

# Seeing the Substance: Rhetorical Muslims and Christian Holy Objects in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries

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Between 1365 and 1373, an altarpiece dedicated to the Virgin was painted in the monastery of Santa María de Sigena, near the northern Aragonese city of Huesca (Fig. 1). Among its rich images from the lives of Mary and Jesus are various miraculous scenes involving the Eucharist. Two of these depict the so-called Miracle of the Bees and the Miracle of the Fisherman, both common eucharistic miracle stories in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. A third image, more violent but also familiar in contemporary iconography, depicts a Jew who stabs a host, causing it to bleed, and then casts it in a boiling cauldron, where it is transformed into a haloed child, apparently unharmed. A fourth image, however, is more unexpected and

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striking: a woman resembling the wife of the Jew from the previous panel consults with a black-skinned man wearing a white turban and golden cape, while in the background a child with open eyes prays in a casket. As the woman kneels for communion, the host seems to emerge from her throat rather than be swallowed, cutting a bloody wound (Fig. 2). As Paulino Rodríguez Barral and Yonatan Glazer-Eytan have suggested, the meaning of this final cryptic image cycle is suggested by a story told in the fifteenth-century work *Spill* (*The Mirror*, ca. 1460) by Valencian author Jaume Roig. In that work, Roig recounts a tale about a Muslim cleric (*alfaquí*) who agrees to make a love potion for a woman out of a stolen Eucharist. When she delivers the host to him, it miraculously takes the shape of a glowing child, which the cleric casts away and instructs her to burn. When it resists destruction and fire, the Muslim promises to convert. The two confess to the bishop, who holds a large vigil and mass, in which the child regains the shape of a host.<sup>1</sup> Although the image and the story seem independent of one another, both tell a similar tale, which may have circulated as a popular legend in fourteenth-century Aragon.

Just as work on the Sigena altarpiece was beginning, an elaborate series of frescos depicting eucharistic miracles was being completed in the cathedral of the Umbrian town of Orvieto. The cathedral's Cappella del Corporale (Chapel of the Corporal), commissioned in the 1350s in preparation for the anniversary of the 1263 eucharistic miracle that allegedly

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Yonatan Glazer-Eytan and Robin Vose for their helpful suggestions during the drafting of this essay; to David M. Freidenreich for bringing the Beam of the Passion to my attention; to Catherine Harding and Lucio Riccetti for helping me obtain the image from the Capella del Corporale; and to the Opera del Duomo di Orvieto for permission to reproduce the image.

The relevant passage in the *Spill* is found in Jaume Roig, *Espill, o Llibre de les dones*, ed. Marina Gustà (Barcelona: Edicions 62, 1978), 72–75. On the comparison with the Sigena altarpiece, see Paulino Rodríguez Barral, *La imagen del judío en la España medieval: el conflicto entre cristianismo y judaísmo en las artes visuales góticas* (Bellaterra: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, 2008), 200–01. The connection is also discussed in more detail in Yonatan Glazer-Eytan, “Moriscos as Enemies of the Eucharist: Some Reflections on Jewish Exceptionalism,” *Jewish History* (forthcoming in 2021), which analyzes the altarpiece in detail. I am grateful to Dr. Glazer-Eytan for sharing a copy of his study with me before publication. My remarks on the Sigena altarpiece rely directly on his work. See also his “Jews Imagined and Real: Representing and Prosecuting Host Profanation in Late Medieval Aragon,” in *Jews and Muslims Made Visible in Christian Iberia and Beyond*, ed. Borja Franco Llopis and Antonio Urquía Herrero (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 40–69, at 50–51; and Francesca Español Bertrán, “Ecos del sentimiento antimusulmán en el *Spill* de Jaume Roig,” *Sharq al-Andalus* 10–11 (1993–1994): 325–45.



Fig. 1 Jaume Serra, altarpiece of the Virgin (ca. 1365–730)

took place in the nearby village of Bolsena, depicts how the host began to bleed during mass, staining the corporal (the altar cloth on which the host and wine are set).<sup>2</sup> In later legend, and certainly by the time the frescos were painted, it was claimed that this miracle was a decisive factor prompting Pope Urban IV to institute the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264, although the earliest contemporary sources do not substantiate this causal

<sup>2</sup>For an exhaustive study of the miracle and frescos in Orvieto, see Dominique Nicole Surh, “Corpus Christi and the *Capella del Corporale* at Orvieto” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Virginia, 2000); and Eraldo Rosatelli, *The Cathedral of Orvieto: Faith, Art, Literature* (Perugia: Quattroemme, 2000), 75–92.



Fig. 2 Jaume Serra, altarpiece of the Virgin (detail)

link.<sup>3</sup> Among the abundant scenes of eucharistic miracles in the Chapel of the Corporal that accompany the bleeding host of Bolsena (including another version of the Miracle of the Fisherman), one represents the popular story of a Jewish boy who was thrown into an oven by his father as punishment for consuming the host. In this three-panel image, the boy is miraculously saved from the oven by the host's power, while the stiff-necked father is thrown into the oven to perish in his son's place.<sup>4</sup> Below this, another scene depicts the capture of Christian soldiers by a Muslim army. The "Saracen" king offers to free the Christians if they will show him, as the inscription reads, "how the Body of Christ is made from bread."<sup>5</sup> A priest among the captives then celebrates mass, during which the Saracens see a child instead of the raised host, providing the requested miracle and prompting their conversion (Fig. 3). As Kristen Van Ausdall

<sup>3</sup> Surh, "Corpus Christi," 7, 19–20. The oldest source, the so-called *sacra rappresentazione*, probably composed sometime between 1294 and 1317, does not mention Urban IV. See Surh, "Corpus Christi," 16, 20; and Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 176.

<sup>4</sup> Dana A. Katz, *The Jew in the Art of the Italian Renaissance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 31.

<sup>5</sup> For the inscriptions, see Surh, "Corpus Christi," 136–37. The term "Saracen" is used in this essay as a reflection of the primary source material and is not offered as a neutral alternative to "Muslim."



Fig. 3 Orvieto Cathedral fresco (Cappella del Corporale), detail (ca. 1357–64).  
© Opera del Duomo di Orvieto

argues, this sequence, like all of the Corporal chapel images, is “meant to answer any doubt about the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist” that was experienced by Christian worshippers.<sup>6</sup> The depiction of the Saracen conversion miracle in particular, just below the image of the murderous

<sup>6</sup> Kristen Van Ausdall, “Art and Eucharist in the Late Middle Ages,” in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 541–618 at 591. Peter Browe gives voice to the standardly accepted view that eucharistic miracles served to address doubts that arose around the doctrine of Transubstantiation. See Peter Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters* (Breslau: Müller and Seiffert, 1938), 177–84. More recently, scholars have proposed that miracle stories serve to encourage contemplation and “explain rather than resist” the difficulties of understanding that give rise to doubt. See Steven Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle and Eucharistic Doubt,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 42 (2012): 308–32 at 316.

Jewish father, “emphasizes the miraculous power of the Eucharist to convert those, like the Jews, who had been specifically demonized.”<sup>7</sup>

Both of these examples reflect the intensification of popular devotion to eucharistic miracles that took place in the fourteenth century as the feast of Corpus Christi, slow to gain popularity after Urban IV’s declaration in 1264, became more widely celebrated as a procession through the advocacy of Pope John XXII (1316–1334).<sup>8</sup> Both monuments represent common eucharistic miracles involving Jewish antagonism and disbelief. Yet both also include less common elements, such as the depiction of Muslim reactions to the host, a theme that had been largely absent from western iconography before the celebration of Corpus Christi became widespread. Both the theme of Muslim desecration of the host, as in the Sigena altarpiece, and that of Muslim recognition of a eucharistic miracle, as in the Orvieto frescos, reflect a changing discourse about Muslim-Christian relations that emerged in western Christendom between the second half of the thirteenth century and the middle of the fourteenth. Nevertheless, as Glazer-Eytan notes, historians “tend to gloss over the existence of accusations of host desecration leveled against non-Jews.”<sup>9</sup> While many studies of this period have concentrated on the role of eucharistic devotion in anti-Jewish thought, the place of Muslims in eucharistic miracles has been largely overlooked.

The goal of this paper is to consider a few examples of Christian representations of Muslims in relation to Christian holy objects such as the Eucharist that emerged in the century following the declaration of Corpus Christi. I take as a starting point Glazer-Eytan’s observation that Christians regularly grouped and even conflated Jews and Muslims in polemical and artistic representations, and that images connecting Muslims to the host must be understood in this light. However, while he has traced the influence of medieval examples into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this essay will consider the association of Muslims and the Eucharist in an earlier period, from the mid-thirteenth to the late fourteenth century. Focusing on Iberia in the wake of Christian military victories over significant areas of Muslim territory in the south of the peninsula, it will look at a few textual examples from both Castile and Aragon, including the devotional songs of King Alfonso X (1252–1284), the *Cantigas de Santa*

<sup>7</sup> Van Ausdall, “Art and Eucharist,” 591.

