

TREES OF LOVE, TREES OF KNOWLEDGE: TOWARD
THE DEFINITION OF A CROSS-CONFESSIONAL
CURRENT IN LATE MEDIEVAL IBERIAN SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This essay seeks to define and explore the significance of trees as a cross-cultural devotional topos in late medieval Iberian spirituality. Through an examination of both visual and literary material from Christian, Islamic, and Jewish contexts, much of which is published here for the first time, trees are demonstrated to be at the center of both polemics and devotions, often—in a Christian context—serving as a stand-in for the crucified body of Christ.

My interpretation of the tree imagery analyzed in this essay stems from two observations that, though initially made in the context of separate lines of inquiry, are in fact inextricably intertwined. The first concerns the consistent importance of tree and garden motifs in a body of devotion-related writings and images produced in late medieval Iberia.¹ Key texts with trees at their conceptual or organizational center that were produced during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by and for members of all three of Iberia's confessional groups—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—initiated an important and long-lived trajectory in Christian visual and literary cultural production in Iberia.

The second observation is equally important. In Castile, the somatic details, graphic images (frequently identified as “devotional images” when destined to be used by individual viewers or in nonliturgical contexts), and descriptive texts characteristic of Passion devotions in both monastic and lay contexts elsewhere in Europe beginning as early as

¹ Here, because of space limitations, we will be concerned only with the trees. I have addressed the garden theme in a fourteenth-century Naşrid context elsewhere. See Cynthia Robinson, “Les Lieux de la Lyrique: L'incarnationisme dans la lyrique mystique andalouse,” in *L'Éspace lyrique méditerranéen au moyen âge: Nouvelles approches*, ed. Dominique Billy, François Clément, and Annie Combes (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2006), 157-86.

the mid-thirteenth century are consistently absent until the late fifteenth century.² The introduction of these elements into a Castilian devotional context brought with it dramatic changes in both textual and visual terms. It is demonstrably linked to the efforts of the Catholic Monarchs and their ecclesiastical advisors to effect conversion. During the final decades of the fifteenth century, Isabelline reform attempted, through management of and collaboration with the major Iberian monastic orders, to regulate religious practice in all its aspects and bring it in line with what was viewed as normative elsewhere in Europe.³ In conjunction

² For elsewhere in Europe, see, among others, Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Jill Bennett, "Stigmata and sense memory: St Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (2001): 1-16; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992); Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York and Cambridge, Mass. Zone Books, 1998); Hamburger, "'To Make Women Weep': Ugly Art as 'Feminine' and the Origins of Modern Aesthetics," *RES* 31 (1997): 9-33; Hamburger, "The Visual and the Visionary: The Changing Role of the Image in Late Medieval Monastic Devotions," *Viator* 20 (1989): 161-82; Erwin Panofsky and Daniel Arasse, *Peinture et devotion en Europe du nord: A la fin du moyen age* (Paris: Flammarion, 1997); Panofsky and Arasse, "Imago pietatis": Ein Beitrag zur Typengeschichte des "schmerzsmanns" und der "Maria Mediatrix" (Leipzig: E. A. Seeman, 1927); *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. H. N. B. Ridderbos, A. MacDonald, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1998); Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Doorbspijk: Davaco, 1983); and Henk van Os et al., *The Art of Devotion in the Late Middle Ages in Europe, 1300-1500*, trans. Michael Hoyle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). For Iberia, the bibliography on religious imagery during the late medieval period is not plentiful; in almost all cases, the matter is approached from a formalist standpoint which fails to consider these objects as religious images. See Judith Berg Sobr , *Behind the Altar Table* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989); and Mar a Pilar Silva Maroto, *Pintura hispanoflamenca castellana, Burgos y Palencia: Obras en tabla y sarga*, 3 vols. (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y Le n, Consejer a de Cultura y Bienestar Social, 1990). Joaqu n Yarza Luaces, *El Retablo de la Flagelaci n de Leonor de Velasco* (Madrid: Ediciones El Viso, 1999), makes what I consider a mistaken interpretation of one altarpiece, largely because of his attempt to bring it in line with the interpretation of Passion imagery elsewhere in Europe; he fails to consider the Iberian audience and context for which the image was produced. The consequences for late fifteenth-century Iberian visual culture of the changes wrought by the Isabelline reform—which in turn should be viewed against the backdrop of the Inquisition—have only just begun to be addressed by art historians. See Felipe Pereda, "El debate sobre la imagen en la Espa a del siglo XV: Jud os, cristianos y conversos," *Anuario Arte* 14 (2002): 59-79; and Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted: Valladolid's 'Cristianos Nuevos' and the Retablo of Don Sancho de Rojas (1415 A.D.)," *Speculum* (2007). An exhibition and accompanying catalog currently in preparation by both authors, entitled *Constructions of Devotion*, will address the topic in detail.

³ See Jos  Garc a Oro, *La reforma de los religiosos espa oles en tiempo de los Reyes Cat licos* (Valladolid: Instituto Isabel la Cat lica de Historia Ecclesiastica, 1969); and *El Cardenal Cisneros: Vida y empresas*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1992-93).

with this latter objective, this period saw the first Castilian translations of such widely distributed European devotional classics as the late thirteenth- or early fourteenth-century Pseudo-Bonaventurian *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (hereafter *MVC*),⁴ Bonaventure's mid-thirteenth-century *Lignum Vitae*,⁵ and Ludolph of Saxony's late fourteenth-century *Vita Christi*.⁶ Not only are these key texts not translated into Castilian until very late in the fifteenth century, but they are also only sparsely and belatedly represented in Latin throughout the late medieval period and are frequently bound with texts which diffuse, rather than augment, the text's graphic or somatic focus on the Passion. In one of the few copies of the *MVC* I have located, for example, a fourteenth-century manuscript housed in the Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (hereafter BNM), MS 54, it is bound together with writings by Hugh of St. Victor on prayer, Bonaventure's *De Triplici Via* and *De Itinerarium Mentis in Deo*, an herbal, writings by St. Bernard on the monastic life, and the *Augustinian Rule*. Ubertino da Casale's *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Iesu* is similarly scarce,⁷ being found only in two manuscripts at the BNM, both in Latin (MSS 11,523 and 17,851, both dating to the fifteenth century).

⁴ Johannes de Caulibus, *Iohannis de Caulibus Meditationes vita Christi: Olim S. Bonaventuro attributae, cura et studio M. Stallings-Taney* (Turnholt: Brepols, 1997). In Iberia one of the rare manuscript examples of the Castilian translation of *MVC* is Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid (BNM), MS 9560, dating to the fifteenth century. Nothing is known about its provenance at present, but judging from the script, I place it in the latter half, and probably the latter quarter, of that century. Moreover, it stands to reason that it is to be dated following the official Isabelline commission of the translation of the text.

⁵ *Lignum Vitae*, in *Decem opuscula ad theologiam mysticam spectantia*, 2nd ed. (Karachi: Ad Claras Aquas, 1900), and *L'Arbre de vie/Lignum Vitae*, trans. J. Bougerol (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1996).

⁶ *Vita Jesu Christi: Ex Evangelio et approbata ab Ecclesia Catholica doctoribus sedule collecta*, 4 vols. (Paris: Apud Victorem Palme, 1870). Elsewhere I have written extensively concerning the Castilian variants on the late medieval meditational and, in most cases outside Iberia, highly somatic, devotional phenomenon concerned with Christ's humanity and passion; the differences are truly striking. See Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted." This gives a different impression than Albert G. Hauf, *D'Eiximenis a Sor Isabel de Villena: Aportació a l'estudi de la nostra cultura medieval* (Valencia: Institut Universitari de Filologia Valenciana-Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1990), in which similarities between the Iberian material and especially Franciscan treatises written elsewhere are, in my opinion, overstated. Without exception, none of the numerous studies concerned with late medieval devotional imagery and practices published in the last twenty-five years mentioned above in n. 2 considers Iberian material as relevant.

⁷ Ubertino da Casale, *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, ed. C. Davis (Turin: Bottega d'Erasmus, 1961).

During the century preceding the Isabelline reforms, on the other hand, trees were often used in Iberian devotional culture to represent, symbolize, or even replace altogether both the body of Christ and that of his mother, the Virgin Mary. These substitutions of tree for body occur most frequently, in the textual realm, in discussions which would, if taking place outside the Iberian Peninsula, concentrate on the more gruesome or disturbing moments of the Passion, with which many Iberian Christians (especially Castilians), Jews, and Muslims were demonstrably uncomfortable. Both Ramon Llull (BNM MS 3365, fol. 99r) and the anonymous author of a treatise entitled *Del comenzamiento de la religion* (On the Beginnings of Religion), bound together with, among other texts, a copy of the *Confessional* written by the mid-fifteenth-century bishop of Ávila, Alfonso “El Tostado” de Madrigal (d. 1455) (BNM MS 4202, fols. 90-91v), affirm that Muslims do not believe that the Passion ever occurred. The anonymous author expounds a bit on this, stating that they believed that Christ had been substituted on the cross by someone else, perhaps an unknown disciple, and so had never been allowed to die such a horrible death.

Moreover, statements concerning even Christians’ discomfort with such images are found, for example, in a series of Passion meditations subtitled *Como deve pensar el cristiano en cristo crucificado* (How the Christian Should Think about Christ Crucified), authored by Catalan Franciscan Tertiary Francesc Eiximenis. These meditations form part of his multi-volumed work on the life of Christ, the *Vida de Jesucrist* (which also circulated under the Latin title, *Vita Christi*, though it was originally written in Catalan), which proposed to its readers no engagement whatsoever of Christ’s lacerated body. Sections of Eiximenis’s text were translated and widely distributed in Castile under the title *Vida de Jesucristo* during the middle decades of the fifteenth century.⁸ They are often found in compilations used for writing sermons, such as a *Santoral*, or compilation of saints’ lives and other material arranged according to the liturgical calendar (BNM MS 12688). The following excerpt comes from Eiximenis’s readings for the Passion season:

⁸ For detailed discussion of Eiximenis’s text, its distribution, and its importance to fifteenth-century Christian devotional life in Castile, see Robinson, “Preaching to the Converted.” For a listing of most of the available manuscripts, see Charles B. Faulhaber, *Bibliography of Old Spanish Texts*, 3rd ed. (Madison, Wis.: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1984).

He who wishes to contemplate at length the injuries and dishonors received by the Savior, let him read the planctus made by the blessed St. Bernard, and the treatise on the seven hours which was made in memory of the Passion of the Savior, and other recent treatises which have been made by certain doctors of these times, and in them he will be able to find quite a lot of material. . . .⁹

In other words, the Castilian faithful and those who ministered to them rejected visual or textual images of Christ's humanity and tortured body. Ecclesiastics and polemicists did not deem them fruitful material for the sorts of dialogue that they hoped would lead to conversion. Nor did the majority of Iberian Christians—whether newly converted or not—view them as appropriate or desirable to their prayers or meditations. On the other hand, the tree images I now turn to were believed to serve such purposes admirably.

The motifs in question appear in a wide variety of contexts dating principally from the mid-thirteenth through the early fifteenth centuries and in treatises clearly intended for polemical purposes and for the public context of debate and preaching, in private chapels in monastic settings, in synagogue ornamentation, in mystical treatises intended for prayer and individual meditation, and in "miraculous" images capable of ending droughts and effecting conversions. They thus characterize and are central to both the private spheres of Iberian devotional life and the more highly charged public sphere in which Christians, themselves often recent converts from Judaism, attempted to persuade Iberia's Jews and Muslims of the truth of such controversial Christian tenets as the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Trinity.

In signaling trees as part of a particularly Iberian devotional current, I do not mean to suggest that such motifs are absent from contemporary or earlier writings, practices, and imagery elsewhere in the rest of Europe, medieval Judaism, or the Islamic world; indeed, *comparanda* for the Iberian material can be easily identified.¹⁰ As is well known, trees

⁹ "El que quiere co[n]te[m]plar largamente las injurias [y] denuestos . . . ql salvador rescibio lea el planto q[ue] fizo el bien ave[n]turado Stn [sic] Bernardo [y] el tractado de las siete horas que fue fecho en memoria de la passion del Salvador [y] otros tractados nuevos q[ue] han seydo fechos de algunos doctores de aq[u]este tiempo [y] en ellos podra fallar materia asas larga. . . ." Fol. ccclxxxi.

¹⁰ See Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*; Darío Cabanelas, *Salón de Comares en la Alhambra: Decoración, policromía, simbolismo y etimología* (Granada: Patronato de la Alhambra y Generalife, 1988); Jerrold Cooper, "Assyrian Prophecies, the Assyrian Tree, and the Mesopotamian Origins of Jewish Monotheism, Greek Philosophy, Christian Theology, Gnosticism, and Much More," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 120, no. 3 (2000): 430-44; R. E. Neil

as metaphors, symbols, and formats for the organization and presentation of information are common to most of the world's religions and are particularly prominent among the devotional traditions of the three great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Vegetation and plants compose one of the most powerful repertoires of symbolic topoi to be found in such Old Testament books as Isaiah, Proverbs, and the Song of Songs, as well as in the Qur'an. Likewise, the Tree of Life at the center of the garden of paradise is a topos common to all three religions; it reappears forcibly for Christians in St. John's apocalyptic visions.

