JEWES AND ALTARPICLES IN MEDIEVAL SPAIN

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INTRODUCTION

At first glance, the title of this essay may seem to be an oxymoron, but the realities of Jewish life under Christian rule in late medieval Spain were subtle and complicated, even allowing Jews a role in the production of church art. This essay focuses on art as a means of illuminating relationships between Christians and Jews in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Historians continue to discuss whether the convivencia that characterized the earlier Islamic rule on the Iberian Peninsula continued after the Christian Reconquest, the massacres following the Black Death in 1348 and, especially, after the persecutions of 1391 that initiated a traumatic period lasting until 1416. One view is that the later centuries of Jewish life on the Peninsula were largely a period of decline that culminated in the Expulsion from Spain in 1492 and the Expulsion from Portugal four years later. As David Nirenberg has written, “Violence was a central and systematic aspect of the coexistence of the majority and minorities of medieval Spain.” Other, recent literature emphasizes the continuities in Jewish life before and after the period 1391-1416 that witnessed the death of approximately one-third of the Jewish population and the conversion of another third to one half. As Mark Meyerson has noted, in Valencia and the Crown of Aragon, the horrific events of 1391 were sudden and unexpected; only in Castile can they be seen as the product of prolonged anti-Jewish activity. Still the 1391 pogroms were preceded by attacks on Jews during Holy Week, for example those of 1331 in Girona.

Nearly twenty years ago Thomas Glick defined convivencia as “coexistence, but... [with] connotations of mutual interpenetration and creative influence, even as it also embraces...”
mutual friction, rivalry and suspicion. His definition is still considered applicable to the relations between Christians and Jews in late medieval Spain. The study of art produced in the last centuries of Jewish residence on the Peninsula may nuance our understanding of this convivencia.

None of the historians concerned with the nature of Jewish–Christian coexistence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries have analyzed the art of the period and the history of its production as a source for understanding relationships between Christians and Jews, or as evidence for knowledge of one another’s religion. Despite the fact that Jews worked as artists for Christians, which suggests they were knowledgeable about Christian history and beliefs, and that Christian artists demonstrated an intimate knowledge of Jewish life by setting scenes from the Gospels and Christian lore within Jewish architectural and ceremonial contexts, the implications of these artistic themes have been ignored.

The failure to exploit this historical source may be due to a lack of knowledge of the art-historical methodologies necessary to an understanding of medieval works of art, which are more than a product of the artist’s imagination. The modern model of an artist who creates sculpture or painting according to his own ideas and design and then seeks a buyer for the finished piece could not be further removed from that of his medieval counterpart whose patrons, either individuals or institutions, initiated the production of a work, and specified its subject, constituent materials, and even its composition in detailed contracts. Consider for example this 1483 contract written for a painter, Pere Cabanes, who was to create an altarpiece in a Valencian funerary chapel:

First, in the center, the image of the most glorious Virgin Mary that is [the same as the image of Mary] in the retablo mayor of the Cathedral of Valencia... and at the side...there is to be the image of Saint Augustine robed, I say robed with the chasuble and dalmatic and with ornaments in the dalmatic and on the shirt, all brocaded in fine gold...with the church in his hand, and from his hand should issue rays of gold...in addition it is agreed that the image of Saint Catherine Martyr is to be dressed with a beautiful ceremonial mantle, of beautiful folds, all brocaded in gold, the field of green, and the skirt below is to be of fine gold brocade on a Carmine ground, and with its beautiful borders of garnishings of fine gold, and with the gold chain around her neck, and gold crown in her hair.

This extract from the contract demonstrates the patron’s role in choosing the subject of the altarpiece, its composition—that is the placement of the figures—and the manner in which they were to be represented. Again and again, the use of gold is stressed, an indication of the importance of this costly material. The contract further indicates how a medieval work was embedded in a tradition of representation linked to its subject matter, as when the text demands that the Virgin be based on the depiction of the same figure in the main altarpiece in the cathedral of Valencia.
The existence of detailed contracts and traditional compositions did not prevent an artist from being innovative, however, introducing new elements that reflected contemporary concerns. In fact, the innovations in a work that diverge from the conventional model are “red flags” calling attention to new content, although only a thorough knowledge of the available models allows the art historian to perceive what is innovative. When elements such as clothing, architectural settings, or the physiognomy of figures can be matched against contemporary textual descriptions, surviving buildings or objects, and comparative visual representations, the conclusion may be reached that painted scenes mirrored the reality before the artist’s eyes, as Richard Ettinghausen noted in discussing Islamic miniatures: “Manuscripts inform us better than...any other medium about contemporary daily life in the Arab world.”

The same is true of retablos according to Carmen Lacarra Ducay. Painters of altarpieces may have been compelled to introduce new subjects or contemporary details because of a change in form that was created in Spain around the second quarter of the fourteenth century. Acting to implement the ruling of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 requiring congregants to see the moment of Transubstantiation during mass, the churches moved their paintings off the altar to a position behind it (figure 27). The retablos, as they came to be called, were thereby freed from the spatial constraints of ordinary altarpieces, and grew in size, often reaching the height of the church vaults as at Tiesul and Eiga de los Callejos. This new art form allowed for many more panels and subjects surrounding the central depictions of saints or holy figures. The artists responsible for creating retablos were challenged to provide more complex iconographic programs than before, and the manner in which they met this challenge forms part of the present discussion.

Of course, the added scenes included Christian subjects, some of which necessarily involved Jewish characters, for example the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna—the parents of Mary—from the Temple on an altarpiece painted by the workshop of Blasco de Grañén between 1435 and 1445 (figure 28). The expanded corpus also encompassed episodes from the Hebrew Bible, such as scenes of the Creation of the World, the Crossing of the Red Sea, and depictions of Jewish worthies like Kings David and Solomon and the Prophets (figure 29). Themes from the Apocrypha also took pictorial form, for example the conversion of Anianus.
Arnau Bassa
Altarpiece of Saint Mark and Antiochus
of Huesca in a Church
1346
Oil on panel
89 × 94 in.
Cathedral of Manresa, Catalonia

Compiled by the Faculty Action Network
who became Saint Mark’s successor as bishop of Alexandria ca. 61 C.E. According to the apocryphal Acts of Saint Mark, as the saint entered Alexandria his sandal strap broke and he sought a shoemaker to mend it. He found Anianus who pierced his own hand while mending the sandal.14 The shoemaker cried out in pain to the One God, prompting Mark to heal Anianus’ wound and then to preach to him and his family. Many of the listeners wear the pointed hats common to representations of medieval Jews of western Europe, but unusual in Spain. Anianus and his wife were then baptized.

