

Of Morisco Memes and Prophecies

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A wagon with spoked wheels carries not only grain or freight from place to place; it carries the brilliant idea of a wagon with spoked wheels from mind to mind.

– Daniel Dennett, *Darwin's Dangerous Idea*

As citizens of a world increasingly dominated by web-based social media, many of us are familiar with the *Internet meme*: an image or video that, for seemingly inexplicable reasons, rapidly captures the attention of web-users, who generate an unending series of quickly-spreading imitations and copies. Most of us have been exposed, one way or another, to such images and videos; they permeate our social media, and they are often picked up by more traditional forms of media. We regularly rely on our most conventional form of cultural transmission when we speak of them to our friends and family members or, for example, “invite” them to do the “Ice Bucket Challenge.”¹ Sometimes such digital content is replicated exactly and “goes viral”; other times it is slightly, sometimes deliberately, modified, as a way to playfully participate in the meme-spreading game. In *Memes and Digital Culture*, Limor Shifman describes the Internet meme as digital content that spreads quickly around the web in various iterations and becomes a shared cultural experience, “a group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance, which were created with awareness of each other, and were circulated, imitated, and/or transformed via the Internet by many users” (41).

What, however, could any Internet meme possibly have to do with a minority group living in 16th-century Spain and their writing? No one speaks of this or that crypto-Muslim blogger from Aragón, after all. Although the Internet is a relatively new phenomenon, the activity and behavior that lie at the heart of what Shifman describes are not native to it—simply remove the words “digital” and “quickly,” replace the terms “web” and “Internet” with any other medium, and we will likely observe the same (or very similar) phenomenon in communities across history. While my purpose here is not to address Internet phenomena, I do wish to examine a few things about memes and how the concept may serve when we wish to speak about the ways in which ideas, practices, *culture*, were transmitted—textually or otherwise—among Morisco communities of 16th- and early-17th century Spain. Today we use the term *Morisco* to refer to those Muslims who converted—willingly or by force—to Christianity after the fall of Granada in 1492. Conversion was not always complete or sincere, as shown by writings that circulated in secret among some Morisco communities prior to their expulsion from Spain in the early 17th century. Written in Aljamiado—a heavily Arabized and “Islamified” Spanish expressed in Arabic characters—these writings are dominated by themes, topics and substance that enshrine a distinctly Hispano-Arab and Islamic heritage at a time in which those who identified with them were under extreme duress.²

¹ In the summer of 2014, as a way of promoting awareness of ALS (Lou Gehrig’s Disease) and encouraging donations to research of the disease, the Ice Bucket Challenge emerged, which entailed dumping an ice-cold bucket of water on a person who would then issue a challenge that someone else (oftentimes a friend or family member) do the same. The activity was filmed and shared via social media.

² The bibliography exploring the nuances and issues concerning the use of the term “Morisco” to refer to Spanish converts from Islam to Christianity after 1500 is extensive; see two recent and excellent surveys of the “Morisco situation” in Harvey (*Muslims in Spain*) and Bernabé-Pons (*Los moriscos*). While there is little space here to delve into the problems of referring to the Moriscos as a single monolithic community, it is important to emphasize the

I will turn directly to some of these writings and practices shortly, but it is first worthwhile to establish a few things about *memes* and *memetics*.

The *Internet meme* alluded to above has been described as a subset or a “hijacking” of the general concept of *meme* as it was first introduced by the evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*. The work was important in disseminating the notion of a gene-centered (rather than an organism-centered) view of evolution, but he takes up the uniquely human matter of the transmission of culture in the book’s final chapter. Dawkins suggested that cultural transmission is analogous to genetic transmission, and he coined the term *meme* as any unit of cultural or behavioral information that is passed on between individuals by non-genetic means, primarily imitation, and is vulnerable to mutation. Examples of memes range from the simple to complex: catch-phrases, tunes, wheel, arch, techniques for building arches, clothes and ways to wear them, alphabet, calendar, *The Odyssey*, impressionism, structuralism, or, say, putting an ‘i’ before the name of your next cool gadget. *Ideas*, we might be tempted to say, broadly speaking, but more precisely, as Stephen Dougherty has recently and succinctly stated: “According to the theory, a meme is a self-replicating unit of data that materializes itself as an instruction for the human mind that gets passed on whenever one human imitates another” (88). The philosopher Daniel Dennett uses the metaphor of a wagon, quoted above, to convey his conceptualization of memes and how they work, and Shifman’s analysis identifies three main attributes ascribed to memes in the scholarship: “a gradual propagation from individuals to society, reproduction via copying and imitation, and diffusion through competition and selection” (18).

Dawkins’ work has been a catalyst for others who wish to examine the broader ramifications and applications of Darwinian evolution. In *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*, Dennett explores the universality of the evolutionary model and ponders the philosophical and moral ramifications of memetics. For Dennett, the Darwinian evolutionary process is, at its core, an algorithmic one: a mindless, mechanical procedure that must produce an outcome and whose function relies on a logical structure independent of substrate. He observes that the algorithmic process of natural selection functions not only in a biological environment, but in any environment with the right conditions for random selection to occur. Susan Blackmore, a major proponent of memetics, develops this notion by recognizing the inevitability of the process: if there is a replicator that makes imperfect copies of itself only some of which survive, then evolution simply *must* occur (11).

As Daniel Rancour-Laferriere notes, the replication of memes “may take place within the central nervous system, as an idea or a concept passed from person to person, or the replication may involve an external object of culture, as in the reproduction of a painting by photographic means” (63). That is, human beings have the distinctive capacity to produce artifacts that can mediate or serve as mediums for the transmission of memes, and such artifacts greatly enhance a meme’s chances for survival and propagation. Building on Dawkins’ tentative queries into the role that humanity’s unique possession of culture plays in our own evolution, Dennett and Blackmore have been at the forefront of seeking a theory of memetics that establishes the meme as the all-important second replicator and analyzes how memes function. Their broader—and

existence of significant differences between the Morisco communities that populated the various regions of Spain; of most importance here, that not all Morisco communities had lost the Arabic language. It is, significantly, only in those communities where Spanish had supplanted Arabic as the native tongue amongst (crypto-) Muslims that the Aljamiado phenomenon is witnessed, primarily in the region of Aragón. For up-to-date assessments of scholarship on the Aljamiado phenomenon and its significance and purposes, see: Barletta (*Covert Gestures*); Montaner-Frutos, (“La edición...”) and López-Baralt (*La literatura secreta*).

controversial—argument is that human beings, in contrast with other species, are uniquely positioned, for better or worse, to transcend the selective pressures of genetic evolution. Whereas the evolution of other species is driven by genes that “selfishly” compete to replicate themselves, humans possess genetically-evolved, complex systems that have given rise to a second replicator: the meme. These systems, such as the capacity to plan ahead and foresee outcomes, the tendency to learn complex behaviors by imitation, and the ability to transmit knowledge and behavior through language, serve first and foremost the propagation of memes. Memes can introduce new selective pressures into our environment, and they drive us to behave in their favor, sometimes (but not always) at the expense of our genes. This can help to explain why behaviors that are so apparently detrimental to our genes—for example, celibacy or suicide based on religious conviction—may prevail: they serve the propagation of our memes. From this, one may extrapolate many ways in which memetic selection can have a very real effect on the gene pool, and so genetic and memetic forces are not separate features of human evolution; rather, they are inextricably bound.

