



Zoraida and Carcayona

Female Christian and Muslim Converts in Early Modern Spanish Literature

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ABSTRACT Studies on the representation of Muslim women in early modern Spanish literature are not numerous, and aspects of their religious identities and conversions are usually less examined. This paper focuses on the role of female Muslim characters in texts written between the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in Spain. In these works the female protagonists convert to a new faith: One to Islam, the other to Christianity. In doing so, they cut ties with the fatherly figure in order to follow the new religion. My research attempts to answer two questions: What does the paternal house represent in regards to the faith that the daughters are rejecting? What role does Islam play in the different approach to female characters' faith? In order to carry out my study, I analyze two texts: The first one is *La leyenda de la doncella Carcayona* (*Legend of the Damsel Carcayçiyona*) (Aragon, c. 1587), where the protagonist, Carcayçiyona, abandons paganism for Islam; the second is Miguel de Cervantes's "Historia del cautivo" ("The Captive's Tale"), a *novella* inserted in his famous *Don Quixote*, Part I (Madrid, 1605), where Zoraida, the daughter of a wealthy and powerful Algerian Muslim, converts from Islam to Christianity. By setting parallels among the female protagonists' religious conversion and focusing on their voluntary estrangement from their fathers, I argue that in both texts, fathers represent the rejected faith while daughters are depicted as the carriers of the newly adopted religion, be it Islam or Christianity. More importantly, since in both cases women are formerly or newly converted Muslims, and the texts are produced in a Christian-ruled nation, this paper underscores the complexities of the encounters between Islam and Christianity in a Mediterranean setting.

KEYWORDS Moriscos, Cervantes, Spanish Empire, Christianity vs Islam, Fathers

Introduction

Few studies have focused on the representation of Muslim women in early modern Spanish literature,¹ and aspects of their religious identities or conversions are usually less examined. This paper focuses on the role of female Muslim characters in two literary texts written between

1 For the most relevant studies, see the following works cited: Kahf (1999), Perry (2005), Quinn (2008), Alcalá Galán (2012, 2016), and Hutchinson (Hutchinson 2011, 2015).

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain: *La leyenda de la Doncella Carcayona* (Legend of the Damsel Carcayçiyona²) (Aragon, c. 1587), an Aljamiado anonymous tale, and Miguel de Cervantes' "Historia del cautivo" (The Captive's Tale), a *novella* inserted into his famous *Don Quixote*, Part I, Chapters 39 to 42 (Madrid, 1605). In these works, the female protagonists convert to a new creed and, in doing so, cut ties with their respective father figure. My research attempts to answer two questions related to this issue: What is the relationship between the fathers and the respective faiths that each daughter eventually rejects? What is the impact of Islam on the distinctive portrayal of each of the female protagonists in both stories? I base my study on two levels: One attempts to establish parallels between the daughters' religious conversions and their voluntary estrangement from their fathers. The other focuses on the way that each woman is characterized by the stories' narrators: one, a Spanish Morisco, and the other, a Spanish Christian. I argue that, in both cases, fathers symbolize the rejected faith while daughters represent the 'right' one, either Islam or Christianity. Similarly, I suggest that the protagonists' distinctive portrayals as dissidents from their native creed are influenced by whoever is narrating the story, a Spanish Morisco or a Spanish Christian, and to whom it is addressed. Finally, since the link that connects both women is Islam, as they are either former or newly converted Muslims, and the texts are produced in a Christian-ruled nation, I contend that their specific characterizations, in which they betray and disengage from their fathers, can be depicted because of the protagonists' association with that faith.³

Contrary to "Historia del cautivo" (hereafter "Historia"), on which there are a considerable number of critical studies, *La leyenda de la Doncella Carcayona* (hereafter *Leyenda*) has been less studied, and has one critical edition, prepared by María del Pino Valero Cuadra. Both Valero and Francisco Guillén (1885, 181–221), who also includes the tale in his collection of Morisco legends, follow Manuscript 57 from the collection of the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* (CSIC) in Madrid. But Valero (2000, 30) bases her edition on three other extant manuscripts written in Aljamiado.⁴ In terms of the tale's features, she suggests that *Leyenda* is both a *hadith* and an *exemplum* at the same time; that is, this work combines its association with Islam, since *hadith* refers to the sayings of Muhammad, and the influence of its medieval Christian sources, such as the didactic sermon known as the *exemplum* (2000, 13). [2]

The best-known study of *Leyenda* is perhaps Mary Perry's (2005, 10) work on Muslim and Morisco women in Spain, in which she focuses on the leading role of Morisco women in preserving the Islamic culture while assimilating to Christianity. Her argument is based on the fact that, in real life, the private domain was—both for Jewish and Muslim *conversas*—a space where women transmitted knowledge and faith (Levine Melammed 2010, 158). In a way, this argument might support the leading role of Carcayona, who, as I will point out in this study, stands out as a heroine who shows the path to Islam after enduring a series of misfortunes. [3]

Similarly, Mary Quinn's research on *Leyenda* introduces a thought-provoking argument: The close intertextual relationship between *Leyenda* and "Historia." Quinn (2008, 216–17) focuses on the challenging implications for the analysis of *Don Quixote's* "Historia" in light of the Aljamiado tale, as she highlights the numerous similarities between them: The relationship between fathers and daughters, which is disrupted by a new religion; the absence of a mother, [4]

2 I am following Wood and Rosen-Kaplan's translation (2021).

3 Two other Moriscas appear in Cervantes's novels: Ana Félix, in the second part of *Don Quixote*, and Rafala in *Los trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda* (The Trials of Persiles and Sigismunda). Both characters also navigate complex relationships with their Morisco fathers. However, since neither narrative involves a direct focus on religious conversion, they fall outside the scope of this study.

4 Another version exists, most likely produced during the Morisco exile in Tunisia, but since it is written in Latin characters, Valero (2000, 14) does not use it for her critical edition.

which entails the father taking charge of his children's religious education; and the religious conversion that the female protagonist undertakes inside her father's house (2008, 219).

