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Missionary merchants: Three medieval anti-Jewish works from Genoa

Ora Limor

Despite the fact that Jews were not allowed to live in medieval Genoa, three anti-Jewish works were written in that city. The first two works describe religious disputations between Genoese merchants and Jews in Mediterranean port cities, one in Ceuta in 1179 and the other in Majorca in 1286. The third and latest work comprises a collection of anti-Jewish arguments, based on biblical and post-biblical Jewish literature. An attempt to define the cultural and social milieu from which these works originated, uncovered various obvious and less obvious connections between them. While there is a close literary connection between the first two disputations, the notarial documents in the Genoese archives also reveal commercial connections between the protagonists of these two disputations and the writer of the third polemical work. In addition, the first two disputations are quite exceptional within the genre of polemical literature, both in their plot and in the nature of their arguments. The protagonists of these disputations are lay Genoese merchants, who are described as more capable of defending their faith than monks and clerics. Hence, these works reveal a new and little known aspect of inter-religious controversy, and also contribute to our knowledge of the culture of the Italian cities in the thirteenth century.

The many works which medieval Christians wrote *contra Iudaeos* are generally grouped according to the literature which serves as their source material, on the basis of a typology suggested by Amos Funkenstein a few years ago (1968:125–6; 1971:373–4). According to this classification, "traditional" works, which relied solely on the authority of the Bible are called "works of the old type", as distinct from later works which began to be written in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and which, in addition to the Bible, based their arguments on the Talmud and on philosophical reasonings.

In this article, it is my intention to examine three unknown or relatively unknown works. Their particular interest does not lie solely in their contents or in the authorities on which they are based, but in their geographical origin and in the occupation of their protagonists. These three works were written in medieval Genoa, and they were related to merchants or to people close to the world of commerce. The starting-point of this discussion is thus social and geographical and not literary as is generally the case, and yet nevertheless we shall find at its conclusion that this social and geographical singularity expresses itself also as a cultural singularity, and that these qualities cannot in fact be separated. In other words, the classical polemicist against the Jews, whether in historical or literary works, is a learned monk or priest, for only

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these were generally considered capable of debating with the Jews and contending with their erudition. *Dieses Kampfes Ritter sind Kapuziner und Rabbiner*, wrote Heinrich Heine when describing in a poem a religious disputation which took place in medieval Toledo (Disputation, 1851). Here in these works, on the other hand, it is not a priest or a monk but a secular merchant who confronts the Jews and succeeds in the enterprise, and for that reason these works are not only interesting with regard to the study of inter-religious controversies, but also with regard to the study of the culture of the mediaeval city and especially of the self-confidence of Italian merchants in the Middle Ages.

Three disputations

Manuscript A III 19 in the library of the University of Genoa is entirely devoted to the controversy against the Jews (Limor 1985,1:29–34, 159–62; Limor forthcoming). It comprises two works. The second is the letter of Petrus Damiani to Honestus, containing a series of arguments against Judaism (Reindel 1983:63–102), while the first, with which we are concerned here, describes a disputation between a Genoese merchant, Guglielmo Alfachino, and a Jew in Ceuta (North Africa) in the year 1179. Unlike the letter of Damiani, which is a well-known polemical work, the second work, which we shall call "The Disputation of Ceuta", after the city where it took place, is completely unknown to scholars of the subject. It exists, as far as we know, in only one manuscript, which is that in the library of the University of Genoa, it has never been published,[1] and in academic literature it has been mentioned only three times – twice in articles dealing with the learning of Genoese merchants and once in a book dealing with the history of the Jews in the city (Revelli 1951:19; Borlandi 1963:228–9; Brizzolari 1971:39–40). On no occasion have the scholars considered the content of the work, and it is therefore worth our while to give its main outlines here.

The data concerning the story of the disputation of Ceuta is to be found at the beginning and end of the work. Briefly, it is as follows: a Genoese, Guglielmo Alfachino, disputes in Ceuta with a very wise Jew called Abraham concerning the nature of the true faith. At the end of the work, the Jew admits that he is convinced by Alfachino's arguments and asks to be baptised. Alfachino suggests that the baptism should take place in the local church, but the Jew is frightened *quoniam Mussumuti isti mali et pessimi sunt valde* (Limor forthcoming), and he fears that if they came to hear of it both the Jew's and the Christian's lives would be in danger. He expresses the conviction that Jesus Christ would certainly grant his being baptised in the river where he himself received baptism, and he sails with all his family in a Genoese ship going to Jerusalem and is baptised in the Jordan. In the course of the disputation, Alfachino points out that 1179 years had already passed since the Messiah, whom all the prophets had foretold, was revealed, and one has therefore to conclude that the disputation of Ceuta took place in the year 1179, eight years before the fall of Jerusalem to Saladin. The Jew was thus able to leave Muslim Ceuta and travel to the Christian Holy Land in order to be baptised.

In the period under discussion North Af-

rica was ruled by the Almohades, who were famous for their religious fanaticism (Hopkins 1958:60–70; Le Tourneau 1970:211–37; Dufourcq 1955). Both Christian and Jewish religious life was forbidden. A religious disputation between a Jew and a Christian would have to have taken place secretly. Conversion was allowed only to Islam, while conversion to another religion could have led to a death penalty,[2] as the Jew indeed hints in the disputation.