It is, perhaps, unsurprising that these ideas have met some opposition. Recently, Dennett has succinctly articulated the kind of resistance they can elicit. He asks a room full of listeners how many of them are Creationists. His answer to his own rhetorical question:

Probably none. I think we’re all Darwinians. And yet many Darwinians are anxious, a little uneasy—would like to see some limits on just how far the Darwinism goes [...] You know spider webs? Sure, they are products of evolution. The World Wide Web? Not so sure. Beaver dams, yes. Hoover Dam, no. What do they think it is that prevents the products of human ingenuity from being themselves, fruits of the tree of life, and hence, in some sense, obeying evolutionary rules? And yet people are interestingly resistant to the idea of applying evolutionary thinking to thinking—to our thinking.” (Dennett, “Dangerous Memes”)

To his credit, in the best spirit of critical inquiry Dennett is meticulously aware of the obstacles and pitfalls he confronts. He observes that there undoubtedly is cultural evolution, but that the degree to which it is analogous to genetic evolution is an open question. He postulates two extremes: at one, cultural evolution parallels genetic evolution exactly; at the other, cultural evolution operates “according to entirely different principles, so that there is no help at all to be found amid the concepts of biology. This is surely what many humanists and social scientists fervently hope” (345).

Agency is at the crux of controversies that arise as a reaction to memetics and to a variety of cognitive and computational theoretical perspectives that approach consciousness in terms of functionality and conceive of the “post-human-individual” as a *processor of information*. Of course we react negatively, perhaps instinctively, to ideas that so rigorously reduce the factor of human agency or will to neurologically generated procedures, or whose logical conclusions are, apparently, a return to the territories of materialism and determinism. Indeed, in his article “Culture in the Disk Drive,” one of Stephen Dougherty’s criticisms of computationists and memeticists is that for them, there is only one true way in which they may achieve legitimacy: culture must be reducible to bits of matter, and studies of man and society must become physical sciences (92).

As humanists, we can quickly recognize the threatening possibilities unleashed by a second replicator that, in its conscious-less drive to replicate itself, drives us as unwitting hosts, machines whose purpose might be merely reduced to their propagation. However, Dennett recognizes that

the aforementioned extremes are unlikely; the more likely and valuable prospects lie in between: “that there is a large (or largish) and important (or merely mildly interesting) transfer of concepts from biology to the human sciences. It might be, for example, that, although the processes of cultural transmission of ideas are truly Darwinian *phenomena*, for various reasons they resist being captured in a Darwinian *science*, so we will have to settle for the ‘merely philosophical’ realizations we can glean from this, and leave science to tackle other projects” (346).

II.

The human world is made of stories, not people. The people
the stories use to tell themselves are not to be blamed.
– David Mitchell, *Ghostwritten*

The likelihood that the true fruits of memetics lie in “merely philosophical realizations,” as suggested by Dennett, resonates with the posture recently advocated by Limor Shifman and others who do not see the undermining of human agency as necessarily inherent to the concept of memes, but rather only one strain of its interpretation (12). Similarly, my purpose is to begin a consideration of how the concepts laid out by memetics might serve an examination of Aljamiado writing and the Morisco culture in which it was produced and, for a relatively short time, propagated, without sacrificing recognition of the authors and consumers of Aljamiado texts as agents engaged in a struggle to preserve a culture in peril. It might be that memetics can complement our understanding of how Aljamiado textual production formed part of a larger extra-textual strategy to preserve Hispano-Muslim cultural heritage and religious identity. Perhaps memetics can aid in our comprehension of late Hispano-Muslim communities themselves, singularly concerned with their survival while subject to pressure from such environmental factors as religious persecution, forced or voluntary cultural assimilation, and physical and geographic circumstance.

Memetics’ reliance on the human faculties of imitation and language makes the written Aljamiado language of late Hispano-Muslim communities a fitting point of departure. In terms of its formal characteristics, it may broadly be described as Spanish written using the Arabic script. Closer inspection, however, reveals the simplistic, albeit convenient, nature of such a broad definition; for example, there are a variety of ways in which the Arabic script is adapted to accommodate phonemic incompatibilities between Spanish and Arabic (for example, the presence of /p/ in Spanish, which does not exist in Arabic). Social and historical factors conditioned the phenomenon as well, further shaping the formal characteristics of the language expressed in these writings. In them, for example, we find the influence of Arabic in numerous calques, formulaic expressions, loan words and even morphology. Significantly, the selection of Arabisms in the Aljamiado lexicon is not the result of ignorance or lack of correspondence in Spanish, but instead tends to be reserved for terms or expressions that have a special significance to Islamic thought, belief and practice. *Faith*, we might say, has exerted a selective pressure that has favored Arabic words and expressions over Spanish ones.

In fact, it is the “Arabo-Islamic” awareness that so insistently emerges from the Aljamiado corpus that has led some scholars to go so far as to describe Aljamiado writing as an “Islamification” of Spanish, a term problematic enough even before our own contemporary struggles with what it implies. But rather than view this variation through the lens of ideology, this so-called “Islamification,” if properly contextualized, may perhaps be best understood as a process responsive to the environmental pressures that threatened Hispano-Muslim identity and reflective of adaptation to such pressures. However, if we can rightly say that the formal characteristics of

Aljamiado writing were thus fundamentally conditioned by circumstantial factors related to *culture in decline*, so, too, was the very adoption of Arabic *script*. Why use Spanish at all? Why not just write in Arabic?

One way of answering the question is to conceive of Aljamiado writing as part of an adaptive process, in this case, one that responds immediately to the loss of Arabic, well-attested already in late Hispano-Muslim communities of Castilla and Aragón. Knowledge of Arabic was scant; Spanish was the language of daily operations. Yet Aljamiado writing, if reflective of a process of adaptation, does a lot more than accommodate the script of one language to another; Aljamiado is also an adaptation that responds to matters of identity: as the language of revelation, Arabic language as well as the script in which it is written are intimately bound to Islamic faith, and accordingly to its faithful follower.³ We might conceive of a «*good Muslims possess Arabic*» meme driving the development of Aljamiado writing. Thus, Aljamiado emerges as an adaptation to the incompatibility between real and ideal states of language, and a reaction to what those states (or the tension between them) implied in late Hispano-Muslim communities. It is, in other words, the best possible compromise between what was needed and what was desired. The mere existence of Aljamiado writing seems to indicate that even a simulacrum of Arabic was better than nothing at all. In the absence of the traditionally preferable Arabic, a simulacrum offered a potentially effective tool for legitimizing the Islamic character and quality of the non-Arabic text it conveyed, which in turn had the potential to effectively contribute to the survival of an embattled Muslim identity. And a simulacrum would, perhaps, at least have “felt” more authentic than a wholesale adoption of Spanish, Latin script and all.⁴

For the propagators of this Aljamiado mode of writing, their concept of Arabic likely did have more to do with look and feel than grammatical and lexical accuracy. It is clear that Aljamiado writing is much more than writing that looks like Arabic; consider this: even today—especially today—the mere concept (and not the language) of Arabic rouses sundry responses, many of which have little to do with the fact that it is, after all, the language used by millions to simply conduct their every-day lives. Arabic was at the heart of many attitudes, concerns and beliefs—or rather, *memes*—in the Hispano-Muslim communities of Castilla and Aragón where Arabic language was nearly extinct. Such memes precipitated a longing, a need and a drive, to be connected through language to faith and heritage, thus creating favorable conditions for the propagation of Aljamiado writing, well-suited to assist in the successful transmission of other *memes* that were crucial components of Hispano-Muslim identity. Aljamiado writing is, thus, at once a reaction to and a reflection of an unstable state of culture; it is both a symptom and, potentially, a cure, and therein lies its adaptive brilliance.