All three episodes are portrayed on a retablo by Arnau Bassa. His depiction of the story emphasizes Anianus’ profession as a shoemaker by placing him within an atelier that includes two other coppers; their wares are spread out before them. This detailed history of Saint Mark’s encounter with Anianus is explained by the role of the Shoemakers’ Guild of Barcelona in commissioning the altarpiece in 1346–7; Saint Mark was their patron saint.15 The role of the patrons is emphasized by the pattern of shoes on the robes of Anianus as he is consecrated as a bishop by Saint Mark in the central panel and by the carved shoes on the vertical frames that divide the retablo into three zones. Interestingly, the shoemakers shown in the first episode seem to be all Jews, recognizable by their beards and their red hair, long considered a sign of evil (figure 30).16 Their depictions are a reflection of the large number of Jews engaged in shoemaking in medieval Spain, and represent an instance of transposing events from the life of Jesus and the saints to the period when the altarpiece was painted.” The scene showing Anianus and his wife being baptized also had contemporary relevance, since the pogroms accompanying the Black Death of 1348,17 which occurred while the altarpiece was in process, led to the conversion of Jews such as Anianus (figure 31).18 His baptism referenced contemporaneous conversions and exemplifies another category of altarpiece subjects involving Jewish figures—scenes of religious conflict between Jews and Christians.” Other such subjects are conversionist sermons, disputations, and the Host Libel.

In the thirteenth century, anti-Jewish libels involving young boys became widespread in Spain. The Host Libel, the charge that Jews desecrated the host by stabbing it, thereby symbolically killing the Christian god, developed in the late thirteenth century and appeared on Spanish altarpieces around the time of the Black Death, 1349–50, for which the Jews were blamed.” Two retablos from the monastery of Vallbona de les Monges created at that time show various scenes of host desecration: the host is stabbed; it is placed in a pot of boiling liquid; Jews are punished by being burned alive or they are converted.” Slightly later, 1363–70, is the more elaborate narrative on an altarpiece of the Virgin painted by the Serra atelier, a family workshop whose principals were Jaume (ca. 1358–90) and Pere (ca. 1360–1407) (figure 32).22 The main predella scene, centrally placed, is the Last Supper; scenes of desecration are at both sides. At left, a Jew with red hair who is also dressed in red throws a wafer into the sea (figure 33). A more detailed sequence of events unfolds at right. A
Christian woman presents a host to a Jewish man. He reappears in the main space piercing the host with a knife; blood streams forth. Simultaneously, a host that was thrown in a vat of boiling liquid is transformed into the Child. A Jewish woman identified by her distinctive headdress watches with emotion and restrains a young boy in the foreground whose gestures draw attention to the scene. Presumably, their actions express recognition of the truth of Transubstantiation, a major step on the road to conversion. At far right a woman who was originally Jewish as seen by her red hair receives communion from a cleric. The conversion of Jews is likewise a component of the written Host Libel narratives.

Another scene expressing the uneasy relationship between Jews and Christians in the late Middle Ages is “A Disputation between Moses and Saint Peter,” a panel from the predella of an altarpiece dedicated to the Mother of God painted for the monastery of Santes Creus by Pere Serra, Guerau Gener, and Lluís Borràssí in the early fifteenth century (figure 10). The subject is based on actual debates between church prelates and rabbis in which Jews were forced to participate. Two of the most important disputations occurred in Barcelona in 1163 between the convert Pablo Christiani and the esteemed scholar, Moses ben Nahman (Nahmanides) and in Tortosa in 1415.

**JEWISH ARTISTS WORKING FOR CHRISTIANS**

Research in the archives of the Crown of Aragon has revealed the names of Jewish artists engaged in a variety of métiers. Perhaps the most interesting for an essay devoted to retablos is the information on Abraham de Salinas, a painter in Saragossa who was commissioned by the cathedral of San Salvador (known as La Seo) to paint a retablo on the Life of the Virgin in 1395, just two years after the worst pogroms in Spanish history, although it must be noted that the Jewish community of Saragossa was one of two spared these attacks. Bonafós Abenx-ueu, a Jewish silversmith, contracted to provide the frame. Later, Abraham created two other retablos for the church of San Felipe in Saragossa, one on the Life of Saint Matthew and another devoted to Saint John the Baptist. He also painted a retablo for the parochial church of La Puebla de Albortón in the province of Saragossa, and a second altarpiece for the same church with six scenes depicting the story of the Annunciation to Mary. That Abraham de Salinas was given the commissions just mentioned, including repeat commissions from the same churches, testifies both to the fact that he was esteemed as a painter, and that he was able to produce various Christological themes that satisfied his patrons. Recently, Robert Chazan analyzed Hebrew polemical literature and concluded that Jewish polemicists knew Christian religious literature and utilized that knowledge in their arguments with Christian debaters. Abraham’s commissions suggest that the same was true for Jewish artists. They must have had sufficient visual models like those cited in the Cabanes contract, or a model book on Christian iconography, or they may have known a Christian textual source.
Bonafós Abenzuere, who made the frame for the La Seo altarpiece, was a silversmith, one of the many Jewish silversmiths of Saragossa who were numerous enough to support their own synagogue. Confraternities of artists and craftsmen, both Jewish and Christian, organized to protect their religious concerns and for mutual support in areas of social welfare, were more numerous in Aragon than elsewhere in Christian Spain, and most Jewish confraternities were in Aragon, particularly in Saragossa. The earliest recorded silversmith in Morella, Aragon, was the Jew Mose Alafoydai, nicknamed “the Jewish silversmith” in documents of 1334–35. Mose had two brothers, Salomon and Caquo, who were also silversmiths. The Santalinea family of silversmiths who flourished in Morella during the second half of the century were conversos. In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Morvedre (Aragon), silversmiths were the foremost artists in the Jewish community; indeed their work was so highly esteemed that they established branch workshops in other locales to which they regularly traveled, and apprentices from other cities came to study with them. The prominence of Jews in silversmithing may be a legacy from their roles in areas previously under Muslim rule, since the hadith, the religious traditions of Islam, viewed metalworking as degrading and left it to Jews. Their knowledge of the forms of church vessels could have been acquired during the times that church silver was pawned with Jews or from works given to them as models for new commissions. In 1380 the sister of the bishop of Tarazona and the sacristan of the church in Borja pawned a silver cross, a reliquary, a censer, and an incense vessel with its ladle of silver with the Jew Yuçe Francés.

Just as silversmiths became conversos, so did painters of altarpieces. Born and educated in the Jewish community, they later converted to Christianity, taking their Jewish educations with them. Among them were an uncle and nephew, Guiller and Juan de Levi, whose family name indicates a Jewish origin. Nothing is known of Guiller until the 1380s when he is listed as a painter. Juan is undocumented until 1388 when he is named Guiller’s heir. The lack of early records may be another indication of Jewish origins. Juan de Levi created a retablo for the tomb of the bishops of Tarazona, Pedro and Fernando Pérez Calvillo, brothers who succeeded one another in office. The existing biographical information on the Pérez Calvillo brothers begins only at the point of their service to the Church, which raises the possibility that they, too, were conversos. The brothers owned many houses in the Jewish quarter of Tarazona, the rents from which were used for the rebuilding of the cathedral. It is well known that conversos often had dealings with one another, and a similar sense of fraternity may have led Bishop Fernando to commission the altarpiece for his brother’s tomb from Juan de Levi in 1408.