The religious fanaticism did not, however, disturb the commercial relationships with Europe, and the Almohades even encouraged these relationships. From Genoese notarial documents we learn of vigorous trading contacts between Genoa and Ceuta in the last decades of the twelfth century (Krueger 1933; Abulafia 1977:154–71). The Disputation of Ceuta reveals an unknown aspect of these contacts.

From the point of view of the polemic itself, there are no special innovations in the disputation of Ceuta. The subjects it treats are the most usual ones in such debates, and the biblical verses quoted are also among those which are most customary. Many of them can be found in Isidor's work *De fide catholica contra Judaeos* (MPL 83:452–538), which was the chief storehouse from which medieval polemicists drew their arguments, and others are taken from the biblical commentaries accepted at that period, which are generally based on Jerome. The first subject to be debated is the preferability of baptism to circumcision. Alfachino then passes to the subject of the Messiah: he speaks of his birth from a virgin and attempts to demonstrate from the book of Daniel that the Messiah had to come at the time when Jesus came, investigates the subject of the Messiah's divinity and the duration of his kingdom and insists on the idea that the commandments of the Law were to be abrogated in his time. He then quotes a long series of prophecies which are given a Christological interpretation in order to prove that Jesus's life-story and everything connected with the crucifixion had been prophecied in detail in the Bible. This collection of quotations was mostly taken from the above-mentioned work of Isidor. But despite the massive reliance on Isidor and on the accepted biblical exegeses, there are some new features in the work, or ones, at any rate, which are not taken directly from the known literature of the subject: for instance, the discussion of the verses from the Book of Proverbs: "There be three things which are too wonderful for me, yea, four which I know not. The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent upon a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maid" (Prov. 30:18–9), or a portent which Alfachino included among the proofs of the coming of the Messiah and which is not to be found in the known polemical literature.[3]

The chief novelty of the work, however, is the personality of the protagonist. Guglielmo is not specifically identified by his occupation, but his stay in Ceuta shows him to have been a merchant, and, indeed, a search in the State Archives of Genoa reveals a series of documents testifying to the commercial activities of a merchant called Guglielmo Alfachino in Genoa and its trading ports in the last half of the twelfth century, or, to be more exact, from 1158 to 1205. The documents were written by four different notaries. Some of them record transactions in which Alfachino himself was

involved, and in others he served as witness to the transactions of others (for example: Chiaudano 1935:34, 96, 97, 126, 145; 1940:91, 130). A document of the year 1158 bears witness to Alfachino's intention of travelling to the Crusader kingdom, and the day after it he made his will (Chiaudano and Moresco 1935:237, 238). The will of Julia, Alfachino's wife, is also in the Genoese archives (Hall, Krueger and Reynolds 1938:394). Among the documents of a later period, there are two *commenda* contracts of May 1205 between Alfachino and the sons of the Streiaporco family (Hall-Cole, Krueger, Reinert and Reynolds 1940:8, 85). The significance of this fact will become clear later. This series of documents, which is of necessity very incomplete, for only a small part of the notarial documents which were written at that period has survived and come down to us, testifies to the fact that Guglielmo Alfachino was a well-known merchant in Genoa, that he had a long life, and that his family owned property in the city. Many documents were drawn up *in plano Alfachini* (for example Chiaudano 1940:91). It would be difficult to describe the personality of this Alfachino from the evidence contained in the notarial documents, but in the disputation he is revealed as competent and knowledgeable, with a rhetorical gift and powers of persuasion, so that the Jew tells him:

> Vere testificor tibi, quod, si possibile esset, ut Christiani omnes convenirent in unum, et his omnibus que tibi opposui eis opposuissem, non michi videtur tam sapienter posse respondere quemadmodum tu solus michi respondisti (Limor forthcoming).

Alfachino is thus described not only as prevailing over his partner in dialogue, but as being a more competent disputant than all the other Christians in the world put together, which is quite a compliment for a merchant!

The second disputation involving Genoese merchants is a little better known than its predecessor, and in its time it was apparently quite famous. It describes a series of disputations held in Majorca in the year 1286 between the Genoese merchant Inghetto Contardo and several learned Jews.[1]

The Disputation of Majorca is almost three times as long as the previous one, is more complicated in its action and is more original and interesting from the point of view of content. Moreover, while the Disputation of Ceuta has come down to us in only a single manuscript, seventeen different manuscripts of the Disputation of Majorca have been found, in addition to two old printed editions, and references to several additional manuscripts which have been lost. All the manuscripts were copied in Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the printed editions were published in Venice – one in 1524 and the other in 1672 (Limor 1985,1:159–229; Limor forthcoming). In view of its wide circulation, one may be surprised at the neglect of this work in the research literature of polemics, especially as from many points of view it is a particularly original and interesting work.

