

DISCOURSES OF JUDAIZING AND JUDAISM IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

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How did discourses of “Judaizing” and “Judaism” become dominant ones in the Iberian Peninsula? We cannot answer such a question simply by pointing to the presence of non-Christians or their crypto-derivatives in the Iberian world, for the power and utility of thinking about Iberia in terms of Judaism (or Islam) need bear no direct relation to the living presence of representatives from those religions. One way to make this obvious point is simply to recall that the discourse of Judaism was often used in countries that had not seen a real Jew for centuries. When a Catholic preacher in Augsburg complained in 1551 that “the King of England, his council and kingdom had all become Jews”, he was not referring to “real” Judaism –there were no Jews living in England in the sixteenth century– but to Edward VI’s embrace of the Lutheran Reform.¹ “Judaism” stood for all sorts of things, including Protestantism (for Catholics) and Catholicism (for Protestants).

¹ On the Augsburg preacher see the complaint of Sir Richard Morrison, England’s ambassador to the court of Charles V, in Tyler (236; 254).

“Judaism” was also a term of criticism used by members of the same community against each other. Open any volume of late medieval or early modern sermons and you will likely find some practice or other denounced as Judaizing, money-lending being only the most famous (others include failure to take vengeance, collecting taxes, paying taxes, wearing spectacles, reading Aristotle, writing on paper). In order to explain these worries we cannot think only in terms of a religion we call Judaism, or of living people we call Jews, but need to think also of abstract *qualities* – “Jewishness”, “Christian-ness” – that are not limited to the adherents of the religion from which they are imagined to derive. On the contrary, they are often the product of one group’s thinking about another: a Christian’s notion of Jewishness, for example, may have more to do with Christian habits of thought about Judaism (what we somewhat reductively call stereotypes) as it does with Judaism itself. Moreover these qualities can attach to the adherents of any religion, and seem to threaten the integrity of that adherence. It is precisely this portability and this peril that made them such powerful tools for thinking about the world.

These tools were at work in all of the religious communities of the Iberian world. I can imagine an essay on Jewish and Christian fears of the “Muslimness” they felt to be encoded in the Arabic language and poetic practices by which they were so attracted; or one on Muslim and Jewish fears of a contagious “Christian-ness” inherent in allegorical techniques of scriptural interpretation. My subject, however, is Christian worries about “Jewishness”, and my goal is to demonstrate why and how these worries became so fundamental to Iberian Christian thinking about and representations of the world. But Iberian Christians did not invent their ideas about Jewishness out of whole cloth: a long history of Christian culture shaped the ways in which they could find difference meaningful and put it to work. So I will begin with a crude sketch of some of the roles played by “Jewishness” in foundational Christian thinking about the difficulties and dangers inherent in the condition of being human in this world. Then, more fully, I will show these dangers of Jewishness being put to work in three registers of Iberian culture that on the face of it had very little to do with living Jews: namely



poetry, painting, and politics.

We must begin with the earliest Christian writings, the epistles of St. Paul. “The Letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3.6): this apparent antinomy between letter and spirit is only one of the many that pepper the Pauline texts. “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom. 8.6). “Now we are fully freed from the law, dead to that in which we lay captive. We can thus serve in the new being of the Spirit and not the old one of the letter” (Rom. 7.5-6). In Galatians, an Epistle entirely devoted to establishing these new antinomies, Paul employed the verb “to Judaize” –*iudaizare* in the Vulgates Latin, Gal. 2.14– to name the action by which Christians slip from one side of these oppositions to the other, becoming enslaved to “Jewish” law, letter, and flesh.²

In the generations after Paul, the Gospels each expanded the “critical function” of Judaism in their own way. Consider just the example of Matthew’s indictment of the Pharisees in passages like 23.5-12:

But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments.... Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. ... And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted...

And again, at 23.27-28:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead *men’s* bones and all uncleanness. Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

There are a host of ontological, epistemological, and sociological errors encoded in this figure of the Pharisee, whose striving after learning, titles, and a reputation for wisdom serves as something like an epistemological and ontological indictment of the “intellectual elite”.

² The literature on these oppositions in Paul is vast, but a crystalline treatment of their rhetorical structure in Galatians can be found in Martyn. Cut off: e.g., “for if you circumcise yourselves, Jesus Christ will avail you nothing”, Gal. 5.2. On the word “to Judaize”, see Dán and Dagron.

It is relatively easy to see how such figures might be used to criticize certain kinds of learning as Judaizing or Pharisaic (a strategy deployed, for example, in the medieval controversies over Scholasticism and the introduction of Aristotelian philosophy.) But the problem extends far beyond the “scribbling classes”, for the risk of “Judaizing” attends every Christian in every interaction with the world. Consider, for example, the error of the Pharisees adumbrated in the trope of the whitewashed tomb – that of a hypocritical confusion of exterior with interior, sign with signified. The Pharisees may typify this error for the early (and later) Christian tradition, but that tradition is also perfectly aware that this confusion is an inescapable hallmark of embodied life in this world, one that will only be overcome with the second coming. In the words of Jesus according to Clement: “For when the Lord himself was asked by someone when his kingdom would come, he said: ‘When the two are one, and the outside like the inside, and the male with the female is neither male nor female.’ Now ‘the two are one’ when we speak truth to one another, and when one soul exists in two bodies with no hypocrisy”.³ The epistemological and ontological problems encoded by the Christian tradition in terms like “Jew” or “Pharisee” are ones that afflict every human in the pre-apocalyptic world. Hence these terms can serve to evaluate every Christian encounter in the world, whether with people, things, or signs and symbols.

