

- 34 Carole Lambert, "Astuces et flexibilité des recettes culinaires médiévales françaises," in *Du manuscrit à la table: Essais sur la cuisine au Moyen Age et répertoire des manuscrits médiévaux contenant des recettes culinaires*, edited by Carole Lambert (Montreal and Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1992), 215–225.
- 35 Montanari, *Medieval Tastes*, 52–53.
- 36 On seasonal fish supply, see Maryanne Kowaleski, "The Seasonality of Fishing in Medieval Britain," in *Ecologies and Economics in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Studies in Environmental History for Richard C. Hoffmann*, edited by Scott G. Bruce (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 117–147.
- 37 *Eenen nyeuwwen coock boeck: Kookboek samengesteld door Gheeraert Vorselman en gedrukt te Antwerpen in 1560*, edited by Elly Cockx-Indestege (Wiesbaden: G. Pressler, 1971), 140–141. On this passage see Johanna Maria van Winter, *Spices and Confits: Collected Papers on Medieval Food* (Totnes: Prospect Book, 2007), 285.
- 38 Mestre Robert, *Llibre del coch*, edited by Veronika Leimgruber (Barcelona: Curial, 1966), 100–101.
- 39 *Llibre de totes maneres de potatges de menjar*, edited by Rudolf Grewe, Amadeu-J. Soberanas and Joan Santanach, in *Llibre de Sent Soví, Llibre de totes maneres de potatges de menjar, Llibre de totes maneres de confits* (Barcelona: Barcino, 2004), 201–203.
- 40 *Le Ménagier de Paris*, edited by Georgina E. Brereton and Janet M. Ferrier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
- 41 What follows is based on Terence Scully, "Les saisons alimentaires du *Ménagier de Paris*," in *Du manuscrit à la table: Essais sur la cuisine au Moyen Age*, 205–213.
- 42 *Ibid.*, 211–212.
- 43 Francesc Eiximenis, *Lo Crestià*, edited by Albert Hauf (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1983), c. 354–355, 142–145. I have discussed this exemplum in "Medieval Clichés of Health and Diet According to Francesc Eiximenis," in *Sociedad y memoria en la edad media: Estudios en homenaje de Nilda Guglielmi* (Buenos Aires: Instituto Multidisciplinario de Historia y Ciencias Humanas, 2005), 127–134.

10 Medieval media and minorities

Jews and Muslims in the *Cantigas de Santa María*

David Nirenberg

Para Teofilo: "contar las sus bondades seria grand regunçerio."

Like the ancient Psalms of David, the medieval *Cantigas de Santa María* (Songs to Holy Mary) present themselves as a poetic and musical communication between an earthly and a heavenly monarch. But unlike the psalms, we possess the *Cantigas* in something like the form intended by their royal "author," and can say a great deal about their production.¹ Four manuscripts of the *Cantigas* survive, all of them contemporaneous (or nearly contemporaneous) with King Alfonso X "the Wise" of Castile, and three of them richly illuminated.² Moreover the poems, illuminations, and music make constant allusion to their historical context (Castile in the mid to late 13th century), a context about which we know a great deal (although never as much as we would like) from numerous other sources. Many of the miracle stories collected in the work are placed in the realm of daily life, their protagonists not only the king, but also women, children, and men from all stations and multiple faiths. These poems and their illuminations seem therefore to provide a window into medieval reality, and it is for that purpose that they are often turned to, as when historians reconstruct the king's biography on the basis of the poems, or write articles on what the *Cantigas* teach us about the possibilities of existence for Muslims and Jews in Christian Castilian society.³

There were indeed many Jews and Muslims living in the Christian kingdoms of the Iberian Peninsula, at least relative to their populations in other Christian lands, and the manuscripts of the *Cantigas* certainly tell us something about the lives those non-Christians may have led. But in this essay I would like to begin to suggest that when the Christian poets, illuminators, and editors of the *Cantigas* represented Jews or Muslims (or demons or "blasphemous" Christians) within their pages, they were not only or even necessarily describing the practices of living Jews or Muslims (or demons, or Christians with views different than their own). They were also, and often, seeking to legitimate the arts – music, poetry, painting, politics – in which they were engaged, and to defend the forms of representation characteristic of the *Cantigas* themselves as a medium of communication between the human and the divine.⁴