The Disputation of Majorca is divided into four parts of unequal length, like four acts of a play, each of which begins with the words *contigit quod* – "it happened that ...". All four parts of the disputation are sited in Majorca, in various locations connected with Inghetto Contardo's commercial activities there, and in each of them he debates with various Jews. In the first part,

Inghetto disputes with a rabbi who is simply called "Rabi" in the text, and afterwards with a magister called Moshe David. His disputation began on the first of May 1286 in the Genoese *loggia* in Majorca, and continued in the magister's residence on the same day and on the following Sunday. In the second part, Inghetto disputes with Astruch Isayah, a learned Jew who had apparently come to Majorca from Catalonia.[5] This disputation takes place a few days after the disputation described in the previous part, and it ends with Astruch's baptism. This section is the most dramatic part of the work, and it includes, in addition to the arguments with which Inghetto succeeds in convincing Astruch, a detailed description of the events leading up to his baptism and an account of the reaction of the Majorcan Jewish community as well as of two miracles which accompanied the events.

The third part consists of a series of short disputations of Inghetto with the "Rabi" and with the magister Moshe David. In these debates, Inghetto prevails over the magister, but the latter delays baptism. In the fourth part Inghetto and the converted Jew Philippus – formerly Astruch Isayah – debate in Inghetto's house with a learned Jew who has come to Majorca recently and whose name is not given.

The disputation of Majorca revolves around the question of whether Jerusalem would be rebuilt by the Jews. According to the rules of the disputation which both sides agree to, Inghetto would submit to circumcision if the Jews could succeed in convincing him that they would rebuild Jerusalem. All the main points at issue between Jews and Christians are subsequently treated within the general framework of this question.

From the point of view of the arguments used, the Disputation of Majorca, like the Disputation of Ceuta before it, is a work of the "old" type according to the accepted classification. Both Inghetto and the Jews debating with him use only biblical authorities to support their arguments, despite the fact that at the time when the work was written, the controversy on the Talmud was at its height (Cohen 1982; Chazan 1989). Inghetto convinces Astruch and the magister of the truth of the Christian religion through the use of biblical verses alone. If one analyses Inghetto's arguments and especially the long series of verses with which he supports them, it is hard to find much originality in them, and that, no doubt, is why the Disputation of Majorca was neglected by historians of inter-religious polemic. However, when one carefully examines the things he says, the way in which he presents his arguments, the rhetorical devices he uses and his general tone, it is soon apparent that the Disputation of Majorca is very different from Christian anti-Jewish disputations as they are known to us. This difference derives, in our opinion, from the personality of the protagonist – or, that is to say, from the fact that the Christian speaking here is a merchant and not a priest or a monk, and that the origin of the disputation of Majorca is an Italian city and not a cathedral or a monastery. And indeed, the theme of the "missionary merchant", which we already find in the Disputation of Ceuta, is developed in the Disputation of Majorca where it becomes a main subject and constantly

reappears, and is found in a number of different variations. When the Jews ask Inghetto whether he is not a Franciscan or Dominican monk or some kind of priest, he answers explicitly: *Nec clericus sum neque fui, nec alicuius religionis unquam fui. Ymo mercator sum* (Limor 1985,2:74), and the magister Moshe David compliments Inghetto:

> Miror de prudencia vestra, quia non credo quod si omnes clerici de Maiorica insimul essent, possent neque scirent dicere ea que dicitis et dixistis, et tam allegorice respondere ad ea que vobis opposita fuerunt. Et pro firmo non scio vobis contradicere, neque possem (Limor 1985,2:81).

Just as in the Disputation of Ceuta, the triumph of the merchant over the Jews becomes a general victory over the professional polemicists – the priests and the monks. Whatever they can do, he can do better.

Like Guglielmo Alfachino, Inghetto Contardo, the protagonist of the Disputation of Majorca is a historical character. This fact has been known to Genoese historians for some years (Revelli 1951:16–9; Borlandi 1963:229; Brizzolari 1971:40–1; Kedar 1976:40–1; Limor 1985,1:6n). A careful search in the archives of the city of Genoa has brought to light a very interesting character, fully involved in the life of the city. Nine notarial documents of the 1280s mention Inghetto, either as a witness to the transactions of other merchants or as a party to a contract. Three documents of 1288 tell us about his commercial activities at La Rochelle in France.[6] In one of the documents, Inghetto is mentioned together with his brother Simon Contardo, who also appears in a long series of notarial documents.[7] There are also other members of the Contardo family mentioned in the documents (Caro 1895–96:292n; Balard 1973:306, 342–43). In addition to these notarial documents, there is a long parchment document in the diplomatic section of the Genoese State Archives containing records of a court case which took place in the town of Nîmes in 1282.[8] The document relates to a conflict which took place between the Tuscan and Lombard merchants resident in the town and the two Genoese consuls, the first of whom was Inghetto Contardo. Inghetto took up a strong position in the dispute, leading to his arrest and the arrest of the second consul – a step which brought about the expulsion of the Florentine merchants from Genoa. It appears from the records, that the dispute created quite a stir in the chief Italian merchant cities, and that Inghetto, who was the main figure in this affair, adopted a vigorous stand which caused the Tuscan cities to retreat. Inghetto's city, Genoa, stood behind him throughout the affair, and it is reasonable to suppose that as a result his name was known in the Mediterranean ports with which Genoa had relations. In addition to these records, in the treasury of the small church of San Marco on the old jetty of Genoa, there is a beautiful parchment document of 1344 stating that in his will of the fourth of February 1312 Inghetto Contardo left a sum of money for the building of a *capellania* in the church. The grant was confirmed in 1316 by Inghetto's brothers Simon and Luchetto, and in 1344 Benedetto Contardo, who was perhaps Inghetto's son, came to an agreement with the rector of the church concerning the building of the *capellania*.[9]

