

**Special issue: Islamicate fictionalities  
Aljamiado retellings of the Hebrew Bible**

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Abstract

Stories from the Hebrew Bible were popular among the Iberian Peninsula's Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Beginning in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims and Moriscos retold these stories in *Aljamiado* texts in Spanish or Aragonese written in Arabic characters. These fictionalized retellings drew on vernacular language and literary forms common to Christians and Muslims, and are a lens through which to study the cultural life of late Spanish Islam in its negotiation with the dominant Christian culture. The vernacular language and culture shared by Moriscos and Christians was a powerful medium for creating fictional Biblical storyworlds, mental models of the reality represented by the Biblical narratives. These retellings both exalt Islamic beliefs, traditions, rituals, and doctrines in the face of social marginalization and persecution, while at the same time validating their experience as speakers of Spanish and Aragonese and as participants in a vernacular culture shared between Moriscos and Christians.

Following their conquest of Muslim-ruled Granada in 1492 CE, Spanish monarchs Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile reneged on their guarantees to preserve the rights of Spanish Muslims to practice their religion and forcibly converted them to Christianity. Many continued to practice Islam for generations, despite the fact that their communities lacked formal religious leadership and Islamic education. These crypto-Muslims, called 'Moriscos' or 'Moor-like people,' were seen as neither authentic Muslims nor Christians. In an effort to provide some form of Muslim education for a population that increasingly spoke and understood only Spanish, and with limited access to Islamic institutions, their *fuqahā'* (spiritual leaders) produced a literature in Spanish written in Arabic script, known as *Aljamiado*, a hispanised form of the Arabic word '*ajāmīyya*, or non-Arabic (vernacular).[1]

Stories from the Hebrew Bible (often mediated through their Qur'anic retellings) were popular among the Peninsula's Jews, Christians, and Muslims. *Aljamiado* retellings of these stories (of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Joseph, Moses, and others) are a lens through which to study the cultural life of late Spanish Islam in its negotiation with the dominant Christian culture, and to a lesser extent, Sephardic (Iberian Jewish) culture (Busto Cortina 2021, 399).[2] The vernacular language and culture Moriscos shared with Christians and Jews serves as a medium for Morisco writers and audiences to represent this negotiation. I argue that these retellings of narratives from the Hebrew Bible simultaneously demonstrate the vernacular culture shared by Moriscos with Christians and Jews and anti-Christian and Jewish narrative polemics intended to exalt Islamic beliefs, traditions, rituals, and doctrines in the face of social marginalization and persecution by Christian institutions and individuals.

As in many other examples throughout the Islamic world, non-Arab Muslims in Iberia adapted the use of the Arabic script to represent their vernacular dialects (typically Castilian and Aragonese). Though we have some examples of the representation of snippets and short verses of Romance written in Arabic script dating back to the tenth century CE (Harvey 1985; Corriente 1995; Cennamo 2016), it is not until the fourteenth century that we see a tradition of *Aljamiado*

translations from Arabic and composition of original Aljamiado texts (Johnson 1974, 11). This continues until after the expulsion of the Moriscos from Spain (1609-1614), after which we have a number of texts written mostly in Roman characters by exiled Moriscos who apparently were not educated in Arabic, and who, despite living in Arabic-speaking Tunis, continued to write in Spanish on Islamic topics.

Aljamiado is a clandestine literature, produced and consumed under constant threat of discovery and punishment by the Spanish Inquisition. Despite the fact that the ‘Catholic Monarchs,’ Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, vouchsafed the religious liberty of subject Muslims in the Capitulations of Granada (1492), they nonetheless reneged on these pledges, prohibiting Islam in 1502 in Castile and in 1520 in the Crown of Aragon.[3] This prohibition was followed by bans on the Arabic language, on the possession of books written in Arabic, and on a series of Morisco customs unrelated to spiritual practice, such as traditional dress, foodways, and music, in 1569. This means that Aljamiado literature, while produced at the same moment of the explosion of printing and the vast expansion of vernacular literacy on the Peninsula and beyond, did not share in this bounty, but rather thrived at the interstices of official and private culture, written and shared in secret, away from the prying eyes and ubiquitous ears of the Holy Office of the Spanish Inquisition.

