

# The Figure of Muḥammad in the *Disputa* by Pseudo Pere Pasqual

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## Abstract

The *Disputa del bisbe de Jaen contra los jueus*—a work attributed to Pere Pasqual, a thirteenth-century Mercedarian from Valencia—contains two chapters that vilify Muḥammad and disparage various Muslim beliefs. In these chapters, we find clichés borrowed from anti-Islamic polemics written by previous authors, although there was probably also some direct influence from an Arabic source. The question of whether the Mercedarian Pere Pasqual, who was canonized in 1670, authored the work remains an open one. Answering this question requires a comprehensive analysis of textual features that allow us to date the text. Moreover, the use of Islam in an anti-Jewish treatise is a polemical strategy typical of medieval religious polemics.

Saint Peter Pascual (Pere Pasqual in Catalan) is a figure who is popular still today in the region of Valencia, especially in its capital city. His great renown is reflected in the many schools that are named for him and the numerous images of him that can be found on ceramic tiles on the walls lining the streets of Valencia. In the iconography, he is always shown writing, since this is the principal activity he is associated with: he is a saint whose fame rests on the works he composed.

Pere Pasqual (we will use the Catalan form of his name, since we will be dealing with a Catalan text attributed to him) is traditionally and popularly understood to have been a thirteenth-century Mercedarian from Valencia who was given the name Pere in honor of the founder of the Mercedarian order: Pere Nolasc. It should be recalled that, from its beginnings, the Mercedarian order was closely linked to the Crown of Aragon, as is clear from Pere Nolasc's biography and the crest of the order. It is also important to recall that the order's main mission was the redemption of captives. This is an essential fact for understanding how the figure of Pere Pasqual developed, since—according to the traditional version of events—he became bishop of Jaen and was taken prisoner by the Muslims in Granada, where he wrote apologetic works in defense of the Christian prisoners' faith. The works that have been attributed to him are the source of his later fame.

1. This study was undertaken as part of FFI2015-63659-C2-1-P, MINECO-FEDER, EU, and 2017 SGR 1787 at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, whose principal investigator is Cándida Ferrero Hernández.

The corpus of texts attributed to Pere Pasqual is quite broad: four works in Castilian (*Sobre la seta mahometana*, *Glosa del Pater Noster*, *Tratado contra los que dizen que ay fadas y ventura* and *Los diez mandamientos con su glosa*) and five in Catalan (*Disputa del bisbe de Jaen*, *Històries i contemplacions*, *Llibre de Gamaliel*, *La destrucció de Jerusalem* and *Llibre del bisbe de Jaen*).<sup>2</sup> This last work is also known by the Latin title *Biblia parua*, even though the work was written in Catalan, because of a translation into Castilian entitled *Biblia pequeña* that is not extant. In 1906, Pedro Armengol Valenzuela published these works along with a Latin translation, though he combined into a single work the *Disputa del bisbe de Jaen* and the *Llibre del bisbe de Jaen*, which are very similar, as we will see below. In 1986, Jaume Riera published an important article in which he questioned whether the bishop of Jaen who was taken prisoner in Granada and the Valencian Mercedarian were the same individual. He argued that this conflation of identities was the result of an appropriation by the Mercedarian order of the writings of a bishop of Jaen in order to strengthen Pere Pasqual's candidacy for canonization.<sup>3</sup> In keeping with Riera's work, it makes sense to refer to the author of these works as Pseudo Pere Pasqual. In 2011, Fernando González Muñoz published the Castilian work, *Sobre la secta mahometana*, whose introduction includes a thorough study of the extant writings and their authorship.<sup>4</sup> It is also important to point out that the works attributed to Pere Pasqual have received special attention for political reasons connected to a reluctance to consider the autochthonous language of Valencia a variant of Catalan. If Pere Pasqual wrote these texts in the thirteenth century, this would mean that a Mozarabic Romance dialect existed in Valencia prior to the conquest of James I of Aragon in 1238. This explains the publication of studies on Pere Pasqual that focus specifically on linguistic aspects.<sup>5</sup>