It was not these events we have described, however, which made Inghetto famous in his city. Agostino Giustiniani.

who in the sixteenth century wrote the chronicles of Genoa, described in his book Inghetto's disputation in Majorca, on the basis of a work which he said he had seen in the Carthusian monastery in Genoa, and which was probably one of the manuscripts of the Disputation (Giustiniani 1537,3:103). Giustiniani briefly described the extraordinary feat of the Genoese merchant, and it was because of this that Inghetto was now mentioned in the histories, eulogies and genealogical records of the city of Genoa. Inghetto's name and a very brief account of his disputation were henceforth to be found in all these sources, but they all borrowed from each other and they all originated with Giustiniani's chronicle and not with the original account of the disputation, although several copies of it existed in the libraries of the city (Limor 1985,1:4–6; Limor forthcoming).

Close to the period of writing of the Disputation of Majorca, another polemical work was written in Genoa. It was known as *Victoria Porchetti*, which was the title given to it by the same Genoese historian, Agostino Giustiniani, who published it in Paris in 1520 (Giustiniani 1520). In the preface which he added, Giustiniani stated that its author was a Carthusian monk from Genoa named Porchetto Salvaygo, which explains the title. One must suppose that a manuscript of this work, like the manuscript of the Disputation of Majorca, was available to Giustiniani in the Carthusian monastery when he searched in the library there for material for his history. This library has unfortunately long ago been dispersed, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain what part the Carthusian monastery played in the polemical literature of Genoa. Were the two works in the library by chance, or was the monastery actually instrumental in their composition?

Victoria Porchetti is quite a voluminous work containing much source-material and many arguments against Judaism, arranged in order of subject-matter. The many learned "proofs" that are found in the work are taken from the Bible, the Talmud and later Jewish literature, and these, in fact, are based on the *Pugio Fidei*, the well-known work by the Spanish Dominican friar Raymundus Martini (Raymundus Martini 1687) – the most important thirteenth-century work of anti-Jewish polemics and Christian Hebraism. Both in its content and its character, Porchetto's work is very different from the two other works we have described. Whereas the disputations of Ceuta and of Majorca have a clear and interesting story and development, Porchetto's work has no literary setting. It does not describe a disputation which is purported to have taken place, but is a collection of arguments for the use of the polemicist. Moreover, while the Disputation of Majorca is a disputation of the "old" type, using only biblical arguments, Porchetto's work definitely belongs to the new type of disputation which developed in the thirteenth century, using arguments based on post-biblical Jewish literature. In other words: Inghetto's disputation is not a disputation of experts – that is, of people who have specialised in polemics. The arguments one finds there are well known and do not require any special training. The biblical verses which are quoted are ones which are quite usual in polemical literature. A Christian merchant with a knowledge of the basic concepts of his reli-

gion could have picked up these proofs and arguments from sermons in church and discussions with Jews in the course of his commercial activities, and Inghetto indeed declares in his disputation that that is how he acquired his knowledge.[10] Porchetto's work on the other hand, is a learned, "professional" disputation for which the writer needed to have a specialised knowledge of polemics. That, however, does not mean to say that Porchetto possessed a first-hand knowledge of the later Jewish literature. Most probably, he had no knowledge of Hebrew or knew only a few words and expressions, and derived his knowledge from the book of Martini, and yet, even assuming that is the case, it is doubtful whether he could have written the book without any knowledge of Judaism whatsoever.

The connection between the "popular" disputation of the merchant – the disputation of Majorca – and Porchetto's learned disputation is not, however, limited only to the geographical and chronological proximity of the two works (both were written in Genoa at the end of the thirteenth century). Here too a search in the State Archives in Genoa has turned up an exciting discovery. In one of the documents dealing with Inghetto's commercial activities at La Rochelle, none other than Porchetto Salvaygo declared that he received from Inghetto Contardo the sum of seventy-four pounds, twelve solidi and ten dinars in the currency of Tours – a sum which Inghetto brought him as an emissary from La Rochelle (Limor 1985,1:52). Thus, Inghetto Contardo and Porchetto Salvaygo knew one another and had commercial contacts. While the chronicler Giustiniani stated that Porchetto was a Carthusian monk, we learn from the chronicle of Jacopo da Varagine, the bishop of Genoa who wrote the famous *Legenda Aurea*, about Porchetto Salvaygo who engaged in diplomatic activities and was the Genoese envoy in the peace-negotiations with Venice in 1295 (Monleone 1941:103). "Salvaygo", it should be noted, was the name of the *albergo* – the commercial financial and political family association characteristic of the Genoese trading nobility – of the Streiaporco family, one of the leading families in Genoa in the thirteenth century (Bianchi and Poleggi 1980:230–1). The document written by the notary Enrico Guglielmo Rubeo on 21 June 1288 makes it clear that in addition to his other activities Porchetto also engaged directly or indirectly in commerce, and that he was an acquaintance and trading partner of Inghetto Contardo.[11] Did Porchetto enter the monastery in his final years and then write his book, or did he engage indirectly in trade while he was a monk, or did some other Genoese Carthusian monk write the work and ascribe it to a well-known figure in his city? At this stage, it is difficult to decide between these various possibilities. It is clear, at any rate, that there was a greater connection between these two Genoese works of the end of the thirteenth century than merely their subject matter.

