

Feigned Ignorance: Early Christian Polemics in Umayyad Spain

Hajin Jun

As Islam supplanted Christianity in political, religious, and cultural dominance during the Umayyad Caliphate, Christians in Spain had to grapple not only with their new inferior status, but also with Islam itself. The *Istoria de Mabomet* and the *Tultuspetru de libro domni Metobii* present the earliest Latin views on Islam, but neither offers easy explanations regarding Christians' understanding of and interaction with Islam during this period. While the two accounts of the prophet's life and the rise of Islam demonstrate the authors' familiarity with the religion, they also blatantly contradict the Quran in many crucial respects. These discrepancies, however, may represent conscious distortion instead of naïve error. As they wrote the texts, the authors keenly understood the existential threat Islam posed to Christianity. In fact, their aggressive response to Islam is neither new nor unique. The writings drew heavily from Eastern Christian predecessors, and these echoes of earlier polemicists challenge the idea that knowledge rises from interaction. Although the authors pored over the Quran, they did not necessarily interact with actual Muslims. Rather, when confronted with Islam, Christian writers turned to their coreligionists for insight. Polemics is diatribe, not dialogue. The authors were most likely Christian monks desperate to protect the integrity of the rapidly diminishing Christian community. Despite the authors' striking familiarity with the Quran, the texts reveal more about Christians' sense of vulnerability in the midst of Muslim rule than about the kinds of cross-confessional interactions that may have taken place.

Scholars have but limited information with which they can contextualize the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru*. Found in the eleventh-

century Codex of Roda, the two texts have no known authorship, and historians can at best make educated guesses as to when and where they were written. Considering the Mozarab clergyman Eulogius found the text in 850 C.E. when visiting a monastery in Navarre, the author of the *Istoria* may have written the text in Navarre some time before 850 C.E. References to Spanish landmarks, such as “the church of the blessed Euphrasius...in the town of Ildai” and “the church of the blessed Leocadia” in Toledo may also suggest that the author was a Spanish cleric from Andalusia.¹ The *Tultusceptru* has an even more ambiguous manuscript history, the text giving no clues at all regarding its author or geographic background.²

The significance of the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* lies not in what scholars can glean from their backgrounds, but in their unique role as the first Latin accounts of the life of Muhammad. Previous Latin texts on Islam focused almost exclusively on Islam’s political and military history. The author of the Chronicle of 741, for instance, makes but one reference to Islam as a religion,³ and in the Chronicle of 754, the author only refers to Muhammad as the leader of the Saracens, not as a prophet. He also speaks about Muslims solely in ethnic and racial terms like “Arabs,” “Saracens,” “Moors,” and “Ishmaelites.”⁴ According to historian John Tolan, Christians did not write about Islam in religious terms simply because they “[knew] and care[d] little about [Muslims] religious beliefs.”⁵ That the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* address Islam as a religion signals a dramatic shift in Christian writers’ awareness of and interest in Islam.

Indeed, the authors of the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* reveal a surprising familiarity with Islam. In several respects, the author of the *Istoria* constructs Muhammad’s biography and the early history of Islam with surprising accuracy. Muhammad did “trave[] on business,” marry his “patroness,”⁶ turn people away from “the cult of idols,” and enjoy the

¹ Kenneth B. Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad,” in Michael Gervers and Ramzi Jibran Bikhazi, eds., *Conversion and Continuity: Indigenous Christian Communities in Islamic Lands, Eighth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1990), 89.

² Ibid., 95.

³ Kenneth B. Wolf, “Christian Views of Islam in Early Medieval Spain,” in John Tolan, ed., *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Collection of Essays*, (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 87.

⁴ Kenneth B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Medieval Spain*, rev. ed. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1990), 113.

⁵ John Tolan, *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam*, xii.

⁶ “History of Muhammad,” trans. Kenneth B. Wolf, in Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 48.

