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ADDITIONS FROM AN APOSTATE:
PETRUS ALFONSI AND A SHIFT IN ANTI-JEWISH POLEMIC

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

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Abstract

In the Twelfth Century, Petrus Alfonsi converted from Judaism to Christianity and wrote his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*. In this polemical text, Alfonsi utilized Islamic science and reason to attack Judaism and the Talmud as being irrational. The *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* deviated from the tradition of Augustine and successfully reintroduced the accusation of intentional deicide along with the first efficacious attack on the Talmud. The arguments developed in the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* provided ideas that would influence the Talmud Burnings of Paris in 1242.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity had been, from the start, a tense one. Since both religions utilized the same sacred text (Torah/Old Testament)[1], there was constant struggle between the two to demonstrate that each respective religious path holds the truth of scripture. A vital tool in this struggle was the art of polemic. Polemicists on both sides used this kind of literature to demonstrate that their own religion was the correct path to follow. Many of these polemical texts were used to perpetuate the oppression of Jewish communities throughout Europe. Polemical literature is a useful tool in tracing the changing, or unchanging, Christian attitudes towards Jews and Judaism.

One writer of polemical literature, Petrus Alfonsi, broke from tradition to the detriment of the Jewish communities within Western Europe. Petrus Alfonsi was born a Jew in Huesca, Spain around 1062 but later converted to Christianity as an adult. He became an influential polemicist, scientist and transmitter of Arabic and Jewish folklore into the Christian tradition. Alfonsi's polemical piece, the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*[2] proved to become very influential to later Latin Christian writers and holds a particular significance to the conversation about polemical literature because Alfonsi's *Dialogi* represented a detrimental shift in Christian thought. Due to his upbringing in a Jewish community, Alfonsi was familiar with the Talmud and Rabbinic literature and he

[1] I have made the decision to use Old Testament for the remainder of this thesis because the person I am writing about wrote from a Christian perspective.
[2] The translation I utilized for this paper is that of Irven M. Resnick's. Irven M. Resnick, Introduction to *The Fathers of the Church: Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue Against the Jews* Vol. 8, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

brought his knowledge of such texts, which previously had been missing almost all together, into Christian literature. Up until the 12th century in Western Europe[3], the Talmud and other Rabbinic literature had almost entirely passed under the radar of Christian polemicists. There is one identifiable attempt in Latin Europe to incorporate the use of the Talmud before Alfonsi by Agobard of Lyons, but he was unsuccessful in employing the Talmud in such a way that made a lasting impression on later polemical writers. Alfonsi on the other hand, had intimate knowledge of the Jewish texts and from this knowledge he could exploit the Talmud to more effectively attack Judaism than others before him. In his attacks on the Talmud, Alfonsi primarily condemned the *aggadah* portion which contains folklore and legend. Alfonsi's attacks on the Talmud in the *Dialogi* would ultimately, I argue, provide fodder for the fires that would consume thousands of Talmuds in the Paris burnings of the 13th century.

Due to their proximity, as well as their shared sacred texts, there are a myriad of polemical texts for scholars to analyze. From the cohabitation, and the constant visible presence of Jews in Christendom, the Church developed a need to justify why the Jews were sharing their space. From the 2nd century C.E., Church Fathers in their defense of Christianity made claims that Judaism should wither and die since according to their theology, God had made a new covenant with the Christians. However, Judaism did not wither and die, so some modifications needed to be made to their ideology. At the end of the 4th century C.E., St. Augustine introduced his witness doctrine in his classics *De civitate Dei* and *Contra Faustum*. According to this doctrine, Jews survived so as to

[3] While there are some examples of intentional deicide in early Greek writers such as the Justinian Code, I am focusing here on Latin Europe.

carry on the tradition of the Old Testament and serve as the reminder to Christians of their origin, where they came from and who they are now. The witness doctrine successfully overshadowed the more intolerable doctrines of previous Church writers and provided a purpose for the Jews to survive, but not thrive, in Christendom.[4]

Polemicists after Augustine adhered to this ideology, even if some writers such as Venerable Bede and Isidore of Seville flirted with ideas on deicide and the "usefulness" of Jews that almost crossed out of Augustine's doctrine, they still stayed within its confines. Writers such as Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville maintained a level of dedication to the witness doctrine as well as the power of *testimonia* to prove the truth of Christianity. The primary method of defense, and offense, was *testimonia*, collections of "proofs" taken from scripture to demonstrate the truth of Christianity. Citations as such from the Old Testament made up the bulk of polemical texts. This was due in part to polemicists copying the works before them but it was also due to a lack of understanding of Jewish texts, such as the Talmud and Rabbinic works. Until the *Dialogi* of Alfonsi, no Christian anti-Jewish polemicist had successfully or convincingly incorporated the Talmud into their writings. It was not until the late 12th century, early 13th century, that the content of polemical writers began to successfully incorporate Jewish sources.

Jewish apostates in the 12th and 13th centuries introduced a visible shift in the tone of the *Adversus Iudaeos* arguments. The apostates incorporated their knowledge of the Jewish texts into their works, and a new passion for proving the faultiness of

[4] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

Judaism. This was not to say that Christians before this period had never heard of texts such as the Talmud, Mishna and Midrash, but it was a common misconception that Jews focused solely on the Old Testament. This idea can be traced through many Christian writings arguing that Judaism was outdated *because* they only focused on the Old Testament. It came as quite a shock to many within the Church that the Jews had in fact grown and developed through time, just as Christianity had. The introduction of this new view of Judaism clashed with previous arguments made by Church Fathers, such as Augustine, and it called for a new approach to the relationship and polemic with Jews and Judaism.

Petrus Alfonsi was the first of these apostates who came onto the scene and wrote an influential polemical text. Alfonsi wrote his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* shortly after converting to Christianity, so one of the goals in this polemical text was to demonstrate the truth of his conviction. Into the *Dialogi* Alfonsi poured his theological and scientific knowledge. He set out to disprove the rationality of Judaism and Islam, and prove why Christianity was the only religion worth observing. Alfonsi's *Dialogi* was part of a larger polemical literature; however he represented a shift in thought. The *Dialogi* provided the Church with new material that, while it did not have a linear or direct effect on the Talmud burnings of Paris 100 years later, I think it is likely that Alfonsi played a crucial role in setting the stage for the Talmud burnings.

Few scholars have spent an extensive amount of time delving into Petrus Alfonsi and his writings. John Tolan, author of *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers,* has provided the most extensive analysis of Alfonsi and his writings. Tolan has delivered an overview of Alfonsi's life, and then his most influential works, his *Dialogi contra*

Iudaeos, Disciplina clericalis and *Epistola ad Peripateticos.* Alfonsi managed to influence the realms of literature, science, polemics and philosophy through the distribution of these texts. Tolan has dedicated much of his book to the *Dialogi* and the *Disciplina clericalis* but it has provided by far the most extensive research done on Petrus Alfonsi, his texts, and his readers. Jeremy Cohen, who has spent less time than Tolan on Alfonsi but has still provided ample analyses, has written on Alfonsi in both of his books *The Friars and The Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* and *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity.* Cohen has only briefly discussed Alfonsi in *The Friars and the Jews* but has dedicated much more space to him in *Living Letters of the Law*, where he presented Alfonsi as an important contribution to the rationalization of Christianity. He also spoke about him briefly in a chapter titled "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate: Peter Alfonsi, Hermann of Cologne, and Pablo Christiani," where he has discussed some of the reasons behind three Jews having converted to Christianity in the Middle Ages. In chapter one I will further engage Cohen on this topic. While it is pertinent for scholars to consider the multi-causal reasons for actions of historical figures, it is to no advantage to take religion out of consideration regarding a religious conversion.

Other scholars, such as Anna Sapir Abulafia and Amos Funkenstein, have integrated Alfonsi into the larger discussion of the ways in which reason was incorporated into the larger sphere of anti-Jewish literature. Abulafia has analyzed how reason developed into the Jewish-Christian debates in her book *Jews and Christians in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*, and Alfonsi is a key example of how *ratio* became prevalent in anti-Jewish literature. The rationalization of Christianity led to an

"intellectual and spiritual alienation of Jews" that paved the way for Jews to be more closely aligned with heretics than with the Jews of St. Augustinian's texts.[5] Amos Funkenstein's book *Perceptions of Jewish History* is a reflection on the ways scholars approach Jewish history, as well as a historiography on many different eras of history spanning from the middle ages to the aftermath of the Holocaust. Although Funkenstein's book is not a collection of essays, some of the chapters have been published separately from his book and the chapter that I employed the most was "Polemics, Responses and Self-Reflection." Funkenstein has situated Alfonsi in the realm of the development of religious philosophy within the Middle Ages and asserts that Alfonsi's anti-Jewish polemical work was "one of the most notorious and influential throughout the middle ages."[6]

While these scholars have analyzed Alfonsi in various ways, I want to set out to demonstrate that Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* successfully contributed two deleterious addendums to the anti-Jewish polemic within the Latin speaking realm: the inclusion of the Talmud in an attack on Judaism, and an overt indictment against the Jews of intentional deicide. Alfonsi, who considered himself an astronomer, employed the use of reason and science to prove to other Christians that Judaism was an irrational religion. His use of science was another aspect of his *Dialogi* that made Alfonsi's writing so unique. He deviated away from polemicists before him by no longer providing Jews with a purpose in a Christian world, for according to Christian writers, if

[5] Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 137.
[6] Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184.

they were no longer keepers of the Old Testament and had intentionally murdered the messiah, what purpose could they have in Christian lands? These two charges found within the *Dialogi* provided later writers with sufficient ammunition to accuse the Jews and the Talmud of being heretical in nature, as opposed to an acceptable minority. The arguments that Alfonsi presented in his polemical text against the Jews were echoed during the Disputation of Paris 100 years after Alfonsi's death, which leads me to argue that Alfonsi's concepts could have been an influencing factor when the local politics of Paris occurred as such to provide a setting for the Talmud Burnings of 1242.