In the church of Rubielos de Mora is a retablo dated ca. 1420 that seems related to those of the de Levi atelier. The proportions of the panels and the Gothic framing devices are similar to those of the Tarazona altarpiece and the palette appears similar, for example the use of red clay earth in outdoor scenes. The facial type of Jesus in the scene among the Doctors at Rubielos (figure 34) is similar to that of Saint Prudentius preaching in Calahorra (figure 35).
Both have pudgy faces, arched eyebrows, small eyes and mouths, features that appear to sit on the surface rather than emerging from the planes of the face. Their idealization contrasts with the Jewish figures in the scene of Christ among the Doctors, whose faces are individualized by features such as large noses, and whose purple robes signify their potential status as penitents.

All sit in a contemporary Gothic building. The Jews hold books with accurately formed Hebrew letters that suggest the texts were written by someone who had studied the Hebrew language (figure 16), which is not surprising if the painter was connected with the de Levi atelier. The 36 retablo—the lowest register of the altarpiece at the viewers’ eye level—is devoted to the depiction of twelve Hebrew prophets, an unusually large number on one retablo and a reflection of the significance of prophetic writings in Christian attempts to convince Jews to convert (figure 17).

In addition to painting retablos, Juan de Levi was also known for fabricating glass and his uncle, Guillerón, produced paintings on clear and colored glass; for example, glass with the figures of the kings of Armenia, Norway, Bosnia and others.37 Guillerón was also a painter on panel and documents record a retablo of his as well as portraits of nobility. Nicolás and Bonanat Zahortiga who worked in the first quarter of the fifteenth century were also converso painters of retablos.38 With continuing study in the Spanish archives more names of Jewish artists will probably emerge, although establishing a link to actual works may be difficult.

All of the artists discussed above can be identified as Jewish from their names or personal histories. The inclusion of correctly written Hebrew inscriptions in a retablo scene definitely indicates the participation of a Jewish or converso artist or scribe. A striking example is the Disputation between Moses and Saint Peter mentioned earlier, which was probably inspired by the Dialogi or Dialogues written by the converso Petrus Alfonsi in the early twelfth century (figure 10). The great popularity of the Dialogi is indicated by the fifty-six manuscript copies that date prior to the advent of printing.39 Alfonsi’s text is patterned on classical dialogues, as were most polemical tracts written in the Middle Ages, since this literary genre allowed authors to present claim and counterclaim in an easily understandable format.40 Its subject is the relative merits of Judaism versus Christianity. The choice of protagonists symbolized the two phases of Petrus Alfonsi’s life. He was Moses before conversion and Peter afterwards. Saint Peter’s empty scroll indicates the artist’s ignorance of Latin, but that he was knowledgeable about Hebrew is shown by the Commandments inscribed on Moses’ tablets.

There are Hebrew inscriptions on other retablos. One decorates the tomb of Jesus on a panel of a Pietà in Daroca painted ca. 1470 by Bartolomé de Cárdenas known as “el Bermejo.” The inscription is clear but not perfectly written. Still it can be translated “Through his death, he made an end to death.” Interestingly, Hebrew letters occur on other works by Bermejo, for example, on the canopy over Mary’s head in a Dormition, and on the tomb of a Resurrection dated 1468–71.41 In contrast, other artists producing scenes requiring Hebrew texts painted pseudo-letters, for example on Saint Stephen Preaching in a Synagogue, a fourteenth-century retablo by Jaume Serra (figure 50). The prayer books held by the Jewish worshippers are inscribed with gibberish. Bartolomé de Cárdenas’ use of Hebrew letters becomes even more striking when one considers his incorporation of Jewish genre elements into his paintings for the Church. One is a Jew on horseback depicted to the left of the Virgin’s head in a Pietà of 1490 in the Museo Diocesano of Barcelona.42 Another is men with pe’ot (side locks), which cover an area that men were forbidden by Jewish law to shave.43 The repeated inclusions of Jewish script and details in his art may indicate that Cárdenas was of converso stock.

Another inter-religious relationship involved a Christian patron hiring a Jew to oversee the production of a work of art. In 1412 Don Guzman, Master of the Order of Calatrava, commissioned a new translation of the Hebrew Bible into Castilian from Rabbi Moses of Arragel, which became known as La Biblia de Alba (Madrid, Palacio de Liria, no. 399).44 Don Guzman wished the text to be accompanied by a commentary and illustrations, but the rabbis were reluctant to violate what he understood to be the biblical prohibition against images. In response, Don Guzman agreed to hire several illuminators from Toledo and to provide them with a model manuscript from the cathedral. In all, Don Guzman wrote to the rabbi three times and amended his commission until Rabbi Moses agreed to participate in the translation project. The Biblia de Alba’s prefatory text tells the history of the commis-
sion and is testimony both to the use of models in the production of medieval art, and to the persistence of Christian–Jewish dialogue, convivencia, in the century of the Expulsion.

To sum up what has been outlined so far, there were Jewish and converso artists living in Spain in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries who worked for the Church and produced what has always been termed Christian art. That it was Christian in concept and use is certainly true, but in the multiethnic society of medieval Spain, the artist could be of another faith.

CHRISTIAN ARTISTS DEPICTING JEWISH LIFE

In a similar fashion, Christian artists portrayed Jewish life with an astonishing fidelity, but always within a Christian context. If Jewish characters were required for a scene from Christian history, the artist cast his Jewish contemporaries in the roles of their ancestors who lived at the time of Jesus and the Apostles, recalling Saint Augustine’s view that Jews were witnesses to the veracity of the Old and New Testaments. The small size of cities and towns whose churches commissioned large altarpieces from major artists, like Ejea de los Caballeros and Rubielos de Mora, were places where Jews formed a significant portion of the population and were easily accessible as models for paintings. Representations of contemporary reality infiltrated scenes set in the distant past like episodes from the Life of Jesus and the early saints that were placed around the central image of the holy figure to whom an altarpiece was dedicated. For example, late medieval Jews appear in a Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, part of the retable in the church of San Salvador in Ejea de los Caballeros painted by Blasco de Gratén from ca. 1440 until his death in 1459 (figure 38).

In the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple from Ejea, the primary Christian figures of Jesus and Mary are idealized in their form and dress and crowned by circular haloes whose shape symbolizes perfection. The Jewish figures of the narrative, Joseph and the High Priest, possessed of a lesser degree of holiness, wear cusped haloes above faces that are individualized, portrait-like and different from the ethereal, blemish-free figures of Jesus and Mary. The Jews’ appearance also reflects discriminatory regulations enacted by the kings of Aragon after the Lateran Council of 1139 that were intended to prevent sexual relations between Jews and Christians by marking the non-Christian. The Law Code of Alfonso X of Castile (1212–48), which was later adopted in all of Spain in 1348, elaborates on this point: Many crimes and outrageous things occur between Christians and Jews because they live together in cities, and dress alike; and in order to avoid the offenses and evils which take place for this reason, we deem it proper and we order that all Jews, male and female, living in our dominions shall bear some distinguishing mark upon their heads so that people may plainly recognize a Jew, or a Jewess.