Specifically, I'd like to explore the possibility that the Escorial (T.I.1) and Florence (Banco Rari 20) manuscripts of the *Cantigas de Santa María* make claims about their own status as salvific media, claims that proceed by casting critics of that status as enemies of God, and especially as Jews and Muslims.⁵ Within the *Cantigas*, as within Christian culture more generally, representations of Judaism, Islam, heresy, etc., played a central role in the articulation of the possibilities and limits of poetic and pictorial mediation, communication, signification, and representation. By focusing on this role, I hope to clarify some of the ways in which medieval Christian media were produced and reflected upon through projections of Judaism and Islam, mediatic projections which in turn shaped the possibilities of existence for real people, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim alike.⁶

An example of how the *Cantigas* reflect upon their own status as medium and material object might help clarify the point. The unfinished Florence manuscript was partly produced (work on the manuscript may have continued after the king's death) in the early 1280s, when the elderly king was more or less a prisoner in Seville, the one city that remained loyal to him in the midst of a civil war in which his son and many vassals rebelled against him on the grounds (among others) that he was a lover of Jews and a "Jewish" tyrant.⁷ The manuscript contains an illuminated *cantiga* (number 209) (Figure 10.1) entitled "He who denies God and His blessings commits a great error and is grievously wrong." The song's first person announces that it is written by the king himself, and relates how, when Alfonso was ill and seemed about to die in 1270, he refused the advice of his doctors and turned to the Virgin instead:⁸

I shall tell you what happened to me while I lay in Vitoria, so ill that all believed I should die there and did not expect me to recover. . . . The doctors ordered hot cloths placed on me but I refused them and ordered, instead, that Her Book [that is, a manuscript of the *Cantigas* themselves] be brought to me. They placed it on me, and at once I lay in peace. The pain subsided completely, I felt very well and cried no more. I gave thanks to Her for it, because I know full well She was dismayed at my afflictions.

The poem represents the king's choice as one between the sciences of the flesh and of the spirit. Rejecting medicine, the king is miraculously cured by the object he calls for instead: a manuscript of his own songs to the Virgin. A contemporary audience might already have heard a "Jewish" option in that choice, since church councils and synods sometimes prohibited the summoning of Jewish doctors to the bedside of patients in extremis, and ordered instead the calling of a confessor. That same audience might also have caught a whiff of irony, or at least of propaganda, since King Alfonso "the Wise" was known to have a penchant for science, and for Jewish physicians.⁹

A theologically attuned hearer of this poem might have detected some anti-Jewish projection in its celebration of the miraculous power of Alfonso's poetry, insofar as that power was represented in Pauline terms within the poem, as a choice of "Christian" spirit over "Jewish" flesh. But the anti-Jewishness of the