Chapter 2: Petrus Alfonsi: The Arabized Jewish Convert to Christianity

Like so many influential characters of the middle ages, what we know about Petrus Alfonsi is scarce. The information scholars can piece together comes mostly from his own works, namely his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*. Though we do not know exactly where he was born, Alfonsi grew up as a Jew in Andalusian Spain under the name Moses. He grew up to become a prominent member of the Jewish community in Huesca, but whether or not he was born there is unknown. Before Alfonsi's conversion, Huesca was under Muslim rule with a Jewish minority made up of about 250 people.[7] Huesca eventually fell under Christian rule in 1096 when Alfonso I "the Battler" of Aragon took the city. Having grown up as a Jew under Muslim rule Alfonsi received an education that, although not all together unique in Andalusian Spain, was beyond the

[7] Irven M. Resnick, Introduction to *The Fathers of the Church: Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue Against the Jews* Vol. 8, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 10.

level of education received in Latin Europe. The significance of Alfonsi's influence was in part due to his cross-cultural background.[8]

What we know of Alfonsi's personal life and upbringing comes from the introduction he provided in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*. He described his baptism at the start of his apologetic work.

> This occurred in the year 1106, the year 1144 of the [Spanish] era from the nativity of the Lord, in the month of June, on the feast day of the apostles Peter and Paul. Thus I took upon myself the name of the apostle, that is, Peter, out of reverence for and as a remembrance of this same day. Moreover, my spiritual father [godfather] was Alfonsus, the glorious emperor of Spain, who received me at the sacred font. This is why I took for myself the name Petrus Alfonsi, appending his name to the name of mine that I have already mentioned.[9]

This short description of his baptism provides us with a basic portrait of who Alfonsi was before his baptism and who he was to become. While we do not know when he was born, we can assume that he was an adult at his baptism in 1106. This gives us at least a rough estimate of his age. Alfonsi took his second name from his godfather, Alfonso of Aragon, who was presiding over the baptismal ceremony. This gives credibility to Alfonsi's claim that he was a prominent member of the Jewish community, for why else would this Christian king partake in a baptismal ceremony unless it were a high-profile Jew who chose to convert?

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[8] For more on Jewish life within Muslim Spain see Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain,* 3 vols., (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1992-93) and Jane S. Gerber, *The Jews of Spain: A History of Sephardic Experience* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

[9] Petrus Alfonsi, "Dialogue Against the Jews," in *The Fathers of the Church: Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue Against the Jews* Vol. 8, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 40.

Scholars have debated the reasoning behind Alfonsi's conversion to Christianity. Alfonsi wrote in his *Dialogi* that his contemporaries "claimed that [he] had done this because [he] had not understood the words of the prophets and the laws appropriately. Still others accused [him] of vainglory and falsely claimed that [he] had done this for worldly honor."[10] It was because of these accusations that he claimed to have written the apologetic dialogue. However, it is far more likely that the incentive behind the *Dialogi* was less about convincing his former Jewish associates of the legitimacy of his convictions, but rather to convince fellow Christians of the authenticity of his conversion. But what were the reasons for his conversion in the first place? Irven M. Resnick has described Alfonsi's move towards Christianity as a "deliberate, calculated, and voluntary conversion that seems to have been well considered, rather than the result of a sudden mystical transformation."[11] Jeremy Cohen agreed, but added that it is important to recognize "Alfonsi's baptism brought little change to his scholarly, intellectual pursuits" since in both worlds, Jewish and Christian, he continued to pursue those subjects which he found most important, philosophy and astronomy.[12] Cohen has pointed to Alfonsi's extraordinarily rational manner of thinking as a way to demonstrate that he "was hardly the unsuspecting victim of an evangelical missionary or a sudden transforming experience."[13] While this may be true, we do a disservice to religious actors such as Alfonsi by discrediting the notion of a genuine religious conversion. If

[10] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 41.
[11] Resnick, Introduction, 13.
[12] 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 (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1987), 27.
[13] Cohen, "The Mentality of the Medieval Jewish Apostate," 28.

we look at religious actions purely from a political or social standpoint, then we fail to recognize the sincere religious convictions of the middle ages.[14] If this were a genuine conversion based in conviction, there would be no Jewish record acknowledging this since, as Jacob Katz argued, the Jewish sources were "disinclined to dwell upon the motives of those who embraces Christianity genuinely."[15] Considering the other benefits to his conversion is significant, but we must not rule out the idea that Alfonsi may have converted out of a genuine religious conviction.

As far as the benefits to his career, converting to Christianity provided him with the means to move, and therefore influence, more freely through Latin Europe. After his conversion, Alfonsi seemingly strategically converted and moved into Latin Christian Europe at a time when it was going through what many scholars have deemed the twelfth-century renaissance, and this was vital for Alfonsi's success in transmitting polemical literature, scientific writings, and his *Disciplina clericalis*.[16] As far as a rational analysis of the benefits to converting, Alfonsi benefitted far more in Latin Europe as a Christian who had converted from Judaism with an Andalusian education, than he would have had he remained a Jew in Huesca. Alfonsi, who as we will see was

[14] Christine Caldwell Ames, *Righteous Persecution: Inquisition, Dominicans and Christianity in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 12.
[15] Jacob Katz, *Exclusiveness and Tolerance: Studies in Jewish-Gentile Relations in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 76.
[16] John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 8-9. For more on the 12th Century Renaissance I looked at Christopher Brooke, *The Twelfth Century Renaissance* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1952) and Alex J. Novikoff, *The Medieval Culture of Disputation: Pedagogy, Practice and Performance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2013).

dedicated to the voice of reason, could have possibly foreseen these academic changes stirring in Europe and placed himself in such a way so that he could benefit.

It is clear from the organization of the *Dialogi* that *ratio* and philosophy meant a great deal to Alfonsi. This could have been another contributing factor to his conversion. During the 12th century, there were those who felt that the reconciliation between Judaism and Aristotelian philosophy was impossible. Scholars such as Alfonsi's contemporary Judah Halevi, felt "that Aristotelianism was at best superfluous to the Torah and at worst weakened the faith of the learned."[17] It was from this struggle between Judaism and Philosophy that drove Alfonsi to prove that Christianity was the right path based on its ability to coincide with philosophy. As Amos Funkenstein describes it, Alfonsi maintained that "only Christianity is the suitable faith for the philosopher."[18] Alfonsi used the *aggadot* as a demonstration that Judaism was not based in reason, for when Moses in the *Dialogi* defends a notion found in the *aggadot* Peter responds, "It is pleasing to proceed along the chain of your foolish explanation, which lacks the aid of both reason and Scripture."[19] Alfonsi continued with this attack of reason throughout his *Dialogi,* demonstrating to the reader his devotion to the concept of *ratio* and grounding religion in philosophy.

Since Alfonsi referenced the Talmud so frequently throughout his *Dialogi,* we must also address his level of Hebraic learning. Everything Alfonsi wrote, he chose to write in Latin so there is not a Hebrew text that scholars can point towards to

[17] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 7.
[18] Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184.
[19] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*,50.

demonstrate Alfonsi's understanding of Hebrew. Rather, scholars have been forced to speculation. In the *Dialogi,* Alfonsi spoke of his own level of Hebrew understanding through the mouth of Moses. Moses, addressing Peter, exclaimed, "For I knew well that earlier you used to excel in the writings of the prophets and the sayings of the sages, and that from your youth you were more zealous for the law than all your contemporaries."[20] He attested to his own excellent understanding of Hebrew, but this must be taken with a grain of salt because, as he demonstrated throughout the entire dialogue, Alfonsi was not shy about boasting of his own learned distinction.

Most scholars who have written about Petrus Alfonsi have dedicated a line, maybe two, to Alfonsi's education. John Tolan wrote that Alfonsi "received a religious education in a town with a Jewish community large enough to have a synagogue and a school…Alfonsi had a solid (though by no means outstanding) knowledge of Hebrew, of the Bible, and of the Talmud."[21] The town Tolan referred to was Huesca, and A. Lukyn Williams has agreed that Alfonsi received his education in Huesca.[22] Williams also points to Alfonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis* as evidence of Alfonsi's Hebrew and Arabic understanding, since many of the tales in this title were taken directly from Arabic and Hebrew sources.[23] It could be that Alfonsi received these sources orally, but I am inclined to agree with Williams' that the *Disciplina Clericalis*, though written in Latin, points us towards believing Alfonsi was well read in Hebrew and Arabic.

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[20] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 43.
[21] John Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1959), 10.
[22] A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird's-Eye View of Christian Apologiae Until the Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), 233.
[23] Williams, *Adversus Judaeos*, 233.

Irven Resnick has argued that "One can assert unequivocally that Alfonsi received typical Jewish Andalusian education, with training in Arabic, Hebrew, Jewish religious texts, and secular studies."[24] Like Tolan's statement on the issue, Resnick is certain of Alfonsi's understanding of Hebrew and Jewish texts. Amos Funkenstein seemed confident of Alfonsi's languages, claiming that "he employed Jewish philosophy – a dominant ingredient in his education."[25] Funkenstein specifically pointed to Alfonsi's use of Sa'adia's *Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, from which he borrowed heavily from for examples of God's existence and attributes.[26] Sa'adia originally wrote *The Book of the Articles of Faith and Doctrines of Dogma* in Arabic, but it was later translated by Judah ben Saul ibn Tibbon in 1186 into Hebrew as *Sefer Emunot ve-Deot* (The Book of Beliefs and Opinions). Given that Alfonsi died before Judah ben Saul ibn Tibbon translated the work, Alfonsi presumably read it in Arabic. To be able to integrate such arguments into his *Dialogi,* seemingly Alfonsi would have needed to have firm understanding of Arabic to be capable of using Sa'adia's proofs as his own.

Not all scholars are certain of Alfonsi's Hebrew though. Jeremy Cohen has written briefly on Alfonsi's education in his two books *The Friars and The Jews* and *Living Letters of the Law,* and while Cohen's direction changes slightly, he still maintained that Alfonsi's Hebrew was less than others suppose. In *The Friars and The Jews,* Cohen has criticized Alfonsi on the ground that "He notably attacked only the

[24] Resnick, Introduction, 11.
[25] Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 186.
[26] Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 186.

