested in missionizing to Jews; convert-led missionizing efforts increased during the period of the Zohar's composition.[122] Between 1263 and 1389, Aragonese kings issued preaching licenses to at least thirteen converts from Judaism and compelled Jewish attendance at their sermons.[123]

Solomon Grayzel writes, "In every major instance of anti-Talmudism, a convert from Judaism was the instigator of the conflict."[124] Converts also laid the Jewish missionizing movement's foundations. Petrus Alfonsi (1062–ca. 1140), a contemporary of Judah Halevi, is thought to be one of the first Jews to introduce the Talmud to European Christian scholars, a contribution that had little effect during his lifetime but became increasingly important after his death.[125] A physician to the court of King Alfonso I of Aragon, Petrus converted to Christianity in 1106, traveled to England to serve as physician to Henry I, and returned to Aragon around 1121.[126] He is best known for the polemic *Dialogue with Moses the Jew*.[127] The dialogue discusses his conversion, presents common Jewish critiques of Christianity—which Petrus dismisses—and attacks Jewish traditions.[128] His *Dialogue*, along with a growing scholastic culture that embraced philosophical argumentation, is credited with promoting persuasive conversion tactics to twelfth- and thirteenth-century Christian intellectuals.[129] Though the reasons for Petrus's conversion remain obscure, he was aware of Jewish conversion critiques and responded to them. Like the Zoharic authorship, Petrus's critics evidently believed that converts' main goal was earthly power. Petrus writes that Jews "falsely claimed that I had done this for worldly honor, because I perceived that the Christian nation [*gens*] dominated all others."[130]

Theobald de Sexannia also helped the Church gain knowledge of Judaism and the Talmud.[131] After joining the Christian clergy, Theobald served as subprior of Saint Jacques in Paris near the time of the 1240 Talmud trial and was instrumental in making this foundational Jewish text available in Latin translation.[132] He is credited with compiling *Pharetra judaeorum* (Quiver for the Jews), a work that collected anti-Jewish arguments and allegedly offensive quotes from the Talmud translated into Latin.[133] He may also have taught Hebrew to friars like Raymond Martini, who supervised the Dominican Hebrew-language school (*studium ebraicum*) in Barcelona from around 1270 until his death between 1285 and 1290, censored Jewish literature for the Church, and used his knowledge of Judaism to author some of the most famous anti-Jewish texts of the thirteenth century, including *Capistrum judaeorum* (Muzzle for the Jews) and *Pugio fidei* (Dagger of Faith).[134] Both works expand on Paulus Christiani's missionizing tactics. These connections place Theobald among the friars most damaging to thirteenth-century Jews.[135]

Other converts campaigned more actively against their former coreligionists. The most notorious of these were Nicholas Donin and Paulus Christiani. Nicholas Donin is best known as the instigator of the 1240 Paris Talmud trial that resulted in 10,000 to 12,000 Talmudic volumes being burnt in 1242, a devastating occurrence for the French Jewish community that caught the attention of other European Jews.[136] Several of Donin's accusations against the Talmud involved the sort of coded anti-Christian statements that the Zohar's rhetoric employs. Donin maintained that all Talmudic references to heretics, peoples, and idolaters actually indicated Christians.[137] His views may relate to the fact that, prior to his conversion, French rabbis excommunicated him for denying the Oral Torah.[138]

Nicholas Donin began campaigning against Judaism in communications with Pope Gregory IX in the mid-1230s, resulting in a papal decree that all Jewish books in which Dominicans and Franciscans could discover "doctrinal errors" should be burned at the stake.[139] This resulted in waves of book burnings that were only stopped by Pope Innocent IV in response to Jewish pleas and petitions.[140] Ultimately, the Talmud trial led to more attacks on rabbinic Judaism and an increase in public disputations.[141] Although some scholars view the Talmud burnings as a project of Dominicans and Franciscans in general, medieval Jews also knew that Donin and converts like him were key figures in these anti-Jewish activities.[142]

The Talmud trial and its surrounding events were bad enough; book burning was an especially impactful oppression prior to the printing press's invention, when all manuscripts were laboriously written by hand. However, the convert Friar Paulus Christiani's deeds had an even broader impact. Paulus Christiani was born Saul of Montpellier, the city at the Maimonidean controversy's epicenter; he spent his youth witnessing that conflict, which involved accusations that anti-Maimonidean Jews had handed over Jewish texts to friars for censorship and burning.[143] Though this accusation's veracity has been questioned, many Jews believed that it was true, and Saul had ample opportunity to observe the uproar firsthand.

After studying with two noted Provençal rabbis, Saul converted to Christianity around 1230 and became the Dominican Friar Paulus. He seems to have abandoned a Jewish wife, taking the couple's children with him, and may have actively proselytized other Jewish children.[144] Significantly, Paulus was a disciple of Raymond de Peñafort, a key figure in the thirteenth-century drive to missionize Jews; Paulus's conversion may have been inspired by Peñafort's preaching near Montpellier in the 1220s, as well as by disgust at the Maimonidean controversy.[145] In addition, Friar Paulus was a driving force in the mendicants' attempts to redefine rabbinic Judaism as heretical, and so to remove Judaism's Augustinian legal protections.[146]

From his conversion until his death in 1274, Friar Paulus's main focus was attacking Western Europe's Jewish communities.[147] His activity in missionizing Jews, initiating and engaging in religious disputations, censoring Jewish texts, and generally oppressing and intimidating his former coreligionists extended through Spain, Provence, and France, making him a well-known and thoroughly despised figure in these regions.[148] His activities provoked polemic responses from Naḥmanides, Jacob ben Elijah of Venice, Mordekhai of Avignon, and Samuel ben Abraham of Dreux, several of whom he disputed in person.[149] Even scholars who argue against the Church's thirteenth-century antagonism toward Jews single him out as a friar with startling anti-Jewish animosity.[150]

Paulus Christiani may have been responsible for initiating the Inquisitorial practice of exhuming the bodies of converts who had reverted to Judaism from their graves to burn them at the stake, a practice that surely traumatized Jewish communities where it occurred.[151] He also censored Jewish texts, though his missionizing strategy involved destroying Jews' books as well.[152] In 1267 Pope Clement IV recommended him to King James I of Aragon as one well suited for directing the Church's campaign

against Jewish literature, explaining that the Dominican, "as a former Jew and zealous convert, has all the essential qualifications of expert knowledge of the languages and of the heresies and errors found in these books and of Christian theology as well."[153]

With close ties to King James I of Aragon, Louis IX of France, and Pope Clement IV, Friar Paulus exemplified the Zohar's prototypical convert who reveled in worldly power.[154] His most famous exploits, the Barcelona disputation of 1263 and the Paris disputation of 1269–1270, had widespread effects including increased threats of physical violence and further waves of coercive missionizing. Both disputations occurred at Friar Paulus's specific request.[155] A Hebrew description of the Paris disputation refers to him as "Paul the Destroyer," a title related both to his activities in Spain and to the fact that he threatened the Jews of Paris with death if they refused conversion.[156] According to this text, written around 1272, Paulus declared, "I shall not leave without taking vengeance upon you and demanding your blood. I wish to show you that you are a faithless people, a people of *bougres*, and that you are fit for burning. I shall announce your sins. For each one you [*sic*] shall be sentenced to death. . . . For thus I have been commanded by the king to bring you to your end."[157] The letter was composed after the event, so these may not be his exact words, but the tone illuminates the relationship between the friar and his former coreligionists.

Aggressive acts toward Judaism and the Jewish community did not end with the thirteenth century. The convert Abner of Burgos, mentioned above for his views on Aḥer, Kabbalah, and the Trinity, suggested that slaughtering the older Jewish generation would make it easier to convert Jewish youths.[158] Abner actively proselytized Jews, and in 1339 convened a disputation in Valladolid to challenge the Amidah prayer's validity at the order of Alfonso XI of Castile. According to Christian authorities, Abner won the debate, and censors removed the Amidah from prayer books.[159] This incident, which happened in Castile, rather than the neighboring kingdom of Aragon where many other such events transpired, legitimates the Castilian Zoharic authors' concern that anti-Jewish attitudes and events could strike their own communities.

Other less prominent converts also troubled the Jews of France and Spain. The converts who instigated the stone-throwing incident of 1297 in Zaragoza have already been discussed.[160] Guy Fulcoldi, the archbishop with jurisdiction over Narbonne during the disputation held there in the late 1250s or early 1260s, traveled with a group of converted Jews that may have included Paulus Christiani; Guy Fulcoldi later became Pope

Clement IV, a great supporter of Paulus's work.[161] Staging disputations in which converts entered synagogues and interacted with local Jews would certainly have had psychological impact. A polemic text claiming to be a countersermon to the Narbonne disputation says that "many great and important people" arrived with the preaching Dominican, again emphasizing the relationship between converts and worldly power in Jewish eyes—an association reflected in the Zohar.[162]

One fascinating thing about these men is that, aside from the chronological outliers Petrus Alfonsi and Abner of Burgos, they seem to have associated with each other directly or indirectly, constituting a core of convert-inspired anti-Jewish activity that traumatized the Jews of France and Spain for more than half a century. Theobald of Sexannia likely would have met Nicholas Donin at the time of the Paris Talmud trial, and he may also have taught Raymond Martini, a close associate of Paulus Christiani. Both Paulus Christiani and Raymond Martini were close with Raymond de Peñafort, the leading Dominican friar of the thirteenth century and a key figure in the push to missionize Jews using Jewish texts.[163] These converted Jews provided the keys for advancing a new anti-Jewish strategy.

Indeed, several prominent Jewish converts well known to the medieval public performed in much the way the Zohar describes, exiting Judaism for a share in the powerful Christian community and using that power oppressively. While these converted Jews may not have had the motives the Zohar ascribes to them, they did associate with worldly powers such as kings and popes, and their ability to instigate harmful and traumatic incidents among France's and Spain's Jewish communities was very real. These individuals, who publicly flaunted their newfound power, likely inspired the Zohar's reflection on Jews who become Others, enjoying the might of the worldly "Other God" and his dangerous associates.

Further supporting the Zohar's perception of converts' motives, some Christian polemicists actually did use the lure of worldly power and high social standing as inducements for conversion. This type of argument evidently inspired the composition of Jacob ben Reuven's *Milḥamot ha-Shem* (Wars of the Lord).[164] A similar strategy, along with undermining Jewish hope for a better future, may have encouraged Abner of Burgos's conversion.[165] Along these lines, the Jewish polemic *Nitzaḥon Vetus* explains that the nature of being part of Israel is experiencing exile and disempowerment. Christians cannot be the new Israel, the text claims, since they "have been living comfortably and quietly since . . . youth."[166]

Nitzaḥon Vetus also names reasons for Jewish conversion similar to those denied by Petrus Alfonsi and described in the Zohar. "One should not be surprised at the bad deeds of an evil Jew who becomes an apostate, because his motives are to enable himself to eat all his heart desires, to give pleasure to his flesh with wine and fornication, to remove from himself the yoke of the kingdom of heaven so that he should fear nothing, to free himself from all the commandments, cleave to sin, and concern himself with worldly pleasures."[167] Implicit here and in the Zohar's condemnation of conversion is the understanding that aligning oneself with the powerful Christian majority was indeed appealing to a disempowered Jewish minority, especially as relations with Christians became less safe. The Zoharic authorship worked to discourage such conversions' appeal.

3

A Moses for the Idolaters

BALAAM AS CHRIST

THIS CHAPTER AND the following one explain a series of passages from *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor) that critique and subvert Christian teachings about Christ's death, his ascension, and the fate of his physical body. Within these passages, the Zohar provides its most comprehensive negations of Christianity by deconstructing the sacred narratives at the religion's heart, its theological teachings, and even its ritual practices. Zohar 3:193b–194b, presented in the following chapter, describes an action-filled episode about a man who claims to be more than he is, flies in the air, and dies at the hands of righteous Jews. Subsequently, his body disappears and is transformed into sorcerous talismans.

Attacking Christ's ascension was crucial to Judaism's defense against Christian religious domination. For Jews and Christians alike, the ascension is no mere upward movement. Rather, both communities take it to represent physically the claim of Jesus' divinity, since Christians assert that Jesus (unlike other heavenly ascenders such as Enoch and Elijah) ascends to sit at the right hand of the Father. Matthew 26:64 states, "You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven."[1] Without the journey to heaven, no divine enthronement is possible. These paired beliefs lie at the core of Christian self-understanding. Even modern Christian theologians consider the ascension, its mystery, and its meaning critical to their arguments regarding the Church's role in the world. Douglas Farrow writes, "It was not with the resurrection or on the road to Emmaus that Jesus' link with his people became inscrutable and enigmatic. Only with his establishment at the right hand of God—'separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens'—

did ecclesial being become possible. . . . When we want to think about the church we are therefore obliged to think about the ascension."[2]

Medieval Spanish Jews were well aware of ascension teachings and their implications for claims of Christ's divinity. Jesus' ascension and enthronement are frequent topics in *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest), which lampoons ascension doctrine by asking, "If you will say . . . that the Messiah rose to the heavens with two perfect, non-deficient natures, so that he rose to the throne and sat with the Father who had every perfection. . . . Whence did he carry up his food and drink to the heavens. . . . In addition . . . a human being has need of a toilet."[3] The same text asks, "You said that he ascended to the firmament sitting on the right of the Most High. Inform me: did his body and his human nature ascend to the heavens in order to sit on the right of God, or not? If you say yes, you have made God united with human nature, and the human nature is on the right."[4] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) also attacks Christian ascension claims, bluntly stating, "Everyone knows that it was before he died and became hidden from people that he was not esteemed, while after his death people erred by following him and thinking that he ascended to heaven."[5]

The Zohar's reinvention of Jesus' ascension and death similarly seeks to demolish claims of Christ's divinity. However, unlike *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*'s polemic rebuttals, the Zohar attacks Christianity with narrative deconstruction. As with other passages in which the Zohar seeks to undermine Christian claims in order to support those of its Jewish audience, the text only alludes to Jesus. Instead of directly referencing him, it employs the gentile prophet Balaam from Numbers 22–24 as a code for Christ by reworking literary and oral traditions about both characters.

The resulting correlation is not simple. The Zohar offers its reader a character neither fully Christ nor fully Balaam. Instead, it merges the two men into a kaleidoscopic Balaam/Christ, a Christ/Balaam, or a Balaam reimagined to intersect with Christianity. The text tantalizes readers with hints that call Christ and Christian teachings constantly to mind. It alludes to the Acts 1 narrative in which Christ rises into the sky until hidden by clouds, to the Holy Spirit's descent as a dove, to the Stilling of the Storm narrative from Luke 8:22–25, and more. In addition, it refers to characteristics that Jews—but not Christians—associated with Jesus, such as arrogance, eloquence, and misidentification as a great prophet.

Invoking these stories, which have little to do with Balaam but much to do with the Christ of medieval literature and art, allows the Zoharic au-

thorship to deconstruct and critique Christian claims without overtly challenging the dominant power of Western Europe. In the following pages, I discuss the character Balaam's unique suitability for his conflation with Christ in the Zohar; identify the main medieval source texts for the Zohar's Balaam-as-Christ narratives; and interpret the Zohar's longest narrative regarding Balaam, paying greatest attention to the passages that precede and describe his death. For the sake of brevity, I will not review every Zoharic text that mentions Balaam, but rather will focus on passages in which Balaam's Christ-like aspects take precedence over his Balaam-like ones to reveal the Zohar's contestations of Christian tradition.

Balaam: Origins and Sources

Choosing the gentile prophet Balaam to represent Christ is an original, yet perhaps unsurprising, move by the Zoharic authorship. Historically, both Jews and Christians struggled with interpreting Balaam's meaning as a gentile prophet who speaks the word of God.[6] Many scholars have observed that ambiguity regarding Balaam is encoded into the Hebrew Bible itself.[7] The main part of his story, including the famous incident in which his ass sees an angel invisible to its rider, appears in Numbers 22–24. There, the Moabite king Balaq, worried about the Israelites approaching his borders, hires Balaam, son of Be'or, to curse the approaching army. At first reluctant, Balaam is swayed by the offer of a reward and given divine permission to go to Moab on the condition that he follow God's command and bless the Israelites rather than curse them. The story that follows is a humorous illustration of divine omnipresence, as Balaq moves Balaam from place to place in the hope that the change in location will produce the desired curse on the Israelites, rather than the blessings that Balaam continues to deliver. Ultimately, Balaam predicts Israel's triumph over its enemies, including Edom, then returns home.

In the biblical narrative, Balaam is not particularly villainous. He does no harm to Israel, and indeed predicts the Israelites' victory in prophetic statements to which both Jews and Christians have attributed messianic import. Everything he does is according to divine decree. When the story continues in Numbers 25 with the priest Pinḥas' dramatic killing of an Israelite man and a Midianite woman engaging in illicit sexual and religious relations (part of the infamous Ba'al Pe'or incident, in which Israel-

ite men defiled themselves by having relations with foreign women and worshipping the women's god), Balaam is nowhere to be found.[8] His next appearance is a brief death scene in Numbers 31, in which Israelites kill him along with five kings of Midian. "They killed among (*al*) their slain . . . five kings of Midian, and also killed Balaam son of Be'or with the sword" (Numbers 31:8). His death is recorded almost as an afterthought. Yet in Numbers 31:16 Moses claims that Balaam was at fault in the Ba'al Pe'or incident, though the narrative never mentions him at the scene, blaming the seductive foreign women instead. Even within the Numbers passages, Balaam's nature is in dispute.

Other biblical texts denigrate Balaam, further confusing his character. Deuteronomy 23:5–6 claims that Balaam did curse the Israelites, but that God turned the curse into a blessing, saying that the Moabites "hired Balaam son of Be'or from Petor Aram-Naharayim to curse you, but the Lord your God did not wish to listen to Balaam. And the Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the Lord your God loves you" (Deuteronomy 23:5–6). Joshua 24:9–10 reiterates Deuteronomy's perspective that Balaam did seek to curse the Israelites but that God protected them from his wickedness. Joshua 13:22 recounts Balaam's death in the battle with the Midianite kings, dissociating him from legitimate prophecy by labeling him a diviner (*qosem*), rather than as a man who legitimately speaks with God.

From a religious reader's perspective, the biblical Balaam is an ambiguous and troubling character. From a scholarly perspective, biblical attitudes toward Balaam shift over time, a change connected to evolving ideas about the exclusivity of Israelite prophecy that lead to increased emphasis on Balaam's negative and unprophetic characteristics, such as his greed.[9] For medieval readers of the Bible, both Jewish and Christian, Balaam's contradictory nature was a topic of great interest because it engaged ideas about Israelite and gentile relationships with God and prophecy. Interpreting Balaam's lofty pronouncements from Numbers 22–24 was important for both groups, who deployed them in ways that often involved one group condemning the other.

A large body of postbiblical writings on Balaam exists.[10] In general, early Tannaitic texts view Balaam more positively, and later Amoraic works portray him more negatively.[11] Common associations with Balaam in rabbinic works include greed, haughtiness, and magical practices that often involve sexual behaviors like bestiality.[12] However, rabbinic works also de-

scribe him as a prophet and diviner.[13] For this study, the most important premedieval text regarding Balaam's status as a prophet is Sifre Deuteronomy 357, an ancient work perhaps redacted in the third century.[14] It interprets Deuteronomy 34:10, "And never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses," by using the qualifying phrase, "in Israel," to suggest that a prophet like Moses *did* arise among the gentile nations, and that this prophet was Balaam. I forgo an extensive textual review to focus first on scholarly opinions regarding the rabbinic Balaam's relation to Christianity and Christ, then on source texts for the Zohar's authors that involve both Balaam and Jesus.

Balaam as Jesus: A Zoharic Innovation

Balaam's presentation as a legitimate gentile prophet in texts like Sifre Deuteronomy 357, combined with strong rabbinic condemnations of his character, have provoked reflection on whether rabbinic literature employs him as a discreet means of discussing Christ. Although nineteenth-century scholars suggested that rabbinic literature's Balaam provided a way for Jews to think about Jesus, twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars generally agree with Ephraim Urbach's conclusion that these older views are incorrect.[15] Babylonian Talmud Gitin 56b–57a, in which Titus, Balaam, and Jesus (all of whom are understood as especially successful harmers of Jews) are identified separately, along with their punishments in the afterlife, provides an excellent prooftext for dissociating the two characters. Balaam's punishment is described as boiling eternally in a vat of semen, presumably for inciting Israelites to sexual relations with foreign women in the Ba'al Pe'or incident.[16]

However, that rabbinic literature deals with Balaam and Christ as two distinct characters does not mean that this literature disengages the rabbinic Balaam from Jewish views of Christianity. Judith Baskin has noted that the trend toward increasingly portraying Balaam as wicked grows alongside Jewish and Christian polemic's development, concluding that the gentile prophet represents a variety of Israel's enemies in rabbinic literature.[17] Baskin writes, "To reject a strict identification of Balaam with Jesus does not mean that the intent of some rabbinic commentary on Balaam was neither polemical nor anti-Christian . . . many comments on Balaam were doubtless influenced by a knowledge of Christian claims and exegetical teachings. . . . Balaam, as a gentile, could not easily represent

the Jewish Jesus, but he could certainly stand for those who attempted to appropriate scripture while preaching the Incarnation, the abrogation of Mosaic law, and the victory of the 'New Israel.' "[18] Similarly, Shaul Magid suggests that the gentile prophet increasingly represented non-Jewish religions—especially Christianity.[19]

That Urbach, Baskin, Magid, and earlier scholars felt obliged to consider the possibility that rabbinic literature's Balaam may have alluded to Jesus indicates that there is a body of sufficiently ambiguous, similar material regarding both characters to provoke the interest of informed readers. The Zohar's authors, who were also strong readers, noticed these similarities as well. It is likely that the same texts that inspired modern scholarly debate over Jesus and Balaam's connections in Jewish texts also inspired the Zoharic reworking of Balaam as an allusion to Christ. Whether or not they understood rabbinic writings on Balaam to refer to Jesus, the Zoharic authorship was sufficiently inspired by such works that it reinvented these characters as a single figure that provided a potent tool for critiquing Christianity and Christ. In this sense, the Zoharic authors' use of Balaam resembles their use of Rachel described in chapter 1. It is as if, scouring previous Jewish literature, they discovered a character uniquely fit for their purpose.

I am not the first scholar to notice the Zohar's Christlike Balaam. Daniel Matt and Elliot Wolfson both have suggested that Balaam may represent Christ in the Zohar, based mainly on textual characterizations of Balaam as an unholy prophet and sorcerer.[20] Shaul Magid has taken a more cautious view of Balaam, suggesting that the Zohar demonizes him, a strategy that "fits nicely into its [the Zohar's] more general demonization of the 'other,' with the Christian 'other' being a primary target"—a view similar to other scholars' conclusions regarding the rabbinic Balaam.[21]

Much of this scholarly speculation regarding the Zoharic Balaam is based on Zohar 2:21b–22a, which is part of the *Midrash ha-Ne'elam* (The Mystical Midrash), one of the Zohar's earliest sections.[22] The passage's starting point is Sifre Deuteronomy 357's assertion of Balaam's prophetic character. It begins by considering whether there can be truth to the claim that Balaam (understood as Christ) is the gentile version of Moses. Although the historical Jesus was not gentile, the Zohar considers Christ gentile by association with his later, non-Jewish followers. The passage then moves quickly to a more general critique of Jewish-Christian power dynamics.

Sefer ha-Zohar 2:21b–22a

Rav Dimi said: And behold, it is written, "And never again did there arise in Israel another prophet like Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:10). But Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: In Israel, one did not arise, but among the nations of the world one did arise. And who was he? Balaam. He [Rabbi Yoḥanan] said to him: Surely, what you say is right. He was silent. When Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai came, they asked him about this word. He opened and said: Black resin mixed with precious balsam?[23] God forbid! Rather, surely it is thus—among the nations of the world one did arise, and who was he? Balaam. Moses' deeds were high and Balaam's were low. Moses did deeds with the holy crown of the supernal king above, and Balaam did deeds with the lower crown that is not holy, below. And in that manner, actually, it is written, "And the children of Israel killed Balaam son of Be'or, the diviner (*ha-qosem*), with the sword" (Joshua 13:22). And if it should arise in your mind that he was greater, go ask his ass!

Rabbi Yosi came and kissed his hands. He said: Behold, the coveting of my heart has gone away! From this I conclude that there is high and low, right and left, compassion and judgment, Israel and idolaters. Israel does deeds with high, holy crowns; idolaters with low crowns that are not holy. These [Israel] are of the right and those [idolaters] are of the left. And so the high prophets are separated from the low prophets, the prophets of holiness from the prophets that are not of holiness. Rabbi Yehudah said: In this manner was Moses separated from all the prophets of high, holy prophecy, [and] so was Balaam separated from the rest of the prophets and sorcerers with prophecy that was not holy, below. And so Moses was above and Balaam was below, and thus, level from level, there was separation between them.

Rabbi Yoḥanan said that Rabbi Yitzḥak said: Moses was concerned and he said, Perhaps, God forbid, Israel will be destroyed from this difficult work! As it is written: "And he saw their labor" (Exodus 2:11). Therefore, "And an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, [from amid the bush,] and he looked, and behold—the bush burned with fire [but the bush was not consumed]!" (Exodus 3:2). That is to say, they [Israel] are enslaved with service, but [like] the bush they are not consumed. Worthy are Israel, for the Blessed

> Holy One has separated them from all the peoples and called them His children! As it is written: "You are children of the Lord your God" (Deuteronomy 14:1).[24]

The rabbis of the Zohar's mystical brotherhood are so troubled by Sifre Deuteronomy 357's teaching, which seems to imply equivalence between Moses and the non-Israelite Balaam, that they fall silent in dismay. When their leader Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai arrives, he alleviates their anxiety by explaining that Balaam was not truly a prophet, but rather a powerful servant of unholy forces—a counter-Moses rather than a fellow-Moses.[25] Instead of referring to Balaam as a man who hears God's words, as in Numbers' version of his story, Rabbi Shimon undermines Balaam's divine connection by referring to him as a diviner (*qosem*), as in Joshua 13:22.

Rabbi Shimon further diminishes Balaam's relationship with God by reminding the companions that Balaam's ass was better able to perceive holiness than he was. This explanation debunks the notion of Balaam as Moses' equal, while the next text section emphasizes the difference between Moses' holiness and Balaam's lack of it. In each comparison, Moses is placed on the side of holiness and Balaam is ascribed qualities that Kabbalistic texts commonly relate to the Other Side, such as unholiness and idolatry. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, the Zohar often relates Christians and Christianity to the Other Side's evil powers. This context provides a strong hint that readers should understand this unholy "prophet" of the Other Side as a reference to Christ, who (from a Jewish perspective) founded a religion like Moses.

When Rabbi Shimon has finished revealing Moses and Balaam/Christ's differences, Rabbi Yosi responds with relief. As discussed in chapter 2, the medieval authors of the Zohar and other Jewish polemic works understood coveting Christian privilege, power, and lack of obligation to the commandments as an especially troublesome motivation for conversion. Here, revealing the gentile prophet as an unholy agent of the Other Side successfully negates the dangerous attraction to Christianity that Rabbi Yosi's coveting indicates.

The passage then takes up Moses' concern for his people's difficulties. Though the context of Exodus 2:11 is ancient Egypt, it takes little imagination to read Moses' statement as a dual reference to the biblical narrative *and* to thirteenth-century Spanish Jews' existence as a minority among an increasingly hostile, dominant majority. The Zoharic authorship expresses

dismay at Jewish suffering under Christian rule by comparing medieval Jews' situation both to the Israelites' slavery in Egypt and to the burning bush being engulfed in flames. However, the Zohar asserts that Jews, like the burning bush and the Israelite slaves, will ultimately survive without being destroyed because of their special relationship with God.

While the passage's overall themes engage Jewish and Christian relations and compare Moses to Christ, further textual details also support this interpretation and indicate the discussion's underlying topic to the reader. First, the confusion over Balaam/Christ's status in relation to Moses engages Christian claims of a new, divine revelation that supersedes the previous revelation to Moses, as discussed in chapter 1. The statement, "Worthy are Israel, for the Blessed Holy One has separated them from all the peoples and called them His children!" and Deuteronomy 14:1 at the passage's end, also refute this claim of a Christian relationship with God that supersedes the Jewish one by asserting Israelites' unique status as God's children. Grouping Balaam with other sorcerers as a uniquely powerful (though still unholy) magician also refutes Christian supersessionist claims. Understanding Christ as a magician rather than as a divine messianic figure is a Jewish tactic for diminishing Jesus' authority so old that it is recorded in the gospel narratives themselves.[26] Mark 3:22, Luke 11:19, and Matthew 10:25 all describe accusations that Jesus' miraculous powers derived from the demon Beelzebub and so were unholy magical acts, rather than holy works of God.[27]

Medieval Jews also were familiar with the explanation of Jesus as a powerful magician. Peter Schäfer has demonstrated that many Jewish texts from late-third- and early-fourth-century Sasanian Babylonia contain detailed counterarguments to gospel narratives. Some of these counterarguments are recorded in the Babylonian Talmud, though this text's thirteenth-century censorship resulted in many such passages' excision, rendering its anti-Christian complaints difficult to trace.[28] For example, Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 104b contains a discussion of a character known as the son of Stada or the son of Pandira, who is born to a woman named Miriam from an adulterous relationship and who learned magic in Egypt, which he practiced by making marks on his skin. A similar character appears in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 67a in a discussion of the appropriate punishment for those who seduced others to practice idolatry.

Educated medieval Jews were very familiar with the Talmud and would have encountered these texts. They also incorporated the idea of Jesus as a sorcerer mistaken for a prophet or a god into their own writings. For exam-

ple, *Milḥemet Mitzvah* (Obligatory War), a mid-thirteenth-century polemic work associated with a forced debate between Jews and friars in Narbonne, argued that listening to Christian sermons was a transgression of Jewish law, since it violated the commandment not to listen to a sorcerer or his followers. Therefore, asserted this work, attending such sermons should not be required of Jews by Christians.[29] The popular Jewish counter-gospel *Toledot Yeshu* (The Generations of Jesus) (about which I shall say more below) also famously characterized Jesus as a powerful magician.

Beyond the familiar accusation of sorcery, other textual allusions hint at Zohar 2:21b–22a's engagement with Christ and Christianity. One of these is the passage's humorous mention of Balaam's ass. Medieval Jews knew the story of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem while mounted on an ass (as described in Matthew 21:1–5 and John 12:14–15). The association with riding an ass to do God's work is one of the reasons Christians historically understood Balaam as a prefiguration of Christ. Medieval Jews and Christians both saw images of Jesus and Balaam riding asses in public Church art. For example, the twelfth-century facade of the Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard in southern France features a prominent depiction of Christ's entry into Jerusalem atop a donkey on the same facade as a depiction of Balaam atop his ass.[30] *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest), a popular Jewish polemic work widely known in thirteenth-century Spain, asks, "Do you not know that Jesus said to Peter: 'Go and bring me that donkey to ride upon.' I wonder how you can say about your God that he rode a donkey."[31] Balaam's relationship with his ass was also highlighted in the Babylonian Talmud, which asks in Sanhedrin 105b, "Since he did not know the mind of his beast, how could he know the mind of the Most High?"—a critique similar to the Zohar's.

Finally, the Deuteronomy 14 citation at the passage's end reinforces the message that Christ and Christianity are Zohar 2:21b–22a's intended topics. Deuteronomy 14:1 reads in entirety, "You are children of the Lord your God. You shall not cut yourself and shall not make baldness between your eyes for the dead." Read in the context of Jewish perceptions of medieval European Christianity, cutting oneself and shaving one's head "for the dead" allude to monastic practices of self-flagellation and tonsure. [32] Since medieval Jews (like modern ones) rejected claims of Jesus' resurrection and divinity, understanding him merely as a deceased human being, it is plausible that the Zohar's authors would have understood these Christian practices as rituals performed in service to the dead—an interpretation that the Zohar's inclu-

sion of this particular Deuteronomy verse in this particular passage strongly suggests. And, as shall be seen, medieval Jews both knew of and were disgusted by Christian ritual practices involving dead persons considered holy.

Considering the Zoharic authorship's intimate familiarity with the Hebrew Bible, it is unlikely that the text's composers would have included Deuteronomy 14:1 by accident. It is far more plausible that they selected this verse specifically to emphasize and expand their negative commentary regarding Jewish-Christian relations. Emphasizing this point, Deuteronomy 14 continues with a list of permitted and forbidden food animals, providing a foundation for the distinctly Jewish practice of kashrut. Like the Zoharic passage in which it is cited, this chapter of Deuteronomy separates Jews and gentiles.

A Flying Balaam: Sources for the Zohar's Reinvented Ascension

Although Zohar 2:21b–22a is a fascinating text that connects Balaam with Jesus, it does not operate on the same level as the complex, incisive, and informed critique of Christianity presented in the Zohar's version of Balaam's death. This longer text, Zohar 3:193b–194b, presented in the following chapter, reinvents Jewish narrative and textual accounts of Balaam and Jesus along the lines of Jewish folklore. Eli Yassif has described Jewish folklore's "multiple existence," in which various stories and motifs are recombined to suit their teller's time, place, and purpose. "Each version of the story should therefore be regarded as an autonomous composition that arrived in a particular community and underwent a process of acceptance and adaptation to its worldview and the issues on its cultural agenda."[33] For the Zohar's authors, telling the story of Balaam's death in a way that allowed them to critique Jesus' death and the Christian claims surrounding it was a form of resistance to Christian domination that secretively supported Jewish claims, dignity, and identity.

The Zohar's flying Balaam narrative has many sources. It cites Sifre Deuteronomy 357 and engages Balaam-related themes from the Babylonian Talmud, such as the villain's greed, use of sorcery, and physical characteristics. It also draws on the rich Jewish literary tradition involving the gentile prophet. These multiple sources reflect the Zohar's nature as a text that Kabbalistically reinvents prior Jewish traditions. I argue that the Zohar's main sources for its reworked version of Balaam's death are the medi-

eval midrashic work Numbers Rabbah's account of Balaam's demise (along with other similar narratives) and *Toledot Yeshu*, a Jewish counter-gospel that inverts, lampoons, and ridicules Christianity's foundational narrative.

Jews in medieval Spain were demonstrably familiar with both these works, and both works bear striking resemblances to the Zohar's death-of-Balaam narrative, while each also contains unique aspects of the story. At the same time, both bear strong enough resemblances to each other that combining them into a single narrative was a natural interpretive progression. The most important commonality between the main sources, at least for the Zoharic narrative's purpose, is the theme of a villain who flies. Since one story involves a flying Balaam and the other a flying Jesus, merging them into a single narrative also provides a covert way for the Zoharic authorship to discuss Christ, a strategy fitting both for the Zohar's character as a symbolic and allusive text and its nature as a hidden transcript of Jewish resistance to Christian domination. Indeed, Eli Yassif has described *Toledot Yeshu*'s various versions (among which it is not a great stretch to include the Zohar's death-of-Balaam story) as "independent negotiations through which medieval Jewish communities expressed their attitudes toward issues central to their lives and toward the dominance of Christianity."[34]

Numbers Rabbah is a medieval midrashic text that Ḥananel Mack has proven emerged in southern France close to the time that the first identifiably Kabbalistic literary works began to appear in the second half of the twelfth century; Mack also revealed Numbers Rabbah's importance as a work of imaginative anti-Christian rhetoric. [35] Numbers Rabbah contains two passages concerning Balaam relevant to the Zoharic text. Numbers Rabbah 20:1 explains that God gave the world's nations opportunities equal to Israel's, including a great prophet like Moses, but that instead of being compassionate like Israel's prophets, this gentile (identified as Balaam) sought to kill people without cause. Sifre Deuteronomy 357's influence on the story is obvious. The second passage, Numbers Rabbah 22:5, recounts the tale of Balaam's death, in which he magically flies in the air along with the kings of Midian until a sacred artifact with God's holy name written on it causes him to fall to his death below. Balaam's presentation in Numbers Rabbah is significant, especially since Mack's work has established this midrash as an important intermediary source between classical rabbinic literature and early Kabbalah, thus for the Zohar as well.[36] Early southern French Kabbalah is, of course, significant for classical Kabbalah's Spanish development in the thirteenth century.

