

## Isaac Ibn Sahula and King Alfonso X: Possible Connections between the Book Meshal Haqadmoni and the Cántigas de Santa Maria

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### Isaac Ibn Sahula and King Alfonso X

At the beginning of the 1280s, two books were published in Castile. One was written by the Castilian King Alfonso X, the other by the Jewish author Rabbi Isaac Ibn Sahula. Alfonso X's illuminated book of stories and songs, the *Cántigas de Santa Maria*, portrayed the miracles of the Virgin Mary and was dedicated to her. It was written over a period of three decades and completed in the year 1284 [1,2]. Isaac Ibn Sahula's Hebrew illuminated book of fables, *Meshal Haqadmoni*, was written in 1281, and the stories in it are accompanied by illuminations with captions written by the author [3-13]. Raphael Loewe's book *Meshal Haqadmoni: Fables from a Distant Past*, offers an annotated edition with English translation, and I will use his translation throughout this paper [7].

A book written by (or under the supervision of) the King over such a long period of time may have been familiar to the Jewish doctor Ibn Sahula, and therefore this paper examines the possible connections between Alfonso's book and Ibn Sahula's, with an emphasis on the Jewish-Christian polemic in thirteenth-century Castile [14]. My main focus will be on the historical and cultural context in which the books were written, through a discussion of one of *Meshal Haqadmoni*'s fables against the background of contemporary Christian literature. According to Revital Yeffet, there are three main polemics in *Meshal Haqadmoni*: the inner community polemic, the cultural-literary polemic against foreign literature, and the Jewish-Christian polemic [12]. Since the similarities between some of the characters in *Meshal Haqadmoni* and Alfonso X have already been pointed out by Yitzhak Baer and Raphael Loewe [15-18], I rely on their assumptions in my examination of both books. For example, they note that two of the characters in the fables are a lion and an eagle, both rulers of the animal kingdom. Scholars have agreed that the lion and the eagle are allegorical figures of King Alfonso X, suggesting the existence of a direct connection between *Meshal Haqadmoni* and Alfonso's book [15,16].

The novelty of the current study lies in the proposed connection between the two texts and their images. While the association between some characters in *Meshal Haqadmoni* and Alfonso X has been noted in the past, there has never been a study that connected the writings of the King and Ibn Sahula's book. ([14,19] on the possible connections between *Meshal Haqadmoni* and the *Cántigas de Santa Maria*.) I would like to conduct a re-examination of the book's fables, and, more precisely, to suggest that there is a connection between *Meshal Haqadmoni* and the *Cántigas de Santa Maria*.

The *Cántigas de Santa Maria* could have served as part of the cultural and literary background of Ibn Sahula's time and place. I do not claim that Alfonso X's poems were the main influence over Ibn Sahula, and, moreover, he completed the writing of *Meshal Haqadmoni* before the entire *Cántigas* were published. Rather, I

suggest that the writings and illuminations of the time should be taken into consideration in order to understand the period's cultural and social atmosphere, in particular if we take into account the performative aspect of the *Cántigas* [20]. Furthermore, in *Meshal Haqadmoni* we find testimony regarding Alfonso X's attitude toward the Jews, so the King's writing cannot be ignored.