Talmudic homilies (*aggadah*) but never the legal traditions which determined contemporary Jewish practice (*halakhah*). Alfonsi in fact may never even have read or used the Talmud but perhaps only had a compendium of quotations in front of him."[27] This is by far the harshest critique of Alfonsi's language abilities. Cohen is less antagonistic in *Living Letters of the Law* and remarked that "Alfonsi had genuine knowledge of rabbinic books appears undeniable; whether he had first hand access to them or consulted some anthology of excerpts from Talmudic and midrashic literature, either in their original language or in translation, is unclear but of lesser importance at the present."[28] Cohen is correct in pointing out that Alfonsi only attacked the *aggadah* in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos,* but I argue this has more to do with Alfonsi's focal point in *ratio* for his attack on Judaism rather than Alfonsi's ineptitude for Hebrew. There is a noted shift in Cohen's later writing. Although his criticism of Alfonsi's Hebrew is less pointed, he still maintained that Alfonsi may have had low literacy in Hebrew.

Ultimately I would argue that Alfonsi must have had a solid grasp on both Hebrew and Arabic. He would have had no Latin translation of the Talmud to work from, so to incorporate so much of the Talmud into his *Dialogi* would lead me to believe that he was well learned in Hebrew. We must also consider his *Disciplina Clericalis* as a testament to his understanding of both languages because of his considerable use of both Hebrew and Arabic folklore. He also extensively incorporated much of Sa'adia's arguments into his own reasoning, which again, were incorporated in

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[27] Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and The Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism,*(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 28.
[28] Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 210.

Alfonsi's Dialogi before there was a translation of it. I find it difficult to believe that Alfonsi was working from translations for both his *Disciplina Clericalis* and *Dialogi,* because of the fact that we don't have evidence of these texts being translated until much later.

As mentioned previously, Cohen rightly points out that Alfonsi only used the *aggadah* in his attack against Judaism, but whereas Cohen blames this on Alfonsi's lack of Hebrew. I maintain that Alfonsi avoided using the *halakhah* because this would be more difficult to argue against with his weapon of *ratio.* Whereas the *aggadah* reads more like a set of folklore and tales, the *halakhah* is a legalistic set of texts to provide structure for Jews and Judaism. Alfonsi spent much of his *Dialogi* attacking what he viewed as outlandish stories, so to have attempted to attack the *halakhah* would have demanded a vastly different tactic than the ones Alfonsi employed in his *Dialogi*. So, whereas Cohen may attribute the absence of the *halakhah* to ineptitude, I would attribute it to strategic planning by Alfonsi.

What is known of Petrus Alfonsi must be pulled from his writings, for there is little else written about him from the 12th century. Between his upbringing as a Jew in Andalusian Spain and his timely conversion to Christianity as an adult, Alfonsi had positioned himself to be incredibly influential in the Christian world. His transmission of Arabic education brought new ideas into the fields of science and literature, and his background in a Jewish education made his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* one of the most game changing *Adversus Iudaeos* texts to come out of the 12th century.

Chapter 3: Preliminary Polemic to Petrus

Although within the jurisdiction of *Adversus Iudaeos* literature Alfonsi's *Dialogi* proved to be unique in many aspects. As far as method goes he utilized the practice of *testimonia* in his defense of Christianity, but incorporated science paired with reason to dismiss Judaism. He also successfully reintroduced the argument of an intentional deicide which was a detrimental break away from At. Augustine's doctrine. Alfonsi represented a change in polemical approach to Jews by fusing the concept of intentional deicide with an argument against the Talmud.

To fully understand the ways in which Alfonsi broke away from tradition in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos,* it is imperative first to understand the theology of St. Augustine of Hippo. Even though there were other patristic writers who spoke out on the Jews before St. Augustine, he provides scholars with a base from which polemicists after him worked from.[29] Augustine's writings provided Christian writers with a standard approach to Jews and Judaism which remained the prevailing ideology until the 12th century, when Christian writers began to deviate from the Augustinian approach. Although there was not a noticeable change over time with Augustine's doctrine, there were those who imposed their own vehement and aggressive ideas into the Augustinian doctrine.

In the late 4th century, Augustine introduced the standard approach towards Judaism and Jews. The texts that illuminate his ideas towards Judaism are not all written as *Adversus Iudaeos* literature. In fact, only one text has a title explicitly against

[29] See Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity*.

the Jews, *Tractactus adversus Iudaeos,* and it is not the most commonly used text to demonstrate Augustine's theological approach towards Jews; instead *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (Against Faustus) and *De Civitate Dei* (City of God) were the most important. *Contra Faustum* was Augustine's response to Faustus the Manichean, who had disappointed Augustine in a discussion, resulting in Augustine breaking away from the Manichean tradition.[30] Even though *Contra Faustum* had been written as an attack on Manicheanism, one of the points of contention between Augustine and Faustus had been the approach to Judaism and Jewish texts, namely the Old Testament. It was in this capacity that Augustine presented his ideals towards Judaism.

As with all things, contextualization is very important and the world in which Augustine lived in effected what he had to say about the Jews. It's important to understand the state of the Jews leading up to the time that Augustine would begin writing about them. Before Constantine began the process of converting an empire, the Jews had very few limitations and "the basic legal protection accorded Jews to practice their religious customs remains secure leading up to the time of Constantine."[31] So they were hardly to be considered a dying or oppressed religion in the eyes of the Christians. After Constantine, there are some changes made to the status of the Jews but namely in regards to their ability to convert people to Judaism and limiting their positions within the government. Constantine put into effect certain legislation that kept Jews from circumcising non-Jewish slaves as well as preventing them from pursuing any Jews who

[30] Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 214.
[31] Lisa A. Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews: Augustine's Theology of Jews and Judaism* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, LLC, 2009) 28.

chose to convert to Christianity.[32] Despite a handful of laws aimed at limiting conversions and circumcision, the Jewish population under the empire's rule could continue to practice freely their own customs and religion. There were even many emperors, including Theodosius, Honorius and Theodosius II who issued legislation protecting the continued existence of synagogues and protecting said synagogues against any kind of damage or destruction.[33]

Since Christianity considered itself to be the *only* true religious path, what does it mean that the newly Christianized government allowed Judaism to maintain its own customs and religion? How are we to historically reconcile two seemingly opposing ideas? The Church fathers dealt with these same questions. They were confronted with an opposing religion that had the ability to maintain itself even though the Christian beliefs maintained that the Jews were the natural enemies of the Church. If Christianity is the only true religion that should be allowed, then what is there to be said and done about the permanent presence of Jews and Judaism? The argument that the destruction of Judaism proved the truths of Christianity would have been weakened significantly by the fact that Judaism was not actually destroyed, or failing. Since it had been given a safe place within legislation, what could be said about the "proofs" of Christianity?

The ideology St. Augustine introduced was used to justify the existence of Jews as the only allowable religious minority amongst Christian ruled lands. Augustine didn't depart from all the common ideas found in the anti-Jewish texts before him, he preserved some main themes such as "the Jews have failed to recognize that Jesus is the

[32] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 30-31.
[33] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 39-40.

messiah prophesied in the Old Testament; the Old Testament observances are no longer valid; the Jews have killed Christ and, consequently, God has punished them by destroying the city of Jerusalem and their Temple."[34] A brief outline of the tenets of Augustine's ideology concerning Jews is pertinent to understanding how novel Alfonsi's contribution was to the *Adversus Iudaeos* tradition.

Augustine's Doctrine of Witness specified that Jews must remain a part of society because they carried with them the prophecies of the Old Testament. Augustine used this to justify the existence of Jews and to justify the continued existence of Judaism. The key is that he portrayed them as conserving only the laws of the Old Testament but Augustine ignored, or remained unaware, of outside Jewish literature such as the Talmud. Augustine ignorantly maintained that the Jews adhered solely to the Old Testament and continued to practice Old Testament rituals, but he provided his own rationale for why they do this. Polemicists maintained this concept of an "unchanging" Jew until the introduction of the Talmud into Christian anti-Jewish polemical literature.

Lisa Unterseher has argued that Augustine's exegetical reading of Cain and Abel is the "linchpin" to understanding Augustine's approach towards Jews and Judaism.[35] Augustine wrote his exegesis of Genesis 4:1-15 in his response to Faustus the Manichean, *Contra Faustum*, and it is from this that his doctrine of Jewish witness stems. Manicheans, as dualists, believed that there were two gods; the evil god created all things material and the good god created all things spiritual, very similar to what later Cathars thought. Faustus made the differentiation between the evil god of the Old

[34] Lisa A. Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews: Augustine's Theology of Jews and Judaism* (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, LLC, 2009) 1.
[35] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 105.

Testament, and the good god of the New Testament, essentially throwing out the need for the Old Testament. Augustine vehemently disagreed with this sentiment and maintained that the god of the Old Testament was the god of the New Testament, therefore the Jews and Christians have the same god. This is part of Augustine's conviction that Judaism was important to Christianity, and explains partly why he must go on to defend the existence of Jews and Judaism.

Many of the sacrifices and offerings from the Old Testament revolved around the Temple, so technically the destruction of the Temple would have brought an end to the sacrifices. Augustine argued in his *Contra Faustum,* that Jews were supposed to continue the rituals as a "mark." Starting with the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, Augustine compares the Jews to Cain and "contends that if Cain had acknowledged his guilt and confessed to God, he would have been assisted to grace so that he might master his sin rather than slay his innocent brother."[36] Since this was a commentary on Jews, Augustine was making the usual Christian claim that if Jews had only accepted Jesus, they also would have been assisted to grace. Since they did not, in Augustine's argument, they remained blind to the new covenant and are cursed with a "mark" in the same way Cain was cursed.

The "mark" of the Jews was to serve as a proof of the Christian prophecies through the maintenance of the Old Testament. This concept differed from previous church writers in that "Augustine invests the contemporary reality of Jews and Judaism with significance by providing a theological justification for Jews and Judaism."[37]

[36] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews,* 129.
[37] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 4.