<sup>8</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 178–85.

<sup>9</sup> Glazer-Eytan, “Moriscos as Enemies.”

*María*, as well as some legal and historiographical works from Alfonso's court that shed light on those songs; the anti-Jewish polemical writing of Alfonso's Catalan contemporary, Dominican Ramon Martí (d. after 1287); and a chapter of the frame-tale collection *El Conde Lucanor* by Alfonso's nephew, don Juan Manuel (d. 1348), recounting a unique story of Muslim host desecration.

As in the examples cited by Glazer-Eytan, the association of Muslims with the Eucharist in both Iberian regions can be understood as a product of Christian ideas about Jews.<sup>10</sup> In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, however, Jews and Muslims were not only conflated as a single legal or theological category, but also, at times, compared with each other from a Christian perspective. I will argue here that in the century after the Christian conquest, the linking of Muslims and Jews in Christian discourse displays a marked ambivalence, sometimes condemning Muslims for representing a military threat and being in league with Jewish crimes, sometimes singling them out for their ability to recognize the holiness of Christian objects and reconsider their past infidelity. This ambivalence about Muslims stands in contrast to accusations of Jewish host desecration and ritual murder and uniformly negative depictions of Jewish intransigence, blindness, and malevolence. Thus Saracens sometime served in Christian texts as counterexamples to Jewish infidelity, offering affirmation of Christian mysteries through their capacity to witness and testify to the presence of Jesus.

### SARACEN PLUNDERING AND JEWISH HOST DESECRATION

Both the Orvieto frescos and the Sigena altarpiece conjure the image of a Muslim as a threat to Christians, either through military power or through disregard for the sanctity of Christian rites and objects, above all, the Eucharist. Although the particular image of Muslims as desecrators of the host was virtually non-existent in western Christian culture before the fourteenth century, their depiction as threats to Christian churches and the other holy objects contained therein was common. Sources from earlier centuries that describe frontier conflicts, both in the conquest of Muslim Iberia and in the eastern crusades, often cast Muslims as defilers of altars and robbers of Christian religious objects. For example, in a history about the First Crusade, the *Historia francorum qui ceperint Jerusalem*

<sup>10</sup> Glazer-Eytan, "Moriscos as Enemies."

(ca. 1101) by Raymond d'Aguilers, canon in Le Puy (Auvergne), Saracens ridicule Christian penitents and subject crucifixes to "lashes and insults," putting them "on yokes on top of the walls."<sup>11</sup> Similarly, in the *Historia Hierosolymitana* from only a few years later, Robert the Monk (who can probably be identified as Abbot Robert of St-Rémi, in Rheims, d. 1122) claims that Saracens smeared blood from circumcisions on baptismal fonts and altars.<sup>12</sup> As John Tolan has observed, such crusade chronicles detailing Muslim spoliation presented "a striking parallel to the accusations made against Jews in the later Middle Ages: that they torture and mutilate crucifixes, icons, the Eucharist, or even Christian children; the Jews are accused of ritually reenacting the Passion."<sup>13</sup>

This parallel sees a spiritual animosity in the material plunder that accompanied military conflicts. One of the best-known cases of spoliation of Christian objects by Muslims in Iberia was the alleged looting of the bells of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in 997 by Almanzor (al-Manṣūr) (d. 1002), chancellor for the young caliph Hishām II and de facto ruler of the Caliphate of Cordoba. After being converted into lamps to hang in the Great Mosque of Cordoba, they were recaptured and returned to Santiago by Fernando III of Castile in 1236.<sup>14</sup> Descriptions of Almanzor's looting are given in Latin sources from the twelfth century and Arabic sources from the fourteenth,<sup>15</sup> but the specific story of the

<sup>11</sup> Raymond d'Aguilers, *Le "Liber" de Raymond d'Aguilers*, ed. John H. Hill and Laurita L. Hill (Paris: Librairie orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1969), 145. Cited in John Tolan, *Saracens. Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 117. On the text, see Barbara Packard, "Raymond of Aguilers," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4, 1050–1200, ed. David Thomas and Alex Mallett et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 297–300.

<sup>12</sup> See Penny J. Cole, "'O God, the Heathen Have Come into Your Inheritance' (ps. 78.1): The Theme of Religious Pollution in Crusade Documents, 1095–1188," in *Crusades and Muslims in Twelfth-Century Syria*, ed. Maya Shatzmiller (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 84–111 at 95. Cited in Tolan, *Saracens*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Tolan, *Saracens*, 117.

<sup>14</sup> A few bell-lamps, taken from Iberian churches, still hang in at least two North African mosques. See Ali Asgar Alibhai, "The Reverberations of Santiago's Bells in Reconquista Spain," *La Corónica* 36.2 (2008): 145–64, at 158; Jerrilynn D. Dodds, ed., *Al-Andalus: The Art of Islamic Spain* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), 18, 272–73; Olivia Remie Constable "Regulating Religious Noise: The Council of Vienne, the Mosque Call, and Muslim Pilgrimage in the Late Medieval Mediterranean World," *Medieval Encounters* 16 (2010): 64–95 at 94.

<sup>15</sup> For example, the twelfth-century *Historia Turpini*, book four of the *Codex Calixtinus*, as well as *Al-Bayan al-Mughrib* by early fourteenth-century Maghribi historian Ibn Idhān.



spoliation and recapture of the bells of Santiago is recounted in the vernacular historiographical text *Estoria de España* begun around 1270 by Fernando III's son, Alfonso X. The triumphal account of the restoration of Santiago's bells was added to the *Estoria* a few years after Alfonso's death by his son Sancho IV.<sup>16</sup>

Earlier sections of the *Estoria* composed during Alfonso's reign lament the pillaging of Iberian churches during the Islamic conquest:

The sanctuaries were destroyed, the churches demolished, the places where God was praised with joy [the Muslims] now blasphemed and mistreated. They expelled the crosses and altars from the churches. The chrism, the books, and all those things that were for the honor of Christianity were broken and thrown to ruin ... the vestments and chalices and other vessels of the sanctuaries were put to bad use, sullied by the infidels.<sup>17</sup>

This description is telling of Alfonso's own perspective on Muslim actions in war, and can be compared to descriptions of Muslim looting in Alfonso's monumental collection of lyric songs about miracles of the Virgin Mary, the *Cantigas de Santa María*. Perhaps begun as early as 1264 (coincidentally the same year that the Corpus Christi feast was declared by Urban IV), many of the songs were completed in the 1270s in the wake of military campaigns against Muslim forces.<sup>18</sup> Although none of the fifteen cantigas that deal with eucharistic miracles mention Muslims,

See Alibhai, "The Reverberations of Santiago's Bells," 146–47.

<sup>16</sup> *Primera Crónica General. Estoria de España que mandó componer Alfonso el Sabio y que se continuaba bajo Sancho IV en 1289*, ed. Ramón Menéndez Pidal. 2 vols. (Madrid: Bailly-Bailliere e hijos, 1906), 1:734. This section of the text pertains to the so-called amplified version of 1289 prepared by Sancho IV after Alfonso's death.

<sup>17</sup> Alfonso X, *Primera crónica general*, p. 313. Translation partly in Tolan, *Saracens*, 188, with my changes.

<sup>18</sup> The editor of the text, Walter Mettmann, has proposed that the first 100 cantigas were completed between 1270 and 1274, the next 100 cantigas by 1277, and the remaining 227 by 1282. See *Cantigas de Santa María*, ed. Walter Mettmann, 3 vols. (Madrid: Castalia, 1986–1989), 1:24. Jesús Montoya Martínez maintains that Alfonso probably decided to compile the first hundred cantigas after the year 1264, when he conquered Jerez (as recounted in cantiga 345), although he probably wrote Marian poetry even before this date. See Jesús Montoya Martínez, "Algunas precisiones acerca de las *Cantigas de Santa María*," in *Studies on the Cantigas de Santa María: Art, Music, 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: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1987),

numerous other songs depict Muslim armies—in Iberia, North Africa, and Constantinople—attempting to destroy or damage Christian sites of worship.<sup>19</sup> For example, *cantiga* 169 (in which Alfonso speaks in the first person, suggesting he is the author of the text) tells of an old church in Arrixaca, near Murcia, which Alfonso had only recently conquered. Although the Muslim townsmen were granted permission to remove the church because it was in their neighborhood, they were unable, despite their efforts. When they asked the Muslim king to have it removed for them, he refused because “Mariame [Mary] deals severely with those who displease Her.”<sup>20</sup> *Cantiga* 229 describes how a band of Muslims attempted to destroy a church under construction in Villasirga, near Palencia. “The Moors went inside and set about to tear the church down completely and destroy and burn it.” Despite their efforts, they were, like the Muslims in *cantiga* 169, unable to move a stone. The Virgin intervened and made the Muslims blind and paralyzed.<sup>21</sup> Numerous other *cantigas* depict attempts to destroy Christian objects, in particular images or statues of the Virgin Mary. Examples include *cantiga* 99 (Muslims seize a church and attempt to destroy the altar and all the images, but one image is saved by the Virgin),<sup>22</sup> 183 (Muslims throw a statue of the Virgin into the sea, and so lose the ability to catch fish), 264 (Muslims in Constantinople throw an image of the Virgin into the sea, and their ships sink), and 345 (Muslims rebel and burn a statue of the Virgin in Jerez, but Christians retake the city and restore the statue), among others.<sup>23</sup>

367–86 at 377. O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas de Santa María*, 9, concurs with this date.