Numbers Rabbah 20:1

"And Balaq son of Tzipor saw" (Numbers 22:2). Thus says scripture: "The Rock! His work is perfect, for all his ways are justice" (Deuteronomy 32:4). The Blessed Holy One did not allow the idolaters an excuse for fault-finding about the world that is coming, saying: You rejected us. What did the Blessed Holy One do? Just as he raised up kings and sages and prophets for Israel, so he raised [them] up for the idolaters. He raised up Solomon as king over Israel and over all the earth, and so he did for Nebuchadnezzar. One built the Temple and said many songs and supplications, and one destroyed it and reviled and blasphemed, and said: "I will ascend on the heights of a cloud [I will be like the Most High]" (Isaiah 14:14). He gave wealth to David and received the House [Temple] for His name. He gave wealth to Haman and received a whole people for slaughter. Every distinction Israel received, you find that the nations also received. As it is found that Moses was raised up for Israel and Balaam for the idolaters.

See what [difference exists] between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the idolaters! The prophets of Israel caution Israel [away] from transgressions, as it is said: "And you, Son of Man, I place you prophet [to the House of Israel, and when you hear a word from My mouth you shall caution them from Me]" (Ezekiel 3:17).[37] But the prophet who rose from the nations produced a breach to destroy human beings from the world. And not only that, but all the prophets [of Israel] were of a compassionate nature toward Israel and toward idolaters. For thus says Jeremiah: "My heart moans like flutes for Moab" (Jeremiah 48:36). And thus [says] Ezekiel: "Son of Man, take up a lamentation for Tyre" (Ezekiel 27:2). But this merciless one arose to uproot a whole nation for no reason at all. Therefore, the section on Balaam was written to make known why the Blessed Holy One removed the Holy Spirit from the idolaters—for this one arose from them and see what he did!

This passage makes the theological argument that God treated Israel and idolaters equally, giving them both chances at power, wealth, and prophecy. In each case, Israel used its opportunities well, but the idolaters used theirs for violence and arrogance. Given the text's chronological and geographical contexts, the passage can be read as commentary on Jewish-Christian relations. As discussed in previous chapters, medi-

eval Jews associated idolatry and violence with Christians. And, as shall be seen below, Jews historically associated Jesus with arrogance. Nebuchadnezzar's statement, "I will ascend on the heights of a cloud [I will be like the Most High]" (Isaiah 14:14), recalls Christian teachings on Christ's ascension, heavenly enthronement, and divine identification—teachings that are the main focus of the Zohar's reinvented Balaam narrative—and (not coincidentally) ideas well known to medieval Jews, as shall be discussed. Although Nebuchadnezzar's statement, "I will be like the Most High," is not included in the passage or indicated with the typical phrase *ve-gomer* (et cetera), Jewish readers familiar with the Hebrew Bible would have known how to complete the verse and understood its significance. The idea of a foreign prophet who urges Israel to transgress its laws corresponds to Christian claims regarding the abrogation of Jewish law discussed in chapter 1. Such urging toward transgression is alluded to in this text when it describes how Balaam "produced a breach," a phrase presumably referring to Numbers 25's Ba'al Pe'or incident, for which Numbers 31:16 blames Balaam.

The passage's focus on Israelite prophets' compassionate pronouncements regarding gentiles also challenges Christian claims of exclusive divine relationship, another topic familiar from chapter 1. The passage implies that even though God favored the Israelites, he cared for gentiles as well, giving them numerous chances for success and even sending prophets both Israelite and gentile to urge them toward righteousness. However, the passage ends with the claim that Israel eventually received exclusive divine favoritism, since the nations and their prophets' bad behavior caused God to remove his favor from them. The underlying message is that while God did indeed grant the Christians a certain amount of favor, they squandered it at every opportunity and eventually lost it altogether. This theme of Christians (and their symbolic referents) willingly giving away divine favor is also found in Zohar 1:192a–b, in which the violent angel Sama'el, guardian of the Edomites (and therefore of the Christians), refuses the Torah when it is offered to him and instead gives it away to Israel.[38]

Although this text's anti-Christian claims extend beyond Balaam, who does not appear as a clearly defined Christlike figure in this context, a passage like this one would have suggested his fitness for such an application to the Zoharic authorship. The following passage is also significant for Balaam's Zoharic development, not because it includes him in an anti-Christian argument but rather because of its similarities to *Toledot Yeshu*, a text that does deal directly with Christ.

Numbers Rabbah 22:5

Of Moses, it is said: "The righteous shall rejoice when he sees vengeance" (Psalms 58:11)—vengeance upon Midian. "He shall wash his feet with the blood of the wicked" (Psalm 58:11)—this is Balaam. Moses said to Pinḥas and to the men of his host: I know that the wicked Balaam is there to receive his reward. Before the wolf comes to the flock, lay out a trap for him. If you see that wicked one doing sorcery and flying in the air of the world, show him the high priest's front plate (*tzitz*) that has written upon it "Holy to the Lord" (Exodus 28:36), and he will fall, and they will kill him.[39] "And they killed the kings of Midian, upon (*al*) their slain" (Numbers 31:8). For they were doing sorceries with Balaam, and they were flying, but when they saw the plate they fell "upon their slain."

Although Numbers 31:8 generally is read, "among (*al*) their slain," the word *al* can also be translated as "upon." Here, *al* anchors a narrative interpretation in which the sorcerous Balaam uses his magical powers to fly in the air with the Midianite kings. When Pinḥas, the priestly hero of the Ba'al Pe'or incident, shows the villains the high priest's headdress's front plate (*tzitz*), upon which is written the divine Name (the Tetragrammaton), the Name's sacred power defeats their magic and they literally fall from the sky onto their own slain forces, dying in the process. Many elements of the Zohar's flying Balaam are present in this narrative, including Balaam's flight, his deadly fall from the sky, the high priest's front plate, and Pinḥas's involvement in Balaam's demise. Nothing in this text, however, demonstrates a clear connection to Christianity. It is only this story's thematic echo of Jesus' flight in *Toledot Yeshu* that allows the Zohar's authors to combine the two works and tell their new version of the story.

The themes of Balaam's iniquity and his flight in the air are also present in other medieval texts. Parallels to both these Numbers Rabbah passages can be found in midrash Tanḥuma on Numbers 22:2, located in the section on *parshat* Balaq. Although dating Tanḥuma literature is difficult, these passages may have been redacted in the early medieval period, making them possible additional sources for the Zohar's Balaam narrative.[40] They do not differ significantly from Numbers Rabbah's presentation of similar material, and many scholars consider Tanḥuma the textual basis for Numbers Rabbah—particularly for Numbers Rabbah's second half.[41] In fact, Balaam's magical flight from Pinḥas was an ancient theme

by the Middle Ages, though it seems to have received special attention at that time. It is mentioned as early as Targum Yerushalmi on Numbers 31. In this venerable work, Pinḥas flies into the air in pursuit of Balaam, eventually killing him in revenge for the Ba'al Pe'or episode.

The Chronicles of Moses, a nonrabbinic work of unknown authorship and origin that probably dates to the tenth or eleventh centuries, also features a story of Balaam magically flying into the air to escape the Israelite soldiers chasing him.[42] There, Pinḥas and his father Eleazar pronounce the divine Name, breaking Balaam's spell and sending him tumbling to earth, where they kill him with a sword (following Numbers 31:8).[43] This version of Balaam's flight may have been available to the Zohar's authors, though its accessibility to them is not as certain as Numbers Rabbah's.

Balaam's name also was used as an insult among medieval Jews of France and Spain. A letter from the rabbis of Lunel and Narbonne that circulated among Jewish communities during the Maimonidean controversy of 1232 described anti-Maimonidean Jews as followers of Balaam. This description accompanied the accusation that anti-Maimonidean Jews had turned over Jewish books to Christian friars for burning.[44] Taken together, these medieval source materials leave an overall impression that Balaam drew special attention as a relevant figure for the Jews of southern France and northern Spain during the early phases of destabilized Jewish-Christian relations in the region.

A Flying Jesus: Sources for the Zohar's Reinvented Ascension

The other main text relevant to the Zohar's reinvented Balaam narrative, as well as to conflict between Jews and Christians in general, is *Toledot Yeshu*. Like the flying Balaam material, *Toledot Yeshu* is composed of texts and traditions of ancient origin that remained popular through the Middle Ages and beyond. Its proliferation was often linked to periods of Jewish persecution and unstable relations between Jews and Christians.[45] Eli Yassif writes of *Toledot Yeshu*, "It was regarded by the society that told the story as part of its cultural property, and its members therefore gave themselves permission to change it and adapt it to their own life and beliefs."[46] Both Yassif and Paola Tartakoff agree that this incendiary narrative often was tailored to the circumstances in which it was told, its details changing to accommodate specific historical circumstances and Christian chal-

lenges to Judaism.[47] In some regards, the Zohar's flying Balaam narrative can be understood as a covert retelling of a particular section of *Toledot Yeshu*—the aerial duel between Yeshu (Jesus) and another Jew with magical powers.

Much of *Toledot Yeshu*'s core material can be traced to Babylonian Jewish communities around the eighth century C.E., with various versions coming together after the ninth century in Europe.[48] Individual segments are older still, and are known from the third-century Christian theologian Origen's work *Contra Celsum* (Against Celsus).[49] The Christian theologian Tertullian also knew some Jewish assertions regarding Jesus similar to the *Toledot Yeshu* material, and among Jewish sources the Babylonian Talmud records ideas about Jesus related to those found in this notorious work.[50] These Talmudic texts probably appeared more vividly prior to that work's thirteenth-century persecution and censorship.[51]

Toledot Yeshu was known in Europe by the first half of the ninth century, and was mentioned both by Agobard, bishop of Lyon, and by his successor Amulo. These two men's writings comprise the first evidence of a fully developed *Toledot Yeshu* narrative.[52] While it is unclear whether the bishops possessed a written *Toledot Yeshu* or were simply familiar with oral versions, Agobard's complaints about the story make clear that medieval French Jews were telling versions of *Toledot Yeshu*, both among themselves and in the presence of Christians. Agobard writes, "Their elders fabricated all these things and they themselves read them aloud with stupid obstinacy."[53] The famous eleventh-century French Jewish exegete Rashi also knew a version.[54] Although little evidence of *Toledot Yeshu* exists between the ninth and twelfth centuries, by the thirteenth century it seems to have developed into a complete narrative similar to what is known today as the "Strasbourg version" (named for a famous manuscript), and to have become extremely widespread during the High and Late Middle Ages. Almost one thousand manuscripts survive.[55]

The Hebrew record of the 1240 Paris Talmud disputation alludes twice to *Toledot Yeshu*, and around 1278 Raymond Martini translated part of it in his famous anti-Jewish work *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* (Dagger of Faith against the Moors and the Jews).[56] The work remained important in Spain into the fourteenth century, when the convert Abner of Burgos (Alfonso of Valladolid) cited it in his anti-Jewish polemic.[57] It was also used in fourteenth-century attempts to re-Judaize apostates, a fact known from inquisitorial records of such events.[58] Paola Tartakoff has demonstrated that medieval Spanish Jews deployed *Toledot Yeshu* in a variety of settings.[59]

She documents its use both as an anticonversion narrative (making it relevant to the Zoharic authors' concerns) and as a narrative for inspiring converts' reversion to Judaism.[60] Tartakoff also provides evidence that the *Toledot*'s tales were told orally in Jewish homes at night in the presence of friends, women, and possibly even children.[61] However, *Toledot Yeshu* was known to be a dangerous text and also was used to provoke Christians. A fourteenth-century Aragonese inquisitorial record details the case of a convert who reverted to Judaism and wished to die as a Jewish martyr. Jewish acquaintances assured the man that simply speaking a few of *Toledot Yeshu*'s claims in Christian clergymen's presence would be sufficient provocation to get him burned at the stake—a punishment that may help to explain why the Zohar's authors preferred to vilify "Balaam."[62]

Allowing for variations among different versions, the following points summarize *Toledot Yeshu*'s main ideas: (1) that Jesus was born of an illegitimate sexual relationship between human beings, (2) that he was a proud and arrogant youth, (3) that he gained magical powers by stealing the divine Name from the Temple, (4) that he used his powers for self-aggrandizement and to lead Jews astray from proper religion, (5) that Jewish authorities empowered a man named Judah (Judas) with the Name so that he could combat Jesus in a dramatic aerial battle that ended with both of them falling from the sky, (6) that Jesus escaped but returned to Jerusalem on a donkey claiming to be the messiah, and (7) that he was eventually captured and put to death for his crimes by hanging from a cabbage stalk.

Further, the work tells of conflict surrounding the disappearance of Jesus' body (which was often described as hidden in a waterway), with Jesus' apostles claiming his resurrection but Jews knowing he was truly dead. Following these events, Jesus' followers become hostile to Jews, who they claim killed their messiah. Great conflict within Israel follows, which (depending on the version) is resolved by Jews prompting a separation between the two religions by means of an undercover Jewish agent claiming to represent Jesus' will.[63] With such vivid reversals of Christian claims, this document proved an important hidden manuscript of Jewish resistance to Christian power for many hundreds of years.

The portion of this story most significant for the Zohar's Balaam/Christ narrative is, of course, the aerial duel between Jesus and Judas. It is this element of the popular story, which was widespread in the Zoharic authorship's cultural environment, that must have recalled teachings in which Balaam also magically flies and combats Israelites. Similarities be-

tween the two tales suggested a way in which the Zohar's authors could covertly critique Christianity's central claims. In addition, combining the gentile prophet Balaam, who already manifested certain Christlike characteristics in the pre-Zoharic Jewish tradition, with the *Toledot Yeshu*'s Jesus allowed the Zoharic authorship to express an important ideological position regarding Christianity.

According to *Toledot Yeshu*, Jesus was a villain who did profound harm to Judaism, but he was a Jewish villain nonetheless. Being a bad Jew did not exclude him from the Jewish community whose problem he became.[64] However, the Zohar's choice to reinvent the non-Jewish Balaam as a *Toledot Yeshu*–inspired Christ character casts Christianity's foundational figure as a gentile through and through. Instead of reclaiming him as a bad Jew, the Zohar understands Christ as an agent of the Other Side—a gentile magician whose gullible and idolatrous followers mistook him for their own holy prophet. There may even be a concrete connection between the two characters. Some Geniza fragments of *Toledot Yeshu* include Yeshu's claim that his magical powers derive from an ancient book of Balaam's.[65] In any case, this narrative shift from Christ *or* Balaam to Balaam/Christ allows the Zohar to extend its argument beyond *Toledot Yeshu* and offer its readers a more comprehensive denial, rebuttal, and vilification of Christ and Christianity. This rebuttal is presented in the following chapter.

4

The Ascension of Balaam

SUBVERTING CHRISTIAN SACRED STORIES

ZOHAR 3:193B–194B REWORKS Christian ideas regarding Jesus' death, ascension, and divinity in critical and imaginative ways. By crafting a narrative in which Balaam/Christ flies but is unable to reach heaven, is killed, and is left unburied, the Zohar's authors seek to negate theological doctrines at Christianity's heart. Allusions to Christian sacred texts, combined with plot reversals, negations, and subversive deconstructions of the majority's central symbols, come together in a sophisticated strike against the claims upon which medieval Christians based their religious and political domination of Jews.

The following narrative has been edited for focus and length, and divided into topical sections with thematic subheadings.

Sefer ha-Zohar 3:193b–194b

Section 1: Prelude to a Fall

Rabbi Eleazar said: Who killed the wicked Balaam and how was he killed? Rabbi Yitzḥaq said: Pinḥas and his company killed him, as it is written, "They killed upon (*al*) their slain" (Numbers 31:8). And we have learned that in the city of Midian he became capable, with the wisdom of his sorcery, of flying in the air—him and the kings of Midian. And it was only because of the [high priest's headdress's] front-plate of holiness (*tzitz de-qedusha*) and the prayer of Pinḥas, that even they were [killed] upon their slain, as it is written, "upon their slain" (Numbers 31:8). And it is written, "and they [the Israelites] killed Balaam son of Be'or the diviner (*qosem*) with the sword [among (*el*) their slain]" (Joshua 13:22). Rabbi Eleazar said

> to him: All this I know. Rabbi Shimon said: Eleazar, all the words of the wicked Balaam were powerful, and surely the companions have established it, as it is written: "And there did not arise again in Israel a prophet like Moses" (Deuteronomy 34:10). And they said, in Israel, one did not arise, but among the nations of the world one did. And who was he? Balaam. And surely we have established a word. Moses was crowned with supernal crowns, and similarly Balaam was crowned with those crowns; this [Moses'] from the side of holiness and this [Balaam's] from the left side. . . .[1]

In this passage, Rabbi Yitzḥaq introduces Balaam's death-narrative, summarizing a story close to that of Numbers Rabbah 22:5. As in the earlier source, Balaam's flight occurs during Numbers 31:8's battle between the Israelite army and the Midianite kings. Also as in Numbers Rabbah, the phrase "upon (*al*) their slain" inspires the interpretation of Balaam's fall, which is attributed to the priestly "front-plate of holiness" (*tzitz de-qedusha*).[2] (Notably, the holy *tzitz* does not play a part in the Zoharic narrative's continuation.) Balaam is identified as a lowly magical diviner (*qosem*), as in Joshua 13:22, rather than as a gentile prophet who spoke with God—an interpretation implied by the Numbers Rabbah text but not explicitly stated. Yet the Zohar summarizes the story's traditional rendition only to surprise and delight with its reinvention of the tale—a movement heralded when Rabbi Eleazar comments, "All this I know," only to have Rabbi Shimon cite Sifre Deuteronomy 357 and Zohar 2:21b–22a's teachings on Balaam. Rabbi Shimon's words indicate that both Rabbi Eleazar and impatient readers should prepare to learn more.

As in Zohar 2:21b–22a, Zohar 3:193b–194b reinterprets Sifre Deuteronomy's prophetic understanding of Balaam to characterize him not as a holy gentile with powers equivalent to Moses', but rather as the Jewish prophet's mirror-image—a counter-Moses in league with the Other Side. These references and the connection drawn between Balaam and the "Left Side"—associated in Kabbalistic lore with the Other Side—help to indicate that the reader should prepare for a topical shift toward Christianity, since both Zohar 2:21a–b and the term "Other Side" are important to the Zohar's critiques of the majority religion.

Section 2: Arrogance and Deception

> And this is written: "Let a stranger praise you, but not (*ve-lo'*) your [own] mouth" (Proverbs 27:2). And if not (*ve-'im lo*) a stranger, [then]

your [own] mouth. This means nothing but that if it is not known who you are, open your mouth with words of Torah and make known true words of Torah. And then they will praise the opening of your mouth . . . and will know who you are. For no word in the world is made known to human beings except at the time that one opens his mouth. His mouth makes known to human beings who he is.

That wicked Balaam sang his own praise in everything. And therefore their minds were deceived. Thus he deceived and rose above [the other prophets of the world] with his words.[3] Of little words he made much. When he spoke defiled words of those levels, he spoke truth. But that wicked one spoke and praised himself in a concealed way and rose above with his words, so that all who heard thought that he rose above all the prophets of the world, as it is written: "Him who hears the speech of God, and who knows knowledge of the Most High" (Numbers 24:16).[4] What man in the world who heard these words from his mouth would not think there was no faithful prophet like him in the world and that he was truthful; and so he was. "Speech of him who hears the speech of God" (Numbers 24:16)—so it was. "And who knows the knowledge of the Most High" (Numbers 24:16)—so it was. But that wicked one spoke [only] of the [evil] levels to which he cleaved . . .[5]

This portion of the narrative prepares medieval readers to connect Balaam with Christ. The litany of Balaam's sinful behaviors in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 105a–106a does consider Balaam deceitful, but it does not highlight his arrogance.[6] On the other hand, Jesus' arrogance was a well-established tradition in Jewish polemic literature. Christian complaints that Jews considered Jesus arrogant can be found as early as Origen's third-century *Contra Celsum* (Against Celsus).[7] Similarly, *Toledot Yeshu* (The Generations of Jesus) portrayed Jesus arrogantly disrespecting his elders, leading people astray with deceptive teachings, and falsely claiming to be the Davidic Messiah.

Other medieval works discussed Jesus' haughtiness as well. Meir ben Shimon of Narbonne's thirteenth-century polemic *Milḥemet Mitzvah* (Obligatory War) compared Christ to arrogant human beings like the Egyptian Pharoahs who proclaimed themselves gods and were worshipped by their people.[8] Similarly, the late-thirteenth- or early-fourteenth-century *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) applied Isaiah 2:11, "The

haughty eyes of man shall be lowered, and the loftiness of men shall be bowed. And the Lord alone shall be exalted on that day," to Jesus, stating, "Jesus, who exalted and raised himself above all men by claiming to be a god, will then be humbled."[9]

The Zohar's comments regarding speaking words of Torah clearly to make one's status known cohere nicely with Jewish complaints regarding Jesus' many obscure statements about his own status as a man, a messiah, or a son of God—as well as Christian interpretations of such statements. As discussed in chapter 1, medieval Jews were particularly troubled by Christian ideas regarding Jesus' nature as both human and divine. Here, the Zohar obliquely suggests that Jesus could easily have proved his holiness with true Torah teachings, if indeed he had any holiness to prove.

Indeed, the Zohar claims that the words spoken by its villain were true, but that they revealed true information about the evil forces with which Balaam/Christ was associated rather than divine secrets. This technique of deceiving with partial truths corresponds to a more general medieval Jewish critique of Christianity—that Christians used proper texts from the Hebrew Bible improperly for their own ends. Significantly, this argument reverses the common thirteenth-century Christian claim that Jews deliberately misinterpreted their own sacred text. Although the Zohar suggests that Balaam/Christ lied with the truth, it never questions his eloquence. The Kabbalists acknowledge that people thought him a prophet because of the splendid way he spoke.

It is not difficult to see how medieval Jewish readers of the gospels might come to such understandings and use them to denigrate Christianity's messiah. Jesus' carefully ambiguous statements at his trial are good examples of passages that Christians read as Jewish acknowledgments of Jesus' messianic status, but that Jews understood as deceptive and obfuscatory. Matthew 26:63–64 recounts, "Then the high priest said to him, 'I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the son of God.' Jesus said to him, 'You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.' "[10] This passage is crucial for understanding the connection between Christian claims of Christ's ascension and his divinity, since ascending to heaven is a precondition for Jesus' attaining the role of the Son of Man who comes from the clouds. In a similarly ambiguous manner, Luke 22:70 reads, "All of them asked, 'Are you, then, the Son of God?' He said to them, 'You say that I am.' " Luke and Matthew are among the Christian sacred writings most familiar to the Zohar's authors.[11]

Section 3: An Other God Revisited

"Who hears the speech of God"—*the* God is not written, for behold: "The way of the God (*ha-'el*) is perfect" (Psalms 18:31). But [rather he heard] an unknown god—it was an Other God. "For you may not bow down to an Other God" (Exodus 34:14). "Who hears the speech of God"— it was a little word, but to one who did not know it seemed great and exalted. "Who hears the speech of God"—of that [god] who is called an Other God. As it is written: "For you may not bow down to an Other God."[12]

This passage invokes the theme of an Other God by citing Exodus 34:14, a biblical verse familiar from examples of the Zohar's anti-Christian rhetoric provided in chapters 1 and 2. In those chapters, the Zohar associates the Other God with Esau, Edom, Rome, the Kingdom of Idolatry, the evil forces of the Other Side, heretics, celibacy, and emasculation—all components of the Zohar's critique of Christianity. Indeed, the term "Other God" is a strong rhetorical clue that the Zoharic reader should prepare himself for coded anti-Christian references. Its frequent repetition in this passage seems designed to prevent anyone from missing this point. Here, Balaam is aligned with the Other Side's characters and forces, emphasizing his relationship to the Other's categorical set and further associating him with Christ and Christianity. Using Psalm 18:31 as its inspiration, the Zohar explains that rather than speaking with *the* God (i.e., the Jewish God), Balaam simply communicated with *a* god—the dreaded Other God alien to Judaism.

Though the choice to identify a god other than Israel's may seem surprising for medieval Jewish monotheists, it is perhaps more understandable when placed in the context of the Zoharic authors' choice to portray Judaism and Christianity as two different, competing religions with two different, competing gods. (This choice opposes *Toledot Yeshu*'s portrayal of Jesus as a human Jew mistakenly worshipped by gentiles.) Describing non-Israelite groups as following other gods is common in biblical narrative, making this assertion a natural choice within the Jewish textual tradition. And, as shown in passages like Zohar 1:204a–b, Zohar 1:171b, and Zohar 2:103a (discussed in chapter 2), the Zoharic authorship associated Christianity's Other God with defilement, evil, and demonic forces, lowering its status is relation to Israel's God. In the Zohar, it is this Other, lower god with whom Balaam/Christ is aligned, and it is this Other, lower god with whom he deceives his followers.

Section 4: Power over Boats and Storms

"And who knows the knowledge of the Most High"—[the most high of] all the levels of defilement, that conduct boats of the sea and the storm-wind. Forty minus one are they, and the greatest seaman of them all, who conducts with his hand, he is the highest of them all. That wicked one cleaved to this, and said that he knew "knowledge of the Most High"—of the highest level of all those who conduct boats! Who heard this that did not become confounded in his mind and swear that there was none like him in the world? But rather that wicked one praised himself in a concealed way. And he said truthful words, but deceived the minds of the children of the world . . .[13]

Here, the Zohar connects Balaam to Christ with a gospel reference. The Zohar claims that Balaam got his powers from the "Most High" of the "powers of uncleanness . . . who conduct boats." While the Balaam of biblical, rabbinic, and popular Jewish literature has nothing to do with boats, Jesus does—in the famous story of his stilling the storm. Luke 8:22–25 reads, "While they were sailing he fell asleep. A windstorm swept down on the lake, and the boat was filling with water, and they were in danger. They went to him and woke him up, shouting, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and the raging waves; they ceased and there was a calm. . . . They were afraid and amazed, and said to one another, 'Who then is this, that he commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him?' "[14] Medieval Jews were familiar with this story. The popular polemic work *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest) asked its readers, "Do you not know that Jesus fell asleep in a boat and a great storm arose upon them, until his students woke him up and he awoke and called to the Lord and the storm was quieted?"[15]

In this passage, the Zohar claims that Balaam/Christ's supernatural powers derive from a demonic spirit who rules the sea and the storm wind, rather than from the true God. It emphasizes this spirit's unholiness and that of Balaam/Christ by enumerating the unclean powers he relies on as "forty-minus-one." Forty is a significant number in the Hebrew Bible, where it is associated with the Flood's duration, Moses' time on Mount Sinai, the Israelites' forty years in the wilderness, the forty silver sockets decorating the Tabernacle, and more.[16] The gospels also use this number to affiliate Jesus with Moses' holiness in the story of Jesus' forty days in the wilderness.[17] Furthermore, the count "forty-

minus-one" is associated with transgression in rabbinic literature, where it appears as the number of labor categories forbidden on the Sabbath and the maximum number of lashes a criminal may receive.[18] When the Zoharic authorship says that the evil storm powers on which Balaam/Jesus relies number forty-minus-one, it does not simply claim there are thirty-nine of them. Instead, it asserts that these powers are wicked, transgressive powers, as well as inferior and deficient to the holiness associated with the number forty. This count emphasizes their sinfulness and inadequacy (and therefore Christ's and Christianity's) when compared with the sacred nature and narrative of Israel and its God. The theme of Balaam/Christ's deceitfulness extends through this passage as well.

Following the reference to boats, storms, and demonic powers, the Zohar includes a text section less relevant to this study that addresses the unholy dynamics of Balaam, Balaq, and Amaleq, then discusses Balaam's sorcery.[19] Balaam's pronouncement of himself as one "Who sees the vision of Shaddai, fallen with eyes open" (Numbers 24:16), is interpreted as a vision of the fallen angels Aza and Aza'el, who are identified elsewhere in the Zohar as the sources of Balaam's magical knowledge.[20] The text claims that Balaam drew unclean spirits to himself and studied sorcery with these fallen angels in the mountains, where they were chained by divine decree, implying that only Balaam was vile enough to associate with such wicked beings. Shaul Magid has noted the absence of a connection between these fallen angels and Balaam in Jewish literature before the Zohar. He identifies a late midrashic tradition on Genesis 6:44 from *Yalqut Shimoni* (The Anthology of Shimon) as the Zohar's source for the tale of these angels' departure from heaven and suggests that their involvement with the wicked gentile prophet is a Zoharic innovation designed to further vilify Balaam.[21]

The main purpose of the passage, which I have omitted for length, seems to be characterizing Balaam as a particularly powerful sorcerer. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the trope of Jesus as a magician, rather than as a holy man or divine manifestation, is an ancient one in Judaism. Identifying Balaam as the world's most powerful magician whose special abilities stem from association with fallen angels helps to conflate Balaam's characteristics with those medieval Jews attributed to Jesus. It also helps the Zoharic authorship to explain why the thoroughly human Jesus attained the status of a god in his followers' eyes, granting him special abilities and vilifying him at once.

Section 5: Flying with Two Figures, the Aerial Battle, and the Tribe of Dan

Where was Balaam at that hour? If you will say [that he was] in Midian, behold, it is written: "And now I am going to my people" (Numbers 24:14). If he went to them, how could he have been in Midian? But rather that wicked one, when he saw that 22,000 of Israel fell through his counsel, he waited there and sought his reward from them [the Midianite kings]. And while he was waiting there, Pinḥas came there, with officers of the army. When he [Balaam] saw Pinḥas, he flew off into the air, and his two sons [went] with him: Yunus and Yumbrus. . . . That wicked one knew all the sorceries of the world, and so took also the sorceries of his sons, and with them he flew swiftly and rose away.[22]

Pinḥas saw him, for he was one man flying swiftly in the air, and was rising in the air away from sight. He [Pinḥas] raised his voice to the men of his army. He said: Is there one who knows how to fly after that wicked one? For behold—it is Balaam! They saw him, that he was flying swiftly.

Tzelyah, a son of the tribe of Dan, arose and took dominion of the rule of sorceries and flew after him. When that wicked one saw him, he made another path in the air and broke through five ethers in that path and rose away and hid himself from sight. Then Tzelyah became confused at that hour and was grieved, for he did not know what to do. Pinḥas raised his voice and said: Shadow of the great serpents that copulate with all snakes, turn your hair! Immediately, he knew, and that path [Balaam's] was revealed, and he [Tzelyah] came next to him [Balaam]. Immediately it was revealed and the two of them came down before Pinḥas.

Come and see: of that wicked one it is written: "And he went sliding (*shefi*)" (Numbers 23:3). . . . And this was: [Dan . . . shall be a serpent upon the way,] an adder (*shefifon*) upon the path [who bites the horse's heels so that his rider is thrown backward]" (Genesis 49:17)—upon that path that wicked one made. As it is written: "Dan shall be a serpent upon the way"— this is Samson.[23] "An adder upon the path"—this is Tzelyah. "Who bites the horse's heels"—this is Iyrah, who was with David, who came from Dan, upon whom David's might depends, as it is written: "And David hamstrung all the chariot [horses]" (2 Samuel 8:4).[24] "So that his rider is thrown

> backward"——this is Serayah, who is appointed to come with the Messiah of Ephraim, who will be from the tribe of Dan, and who will be appointed to do vengeance and make war on the rest of the peoples, and when this happens, then [it will be time] for the redemption of Israel. As it is written: "For your redemption I hope, O Lord" (Genesis 49:18) . . .[25]

Here, the Zohar reinvents and undermines claims of Christ's ascension to heaven by alluding to Christian sacred literature and referencing *Toledot Yeshu*'s aerial battle. First, the Zohar's statements—"Pinḥas saw him, for he was one man flying swiftly in the air, and was rising in the air away from sight," and "he made another path in the air and broke through five ethers in that path and rose away and hid himself from sight"—are very similar to Acts 1:9's, "As they [the apostles] were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." Notably, the Acts narrative takes place *after* Christ's death and resurrection when he returns to earth to prove to his apostles that he is alive. In the Zohar, Balaam/Christ's flight happens *before* his death and ultimately leads to it, reversing the Christian story's order and so countering Christian claims of Jesus' resurrection and triumph over death.

Christ's ascension was a topic of prolonged and intense debate between medieval Jews and Christians, as is attested by its inclusion in the convert Petrus Alfonsi's doctrinal statements in the introduction to his anti-Jewish polemic *Dialogue with Moses the Jew*, and by its frequent mention in *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*, which states, "If you believe in the Messiah [i.e., Jesus] since he was elevated into heaven, Enoch [son of Jared] was also elevated before him, and all the angels, and Elijah the prophet"; and also says, "It is much more fitting to worship this one [Elijah] as a God than one who was crucified by the Jews, who cursed him and pulled out his hair and hit him! Afterwards, he was elevated [to heaven] as you say."[26] This latter statement is of particular interest because it engages another theme taken up by the Zohar's authors—Jesus' death at the hands of righteous Jewish authorities. *Nitzaḥon Vetus* also addresses Christian ascension claims in statements such as, "Everyone knows that it was before he died and became hidden from people that he was not esteemed, while after his death people erred by following him and thinking that he ascended to heaven."[27] I will have more to say on this central Christian doctrine and Jewish attitudes regarding it in

the following chapter, which addresses the Zohar's response to Christian art.

To strategically deconstruct the ascension, and thus the divinity and authority of Christ, the Zohar incorporates the dramatic aerial battle between Jesus and a flying Jew from *Toledot Yeshu* into its narrative as an aerial battle between Balaam/Christ and the Jewish warrior Tzelyah. This aerial battle is one of *Toledot Yeshu*'s most distinctive features. Early versions include Yeshu's flying in the air until brought down by a Rabbi Yehudah (either a reference to Judas Iscariot or a generic Jewish figure) the gardener, and the Strasbourg version similar to the one known in thirteenth-century Spain also features a battle between Yeshu and a flying Jew.[28] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* likewise mentions an aerial battle between Jesus and a Rabbi Yehudah that seems to derive from the famous counter-gospel.[29] Jesus' inability to get to heaven is the most critical factor in these stories. By blocking Christ's ascension, which is the main precondition for his heavenly enthronement, these Jewish traditions effectively dethrone and humanize Jesus by confining him to earth.

The Zohar uses familiar aspects of earlier Balaam narratives to maneuver its villain into a Jesus-like position. Employing the Talmudic theme of Balaam's greed, it portrays him seeking a reward for his villainy and so arriving at the battle-site where he exposes himself to Jewish retribution. However, when Balaam/Jesus sees the danger he is in, he uses his sorcery to fly into the air, taking his two evil sons Yunus and Yumbrus with him. These characters are named as Balaam's sons and as evil Egyptian magicians in Jewish tradition.[30] Versions of the *Chronicles of Moses* include these characters and their flight with their evil father.[31] The Zohar also blames them for instigating the golden calf incident, taking care to explain why they did not die at that time (a reference to other sources' accounts of the two figures).[32]

It is intriguing to speculate whether these two characters relate to the Zohar's theological critique. Though Balaam was sometimes depicted in Jewish literature as flying with his two sons or with the more numerous Midianite kings, the aerial battle from *Toledot Yeshu* that seems to be an important inspiration for this passage does not contain additional flying figures, except for Yehudah, whom the Zohar replaces with Tzelyah from the tribe of Dan. Three possibilities exist for relating these flying figures to Christian theology (though they may function mainly as embellishments to the tale). First, they may relate to the two men in white present at Christ's ascension: "As they [the apostles] were watching, he was lifted

up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them" (Acts 1:9–10). Second, they may represent the two thieves crucified with Jesus in the gospel narratives.[33] The more likely third explanation involves portrayals of the ascension in medieval Christian public art, a topic discussed in the following chapter. Interestingly, some Jewish traditions regarding Yunus and Yumbrus did involve them magically growing wings and flying over the Red Sea.[34]

In any case, these enigmatic characters disappear from the main Balaam/Christ narrative, which continues with the warrior priest Pinḥas' quick assessment of the situation and his call for help intercepting Balaam. Balaam/Christ's flight from the Jewish authorities' immanent approach departs from Numbers Rabbah's flying Balaam story, in which Pinḥas locates and kills Balaam after he has flown aloft. The Zohar heightens the scene's drama (and its critique of Christianity) by depicting the wicked magician actively fleeing Israelite justice, rather than simply hovering over the battle.

Next, the magical warrior Tzelyah from the tribe of Dan takes up Pinḥas' challenge and follows Balaam/Christ into the air. The villain hides from his pursuer, but Pinḥas recites a spell that reveals his location, allowing Tzelyah to return the sorcerer to earth where he must answer for his crimes to Jewish authorities. The text then praises Tzelyah as a member of the tribe of Dan, contextualizing him among other Danite heroes that triumphed over idolatrous forces or foretold idolatry's doom. Finally, the passage looks forward to Israel's redemption over similar foes, as do other Zoharic predictions of Israel's future triumph over Edom—and therefore over Christianity.