One way of describing my project in this article is as an inquiry into how Iberian Christian thought produced “Judaism from its own entrails”, as Karl Marx famously put it. I will dwell on two spheres of aesthetics that shared a heightened concern with Judaism: the spheres of painting and of poetry. I focus on these because they were especially suspect –within Hellenistic thought and its Christian heirs– of misplaced attention to the world, and therefore the focus of much explicit anxiety about the dangers of engaging in representations (mimesis) of that world. We all remember the long pages Plato dedicated to the dangers of poetry and painting, both of which are presented as incapable of perceiving the higher reaches of truth. Worse, as

³ Clement II to the Corinthians 12.2-3, in “The Apostolic Fathers” (147). The same saying is attributed to Jesus by the Gospel of Thomas, and probably dates to the mid-first century.



Plato stressed in the *Republic*, both have great power to mislead us, to make us look through our eyes of flesh rather than through the intelligence.⁴

Augustine sounds much like Plato when he writes, in *De doctrina Christiana* (III.v.9) that “To be unable to lift the eye of the mind above what is corporeal and created”, was “a miserable slavery”, “the death of the soul”. This was, he explained, the state of the Jews, who had subjected their souls to the material form of the scripture’s letter, just as they had earlier subjected it to the material form of the sculptor’s golden calf. But he also recognized that it was the state of every embodied human being at every moment of their life. As he put it in Book Ten of his *Confessions*: our eyes delight in the “corporeal light” of the world. But that light “seasons the life of the world for her blind lovers with a tempting and fatal sweetness”. We can resist the seduction of our eyes, but we cannot escape it. Only God’s unceasing grace can pluck us from “the snares set all around me”. A charming example makes clear how great the danger is:

I do not nowadays go to the circus to see a dog chase a rabbit, but if by chance I pass such a race in the fields, it quite easily distracts me even from some serious thought and draws me after it... with the inclination of my mind. And unless, by showing me my weakness, you [God] speedily warn me to rise above such a sight and [turn] to you by a deliberate act of thought... then I become absorbed in the sight, vain creature that I am. (X.35)

More than a millennium later the Protestant poet George Herbert expressed the danger more savagely in his poem “Self Condemnation”:

He that doth love, and love amisse,
This worlds delights before true Christian joy,
Hath made a Jewish choice.
...And is a Judas-Jew.

These quick quotes must suffice to remind us of some of the ways in which our engagement with the world –indeed sense perception itself– could be imagined within Christian culture as “Judaizing”.⁵ This threat of “Jewishness”

⁴ Key passages for the place of poetry in Platonic ontology are *Politeia* 595A-608B and *Phaedrus* 245A, 247C, and 248E.

⁵ These and other examples are discussed in more detail in Nirenberg, “The Judaism of

was always a potential within Christian cultural critique, but its power was not constant, nor were the ways in which this danger is imagined or put to work unchanging. On the contrary: how a given society thought about the Jewishness of a particular cultural practice was constantly being transformed by changes within that society – including but not limited to changes in the presence of real Jews within a society. And the reverse is true as well (but much less often noted): changes in cultural practices often provoked new ways of activating and representing the dangers of “Jewishness”. These representations could in turn reshape the meanings of “Judaism” within a society, thereby altering the possibilities of life for “real” Jews of flesh and blood. No pre-modern Western European society better illustrates this dynamic principle than Iberia.

Consider the example of poetry: suspicions of poetry on the grounds of its overt appeal to the sensible beauty of language were more or less canonical in the medieval West. As Thomas Aquinas put it in his *Quodlibetal Questions*, “Poetic fictions have no purpose except to signify; and such signification does not go beyond the literal sense” [7.6.16]. Like many other saints, Aquinas stresses the dangers and not the opportunities that Plato discovered in poetry’s appeal to the senses, and restricts poetics –biblical poetry excepted– to the domain of the flesh and the letter: that is, to the domain of “Judaism”. Medieval poetics developed any number of answers to this charge, but for our purposes the most interesting strategy for the legitimation of secular and vernacular poetry emerged in Spain, where poets learned to represent the dangers of mimesis within the poem itself, but to contain those dangers within figures of Judaism.⁶

The thirteenth-century *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* provide an early Castilian example. Their author Gonzalo de Berceo, one of the first Castilian poets whose name we know, produced some of the earliest examples of the Castilian poetic genre called *Mester de Clerecía* (clerical service, or

Christian Art”.