Urs Kamber traces a rich tradition of the tree's rhetorical deployment by Christian Latin writers from the early Christian period through the thirteenth century, particularly in numerous commentaries on the Song of Songs.¹¹ He also highlights treatises by Hugh of St. Victor, who employed the motif as a teaching tool for imparting knowledge of the virtues and vices, and *Liber Figurarem* by Joachim da Fiore (d. 1202), the latter originally illustrated. Kamber sees the tradition as culminating during the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, with such vernacularizations as the *Somme le Roi* in France, the writings of the German mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and in the Mediterranean region, in Matfre de Ermengaud and Ramon Llull, about whose tree imagery I will have more to say in the following pages.¹²

Dodge, "The Well of Life and the Tree of Life," *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 6, no. 2 (October 1908): 191-96; *Arbor scientiae: Der Baum des Wissens von Ramon Lull; Akten des Internationalen Kongresses aus Anlass des 40-jährigen Jubiläums des Raimundus-Lullus-Instituts der Universität Freiburg*, ed. Fernando Domínguez Reboiras, Pere Villalba i Varneda, and Peter Walter (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Mary Forman, "Gertrud of Helfta: Arbor Amoris in Her Heart's Garden," *Mystics Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (2000): 163-78; Rab Hatfield, "The Tree of Life and the Holy Cross: Franciscan Spirituality in the Trecento and the Quattrocento," in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, ed. Timothy Verdon and John Henderson (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 132-60; Urs Kamber, *Arbor Amoris: Der Minnenbaum, Ein Pseudo-Bonaventure Traktat* (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 1964); Alejandra López et al., "The Tree of Life: Universal and Cultural Features of Folkbiological Taxonomies and Inductions," *Cognitive Psychology* 32, no. 3 (1997): 251-95; and Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). As in Wood, *Women, art, and spirituality*, Hatfield's interpretation of the images he analyzes is closely based on St. Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae*.

¹¹ Kamber, *Arbor Amoris*, esp. 130-40.

¹² On Matfre de Ermengaud, see Peter Ricketts, "L'Origine d'une publication: Le Breviari d'amor de Matfre Ermengaud de Béziers; Un Texte et une passion," *Bulletin de la Société Archéologique, Scientifique et Littéraire de Béziers* 5 (2001): 17-20; Ricketts, "Trois saluts d'amour dans la littérature de l'occitan médiéval," *Revue des Langues Romanes* 106, no. 2

Also part of this thirteenth- and fourteenth-century culmination is another group of well-known and widely distributed Franciscan treatises, in particular, Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* and Ubertino da Casale's *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, both of which employ the "tree tradition" to classify and present meditative material that encourages readers' concentration on and visualization of Christ's Passion. Kamber does not devote a great deal of attention to the differences between these Franciscan texts and the writings, of Lull in particular, but they are significant. The Franciscan writers are primarily concerned with the Passion, whereas for Lull, it is not an important theme. For the purposes of the present essay, this is a point worth bearing in mind, for it would appear that, until the Isabelline translations mentioned earlier, the Castilian Christian tradition embraced the approach to devotion exemplified by Lull and trenchantly rejected that typified by the Franciscans.

In Iberia, meditative trees, in addition to providing creative ways to circumvent a current of Passion devotions which many found offensive, achieved heightened significance because of the multiconfessional contexts in which they were deployed. Tree images are often related to locally specific practices and circumstances and frequently play a crucial role in a context of Christian polemics of persuasion that formed so central and public a part of medieval Iberian culture from the latter part of the thirteenth century through the first decades of the sixteenth. In other words, in Iberia from the late thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries, a "medieval commonplace," to borrow a term from R. D. F. Pring-Mill,¹³ is grafted onto a growing preoccupation with the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity.

In what follows I will examine a selection of textual and visual examples, beginning with the moment in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries when Christians appropriate tree motifs from Muslim and Jewish discourse, as well as from much earlier Christian Latin writers. The Catalan author, mystic, and possibly Franciscan Tertiary Ramon Lull (1232-1318) deploys tree images with particular dexterity.¹⁴ Lull's

(2002): 493-510; and Ricketts, "Une Nouvelle Citation dans le Breviari d'amor de Matfre Ermengaud," *Revue des Langues Romanes* 104, no. 2 (2000): 421-25. Ermengaud's tree, largely dedicated to the teaching of virtues, vices, and good spiritual habits to laypersons, is inhabited and even incarnated in the Virgin and is thus of interest for a number of the Iberian examples to be examined below. Lull's works also enjoyed substantial popularity in France, being translated into French under the patronage of Philippe le Bel and his wife, Juana of Navarre, and dedicated to the Virgin.

¹³ *El microcosmos lul·lià* (Palma de Mallorca: Editorial Moll, 1961).

¹⁴ On Lull, see, from among a vast bibliography, Miguel Cruz Hernández, *El pensamiento*

interest in the conversion of Muslims and Jews to Christianity was principal among the factors that drove his prodigious output, and trees constituted one of the groups of topoi, metaphors, and organizational schemes he most often used.

As we will see in the examples to be examined, the second half of the fourteenth century represents the moment of greatest efflorescence of this devotional tree discourse in both Castile and the Naşrid kingdom of Granada, with notable and original textual production taking place in both Christian and Muslim cultural spheres. This efflorescence coincides, moreover, with the flourishing of a style of architectural ornamentation which is characterized by strikingly naturalistic vegetation and is most often subsumed beneath the rubric of *mudejar*. It appears in the 1350s in Toledo, probably first in the Sinagoga del Tránsito (fig. 4) and then again at Santa María de Tordesillas (near Valladolid) shortly thereafter (figs. 2 and 3).¹⁵ A similar but not causally related vegetal naturalism also characterizes the ornamental program of the Alhambra's Palace of the Lions, built between 1359 and 1392.¹⁶ All these examples manifest the importance of vegetal symbolism in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic poetic and devotional discourses, as demonstrated by J. C. Ruiz Souza's recent interpretation of the Alhambra's Palace of the Lions in

de Ramon Llull (Madrid: Fundacion Juan March y Editorial Castalia, 1977); *Arbor scientiae: Der Baum des Wissens von Ramon Llull*; Harvey J. Hames, "Conversion via Ecstatic Experience," *Viator* (1999): 181-200; Hames, *The art of conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the thirteenth century* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2000); Mark D. Johnston, *The Spiritual Logic of Ramon Llull* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Ramon Llull, *Quattuor libri principiorum* ed. R. D. F. Pring-Mill (Wakefield: S. R. Publishers, 1969 [1721]); Ramon Llull, *Le Livre du Gentil et de Trois Sages* ed. R. D. F. Pring-Mill, and Armand Llinarès (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1966); Ramon Llull, "Llibre del gentil e dels tres savis," in *Nova edició de les obres de Ramon Llull* ed. R. D. F. Pring-Mill, Armand Llinarès, and A. Bonner (Palma de Mallorca: Patronat Ramón Llull, 1993), 2:5-210; Ramon Llull, *El Libro del Amigo y Amado* ed. Pring-Mill, Llinarès, and Bonner (Madrid: Tipografia Yagües, 1900); Ramon Llull, *Arbre Exemplifical* ed. R. D. F. Pring-Mill, Armand Llinarès, A. Bonner, and Francesc de B. Moll (Palma de Mallorca: Editorial Moll, 1971); and Ramon Llull, *The Tree of Love*, ed. R. D. F. Pring-Mill, Armand Llinarès, A. Bonner, Francesc de B. Moll, and E. Allison Peers, 2nd ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge; New York and Toronto: Macmillan, 1981), esp. introduction by Peers.

¹⁵ This question is discussed in some detail in Robinson, "*Mudéjar Revisited: A Prologomena to the Reconstruction of Perception, Devotion and Experience at the Mudéjar Convent of Clarisas, Tordesillas, Spain (14th century A.D.)*," *RES* 43 (2003): 51-77.

¹⁶ I am currently preparing an essay that analyzes the ornamental program of the Palace of the Lions from a devotional point of view. Its working title is "Poetry and the Poetics of Ornament in Granada's *Alhambra*," and it will appear in a special issue of *Muqarnas* (2008), a *festschrift* dedicated to Oleg Grabar on the occasion of his eightieth birthday.

Granada as a *madrasa* conceived for the purposes of study with strong Sufi, or mystical, overtones.¹⁷

The very late fourteenth century and the first decades of the fifteenth witness the deployment of both textual and visual “Tree-” and “Root-Christ” (figs. 5 and 11) by Christian polemicists, often conversos, recent converts from Judaism. Such topoi are also appropriated by the newly found Hieronymite Order for devotional purposes. They are of particular interest in this context because among the principal monastic orders in Iberia, the Hieronymites were perhaps the most ready to accept recent converts from Judaism into the folds of their brotherhood prior to the Inquisition.¹⁸ The tree tradition survives into the latter decades of the fifteenth century and even into the sixteenth, but from the 1470s or so onward, it coexists with a powerful current—most often royally or ecclesiastically sponsored—of imagery dependent on figural representation for its rhetorical effect. In the pages that follow, I will first discuss examples of Iberian devotional trees from the mid-thirteenth century, then trace the development of these topoi in the fourteenth, ending with examples from the early fifteenth, only a few decades prior to the introduction of new devotional currents during the period of Isabelline reform.

The “Tree of Creation” by Andalusī mystic Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī (1165-1240) the motif at the center of his short treatise entitled *Shajarat al-Kawn*,¹⁹ constitutes one of the earliest, richest, and most fascinating

¹⁷ See Robinson, “*Mudéjar Revisited*,” for a detailed analysis of the vegetal ornament central to the program of ornament at Tordesillas; for the interpretation of the Palace of the Lions, see Ruiz Souza, “El Palacio de los Leones de la Alhambra: ¿Madrasa, zawiya y tumba de Muhammad V? Estudio para un debate,” *Al-Qantara* 22, no. 1 (2001): 77-120. See also Carmen Rallo Gruss and Juan Carlos Ruiz Souza, “El Palacio de Ruy López Dávalos y sus bocetos inéditos en la Sinagoga del Tránsito: Estudio de sus Yaserías en el Contexto Artístico de 1361,” *Al-Qantara* 20 (1999): fasc. 2, pp. 275-97, who are of the opinion that the stucco vegetation at Tordesillas and Toledo directly depends on Granada, and that it was probably produced by groups of traveling artisans from the Naşrid capital. As I have indicated earlier, I believe that the ornamental programs of all three monuments are closely related but that the Castilian current developed independently from—and quite possibly earlier than—the Granadan one.

¹⁸ Basic bibliography on the Hieronymites is given in Robinson, “*Mudéjar Revisited*.” On the question of converted Jews, or conversos, in the order, and the ramifications of this in the context of the Inquisition, see Gretchen D. Starr Le-Beau, *In the shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, friars, and conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003). See also Robinson, “La Orden Jerónima y el Convento de Clarisas de Santa María la Real de Tordesillas,” *Reales Sitios* (2007).

¹⁹ Cabanelas, *Salón de Comares en la Alhambra*. See also Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn/L’Arbre du Monde*, trans. M. Gloton (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1998).

examples of the distinctively Iberian devotional tree images. Based in the Qur'anic topos of the Universal Tree, whose topmost branches support the throne of Allah, Ibn 'Arabī's tree functions as a sort of palimpsest, placed within and over the body of the Prophet Muhammad. The Prophet's generation from the Universal Tree's roots represents the seminal moment of the universe's creation, one which occurred before the beginning of time. Muhammad is the *insān al-kāmil*, or Perfect Man; the universe takes on the form of his body, which is at the same time that of a beautiful and perfect tree. The roots from which Muhammad has sprung, however, can also be conceived of as verbal roots, specifically that of *k-w-n*, or "to be," the imperative of which was spoken by God to bring first the Prophet and then the universe into being. Muhammad is proposed as the perfect physical and spiritual example for imitation by the faithful, inextricably linked as he is at the deepest level of his physical and spiritual essence to Allah's words. Ibn 'Arabī thus encapsulates both the Prophet's holy body and the divine word into the signifier of the Universal Tree. Ibn 'Arabī's tree *is* the prophet, but it is also the universe. Likewise, the tree *is* all of creation produced through continuous emanation, but its branches also physically *hold* the throne of Allah. The substitution of body for tree that Ibn 'Arabī's treatise effects is of capital importance to later Christian polemical discourse. It is also difficult to imagine that Ibn 'Arabī himself was not affected in its conception by the central Christian tenet of Christ's incarnation as the living word of God.²⁰

A more open-ended symbolic idiom based on trees—as well as other flower- and fruit-bearing varieties of vegetation—is deployed in the *Sefer ha-Zohar* (hereafter, *Zohar*), a key text for Iberian Kabbalah, or Jewish mysticism, that was probably compiled by the Castilian Jew Moses de León (1240-1305).²¹ In countless passages, of which merely one example is cited below, individual varieties of plants and trees possess symbolic potential, but the specifics of the latter are to be determined by the user of the meditative system and his or her perception of the relationships among elements of the system:

²⁰ Ibn 'Arabī's lyrical compositions evidence a notable openness to the idea of the incarnation of the deity before the eyes of those who love him. See Robinson, "Les Lieux de la Lyrique"; and José Miguel Puerta Vilchez, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe: Al-Andalus y la estética árabe clásica* (Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 1997), esp. 756-67.

