

**El Choque de las Creencias:
Christian Interactions with Muslims and Jews in Medieval Iberia
Through the Lens of Las Cantigas de Santa Maria**

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Introduction

In the year 710 A.D., the Muslim armies which had conquered the southern coast of the Mediterranean sent a scouting party across the westernmost strait to test the waters of the Iberian peninsula¹. The initial force encountered a fertile land under the rule of a collapsing Visigothic kingdom, and after returning with riches, the Islamic armies decided to mount a full invasion. Tariq ibn Zaid led a force of 9,000 men, and was soon joined by his superior, Musa ibn Nusair, with an additional 18,000 warriors¹. Within four years, and with the assistance of native Jewish and Christian populations, Muslim armies had conquered most of the land which they would call Al-Andalus¹. Their dominance would last for four hundred years; their presence would last an additional three and a half centuries, and their influence forever.

From the point of their conquest, the nature of Islamic rule in what we now know as Spain was remarkably tolerant and cooperative. While there almost certainly was some resistance to Muslim rule by the native Jews and Christians, they also supported the initial defeat of their Visigothic rulers, and the Muslims in turn gave the other religious communities some measure of autonomy and even administrative control¹. This semi-cooperative relationship had its ups and downs through the next centuries, and came to military clashes later on as the Christian Reconquista ensued following the turn of the millennium.

This Reconquista would eventually end with the expulsion of all Jews and Muslims from a decidedly intolerant Spanish state in 1492, thus bringing a definitive end to a singularly diverse society for its time. However, while it lasted, and despite periodic struggles, the interaction between Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions brought rich cultural and economic

development to the Iberian peninsula which could not have been possible without the intersection of these very different peoples.² Scholars have called this period a forge that formed the pillars of the Spanish identity, and while others argue that the roots for modern Spain were set later, the debate only ignites further interest in the period. The nature of interactions in “la convivencia”- “the coexistence” is subject to a great deal of study, and will be investigated further by this paper, but none can dispute that the mix of societies in medieval Spain was truly remarkable. This paper does not intend to diminish nor conflate the importance of la convivencia, but rather, through an analysis of contemporary literature, intends to better understand the place of Jews and Muslims in the society of Christian Iberia. The particular literary lens for this study will be a 13th century Spanish collection of cantigas, or hymns, known as *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Selections from these hymns reveal many insights into the Iberian Christian perspective on the minority religions in their lands, most notably that some level of tolerance existed despite the persistence of negative stereotypes, because Christians and their kings especially recognized the potential value of cooperation. Though pragmatism did not completely negate the effects of religious resentment, especially where the church was involved, the value that Christian kings felt they could draw from their non-Christian subjects helped dictate the extent of the protection they gave and influenced the interactions of the common Christians with Muslims and Jews.

Though the individual cantigas tend to focus on the lives of the common people and not as much their rulers, the additional emphasis of this study on the role of Iberian kings is due to the part King Alfonso X of Castile and Leon played in the assembly of *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Alfonso X, also known as Alfonso el Sabio, or the Learned, assumed his throne in 1252

and his court soon became known for cultural and scientific advancements made possible by cooperation between the three religions.³ The king's traveling court was renowned for compilations of literature like *Las Cantigas* and had a hand in developing the language that would become the common dialect of modern Spanish.³ The literature collected and created by Alfonso's administration was able to reflect and influence a vast geography because of Alfonso's control over Andalusia and the tribute owed him by the last Muslim states in Spain at the time—Granada and Murcia.³ Other significant works of Alfonso's court include the creation of *Las Siete Partidas*, laws which would guide the treatment of Jews and Muslims in Iberia over the next couple centuries, and contributions made to the School of Translators of Toledo, which predated Alfonso but became a way for Christian rulers to learn from the Arabic communities they governed.⁴

Focusing on the cantigas, it is important to realize that though they depicted daily life for the masses, they, like many of Alfonso's other contributions, were compiled by the Church and members of the court, all high profile figures in Christian society. Because of this influence and the potential for different perspectives exhibited by Christian elites versus the rest of society, it is important to also analyze the documents themselves for insight into the writers' opinions and how they might conflict with the actual socio-cultural conditions. The purpose of this analysis is to determine what insights can be gleaned from *Las Cantigas* into the nature of the cultural interactions between the three sets of religious peoples in medieval Spain at the time of their writing. But when the cantigas conflict with modern consensus on what is historically accurate, the stories at least betray the perspectives of the writers regarding *la convivencia* and some popular opinions of interactions between the different religious groups.

Literature Review: The current debate

Though there is evidence of collaboration and the sharing of technologies and knowledge such as the Alfonsine Tables of astronomical calculation, the evidence of conflict between religious groups in medieval Spain is just as ubiquitous. Alfonso X and Jaume I of Aragon were famous for protecting certain rights of Moors and Jews under their rule, even against the wishes of the church.⁵ Yet they also considered themselves to be in a holy war against Islam and Alfonso at one point arrested all of the Jews in his kingdom to extort them for ransom.⁶ Thus the nature of relations between religious groups remains subject to debate. There were many cultural contributions from the cooperation of ethnic and religious groups, and there were also many wars. Focusing on the positive point, historians such as Jonathan Decker have labeled the *convivencia* a Golden Age of Spain.³ Others such as Yitzhak Baer, looking at limitations on the rights of Jews and Muslims, are far more doubtful.⁷ Both sides should give credence to evidence presented by their opposition, because neither history nor human interaction is ever truly black and white, and such broad generalizations about centuries of social interactions should be considered in shades of grey. This paper's analysis does not seek to decide such a monumental debate, but simply to add to the broad base of knowledge which has been unearthed by scholarly discussion.

The many historians who have contributed to this debate include Larry J. Simon, Jonathan Ray, Robert I. Burns, and countless others. As time passes, historians have begun to move more towards the middle ground between arguing for tolerance or intolerance,

acknowledging the lack of a clear defining line.⁸ For example, until the 1970's the general consensus had been established that the Majorcan crusade of the 1200's had led to the enslavement of nearly all Muslims who did not flee or were killed during the Christian conquest.⁹ However, in 1970 the historian Elena Lourie upset that consensus by pointing to examples of free Muslim tenant farmers and traders in the region, who even enjoyed some level of comfort in society.⁹ She argued that the slaves had thus been freed by the later 1200's and the slave trade of Moors was not actually central to the interactions between Christians and Muslims.⁹ Many historians following or allying with the stance of Ricard Soto pushed back, using documentation of recurring slave exchanges to reiterate that the slave trade of Muslims was really a thriving, major, and integral part of the society, creating a focal point for and defining the interactions between religions.⁹ The debate has even spilled over to question whether interactions were consistent throughout Spain. Newer arguments contradict previous tradition by expressing differences between the acculturation of Mudejar Islamic societies in different geopolitical areas but in the same timeframe.⁸

David Nirenberg is one historian who really emphasizes the middle ground interpretation of interaction between religions, focusing in particular on the different forms of violence between religious groups.¹⁰ Like Salvador Martinez and other historians focusing on areas like Aragon, he discusses the practical reasons for Christian kings to promote positive interactions between religions, including the economic benefits each minority provided. Approaching the subject from the rationalistic economic viewpoint also highlights the differences in roles played by Muslims and Jews, which factors into how well they became integrated into the larger

society.¹⁰ Muslims had a more significant presence in terms of population and were important as craftsmen but also especially for agricultural labor, even making up a majority of the population in some rural areas.¹⁰ Because of this and the desire to avoid revolts, kings like Alfonso and James I gave the Muslim communities a great deal of autonomy and allowed them to govern themselves, which reduced the possibility of legal or social integration but also allowed them to form many economic relationships with Christians, as they were at the base of the economy and were too numerous to be ignored in any sense.¹¹ Jews, on the other hand, were a minority concentrated in urban areas and under the direct authority of the king. This set them even further apart because the king closely monitored any conflicts between his Jewish and Christian subjects and sought to prevent them with legal barriers.¹⁰

There is no single understanding or truly dominant argument to define religious relations in medieval Spain, despite many decades of study. Descriptions of the period vary from the golden age of tolerance to a society of Jewish decline and Muslim enslavement, and no single view is entirely right or wrong, as all have evidence both to support and contradict them. Several historians have made a more balanced interpretation to acknowledge both sides and the fact that the religious groups were made up of individuals who each acted differently towards their neighboring societies. This is the approach that this study supports, but is certainly not the only possible course. The complexity of the debate means that no one argument can overwhelm the others, and there is still plenty of space for further input. This paper will attempt to help fill that gap and shed more light the state of social interactions through an analysis of *Las Cantigas de Santa María*.

Background on the Era and Contributions of the Court of Alfonso X:

Alfonso X figures prominently in the discussion of religious interactions and attitudes in medieval Spain, and is not only important in his contributions to and descriptions of peaceful cooperation, but he also has been depicted as a source of divisive attitudes and harsh treatment of other religions. In the *Siete Partidas*, Alfonso asserts that Christians should avoid violence or compulsion towards other religions and rely only on kind words to convert Muslims or Jews, but he does still emphasize that conversion is necessary and in the same paragraph calls Muslims foolish and Jews obstinate for continuing to practice their faiths.⁵ He was a revolutionary compared to many of the Christian rulers of Northern Europe, accepting Jewish and Muslim culture even when it pitted him against the pope, but there was still the instance in which he jailed all of the Jews on a whim and he was more than willing to wage war on Islam as a whole.⁶ In this way, Alfonso may symbolize the nature of *la convivencia* as a whole: remarkable for its time and tolerant in legal practice without being tolerant in ideology.