In this context, we can read Aljamiado literature as an act of resistance (López Baralt 1992, 199–221). Scholars have traditionally viewed this literature as the death rattle of Andalusí cultural production, the desperate cries of a culture in decline. More recently scholars such as Vincent Barletta and Andrea Pauw (2021, 452) emphasise its creative, adaptive, and generative characteristics. Pauw encourages us to see it as a vernacular expansion of Islamic learning, reaching new Romance-speaking and reading audiences, just as was happening in the Christian and Jewish literary worlds with the introduction of print and an increasing production of titles in the vernacular as opposed to Latin and Hebrew.

Neither was the expansion of vernacularity among Muslim Iberian writers limited to activity within Muslim communities. Though most Aljamiado texts are religious in nature, there are a number of texts that are not, and rather address humanist philosophy (Novoa 2014), chivalric romance (Galmés de Fuentes 1970; Wacks 2014; Menaldi 2020), drama (Asín 1933) and other genres popular with medieval Iberians of all religions.[4] This means that Muslims living in Christian Spain participated in a shared vernacular culture with their Christian, Jewish, and *converso* (recent Christian converts from Judaism or Islam) neighbors. This shared vernacular served at once to bring Muslims and Moriscos together with their non-Muslim neighbours but also created a space for them to construct and voice identities as Hispanophone Muslims in late medieval and early modern Iberia, in a context of incipient empire, surveillance, and persecution. These stories show us how Moriscos navigated their experience as members of a persecuted religious (and, it could be argued, ethnic) minority on the one hand, and their experience as Spanish-speakers and participants in a vernacular Hispanophone culture on the other.

Islam counts the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament as sacred books, and reveres many of its figures as prophets, including Moses, Jesus, and Mary (Tottoli 2002). However, the Islamic doctrine of *tahrīf* (lit. ‘distortion’ or ‘falsification’) holds that these texts have been corrupted by Jews and Christians, and that the Islamic interpretation of the Bible is the

correct one (Lazarus-Yafeh 2012). Islamic traditions about figures from the Hebrew Bible and New Testament focus on the question of prophecy, and on establishing a line of succession beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad (Adang 1996, 16; Tottoli 2002, 51 n. 4). They build out a specifically Islamic Biblical storyworld, expanding on and adapting the narratives of the Hebrew Bible to meet the interpretive needs of the *'ummah* (the community of Muslims) in any given moment. [5]

The vernacular language and culture as a lens through which to read these retellings is key to this interpretation. In Aljamiado retellings of narratives from the Hebrew Bible, we see a compelling mixture of Islamic traditions, elements drawn from Christian and Jewish tradition, material from vernacular culture common to all three groups, and artistic innovation and originality that at times responds to Islamic tradition, at others is specific to Morisco experience (Perry 2012, 165), and occasionally appears to be simply literary innovation for its own sake. In the examples that follow, we will see how these retellings make use of the vernacular Hispanophone culture as a vehicle for a Morisco Biblical storyworld, how the texts interpret traditions shared by Muslims, Jews, and Christians, and in particular how the texts present Biblical narratives in a polemical context, pushing back against the dominant Christian interpretations and exalting both Islamic tradition and the Morisco lived experience in acts of creative narrative resistance.

How precisely does this happen? How does the vernacular catalyse the lived experience of writers and audiences in building a storyworld (Martínez 2018, 39)? We can discern three ways in which the vernacular serves as a vehicle for shared retellings: (1) in writers' use of colloquialisms and other elocutions drawn from everyday speech, (2) in the writers' description of shared material vernacular culture, and (3) in the use of genres, tropes, and forms common to vernacular narrative genres across religious traditions. Speakers of a vernacular, regardless of religion, have a shared affective experience in their vernacular, and its representation in that vernacular rings true for all of its audiences (Pauwels 2021).