King James I of Aragon decreed in 1267 that his Jewish subjects wear a dark cloak out of doors emblazoned with a rotulus and, in 1241, Jews and Muslims were prohibited from trimming their hair and beards so that unkempt hair became a compulsory sign of alterity. Wild hair was a sign that also marked heretics in the Bible Moralisée, the large picture Bibles written and illuminated in the first half of the thirteenth century for the kings of France. Jews were often conflated with heretics. The imposition of these restrictions provoked the following response from the Spanish Jew Solomon Alami (1370–1420):

We have suffered measure for measure. Because we adopted their dress, they dressed us in different vestments so that we would seem to be strangers among them, and because we shortened the corners of our hair and beard, they forced us to let our hair grow as if we were plunged into deep mourning.

The presence of recognizable Jews in Christological scenes served to underscore the Christian-ity of holy figures, much as black figures in exotic clothes emphasized the European character...
of those who sat for portraits during the Renaissance. The differences in the clothing or appearance of the Jews also reinforced their Otherness.

That these regulations were necessary suggests the visual homogeneity of the Spanish population, a homogeneity that required artificial means of differentiation. In other words, Jews and Christians looked very much alike. On the Iberian Peninsula, sartorial differentiation had first been instituted by the Muslim rulers of Al-Andalus to signify the subordinate status of dhimmi or protected minorities, peoples who had a sacred text. Some articles of dress required by the Muslims, such as the caunara, a rope belt, appear in the later Christian art of Aragon, for example, in the scene of the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna from the Temple discussed earlier (figure 18). The designation of clothing as a symbol of minority status was part of a general medieval view of dress as denoting class or occupation. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass describe medieval and Renaissance clothing as material mnemonics. Clothes signified an individual’s place in society, and were not “fashion” in the contemporary sense of the term. Livery, for example, marked an individual as in the service of another, more powerful person. The dingy clothing and wild hair of Jews were signs of their exclusion from Christian society and of their defeat by a victorious Christianity.

The presence in the Ejea Presentation of Jesus in the Temple of three discriminatory markers are a contemporary intrusion into the subject, as is the setting of the scene in a Gothic building whose representation includes detailed pier capitals and a triforium. That the building is not a church but a synagogue is indicated by the Torah case or tik that is on the altar. A cylindrical case of wood or silver to hold a Torah scroll upright in the synagogue first came into use in the eleventh century in the Maghreb, at the same time that the Koran box became a feature of mosques. It was used in Spain until the Expulsion, alternatively with textile coverings (mantles) for the Torah scroll. That the case was understood as a Jewish appurtenance is explicit in a 1515 scene of Christ among the Doctors on the main altarpiece in the royal monastery de Santa María de Sijena: “There the case is shown partially open revealing two round-topped Tablets of the Law with five lines of “writing” on each, corresponding to the Ten Commandments. Another detail of the Ejea panel, Joseph's basket with two doves, the post-partum Temple offering of a woman of modest means, indicates that the architecture is meant to be understood as the Temple, although its form reflects contemporary synagogues. In other words, if the Jews of the late Middle Ages could be construed as representatives of Jews alive during the early history of the Church, by the same reasoning the contemporary Jewish house of worship could serve as a stand-in for the Temple of antiquity. In a Presentation of Jesus in the Hispanic Society of New York, further contemporaneous details are included: a curved circumcision knife and a beaker to hold wine blessed after the actual circumcision (figure 40).

In fact, all scenes on the retablos that were supposed to have taken place in the Temple are shown in synagogue spaces: the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (sometimes represented as his Circumcision), the most commonly depicted Temple narrative; Christ among
the Doctors; the Annunciation to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist; and the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna from the Temple. All of these scenes are staged in Gothic buildings that are sometimes a combination of nave-like spaces and apses or are simply rectangular halls as in the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna. One retablo includes another detail, an outside staircase leading to a second story, presumably the balcony for women that is found in the Córdoba synagogue, El Tránsito in Toledo, in the Híjar synagogue and at Lorca. The identification of the painted buildings depends on the placement of the tik on the altar and the absence of any Christian accoutrements such as a cross. In the Expulsion of Joachim and Anna, a noteworthy detail of the tik is its decoration with a scarf or cloth, a custom still practiced in the Sephardi diaspora and also by eastern Jewish communities today.

The scene of the Annunciation to Zacharias while he is serving in the Temple appears on retablos dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. According to Christian lore, Zacharias was an ordinary Temple priest, but on an altarpiece in The Cloisters, he acts as the High Priest in the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year. His garb is a mix of that worn by all priests, for example the headdress and linen belt, but with the addition of elements from the High Priest’s regalia such as the pendant bells and pomegranates along the hem. Another extraordinary detail of this scene that indicates Zacharias is acting as the High Priest is the rope wound around his leg and held by a priest who stands outside the Holy of Holies. The rope allowed the High Priest’s body to be removed in the event that he died in the Divine presence for not having performed his duties correctly. The service depicted in this extremely detailed and particularized scene is based on the talmudic tractate, Yoma. Yet, as in other retablo depictions of the Temple, there is a Torah case on the altar, which is a synagogue appurtenance. The wealth of the detail from Jewish lore suggests that the artist, Domingo Ram (ca. 1464–1507), came from a converso background or had a Jewish assistant.

Excavations near the fortress in Lorca in 2003 prove the accuracy of the synagogue architecture painted on some retablos. The remains of the Lorca synagogue consist of a vestibule leading to a rectangular hall whose perimeter is surrounded by stone benches. The ruins of the Torah ark are on one of the short ends and the center of the hall is filled with the remains of the reader’s desk or teivah that was reached by a flight of steps. A painted version of this synagogue type appears on a retablo panel now in the Metropolitan Museum in New York, where the scene is enlivened by Jewish worshippers seated along the walls and by Mary and Joseph watching Jesus ascend the steps of the teivah (figure 42). The space is illuminated by glass “mosque” lamps and, in a case of life imitating art, a large cache of glass shards from “mosque” lamps was found beneath the teivah at Lorca and reconstructed.

The substitution of “modern” synagogue buildings for the ancient Temple may be attributable to the fact that the actual appearance of the Temple was unknown to medieval men and women. Or the substitution may have been encouraged by a common Jewish usage that terms the synagogues a “small sanctuary” (mikdash me’at), a play on the name of...
the Temple in Jerusalem, the beit ha-mikdash. In medieval Spain, the phrase is used in the Hebrew dedicatory inscription of the Cordoba synagogue:

Isaac Mehab, son of the honorable Ephraim, has completed this lesser sanctuary (mikdash me’at) and he built it in the year 75 [1314–1315] as a temporary abode. Hasten, O God, to rebuild Jerusalem.65

The impact of the term “lesser sanctuary” is emphasized by Isaac Mehab’s characterization of the synagogue as a temporary abode, accompanied by his prayer that the true House of God, the Jerusalem Temple, will soon be rebuilt.

