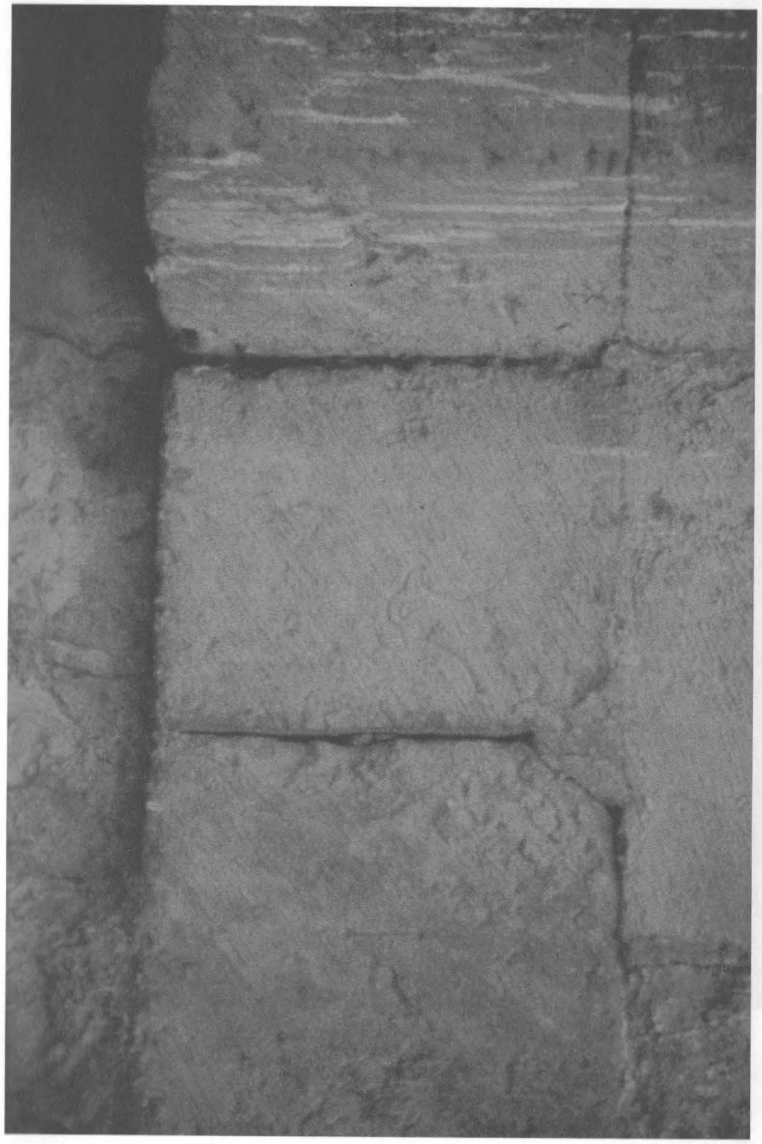

Fig. 14. Bird's head mason's mark, San Isidoro de León (photo: author).

"CAIN'S BLADE AND THE QUESTION OF MIDRASHIC INFLUENCE IN MEDIEVAL SPANISH ART"*

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Questions surrounding the relationship between medieval Christian and Jewish Biblical imagery have been a constant in modern art history, and their answers have evolved along with the politics and methods of the field. Past attempts to trace the artistic primacy and influence of one faith group over the other has yielded in recent years to a greater diversity of approaches striving to recognize the complexity of these relationships. If such scholarship has proven anything, it is that predictable interpretive rules cannot be applied systematically to works of broad geographical and cultural diversity; that commonalities of form and content cannot be presumed automatically to imply "influence;" and that individual questions of content, iconography, and meaning can only be addressed sucessfully when they are carefully framed within a specific local and chronological context.[1] To adapt a familiar adage, students of cultural exchange are learning to think globally, but interpret locally.

The necessity of local thinking has particular resonance for historians of medieval Iberia, where constant territorial shifts and political/ideological renegotiations among Christians, Muslims, and Jews contributed to what is less a monolithic historical narrative than a varied cluster of sub-histories. Here, the interpretation of intercultural relationships is closely tied to the question of specifically when,

* The research and writing of this paper has benefited from discussions with Annemarie Weyl Carr, William Babcock, Lisa Unterseher, Eric Marshall White, and Katrin Kogman-Appel, as well as from the editorial supervision of Julie Harris. I am also grateful to Damir Niksic for his assistance with the reproduction from the Sarajevo Haggadah.

[1] Katrin Kogman-Appel analyzes this discourse in "Bible Illustration and the Jewish Tradition," in *Imaging the Early Medieval Bible*, ed. John Williams (College Park, PA, 1999), 61–96; see also *idem*, "Jewish and Non-Jewish Culture: The Dynamics of Artistic Borrowing in Medieval Hebrew Manuscript Illumination," *Jewish History* 15 (2001): 187–234, esp. 206–207.

where, and among whom such relationships occurred. This variability makes it difficult to generalize about any aspect of Iberian cultural history, where it penetrates to the most elementary levels of questioning about art's evolution, function, and meaning. It is also a key concern of the present study, which investigates the origins and trajectory of a peculiar iconographic motif whose sporadic appearances within both Christian and Jewish art in Iberia help to document the multiplicity of paths by which medieval cultural exchange could occur.

The starting point for this investigation is the Sarajevo Haggadah, produced in Catalonia in the middle of the fourteenth century and now in the National Museum of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Among the first significant works of Jewish art to come to the attention of modern art historians, the book preserves an extensive cycle of prefatory imagery, comprised of thirty-four leaves with full-page illuminations narrating the history of the Israelites from Genesis to Exodus.[2] Within this series appears an odd depiction of Cain killing Abel, which shows Abel kneeling passively as Cain grasps his hair with his left hand and pierces his neck with a knife or a short sword (fol. 4r; Fig. 1). Cain's use of this weapon, rather than the club, hoe, rock, or jawbone with which he more often is shown murdering Abel, is extremely rare in medieval imagery, so much so that it scarcely earns mention in even the most comprehensive iconographic catalogues.[3] Its depiction in the Sarajevo Haggadah remains unique among surviving illuminated haggadot.[4]

[2] For a recent overview of the literature on this manuscript and its iconographic problems, see Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Der Exoduszyklus der Sarajevo-Haggada: Bemerkungen zur Arbeitsweise spätmittelalterlicher jüdischer Illuminatoren und ihrem Umgang mit Vorlagen," *Gesta* 35/2 (1996): 111–128. A basic description of the codex appears in the facsimile by Cecil Roth, *The Sarajevo Haggadah* (New York, 1963), 10. A more recent facsimile with the translated commentary of Eugen Werber has been published by the Sarajevo Museum as *The Sarajevo Haggadah* (Sarajevo, 1999).

[3] For example, *Lexikon der Christliche Ikonographie*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum and Günter Bandmann (Rome, 1968–76), vol. 1, col. 8, lists a sword among the potential murder weapons, but offers no examples. Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétienne* (Paris, 1955–59), 1:96, does not mention a blade at all. A fuller treatment of Cain's weapon in works of art is offered by Anna Ulrich, *Kain und Abel in der Kunst. Untersuchungen zu Ikonographie und Auslegungsgeschichte* (Bamberg, 1981), 94–97 and 137–142. For general exegetical sources, see Viktor Aptowitzer, *Kain und Abel in der Agada, den Apokryphen, der hellenistichen, christlichen, und muhammedanischen Literatur* (Vienna, 1922), 44–52, and Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia, 1925), 5:139–140 n. 20.

[4] The only other Sephardic haggadot depicting the Fratricide are: London, Brit. Lib. MS Add. 27210 (so-called "Golden Haggadah"), fol. 2v, and London, Brit. Lib. MS Or. 2884 (so-called "Catalan Haggadah"), fol. 2r. See Laurence Brugger, *La façade de Saint-Étienne de Bourges: le Midrash comme fondement du message chrétien* (Poitiers, 2000), 160–161; see also Katrin Kogman-Appel, "The Sephardic Picture Cycles and the Rabbinic Tradition: Continuity and Innovation in Jewish Iconography," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 60/4 (1997): 451–482, esp. 470.

