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Conscripting the Virgin: Holy Mary's Mediterranean Crusade in Alfonso X's *Cantigas De Santa María* (ca. 1275)

Alexander J. Korte

Abstract
The Cantigas de Santa María [Songs of Holy Mary] *is a collection of over 400 devotional poems that feature many fictionalized accounts of Castile's crusades, including the conquest of Seville (1248) and the campaign against Salé (1260). This article demonstrates how the collection's author/compiler, Alfonso X of Castile (r. 1252-84), used the work to project a rhetorical alliance between the Virgin's authority and his own imperial interests. I suggest that the CSM collection presents a form of cultural redemption that sought to project literary strength and control over a theatre of war that was historically problematic during Alfonso's reign.*

Keywords
Cantigas de Santa María*; Alfonso X; crusade; Castile; Salé; Mediterranean; religious warfare.*

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CONSCRIPTING THE VIRGIN: HOLY MARY'S MEDITERRANEAN CRUSADE IN ALFONSO X'S *CANTIGAS DE SANTA MARÍA* (CA. 1275)

Alexander J. Korte*

This article explores the problematic legacy of Castile's thirteenth-century Mediterranean crusades as reimagined in the *Cantigas de Santa María,* a collection of 420 narrative poems dedicated to the miracles of the Virgin Mary and attributed to King Alfonso X "el Sabio" of Castile (r. 1252-84). Dubbed the "Emperor of Culture" by Robert Burns, Alfonso is best known as a patron of letters who commissioned many legal, historical, scientific, and poetic works during his reign.[1] Unfortunately, his artistic successes did not find their parallel in the political sphere, where he struggled to continue his father Fernando III's goal of expanding the empire into North Africa and beyond.[2] Assuming the

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[1] Works attributed to Alfonso and his team include the legal compendium *Siete partidas* (1256-65), histories like *Estoria de Espanna* (known also as the *Primera Crónica General,* c. 1270) and *General Estoria* (c. 1274), and the poetic *Cantigas de Santa María* (ca. 1257-1281). For general studies on Alfonso X of Castile, see *Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance,* ed. R. I. Burns (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); S. R. Doubleday, *The Wise King: A Christian Prince, Muslim Spain, and the Birth of the Renaissance* (New York: Basic Books, 2015); M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X el Sabio* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2004); J. E. Keller, *Alfonso X, el Sabio* (New York: Twayne, 1967); F. Márquez Villanueva, *El concepto cultural alfonsí* (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2004); J. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X, the Justinian of his Age: Law and Justice in Thirteenth-Century Castile* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019) and *The Learned King: The Reign of Alfonso X of Castile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993).

[2] Fernando III was Alfonso X's predecessor (r. 1217-52). Canonized in the late seventeenth century, he is best known for annexing large portions of al-Andalus (at that time controlled by the Almohads, who ruled from Marrakesh) through military campaigns that culminated in the conquests of Cordoba in 1236 and Seville in 1248. For more on this period, see J. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of

throne shortly after Fernando's conquest of Seville in 1248, Alfonso would spend the first decade of his reign preparing the new southern reaches of his kingdom to support his own *cruzada* in North Africa. Then, in 1260, he finally deployed his warships against Morocco in a campaign that, by all accounts save those portrayed in the king's later histories and poems, resulted in disaster.[3] Although the Castilian navy returned home with some booty and captives to ransom, the campaign ultimately failed to secure any lasting foothold from which to fulfil Rome's hopes or advance the monarch's own imperial aspirations. Alfonso would never resume his crusade in Africa, preoccupied instead by an unsuccessful bid at Holy Roman Emperor, the revolt of his Muslim subjects, and a capricious alliance with the neighbouring kingdom of Granada. In his final years, facing a debilitating illness that threatened the legitimacy of his rule, a counter-invasion by the emerging Marinid empire of North Africa brought the crusade to Castile's doorstep. Shortly thereafter, in 1284, Alfonso died amid a succession crisis.

Produced in various iterations that span the length of Alfonso's reign, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* attempts to make sense of this period as it unfolded.[4] Written in Galician-Portuguese, the *Cantigas* are part of a larger pan-European tradition of Marian poetry that became especially popular in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and strives to elevate the image of the Virgin through narratives that reveal Her power to intervene in our lives through miracle,

Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 78-123. On Fernando's goals for conquest in North Africa, see *Primera crónica general,* ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, 2 vols. (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1955), 2.770-1, ch. 1131.

[3] M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X,* 133-41; J. O'Callaghan, *The Gibraltar Crusade: Castile and the Battle for the Strait* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 25-29.

[4] The *Cantigas* are extant in four manuscripts that each date to the thirteenth century: "E" Escorial ms. B.I.2 (Codex of the Musicians); "T" Escorial ms. T.I.1 (Rich Codex); "F" Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Banco Rari 20; and "To" Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, ms. 10069. According to Mettmann's audit, there are a total of 427 *cantigas,* of which 273 are miracle narratives and 154 are *cantigas de loor* (songs of praise) dedicated to the Virgin's glory. The "To" manuscript is the earliest edition containing a total of 127 songs with brief musical notation included. The "F" collection of 133 songs (of which 113 differ from "T") is thought to be an incomplete continuation of "To." The "T" manuscript, with 193 songs, is also called the *Códice Rico* for its accompanying miniatures and musical annotation. Finally, the "E" manuscript contains 401 poems and is considered the most modern. Scholars generally accept the years 1257 as the start date and 1281 as the end date of the project. Mettmann suggested that the first collection of 100 miracle poems was completed between 1270-74, the following 200 between 1277-82, and the remaining between 1277-82. See *Alfonso X el Sabio,* ed. W. Mettmann, 3 vols., (Madrid: Castalia, 1986-89), 1.21-24; *Alfonso X el Sabio: Cantigas,* ed. J. Montoya (Madrid: Cátedra, 2008), 33-44; J. O'Callaghan, *Alfonso X and the* Cantigas de Santa María: *A Poetic Biography* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 8-13.

spiritual reward, and divine punishment.[5] Complete with sheet music and nearly 2,000 accompanying miniatures, the *Cantigas* offers a trove of information on medieval daily life and the cultural practice of the thirteenth-century western Mediterranean.[6] The illuminations and narratives depict scenes of hunting, praying, leisure, gambling, domestic affairs, and, notably for the purposes of this study, conquest and crusade. Alfonso, together with his team of musicians, poets, and manuscript illuminators, adopted the genre into a uniquely Iberian context by highlighting local characters and historical events. The collection's miracle narratives of war against Muslim armies both in the Peninsula and beyond attempt to remember and articulate Castile's emerging role as a maritime power struggling to compete on a new Mediterranean frontier.

Because Alfonso X thoroughly oversaw the production of, and, in some instances, may have even authored certain poems in the collection, my reading stresses Alfonso's dual role as artist and ruler—as crafter of a cultural product and cultivator of an official narrative.[7] That is, central to my argument is the idea that Alfonso treated this collection of poems not only as a personal, religious text to express his devotion to the Virgin (and thus secure his salvation), but also as a political tool intended to reappropriate unflattering military losses into laudatory testaments of imperial strength. Political readings of the *Cantigas*, broadly understood, have garnered more attention in recent years. Michael

[5] The Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) is credited with elevating Mary into a central devotional figure in the medieval era. In the Iberian context, Gonzalo de Berceo's *Milagros de Nuestra Señora* was also key to Her rise in popularity. See E. A. Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church" in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation,* ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1987), 394-414; J. Montoya Martínez, *Las colecciones de Milagros de la Virgin en la Edad Media: El milagro literario* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 1981); A. Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora: The Virgin Mary at War and Peace in the Old and New Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); M. Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

[6] J. Keller, *Daily Life Depicted in the* Cantigas de Santa María (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

[7] My framing of authorship follows J. Snow, "Alfonso as Troubadour: The Fact and the Fiction," in *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and his Thirteenth-Century Renaissance,* ed. Robert I. Burns (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 124-40, and "Clues to Authorship of the *Cantigas de Santa María* from the Toledo Manuscript," *Romance Quarterly* 66.3 (2019): 135-46. Snow constructs authorship in broad terms that considers how Alfonso crafts an image of himself as "the kind of person he wanted to be (and be remembered as) and not always the historical king whose public life we know best" ("Clues to Authorship" 137). Mettmann is more literal, concluding that Alfonso authored only eight or ten poems in the collection (*Cantigas,* 1.17-20). See also M. Schaffer, "Questions of Authorship: The *Cantigas de Santa María*," in *Proceedings of the Eighth Colloquium,* ed. Andrew M. Beresford and Alan Deyermond (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College Department of Hispanic Studies, 1997): 17-30.