⁶ For a more extensive description and bibliography of medieval Christian critiques and defenses of poetry see the discussion in Nirenberg, “Figures of Thought”. The present article addresses a different group of Spanish poets.



clerical mastery). Berceo is well aware of the dangers of poetry, so aware that he prefaces his collection with an allegory about his poetic inspiration, concluding with a warning on how his poetry should be read:

Señores e amigos, lo que dicho avemos
 palabra es oscura, esponerla queremos;
 tolgamos la corteza, al meollo entremos,
 prendamos lo de dentro, lo de fuera dessemos. (c. 16)

The warning is a standard one of Christian hermeneutics: do not stop at the literal exterior of the word (as the Pharisees and Jews do), but penetrate into its spiritual interior. But, as Berceo's metaphor itself suggests, even within this hermeneutics our apprehension of the interior cannot escape carnality: it always depends on the mediation of letters, signs, symbols, and fleshy concepts: in this case, for example, the inner spiritual meaning of the nut is itself *meat*. These mediating signs are always alienated from the truths they are meant to signify, always in some sense fraudulent. To put it in the anachronistic terms of Jacques Derrida, the "experience of language is from the outset an experience of circumcision (cutting and belonging, originary entrance into the space of law, non-symmetrical alliance between the finite and the infinite). And so in quotation marks and with all the necessary rhetorical precautions, a 'Jewish experience'" (quoted in Weber 43).

Since Berceo has not read Derrida, he resists the "Jewishness" of the symbolic economies he depends on, rather than surrendering to it. He does so by deploying Jews as figures of false mediation, figures whose contrast with the Christian is meant to secure what Shakespeare, exploring a similar difficulty in the *Merchant of Venice*, called "the difference of our spirit", that is, the difference between Christian and Jewish communication and exchange (4.1.365–66). Time after time Gonzalo juxtaposes Jews with Christians. In "La Deuda pagada" (miracle 23), for example, he opposes Jewish moneylender with Christian merchant in order to demonstrate the difference between a "Jewish" attitude toward money and profit and a "Christian" one. In the miracle of Theophilus [miracle 24], a Jewish power broker for Satan is contrasted with the Christian *privado*, or favored minister, etc. (miracle 25, 791b). All of these figures of Judaism have a long

history, and a long future, but my general point is simply that in Berceo's writing (as in that of many others), the constant contrast between Jewish and Christian mediations is meant to distance the one from the other, so as to protect Christian practices of mediation and mimesis (such as the writing of poetry) from the charge of "Judaism".⁷ Yet Gonzalo also shares the Augustinian view that every encounter with a sign, symbol, or thing has the potential to ensnare the poet's or the reader's soul through misplaced absorption; so that in fact no amount of anti-Jewish projection can quite guarantee a Christian poetics. Hence he concludes with prayer: "Madre, del tu Golzalvo seï remembrador / que de los tos miraclos fue enterpretador" (911ab). The poet is "enterpretador", interpreter: a word that never quite escapes its (perhaps spurious) etymology of "inter pretare", inter-loaning, with its hints of usury and fraud. Gonzalo's prayer seems to recognize that only through this last Marian miracle could Christian poetry ever achieve the "mester sen pecado" (74), the mastery without sin, the poetics without Judaism it is striving for.

Berceo's is the earliest example of the *Mester de Clerecía's* Jewish problem, but it is not the most explicit. That honor goes to the nearly contemporaneous (but un-dateable and anonymous) *Libro de Alexandre*. This poem too, begins with a statement of its Christian *bona fides*: "Mester trayo feroso, non es de joglería;/ mester es sin peccado, qua es de clerecía:/ fablar curso rimado por la quaderna vía,/a sílabas contadas, qua es grant maestría" [Stanza 2]. But unlike Berceo, it seems to suggest explicitly that no amount of prayer or projection can purge representation, whether linguistic or pictorial, of its "Judaism".

This suggestion is most obvious in the character of Apelles. The historical figure Apelles of Kos was a famous Alexandrian painter. In the *Book of Alexander*, Apelles is the artist who decorates Alexander's tents with paintings depicting the rise and fall of the world's great empires. The paintings provide not only a history but also a moral commentary, and Apelles emerges as the critic within the epic, his paintings pointing toward the temporal and

⁷ For an attempt to describe the "long history" of "Jewishness" of the privado, beginning with Berceo and ending with Lope de Vega, see Nirenberg, "Deviant politics and Jewish Love".



moral limits of the sovereignty that Alexander aspires to. The poet describes Apelles as if he were a cleric like the poet himself, fulfilling a similar office: “clérigo bien letrado,/ todo su ministerio tenié bien decorado” (1800cd). In this sense he is, as some scholars have pointed out, the poet’s alter ego. What is therefore all the more extraordinary is that he is repeatedly identified in the poem –perhaps as an homage to a character in Horace’s *Satires*– not as Apelles of Kos but as Apelles the Jew. It is as if, without apology, the Christian poet assigns the mastery of mimesis to Judaism, and acknowledges the religion as in some way his own.

But even more surprising than the “Jewishness” of the painter in the *Book of Alexander* is the “Jewishness” of the hero, Alexander himself. Consider just two moments in the hero’s career: his childhood and his death. As a child, we are told, Alexander was such a good student –“tant avié buen engeño e sotil coraçon” [17]: note the Jewish implications of the words– that a rumor began to spread that he was not the son of King Philip, but of his tutor Nectanebo: “Por su sotil engeño que tant’ apoderava/ a maestre Nectánabo dizién que semejava,/ e que su fijo era grant roído andava” [19]. Alexander’s pride is ruffled by the rumor, and he solves the problem as every hero should: he throws his tutor from the high tower on which they are stargazing, killing the “subtle” and learned “Jew” into which his intellect threatens to convert him.

