The religious polemics of the Muslims of Late Medieval Christian Iberia
Colominas Aparicio, M.

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Conclusions

In this dissertation I have explored the corpus of religious polemics of the Muslim inhabitants of the Christian territories of the Late Medieval Iberian Peninsula (Mudejars). My primary purpose has been to investigate how the Mudejar authors of religious polemics addressed identity and religious leadership in their works, thereby constructing their identities as Muslims in relation to the Christians and the Jews, as well as in relation to their Muslim co-religionists. My principal theoretical claim has been that, although the religious polemics between Muslims, Christians and Jews could sometimes be verbally violent, they should not be considered first and foremost expressions of verbal violence and refutation, as it is often the case in our Post-Modern societies. Building upon recent criticism of the views of such scholars of the Middle Ages as Jesse Lander, Alex Novikoff, and David Nirenberg, I have argued that seeing polemics as an obstacle to social cohesion ignores the plurality of their functions, which included the negotiation of social boundaries and the construction of religious identities between and among communities in the Iberian Peninsula. This argument also has consequences for our more general perceptions of interreligious dynamics in the Middle Ages and of medieval man who often appears irrational and inclined towards violence.

Consequently, using the theoretical and methodological tools provided by Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Identity Theory, the study has propounded a revision of what is understood by ‘religious polemics’. Taking this perspective, I have inquired into identity and religious authority by addressing some related questions. I have sought to identify which treatises were in circulation among the Mudejars and what their principal characteristics were. I have also attempted to place this corpus within the tradition of Muslim literature of the same kind in Muslim lands and to discover the reasons and motivation for the production and consumption of such works by the Mudejars. Finally, I have analysed the major strategies underpinning the authors’ arguments and their approaches to authority and I have repeated the exercise for the Christian and Jewish claims to which these works provided an answer. My goal has been to shed light on Mudejar Islam as a discursive practice.

The contribution to our understandings of identity and religious authority in Mudejar polemics yielded by the answers to these questions can be summarized as follows. The analysis of the corpus of polemics reveals that the Ta'yiḏ al-Milla and the Kitāb al-Mujādala wa-l-Yahūḍ wa-Naṣārā are the most important Mudejar treatises of polemics
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preserved for us and, moreover, that among the polemics in the territories of the Iberian Peninsula they are exceptional compositions. It has been demonstrated that the particular nature of these texts is connected to the sources which their authors used to discuss religious subjects or in other words, it has to do with how they approached the authority of texts. The extensive quotations from the Torah in the Taʿyid are unprecedented in other Muslim polemics known to us from Christian Iberia, al-Andalus and the Maghreb, and the same can be said about the outstanding use of philosophy in the Kitāb al-Mujādala, a use equalled only by that in the Sicilian Questions of Ibn Sabīn of Murcia (1217–1270 CE). Furthermore, the analysis of the polemical corpus has revealed the contemporaneous circulation of Arabic and Aljamiado versions of some polemics, especially during the fourteenth and the fifteenth century, and has placed the composition of the Arabic originals in the fourteenth century. This was also the period in which most Aljamiado versions were produced and it has been proven that, in all but one exception, we are dealing with adaptations and not simply with translations. This is the case of MS L 536, 886 H (=1481 CE), which expands the anti-Jewish polemic of the Taʿyid to accommodate a work of anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics and suggests that the adapter might have used the Kitāb al-Mujādala to assist in his purpose. A key figure in the adaptation of Mudejar polemics was ʿAlī al-Gharīb who, as Koningsveld and Wiegers have shown, provided an Aljamiado version of the Kitāb Miftāḥ ad-Dīn, and, as has been argued here, most probably adapted the Taʿyid al-Milla in MS BNE 4944 as well. The Aljamiado version of the Taʿyid in MSS J8 and J9 seems to rely on earlier fourteenth-century Aljamiado adaptations which do not depend on MS BNE 4944. However, al-Gharīb is also mentioned in them. The analysis shows that, while most dated manuscripts in Romance were produced after the last forced conclusions in 1526 CE, we can say that Arabic works with a polemical content were still being copied in the sixteenth and the early seventeenth century. This was true even when Aljamiado adaptations already existed, as is the case of the conversion narrative of the Kāʿab al-Alhār or the “demandas de los judíos”. It has been noted that these Arabic originals have escaped the attention of scholars so far.