Gerli, for example, writes of a growing alliance between the intelligentsia and the state in thirteenth-century Castile that was instrumental in "constructing, and critiquing, the mythologies of power for a monarchy with imperial aspirations."[8] For Francisco Márquez Villanueva, the cultural products that emanated from the royal Alfonsine scriptorium reflect "una clara extensión de su proyecto politico."[9] Connie Scarborough argues that Alfonso "was less concerned with clarity and accuracy of historical data than imparting a political message."[10] Similarly, Edward Holt interprets the *Cantigas* as "devotional statecraft," Henry Drummond considers the collection a retelling of "court-approved accounts… in the retelling of political history," and Nicholas Parmley sees in the work not only reconstructions of historical events but also traces of "a planned and imagined Alfonsine Empire that exceeds the borders of the Iberian Peninsula."[11]

Alfonso relied on the public dissemination of the miracles as a means of propagating his political messages. The poems were sung throughout the realm on public feast days and as part of court ritual, giving the monarchy a direct channel through which to deliver devout but also propagandistic messaging to its subjects.[12] Alfonso relied on this strategy up through the final years of his reign, when a succession crisis threatened his legitimacy in all parts of the realm save Seville and sections of Murcia, two of his most cherished holdings.[13] Both

[8] M. Gerli, "The Destiny of Empire: Alfonso X and the Cultural and Political Significance of the *Libro de Alexandre*" in *Essays in Homage to John Esten Keller,* ed. Roger D. Tinnell (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2012), 93-109.

[9] F. Márquez Villanueva, *Concepto cultural,* 37.

[10] Connie Scarborough, *A Holy Alliance: Alfonso X's Political use of Marian Poetry* (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2009), 50.

[11] H. T. Drummond, *The* Cantigas de Santa María*: Power and Persuasion at the Alfonsine Court* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023), 217; E. L. Holt, "*Cantigas de Santa María*, Cantigas de Cruzada: Reflections of Crusading Spirituality in Alfonso X's Cantigas de Santa María," *Al-Masāq* 27.3 (2015): 213; N. M. Parmley, "Alfonso X's Imagined Mediterranean Empire: Shipwrecks, Storms, and Pirates in the *Cantigas de Santa María," Hispanic Review* 85.2 (2017): 200.

[12] C. Scarborough, *Holy Alliance,* 23-36, and H. Drummond, *Power and Persuasion,* 1-34. Keller elaborated a tripart consideration of the reception of the *Cantigas* that considers the textual, visual, and auditory modes. See J. Keller, "The Threefold Impact of the *Cantigas de Santa María*: Visual, Verbal, and Musical," in *Studies on the* Cantigas de Santa María*: Art, Music, and Poetry: Proceedings of the International Symposium on the* Cantigas de Santa María *of Alfonso X, el Sabio (1221-1284) in Commemoration of Its 700th Anniversary Year 1981,* eds. Israel Katz, Samuel Armistead, Joseph Snow and John Keller (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1987), 7-34.

[13] Alfonso suffered a debilitating illness in the final years of his reign. In 1282, two years before his death, his son and heir Sancho IV openly rebelled against his father's rule, with the

his love for the city of Seville as well as his esteem for the collection are attested in his final will, in which he ordered that "todos los libros de los Cantares de loor de Sancta Maria sean todos en aquella iglesia [de Sevilla] do nuestro cuerpo se enterrare, e que los fagan cantar en las fiestas de Sancta Maria" ("may all the books of the Songs of Praise of Holy Mary be kept in that church [of Seville] where our bodies will be entombed, and may they be sung on the feasts of Holy Mary").[14] As his last words attest, Alfonso planned for the scope of his literary empire to extend even beyond his own life.

As this article will demonstrate, Alfonso laboured in the production of the *Cantigas* to cultivate a unique relationship with the Virgin Mary especially as it related to Her martial authority and, by extension, the potency of the king's military endeavours against his Mediterranean rivals—especially the emerging Marinid empire of Morocco and, to a lesser extent, the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. As such, the *Cantigas* offers a valuable perspective not only on medieval ideologies of war, but it also demonstrates how Alfonso sought to leverage such attitudes to cleanse the historical blemishes of a lost crusade. Specifically, this study progresses in four sections. In the first, I consider how the figure of Holy Mary operates as a symbol for broader crusader rhetoric as well as Castilian military power. I then explore various portraits of Seville in the collection to demonstrate how Mary comes to champion the imperial interests of the monarchy by supporting campaigns of territorial expansion in al-Andalus. In the final two sections, I focus on the *Cantigas* account of the 1260 crusade to Salé and Castile's subsequent years of defensive wars against the Marinids to explore how Alfonso attempted to reconcile these turbulent years in poetic form. Because space is limited, I cannot offer a complete catalogue of crusader miracles, but instead aim to highlight some of the most informative, including *Cantigas* 169, 292, 328, and 401, among others. Ultimately, I suggest that the *Cantigas* present a form of cultural redemption that sought to project literary strength and control over a theatre of war that was historically unconquerable during Alfonso's reign. The corpus of poems that I consider serves as a literary testament to the Castilian conquest and crusade that outshines the historical events themselves, demonstrating how the king sought to transform uncertainty and failure into stability, strength, and success.

support of many of the Castilian nobles. Alfonso disinherited Sancho for a time, but apparently reinstated Sancho's rights on his death bed. For more on these years, see M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X*, 353-71.

[14] *Diplomatario Andaluz de Alfonso X*, ed. Manuel González Jiménez (Seville: El Monte, Caja de Huelva y Sevilla, 1991), 560, no. 521. My translation.

I. A Crusader Mentality

Alfonso X infused the *Cantigas* collection with crusader rhetoric to promote an image of the Virgin Mary as a defender of the faith and an ally in the king's own imperial projections. Almost every phase of Alfonso's long crusading career is represented in the *Cantigas.* There are multiple references to the Holy Land as both a real and desired space. In addition, the *Cantigas* portrays many local crusading events, including the conquest of Seville in 1248, the African crusade of 1260, and Marinid invasions of 1275 and 1277, among others. While some references are complete narratives that treat historical names and events, others appear more subtly, either as brief asides, or hinted at in the accompanying miniatures or melody, or simply baked into the collection's larger ethos. Because many of these allusions have been addressed previously by the likes of Joseph O'Callaghan, Henry Drummond, Connie Scarborough, and Edward Holt, my aim in this section is to explore some of the general ways that Alfonso cultivated an especially martial image of the Virgin in efforts to promote his Mediterranean crusades and project the imperial goals of his reign. Establishing Mary as an ally in Alfonso's crusading campaigns will allow for a more nuanced discussion, in the following sections, of the miracle narratives that recount the campaigns against Seville (1248) and Africa (1260).

One of the most overt ways that the *Cantigas* collection engages crusader rhetoric is through references to campaigns in the Holy Land (*Ultramar*). For example, *Cantigas* 46 recounts how Holy Mary converted a Muslim crusader after a statue of Her that he had carried from battle transforms into living flesh.[15] The narrative begins by describing how a "mouro… con ost' en Ultramar / grande foi, segund' oý, / por chrischãos guerrejar / e roubar" (Moor… went to the Holy Land with a great army to make war on Christians and pillage their lands) (1.171).[16] Extremely successful in his campaign, the man returns with a statue of the Virgin that he decorates with gold-spun clothing and sets in his home. Contemplating the image, he expresses doubt that Mary is God reincarnate but nonetheless declares that he will convert to Christianity if God somehow manifests Himself. At this point, the statue's breasts turn to flesh and "deitar / leite come per canudos" (begin to flow with milk in gushing streams) (1.173). This prompts the man to receive baptism and compel his followers to

[15] *Cantigas* 46 appears in the early "To" manuscript as well as manuscripts "T" and "E." I employ the numbering system established by Mettmann in his standard critical edition. Parenthetical references refer to volume and page number.

[16] All English translations of *Cantigas* are taken from Alfonso X, *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, The Wise: A Translation of the* Cantigas de Santa María, trans. K. Kulp-Hill (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000).

similarly convert. In another song set in the Holy Land, *Cantigas* 165, we learn how Holy Mary prevented the sultan of Egypt from attacking the poorly defended city of "Tortosa d' Ultramar" (Tartus in Syria) (2.164).[17] However, when the sultan advances on the city, he is surprised to see an ethereal host of knights stationed on the ramparts. One of the sultan's men informs him that the knights have appeared "per mandado da Virgin, Madre d'Iça" (on the order of the Virgin, Mother of Iça) (2.166). The sultan then invokes the Quranic Mary's virginity as justification for abandoning his campaign.[18] In the end, he declares that he will not fight against Her and turns his army around: "guerra per nulla maneira con ela" (I will wage no war on her) (2.167).