“triumph of victory” in military and political affairs. Muhammad’s followers also did “establish the Syrian city of Damascus as the capital” of Islamic political rule. In addition, the author has read at least enough of the Quran to know the different stories and genres it encompasses. He notes that the Quran includes “psalms,” “a story of spider webs for catching flies,” “sayings about the hoopoe,” and songs “in honor of Joseph, Zachary and even the mother of the Lord, Mary.”⁷ And while the author of the *Tultusceptru* does not employ as many textual references to the Quran, the specificity and relative obscurity of his references similarly reveals a wide exposure to Islam. As in the Quran, the *Tultusceptru* centers Islam on the basis of divine revelation and a God concerned about the Arabs, the “inhabitants of the desert.”⁸ Historian Kenneth B. Wolf observes that even more significantly, the author refers to Muhammad as Ozim, a derivative of “Hashim,” in reference to “the name of the Prophet’s clan.” The Arabs also live in Erribon, he continues, referring to “Ethribum...the pre-Islamic name for Madina.”⁹ More tellingly, the authors also demonstrate familiarity with and understanding of the *shahadah*, the Muslim profession of faith. Just as God commands Muhammad to “Recite” in the Quran,¹⁰ the angel in the *Tultusceptru* “order[s] him” to recite “*Alla occuber*” “so that [the Arabs] might believe.”¹¹

Not only did the authors understand the basic factual and textual information regarding Islam, they also knew about the points of controversy in the Quran. In particular, the author of the *Istoria* included in his text Muhammad’s marriage to Zaynab. Muslim scholars had long debated the paradox of how the Prophet could have received a revelation instructing him to marry the former wife of his adopted son, contradicting his own injunction against such marriages. Although the author does not explicitly address the controversy (he introduces Zayd simply as “a certain neighbor of [Muhammad]”), the very inclusion of this incident can indicate the breadth of his exposure to Islam.¹² In addition, both authors’ distortion of Gabriel as a demonic figure may reflect their knowledge of Muslims’ own struggle to understand the idea of divine and corrupt revelation. According to the Quran, when Muhammad first received God’s revelation, his wife Khadijah had to quell his doubts and reassure him of its divine origin.¹³ More

⁷ Ibid., 49.

⁸ Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad,” 100.

⁹ Ibid., 95.

¹⁰ Quran Sura 96.

¹¹ Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad,” 100.

¹² “History,” 49.

¹³ Quran 74: 1-7.

provocatively, the texts' emphasis on erroneous revelation may have a connection with the satanic verses—an incidence recorded in the Quran where Muhammad receives a false revelation commanding him to tolerate certain polytheistic beliefs.¹⁴

Despite its author's evident familiarity with the Quran, the *Istoria* also includes information that blatantly contradicts it. The author charges Muhammad of "usur[y]" and "pride"¹⁵ despite the Quran's prohibition of usury¹⁶ and Muhammad's reaction of distress, not reverence, upon his first encounter with Gabriel.¹⁷ The author also makes more serious departures from the Quran. He asserts that Muhammad "attend[ed] assemblies of Christians" (where he "commit[ted] some of the sermons of the Christians to memory") and that he "predicted that he would be revived on the third day by the angel Gabriel," denying the Quran's repeated mentions of Muhammad's refusal to perform miracles.¹⁸

The *Tultusceptu* goes even further, wholly recreating its own narrative on the origins of Islam. While the *Istoria* accurately depicts Muhammad's profession and personal life before becoming a prophet, the *Tultusceptu* invents its own biography for Muhammad. Although Islamic tradition holds that Muhammad was forty years old when he received his revelation, the author of the *Tultusceptu* portrays Ozim as a very young Christian monk who receives a second-hand commission to spread Christianity. Ozim also receives the revelation for Islam not from Gabriel, but from an "evil angel" who changes his name to Muhammad. Additionally, instead of portraying "*alla occuber*" as a profession of faith, the author depicts it as an invocation of demons.¹⁹ Considering the authors' familiarity with Islamic texts, the contradictions in the two accounts are especially problematic and raise important questions about their discourse.

One difficulty in using the texts to evaluate the authors' understanding of Islam is that what the authors write about Islam may not reflect what they actually know. While historian John Tolan suggests the texts' inaccuracies result from the authors' inability to understand Arabic, this view does not fully account for the texts' contradictions.²⁰ The authors' accurate Quranic references demonstrate a high level of familiarity with Islam, and the use of Latin does not necessarily preclude Arabic language skills. Rather, the choice of language simply points to a

¹⁴ Quran 53:19-22.