The *Llibre del bisbe de Jaen* (or *Biblia parua*) and the *Disputa del bisbe de Jaen* are very much alike. The beginning of both texts is virtually identical, and there are many chapters with very similar contents. The titles of the chapters may serve as an example. In the *Disputa* we have: *si les colpes de Adam egualment foren paga-*

2. I include here the works that appeared in the edition prepared by Valenzuela, Pedro Armengol (1905-1908), *Obras de S. Pedro Pascual, mártir, obispo de Jaén y religioso de la Merced, en su lengua original, con la traducción latina y algunas anotaciones* (4 vols.), Rome, Imprenta Salustiana. For a description of the works, the manuscripts that they preserve, and the study of the same, see the essential introduction by González Muñoz, Fernando (2011), *Pseudo Pedro Pascual: Sobre la se[c]ta mahometana*, Valencia, Publicacions de la Universitat de València.
3. See Riera i Sans, Jaume (1969), «La invenció literària de Sant Pere Pasqual», in *Caplletra* 1, pp. 45-60. A more recent study on the same question is Pérez-Embid, Javier (2005), «De la frontera espiritual a la frontera militar: el caso del obispo de Jaén Pedro Pascual (+ 1300)», in *Iglesias y Fronteras: V Jornadas de Historia en la Abadía de Alcalá la Real. Homenaje a Don José Rodríguez Molina*, pp. 597-612.
4. González Muñoz (2011), *Sobre la se[c]ta*. A further addition to the existing scholarship on the works of Pseudo Pere Pasqual will be the new edition of the *Disputa del bisbe de Jaen* that I am preparing, which will be accompanied by an English translation made in collaboration with Dr. Ryan Szpiech.
5. An example would be the study by Costa Català, Joan (1996), «Introducció a la Bíblia Parva de Sant Pere Pasqual» in *Revista de Filologia Valenciana* 3, pp. 39-72.

*des, com lo cors de Yhesu Christ fo més en lo sepulcre and quin captaniment féu la ànima de Adam quant vehé la santa ànima de Ihesu Christ en los inferns.* These chapters clearly coincide with the following, from the *Llibre: si les colpes de Adam equalment foren pagades, per què lo cors de Ihesu Christ fon més en lo sepulcre and quin captiviment féu Lucifer e los altres dimonis qui tenien la ànima de Adam e dels altres sancts pares en lur poder quant la ànima de Ihesu Christ fon vista en los inferns.* It is easy to find other coinciding chapter titles if we compare the indexes of the two works. The similarities between the *Disputa* and the *Llibre* make it logical to surmise that one of the texts is probably an adaptation of the other. For this reason, Valenzuela only published the *Disputa* in the complete works of Pere Pasqual, since he thought that the *Llibre* was a new version of the same text. Riera, however, is of the opposite opinion, believing that it is the *Disputa* that comes from the *Llibre*.

Despite the similarities, the two texts have clear differences. The *Disputa*, as its title suggests, consists of a debate between a Christian and two Jews, while the *Llibre* reminds one of a catechism, in that it presents questions, followed by answers. Another important difference between the two texts is their unequal success: while the *Disputa* survives in only two manuscripts (the second being a direct modern copy of the first), the *Llibre* is preserved in more than twenty manuscripts; moreover, the *Biblia parua* was printed in 1676 and was translated into a number of languages, including Castilian, Occitan, and Italian.<sup>6</sup>

In the text of the *Disputa*, there are two chapters devoted to Muḥammad and Islam. These are chapters 48 and 49, found on folios 82v–85r of manuscript 75 at the University Library of Barcelona, which dates from the fifteenth century. This amounts to only a small portion of the text, since the work has a total of 48 chapters. Still, the attention given to Islam in the *Disputa* is greater than what we find in the *Llibre*, which has only a few short references to Muḥammad and Muslims at the Last Judgment.