Before proceeding with the analysis, it is important to define two concepts that are essential for this study: Morisco and Aljamiado. First, Moriscos are former Spanish Muslims throughout the Spanish Empire who were forced to convert to Christianity between 1502 and 1526. Once these people were baptized as Catholics, the Inquisition, suspecting their conversion was not sincere, followed them very closely, searching, sometimes with good reason, for proof of their crypto-Islamic activities. Eventually, all Moriscos were expelled from Spain between 1609 and 1614, and most of them were exiled to Tunisia. Second, Aljamiado literature refers to texts written by Moriscos in medieval and early modern Spain. The term itself comes from the Arabic word *'ajamiyyah*, which means 'foreign', and it was applied to people of non-Arabic ancestry. In the case of Spain, Aljamiado texts were written in Arabic characters but in Spanish. This literature was written mostly during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when Muslims, first, and Moriscos, later, were subjected to restrictions and persecution, and Arabic was prohibited. Therefore, this type of literature addresses, for the most part, religious topics in order to preserve the Islamic legacy. As Anwar Chejne (1974, 376) suggests, these texts were "a link between Arabic writings and early Spanish literature, particularly with respect to a number of legends and stories which appear in both." [5]

Carcayona, The Handless Maiden

Leyenda is a story preserved in an Aljamiado manuscript written by a Morisco in circa 1587 in Aragon, a region in northeastern Spain (Valero Cuadra 2000, 33). According to some critics, such as Valero, the story may have been written in Al-Andalus during the Mudejar period,⁵ or even earlier. In any case, its goal was most likely to disseminate Islam; but during the Morisco years, and within the corpus of Aljamiado literature, it played a didactic, exemplary, and defensive role due to the confrontation between Islam and Christianity in Spain at that time (Valero Cuadra 2000, 272). [6]

Leyenda tells the story of Carcayona, the daughter of Nachrab, King of the Romans, who resides in al-Hinda (India). After her mother dies during childbirth, the young girl is raised by her father, who educates her in a pagan faith. As part of their beliefs, both father and daughter worship a female idol, represented by a statue that is covered with gold and silver, beautiful pearls, and luxurious stones. When Carcayona grows up and becomes a teenager, Nachrab falls in love with her and, succumbing to his incestuous desires, attempts to sleep with her. The daughter, however, rejects him and questions his inappropriate lust, casting great shame on him. [7]

One day, Carcayona is visited by a dove that brings her news about Islam and whose presence causes the idol's statue to break into small pieces. Intrigued by what the bird tells her about this new faith and captivated by it, the young woman asks her father to abandon Paganism and to convert to Islam. The King refuses to do so and, due to her continuous demands, threatens to cut off her hands. Carcayona, far from being afraid and confident in her Islamic faith, allows her father to mutilate her and expel her from the palace.⁶ As she takes refuge in a cave, [8]

5 *Mudejares* were Spanish Muslims who were allowed to keep their Islamic faith while living under Christian rule.

6 The association of infidelity with the worship of idols has in Islam its closest parallel in the story of Ibrahim as destroyer of idols. The prophet also opposes his father's wishes and does not fear his punishment.

surrounded by beasts that, nevertheless, do not harm her because of Allah's protection, she is discovered one day by the King of Antioch. The couple fall in love, get married and live happily in his kingdom until the day that he needs to leave for war.

During her husband's absence, Carcayona gives birth to a child, but, because of the envy she provokes in the Court's women, she becomes the victim of slander: One day, her mother-in-law receives a forged letter in which the King asks her to kill his wife. Moved by compassion, she disobeys her son's orders and lets Carcayona leave the kingdom with her child. The young mother finds refuge in a remote place where her hands are restored by Allah's mercy. Once the King returns from war and learns about the fabricated lie about his wife, he looks for her and finally finds her. Carcayona asks him not to return to his kingdom, the husband agrees, and they settle in another place where everyone follows Islam (Wood and Rosen-Kaplan 2021, 4).

Like many other tales at the time, the story narrated in *Leyenda* is not an original one. Its origins can be traced back to several medieval European and Arabic sources, with some critics favoring the latter as the most influential on this Aljamiado legend (Valero Cuadra 2000, 257). However, as I will demonstrate in the sections below, the story is not only a combination of both European and Arabic sources, but it also has a unique feature as a result of the socio-political environment in which it was created. This environment was that of the Spanish Christian territory that hosted Moriscos, or New Christians from Islam, as opposed to Old Christians, who were those who could prove no Islamic or Semitic ancestry.

Out of the most relevant sources to which the Morisco version may be related, I will focus specifically on two Arabic and two European tales, as they display close similarities with *Leyenda*.

The first Arabic story is *La historia de la paloma de oro y la hija del rey* (The story of the golden dove and the King's daughter), which is included in Breslau's edition of *The Thousand and One Nights* (1825–1838). Valero (2000, 252) believes that the Aljamiado legend might have been an adapted translation of this particular tale. She has good reasons to suggest this since this version tells the exact same story as the Morisco legend, except for the inclusion of the father's incest and the ending in which Carcayona and her husband move to a new place where everybody follows Islam. In the Arabic version, the cause for amputation of the daughter's hands is simply her acceptance of Islam and contradicting her father's orders about keeping their native faith. Like *Leyenda*, in this Arabic story, the recovery of her hands is also due to God's intervention (Chauvin 1892–1922, 5:139–40).

The other Arabic story, called *Las manos cortadas* (The Amputated Hands), also appears in *The Thousand and One Nights*.⁷ Here, a king gives an order that prohibits almsgiving, but a compassionate young woman disobeys him and gives two bread crusts to beggars. As punishment, her hands are amputated for defying the King's law. Later in the story, the King looks for a wife and, without being aware that she was the one who disobeyed him, falls in love with the handless woman and takes her as his wife. When the woman gives birth to a baby, the servants, out of envy, send a letter to the King accusing her of being a libertine, so he banishes her from the kingdom. When she is in the middle of the desert, she stops to drink water, and her baby falls in the river. She starts crying, but two men show up and help her to recover the baby, as well as her hands, since they reveal that they are God's messengers. In this version, incest is not included, the man who cuts the protagonist's hands off is not

7 This story was published by Miguel Asín Palacios in his *Crestomatía de árabe literal con glosario y elementos de gramática* (Anthology of Arabic literature including a glossary and grammar) (1959) (Busto Cortina 1999, 400).

even her father, the cause for her escape is the envy of others, and the recovery of her hands happens by God's grace (Busto Cortina 1999, 401).