The haggadah's depiction of Cain using a blade to kill Abel has been explained by Katrin Kogman-Appel as having been inspired by early medieval rabbinic commentary on the Bible, specifically the late fourth-century *Genesis Rabbah*, which reports certain sages' argument that in murdering his brother Cain imitated his father Adam's sacrifice of a bullock, attacking his brother at "the throat and [his] vital organs."[5] This argument is supported well by the illumination, where Abel kneels on the ground so that Cain must pull his head up to expose his throat for the kill, resulting in a composition reminiscent of contemporaneous scenes of Jewish ritual slaughter, such as the killing of a lamb in preparation for Passover depicted in the fourteenth-century Spanish Rylands Haggadah (Manchester, John Rylands Library, Hebrew MS 6; Fig. 2). According to Kogman-Appel, the artist's deliberate invocation of rabbinic tradition in the Sarajevo Haggadah was but one of many modifications drawn from Midrash by which the illuminators of the Iberian haggadot customized what had been a fundamentally Christian cycle of Biblical imagery, employing allusions to rabbinic tradition to promote a specifically Jewish understanding of both image and the text.[6]

This hypothesis is both plausible and serviceable, contributing as it does to an argument that effectively refutes past assumptions that Jewish artists assimilated available Christian models with little critical modification. For students of medieval Iberia, however, the identification of the blade motif as based on Midrash is made still more interesting by the existence of several medieval Christian monuments in which Cain also uses a blade to kill his brother. Four of these, the first to be considered below, were produced in northern Spain or southern France during the second half of the twelfth century. A fifth example, found in a Byzantine manuscript of the 1130s,

[5] Kogman-Appel, "Sephardic Picture Cycles," 470–471, and *idem*, "Artistic Borrowing," 207. For the midrash (*Genesis Rabbah*, 22.8), see Jacob Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah. The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis. A New American Translation* (Atlanta, 1985), 1:248.

[6] An extension of this argument is found in Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Coping with Christian Pictorial Sources: What Did Jewish Miniaturists Not Paint?" *Speculum* 75 (2000): 816–858.

has its own contribution to make to an analysis of this group and will be examined subsequently.

The four Western representations of Cain killing Abel with a blade were produced in Aragón, in Burgos, and in southern France west of the Rhône, on the border between Languedoc and Provence. Because all these works were produced within the same general geographic sphere as the Sarajevo Haggadah, and as much as two hundred years earlier, they raise several questions relevant to the debate over the relationship between Jewish and Christian artistic traditions in Spain. The most obvious concerns any possible connection between the haggadah and its Christian predecessors. Were these monuments somehow related, either via the use of similar pictorial models or through shared awareness of some common text, even the midrash itself? In the context of continuing modern enthusiasm for an idealized conception of medieval Iberian *convivencia*,[7] it would be appealing indeed to find that the depiction of Cain killing Abel with a blade resulted from some overlap of Jewish and Christian cultural traditions. If this connection is to be pursued, however, the path and nature of its travels must be carefully elucidated. Did the midrash inspire the motif directly in both Jewish and Christian works, and if so, by what means did it get into the Christian artistic pipeline? Did Christian and Jewish representations of Cain and his blade emerge more or less coincidentally, as unrelated visualizations of this common textual source, or do the surviving examples of the motif represent remnants of some lost model-copy chain by which it crossed cultural boundaries? If the latter, then in which artistic tradition would the motif first have emerged? Finally, what happened to the meaning of the original midrash during these hypothetical crossings between cultures? Was it preserved and recognized by both Jewish and Christian viewers? Did it survive the transmission between ideological frames?

Similar questions have been pursued in many other instances of apparent midrashic influence upon Christian imagery, both in Spain and elsewhere, and the conclusions drawn thus far have varied widely, an effect attributable in part to the unusually heavy politicization of

[7] On this tendency and its effects in modern scholarship on medieval Spain, see O.K. Werckmeister, "The Islamic Rider in the Beatus of Girona," *Gesta* 36/2 (1997): 101.

such discourse.[8] Without wanting to be drawn too deeply into this wider debate, I do believe that there is merit in looking more closely at the motif of Cain's blade with the goal of retracing its possible visual and textual paths within the two religious-artistic cultures where it appears. While my study will center narrowly on a very traditional concern—the pursuit of textual and visual sources for a single iconographic element—it also provides an opportunity to consider the broader problem of cross-cultural exchange in Spain under comparatively controlled and consistent conditions. Because the depiction of Cain's blade survives only in a very limited number of monuments, and because these survivals are generally closely related in date and location of origin, their relationships may prove simpler to reconstruct than in the case of more widely diffused examples. Such a limited sampling is always at risk of having been skewed by the loss of other relevant examples, but at the same time I believe that it has potential to shed a more focused light on the pathways by which images and ideas traveled among medieval Iberian cultures.

Cain's Blade in Iberia and Southern France

Four depictions of Cain killing Abel with a blade survive in Christian monuments that were produced either in northeastern Spain or in southern France during the twelfth century. Although politically and linguistically distinct today, the Spanish and French constituents of this area were drawn into close proximity in the Middle Ages by politics, by the Church, and to some extent by language. The political and geographical crux of this relationship lay in the Crown of Aragón, created by the union of the Aragonese kingdom with the counties of Cataluña in 1137. Intermarriage and political ambition had brought Provence under Catalan-Aragonese rulership for most of the twelfth century; this, along with intensive ecclesiastical collaboration between southern French and Aragonese religious houses during the same period, fostered a cultural interpenetration that is traceable at many levels, not least in the area of artistic exchange.[9]

[8] This literature is vast but has been well analyzed in Kogman-Appel, "Bible Illustration," 69–74.

[9] Provence came under Catalan or Aragonese rule twice in the 12th century, from 1096–1131 and again from 1162–1192; on political and cultural ties, see Alain

This can be seen, for one example, in the emergence of extensive Biblical narrative cycles as a predominant decorative format in northeastern Iberian and southern French cloisters of the latter half of the twelfth century.[10]

In surveying these Christian depictions of Cain killing Abel with a blade, I will work backward chronologically and outward geographically, retracing the motif's visible heritage from the fourteenth-century haggadah to the monuments most distant from that work in time and space. Although close iconographic similarities between some of these works will quickly become obvious, it will be only after all of them have been introduced that any broad pattern of interrelationship can be evaluated.

Geographically and, as I would argue, also chronologically most proximate to the Sarajevo Fratricide is the depiction of Cain killing Abel on a cloister capital in the collegiate church of Santa María in Alquézar, located about 35 kilometers east of the city of Huesca and not far from the border of Cataluña, where the Sarajevo Haggadah itself is thought to have originated (Fig. 3).[11] The capital is one of only six from the twelfth century to remain in the church's small, irregular cloister following an extensive reconstruction after 1313.[12] The often idiosyncratic iconography and shallow, unsophisticated facture of these capitals has inspired some dispute over their date, which has been placed as early as the first two decades of the twelfth

Borg, *Architectural Sculpture in Provence* (Oxford, 1972), 9–11, and Thomas N. Bisson, *The Medieval Crown of Aragon: A Short History* (New York, 1986), 26–27 and 34.