The further implication here is that once Aljamiado writing, as a formal technique, got off the ground, it, too, proved not only to be a popular medium for spreading culture, but itself was a successful meme, one that was well-suited to aid Hispano-Muslim communities’ navigation—and possible survival—of the problems presented by cultural decline. We might return here to

³ For an insightful exploration of the “attachment of the Moriscos to their language,” see López-Morillas, “Language and Identity.”

⁴ Here I am making a clear distinction between two types of Aljamiado writing that are sometimes considered together: those texts written prior to expulsion that employ the Arabic script, and those written after the expulsion in which the Latin script is used. The scholarship sometimes refers to Aljamiado writing broadly as the writing of the Moriscos before and after the expulsion, but my conceptualization of Aljamiado writing here is restrictive to those written using the Arabic script. It would follow, nonetheless, that the shift from Arabic to Latin script after the expulsion would be conceived as yet another adaptation in the writing habits of Moriscos to changing circumstances, who after the expulsion were, perhaps, more interested in emphasizing the Hispano aspect of their Hispano-Arab heritage.

Dennett's wagon, and hijack it thus: Aljamiado writing carries not only the stories and texts sacred to the (crypto-) Muslim community, it also carries the brilliant idea of writing in Aljamiado from mind to mind. The «*Aljamiado writing*» meme should be examined as both form and content—or rather form that *is* content; it was a particular way of conveying information that itself, intrinsically, said (and says) something culturally significant about those using it. Such efficiency must have contributed to its successful propagation. Once the practice of Islam—and, notably, non-Islamic practices that were nevertheless associated with it—was effectively prohibited and punishable, the adoption and apparent surge of Aljamiado writing after the first quarter of the 16th century in Aragón meant that other memes pertinent to Muslim identity, preserved now in a secret body of writing, possibly had a better chance to survive as well.

One stark affinity between memetics and Aljamiado writing is that both are very much about survival. Like the Aljamiado phenomenon itself, Aljamiado texts suggest that the loss of a sacred language linked to salvation and righteousness weighed heavily on Morisco minds, and one senses that anxiety about survival, aroused by an ideal sense of identity at odds with the real state of culture, permeates the Aljamiado textual discourse.⁵ But Aljamiado writing is one reflection of a much broader Hispano-Muslim discourse revolving around culture in peril, and I suspect that memetics could be helpful in identifying or describing what unifies Aljamiado discourse and its relationship to the broader one. Rather than consider, for example, the themes, topics or motifs of Aljamiado literature, we might speak of the memes that were, as we sometimes say, “in the air,” and examine how those that seemed good or effective “infected,” in a sense, not only the writings, but also the minds of late Hispano-Muslims, in turn further shaping the ways in which they contemplated and reacted to their plight.

III.

First, memes may best be understood as pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person, but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon. Although they spread on a micro basis, their impact is on the macro level: memes shape the mindsets, forms of behavior, and actions of social groups.

– Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture*

One of the most profound indicators of declining culture must surely be the loss of language, and the loss of Arabic, in conflict with a «*good Muslims possess Arabic*» meme, was one significant environmental pressure that gave rise to the «*Aljamiado writing*» meme. The «*good Muslims possess Arabic*» meme thus lies latent in the very act of writing in Aljamiado, but also, potentially, in acts as seemingly innocuous as possessing, reading from, or merely being in the presence of Aljamiado texts. However, while the «*Aljamiado writing*» meme could prosper as a surrogate for Arabic, it wasn't the only manner in which concern over loss of language was expressed. The cognitive dissonance resulting from the tension between the absence of Arabic and a «*good Muslims possess Arabic*» meme is implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, reflected in textual content as well. We see it, for example, in the *alfaquí* of Segovia ʿIṣā Gidelli's rationale for taking

⁵ Bartletta's approach to Aljamiado literature is of particular relevance in this regard; for Barletta, the essence of Morisco writing is that it directly engages an uncertain future, and it was the uncertainty and anxiety they felt that helped to motivate and shape their textual production (see *Covert Gestures*). See also López-Baralt (“Crónica de la destrucción de un mundo”) for an approach that similarly takes into account the way Aljamiado texts reflect the cares and concerns of their writers and receptors.

on the unheard of task of translating the Qurʾān into romance; we see it in the testimonials of elder Hispano-Muslims recorded in *Aljamiado* by the Mancebo of Arévalo, for whom the loss of Arabic is merely another step towards further cultural decay; and we find it with a further twist in *Aljamiado* prophecies that link the loss of Arabic to negligence, which in turn has brought God's wrath down on the Hispano-Muslim populace in the form of Christian subjugation and oppression.

In such texts, the loss of Arabic is treated as a stressor that paves the way or is otherwise related to further estrangement from assumed "authentic" states of cultural and spiritual identity. Furthermore, the attitudes they express toward cultural debility hint at other memes arising from tension between real and ideal states of culture, such as memes for «*communal suffering as punishment for religious misconduct*», a nostalgic «*mythification of al-Andalus*», or a general apocalyptic mentality regarding Morisco destiny. In the texts examined here, the disastrous effects of loss of language and its relationship to the erosion of culture and identity among Spanish crypto-Muslim communities are central concerns.

The linking of language and righteousness, though not unique to Hispano-Muslim communities, is thematic to the *Aljamiado* corpus and latent in the very act of its fabrication, and itself might be conceived as a prominent and powerful (if not definitive) *Aljamiado*-Morisco meme.⁶ Muslim writers of late-medieval and early-modern Spain express a variety of concerns arising from the loss of Arabic and the ensuing spiritual estrangement in their communities.⁷ For a Muslim, language and religion most explicitly meet at the Qurʾān, and so it is unsurprising that *Aljamiado* writings that either implicitly or explicitly address the incapacity to approach the Qurʾān (another component of «*being a good Muslim*») abound.⁸ The work of Segovia's *alfaquí* ʿĪḩā Gidelli is of particular interest in this regard. Writing in the early second half of the fifteenth century, Gidelli produced two works that would be significant to subsequent generations of Hispano-Muslims: a translation of the Qurʾān and a compendium of Sunnī orthodox beliefs and practices. Both pieces were composed in Castilian, and in their prefatory remarks he carefully explains his motives for doing so.⁹ For one thing, he notes his desire to follow God's command to teach what one knows to others in a language they will understand, and furthermore, "because the Moors of Castile, under such great oppression, subjected to the exaction of tribute, forced labor and exhaustion, have declined in their wealth **and have lost their schools of Arabic**, [and] in order to put right all these things which are wrong, many of my friends...have pressed me hard, and have asked me to...copy out **in Romance**...[a] written work concerning our law and *sunna*: what every good Muslim should know and have as normal practice." He has opted for brevity since

⁶ My intention in using the term *Aljamiado-Morisco* here is to emphasize both the textual representation of memes in *Aljamiado* writings and also the broader "mindset" of the Morisco communities amongst which *Aljamiado* texts circulated.

⁷ See Kathryn Miller's *Guardians of Islam* for a fascinating examination of the ways in which these writers interacted with each other and with leaders from the Islamic community outside of Spain in order to understand, define and localize their roles as leaders and the guardians of a sacred knowledge.

⁸ As for writings that implicitly address this problem, I am thinking, for example, of *Aljamiado* translations of the Qurʾān (examined in detail by López-Morillas). While such translations may certainly stand as explicit treatments of the issue, here I am thinking of writings, as those that will be examined below, that make explicit statements regarding the loss of Arabic and its relation to the inability to access sacred Islamic texts.