On the European side, the most popular story linked to this legend is probably *Le Roman de la Manekine*, a French novel written in verse, which is thought to be the first literary version of the legend. It was composed by Philippe de Remi most likely between 1226 and 1242 (Francomano 2006, 1; Basarte 2013, 30). Here, a princess named Joïe, and later known as Manekine, cuts off one of her hands in order to escape an incestuous marriage to her father, the King, who, in turn, condemns her to death. The daughter manages to escape on a boat and, upon arriving in a new land, becomes the wife of a Scottish nobleman. When her husband leaves, his mother forges a letter addressed to him claiming that Manekine has given birth to a monster. Eventually, the nobleman's mother orders both Manekine and her son to be burnt, but Manekine manages to escape with her son. Years later, she recovers her hand in Rome, through the Pope's intercession with God, and she reunites with her husband (Francomano 2006, 2–3). [14]

A very similar European version of this story is the fourteenth century Catalan *La filla del rei d'Hongria* (The daughter of the King of Hungary). Like *La Manekine*, here the cause for cutting off the young woman's hands is incest. The father, a Catholic King, falls in love with his daughter after unceasingly looking for a bride who is as beautiful as his late wife. The princess cuts her hands off to avoid the marriage and consequently leaves the country and meets the Count of Marseille, who marries her. But when she has a baby, her mother-in-law fabricates a lie against her, and she is forced to leave. She ends up at a monastery where she lives with her son, until one day, through the intercession of God and the Virgin Mary, she recovers her hands. Finally, her husband finds her, and they are reunited (Anònim and Pellissa Prades 2021, 16–24). [15]

In all of these four sources, it is clear that some motifs coincide with those of *Leyenda*. However, the similarities and differences have some notable elements. For example, in the European sources, incest and the resulting escape are both present, as is the fact that the hands are recovered by either God's or his representatives'—the Pope, the Virgin Mary—will. In the two above-mentioned Arabic sources, however, there is no incest, the hand amputation is performed because the protagonist disobeys the King's order—and the order itself goes against Islam, as it demands following Paganism or prohibits almsgiving—and the hands are returned through Allah's intervention. Therefore, the Aljamiado tale draws equally on these sources. The *Leyenda* adds the incest motif (European, Christian sources), although that is not the main cause for the protagonist's escape or her hand amputation, and the reason for the amputation is obedience to Islam (Arabic, Muslim sources), even if that means disobeying her powerful father's order. Finally, the recovery of her hands is due to Allah's intervention, just as in the Arabic sources. [16]

Other elements that are also present in *Leyenda* and its Arabic and European sources are the absence of a mother who dies giving birth to the protagonist, a father who is in charge of her education, the girl's noncompliance to a law, the consequent amputation of her hands and her banishment from her native nation, a king from another country who marries her, the envy that she provokes among those around her, and, finally, the recovery of her hands.⁸ [17]

8 For more on the sources of this legend and its impact on Latin American folktales, see basarte_cuento_2013 and, for additional European versions, see Valero Cuadra (2000).

Incest And Religious Conversion

In spite of the condemnation of incest in both the Christian and the Muslim world (Marsan 1974, 239), the incestuous father only shows up in the European Christian and the Morisco versions (Busto Cortina 1999, 408). While in *La Manekine* and in *La filla del rei d'Hongria* the hand amputation is the result of the daughters' refusal to marry their fathers, in the Arabic tales, it is either the daughter or a young woman who disobeys an order given by the King. Additionally, the disobedience is related to either not defying an Islamic law, such as giving alms, or choosing Islam over another religion. [18]

According to Elizabeth Archibald (2001, 146), father-daughter incest stories in the medieval period can be divided into two groups: those in which incest is consummated and those in which it is avoided. In the latter, the stories focus on the daughter's rejection of her father's advances and on her consequent banishment or flight. Additionally, after the incest episode occurs, the incestuous father is absent from the story. Similarly, the so-called "flight from the incestuous father" motif appears in the thirteenth century as an *exemplum* and as a romance, a motif that was very popular in the late medieval period, sometimes combined with the limb mutilation (Archibald 2001, 147–48). The motif is presented in a Christian context where the protagonist's faith, as well as divine providence, sustains her during her ordeals (Archibald 2001, 177). [19]

As for *Leyenda*, although the incest motif is present, it is not the reason for the daughter's flight from her father; instead, it is her conversion that triggers the initial tragic outcomes for her. This detail is key to the main differences between the Aljamiado story and its predecessors. It concerns the Islamic faith to which Carcayona is exposed, her conversion as a result of it, and her consequent punishment for rejecting her father's religious beliefs. Additionally, the episode in which Carcayona refuses her father's sexual attempts—she even puts him to shame—is absent in the sources, a fact that emphasizes that her punishment corresponds specifically to her rejection of the father's Paganism in favour of Islam. This detail establishes a significant contrast between *Leyenda* and its Christian European sources, since the former's ultimate goal is, then, to teach about Islam and very subtly defend it against Christianity, as will be discussed below. Therefore, when Carcayona escapes both her house and her native religion, she has to endure much suffering—the loss of her hands being one of them—but eventually she will be rewarded with the recovery of her hands, the love of her husband and son, and their full conversion to Islam. [20]

The incest motif present in the story leads to the theory that it might have a specific purpose. Carcayona's shrewdness in embarrassing the King and blocking his sexual advances should be interpreted as a prelude to her future conversion. Indeed, from the very beginning of the Aljamiado legend, there are marks that foreshadow Carcayona's religious conversion and the future estrangement from her father. First of all, she is portrayed as a curious, smart and inquisitive child which, from a very young age, is very concerned about who the creator of all things is.⁹ Second, the idol that both she and her father worship hides Iblis, the Devil, who communicates with Carcayona up until the dove's visit. Once this event occurs, Iblis, [21]