<sup>19</sup> *Cantigas* that mention the Eucharist include 4, 66, 69, 75, 104, 128, 149, 208, 222, 225, 234, 237, 238, 251, and 263 (and see note 36 below).

<sup>20</sup> Alfonso X, *Cantigas*, 2:174; an English translation of all of the songs is provided in *Songs of Holy Mary: A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa María*, trans. Kathleen Kulp-Hill (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), here at 204.

<sup>21</sup> Alfonso X, *Cantigas*, 2:301–02; *Songs of Holy Mary*, 275.

<sup>22</sup> Alfonso X, *Cantigas*, 1:302–03; *Songs of Holy Mary*, 125.

<sup>23</sup> On these and related anecdotes, see Mercedes García-Arenal, “Los moros en las *Cantigas* de Alfonso X el Sabio,” *Al-Qantara: Revista de estudios árabes* 6 (1985): 133–52; Albert Bagby, “The Moslem in the *Cantigas* of Alfonso X, El Sabio,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly* 20 (1973): 173–204; P. K. Klein, “Moros y judíos en las ‘*Cantigas*’ de Alfonso el Sabio: imágenes de conflictos distintos,” in *Simposio internacional ‘El Legado de al-Andalus’: el arte andalusí en los reinos de León y Castilla durante la edad media*, ed. M. Valdés Fernández (Valladolid: Fundación del Patrimonio Histórico de Castilla y León, 2007), 341–64.

Desecration of Christian objects and spaces was of serious concern to Alfonso, and especially offensive to him was the prospect of desecration that might take place within his own kingdom at the hands of the minority non-Christian population. Alfonso issued legislation to prohibit the abuse or destruction of holy things by residents of his kingdom. In his law code, the *Siete Partidas*, he discusses violence against holy objects, including “spitting on the image of Christ or on the cross, or damaging it with a stone or knife or anything else.”<sup>24</sup> Alfonso is quick to add in the next law that Muslims and Jews in particular are prohibited from similar actions:

We order and forbid all Jews and Moors of our kingdom from being so bold as to insult our lord Jesus Christ ... and his Mother the Virgin Mary ... nor to do anything against them, such as spitting on the cross, or on the altar, or on any picture of Christ that is in the Church, or on the door of it, whether painted or carved, in likeness of our lord Jesus Christ or of holy Mary or of the other male or female saints. Nor shall he be so bold as to damage with his hand or foot or any other thing any of the above-mentioned things, nor throwing stones at the church, nor to do or say anything like this publicly to dishonor Christians or their faith.<sup>25</sup>

These prohibitions, which recommended heavy punishments, along with constant references to similar crimes both past and present, made it clear that the issues of spoliation by Muslims during conquest of Christian lands, and of desecration and defilement by Muslims living in Christian lands (such as during holy processions), were pressing concerns during Alfonso’s reign.

While this concern might be understood partly in the context of the military threat presented by Muslims, it is also necessary to consider it in relation to Alfonso’s broader theological criticism of Jews as antagonists of Christians and desecrators of Christian sacred objects. Some stories of desecration in the *Cantigas*, for example, involve not Muslims but Jews, yet use similar language and description. In cantiga 34, for example, a Jew in Constantinople steals an image of the Virgin at night, throws it into a latrine, and defecates on it. Immediately, “the devil killed him, and he

<sup>24</sup> Partida 7, título 28, ley 5. See *Las siete partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1807), 3:689.

<sup>25</sup> Partida 7, título 28, ley 6. *Las siete partidas*, 3:690.

went to perdition.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Alfonso repeats (cantiga 4) the popular legend of the Jewish boy thrown in the oven for accepting the Eucharist. This story circulated widely, and had already been told in Romance in miracle 16 of the *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* of Gonzalo de Berceo (d. before 1264), composed in La Rioja around 1260. Like the Orvieto frescos, Alfonso’s cantiga 4 specifies that “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.”<sup>27</sup>

Alfonso’s descriptions of Muslim destruction and desecration drew from this tradition of popular anti-Jewish rhetoric, which had proliferated in the twelfth century. A prominent theme in popular stories about Jewish threats to Christian culture was the charge of ritual murder, which accused Jews of stealing and killing Christian children. Such blood libel was made against Jews in England beginning in the middle of the twelfth century, first appearing in the 1150 account by Thomas of Monmouth of the murder of William of Norwich six years before, and reappearing repeatedly over subsequent decades across England and the continent. The first recorded accusation in the Iberian Peninsula that Jews “drink blood” appears in *Disputa entre un cristiano y un judío*, which has been dated to the first half of the thirteenth century.<sup>28</sup> Only a few decades later, Alfonso

<sup>26</sup> *Cantigas*, 1:143; *Songs of Holy Mary*, 45. On the subject of this cantiga in context, see Merrall Llewelyn Price, “Medieval Antisemitism and Excremental Libel,” in *Jews in Medieval Christendom: Slay them Not*, ed. K. T. Utterbach and M. L. Price (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177–87; Albert I. Bagby, Jr., “The Jew in the *Cántigas* of Alfonso X, El Sabio,” *Speculum* 46 (1971): 670–88 at 676; and Vikki Hatton and Angus Mackay, “Anti-Semitism in the Cantigas de Santa Maria,” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 61 (1983): 187–99. The legend of the Jew and the latrine appears across Europe, such as in Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Prioress’ Tale” and the writing of Caesarius von Heisterbach (see note 35, below). See William Cecil McDonald, “The ‘Jew in the Latrine’: Exploring the Transmission of an Early German Anti-Jewish Narrative,” *Medieval Encounters* 27 (2021, forthcoming). On other stories about Jewish desecration that circulated in Europe, see Christoph Cluse, “Stories of Breaking and Taking the Cross: A Possible Context for the Oxford Incident of 1268,” *Revue d’Histoire Ecclésiastique* 90/3 (1995): 396–442. On a fictional tale of such desecration in Jewish literature, see Harvey Hames, “Urinating on the Cross: Christianity as Seen in the *Sefer Yoseph ha-Mekaneh* (ca. 1260) and in Light of Paris 1240,” in *Ritus Infidelium: Miradas interconfesionales sobre las prácticas religiosas en la Edad Media*, ed. José Martínez-Gásquez and John Victor Tolan (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2013): 209–20.

<sup>27</sup> *Cantigas*, 1:66; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 7. See also Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 15–16.

<sup>28</sup> “Dexades de comer las otras sangres et comedes las de uestros fijos” [You gave up eating other bloods and eat that of your children], Américo Castro, “Disputa entre un cristiano y un judío,” *Revista de filología española* 1 (1914): 173–80, at 173 and 176.

expressed in the *Partidas* a fear of Jews “stealing children and putting them on a cross, or making images of wax and crucifying them when children cannot be found.”<sup>29</sup> Alfonso includes such a tale of child murder in *cantiga* 6, in which he describes how a Jew stole a child who offended him by singing the hymn *Gaude Maria virgo*, which is critical of the Jews.<sup>30</sup> Even more germane to Alfonso’s stated concern over Jews “making images of wax” is *cantiga* 12 (also found in miracle 18 of Berceo’s *Milagros*), in which Jews are discovered to have made “an image of Jesus Christ, which the Jews were striking and spitting upon. And furthermore, the Jews had made a cross upon which they intended to hang the image.”<sup>31</sup> Such tales—as well as the later legend of the murder of the boy named Dominguito del Val in Aragon, allegedly in 1250—all seem to be versions of the story of William of Norwich.<sup>32</sup>

Accusations of ritual murder (whether real or symbolic) can be interpreted not only as a general expression of anti-Jewish rhetoric, but also, beginning in the late thirteenth century, as the source of a new rhetoric alleging Jewish hostility to the Eucharist. Christian debate over the question of the divine substance of the Eucharist began in the middle of the eleventh century between Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) and Lanfranc of Bec, archbishop of Canterbury (d. 1089), and intensified in

<sup>29</sup> Partida 7, título 24, ley 2. Alfonso X, *Las siete partidas*, 3:670. See also Dwayne Carpenter, *Alfonso X and the Jews: An Edition of and Commentary on Siete Partidas 7.24 ‘De los judíos’* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 29 and 64–65. I partly disagree with the assessment of Katherine Aron-Beller that “Iberian tales did not articulate religious concerns about Jews as desecrators of Christian images or associate them with the pursuit of Eucharistic blood.” See Katherine Aron-Beller, “The Jewish Image Desecrator in the *Cantigas de Santa María*,” *Ars Judaica: The Bar Ilan Journal of Jewish Art* 14 (2018): 27–45 at 45.

