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Abstract

Libro del caballero Zifar is a 14th century manuscript which details the life of the dishonored Christian knight Zifar and his journey towards redemption. Given the nature of the work's content in conjunction with its frequent didactic moralizing, its narrative particularly illuminates the religious values of the Spanish culture in which it was created: a culture which favored Christianity and was capriciously shifting in its acceptance of other religions. While the work has received substantial scholarship, very little has been written about how the work conceptualizes the religious and even ethnic "other," despite how prominently dichotomies are drawn in relation to the main characters on these terms, especially those relating to the former. This study investigates the portrayal of religious minorities in the work to demonstrate a congruence between their negative depictions in the Zifar and the predominantly intolerant religious ideology of the Iberian peninsula at the time.

Keywords*:* Cifar, Libro del Caballero Zifar, medieval Spain, minority studies

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The Book of the Knight Zifar or *Libro del caballero Zifar* is one of the first works of fictional Castillian prose, completed in the early 14th century, predating but akin to other didactic novels such as the *Book of Good Love (Libro de buen amor)* and the *Book of the Examples of Count Lucanor (Libro de los ejemplos del conde Lucanor.)* Being the first in its genre as well, this work reveals much in not only its narrative style and technique but also for the numerous insights its plot can provide as to the culture that created it. One such insight it grants is that of how the peoples of different minority faiths and races interacted with one another, specifically in how interactions were not disparate nor unequivocal but instead shifted concurrently between violent and peaceable. The primary minority groups presented in the Zifar are Jews and Muslims, both of which are regarded negatively and warily, albeit not with outright violence nor hostility. Their portrayal within the novel demonstrates a congruence with the predominant Christian ideology of the time.

The story itself is one that is specifically stated by the author to be a translated work, not of their own creation, but one of relative cultural immediacy. It begins with a prologue not explicitly related to the tale of the Knight Zifar, but rather of Ferrán Martínez's struggle to retrieve the body of his former teacher, bishop Don Gonzalo, and bury him in his native city of Toledo rather than Rome. With the aid of the monarchs of Spain, Martínez is successful in his supplication to the pope for the body and brings him to Toledo to be reinterred. Once in Spain, there is a great procession as the body is returned, making the journey and its great financial and physical expense worth it. Through his adventure in which he is aided by God and the good sense granted by Him, his tale is implicitly related to that of the Knight Zifar.

The story then follows the life and works of the Knight Zifar and his family after the knight falls in disfavor with his king following the malevolent counsel of other knights, since Zifar is plagued by a familial curse that causes his mount to die every ten days, incurring a large cost. The knight decides to leave with his family for another land, however they are all separated around the city of Falac by various means and are lost to one another for ten years. In the meantime, the knight goes on to become the King of Mentón upon defending the city against its enemies; his wife escapes the sailors who stole her away and starts a convent where she earns great renown for her kindness and prudence; and their two sons grow up and train together to become knights, all eventually rejoining in the city of Mentón through God's intervention. Once reunited, Zifar's sons decide they want to be kings, and are both instructed in the ways of kingly rule through a variety of apologues and biblical tales, following the way of other *specula principum.* The elder Garfin is given rights to Mentón while Roboan must leave, however he very soon finds himself becoming emperor of Tigrida and marrying the Princess Seringa, ending the story as the family reunites after the marriage ceremony.

The origins of the *Book of the Knight Zifar* are still unknown. While the specific authorship of the *Zifar* has seen much scrutiny, its place of origin is readily accredited to the Spanish city of Toledo: the same Toledo as mentioned in the prologue. The vivid descriptions of the technical process of obtaining the cardinal's body as well as the procession itself as the body was taken through Toledo illustrate an intimate knowledge of the city and its history. Moreover, the introduction conveys the importance of Toledo as a holy and respected site worthy enough of receiving help from the King and Queen of Castille for the disinterment of the

cardinal from Rome—something which had never been allowed before.[1] Various details scattered throughout the work also hint at an author influenced by Mozarabic culture, especially in the naming of characters and places.[2] Mozarabic culture refers to that of Christians who lived in territories under Islamic rule and were thusly influenced by Islam, mixing aspects of it into their religion and personal lives. This was most prevalent in this city of Toledo, due in part because of the emphasis on scholarly practices such as translation and liturgical study that allowed various religious groups to come into close contact with and influence one another. Following this line of thought then, it is important to define the cultural landscape of Toledo around the time of the *Zifar*'s creation, which is dated around the year 1300, to understand the novel as a reflection of its surroundings.