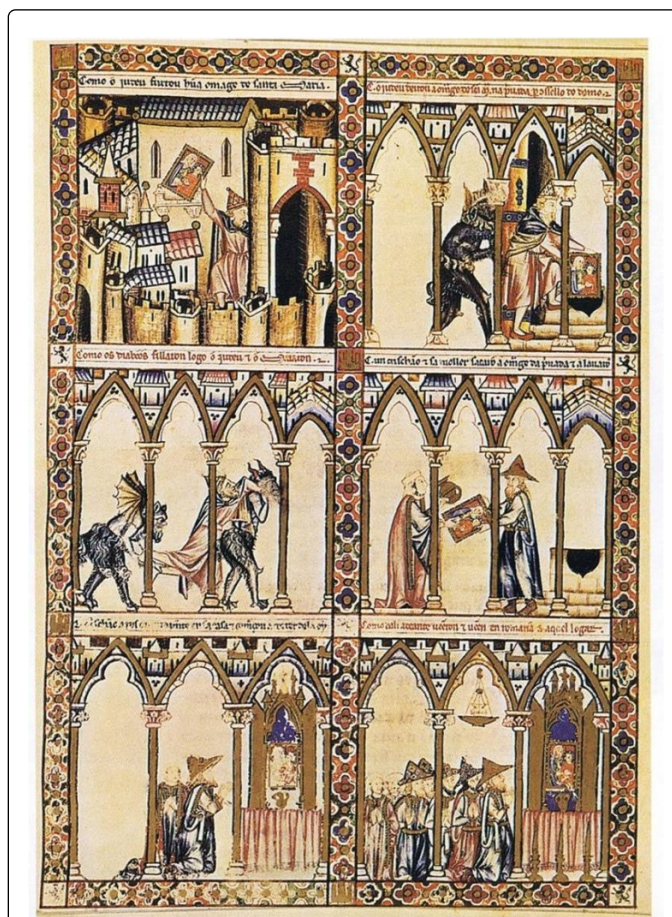


Figure 1: Figure of King Alfonso X, suggesting the existence of a direct connection between *Meshal Haqadmoni* and Alfonso's book.

I would like to begin by discussing the *Cántigas de Santa Maria*, which had great importance and value in the history of Christian poetry. The purpose of this discussion is to explore the cultural environment in which Ibn Sahula lived and wrote, and to examine an example of the "foreign" literature against which he wrote, and which was so widespread in Castile. The reign of Alfonso X (1252-1284) is

characterized by a variety of cultural and political developments [21-23]. Alfonso X was renowned as a learned king, and thus received the title: 'El Sabio,' the wise [24]. Hundreds of poems are ascribed to him, mainly those dedicated to the Virgin Mary, the Cántigas de Santa Maria. He also authored an extensive seven-part book of law titled *Las Siete Partidas* [25,26] and two history books: *Estoria de Espanna*, on the history of Spain [27] and *General Estoria*, a world history intended to reach his own era, but actually ending at the period of Jesus [28]. (Whether he actually wrote the entire corpus ascribed to him remains doubtful.)

Alfonso X also translated into the vernacular (Galician-Portuguese) a number of works on a vast range of topics, including fables, books on the game of chess, a biography of Alexander the Great, and more. In this endeavor, he relied largely on the assistance of Jews, especially for the translations on astronomy and Arab philosophy. According to Raphael Loewe, we should read *Meshal Haqadmoni* with the knowledge that Ibn Sahula was aware of the literary enterprise of Alfonso X's court and perhaps even familiar with some of the King's Jewish assistants and translators [7,29]).

The non-Christian residents of Castile, i.e., the Muslims and the Jews, enjoyed religious freedom, but there was also legal discrimination against them. For example, the ban on Muslims and Jews ruling over Christians prohibited them from entering into governmental institutions. According to Baer, some Jews held high key offices in the kingdom, but not in the army or in the high courts [15,18,25,30]. In keeping with the decision of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, although Jews were not obligated to wear an identifying badge [31-33], they were required to wear special clothes that marked them as different from the Christians. In *Siete Partidas* 7.24.11, we learn that the Jews had to wear special headgear to distinguish themselves from the Christians [25].

The Cántigas de Santa Maria appeared in some illuminated manuscripts in the last quarter of the thirteenth century (around 1283), and some of the manuscripts that were written and illuminated under the supervision of Alfonso X still remain. We have four original manuscripts, two of them illustrated with over two thousand miniatures: *Códice Rico*, El Escorial, Biblioteca de San Lorenzo, Ms. T.I.1, made in 1283 and entirely decorated [34] and *Biblioteca Nazionale* at Florence, Banco Rari 20, which was also decorated, but whose illuminations were not all completed; *Códice de Toledo*, Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid 10069, which contains one hundred poems; and the fourth manuscript, J.B.2 (Escorial E), which contains over four hundred poems, including all of those that appear in the other three manuscripts as well as unique poems that appear only here. It was made in the years 1281-1282, with decorated initials, and on every tenth poem an illustration of a musician appears [1,35,36]. The Cántigas de Santa Maria is written in the vernacular Galician-Portuguese common in Castile [37], and some of the poems in it were designed to be read and sung aloud, as they are accompanied by musical notes.