Compared with other *cantigas* that treat crusading campaigns in the Holy Land (*Cantigas* 5; 193), *Cantigas* 46 and 165 stand out for the tensions they create between competing ideas of the Virgin. Both the unidentified crusader of *Cantigas* 46 and the sultan of Egypt in *Cantigas* 165 exhibit a reverence for Holy Mary that initially corresponds to Her role within the Quranic tradition. However, as the narratives progress, we see Mary challenge these assumptions by intervening to inspire conversion and protect a stronghold of the faith. As Holt has outlined, Alfonso was not the first to employ Mary's image in this way, but his Marian collection was instrumental in supplanting the traditional Spanish crusader Saint James "Matamoros" (*the Moor-slayer*) with the Virgin, making her "the preeminent and unrivalled patron of martial piety" in the king's time.[19] The above poems, which José Manuel Rodríguez García has identified as instruments used to preach the crusades, helped foster this image. The *Cantigas* is, after all, a collection of carefully crafted rhetorical messaging meant to inspire both religious and political devotion. These particular songs would encourage spiritual righteousness and, as Rodríguez García explains, "atraer a posibles cruzados y luego reconfortarlos, guiarlos y animarlos una vez tomada la cruz."[20] The songs are, in effect, a call to crusade, but one that came with assurances that Holy Mary will offer protection as an agent and defender of the Christian faith.

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[17] *Cantigas* 165 appears in manuscripts "E" and "T." The sultan is identified as "Bondoudar," a likely reference to the Mamluk sultan Baybars al-Bunduqdārī, who reigned from 1260-77. See M. García-Arenal, "Los moros en *Las Cantigas* de Alfonso X el Sabio" *Al-Qantara* 6.1 (1985): 139. Because the siege of Tortosa took place in May 1268, we might surmise that this *cantiga* was composed after that time (J. O'Callaghan, *Poetic Biography*, 97).

[18] Quran, 3: 47

[19] E. Holt, "Cantigas de Cruzada," 218. In medieval Iberia, Mary also came to serve as the preeminent guardian and liberator of Christian captives. By the thirteenth century, she had surpassed Eulalia as the patron saint of the Mercedarian order, an institution dedicated to the redemption of captives (A. Remensnyder, *Conquistadora*, 99-105).

[20] J. M. Rodríguez García, La *cruzada en tiempos de Alfonso X* (Madrid: Sílex, 2014), 121.

Although scholars differ on the exact definition of crusade especially as it relates to the Iberian context, the Castilian wars of the thirteenth century against the Muslims of al-Andalus can reasonably fall under this category for the general characteristics befitting such designation: international armies who "take the cross," papal support in the form of financing and the granting of indulgences, and offensive military campaigns in defence of the faith.[21] In Christian Iberia, crusader zeal also paired conveniently with the ideological imperative to "reconquer" the lands of Hispanic Christendom following the Muslim victory over the Visigoths in the eighth century.[22] Almost immediately thereafter, Christian writers began articulating the idea that the Castilian kings were direct heirs to the Visigoths by way of the royal Asturian line.[23] It was the Visigoths who, following Roman imperial tradition, cultivated Christianity in the Peninsula and, from their capital in Toledo, exercised political authority even into Mauritania, which then served as part of the larger Diocese of Spain. Consequently, the Castilian kings considered it their birthright and moral imperative to recover the domains of their ancestral Visigothic empire, including al-Andalus but also North Africa.[24] In line with this spirit, multiple popes granted crusading privileges to support the campaigns of reconquest, including those organized by Fernando III and Alfonso X in the thirteenth century. For these Castilian monarchs, war with Islam was thereby informed by a combination of crusading fervour and imperial reclamation.

[21] For a thorough review of these topics, see H. Drummond, *Power and Persuasion,* 179-187; E. Holt, "Cantigas de Cruzada," 208-9; J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar Crusade,* 14-17 and *Reconquest,* 17-22; J. M. Rodríguez García, *Cruzada en tiempos de Alfonso X,* 19-31. Alfonso never received the full international aid that he desired, but his first collection of *cómitres,* or sea captains, did represent a diverse coalition of international seamen.

[22] The Catalan philosopher Ramón Llull (1232-1315) developed the idea that the crusades should begin in Morocco and then extend to the Holy Land. See E. Holt, "Cantigas de Cruzada," 210; J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar Crusade,* 21 and *Poetic Biography,* 98.

[23] J. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest*, 3-7.

[24] Here and throughout this article, I use the term al-Andalus to refer to the loose collection of Islamic polities in southern Iberia, including Niebla, Seville, Murcia, and Granada. With the exception of Nasrid Granada, which remained a relatively independent vassal state until its conquest by the Catholic Monarchs in 1492, all of these kingdoms were annexed by Castile by the middle of the thirteenth century. In recent years, scholarship as rightly problematized the notion of a continuous and unified seven-hundred-year Christian struggle to retake the lands of al-Andalus from the invading Muslims. While the term *Reconquista* can be helpful in a nominal sense, the idea fails to account for the complexities of interfaith relationships in the Peninsula. See A. García Sanjuán, "Weaponizing Historical Knowledge: The Notion of the *Reconquista* in Spanish Nationalism," *Imago temporis: Medium Aevum* 14 (2020): 133-62; D. Wacks, "Reconquest Colonialism and Andalusī Narrative Practice in the *Conde Lucanor*," *Diacritics* 36.3/4 (2006): 87-103; J. O'Callaghan, *Reconquest,* 3-4, 17-22.

In addition to narrative episodes set in the Holy Land, the *Cantigas* include many allusions to the monarchy's local crusading efforts. These include both shorthand references and longer, more developed illustrations of Castile's supremacy over Islam. Representative of the former is *Cantigas* 256, which uses Fernando's conquest of Capilla, in the province of Badajoz, as a simple historical framing for the poem's central narrative concerning how Mary cured the pregnant queen Beatriz of an illness.[25] Accordingly, we hear how Beatriz's sickness occurred "quando o mui bon Rei gãou, / Don Fernando, a Capela e de chrischãos poblou" (When the good King don Fernando won Capilla and settled it with Christians) (2.256). In interpreting this poem, Remensnyder has concluded that because of Mary's intervention, Fernando "owed her not just his life, but also his throne."[26] The queen falls ill during the campaign, but Mary intervenes to cure her and, by extension, ensure the security of the royal line through the child's birth. In addition, the reference to Fernando's settling of the town with Christians (*de chrischãos poblou*) demonstrates how territorial conquests and efforts to evangelize operate in tandem with the Virgin's protections over the royal family. As one body grows, so does the other.

While this is only a passing reference, other poems are more explicit in their construction of Mary as Alfonso's crusading ally. Such is the case with the very first poem in the original "To" manuscript, referred to as "Prologue A" by modern editors.[27] In this brief, seven stanza poem that serves to introduce the first 100 songs of the collection, we learn that:

> Don Affonso de Castela,
> de Toledo, de Leon
> Rey e ben des Conpostela
> ta o reyno d'Aragon. (1.53)
>
> (Don Alfonso of Castile, of Toledo, of Leon is king from Compostela as far as the kingdom of Aragon)

The poetic voice introduces king Alfonso of Castile *and* Toledo, making the implicit link between his birthplace and the political capital of the former

[25] Beatriz of Swabia (1198-1235) was Fernando's wife and Alfonso's mother. It was through his mother's Hohenstaufen line that Alfonso justified his claim to the seat of Holy Roman Emperor. Fernando conquered the town in 1227. *Cantigas* 256 appears in the "F" and "E" manuscripts.

[26] A. Remensnyder, *Conquistadora,* 48.

[27] This poem appears in "To", "T", and "E."