²¹ *The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts*, ed. Isaiah Tishby, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

For Rabbi Jose said: The trees through which wisdom is revealed, for example, the carob, the palm, the pistachio, and so on, have all been constructed according to a single combination. All those that bear fruit, apart from apples, are a single mystery (all deriving from *tiferet*), but the paths are separate. All those that do not bear fruit, that is, the large ones, apart from the willows of the brook, which have a mystery of their own, derive their nourishment from the one source. And each of the smaller ones, except for the hyssop, had the same mother (*malkhut*). . . .²²

A few decades later, in his late thirteenth-century *Arbor Scientiae*,²³ Ramon Llull takes advantage of both the incarnational aspects exemplified by Ibn 'Arabi's *Shajarat al-Kawn* and the biblically based symbolic potential of the system employed in the *Zohar*. As observed earlier, trees are one of Llull's most frequently employed symbolic systems, one which both he and his readers considered more accessible than the arcane *Ars Magna*, as demonstrated by the reception of the *Arbor Scientiae* throughout Iberia to the end of the fifteenth century and beyond. A late fifteenth-century devotional miscellany, today in Seville (Biblioteca Colombina 5-1-42), for example, contains a shortened, diagrammatic version of the meditative system proposed by Llull. In it, a series of trees is associated with God's qualities and dignities; the shortened format in which it presents the main portions of the *Arbor Scientiae* suggests that the manuscript's owner thought it useful for quick reference for his prayers and devotions. Other manuscript copies indicate the *Arbor Scientiae*'s continued presence in Castilian devotional life. The *Ars Magna*, on the other hand, does not appear to have fared as well. For example, in one manuscript of devotional works (BNM MS 11559, acquired by the Biblioteca Nacional from the Marqués de Santillana's collection) that includes Llull's *Les Cent Noms de Deu* and *Hores de Sta Maria*, as well as prayers by St. Anselm, drawings that clearly once belonged to a larger manuscript of Llull's *Ars Magna* are used to line both front and back covers.²⁴

²² *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 2, no. 16: "Trees and Herbs" (*Zohar* 1, *Midrash ha-Na'elam*, 15b-16a). *Tiferet* translates as "tree of life."

²³ The *Arbor Scientiae* was edited in Barcelona in 1482. See Diosdado García Rojo, *Catálogo de incunables de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nacional, 1945), no. 1579.

²⁴ Mario Schiff, *La bibliothèque du marquis de Santillane* (Paris: E. Bouillon, 1905), no. 385; Ricketts, "Une Nouvelle Citation dans le Breviari d'amor de Matfre Ermengaud," "L'Origine d'une publication," and "Trois saluts d'amour dans la littérature de l'occitan médiéval." It is probable, however, that Llull himself considered these systems interchangeable, given that the same qualities and dignities that are used to construct his *Ars Magna* appear again associated with the individual trees that compose the "handbook"

Of the trees that compose Lull's *Arbor Scientiae*, the "Arbre Cristinal" (Christological Tree) offers perhaps the best example of their persuasive potential. In an anecdote recounted in the "Christological Tree" section, a Jew visits Lull's Hermit, interrupting his solitary meditations atop a mountain, and asks him for an explanation of the mystery of the Incarnation. The Hermit responds that he is hardly the adequate person to provide such an explanation, given that he is humble and ignorant, and that there are learned men much more equal to the task. The Jew insists, and the Hermit requests that he return the next day, which will give him time to seek revelation on the subject from God. Once the Jew has departed, the Hermit begins to pray fervently, but as the night advances, he finds himself still bereft of the words equal to the explication of one of the two great mysteries of his faith. He nears desperation and even begins to doubt his own convictions as he faces the dawn of the day that will bring the Jew's return. Despite his agitated state, he is overwhelmed by the beauty of the sunrise and pauses to thank God for it. For his humble gratitude in the face of adverse circumstances, God rewards him with a revelation. When the Jew arrives, the Hermit confidently begins his discourse:

It happened that Wisdom, Will, and Power met in a beautiful meadow all planted with many beautiful and virtuous trees. They agreed between the three of them to carry out a beautiful and worthy deed there in the meadow. In that meadow there was a small tree, and Will asked Wisdom if she knew whether Power had such great virtue that she could, from that tiny tree, give of [her] essence to all of the trees in the meadow, which were quite large, so that they would all be clothed in the tiny tree's essence. Wisdom responded to Will, saying that she was certain that Power had sufficient virtue to clothe all of those trees according to the characteristics of the tiny tree, but according to the essence of the bigger trees rather than that of the small one. Then Will asked Power to become so great in those trees—which [represent] goodness, greatness, eternity, and all the other divine dignities—just like the knowledge of Wisdom and the will of she who desired to be clothed in that virtue. And, just in this manner, the Incarnation is based in the equality of Power, Wisdom, and Will, just like that found between the big tree and the small one. And then the Jew understood

in Biblioteca Colombina 5-1-42. In this, he would be similar to twelfth-century Andalusī philosopher Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī, who explained his cosmology first in numeric, then in geometric, then in "botanical" terms. See Robinson, *In Praise of Song: The Making of Courty Culture in al-Andalus and Provence, 1005-1135 A.D.* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 202-35.

how the Incarnation had come about, and praised and blessed God, and wished to become a Christian, and to always honor God as greatly as he could.²⁵

Similarly, Lull's *Dame Intelligence* instructs the Jew, Muslim, and Christian who protagonize the *Llivre del Gentil et des Tres Savis* (Book of the Gentile and the Three Sages)²⁶ to employ the trunks, branches, leaves, and fruits of the trees in the shaded glen where they have stopped to demonstrate the truths of their respective faiths.²⁷ Predictably, in both cases the

²⁵ "Conten que saviesa, voluntat i poder s'encontraren en un bell verger que era plantat de molts arbres bons i virtuosos. Entre tot tres prengueren l'accord de fer en aquell verger una bella obra. En aquell verger hi havia un arbre petit, i la voluntat demanà a la saviesa si ella sabia que el poder tingués tal virtut que pogués, d'aquell arbre petit, donar natura a tots aquells arbres del verger, que eren molts grans, de manera que tots fossin vestits de la natura d'aquell arbre petit. La saviesa respongué a la voluntat i digué que ella sabia que el poder tenia virtut de vestir tots aquells arbres de l'arbre petit, segons la natura dels grans arbres i no segons la natura del petit. Aleshores la voluntat pregà el poder que ell fos tan gran en aquells arbres—els quals són bondat, grandesa, eternitat i les altres divines dignitats—com era el saber de la saviesa i el seu voler qui aquell vestiment desitjava. I per açò la manera de l'encarnació estigué en la igualtat del poder, saviesa i voluntat, la qual tingueren en aquells grans arbres i en l'arbre petit. I aleshores el jueu entengué la manera de l'encarnació, i lloà i beneí Déu, i desitjà esser cristià i tractar l'honrament de Déu, sempre tant com pogués." Lull, *Arbor Scientiae*, 87-89.

²⁶ As seen in British Library (hereafter BL) Add. 14040, a fifteenth-century copy of the Castilian translation known as *El Libro del Gentil et de los Tres Sabios* (the translation was made by Gonçalo Sanches de Useda, of Córdoba, in 1416), this text also had an important visual tradition associated with it. On fols. 1v-3r, five images of trees are represented, in which the virtues and vices are explicated according to their relationship to God's qualities in the same terms used by the protagonists in the following pages. These latter are represented in dialogue against the backdrop provided by the two trees on fols. 1v-2r. The organization of topics for meditation along the tree's branches and flowers has significant resonance with Lull's *Ars Magna*, as well as with the abbreviated system for private meditation or quick reference contained in the Colombina manuscript referenced in note 24. It is worth noting, in the interest of other arguments made in this essay, that in this particular manuscript Lull's text is accompanied by a treatise in Castilian concerning the existence of God and the truth of the Christian faith, composed in Barcelona and transcribed for a lay nobleman, Alfonso Ferrandes de Ferrera, in 1406. It contains what appears to be a shortened version of Lull's work, without the characters or the trees, composed specifically for the purpose of allowing lay readers to enter into debate with infidels: "And we do this so that the treatise can be understood without a teacher. This treatise is good to use against those who say that there is no God and against heretics who say that there are many gods. And it is good for proving [the truth of] the holy Roman Catholic faith and contains quite a lot of good on its own. Principally, that Christians may be strengthened in their belief and may destroy and confuse with irrefutable reasoning all those who are not Christians and who want to destroy the holy Christian faith with their own reasoning." Fol. 86r.

²⁷ Both the common and overlapping traditions which permitted the development of this particular sort of dialogue and the symbolic idiom in which it is carried out have

Christian triumphs in the end. Nevertheless, the success of the techniques of knowledge organization, as well as the importance of the shifting, analogical symbolism accorded to the trees' elements by each of Iberia's three confessional groups in facilitating debate, demonstrates a widespread acceptance of and familiarity with this system of meditation.

Shade-dappled glens populated by lush trees and punctuated by fountains are Llull's favorite places for encounters between the devotee and the divine—as they are for Ibn 'Arabī²⁸—as well as for prayer, meditation, and the application of the divine balm of love and consolation to his troubled soul. The fourteenth-century *Arbor Scientiae* (BNM MS 3364, fols. 1-221),²⁹ for example, opens with Llull walking through a lush green wood, sad and burdened by care. He finally stops to weep beneath a tree, where he meets a monk who tells him that he should write a book. Llull confides to his interlocutor that he is distraught because, despite the fact that he has been laboring for thirty years, no one appreciates his books and a lot of people even consider him useless. He is particularly upset that, despite all his efforts, Christ still “has so few friends in this world, and the Muslims spend their time protesting and committing offenses against our holy faith” (fol. 1).³⁰ He does not think he has the ability to write the book the monk requests of him and just wants to be left alone with his sadness.

Not to be dissuaded, the monk responds that this book would help Llull's other books to be better understood (implicitly by those Llull wishes to convince of the truths of Christianity) and thus more appreciated. Llull ponders for a long while what the monk has asked of him:

been thoroughly analyzed in two of Hames' works, “Conversion via Ecstatic Experience” and *The Art of Conversion*.

²⁸ Ibn 'Arabī states in one of the compositions of the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*: “Oh, Garden of the Valley, there do I find the Mistress of the Sanctuary! . . .” *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (Beirut: Dār Sāder, 1998), 87-89; translated in Robinson, “*Mudéjar Revisited*,” 41. A large majority of the compositions that compose the *Tarjumān*, all of which treat such encounters, are set in glens or gardens.

²⁹ It also includes documents concerning Llull's heresy defense written to the ambassador from Rome (fols. 222-68), Ant. Sig. L. 52. Also related is BNM MS 3365, Ramon Llull, *Obras*, containing *quaestiones* and fragments of *Llibre de consolacio del ermita[?]*, in Catalan, fifteenth century, Ant. Sig. L. 58. It opens in a similar manner: “[P]er hum boscatge anava Ramon trist e concirós. . .” Manuel de Castro, O.F.M., *Manuscritos Franciscanos de la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid* (Madrid: Servicio de Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia, 1973), 204.

³⁰ “Q[uo]ni[am] dominus noster ihs xps tan paucos amatores habet in hoc mundo et ad serracenos [sic] redire . . . ad protestandum et ofendendum illis nre scte fidei veritatem. . . .”

[A]nd about the good which could come about if he wrote that book. And while he considered thus, he gazed at a certain beautiful tree in front of him, among whose leaves he saw many flowers and fruits, and he considered its possible significance. “Ramon,” said the monk, “What are you thinking about, and why do you not answer me?” “*Lord monk,*” said Ramon, “*I am thinking about the things signified by this tree.*”³¹

Llull then announces that he will indeed compose the book and that it will be organized in the form of a tree, with its topics distributed according to the significance of roots, trunk, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, and fruit. The treatise ultimately contains seven trees in all, including “angelic,” “maternal,” “Christological,” “divine,” and “celestial” trees. Llull’s book will serve to represent and to explain all knowledge a Christian (or an aspiring Christian) would need to reach paradise, itself represented in the final “celestial” tree, which will help readers to envision paradise as the lush, flower- and fruit-laden branches of an enormous tree (fol. 90r).

As mentioned earlier, the trees also serve the reader as tools with which to meditate on the qualities and attributes of God. For example, in the “Arbre Angelical” (Angelic Tree), we read: “On the Qualities of the Angelic Tree: Saint Michael is good through goodness and great because of greatness . . .” (*De qualitate arboris angelica: Sanctus Michael est bonus per bonitatem et magnus per magnitudinem . . .*) (fol. 86v). Meditation on the “Arbor Maternalis” (Maternal Tree), which represents both the qualities of and the incarnation of the Virgin (fols. 94 ff.), precedes meditation on the “Christological Tree,” which is an “Arbor Duplex,” both human and divine (fols. 97r ff.). In the context of the “Christological tree,” Llull addresses one of the main problems that has led him to compose the treatise: the fact that the Muslims do not believe that Christ ever suffered the Passion (fol. 99r). He enumerates their reasons for adopting this position and proceeds to refute them one by one. The “Christological Tree” is followed by the “Arbor Divinalis” (Tree of Divinity), which presents readers with God’s dignities and which Llull announces will be “metaphorically” (*metaforice*) considered, beginning with the tree’s roots (fol. 110r).