Findings about the connection of the Muslim literary corpus of religious polemics with the production of religious treatises of Muslim polemics against the Christians and the Jews allow us to say that the Mudejars made an original contribution to the existing body of Muslim polemical literature of the Middle Ages. This is true in the sense that the copying and transmission of a number of polemics should be placed within a Mudejar environment and that we now possess further evidence that it is highly likely some Mudejars were involved in the composition of such works. The works of the fourteenth-century Castilian judge (qāḍī) Hamete Sharafi has been identified as the most direct source of the Kitāb al-
Mujūdala ma'a-l-Yahūd wa-n-Nāṣārā and it is hoped that future discoveries will enable us to determine whether he was also the author of the Kitāb al-Mujūdala. If this hypothesis is feasible, he will have been the first Mudejar judge for whom we have documented evidence of his polemical activities. Secondly, the findings from the analysis of the Ta'yīd al-Mīlla confirm that we are not dealing with the same author as the man who wrote the Kitāb al-Mujūdala, nor that he was a former Jew, as argued by Kassin. Moreover, the fact that, on the one hand, the work fits easily into the tradition of Muslim polemics against the Jews, and, on the other hand, a work of such a size is unprecedented in the Iberian territories and North Africa, lends support to the possibility that the Mudejars were also closely involved in the composition of this polemic. The claim that the Mudejars made these polemics ‘their own’ is true in the sense that they adapted their contents and imbued them with meanings in order to meet the needs of their communities in the face of the growing pressure exerted by the Christian society. They did so in compliance with criteria which were found within the communities, or aljamas. One very salient feature of Mudejar polemics is therefore that in many ways they reflect the contexts in which these texts were composed, adapted and disseminated. The differences just mentioned between originals and copies and the fact that some Arabic manuscripts were still being copied at a rather later period bear witness to the Mudejars’ endeavours to adapt their answers to the needs of their communities. As if their authors were echoing life within the aljamas, the corpus of Mudejar polemics which has come down to us is multilingual and heterogeneous.

The inquiry into the multiple and complex ways in which Mudejar authors undertook the most important task of keeping alive Islamic knowledge and practices and simultaneously reinforcing the social cohesion within their communities confirms the contention in this study that the negotiation of intergroup relations between the Mudejars, the Christians and the Jews contributed towards shaping Islam as a discursive tradition in the Christian territories in the sense propounded by Asad. Evidence shows that the discourses set out in polemics are at the crossroads of a canonical corpus and the frameworks of power and discipline in which the Mudejars’ lives were set. Therefore it was fitting that, while their polemical discourses built on a ‘past’, or an established tradition of polemics which provided them with an extended repertoire of sources and arguments, they also related to the ‘future’, the worldly and the eschatological one, and the leaders of these communities took pains to secure the transmission of Islamic knowledge to future generations, adapting without hesitation Arabic polemics into Romance Aljamiado or versifying them to facilitate memorization. However, the most interesting aspect is the Mudejars’ engagement in polemics with the ‘particular Islamic practice in the present’, or with the construction of Muslim identities outside the Muslim territories of the dār al-Islām.
It is precisely this inquiry into this latter aspect which presents the most interesting findings about the Mudejars' Islam. In particular, I refer to questions about the systems of knowledge and discipline authorized in polemics, namely: to the corpus which underpins Islam and the forms of government of the Mudejar communities. It was crucial to the Mudejar leaders to provide an in-depth discussion of the most relevant knowledge of their time and to deal seriously with the minority status of their communities. Only in this way could they endure the socio-political dominance of the Christians and impede conversion to Judaism and Christianity. This endeavour resulted in the integration of the theological and epistemological frameworks of the Christians and the Jews into the Mudejars' polemical discourses and in the references in their treatises to the political subordination of the Mudejar communities, and to the humiliations and indignities they suffered. Research on these issues reveals that the Mudejar leaders not only refuted the discourses of the Christians and the Jews but also appropriated these discourses to make Islam intelligible to their fellow Muslims. The erudition of the author of the *Kitāb al-Mujādala* in such subjects as philosophy, logic and the natural sciences, plus his detailed knowledge of Christianity, provides further evidence that the close social contacts between the Mudejar and the Christian elites also extended to the intellectual sphere. It suggests that the productive collaboration between the fifteenth-century Mudejar *faqīh* Iça Gidelli and the Christian preacher Juan de Segovia, studied by Wiegers, could have been just the most exceptional example of the mutual influences between the learned of the religious elites and their polemics known to us. A related question is to what extent the worldview of the Mudejar leaders and, more particularly, their understanding of the world as a natural system intersected with that of the Christians and the Jews. This is a research topic to which I hope to devote myself in the future.