¹⁵ "History," 48.

¹⁶ Quran 2:275.

¹⁷ Ibid., 74:1-7.

¹⁸ "History," 48-49.

¹⁹ Wolf, "The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad," 100.

²⁰ Tolan, *Medieval Christian Perceptions of Islam: A Book of Essays*, xv.

Christian readership. If the author of the *Istoria* “was an Andalusian who moved north,” as Wolf suggests, he may have directed the text to Christians in northern Spain who were even less knowledgeable about Islam than their coreligionists in the south.²¹ Moreover, the author’s perception of the reader’s level of familiarity with the subject may affect his commitment to factual accuracy. When Muslim scholar Ibn Hazm sought to disabuse Christians of their erroneous religious beliefs through “On the Inconsistencies of the Four Gospels,” he addresses his text directly to Christians. Although Ibn Hazm often takes Biblical quotes out of context to suit his aims, he does not add anything to the Bible. The reader would perceive the changes immediately, and Ibn Hazm would lose his credibility and the argument. However, since Muslims probably would not read and scrutinize their texts, the authors of the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* could have more freely included mistakes or knowingly strayed from the Quran to support their arguments.

While the *Istoria* appears more biographical than the *Tultusceptru*, it too is a carefully crafted narrative. In particular, the way in which the author of the *Istoria* presents Muhammad’s resurrection shows that the contradictions are not errors but distortions. The author presents Muhammad’s failed resurrection as a foil to that of Jesus in the Gospels. Other than the prediction to be raised in three days, Muhammad’s resurrection directly opposes Jesus’ in every way. Jesus was raised by God, while Muhammad claimed he would be “revived...by the angel Gabriel;” Jesus’ disciples doubted whether the resurrection would take place, while Muhammad’s “anxious[ly]” awaited “the miracle which he had promised them;” and angels greeted Jesus’ disciples at the empty tomb, while the angels “were frightened by their presence” and Muhammad’s body rotted.²² In addition, the conclusion of the *Istoria* closely parallels that of the Gospel of John. The Gospel concludes, “Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.”²³ The *Istoria* closes with, “[i]ndeed he accomplished many sins of various kinds which are not recorded in this book. This much is written so that those reading will understand how much might have been written here.”²⁴ The parallel suggests a polemical intent; the author portrays the *Istoria* as a kind of anti-Gospel, not necessarily an accurate depiction of the life of Muhammad, as the title of the text might imply.

²¹ Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad,” 91.

²² “History,” 49.

²³ John 21:25.

²⁴ “History,” 50.

These distortions of the Quran may actually result from a deep understanding of Islam. As historian Norman Daniel writes, “[t]he essential differences that separate Christianity and Islam are about Revelation.”²⁵ One of Islam’s most fundamental premises is that Muhammad received the true revelation of God’s word that had previously been “corrupted” and “altered” by Judaism and Christianity.²⁶ The Quran claims authority over the contents of the Bible—the covenant of Abraham, the meaning of Old Testament prophets, and even the identity of Jesus the Messiah. As Ibn Hazm controversially suggests in his refutation of Christianity, a true Christian would really be a Muslim. Islam’s monopoly on the unblemished word of God, however, hinges upon the divinity of Muhammad’s revelations. If one accepts them as from God, Islam would render Christian doctrine obsolete; it would supersede Christianity much as Christianity claimed to supplant Judaism. Thus, the authors’ manipulation of the Quran may in fact represent their attempts to address this threat. They challenge the divinity of Muhammad’s revelations to defend Christianity, providing competing explanations for the commonalities shared between Islam and Christianity.

