

## THE PARCHMENT OF THE “TORRE TURPIANA”: THE ORIGINAL DOCUMENT AND ITS EARLY INTERPRETERS <sup>1</sup>

P. S. VAN KONINGSVELD  
G. A. WIEGERS  
Leiden University

### 1. Introduction

In March 1588 a parchment and several relics, including bones purporting to be of the protomartyr St. Stephen, and a piece of a veil which allegedly had belonged to St. Mary, were discovered in the former minaret of the Friday Mosque in Granada. Judging from the writings of those who attempted to translate the document in the late 16th and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the parchment contained texts in *Arabic*, *Spanish*, and *Latin*. Together with the Lead Books, discovered in various caves in the outskirts of Granada in the years 1595-1600, which contained Arabic texts in a mysterious Arabic script, the parchment stood at the beginning of an important national cult. The parchment, the veil and the bones became important relics of the Granadan cathedral, which had hitherto sadly lacked such assets. After being transferred to the Vatican at the beginning of the seventeenth century and their anathematization in 1682 they were kept in Rome until the year 2000 when they were returned, together with a collection of relevant documents on CD-Rom, to the Archbishopry of Granada. <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The authors wish to thank Mercedes García-Arenal for her valuable help in providing materials unavailable to them.

<sup>2</sup> In a declaration dated 17 June 2000, written and signed by the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Ratzinger, the materials handed over to the Granadan archbishopry are described as follows: «1. n. 1 pergamino antiguo, 2. n. 236 láminas circulares de plomo, 3. n. 14 cajas de plomo, 4. n. 2 láminas grandes de plomo, 5. n. 20 CDRom de documentación histórica». The said declaration was published in the catalogue of the exhibition organised on the occasion of the return of the lead tablets to Granada, viz. Martínez Medina, F.J. (ed), *Jesucristo y el emperador Cristiano*, Córdoba 2000, 749. In this publication we also find the very first photo of the parchment, some of the lead tablets, stones in which they were found, and other related materials.

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To the best of our knowledge, subsequent to their being anathematized no researcher ever obtained any direct access to these materials, including the parchment, during the centuries of their preservation in Rome. The extensive literature on the subject had to rely without exception on translations and copies, only. After a long series of attempts to get access to these materials in the Vatican, we were finally able, with the permission of the Abbott of the Sacromonte Abbey, to study the parchment now preserved in its archive, during the summer of 2002. After having drawn the attention of the authorities of the Sacromonte to the small and hardly legible photograph of the parchment published in the book *Jesucristo y el Emperador Cristiano*, Córdoba 2000, p. 624, we also obtained the permission to have new photographs made on the spot with the aim of having them published in a short forthcoming article in *Al-Qanṭara*. The negatives of these photographs, made by Mr. Javier Algarra from Granada, are presently preserved in the Archivo del Sacromonte.

## 2. Layout and Script

Our study of the parchment itself, which measures 63,5 by 49 cms, was limited to its recto side. As the parchment was framed and protected by glass, we were unable to have a look at its verso side. However, according to the librarian, don Vicente Redondo, to whom we express our gratitude here for his help, nothing is written on the verso side. Here follow some general observations on layout and script (cf. Plates I-V).

The eye of the curious observer of the document is first of all drawn to what presents itself as a number of *squares and rectangular spaces with legends in Latin and Arabic script, alternately in brown and red ink*. These squares and rectangular spaces are encompassed by *marginal notes, most of them written in Arabic, one written in (a different) Latin script*.

In each of the numerous squares (48:29=1392 in all), there usually figures one letter, only. In the much less numerous rectangular spaces (15:10=150 in all), however, one usually observes one, or even more than one, word. Both at their right— and left-hand sides, the squares and rectangular spaces under discussion are enclosed by vertical double-line spaces. This suggests a kind of “unity” between both parts,

notwithstanding their widely different form. The double-line spaces contain occasional letters, usually in brown ink. These letters are sometimes similar to Greek (usually capitals Delta, Thèta, and Phi), sometimes to Latin letter forms. A third category of these script forms falls outside this scope and may be classified as "*mysterious*". The script of these Latin letters is basically Gothic script, or "letra francesa".<sup>3</sup> The sequences of these letters within the double-line spaces accompanying the Latin squares are as it were "mirrored" by the same letters in the double-spaced margins of the rectangular spaces with Arabic script: The upper left is mirrored by the lower right and the upper right is mirrored by the lower left, so that, also here, a "unity" seems to be suggested between the Latin and Arabic parts. Finally, two Greek letters, a Delta and a Theta, are found at the left hand upper margin very near to the left corner of the upper squares.

In the upper squares, usually one Latin letter is found. Nevertheless, there are exceptions. The squares of line 16, no. 21 and line 16, no. 22 seem to contain two letters. There are also squares that are blank. This may be due to the fact that they have been left blank from the outset, but it may also be that the ink disappeared in the course of time. Brown and red ink usually alternate. Sometimes, however, we find a sequence of two or more brown or red letters after each other. Not all letters in the squares itself are Latin ones, here we find also some Greek letters, and letter forms that cannot be defined and which can be qualified as mysterious (for example the letter in square 25, 38).

As for the *Arabic script* of the rectangular squares, as well as the marginal notes of the document, the following remarks can be made. As a rule, all passages in Arabic are completely devoid of diacritical dots and also of vowels (but there are some rare exceptions to be discussed below). In addition to the lack of diacritical dots and vowels, the script is of an outspokenly cursive nature, allowing for the connection of letters that normally would remain unconnected. In the third place, a careful scrutiny of the Arabic passages shows that their script contains many *fancy and hybrid elements*. As an example, let us take the marginal note reproduced in Plate II. Sometimes we are dealing with *meaningless ligatures* (passim), at other times (e.g. in

<sup>3</sup> Morterero y Simón, C, *Apuntes de la iniciación a la paleografía española de los siglos XII a XVII*, Madrid, 1979 (2), 41.

sentences 3 and 4) with *letter forms vaguely reminiscent of the Hebrew or Syriac script*, and finally (e.g. in the second note, in red ink) *letter forms seems to be similar to the Greek script*. These pseudo-Arabic features are to be observed in all “Arabic” passages of the parchment. (We already observed similarly fantastic letter forms in the Latin script of the central squares; they also figure in the Latin script of the final note; see below).

The combination of these three features in the Arabic script of the document shows that we are dealing with a conscious process of *mystification*. In view of the nature of some of the fancy forms introduced into the script, the mystification observed may be interpreted as an attempt to create an “authentically ancient” atmosphere. In the case of the “Arabic” passages, this conscious process of mystification resulted, as a rule, in a totally *incomprehensible and meaningless* text, notwithstanding the fact that a few words might be “deciphered”, with the help of great ingenuity.

The final marginal note, figuring at the left corner below, was written in a Latin script form that differs clearly from that of the other parts of the document (cf. Plate V). This final note in Latin, containing a passage starting with the words *Relacio Patricii sacerdotis*, is the only text that can be deciphered without any major difficulty. We are dealing with a Latin script that was identified by various contemporary sources as “French script” (*letra francesa*).<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Translations and Transcripts by Early Eyewitnesses

#### 3.1. *Survey of the Early Eyewitnesses*

To establish who were the first to study the document, we used Adan Centurión, Marqués de Estepa’s *Información* (1632) as an early source, together with publications by D. Cabanelas Rodríguez,<sup>5</sup> C.