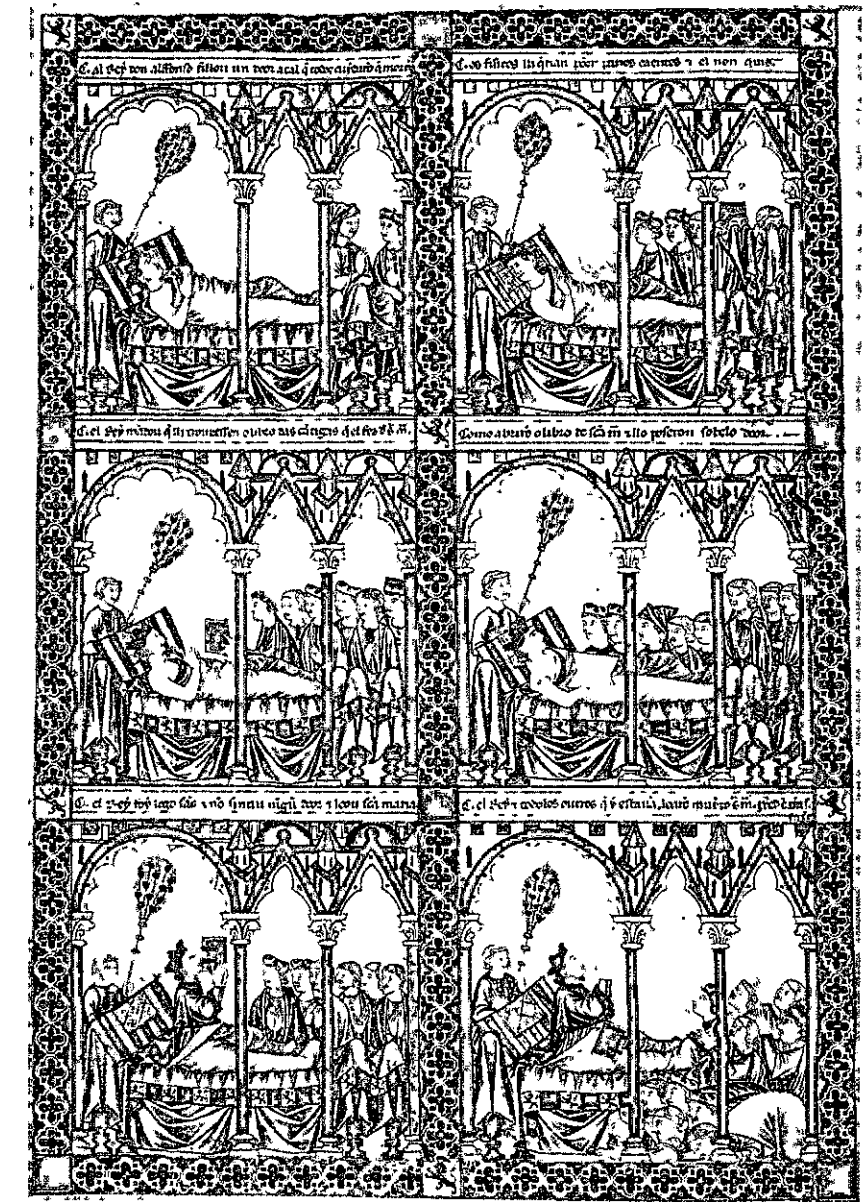


Figure 10.1 *Cantiga* 209, Florence, Ms. Banco Rari 20, fols. 119r-v

Source: Photo courtesy of EDILAN

celebration might have been more obvious to a viewer of the manuscript than to the audience of the poem, for if Francisco Prado-Vilar is right, the illumination, unlike the poem, explicitly represents the king's choice as a rejection of Judaism. For according to Prado-Vilar, the artists cast the instructing physician in the first panel as a Jew. The king refuses the Jew's advice, and the Jewish physician disappears from the scene while the book is brought forth, returning only to witness the miraculous cure.¹⁰

The illumination concludes with a scene of worship: the king is kissing the book, raised up to heaven, while the faithful (the Jewish doctor banished) stand before him in prayer. The manuscript, by this reading, deploys anti-Jewish projection in order to represent its own miraculous confirmation as a medium between God and man, worthy of being kissed by the royal author himself. The claim is bold. It is, after all, not a bible or liturgical manuscript being celebrated here as a wonder-working object. (Alfonso himself does seem to have thought of his collection as a liturgical work: in his testament he ordered that the manuscripts be deposited in his funeral chapel in Seville, and read annually as part of the liturgy on the Virgin's feast day.)¹¹ Alfonso is kissing the work of his own hands (and that of his scriptorium): an anthology of poetry by laymen, richly illustrated by (or at the behest of) those laymen with images of themselves.

Even if the book being kissed had been a bible, the Pauline tension between an emphasis on its mediatic materiality and its divine truth could have been expressed in anti-Jewish terms. Indeed, the Church fathers had condemned the use of biblical texts to work miraculous cures as a misplaced "Jewish" yearning for signs in the flesh.¹² But what makes the claims of the *Cantigas* all the more remarkable is that the principal arts deployed within them – painting and poetry – were themselves subject to so much criticism as "Jewish" forms of representation in early and medieval Christian culture. It is precisely because this was the case – and this is my basic point in these pages – that the representation of Jews, Muslims, and other enemies of God and of Christian representation were so useful to the creators of the *Cantigas* in justifying their delight in these arts.