⁹ The compendium is referred to variably as the *Breviario Sunni*, the *Sunnī Breviary* or *Compendium*, or the *Kitāb Segoviano*. Gidelli's translation of the Qurʾān has not survived. Weigers has shown how the prefatory remarks from the extant *Breviario*, in which Gidelli's purpose and motivation are expressed, are, however, intimately connected to the lost translation of the Qurʾān (*Islamic Literature* 124-130), and Harvey notes that the *Breviario*'s preface is, in fact, a conflation of the *Breviary*'s preface and the preface that accompanied his Qurʾān (*Islamic Spain* 83).

“long writings are all very well for those who have secure resources on which to maintain themselves, and that is a thing of the past here in Castile.”¹⁰

The cultural state of affairs among Castilian Muslims, as attested by Gidelli, was already in a precarious state well before our Morisco writers had taken up their pens. Yet Gidelli’s work was to resonate in Hispano-Muslim communities well beyond his own, for it appears to have been a keystone for shaping later Morisco writing in Aragón and the development of the Aljamiado phenomenon. Gerard Weigers and others have argued that his *Sunnī Compendium* circulated widely in later Morisco communities and served as a catalyst for their use of the Arabic script to legitimately write in Spanish about all-things-Islamic.¹¹ Put another way, Gidelli’s thought was provocative for later generations of Hispano-Muslims grappling with linguistic and doctrinal deficiencies in their own communities, and his work was a key component in the generation, transmission, evolution and success of the «*Aljamiado writing*» meme. The seeds of the Aljamiado meme may thus have been initially embedded in the writings of Gidelli, but they were by no means bound to them, and their further propagation would inevitably come to rely less on direct contact with his writings and more on the imitations and manipulations of his followers. A similar suggestion is made by López-Morillas regarding the role his work may have played in the later Morisco translations of the Qur’ān: “Whether the Moriscos actually copied ‘Īsā’s version we shall never know, since it is lost to us. But at least some of the many Morisco Qur’āns from the sixteenth century that have survived could be its spiritual, if not its literal, heirs” (*The Qur’ān* 14). This notion of contemplating “spiritual heirs,” rather than literal ones, it seems to me, is the essence of a memetic approach to Aljamiado-Morisco discourse and the “macro level” impact of their memes, to use Shifman’s words.

It is possible, for example, that the “spiritual residue” of Gidelli’s work goes beyond his role in shaping Morisco Qur’āns or an «*Aljamiado writing*» meme. Weigers has recently shown that Gidelli’s concern for the loss of Arabic among his fellow Hispano-Muslims transcends its immediately practical implications for sustaining their aptitude in Islamic doxa and praxis. In essence, Gidelli’s aim is to inform his readers of the imminence of the end of the world, reproach them for their religious deviations, and concisely inform them of the articles of Islamic faith so they may straighten out before it’s too late, and in order to do so he must resort to a language that his receptors will understand: Castilian. This last element is obviously of significance when it comes to his own immediate needs for legitimizing his use of a non-Arabic language, as well as to whatever his perceived authority in doing so meant for later generations of Hispano-Muslims. It is, however, his identification of the failings of his community and his apocalyptic tone that are of interest here, for it is plausible that these elements, too, were picked up in the “Aljamiado wagon” or otherwise became features of Morisco cultural baggage, particularly if assertions regarding his influence on Morisco writing habits are correct. Naturally, Gidelli is not the first to express concern over the failings of his people at what is deemed a pivotal moment, nor are his writings the only place in which we find such concern expressed in the Hispano-Muslim context. But we might speculate that his apocalyptically inspired finger-pointing served as a spiritual precursor for the substance and tenor of (at least some) Aljamiado writing and Morisco discourse.

¹⁰ Harvey’s translation of the *Breviario Sunnī*’s preface (*Islamic Spain* 81-82), emphasis mine; for the complete original text, see Weigers, *Islamic Literature* 236-239.

¹¹ López-Morillas (*The Qur’ān*), Harvey (*Islamic Spain; Muslims in Spain*), and Epalza (“A modo de introducción”) have been among the proponents of the hypothesis that Gidelli’s work exercised a direct and significant influence on later Islamic writing activity; Weigers’ careful examination of sources elaborates this position by noting that Gidelli was probably a prominent figure for “authorizing” the use of Spanish as a written language among Muslims, but not the only one (*Islamic Literature*).

Regardless of the nature of Gidelli's role in "loading the wagon" and setting the tone for later purveyors of Aljamiado writings, it was political and societal circumstance that ultimately necessitated Aljamiado writing activity. Cultural, religious and linguistic degradation were the environmental pressures leading to the composition of all of these texts, and the dwindling knowledge of a sacred language was but one—albeit fundamental—manifestation of this decay. The writings of Gidelli and others, as we shall see, directly confront the many ways in which their community is perceived to have deviated from ideal states of culture, and as is to be expected, they may do so in a variety of ways and from a variety of stances. Gidelli's prefatory remarks, for example, seem to treat estrangement from Arabic language and Islamic custom as the result of external forces, but in some cases estrangement is considered instead as the source of misery and impoverishment. Both portrayals clearly represent grave concern for present and future circumstances, as well as for individual and collective behavior. They differ, however, in what they imply regarding the perceived victimization or culpability of the estranged, a difference that also affects what is implied regarding their reaction to their circumstance.

Take, for example, the later Aljamiado writings of the Morisco author known as the Mancebo de Arévalo which, like Gidelli's earlier writings, also appear to have achieved wide circulation and influence among Aragonese Moriscos. His *Tafçira*, probably composed around 1537, is principally a collection of Islamic precepts and practices, but the Mancebo's compilation also journals his tour of Spain's Morisco communities, and the *Tafçira*'s testimonial dimension is another of its many noteworthy facets. In it he records the memories and predictions of an elder Morisco woman whose lament is framed by her cynical attitude regarding the future. The Mora of Úbeda, as she is known, is a knowledgeable and highly-respected woman from the Granadan Morisco community, witness to Granada's fall. The Mancebo relates to us her grief for the decline of her people, and she tells the Mancebo to pray for God's forgiveness, since "the very ones who lament are to blame," claiming we do not suffer for the sins of our forebears, but rather for our own failings. She goes on to cite Muhammad, who warned "*que si pecamos, constreñidos serémos*," that is, that the sinner will be compelled to atone through the punishment of oppression or restriction.¹² Such sentiments are echoed in the statements of Yūse Banegas, collected by the Mancebo in another place. After describing the sorrow of the "children of Granada," Yūse tells the Mancebo that he laments what Spain's Muslims will live to see: their religion will diminish, leaving later generations to ask what happened; in Yūse's words, "all will be coarseness and bitterness." His vision of a spiritually barren future is paired with a few ideas about where the blame lies: "We will yet see greater punishments," he says, "for our increasing sinfulness," and he asks "if in such short time we see such burden, what do you suppose awaits us? If the faith wanes in the parent, how will it be exalted by their offspring? If the king of the conquest does not keep his word, what are we to expect of his successors? This I tell you, son: our decline will only worsen..."¹³ The mistrust of Christian authority could not be clearer, but neither could the expression of a sense of communal culpability.

As isolated or unique instances of thought, such testimonies can and should be examined as the anecdotes they are in the writings of the Mancebo. However, these cynical lamentations may also reflect a broader mindset existing among the generation of Hispano-Muslims that witnessed the culmination of the Reconquest and its aftermath, for whom falling back on a timeless meme,

¹² My translation and paraphrasing of the text in Narváez-Córdova's edition (Mancebo de Arévalo, *Tafçira* 400).

