

**Marian Antisemitism in Medieval Life and Legend:  
A Study based on Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria***

by

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### ABSTRACT

This thesis examines three miracle tales with anti-Jewish leitmotifs from Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Escorial, Biblioteca Real, MS T.I.1. In each one, a Jewish male is confronted by an image of the Virgin and Child which provokes a strong reaction from him. The Jewish characters who interact with the image of the Virgin in a positive way are integrated into the Christian community. Jews who respond negatively are punished. In each tale, the Jew's reaction to the image of the Virgin and Child corresponds to his acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation which it embodies. These narratives (and another involving a Moor, with which I compare them) not only demonstrate the power of the Virgin over non-Christians, but the power of the Marian image over Muslims and Jews whose apparent rejection of religious imagery was a source of concern for medieval Christians. While focusing on miracle tales, this discussion also draws attention to the role played by sacred images in medieval life. Throughout Europe, Christians rallied around representations of the Virgin onto which they projected their values. These religious images served as "shields of faith" reinforcing the identity of the group united in veneration of them.

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## PREFACE

The term “antisemitism” was coined in the 1870s, by Wilhelm Marr, a political radical who was expelled from his native Switzerland on account of his extreme views. In the name of “democracy” he railed against Jews whom he once described as “a tribe of mongrels whose vital principle...is selling to the highest bidder.”<sup>1</sup> Marr subscribed to the idea “that humans were divided into clearly distinguishable races and that the intellectual, moral, and social conduct and potential of the members of these races were biologically determined.”<sup>2</sup> Several twentieth-century scholars, including Nicholas de Lange, argue that in light of its origins, the term antisemitism “in the strict sense...cannot be detached from the racial theories which exercised such an important influence on the ethos of Western politics and thought from the middle of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth.”<sup>3</sup>

The term “anti-Judaism” also dates to the nineteenth century when it was employed by Bernard Lazare “to distinguish the centuries-long religious opposition of Christians to Judaism and Jews from nineteenth-century antisemitism.”<sup>4</sup> Historians seeking to emphasize the distinction between religious and racial prejudice label the former “anti-Judaism” and the latter “antisemitism,” and do not use the terms interchangeably. Yet scholars wanting to draw attention to “the inherent consistency of western attitudes towards the Jews,”<sup>5</sup> intentionally employ the term antisemitism “as a blanket label for all stages of Jew-hatred.”<sup>6</sup> These individuals would probably concur with Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz who state: “In the case of the supposed

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<sup>1</sup> Moshe Zimmermann, “From Radicalism to Antisemitism,” in *Antisemitism through the Ages*, ed. Shmuel Almog, tr. Nathan H. Reiser (Oxford 1988), 248.

<sup>2</sup> Gavin Langmuir, “Toward a Definition of Antisemitism,” in *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley 1990), 311.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas de Lange, “The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Ancient Evidence and Modern Interpretation,” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (New York 1991), 22.

<sup>4</sup> Gavin Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism* (Berkeley 1990), 275.

<sup>5</sup> Gilman and Katz, preface to *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, vii.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

difference between ‘anti-Judaism’ and ‘anti-Semitism’ in the history of the treatment of Jews in Europe, we are dealing with shifts in the articulation of perception, not in the basic perception itself.”<sup>1</sup>

Gavin Langmuir, who has written extensively on the formation of antisemitism, has attempted “to pinpoint when and why Christian anti-Jewish feelings became antisemitic.”<sup>2</sup> According to Langmuir: “If antisemitism is defined as chimerical beliefs or fantasies about ‘Jews’, as irrational beliefs that attribute to all those symbolized as ‘Jews’ menacing characteristics or conduct that no Jews have been observed to possess or engage in, then antisemitism first appeared in medieval Europe in the twelfth century.”<sup>3</sup> Langmuir is not alone in identifying antisemitism as one of the features of Western culture that emerged in the Middle Ages. R. I. Moore presents the same general argument in recent publications.<sup>4</sup>

The argument that medieval developments were influential in shaping modern antisemitism is persuasive. However, the assertion that “chimerical beliefs about ‘Jews’ ” originated in the twelfth century is debatable. As will be demonstrated shortly, Marian legends dating from the early Middle Ages also characterize Jews as malevolent beings, and reflect the irrational beliefs of their Christian authors. On the grounds that most readers understand “antisemitism” to mean all expressions of hostility against Jews, I have elected to use the term in reference to medieval culture in this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London 1995), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Langmuir, *History, Religion and Antisemitism*, 297. Cf. Langmuir, “Medieval Antisemitism,” in *Toward a Definition*, 302.

<sup>4</sup> R. I. Moore, “Anti-Semitism and the Birth of Europe,” in *Christianity and Judaism: Papers read at the 1991 Summer Meeting and the 1992 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford 1992), 33-57. See also R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Oxford 1987).

## INTRODUCTION

Scholars have investigated many aspects of antisemitism in medieval European society.<sup>1</sup> However, few have examined manifestations of antisemitism in the Christian cult of the saints. The central premise of this thesis is that the cult of the Virgin Mary served as a vehicle for the expression of anti-Jewish sentiments.

In the following pages I argue that the cult of the Virgin provided a foundation for the construction of anti-Jewish prejudice due to the role occupied by Mary and the Jews in Christian theology. Mary was the agent through which the Old Covenant (Judaism) was supplanted by the New (Christianity). The Jews, on the other hand, “were doctrinally in a dual position. They were the chosen people of the Old Testament who had prophesied the Saviour’s coming, yet they had rejected and crucified him.”<sup>2</sup> Christians, frustrated by the Jewish refutation of the doctrine of the Incarnation, conceived the idea that Jews were the avowed enemies of the Mother of God.

This thesis is based on evidence drawn from a variety of sources including theological texts, pilgrim accounts, historical narratives, medieval plays and works of art. Nevertheless, because the miracles of the Virgin offer the richest source of material to the student of Marian antisemitism, they have served as the primary focus of this inquiry.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (New Haven 1943); Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Vols. III-X (New York 1965); R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Oxford 1987); and several essays in Shmuel Almog, ed. *Antisemitism Through the Ages* (Oxford 1988).

<sup>2</sup> Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge 1989), 165.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Worth Frank estimates that Marian miracles with anti-Jewish leitmotifs “comprise 7 1/2 percent of the common stock of miracles.” Robert Worth Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin, Medieval Anti-Semitism, and the ‘Prioress’s Tale,’ ” in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo 1982), 179. These were among the most popular of the Virgin’s miracles (e.g. “The Legend of Theophilus”).

### *The Miracles of the Virgin*

As the cult of the Virgin gained an increasingly large following, reports of her miraculous deeds grew proportionally. It has been estimated that over two thousand Marian miracles were composed in the Middle Ages alone.<sup>4</sup> These miracles were as familiar to illiterate members of medieval society as to the educated elite since they were incorporated into sermons and spread by word of mouth. In the thirteenth century, the friars were especially instrumental in advertising the Virgin's posthumous feats. As Evelyn Wilson observes: "the preaching of the mendicants spread Mary legends to the far corners of Europe."<sup>5</sup> The majority of Marian legends have a didactic message. Some advertise the authenticity of a given relic or the efficacy of a certain shrine. Others offer rationales for specific practices, such as making confession or giving tithes. Arguments advocating the superiority of Christianity over rival faiths are also incorporated in them. Time and again, Mary is portrayed as the champion of the Christian religion, triumphing over heretic and unbeliever alike.

Several miracle tales involve a confrontation between the Virgin and Jews, who are said to harbour a particular enmity towards her. This thesis focuses on a select group of miracles featuring Jewish protagonists. What sets them apart is that in each one an image of the Virgin and Child plays a significant role.

### *Images of the Virgin and Child*

Images of the Virgin and Child were a pervasive presence in medieval life, appearing in both sacred and secular contexts. They adorned altars, liturgical objects and private devotional items; were set up over gates and doorways; and were even emblazoned on banners carried into battle. The bond between mother and son, expressed

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<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Faye Wilson, *The Stella Maris of John of Garland: Edited, Together with a Study of Certain Collections of Mary Legends Made in Northern France in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1946), 10.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

in visual terms, reassured Christians that the Virgin intervened for them in heaven, and that “her intercessions had the infallible efficacy of a blood-relative.”<sup>6</sup> Of equal importance, paintings of Mary holding her offspring reminded Christians of the Incarnation--the pivotal moment when God became flesh.

Given their ubiquity in everyday life, it is not surprising that Marian images were also assigned a central role in the miracles of the Virgin. As several scholars have recently observed, many Marian tales revolve around painted or carved representations of the Virgin which “mediate between the human and the divine.”<sup>7</sup> These include a number of stories in which the Virgin effects a miracle through her image.

In the miracles analysed here, a Jewish male is confronted by an image of the Virgin and Child which provokes a strong reaction from him. Since the doctrine of the Incarnation was hotly debated by medieval Christians and Jews, it is significant that the Jewish characters interact with images embodying this very doctrine. Predictably, those protagonists who defile the image are doomed to perdition whereas those who respond favourably towards it are converted.

These narratives (and another involving a Moor, with which I compare them) not only demonstrate the power of the Virgin over non-Christians, but the power of the Marian image over Muslims and Jews whose apparent rejection of religious imagery was a source of concern for medieval Christians. Decrees stipulating that when “a [religious] statue passed in procession in the street, Jews and Muslims must prostrate themselves or at least remove their caps,” and laws forbidding them from desecrating crosses and paintings, indicate that medieval Christians desired that their sacred images be universally

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<sup>6</sup> Peter Brown, “A Dark Age Crisis,” in *Society and the Holy* (Berkeley 1982), 271.

<sup>7</sup> Suzanne Lewis, *Reading Images: Narrative Discourse and Reception in the Thirteenth-Century Illuminated Apocalypse* (Cambridge 1995), 279. See also David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago 1989), 283-316 and Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 220-241.

esteemed.<sup>8</sup> This same concern is reiterated in the miracles of the Virgin in which Jews find themselves face to face with her image. These miracles, which advocate the veneration of images and stress the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, merge piety and propaganda. In short, they are politically-charged narratives reflecting the values of the ruling majority.

### *Methodology*

For the sake of coherence, this thesis is centred on a particular collection of miracles: the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* or *Songs of Holy Mary*, Escorial MS T.I.1 of Alfonso X (1252-1284). This illustrated manuscript proved apt for my purposes because it contains all of the most popular medieval miracles concerning Jews. In addition, it invited an examination of the function of images because the artists responsible for its unparalleled miniatures carefully documented the role played by paintings and sculptures of the Virgin in each tale. According to my estimate, statues of the Virgin and Child resting on an altar are depicted approximately 290 times in the manuscript, often more than once in a single miniature.<sup>9</sup>

Because this discussion chiefly concerns the Marian images represented in the miniatures rather than the miniatures themselves, it does not involve a stylistic analysis of them, nor does it address the complex issue of workshop practice, including the question of the “interaction and influence of other, contemporary artistic currents on the Alfonsine

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<sup>8</sup> The fifteenth-century decree quoted here was promulgated by officials of Tortosa “zealous for the Christian religion.” It is mentioned by Norman Roth, *Conversos, Inquisition, and the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Madison 1995), 278. I am referring to legislation along the lines of Alfonso X's *Siete Partidas* (7.28.56) cited in Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X of Castile* (Philadelphia 1993), 111.

<sup>9</sup> These statues are of the “*sedes sapientiae*” or “Throne of Wisdom” type. See Ilene H. Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom: Wood Sculptures of the Madonna in Romanesque France* (Princeton 1972). Supplementing the recurrent depictions of statues of the Virgin and Child on altars are Marian icons (*Cantigas* 9, 34, 46 and 179); wall paintings (*Cantigas* 74 and 99); statues set up out of doors--often above gates (*Cantigas* 13, 24, 28, 42, 51, 136, 183, and 185); statues resting on shelves indoors (*Cantiga* 38); and “*arχειροποιεται*” or “images made without hands” (*Cantigas* 27 and 29). An image of the Virgin is also emblazoned on a banner (*Cantiga* 181).

pictorial production.”<sup>10</sup> However, the iconographical content of the miniatures is explored (especially in Chapter Four) to illuminate the underlying theological beliefs which influenced relationships between medieval Christians and Jews. Since several studies of the representation of Jews in medieval art have already been undertaken, I do not address this subject at length.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that in illustrations of Marian legends, although Jews are frequently depicted with distinguishing caps, badges, or hooked noses, the Virgin (despite her Jewish ancestry) is never negatively caricatured but appears in the guise of a Christian Queen.<sup>12</sup>

In the first chapter, which provides the requisite theological background, I discuss how the Jewish refutation of the doctrine of the Incarnation was interpreted by Christians as an affront to the Virgin. In order to draw attention to the religious issues which lay at the heart of popular prejudice against Jews, I also refer to their alleged participation in the Crucifixion and their purported attempts to desecrate the Virgin’s body after her soul had been taken to heaven.

The second chapter centres on “Arculf’s Tale” (*Cantiga* 34), a miracle of Byzantine origin in which a Jew defecates on an icon of the Virgin and Child. Although some scholars have argued that stories in which Jews are portrayed assaulting Christian images are outgrowths of the Iconoclastic Controversy, I suggest that this is not necessarily the case, since Jews were vulnerable to charges of image desecration before the Controversy and long after. References to Jews being punished for iconoclastic acts occur in a variety of texts from all over Europe. A representative sample of these

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<sup>10</sup> Connie L. Scarborough, “A Summary of the Research on the Miniatures of the *CSM*,” *Bulletin of the Cantigueiros de Santa Maria I/I* (Fall 1987), 44. Scholars who address issues of style and workshop production are mentioned by Scarborough. *Ibid.* See also José Guerrero Lovillo, *Las Cantigas: Estudio arqueológico de sus miniaturas* (Madrid 1949).

<sup>11</sup> For example, see Bernhard Blumenkranz, *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l’art chrétien* (Paris 1966); Eric M. Zafran, “The Iconography of Antisemitism: A Study of the Representation of the Jews in the Visual Arts of Europe 1400-1600,” diss., New York University, 1973; and Moshe Lazar, “The Lamb and the Scapegoat: The Dehumanization of the Jews in Medieval Propaganda Imagery,” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, 38-80.

<sup>12</sup> A decree of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 required that all Jews wear an identifying badge. While the wearing of the badge was not adopted in every area, “by the second half of the thirteenth century, most European countries were enforcing the wearing of the badge.” Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews*, Vol. VII (Toronto 1991), 137.

references (ranging in date from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries) is provided in this chapter in order to underscore the longevity of the motif. In addition, I stress how cult practice reinforced anti-Jewish prejudice since images allegedly attacked by Jews (like the famous “Beirut” icon) were visited by pilgrims who spread the word of the Jews’ “perfidy.”

“The Legend of the Divine Surety” (*Cantiga* 25), also of Byzantine provenance, is analysed in Chapter Three. In this miracle, a statue of the Virgin and Child springs to life and inspires a Jewish moneylender to believe “wholeheartedly in Holy Mary and in Her Son.”<sup>13</sup> Since medieval Jews were more likely to eschew Christian images than be attracted to them, it is significant that a statue converts the moneylender. The Christian author of this propagandistic narrative simultaneously provides an apologia for his faith and for the veneration of images.

A Marian image is also instrumental in the conversion of a Jew in the “Tale of the Jewish Boy” (*Cantiga* 4), examined in Chapter Four. I compare Byzantine and Western versions of this legend, note discrepancies and shifts in plot, and try to determine what functions they serve. Because this is a eucharistic tale, this chapter also explores the connection between the Virgin and the eucharist in Christian theology.

Before introducing the *Cantigas*, I must emphasize that in this discussion I compare the miracles recounted in this Spanish manuscript with many versions from other collections of the Virgin’s miracles. My reason for doing so is simply to underline the fact that audiences divided by thousands of miles and hundreds of years were receptive to the same basic narratives. For those investigating antisemitic themes it is crucial to acknowledge that a large majority of the tales featuring Jews are derived from a common stock and do not necessarily reflect their narrators’ social contexts. More often than not, medieval narrators of the Virgin’s miracles uncritically repeat the ideas of earlier writers. In other words, anti-Jewish tales are not unique to any particular collection of Marian

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<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Kulp-Hill, unpublished translation of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, based on the edition of Walter Mettmann, Alfonso X, el Sábido, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, 4 Vols. (Coimbra 1959-1972). All subsequent quotations of the *Cantigas* in this thesis are from Kulp-Hill’s unpublished typescript.

miracles but “are a commonplace in the genre, a standard, constituent element.”<sup>14</sup>

As Robert Worth Frank observes, this fact “has not been commented upon at any length,” even by the few scholars who have noted the “persistent presence of anti-semitism” in the miracles of the Virgin.<sup>15</sup> One of the first to remark on the phenomenon was Henry Adams. In his book, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1913), the Harvard professor writes: “Like other Queens, ...[the Virgin] had many of the failings and prejudices of her humanity. In spite of her own origin, she disliked Jews, and rarely neglected a chance to maltreat them.”<sup>16</sup> However, derogatory references to Jews scattered throughout Adams’ book disclose an antisemitism rivalling that which he attributes to *Notre Dame*.

More recently, Hyam Maccoby has addressed the subject of anti-Jewish motifs, but he does not explore it in any depth. Overlooking Byzantine sources, he states: “Here we have a new development of the anti-Jewish theme, for the honour, not to say worship, paid to the Virgin Mary was not an early element in Christianity, but a product of the eleventh century at the earliest.”<sup>17</sup> William Chester Jordan, who also focuses exclusively on Western Europe, implies that the French prior, Gautier de Coincy (d. 1236) introduced “anti-Jewish leitmotifs into the miracles of Mary,” but, in fact, this topos already occurs in Byzantine tales of the sixth century.<sup>18</sup> If the longevity of this theme is to be

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Worth Frank, “Miracles of the Virgin,” 179.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-178.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Adams, *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* (1913; rpt. Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1986), 250.

<sup>17</sup> Hyam Maccoby, *The Sacred Executioner: Human Sacrifice and the Legacy of Guilt* (London 1982), 157. In fact, Mary was honoured by Christians at a much earlier date. “The depiction of the Madonna and Child finds its origins in the early Christian painting in the Roman catacombs,” and Marian churches, such as S. Maria Maggiore, Rome, date from the first half of the fifth century. John Osborne, *Early Mediaeval Wall-Paintings in the Lower Church of San Clemente, Rome* (New York 1984), 118. Already in 431, the Council of Ephesus had pronounced Mary to be “Theotokos” or “God-bearer,” and festivals in honour of the Virgin were introduced into the liturgical calendar by the late seventh century. *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>18</sup> William Chester Jordan, *The French Monarchy and the Jews: From Philip Augustus to the Last Capetians* (Philadelphia 1989), 46. It is possible, however, that “anti-Jewish motifs in the literary artifacts of the cult [of the Virgin] became especially robust in northern France ca. 1240” as Jordan suggests. William Chester Jordan, “Marian devotion and the Talmud Trial of 1240,” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, B.Lewis and F. Niewöhner, eds. (Wiesbaden 1992), 68.

acknowledged, Eastern and Western sources need to be examined in conjunction with one another.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, while basing this study on the *Cantigas*, I treat this Spanish work as part of “an international literary tradition.”<sup>20</sup>

### *The Cantigas de Santa Maria*

Alfonso X ruled over the kingdoms of Castile and León from 1252 until 1284, and spent most of his reign trying to consolidate the Muslim territories gained by his father, Fernando III. However, he is more famous for his cultural endeavours, since his court was a centre of learning, and he supervised the production of several scientific, legal and literary texts. The Spanish king gathered miracle tales from a wide variety of sources and created an encyclopaedic collection of 427 songs honouring the Virgin.<sup>21</sup> This unique compilation consists of four related manuscripts known collectively as the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* or *Songs of Holy Mary*.<sup>22</sup> Unless specified otherwise, all

<sup>19</sup> Western writers of the medieval period acknowledged their debt to Byzantium. William of Malmesbury (d. ca. 1143) declares: “The enthusiasm of the Greeks has challenged and incited our own people to the love of Our Lady and, as in so many other instances, this exemplary worship has flowed from the Greeks on to Latin soil.” Peter Carter, “The Historical Content of William of Malmesbury’s *Miracles of the Virgin Mary*,” in *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern*, ed. R.H.C. Davis and J.M. Wallace-Hadrill (Oxford 1981), 162.

<sup>20</sup> to use Stephen K. Wright’s phrase. Stephen K. Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord: Medieval Dramatizations of the Destruction of Jerusalem* (Toronto 1989), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Among other sources, Alfonso consulted the famous shrine collection of Soissons (mentioned in *Cantiga* 61), and Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum historiale*, sent to him by Louis IX of France (d. 1270). E. Wilson, *Stella Maris*, 68. See also Elise Forsythe Dexter, “Sources of the *Cantigas* of Alfonso el Sabio,” diss., University of Wisconsin, 1926. The question of Alfonso X’s role in the production of the *Cantigas* has been addressed by several authors. The consensus is that “he was active in almost every phase of book composition, from sourcebook collecting to editing to sponsorship of the large teams necessary in actual production (the miniaturists, the draftsmen, the scribal musicators, and others).” Joseph T. Snow, “Alfonso as Troubadour: The Fact and the Fiction” in *Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Robert I. Burns (Philadelphia 1990), 124. It is possible that he penned some of the verses and music himself; the *Cantigas* contains “repeated claims to authorship of both lyrics and melodies.” *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>22</sup> Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional, MS 10069; Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS Banco Rari 20; and Escorial Biblioteca Real, MSS T.I.1. and B.I.2. These manuscripts are described by Evelyn S. Procter, who addresses the issue of dates. Evelyn S. Procter, *Alfonso X of Castile: Patron of Literature and Learning* (Oxford 1951), 24-46.

references to the *Cantigas* in this thesis will be to Escorial, MS T.I.1, known as the *Códice Rico*.

The *Códice Rico* contains 194 songs about Mary written in Galician-Portuguese, “the troubadour tongue...usually employed by poets for secular subject matter.”<sup>23</sup> While the majority are concise narratives recounting the miraculous exploits of the Virgin, every tenth song is a hymn of praise or *loor* underscoring her theological importance. The lyrics exhibit a wide variety of metrical forms and all are set to music.<sup>24</sup> In addition, each *cantiga* is accompanied by at least one full-page illumination (measuring 326 x 230 mm, including frames). The illuminations are continuous narratives divided into six panels reading from left to right and top to bottom, and the action depicted in each panel is described by a caption written above it.<sup>25</sup> Although the space reserved for the captions has sometimes been left blank, the miniatures are complete. Even the borders framing the illuminated panels are decorated with repeated geometric or floral patterns and bear the heraldic devices of the King’s two kingdoms: the rampant lion of León and the three-towered castle of Castile.<sup>26</sup> The royal escutcheons attest to the king’s intimate connection with the manuscript as do portraits of him which occur throughout the work. In the miniatures of the two prologues, Alfonso X, the self-professed troubadour of the Virgin,

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<sup>23</sup> Connie L. Scarborough, “Visualization vs. Verbalization in Ms. T.J.1. of the *Cantigas de Santa María*,” diss., University of Kentucky, 1983, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Kulp-Hill, “Translating the *Cantigas de Santa María*,” in *Studies on the Cantigas de Santa María: Art, Music, and Poetry: Proceedings of the International Symposium on the Cantigas de Santa María of Alfonso X, el Sabio (1221-1284) in Commemoration of Its 700th Anniversary Year--1981 (New York, November 19-21)*, ed. Israel J. Katz and John E. Keller (Madison 1987), 288.

<sup>25</sup> Scholars believe that the captions were composed first and used as guides by the artists responsible for the miniatures. However, incomplete pages indicate that the captions were not actually inscribed above the panels until after the paintings were complete. Kathleen Kulp-Hill, “The Captions to the Miniatures of the ‘Códice Rico’ of the *Cantigas de Santa María*, a Translation,” *Bulletin of the Cantigueiros de Santa María* 7 (Spring 1995), 4.

<sup>26</sup> Scarborough, “Verbalization vs. Visualization,” 135.

is shown dictating her miracles to his scribes (Fig. 1).<sup>27</sup>

The king is also portrayed in a number of miracles with his family and courtiers.<sup>28</sup> *Cantiga* 122 tells how the Virgin revived Alfonso X's dead sister before his very eyes, and *Cantiga* 142 how she saved a man in his hunting party from drowning. Arguably, the most intriguing of these personal miracles is *Cantiga* 209 (Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale, MS Banco Rari 20) which recounts how the king recovered from a serious illness after he rejected the hot cloths offered by his doctors and ordered his book of Marian miracles to be placed on his body. This story is told in the first person and illustrated in a miniature (fol. 119v) which documents the cure.<sup>29</sup> Like an ex-voto placed above a saint's shrine as proof of its efficacy, this illustration testifies to the Virgin's restorative powers.<sup>30</sup>

Alfonso X's personal attachment to the *Cantigas* is also revealed in his will (dated 22 January 1284) which reads: "Likewise we order that all the books of the *Canticles of*

<sup>27</sup> For a discussion of Alfonso X as the Virgin's troubadour see Joseph T. Snow, "The Central Role of the Troubadour Persona of Alfonso X in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 56 (1979), 305-315, Joseph T. Snow "Alfonso as Troubadour: The Fact and the Fiction," 124-40, and George D. Greenia, "The Politics of Piety: Manuscript Illumination and Narration in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*," *Hispanic Review* 61 (Summer 1993), 325-344.

<sup>28</sup> Twenty-eight songs in the *Cantigas* corpus refer to the king, his relatives, or his courtiers. Procter, *Alfonso X of Castile*, 32-33. Alfonso X appears in *Cantigas* 10, 20, 29, 30, 50, 70, 80, 90, 100, 110, 113, 120, 130, 140, 142, 160, 169, 170, and 190.

<sup>29</sup> The miniature is reproduced in Keller and Kinkade, *Iconography in Medieval Spanish Literature* (Lexington 1984), Plate 32. A similar incident is recorded by Bernard of Angers in his book of St. Foy's miracles. Bernard reports that when his teacher, Reynold, fell sick he placed Bernard's book "on his head just as if it were the text of the holy gospel and trusted that he would recover through Sainte Foy's power." Pamela Sheingorn, *The Book of Sainte Foy* (Philadelphia 1995), 109-110. A comparable cure is documented in Thomas of Celano's *Tractatus de miraculis* (ca. 1250). In this work, a woman with an ulcer on her chest is healed when she presses a book of St. Francis' miracles against the diseased area. Not even a scar is visible when her bandages are removed. Thomas of Celano, *Tractatus de miraculis*, number 193, cited in Carol Jayne Gibson, "Form, Content and Meaning in Seven Franciscan Altarpieces of the Dugento," thesis, University of British Columbia, 1974.

<sup>30</sup> The term "ex-voto" (deriving from Latin and meaning "out of a vow" or "in pursuance of a vow"), encompasses two sets of objects which perform distinct functions. The first are votive offerings placed at a shrine in order to prompt the saint's intervention and effect a desired miracle, such as the wax effigy of the goshawk offered to the Virgin by a man who had lost his bird while hunting (*Cantiga* 44). The second are thank offerings placed at a shrine after a miracle has taken place, such as the chain laid at the foot of the altar by a Christian who is freed from a Moorish prison by the Virgin (*Cantiga* 83). Both types played an important role in the medieval cult of the saints.

*Praise of Holy Mary* be in that church where our body shall be interred.”<sup>31</sup> When the king died on 4 April 1284 he was buried in the Cathedral of Seville where the *Cantigas* remained until Philip II moved them to the Library of the Escorial.<sup>32</sup> In his will, Alfonso X also stipulated that the *cantigas* be publicly performed on the Virgin’s feast days. This suggests that these songs extolling the Virgin reached a broad audience, even if the miniatures were seen only by a privileged few.<sup>33</sup>

According to John E. Keller and Richard P. Kinkade, Alfonso X documented several miracles himself “by traveling to the sites of these occurrences and questioning people who had been present at the time.”<sup>34</sup> Not surprisingly, many local miracles in the *Cantigas* are associated with various Marian shrines in the Iberian peninsula, such as Salas, Puerto de Santa Maria, Villa Sirga, and Montserrat.<sup>35</sup> Other miracles which reflect the Spanish setting involve Moors. A typical example is “the story of the members of the garrison of Jerez who offered to the Virgin a robe looted from the Moors and who never afterwards lacked booty when they raided Moslem territory.”<sup>36</sup>

Miracles which one could call “pan-European classics” make up the bulk of the *Cantigas*. These were repeated *ad infinitum* by various authors from Byzantium to Britain and figure in virtually all major collections. The majority of medieval miracles involving Jews fall under this category, including the three which are the subject of this thesis. The fact that miracles featuring Jews had a universal appeal is not coincidental. As Gavin Langmuir explains:

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<sup>31</sup> John E. Keller, “The Art of Illumination in the Books of Alfonso X (Primarily in the Canticles of Holy Mary),” *Thought*, 60/239 (December 1985), 388, n.1.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>33</sup> George D. Greenia suggests that the songs (publicly performed) and the miniatures (viewed only by privileged courtiers) were designed with two different audiences in mind. Greenia, “Politics of Piety,” 326 and 337.

<sup>34</sup> Keller and Kinkade, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Procter, 29. The statues of the Virgin which attracted pilgrims to these shrines are discussed by Lovillo, *Las Cantigas*, 266-279.

<sup>36</sup> *Cantiga* 374, Escorial MS B. 1.2 cited in Procter, 28-29.

The existence of Jews and the majority's reaction to them have been an enduring element in Western consciousness, an element whose precise nature has varied with social change, but an element that has nonetheless maintained a striking continuity. Even when Jews were least important or were physically absent, they have been part of the mythology of the West: *The Jew of Malta* and *The Merchant of Venice* were written in and for a society in which the residence of Jews had been illegal for three hundred years.<sup>37</sup>

To understand the part played by Jews in the mythology of the West (and, more specifically, in the miracles of the Virgin), it is necessary to examine the role assigned to Jews in Christian theology.

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<sup>37</sup> Langmuir, "Majority History and Postbiblical Jews," in *Toward a Definition*, 40.

## I MARIAN ANTISEMITISM: THEOLOGICAL UNDERPINNINGS

They love not Our Lady...but blaspheme and despise and scorn her, saying and affirming and believing that her glorious Son was not conceived by the Holy Spirit, but was the son of a man.