Visigothic empire. The song goes on to document the extent of Alfonso's holdings, which include Cordoba, Jaen, Seville, Murcia, the Algarve, "que gãou / de mouros e nossa ffe / meteu y," (which he won from the Moors and established our faith there) as well as Badajoz, Niebla and Jerez "que tolleu / a mouros," (He then took Niebla and Jerez from the Moors) in addition to Vejer and Medina and Alcala. The long list of place names conflates campaigns carried out by his father (Cordoba 1236, Seville 1248) with those of Alfonso himself, especially his pacification of Jerez and Murcia following the 1264 revolt of his Muslim Mudéjar subjects.[28] The song goes on to identify Alfonso as "dos Romanãos Rey (king and lord of the Romans) (1.54). In this prologue, the military conquests of al-Andalus frame Alfonso's imperial strength through a holy lens that casts the Moors as enemies in Castile's expansionist policies. Alfonso controls the lands of the south not only because he wrested them from Muslim hands, but also because he afterwards brought the Christian faith into the region (*nossa ffe / meteu y*). The poem then turns to the Virgin, establishing a causal relationship between Her spiritual power and Alfonso's secular conquests: "Poren dos miragres seus / Fezo cantares e sões" (Therefore, from Her miracles he composed songs and melodies). Therefore, the prologue concludes, Alfonso composed the following collection of songs and melodies to honour and praise the Virgin's miracles.

As Walter Mettmann has pointed out, Prologue A's reference to Alfonso as "King of the Romans" is a clear allusion to his aspirations to the throne of the Holy Roman Empire.[29] After the death of Emperor Frederick II, Alfonso had a legitimate claim to the seat through his mother's line, and he was in fact elected in 1257. However, his claim was challenged and ultimately unsuccessful. Despite years of lobbying, Alfonso was finally convinced to relinquish his claim in 1275.[30] This is an important component of Alfonso's reign that occurred simultaneously with his crusading designs, suggesting that "his aspiration to ascendancy in Spain, his projected African crusade, and his quest for imperial title were all linked together."[31] His wars with Islam offered the dual benefit of

[28] The *Mudéjares* were Muslim subjects living in Christian Iberia. In 1262, encouraged by support from the Muslim king Ibn al-Aḥmar of Granada (r. 1232-73), Alfonso's Mudejar subjects revolted across large swaths of al-Andalus. The bloody rebellion lasted two years before it was quelled. See M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X*, 163-190.

[29] W. Mettmann, *Cantigas de Santa María,* 1.54.

[30] M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X,* 111-19. This was the same year as the first of two Marinid invasions into the Peninsula. Alfonso was delayed in responding to the attack because he was abroad lobbying his case for Holy Roman Emperor at the time. In addition, an illness prevented him from traveling for many months.

[31] J. O'Callaghan, *Learned King,* 198 and *Gibraltar Crusade,* 16, 21.

increasing his kingdom's size while also serving as public *bona fides* in his campaign for Holy Roman Emperor.

Finally, various *cantigas de loor* contain personal entreaties to the Virgin to drive the Moors from Spain and the Holy Land. These "songs of praise" occur every tenth poem in the collection and act as a sort of poetic pallet cleanser by singing praises to the Virgin without recounting miracles *per se.* In *Cantigas* 360, for example, the poetic voice takes four stanzas to laud Holy Mary as the earthly manifestation of God the Creator. In the final stanza, the song concludes with a pointed supplication to rid Spain of the sect of Mohammed: "E por questo te rogo… que de Mafomet a seita possa eu deitar d'Espanna" (Therefore, I beg you… that I may expel the sect of Mohammed from Spain) (3.231).[32] It is this rhetoric that has led Scarborough to identify the *Cantigas*'s image of Mary as "an agent of the Reconquest, a divine helper in the fight against Moorish invasions and incursions in Castilian territory."[33] In an even more explicit example, *Cantigas* 401 (the *Petiçon*) entreats the Virgin to eviscerate the infidel Moors: "queira que os encreus / mouros destruyr possa" (I may be able to destroy the infidel Moors) (3.303). Composed in the first-person perspective of the king, the *Petiçon* reflects deeply personal sentiments, suggesting that it may have been written by Alfonso himself.[34] As the song goes on, Alfonso petitions for strength and power to expel the Moors from Spain but also the Holy Land: "e que contra os mouros, que terra d'Ultramar / tẽen e en Espanna gran part' a meu pesar, me dé poder e força pera os en deitar" (against the Moors who hold the Holy Land and great portions of Spain, to my great regret, so that I may drive them out) (3.304). Of course, the absolutist rhetoric on display in these *cantigas de loor* contradicts Alfonso's policies that seemed to embrace (or at least tolerate) certain Muslim populations in the Peninsula.[35] Yet, as Drummond points out, such passages do not necessarily reflect realistic aims, but rather function as "rhetoric, designed to reaffirm Alfonso X's idealized personality as a crusader king."[36] As these songs of praise demonstrate, the references not only to the Muslims of Spain but also to those who occupy the Holy Land inflects the praise poems with a crusader mentality that signals Alfonso's concern and preoccupation with the task of holy war.

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[32] *Cantigas* 360 appears in manuscripts "F" and "E."

[33] C. Scarborough, *Holy Alliance,* 24.

[34] J. O'Callaghan, *Poetic Biography,* 8. In the earliest "To" manuscript, this song expressed Alfonso's desire to compose 100 miracles, but the line was removed in later manuscripts to account for the growth and development of the collection.

[35] There were many reasons why Castilian monarchs tolerated a continued Muslim presence in Castile following the annexation of their lands, including economic viability, cultural vitality, and political convenience (or any combination of the three).

[36] H. Drummond, *Power and Persuasion,* 184.

As this section has demonstrated, Alfonso infused the *Cantigas* collection with various references to Mary as an agent in his crusades. In songs set in the Holy Land, Mary appears to Muslim crusaders to sway undecided worshipers and protect Christian strongholds. In other poems, the Iberian theatre of the crusades are put on display to cultivate an image of Mary as a patron of (re)conquest and an ally in the king's imperial goals. Finally, various *cantigas de loor* conflate reconquest rhetoric with crusader zeal to articulate and project Alfonso's goals for future conquests. Having established an image of Mary as a patron of martial piety, the following section turns to Mary's role in the Castilian conquest of Seville in 1248.

II. Seville, Door to the Mediterranean

For the Castilian monarchs of the thirteenth century, war with Islam was not just an ideological mandate informed by crusader rhetoric and theories of reconquest. In addition, the campaigns against al-Andalus served Castile's imperial goals of expanding the southern borders of the kingdom and thereby establishing a zone of influence in the Mediterranean. Crucial to this objective was Fernando III's conquest of large parts of al-Andalus, including Cordoba (1236), Murcia (1243), Jaen (1244), and Seville (1248). Prologue A invokes all four of these holdings together as a great boon which God bestowed on Alfonso: "u gran ben / lle fez Deus" (where God bestowed on him a great boon) (1.53). The acquisition of Seville in particular, located along the Guadalquivir, was extremely beneficial in this regard. Not only was the region a prosperous commercial centre, but it also came to serve as a staging ground for Alfonso's military campaigns against Morocco and Granada. Near the end of Alfonso's reign, he made plans to inter the remains of his parents in the city's cathedral. This and many other local histories are featured in the *Cantigas* collection, affirming the kingdom of Seville as a central character in the king's rhetorical project. Especially in the narratives that detail the transition of the city from Muslim to Christian hands, Seville emerges as a significant setting of Castilian military posturing and a potent symbol of Alfonso's royal authority.

In total, there are twenty-five poems in the *Cantigas* collection that either reference Seville or use the city as a setting for miracle accounts.[37] Some of the earliest poems on the list frame the region as a Muslim-controlled territory of transgression, captivity, and violence. Broadly speaking, these narratives correspond to the time when, following the Almohad's abandonment of the city, Seville was controlled by independent governors in nominal allegiance to the

[37] Prologue A, 124, 169, 227, 257, 292, 323-5, 328, 344-5, 347-8, 366-7, 371, 375-6, 378-9, 382, 385-6, 389.

Tunisian emir.[38] In *Cantigas* 124, a Christian subject is taken prisoner in Seville and sentenced to death for travelling too often to the region without permission: "porque foi a Xerez / e a Sevilla quand' eran de mouros, mais dũa vez, / foi acusado e preso" (Because he went to Jerez and Seville more than once when they belonged to the Moors, he was accused and arrested) (2.72).[39] This poem contains also one of the earliest descriptions of the kingdom, wherein we learn that the lands of Seville rest "ena terra que está / Mui preto d' ambo-los mares, do gran que corr' arredor / da terra e ar do outro que é chamado Mẽor" (in the land which is near both seas, the large one which encircles the land and the other one called Minor). These references to the Atlantic (*gran*) and Mediterranean (*Mẽor*) bodies of water serve to establish the kingdom as an important geopolitical zone of maritime influence. This theme, expressed also in *Cantigas* 328, plays out repeatedly in many other poems that document trade, travel, and settlement in the region.[40] We are not told why the Christian prisoner of *Cantigas* 124 travels to Seville, only that he piously fasts each year in celebration of the Annunciation.[41] It is for this reason that Holy Mary is said to work her miracles for the man. The Moors subject him to a brutal execution that includes stoning, impalement, and the cutting of his throat. Despite all this, the man does not die until Mary intervenes to grant his petition for confession. The narrative ends with the poetic voice supposing that, now that Mary has granted the man last rights, his soul will ascend to heaven.