9 A very similar case is found in *El hadith del árabe y la doncella* (Alhadith of the Arab and the maiden). An Arab man's young daughter insistently wants to know who her parents' lord is. When she learns that her family worships an idol, she encourages her father and mother to follow Allah instead. The mother then asks her husband to kill their daughter to prevent her from spoiling their religion, so he beheads her. By Allah's grace, however, the girl resuscitates momentarily, and finally her father converts to Islam (Hegyí 1981, 185–96).

enraged by the presence of Allah’s messenger, immediately vacates the statue. This episode is, actually, the breaking point of the tale because it is then that the protagonist opens her heart to Allah and Islam. Third, King Nachrab’s incestuous desire might result from his Paganism, but also—although in a very subtle way—from the fact that he is portrayed as the King of the Romans. I suggest this is a subtle reference to the Roman Catholic Church and, therefore, addressed to Spanish Christians. More specifically, as it is likely a translation of the Arabic term “Malik al-Rum” (“King of the Christians”), it points to the term “rum,” which refers broadly to all Christians. In *Leyenda*, it designates the Romans of India, understood as the *rumíes* or Indian Christians, as Bernabé Pons aptly suggests (2002, 32). Finally, Nachrab’s Paganism makes him act erroneously in two instances: When he attempts to sleep with his daughter and when he amputates her hands and banishes her from the kingdom.

The way that the protagonist’s hands are recovered is another element to consider when examining these stories, as it highlights their didactic goal: To teach about the Christian or the Muslim faith. The inclination towards one faith or another is clear: On the one hand, in both *La Manekine* and *La filla del rei d’Hongria*, the teaching of Christian principles is present since it is either the Pope¹⁰ or God and Virgin Mary who make the return of the princesses’ amputated hands possible. On the other hand, both the two Arabic tales and *Leyenda* highlight only God’s/Allah’s intervention in the recovery of the hands.

The Islamic proselytism found in Carcayona’s story is justified by the fact that it was addressed to a Morisco audience (Marsan 1974, 240). Also, as Mary Quinn (2008, 216) states, its goal was to show the New Christians “the power of Allah to protect and provide in the face of human betrayal” at a time when oppression and persecution by Old Christians, mostly enforced by the Inquisition, was strong. Therefore, like Moriscos facing the Inquisition’s suspicion about them not following Christianity according to the rules and secretly believing in Islam, Carcayona’s adherence to the new faith is considered a disloyalty that deserves the punishment imposed by her father.

One final point to highlight here is the protagonist’s name. Except for *La Manekine*, whose protagonist is initially called Joïe and then Manekine, the naming of protagonists in tales such as those discussed above is rather unusual. As Emily Francomano (2006, 8) points out, “in many versions of the tale, the handless maiden remains nameless, identified only by her relationships: she is the daughter of a king, the wife of a king or count, the mother of a son.” This does not happen in *Leyenda*, where, probably influenced by the French nouvelle, its female protagonist does have a name: Carcayona.¹¹

The devotion to Islam as the main cause for the punishments of *Leyenda*’s protagonist and the father’s Paganism as the object of the daughter’s rejection are elements that this Aljamiado text shares with our next story: Miguel de Cervantes’ “Historia del cautivo”.

10 Emily Francomano (2006, 16) suggests that Philippe de Remi’s emphasis on the role of the hand as an icon for Christian memory culminates in the final episode, when the missing hand is found in Rome, the Pope’s place of residence.

11 Valero (2000, 355–58) suggests three possible explanations for the choice of Carcayona as the protagonist’s name: first, that it is based on Carcassonne, the French city that was under Muslim control between 715 and 759 CE, then conquered by the French and assigned by them to the County of Aquitaine in 817 CE; second, the sacred city of Carcassonne in Jerusalem; and third, Karkasiya, the Syrian city next to River Euphrates. However, Valero (2000, 362) favors the French Carcassonne as the most accurate.

Zoraida, the New Christian and Marian Devotee

“Historia del cautivo” narrates the story of Zoraida, the daughter of Agi Morato,¹² a wealthy Algerian Muslim who has raised her since his wife’s death. In spite of the Islamic faith that both father and daughter profess, Zoraida is secretly devoted to the Virgin Mary, or, as she calls her, Lela Marién. The young woman learned about her from a Christian slave who took care of her as a child. Since then, she has a fervent desire to go to Spain, the land of the Christians, where she will be able to worship Mary freely. While she is planning on leaving her house and her nation, Zoraida meets Captain Ruy Pérez de Viedma, a Spanish captive. Through an epistolary exchange, and after revealing to him her true conversion to Christianity, Zoraida proposes to Ruy Pérez that they leave together by offering to finance his ransom and their escape. The captain accepts and promises to marry her as soon as they arrive in Spain. Eventually, they manage to embark and start fleeing, but they are interrupted by the appearance of Zoraida’s father, who learns, in a painful way, what his daughter has done. As Agi condemns her actions, as well as her betrayal not only to him but also to Islam,¹³ Zoraida lets the Spanish captives tie him up to keep him from interfering with their escape. The scene in which Zoraida sees her father for the last time closes with him begging her to return and promising that all her actions will be forgiven; but it is to no avail. Zoraida abandons her aging father on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa and departs for Spain. [26]

Just like *Leyenda*, Cervantes’ tale is inspired by earlier medieval stories. The topic of Muslim maidens who convert to Christianity and free Christian captives is found in at least two other tales. The first is the fifteenth-century French story of the shrine of Notre-Dame de Liesse. In it, three French crusaders are made prisoners of the Sultan of Egypt, whose daughter, Ismerie, visits them in prison; soon she is attracted to Mary’s image, which prompts her to convert to Christianity. After freeing the Christians, Ismerie escapes with them to France, where she will serve Mary and her son Jesus Christ.¹⁴ The second story is about Fatima, a Muslim maiden whose father wants to marry her to a man she does not love. Attracted to the Virgin of Guadalupe, whom she has heard about from her father’s Christian captives, Fatima decides to convert to Christianity. Therefore, she liberates the captives and goes to Spain with them, where she will remain at the Virgin of Guadalupe’s shrine for the rest of her life. From then on, she will be known as *la buena cristiana* (the good Christian) (Remensnyder 2007, 660–61).¹⁵ [27]