Augustine was not explicit when he referred to the mark that the Jews had received. Some scholars have argued that the "mark" refers to circumcision, but Lisa Unterseher has made the argument that the "mark" wasn't merely circumcision but all Jewish observances.[38] Since Augustine's purpose was to justify Jews *and* Judaism, the claim Unterseher has made is stronger than the argument for circumcision. For Augustine, the mark, like the mark of Cain, was meant to distinguish Jews from the rest of the populace and circumcision doesn't quite cut it since it "marks only half of the population and could only be normally observed in either the baths or the gymnasium."[39]

The mark also needed to be obvious because of the purpose it served in Augustine's theology. After Cain kills his brother "the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him."[40] The mark worked as a protective shield, preventing anyone from killing Cain. The same went for the mark Augustine claimed the Jews had. Augustine argued that no violence should come to the Jews because they were the bearers of the Old Testament, and to ensure that no harm came to them they "wore" the mark of their customs. Augustine introduced his exegesis of Psalm 58:12, "Slay them not, lest at any time my people forget. Scatter them by thy power; and bring them down."[41] So per Augustine, the mark held a two-fold outcome; the Jews must not be put to violence, but they must also be brought down and suppressed under the

[38] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 139. For an argument in the case of circumcision being the mark of the Jews refer to Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 94.
[39] Unterseher, *The Mark of Cain and the Jews*, 139.
[40] Genesis 4:15.
[41] Psalms 58:12

Christian powers. However, the command to "slay them not" was "inadequate without the command to 'scatter them.'"[42] They must not be allowed to thrive wherever they may go, and it is mandatory for the doctrine of Jewish witness that Jews be dispersed. It was in this way that Augustine demonstrated the truth of Christianity, by showing that the proper way to prove the superiority of Christianity was not by ridding the world of Jews but by keeping them around and subservient to Christians.

Lisa Unterseher has focused on Augustine's exegesis of Genesis 4:1-15 from *Contra Faustum* for the fundamentals of Augustine's theology on Jews and Judaism; however John Tolan has argued that *City of God* by Augustine "contains all the essential elements of Western Christian attitudes toward the Jews from the fourth century to the twelfth."[43] Tolan has pointed to a specific passage from *City of God* where Augustine wrote:

> They [the Jews] were dispersed all over the world – for indeed there is no part of the earth where they are not to be found – and thus by the evidence of their own Scriptures they bear witness for us that we have not fabricated the prophecies about Christ. In fact, very many of the Jews, thinking over those prophecies both before his passion and more particularly after his resurrection, have come to believe in him. About them this prediction was made: 'Even if the number of the sons of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, it is only a remnant that will be saved' [Isaiah 10:22]. But the rest of them were blinded; and of them it was predicted: 'Let their own table prove a snare in their presence, and a retribution and a stumbling-block. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they may not see. Bend down their backs always' [Psalms 69:22]. It follows then that when the Jews do not believe in our Scriptures, their own Scriptures are fulfilled in them, while they read with blind eyes.[44]

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[42] Kristine T. Utterback, "Introduction" in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: Slay Them Not* ed. Kristine T. Utterback and Merrall Llewelyn Price (Boston: Brill, 2013), 3.
[43] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 17.
[44] Saint Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books), 827-828.

This passage from *City of God* overlapped with some of the ideology found in *Contra Faustum*, such as the concept of the Jews as witnesses of the Old Testament prophecies. There was also a reiteration of forcing the Jews to "bend down their backs" as they were scattered throughout the world. What was more notable in this passage though, and which is extremely important when considering Alfonsi, is the repetitive imagery of the "blind Jew." Augustine maintained that the Jews were blind to the new covenant with Christianity because of their adherence to the Old Testament and that they were blind to Jesus as the messiah.

The tenets of St. Augustine's theology towards Jews quickly became the foundation for other anti-Jewish polemical writers up into the 12th century. Augustine provided future writers with the idea that Jews had no other texts outside of the Old Testament, a concept that only a few broke away from.[45] In Augustine's writings, adhering to the Old Testament was essential for the Jewish role within a Christian world. The *reason* Jews could remain as a religious minority was because of their role as witness. Not only were they just "allowed" but they were theoretically permitted a level of protection so long as Augustine's ideology was used as the standard. Augustine provided a means for a terrestrial existence of the Jews in Christendom. It was also important that Augustine insisted on the "blindness" of the Jews towards Jesus and the new covenant. This "blindness" maintained that the Jews unknowingly crucified Jesus

[45] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers*, 18. Tolan provides one exception to this. Agobard of Lyons (c. 779-840) wrote against some of the *Mishnah* and the *Toledot Yeshu*, but Tolan argues that Agobard had little to no influence on Christian writers so the outside texts were still widely unknown until Alfonsi wrote his *Dialogi*.

therefore it was portrayed as not having been their intention to kill the Christian messiah. Alfonsi contradicted all these ideals in his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*.

Looking at the polemicists between Augustine and Alfonsi demonstrates Alfonsi's originality in the realm of Christian polemical literature. I will briefly provide an overview of two Christian polemicists who wrote texts against the Jews prior to Alfonsi. Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville are just two writers that sufficiently set the stage for Alfonsi's *Dialogi*. Each of these polemicists had their own style of disputing with the Jews, but they also all remained within the realm of the Augustinian tradition by maintaining the concepts of an unintentional deicide and a Jewish population that had a role within the Christian world. The notions found within the writings of Isidore and Gregory were aggressive, but did not provide any justification for ridding Christian lands of Jews.

Gregory the Great (540-604) has provided scholars with two types of sources to analyze his attitudes towards Jews; his legal works as Pope, and his *Adversus Iudaeos* literature. Since my focus here is polemical literature, I will only discuss his *Adversus Iudaeos* texts, namely his *Moralia*, which best displays his theological condemnations of Jews and Judaism.

When Gregory the Great took the papal seat, one of his primary concerns was how to situate the Jews within the Christian world, along the same lines as Augustine attempted to do. The rhetoric of Jews as a representation of the old covenant remained and Gregory was trying to provide a justification for why they were still a surviving religious minority. Gregory's assertions about Judaism very much fell within the stipulations that Augustine had provided in the late 300s. He provided the Jews with a

purpose and reason to exist, even if it was framed in a hostile manner. In his *Moralia* he criticized the Jews for their inability to interpret scripture in any other way but literally, a theme we will run across again in Alfonsi's writings.[46] Like others before, and after him, Gregory "attributed the guilt of the Jews to error, rather than deliberate intention."[47] So while the accusation of deicide remained, as with Augustine, it was an ignorant deicide.

Like Augustine, Gregory provided the Jew with a purpose in his texts, as well as a level of protection, but unlike Augustine, the purpose of the Jews was far more undesirable than being the librarians of the Old Testament. The Jew in Gregorian thought "signified disunity and discontinuity…[and] to perfect Christian unity, the church must work vigorously to convert them, albeit while observing the practical dictates of 'Slay them not.'"[48] The Jewish people served as a goal post. They represent the disunity of the physical world and only through their conversion will the end of days, and therefore the spiritual kingdom of god, become a reality. The association of Jews with carnality was not an uncommon thing in many polemical texts. Alfonsi also pointed to the Jews' carnality but as a reason Jews could not comprehend spiritual matters, whereas Gregory equated this carnality with the Jewish collusion with the Devil. Unlike Augustine, Gregory was aggressive and hostile in nature, but the significance here is that he provided a "reason" for the Jews to survive in Christian lands.

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[46] Solomon Katz, "Pope Gregory the Great and the Jews," in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 24, no. 2 (1933) 119.
[47] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 79.
[48] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 94.

Isidore of Seville (c. 560-636) who was the head of the Church in Visigothic Spain provides another preliminary example of a polemicist who remained within the confines of Augustine's doctrine of Jewish Witness. The language that Isidore used in his anti-Jewish tractates was far harsher than many of his predecessors, especially Augustine. For example, in his *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, Isidore claimed that "with nefarious disbelief, the Jews – impious, hardhearted, incredulous toward the prophets of old, and impervious toward those of late – prefer to ignore the advent of Christ rather than to acknowledge it, to deny it rather than to believe it."[49] His language was venomous, and while he doubted the sincerity of the Jewish blindness, he did not outright accuse them of knowingly killing Jesus. Ultimately Isidore maintained that the Jews killed Jesus because they "failed" to recognize him as the messiah.[50] Again, the emphasis is on their inability to recognize Jesus, not a knowing intention.

Something else significant in Isidore's writing, as opposed to Alfonsi, is summed up in an observation made by Bat-Sheva Albert, who could trace back 90% of all Isidore's arguments to earlier patristic sources, and argued this "strict conformity to patristic sources was meant to serve his purpose of transmitting their content as truthfully as possible."[51] Isidore maintained the tradition of using a stock collection of *testimonia* to prove the certainty of Christianity. But most importantly, as Jeremy Cohen put it, "an Isidorean hermeneutic of integration had created a Jew with a *purpose* [my

[49] Isidore of Seville, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum* trans. Jeremy Cohen in *Living Letters of the Law*, 96.
[50] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 97.
[51] Bat-Sheva Albert, "Isidore of Seville: His Attitude Towards Judaism and His Impact on Early Medieval Cannon Law," in *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 80, no ¾ (1990), 209.

italic] and power in Christian history."[52] As with the Augustinian tradition, Isidore provided the Jews with a purpose within the Christian world, and this is one of the ways in which Alfonsi will detrimentally break away from the traditional polemic we have looked at thus far.

These examples provide the groundwork from which Alfonsi will both build and digress from. Augustine, Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville all present a Jew with a purpose within the Christian world, albeit with different reasons for their existence. They also utilized the method of *testimonia* to prove the truth of Christianity. There was a clear sense of Jewish adherence to the Old Testament, they were presented as the book keepers of the Old Testament and at the same time criticized for their observance of an "outdated" religion. Throughout the polemical works, there is no question that the Jews were responsible for Jesus' death, but their ignorance is to blame. Their stubborn blindness is why they were unable to recognize Jesus as the messiah, and it for that reason they are not to be killed, but also not allowed to thrive. The Jewish people are presented not as blameless, but not as having knowingly killed the messiah. These were the basic tenets of anti-Judaism that made up the bulk of polemical literature leading up to Alfonsi.

Chapter 4: Alfonsi the Scientist

Before delving into the content of Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*, there is one last aspect of his background that is crucial for understanding the way he wrote the *Dialogi*. Having grown up in a Jewish community in Andalusian Spain, Alfonsi received an education that while "customary as it might have been in the Jewish-

[52] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 122.

Muslim circles of educated Andalusians, was astonishing in the far northern climes of Europe in the early years of the twelfth century."[53] This does not diminish his knowledge by any means but implies that astronomy was a fundamental aspect of what he learned, and eventually what he poured into his *Dialogi*. I would like to focus, very briefly, on Alfonsi's contribution to transmitting Islamic science into the Latin world.