The cultural environment

We have now reached the point where we ought to examine the evidence concerning the social and literary connection between the three Genoese polemical works we have discussed. Between the disputation of Guglielmo Alfachino and that of Inghetto Contardo there was a space of about a hundred

years, but at the same time there can be no doubt about the similarity of their social background and subject-matter. We have already touched on the central motif of the two works – the theme of the missionary merchant who is more capable of undertaking missionary activities than anyone else. This motif provides the main connection between the two disputations, making them into two chapters in the history of the cultural development of the merchants of the city. Not only are the two disputations connected with merchants, but in both cases the writers (who remain anonymous, unlike the chief characters) are at pain to stress the superiority of the merchants as polemicists to all other people. This, however, is not the only similarity between the disputations of Alfachino and Inghetto. In addition to the similarity of the subject-matter, the circumstances of the disputation and the figure of the central character, a few passages in the Disputation of Majorca are taken from the Disputation of Ceuta: in two places, there is a verbal transcription and in others a direct influence (Limor 1985,1:29–34, 159–62; Limor forthcoming). One of the transcribed passages is a lengthy discussion of the verse in Proverbs, chapter 30 we have mentioned, to which Alfachino gives a Christian interpretation, and another is a discussion of the foods permitted and prohibited by the Mosaic law – a subject which was one of the mainstays of inter-religious controversy. The connection between the two works is thus closer than might appear at first sight, and it is all the more significant in view of the fact that the writer of the Disputation of Majorca, did not, as far as we know, draw his material directly, or at any rate, verbatim, from any of the many other polemical works which existed, either because he was unacquainted with them or else because he did not feel them to be congenial, since all of them were written by learned men of the church. On the other hand, he felt at ease with the Disputation of Ceuta which was conducted by a merchant and written in his own city, and when he came to write the Disputation of Majorca, he used it as a model.

The identification of the verbal transcriptions from the Disputation of Ceuta shows the Disputation of Majorca in a new light. It is now clear that the latter is not an exact account of a disputation as it actually took place, but that the writer, when he sat down to write the Disputation of Majorca, was assisted by the literary material which was available. At the same time, however, one should stress that the Disputation of Majorca was not merely an amplification of the Disputation of Ceuta. The passages transcribed from the Disputation of Ceuta constitute only a small part of the entire work (about 1200 words out of a total of 20,000). Most of the Disputation of Majorca is not taken from the Disputation of Ceuta or from any other known work. Both the narrative setting and the polemical content are original and rooted in the historical environment and the mentality which the speaker – whether the writer or the main character – shares or is familiar with.

These observations also naturally raise the question of the historical authenticity of the Disputation of Majorca, and incidentally of the Disputation of Ceuta as well. The ascription of various exploits to historical characters was something quite common in medieval literature, and especially in the Italian *novella* of the thirteenth and

fourteenth centuries. Boccaccio and Sacchetti, for instance, made contemporary merchants central characters in their stories. The use of historical characters gave the story credibility and made it into a tradition. The writers of the disputations we are concerned with also placed them within the cultural setting with which they were familiar, both with regard to the literary narrative and with regard to the theological content. But at the same time one should remember that the Disputations of Ceuta and of Majorca are not pure fiction. They profess to be historical – that is, works in which the facts described are closer to the "objective" facts. In these works, and especially in the Disputation of Majorca, in addition to a great deal of reference to contemporary events (for example, a quite extensive reference to the disputation of Barcelona 1263 (Limor 1985,2:53–5) there are arguments which a merchant might have used but which a monk might have hesitated to employ.[12] Even if the writers fabricated the details of the story, they did not invent the main characters or the sort of words they put in their mouths. Inghetto and Alfachino said things in these works which, if they did not actually say them, they might well have said. The works purported to describe a disputation which after a certain time was written down, but they could also have been the product of the imagination of a gifted writer who found an anecdote about a missionary merchant which was current in his city and attached it to a merchant with whom he was familiar. With regard to the disputations, the point which seems to us significant here is that in both cases the work faithfully reflects the cultural universe of the merchant, which indicates that the author himself belonged to the same cultural milieu as his protagonist – that is, the upper Genoese bourgeoisie. This is a point we shall return to later in this study.

Let us now return to the obvious and the less obvious connections between the three Genoese polemical works we have discussed. In the case of Alfachinos's and Inghetto's disputations one could point to the close literary connection between the two. The notarial documents in the Genoese archives have not at this stage revealed any additional connection between the families which the two merchants belonged to, but these documents, only part of which, we should remember, has come down to us, clearly show a connection between Alfachino and Streiaporco (Salvaygo), the third element of our story. In the thirteenth century, as we see from the documents, their two families were linked by ties of marriage (Cancellieri 1981:140–1). As the date of writing of the Disputation of Ceuta is unknown to us, it is difficult to say if the connection was established earlier or later, but it certainly existed at the time when *Victoria Porchetti* was written, and it was of a personal nature which may have underlied their common interest in the Jewish problem. Guglielmo Alfachino, we learn from the documents at the beginning of the thirteenth century had commercial contacts with the Streiaporco (Salvaygo) family (Hall-Cole, Krueger, Reinert, and Reynolds 1940:8,85), and in the 1280s Porchetto Salvaygo had commercial contacts with Inghetto Contardo, as we have already pointed out.