The whole of the Iberian peninsula in the latter part of the medieval period was an interesting site of religious and cultural mixing. The peninsula existed in opposition to much of Western Europe where people of different faiths and ethnicities were "often a figment of the imagination… infrequently encountered" and could be highly fictionalized.[3] Instead, people of different religions and ethnic backgrounds were forced into close proximity with one another because of conquest throughout the entire period and as time and struggle progressed, the cultural makeup and ecumenian hegemony of the region changed and diversified. The city of Toledo was a significant cultural center in Iberia under Muslim rule but especially so after its Christian conquest in 1085, being one of the first cities in which a significant number of Jews, Christians, and Muslims lived alongside one another for extended periods of time. While percentages vary, the amount of Jews present in Toledo in the 13th and 14th centuries was estimated to be 10-15% of the city's total population and Muslims another 15%.[4] Even now, the city holds the popular moniker of "The City of Three Cultures" to boast of its tolerant past. In the 12th century too, the city created one of the largest houses of translation in which older texts were translated from Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Arabic into other languages, including Castillian. Exchange of information allowed for greater mingling between various groups so that "the intellectual climate of Toledo made possible more ordinary, less stressful interactions across religious divisions than was the case in most of Europe at that time."[5]

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[1] "for no one was ever buried in the city of Rome and later disinterred to be taken elsewhere for burial" from Charles Nelson, *The Book of the Knight Zifar,* eds, (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1983) https://uknowledge.uky.edu/upk_spanish_literature/17, 20.

[2] James Burke, "Names and the Significance of Etymology in the Libro Del Cavallero Cifar." *Romanic Review* 59, no. 3 (1968): 161–73. Burke claims that the names of people and places throughout the work derive from a mix of Latin and Arabic, a distinctly Mozarabic feature for him. Other scholars follow this line of thought and believe that thusly, the events following the prologue are a metaphorical extension of the political turmoil within Toledo at the time

[3] Mark D. Meyerson, "Introduction" in *Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Medieval and Early Modern Spain* ed. Mark D. Meyrson & Edward D. English (University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), xiii-xv. This however is not to say that perceived "others" were not hatefully fictionalized in the region, rather that their conception was not some distant or segregated imagination as it was in other parts of Europe.

[4] Daniel J. Smith, "Heterogeneity and Exchange: Safe-Conducts in Medieval Spain," *The Review of Austrian Economics* 27, no. 2 (June 2014): 188.

[5] Nina Melechen, "The Jews of Medieval Toledo: Their Economic and Social Contacts with Christians from 1150 to 1391" (Ph.D., United States -- New York, Fordham University), 3.

However, to paint Toledo as an epicenter of tolerance would be overly simplistic as the religious sentiments in Toledo were often capricious. While the city was home to large numbers of people from all three major faiths, these relationships were not always benevolent. In the latter half of the 14th century, Toledo was rife with violent antisemitism that to this day has left the area almost completely devoid of Jewish peoples. Attitudes following victories during the Reconquista also antagonized opinions against Muslims, leaving them vulnerable to discrimination. The dominant religion after its reclamation was Latin Christianity which in turn led to legal prohibitions and prejudice, but that is not to say that Jews and Muslims—religious minorities at the time of this writing—were insignificant in any terms. Jews and Muslims were active participants in their communities and outside of them as well, and were staples in the economies of many Iberian cities as merchants, travelers, bankers, and in other professions.[6] In fact, it is this intimacy in social spheres that often provoked tensions, especially for Christians who wanted to maintain religious power in the region.[7]

The reality of the state of affairs between majority and minority groups in the Iberian Peninsula is unknowable in its totality, however intolerance and tolerance waxed and waned, though not to be defined as overarchingly good or bad, but rather as a system in which "whatever tendencies toward intolerance as an idea might be found, practical considerations and realities often limited these [tendencies]."[8] The treatment of minority groups within any area cannot be simply defined and more comprehensive work has been done to that end of refining our view on these relations. Even so, the Christian-dominated society within Toledo did fall into the trend of labeling minorities, Jews primarily amongst these, as an "other."[9] Broadly speaking, the "other" is a category placed upon those who did not fit into the dominant category of peoples, describing those who distinctly acted and looked different from the "regular" person. In Castilian medieval thought, this was based on a mix of ethno-religious boundaries that very clearly linked to one's lineage and most clearly presented itself in—but was not limited to—the figures of the Jew and the Saracen/Moor.[10]