Tutors are easier to kill than figures of Judaism. In the end, it is the Judaism of the letter that kills Alexander, rather than the other way around. Although we moderns think of Alexander as dying from a drinking binge, in the medieval Alexander tradition, Alexander dies of poison. In the *Libro* he is poisoned not once, but twice. The first dose comes in a chalice of wine. The second comes when Alexander, realizing that he has just drunk poison, reaches for an antidote: a feather or quill, with which to make himself vomit:

Metió el rey la peñola por amor de tornar....

“Amor”, “tornar”: vocabulary of love and conversion is meant to remind us that a Christian ontology as well as a life is at stake. Alas for Alexander, the quill too has been dipped in poison, and the second dose proves fatal:

non podrié peor fuego en su cuerpo entrar,
 enveninó las venas que pudo alcançar,
 en lugar de guarir, fizolas peorar.

In this feather we might recognize the implement of the poet, and in its poison, the fear of every Christian writer: the fear that, no matter how much he tries to exorcise the “Judaism” that haunts his practice, his letters may kill what they promise to vivify.

Is my claim that “Judaism” threatens Alexander too fanciful? Consider the career of the king who ruled Castile during the time when the poem was most probably composed: King Alfonso the Wise. If Alonso was wise, it was in part because he surrounded himself with Jewish tutors. Here, for example, is the prologue of a book of natural history [*Lapidario*] Alfonso commissioned in 1250:⁸

He [Alfonso] obtained it in Toledo of a Jew who held it hidden, who neither wished to make use of it himself nor that any other should profit therefrom. And when he [Alfonso] had this book in his possession, he caused another Jew, who was his physician, to read it, and he was called Jehuda Mosca *el menor* [Yehuda ben Moshe ha-Kohen] and he was learned in the art of astrology and understood well both Arabic and Latin. And when through this Jew his physician he understood the value and great profit which was in the book, he commanded him to translate it from Arabic into the Castilian language. (Procter 19)

The two miniatures that illustrate this prologue in the most sumptuous manuscript (Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, MS. h.I.15, produced in the 1270s)⁹ juxtapose the portrait of the king receiving the book from his two translators, Yehuda Mosca and the cleric Garci Pérez, with a scene of Aristotle lecturing to a gathering of scholars. Alfonso is here presented, without any anxiety about Jewishness, as a master of all manners of learning.

⁸ For an introduction to the figure of Yehuda and his corpus of scientific translations, see Roth (especially 60-66). For a more extensive study of this character, see Hilty.

⁹ The facsimile edition is Alfonso X, el Sabio, “El primer Lapidario de Alfonso X”. For a study of the illuminations, see Domínguez Rodríguez.



But if we turn to another register of Alfonso's cultural project, we get a very different view. The king's *Cantigas de Santa María*, for example, a collection of poetry and song dedicated to the Virgin Mary, are exceedingly worried about "Jewishness". As we by now expect, the book begins with a prologue defending poetry, and calling on the troubadour to put his knowledge to work pursuing eternal rather than earthly loves. *Cantiga 6* goes a step further: it tells the story of a child killed by the Jews for singing poems to the Virgin (the *Gaudeo maria*), thereby aligning the poet and his mimesis not with the Jews but with the Christ figure martyred at their hand. (The strategy bears comparison to Chaucer's in "The Prioress' Tale".)

Cantiga 209 provides a particularly interesting example because self-referential staging of the conflict between Christian and Jewish arts. It is a song written by the king himself, in which he tells how, when he was taken gravely ill and seemed about to die in 1270, he refused the advice of his doctors and turned to the Virgin instead (illustrated on fol. 119v of MS. B.R. 20 – the last manuscript of the *Cantigas* to be undertaken):¹⁰

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 [panels 2 and 3]. They placed it on me, and at once I lay in peace [panel 4]. ... I gave thanks to Her for it, for I know full well She was dismayed at my affliction [panels 5 and 6]. (Kulp-Hill 251)

The illustration portrays the physician giving the instructions as a Jew (perhaps Abraham Ibn Waqar, a physician of Alfonso's) who absents himself when the Virgin's book is brought forth, and then returns to witness the miraculous cure. We should not overlook the multiple miracles being staged through this victory of Christian book over Jewish doctor, among them, the

¹⁰ This manuscript (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS. Banco Rari 20) was unfinished at Alfonso's death, and is the second volume of an edition of the *Cantigas* undertaken between 1275 and 1284. The facsimile edition is Alfonso X, el Sabio, "Cantigas de Santa María. Edición facsímil del códice B.R. 20". The first volume, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1 (the so-called *Codice Rico*) is also available in facsimile: Alfonso X, el Sabio, "Cantigas de Santa María. Edición facsímil del Códice T.I.1". On this miracle, see most recently Prado-Vilar.

miracle of King Alfonso's conversion from all the sciences that threatened to Judaize him.