The use of everyday speech and colloquialisms reinforces the audience's identification with the storyworld and opens the door to their further populating the story with the raw material of lived experience, increasing the narrative's relevance to their own experience. In the fourteenth-century *Alhadiz de Yuçuf* (*Ḥadīth Yūsuf*, 'Tale of Joseph', known in Spanish as the *Poema de José*), the merchants who buy Joseph from his brothers later taunt Joseph, saying that his brothers sold him for a low price:

They sold you as if you were a sheep  
Saying that you are *a low-class thief*  
*I wouldn't give a fig* for those kinda guys

ellos te an vendido como si fueses oveja  
diciendo que eres ladron y *de mala peleja*;  
yo por tales sennores *no daría una arbeja*  
(Johnson 1974, 41, st. B42b–d)

It is worth a moment to explain the colloquialisms quoted here. The first, *de mala peleja* (Mod. Span. *pelleja*, pelt), is an expansion of the idea that the brothers sold Joseph ‘as if you were a sheep’ (*como si fueses oveja*), but a sheep bearing poor-quality skin (*de mala peleja*). In the second, the merchants express their low esteem for Joseph’s brothers by saying that they are worth ‘less than a pea’ (*no daría una arveja*), similar to expressions in English such as to not “give a whit” or “give a fig.” These are good examples of how the vernacular is key in the audience construction of a Biblical storworld shared across religious groups.

Joseph then rises to power as the first minister of Pharaoh and carries out his plan to save the Egyptians from famine by storing up grain. Once the people come to purchase the stored grain, Joseph comments that they will pay for it ‘*por oro y plata y cuernos y algos*’ (Johnson 1974, 67, st. B150), that is, ‘with gold, silver, heads of cattle, and goods.’[6] The sense of this formula (not attested elsewhere that I have found, but similar to others attested in medieval sources), is ‘they will pay everything they have for it,’ the idea being that Joseph and Pharaoh have cornered the market and are able to charge whatever they wish for the grain. This type of colloquial comparative expression heightens audience identification with the narrative by making the discourse relevant to vernacular audiences’ personal and collective experience.

Morisco writers also shared in the vernacular poetics of the day, and their writing, especially the fourteenth-century *Poema de José*, demonstrates familiarity with concepts, tropes, and poetic forms practiced by their Christian counterparts. The poem is written in the form known as the *mester de clerecía* (Pauw 2021, 443), also called Alexandrine verse because it was the vehicle for Gaultier de Châtillon’s Alexander poem, the *Alexandreis*, later adapted by Castilian authors, most notably Gonzalo de Berceo, for the composition of hagiographical and other devotional poems (Weiss 2006; Pinet 2016). The Morisco protagonist of the Aljamiado Joseph poem is both heroic and hagiographical, in that it clothes the biblical narrative in the trappings of the heroic verse of the times, making Joseph a sort of Biblical Morisco Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (aka *El Cid*, d. 1099 CE), hero of the eponymous *Cantar de Mio Cid* (*Song of My Cid*, ca. 1200 CE) (Pauw 2021, 447). In this way, the author interprets the Biblical story in a poetic form familiar to audiences across religious groups, facilitating the creation of a shared storyworld. The poem describes the court of Pharaoh in terms of the chivalric culture celebrated in the epic poetry of the dominant culture. When Joseph is about to reveal himself to his brothers in Egypt, he asks his brother Benjamin:

Do you recognize me, *squire*?  
He replied: ‘No, by my faith, *sir knight*.’