Given that we possess anthologies stuffed with medieval poetry and churches overflowing with images, it is easy to forget that across the centuries many Christians have considered these arts perilous. Their stigma was double, inherited from both Athens and Jerusalem. Think, for example, of the repeated criticism of both poetry and art (indeed of all forms of representation) in Plato's writings. Jumping to Jerusalem, the apostle Paul had similar concerns about both art and writing. The opening of his epistle to the Romans, for example, conflates the Mosaic Law's concern with the worship of images with the ontological preoccupations of Platonic philosophy in order to arrive at a general critique of our knowledge of things in the world.

Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so these people have no excuse. . . . While they claimed to be wise, in fact they were growing so stupid that they exchanged the glory of

the immortal God for an imitation [*homoiómati*, counterfeit], for the image [*eikonos*] of a mortal human being, or of birds, or animals, or crawling things. (Rom. 1:20–23)

Image and imitation lead to perdition. Christians should rather "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:18).

Similar dangers were thought to attend our use of language. Remember the Pauline dictum: "for written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). In his earlier epistle to the Galatians, Paul had suggested that excessive attention to the letter, the word, the sign and symbol, the fleshy appearance of things, was a peculiarly "Jewish" error, and he used the verb "to Judaize" to describe those Christians who (to his mind) worshipped this fleshy appearance rather than an inner spiritual reality. In Romans he developed this theme in order to criticize both those Jews who had not recognized Jesus, and those Christians who he believed placed mistaken emphasis on the literal meaning of scripture: "The real Jew is the one who is inwardly a Jew, and real circumcision is in the heart, a thing not of the letter but of the spirit" (2:29).

Like Paul (and sometimes under his influence), the gospel authors also developed special figures of Judaism through which to enact the fatal error of seeing only the fleshy significance, rather than the spiritual meaning, of a sign or thing: e.g., to see Jesus as the man he appears to be, rather than as the God he is; or to understand the Hebrew Bible only in its literal meaning, rather than in the spiritual sense that announces the coming of Jesus; or to place priority on treasure and beauty in this world, rather than the next. Think, for example, of the Pharisees:

Everything they do is done to attract attention, like wearing broader headbands and longer tassels. . . . Blind Pharisee! Clean the inside of cup and dish first so that it and the outside are both clean. Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption. In just the same way, from the outside you look upright, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

(Matt. 23:5, 26–28)

There swirls about this figure of the Pharisee a confusion between appearance and meaning, beauty and truth, material exterior and spiritual interior. Out of this confusion we can begin to see types of Judaism emerging in Christian thought to represent misplaced priorities, the wrong kind of attention to the medium, an absorption that focuses on the lethal beauty of this world rather than seeing through it into the next: precisely the kind of misplaced attention with which art and poetry will be taxed.

The case of art and devotional images is perhaps more familiar than that of poetry. Of course we know that images did find their way into Christian devotion, in part through the argument that through the visible they helped orient the believer's inner eye toward the invisible. But we should not forget that they never

lost their vulnerability to stigmatization as misleading and material imitation, attracting the eye toward outer appearance rather than inner truth. Debates about images never disappeared from Christianity, and figures of Judaism played many and often opposing roles in those debates.

These diverse possibilities are already evident in 394 CE, during a debate over the decoration of churches that took place between a relatively obscure presbyter named Nepotian and the much more famous St. Jerome. In an earlier letter Nepotian had apparently invoked the example of the Jews and their Temple as justification for the Christian decoration of churches with expensive materials and images. Jerome attacked precisely that point in his counterargument: "and let no one allege against me the wealth of the temple of Judea, its tables, its lamps . . . and the rest of its golden vessels." Those things of the Temple, Jerome explains, were "figures typifying things still in the future." But for Christians, who *live in that future*, "the Law is spiritual." If Christians "keep to the letter" in this, they must keep it in everything, and adopt the Jewish rituals: "Rejecting the superstition of the Jews, we must also reject the gold; or approving the gold, we must approve the Jews as well. For we must either accept them with the gold or condemn them with it." Note Jerome's infectious logic: those who choose to decorate churches must become Jews.

