Learning from Al-Andalus: King Alfonso X (The Wise) and the Thirteenth-Century Renaissance

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Brunetto Latini (L) and Dante Alighieri (R), fresco, Chapel of the Podestà, Bargello, Florence, c. 1335

His dates: (c.1210-1294)
Brunetto Latini’s Mission to King Alfonso in 1260, Tesoretto, Florence, Bibl. Laurenziana, Strozzi 146, f.1 v
The Alfonsine ‘Renaissance’, 1252-1284

- Continuation of School of Translators in Toledo established under King Fernando III el Santo

- Innovation: Translations of Arabic and Hebrew works into Castilian rather than Latin

- Growth and prestige of Castilian as a language of culture, learning and politics

- Ambitious intellectual, legal, scientific, artistic projects

- Continued repopulation and conquest of Al-Andalus
Convivencia: King Alfonso the Wise (el Sabio)

Libro de los Juegos (Book of Games), Escorial, T.I.6, c. 1280
Evaluating Convivencia: How to assess the state of Jews, Muslims, Christians living together at this point?
Detail: Battle of Alaros (1195) with Yaqub al’Mansur, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms. T I,1.
L. Map of Spain, 1150-1492; R: The push into Muslim Territories, 13th century
You can study the fluid nature of symbols such as the hexagram and swastika, as markers of Jewish or Muslim identity.

- Elements of dress that mark Jews and Muslims
- Spaces marked with pseudo-Arabic lettering
- Stories of punishments of Jews or Muslims, or tales of conversion. (Of course, this also happens to Christians as well).
- These images are highly mediated (constructed) and not snapshots of life as it was.
Battle of Chincolla with Muslim Troops, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms.T I.1, f. 247.
Detail, Battle of Chincolla with Muslim Troops, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms. T I.1, f. 247.
The Jewish money-lender in his chambers, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms. Tl.1, f. 39
Moor and the Christian Woman Caught in Adultery, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms. T I,1, f. 244
Moor and the Christian Woman Caught in Adultery, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Escorial, MS. T.I.1, f. 244
Muslim inspecting an image of the Virgin, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Escorial, MS. T.I.1, f. 68v.
Muslim inspecting an image of the Virgin, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Escorial, MS. T.I.1, f. 68v.
The Conversion of the Jewish Woman
Marisaltos, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Escorial, MS. T.I.1, f. 154
Detail: Conversion of the Jewish Woman Marisaltos, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Escorial, MS. T.I.1, f. 154
Detail: The conversion of the Jewish money-lender, Escorial, Cantigas de Santa Maria, Ms.T I,1, f. 39
Alfonso’s Projects: An Encylopedic Enterprise that inspires Brunetto Latini

- Legislative works & important chancery
- Scientific (including astronomical and astrological)
- Recreational entertainment (games)
- Prose works (historical)
- Poetic (religious and secular)
Brunetto Latini: Notary, philosopher, poet

- He wrote his Trésor (Tesoro in Italian), and the Tesoretto, both of which may reflect his absorption of new Aristotelian texts transmitted through the translators of the Alfonsine court. Both works are encyclopedic compilations that reflect the latest learning. Some scholars believe that his work reflects his great admiration for the learning and culture at the court of King Alfonso the Wise.

- These works are datable to c. 1260-66, when Latini is exiled in France.
How we do balance the positive impact that the Alfonsine court had on Latini, versus the focus on stories of punishment and conversion of Jews and Muslims in the Cantigas? It involves rethinking *convivencia*, and acknowledging the politics of assimilation.