The one exception to the modeling of the Temple on local synagogues is a scene of the Presentation of Jesus on an altarpiece in Palencia, in which all the figures stand in an hexagonal structure with a domed roof66. Medieval circular or polygonal structures were thought to imitate the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the most important Christian building in Jerusalem.65

Of the architecture associated with Jewish life in the Kingdom of Aragon, the most common form still standing is the arcuited gate to the judería, the Jewish quarter. The use of this defining structure to situate an episode from fourth-century Christian history within the ambience of late fifteenth-century Jewish life is evident in a portrayal of Saint Helena in the Holy Land questioning Judas, a Jew who claimed to have knowledge of the burial spot of the True Cross (figure 43). The scene is part of an altarpiece devoted to the True Cross by Miguel Jiménez and Martín Bernat painted in 1486–87 for the parish church of Santa Cruz de Blesa in Teruel. The scene is staged on local Jewish turf, just inside the arcuited gate to an Aragonese juderia, while the house behind is based on the architecture of Jewish houses still existing in former Jewish quarters. In this painting, the juderia symbolizes the land of the Jews, the Holy Land.

The scene of Saint Helena is remarkable for its representation of fifteenth-century dress. The Jew Judas is dressed in the dark cloak mandated by the decree of Peter III of Aragon in 1241; his hair and beard grow wild because of the decree of 1411. But Helena and her ladies are dressed in rich silks and jewels. She wears a red gown with ermine cuffs and hem, a brocade cloak of silk and gold threads, and an elaborate crown. The lady directly behind her wears a headdress with pearls. In the high Middle Ages, scarlet cloth gave status to the wearer and was reserved for the elite, while silk brocade was a mark of royalty.66 Various sources indicate that wealthy Jews were able to wear clothing similar to the robes of royalty depicted on the altar-pieces. In 1268 a Jew from Játiva bought his wife an exemption from the dress regulations which specifically allowed her to wear scarlet and “snow white” clothes. According to the sumptuary laws passed at a meeting of Castilian Jews convened at Valladolid in 1475:67

No woman unless unmarried or a bride in the first year of her marriage shall wear costly dresses of gold-cloth, or olive-colored material (a Chinese silk) or fine linen or silk, or of fine wool. Neither shall they wear on their dresses trimming of velvet
Altarpiece of Saint John the Baptist with Scenes from his Life

Domingo Ramón

Annunciation to Zacharias

1464–1507
Tempera on wood
59 ½ × 28 ⅝ in.
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MMA 25.120.929
42. Anonymous

Christ among the Doctors
Early fifteenth century
Tempera and gold on wood
44 × 30 in.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MMA 32.100.123
Jews and Altarpieces in Medieval Spain

or brocade or olive-colored cloth. Nor shall they wear a golden brooch nor one of pearls, nor a string of pearls on the forehead, nor dresses with trains on the ground more than one third of a vara in measure, nor fringed Moorish garments, nor coats with high collars, nor cloth of high reddish color, nor a skirt of bromea thread... nor shall they make wide sleeves on the Moorish garments of more than two palms in width, but they may wear jewelry like silver brooches and silver belts provided that there is not more than four ounces of silver on any of them.

Although not identified as such in the sumptuary laws, the bridal costumes described are similar to the royal dress of Helena and her courtiers. In contrast, the Jewish women in the open windows in the background of the scene wear subdued dresses and headgear. The artist created a single, nuanced facial type and then used it for all four women, but varied their dresses, which have different necklines and trim and are of differently colored textiles. Emphasis is given to the rendering of the white silk sleeves that appear to be a separate garment worn together with the women’s gowns, like those described in the sumptuary laws.

Despite the rich details on these panels, there is an air of tension to the confrontation between Helena and Judas that is generated by the sober expressions of all figures. As a result, the depiction of the Christian Queen Helena interrogating the Jew, Judas, may have been intended to represent the activities of the Inquisition, established in Aragon in the second half of the thirteenth century.

In the case of Jewish women’s dress, we are fortunate to have representations in other works of art to corroborate what is known from the retablos. Prior to the late medieval examples that are the subject of this chapter, the number of Jews depicted in Spanish art was small and nearly all were male.64 During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, Jewish women were depicted in both Jewish and Christian art.

In Jewish art, women appear in some ten illuminated haggadot (or service books for Passover) that were created in Barcelona and its environs between 1300 and 1360. These manuscripts contain an illuminated text of the Seder, the home ceremony for Passover, and some include a prefatory series of biblical and genre scenes. In the Seder scene of the Sarajevo Haggadah (Sarajevo, National Museum) and in that of the manuscript known as the Sister of the Golden Haggadah (London, British Library, Ms. Or. 1884, fol. 180) (figure 44), the women wear elaborate pleated head coverings with a raised flower-like element in the center of the forehead. Otherwise their indoor dress is nondescript, essentially the flowing robes that hide the body in much Gothic art. In depictions of the synagogue service that preceded the Seder, both men and women wear the long, hooded cloaks that were required dress out of doors (e.g. London, British Library, Barcelona Haggadah, Add. 14766, fol. 61v).65

The identification of Jewish women in Christian art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries depends on their clothing and the narrative context in which they are seen, since they lacked the identifying beards of Jewish men and their hair was generally covered.

64 Miguel Jiménez and Martín Bernat, Altarpiece of the True Cross, Saint Helena Interrogating Judas (detail) (1485–87), Oil on panel 77 x 45 x 5 in, Museo de Zaragoza, Saragossa.

65 El enemigo.

Compiled by the Faculty Action Network
One of the scenes from the Hebrew Bible, an Exodus from Egypt included in the retablo of Saint Bernard and the Guardian Angel of 1462–82 (Barcelona, Museu de la Catedral), is the work of a painter from the atelier of Jaume Huguet (figure 45).70 The panel preserves the traditional v-shaped composition in which the drowning Egyptians appear in a lower corner, while the Israelites stride along the Red Sea, a composition that appeared in early Christian art.71 A manuscript or copy book may have been the means by which this iconography was transmitted from Rome to medieval Spain. Although composed traditionally, the Israelites are represented as contemporary Jews. The painter took great care to individualize the faces of the Israelites and to vary their dress. The foremost Jewish figures, Moses and Aaron, are thought to be portraits of the leading Jewish residents of Banyoles where the retablo first hung. The figure guided by the Guardian Angel is tentatively identified as Bonjuà Cabrit, who was doctor-surgeon to the Royal House of Barcelona.72 He wears a striped garment over his head, probably a tallit or prayer shawl and a gold-bordered cloak, and carries a codex with gilt edges. Although most of the women leaving Egypt wear simple scarves over their heads, one near the end of the procession wears an elaborate headdress with chin strap that forms a roll around her head and has a protruding element at top dotted with pearls. Attention is drawn to this elaborately dressed woman by her bright red cloak, which visually links her to the man at the head of the procession and suggests she is his wife.73 Above the scene of the Exodus is a panel representing a parallel event, the Guardian Angel leading Lot, his wife and daughters out of Sodom. The wife, wearing a white tunic that foreshadows her fate, turns back toward the city. The same angel redeems Lot’s family and the Israelites of Egypt.