‘Conoçesme, escudero?’  
Yel le dixxo: ‘No, a la fe, caballero.’  
(Johnson 1974, 83, st. B246)

The words *escudero* and *caballero* do not correspond to the storyworld of the Hebrew Bible. Joseph is effectively the Prime Minister of Egypt, and Benjamin is a Canaanite refugee, not an *escudero*. What these vernacular terms do for the audience is to express the power dynamic

between Joseph and his brother in terms that are relevant to their experience and allow them to more effectively populate the Biblical storyworld with familiar affective and cultural content.

This shared vernacular aesthetic and culture at times facilitates sharing of material by authors of Biblical retellings across religious traditions. While the Muslim traditions of Biblical figures are often shaped at their origins by existing Christian and Jewish retellings dating to late antiquity and Early Islam (Reynolds 2010), this process repeats itself in some Aljamiado compositions or adaptations of earlier traditions that show the additional, later influence of Christian or Jewish traditions. Christologically influenced portrayals of figures such as Isaac and Joseph as prefigurations of Jesus, for example, are abundant (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 22; Rosa-Rodríguez 2013; Busto Cortina 2021; Celli 2021). In the *Poema de José*, the recently enslaved Joseph's speech to the absent Rebecca recalls the separation between Jesus and Mary (Pauw 2021, 448):

Mother, my lady, may the Lord forgive you.  
 Mother, if you could see me now, it would pain you  
 My neck is chained, I am a slave with a master,  
 Sold by my brothers, as if I were a traitor.  
 They have sold me, though I did them no wrong.  
 Separated me from my father, before his death.  
 This is what they have done to me, with cunning and deceit.  
 Sold me for a few pennies, and now I am roasted and cooked![7]

Madre, sennora, perdoneddos el Sennor.  
 Madre, si me vidieses, de me abrias dolor.  
 Voy con cadena al cuello, cativo con sennor,  
 Vendido de mis hermanos, como si fuese t(a)raidor.  
 Ellos me han vendido, no teniendoles tuerto.  
 Partieronme de mi padre, ante que fuese muerto.  
 Con art y con falsia ellos me ovieron vuelto.  
 Por mal preçio me an vendido, por do voy asado y cueito  
 (Johnson 1974, 43, st. B47–48)

In this way the vernacular serves as a medium binding the Aljamiado Joseph storyworld to the Joseph of Christian tradition, the same Christian tradition that developed the verse form adapted by the Morisco author of the Joseph poem, and that shared with Morisco audiences their common vernacular culture, turns of phrase, popular sayings, and other forms of verbal art.

However, this shared vernacular culture is the same medium in which Aljamiado authors stake out and call attention to critical differences between Muslim non-Muslim traditions of the Hebrew Bible, and exalt Islam in the face of Christian persecution through depictions of Muslim ritual and doctrine. These polemical depictions are a form of resistance representation: the representation of a religious culture and an ethnicity threatened with extinction through legislation and systematic repression. There is a well-established and documented tradition of formal anti-Christian polemic literature written by Iberian Muslims (Colominas Aparicio 2016;

Balabarca-Fataccioli 2020), and Jews, most written as prose treatises. As narratives, however, the texts we read here are what we might call polemical narrative, the exaltation of Islam and the denigration of Christian and/or Jewish religion and traditions in narrative form.

Just as Morisco representation of Islam is a form of resistance, negative representation of Christianity and Judaism throws this self-representation into greater relief, uplifting Islam and Morisco lived experience. Donald Wood (2020, 39) notes that Aljamiado versions of *Isrā' iliyāt*, or traditional Muslim tales of the Hebrew Bible transmitted by converts from Judaism during the early period of Islam (Lowin 2007), connect Islamic ritual practice with anti-Christian and anti-Jewish polemic. The Muslim doctrine of *tahrīf* holds that the Jews corrupted the version of the Torah received at Sinai, and that the revelation received by Muhammad purified and completed this revelation. The direct representation of Jews or Biblical Hebrews (standing in for contemporary Iberian Jews) in the Aljamiado Biblical narratives reinforces the doctrine of *tahrīf* and the moral and spiritual inferiority of non-Muslims in general. The *Diálogo de Moisés con alá en el sinai* ('Dialogue of Moses with God on Mount Sinai' = *Dialogue*) allegorises the doctrine of *tahrīf*. Moses comes down from the mountain with 'seven [not two] tablets of pearls and coral, on which the Torah was written' ('siete tablas de perlas y coral, en que ellas estaba escrito el at-tawrah.' Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 174). This representation suggests that the Jews reduced or abrogated the law once it was received,[8] and the traditional two tablets is, in keeping with the doctrine of *tahrīf*,