<sup>30</sup> Antony Bale, *The Jew in the Medieval Book: English Antisemitisms 1350–1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 67. Cf. *Cantigas*, 1:74; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 11. On these images in the *cantigas*, see Hatton and Mackay, “Anti-Semitism in the *Cantigas*”; and Bagby, “The Jew.”

<sup>31</sup> *Cantigas*, 1:89; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 19. Gonzalo de Berceo, *Milagros*, 142–44, noted by Carpenter, *Alfonso X*, 65. In the reference on 114 n. 14, Carpenter confuses miracle 16 (which resembles Alfonso’s *cantiga* 4) with miracle 18.

<sup>32</sup> Carlos Espí Forcén, “El corista de ‘Engraterra’: ¿San Guillermo de Norwich, San Hugo de Lincoln o Santo Dominguito de Val de Zaragoza?” *Miscelánea Medieval Murciana* 32 (2008): 51–64. On the wide dissemination of the story, see E. M. Rose, *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of the Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

subsequent theological discussions over the course of the subsequent century.<sup>33</sup> Such discussions coincided with a proliferation of eucharistic miracle stories, which were later gathered in collections that circulated on a wide scale in the thirteenth century.<sup>34</sup> Such stories appear in the *Cantigas* as well, including one telling story—cantiga 149—about a doubting priest similar to the priest in the Bolsena miracle of 1263. This and a few other miracle stories in the *Cantigas* provide evidence that the work was concerned with the contemporary debates about the Eucharist and the Corpus Christi feast such as those later commemorated in the Orvieto frescos.<sup>35</sup>

By the late thirteenth century, such eucharistic miracle tales overlapped with ritual murder stories, giving way to the first charges of host desecration in Paris in 1290. Dozens of accusations appeared in subsequent decades all across Europe, including the Iberian Peninsula in Barcelona, Lleida, and Huesca in the second half of the fourteenth century and in Segovia in the early fifteenth.<sup>36</sup> As Miri Rubin explains, the accusation of host desecration grew from the story of the Jewish boy and “was produced through the intersection of two discursive frames: that which reflected on Jews and attempted to separate them from Christians, and that which defined Christian identity around the sacramental promise and practice of the eucharist.”<sup>37</sup> Alfonso’s pronouncement in the *Siete Partidas* against Jews “stealing children” or making wax substitutes to kill “when children cannot be found” presages the host desecration account in Paris. It also supports a reading that sees both the cantigas discussing the eucharistic miracles as well as those recounting anti-Jewish stories—about the Jewish

<sup>33</sup>For a comprehensive overview of eucharistic theology in this period, see Gary Macy, “Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages,” in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen Van Ausdall (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 365–98.

<sup>34</sup>One prominent example is the *Dialogus miraculorum* (1219–1223), a collection of miracles of all kinds (including sixty-seven eucharistic miracles) by German Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach (d. ca. 1240), but numerous other collections followed it. The most comprehensive study of eucharistic miracles is Browe, *Die eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters*; see also Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 108–29; and Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle.”

<sup>35</sup>Like the priest in the earliest account of the Bolsena miracle, the doubting priest in cantiga 149 is from Germany, and the miracle of presence occurs while the host is being consecrated. Other cantigas that recount eucharistic miracles include 69, 104, and 251. Also, cantigas 128 and 208 recount versions of the Miracle of the Bees, also represented on the Sigena altarpiece.

<sup>36</sup>Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 40–48 and 109–14.

<sup>37</sup>Rubin, *Gentile Tales*, 28.

boy in the oven, the waxen crucifixion, and the desecration of Mary in the latrine—as part of that same emerging anti-Jewish rhetoric. Given that Muslims and Jews are often conflated in the Alfonsine legislation (as in some other medieval legislation),<sup>38</sup> the accusations against Jews also provide a meaningful context in which to understand the parallel images of Muslim spoliation and desecration in the Alfonsine corpus.

### HERMENEUTICAL JEWS AND RHETORICAL MUSLIMS

In comparing Muslims and Jews in this way, the *Cantigas* might seem to anticipate similar connections in fourteenth-century discourse, such as that on display in the Sigena altarpiece. At the same time, however, the *Cantigas* might also be shown to complicate its own image of Muslim desecration, presenting some stories in which, as in the Orvieto frescos, Muslims are able to recognize a Christian miracle and even, at times, be converted by it. In this openness to miracles, Muslim characters assume a role in the story similar to that played by doubting priests, children, women, or ill-informed laymen in earlier eucharistic miracle stories that circulated in Europe.<sup>39</sup> Both in the *Cantigas* and in later images, considered in more detail below, the capacity to witness expresses an ambivalence about the place of Muslims in relation to Christian truth, and contrasts with the unambiguous Jewish reaction to the host.

Although both the image of Muslims as critics of the Eucharist and that of Muslims as witnesses to eucharistic miracles were new to Europe in the thirteenth century, both themes had appeared in earlier eastern sources. Before Muslims were accused of desecration in crusade chronicles, Christian legends of Muslim desecration and recognition of the Eucharist had appeared in eastern Christian sources in Syriac and Arabic, usually as part of conversion stories. In addition, the topic of the Eucharist was

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Benjamin Z. Kedar, “*De Iudeis et Sarracenis*: on the Categorization of Muslims in Medieval Canon Law,” in *Studia in honorem eminentissimi cardinalis Alphonsi M. Stickler*, ed. R. I. Castillo Lara (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1992), 207–13. Reprint in *The Franks in the Levant, 11th to 14th Centuries* (Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1993), XIII. For a comparison of Jews and Muslims in decrees of ecclesiastical councils, see Ryan Szpiech, “Saracens and Church Councils, from Nablus (1120) to Vienne (1313–1314),” in *Jews and Muslims under the Fourth Lateran Council*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Champagne and Irven M. Resnick (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 115–37.

<sup>39</sup> Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 128; but cf. Justice, “Eucharistic Miracle,” 311–12, who does not discuss the function of witnessing in distinguishing Jews from Muslims.

prominent in early Christian-Muslim dialogues and polemics.<sup>40</sup> The early ninth-century *Martyrdom of Anthony* (*Rawḥ al-Qurashī*), by a Melkite Christian in the Abbasid Caliphate, tells the story of a nephew of Caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd who would often vandalize churches, but was converted (taking the name of Anthony) by a miraculous vision of a lamb on the altar. A contemporary Greek text by the ascetic Gregory of Dekapolis (d. 842) tells a similar story of the conversion of Ampelon, nephew of the emir of a local city, who attempted to desecrate a church but was converted (taking the name of Pachomius) when he saw a vision of the faithful eating Christ's butchered body in place of the Eucharist.<sup>41</sup> The eleventh-century Arabic-language compilation *Siyar al-bīʿa al-muqaddasa* (Biographies of the holy Church), better known as *History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria*, relates a similar story, allegedly from an earlier source, which includes the less common element of Muslim host desecration. It describes how one al-Hāshimī, the son of a king in Baghdad, would regularly interrupt Christian masses and "order the eucharist to be taken from the sanctuary, and they would break it and mix it with the dust, and he would overturn the chalice." During one mass, he was converted after

<sup>40</sup>Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Some Neglected Aspects of Medieval Muslim Polemics against Christianity," *The Harvard Theological Review* 89.1 (1996): 61–84 at 71–72 and 78–9, mentions the work of one al-Qurtūbī, who has since been identified as Cordoban jurist al-Imām al-Qurtūbī (d. 1258), on whom see Juan Pedro Monferrer Sala, "Al-Imām al-Qurtūbī," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 4, 1200–1350, ed. David Thomas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 391–94. Early encyclopedist al-Ṭabarī (d. c. 860) wrote critically of the Eucharist, and Arab Christians found it necessary to defend the Eucharist against Muslim arguments, as did the ninth-century Nestorian apologist Ammār al-Baṣrī, on whom see Wageeh Y. F. Mikhail, "Ammār al-Baṣrī's *Kitāb al-Burbān*: A Topical and Theological Analysis of Arabic Christian Theology in the Ninth Century" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Birmingham, 2013), 291–300. Such criticism continued in later centuries: the Mallorcan friar Anselm Turmeda, who converted to Islam and wrote a polemic against Christianity, criticized the Eucharist at some length. See Mikel de Epalza, *Fray Anselm Turmeda (ʿAbdallāh al-Tarḡumān) y su polémica islamo-cristiana. Edición, traducción y estudio de la Tuḥfa* (Madrid: Hiperión, 1994), 348–59. See also Clint Hackenburg, "Voices of the Converted: Christian Apostate Literature in Medieval Islam" (Ph.D. Diss., The Ohio State University, 2015), 63, 94–96, 328–30.