The "other" too was defined by Christians in relation to themselves and their religion. With regards to Moors, their othering was occasionally based in comparisons of skin color but primarily it was based on religious pretexts of "classifying them into a pre-established tripartite

[6] Norman Roth, "New Light on the Jews of Mozarabic Toledo." *AJS Review* 11, no. 2 (1986): 189–220; David Nirenberg, *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Brian Catlos, *The Victors and the Vanquished: Christians and Muslims of Catalonia and Aragon, 1050–1300*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) are all excellent works that delve into the economic and cultural place Jews and Muslims held under Christian rule

[7] Fear of social mixing can be exceptionally seen through the ways the bodies of the three religious groups were regulated by law, most notably in the ways that intermarriage and sexual relationships were often forbidden and disparaged, see David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[8] Glenn W. Olsen, "The Middle Ages in the History of Toleration: A Prolegomena," *Mediterranean Studies* 16 (2007): 18.

[9] This distinction however did not indicate these other groups as "marginal", to mean that they were ignored and not influential, rather that they were conceptually different from Christians

[10] David Nirenberg tackles this concept of lineage associated with inherent traits in Spain, intensifying with pogroms that forced conversion and created a new category of people who were Christians but could not directly trace their origin to Christians and were "impure"

scheme that reinforced the superiority of Christianity…" and made the Saracen "an occasional punishment to a [Christian] people that misbehave… a group without agency, at the permanent service of Christianity."[11] Even the interchangeable monikers by which they were referred were created to function with regards to the Bible: 'Saracen' modeled off of the biblical figure of Sarah and 'Agarene' modeled off the related figure of the slave Agar. With regards to Jews, their othering manifested in the belief that they were witnesses to the true faith, albeit misguided and traitorous in their rejection of Jesus. Consequently, they were not to be killed or "severely oppressed… so that the Christians should never by any chance be able to forget their Law."[12] Thus, while defined in opposition to Christianity, these two primary groups also became inextricably tied with it and were integral parts in the history of Christendom. Across the peninsula, the lines that divided these groups were blurred because of proximity between Christians and their perceived "others" which heightened tensions and added to narratives of hidden Jewish conspiracy and violent Muslim retaliation.[13] As a result, these "others" were discriminated against in any matter of ways that could present through legal policies to extrajudicial violence.

The interactions in the *Zifar* are emblematic of this capricious state of affairs. In the prologue, the author recalls that during the transfer of the archbishop Don Gonzalo's body from Rome to Toledo:

> "[upon] reaching Toledo, he was honored by all the clergy, all the religious orders, and the citizens of the town… the king, Don Fernando, son of the famous king Don Sancho, and of the queen, Dona Maria, which prince Don Enrique, his uncle, Don Diego, lord of Vizcaya, and Don Lope, his son, many other rich men, noblemen, and knights came to receive the body of the cardinal outside the city, where they accorded it much honor. And wherever they went, the townsmen came out to receive it as they would the body of a saint… There was not a Christian, Moor, or Jew who did not come out to receive the body [of Don Gonzalo] with their very largest candles and branches in their hands"[14]

This passage demonstrates the inherent importance of Christian ceremonies as part of the predominant religious structure. The transfer of the cardinal's body becomes a grandiose spectacle for all to see and honor, with even the King and Queen in attendance. But what is of more importance is there is also an inherent mixing of religious groups in the realm of public religious demonstration which does not provoke hostilities between the different religious groups as sometimes occurred.[15] The transfer of this bishop's body is a holy, public Christian ceremony, but even so, it is an affair that crosses religious differences. These groups were sometimes not keen to intermingle in secular affairs, let alone in religious ones, thus this spectacle not only demonstrates the close proximity in which all these groups lived, but also the

[11] Julia Costa Lopez, "Beyond Eurocentrism and Orientalism," *Review of International Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016): 460-461.
[12] *Ibid*, 458.
[13] Stories such as the "Jews of Toledo" from the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* are examples of this fear that Jews existed amongst Christians and in private plotted against them and defamed Christian practices and even people
[14] *Zifar*, 22
[15] David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996): 180

amiability with which these minority groups could regard the majority, even in the polarizing sphere of religious ceremony.

While this depiction of unification in honor of Don Gonzalo is certainly a rhetorical device to glorify him and the questionable process by which he was reinterred outside of Rome, it also reflects the realities of cultural borrowing that occurred in which groups engaged in cross-religious practices and ceremonies. Brian Catlos demonstrates this in citing examples of "Christians in Spain [who] were criticized for following Muslim and Jewish dietary codes and Muslims [who] were reported celebrating Jewish holidays."[16] Thus, since such types of interactions were infrequent but not unprecedented, this mass cross-religious celebration of the cardinal is still a remarkable event and one that reflects a culture that pushed the three groups together.