An identical headdress to that worn in the Exodus scene appears in Christian sculptures and on altarpieces to identify Jewish women, suggesting that this headdress was considered distinctive. It appears, for example, on a retablo panel of the Massacre of the Innocents dated 1390–1400, now in the Museo de Zaragoza,75 and worn by a group of women on a fourteenth-century capital in the cloister of Barcelona cathedral.76

**OTHER RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN ARTISTS**

The relationship between the iconography of the haggadot manuscripts and that of the altarpieces, which goes beyond the matter of dress, is key to understanding another facet of the relationship between Christian and Jewish artists in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Spain.

We have examined evidence that Jewish artists worked to produce Christian art, specifically works of silver and altarpieces, and that Christian artists were knowledgeable about Jewish life, which they depicted on retablos when appropriate to the subject matter. This common knowledge was due, at least in part, to ateliers that included both Christians and Jews. A responsum of Maimonides (Cordoba 1138—1204 Cairo) indicates that mixed workshops existed as early as the twelfth century in North Africa:
What does our Master say with regard to partners in a workshop, some being Jews and some Muslims, exercising the same craft. The partners have agreed between themselves that the gains made on Friday should go to the Jews and those made on Saturday to the Muslims. The implements of the workshop are held in partnership; the crafts exercised are in one case goldsmithing, in another the making of glass. Maimonides allowed the arrangement as long as the Jewish craftsmen did not benefit from revenues earned on Saturday. Although the text is not specific, the Jew was in all likelihood the goldsmith, as the Muslim legal traditions viewed these professions as unclean, better left to the dhimmi, the Jews. Another mixed shop mentioned in a Geniza document was that of a Jewish silk weaver who employed Muslims, a Jew, and a Jewish convert to Islam.

That inter-religious ateliers also existed in Spain was first suggested by the renowned art historian Millard Meiss. In 1941 Meiss published an article in which he linked a retable dedicated to Saint Mark, now in the Morgan Library, New York (figure 46) to several manuscripts, including Peter IV’s Ceremonial de la consagración y coronación de los reyes y reinas de Aragón (Madrid, Museo Lázaro Galdiano). On the basis of their similarity in style Meiss argued that the altarpiece and the manuscript were produced by artists working in the same atelier. A few years later, Francis Wormald added a Hebrew translation of Maimonides’ Guide to the Perplexed (figure 9) to the manuscripts produced in the same atelier on the basis of its figure style and decorative motifs, thereby establishing the participation of both Jews and Christians in one workshop that produced manuscripts for both religious communities. One result of the inter-religious character of this workshop is that both Christian and Jewish models must have been available, since a miniature of the Maimonides manuscript is based on a Byzantine composition of the four Evangelist symbols. The simultaneous presence of the same creatures in Jewish lore (Ezekiel 1) must have facilitated the transfer of the composition to Maimonides’ Guide. At the very least, Meiss and Wormald proved that Hebrew scribes provided manuscripts for the same illuminators who decorated Christian texts. The chief illuminator’s name is now identified as Ferrer Bassa (d. 1348). The fact that this atelier created both small-scale works of art (the manuscript miniatures) and large-scale altarpieces allows us to draw connections between both types of works.

The existence of the San Marco atelier is of great significance when considering the genesis of the illuminated haggadah produced in Spain during the second and third quarters of the fourteenth century. These haggadot have always been viewed as a unique phenomenon within Spanish Jewish art, whose origins in the second quarter of the fourteenth century have never been satisfactorily explained. When the biblical and genre scenes, however, are viewed in the context of the altarpieces, and their style is considered, the place of the haggadot within Spanish art becomes more apparent.

An early haggadah, a late thirteenth-century “Hispano-Moresque” manuscript in the British Library (figure 1) is related stylistically to scenes from the Life of Christ on a
35. Workshop of Ferrer Bassa

Altarpiece of Saint Mark

Fourteenth century

Paint on wood

$22 \frac{1}{2} \times 44 \frac{1}{4}$ in.

The Morgan Library, New York

AZ071
fragmentary late thirteenth-century altarpiece in The Cloisters (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 55.62 a, b and 1977.94) and to similar retablos (figure 47). In these works, the scenes are set in architectural frames, often of deep red, above which are rubrics indicating the content of the scene (Latin on the altarpiece; Hebrew in the haggadah). The languages of these rubrics, assuming they served as instructions to the artists, indicate that both Jewish and Christian artists were active. The action takes place below against blank backgrounds, with only the minimal props required by the narrative. Terracotta red and ochre are the dominant colors on both works, and they appear saturated rather than shaded. Throughout, the size of key figures such as Jesus or Moses and Aaron, or even the baker of matzot (the unleavened bread for Passover), is enlarged to indicate a subject’s importance. Still, differences between the two works indicate that different artists were responsible for the haggadah and the retablo. Although the heads and hands of the figures of both works are outlined, rather than modeled, the painter of the Christian scenes often added a small circle of red paint to indicate a protruding cheek and furnished his figures with eyebrows, details absent on the haggadah figures. As is typical of the art of this period, figures are slim and drapery hides the body in both works, but the cloaks of the altarpiece figures are slightly more detailed, with a white highlight along the edge of the material. The haggadah and the retablo fragments in The Cloisters belong to a group of altarpieces whose style has been termed “linear Gothic,” nearly all of them dated to the first half of the fourteenth century.