In an example of more directly polemical discourse, in the same text Moses actually directly asks God which group he loves more, Jews or Muslims? The answer is obvious:

Moses said:

Oh Lord! Who are most beloved of you? *Al-'umma* [the community of Muslims],  
or those of the Bani Isrā'il [lit. Sons of Israel, i.e. the Jews]?

God, may his name be exalted, replied:

*Al-'umma* of Muhammad.

Dixo Muça:

¡Ya Señor! ¿Cuáles son más amados a tú, al-Umma [comunidad] de Muhammad,  
o los de Bani Içra'ila?

Dixo Allah, el noble en su nobleza:

—El-alumma de Muhammad (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 175)

Elsewhere authors of Aljamiado narratives insert details meant to emphasise the wrongdoing of Biblical characters standing in for non-Muslims. This gesture is similar to when Christian retellings of the Gospels single out Judas to represent contemporary Jews, while the other Jewish characters (Disciples) are coded as Christians (Maccoby 1992). In the Aljamiado Joseph poem, the author puts this into practice by describing a Hebrew-language bill of sale for the young Joseph prepared by his brothers, identifying the injustice of his enslavement with Hebrew and Jewish tradition in order to intensify the identification of the heroic Joseph (historically an Israelite and a Jew in Jewish tradition) instead with Islam and Islamic tradition:

The king took out a letter that he valued very highly,  
 Written in the Hebrew of time long ago,  
 Of how they sold him,  
 And how they brought him to market.  
 The old man had kept it until that very moment!

Y saco el rrey una carta que tenia ençalçado,  
 Esc(i)ribta en abraico del tienpo pasado,  
 Decomo lo vendieron,  
 y lo ovieron mercado.  
 Y tuvolo guardado el vellido fasta daquel estado  
 (Johnson 1974, 91, st. B298)

The example of the tablets teaches that Jews and Christians have corrupted divine revelation, but here, the Hebrew language itself serves as the vehicle of the moral corruption of Joseph's brothers. Highlighting the fact that the letter was written in Hebrew ties the brothers' corruption to Jewish tradition.

This polemic storyworlding extends to representations of Islamic doctrine and ritual. A number of aljamiado texts are pedagogical in that they teach audiences the rudiments of Islamic doctrine, prayer, and ritual (Barletta 2005, 112; Ruiz Bejarano 2017). We have a number of examples in which the narratives participate in this polemic implicitly, not by portraying Christians or Jews in a negative light, but rather by demonstrating correct Islamic practice and belief. In an atmosphere of persecution, this alone is a polemical (and dangerous) gesture, reclaiming Biblical narrative for Islamic tradition. Some of these examples simply demonstrate correct practice. For example, *El sacrificio de Ismael* ('The Sacrifice of Ishmael' = *Sacrifice*), the text teaches audiences the *takbīr*, or phrase 'Allāhu 'akbar ('God is great'), and demonstrates the characters using it at appropriate moments (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 23). In the fifteenth-century *Leyenda de Yusuf* ('The Legend of Yūsuf'), the angel Gabriel visits Joseph in the pit into which his brothers have thrown him and teaches him Muslim prayers (Klenk 1972, 16–17; McGaha 1997, 174). In some examples, the narrative simply demonstrates the tradition or doctrine in question. In the *Diálogo de Moisés* ('Dialogue of Moses'), Moses ascends the mountain and spends forty days purifying himself spiritually before receiving the law. The scene describes him performing Muslim prayer, using the Arabic terms to describe the act of prayer: *ṣalāt* (prayer), *rak'a* (prostration), and *sajada* (to prostrate oneself):

he went up to Mount Sinai and performed *aṣ-ṣala* in two *rak'as*, and when he was *sajjada*'ed, *Allāh ta'āla* approached him and said...