In addition, the main protagonist Zifar functions as an "other" in that he hails from a different land: India. This inherently dons him a foreign label, one outside of Europe, outside of the limits of Latin Christendom at the time. However there, he is baptized and soon after becomes known as "the Knight of God" because of his devotion. Present then in his conception are ideas of both religious dominion and conversion. In making him an Eastern man converted to Christianity, Zifar becomes a symbol for the continued spread of Christianity, during a time where in the East, Christian lands were being repatriated by Muslims whilst in the West (particularly Spain) Muslim lands were being repatriated to Christians. He embodies a beacon of hope for the continuation of Christianity throughout the lands and even unity, because no matter how far east or west he travels, everyone thinks similarly and similarly values Christianity and chivalry. This is even echoed by the author stating that this story "was translated from Syriac into Latin and from Latin into Spanish" by the grace of God, who allowed him to remember it.[17] The author's note that the story which he recounts is of Syriac origin is testament to the movement of Eastern ideas and stories to and through the West, another result of both the work of Toledo's efforts in translation as well as simply the oral and written traditions passed through close contact with one another.

On the other hand, minorities were still discriminated against in other areas, exemplified in the "historical" narratives and the morals espoused in the story. The *Zifar* echoes 13th century Spanish *fueros*, advocating for the prohibition Jews from high office based on their religion that connects them to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the section "Castigos del Rey de Mentón," the knight Zifar spends much time explaining the treachery of the Jewish peoples against the Christians and, most importantly, the savior himself, proving their inherent lack of trustworthiness and character.[18] While Muslims or pagans are not explicitly mentioned by

[16] Brian A. Catlos, "Accursed, Superior Men: Ethno-Religious Minorities and Politics in the Medieval Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 56, no. 4 (October 2014): 848.
[17] *Zifar*, 23
[18] While most of the other pieces of advice encompass anywhere from half a page to slightly less than two pages in Nelson's print edition, this section on the Jews encompasses three. I opine that this is a very deliberate choice by the author for emphasis as the only other sections comparable in length are "Of the parable that the king gave his sons about the hunter and the calendar lark" (4.5 pages because it is explicitly in tandem with the preceding labeled section), "Of the parable that the king of Mentón gave his sons about King Tabor and his favorites of the palace" (4 pages), and "Of how the king of Mentón told his sons how they ought to keep the faith" (3 pages). All of

name as the Jews are in the title of this passage, they too are implicated: “Of how kings should guard themselves against placing their affairs in the control of Jews and anyone else outside the faith.”[19]

In the three pages that this section covers, Zifar informs his sons that the Jews should not be entrusted with royal power because of their desire to enrich themselves at the expense of the Christian. If given power, the Jew would “flatter you with those things they believe please you” while secretly plotting “how your villages can be destroyed” and enriching themselves, to finally “abandon you and rise against you.”[20] Thus, it is a necessary obligation for the Christian to disempower these people outside the faith so that they do not harm others.

This specific instance referenced in the *Zifar* is representative of a pattern in medieval canon law with regards to Jews and other minority groups, “focused not on conversion or elimination, but rather on segregation and minimizing interactions… destined to regulate and minimize as much as possible all interaction between Christians and Jews.”[21] The decree on which this section of the *Zifar* was based was from the *Siete partidas* and accompanied other legal regulations. Most notable among these other regulations was the requirement for Jews to wear distinctive clothing (badges, hats, etc.) so as to easily identify them amongst Christians and to maintain the established boundaries. Reiteration of actual *fueros* in place within Toledo in the *Zifar* display a continuity of thought, that the advice granted in previous literature was important enough that it needed to be reiterated and adopted by model characters to emphasize the necessity for one to follow it. However, even legally decreed and reiterated through literature, Jews were still able to enter into the royal courts in the peninsula, although certainly not without some suspicion.