Raymond Lull (b. ca. 1231)

### *Christ's Advent*

The conviction that a specific antagonism existed between Mary and the Jews was reinforced by certain beliefs concerning Christ's advent. Early Christian writers, such as Jerome, explained that Mary was betrothed to Joseph so that she would "not be stoned by the Jews as an adulteress."<sup>1</sup> The idea that the Jewish patriarchy considered Mary to be a licentious woman and desired to punish her also occurs in medieval texts. In his "Second Sermon on the Virgin Mother," Bernard of Clairvaux states that Joseph had to hide his pregnant fiancée because "that stiff-necked people...those cruel and incredulous Jews, would have mocked at him and stoned her."<sup>2</sup> Bernard connects the Jews' "rejection" of the pregnant Mary with their later "rejection" of Christ, for he writes: "What would they have done to him whilst yet unborn, on whom afterwards, when glorified by miracles, they did not hesitate to lay sacrilegious hand?"<sup>3</sup>

In the gospel of Matthew, when Joseph discovers that his fiancée is pregnant, he debates whether or not to marry her.<sup>4</sup> This incident, often referred to as Joseph's "doubts" or "troubles," was elaborated in the *Protoevangelium of James* and in *Pseudo-Matthew*.<sup>5</sup> C.M. Kauffmann, who traces the history of this motif, notes its occurrence in

<sup>1</sup> David Berger, "The Attitude of St. Bernard of Clairvaux toward the Jews," *Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research* 40 (1972), 101.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 1:18-25.

<sup>5</sup> The oldest extant manuscript of the *Protoevangelium of James* dates from the fourth century, although the work is mentioned by Origen (d. ca. 253). The *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* was composed ca. 550-700. Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge 1990), 3 and 13.

the *Holkam Bible Picture Book* (Brit. Lib., Additional MS 47682), a Dominican composition of English origin (ca. 1320).<sup>6</sup> Here, the story of Joseph's doubts is told in four panels on fol.12r.<sup>7</sup> In the first scene, at the upper left, Joseph is confronted by three crudely caricatured Jews, who seem happy to announce that Mary has been unfaithful to him ("*Marie est grose ne est pas de tey*"). In the next panel, Joseph, with his hands resting on Mary's abdomen, tests the trio's claims. Finding that she is expecting a child, he does not disgrace her, but goes off to a solitary place where he is visited by an angel who assures him that Mary has conceived by the Holy Ghost. In the final scene the affair is resolved as Joseph, hurrying to Mary's side, begs her forgiveness. In this sequence, Joseph, the forbearing suitor who overcomes his doubts, is contrasted with the scoffing Jews who wish to bring about Mary's downfall. The original audience of the *Holkam Bible Picture Book* likely identified the three Jews with "unbelieving" Jews in general, since the doctrine of the Incarnation was a major point of contention between Jews and Christians from late antiquity and throughout the medieval period.

In Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho* (ca.150), the Rabbi, Trypho, dismisses the notion of the Incarnation as a myth, and accuses his Christian opponent of "peddling the same tales as the Greeks," who held "that Perseus was born of Danae while she was a virgin after he who is called Zeus among them had flowed into her in the form of a stream of gold."<sup>8</sup> While these words are put into Trypho's mouth by a Christian author, they may reflect actual arguments; some scholars maintain that Justin Martyr's composition is "the last piece of the genre to be at least partially based on the reminiscence of real contests."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> It is also recounted in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Crist*, is illustrated in Romanesque wall-paintings (at Nohant-Vicq and Coombes, Sussex), was incorporated into Nativity Plays, and narrated by Pseudo-Bonaventura in his late thirteenth-century *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. C.M. Kauffmann, "Art and Popular Culture: New Themes in the Holkam Bible Picture Book," in *Studies in Medieval Art and Architecture Presented to Peter Lasko*, ed. David Buckton and T.A. Heslop (Phoenix Mill 1994), 61.

<sup>7</sup> The miniature is reproduced in Kauffmann, Fig.12.

<sup>8</sup> F.E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: The Classical Texts and Their Interpretation* (Princeton 1990), 126.

<sup>9</sup> Amos Funkenstein, "Basic types of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Later Middle Ages," *Viator* 2 (1971), 374.

Christian writers of polemical treatises, such as Ildefonsus (Archbishop of Toledo, 657-667) vehemently rebuked Jews for refuting the doctrine of the Incarnation, foretold by the prophets and foreshadowed by Old Testament events. In his *Liber de virginitate Beatae Mariae*, which draws on earlier works and repeats familiar arguments,<sup>10</sup> Ildefonsus concludes that “the Jews are an obstinate and incredulous people for refusing to believe that the Son of the Virgin is God [and] for having rejected the Word of the Lord, that is, the Word made flesh in the virgin.”<sup>11</sup> This idea was often reiterated by Christian apologists. For example, in his *Treatise against the Jews on the Incarnation* (ca. 1111), Guibert of Nogent cites several irrefutable proofs from Nature in defence of Christ’s miraculous conception.<sup>12</sup> Paraphrasing this part of his work, Anna Sapir Abulafia writes:

[Guibert]...proceeds to chide Jews, who by now he has dubbed insane and enemies of Mary, for insisting that the passing of seed was a *sine qua non* of the process of birth. Were Jews not aware of the fact that cats were engendered out of cat-nip and she-goats out of foliage and that vultures were conceived and brought forth without coition? Furthermore, bees reproduce without coition, while tiny flies fertilize themselves. Guibert concludes that Jewish denial of the Virgin birth implies that God could not do for himself what he had made possible in others.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Ildefonsus borrowed the title of his work and many ideas from Jerome (d. 420). Braegelmann, *The Life and Writings of Saint Ildefonsus of Toledo* (Washington, D.C. 1942), 128.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 146. Ildefonsus’ text was brought from Spain to France in 951 by Gotescalcus, bishop of Puy, and it circulated widely thereafter. King Louis IX (d.1270) even presented a copy of it to the Masters at the University of Paris. According to tradition, Ildefonsus received an alb from the Virgin as a reward for championing her cause. This miracle was included in numerous collections of Marian legends compiled in Western Europe and is illustrated in *Cantiga 2* which shows Ildefonsus writing his treatise and engaging in heated debate with a group of Jews. During the reign of Alfonso X, (26 May 1260) Ildefonsus’ relics were “rediscovered” in the Church of San Pedro in Zamora. They had gone missing in the eighth century when they were translated to San Pedro for safekeeping in the face of Arab attacks. Braegelmann, 26. The alb was stored in the Arca Santa of the Cathedral of Oviedo. Julie A. Harris, “Redating the Arca Santa of Oviedo,” *Art Bulletin* 77/1 (March 1995), 86. The stone in the cathedral of Toledo on which Mary is believed to have stood when she gave Ildefonsus the alb is still venerated today. William A. Christian, Jr, *Local Religion in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Princeton 1981), 77.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Sapir Abulafia, *Christians and Jews in the Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (London 1995), 81.

<sup>13</sup> Guibert of Nogent, *Treatise against the Jews on the Incarnation* (PL 156, 499-500), cited in Abulafia, *Christians and Jews*, 83.

Christian concern with Jewish denial of the Incarnation was also expressed in drama. In the *Ludus de Nativitate* (Nativity Play) from the thirteenth-century *Carmina Burana* manuscript,<sup>14</sup> discovered in the Bavarian monastery of Benediktbeuren in 1803, Archisynagogus and his companions (who represent disbelieving Jews), enter into a debate on the question of the Virgin Birth with St. Augustine. Archisynagogus, who refutes the Virgin Birth recites a long speech on the absurdity of the doctrine which includes the following lines:<sup>15</sup>

It seems to me I hear these people  
Spew forth this saying,  
That without commerce with men  
A virgin ought to bear a child.  
O what simplemindedness  
Constrains them to be so foolish  
Who would predict a camel  
To descend from a cow!

*Illos, reor, audio  
in haec verba fluere,  
quod sine commercio  
virgo debet parere.  
O quanta simplicitas  
cogit hos desipere  
qui de bove praedicant  
camelum descendere!*

Before leaving the stage, Augustine and Archisynagogus engage in a final skirmish which sums up their positions. While Augustine refers to the Virgin Birth as “A thing to be wondered at!” his Jewish rival declares it, “A thing to be denied!”<sup>16</sup> The stage directions specify that this exchange is to be “done several times,” as if to ensure the audience would get the point.<sup>17</sup>

David Bevington asserts that the arguments presented by the opponents in the course of this dialogue reflect twelfth-century Christian literature, particularly pseudo-Augustine’s *De Altercatione Ecclesiae et Synagogae Dialogus*.<sup>18</sup> Echoes of the conflict between Augustine and Archisynagogus in the *Ludus de Nativitate* may also be found in contemporary works written by and for Jews. Designed to counter arguments directed at them by the Christian majority, many of these compositions, written in Hebrew for a

<sup>14</sup> Munich, Staatsbibl., MS lat. 4660.

<sup>15</sup> David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Boston 1975), 184.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Jewish audience, contest the doctrine of the Incarnation. For Jewish thinkers, the idea that the all-powerful Creator of the universe would deign to adopt human form was “illogical and...a gross belittlement of God’s greatness.”<sup>19</sup> Joseph Kimhi, a Spanish Jew who was forced to flee to Provence during the Almohad persecutions in 1148, addresses the doctrine of the Incarnation in his *Sefer ha-Berit* or *Book of the Covenant*. Like many Christian treatises, Kimhi’s work is written in the form of a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew.<sup>20</sup> The Incarnation is discussed by the pair, just after the Jew has described his co-religionists as charitable, virtuous and self-disciplined. The subsequent exchange reads as follows:

**The Christian said:** “All the words you have said about...good works... what good do they do you when you do not believe that Jesus became incarnate through Mary to save the world? For works follow faith, but faith does not follow works....

**The Believer said:** “How you trust in emptiness and depend on vanity! For I believe in the Creator of the world, who *never grows faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be fathomed* [Isaiah 40.28]....How can I believe of this great God, who is hidden and secret, that He would enter completely unnecessarily into the belly of a woman, into her filthy and stinking entrails; or, of the living God, that He would be born of woman, a child without knowledge and understanding, a fool not knowing the difference between his right and his left hand, who defecates and urinates and sucks at his mother’s breasts.<sup>21</sup>

Similar objections are raised in a text by Rabbi Meir ben Simon written approximately one hundred years after Kimhi’s *Sefer ha-Berit*. Like Kimhi, Meir opposes the notion that God would have shared the same physical characteristics as ordinary mortals. In a memorable passage, he unfavorably compares Jesus with Moses, writing:

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<sup>19</sup> Hanne Trautner-Kromann, *Shield and Sword: Jewish Polemics against Christianity and the Christians in France and Spain from 1100-1500* (Tübingen 1993), 71.

<sup>20</sup> There is a possibility that the *Sefer ha-Berit* is based, in part, on actual debates, as Kimhi participated in discussions with Christians while residing in Narbonne. *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

When [Jesus] was born, he passed through the birth canal and had to be washed. He had to nurse, cried, played, slept, awoke, ate, drank, and was hungry--he and his disciples--, defecated, urinated, and flatulated. But behold, we find with Moses, peace unto him, that he tarried forty days and nights, not eating bread or drinking water when he was on the mountain and the spirit of God was upon him. How much more should we believe that he was not in need of elimination and other objectionable bodily functions.<sup>22</sup>

Robert Chazan states that “in penning such criticism of the doctrine of Incarnation, Rabbi Meir was, of course, in the mainstream of medieval Jewish polemics.”<sup>23</sup> That this is the case is confirmed by Latin and Hebrew accounts of the Barcelona disputation of 1263 convened by King James I of Aragon. Representing the Christians in the public disputation, in which the king participated, was Pablo Christiani, a Jewish convert who had joined the Dominican order.<sup>24</sup> In Barcelona, Pablo, who is believed to have debated with Rabbi Meir of Narbonne at an earlier date,<sup>25</sup> met a formidable opponent in the person of Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) of Gerona. Like many of his Jewish contemporaries, Nahmanides considered the doctrine of the Incarnation to be irrational and saw it as *the* divisive issue between the two faiths.<sup>26</sup> As reported by the Rabbi in his account of the proceedings, he addressed the assembled Christians as follows: “That the creator of the heaven and earth...should become a fetus in the womb of a certain Jewess, grow there for seven months, be born an infant, then grow up, and later be delivered into

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<sup>22</sup> Meir ben Simon, rabbi, *Milhemet Mizvah*, in Robert Chazan, *Daggers of Faith: Thirteenth-Century Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response* (Berkeley 1989), 60. Meir and Kimhi's references to bodily functions, especially the latter's description of the womb as “filthy and stinking” disclose an anxiety about the body that was shared by medieval Christians.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> On the missionizing efforts of the mendicant orders among medieval Jewry see Jeremy Cohen, *The Friars and the Jews: The Evolution of Medieval Anti-Judaism* (Ithaca 1982). Robert I. Burns, S.J. critiques Cohen's argument in “Anti-Semitism and Anti-Judaism in Christian History: A Revisionist Thesis,” *Catholic Historical Review* 20 (1984), 90-93. On the Barcelona Disputation see Cecil Roth, “The Disputation of Barcelona (1263),” *Harvard Theological Review* XLIII/2 (April 1950), 117-144; Robert Chazan, “The Barcelona ‘Disputation’ of 1263: Christian Missionizing and Jewish Response,” *Speculum* 52 (1977), 824-842 and Chazan, “The Barcelona Disputation of 1263: Goals, Tactics, and Achievements” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, 77-91.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, *Friars and the Jews*, 108.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

the hands of his enemies, that they should condemn him to death and execute him, and that afterwards...he lived and returned to his previous abode--the mind of no Jew nor of any [other] man will accept this."<sup>27</sup> It should be borne in mind that Nahmanides was ordered to participate in the debate by a Christian monarch. Like those of Joseph Kimhi and Rabbi Meir, the arguments presented by Nahmanides were defensive rebuttals and not independently generated attacks on the Christian religion. The stakes were high for Jews who publicly defended their beliefs against an empowered majority. As a result of Nahmanides' involvement in the Barcelona disputation and his distribution of his account of the proceedings, he was forced to emigrate to Palestine.

Arguments supporting the doctrine of the Incarnation were incorporated into various miracles of the Virgin. *Cantiga* 108, set in Scotland, tells the story of a Jewish baby who is born with his head on backwards because his father, who has had a heated argument with the magician Merlin, denies that God chose to become incarnate in the Virgin (Fig. 2).<sup>28</sup> The child's skewed physique, reflecting the medieval predilection for inverting conventions,<sup>29</sup> may be seen as a metaphor for the supposed spiritual backwardness of the Jews, who in failing to acknowledge Mary's virginity, fail to acknowledge Christ's divinity. Merlin, who prayed to the Virgin requesting that the baby be born with this grotesque handicap, takes the newborn child under his care (since his

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Although Nahmanides had been granted freedom of expression at the Barcelona disputation, there is some doubt as to whether the objections he raised on critical points of Christian doctrine were actually voiced as stated or whether he embellished his account of the proceedings afterwards. Hyam Maccoby, *Judaism on Trial: Jewish-Christian Disputations in the Middle Ages* (London 1982), 54. Because Nahmanides distributed his own account of the Barcelona proceedings, King James exiled him for two years and had his report destroyed. The Dominicans, not satisfied with this punishment, brought the Rabbi before the King in 1265 on charges of blasphemy. However, James did not assign any additional punishment to Nahmanides at this time. Apparently frustrated, the Dominicans appealed to Pope Clement IV, who sent a letter to James I (1266), "calling for royal diligence in suppressing Jewish audacity, especially that of Nahmanides." Cohen, 110.

<sup>28</sup> "That treacherous Jew began to speak of the Virgin and to swear by the name of the Creator that Our Lord did not choose to become incarnate in Her nor could it be so."

<sup>29</sup> On medieval inversions see Michael Camille, *Image on the Edge* (London 1992). "The medieval image-world was, like medieval life itself, rigidly structured and hierarchal. For this reason, resisting, ridiculing, overturning and inverting it was not only possible, it was limitless. Every model had its opposite, inverse anti-model." *Ibid.*, 26.

horrified father tries to kill him) and, when the child is older, uses him as an example in order to convert the Jews and “lead them from their erroneous belief.” The Jew shown being baptized in the final panel of the miniature attests to Merlin’s success in this undertaking, while the sculpture of the Virgin and Child placed on an adjacent altar serves as a reminder of the Incarnation--the issue of contention between Merlin and the Jewish sage.<sup>30</sup>

A twelfth-century miracle which takes place at the Pantheon in Rome also concerns a debate between Jews and Christians “over the question of the virgin birth.”<sup>31</sup> In the course of the narrative, a blind man who sings “a response of his own composition refuting the Jews” is healed, five hundred Jews accept baptism, and the rest flee the city.<sup>32</sup> This miracle was later reworked and appears in the *Promptuarium Discipuli de Miraculis Beate Marie Virginis* (1435-1440), a collection of *exempla* compiled by the Dominican preacher, Johannes Herolt.<sup>33</sup> In Herolt’s redaction, the blind man sings the responsory “*Gaude, Maria Virgo, cunctas hereses*” although he is not described as its author. Herolt states that because the blind man was healed after singing this refrain, and “a great number of infidels” were converted, the “custom became established among the Romans of daily singing in honour of the Glorious Virgin that responsory in memory of that event.”<sup>34</sup>

More familiar to readers due to its retelling in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is the story of the boy, known for his devotion to Mary and his melodious voice, who is murdered by a Jew and then restored to life by the Virgin. The earliest versions of this story stress that the Jew murders the boy because he is enraged by his continual singing

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<sup>30</sup> A reproduction of the miniature occurs in Keller and Kinkade, Plate 39.

<sup>31</sup> E. Wilson, 185-186.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> In Herolt’s version the Pantheon is not mentioned, however, the blind man is healed after a three-day fast decreed by Pope Boniface, who was in fact responsible for transforming the Pantheon into a Christian church in 609 C.E. Richard Krautheimer, *Rome: Profile of a City, 312-1308* (Princeton 1980), 72.

<sup>34</sup> Johannes Herolt, *Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, tr. C.C. Swinton Bland (London 1928), 52-53.

of a particular song--once again, the responsory "*Gaude , Maria Virgo,*" which celebrated the Incarnation and castigated Jews for saying that Christ was born by means of ordinary reproductive processes.<sup>35</sup> The Jew's irritation at the song and animosity towards the Virgin are emphasized in *Cantiga 6*, in which the story is set in England.

In this *cantiga*, the Jews are described as having "a great quarrel" with the Virgin "because Jesus Christ, who reproves them, was born of Her," and we are informed that the "song the boy sang best...was the song which says '*Gaude , Virgo Maria*' and then berates the Jew, who takes great exception to it." Irritated by the boy's song, a Jew kills him and buries the body in his wine cellar (Fig. 3). The boy is discovered by his widowed mother and various townspeople who hear him singing "in a loud clear voice," and find that the Virgin has miraculously restored him to life so that he can continue to praise Her inviolate virginity. The fact that a pleasing fragrance surrounds him after he is lifted out of his hastily dug grave, confirms his saintly status. The story concludes with a massacre of the Jews and the burning of the murderer.

The Jewish "rejection" of Christ's Incarnation is also alluded to in *Cantiga 89*. In this miracle, a pregnant Jewess goes into labour and experiences a difficult birth which threatens her life. In the text, the agony which the woman experiences is attributed to her rejection of Mary. It reads: "the time had come for her to give birth, but, because of her sinful ways, she could not, for she did not believe anything which is proven true about Holy Mary." When the woman hears a heavenly voice and cries out to the Virgin, her suffering is immediately curtailed and she delivers a healthy son. Evidently, the Jewish woman's acknowledgement of everything "proven true about Holy Mary" leads to her

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35 *Gaude, Maria virgo, cunctas hereses sola interemisti;  
Quae Gabrielis archangeli dictis credidisti.  
Dum Virgo Deum et hominem genuisti,  
Et post partum Virgo inviolata permansisti.  
Gabrielem archangelum scimus divinitus te esse affatum;  
Uterum tuum de Spiritu Sancto credimus impraegnatum;  
Erubescat Judaeus infelix, qui dicit Christum Joseph semine esse natum.*

W.F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds., *Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales* (New York 1958), 448. Hyam Maccoby draws attention to the significance of this responsory in relation to the role of the Jew in this miracle tale. Maccoby, *Sacred Executioner*, 160.

integration into the Christian community, for in the final scene of the miniature accompanying this *cantiga* she is shown being baptized with her children.<sup>36</sup>

In summary, the fact that Jews denied Christ's divinity and failed to recognize the significance of the Virgin Mary, was a source of concern for Christian theologians. This concern was expressed in treatises, in plays and in Marian legends. The elaborate arguments conceived by Jewish thinkers attest to the fact that they were often called upon by Christians to supply a rationale for their position vis-à-vis the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. In the minds of many medieval Christians, the Jews' hostility towards the Mother of God was also expressed in their alleged participation in the Crucifixion.

### *Christ's Passion*

In accounts of Christ's Passion, the Virgin often serves as a foil for the "malevolent" Jews who are shown taking an active part in the Crucifixion. According to the gospel of John (John 19: 25-27), Mary witnessed her son's death. The gospel writer draws attention to the intimate bond between mother and child; even in the agony of death, Christ, the dutiful son, is concerned about his mother's welfare. Medieval writers embellished this sketch of the Crucifixion, painting a detailed portrait of the sorrowful Virgin or *Mater Dolorosa*. The idea "that as a human mother she could not possibly have concealed her grief entirely, but must have betrayed her suffering visibly and audibly,"<sup>37</sup> gained a foothold and inspired the composition of lyrical poems known as *planctus Mariae* (laments of the Virgin). One of the most famous laments, the *Planctus ante nescia* ("Complaint was unknown to me") is attributed to the twelfth-century writer, Godfrey of Saint-Victor.<sup>38</sup> In this monologue, the Virgin gives voice to her anguish and excoriates the Jews, whom she holds solely responsible for Christ's death. In these lines, Godfrey

<sup>36</sup> See Connie L. Scarborough, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Spain as Portrayed in Alfonso X's Cantigas de Santa Maria* (Lewiston 1993), Fig. 16.

<sup>37</sup> Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church* (Oxford 1951), Vol. I, 494.

<sup>38</sup> It is included in the *Carmina Burana* (Munich, Staatsbibl., MS lat. 4660). The full Latin text is quoted in Young, *Drama*, Vol. I, 496-498.

reflects the wide-spread idea that first-century Jews were the chief instigators of Christ's murder and that all Jews born afterwards were to be held accountable for the alleged crime of their ancestors.<sup>39</sup>

The denunciation of the Jews uttered by Mary in the *Planctus ante nescia* also occurs in other *planctus*, such as the anonymous *Flete, fideles animae* ("Weep, faithful souls") ca. 1200. Marian laments like these were conceived as independent works, but were later incorporated into the liturgy of Holy Week.<sup>40</sup> The ready-made monologues were also written into the scripts of medieval plays. Both laments mentioned above are featured in the Passion Play (*Ludus de Passione*) in the *Carmina Burana* (107r-112v).<sup>41</sup> According to Stephen Spector, in the English Towneley plays of the fifteenth century, "Mary [also] characterizes the Crucifixion as strife between the Jews and Jesus."<sup>42</sup> The same motif occurs in a late medieval German play in which Jews leading Christ to Golgotha approach the Virgin, "taunt her, show her the nails, ropes, hammers, tongs and drills they are carrying and tell her what will be done to her son."<sup>43</sup>

In Crucifixion scenes in the *Cantigas*, the Virgin and the Jews are also juxtaposed. For example, in *Cantiga* 50, as Mary kneels at the base of the cross bewailing her son's fate, two Jews, poised on ladders high above, drive nails into his palms.<sup>44</sup> Their co-religionists watch approvingly from the ground, but Roman soldiers are absent from the composition. Hence, the burden of guilt for Christ's Crucifixion falls on the Jews alone.

A popular Marian legend which seems to have originated in the twelfth century also emphasizes the Jews' responsibility for the Crucifixion and elaborates on the theme

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<sup>39</sup> "In medieval literary and pictorial descriptions of the Passion the Jews are often depicted as the prime movers, with the Romans acting at their instigation only; and sometimes even the Roman soldiers are converted into (medieval) Jews." Stefan Rohrbacher, "The Charge of Deicide: an anti-Jewish motif in Medieval Christian Art," *Journal of Medieval History* 17 (1991), 298.

<sup>40</sup> See examples given by Young, 503-513.

<sup>41</sup> Bevington, *Medieval Drama*, 220-221.

<sup>42</sup> Stephen Spector, "Anti-Semitism and the English Mystery Plays," in *The Drama of the Middle Ages: Comparative and Critical Essays*, ed. Clifford Davidson et. al. (New York 1982), 331.

<sup>43</sup> Rohrbacher, "The Charge of Deicide," 309.

<sup>44</sup> This miniature is reproduced in Lovillo, *Las Cantigas*, Fig. 56.

of the *Mater Dolorosa*. As the archbishop of Toledo is saying mass on the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, Mary's "piteous and sorrowful" voice is heard lamenting the fact that the Jews are once again tormenting her son. In *Cantiga* 12, the weeping Virgin cries out: "Oh, God, oh, God, how great and manifest is the perfidy of the Jews, who killed my Son, though they were his own people, and even now they wish no peace with Him!" When the archbishop and the citizens of Toledo hurry to the Jewish quarter, they find a group of Jews striking and spitting upon a wax replica of Christ. As shown in the accompanying miniature (Fig. 4), the image is about to be attached to a large cross. The idea that the Jews intend to reenact Christ's Passion is emphasized in the illustration in which they hold up a crown of thorns and a lance. Confronted by this sacrilege, the Christians draw their swords and slaughter the Jews. While the violent conclusion is not unusual for the genre, it is notable that the accusation of deicide "comes from the mouth of the Virgin herself"<sup>45</sup> just as it does in the Marian *planctus* discussed earlier.

Curiously, Albert Bagby who describes the miniature, fails to observe the depiction of the Virgin at the mass.<sup>46</sup> In this scene, as the oblivious congregation stares at the altar on which her statue rests, the Virgin peers down from above, framed in the trefoil of a gothic arch. This important detail stresses that the complaint about the Jews originates with the Virgin and reinforces the central motif of the *cantiga*, that is, "what most offends Holy Mary is a wrong done to Her Son."

### *The Death of the Virgin or Transitus Mariae*

While accounts of Mary's death differ in some details, they consistently portray the religious leaders of the Jews as the Virgin's adversaries. In the Greek account spuriously attributed to John the Evangelist, when Mary prepares to die and meets with Christ's apostles in Bethlehem, the Jews go to the governor and ask him to drive her

<sup>45</sup> Albert I. Bagby, Jr., "The Jew in the *Cántigas* of Alfonso X, el Sabio," *Speculum* 46 (1971), 675.

<sup>46</sup> He mistakenly writes, "Panels 1 and 2 of the frame [i.e. miniature] suggest that the voice of the Virgin might have come "from on high," for of the Virgin herself we can see only a statue upon the altar, holding the child Jesus." *Ibid.*, 675, n.27.

away from the region.<sup>47</sup> The conflict then shifts to Jerusalem where the Jews set fire to the house in which Mary and the apostles are gathered. As a result of divine intervention, the Jews themselves are incinerated. Shortly after, Christ escorts the Virgin's soul to Paradise and the apostles place her body on a bier to carry it away to her tomb. When a Jew named Jephonias attempts to upset the bier, an angel wielding a sword severs his hands at the wrists. The Jews who witness this sight are prompted to convert to Christianity, and Jephonias follows their example after his hands are miraculously reattached.<sup>48</sup>

The hostility between Mary and the Jews is also emphasized in the Latin version of Pseudo-Melito. When Mary is about to die she tells John the Evangelist that the Jews are conspiring against her, stating: "I have heard the counsels of the Jews who say: Let us wait until the day when she shall die who bore that deceiver, and let us burn her body with fire."<sup>49</sup> When a Jewish high priest attempts to overturn the bier his hands shrivel up to the elbows and become firmly attached to it so that he is, understandably, "wrung with extreme torment."<sup>50</sup> As in the Greek narrative, the matter is resolved when the Jews convert to Christianity.

Accounts of the Virgin's death were supplemented by reports of her assumption into heaven. Although the doctrine of the assumption was not declared dogma until 1950, reports that the Virgin had been transported by Christ into Paradise had achieved wide

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<sup>47</sup> An English summary of this account is given in Montague Rhodes James, *Notes from the Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford 1924; rpt. 1960), 201-209.

<sup>48</sup> Examples of the theme in the visual arts are listed in Eric Zafran, "The Iconography of Antisemitism," 200-204. A miniature (Cambridge, St. John's College, MS 262, fol. 12r) showing the death of the Virgin and the attack on her bier is reproduced in Kauffmann, Fig.2. The earliest extant artistic rendition of the Virgin's funeral procession (ca.800) is examined in Betty Kurth, "The Iconography of the Wirksworth Slab," *Burlington Magazine* 86 (May 1945), 114-121. A Byzantine wall-painting of the same subject is analysed in Ann Wharton Epstein, "Frescoes of the Mavriotissa Monastery near Kastoria: Evidence of Millenarianism and Anti-Semitism in the Wake of the First Crusade," *Gesta* 21/1 (1982), 21-29.

<sup>49</sup> James, *Apocryphal N.T.*, 211. Cf. *Cantiga* 419, in which the ailing Virgin asks John the Evangelist to help her, informing him that "the evil Jews, who killed my Son like false infidels, threaten to burn the flesh from these bones of mine after I have died." Once again, the deicide charge is put into the mouth of the Virgin and the Jews are said to be plotting against her.

<sup>50</sup> James, 214.

diffusion by the fifth century.<sup>51</sup> The theme gained increasing importance in the following centuries and inspired works by medieval writers, dramatists and artists.<sup>52</sup>

The Readings for the Feast of the Assumption in the *Golden Legend* explain that Mary “was not brought down to the common lot--rot, the worm, the dust--because she had begotten...the Saviour of all.”<sup>53</sup> In other words, the assumption of the Virgin has a Christological basis. Acknowledging this fact gives us a better understanding of the characterization of the Jewish protagonists in the accounts of her death. They are said to despise Mary because she gave birth to Christ. The miracles of the Virgin which will be examined in this thesis are more easily understood against this theological background. The Christian perception that Jews scorned the Virgin and thought that Jesus had been conceived by conventional rather than supernatural means inspired these stories and created a receptive audience for them.