³¹ “[E]t in bono quod sequere posset si librum illum faciet. Et dum ita consideraret quadam pulcrum arborem respexit, quam coram ipso stabat in qua folia plura flores et fructus consistebat in hiis qua ipsam significabat cogitavit. Raymunde dixit monachus in quo cogitates et quare meis sermonibus non respondetis. *Domine monache dixit raymundus, cogito in hoc quae per hanc arborem significantur.*” Fol. 1v (emphasis added).

It should be noted that Lull, whose connections with the Franciscan Order are undisputed, was engaged in the composition of his *Arbor Scientiae* at a moment and in a place not too distant from that in which Bonaventure composed his *Lignum Vitae*, in which Passion meditation is central. Because of these connections, Lull could hardly have been ignorant of the new currents of devotion to Christ's humanity and Passion emanating from the centers of Franciscan operations on the Italian peninsula and of their frequent reliance on highly visual evocations to fully engage the reader in his or her Savior's every pain and humiliation. Yet Lull avoids such topics, repeatedly assuring his readers that the material presented through his trees is worthy not of being visualized but of being "remembered, understood, and loved" (recol[li]ere, intelligere et amare) (fol. 87r). Rather than narrative evocations of the moments and aspects of Christ's human incarnation with which readers might most easily sympathize, he prefers an associative and symbolic system, one that concentrates on Christ's divine attributes and qualities as *embodied by the symbolically deployed parts of a tree*.

As mentioned above, the mid-fourteenth century saw the most intense, and in many ways the most interesting, deployment of trees at the center of an Iberian devotional discourse. In a Christian context, the focus is on the arboreal embodiment of Mary and Jesus; in an Islamic one, as we shall see, it is on a tree that narrowly avoids being conceived of as an embodiment of the divine beloved. In the case of Christian material, moreover, narrative episodes most often having to do with Christ's infancy and Passion are also "grafted onto" the more symbolic and conceptual system coined by writers like Lull. We witness, as will be detailed in the following pages, the earliest examples I have found of an alternative approach to Passion meditations, one which presents the Virgin as a model for the achievement not of *compassio*, but of ecstasy. The visual manifestations of these tendencies often come in the form of mid-fourteenth-century mudejar architectural ornament of the "naturalistic" variety, several examples of which will be considered below.³²

Lull's treatises continue to be central to this devotional tree discourse throughout the fourteenth century in Iberia. While they were written either with the primary objective of conversion in mind or because of past conversions successfully effected, they were also important in forming

³² I have addressed these issues in some detail elsewhere, so they will not be treated at length here; it will be the purpose of the following section to tie them more closely to a now fleshed-out textual tradition. See Robinson, "Mudéjar Revisited."

the devotional *mentalité* of Iberian Christians not directly involved in the conversion effort. Miguel Cruz Hernández has demonstrated that Lull's "philosophy of love" was even taught to Franciscan Tertiaries in Mallorca using model trees.³³ His writings are also well represented in monastic libraries and Castilian noble collections of the fifteenth century.³⁴ Indeed, the popularity of Lull's meditative methodologies probably provides much of the explanation both for a rather unique mid-fourteenth-century rendition of the Epiphany (fig. 1), located in the so-called Golden Chapel (Capilla Dorada), and for the well-known "Patio Mudéjar" found at Santa María de Tordesillas, the royal convent of Poor Clares found in 1363 by the daughters of Peter I of Castile (figs. 2 and 3), near Valladolid. Both find striking resonances in Lull's writings.³⁵

In the Golden Chapel's Epiphany, the diminutive tree proffered to the kneeling sage and to the viewer by the Virgin, upon whose topmost branches a bird alights, its wings caressed by her Son's fingers, should be read both as both path and subject for meditation. This image offers a striking alternative to the meditations on Christ's Passion presented by earlier and contemporary Italian images. Scholars have identified representations of Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* in an altarpiece produced in the 1330s by Pacino di Buonaguida for a female Franciscan convent

³³ *El pensamiento de Ramon Llull*, 125-44; 222-30.

³⁴ Indeed, this has been firmly demonstrated for the fifteenth century by Helen Nader, *The Mendoza Family in the Spanish Renaissance, 1350-1550* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1979), esp. 97: "[T]he Counts of Benavente [who were conversos] . . . quickly adapted to Christian culture and became famous in fifteenth-century Castile as poets and men of letters. Part of their reputation rested on their library, which reflects the taste of both the Counts of Benavente and their Castilian admirers. . . . The greatest number of books by a single author are those of the thirteenth-century religious philosopher, Ramon Llull." Thanks to David McKenzie for bringing this citation to my attention. While the goal of this project is not to meticulously trace the reception of Lull's works in the Iberian Peninsula, a glance through M. Castro, *Manuscritos Franciscanos*, and Charles Faulhaber, *Libros y bibliotecas en la España medieval: Una bibliografía de fuentes impresas* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1987), followed by a consultation of *Philobiblon*, a database of Old Spanish texts in libraries the world over maintained by the University of California at Berkeley, yields a substantial number of copies of works by Lull datable to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

³⁵ In Robinson, "Mudéjar Revisited," I suggested a direct relationship between this *Epiphany* and an Arabic text, Ibn al-Khaṭīb's *Rawḍat al-ta'arīf bi-al-ḥubb al-ṣharīf*, to be discussed below. I still believe that relationship to be viable but am now convinced that texts such as Lull's *Arbor Scientiae* and the Marian treatise to be discussed here (BNM MS 8952) served as important mediators, with the most likely setting for exchange of views and information being the royal courts of Peter I of Castile, who moved between Toledo, Valladolid, and Seville, and Muhammad V in Granada.

of Monticello, just outside Florence.³⁶ An enormous leafy tree stands at the center of the composition, its trunk serving as a frame on which Christ's crucified body is placed. Medallions containing representations of the key moments of Christ's life are hung, fruitlike, along the branches. There are also Catalan representations of the same theme, such as the mid-fourteenth-century wall painting found in the Capella dels Dolors (Chapel of the Agonies) of the parochial church at L'Arboç, completed sometime around 1330.³⁷ Other examples were found at the Dominican convent at Puigcerdà. Documentary sources also record representations of the *Lignum Vitae* that have not survived in the Franciscan convent of Barcelona and in the church choir of the closely connected Clarisan establishment at Pedralbes.³⁸ It thus appears that the "avoidance techniques" exemplified by the deployment of Lull's meditative system are, indeed, something particularly Castilian.

Bonaventure's treatise, consonant with the focus on the humanity of the Son of God that drove Franciscan piety, concentrates the reader's attention almost exclusively on the body of Christ *as body*. As in Pacino di Buonaguida's altarpiece, the tree in Bonaventure's text exists as an organizational tool for the Passion vignettes presented to readers in both text and image as the true objects for their contemplation, one in which the exercise of spiritual and physical sight is fundamental.³⁹ Lull's writings, on the other hand, encourage an associative approach open to manipulation by his readers, one based on the symbolic relationship between the tree's parts and God's (or Mary's or Christ's) qualities, with frequent emphasis on the divine, rather than the human aspects of these.

Despite the fact that almost nothing survives of the original library of Santa María la Real de Tordesillas and that it therefore cannot be

³⁶ Hatfield, "Tree of Life," 135 ff.; and Wood, *Women, art, and spirituality*.

³⁷ J. Sureda i Pons, *La pintura gòtica catalana del segle XIV* (Barcelona: Els Llibres de la Frontera, 1989), 23-24.

³⁸ Ana Castellano i Tressera, *Pedralbes a l'edat mitjana: Història d'un monestir femení* (Barcelona: Montserrat, 1998).

³⁹ See, for example: "*Iesu, cruci clavatus . . . et super lignum crucis dire proiectus, expansus, protensus et tractus et in pellis modum hinc inde extensus, clavorum perforatur aculeis, manibus sacris et pedibus cruci affixus et durissime sauciatus. . . . Vide, nunc, anima mea, quomodo is qui est super omnia benedictus Deus, ab imo pedis usque ad verticem totus in aquas passionis demergitur. . . . (Jesus, nailed to the cross, and you might say he is projected, stretched out on the wood of the cross, tense like a piece of vellum, with nails perforating his sacred hands, and feet, fixing them to the cross, cruelly wounded. . . . Look, now, my soul, how God, he who is blessed above all others, from his head to his feet, is completely submerged in the waters of his passion. . . .)* Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*, 160 (emphasis added).

proven that the library contained any of Lull's writings, it seems likely that it did. When we consider the visionary posture of the Magus of the Epiphany, as well as the Child's teaching or speaking gesture as he lectures the kneeling king, the lens offered by Lull's text seems unquestionably more appropriate to the interpretation of the image. Indeed, even the spatial organization of Lull's *Arbor Scientiae*, in which knowledge of the Mother of necessity precedes that of the Son, is reminiscent of that of the convent in which the glenlike patio, with its insistence on naturalistic vegetal ornamental themes—pomegranates and vines are particularly prominent—precedes the Golden Chapel. As I have argued elsewhere, the vines and implied trees of the patio provide meditational tools and cues for a viewer's approximation to the Virgin.⁴⁰

Many scholars, myself included, have noted striking formal similarities between the vegetal ornament of Tordesillas's Patio Mudéjar and that of the almost contemporary Sinagoga del Tránsito in Toledo (fig. 4), probably completed in 1359. J. C. Ruiz Souza and Carmen Rallo Gruss have even proposed that the two programs were produced by the same workshop.⁴¹ The similarities, however, are much more profound than a simple case of stylistic influence or traveling artisans. The embodiment of knowledge in a feminized tree is at the center of the ornamental program of the Toledan synagogue's Torah wall, as is made clear by the inscription which surrounds it: "She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; those who hold her fast are called happy (Prov. III:18)."⁴² The tree in question is representative of *khokhmah*, the Hebrew personification of Wisdom in Proverbs. According to Kabbalistic traditions, She is not just Wisdom, but Divine Wisdom, a direct emanation from *Ein Sof*, the primary principle, and the source of Intelligence, or *Binah*. The family of the synagogue's patron, Schlomo ha-Levi, had been connected for more than a century to Kabbalistic exegesis and practices and would certainly have been familiar with the tree- and

⁴⁰ Robinson, "Mudéjar Revisited."

⁴¹ Robinson, "Mudéjar Revisited"; and Rallo Gruss and Ruiz Souza, "El Palacio de Ruy López Dávalos."

⁴² Juan Joseph Heydeck, *Las Inscripciones Hebreas de la Sinagoga Toledana de R. Semuel ha-Levi* (Toledo: Fuensalida, 1978). The ideas expounded here about the Sinagoga del Tránsito come from a paper presented by Damon Montclare at the symposium along with the rest of those published here. Unfortunately, circumstances prevented its being included here, and I would like to thank him for his permission to cite his ideas, as well as for valuable discussion on many points of my argument.

plant-based symbolism that characterizes such key texts as the *Zohar*.⁴³ Schlomo ha-Levi was also, until his fall from grace in the late 1350s, a highly placed member of King Pedro I's court. Thus, connections between Tordesillas's tree-holding Virgin and the embodiment of Divine Wisdom in the form of a Kabbalistic tree found on the torah wall of the Toledan synagogue, as well as the interchanges—possibly oral in addition to or independent of textual—necessary to bring them about are entirely plausible. In addition to the connections suggested by the relationship that existed between Pedro I and Schlomo ha-Levi, Tordesillas inherited properties from at least one converso family during the first decades of the fifteenth century, a fact that generally indicates a familiar and sustained relationship between convent and donor.⁴⁴

It is also likely that there were intermediary texts, such as Lull's *Arbor Scientiae* or Matfre de Ermengaud's *Breviari d'Amor*, involved in the visual manifestation of the devotional tree offered to viewers by Tordesillas's Virgin. Another possible source for the motif is *Mariale sive de laudibus Beatae Virginis* (hereafter *Mariale*) (BNM MS 8952), an unpublished and quite lengthy anonymous fourteenth-century treatise, proceeding from the library of the cathedral of Ávila and almost certainly composed there.⁴⁵ This manuscript provides us with proof that the sort of meditation propagated by Lull and the Kabbalists found ready acceptance

⁴³ Heydeck, *Las Inscripciones Hebreas*. See the introductory pages, where a long ancestry of illustrious devotees of the Kabbalah is traced for the synagogue's patron, Schlomo ha-Levi Abulafia. These include Schlomo ha-Levi Abulafia (born in Burgos in 1224; died in Toledo in 1283), a courtier of King Alfonso X of Castile, and his extensive writings in the genre of biblical commentary show marked Kabbalistic tendencies. His *Osar ha-Kabod* (Treasure of Glory) includes the first known citations from the *Zohar*.

⁴⁴ Jonás Castro Toledo, *Colección diplomática de Tordesillas, 909-1474* (Valladolid: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Diputación Provincial de Valladolid, 1981), 244-45, no. 422, for a legal dispute engendered by the donation of vineyards to the convent by one Juana Sánchez, wife of Pedro González, a converso. On the powers granted to the abbess of Tordesillas by royal patrons, see Robinson, "Mudéjar Revisited." At the time of the donation, the abbess would have been Doña Juana García de Guadalajara. See J. Castro Toledo, *Colección diplomática de Tordesillas*, 246, a fact suggestive of important connections to Jewish and converso communities.