<sup>4</sup> Alonso, C., *Los apócrifos del Sacromonte (Granada). Estudio histórico*, Valladolid, 1979, 24; Centurión, A., *Información para la historia del Sacromonte, llamado de Valparaiso y antiguamente Illiputano junto a Granada donde parecieron las cenizas de S. Cecilio, S. Thesiphon y S. Hiscio, discipulos del Apostol, único patron de las Españas, Santiago y otros santos discipulos dellos y sus libros escritos en láminas de plomo*. Primera Parte, Granada, 1632. f. 6 v.

<sup>5</sup> Cabanelas Rodríguez, D., *El morisco granadino Alonso del Castillo* (estudio preliminar: Juan Martínez Ruiz), Granada, 1991<sup>2</sup>.

Alonso,<sup>6</sup> and G. Morocho Gayo.<sup>7</sup> Alonso, who closely follows the events described by Estepa,<sup>8</sup> tells us that shortly after the parchment was discovered on 18 March 1588, a committee of canons was installed by the then bishop of Granada, Juan Méndez de Salvatierra. The translators were bound by secrecy under the pain of excommunication.

The first who was approached was the *licenciado* José Fajardo, who had been professor of Arabic at the University of Salamanca. He excused himself, however, stating that he did not know Arabic well enough. Under the responsibility of the *licenciado* Francisco López Tamarid, "familiar y intérprete del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición deste reino de Granada" and *racionero* of the cathedral of Granada, Miguel de Luna and then Alonso del Castillo were asked to examine the document. Luna demanded that he were allowed to study the parchment at home, which he did between 26 and 30 March 1588. According to Cabanelas Rodríguez, again following Estepa, Fajardo and Francisco López Tamarid assisted him. Subsequently, and allegedly independently from Miguel de Luna, Alonso del Castillo studied the parchment between 2 and 5 April of the same year. There is agreement among the students of the Sacromonte affair that Miguel de Luna's translation of 1588 is found in Biblioteca Nacional Madrid, Ms 5785, f. 156r-156v, and Castillo's translation of 1588 on f. 156v-157r of the same manuscript.<sup>9</sup> We assume that these identifications are correct, but it should be noted that both translations are not *expressis verbis* attributed to these translators.

After having made these initial translations, Castillo and Luna made others, such as for example the version of Castillo published by Hagerty, which is based on manuscript C 28 of the Sacromonte Ar-

<sup>6</sup> Alonso, C., *Los apócrifos del Sacromonte (Granada), Estudio histórico*, Valladolid, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Morocho Gayo, G., «Estudio introductorio», Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*. IV *Escritos sociales 2. Escritos políticos*. León, 1999, 143-426.

<sup>8</sup> Centurión, *Información*, f. 6r-12r.

<sup>9</sup> These translations by Luna and Castillo are not complete. A number of elements to be discussed below, viz. 3.2.4 (the marginal notes), 3.2.5 (commentary), and a large part of 3.2.7 (the Gospel text), are not to be found in them. Even if the point cannot be proven, it seems in view of our present knowledge of the parchment itself, very hard to believe any longer that these were made independently from each other. The basic elements of the translations, including their wording, is almost identical in a number of essential points. Mainly minor variants exist (for example patriarcha/perlado; sathan/demonio etc.).

chive.<sup>10</sup> From the perspective of the Arabic parts, the most important of these is a manuscript in the handwriting of Alonso del Castillo preserved in the Archivo del Sacromonte (B 2), which, apart from Spanish translations of all the Arabic texts of the document, also contains a transcript of the Arabic texts of the rectangular spaces together with a translation of them and brief comments. (No reason is given why only these parts of the Arabic legends of the document are provided in their original script and language.) On April 2, a transcription of the Latin text (*Relacio Patricii*) was sent to the Vatican.<sup>11</sup> Presumably the version signed by Tamarid himself had come into existence by then as well.<sup>12</sup> The process came to a standstill because of the sudden death of Salvatierra, and the new archbishop, Pedro Vaca de Castro y Quiñones, revived it. In 1592 a copy was sent to the court in Madrid for inspection. The copy in question, which is now preserved in the Escorial library, was signed and certified by Tamarid.<sup>13</sup> Benito Arias Montano was only prepared to give his expert opinion when he had been able to scrutinize the document itself after it had been brought to him in Seville by canon Pedro de Lorca in 1593. Montano was probably assisted and seconded by his student Pedro de Valencia, whose own opinion, expressed in writing in 1607, will be discussed below as well.<sup>14</sup>

Another early eyewitness and interpreter of the document is the Morisco author, al-Ḥajarī, who provides rather extensive quotations from it in the first chapter of his *Kitāb Nāṣir al-Dīn*.<sup>15</sup> Al-Ḥajarī stud-

<sup>10</sup> Hagerty, M.J., *Los libros plúmbeos del Sacromonte*, Granada, 1998(2), 19-25, 325-328.

<sup>11</sup> Alonso, *op. cit.*, 26 note 12 (Arch. Vat. Spagna, vol. 34, f. 253r).

<sup>12</sup> López Tamarid, Francisco, *Relación de las sanctas Reliquias que se hallaron en la torre de la mezquita de tiempo de moros...*, Biblioteca Nacional Madrid, MSS 1583, f. XLIX-LXII. Published in Wiegiers, G.A., «“The Old” or “Turpiana” Tower in Granada and its Relics according to Ahmad b. Qāsim al-Ḥajarī», R. Gyselen (ed.), *Sites et monuments disparus d’après les témoignages de voyageurs. Res Orientales*, VIII (1998), 193-207.

<sup>13</sup> Alonso, *op. cit.*, 27. The said manuscript is extant in the Escorial library, R II 15. The description by Braulio Justel Calabozo (*La Real Biblioteca de El Escorial y sus manuscritos árabes. Sinopsis histórico-descriptiva*, Madrid, 1987(2), 157 note 3) suggests that Tamarid’s *Relación* and the Escorial MS are the same version. We have not been able to study it.

<sup>14</sup> Cabanelas Rodríguez, D., «Arias Montano y los libros plúmbeos de Granada», *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, XVIII-XIX (1969-1970), 7-41; Morocho Gayo, G., «Estudio introductorio», 225-228.

<sup>15</sup> Ḥajarī, Aḥmad b. Qāsim al-, *Kitāb nāṣir al-dīn ‘alā l-qawm al-kāfirīn* (*The Supporter of Religion against the Infidels*). Historical study, critical edition and annotated

ied the parchment in 1599, shortly before he escaped from Spain to Morocco.<sup>16</sup> It is interesting to compare some of his interpretations to the views of the Christian scholars, as he was convinced that the parchment was an ancient document, dating from the beginning of the Christian Era, interpreting it, however, from an Islamic theological perspective, viz. as an early and authentic Christian testimony to the truth of the message of Islam.

### 3.2. *Comparative Discussion of the Main Elements of the Parchment*

#### 3.2.1. The Cross at the Top

According to Tamarid, whose translation (including a reproduction of the iconographical details) we will take as a point of departure because of its completeness (it is the only one which offers a complete translation of the Gospel text), its date (presumably about 1588) and its author (see above), there was a large cross at the top, formed by five small crosses.