¹³ Yūçe Banegas' testimony appears in the Mancebo's *Sumario de la relación y ejercicio espiritual*; I paraphrase here the edition of the selection as it appears in Harvey ("Yuse Banegas" 301). More recently the text has been edited in full by Fonseca Antuña.

one that equates misfortune and suffering with divine punishment received for sinfulness or for otherwise deviating from the path of righteousness, may have been one strategy for confronting the political, cultural and ideological disruption that the Fall of Granada represented across the Hispano-Muslim community. Like Gidelli, the testimonies recorded by the Mancebo express a real concern for the cultural degradation perceived in their communities, but they are also bluntly accusatory and wholly pessimistic regarding the future that awaits them. The Mancebo's appropriation of Yūse Banegas' and the Mora de Úbeda's statements and attitudes regarding the past, present and future suggests that he found wisdom and truth in the words of his elders and respected authorities. It is not unlikely that his audience did as well, nor that the Mancebo expected they would. Through his writing, the Mancebo thus mediates the reception and transmission of a meme that attributes the suffering of a community to its own spiritual negligence.

The writings of Gidelli and the Mancebo reveal much about their own immediate interests and struggles, but by virtue of the success of their writing activities, Gidelli and the Mancebo come to us as noteworthy transmitters of memes and shapers of culture.¹⁴ The circulation of their work among Morisco communities in Aragón is suggestive of the influence they may have exercised on thought within and the writing activities of those communities. Yet regardless of their roles in propagating memes related to the loss of language, spiritual estrangement and communal suffering, the potential of a memetic approach to Morisco writing doesn't lie so much in identifying the origins, sources, points of contact, or lineage of memes from originators through imitators; rather, the opportunities offered by memetics *vis-à-vis* Morisco writing are more likely found in its concern for the "macro-level" matters related to the mindsets and activities of social groups. After all, the writings of Gidelli, the Mancebo, and a host of anonymous, apocryphal and traditional texts preserved in Aljamiado were propagated and consumed broadly by an audience with specific needs, desires and expectations, an audience for whom consternation regarding a degraded or tenuous cultural state was a shared experience that affected their thought about and behavior within their corner of the world.

IV.

For more than three thousand years now, people have managed to convince themselves that their world was teetering on the brink of total transformation, that their enemies were about to be annihilated and their own fondest hopes fulfilled by a shattering event that would change the nature of reality itself. That sense of overwhelming immediacy is the bait dangled by the apocalypse meme.

– John Michael Greer, *Apocalypse: A History of the End of Time*

The existence of a meme for «*communal suffering as punishment for religious misconduct*» among the late Hispano-Muslim populace, hinted at in writings such as Gidelli's and the Mancebo's, is suggested as well in a cluster of prophetic texts that appear in a sixteenth-century Aljamiado manuscript from Aragón (MS 774 held at the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris): the *Rrekontamiento de los eskándalos ke an de akaeçer en la çaguería de los tienpos en la isla de*

¹⁴ Narváez-Córdova makes an interesting observation regarding the Mancebo's awareness of his own agency: "El autor implora a Dios le dé la oportunidad de poder realizar él, a su vez, su peregrinaje a Meca, para luego contarlo, pues si muere antes, ¿quién divulgará y narrará las cosas de España? Este pasaje nos revela, primero, que el Mancebo aún no ha ido a Meca y, segundo, la aguda conciencia que tenía de la obra divulgadora y proselitista que estaba llevando a cabo. Reconoce su importancia como preservador de su cultura y de su tradición" ("Mitificación" 153).

España, the *Profeçia sakada por estrolojía i por el sabio digno de gran çençia Sant Esidrio*, the *Planto de España* (also attributed to Saint Isidore), and *Profeçia de Mahoma sobre España*. Like many societies before and after them, Morisco communities turned to prophecy to explain the harsh realities of the present and shape future action.¹⁵ One outstanding feature of the Morisco prophecies of MS 774 is their preoccupation with the role that deviance from religious obligations has played in the communities that are the object of their attention. In the *Profeçia de Mahoma*, Muhammad relates to his companions a number of Gabriel's revelations regarding an "island in the west called Andaluzía," i.e. Spain.¹⁶ In his prediction of the Islamic conquest of this land, Muhammad also indicates its intrinsic holy value. Yet, while Spain will be the last of the lands to receive Islam, where it will be strong and lasting, in an emotional end-scene, Muhammad weeps upon seeing that it will also be the first land from which Islam is ousted. The reasons for the fall of Spain's Muslims are various: few of them will observe their obligatory practices, they will fail to prepare their souls for the final judgment, they will love this world over the next, and they will have abandoned the teachings of the Qur'ān.¹⁷ Similarly, the opening remarks of the *Rrekontamiento* tell of an elderly man in Damascus visited by a heavenly messenger who informs him that hard times will come to the Muslims of Spain for their abandonment of Islam: they will no longer understand the Qur'ān, they will fail to pray and give alms, they will no longer fast, and while they will say that Allah is in their hearts, their words will be empty:

Porke akaeçerá[n] entr[e] ellos muchas kosas feyas. I la primera kosa ke farán será ke ðeşarán el ðeprender (*comprender*) ðel alqurán, i ðeşarán l-assalā (*la oración*), i no pagarán a'zzake (*la limosna*), i ðayunarán poko, i ðizen ke Al-lah es verðadero en sus koraçones, i son vazíos de nonbrar ada Al-lah. I por esto senbrarán mucho i kojerán poko, y trabajarán mucho, abrán provecho poko. (Sánchez-Álvarez 239)

He is told further they will be deprived and punished for being shameless and adulterous, for turning on one another, for not attending mosque, and for the lack of respect the young have for their elders:

Ðišole ke será poka la vergüença i mucha el a'zzine (*adulterio*) i no rreconoçerá el ermano a su ermano, ni el fiyo al paðre, i ðexan las meçkiðas vazias i ðespobladas, i no onrrarán los chikos a los grandes, i ðirán los chikos ke los viejos no son verðaderos, i tiénenlos en cuenta de chikos, pues, kuando akello será, enviará Al-lah, ta'ālā, (*Dios, ensalzado sea*) sobr-ellos, kien les afollará (*echar a perder, pisotear, humillar*) el tiempo, i darles á grandes fanbres i gran mengua de viandas. Abrá grandes adversidades entre las jentes en las çiwðades i en

¹⁵ There is some evidence that such prophecies were thoroughly propagated among Morisco communities (see, for example, Sánchez-Álvarez (45-50) and López-Baralt (*La literatura* 184)). Various scholars (e.g. Cardaillac, Iversen, Sánchez-Álvarez, López-Baralt, García-Arenal) have examined the socio-political contexts that contributed to their propagation, their unique historical contexts, and the role that they may have played in Morisco communities, including their possible use to incite rebellion (e.g. the Alpujarras uprising in 1568) or affect the policies and attitudes of Christians (e.g. in relation to the *libros plúmbeos*), as well as how they are more broadly connected to Christian and Islamic apocalyptic traditions. Green-Mercado's recent work on the appearance of Abraham Fatimí as a messianic figure and his connection to Morisco apocalyptic expectations is of great interest here as well, for as she observes: "Through the evocation of apocalyptic expectations, a particular type of Morisco community was shaped and constructed: one that aimed at (re)creating, or restoring, the ummah, the Islamic community of believers" (195). Many such apocalyptic and communal expectations might be said to manifest through memes, and it may be that Fatimí was particularly adept at tapping into them.

¹⁶ "Island," in this case, is an example of the many semantic calques of Arabic that appear in Aljamiado texts. As described by Kontzi (1978), the use of the word *island* to describe Spain comes from the Arabic جزيرة *ǧazīra*, which means "island" as well as "peninsula".