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<sup>51</sup> Mary Clayton, *Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Several late medieval Assumption plays are examined in Wright, *The Vengeance of Our Lord*. The iconography of the Assumption of the Virgin is discussed in Osborne, *Early Mediaeval Wall-Paintings*, 48-53.

<sup>53</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 97.

## II “ARCULF’S TALE” AND OTHER ALLEGED INCIDENTS OF JEWISH ICONOCLASM

Stories of images allegedly desecrated by Jews circulated in Byzantium and Western Europe throughout the Middle Ages. The stereotype of the iconoclastic Jew was based on the Christian perception that Jews rejected all forms of visual expression, in compliance with the Mosaic injunction, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness.”<sup>1</sup> In these accounts, Jews are almost always shown desecrating crucifixes or representations of the Virgin and Child rather than images of lesser saints.<sup>2</sup> This can be explained as follows: because Jews were blamed for the Crucifixion they were suspected of recreating Christ’s Passion using paintings and sculptures as surrogates. Since they refuted the doctrine of the Incarnation and were believed to harbour a deep-seated hatred towards the Virgin, they were also accused of assaulting her likeness. In short, the Christian authors who constructed the persona of the iconoclastic Jew emphasized the Jewish rejection of the central tenets of the Christian faith as well as the Jewish rejection of figural imagery. In virtually all accounts of “wounded” images, the sacrilegious action of the Jewish protagonist calls “forth a response from the supernatural force embodied in the icons.”<sup>3</sup> Typically, they emit blood, water or oil which is said to have healing properties. Ordinary devotional objects are thus transformed into wonder-working prodigies.<sup>4</sup>

Reports of attacks by Jews on paintings and statues were corroborated by the “wounded” images displayed in churches. As Hans Belting remarks: “the icons...provided tangible proof of all the famous legends in which they played so

<sup>1</sup> Exodus 20:4. The prohibition against images is repeated seven more times in the Pentateuch: Exodus 20:23 and 34:17; Leviticus 26:1; and Deuteronomy 4:15, 4:23, 5:8 and 27:15.

Wladyslaw Tartarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics: Medieval Aesthetics* (Warsaw 1970), Vol. II, 9.

<sup>2</sup> The only example I have come across in which a Jew attacks an image of a saint is in “The Legend of St. Nicholas” in which a Jew, who asks a statue of St. Nicholas to protect his possessions, beats it severely when it fails to do so. Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. I, 25.

<sup>3</sup> George P. Galavaris, “The Mother of God, ‘Stabbed with a knife,’” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 13 (1959), 230.

<sup>4</sup> Images which sweated, wept or bled “were also known to the Greeks and Romans, who considered them portents.” Christian, *Local Religion*, 195.

spectacular a part.”<sup>5</sup> Western pilgrims visiting Constantinopolitan shrines were regaled with stories of Jews desecrating icons--stories which they repeated to their acquaintances on their return. These reports encouraged Christians to believe that Jews (already stereotyped as Christ-killers and enemies of the faith) were predisposed to vandalize Christian images.

### *“Wounded” Images*

The earliest mention of a Jew assaulting an icon occurs in Gregory of Tours’ sixth-century *Glory of the Martyrs*.<sup>6</sup> After being stabbed by a Jew, an icon of Christ bleeds profusely. The “crime” is discovered, and the Jew, described as “a wicked assassin,” is stoned by Christians. The bleeding of the image serves two functions. In the first place, it erodes the distinction between image and prototype, reinforcing the belief that Christ, embodied in the icon, is God made flesh. Secondly, because it validates the doctrine of the Incarnation, it serves as a testament to the Christian religion. The fact that Jews were not swayed by “miracles” of this nature was a source of irritation for Christians. Writing in the early seventh century, Leontius, Bishop of Neapolis (Cyprus), composed an apologia for icons in the form of a dialogue between a Christian and a Jew. During the course of the debate, the Christian castigates Jews for their lack of faith, writing: “How grievous is the obstinacy of these sinful Jews! How many shadow-appearances and miracles of gushing have taken place, how many times has blood flown from the icons and the martyrs’ relics! Yet these witless fellows, rather than being

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, tr. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago 1994), 195.

<sup>6</sup> Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs*, tr. Raymond Van Dam (Liverpool 1988), 40.

converted by such sights, held them to be imaginary and foolish.”<sup>7</sup>

In his ground-breaking study, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue* (1934), James Parkes proposed that stories about Jews desecrating Christian images were conceived during the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. However, he acknowledged that this hypothesis did not account for the sixth-century miracle (described above), from the *Glory of the Martyrs*.<sup>8</sup> Although Gregory’s story indicates that propagandistic tales of this kind were already in circulation at an earlier date, several historians have reiterated the idea that tales about iconoclastic Jews originated in eighth-century Byzantium.<sup>9</sup> More likely, as soon as the veneration of images became widespread, Christians invented stories justifying the practice and condemning “obstinate” Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the Byzantine crisis undoubtedly reinforced the stereotype of the

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<sup>7</sup> Leontius, bishop of Neapolis (Cyprus), *Polemic against the Jews*, extant portion from Bk. v; PG 93, 1597-1609, translated by Joshua Starr, *The Jews in the Byzantine Empire* (Athens 1939), 83. Leontius’ arguments against the Jews were recycled and used to refute the iconoclasts at the Second Council of Nicaea (787) and at the Iconoclastic Council of 815. Kathleen Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge 1992), 33. In his *Fortress of the Faith* of 1459 (Bk. III, Chap. X), the Franciscan, Alfonso de Spina, also marvels that Jews are not inspired by miracles to convert to Christianity. He asks: “Did not, more than once, an image of the Blessed Lord bleed when pierced by a Jew’s weapon, or indeed was only struck by a Jew? And when a Jewish boy had received the blessed Bread in Church, and, for doing so, was thrown by his father into a furnace--did he not come out alive?” A. Lukyn Williams, *Adversus Judaeos: A Bird’s-Eye View of Christian Apologiae until the Renaissance* (Cambridge 1935), 279. See Chapter Four, below, for a discussion of the “Tale of the Jewish Boy.”

<sup>8</sup> In an attempt to reconcile Gregory’s account with his theory, Parkes questioned whether the tale was a later addition to the *Glory of the Martyrs*. James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (London 1934; rpt. New York 1974), 292, n.1-3. As far as I know, there is no evidence to suggest that the story was added later.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Eric Zafran states: “These [types of legends] are undoubtedly an outgrowth of the great iconoclastic struggle in the East.” Zafran, “An Alleged Case of Image Desecration,” 63, n.11.

<sup>10</sup> Norman Baynes argues that it was likely that conflicts over the veneration of images surfaced well before the eighth century. He asks: “Is it not rather probable that there was a continuous questioning of the legitimacy of the cult [of images]? May not the part played by the icon in the life and religious usage of the Byzantine world have been subjected to the constant criticism of pagans, Jews and even Christians?” Norman H. Baynes, “The Icons Before Iconoclasm,” *Harvard Theological Review* 44 (1951), 93.

iconoclastic Jew. The label “Jew” was applied to iconoclasts by iconophiles.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, it was rumoured by the iconophiles that a Jewish sorcerer named Tessarakontapechys (Forty-Cubits), had led the attack on the icons. According to John of Jerusalem, who represented the Oriental Patriarchs at the Second Council of Nicaea (convened in 787 to end the debate over images), Forty-Cubits encouraged the Muslim Caliph Yazid II (720-724 C.E.) to ban images in his territory.<sup>12</sup> The iconoclastic movement was said to have spread from the Muslim to the Byzantine realm where it received the sanction of Emperor Leo III (717-741). Other redactions of the story reported that aniconic Jews exercised a direct influence over Leo III.<sup>13</sup>

Accounts of miraculous images were endorsed by Byzantine iconophiles. At the Second Council of Nicaea, it was reported that an icon of Christ displayed in a house in Beirut was “made to undergo Christ’s entire Passion at the hands of Jews” and, in the process, emitted water and blood which were professed to have restorative properties.<sup>14</sup> The bleeding icon was said to have inspired the Jews of Beirut to convert to Christianity and to repent of their “hostility toward images.”<sup>15</sup> Ernst Kitzinger suggests that the story of the Beirut icon (falsely attributed to St. Athanasius, ca. 296-373) was actually composed by an eighth-century iconophile. Despite its obscure origins, the story maintained its popularity for centuries. In 975, during a military campaign, the Emperor

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<sup>11</sup> Joshua Starr, “An Iconoclastic Legend and its Historical Basis,” *Speculum* 8 (1933), 503. The parallel between iconoclasts and Jews was also made visually. See Corrigan, *Visual Polemics*. In Reformation Germany, Johann Böschenstein, a preacher who criticized the veneration of images, was also accused “of being a Jewish convert.” R. Po-chia Hsia, “Jews as Magicians in Reformation Germany,” in *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis*, 125.

<sup>12</sup> For the edict of Yazid II see A. Vasiliev, “The Iconoclast edict of the Caliph Yazid II, A.D. 721,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 9-10 (1956), 25-47.

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Starr, “An Iconoclastic Legend,” 501. In 722, Yazid II did in fact issue an edict against images “which anticipated the first Byzantine decree of Leo III by four years.” Tartarkiewicz, *History of Aesthetics*, Vol. II, 44. However, as Peter Brown remarks, modern scholarship has “led to the greatest caution in invoking the influence of any non-Christian culture in the genesis of the Iconoclastic movement.” Brown, “Dark Age Crisis,” in *Society and the Holy*, 252. He states, “almost all scholars...regard Iconoclasm as endogenous: it was a crisis within Byzantine Christianity itself.” *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>14</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 8 (1954)107, n.87.

<sup>15</sup> Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 305.

John Tzimiskes acquired an icon allegedly stabbed by Jews. John considered this icon to be the famous Beirut image and he displayed it alongside other prestigious relics in his newly constructed chapel at the Chalke Gate of the Imperial Palace.<sup>16</sup>

The story of the Beirut icon struck a chord in Western Europe which had been introduced to a similar tale by Gregory of Tours two hundred years earlier. Although the Virgin plays no part in the narrative, it was included in several collections of Marian legends compiled in France,<sup>17</sup> in Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*, and in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, a book which was "at least as popular in the later Middle Ages as the Bible itself."<sup>18</sup> Jacobus describes the icon as a particularly beautiful crucifix painted by Nicodemus,<sup>19</sup> which hangs in the bedroom of a pious Christian who prays to it regularly. When the Christian moves he inadvertently leaves the crucifix behind and the house is rented by a Jew whose co-religionists desecrate it. After it has been stabbed by the Jews, they fill a container with the blood and water flowing from it, take this liquid to the synagogues and anoint the sick with it, curing them instantly. The Jews report the miracle to the bishop who baptizes them and deposits the blood in phials of crystal and glass.

Actual relics of blood supposedly shed by the Beirut icon were enshrined in various churches. In 962 Nicephorus Phocas returned from Syria with a quantity of it which he placed in the church of All Saints, Constantinople.<sup>20</sup> It was stolen by the Venetians in 1204 and deposited in the treasury of San Marco where it miraculously

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<sup>16</sup> Cyril Mango, *The Brazen House: A Study of the Vestibule of the Imperial Palace of Constantinople* (Copenhagen 1959), 150-151.

<sup>17</sup> E. Wilson, 177-178.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York 1992), 290.

<sup>19</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 171. The icon is first attributed to Nicodemus in a Latin version of the ninth century. This version inspired the legend of the *Volto Santo* (Holy Face), a sculpture made by Nicodemus which supposedly bled when attacked by Jews. The *Volto Santo* sculpture, enshrined in Lucca in Tuscany, attracted numerous pilgrims, and copies of it circulated throughout Europe. Belting, 305. Belting states: "the *Volto Santo* from Lucca ranked alongside images of the Virgin painted by Saint Luke...and the Holy Face at St. Peter's in Rome called the Veronica...as one of the most famous miraculous images of Christendom." *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Mango, *Brazen House*, 151.

survived a fire in 1231.<sup>21</sup> Blood relics from the Beirut icon were also displayed in Rome at the Lateran, and in the Sainte-Chapelle, Paris.<sup>22</sup> A portion of the esteemed liquid, stored in a crystal ampulla, was also housed in the Arca Santa of the Cathedral of Oviedo.<sup>23</sup> According to Jonathan Sumption, “a small quantity of it, kept by the Franciscans of La Rochelle, aroused ‘certain dissensions’ in the diocese, which were referred in 1448 to the arbitration of the university of Paris. The faculty of theology declared that the veneration of the blood was in no way repugnant to the faith, and their opinion was confirmed by Pope Nicholas V.”<sup>24</sup> These relics authenticated the account of the Jews’ attack on the icon, reinforcing anti-Jewish prejudice.

Stories of “bleeding” Marian icons are clearly patterned after similar legends involving paintings of Christ. A chapel in Hagia Sophia, Constantinople was said to house two icons which had been attacked by Jews--one of Christ and one of his mother. The legend of the Christ icon predates similar reports concerning a Marian image. It was translated from Greek to Latin by Johannes Monachus in the early eleventh century, and repeated by Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian monk of the thirteenth century, who claimed that the Christ icon could still be seen in Hagia Sophia in his day.<sup>25</sup> The icon is also mentioned by Jacobus de Voragine in his *Golden Legend*:

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<sup>21</sup> According to Cyril Mango, it is still preserved in San Marco in a silver reliquary shaped like a five-domed church. *Ibid.* This object originally served as a lamp or incense-burner. A rock-crystal phial purportedly containing the blood shed by the Beirut icon was placed in it sometime in the thirteenth-century. David Buckton, ed. *The Treasury of San Marco, Venice* (Milan 1984), 237.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Harris, “Arca Santa,” 86.

<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Sumption, *Pilgrimage: An Image of Medieval Religion* (London 1975), 47.

<sup>25</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Libri VIII miraculorum*, lib.2, cap. 39 translated in David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago 1989), 311.

In Constantinople a Jew went into the church of Saint Sophia and there looked at an image of Christ. Seeing that there was no one about, the Jew drew his sword and struck the image in the throat. Blood poured out instantly and spattered the Jew's face and head. Terrified, he seized the image, threw it down a well, and fled. A Christian met him and asked: "Where are you coming from, Jew? You've killed a man!" "Not true," said the Jew. But the man said again: "Of course you've committed a murder and that's why you're spattered with blood!" The Jew: "Truly the God of the Christians is great, and everything confirms faith in him. I have not stabbed a man but an image of Christ and straightaway the blood gushed out from his throat!" The Jew then led the man to the well and they retrieved the sacred image, and it is said that the wound in Christ's throat can be seen to this day. The Jew became a Christian without delay.<sup>26</sup>

Jacobus' references to the well are explained in the Greek version of the legend which specifies that the icon of Christ, stabbed by the Jew, was located in a chapel in Hagia Sophia which housed an important, if somewhat cumbersome relic--the well-head on which Christ had sat when he spoke with the Samaritan woman.<sup>27</sup> This chapel served an important political function as it was one of the architectural links in a chain connecting the imperial palace to Hagia Sophia.<sup>28</sup> It was in the Chapel of the Holy Well that "the emperor prayed and lit tapers, distributed largesse, was received by the patriarch and bid him farewell."<sup>29</sup> However, access to the chapel was not restricted to the elite. Anthony, Archbishop of Novgorod, a Russian pilgrim who visited Constantinople in 1200, claims to have visited it and to have kissed an image of the Virgin and Child displayed inside. According to Anthony, a Jew lacerated this image, striking the infant in the neck, and causing blood to flow from the wound. An anonymous English pilgrim writing at approximately the same time, corroborates Anthony's testimony, adding that both blood and water flowed from the image of the Virgin and Child. The accounts of these pilgrims are augmented by Byzantine evidence.<sup>30</sup> Nicolaus Thingeyrensis'

<sup>26</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 170-171.

<sup>27</sup> See the Greek text in F. Combefis, *Historia haeresis monothelitarum, sanctaeque in eam sextae synodi actorum, vindiciae* (Paris 1648), 648-657 cited in Galavaris, 232, n.28.

<sup>28</sup> Mango, 60-72.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> The pilgrim accounts are mentioned by Galavaris, 231.

catalogue of Constantinopolitan relics compiled in 1157 includes a reference to the Marian icon stabbed by a Jew housed in the chapel of the Holy Well. Nicolaus states that after the knife-wielding Jew had assaulted the image he tried to conceal his “crime” by throwing the icon into the Samaritan well which was gaping open nearby. Shortly after, it was retrieved and “restored to its former place” where it continued to issue blood.<sup>31</sup> Nicolaus claims that this miracle made a great impression on the Jew, because he converted to Christianity immediately.

Four lead seals from the Dumbarton Oaks Collection published by George P. Galavaris in 1959 also attest to the existence of a Marian icon bearing the epithet “stabbed with a knife.” Inscriptions indicate that these seals (which range in date from 1086 to 1235) were owned by members of the clergy of Hagia Sophia--specifically, by chiefs of the library and archives of the patriarch. On the basis of this information, Galavaris suggests that the “seals copy the famous ‘stabbed’ icon in St. Sophia, to which Peter and Constantine, the deacons and chartophylaces, may have been particularly devoted.”<sup>32</sup>

### *Arculf's Tale*

The earliest surviving account of a Jew defiling a Marian image occurs in *De locis sanctis ex relatione Arculfi episcopi Galli*, by Adamnan, Abbot of Iona (679-704). As the title of this book suggests, it was written in collaboration with Arculf, a bishop from Gaul, who travelled on pilgrimage to the Holy Land (ca. 680). On his return, Arculf was shipwrecked on the British coast and described his experiences to Adamnan who recorded them for posterity.<sup>33</sup> He even drew plans of some of the shrines he had visited during his

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Denis Meehan, ed., *Adamnan's De Locis Sanctis* (Dublin 1958). The earliest first-hand account of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by a western author, the *Itinerarium Burdigalense*, was also composed by a native of Gaul, “who arrived in the East in 333 C.E.” Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven 1992), 109.

nine months stay in Jerusalem and these appear alongside Adamnan's text.<sup>34</sup>

Arculf, who knew how to capture his audience's attention, told Adamnan about a volcano near Sicily which he had heard rumbling, and described the crocodiles he had seen lurking in the Nile. He also mentioned a miraculous icon of the Virgin Mary, which he had seen in Constantinople. Arculf was briefed about this icon by "some well-informed witnesses"<sup>35</sup> who told him that a Jew, seeing the icon on the wall of a house and learning that it was a portrait of the Virgin, had seized it, hurled it into a latrine and defecated on it. Shortly after, the icon was retrieved by a Christian, who cleaned it and set it up in a place of honour in his own home. As if in response, oil began to flow from the icon immediately.<sup>36</sup> The veracity of this miracle is confirmed by Arculf who assured Adamnan that he saw this substance with his own eyes.<sup>37</sup> Although he does not state that

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<sup>34</sup> Arculf drew the plans on wax tablets and Adamnan copied them onto parchment. Surviving copies of the plans from various manuscripts are reproduced in John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster 1977), 193-197. Adamnan's composition was influential in heightening an interest in Holy Land pilgrimage among the Anglo-Saxons. Bede included excerpts of it in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* Bk. 5, 15-17. According to Bede, Adamnan presented his book to King Aldfrid of Northumbria, and "through his generosity it was circulated for lesser folk to read." Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede*, tr. Leo Sherley-Price and D.H. Farmer (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1990), 295.

<sup>35</sup> Meehan, *De Locis Sanctis*, 119.

<sup>36</sup> Another legendary Marian image which emitted oil was the "Mother of God of Sardenay (or Sardenai)." The story of this icon is told in *Cantiga* 9 which begins: "This is how in Sardonay, near Damascus, Holy Mary made Her image, which was painted on a wooden tablet, become flesh and exude oil." According to Annemarie Weyl Carr, this famous icon "was visited by various Western pilgrims in the twelfth century, and the Knights Templar made arrangements to collect oil from its breasts regularly." Annemarie Weyl Carr, "East, West, and Icons in Twelfth-Century Outremer," in *The Meeting of Two Worlds: Cultural Exchange between East and West during the Period of the Crusades*, ed. Vladimir P. Goss (Kalamazoo 1986), 350. Icons which dispensed oil were closely associated with relics; countless relics exuded oil which was collected by pilgrims in flasks. See André Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte* (Paris 1958). St. Catherine at Sinai was reputed to be especially oleiferous. Western monks returning from her shrine reported that they saw "her head, hair and bones swimming in oil." Caesarius of Heisterbach, *The Dialogue on Miracles (1220-1235)*, tr. H. Von E. Scott and C.C. Swinton Bland (London 1929), Bk. VIII, Chap. LXXXIV, Vol. II, 85.

<sup>37</sup> Meehan, 119.

the oil had restorative properties, this detail is added in some later versions of the story.<sup>38</sup>

While the Jew who steals the icon in Arculf's account is described as a "scoundrel," he is not punished for his actions. Adamnan's text simply reads: "After that disgraceful action the hapless creature went away, and what he did subsequently, how he lived, or what sort of end he had, is unknown."<sup>39</sup> Instead of focusing on the fate of the Jewish protagonist, the narrative stresses the fate of the image.

### "Arculf's Tale" Retold

Over five hundred years after Arculf related this story to Adamnan, Alfonso X included it in his *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. *Cantiga 34* is set in Constantinople,<sup>40</sup> and follows the same basic plot as Arculf's tale. The captions above the six panels of the miniature illustrating the miracle (Fig. 5) read as follows:<sup>41</sup>

1. How the Jew stole the image of Holy Mary.
2. How the Jew threw the image of Holy Mary into the privy on the advice of the devil.
3. How the devils immediately seized the Jew and killed him.
4. How a Christian and his wife took the image out of the privy and washed it.
5. How the Christian put it in a place of honour in his house and oil began to exude from it.
6. How from then on people have come to that place on pilgrimages.

<sup>38</sup> "And pure oil used to run out of that picture, and everyone who anointed himself therewith was healed...by the command of God and by the prayer of Our Lady Mary." Ethiopian Collection of Mary Miracles, fifteenth-century (Brit. Lib., MS Orient. 652, fol. 102a, No.79), Budge, *One Hundred and Ten Miracles of Our Lady Mary* (Oxford 1933), 242. Cf. *Cantiga 321* in which water used to wash an image of the Virgin and Child cures a sick girl from Córdoba when she drinks it. This *cantiga* is discussed in Joseph F. O'Callaghan, "The *Cantigas de Santa Maria* as an Historical Source: Two Examples (nos. 321 and 386)," in *Studies on the Cantigas*, 387-402.

<sup>39</sup> Meehan, 119.

<sup>40</sup> The Christian is shown in the accompanying miniature wearing a Greek hat. Men also wear hats of this type in *Cantiga 28* ("How a Sultan besieged Constantinople which belonged to the Christians") and in *Cantiga 131* ("How the Emperor of Constantinople entered a tunnel to inspect a silver mine"). The artists who worked on the manuscript evidently paid a great deal of attention to minor details in order to make the settings more convincing.

<sup>41</sup> Kulp-Hill, "The Captions to the Miniatures of the 'Códice Rico' of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a Translation," 16.

The icon of the Virgin and Child appears in five panels of the miniature. Although each panel measures only 109 x 100 mm (4.29" x 3.93"),<sup>42</sup> the icon (approximately the size of a postage stamp) is rendered with painstaking detail (Fig. 6). Its aesthetic qualities are also underscored in the lyrics which read: "it was so beautiful that even if one examined more than a hundred, not another equal to it could be found."<sup>43</sup> This phrase serves as a reminder that although few treatises on the visual arts were produced in the Middle Ages,<sup>44</sup> qualitative judgments were applied to works of art. By emphasizing the unique appearance of the icon, the writer of *Cantiga* 34, makes the Jew's desecration of it seem all the more reprehensible.

Panel paintings appear rarely in the *Cantigas* in which the Virgin is customarily represented as a three-dimensional statue.<sup>45</sup> Its inclusion here is explained by the lyrics, which specify that the desecrated image is "painted on wood." The icon's prestige is enhanced by the fact that it is of Byzantine workmanship. Icons of Eastern origin or those purported to be were highly valued in the Latin West. Several were considered to be actual portraits of holy personages or copies of them which retained the sanctity of the originals. Many icons were imported by monks fleeing the persecution of the Iconoclastic Controversy; one Marian image, tossed by the Patriarch Germanus into the ocean, was purported to have made the journey to Rome unaccompanied within twenty-four hours.<sup>46</sup> During the Crusades more Eastern icons were imported to the West, especially by the Venetians. These paintings were esteemed by Western Europeans for more than aesthetic reasons. "A religious object," states Hans Belting, "could have no greater proof of its power than to come from Constantinople."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Keller and Kinkade, *Iconography*, 13.

<sup>43</sup> See Appendix for Kulp-Hill's unpublished translation of *Cantiga* 34. All subsequent quotations of *Cantiga* 34, *ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> Tartarkiewicz, Vol. II, 138 and 144.

<sup>45</sup> Of the 194 miracles in Escorial MS T.I.1, only four involve icons (*Cantigas* 9, 34, 46, and 179). *Cantigas* 9 and 34 are set in the East; 46 and 179 in the West.

<sup>46</sup> Belting, 63. Also see E. von Dobschütz, "Maria Romaia," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 12 (1903), 173-214.

<sup>47</sup> Belting, 196.

### *The Function of Icons in Personal Devotion*

In “Arculf’s Tale,” the icon of the Virgin is stolen from a house, and in *Cantiga* 34, from a city street ( the Jew removes it from a shelf attached to the external wall of a building, Fig. 6). In the Middle Ages it was common practice to display images of saints in secular contexts like these. Icons adorned work-shops by at least the fifth century, and by the late sixth, “images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints became common in the domestic sphere.”<sup>48</sup> This was the case in Western Europe as well as Byzantium. Gregory of Tours explains: “at this time Christ is cherished with such love...that believers who remember his law in the tablets of their heart also hang a painted image of him in churches and *houses* to record his power in visible tablets”(emphasis mine).<sup>49</sup> And Leontius of Neapolis (ca. 625-668) mentions that representations of Christ and his suffering are displayed in houses, market-places, and even on articles of clothing.<sup>50</sup> These customs, which must have come under attack during the first wave of iconoclasm (725-775) were evidently reinstated in the final quarter of the eighth century. In the Confession of Faith of the Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea, the rationale behind the ubiquitous display of images of Christ, his mother and the saints is disclosed. The Confession of Faith decrees that images should be set up “in houses and by the wayside” as well as in churches, since “the more frequently as they are seen in artistic representation, by so much the more readily are men lifted up to the memory of their prototypes.”<sup>51</sup>

### *The Veneration of Saint and Image Equated*

As early as the fourth century, Basil of Caesarea (329-379) expressed the idea that

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<sup>48</sup> Ernst Kitzinger, “The Cult of Images,” 98.

<sup>49</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Baynes, “The Icons Before Iconoclasm,” 100.

<sup>51</sup> Acts of II Nicaea, Confession of Faith, F.E. Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam: The Classical Texts and Their Interpretation* (Princeton 1990), 859.

“the veneration offered to a portrait [icon] is transferred to its prototype.”<sup>52</sup> The number of times this idea was repeated by iconophile theologians in defence of images is a clear indication of its importance in the Eastern Church.<sup>53</sup> Eventually, the concept also gained a footing in the West. Thomas Aquinas (d.1274), after carefully considering the different degrees of respect to be shown to different symbols, concluded that “the same reverence should be shown to Christ’s image as to Christ Himself.”<sup>54</sup> However, the idea that honour paid to the image was transferred to its prototype was not only an abstract notion held by educated theologians, but an idea reflected in the everyday practices of ordinary individuals.

By burning incense and candles in front of icons, as their pagan ancestors had burned lamps before household gods,<sup>55</sup> Christians demonstrated honourable reverence towards the saints depicted. These practices, which are referred to in Christian stories concerning images, were apparently widespread in the East from an early date. John Moschus (d. 619), tells the story of a pious hermit who “before leaving on a journey...asked that his [Marian] icon itself take care that the candle burning before it not go out in his absence.”<sup>56</sup> And at the Second Council of Nicaea it was decreed that “incense and lights may be offered [to icons] according to ancient pious custom.”<sup>57</sup> In the final panel of *Cantiga* 34, a crowd of worshippers kneel before the miraculous icon (Fig. 7). Three large votive candles are shown burning before it and their function is alluded to in the lyrics which inform us that the Christian owner of the image “made offerings to it for his salvation.” A vessel has been placed beneath the icon to catch the

<sup>52</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *Liber de Spiritu Sancto*, VIII (PG 32 c.149) cited in Tartarkiewicz, Vol. II, 26.

<sup>53</sup> John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith*, 4.16 in Peters, *Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 858. Acts of II Nicaea, *Confession of Faith*, *Ibid.*, 859. Theodorus Studites, *Antirrheticus*, III, 3 (PG 99, c.425), in Tartarkiewicz, Vol. II, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 3, Q.25, Art. 3 quoted in Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge 1989), 207 and William R. Jones, “Art and Christian Piety: Iconoclasm in Medieval Europe” in *The Image and the Word: Confrontations in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Missoula 1977), 85.

<sup>55</sup> Belting, 41.

<sup>56</sup> John Moschus, *Pratum spirituale*, *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Acts of II Nicaea, *Confession of Faith*, in Peters, 859.

miraculous oil which exudes from it, giving divine sanction to the veneration of the image/saint by the kneeling Christians.

In an atmosphere in which icons “were increasingly identified with the persons or deities they represented,”<sup>58</sup> those who did not venerate images were perceived as antagonistic towards the holy personages themselves. In “Arculf’s Tale,” the Jew does not attempt to vandalize the image until he is informed that it is a portrait of the Virgin. His hostility towards her is given particular emphasis, for he becomes incensed at the sound of her name.<sup>59</sup> In *Cantiga* 34, the desecration of the icon by the Jew is also characterized as an “insult to Holy Mary” and not a random protest against figural imagery. The implication is that when the Jew defecates on the image he violates the woman without stain or blemish who had conceived and given birth without compromising her virginity. The idea of a painting of the radiant, and pure Virgin being thrown into a dark and filthy pit likely played on the anxieties of medieval Christians, who already perceived Jews to be subversive and “unclean.”<sup>60</sup>

### *Pollution Metaphors*

Ildefonsus of Toledo, who likened Jews to an infectious mass threatening the Christian body, maintained that they were a “bad limb that required amputation.”<sup>61</sup> Later Christian authors, such as Guibert of Nogent, condemned Jews for their “carnality,” and

<sup>58</sup> Anthony Welch, “Epigraphs as Icons: The Role of the Written Word in Islamic Art” in *The Image and the Word*, ed. Joseph Gutmann (Missoula 1977), 72.