Another link in the chain of relationships

between the families we have considered was the aforementioned church of San Marco. In 1173, six years before the date given for the disputation of Ceuta, the Streiaporco family built the church of San Marco in the jetty of Genoa (De Simoni 1948:51–6). To this very same church, Inghetto left a large sum of money in his will a hundred and forty years later. In the document which has been kept in the church, the man who executed the will is called "the patron Benedetto Contardo".[13] Did the Salvaygo family involve themselves in the affairs of the church they had founded together with the Contardo family whose sons were its "patrons"?

The information we receive from the various archival documents which have been discovered in Genoa is to a large extent elusive, and it is hard to determine its exact limits. At any rate, they seem to suggest that the Alfachino, Contardo and Salvaygo families were well known in medieval Genoa, and that the connection between them, which seemed at first sight to be limited to literary matters, was also of a social and commercial nature.

The three texts we have considered, in addition to their unique contribution to our understanding of the relationship between Christians and Jews in the Middle Ages, also throw light on an interesting aspect of the Italian merchant aristocracy which, at the period when the works were written, was socially, culturally and politically in the ascendant (Kedar 1976). In Genoa, these merchants began at that time to leave their mark on various areas of culture, most of which were directly or indirectly connected with trade and commerce. Thus, when Giovanni Mauro di Carignano, the rector of the aforementioned church of San Marco, drew one of the first nautical maps, and another priest, Rufinus, compiled a botanical dictionary, they both received considerable assistance in gathering information from merchants and from foreigners who had come from far away. Boccaccio mentions a Genoese astronomer, Andalo di Negro, who made observations in various places in the world and refused to rely on hearsay alone. In Genoa or one of its dependencies in the first decade of the fourteenth century, a Latin-Persian-Cumanic dictionary was compiled for the use of merchants and missionaries who travelled to faraway places (Kedar 1976:12–3). The world of commerce and the world of the missionaries were in general closely interconnected. The enterprising merchants, of whom Marco Polo was the prototype, always sought to combine profits in this world with gaining merit in the world to come, and they made it their business to convert the heathen they met in the course of their commercial activities. The close connection between merchants and missionaries included a similarity of outlook. Both left their own localities and travelled to distant places where they met unfamiliar people with whom they entered into negotiations. These negotiations required certain gifts, especially the gift of speaking, or, in other words, powers of persuasion. They had to sell their particular merchandise and therefore had to persuade their partners in dialogue that their goods were better than any others. In the accounts of thirteenth-century voyages, the missionaries generally followed in the wake of the merchants, and people often connected the two activities.

Anti-Jewish disputation conducted by merchants may indeed have been unusual in the literature of polemics, which was mainly the province of priests and monks, but it was by no means extraordinary when seen in the light of the cultural development of Italian merchants in general and those of Genoa in particular. This was especially true in view of the cultural mission which merchants often took upon themselves as they set off for distant places, as though they were a kind of ambassador forging bridges between different cultures. Anti-Jewish polemics is generally regarded as a subject in itself and a separate category, and thus disputations involving merchants seem like an alien growth. This no longer appears to be the case, however, when one considers inter-religious polemics as a cultural phenomenon integrally related to all the cultural phenomena of the period. It is not surprising that, at a period when the merchants' consciousness was growing, their disputations became not only panegyrics of the heroic merchants but also a form of criticism of the traditional bearers of culture, the priests and the monks. At the time when these Genoese polemical works were written, the merchants had already gained political and economic dominance in their city. As a result their self-confidence and their consciousness of their own worth also increased in the spheres of culture and religion, and this is reflected in the literary production which we have here.

Because encounters with Jews formed part of the merchants' lives, it is hardly surprising if this anti-Jewish polemical literature was written in Genoa, despite the fact that at the time when these works were written there were no Jews living in Genoa whatsoever (Staglieno 1876; Roth 1950; Zazzu 1974 and 1975). Medieval Genoa was a maritime power with areas under its control and a great deal of influence. If the Genoese merchants did not meet Jews in their city, they must undoubtedly have met them in the Mediterranean ports in which they traded, including Majorca and Ceuta. And, as we have seen, it was precisely when they were far from home that they were filled with a spirit of proselytism and a desire to impart their religion to those who did not yet accept it.

The merchant as missionary

Thus far we have given little consideration to the polemical content of these works. This content is really a subject for a separate discussion, and here we shall only touch on certain outstanding points which are directly connected with the socio-cultural features we have considered. Even these features, it should be pointed out, are only to be found in the disputations of Guglielmo Alfachino and Inghetto Contardo. *Victoria Porchetti*, being a learned disputation, is of a quite different character.

We have already drawn attention to the fact that the two merchants' disputation have a decidedly amateurish quality. It is particularly significant that they contain little knowledge that a lay Christian could not acquire. They take no account whatsoever of post-biblical Jewish literature, as this needed a knowledge which the Christian acquired specifically for polemical work. Not even the word *Talmud* is mentioned in these works, despite the fact that the disputation of Majorca took place in 1286, one generation after the disputation of Barcelona and

two generations after the disputation of Paris. The same can be said with regard to philosophical arguments.