¹⁷ My paraphrasing of the Spanish text as edited by Sánchez-Álvarez (252-253).

las villas, i enviará Al-lah ta'ālā (*Dios, ensalzado sea*) sobr-ellos la lluvia kuando no fará menester, i deternerl-á kuando fará menester. (*ibid.* 240)

The *Rrekontamiento* is most explicit in referring to failure to practice four of the five pillars of Islam, but an overwhelming notion that emerges from each of these prophecies is that disaster is the culminating effect of abandoning key religious precepts in conjunction with the betrayal of a communal and familial trust.¹⁸ From a doctrinal perspective, the tone is generally accusatory; the audience is ostensibly meant to recognize and experience guilt for their failure to maintain their religious obligations, and it is their failure which has resulted in their suffering. But it cannot be ignored that the concern is a societal one as well: the litany of violations is centered on those that contribute to spiritual degradation as well as to the disintegration of communal, familial and cultural bonds, bonds that, moreover, should aid the community to persevere at a time of extreme stress and persecution. The *Rrekontamiento* is furthermore careful to emphasize that these infringements will result in Allah's retribution, as exemplified by the previously cited passage as well as at the close of the prophecy:

Pues tened buena esperança, ke el tienpo se açerka de la fin ke ðize el vivo al muerto: ¡fuésemo komo tú! Pues espertadvos ðe vuestra negligença, ke el tienpo se açerka. I mirad bien en los señaes k-el al'abið (*asceta*) ðišo ke abian de venir en los muçlimes de la isla preçiosa de España, por los grandes pekados ke akaeçerán entre los muçlimes i se ensañará Al-lah ta'ālā (*Dios, ensalzado sea*) sobr-ellos, i enviará sobr-ellos los ađoradores de la kruz i prenderles an sus algos i sus kasas, i sus mujeres i sus kriaturas, i no abrán piedad d-ellos. Pues los muçlimes, seyed aunados komo la fragua enplomada fuerte. (*ibid.* 243)

To its Mosico audience, the oppressive *señaes* of Allah's retribution for having abandoned their spiritual duties must have been painfully familiar, reason enough, perhaps to heed the text's call to "awaken from their negligence," an affirmation that there is time enough to redress their deviance and fulfill the favorable destiny predicted in the providential confrontation described in the body of the text.¹⁹ Culpability and causation play a particularly prominent role in the

¹⁸ It is not entirely surprising that the final pillar, *hajj*, is missing; Harvey ("The Moriscos and the *Hajj*" 13), explores the exceptional nature of the Morisco situation, which made the pilgrimage to Mecca extraordinarily difficult, at the very least, for Spanish crypto-Muslims, who were largely cut off from *Dār al-Islām*. One occasionally finds an offering of "substitutions" for the pilgrimage in Aljamiado texts; in the very miscellany that houses these prophecies there is a "supplication" or "invocation" ("*a'ddu'a de Mūçā*", Sánchez Álvarez 177) which states that reciting it will be like making the pilgrimage to Mecca ("Kí' en lo ðirá akeste a'ddu'ā es komo ke hiziese alhaj a la kasa de Makka la muy rreverenda"). The *Rrekontamiento* itself, as we will see, tells its reader that a Muslim's mere presence in Spain is equivalent to his making the pilgrimage multiple times.

¹⁹ The *Rrekontamiento* places these infringements and their divine retribution into a pseudo-prophetic context (in reality historical) that seems to present "clues" to the proximity of a "preordained" uprising that will ultimately result in a Muslim victory and restoration of glory to al-Andalus: after great trials and tribulations, Allah will inspire a Muslim re-conquest of Christian lands; Muslim uprisings in Spain will culminate in a bloody battle resulting in the captive Christian king's conversion to Islam, followed by the conversion of Christians throughout these newly reconquered lands (my paraphrasing of Sánchez-Álvarez (242-243)). The text's insistence on the imminence of these events was likely designed to encourage perseverance, and perhaps to even incite rebellion. Recall that memes shape not only the mindsets of social groups, but their actions and behavior as well. Sánchez-Álvarez (48) notes that the notion that this and other Morisco prophecies played a role in fomenting the Granadan uprisings collectively referred to as the Second Granadan War (1568-1570) seems to have first been suggested by Godoy-Alcántara in his *Historia crítica de los falsos cronicones* in 1868; the matter has been considered recently by Iversen and Green-Mercado as well.

Rrekontamiento and, though to a somewhat lesser degree, in the *Profecía de Mahoma*. The patent connection between a community's sinful disregard for its spiritual obligations and its suffering here is starkly reminiscent of Yūse Banegas' lament and the Mora of Úbeda's warning: "*que si pecamos, constreñidos serémos*," and one is reminded as well of Gidelli's apocalyptic concerns as he observed his own community stray from its religious duties. The suggestion here, however, is not that the prophecies are informed directly by either the writings of Gidelli or the Mancebo, but rather that all of these texts exhibit a meme, common enough to apocalyptic writing in general, that associates negligence or sinfulness with suffering delivered by divine justice. Such a meme for «*communal suffering caused by religious misconduct*» may have enjoyed prominence in Morisco communities and discourse for its potential—like «*Aljamiado writing*»—to facilitate and assure the preservation of other memes aligned with “authentic” or ideal cultural states by compelling its bearers to face their error in abandoning them, and to correct their behavior accordingly.

The overtly accusatory character of the prophecies considered above, however, appears at first-glance to be tempered (if not wholly contradicted) by the pseudo-Isidore prophecies that lie between them. The *Profecía sakada por estrolojía*, for example, makes its own “prediction” related to the failure to adhere to the tenets of faith. It states that in the year 1501 no one in Spain will be able to read the Qur'ān because of the little wisdom and knowledge remaining in the Muslim community, but it also predicts the forced conversion to Christianity of that community:

Kuando será llegaða la rrueda de mil i kinientos i uno, no se fallará en la España kien leirá l-alqurán. Esto será por la poka çiençia i mal consejo ke abrá en la morería ke de muy prieta defendiéndose, les farán tomar la krisma por la fuerça...” (*ibid.* 244)

The explicitness of the date, which corresponds to a period in which many of Spain's Muslims did in fact experience forced conversion, reminds us that the abandonment of the faith occurred, in many instances, against one's will.²⁰ It is, however, the notion that forced conversion is apparently predicated on the weakening of learning and the supportive counsel provided by a learned community that is, perhaps, more important here. Gidelli's own rationalization for his unconventional Qur'ān and compendium reminds us that the erosion of Islamic learning in Spain had begun long before the conquest of Granada in 1492, an event that precipitated an even more dramatic exodus of the Muslim learned classes from the domain of the Catholic Monarchs. In Spain's Muslim communities, the *alfaquíes* were the esteemed authorities on the teaching of the Qur'ān, experts in religious and legal counsel and the bearers of Islamic culture and learning.²¹

²⁰ In 1499 Archbishop of Toledo Francisco Jiménez Cisneros visited Granada, particularly concerned with the matter of *elches*, Christians who had converted to Islam and were supposedly protected under Granada's capitulation terms. Cisneros introduced a number of “confrontational” (Harvey, *Muslims in Spain* 28) measures to hasten the much-desired conversion of Muslims, one of the most spectacular of which (Bernabe-Pons, *Los moriscos* 27) was the burning of Arabic books and manuscripts. Such measures provoked an uprising in the Muslim quarter of Granada and, subsequently, open revolt in the rural parts of the Kingdom of Granada. These insurrections were quickly subdued by Christian authorities; in their aftermath, Granada's Muslims were given the choice of baptism or exile (1501). It appears that around this time the Christian authority began to consider Granada's capitulation treaty, which had guaranteed the rights of Muslims to continue in their faith and cultural practices, null and void. Shortly thereafter, in 1502, a similar policy under which Muslims were compelled to choose conversion or exile was instituted in Castile.