Politics was itself one of those Judaizing sciences. We often forget the "Jewishness" that threatens politics –which is after all also a form of earthly mediation and representation– in Christian thought. This is not the place to summarize the early Christian history of that threat, from the Gospel of John's alignment of the "princes of this world" with Satan and the Jews, to St. Augustine's placement of the Jews and the earthly city under the same sign of Cain, because both aiming toward purely material ends. Nor can we here do justice to the ongoing "Judaizing" of medieval sovereigns by their critics.¹¹ Let me merely assert that we should understand the *Cantigas*, in part, as an attempt to defend Alfonso's politics against the charge of Jewishness. The point is a little submerged in *Cantiga 209*, one of the last to be added to the collection, but it is quite explicit in the collection's first miracle, *Cantiga 3*'s miracle of Theophilus, which returns us to Gonzalo de Berceo's attempt to draw a stark distinction between the salvific practices of political mediation and representation in Christian courts, and the damning "Jewish" practices in Satanic ones.¹²

The question being implicitly staged in *Cantiga 3* and its illuminations is: to which of these two does Alfonso's own court belong? The production of the *Cantigas* was itself an effort to claim membership in the first category, that of Christian politics. But in the 1270s King Alfonso fought two civil wars against rebels who placed him in the second, accusing him of being a Judaizer and lover of Jews. Not even the king's execution of his Jewish financier, Isaac ibn Zadok, appeased those who saw Alfonso as a tyrant manipulated by Jewish councilors. Alfonso died during the second of these civil wars, opposed by his eldest son and many of the bishops of his realm.

¹¹ For a broader discussion, see Nirenberg, "Christian Sovereignty and Jewish Flesh" and "Warum der König".

¹² Most recently on the Theophilus miracle in the *Cantigas*, see Patton. Indeed already in the first *Cantiga* King Alfonso is representing himself as an enemy of Judaism, by dedicating the book to the memory of Alfonso's namesake Ildefonsus, the seventh-century bishop of Toledo, famous for his defense of Mary's virginity against the skepticism of two heretics and a Jew: De perpetua virginitate Mariae contra tres infideles.



We might say that, like Alexander, he died poisoned by the Jewishness of the letter within Christian thought.¹³

I did forget one of the many miracles that was being staged in *Cantiga 209*: the defense of the Christian artwork against the Jewishness that threatens it, a defense staged in the image (though importantly *not* in the text!) as the art-object's triumph –that is, the triumph of the illuminated book itself– over the Jew's healing arts. This defense becomes all the more important, if we remember how vulnerable to "Judaism" art has been within the long history of Christianity. Think of St. Paul's condemnation in Chapter One of Romans: "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 [or counterfeit], for the image of a mortal human being, or of birds, or animals, or crawling things" [Romans 1.20-23]. Because of this error, Paul concludes, love had become misdirected, so that men had started lying with men, women with women. If we recall such statements alongside Augustine's association of the "lust of the eyes" with the Jews' adoration of the Golden Calf, we will not be surprised to find that there was a great deal of debate among Christians about art and its uses, and that Judaism figures prominently within that debate.¹⁴

A famous example is the debate between St. Jerome and Nepotian in 394. Nepotian was an advocate for the adornment of churches with art objects, Jerome was opposed. Jerome dismisses what had evidently been Nepotian's argument: "and let no one allege against me the wealth of the temple of Judea, its tables, its lamps" and the rest of its decorations. According to Jerome, those things of the temple 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. In other words, those who choose to decorate churches must

¹³ On the aristocratic uprisings of 1270-1275, see Baer; Nieto Soria. On the episcopal complaints, and on Sancho's role in investigating and amplifying them, see Linehan. The quote is from Linehan p. 137. For examples of Sancho's anti-Jewish measures during the rebellion in 1282 see p. 136, note 37.

¹⁴ Again, an extended treatment of these critiques is provided in Nirenberg, "The Judaism of Christian Art".

become “Jews”.¹⁵

Just from this one example we can see that the role of Judaism in discourses about art is polyvalent. Jews are at once the bearers of an eternal truth, exemplars of an equally enduring falsity, and typological representatives of the Christological overcoming of the opposition. The Jews provide Christians with examples of the most complete rejection of the eye’s attraction to the material object (“Thou shalt have no graven image”), of the most degraded submission to it (the Golden Calf), and even (typologically) of the bridging of the gap between spiritual and material in the Incarnation (e.g., in the art of the Tabernacle, invoked by Nepotian, which prefigured Jesus as material dwelling-place of the divine). So varied are these roles, so flexible is this dialectic, that virtually any visual relationship to the object can be mapped onto the figure of the Jew: precisely the kind of flexibility necessary for a discourse to become dominant as an explanation of the world.

Thus in the civil war over the use of devotional images that shook the eastern Roman empire (Byzantium) in the eighth and ninth centuries, both sides charged their opponents with Jewishness. According to the Iconoclasts, the advocates of devotional art were either worshipers of the material picture, in which case they were idolaters, or else they were worshippers of the image of Jesus’ human body, in which case they were like the Jews, overlooking his divinity. The Iconophiles, on the other hand, charged that Iconoclasts were “Jews” not only because they interpreted the commandment against graven images literally, but also because they perceived only the outer beauty of the images themselves, without realizing that this beauty was meant to turn the inner eye toward God. The Jews were led by this error into crucifying Christ, the Iconoclasts into destroying his image.¹⁶

¹⁵ St. Jerome, Letter 52, chap. 10. Jerome’s friend Epiphanius of Salamis made a similar argument at much the same time. Criticizing the decoration of churches with wall-paintings of the saints, he reminded his readers of Paul’s characterization of false priests as “whited walls” (Acts 23.3). To paint a fresco is to become a Pharisee (Epiphanius of Salamis, 67).