In both disputations – both the disputation of Ceuta and the disputation of Majorca – the Jews express amazement at the wisdom of the Christian. In the disputation of Majorca, the Jews try to prevent Astruch Isayas from speaking with Inghetto: ... *sed pro nostro consilio non eum queratis* ..., they say, *multum bene novit legem* (Limor 1985,2:83). In Majorca as in Ceuta, the Jews remark on the rhetorical talents of their Christian adversary, and they find it hard to believe that he is only an ordinary merchant. In both cases, astonishment is expressed both at the extent of the merchant's knowledge and at his powers of persuasion. We shall proceed to examine both these characteristics.

Inghetto and Alfachino's proficiency in the Scriptures is very impressive. They know many verses of the Bible and have a verse or verses to match every one of their arguments. Alfachino quotes from seventeen books of the Bible and Inghetto from fourteen. Impressive though their knowledge of the Bible is for a merchant, however, it is less impressive when compared with that displayed in other polemical works of the period. Alfachino and Inghetto have far less knowledge of the Bible than learned churchmen, as can be demonstrated even by a comparison of the number of books and verses which they are able to quote (Limor 1985,1:18–21). Moreover, many of the biblical sources given in Alfachino are taken from Isidor's work, and Inghetto relies heavily on verses to be found in the Catholic liturgy, especially those from the Book of Psalms, which were likely to be better known to the layman than any other part of the Scriptures. From both works one gains the impression of someone who acquired his knowledge casually and at second hand. Here, perhaps, one should point out that a reading of the two disputations does not indicate two levels of speech – the level of the protagonist and that of the author. These are definitely not works written by scholars who for literary reasons connected them with merchants.

Inghetto and Alfachino do, however, display powers of persuasion – Inghetto far more than Alfachino. The difference between the two works in this respect provides an excellent illustration of the development of culture among the merchants of the city. The disputation of Majorca is far more skilfully written, and the merchant's personality is far more developed than in the previous work. Inghetto is complimented by the Jews on his rhetorical talents: *Bonus predicator esses* they tell him (Limor 1985,2:73). It should be pointed out, however, that Inghetto is a natural rhetorician, and one can find no evidence that he had a theoretical knowledge of the art of rhetoric – the *ars praedicandi* – which was developing at that period and which was expounded in dozens of books to aid the preacher, including advice on giving sermons and a collection of examples generally taken from the classical models of rhetoric (Murphy 1981). Inghetto's talents of persuasion derive from his personality and his occupation, and not from any particular study. Proverbs, parables, rhetorical devices – all these effects which are acquired in the course of experience are also to be found in him. One does not, however, find the fixed and carefully-moulded structures of the *ars praedicandi*

which are the result of special study. Alfachino and Inghetto both represent a kind of popular preacher and like many artists of a popular kind they succeed in achieving through their enthusiasm what others fail to achieve through study.

An examination of the arguments which the merchants put to the Jews reveals subtle differences from the usual content of polemics and significant changes in style, and here, too, the disputation of Majorca is the more developed and interesting of the two works. Most of the arguments put forward by the two merchants are to be found in the earlier literature of polemics, and they are in effect the classical arguments of Christian polemics against Judaism. Familiar arguments, however, are presented, especially in the disputation of Majorca, in fresh and original ways. This is shown, first of all, by the great vitality of the language, and by the stress which is laid on the relevance of the matters under discussion to the particular time and place. This is particularly noticeable in the most commonplace arguments such as the attacks on the Jewish dietary laws and on circumcision. Both these subjects are introduced by Inghetto in a lively way and with the use of varied techniques of persuasion. He uses arguments of different kinds like weapons which reinforce one another and spices his discourse with sayings and illustrations which are taken from his familiar environment. Inghetto does not adress himself indifferently to all Jews in all times and places, but solely to his partners in dialogue. *Tu ruminare nescis*, he tells the Jew (Limor 1985,2:2). By these words, he is implying that the Jew does not understand the true nature of the Mosaic commandments, which have to be understood allegorically, and when the law states that the eating of animals which chew the cud (ruminate) is permitted, this should be understood symbolically as a reference to people who know how to distinguish between good and evil. The idea is by no means original and it is also to be found in Thomas Aquinas (Summa Theologica 1,2, qu. 102, art. 6), but Inghetto, no doubt intending to strengthen his argument, says: *Tu scis, o Iudee, quod in lingua tua Hebrayca ruminare pro discernere intelligitur ... Ad hoc intelligendum quod homines, qui bene discernunt, ita bonum a malo debent discernere* ... (Limor 1985,2:5). In Latin the word *ruminare*, in addition to its primary meaning of chewing the cud, also has the meaning of "reflection", and this meaning also passes into other European languages, but it does not exist in Hebrew. The claim that this meaning exists in Hebrew also is an original addition by Inghetto, who in his desire to strengthen his argument and get closer to his partners in dialogue goes from Latin to Hebrew and ends up with a mistake. In this passage and others the popular character of the disputation goes together with enthusiasm in argument. This erroneous argument is the result of Inghetto's wish to express things in a way that would be more familiar to the Jew and better understood by him.