What have brought Alfonso's cooperative side to light for many historians are the many intellectual achievements of his court in collaboration with Jewish and Muslim academics. *Las Cantigas* themselves, though a very Christian work, come out of a vast collection of cultural and scientific literature which was often influenced by or appropriated from Arabic and Jewish sources. Alfonso built upon a tradition which began in the 12th century when Arabic Christians and Jews fled to Toledo to escape increasing persecution in Islamic Iberia and started translating their shared knowledge into Latin to communicate with Christian European society.⁴ This effort

eventually grew into what would be known as the School of Translators of Toledo, a center for sharing knowledge from many different traditions. Jewish, Muslim, and Christian intellectuals worked side by side at the court of Alfonso X, producing great works like the Alfonsine tables.³ This sharing of philosophical, medical, and numerous other forms of information was monumental because of its eventual contribution to the summative knowledge base of Christian Europe. It helped bring together fonts of knowledge from individual religious communities and make them accessible to a wider audience. By combining otherwise isolated bits and pieces of information, intellectuals in each religious tradition were able to fill in the gaps in their own knowledge and realize more cohesive scientific advances. While later scientists might “stand on the shoulders of giants,” the intellectuals in Spain were privileged in that they were simply able to stand on a more united foundation. Alfonso considered the pursuit of knowledge to be his highest calling, and having grown up with each of his parents calling on Muslims and Jewish academics for advice, he recognized the importance of continuing to nurture cooperation.⁶

Religious life in medieval Spain was a sharp contrast to the cooperation in intellectual pursuits, as evidenced by the strict guidelines Alfonso set forth in *las Siete Partidas*.¹² The *Partidas* reiterate many of the restrictions that were placed on the rights of Jews by the Fourth Lateran Council, such as preventing Jews from holding public office and setting harsh penalties for any Jews who insulted Christians or proselytized.¹³ Jews were not even allowed to leave their homes on the weekend of Good Friday or else the state would not hold Christians responsible for acts of violence against them.¹² There were punishments for Jews holding Christian slaves or having intercourse with Christian women, and the death penalty for any Christian who converted

to Judaism, laws which were also applied to Muslims. Despite social and commercial interactions, religious guidelines were intended to separate the different cultures unequivocally.⁹

On the other hand, because the *Siete Partidas* were a legal code and not simply religious doctrine like the decrees of the Lateran Council, they did guarantee some protections for Jews. Though repressive, laws like the one forbidding Jews from leaving their homes on Easter weekend were in a sense intended to protect the Jews from the larger Christian populace, who the state really couldn't control on holy days, try as they might against the church-led riots. According to the *Partidas*, Jews could not be coerced into conversion and they were to be protected from Christian harassment or even court summons on their Sabbath day.¹² Jews could also have synagogues- Muslims only enjoyed the right to mosques in rural areas- and their rights to practice without harassment in these spaces were legally assured. Alfonso also left some loopholes on the restrictions of Jewish professions, but more for pragmatic reasons, as he personally relied on Jewish physicians and financiers. As the *Partidas* had a significant influence in the laws of Christian Spain over the next couple hundred years, the minor protections for religious minorities encouraged at least some level of tolerance.

The cooperation of his court and acceptance of the scholarly works produced by Jews and Muslims demonstrate that Alfonso did respect Jews and Muslims as individuals and for what contributions they could bring to society, but his rule was still firmly rooted in Christian doctrine and he was convinced of the error and danger in Jewish and Muslim ideologies. Alfonso allowed Moors and Jews to govern themselves so long as they did not risk infringing on Christian sensibilities, yet he also restricted their place in society and treated them like a part of his personal treasury, to be protected or persecuted at his whim.⁶ Despite some assertions that la

convivencia was a golden age for tolerance, Alfonso shows that it may have simply been gilded, with significant progress but far from perfect. The stories of *Las Cantigas* will further demonstrate that theme.

Las Cantigas: Background

Las Cantigas de Santa María, the subject of this analysis, were a collection of stories summarized as hymns and put to music all under the direction of Alfonso X. Though the authorship of the cantigas is uncertain, many scholars including Keller, Bell, and Parkinson and Jackson have concluded that multiple authors were involved in the drafting of the pieces, and Alfonso X himself seems to personally have had a hand in dictating or writing parts of the collection. Bell and Parkinson and Jackson, in particular, support the evidence of multiple authors in their analysis of the texts, based on the language use in the texts and origins of the tales. Bell emphasizes details in the language and wording of the cantigas to support her conclusion, as certain words and phrases in the text seem closer to Portuguese or French instead of the Catalan language of the time.¹⁴ This is especially clear where several linguistic variations of the same word are used within the cantigas. According to Bell, Alfonso also freely admitted to be merely a translator of some tales who had local accounts of miracles copied down for him.¹⁴

Parkinson and Jackson focus especially on the process of creating the cantigas and enumerate the many possible occupations required to form and compile the pieces. A few of these positions include translators, collectors who went out to solicit oral traditions, summarizers of the stories, and compilers.¹⁵ Parkinson and Jackson believe that the last of these often drew

from existing collections- including French tales from the writings of Hugo Farsitus- and then split the borrowed tales into different sections of the collection, both potentially to hide the lack of originality and to fit with their own categorization.¹⁵ These three authors make a compelling argument for the influence of multiple authors on the work, and that argument has become a general consensus.

Based on the research by Parkinson and Jackson, the formation of the *Cantigas* collection occurred in stages, with the first 100 text-based cantigas expanded to 200, then 400.¹⁵ Meanwhile each cantiga set went through three main stages as well. First, as mentioned, designated collectors went out to gather stories of miracles, both in written and oral accounts, including narratives from those as high and noble as Alfonso X himself down to the common people. Translators took stories from other collections and foreign traditions as well, so long as they fit the premise of the collection. As they continued to collect stories, others began to summarize them, shortening them so that they could be made into compelling hymns and poetry. The second major step in the process was then the musical composition.¹⁵ This was the lengthy stage of actually setting the tales to a pleasing form that could fit with music. Finally, the compilation stage took place as scholars of the time reorganized the cantigas to follow a certain categorization and then fit the themes to music and art as well, eventually creating the full-bodied collection. These final works were so vast that determining a single definitive edition has been a fruitless effort, yet they had a major impact in Alfonso's time and in subsequent generations, causing Alfonso's grandson to try to imitate them during his reign in Portugal two generations down the line.¹⁶ As a result, there are four existing editions, though only three are

complete, each including a different number of the cantigas. The largest, used in this analysis, includes over four hundred hymns.

Since their creation *Las Cantigas* have also been incredibly important to historians and scholars of many different disciplines, for their anecdotal insight into the society of the time and Alfonso's motivations and perspectives.¹⁷ Andrachuk explains the interesting legal dilemma that the cantigas pose in Alfonso's time, because he oversaw their creation even as he was writing incredibly detailed laws and codes for his kingdom which would be drawn on by future generations as well.¹⁷ The legal issue the cantigas pose stems from Alfonso's own insistence on details as he incorporated liturgical and canonical regulations in his civil codes. According to Andrachuk, Alfonso believed that religious rules for worship of God came before civil laws, though both were important. Alfonso considered them linked, but worship codes came first because if one followed those, then civil obedience would also naturally follow. However, in *Las Cantigas*, many liturgical laws are broken, and done so either with the blessing or forgiveness of the Virgin Mary. There is a common theme among the cantigas of salvation despite disobedience because of overwhelming devotion to the Virgin, who shows mercy on her favored.

Andrachuk interprets this by stating that the reason Alfonso allowed contradictions is because he and the other cantigas writers were simply not so concerned about theology in the narratives and focused more on praise and reverence for the Virgin, as they sought her mercy themselves.¹⁷ Moving beyond Andrachuk's argument, this appreciation for mercy and understanding may have reflected societal beliefs (and those of Alfonso in practice) as well. In the cantigas, the Virgin saves "good" Muslims, even in a couple instances without conversion as a consequence. Alfonso clearly believed in coexistence and acceptance in society as well, even if

he would have preferred the conversion in support of his own religion. He may have accepted in the cantigas that liturgical laws are not always perfectly practical, and wished to show how mercy from the Virgin could balance with the justice that he found necessary to enforce. And his praise of the Virgin was also an expression then of his appreciation of tolerance even if he and the contemporary Christian society believed that Muslims were in the wrong.

Aside from a view into Alfonso's mind, Bell and many others look to the image drawn by the influence of the common Christian populace in the cantigas. Supported by Parkinson and Jackson's study of the method of collection, Bell claims that many of the stories in the cantigas gave voice to the views of the common people, and that Alfonso and the other final sponsors of the work wished more to follow public sentiment than to attempt to change it.¹⁴ This claim might ring true in some instances, as Alfonso's court did not author most of the stories themselves. Though the "public perception" might not be localized to the commoners of Iberia, this could explain why the cantigas vary so widely in their depictions of Christians, Muslims, and Jews, not supporting a single agenda on behalf Alfonso or the Christian church. The wish to follow the public perceptions could be another reason for contradiction with the liturgical code in the cantigas, as various characters break minor or major religious rules and are still accepted and even depicted as protagonists. The representation of public perceptions through the cantigas is perhaps their strongest benefit, while the tales may not have been factual, they reveal truths by relaying messages that Christian society could be expected to believe or wished to support.