The stories in *Meshal Haqadmoni* were part of the cultural background in which Ibn Sahula lived and worked, and several of them contain Jewish characters, as do their illuminations. The book's anti-Jewish illustrations and stories have been discussed in previous research. Louise Mirrer addressed the portrayal of the bodies of Jews in the book's text and illuminations [38]. Albert Bagby identified five main subjects regarding the Jews in this text: the Jew as the enemy of Christianity; the Jew as the devil's disciple; the Jew as a symbol of avarice; the traitorous Jew; and the converted Jew [39].

Bagby studied Alfonso X's attitude toward the Jews by comparing the songs that refer to Jews in the Cántigas de Santa Maria with other contemporary popular songs that also referred to the Jews that were circulating in Europe. According to Bagby, of thirty songs in Alfonso X's book, only eight are familiar in other collections of stories. Thus, according to him, the rest of the songs must have been composed by Alfonso X. Bagby claims that even in the only three songs in which the Jew does not receive malicious characteristics, the only positive aspect of the Jew's behavior consists of his pleas for Mary's help. Vikki Hatton and Angus Mackay suggest that the attitude towards the Jews in the Cántigas de Santa Maria was ambivalent, as the anti-Jewish phrases balance the more neutral phrases regarding the Jews, especially in comparison to other anti-Jewish stories of the time [40].

Dwayne E. Carpenter offered five categories different from those proposed by Bagby regarding the Jews in the Cántigas de Santa Maria: Jewish culpability for the death of Jesus; Jewish disparagement of the Virgin, Jesus and Christianity; Jews as allies of the Devil; Jews as avaricious; and the rescue and salvation of Jews [41]. Carpenter studied the amount of hostility against the Jews in the Cántigas de Santa Maria by researching the poems that mention the Jews. He relates not only to stories where the Jews are mentioned as main characters, but also to incidental references where, he claims, the true nature of the attitude towards the Jews is more clearly revealed [41].

Pamela Patton suggests studying the image of the Jew in Alfonso X's book not as a measure of the King's hostility towards the Jews, but rather in order to learn about the anti-Jewish attitude of Christian Castilian society. This notion is apparent in the poems, whether it is the King's position or not [19,42]. Therefore, the illustrations are less representative of Alfonso X's attitude toward the Jews, and more reflective of the social atmosphere around him, so although the manuscripts were produced in his court, they represent ideas prevalent in society at the time. The illuminations in Alfonso's book not only illustrate the text, but also interpret it; in some instances, the artists added information to the poem, so even if the Jew did not participate as a main character in a story, the artist portrayed him in most scenes and emphasized his grotesque nature [42].

Patton points to an example of this phenomenon in the illuminations of Cántiga 3, which tell the story of Theophilus. Although the Jew in the song is mentioned in only a single verse, the illustrations nonetheless portray the Jew in two scenes out of six. The text states that Theophilus acted on the advice of a Jew: "per consello dun judeu," [1], and the scenes portray the Jew as associated with and resembling the Devil in his grotesque appearance [42,43]. Hatton and Mackay, on the other hand, claim that in comparison to the story *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, written by Gonzalo de Berceo (c. 1198-after 1252), the Jew's presence is minor, and he is mentioned as merely a consultant [40]. However, the negligible mention of the Jew implies the anti-Jewish nature of the text in the Cántigas de Santa Maria, for the audience needed no further information to understand the close relationship and supposed alliance between the Jew and the Devil.

It is clear that there was a public demand for such depictions, since most of the stories in the book were already familiar in Western Europe, and only a few of them were original. Therefore, the image of the Jew in the eyes of Castilian Christian society is of interest when studying the period in which Ibn Sahula wrote his book. Patton's methodology will guide us here, as my intention is to portray that Ibn Sahula wrote some of the fables in *Meshal Haqadmoni* as a response to the Castilian Christian milieu, and not merely in reaction to the King's approach toward the Jews.