<sup>41</sup>Dekapolites's sermon containing this anecdote is found in *Patrologiae cursus completus series graeca*, ed. J. P. Migne, 161 vols. (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857–1866), 100:1201–12. See David Vila, "The Martyrdom of Anthony (Rawḥ al-Qurashī)," and Daniel J. Sahas, "Gregory Dekapolites," both in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 1, 600–900, ed. David Thomas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 498–501, and 615–17, respectively; and Tolan, *Saracens*, 56 and 299 note 76.



seeing, in place of the host, a “beautiful child” bleeding and torn in pieces.<sup>42</sup> These sources were unknown in the Latin world, but their circulation in the eastern Mediterranean underscores the long history preceding the later emergence of similar stories in Europe.

In western stories and images, Muslims are first associated with the Eucharist in the guise of enemies who are antagonists to Christ or are witnesses to the Mass, but do not recognize the eucharistic miracle. For example, in the images on the Beam of the Passion, a painted beam from early thirteenth-century Iberia that was displayed above a eucharistic altar, Muslim figures take the place of Christ’s tormentors.<sup>43</sup> Not long after the beam was painted, a miracle story from Valencia began circulating that associated Muslims with the liturgy of the Eucharist, bearing a striking resemblance to the Orvieto miracle story. As the version of events recorded in 1340 tells it, Christian soldiers were surrounded by Muslim fighters outside of Llutxent during a military campaign in 1239. During a hasty Mass before battle, the host was seen to stain the corporal with blood, inspiring the Christians to defeat their attackers. The stained corporal was taken to Daroca, near Zaragoza, where it became a site of pilgrimage that is still venerated today.<sup>44</sup> Contemporary with these examples, from ca. 1255, is the hagiographic vita of Saint Clare of Assisi, in which Muslims are associated explicitly with the Eucharist. Both in text and in subsequent iconography dramatizing Clare’s life (including on a painted reliquary from Assisi), Clare is depicted as repelling Saracen invaders with the

<sup>42</sup> See *History of the Patriarchs of the Egyptian Church, Known as the History of the Holy Church, by Sawīrus ibn al-Muḳaffāʿ, bishop of Ašmūnīn*, ed. A. S. Atiya, Y. ʿAbd al-Masiḥ, and O. H. E. Khs.-Burmester (Cairo: Imprimerie de l’Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1948), vol. 2, pt. ii, 110–11 (Arabic)/164–65 (trans.). On the author, see Mark N. Swanson, “Mawhūb ibn Maṣṣūr ibn Mufarrij al-Iskandarānī,” in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History*, vol. 3, 1050–1200, ed. David Thomas et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 217–22.

<sup>43</sup> On the Muslim iconography on the Beam of the Passion, see David M. Freidenreich and Véronique Plesch, “What is That to Us?: The Eucharistic Liturgy and the Enemies of Christ in the Beam of the Passion.” *Studies in Iconography* 41 (2020): 104–30. I am grateful to David Freidenreich for drawing my attention to this example and for sharing his essay with me.

<sup>44</sup> For a thorough study of the miracle, see José Luis Corral Lafuente, “Una Jerusalén en el occidente medieval: la ciudad de Daroca y el milagro de los corporales,” *Aragón en la edad media* 12 (1995): 61–115; and Glazer-Eytan, “Jews Imagined and Real,” 45. I am grateful to Dr. Glazer-Eytan for drawing this story and reference to my attention.

Eucharist in a little silver box.<sup>45</sup> In these and similar stories and images, Muslims are cast as enemies of Christ or as military threats who provoke miracles but are not witnesses to them.

The *Cantigas*, by contrast, despite the numerous examples of desecration, also tell stories that stress the capacity of Muslims to witness, recognize, and respond to Christian miracles. In cantiga 28, for example, the Virgin protects Constantinople from an invading Muslim army by hovering over the city and protecting it with her mantle. “When [the Muslim sultan] had seen this, he realized that he was a sinner, for he saw that it was a miracle of Our Lord.” The sultan then receives baptism in secret.<sup>46</sup> The plots of these miracles all hinge on the ability of the Muslims to recognize and benefit from the spiritual power of the Virgin. In cantiga 167, the Virgin revives a Muslim boy from the dead when his mother “saw how the Christians went to Holy Mary of Salas ... and took the very bold step of trusting in the Virgin.”<sup>47</sup> In a notable contrast with the Jewish crucifixion of a waxen statue in cantiga 12, the Muslim woman then offers “a waxen image” to the Virgin when she asked for her son to be restored, confidently stating that “I believe that She will sympathize with my woe.”<sup>48</sup> In cantiga 205, a Muslim woman and child—in a way that echoes the salvation of the Jewish boy from the oven in cantiga 4—are saved from a burning castle under siege by the Christians after they notice that she looks like the Virgin with the Christ child.<sup>49</sup>

In some cases, Muslims are not only able to discern the Virgin’s spiritual power, but can also appreciate the holy power of Christian images and objects. For example, in cantiga 215, which recounts an event that took place in Alfonso’s own day in a battle in 1277, Muslim soldiers of Marinid ruler Abū Yūsuf (d. 1286) lay waste to the area near Cordoba, and sack a village near Martos, in Jaén. In an echo of the legendary theft of Almanzor, we are told, “Out of ill-will towards our law, they carried off the bells and robbed the altars, on which they left nothing. Then they broke the

<sup>45</sup>This legend is studied by Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, “St. Clare Expelling the Saracens from Assisi: Religious Confrontation in Word and Image,” *The Sixteenth-Century Journal* 43 (2012): 643–65, especially 645.

<sup>46</sup>*Cantigas*, 1:131; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 40.

<sup>47</sup>*Cantigas*, 2:169; my translation; cf. trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 202, which simply states that she “ventured to trust in the Virgin.”

<sup>48</sup>*Cantigas*, 2:169; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 202.

<sup>49</sup>*Cantigas*, 2:251–53; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 247.

crucifixes and images. They had the border in a great distress.”<sup>50</sup> However, when (as in *cantigas* 169 and 229) they attempted to destroy a statue of Mary but were unable, “they realized that there was great abundance of power in it.” Moreover, they then took the statue to the king of Granada, Muḥammad II (d. 1302), who “recognized this event as a great miracle” and had it delivered to Alfonso to be venerated.<sup>51</sup>

This story stresses the Muslim’s ability to recognize the power of miracles and holy objects, but it is important to note that it does not specifically mention the Eucharist. It is noteworthy that one *cantiga* (104) recounts a love-potion legend that bears comparison to the Sigena altar-piece scene, but does not include any Muslim protagonists. Nevertheless, there is one *cantiga* (46) that not only highlights the Muslims’ capacity to see and accept Christian miracles, but also links that capacity to a miraculous *corporeal* manifestation—in this case, the lactation of the Virgin. A Moor went abroad “to make war on Christians and pillage . . . . That Moor laid waste all the lands he could enter and carried off all he could steal. He triumphantly returned to his own land and piled together the booty he had taken to distribute it.” Among his stolen holy objects, he noticed a painting of the Virgin. As it took his fancy, “he had it set up in a high place and dressed in garments of spun gold.” Because the image caused him to have religious doubts, he challenged God to show him a sign, agreeing to convert to Christianity if he did. “The Moor had scarcely uttered this when he saw the statue’s two breasts turn into living flesh and begin to flow with milk in gushing streams. When he saw this, verily he began to weep and had a priest called in who baptized him.”<sup>52</sup> In this striking story, which recasts a popular Marian theme in specifically Iberian terms of reconquest and conversion, the focus on the corporeal manifestation of grace is not unlike the capacity of the Muslims in Orvieto to see the bleeding Christ child in the host. Mary’s lactating breasts are like Christ’s bleeding wounds, and Mary’s milk is thus a theological surrogate for the Eucharist, a common theme in high medieval iconography, as Caroline

<sup>50</sup> *Cantigas*, ed. Mettmann, 2:288, translation mine. Strangely, lines 15–17 of this particular stanza are left out of the Kulp-Hill translation. For a discussion of this song, see Joseph F. O’Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the Cantigas de Santa Maria: A Poetic Biography* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 153–54.

<sup>51</sup> *Cantigas*, ed. Mettmann, 2:272–75, translation mine.