<sup>59</sup> Meehan, 119. Later versions also stress the Jew’s hatred of the Mother of God. For example, in an Ethiopian text of the fifteenth century (Brit. Lib., MS Orient. 652, fol. 95b, No.74.), the Jew also becomes enraged at the mention of Mary’s name and expresses his contempt for her, asking the Christian: “Art thou not ashamed to mention the name of one who is detested among us?” Budge, 241.

<sup>60</sup> Medieval Christians also characterized Moslems as the polluted infidel. For example, in his *Chronica Majora* (ca.1250), Matthew Paris happily reports that Mohammed met his end when he fell into a dung heap, choked on his own vomit, and, while lying there, was smothered by an ugly sow. Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050-1320* (London 1992), 500.

<sup>61</sup> Kenneth R. Stow, *Alienated Minority: The Jews of Medieval Latin Europe* (Cambridge, Mass. 1992), 51.

remarked on the “Jewish stench” that could only be eradicated by means of Christian baptism. Rumours, like the one that Jews were supplying lepers with poison so that they could contaminate all of the drinking water in Christendom, reinforced the association between Jews, disease and villainy.<sup>62</sup> Medieval legislation also reflects the idea that Jews are polluted. In some European communities, food touched by Jews was considered to be contaminated and, in virtually all of them, sexual relations between Jews and Christians were prohibited. As Kenneth Stow writes: “to have sexual relations with a Jew where the blood might be mixed, was, in the words of Caesar of Heisterbach, ‘super harlotry,’ the equivalent of denying Christ.”<sup>63</sup>

The perception that Jews were corrupt and lascivious rested on the belief that they were agents of Satan. This belief, rooted in scripture,<sup>64</sup> found expression in various Christian texts in which Jews are characterized as servants of Satan who are only too willing to do his bidding.<sup>65</sup> In the most famous Marian legend of all, which dates back to the sixth century, a Jew helps the cleric Theophilus make a pact with the devil.<sup>66</sup> The idea that Jews are allied with the devil is also expressed in *Cantiga* 109 in which a group of devils, attempting to seize a Christian, are addressed by a Jewish bystander: “A Jew begged the devils to tell him in God’s name why they did not seize Jews. One devil said, ‘Because you belong to me and serve me. Therefore, we do not harm you for all of you are already ours.’ ”

In the miniature of *Cantiga* 34, a muscular devil literally forces the Jew to throw the icon into the latrine (Fig. 8). Although one would expect that the devil would be

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<sup>62</sup> Jordan, 245 and 248.

<sup>63</sup> Stow, *Alienated Minority*, 235-236. Like their Christian counterparts, Jewish authorities issued legislation forbidding intermarriage. The rules of *kashrot*, which required Jews to follow strict dietary observances, also had an impact on social interaction between Christians and Jews. Jordan, *French Monarchy*, 23-24.

<sup>64</sup> In John 8:44, Christ admonishes a group of Jews, stating: “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.”

<sup>65</sup> See Robert Bonfil, “The Devil and the Jews in the Christian Consciousness of the Middle Ages,” in *Antisemitism Through the Ages*, 91-98.

<sup>66</sup> See Moshe Lazar, “Theophilus: Servant of two Masters. The Pre-Faustian Theme of Despair and Revolt,” *Modern Language Notes* 87B (1972), 31-50. See E. Wilson, 208-209, for a list of the medieval texts in which the Theophilus legend appears. It is recounted in *Cantiga* 3.

delighted with the Jew's actions and might even offer him a reward, instead, he strikes him dead. As if unsatisfied with this apparently incongruous aspect of the story, the narrator of *Cantiga* 34 offers an alternative outcome; he implies that the Jew's punishment is actually administered by the Virgin herself. The opening line of the song reads: "This is how Holy Mary got even with the Jew for the dishonour he did to Her image." And a few stanzas later, the reader is warned "that he who goes against Her will is as powerless as a straw against the wind."

### *Jews Accused*

If you condemn me for bowing down to the wood of the cross as to God,  
 why not condemn Jacob who 'bowed down at the point of Joseph's staff'?  
 Yet no sooner do you see me adore the icon of Christ or of his Immaculate  
 Mother,...then you flare up.

Leontius, Bishop of Neapolis, *Against the Jews*

In her study of ninth-century Byzantine psalters, Kathleen Corrigan states: "there is abundant evidence that Christians were concerned about the attitude Jews held toward the Christian cult of images."<sup>67</sup> This concern extended well beyond the borders of the Byzantine Empire. References to Jews being punished for iconoclastic acts occur in a variety of texts from all over Europe. A representative sample of these references, ranging in date from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, is provided below in order to demonstrate that legendary accusations against Jews were paralleled by actual charges.

According to the tenth-century chronicler, Agapius of Menbidj, in 592 the Jews of Antioch were accused of having desecrated an icon of the Virgin Mary which had been displayed in a house rented by a Jew from a Christian.<sup>68</sup> The allegation (described by historian Andrew Sharf as "a common pretext for violence") instigated an attack on the

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<sup>67</sup> Corrigan, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Mahbub ibn Kustantin (Agapius of Menbidj), *Kitab al-'Unwan*, ed. and tr. A.Vasiliev, *PO*, 8, 439-40, cited in Andrew Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry from Justinian to the Fourth Crusade* (New York 1971), 57, n.9.

Jews and is said to have led to their expulsion from the city.<sup>69</sup>

Christians sometimes worried that Jews would defile religious images by virtue of their presence alone. In a letter sent by Eustathios, Patriarch of Thessalonica (1175 to ca. 1185) to his superior, the Patriarch of Constantinople, he voices this concern. He writes:

During the incumbency of the saintly patriarchs [of Thessalonica] who preceded my worthless self, the Hebrews were permitted to spread out.... Some of them occupied ruined Christian dwellings which they rebuilt, while others lived in houses occupied by Christians. Some of these houses had been decorated with religious pictures, before which hymns had been chanted, yet until the other day no one said a word of it. However, in the course of a recent dispute the matter was mentioned, and since I was naturally aroused by the situation, I took action. I have been given a list by certain persons, which covers not only the city but other people as well. Inasmuch as it seems to me that I cannot adjust this entire matter properly unless I receive instructions from your great Holiness and obtain aid from you, I venture to ask what I am to do in order to handle the affair in reverent obedience and to terminate the issue correctly.<sup>70</sup>

Eustathios is not only annoyed that Jews and Christians are living side by side, but that Jews are living in houses adorned with Christian images. Although the notion that Jews might deface or remove these emblems is not explicitly stated in this text, it may have crossed the mind of the patriarch who was so eager to “terminate the issue.”

Solomon ibn Verga, a Jewish chronicler of the sixteenth century, explains that Jews, who had lived in Apulia since the Carolingian era, were forced to convert or flee from their homes during the late thirteenth century because a priest, who had quarrelled with a Jew from Trani, placed a wooden statue of Jesus in the garbage in order to “vent his wrath on them all.”<sup>71</sup> When the defiled statue was discovered, a mob rose up against the Jews and drove them away. Solomon’s explanation may not be historically accurate (the Dominican friar, Bartolomeo da l’Aquila had embarked on an aggressive anti-Jewish campaign ca.1290, offering Jews the choice of baptism or exile)<sup>72</sup> but it reveals the

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-46.

<sup>70</sup> Eustathios, Epistle 32, PG 136, 1299 translated in Starr, *Jews in the Byzantine Empire*, 237.

<sup>71</sup> Cohen, 88.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 85; and Joshua Starr, “The Mass Conversion of the Jews in Southern Italy 1290-1293,” *Speculum* 21 (1946), 203-11.

concern of this sixteenth-century writer that Jews could be unjustly blamed for defiling Christian images and could suffer serious consequences as a result.

Some accusations against Jews resemble Christian legends to such a degree that it is highly likely that they were derived from them. For instance, in his *Chronica Majora* (ca.1250), Matthew Paris reports that Abraham of Berkhamsted, among the wealthiest Jews in England, obtained an image of the Virgin and Child, threw it into his latrine, defecated on it and demanded that his wife do the same.<sup>73</sup> When she objected and instead cleaned the image, he allegedly killed her. Gavin Langmuir argues that the story is improbable because “although Abraham was on trial in this period on some charge, he was released on pledge before his trial and was finally condemned to lose his chattels but freed on condition that he avoid the king’s presence for a year--hardly the penalty we would expect for murder or striking blasphemy.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that Matthew’s “historical” account seems to be patterned after Arculf’s tale (which had been circulating in England for over five hundred years) also leads one to question its veracity.

In a letter to James II of Aragon, written in 1302, the inquisitor, Johannes de Lotgerio, apparently eager to see “justice” served, “claimed jurisdiction in the case of some Jews who were alleged to have insulted the Christian religion by spitting on a picture of the Virgin in a church in Alexandria.”<sup>75</sup> The punishment allotted to these individuals is not specified; however, in 1310, a Parisian Jew charged with the same offence was burned in the Place de la Grève.<sup>76</sup>

Another alleged act of Jewish iconoclasm is reported in a letter sent by Philip IV of France to Pope John XXII in 1329. In this letter, the king requested that the pope grant an indulgence to pilgrims visiting a particular Marian image housed in the Abbey of Cambron in the province of Hennegau (Belgium). According to Philip IV, this image was

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H.R. Luard (Rolls Series, 1872-83), V, 114-15, in Langmuir, “The Knight’s Tale of Young Hugh of Lincoln,” *Speculum* 47 (1972), 463.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Norman Zacour, *Jews and Saracens in the Consilia of Oldradus de Ponte* (Toronto 1990), 13.

<sup>76</sup> Y.H. Yerushalmi, “The Inquisition and the Jews of France in the Time of Bernard Gui,” *Harvard Theological Review* 63 (1970), 322.

worthy of special attention because in 1322 a converted Jew named William had attacked it, stabbing the figure of the Virgin five times.<sup>77</sup> When the vandalism was discovered, William denied committing it and managed to evade punishment for several years. However, he was eventually forced to confess to the crime when John Flamens (a blacksmith to whom a resentful, bleeding Madonna had appeared in a dream), challenged William to trial by combat and overcame him. The *Vièrge de Cambron*, like the stabbed Marian icons venerated in Constantinople, was said to have bled when struck by the Jew, and acquired a wonder-working reputation. A surviving list enumerates the miracles attributed to the image between 1336 and 1602. The steady traffic of pilgrims can be explained by the fact that the pope conceded to Philip IV's request and granted remission of sins to those who visited the shrine at Cambron.<sup>78</sup>

Maximilian I, who visited the shrine in 1477, was "so impressed by the story of the desecration...that he ordered it to be painted in the Franciscan church of Colmar."<sup>79</sup> This narrative cycle was destroyed in 1792, but a sequence of twelve woodcuts based on the monumental composition is included in a book printed by Martin Hupfuff in Strasbourg (ca. 1512-15) which bears the telling title: *The Desecration and Shame of the Picture of Mary by the Jews erected for an eternal remembrance by Maximilian the Roman Emperor in the proud city of Colmar from which the Jews have been expelled forever.*<sup>80</sup>

In 1493 in Mantua, a Jewish banker named Daniele da Norsa purchased a house which was decorated with an image of the Virgin. Daniele requested permission from the local bishop to remove it; however, when he proceeded to do so (after receiving

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<sup>77</sup> "Reports differ as to whether the image stabbed was a fresco, altar painting, or sculpture." Zafran, "Alleged Case," 64, n.16. The number of gashes could be a symbolic allusion to Christ's five wounds.

<sup>78</sup> Zafran, "Iconography of Anti-Semitism," 208.

<sup>79</sup> Zafran, "Alleged Case," 65.

<sup>80</sup> Maximilian I ordered all Jews to leave Colmar in 1510, but this decree was not implemented until 1512. Zafran, "Iconography of Antisemitism," 210. Reproductions of the woodcuts appear in Zafran, "Alleged Case," Figs. 3-14.

permission) he incited a riot.<sup>81</sup> The case was brought to the attention of Francesco Gonzaga II, Duke of Mantua, who stipulated that the Jew's house be destroyed and a church dedicated to the Virgin be erected on the site.<sup>82</sup> The Duke also ordered Daniele to pay 110 ducats to the artist Andrea Mantegna (ca. 1430-1506) to paint a picture of the Virgin to replace the one that had been destroyed. In this painting (the *Madonna della Vittoria*, now in the Louvre), the Virgin shares centre stage with Francesco Gonzaga, for it commemorates his victory over the French at the Battle of Fornovo in 1495--a triumph the duke attributed to the Mother of God. This image became a focus of local veneration and only hours after it was installed in the church of San Simone it was surrounded by ex-votos which attested to its efficacy.<sup>83</sup>

Another altarpiece immortalizing the so-called Mantua affair was painted concurrently by a follower of Mantegna. Daniele was also forced to pay for this work, which may be seen today in a chapel of the Church of Sant' Andrea, Mantua. This picture shows the Virgin seated on a throne holding the infant Christ. She accepts a model of her new church from St Jerome, as Sts. Anne and John the Baptist witness the transaction. Members of the evicted Jewish family are shown "humbled below the throne" while the space above it is occupied by two angels holding a plaque which reads:

*Debellata/Haebraeorum/Temeritate* ("the temerity of the Hebrews having been overcome").<sup>84</sup>

The Mantua incident may have been influenced by economic rivalry. In the decade leading up to the affair and after it, itinerant Franciscan monks condemned Jewish money-lending and supported the establishment of *Monti di Pietà* ("publicly funded

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<sup>81</sup> Zafran suggests that the people of Mantua may have "been recently aroused by the preaching of Fra Bernardinus da Feltre [sic] and other...anti-Semitic friars." Zafran, "Iconography," 215.

<sup>82</sup> The church, a votive building celebrating Gonzaga's military prowess, was known as the Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria. Baron, *Social and Religious History*, Vol.X, 289.

<sup>83</sup> Freedberg, 145-146.

<sup>84</sup> Zafran, "Iconography," 215-16.

associations...organized to grant interest-free loans”).<sup>85</sup> Successful Jewish financiers, like Daniele, who continued to operate after a *Monte di Pietà* was set up in Mantua by the Franciscan, Bernardino da Feltre (1484),<sup>86</sup> may have served as a target for economic jealousy. Daniele da Norsa’s alleged desecration of an image of the Virgin was probably no more than a convenient justification for the expression of antisemitism motivated by secular causes.<sup>87</sup>

In his biographical sketch of the artist Lodovico Buti (ca.1560-ca.1603), the art-historian, Filippo Baldinucci (d.1696), relates the following incident.<sup>88</sup> Buti was commissioned to paint a picture of the Virgin on the external wall of a church in Florence which happened to be adjacent to a Jewish cemetery. As Baldinucci reports: “this figure accidentally became the principal feature of this little cemetery. The Jews were much annoyed to see our sacred image in that place.”<sup>89</sup> The Jews approached the patron of the chapel, requested that the image of the Virgin be transferred to the opposite side of the building (where it would not dominate their burial ground), and offered to pay for this alteration. The patron agreed, accepted the Jews’ money, and assigned the job to Lodovico Buti. Buti painted a new picture of the Virgin on the one side of the building, but instead of leaving the other side bare, he painted “a handsome Crucifixion” in place of the original image of the Virgin. The Jewish authorities immediately demanded an explanation and were told that the bargain had “been fulfilled to the letter” and that they

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<sup>85</sup> Stow, 210. According to Stow, “the *Monti* themselves often became profit-making, interest-collecting institutions.” *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> Baron, Vol.X, 289.

<sup>87</sup> “In a similar case in Sardinia, the vicar of the local bishop had permitted a Jew to erase an image of the Virgin from the wall of his house. Innocent VIII had the vicar summoned to Rome to answer for his crime.” Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews: History*, Vol. 7 (Toronto 1991), 86.

<sup>88</sup> Baldinucci’s anecdote inspired Robert Browning to write the poem, “Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial,” first published in *Pacchiarotto* in 1876. See *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew (New Haven 1981), Vol. II, 481-495.

<sup>89</sup> Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie dei Professori del Disegno, or Notices of Painters from Cimabue*, quoted in George Willis Cooke, *A Guide-book to the Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning* (Boston 1891), 140.

were “very presumptuous.”<sup>90</sup> Balducci concludes: “Then the rabbis dispersed, discontentedly, but tacitly acknowledging they were wrong. They said no more about it, and no longer tried with their ill-gotten riches to control the piety of good Christians.”<sup>91</sup>

### *Counter-narratives*

Although Balducci’s anecdote cannot be accepted at face value, it stands to reason that Christian images could offend the sensibilities of Jews who came into contact with them on a daily basis. As Anna Sapir Abulafia observes:

No Jew could go many steps in his or her town without being confronted by some kind of representation of Christianity....It was against this constant intrusion that a Jewish minority had to gird itself if it wanted to preserve its own distinct identity. It could not afford, for even a moment, to forget that Jews did not believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God who rose from the dead, and it needed to recall at all times that Jews regarded Christian usage of symbols as idolatry; in short it needed to withstand the inevitable attraction that an assertive majority culture exercised upon the minority living in its midst.<sup>92</sup>

One way the Jewish minority “girded itself” was through the creation and dissemination of stories and songs which discredited the Christian cult of images. Anti-Christian works of this type circulated exclusively among Jews and strengthened their resolve in the face of pressure to convert to Christianity. An example is the Sephardic ballad, *El idólatra de María*, sung in the Iberian Peninsula before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, which survives in several variants. In this ballad, a Christian mariner prays to the Virgin to calm a violent storm, promising that if he is saved, he will clothe her (i.e. her image) in gold. When the storm does not abate, the hypocritical Christian “idolater” calls Mary a whore and drowns, while his Jewish crew, who pray to God on High, are

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Abulafia, 70-71.

spared.<sup>93</sup> Samuel Armisted and Joseph Silverman are justified in calling this ballad “a miracle in reverse,”<sup>94</sup> for it inverts the standard miracle tale in which the Virgin unfailingly intervenes. Here, Mary is portrayed as an ineffectual idol, in contrast to the living God of Israel. Scholars, such as Manuel da Costa Fontes, believe that the Jews who composed *El idólatra* based their composition on a Christian prototype, transforming it by substituting Jewish values for Christian ones.

A similar substitution occurs in the preface of Joseph ben Nathan Official’s thirteenth-century *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane* (Book of Joseph the Zealous), which refutes Christological interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. In his preface, Joseph includes the following anecdote which critiques the Christian veneration of the crucifix:

Once my lord and father Rabbi Nathan--may his soul be in Eden--was riding with the Bishop of Sens. On the way the bishop dismounted from his horse [and walked] over to a thorn bush to urinate. My lord and father saw him, and he too dismounted [and walked] over to an abomination [cross] and urinated on it. The Bishop saw this and was angry, and said to him: “It is not fitting to do this, desecrating the crossed thing [=the cross].” My father answered: “On the contrary, *you* have acted foolishly! The thorn bush on which the Holy One--blessed be He--let his *shekhinah* [radiance] rest, for the sake of salvation alone, on *that* you urinated. According to what you say--that your idol was exhausted on it, and stank on it, and was destroyed on it--it would be no more than reasonable if you exposed yourselves to urinate on it.”<sup>95</sup>

Rabbi Nathan argues that the thorn bush (representing the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses) is superior to the cross. The contempt for the crucifix expressed in this passage is underscored by the language employed; the cross is described as an

<sup>93</sup> Louise Mirrer, “Representing ‘Other’ Men: Muslims, Jews and Masculine Ideals in Medieval Castilian Epic and Ballad,” in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis 1994), 171, n.18. In an Ethiopian version of this miracle, three Arab sailors, caught in a storm, are thrown from their boat into the Nile. Two pray to the Virgin and are saved; one prays to Muhammad and is swallowed by a crocodile. Budge, 41-42.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel G. Armisted and Joseph H. Silverman, *The Judeo-Spanish Ballad Chapbooks of Yacob Abraham Yoná* (Berkeley 1971), 141.

<sup>95</sup> Joseph ben Nathan Official, *Sefer Yosef ha-Mekane*, quoted in Trautner-Kromann, 101.

abomination (*toeva*) and Jesus referred to as an idol (*jira*).<sup>96</sup> Although Rabbi Nathan (who served as financial advisor and administrator to the Archbishop of Sens) engaged in countless arguments “with high-standing clerics, priests, and monks, and with Jewish converts to Christianity,”<sup>97</sup> it is unlikely that he did as his son Joseph describes.<sup>98</sup> This “incident” was probably invented by Joseph to emphasize the absurdity of Christianity and pay tribute to his father’s extraordinary character. As in the Sephardic ballad, *El idólatra*, Christian conventions are inverted to buttress the faith of the Jewish minority.

In summary, the Christian veneration of images had ramifications for medieval Jews. The accusation that Jews desecrated Christian images frequently served as a pretext for violence against them. Like the host-profanation charge which emerged in the thirteenth century, the image-desecration charge was universal because images (like sacred hosts) were venerated throughout Christendom.

Anti-Jewish miracle tales about bleeding images or hosts inspired real accusations against Jews. As Miri Rubin explains: “The Host-desecration tale was not only a poignant story about Jews, it was also a blueprint for action whenever the circumstances of abuse suggested themselves in the lives of those who were reared on the tale. The story’s fictionality was masked from the very beginning...: it was always told as a report about a real event.”<sup>99</sup> In accounts of images defiled by Jews, the lines drawn between life and legend are also indistinct.<sup>100</sup>

In this chapter, we have seen how Byzantine emperors, like John Tzimiskes, who cherished the famous Beirut icon, gave credence to miracle tales in which Jews were

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>99</sup> Miri Rubin, “Desecration of the Host: The Birth of an Accusation,” in *Christianity and Judaism*, ed. Diana Wood (Oxford 1992), 169.

<sup>100</sup> Modern scholarship has contributed to this blurring of fiction and reality. For example, two scholars writing on the *Cantigas* state: “Perhaps the most unusual glimpse of *medieval life* (emphasis mine) occurs in a miniature that recounts the story of a Jew who disposed of the Virgin’s image in a latrine.” Ellen Kosmer and James F. Powers, “Manuscript Illustration: The *Cantigas* in Contemporary Art Context,” in *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance*, ed. Robert I. Burns, S.J. (Philadelphia 1990), 47.

portrayed in a negative light. Western monarchs followed suit. Alfonso X, a tolerant and enlightened king who employed Jewish translators and administrators at his court, nevertheless repeated antisemitic miracles (such as “Arculf’s Tale”) which had been conceived hundreds of years earlier. Philip IV and Maximilian I helped to advertise the miracle of the Virgin of Cambron and, in doing so, they reinforced the anti-Jewish biases of the Christian populace. They insisted that miracles were true because these events affirmed their values and beliefs. By portraying themselves as witnesses to God’s grace, it is likely that these rulers also enhanced their personal prestige. For men like these, who did not question the prejudices they had inherited from their ancestors, attempting to demonstrate that Christianity was superior to Judaism was as natural as praying to the Virgin.

### III THE “LEGEND OF THE DIVINE SURETY”

Sculptures or paintings which cry, move, or perform other actions abound in hagiographical texts. Medieval authors used the motif of the animated image to serve a variety of literary functions. As noted in the previous chapter, in some tales an image bleeds after being struck by an iconoclast. In others, a picture or sculpture springs to life to admonish individuals and cause them to undergo a profound change of heart. According to tradition, in 1206, while kneeling in the ruined church of San Damiano, just outside of Assisi, Giovanni Bernardone (better known as “St. Francis”), was addressed by a crucifix and advised to repair Christ’s house. This encounter with the speaking image marked a turning point in Giovanni’s life. As reported in the *Golden Legend*: “from that moment on his soul melted within him [and] his compassion for Christ was marvelously fixed in his heart.”<sup>1</sup> While dissolute Christians often starred in moralistic narratives of this type, medieval authors also cast Jews in central roles. Typically, after witnessing the “performance” of a religious image, the Jew converts to Christianity. This is the basic plot of the “Legend of the Divine Surety,” which will be examined in the following pages.

The earliest surviving Greek copies of the tale occur in manuscripts of the eleventh century.<sup>2</sup> A Latin translation of the same period is also extant. As the story was translated into vernacular languages, it lost certain elements and acquired others. The most dramatic shift in the narrative was that it was transformed from a miracle of Christ into a miracle of the Virgin. The legend, in various forms, sustained its popularity for hundreds of years. Western European recensions share certain details with an episode described in Giovanni Fiorentino’s, *Il Pecorone*, which Shakespeare used as a source for his *Merchant of Venice*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 221.

<sup>2</sup> Greek manuscripts are listed by Michael Huber, *Johannes Monachus, Liber de Miraculis*, Heidelberg, 1913, xxv cited in Mango, *Brazen*, 143, n.142.

<sup>3</sup> Various Western redactions of the legend are summarized in Erik Boman, *Deux Miracles de Gautier de Coinci* (Paris 1935).

*The Byzantine Narrative*

The “Legend of the Divine Surety,” set in seventh-century Constantinople, concerns Theodore, a Christian merchant and shipmaster, and Abraham, a wealthy Jew. Theodore, who travels regularly on business between Constantinople and Syria, is left destitute when he loses his cargo at sea. Since his friends refuse to give him a loan, as a last resort he solicits Abraham’s help, stopping first to pray before an icon of Christ.<sup>4</sup> Abraham, who had offered to go into business with him at an earlier date but was rebuffed, is surprisingly sympathetic to the merchant’s request, but stipulates that he provide a reputable individual to stand as his surety or guarantor. The merchant asks his friends to serve in this capacity, but none will take the risk.

Discouraged, Theodore prays again before the icon and then returns to Abraham’s house. Leading Abraham before the icon, Theodore introduces Christ as his guarantor.<sup>5</sup> As to be expected, Abraham is taken aback, and at first he demurs. However, impressed by the merchant’s faith and “stimulated by some divine urge,” the Jew eventually overcomes his objections and agrees to lend Theodore fifty pounds of gold.<sup>6</sup> The gold is counted and weighed in front of the icon, the merchant goes to sea, experiences another shipwreck, and returns to Abraham penniless. The magnanimous Jew advances him a second loan and advises him not to sail in winter. He also counsels Theodore to send some of the money owed him by messenger rather than risk losing everything in another accident. After loading his ship with luxury items, Theodore embarks on another journey. Driven off course by strong winds, he arrives at an island “in the very westernmost parts of the ocean” (likely Britain), where he trades his merchandise for lead and tin.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The icon is said to be located on the east side of a domed tetrastyle roofed with bronze tiles, built by Constantine the Great in the middle of Constantinople. Mango, *Brazen*, 144.

<sup>5</sup> “In the Byzantine and early western versions of the story there is no hint that the image is actually presented to the creditor as a pawn.” Benjamin N. Nelson and Joshua Starr, “The Legend of the Divine Surety and the Jewish Moneylender,” *Annuaire de l’institut de philologie et d’histoire orientales et slaves* 7 (1939-44), 334.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>7</sup> Tin was known in Byzantium as “the Britannic metal.” *Ibid.*, 302.

The merchant makes a large profit, but his happiness is overshadowed by growing concern about the return voyage to Constantinople. Heeding his benefactor's advice, he decides not to risk losing the gold he has earned in yet another ship-wreck. Dismissing "all human reasoning with its hesitation and lack of faith,"<sup>8</sup> he places it and a message addressed to Abraham in a wooden chest which he throws into the sea, asking Christ to convey it to the moneylender. When night falls, Theodore and Abraham, miles apart, dream similar dreams in which the icon testifies that the loan has been repaid. And when Abraham goes down to the beach in the morning he finds a chest bobbing in the waves. Fetching it, he discovers that it contains a letter from Theodore and the gold owed to him. He is so impressed by this miracle that he immediately converts to Christianity. When Theodore arrives safely in Constantinople, Abraham, wanting to test the merchant's faith and confirm that the Christian faith is the true one, claims that he has not received payment. Undeterred, Theodore leads Abraham before the icon and asks the image to prove that he has paid the debt. It complies, striking Abraham with a lightning-like force and hurling him to the ground. This sign confirms the Jew's decision to embrace the Christian faith and he is baptized by the Patriarch Sergius (610-638) along with 75 members of his household.

Shortly after, a special service attended by the Emperor Heraclius (610-641) is held to commemorate the miracle which God has worked through the icon. Theodore's letter to Abraham is read before the congregation and the Emperor orders the chest to be placed before the image as a reminder of the event. A final miracle brings the story to its conclusion. When the cargo is unloaded from Theodore's ship, he and Abraham find that the tin and lead have been turned into silver. Both men agree to offer the precious metal to God and it is used to make liturgical furnishings for the Church of Hagia Sophia. While Theodore joins a monastery, Abraham builds a chapel near the site of the miraculous icon. Inducted into the priesthood by Patriarch Sergius, he serves as priest of this chapel assisted by his two sons who are appointed deacons. From that time forth, the icon is

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

known by the name “*Antiphonetes*,” meaning “guarantor” or “bondsman.”<sup>9</sup>

### *The Icon of Christos Antiphonetes*

Although Theodore and Abraham are fictional characters, the icon purported to have served as the merchant’s guarantor is mentioned in several historical documents. The earliest reference to the icon is in a spurious letter allegedly sent by Pope Gregory II to the iconoclastic emperor, Leo III. The date and origin of this composition are still in question, but it is generally believed to have been written before the ninth century.<sup>10</sup> The *Antiphonetes* icon is mentioned in the main body of the letter, and in several manuscripts, including the oldest known copy, Vat. Pal. gr. 308 (saec. XI), the story of Abraham and Theodore is given in full.<sup>11</sup> Thus, for the medieval elite who had access to the letter, the “Legend of the Divine Surety” was told on the authority of Pope Gregory II himself.

The icon of *Christos Antiphonetes* is also mentioned by an English pilgrim who visited Constantinople in 1190. Fortunately, he provides specific information on the location of the object. He writes: “Next to St. Sophia is the Church of the Virgin called the Chalkoprateia...in which three churches are united: one of Christ, one of the Virgin, and one of Jacob, the brother of the Lord. In the large church of the Virgin are the relics of the holy martyr Niketas, and in the church of Christ, high up near the altar is an icon of Christ that performed a great miracle at the time of the Emperor Heraclius [i.e. the miracle of Theodore and Abraham].”<sup>12</sup> After describing the icon, the English pilgrim repeats the “Legend of the Divine Surety.”<sup>13</sup>

That an icon, believed to have been instrumental in converting a Jew, came to be

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<sup>9</sup> Mango, *Brazen*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> Belting, 507.