This point is also corroborated earlier in the novel, however more specifically in the context of avoiding racial mixing. Ideas of race at the time of the Zifar’s conception saw a distinctive shift that began associating dark colors like black with sin, and light colors with virtue and holiness.[22] Thus, images of Christians and their saints quickly became infused with bright whites which had previously not been used for skin tone, while depiction of black skin darkened and became more polemical. In the beginning of the *Zifar,* the author provides a brief history of India and its populations and in this section, demonstrates this pairing between black and negative characteristics. The author states that the Indians were good men who “although they [were] dark-skinned and resembled negroes in color… God protected them from the negroes’ way and their stupidity”.[23] For the author, the complexion of the Indians should dispose them to negative traits, but by the grace of God and the stars, they have not been tainted as the Africans have and are instead models of learning and virtue.

these sections reflect incidents and opinions of explicit cultural immediacy, such as that of the story of King Tabor as a parallel to the royal conflicts over the ascension to Castilian crown between Don Enrique and Ferdinand IV.

[19] *Zifar,* 196.

[20] *Ibid*, 197.

[21] Lopez, “Beyond Eurocentrism,” 14.

[22] Geraldine Heng, “Color: Epidermal Race, Fantasmatic Race: Blackness and Africa in the Racial Sensorium” in *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 181-190.

[23] *Zifar, 24.*

Zifar also later tells his sons of a philosopher who was once approached by his students to explain why his countenance symbolized that he was a man embroiled in sin. In turn, he replies that he desires to live in sin, yet consistently makes the effort to refrain, citing an example in which he lusted after two black men and subsequently refused to ever let another step foot into his home because he knew "it was not proper."[24] Both these instances reflect the medieval desire for segregation—albeit to varying degrees based on the social context—between minority and majority groups. While public ceremonies were more free for common intermingling, such as the procession of the archbishop's body, these more powerful and/or intimate relationships with one another were to be more highly regulated with segregation at its emphasis.

In addition, at the time of the novel's creation, there was significant political unrest due to Infante Sancho IV's revolt against his father Alfonso X. This political struggle brought up grand questions of how royal lineage was to be determined and why it would be determined in that manner, thus raising to the forefront of political discussion ideas of natural dispositions and the importance of lineage, especially in contrast to deeds.

The concept of *buen seso natural* is one introduced by John Parrack in his 2006 article "The Cultural Authority of 'buen seso (natural)' in the *Libro del Caballero Zifar*", though the term originates from Alfonso's *Siete Partidas* in describing the necessary qualifications for court officials.[25] *Buen seso natural* is best translated to mean "good, natural sense" and describes the natural inclination of one to "truth, loyalty, prowess, fairness, and wise counsel" amongst other virtues, and away from the irrational, emotional impulses, especially those of the flesh or those associated with temporal gains such as licentiousness and avarice.[26] By the Aristotelean philosophy reiterated by the *Siete partidas*, the soul, the body, and the mind are tripartite forces that act within one another and are subdivided into separate forces, such as the soul which is divided into the rational and irrational, and in which "the mind and body are complementary yet often conflicting aspects of all humans."[27] The *Zifar,* thusly inspired by the *Siete partidas,* then similarly follows this rationale to craft the definition and importance of *buen seso natural*.

Buen seso natural is a God-given virtue of birth, hence the need for reference to the "natural," in comparison to simply calling it *buen seso,* though the book does occasionally use this term as well. Consequently, this then ties *buen seso natural* to the importance of lineage and iterates the predominant ideology of ineffable differences amongst the religious and racial groups presented. The numerous examples provided in the novel that portray acts in accordance with this principle refute the possibility of going against one's inherent nature, thusly claiming that even though someone may appear righteous and good, their natural inclination may inevitably persuade them to act on the contrary; as is the case with Jews and anyone outside of the Christian faith.

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[24] *Ibid, 161.*

[25] "Las siete partidas," Biblioteca Virtual Universal, https://biblioteca.org.ar/libros/130949.pdf, 30

[26] *Zifar*, 8: "de verdad, y de lealtad, y de armas, y de justicia y de buen consejo"

[27] John C. Parrack, "The Cultural Authority of "buen seso (natural)" in the Libro del Caballero Zifar." *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 35, no. 1 (2006): 282.

For the knight Zifar, his lineage is both a status symbol and a source of shame because he is indirectly responsible for his predecessors; while his royal blood and honor allows him an open welcome wherever he may wander, he is still afflicted by the sin of his great-grandfather and thusly cannot keep a horse for more than ten days before it dies. However, following the logic of a line from the *Siete partidas*, because Zifar is the fourth in the generation, he is able to prove himself and no longer be held back by the sins of his great-grandfather.[28] Not only does he become a wealthy and just ruler, but the next generation of his sons do as well, proving that he has redeemed his line from his predecessor's sin.