Alfonsi's influential scientific text was his *Epistola ad Peripateticos*. He presumably wrote his *Epistola ad Peripateticos* in France around 1116 in an attempt to "persuade French scholars of the importance of astronomy in general and the superiority of the astronomical doctrines of the Arabs in particular."[54] It is unclear when he taught in France or to what extent, but he opens his *Epistola* "to the Peripatetics…in all parts of France most diligently engaged in the teaching of knowledge."[55] He explicitly directed the *Epistola* to French scholars who were lacking, he felt, in the realm of scientific learning.

One of the more profound ideas to come out of Alfonsi's scientific writings were his ideas on what ought to have been included in the categorization of the seven liberal arts. Originally the seven liberal arts included logic, grammar, and rhetoric in one category titled the trivium, and then geometry, music, astronomy and arithmetic in a second category called the quadrivium. Alfonsi disagreed with this line up of arts and

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[53] Maria Rose Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain,* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2003), 149.
[54] Irven M. Resnick, Introduction to *The Fathers of the Church: Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue Against the Jews* Vol. 8, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 19.
[55] Petrus Alfonsi, "*Epistola ad Peripateticos*," trans. John Tolan in *Petrus Alfonsi and His Medieval Readers* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1993), 173.

he expressed his dissatisfaction with the subjects in his *Epistola ad Peripateticos*. Alfonsi, who considered himself a scientist above all else, felt that grammar and rhetoric had no place in this list of liberal arts because "neither grammar nor rhetoric, although useful, can be judged to provide true or scientific knowledge."[56] It is interesting to note that for someone who was so easily able to move between languages, he felt that grammar was not to be considered amongst the liberal arts. One theory in regards to that is that "his downplaying of grammar may also be a reaction against the claims made for the primacy and sacredness of Arabic by Muslims, or of Hebrew by Jews."[57] This jab at grammar could have possibly been another way to reinforce his devotion to his newfound faith since unlike Islam or Judaism, Christianity did not rely on the sacredness of a certain language to access belief or understand god.

Since Alfonsi was himself an astronomer it is no surprise that he felt astronomy was the single most important of the liberal arts to study. He emphasized the importance of astronomy in his *Epistola ad Peripateticos* with the intention of influencing those French astronomers who may have had a say in the importance and weight given to astronomy in the future. Even though he removed two subjects from his own list of liberal arts, he conceded to add a new one to it; medicine. Alfonsi agreed that medicine was pertinent to the studies of liberal arts seeing as it pertained to the wealth and health of the body. Even though he added this new subject to the list, he still placed it directly beneath astronomy because only after being educated in astronomy can one "determine

[56] Resnick, Introduction, 20.
[57] Lourdes María Alvárez, "Petrus Alfonsi," in *The Literature of Al-Andalus* ed. María Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin & Michael Sells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 287.

the proper times for bloodletting, cauterizing, incisions, and other procedures."[58] Alfonsi's objection to the organization of the seven liberal arts (now reduced to six) was one of the new additions he attempted to implement in the field of scientific study, however he proved unsuccessful in this venture as the seven liberal arts remained the same. It is also worth noting that unlike the *Dialogi,* with its 79 remaining manuscripts, there is only one surviving manuscript of the *Epistola ad Peripateticos.* It is interesting that Alfonsi wrote the *Epistola* "to give us [Alfonsi] a perpetual name after our death" but it was his religious text that went on to become the more influential of the two.[59] In fact, it was his

Even though he may not have made any significant changes or additions to the realm of categorization of curriculum, Alfonsi did play a hand in introducing new ideas to the Latin world as well as inspiring many of his students to continue on with great accomplishments. He brought north with him a kind of knowledge and education that was average by Andalusian standards, and transmitted that learning over to the Northern European students who would use this knowledge as a platform. For example, Alfonsi brought north with him his own translation of al-Khawārizmī's astronomical tables that needed improvement, and "within ten years Peter Abelard completed a new and much improved translation of al-Khawārizmī."[60] Despite the flaws that Alfonsi may have had, he introduced new material to the field of astronomy to the Northern European scholars.

After he left Huesca, Alfonsi moved to England for a time being and is believed to have earned a position as physician to King Henry I, thanks to his Andalusian

[58] Resnick, Introduction, 20.
[59] Petrus Alfonsi, *Epistola,* trans. John Tolan, 176.
[60] Alvárez, "Petrus Alfonsi," 287.

education.[61] King Henry I, who was himself a supporter of astronomy and "played an active role in fostering the study" would surely have helped his influenced Alfonsi's role as teacher in England. While in England he worked with and trained an astronomer by the name of Walcher of Malvern. We know of Alfonsi's influence of Walcher for two reasons, the first being that in his treatise titled *Sententia Petri Ebrei, cognomento Anphus, de Dracone, quam Dominus Walcerus prior Maluernensis ecclesie in latinam transtulit linguam,* Walcher refers to Petrus Alfonsi as "Magister noster Petrus Anfulsus" throughout the work.[62] It has been accepted that this Petrus Anfulsus is Petrus Alfonsi, who was sometimes also referred to as Pedro Alfonso and Peter Alphonso. Although the spelling is similar, it is more the fact that Alfonsi is recorded to have been in England at the time that Walcher was writing *De Dracone* that leads scholars to accept this as Alfonsi. Another proof that points to Alfonsi's contribution to Walcher's treatise is that Walcher "adopts the system of astronomical division in degrees, derived from the Arabs…[and] he alludes to his master's astronomical tables, which are related to the tables of the famous Arab astronomer Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī."[63] Walcher received this Arabic influence in astronomy from Alfonsi, of that we are certain.

Alfonsi worked hard to make an impact in the realm of science, and his *Dialogi* was influenced as much by scientific goals as it was his theological convictions. With both religion and science being held in such high regard to Alfonsi, it would only make

[61] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi and his Medieval Readers*, 11.
[62] José María Millás Vallicrosa, "Pedro Alfonso's Contribution to Astronomy," in *Aleph* 10, No. 1 (2010), 144.
[63] Vallicrosa, "Pedro Alfonso's Contribution to Astronomy," 144.

sense the he required his scientific convictions to align and support his theological convictions. Alfonsi considered himself an astronomer and it is important to recognize that his science influenced his polemical work. He went on to become influential in Latin astronomy, even if it was merely as the role of transmitter. As will become clear in the body of the *Dialogi,* Alfonsi used astronomy to discredit Judaism as an irrational religion because, as he presented it, their inability to grasp seemingly basic astronomical and medical phenomena meant that their religion could not possibly be the right path. Astronomy is as central to Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* as the theological *testimonia.*

Chapter 5: *Dialogi contra Iudaeos*

As described in the title Alfonsi set this text up as a dialogue; a conversation not with another Jew but rather the current self, the 'Christian' Peter, arguing against his former self, the 'Jewish' Moses. In the prologue Alfonsi defends the structure of the book as such; "I have arranged the entire book as a dialogue, so that the reader's mind may more quickly achieve an understanding."[64] Even though this discussion is not between two separate persons, he validates the dialogue format as making it easier for people to read through it and comprehend the arguments he has laid out. Dialogues before this one were set up between Christians and straw figures formulated by Christian men who may never have encountered or spoken with a Jew or Pagan. By making the Jewish speaker his former self, it provided more validation to the authenticity of the Jewish speaker. If it is assumed this dialogue was written for a

[64] Petrus Alfonsi, "Dialogue Against the Jews," in *The Fathers of the Church: Petrus Alfonsi Dialogue Against the Jews* Vol. 8, trans. Irven M. Resnick (Washington D.C: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 41.

Christian audience, it also provided insight into how Petrus Alfonsi came to the decision to convert. The *Dialogi* is composed of twelve separate chapters. The first four are directed at proving the faults of Judaism, the fifth is directed at proving the faults of Islam and the last six are a defense of Christianity. Despite there being a chapter against Islam, the *Dialogi* is still considered mainly to be a piece of *Adversus Iudaeos* literature for two reasons; first, the predominant aim of the text is to tear down Judaism; and second the entire dialogue is set up as a dispute between a Christian and a Jew.

Alfonsi broke away from the mold of former polemicists by incorporating into this religious polemical text aspects of science and reason [*ratio*]. He utilized science and reason as a new polemical approach. He did not rely solely on these two features because he did incorporate most of the old go-to arguments in respect to biblical "proofs," but these biblical proofs are found in his later chapters defending Christianity. Even though he did incorporate the use of *ratio* in his defense of Christianity, his use of science and reason is most strongly employed in the first 4 titles dedicated to outlining why Judaism was an illogical religion in his eyes. And as I highlighted previously, Alfonsi was not the first to use reason in a polemical text, but he was the first to use it to discredit Judaism rather than prove the truth of Christianity

From the start of the first *titulus* Alfonsi sets up his tactic by having Moses (again, this is not another actual person but rather Alfonsi is speaking with his former, Jewish self) delimit the topics for this first section.

> Let us construct this first heading, then, so as to contain the arguments with which you have inveighed against us and against our sages, namely, that we attribute form and body to God and that we add such things to his nature as the

> truth of reason abhors. Therefore, let us discuss this matter carefully, until, by reason and argument, we arrive at its investigation.[65]

This introduction to the beginning of the first *titulus* immediately frames Alfonsi as being a well-read, rational and seemingly arrogant individual. To begin, it is obvious to the reader that Alfonsi prided himself on his ability to find the ultimate truth via a series of rational and scientific approaches. Alfonsi did this throughout the dialogue, where he would have Moses compliment Petrus on his wisdom. It furthermore gives the reader the feeling that before the dialogue even begins Moses, on some level, has already acknowledged that Judaism does not follow a path of *ratio*. This provides Alfonsi's following arguments with a little more credence before he has even begun to present them.

As outlined by Moses, the initial topic that Petrus attacked was the corporeality of god. Throughout the dialogue we can see Alfonsi elevating himself over Moses, and in doing so elevating himself over Jews and their own knowledge of Judaism. He does this subtly, but he does it nonetheless. To begin the discussion on the corporeality of God, Moses is not the one to present where the Jewish ideas of corporeality originate, but rather it is Moses who asks Petrus to explain where the ideas can be found in Jewish texts. By doing this, Alfonsi was again setting himself up to be the authority of both Judaism and Christianity.