⁴⁵ Personal communication from Dr. Julián Martín Abad, senior librarian at the Sala Cervantes reading room of the BNM. The manuscript was removed to the recently created Archivo Histórico Nacional in Madrid (where it was given the shelf number 12-1-B), along with the rest of the cathedral's books and documents, during the exclassification movement in 1871. Sometime before 1896 it passed into the BNM, as noted in an inventory from the period. See Julián Martín Abad, *En plúteos extraños: Manuscritos, incunables y raros de la Biblioteca Capitular de Ávila en la Biblioteca Nacional de España* (Burgos: Instituto Castellano y Leonés de la Lengua, in press). The binding is original, with numbering on the inner face of the front cover that allows a knowledgeable reader to

among a Castilian monastic or ecclesiastical public as well. On fol. 92, “contemplative men” (*virī contemplatīvi*) are urged to use trees in their devotions and are assured that this will produce joy in their souls and bring them closer in a loving relationship to the Virgin and thus to God. Beginning with references to the Virgin’s miraculous and Immaculate Conception and closing with an extensive analysis of Gabriel’s angelic salutation, the treatise is a vast compendium of Marian lore, including extensive exegeses of most of the known metaphors and epithets used to address and describe her.⁴⁶ An alphabetical table of contents lists the metaphors to be analyzed, but the treatise itself is organized according to material: celestial comparisons first, followed by metals, mountains, and precious stones, then gardens and fields, which are followed by a lengthy section on trees, twenty-six in all. The text offers its readers, above all, access to *imitatio Mariae*. Each section expounds on the desirable qualities and virtues of the Virgin, with the parts of the plant in question (each symbolizing particular qualities or virtues, much after the fashion of Lull) evoked by the metaphor it treats and suggests that with proper love, meditation, and devotion, readers may become like her.

The treatise is also conceived as a spiritual ascent. The Virgin is compared to the air (*aer*) on fol. 30v, where an analysis of the “VII regions of the air and the VII grades of ascension of spiritually proficient men” (*de VII regionibus aeris et de VII gradibus ascensionis viri spiritualiter proficientes*) begins. Starting in the “valley of tears” (*valle plorationis*), those who love the Virgin travel through the “VII mansions” located across the tops of mountains to a place of rest and enjoyment (*locum tabernaculi*), and from there to God’s dwelling place (*usque ad domum dei*), located at the very top of the highest of the mountains and suffused in divine light (fol. 31r). Like Lull, the anonymous author appears to propose a variety of alternative systems through which readers might effect their own ascents to see God’s face, just as Jacob did.

Implicitly, given that the ascent is through the air, those who love the Virgin travel “through” her to reach spiritual union with the divinity.

reconstruct its history. Many thanks to Dr. Martín Abad for his assistance with this unpublished manuscript.

⁴⁶ While it shares numerous characteristics with other Marian treatises, such as the one often falsely attributed to Albertus Magnus (a copy of which is found in BNM MS 7152), extensive comparative research has demonstrated that it is in fact different, and probably unique—if only for its length, it stands out sharply from all material I have examined as potential *comparanda*. Besides the Bible and Augustine, Bede is perhaps the authority most frequently cited.

She is also, however, a place, specifically, the paradisiac garden of God (*paradisus dei*) (fol. 49v), a comparison inspired by Genesis, chapter 2, and the Song of Songs, canticle 4, and an enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*) where cherubim and seraphim guard the *lignum vitae* (fol. 50r). She is, likewise, a beautiful, fertile, and well-watered field (*De agri interioris latitudine. Pulcritudine. Plenitudine et pinguedine*). For the latter comparison, Augustine, the Apocalypse, Matthew, chapter 13, and Proverbs, chapter 31, are cited as well, and readers are told that “in this meadow, it is good to meditate, just as did the saintly patriarch Isaac” (*In hoc agro bonum est meditari sic ut faciebat ille sanctus patriarcha ysaac. Gen. XXIII*) (fol. 51r). These metaphors could equally well evoke the Tordesillas patio.

Later readers are told that “Mary may be compared to a tree (*Maria dicitur arbor*). . . . There was never a tree like unto her beneath the heavens, nor above them such a fruit as hers (*Non fuit talis arbor sub celo sicut Maria. Nec talis fructus super celos sicut fructus eius*).” In support of this comparison, Matthew, chapter 6 (“*Arbor bona fructus bonos facit*” [fols. 61v-62r]), is cited. More interesting for our purposes, however, is the second scriptural source the work offers: “She is a tree of life to those who know her and hold her fast” (*Lignum vite est his qui apprehenderit ea[m]* [Prov. III:18]). The same verse is cited in the inscription that surrounds the representation of the Tree of Life adorning the eastern, or Torah, wall of the Sinagoga del Tránsito in Toledo. The implications, of course, are that the meditative systems used to approach both groups of symbolic trees would also have been similar.

The trees the *Mariale* offers up for meditation number twenty-six, and all of them, states the author, have been scrupulously harvested from the Holy Scriptures (see fols. 62v ff.). He assures his readers that by meditating on them, they “should not doubt that they will eat of every tree in paradise and that they will then imitate them to the best of the ability given to each one” (*esse non dubito ut de omni ligno paradisi comedas et operis ac imiteris in quantum tibi dabitum*) (fols. 61v-62r). As in Lull’s *Arbor Scientiae*, discussed earlier, each part of the tree—roots, seed, flowers, fruit, resin, branches, trunk, leaves, and so on—is then named as symbolically significant and worthy of meditation, for each one provides words, food, and medicine to those who are diligent.⁴⁷ Amid abundant citations from Exodus, Psalms, and other Old Testament books sown

⁴⁷ Gregorius Nyssenus undertakes a similar treatment of trees in *De creatione hominis*, *Patrologia Latina Online Database* (hereafter *PL*), vol. 67, col. 347. Likewise, Haymo

thickly with trees, the author expounds on the purposes of the Virgin tree (fols. 65v-66r). She watches over sinners, awakens those who sleep in sin so that they may examine their souls, and motivates and scolds the negligent. She makes men hate sin, makes the hearts of sinners weep tears of contrition, leads men along the righteous path just as the Israelites were led through the Red Sea, and brings those who err along the path to death back onto the straight and narrow. She protects those tormented by temptation, gives rest to those who labor, removes the yoke of carnal appetites from those engaged in the work of spiritual perfection, and gives consolation and illumination to those who meditate on her. Finally, like Esther, who entered the king's palace with a golden staff (Esther V:1-5), the Virgin leads those who love her into the celestial kingdom. Here, in diametric opposition to the paths laid out by Bonaventure, the Passion, or a reader's potential use of the Passion to come closer to the Virgin or to her Son, is not even mentioned in connection with trees.

One of the most significant characteristics of the Virgin as presented in the *Mariale*, because of the sharp contrast it offers to the better-known Franciscan tradition, is the stoicism she exhibits during her Son's Passion, as well as the ecstasy it induces in her soul. References to the Virgin's stoicism, indeed, are sprinkled throughout the treatise. On fol. 59v, for example, in an exegesis comparing the Virgin to precious metals and stones, she is likened to "a city of gold (Apoc. XXI)," for gold is the only metal capable of standing up to the "fire of examination." This

Halberstatensis, *Commentaria in Isaiam* (PL, vol. 116, col. 713), provides fruitful comparative material. Although I am not proposing these works as specific sources either for Llull's *Arbor Scientiae* or for the *Mariale*, given that it proceeds from a monastic context, they might have been known by Llull or by the fourteenth-century manuscript's author or authors. Closer in time and space to the context under consideration here, and of particular interest because of its polemic intent, is Petrus Alfonsus, *Dialogus* (PL, vol. 157, col. 535; emphasis added): "In quibus impiae Judaeorum opiniones evidentissimis cum naturalis, tum coelestis philosophiae argumentis confutantur, quaedamque prophetarum abstrusiora loca explicantur. PETRUS: Licet ridiculose hoc proferas, tamen, si vis, dicam quid secundum carnem ei attribuum. Dicit quippe idem Isaias: *Dabo in solitudine cedrum, et sethim, et myrthum, et lignum olivae, et ponam in deserto abietem, pinum et buxum simul* (Isa. XLI). *Per has sane arbores septem, corpus Christi designator . . .*" (These impious opinions of the Jews are easily confounded by the most obvious natural, then celestial, arguments, which are explained in several of the more abstruse quotations from the prophets. PETER: What you suggest is obviously ridiculous, for, you see, I say to you that a second sort of flesh is attributed to him. Isaiah himself said: *I will place in solitude the cedar, the seth tree, the myrtle and the olive tree, and in the desert I will place the fir, pine, and box trees* (Isa. XLI). *Through these seven trees, the body of Christ is signified . . .*). All trees named in the *Dialogus* are given substantial treatment in the *Mariale*.

fire, in the Virgin's case, is her Son's Passion: "Christ's Passion was indeed the fire of examination. Of this it is said in the Psalms, 'You examined me with fire'" (*Passio xpi recte fuit ignis examinationis. Unde ipsius . . . dicit in Ps. Igne me examinasti*) (fol. 59v). The author also asserts that all those who witnessed the Passion (as well as all metals subjected to the fire) were corrupted by it, except the Virgin.

Later in the treatise both Christ and Mary, fruits of the same tree, become medicinal "pomegranates" in the context of the Passion. Indeed, we might find here an iconographic explanation of the carefully rendered pomegranates that form part of the ornamental program of the Patio Mudéjar. The pain and humiliation and, in particular, the bitterness (appropriate, of course, to the taste of the fruit itself) of the Virgin's experience of the Passion is evoked but is then subsumed, on the one hand, into a discussion of the healthful medical properties of pomegranates, citing authorities such as Avicenna and Pliny and, on the other, into references to the Virgin's conversion of her pain into ecstasy as she meditates on the events of her Son's Passion:

[Fol. 85r:] On Christ's Passion and Mary's Compassion: LVII: Mary is compared to a pomegranate tree, or to a pomegranate. Can. IIII. Your fragrance is like a garden of pomegranates, etc. *Malogranatus* is the pomegranate tree; *malogranatum* is its fruit . . . [fol. 86r]. The liquid is sweet affection and the nucleus is strong virtue. This apple's liquid was indeed made sweet for this season, for at the time of the Passion, from the above-mentioned fragments is produced vinegar. While one is useful for medicines, the other is sweet and flavorful for rumination. What could be sweeter and taste better for rumination with a healthy and loving palate than to paint before one's inner eyes an image of Mary? Therefore, turn over and over again in your soul with what ardors, with what affections, with what excesses and ebullitions she was made anxious, tortured, raptured, and inebriated daily, as John says, considering the place of the Passion, visiting the place of his apparition, contemplating and going up to visit the place of his ascension, commemorating him seated at the Father's right hand, gazing upon her Son, her only son, her love, all her heart, half of her soul, portion of her most worthy flesh. Mary is compared not just to a pomegranate but to a garden of pomegranates, of which it is said that this tree goes up like a tender plant before the Lord. . . .⁴⁸

⁴⁸ "De xpi passione et marie compassionem: LVII: Maria dicitur malogranatus vel malogranatu[m]. Can. IIII. Emissiones tue paradisi malorum puniceorum, etc. Et ibidem sicut fragmenta mali punicei ita gene tue, etc. Malogranatus arbor est. Malogranatum fructus eius . . . [fol. 86r] liquor id est affectio dulcis et nucleus id est virtus fortis. Liquor enim huius mali pro isto tempore dulcis fuit quia in fragmine superdicto pro tempore

The Virgin is later compared to the *ungula*, or onyx, a tree whose “tears,” or resin, are converted into precious stones, hard and impermeable, as soon as they appear (fols. 101v-102r). This section is dedicated to an exposition of the Virgin’s strength of heart, even though her heart was pierced by thorns during the Passion. The onyx plant when burned ignites into flames, like the Virgin’s heart; like the *mulier amicta sole* of the Apocalypse (the woman clothed by the sun with the moon beneath her feet, a common metaphor for the Immaculate Conception [Apoc. XII:1]), however, she is not consumed.

