



Recent scholarship on the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

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AFTER SOME RECENT research excursions into other topics, namely *Celestina*, the world of the Emperor Carlos V, and the *Libro de enxemplos por A.B.C.*, today I return to my first love, Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. While I will not today bore you with any new, or old, ideas of my own about this Marian opus, I would like to point out some recent developments in the field of *Cantigas*' studies as well as areas of ongoing investigation, the latter of which continue to promote healthy disagreement among scholars. While some of our colleagues in other fields may have lost the talent for constructive debate in areas of scholarship, such, thankfully does not appear to be the case among alfonsoistas who, while we make take different approaches or arrive at different conclusions from the evidence presented, nonetheless share a genuine fascination with this spectacular work and a sincere desire to unravel its secrets.

Perhaps the most exciting recent addition to *Cantigas*' scholarship and one which will surely make the work known far beyond the present core of investigators and *aficionados* is the long-awaited publication of Kathleen KULP-HILL'S translation of the Galician-Portuguese texts into English. We are all grateful that

Medieval and Renaissance Studies, based in Tempe Arizona, decided to undertake this worthy project and that they have produced a volume as eminently practical as it is handsome. In her edition, Prof. Kulp-Hill's choice to include some original drawings, based on the Cantigas' miniatures, by her deceased colleague and fellow alfonsista Charlie Nelson. Charlie's styling of the miniatures attest to the illuminations' continuing power to inspire and influence artists. In fact, Charlie's rendering of the famous baseball scene from Cantiga 42 which serves as the illustration on the cover of Prof. Kulp-Hill's translation prompted a call from the historian at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown who wanted to acquire a copy of it for their archives.

Undoubtedly the illustrated codices of the Cantigas (Escorial ms. T.I.1 and Florence Banco Rari 20) have traditionally been, and continue to be, a boon to art historians. However, in my opinion, we have often privileged a synchronic over a diachronic view of the codices' miniatures, that is, we have seen them as historical artifacts of the Alfonsine scriptorium, but not as part of a continuum of illustrative technique and artistic development. The desire of artists in the centuries following the original production of the Alfonsine manuscript to complete some of the unfinished packages of the enigmatic Florentine manuscript, unfortunately with much inferior results, is an obvious example of the miniatures' power to inspire. We should not lose sight, however, of the fact that the artists of the Cantigas, while in many ways imminently original in their production, were nonetheless profoundly influenced by miniature techniques in illustrated Bibles, psalters, and Books of Hours. Couple these and other pictorial techniques with the Alfonsine scriptorium's own unique developments which resulted in such illustrated codices as the *Lapidario*, the *Libros de ajedrex, dados y tablas*, as well as the Escorial ms. T.I.1 and the Florence Banco Rari 20 manuscripts of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* are examples of medieval miniatures which, while most certainly the product of a courtly forum, are nonetheless unique vignettes of the complex multi-racial, multi-religious, and multi-cultural realms over which the Wise King presided. Although Alfonso's court was itinerant and the various workers in the scriptorium may have at times worked in isolation from one another or at some distance from the King, they could not help but be influenced by first-hand knowledge of many of the places, settings, and situations that inform many of the narrative Cantigas.

These observations lead me directly to another exciting recent development in Cantigas' scholarship, namely John KELLER'S and Annette CASH'S *Daily Life as Depicted in the "Cantigas de Santa Maria"*, published by the University of Kentucky Press in 1998. This beautifully produced book was awarded the SAMLA prize for best publication. I think that Katherine Gatto of John Carroll University best describes this book in her review in *Hispania*, published in September of 2000: AA fabulous, profuse, lavish, extravagant, and disturbing world of thirteenth-century Spain is unfurled before our eyes in the coffee-table sized compendium of the contents of the illuminated miniatures of the Cantigas de Santa

Maria". Prof. Gatto further points out that AIIn particular, scholars oriented towards cultural studies will find a new lode of medieval gold to mine in the descriptions of the visual representations of the hymns composed in devotion to the Virgin Mary ...". As we are all aware, a prominent and growing field within social history is that of cultural studies, a fruitful approach to literary as well as historical documents recognized and given useful form by Profs. Keller and Cash. In my own review of this work, published in *Cantigueiros*, vol. X, I point out the practical and user-friendly organization of the book in 27 categories, each with a number of subcategories, as well as an Appendix which, in my review, I call Aa very useful research tool that will save scholars hours of time when searching for an individual item or specific representation among the over two thousand miniatures contained in these manuscripts".

While focusing on the Cantigas' miniatures, we should also point out some exciting new videos on Alfonso's Marian corpus. Several years ago, Jordi TORRENT of Duende Pictures produced a video, sponsored by Spain's Ministry of Culture as well as other grants, entitled *Las Cantigas de Santa Maria: An Historical Mirror of 13th-Century Spain*. The script for this video was the brainchild of John Keller and the video enjoyed its premiere at this very conference. I was indeed honored to be one of the Alfonsistas interviewed for the video which is intended as a pedagogical tool to spread the word of the exciting world of the Cantigas beyond those of us already intimately familiar with it. This video works well at both the graduate and undergraduate level since the text is in English. Also, the musical score is provided by Live Oak and the Ensemble Alcatraz, two of the most prominent groups of performers of medieval music.