²¹ From the Arabic الفقيه, *al-faqīh*, legist, jurisprudent, expert of Islamic law, although the role they played in Morisco communities was greatly expanded: “En época morisca estos alfaquíes ya no eran *fuqaha*’ en el sentido clásico del término (es decir juristas, especialistas en leyes) sino gentes instruidas en la lectura y escritura, que tenían acceso a

The *Profeçia sakada por estrolojía*'s mention of the scant learning that remained in the Muslim community almost certainly refers to the intellectual erosion that had occurred by the time of its composition; indeed, over time, the diminishing number of *alfaquíes* was to have profound implications for the cultural future of Spanish Muslim communities. By acknowledging such conditions, the *Profeçia sakada* might be seen as having an exculpatory dimension that seemingly clashes with the accusatory tone of the *Rrekontamiento* and the *Profeçia de Mahoma*: in the face of such intellectual and cultural ruin, how could any community be blamed for its negligence, or more appropriately, ignorance?

Yet pseudo-Isidore's predictions regarding the state of Muslim learning and forced conversion at the hands of Christians in the *Profeçia* are made in a broader context that includes a general forecast for Spain's Jews and her populace as a whole:

I dize así: los judíos tienen fuerte mal i serán derribados de su ley i desmenuzada;
 ¡O España!, ke te digo ke si tu jente supiesen lo ke tú as de aber, i lo kreyesen así, te deşarían sola, ¡tan gran mal ke verná sobre ti [...] de ke será llegada la rrueda de mil i kinientos i uno, entonces serán las jentes en España tan atrebuladas i tan ablastadas ke no sabrán a dó ir, ni ké á de ser d-ellos según lo ke se rremoverá en-ella..." (*ibid.* 244)

Such great evil will prevail in "*el rregno de korronpiçión*," the text continues, that its people will no longer know one another and they will wish for death. It is here where one begins to perceive the true focus of this and the following prophecy: pseudo-Isidore's audience should be, naturally, a Christian one, and it is this community to which his accusations of deviance are directed, they who are to be held accountable:

I si abrá fecho [el cristiano] bien o mal, entonces lo verá; porke viene sobre los kristianos muy korronpido mal, ke no parará jamás la fortaleza del mal, fasta ke será akabaða la seta. (*ibid.* 244-45)

Indeed, the function of the *Profeçia*'s predictions regarding the state of Spain's Muslims in 1501 (and, for that matter, its Jews, who by that time will have been "derribados de su ley i desmenuzada") is to temporally contextualize its chief prognosis, supposedly made by the esteemed Christian authority, regarding the imminent end of Christendom in Spain. Anticipation of a generalized malaise and the destruction of Christian Spain continues in the *Planto de España*, in which pseudo-Isidore cries out for Spain, whose people will be akin to sheep without a shepherd and whose sins will be abhorred by God. The weak will perish and their blood will cry out for retribution, yet the text's tone implies that their demise will go un-avenged.²² The diatribe against Christian authority—traitors not merely to the Morisco community but to the entire Spanish populace—is manifest in the *Planto*, but not unique to it; the lack of confidence voiced earlier by Yūse Banegas is recalled in passages such as this: "Oh Spain! You closed off your cities and destroyed their liberties. You are an oath-breaker, and your regents are thieving wolves void of goodness. Your trade is in pride and grandiosity, sodomy and lust, in blasphemy, denial and

obras jurídicas y religiosas y que por lo tanto podían leer el Corán en voz alta ante un auditorio analfabeto" (García-Arenal 133).

²² My paraphrasing of the text (Sánchez-Álvarez 246).

pompousness, vainglory, tyranny, thievery and injustice...²³ It is pseudo-Isidore's accusations levied against a Christian authority, clergy, and community gone astray that bring us back to «communal suffering as punishment for religious misconduct»:

¡Guay de ti!, España, ¿ké farás de la iglesia de Dios?, ke darás sus beneficios a los pekađores, ke serán peores ke idólatras, i no te peđrikarán el Avanjelio del tu salvador, más las sus falsas intinçiones por endinar a los pekeños i traerlos a sekutar sus maldades;
 ¡Guay de ti!, España, ke muchas vezes fuste amenazađa; agora serás destruiđa, ké fanbre i guerra i mortandad abrás. Por vengança de tus males, serás rronpiđa i đesonrrađa, i la tu gran çiuđad i su santo tenplo será komeņado i no será akabađo;
 ¡Guay!, entonces de la klerezía, i de los falsos rrelijosos ke todos serán đestruidos por sus grandes pekađos, ke olviđarán el servicio de su iglesia i se ençenderán en le mundo i en las kobdiçias i ganancias, i levarán logro. Komo las langostas de los marranos (*tornadizos*), usurparán a los menores. Kon la fuerça de la iglesia, fornrikarán. Serán tiranos, soberbiosos, grandiosos, vanagloriosos, luçiferales, de fechos abominables i pekađos krueles i mortales. Serán los rrelijosos sin firmeza, sin verđad, i sin kariđad. La ira del señor del çielo deçenderá sobr-ellos i serán korridos i đesbaratađos i aflijidos, i muertos; ke salrrán de sus kuevas las bestias agareñas, enpoçoñadas para đestruir la-Spaña, la alta, i la baša. (*ibid.* 247-248)

This time, it is the Christian community that is being notified that its corruption and malfeasance—ultimately, its “un-Christain” behavior—will lead to its downfall. Pseudo-Isidore's ostensible Christian audience in this case, though, is a pseudo-audience. In their hands, his prophecies would serve as a warning; in the hands of their Morisco appropriators, however, pseudo-Isidore's prophecies could convey some sense of hope and opportunity. The signs of their imminent fulfillment conform to the lived experiences and conditions of their contemporary Morisco audience and are on par with those of the *Rrekontamiento*, whose victorious Muslim outcome is affirmed and corroborated by the esteemed Christian authority. To this point, «communal suffering as punishment for religious misconduct» operates in the pseudo-Isidore texts as it does in the *Rrekontamiento* and *Profeçía de Mahoma*. Conceived as a universal truth, the «suffering» meme tells its carrier that *all* deviant communities will receive their divinely ordained just-deserts. The downfall and destruction of one community might just happen to be, in this case, another's opportunity for vindication and return to glory.

However, pseudo-Isidore's predictions do not end here; while at the heart of each it is foreseen that Muslims will seize an opportunity created by a Christian downfall, the predictions made in the *Profeçía* and the *Planto* alike ultimately render a Muslim victory as either tentative or ephemeral. While this ought to be expected in texts that are presented as hailing from a Christian authority, making it plausible that such elements were retained in order to maintain an illusion of authenticity, it still begs the question: how might their Morisco audience have confronted the apparently competing outcomes projected by their prophecies? And, if it is correct that prophecies such as these played a significant role in arousing revolt, does this mean that prophesized outcomes

²³ My translation of the text: “¡Guay de ti!, España, ke rrobaste los adarbes de las tus ciwdades, i krebantaste sus libertades. Krebantađora de las kosas ke juraste, los tus rrejidores son lobos rrobađores sin bondad. Su ofiçio es soberbia, i grandía, i sodomía, i luşuria, i blasfema, i rrenegança i ponpa, i vanigloria, i tiranía i rrobamiento i sinjustiçia” (*ibid.* 247).