The two chapters in the *Disputa* dedicated to Muḥammad and Islam are announced in the previous chapter, which recounts the Devil's battles and is entitled *De les VIII batalles fetes per lo Diable*. The eight battles described in this chapter are: Lucifer's rebellion against God in heaven, the Devil's temptation of Eve, the idolatry that preceded the Flood, the attempt by Egyptian magicians to match the signs of Moses, the worship of the golden calf on Mount Sinai, Jeroboam's golden calves at Bethel and Dan, Simon the Sorcerer's actions in Rome, and lastly, the appearance of false gods 600 years after the Passion of Jesus. The chapter ends with this last section, where the next two chapters, dedicated to Muḥammad and Islam, are announced. In this way, the reader is prompted to understand that everything to be described in these two chapters should be seen as the work of the Devil.

6. The *Disputa* is preserved in the following manuscripts: Biblioteca Universitaria de Barcelona, ms. 75, from the fifteenth century, and Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia, 9-27-6-5356, from the seventeenth century. For a description of the manuscripts of the *Llibre* del bisbe de Jaen, see Riera i Sans, Jaume (1969), «La invenció literària» pp. 51-55, and González Muñoz (2011), *Sobre la se[c]ja*, pp. 46-48.

It would be pointless to repeat here all the information about Muḥammad and Islam that appears in these two chapters of the *Disputa*, but I will attempt to recap the most salient points. The author outlines his own view of Islamic doctrine, which he consistently describes as the personal prescriptions of Muḥammad. This is how he explains the license to practice polygamy (“que prenguessen moltes mullers e drudes tantes com se volguessen”), the prohibition against wine (“donà’ls per ley que no baguessen vi”), the celebration of Friday for being the day consecrated to Venus (“colguessen los divendres, e açò per reverència de Venus”), the precept of circumcision to avoid the criticism of the Jews (“ordonà’ls circuncisió per so que los jueus no haguessen rahó de contrestar ab ells”) and the precept of ablution to avoid the criticism of the Christians (“ordonà’ls levament d’ayga per los forats del cap e de les anques... per so que los christians no haguessen rahó de preycar lo sant bapisme”), as well as the description of Paradise (“e seran en aquell Peradís de Déu quatre rius: un de let, altre de mel, altre de noble vin, e altre de noble aygua”).

As for details about the life of Muḥammad, his family origins are recounted (“era alarp del linatge de Ismael, bort, fill de Agar, serventa de Abram”) and the name of his father is given (“son pare, qui fo ydolatre e hac nom Bachalif”), as there is information about the origins of Islam (“materanli al cab qu’el seria gran senyor de Aràbia e que seria appellat entre los alarps ‘Missatge de Déu’”) and the names of its earliest followers:

[...] per so Mafumet insercà deu companyons qui fessen ab ell falsos testimonis, alarps semblants d’ell, entre los quals era lo primer, Xali, en Sayt, en Babil, en Mas-sot, en Maymo, en Homar, Nadis, en Casim, dient Mafumet a ells: “yo n’hauré la honor e vosaltres tots serets grans senyors en Aràbia”.<sup>7</sup>

The text also adds biographical details that are inconsistent with Christian notions about prophets and the Messiah, such as the fact that Muḥammad never performed miracles (“e creen que Mafumet no féu null temps miracle”) and failed to predict and therefore avoid his own injuries in battle (“creuen que Mafumet fon nafrat per la cara e per les dents... e les nafres de les dents e de la cara pres en diverses batalles que ell null temps poch revelar com hu pendria de la batalla, e per aquesta rahó és vist manifest que ell no era profeta”), his carnal relations with women (“creuen que Mafumet hac affer ab diverses fembres, drudes”), and his death and burial, which are described in mundane terms (“creen los moros que Mafumet morí, e que fo soterrat en les muntanyes de Mecha”).<sup>8</sup>

The *Disputa* also calls attention to the legends transmitted by hadith collections, which it calls *Mislim* (“un dels seus libres, qui es appel·lat ‘Mislim’”) and *Lomari* (“en lo libre de Mafumet qui ha nom ‘Lomari’”). According to one of these legends, Muḥammad instructed his followers to lick their hands after eating (“que menjassen