While the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* are the first texts to articulate in Latin the religious threat Islam poses to Christianity, their arguments evolved from earlier Eastern Christian writings on Islam. While Wolf’s examination of the texts illuminates the change in thinking among Spanish writers regarding Islam, there is a limitation in his analysis of the position of Spanish Christians within the larger Christian community. “Not knowing for certain who the author (or adapter) was or when he wrote,” he argues, “inhibits any search for the motives behind the composition.”²⁷ In his view, scholars are limited to examining the ways in which later Christian writers like Eulogius used the *Istoria* for their “polemical and apologetic goals.”²⁸ Tolan, however, argues that incomplete knowledge of authorship and origin does not necessarily prohibit an examination of the authors’ polemics. In fact, the authors’ harsh representations of Islam may not represent a newly antagonistic attitude toward the religion, but rather evidenced the “Eastern Christian

²⁵ Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West* (Oxford: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), 35.

²⁶ Ibn Hazm, “On the Inconsistencies of the Four Gospels,” trans. Thomas E. Burman, in Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 82.

²⁷ Wolf, “The Earliest Christian Lives of Muhammad,” 91.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

polemical views...[that] were imported to Spain.”²⁹ The *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptra* fit into an existing tradition that disparaged Islam.

The Eastern Christians and the author of the *Istoria* undermined Islam's claim to divine revelation by emphasizing the carnality of Muhammad's lifestyle. Augustinian thought valued the rational, spiritual, and eternal over the irrational, physical, and temporal. Fleshly desires, the most dangerous of which was lust, represented a “perver[sion]” devoid of a “capacity for comprehending” spiritual matters.³⁰ In *Risalat al-Kindi*, a Byzantine polemical text, the author attacks Muhammad's sexuality as inappropriate for a prophet.³¹ In particular, he highlights the contradiction between the multiplicity of Muhammad's wives and Apostle Paul's admonition that unlike the unmarried, “he that is married cares for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.”³² In the *Istoria*, the author similarly contends Muhammad was “[a] flame with the fuel of his lust.” Muhammad not only had many wives, but he married women whom he should not have—his “patroness” and the wife of another. The author also portrays Muhammad as a greedy businessman and “the wisest among the irrational Arabs in all things.”³³ These descriptions contrast Muhammad's actions with the lifestyles of Christian ascetics and Jesus who was but a carpenter, taught spiritual wisdom, and remained unmarried. By portraying Muhammad as a flawed man chiefly concerned with worldly matters, the author challenges Muhammad's claim as the divinely chosen seal of the prophets.

More significantly, the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptra* build upon the distortion of Islam as a heretical strain of Christianity. John of Damascus, a seventh century Arab Christian monk, concluded his book, *On the Heresies*, with a description of Islam. He viewed Islam as the latest in a long line of heresies and dismissed Muhammad as “false prophet” who “formed a heresy of his own.”³⁴ The author of the *Istoria* incorporates this idea and begins his account by labeling Muhammad a “heresiarch” in the very first sentence. He also explains the similarities between Christianity and Islam by asserting that Muhammad “attend[ed] assemblies of Christians...and commit[ed] some of the sermons to memory.”³⁵ According to the text, Muhammad first encounters Christianity, and the ideas that emerge from Islam represent heretical

²⁹ John Tolan, *Saracens*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 70.

³⁰ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, Arthur Symons, ed. (London: W. Scott, 1898), 78.

³¹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 61.

³² 1 Cor. 7:32-33.

³³ “History,” 48-49.

³⁴ Tolan, *Saracens*, 52.

³⁵ “History,” 48.

distortions of Christian doctrine. Perhaps more tellingly, both John of Damascus and the *Istoria* tie Islam with Arianism. John of Damascus contends that Muhammad created Islam upon “encountering an Arian monk,”³⁶ and the *Istoria* uses the same language Christian writers employed to attack Arian heretics. In the *Lives of the Holy Fathers of Merida*, the author depicts an Arian king as a “vessel of wrath, fomentor of vice, and root of damnation”³⁷ who used “diabolical cunning” and “crafty persuasions” to convince a bishop to apostasy.³⁸ In the *Istoria*, Muhammad similarly orders his followers to “cut down their adversaries with the sword,” embodies greed, lust, and pride, and “commit[s] not only his own soul, but those of many, to hell.”³⁹ And although the word ‘heresy’ does not appear in the *Tultusceptru*, it also makes a strong connection between Islam and heresy. In this text, Muhammad does not simply attend church—he is a part of it. As a monk, he spent his life in prayer, devotions, and the study of Christian doctrine. Because he once belonged to the church, his apostasy has far more serious implications.