Moses requests that Petrus demonstrates where it is the rabbis have spoken on the corporeality of God and what it is they have said exactly concerning God's form and

[65] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 48.

body.[66] Petrus points to the *Benedictions*, referring to the tractate *Berachot* of the Talmud. Petrus outlineed what is said in *Berachot 6:a,* and he is working off the age old assumption that Jews only interpret things literally. This is one of the ways in which Alfonsi adheres to an older tradition of anti-Jewish polemic, the assumption on the part of Christians that Jews are incapable of allegorical interpretation. Like many polemicists before and after him, Alfonsi does not bother to acknowledge that Jews would take this Talmudic tractate and interpret it any other way than literally. Peter presented a Jewish image to Moses of a God who wears *tefillin* and has a small box tied to his head and as Moses responded to this, at every turn Peter slipped in sarcastic responses that allowed the conversation to continue such as, "Let us concede that it is as you state, to your destruction," or "Your argument wanders to the refuge of an irrational conclusion, since you will be able to ground every falsehood on the tradition of the ancients."[67] Here I would like to draw some attention to the way in which Alfonsi chose to write this dialogue. Others before him had written *Adversus Iudaeos* texts with hatred and animosity towards the Jews, often using crude descriptions or comparing them to vile animals. Isidore of Seville was no stranger to invoking the image of the Devil or Antichrist in his discussion of Jews. And while both Alfonsi and Isidore were both attacking Judaism, and both set out to dismiss the truth of Judaism, Alfonsi's tone differs from Isidore in that he delivers backhanded, sarcastic remarks to deliver his point.

[66] Alfonsi, *Dialogi,* 48.
[67] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 50-51.

After both Moses and Peter agree on the Jewish perceptions of the form of God, Peter continues to use *ratio* to dispel the notion.

> Moreover, I propose to you two things for the band which you say he has on his head. For either the band comes from him, or from something else. If truly from something else, then it is either a creator or a creature. If a creator, then there are two creators. If it is a creature, then some creature is greater than a certain part of the creator, which is unsuitable.[68]

Peter continues with this series of logical inferences to prove to Moses that the notion of the corporeality of God does not resonate with reason. Every conditional statement Peter offers up ends with a conclusion that would have been offensive or blasphemous to Christians. If this band is part of God, then God can be divided; God cannot be divided, Peter argues, so therefore the band cannot be part of God. Peter continues with the argument against the band by claiming that if God requires the band, then Jews are claiming God *needs* something, and if he does not need it but only wants it, God wears something superfluous.[69] Alfonsi intentionally used language here that would indict the Talmudic stories as being heretical by employing such corporeal descriptions of God. By ratio, Alfonsi framed the Talmud as being heretical in nature. These portrayals are set up to provoke a horrified reaction from any Christian readers at agreeing with any of the conclusions. Alfonsi uses that pattern is throughout the dialogue to prove that Judaism is not based in reason, which ultimately was his motivation for converting to Christianity.

Embedded in the arguments against the band and the corporeality of God are accusations that the sages have falsified information. That plays into the larger

[68] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 52.
[69] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 52.

detrimental outcome of Alfonsi's dialogue which is that the Jews have ceased to follow the Old Testament. Alfonsi portrayed the Jews as having turned from the Old Testament towards the blasphemous, false words of the sages. By presenting the Jews as having abandoned the Old Testament, Alfonsi is working against the accepted doctrine of St. Augustine. By introducing the Talmud and the words of the sages, Alfonsi exhibited that Judaism was not as had been perceived by many Christians.

Peter moves on to assert that the sages claim God becomes angry every day. This stems from Psalms 7:12 when David says, "He is angry every day." Alfonsi here is referring to *Berachot* 7a: 2, where it is attributed to Rabbi Meir that "when the sun comes up, and all Kings, east and west, put their crowns on their head and bow down to the sun, forthwith the Holy One, blessed be he, grows angry."[70] Alfonsi attacked this claim on two fronts, first by defining the scientific conception of anger: "Anger is, after some word that is unpleasant has been heard, when red color, that is, bile, boils over and is diffused over the liver and mixes with blood. From this a man heats up and becomes pale in the face. This does not suit God in any way, unless he is composed of the four elements."[71] Alfonsi utilized his education to dispel the notion that God could even become angry. Again, he exploited a kind of shock factor for the reader here by providing an image of a God that contains bile. Peter then reaffirmed his scientific refutation with a follow up of *ratio*. Peter says to Moses, "Nor is it less abhorrent that

[70] B. Berakhot 7a.
[71] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 66. Resnick adds in a footnote that he had been unable to discover any other source that provides this particular definition of anger from the period, although he does say that "a person with a complexion dominated by red bile typically is understood to be prone to anger." *n. 42*.

they say he grows angry over a thing for which he cannot avenge himself."[72] For rationally, if God is enraged over something he cannot change, then he is not all powerful. But since God is all powerful, it would be irrational to claim that he becomes angry over something he could change, if he wanted to.

Peter went on to describe to Moses why it was that the Jews were in permanent exile. Peter prompted this by asking Moses, why it is he thinks the Jews have remained in exile, and after Moses lists many possible answers Peter asserts that it is "Because you have slain Christ, the Son of God…and as long as you abide in your paternal faith just as in their will, you will without any doubt remain in the same judgement of damnation."[73] There are two key points to Alfonsi's assertion of the permanent exile of the Jews. The first he gave when he stressed that "the envy and malice of the Jews were the true cause of Christ's death."[74] He does not attribute it to ignorance, or to blindness of the Jews towards the Christian identity of Christ, as Augustine had previously said. Rather, it reads as though the crucifixion of Christ was intentional deicide stemming from "envy and malice." This is one of the more detrimental accusations to come out of Alfonsi's dialogue. Both John Tolan[75] and Jeremy Cohen[76] have acknowledged that envy does not necessarily mean they were not blind, and therefore it need not mean that they intentionally and knowingly killed the messiah. Alfonsi was intentional with the words he chose for his *Dialogi*, he rationally organized this text. Alfonsi intentionally deviated from the widely accepted concept of Jewish blindness regarding the

[72] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 66.
[73] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 106.
[74] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 107.
[75] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 217 n. 34.
[76] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 214-215.

crucifixion. He helped pave the way for later polemicists to invoke the image of a knowing, intentional deicide.

The other important aspect of this part of the dialogue was the justification Peter provided for why the Jews have continued to survive. This was prompted by Moses claiming, "If he was a man such as you say, and his death was the cause of our tribulation, none of us would deserve to live."[77] To this, Peter responded,

> You do not conceive a proper understanding of this matter. For God does not suffer the remnant of your people to live because he plans something to their advantage, but only so that you serve all the nations and so that you would be in the eyes of all a reproach ad a byword and a curse, just as the giver of the law promised, saying: "You will become a horror in a proverb and a byword among all peoples, to whom the Lord will lead you."[78]

Like Augustine, Alfonsi provided a form of justification for the dispersion and survival of Jews. Unlike Augustine though, Alfonsi did not ascribe to them the job of librarian, or keepers of the Old Testament. Rather they survive to demonstrate what happens to those people whose sin is so great. In Alfonsi's logic, they survive only to suffer. The only optimism Alfonsi provided was in the form that God allows them to live due to the chance that some of them would convert (like he did) and therefore save their souls.

The fourth chapter of the dialogue is dedicated to outlining the Jews' inability to perform rituals or sacrifices prescribed in the Old Testament. Peter starts off this chapter telling Moses, "Since what I said – that you keep hardly any of the commandments of the law – is so clearly evident, it does not require proof from either authority or reason."[79] The reason the Jews are unable to perform the sacrifices and rituals that Peter

[77] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 107.
[78] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 109.
[79] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 139.

lists is because of the destruction of the temple, but Peter takes it one step further claiming that if the sacrifices were acceptable to God then he would not have exiled the Jews or destroyed their temple. He concludes this chapter by stressing to Moses: "You are all unclean, according to the law of Moses. For there is no one among you who is not polluted by contact with the dead."[80] The lone path to cleanliness, Peter presented, was to convert to Christianity as he had. Essentially what Alfonsi contributed here was the additional claim that not only were Jews no longer adhering to the Old Testament like others claimed they did, but they could not obey the laws even if they wanted to because of the temple destruction. Alfonsi argued that they could not be practicing Jews as the scripture demands. This does not necessarily mean that they could not function as witnesses as in Augustinian's doctrine because they were still keepers of the Old Testament. But Alfonsi argued that their inability to observe the Mosaic commandments meant they were not actually practicing Jews. This portrayal begged the question for many Christian writers; if the Jews are unable to practice Judaism, then what are they?

Although Alfonsi dedicated most his *Dialogi* to Judaism and Christianity, he provided short attack on Islam, another important contribution he made to polemical literature. This was by far one of the most well informed Christian attacks on Islam in the early middle ages. Even though Alfonsi's polemic here is brief, he offered "an exposition of Islam more serious than that of any previous writer" and this is because he grew up as an Arabized Jew within a Muslim world.[81] Jewish communities played a large role in the translation and mediation between cultures. Because Alfonsi was raised

[80] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 145.
[81] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, 206.

in a Jewish community under Islamic rule, it was possible for him to ascertain a wealth of knowledge on Islam. The kind of cultural knowledge he received concerning Islam would not have been possible had he been raised under Christian rule.

Alfonsi's polemic against Islam is prompted by Moses inquiring "why, when you abandoned your paternal faith, you chose the faith of the Christians rather than the faith of the Saracens, with whom you were always associated and raised."[82] Before Peter answers though, Moses outlines many tenets of Islam, and found within these paragraphs are Alfonsi's unique contributions to the anti-Islam polemic. Alfonsi does not liken them to pagans or polytheists but rather they are shown to be more akin to Christians and Jews in their faith. Even Moses, in his summarization of Islam, claimed that "if you should investigate the basis of this [Islamic] law, you will find that it is grounded on an unshakable foundation of reason."[83] So immediately Alfonsi presented Islam as a seemingly rational, monotheistic religion with practices that could be likened to Christianity, such as fasting and pilgrimages to their holy site.