This information is more or less confirmed by the parchment (cf. Plates I and III). The crosses are indeed to be found in the same configuration as described by Tamarid. Moreover, at the upper right hand side they appear also at the beginning of the Arabic text. The crosses are also reproduced by the marquis of Estepa.<sup>17</sup> The crosses were no doubt meant to give the document an authentic Christian outlook. Al-Ḥajarī does not mention the crosses at all. This is probably due to his interpretation of the parchment as a proto-Islamic document.

#### 3.2.2. The Arabic Introductory Lines

Then followed five lines *in Arabic* (cf. Plate III) which according to Tamarid read: "Prophecy by John the Apostle about the destruction and judgment of the peoples and [also] about the persecutions which

translation by P.S. Van Koningsveld, Q. al-Samarrai, and G.A. Wieggers, Madrid, 1997, Arabic text, 16-34 / translation, 68-91.

<sup>16</sup> In *Nāṣir al-dīn*, f. 9v, he tells us that he read the parchment while already ten years had passed after it was discovered.

<sup>17</sup> Centurión, *Información*, f. 6r.

will continue thereafter until the Day known in his exalted Gospel, interpreted in Greek by the learned and holy servant of the faith, Dionysius the Areopagite.” With slight modifications, this translation is also found in the early translations by Luna and Castillo.

The Christian scholars only offer translations of this passage. The only eyewitness transcribing a few words of the Arabic text is al-Ḥajarī, who makes the following remarks: “At the top was written: ‘The mysterious book of the evangelist John concerning the destruction of the universe’ (*jafr al-munājil Jūḥannā fī kharab [sic] al-wujūd*).<sup>18</sup> It is indeed possible to read in the first words something like *jafr al-munājil*, but the remainder of the “Arabic” text is, to the best of our understanding, illegible and devoid of any meaning. The interpretation of the Christian scholars only derives its plausibility from the contents attributed to the prophecy in Spanish (no. 5 below) and to the Latin text at the end (no. 8), not from an objective reading, *on its own merit*, of the text. The Arabic phrasing is fantastic.

### 3.2.3. The Discovery of the prophecy by Cecilius (in Arabic)

According to the eyewitnesses, the preceding note was followed by story of the discovery of a prophecy by Cecilius, bishop of Granada, written *in Arabic* as well (cf. Plate III). In it, this “bishop of Granada” related how he had been stricken with blindness as a result of an eye-disease when he was on the way from Jerusalem to Athens. Upon reaching Athens he was cured in a miraculous way: his eyes were touched by the veil with which Mary had dried Jesus’ tears. After regaining his sight, he discovered the wonderful prophecy in a Hebrew script, translated into Greek by Dionysius the Areopagite (a disciple of Paul’s, and the first bishop of Athens, see Acts 17: 34). Consequently, Cecilius told that this prophecy was translated by him from Greek into the spoken language, Romance, and then explained in the language in use among the Christians of Spain.

The sources for this translation are again the early translations by Miguel de Luna, Alonso del Castillo and Tamarid. Also al-Ḥajarī agrees with this interpretation in general terms.<sup>19</sup> However, according to him, and contrary to the interpretation of the Christian scholars, this

<sup>18</sup> *Nāṣir al-dīn*, f. 8v.

<sup>19</sup> *Nāṣir al-dīn*, f. 9r.

whole passage did not begin with a reference to the Holy Trinity, but with the words: "In the name of the venerable and *multabība* essence" (*Bismi l-dhāt al-karīma al-multabība*, and not: *al-muthallatha*). With the help of al-Jawharī's dictionary al-Ḥajarī understood that the key-word *al-multabība* referred to "the plain and pure essence which was neither composite nor mixed", in accordance, of course, with the authentic Islamic doctrine of the divine essence.

From our side, we should like to remark that not a single "word" of the "Arabic" lines concerned warrants the interpretations of the early eyewitnesses, including al-Ḥajarī, even though it is indeed possible to read in the third word of the first line something like *al-multabība*. However, the remainder of the "Arabic" text is, to the best of our understanding, completely illegible and devoid of any meaning. Also these interpretations, it seems to us, only derive a certain "plausibility" from the contents attributed to the prophecy in Spanish (no. 5 below) and to the Latin text at the end (no. 8), and, again, not from any objective reading, *on its own merit*, of the text. The Arabic phrasing is, again, fantastic.

#### 3.2.4. Marginal Notes in Arabic

Before discussing the prophecy itself, we have to pay attention to the already-discussed accompanying notes in Arabic script in the left margin (in brown and red ink, cf. Plate II). According to al-Ḥajarī, "In the margin was written in Arabic in letters without diacritical points: 'O student of the riddle, you must combine! If you do not combine, you shall not fully grasp the mystery!'" (in transcription: *yā ṭālib al-laghz, aqrin wa-in lam taqrin lam tuḥiṭ bi-fahm al-jafr!*). In fact, there are 7 small sentences in brown ink ending with a letter that could be interpreted as a *hā'* (often used as an abbreviation of *intahā*, meaning "end [of note]"). These are followed by 4 small sentences in red ink, ending with a word that could be read as *fī*. Although the first words of the first note could be read as *Yā ṭālib*, one has to use a great deal of imagination to follow al-Ḥajarī in the remainder of his transcription. In fact, the words of these notes seem to be devoid of any real meaning (cf. our earlier remarks about the script of these notes).

On his turn, López Tamarid tells us the following about these notes: "En el margen del pergamino original está unas letras en

arabigo que dice así: ‘*con coraçon puro leerás estas cosas sublimes y sabrás la sciencia soberana y si no supieres las dos lenguas, no alcanças la propheta hebrea*’”. This reading is followed by Pedro de Valencia (who had had access to Arias Montano’s assessment, as we will see below), who reads the marginal note as follows: “*Con limpio corazón leerás estas cosas soberanas y alcanzarás la ciencia divina. Y si no supieres las dos lenguas, no alcanzarás la Profecía Hebrea*”.<sup>20</sup> This remarkable coincidence can certainly not be explained, in our view, by assuming that both scholars reached the same translation of an illegible and meaningless text while working independently from each other! The translation by Castillo published by Hagerty reads the marginal note as: “*Tú que quieres saber la significación de estas cifras conviene que estés instruido en las letras y ciencia de la sagrada teología, y asimismo para entender lo que está escrito abajo*”. This is certainly somewhat closer to al-Ḥajārī’s interpretation!

### 3.2.5. The Prophecy in Spanish

Let us now turn to the Spanish text of the *prophecy* itself (cf. Plates III and IV) Here, again, we have to distinguish between the data provided by al-Ḥajārī on the one hand and the Christian scholars on the other hand.

This text, as transcribed by López Tamarid, by Alonso del Castillo (i.e. the version included in the Sarcromonte Archive, B 2), and by Morocho Gayo,<sup>21</sup> was said to have stated that after *six* centuries furious ministers would cast Stygian shadows, which would darken the light of the sun, while the Temple of the Lord would suffer grievous persecutions. After *fifteen* centuries a dragon would rise in the North, which would divide the faith into sects (apparently a reference to the Reformation). Then three enemies would appear in the northern parts, who would fill the earth with vice, threatening mankind in general and the priesthood (Sp. *sacerdocio*) in particular. They would try to extinguish the light, which would recede and seek shelter. These miraculous events would herald the coming of the Antichrist, who was

<sup>20</sup> *Obras Completas*, IV, 450.