Tzelyah's role in this story corresponds to Rabbi Yehudah's in *Toledot Yeshu*—he is a good Jewish magician able to pursue Balaam/Christ through the air.[35] However, his most interesting Zoharic characteristic is his membership in the tribe of Dan, an Israelite group associated with magic and sorcery through its connection with serpents in the blessing of Jacob. "Dan shall be a serpent by the road, an adder by the path that bites the horse's heels so that his rider is thrown backward" (Genesis 49:17).[36] The word "serpent" (*naḥash*) can also mean "sorcery," and there is a strong connection between the two in Jewish tradition.[37] The spell with which Pinḥas aids Tzelyah and forces Balaam from hiding is also a snake-based spell, in which the "great serpents" refer to the demonic powers of Sama'el and his mate—figures cited elsewhere in the Zohar in relation to

Balaam's sorcery.[38] Evidently, the spell helps Tzelyah, whose name can be translated as "Shadow of God," to overcome the shadow of the great demonic snakes.[39] It is interesting that Pinḥas, rather than Tzelyah, recites this incantation—a story element that may be carried over from traditions in which Pinḥas causes Balaam to fall from the sky without aerial pursuit.

Balaam is a snaky fellow in general. In the Zohar, the term *shefi*, which describes Balaam's sliding movement, is connected with serpents through its relation to the term *shefifon*, a type of adder. The word *shefi* may represent a limping or meandering gait, and its inclusion in this narrative seems to derive from a tradition in Babylonian Talmud Sotah 10a that Balaam limped on one leg: "Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Balaam limped on one of his legs, as it is written: 'He [Balaam] went *shefi* (limping) (Numbers 23:3).'[40] Samson limped on both his legs, as it is written: '*shefifon* (limping) upon the path (Genesis 49:17).' "[41] The Talmudic passage seems to inspire the Zohar's teaching on the tribe of Dan as well.

Although the tribe of Dan's involvement in Balaam's death may seem like a random elaboration, Danite importance in this narrative provides yet another hint that the Zohar's Balaam should be read as a Christ figure. Medieval Christians had a tradition that the Antichrist would originate from the tribe of Dan. This teaching developed from ancient ideas known to the Church Father Irenaeus in the second century and from prophetic statements by the fourth-century Tiburtine Sybil; it was reiterated in ninth- and eleventh-century works, which together inspired a long-lived apocalyptic tradition that the Antichrist would emerge from this specific tribe—a tradition that also associated Danites with Jewish wickedness.[42] For example, a tenth-century monk named Adso who became the abbot of Montier-en-Der composed a popular account that cited the Antichrist's emergence from the tribe of Dan.[43] Hugo Ripelin of Strasbourg (1210–ca. 1270) taught that the Antichrist would emerge from the tribe of Dan and that Jews would be his special followers, while the thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* (The Golden Legend), a collection of stories compiled by the Dominican bishop of Genoa, claimed that Judas' father was of the tribe of Dan.[44] The *Legenda Aurea* was a well-known text, with about one thousand surviving manuscripts, and was also translated into several languages to accommodate a wide readership.[45] Bonaventure's fifteenth-century *Collationes in hexaemeron* (Collations on the Hexameron) names both Balaam and Dan as the Antichrist's forerunners.[46]

The Zohar's authors subverted this tradition by claiming the tribe of Dan as a source of Jewish heroes with special powers to combat "idolatry"—by which they meant Christianity—just as Christians believed the Antichrist would combat Christians for different reasons. Tzelyah of Dan is indeed an anti-Christ in this narrative, but in a Jewish sense rather than a Christian one. His presence in the text both heightens the story's excitement and elaborates the Zohar's critique of Christianity.

Section 6: Death by Sword

> When that wicked one came down before Pinḥas, he [Pinḥas] said to him [Balaam]: Wicked One, how many evil turns have you done to the holy people? He [Pinḥas] said to Tzelyah: Come and kill him, but not with the Name, for it is not fitting for this one to be remembered for supernal holiness—so that his soul does not go forth and become adorned with words of the levels of holiness, and what he said is not established for him: "May my soul die the death of the upright" (Numbers 23:10). At that hour, he [Tzelyah] tried upon him [Balaam] many types of death, but he did not die until he [Tzelyah] took up a sword that had a serpent engraved upon each side. Pinḥas said to him: Take up his own [weapon], and with his own [weapon] he will die! Then he [Tzelyah] killed him [Balaam], and he was able to do it. For such is the way of that side: one who goes after it dies with it, and with it his soul goes forth, and with it he is adorned.[47]

This passage narrates Balaam's dramatic death scene. In a departure from the Numbers Rabbah tradition, but in keeping with *Toledot Yeshu*, Balaam/Christ does not die of his fall from the air. His death occurs on the ground. The Zohar's authors have internalized the flying motif to the extent that the prooftext, "And they killed the kings of Midian, upon (*al*) their slain" (Numbers 31:8), evokes a flying Balaam but is not directly associated with his death. When Balaam/Christ alights before him, Pinḥas turns to Tzelyah for the villain's execution, a surprising choice given the priest's biblical role in divine vengeance.[48] However, Tzelyah's magical presence in this story emphasizes the Zoharic authors' departure from traditions in which the Holy Name on the High Priest's front plate causes the villain to fall to his death. Instead, the Zohar prefers that Balaam/Christ have nothing to do with holiness—not even in the manner of his death.

This choice represents one of the Zohar's clearest departures from *Toledot Yeshu*, which identifies Jesus as a Jew, though a very bad one.[49] The Zohar instead excludes Jesus from Judaism by conflating him with the gentile Balaam while dissociating him from holiness by aligning him with the Other Side's alien god. Thus, Pinḥas' order that Tzelyah not use the Divine Name to kill Balaam is a dramatic difference from both the Numbers Rabbah and *Toledot Yeshu* aerial battle traditions that thoroughly divorces Balaam/Christ from Judaism and holiness. Balaam's plea for a righteous death and the Zohar's denial of his request also contradict Christian claims that Jesus died an especially holy death. Instead, Balaam/Christ is killed with his own sword.

Twenty-first-century readers may be surprised that the Zoharic authors portrayed a Christ figure's death occurring at Jewish hands. However, medieval Jews and Christians both commonly understood Jews as responsible for Jesus' death. It was their interpretations of that death's meaning on which they were divided. Christians blamed Jews for the crime of deicide, while Jews understood themselves to have acted properly under Jewish law regarding those guilty of capital crimes. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* reflects on this conflict, asserting that since God's will has power and according to Christians Jesus *is* God, then by their own logic everything Jews did to him was according to his own will. The text additionally claims that gentiles sin if they detest these events (and presumably the Jews involved in them) because they are denying their God's will.[50] Needless to say, Christians did not agree with this line of reasoning. Less convolutedly, *Nitzaḥon Vetus* assures its readers, "You should know that he [Jesus] was a sorcerer and that all his wonders were performed through sorcery; consequently, he was condemned to death legally and properly."[51]

Balaam's death also coheres with the Christian saying, "Those who live by the sword will die by the sword," an aphorism based on the account of Jesus' arrest in Matthew 26, where an unnamed disciple draws his sword and cuts off the high priest's slave's ear. (This scene is shown on the façade of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, where Jews are depicted in a caricature-like fashion in the same sculptural composition that includes both Balaam and Jesus riding donkeys.)[52] "Then Jesus said to him, 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword' " (Matthew 26:52).

In a technique drawn from both religions' polemic, the Zohar appropriates a Christian text to critique Christian behavior. The violent Christians and their object of worship are destined to fall to violence in turn, a fate

the Zohar suggests by echoing Christians' sacred text and toward which it looks earlier in this narrative by hoping for a violent divine retribution against the nations.[53] The Zohar's assertion, "For such is the way of that side: one who goes after it dies with it," sounds a great deal like Matthew's, "All who take the sword will perish by the sword." Notably, the Matthew passage refers to violence directed toward Jews by Jesus' followers. By killing Balaam/Jesus with his own sword, the Zohar offers a critique of Christian violence that highlights the disjunction between the majority's stated ideals and their actions toward Jews.[54]

Section 7: A Questionable Gravesite

> And so died Balaam, and he was punished with punishments in that world, and was never buried. And all of his bones rotted and became disgusting serpents . . . and even the worms that ate his flesh were turned into serpents.[55]

Here, the narrative shifts to the dead Balaam's body. Like Jesus' body in Jewish tradition, it suffers a questionable fate. Never buried, it rots and disappears completely as its bones and the worms that consume them are transformed into snakes. This ambiguous end to Balaam/Christ's corpse echoes disputes regarding the fate of Christ's body from the gospel tradition. In Matthew 27:62–66, Jews request that Jesus be sealed in his tomb and guarded so that his followers cannot steal his remains and claim that he rose from the dead. The gospel's concern is well founded, since Jews from ancient through medieval times commonly claimed that Jesus' disappearance from his tomb was a Christian subterfuge. The Strasbourg version of *Toledot Yeshu* explains that Jesus' body was taken down from the cabbage stalk on which it hung (the *Toledot Yeshu*'s version of the crucifixion) and hidden in a waterway, allowing his apostles to claim that it had vanished and he had ascended to heaven.[56] Amulo, the ninth-century bishop of Lyons whose writings comprise the earliest-known European version of *Toledot Yeshu*, also notes that Jews said Jesus's body was removed from its grave, dragged through the city, and thrown away. According to Amulo, Jews claimed that, "Therefore, till today his sepulcher stands empty and is fouled with stones and full of filth."[57] More than four centuries later *Nitzaḥon Vetus* remarks, "Jesus turned to worms and became worthless after his death"—a fate similar to that described in the Zohar.[58]

Medieval Jews and Christians both understood that the presence or absence of Christ's body in its tomb was intimately connected to claims of his ascension and divinity. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* exclaims, "Heaven forbid that I say that . . . he was hidden three days in the grave with the dead, and afterwards he rose and went away."[59] Christ's empty tomb was also pictured in medieval Christian public art, where it was associated closely with Jesus' ascension, triumph over death, and divinity, as shall be discussed in the next chapter. The stakes of the argument regarding Christ's ascension and his body's fate were high for all parties involved, and the topic's prominent public placement exacerbated the dispute. The Zoharic narrative supports the Jewish position by arguing that Balaam/Christ's ascension was a magical flight rather than a divine event, that his death occurred after his ascension and not before it, and that his body went unburied and rotted away or was changed into serpents rather than disappearing from his sepulcher to enjoy a heavenly destiny.

Section 8: Relics and Magic

> We have found in the Book of Ashmoda'i that he gave to King Solomon, that all who seek to do powerful sorceries concealed from sight, if he knows the clay where Balaam fell and finds the serpents that are of the bones of that wicked one—if he kills one of them, with its head he can do exalted sorceries, with its body he can do other sorceries, and with its tail he can do other sorceries. Three types of sorceries are in each and every one.[60]

Here, the Zohar ascribes magical properties to the serpents that arise from Balaam's body. The association between magic, sorcery, and snakes is well known, and evident from the Zoharic narrative related thus far. (Indeed, Zohar 1:125b–126b claims that Balaam's wicked sorceries involved snakes that drew spirits to him.)[61] According to this passage, Balaam's body is transmuted into snakes invested with potent magic derived from his own sorcerous powers during life. In a sense, the snakes that arise from Balaam are continuations of the sorcerer himself, since formerly they were his bones. They are tainted by contact with the dead magician. It is this aspect of the snakes that allows the Zoharic narrative's final anti-Christian critique, which involves the cult of relics.

Medieval European Jews were familiar with Christians' practice of burying their dead in churches and cathedrals. They also knew that the

cult of saints involved preserving, acquiring, and praying over deceased holy people's physical remains. During the twelfth century, when Kabbalah first developed in Europe, this relic cult's popularity increased.[62] Furthermore, since the Saint James pilgrimage and its network of holy sites (which shall be discussed in the following chapter) coincided with high Jewish population areas, Jewish awareness of the relic cult was unavoidable. The pilgrimage involved traveling to Santiago de Compostela in northwestern Spain to encounter the remains of Saint James the Greater, the only major apostle Christians thought was buried entirely in Western Europe.[63] Individual churches and cathedrals along the pilgrim routes had their own less prestigious remains. Jews may have perceived the pilgrimage as a kind of gristly tourism in which Christians traveled to worship human body parts that they believed had special powers, and which they treated reverently and used to perform magic (i.e., Christian miracles).

Due to strict religious laws regarding treatment of the dead, Jews found these Christian practices disturbing. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* cites Numbers 19:16, which explains that anyone who touches a dead body, the body of a man killed by the sword, a human bone, or a grave will become unclean, challenging Christians: "It is written about those who turn a house of worship into a graveyard: 'Their fire will not be extinguished, nor will their smoke pass away, till the heavens are no more.' What will you, who are poor of understanding, do in those days with these graves which are in the houses of your abominations, and with the bones of the dead which you wash in wine, place in their grave, and use for cures?"[64] The same text also accuses Christians: "[He commanded you] to place your dead in the house of your abominations [i.e., the churches] and for your sick ones to pray to them."[65]

Nitzaḥon Vetus also condemns the relic cult, explaining to its readers, "The heretics contend that they beseech the saints, who are dead corpses, so that these saints may pray for them before God."[66] The same text inquires of Christians: "You know that a dead man is impure and defiles all who carry or touch the body and everything in the tent where it is, and yet you defile priests constantly by bringing them into your houses of idolatry."[67] Here, it is possible to see Jewish puzzlement at a shared text, Numbers 19:11–22, that Christians appear to ignore. Indeed, *Nitzaḥon Vetus* seems particularly troubled by the relic cult, wondering at how to understand "their practice of taking the bones of the dead as holy relics . . .

indeed, even the bones of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all righteous men convey impurity just like those of other men, for scripture makes no qualifications here."[68]

The Zohar does mention a tradition in which troubled Jews might seek help at a graveside from a deceased person's *nefesh* (spirit), inspiring a complicated intercessory prayer process that could eventually provoke divine response.[69] However, this ritual did not involve direct contact with or veneration of unburied human body parts in houses of worship, as did the Christian relic cult. The Zohar expresses its horror and condemnation of these non-Jewish traditions by linking Christians' relic practices to the defiling use of magical serpents derived from unburied human remains.

Balaam/Christ's Death in the Zohar

In summary, then, the Zohar's Balaam/Christ narrative begins by citing a familiar medieval tale of Balaam's flight and demise, but quickly indicates through textual clues that it is concerned with critiquing Christ and beliefs regarding the manner and meaning of his death. These beliefs include Christ's death as a holy event, his ascension to heaven, and his disappearance from his tomb—all of which are core components of Christian doctrines regarding Jesus' divinity, triumph over death, and residence in the heavens. In the Zohar, Jesus' death happens after his ascension to the heavens rather than before, is not holy, and is very final, though it leads to insidious and ongoing magical rituals. Combining the character of Jesus, whose historical Jewish identity the Zoharic authorship avoids acknowledging, with the gentile prophet Balaam, the Zohar separates Jesus and his Christian followers from Jews and ranks them among the world's idolatrous nations. The Zohar's main mode of challenging Christianity in this passage is, as in other texts examined in this study, a creative deconstruction of Christian characters, symbols, and stories combined with these stories' redeployment to support Jewish claims.

Framing Narratives

To dispel any lingering doubts about the Zohar's use of Balaam to critique Christianity, I conclude this chapter by presenting one of the stories that frames the Zohar's death of Balaam sequence.[70] The following passage precedes the flying Balaam/Christ story and relates Balaam's magic to Christian ritual.

Sefer ha-Zohar 3:192a

"And he [Balaq] sent messengers to Balaam, son of Be'or [near Petorah that is by the River, the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, 'Here is a people that came forth from Egypt. Behold—it covers the earth from sight and it is dwelling next to me']" (Numbers 22:5). Here are twenty-eight words to correspond to the twenty-eight levels of sorcerous divinations of the bird. . . . [71] Balaq divined divinations and did sorcery and prepared the bird. And he knew that the levels of Moses were high and honorable, and he did sorcery with his magic and divined with his divinations, and knew that the levels of Balaam corresponded to them. Immediately, "he sent messengers to Balaam, son of Be'or."

Petorah was the name of the place, as it is said: "From Petor of Aram Naharayim to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). Why was it called this? Because, as it is written: "Who arranged (*ha-'orkhim*) a table for Fortune (*Gad*)"[72] (Isaiah 65:11). And a table (*patora*) was ordered there every day, for in that manner it was prepared for the sides of evil. They ordered before them a table (*patora*) with food and with drink, and did sorceries and offered incense before the table. And all the defiled spirits gathered there. . . . And all the sorceries and divination of the world were done upon that table (*patora*). And therefore they called the name of that place Petorah. For in Aram Naharayim, they called a table (*shulḥan*) a *patora*. . . .

"And you shall make a table of acacia wood [two cubits long, and two cubits wide, and a cubit and a half high]" (Exodus 25:23). And it is written: "And you shall put the showbread upon the table [to be before me eternally]" (Exodus 25:30). The Blessed Holy One wanted to have all those holy vessels made before him in order to draw the Holy Spirit [*ruḥa qadisha*] from above to below. That wicked one—who is Balaam—used to prepare [a table] similarly for the Other Side. And he used to prepare a table and bread that was called Abominable Bread (*leḥem mego'al*).

As a framing narrative of the flying Balaam/Christ sequence, this passage indicates Christianity as the Zohar's oblique topic by telling the familiar story of Balaq summoning Balaam to curse the Israelites, while taking creative liberties with the two men's preparations for cursing. Three main items connect this passage to Christianity: the bird sorcery that draws the evil spirits of the Other Side, the Abominable Bread used in Balaam and

Balaq's ceremonies, and the table at which these practices are conducted. Each of these points corresponds to a Christian practice or object: the Holy Spirit's representation as a bird, the eucharist, and the altar found in medieval churches.

The bird, specifically the dove, was a Christian symbol familiar to medieval Jews. The symbolism is based on the gospels' account of Jesus' baptism. "And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' " (Matthew 3:16–17).[73] Thirteenth-century Spanish Jews would have been familiar with this episode from its many depictions in Christian public art of the time (examples are provided in the following chapter) and from polemic texts.

Sefer Nestor ha-Komer says, "According to your words, the heavens opened up and he saw the spirit of God like a dove descending upon him and he heard a voice from heaven saying: 'Here is My beloved, My son, with whom I am well pleased.' "[74] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* recounts the version of this story found in Luke's gospel, complaining elsewhere of "the defilement of their baptism" and "apostates who accept their defiling baptism."[75] That the Zohar tells not just of a bird, but of the "sorcerous divinations of the bird" and of the wicked ones seeking to draw down unclean spirits in a perverse inversion of the Temple ritual that draws the Holy Spirit "from above to below," demonstrates that this text is referencing Christian practices. The Zoharic authorship's word choice also emphasizes this reading—Balaq's preparation of the bird sorcery is described with the same root (*t.q.n.*) as making something fit for legitimate priestly ritual. This root's use also anticipates the passage's contrast between legitimate priestly offerings and "Abominable Bread."

The eucharist, of course, was another aspect of Christian ritual and theology known to medieval Jews. *Milḥemet Mitzvah*'s (Obligatory War) author complains of Christians eating bread that they claimed was the body of their god.[76] *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* asserts that Jesus "commanded you . . . to sacrifice bread and wine, *communio* in Latin, bringing it into your body and making from it excrement and stench."[77] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* explains, "When they defile the abominable bread and make it impure, they say the following: 'Hoc est enim corpus meam.' Translated, this means: 'I alone am the body and blood.' "[78] (Those familiar with Latin will know that the medieval author is incorrect. The phrase means, "this is my body.")

Abominable Bread was a common medieval Jewish label for the eucharist in Northern Europe, and was evidently known to the Zohar's authors as well.[79] Its popularity may have stemmed from the fact that *leḥem mego'al* can be read as a pun in which *mego'al* (abominable or soiled) resonates both with the similar sounding root *g.'.l.* (redeem) and with the term *go'el* (redeemer). Thus, the Zohar names the Other Side's showbread Abominable Bread, while implying that Christians consider the filthy stuff to be the Bread of Redemption. The choice of the word *mego'al* (abominable), rather than the more common Zoharic *mesa'av* (defiled)—a term used both in the Balaam/Christ narrative above and in the teachings on the Other Side from chapter 2—emphasizes that this is a deliberate choice meant to condemn a specific Christian ritual.

Conflict over communion also embroiled medieval Christian communities, leaving traces in public art of the Zohar's time. The façade of the Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard in southern France features a prominent Last Supper on the lintel below its central tympanum. Scholars speculate that this depiction represents a public message directed at a heretical group led by Peter de Bruys, who denied the mass's validity.[80] Transubstantiation became official Church dogma at the Lateran IV council of 1215, around the same time that elevating the host became an established part of the mass.[81] The feast of Corpus Christi became an official Church calendar event in 1264, the year after the Barcelona disputation.[82] Thus, during the period immediately prior to the Zohar's composition, the host's role in the mass became far more prominent, coming to Jews' attention in elaborate public festivals and rituals. That these rituals' official implementation coincided with Lateran IV's anti-Jewish regulations probably did not escape medieval Jews' attention.

The Zohar describes a ritual associated with Balaam in which a special table, reminiscent of a Christian altar, is prepared for an idolatrous god called Fortune (Gad) mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud.[83] The location from which Balaam travels to Balaq becomes a name for this idolatrous table, which is prepared, like the bird magic earlier in the passage, in a ritual manner designated by the root *t.q.n.* At the table, the people of Aram Naharayim and the sorcerer Balaam perform a magical rite that mirrors the Catholic mass, including the use of incense and a table with food (the eucharist) and drink (the communion ritual's wine) in order to attract defiled spirits. The passage then introduces the legitimate prepared table for the Tabernacle's priestly showbread described in Exodus 25, explaining that God designed this ritual to draw the Holy

Spirit from above to below. Thus, the Zohar claims that Balaam's ritual represents a dark mirror-image of the Tabernacle ritual, drawing unclean spirits of the Other Side into the world to do evil deeds. The attention-getting way that the text interprets the place-name Petor of Aram Naharayim as a ritual table emphasizes its allusion to the Christian altar, leaving little doubt of the message the Kabbalists wished to convey.

Conclusions

The Zohar's Balaam material is a rich source for understanding the late-thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalists' attitudes toward Christ and Christians, as well as their modes of resistance to Christian claims. Although these stories may seem aggressive, or even crude, James C. Scott has shown, "At its most elementary level the hidden transcript represents an acting out in fantasy . . . of the anger and reciprocal aggression denied by the presence of domination."[84] Understanding these counter-Christian narratives' context and emergence from a people increasingly oppressed by a powerful majority helps to keep these writings in perspective. Many scholars have pointed out medieval Jewish techniques of critiquing, lampooning, and intellectually disrupting Christian claims in order to render them less powerful.[85] The Zoharic authors' rendering of Balaam as Christ to critique core elements of Christian belief echoes their deconstruction of the Passion story analyzed in chapter 1. By engaging with Christian material, the Zoharic authorship's hidden transcript redeploys an oppressive power's symbols as sources for their own community's support. In the following chapter, I show how the Zohar similarly engages Christian public art.

5

In the Palace of Images

RESPONDING TO CHRISTIAN ART

THIRTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN WAS home to overlapping sacred geographies in which Jewish literary production, Christian pilgrimage routes, and Christian artistic development converged. This chapter argues that, as with other forms of Christian discourse, the Kabbalists who composed *Sefer ha-Zohar* (The Book of Splendor) actively "read" Christian public art and responded to these visual "texts" by crafting narratives that subversively commented upon their sources to bolster Jewish faith and undermine Christian claims. Monumental sculpture on Church portals along pilgrimage routes and at the hearts of urban centers dramatized these Christian assertions where they could not have failed to gain Jews' attention.

Indeed, while medieval Jewish polemic and mystical literature flourished, Western European Christians were experiencing an artistic revolution that brought figurative sculpture into public view for the first time since antiquity.[1] They produced this sculpture to explain and enforce Christian theological and political assertions—particularly those of Christian universal domination, expressed in images of Christ enthroned in the heavens or presiding over the Last Judgment.[2] Countering such messages bolstered Jewish resistance to Christian power during this time, in which previously stable (if never perfect) relations between Spain's Jews and Christians were breaking down under a barrage of enforced public religious disputations, enforced Jewish attendance at Christian sermons, trials and censorship of Jewish texts, and the production of Christian polemic works that deployed rabbinic literature to assert Christian theology.[3]

Christian art's increasing prominence in the thirteenth century was an important aspect of these challenges to Judaism's legitimacy and place

within Christendom. David Morgan writes, "Religions and their visual cultures configure social relations," noting that such visual cultures can enact public coercion.[4] Similarly, Foucault explains, "The exercise of discipline presupposes a mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power, and in which, conversely, the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible."[5] Public Church art was directed primarily at Western Europe's Christian community. However, Jews were also a target audience for this art's strict visual depictions of cosmic hierarchy, which reinforced Jewish political and social subordination to Christians.

Even in artworks where Christ was not depicted as universal judge and ruler, messages regarding Christian supremacy and supersession were unavoidable for Jewish viewers. The Romanesque Church of San Isidoro in the heart of León in Castile features a twelfth-century tympanum depicting the sacrifice of Isaac, a foundational narrative for Judaism that engages topics of Jewish faith, continuity, and trust in God (see Figure 5.1).[6] The tympanum's lower register dramatizes Genesis 22's account of the near-sacrifice. Abraham holds a knife to his son's throat, while a heavenly hand reaches to save Isaac (depicted as a young man), and an angel to the patriarch's left displays a ram as an alternative sacrificial victim. In this register, the only clearly Christian imagery is Isaac's position against a tree, an allusion to the wood of the cross.

FIGURE 5.1 Church of San Isidoro, León. Sacrifice of Isaac, twelfth century.

The tympanum's upper register is quite different. Directly above Abraham and Isaac, two angels carry a wreath that encircles a lamb holding a cross, representing Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God. To either side of the lamb an angel flies holding a cross. For Christians, the work explains Isaac's sacrifice as a type for Christ's, with the tympanum's top section "fulfilling" its bottom narrative and Christ's completed sacrifice superseding Isaac's aborted one. For Jewish viewers, the tympanum illustrates Christian supersession claims, Christian expropriation of Jewish text, and the subordination of Jews to Christians, which the composition implies by placing the Hebrew Bible story below its Christian interpretation.

It is unthinkable that Moses de León and other members of the Zoharic authorship would have failed to encounter this church during their travels in Castile. Indeed, since it is a twelfth-century work and not part of the thirteenth-century Gothic revolution, they could have been familiar with it for most of their lives. It is similarly hard to imagine that the Zohar's authors would have failed to understand the impact that such monumental public art brings to bear upon its viewers.[7] As Sara Lipton explains, "Medieval people were exposed to far fewer pictures than we are, but art seemed to them all the more powerful for that—it was rare, precious, and mysterious and revealed unseen, perhaps unimagined things."[8]

The following Zoharic passage deals directly with art's emotional impact and consequences for its observers. It is a fitting place to begin a discussion of the Zohar and Christian art, because it demonstrates medieval Jews were not only aware of Christian art's themes but also understood visual imagery's capacity to affect emotional states and mobilize action.[9] In addition to reflecting engagement with Christian artistic motifs, this passage deals specifically with viewing images distressing to Jews. I excerpt it from an elaborate messianic narrative that foretells a triumphant Judaism exalted over the wicked nations of the world, a theme by now familiar from the Zohar's writings about Christianity.

Sefer ha-Zohar 2:8a–b

> Come and see: In the Garden of Eden below there is a place [that is] hidden, secret, and unknown. And it is embroidered with many colors, and in it are hidden a thousand palaces of longing. And no one enters into them except for Messiah, who exists continuously in the Garden of Eden. And the whole garden is surrounded with numerous bands of the righteous. And Messiah stands over them, and

over many hosts and camps of the souls of the righteous there. . . . Within all those palaces there is another place, secret and hidden, that is entirely unknown and is called Eden. . . . And in that place are embroidered images of all the rest of the peoples that gathered upon Israel to harm them.

He enters into that place, raises his eyes, and sees the patriarchs, who are entering the destruction of the House of God, until he observes Rachel, with tears on her face, and the Blessed Holy One comforting her. But she does not desire to receive comfort, as it is said: "She refuses to be comforted for her children" (Jeremiah 31:15). Then Messiah lifts up his voice and weeps, and the whole Garden of Eden trembles, and all of those righteous ones who are there roar and weep with him. He roars and weeps a second time, and the heaven that is above the garden trembles, [along with] one thousand five hundred myriad supernal dwellers until [the sound] arrives at the supernal Throne. . . . And all go up above, and the Blessed Holy One swears to them to remove the Wicked Kingdom from the world by the hand of Messiah and to enact vengeance for Israel—and [to enact] all those goodnesses that the Blessed Holy One is prepared to do for His people . . .[10]

And a voice will burst from the branches of the trees of the garden, calling with strength and saying, "Arise, high holy ones! Rise before Messiah!". . .Then they will all rise and gird him as before with the implements of his armaments; Abraham on his right, Isaac on his left, Jacob before him, Moses the faithful shepherd above all these righteous ones, going and dancing in the Garden of Eden. When Messiah is arrayed by the hand of the righteous ones in the Garden of Eden, he will . . . see there that image of the destruction of the Temple, and all of the righteous ones who were killed in it. . . . He enters there into one palace and sees all those supernal angels that are called Mourners of Zion, those who weep over the destruction of the Temple, and they weep continuously. And they give him one royal garment of red to do vengeance . . .

He will descend, surrounded by all those adornments from above and below, surrounded by holy camps . . . In what place? "On the way" (Deuteronomy 22:6). This is the grave of Rachel, who stands at the crossing of the ways, and he will gladden her and he will comfort her. And then she will take comfort, and she will rise and kiss him.[11]

This passage treats its reader to an esoteric view of King Messiah's preparation to enter the world. It also demonstrates several points about the Zoharic authors' relationship with Christian art. First, the Kabbalists were aware of art's ability to evoke emotion and of emotion's ability to inspire action. Second, the Zoharic authorship was aware of a role for art in the growing thirteenth-century conflict between Jews and Christians, designating artistic works as contested intellectual spaces that generated conflict between communities. Third, the descriptions mirror compositional features common to Romanesque and Gothic art in the Kabbalists' environment, a topic to which I will return below.

In this passage, emotion generates action. The stronger the emotions evoked, the greater are the consequences of the actions that follow, until cosmic vengeance is achieved. The palace that Messiah enters is a palace of longing, and inside it disturbing images of the world's nations harming Israel confront him. Viewing these persecutions culminates in an image of the patriarchs entering the destroyed Temple, progressing from the gentile nations' attempts to harm Israel to the Temple's destruction and Israel's exile. This imagery generates emotional turmoil in the reader, who is spurred to reflect on Jewish degradation at the hands of Israel's enemies, while the reader's interior turmoil reflects Messiah's narrated experience of the same emotions. Notably, the passage blames gentiles for the Temple's destruction, rather than Jewish disobedience to the Torah, as both Christians and Jews often claimed. Furthermore, Jewish readers would have connected gentiles with the Romans who destroyed the Temple—a group they also connected with contemporary Christians.[12]

Next, a depiction of the matriarch Rachel with tears on her face intensifies these images and emotions. The Jeremiah 31:15 citation explains that even divine comfort cannot alleviate Rachel's misery. The Zohar intentionally heightens this scene's impact by transforming the biblical narrative, in which Rachel's weeping is only one component of a consolation proclamation, into God's unsuccessful attempt to comfort her. Her misery evokes similar feelings in Messiah, who weeps loudly until the righteous who surround him weep as well. Their combined grief is a cosmic commotion so powerful that it shakes Eden's foundations and reaches the divine throne, where it inspires vengeance upon those who have caused such misery. It is only when Messiah receives his red garment of vengeance from weeping angels called the "Mourners of Zion" that Rachel's tears are transmuted into kisses and the action shifts from mourning to revenge.

In this vivid passage, Messiah's art-inspired weeping passes mimetically from one character to another until it stimulates events at the end of time. The art that causes this uproar depicts gentiles dominating Jews, a theme that reflects public art in the Kabbalists' own environment. During the Romanesque period, Christian art depicting violence toward Jews or symbols of Judaism often demonstrated ideological justifications for persecuting Jews.[13] The sculptural facade of the Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard in southern France provides a vivid example. It is a significant work at an important pilgrimage site that is the first known representation of the entire Passion cycle in stone. Dating Saint-Gilles-du-Gard's facade is controversial; scholars locate its production between the early twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.[14]

The right tympanum of Saint-Gilles' detailed sculptural program features a crucifixion scene in which an angel to Christ's right violently shoves a robed female figure who embodies Synagoga, while another female representing Ecclesia watches from the left (Figure 5.2a). As Synagoga topples to the ground, a crown representing Jerusalem falls from her head. Directly below on the lintel, an angel appears to three women at Christ's empty sepulcher to announce his triumph over death, while the living Christ appears to his apostles on the frieze to the right (Figures 5.2a and 5.2b).[15] Christ's resurrection is coupled with the synagogue's demise at Christian hands. The composition is structured so that the tip of Synagoga's sliding crown points toward Christ's empty tomb and reappearance to his followers, topics that represent theological justifications for Christianity's rise to power (Figures 5.2a and 5.2b).

As a whole, the ensemble signifies "the triumph of Christ over death at the hand of the Jews."[16] The lintel and frieze, which depict the life of Christ, also feature Jews as villains in scenes depicting Judas' payment and Christ's arrest, emphasizing the tympanum's anti-Jewish message. Indeed, Jacqueline Jung refers to Saint-Gilles' facade as an "encyclopedia of anti-Jewish caricature."[17] An important embarkation point for the Crusades, Saint-Gilles and its violent messages regarding Jews were also viewed by the numerous pilgrims who traveled through Castile on their way to the great Church at Santiago de Compostela.[18] Jews living along the pilgrim routes, like the Zohar's authors, would likely have heard of such art, and Jewish travelers may well have seen it for themselves. These travelers included the early southern French Kabbalists and their students who traveled to Spain.

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 5.2 Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. Angel toppling Synagoga while Ecclesia watches, with women at empty sepulcher on lintel (a); Christ appearing to apostles, located on frieze to right of lintel with women at empty sepulcher; wing of angel at sepulcher visible to left (b), ca. early twelfth century/early thirteenth century.

Such negative depictions of Jews were the product of a culture increasingly occupied with anti-Jewish actions. Zohar 2:8a–b confronts the link between art depicting violence toward Jews and the anti-Jewish emotions and actions such art inspired. It counters that connection by envisioning a powerful Jewish viewer, rather than a Christian one, assaulted by aggressive imagery. Like medieval Christians inspired to violence by anti-Jewish depictions, the Zohar's Messiah is driven to vengeance, but his aggression is directed toward Christians rather than toward already disempowered Jews.[19]

This text's emphasis on emotion as a source of action is not accidental. Rather, it is part of a broad movement in medieval culture. Increased emphasis on emotion belongs to the growth of Marian devotion in medieval Europe and its strategy of reconfiguring Christ's mother as a humanistic intermediary figure that inspired empathetic spirituality.[20] Jewish mystical literature of the thirteenth century exhibits a parallel interest in affective spirituality and compassionate mimesis.[21]

In Zohar 2:8a–b's vivid depiction of Messiah's entrance into the palace of images, the Zoharic authors demonstrate their understanding of art's capacity to evoke strong emotion, which is passed from one character in the narrative to another until emotion inspires action. Designating artistic images as instigators of revenge and redemption indicates that the Zohars' authors understood art's power not only to move its viewers but also to change attitudes and mobilize actions, both religious and political. The Zohar's authors were aware of Christian art's role in shaping public opinion, and in passages like this one they acknowledge such art's impact while engaging in its subversion.[22]

In what follows, I focus on public sculpted art that existed or was produced in Castile during the thirteenth century, along with selected southern French works of the same chronology that the earliest Kabbalists could have viewed and that traveling Jews could have seen or heard about. After describing the landscape of thirteenth-century Christian art and its relationship to Jewish viewers, I connect that visual imagery to Zoharic material examined in this study, including the Messiah passage presented above, as well as the Rachel and Balaam passages from chapters 1, 3, and 4. All of the artworks described in this chapter were accessible to thirteenth-century Jews and occupied the visual space of their daily lives; each work remains standing and can be observed in situ. The discussion will foreground public art in urban environments where Jews were present, excluding works in rural environments or restricted spaces, such as

private cloisters. The Zoharic Kabbalists, many of whom led a peripatetic lifestyle, would have seen a broader representation of these works than more settled Jews.[23] Although other works existed during the Kabbalists' lifetimes, many were destroyed or displaced over the centuries in the course of wars, calamities, and construction projects and so remain inaccessible to study.