deemed unfavorable were simply dismissed or ignored?²⁴ Such matters clearly complicate and problematize interpretation, but prophecies are intentionally ambiguous, their nature is to evade absolute interpretation; in fact, if *prophecy* itself is approached as a meme, the perpetually “open” character of prophecies contributes substantially to their survival. They are primarily suggestive, they rely on an opacity that evokes variable interpretation for any given historical moment, and they are readily adapted or mutated to circumstances, needs, desires and expectations. However, while predicting outcomes is a vital part of indulging in prophecy, it is what prophecy may do for a community struggling to explain or understand circumstance that first draws our attention to a «*communal suffering as punishment for religious misconduct*» meme. Despite the rival outcomes described among the four Aljamiado prophecies of MS 774, the «*suffering*» meme remains as one element that binds them to a common foundation and encompasses an array of attitudes regarding culpability, causation, action, and the relationship between them. Its bearer will recognize that sinful or deviant behavior will result in divine justice, yet it also emphasizes that a community can be as responsible for its suffering as it is for its vindication. Though initially jarring, the juxtaposition of two Christian prophecies and two that follow Islamic traditions ultimately is given a degree of coherence by their common reliance on this meme. As a customizable template, imbued here with details particular and unique to the lived experiences of its Morisco audience, the meme additionally provides a coherent narrative framework across these texts that possibly emphasized hope and perseverance over despair, and through which its intended receptor was able to comprehend the losses they witnessed.

Explaining loss and coming to terms with the decaying state of Hispano-Muslim culture might have been important aspects of Morisco writing activity, but such rationalization occurs only when the writer is cognizant of just how far his people have fallen. Another outstanding feature of these prophecies is their depiction of Spain’s significance from a Muslim perspective, one that exhibits a nostalgic awareness of the decadence of Hispano-Muslim culture. The Spanish heirs of Andalusian Islamic culture express this nostalgia variously, but its manifestation in the *Profecía de Mahoma* is particularly sharp in making this point. Spain is depicted as a place so sacred that merely being there is equal to the greatest acts of fasting or pilgrimage. At length Spain is equated with Paradise and elevated to a level of sanctity on par with Jerusalem:

Mantener frontera en-ella [Andaluzía] es komo ke đayuna todo el tienpo, i está en pied en fueras d-ella. Buena ventura para kien lo alkançará en el fin del tienpo, i enviará Al·lah, ta‘ālā, a ella un ayre ke lieva a los d-ella a Baytu Almaqdiç (*Jerusalén*);
 Mantener frontera en Andaluzía un día solo, i una noche es mejor ke dozze alhacjjās kunplidos el debdo; Dīšo el mensajero de Al·lah [...] kela isla de l-Andaluzía es un plano de los planos del aljanna (*Paraíso*);
 Alandaluzía abe kuarto puertas de las puertas del aljannat. Una puerta ke le dizen Faylonata, i otra puerta Lorqa, i otra puerta ke le dizen Tortosa, i otra puerta ke le dizen Guadalajara.” (*ibid.* 249-251)

The treatment of Spain as a sacred space, however, is not original to these texts, and it may well have been another prevalent meme that lived in Morisco minds and writings. The Mancebo of Arévalo also tells of his contact with many who “out of ignorance said this island is directly

²⁴ See López-Baralt for a treatment of similar questions and problems surrounding the incongruities between these texts (*La literatura secreta* 211-213).

beneath Paradise,” and that Granada is the “Pillar of Islam.”²⁵ While he may not accept the notion of Spain’s connection to Paradise, he does engage the «*mythification of Spain*» by seeing it as a new Israel, which provides him with a template for interpreting and explaining the loss of Muslim hegemony in the Iberian Peninsula.²⁶ Significantly, these observations are made in a chapter of his *Tafçira* dedicated to explaining “the Fall of Andaluziá” that emphatically explains how the loss and suffering experienced by Spain’s Muslims—past and present—is due to human fallibility, not a failing in God’s mercy. Such shortcomings are exemplified, for the Mancebo, by the common sinner’s inability to properly seek God’s aid, or an entire peoples’ incapacity to comprehend God’s workings in the fullness of time, and their resulting impatience to receive the good will of God.²⁷ The Mancebo thus perpetuates «*communal suffering caused by religious misconduct*» and adjusts it to his own vision of historical context by representing the decline of his people as a fall from grace or greatness, in full awareness of the special place reserved for al-Andalus in the Islamic world.

Aljamiado writing suggests that reconciliation of a relatively hollow state of culture with this past greatness was a matter that substantially inhabited certain Morisco minds and communities, at the very least among their most learned members. The interest in idealizing the glorious past of al-Andalus shown in some Aljamiado texts functions as more than idle remembrance; such idealization and nostalgia could well have had, for example, a consoling or even inspiring effect on its receptor. Alongside «*Aljamiado writing*» and «*communal suffering caused by religious misconduct*», the «*mythification of Spain*» was suitably adapted to the unique motives and circumstances of the Morisco writers and communities amongst which such memes circulated. In the prophetic texts examined here, their coalescence serves to explain loss, but to also assure that what is lost may yet be regained or reformed.

Making sense of circumstance and creating meaning for its change and our adaptations to it are part and parcel to the Human drama. Across time, we have shaped our comprehension of our place in our space through rational and irrational means, on micro- and macro-levels, as individuals and as members of diverse communities. Prophecies are by nature ambiguous and flourish amid uncertainty and, for better or for worse, they have served as but one tool for people to make sense out of chaos. The prophetic texts considered here capture a sense of foreboding that, perhaps, was a component of the general mindset in Morisco communities, an apocalyptic sense not unlike that of Gidelli’s. Each displays dismay for the losses suffered by the Hispano-Muslim populace: their loss of Arabic and of proper Islamic custom despite a glorious legacy, all bound to a concern regarding what is to come. The sinfulness of religious deviance and neglect, the guilt or lament for the loss of Arabic, and the nostalgic idealization of Muslim Spain, all encompassed by memes such as they are proposed here, are not unique to Morisco prophecy; they are manifest in the thoughts and writings of Hispano-Muslims from multiple-generations, some of whom came to consider communal estrangement from spiritual duty to be the cause of God’s punishment, rather than the result of a Christian authority with an oppressive agenda. We know the Aljamiado phenomenon emerged out of a need to preserve, and perhaps revive, culture; might there be a

²⁵ “ke diššeron algunoš hablando inorantemente kešta Išla eštá debaššo del-Alÿannah por-el garan korriyente de šuw šaber. Y-a Garanade dezzíyan Pilar del Al-Alislām” (*Tafçira* 309).

²⁶ For the concept of the “mythification” of al-Andalus, see Narváez-Córdova, “Mitificación.”

²⁷ My paraphrasing of the (Mancebo de Arévalo, *Tafçira* 312-313). The Mancebo, following one of his sources, emphasizes that we, unlike righteous men such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, seek His aid in selfish ways or only at times of dire necessity, and are quick to forget His benevolence and mercy. He makes the case that God’s blessing and benevolence comes when He is prepared to deliver it; thus, the message seems to be that what is required of us is patience and perseverance in maintaining the faith, and suggests that lack in faith and perseverance invite His wrath.

reflection of a tragic sense of culpability amid the Aljamiado *corpus* and that existed in the minds of some of its purveyors? Yet despite the dark times they herald, the Aljamiado prophecies seem to offer a comprehensive vision that at once explains the arrival of that darkness and anticipates a path out of it. They encapsulate the sensations and premonitions of generations as they sought to shape their destiny; they exhibit perceptions and postures that, in a sense, lie latent in the Aljamiado phenomenon itself. On the most basic level, the memes we observe in such prophecies function as a means to transmit the pain and frustration experienced by those who sought to resolve the incompatibilities between perceived ideal and real states of culture, but we may perceive as well that Morisco writers relied on them to explain and, perhaps, redress the distress that characterized their communal lives.

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