These arguments do not disappear in the Middle Ages. Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, famously aligned decorators of churches with the Jews. The true Christian, wrote Bernard, regards "all things . . . as dung." (Bernard is here echoing St. Paul, Philippians 3:8; St. Jerome, Letter 52.10). Those who fill sanctuaries with material beauty are not Christians but "Jewish money-lenders," driven by "avarice, which is the service of idols." Small wonder, Bernard complained elsewhere, that there are many who confuse churches with synagogues.¹³ Somewhat less famously, a late-15th-century anonymous Spanish author invoked St. Paul's linkage of idolatry and sodomy (in chapter one of Romans cited above) in order to exhort his fellow Christians not to contaminate themselves with devotional art objects or fall into homosexual fornication.¹⁴ In this he was in keeping with an important strand of medieval thought. Every step in the development of devotional art had its dissenters. Some of these dissenters came to be canonized as saints, others condemned as heretics, still others given the contested name of reformers (think of Martin Luther or John Calvin). But regardless of their differing fortunes, what many of them shared was the view that there is something Judaizing about art.¹⁵

These struggles over images are well known. Perhaps less familiar is the fact that poetry also faced a stream of Christian critique across the centuries, not only (in early and late antique Christianity) because of its association with pagan Greek and Roman myth and culture, but also because, in its emphasis on verbal beauty, it was thought (like art) to emphasize too much the deceitful exterior of the letter, appealing more to our sensual desire for beauty than our spiritual love of truth.

St. Augustine took up both strands of this critique. In *The City of God* he drew on the Roman and Greek philosophical tradition to condemn the "poetic theology" of the Romans as lies (*mendacia*) and poisonous delight (*noxia delectatio*).¹⁶

And in Book IV of *On Christian Doctrine* he drew on Cicero to launch a more general critique of poetry and rhetoric: "eloquence without wisdom is frequently a positive injury, and is never a positive service." Beauty must be deployed only in the service of truth, "for of what use is a golden key, if it cannot open what we want it to open?" The problem is that over the course of human affairs "so much labor has been spent by men on beauty of expression" not in order to teach the good, but on the contrary, to teach the bad, "merely for the sake of being read with pleasure." Augustine concludes by associating this perverted aesthetics with Judaism:

May God avert from His Church what the prophet Jeremiah says of the synagogue of the Jews: "A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests applaud them with their hands; and my people love to have it so: and what will you do in the end thereof?"¹⁷

King Alfonso's near contemporary St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) pursued a similar critique of poetry in his *Summa Theologica*. Revealingly, he placed the discussion of poetry in a section of his treatise dedicated to questions about the "ceremonial precepts" of the "Old Law." Why are those fleshy ceremonies in the Scriptures, and how should a Christian relate to them? In clarifying this difficult question of Christianity's relationship to the ceremonies of Judaism – the same question that had animated Peter and Paul's debate discussed earlier – the "Angelic Doctor" turns to a cognitive analogy:

Just as human reason fails to grasp poetical expressions on account of their being lacking in truth, so does it fail to grasp Divine things perfectly, on account of the sublimity of the truth they contain: and therefore in both cases there is need of signs by means of sensible figures.

In other words, poetry has to depend upon aesthetic representations because of a lack of truth, whereas Scripture does so because of an excess of the same: divine truth is so great as to be beyond human comprehension.

Thomas was fully aware that the Christian cannot escape aesthetics. Even the salvific domains of scripture and liturgy must utilize language in a fashion similar to the secular and sensual domains of poetry and rhetoric. It is in order to heighten the contrast between the two that he insisted on condemning poetry to a position even more distant from truth than Plato had done. "Poetic fictions have no purpose except to signify; and such signification does not go beyond the literal sense." Remember the Pauline dictum: "for written letters kill, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6). For Aquinas, as for many other divines, poetry is restricted to the domain of the flesh and the letter, that is, to the deadly domain of "Judaism."¹⁸

The history of art and the history of poetry in Christian Europe are, in part, a history of how art and poetry have defended themselves against these criticisms, and articulated their legitimacy as truthful, even salvific, practices of representation and forms of knowledge. The *Cantigas* deserve a distinguished place in that

history, for they are quite aware that art has enemies, judging from the effort they dedicate to staging that enmity and its miraculous defeat. *Cantiga* 297 directly confronts the clerical critics of art. It sings of a friar who visited the court of a king possessed of a particularly beautiful and miracle-working statue of Mary. The "false friar who did not believe in God" upbraided the king, reproaching him with idolatry for his excessive belief "that there is power in carved wood," and accusing of blindness everyone who cannot see how foolish is such belief. The king condemns in turn the incredulous cleric, and predicts that he will come to a bad end.¹⁹ The friar does indeed go mad, and the *cantiga* delivers something of a theological defense of Christian image worship, though not perhaps one that would pass more learned examination.²⁰