<sup>21</sup> Appendix III, I, 424-426 (based on Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia, MS 9/2229).

going to fulfil this prophecy, and mark the beginning of the Final Judgment, as well as the appearance of the Judge of the Truth.

In order to judge the transcriptions and interpretations of the Christian scholars, it should be kept in mind that the squares were read from the outset with a particular "key", as can be gauged from some explicit remarks made by some of them. According to López Madera and Ignacio de las Casas, one started with the dark letters, following the squares until the end, and then started again at the beginning (left upper side) reading the red letters.<sup>22</sup> The Christian interpreters indeed started at the left upper part, with the dark letters. The sequence of the dark letters was followed until the end was reached. Then the red letters were "read". Thus, the first seven words of the square (dark color) were read as "*la edad de la luz ya comenzada*". The final words (red color) are read by Tamarid as "*cuando le plazera*".

If we collate the transcriptions with the squares themselves, however, we reach the following conclusions. Even if quite a number of these interpretations can be followed by the modern detached observer, we cannot but conclude that in many cases these at best are conjectures, due to the incredible variety and vagueness of the letter forms. In some cases, however, the interpreters ignored a clear letter in order to obtain some kind of result. This holds also true for the empty cases, the majority of which appears in the "red" sequence. Another conclusion that can be drawn from a comparison of the transcriptions/interpretations with the parchment is that all the extant transcriptions are incomplete. The last words about the coming of the Judge of Truth match line 23, which leaves the last six lines *untranslated*. One can only speculate why this is so. Difficulties of interpretation may play a role here. For upon a closer look it looks like that the majority of the red letters in the last six lines (lines 24-29) are a kind of repetition of the brown ones next to them, albeit with some variations and exceptions.

For the sake of further comparison, we here present the result of our own efforts to decipher the texts of the squares, applying the same "key" as the early Christian scholars, i.e. we shall start with the brown letters and continue with the red ones. (In our transcription,

<sup>22</sup> *Apud* Morocho Gayo, «Estudio introductorio», 199-200.

■ indicates a blotted square, of which the letter or symbol is unreadable, while □ indicates a square that has remained empty, as far as can be judged without the use of infrared light and on the basis of the photographs at our disposal.):

*Dark letters:*

1. La [h]edad de la lu<sup>23</sup>z ia co[m<sup>24</sup>]encad
2. por el maestro i con la pasion
3. rrod[e]mida con dolor del cuerp
4. o i los [p]rofectas pasados q<sup>25</sup> al
5. umbraθ[?] de la ter[c]era ■ [?][?]so
6. na esperar[u]n su [s]beaida ■ cn
7. n ndi al acabamiento quie[?] ■
8. onta[?] ■ or bo[c]a deste maestro
9. en la misericordia<sup>26</sup> preferid
10. o a lo<sup>27</sup>s ■ e[?]s hglos ca<sup>28</sup>nplidas d
11. [?] su a[d<sup>29</sup>]ven□miento por pecado
12. s ■ raues en el monØo q<sup>30</sup> cometi[d?]
13. os s ■ ran [t<sup>31</sup>]inieblas se leuant
14. ar[o<sup>32</sup>]n mui escuros en las oria
15. ntales portes i a las ocident
16. ales se estenderan por minist
17. ros furiosos q en ellas seran
18. criados, con q la l□z de nuestr
19. o sol se eclipt<sup>33</sup>ará i el templo
20. del Maestro i su fe graues pose<sup>34</sup>

<sup>23</sup> U erroneously in red.

<sup>24</sup> M turned on its head

<sup>25</sup> With dot above the letter.

<sup>26</sup> Quite clear!

<sup>27</sup> O in the form of Δ.

<sup>28</sup> A very clear a.

<sup>29</sup> Slightly blotted and difficult to read.

<sup>30</sup> q with horizontal bar above.

<sup>31</sup> Looks like a v. Perhaps a later correction or emendation.

<sup>32</sup> o with a vertical bar half in it.

<sup>33</sup> Unclear.

<sup>34</sup> Two red letter following directly next to each other here.

21. seuciones padeceran, i a las qu
22. inze sglos cu[? <sup>35</sup>]plidos por los
23. pertinaces coraçones endur
24. ecidos nizi[?]das tinieblas s
25. e levp <sup>36</sup>ntarán en las partes de
26. aquilo■ i dellas un dragon sal
27. dra i por su voc <sup>37</sup>a arrojara simi
28. ente [z] sembra la fe diuidira e
29. n sotas, y con la otra iutada el

### *Red letters*

1. mundo ocuparan Δ i de las oci⊕
2. dentales partes saldran los
3. tres eneΦmi■os, su malicia au
4. Φmentando, i por su maestro la
5. sensualidat traeran, i con le
6. pr <sup>38</sup>a nunca uista □el munΔdo se ol
7. ulisiu■na i a la luz en parta i d
8. iminuta de la tierra se re□ir[?]
9. ará zonde con naufragios sus
10. Δtentada sera en el abrigo de
11. la coluna o e su piΦedra con es
12. tas senales pro[?]i[?]geosas i ot
13. Σas q el ξcielo mosrrtai ■e
14. nero umano sera aΔmenazado i t
15. no[?]pecial el [?]aceroocio i an
16. u■nci□ndo el ante[?]x[?]o <sup>39</sup>, que se
17. ra breue sn <sup>40</sup> uenida, con que est
18. a profeΦcia se camplira, i el [?]
19. uizio fenal se acercar[?] quan
20. do se manifestara al mudo est

<sup>35</sup> Mistakenly in red?

<sup>36</sup> Sic.

<sup>37</sup> MS: O.

<sup>38</sup> Erroneously written with dark ink. We interpret it as red.

<sup>39</sup> One large square, occupying the space of four squares?

<sup>40</sup> Sic.

21. a ver■ad u□rdad uerdΦad euss
22. i dad [?] medio zia saldra el ju
23. ez de la uΔrd■d i ucnos se plac
24. era Φn[?]tvoo□das tinieblas s
25. e levantaran [?]n las partas de
26. aquil□n dupvsv dragon sal
27. [d]ra <sup>41</sup> q por su voca <sup>42</sup> arrojara simi
28. onta q semsia sotunia i[a]ae
29. nsotaΔ I con la otra ivtara el

Compared with the document, al-Ḥajarī's data are vague and faulty. According to him, Cecilius had taken a "copy in Greek" of the divination of the Apostle John, which he "then introduced into a diagram consisting of 49(!) squares, while writing within each square a Spanish letter. Then underneath the diagram he added a commentary in Arabic". After having completed the translation of the Arabic [part] "which said that it was the commentary, I started with the Spanish [part] (...), until I found the sign to stop. Then I took from the Arabic —the commentary the [passage] corresponding to the [Spanish part I had just finished reading]. In this way the wording fitted and was understandable. *This [method] was in accordance with the marginal remark: 'O student of the riddle, combine!', because combining is the bringing together of two separate things*". To this al-Ḥajarī adds: "The translations of all those who preceded me —among whom there were people more learned than myself— contained the [Arabic, VK-W] commentary only, while its meaning had not been understood". Nevertheless, the only explicit reference al-Ḥajarī makes to the Spanish text is "that it mentioned something which would take place after the completion of six centuries [reckoning] from the birth of Jesus —peace be upon him!" However, he vehemently rejects the view of other translators who had interpreted this passage as a reference to the Prophet Muḥammad. (See our further discussion of this issue in the next paragraph, 3.2.6).