As mentioned, the motif of the Virgin’s ecstatic visions prior to and during the Passion was quite probably unique to Iberia. It was incorporated, still closely related to the motif of the Tree of Life, into Eiximenis’s *Vita Christi*, which characterized the Christian devotional climate of fifteenth-century Castile prior to the Isabelline reforms. It is present, for example, in excerpts of Eiximenis’s text found in the fifteenth-century *Santoral* (BNM MS 12688), discussed earlier, a manuscript almost certainly used for the preparation of sermons.⁴⁹ According to Eiximenis, while the Virgin stood beside her Son’s cross, she “was raptured and her soul was raised up [to heaven], after which she was alleviated of all pain and filled with great consolation” (*de como fue robada [y] alçada la alma de la vge[n] bien aventurada . . . fue aliviada de todo dolor [y] llena de grand consolacion . . .*) (fol. ccccviii-r). At that point: “She was completely changed into another and, beholding her Son on the Cross and now being privy to great secrets, . . . she dropped to her knees [and] adored it with all reverence. . . . [E]mbracing the cross . . . she said, with all her heart, ‘Oh, Tree of Life watered by the fountain of paradise. . . .’”⁵⁰

passionis valde extitit acetosus. Ille utilis ad medicandum; iste dulcis et saporosus ad ruminandum. Quid enim dulcius quidve sapidius ad ruminandum palato sano et amoroso quam coram internis oculis depingere si mariam. Deinde volve et revolve animo quibus ardoribus, quibus affectibus, quibus excessibus, quibus ebullitionibus angebatur, cruciabatur, rapiabatur, inebriabatur cotidie ut dicit Johannes. Locum passionis considerans, visitans loca apparitionis, contemplanus locum ascensionis, visitans ipsum ascendentem, comemorans ipsum in dextra patris sedentem, prospiciens filium suum unigenitum suum, amorem suum, totum cor suum, dimidium anime sue, portionem dignissimam carnis sue. Comparatur et Maria non tam malogranato set etiam [fol. 86v] ipsi paradisi malorum puniceorum de quo dictum est quod attulit arbor ista ascendit quasi virgultum coram domino. . . .” BNM Ms. 8952, fol. 85r. The last five words of this passage are from Isaiah 53:2; this verse, like the several that follow, concerns the Man of Sorrows.

⁴⁹ Robinson, “Preaching to the Converted.”

⁵⁰ “[F]ue toda mudada en otra. . . . E acatando al su fijo en la cruz y conoscoiendo los grandes secretos . . . finco las rodillas [y] adorola con toda reverencia . . . abrazando

The same motif is found in an anonymous fifteenth-century treatise written for a female patron (San Lorenzo del Escorial, b.III.3). It relates how the Virgin is swept away (*arreatada en el espíritu*) and taken to a “great city,” where she is shown the “tree of paradise” by the Sainted Fathers of the Old Testament (fol. 6r). The tree, they tell her, will not be complete until her son is upon it. They then urge her not to fear, for her son is destined to be their salvation.

As I have written elsewhere, the Tordesillas Epiphany may also have direct connections to contemporary meditational trends of the Nasrid court.⁵¹ The diminutive bird perched atop the tree proffered by the Virgin appears to be closely related to a treatise entitled *Rawḍat al-Taʿrīf bi-l-Ḥubb al-Sharīf*, written by Granadan Sufi mystic and vizier Ibn al-Khaṭīb.⁵² The text centers on a “Tree of Love” (*shajarat al-ḥubb*), ascended by an ecstatic bird in hopes of union with the deity. Rather than a simple or unidirectional case of a monolithic Islamic influence on Christian meditative practices and imagery, however, I believe that Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s treatise was probably deeply affected by Lullian thought, or perhaps by the larger tradition of meditative trees outlined in the preceding pages—the point of transmission again being the royal court, given that Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s patron, Muhammad V of Granada, was a close ally of Pedro I of Castile.

Like Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*, Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s tree is based in the Qur’anic concept (1:125) of the Universal Tree and is thus inverted, its roots spreading up into the sky.⁵³ The tree’s branches, however, like those of the *Mariale* analyzed above, also reach and fill the sky (1:90). Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s tree must sprout from a seed planted in the fertile soil of the devotee’s soul (1:42), where it will flourish and grow if its owner

a la cruz . . . dijo con toda entreguedat de coraçon ‘O arbol de vida regado de la fuente de parayso. . . .’” (emphasis added).

⁵¹ Robinson, “*Mudéjar Revisited*.”

⁵² Emilio García Gómez, *Poemas árabes en los muros y fuentes de la Alhambra* (Madrid: E. García Gómez, 1985); Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawḍat al-Taʿrīf bi-l-Ḥubb al-Sharīf*, ed., M. Kattānī, 2 vols. (Beirut: Al-Dār al-Bayḍā, 1970); Emilio de Santiago Simón, *El polígrafo granadino Ibn al-Jatīb y el sufismo: Aportaciones para su estudio* (Granada: Excma. Diputación Provincial, Instituto Provincial de Estudios y Promoción Cultural: Departamento de Historia del Islam de la Universidad, 1983); *Diccionario de autores y obras andaluzes*, ed. J. Lirola Delgado and J. M. Puerta Vilchez, s.v. “Ibn al-Jatīb”; Puerta, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe*; Robinson, “Les Lieux de la Lyrique”; and Robinson, “Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb,” in D. Stewart and J. Lowry eds., *Dictionary of Literary Biography, Arabic Literary Culture, 1350-1830* (London, 2007).

⁵³ Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawḍat al-Taʿrīf*; specific citations in this section will be given in parentheses in the main text, with volume number preceding page number.

is among those who love God (1:101). Here, Ibn al-Khaṭīb cites, in a particularly interesting way in light of the *Mariale*, key Qur'anic verses, or *suras*, referencing the Virgin (*surat Maryam*) (1:102 nn. 64 and 65). This tree's fruit, like that of the other trees we have examined, may be harvested (2:454-55) in the form of spiritual exercises (2:457).

To undertake its ascent—a voyage that, as in the case of the *Mariale*, has both love and knowledge as its goals but is also presented as a journey to the interior of the tree (1:116-17)—the reader's soul must become a bird (1:44). This concept is strikingly reminiscent of a passage from the *Zohar*: “When Rabbi Abba saw a tree whose fruit turned into a bird and flew away, he wept and said, ‘If men only knew to what these things alluded, they would rend their garments down to their navels because this wisdom is now forgotten!’”⁵⁴ Like the turtledove perched on the branch of a ban tree in a well-known poem by Ibn ‘Arabī,⁵⁵ Ibn al-Khaṭīb's birds also “teach men's souls how to love” (1:365). The soul's ascent, as in the case of the trees in Lull or the *Mariale*, is also likened to the process of reading or of meditation (1: 112-19). All parts of the tree are named and linked to chapters or sections of Ibn al-Khaṭīb's encyclopedic treatise, with individual branches containing information about Sufism itself, spiritual exercises or—in a somewhat different approach from that adopted in the Latin or Jewish tradition but very much within the Islamic tradition—verses of love poetry filled with lost hearts, burning entrails, and swollen, burning eyelids.⁵⁶ Leaves with names like the “Leaf of Fear and Reverence” (2:652) are placed along branches such as the one called “From Knowledge to the Manifestation of the Beloved” (2:662). The leaves are also likened, as are the various mansions at which the contemplative soul stops on its ascent to God's dwelling place in the *Mariale*, to the stations or places (*maqām*; *maqāmāt*) (1:153) that God's lovers must visit as they undertake their voyage toward union with him.

The actual image of the Tree of Love is also important to the process proposed by Ibn al-Khaṭīb. He suggests that readers make it a mental *tashbīh*, or “similitude” (1:101), and the original manuscript was accompanied by sketches of the Tree of Love probably drawn by Ibn al-

⁵⁴ *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:671-72, “Trees and Herbs” (*Zohar* 2, *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, 15b-16b).

⁵⁵ See, for example, Ibn ‘Arabī, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, 171.

⁵⁶ See Ibn al-Khaṭīb and Santiago Simón, *El polígrafo granadino Ibn al-Ḥaṭīb y el sufismo*, for a thorough discussion of the treatise's organization; see Robinson, “Les Lieux de la Lyrique,” for a discussion of some of the verses.

Khaṭīb himself.⁵⁷ Later, however, he admonishes his readers to divest themselves of any attachment to images and to pass through the station (*maqām*) of darkness, after which Allah, the divine beloved, will be their *jalīs* (boon companion) at a paradisiac soirée of wine and song in a garden shaded by trees (2:500). The celestial vision is very similar to the one proposed by Ramon Llull to his readers as they contemplate the “Arbre Celestial” (Celestial Tree), the final of the seven trees of his *Arbor Scientiae*. A link, moreover, between Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn*, discussed earlier, and the court of the Naṣrids during the mid-fourteenth century is found in the *Escala de Mahoma* (Muhammad’s Ladder), whose Arabic original Darío Cabanelas links to the visual evocations of that theme that he has identified in the wooden ceiling of the Comares Hall in the Alhambra, probably dating to the 1330s.⁵⁸

The frequent comparisons between Christ and roots made by medieval Latin commentators of the Old Testament do not appear, for the most part, to have engendered a coherent visual tradition. In Castile, however, during the first decades of the fifteenth century, these concepts materialize into an *acheiropoieta* (an image not made by human hands) capable of effecting miraculous conversion. Bonaventure does include and analyze the motif at length as he explicates John 15:1 (“*Ego sum vitis vera . . .*”) in a treatise not to my knowledge contained in Castilian libraries during the fourteenth or fifteenth century.⁵⁹ Nowhere, though, is this verse, and the analogy it proposes, embodied so literally as in the *Cristo de la Cepa*, or the *Christ of the Vine* (fig. 5), “found” by a wealthy Toledan Jew in his vineyard.

The story goes that a Jew was working one day among his vines.⁶⁰ As he was just about to sink his hoe into a particularly recalcitrant clump of weeds, he looked down and saw the *Cristo*. The *Cristo* is about twelve inches tall, and it clearly configures the outstretched arms and joined legs of Christ Crucified, as well as showing traces of the roots and vines from which it was generated, as legend has it. Weeping copiously, the Jew fell to his knees and immediately accepted the Christian

⁵⁷ The drawings of a “sacred tree” are mentioned in M. Kattānī’s introduction to Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Rawḍat al-ta’rīf*, as being present in manuscript copies of the *Rawḍat* housed today in Istanbul; I have not yet been able to view them but hope to do so in the near future.

⁵⁸ See Cabanelas, *Salón de Comares en la Alhambra*.

⁵⁹ Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*, 367; the text is identified as anonymous in *PL*, vol. 184.

⁶⁰ This is related in the newspaper clipping from 1879 placed alongside the object, which is displayed in the Cathedral Museum in Valladolid.

truth for his own. Housed today in the Museum of the Cathedral of Valladolid, the *Cristo* originally belonged to the reformed Benedictine monastery of San Benito in the same Castilian city.⁶¹ It was probably donated during the first decade of the fifteenth century by Sancho de Rojas, archbishop of Toledo, who had received it from the converted Jew whom he himself had baptized.

On the one hand, the *Cristo de la Cepa* conforms to some of the most basic characteristics of the devotional image as it is understood in current art historical discourse: as a representation of the Crucified Christ, it is concerned with the Passion, and its size lends itself to an intimate, individual relationship between viewer and viewed. On the other hand, its appearance sharply distinguishes it from other European devotional images, whose impact on viewers is almost always one of striking, and at times even disturbing, verisimilitude. No claim would ever be made that the *Cristo* is realistic in the conventional sense of this term. Its body is never quite severed from its rootness or vineness, and the cross grows out of, or into, the body in an organic way that makes it difficult to distinguish where one begins and the other ends. Indeed, I believe that precisely these characteristics account for its immediate success in effecting conversion, reducing its Jewish discoverer to tears on sight.

Very specific conversion issues also pertained in the Benedictine monastic community into which the *Cristo de la Cepa* was introduced. Its donation to San Benito coincided almost exactly with the visit to Valladolid of the radically anti-Jewish Dominican preacher San Vicente Ferrer, an event that precipitated numerous conversions. I have argued elsewhere that San Benito and its monks were directly involved both in these conversion efforts and almost certainly in the pastoral care of the new converts.⁶² Interestingly, a very old copy of a now-lost treatise entitled *El Libro de las Batallas de Dios*, composed by the converted Rabbi Abner, whose Christian name was Alfonso de Burgos, and known to have existed in San Benito's library,⁶³ began with a reference to Christ

⁶¹ On San Benito de Valladolid, see *Monasterio de San Benito el Real de Valladolid, VI Centenario, 1390-1990*, ed. Javier Rivera (Valladolid: Ayuntamiento de Valladolid: Instituto Nacional de Empleo: Escuela-Taller Monasterio de San Benito, 1990); and Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted."

⁶² Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted."

⁶³ Federico Sangrador Miguela, *La iglesia de San Benito el Real de Valladolid: Restaurada y dedicada, actualmente, al culto y veneración de la Santísima Virgen del Carmen; Relación histórico-descriptiva* (Valladolid: J. R. Hernando, 1904), 44-45.

as the “the true root of the Christian faith” (*verdadera rraiz de la fe Cristiana*).⁶⁴

The tradition represented by Ibn ‘Arabī’s *Shajarat al-Kawn* is also important to the interpretation of this object, in terms of both the way the *Cristo de la Cepa* appears to function visually and the way late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century converso writers use the topos of the “true root” (*verdadera rraiz*). In addition to its established tropic relationship to the human Son of the Christian God, the phrase evokes numerous biblical passages that would have resonated with a Jewish or converso audience. The mystical vine also finds precedents among the topoi employed by Ibn ‘Arabī in the *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq* (hereafter *Tarjumān*), a compilation of classical Arabic love lyrics with clear mystical overtones.⁶⁵ In one of the compositions that make up the *Tarjumān*, Ibn ‘Arabī makes mention of a thorny vine (*al-balbāla al-mashūka*) in proximity to numerous evocations of Jesus’ name (*‘Īsā*). Also present is a female bishop (*usqafa*), whose likeness to the Virgin is clear. References to “the pure virgin” (*al-udhrā’ al-butūl*) appear in a composition likewise thickly sprinkled with words derived from the root *m-s-h*, from which is also derived the Arabic word for “Messiah,” *masīh*.⁶⁶

Castilian Christianity before the Isabelline reform tended to diffuse Christ’s pain by using metaphors of trees, water, perfumes, and fire. This tendency finds echoes in Naṣrid Granada, in the form of a late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cult that formed around a shrine dedicated to the tenth-century Sufi martyr, Ḥallāj, who was mutilated and then hung on a gibbet in Baghdad (tradition has it that he was crucified) because of his daring poems and exclamations celebrating the ecstatic union he had achieved, through mutual love, with *his* beloved, Allah.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Carlos del Valle and Johann Maier, *Polémica judeo-cristiana: Estudios* (Madrid: Aben Ezra, 1992), 75-77.