But it is in this that a conflict emerges in the ability to attain redemption. The book highlights the inevitability of sin and human fault and in that same vein, the ability for redemption and change, however only for some. The time frame in which one can attain redemption is often limited or for some, non-existent. While the Knight Amigo joins the Knight Zifar in his quest and is able to prove his worth and even his *buen seso*, the rival kings and princes are only granted one or two chances to repent for their boldness before usually being killed. For other groups, there is no redemption offered as it is believed to be impossible for them, and that is where the Jewish people fit in the novel. When the Knight Zifar imparts knowledge upon his sons so they can rule righteously as kings, he tells them to never entrust themselves nor their kingdom in the hands of Jews because "it is the natural wickedness of the Jews always to wish ill to the servants of God, because of the error and sin into which they fell at His death."[29] Here, because of their fatal mistake, there exists no possibility of redemption for any Jew because their *seso natural* inclines them to treachery. Even if a Jew were to convert to Christianity, this still could not distance them enough from their innate propensities to evil. This provided a stark contrast to that which is offered to the Christian knight Zifar, for he may relinquish himself from the curse of his forefathers now that he is the fourth generation, while on the contrary, "four generations after a conversion, the descendant of a once-Jew was still tagged as a Jew."[30] It is also against *buen seso* that they wish to upend the divinely imparted social structure to instead "place Christians into servitude" even though they are the ones who "must be the servants of the Christians."[31] The "other" is then seemingly unable to reach above their prescribed status as it is a born facet to their identity, even in some cases of relinquishing it through conversion.

An intricacy in this ideology though rests in that it is not right to go against one's nature. Fables interspersed throughout the novel reiterate this point, although two in particular really highlight this point. The first is Aesop's fable of the ass and the dog which is recounted to the Amigo. The story goes that an ass saw how his master's dog was seen so favorably for simply eating and resting and decided to play with his master in a similar manner as the dog. However,

[28] Articles have been written regarding the reason for the death of Zifar's horse every ten days, usually directly tying it to his journey to redeem himself, whether that be because of his loss of knighthood or because of his great-grandfather, see David Arbesú, "La muerte de los caballos en el *Zifar* y el debate sobre la nobleza." *La corónica: A Journal of Medieval Hispanic Languages, Literatures, and Cultures* 35, no. 1 (2006): 3-22, or Contreras Martin "El caballero Zifar en busca del linaje" *Literatura Medieval* 2, (1993).
[29] *Zifar*, 196.
[30] Heng, *Invention,* 77
[31] *Zifar,* 196.

upon jumping onto his master's shoulders, the ass wounded him and he was beaten severely, "and certainly this was just, for no one should try to do anything against what nature intended."[32]

The story of the lark and the hunter echoes a similar message. A hunter catches a lark but promises it freedom if it can give him a good piece of advice, and the lark in turn gives three: "Do not believe that what you know is impossible could be true; the second, do not grieve over what you have lost, if you realize that you can not regain it; the third, do not undertake a thing that you realize cannot be completed."[33] The hunter sets the bird free, only to have the bird taunt him later about the magic powers he has, provoking him to seek out the help of someone who can make him fly. The hunter consults with a false magician[34] who promises him a recipe to fly which fails, resulting in the hunter's death. This specific example is given in the beginning of the didactic section "Castigos del Rey de Mentón" with the moral being to not believe "bad advice that for natural reasons could not possibly be."[35] Concepts like this then solidified the idea that these minorities were inherently bad and in order to not go against their nature, must perform acts befitting. As a result, their removal, oppression and deaths could be justified, even if such drastic measures were taken infrequently.

In the 14th century, the city of Toledo was home to a diverse population that was constantly in interaction with one another intellectually, commercially, and socially, and the positions that these religious minority groups held in the peninsula fluctuated in response to the varying pressures encountered in these spheres. Jews and Moors were molded into an other whose existence was at the same time a threat and a necessary entity that could be used to uplift the predominantly Christian community. The *Libro del caballero Zifar* is not a religious text, yet its pages are infused with religious reference and sentiment that make it impossible to separate from the religious context in which they were written that embodied a tumultuous relationship amongst Christians and the minority groups over which they presided.

[32] *Zifar*, 68: "Y fue con gran derecho, ca ninguno no podemos más atrever de cuanto la natura le da. Onde dice el proverbio, que 'lo que la natura niega, ninguno lo debe cometer'"
[33] *Zifar*, 156.
[34] Nelson translates this to be a 'fakir' where the original Spanish defines it as a "trasechador", with the change to 'fakir' removing the emphasis there was on the falseness of the man's claims.
[35] *Zifar, 156.*

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