<sup>11</sup> Mango, *Brazen*, 115.

<sup>12</sup> K.N. Ciggaar, “Une description de Constantinople traduit par un pèlerin anglais,” *Revue des études byzantines* 34 (1976):211ff., cited in Belting, 528.

<sup>13</sup> In his account, although Abraham agrees to accept the icon of Christ as Theodore’s surety, he expresses his disapproval of both the image and its prototype, saying, “Brother Theodore, though I hate Christ and his icon, I will lend you the gold.” Nelson and Starr, 316.

housed in this church is interesting in light of the building's history. Various sources relate that in 442, when Theodosius II (408-450) was absent from the Byzantine capital, the prefect of the city authorized the construction of a synagogue in the Chalkoprateia district to the west of the Church of Hagia Sophia. When the emperor returned to Constantinople the following year he ordered this new synagogue to be converted to a church.<sup>14</sup> The sixth-century historian, Theodorus Lector, (who compiled his church history from earlier sources) claims that the Emperor's sister, Pulcheria, undertook the project. The fact that the empress was a vocal opponent of the Nestorian heresy may explain the dedication of the new church to Mary, the Mother of God.<sup>15</sup> This church was a popular pilgrim destination as it was close to Hagia Sophia and contained, in addition to the renowned *Antiphonetes*, the Virgin's girdle, and a wonder-working Marian icon.<sup>16</sup>

Anthony of Novgorod, who visited Constantinople in 1200, also mentions the *Antiphonetes* icon. Although the Russian pilgrim's account is vague, he seems to have seen the icon when it was still enshrined in the Church of the Virgin in the Chalkoprateia.<sup>17</sup> Post-Crusade references to an image "which performed the miracle of Theodore the merchant" are also provided by Russian sources--the account of the pilgrim, Ignatius of Smolensk (1389) and the Russian Anonymous of approximately the same date.<sup>18</sup> The image (which was probably a replica of the original icon) is described in the

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<sup>14</sup> D. Jacoby, "Les quartiers juifs de Constantinople à l'époque byzantine," *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 168-9.

<sup>15</sup> Pulcheria was also involved with the construction of two other important Marian churches, the Blachernae, (housing the Virgin's shroud) and the Hodegoi (in which a portrait of Mary painted by St. Luke was displayed). Kenneth G. Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley 1982), 142 .

<sup>16</sup> Mango, *Brazen* , 121.

<sup>17</sup> Although parts of this church are still preserved, the structure "is not mentioned in sources dating from after the Crusader period and probably fell largely into ruins." George P. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* (Washington, D.C. 1984), 336. The icon of *Christos Antiphonetes* is not recorded on the Crusaders' lists of loot taken from Constantinople, but the relic of the Virgin's girdle was seized during the Conquest and sent to the West. *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>18</sup> "The Legend of the Divine Surety" supplied by the Russian Anonymous differs from the Byzantine tale. In the Russian version, the Christian who has borrowed money from the Jew drowns with his goods and the Jew berates the image of the Guarantor Savior until the sea spews up the silver. *Ibid.*, 150-152.

Russian Anonymous as being painted on a city wall to the east of the Basilike marketplace on the southern shore of the Golden Horn.<sup>19</sup> This location probably lent an air of immediacy to the story of Theodore and Abraham, as the waterfront was “much frequented by merchants,” and served as a Jewish quarter until the eleventh century when the Jews moved to the eastern shore of the Golden Horn.<sup>20</sup> As George P. Majeska observes: “A minimum of imagination suggests why a copy of the icon of the Savior responsible for the conversion of the Jewish moneylender Abraham should be displayed by authorities in Constantinople’s old Jewish quarter.”<sup>21</sup> Later sources make no mention of the image which acted as Theodore’s guarantor.

The fact that the icon responsible for Abraham’s conversion was displayed for a significant period of time—first in the Church of the Virgin in the Chalkoprateia, and later, on a city wall, undoubtedly lent credence to the account. Guides showing pilgrims the image of *Christos Antiphonetes* could tell the story as the “Guarantor Savior” met their gaze and attested to its veracity.

### *Western Redactions of “The Legend of the Divine Surety”*

According to tradition, “The Legend of the Divine Surety” was transported to the West by a pious archdeacon from Liège who went on pilgrimage in Byzantium.<sup>22</sup> Witnessing a festival in Constantinople, the archdeacon asked one of the locals the cause of the celebration and was told the story by a person who could speak Latin.<sup>23</sup> The only secure information regarding the story’s dissemination is that Johannes Monachus, a southern Italian monk who visited Constantinople, produced a Latin translation of it in the

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Boman, *Deux Miracles*, XXI-XXIV.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, XXII.

eleventh century.<sup>24</sup> This translation is faithful to the Greek narrative and features an icon of Christ. As previously stated, later writers, swept up in a wave of enthusiasm for the Virgin, discarded this seemingly critical element. Nigel of Canterbury (d. ca. 1200), who composed the earliest extant version of the legend in Latin verse, claims that the transaction between the merchant and the wealthy Jew takes place in front of an icon of “the sacred mother” in the Church of Hagia Sophia.<sup>25</sup> In the *Cantigas*, although the miracle is still set in Constantinople, the action centres around a statue of the Virgin and Child.

The shift in focus from Christ to the Virgin alters the legend’s theological message. In the Greek tale, Christ’s payment of Theodore’s debt could be seen as a metaphor for His atoning death on the cross, described in the following terms in the *Akathistos* hymn: “Wanting to grant grace for all ancient debts, the redeemer of mankind came of his own...and tearing up the writ of indebtedness, he hears from all: ‘Alleluia.’”<sup>26</sup> In the *Cantigas*, the miracle is attributed to the “Peerless Virgin” alone, and the Alfonsine poet stresses that “he who trusts in the Mother of God can well repay that which he owes.”<sup>27</sup> While referring to the material debt owed by the merchant, the poet may also be alluding to the idea that through Mary’s mediation, Christians can approach the throne of God and discharge their debts of sin.

<sup>24</sup> Johannes Monachus, *Liber de miraculis*, ed. M. Huber (Heidelberg 1913), 3-35 [*Sammlung mittellateinischer Texte*, VII]; rpt. in K.P. Harrington, *Mediaeval Latin* (Boston 1925), 519-538.

<sup>25</sup> Jan Ziolkowski, ed., Nigel of Canterbury, *Miracles of the Virgin Mary, in Verse* (Toronto 1986), 78, lines 1977-80. Nigel probably follows William of Malmesbury’s *Miracula Sanctae Mariae Virginis* (c. 1140) in placing the icon of the Virgin in Hagia Sophia. For the relationship between Nigel and William’s compositions see *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>26</sup> Vasiliki Limberis, *Divine Heiress: The Virgin Mary and the Creation of Christian Constantinople* (London 1994), 158. The Akathistos hymn, an anonymous composition written before the sixth century, “is the oldest continuously performed Marian hymn in the Eastern Orthodox Church. *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>27</sup> See Appendix for Kulp-Hill’s unpublished translation of *Cantiga* 25. All subsequent quotations of *Cantiga* 25, *Ibid.*

*Cantiga 25*

The miniature of *Cantiga 25* consists of twelve panels, like every fifth *cantiga* in the manuscript (Figs. 9 and 10).<sup>28</sup> In the first, a Christian, who has spent all his money doing charitable works, requests a loan from a Jewish moneylender. Evidently, the moneylender asks for a surety, because in the next scene, the Christian, touching a statue of the Virgin and Child with his left hand, and raising his right, as if making an oath, presents Mary and Christ as his guarantors (Fig. 11).<sup>29</sup> In panel 3, the Jew, seated at a low table, counts the agreed sum in the presence of the Christian and gives it to him. Although the next events are not illustrated, the lyrics state that the merchant then goes off and makes a healthy profit, but forgets to repay the loan on the specified date. As shown in panel 4, far from home, with no possibility of repaying the debt on time, the merchant places the money in a chest, throws it into the sea, and asks God to guide it to the Jewish moneylender. The next scenes (5 and 6), show the arrival of the chest at “the port of Byzantium.”<sup>30</sup> The Jew’s servant tries in vain to retrieve it but it eludes his grasp so that his master is forced to wade after it himself. When he seizes the chest he orders his servant to carry it home (panel 7), where he opens it and discovers the money owed to him by the Christian merchant. After counting it, the Jew hides the chest under his bed in

<sup>28</sup> *Cantiga 145*, with six panels, is the sole exception.

<sup>29</sup> In the French narrative of Gautier de Coincy (1177-1236), contact with a similar statue seals the transaction. The Christian swears on an image of the Virgin and Child that if he fails to repay the money on the specified day, he will be the Jew’s serf for the rest of his life. After praying to the Virgin, the Christian places the moneylender’s hand into the sculpted hand of the infant Christ, introducing the latter as his surety and pledge.

“La main de l’enfant en la main  
Dou giu met, sanz delaiance  
La plegerie li fiance.”

Gautier de Coincy, *Les Miracles de Notre Dame*, ed. Frederic Koenig (Geneva 1970), Vol. 4, 117-18, lines 192-194.

<sup>30</sup> The architectural backdrops of scenes 4 through 7 are almost identical, indicating that the artist simply copied the background in a formulaic way and did not bother to discriminate between the “port of Byzantium” (shown in panels 5-7) and the unspecified port from which the merchant launched the chest (panel 4).

order to keep it a secret from his acquaintances (panel 8).<sup>31</sup> Panel 9 shows the merchant, having completed his business, returning by ship to the Byzantine port. After disembarking, he is accosted in the street by the moneylender (panel 10), who gestures at him as if accusing him of not fulfilling his side of the bargain. According to the lyrics, the moneylender not only demands payment, but threatens to blackmail the merchant if he does not hand over the money.<sup>32</sup> However, the Christian confidently retorts that Mary will testify that he has paid the debt, and the pair go to the church to test this claim. At the church the Christian addresses the statue of the Virgin as if it were flesh and blood, beseeching it to “tell the truth” and to “make manifest the perfidy of the Jew” and it complies with his request and immediately springs to life (panel 11, Fig. 13). The prescient statue rebukes the moneylender in no uncertain terms saying: “You, cursed Jew, know that you received your money in full, and that you maliciously hid the chest under your bed,” at which point the moneylender withdraws his accusation and converts to Christianity. In panel 12, he is shown immersed in a decoratively carved font, clasping his hands as a priest baptizes him. Meanwhile, the vindicated merchant kneels in gratitude before the altar, as his astonished companions admire the statue which has resumed a hieratic pose.

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<sup>31</sup> The Jew's bed-chamber is decorated with a cloth bearing a swastika and a curtain emblazoned with two hexagrams and an inscription in Arabic characters (Fig. 12). Motifs, such as these, embroidered on textiles, likely served an apotropaic function, preventing evil spirits from crossing the threshold of the room. Sheila Paine, *Embroidered Textiles: Traditional Patterns from Five Continents with a Worldwide Guide to Identification* (New York 1990), 159. Cf. the curtain in the miniature of *Cantiga* 46, Fig. 14. The hexagram, (Magen David or Shield of David) was only adopted as a distinctively Jewish symbol in the nineteenth century. Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *Encyclopedia of Judaism* (New York 1989), “Magen David”. Apparently, “efforts to decipher...Arabic inscriptions appearing in the miniatures...(some eighteen in all), have met with little success.” Scarborough, “Visualization vs. Verbalization,” 135.

<sup>32</sup> In medieval texts, Jews are frequently characterized as greedy and unscrupulous individuals. As Sara Lipton observes, by the high Middle Ages Jews were equated with “usury, avarice, and the destructive effects of money capital as a whole.” Sara Lipton, “The Root of All Evil: Jews, Money and Metaphor in the *Bible Moralisée*,” *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 1/3 (1995), 302.

*The Function of the Statue in Cantiga 25*

In *Cantiga 25*, when the merchant offers the Virgin and Child as his guarantors he touches their sculpted likenesses and promises to repay the loan. The Alfonsine poet writes: "When the Jew agreed to this [the guarantors]...the Christian showed him the statues [of the Virgin and Child] and, in the presence of the people, he touched them and said that he was placing them as security so that he could pay his debt without fail."

In medieval society, contact with sacred objects strengthened oral promises. As early as the fourth century, Christians swore oaths on the gospels.<sup>33</sup> Oaths sworn on saints' relics eventually acquired the same prestige. Gregory of Tours relates several anecdotes concerning oaths sworn at saints' shrines. One case involves two men who go to the church of St. Marcellus at Chalon-sur-Saône to resolve a dispute. When the guilty party raises his hand to swear an oath in the name of the saint, he is unable to pronounce it and finds that his limbs are paralyzed.<sup>34</sup> A shoplifter, accused by a merchant of stealing an ornament, suffers the same punishment when she denies the crime at the tomb of St. Eugenius at Vieux.<sup>35</sup> Another case concerns a man who swears a false oath on St. Stephen's blood, enshrined in Bourges, and is knocked unconscious just as Abraham is struck with a lightning-like force by the icon in the Greek version of "The Legend of the Divine Surety."<sup>36</sup> According to Gregory, St. Pancratius (or Pancras) buried in Rome, and St. Polyeuctus buried in Constantinople, were famous for taking "immediate vengeance against perjurers."<sup>37</sup>

Relics continued to be employed as legal instruments for hundreds of years. In

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<sup>33</sup> Kitzinger, "Cult of Images," 99. The Jewish tradition of swearing oaths on the Torah may have served as a precedent for this. Apparently, the relatively new Christian customs did not immediately supersede older traditions. John Chrysostom reports that some Christians in fourth-century Antioch considered oaths sworn in the synagogue to be more binding than those made in Christian shrines. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late Fourth Century* (Berkeley 1983), 79-80.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 77-78.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

seventh-century France, “bondsmen assigned to royal castles swore legal oaths” on the cloak of St. Martin “which was stored in a capella (this word is the origin of the word ‘chapel’).”<sup>38</sup> Relics also played an important role in the peace councils convened by French bishops in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Men vowing to uphold the “Peace of God” swore on the relics of local saints, and on those of Stephen, the protomartyr.<sup>39</sup> The relics also “witnessed” the proceedings, since they were believed to embody the saint.<sup>40</sup> One of the most famous medieval oaths sworn on relics is depicted on the Bayeux tapestry (ca. 1080), which shows Harold, with his arms outstretched, touching two reliquaries and pledging allegiance to William the Conqueror.<sup>41</sup>

As saints’ images began to be perceived as embodiments of them, oaths were also sworn on them. As early as 656, during a theological dispute between Maximus the Confessor and Theodosius, Bishop of Caesarea, “all participants rose, prayed, kissed the gospel book, the cross and the icons of Christ and the Virgin, in whose presence the conversation was evidently held, and placed their hands on those objects in confirmation...of what had been transacted.”<sup>42</sup> Various Western European texts also mention the practice of swearing oaths on images. Feudal oaths were sworn by knights on the statue of the Madonna at Hildesheim, and sometimes bishops took their oaths of office before “her.”<sup>43</sup> As Ilene Forsyth remarks: “a promise to a statue of the Virgin was

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<sup>38</sup> Arno Borst, *Medieval Worlds: Barbarians, Heretics and Artists in the Middle Ages*, tr. Eric Hansen (Chicago 1996), 128.

<sup>39</sup> Daniel F. Callahan, “The Peace of God and the Cult of the Saints in Aquitaine in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries,” in *The Peace of God: Social Violence and Religious Response in France around the Year 1000*, Thomas Head and Richard Landes, eds. (Ithaca 1992), 176-177.

<sup>40</sup> The reliquary statue of St. Foy at Conques also ratified treaties and resolved disputes. Bernard of Angers, who wrote the first two books of St. Foy’s miracles, describes one such incident as follows: “you could see both Hadimars (for they each had that name) arguing before the holy image as if before a tribunal, this one accusing, that one admitting his own sin and offering reparation.” Sheingorn, *The Book of Sainte Foy*, 101.

<sup>41</sup> See David Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Complete Tapestry in Colour with Introduction, Description and Commentary* (London 1985), Plates 25 and 26.

<sup>42</sup> Kitzinger, 99. The disputation is described in the *Vita S. Maximi Confessoris*, PG 90, col.156.

<sup>43</sup> Forsyth, 45.

regarded as an avowal to Mary herself.”<sup>44</sup>

*Cantiga 25* is best understood in light of these practices. The Marian statue functions as a legal instrument and is said to witness the agreement between the Christian and the Jew, just as the relics of Stephen witnessed peace vows and the icons present at the disputation between Theodosius and Maximus the Confessor witnessed the proceedings and gave them divine sanction. The idea that the statue is “indwelt in some mysterious way”<sup>45</sup> by the presence of the Virgin is heightened in the final moments of the story when the sculpture speaks to testify to the repayment of the loan and to convince the Jew of the truth of the Christian religion.

In *Cantiga 25*, the medium is the message, as the statue of the Virgin and Child, a tangible expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation, takes on human characteristics and inspires the Jew to believe “wholeheartedly in Holy Mary and in Her Son.” Since medieval Jews were more likely to eschew Christian images than be attracted to them, it is significant that a statue converts the moneylender. The Christian author of the tale simultaneously provides an apologia for his faith and for the veneration of images. A similar piece of propaganda is included in Caesarius of Heisterbach’s *Dialogue on Miracles* (1220-1235), in which an abbot tells how a Jew in Trier bore witness to a bleeding crucifix. According to Caesarius, the abbot was “much more pleased with the testimony of an enemy,” than with Christian reports of the prodigy.<sup>46</sup> Late medieval accounts of Jews witnessing the mass and glimpsing the actual body of Christ in the host also show Jews being “confronted by a miracle and...compelled to accept conversion.”<sup>47</sup> Of course, not all tales of this nature involve Jews. Many feature Christians whose encounter with the miraculous affirms their convictions, or--in the case of sinners--reproves them. Some also concern Muslims. *Cantiga 46* tells how an image of the Virgin

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>45</sup> H.J. Magoulias, “The Lives of Byzantine Saints as Sources of Data for the History of Magic in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries A.D: Sorcery, Relics and Icons,” *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 261.

<sup>46</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, tr., Scott and Bland, Bk. X, Chap. XIX, Vol. II, 189.

<sup>47</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991), 122.

inspired a Moor to convert to Christianity. This story is worth a brief mention here, because it underscores the Christian desire that adherents of rival faiths come to an understanding of Christianity and acknowledge the power of images.

*Cantiga 46: "The Moor and the Image of the Virgin"*

In *Cantiga 46*, a Moor, who has obtained an image of the Virgin and Child as booty in war, and is captivated by its beauty, sets it "up in a high place" in his house and dresses it "in garments of spun gold." Though he often contemplates the image, he cannot help but voice his doubts concerning the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation, musing: "All who will believe this are mistaken...for I cannot imagine that God...who is so great would clothe Himself in flesh and walk among common folk."<sup>48</sup> Declaring that no less than a miracle will make him change his mind, the Moor is instantly converted when the image's "two breasts turn into living flesh and begin to flow with milk in gushing streams." This amazing occurrence is recorded in the accompanying miniature (Fig. 14), which depicts the astonished Moor kneeling before the lactating icon as his female companion (serving as a pendant to the icon of the Virgin and Child), suckles an infant. Like the Jewish moneylender in *Cantiga 25*, the Moor, won over by the image, humbly submits to baptism. The moral of this story is spelled out in the refrain which declares, "So that the miracles of the Virgin may be more widely known, She performs them before incredulous men."

It is significant that even before the miracle occurs, the Moor sets the Marian image "up in a high place" and dresses it in golden garments. The Muslim esteem for the Virgin is also emphasized in other miracles in the *Cantigas* corpus. In *Cantiga 165*, a Sultan refuses to wage war on the Virgin (i.e. the Christian city of Tartus) because "in the Koran it says that Holy Mary was always a virgin."<sup>49</sup> In the accompanying miniature, he is shown pointing to the text which lies open on his lap. After ordering his troops to

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<sup>48</sup> Similar objections were raised by medieval Jews. See Chapter One above.

<sup>49</sup> Kulp-Hill, *Captions*, 56.

retreat, he then kneels before a statue of the Virgin, offering gifts to the saint. Similarly, in *Cantiga* 169 (which is based on an historical incident) a Moorish king refuses to destroy a church dedicated to the Virgin, lest it displease her.<sup>50</sup> The narrator of *Cantiga* 329 even states outright that “Muhammad professed the Virgin birth.”<sup>51</sup>

Several medieval writers maintained that Muslims were superior to Jews because “they recognized the special nature of Mary.”<sup>52</sup> Peter the Venerable (ca. 1094-1156) ascribed to this view, as did Abner of Burgos (Alfonso of Valladolid) who converted to Christianity from Judaism at the beginning of the fourteenth century.<sup>53</sup> The latter cites references to Mary in the Koran and argues “that Muslims, in contrast to Jews, enjoy worldly glory and temporal power because they honor the Virgin.”<sup>54</sup> Perhaps the idea that Muslims did not discredit Mary (as Jews supposedly did) explains the positive characterization of the Moor in the miracle of the lactating icon.<sup>55</sup>

### *The Correlation between the Veneration and the Animation of Images*

The miracles of the Virgin were obviously intended for Christians rather than for Moors or Jews. Image-oriented tales like the ones described above served as a form of internal polemic, upholding the values of the religious majority and defending its devotional practices. It is difficult to say how stories of lactating icons or crucifixes spurting blood would have been perceived by their original audiences. Some Christians may have entertained similar doubts as a novice described in Caesarius’ *Dialogue*. After a monk has told him several tales of miraculous images, the novice expresses his

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<sup>50</sup> This incident is discussed in O’ Callaghan, *Learned King*, 191-192.

<sup>51</sup> Dwayne E. Carpenter, “Social Perception and Literary Portrayal: Jews and Muslims in Medieval Spanish Literature,” in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian Mann et. al. (New York 1992), 73.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> For Peter the Venerable see Abulafia, 131. For Abner of Burgos see Carpenter, 73.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> The story of the Moor and the Marian image is also recounted in Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum historiale* and Gautier de Coincy’s *Miracles de Notre Dame*, E. Wilson, 161.

amazement that inanimate objects can act like animate ones, confessing: “bewilderment overwhelms me when I hear that in wood there can be a voice to speak, a hand to strike and a body which can bend itself, raise itself, and sit down, and perform all other functions of life. This astonishes me far more than the speech of Balaam’s ass. For it indeed had life in it...but there is no breath of life in wood, or stone, or metal.”<sup>56</sup> In reply, the monk patiently explains that nothing is impossible for God, and declares that “saints work many wonders in and through their images, especially in those places where they are held in veneration.”<sup>57</sup>

In the late Middle Ages it was not unusual to treat wooden sculptures as proxies for Christ and the saints. In the final panels of almost every miniature in the *Cantigas*, recipients of the Virgin’s favour show their gratitude by paying homage to her image. In some stories they even bring gifts to the statue or crown it with garlands. For example, in *Cantiga* 18, a woman vows to make a wimple to adorn a statue of the Virgin in a church in Segovia. When she forgets her promise, her silkworms go ahead with the task and weave two wimples for good measure. As shown in the miniature, Alfonso X, who hears of the miracle, enshrines the more beautiful of these in his own chapel.<sup>58</sup>

Not every person who placed a candle before a statue of the Virgin would have claimed that it shifted or spoke in gratitude, but the fact that objects were frequently treated like flesh and blood may have contributed to their tendency to act like human beings.<sup>59</sup> After all, the image of the Virgin which produces milk for the Moor is clothed by him beforehand in golden garments, and the statue of the Virgin in *Cantiga* 25 does not speak until it is addressed by the Christian merchant.

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<sup>56</sup> Caesarius, *Dialogue*, Bk. VII, Chap. XLV, Vol. I, 528. (The story of Balaam’s ass which spoke when it was struck by its master occurs in Numbers 22:23-35).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> See Keller and Kinkade, Plate 36.

<sup>59</sup> Even today people are more inclined to attribute actions to statues and images in cultures where these objects are incorporated into communal rituals and held in high esteem. For example, see Marina Warner, “Blood and Tears,” *New Yorker* (April 8, 1996), 63-69.

#### IV “THE TALE OF THE JEWISH BOY”

In a popular edition of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, published by Cresset Press, London (1992), there is a reproduction of a medieval miniature showing a man gripping the wrist of a boy in one hand and holding a twig switch in the other. Like a villain in a sinister fairy tale, the man pushes the young boy into a blazing oven. Surprisingly, the child (who can be seen through the open door), betrays no discomfort but sits in the midst of the flames with his hands piously clasped like a saint embracing martyrdom. For those acquainted with medieval literature, the picture is immediately identifiable as a depiction of one of the most popular miracles of the Virgin Mary--the so-called “Tale of the Jewish Boy.” Since the miniature illustrates a well-known legend, it is surprising to find the scene described as if it were an historical occurrence. The caption reads: “the hostility of the Christian world towards the Jews in the middle ages was fully reciprocated. This illustration from the late fourteenth-century Vernon manuscript [Bodleian Library, Oxford. MS Eng. poet. a.1, fol. 125] is of a Jew who threw his own child into an oven because he had been contaminated by entering a Christian Church.”<sup>1</sup>

On the basis of a propagandistic legend conceived by medieval Christians and reflecting their biases, the author of this caption (seemingly as credulous as the original audience of the tale), perpetuates a view of medieval Jews that is patently false. There is no evidence to substantiate the hypothesis that medieval Jews, in general, were antagonistic towards their Christian neighbours, or that they were heartless murderers of children.<sup>2</sup> This erroneous caption serves as a reminder of the power exercised by myths and demonstrates the importance of tracing medieval legends to their original sources in order to determine who wrote them and for what purposes. The history of “The Tale of the Jewish Boy” will be reviewed in the next few pages in order to shed some light on the

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<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Gila Falkus (London 1992), 112.

<sup>2</sup> The ritual murder charge, first raised in twelfth-century England, encouraged Christians to believe that Jews routinely murdered children. A large volume of writing has been devoted to this subject including Langmuir, “Thomas of Monmouth: Detector of Ritual Murder,” *Speculum* 59/4 (1984), 820-846 and R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Trent 1475: Stories of a Ritual Murder Trial* (New Haven 1992).

social contexts in which it circulated. The second part of this discussion will be devoted to an analysis of the narrative itself (as it appears in the *Cantigas*) and will highlight changes in the plot which occurred as the story was tailored to suit different audiences.

### *The Story Evolves*

The story of a Jewish boy who takes communion, is thrust into a roaring furnace by his father, and rescued by the Virgin, is one of the earliest extant Marian miracle tales featuring Jewish protagonists. It originated in Byzantium and is recounted by Evagrius Scholasticus in his sixth-century *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>3</sup> Evagrius, a lawyer living in Antioch, claimed to have heard the story from Menas, patriarch of Constantinople (536-552), who reported it as fact “in order to demonstrate the sacred character of the Eucharist.”<sup>4</sup> Gregory of Tours, a contemporary of Evagrius, introduced the legend to a Western audience when he included it in his *Glory of the Martyrs*. Gregory’s account begins: “I will not pass over events in the East that support the catholic faith,”<sup>5</sup> revealing his awareness of the tale’s origins.<sup>6</sup> Gregory’s version circulated widely in the following centuries and was incorporated into the liturgy. It appears in several twelfth-century lectionaries as one of five Marian miracles from the *Glory of the Martyrs* read on the Feast

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<sup>3</sup> Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London 1898; reprint Amsterdam 1964), IV.36, 185-6. The story also appears in George Hamartolus, *Chron.*, IV, ccxxii and Nicephorus Callistus, *Ec. Hist.*, XVII, xxv. Parkes, 296.

<sup>4</sup> E. Cobham Brewer, *A Dictionary of Miracles* (Philadelphia 1884; reprint Detroit 1966), “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.”

<sup>5</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 29.

<sup>6</sup> Although Gregory of Tours’ Byzantine sources remain unidentified, Averil Cameron argues that Gregory provides accurate information regarding Eastern Christendom and is faithful to the Byzantine sources he employed. Averil Cameron, “The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours,” in *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London 1981), XV, 421-426.

of the Assumption of the Virgin.<sup>7</sup>

In the twelfth century, “The Tale of the Jewish Boy” took its place alongside other miracles of the Virgin in collections devoted specifically to the Mother of God whose cult was attracting an increasingly ardent following. According to Richard Southern, the first collection of Marian miracles was compiled in England in the twelfth century by Anselm the younger, nephew of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury. In Anselm’s work, the “Jewish Boy” is told on the authority of Peter, a monk of St. Michele della Chiusa (in Piedmont)--the monastery at which Anselm was educated.<sup>8</sup> Peter, who was apparently counting on the fact that his colleagues had not read Gregory’s *Glory of the Martyrs*, claimed that the miracle had occurred while he was visiting Bourges. It is likely that the shift in setting from Constantinople to Bourges would have enabled an occidental audience to identify more closely with the alleged occurrence. The “eye-witness” motif probably contributed to the propagation of anti-Jewish sentiment in the context of such tales since it lent them an air of immediacy. In many manuscripts, including the *Cantigas*, the recasting of miracles as contemporary events was reinforced by illustrations depicting characters in contemporary dress.

Dominic of Evesham, whose own compilation of Marian miracles (ca. 1120-1125) was written shortly after Anselm’s (and was influenced by it), retained the French setting

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<sup>7</sup> It also occurs in Vincent of Beauvais’ *Speculum historiale* and Jacobus de Voragine’s *Golden Legend* after accounts of the Virgin’s assumption. Vincent of Beauvais, *Spec. hist.*, VII., LXXXI cited in Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, XIII Century: A Study in Medieval Iconography and its Sources of Inspiration*, tr., Dora Nussey (London 1913), 264, n.1. Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 87-88. According to the *Liber Pontificalis* (II,508), the Emperor Maurice (d. 602) decreed that the Feast of the Dormition of the Virgin be celebrated throughout the Byzantine empire on 15 August. It was introduced into the Roman liturgical calendar by Pope Serguis I (687-701). As the belief in the corporeal assumption of the Virgin gained acceptance, the Feast of the Dormition was transformed into The Feast of the Assumption. Pope Leo IV (847-855) added the octave to the feast. Charles G. Herbermann, ed., *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York 1907), “Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary.”

