**Polyphony and plurality:**

**interpreting the many voices of Alfonso X**

**(*Cantigas de Santa María*, *Siete Partidas* and *Estoria de España*)**

The thirteenth-century presents itself as a turning point in the study of Christian-Muslim contact in medieval Iberia. Following the conquests of Cordova, Seville and Murcia, Christian Iberia firmly dominated the Peninsula. Yet Islam remained a challenge this newly-won supremacy. Monarchies were wary of the internal threat posed by recently absorbed Muslim populations, alongside continued threats from North Africa. This anxiety is clearly reflected in the writings of Alfonso X. Despite this latent distrust, in the very same texts we find attitudes to Muslims that are notably more positive. The law stands to protect the rights of Muslim residents and sensitively welcome them to the Catholic faith; lyric poetry suggests that Muslims are also the "friends" of the Virgin Mary; historiography admires the achievements and virtues of past Islamic rulers. All the while, these assertions receive the stamp of approval of the king. How do we address such a wide variety of contrasting attitudes across Alfonso's legislation, poetry and historiography? How do we bring coherence to these diverse assertions? What implications does this bring for methods of interpretation for these writings? This paper seeks to exemplify the intriguing ambivalence to Muslims in the works of Alfonso X. It attempts to explain how this is a product of the many different voices within the texts: we frame this through the term "polyphony". Key to understanding this are the technical features of composition: the collaborative effort within the scriptorium, compilation as a principal technique for composition, and adherence to specific textual traditions.

Key words:

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