<sup>41</sup> Letter resembling.

<sup>42</sup> See note 39.

### 3.2.6. The Commentary to the Prophecy in Arabic

The prophecy in the Spanish language was according to Tamarid and other early interpreters followed by a commentary, said to have been written again by Cecilius *in Arabic*, explaining the hidden meaning of the aforesaid prophecy. (cf. Plate IV).

The texts of this “commentary”, in fact consisting of one or more Arabic words written alternately in brown and red ink in each of the 150 rectangular spaces, has been copied, translated and commented upon by Alonso del Castillo in the unpublished manuscript B 2 preserved in the Archivo del Sacromonte. In his study, Castillo first follows up the 75 spaces with legends in brown ink, and then continues with the second part of the spaces, in red ink. Castillo also provides grammatical and philological comments to each of the 150 passages. Judging from the work of Castillo, we are dealing here with a text in Andalusian dialect, with a vocabulary that also included some Spanish words (like the word *danū*, see below). The authorship of the prophecy is ascribed to St. John the Apostle, “el mas preferido de los apóstolos”(8-10). Castillo’s transcription, translation and commentary deserve a separate study that falls outside the scope of the present article. We will confine ourselves here to a comparison of a longer passage quoted by al-Ḥajārī’s in his already-quoted book *Kitāb Nāṣir al-Dīn*.

Al-Ḥajārī provides what he sees as a poetical quotation of six lines from the Arabic text with a few introductory words:

*Wa-ba’d mā tadammanahu al-jafru — qāla fī ‘l-‘ajamī al-maktūb  
fī ‘l-raqq shay’an mimmā yakūnu ba’da kamāli sittati qurūn min  
mīlād ‘Isā — ‘alayhi al-salām- wa-qāla fī ‘l-sharḥi ‘l-‘arabī (al-qirnu  
mi’atu sana):*

*Min ghamarāt al-sharqayni atā malikun jānī bi-‘l-inshirār  
‘Alā ‘l-wujūdi qāyimun bi-tamāmi ‘l-qadri qad antaṣār  
yā mālikan dāyiman min hadhā ‘l-amri ayna al-farār  
wa-mulku yataḥakkamu ‘alā ‘l-wujūd kullih ilā ‘l-ghurūb  
wa-dīnun yataqaddim ‘alā man qad amlahu min al-‘uyūb  
wa-‘l-sirru yatafahhimu bi-mā al-qadar a’ṭah ‘alā al-dhunūb.*

In our edition of *Kitāb Nāṣir al-Dīn*, we translated this passage as follows:

[Here is] part of the commentary of the contents of the divination.  
In the Spanish text written in the parchment [the author] mentioned

something which would take place after the completion of six centuries, [reckoning] from the birth of Jesus —peace be upon him! He says in the Arabic commentary (and [you should know that] a century is a hundred years):<sup>43</sup>

From the adversities of the very East comes a king gleaming the spread of his power

With the completeness of his power he stands against the world victoriously

O eternal master, where to escape from this event?

A king who will dominate the whole world until Doomsday

And a religion which will proceed against those who have filled it with vices

And a secret which will be understood by [the power] given to it by the Divine decree to nullify sins.

Al-Ḥajarī then continues as follows:

I translated the meaning of these verses. The meaning *they* [viz. the other translators, VK-W] had understood was that the king was in fact the Prophet —may God bless him and grant him peace!—, because they said that he was born in the year 621 after the birth of Jesus —peace be upon him! I am convinced, however, that he was born before that —may God bless him and grant him peace!—, in the fifth century, whereas his religion became known during the sixth [century].<sup>44</sup>

(...) The interpreters disagreed about the meaning of the word *al-jānī* [in the first verse] because it has two meanings. *The pious shaykh al-Jabbis and my own translation said: this is an adjective of the verb janā, which appears in the Noble Quran in the words of the Exalted Lord: ‘Wa-janā al-jannatayn dān’*<sup>45</sup>.

If we compare al-Ḥajarī’s quotation to Castillo’s transcription and translation as preserved in MS Sacromonte B 2, we obtain the following results:

The passage concerned is found in the second sequence of Castillo’s transcript, where he is copying the words of the parchment

<sup>43</sup> The words between brackets are clearly an interpolation or gloss added by al-Ḥajarī later. In our translation we erroneously considered these words to be part of the quotation from the parchment.

<sup>44</sup> Al-Ḥajarī wants to say that Muḥammad was born during the century prior to the year 600, while Islam became spread during the century following it.

<sup>45</sup> Sūra 55:54.

written in brown ink, more specifically No. 27 up till and including No. 49. Castillo reads this passage as follows: (27) "Min 'umrān al-sharqiyyīn" (and not, as in al-Ḥajarī, "Min ghumurāt al-sharqayn") (28) "yatī malikun jānī" (H: "atā"); (29) "bi-'l-inshirār"; (30) "'alā 'l-ujūl" (H: "al-wujūd"); (31) "qāyimun"; (32) "bi-tamāmi 'l-qadri"<sup>46</sup>; (33) "qad yantasiru" (H: "antaṣār"); (34) "bi-sultānin dāyimin" (H: "yā mālikan dāyiman"); (35) "min hadhā 'l-amri"; (36) "ayna 'l-firāru"; (37) "wa-mulkuhu" (H: "wa-mulku"); (38) "mutaḥakāmun" (H: "yataḥakkamu"); (39) "'alā 'l-ujūli" (H: "'alā 'l-wujūd"); (40) "kullihā" (H: "kullihī"); (41) ilā 'l-ghurūbi"; (42) wa-danū yataqaddām<sup>47</sup> (H: "wa-dīnun"); (43) "'alā marqad āmālihi" ("alā man qad amlahu"); (44) "min al-'uyūb"; (45) "wa-'l-yusru" (H: "wa-'l-sirru"); (46) "yataham-māmu" ("yatafahhimu"); (47) "bimā 'l-qadaru"; (48) "a'tahu"; (49) "'alā 'l-dhunūb".

Like in the other texts of the parchment, the script of the passages under discussion contains many hybrid and fantastic elements to underline their ancient origin. These fancy elements result in a high degree of ambiguity of the passages that allow for various interpretations. In some cases, where the script seems to be somewhat "clearer", some transcriptions are evidently wrong, while in these cases Castillo and al-Ḥajarī appear to have committed the same "mistake". An example of this is passage No. 32, where the MS is clearly lacking the sign for *rā'* (in "tamāmi 'l-qadri", read both by Castillo and al-Ḥajarī), the more plausible reading being: "tamāmi 'l-qaddi". The high degree of coincidence between both the transcripts of Castillo and al-Ḥajarī leads us to the conclusion that the latter in fact depended on the work of the former which he adopted while adding some minor "corrections".