As the dialogue continued in this short chapter, Alfonsi used similar tactics to discredit Mohammed and Islam as he used to discredit Judaism. When Moses lists the miracles that were attributed to Mohammed, Peter claims they are "frivolous things" and that on top of that, they must not be believed by the sages because those "miracles" were not recorded in the Qur'an. Here, Peter quotes Mohammed as saying "that alone should be accepted as true about me which is proved to be supported by the authority of the Qur'an."[84] Therefore, if these miracles cannot be found in the Qur'an then there

[82] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 146.
[83] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 146.
[84] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 154.

were no miracles. This is recognizably the same if/then logic Alfonsi used throughout the first four titles of his dialogue. Peter then goes on to discredit Islam based on its corporeal practices, such as washing hands before prayer, praying out loud and feasting at the end of a fast.[85] The most significant aspect to recognize from Alfonsi's short dedication to Islam is the level of familiarity with the practices of Islam.

The remainder of Alfonsi's *Dialogi* turned from discrediting Islam and Judaism to justifying why Christianity is the true and rational religion. For some chapters, he reverts to the use of *testimonia* and the authority of scripture, much like Augustine. For the rest of the titles though he adheres to the *sola ratione* tactic he used in the previous chapters. He defended the Trinity, incarnation and the Virgin birth. Again, throughout these chapters he utilized many conditional statements, and bolstered his *sola ratione* arguments with the authority of scripture. The dialogue ends with Moses exclaiming, "Certainly, God gave you a great deal of his wisdom to you and illuminated you with a great reasoning power that I am unable to vanquish. Instead you have confounded my objections with reason."[86] The result of the dialogue is that Peter has enlightened his former self using reason and science.

To summarize, the methods used in Alfonsi's *Dialogi* are unique when all parts of his text are taken together. While he was not the first polemicist to ever utilize reason[87] he did uniquely use reason combined with science to demonstrate why neither Judaism nor Islam could hold the truth of religion. Neither the Talmud nor the Qur'an contain the rational thought that the New Testament holds, per Alfonsi. Their inability

[85] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 156-157.
[86] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 273.
[87] For more here, see Anselm of Canterbury.

to rationalize, or utilize science, meant that they were unable to understand God. Throughout the dialogue it appears clear that *ratio* is intimately linked with the understanding of God, and without *ratio* there could be no understanding of God.

By far the most detrimental innovation that Alfonsi made with his *Dialogi* was the successful re-introduction of the Talmud to the polemical discussion. This introduction of Talmudic literature provided future polemicist with a deviation away from the Augustinian doctrine. If they no longer adhere to the Old Testament, then how is it they are serving their purpose in Christendom? And if they are not serving any purpose, or role, why should they be allowed to survive? Along with that, Alfonsi throws into question whether the Jews of Jesus' time crucified him with malicious, knowing intent, or if their envy (and therefore blindness) still excuses them to an extent. This, paired with the accusation that the sages falsified information, meant that the Jews were no longer the same Jews portrayed in the Augustinian doctrine. This prompted the question, since Jews have developed their own post-biblical literature, were they to then be considered heretics?

Chapter 6: Jews or Heretics?

Alfonsi utilized logic and reason throughout the *Dialogi,* and having been such a strong proponent for logical thinking Alfonsi surely would have understood the impact of the specific words he chose to use within the dialogue. Alfonsi was very particular in his wording when he asserted that the Jews slew Christ out of "envy" [*invidia*] not blindness nor ignorance but rather, very explicitly, "envy."[88] This language, coupled with his assertive re-introduction of the Talmud into the discussion, situated the *Dialogi*

[88] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 231.

as being one of the more detrimental texts in the anti-Jewish polemic. This portrayal of Jews in the *Dialogi* contributed to the rhetoric of Jews being more aligned with heretics than with the image of them as keepers of the Old Testament.

There is much debate among scholars when it comes to the extent to which the rhetoric of "Jews as Heretics" can be found in Alfonsi's *Dialogi*. But before delving into the ways in which Alfonsi may have contributed to the rhetoric of Jews being viewed as heretics, I want to first explain the logic behind that development. There were two significant developments in the anti-Jewish polemic; the accusation of an intentional deicide and the introduction of rabbinic literature into the discussion.

First, it must be determined what the source of their deicide was. The charge of deicide was not something new but the trend was to agree with Augustine's declaration that the Jews who killed Jesus did so out of ignorance and blindness to the identity of Jesus as messiah, and not due to malevolence. In their blindness, Augustine maintained, the Jews murdered the messiah because they simply did not know who he was. However, Alfonsi explicitly blamed their deicide on malice and envy. According to Alfonsi, the Jews that murdered Jesus did so "because they were afraid of losing their rank and reputation on account of him."[89] If they knew who he was, then they presumably knew the truth of Christianity and were *choosing* to teach something different, therefore they were heretical in nature. The second part to the discussion is the use of the Talmud. If the Jews were no longer adhering to the Old Testament and had instead decided to follow the Talmud, which had branched away from the teachings of the Old Testament then were they to be considered a new, and heretical sect? The re-

[89] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 236.

introduction of the Talmud to the anti-Jewish polemic provided a means for Christians to claim that the Jews of the era were worshipping a deviation of Judaism, not the acceptable Judaism of the Old Testament that provided them with the title of keepers of the Book, witnesses to the truths of Christianity. These are the two parts of anti-Jewish polemic that must be considered when discussing Alfonsi's contribution to the charge of heresy against the Jews.

There is some debate as to whether Alfonsi meant that the Jews of Jesus' day *knew* the real identity of who it was they were charged with killing, or if they were blind to the identity of Jesus as messiah. Jeremy Cohen has argued that while Alfonsi used the word "envy" to describe the Jews who killed Jesus, it "need not imply that they knew his real identity."[90] This argument he bases from his example of Bede, who Cohen argues accused the Jews of killing Jesus out of envy, but it was their envy that blinded them.[91] Although Cohen sufficiently provides an argument for why blindness and envy may not be necessarily incompatible in the writings of Bede, those arguments do not necessarily apply to the writings of Alfonsi. Cohen then goes on to describe Alfonsi as having praised the sages of the time of Jesus, so it would seem incompatible that Alfonsi would praise these men, then condemn them of intentional deicide. Cohen goes on to point out that Alfonsi's list of praiseworthy sages were men who lived after the crucifixion, therefore confusing those sages who lived before and after Christ. If he confused the timelines of those sages, then is it not possible that he did in fact mean to condemn the sages of Jesus' time of intentional deicide? I find Cohen's argument does

[90] Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law,* 214.
[91] Jeremy Cohen, "The Jews as the Killers of Christ in the Latin Tradition, From Augustine to the Friars," *Traditio* Vol. 39 (1983).

not hold up here regarding the text of the *Dialogi* itself. If Alfonsi wanted to blame the killing of Jesus on blindness or ignorance, then I think it is fair to say those are the words he would have chosen to articulate his ideas.

While Cohen asserts that envy and blindness need not be incompatible, others have made the argument that Alfonsi intended for Jews of Jesus' day to be accused of intentional deicide. John Tolan wrote explicitly that "Peter affirms that the Jewish authorities in fact *were* aware that they were committing deicide."[92] He went on to conclude, "That the Crucifixion was the cause of the Jewish exile is not a new idea; what *is* new is Alfonsi's charge that Jews – or at least a small number of rabbis – *knew* that Christ was the Son of God when they killed him and knew that this sin was the cause of their exile."[93] As Cohen pointed out in his text *Living Letters of the Law*, Tolan acknowledges in a footnote that envy and blindness are not always incompatible, but I do not believe he means for that to apply to Alfonsi's text. Ultimately Tolan is arguing that Alfonsi intended for at least a few rabbis to be accused of intentional deicide. Anna Sapir Abulafia agrees with Tolan on this point writing that Alfonsi's presentation was of "doctors and scribes [who] were wise and learned and they were *not* ignorant of Jesus' real identity."[94]

Looking at the *Dialogi*, I would argue that Alfonsi intentionally indicated that the Jews knew who Jesus was when they killed him. In the tenth *titulus* Moses asks Peter, "If they had known this, why did they reject his faith and teaching and, by crucifying him, *knowingly* [my italics] incur the damnation of their souls?" to which

[92] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 20.
[93] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 21.
[94] Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 120.

Peter responds, "Clearly they did this from envy, just as we declared, namely, because they were afraid of losing their rank and reputation on account of him."[95] The key here is that Alfonsi made the decision to put the word "knowingly" into Moses' mouth. Peter's response does not explain away that they did not do it knowingly, rather he uses the story of Jeroboam for comparison. Jeroboam created two golden calves for his people to worship so that they did not go to the side of Rehoboam by traveling to worship in Jerusalem.[96] Peter asserts that "Jeroboam and his leading men were endowed with much wisdom" and yet they did this anyway, just as the Jews who slew Christ had such wisdom and slew him anyway.[97] This leads me to believe that Alfonsi broke away from the Augustinian tradition of blaming the Jews' blindness on their crucifying of Jesus. Just as Jeroboam knew what he was doing, so did the Jews of Jesus' day. Alfonsi comparison to Jeroboam is situated at the end of tenth *titulus,* which was a defense of Christianity and the chapter focused on proving the divinity of Christ. After Peter has explained to Moses the divinity of Christ, that he was not a magician but rather the messiah, he used the story of Jeroboam as a comparison for the actions of the Jews of Jesus' time. Alfonsi consistently uses the word "envy" and "malice" to describe the Jews who killed Jesus. While I agree with Tolan and Cohen in that "envy" does not necessarily mean they did it knowingly, I believe in the case of Alfonsi he intended to portray the Jews who were charged with killing Christ as doing it with the full knowledge of who it was they were killing.

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[95] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 236.
[96] 1 Kings 12:25-33.
[97] Alfonsi, *Dialogi*, 237.

The way Alfonsi introduced and framed the writings of the Talmud imparts weight to the argument that he intentionally portrayed the Jews of his time as being heretical in nature. Tolan argues that the way Alfonsi portrayed the Aggadah was "to show that these texts contain doctrine heretical by the standards of classical Judaism, making Judaism as it was practiced by Alfonsi's contemporaries a heretical deviation from the Law."[98] Alfonsi set out to accomplish this goal by implicating the Jewish sages as being irrational and ridiculous because of their obedience to the Talmud instead of the Old Testament. A Talmud which Alfonsi portrayed as presenting a God who is not omnipotent or omniscient, hence heretical by nature.