The aspirational sense and function of the cantigas is the last point to address here, but it is not a minor aspect. Robert Burns analyzes many of the most common themes of the cantigas, from threats of captivity for Muslims and Christians, the perils from the sea (both natural and in

piracy), and Christian-Muslim friendship and antagonism, to zeal for conversion.¹⁸ Though the themes range widely (as can be expected between 400 stories), many are significant in this study, and the focus on Christian Muslim friendship, antagonism, and especially conversion provides a clear aspirational element according to Burns. Alfonso X dreamed of the cooperative pursuit of knowledge and was assisted in his pursuit by a Muslim named Muhammed b. Ahmad b. Abi Bakr, whom he considered a “good” Moor and an ally as they worked in creating a school where Christians and Jews could enroll alongside Muslims.¹⁸ For the less educationally elite, the dream of cooperation amounted to commerce or less intellectual social interactions, but on the Christian side the dream of conversion was an underlying motivation. The cantigas tell many tales of conversion of Jews and Muslims due to visions or miracles which show them the perceived error of their ways, and during this period in Spain, many Christians who strove for a peaceful coexistence imagined that such a dream would come to life.¹⁸ Burns describes this mindset as an “aggressive optimism” which failed to realize how far most Muslims were in fact from conversion and eventually faded as the 14th and 15th centuries carried on. This mindset was replaced by a more punitive approach to religious differences as the reconquista wrapped up and the inquisition was set in place, but the cantigas show how optimism was still strong at the time and could have provided a powerful argument for cooperation even to those who were more religiously strict and set in their ways.

For all of these reasons *Las Cantigas* form a rich repository and source from which medieval religious (and many other) perspectives can be analyzed, giving insight into the thoughts of Alfonso X and the society he governed. The variety of geographical sources for the cantigas means that their analysis must be taken with a grain of salt in terms of their application

to Iberia, but the influence the Alfonso and the Spanish church had in selecting and compiling the final texts would indicate that even the cantigas of foreign origin can provide some revelations into Iberian viewpoints.

Las Cantigas: Specific Selections, Summaries and Rationale, and Textual Analysis

Of the four hundred-plus *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, only twenty-two include direct references to exchanges between people of different faiths, narrowing down the selection that is of interest in this analysis. From those twenty-two, this paper will focus on ten which have been chosen for their particular depth of discussion on those interactions as well as the variety of perspectives they provide. They are numbered by their index classification in the Oxford *Cantigas of Santa Maria* database, the largest of three complete collections of the original works. For reference, the cantigas referenced here are included in an appendix to this paper along with their numbering by the Oxford system and brief summaries. The ten in this study are grouped based on whether they discuss Muslim or Jewish interactions with Christians. The cantigas regarding Muslims will be discussed here and the Jewish grouping in the following section.

The first cantiga analyzed in this paper is Cantiga 345, which presents a narrative of Alfonso X and gives some contemporary insight into the circumstances and attitude of the ruler under whom the collection was gathered. The following four cantigas were chosen and paired for their comparative depictions of attitudes directed at Christians or Muslims in similar situations. The first pair tells stories of a Muslim captive encouraged to convert to Christianity (Cantiga 191), and a Christian captive encouraged to convert to Islam (Cantiga 325), respectively. The

second pairing includes Cantiga 95, a tale of Moorish pirates from Africa taking a Christian captive on the coast of Portugal, compared with Cantiga 371, which describes Christian pirates attacking a Moorish merchant ship promised safe passage by a Christian king of Seville. Slightly more detailed synopses of the cantigas follow, though the full texts can be found in the Oxford repository cited at the end of this paper or at several other sites.

Cantigas Regarding Muslim-Christian Relations

Cantiga 345 Describes a story of Alfonso X himself, and a battle his knights face as recently conquered Muslims residents of his kingdom rise up to reclaim the castle of Jerez. His knights lose the castle initially, and Alfonso, though far off, has a vision relating this to him, but the castle is retaken days later.

The first cantiga of interest in this analysis is that which is most closely tied to Alfonso X, the sponsor, supreme curator and partial author of the cantigas. It is significant not because it relates the state of general interactions between Christians and Muslims, but because it shows Alfonso X's personal relationship with the Spanish moors, with whom he had many interactions as a conquerer and ruler. With this cantiga witnessing an instance in his relationship with the Moors, Alfonso's perspective in helping to shape the writing and compilation of the larger collection may be better understood.

Cantiga 345 in its full text begins by describing the setting of the miracle and its timing in the reign of Alfonso X. It states that Alfonso had fought off Moors and evil

Christians “For the Virgin’s sake,” and recently conquered the city of Jerez. He populated it with Christians but allowed at least some of the Moorish previous inhabitants to stay in the city. The Moors won Alfonso’s trust and then slowly built their strength before betraying him by attacking the city’s castle while Alfonso was away. Given the timing of the event during Alfonso’s reign, the nature of Alfonso’s holdings, and specification of the city, this part of the cantiga at least is an extremely plausible narration and likely was based on a real event. If so, this could either be a conscious justification or simply an explanation of why Alfonso and other Christian rulers had a tendency to manipulate or distrust treaties they made with the Iberian Moors.⁵ That the cantiga introduces Alfonso’s actions as on behalf of the Virgin (it also states that he composed songs in her honor) pushes the point that both Bell and Andrachuk make that the cantigas were an instrument for Alfonso to praise the Virgin and either win her favor or tell his people that he was in her favor already.

The description of Alfonso’s combat with “evil Christians” in addition to the Moors could be intended as justification of war with other Christian kingdoms, but regardless, it indicates the acceptance of morality that does not strictly align with religion. It is worth noting that Alfonso did in fact ally with Muslim forces against Christian rivals, seeking to be the undisputed Christian king of Iberia.¹⁹ Besides a justification of intra-religious conflict, this concept could be used to explain tolerance for other religions, as there could potentially also be “good Muslims” (as Burns classifies Alfonso’s ally Muhammed b. Ahmad b. Abi Bakr). Other cantigas (such cantiga 95, analyzed later in this paper) seem to imply instances of shared morality, which bridges

the societal gap between religions in a sense. However, the cantiga later seems to contradict this morality with the attack by the Moors and further with their deviousness in first gaining and then betraying the king's trust. The turn follows the Christian public's uncertainty and shakiness regarding reception of other religions, and also counters the previous justifications by giving Alfonso a reason to distrust and legally restrict his Muslim subjects. Hence the limited cultural cooperation, because he could not afford to wage a complete religious war with such a strong Muslim presence. He stood to gain from cooperation with the Muslims in some situations- such as for the sake of scientific advancement or as military allies- but the Christian base of his kingdom was not completely at ease in accepting other religions.

In response to the Muslim attack, cantiga 345 says that the Christian Don in charge of the castle sets up a defense, but it is a poor one, which the cantiga admonishes the Don for. The scolding of the irresponsible Don does not contribute any hints on the inter-religious relations, but it sets the stage for the key miracle of the cantiga. As the castle falls and the Moors destroy a chapel and move to burn a statue of the Virgin, the Virgin sends Alfonso a dream in which he must save the Virgin and Child from flames. The destruction of the chapel by the Moors and the burning of Christian statues is a common theme in the cantigas, a reference to religious conflict which accentuates the fact that convivencia was not a perfect paradise. The vision is a more unique feature of this cantiga, in that it appears to Alfonso, and it again establishes the idea that he had contact with and was to some extent favored by the Virgin. Interestingly, the cantiga ends immediately after by saying that God allowed the Christians to reconquer the castle and

Alfonso restored the statue to the chapel in great triumph. It does not explain how the respectively destroyed and burned chapel and artifact are restored.

Cantiga 345 sets a good base for building further analyses of the cantigas because it hints at Alfonso's motives in creating the cantigas and also shows the discrepancy between the coexistence idealized by Alfonso and the real conflict that persisted. It thus explains Alfonso's personal struggle and perspective as he tries to realize his goal of peaceful coexistence within his kingdom. If Bell is correct in her analysis of the collection as a whole, Alfonso is also reflecting general public opinion and belief in this cantiga, rather than trying to change it, and so it expresses the Christian distrust of their Muslims peers despite acceptance of a morality that can be independent of religion.

Cantiga 191 A Christian respects his Muslim captive and tries to convert him to Christianity, though the captive refuses. The Christian makes the man go lie in a cave and fight with the devil, which he does successfully for two days. Finally, the Virgin appears to save him. When she comes, she insults Mohammed and tells the Muslim of the faults of his religion, and asks him to convert. The Muslim does.

Cantiga 191 presents a tale of inter-religious captivity, which, as discussed earlier in this paper, was not an uncommon narrative for the time. The key aspects which may be analyzed in this cantiga include the nature of that captivity and its depiction of the relation between captor and captive, the implied descriptions of the characters, and the process of religious conversion. The first notable detail of this story is that it mentions the respect the Christian man has for his Muslim captive. He considers his captive to be a good man but simply misguided, and it is respect that prompts him to ask the Muslim to

convert to his own religion. From this we see evidence of positive relations between the two men, and the fact that this example is found in a cantiga shows social acknowledgement of respect between individuals of different religions. However, the two do still hold very different ranks within Christian society. While the church frowned upon Christians enslaving other Christians, the conflicts between the Christian and Islamic regions of Spain meant that many captives from battle became subject to owners of the opposite religious tradition. The fact that respect exists despite this difference in social status is significant and also speaks to the characteristics of both individuals described.

Though the cantiga does not spend much time on outright descriptions of the characters, the apparent mercy shown by the Christian man and the fact that he is willing to appreciate and honor his captive and even consider him worthy of an effort of conversion tells the audience that the Christian is a humble and virtuous man. The fact that he shares the same faith as the audience to the cantiga creates a positive base impression, but the cantiga builds that further with his actions. It is not a foul or poor Christian who seeks to understand and convert his Muslim captive, but an upstanding man, and so this behavior is clearly looked upon favorably. This provides evidence of the optimistic Christian mindset of the time which preferred conversion of other religious individuals over fighting them or expelling them from the county, as the later inquisition would do. The reason for this can be seen in the cantiga's depiction of the Muslim man. He is shown as an individual who the Christian respects and who clearly strives for good and not evil, given his struggle against the devil. In addition, the fact that he fought with

the devil for two full days without conceding speaks to his strength of spirit and faith, so the cantiga certainly applauds his virtuous persona, regardless of his religion.