The complexities inherent in the relationship between both faiths in seventeenth-century Spain are underscored by one significant element in “Historia”: Cervantes’ emphasis on the Virgin Mary as the object of Zoraida’s veneration. Since Mary was also a symbol of devotion [28]

12 Hajji Murad was a historical figure, son of Slavic parents, who renounced Christianity and became an important man in Algiers (Cervantes 2009, 346). The possibility of Cervantes basing his character Agi Morato on Hajji Murad and this story on true facts about him has been indicated by Jaime Oliver Asín, who notes that Hajji Murad was accepted by Christians because he did not have Islamic beliefs and that he was just apparently a Muslim (1948, 14).

13 Agi’s disappointment is so intense that he even calls his daughter *perra*, which literally means ‘bitch’ or ‘whore’ but that in this context also means someone unfaithful, either non-Christian or non-Muslim. Calling someone *perro* (masculine) or *perra* (feminine) was a very common insult among Muslims and Christians in early modern Spain.

14 This story is included in Orderic Vitalis’ *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written in the twelfth century (Remensnyder 2007, 659).

15 This story is told by Gabriel de Talavera in his *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (History of our Lady of Guadalupe) (1597), but the tale of *la buena Christiana* appears in a handful of documents dating from a hundred years earlier (Remensnyder 2007, 661).

for Muslims, Christians and Moriscos, the addition of this detail constitutes further proof of the intricate relations between New and Old Christians in early modern Spain.

In “Historia,” Zoraida, a former Muslim woman, is portrayed as an example of Christian faith, but, more importantly, of Marian devotion. This aspect of the story is significant, as it is linked with medieval Christian popular tales in which Marian miracles involved the conversion of Jews and Muslims to Christianity (Remensnyder 2007, 657). The devotion to Mary and her intercession made possible the religious conversion of non-Christian subjects, but she also had an ‘active’ participation in war and battle. Both within Spain and throughout the Mediterranean area, Spanish Christians claimed that Mary had intervened in their victories over the Muslims, examples of which are the Conquest of Granada (1492) and the Battle of Lepanto (1571).¹⁶ Thus, when stories about these religious and geopolitical triumphs were told, “the Virgin serve[d] as a symbol of Christian victory over Muslims on the spiritual battlefields of captivity and conversion, arenas that were very much extensions of the physical battlefield” (Remensnyder 2007, 648). [29]

Although not in battle, in “Historia” the Virgin Mary has a decisive power of conversion over the story’s female protagonist.¹⁷ Marian images were used as a tool to convert Muslims—especially North Africans—in early modern Spain, and this had an impact on Spanish writers, such as Lope de Vega, who created literary works that enhanced the Marian conversion through the vision of her icon (Infante 2022, 91).¹⁸ However, this is not the case with Zoraida, who is attracted to the Virgin and eventually converts to Christianity only by learning about Mary from her Christian slave. [30]

This situation raises a question about Zoraida: Did she hear about Mary for the first time from her Christian captive? Although this information is missing in Cervantes’ story, we need to consider that the Virgin Mary was a key figure among Christians and Muslims, and that, within Spain, both Muslims living there before the conquest of Granada and Moriscos recognized her revered place in Islam and Christianity (Infante 2022, 90). Spanish Christians used Mary’s images to catechize the newly converted Moriscos. During the Counter-Reformation, which started with the Council of Trent (1545–1563), there were attempts to evangelize using Mary as a point of entry into Christianity (Wood 2019, 155). Mary’s devotion among Muslims is also noted in Bernardo Pérez de Chinchón’s ([1532] 1595, 508–10) *Antialcorano* (The anti-Qur’an), where he acknowledges the connection between Islam and Christianity through Mary, Maryam in Islam, and describes how she is depicted in the Qur’an. For example, it is not a coincidence that the Qur’an’s *Sura nineteenth* is named after Mary/Maryam (Qur’an, 19). [31]

Therefore, returning to my previous question, I suggest that Zoraida was probably familiar with Mary/Maryam. However, the issue is not whether or not Zoraida knew about Mary; rather, what is relevant is the fact that she chooses to follow Lela Marién as a Christian figure, not as an Islamic one. Her plans to move to Spain are motivated by her desire to see Mary, as she expresses in her letter to Ruy Pérez: “y me dijo que fuese a tierra de cristianos a ver a Lela Marién, que me quería mucho” (Cervantes [1605–1615] 2004, 414) (“and she told me to go to a Christian land to see Lela Marién, who loved me very much,” Cervantes 2009, 347). [32]

16 Cervantes was a soldier at Lepanto, so his inclusion of Mary in the story cannot be a coincidence.

17 In Spanish literature, the Virgin Mary’s “militant version” is more apparent in the famous *comedias de moros y cristianos* (Moors’ and Christians’ plays), which were part of early modern Spanish drama (Infante 2022, 116). For more on the Virgin Mary’s participation in the conversion of Muslims and Jews on the battlefield, see Infante (2022).

18 Among examples of conversion in real life, Infante (2022, 91) mentions the case of princes and high-ranking officials, such as Muley al-Shaykh (later known as Felipe de Africa), Muhammad al-Attaz (named Balthasar de Loyola), and Muley Alal Merin (baptized as Gaspar de Benimerín).

Defying Islamic precepts that prohibit the veneration of images or icons, Zoraida runs away in search of the different places in Spain where she will be able to see and worship Mary's statues and images, as they are widespread in churches and shrines. But that is not the first time that she disobeys that rule, she has already done it earlier, while in her father's house, when she produces a cross made of reeds for Ruy to recognize her as a Christian.