subió al monte de Turiçina'a (Sinai) y hizo *assala* (oración) en el dos *arrak'as* (postraciones), y como estaba *aççajado* (postrado), acercólo *Alla ta'ala*, y díjole..." (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 168)

In the same text, Moses demonstrates correct practice around marriage. When Shu‘ayb (Jethro) offers him his daughter Zalifa,[9] Moses instructs her to tell her father that because Moses is a believer, he may not cohabit with a woman before paying her the bride price:[10]

Oh damsel! Go away and go back to your father, and if he should ask you why you return, tell him that Moses says that he is of the *al-‘umma* and from a group for whom it is not *ḥalāl* for them to have relations with a woman until they have first paid her what is due.

¡Ya Donzella! Deventate i vete a tu padre i si te preguntare por qué te vuelves dile que dice Muça que él es de al-‘Umma (comunidad religiosa) y de raíz que no es halal (lícito) a ellos usar con mujer hasta que hayan pagado los derechos. (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 166)

It is not uncommon in Muslim texts written in Christian Iberia to represent contemporary Christian practice with pagan figures from pre-Islamic historical or fantastical settings. That is, in some cases Christian practices are represented as idolatrous by association with tropes of paganism familiar from classical Islam. Here, Moses is represented as a good Muslim while the pagan Shu‘ayb offers up his daughter without any ceremony or assurance of her well-being that is the motive for the traditional *ṣadāq* or bride price (el-Alami 2015). In this way, Shu‘ayb stands in for Christian Iberians whose marriage practices are incompatible with Islam and Moses as the Morsico whose opposition to Christian practice is framed as heroic and salvific.

Other examples demonstrate morally correct behaviour, rather than a particular practice or ritual. *Alhadiz de Muça con Yakub el karniçero* (‘The Tale of Moses and Jacob the Butcher’), demonstrates the concept of *ḥasb wa nasb* (behaviour and lineage),[11] as well as the importance of filial piety. In the tale, the butcher suffers a poor reputation in his town because his parents are considered morally corrupt, but when the butcher invites Moses to his home, the prophet sees Jacob as a righteous man whose filial piety is exceptional. Christian Iberia in this moment was obsessed with the importance of lineage, both with regard to nobility as with religious purity (Kaplan 2012). A tale de-emphasising lineage as a marker of social prestige in favor of correct behaviour would likely resonate with Morisco audiences who were criminalised for their cultural heritage and lineage, even when they publicly adhered to Christian orthodoxy.

In other cases, narratives explain established Islamic doctrine or ritual. This is an important pedagogical function of Aljamiado literature in general, to teach the basics of Islamic doctrine and practice to Castilian- or Aragonese-speaking audiences. In the *Sacrifice of Ishmael*, the sacrificial lamb provided by the Angel Gabriel escapes the altar, and Abraham throws seven rocks at it, after which Ishmael catches the lamb and Abraham sacrifices it to sanctify the place (traditionally believed to be Mecca) as a house of prayer. [12]