[10] As discussed in Pamela A. Patton, *Pictorial Narrative in the Romanesque Cloister* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

[11] Kogman-Appel, "Exoduszylus," 111; Roth, 8–9; Bezalel Narkiss, *Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts* (Jerusalem, 1969), 21–22 and 60. Historical sources on Alquézar and its cloister include Ricardo del Arco, "De la Edad Media en el Alto Aragón: documentos de Alquézar," *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón* 2 (1946): 433–443; Antonio Ubieto Arteta, "La construcción de la colegiata de Alquézar (notas documentales)," *Pirineos* 5 (1949): 253–263; Antonio Durán Gudiol, *Historia de Alquézar* (Madrid, 1984); and Damiano Peñart y Peñart, *Historia de la Diocésis de Huesca* (Huesca, 1993), 151. The sculpture and architecture of the cloister are examined by Jacques Lacoste, "La sculpture romane du cloître d'Alquézar (Huesca)," in *XII Semana de Estudios Medievales 1974* (Pamplona, 1976), 219–237, and Angel San Vicente and Angel Canellas López, *Aragón*, series "La España Románica," no. 4 (Madrid, 1979), 283–288. Its iconography recently has been studied by Harriet Sonne de Torrens, "Divine Wisdom and Trinitarian Theology: The Cloister Program of Salvation-History in the 11th Century Monastery of Alquézar," in *El tímpano medieval: Imágenes, estructuras y audiencias*, ed. Rocío Sánchez (Santiago de Compostela, forthcoming).

[12] Durán, 260, Lacoste, 221.

century, to coincide with the consecration of the original church, and as late as 1220–1230, the chronology suggested by Jacques Lacoste. Lacoste's arguments regarding the construction dates of adjacent conventual buildings and his stylistic comparison of the Alquézar group with other local late Romanesque sculpture, such as that of the San Juan de la Peña circle, do seem to support a later date for the cloister, although probably not one advanced far into the thirteenth century.[13] For the purposes of the present discussion, to which strict chronological refinement is in any case not central, I will treat the cloister's Romanesque capitals as having been produced toward the end of the twelfth century.

The Fratricide at Alquézar appears within a series of four Genesis scenes depicted on a double capital. The series opens with scenes of the Temptation of Adam and Eve and of the two brothers at labor, Cain at the plow and Abel tending sheep. The Offerings of Cain and Abel do not appear in a distinct episode, but their outcome is suggested by a monk-like figure of God, who stands beside the shepherd Abel and makes a blessing gesture.[14] Cain's murder of his brother then closes this cycle.

In both composition and detail, this murder scene differs distinctly from other, contemporaneous depictions of the event, even those of the artistic circles to which Alquézar has been related stylistically. The far more conventional Fratricide from San Juan de la Peña offers a representative example: here, Cain dispatches his kneeling brother by hitting him over the head with a hoe (Fig. 4).[15] At Alquézar, by contrast, the Fratricide takes the striking form of an active hand-to-hand struggle, in which the brothers stand and face each other: Cain grasps his brother by the hair with his left hand

[13] Lacoste, 222–226 and 232–237. I have argued elsewhere that Lacoste's dating of the San Juan de la Peña group to the early 13th century is unnecessarily advanced; thus it does not support an extremely late dating for the distantly related Alquézar cloister. See Pamela A. Patton, "The Capitals of San Juan de la Peña: Narrative Sequence and Monastic Spirituality in the Romanesque Cloister," *Studies in Iconography* 20 (1999): 51–100, esp. 51 and 92 n. 3; also *idem*, *Pictorial Narrative*, 33–34.

[14] Lacoste, 229–230, describes the plowing figure as Adam rather than Cain but does identify the tonsured figure as God in the guise of a monk.

[15] Although the interpretation of this scene as a Fratricide has been questioned because of its juxtaposition to a scene of the Magi before Herod, I have argued that its composition and details are entirely in keeping with other local depictions of Abel's Murder: Patton, "Capitals," 63–66.

as his right plunges a short blade into his victim's throat; Abel responds by ineffectually grasping at his brother's thrusting arm with both his own.[16]

The Alquézar Fratricide differs from that in the Sarajevo Haggadah in depicting Abel standing and attempting to defend himself from his brother's attack, rather than on hands and knees with his head pulled back by the hair, a position more consistent with the midrashic description of Cain's imitation of animal sacrifice. Apart from this, however, the Alquézar version shares the essential elements of the Sarajevo scene, in that Cain grasps Abel's hair with his left hand and cuts Abel's throat with his right, as well as in his use of a blade at all. This fundamental cluster of characteristics represents the defining formula for the Fratricide with a blade as it appears, with little variation, in all representations of this iconographic variant that survive today.

A very close parallel to the Alquézar Fratricide appears in another northern Spanish work produced toward the end of the twelfth century, the Burgos Bible (Burgos, Bib. Pública, MS 846, fol. 12v). Illuminated circa 1175 in the vicinity of Burgos, the manuscript has been compared on stylistic grounds to works made in the late twelfth-century scriptoria of Las Huelgas and San Pedro de Cardeña.[17] The Murder of Abel here appears within a full-page illumination prefacing the Book of Genesis, which contains two registers of Biblical scenes representing, although with a greater number of episodes, essentially the same section of the Genesis story as that depicted on the Alquézar capital (Fig. 5).

Like the Alquézar imagery, the Burgos narrative opens with the Temptation of Adam and Eve, who are shown first reprimanded and then clothed by God in the upper register. In the lower register, a more confusing jumble of figures represents the remaining Genesis scenes. At upper left, the two parents display implements of their Labor, Eve with a child and a spindle, Adam with a mattock;

[16] Cain's weapon at Alquézar is mentioned only by San Vicente and Canellas López, 286–287, who misidentify it as a sickle.

[17] Walter Cahn, *Romanesque Bible Illumination* (Ithaca, NY, 1982): 170–180 and 289–290; Joaquín Yarza Luaces, "La miniatura en Galicia, León, y Castilla en tiempos de Maestro Mateo," in *Actas del Simposio Internacional sobre "O Portico de la Gloria e a Arte do seu Tempo" (Santiago de Compostela, 3–8 October 1988)* (La Coruña, 1992), 320–322; John Williams, "Bible," in *The Art of Medieval Spain, 500–1200* (New York, 1993), 299–300.

at lower right, Cain and Abel make their offerings below a figure of God enthroned. The Murder of Abel takes place in the lower central portion of the register, while above, Abel lies wounded near a flock of sheep, and to the right, a penitent Cain confronts the same enthroned deity to whom the two brothers have made their offerings. At lower left, an additional figure of Cain stands beside a cluster of oxen. These, along with the flock of sheep that accompanies the injured Abel, may allude to the two brothers' respective occupations as farmer and shepherd, paralleling the more fully developed scenes of the brothers' labors on the Alquézar capital.

Compositionally and in detail, the Burgos Fratricide so closely resembles the Alquézar scene as to suggest a shared iconographic source. Here too, the brothers confront each other in violent combat: Abel wraps his hands around his brother's throat as Cain grasps the nape of Abel's neck and plunges a knife into his ribs, a shift of location that represents the most significant difference between the two scenes. Their similarity is further underscored by the comparable configuration of the narrative sequences within which each example appears: each opens with the Temptation of Adam and Eve and climaxes with the Fratricide. This too suggests the use of a shared iconographic model of some kind, a not unlikely possibility, since artistic interchange between Burgos and Aragón, like that between Aragón and southern France, had become especially intense toward the end of the twelfth century.[18] That the relationship between the two monuments was not necessarily a direct one of model and copy is suggested by such disparities as the shifted location of the knife wound and the energy with which Abel defends himself from his attacker. Nonetheless, the many points of comparison between the two images demonstrate their foundation in a shared tradition.

Two further Romanesque examples of Cain using a blade to kill Abel demonstrate that a similar motif was known and used within southern France as well by the second half of the twelfth century.

[18] This often involved the thriving second workshop at Silos, the diffusion of whose style is illustrated, e.g., by Elizabeth Valdez del Alamo, "Triumphal Visions and Monastic Devotion: The Annunciation Relief of Santo Domingo de Silos," *Gesta* 29/2 (1990): 167–188; esp. 177–179; see also Georges Gaillard, "Sculptures espagnoles de la seconde moitié du douzième siècle," *Romanesque and Gothic Art. Studies in Western Art. Acts of the Twentieth International Congress of the History of Art* (Princeton, NJ, 1963), 1:142–149. Ulrich, 141, incorrectly interprets the scene as Cain's attempt to strangle, rather than stab, Abel, relating it to a reference of this kind also found in *Genesis Rabbah* (22.8).