If the frequency of a polemic is any indication of the contested-ness of a position, then the compilers of the *Cantigas* were aware that theirs was precarious indeed, for they multiply both miraculous images, and their enemies. In *cantiga* 74, the devil himself is enlisted in defense of pictorial realism (Figure 10.2). A painter paints a fresco of the Virgin and of the devil. The two are poised in an exquisite antithesis, framed by a symmetry of arches and of scaffolding. (The symmetry is appropriately imperfect: the artist's pose is different on each side, and his paints and pots are all aligned with the Virgin's portrait, rather than the devil's.) The devil is angered by the painter's accurate depiction of his ugliness, and engages the artist in argument, here depicted with all the gestures of rhetoric: art and artist are here staged as a form of anti-demonic disputation. The vengeful demon returns while the artist is once again painting a high fresco of the Virgin, and destroys the scaffolding upon which he stands. But the falling painter prays to his patroness, who suspends him miraculously in mid-air by his brush, the tool of his art becoming also the instrument of his salvation.²¹

Among art's more human enemies, Muslims and Jews rank high. *Cantiga* 99 (Figure 10.3), for example, sings of "how Holy Mary thwarted a great band of Moors who entered a city of Christians and tried to destroy their holy statues." "They saw a statue there which appeared more beautiful than the others," and tried to destroy it, but "the statue bore no mark of having been touched or damaged. They all thought they were going to die there, and realized that God was angered." As happens so often in these illuminations, the illuminator seems to call special attention to the materiality of his practice. With each frame the white background of the parchment becomes increasingly crowded with Muslims, until in the fourth frame, with their irruption into the city, no empty parchment remains, except within an arch in which the Muslims, armed with pickaxes, are scraping away at the page, trying to rid it of its images. They are here the antithesis of the scribes and illuminators, whose painstaking scraping and preparation of the supporting animal hides cleared space for the Christian image. In this case it is the image that miraculously prevails, re-appearing within the space cleared by the Muslims, who – in the last panel – flee the parchment, leaving its space once again clear and white for illumination.²²

This poem is but one of many in which the Virgin's image stands for Christian conquest of Islam, and its removal (almost always thwarted) for Christian defeat.