Christian Art in the Kabbalists' Environment

The Romanesque style, which flourished between 1050 and 1200, began the medieval European wave of public Church art and continued into the thirteenth century alongside the Gothic mode.[24] While Romanesque architecture brought new building techniques to Western Europe, its most impactful innovation for Jews was its monumental sculpture—especially the sculpted tympana over Church portals that moved Christian religious art from interior triumphal arches at the sanctuary end of churches' naves to exteriors in public view.[25] These tympana featured sophisticated visual representations of the Christian message and made this message newly visible to non-Christian observers.[26] Many of the first examples of such art emerged in Catalonia, and by the end of the eleventh century the new public sculpture had spread throughout northern Spain, southwestern France, and northern Italy.[27] By the mid-twelfth century, these tympana had developed into triple-arched Church entrances that further elaborated Christian narratives.[28] These visual narratives accompanied other forms of Christian storytelling that became prominent during this period, such as historical writings, epic poems, troubadour poetry, and liturgical dramas.[29]

Notably, these sculpted churches arose throughout the same areas from which Kabbalah emerged: southern France, Catalonia, and Castile. This flourishing accompanied other changes in Western Europe, such as population growth, economic growth, and the intense period of cultural development known as the twelfth-century Renaissance. Expansion of monasticism, Gregorian Church reform, the formal institution of clerical celibacy, the elaboration of Marian devotion, the increased importance of the Saint James pilgrimage, and the growth of the cult of relics (which required suitable housing for sacred artifacts) also marked this period.[30]

Western Europe's artistic revolution was driven further by the Gothic style's emergence, which began in mid-twelfth-century France and spread rapidly to thirteenth-century Spain, arriving first in Castile, where the

Zohar was composed.[31] This style's popularity also heralded cultural change, including the mendicant orders' rise, escalating conflict between Christian lay and religious leaders, the growth of cities and towns, and the many changes in Jewish-Christian relations discussed in previous chapters.[32] It spread rapidly from France to Spain along the Saint James pilgrimage routes.[33]

Paul Williamson writes that the history of sculpture in Spain between 1230 and 1300 is "essentially . . . Castilian."[34] Two of the first Gothic cathedrals in Spain were constructed in the Castilian cities of Burgos and León. Both enormous structures were begun and largely completed during the thirteenth century.[35] Burgos' cathedral, though administered by Rome, enjoyed royal patronage.[36] Begun in 1221 under King Ferdinand III by Bishop Mauricio, who attended the Fourth Lateran Council (Lateran IV), the cathedral was consecrated in 1260.[37] As the first example of the mature Gothic style in Spain, it would have attracted a great deal of attention—not least for its elaborately sculpted portals.[38]

The south portal of the Burgos cathedral, known as the Sarmental Portal, dates to the period 1230–1240.[39] Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras has suggested that its sculpted tympanum reflects Bishop Mauricio's attempt to promote the ecclesiastical and social reforms of Lateran IV by rendering old sculptural themes in the new, lifelike Gothic style.[40] Lateran IV was concerned with defining the Christian community and separating Christians from their surrounding others, including Jews. The north portal, known as the "Puerta de la Coronería" (Coronation Portal), was constructed between 1245 and 1255 and features a vivid Last Judgment scene.[41] This massive structure (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) was largely complete by 1300.

Similarly, Léon's cathedral was started around 1255 and mostly finished by 1300. It was the second wholly Gothic cathedral built in Castile-León. Its construction, subsidized by the Castilian Crown, was begun under Bishop Martín Fernández, a chancellor to Alfonso X (reigned 1252–1284), during whose reign much of the Zohar was composed.[42] This lavish cathedral features six thirteenth-century portals that the Zohar's authors would have encountered.

Other Castilian cathedrals, like those at Ávila and Sasamón, also existed or were embellished with sculpted tympana during the Zoharic authors' lifetimes.[43] Sasamón, a small city thirty kilometers west of Burgos, contains the cathedral of Santa María la Real, which features a sculpted tympanum from around 1280. Ávila is home to the cathedral of San Salvador, which

was constructed during the last third of the twelfth century and features a sculpted north portal.[44] The Toledo cathedral's complex Clock Portal, dating from 1280 to 1310, depicts a sculptural narrative of Jesus' life.[45]

Unlike Romanesque sculpture, which was evident in cities and towns but more often decorated rural monasteries, the Gothic style grew along with urban culture. Cathedrals and their dramatic facades dominated the skylines of thirteenth-century cities.[46] Public life focused on these gigantic structures, which stood toward the center of towns near marketplaces. In León, public trials took place in the cathedral's doorways.[47] Williamson writes, "No member of society living within reach of a cathedral undergoing construction would have been untouched by the work, and a good proportion would have been actively engaged on it."[48] León, Burgos, Ávila, Toledo, and other cities and towns of Castile also housed the Zohar's authors, who found themselves at the epicenter of an artistic revolution. Moses de León, for example, spent his final days in Ávila.[49]

The most frequent topic the Zohar's authors would have seen on tympana was Christ in Majesty, a theophanic image showing Christ enthroned, often within a mandorla. In Castilian works, the enthroned Christ sits among symbolic depictions of the four evangelists, who are shown either as humans seated at writing desks, as tetramorphs (Matthew's angel, Mark's lion, Luke's ox, and John's eagle), or in a combination of both types of figures. Commonly, the twenty-four elders of the apocalypse, angels, and other figures surround Christ in the archivolts.[50]

Examples of Christ in Majesty tympana remain today on the south transept of the central portal tympanum of the León cathedral (Figure 5.3a), the southern Sarmental portal at the Burgos cathedral (Figure 5.3b), and the single sculpted portal at Sasamón's cathedral (Figure 5.4a); and also, in southern France, at the twelfth-century Church of Saint-Trophime at Arles (Figure 5.4b).[51] Ávila's cathedral also features Christ in Majesty seated in a mandorla of clouds, in the midst of angels holding instruments of the Passion known as the *arma Christi* (Figure 5.4c).[52] So popular and widespread was the Christ in Majesty topic in Western European art that the Abbot of Westminster, Gilbert Crispin, had a Jewish character comment upon it in his *Dialogue between a Jew and Christian*, a work related to the abbot's conversations with a Jew from Mainz.[53] Such comments reflect not only Jewish consideration of Christian sculpture but also Christians' awareness of a Jewish audience for their art.

(a)

(b)

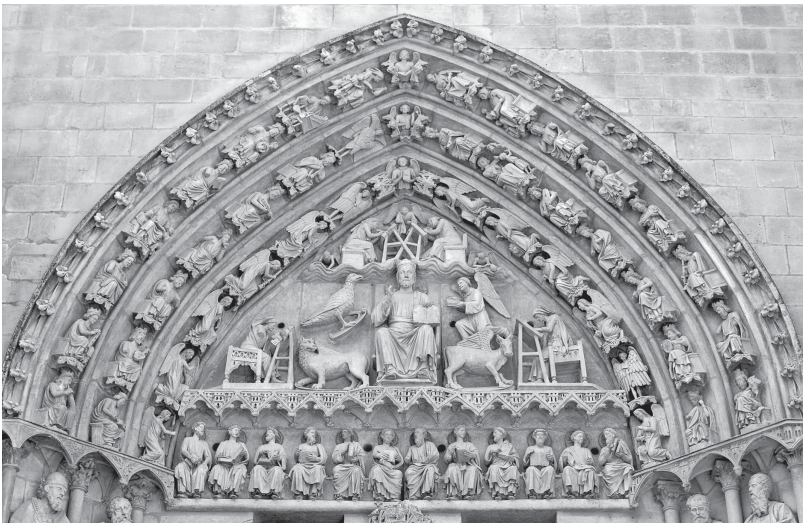
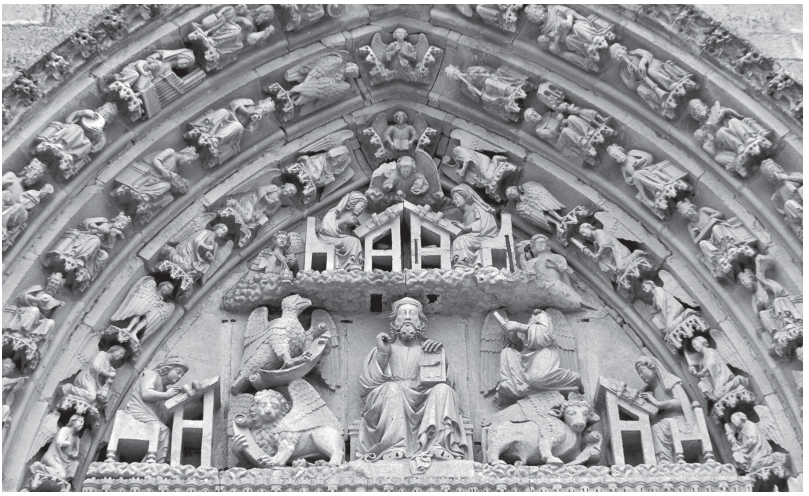


FIGURE 5.3 León Cathedral. Christ in Majesty with tetramorphs, evangelists at writing desks, cloud imagery, angels swinging censers, and apostles standing on lintel, thirteenth century (a); Burgos Cathedral, Sarmental Portal. Christ in Majesty with tetramorphs, evangelists at writing desks, cloud imagery, and apostles enthroned on lintel, ca. 1230–1240 (b).

(a)



(b)

FIGURE 5.4 Cathedral of Santa María la Real, Sasamón. Christ in Majesty with tetramorphs, evangelists at writing desks, and cloud imagery, ca. 1280 (a); Church of Saint-Trophime, Arles. Christ in Majesty in mandorla surrounded by tetramorphs, second half of twelfth century (b); Cathedral of San Salvador, Ávila. Christ in Majesty in mandorla with cloud imagery, bands of angels holding implements of the Passion, and Mary crowned at apex, last third of twelfth century (c).

(c)

FIGURE 5.4 Continued

Other topics considered suitable for tympana were Christ's ascension to heaven and the Last Judgment, in which Christ separates the saved from the damned in graphic detail.[54] These themes remained key topics of Castilian public sculpture into the thirteenth century, where they appeared on Gothic cathedrals as well as Romanesque churches.[55] León's Church of San Isidoro features a dramatic ascension depiction (Figure 5.5). At the León cathedral, the west facade's central tympanum depicts a crowned and enthroned Christ displaying his stigmata while presiding over the Last Judgment (Figure 5.6a). The Burgos cathedral's north transept tympanum also displays Christ enthroned at the Last Judgment (Figure 5.6b). Further abroad, but within the range of Jewish travelers and Christian pilgrims, the late-twelfth-century Church of Saint-Trophime at Arles depicts a crowned, enthroned Christ reigning over the judgment of souls.[56]

One of these themes' most important aspects is that they interact typologically, with each implying, predicting, and reinforcing the others. Christ in Majesty interprets the theophanic vision of Revelation 4:2–5:10, in which Jesus is seated on a heavenly throne surrounded by a rainbow and accompanied by the evangelists' tetramorphs and the twenty-four elders of the apocalypse. In Revelation, this vision is a prelude to the Last

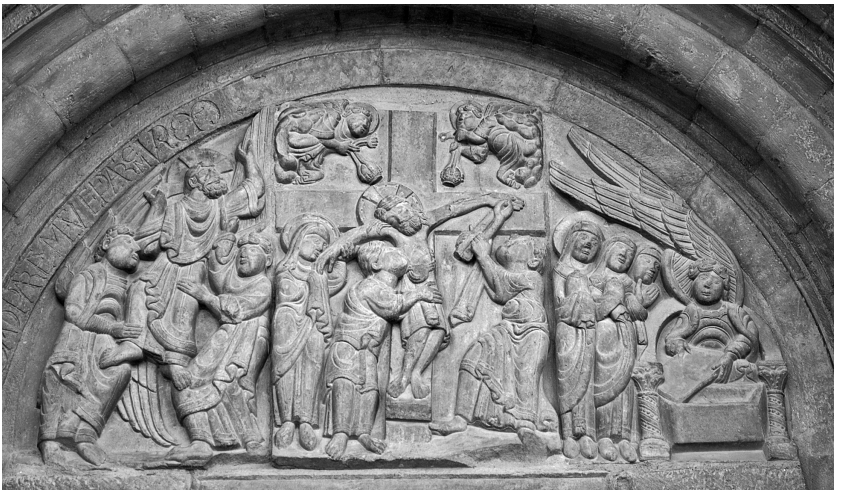


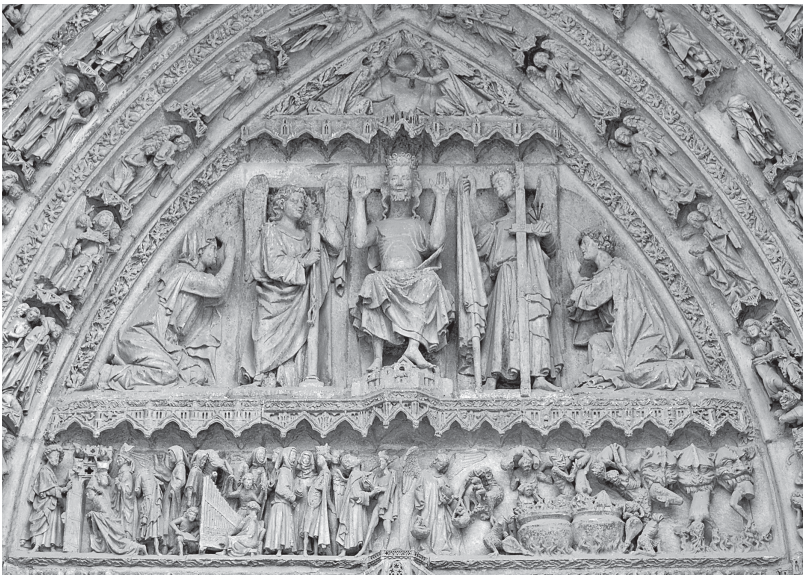
FIGURE 5.5 Church of San Isidoro, León. Tympanum featuring ascension, deposition with censer-swinging angels, and women at the empty sepulcher, twelfth century.

Judgment, a motif that gradually replaced Christ in Majesty in many parts of Europe during the twelfth century, though the earlier motif's popularity endured in Spain.[57] The ascension also references the Christ in Majesty and Last Judgment motifs, because it explains how Christ arrives at the heavenly throne to which he will return as judge.

This motif, which generally shows Christ ascending to heaven accompanied by two angels who help him on his way, alludes to Acts 1:9–11, which also refers to Christ's return, and so to the Last Judgment. "When he [Jesus] had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven, suddenly two men in white robes stood by them. They said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.' " Christ ascending was depicted on his way to heaven, Christ in Majesty was shown enthroned there, and Christ in Judgment had returned from there. Together, the three motifs expressed core Christian claims. No reliably dated tympanum prior to the third decade of the twelfth century possesses a theme unrelated to these concepts.[58]

So critical was this theology of ascension, enthronement, and return that portrayals of Christ's ascension to heaven are visually distinct from those of other righteous souls rising to their heavenly reward, empha-

(a)



(b)

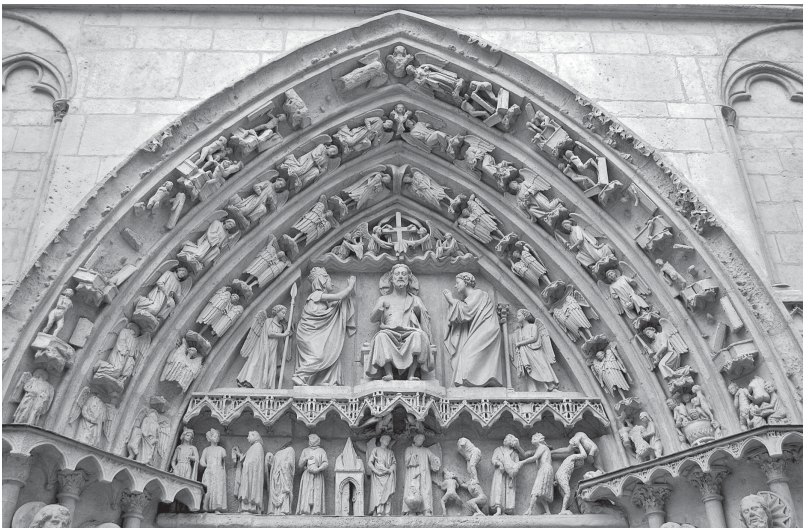


FIGURE 5.6 León Cathedral. Last Judgment with Christ displaying stigmata flanked by angels holding instruments of the Passion and kneeling Mary and John, lintel with saved and damned featuring crowned figure and hooded friar, thirteenth century (a); Burgos Cathedral, Puerta de la Coronería. Last Judgment with Christ flanked by Mary and John and angels holding instruments of the Passion, lintel with saved and damned featuring hooded friars, ca. 1245–1255 (b).

sizing the claim that Christ's ascension is the cause of others' ascent. The ascending Christ rises accompanied by angels yet free of restraint (Figure 5.5). The souls of mere mortals are carried to heaven in slings held by angels. The human soul's journey to heaven appears on a mid- to late-twelfth-century tympanum at the Church of San Vicente in Ávila (Figure 5.7a) and on the León cathedral's right south transept portal, where angels carry Saint Froilán's soul in what looks like a small hammock (Figure 5.7b).

Such visual expressions of Christian narratives gained impact from the art's location and composition. Their placement above viewers added to the spectator's sense of Jesus lifting into or seated among the heavens. When approaching these figures from below, Christ appears to be flying or floating over the viewer's head, an effect generated by relief sculpture protruding from the tympanum arch. Cloud imagery surrounding Jesus reinforces this effect. From below, Christ appears with his head in a mantle of clouds.

Vivid and dramatic coloring also drew the viewer's gaze, which made these sculptures easier to read than they appear in their modern, monochromatic state.[59] Medieval statues and sculpted facades were vividly and realistically painted.[60] Color also helped to reinforce ideological messages concerning Christ's placement in the heavens; iconographic images of Jesus and the Virgin often were located upon a luminous blue background, sometimes adorned with golden stars.[61] The cloud forms common to Christ in Majesty images were also easier to understand when colored. In their current lackluster state they appear mainly as sculpted waves and squiggles.

Art on the outside of churches featured other Christian narrative elements as well. The twelve apostles often appeared on lintels below images of Christ in Majesty, as on the south transept central portal at the León cathedral (Figure 5.3a), the single sculpted portal of the Sasamón cathedral, the south portal of the Burgos cathedral (Figure 5.3b), and the Church of Saint-Trophime at Arles. Images of the crucifixion and deposition were featured at the Church of San Isidoro in León (Figure 5.5) and at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard in southern France (Figure 5.2a). The women at the sepulcher, who also emphasized Jesus' triumph over death, were shown on the Church of San Isidoro (Figure 5.5) and at Saint-Gilles (Figure 5.2a). Baptism images also marked public art of the thirteenth century, showing Christ with the Holy Spirit descending as a

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 5.7 Church of San Vicente, Ávila. Righteous soul carried to heaven in a sling held by angels, mid- to late twelfth century (a); León Cathedral. Saint Froilán's soul carried to heaven in a sling held by angels, thirteenth century (b).

dove—imagery that can be seen on the Toledo cathedral's Clock Portal (Figure 5.8a), the Church of Saint-Trophime at Arles (Figure 5.8b), and perhaps figured on the west facade of the Burgos cathedral before its reconstruction.[62] The Zohar's authors addressed all these themes, as shall be seen.

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 5.8 Toledo Cathedral, Portada del Reloj. Christ's baptism with Holy Spirit descending as a dove, ca. 1280–1310 (a); Church of Saint-Trophime, Arles. Christ's baptism with Holy Spirit descending as a dove, second half of twelfth century (b).

Art and Pilgrimage

The driving force behind monumental art and architecture's expansion in this region was the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela, one of the three most important medieval pilgrimage sites. The other two were Rome and Jerusalem.[63] Santiago in northwestern Spain transformed itself into a monumental location honoring Saint James the Greater in the eleventh century; James was considered the only major apostle to be buried as a complete body at a single site in Western Europe.[64] By the middle of that century, Western Europe boasted a network of roadways that included both ancient Roman and medieval works, and new roads connected the pilgrimage's infrastructure of bridges, hospices, reliquary chapels, monasteries, and churches.[65] While construction of the great Santiago Church that culminated the pilgrimage began in 1078, architectural projects along the route continued into the thirteenth century and beyond, as with the great cathedrals at Burgos and León.[66] These sites, often adorned with elaborate sculptural programs, represented secular and religious attempts to facilitate pilgrims' travel and to display piety, authority, and wealth.

Scholars recognize four main routes to Santiago: the *via turonense*, the *via lemovicense*, the *via podense*, and the *via tolosana*, which traverse large portions of central and southern France and northern Spain. The *via turonense* began in Paris, the *via lemovicense* was named for Limoges, and the *via podense* started at Notre-Dame-du-Puy.[67] The *via tolosana* (the way of Toulouse), which was the southernmost route and the one that passed through the early and classical Kabbalists' regions in southern France and northern Spain, began in Arles and continued through Montpellier, Narbonne, and Toulouse, featuring religious and Carolingian relics at chapels on the way.[68] All four routes converged at Puenta la Reina in northern Spain, then passed through the Castilian cities of Burgos and León before proceeding to Santiago; during the Middle Ages the Spanish part of the route was a sparsely populated frontier region, leading to an increased amount of organized assistance, as in Burgos and León.[69]

This route remains in use today. It is not uncommon to see pilgrims walking it with donkeys, a sight that evokes Zoharic imagery of a mystical brotherhood that traveled the same way, as well as providing a glimpse of the pilgrimage in its prime. Travelers and dwellers along the pilgrim routes would have encountered a surprisingly international mix of French,

Belgian, Flemish, German, Italian, Polish, Hungarian, Slovenian, Croatian, Austrian, and Slovakian pilgrims, affording ample opportunity to spread news, rumors, and gossip.[70]

Jews also traveled this area and sent letters and communications through it.[71] They likely would have used many of the same routes as pilgrims. In the thirteenth century, as in the twenty-first, a main road was often the quickest and safest way to travel from one place to another. Jews along these routes would have become familiar with the pilgrimage's iconography, as well as with the broader Christian messages its public art presented. Indeed, though this study examines only public Church art that remains standing today, thirteenth-century Jews would have been familiar with many other forms of Christian art used in religious processions and carried by travelers.[72]

The Saint James pilgrimage passed not only through areas with well-established Jewish populations, such as Montpellier (where the Maimonidean controversy raged during the first half of the thirteenth century) and Narbonne (where the first accusation of an international Jewish conspiracy claimed that Jewish leaders met), but also through the heartland of Kabbalah's early and classical development in southern France and northern Spain, and particularly Castile.[73] Burgos was home to the second-largest Castilian Jewish population, and was also a commercial and an artistic center with the third-largest cathedral in Spain.[74] Not coincidentally, it was also the first major city along the pilgrimage after the four routes converged. León, of course, is the toponym of Moses de León, one of the Zohar's most important authors. In other Castilian towns where the Kabbalists lived and traveled, like Ávila, Jews rented land and dwellings from local cathedrals that featured elaborate sculptural facades.[75] Toledo, where Castile's largest Jewish population lived in the thirteenth century, saw the beginning of a new cathedral's construction during that time.[76]

Catalonian Jews also would have encountered Christian art and shared their reactions to it with the Jews of Castile when they came into contact. In the Catalonian cities of Barcelona and Girona, home to many famous Jewish Kabbalists, philosophers, legalists, and poets, the local Jewish quarter sat in close proximity to monasteries and churches, affording further opportunities for Jews to encounter Christian ideas and to view Christian art.[77] Indeed, one of the 1263 Barcelona disputation's four sessions was evidently held in a cloister rather than at the royal palace.[78]

Such cities and towns, especially those containing large cathedrals, not only gave Jews the opportunity to view Christian art but also forced such

encounters by virtue of the cathedrals' grandeur and role as centerpieces of medieval urban life.[79] In her work on Christian iconography of Ecclesia and Synagoga in medieval France and Germany, Nina Rowe considers the "monumental sculpted ensembles that dominated the public space at city centers . . . poised above the motley populace," which she explains included local Christian burghers, traveling merchants, pilgrims, itinerant artists, popular preachers, and Jewish men and women all going about their business.[80]

Art and Domination

Although medieval Church art was a form of religious expression, it was also highly political. Monumental sculptural facades made statements regarding Christian power, cosmology, social hierarchy, and attitudes regarding majorities and minorities.[81] Christ ascending beyond the world, seated on a throne in heaven above it, or enthroned and judging souls upon his return expressed clear messages of Christian triumph and authority. M. F. Hearn writes, "The theme of the triumph of Christ. . .thus endowed the act of entering the Church with the aura of participation in that triumph."[82]

Yet the Church's messages of dominance were not meant only for those who entered. They were also important parts of Christendom's public transcript of universal domination and so were intended for those who did *not* enter into churches, as well as for those who did. Jews, as members of this society, were meant to read and assimilate Christian art's messages. As described above, in the Zoharic Kabbalists' environment, images of an enthroned, crowned Christ seated in majesty among the heavens or presiding over the Last Judgment were popular topics. These messages were vivid, concrete, and impactful, and were accessible to both literate and illiterate viewers. Debra Higgs Strickland has called medieval art an "ongoing Church-sponsored propaganda campaign."[83] Similarly, Andreas Petzold has written, "In public art, images appear to have served a comparable function to advertising today. The great expense, artifice, and skill were expended to reinforce the Christian view of the world, and as a vehicle for propaganda and comment on contemporary issues."[84]

This view echoes that of medieval art's sponsors. As early as the seventh century, Pope Gregory the Great justified public artworks as "books" for the illiterate, explaining, "What writing offers to those who read it, a

picture offers to the ignorant who look at it."[85] In a society of largely illiterate folk, these sculpted ensembles offered an important way to stimulate personal response and religious conviction, as well as to disseminate information about the world and social order.[86] For example, medieval sculpted ensembles often pictured Christ or angels at a composition's apex with the Virgin beneath him and the twelve apostles below, followed by famous saints on the next tier, then less important local saints, with live viewers standing beneath the edifice included in the power structure through which intercessory prayer was thought to pass.[87] When worshippers entered churches beneath such sculptures, they participated in them by occupying their proper space within the Church hierarchy and affirming the message of Christendom's triumph.[88] Indeed, Romanesque and Gothic sculpture had similar functions to the Roman sculpture that inspired them, since they proclaimed public political policy and interpreted important events.[89] Such political messaging almost inevitably contained the theme of the Church triumphant and dominant over society.[90]

Of course, these public artworks also carried important messages regarding groups who did not affirm their place within the Christian world, and were designed to influence public opinion and attitudes regarding Christianity's Others.[91] Strickland writes that it is "safe to assume that the negative messages about enemies of Christendom conveyed in medieval works of art were received by nearly everyone."[92] Jacqueline Jung has suggested that Jews may have been a deliberately intended target audience for exterior Church art.[93] And in much of Europe, particularly in northern France and Germany, negative images of Jews did accompany deteriorating relations between Jews and Christians, transforming public opinion and in some cases provoking and rationalizing violence against the Jewish communities that were increasingly portrayed as enemies of Christ and Christendom.[94]

Thirteenth-century European art made increasingly clear distinctions between Jews and Christians, portraying historical Jews in ways that conflated them with Jews in the medieval Christian environment.[95] In the regions where the Kabbalists lived and wrote, such clear anti-Jewish imagery was less common than the ubiquitous scenes of Christian universal triumph that adorned churches in public settings. However, both explicitly and implicitly anti-Jewish artworks comprised an important public transcript of domination that was legible to all members of the society who viewed them, whether in power or subordinate to it.

In the Last Judgment scenes at the León and Burgos cathedrals, and at Saint-Trophime in Arles, graphic and disturbing images contrast the fate of the saved with that of the damned, informing viewers that Christ's Church claimed dominion over all humanity, whether Christian or not. The central Last Judgment tympanum of the León cathedral's west facade is famous for its lintel, which on its right contains vivid imagery of sinners being thrown into boiling cauldrons and gigantic demonic heads consuming the damned, with motifs of torment extending to smaller sculptures in the archivolts. On the same lintel's left, the happy blessed proceed toward heaven with relaxed postures, smiling and conversing with each other (Figure 5.6a). Among them stands a crowned human king sometimes identified as Alfonso X (under whose reign the cathedral was commissioned and much of the Zohar written) and a hooded friar (Figure 5.9).[96] Two hooded mendicant friars are also featured among the saved on Burgos's Last Judgment tympanum, emphasizing both their claimed alignment with heaven and their earthly power, which increased dramatically in thirteenth-century Castile (Figure 5.6b). On Saint-Trophime's frieze, the saved proceed happily toward Abraham's bosom while the damned march together in chains through the fires of hell. Outside the Kabbalists' territories in Germany, the thirteenth-century cathedral at Mainz clearly depicts a Jewish man being led away in chains among the damned.[97] However, even without a Jewish figure's inclusion among the damned, Jews who viewed the Last Judgment scenes at León, Burgos, and Arles would have understood where Christians placed them.

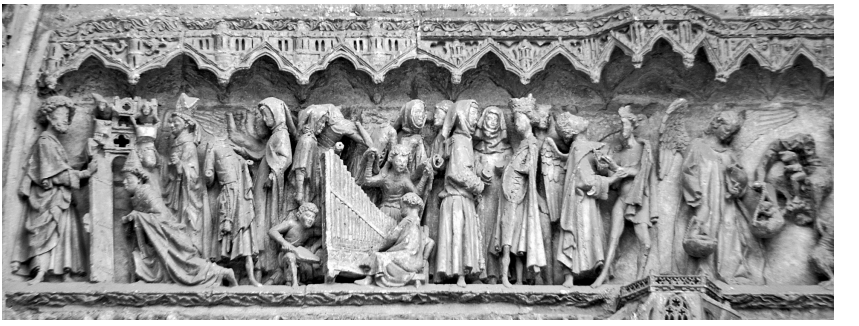


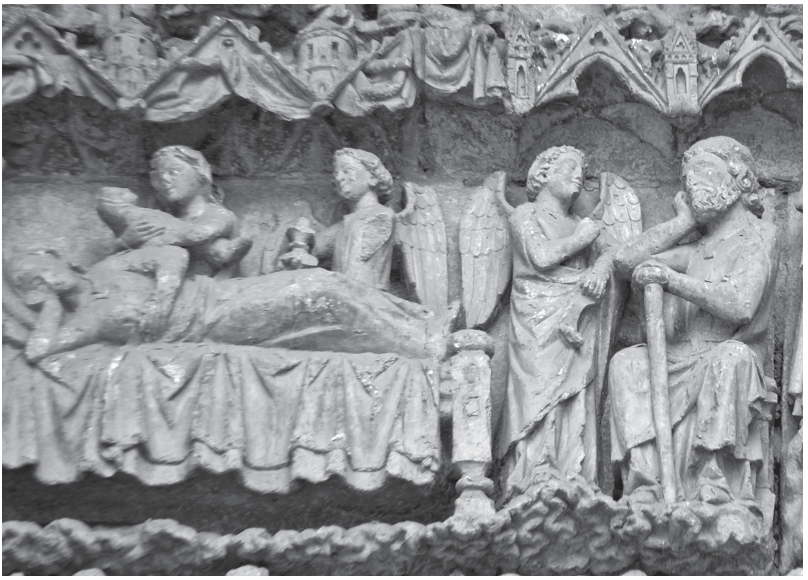
FIGURE 5.9 León Cathedral. Detail, Last Judgment lintel with happy righteous entering heaven, including crowned figure and hooded friar, thirteenth century.

Other themes exalting Christianity and denigrating Jews also occupied the Kabbalists' artistic environment. For example, twelfth- and thirteenth-century Church tympana featuring the Christ in Majesty motif often depicted the twelve apostles on the lintel below or in the pillars to either side of the door, as at Ávila, Burgos, Sasamón, and Saint-Trophime at Arles. At all these sites but Ávila and León, the apostles are shown enthroned (see Figure 5.3b for an example). At León the apostles are standing—a detail discussed below. Though these twelve figures serve as narrative and symbolic accompaniments to Christ, they also play an important role in Christian supersession claims and Jewish responses.

The twelve apostles' enthronement in judgment over the twelve Israelite tribes is connected closely to Christ's heavenly enthronement. Such sculpted images recall claims of Christian triumph over Israel and Jews. Matthew 19:28 reads, "Jesus said to them, 'Truly I tell you, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man is seated on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" In Luke 22:28–30, Jesus says, "You are those who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." The Kabbalists' responses to these ideas, presented in chapter 1, indicate that they understood the religious and political implications of tympana depicting a kingly Christ in the enthroned apostles' company.[98] Frequent encounters with enthroned apostles in art as well as in text made answering Christian claims regarding divine rejection of Jews all the more urgent.[99]

Images of Jewish displacement and Christian power appear in other types of sculptural compositions as well. In the lower-right portion of the left tympanum of the León cathedral's west facade, an angel stands before Joseph at Jesus' birth (Figure 5.10a). Joseph's Jewish identity is clear from his hat: an item strongly associated with Jews in medieval art. He sits propped on a staff with his head leaning against his hand, a common depiction of Joseph at Christ's birth. An angel's body blocks Joseph's access to the birth scene before him, and the angel's raised hand (which signifies speech in ancient and medieval art) makes him appear both to bar Joseph from the action and to lecture him on Jews' subordinate role in the new Christian world.[100] Joseph's apparent response is tired resignation. It is reasonable to suppose that this was also the Church's preferred stance for medieval Jews.

(a)



(b)

FIGURE 5.10 León Cathedral. Detail of Joseph addressed and barred from Christ's birth by an angel, thirteenth century (a); León Cathedral. Joseph at Christ's birth in context, thirteenth century (b); Church of Saint-Trophime, Arles. Joseph addressed by an angel and barred from Christ's birth by a doorway, second half of twelfth century (c).

(c)

FIGURE 5.10 Continued

Although Joseph, Mary, and the infant Jesus are all Jewish according to the gospels, both Mary and Jesus are integral to Christian faith in a way that Joseph is not. Joseph is the only one of the three clearly depicted as a Jew on the León tympanum. Mary and her newborn son occupy the center of the register that shows Jesus' birth. She appears prominently enthroned, holding her infant at the tympanum's center directly above the birth scene, while Joseph remains visually marginalized (Figure 5.10b). The message of Mary's holiness and Joseph's exclusion from religious importance is reconfirmed on the same León cathedral facade's rightmost tympanum, where Mary is shown being crowned by angels. Joseph and his Jewish hat are nowhere to be found.

A similar scene exists at the Church of Saint-Trophime, where the capital of the column to the entry's right shows Christ's birth, while the left column's capital shows an angel with a raised hand addressing Joseph, who again wears a Jewish hat. The space that the Church door occupies exiles Joseph from the Christian world's birth (Figure 5.10c). Unlike at León, where Joseph faces his wife, here he turns his back on the scene. At both locations, these compositions' messages of Christian dominance and Jewish subordination remain clear to viewers of either group.

Art and Its Jewish Reception

Given these examples, it becomes easier to understand why medieval Jews labeled Christians as idolaters and Edomites (i.e., Romans).[101] It is not only

that Jews perceived Christendom as the inheritor of pagan Rome's oppressive power, but also that Christian religious images became increasingly prominent and grandiose in areas where Jews lived during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Often, these works recalled Roman compositions, mirroring triumphal arches and their messages of domination.[102] Jewish connections between Rome and Christendom would have been further fueled by a European landscape in which many Roman architectural projects remained, inspiring the Christian works that were built among them. Petzold notes that such borrowings "remind us that the art of this period is, first and foremost that of the Church triumphant, although it had a secular audience firmly in mind."[103] In this sense, medieval Jewish use of "idolater" for "Christian" is itself a protest of Christianity's self-definition and claims of universal domination.