⁶⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, 13-15.

⁶⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Tarjumān al-Ashwāq*, 9.

⁶⁷ For Ḥallāj in general, see Herbert Mason, “Ḥallāj: A Martyr for Truth,” *Boston University Journal* 21, no. 3 (1971); Louis Massignon, *Akhhār al Ḥallāj: Recueil d’oraisons et d’exhortations du martyr mystique de l’Islam*, 3rd ed. (Paris: Libr. philosophique Vrin, 1957); Massignon, *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansūr Ḥallāj: Martyre mystique de l’Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 mars 922, Étude d’histoire religieuse*, 4 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1975); and Samah Selim, “Mansur al-Hallaj and the Poetry of Ecstasy,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 21, no. 1 (1990): 26-42. For the cult of Ḥallāj in Granada and in al-Andalus in general, see Massignon, *La Passion de Husayn Ibn Mansūr Ḥallāj*, 2:324-52; María Jesús Rubiera Mata, “Un aspecto de las relaciones entre la Ifrīqīya Hafṣī y la Granada Nasrī: La presencia tunecina en las tariqāt místicas granadinas,” *Les cahiers de Tunisie* 26 (1978): 165-72; Santiago Simón, *El polígrafo granadino Ibn al-Jatīb y el sufismo*, esp. 24-32. He is mentioned and quoted on several occasions in Ibn al-Khaṭīb’s *Rawḍat*, as well as numerous times by Ibn ‘Arabī throughout his oeuvre.

The most common translation of *cepa* is “pruned vine,” but the term may also be translated as “stump,” which in turn links it to *jūdhā*, the Arabic word often used to refer to Ḥallāj’s gibbet or cross.

Both José Miguel Puerta and ‘Abd al-Wahab Meddeb have explored Ibn ‘Arabī’s discussion of what, in effect, amounts to the mystic’s desired creation of a mental image that serves as a devotional one.⁶⁸ Such an image oscillates between likeness (*tashbīh*) and abstraction (*tanzīh*); in an extended treatment of the much-discussed Qur’anic passage “There is nothing like him/nothing is like him” (Qur’an 42:11), Ibn ‘Arabī cautions against coming down too firmly on either side of the line between immanence and transcendence. He recognizes and respects the importance of images to Christians but firmly advocates for a more interiorized, private process of image use in devotions.⁶⁹ The mechanics of how this idea made its way into the Christian mainstream have yet to be worked out. It may not, in the end, be possible to separate it from similar Augustinian ideas, but it is interesting to note that at least one Castilian bishop, Alonso del Madrigal, “El Tostado,” bishop of Ávila, appears to have been convinced of the validity of a tradition concerning the prophet known as the “Gabriel *ḥadīth*.” Both Meddeb and Puerta cite it in explicating Ibn ‘Arabī’s views on what amount to devotional images: as the Angel Gabriel and the prophet agreed, “Man should worship God as though he could see him.”⁷⁰ Alonso del Madrigal makes a statement to the same effect in his exegesis of the Ten Commandments, bound in BNM MS 4202 just after his *Confessional* (BNM MS 4202, fol. 121).⁷¹ The comment appears in the context of a discussion of the symbolic value of the Eucharist, which El Tostado privileges above visual representations of Christ.⁷² This provides an interesting place from which to undertake an examination of our final two examples.

⁶⁸ Puerta, *Historia del pensamiento estético árabe*, 744-805, esp. 797-99; ‘Abd al-Wahab Meddeb, “La imagen y lo invisible: Ibn ‘Arabī: Estéticas,” in *Los dos horizontes (Textos sobre Ibn ‘Arabī)* (Murcia: Editora Regional de Murcia, 1992), 259-69.

⁶⁹ For some of Ibn ‘Arabī’s views on the question of images in a Christian context, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makīya*, ed. A. Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmīyah, 1999), 1: 337-43.

⁷⁰ Al-Nawawī, *Al-Arba ‘in al-Nūwawīyya: Fī-l-ahādīth al-saḥīḥa al-nabawīyya/Forty Hadīth: An Anthology of the Sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad*, trans. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Ḥadīth no. 2, pp. 28-33.

⁷¹ See M. Castro, *Manuscritos Franciscanos*, no. 244; the manuscript was completed on March 10, 1460.

⁷² Gregory Kaplan has also recently examined some of El Tostado’s very distrustful attitudes toward holy images in “Imágenes de santidad y poderes imaginados,” *La Corónica* 33, no. 1 (2004-5): 99-112. His focus is primarily on El Tostado and more generally on

Another key biblical commonplace which is omnipresent in the works of medieval Latin commentators is the equivalence of Christ with the Tree of Life located in the middle of the garden of paradise. Indeed, a treatise often attributed to Bonaventure, the *Vitis Mystica* (The Mystical Vine) opens with an evocation of the tree: “The Tree of Life, which is in the middle of paradise, Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose leaves are medicine, but whose fruit is truly eternal life” (*Lignum vitae, quod est in medio paradisi, Domine Jesu Christe, cuius folia sunt in medicinam, fructus vero in vitam aeternam* (Numbers XVII:8; Ecclesiastes XV:3; Isaiah XXII:22; Apocalypse III:7; John I)).⁷³ In early fifteenth-century Castile, however, the topos takes on particular importance and significance because of its usefulness in a polemical context, a characteristic which probably in turn heightens its value as a devotional topos. As in the case of the *Cristo de la Cepa*, the biblical symbol of the Tree of Life is pushed to the furthest limits of its possible meanings and rendered literal. As in the two images to be considered below (figs. 5 and 11), Christ is not *hung* upon the Tree of Life, but rather, due to Castilian and, perhaps especially Hieronymite reticence before images of his crucified body, he *becomes* it.

In the Castilian textual tradition, the topos is even represented in the first person in Christ’s voice, for example, in a late fourteenth-century *Biblia Moralizada* (BNM MS 10232, fols. 114r-114v), almost certainly proceeding from a very early Hieronymite context.⁷⁴ In the commentary on the Song of Songs, specifically in the verse that begins “veni in ortum meum soror mea . . .” (Cant. V:1), Christ in paradise is presented as a tree growing in the heavenly Garden of Delights: “Here [Christ] says to the church, ‘Your words have been heard, for I have taken on flesh in my orchard, which is the Empyrean Heaven, that which is above all the other heavens, where the Garden of Delights is found. . . .’”⁷⁵ The clearly Old Testament lineage of this topos explains its centrality to the *Zohar*:

Castilian Catholicism, as foreshadowing some of the issues that would be raised almost a century later by the Counter-Reformation. I, however, would argue that the immediate social and historical context in which El Tostado was writing provides a much more satisfactory explanation.

⁷³ Bonaventure, *Lignum Vitae*, 367.

⁷⁴ Robinson, “*Mudéjar* Revisited.”

⁷⁵ “Aquí dize [Jesucristo] ala egl[es]ia las tuyas palabras son oydas por quanto tome carne en el mi huerto co[n]viene a saber en el cielo empireo el cual es sobre todos los cielos onde es el huerto de los deleytes. . . .” Fols. 114r-114v.

Rabbi Abba said: Why is it written “the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good [and evil] (Genesis 2:9)? The Tree of Life (*tiferet*). We have already learned that it is a journey of five hundred years . . . and all the waters of creation . . . separate in different directions beneath it. The Tree of Life is actually in the middle of the garden, and it gathers all the waters of creation and they separate beneath it. . . .”⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, the late fourteenth-century converso writer known as Juan el Viejo de Toledo in his *Memorial de Cristo* (BNM MS 9369), a treatise intended to convince his erstwhile Jewish brethren of Christian truth, also renders Christ’s Passion in tree terms, conflating the image with the Last Judgment:

Christ is also declared the Messiah in the book called the *Sohar* [*sic*], which contains all the great secrets of the Law. He is also declared the Messiah in the Book of Cenhadrin as I have said earlier. . . . [He is] the Messiah King who offered himself for us on the wood of the cross. The Messiah King is also signified by that which is said in the first chapter of the Law, in which the Tree of Life was in the middle of paradise, and it had such great virtue that anyone who ate of it would live for all eternity. And it was of this tree that, according to the Holy Gospel and to Solomon in the Book of Proverbs, he is a tree of life to all those who come near to him, for the tree that was in paradise was wood, and through the wood of the cross in which our Lord placed his shoulders did all of humanity attain everlasting life. . . .⁷⁷

It is also worth noting that on fol. 28v of the *Memorial de Cristo*, the author mentions the *Zohar* (“*el Sohar, libro de los grandes secretos*”) as a source for knowledge of the Passion.

In another image from an early fifteenth-century Hieronymite context, the conceit of Christ as the “Tree of Life in the Middle of the

⁷⁶ *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. 1, no. 27: “The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge,” 2 (*Zohar* 1, 35a).

⁷⁷ “El caldeo declara toda esta autoritat de la pasion por el mexias otrosy en el libro que es llamado eli hayu rraaba lo declara por el mexias otrosy en el libro que es llamado el *Sohar* es libro delos grandes secretos de la ley la declara por el mexias otrosy en el libro de cenhadrin segund he dicho suso . . . [es] rrey mexias que se ofrecio por nos en el madero de la cruz otrosy por el rrey mexias seneficava aquello que dize en el primero capitulo de la ley que el *arbol de la vida* estava en meytad del parayso y que tenia tal virtud que el que del comiese viviria para siempre. Era deste arbol segund el lo dixo en los santos evangelios y por el salomonem en el libro de los puervios [*sic*] *arbol de vida* es atodo aquel qu e se allega ael ca el arbol que estava enel parayso era madero y por el madero dela cruz en que poso nuestro sennor sus espaldas cobro el unaman linaje la vida perdurable. . . .” Fols. xxx-xxxii (emphasis added).

Garden of Paradise” comes to be represented as both eucharistic symbol and devotional image. The image is part of the ornamental program of the chapel of the Hieronymite villa retreat (*granja*) at Valdefuentes, only a few kilometers from the Marian pilgrimage center of Guadalupe, then in Hieronymite hands (figs. 6-9). There, on both the north and south walls immediately surrounding the altar, we find delicately rendered trees, often embraced by vines sustaining thick leaves and clusters of ripe grapes, at the center of compositions that include grassy knolls and hillocks, as well as a wide variety of birds. The birds are reminiscent of the Tordesillas Epiphany; such a connection is not a stretch, for in the 1370s the Clarisan convent was reformed by Pedro Fernández Pecha, the founder of the Hieronymite Order, in collaboration with Juana Manuel, queen of Castile.⁷⁸

The images may have a Jewish connection as well. Although it is impossible at present to demonstrate a direct connection, the images in the chapel at Valdefuentes are strikingly reminiscent of an image found in a Hebrew Bible produced in Zaragoza in 1404. The full-page illustration shows two intertwined trees growing out of a rocky crag, above which two birds hover. It is a representation of the Mount of Olives, where, as Jewish tradition has it, the Messiah will appear to announce the redemption of God’s chosen race. Clara Bango García notes that since this image appears in the manuscript in proximity to others that represent liturgical objects such as menorahs belonging to the Temple of Jerusalem, it is possible that it also refers to the latter’s reconstruction.⁷⁹ Resonances of this image with the image program chosen for the Hieronymites’ private chapel become all the more striking when we remember that the Hieronymites were particularly likely to welcome recently converted Jews as brothers of their order.

This imagery is also more generally evocative of the Song of Songs, a text which José de Sigüenza,⁸⁰ a sixteenth-century historian of the Hieronymite Order, indicates was one of the most important in the training of novices. Given that the *granjas* served the purposes of retreat and study, such connections would be logical and, as in the texts discussed

⁷⁸ Robinson, “*Mudéjar* Revisited.”

⁷⁹ *Memoria de Sefarad: Toledo, Centro Cultural San Marcos, Octubre 2002-Enero 2003* (Madrid: Sociedad Estatal para la Acción Cultural Exterior, 2003), cat. no. 151, pp. 200-201. The manuscript in question is Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, MS Heb. 31; the dating is found in the colophon, fol. 395v.

⁸⁰ José de Sigüenza, O.S.J., *Historia de la Orden de San Jerónimo*, ed. Francisco J. Campos y Fernández de Sevilla (Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 2001), 1:318-20.

in the previous pages, the imagery can easily serve the function of eucharistic or Christological representation as well.