I would like to focus on Cántiga 34 of the Cántigas de Santa Maria, where we read the story of a Jew desecrating an icon of the Virgin Mary (Figure 1). The story takes place on the streets of Constantinople, the location of an unusual, beautiful wooden panel painting of Mary and Child. One night a Jew steals the icon and hides it under his mantle. He brings the icon to his house, throws it into the lavatory and contaminates it. Mary allows the Devil to kill the Jew as punishment for his crime, and nothing remains of the Jew. Meanwhile, a good Christian finds and rescues the icon from the impure place and carefully cleans it. Afterwards, he places the icon in a worthy location in his home, offering it a tribute as a means of securing his salvation, and the icon emits a pleasant scent [1,2,19,35,39]. Interestingly, we find similar stories in the book *De Locis Sanctis*, written around 683–686 by Adamnan (ca. 625–704), the Abbot of Iona [44], and in twelfth and thirteenth century France and Germany [45,46].

Like most of the illustrated poems in the Cántigas de Santa Maria, the story is portrayed in six scenes, and the Jew occupies three of them. In the first scene on the left, the Jew appears in grotesque profile, walking by the city's buildings, dressed in a red garment and a pointed hat as he raises the icon in his right hand. In the next scene, we notice that the garment reaches his knees and thus shows his pointed red shoes, part of the distinguishing mark required in the *Siete Partidas* 7.24.11. (On the distinguishing mark [25]). In this scene, we notice the Jew throwing the icon into the lavatory, while a devil stands next to the door behind him. In the third scene, we observe two demons carrying the Jew's body. All three characters are portrayed in profile, showing their grotesque noses and pointed chins. The next three scenes portray the good Christian's acts. In all but one of the scenes, the viewer can clearly see the icon of the Virgin and child, so viewing the Jew's theft and contamination of the icon must have had a shocking impact on Christian audiences. Below, we shall see how this effect may be reflected in Meshal Haqadmoni.

Let us now turn to a discussion of Isaac Ibn Sahula's Meshal Haqadmoni. None of the original manuscripts remain, not even manuscripts from the author's time and place. However, we do have five fully illuminated manuscripts from Germany and Italy, all from the fifteenth century: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Opp. 154, produced in 1450, Germany [47]; Munich, Bavarian State Library, MS Heb. 10, produced in 1458, Germany [48]; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Can. 59, produced in 1470–1480, Italy; Rothschild Miscellany, Jerusalem, Israel Museum, Ms. 180/51, produced in 1470–1480, Italy, fols. 298v–371r [49–51]; Milano, Ambrosian Library, MS X 112 sup, produced in 1483, Italy. The images in the five manuscripts and the first printed edition are similar in terms of their subjects and their iconography [3,6,9,12].

The book was first printed in Brescia by Gershom Soncino ca. 1491 and wood cuts replaced the manuscripts' illuminations [52]. Notably, this is the first printed Hebrew book with a full cycle of illustrations, and it is that Soncino ordered these illustrations specifically for this book [4]. As mentioned, the fables are accompanied by some eighty illuminations with captions written by the author.

Most scholars agree that Ibn Sahula illustrated the images himself or at least supervised their production. In his introduction, Isaac Ibn Sahula explains the purpose of the illuminations: "Likewise, methinks, the pictures which conjoint/ I place with texts they illustrate, should point to/ The moral, and retain the interest/ Of children, while for those that are oppressed/ By cares, providing light relief through art; Thus peradventure they shall find their heart/ Drawn to essentials by my goad, and lay/ Aside their Homer, and will put away/ What heretics

and what free-thinkers say" [7]. Thus, he declares that he is fighting the tendency to follow foreign literature, and calls upon his nation to repent. Thus the illustrations' purpose is to appeal to the audience and direct attention to the essence of the book by artistic means. It is worth mentioning that Gronemann doubts whether the book was originally illustrated in its entirety, and suggests that only the fables that discuss the planets in the fifth chapter were illuminated [6]. Though there are no remaining manuscripts made by Ibn Sahula, I find this claim unjustified in light of the author's introductory statement [7]. As Ayelet Oettinger-Salama maintains, the purpose of the illustrations is didactic, so the illuminations of the planets alone would not be sufficient [9]. Although it may be somewhat problematic in terms of methodology to refer to illuminations made approximately two hundred years after the book was written, the illuminations remained consistent over the years, which suggests both that the author closely supervised the exact location of the scenes and the appropriate captions and that they all derived from earlier similarly illustrated manuscripts. Taking this issue into account, I will focus here mainly on the text, since some of the illuminations are connected to their own place and time, and less to that of Ibn Sahula.