Jews also were directly critical of Christian art. The Spanish convert Petrus Alfonsi (1062–ca. 1140) wrote of Jewish revulsion toward the crucifix and Christian icons in his *Dialogue with Moses the Jew*.[104] The twelfth-century Rhenish scholar Herman (formerly Judah) recorded a similar perplexity regarding Christian art in his conversion account. "In your temples you have set up as objects of adoration . . . huge images elaborately wrought with the art of painters and sculptors. O, if, to consummate your perdition, you worshipped the likeness of anything besides that of a crucified man!. . . since, according to the authority of the Law, 'cursed is everyone who hangs on wood.' "[105] The widely read Jewish polemic *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* (The Book of Nestor the Priest) complained that Jesus, "Commanded you . . . to buy a rotten tree and make from it an image from which there is no benefit."[106] *Nitzaḥon Vetus* (The Old Book of Polemic) similarly elaborates, " 'Those who carry the wood of their graven image [and pray unto a god that cannot save]' (Isaiah 45:20) refers to a cross upon which an image is drawn. . . . The verse is referring to the nation which believes in Jesus, for they carry the wood and the idol in order to show the image of their deity, but they do not pray to the wood and idol themselves but to the one in whose image and likeness this wood and idol were made."[107] The passage interprets a prophetic pronouncement regarding idolatry by applying it to Christians.[108] It also displays a sophisticated understanding of how medieval Christians used images as devotional objects, rather than worshipping such objects as deities.[109] However, this distinction does not mitigate the text's idolatry accusations.

Zoharic Subversions of Christian Art

Thirteenth-century Jews like the Zohar's authors became familiar enough with Christian art to incorporate its motifs subversively into their writings. For example, the imagery of Zohar 2:8a–b strongly resembles Romanesque and Gothic sculpted tympana the Kabbalists would have seen, emphasizing its dialogue with public Christian images. First, its description of the vengeance-inspiring scenes "embroidered with many colors" that Messiah sees in the "palace of longing" corresponds to Church tympana's bright, polychromatic painting. Second, when Messiah "raises his eyes" to view these images, he mirrors the action medieval viewers performed to see the monumental sculpture over their heads—a relationship between art and viewer that emphasized Christian authority and increased the viewer's relative sense of disempowerment.

Motifs common to monumental tympana also appear in the passage's descriptions. This is particularly evident in the scene where the heavenly righteous ones arm Messiah for vengeance. There, four Jewish figures surround Messiah in a manner similar to Christ in Majesty tympana, which show the four evangelists or their tetramorphs encircling Jesus. Such imagery can be seen at León, Burgos, and Sasamón in Castile, as well as at Saint-Trophime at Arles (Figures 5.3a, 5.3b, 5.4a, and 5.4b). Moses' inclusion with the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, implies that the Zohar's authors deliberately assembled a group of four figures to invoke this correspondence. Including Moses with the patriarchs is not the usual practice in Jewish literature, where the patriarchs generally are listed together as a group of three without the prophet, as in the first benediction of the ancient Amidah prayer, which was recited daily by medieval Jews.[110]

Messiah's descent from heaven "surrounded by holy camps" is also reminiscent of Christ in Majesty tympana where Jesus is surrounded by bands of angels, apocalyptic elders, and other figures in the archivolts, a feature common to all the Gothic portals discussed in this chapter (Figures 5.3a, 5.3b, 5.4a, 5.4b, 5.4c, 5.6a, and 5.6b). The Zoharic Messiah's descent also echoes Christian narratives of Jesus' descent from heaven at the Last Judgment, a theme to which the Christ in Majesty motif alludes.

The passage further describes the Jewish figures and angels surrounding Messiah girding him "with the implements of his armaments," a description strikingly similar to the Last Judgment motif of Christ sur-

rounded by Mary, John, and angels bearing the instruments of the Passion known as the *arma Christi*—the armaments of Christ. Some of the most recognizable of these armaments in medieval art include the cross, the crown of thorns, the column and whips associated with the flagellation, the nails, and the lance. Tympana with *arma Christi* can be seen at Ávila, where the instruments are borne by angels displayed in banded levels (Figure 5.4c); on the León cathedral west facade's central Last Judgment tympanum, where angels holding the instruments are flanked by a kneeling Mary and John (Figure 5.6a); and on the Burgos cathedral's Last Judgment tympanum, where Mary and John are flanked by angels holding the instruments, including a clearly rendered spear—a distinctive armament (Figure 5.6b). Although the Christian figures display the instruments of the Passion to remind viewers of Christ's sacrifice and transcendence, indicating his authority, the Zohar's Messiah is arrayed for a war of vengeance yet to come, in which authority will shift toward Jews.

While God fails to comfort Rachel in Zohar 2:8a–b, Messiah's preparations for vengeance do "comfort her . . . and she will rise and kiss him." Rachel's prominent role in the narrative, both as part of a visual composition Messiah observes and as a character whose tears and kisses provoke and affirm vengeance upon the gentiles, echoes Mary's prominence in thirteenth-century Church tympana. The Virgin is depicted intervening in the León and Burgos cathedrals' Last Judgment scenes; she is prominently featured being crowned and holding the infant Jesus in the right and left tympana of the León cathedral's west facade; and her coronation appears at the apex of the Ávila cathedral's Christ in Majesty tympanum (Figures 5.6a, 5.6b, 5.10b, and 5.4c). She is shown mourning the dead Christ on the Church of San Isidoro in León (Figure 5.5). In Zohar 2:8a–b, Rachel's prominent roles in weeping, being comforted, and inspiring vengeance serve as foils for Christianity's Virgin mother, rather than corresponding to Christ as in chapter 1.[111] Like Mary, Rachel mourns for her children, and her tears intercede with Messiah to affect Jews' worldly fate.

Finally, the Zohar's description of "all these righteous ones going and dancing in the Garden of Eden," before Messiah, resembles the merriment of the righteous before Christ in the Last Judgment tympana at Burgos and León (Figures 5.6a and 5.6b). The León cathedral's striking Last Judgment lintel displays happy, excited characters entering into paradise on its left (Figure 5.9). They serve as counterpoints to images of the damned entering Hell on the lintel's right. The Zohar reverses this scene by describing happy Jews celebrating in paradise as Messiah comes to visit

God's judgment and punishment on sinful Christians. These many parallels between art and text are both striking and intentional. Just as Christians displayed their sacred narrative's claims of universal dominance in their art, the Kabbalists displayed their own tradition's dominance over Christians and their art in sacred narrative. The Zohar's intimate knowledge and subversive mimicry of the main Castilian tympanum motifs demonstrate its authors' negative engagement with the artistic revolution going on around them.

Notably, medieval public sculpture's growing importance prompted complaints from Christians as well as from Jews. The twelfth-century Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux wrote, "So many and so marvelous are the varieties of these diverse shapes on every hand that we are more tempted to read in the marble than in our books, and spend the whole day wondering at these things than in meditating upon the law of God."[112] Interestingly, the new sculpture's role as exterior Church architecture served to defend against Christian idolatry charges, since thirteenth-century Christians generally considered idols to be free-standing statues on pillars.[113] Medieval Jews clearly did not recognize this distinction.

The Zohar's Balaam and Christian Art

In addition to confronting Christian theology's literary and verbal challenges, nearly every point in the Zoharic Balaam narrative examined in the previous chapter also incorporates and refutes themes drawn from sculpted Church facades.[114]

Sefer ha-Zohar 3:192a

"And he sent messengers to Balaam, son of Be'or" (Numbers 22:5). Here are twenty-eight words to correspond to the twenty-eight levels of sorcerous divinations of the bird . . . .[115] Balaq divined divinations and did sorcery and prepared the bird. . . . Immediately, "He sent messengers to Balaam, son of Be'or." Petorah was the name of the place, as it is said: "From Petor of Aram Naharayim to curse you" (Deuteronomy 23:5). Why was it called this? Because, as it is written: "Who arranged a table for Fortune (*Gad*)" (Isaiah 65:11). [116] And a table was prepared there every day, for in that manner it was prepared for the sides of evil. They prepared before them a table with food and with drink, and did sorceries and offered incense before

> the table. . . . That wicked one—who is Balaam—used to prepare [a table] similarly for the Other Side. And he used to prepare a table and bread that was called Abominable Bread (*leḥem mego'al*).[117]

In this passage, the wicked Balaam (who stands for Jesus in the Zohar's allusive parlance) practices sorcery with the Moabite king Balaq.[118] As discussed in the previous chapter, the sorceries and divinations of the bird seem to refer to Christ's baptism, which Christian art generally depicts with a dove representing the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus' head as he stands immersed in water.[119] Such imagery exists on the Toledo cathedral's Portada del Reloj (Clock Portal) (Figure 5.8a); on the inner right column capital flanking the door to the Church of Saint-Trophime at Arles (Figure 5.8b); and on the interior south transept portal of the Burgos cathedral (a site questionably accessible to Jews, but whose production Jews could have witnessed); it also may once have occupied the west facade of the Burgos cathedral.[120] This cathedral's three sculpted west facade portals were replaced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their original topics remain unclear. Burgos's cathedral museum suggests that a baptism with a dove featured prominently in the program, at the apex of a tympanum dedicated to the Virgin and child.[121]

Depictions of the baptism with a dove were also available at other sites medieval pilgrims visited, such as the ancient necropolis of Les Alyscamps at Arles, which was believed to contain relics related to the *Chanson de Roland*. A fourth-century sarcophagus featuring a baptism with a dove now in the Musée departemental de l'Arles Antiques once resided in the necropolis.[122] Artworks such as these would have brought Christian associations with birds to medieval Jews' attention. The Zohar, drawing on this common imagery, reconfigures the dove's descent as Christian sorcery.

Similarly, the table that the wicked sorcerer arrays for the "sides of evil," with its "Abominable Bread," seems to allude both to the eucharist, which Jews would have seen displayed in religious rituals (as discussed in the previous chapter), and to the Last Supper—another topic featured in Christian art the Kabbalists would have seen. The Last Supper on the lintel below the central tympanum at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard and its relation to eucharistic conflict between Christians was discussed in the previous chapter (Figure 5.11a). The Last Supper also features on the right side of the lintel of the Ávila cathedral's sculpted portal (Figure 5.11b). The Zohar's

(a)

(b)

FIGURE 5.11 Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. Last Supper, early twelfth century/early thirteenth century (a); Cathedral of San Salvador, Ávila. Last Supper, last third of twelfth century (b).

authors knew that the host was ritually associated with the table and the altar, and again portrayed Christian practice as sorcery. The incense accompanying the Other Side's rituals also alludes to Christian art. Both the Christ in Majesty tympanum on León's cathedral and the deposition scene on the Church of San Isidoro's tympanum include angels swinging censers above Christ's head (Figure 5.3a and Figure 5.5).

As discussed in the previous chapter, the long passage narrating Balaam's flight and death in Zohar 3:193b–194b alludes to the empty sepulcher when it describes Balaam's lack of burial, which results in his body's disappearance. "And so died Balaam, and he was punished with punishments in that world, and was never buried. And all of his bones rotted and became disgusting serpents . . . and even the worms that ate his flesh were turned into serpents." Jewish and Christian contention over the fate of Jesus' body was discussed in chapter 4, yet it is also relevant when discussing the Zohar's response to Christian art because the empty sepulcher was another sculptural motif familiar to the Kabbalists. Though the numbers of women and angels vary between gospel accounts, visual representations of the empty tomb in the Kabbalists' environment depict three women and one angel.[123] This scene is featured on the right side of the deposition tympanum on the Church of

San Isidoro in León and on the right tympanum's lintel at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard (Figures 5.5 and 5.2a).

Claims about Christ's disappearance and triumph over death relate directly to claims of his ascension and heavenly enthronement. Many sculptural programs highlight these connections for Christian and Jewish observers. At Saint-Gilles, the tympanum above the three women at the sepulcher shows the crucifixion and the fall of Synagoga, while the resurrected Christ reappears to his apostles on the frieze to the right of the empty tomb, at the same level as the lintel (see Figures 5.2a and 5.2b). Placing the sepulcher scene so close to the crucifixion and the resurrected Christ's appearance provides an intellectually coherent presentation of Christian theology.

At León's Church of San Isidoro, the women at the sepulcher occupy the right of a tympanum whose center shows the deposition from the cross and whose left side features the ascension. Here, the angel smiles as he opens the tomb and reveals its emptiness while spreading his wings over the women. The scene interacts with the ascension to the left, where Christ springs joyously heavenward with an angel on either side, his lively features contrasting with his moribund ones in the central deposition (Figure 5.5). Together, the two scenes flanking the deposition reference John 20:17, in which Jesus appears at the empty tomb and says to Mary Magdalene: "I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' "

Nearby, the León cathedral's south transept central tympanum features Christ in Majesty, placing Jesus in heaven after his ascension. The apostles on the lintel below him stand in poses of wonder and astonishment (Figure 5.3a), rather than appearing in the more usual enthroned grouping. The combined effect of both sculptural ensembles, which are located a short walk from each other, is to tell the story of Christ's death, his disappearance from his tomb, his ascension to heaven, his enthronement there, and his reappearance to his apostles on earth.[124] Thus, León's sacred architecture as a whole displays the same message of death, ascension, and resurrection as the Church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. Both reinforce the Christian narrative of a divine being who vanishes from his empty tomb and flies into the heavens, triumphing over death to rule the earth and its inhabitants (including Jews) below.

When the Zohar counters this theology by claiming that Balaam/Christ's body disappeared and turned into worms and snakes, negating

Christian ascension and enthronement claims, it echoes Jewish polemic common in the Kabbalists' environment. *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* asserts, "Heaven forbid that I say that . . . he was hidden three days in the grave with the dead, and afterwards he rose and went away,"[125] while *Nitzaḥon Vetus* simply says, "Jesus turned to worms and became worthless after his death."[126]

Furthermore, Zohar 3:193b–194b also engages the ascension prior to its empty tomb reference. "We have learned that in the city of Midian he [Balaam] became capable, with the wisdom of his sorcery, of flying in the air . . . Pinḥas came there, with officers of the army. When he [Balaam] saw Pinḥas, he flew away into the air, and his two sons [went] with him: Yunus and Yumbrus. . . . Pinḥas saw him, for he was a man flying in the air, and was rising in the air away from sight. When that wicked one came down before Pinḥas, he [Pinḥas] said to him [Balaam]: Wicked One, how many evil turns have you done to the holy people? He [Pinḥas] said to Tzelyah: Come and kill him, but not with the Name, for it is not fitting for this one to be remembered for supernal holiness." Using God's holy name to kill Balaam might sanctify his death.[127] The Zohar's authors depict their characters strategically, disengaging Balaam from any connection to holiness whatsoever. Thus, the Zohar's Balaam narrative subversively echoes and distorts claims of Christ's death, ascension, resurrection, and enthronement.[128] These themes, which permeate Christian theology, were most clearly and comprehensively conveyed in the Kabbalists' environment through the medium of public art.

Even the Zoharic narrative's details seem to engage Christian artworks. While such connections are less clear, they remain significant. For example, on the San Isidoro deposition tympanum the ascending Jesus is flanked by two angelic figures (Figure 5.5). The Zohar describes Balaam's sons Yunus and Yumbrus flying alongside their father, corresponding to this motif. Although Yunus and Yumbrus are known from earlier Jewish literature, neither of the Zohar's main sources for its reinvented Balaam/Christ feature two figures flying alongside Judaism's challenger (though Balaam's sons' flight is recorded in the more obscure Chronicle of Moses).[129] Yet the image of three wicked flying figures does correlate to Christian public art. And a tradition that described these two magicians growing wings to avoid drowning at the Red Sea did exist in earlier Jewish literature, providing a connection between San Isidoro's winged figures and Balaam's flying sons.[130]

Ascension and enthronement claims were not central to disputations between medieval Spanish Jews and Christians, which focused instead on

the assertions that (1) the messiah, a human incarnation of God, had arrived in the person of Jesus Christ, who had suffered and died for humanity's salvation; (2) that this messiah's coming invalidated Jewish law, which was no longer necessary in the postmessianic world; and (3) that since Jews denied these messianic developments, God had rejected them and excluded them from present or future salvation.[131] It is therefore worth asking where Jews encountered the ascension claims that the Zohar so firmly negates in its subversive Balaam narratives.

The answer, I suggest, was right above their heads. Frequent encounters with public, monumental images of Jesus' ascension and heavenly enthronement drew the Kabbalists' attention to this particular topic in an especially urgent way.[132] Such images would have presented themselves to Castilian Jews daily as discouraging reminders of Christian dominion. Of necessity, Christian art forced medieval Jews to become what Strickland calls "well-informed and often highly educated rejecters of Christ and Christianity."[133]

During the Zoharic authors' time, Christian claims of domination intruded into Jewish lives on many levels at once. Spanish Jews learned about Christianity from disputes both public and private, from casual conversation, from observing public Christian ritual, from reading polemic, and from other sources as well. However, the advance of Christian art into Jews' daily lives as Romanesque and Gothic sculpture became more public and widespread also demanded Jewish attention—all the more so because it functioned as an unavoidable and coercive form of public Christian advertising. Jews also had the opportunity to encounter Christian religious observances that included Marian processions, devotional shrines, and external Church art.[134] Christian art increasingly pervaded and invaded the Kabbalists' lives, and just like Christian theology, rhetoric, and written narrative, it required a response. The Zoharic authors' preferred response was to deconstruct Christian claims, subvert them, and redeploy them for their own ends.[135]

Conclusion—Coercion and Creativity

MYSTICAL RESISTANCE

IT IS CLEAR not only from the Zohar's subversions of Christian stories but also from Jewish polemic and popular texts of the period that thirteenth-century Jews would have understood monumental Christian art's imagery as an assertion of political and theological domination, whose corollary was the idea that Christian claims were superior to Jewish claims. Yet even as Christians depicted their sacred narratives typologically fulfilling and dominating Jewish sacred stories (as on the sacrifice of Isaac tympanum on the Church of San Isidoro in León), Jews reversed the dynamic by crafting literature that similarly alluded to Christian narratives in order to apply Jewish reinterpretations that displaced the dominant majority's claims (as in the Zohar's Balaam/Christ narratives).[1] One way to understand Jewish literary subversion of Christian visual imagery is as narrative iconoclasm. This view is supported by frequent Jewish medieval textual references to Christians as idolaters, a label that must have seemed especially appropriate to medieval Jews observing Christian art, which had obvious ties to Roman traditions.[2]

The Zohar's narrative deconstruction of Christian visual claims thus can be seen as a form of minority resistance to majority power that conforms to what Homi Bhabha terms "an insurgent act of cultural translation . . . that interrupts the performance of the present."[3] Such subversive narratives can be viewed as verbal vandalism employed in situations where physical vandalism would have prompted strong, brutal reprisals. Like many forms of global graffiti, the Zohar's narrative iconoclasm is a form of political resistance and protest.[4] The Zohar's authors, as disempowered viewers of Christian theological and political messaging, knew

that "idols are dangerous because they have power over the life of the imagination."[5] By disrupting, appropriating, and redeploying these idols' meanings, they denied Christian claims over their lives, imaginations, and political status—a project that represents one part of a greater Jewish effort to resist and respond to Christian power.[6]

This response can be better understood when considering that visual expression is a means of conveying power and that resistance to that power is often a goal of dominated minority groups—a category in which I include thirteenth-century Jews. Michel Foucault explains, "The first of the great operations of discipline is . . . the constitution of '*tableaux vivants*,' which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities."[7] The hierarchical function he ascribes to such living tableaux is also that of medieval art, in which Christ, the Virgin, and the angels are shown over the apostles, who are shown above the lesser saints and so on, with vast sculptural pyramids that employ tympana's arched forms assembled over the heads of lowly viewers to model the power structures of Christendom. Christians entering churches below such displays may have felt contented by confirming their role within this hierarchical structure, but Jews viewing these sculptures would have understood themselves as either subordinate to or outside of it. Such constant messaging became, as it was intended to be, its own form of psychological and political coercion.

Jews' problematic relation to this constantly represented hierarchy, whether depicted by a toppling Synagoga or simply made conspicuous by exclusion, rendered living Jews visible as targets of coercion and hostility, further fueling the thirteenth-century deterioration of Jewish-Christian relations. To Jews, such representations must also have served as constant reminders of that deterioration by recreating their environment as what Homi Bhabha has called "the unhomely world."[8] Bhabha writes, "To live in the unhomely world, to find its ambivalencies and ambiguities enacted in the house of fiction, or its sundering and splitting performed in the work of art, is also to affirm a profound desire for social solidarity."[9] That Kabbalistic literature developed its own hierarchy of mystical ascent via the *sefirot* (divine gradations) may have helped to mitigate Christian art's psychological impact, but did not erase its effects entirely.[10]

Art has greater staying power than other forms of Christian messaging. Sermons and Passion plays may end, books may go unread, disputations may linger only in obscure records, and spoken words may disappear from the public mind, but medieval Christianity's art of triumph remains stand-

ing to this day.[11] David Morgan writes of a "tacit agreement, a compact or covenant, that a viewer observes when viewing an image . . . in order to believe, some legitimate claim to truth to be affirmed."[12] He explains, "The covenant frames a way of seeing or a gaze by establishing the epistemological or even moral conditions under which viewers encounter an image. . . . If for some reason the image fails to live up to the covenant, the viewer reacts by denying its claim to truth and so falls out of trust with the image. This could lead to violence toward the image but most often results in a renegotiation of the contract under which one views it."[13]

When the Zohar's authors gazed upon public Christian sculpture on the outside of churches, they experienced visual and conceptual disjunction. The covenant of images that bound together Christian society also asserted explicitly (as in depictions of Jews as evildoers at Saint-Gilles) and implicitly (as in the Last Judgment scenes that divided the saved and the damned under Christ's direction) the subjugation of Jews. To see these Christian covenantal images as a Jew was to see a claim with which one could not enter into agreement. Instead, the claim demanded a response of rejection and negation.

The invasion of increasingly grandiose messages of Christian domination into the visual space in which medieval Jews conducted their daily lives prompted a response from the Zohar's authors, who, famed for their theosophical intent to create worlds within worlds of words, strove to create a space for Jewish solidarity and resistance. Unlike the resistance of polemic literature, which is enlivened by argumentation and refutation, the Zohar's authors resisted Christian power by painting pictures with words as vivid as the painted sculptures that adorned the great cathedrals among which they lived. These churches' displays imposed upon their viewers what Kenneth Mills and David Morgan refer to as "theatrical coercion," which is an "effective, memorable, and brutal means of publicly dethroning one image and replacing it with another"—a scenario stunningly encapsulated in the Saint-Gilles display of a fallen Synagoga shoved aside by an angel at the Crucifixion while Ecclesia watches.[14] In response, the Zohar's authors resisted this public transcript by dethroning Christian images in the privacy of encoded mystical writings. Doing so, they offer insight into what happens when a group chooses to dissent from publicly inscribed messages of authority.

James C. Scott has written, "Every subordinate group creates, out of its ordeal, a 'hidden transcript' that represents a critique of power spoken behind the back of the dominant. The powerful . . . also develop a hidden

transcript representing the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed."[15] Scholars have explored inner Christian ideas regarding self-transformation and self-conversion that serve as hidden counterpoints to public attempts to convert Jews.[16] Similarly, scholars have demonstrated Christian conceptions of defending the faith that were used to justify aggression toward outsiders. They have shown that in some cases thirteenth-century Christian oppression of Jews (or the lack thereof) reflected internal Christian power struggles, as is the case with Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's defense of his Jewish community from Lateran IV's edicts.[17] Christian disputation literature has also been interpreted as a hidden transcript of Christianity's self-doubt.[18] These Christian self-understandings represent an internal Christian transcript generated by those in power and largely hidden from Jews, who mainly encountered the newly oppressive laws, enforcements, and visual demonstrations of the Church's public message. It is to this public transcript of power and authority that the Zohar's authors responded with their own hidden claims.

Scott writes, "The practice of domination . . . *creates* the hidden transcript. If the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness."[19] The point of this study has been to reveal the Zohar as a rich and varied hidden transcript of resistance to Christian power. Although the Zohar has been largely unexplored as evidence of Jewish resistance to medieval Christianity, its concerns engage the multifaceted politics of thirteenth-century Christian oppression of Jews. As this study has demonstrated, the forms of oppression to which the Zohar responds include increases in forced proselytizing and disputations; the physical coercion inherent in these encounters; the confiscation, censorship, and destruction of Jewish texts; and the visual transformation of public space into a discourse of Christian triumph and domination. The Zohar, in its oblique manner, engages all of these aspects of thirteenth-century Spanish Jewish life.

Scott notes that such political life among subordinate groups has often been overlooked because it happens at a level not generally understood as political.[20] After all, the Zohar was composed by a small group and may have been seen only by a limited audience during its composition.[21] Yet the Zohar's narrative deconstructions and iconoclastic efforts were forms of resistance to power, and as such were political indeed. They were the Kabbalists' favored techniques of political dissent, and as Scott reminds readers, hidden transcripts such as the Zohar are themselves conditions of practical resistance, not substitutes

for it.[22] The Zohar's many and varied rejections of Christianity, along with its subversive deconstructions of Christian concepts, tropes, and motifs, constituted an intellectual response to an increasingly oppressive culture. This intellectual response was also actualized resistance, because these authors believed that their words, rituals, and actions impacted the world by affecting the divine: a basic tenet of Kabbalistic theology.[23] For the Zohar's fictitious mystical companions, as well as for its living authors, the foundations for resistance to worldly power and the paths toward divine redemption were laid in midnight meetings, guarded mystical secrets, and meaningful actions conducted away from the public eye.[24] This subversive strategy spurred the Kabbalists to answer Christianity's many challenges to Judaism with wit, creativity, ambiguation, and deconstruction—dismantling their challengers' signs of power to redeploy them to their own ends.[25]

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. William Bacher, "Judæo-Christian Polemics in the Zohar," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 3, no. 4 (1891): 781; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, *From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, with an introduction by Benjamin R. Gampel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 1:244. On a related note, Gershom Scholem also affirmed that historical forms of mysticism relate directly to their concrete environments. Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, foreword by Bernard McGinn, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: Schocken, 1965; reprint ed., New York: Schocken, 1996), 118.
2. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:267.
3. Elliot Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the Zohar," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series, ser. ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Michael Brenner (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 214–46; Elliot Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988): 248–49; Elliot Wolfson, "Othering the Other: Eschatological Effacing of Ontic Boundaries," in *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, ed. Elliot Wolfson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 129–30; Daniel Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 15–22; Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008): 1–58; Hartley Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 20–32; Arthur Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the

Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context." *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002): 1–52; Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli and ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, 139–61 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); Daniel Abrams, "The Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun: A Zoharic Polemic against the Veneration of Mary," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 21 (2010): 7–56; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 51–52, 58–63. Also see Ellen Haskell, *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts: The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 95–101. Those with an interest in greater philological analysis of Christian influences on the Zohar are encouraged to consult Yehuda Liebes's Hebrew-language version of "Christian Influences on the Zohar," which contains additional linguistic information. Yehudah Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2, no. 1 (1983): 43–74 [Hebrew].

4. Javier Roiz, *A Vigilant Society: Jewish Thought and the State in Medieval Spain*, translated by Selma R. Mrgaretten (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 146. Roiz understands Kabbalah as an internal Jewish space into which Spain's Sephardic Jewish culture, which grew and flourished under Muslim rule, withdrew when forced under Christian hegemony—a hegemony bound to the new Gothic vision of a Christian world that preceded the modern state. See Roiz, *Vigilant Society*, 134–36.
5. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 198.
6. Ibid., xii.
7. Ibid., 111, 198. The quote is on 111.
8. For a complementary study that emphasizes thirteenth-century Kabbalah's political character as a means for cultivating Jewish self-empowerment and defense against cultural challenges, see Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 1–44.
9. For a concise overview of the Zohar's composition and scholarship regarding it, see Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 162–68. Most of the Zohar seems to have been composed between 1280 and 1286, although some sections may have been written earlier. The Zoharic authors continued writing and revising various textual sections throughout the early 1290s. Dating the Zohar's different parts with precision is a topic of scholarly debate. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941; reprint ed., New York: Schocken 1995), 163–68, 188; Isaiah Tishby and Fischel Lachower, eds., *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), 91–96; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*,

11–12, 85–86; Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 5–9.

10. While Gershom Scholem considered the Zohar's Aramaic a linguistic choice intended to reinforce the work's purportedly ancient character, modern scholars have shown it to be part of a larger body of esoteric literature composed in Aramaic, and therefore not necessarily directed at convincing readers of an ancient provenance. Yehudah Liebes, "Hebrew and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar," trans. Daphne Freedman and Ada Rapoport-Albert, *Aramaic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2006): 35–52; Charles Mopsik, "Late Judeo-Aramaic: The Language of Theosophic Kabbalah," trans. Ariel Klein, *Aramaic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2006): 21–33; Ada Rapoport-Albert and Theodore Kwasman, "Late Aramaic: The Literary and Linguistic Context of the Zohar," *Aramaic Studies* 4, no. 1 (2006): 5–19.
11. For a detailed and compelling presentation of the multiple author theory, see Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," in *Studies in the Zohar*, ed. Yehuda Liebes (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 85–138. Also see Ronit Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and Their Adaptations," *Hispania Judaica* 3 (2000): 4; Ronit Meroz, "The Path of Silence: An Unknown Story from a Zohar Manuscript," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 1, no. 2 (2008): 320; Ronit Meroz, "And I Was Not There?: The Complaints of Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai According to an Unknown Zoharic Story," *Tarbiz* 71 (2002): 163–93 [Hebrew]; Boaz Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky: Chapters in the Reception History of the Zohar and the Construction of Its Symbolic Value* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2008), 43–44 [Hebrew]. Melila Hellner-Eshed accepts a modified version of Liebes's theory, approving of group authorship's possibility while reluctant to deny a single author's charismatic and directorial force. She suggests that a single author may be responsible for the Zohar's narrative layers. Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 18–19. For theories regarding diverse authorial groups, see Elliot Wolfson, "The Anonymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets—New Evidence for the Early Activity of the Zoharic Circle," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 19 (2009): 144–45, 173–75; Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant," 232n8; Daniel Abrams, "The Invention of the *Zohar* as a Book: On the Assumptions and Expectations of the Kabbalists and Modern Scholars," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 19 (2009): 89, 111–13, 139; Boaz Huss, "*Sefer ha-Zohar* as Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998): 268–71; Huss, *Like the Radiance of the Sky*, 43–44; Meroz, "Zoharic Narratives and Their Adaptations," 4–5, 15–22; Meroz, "Path of Silence," 320; Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 9. Daniel Abrams has even suggested that the Zohar "is best appreciated as a literary and religious process instead of an act of single or multiple authorship in Castile" (Abrams, "Invention of the *Zohar* as a Book," 139). For the Zohar's "canoniza-

tion" and its fascinating history after leaving Spain with the exiles in 1492, see Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, 1:25–30.

12. See especially Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 118–19, 124, 129–31.
13. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 130–31. For secrecy in the Zohar, see Eitan P. Fishbane, "Tears of Disclosure: The Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2002): 25–47; Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 15–44. Lachter notes that despite calls for secrecy the Zohar may have had a fairly broad audience, since it is part of a trend toward increasing public interest in Kabbalah. Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 5, 30–31.
14. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 115.
15. See Eli Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*: Folk-Narrative as Polemics and Self-Criticism," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 109–13; Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning*, trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Folklore Studies in Translation (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 309.
16. See Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Paola Tartakoff, "The *Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in *Toledot Yeshu ("The Life Story of Jesus") Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 297–309 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 160–66.
17. Christian interest in translating Kabbalistic works did exist in thirteenth-century Castile, and may have prompted the Zoharic Kabbalists' reliance on allusive language for controversial topics. See Peter Linehan, *Spain 1157–1300: A Partible Inheritance* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 137; Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 17–19, 31–32.
18. Anti-Jewish polemic events described in this Introduction and chapter 2's descriptions of Christian anti-Jewish violence make clear why the Zohar's authors hoped to avoid Christian scrutiny.
19. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 119.
20. See especially Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 70–73.
21. When the first printed editions of this text were produced in Mantua and Cremona between 1558 and 1560, they helped to solidify the previously nebulous body of Zoharic literature, which existed in many different versions and forms prior to its printed editions. See Rapoport-Albert and Kwasman, "Late Aramaic," 7. The two printed editions also exhibit differences. Yehudah Liebes understands this as further evidence for the diversity of Zoharic authorship; see Liebes, "Hebrew and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar," 42. Also see Wolfson, "Anon-

ymous Chapters of the Elderly Master of Secrets," 173–74; Abrams, "Invention of the *Zohar* as a Book," 8–15, 27–32, 89–90, 105–13; Huss, "*Sefer ha-Zohar* as Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text," 282–83.

22. Contextual clues are important as well, even where terms commonly used to engage Christianity appear. For example, some Zoharic expositions on the forces of evil known as the Other Side include critiques of Christianity, while others contemplate the nature of evil for more abstract theological purposes. In general, the surrounding textual material provides clarification of this multivocal text's main focus in each passage.
23. Peter Schäfer explains how such shared terms' history developed, as ancient rabbis appropriated and reinterpreted Christian ideas originally appropriated and reinterpreted from Jews. Peter Schäfer, *The Jewish Jesus: How Judaism and Christianity Shaped Each Other* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1–2. For another look at shared terminology that emerged from early Jewish and Christian communities, see Yehuda Liebes, "Who Makes the Horn of Redemption Flower," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 313–48 [Hebrew]; Yehuda Liebes, "Who Makes the Horn of Jesus to Flourish," *Immanuel* 21 (1987): 55–67.
24. This Zoharic definition of the Kingdom of Heaven is the topic of chapter 1.
25. For a fascinating look at how medieval Jewish visual imagery also adopts, adapts, and subverts Christian themes to comment on Jews' relationships to European Christian majority culture, see Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).
26. See Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 14; Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, 24–25. Also see Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, with a new preface by the author (Routledge Classics Edition, first published 1994 by Routledge; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2008), 89.
27. This passage is further discussed in chapters 1 and 2.
28. Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2002), 59, 69.
29. J. Boyarin and D. Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora*, 73.
30. Ibid., 59, 69.
31. Much of the material in this section of the Introduction and in chapter 1 was published previously in the *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*. See Ellen Haskell, "The Death of Rachel and the Kingdom of Heaven: Jewish Engagement with Christian Themes in *Sefer ha-Zohar*," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38, no. 1 (2012): 1–31.
32. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 63, 82–83, 109–10, 244–45, 249; Jeremy Cohen, "The Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 71, no. 1 (1980): 52–53.

33. Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 171–73; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:155; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 81, 105, 109–10, 125; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 330; J. Cohen, "Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," 52.
34. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82, 109–10; J. Cohen, "Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," 52.
35. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82–83.
36. Ibid., 203; Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 53.
37. Raymond Martini's *Pugio fidei* is perhaps the most famous Christian polemic text, while Naḥmanides composed a Jewish polemic work responding to Christian missionizing in the wake of the 1263 Barcelona debate. Rabbi Solomon ibn Adret (1235–1310), head of Barcelona's Jewish community, also wrote polemic texts and engaged in active debate with Christian friars. According to Jeremy Cohen, much of this rabbi's advice corresponds directly to challenges raised in Martini's *Pugio fidei*. Lucy Pick notes a poem in which Rabbi Meir ben Todros Abulafia (ca. 1165–1244), head of Toledo's Jewish community, complained about constant Christian proselytizing. This list of sources is far from comprehensive—disputations and polemic works were also common in southern France beginning in the twelfth century. It is notable that late-twelfth-century southern France was also the first point at which Kabbalah emerged as a recognizable theological system. See J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82, 134, 157–58; J. Cohen, "Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," 48, 55; Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute," 49, 51; Norman Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: A Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 227–28; Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, ed. Sabine MacCormack, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 170; Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 142–43; Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies no. 8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 181–83; Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 167.
38. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, vii, x, 5, 11–12; J. Cohen, "Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," 107.

39. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:109, 150; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 54, 57–58.
40. Stephen J. Whitfield, "Where They Burn Books . . .," *Modern Judaism* 22, no. 3 (2002): 214–15.
41. J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 319–20, 326; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 63; Solomon Grayzel, "The Talmud and the Medieval Papacy," in *Essays in Honor of Solomon B. Freehof Presented by the Rodef Shalom Congregation*, ed. Solomon Grayzel 220–45 (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1964), 228.
42. Whitfield, "Where They Burn Books . . .," 215; Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 254; J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law,* 320, 326; Grayzel, "Talmud and the Medieval Papacy," 228.
43. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 170, 174–175; Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:157; J. Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews*, 110.
44. J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 346–47; Syds Wiersma, "The Dynamic of Religious Polemics: The Case of Raymond Martin (ca. 1220–ca. 1285)," in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History: Religion, Art and Literature*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner, 201–217, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, vol. 17, ser. ed. David Golinkin, Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, Freek van der Steen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 202; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 81.
45. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 28.
46. See J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, for an extensive articulation of the first view. For the second, see Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 3, 5, 127–36; Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 64; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 15, 21. Pick draws on the works of Karl Morrison to arrive at her conclusion. See Karl Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), xii–xvi.
47. See Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 7, 21, 135. Vose writes, "The friars' primary aim was the protection and nurturing of the faithful rather than conversion of unbelievers." Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 7.
48. For the first view, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 6–7, 22–23, 123–24, 135–38; Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 13–14, 103–9. For the second, see Roiz, *Vigilant Society*, 124.
49. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 66–67. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, Cambridge Studies in Social and Cultural Anthropology, vol. 16, ser. ed. Ernest Gellner, Jack Goody, Stephen Gudeman, Michael Herzfeld, Jonathan Parry, 24th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 191; Roiz, *Vigilant Society*, 104.
50. This text is discussed in chapter 2.

51. See David Berger, "From Crusades to Blood Libels to Expulsions: Some New Approaches to Medieval Anti-Semitism," in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. David Berger, 15–39 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 17. See also Hans Robert Jauss on reception theory: Hans Robert Jauss, "The Identity of the Poetic Text in the Changing Horizon of Understanding," in *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*, ed. James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein, 7–28 (New York: Routledge, 2001), 20.
52. For medieval Europe as a "persecuting society," see R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990). For a disagreement, see Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middles Ages*, ed. Michael Cook, William Chester Jordan, and Peter Schäfer, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 4–5.
53. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:111–12, 144–45; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims, and Jews*, 10. For a concise general history of Alfonso X's and Sancho IV's reigns in Castile, see Linehan, *Partible Inheritance*, 104–234.
54. Lucy Pick identifies King Alfonso X of Castile as carrying on many of Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's activities, including polemicizing against Judaism while maintaining largely positive relationships with the Jewish community under his jurisdiction. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 172–73, 177–78, 206. Also see Robert Burns, "Jews and Moors in the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X the Learned: a Background Perspective," in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence: Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, ed. Roger Collins and Anthony Goodman (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 48, 54. For an overview regarding Jews in Spain and their complex relationships to Christian secular and religious leaders in the thirteenth century, see Linehan, *Partible Inheritance*, 87–95.
55. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:129–30.
56. Ibid., 1:130.
57. Ibid., 1:130, 257; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 136–38.
58. For the Zohar's chronology, see the discussion above—especially n. 9.
59. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:101–2; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 53. For an in-depth look at the network of Jewish communications that surrounded the Maimonidean controversy in Provence, Catalonia, and Castile, see Daniel Silver, "The Actual Controversy," in *Maimonidean Criticism and the Maimonidean Controversy, 1180–1240*, ed. Daniel Silver, 148–98 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965).
60. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:102–3, 105–6.
61. Ibid., 1:107; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 54–55.
62. See Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:289–91.
63. Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah," *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 18, 32.

64. Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, trans. Allan Arkush, 1st English translation (n.p.: Jewish Publication Society, 1987; reprint ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 374, 394; Yechiel Goldberg, "Spiritual Leadership and the Popularization of Kabbalah in Medieval Spain," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizraḥi Jewry* 2, no. 2 (2009): 3–5; Moshe Idel, "Naḥmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow, 15–96 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 32–34; Moshe Halbertal, *Concealment and Revelation: Esotericism in Jewish Thought and Its Philosophical Implications*, trans. Jackie Feldman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 71.
65. For this Kabbalist's life and historical context, see Eitan P. Fishbane, *As Light before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 20–46.
66. Robert Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne: A Christian Sermon and a Jewish Reply," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, no. 4 (1974): 452. Friar Paulus's life and his effects on Spanish and French Jewish communities are discussed in chapter 2.
67. See William Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela: First English Translation with Introduction, Commentaries, and Notes* (New York: Italica Press, 1993), 21–24.
68. Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 8–9, 122–24; Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 75; Holger Zellentin, "Late Antiquity Upside-Down: Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature," Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007, 21–22, 104.
69. Ḥananel Mack, "Anti-Christian Polemic in the Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah," *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 3, no. 1 (1989): 134–37 [Hebrew].
70. Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 141, 150, 160–61.
71. In his *Sefer ha-Berit* (The Book of the Covenant), the southern French author Joseph Qimḥi (ca. 1105–ca. 1170) quotes Luke's gospel. Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Moher (Paul Siebeck), 1993), 61, 63; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 181–82. Meir ben Simon of Narbonne (ca. 1210–ca. 1275) critiqued the gospels and provided useful knowledge of Christian terminology and interpretive methods in his *Milḥemet Mitzvah* (Obligatory War). Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8, 73; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 182–83. The French author Joesph ben Nathan Official's (ca. 1210–ca. 1280) *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqane* (The Book of Joseph the Zealot) provides brief quotations from the gospels that are presented in Latin

written with Hebrew letters, then translated into Hebrew. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8, 90, 92.

72. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8, 56; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 181–82; Rubin, *Mother of God*, 167; David Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. David Berger, 227–44 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 229; David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1986): 588.
73. Joel E. Rembaum, "The Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 160n19.
74. For this text's history in Iberia, see, see Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 1:14–15, 27–28. For Christian materials in this text see Rembaum, "Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer,' " 158–63.
75. By the thirteenth century, this text had also arrived in Germany. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:28, 31–32.
76. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 143; Rembaum, "Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer,' " 169–70.
77. Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 139, 150, 160–61; Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 259; Daniel Abrams, "The Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun," 16–17, 20–24. Jonatan Benarroch, though not writing on Christian influence upon the Zohar, suggests that Zoharic passages regarding the Shema prayer indicate that "the main idea here is that in order to be elevated above (during the Shema Recitation) and unite with the father . . . one needs first to connect with the son. . . . Only through the son can one enter the gates above and go up to the father." Benarroch is not concerned with the Zoharic authorship's relationship to Christian theology, but his formulation provides indirect proof that the Zohar is knowledgeable of (and in some cases even attracted to) aspects of Christian teachings. See Jonatan M. Benarroch, "'The Mystery of Unity': Poetic and Mystical Aspects of a Unique Zoharic Shema Mystery," *AJS Review* 37, no. 2 (2013): 256.

CHAPTER 1

1. Much of the material in this chapter has been published previously in the *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*. See Ellen Haskell, "The Death of Rachel and

the Kingdom of Heaven: Jewish Engagement with Christian Themes in *Sefer ha-Zohar*," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 38, no. 1 (2012): 1–31.

2. While the following text does not exhibit all of these themes, the rest appear in texts presented below.
3. For a study of how ancient Jews, Christians, and Jewish Christians also struggled over terms important to both groups, see Yehuda Liebes, "Who Makes the Horn of Jesus to Flourish," *Immanuel* 21 (1987): 55–67; and Yehuda Liebes, "Who Makes the Horn of Redemption Flower," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984): 313–48 [Hebrew]. For further reflections on Christian linguistic survivals in Jewish ritual, see Yehuda Liebes, "The Angels of the Shofar and *Yeshua Sar ha-Panim*," in *Early Jewish Mysticism*, ed. J. Dan (Jerusalem: n.p., 1987), 171–96 [Hebrew].
4. The edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar* used in this study is Reuven Moshe Margaliot, ed., *Sefer ha-Zohar al Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999). Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Zoharic texts are my own unless otherwise indicated. Brackets contain relevant words and phrases that are implied but left out of source texts, such as completions of biblical verses and textual clarifications.
5. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xii. Also see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 111, 119, 198.
6. My main source for dating rabbinic texts is H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed. Markus Bockmuehl (n.p.: T & T Clark, 1991; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).
7. The source for my translations of Genesis Rabbah passages is J. Theodor, *Bereschit Rabbah: mit Kritischem Apparat und Kommentar*, 2nd printing with additional corrections by Chanoch Albeck, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965).
8. All of the rabbinic texts translated in this project would have been familiar to the Zoharic authorship. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1995), 173–74.
9. While brackets normally represent words that are implied but left unstated in the rabbinic texts, this sentence's brackets are extracted from Theodor and Albeck's critical edition of Genesis Rabbah, where they represent a textual variation.
10. Many of the rabbinic teachings that are connected conceptually to the Zohar's reinterpretations of Rachel and the Kingdom of Heaven name Shimon bar Yoḥai as their tradent. For example, Theodor and Albeck record variant manuscripts of Genesis Rabbah 71:2 in which the teaching about Rachel as Essence of the House is given by Shimon ben Yoḥai, rather than by Shmu'el bar Naḥman, both by name and under his acronym Rashbi. Shimon bar Yoḥai is also this teaching's tradent in *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* (The Section of Rav Kahana) 20:2. The connection between the Kingdom of Heaven and the Shema prayer, which is discussed below

in connection with Mishna Berakhot 2:2, is elaborated by Shimon bar Yoḥai in Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 10b and Babylonian Talmud Berakhot 14b. Rabbi Shimon's presence in these texts is significant because it was to him that the Zohar's authorship was pseudepigraphically attributed. It is therefore possible that the Kabbalists who composed the Zohar gave his teachings special attention.

11. The Zohar does discuss the story of Rachel stealing her father's idols in connection with her death. However, it explains her death as a punishment for profound parental disrespect, rather than as the result of Jacob's curse. See Zohar 1:164b.
12. It should be evident from this brief description why scholars have seen close ties between the Christian Marian theology that developed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Western Europe and the Shekhinah, who appeared in Kabbalistic form in twelfth-century southern France. See Arthur Green, "*Shekhinah*, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs: Reflections on a Kabbalistic Symbol in Its Historical Context," *AJS Review* 26, no. 1 (2002): 21; Peter Schäfer, "Daughter, Sister, Bride, and Mother: Images of the Femininity of God in the Early Kabbala," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2000): 221–42; Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 233. The thesis that the Virgin Mary influenced the Kabbalistic Shekhinah's development is a main point of Schäfer's book, *Mirror of His Beauty*.

    However, some scholars question this connection, along with the idea of Shekhinah's femininity as a medieval Kabbalistic innovation. Moshe Idel, Daniel Abrams, and Yehuda Liebes are skeptical of the hypothesis that the Virgin influenced the Shekhinah, which relies on Gershom Scholem's understanding that the term Shekhinah, used in rabbinic literature for the divine presence, had no feminine connotations until the late twelfth century's early Kabbalistic literature. Daniel Abrams's work includes an analysis of a Zoharic argument against Marian theology that requires awareness of such theology to make its case. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 46–49, 267–68; Daniel Abrams, "The Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun: A Zoharic Polemic against the Veneration of Mary," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 21 (2010): 11–16; Yehuda Liebes, "Indeed, the Shekhinah a Virgin?: On the Book of Arthur Green," *Pe'amim* 101–2 (2005): 303–13 [Hebrew]; Gershom Scholem, "*Shekhinah*: The Feminine Element in Divinity," in *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, foreword by Joseph Dan, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, ed. Jonathan Chipman (New York: Schocken, 1991), 140–96.

    For an interesting perspective on how the idea of *Shekhinah* transformed during the transition from Catalonian to Castilian Kabbalah, see Haviva Pedaya, "The Great Mother: The Struggle between Nahmanides and the Zohar Circle," *Temps i espais de la Girona jueva; actes del Simposi Internacional celebrat a Girona* (2011): 299–315.
13. Helpful discussions of *Shekhinah* beyond those listed in the preceding note include Ephraim Urbach, "*The Shekhinah*: The Presence of God in the World," in

The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 37–65; Isaiah Tishby, "*Shekhinah*," in *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Isaiah Tishby and Fischel Lachower, trans. David Goldstein, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), 371–422.

14. The word I have translated as "purified" is given in two versions in the Margaliot edition of the Zohar. The first version, *itd'khi'at* (with a *kaf*) has implications of being removed, but also implies purification and cleansing of sin. The second version, the homonym *itd'ḥiyat* (with a *ḥet*), simply refers to removal or supersession. There seems to be a pun operating in this text that draws on Christian themes the Zohar's writers and readers would have known. The idea of being pure and cleansed of sin alludes to both Jesus and his mother Mary, the pure Virgin, and both figures' associated imagery resonates throughout the Zoharic Rachel narratives. Those further interested in comparing manuscripts are encouraged to consult the Aramaic of Daniel Matt's critical edition of the Zohar, which can be found online at *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, translation and commentary by Daniel Matt, "Aramaic Texts," http://www.sup.org/zohar/?d=Aramaic%20Texts&f=index. For the English printed edition, see Daniel Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, intro. Arthur Green, vols. 1–7 (Stanford: Stanford University Press for Zohar Education Project, 2009).
15. Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41–42; Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, 179–94, *Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies* 8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 179–81, 183, 185, 187; Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, ed. Sabine MacCormack, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 140; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 111, 147; Lieve Teugels, "The Background of the Anti-Christian Polemics in Aggadat Bereshit," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 30, no. 2 (1999): 201; Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 149. Although there were many other topics of contention between Jews and Christians, these claims represented a significant portion of Christianity's religious self-understanding and the bulk of its accusations toward Judaism. Many of the messianic claims were further nuanced with incarnational theology. The list above does not include other common medieval Christian claims about Jews, such as the notion that Jews were too stupid to realize Jesus' divinity and the idea that Jews were purposely malicious toward Jesus. David Berger, "The Attitude of

St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972): 102; Norman Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: A Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 227–28.

16. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 12, 140; Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah," 227–28; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, 41–42; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 136–37. Meir ben Simon of Narbonne's polemic work *Milḥemet Mitzvah*, which he composed between 1245 and 1270 in response to a forced debate held in a local synagogue between himself and a priest, also reflects on the Christian claim of Jesus as messiah. See Robert Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne: A Christian Sermon and a Jewish Reply," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, no. 4 (1974): 451–52; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 182–83; Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Moher [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 73.
17. Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.
18. Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 125. Tartakoff makes this point in relation to the Jewish text *Toledot Yeshu*, which recounts a Jewish perspective on the life of Jesus, but it is equally true for the Kingdom of Heaven material.
19. All New Testament quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.
20. Yehudah Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, 139–61 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 160.
21. See Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 10–12; Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 258; Lieve M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, trans. from the Hebrew with an Introduction and Notes, ed. Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Freek Van Der Steen, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001), xxx.
22. Daniel Matt's Zohar translation has an alternative version of this passage not included in the printed edition that includes a reference to the Shema prayer. It describes the necessity of cleaving to the "I" Kingdom of Heaven by accepting the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, an act associated with reciting the Shema. This connection's importance will become evident in the following discussion. See Matt, *Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 3:254–55. For Matt's online Aramaic manu-

script, see Matt, "Aramaic Texts," http://www.sup.org/zohar/?d=Aramaic%20Texts&f=index.

23. For a full description of the Shema prayer, its history, and its accompanying blessings, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin, based on the original 1913 German edition, and the 1972 Hebrew edition, ed. Joseph Heinemann et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society and Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 16–24.
24. Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 308.
25. This association was particularly important in the Jewish philosophical tradition. See Gershom Scholem, "*Shekhinah*: The Feminine Element in Divinity," 154–56.
26. The Kabbalist Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla also uses imagery of the Shekhinah dwelling upon the virtuous Kabbalist in his writings. See Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008): 55. Gikatilla was associated with Moses de León, and was likely a member of the Zoharic authors' group. For information on the relationship between Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla and Moses de León, see Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," in *Studies in the Zohar*, ed. Yehuda Liebes (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 99–103; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 194–96.
27. Also see Luke 4:21–22; Mark 1:9–11; John 1:31–33.
28. See Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 1:121 (section 115); David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, translation, and commentary by David Berger*, Judaica Texts and Translations No. Four (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 1:172 (section 157). *Nitzaḥon Vetus*, also known as *Nitzaḥon Yashan*, is an anonymous text of late-thirteenth- or early-fourteenth-century origin that may have been written in Germany. It compiles arguments from many earlier Jewish polemic works known in the Kabbalists' milieu. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 102; Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 143.
29. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:105–6 (section 35). Another related quote reveals the text's argument more clearly. "If you say that his [Jesus'] religious practices did constitute correct belief, tell me: Was whoever followed his religious practices a sinner or a believer? If you say he was a believer, then you have sinned because you did not act according to his religious practices and you did not walk in his ways." Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:105 (section 34).
30. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 89 (section 71).
31. Ibid., 228 (section 242).

32. David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 9; Steven Fraade, *From Tradition to Commentary: Torah and Its Interpretation in the Midrash "Sifre to Deuteronomy,"* ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 65–66.
33. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 75; Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 8–9; Holger M. Zellentin, *Late Antiquity Upside-Down: Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature* (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2007), 1, 104.
34. Zellentin, *Late Antiquity Upside-Down*, 9, 15, 101.
35. See Ivan Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood: Jewish Acculturation in Medieval Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 108–9. For Kabbalistic examples, see Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 149; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 260; Daniel Abrams, "The Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun: A Zoharic Polemic against the Veneration of Mary," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 21 (2010): 17–21.
36. I discuss this work's relation to the Zohar in chapters 3 and 4.
37. Yehuda Liebes has argued that humor and irony often do play important roles in Zoharic discourse. See Yehuda Liebes, "Zohar ve-Eros," *Alpayim* 9 (1994): 80–85 [Hebrew]. While this may be the case in some sections of the Zohar, I do not see humor in the Zohar's Rachel as Christ narratives. For a view on the limited scope of humor and irony in the Zohar, see Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 232n81.
38. It is interesting when examining the character of this narrative to recall Liebes's and Wolfson's observations that the Kabbalists seem to have been impressed by, and even attracted to, certain aspects of Christian theology, appropriating them as part of Jewish tradition. See Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 139, 154–55, 161; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 255, 259.
39. In John 14:25–26, Jesus implies that his death will cause the Holy Spirit to manifest, providing an interesting parallel to the Rachel narrative.
40. For the Kabbalists' familiarity with specific gospels, see above in this chapter and the discussion in the introduction.
41. In context, Zohar 1:18b uses Rachel's labor in Genesis 35:16 as a prooftext for interpreting the rainbow as a sign of divine judgment.
42. The Zohar was not the only medieval Jewish text to use Passion imagery in association with a Jewish character. Ephraim of Bonn's *Sefer Zekhirah* (Book of Remembrance) contains a narrative in which Christians physically abuse Rabbi Jacob ben Meir of Ramerupt (Rabbenu Tam), wounding his head in a manner reminiscent of the Passion story's crown of thorns. See Ivan Marcus, "Jews

and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," *Prooftexts* 15, no. 3 (1995): 210–14.

43. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 140; Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah," 227–28; Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 77.
44. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:103 (section 28). This is not the only place where *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* argues that human and divine natures are incompatible. For more examples, see Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:108 (section 50), 1:104–5 (sections 29–31).
45. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 193 (section 188).
46. Yehuda Liebes points out several Kabbalistic passages in which Jesus is referred to allusively in connection with barrenness and lack of sexual completion, which the Kabbalists considered defective states. See Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 146–52, 154–56.
47. David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 97–98. Daniel Abrams has also noted the Kabbalists' focus on theosophically sexualizing God, implying a critique of Christian celibacy. Abrams, "Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun," 13, 18. Those interested in this topic also are encouraged to consult Daniel Abrams, *The Female Body of God in Kabbalah: Embodied Forms of Love and Sexuality in the Divine Feminine* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2004) [Hebrew].
48. This text will be discussed in chapter 5.
49. Teugels, "The Background of the Anti-Christian Polemics in Aggadat Bereshit," 201; Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 167; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 281–84. Peter Schäfer has analyzed many examples of Jewish and Christian polemic texts involving the Virgin that were circulating during this period. Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 173–216.
50. Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 284.
51. Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 37–38, 42–43.
52. Jeremy Cohen sees the early thirteenth century as the peak of the Roman papacy's power, which thereafter began to decline in the face of various challenges. See J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 33–34, 255.
53. R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990), 6–11; Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, *From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, intro. Benjamin R. Gampel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 150.

54. Joel E. Rembaum, "The Talmud and the Popes: Reflections on the Talmud Trials of the 1240s," *Viator* 13 (1982): 220.
55. See Jonathan M. Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middles Ages*, ed. Michael Cook, William Chester Jordan, and Peter Schäfer, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 65.
56. See Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 257–58.
57. Stow, *Alienated Minority*, 257–58. Stow suggests these dynamics may have affected the 1240 Talmud trial.
58. Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, 2–3; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 255.
59. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 5, 172–73, 177–78.
60. Ibid., ix–x.
61. Robert Burns, "Jews and Moors in the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X the Learned: a Background Perspective," in *Medieval Spain: Culture, Conflict, and Coexistence Studies in Honour of Angus MacKay*, ed. Roger Collins and Anthony Goodman, 46–62 (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 48, 54; Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 206. Other Spanish leaders also found it convenient to bypass rules regarding Jewish dress. Peter Linehan, *Spain 1157–1300: A Partible Inheritance* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 88.
62. According to many scholars, polemic is directed toward an internal audience rather than toward its stated audience. For examples, see Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 5, 133, 135; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 179; Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute," 36–37.
63. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 14–16, 22, 243–44. This Augustinian understanding is found in the teachings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) and in Alfonso X of Castile's thirteenth-century *Siete Partidas*. Berger, "Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," 90–91; Burns, "Jews and Moors in the *Siete Partidas* of Alfonso X," 53.
64. Green, "*Shekhinah*, the Virgin Mary, and the Song of Songs," 21; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 233; Schäfer, "Daughter, Sister, Bride, and Mother." The thesis that the Virgin Mary influenced the Kabbalistic Shekhinah's development is a main point of Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*.
65. Moshe Idel, Daniel Abrams, and Yehuda Liebes are skeptical of the hypothesis that the Virgin influenced the Shekhinah. See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, 46–49, 267–68; Abrams, "Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun," 11–16; Liebes, "Indeed, the Shekhinah," 303–13.
66. Rubin, *Mother of God*, 159–64.
67. Ibid., 159–65; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 281–84.
68. Rubin, *Mother of God*, 162, 168. See also Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 173–216.

69. For specific references, please see the discussion and notes earlier in this chapter.
70. For a different perspective on how medieval Kabbalists cross gender boundaries in their literature, see Elliot Wolfson, "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," in *Circle in the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism*, ed. E. Wolfson, 79–121 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995); Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 81–82, 324–25, 331, 366–67; Elliot Wolfson, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath," 165, 173–74. For the author's reflections on these and other matters regarding Shekhinah and the Virgin, see Ellen Haskell, *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts: The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 95–108.
71. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 108–9, 116–17, 218.
72. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, publications of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, no. 16 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 79–117.
73. Eugene Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 109–10, 127–28.
74. Rogers, *After the Spirit*, 109; Cleo McNelly Kearns, "The Scandals of the Sign: The Virgin Mary as Supplement in the Religions of the Book," in *Questioning God*, ed. John Caputo, Mark Dooley, and Michael Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 331. Kearns traces this cross-gendered typology from its roots in the New Testament and patristic literature through its modern articulations in twentieth-century catechetical statements of Pope John Paul II. Cleo McNelly Kearns, *The Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 15–19, 105, 149, 166.
75. Kearns, *Virgin Mary, Monotheism, and Sacrifice*, 105, 166–67, 178.
76. Kearns, "Scandals of the Sign," 334.
77. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, xv, xxix. See Aggadat Bereshit 31C for the specific passage.
78. This public transcript was particularly important for medieval Christians, since institutionalized anti-Judaism was a critical component of Christian self-definition. See M. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross*, 139, 161.
79. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, 11–12.
80. Israel Yuval and Lieve Teugels have both observed Jewish literature's tendency to deal allusively, rather than explicitly, with Christian faith claims. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 51; Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, xxx. Yuval also notes that Jews can internalize Christian language without a polemic cause, even in highly polemicized contexts. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 203, 248.

81. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, with a new preface by the author (Routledge Classics Edition, first published 1994 by Routledge, New York: Routledge, 2008), 89.
82. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, afterword copyright 1994 (New York: Vintage, 1979), 332.
83. Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (New York: Routledge, 1995), 51.
84. See Butler, "Contingent Foundations," 47–51.
85. See ibid., 54.

CHAPTER 2

1. For an earlier study on the Zohar as a source for uncovering historical attitudes regarding converts *to* Judaism (rather than away from it), see Jochanan H. A. Wijnhoven, "The Zohar and the Proselyte," in *Texts and Responses: Studies Presented to Nahum N. Glatzer on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday by His Students*, ed. Michael Fishbane and Paul R. Flohr, 120–40 (Leiden: Brill, 1975). For more recent studies on the Zohar's attitudes regarding proselytes to Judaism, see Elliot Wolfson, "Othering the Other: Eschatological Effacing of Ontic Boundaries," in *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, ed. Elliot Wolfson, 129–85 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 166–71; Pinchas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 46–48.
2. The edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar* used in this study is Reuven Moshe Margaliot, ed., *Sefer ha-Zohar al Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999). Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Zoharic texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Brackets contain relevant words and phrases that are implied but left out of source texts, such as completions of biblical verses and textual clarifications.
3. On Christian missionizing's ineffectiveness in obtaining many converts, see Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 88–89.
4. Such literature proliferated in the late eleventh through the twelfth centuries; twenty such works were produced during this period. Although the literature arose from the twelfth-century Renaissance's new intellectual trends and may not originally have been associated with missionizing, its ideas eventually inspired confrontations with Jews. See David Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1986): 577–79.

5. Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," 579. These debates, which happened below the upper clergy, are difficult to document, but Berger finds evidence that they were both real and frequent. They preceded and accompanied a thirteenth-century shift toward increasingly aggressive missionizing to Jews. See Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," 584–86. Berger writes, "There is strong reason to believe that Jews confronted Christians on the streets of Europe to pose religious arguments and took great satisfaction in producing a sense of discomfiture or defeat in the mind of the interlocutor." David Berger, "Jacob Katz on Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages," in Berger, *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. David Berger, 51–74 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 64–65.
6. The 1240 Talmud trial was led by Nicholas Donin, while a former Jew turned Dominican friar, Paulus Christiani, launched the latter two disputations.
7. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 82.
8. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, *From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, with an introduction by Benjamin R. Gampel (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 167. For the quote, see Solomon Grayzel, *The Church and the Jews in the XIIIth Century*, edited and arranged, with additional notes, by Kenneth Stow, 2 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 2:142.
9. Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155–56, 159; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82.
10. During Christianity's European expansion in the earlier Middle Ages, converted Jews often integrated fully into Christian society. After the turn of the millennium, personal transformations and individual conversions, including those of Jews, received more attention—an inward shift that coheres with other twelfth-century Renaissance trends. Following the twelfth century, Christians preferred conversions associated with miracles understood to represent personal, interior change. In such signs' absence, Christians often considered converts to retain Jewish identity. Conversion became understood as a work in progress that could last a lifetime, and even baptism was deemed insufficient to transform a Jew. As early as the 1215 Lateran IV council, Church authorities expressed concern that converted Jews might revert. A 1267 papal bull, reissued in 1274, ordered Dominican inquisitors to prosecute Jews suspected of reversion. This concern continued through the thirteenth century, as shown by King James II of Aragon's 1296 decree threatening corporal punishment to former Jews whose conversion was deemed questionable. The Church's concern was in some cases legitimate, since forced conversions—which often were related to the Crusades or to ritual

murder accusations—did create groups of new Christians who wished to revert. Financial conditions and personal pressure also contributed to reversion. Both Christians and Jews remained skeptical of reverted individuals. See Jonathan Elukin, "The Discovery of the Self: Jews and Conversion in the Twelfth Century," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael A. Singer and John Van Engen, 63–76, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 10 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 63, 65, 69; Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middles Ages*, ed. Michael Cook, William Chester Jordan, and Peter Schäfer, Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 18, 68, 94; Kenneth Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 262; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 159; Robert Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France: A Political and Social History*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, Ninety-first Series (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 146; David Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe—Boundaries Real and Imagined," *Past and Present* 194 (2007): 12, 16–22, 32. Malkiel connects this concern to the relatively fluid boundaries between Jews and Christians that existed prior to Lateran IV, illustrating his point with Northern European cases of Jews giving their Christian servants Purim presents and the commentator Rashi's Christian neighbors sending him cakes at Passover's end. For the twelfth-century Renaissance, see Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

11. These works include Jacob ben Reuben's *Milḥamot Ha-Shem*, Meir of Narbonne's *Milḥemet Mitzvah*, and Moses of Salerno's writings. The polemics' details include locations and arguments used. Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," 588–89.
12. Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100–1500* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Moher [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 8, 61, 63; Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, 179–94, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies no. 8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 181–82; Joel E. Rembaum, "The Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 45 (1978): 168.
13. This work also supported Jewish law, a key part of Christian attacks on Judaism. See David Berger, "On the Uses of History in Medieval Jewish Polemic against Christianity: The Quest for the Historical Jesus," in *Jewish History and Jewish*

Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, 25–39, The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Michael Brenner (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 29. Christian attacks on Jewish law during this period are addressed in the previous chapter. For general information on *Milḥamot ha-Shem*, see Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 181–82; Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 142; Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 185; David Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," in Berger, *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. David Berger, 227–44 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 229; Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 167.

14. Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," 588; Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future," 182–83; Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 73; Rembaum, "Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," 168; Robert Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne: A Christian Sermon and a Jewish Reply," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, no. 4 (1974): 437–57; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82.
15. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8, 90–91; Berger, "Mission to the Jews and Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Polemical Literature of the High Middle Ages," 591; Rembaum, "Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," 168. Joseph was familiar with this problem, since he studied with the rabbi who debated the convert Nicholas Donin during the 1240 Paris Talmud trial. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 90.
16. For Solomon ibn Adret, see Norman Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: A Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 227–28; Ram Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute: The Case of Christian Spain and Provence in the Late Middle Ages," *AJS Review* 27, no. 1 (2003): 51; Jeremy Cohen, "The Christian Adversary of Solomon ibn Adret," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 71, no. 1 (1980): 48, 55; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:281. Jeremy Cohen notes that much of *Perushei Aggadot*'s advice addresses attacks on Judaism from the Dominican friar Raymond Martini's famous anti-Jewish work *Pugio fidei* (Dagger of Faith). J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 157–58.
17. See Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, ed. Sabine MacCormack, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 170.

18. Elliot Wolfson, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 59 (1988): 217, 219, 222, 248–49. Wolfson explains that the Kabbalists regarded emphasis on the commandments' mystical effects as a means of keeping Jews and Christians distinct. He also suggests that the ecstatic Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia's messianic activity may have been another response to the late thirteenth century's intense Christian missionizing. See Elliot Wolfson, "Textual Flesh, Incarnation, and the Imaginal Body: Abraham Abulafia's Polemic with Christianity," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson, 189–226 (Boston: Brill, 2012), 196.
19. See Hartley Lachter, "Kabbalah, Philosophy, and the Jewish-Christian Debate: Reconsidering the Early Works of Joseph Gikatilla," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 16, no. 1 (2008): 56. For Gikatilla's connection to the Zohar, see Yehuda Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, 85–138 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 99–103; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, with a foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1995), 194–96.
20. As is the case with other anti-Christian topics in the Zohar, uncovering resistance to Christian conversion pressure is a matter of sensitive reading for contextual clues that cohere with historical events and attitudes from the authors' milieus.
21. Wijnhoven also notes that the Other Side (*Sitra Aḥra*) was important to the Zohar's teachings on gentiles and conversion, since it was considered the source of non-Jewish souls. See Wijnhoven, "Zohar and the Proselyte," 124–26, 128–29. This observation helps to explain why those who exited Judaism to join themselves to gentiles were considered to have joined themselves to the *Sitra Aḥra*.
22. In the Genesis narrative, this question in context means, "Why do you keep looking [at each other]?" (Genesis 42:1).
23. That is, one should try not to be seen by the unclean side's threatening forces.
24. This term is somewhat obscure, and at face value appears to refer to a type of demon. The root of *tarisin* is *t.r.sh.*, a term with connotations of shielding, putting on armor, and conflict. I will return to *gardinin* shortly.
25. At this point, Daniel Matt's Pritzker translation of the Zohar inserts a phrase not found in the Margaliot printed version used for this project. He includes the clause, "And cleave to I, Kingdom of Heaven—accepting upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." See Daniel Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, with an Introduction by Arthur Green, vol. 3 (Stanford: Stanford University Press for Zohar Education Project, Inc., 2009), 3:254–55. Those further inter-

ested are encouraged to consult the Aramaic of Daniel Matt's critical edition of the Zohar, which can be found online at *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, translation and commentary by Daniel Matt, "Aramaic Texts," http://www.sup.org/zohar/?d=Aramaic%20Texts&f=index.

26. This medieval treatment of Aḥer as a prototypical heretical figure rather than a real historical individual is similar to the character's role in ancient Jewish literature. See Alon Goshen-Gottstein, *The Sinner and the Amnesiac: The Rabbinic Invention of Elisha ben Abuya and Eleazar ben Arach*, Contraversions: Jews and Other Differences (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 4, 8, 299; Yehuda Liebes, *The Sin of Elisha: The Four That Entered the Orchard and the Nature of Talmudic Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Academon, 1990), 12.

27. See Gerson Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," in *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, ed. Gerson Cohen, 243–69 (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1991); Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 14; Jonathan Boyarin and Daniel Boyarin, *Powers of Diaspora: Two Essays on the Relevance of Jewish Culture* (Minneapolis: Regents of the University of Minnesota, 2002), 79; Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*, 141–42; Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 3:30; Israel Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Jonathan Chipman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 10–12; Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 258; Lieve M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit*, trans. from the Hebrew with an Introduction and Notes, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, ed. Marcel J. H. M. Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Freek Van Der Steen (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2001), xxx; Elliot Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the Zohar," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, 214–46, The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series, ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Michael Brenner (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 219–21, 234n21; Elliot Wolfson, "Martyrdom, Eroticism, and Asceticism in Twelfth-Century Ashkenazi Piety," in *Jews and Christians in Twelfth-Century Europe*, ed. Michael A. Singer and John Van Engen, 171–220, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies 10 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 195–96; Elliot Wolfson, "Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah: Some Philosophical Observations on the Divine Androgyne," in *The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, ed. Lawrence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, 166–204 (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 189–90; Javier Roiz, *A Vigilant Society: Jewish Thought and the State in Medieval Spain*, trans. Selma R. Mrgaretten (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 8.

28. Daniel Matt, trans., *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 240.
29. David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by David Berger*, Judaica Texts and Translations Number Four (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 133 (section 122).
30. For Baḥya ben Asher's relation to the Zohar, see Liebes, "How the Zohar Was Written," 90–93. For *Kad ha-Qemaḥ* see Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 8, 34, 138, 142, 188.
31. G. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," 259–60.
32. Although every mention of Esau, Edom, an Other god, or the Kingdom of Idolatry in the Zohar is not necessarily a reference to Christianity, it is important to understand these usages when they appear. Christians were aware that Jews associated them with Edom by the fourth century. Church authorities often denounced the connection; they tended to connect Esau with Jews, since they exegetically linked themselves to the favored, younger Jacob rather than to the older Esau who lost his birthright. See G. Cohen, "Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought," 252–55.
33. Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 1:130 (section 184).
34. Temptation narratives can be found in Matthew 4, Mark 1, and Luke 4.
35. Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 2:314–15; Isaiah Tishby and Fischel Lachower, eds., *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, trans. David Goldstein, 3 vols. (Washington, DC: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1989), 2:464; Elliot Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant," 218. Also see Joseph Dan, "Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah." *AJS Review* 5 (1980): 19–20. For information on this evil angel's origins, see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Meridian, 1978), 385–86.
36. This statement appears as part of a narrative in which God tricks the violent angel Sama'el out of receiving the Torah just as Jacob tricks Esau out of receiving his birthright in Genesis (see Zohar 3:192a–193a). The passage contains clear allusions to Christianity. For analysis of this fascinating text, which also includes a critique of Islam, see Elliot Wolfson, "Othering the Other," 133ff.
37. Jacob receives the name Israel in Genesis 32.
38. For examples, see Marcus Jastrow, *A Dictionary of the Targumim, The Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1996), 953.
39. For further material on medieval Jewish creativity regarding Esau, his relationship to Christianity and his meaning for Jews, see Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams*

of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 27–29, 115.