7. *Disputa*, UB 75, f. 83ra

8. *Disputa*, UB 75, f. 84va

abans qu'es torcassen les mans que les se lapassen e axí mateix les scudelles... Mafumet, per darlosne aximpli, les se lepava abans que les se torchàs”) and said that if a fly fell into food, it should be submerged entirely to avoid poisoning (“encare se lig de la moscha que Mafumet los donà doctrina que, si la moscha cau en la nap o en la scudella, que ells que la y empenguen de dins com diga que en la una ala porta verí e en l'altra aporta medicina”). According to a different legend, Muḥammad gave the precept that the bones of meat should be left for the *jinn*:

Mafumet legia l'Alcorà als diables, que molts d'ells tornaven serrahins e, açò fet, qu'els diables demanaren a Mafumet qu'els assignàs vianda que menjassen, e que Mafumet respòs “menjats tots los ossos que trobaret”, e per so los serrahins no roseguan los ossos ne ls venen ab la carn.<sup>9</sup>

In addition, these legends relate that God gave Muḥammad permission to have his followers rob whatever they needed (“que Déu dix a Mafumet que ell e als seus poguessen amblar e robar segons les lurs pobreses”).<sup>10</sup>

All these legends are used in one way or another to create an uncomplimentary image of Muḥammad, but we should not therefore conclude that they are crude inventions of the author. By tracking down the sources of all these passages, we will be in a better position to understand the nature of the text and the author's method in writing it. Thus, for example, the quotation about the use of the bones of food comes from an authentic hadith found in al-Bukhari (5, 58, 200), which gives the same information about the *jinn*. Moreover, this same passage is found in *De seta Machometi*, by Ramon Martí:

Machometus legit Alcoranum demonibus, quem cum audierunt, facti sunt Sarraceni; quo facto, petierunt ab eo uaticum eorum et quod omne stercus caprarum uel ouium esset annona bestiis eorum; et ideo probauit Sarracenis ut non pergerent interiora sua cum ossibus, quia sunt illa cibus fratrum eorum, scilicet demonum.<sup>11</sup>

We have a similar situation in the reference to Muḥammad ordering his followers to submerge the whole fly in the food so that the antidote in one wing might neutralize the poison in the other. This information also comes from an authentic hadith found in al-Bukhari (7, 71, 673), which Ramon Martí included in his work: (“*Item in libro qui dicitur Bochari, loquens de musca, dixit Sarracenis: ‘Quando ceciderit musca in uas, submergite eam ibi, quia in una ala portat uenenum et in altera medicinam, ponite ante alam in qua est uenenum deinde aliam’*”).<sup>12</sup>

9. *Disputa*, UB 75, f. 84rb.

10. *Disputa*, UB 75, f. 84rb.

11. Ramon Martí's quotations are taken from the edition by Hernando, Josep (1983), «Ramon Martí (s. XIII), *De seta Machometi seu de origine, progressu et fine Machometi et quadruplici reprobatione prophetiae eius*», in *Acta historica et archaeologica mediaevalia*, 4, pp. 963.

12. Hernando (1983), «Ramon Martí (s. XIII), *De seta*», p. 32.

Likewise, the reference to Muḥammad's precept about the need to lick one's hands after eating comes from a hadith found in *Sahih Muslim* (23, 5300), where Muḥammad tells his companions that nothing should be left uneaten because we do not know in which part of the food the blessing resides. Ramon Martí quotes this same hadith:

Dicitur in libro qui uocatur *Muzlim*, in tractatu ciborum, que Machometus mandauit suis quos lamberent digitos et parapsidem. Et dicunt alibi quod Machometus dixit 'Quando comederit aliquis uestrum non tergat manum suam quousque lambat aut suggat eam aut lambat eam sibi aliquis'. Et ipse Machometus lambebat manum suam et antequam ipsam tergere.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, we can confirm that the information in the *Disputa* that relates to the hadith is correct, and it is highly likely that it was taken from Ramon Martí's Latin work. In this sense, neither Martí nor the author of the *Disputa* invented scenes to disparage Muḥammad. Rather, they selected passages from the hadith collections that, in the eyes of Christians, would seem ridiculous.