In another poem set in Seville, *Cantigas* 227 narrates how Holy Mary frees a Christian soldier who falls prisoner after travelling to the region in times of war: "foi por sa besonna / a Sevilla ena guerra, caeu en cativ' enton" (he was then obliged to go to Seville in the war and fell into captivity) (2.297).[42] As Ryan Szpiech has demonstrated in his study of medieval captivity narratives, imprisonment could often act as a demonstration of "concrete knowledge

[38] J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar*, 112.

[39] *Cantigas* 124 appears in manuscripts "T" and "E."

[40] See for example *Cantigas* 367, 371, 376, 379, 382. A key passage from the *Estoria de España* documents the city's lively maritime trade industry at this time: "Vienen a Sevilla navíos cada día desde la mar por el río. E las galeras e naves apuertan fasta dentro en los muros, con todas mercancias cuantas son en todas partes del mundo. De Tánjar, de Ceuta, de Túnez, de Alexandria, de Genua, de Portogal, de Ingratierra, de Pisa, de Lombardia, de Bordeos, de Bayona, de Sicilia, de Gascoña, de Aragon, e aun de Francia venian ende muchas, e de otras muchas partes en allende mar e de tierra de cristianos" (C. Fernandez Duro, *La marina de Castilla desde su origen y pugna con la de Inglaterra hasta la refundición en la armada española* (Madrid: Progreso editorial, 1894), 54).

[41] Held on March 25, the Annunciation celebrates the angel Gabriel's appearance to Mary (Luke 1.26-28).

[42] *Cantigas* 227 appears in manuscripts "F" and "E."

transfer" facilitated by intercultural contact and theological disputation between master and slave.[43] While this is true for some narratives in the collection (Szpiech focuses on *Cantigas* 192 and 265), others, such as *Cantigas* 227, reveal only the brutality of confinement. Beaten, tortured, and thrown into a dark dungeon, the man's only recourse is to pray to the Virgin for mercy. Her answer comes when She illuminates the dungeon and unlocks the irons around his body. This allows him to sneak past the guards, who are too distracted by their prayers to notice what is going on. In this *cantiga,* captivity becomes a stand-in for war itself, and Mary's liberation of the Christian captive serves to reaffirm her support for the Castilian cause. The song's refrain affirms Mary's position as a political liberator, thereby extending her spiritual aid into the realm of war: "ben pode guiar os presos, pois o[s] saca de prijon" (She… can well guide prisoners, for She frees them from bonds) (2.297).

In one final example from this era, *Cantigas* 344, Mary actually prevents two opposing armies from engaging one another on the battlefield.[44] This occurs near a church in Tudia, near Badajoz, at a time when the Muslims controlled Seville: "No tempo quando de mouros foi o reino de Sevilla" (In the time when the kingdom of Seville belonged to the Moors (3.196). It is presumably from this kingdom that the host of Moors sets out to attack the Christian forces. At nightfall, each army takes up a position near the church, yet the Virgin causes them not to notice one another until the following day. Amazed at what has occurred, both sides declare the event a miracle and agree to a truce that prevents bloodshed, at least that day. Because Holy Mary intervenes on the behalf of both armies, as the refrain makes clear, this *cantiga* reinforces the message that She protects all those who acknowledge Her power despite confessional allegiance. We have already seen this theme at work in *Cantigas* 46 (in which a statue of Mary begins to lactate in the presence of an incredulous Muslim, resulting in his baptism), and similar messages appear throughout the collection.[45] Ultimately, however, Mary's appearance in *Cantigas* 344 demonstrates her favour for the Castilian army, whose soldiers have found themselves the target of a surprise nighttime offensive from the Moors of Seville. Identified as the patron of the church at Tudia. Her presence in the conflict not only prevents bloodshed but also ensures the integrity of Her place of worship.

[43] R. Szpiech, "Prisons and Polemics: Captivity, Confinement, and Medieval Interreligious Encounter," in *Polemical Encounters: Christians, Jews, and Muslims in Iberia and Beyond,* eds. Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerard Wiegers (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 274.

[44] *Cantigas* 344 appears only in manuscript "E."

[45] See *Cantigas* 379, in which Holy Mary protects a group of Muslim merchants doing business in Puerto de Santa María who are attacked by Catalan corsairs.

The narrative concludes when both armies, in awe of Mary's intercession, disengage one another peacefully.

The conquest of Seville, a campaign in which Alfonso participated as prince, is alluded to in *Cantigas* 292.[46] Contrary to relating the events of the siege, however, the poem focuses instead on the city itself as a symbol of the spiritual and secular inheritance that Fernando III leaves to his son. The song begins by invoking the esteemed military career of Fernando. His successful campaigns, we are told, are the result of the mutual love that Holy Mary and the king hold for one another. Notoriously devout (Fernando III "el Santo" was canonized in 1671), the song relates how, whenever he conquered a city, he would place a statue of the Virgin in the portico of the mosque: "quand' algũa cidade de mouros ya gãar, / ssa omagen na mezquita põya eno portal" (When he conquered some city from the Moors, he placed Her statue in the portico of the mosque) (3. 78). As Remensnyder has pointed out, many Christian writers best remember Fernando's appropriation of Córdoba's famed red-and-white hued mosque after his conquest of that city in 1236, but in the *Cantigas,* Alfonso chose to highlight his father's work in Seville, thereby fashioning "a flattering prince's mirror in which to gaze at his own reflection" and ultimately legitimating in lineage "his own practice of Marian monarchy."[47] In *Cantigas* 292, Mary repays Fernando's devotion by supporting the king in all his endeavors: "en todo'los seus feitos atan ben o ajudou, / que quanto começar quiso e acabar, acabou" (in all his deeds She aided him so well that all he chose to begin and carry out, he achieved). Here, the implication is that Fernando's extraordinary military success are the direct result of the symbiotic relationship that he cultivates with the Virgin, who rewards his piety with territorial acquisitions. Her favour for King Fernando extends even beyond his death. After his passing, She grants him renown and, furthermore, the security of his son's seat in the "capital" city of Seville:

> E ar fezo-ll' a ssa morte que polo mellor morreu
> rei que en seu logar fosse, e fez per que o meteu
> el Rei seu fill' en Sevilla, que Mafomete perdeu
> per este Rey Don Fernando, que é cidade caz. (3.78)
>
> In return, She granted that at his death he should be acclaimed the best king ever to hold the throne and caused him to place his son in Seville, a capital which Mahomet lost because of this King don Fernando.

[46] *Cantigas* 292 appears in manuscripts "F" and "E."
[47] A. Remensnyder, *La Conquistadora,* 49-50.

These stanzas mark the Castilian acquisition of Seville, expressed through a religious lens that uses the prophet Mohammad as a symbol of Muslim power in the region, now lost (*que Mafomete perdeu*). The king in reference is of course Alfonso X, who inherited the kingdom following his father's untimely passing just a few years after the city's conquest. The passage serves the dual purpose of legitimizing Alfonso's authority in Seville by way of divine sanction and imperial inheritance. Holy Mary works together with King Fernando to legitimize Alfonso's rule in what will become Castile's new, unofficial capital in the Mediterranean.

Having legitimized Alfonso as the heir to Fernando's campaigns of conquest, the narrative then skips to Alfonso's time as king to relate two interconnected miracles involving his deceased parents. In the first, Alfonso discovers that their bodies have remained uncorrupted after many years of interment. As the narrative relates, this miracle occurs when Alfonso has the remains of his mother Beatriz transferred to Seville, where he has commissioned a rich sepulchre in the cathedral that will serve as the final resting place for the royal couple. We learn that God and Mary have together prevented the decomposition of the bodies because they so favoured the pair (Fernando and his wife Beatriz): "ca ambos eran ben seus / quites" (because both were favoured by Him) (3.79). The second miracle occurs after the interment, when Fernando appears to an artisan involved in the construction of the sepulchre to express displeasure with its design. The message, which he delivers to a ring maker identified as Master Jorge, finds its way to Alfonso, who then expresses pleasure at the man's dream vision.