¹⁶ Kathleen Corrigan discusses a number of Iconodule claims about the Jewish origin of Iconoclasm in her foundational study of the anti-Jewish polemics produced in the debate over images (31-32). Further sources are gathered in Brubaker and Haldon; and Haldon and Ousterhout.



Similarly in the medieval West, all the great transformations in the devotional roles of art were accompanied by debates about “Jewishness”. The Temple and its fixtures served as touchstones for the great twelfth century debates over the use of images in churches, just as they had in Jerome’s day. Defenders of images, such as Abbot Suger of St. Dennis, invoked them (Suger of Saint Denis 48).¹⁷ And so did critics, such as St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who famously quipped (citing Jerome), that those who fill sanctuaries with material beauty are like Jewish money-lenders, driven by “avarice, which is the service of idols”. Small wonder, Bernard complained, that many confuse churches with synagogues. As Bernard’s complaint makes clear, the association he was making was not simply with some ancient rites of Israelites long gone, but with Jewish errors that he understood as a clear and present danger, and strove to associate with the Jews of his own world.¹⁸

It is because art was felt to be in such close proximity to “Judaism” that the art-object itself frequently staged the process of choosing between the eyes of the flesh and the eyes of the spirit, in order to defend itself from –and charge its critics with– the accusation of “Jewishness”. One way to achieve this was to deploy figures of Judaism within the work, in order to project upon those figures all the dangers of “Judaizing” inherent within the process of representation and interpretation. Let me touch upon two examples of this type of projection, in order to make my claims plausible. The first, very briefly, and merely as an example from the context and period of the poems we have been discussing, comes from the same *Cantigas de Santa María* that

¹⁷ On the debate see Rudolph, “Artistic Change”. The Temple decorations were cited by a long tradition of Western (as well as Eastern) defenders of art, on which see Kessler, “Spiritual Seeing” and “Seeing Medieval Art” (65-66). For a pictorial example see Stahl.

¹⁸ For Bernard’s critique of images, see Rudolph, “The ‘Things of Greater Importance’”, esp. 278-280. On those who consider churches synagogues, see Bernard’s Letter 241:1. Purported disputations (these were as much a genre of Christian writing as an actual practice) between Christians and Jews in the twelfth century, like those of Gilbert Crispin or Rupert of Deutz (d. 1129), put arguments against images in the mouths of Jews so that they could be refuted as un-Christian. See, e.g., Rupert of Deutz’s response to the Jew’s criticism of devotion to the cross in “Anulus sive dialogus inter Christianum et Iudaeum”. See also, from the same circle, the account of the conversion of the Jew Herman-Judah and his difficulties with images, on which Schmitt, “La question des images” and “Les dimensions multiples du voir”; and more generally Dagron.

we have already seen projecting the dangers of poetry and of politics upon figures of Judaism. *Cantiga 34*, the story of the Jewish image thief, carries out a similar defense of art (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Biblioteca del Real Monasterio, MS. T.I.1, fol. 49v. Photo: Edilán.



In the illumination we see a Jew stealing an image of the version and depositing it in a latrine. The Jew is carried off by the devil, the image is recovered, and then converts the Jewish community, who are seen worshipping before it in the last panel of the illumination, kneeling devoutly before it in full Jewish hat and dress. Two distinct charges, analytically separable albeit empirically indistinguishable, are here being projected onto the Jew. The first is that of treating the image as mere matter, not worthy of any devotion or respect (iconoclasm). The second, that of excessive respect, a confusion of the image with the deity (idolatry): as if by putting the image in the latrine, it were Mary herself who were covered with dung. The Jew in *Cantiga 34* is used to represent both these errors, demarcating the space for proper Christian worship. That the representation is self-conscious should not be doubted. Note, for example, how in the first panel the illuminator has hyper-framed the image—first within the frame of the picture, then within the frame of the city, and finally within the frame of the image itself—as if to call attention to the artfulness of the work of art.

This is not the place to attempt a broad treatment of the question of how Christian art deployed figures of Judaism to discover “the conditions of possibility for its own existence”.¹⁹ But perhaps a slightly more detailed discussion of one example may stand for all. *The Fountain of Grace, or: The Dispute between Church and Synagogue*, attributed to Jan Van Eyck or his workshop, hangs today in the Prado (Fig. 2).

The example is a good one because it involves both aspects of our problem: on the one hand, aesthetic change projecting new dangers of “Jewishness” onto living beings; and, on the other, change in the presence of living Jews within a society producing new ways of thinking about the “Jewishness” of aesthetics. First, the aesthetics: Jan van Eyck (c. 1385-1441) was not the inventor of oil painting, as Giorgio Vasari believed, but he was certainly a precocious master of oil and its glazes, and of the detailed realism the new techniques made possible. If we remember the Church Fathers’ complaints about artists, such as St. Isidore’s quip that “when they strive to make things

¹⁹ “Conditions of possibility”: Nirenberg, “Introduction” (2). Readers interested in this topic may see Lipton.