Agi Morato and His Unfaithful Daughter

Unlike King Nachrab, Agi Morato is portrayed in "Historia" as a noble man who loves and protects his daughter, even if that means forgiving her lies and treason. Indeed, as the story comes to an end, it is clear that the father does not deserve his daughter's betrayal or her abandonment of him. In this sense, Zoraida's actions are twofold. On the one hand, she takes advantage of the Spanish captain's situation in order to obtain passage to Christian territory. On the other hand, before meeting Ruy, she has already decided to leave behind her beloved father in exchange for her own happiness. Zoraida thus exercises power over the two men in her life, Agi Morato and the Spanish captive, while meticulously and secretly planning her actions. One illustrative example is that, in order to conceal her intentions from her father, she begs the captain not to disclose their escape plan to anybody, because if Agi Morato discovers them, "me echará luego en un pozo y me cubrirá de piedras" (Cervantes [1605–1615] 2004, 414) ("he will throw me in a well and cover me over with stones," Cervantes 2009, 347). Surprisingly, what happens afterwards is nothing of the sort; instead, Zoraida is the one who leaves her father in a state of sorrow.

Some critics have read the actions of "Historia's" female protagonist as cold and heartless (Delgado García 2012, 72), and they have accurately stated that, in rejecting Agi Morato's authority, Zoraida is also renouncing his religion (Remensnyder 2007, 665). Moreover, Zoraida's rejection of her father's faith does not imply that she wants to favour a man from another faith (the Christian captive), as I will discuss below, but that she wants to follow Christianity.

Similar to *Leyenda*, in "Historia" the father symbolizes the religion that the daughter leaves behind in order to follow a new one in an unknown nation. Contrary to the portrayal of Carcayona, however, Cervantes portrays his female protagonist as a strong-willed young woman who prioritizes her happiness over the state of sadness in which she leaves her good-hearted father. Although her father is a sweet and loving character, Zoraida eventually neglects him when she chooses Christianity over Islam. The representation of Zoraida's father as not lustful, cruel or morally decadent, as King Nachrab was, may correspond to Cervantes' humanizing vision of a world that ultimately shares values with that of Christians (Alcalá Galán 2012, 24).

Zoraida's disloyalty to her father may also contradict both Christian and Muslim precepts. The Judeo-Christian fourth commandment demands that one must honor one's father and mother; likewise, the Qur'an instructs the following: "Be good to your parents. If one or both grow old in your presence, do not say off to them, not reprove them, but say gentle words to them. And look after them with kindness and love, and say: 'O Lord, have mercy on them as they nourished me when I was small'" (17:23-24). However, both the Bible and the Qur'an also favour casting off "the ties of blood kinship in favour of [a] spiritual family" (Remensnyder 2007, 666). Thus, Zoraida might not be a bad daughter after all, if we attend to Jesus's words to his followers: "If any man come[s] to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"

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(Luke 14:26), or to what the Qur'an states: "You will not find those who believe in God and the Day of the Resurrection, loving those who oppose God and His Prophet, even though they be their fathers, sons, or brothers or their kin" (58:22). Zoraida is apparently following both commandments.

In both the Aljamiado and the Cervantine story, the women are able to make their own choices, thus reaching a sort of religious independence. By deciding to convert to either Islam or Christianity and, consequently, to move away from their paternal homes, Carcayona and Zoraida, respectively, are coming to terms with adulthood. Once they reject the faith imposed by their fathers, they are ready to follow their own personal satisfaction. And in these tales, that satisfaction is associated with religion rather than with love, even if both stories, especially Cervantes', involve their protagonists falling for young, valiant men. Thus, a curious element that connects *Leyenda* and "Historia" is the fact that their female protagonists carry out risky actions in order to embrace a new faith rather than a prohibited romantic love. Husbands and male lovers, thus, are there to make their wives' and female lovers' wishes come true. [37]

Fathers' Authority and Absent Mothers

As mentioned above, both characters eventually convert to a faith that opposes that of their fathers: Carcayona becomes a Muslim and rejects Nachrab's Paganism, and Zoraida becomes a Christian and rejects Islam. Perhaps the Cervantine character's actions imply a higher level of risk since she defies not only her father's religion but also her nation's, and she does so at a time when Muslims and Christians considered themselves enemies. Similarly, both women put a geographical distance between themselves and their nations and religions of origin, which eventually allows them to practice their new faith freely. Therefore, it would not be too much to suggest that, as a consequence of their actions, religion proves to be stronger than kinship. [38]

Furthermore, in both cases the mothers are either dead or absent from the story and the children's religious education relies on the fathers. The physical absence of the mothers has a profound effect on the daughters, as it pushes them to find elsewhere the maternal bond that they are lacking. In these stories, the protagonists find it in the alternative religion. One can suggest that Carcayona's maternal figure is represented by the golden dove and Zoraida's by the Virgin Mary. Each of these adoptive mothers reveal the path to the new religion while keeping their 'daughters' faith intact, in spite of the adversities the daughters have to confront once they decide to abandon their nations, fathers and religious beliefs. The dilemma between keeping their old religion or renouncing it is resolved when they decide to choose the latter (the maternal bond) by defying the former (the paternal bond), that is, when they abandon the male parent and the native faith. [39]

Regarding the absence of the mother in such literary texts, Anne Cruz (1996, 36–43), who has highlighted the relevance of psychoanalysis in the study of early modern Spanish literature, argues that [40]

what resounds repeatedly in Golden Age discourse is the lack of the mother, as written texts [by male authors] mediate between her presence and the spoken language of the mother tongue. In the sixteenth century mothers disappear as cultural protagonists in didactic treatises and in literary narratives alike, [an absence that reflects the] patriarchy's efforts to control feminine agency in the 'real' world. [41]

Once the mother is absent from the picture, then the paternal figure, who already symbolizes power, embodies the religious authority, too, as this aspect of his daughter's education now falls to him. [42]

Additionally, according to Islamic law, "religious affinity was inherited through the paternal line," aligning with Maliki jurisprudence, which holds that a child's father determines whether they are a Muslim, a Christian or a Jew (Deardorff 2017, 259). Several scholars have highlighted this religious transmission in Islam. Luis Bernabé-Pons notes that, according to the general opinion, Muslims acquire their Islamic identity at conception, provided that the father is Muslim (2020, 82). Similarly, Mercedes García-Arenal refers to the testimony of Jesuit Pedro de León regarding the Moriscos, who in some cases did not fully convert to Christianity, as they continued to adhere to their ancestral faith, expressing this with the statement: "mi padre moro, y yo moro" (my father was a Moor, and I am a Moor) (2016, 309). [43]