The Virgin Mary's role in this cantiga reinforces that positive depiction of the man simply for the fact that she considers him worthy of her help, though she insults his choice of religion. This causes the Muslim to finally convert, because of the mercy shown him and the incontrovertible evidence (in the eyes of the audience) that his religion is inferior. This story of conversion is evidence of the optimistic viewpoint of the Christians, and it also shows a relatively kind approach to encouraging conversion. While the Christian does send the Muslim to a cave, resulting in a struggle against the devil, the cantiga tells of the action as a means to show the Muslim the error of his ways, and the Virgin ultimately saves him. Compared to giving the outright choice between conversion and death, this seems a generous approach. In the following cantiga, the roles are flipped, and the contrasts between tales show the negative perception of the attempts of Muslims to convert Christian captives.

Cantiga 325 A Christian woman from Seville is captured and imprisoned with another Christian under the jurisdiction of a dying Muslim woman, who mistreats them and gives them little to eat. The Muslim woman bribes, threatens and cajoles the Christians to convert, and though one agrees out of fear, the other refuses. "Consumed with rage," the Moorsess throws both into jail. Mary comes to the faithful Christian in a dream and transports her to freedom.

Cantiga 325 presents a foil to the prior tale, and can again be examined in light of the nature of the captivity, depictions of the characters, and story of attempted

conversion. The introduction to the story almost immediately contrasts with the other cantiga, explaining that instead of respecting the Christian captives, the Muslim owner mistreats them. There is no respect or positive relationship mentioned between the Christian captives and their captor, and when the Muslim woman requests that the Christian women convert, it is on her deathbed and is not said to be out of any sort of respect. Instead of simply asking for the conversion or attempting to show the Christians the error of their ways, she tries to bribe (or tempt) them with offers of wealth, then offers a threat of beheading as their only other option. When one of the Christians agrees to convert, it is out of fear, not appreciation for the Islamic religion. In such stark contrast to the tone of Cantiga 191, this captivity is abusive and negative, associating both the Muslim woman and the possibility of conversion with evil temptation, murder, and fear. Obviously the Christian audience did not approve of or respect the idea of conversion when it went back the other way.

The Muslim is depicted as malicious and vengeful as well, for when even one Christian refuses to convert, the Muslim is “consumed by rage,” and throws them both into jail. This is a distinct contrast to the upstanding Christian captor of the previous cantiga, or even with the Muslim captive of that tale, and the descriptions are likely so because this is a tale of the sort of conversion that the cantiga wishes to emphasize as terrible in every way. The Christians here are again shown in a more positive light, but the one who refuses conversion is the one the story focuses on, and the one whom Mary saves. There is little description of the women, aside from the differentiation between their responses to the Muslim’s request, and that highlights the cantiga’s focus. The one

who converts is faithful and must be better, as she is saved by the Virgin, while the one who submits is fearful and weak. Alongside the other cantiga, this expresses that those who stay Christian or convert to Christianity are strong and virtuous, while those who convert to Islam are weak in spirit and guided by their fear. This tale, instead of seeming to value the individual despite their religion, voices another perspective of medieval Iberian society, that the religious affiliation of a person showed evidence of their personal virtue.

However, the fact that the cantiga even mentions a Christian who is willing to convert to Islam is notable, acknowledging that such conversions occurred, though the Christian society obviously wishes they would not, and the cantiga tries to imply that the methods of such conversions were devious. Taken together, these tales of captivity as a focal point for conversion efforts provide at least cases for the argument that such methods may have been common. Again, the attempts to convert individuals from rival religions show some appreciation for the people of other religions, if their conversion would be valuable enough to merit the extra effort beyond simply enslaving or disposing of them as enemies.

Cantiga 95 Describes how a humble German Christian count living in Portugal is captured by Moorish pirates from Africa. The Moors attack Spain but find that their ship cannot leave the coast for three nights, though they sail away each night. They realize that their prisoner is the cause of this, because the Virgin Mary is protecting him, and so they free him and offer him their spoils, which he refuses, but for a single vial. Once the count is returned home, the Moors are able to leave, and afterwards the Moors would always revere the count.

Though this story is one of the more fantastic and less relatable tales in *Las Cantigas*, it still holds value in the study of the views it depicts in the context of medieval Christian society. Two figures are specifically glorified by this cantiga, the latter being of course the Virgin Mary, whom the collection was created to praise. The first and manifested character, however, is the humble Christian count. Straying a little from this paper's focus on relations between the religious communities, the depiction of the count shows the value of humility in Spanish Christian society. The cantiga describes him in saying that he went to live as a hermit on the shores, fasted religiously, abstained from wine, and gave away what fish he could catch. This from a man who, given his title, presumably came from the higher echelons of German society. Though the value of humility within the church was established, these traits are significant because they show that it was not simply any Christian man that the Moorish pirates captured and came to revere. He is described as a near epitome of manifest Christian values, and he even exhibits some specific traits emblematic of both Christian and Muslim religious values such as his self-denial in fasting and abstaining from wine. This is important in explaining the idealized respect given him by the Moors and the potential aligning of morality between cultures.

Many of the cantigas proclaim the superiority of the Christian religion (as might be expected given their nature) through the conversion of Muslims and Jews when miracles somehow reveal the shortcomings of their own religions. Cantiga 191 depicts one of these scenarios, but it is merely one of many in that regard. Cantiga 95 does not go so far as to describe conversion, but does clearly state that the Moorish pirates revered the count after their encounter.

A large part of this, the audience may presume- and was likely intended to by the religious message of the cantiga- is due to his holy nature. If not, why would the cantiga dwell so much on his humble Christian lifestyle as an introduction to the story? The cantigas were hymns and written with various goals, but they included the glorification of those who followed the Christian path, to encourage listeners to imitate the virtuous.

The result of the count's virtue is such that the Virgin Mary miraculously protects him, but his saintly character also gives him a sort of moral superiority over the Muslim pirates who capture him. It is not simply any intermittently faithful Christian who the Virgin Mary saves or that the Moors hold in regard, but an irreproachable and humble man. The cantiga tells of the Moors attacking elsewhere along the coast both before and after their encounter with the count, but only he is protected. That the Moors are not punished by the Virgin for their attacks and that they also respect the righteous seems to imply some common ground. The cantiga specifically states that they *revere* the count, not that they necessarily fear the man himself after realizing his role in the miracle. Reverence would relate more to his own persona than to the event caused by the Virgin, and so there is a connection made between values of the Muslim and Christian community. Both recognize a righteous man, and the respect indicates acknowledgement of shared values in the society for which the cantiga was written.

As it is a Cantiga de Santa Maria, the power and role of the Virgin Mary in the tale cannot be ignored. She provides protection for the righteous, and creates the miraculous element in this cantiga that defines it as a more fantastic than historically reliable account. As seen in the cases of conversions, she is shown to have power over those of other religions, which is significant in the claim of superiority of the Christian religion, but also in that she does not seem

to harm the Muslim pirates. She simply protects her own, and though she is considered a peaceful figure throughout Christian religious tradition, it is still significant that the society responsible for producing and circulating this cantiga does not promote violence against the rival Muslim religion, at least not in the person of their holy mother, who was near a deity in the eyes of the Christian church. The combination of mutual respect for the count and potential aligning values and the peaceful response by the Virgin makes a strong argument for some level of identification or need for tolerance between the two religions. While other cantigas are admittedly more violent and depict less tolerant scenarios, this cantiga shows how some part of society acknowledged either similarities between the two religious groups or at least a need to coexist peacefully.

A second insight given by this cantiga lies with the other set of characters, the Moorish pirates. While not providing as much depth into the attitude of the inter-religious interactions, the cantiga does raise or confirm some points about the nature of those interactions. The only additional clues to the social attitudes between religious groups are betrayed by the descriptions of the Muslim pirates. The first description tells the audience that many of the Moors were frightened by the miracle that kept them from leaving shore, which explains little except in furthering the point that the Christians considered the Virgin Mary to be clearly superior and to hold power over the Moors, who were not saved even when calling to Mohammed. The second description is of the admiral of the Moors, who is said to be a clever man, a concession of some level of esteem. This furthers the case for a mutual respect between persons of different religions, though cleverness does not necessarily mean the writer or audience would approve of the moral character of the Muslim pirate.

The cantiga does reveal some nature of the interactions between cultures in describing the attackers as Moorish pirates who came from the coast of Africa. This confirms continued interaction between the cultures across the sea and also raises the point of whether or not the Moors of Africa would have attacked those of Spain or allied with them. The cantiga's use of the word for "admiral" also seems to indicate that the pirates may have had a military background or role, which would not have been so uncommon considering that Alfonso himself enlisted Muslim privateers to harass some of his Christian rivals and merchants traveling to their kingdoms.¹⁹ The cantiga does not directly discuss the impact this privateering might have had on society's view of piracy, but it calls the subject into question, especially given the ambiguous view of pirates in society which will be discussed briefly in the next analysis.

Cantiga 379 Describes a town in Seville where all merchants were welcomed and declared to be under the protection of the Christian king. Catalanian pirates attacked a Muslim ship headed for the town and captured it and killed most of the merchants. The pirates were sent aground in Seville by a fierce storm (attributed to the Virgin Mary in the cantiga) and forced to return the stolen goods to the Christian king of Seville before joining his service. The cantiga ends praising the Virgin for protecting her colonists and even extending mercy to the Moors.

This story provides the reader with several pieces of minor information but is equally revealing in what it leaves out. The specific instance of the story names the port referred to and its simplicity in talking of a ship being blown aground, in addition to the natural events recounted as a miracle, make it believable and one of the stories more likely to have been based on an actual occurrence. The village described is that of Santa Maria del Porto in Seville, which

was a location which likely would have had plenty of contact with Muslim merchants and also the pirates of the Mediterranean. Further, while it was relatively far from the kingdom of Castile and León, the background to the story of widely branching protection from the king in Seville would make practical sense due to reliance on foreign trade.