Other information included in the *Disputa* seems to come from different authors. This is true of a reference to the argument that Muḥammad was not a prophet because he could not foresee the wounds that he would receive ("Mafumet fon nafrat per la cara e per les dents... e les nafres de les dents e de la cara pres en diverses batalles que ell null temps poch revelar com hu pendria de la batalla, e per aquesta rahó és vist manifest que ell no era profeta"). This line of reasoning can be found in virtually the same form in the Latin text *Dialogus contra Iudaeos*, by Pedro Alfonso ("de bellis autem, quae domino precipiente et uictoriam promittente se inisse fatebatur, dentes eius contriti in bello faciesque collisa, multa etiam cedes et fuga suorum ueritatem testantur").<sup>14</sup>

However, the *Disputa* contains some surprising information whose origin is unclear. This is the case with the passage in which the name of Muḥammad's father is given as *Bachalif* ("son pare, qui fo ydolatre e hac nom Bachalif"). Here, the text does not follow Ramon Martí's treatise, which gives the name of Muḥammad's parent as *Abdalla*.<sup>15</sup> Neither does it seem to follow Jiménez de Rada's *Historia Arabum*, a very popular work among Christian polemicists, which mentions the name *Aly*. The name *Bachalif* is surprising, and it might come—though this is only a conjecture—from a corruption of the name of Muḥammad's uncle, *Abutalib*. The list of the names of Muḥammad's earliest companions is also surprising: *Xali, en Sayt, en*

13. Hernando (1983), «Ramon Martí (s. XIII), *De seta*», p. 46.

14. The quotation is taken from Cesare, Michelina (2011), *The Pseudo-Historical Image of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medieval Latin Literature: A Repertory*, Berlin – Boston, DeGruyter, p. 66.

15. Hernando (1983), «Ramon Martí (s. XIII), *De seta*» p. 18. This name, Abdalla, also appears in the Castilian work *Sobre la seta mahometana*, likewise attributed to Pere Pasqual, as the name of Muḥammad's father. See González Muñoz (2011), *Sobre la se[ç]ta*, pp. 86. Thus, the two works attributed to Pere Pasqual provide contradictory information on this point.

*Babil, en Massot, en Maymo, en Homar, Nadis, en Casim.* Most of these names are preceded by the Catalan personal article *en*, so that the name *Nadis* should perhaps be understood as *n'Adis*. Some of the names might be said to correspond to those of the earliest caliphs, such as *Homar* (Umar ibn al-Jattab) and *Maymo* (Mu'awiyya), or else of people closely connected to the Muḥammad during his lifetime, such as the name *Sayt*, which might refer to Muḥammad's adopted son, Zayd ibn Haritha. The rest of the names are truly difficult to identify. Perhaps the form *Xali* should be understood as the name *Ali*; perhaps *Babil* refers to Abu Bakr; *Massot* is possibly Masud; and *Adis*—if the interpretation *n'Adis* is correct—might be Adiga, a possible variant of Khadija. But all these identifications are extremely dubious and should be considered mere conjectures. Accordingly, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that the significant modification of these names is the result of a transcription based on hearing the pronunciation of an Arabic speaker. One argument for this explanation is the fact that the *Disputa* contains a quote that, though it is an altered version, is without a doubt in Arabic. This is a passage in which a phrase is attributed to Muḥammad, and its Catalan translation is given: “dient axí en morisch, ‘cacuyll exerop humistich onofor’, qui vol dir ‘menjarem e beurem e sequdirem fembres e haurem rapós.’” The transcribed part, though distorted, contains words that can be recognized as the verbs “eat” and “drink” in Arabic, so it is possible that these are Andalusian variants taken down by ear from the pronunciation of an Arabic speaker, which would account for their distortion.<sup>16</sup> This is the likely reason for the significant alteration of the proper names that appear in the *Disputa* and the difficulty in identifying them.