40. The Talmudic passage is concerned with explaining that it is permissible to call Joseph a fox. The word for "bow" is the same in both passages.
41. The word for "fox" is different in each passage, but readers would have understood that the texts referred to the same animal. Due to the Talmud's lengthy development, such variations are unsurprising.
42. James C. Scott's book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* is a study in such strategies, but see especially his comments on trickster folktales. Jacob is also a trickster in the biblical narrative. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 162–66.
43. Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin explain the tradition of rabbinic resistance to domination in their essay, "Tricksters, Martyrs, and Collaborators: Diaspora and the Gendered Politics of Resistance," in *Powers of Diaspora*, 37–102.
44. In Kabbalistic theology, the right side of the sefirotic structure is associated with mercy and love, and the left with judgment and power. Evil is often associated with the left side too, and sometimes considered an outgrowth of it. For an essay on the Zohar's concept of evil, see Tishby and Lachower, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:447–74.
45. Daniel Matt notes that the word "right" stands for God's right hand in these biblical verses and suggests that this teaching may also apply the term "right" to Israel (since it defines them this way immediately above), implying that God has exiled ("withdrawn") Israel among the enemy and pleading for Israel's deliverance. See Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 2:414n766.
46. This common Christian argument was discussed in chapter 1.
47. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 80. Also see Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 5–6, which features an equally fascinating apocalyptic role-reversal narrative by a black slavewoman in the pre–Civil War American South.
48. Elliot Wolfson has explored Zoharic traditions that characterize Torah as the antidote to an Esau described as the primordial serpent, reading the conflict between Jacob and Esau onto the creation narrative by connecting Esau with primordial chaos and Jacob with the divine spirit. Wolfson, too, concludes that "Esau" is a code term for "Christendom" in such narratives. Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant," 219–21. In this article, Wolfson explores the relationship between Christianity, the demonic, and gender in classical Kabbalistic texts. Other Wolfson essays that engage these topics are Wolfson, "Textual Flesh, Incarnation, and the Imaginal Body"; and Elliot Wolfson, "Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar," *Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 1 (1988): 73–95.
49. The journey to Pardes seems to represent a heavenly journey, such as those described in Merkavah writings. For further studies on Elisha ben Abuyah as a figure of rabbinic mythology and an antithesis to Rabbi Aqiva, a figure who

balanced love and awe of God more successfully than the notorious Aḥer, see Liebes, *Sin of Elisha*, 98–105; Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 22, 168n166, 174n67; Goshen-Gottstein, *Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 229.

50. For analyses of this sin with regard to Elisha ben Abuyah, see Liebes, *Sin of Elisha*, 34–57; Goshen-Gottstein, *Sinner and the Amnesiac*, 90–91, 99–100.
51. For an illuminating essay on early Jewish and Christian ideas regarding ancient Jewish and Christian theologies of two divine powers, see Daniel Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven; Or, the Making of a Heresy," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman, 331–70 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004). For this doctrine's relation to Aḥer, see Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven," 355–57. Boyarin understands the famous Talmudic Pardes parable more as a trace of an ancient Logos theology than as an allusion to mystical experience. Boyarin, "Two Powers in Heaven," 357.
52. For Metatron's role in early Jewish mysticism, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 67–70; Andrei Orlov, "Titles of Enoch-Metatron in *2 Enoch*," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 18 (1998): 71–86; Andrei Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition*, ed. Martin Hengel and Peter Schäfer, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005). Metatron is also found in medieval Ashkenazic literature (which describes him as the angel of the Torah, the crown of God, and the Divine Presence) in the thirteenth-century ecstatic Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia's writings, and also in the Zohar where he is leader of the angelic hosts. He is closely associated with Shekhinah and frequently depicted as her heavenly minister, warrior, and son. See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, with a foreword by Harold Bloom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 141–42; Arthur Green, *Keter: The Crown of God in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 37–38, 91–92; Daniel Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology: The Inclusion and Exclusion of Metatron in the Godhead," *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 3 (1994): 291–321; Moshe Idel, "Enoch Is Metatron," *Immanuel* 24–25 (1990): 220–40; Elliot Wolfson, "Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz," in *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazic Judaism: International Symposium Held in Frankfurt a.M. 1991*, ed. Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan, 60–92 (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995); Tishby and Lachower, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 2:626–31.
53. See James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 268.
54. The Kabbalists also worried about this sin in a Jewish context, since their sefirotic theology emphasized divine unity and various divine aspects at the same time. As Eitan Fishbane notes, "What emerges from this ongoing dialectic is a prescription for a kind of divided consciousness—one in which the supplicant is instructed to focus simultaneously upon a particular *sefirah*, and to keep his mind connected to the structure of unity and its higher source." Eitan Fishbane,

As Light before Dawn: The Inner World of a Medieval Kabbalist (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 204. For a passage from Isaac of Acre's *Me'irat Einayim* (Enlightenment of the Eyes), which warns against cutting the shoots by contemplating a single *sefirah* alone, see E. Fishbane, *As Light before Dawn*, 204–5.

55. See Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:343, 347.
56. Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, 139–61 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 141–42.
57. Trinitarian and anti-Trinitarian arguments were important in the Barcelona disputation, in Raymond Martini's writings, in *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*, in Solomon ibn Adret's *Perushey Aggadot*, in Mordekhai of Avignon's *Maḥaziq Emunah* (Upholder of Faith), and in Jacob ben Reuven's *Milḥamot ha-Shem*. Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 454; Rembaum, "The Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer,'" 158; Ben-Shalom, "Between Official and Private Dispute," 51; Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 143.
58. Meshullam da Piera is also known as En Vidas de Girona. See James H. Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy," *Prooftexts* 1, no. 2 (1981): 133–36, 138.
59. For Meshullam da Piera's dates and location, see Lehmann, "Polemic and Satire in the Poetry of the Maimonidean Controversy," 133–34. For a look at Girona's differing Kabbalistic schools, one of which centered around Ezra of Girona and Azriel of Girona, and the other of which was led by Naḥmanides, see Moshe Idel, "Nahmanides: Kabbalah, Halakhah, and Spiritual Leadership," in *Jewish Mystical Leaders and Leadership in the Thirteenth Century*, ed. Moshe Idel and Mortimer Ostow, 15–96 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 15–96. Also see Boaz Huss, "*Sefer ha-Zohar* as Canonical, Sacred and Holy Text: Changing Perspectives of the Book of Splendor between the Thirteenth and the Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 7 (1998): 272–73. Alon Gottstein has called for a new study and evaluation of the enigmatic Elisha ben Abuyah as a historical personage versus as an arch-heretic, noting that *Avot de Rabbi Natan* is the only rabbinic textual tradition that preserves his teachings separately from the account of his heresy. There, he seems to be presented as a saintly martyr. Alon Goshen Gottstein, "Four Entered Pardes Revisited," *Harvard Theological Review* 88, no. 1 (1995): 126–28.
60. For more information and analysis of this important Zoharic section, see Pinhas Giller, *Reading the Zohar: The Sacred Text of the Kabbalah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 35–68; Oded Yisraeli, *The Interpretation of Secrets and the Secret of Interpretation: Midrashic and Hermeneutic Strategies in Sabba de-Mishpatim of the Zohar* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2005) [Hebrew].
61. Melila Hellner-Eshed identifies Genesis 2:10 as an important citation for the Zoharic authorship. She connects this passage with movements of divine reality

and divine consciousness, creation and sustaining of other realities, processes of human consciousness, and sexual symbolism. Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 235–37.

62. The root of the word translated as "enlarging" is *p.v.sh./p.sh.y.*, meaning to expand, enlarge, or increase. "Enlarge" coheres with the passage's sexual topic.
63. The Zohar takes a strict and negative view of converts' status, and so is distinct from other medieval Jewish authoritative sources that consider conversion nonbinding and deny that baptism has an actual effect. See Jacob Katz, "Although He Has Sinned He Remains a Jew," *Tarbits* 27 (1958): 203–17; Berger, "Jacob Katz on Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages," 65.
64. For Shekhinah's presence among observant Jews, see the previous chapter. For the Kabbalists' constituting Shekhinah's face, see Zohar 2:94b. Joel Hecker analyzes this phenomenon in Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 137.
65. See Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 46–48.
66. For a more traditional interpretation of *Saba de-Mishpatim*'s teachings on remarriage and demonic impotence than the one I provide, see Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 54–58.
67. Daniel Matt has also suggested that Zohar 2:103a may offer a critique of Christian celibacy. See Daniel Matt, trans., *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, vol. 5 (Stanford: Stanford University Press for Zohar Education Project, 2009), 61n176. Beyond this, several scholars have noted that the Spanish Kabbalists were familiar with, and may even have borrowed from, Christian monastic ideas. For an interesting look at if and how Moses de León engaged medieval Christian monastic teachings on abstinence and penitence, see Avishai bar Asher, "Penance and Fasting in the Writings of Rabbi Moshe de Leon and the Zoharic Polemic with Contemporary Christian Monasticism," *Kabbalah* 25 (2011): 293–319 [Hebrew]. Bar Asher's article also explores how Moses de León's penitential teachings relate to medieval Jewish philosophy and the teachings of the Hasidei Ashkenaz. For further reflections on the Kabbalists' abstinence practices, emphasis on poverty and social reform, and apocalyptic beliefs in relation to Christian monastic ideals (especially the Spiritual Franciscans), see Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 16–17; Yitzhak Baer, "Mysticism and Social Reform," in *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, *From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, with an Introduction by Benjamin R. Gampel, 243–305 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 270–77; Yitzhak Baer, "The Historical Context of the *Ra'aya Meheimna*," *Zion*

5 (1940), 1–44 [Hebrew]. For possible Zoharic allusions to Christian monastic practices, see Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 160–61.

68. David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 97–98.
69. See Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 144–56. In addition, Daniel Abrams suggests that the Kabbalists' focus on theosophically sexualizing God implies a critique of Christian celibacy. Daniel Abrams, "The Virgin Mary as the Moon That Lacks the Sun: A Zoharic Polemic against the Veneration of Mary," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 21 (2010): 13, 18.
70. See Charles Chavel, ed., "*Iggeret ha-Qodesh*," in *Kitve Rabenu Moshe ben Naḥman*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 2002). *Iggeret ha-Qodesh* is conveniently but incorrectly grouped with Naḥmanides' works in Chavel's volume.
71. Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, trans. Irven M. Resnick, The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 190. For further information about Petrus Alfonsi see Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman, 20–47 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 23–29; Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations 1000–1300: Jews in the Service of Medieval Christendom*, ed. Julia Smith, The Medieval World (Harlow, UK: Pearson Education, 2011), 210. For a Jewish reversal of this claim in which the patriarch Jacob, rather than Christ, is considered a tree that bears fruit of salvation, see Wolfson, "Othering the Other," 146–47.
72. For analysis of an interesting parallel from Joseph of Hamadan regarding Jewish fruitfulness and gentile fruitlessness, see Hartley Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 97–98. For Lachter's fuller discussion of Jews and gentiles in thirteenth-century Kabbalah, see Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 91–99. For more on the Zohar's defense of Jewish marriage and marital sexuality in response to challenges from Christianity and Jewish philosophy, see Ellen Haskell, *Suckling at My Mother's Breasts: The Image of a Nursing God in Jewish Mysticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2012), 92–95, 106–8.
73. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 65–66; Robert Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages* (Springfield, NJ: Behrman House, 1980), 253.
74. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:123. Widely read by Spanish Jews, *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* became an important source text for polemic authors by the twelfth century. Rembaum, "Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," 164–65.
75. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 205 (section 209).
76. Ibid., 223 (section 236). In this case, "their Torah" seems to refer to Christian law and custom.
77. Ibid.

78. Elliot Wolfson also has explored the ways in which medieval anti-Christian polemic addresses sexuality and embodiment. Wolfson notes that the Zohar's "alien god" rhetoric intertwines closely with its indictment of Christianity and its efforts to counter conversion, claiming that the Zohar likens conversion's attraction to the attractions of forbidden sexual intercourse. In Wolfson's opinion, the Zohar's cautions against interacting with an alien god indicate a Kabbalistic association between attraction to Christianity and attraction to forbidden intercourse with a menstruant. He also relates the Zohar's critique of Christian sexuality to contestation of Pauline ideas regarding circumcision's replacement by baptism. In this context as well, the Zoharic authorship reads Christianity as deviance. Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant," 217–18, 222–24, 240–41n75, 242n84; Wolfson, "Othering the Other," 151–54.
79. See Steven F. Kruger, *The Spectral Jew: Conversion and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*, ed. Rota Copeland, Barbara A. Hanawalt, and David Wallace, Medieval Cultures, vol. 40 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 81–85.
80. Interjections make this sentence difficult to render in English; I simplify the translation for clarity.
81. The text plays with the idea of a deficient spelling lacking a second *yud*, implying an association with the man who does not engender offspring's imbalance of masculine and feminine principles. See Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 5:108n307.
82. He places himself under the demonic male's authority in this world, and so comes under the demonic female's authority in the next world. See Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 5:107–8nn306–7.
83. In the Talmudic passage, both animals are preserved for the righteous to feast upon in the world to come.
84. The Zohar's associations with the Other Side are not limited to the Christian god, Christianity, and Christians, but its authors often do use this term to indicate that the reader should be alert for critiques of the dominant religion.
85. For some scholarly reflections on this famous passage, see Elliot Wolfson, "Beautiful Maiden without Eyes: *Peshat* and *Sod* in Zoharic Hermeneutics," in *Luminal Darkness: Imaginal Gleanings from Zoharic Literature*, ed. Elliot Wolfson, 56–110 (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007); Tzahi Weiss, "Who Is a Beautiful Maiden without Eyes? The Metamorphosis of a Zohar Midrashic Image from a Christian Allegory to a Kabbalistic Metaphor," *Journal of Religion* 93, no. 1 (2013): 60–76.
86. The Zohar's argument hinges upon a person's willful lack of reproductive sexuality, rather than upon barrenness or infertility.
87. Wolfson notes that the Kabbalists characterized conflict between Judaism and other religions in erotic terms, depicting both Christians and Muslims as oversexed. See Wolfson, "Othering the Other," 136–42, 148.
88. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 98 (section 81).
89. See Romans 1:20–27.

90. Eugene F. Rogers, *Aquinas and the Supreme Court: Race, Gender, and the Failure of Natural Law in Thomas' Biblical Commentaries*, ed. Gareth Jones and Lewis Ayres, Challenges in Contemporary Theology Series (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 289–93; Eugene F. Rogers, "Aquinas and the Supreme Court," lecture, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, November 2013.
91. Paul's ideas regarding gentile sexuality may have been present in ancient rabbinic circles as well. It is possible that both Aquinas and the Zohar reach similar conclusions about God punishing idolaters with nonreproductive sexuality from ancient sources. Aquinas also could have spoken with rabbis or converts. Rogers, "Aquinas and the Supreme Court."
92. For other such entities, note the *tehirin* demons of Zohar 1:198b. For a comprehensive definition of *guardián*, see Joan Corominas and José Pascual, *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1980), 3:246–47.
93. For the first example, see Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, 3:246–48. For the second, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 165, 388n43. Scholem notes that the Zohar employs *gardina* as "guardian" and also connects the term to the Zohar's discussions of demonic activity. For further insight into Spanish linguistic inclusions in Jewish mystical works and their relationship to authors' peripatetic lifestyles, see Amos Goldreich, "Iberian Dialect in an Unknown Fragment from the Author of *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 8 (1989): 89–122. Goldreich's article is concerned mainly with the author of *Tiqqunei ha-Zohar*, a slightly later work that I have not included in my study, since scholars generally consider it separate from the main body of *Sefer ha-Zohar*. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 170–71; Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 159; Giller, *Reading the Zohar*, 7.
94. See Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 439; Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 38; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 82. James I had many Jewish contacts and personal acquaintances. See Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:144.
95. For more of the edict, see Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages*, 256.
96. Ibid.
97. Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 452; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 109; Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages*, 259.
98. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 153–54. Records of the Barcelona disputation show that Paulus had debated Naḥmanides prior to the official disputation in the Kabbalist's own home in Girona. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 36.

99. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:153; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 109. The 1263 disputation lasted four days.
100. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:159; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 84.
101. Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 90. For more on the Paris disputation, see Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, 149–53.
102. Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages*, 261.
103. Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, 102–3.
104. See Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:167; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 156.
105. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 159.
106. Ibid., 156.
107. Ibid., 159.
108. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 90.
109. Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 6–7. Although Malkiel focuses mainly on Ashkenazic communities, his evidence complicating the assumption that Ashkenzic Jews were less likely to convert than Sefardim implies that Spanish Jewish conversion culture was likely somewhat similar to that of northern Jews, if not more free-flowing. See especially Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 3, 8, 16, 33.
110. Malkiel explains that this holds true for voluntary and coerced converts. Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 5–6.
111. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 98.
112. For more on this rabbi's life and his involvement with the Jews of Barcelona and Toledo, see Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:281, 1:288; Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 132–33. The mentioned complaint can be found in Solomon ibn Adret's Responsa part 7, number 179. See Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 25.
113. Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 21.
114. David Malkiel contends that converted Jews often interacted with former coreligionists, while Jeremy Cohen asserts that nonessential contacts were strongly discouraged. Malkiel, "Jews and Apostates in Medieval Europe," 24, 28; J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 21–23.
115. Maimonides also considered conversion to Christianity a form of idol worship. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 106–8. The Zoharic authors similarly understood Christianity as idolatry. Wolfson, "Othering the Other," 139.
116. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 106.
117. Gerald Blidstein, "Who Is Not a Jew?—The Medieval Discussion," *Israel Law Review* 11 (1976): 374–75, 382–83.
118. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 113.

119. Ibid. Tartakoff explains that Jewish communities rejected converts "because apostates terrorized Jewish communities and tore apart Jewish families. . . . To Jews, apostates represented imminent danger." Ibid., 108.
120. See Katz, "Although He Has Sinned He Remains a Jew," 203–17; Berger, "Jacob Katz on Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages," 65; Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 64, 67.
121. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 111.
122. Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 438–39.
123. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 88–90.
124. Solomon Grayzel, "The Talmud and the Medieval Papacy," in *Essays in Honor of Solomon B. Freehof Presented by the Rodef Shalom Congregation*, ed. Solomon Grayzel, 220–45 (Pittsburgh: Rodef Shalom Congregation, 1964), 244; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 121.
125. Abulafia, *Christian-Jewish Relations 1000–1300*, 210.
126. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 23–24, 27–28.
127. Ibid., 24; Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*.
128. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 24–28.
129. See Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 25–28.
130. Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, 41.
131. Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, 146.
132. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 113. He is also known as Thibaut de Sézanne.
133. Ibid., 120–21.
134. Ibid., 113–14; Syds Wiersma, "The Dynamic of Religious Polemics: The Case of Raymond Martin (ca. 1220–ca. 1285)," in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner, 201–17, Jewish and Christian Perspectives Series, vol. 17, ed. David Golinkin, Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Freek van der Steen (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 202; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 343–47.
135. Wiersma, "Dynamic of Religious Polemics," 207.
136. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 63; Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, 126–27.
137. Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword*, 46.
138. Many of Nicholas Donin's critiques of the Oral Law were similar to those of the Karaites. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:150; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 60.
139. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:151; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 60–62.
140. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:151.
141. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 78.

142. For Talmud burning as a mendicant project, see J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 74–76. For further discussion of Nicholas Donin, the 1240 Talmud trial, and churchmen burning the Talmud, see Robert Chazan, "The Condemnation of the Talmud Reconsidered (1239–1248)," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 55 (1988): 11–30; William Chester Jordan, "Marian Devotion and the Talmud Trial of 1240," *Religiongespräche im Mittelalter* (1992): 64–66; Joel E. Rembaum, "The Talmud and the Popes: Reflections on the Talmud Trials of the 1240s," *Viator* 13 (1982): 203–23; Grayzel, "Talmud and the Medieval Papacy," 224–27; Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 140–41.
143. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:109; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 54.
144. Robert Chazan, "The Letter of Rabbi Jacob ben Elijah to Friar Paul," *Jewish History* 6, nos. 1–2, The Frank Talmage Memorial Volume (1992): 59; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 128.
145. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 37, 40; J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 334–35.
146. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 38.
147. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 108, 120; J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 35–36, 39.
148. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:152; J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 35–36.
149. J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 36; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 127; Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 453; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:152; Chazan, "Letter of Rabbi Jacob ben Elijah to Friar Paul," 59.
150. See Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 134. Vose notes that without Friar Paulus's personal presence and drive, it is unlikely the 1263 Barcelona disputation would have occurred. See Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 146.
151. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 127; J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 37; Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 92; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:152.
152. J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 110, 127; J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 346–47.
153. J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 336. For the quote see Grayzel, *Church and the Jews in the Thirteenth Century*, 2:98.
154. See Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 439–40; J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 36.
155. These topics have been discussed above, but see also J. Cohen, "Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 36; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:152, 155; J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 110, 127; Chazan, *Medieval Jewry in Northern France*, 149–53; Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 455.
156. J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 336–37.
157. Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages*, 262–63.

158. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:353.
159. Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*, 81; Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:357.
160. Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 90.
161. See Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," 457. Robin Vose describes Guy Fulcoldi as an extreme figure interested in disputations. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 30.
162. See Chazan, *Church, State, and Jew in the Middles Ages*, 256–57.
163. See J. Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, especially 106, 122–23, 164, 170. Cohen's book deals with this shift in medieval Christian attitudes toward Judaism.
164. Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe*, 207.
165. Ibid., 209, 213. See also Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future."
166. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 170 (section 156).
167. Ibid., 133 (section 122). For the Alfonsi quote, see above.

CHAPTER 3

1. All New Testament quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.
2. Douglas Farrow, *Ascension and Ecclesia: On the Significance of the Doctrine of the Ascension for Ecclesiology and Christian Cosmology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 10. The quote within Farrow's quote is from Hebrews 7:26 (RSV).
3. Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996),: 1:103 (section 28). Also see ibid., 1:101n5, 1:100 (Section 10), and 1:101 (Section 20).
4. Ibid., 1:108 (section 50). See chapter 1 for the Zohar's contraventions of Christian claims regarding Jesus' dual nature.
5. David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by David Berger*, Judaica Texts and Translations Number Four (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 115 (section 98). Also see ibid., 98 (section 80).
6. See Jay Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," in *Joshua Finkel Festschrift: In Honor of Joshua Finkel*, ed. Sidney B. Hoenig and Leon D. Stitskin, 41–50, with a foreword by Samuel Belkin (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1974), 43–44. Christian exegetes from the ancient through the medieval periods characterized Balaam alternately as a villain who threatened Israel, as a character related to the magi who attended Jesus' infancy, and as a type for Christ. See Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," 43–44; Judith Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars' Press, 1983), 101, 103,

113. From at least the third century on, Christians associated Balaam with messianic prophecy in art and public plays. Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 1, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 1:13. Similarly, ancient and medieval Jewish interpreters struggled with Balaam's dual roles as a prophet who spoke the word of God and as a foolish villain instructed by his own ass.

7. Origen is known to have made this observation. Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," 44. See also John Van Seters, "From Faithful Prophet to Villain: Observations on the Tradition History of the Balaam Story," in *Biblical Itinerary: In Search of Method, Form, and Content. Essays in Honor of George W. Coats*, ed. Eugene E. Carpenter, 126–32, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Book 240 (N.p.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 132.
8. Pinḥas was the grandson of Moses' brother Aaron. According to the biblical narrative, he was granted a divine pact of eternal priesthood for his deed.
9. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 76; Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbalah*, ed. Herbert Marks, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 149–50. Magid cites Deuteronomy 18:13–20 as the prooftext for prophecy as Israel's alone.
10. For excellent and comprehensive analyses of these texts, as well as assessments of their development in historical context, I refer readers especially to the works of Judith Baskin and Shaul Magid. Baskin's work focuses on Balaam in biblical, rabbinic, and early Christian literature, while Magid focuses on Balaam's character as it appears in rabbinic literature through its fascinating transformations in sixteenth-century Lurianic Kabbalah. See Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 74–114; Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 143–95. Braverman and Urbach's studies of Balaam are also good resources for understanding the postbiblical Balaam. See Braverman, "Balaam in Rabbinic and Early Christian Traditions," 41–50; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Homilies of the Sages on Gentile Prophecy and on the Case of Balaam," *Tarbiz* 25 (1956): 272–89.
11. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 81.
12. See Mishna Avot 5:19, which labels him "the wicked Balaam" and refers to people who have "an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a greedy soul" as his apostles. See also Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 105a, which presents a litany of Balaam's evils and punishments, including bestiality with his ass, practicing magic with his phallus, and being excluded from the world to come. Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 106a portrays him as greedily seeking financial reward for Israelite deaths.
13. See Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 106a, which discusses his role as one versus the other.
14. For an overview of the difficulties in dating Sifre Deuteronomy, see H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. and ed.

Markus Bockmuehl (N.p.: T & T Clark, 1991; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 249–51, 272–73.

15. For good summaries of older scholarship that attempted to connect Balaam with Jesus, see Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 296–97n52; Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 79, 91–93, 156n47, 157n48–50, 168n55. For Urbach's study of this matter, see Urbach, "Homilies of the Sages on Gentile Prophecy and on the Case of Balaam," 272–89, especially 281ff.
16. For a discussion of Jesus' role in this story and its implications for the Babylonian Talmud's engagement with Christianity, see Peter Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 141–44.
17. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 77, 100. The quote is found in Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 77.
18. Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 92, 116.
19. Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 150.
20. Daniel Matt, trans., *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983), 240; Elliot Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant: Memory, Forgetfulness, and the Construction of History in the Zohar," in *Jewish History and Jewish Memory: Essays in Honor of Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi*, ed. Elisheva Carlebach, John M. Efron, and David N. Myers, 214–46, The Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry Series, ser. ed. Jehuda Reinharz and Michael Brenner (Hanover, NH: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 217. For more of Wolfson's reflections on connections between Jesus and the Zoharic Balaam, see Wolfson, "Re/membering the Covenant," 217–18, 236n36–37; Elliot Wolfson, "Othering the Other: Eschatological Effacing of Ontic Boundaries," in *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, ed. Elliot Wolfson, 129–85 (UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 140–41.
21. Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 158–59. Magid understands the Zohar's Balaam as part of a more general demonic group of characters that includes both Esau and Amaleq. However, it is not the Zoharic Balaam on which he focuses most of his attention, but rather on a fascinating Lurianic teaching that uses Moses and Balaam as mirror images of each other. See Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 160–61, 167.
22. See Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, with a foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1995), 181–88; Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 8, 238.
23. The translation "black resin" (*qotifa de-qarnetey*) follows Daniel Matt, who notes that the phrase refers to ultimate impurity. Matt explains that the word *qarnetey* is one of the Zohar's famous neologisms, suggesting that the Zohar's authors evidently felt the need to develop new words to express their intense disgust with Balaam. Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*, 239.

24. The edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar* used in this study is Reuven Moshe Margaliot, ed., *Sefer ha-Zohar al Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999). Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Zoharic texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Brackets contain relevant words and phrases that are implied but left out of source texts, such as completions of biblical verses and textual clarifications.
25. It is noteworthy that while Jewish literature tends to consider Jesus as a prophet for Christians and a founder of Christianity as a large-scale religion (leading to his comparison with Moses), reducing Christ to a prophet's role is theologically offensive to Christians. The Jewish portrayal of Christ as a kind of false prophet (or prophet of evil, as in the Zohar) appears to be an attempt to make sense of his influence from a Jewish perspective.
26. For a fascinating and extensive exploration of this topic, see Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1978).
27. The topic of Jesus as a magician also figures prominently in Origen's third-century *Contra Celsum*. See Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum*, trans. with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).
28. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, 8–9, 132.
29. See Robert Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne: A Christian Sermon and a Jewish Reply," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, no. 4 (1974): 440, 442–43; Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, 179–94, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies no. 8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 182–83.
30. For an explanation of the dating for this Church, which lies a short distance west of Arles, see Whitney S. Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France: Medieval Architecture, Sculpture, Stained Glass, Manuscripts, the Art of the Church Treasuries* (Wesleyan University Press, 1966 under title *Monastery and Cathedral in France*; reprint (N.p.: Westview Press Icon Editions, 1972), 73.
31. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:120 (section 109).
32. Of course, tonsure involves shaving the scalp and not the forehead. However, tonsure's shaved zone is centrally located between the eyes though further back on the head. Most people are already bald between the eyes. The Zoharic interpretation of this passage is clear from the context.
33. See Eli Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*: Folk-Narrative as Polemics and Self-Criticism," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 101–35 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 109–10.

34. Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 110–11. For the work's role in ancient Jewish communities, see also Yehuda Liebes, "Who Makes the Horn of Jesus to Flourish," *Immanuel* 21 (1987): 62.
35. Ḥananel Mack, "Anti-Christian Polemic in the Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah," *Proceedings of the Tenth World Congress of Jewish Studies* 3, no. 1 (1989): 133–40 [Hebrew].
36. Mack, *The Mystery of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2010), 80, 94 [Hebrew]. Also see Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 102–3.
37. This preliminary "And you" is not found in Ezekiel 3:17.
38. This fascinating passage, which is located prior to the Zohar's flying Balaam narrative, also contains many Jewish critiques of Christianity. According to the narrative, as the Torah emanates through the sefirotic gradations, it arrives at the "Left Arm," (which represents Judgment —a quality the Kabbalists sometimes associated with evil) and requires cleansing. God therefore conducts a purification process by duping Sama'el, the angel associated with Edom, Rome, and Christians (as discussed in previous chapters). When God offers Sama'el the Torah, the wicked angel inquires about its contents and God cites the commandment, "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Horrified, Sama'el rejects the Torah, asserting that his domain is defined by murder and war—a Zoharic reference to his stewardship over violent Christians. Sama'el suggests that God give the Torah to the Israelites, hoping that its nonviolence requirements will result in their destruction. Thus, the wicked angel willingly gives up his right to the Torah, recapitulating Esau's selling his birthright to his brother Jacob in Genesis 25—a biblical episode that again references medieval Jewish associations of Christianity with Esau and Edom. Of course, Sama'el's attempt to scheme against God backfires. The Zohar's message is clear: Christians were offered the Law but denied it, preferring to maintain their violent ways. Yet their choice of violence and disregard for Torah ultimately will prove their undoing. For further analysis of this fascinating story, see Wolfson, "Othering the Other,", 133ff.
39. This plate was suspended from a blue cord at the front of the high priest's headdress.
40. For dating *Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu* works, see Marc Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2003), 4–5; Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 305–6; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 390. For interested readers, an English translation of *Tanḥuma* literature can be found in John T. Townsend, *Midrash Tanhuma: Translated into English with Introduction, Indices, and Brief Notes*, 3 vols. (Jersey City, NJ: Ktav, 2003).
41. See Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 310–11; Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah*, 102–3. Ḥananel

Mack has described the close ties between Tanḥuma and Numbers Rabbah's second part. Ḥananel Mack, "Numbers Rabba: Its Date, Location, and Circulation," in *Studies in Aggadic Midrashim in Memory of Zvi Meir Rabinowitz*, ed. M. A. Friedman and M. B. Lerner, 91–105 (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv University, 1996), 91–92 [Hebrew]; Mack, *Mystery of Rabbi Moshe Hadarshan*, 171–72.

42. See Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 336; Tessa Rajak, "Moses in Ethiopia: Legend and Literature," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 29, no. 2 (1978): 112; Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 162; Avigdor Shinan, "Dibre ha-Yamim Shel Mosheh Rabbenu (The Chronicles of Moses)," *Ha-Sifrut* 24 (1977): 102, 115 [Hebrew].
43. To be clear, this is the way the story is presented in Shinan's version of the *Chronicles of Moses*. See Shinan, "Dibre ha-Yamim Shel Mosheh Rabbenu." *Sefer Zikhronot*, a text that is probably from fourteenth-century Italy and that draws on the *Chronicles of Moses* for its material, contains a version of the story that is almost exactly the same as that found in Shinan. See Eli Yassif, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot That Is the Chronicle of Yeraḥme'el: Critical Edition by Eli Yassif* (Tel Aviv: Ḥayyim Rosenberg Library of Jewish Studies, University of Tel Aviv, 2001), 171; Goldenberg, *Curse of Ham*, 346n47. The other widely available version of the *Chronicles of Moses* contains a different story, in which Balaam and his two sons "fly in the air" to flee to Egypt from a battle at Cush in which Moses is victorious. (In other versions Balaam and his sons flee, but do not fly—an important distinction.) This version does not contain the battle with the Canaanite kings, and seems also to lack a death scene for Balaam. See Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, vol. 2 (Leipzig and Vienna: n.p., 1853–1877; reprinted, Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), 1–11, esp. 7 and 11.
44. Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 54.
45. Indeed, this text was so popular that it was known and considered relevant not only by Jews living in Christian-dominated lands but among Jews living under Muslim rule as well. *Toledot Yeshu* is almost as offensive to Muslims as to Christians, and as with Jews living among Christians, it seems to have been a touchstone for reminding Jews of their religious identity while living under Islam. See Philip Alexander, "The *Toledot Yeshu* in the Context of Jewish-Muslim Debate," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 137–58 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 138, 144, 155.
46. Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 110.
47. Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 123, 125; Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 109–11.

48. Michael Sokoloff. "The Date and Provenance of the Aramaic *Toledot Yeshu* on the Basis of Aramaic Dialectology," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 13–26 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 25; Pierluigi Piovanelli, "The *Toledot Yeshu* and Christian Apocryphal Literature: The Formative Years," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 89–100 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 99–100; Eli Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 109; John Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?" in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 221–45 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 238, 240, 242. Hillel Newman locates *Toledot Yeshu*'s chronological origins between the fourth and the early ninth centuries, placing them close to the production of early Amoraic midrashic works. He also notes that this complex work had an extended preliterary tradition as well as a lengthy literary development. See Hillel I. Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 59, 62–63.
49. These include claims of Yeshu's illegitimate rather than miraculous birth, accusations of his mother's adultery, learning magic during his travels in Egypt (a claim that connects Balaam to Jesus in medieval Jewish literature), and more.
50. For Tertullian, see Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?" 242; Yaakov Deutsch, "The Second Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 283–95 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 285. Medieval Jews also were familiar with many of these traditions. For example, *Nitzaḥon Vetus*' author maintained that Jesus learned magic in Egypt, while the Zohar made similar claims for Balaam, who was also associated with Egypt and magic in earlier Jewish literature. See Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 63–64 (section 32); Zohar 2:69a–b; Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors*, 74–114.
51. For a fascinating discussion of Jesus' role in Talmudic literature, see Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*.
52. See Newman, "Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," 62, 71; Peter Schäfer, "Agobard and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 27–48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 28–29, 48; Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 102.
53. For Agobard and Amulo, see Schäfer, "Agobard and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," 38–39; Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?" 230. For the quote, see Newman, "Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," 71.
54. Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?" 226.

55. Deutsch, "The Second Life of Jesus," 295; Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, "Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 197–220 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 213.
56. Martini may cite *Toledot Yeshu* in his earlier work *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (Muzzle for the Jews) as well. Horbury, "Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*," 53–54; Deutsch, "Second Life of Jesus," 287, 289; Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 121; Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 349.
57. Horbury, "Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*," 54.
58. Paola Tartakoff, "The *Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 297–309 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 297–98, 304–7; Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 103–4.
59. Tartakoff, "*Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," 305.
60. For example, a version used to re-Judaize a convert may have been less extreme than a version told to an exclusively Jewish audience. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 122.
61. Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew*, 121–22; Tartakoff, "*Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," 302–3, 305.
62. Tartakoff, "*Toledot Yeshu* and Jewish-Christian Conflict in the Medieval Crown of Aragon," 297–98, 307, 309.
63. This summary is based partially on the Strasbourg version of *Toledot Yeshu* and partially on versions found in early Aramaic fragments of the text. See Schäfer, "Agobard and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," 34–36, 45–46. I also rely on John Gager's presentation of this material. John Gager, "Turning the World Upside Down: An Ancient Jewish Life of Jesus," lecture, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, March 2012.
64. Gager, "Turning the World Upside Down."
65. Yassif, "*Toledot Yeshu*," 119–20.

CHAPTER 4

1. The edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar* used in this study is Reuven Moshe Margaliot, ed., *Sefer ha-Zohar al Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999). Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Zoharic texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Brackets contain relevant words and phrases that are implied but left out of source texts, such as completions of biblical verses and textual clarifications.