Regardless of whether the story was based on an actual event, it does cite the protection of all merchants in the city and also at the end says that the Virgin protects all her colonists and even is merciful to the Moors. Both of these statements point to some sense of tolerance for the Muslim merchants, while also emphasizing that the protection *even* extended to Muslims. This reveals the contrasts of the Christian society in tolerating and doing business with the Muslim peoples, while also considering them on the edge of their acceptable interactions. The Christian kingdoms in fact needed to accept the other religious peoples, because they were required to be open in order to attract, as the poem describes “Merchants from many places, including Genoa and even Chartres.” The cantiga specifically describes these economic interactions as possible *As a result* of the king’s protection, which guaranteed safe trade for all. This condition and protection for merchants has been documented as a policy for both Alfonso X and Jaume I of Aragon, so it was not unique, though the rulers did tend to be less concerned when it was Muslims that were attacked or if the attacks occurred outside of their own kingdoms.⁵

Clearly, the fact that they needed the Muslims for the commerce they brought did not mean that the people of the Christian kingdoms accepted them as equals, and the cantiga’s emphasis on how generous the protection of the Virgin was clearly implies that. Perhaps they could do business together, and maybe they would even work together to promote peaceful trade, but that does not mean they had to like each other. That the Moors required the Virgin’s mercy

simply reinforces the fact that they were inherently sinners and unworthy of protection, and while all Christians were considered sinners or needed the Virgin's support (which the particular cantiga reiterates in the refrain), the "even" is what stands out.

In addition, if this did in fact refer to an actual event or even a common or believable occurrence at the time, what is left out by the cantiga is how the Virgin was actually supposedly merciful to the Muslims. The cargo and ship were not actually recovered by the Moorish merchants in the poem, but by the king, who may or may not have ordinarily kept such spoils once they had been recovered from criminals. In addition, the pirates are not really punished, which provides interesting insight into the interactions with and treatment of pirates in the Christian kingdoms of Spain. It is not certain that there would have been harsher consequences for the murder of Christian merchants in a region that relied on foreign trade, but it is suspicious that there is no talk of execution or even strict disciplinary measures taken. The cantiga refers to the pirates entering the king's service, and this could be a reference to the sort of privateering activities previously mentioned. Even if it were not for the offensive and more pirate-like purpose of harassing rivals, kings like Jaume I commonly hired Christian privateers as a sort of auxiliary navy, to protect themselves or allies against foreign aggressions or invasions.²⁰

Regardless of how the pirates were employed, there is even more doubt cast on the service as being a real punishment for the pirates by the statement in the cantiga that they "remained there in his service because they did not dare to return home at that time." This could be because the king threatened them to stay, or because there were reasons they would not be accepted at home, perhaps the same that caused them to become pirates. However, it does sound like they had enough freedom to choose.

This cantiga, like the rest, is a hymn of praise to the Virgin Mary, who did not in fact protect the Muslim merchants. That the pirates were forced to give the stolen goods to the king is counted as ample vengeance by the Virgin for their actions in the poem. This almost certainly means that the audience of the cantiga would have accepted the accounts as balanced as well. The pirates atoned for their sins to some extent by voluntarily joining the king's service, but it still seems like a light justice after committing such a violent crime against Muslim merchants. It is surprising that a king in a region so reliant on foreign trade and who claimed to protect all commerce in its borders could afford to treat pirates so gently. It is difficult to directly correlate the level of retaliation against the culprits with the faith of the merchants, but given the additional indications that Muslims were on the edge of the protection by the king (or the Virgin), the cantiga does seem to indicate a judiciary bias as well. It certainly indicates a lesser level of social regard for the Muslims in that the actions of the pirates against the merchants could be balanced in the eyes of the Virgin and king (who, in this context, represent Christian social approval) by such minor recrimination.

Regarding Jewish-Christian relations

Like the Muslims living in the Christian kingdoms of Iberia, the Jews who lived or did business in the Christian regions of peninsula were a minority group, tolerated for the most part because of the commercial value they provided, though on the fringes of the larger Christian society. Based on the restrictions stated in *Las Siete Partidas*, Jews would be one of the lower social classes, lacking many of the rights of Christians and forced to stay out of positions of

power and presumably, the public eye.¹² However, according to analysis done by Eleazar Gutwirth looking at medieval correspondence between Jews in Iberia, Jews were not so isolated or disadvantaged as their legal status would indicate.²¹ Gutwirth suggests that their status as merchants and freedom to facilitate commerce as moneylenders allowed hispanic Jews to act as a true and culturally involved middle class, influencing and reflecting the tastes and traditions of the larger society. Similarities between business norms and artistic styles indicate that at least until the 1300s, Jews still retained some influence as commercial leaders and intellectuals, carrying over from their early success in the courts of Muslim Iberian lands. Despite the codes preventing Jews from holding public office, they even held positions as courtiers to Christian monarchs on the peninsula, representing their communities.²²

Yet the forced conversions and attacks against Jews that would take place in the late fourteenth and fifteenth century Iberia were not at all unprecedented. The laws of the *Siete Partidas* to protect Jews existed because they were needed on occasion to preserve social order, and events such as the public disputation of 1263, in which an approved debate between Christian and Jewish theologians turned vicious, led to periodic attacks and accusations launched at the Jewish community.²² Though Jews were commercially, culturally, and intellectually a part of Iberian society, religious differences and the legal restrictions also shaped the Jewish identity. Though culturally very similar, many Jews self-identified as being outside of Christian society, in part because individuals within the Christian society (particularly the church) would intermittently attack their identity as Jews, and in part to conform to their religious community. As with elsewhere in Christian Europe, Jews often resided in separate quarters or neighborhoods of Iberian cities (as Cantiga 12 will mention) and were not physically integrated into Christian

culture. Jews were neighbors, academic peers, and business partners with the Christians of thirteenth-century Iberia, but the scholarly cooperation shown by the works of Alfonso's court could not perfectly endure the stress of being legally second-class citizens and under siege by the influential Christian church.

Despite the similarity of Jews and Muslims as religious minorities accepted at least partly because their commercial value to royal interest, the cantigas depict differences in how each group was treated. The exact reasons for this are only a subject of speculation, but there were several notable differences between the Jewish and Muslim situations that could have factored in. For one thing, the Muslim population on the peninsula was significant even after the Reconquista, with the emirate of Grenada as a powerful force to counter the advancing Christian kingdoms. Despite the obviously negative sentiments that accompany open conflict, Christian rulers did respect their Muslim opponents for bravery and cunning on the battlefield.⁵ Meanwhile, Jewish population on the peninsula numbered only around 100,000 at the time the cantigas were written, and though they performed a valuable service as financiers, Jews were often treated like property of the king, and may not have commanded as much respect from Christian elites.²³ Or maybe the stereotype of the Jews as greedy moneylenders throughout the continent led to greater resentment than that for Muslim traders, who could only be found in arguably more tolerant areas (such as Iberia), where foreign commerce was common. Antisemitism also had a longer history as a part of the Christian church simply because of the age of the religion compared to Islam, combined with arguably more direct theological conflict and the accusations of Deicide against the Jews. Because of the influence of the church in the collection of the cantigas, this could certainly have played a role. Each of these possible causes

will be discussed further throughout the following analysis, but regardless of the reason, these cantigas express a slightly different and more consistently negative tone towards Jews than was expressed towards Muslims. Before delving into the stories it is also worth noting that the greater emphasis on violence between Christians and Jews as compared with Muslims also stems from the fact that the Jews were closer to the crown and thus Alfonso may have been more fixated on the instances of violence or conflict that they were involved in.¹⁰ It is almost certain that given the larger Muslim population and their greater level of interaction with the Christian society, acts of violence between or within those communities were far more common, so conflicts regarding Jews are overrepresented in the Cantigas.¹⁰

To compare with the five cantigas selected for their portrayal of Christian-Muslim interactions and perspectives, this analysis will focus on five cantigas depicting Jews in Christian society. The four themes shown by these hymns include the functional role or importance of Jews in Iberian society, the negative stereotypes of Jews that persisted, the nature of Christian retributions against Jews for real or perceived slights, and finally the efforts and tales of converting Jews to Christianity. Cantiga 25, which tells about a loan granted to a Christian by a Jewish man, explains the importance of Jews in Christian society and also touches on the themes of negative stereotypes and conversion. Cantigas 12 and 286 express more negative stereotypes of Jews as disrespectful and sacrilegious, leading into a description of the retributions by Christians. Cantiga 85 then shows the contrast between these retributions and the punishment or implied lack thereof for Christians who act against Jews, echoing Cantiga 379's message regarding Moors. Finally, Cantigas 89 focuses more on the matter of conversion as a Jewish woman is saved by the Virgin after praying to her for help.

Cantigas relating to Jewish-Christian Interactions:

Cantiga 25 tells of a Christian merchant who spent his money doing good until he had nothing left. He then asked for a loan for his business affairs, but no one else would grant him one, so he asks a Jew. The Jew agrees so long as the Christian offers some sort of security. As security, the Christian swears (in front of witnesses) on statues of the Virgin and Child that he will repay the loan, and prays to the Virgin that she may repay the Jew if he cannot.

The Christian does well for himself but forgets about repaying the loan until the day before it is due, at which time he is far from where the Jew resides. So he fills a chest with the money he owes and throws it into the ocean, praying for it to reach the Jew. The chest floats into the port in Byzantium where the Jew was, and after chiding his servant for trying and failing to successfully seize the chest, the Jew picks it up and sees the money inside. Instead of accepting the payment, he takes it home and hides it, telling not even his friends. When the Christian finally arrives, the Jew demands repayment and threatens to blackmail him, despite the Christian's insistence that he had paid. The Jew agrees to follow the Christian to a church, where a statue of Mary speaks to say that the Jew had received the money. The Jew then converts.