Now that we have broached the subject of the dietary laws, it is also worth pointing out that its centrality both in the disputation of Ceuta and the disputation of Majorca testifies to a genuine contact with Jews. Inghetto's and Alfachino's Jews are not abstract entities but people of flesh and blood who are peculiar in that they refuse to eat with Christians. This impression of

authenticity is also conveyed by the fact that in these works abstract questions of faith are not given a place of great importance. The question of the Trinity, for example, is debated only in the third part of the disputation of Majorca, while in the disputation of Ceuta it does not appear at all.

Generally, the gifts of persuasion of the missionary merchants take the form of a powerful rhetoric which may be seen as an authentic expression of the communications aspect of urban culture. The city is a crossroads where buying and selling goes on at every level. As in commercial negotiations or legal debate, everything, in these disputations, depends on the power of persuasion, and the merchants accordingly mobilize all their rhetorical talents when they try to persuade the Jews. They express the familiar arguments in an effective way, and they sometimes take the liberty of saying things which were less usual – things which churchmen would perhaps not have dared to say. Thus, Inghetto is somewhat disrespectful of major Christian symbols such as crosses and images,[14] and on the other hand he emphasises the importance of common moral principles such as respect for the sanctity of life and stresses the basic common position of Jews and Christians. This approach is reflected in Inghetto's actual words:

Quoniam inter nos et vos non est dissencio nisi de Messia, quem nos dicimus venisse et vos dicitis venire debere. Nos vero et vos unum deum adoramus, creatorem celi et terre. Respondete michi si creditis quod aliquis bonus Christianus qui legaliter et fideliter vivat secundum legem vestram condempnatur. Responderunt Iudei: In veritate non (Limor 1985,2:75).

Thus, throughout the disputation, Inghetto takes small steps towards his partners in dialogue, obviously with the aim of removing divisions and gaining the others' confidence, for as a gifted merchant he knows very well that persuasion is always based on confidence, and that it is easier to influence people and persuade them to change their positions if one begins with mutual trust rather than confrontation (Parsons 1963:51).

A result of all this is that from the literary point of view the two Genoese merchants' disputations are more interesting and more agreeable to read than most works of polemical literature, and from the historical point of view, apart from the fact that they reveal a new and little-known aspect of inter-religious controversy, they also contribute to our knowledge of the culture of the Italian cities of the thirteenth century. These works, describing the exploits of heroic merchants, famous sons of Genoa who were able to debate with learned Jews and win the argument, reflect the new social and cultural situation coming into existence in the Italian cities, and provide a fascinating expression of it as well as celebrity for its distinguished representatives, the educated lay merchants.

Notes

ASG: Archivio di Stato di Genova
ASLSP: Atti della Societa Ligure di Storia Patria

[1] A critical edition of The Disputation of Ceuta: Limor forthcoming.

[2] This is the Muslim law (Goitein 1971:305; Fattal 1958:163–74). While in other times and in other places the Muslim authorities might have ignored such a conversion, this could not have been the case in Almohadic Ceuta. On the Jews in Ceuta see Corcos

1967 (the conclusions of this article, which emphasise the harmony between Muslems and Jews, are highly controversial) and Ben Sasson 1990.

[3] The reference is to the portent of a river of oil which would burst forth in Rome in the time of Augustus, and which is mentioned by Orosius (Zangemeister 1887:443; Duchesne and Fabre 1952:317).

[4] A detailed account of the Disputation of Majorca may be found in Limor 1985,1. The text itself: Limor 1985,2. A revised critical edition: Limor forthcoming.

[5] Moshe is the most common Jewish name in Spanish documents of the period. Astruch is also very common but Isayah is very rare (Régné 1978: Index of persons). The combination Moshe David (which is identical with Moshe ben David – Moses son of David) has also been found in documents relating to the Jews of Majorca at that period. I am grateful to Y. Assis for his help.

[6] ASG, Notai, Enricus Guillelmus Rubeus, in cartulare 94 (not. Vivaldus de Porta, 1286–89), f. 248r–248v; These documents were published in Limor 1985,1:51–3. See also cart. 93, f. 120v; cart. 94, f. 197r; cart. 131, f. 158v.

[7] ASG, Notai, Enricus Guillelmus Rubeus in cart. 10 (diversorum notariorum 1286–93, f. 49v. See Limor 1985,1:54, 8n, 12–13).

[8] ASG, Materie politiche, mazzo VI, Ruolo delle sentenze de 6 Febr. 1282 (Ferretto 1903:308–415; Berti 1857:167–73).

[9] Archivio della parrochia di S. Marco, f. 6 (Ferretto 1924:41).

[10] *Sed hec que scio didici a Iudeis et per gratiam dei et Messie domini nostri Yesu Christi. Et bene dico vobis quod in tempore meo cum multis Iudeis habui conflictum, et specialiter in Provincia et in Alexandria Egypti* ... (Limor 1985,2:74).

[11] Churchmen who also engaged in commerce were not unusual in the history of Genoa (Kedar 1976:59–60).

[12] Such, for instance, is Inghetto's statement that where life is at stake he would not hesitate to burn a cross or an image in order to warm water for a sick friend: *Sed bene dico vobis quod si haberem crucem seu ymaginem aliquam ligneam, et non haberem de quo possem calefacere aquam fratri meo Christiano seu aliquo amico meo Iudeo si infirmaretur, ego ipsam crucem et ymaginem in ignem ponerem et comburerem* (Limor, 2:106).

[13] See note 9.

[14] See note 12.

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