Al-Ḥajarī may also have known Castillo's translation. He explicitly refers to the translation of "the pious shaykh al-Jabbis": Discussing the meaning of the word *jānī* (in the first verse, cf. passage No. 28 of Castillo's transcription), al-Ḥajarī remarks: "The pious Shaykh al-Jabbis and my own translation said: this is an active adjective of the verb *janā* (...)" This remark seems to be in agreement with Castillo's translation: "(27) De la poblacion de los orientales (28) saldra un furioso rey (29) con milicia y arma".

<sup>46</sup> The MS has no sign for *rā'*, while the presumed *qāf* has two dots (!).

<sup>47</sup> Castillo translates: «con *daño* que se adelantara», apparently identifying the Arabic *danū* as a Spanish word.

In some cases, however, where al-Ḥajarī's transcription differs from that of Castillo, his translation (which we do not know) would of course have been different, as well. Cases in point are lines 4 and 5 of the poem quoted above from al-Ḥajarī's book. In accordance with our published translation, al-Ḥajarī's text speaks there of "A king who will dominate the whole world until Doomsday, and a religion which will proceed against those who have filled it with vices". According to al-Ḥajarī, "the priest" (probably the archbishop, VK-W) did not like his translation of this passage and asked him: "How do you reach this translation?" "He disliked this very much", al-Ḥajarī adds:

because according to my translation, in fact the unbelievers (viz. the Christians, VK-W) are the ones who would fill it with vices. The Religion of the Prophet —may God bless him and grant him peace!— proceeded against them. This corresponds to the words of the Exalted Lord in the Noble Quran: 'He sent him with the Guidance and the Religion of Truth to proclaim it over the whole of religion, even though the polytheists dislike this'. This [leads us to the following] meaning (though God knows best!): the religion of the Prophet —may God bless him and grant him peace!— proceeds against the polytheists who have filled it with vices.

As we saw earlier, Castillo's transcription (Nos. 37-44) differs in various points from that of al-Ḥajarī. The key-word *dīn* (in No. 42) allowing al-Ḥajarī to attribute, also in this case, an Islamic tendency to the document, does not figure in Castillo's text. In stead, he reads: *danū*, a word he identifies in his translation with the Spanish word *daño*, figuring as follows in his translation: "(37) Y su reino (38) sera tan pujante (39) por las hedades (40) y por todo su proceso (41) hasta el occidente (42) con *daño* que se adelantara (43) en el obdormiento de su deseo (44) por mandado de los ynconuenientes". There seems to be no allusion to Islam here, at all.

### 3.2.7. Concluding Remarks by Cecilius in Arabic

Then are said to follow some concluding remarks, again by Cecilius, *in Arabic*, including the beginning of the Gospel of John (mainly the verses 1-14, though the Spanish translation by Tamarid

shows deviations from the Vulgate).<sup>48</sup> Although a scholar such as Pedro de Valencia offers a discussion of this section,<sup>49</sup> the reading is not confirmed by the parchment (cf. Plate IV). In this section we also find the "signature" of Cecilius, which Arias Montano discusses, as we will see below. This signature is usually transcribed as "Cecilius Obisopus Granatensis". The only element one can read, however, is the name of "Sisiliyūh". The other two words are not clear. There are a few "diacritical" dots here, but in a fantastic manner, on the word that was interpreted as "obispo" or "episcopus".

### 3.2.8. Final report by Patricius in Latin

Finally, we find the report by Patricius, servant of Cecilius written in Latin (cf. Plate V). It describes certain things hidden by him viz. a prophecy and relics, as well as the reason why these were hidden, viz. in order to avoid discovery by the Moors and because Cecilius felt that his martyrdom was imminent. This text also contains a descriptive list of the relics accompanying the parchment, which indeed were found when it was discovered. Following the transcription of Castillo (which is in need of a number of corrections), its text reads as follows:

relacio patricii sacerdotis. Serbus dei cecilius episcopus granatensis cum in iberia esset et cum videret dierum suorum finem oculi mihi dixit se havere procerto suum martirium et apropinquare et ut pote qui ille qui in deo amauat tesarum suarum relicarium mihi comendauit et me admonuit ut oculte haverem et in loco locarem et ut in potentiam maurorum nunquam benerit afirmans esset tesaurum salutis atque cienciae certae et plurimum laborarse et iter ffecisse terra marique et debere esse in oculo loco donec deus velit illum manifestare et ego melius quam intellexi in hoc loco clausi ubi iacet deum rogans ut eum obseruet et reliquiae q nun hic iacent sunt: Profeciae diui Ionnes euangelista circa finem mundi medius pannus quo uirgo maria abstersit lacrimas ab oculis in pasio sui fili. Os diui Steven primi martiris. Deo gracias.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> This again coincides with al-Ḥajārī's testimony in *Nāṣir al-dīn*.

<sup>49</sup> Pedro de Valencia, *op. cit.*, 430.

<sup>50</sup> Apud Hagerty, *Los libros plúmbeos*, 25.

#### 4. Palaeographic Comments by Eyewitnesses

Al-Ḥajarī's remarks on the script of the document are uncritical. It was his belief in what he thought to be the content of the document that also determined his conviction that this was the genuine form of the Arabic script used in the East in those ancient times: "In the Arabic script of that time, as found in the parchment, the letter *qāf* had two dots, which proves that the Easterners in this respect are following the old practice [of writing], contrary to the Westerners, because they make the *qāf* with one dot only."<sup>51</sup> As a rule, the "Arabic" passages of the parchment are devoid of diacritical dots (and also of vowels). But there are some rare exceptions. One of these is a word in the first line of the second Arabic note, with a letter resembling a *qāf*, provided with 2 dots. This is a word al-Ḥajarī may have had in mind when writing his above-quoted remark about the *qāf*. The strange and fantastic letter forms to be found in many places of the document may have strengthened his conviction about the ancient date and Eastern provenance of the parchment, even though he does not refer to these characteristics explicitly. However, a careful scrutiny of the Arabic letter forms of the document occasionally reveals letter forms characteristic of the *maghribī* handwriting, for instance in the *dāl*, in various emphatic consonants, etcetera.

The distinguished scholar Benito Arias Montano judged the document as a falsification as well. He carefully studied the parchment itself in 1593<sup>52</sup> when it had been brought to him personally by the Granadan scholar Lorca: "y ahora viendo el mismo pergamino original, que recibí de mano del señor doctor Lorca, y juntamente las prefaciones, copias y traducciones del licenciado Luna, *hechas con diligencia y puntualidad*" [our italics, VK and W]. He also had at his disposal an unpublished study about the parchment by Lorca himself. Arias Montano focuses in his critical assessment on external evidence, but tells us very little about the *contents*. His point of departure is the maxim of *no admitir las cosas inciertas por ciertas*, viz. to be very careful with admitting as religious doctrine other writings next

<sup>51</sup> Al-Ḥajarī, *Nāṣir al-dīn*, 82.