Both of these works were produced at the easternmost boundary of Languedoc, west of the Rhône, but they are more properly considered Provençal, in that they pertain stylistically to the tradition of classically-infused narrative sculpture that flowered in Provence from the 1140s onward.[19] The first work to be considered is a sculptural fragment on the façade of the cathedral of Notre-Dame in Nîmes, produced probably in the 1180s.[20] It represents one of six twelfth-century Genesis scenes at the north end of a narrow frieze below the pediment of the façade's upper stage, and which today are augmented with other Biblical scenes added in the course of a seventeenth-century restoration. The surviving twelfth-century scenes form a narrative series similar to that presented by the northeastern Spanish works. Beginning with the Temptation of Adam and Eve, the cycle depicts the first parents' attempt to hide from God, their Reprimand, and their Expulsion, followed by scenes of the Offerings of Cain and Abel and Abel's murder. If the series originally extended beyond this point in the Genesis story, no record of this has survived.[21]

Unlike the combative Iberian versions, the murder scene here presents Abel as the hapless victim of a clearly dominant Cain, who leans dynamically forward as his brother falls to the ground, his body bent heavily downward and his arms limp (Fig. 6). Cain grasps Abel's hair with his right hand, raising his left above his brother's head to plunge a knife straight downward into his neck. Although constrained by the narrowness of the frieze format and presenting the brothers' positions in reverse orientation, this composition closely resembles the ritual formula found in the Sarajevo Haggadah, particularly in Abel's subordinate, nearly kneeling posture, with hands brought together supplicatingly, and in the dynamic downward stroke of

[19] As Borg, 7–8, has pointed out, the artistic boundaries of the Provençal school extended some distance beyond the official geographic boundaries of the diocese. Both Nîmes and Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, the works discussed here, very clearly pertain artistically to developments within Provence proper.

[20] Borg, 101–102; (for early literature, see 101 n. 17). The same author has dated the frieze to the 1180s on the basis of stylistic ties to other Provençal works and on an 1186 document referring to presence there of the sculptor Petrus Brunus (108). See also Marcel Gouron, "La Cathédrale romane de Nîmes," *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* (1936–1937): 581–200, and Jacques Lugand *et al., Languedoc Roman. Le Languedoc méditerranéen*, 2d ed. (Vauban, 1985), 38–39.

[21] See Ulrich, 94–95. The frieze is assumed to have been relocated to the façade from some other location in the lost Romanesque church. It is illustrated in its entirety by François Durand, *L'Eglise Sainte-Marie ou Nôtre-Dame de Nîmes, Basilique-Cathédrale (description archéologique)*. (Nîmes, 1906), 17–20, pls. III and IV.

Cain's weapon. It thus offers a more persuasive visual comparison with the haggadah's Fratricide than do the two Iberian examples, which would seem to represent a more distant variant of this particular iconographic tradition.

Closely related to this work in style and basic conception is the more complex and allegorical Fratricide relief on the façade of the pilgrimage church of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. The dating for this work remains in dispute, with estimates ranging from the 1140s to the 1180s (Fig. 7).[22] The Cain and Abel relief is located on west end of the the north base of the church's center west portal, adjacent to two individual scenes of the brothers' offerings. It has suffered badly from exposure to the elements, and the destruction of both figures' faces suggests that it may also have been deliberately mutilated. Formally, however, it remains a dynamic masterpiece. Encouraged by a masklike demon whose head protrudes close by his own, the bearded Cain assaults his brother from behind, his weight planted on his rear foot and his head and arms thrust forward, his left hand pulling Abel's hair sharply backward so that his right can draw a knife across his brother's throat. Apparently caught off-guard, Abel staggers heavily off balance, his left foot dangling in midair as his body collapses backward in a series of stacked zigzags; above, his soul issues upward to be received and crowned by a pair of angels, who provide a counterpoint to Cain's demonic advisor.

At Saint-Gilles, the placement of Cain behind Abel, and especially the contrast between the elder brother's forceful forward movement and his victim's unstable collapse, represents a more deeply energized version of the formula at Nîmes. As there, Cain is presented as a dominant figure with complete control over his victim,

[22] Whitney S. Stoddard, *The Façade of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. Its Influence on French Sculpture* (Middletown, CT, 1973) provides a useful, if now dated, state of the question for chronology and other issues. Stoddard considered the reliefs to be the work of the "Thomas Master," whose activity he placed in the 1140s (148–149). Borg, 125–126, placed the façade somewhat later, citing documents of 1171 and 1186 referring to Petrus Brunus, who also signed two apostle figures on the façade. Disagreement continues also regarding the façade's original appearance and the nature of any subsequent reconstructions, but this discussion does not affect analysis of the Cain and Abel reliefs, which are generally assumed to have remained in place following the earliest phases of construction. Publications on the façade's iconography tend to omit discussion of Cain's weapon: e.g., Marcia L. Colish, "Peter of Bruys, Henry of Lausanne, and the Façade of Saint-Gilles," *Traditio* 28 (1972): 451–460, and Carra Ferguson O'Meara, *The Façade of Saint-Gilles du Gard* (New York, 1977).

a composition which preserves the ritual aspects of the composition. At the same time, however, it is distinguished from other Jewish and Christian exemplars by its inclusion of symbolic elements that impose a layer of specifically Christological allegory onto this fundamentally narrative framework. The demon and the angels, which first accompany each brother in the adjacent Offerings scenes, are characteristically Christian additions that feature in numerous Romanesque representations of the brothers' story.[23] In these, the devil clearly functions to identify Cain as the embodiment of evil that he became to Christian writers and viewers, while the angels receiving Abel's soul reveal the victim's innocence and ultimate salvation and facilitates an understanding of Abel as a sacrificial antetype of Christ, a natural outgrowth of the widespread twelfth-century effort to recast the narratives of the Old Testament as precursory to those of the New.[24]

Although none of these details was necessarily an innovation at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard, their meaning there would have been newly intensified by Cain's distinctive choice of weapon and its ritual implications, which invoke mental comparison with other stories of Biblical sacrifice also considered to prefigure the Crucifixion, most significantly that of Isaac. Incorporating traditional symbols of Abel's innocence and salvation with a composition suggestive of pre-Christian ritual, the relief thus foreshadows Christ's own sacrifice. In this context, Cain's unusual murder weapon reads as easily as an element of Christian exegesis and typology as it does as a midrashic one in the Sarajevo Haggadah.

Especially in context of the other Romanesque examples discussed above, the heavily Christianized representation of Cain killing Abel at Saint-Gilles-du-Gard complicates any interpretation of Cain's blade as directly inspired by Midrash. Although, as we shall see, the ultimate source of Cain's weapon may well have had roots in Jewish exegesis, the armature of Christian typology within which the murder scene has been produced here suggests that the motif had become

[23] See Paul-Henri Michel, "L'iconographie de Cain et Abel," *Cahiers de Civilisation Médiévale* 2 (1958): 194–199. The devil and angel appear, for example, in the Offerings of Cain and Abel in the cloister of Moissac; see Meyer Schapiro, *The Sculpture of Moissac* (New York, 1985), fig. 93.

[24] Michel, 195–196 and 198, cites the typology of Abel with Christ from the writings of St. Paul onward and traces the association of Cain with the devil to Prudentius. See also Ruth Mellinkoff, The *Mark of Cain* (Berkeley, 1983), 93. Augustine, who in *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (*PL* 42, 259) compared Abel with Christ and Cain with the Jews, certainly stands at the head of this tradition.

familiar enough in the Christian visual repertoire that its allegorical potential could be fully exploited from a Christian point of view.

The differences of conception between this elaborated version of the Fratricide and the other French and Iberian examples, which range from the simple narrative composition at Nîmes to the peculiarly combative images of Burgos and Alquézar, suggest the depth of its entrenchment within a Christian visual tradition. While all the works share fundamental iconographic features—particularly Cain's use of a blade, his grasp of Abel's hair, and the location of the wound in or near the neck—the formats in which these elements are presented vary surprisingly. Within such a small sample of images, this iconographic diversity seems less likely to have emerged in the context of a recently imported iconographic formula than within a broadly established local tradition which had had some time to branch out and develop.

