

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONSTRUCTING THE INIMICAL JEW IN THE *CANTIGAS DE SANTA MARIA*: THEOPHILUS'S MAGICIAN IN TEXT AND IMAGE

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The emergence of a distinct vocabulary of anti-Jewish imagery in the medieval art of northern Europe has been richly documented and analyzed by art historians, who often present it in the context of a general deterioration in Christian attitudes toward Jews from the twelfth century onward.<sup>1</sup> Less attention, however, has been paid to the question of how and when this phenomenon occurred in the visual culture of medieval Christian Spain. On the surface, medieval Iberian art of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries offers few parallels to the overtly derogatory images of Jews and Judaism that emerged with such force in northern Europe during that same period. Nonetheless, it can be argued that by the later years of that span, such imagery did begin to emerge in Christian Iberia, in tandem with other social transformations.

One focal point for this phenomenon was the reign of Alfonso X, king of Castile from 1252 to 1284. Although Jewish-Christian relations under Alfonso are less well documented in general than those in neighboring Aragon,<sup>2</sup> a largely favorable view of Jews has been attributed to the king on the basis of what is, in fact, a *mélange* of contradictory

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<sup>1</sup> Beyond the pioneering work of Bernhard Blumenkranz's *Le juif médiéval au miroir de l'art chrétien* (Paris, 1966), several more recent studies have addressed visual representations of Jews, almost exclusively in northern Europe. These include Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge, 1989); Ruth Melnikoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, 2 vols. (Berkeley, 1993); Heinz Schreckenberg, *The Jews in Christian Art: An Illustrated History* (London, 1996); Sara Lipton, *Images of Intolerance: The Representation of Jews and Judaism in the Bible Moralisée* (Berkeley, 1999); and Debra Higgs Strickland, *Saracens, Demons, and Jews: Making Monsters in Medieval Art* (Princeton, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the abundant documentation for Aragon, see Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, Vol. I: From the Age of Reconquest to the Fourteenth Century*, trans. Louis Schoffman, 2nd edn. (Philadelphia, 1992), 138–185; on Aragon's Jewish communities, see Yom Tov Assis, *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry: Community and Society in the Crown of Aragon, 1213–1327* (London, 1997).

evidence. Some of the king's recorded actions did measurably benefit Jews, although they probably were motivated not so much by idealism as by the desire to take advantage of Jewish expertise in science, philosophy and the administration of newly conquered Andalusian cities. These actions include the king's donation of mosques to Jewish communities in recently captured Seville,<sup>3</sup> his ongoing employment of Jews as physicians and high-ranking administrators (at times in flagrant disregard of canon law) and his engagement of Jews in many of the spectacular scholarly undertakings for which his reign is famous. Contradicting these deeds, however, are the embedded elements of anti-Judaism found in many of the king's legal and literary projects and, as will be discussed below, the persecution of Jewish communities that marked the king's final years. In most historical accounts, nonetheless, the king's positive actions toward the Jews win out.<sup>4</sup>

A peculiarity of past inquiry on this topic is that it has centered so magnetically around the words and actions of Alfonso himself, the extraordinary scholar-king whose political idealism and literary and scientific ambition have earned the attention and affection of so many modern scholars. To credit the bulk of Castilian social development to such a compelling figure is indeed tempting, and probably not entirely inaccurate. However, in the present essay, which considers the visual imagery that was produced to accompany Alfonso's famous collection of Marian songs, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, I propose to move slightly away from the person of the king, examining this imagery not, as has been done before, in terms of the Alfonso's own ideas about Jews, but as at least partially separate from them—as a reflection of the increasingly

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<sup>3</sup> These may have provided a loophole in laws forbidding construction of new synagogues; see Heather Ecker, "The Conversion of Mosques to Synagogues in Seville: the Case of the Mezquita de la Judería," *Gesta* 36, no. 2 (1997): 190–207.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Baer, *History*, 1:111–130; Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton, NJ, 1954), 474–491; David Romano, "Los judíos y Alfonso X," *Revista de Occidente* 43 (1984): 203–217; José María Monsalvo Antón, *Teoría y evolución de un conflicto social. El antisemitismo en la Corona de Castilla en la Baja Edad Media* (Madrid, 1985), esp. 207–211; Dwayne Carpenter, *Alfonso X and the Jews: An Edition and Commentary on the Siete Partidas* 7.24 (Berkeley, 1986); Joseph F. O'Callaghan, *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X of Castile* (Philadelphia, 1993), 96–113; Julio Valdeón Baroque, *Judíos y conversos en la Castilla medieval* (Valladolid, 2000), 27–46; and idem, *Alfonso el Sabio: La forja de la España moderna* (Madrid, 2003), 198–207. Specific information about Jews employed at court also is found throughout Antonio Ballesteros-Beretta's classic biography, *Alfonso X el Sabio* (Madrid, 1963).