<sup>52</sup> *Cantigas*, ed. Mettmann, 1:172–73; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 62.



Fig. 4 *Cantigas de Santa María*, cantiga 46 detail, El Escorial MS T-I-1, folio 68v

Walker Bynum has shown.<sup>53</sup> The Muslim, moreover, has no difficulty recognizing a spiritual presence in the ritual object, immediately weeping and seeking baptism, after which his subjects and friends follow him and convert. The shock of a theological miracle produced by a corporeal manifestation of God’s presence—the lactating breasts—produces an immediate change of heart (Fig. 4).

In the *Cantigas*, Alfonso compares Muslims and Jews directly, as in cantiga 348, in which he calls the Jews “people much worse than Moors” and says Mary “hates” them “worse than the Moors.”<sup>54</sup> Other fourteenth-century authors repeat Alfonso’s comparison between Muslims and Jews. Jurist Oldradus de Ponte (d. 1337) states that “the sect of the Saracens is not as bad as that of the Jews,” and converted Jew Alfonso de Valladolid (Abner de Burgos) (d. ca. 1347) similarly affirms that “the law of the

<sup>53</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 271. See also Vibeke Olson, “Blood, Sweat, Tears, and Milk: ‘Fluid’ Veneration, Sensory Contact, and Corporeal Presence in Medieval Devotional Art,” in *Binding the Absent Body in Medieval and Modern Art: Abject, Virtual, and Alternate Bodies*, ed. Emily Kelly and Elizabeth Richards Rivenbark (New York: Routledge, 2017), 11–31 at 19, who notes, “Mary’s milk was the counterpart to Christ’s blood, and like Christ’s blood, Mary’s milk was the vehicle through which her presence was seen, heard, felt, and tasted . . . Mary’s milk could be understood in a Eucharistic sense, as a symbolic reference to Christ’s blood.”

<sup>54</sup> *Cantigas*, ed. Mettmann, 3:206; trans. *Songs of Holy Mary*, 423–24.

Moors is not as bad as the faith of the Jews.”<sup>55</sup> Based on this sort of comparison, numerous texts in this period also distinguish between Muslim tractability and vision and the persistent blindness and malevolence of Jews when faced with similar objects. Unlike the Jewish father in *cantiga* 4, for example, who rejects the miracle that follows his son’s ingestion of the Eucharist, the family of the Muslim man in *cantiga* 46 converts on account of Mary’s miraculous female body.

This repeated contrast is not unique to the *Cantigas* or to the Orvieto frescos a century after. Rather, it is part of a larger trend in anti-Jewish writing of the period in which Islamic texts and Muslim characters are not only deemed to be “not as bad” as Jews, but are also frequently invoked as “witnesses” to Christian truth against Jewish error, playing a rhetorical role as allies of Christian apologists. Muslim respect for Jesus and Mary was cited repeatedly by Christian polemicists of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as a further proof that Jewish rejection of Christianity was unfounded. For example, in speaking of Jesus’s miracles in his extensive anti-Jewish polemic *Capistrum Iudaeorum* (1267), Catalan Dominican Ramon Martí, exactly contemporary with Alfonso X, states that “Our enemies, that is the Saracens, are witnesses that ... the Lord Jesus did these and many similar things.”<sup>56</sup> Similarly, in his later *Pugio fidei* (1278), Martí affirms about his discussion of the Virgin birth and the ascension of Jesus to heaven, “Let those who doubt this ask the Saracens and they will confirm with their own testimony that I speak truly.”<sup>57</sup> Martí’s younger contemporary, Dominican Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (d. 1320), whose attack on Islam *Contra legem Sarracenorum* became one of the most popular and widely disseminated anti-Muslim polemics of the later Middle Ages, also affirms, “Never is there such a valid witness ... as when he who is trying to offend speaks praise.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Norman Zacour, *Jews and Saracens in the Consilia of Oldradus de Ponte* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 77; Alfonso de Valladolid, *Mostrador de justicia*, ed. Walter Mettmann, 2 vols. (Altenberge/Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1994–1996), 2:427, my translation.

<sup>56</sup> Ramon Martí, *Capistrum Iudaeorum*, ed. and trans. Adolfo Robles Sierra, 2 vols. (Würzburg: Echter; Altenberge: Telos, 1990–1993), 1:282 (1.7.12), my translation.

<sup>57</sup> *Pugio fidei*, 2.8.11. Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, MS 1405, fol. 65v; and Ramon Martí, *Pugio fidei adversus Mauros et Iudaeos* (Leipzig and Frankfurt: Sumptibus Haeredum Friderici Lanckisi, Typis Viduae Johannis Wittigau, 1687), 365, my translation.

<sup>58</sup> Jean-Marie Mérigoux, “L’ouvrage d’un frère prêcheur florentin: Le « *Contra legem Sarracenorum* » de Riccoldo da Monte di Croce,” *Memorie Domenicane* n.s. 17 (1986): 1–144 at 136, my translation.

This image of what I have elsewhere termed the “rhetorical Muslim” stands in stark contrast to the traditional image of the Jewish infidel in Christian polemics. The figure identified by Jeremy Cohen as the “hermeneutical Jew”—“the Jew as constructed in the discourse of ... Christian theologians’ interpretation of Scripture”—could be understood in the classic formulation of St. Augustine (d. 430) as a *testimonium scripturarum* (“a testimony of the Scriptures”) on account of his *disbelief* in Christian truths allegedly found in his own books.<sup>59</sup> The “rhetorical Muslim” of the later Middle Ages, by contrast, follows a contrary logic. Whereas Jews are imagined to “testify” by virtue of their alleged “disbelief,” Muslims are “witnesses” to Christian truth by virtue of their actual recognition of Mary and Jesus.<sup>60</sup> Alfonso’s Muslims in the *Cantigas*, like the converted Saracens in Orvieto, play precisely this rhetorical role, offering further confirmation of Christian truths through their capacity to see and willingness to recognize a Christian miracle. In the *Cantigas* and other contemporary writing, the image of the Muslim as a pro-Christian witness existed alongside—and in ambiguous tension with—the image of the Muslim as an infidel and desecrator of Christian spaces and objects.

### THE PARDONING OF LORENZO SUÁREZ GALLINATO

The ambivalent Christian stance toward Muslims taken in Alfonsine works such as the *Cantigas* continues to appear in some Castilian texts of the fourteenth century as well. One salient example that evokes all of the elements considered above—Christian-Muslim military conflict, conversion, Muslim host desecration, and the suggestion of a Muslim capacity to recognize a Christian miracle—was written by Alfonso’s own nephew, Castilian nobleman don Juan Manuel. Among the fifty stories contained in the exemplary tale collection *El Conde Lucanor* (from 1335), a collection of frame tales that is now one of the most canonical and widely read

<sup>59</sup> Jeremy Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2–3, 39.

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed discussion of the “rhetorical Muslim,” see Ryan Szpiech, “Rhetorical Muslims: Islam as Witness in Western Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic,” *Al-Qanṭara* 34 (2013): 153–85; and Ryan Szpiech, “*Testes sunt ipsi, testis et erroris ipsius magister*: el musulmán como testigo en la polémica cristiana medieval,” *Medievalia* 19 (2016): 135–56; and see also Jeremy Cohen, “The Muslim Connection, or On the Changing Role of the Jew in High Medieval Theology,” in *From Witness to Witchcraft: Jews and Judaism in Medieval Christian Thought*, ed. Jeremy Cohen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1996), 141–62.

texts of medieval Castilian literature, we find two anecdotes (*exemplos* 15 and 28) that involve King Fernando III, the author's grandfather, and a Galician knight named Lorenzo Suárez Gallinato.<sup>61</sup> The first (*exemplo* 15) serves to introduce their relationship and tells the story of Fernando's conquest of Almohad Seville in 1248, while the second (28) records a story told by Suárez Gallinato to Fernando about the former's previous service to the Muslims of Granada.