The miracles of *Cantigas* 292 are dense with meaning. First, we know that the historical transfer of Beatriz's remains occurred sometime late in Alfonso's reign, probably 1279. This means that *Cantigas* 292 was likely composed sometime after this time, in the final years of Alfonso's life.[48] In fact, while some, more general crusading poems (like *Cantigas* 46 above) were part of the original collection of 100 poems, most of the more Iberian-specific narratives only appeared in the later "T" and "E" versions. This is an important consideration that suggests that Alfonso was most committed to tailoring a complementary image of his military campaigns precisely at a time when his legacy as a monarch was most in doubt. The final decade of his reign—beginning with his lost bid for Holy Roman Emperor and ending with the destruction of his cherished port town El Puerto de Santa María by North African armies—was perhaps the most politically disheartening for the king. Besieged on multiple fronts by an invading Marinid army and a debilitating illness that caused tension with his heir and questioned the legitimacy of his rule, it made sense that Alfonso would work at this moment

[48] J. O'Callaghan, *Poetic Biography*, 50-55.

to craft a rhetorical image of himself as the rightful inheritor of his father's divinely sanctioned imperial pursuits.

Second, the central image of the narrative is of course the statue of Fernando, which Alfonso initially commissions to have seated on a throne, wearing a silk robe, an ornate gold ring, and holding a sword in his hand. It is with this sword, the poetic voice reminds us, that Fernando administered the decisive blow to Islam: "con que deu colbe a Mafomete mortal" (with which he had dealt a fatal blow to Mahomet) (3.79). Statues appear throughout the *Cantigas* collection (such as we saw in *Cantigas* 46), symbolizing by way of metaphysical imposition the power of the Virgin to transpose Her spiritual self into the secular plane.[49] Here, Fernando demonstrates similar capabilities, channelling his likeness as a means by which to appear to Master Jorge. In Master Jorge's vision, Fernando requests that a statue of the Virgin replace his statue in the cathedral to better demonstrate Mary's position of superiority. Notably, Fernando specifies that a specific statue be used—one that he brought from Toledo: "con que vin ben des Toledo" (which I brought all the way from Toledo) (3.80). With this request, Fernando is symbolically transferring the ancient seat of Visigoth power to the newly controlled throne at Seville, thereby affirming the city's supreme value for the monarchy. He additionally requests that the ring that Master Jorge has worked be removed from his statue's finger and placed on Mary's. This act, Fernando explains, will serve to recognize Her gift of rule: "ca dela tiv' eu o reyno" (from Her and Her Beautiful Son I received the kingdom) (3.80). Jesús Montoya Martinez has pointed to this stanza, in which Fernando additionally references his knighthood in Burgos, as a demonstration of the *Cantigas* collection's "mentalidad caballeresca" vis-à-vis the Arthurian tradition.[50] In addition, Fernando's words emphasize Mary as the principal patron of Castilian empire. The intergenerational dynamics on display in this song reminds us that Mary's protection over the realm is multifaceted and demonstrative of what Scarborough calls his "royal arsenal of power."[51] Mary grants the kingdom to Fernando (*dela tiv' eu o reyno*), who later relies on Her aid to extend the borders of the realm into Seville, thereby dealing Islam a fatal wound (*colbe mortal*). Seville then becomes Alfonso's birthright, the physical manifestation of his father's exemplary military career, and the symbol of his monarchy's might in al-Andalus.

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[49] In *Cantigas* 324, for example, Mary's statue cures a deaf-mute. In another instance, *Cantigas* 345, an invading army of Moors attempts to burn a statue of the Virgin, but they fail to destroy the likeness. Both narratives occur in Seville.

[50] J. Montoya Martínez, "La literatura caballeresca en la obra de Alfonso X," *Revista Filología Románica* 14.2 (1997): 300.

[51] C. Scarborough, *Holy Alliance*, 154.

Following the conquest of Seville, Castile became the largest and most powerful Christian kingdom in Iberia, stretching nearly the entirety of the Peninsula from Compostela and Santander on the northern Atlantic coast, to Cádiz and Cartagena on the shores of the Mediterranean. Thanks largely to the military exploits of his king father Fernando III, Alfonso X inherited a kingdom that had nearly doubled in size since his birth in the ancient Visigothic capital of Toledo. The major wars of reconquest that came to define the later eleventh and twelfth centuries had all but passed. However, judging from Fernando's last words to his son as recorded in the *Primera Crónica General,* more work remained:

> Fijo, rico fincas de tierra et de muchos buenos vasallos, mas que rey que en la cristiandat ssea; punna en fazer bien et ser bueno, ca bien as con que. Ssennor te dexo de toda la tierra de la mar aca, que los moros del rey Rodrigo de Espanna ganado ouieron; et en tu sennorio finca toda: la vna conquerida, la otra tributada. Sy la en este estado en que te la yo dexo la sopieres guardar, eres tan buen rey commo yo; et sy ganares por ti mas, eres meior que yo; et si desto menguas, non eres tan bueno commo yo.[52]

If we are to believe that these were the king's final words to his son, Fernando left him a clear mandate to continue his campaigns of conquest in the region and beyond. The declaration additionally served to qualify Alfonso's reign relative only to territorial acquisition and imperial aggrandizement. It was presumably with these words in mind that Alfonso set out to prepare for his African crusade. Never had Castile been so close to its goal of "recovering" the African lands that once made up the southern reaches of the ancient Visigothic empire.

III. African Crusade

Upon taking the throne in 1252, Alfonso immediately set to work preparing for his African crusade. With each of the three remaining Ibero-Muslim kingdoms

[52] "My son, you are richer in lands and good vassals than any other king in Christendom. Strive to do well and to be good, for you have the wherewithal. My Lord, I leave you the whole realm from the sea hither that the Moors won from Rodrigo, king of Spain. All of it is in your dominion, part of it conquered, the other part tributary. If you know how to preserve in this state what I leave you, you will be as good a king as I; and if you win more for yourself, you will be better than I, but if you diminish it, you will not be as good as I" (J. O'Callaghan, "Image and Reality: The King Creates His Kingdom" in *Emperor of Culture: Alfonso X the Learned of Castile and His Thirteenth-Century Renaissance,* ed. Robert I. Burns, S.J., 14-45 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 15). Original text appears in *Primera Crónica General,* ed. R. Menéndez Pidal, 772-3, ch. 1132.

of Niebla, Granada, and Murcia recognizing Castilian suzerainty, Alfonso freely prioritized the commercial and military development of Seville. He incentivized Christian settlement of the region and conscripted the kingdom's first standing navy. In addition, Alfonso lobbied his international allies for support. While England refused the opportunity to campaign in Morocco, both Marseilles and Pisa pledged galleys. Pope Innocent IV also granted indulgences and financing for the campaign. Finally, after years of preparation, Alfonso launched his crusade. Curiously, however, his ships did not target Tangier or Ceuta, the two most strategic African ports in the Strait, but instead landed at Salé on the Atlantic coast.[53] The expedition lasted only a few short weeks and failed to establish any lasting foothold in Morocco.

Many of the king's efforts to fortify the southern reaches of his kingdom are reflected in the *Cantigas* collection. In *Cantigas* 376, for example, we learn that Alfonso makes his residence in Seville to oversee the development of his naval fleet: "na çibdade de Sevilla, u fazia sa morada / el Rey por guardar a terra e que fosse ben pobrada / e ouvesse per mar frota, per que fosse mais temuda" (in the city of Seville where the king resided in order to protect the land and see that it was well colonized. He maintained a fleet upon the sea so that he might be more feared) (3.264).[54] It is likely that these verses refer to the early years of Alfonso's reign when he chose Seville as his permanent residence in order to personally oversee the security of his growing kingdom (*per guardar a terra*). The Machiavellian reference to the fear that the king's fleet inspires (*per que fosse mais temuda*) is a clear rhetorical flourish intended to inspire confidence in the king's naval *apparati*. Additionally, in *Cantigas* 385, we learn of a church stronghold that Holy Mary herself builds on the shores of Seville: "fez y na marinna / pera guardar os creschãos dos mouros e ser bastida / Pera guerrejar or mouros d'Espann' e os afriçaos" (She quickly built a church on the shore in which She could be devoutly worshipped and which would protect the Christians from the Moors and be an assault tower to wage war on the Moors of Spain and the Africans) (3.284).[55] As the poetic voice indicates, the church is at once a setting for worship as well as a fortified stronghold (*bastida*) from which to make war (*guerrejar*) against the Moors of Spain and Africa. Both poems sketch a strong

[53] The fourteenth-century Tunisian scholar Ibn Khaldūn testified to the importance of this area when he wrote that Tangier and Ceuta were considered the most important seats of power for the Almohad Empire "because they were both maritime fortresses, seaports, arsenals for shipbuilding, and points of embarkation for those wishing to participate in the Holy War" (J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar Crusade,* 4-5).