<sup>8</sup> Richard Southern, “The English Origins of the ‘Miracles of the Virgin,’ ” *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958), 176-216. The text reads: “*Contigit quondam res talis in civitate Bituricensi quam solet narrare quidam monachus sancti Michaelis de Clusa nomine Petrus dicens se eo tempore illic fuisse.*” *Ibid.*, 192.

in his version of the “Jewish Boy.”<sup>9</sup> Not long after, the story appeared in a more extensive collection of Marian miracles made in England--William of Malmesbury’s *Miracula Sanctae Mariae Virginis* (ca. 1140), comprising fifty-three stories.<sup>10</sup> With seeming disregard for earlier traditions of which he was aware,<sup>11</sup> or perhaps, as Peter Carter suggests, motivated by “a wilful desire to credit Pisa with miracles beyond her due,” William reports that the incident involving the Jewish boy took place in that Italian city.<sup>12</sup>

On its completion, William of Malmesbury’s *Miracula Sanctae Mariae Virginis* was edited and combined with the collections of Anselm the Younger and Dominic of Evesham, to form a single work. Southern indicates that a volume of this description was owned by Master Alberic, a canon of St. Paul’s, London, around the middle of the twelfth century, and that William Adgar, who produced the first French (Anglo-Norman) translation of general Marian miracles, used this encyclopaedic volume as a source.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the first collections of universal Marian legends, as opposed to those connected with a specific shrine (such as Laon, Coutances, Soissons or Chartres), were introduced by British natives to the continent, where they were enthusiastically received.

By the thirteenth century, educated laymen had joined clerics in disseminating the

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<sup>9</sup> Extant manuscripts of Dominic’s work are cited by J.C. Jennings, “The Origins of the ‘Elements Series’ of the Miracles of the Virgin,” *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1968), 84-93. Dominic’s collection is often referred to as the “Elements Series” because the first four miracles in it, including the “Tale of the Jewish Boy,” advertise the Virgin’s mastery over fire, air, water and earth. Southern, “English Origins,” 178.

<sup>10</sup> The tale also appears in William’s *Gesta regum*. Carter, “Historical Content,” 127-165.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 161. Nigel of Canterbury’s, *Miracula Sancte Dei Genitricis Virginis Marie, Versifice*, (c. 1200), follows William of Malmesbury (or a related text), in setting the story of the Jewish Boy at Pisa. This detail is one of two indications that Nigel used “William of Malmesbury’s collection or a close descendant of it” as a source. Ziolkowski, ed., *Nigel of Canterbury*, 7. Jeremy Cohen identifies an incident mentioned in an anti-Jewish sermon preached in Florence by the Dominican friar, Giordano da Rivalto (more commonly known as Giordano da Pisa) as a late variant of the “Tale of Jewish Boy.” In this sermon of 1304, the setting has been shifted once again. Cohen states: “Giordano also rejoices over an incident he reports as having occurred in Greece, in which a Jewish father, along with many of his co-religionists, was burned for persecuting his son who had secretly converted to Christianity, and which culminated in the expulsion of all Greek Jewry.” Cohen, 241.

<sup>13</sup> Southern, “English Origins,” 202-203.

miracles of the Virgin and they helped to popularize the “Tale of the Jewish Boy.” John of Garland, a schoolmaster, and the “first lay compiler of Mary legends in Northern France,”<sup>14</sup> inserted it in his collection of Marian miracles in Latin verse--the *Stella maris* (ca. 1248-49)--a unique combination of secular and sacred learning designed for use in the classroom.<sup>15</sup> In his preface, John alludes to the fact that he designed the *Stella maris* for pedagogical purposes. Further evidence of the text’s use in the classroom is provided by one of the two known copies of the work still extant. This thirteenth-century manuscript, housed in the Public Library of Bruges (MS Bruges 546), contains glosses written for the benefit of schoolboys struggling with Latin grammar and syntax.<sup>16</sup>

At approximately the same time as the “Tale of the Jewish Boy” was presenting learning difficulties for French schoolboys, it was providing a source of entertainment for the elite at the court of Alfonso X. The tale of the Jewish Boy appears as the fourth song (*Cantiga* 4) in Escorial, MS T.I.1.

#### *Cantiga* 4

The miniature of *Cantiga* 4 is a continuous narrative arranged in six panels reading from left to right and top to bottom (Fig. 15). Captions appearing in the upper register of each panel highlight the key moments in the story and supplement the text supplied by the song lyrics.<sup>17</sup> In panel 1 (whose caption reads: “How a little Jewish boy learned to read with the Christians”), the Jewish boy, seated among his classmates in a Christian grammar school, listens with them to a lesson delivered by a master who reads from a

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<sup>14</sup> E. Wilson, 68.

<sup>15</sup> John of Garland based his rendition of the “Tale of the Jewish Boy” on that of Gregory of Tours, instead of following English prototypes. *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> The English translations of the captions of *Cantiga* 4, quoted in this summary, appear in Kulp-Hill, “Captions”, 7.

book on a lectern.<sup>18</sup> In the next scene, the young pupils, having left the classroom, are shown in the apse of a church, lining up in single file to take communion as a priest bends forward to administer the sacrament. The Jewish boy is shown at the far right on a platform where he receives the host from a statue of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child. As if in imitation of the priest's gesture, the sculpted Virgin, resting on the altar under a ciborium, leans forward to place the wafer in the child's open mouth, while the infant Christ in her lap (with his right hand raised in benediction) appears to give his blessing.<sup>19</sup> The caption of this panel describes the action as follows: "How the Christians took Communion and Holy Mary gave Communion to the little Jew."

The final scenes are set in the home of the Jewish boy. In panel 3, the child's parents seated at a table, welcome him home. The caption: "How the little Jew told his father he had taken Communion with the Christians," alludes to the boy's confession and sets the stage for the impending punishment. In the subsequent panel ("How the Jew thrust his son into the glass furnace"), the father, a glass-maker by trade, stokes the furnace into which he has just cast his son. As the flames burn high licking the outside of the furnace, the mother of the child tears her hair in grief, while her female companion wrings her hands.

Panel 5 shows the townspeople rushing into the house in response to the women's cries. One of the men approaches the furnace and, grasping the child by the wrists, pulls him out unharmed to the amazement of the assembled crowd. The Virgin and her infant son who have saved the child from certain death are seated within the furnace, framed by its open door. As in the second panel, the Christ Child's hand is raised in blessing, while his mother, who has been shielding the young Jewish boy with her cloak, still holds it up protectively. Not surprisingly, the caption reads: "How Holy Mary

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<sup>18</sup> Jewish children did not usually study with gentiles. As if alluding to this fact, the writer of *Cantiga 4* states that it "grieved" the child's father that his son studied with Christians. See Appendix for Kulp-Hill's unpublished translation of *Cantiga 4*. All subsequent quotations of *Cantiga 4*, *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> The practice of placing the host directly in the communicant's mouth dates to the ninth century. Joseph R. Strayer, ed. *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York 1987), Vol. VIII, "Mass, Liturgy of the."

protected him in the furnace and they took him out safe and sound.” In the sixth and final scene, the townspeople are shown subjecting the father to the same punishment that he had attempted to inflict on his son. Although the conical furnace easily accommodated the child, the father, who struggles to get away, can barely fit through the door. However, with the crowd’s approval, two men with forked sticks push him into the flames. The caption therefore describes this scene: “How the Christians thrust the father of the little Jewish boy into the furnace.”

The miniature not only illustrates the story recounted in the song lyrics but augments them. As Connie L. Scarborough remarks, the illuminators of the *Cantigas* exhibited a “propensity for inserting--into their drawings--narrative details beyond those included in their patron’s poetic text.”<sup>20</sup> Certain elements of the miniature of *Cantiga 4* have literary parallels in the version of Gregory of Tours. For example, although neither the Alfonsine lyric nor the captions contains a specific reference to the father of the boy stoking the furnace, the artist has shown him in the fourth panel clutching a bundle of sticks in each hand, providing a visual approximation of Gregory’s statement: “he seized the boy and threw him into the mouth of a raging furnace...and added wood so the furnace would burn hotter.”<sup>21</sup> In the fifth panel, the miniaturist has depicted the figure of the Virgin in the furnace with her cloak protectively raised. Again, no allusion to the cloak is given in the song lyrics or the captions, although Gregory of Tours attributes the following words to the Jewish boy, “the woman...covered me with her cloak.”<sup>22</sup> This detail is of particular interest for, as Averil Cameron points out, Gregory’s mention of the Virgin’s cloak in the context of this story is the earliest surviving “testimony to the properties of the robe” which was venerated as a wonder-working relic by the citizens of

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<sup>20</sup> Scarborough “Verbalization vs. Visualization,” 136. The same point is made by M. Victoria Chico in “La relación texto-imagen en las *Cantigas de Santa Maria* de Alfonso X el Sabio,” *Reales Sitios* 23/87 (1986), 65-72.

<sup>21</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 30.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

Constantinople.<sup>23</sup>

Either of these details could have been arrived at independently by the artist, but a more likely explanation for the correspondence is that the court illuminators had recourse to other versions of the tale. In this case, the miniaturists, like the author of the poetic lyric, may have had access to a source which was ultimately inspired by that of Gregory of Tours. Elise Dexter's assertion that the Alfonsine poet probably followed Gautier de Coincy (whose version contains elements from Gregory), lends credence to this theory.<sup>24</sup> Although it is possible that the illuminators had literary or visual models in front of them, given the popularity of the story and its wide diffusion, it is also conceivable that the artists who painted this miniature were inspired by oral accounts.

Other discrepancies between text and image may be observed. The song lyrics (and the caption of the second panel) state that the Virgin gives the boy communion, but in the miniature an animated statue offers the child the host. Since we *read* that the saint offers the host to the boy, but we *see* a statue performing this action, the distinction between saint and image is compromised.

This conflation of saint and image is apparently intended to convey the point of view of the Jewish boy. For, as the lyric states, when the boy saw his Christian classmates receiving communion from the abbot, he was so impressed that he had a vision in which "it seemed to him that Holy Mary, whom he saw resplendent on the altar...was giving them the sacrament."<sup>25</sup> The child's vision "thrilled him so much that he placed himself among the others to receive his portion [and] Holy Mary then stretched

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<sup>23</sup> Averil Cameron, "The Virgin's Robe: an Episode in the History of Early Seventh-Century Constantinople," in *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London 1981), XVII, 46. The robe was believed to have saved the city of Constantinople from attacking armies on more than one occasion. *Cantiga* 28 tells how the Virgin descended from heaven and "gently spread Her mantle [over the city of Constantinople] so that it deflected the blows dealt by the thick-lipped sultan." The sultan who sees "the Mother of God...hovering over the city with Her mantle outstretched" decides to surrender and is converted to Christianity by the Patriarch Germanos.

<sup>24</sup> Dexter, "Sources of the *Cantigas*," 9-11.

<sup>25</sup> Images frequently act as a catalyst for visions and marvellous occurrences in miracle tales. As David Freedberg observes, "Time and again it is plain that experience of the miraculous event proceeds directly from the pious attentiveness of the contemplative beholder to the image." Freedberg, *Power of Images*, 166.

out Her hand to him and gave him communion.” Although the narrator of *Cantiga* 4 says that “Holy Mary” gave the boy the sacrament, the child himself declares: “The lady whom I saw on the pedestal gave me communion.” The miniaturist’s portrayal of the Virgin as a statue conveys the child’s vision and enables the viewer to share in it.

The miniaturist has adopted a similar strategy in panel 5. The Virgin and Child depicted in the furnace resemble the statue of panel 2. Again, the words of the Jewish boy undoubtedly inspired this treatment, for after he has been pulled from the furnace he tells the townspeople that the “the Lady” whom he had seen on the altar protected him from harm. In Gregory of Tours’ *Glory of the Martyrs*, the boy gives a similar reply when asked by the Christians “what sort of shield he had had in the flames.”<sup>26</sup> He states: “The woman who was sitting on the throne in that church where I received the bread from the table and who was cradling a young boy in her lap covered me with her cloak.”<sup>27</sup>

Qualifying the boy’s remarks by making a careful distinction between saint and image, Gregory of Tours assures his readers: “there is hence no doubt that the blessed Mary had appeared to him.”<sup>28</sup> In both Gregory’s text and in *Cantiga* 4, the implication is that the boy identifies the Virgin on the basis of the image which he has seen in the church. This idea is more fully developed in the *Golden Legend* in which Jacobus de Voragine writes:

The mother of God, looking like a painting that the boy had seen on the altar, came to his side and kept him unharmed by the fire. The boy’s mother’s outcries brought together a number of Christians and Jews, and seeing the lad unscathed in the furnace they pulled him out and asked him how he had been able to escape the flames. “That venerable lady who stood above the altar,” he answered, “helped me and held the fire away from me.” The Christians present, understanding that he referred to the image of the Blessed Virgin, seized the boy’s father and cast him into the furnace.<sup>29</sup>

It was customary in Byzantium for people to identify the saints who appeared to

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<sup>26</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 30.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 87-88.

them in dreams and visions by consulting icons.<sup>30</sup> The correspondence between the saint's appearance and his or her image confirmed the authenticity of the supernatural vision experienced by the individual.<sup>31</sup> In a pronouncement of the synod of 869, the veneration of images is justified on the basis of the argument that "if...a man does not do homage to the icon of Christ, he also shall not be able to recognize His form at the Second Coming."<sup>32</sup> In the legend of St. Sylvester, which offers an obvious apologia for icons, the Emperor Constantine himself converts to Christianity after viewing icons of Sts Peter and Paul and identifying them as the two men who had appeared to him in a dream.<sup>33</sup> The motif of the Jewish child who recognizes the Virgin in the furnace because he has previously seen her statue is analogous to this Byzantine topos.

Surprisingly, in light of the centrality of images in Byzantine worship, in Evagrius Scholasticus' *Ecclesiastical History*, although the Jewish boy tells his mother that a lady dressed in purple protected him in the furnace, he makes no mention of a specific icon. One could argue that the boy's description of the Virgin as a lady dressed in purple is itself a reference to an artistic representation, since this was how Mary was commonly portrayed in Byzantine art.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, apart from this oblique reference, no mention is made of an image in the earliest Greek version of the tale. Even Gregory of Tours, who mentions an image, does not suggest that this object inspired a vision, or that Mary gave the Jewish boy communion as if in response to his adoration of her likeness. These elements are later Western additions.

As the cult of the Virgin flourished in the Latin West, images of the Virgin proliferated and began to figure prominently in miracle tales, including adaptations of

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<sup>30</sup> Peter Brown remarks: "The icon had the validity of a realized dream. Often it served as an Identikit: the dreamer, on waking, would find out by referring to his icon which invisible protector had appeared to him in the night." Brown, "Artifices of the Holy," in *Society and the Holy*, 212.

<sup>31</sup> Belting, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Mansi 1901, 16:400 (canon 3 of the anti-Photionic synod) cited *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>33</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. I, 64-65.

<sup>34</sup> Regarding the Byzantine saint, Theodore of Sykeon (d.613), Robin Cormack writes: "Icons were the source of his perceptions of the Virgin Mary, who appears in a vision unnamed, but described unambiguously as a woman dressed in purple." Robin Cormack, *Writing in Gold: Byzantine Society and its Icons* (London 1985), 45.

Byzantine legends, such as the “Legend of the Divine Surety,” in which the Virgin originally played no part at all. Although some stories involve paintings (such as Jacobus de Voragine’s account of the Jewish Boy), the large majority concern three-dimensional representations of the enthroned Virgin and Child. In many ways, the mediating role played by the sculpture of the Virgin and Child in *Cantiga* 4, reflects the mediating role played by actual images of the Virgin in contemporary devotion. Ilene Forsyth states:

All of the functions for the statues which are revealed by available evidence presuppose a belief in this particular image as a medium. The carved Mother and Child are mediators or aids for communion and communication with Mary and Christ themselves. As isolated effigies within the church, close to the worshipper, like him in size, sharing his own environmental space, yet both human *and* god-like in form, the austere figures must have provided an excellent bridge for the transition from reality to abstraction. For the medieval mind, there was doubtless a negligible distance between the Virgin known throughout Christendom and the wood Virgin in Majesty, representing the Throne of Wisdom, known in the local church.<sup>35</sup>

In an inversion of the biblical story of the three Hebrews who are thrown into a furnace because they refuse to worship an idol (but are miraculously preserved),<sup>36</sup> a Jewish boy who is transfixed by a sculpture of the Virgin and Child and cast into a furnace is rescued by the Mother of God.<sup>37</sup>

### *The Virgin on the Altar: Mary as Theotokos*

In the second panel of the miniature of *Cantiga* 4 (Fig. 16) the viewer is reminded of the central importance of the Incarnation by means of the child in Mary’s lap and the host in her hand. This portrait of the Virgin highlights the role played by her in mankind’s redemption and reiterates ideas concerning the nature of the eucharist which were

<sup>35</sup> Forsyth, *The Throne of Wisdom*, 9.

<sup>36</sup> Daniel 3:1-30

<sup>37</sup> In a general discussion of the literary portrayal of Jews in Spain, Dwayne E. Carpenter acknowledges the important role played by the image in this miracle. He writes: “the child’s adoration of the image of the Virgin prepares the way for Mary’s miraculous intervention.” Carpenter, “Social Perception and Literary Portrayal,” in *Convivencia*, 66.

developed in the course of theological debate. As early as the second century, Christian apologists such as Justin Martyr (d. ca. 165), drew parallels between the incarnate flesh of Christ (born of Mary) and the eucharistic host.<sup>38</sup> Approximately seven hundred years later, in his *De corpore et sanguine domini*, Paschasius Radbertus (d. 865) also compared the miraculous transformation of matter at Christ's conception with the transformation of bread and wine in the mass, writing: "just as real flesh was created from a virgin by the spirit, without coition, thus from the substance of bread and wine, that same body and blood of Christ is miraculously consecrated."<sup>39</sup> Peter Damian (1007-1072), concurred that the flesh formed in Mary's womb and the body of Christ offered to the communicant were one and the same. Painting a sympathetic portrait of Mary as mother, he states: "That same body which the blessed Virgin bore, which she cherished at her bosom, girded in swaddling clothes, nurtured with maternal care, it is that, I say...which we now receive from the sacred altar."<sup>40</sup> Although the central focus of these writers is the mass, the Virgin, as *Theotokos* or God-bearer, is integrated into their arguments underscoring the fact that a connection between Mary and the eucharist (expressed in the miniature of *Cantiga 4*) has a long tradition in Christian thought.<sup>41</sup>

The parallel between Christ's body and the eucharistic wafer inspired innumerable miracle tales in which communicants claimed to have seen Christ in the consecrated host. A story recounted in Caesarius' *Dialogue* concerns a priest who saw three consecutive visions in the host while celebrating mass: an image of the enthroned Virgin nursing the

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<sup>38</sup> Justin writes: "In like manner as Jesus Christ our Saviour, having been made flesh by the word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh." Justin Martyr, *Apology* I, 66 translated in Thomas Livius, *The Blessed Virgin in the Fathers of the First Six Centuries* (London 1893), 203.

<sup>39</sup> Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1991), 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>41</sup> At the Council of Ephesus in 431, Mary was proclaimed to be "Theotokos" or "God-bearer."

Christ child, an image of a lamb, and finally, an image of the crucified Christ.<sup>42</sup> As this anecdote suggests, the mass not only commemorated Christ's Passion but recalled His Incarnation. The literal equation of the eucharistic emblems with Christ's flesh and blood was affirmed at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 in a statement of faith which declared: "there is indeed one universal church of the faithful, outside of which nobody at all is saved, in which Jesus Christ is both priest and sacrifice. His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine."<sup>43</sup> As theologians expressed "greater interest in the reality of Christ's presence in the host" they began to refine their ideas concerning "Mary's affinity to the eucharist."<sup>44</sup> As Miri Rubin remarks, "The overarching symbol of salvation, the eucharist, was combined with another source of comfort, solace and healing, Mary, in an intersection of discourses."<sup>45</sup> The Virgin who had brought forth Christ at the Nativity and offered "to ordinary mortals the saving flesh of God" was equated with the priest who extended the body of Christ to believers at the Mass.<sup>46</sup> Parallels were also made between the Virgin and the liturgical furnishings used during communion.

In William Durandus' thirteenth-century *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, the author compares the tabernacle or box in which consecrated hosts are stored with Mary's womb in which Christ's body rested.<sup>47</sup> In *Cantiga 51*, people beseeching the Virgin's

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<sup>42</sup> Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogue on Miracles*, tr., Scott and Bland, Vol. II, Bk.9, Ch. III. Jews sometimes appear in stories of this type. Miri Rubin states: "the classic story is that of the mass of St. Basil in which a Jew entered a church and saw instead of the host a child torn asunder: the Jew was convinced of the truth of Christianity and converted." Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 122. Eucharistic miracles in the *Códice Rico* include *cantigas* 73,75, 104, 128, and 149.

<sup>43</sup> R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215- c.1515* (Cambridge 1995), 21.

<sup>44</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 142.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. See *Cantiga 12* in which Mary interrupts the mass during "the secret" and announces that the Jews of Toledo are injuring her son.

<sup>46</sup> Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 101. See also *Cantiga 149* in which Mary holding her Son, appears to a German priest who doubts the real presence of Christ's body in the eucharist and declares, "Man of weak understanding, this Babe Whom I hold in my arms is truly that Host you consecrate."

<sup>47</sup> William Durandus, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, Bk.I, ch. iii,25 quoted in Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York 1984),27.

aid appeal to her as the “most sacred altar in whom the body of Christ was conceived and consecrated.” Mary was also linked with the eucharist in Byzantine thought. The fourteenth-century Russian pilgrim, Stephen of Novgorod, mentions that when he visited the Studius Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Constantinople (probably the most important monastery in the capital), he was shown a trough used for kneading communion bread. This trough had gained the status of a relic since one day when a baker was sifting flour in it, the voice of Christ had cried out and immediately afterwards, “an image of the holy Mother of God with the infant Christ” had appeared in it.<sup>48</sup>

Medieval artists also explored the relationship between the Virgin and the mass. Worth a separate study in and of themselves, their works manifest an incredible iconographical range. An example of Byzantine provenance is the eleventh-century fresco in the apse of the Church of St. Sophia at Ohrid (Macedonia).<sup>49</sup> The lowest register of this apse fresco is occupied by six bishops, while above them, Christ is shown consecrating the bread before offering it to his disciples (a pictorial formula known as the Communion of the Apostles). Directly above the figure of Christ there is a monumental painting of the enthroned Virgin which serves as a counterpart to the portrait of Christ below. Just as Christ holds up an oval loaf of bread, as if to say, “this is my body,” Mary, who bears an oval portrait of her infant Son, presents the *Corpus Christi* to the faithful.<sup>50</sup> The implicit message is that both Mother and Son are effective mediators of God’s divine grace.

The parallel between Christ’s Incarnation and Passion is also expressed in a number of Romanesque paintings in Spanish churches. In several, the Virgin clasps the

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<sup>48</sup> Majeska, *Russian Travelers*, 38-40. This is the only source which mentions “the apparition of the Virgin with Christ in a kneading trough at the Studite Monastery.” *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>49</sup> Ohrid, Macedonia, St. Sophia; apse, ca. 1050, Belting, Fig. 99.

<sup>50</sup> The Virgin and Child were first depicted in apses of Byzantine churches “during the sixth century precisely because of her [the Virgin’s] function as the means by which God took flesh, that is as a symbol of the orthodox (and imperially sponsored) doctrine of the Incarnation.” Averil Cameron, “Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium,” in *Continuity and Change*, XVIII, 34.

mythical chalice associated with Christ's passion, known as the Holy Grail.<sup>51</sup> According to C.R. Dodwell, the late eleventh-century apse painting from San Pedro del Burgal, Lérida, which shows the Virgin bearing a shallow vessel, is "the earliest allusion to the Grail in art or in literature."<sup>52</sup> Dodwell contends that "Spanish artists may have associated the Grail with the Virgin because they saw her as the human Grail that had carried the blood and divinity of Christ."<sup>53</sup>

Barbara Lane, Miri Rubin and Caroline Walker Bynum each discuss the correlation between the Virgin and the eucharist expressed in late-medieval panel paintings. While Lane concentrates on Netherlandish altarpieces,<sup>54</sup> Rubin describes a Florentine polyptych (ca. 1340) painted for the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in which the Christ Child, seated in his mother's lap, is shown bearing a scroll which reads: "*Ego sum panis vivus qui de celo descendi* ("I am the living bread which came down from heaven," John 6:51)."<sup>55</sup> Bynum's analysis includes a reproduction of a Swabian, *Retable of the Mystical Mill* (ca. 1440), in which the painter has rendered Mary as "miller or celebrant" pouring grain into a mill.<sup>56</sup> Grain emerges from between the grinding stones in the form of eucharistic hosts, but before these can be received by the clerics who kneel in the foreground, they are transformed into the Christ Child who comes to rest in a chalice held aloft by them.

Three-dimensional objects also depict Mary in a sacerdotal role. In several of the Romanesque "Throne of Wisdom" statues examined by Ilene Forsyth, Mary wears a chasuble and archepiscopal pallium and thus resembles a priest celebrating mass.<sup>57</sup> Of particular interest in light of the miniature of *Cantiga 4*, in which the animated statue

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<sup>51</sup> This motif is represented on an antependium from Martinet (Lérida), and in wall-paintings of San Clemente de Tahull, Santa Eulalia de Estahón, Añós (Andorra), and San Román dels Bons (Andorra). C. R. Dodwell, *The Pictorial Arts of the West, 800-1200* (New Haven 1993), 257.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 258. See Rubin, 139, for a brief discussion of "grail imagery" in relation to the eucharist.

<sup>54</sup> Barbara Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece*.

<sup>55</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 143.

<sup>56</sup> Bynum, Fig. 3.8.

<sup>57</sup> Forsyth, *Throne of Wisdom*, Figs. 112-121.

offers the host to the Jewish boy, are certain small-scale “Throne of Wisdom” sculptures thought to have served as receptacles for communion wafers. These include a Spanish statuette (ca.1200) now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Like several other sculptures of this type, the Metropolitan piece, composed of gilt copper and enamel fastened to a wooden core, has a small hinged door at the back of the throne. Speculating on the function of this aperture, David Simon argues that: “while the openings may have contained relics, it is more likely that they were meant to contain the Host; since the consecrated body of the Eucharist was believed to be the body of Christ, it was appropriately secured in an image of the Mother of God.”<sup>58</sup>

In summary, the *Cantiga* miniature, showing the Virgin as celebrant, takes its place among other medieval works of art advertising the connection between Christ’s Incarnation and the eucharist. Nevertheless, it also stands apart in that it shows Mary offering the supreme sacrament to a Jew. The distribution of the eucharistic elements was carefully regulated. By claiming exclusive rights to the administration of the body and blood of Christ, the Church exercised exclusive rights to the mediation of God’s grace. Only a priest could offer the host to Christians who were (theoretically) worthy to receive it. Even Christians of good standing were advised to fast, to abstain from sexual intercourse and to make confession prior to taking communion, and excommunicates were forbidden from participating in the mass.<sup>59</sup> By partaking of the body of Christ, Christians affirmed their places in the *Corpus Christi* or body of believers. The fact that the canon *Omnis utriusque sexus* of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made annual confession and communion at Easter obligatory for all Christians of the age of discretion, demonstrates that the mass was seen as a ceremony which integrated the community.<sup>60</sup>

Anna Sapir Abulafia, who suggests that the performance of religious rites by the Christian

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<sup>58</sup> David L. Simon, “Late Romanesque Art in Spain,” in *The Art of Medieval Spain, A.D. 500-1200* (New York, 1993), 284.

<sup>59</sup> Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament according to the Theologians c.1080- c.1220* (Oxford 1984), 120.

<sup>60</sup> R.N. Swanson, *Religion and Devotion*, 33. Miri Rubin observes, “requirements for minimal age at communion appear in thirteenth-century synodal legislation: Aquinas recommended that children should not receive communion before the age of ten.” Rubin, *Corpus*, 64.

majority could heighten the isolation of medieval Jews writes:

Inevitably they [Jews] fell outside the collective ritual enactments of Christian oneness, which took place whenever the sacraments were celebrated and whenever Christ's body was venerated either on the cross or in the Eucharist....The fact that Jews could not participate in any aspect of the celebration of the sacraments...increased their isolation not just from Christians enacting Christian rituals, but from Christians who saw their rituals as essential vehicles of grace for the whole of humanity.<sup>61</sup>

The miniature of *Cantiga* 4 shows the Christian boys receiving the sacrament from a priest who represents the patriarchal authority of the institutional Church. In contrast, the unbaptized Jewish child, unworthy to receive the eucharist by ordinary standards, is offered his first communion by "*Santa Maria*" herself. Even the normal sequence of Christian initiation is reversed, since the boy is yet unbaptized. Evidently, as Mother of God, the Virgin was not bound by ecclesiastical conventions.<sup>62</sup>

#### *The Virgin in the Furnace: Mary as Mediatrix*

While the portrayal of the Virgin in panel 2 underscores her place in the history of salvation, her portrayal in panel 5 (Fig. 17) highlights her on-going ability to intervene in human affairs. The first concept is dependent on the latter; because Mary is *Theotokos* or God-Bearer, she is able to serve as the ultimate mediator. In panel 5, the Virgin as *Mediatrix* protects the Jewish boy in the furnace and demonstrates her sovereignty over fire.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Abulafia, 129-130.

<sup>62</sup> The Virgin's disregard for the strictures of the Church is a recurring theme in Marian legends. For example, in *Cantigas* 14 and 124 the Virgin asks Christ to revive men who have died before making confession, and thereby saves them from eternal damnation. Other scenes in the *Cantigas* show the Virgin bestowing special favours on people who would normally be reprimanded for their sinful behaviour. She enables an abbess to conceal her pregnancy, revives a monk who has drowned in a river on the way to visit a prostitute, rescues a convicted thief from death on the scaffold, and restores the reputation of an incestuous woman (*Cantigas* 7, 11, 13, and 17). See James F. Burke, "Virtue and Sin, Reward and Punishment in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*," in *Studies on the Cantigas*, 247-252.