This cantiga highlights several of the key points in the function and depiction of Jews in Christian societies. It begins by describing one reason Jews were important for their role in financial matters, even giving some details regarding the nature of that interaction. Because of religious restrictions on usury or lending with interest to other Christians, Christians often relied on the Jewish community to provide them with loans. Without interest, there would be little incentive for the lender to grant a loan, even with some sort of security for repayment, so financing for business ventures would have been much harder to secure. Especially in areas such as the Mediterranean coast, where trade and shipping missions could bring in significant profits but faced the perpetual risk of storms or piracy, this incentive for investments was absolutely

necessary. This role of Jewish moneylenders was so important that many Christian kings over the next several centuries would lend their personal protection to Jewish communities so that they could finance their armies and other governmental activities.⁵

In this cantiga, the transaction between the Christian merchant and Jew seems to follow a common formula. The Christian cannot find others willing to grant him a loan, but the Jew is willing to do so. The Christian was broke and apparently not appealing as a debtor, so though the cantiga does not explicitly mention any sort of interest, it is likely that the Jew required an additional incentive. He still required additional security, probably all the more important because the Christian would be pursuing these ventures far away. The presence of witnesses at the oath the Christian makes is an interesting note because it solidifies the loan as closer to a legal contract than simply a personal pledge. The publicity of their agreement is further affirmed by the fact that the Jew feels the need to hide the money from his friends before denying that he received repayment -if it were a private agreement, why would his friends have reason to be suspicious about him receiving a chest?- and by the Jew's threat to blackmail the Christian. All of this points to the idea that there was an established order and precedent to such a contract, and that it was a public and social function performed by the Jewish community.

Beyond detailing a practice that gave Christian society in Iberia a reason to value their Jewish neighbors, the cantiga expresses a number of stereotypes and a perspective painting the nameless Jew in a negative light compared to the good Christian merchant. While the Christian is a philanthropist, apparently successful in business matters, and faithful both to his religion and word as a businessman, the Jew is shown to be badly-tempered, dishonest, and greedy. This is a single event and depiction of two individuals, but also a story with themes and a moral,

expressing and perpetuating the stereotypes of Christians vs. Jews. The philanthropic nature of the Christian merchant is of course idealization of one of their own by the Christians who composed and recited this cantiga, but most significant as a foil to the Jewish character. The sins of the Jew would perhaps be less reprehensible against an equally sinful victim, but the Christian is portrayed as a paragon of virtue, so they seem much worse. The oft-needed function of Jews as moneylenders in Christian society doubtless engendered resentment among some Christian debtors, especially when contractual terms included interest on the loans, and we can see in this cantiga that that relationship led to stereotypes of greedy Jews. In this instance, however the negative characteristics attributed to the Jew do not stop at greedy, but push further to describe how the Jew treats his servant poorly and is so deceitful so as to hoard and hide the money he has received from even his friends. He threatens to falsely blackmail the Christian and all around is shown as a negative character.

Still, despite this overwhelmingly negative representation of Jewish moneylenders, there was apparently not enough distrust or enmity to prevent the Christian from doing business with him. The cantiga even makes it clear that asking a Jew was the Christian's last resort, but he was still desperate enough to take the money. Again, this shows just how crucial the role of Jewish moneylenders was. Christian doctrine against usury often discouraged lending between Christian merchants, leaving a massively important hole in the commercial process. In Iberia and elsewhere, Jews filled that gap. Either ironically or maybe suitably, at the end of this cantiga, the Jew converts to Christianity when faced with a statue of the Virgin revealing his sins, a conversion that would have prevented him from continuing in this moneylending role in the future. He would no longer be able to (fiscally efficiently) grant loans to other philanthropic but

down on their luck Christians, nor would he be able to try to cheat anyone in a similar manner. The conversion itself is not described in detail, but is a recurring theme in cantigas mentioning Jews, and can be analyzed in several other cases.

Cantiga 12 briefly recites another tale of culpable behavior by Jews, taking place in Toledo on the day of the Feast of the Virgin's Assumption. While the archbishop is reciting mass, he hears a woman's voice saying that the Jews killed Christ and are still antagonistic towards him. After the mass, he tells the congregation what he has heard and they head to the Jewish quarter. There, they find some Jews hitting and spitting on a wax image of Christ, intending to hang it on a cross. The Jews are killed.

This rather concise cantiga still manages to convey a strong message regarding certain views of the Christian society towards the Jews and how the Christians might act upon them. Though the story may be fabricated, its events recall several warnings made in *Las Siete Partidas* to justify the requirement that Jews do not leave their homes during the weekend of Good Friday. The Partidas state that disrespect of any Christian religious artifacts or traditions shall be punishable by death, and state that Jews are rumored to be predisposed to such behavior especially on holy days for Christians.¹² Though not Good Friday, the date mentioned in the cantiga is auspicious as being devoted to the Virgin, a particularly important religious figure to the Christians. It is reasonable to assume then that on a day of devotion and religious passion, Christians would be more extreme in their reactions to a religious offense, and the actions of the Jews in the story would seem to be even more of a mockery. The Partidas say that Christians will not be held responsible for their reactions to Jews being out in public on Easter weekend, and by

introducing the tale as set on another major religious holiday, the cantiga prepares its audience for the fallout.

Once the stage has been set, the cantiga begins to describe the events of the day, in which the archbishop invokes the memory of deicide and incites the masses to search for fault with their Jewish neighbors. The role of the Christian church, through the person of the archbishop, is important because it gives a source for the hatred towards the Jews. Though the Christian and Jewish societies did not perfectly mix (as the existence of Jewish quarters of the city hints), they generally coexisted fairly peaceably, if only because the Christians needed the Jews for commercial reasons and tolerated them because of the king's law. But with the direct involvement of the church in this story, that changes suddenly, and the congregation immediately goes out to persecute Jews based on a vague accusation. Any single cantiga cannot be generalized into a factual representation of the state of the entire Iberian society, but this does seem to indicate, believably, that the church had some role in instigating conflict between religious factions in Spain. Not only does the church incite mob violence against the Jews in this tale, but the way the mob then takes charge of punishing the Jews implies that church authority could either set or supersede some of the secular laws of the land. And it certainly is plausible that the Christian church had enough influence to encourage royal laws against profaning Christian relics and imagery, especially considering G.P. Andrachuk's discussion of Alfonso X's support for religious over civil law.¹² But either way, the congregation is implied to have disregarded any legal process and simply killed the Jews in anger, without fear of repercussion, which speaks of an even greater power. The church thus provides the ends and allows the means

for this religious conflict, so clearly the cooperation that did exist during the *convivencia* was despite, rather than encouraged by, any religious authority.

Aside from the role of the church and actions of the Christians, *Cantiga 12* returns to the theme of portraying the Jewish community in a negative light. It brings up the long-held grudge against Jews for committing deicide in the crucifixion of Christ, and not only mentions the actual event but also describes how Jews allegedly intended to reenact it. The reenactment does not seem to quite take place, but still the Jews are first accused of and then shown as mocking symbols of Christianity. While *Cantiga 25* decried a number of moral failures and sinful attributes of Jews, this tale now begins to make it more personal, creating or at least putting to words a suspicion that the Jews secretly disparage Christians and their religion behind their backs. If this *cantiga* was in fact a voice of the common Christian populace and not simply an instrument of the church like the speech of the archbishop character, then it reveals tensions between the different religious populations that went beyond negative stereotypes and were in fact rather personal. The *cantiga* indicates that this tension could be enough to make Christians seek out questionable behavior by Jews at their own residences and find excuses to attack them, a picture that starkly contrasts with the idea of a cooperative *convivencia*. The implications of the story are supported by several very real instances during the reign of James I when Easter week riots in Girona forced the king to take up arms to protect the Jews in his kingdom.¹⁰ That he did interfere at all, however, speaks to the more positive side of the special relationship between the Christian crown and its Jewish subjects.

Cantiga 286 tells the story of a Christian who would say his prayers to the Virgin for protection while lying prostrate outside of a church. One day, as he prayed, a large dog came to disturb him, so the Christian picks up a stone to throw at the dog. He notices two Jews mocking him and laughing at what the dog had done, so he prays to the Virgin to avenge him. As he throws his stone at the dog, a portico collapses and crushes the Jews. Everyone who saw this then praised the Virgin.

Cantiga 286 repeats the theme of retribution against Jews for mocking Christians, though this time the punishment comes from a divine source and for a far less significant crime. Unlike in *Cantiga 12*, the only misdeed the Jews commit in this story is laughing at a Christian's misfortune. It is a personal insult instead of a religious offense, which has a different set of social consequences. The individual mockery lacks the universal offensiveness to Christians, but is more directed and thus may instill more anger and passion in resentment. The stereotypes of Jews as greedy and morally inferior leads to despising them or considering them a lesser people, but the suspicion of Jews mocking Christians behind their backs or being dishonest in business transactions indicates a greater tension and distrust between the two peoples. Repetition of stories like this one would only add to that suspicion.

The other differentiating aspect of the retribution here is that it comes from the Virgin as a source of divine vengeance. Though she was depicted as showing mercy to Christians and some Muslims in the *cantigas* discussed earlier, and she does show mercy to Jews in some of the following selections, there is no mercy for the laughing Jews. The church, court, or Christian society authoring this *cantiga* wanted to imagine some retribution for personal offense against a Christian, so the depicted Jews were not given any chance to repent or find mercy, even from the merciful and protecting holy figure. If even the Virgin reacts to mockery by Jews in such a

manner, it justifies society responding in a like manner as in Cantiga 12. The extreme nature of the response for such a minor transgression only affirms how passions could rise when the insult is seen as personal.