This iconographic diversity, moreover, is paralleled by one of context and function. Although the Romanesque exemplars of Cain using a blade do fall within relatively limited geographical, chronological, and cultural boundaries, they differ significantly from each other in the medium, style, and setting in which they appear, as well as in their likely audience. Alquézar's tiny cloister, with its locally inspired and crudely handled capitals, was restricted to a commensurately rudimentary population of Augustinian canons that was dedicated to establishing Christian society in a newly held frontier;[25] by contrast, the Burgos Bible, most likely produced for an equally closed but longer-established Benedictine community, incorporates English and French stylistic elements that suggest access to a far more cosmopolitan visual repertoire.[26] Meanwhile, in the two Provençal churches—one a cathedral, the other a renowned pilgrimage site—the Fratricide emerged as components of extensive ensembles of narrative sculpture facing into public urban spaces, from which they could be scrutinized by a variety of local and transient viewers. These differences of form, scale, medium, and audience are significant enough to suggest that the motif of Cain killing Abel with a blade must have become fairly widely dispersed in northeastern Spain and southern

[25] Although originally founded as a monastery, by 1125 Alquézar had been reduced to a priory. On the foundation's 12th- and early 13th-century history, see Durán, 49–100.

[26] Williams, 299–300.

France by the second half of the twelfth century—at least, widely enough dispersed to present an accessible and meaningful iconographic option for the various artists and viewers of these works.

Cain's Blade in Byzantium

One further and final depiction of Cain killing Abel with a blade, although also a work of the twelfth century, falls outside the geographic and cultural parameters of the group discussed above. Its inclusion here is important, however, because it points the way to an alternative source for the motif, one which can be found within the textual traditions of Christianity. This example, the only one known to me outside the western Mediterranean sphere, is found in what seems to be the earlier of two richly illustrated and closely related copies, produced in the 1130s, of a collection of sermons on the life of the Virgin, authored by a certain James, "monk of the Kokkinobaphos monastery."[27] The manuscript in which Cain's blade appears is now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris, Bib. Nat. MS gr. 1208). In this work, Abel's murder appears once again within a series of Genesis scenes, this time enframed in one of many square, multiscenic illuminations interspersed throughout the text. The illumination in question appears in the context of Sermon 2, "On the Birth of the Virgin," and depicts the Fratricide as one of a sequence of narrative episodes set into a common landscape (fol. 49v; Fig. 8). The series opens with the central, repeated images of the lamenting Adam and Eve, first dressed in fig leaves and then in animal skins. It continues with scenes of the two brothers' offerings, one at each upper corner of the image, and closes with a series of episodes related to the Murder of Abel.

These three episodes appear at the bottom of the illumination, read from left to right in a series that correlates closely to the Genesis account: "And Cain said to Abel his brother: Let us go forth abroad.

[27] Jeffrey C. Anderson, "The Illustrated Sermons of James the Monk: Their Dates, Order, and Place in the History of Byzantine Art," *Viator* (1991): 69–120. The illuminations are published in H. Omont, "Miniatures des homélies sur la vierge du moine Jacques (Ms. grec. 1208 de Paris)," *Bulletin de la Société Française de Reproductions de Manuscrits a Peintures* 11 (1927): 5–24. See also Irmgard Hütter, "Die Homilien des Mönches Jakobus und ihre Illustrationen: Vat. Gr. 1162–Par. Gr. 1208" (Ph.D. Diss., Univ. Vienna, 1970).

And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and slew him" (Genesis 4.8).[28] At left, the brothers appear seated, apparently in conversation; in the center, they walk along together; and finally at right, Cain attacks his brother. This is an especially violent rendering of the murder, showing Cain literally leaping upon Abel from behind, throwing his left leg over his brother's shoulder and pulling his head back so that his throat is exposed to a long, slightly curved knife. The frontal orientation of Abel's body presents his plight to the viewer with singular directness and requires Cain to twist his brother's head savagely to one side, accentuating his helpless position. In the scenes leading up to this expressive climax, Cain's weapon takes on a highly prominent role: Cain whets it ominously on a stone as the brothers talk, and he totes it visibly in his "downstage" hand as they go out together, leaving little doubt of how Abel is fated to meet his demise.

The emphatic repetition of Cain's blade in these episodes implies a particular concern with the relevance of this weapon not just to the narrative, but to the written sermon that it was designed to illustrate. Jeffery Anderson has suggested that the motif was directly inspired by this text, citing a passage immediately preceding the illumination, in which Adam laments Abel's death by asking Eve, "How could you fail to recognize the sharpened knife [*xiphos*] drawn against us?" Anderson interpreted this adaptation as the illuminator's innovative attempt to pictorialize the content of James's text, presenting the murder weapon as one of several iconographic inventions that signal the Paris manuscript's priority over a second, less original twelfth-century copy of the sermons, now in the Vatican Library (Vat. MS gr. 1162).[29]

The interpretation of Cain's blade as directly inspired by James' text offers an alternative to the more conventional interpretation by Irmgard Hütter, who in her 1970 dissertation on the Kokkinobaphos manuscripts had attributed Cain's use of a blade to the same Genesis midrash cited by Kogman-Appel in connection with the Sarajevo Haggadah.[30] Forced to choose between these explanations, we might find it plausible that the artist would have been inspired by a desire

[28] All Genesis citations taken from the Douay-Rheims translation.

[29] Anderson, 79–81, translates the word *xiphos* as "knife" here, perhaps in recognition of the fluidity of the term in late Byzantine usage. For Vat. gr. 1162, see Anderson, fig. 4.

[30] Ulrich, 94–95, citing Hütter, 1:277–306.

to illustrate a text at hand, rather than by the awareness of a motif rooted in an alien religious tradition. This possibility is strengthened, moreover, by the fact that the idea of Cain killing Abel with a blade is not limited to early Jewish exegesis: by the late fourth century C.E., it had emerged in at least one early Christian text as well.

Cain's Blade in Christian Exegesis

The idea that Cain killed his brother with a blade, as has been shown, certainly existed in Jewish tradition by the end of the fourth or early fifth century C.E., when it was codified in *Genesis Rabbah*.[31] It also seems to have survived in some form in Jewish exegesis of the later Middle Ages: the thirteenth-century Ashkenazic commentary *Yalkut Shim'oni* echoes the Genesis midrash in attributing Cain's use of a blade to his desire to imitate a sacrifice, in this case Abel's offering of a lamb.[32] Whether this specific medieval text would have been well enough disseminated at the time to have inspired the creators of the Sarajevo Haggadah remains uncertain, though it is fairly safe to guess that it would not have been known to their Christian counterparts.[33]

For these Christian artists and their patrons, an alternative and probably more accessible source for the idea that Cain used a blade was presented in the writings of John Chrysostom. Chrysostom's nineteenth *Homily on Genesis*, written in 385 or 386 C.E.—at about the same time, if not slightly earlier than *Genesis Rabbah* is thought to have been codified—conjures a description of Abel's murder that resonates closely with the Genesis midrash. Here, in imagining Cain's misdeed, Chrysostom queries, "How could his hand grasp the sword [*xiphos*] and deal the blow?"[34] Chrysostom here uses the same word,

[31] Neusner, ix–x.

[32] I am indebted to Katrin Kogman-Appel for calling my attention to this source and to Serge Frolov for his assistance with the Hebrew. *Yalkut Shim'oni le-rabenu Shim'on ha-darshan, osef midrashe HaZaL la-Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim, 'al-pi ketav yad Oksford, 'im shinuye nusha'ot mi-kitve yad u-defusim rishonim*, ed. Yitshak N. Lerer (Jerusalem, 1970), 1:127.

[33] Some evidence that the *Yalkut Shim'oni* was circulated in Spain is cited by Katrin Kogman-Appel, "Hebrew Manuscript Painting in Late Medieval Spain," *The Art Bulletin* 84 no. 2 (June 2002): 262 and 271 n. 108.