In *exemplo* 15, Juan Manuel notes that Fernando had various good men in his army, and Suárez Gallinato was among the three best.<sup>62</sup> One day, during the campaign to take Seville, these three approach the city without having received orders. They initiate a skirmish with the Muslims, provoking a significant confrontation. Although the Christians emerge victorious, the king is angry, and orders the knights to be arrested for insubordination, saying their crimes of acting without orders and risking their lives merit death. After other soldiers plead for their release, the king frees them and determines which of the three was the best knight at arms, the honor going to Suárez Gallinato.<sup>63</sup>

This story is in keeping with a number of Castilian legends about Suárez Gallinato that reproduce this pattern of insubordination and subsequent pardon by the king. Alfonso X recounts in the *Estoria de España* that before the siege of Cordoba (1236), Fernando had banished Suárez Gallinato from his kingdom. The latter responded by entering into the service of Ibn Hūd (d. 1237),<sup>64</sup> a Muslim ruler who governed Murcia under the Almohads and who subsequently rebelled and claimed rule over various Andalusī cities in the mid-thirteenth century, including Cordoba. Eventually, the *Estoria* tells us, despite his initial service to the Muslim king, Suárez Gallinato betrayed Ibn Hūd and provided intelligence to the

<sup>61</sup> For a summary of the two exempla about Fernando III, see Carlos Heusch, "Yo te castigaré bien como a loco". Los reyes en *El Conde Lucanor* de Juan Manuel," *e-Spania* 21 (2015): 1–15 at 5–6 (para. 11–12). Also relevant is David Wacks, *Framing Iberia: Maqāmāt and Frametale Narratives in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 140. For a discussion of *exemplo* 28, see Olivier Biaggini, "Le miracle dans le *Conde Lucanor* de Don Juan Manuel," in *Miracle d'un autre genre*, ed. Olivier Biaggini and Bénédicte Milland-Bove (Madrid: Casa de Velásquez, 2012), 257–80 at 274–76.

<sup>62</sup> Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, ed. José Manuel Blecua, 2 vols. (Madrid: Gredos, 1983), 2:124.

<sup>63</sup> Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, 2:125.

<sup>64</sup> *Primera Crónica General*, 1:731. On Juan Manuel's adaptation of Alfonso X's text, see Diego Catalán, "Don Juan Manuel ante el modelo alfonsí: El testimonio de la *Crónica abreviada*," in *Juan Manuel Studies*, ed. Ian MacPherson (London: Tamesis, 1977), 17–52.

Christians, in the end aiding in the conquest of Cordoba and thus winning back the Christian king's favor. The downfall of Ibn Hūd, a rebel against the Almohads, at the hands of Suárez Gallinato, a former rebel against Fernando III, is a cautionary tale about the risks of insubordination and rogue political action.

The question of what merits the king's pardon for betrayal or misbehavior is also at the heart of *exemplo* 28, which mirrors *exemplo* 15 in many ways. Like the former, it also involves Suárez Gallinato and it similarly tells an anecdote about his insubordination and eventual winning of royal pardon—in this case pardon both by a Muslim king and by Fernando himself. But the crime it presents is more severe and the final pardon more dramatic, hinging on a eucharistic miracle. The story begins after Suárez Gallinato has returned to the service of the Christian king:

Don Lorenzo Suárez used to live with the King of Granada, and when he returned to favour with King Fernando, the king asked him one day whether, in view of the many ways he had offended God by his service with the Moors, he thought that God would ever have mercy on his soul; and he replied that he had never done anything which would lead him to think that God would have mercy on his soul, except that once he had killed a celebrant priest. This was thought by the king to be very strange, and he asked him to explain.<sup>65</sup>

It is then revealed that Suárez Gallinato was formerly serving “the king of Granada,” that is, Ibn Hūd in Cordoba (not his rival, the true king of Granada Muḥammad I ibn Naṣr).<sup>66</sup> Juan Manuel seems to base his narrative loosely on the backstory in the *Estoria*, depicting Suárez Gallinato as having betrayed the Christians through service to a Muslim ruler. But he moves the sphere of the knight's action from Cordoba to Granada (the only Iberian land still under Muslim rule in Juan Manuel's day) and makes

<sup>65</sup> Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, 2:247; Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor. A Collection of Medieval Spanish Stories*, ed. and trans. John England (Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd., 1987), 191.

<sup>66</sup> María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, “Tres notas sobre Don Juan Manuel,” in *Estudios de literatura española y comparada* (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1969), 107, notes that Juan Manuel alters the circumstances of the knight to make his loyalty seem greater, and compares the miracle of the host to related Cistercian stories. See the comment by Colin Smith, *Christians and Moors in Spain, Volume II, 1195–1614* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1988), 45. Heusch, “Yo te castigaré,” 5 (para. 11) suggests that the story of the apostate priest in Granada abusing the host derives from oral tradition.



Ibn Hūd into the “king of Granada,” whom Suárez Gallinato serves directly as personal bodyguard. In this capacity, the latter is forced to choose between political allegiance to the “body” of the king and spiritual allegiance to the “body” of Christ that he recognizes in the Eucharist. The story continues with Suárez Gallinato’s answer:

He replied that while he was living with the king of Granada, he was greatly trusted by the king and was his bodyguard; and one day, whilst out riding in the city with the king, he heard the sound of men shouting, and because he was the king’s personal guard, he spurred his horse, and reaching the place where the noise was coming from, he found a priest in full vestments. It is the case that this priest was a Christian who had converted to Islam, and one day, to amuse the Moors, he told them that if they wanted, he would give them the God in whom the Christians trusted and believed. The Moors asked him to do so. The treacherous priest then made some vestments and built an altar, and said Mass and consecrated a host; and when it had been consecrated, he gave it to the Moors, and they dragged it around in the mud, making a great mockery of it.<sup>67</sup>

It is with this offense of desecrating the host that Suárez Gallinato feels compelled to take action, assaulting the apostate priest in order to save the Eucharist from further abuse:

When Don Lorenzo Suárez saw this, although he was living with the Moors, he remembered that he was a Christian, and believing that without doubt that was truly the body of God, he believed that since Christ had died to redeem his sins, it would be a blessing for him to die avenging Him and saving Him from the affront which those false people thought they were inflicting on Him; upset and distressed by this, he went up to the treacherous renegade priest who was committing this act of blasphemy, and cut off his head. He then dismounted and knelt on the ground to adore the body of God; and the host, which was at some distance from him, leapt up from the mud and into the lap of Don Lorenzo Suárez.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, 2:247; Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor*, trans. England, 191.

<sup>68</sup> Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, 2:247; Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor*, trans. England, 191.

From a narratological perspective, the structure of this account is complicated.<sup>69</sup> In the outer frame of the story, Count Lucanor asks his friend Patronio for advice about a man who wants to work for him but has formerly acted incorrectly on various occasions. Within the narrative frame of Patronio's response, a second frame opens in which Fernando asks Suárez Gallinato if he believes he will be condemned for his service to the Muslims. That leads to yet a third narrative level in which Suárez Gallinato tells the anecdote that culminates with the killing of the renegade priest. The narrative structure has the effect of emphasizing the oral, anecdotal nature of the encounter and giving the aura of a miraculous legend to the events. The text's character as legend, telling of Suárez Gallinato's deeds in the form of a hagiographic account of a saint's life, is most evident in his final and transformative change of heart. When he "saw" the abuse of the Eucharist, he "remembered that he was a Christian" and he was moved, like a saint, even to welcome martyrdom for his revived faith. The emphasis on "remembering" implies Suárez Gallinato's experience is like a conversion, often constructed in contemporary conversion narratives as a "return" to God from infidelity or infraction. He "returns" to his faith in spite of his sins, "although he was living with the Moors."

The fact that his witnessing of the miracle of Transubstantiation provokes his return to faith only makes sense if we see it as a reversal of his former course, a pulling back from his path of treason and betrayal. He was already banished by the Christian king and was in the intimate service of the Muslim. Fernando suggested that he in fact had gone so far in his sin that his redemption may have been impossible, implying not only that his treason was political, but that he was close to apostasy and even conversion to Islam. His story thus logically unfolds in direct contrast to that of the renegade priest who "was a Christian who had converted to Islam." Tellingly, the priest is described according to his outer garments: Suárez Gallinato "found a priest in full vestments" because the false priest had "made some vestments" along with an altar for Mass. Unlike the bad priest, who focused on the "outer" appearance of holiness, and so failed to believe in the imperceptible reality of Christ's true presence in the host, Suárez Gallinato turns inward from these spectacles, "believing that without a doubt that was truly the body of God," even though it kept the

<sup>69</sup>For a study of this and similar narratological devices, see Mariano Baquero Goyanes, "Perspectivismo en 'El Conde Lucanor,'" in *Don Juan Manuel. VII centenario* (Murcia: Universidad de Murcia, 1982), 27–61, especially 40–41.

outer form of bread. After dispensing with the evil priest, he “knelt on the ground to adore the body of God,” and the host “leapt up from the mud” onto his lap. The leaping of the host is reminiscent of contemporary eucharistic miracles in which the host leaps into the mouth of the believer (or out of the mouth of the sinner, as in the Sigena altarpiece).<sup>70</sup> In this climax, the believer’s inner faith and outer perception are united, suggesting that the miracle is a sort of sacrament, in the classic definition used in Christian debates over the Eucharist as a “visible form of invisible grace.”<sup>71</sup>

While it is clear that Suárez Gallinato’s renewed faith—his spiritual conversion—is described in contradistinction to the bad priest’s apostasy, it is less clear what role the Muslims play in the story. When the miracle of the leaping host occurs, the Muslims do not accept it and become enraged at the Christian knight’s violent act. Forming a mob, they attempt to kill Suárez Gallinato:

When the king heard this noise and saw them trying to kill Don Lorenzo Suárez, he ordered them not to harm him, and asked for an explanation. In a furious rage, the Moors explained everything to him. The king was greatly angered by this, and demanded to know why Don Lorenzo Suárez had acted as he had. Don Lorenzo Suárez replied that as he well knew, they were of different faiths, but despite being aware of this the king entrusted his person to him and had chosen him for this purpose, in the belief that he was loyal and that not even fear of death would prevent him from protecting him; so if the king considered his loyalty such that he would do this for him, who was a Moor, he should appreciate the lengths to which he would go, being loyal and a Christian, to protect the body of God, who is the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; and if he had him killed for this, it would be the best day of his life. When the king heard this, he approved of what Don Lorenzo Suárez had done, and loved and esteemed him, and did much more for him from that day forward.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup>For example, Catherine of Siena’s communion. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 120 note 232; and Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 48–72.