<sup>52</sup> Letter to Juan Fonseca, Deán de la Catedral de Granada. Full transcription in Cabanelas Rodríguez, «Arias Montano y los libros plúmbeos de Granada», also edited in Morocho Gayo, «Estudio introductorio», appendix 1,3, pp. 362-367 in Pedro de Valencia, *Obras Completas*, IV.

to the Sacred Scripture and opinions other than those of the Roman Catholic Church.

According to Arias Montano, the parchment certainly does not date back to the time of Cecilius. It is "viejo, empero no antiguo; viejo digo usado y maltratado más que guardado y conservado, como suelen hacer los que descubren cosas nuevas que nunca fueron antiguas". The script is modern, and written in such a way that it looks ancient, "empero no que imite a las que usaba quatrocientos años ha entre buenos y ruines escribientes, de que tenemos asaz muestras en nuestros libros escritos e instrumentos. La tinta negra y roja no es antigua, sino mala tinta y sin cuerpo para que parezca vieja. Escrito todo con pluma y no con caña, cosa que ha menos de quatrocientos años que se introdujo entre los latinos y griegos y que aún estos no la han dejado —digo los griegos— del todo; los árabes mucho menos". About the signature at the very end he tells us: "Verdad es que la que pone por firma es de otra pluma, de otra letra y de otra forma de tinta, y el tercer vocablo de esta firma adrede puesto, no solo sin xuclas, sino sin notas que distingan las letras, por hacer la lectura dudosa y maravillosa".

Without discussing the details of the contents of the parchment he tells us the following about its historical background: "Conforme a esto, estuvo aquí un maestro de latín Mal Lara, que enloquecía los hombres hallando invenciones de enterrar escritos que prometían tesoros escondidos. Y otro, pintor, que hinchó la tierra y los moldes de monstruos y apariencias y maravillas falsas, sin ningún provecho suyo, aunque lo daba a los impresores. El lenguaje o estilo, traducido, como se pretende, de hebraico en griego, de griego en arábigo y en español, con título de profecía de san Juan apóstol, evangelista y profeta, que lo fue todo, no concierta en frases ni en las cosas ni en los vocablos de ellas con el decir de alguno de cuantos tenemos por verdaderos profetas, ni con el *Apocalipsis*, ni menos con el de las Epístolas y Evangelio de San Juan". The prophecy rather fits in the class of forgeries of which Arias mentions among others the so-called *Testament of Christ*. But in addition to forgeries with a more or less "public" and clear message, there are esoteric and enigmatic ones (i.e. *disimulado estilo*), which are written in a way which is called in Spanish *cifra*. It resembles "a las recetas de los alquimistas y a [las]

<sup>53</sup> Morocho Gayo, «Estudio introductorio», 383.

de algunos empíricos paracelsistas que, con poca ciencia, desatinan a los que siguen hasta entender sus misterios". The Castilian language of the prophecy is modern ("el cual que se hable el día de hoy").

In a letter of 1596 Montano returns to the problems involved in the parchment in the following terms, but bases himself on a transcript that he had apparently in his possession.<sup>53</sup> Because of the lack of diacritics, he tells us, the entire reading is difficult: "el pergamino que acá tengo sacado del que se dize hauer sido hallado en las ruinas de la Torre, si es puntualmente sacado o copiado del original, no lo leerán quatro que entiendan la lengua sin variar en muy muchos lugares de grande manera, porque no solo carece de xuclas o haracas, que son las vocales (que esto no haze mucho negocio a quién está diestro en leer) sino lo que más importa: está falta de los puntos sustanciales de las letras consonantes, y por esto juzgo yo hará adivinar a los ingenios".

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. *The "Authenticity" of the Parchment*

One could argue that the parchment as we have it here, in view of the incomprehensibility of its Arabic texts and the many inconsistencies and corruptions of its Spanish and Latin texts, is perhaps not the original as "found" in 1588, but a copy made by an ignorant scribe. We believe this proposition must be rejected. The first argument in favour of its "authenticity" is its *provenance*: We are not dealing here with a document discovered by surprise in some library or archive but with the parchment which for almost three and a half centuries was preserved in the Vatican among all the other materials, including the *Lead Books*, which had been transferred from Spain to Rome in the 17th century. The second argument is related to the hybrid and fantastic elements to be encountered both in the Latin and the Arabic script. These were obviously intended to lend credibility to the parchment as an ancient document. These features clearly indicate that the document was the product of a conscious act of mystification. This act of mystification included, we believe, the incomprehensibility and meaninglessness of the Arabic texts (with the exception, to some ex-

tent, of the Arabic prophecy written within the rectangular spaces). Had our parchment simply been the copy of originally meaningful Arabic texts, then even an ignorant scribe would at least have left us some understandable passages. This, however, is not the case. In addition, the ease with which the Arabic "words" were written down suggests an experienced and swiftly writing hand. The fact that we are convinced to be dealing here with the original parchment of 1588 does, however, not exclude the possibility *that the Spanish text of the prophecy it contains is in fact a copy of an already existing text which may have circulated earlier*. This remains to be verified by future research. At any rate, we fully agree with Arias Montano's view that the paleographical evidence indicates that our document is not ancient: *We are dealing with a (contemporaneous, 16th-century) falsification*.

## 5.2. *The Religious and Political Message of the Parchment*

The religious and political message of the parchment can, of course, only be understood from its legible parts, viz. the Spanish prophecy and the Latin note. Apart from an apocalyptic message, the *Spanish prophecy* announces, among others, that Reformation and Islam, two entities that often appear as major threats to Catholic Spain in the sixteenth century, would be defeated. The main message of the *Latin note*, on the other hand, seems to have been to lend credibility to the Spanish prophecy as an ancient text towards an Arabophone audience (of Muslim descent): the Moriscos. At least one of the Moriscos, al-Ḥajarī, was convinced of the ancient origin of the parchment, followed the available translations in broad lines, but did not accept its anti-Islamic message. Obviously, this would have undermined his (Islamic) conviction that a genuinely ancient Christian document should perforce confirm the basic doctrines of Islam.<sup>54</sup> But there is not the slightest evidence for his interpretation of the parchment as a proto-Islamic document. We are clearly dealing here with a Roman Catholic message heralding the de-

<sup>54</sup> See for evidence of some sort of influence of the Sacromonte texts on the religious life of the Moriscos: Harvey, L.P., «A New Sacromonte Text? Critical Notes», *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CCI-4 (1984), 421-425, correcting the earlier views of Barkai, R., «Une invocation musulmane au nom de Jésus et de Marie», *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CC-3 (1983), 257-268.

struction of Islam.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, however, the document also contained a symbolic message, viz. in stipulating that the first-century Granadan Christians, including the well-known figure of Cecilius, wrote Arabic and Spanish, just as many Moriscos did. In other words: even though Islam had to be extirpated, Arabic as a language could harmoniously accompany a genuine Christian life. This rather primitive message, the mystifying use of mysterious script forms, as well as the magical squares and rectangular spaces, indeed point, as Arias Montano suggested, to magic, esoteric learning and popular prophecy as the original context and atmosphere of the document.