Like many of the collection, the thematic purpose behind Cantiga 286 is to reassure Christians of the importance of their faith and give them confidence that the Virgin would protect them against wrongdoing and avenge their enemies. The main character's piousness is emphasized by his habitual prayers and manner of praying, giving the audience something to aspire to as they receive this protection. In this cantiga the fact that the punishment of the Jews comes from a divine source instead of from Christians themselves also would serve to assure the public that though they would not be allowed to personally commit violence against Jews, they can rest assured that there would be justice.¹⁰ Alfonso was strict about protecting the Jews from physical violence by Christians, though judicial forms of violence, as discussed by David Nirenberg, remained an outlet.¹⁰ The choice to include this hymn in the collection may explain another means for appeasing the agenda of the Christian church, by giving the moral high ground as an alternative to committing physical violence. At the same time, the cantiga could stand as a warning to Jews or others in the Christian kingdoms by celebrating their deaths if they are to so much as laugh at their Christian neighbors.

Cantiga 85 is set in England and tells the conversion story of a Jewish man who was rescued by the Virgin. The man has been captured and tortured by Christian thieves, who are holding him hostage to extort money from him. When the Jew falls asleep, the Virgin appears to him in a dream, healing and freeing him. When he wakes, he sees that the dream is true and the Virgin is standing before him. She

identifies herself as the one whom the Jews despise, then takes him from the house to a high mountain. In the valley below he sees many evils and devils torturing the souls of Jews, which terrifies him. The Virgin then takes him to another mountain, where Christ is seated with a host of saints and singing angels. The Virgin tells him that if he believes in Christ, eats suckling pig, and stops cutting goats' throats, he may join the saints.

After the Virgin leaves, the Jew makes his way to a monastery and is given food and tells his tale. He is then baptized and the miracle is proclaimed far and wide.

Cantiga 85 brings *Las Cantigas* away from their typical Mediterranean geography and over to England. The setting and explicit mention of the faiths of the characters show that Iberians at the time were aware of similar religious tensions elsewhere in western Europe, but the story also remains relevant to Iberian culture because the cantigas were gathered and propagated throughout the peninsula. Location aside, this cantiga is notable for positioning certain Christians as a guilty party, while it is a Jewish victim who receives help from the Virgin. The Christian church and society of course acknowledged that not all Christians were good, but contrasting Christian criminals with a Jewish victim shows the Jew in an unusually positive light. He not only suffers injustice at the hands of evil Christians, but receives the mercy of the Virgin, indicating that the transgressions against the Jew would be disapproved of by Christian society.

However, the protection for Jews only extends so far in this tale. Like the pirates who went unpunished for attacking Moors in Cantiga 379, and unlike the Jews who are killed for relatively minor offenses in Cantigas 12 and 286, no ill fate is said to befall the Christian thieves. In most other cantigas where justice is issued, it becomes a key point in the story, so no mention of punishment implies that the thieves faced no retribution, or at least that it was not important. In fact, the only discussion of punishment in this cantiga is when the Jew is terrified by the sight

of devils torturing the souls of Jews as punishment for their faith. The ultimate destiny of Christians, on the other hand, is to be seated with a host of saints in the company of angels. This comparison invites listeners to conclude that the transgression committed by the Jew in his initial choice of faith is worse than even theft and the torture of non-Christians, so long as you are a Christian yourself. This sentiment indicates a vast chasm between how the Christians viewed their moral superiority and Jewish moral inferiority. The actions of the thieves were not condoned, but they were a minor offense in the eyes of the church compared to living life as a Jew.

In addition to the implication that Jews were morally inferior even to Christian thieves, the cantigas shows a rejection of Jewish culture by Christian society when the Virgin requires the Jew to give up his Jewish religious and cultural practices in order to be saved. The abstinence from eating pork and practice of cutting goats' throats to have kosher meat are both practices that should have been largely inoffensive to Christian society, aside from the religious implications. That the Jew was not allowed to continue with these traditions if he wished to be saved indicated that either Christian society was uncomfortable coexisting with the religious associations of these acts, they would not believe Jews had converted unless they made an effort to betray the tenets of their previous faith, or both. Either reason indicates a desire to end Jewish cultural practices where they lived, and if the latter reason was relevant, it shows that at least some individuals in Christian Iberia still held suspicions and mistrust for professed converted Jews during the *convivencia*. Alfonso's writing in the *Siete Partidas* would indicate that to be the case, as the document not only protects new Christians from insults and accusations that were apparently

common, but immediately afterwards mentions the risks of new Christians reverting and describes how they should be punished if they do.⁵

Despite these indications of tension, this *cantiga* does show some evidence of positive interactions between Christians and Jews in society. The most apparent demonstration of goodwill is in the mercy the Virgin shows to the Jew even before he agrees to convert. She heals him and frees him from his bonds, and her actions as a Christian holy figure in the story signal that they are the actions that a good Christian -according to the perspective of this society- would take. The Virgin's intercession also means that Jews were seen as redeemable, which is not really a message of acceptance for the religion, but does support some level of tolerance for the individuals. In this story, the Virgin's merciful actions even extend to the actions of the church, when the Jew is given food by the monastery before telling his story or asking for baptism. If the Christian church did regularly or even occasionally offer sustenance to the impoverished of other religions, this does show a level of greater acceptance in Christian society.

Cantiga 89 tells a short tale about a Jewish woman who is struggling in labor. She could not deliver the baby and no medicine was working, leaving her crying in pain. The woman then sees a great light and hears a voice telling her to call on the Virgin Mary. The Jew prays to the Virgin and then her health recovers and a baby son is born. At the sound of her prayers, the woman's Jewish attendants rebuke the woman and flee from the house. After thirty days, the woman goes to a church with her daughter and newborn son to all be baptized.

Like the previous *cantiga*, *Cantiga 89* portrays a much more merciful side of the Virgin's influence in Jewish lives. It is a happier story without any direct threat or intimidation that the other conversion stories include. In this tale the only worry is a natural and common occurrence

for the time, though of course pregnancy complications are still very serious. But there is no mention of human aggressors or wrongdoing on the part of the Jew that led her to face this struggle. Instead of telling Jews that they will suffer for eternity if they do not convert or be killed for crimes against Christians, this cantiga celebrates a blessing upon a Jewish woman as she is rescued by the Virgin when she prays. It shows a different tactic the church might have used to try and encourage Jews to convert, using a carrot instead of a stick.

This cantiga may also indicate the existence of much lighter and more positive relationships between Christians and Jews. Similar to the tale in Cantiga 181 where the Virgin helped Muslim friends of Christians, this hymn is saying that the Christian holy powers will help people of different faiths if they pray for it. Also similar to 181 and 85, the mercy shown comes before any mention of conversion, so the aid given is not shown as conditional upon conversion. Though this tale does not cite any relationship between Christians themselves and the Jews, saying that the Christian's holy figure will come to the aid of Jews as well is a symbol of acceptance by Christian society. This seems a stark contrast to the tales of Jews being killed for a crime as slight as laughing at a Christian, and should not be taken as overwhelming tolerance by any means, but shows a step closer towards tolerance. Of course, the cantiga's primary purpose may be just to celebrate the merciful nature of the Virgin, but the fact that such a beloved religious figure took action to help a Jew means that such an act would be approved of by Christian society.

Moving to the slightly less tolerant functions of this cantiga, it is worth mentioning that the Jewish woman chooses to convert to Christianity after the miracle occurs. Though the miracle comes before the conversion, and unlike Cantiga 85, there is no threat or intimidation of the Jew

to encourage them to convert, it is notable that each Cantiga with Jews involved ends in either conversion or death for the Jews. Even when conversion is not forced, the cantigas make it apparent that Christians society was not entirely comfortable living alongside Jews who remained faithful to their own religion. Unlike Alfonso's viewpoint expressed in *Siete Partidas* that conversion should not be forced upon anyone, either the general Christian society or at least the parts of church that influenced the cantigas were against letting Jews in particular continue to practice without converting.¹² The Jews may have been needed for the functions they performed, but at a societal level, Christians did not know how to accept their faith practices.

The cantiga seems to indicate that the reverse was true as well, with the Jewish attendants reprimanding the woman and then fleeing after she decided to call out to the Virgin. The mention of fleeing at the sound of a holy name is mildly reminiscent of biblical accounts of demons, and this may have been an intentional allusion by the author of the cantiga, but the only certain conclusion is that the characters of the Jews were uncomfortable around Christian practices. Though Jews as a minority and non-evangelical religion had little choice but to accept that their neighbors may follow different faiths, this point is worth consideration. Given, the fact that Christianity had done away with many of the cultural taboos that Judaism still abstained from, such as those mentioned in Cantiga 85, the Jews might have been uncomfortable living alongside such practices. It is possible that the Jews also had some influence in the separation of Jewish from Christian quarters of the city for reasons other than protection. Despite the focus on Christian tolerance or lack thereof that this analysis necessarily represents because of the source of the cantigas, it must be remembered that the interactions were not entirely one-sided.

Conclusion

Though this study presents evidence from only a limited number of cantigas, this selection collectively supports several important conclusions. Examination of Cantiga 345 sets the stage for analysis of the cantigas as a whole, providing insight into Alfonso X's perspective in building the collection. In addition, it explains some of the mixed attitudes Christian rulers had towards the other religious communities living under their rules. While the rival religious communities were too large to entirely dismiss or efficiently quell, and they did hold value for the society as a whole, the rulers did not necessarily trust those communities and did feel reason to restrict some of their freedoms. Thus it was a struggle back and forth to determine how to best pursue a peaceful coexistence.