The most lavish Passover manuscript of the period, the Golden Haggadah in the British Library (Add. 27210), can be dated to around 1320 on the basis of its figure style which is similar to that of the Usatges de París (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms. lat. 4670) and like the Latin work was produced in Barcelona or Lérida (figure 48). The iconography of the Creation scenes and other stylistic elements may be linked to similar scenes on a second retablo in The Cloisters, one dedicated to Saint Andrew (Metropolitan Museum, 35.121.157) (figure 49). Five scenes of the Creation story appear in the Golden Haggadah: Adam Naming the Animals in its own frame and the remaining four occupying a single frame of the four-frame scheme used on the miniature pages. The sequence reads chronologically from right to left, the direction in which Hebrew is read: Adam Naming the Animals (Gen. 2: 11–12), the Creation of Eve (Gen. 2: 21–22), the Man and his Wife with Loinscloths (Gen. 3: 7) and God (in the guise of an Angel) Reproofing Adam and Eve (Gen. 3: 16–18). In the second, composite frame, the figure of Eve is shown tempted by the Serpent and simultaneously covering herself with a loinscloth, while Adam both covers himself and raises his head as the angel reproaches him. The rubric for the second frame refers only to the third episode: “Adam and his Wife were Naked.” The retablo originally included seven Creation scenes, but the location of the last three is unknown. With one exception, each of the altarpiece scenes is given its own pictorial space: God Creates the Creatures of the Waters and the Birds (Day 5; Gen. 1: 20–23), the Creation of Man (Day 6; Gen. 1: 26–27), God Casts...
a Deep Sleep on Adam (Gen. 2:21), God Presents Eve to Adam (Gen. 2:22), God Commands Adam and Eve not to Eat from the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:16–17), the Temptation and Reproach (Gen. 3:1–6; 11), and the Expulsion (Gen. 3:24). All of these retablo and haggadah scenes are set against gold diapered backgrounds with the foregrounds made up of landscape elements earth and stylized trees. The patches of earth on the retablo are composed of stylized forms stacked up against one another, while in the haggadah the landscape is a continuous, shaded mass. On the altarpiece, God dominates through his size or his appearance in a mandorla; in the haggadah scenes he is absent. Despite differences in the figure style between the haggadah and the altarpiece—the retablo figures are more linear—there are striking similarities between the two works, in particular their devotion of considerable space to the story of Creation and their emphasis on a few important figures in scenes set against a diaphanous gold background and anchored to a foreground of earth and stylized trees.

The Creation of Adam and Eve and the Fall was a popular theme in medieval Spanish art. In a Commentary on the Apocalypse of Beatus of Liébana dated 1000 is a Temptation with Eve at right and both figures covering their genitals with leaves. A more extensive cycle appears on a cloister frieze of the cathedral of Girona dated before 1150: God Creating Adam, the Creation of Eve, God Warning Adam and Eve about the Tree of Knowledge, and a Temptation that repeats the iconography in the Beatus manuscript. What is remarkable about this series is that God is an elderly bearded man, without a halo. Christian symbolism is lacking. The story of Adam and Eve was also painted on church walls and in manuscripts. One panel in the Capilla de la Vera Cruz de Maderuelo (Segovia) from the third quarter of the twelfth century includes a composite Temptation/Man and his Wife with Loincloths, the iconography of which is identical to that on the Saint Andrew retablo in The Cloisters. An extensive biblical cycle was also painted in the chapter house of the convent of Sigüenza (Buena) ca. 1150. The scenes included the Creation of Adam, the Creation of Eve, God Pointing to the Tree of Knowledge, the Temptation, and the Expulsion followed by later biblical subjects such as Moses Receiving the Tablets of the Law and the Anointing of David as King.

One image on the Saint Andrew altarpiece, a combination of the Creation of the Creatures of the Waters and the Birds on Day 5 with the Creation of the Beasts and Cattle on Day 6, may be related to the same scene in another haggadah manuscript, that found in Sarajevo. In both images, the creatures of the water are seen swimming, while above them are birds, cattle, and wild animals. The role of God in the haggadah Creation scene is symbolized by a cone of gold rays that emanates from the heavens and falls on the earth. On the retablo, God is anthropomorphic and ensconced in heavenly clouds. The image of the second day when the earth was separated from the firmament is shown in a similar way in the Sarajevo Haggadah (figure 15) and in the Harburg Pamplona Bible, a manuscript commissioned by King Sancho...
Anonymous
Altarpiece of Saint Andrew from Añastro
Late fourteenth century
Tempera on wood: punched and diapered, gold ground
78 ¼ × 39 ¾ in.
The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
MMA 25.120.257
Another parallel between the Pamplona Bibles and the haggadot occurs in the scene of the Crossing of the Red Sea in which the water is depicted as a series of bands. These interlocking relationships between art created under Christian auspices and the haggadot suggest an area of artistic interchange in addition to the work of Jewish artists for the Church and the depiction of Jews by Christian artists.

**ART ON CONVIVENCIA**

In this essay, we have examined the art of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Crown of Aragon as a means of understanding Jewish–Christian relations prior to the Expulsion. What has emerged is that the artists (and patrons) of the two religious groups had profound knowledge of each other’s religious praxis, so much so that Christians represented Jewish life with fidelity and Jews produced art that was inspired by Christianity. In fact, Jews and Christians produced each other’s art; Christian retablos were painted by Jews, church silver was made by Jewish silversmiths, and Hebrew manuscripts like Maimonides’ Guide to the Perplexed were illuminated by Christians. In the practice of art, convivencia certainly reigned.

The profound knowledge of Jewish beliefs and customs evident in the altarpieces could have been the result of the employment of Jewish artists or conversos on a project, but it also could have been due to the small size of villages like Ejea whose parish churches commissioned retablos from major artists. In small towns and cities, the mingling of Jewish, Christian, and even Muslim residents was inevitable. At the time Blasco de Grañén painted its altarpiece, Ejea was home to some 150 Jews out of a total population of a thousand.97 In addition, Jewish scholars became knowledgeable about Christian lore as a result of their own interest or out of the need to counter the claims made by church spokesmen, often conversos, in disputations and conversionist sermons. They voluntarily attended sermons in churches and cathedrals,98 where they could have been exposed to scenes from the Hebrew Bible on altarpieces and on sculpture. Christians attended sermons in synagogues out of their own curiosity, and their firsthand experience of Jewish houses of worship could serve as models for scenes on retablos.99 All the ways that Christians and Jews mixed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for business, as doctors attending patients, as workers and servants in each other’s homes, as artists and artisans, and as colleagues exploring intellectual issues, allowed exposure to each other’s way of life and art.

But, we must also ask: What was the effect of the art created during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on its viewers? Surviving Jewish art from Spain largely consists of manuscripts, although recent excavations have brought to light more ceremonial objects and visual culture.100 Most of the illuminated manuscripts are Bibles and haggadot, although other genres such as philosophical and scientific treatises also exist. Ten of the haggadot have figurative compositions, but these manuscripts were an art form that was enjoyed privately in the Middle Ages.

The opposite is true of the Christian retablos. Altarpieces are definitely works of public art meant to teach, to inspire, and to invest the Church with grandeur.101 The artists’ practice of populating scenes from the Gospels and the Lives of the Saints with figures that appear to be modeled on local Jews, who are dressed in costumes visible in the course of daily life, and whose unkempt hair and beards were the result of royal edicts, must have had an effect on worshippers’ standing before large and impressive altarpieces. These depictions branded contemporary Jewry with the guilt of their ancestors who tormented Christ and the martyrs of the Church.102 The portrayals were reminders of the Christian doctrine that the Jews of any age were equivalent to those alive during the early centuries of the Church. Jews were witnesses to the truth of Christianity and were, therefore, allowed to survive; still they embodied the guilt of their ancestors.