[54] *Cantigas* 376 appears only in the final "E" manuscript.

[55] *Cantigas* 385 appears only in the final "E" manuscript.

image of Castile's new coastal border, one that is fortified by spiritual and military infrastructure.

The development of the first standing Castilian navy was not unique to Alfonso's reign, but rather an extension of his father's incipient naval force that was used to blockade the city of Seville during the 1247-8 campaign.[56] In 1251, Fernando authorized a *fuero* granting the seamen of the city's shoreline neighbourhood their own *alcalde de la mar*.[57] By the following year, the first of Alfonso's reign, the completion of the Royal Dockyards offered a permanent place to harbour his warships. This achievement coincided with the publication of fixed price and wage schedules, and for the first time customs duties began to contribute substantially to the war efforts.[58] In the following years leading up to the Salé campaign, Alfonso established the first *almirante de la mar* and contracted with a total of twenty-one sailors to serve as the admiral's *cómitres*, or captains. From the sixteenth-century Spanish historian Argote de Molina, we know that the names of the initial contracted *cómitres* represented a diverse Mediterranean conglomerate reflective both of Castilian origin (Cantabria), but also Italian, Catalan, and French, among others.[59] Among the justifications that Alfonso gave for the creation of the admiral position, it is recorded that "we greatly desire to carry forward the work of the crusade overseas for the service of God and the exaltation of Christianity."[60] The lands and estates that Alfonso gifted to each captain came with the responsibility of arming and maintaining a war galley that could be deployed for a service of three months every year.[61]

[56] As narrated in the *Primera Crónica General* (ch. 1075), Fernando contracted with the marine captain Ramón Bonifaz to convene "la mayor flota que podiese et la meior guisada" and "quebrantar el fuerte et alto capitolo del coronamiento del Andalozia." Bonifaz succeeded in this task, leading a fleet up the Guadalquivir to blockade the city from the water while Fernando, with help from Jaime I of Aragon and Ibn al-Aḥmar (Muḥammad I) of Granada, led the ground siege. For these reasons, Bonifaz is sometimes credited with being the first admiral of the incipient royal fleet. In reality, the first person known to hold the title of *almirante de la mar* was actually Roy López de Mendoza, who enjoyed this distinction via royal charters from December 1253 to January 1260. See José Luis Infiesta Pérez, "El Almirante Bonifaz y la conquista de Sevilla," *Historia 16* 212 (1993): 49-54 and Florentino Pérez-Embid, "La marina real castellana en el Siglo XIII," *Anuario de estudios medievales* 6 (1969): 141-57.

[57] J. O'Callaghan, *Justinian*, 92-3.

[58] J. O'Callaghan, "Image and Reality," 21. According to Pérez-Embid, Alfonso's marines served a tripart role of "armadores, combatientes, e intermediaries en el movimiento mercantil del puerto" (F. Pérez-Embid, "Marina real castellana," 156).

[59] Some of the names documented include "Guillén Juan Ruiz, Nocolos Tazo, Per de Vayona, Miguel Calafat, and Per Arnalt de Burdel (F. Pérez-Embid, "Marina real castellana," 163).

[60] J. O'Callaghan, "Image and Reality," 24.

[61] J. O'Callaghan, *Justinian*, 93-4.

These efforts are codified in Alfonso's legal compendium *Siete Partidas,* which defines in minute detail the structure of his navy and the obligations of its mariners.[62] Although this law code was never employed during Alfonso's reign, the encyclopaedic amount of information on maritime law and duty attests to the king's committed vision to a strong naval presence on his Mediterranean frontier.

In the ninth summer of his reign, in the year 1260, Alfonso finally launched his African Crusade. This short-lived campaign is recounted in terse detail in *Cantigas* 328. Considered the introductory poem to the Cycle of El Puerto de Santa María, the central narrative concerns the renaming of the port town of Alcanate (Ar. al-Qanāṭir) to El Puerto de Santa Maria.[63] Officially, this change occurred in 1260 and coincides with Alfonso's repopulation efforts in the region.[64] Located at the mouth of the Guadalete River opposite Cádiz, El Puerto provided a sheltered harbour and immediate access to the Atlantic Ocean. That summer, Alfonso resided in El Puerto to outfit a naval base in direct preparation for the assault. In *Cantigas* 328, the poetic voice recounts the campaign in a two-stanza aside:

> Ond' en este logar bõo foi pousar hũa vegada
> el Rey Don Affonso, quando sa frota ouv' enviada
> que Çalé britaron toda, gran vila e muit' onrrada,
> e o aver que gãaron de dur seria osmado.
>
> El pousand' en aquel logo e ssa frota enviando
> e yndo muitas vegadas a Cadiz e ar tornado,
> e do que mester avia a frota ben avondando
> per que fosse mais agỹa aquel feit' enderençado
>
> Non catou al…

[62] *Las Siete Partidas del Rey Don Alfonso el Sabio*, ed. Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid: Imprenta Real, 1807), 3 vols. See "Título XXIV Que fabla de la Guerra que se face por mar," II.258-267. Topics range from necessary supplies, to rank qualifications, to types of vessels. For an English translation of the *Siete Partidas,* see R. I. Burns ed., *Las Siete Partidas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 5 vols. Title XXIV ("Concerning War Waged on the Sea") appears in vol. 2, *Medieval Government: The World of Kings and Warriors (Partida II),* 462-469.

[63] In total, twenty-four songs are included in the cycle of poems dedicated to El Puerto de Santa María: 328, 356-359, 364, 366-8, 371-2, 375-9, 381-2, 385, 389, 391-3, 398. See J. O'Callaghan, *Poetic Biography,* 172-91 and C. Scarborough, *Holy Alliance,* 55-80.

[64] M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X,* 144. Alfonso would have to authorize a new town charter in 1281 following El Puerto's destruction at the hands of the Marinids.

> In this fine spot King don Alfonso stayed once when he had sent his fleet which destroyed Salé, a great and highly honoured city. The booty which they won could scarcely be calculated. While staying in that spot and commanding his fleet and going to Cádiz and back many times, supplying his fleet well with all it needed so that the enterprise might be more speedily carried out, he paid no attention to anything else…

From these verses we learn of the king's careful administration of the campaign. Giving the project his undivided attention (*non catou al*), Alfonso travels many times from Cádiz across the bay to El Puerto de Santa María to personally command his fleet. He makes sure to supply his forces with all necessary supplies to ensure a speedy victory (*mester avia… feit' enderençado*). As a result, the ships return with a hoard of treasure too extensive to count (*de dur seria osmado*). The narration then returns to the central miracle of the song, and the Salé digression is complete.

The events of the Salé raid as recounted in *Cantigas* 328 are accurate, yet conveniently brief. Sometime in early September, as the celebration of Ramadan was ending, the crusaders landed at Salé to little resistance. Morocco was, at that time, in a state of political uncertainty following the rise of the Marinid emir Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. 'Abd al-Ḥaqq (1258-86), whose rule oversaw the end of the Almohad dynasty based in Marrakesh. Abū Yūsuf's nephew, Ya'qūb, was then in possession of Salé and, in an apparent attempt to distinguish himself from his uncle, solicited an alliance from Castile in the form of some 200 cavalry.[65] This detail may help explain why Alfonso's campaign targeted Salé instead of the more strategic Mediterranean ports of Tangier or Ceuta. It could also explain why the Castilian soldiers encountered so little resistance despite Ceuta having warned the coastal towns earlier that summer of an impending attack.[66] The contingent of Christian soldiers then spent the next two weeks destroying the city and harassing its residents. They returned to Castile with some 3,000 captives, many of whom were later ransomed. What the *Cantigas* narrative omits, however, are the embarrassing details of the fleet's return. In a matter of days, Abū Yūsuf mustered a counterattack on the town that drove the Christian soldiers into a clumsy retreat. Leaving puppets on the parapets, the crusaders

[65] This probably occurred sometime in late 1259 or early 1260 (J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar Crusade*, 26).

[66] O'Callaghan suggests that the governor Ya'qūb may have changed his mind after his initial request for aid (*Gibraltar Crusade* 28). Another possibility is that he let the Castilians in but after seeing their bloodlust he quickly appealed to his uncle, who led the successful counterattack.

carried their booty onto the ships and burned everything else. Insufficient water supplies plagued the withdrawal, and one crew had to land at Larache to sell fifty-three Muslim captives in exchange for potable water. There were whispers of mutiny. Some sailors were reportedly so disgusted by the management of the affair that they deserted in favour of service to Abū Yūsuf. By early October the fleet started to limp back into the shelter of El Puerto de Santa Maria. Of the thirty-seven vessels that set out on the expedition some weeks previous, only twenty-five returned. Meanwhile, Abū Yūsuf ordered Salé restored. He reconstructed mosques and houses and built a defensive wall along the riverbank to prevent future attacks.