<sup>63</sup> The title "Mediatrix" was "introduced into the literature of the West around the 9th century through a translation by Paul the Deacon of the Life of Theophilus." William J. McDonald, ed., *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York 1967), Mary, Blessed Virgin, II.

Several miracles in the *Cantigas* emphasize Mary's mastery over fire, including accounts of relics and statues of the Virgin that survive conflagrations intact.<sup>64</sup> *Cantiga* 35, based on an historical event, tells how relics of Mary enshrined in a church in Laon were untouched when the building burnt to the ground.<sup>65</sup> *Cantiga* 39 relates how a fire, started by lightning, gutted the monastery church of Mont-Saint-Michel but did not harm a statue of the Virgin and Child displayed on the altar. Interestingly, the narrator of *Cantiga* 39 compares the miracle of the statue at Mont-Saint-Michel with the miracle of the Jewish boy in the furnace who is sheltered by the Virgin's cloak.<sup>66</sup>

Mary's ability to withstand fire was hardly unique. Many Christian saints shared the same reputation including Alexander, Eventius, Theodulus, Mamas, Vitus and Agnes.<sup>67</sup> According to legend, although St. Eustace and his family "rendered their souls to the Lord" after being tossed into a brazen bull, when their bodies were taken out of the

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<sup>64</sup> Marian relics were also effective in putting out fires. In his *Glory of the Martyrs*, Gregory of Tours records that once, when walking along a road, he saw a cottage engulfed in flames. Fortunately, he was wearing a cross around his neck which contained relics of the Virgin (as well as those of the Apostles and St. Martin). When he held this object towards the fire it was immediately extinguished "as if there had been no blaze." Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 22. Perhaps it is no coincidence that this anecdote follows closely after Gregory's rendition of the "Tale of the Jewish Boy" (the former is GM 9; the latter GM 10).

<sup>65</sup> In 1112, Laon Cathedral was destroyed by fire. To finance its rebuilding, eight canons from Laon embarked "on a fundraising tour with the relics of the church [including the feretory of Our Lady]....Money was collected and the miracles that took place around the feretory were recorded." Benedicta Ward, *Miracles and the Medieval Mind: Theory, Record and Event, 1000-1215*, 134. Also see J.S.P. Tatlock, "The English Journey of the Canons of Laon," *Speculum* 8 (1933), 454-85. The writer of *Cantiga* 35 writes "Lyon" instead of Laon, but it is obvious from the details of his story that it is based on the narrative concerning Laon. When Chartres Cathedral burned down on 10 June 1194, its most prestigious relic, the Virgin's tunic, survived unharmed and was also sent on a fundraising tour. Malcolm Barber describes this relic's "brilliantly stage-managed" recovery as follows: "According to an anonymous treatise of c.1210...on a certain feast day the clergy assembled the entire populace of the city at the place where the church had been and, with great ceremony, brought out from the crypt the chest in which the Virgin's tunic had been preserved....With typical ecclesiastical taste for seeking consonances, the author...compared the survival of the tunic with the miraculous 'escapes' of the Old Testament, like Jonah and the Whale and Daniel in the Lion's Den." Barber, *Two Cities*, 477.

<sup>66</sup> This comparison is not made in any other extant version of the Mont St. Michel miracle. Scarborough, "Visualization vs. Verbalization," 130.

<sup>67</sup> These saints are listed in Brewer, *Dictionary of Miracles*, "retributive punishment" and "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego."

bovine crucible they were found intact.<sup>68</sup> Paradoxically, even those saints who died in fires often acquired a posthumous reputation for extinguishing them. St. Agatha, who died shortly after being tortured over burning coals, was invoked by medieval Christians wanting to protect themselves “against all that burns, such as lightning, manmade conflagrations, the internal burning of colic, inflammation of wounds and sores...and the flames of desire which afflict the young.”<sup>69</sup> Agatha, who was buried in Sicily, was also credited with protecting the inhabitants of that island from volcanic eruptions.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike the saints described above, the Virgin never experienced fiery tortures. Consequently, the *raison d'être* of her fire-fighting capabilities is different from theirs. Mary's sovereignty over fire is partially explained by the writer of *Cantiga 33*, who contends that the Virgin is able to control fire, air, earth and water, because she is the mother of the one who created the four elements. The notion that Mary had an impeccable character and that her inner purity was reflected in her body (she was taken up into heaven without having suffered physical corruption), also encouraged the idea that like gold, the purest of metals, the Virgin and her relics were impervious to fire.<sup>71</sup> Mary's sexual purity and bodily integrity are linked in the readings for the Feast of the Assumption in the *Golden Legend*. Here, Christ says to Mary, “Arise, my dear one...as you never knew the

<sup>68</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 266-271.

<sup>69</sup> A. Van Gennep, “Le culte populaire de sainte Agathe en Savoie,” *Revue d'ethnographie et des traditions populaires*, 17 (1924), 28-29 cited in Meredith Parsons Lillich, “The Ex-Voto Window at St.-Gengoult, Toul,” *Art Bulletin* 70 (March 1988), 129. Like St. Agatha, the Virgin acquired a reputation for curing inflammations, including erysipelas or St Martial's fire, a malady caused by streptococcus bacterium. See *Cantigas* 37, 53, 81, 91, 105, and 134.

<sup>70</sup> See excerpt from Hugeburc's *Life of St. Willibald (723 C.E.)*, Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims*, 125. Cf. Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, I, 157: “One year from the day of Agatha's birth into the new life of heaven, the mountain that looms over Catania erupted and spewed a river of fire and molten rock down toward the city. Then the crowds of pagans fled from the mountain to the saint's tomb, snatched up the pall that covered it, and hung it up in the path of the fire; and...the stream of lava halted and did not advance a foot further.” In *Cantiga 307*, which is also set in Sicily, a series of volcanic eruptions ceases when a good man composes a song that is worthy of the Virgin.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory's description of the Virgin's assumption in his *Glory of the Martyrs* “represents...the first formulation of the doctrine of the bodily Assumption of the Virgin in western orthodox theology.” Van Dam, 22, n.4. “The concept of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, although not official church dogma until 1854, was prevalent in the writings of the Church Fathers as early as the fourth century.” Scarborough, *Women in Thirteenth-Century Spain*, 33.

stain of sin through carnal intercourse, so you shall never suffer dissolution of the flesh in the tomb.”<sup>72</sup>

The correlation between the immaculate nature of the Virgin and the indestructibility of her relics is emphasized in a Byzantine text of the seventh century which describes the public unveiling of the Virgin’s robe at the Church of the Blachernae, Constantinople (ca. 620). This anonymous text describes the opening of the casket containing the “divine robe” and the patriarch’s discovery that this garment, “woven from perishable wool...had suffered no destruction at all [since it had been enshrined].”<sup>73</sup> The narrator explains that the robe is imperishable because the Virgin is incorruptible and includes the following statement in his enthusiastic panegyric: “For naturally...she who had a pure and indestructible soul and body and thought and character and words and ways and spirit itself, untouched by any dirt and free of blemish, bestowed her indestructibility also on her garments.”<sup>74</sup> Since it was believed that neither rot nor mildew could destroy a piece of cloth that had come into contact with the Virgin, it is not surprising that her relics were also considered to be impervious to fire. As previously stated, Gregory of Tours specifically mentions that the Virgin’s robe shielded the Jewish boy.

Mary’s sexual purity and sovereignty over fire were seen as related aspects of her character. Early Christian theologians interpreted at least two Old Testament events involving fire as prefigurations of Mary’s “unimpaired virginity”: the story of the burning bush (which was set afire and yet remained unaltered) and the story of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace who withstood the flames.<sup>75</sup> Influenced by earlier writers, medieval theologians also interpreted these biblical accounts as Marian types, explaining that the Virgin, at the Annunciation, had “received the divine flame in her womb yet was not

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<sup>72</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 82.

<sup>73</sup> Averil Cameron, “The Virgin’s Robe,” 53.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London 1976), 63.

consumed.”<sup>76</sup> Other Old Testament accounts interpreted as prefigurations of the Virgin birth included: the story of Aaron’s rod which blossomed spontaneously,<sup>77</sup> the story of Gideon’s fleece which was miraculously soaked with dew, and the story of Daniel who emerged safely from the lion’s den.

Four of these Old Testament motifs relating to Mary appear in an illumination from a twelfth-century lectionary (Dijon, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 641, fol.40v), where they frame an image of the enthroned Virgin and Child. In this illumination, Mary and her offspring are shown with the Old Testament king, Jesse, in an arrangement known as the Tree of Jesse (a genealogical table demonstrating the fulfilment of Isaiah’s prophecy “that a Messiah would spring from the family of Jesse, the father of David”).<sup>78</sup> Daniel in the lion’s den and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace are shown above the

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<sup>76</sup> Rabanus Maurus, *De universo*, lib. XXIII. PL cli., 513 quoted in Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France*, 147.

<sup>77</sup> Adam of St. Victor refers to this type in his Nativity sequence, *Splendor patris et figura*:

<i>Cur, quod virgo peperit,</i>	Why should it offend the Jews,
<i>Est Judaeis scandalum,</i>	That a virgin bore a son,
<i>Cum virga produxerit</i>	When a rod could thus produce
<i>Sicca sic amygdalum?</i>	Almonds, though a sapless one?

quoted in Elizabeth C. Parker and Charles T. Little, *The Cloisters Cross: Its Art and Meaning* (New York 1994), 188. The play on words (*virgo/virgin* and *virga/rod*) was a very common pun occurring throughout the medieval period, and was borrowed by Adam from earlier writers. It is found in Jerome, in pseudo-Bede, and Isidore. Norman Roth, *Jews, Visigoths and Muslims in Medieval Spain: Cooperation and Conflict* (Leiden 1994), 241, n.61. It also occurs in a seventh-century sermon often attributed to Ildefonsus of Toledo, in which the author stresses that “if an ‘incredulous Jew’ could explain to him how a rod can bud and blossom, he can explain how a virgin can conceive.” *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>78</sup> James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York 1974), “Jesse, Tree of.” Isaiah 11:1 reads: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.”

Virgin, while the burning bush and Gideon's fleece flank the figure of Jesse below.<sup>79</sup> These typological images, like the Tree of Jesse motif, reiterate the message that the Old Law has been transformed into the New Dispensation through Christ's Incarnation and that Christianity has superseded Judaism.

The parallel between Mary and the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace is also expressed on an enamel plaque dating from the third quarter of the twelfth century, (possibly from Maastricht, and now in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston). On the plaque an angel is shown protecting the three youths, while an inscription running along the border proclaims, "Neither the fury of the king and the fire could harm the youths, nor birth destroy the seal of virginity of the Mother."<sup>80</sup> The motif was occasionally represented in the monumental arts in the high Middle Ages and appears among other Old Testament types of the Virgin Birth in sculptural relief on the porch of the facade of Laon cathedral. In his analysis of this sculptural program, Emile Mâle proposes that its designer was directly inspired by the Old Testament types described in a sermon for the feast of the Annunciation in Honorius of Autun's *Speculum ecclesiae* (ca. 1130) and quotes the following excerpt from it:

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<sup>79</sup> See Richard Southern, *The Making of the Middle Ages* (London 1953; rpt. 1993), Plate 1. This illumination was produced by the Cistercians, who were particularly devoted to the Mother of God. For information on the scriptorium of Cîteaux see Yolanta Zaluska, *L' enluminure et le scriptorium de Cîteaux au XIIe siècle* (Cîteaux 1989). Many Old Testament types of the Virgin Birth are referred to in the Marian homilies of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153). In an explicit sexual metaphor, Bernard compares Christ's conception with the soaking of Gideon's fleece. He writes: "This abundant rain which God had stored up for his inheritance fell with hushed silence into the virgin womb, penetrating her gently without the din of human intervention." Bernard of Clairvaux, Homily II, 7, *Magnificat: Homilies in Praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary by Bernard of Clairvaux and Amadeus of Lausanne*, tr. Marie-Bernard Saïd and Grace Perigo (Kalamazoo 1979), 20.

<sup>80</sup> Ann Walton, "The Three Hebrew Children in the Fiery Furnace: A Study in Christian Iconography," in *The Medieval Mediterranean: Cross-Cultural Contacts* (Minnesota 1988), 62. See *ibid.*, Plate 7.

The angry king loaded them with chains and ordered that they should be thrown into a furnace...but by the will of God the flames escaping from the furnace burnt those without and touched not a single hair of those who were within. Moreover they were heard singing in the midst of the fire, and with them the king saw one like to the Son of God. Even so the Holy Spirit impregnated the Holy Virgin with His inner fire, while without He protected her against all concupiscence.<sup>81</sup>

Whether or not the Laon relief was directly inspired by Honorius' sermon cannot be conclusively proven because, as pointed out by J. Sauer, "Honorius reflected the symbolism current in his time, for which there is no single source."<sup>82</sup> In short, Old Testament types of the Virgin birth, like Marian miracle tales, were widely disseminated manifestations of the Virgin's cult.

From an early date, Old Testament "prefigurations" of Mary's virginity were incorporated into anti-Jewish treatises, such as Ildefonsus of Toledo's seventh-century *Liber de Virginitate Beatae Mariae*. In this work, the metropolitan of Toledo argues that Old Testament types (including the story of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace), clearly foreshadow Mary's perpetual virginity. Like many Christian writers before him, Ildefonsus claims that Jews are blind and deaf because they do not acknowledge that Christ "is the Son of God made flesh of man, nor believe the many things which have been foretold concerning him."<sup>83</sup> Although Ildefonsus acknowledges Mary's "Jewishness," he stresses that the sceptre has passed from Israel. He states: " behold, our Virgin is of your race, of your descent, of your people, your nation, your origin. Truly, however, she is of our faith, our belief, our glorification, our reverence."<sup>84</sup>

The biblical account of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, exploited by Christian writers to extol the Virgin, was also appropriated by them to glorify Christ himself. As the writer of *Cantiga 4* explains, the Virgin's rescue of the Jewish boy is an

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<sup>81</sup> Mâle, 149.

<sup>82</sup> J.Sauer, *Symbolik des Kirchengebäudes und seiner Ausstattung in der Auffassung des Mittelalters* (2nd ed., Freiburg, 1924), 385-388, cited by Eva Matthews Sanford, "Honorius, Presbyter and Scholasticus," *Speculum* 23 (1948), 399, n.7

<sup>83</sup> Braegelmann, 146.

<sup>84</sup> Ildefonsus of Toledo, *Liber de Virginitate Beatae Mariae* quoted in Roth, *Jews, Visigoths*, 19.

purpose had been to prepare and prefigure the New Law of Christ.”<sup>89</sup>

Christian apologists in both the Byzantine East and the Latin West accused Jews of being stubborn and blind for failing to apprehend the “true” meaning of their own sacred writings. In a ninth-century sermon (which Cyril Mango has described as typical of the period), Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople, chides Jews for failing to acknowledge Christ. He states: “Tell me then, O Jew, why dost thou boast of the prophets, but blasphemest against Him who has been prophesied? Why dost thou adhere to the letter, but disregardest the spirit of the writings?...Thou dwellest miserably on the oystershell which encases the pearl, while Christ’s people neatly open it and extract therefrom the truly white glow of truth.”<sup>90</sup>

The belief that Hebrew prophets had predicted Christ’s birth, and that “Old Testament” events were portents of “New Testament” occurrences continued to be salient features of Christian theology throughout the medieval period. One of the masterful twelfth-century relief carvings on the capitals of the Church of La Madeleine, Vézeley, succinctly expresses the Christian conception of the Old Testament as a deposit of raw material out of which to shape a new faith, for it shows “St. Paul grinding out the grain of the Old Testament in Christianity’s ‘mystic mill.’”<sup>91</sup> The complex iconographical program of the Cloisters Cross from Bury St. Edmunds (recently examined by Elizabeth Parker and Charles Little), also illustrates “the belief that the Old Testament directly anticipates the events of the New.”<sup>92</sup>

The fact that Christians “considered themselves the spiritual heirs of the Jews of the Old Testament because they recognized Jesus as the prophesied Messiah and Son of God,”<sup>93</sup> complicated relations between medieval Christians and Jews. Not surprisingly, Jews considered Christological interpretations of their sacred books to be unfounded, if

<sup>89</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, J. P. Smith, ed. (Westminster, Md. 1952), 31 quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition* (Chicago 1971), Vol. I, 16.

<sup>90</sup> Photius, Homily VIII, quoted in Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Massachusetts 1958), 155.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Kraus, *The Living Theatre of Medieval Art* (Bloomington 1967), Fig. 98.

<sup>92</sup> Parker and Little, *Cloisters Cross*, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Abulafia, 63.

not absurd, and forcefully defended their own beliefs. In his *History of the Franks*, Gregory of Tours repeats the spirited arguments of a Jew named Priscus, whom he and King Chilperic unsuccessfully attempt to convert to Christianity with proofs from the Hebrew prophets.<sup>94</sup> Although it is impossible to determine whether the debate described by Gregory is based on an actual confrontation, arguments countering Christian assertions occur in surviving Jewish texts such as Jacob ben Reuben's twelfth-century *Milhamot ha-Shem (The Wars of the Lord)*, in which "the author proceeds book by book and verse by verse, adducing Christological interpretations of key biblical verses and then vigorously rebutting these interpretations."<sup>95</sup> The Christian perception of the Hebrew Bible reinforced the notion that the Church had usurped the Synagogue. As will be disclosed, the message that Christianity has vanquished Judaism is also incorporated into "The Tale of the Jewish Boy."

#### *The Characterization of the Jewish Father in Cantiga 4*

In *Cantiga 4*, the uncompromising Jew, who cannot forgive his son's transgression, is contrasted with the compassionate Virgin who mercifully intervenes on the boy's behalf. It is no accident that the father who adheres to his faith is characterized as a despicable criminal, whereas his wife and young son, who convert to Christianity, are represented in a positive light. "Already in the early Middle Ages," remarks Miri Rubin, "a fascination with the hard-hearted, stubborn Jewish male encapsulated the whole attitude to Jews. Whereas Jewish children in their purity could be made to see the light of Christian truth, and the tender mother might be swayed by her son's insight, the Jewish father stood in the way."<sup>96</sup> Before examining the way in which Christianity's superiority over Judaism is articulated via the characterization of the father in *Cantiga 4*, it is useful to

<sup>94</sup> Gregory of Tours, *The History of the Franks*, tr. Lewis Thorpe (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1974), Bk. VI, 5, 329-331.

<sup>95</sup> Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, 19-20. Chazan remarks that this work and others like it "were clearly meant for internal purposes only, to buttress the faith of Jews." *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Miri Rubin, "Desecration of the Host: The Birth of an Accusation," in *Christianity and Judaism*, 173.

review some recent observations concerning the antisemitic content of the story.

In their article, "Anti-Semitism in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*" (1983), Vikki Hatton and Angus MacKay suggest that the portrayal of Jewish characters in the *Cantigas* is relatively sympathetic and propose that this "tolerant" attitude reflects "social conditions of Alfonsine Castile."<sup>97</sup> These scholars argue that, unlike other narrators of the miracles of the Virgin, such as Gonzalo de Berceo,<sup>98</sup> the author of the *Cantigas* does not reduce Jews to stock characters.

Hatton and MacKay (who compare various redactions of the "Tale of the Jewish Boy"), observe that the three Jewish characters are assigned names in *Cantiga* 4. This detail leads them to conclude that "the [Alfonsine] author is attempting to portray them as individuals, rather than...as anonymous symbols of their race."<sup>99</sup> However, the male protagonists are mentioned by name only once, while they are referred to as "the Jew" and "the boy" numerous times.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, instead of distinguishing them as individuals, the naming of the characters has the opposite effect, since the father, (portrayed with a flowing beard like an Old Testament prophet) is called Samuel, and the boy, indistinguishable from his Christian schoolmates, is called Abel (the biblical Abel, murdered by his brother Cain, was seen in Christian theology as a type for Christ).<sup>101</sup> The mother, Rachel, is also stereotyped. The narrator of *Cantiga* 4 explains that when she saw her child in the roaring furnace she "began to cry out loudly and ran out into the street [and]...the people came in response to Rachel's laments," alluding to the biblical passage: "a voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her

<sup>97</sup> Vikki Hatton and Angus MacKay, "Anti-Semitism in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 61 (1983), 189.

<sup>98</sup> Berceo's, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, was composed at approximately the same time as the *Cantigas*. Gonzalo de Berceo, *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, ed. Daniel Devoto (Madrid 1965).

<sup>99</sup> Hatton and MacKay, "Anti-Semitism in the *Cantigas*," 192.

<sup>100</sup> In fact, the boy's name only appears in the last line of *Cantiga* 4 and it is the last word in this line.

<sup>101</sup> Concerning the boy's appearance, Bernhard Blumenkranz states: "l'absence de traits distinctifs chez l'enfant juif indique que l'artiste veut exprimer, non pas des caractéristiques ethniques, mais plutôt une idée théologique en rapport avec le problème du salut." Bernard Blumenkranz, *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris 1966), 24-25.

children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”<sup>102</sup>

Other arguments which Hatton and MacKay advance to substantiate their view that the *Cantigas* reflects the relatively liberal atmosphere of thirteenth-century Castile are equally problematic. For example, they suggest that the fact that the father is a glass-maker is significant, and may reflect the diversified society of Castile where Jewish artisans were common. However, they overlook the fact that *Cantiga 4* is set in Bourges (following a tradition first established in an English redaction of the early twelfth century).<sup>103</sup> It could be argued that the author of *Cantiga 4* retained the French setting and yet inserted details reflecting his own social context. However, Gregory of Tours sixth-century account also describes the father as a glass-maker.<sup>104</sup>

Hatton and MacKay also propose that the punishment inflicted on the Jewish glass-maker by the townspeople may reflect thirteenth-century legislation. They state: “*Cantiga 4*...in which the Jewish father attempts to burn his own son, and is subsequently burnt himself, may reflect the Alfonsine law decreeing the penalty of death by burning for Jews who kill converts.”<sup>105</sup> This idea is implied by Bagby (1971) who claims that the father’s punishment is “in keeping with the law of the land,” and is repeated in O’Callaghan (1993).<sup>106</sup> The law to which these authors are referring is set down in Alfonso X’s code, the *Siete Partidas* or *Seven Divisions* (7.24.6), which reads: “we decree that if any Jew or Jewess willingly desires to become a Christian, his fellow Jews shall not hinder him in any way. And if any of them should stone, wound, or kill him because he wishes to convert, or if they do this after his baptism, if such a deed can

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<sup>102</sup> Jeremiah 31:15 (quoted in Matthew 2:18 in the context of the Massacre of the Innocents). Chaucer, making a similar parallel, compares the mother of the little chorister killed by Jews with the biblical Rachel in his “Prioress’s Tale”. He writes: “His mooder swownyng by his beere lay;/Unnethe myghte the peple that was there/ This newe Rachel bryng fro his beere.” Larry D. Benson, ed. *The Riverside Chaucer* (Oxford 1987), 211, lines 625-627.

<sup>103</sup> *Cantiga 4* reads: “In Bourges there was a Jew who made glass.”

<sup>104</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 29.

<sup>105</sup> Hatton and MacKay, 195.

<sup>106</sup> Bagby, 678 and O’Callaghan, *The Learned King*, 112.

be proved, we order that all of the accomplices to the homicide or stoning be burned.”<sup>107</sup> Although at first glance it may seem as if *Cantiga* 4 reflects this law, it should be noted that the *Siete Partidas* was not applied in Alfonso’s time, and even when “it was promulgated--in 1348--it was as additional (suppletory) law, never as a comprehensive legal corpus.”<sup>108</sup> Because the father is also cast into a furnace in Gregory of Tours’ rendition,<sup>109</sup> a more plausible suggestion is that the Jew’s punishment in *Cantiga* 4 follows a literary prototype.

Raymond Van Dam, noting Gregory of Tours’ “nonchalant attitude toward the murder of this boy’s father,” finds it “remarkable” in light of the fact that Jews usually “enjoyed toleration” in sixth-century Gaul.<sup>110</sup> However, it is not surprising that Gregory takes the man’s violent death for granted, since retributive punishment is a commonplace of hagiographical narratives. When St. Agnes is cast into a fire, she is uninjured, but many of her attackers are incinerated. Likewise, St. Pantaleon, bound to a cylinder studded with spikes, is not affected adversely, but rolls over a crowd of idolaters and “kills them most miserably.”<sup>111</sup> As E. Cobham Brewer remarks: “Instances of...retributive punishment in the lives of the saints are so numerous they would fill a large volume.”<sup>112</sup>

The father in *Cantiga* 4 is best understood as a theological symbol. If we accept that the merciful Virgin represents the Incarnation or New Covenant, it follows that the

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<sup>107</sup> Dwayne Carpenter, *Alfonso X and the Jews: An edition of and Commentary on Siete Partidas* 7.24, “*De los judíos*,” (Berkeley 1986), 33. Not surprisingly, given Alfonso X’s interest in Roman Law, the same punishment for Jews who injure Christian converts is legislated by Theodosius II in a law of 438. C.Th. 16.8.1. cited in Sharf, *Byzantine Jewry*, 25.

<sup>108</sup> Stow, 194.

<sup>109</sup> The passage reads: “once he [the father] was thrown in, the fire burned him so completely that somehow scarcely a tiny piece of his bones was left.” Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 30.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, n.17.

<sup>111</sup> These examples are cited in Brewer, “retributive punishment.”

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

hard-hearted father stands for the Old Law.<sup>113</sup> This aspect of the narrative is by no means an innovation of its Spanish author, for the connection between the father and the Old Law is expressed by Gregory of Tours. In Gregory's account, the father, who is described as "an enemy of Christ the Lord and his laws,"<sup>114</sup> makes a short speech to his son before pushing him into the furnace. He states: "if you have communicated with these boys and forgotten your ancestral worship, then to avenge this insult to the law of Moses I will step forward against you as a merciless murderer."<sup>115</sup> The confrontation between Judaism and Christianity is clearly articulated; the father attempts to murder his son for the sole reason that the child has participated in the mass. In the majority of Marian legends involving Jews, Jewish men (rather than women) are portrayed as antagonistic towards the Virgin and the Christian faith. This is probably because Jewish men participated in debates with Christians and were therefore seen as the most active proponents of their own faith.

In their discussion of Alfonso X's version of the "Tale of the Jewish Boy," Hatton and MacKay downplay its underlying message, that is, that Christianity has replaced Judaism, making the later an absurd anachronism. While they admit that Jewish characters in the *Cantigas* are looked on favourably only when they convert to Christianity,<sup>116</sup> they do not bring this idea sufficiently to bear on their analysis of *Cantiga* 4. It could be argued that the central miracle of the "Jewish Boy" is not the child's sensational rescue from the furnace, but his conversion to Christianity. Like St. Laurence, the Jewish boy "passed through a brief earthly fire but avoided the flame of the eternal fire

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<sup>113</sup> This interpretation of the father's role in this story is supported by Miri Rubin who states: "the Jewish father stood for the Law in its cruel and unyielding nature; whereas the woman/mother was assimilated into the image of female gentleness, seen as a person more easily influenced, and more readily moved by affective manifestation." Rubin, "Desecration of the Host," 173. Although Rubin draws attention to the issue of gender in this tale, she does not comment on how the father (Old Law) also serves as a foil for the Virgin (New Covenant), which is my main point here.

<sup>114</sup> Gregory of Tours, tr. Van Dam, 30.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Hatton and MacKay, 193.

of hell.”<sup>117</sup> The boy’s conversion, confirmed by the ritual of baptism, distinguishes him from other Jews, who are condemned to suffer eternal damnation.

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<sup>117</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, tr. Ryan, Vol. II, 72.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Jew thinks that there is no teaching and religion better than his and considers those who believe something else to be imbeciles. The Christian, on the contrary, believes that the Jew is nothing but an animal in human form, and that his soul will go to the depths of hell. As for the Moslem, he will say that hell is full of both of them.

Solomon ibn Verga, *Shebet Yehudah*

Most religions are exclusive in that their adherents lay claim to the absolute truth. One way medieval Christians advocated the superiority of their religion over Judaism was through the dissemination of Marian miracles with anti-Jewish leitmotifs. The three miracle tales that have been analysed in this thesis reveal Christian attitudes towards Jews and illuminate the role played by the Virgin in Christian theology. They also reflect the centrality of images of the Virgin and Child in medieval worship. Jews who interact with the image of the Virgin in a positive way (like the child who attends mass) are integrated into the Christian community. Jews who respond negatively (like the one in “Arculf’s Tale”) are punished. In each tale, the Jew’s reaction to the image of the Virgin and Child corresponds to his acceptance or rejection of the doctrine of the Incarnation which it embodies.

These legends sustained their popularity for hundreds of years. We have seen how “Arculf’s Tale,” originating in seventh-century Constantinople, found an enthusiastic audience in Anglo-Saxon England and thirteenth-century Spain. Why did disparate audiences find this miracle relevant and vital?

In the first place, stories of this type maintained their popularity because they extolled the Virgin, whose cult never waned.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, they had a lasting impact because they concerned sacred paintings and sculptures. People throughout Christendom could readily identify with these fictional images because they venerated similar objects on a daily basis. Thirdly, these stories had a universal appeal because they disparaged Jews. As Hatton and MacKay observe: “Christian popular opinion of Jews could be seen as

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<sup>1</sup> Jordan, in particular, emphasizes this point. Jordan, *French Monarchy*, 46.

having been relatively consistent throughout Europe, and to have borne little or no relationship to the differing fortunes of the various Jewish communities.”<sup>2</sup> This uniformity of opinion can be explained by the fact that attitudes towards Jews were coloured by theological biases. As emphasized in the previous chapter, Christians considered themselves to be the “True Israel” and the heirs to the Hebrew Bible, and perceived Jews to be stubborn impostors, clinging to a birthright which they had forfeited.

While focusing on miracle tales, this thesis has also drawn attention to the role played by sacred images in medieval life. Throughout Europe, Christians rallied around representations of the Virgin onto which they projected their values. As indicated by the Mantua affair discussed in Chapter Two, these religious images served as “shields of faith” reinforcing the identity of the group united in veneration of them. One could say that the veneration of religious images served to define “Self” from “Other,” since individuals who did not esteem them (including Jews), stood outside the *communitas Christi*.