By transforming Islam from a separate religion to a heresy, the Christian writers tame the threat of Islam. In the act of calling Islam a heresy, the authors pass a normative judgment. Although Muslims themselves would agree that their faith has an important connection to Christianity, labeling Islam as a heresy not only connects the two religions, but relegates Islam to a subordinate position. By definition, heresies represent mistaken and misguided deviances of the correct doctrine. In addition, heresies originate from the Church and belong to it. According to Augustine, heresies do not have an identity separate from the Church—heretics “are lost” but can be easily and seamlessly reintegrated “when found.”⁴⁰ By assuming a sense of ownership over Islam, Christian writers bring the religion into their own religious sphere and judge it according to Christian standards.

The two texts also continue the tradition of portraying Islam as a diabolical faith. In the works of Anastasius, a seventh-century monk in Mount Sinai, “[t]he Saracens figure prominently as the demons’ chief allies” because they reject “the cross, baptismal water, and the Eucharist.”⁴¹ In the *Istoria*, the author portrays Muhammad as “a shrewd

³⁶ Tolan, *Saracens*, 52.

³⁷ “Lives of the Holy Fathers of Merida,” trans. Joseph N. Garvin, in Olivia Remie Constable, ed., *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁹ “History,” 48-50.

⁴⁰ Saint Augustine, “Church Fathers: Letter 93,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102093.htm> (accessed 6 Dec. 2009).

⁴¹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 43-44.

son of darkness” who mirrors the devil’s craftiness.⁴² Just as the devil uses scripture to tempt Jesus in the Bible, Muhammad uses his knowledge of the Bible as a veneer of truth to lead people astray. He repudiated “the cult of idols” “as if on the basis of reason” and orders violence against enemies “as if with a new zeal of faith.”⁴³

While the *Tultusceptru* does not portray Muhammad himself as diabolical, the devil plays a direct role in the creation of Islam. The evil angel thwarts the spread of Christianity, gives Ozim the Islamic revelation, and teaches him to “conjure up demons.” Ozim’s encounter with the devil echoes Eve’s encounter that led to the fall of man. The evil angel preys on the naïve monk, and like Eve who only heard God’s command through Adam, Ozim cannot distinguish between the message he received from Bishop Osius and new one the devil entrusts to him. Just as Christians hold Eve accountable for original sin, the text may imply that despite being duped, Ozim still holds responsibility for creating Islam. Perhaps more significantly, the devil changes Ozim’s name to Muhammad. In the Bible, names and name changes hold tremendous significance, as God changed a person’s name to symbolize a new covenant and identity (the most famous name change being that of Abraham). That the devil gives Ozim a new name undermines not only the divinity of Muhammad’s revelation, but the legitimacy of Islam’s connection to Abraham and monotheism.⁴⁴ According to the author, Islam does not have a sacred covenant with God, but rather it has a fallen one with the devil.

The two authors’ incorporation of their predecessors’ discursive strategies to make their own claims about Islam reflects the insular nature of polemics. The authors borrowed the arguments they used to attack Islam; they did not reach their conclusions upon personal interactions with Muslims. Instead, the conversations the authors had about Islam took place within the safe confines of the Christian community. As anthropologist Mary Douglas writes, people often “select from all the stimuli falling on our senses only those which interest us,” and those that do not, people “ignor[e] or distort so that they do not disturb these established assumptions.”⁴⁵ In the same way, Eastern Christian texts enabled the authors of the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptru* to address Islam in a way that maintained an acceptable level of comfort and distance. If the authors began their inquiries on Islam with a sense of hostility, Eastern polemicists offered an interpretive framework for the Quran that simply served to corroborate the authors’ preexisting views.

⁴² “History,” 48.

⁴³ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁴ Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives of Muhammad,” 100.

⁴⁵ Tolan, *Saracens*, 3.