Fig. 2. School of Jan van Eyck, The Fountain of Grace and the Triumph of the Church over the Synagogue. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.



more real, they bring forth [more] falsehood”, we can foresee some of the “Judaizing” anxieties such realism could arouse: anxieties about literalism, mimetic deceit, and idolatry, among others.²⁰

Next, the sociology: the *Fountain of Grace* was painted shortly after Van Eyck’s visit to Iberia in 1428-9, when conflict between Old Christians and New Christians –the tens of thousands of Christians converted from Judaism more or less by force at the end of the fourteenth century– was emerging violently into the open in the form of riots, discriminatory legislation, and exclusionary practices aimed at the latter. The artist may have spent time travelling in the retinue of Juan II –sometimes thought to be the royal figure in the foreground of the painting– at more or less the same time that the king was attempting to quell anti-*converso* threats in Seville.²¹

It is often forgotten that the status of painting was itself one of the issues in this conflict between Old Christians and New.²² There were a number of fifteenth-century Iberian theologians, some of them New Christians, who, like Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Jerome, or St. Paul before them, criticized devotional art as a form of idolatry, a misdirection of attention from the creator to the created. As one anonymous author put it in the mid-fifteenth century: do not “contaminate [yourselves]” with idols, nor fall into homosexual fornication (Recall St. Paul’s linkage of idolatry and homosexuality in Romans 1).²³ He warned as well that the more realistic the picture, the greater the danger. How does *The Fountain of Grace* confront this charge –sharpened by both aesthetic and sociological change– that it is itself a catalyst for conversion toward idolatry and Jewishness, rather than toward grace?

The upper story of the painting is an enclosed paradise. God sits at its apex.

²⁰ Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum sive originum libri xx*, Lib. XIX.xvi, “De pictura”.

²¹ On the voyage to Portugal and Spain, see Justi (258-69); Paviot, “La vie de Jan Van Eyck”.

²² On the image controversies spurred by the mass conversions, see especially Pereda, “Las imágenes de la discordia”. An English version of the chapter most relevant to my argument, discussing this and other texts, may be found in Pereda, “Through a Glass Darkly”.

²³ According to Talavera, the critic claimed that the greater the illusionism of the image, the greater the danger (189).

To his right and left sit Mary and John the Evangelist, each absorbed in the reading of a book. A lamb lies at his feet, and a river flows from his throne through the garden: a pictorial representation of the verse from the Apocalypse, *procedentem de sede Dei et Agni* (Ap 22.1). The river descends until it empties into a fountain outside the walls of paradise. Those walls, with turrets left and right, separate paradise from the painting's ground floor: the terrestrial antechamber or forecourt, so to speak, of the heavenly city. The angel in the turret on the left reads from a book, while from the hands of the angel in the other tower a scroll descends bearing an inscription from the Song of Songs: "Can. Fons [h]ortorum, puteus aquarum viventium" [Cant. 4.15]. Only the river and the scroll—grace mediated through scripture—break the barrier between the garden and the exterior courtyard, in which two groups are clustered on either side of the fountain. On the left a pope stands by the fountain, surrounded by Christian clerics, cardinals, and kings; on the right a group of Jews, surrounding their high priest. The Christians gesture in rapt attention toward the fountain. The Jews, their high priest blindfolded, lean away from the fountain and avert their faces, vainly consulting various scrolls of Hebrew script, the largest of which lies unfurled like a fallen standard on the floor.

The painting's foregrounding of media—books and scrolls, but also music and the gestures of preaching—calls attention to our questions about mediation. The Jews and their scrolls, painted with realistic but nonsensical Hebrew script, are a familiar embodiment of the fleshly letter and its perils. But here they embody as well the perils of a painting whose painstaking literalism is everywhere evident, and perhaps nowhere more so than in the depiction of the archi-synagogus or high priest himself. In the priest's bejeweled breast plate (ephod), for example, the painter reveals his meticulous attention to the letter of Exodus 39. He bases his rendering of this famously obscure ritual object on a drawing provided by the biblical commentator Nicholas of Lyra, but makes slight changes in favor of an even more literal reading of the Vulgate text (distinguishing, for example, the white tunic from the ephod).²⁴

²⁴ On Hebrew inscriptions in Van Eyck's painting see Paviot, "Les inscriptions grecques". The high priest's Phylacteries are also a visual literalization, referring to Matthew's condemnation



Through the figure of the Jew, the painting announces its “Jewish” dependence on the letter, on external beauty and the outer appearance of things. But the same figure, condemned and blind, also proclaims the Christian artwork’s transcendence of that letter. The painting responds to the critical viewer who would reproach the painter with an excess of literalism, realism, artifice, or materialism, by placing that critic among the Jews within its frame, standing blind before the fountain of grace.