The analogy between the paternal figure and religion has been pointed out by Jacques Lacan, who states that "the figure of the father [combines] two almost conflicting functions: the protective function and the prohibitive function" (Evans 2006, 62). Similarly, what he refers to as the "imaginary father" has a twofold feature: An ideal father or the opposite. The former is "the prototype of God-figures in religions," while the opposite is a terrifying one; but in both cases, the father is seen as "omnipotent" (2006, 63). In both *Leyenda* and "Historia," the fathers correspond to Lacan's interpretation, as they are protective and prohibitive but at the same time omnipotent God-figures. But in these specific literary works—whether the text's author is an unknown Morisco, as in *Leyenda*, or Christian, as in Cervantes' work—daughters privilege their own faith over their fathers' faith when religion is at stake. Although the father's word should be accepted as definitive, his authority is transgressed by the protagonists of these stories. [44]

Another notable feature common to both *Leyenda* and "Historia" is that both stories portray non-Christian, Muslim characters. This detail leads to the following questions: Are the acts of insubordination performed by both Carcayona and Zoraida only possible because they are either new or former Muslims? Could their transgressive behavior, expressed through paternal disobedience and a drastic split from native religions, be explained by their association with Islam? Based on the analysis of another work by Cervantes, *La gran sultana* (The Great Sultana), I argue that it is less likely that a similar situation would occur with a fictional female Christian protagonist. [45]

The Case of *La gran sultana*, the Persevering Christian

La gran sultana is a *comedia de cautivos* (captive plays) in which a Spanish woman, Catalina de Oviedo, or Sultana, as she is called in the play, refuses to convert to Islam even after marrying her Muslim captor. In spite of Sultana being the secret prisoner of the Ottoman Sultan (called the Turk in the play) for six years, she has been able to hide herself from him thanks to the aid of one of the Turk's eunuchs, Rustán. One day, however, her fate changes when another eunuch, Mamí, discovers her secret and informs his master about the beautiful Spanish captive whom he keeps in his prison. The Turk demands to meet her immediately, and as soon as Sultana appears in front of him, he falls in love and asks her to marry him. Sultana, however, begs him to give her a period of three days to provide an answer, and he grants it. Eventually, Sultana accepts the marriage proposal, but she negotiates her cultural and religious identity with her future husband so that she will be allowed to keep her Christian name, religion, dress [46]

and customs. Towards the end of the play, she becomes pregnant with the Turk's son and everybody celebrates.¹⁹ In addition to the main plot, the play contains other subplots in which characters in disguise and dressed as the opposite sex also form part of the fictionalization of Spanish Christian captives in Ottoman Constantinople.

For some critics, *La gran sultana* demonstrates a case of “Cervantine Orientalism” because the plot's unlikelihood—a Spanish Christian woman marrying the Sultan and keeping her religion—and its “absurd situations” are used deliberately by Cervantes in order to exaggerate the stereotypes about the Ottoman Empire (Alcalá Galán 2012, 27). Nevertheless, what is certain is that, in *La gran Sultana*, the female protagonist has a subaltern position as a captive, so she is, in a way, forced to accept the marriage. But at the same time, the Turk's love makes him vulnerable to her beauty as well as to her demands. This imbalance allows her to negotiate her cultural and religious identity. Therefore, as Sultana chooses to accept the proposal, provided that she can maintain crucial external signs of her religious identity (name, dress, and customs). She places herself in a somewhat higher position than her powerful soon-to-be husband. This aspect of her character—her power over men—places her closer to our two previous protagonists; nevertheless, in Sultana's case, the husband's features do not correlate with those of the King of Antioch or Ruy Pérez. On the contrary, these traits correlate with those of Carcayona's and Zoraida's fathers in that they, too, want to sleep with them (King Nachrab) or impose an Islamic faith that will eventually be rejected (Agi Morato). And if this correspondence among the father figures and the Turk is not enough, let us examine Sultana's relationship with her own father, who has also been captured by the Turk and placed in one of his prisons. Once Sultana's father realizes that his daughter is in the seraglio and that she will marry the Turk, he condemns her dishonest decision:

PADRE. Hija, por más que me arguyas,
no puedo darme a entender
sino que has venido a ser
lo que eres por culpas tuyas;
quiero decir, por tu gusto:
que, a tenerle más cristiano,
no gozara este tirano
de gusto que es tan injusto.
¿Qué señales de cordeles
descubren tus pies y brazos?
¿Qué ataduras o qué lazos
fueron para ti crüeles?
De tu propia voluntad
te has rendido, convencida
desta licenciosa vida,
desta pompa y majestad.

SULTANA. Si yo de consentimiento
pacífico he convenido

19 Cervantes' play mirrors several accounts of historical events in which a Christian captive marries a Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. The most famous is the Slavic Christian captive Haseki Hürrem (1505–1558), known as Roxelana, who became the only legal wife of Süleyman the Magnificent. She was called “the great sultana” at the time, as she was able to exert control over the Empire after she was made sultana (Boll 2013, 130).

con el deste descreído,
 ministro de mi tormento,
 todo el Cielo me destruya,
 y, atenta a mi perdición,
 se me vuelva en maldición,
 padre, la bendición tuya.
 Mil veces determiné
 antes morir que agradalle;
 mil veces, para enojalle,
 sus halagos desprecié;
 pero todo mi desprecio,
 mis desdenes y arrogancia
 fueron medio y circunstancia
 para tenerme en más precio.
 Con mi celo le encendía,
 con mi desdén le llamaba,
 con mi altivez le acercaba
 a mí cuando más huía.
 Finalmente, por quedarme
 con el nombre de cristiana,
 antes que por ser sultana,
 medrosa vine a entregarme. (Cervantes [1615] 1998, 92–94)