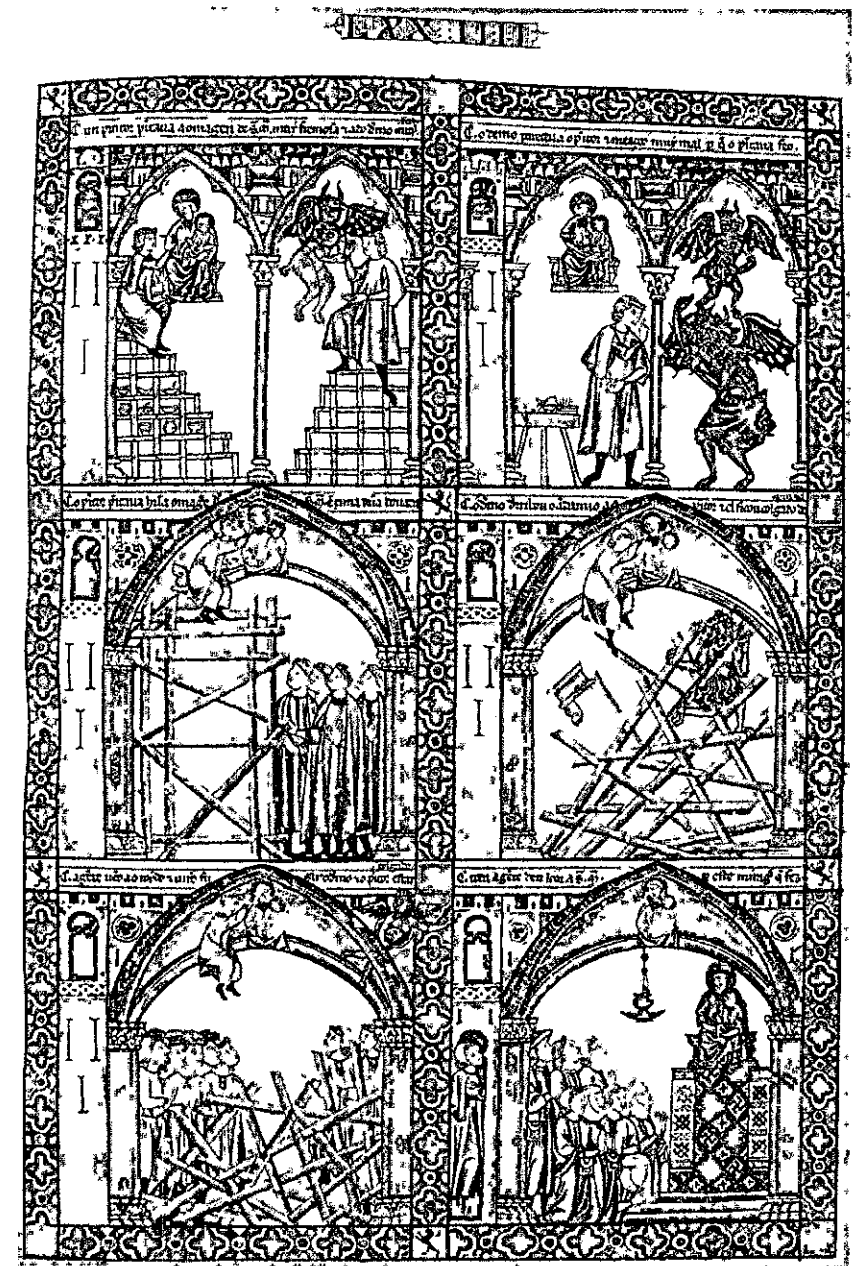


Figure 10.2 *Cantiga* 74, Escorial Ms. T.I.1, fols. 108v–109r

Source: Photo courtesy of EDILAN

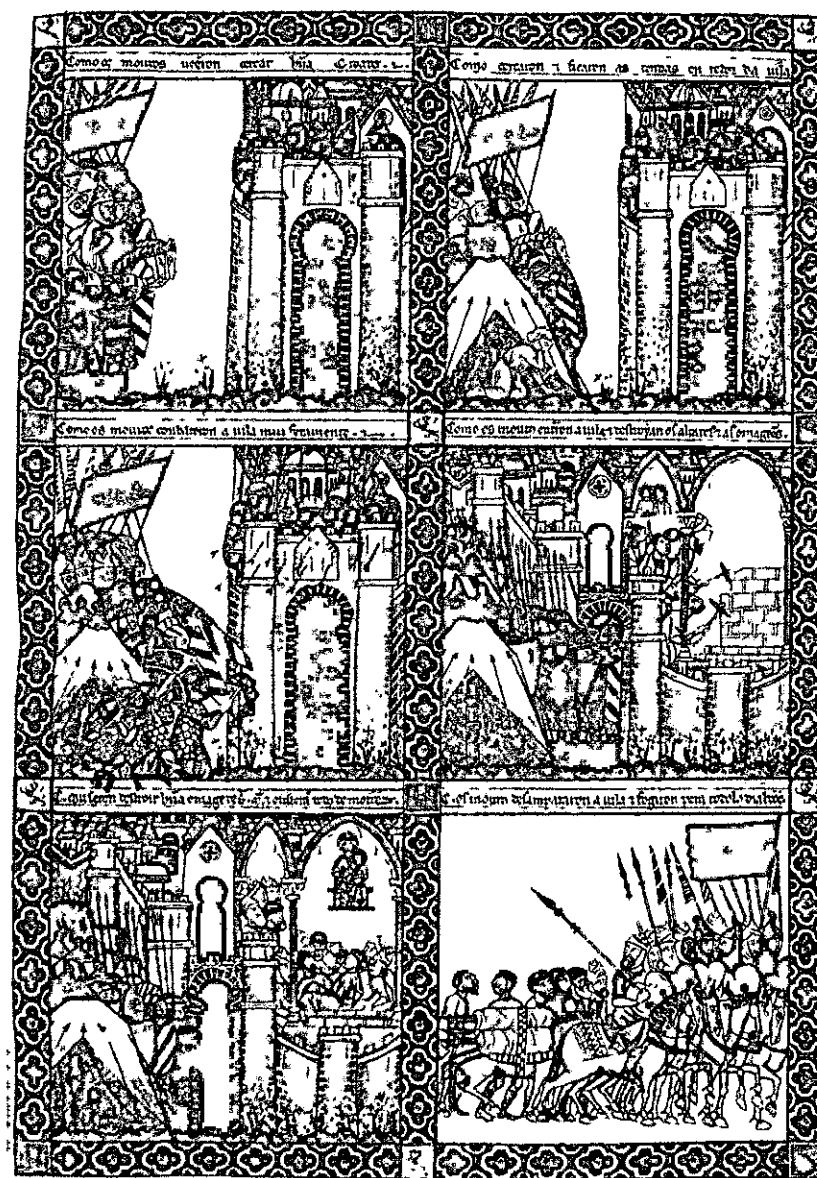


Figure 10.3 *Cantiga* 99, Escorial Ms. T.I.1, fols. 143–144r

Source: Photo courtesy of EDILAN

Cantiga 292 makes the logic explicit, when it explains that whenever Ferdinand III (Alfonso's father) conquered a city from the Muslims, he would place Mary's image at the mosque's door.²³ Conversely, when the Muslims threaten to recapture Chincoya castle in *cantiga* 185, the Christian defenders put the Virgin's image to something like trial by battle: "If you are the Mother of God," they exhort it, "defend this castle and us, who are yours," lest it "fall into the power of the unbelieving moors, and so they may not burn your statue." In Chincoya's case Muslim conquest was averted. But in the case of Jerez, which was in fact lost to the Muslims for a year or two during the revolt of the Mudéjar's in 1264, *cantiga* 345 explains that the king and queen first learned of the loss because both simultaneously dreamt, during siesta in Seville, that the image of Virgin and Child were surrounded by fire. They thus realized that the alcazar of Jerez had fallen, and sorrowed because "a omagen da Virgen avia mal recebudo." The reconquest in 1266 was, not surprisingly, marked by a "very great procession" restoring the Virgin's image to the chapel, "segun devia ser."²⁴

It is not much of an exaggeration to say that, in the *Cantigas*, attitudes toward the power of devotional art – and especially toward the Virgin's image and its miracles – are used to represent the spiritual, as well as the territorial, boundary between Christianity and its enemies. In the songs we've seen thus far, that enemy is a Muslim. But in others, the enemy of Christian painting is figured as a Jew. *Cantiga* 34 (Figure 10.4) provides a famous example. In it a Jew of