One of the most important theological tasks of Aljamiado retellings of the Hebrew Bible is to exalt Islam over Christianity and Judaism (Colominas Aparicio 2020, 114). What this means, in addition to negative representation of non-Muslims and their respective traditions, is that they tend to place emphasis on Muhammad’s prophecy (Green-Mercado 2019, 54–55; Lugo Acevedo 2008; Zuwiyya 2017). This message would have been particularly important in a

cultural landscape where many Christians understood Muhammad as a kind of ‘Muslim Christ’ (Tolan 2019, 119–42). It was crucial for Moriscos to understand that Muhammad was the last prophet, and the most important prophet, beloved by God over all other humans, but ultimately human himself. Additionally, prophets in the narratives served the Moriscos as models of patience in the face of adversity, valuable for a population persecuted for their religious beliefs (Pauw 2021, 445). Aljamiado representations of biblical prophets resisted the Christian Biblical storyworld with which Moriscos were likely familiar through attendance at mass, Church art, and oral tradition. These representations enabled Morisco audiences to repopulate the Christian Biblical storyworld with a Morisco Adam, a Morisco Abraham, and so on.

The Aljamiado *Libro de las luces* is an account of the chain of prophecy from Adam to Muhammad (Lugo Acevedo 2008; Zuwiyya 2017). While the text spends most of its time on early Islam, it begins with a section on Adam and Eve. According to the text, light of prophecy (depicted in some Muslim art as a kind of fiery halo) passes from Adam to the Biblical prophets, and then to Muhammad. Adam tells Eve to purify herself before intercourse, during which he passes the light to her, which then passes to Seth, and thence to all prophets down to Muhammad (Lugo Acevedo 2008, 105). This is significant for thinking about the polemic nature of the Morisco Biblical storyworld. It counters the images of Eve in Christian interpretations that focus on her sin in Eden and its consequences for womankind. The story flips the Christian script of Eve as the origin of sin that makes *necessary* redemption in Christ to Muslim Eve, mother of prophets whose legacy makes *possible* redemption in the prophecy of Muhammad.

This chain of prophecy continues with Abraham (Ibrāhīm), who is the first Muslim according to tradition, and the second most important prophet after Muhammad (Busse 2012). He is portrayed in both the *Alhadiz de Ibrahim* (*ḥadīth Ibrāhīm*, = ‘Tale of Abraham’) and the *Sacrifice of Ishmael* as a champion of monotheism in an environment in which Muslim scholars sometimes described Christianity as a form of idol-worship (Lapiedra Gutiérrez 1997, 158–175; Serrano Ruano 2012, 739). In the *Tale*, God shows Abraham seven miracles, each one more fantastic than the last, as proof of his readiness for prophecy (Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 25). In *Moisés con la paloma y el halcón* (‘Moses, the dove and the falcon’) (Corriente 1990, 274–76), Moses demonstrates his *rahma* (mercy) by feeding the falcon his own flesh to prevent the falcon (actually the Angel Gabriel putting Moses to the test) from eating the dove, who is under Moses’ protection. [13] Moriscos would have been familiar with Christian tropes of the self-sacrifice of Jesus, and we may read their application here for Morisco audiences a way to reclaim the trope in an Islamic context. In fact, we can read Morisco Moses in the context of Christian Iberia as a corrective or update to Christological readings of the Hebrew Bible, according to which the Hebrew Bible prefigures Christ’s life and passion, and therefore the possibility of Christian redemption (Sapir Abulafia 2012, 616–17). This Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible would have been familiar to Moriscos, even those (likely the large majority) who had not been properly catechised after their forced baptisms. For this audience, as with Jewish audiences in Christian Iberia, all readings of the Hebrew Bible are polemic, at least implicitly.

In the same way that Christian readings of the Hebrew Bible read the figures of the Hebrew Bible as prefigurations of Christ and the revelation of the New Testament, so too do Aljamiado retellings read it as a precursor to the prophecy of Muhammad and the revelation of the Qur’an. God makes it explicit to Morisco Moses that he is an important prophet, but not as

important as Muhammad. It is as if the narrator were visiting Moses in the storyworld of the Hebrew Bible to bring him an important update: the law he is about to receive at Sinai will be the foundation for the completion of the law received by Muhammad. In the *Demandas de Muça* ('Moses' Questions') God reminds Moses of his place and reinforces succession of prophecy from Adam to Moses to Muhammad (Corriente 1990, 63–64). In the *Diálogo* ('Dialogue') God states plainly to Moses that Muhammad is more important than him: 'Muhammad is my beloved, and the beloved is of a higher Rank than he who speaks with me now [i.e. Moses]' ('Muhammad es mi amado, y el amado es mayor en grado que el que habla con mi,' Vespertino Rodríguez 1983, 174). By reinforcing the prophetic lineage traditional to Islam for audiences whose Biblical storyworld was a battlefield between Christian and Muslim traditions, these polemical retellings used narrative to build group identity, resist Christian readings, and dodge Christian persecution.