Meshal Haqadmoni is divided into five main chapters (On Wisdom, On Penitence, On Sound Counsel, On Humility, and On Reverence), each opening with the vices of a given character and ending with the author's praise of the virtues of the respective trait. Every chapter opens with a polemic dialog between the cynic and the author, with both of them referring to scientific knowledge in the realms of nature, medicine, and philosophy, all disguised in fables. Aside from being a physician, Ibn Sahula was a Kabbalist (on possible Kabbalistic ideas in Meshal Haqadmoni [53]; for more on Ibn Sahula's Kabbalistic writings [15,54–58]). The stories all begin with the perspective of the cynic, whose goal is to undermine the author's faith with fables that m to prove that virtues are not beneficial, but rather harmful. All of the chapters contain fables, mainly about animals. Some of these begin in the middle of a given story, when one of the characters (usually an animal) starts to read the fable. Only following a long discussion does the plot return to the original tale, which is outside the main frame of the story. This literary motif is characteristic of the structure of the maqama and books such as *Kalila wa-Dimna*. (On the relationship between this genre of literature and its connection to Meshal Haqadmoni [3,11,12,59]).

Both the humans and the animals in the fables can be characterized as Jewish on account of their words and customs. Furthermore, they use biblical verses, the Talmud, and the Midrash to deliver moral messages, even when they are not identified as Jewish, but as members of other religions [11]. While Ibn Sahula did relay stories from "other origins," his use of Jewish sources is in line with his aim to reintroduce his readers to these texts: "For I observed its golden rhetoric was dulled for many folk, who were so quick to con the works of the heretics, and k Philosophy dependent on the Greek, Arabic saws, tags from each several part. ... The Torah's precepts ye have cast aside, with them that choice tongue, wherein are applied analogies the jurists use – so fair a maiden, and so delicate her flair" [7]. After long deliberation, at the end of the book the cynics admit their errors and justify the author's words.

I would like to focus on one of Meshal Haqadmoni's fables, from the first chapter: "The Lion upon whom attend Companions" [3,7,14]. In the story we find a connection to the Jewish-Christian polemic, so we shall examine the fable's text and images from this perspective. Our consideration of the fable will take place in the context of the place and

culture in which Ibn Sahula lived, while the main reference shall be to King Alfonso X, whom, according to the scholars, is represented by the lion in the fable [7,15,16]. The fable "The Lion upon whom attend Companions" tells the story of a kingdom ruled by a lion, who has two companions and advisors: the hart and the fox, who are facing a serious problem in the kingdom. At the beginning, we learn that the animals are complaining that the lion eats them, so they decide to unite and rebel against the king. Scholars have pointed out that this story reflects the actual historical event in which the nobles in Alfonso X's court rebelled against him in 1271 [7,18,23]. The author's approach is to emphasize the notion that there should be no rebellions against the kingdom. (On the notion that it is prohibited to rebel against the kingdom [60]).

After the animals leave the kingdom, the lion has no more animals to eat, so the fox, in a cunning gesture of flattery, offers him his own flesh, but and immediately informs him that his flesh is not as tasty as that of the hart (his rival courtier). Thus, the fox ostensibly offers his own flesh to be eaten by the lion, yet at the same time makes it clear that it is not good enough for the king. The scene is illustrated in the same way in all the manuscripts: the fox and hart are standing in front of the lion. Despite the fox's words, the lion refuses to harm the hart, since doing so would be a violation of the alliance between them. The fox speaks badly of the hart and claims that the hart has no noble genealogy, unlike the fox. This claim leads the lion to call upon all his ministers and investigate the hart's pedigree. The fox represents the anti-Jewish stance in King Alfonso X's court, when, according to Loewe, he demands to inspect the hart's *limpieza de sangre* (purity of blood), while the hart represents the Jewish courtiers [7,16]. The fox gives a speech, at the end of which the lion calls him a murderer and expels him from his court. From this point on, the fox conspires to rebel against the king and assassinate him with poison. Finally, after a trial is held, the fox is executed by decapitation, just as it was customary to punish aristocrats accused of treason against the King [16].