<sup>71</sup>Augustine of Hippo is certainly the origin of the concept, but his use of the exact phrase is not known. Cf. Augustine Hipponensis, *Questionum in heptateuchum libri septem*, ed. I. Fraipont, CCCM 33 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1958), 227–28 (III:84). The classic formulation, “a sacrament is the visible form of invisible grace” (*invisibilis gratiae visibilis forma*) is first articulated as such by Berengar of Tours (in answer to Lanfranc), who attributes it to Augustine in his defense of the concept of the divine substance of the Eucharist.

<sup>72</sup>Juan Manuel, *Obras completas*, 2:247–48; Juan Manuel, *El Conde Lucanor*, trans. England, 191–93.

By comparing the body of the king with the body of Christ, Suárez Gallinato's explanation of his actions makes his faith even clearer. He is a "bodyguard," and thus a fitting defender of the doctrine of the true presence of the body of Christ in the host. Various scholars have noted the possible sources of this miracle tale, pointing to a related anecdote told by French crusading historian Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) and by Dominican preacher Steven (Étienne) of Bourbon (d. ca. 1261).<sup>73</sup> The source tales do not, however, describe the desecration of the host, but instead tell of a Christian knight who, while crossing a bridge, hears someone blaspheme Christ and punches him in response. By adapting this legend to make it hinge explicitly on desecration and protection of the "true presence" in the Eucharist, Juan Manuel links this story with contemporary accounts of host desecration, usually at the hands of Jews, that circulated in the early fourteenth century.

At first, it seems that the Muslim characters are incapable of recognizing the motives of Suárez Gallinato's actions. Given that the initial action of the Muslim mob was to desecrate and mock the Eucharist, their violent reaction, attempting to kill Suárez Gallinato and not responding to the consecration or the miraculous leap of the Eucharist out of the mud, portrays them as blind to the holy presence in the host that Lorenzo is actively defending. Their anger at his action—they are "outraged" and "in a furious rage"—cannot be explained only by their devotion to the apostate priest, but must be understood also as a manifestation of their rejection of the doctrine of real divine presence in the consecrated host. The text adds the curious detail that Suárez Gallinato acted to save the host "from the affront which those false people *thought* they were inflicting on Him." By claiming that the affront was only apparent and in the minds of the Muslims, the text seems to allude to a theological distinction between the form and the substance of the host. The text does not question if the host has been truly consecrated, and so the actions against it are only able to

<sup>73</sup> See Alexandre Haggerty Krappe, "Les sources du *Libro de Exemplos*," *Bulletin hispanique* 39 (1937): 5–54 at 19, #53, and also Daniel Devoto, *Introducción al estudio de Don Juan Manuel, y en particular de El Conde Lucanor* (Madrid: Castalia, 1972), 414–15. Krappe lists Étienne de Bourbon, Jacques de Vitry, and Bernardino da Siena as possible sources. See Étienne de Bourbon, *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon dominicain du XIIIe siècle*, ed. A Lecoy de la Marche (Paris: H. Loones, 1877), 340 (#385). Jacques de Vitry tells a similar story. See Jacques de Vitry, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones vulgares of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Thomas Frederick Crane (London: David Nutt, 1890), 221–22 (#219).

desecrate its outer form (a question that was debated in thirteenth-century eucharistic theology). Yet such actions are not able to truly inflict harm on the mystical body, which is in the substance of the host but not its form, a distinction that the Muslim mob and the bad priest are unable to understand.

However, the idea of desecrating the host did not come from the Muslims, but from the renegade priest, suggesting that the more serious threat is from internal doubt within the Christian community rather than external mockery or desecration. Moreover, not all the Muslims are blind or opposed to the miracle of the Eucharist, as the response of the Muslim king suggests. Although the king is also angry at first, it is because his laws have been broken. Suárez Gallinato's likening of the king's royal body to the body of Christ pleases rather than offends the king. When the king "approved of what Don Lorenzo Suárez had done," he shows an implicit appreciation for the doctrine of the Eucharist by understanding the comparison between loyalty to the "body" of Christ and loyalty to him. The king thus "loved him and esteemed him, and did much more for him from that day forward." Similarly, just as the false priest's lack of faith in the Eucharist led to his death, Suárez Gallinato's actions led to his own success and pardon by the Muslim king. This fate mirrors that of his former pardon by the Christian king in *ejemplo* 15, which also echoes his other former pardon by Fernando III, alluded to in the opening of the story when he "returned to favour with King Fernando." Although the lingering ambiguity created by the former betrayal of Ibn Hūd is never addressed or resolved, Suárez Gallinato's apparent return to favor with both worldly kings is akin to his "remembering" his faith and returning to favor with God.<sup>74</sup>

The pardoning of Suárez Gallinato is thus an affirmation of the power of witnessing. By the end of the tale, the pardon of Suárez Gallinato is triple, coming first from the Muslim king, next from King Fernando, and finally from God, from whom the knight expects mercy for his defense of

<sup>74</sup>The conundrum of Suárez Gallinato's faith introduces a perplexing ambiguity of purpose. The pardon by the Muslim king depends on the comparison of Suárez Gallinato's loyalty to the king's body with his loyalty to defend Christ's body. If Suárez betrayed a former ruler, Ibn Hūd, in order to win the pardon of Fernando III, the justification of his faithfulness to the Eucharist is implicitly undermined as well. From the reader's perspective, it is impossible for Suárez to be pardoned by all his sovereigns (Muslim king, Christian king, God). In the end, he opts for the pardon of the Christian king—making the opening discussion in which the king doubts his future salvation all the more poignant.

the Eucharist. While the priest is condemned for his failure to witness (and not only for his apostasy), Suárez Gallinato is saved by his ability to “see,” and this ability is meant to be—against the doubts of the king himself—his final salvation. The Muslim king, moreover, by recognizing that defense of the Eucharist was akin to defense of his own royal body, resembles the Muslims of the *Cantigas de Santa María* who, when faced with a Marian miracle or holy object, recognize its spiritual power. In this way, this pardon story constitutes an explicit statement of faith in the context of contemporary debates over the theology of the Eucharist. *Exemplo 28* is a direct evocation of the contemporary image of the testifying Muslim that had circulated in Iberia at least since the reign of Alfonso X.

### CONCLUSION

The alternating representations of Muslims as desecrators of Christian objects and as “witnesses” to the spiritual presence in the Eucharist and similar Christian holy objects can be understood as part of a broader phenomenon in western Christian discourse in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The stories of Muslim desecration and destruction in the *Cantigas*, like earlier images from conquest and crusade chronicles, inform the depiction of Muslims as host desecrators in *exemplo 28* of *El Conde Lucanor* and again in the Sigena altarpiece a few decades after. At the same time, the stories about Muslims as witnesses and converts in the *Cantigas*, as well as contemporary discourse in polemical writing by Ramon Martí and other polemical writers, anticipate the depiction of the Muslim king of Granada in *exemplo 28*, and the images of Muslim converts in the Orvieto frescos.

These examples, spanning from the mid-1260s through most of the fourteenth century, also coincide with the declaration and popularization of the Corpus Christi feast as well as the concomitant emergence, beginning in 1290, of accusations against Jews of host desecration. While the former images of Muslims as desecrators respond in part to ongoing military engagements with Muslims in the Iberian reconquest and in the crusades, the latter association of Muslims with the Eucharist and other spiritual matters is more a product of contemporary Christian ideas about Jews that conjured images of Muslims for comparison. Although Muslims would continue to be seen as military enemies through at least the sixteenth century, they also sometimes played this rhetorical role as imagined witnesses to Christian truths, in contrast to the “hermeneutical” role

played by Jews as incorrigible disbelievers. The overlapping but partly contrasting images preserved in the Sigena altarpiece and Orvieto frescos bespeak a broader ambivalence about the relative place of Muslims and Jews in the Christian theological imaginary of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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