[34] Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis. 2.18–45*, trans. Robert C. Hill

xiphos, as does James, although the customary modern translation of the earlier writer's usage as meaning "sword" obscures this parallel. More important is the fact that both writers envisioned the murder as having been effected with a blade, marking both the emergence and the survival of this essential idea in the Christian exegetical tradition from the late fourth century onward.

Whether this idea actually originated with Chrysostom is not known. Many of the interpretations compiled in *Genesis Rabbah* had existed in oral form for centuries before he wrote, and such oral versions provided rich source material for many early Christian writers. Chrysostom himself did not know Hebrew, but his own native city of Antioch boasted a thriving Jewish population which mingled so freely with the Christian one as to motivate the author's now-famous diatribes against judaizing behavior.[35] In this setting it would seem quite possible that his vision of Cain's "sword" arose from an awareness of some oral, vernacular form of the Genesis midrash, rather than through his own invention, although the fluidity with which ideas traveled in both directions between Christian and Jewish exegetes in this period leaves this difficult to prove. More important than his source, however, is the fact that Chrysostom mentioned a blade at all, introducing this idea into a powerful textual medium that would exert a lasting influence over much of the medieval Christian world.

A key recipient of this influence was James of Kokkinobaphos himself, whose own work drew heavily on that of Chrysostom; his debt to the golden-tongued preacher is made manifest in the opening illumination of his own book of sermons, in which the diminutive author is shown attending the towering, enthroned figures of both Chrysostom and Gregory of Nyssa (fol. 1v).[36] Although James's own sermon on Genesis treats Cain's blade metaphorically, as a verbal index of the crime rather than as its literal instrument, his inspiration for this detail surely may be attributed to Chrysostom, whom he follows even in the use of the term *xiphos* for the murder weapon.[37] Both in the

(Washington, DC, 1986), 24. On the dating of this sermon, see *idem*, *Saint John Chrysostom, Homilies on Genesis. 1.1–17* (Washington, DC, 1986), 6.

[35] Robert Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews* (Berkeley, 1983), 83; see also Wayne A. Meeks and Robert Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula, MT, 1978).

[36] Anderson, fig. 1.

[37] *PG* 127, 580.

language of its text and in the details of its illustration, then, James' homily seems to spring from the lively interpretive tradition that had been set in motion some eight centuries earlier by his exegetical role model.[38]

If the reference to a blade in the Kokkinobaphos manuscript is more likely to have been inspired by James's awareness of Chrysostom's homily than by his knowledge of the Genesis midrash, then it is not a great leap to attribute the Iberian and Provençal examples of the motif to the same line of Christian tradition, one that could easily have filtered into the western Mediterranean via Byzantine artistic models. The powerful impact of Byzantine visual culture upon that of western Europe during the high Middle Ages has been widely recognized, and its impact upon the mediterranean regions of Spain and southern France was particularly powerful.[39] The case for such pictorial transmission of Cain killing Abel with a blade is well supported by the similarities of selection and configuration among the pictorial narrative sequences within which the western examples of the motif tends to appear: in all examples except for Saint-Gilles, it closes a sequence of Genesis episodes that begins with the Temptation of Adam and Eve and sometimes also includes representations of the brothers at labor. This typical sequence is very similar in turn to that of the Kokkinobaphos miniature, and it is not difficult to envision the motif of Cain and his blade carried westward packed within a narrative excerpt of just this kind. At the same time, the formulaic variety among surviving examples of the motif make it clear that in

[38] Other extremely sporadic mentions of Cain's use of a blade in both East and West suggest that the idea survived in some textual form throughout the Middle Ages, although they are too inconsistent to offer much of a pattern. For example, a problematic early modern painter's manual specifies that Cain be depicted using a knife to kill his brother. See Dionysios of Fourna, *Manuel d'iconographie chrètienne. grècque et latine*, intro. M. Didron and trans. Paul Durand (New York, 1963), 83. Cain is also described as *ecg-bana*, or "sword-slayer," of his brother in the Old English epic *Beowulf* (2.1261–1262).

[39] See the classic studies on this subject by Ernst Kitzinger, "The Byzantine Contribution to Western Art of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 20 (1966): 27–47, and Otto Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West* (New York, 1970). Byzantine traditions are evident in northeastern Spain as early as the mid-11th century in the Gospels cycle of the Ripoll Bible (Bib. Vat., MS lat. 5729), and their impact is still traceable at the end of the twelfth century in the frescoes of Sigena in Aragon. See Wilhelm Neuss, *Die katalanische Bibelillustration um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends und die altspanische Buchmalerei* (Bonn, 1922), 128–130, and Karl F. Schuler, "The Pictorial Program of the Chapter House of Sigena" (Ph.D. Diss., New York University, 1994).

this case, as in so many, the transmission of such iconographic conventions may have been neither systematic nor particularly comprehensive.

Both the exegetical and the artistic traditions of the Byzantine world thus provide a plausible and accessible Christian precedent for the Romanesque monuments in which Cain is depicted killing Abel with a blade. Given this, any influence of Midrash on these particular works must be counted as minimal, represented at most by its indirect inspiration of the Byzantine tradition that was set into motion by John Chrysostom in the late fourth century C.E.

Conclusions

This study opened with the suggestion that tracing the emergence of Cain's blade as a motif in both Christian and Jewish works of art in Iberia might reveal something new about the mutual impact of Christian and Jewish artistic traditions there. The specific questions surrounding the motif have now been partially resolved. As has been shown, the depiction of Cain killing Abel with a blade appears both earlier and more frequently in surviving Christian images than it does in surviving Jewish ones, of which the Sarajevo Fratricide remains the only known case. The Christian works have been interpreted here as diverse reflections of a Christian textual and visual tradition that appeared in writing as early as the sermons of John Chrysostom and in imagery no later than the early twelfth century in the Paris manuscript of the homilies of James of Kokkinobaphos. The idea that Cain killed Abel with a blade thus had more than adequate roots in Christian tradition by the time it appeared in the Iberian and Provençal monuments examined here, and this tradition seems to represent their most immediate source. Although Chrysostom's *xiphos* may well have originated in rabbinic tradition, neither the artists nor the viewers of the medieval Christian monuments are likely to have recognized this.

Whether any direct connection can be drawn between these Christian images of Cain with a blade and the Fratricide of the Sarajevo Haggadah remains a complicated question. Although no known Jewish parallel exists for the motif, the invention of specialized iconography based directly on rabbinic and other Jewish textual sources certainly has been well documented in the Sephardic haggadot, and this supports the possibility that the Jewish artist could have developed his

version of the motif spontaneously, without any awareness of the Christian convention.[40] On the other hand, we now know also that Christian examples of the scene already had been produced and would survive within the same geographical arena where the Sarajevo Haggadah was to be created. That at least two of the examples still known today were found in extremely visible public contexts, on the facades of a cathedral and a pilgrimage church, attests to the continuing accessibility of such imagery to Christian and non-Christian viewer alike. The Nîmes sculpture in particular, in which a dominant Cain brings his sword down vertically on the neck of his passive, nearly kneeling brother in a composition closely comparable to that in the Sarajevo Haggadah, exemplifies the kind of image that easily might have been adapted by that manuscript's designer. Since this designer already is well known to have relied on Christian pictorial traditions for other aspects of the haggadah's pictorial cycle, the possibility that a Christian model was used for the Fratricide scene too must be seriously considered.[41]

The possible use of a Christian prototype, however, would not alter the scene's essential compatibility with the Genesis midrash, which was both recognized and exploited by the Jewish illuminator. As configured in the haggadah, the murder of Abel is highly consistent with the implications of this text. Cain's dominant posture and rather businesslike expression, Abel's passive collapse, and the close juxtaposition of the scene to the altar at which the brothers make their offerings all play heavily upon the ritual overtones of the episode as explicated in the rabbinic text, and they do so much more strongly than in the Christian examples, where such overtones are often complicated by expressive or allegorical concerns. Thus, even if the most immediate inspiration for the murder scene in the haggadah could be traced to Christian imagery, the artist here seems

[40] Such inventions are treated in several articles by Kogman-Appel, cited throughout the notes above; other recent contributions concerning the Sephardic haggadot include Michael Batterman, "Bread of Affliction, Emblem of Power: the Passover Matzah in Haggadah Manuscripts from Medieval Spain," in *Imagining the Self, Imagining the Other: Visual Representation and Jewish-Christian Dynamics in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period*, ed. Eva Frojmovic (Leiden, 2002), 53–89; and Julie A. Harris, "Polemical Images in the Golden Haggadah (British Library, Add. MS 27210)," *Medieval Encounters* 8 no. 23 (2002): 105–122, as well as the essay by Harris in this volume.