On the western wall of the chapel, another curious and, in my experience, unique image appears (fig. 10). Two palm trees stand side by side, the tips of their fronds interwoven, and should the celebrant of mass look up, they would be in his direct line of sight. The *Mariale* discussed earlier contains what would appear to be the key to their interpretation. Though the presence of that treatise at the Hieronymite *granja* cannot be demonstrated, given that it is as far as we know an *unicum*, it is almost certainly a compilation of Marian knowledge widely disseminated throughout Castile.

The Hieronymite Order placed enormous importance on devotion to the Virgin, and it is certainly possible that the Marian metaphors analyzed in the *Mariale* would also have been known to the chapel's audience. On fol. 68r, the Virgin is compared to a palm, the same palm tree under which Deborah rested and in whose cool shadow all faithful and devoted souls may dwell. Her fruit is Christ, who, like the fruit of the palm, is sweet and red on the outside because of his humanity but strong and hard on the inside because of his divinity. From this seed, the treatise tells us, the Virgin sprouted. This palm tree also offers a path of ascent to the hearts of those who contemplate it: "I said, 'I will climb the palm tree' (*Dixi ascendam in palmam*) (Cant. VII), once souls have been prepared to fly to the sky (*ad volandum in celum*) (fol. 72v)," (a concept which clearly resonates with the birds of Tordesillas and Ibn al-Khaṭīb) through stations linked to the Seven Virtues, from the valley of tears to the heights of union with the divine.⁸¹ Readers are later told that this path of contemplation is efficacious both for Christians and infidels (*sive sint fideles sive infideles . . .*) (fol. 69r). We then read that all men are united in one body whose nourishment is the body of Christ (fol. 69v), a passage that may provide the key to the visual representation of the topos in a setting used for the performance of the mass.

It is then stated, on the authority of numerous botanical specialists, that there are masculine and feminine palms, with God representing

⁸¹ The short treatise entitled *Palma Contemplationis* included at the end of the Rothschild Canticles operates on similar principles, but it is certainly far from evident that it served as a source for BNM Ms. 8952; moreover, the comparison of the palm tree specifically to the Virgin is not characteristic of the Northern European compilation. See Hamburger, *The Rothschild Canticles: Art and Mysticism in Flanders and the Rhineland circa 1300* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990).

the masculine and the Virgin the feminine (fol. 73v). The masculine, “father” palm bent down his branches to effect an embrace, which the manuscript’s compilers liken to their chaste interpretation of the kiss of the Song of Songs: “With his heart and not his mouth, let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth” (*Corde non ore osculatur me osculo oris sui*), a somewhat sanitized version of Cant. 1:1. This is, of course, a representation of the Incarnation in “tree terms,” and if we bear in mind the admonitions of the *Mariale* as we contemplate the image on the chapel wall, we will also remember to venerate the Virgin Immaculate, “[w]ho was created from the beginning and before time, and who will be until the end of time” (*Quia ab initio et ante secula creata est et usque ad futurum seculum non desinet* [Ie. XVI]).

The Valdefuentes chapel was private rather than public, available only to the monks during their summer retreats and to those whom they chose to invite. Therefore, it is clear that the same tree imagery that we have seen held strong appeal for converso writers and preachers also spoke to the Hieronymite brothers in ways that more literal images of Christ’s life or Passion did not. The employment of the motif in such a context was certainly influenced by the fact that the Eucharist was a very problematic concept for conversos, many of whom were readily received into the Hieronymite Order.

According to Felipe Pereda, Christian writers throughout the fifteenth century perceived the motif of the vine to be a *topos* capable of “uniting rather than dividing” and thus potentially of great utility in effecting conversion or in achieving unity between “Old” and “New” (or recently converted) Christians. Nonetheless, at a moment of crisis in the mid-fifteenth century, it was used in a polemical context. It is the principal focus of the ornamental program of the *Puerta de los Leones* (Portal of the Lions) of the Cathedral of Toledo in a reinterpretation of the Tree of Jesse, which replaces the Old Testament prophets traditionally represented with portraits of Toledan bishops.⁸² Pereda connects this particular reinterpretation of a long-lived iconographic motif with a specific source. In the winter of 1465, Alonso de Oropesa, prior of the Hieronymite convent of La Lupiana (near Toledo), at the request of the archbishop of Toledo, Alonso de Carrillo, wrote a treatise entitled *Lux ad Revelationem Gentium*. In this work, the vine is expounded at great length, particularly

⁸² “La Puerta de los Leones de la Catedral de Toledo: Una interpretación en clave litúrgica y funeraria,” in *Grabkunst und Sepulkralkultur in Spanien und Portugal/Arte funerario y cultura sepulchral en España y Portugal*, ed. Barbara Borngässer, Henrik Karge, and Bruno Klein (Frankfurt: Vervuert Verlag, 2006), 155-90; esp. 176 n. 49, 182-83.

in its conceptualization as the Incarnation.⁸³ Oropesa had begun the work shortly after the bloody confrontations in Toledo between conversos and Old Christians of 1449, but he was urged to finish it in 1462, only a few years before the archbishop would offer to assist the Crown in instituting the Inquisition in Toledo. Though Oropesa's treatise uses the motif in its traditional sense, its propagandistic deployment at such a moment and in such a public context as the Cathedral of Toledo heralded what would prove to be, for many, a deadly intensification of tensions between the ecclesiastical establishment and the group of converted Jews for whose souls they were responsible.

The tree imagery I have been discussing had a long devotional after-life. A small wooden sculpture from Carrión de los Condes, near Palencia, produced during the first years of the sixteenth century, places Christ's body over the surface of a gnarled tree, painted a color similar to that of the blood he sheds (fig. 11). The expression of agony on the Savior's face is echoed and almost overwhelmed by the truncated limbs of the enormous tree that serves as his cross. The tree has been pruned in a way that is still typical of horticultural practice in Castile—the plaza at the center of Carrión is filled with such trees. The band of inscription containing the words *credo* and *deus* which circle the tree's base (its *cepo*) seem to hint at the persistence of the conversion-inspiring links in the minds of Iberian Christians between the Perfect Man, the Universal Tree, and God.⁸⁴ From the 1470s onward, however, these Iberian trees ceded center stage to enormous altarpieces conceived both as signs of orthodoxy and as teaching tools for a sector of the populace that the ecclesiastical establishment perceived to be problematic. Uniquely Castilian, these large altarpieces dedicated to the complete exposition of the "Life of Christ" now proclaimed, in plain and obvious visual terms, the Christological truths which had before been both hinted at by a shared symbolic language and hidden among the lush leaves and sturdy branches of a noble tree.⁸⁵

⁸³ Pereda also notes use of the motif by Alonso de Cartagena, author of *Defensa de la unidad cristiana*, whose treatises had definitely been read by Alonso de Oropesa. For both of these authors, the vine is an example of peace and concordance. Pereda, "La Puerta de los Leones de la Catedral de Toledo," 178-83. For Oropesa's treatise, see Luis A. Díaz y Díaz, *Luz para Conocimiento de los Gentiles* (Madrid: FUE-UPSA, 1979), 7-97.

⁸⁴ Many thanks to Michael McCormack for this observation.

⁸⁵ As mentioned above, scholarship has only just begun to address the connections among Isabelline reform, the Inquisition, and image use and politics in Castile. For the moment, consult Pereda, "El debate sobre la imagen en la España del siglo XV"; and Robinson, "Preaching to the Converted." Both authors are preparing book-length studies related to the topic.



Figure 1: Epiphany, Santa María de Tordesillas, 1363-1380, detail.



Figure 2: "Patio Mudéjar," Santa María de Tordesillas, 1363-1380.



Figure 3: "Patio Mudéjar," entrance to the "Capilla Dorada," Santa María de Tordesillas, 1363-1380.

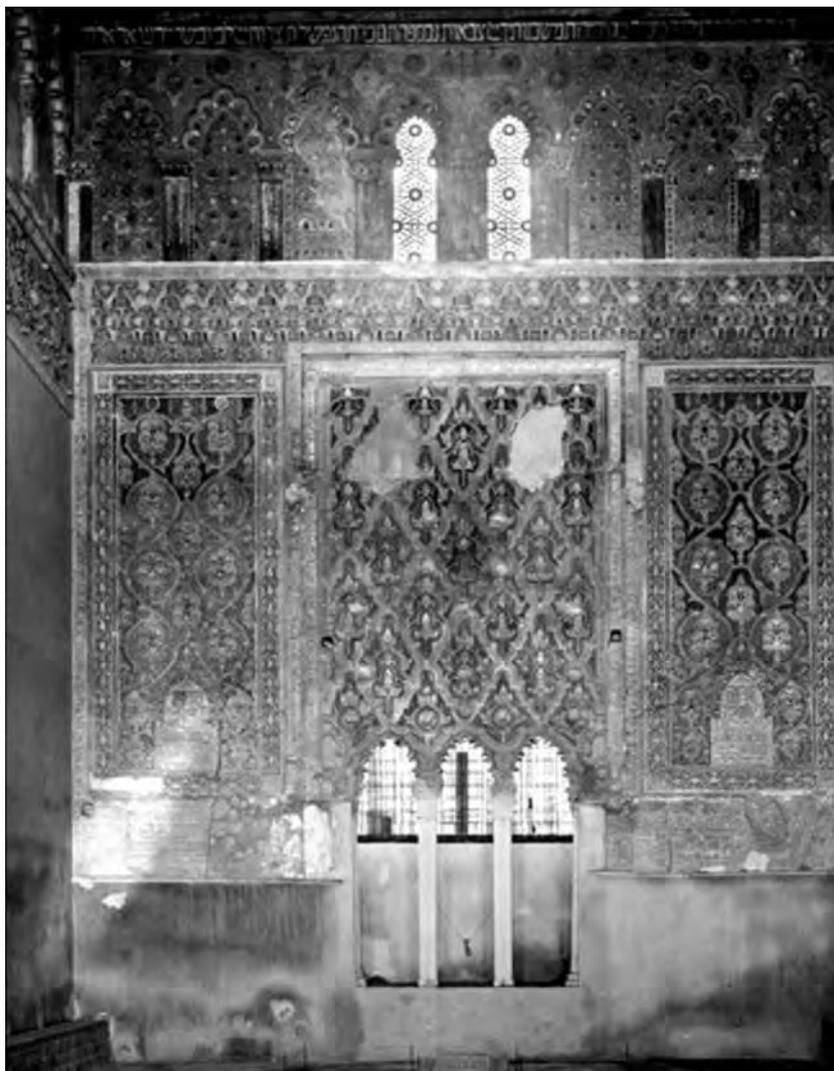


Figure 4: Torah Wall, Synagogue of "El Tránsito," Toledo, mid-fourteenth century.



Figure 5: "Cristo de la Cepa," early fifteenth century, Museo de la Catedral, Valladolid.



Figure 6: Nave, Private Chapel, Hieronymite *granja* at Valdefuentes (province of Cáceres), early 15th century.

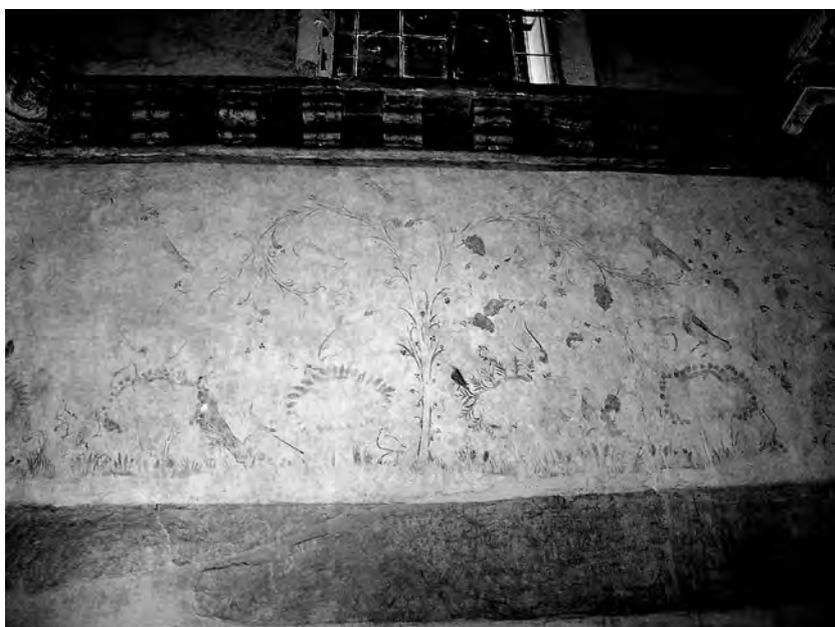


Figure 7: "Tree of Life," Hillocks and Birds, Fresco Painting, East End, Private Chapel, Hieronymite *granja* at Valdefuentes (province of Cáceres), early 15th century.



Figure 8: "Tree of Life" (details), Fresco Painting, East End, Private Chapel, Hieronymite *granja* at Valdefuentes (province of Cáceres), early fifteenth century.



Figure 9: Hillocks and Birds, Fresco Painting, East End, Private Chapel, Hieronymite *granja* at Valdefuentes (province of Cáceres), early fifteenth century.



Figure 10: Two Palms, Fresco Painting, East End, Private Chapel, Hieronymite *granja* at Valdefuentes (prov. Cáceres), early 15th century.



Figure 11: "Cristo de la Cepa," sixteenth century, Museo de Santiago, Carrión de los Condes.