The analysis of Mudejar Islam as a discursive practice has shown why oppositions which at first sight seemed binary benefit from an approach which takes into account the ternary relationships in the Iberian Peninsula. It has demonstrated that the ways in which the Mudejars addressed the Christians and the Jews seem to correspond to the contemporary asymmetric power relations between the three communities. Whereas the Mudejars appear to have done their utmost to elaborate a discourse which could counter the Christians' dominance, their main concern with respect to the Jews was to compete with them for religious excellence. The findings about whether the Christians' anti-Jewish discourses stirred the hostility of the Mudejars towards the Jews and led them to keep copying anti-Jewish polemics after the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 CE, indeed until the seventeenth century, are inconclusive. If, on the one hand, the Mudejars' production of anti-Jewish works sometimes increases parallel to that of the Christians, on the other hand,
their discourses are only partly affected by those of the Christians. Moreover, the Mudejars seem to have lagged behind with regard to the Christians’ uses of extra-biblical Jewish sources from the rabbinical tradition. In the eyes of the Mudejars, Jews were above all ‘biblical’ Jews. No comparison has yet been made between these attitudes and those encountered in the Muslim territories; an inquiry of this nature could offer interesting insights in this regard.

The most direct conclusion to be drawn about the authority of the religious leaders of the Mudejars is that, besides their primary and most obvious aim in polemics of showing the errors in the views of their opponents, another equally important concern of these leaders was to prevent their communities cutting themselves off from what was happening outside (and sometimes inside) the geographical boundaries of their neighbourhoods and morerías. A most important implication of the engagement by the religious leaders with their most immediate environment and their relationships with the members of other religions is that, on occasion, their Islamic views departed from what other Muslim co-religionists considered ‘normative’. Despite this deviation, it has been demonstrated that the Mudejars’ leaders were able to govern their communities and to produce a coherent and authoritative discourse which set the limits of Islam. On these grounds it can be claimed that they were active in the field of Sunni orthodoxy. From such a perspective it appears that the Mudejar leaders relied only partly on the guidelines and knowledge produced in the Muslim centres of their time and built their own conceptual frameworks of normativity and religious authority. In their polemics, this is suggested by the nature of some of these arguments which can only be explained in the context of the Christian territories, and has been further reinforced by the Mudejars’ agency in building conceptual frameworks of religious authority and government. Moreover, some Mudejar authors produced a discourse on political philosophy which served to legitimize the residence of their communities in the Christian territories. Future research should determine whether this applies to other aspects of the religious and cultural practices of their communities.

As a general conclusion, it might be said that Mudejar polemics cover a heterogeneous corpus of treatises eliciting compelling discourses which fit into the ‘definition’ of polemics given in the introduction to this thesis. They are powerful examples of oral or written interactions which, with or without verbal violence, oppose the beliefs or the standpoints of an adversary by sound arguments. The interactions in these works are dialectical (namely: they are bi-directional) and can include two or more parties, and can attempt (and eventually, succeed) in convincing either the adversary or the group to which the polemicist belongs. In every case, they function as devices of identity construction of the individuals and groups involved.