In conclusion, retellings of tales from the Hebrew Bible were a way for Moriscos to teach and learn about Islamic practice, reinforce the group identity, and resist persecution. At the same time, we see in these tales the depth of Morisco engagement with the vernacular language and culture they shared with their Christian and Jewish neighbors. Even in their critique of Christianity and Judaism, Morisco authors draw on colloquialisms, poetics, and narrative motifs derived from the vernacular culture common to all three of the Peninsula's religious traditions.

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#### Endnotes

- [1] For introductions to *aljamiado* language and literature, see Chejne 1983; Galmés de Fuentes 1996; López-Morillas 2000, 54–57.
- [2] On *aljamiado* narratives about Biblical figures, see Vespertino Rodríguez 1978; 1983; Pascual Asensi 2008; 2007; Wood 2020; Pauw 2021.
- [3] On the history of Late Spanish Islam and the Moriscos, see Chejne, *Islam and the West: The Moriscos*; García Arenal; López-Baralt; Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500 to 1614*; Catlos 281–308; Carr.
- [4] For a selection of English translations of aljamiado legends both religious and secular, see Rosa-Rodríguez 2018.

[5] A storyworld is an audience-constructed simulated world built around a text or texts, a “mental [model] of situations and states of affairs” (Martínez 2018 , 28) See also Ryan (2014, 33).

[6] This appears to be a formula specific to medieval Spanish, bringing together the two binomials ‘silver and gold’ and ‘cattle and goods.’ On binomials in Spanish, see Malkiel 1959; García-Page 1998; Pérez 2006.

[7] One might read the reference to being ‘cooked’ as an anti-Christian jab at the Christian tradition of Jesus as the sacrificial ‘lamb of God.’ Moriscos read the story of the Sacrifice of Ishmael on the holiday of Eid al-Adha commemorating the near-sacrifice of Ishmael (Barletta 2005, 111).

[8] Al-Tha‘labī relates differing traditions in which there are nine or two tablets (2002, 336 and 348), while al-Ṭabarī (1989, 3: 73–78) is silent on the question.

[9] In the Hebrew Bible, Jethro’s daughter is Tzipporah, Ar. Ṣafūrā (al-Tha‘labī 2002, 191).

[10] This detail is absent in the traditions about Moses and Shu‘ayb (Jethro) related by al-Tha‘labī (2002, 290–92) and referenced by al-Ṭabarī (al-Ṭabarī 1989, 3: 31). The Qur’anic Shu‘ayb has no apparent connection to Jethro and is only identified with him in later commentaries (al-Ṭabarī 1989, 3: 31 n 166).

[11] In pre-Islamic Arabia and in Classical Islam, one’s reputation and social worth was a balance of The excellence of ancestors [nasab]...and the generosity which procures ḥasab by religion’ (Bearman et al. 2015). See also Mottahedeh 1980, 100–104; Ephrat 2000, 122 n 65.

[12] See the traditions related by Al-Ṭabarī (1989, 2: 94) and al-Tha‘labī (2002, 160–61). The aljamiado text is in fact found incorporated into a khutba (sermon) for ‘Eid al-adha (Barletta 2005, 111).

[13] The concept of divine mercy is central to Islam and especially to Qur’anic prophecy (Mir 2016, 53–54). The Qur’an states that God sent the Prophets as an act of mercy (Reynolds 2020, 101–4).