The negative message of historical scenes was compounded by representations of contemporary arenas of conflict between Jews and Christians. We have discussed representations of a disputation and of forced baptisms. The two altarpieces from the Cistercian monastery of Vallbona de les Monges painted in 1349–50 with their scenes of the Desecration of the Host were expressions of anti-Judaism linking the Black Death to Jewish transgressions.103 Another arena of conflict was the conversionist sermon that became a popular tactic of Christians seeking to convert Jews after 1242 when James I of Aragon and other secular rulers permitted the mendicant orders to preach in synagogues.104 Scenes of conversionist sermons appear on altarpieces dedicated to Saint Stephen, who was known as a zealous preacher and died in Jerusalem ca. 35 C.E. A retablo by Jaume Serra (figure 50) of ca. 1385 shows Saint Stephen in a Gothic building that might be a church or a synagogue, flanked by Jewish men who are reacting to his sermon (figure 51). Interestingly, given the placement of the representation on an altarpiece, the Jews are shown reacting in diverse ways to what they have heard. An elderly man in the right foreground holds his Bible or prayer book up to the saint and appears to be arguing with Stephen. Behind him is a man who covers his ears in order not to hear blasphemy, and between the two is a man tearing up his Hebrew book having been convinced by the saint to abandon Judaism. The same actions are repeated by the Jews standing at left. Similar responses are depicted in a scene of Christ among the Doctors on a contemporaneous retablo by Lluís Borrassà.105 Jews are known to have attended Christian sermons out of intellectual curiosity and the opposite was also true, Christians sometimes going to listen to sermons delivered in synagogues;106 but in the scenes examined here the participants were not acting out of free will; rather they were participating in a compulsory event designed to convert them.

There are two unusual renderings of the Miracle of the Loaves and the Fishes that express a reconciliation between Jews and Christians, albeit in a Christian context. On
the altarpiece of San Salvador in Faja de los Caballeros painted by Blasco de Grañén and Martín Soria between 1444 and 1476 (figure 52) and on the altarpiece of the Transfiguration painted by Bernat Martorell between 1445 and 1451, the stream of people approaching Jesus is made up of both Christians and Jews, the Jewish men identifiable by their dark cloaks and untrimmed hair and beards. This treatment of the subject reflects the teachings of Abbot Joachim of Fiore (ca. 1135–1202), who saw a future in which Jews and Christians would join as one flock. On another retablo painted by Martorell ca. 1435–45 on the theme of Saint John the Baptist, two scenes on the right present Christians and Jews acting together. Both
Christian and Jewish women attend Anna in a scene of the birth of the saint. Below, Saint John preaches to a mixed group of Jews and Christians.

Joachim of Fiore was perhaps the first theorist of incremental progress ending in a "mutually beneficial union of Christians and Jews." His ideas were disseminated throughout western Europe via the books of his followers, among whom were Arnold of Villanova, influential in Spain in the early years of the fourteenth century, and the Franciscan monk Francesc Eximenes, born in Girona in 1327, who served Peter the Ceremonious of Aragon (1336–87) and other members of the royal family. Eximenes’ writings that spread Joachite ideology throughout Spain were written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century. The Franciscan expanded Joachim’s philosophy to include the concept that the "saints" of the Old Testament would be venerated along with those of the New: that is Saint Abraham, Saint David, Saint Isaiah and others. The altarpiece scenes discussed above may be a reflection of this syncretist vision, as may the many portraits of Israelite kings and prophets on the retablo, although the prophets served a dual role as venerated holy figures and as predictors of the coming of Jesus as the messiah.

The record of Jewish life on the altarpieces of Aragon is a precious one. Manuscripts were the only art form Jews were allowed to take with them into exile in 1492 and the few genre scenes they contain yield only a partial glimpse of Jewish life. The figures that inhabit the miniatures showing the preparations and celebration of Passover in the haggadot are largely stereotypical. But the larger scale of the altarpieces and the superior skill of the artists afford us actual, particularized portraits of Jews living in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as well as details of their dress and surroundings. Some of the paintings include Jewish figures as part of the daily life of medieval Aragon, like the shoemakers of the Manresa retablo, or the Jew on horseback depicted behind the Virgin Mary in a Pietà by Bartolomé de Cárdenas of 1490. A similar rider is shown leaving a city on an altarpiece in Palma de Mallorca. Their inclusion on the retablo exemplifies the social interaction that characterized Jewish society, and which has been termed *convivencia*. There is, however, another way to view the art we have been studying. Michael Camille has written that an innovation of Gothic artists was to see the past, the present and the future as unfolding in the present, with the present being the "real" time of the image. Characters from the biblical past were shown as if existing in the present, just as the Jews in Spanish art represented their distant forebears, and synagogues were equated with the Jerusalem Temple. This approach was possible because medieval man did not see a gulf between himself and the time of Jesus and the saints. In fact popular religious texts encouraged people to visualize themselves as present at major events in Jesus’ life, just as Jews are enjoined, to this day, to view themselves as participants in the Exodus from Egypt at the Passover Seder. This state of mind was an avenue for the integration of Jews into Christian life, which was sometimes beneficial, but too often detrimental.
ENDNOTES
5. In the narrative event at 10:49, the protagonist is asked, "What is the name of this place?" The answer, "It is the city of Jerusalem," is then given.
6. A discussion of the relationship between the city of Jerusalem and the city of Rome is found in a letter written by a Roman bishop to a Jerusalem bishop.
7. See the discussion of the role of the city of Jerusalem in the narrative event at 10:49.
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Knowledge of this headdress had even spread to Germany by the beginning of the fifteenth century. In a scene of the Birth of Mary on the Buxtehuder Altar, Master Bertram painted the woman wearing an elaborately formed cappa with loop and circular elements on her head. (Engler 1978) 107 For an illustration see Ruiz i Quesada, ed., L’art gòtic a Catalunya. Pintura III, fig. 294.

67 In 1456 the Jewish community of Morvedre passed sumptuary laws regulating Jewish women’s clothes and the manner of their piety, which could in turn wield political power. (Romeu-Cortés 1977, 45.)

A singular exception is a figurative canvas found in the collection of Francesc Catòria featuring a Jewish woman wearing Studies illustrated with numerous engravings.

68 A singular exception is a twelfth-century mural in the cathedral in Burgos, ca. 1175 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992), no. 221. 1000 in Spanish art. (See an engraved bowl in Jeffrey Spier [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993], fig. 4).


27 For a reformulation of the law requiring Jews and Moors to wear long robes over their clothes enacted in 1412, see Rubens, Memoria de Sefarad, Vol. 1: Economic Foundations (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1979), fig. 43; on the mosaic in Sta. Maria Maggiore, see Wolfgang


97–98

99 For examples of newly excavated ceremonial art and visual culture, see Huang, “Hebrew Art in the Notarial Culture. Latinate Jews in Mediterranean Spain 1250–1350” (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), 64.