So, the two injurious notions that Alfonsi contributed to anti-Jewish literature was that of the Talmud as a deviation of 'proper' Judaism, and the re-introduction of the indictment of an intentional deicide. The possibility of Alfonsi having influenced polemicists after him is very likely when looking at John Tolan's charting of the survival of Alfonsi's *Dialogi.* Alfonsi's *Dialogi* went on to become one of the most read and influential anti-Jewish polemical works to come out of the Middle Ages. Tolan marvelously maps out the spread of the *Dialogi,* with sixty-three manuscripts still surviving from the 12th century all the way into the 16th century.[99] After providing a look at the scope and spread of the *Dialogi*, Tolan asserts that "no other text matched its influence in number of manuscripts, in geographical spread, or…in influence on later

[98] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi,* 22.
[99] Tolan goes over the numbers pertaining to the manuscripts. There are 63 surviving manuscripts, and 16 "containing rewritings or large excerpts from the *Dialogi"* for a total of 79 manuscripts. Of these 79, 21 were from the 12th century, 24 from the 13th, 14 from the 14th, 18 from the 15th, and 2 from the 16th. For more on the specific geographical spread of the Dialogue see Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi,* 98-103.

writers."[100] Alfonsi's influence on later writers includes the likes of Peter the Venerable of Cluny, Peter of Cornwall and, possibly, Nicholas Donin.

Although in many instances it is difficult to trace exactly how and who Alfonsi influenced with his *Dialogi,* scholars agree that his influence is distinct in the writings of Peter the Venerable of Cluny. When compared to other anti-Jewish polemicists, Peter the Venerable was particularly ferocious. To provide a sense of his vehement writing against the Jews, in Peter the Venerable's *Adversus Judaeorum duritiem* he exclaimed, "For I dare not declare that you are human lest perchance I lie, because I recognize that reason, that which distinguishes humans from…beasts, is extinct in you or in any case buried…Truly, why are you not called brute animals? Why not beasts? Why not beasts of burden? .... The ass hears but does not understand; the Jew hears but does not understand."[101] This man was no friend of the Jews, and he wrote of them in such hateful ways. However, it seems clear that he utilized Alfonsi's *Dialogi* for his tirades against Jews and Judaism. Like Alfonsi, Peter's arguments were couched in issues of carnality, his main complaints being that the Jews are invested only in money and the carnal world. This of course provides him a means of utilizing Alfonsi's issues of corporeality found within *Dialogi I* in Alfonsi's *Dialogi* and it is this way that he introduces his attack on the Talmud. Though Peter claims that the Talmudic knowledge came to him through Christ, scholars argue that it came directly from the *Dialogi*. For Peter the Venerable, "the Talmud [was] a genuine heresy, containing human traditions

[100] Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi,* 98.
[101] Peter the Venerable, *Adversus Judaeorum duritiem,* trans. by Gavin I. Langmuir in *Toward a Definiton of Antisemitism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 207.

which are not intended to interpret the Bible but to compete with it."[102] His presentation of the Talmud, via Alfonsi's *Dialogi,* was meant to demonstrate that Jews have deviated from the Old Testament and were heretically claiming that the Talmud, a man-made, carnal text in Peter's argument, was to be worshipped above all else. Peter the Venerable is a clear-cut demonstration of the way Alfonsi's *Dialogi* and its introduction of the Talmud into the anti-Jewish discussion blurred the lines for polemicists between Jews and Heretic.

Alfonsi's re-introduction of Talmudic and Rabbinic literature into the discourse of anti-Jewish literature provided another means for Christian polemicists to justify a level of intolerance towards Jews and Judaism. This paired with the articulation of intentional deicide led Christian polemicists to question the validity of St. Augustine's doctrine of Jewish Witness. If the Jews of the 12th century were no longer observing the laws of the Old Testament, and if it could be argued that the Jews of Jesus' time knew who it was they had killed, then was there a justification for allowing their survival within Christian realms? These were the considerations that Christian polemicists began to discuss and elaborate within their writings. At the center of these discussions was the role of the Talmud. If it was the Talmud that was responsible for misleading the Jews, then is it the Talmud and not the Jews that should be under scrutiny? Christian polemicists considered this, and it played out to the detriment of the Talmud in 13th century Paris.

[102] Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 1993), 189.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Petrus Alfonsi, a Jewish convert to Christianity, wrote one of the most influential and profound *Adversus Iudaeos* texts of the 12th century. Having grown up a Jew under Muslim rule provided Alfonsi with a background in Talmudic learning and an Andalusian education, which specifically provided him with an understanding of the Hebrew language as well as a familiarity with astronomy. He brought these aspects of the education of his youth into his Christian writings after he converted, making his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* one of the most unique polemical texts to come out of the 12th century.

Alfonsi's *Dialogi* incorporated features of earlier polemical works, such as the use of *testimonia* from the Old Testament to "prove" the truths of the Christian faith but more importantly he introduced novel arguments into the wider Christian anti-Jewish polemical literature. Alfonsi was the first Latin Christian writer to successfully, and influentially, introduce the Talmud as a viable source of attacks on Judaism. By using the *aggadah* as his evidence, Alfonsi set out to demonstrate how the Talmud was irrational and therefore a misleading text for the Jews to follow. To demonstrate such irrationality, Alfonsi utilized his Andalusian education and the sciences that he studied, namely astronomy. Since the fables from the *aggadah* did not seem to comprehend the realities of astronomy, per Alfonsi, the Jews were adhering to an unreasonable text. To further support his argument Alfonsi argued that the Jews were incapable of reading the Talmud any other way than literally. The accusation of being incapable of reading allegorically was an old trope from Christian polemical literature, but whereas others before Alfonsi accused the Jews of reading the Old Testament only literally he accused

them of being unable to read the Talmud allegorically. This introduction of the Talmud proved to be detrimental in terms of the literary developments in the later writings of anti-Jewish texts.

By introducing the Talmud into the polemic, Alfonsi's *Dialogi* produced an argument that landed outside the lines of the witness doctrine from St. Augustine's texts. St. Augustine asserted in his writings that the Jews were to remain a protected minority, although unable to thrive, because of their role as the keepers and librarians of the Old Testament. This image of the Jews as keepers of the Old Testament stemmed from Augustine's assumption that the Jews *only* observed the laws of the Old Testament, and he was either unaware or ignored the development of rabbinical literature, such as the Talmud. Christian writers after Augustine maintained this idea of a Jew with a purpose that served Christians, as Jeremy Cohen put it, the "hermeneutical Jew." By preserving this image of the Jews in their texts, Christian writers were providing, in theory, a means of protection of a Jewish minority. Alfonsi broke away from this. He introduced the Talmud, and through his dialogue attempted to demonstrate that the Jews were no longer adhering to the Old Testament, nor could they if they wanted to according to Alfonsi. This changed the way Christian writers viewed Jews, for if they were no longer the librarians of the Old Testament, as they had believed, then there needed to be a reevaluation of their "role" in the Christian world.

The other significant development in Alfonsi's polemical text was the presentation of an intentional deicide. This concept was not so profound or novel for others had flirted with this idea before Alfonsi, however the accusation of an intentional deicide paired with the presentation of a blasphemous Talmud proved to be disastrous

in the anti-Jewish polemic rhetoric. By presenting Jews who had intentional committed deicide, and then proceeded to observe the Talmud instead of the Old Testament, Alfonsi paved the way for Christians to wonder whether or not Jews were in fact heretics who deliberately blaspheme against God and the Christians. With the pairing of intentional deicide and an irrational sacred text, Alfonsi presented an image of a very different Jew than that of St. Augustine's texts.

The paucity of documents demonstrating the influence of Alfonsi's intellectual development of anti-Jewish thought on those participants of the Talmud burnings in Paris does not mean that his influence was non-existent. To say that Alfonsi had a direct connection to the burnings would be an irresponsible representation of history, but the rhetoric against Jews and the Talmud used in Paris was an echo of the *Dialogi contra Iudaeos.* In 1236, Nicholas Donin, a Jewish convert to Christianity, submitted to the Pope thirty-five charges of anti-Christian sentiments, both against Christians and the Christian faith, found within the Talmud therefore declaring it a heretical and blasphemous text.[103] This declaration of the Talmud as heretical in nature because it had replaced the sacred text of the Old Testament and lacked reason resonances the accusation lobbied by Petrus Alfonsi 100 years earlier.

In the summer of 1242, twenty-four carriages filled with Talmuds and other Jewish religious texts were driven through Paris and put to the flame at the Place de Grève as a result of a public disputation that was instigated by Donin, who used rhetoric very similar to that of Alfonsi's *Dialogi* although he took it one step further by

[103] Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London: Littman Library Of Jewish Civilization, 1993) 25.

unambiguously declaring the Talmud a heretical text. Donin, like Alfonsi, accused the Talmud of blaspheming against God by portraying God in an anthropomorphic manner such as grieving or weeping over the Jewish exile.[104] This complaint was lobbied against the Jews in Alfonsi's *Dialogi* as being irrational and blasphemous. Donin also attacked the *aggadah* for containing "foolish and obscene passages" that hold no place in a religious text.[105] This again echoed the complaints of Alfonsi who rendered many of the homilies from the *aggadah* as being so irrational in content that they contribute no worth to the religion. The complaints that Donin launched against the Talmud resulted in a grand disputation in Paris, presided over by the Queen Mother, Blanche of Castile, which in turn resulted in thousands of volumes, maybe ten to twelve thousand volumes, of the Talmud being thrown to the flame.

I am not insisting that there is a direct line between the writing of Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* and the Talmud burnings of Paris 100 years later. Nor do I want to assert that this shift in rhetoric was a cause of an emerging "persecuting society."[106] Although many scholars have tried, it is difficult to indicate a specific era and assert precisely where persecuting began and then steadily worsened over time. There is a danger in viewing such things as teleological, and Jonathan Elukin is correct in asserting that looking at Jewish history in such fashion does a disservice to history.[107] By perceiving history in such a linear way, it takes away from the local conditions and active agents that prompted events such as the Talmud burnings to occur. However,

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[104] Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 34.
[105] Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial*, 36.
[106] R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society* (Cambridge: Blackwell,1987).
[107] Jonathan Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart*: *Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007).

when those conditions aligned to provide the setting for such occurrences, Alfonsi's influence was very much present in the rhetoric used. Alfonsi's *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* was an influential addition to the realm of polemical arguments, and ultimately a detrimental shift in arguments against the Talmud and the Jews.

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