Constantinople steals an outstandingly beautiful (so the text tells us) image of the Virgin that has been painted on a board and hung in the street. In the first scene of the illumination the illuminator makes the point starkly but artfully (Figure 10.5, detail). A grotesque Jew in profile is juxtaposed to the painting he holds askew in his hands, already striding into a doorway whose darkness plays foil to the light color-field of wall from which the painting has been removed. The Jew here serves as an icon of the anti-iconic, the "pictoriality" of the entire scene emphasized by the accumulation of frames – the border of the illumination, the city walls, and the frame of the icon itself – the illuminators have deployed. In the following scenes the Jew acts accordingly, throwing the painting down a latrine, and defecating upon it. A Christian then discovers the image, which instead of stinking of feces smells sweeter than spices, balsam, and unguents, and emits henceforth a substance like oil. In the last panel we see the board itself enshrined as object of devotion. And all this, the poem explicitly tells us, the Virgin did "in order to teach" (*por dar entendimento*). The Jew here serves as an instructive negative example against which the proper Christian attitude toward devotional objects in general, and (I am suggesting) toward the artistic program of the *Cantigas* in particular, is meant to emerge in high relief.²⁵

Even more than devotional art, the vernacular poetry of the laity needed to legitimate its practice within this field of critique, and it met the challenge in much the same way, with the poets striving to present their critics as "Jews" and heretics (Muslims seem here less important), and themselves as enemies of Judaism. Indeed, Alfonso's collection begins with a prayer addressing the poor reputation of lay poetry. In that poetic prayer the royal troubadour differentiates good poetry from