### 5.3. *The Involvement of Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Translation of the Parchment*

As indicated at the beginning of our article, together with the veil and the bones the parchment became part of an important collection of relics of the Granadan cathedral, which had hitherto sadly lacked such assets. While marking the final destruction of a major symbol of Islam (the old minaret), they also formed part of the foundation of the new Church of Granada and its specific cult. The "Lead Books" were a further development in this assimilationist line. Our survey of early eyewitnesses and interpretations indicates that the basic elements of the interpretation of the parchment were crystallized very soon after it had been discovered. The sources point to a main role of Miguel de Luna and Alonso de Castillo in this process. The early and broad agreement about the otherwise incomprehensible passages of the document should perhaps be understood in the light of the political importance attributed to a "correct" interpretation by ecclesiastical authorities, in a way similar to developments around the interpretation of the Lead Books. Various researches have indicated that the translations of the Sacromonte Lead Books were influenced, if not outright manipulated by the ecclesiastical authorities that supervised this process. Suspicions that the interpretations were not reliable were voiced almost from the outset, but historical evidence for the

<sup>55</sup> This conclusion contradicts Bernabé Pons' assumption that the contents of the parchment would turn out to be very much in line with al-Ḥajarī's interpretations, viz. of a proto-Islamic tendency. See Bernabé Pons, L.F., «Los mecanismos de una resistencia: los libros plúmbeos del Sacromonte y el *Evangelio de Bernabé*», *Al-Qanṭara*, XXIII, 2 (2002), 477-498, 485.

actual behaviour of the principal actors involved has until recently remained largely in the dark. In the last few years a number of researches have appeared that shed new light on this process.

The first to draw the attention to this process was M. J. Hagerty.<sup>56</sup> In 1996, L.P. Harvey and G.A. Wieggers found evidence in the hitherto unknown correspondence between Luis Tribaldos de Toledo and Adán Centurión, Marqués de Estepa. Tribaldos tells Estepa that the convert Muslim Arabist, Diego de Urrea, had told him that when he interpreted the tablets in a faithful way and finding bad Muhammedan doctrine, of which there was much to be found, the Archbishop had become angry, and told him that he had wrongly understood, and that it was impossible that they read like that, and that then he translated them in a way that seemed to be in agreement with good Catholic doctrine.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, Tribaldos accused Pedro de Castro of having paid one of the early translators, the Maronite Archbishop of Mount Lebanon, to change the interpretation of the texts. In his recent article, Benítez Sánchez Blanco quotes Ignacio de las Casas's statements about a process to the same effect. Although initially a defender of the authenticity of the Sacromonte tablets, this Jesuit of Morisco extraction later became one of their fiercest opponents. According to him, the translators of the *plomos* always worked in the presence of the Archbishop, Pedro de Castro, or of persons appointed by him. When problems occurred, these persons opposed a proposed translation of a particular word or passage, thus preventing the translators from saying the truth. Often being descendants of Arabs, the translators were according to Casas afraid of being accused of being bad believers and did not dare to speak out. This they had acknowledged themselves to Casas.<sup>58</sup>

Whether these accusations were in fact grounded, remains uncertain. However, our study of the parchment indicates, to say it mildly, that al-Ḥajarī's proto-Islamic interpretation of the Lead Books cannot

<sup>56</sup> Hagerty, M.J., «La Traducción interesada: El caso del marqués de Estepa y los libros plúmbeos», *Homenaje al Prof. Jacinto Bosch Vilá*, vol. II, Granada, 1991.

<sup>57</sup> Harvey, L.P., and Wieggers, G.A., «The translation from Arabic of the Sacromonte tablets and the Archbishop of Granada: an illuminating correspondence», *Qurtuba*, I (1996), 59-78, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Benítez Sánchez Blanco, R., «Traducción, crítica y denuncia de los libros plúmbeos por el P. Ignacio de las Casas», *Al-Qantara*, XXIII, 2 (2002), 403-436, 418. We have seen above that this situation was different in the case of the parchment.

be accepted at face-value. One should, however, also bear in mind that notwithstanding the reference in the Lead Tablets to the discoveries of the “Turpiana” tower (they were the only documents referring to the tower by this name! <sup>59</sup>), there is no firm proof, so far, that the whole affair was conceived of as one concerted action right from its inception. Perhaps the idea of forging the Lead Tablets only came about when the Parchment and the relics had other results than the forgers had hoped for. However this may be, so far it has become clear that the Parchment is a straightforward Roman Catholic document. A final judgment of the value of the accusations concerning the Lead Tablets, mentioned in the preceding paragraph, can only be given on the basis of a careful study of their originals, now available in Granada.

#### ABSTRACT

The present contribution deals with the famous parchment found in 1588 in the old minaret of the former Friday Mosque of Granada, with texts in Arabic, Spanish, and Latin. Together with the Lead Books, discovered in various caves in the outskirts of Granada in the years 1595-1600, the parchment stood at the beginning of an important national cult. After being transferred to the Vatican at the beginning of the seventeenth century and following their anathematization in 1682 the parchment and the Lead Books were kept in Rome until the year 2000 when they were returned to the Archbishopry of Granada. The article presents an analysis of the layout and script of the parchment (2) followed by a survey of translations and transcripts by early (Christian and Muslim) eyewitnesses (3.1). The data of these early eyewitnesses are critically compared with the main elements of the parchment (3.2) Then follows a discussion of the palaeographic comments made by a few (Christian and Muslim) eyewitnesses (4). In the final conclusions, the authors argue that the document under discussion is indeed the original parchment as found in 1588 notwithstanding the incomprehensibility of its Arabic texts and the many inconsistencies and corruptions of its Spanish and Latin texts (5.1). According to the authors, there is no evidence for the interpretation of the parchment as a proto-Islamic document, as we are dealing here with a Roman Catholic message heralding the destruction of Islam. At the same time, however, the document also contained a symbolic message, viz. in stipulating that the first-century Granadan Christians, including the well-known figure of Cecilius, wrote Arabic and Spanish, just as many Moriscos did. In other words: even though Islam had to be extirpated, Arabic as a language could harmoniously accompany a genuine Christian life.

## RESUMEN

Este artículo está dedicado al famoso pergamino encontrado en 1588 en el antiguo minarete de la que había sido mezquita aljama de Granada, con textos en árabe, latín y castellano. Junto con los libros plúmbeos descubiertos en diversas cuevas a las afueras de la ciudad entre 1595 y 1600, el pergamino está en los orígenes de un importante culto nacional. El artículo presenta un análisis de la composición y escritura del pergamino (2) y pasa revista a las transcripciones y traducciones que se hicieron por testigos cristianos y musulmanes (3.1). Éstas se comparan críticamente con los principales elementos del pergamino (3.2) y se discuten los comentarios paleográficos hechos por estos testigos contemporáneos (4). Como conclusión, los autores mantienen que el documento transferido desde el Vaticano en el año 2000, es el original encontrado en 1588 a pesar de lo incomprensible de los textos árabes y de la corrupción de los textos castellano y latino (5.1) Según los autores, no hay base para considerar al pergamino como documento proto-islámico, puesto que se trata de un mensaje católico romano anunciando la destrucción del islam. Al mismo tiempo, el documento incluye un mensaje simbólico al mostrar que los cristianos granadinos del siglo I, incluyendo a Cecilius, escribían árabe y castellano, lo mismo que hacían los moriscos. Así, aunque el Islam había de ser extirpado, la lengua árabe se podía armonizar con una vida genuinamente cristiana.