One important factor that may have contributed to the texts' defensive stance is the polemicists' relationship to monasteries. John of Damascus wrote *Against the Heresies* upon retirement to the Mar Sabbas monastery, and Eulogius's discovery of the *Istoria* in a monastery in Navarre suggests its author was most likely a monk. Monks represented a particularly devout subset of Christians, and monasteries "espoused an ideal of prayerful removal from sinful society."⁴⁶ Monasteries also served to maintain the survival of Christianity during Islamic rule in Spain. As Tolan writes, monasteries represented "steadfast bastions of Latinity and of resistance to acculturation."⁴⁷ And in the words of Mikel de Epalza, monasteries offered the "sole means" through which the Christian community continued to exist. Because monasteries trained bishops (who ordained priests and consecrated holy oil), they played a critical role in carrying out the sacrament of baptism, a rite necessary to become a Christian.⁴⁸ Considering monasteries' strong interest and role in ensuring the survival of Christianity, monastic writers may have been especially sensitive to the threats Islam posed against Christianity.

In addition, the socio-political environment in which the authors wrote their texts may have provided the immediate impetus prompting the authors to turn to Eastern Christian polemics. According to Tolan, the Spanish polemicists and John of Damascus both witnessed "the world around them change, becoming foreigners in their native land, no longer speaking the same language as their children."⁴⁹ Spanish Christians increasingly converted to Islam and assimilated into Muslim society. Many Christians became almost indistinguishable from Muslims—they "dressed like Muslims, spoke like Muslims, and lived like Muslims."⁵⁰ Christian polemicists observed with alarm the rapidly disappearing linguistic and cultural distinctiveness of the Christian community. The celebrated writer Paul Alvarus lamented, "Where is the layman who now reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures, or who studies the Gospels, prophets or Apostles? Alas! All talented young Christians read and study with enthusiasm the Arab books."⁵¹

Intimately connected with Christian conversion and assimilation was the material allure of Muslim culture and society. In the *Istoria*, the

⁴⁶ Richard Bulliet, *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 25.

⁴⁷ Tolan, *Saracens*, 86.

⁴⁸ Mikel de Epalza, "Mozarabs: An emblematic Christian Minority in Islamic al-Andalus," in Salma Khadra Jayyusi, ed., *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, 2 vols (Leiden, 1992), 156.

⁴⁹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 87.

⁵⁰ Wolf, "Christian Views of Islam," 93.

⁵¹ Tolan, *Saracens*, 86.

author portrays Gabriel as a vulture, the Christian symbol for greed,⁵² “exhibiting a golden mouth.”⁵³ And in the *Tultusceptra*, the author similarly calls Islam “a vessel of Mammon,” the demon of greed,⁵⁴ that leads people to “the company of hell.”⁵⁵ The connection the authors make between Islam and greed, however, serves more as an ultimatum for Christians than an attack on Islam. The authors blame the appeal of political and economic advancement for leading astray opportunistic Christians. The most famous biblical reference to Mammon states, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”⁵⁶ The authors try to convince Spanish Christians that they must see Christianity and Islam as diametrically opposed and ultimately choose between the two.

In the *Istoria* and the *Tultusceptra*, truth coexists with falsehood, knowledge begets intolerance, and understanding feigns ignorance. The very question of whether Christian writers were ignorant of Islam reflects the hope that ignorance caused religious conflict and that knowledge can offer a solution. Not only do these texts elude simple definitions of ignorance and understanding, but they also complicate the meaning of inter-confessional interaction. Knowledge alone does not develop the capacity for acceptance or tolerance. The authors knew a great deal about the Quran, but they drew their understanding from other Christian polemicists, ultimately seeking to defend their own faith. While these texts offer a window into how some Christian writers made sense of Islam under Muslim rule, they leave much unanswered regarding broader questions of *convivencia*, interaction, and tolerance.

⁵² Caryl Coleman, “Birds (In Symbolism),” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02576b.htm> (accessed 12 Dec. 2009).

⁵³ “History,” 48.

⁵⁴ Hugh Pope, “Mammon,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09580b.htm> (accessed 12 Dec. 2009).

⁵⁵ Wolf, “The Earliest Latin Lives,” 100.

⁵⁶ Matt. 6:24.

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