An especially important study, employing the *Cantigas* as an historical document to help us understand the complex personality of Alfonso X and his reign is Joseph O'CALLAGHAN'S *Alfonso X and the Cantigas de Santa Maria: A Poetic Biography*, published in 1998 by Brill. We are all familiar with Prof. O'Callaghan's equally valuable previous study, published in 1993, *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X of Castile*. In *A Poetic Biography*, O'Callaghan presents Alfonso as the Virgin's troubadour who, by appealing to the Celestial Queen through his songs, recounts important events in his own life and in the history of the kingdoms under his command. This imminent historian's contributions to Alfonsine studies throughout his long career have been invaluable and, with this work, he brings together a vast range of information analyzing Cantigas which reflect the crises faced by Alfonso, such as the mudéjar uprisings, the Benimerines, the Wars of Granada, and his own son's betrayal. With such solid scholarship by O'Callaghan, together with the work produced by Father Burns, Richard Kinkade, and a host of other Alfonsista, there remains little doubt that the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* is, beyond its poetic and artistic values, a valid historical document of the Wise King's reign.

Also in 1999, after a two-year delay the lectures, round tables, and transcripts of the ensuing discussions at the Curso de Verano de El Escorial on the sub-

ject of Scriptorium Alfonsí, which took place during the summer of 1997, were published in Madrid by the Universidad Complutense, sponsor of the summer courses. This volume contains papers on various aspects of the Alfonsine corpus including the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, the histories, and the legislative works. Well-known Cantigueiros who contribute to this volume include Martha SCHAFER, Valeria BERTOLUCCI, Joseph SNOW, Ana DOMÍNGUEZ, Francisco CORTI, and Jesús MONTOYA. Also the volume contains an in-depth musical analysis by the noted Argentinian musicologist, Gerardo HUSEBY. I single-out this particular article because it is one of the last published by this excellent scholar before he was impaired by a devastating stroke. We were lucky to have previously published his erudite scholarship in *The Bulletin of the Cantiguerios* and we all pray that he will soon return to a full and productive participation in his academic work and in his personal life.

There also continues to be very interesting and innovative work done of the Cantigas from literary and theology perspectives. Notable in this category is David FLORY'S monograph, *Marian Representations in the Miracle Tales of Thirteenth-Century Spain and France*, published in 2000 by the Catholic University of America Press. In this important book, Flory makes key connections between Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora*, Gautier de Coinci's *Miracles de Notre Dame*, Jacques de Vitry's treatment of the virgin in his *Sermones vulgares*, Rutebeuf's Marian tales, and Alfonso's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. This monograph, although a succinct 150 pages in length, is impressive for its breadth of knowledge and Flory is to be commended for his synthesis of these authors who, although writing in different languages and in distinct milieus, share not only a personal devotion to the Virgin but the desire to disseminate miracles attributed to her. They also share certain literary expectations surrounding the medieval sub-genre of Marian literature and, each in his own unique way as Flory points out, taps into this literary tradition, while at the same time building upon it.

Finally, in a shameless plug for our annual publication, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, I am proud that the present volume contains a variety of articles which attest to the ongoing fields of interest in the Alfonsine Marian corpus. In the current issue, Manuel Pedro FERREIRA, a Portuguese musicologist who has made many valuable contributions to Cantigas' studies, includes an intriguing examination of the influence of plainchant on Cantigas' melodies. Jesús MONTOYA isolates and studies the Alfonsine loores in light of the Marian theology of the time. Francisco CORTI studies the images of Escorial ms. T.I.1 with an eye to genealogical symbolism, especially representations of the Tree of Jesse. An exciting, young scholar from Brazil, currently completing a Ph.D. dissertation and already a licensed psychologist presents some initial findings on his applications of psychological theories to the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* in an article in Portuguese, "AMaria, Mãe do Ocidente: Un incursão nas Cantigas de Santa Maria". I am pleased that Kathy KULP-HILL found time in her busy career to also contribute a new article, "Holy Mary, Muse and Protagonist", to this issue of Cantigueiros. We

are also happy to offer our subscribers a fascinating interview conducted by David FLORY with Judith COHEN, a very talented musician in the field of early and ethnic music who many of you know well from her work on the *Cantigas*, sephardic music throughout the world and, ballad collection. Since Prof. Flory, before his distinguished academic career in medieval literature, enjoyed a very successful career as a professional opera singer, these two scholar-performers share a unique perspective and an intriguing conversation, which I am sure you will all find as insightful as I do.

I believe this short examination of recent Cantigas scholarship and the exciting new directions it is taking is testimony to the continuing interest in this fascinating work -- its manuscripts, its historical and theological implications, linguistic and poetic exegesis, its artistic value, and its mine of medieval musical data. I regret that I have not been able to recognize all the valuable recent contributions worldwide to Cantigas scholarship but neither time nor this forum is sufficient for a comprehensive review. Please forgive any glaring oversights on my part. I hope that some of you are inspired to continue work on the Cantigas. I believe it is a nearly inexhaustible source for dissertation topics, studies in art, music, literature, history, and language, and perhaps our most valuable window into the world of Alfonso X.