Scholarly interest in this fable has mainly concerned the question of the historical context of Alfonso X and his fickle attitude toward the Jews. I would like to examine another historical aspect of the story that mainly concerns the Jewish-Christian polemic as it is reflected in the hart's sermon delivered before the lion. The hart, realizing he is in danger, prays to God, declares his love and loyalty to the king, speaks of his genealogy and matters of the soul. The hart convinces the lion, who declares: "What penalty the wicked have to pay/ How those whose worth is scant just fade away/ How some, through wanton error, are cut off/ Destruction dragging those who, sinful, scoff" [7].

The hart begins to clarify the vices of the wicked soul that speaks against the Talmud and insults it: "On scholarship [Talmud] she loads insults obscene/ Her heart full of contempt; precepts she spurns/ And from their highway into byways turns/ To roam, her outrages past numbering/ All the commandments from her back to fling/ The holy law of God dishonoring" [7]. (It is worth noting that Loewe translated the word Talmud as scholarship, but, as we shall below, it is important to follow the accurate meaning of the word, which here refers to the rabbinic writings.) It is that here we find criticism against the Jews who have drifted from the Holy Scriptures, prefer foreign literature, and even convert to Christianity.

The hart declares that the penalty of the wicked is that they will not have a part in the afterlife, and goes on to explain: "I catalogue here those who, by their sin/ Have forfeited all claim to share therein/ Ones who, unorthodox, affirm a lie/ All unbelievers; those who would deny/

The law, the resurrection of the dead/ Or the Messiah's coming; all these, led/ Into apostasy, with those who lead/ Astray the public; those, too, that secede/ From laws which the community maintained/ Insurgents; those who trespass in disdain/ Defiant: all informers; those whose lies/ Spread slander, or by surgery disguise/ Their covenantal seal" [7]. We hear in these words an echo of the blessing of the apostates (Birkat Haminim), part of the Amidah prayer [7]. (On Birkat Haminim [61]).

The hart elaborates on the punishment of the wicked, noting that in addition to being deprived of an afterlife, they are doomed to "excrement that they." This phrase is mentioned in the Babylonian Talmud, Gittin 57a: "He then went and raised Balaam by incantations. He asked him: Who is in repute in the other world? He replied: Israel. What then, he said, about joining them? He replied: Thou shalt not k their peace nor their prosperity all thy days for ever. He then asked: What is your punishment? He replied: With boiling hot semen. He then went and raised by incantations the sinners of Israel. He asked them: Who is in repute in the other world? They replied: Israel. What about joining them? They replied: k their welfare, k not their harm. Whoever touches them touches the apple of his eye. He said: What is your punishment? They replied: With boiling hot excrement, since a Master has said: Whoever mocks at the words of the Sages is punished with boiling hot excrement."

Furthermore, in the hart's words we may find an utterance regarding the public polemics, such as the Paris Talmud Trial in 1240 between Rabbi Yehiel of Paris and the converted Nicolas Donin. (There are Hebrew accounts of the "Talmud Trial" and a Latin text [62], originally published by Isadore Loeb [63]. For an English translation of the Latin text Hyam Maccoby [64]). The Paris Talmud Trial of 1240 was the first of three public disputes initiated by converted Jews, where the Talmud was the main focus of discussion. The aftermath of the 1240 trial was the burning of the Talmud in 1242. In 1263 in Barcelona, R. Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) defended the Talmud against the converted Pablo Christiani, who also debated with R. Abraham in the second Paris trial in 1271/1273 [61,65-82].