The Christian cult of the Virgin had a significant impact on medieval Jews. This thesis has examined only one aspect of antisemitism in the Marian cult: its dissemination through popular tales. While I have suggested that Christian beliefs and practices affected Jews, an examination of other avenues of expression for anti-Jewish prejudice within the framework of the Marian cult could reinforce this hypothesis. For example, one could investigate in greater depth how the charge of blasphemy affected medieval Jewry. As demonstrated here, Christians coming to the defence of the Virgin accused Jews of desecrating her image. Additionally, in thirteenth-century France, the Talmud, said to contain slurs against her, was burned.<sup>3</sup> The same charge of blasphemy incited riots in fifteenth-century Sicily where Christians shouting: “Long live the Virgin and death to the

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<sup>2</sup> Hatton and MacKay, 189.

<sup>3</sup> Jordan, *French Monarchy*, 137-141. See also Jordan, “Marian devotion and the Talmud Trial of 1240,” in *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter*, 61-76.

Jews” killed approximately 400 people.<sup>4</sup>

Research into the transformation of synagogues into Marian churches could also yield pertinent information. Synagogues were frequently turned into Marian churches in the wake of zealous demonstrations. When the Jews of the southern French communities of Novarum and Carpentras refused to convert to Christianity despite Pope John XXII’s efforts, their synagogues were destroyed and supplanted by Marian chapels.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries, several synagogues in Trani were also expropriated and converted into churches, including Santa Maria Nova.<sup>6</sup> During anti-Jewish riots of 1391, synagogues in Lerida and Toledo were similarly transformed.<sup>7</sup> In Germany, as well, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, churches “in honor of the conquering Virgin” were erected “on the ruins of freshly destroyed synagogues and ghettos.”<sup>8</sup> The most famous Marian shrine of this sort was located in Regensburg, from which the Jews were expelled in 1519. A Marian chapel was established on the synagogue’s ruins and miraculous powers were attributed to a painting of the “*Schöne Maria*” enshrined within it. Over 50,000 pilgrims visited this shrine in 1519 alone.<sup>9</sup> Since the Virgin typified the New Covenant and was “the very symbol and being of *Ecclesia*,”<sup>10</sup> the fact that these former synagogues were dedicated to her seems more than a coincidence.

Further analysis of the subject of antisemitism in the Marian cult may lead to a

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<sup>4</sup> Baron, Vol. X, 243. Similar sentiments have been expressed in the twentieth century. In 1939, in Nazi-occupied Poland, a sign reading: “Come dear Mary and free us of the Jews” was placed on the Great Synagogue of Danzig. The building was destroyed shortly after. Geoffrey Wigoder, *The Story of the Synagogue: A Diaspora Museum Book* (London 1986), 186.

<sup>5</sup> Edward A. Synan, *The Popes and the Jews in the Middle Ages* (New York 1965), 130.

<sup>6</sup> Shlomo Simonsohn, *The Apostolic See and the Jews* (Toronto 1991), Vol. 7, 67.

<sup>7</sup> Léon Poliakov, *The History of Anti-Semitism*, tr. Natalie Gerardi (New York 1973), 163-164.

<sup>8</sup> Lionel Rothkrug, “Popular Religion and Holy Shrines: Their Influence on the Origins of the German Reformation and their Role in German Cultural Development,” in *Religion and the People, 800-1700*, ed. James Obelkevich (Chapel Hill 1979), 28. This occurred in Eger, Würzburg, Bamberg, Rothenberg, Regensburg, Munich, Heidelberg, Ingolstadt, Cologne, Amberg and Nuremberg. *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Freedberg, 103.

<sup>10</sup> Zafran, “Iconography,” 200.

better understanding of how the anti-Jewish sentiments expressed in the miracles of the Virgin were also articulated in everyday life. It could also shed light on the larger issue of the role played by religious beliefs in the formation of prejudice.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "It would be difficult to find a sociologist of religion who would argue that the content and nature of the beliefs to which the person is committed has no influence upon his or her attitudes toward adherents of other religious faiths." Rob Eisinga, et al., "Orthodox Religious Beliefs and Anti-Semitism: A Replication of Glock and Stark in the Netherlands," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 34/2 (June 1995), 222.

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## APPENDIX

*N.B.* Translations of *Cantigas* 34, 25 and 4 are used by permission of Kathleen Kulp-Hill, Eastern Kentucky University

### *Cantiga 34*

This is how Holy Mary got even with the Jew for the dishonor he did to Her image.

*It is right and fitting that he who insults Holy Mary should receive the devil as punishment.*

Concerning this, I shall relate a true miracle, which the Virgin Mother of God performed in the rich city of Constantinople in order to demonstrate that he who goes against Her will is as powerless as a straw against the wind.

There was in the street a well-made image of Holy Mary, painted on wood. It was so beautiful that even if one examined more than a hundred, not another equal to it could be found. A Jew stole it one night

and after he carried it home hidden under his cape, he threw it into the privy, then he sat down there and desecrated it shamefully. The devil killed him and he went to perdition.

After the Jew was thus killed and condemned and the devil had taken him off without a trace, a conscientious Christian took the image out of the evil-smelling hole.

Although the place was foul, the image gave off such a beautiful fragrance that spices from the East, balsam or unguent, would not smell as pleasant as the image which I mention.

After he took it out of there, he washed it in water at once and took it to his house. He put it in a proper place and made offerings to it for his salvation.

When he had done all this, the Mother of God performed a great miracle there. A substance like oil issued from that image in great abundance to serve as a reminder of this wondrous event.

### *Cantiga 25*

This is how the statue of Holy Mary served as witness between the Christian and the Jew.

*He who trusts in the Mother of God can well repay that which he owes.*

Concerning this, I wish to tell you a great and beautiful miracle which the Peerless Virgin, Mother of the Glorious King, performed for a man who had spent all his wealth in doing good and gaining eminence, and never on foolish things.

When that good man had exhausted his fortune thus, he could not find, as I learned, either stranger or acquaintance who would give him a loan. When he realized it was useless, he went straight to a Jew to see if he would lend him something.

The Jew then told him: "My friend, I shall gladly do what you wish if you will give me some good security." The Christian answered: "I have not the power to do that, but I will stand behind my own word to pay it back to you on a fixed day."

The Jew replied thus: "Without security I can never let you have the money." The Christian said: "Agree to this: I shall put as my warrantors Jesus Christ and Holy Mary." The other replied: "I do not believe in them, but I should accept them as your warrantors

because I know that She was a saintly woman and He a saintly man and a prophet. Therefore, sir, I agree and shall give you all you wish at your terms." The Christian replied: "Their statues, which I yonder see, I give you in security."

When the Jew agreed to this, both went at once to the place and the Christian showed him the statues and, in the presence of the people, he touched them and said that he was placing them as security so that he could pay his debt without fail when the time was up.

"And you, My Lord Jesus Christ, and you, Honorable Mother," he said, "if I should be far away or my business impeded, I cannot fail to meet the terms. If I cannot pay on my own, you must make the payment for me as I should for myself,

for I shall repay you for it. Make the payment for me so that he cannot say: 'I have not what is rightfully mine,' and sue me for it and make me expend myself or my property in litigation, for if I took thought of dying, of this I should die."

After the Christian had thus satisfied the Jew, he quickly earned with the money all that he desired in profitable trade, for he knew how to set about it and carry it out well. However, he forgot the time allotted for him to pay.

The Christian, who did not wish to default on the terms that he had set, became very concerned a day before it was to fall due. Therefore, he had a chest constructed and placed in it all he owed the Jew, and said: "Oh, God, guide it to its destination."

Saying this, he put the chest into the sea and the wind moved the waves. The next day it appeared in the deep waters of the port of Byzantium. A Jew ran quickly to seize it, but failed to do so, for the chest floated away before him.

When the Jew saw this, he went shouting to his master, and the latter came out and said to him: "You are not worth a pittance, for you are afraid of the sea in a very cowardly way. I shall try it and God will quickly grant it to me."

When he had said this, he ran there at once and the chest landed in front of him. Then he stretched out his hand and grasped it joyfully, for he could not wait to know what was in it.

He had it carried to his house at once, and found his money inside. He kept it a secret from his friends so that they would not know how he hid the money from them. After counting it and putting it back he put the chest under his bed.

After the Jew had made sure of his money, the merchant arrived there. The Jew, unwisely, adamantly demanded that he give him what he owed him, or else he would tell things which would bring shame upon him.

The Christian said: "I have a good witness that I have paid you: the Virgin, Mother of the Child whom I showed you on the altar, who will inform you how it was, for She would not lie. You do not wish to contend with Her, for misfortune would befall you."

The Jew answered: "That is all very well. Let us go to the church, and if I hear it from the statue of yours, so be it." They set out at a run, and all the people ran after them, eager to know what would come of that dispute.

They entered the church, and the Christian said: "Oh, Divine Majesty, if I made this payment, I beg you to tell the truth, so that you may make manifest the perfidy of the Jew, who thinks to demand of me what I do not owe him."

Then the Mother of God said, as I found it written: "The falsity of the Jews is great. You, cursed Jew, know that you received your money in full, and that you maliciously hid the chest under your bed."

When the Jew heard this, he at once believed wholeheartedly in Holy Mary and in Her Son, and became a Christian. May this serve as a reminder to you of what Isaiah prophesied, that God would be born of the Virgin for our sake.

### *Cantiga 4*

This is how Holy Mary saved from burning the son of the Jew, whose father had thrown him into the furnace.

*The Mother of Him who delivered Daniel from the lions saved a little boy of the tribe of Israel from the fire.*

In Bourges there was a Jew who made glass. A son of his, the only one he had as nearly as I could determine, studied in the school among Christians, which grieved his father Samuel.

The boy studied as well as he could and took great pleasure in learning all that he heard. Thus he won such favor with the other boys with whom he studied that he was accepted into their group.

Concerning this, I wish to recount what happened to him one day at Eastertide. He went into the church where he saw the abbot at the altar giving communion wafers and wine from a beautiful chalice to the youths.

The little Jew was pleased, for it seemed to him that Holy Mary, whom he saw resplendent on the altar cradling Her Son Immanuel in Her arms, was giving them the sacrament.

When the boy saw this vision, it thrilled him so much that he placed himself among the others to receive his portion. Holy Mary then stretched out Her hand to him and gave him communion, which tasted sweeter than honey.

After he had received the communion, he departed from there and entered his father's house, as was his custom. His father asked what he had done and the child said: "The lady whom I saw on the pedestal gave me communion."

The father, when he heard this, became so enraged that he lost his reason. He caught his son and when the furnace was burning brightly, he shut him in it, committing a cruel and treacherous deed.

Rachel, the boy's mother, who loved her son dearly, believing that he was burning in the furnace, began to cry out loudly and ran into the street. The people came in response to Rachel's laments.

When they discovered the true cause of her mourning, they went straight to open the furnace where the boy lay, but the Virgin had protected him as God Her Son protected Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael.

With great rejoicing, they took the child out and asked him if he felt any pain. He said: "No, for I held close to me the One Whom the lady I saw on the altar with Her beautiful Son held close to Her."

Because of this great miracle, the Jewess came to believe and the boy received baptism at once. The father, who had done the evil deed in his madness, was put to death in the same manner that he had tried to kill his son, Abel.

**D**on Alfonso de Castela  
 de Toledo de Leon  
 Rey. e ten res. Oportela  
 ta o Reyno Daragon  
 e Oportela de Tahan  
 de Sevilla e outros  
 e de M. v. e. u. gran li  
 lle fez deus com aprou  
 e Algarue que gaou  
 de os ouros e nois a fr  
 meru y. e az poblou  
**B**atallous q. Reyno e  
 vir anague que moue  
 a mouros. Neule X. e  
**B**eger Medina pienta  
 e Alcala toum ues.  
**E** que tos Romãos Rey  
 e pr terir e Sennoz  
 este L. i. u. com achi  
**D** a uirgen santa maria  
 que este marie de deus  
 en que ele auyro fia  
**E** puen tos auingres se  
 ezo cantares e foes  
 saluosos de cantar  
 reos de fennas nroes  
 com y poteres achar.

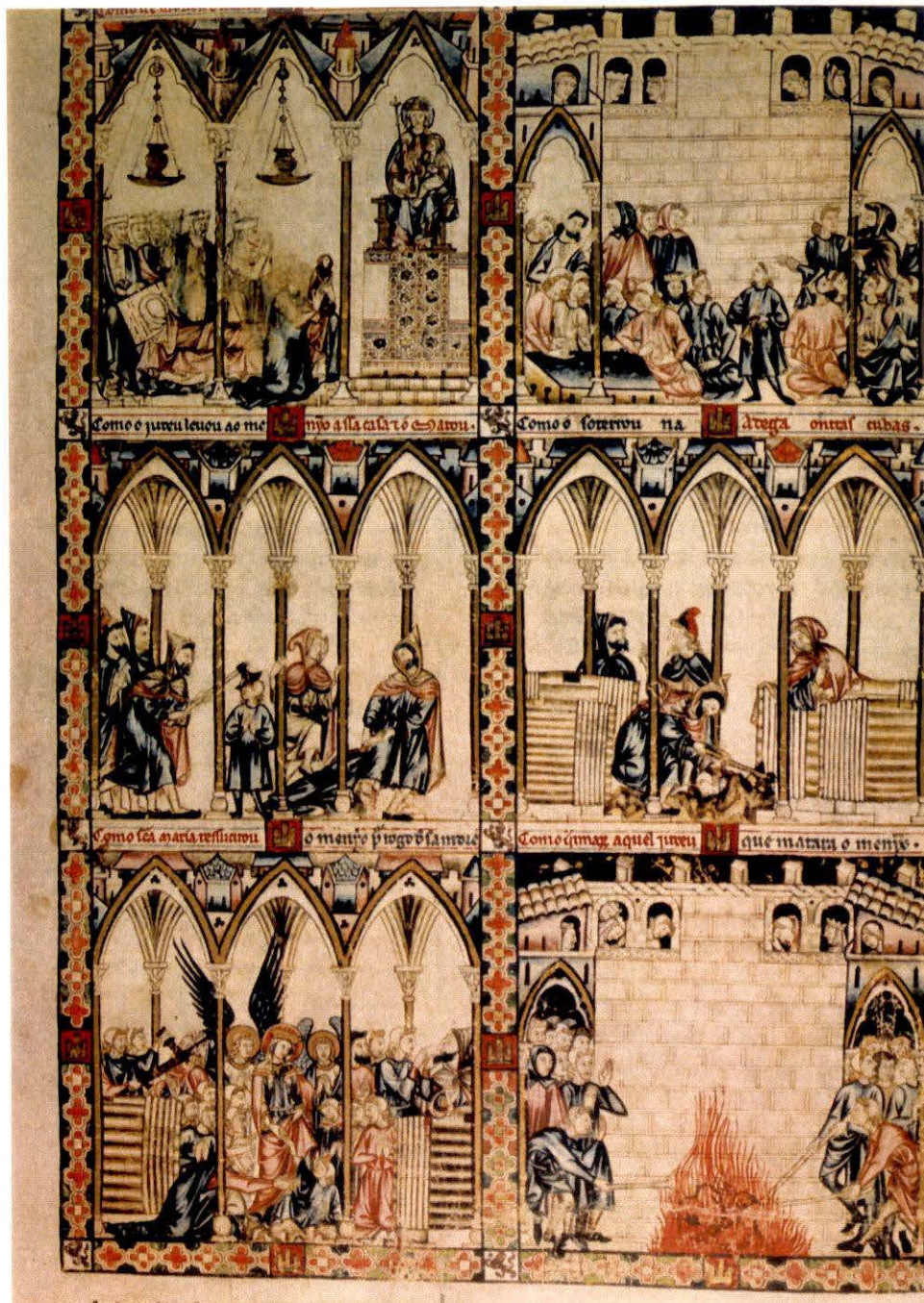
Esta e a primeira cançã de loor de  
 a santa maria ementando os .vii. goyos  
 que oune de seu fillo.

**E**loge marie q. eu  
 notur. pla. se no  
 d. n. e. n. q. t. o. q. t. e. m. e. f. u. l. a. r. t. e. m. e. n. t. a.  
 e s. a. g. r. a. t. a. . p. o. r. n. o. s. d. a. r. g. r. a. n. s. o. l. o. a. d. a.  
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 e. s. u. m. a. s. n. a. d. a. t. e. u. m. a. p. l. o. g. a. t. a. d. e. n.

**Figure 1:**  
 Prologue A, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, Escorial, Biblioteca Real,  
 MS T.I.1, fol. 5r.



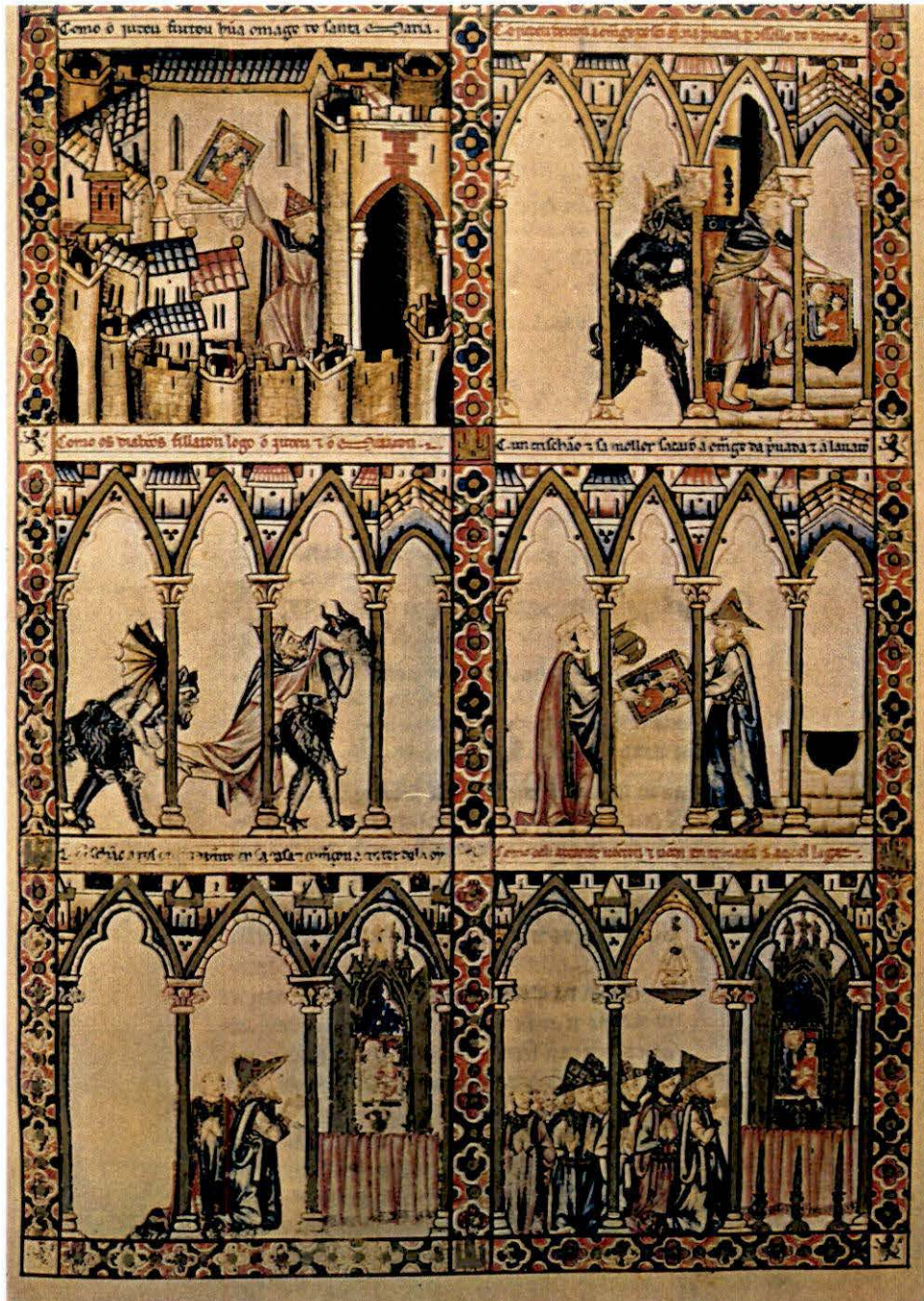
**Figure 2:**  
*Cantiga 108*, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 155v.  
 “How Merlin argued with the Jewish sage concerning Holy Mary.”



**Figure 3:**  
*Cantiga 6*, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 13v.  
 “How a woman’s husband died and she offered her son to Holy Mary.”



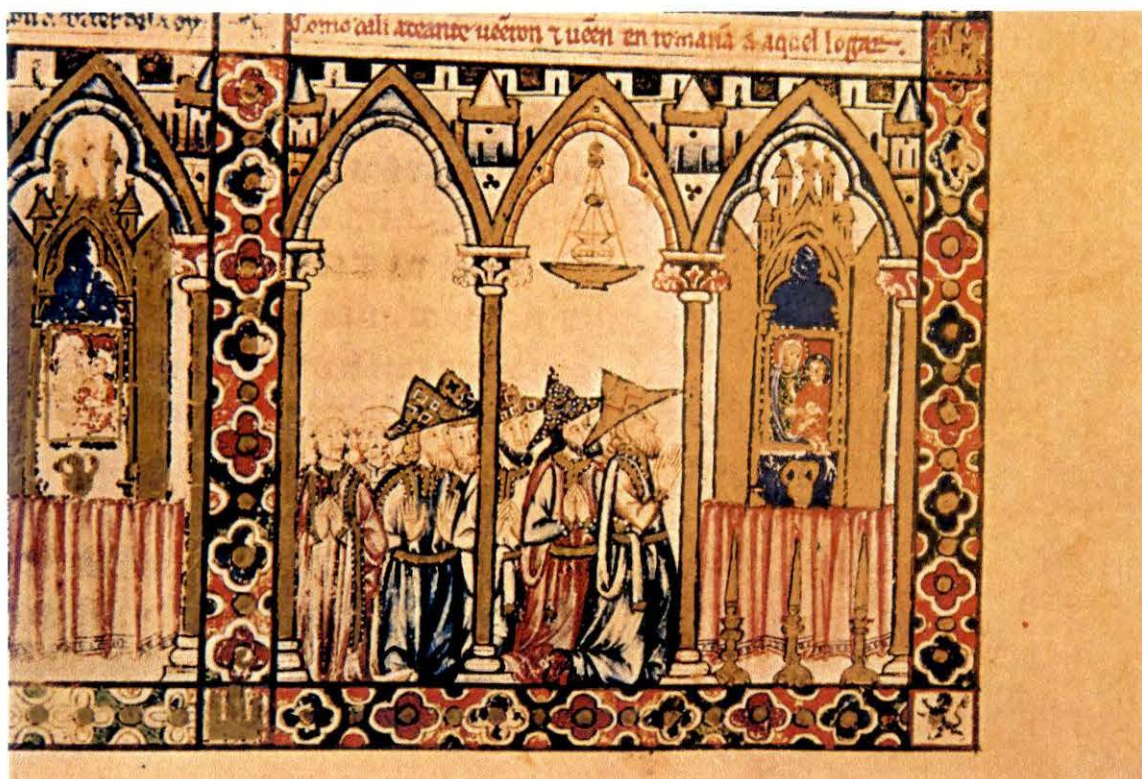
**Figure 4:**  
*Cantiga 12*, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 20v.  
 “How the Archbishop of Toledo began the mass.”



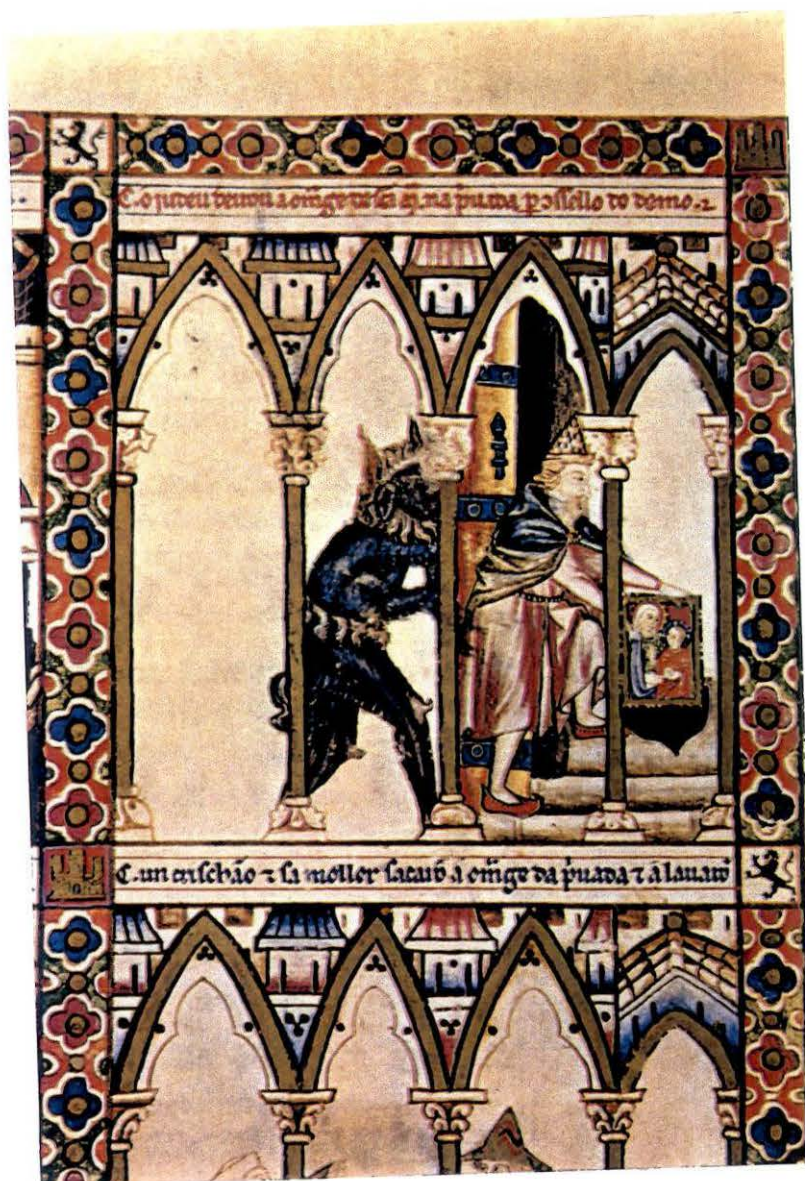
**Figure 5:**  
 Cantiga 34, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 50r.  
 "How the Jew stole the image of Holy Mary."



**Figure 6:**  
*Cantiga 34*, detail, panel 1.



**Figure 7:**  
*Cantiga 34*, detail, panel 6.



**Figure 8:**  
 Cantiga 34, detail, panel 2.



**Figure 9:**  
*Cantiga 25, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 38v.*  
 “How the Christian begged the Jewish moneychanger to lend him some money.”



Figure 10:  
Cantiga 25, Escorial, MS T.1.1, fol. 39r.



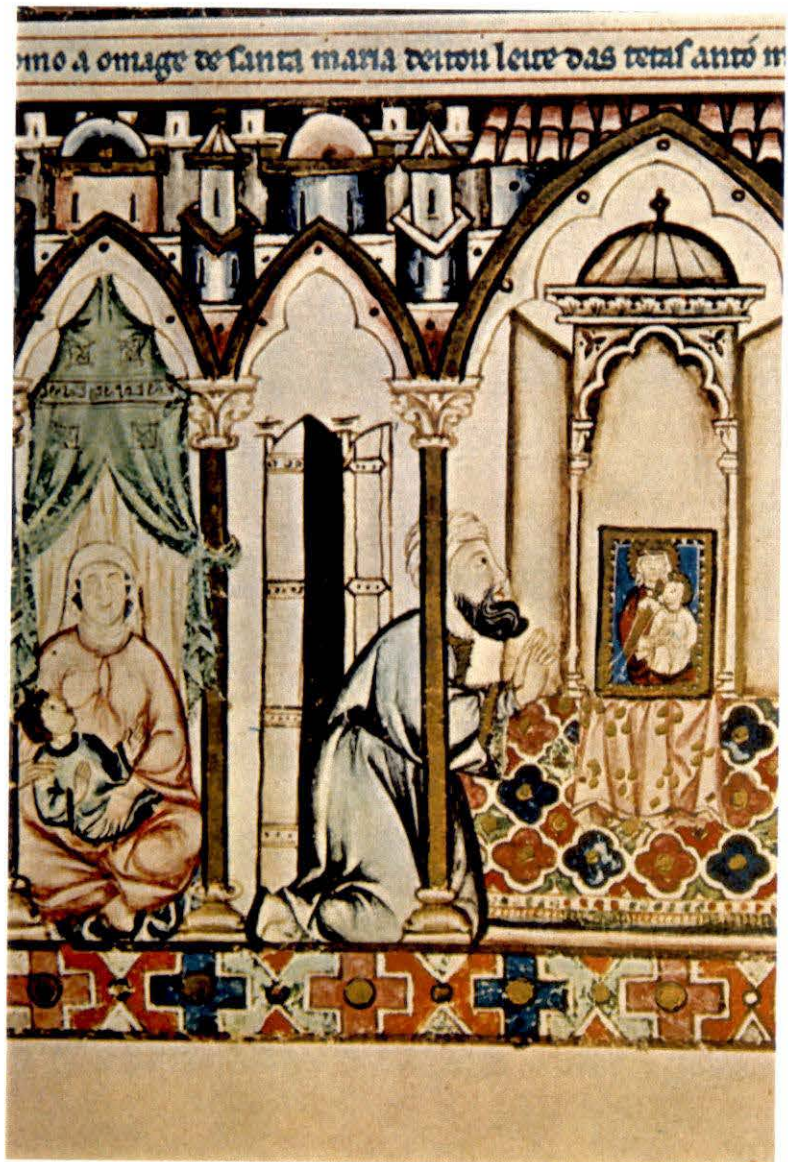
**Figure 11:**  
*Cantiga 25, detail, panel 2.*



**Figure 12:**  
 Cantiga 25, detail, panel 8.



**Figure 13:**  
*Cantiga 25*, detail, panel 11.



**Figure 14:**  
*Cantiga 46*, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 68v., detail, panel 5.  
 “How the image of Holy Mary gave milk from its breasts in the presence of the Moor.”



**Figure 15:**  
*Cantiga 4*, Escorial, MS T.I.1, fol. 9v.  
 “How a little Jewish boy learned to read with the Christians.”



**Figure 16:**  
Cantiga 4, detail, panel 2.



**Figure 17:**  
*Cantiga 4, detail, panel 5.*

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Author:



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April 30, 1997