This strategy of defending painting from the criticisms of Jewishness by projecting Jewishness onto the critic of painting proved powerful. Beginning in the 1440s, we can document the widening use of devotional images for domestic use in Iberian cities, presumably as a new way of asserting one’s Christian *bona fides*. In 1478 Seville’s archbishop, Pedro González de Mendoza, and Queen Isabel’s confessor, Fray Hernando de Talavera, went so far as to issue an edict without analogue in medieval or early modern Europe, requiring Christians to keep images at home: “Iten, porque es cosa razonable que las casas de los fieles cristianos sean munidas y guardadas de la memoria de la pasión de nuestro Redentor Jesucristo y de su bendita Madre, queremos y ordenamos que cada fiel cristiano tenga en la casa de su morada alguna imagen pintada de la cruz, en que nuestro Señor Jesucristo padeció, y algunas imágenes pintadas de nuestra Señora o de algunos santos o santas, que provoquen y despierten a los que allí moran a devoción”.²⁵ And shortly after that, we begin to find New Christians brought before the Tribunal of the Inquisition, either because, like the accusation against Donosa Ruiz in 1484, that “Nunca tuvo ni tiene ni costumbró tener en su

of the Pharisees (Mt 23.5: dilatant phylacteria). On Nicholas of Lyra’s importance as an exegete in the later Middle Ages, see most recently Copeland. On Nicolas’ illustrations, see Pereda, “Le origini dell’architettura cubica”. My observations on the artist’s literalizing biblicalism in his representation of the ephod are based on Pereda’s discussion of the same in his forthcoming “ojos que no ven, oídos que no oyen, sentido literal y visión espiritual en la ‘fuente de la vida’”. My thanks to Professor Pereda for his generosity in making available his manuscript.

²⁵ Talavera 186. In 1480 civic ordinances were issued regulating Seville’s workshops, controlling the quality and style of every picture produced, and instituting a system of examinations, licenses, and inspectors (veedores). See “Petición presentada en el Cabildo de Sevilla”; Rallo Grus (451-52). Donosa Ruiz, published by Llorca. These texts are cited, and this process discussed, in Pereda, “Through a Glass Darkly”.

casa oratorio de la Virgen María ni de Jhu. Xristo, ni de sus santos, segunt que xristianos costumbran tener e delant de los quales fazen oración”; or because they misused the paintings they had, turning their backs to them, or even whipping or torturing them.

This seems to me an excellent example of the inter-relationship between what we might otherwise want to distinguish as “discursive” versus “real” Jewishness. A debate over the “conversionary” potential of painting –does it lead one toward Christian-ness or toward Jewish-ness?– taking place within a sociological context of mass conversion, not only transformed the place of painting in Christian devotion, but also the attributes associated with “Jewishness” and “Christian-ness” in Iberia, and even the meaning/possibility of conversion itself.

I hope these examples help to make clearer why I think it so important to realize the inter-relationship between what we might want to call the “sociological Judaism” of medieval Spain –that is, the “Jewishness” that threatens those who look like or act like the roles assigned to living Jews within a society– and “ontological, epistemological, or aesthetic Judaism”, that is, the *qualities* of “Jewishness” that, in Christian discourse, threaten every embodied human being, dependent as we are on letter, flesh, law, and the created things of this world. As a final example of this interaction, let’s look at just one sentence of a political rather than an artistic tract: the first sentence of the first treatise advocating purity of blood statutes barring New Christians from political office, penned during Toledo’s revolt against King Juan in 1449:

[I address this letter] to the Holy Father..., and to the high and powerful king or prince or administrator to whom, according to God, law, reason and right there belongs the administration and governance of the realms... of Castile and Leon, and to all other... administrators in the spiritual and temporal [affairs] of the universal orb, in the Church militant, which is the congregation and university of faithful Christians, [that is, those] truly believing in the birth, passion and resurrection [etc.].... [but I do not address it to those administrators who are] the unbelieving and the doubtful in the faith, who are outside of us and in confederation [*ayuntamiento*] with the synagogue, which is to say a congregation of beasts, for since such bind



themselves like livestock to the letter, they have always given and still give false meaning to divine and human scripture. [In short, I address this letter to those] attesting to the truth and saying: ‘the letter kills, the spirit vivifies’ [2 Cor 3.6].²⁶ (Benito Ruano 320-21)

This treatise is often treated as the first argument for “racial Judaism”. So it is all the more curious that it begins with a literacy test. “Administrators” who read like Jews, literally after the flesh, have joined the synagogue and lost the human right to participate in the *res publica*. We know exactly what governors and administrators the authors have in mind, and none of them were “real Jews”: the royal favorite Alvaro de Luna, the King, Juan II, who supported him, and even the Pope, if he ended up rejecting Toledo’s appeal and overturning the statutes of purity of blood. And what if all princes turn out to read like “Jews”, preferring to uphold earthly laws over the dictates of the spirit?²⁷ In that case, the treatise concludes, the city should place itself directly under the governance of the Holy Spirit: the only “politician” at no risk of Jewishness.

Here we see the hermeneutics of Paul’s killing letter thoroughly interpenetrated with the bio-politics of conflict and *convivencia* in Iberia. As good a place as any to conclude our inquiry into how, through Judaizing discourses, a Christian society could produce Judaism out of its own entrails.

²⁶ On the tradition of representing the Synagogue as a “congregation of beasts” see Stow (6).

²⁷ St. Ambrose made a similar charge against Emperor Theodosius in the fourth century. See his Letters 40 and 41, in Liebeschuetz (95-123).

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