According to the Hebrew account of the 1240 Talmud trial, the punishment of the wicked to be doomed to "excrement that they" is also mentioned. Nicolas Donin claimed that the Jews wrote in the Talmud that Jesus was condemned to boiling hot excrement, and on the basis of the Talmud, Balaam's punishment is ascribed to Jesus [45,62,75,83,84]. In the Jewish tradition, Balaam is sometimes replaced with Bela ben Beor, the first king of Edom. Therefore, Balaam is identified both with Esau and Jesus [83,85]. Hence, when the Talmud mentions the punishment of Balaam and the criminals of Israel as being punished "with boiling hot excrement," it refers to Jesus.

The response of R. Yehiel of Paris to the text was that it did not refer to Jesus of Nazareth, but was the punishment of some other man called Jesus. Therefore, we can in this statement in Meshal Haqadmoni a reference to the Paris Talmud Trial and to the punishment of Balaam/ Jesus. Even if this notion was not actually raised in the Talmud Trial itself and is recorded only in the later written text, there is important value to its inclusion in the Hebrew account. While it may have been written some decades after 1240 [75], nonetheless it had been written (and probably widespread) by 1280s, when Ibn Sahula wrote Meshal Haqadmoni. Hence, whether or not these exact words were mentioned in the actual Talmud Trial is of less importance to our discussion than the fact that they appear in the account written before Ibn Sahula wrote his book.

Returning to the illumination of Cántiga 34, the fact that the icon of Virgin and Child is desecrated by being thrown into the lavatory ms to indicate a Jewish intention to punish Jesus and Mary with “excrement that thes.” This kind of abuse could show the punishment that the Virgin and Child deserve in the eyes of the Jews, when at the end of the story the Jew is condemned to hell. The story in Cántiga 34 is not the only one in the Cántigas de Santa Maria to display Jewish mockery of Christian symbols. The Christian notion in this book is that the Jews are allegedly already trying to implement the Talmud’s ideas about the punishment of the wicked. In Cántiga 12 we are told that the Jews of Toledo were caught by the Archbishop and his congregation as they were spitting at and cursing a wax image of Jesus and later placing him on an improvised cross [2,41].

The idea of Jews mocking a wax crucifix appears also in Alfonso X’s book of law, *Las Siete Partidas*, 7.24.2 [25], where the King wrote that he had heard that in some places the Jews abduct Christian children on Good Friday and place them on a cross, but if they do not find such children, they create a wax image and crucify it. Alfonso X mentions that if these incidents turned out to be true in his kingdom, the Jews who carried them out would be executed. He also orders the Jews to stay behind close doors on Good Friday [25,40,86-89] (In 408 Theodosius II forbade the Jews from burning a figure like Haman on Purim, as it was understood to be mockery on the Crucifixion. [86-89]). Elliot Horowitz discusses at length cases in which Jews were accused of mocking the cross, and testimonies of such actions appear in Jewish texts [90-92].

The King’s reference to this issue in his law book and in the Cántigas de Santa Maria indicates the prevalence of such stories. The fact that these incidents appear both in a popular illuminated book of poetry and in a book of law reinforces the notion that it is not merely a legend or rumor, and suggests that they are true. Although Alfonso X wrote that he had heard rumors of such accusations, and did not report actual incidents in his kingdom, the fact that he enacted a law to be used in case such events occurred strongly suggests that the story represents a situation that could conceivably be faced.

The hart in the Meshal Haqadmoni fable symbolizes the voice of the Jewish writer, who is fighting both the wicked among his people and the Christians. The sense of persecution in the Meshal Haqadmoni stories may derive from the attitude of Christian society toward the Jews. For the Christian public, the King’s attitude toward the Jews is expressed in his book, despite the fact that Alfonso X is considered a tolerant monarch and beneficent toward the Jews. Most scholars have studied his book king an answer to the question of whether or not it and its author were expressing an anti-Jewish attitude. Examination of the book reveals that the anti-Jewish stance is consistent, and while King Alfonso himself may have treated the Jews fairly, his book conveys an anti-Jewish message to his audience. In Meshal Haqadmoni we find a possible response to this message.

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