2. In Numbers 31, Moses appoints Pinḥas as the Israelite campaign's head priest and arms him with the holy vessels (*keley ha-qodesh*) and trumpets. Presumably, it is these sacred vessels that inspire the role the high priest's headdress plays in the flying Balaam narratives. See Exodus 28:36 for a description of the *tzitz*.
3. The root of the word I have translated "rose above" is *s.l.q.*, which is related to the Hebrew *'.l.h.* The terms have connotations of rising, removing, transcending, and surpassing. In other places where the term is used within this narrative, it refers to rising away—usually from pursuing Israelites. The meaning is very clear in those contexts, so I have maintained a similar translation here where it seems more awkward.
4. This quote and those immediately following are taken from one of Balaam's prophetic pronouncements.
5. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
6. Mishna Avot 5:19 calls Balaam's apostles haughty.
7. See Henry Chadwick, trans., *Origen: Contra Celsum*, translated with an introduction and notes by Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 71 (book 2, section 7).
8. Robert Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne: A Christian Sermon and a Jewish Reply," *Harvard Theological Review* 67, no. 4 (1974): 449.
9. David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary by David Berger*, Judaica Texts and Translations Number Four (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 97 (section 80).
10. All New Testament quotations are from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.
11. See Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, 139–61 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 160; David Berger, "Gilbert Crispin, Alan of Lille, and Jacob ben Reuben: A Study in the Transmission of Medieval Polemic," in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-Christian Relations*, ed. David Berger, 227–44 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 229.
12. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
13. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
14. For different versions of this story, see Matthew 8:23–27 and Mark 4:35–41.
15. Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 1:115 (section 84). Jesus' association with boats was also pictured in Christian public art. For example, the abbey of Saint Pere de Rodas in coastal Catalonia featured a relief sculpture of Christ walking on the water with Peter attempting to approach him across the waves, as narrated in Matthew 14:22–33. The sculpture is now on display in the Museu Fred-

eric Marés in Barcelona. See Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 143–44. Also see Mark 6:45–52 and John 6:16–21.

16. For these references, see Genesis 7; Exodus 24; Exodus 34; Deuteronomy 8; Exodus 26 (in the order listed).
17. See Mark 1:13; Luke 4:1–2; Matthew 4:1–2. Christians sought other correspondences between Moses and Jesus as well. For example, by the second century Moses' upheld arms during the battle with the Amaleqites was understood as a prefiguration of the crucifixion. See Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vols. 1 and 2, trans. Janet Seligman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 2:90.
18. For prohibited Sabbath labor categories, see Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 6b, 49b, 70a, 96b, 97b; Numbers Rabbah 18:21. For lashes not exceeding forty and their rabbinic adaptation to forty-minus-one, see Deuteronomy 25:1–3; Babylonian Talmud Makkot 22b.
19. The Zohar's discussion of these three villains may imply a critique of Trinitarian theology, but the passage's continuation makes that reading uncertain.
20. The origins and characteristics of these (and other) fallen angels in early Jewish apocalyptic literature are discussed throughout Andrei Orlov, *Dark Mirrors: Azazel and Satanael in Early Jewish Demonology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2011). For further references to Balaam's sorcery, see Zohar 1:125b–126a and Zohar 3:208a–b. Zohar 1:125b–126a retains the Talmudic tradition of Balaam engaging in sex with his donkey as a means of attracting the impure spirits necessary for his sorcery. For more of the Zohar's presentation of Aza and Aza'el's origins, see Zohar 3:208a–b, in which God casts the two from heaven for complaining about humanity's sins. According to Shaul Magid, the story is based on a late midrashic tradition from *Yalqut Shimoni* on Genesis 6:44, in which the angels boast to God that they could succeed on earth where humanity has failed, but upon arriving sin themselves by cohabiting with human women. They then become enemies of humanity. See Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbalah*, ed. Herbert Marks, Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 180, 304n148.
21. See Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 179.
22. I am translating the root *p.r.ḥ.* as "flew/flew off" and the root *t.v.s.* as "flew swiftly."
23. See Judges 13 for Samson's affiliation with the tribe of Dan.
24. The Zohar's version of the name Iyrah ends in a *he*. However, the cited Iyra of 2 Samuel's name ends in an *alef*.
25. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
26. For Alfonsi's doctrinal statement, see Petrus Alfonsi, *Dialogue against the Jews*, trans. Irven M. Resnick, The Fathers of the Church Medieval Continuation (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 39–40. Also see Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:100 (section 10) for the

first quote; and Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:101 (section 20) for the second. In the second quote, the first bracketed insertion clarifying the prophet Elijah's identity is mine, and the second is Lasker and Stroumsa's. Also see Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:101n5 for a similar argument from an alternate manuscript.

27. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 115 (section 98). See also Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 98 (section 80).
28. See Peter Schäfer, "Agobard and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 27–48 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 34–35; William Horbury, "The Strasbourg Text of the *Toledot*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 49–59 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 49.
29. The fourteenth-century convert Abner of Burgos also cites *Toledot Yeshu* as a problematic Jewish narrative. See Yaakov Deutsch, "The Second Life of Jesus: Christian Reception of *Toledot Yeshu*," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 283–95 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 293–95.
30. For an excellent overview of these characters' origins and appearances in early Jewish literature, see Albert Pietersma, "Introduction," in *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians: P. Chester Beatty XVI* (*with New Editions of Papyrus Vindobonensis Greek inv. 29456 +29828verso and British Library Cotton Toberious B. v f. 87*), ed. and trans. Albert Pietersma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 1–80.
31. See Avigdor Shinan, "Dibre ha-Yamim Shel Mosheh Rabbenu (The Chronicles of Moses)," *Ha-Sifrut* 24 (1977): 109 [Hebrew]; Eli Yassif, *Sefer ha-Zikhronot that is the Chronicle of Yeraḥme'el: Critical Edition by Eli Yassif* (Tel Aviv: Ḥayyim Rosenberg Library of Jewish Studies, University of Tel Aviv, 200), 162; Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-midrash*, 6 vols. (Leipzig and Vienna, 1853–1877; reprint, Jerusalem: Bamberger & Wahrmann, 1938), 2:7, 2:11.
32. See Zohar 2:191a and Zohar 2:194a. See also Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash*, 170, 302n121. The section omitted at the ellipses in this passage explains Yunus and Yumbrus' presence at the battle with the Midianite kings, when a reader might otherwise suppose they had perished during the golden calf incident's aftermath. For non-Zoharic origins of this story, see Pietersma, *Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians*, 31.
33. See especially Matthew 27:32–44; Luke 23:32–43.
34. See Pietersma, *Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians*, 30.
35. I have not found references to Tzelyah outside the Zohar. He may be an invention its authors designed specifically for this story.
36. Some of the Danite characters mentioned here are fairly obscure. For example, Serayah is a Zadokite priest from the time of the Babylonian conquest who was

told by the prophet Jeremiah to pronounce the doom of Babylon upon his arrival in that city. See Jeremiah 51:60–64, which prompts this Zoharic teaching. The choice of this character, who prophesies doom for an oppressive overlord, is probably not accidental.

37. See, for example, Zohar 1:125b–126a. There, Balaam performs sorceries to draw the spirit of the primordial serpent. Balaam's magical rituals resemble the sorcerous practices that the Zohar describes later magicians performing with snakes exuded from Balaam's corpse (a story located at the end of the Zohar 3:193b–194b passage presented in this chapter).
38. See Zohar 1:126a.
39. See Margaliot's marginal commentary on this passage for further clarification.
40. The meaning of this term in the biblical verse is uncertain.
41. There is also a parallel text in Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 105a.
42. Bernard McGinn, *Antichrist: Two Thousand Years of the Human Fascination with Evil* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 58–59; Andrew Gow, "The Jewish Antichrist in Medieval and Early Modern Germany," *Medieval Encounters* 2, no. 3 (1996): 252–54; Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 213. McGinn notes that Irenaeus relies on earlier Jewish and Christian sources for his Antichrist ideas. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 59.
43. McGinn, *Antichrist*, 100–102.
44. For the first reference, see Gow, "Jewish Antichrist in Medieval and Early Modern Germany," 263. For the second, see Ora Limor and Israel Jacob Yuval, "Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth," in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 197–220 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 211–12.
45. Limor and Yuval, "Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth," 213.
46. Richard Kenneth Emmerson, *Antichrist in the Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Apocalypticism, Art, and Literature* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 30. For a fifteenth-century Irish text that tells of the Antichrist's emergence from the tribe of Dan, see McGinn, *Antichrist*, 99.
47. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
48. Pinḥas would also have seemed a logical choice because of his association with spears. In Numbers 25, his killing of a sinning Israelite and a Midianite woman with a single spear thrust is graphically detailed. This connected him to the story of Jesus' side being pierced by a Roman soldier later known as Longinus found in John 19:34 and in some versions of Matthew 27:49. This story was also known to medieval Jews and critiqued in some versions of *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* because Matthew places the occurrence before Jesus' death and John places it afterward. See Joel E. Rembaum, "The Influence of 'Sefer Nestor Hakomer' on Medieval Jewish Polemics," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*

45 (1978): 159. Rembaum uses a different manuscript than Lasker and Stroumsa. See Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:95.

49. John Gager, "Simon Peter, Founder of Christianity or Saviour of Israel?" in *Toledot Yeshu* ("*The Life Story of Jesus*") *Revisited: A Princeton Conference*, ed. Peter Schäfer, Michael Meerson, and Yaacov Deutsch, 221–45 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 236.
50. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:102 (section 24a).
51. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 204 (section 205).
52. See Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200–1400* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 152–53, 162.
53. Jewish opinions of Christian violence are discussed in chapter 2.
54. Killing Balaam with his own sword also reflects a tradition that a specific weapon is needed in order to slay a sorcerer. See Judith Baskin, *Pharaoh's Counselors: Job, Jethro, and Balaam in Rabbinic and Patristic Tradition* (Chico, CA: Scholars' Press, 1983), 90, 156n46.
55. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative.
56. John Gager, "Turning the World Upside Down: An Ancient Jewish Life of Jesus." Lecture, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Greensboro, NC, March 2012; Limor and Yuval, "Judas Iscariot: Revealer of the Hidden Truth," 206; Hillel Newman, "The Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," *Journal of Theological Studies* 50, no. 1 (1999): 64.
57. Schäfer, "Agobard and Amulo's *Toledot Yeshu*," 45–46.
58. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 134 (section 125).
59. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:98–99 (section 5).
60. This passage is part of the *Sefer ha-Zohar* 3:193b–194b narrative. At this point the Zohar proceeds with a story about Solomon, the queen of Sheba, and the magical serpents. Then Rabbi Shimon proceeds to hint at other things that happened to Balaam after his death, but stops when he deems the topic has approached secrets that should not be revealed. Following this, a new discourse by Rabbi Aba begin in Zohar 3:195a: "Rabbi Aba opened: . . . the prayer of the poor man takes precedence over the prayer of Moses, and takes precedence over the prayer of David, and takes precedence over all the rest of the prayers in the world. What is the reason? Because the poor man has a broken heart. And it is written: 'The Lord is near to the broken hearted, [and those crushed of spirit he delivers]' (Psalms 34:19)." This topical transition may be incidental, or may signify a contrast between the generic righteous man and the specific wicked one who was the subject of the previous passage. It is also possible that this section alludes to Jewish distress at the medieval state of the world, poignantly contradicting the Christian argument that God had abandoned the Jewish people (an assertion discussed in chapter 1).

61. Elliot Wolfson has shown that the Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia composed some anti-Christian arguments involving snakes, including the idea that the snake that tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden was a prefiguration of Jesus. See Elliot Wolfson, "Textual Flesh, Incarnation, and the Imaginal Body: Abraham Abulafia's Polemic with Christianity," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish Intellectual and Social History: Festschrift in Honor of Robert Chazan*, ed. David Engel, Lawrence H. Schiffman, and Elliot R. Wolfson, 189–226 (Boston: Brill, 2012), 210, 214.
62. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 101.
63. William Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela: First English Translation with Introduction, Commentaries, and Notes* (New York: Italica Press, 1993), 5.
64. See Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:124 (sections 129–130). Also see Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:123 (section 128). Churches and cathedrals from the Kabbalists' time were indeed filled with tombs and funerary chapels.
65. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:123 (section 128).
66. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 210 (section 217).
67. Ibid., 206 (section 210).
68. Ibid., 225 (section 240). The text goes on to surmise that God hid Moses' bones (in Deuteronomy 34:6) precisely to prevent Jews from turning to such practices. The same polemic text also applies Isaiah 65:4, "Those who sit among the graves," to Christians and the cult of saints. See Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 206 (section 210) and 118 (section 103).
69. See Zohar 2:141b.
70. Other sections of these framing stories also contain anti-Christian rhetoric, as in Zohar 3:192a–b where God tricks the violent angel Sama'el, guardian of the Christians, into giving up his right to the Torah and passing it to Israel instead. The tale is discussed briefly in the footnotes of chapters 2 and 3.
71. There are twenty-eight words in Numbers 22:5.
72. Fortune (Gad) was apparently a Babylonian deity. See Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 63b.
73. Also see Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–33.
74. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:121 (section 115).
75. For these passages in the order mentioned, see Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 168 (Section 154), 92 (section 73), and 94 (section 78).
76. Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 34.
77. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:123 (section 127).
78. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 219 in the English, (section 231), 155 in the Hebrew.
79. David Berger, "A Generation of Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Interaction in the Medieval World," in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in Jewish-*

Christian Relations, ed. David Berger 40–50 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 44. Berger offers a list of similar terms.

80. The heretics were burned at the stake around 1126. See Whitney S. Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France: Medieval Architecture, Sculpture, Stained Glass, Manuscripts, the Art of the Church Treasuries* (Wesleyan University Press, 1966 under the title *Monastery and Cathedral in France*; reprint (N.p.: Westview Press Icon Editions, 1972), 73.
81. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 2:11.
82. Ibid.; Peter Linehan, *Spain 1157–1300: A Partible Inheritance* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 91.
83. See Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 63b.
84. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 37–38.
85. See Newman, "Death of Jesus in the *Toledot Yeshu* Literature," 77; Paola Tartakoff, *Between Christian and Jew: Conversion and Inquisition in the Crown of Aragon, 1250–1391*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras and Edward Peters, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 7; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 115.

CHAPTER 5

1. See chapter 2 for a discussion of Jewish polemic literature's flourishing. See the introduction for Jewish knowledge of Christian texts and theology. The Zohar is the best-known example of classical Kabbalah's literary proliferation in the thirteenth century.
2. See M. F. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture: The Revival of Monumental Stone Sculpture in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981), 11; Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 18, 45.
3. See previous chapters for fuller discussions of thirteenth-century Jewish-Christian relations.
4. David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9, 123–24.
5. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 170–71.
6. For dating this Church's tympana, see Rolf Toman, ed., *Romanesque: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting*, trans. Fiona Hulse and Ian Macmillan (Potsdam, Germany: H.F. Ullman Publishing, 2004), 194, 289; Pedro de Palol and Max Hirmer, *Early Medieval Art in Spain* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1967), 480.
7. For another study that addresses Christian art's impact on the Zohar (in this case its famous *Saba de-Mishpatim* section), see Tzahi Weiss, "Who Is a Beautiful Maiden without Eyes? The Metamorphosis of a Zohar Midrashic Image

from a Christian Allegory to a Kabbalistic Metaphor," *Journal of Religion* 93, no. 1 (2013): 60–76. Weiss's article deals with the famous riddle found in the Zohar's *Saba de-Mishpatim* section.

8. Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York: Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2014), 10.
9. This passage is unusual because unlike many of the examples below, which show engagement with Christian imagery without explicitly discussing visual art's impact, it shows engagement with Christian art in the context of a passage *about* seeing and reacting to images. That the passage's main action takes place away from the common sphere of human activity does not detract from its insights into how art provokes emotional response. As is the case throughout the Zohar, the authors speak through the characters they craft. Rachel, Messiah, and the other figures in this passage are lenses through which the Zoharic authors express their own ideas and reactions, as well as their theology. In this case, Messiah's horrified reaction to images of Jewish suffering resembles that of a propaganda campaign's victim to the images deployed against him. Unlike that victim, Messiah is able to deliver a potent and crushing response. It is not inappropriate to see some elements of wish fulfillment implied in this scenario, as in other eschatological narratives that imagine an eventual Jewish triumph over Christian domination.
10. Here, the Zohar details eschatological events, as the nations tremble at signs and wonders but continue to persecute Israel until Messiah is ready to arrive.
11. The passage continues with the world's Torah scholars gathering around Messiah and the reunion of God's masculine and feminine aspects. The edition of *Sefer ha-Zohar* used in this study is Reuven Moshe Margaliot, ed., *Sefer ha-Zohar al Ḥamishah Ḥumshei Torah*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1999). Translations of biblical, rabbinic, and Zoharic texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Brackets contain relevant words and phrases that are implied but left out of source texts, such as completions of biblical verses and textual clarifications.
12. See previous chapters for discussion of Jewish connections between Edom, Rome, and Christianity.
13. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 23.
14. See Whitney S. Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France: Medieval Architecture, Sculpture, Stained Glass, Manuscripts: The Art of the Church Treasuries* (1966; reprint, Westview Press Icon Editions, 1972), 73; Toman, *Romanesque*, 283; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 7; Jacqueline E. Jung, *The Gothic Screen: Space, Sculpture, and Community in the Cathedrals of France and Germany, ca. 1200–1400* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 152.
15. Strongly reminiscent of the Roman architecture whose remains were visible in southern France, this Church's elaborate facade also features Christ's Incarnation in the left tympanum, Christ's entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper, and

many other scenes. The existing central tympanum is not original to the work. For discussions of this facade, see Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*, 73; Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 204–9; Toman, *Romanesque*, 283–84; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 14–23, 51; Nina Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City: Synagoga and Ecclesia in the Thirteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3, 74–75; Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 151–53, 162.

16. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 209.
17. Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 151. For discussion of Jews depicted on this Church's lintel, see Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 151–53.
18. See Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 207; Toman, *Romanesque*, 283; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 21–22.
19. See the Introduction and chapter 2 for discussion of Christian violence against Jews during the Zoharic authors' time.
20. Rachel Fulton, Caroline Walker Bynum, and Miri Rubin have all shown that, by the twelfth century, Western European Christians had become interested in affective spiritually and compassionate mimesis in ways that altered previous understandings of how a person should relate to Christ and the Virgin by rendering them more relatable to humanity. See Rachel Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 4, 197, 397, 462; Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 249, 252; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 158; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, Publications of the UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies no. 16 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 115, 160.
21. Eitan Fishbane has demonstrated close connection between emotional display, mystical interpretation, and the action of exposing divine secrets in the Zohar; Joel Hecker has shown the importance of "affective performance" among the Zohar's mystical brotherhood; and Melila Hellner-Eshed has emphasized the Zoharic group's technique of generating mystical experience by building "religious-emotional energy." Eitan Fishbane, "Tears of Disclosure: The Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2002): 30–34, 38–39; Joel Hecker, *Mystical Bodies, Mystical Meals: Eating and Embodiment in Medieval Kabbalah*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos, Raphael Patai Series in Jewish Folklore and Anthropology (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005), 130–31; Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 189.
22. The Zohar's authors were not the only medieval Jews who observed and subverted themes from Christian art. Marc Epstein's study of animal iconography in medieval Jewish art explains how Jews adopted and adapted Christian imagery

for their own ends. Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

23. Sadly, I could find no significant public artworks remaining in situ from thirteenth-century urban Catalonian sites where early and classical Kabbalah also flourished. (At least, there were no such artworks at sites I was able to visit.) The cathedral at Girona has a stunning thirteenth-century cloister with capitals devoted to Hebrew Bible stories, but Jews would not have had regular access to it, so I have excluded it from my study.
24. See Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 7–11; James Snyder, Henry Luttikhuizen, and Dorothy Verkerk, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006), 253, 259; Toman, *Romanesque*, 7.
25. The Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya has an amazing collection of Romanesque interior sanctuary art. See Manuel Castiñeras, Jordi Camps, and Joan Duran-Porta, *Romanesque Art in the MNAC Collections*, trans. Andrew Langdon-Davies and Andrew Stacey (Barcelona; Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya and Lunwerg Editores, 2008).
26. See Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 119, 137–39; Toman, *Romanesque*, 9, 256–57; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 14, 18, 54, 49.
27. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 49; Snyder, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 256.
28. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 192–93; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15.
29. See Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15.
30. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15–22; Snyder, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 285; Toman, *Romanesque*, 7, 11. See previous chapters for more on the twelfth-century Renaissance. A good source on this topic is Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
31. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 8; Rolf Toman, ed., *Gothic: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting*, trans. Christian von Armin, Paul Aston, Helen Atkins, Peter Barton, and Sandra Harper (Potsdam, Germany: H. F. Ullman, 2004), 8–9. The High Gothic period is generally considered to span the decades of 1180–1270. Toman, *Gothic*, 9.
32. Paul Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture 1140–1300* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1.
33. Toman, *Gothic*, 9, 96.
34. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225.
35. Toman, *Gothic*, 372–74; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225. By the fourteenth century Castilian sculptural production had moved further south to Toledo. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 238.
36. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225.
37. Mauricio was also an associate of Toledo's Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada. See Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225; Rocío Sánchez Ameijeiras, "Church Reform and the Poetics of Gothic Sculpture in Burgos and Amiens," in *Spanish Medieval Art: Recent Studies*, ed. Colum Hourihane, 155–85, Medieval and Renais-

sance Textual Studies, vol. 346 (Princeton, NJ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies and The Index of Christian Art, 2007), 178. For discussion of Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, see chapter 1.

38. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225.
39. This portal served mainly as an entrance for the archbishop. See Ameijeiras, "Church Reform," 160–61, 164, 178; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225.
40. Ameijeiras, "Church Reform," 161.
41. This portal, though unused today, was once the main entrance for pilgrims. See Ameijeiras, "Church Reform," 164; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 225–26. Just inside the cathedral, the south transept portal features an elaborate baptism of Christ accompanied by many figures from the Hebrew Bible. See Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 229. However, Jews were not likely to have seen this portal, since it is an interior feature.
42. For information on this cathedral's construction and dating, see Toman, *Gothic*, 103, 374; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 231.
43. See Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 236–39.
44. See Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 238; Toman, *Gothic*, 96–97.
45. Toman, *Gothic*, 100, 103, 378; Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 239. The dates given are a combination of these two sources' suggestions.
46. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 1, 4; Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 250; Snyder, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 323; Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 1.
47. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 4; Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 20. Encounters with Christian sculpture may have been especially lively during the cathedrals' construction, as figures would have been produced on the ground and then placed in situ. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 5.
48. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 4.
49. Moses de León died in the early fourteenth century. See Arthur Green, *A Short Guide to the Zohar* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 164.
50. This sculptural theme began as the topic of apse paintings in sanctuary interiors, a sacred space that represented the dome of heaven. Over time it migrated to tympana above Church portals. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 54; Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 137.
51. Saint-Trophime's sculpted facade dates to the second half of the twelfth century. See Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*, 64–65; Toman, *Romanesque*, 30.
52. These implements appear more commonly in Last Judgment scenes, as on the north portal tympanum at the Burgos cathedral and the west central portal tympanum of León's cathedral.
53. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 54; Fulton, *From Judgment to Passion*, 281–84; Rubin, *Mother of God*, 162.
54. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 54; Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 137.

55. This statement is based on personal observation.
56. See Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*, 65, 77; Toman, *Romanesque*, 30.
57. Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 2:10.
58. Hearn, *Romamesque Sculpture*, 136–37. In some places, sculptural programs connected these themes deliberately. For example, the west front of the Strasbourg minster, sculpted in the last quarter of the thirteenth century, places Christ's face in majesty among clouds over a central portal that depicts the Passion and ascension in the top register of the tympanum. Schiller writes, "This shows that the Christ of the Ascension is also to be understood as the one who will return as Judge." See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 1:24–25.
59. See Helen Kleinschmidt, "Notes on the Polychromy of the Great Portal at Cluny," *Speculum* 45, no. 1 (1970): 36–37; Stefan Roller, "The Polychromy of Mediaeval Sculpture: A Brief Overview," in *Circumlitio: The Polychromy of Antique and Mediaeval Sculpture*, ed. Vinzenz Brinkmann, Oliver Primavesi, and Max Hollein, 338–55 (Frankfurt: Hirmer, 2010), 350; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 54–55.
60. See Roller, "Polychromy of Mediaeval Sculpture," 350; Kleinschmidt, "Notes on the Polychromy of the Great Portal at Cluny," 37.
61. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 75; Kleinschmidt, "Notes on the Polychromy of the Great Portal at Cluny," 37. Blue carried positive symbolic associations and red negative symbolic associations in many medieval contexts. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 75. Such blue backgrounds can be seen into the fourteenth century and beyond, as evinced in the excellent collection of Catalonian Gothic art at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, and in interior cathedral displays that date far past the thirteenth century, yet continue to render Christ and the Virgin against a starry blue ground.
62. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 227.
63. See William Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela: First English Translation with Introduction, Commentaries, and Notes* (New York: Italica Press, 1993), 21; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 115.
64. See Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 5, 21. James was considered a proselytizing apostle, connecting his veneration to the conversion process that the Zohar's authors protested so vehemently. For a good introduction to sources and beliefs concerning James the Greater, see Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 8–14.
65. Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 23–24.
66. Ibid., 22. For Burgos and León's cathedrals, see above. The best source for understanding the medieval pilgrimage is the *Liber Sancti Jacobi*, a sort of medieval tour guide composed between 1139 and 1173 for travelers on the route. Melczer's work contains a good description of the text and a translation that is worth reading. See Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 22–23, 28–32.

67. See Melczer, *The Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 24–27; Snyder, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 259; Toman, *Romanesque*, 146.
68. See Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 25.
69. Ibid., 27.
70. Ibid., 24–25, 50.
71. See the introduction for details on Jewish communications networks in these areas.
72. See Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 239–40; Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary and the Song of Songs," 27.
73. The Narbonne accusation is found in Thomas of Monmouth's *Life and Miracles of Saint William of Norwich*, written in the 1150s. See Jeremy Cohen, *Christ Killers: The Jews and the Passion from the Bible to the Big Screen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99, 202.
74. See Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, *From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, intro. Benjamin R. Gampel, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 1:192–93; Derry Brabbs, *The Roads to Santiago: The Medieval Pilgrim Routes through France and Spain to Santiago de Compostela* (London: Frances Lincoln Limited, 2008), 179.
75. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:198. Moses de León lived until 1290 in Guadalajara, though he also lived a wandering lifestyle in Castile and spent his last years in Ávila. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, foreword by Robert Alter (Jerusalem: Schocken, 1941; reprint, New York: Schocken, 1995), 186–87.
76. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:192–93; Toman, *Gothic*, 100, 378.
77. Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:194; Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 251.
78. Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 151.
79. Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 20.
80. Ibid., 1.
81. Understanding and responding to such political messages was part of Christians' process of learning to read these artworks. For more on the process of learning to look at Church architecture, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Theologies in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9–10.
82. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 138.
83. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 13.
84. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 45.
85. Ibid.; J. Cohen, *Christ Killers*, 185.
86. See Stoddard, *Art and Architecture in Medieval France*, 69; Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 2:11; Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 84; Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 3–4.

87. See Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela*, 3–4; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 14.
88. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 138.
89. Ibid., 139.
90. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15; Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 138. Individuals and organizations within the Church hierarchy, as well as royal patrons, also sponsored public sculptural ensembles to assert their status, particularly in the thirteenth century when urban building projects that incorporated such works helped to emphasize and perform ecclesiastical power. Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 5, 82–83.
91. Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 7; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 156.
92. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 13.
93. Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 148.
94. See Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 155–56, 159; Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 95, 104–5; Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 84; Robert Chazan, *Reassessing Jewish Life in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 139–40; J. Cohen, *Christ Killers*, 190–94. Some of the best examples in the Kabbalists' region of art that represents Jews harming Christians are on the lintel of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, which depicts Jews at the payment of Judas and the arrest of Christ, as well as Ecclesia and Synagoga figures at the crucifixion. See Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 151–62.
95. Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 166; Lipton, *Dark* Mirror, 132; J. Cohen, *Christ Killers*, 190–91.
96. For the Alfonso X reference and other possible identifications of this figure, see Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 232.
97. The dates for this sculpture are ca. 1235–1240. See Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 132.
98. It is also possible that the Zohar's reinvention of Rachel as someone who dies for the Divine Presence's manifestation (as discussed in chapter 1) is related to crucifixion and deposition images like the ones found at the Church of San Isidoro in León and at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard.
99. Of course, anti-Jewish claims are not all that these images represent. But they are the most relevant claims for a Jewish audience.
100. See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 1:38 for the raised hand's association with speech.
101. See previous chapters for discussion of this connection.
102. Hearn, *Romanesque Sculpture*, 139. The Roman triumphal arch inspiration is particularly noticeable at Saint-Gilles. See Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 36; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15.
103. Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 15.

104. Jeremy Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman, 20–47 (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 28.
105. Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 82. Also see Jung, *Gothic Screen*, 52. The biblical quotation is from Deuteronomy 21:23.
106. Daniel Lasker and Sarah Stroumsa, eds., *The Polemic of Nestor the Priest: Qissat Mujadalat al-Usquf and Sefer Nestor Ha-Komer*, vols. 1–2 (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East, 1996), 123 (section 127).
107. David Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus with an Introduction, translation, and commentary by David Berger*, Judaica Texts and Translations Number Four (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 214 (section 219).
108. The Zohar also regards Christians as idolaters. See Elliot Wolfson, "Othering the Other: Eschatological Effacing of Ontic Boundaries," in *Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism*, ed. Elliot Wolfson, 129–85 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 139.
109. These Jewish critiques of wooden cultic images become understandable when visiting sites like Barcelona's Frederic Marés museum, in which the sheer quantity of wooden crucifixes from twelfth- and thirteenth-century Spain threatens to overwhelm the viewer.
110. For an extensive discussion of the Amidah prayer's history and structure, see Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin, based on the original 1913 German edition; and the 1972 Hebrew edition, ed. Joseph Heinemann et al. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society and Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993), 24–54.
111. For Mary's antagonistic relationship to Jews in medieval Christian literature, see Rubin, *Mother of God*, 161–68, 227–28; Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 173–216.
112. See Snyder, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, 282–83, 485n35; Petzold, *Romanesque Art*, 111.
113. Rowe, *The Jew, the Cathedral, and the Medieval City*, 101.
114. See chapters 3 and 4 for a full discussion of the Zohar's Balaam.
115. There are twenty-eight words in Numbers 22:5.
116. Fortune (Gad) was apparently a Babylonian deity. See Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 63b.
117. The Abominable Bread and its punning reference to the Christian bread of redemption (the eucharist) are discussed in the previous chapter. "Abominable Bread" was a common Northern European Jewish term for the eucharist as well. See David Berger, "A Generation of Scholarship on Jewish-Christian Interaction in the Medieval World," in *Persecution, Polemic, and Dialogue: Essays in*

Jewish-Christian Relations, ed. David Berger, 40–50 (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 44.

118. See chapters 3 and 4 for Balaam as Christ in the Zohar.
119. For baptism narratives, see Matthew 3:16–17, Mark 1:9–11, Luke 3:21–22, and John 1:32–33.
120. The sculptures that adorned medieval churches were produced on the ground in masons' yards and later set in place. Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 5.
121. See Williamson, *Gothic Sculpture*, 227. Williamson says that the portals were dedicated to the Virgin. The cathedral museum offers a reconstructed version of the west facade in miniature that includes a baptism scene, but the source of its information is unclear.
122. See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 1:133.
123. For the gospel accounts, see Matthew 28:1–7, Mark 16:1–8, Luke 24:1–7, and John 20:11–18.
124. See John 20:19–23, Luke 24, Mark 16, and Matthew 28. Of course, the León cathedral is a composition unto itself, with depictions of Christ's birth, heavenly enthronement, role in the Last Judgment, etc. Jesus' appearance to his apostles on the road to Emmaus from Luke 24 is also depicted on the lintel at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, discussed previously.
125. Lasker and Stroumsa, *Polemic of Nestor the Priest*, 1:98–99 (section 5).
126. Berger, *Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages*, 134 (section 125).
127. See the two previous chapters for the Zohar's Balaam source texts in which a holy item with God's Name written on it causes Balaam to fall from the sky to his death.
128. For a full discussion of this topic, see chapter 4.
129. See chapters 3 and 4 for discussion of these two source narratives: Numbers Rabbah and *Toledot Yeshu*.
130. See Albert Pietersma, "Introduction," in *The Apocryphon of Jannes and Jambres the Magicians: P. Chester Beatty XVI (with New Editions of Papyrus Vindobonensis Greek inv. 29456 +29828verso and British Library Cotton Toberious B. v f. 87)*, ed. and trans. Albert Pietersma (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 30. Another possible inspiration for the Zohar's three flying figures is Christ's crucifixion between two thieves. However, I find the ascension with angels theme a more compelling connection.
131. These claims and their deployment are discussed in greater detail in chapter 1. See Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 41–42; Robert Chazan, "Undermining the Jewish Sense of Future: Alfonso of Valladolid and the New Christian Missionizing," in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain: Interaction and Cultural Exchange*, ed. Mark D. Meyerson and Edward D. English, 179–94, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies no. 8 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre

Dame Press, 1999), 179–81, 183, 185, 187; Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, ed. Sabine MacCormack, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 140. Although there were many other topics of contention between Jews and Christians, these central claims constituted the bulk of Christianity's religious self-understanding and the bulk of their accusations toward Jews. See also David Berger, "The Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 40 (1972): 102; Norman Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah: A Theme in Muslim and Christian Polemic in Spain," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 54 (1987): 227–28. These claims are addressed in Naḥmanides' report of the 1263 Barcelona disputation, in Solomon ibn Adret's text countering the claims of an anonymous Christian scholar, in Raymond Martinī's *Pugio fidei* (Dagger of Faith), in Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's *Dialogue on the Book of Life*, and in other places as well. Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, 12, 140; Roth, "Forgery and Abrogation of the Torah," 227–28; Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, 41–42.

132. Liebes writes, "The author of the Zohar quite consciously used great quantities of Christian material in his splendid work." Yehuda Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," in *Studies in the Zohar*, trans. Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli, ed. Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, 139–61 (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), 160. Liebes suggests that the spiritual affinity between Judaism and Christianity was one cause of the animosity between them. Liebes, "Christian Influences on the Zohar," 161.
133. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 154.
134. Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty*, 239–40; Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary and the Song of Songs," 27.
135. This is Judith Butler's concept of deconstruction. See Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of "Postmodernism," in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, 35–57 (New York: Routledge, 1995), 50.

CONCLUSION

1. For a study of how medieval Jewish visual imagery also subverts themes from Christian art, displaying a minority's response to majority culture, see Marc Michael Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); see esp. 7–8, 27–29, 105, 114–16.

2. Andreas Petzold, *Romanesque Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1995), 51. In southern France especially, Romanesque churches sprang up in cities already cluttered with Roman ruins, encouraging Jewish understanding of Christians and their artistic displays as continuations of Roman dominion.
3. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, with a new preface by the author, Routledge Classics Edition, (1994; reprint, New York: Routledge, 2008), 10.
4. See David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 126, 138–39. For a good example of how imagery may change meaning contextually when incorporated into graffiti, see Epstein, *Dreams of Subversion*, 11.
5. Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 142.
6. Homi Bhabha refers to a "strategy of subversion"; Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 89.
7. See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 148.
8. Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 13.
9. Ibid., 26–27.
10. For sefirotic theology as a strategy for hierarchical mystical ascent, both for living Kabbalists and for the souls of the dead, see Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, ed. Sorin Antonhi and László Kontler, Pasts Incorporated: CEU Studies in the Humanities, vol. 2 (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2005), 47–51, 88–93, 101–42.
11. Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 154.
12. Morgan, *Sacred Gaze*, 76.
13. Ibid., 81.
14. See ibid., 123–25; see also Kenneth Mills, *Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).
15. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), xii.
16. See Lucy Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence: Archbishop Rodrigo and the Muslims and Jews of Medieval Spain*, ed. Sabine MacCormack, History, Languages, and Cultures of the Spanish and Portuguese Worlds (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3, 5, 127–36; Robert Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 64; Robin Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15, 21.
17. See Vose, *Dominicans, Muslims and Jews*, 7, 21, 135; Pick, *Conflict and Coexistence*, ix–x, 5, 172–73, 177–78.
18. Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews*, 155.

19. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 27. The italics are Scott's. Scott goes on to note that subordinate groups' hidden transcripts generate their own subcultures and forms of domination over and against the dominant elite, a description that coheres nicely with the Zoharic authors' frequent warnings regarding the dangers of sharing mystical secrets with the uninitiated or uninformed (and sometimes even with each other).
20. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 198.
21. The size of the Zohar's audience is uncertain. Lachter has suggested that the Zohar was part of a trend toward Kabbalah's growing publicity and openness. See Hartley Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 5, 11, 31–32.
22. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 191.
23. For more on this topic and how such theology constituted its own form of resistance, see Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*.
24. For an interesting essay on secrecy in the Zohar, see Eitan Fishbane, "Tears of Disclosure: The Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative," *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11, no. 1 (2002): 25–47.
25. Judith Butler states, "To deconstruct the concept . . . is not to negate or refuse. To deconstruct these terms means, rather, to continue to use them, to repeat them, to repeat them subversively, and to displace them from the contexts in which they have been deployed as instruments of oppressive power." Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in *Feminist Contentions: A Philosophical Exchange*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, 35–57 (New York: Routledge, 1995), 50.

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