FATHER. Daughter, despite all your arguments, it still seems to me that you've come to be who you are by your own faults; I mean, by your pleasure; for if you had more Christian leanings, this tyrant would not enjoy something so unjust. What signs of whipping do your feet and arms show? What ties or binds have cruelly held you down? You've surrendered of your own volition, swayed by this licentious life, this pomp and majesty. [50]

SULTANA. If I have peacefully assented to this unbeliever, this minister of my torment, may all heaven destroy me, and may your blessing become a curse to me, for my perdition. A thousand times I resolved to die before pleasing him; a thousand times, to anger him, I disdained his courtesies; but all of my disdain, my scorn, and arrogance just made him hold me in higher esteem. My zeal excited him, my disdain attracted him, and my haughtiness brought him closer when I fled him the most. Finally, to keep a Christian name, rather than that of Sultana, I fearfully gave in. (Cervantes 2012, 146–47) [51]

As expressed in this dialogue, and contrary to what happens in *Leyenda* and “Historia,” Sultana looks not to reject her religion or her father’s authority but to adapt herself to her difficult circumstances. She needs to deal with an inevitable union with her captor, the most important man in the Ottoman Empire, and a Muslim, but at the same time she wants to maintain her Christian faith. And, as in the two previous stories, here love is not the driving force behind her choice at all. In Sultana’s case, she uses marriage and the love that the Turk professes to her to negotiate her religious and cultural independence. Once again, faith is more important than love. However, in order to reach her goal, Sultana does not need to reject her father’s [52]

authority or her native religion, something that would have been advantageous in her situation, as converting to Islam might have been more beneficial for her future life in the Ottoman Empire. Rather, she takes the most difficult path, although the righteous one from a Christian perspective: To stand by her Christian beliefs and her Spanish culture. By doing this, she contradicts her new home's legal and religious precepts, although the audience knows that the Turk will not do anything against her because his love for her has even made him promise that he will not sleep with any other women again (Alcalá Galán 2012, 29).

One final thing that is worth noting is how Sultana and her father relate to each other. Contrary to Carcayona and Zoraida, who contradict their fathers' orders and eventually abandon them and their former faiths, in Cervantes' play *La gran sultana*, however, it is the daughter who disputes her father's accusations of her being too pleasing to the Turk or not being Christian enough. Sultana's meticulous description of each and every thing she has done to deter the Turk's advances, and her final conclusion that the only solution would be to die by her own hand, demonstrate her arguments and place her in a superior position. Sultana is, therefore, able to keep her religion intact throughout the play because, in spite of her husband's authority over her, she is able to defy it and even control the situation, taking advantage of the fact that he is in love with her, and, more importantly, because she is a fervent Christian. In that sense, her character cannot escape, like Carcayona and Zoraida, from the faith and the authority that is imposed on her, but she can transform the situation to her favour and eventually win without dishonouring her father, her nation or her religion. [53]

Conclusion

Female protagonists in Islam-related Spanish literature tend to privilege religious conversion over kinship or romantic love. In the cases studied here, both Carcayona and Zoraida break their religious bonds, leave their fathers, and embrace a new religious faith. Similarly, they are assisted by male protagonists whom they eventually marry, not necessarily out of love but mainly for practical reasons. Nevertheless, when we compare the two cases of Carcayona and Zoraida with *La gran sultana*'s protagonist, matters seem to take a different path for Sultana. Not only does Sultana not convert to Islam, but she also keeps her Catholic faith firm and manages to negotiate with her future Muslim husband on this significant aspect of her life. Although Sultana's father is not portrayed as an authority figure, she puts her Catholic faith and her identity first, above all things, even when she marries her religious enemy. [54]

The differences among these texts, then, is who produces them, when they are written and to whom they are addressed. In early modern Spain, when the conflict between Moriscos and Old Christians was extremely tense—reaching its climax in the early seventeenth century with the final expulsion of the former from Spain—religion and identity were closely related, and, as we have seen throughout this study, literature was not exempt from these complexities. [55]

Therefore, the main point of difference between Carcayona and Zoraida is that the former is a converted Muslim, and Zoraida, on the contrary, is a Muslim who converts to Christianity. The former is created from the Morisco perspective, the anonymous author of *Leyenda*, while the latter is seen from the point of view of a Christian, Cervantes. Thus, the Morisco author of *Leyenda* needs to emphasize the protagonist's strong faith and resilience towards the suffering she must endure, just as Moriscos did at that time. And the daughter's estrangement from her father is justified by his Paganism as well as by his incestuous desires, which work as a sign of his 'wrong' faith. [56]

In the case of Cervantes' "Historia," Zoraida's love for the Virgin Mary replaces her love for her father and for their Islamic, but non-Pagan, faith. Unlike Carcayona's father, Agi Morato does not seem to do anything wrong to justify Zoraida's betrayal; he just represents the Muslim enemy. Nevertheless, Cervantes emphasizes the power of Christianity over Islam at a time when conflicts between Christianity, especially in Spain, and Islam, represented by the Ottoman Empire, were at their height. One can observe that Zoraida's portrayal is less kind than Carcayona's, in that the former chooses Christianity over her father's faith, but she is still the 'other,' a Muslim maiden who eventually converts. As Mercedes Alcalá-Galán (2012, 12) suggests, "women who are 'Others'... are viewed in the Spanish Christian collective imagination as highly sexual subjects incarnating betrayal and ambition." Carcayona, however, is the role model that the anonymous author of the *Aljamiado* manuscript wants to highlight as an example for all Moriscos living in Spain. [57]

In summary, the complicated relationship between Moriscos and Old Christians during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Spain is reflected in literature and, more importantly, in the way that female converts to Islam or Christianity are portrayed there. First, as has been demonstrated here, these women transgress their fathers' authority, which symbolizes their native religion, and escape from them in search of a free space to perform their own rituals. And second, it is more likely that fictional situations such as those depicted in these texts occur when the main characters are associated with Islam and the Muslim community than when they are Christian. All in all, the literary production of the time underscores the complexities of the encounters between Islam and Christianity in a Mediterranean setting, and more specifically in Spain. [58]

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