Cantiga 345 also begins to bring forth the idea of morality or value of individuals independent of their religion, and though it only briefly alludes to the possibility of evil Christians, cantigas such as 191 and 95 show glimpses of instances where Christians and Muslims can share positive values and respect each other. Cantiga 379 presents some tenuous notions of how Muslims allied with Christians can even be worthy of protection by the merciful Christian Virgin Mary, though it focuses more on glorification of the mother of Christ than how the Muslims might have actually benefitted from her help. It does detail another instance of religious coexistence through discussion of commerce and piracy, with all the ambiguous protections given Muslims by Christian rulers. Throughout the cantigas there is still an emphasis on the superiority of the Christian audience for whom the hymns were written, and despite instances in which the cantigas reflect respect for Muslim individuals or their value and importance in Christian kingdoms, the Islamic religion itself is looked down upon. This is

evident in Cantiga 325 especially with its portrayal of conversion to the Muslim religion, but really all of the cantigas examined show describe some negative associations with the religion, even if it is just that those who follow it are considered misguided.

Looking to the cantigas describing Jews in Christian society, Cantiga 25 introduces the important role Jews played in commercial matters as lending agents as well as the common negative stereotype that stemmed from resentment of that role. Though Jews were a valuable part of Christian society even for purely practical reasons, the Jew is characterized as deceptive and greedy a foil for the philanthropic Christian character. Cantigas 12 and 286 build upon the negative stereotypes of Jews by showing how they might mock and disrespect Christian religious practices. Unlike in Cantiga 25 where the Jew repents and converts, however, the Jews in these cantigas receive the punishment that they might have actually been sentenced to in Iberia: death. Cantiga 85 brings a complete turnaround by positioning Christian thieves as the evildoers and an innocent Jew as the victim of a kidnapping, thus showing that the negative generalizations of Jews were not considered universal. However, being a Christian hymn, after the Jew is rescued by the mercy of the Virgin, the cantiga emphasizes that even an otherwise blameless Jew would be sentenced to an eternity of hell and thus that conversion to Christianity is the only right choice. Cantiga 89 repeats the theme of conversion after a mother is saved by the Virgin in childbirth, though in this instance there is no coercion required, something Alfonso X might have appreciated.

Both sets of cantigas make it clear that Christianity is the proper and superior religion in the eyes of the authors, which can only be expected of church literature sponsored by a Christian king. The hymns also depict several negative stereotypes of both Jewish and Muslim characters,

showing clear opposition to their cultures, but again this would not be unexpected at the time. Where they can provide real insight is in knowing that despite these stereotypes and the rejection of their religion, Jews and Muslims were in fact tolerated in the Christian Iberian kingdoms, and the brief glimpses of value shown in the non-Christian characters helps show why. For the Jews it seems to be that the primary reason for acceptance was pragmatism. Even if taken as a last resort, they could provide an important service for the commercial success of the kingdom, something that Christian merchants and most of all their kings, valued. For Muslims, the practical societal value was centered around their trading networks, which apparently meant enough to the Iberians that kings would promise to provide protection for these travelers. The fact that it did not work out so well for the Muslim merchants in the cantiga could indicate that they were still less valued than their Christian counterparts, or more so that the Christian kings were resourceful as that particular character gains not only the goods but new servants by the end of the tale.

Las Cantigas also show that there was indeed mutual respect and cooperation between Christians and Muslims in Iberia, that despite being at war the two peoples held each other in some esteem and acknowledged that religious differences did not prevent them from being less valuable as individuals. Even though tolerance was obviously not overwhelming, given the context of the period, any respect and collaboration was remarkable. Surprisingly, it was the cantigas depicting Jews that were less likely to give the religious minority the benefit of the doubt. Legally Jews enjoyed more rights than Moors in the Christian kingdoms, but in the cantigas they are more often shown as abusing those would-be freedoms. Where the Muslims could be respected as allies while still following their faith, the only options for Jews in the

cantigas are conversion or death. Part of this may stem from the fact that Jews were present throughout all of Europe and the stories that were blended into the cantigas may have come from the far less tolerant regions of the north. Muslims were less commonly seen in Christian society except as merchants in commercial centers around the Mediterranean, where trade often meant more than religious differences. Therefore the cantigas depicting Jews may have been more negative largely because they came from less tolerant areas outside of Iberia. At the same time, the fact that these particular stories made it to Iberia and were chosen by Alfonso's scribes and the church for this compilation would indicate that at least the Christian church held onto a particularly strong bias against Jews.

As a whole, *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria* provide additional perspectives to color the context of religious interactions in la convivencia. Like *Las Siete Partidas* and the actions of Alfonso X and other Christian Iberian kings, they show that while Iberia was a land of relative tolerance, it certainly did not extend to all areas of society. The elites of Christian society recognized the practical value of cooperation for business and academic purposes, so cultures blended and there was some level of acceptance for religious outsiders. But tolerance based on pragmatism and not acceptance of other beliefs meant that theological conflict could constantly strain the ties between religious groups. It may have been a golden age of scientific progress and a mixing of cultures, and that was the result of great strides towards cooperation, but it was by no means a land of total tolerance.

End Notes

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Appendix A: Index of *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria* included in this study
Numbered according to the Oxford University database.

Cantiga 12- briefly recites another tale of culpable behavior by Jews, taking place in Toledo on the day of the Feast of the Virgin's Assumption. While the archbishop is reciting mass, he hears a woman's voice saying that the Jews killed Christ and are still antagonistic towards him. After the mass, he tells the congregation what he has heard and they head to the Jewish quarter. There, they find some Jews hitting and spitting on a wax image of Christ, intending to hang it on a cross. The Jews are killed.

Cantiga 25- tells of a Christian merchant who spent his money doing good until he had nothing left. He then asked for a loan for his business affairs, but no one else would grant him one, so he asks a Jew. The Jew agrees so long as the Christian offers some sort of security. As security, the Christian swears (in front of witnesses) on statues of the Virgin and Child that he will repay the loan, and prays to the Virgin that she may repay the Jew if he cannot.

The Christian does well for himself but forgets about repaying the loan until the day before it is due, at which time he is far from where the Jew resides. So he fills a chest with the money he owes and throws it into the ocean, praying for it to reach the Jew. The chest floats into the port in Byzantium where the Jew was, and after chiding his servant for trying and failing to successfully seize the chest, the Jew picks it up and sees the money inside. Instead of accepting the payment, he takes it home and hides it, telling not even his friends. When the Christian finally arrives, the Jew demands repayment and threatens to blackmail him, despite the Christian's insistence that he had paid. The Jew agrees to follow the Christian to a church, where a statue of Mary speaks to say that the Jew had received the money. The Jew then converts.

Cantiga 85- is set in England and tells the conversion story of a Jewish man who was rescued by the Virgin. The man has been captured and tortured by Christian thieves, who are holding him hostage to extort money from him. When the Jew falls asleep, the Virgin appears to him in a dream, healing and freeing him. When he wakes, he sees that the dream is true and the Virgin is standing before him. She identifies herself as the one whom the Jews despise, then takes him

from the house to a high mountain. In the valley below he sees many evils and devils torturing the souls of Jews, which terrifies him. The Virgin then takes him to another mountain, where Christ is seated with a host of saints and singing angels. The Virgin tells him that if he believes in Christ, eats suckling pig, and stops cutting goats' throats, he may join the saints.

After the Virgin leaves, the Jew makes his way to a monastery and is given food and tells his tale. He is then baptized and the miracle is proclaimed far and wide.

Cantiga 89- tells a short tale about a Jewish woman who is struggling in labor. She could not deliver the baby and no medicine was working, leaving her crying in pain. The woman then sees a great light and hears a voice telling her to call on the Virgin Mary. The Jew prays to the Virgin and then her health recovers and a baby son is born. At the sound of her prayers, the woman's Jewish attendants rebuke the woman and flee from the house. After thirty days, the woman goes to a church with her daughter and newborn son to all be baptized.

Cantiga 95- Describes how a humble German Christian count living in Portugal is captured by Moorish pirates from Africa. The Moors attack Spain but find that their ship cannot leave the coast for three nights, though they sail away each night. They realize that their prisoner is the cause of this, because the Virgin Mary is protecting him, and so they free him and offer him their spoils, which he refuses, but for a single vial. Once the count is returned home, the Moors are able to leave, and afterwards the Moors would always revere the count.

Cantiga 191- A Christian respects his Muslim captive and tries to convert him to Christianity, though the captive refuses. The Christian makes the man go lie in a cave and fight with the devil, which he does successfully for two days. Finally, the Virgin appears to save him. When she comes, she insults Mohammed and tells the Muslim of the faults of his religion, and asks him to convert. The Muslim does.

Cantiga 286- tells the story of a Christian who would say his prayers to the Virgin for protection while lying prostrate outside of a church. One day, as he prayed, a large dog came to disturb him, so the Christian picks up a stone to throw at the dog. He notices two Jews mocking him and laughing at what the dog had done, so he prays to the Virgin to avenge him. As he throws his stone at the dog, a portico collapses and crushes the Jews. Everyone who saw this then praised the Virgin.

Cantiga 325- A Christian woman from Seville is captured and imprisoned with another Christian under the jurisdiction of a dying Muslim woman, who mistreats them and gives them little to eat. The Muslim woman bribes, threatens and cajoles the Christians to convert, and though one agrees out of fear, the other refuses. "Consumed with rage," the Moors throw both into jail. Mary comes to the faithful Christian in a dream and transports her to freedom.

Cantiga 345- Describes a story of Alfonso X himself, and a battle his knights face as recently conquered Muslim residents of his kingdom rise up to reclaim the castle of Jerez. His knights lose the castle initially, and Alfonso, though far off, has a vision relating this to him, but the castle is retaken days later.

Cantiga 379- Describes a town in Seville where all merchants were welcomed and declared to be under the protection of the Christian king. Catalan pirates attacked a Muslim ship headed for the town and captured it and killed most of the merchants. The pirates were sent aground in Seville by a fierce storm (attributed to the Virgin Mary in the cantiga) and forced to return the stolen goods to the Christian king of Seville before joining his service. The cantiga ends praising the Virgin for protecting her colonists and even extending mercy to the Moors.