Based on the text's description of the features of Islam, a few conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of Pseudo Pere Pasqual's *Disputa*. It seems that the author drew from earlier anti-Islamic sources in Latin, particularly Ramon Martí's *De seta Machometi*. Accordingly, this part of the *Disputa* consists of a repetition of anti-Islamic clichés developed in earlier polemical literature. We should note, however, that there must have been a direct Arabic source for the transcriptions from Arabic and possibly for the alteration of Arabic proper names. It is especially noteworthy that there are some discrepancies of fact between the *Disputa* and the work *Sobre la seta mahometana*, since both works—one in Catalan and the other in Castilian—have traditionally been attributed to the same author. An example would be the name given for the father of Muḥammad: *Bachalif* in the *Disputa* and *Audalla* in *Sobre la seta mahometana*. This should cast doubt on the identification of the author and the attribution of the complete corpus of works in Castilian and Catalan to a single author according to the traditional understanding of Pere Pasqual.

16. I am grateful for the assistance provided by the distinguished Arabist Luis Fernando Bernabé Pons, who was kind enough to look at this passage for me.

The dating of the text has been a source of controversy. Although it is preserved in a fifteenth-century manuscript, as we have said, the claim was made that the text was older in order to be able to attribute it to the thirteenth-century Mercedarian Pere Pasqual.<sup>17</sup> For this reason, it would be ideal if an in-depth study of the features of the Catalan used in the text were undertaken in order to definitively date the text to the thirteenth or the fifteenth century. From my limited experience with Catalan manuscripts from the fourteenth century—all of them of the *Llibre dels Fets*, by James I of Aragon—I can confirm that there are some features that can be found in those manuscripts but not in the *Disputa*. One of them is the frequent use of the verbal periphrasis formed by the infinitive and the verb *haver*, which will evolve into the simple future tense, though here the form even allows pronouns to be inserted between the infinitive and *haver* (*venjarnos hem, mostrarliho hem, darli hem*, etc.). This kind of periphrasis, which is very common in the fourteenth-century manuscripts of the *Llibre dels fets*, does not appear in the *Disputa*, where the future is now expressed using the independent, inflected verb form (*exirà, serà, aportarà*, etc.). I do not feel at all qualified to date the language of the *Disputa*, but I believe that details like this may help to determine whether the Catalan in which the text is written is closer to the fifteenth century or closer to the thirteenth.

Lastly, I do not want to neglect to mention that the *Disputa* has two features that are commonly found in religious polemics. One of them is the discussion of Islam in a treatise that is predominantly anti-Jewish, wherein Islam plays the role of a relative, circumstantial ally of Christianity. Although there are relatively few references to Islam in the work as a whole, given that only two out of 48 chapters deal with this religion, both contain certain facts that validate Christianity vis-a-vis Judaism, especially the description of the figure of Jesus among Muslims, as in the following example:

[Mahoma] dix que Jesucrist isqué de Déu e que no hac pare en aquest món e que nasqué de sancta Maria verge e ella romanent verge en per tots temps, e-n açò dix veritat... que Jesucrist ressucitave morts e endressava los contrets e fahia ulls a aquells qui no-n havian del lot de la terra, e-n açò dix veritat.<sup>18</sup>

The role assigned to Islam as circumstantial ally of Christianity vis-à-vis Judaism in religious disputations has been referred to as the “rhetorical Muslim” and has been studied by Ryan Szpiech.<sup>19</sup> Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that the experience of captivity—whether real or feigned—served to heighten authority in religious polemics: we find it used in this way by authors such as Llull and Alfonso

17. The same is true for the dating of the *Biblia parva*. See, for example, Costa (1996), «Introducció a la *Biblia Parva*».

18. *Disputa*, UB 75, f. 83vb

19. Szpiech, Ryan (2013), «Rhetorical Muslims: Islam as Witness in Western Christian Anti-Jewish Polemic», in *Al-Qantara* 34 (1), pp. 153-185.



Buenhombre.<sup>20</sup> The authority of the writer of the *Disputa del bisbe de Jaen contra los jueus*, which was enhanced by the fact that he had undergone captivity, probably contributed to the later attribution of this work by the Mercedarians to the historical Pere Pasqual. It remains to be seen whether this attribution is accurate, whether the works on which Saint Pere Pascual's fame and iconography are based were actually written by him.

20. On the authority conferred by captivity, see Szpiech, Ryan (2018), «Prisons and Polemics: Captivity, Confinement, and Medieval Interreligious Encounter», in *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond*, pp. 271-303.