[41] In addition to Kogman-Appel's arguments regarding such Christian sources, see Herbert R. Broderick, "Observations on the Creation Cycle of the Sarajevo Haggadah," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 47 (1984): 320–332.

to have recognized its potential to evoke a specifically Jewish text, and to have utilized this in turn to craft a specifically Jewish retelling of the Genesis story.

With regard to the relationship between Jewish and Christian artistic traditions, the obscure beginnings and indirect trajectory of Cain's blade in Iberia, France, and Byzantium offers less in the way of firm conclusions than might be desired. Rather than referring unequivocally to a single source text or displaying a firm line of ancestry traceable to one faith tradition or the other, it demonstrates instead a disconcerting adaptability. In the Sarajevo Haggadah, its consistency with Midrash convincingly evokes Jewish identity whether or not its most immediate model derived from Christian tradition; at the same time, the motif serves with equal effectiveness within a Christian setting, whether in a primarily narrative work like the Burgos Bible or a more allegorical one like the façade of Saint-Gilles-du-Gard. In fufilling these multifarious roles, the motif of Cain killing Abel with a blade demonstrates above all a pliability characteristic of much medieval imagery, which, regardless of its religious or cultural origins, seems to have retained the ability to accrete and shed layers of nuance as it moved through time and space and between cultural frames.

Precisely because of this pliability, few of the conclusions that drawn here regarding the "midrashic" motif of Cain's blade can be applied consistently in other cases where the respective influence of Jewish and Christian traditions is at issue. As Kogman-Appel has argued, the conditions under which individual rabbinic motifs emerged and were adopted, adapted, or rejected by Christian artists varied significantly enough to discourage generalization; each "has its own historical, political, and cultural *Sitz im Leben*."[42] The iconographic relationships presented here are better viewed, then, as reconstructing only one of many potential models by which such cross-cultural transmission can be understood by modern historians. Revealing themselves to be both more flexible and less easy to categorize than we might wish, such relationships demand the adoption of an equally flexible mindset on the part of those engaged in the hunt for their origins and meaning.

[42] Kogman-Appel, "Bible Illustration," 62.

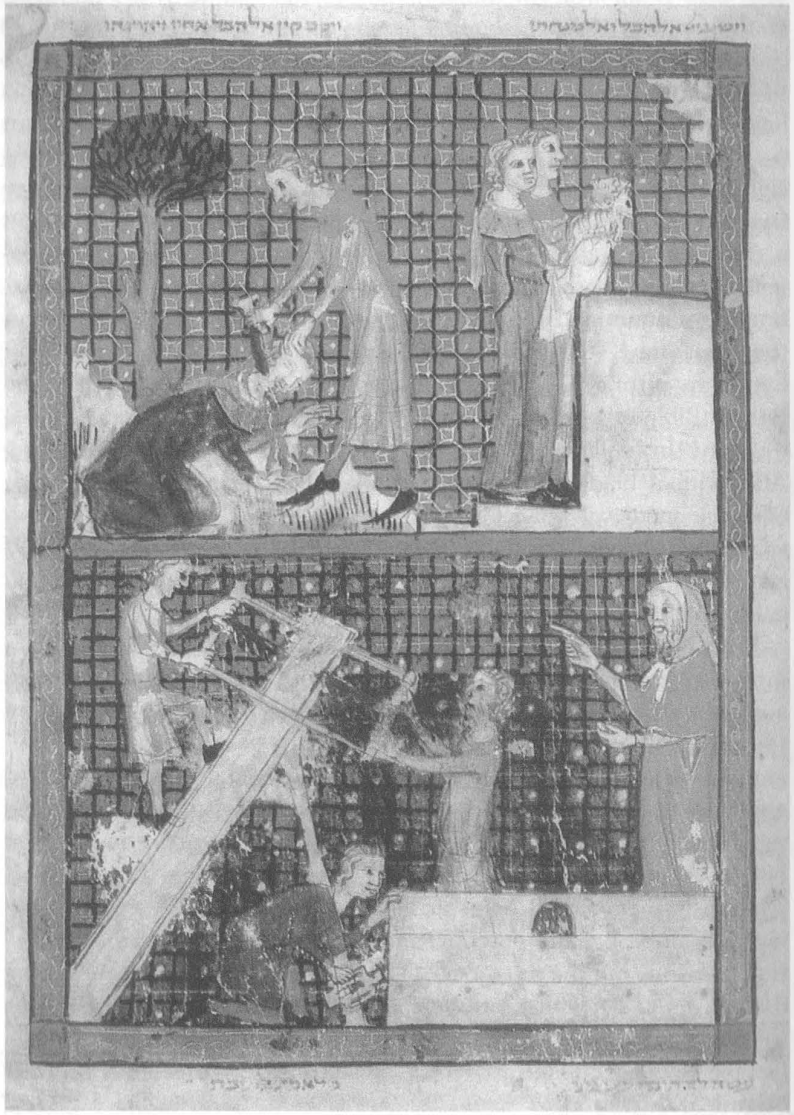

Fig. 1. Cain killing Abel, *Sarajevo Haggadah*, fol. 4r (photo: Sarajevo, National Museum, by permission).

Fig. 2. Preparations for Passover, *Rylands Haggadah*. Manchester, John Rylands University Library, Hebrew MS 6, fol. 19v (photo: reproduced by courtesy of the Director and Librarian, the John Rylands Library of Manchester).

Fig. 3. Alquézar, cloister capital with Genesis scenes, detail of Cain killing Abel (photo: author).

Fig. 4. San Juan de la Peña, cloister capital, detail of Cain killing Abel (photo: author).

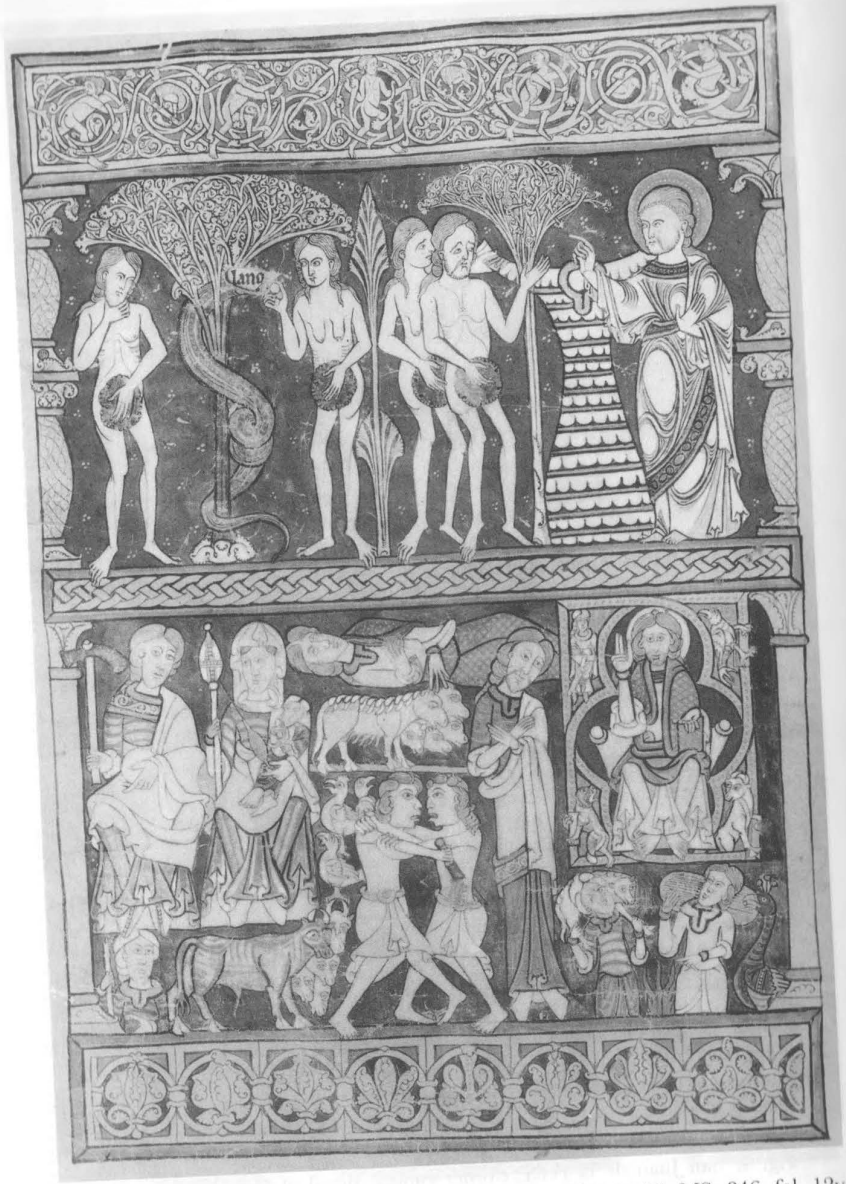

Fig. 5. Genesis scenes, *Burgos Bible*. Burgos, Biblioteca Provincial, MS. 846, fol. 12v (photo: Institut Amatller d'Art Hispanic, Arxiú Mas).

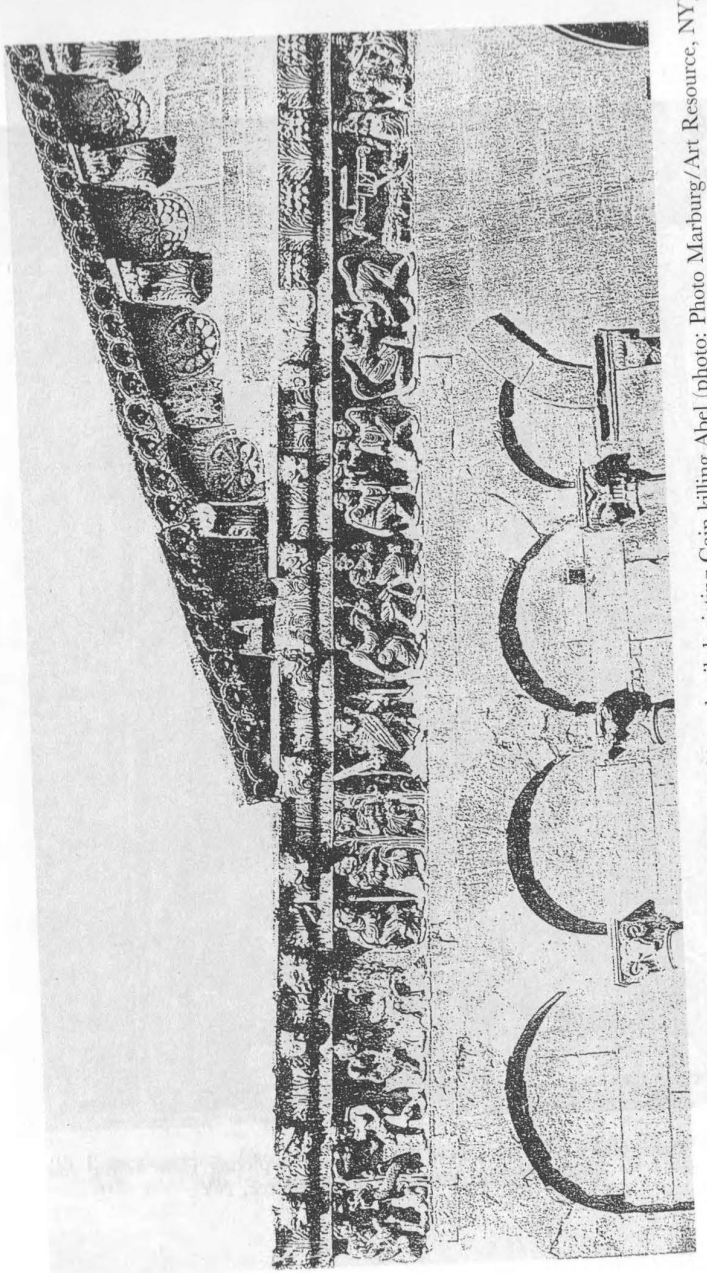

Fig. 6. Cathedral of Notre-Dame, Nîmes, west façade, frieze detail depicting Cain killing Abel (photo: Photo Marburg/Art Resource, NY).

Fig. 7. Saint-Gilles du Gard, west façade, relief depicting Cain killing Abel (photo: Photo Marburg/Art Resource, NY).

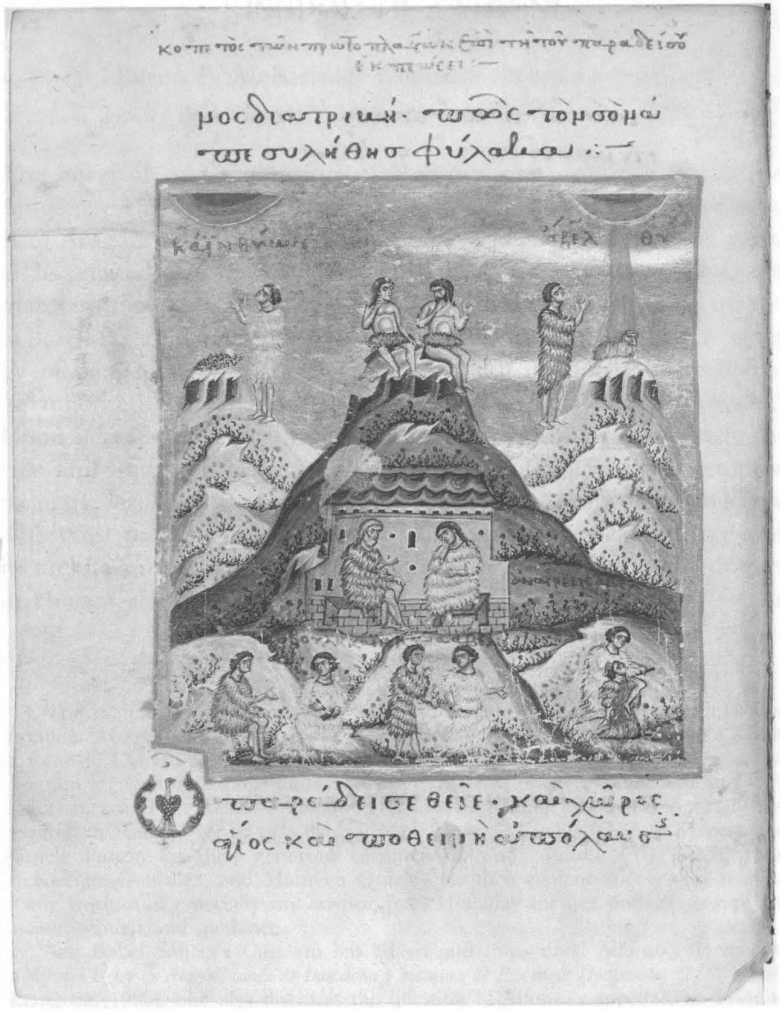

Fig. 8. Genesis scenes, *Homilies of James Kokkinobaphos*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. gr. 1208, fol. 49v (photo: Bibliothèque Nationale de France).

THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN IBERIAN WORLD

VOLUME 26

CHURCH, STATE, VELLUM, AND STONE

Essays on Medieval Spain in Honor of John Williams

EDITED BY

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BRILL
LEIDEN · BOSTON
2005