The *Crónica de Alfonso X,* a royal account of the king's reign produced in the century following his death, reported that Alfonso was pleased with the campaign's outcome: "desque lo sopo, ovo ende grant plazer" (upon hearing the news, he was greatly pleased).[67] Given this document's positioning within the royally sponsored histories of the realm, this perspective is understandable. And yet, it seems strange that, given the many years of preparation that went into the campaign, Alfonso would be pleased with these relatively fruitless results. Holt reads in the king's collection of profane poetry, *Cantigas d'escarnho e de maldezir* a more truthful indication of the king's feelings toward the campaign. Accordingly, Alfonso decried against poorly prepared and cowardly troops who neglect their duties.[68] Ultimately, Alfonso's plans for establishing and maintaining a foothold in Morocco shrivelled in the sweltering heat that gave his retreating navy such troubles on their return to El Puerto de Santa María. The Moroccan historian Ibn 'Idhārī contradicted the royal Castilian histories when he wrote that Alfonso "was about to explode and die of grief" upon learning that the Marinids had so quickly recovered Salé.[69] Writing also with the benefit of hindsight but from an opposing perspective, 'Idhārī's account is equally understandable, if not entirely believable. By all accounts, Alfonso had failed his first great test of kingship relative to the final words of his father. Admittedly, in the following years Alfonso did succeed in conquering the neighbouring kingdoms of Jerez (1261) and Niebla (1262), but his dreams for an empire that extended beyond the shores of Iberia would never come to fruition.

IV. Alfonso's Last Stand

Contrary to the expedition's ultimate objectives, the events of Salé did more to destabilize Castilian interests in the region than anything. As it turns out, the

[67] M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X,* 139 n. 28. My translation.
[68] E. Holt, "Cantigas de Cruzada" 220.
[69] J. O'Callaghan, *Gibraltar Crusade,* 27.

attack antagonized the Marinid emir Abū Yūsuf and created, in the words of González Jiménez, a "conflicto diplomático" that plagued the remainder of Alfonso's reign.[70] Shortly after the campaign, Alfonso's long-time ally in Granada, Ibn al-Aḥmar, broke the truce with Castile and began to plot with Abū Yūsuf against neighbouring Castile. In addition to his bid for Holy Roman Emperor, as well as navigating a contentious succession dispute, Alfonso would be forced to spend the rest of his reign in various defensive campaigns that further threatened the progress of his imperial designs and ultimately stopped the advance of his territorial conquests.

In 1264, encouraged by support from Morocco and Granada, the Muslim Mudéjar subjects of Castile rebelled from Jerez to Murcia.[71] These events are recounted in *Cantigas* 345 and 169. In *Cantigas* 345, we hear "dos mouros como gãaron Xerez con seu gran poder" (the Moors rebelled and won Jerez with their great power) (3.198).[72] The poetic voice equates Alfonso's struggle to overcome the rebellion with the cause of the Virgin herself: "da Reynna dos ceos tĩia bando / contra mouros e crischãos maos" (He fought the Queen of Heaven's cause against Moors and bad Christians) (3.198). Despite Alfonso's quick mobilization of troops from Seville, the Moors succeeded in causing great damage to the town. During the assault, they destroy the church and carry out a statue of the Virgin that they intend to burn. As in *Cantigas* 46 and 292, the Virgin Mary again takes focus in the form of her material likeness (*omagen*). In a dream, Alfonso sees Holy Mary running from the burning church with baby Jesus in her arms and, upon waking up, he understands that the castle is lost. However, as the narrative concludes, we learn that God ordained the recovery of the city and the restoration of the statue: "quiso Deus que gaannada / Xerez este Rei ouvesse e de crischãos pobrada, / e a omagen da Virgen en acapela tornada" (God willed that Jerez be conquered by this king and populated with Christians, and the statue of the Virgin be returned to the chapel) (3.201).

Cantigas 169 is set in Murcia and similarly recounts the time when "ss' alçaron mouros des Murç ata Sevilla" (the Moors rebelled from Murcia to Seville) (2.173).[73] Reportedly, this occurs when "Aboyuçaf, el sennor de Çalé" (Aboyuçaf, lord of Salé) passes by with a great host: "passou con mui gran gente" (passed by with a great army) (2.174). This is one of a few references in the *Cantigas* collection to the Marinid emir Abū Yūsuf. Curiously, his name is not mentioned in *Cantigas* 328's reference to the Salé campaign, but does appear in several poems that document the later Marinid invasions into Iberia during

[70] M. González Jiménez, *Alfonso X*, 140.

[71] For the events that led to the revolt, see J. O'Callaghan, *Learned King*, 181-2.

[72] *Cantigas* 345 appears in manuscript "E" only.

[73] *Cantigas* 169 appears in manuscripts "T" and "E."

the 1270s.[74] Here his presence is meant to illustrate his role in fomenting the sedition of Alfonso's Muslim subjects in the cherished Murcian holding. The narrative stands out for conflating two seemingly separate periods in history. While a small contingent of Marinid forces landed at Tarifa to aid Ibn al-Aḥmar around 1263, Abū Yūsuf himself did not participate in this campaign. Rather, he was most active during the later Marinid invasions of 1272, 1275, and 1277. As Scarborough has suggested, the reason for such an historical transposition lies in Alfonso's own displeasure at having lost to the emir during the 1260 campaign in Salé.[75] Finding the idea of memorializing this loss in his *Cantigas* collection unappetizing, he instead recast the Marinid foe as an antagonistic foil in a more praiseworthy narrative that highlights the Moors' inability to destroy the church. As the narrative concludes, we hear how Holy Mary intervenes to thwart the plot and drive Her enemies from the region: "Desfez a Virgen santa, que os ende sacou, / que ena Arraixaca poucos deles leixou; / e a sua eigreja assi deles livrou" (However, the Holy Virgin undid their treacherous plot, for She drove them out of there and left very few of them in La Arrijaca. Thus, She freed Her church from them) (2.174). In this way, Alfonso inverts his historical defeat at Salé into a more favourable account of a victory at Murcia.

Abū Yūsuf's subsequent invasions in the decade of the 1270s are also alluded to in *Cantigas* 215 and 323. This period coincides with Alfonso's establishment of the Order of Saint Mary of Spain, a naval order reflective of Alfonso's desire to "build maritime infrastructure on the Mediterranean coast and in the Strait."[76] Despite the order's establishment in 1270, Abū Yūsuf and his Marinid army managed to infiltrate the Peninsula clandestinely through Algeciras, which was still in possession of Granada (ruled at that time by Ibn al-Aḥmar's successor Abū 'Abd Allah, (or Muḥammad II, r. 1273-1302). As *Cantigas* 323 narrates, the Marinid emir succeeds in burning many lands in the kingdom of Seville: "Aboyuçef passou ben pelo estreito / d'Algizira e a terra de Sevilla tod' a eito / correu, e muitas aldeas forna dos mouros queimadas" (Aboyuçaf passed through the Strait of Algeciras and rapidly invaded all the land of Seville, and many villages were burned by the Moors) (3. 148).[77] The army passes through

[74] See also *Cantigas* 181 (Manuscripts "T" and E"). This poem relates Abū Yūsuf's assault on the Almohad caliph 'Umar al-Murtaḍā (r. 1248-66) in Marrakesh. Notably, while the Marinids succeeded in ousting the Almohad government from Morocco, this *cantiga* portrays the military defeat of Abū Yūsuf and his Marinid forces after al-Murtaḍā's hosts display Holy Mary's banner. The poem therefore stands as another likely instance of Alfonso reappropriating the military histories of his realm to his own aims—in this case projecting the military weakness of one of his greatest political rivals.

[75] C. Scarborough, *Holy Alliance,* 50.

[76] N. Parmley, "Imagined Empire" 208.

[77] *Cantigas* 323 appears in manuscripts "F" and "E."

Coria, a village some ten kilometres south of Seville, destroying everything in its path: "os mouros logo deitaron / sas algaras e correron e roubaron quant' acharon" (the hordes of Moors fell on them and raided and plundered everything in their path) (3. 149). The poem, which focuses on the grief of a man whose son has just died, does not offer a resolution to the invasion except through the words of the boy, whom Holy Mary revives. Prompted to explain his miraculous recovery, the boy declares that Mary had been with him and also defended him from the Moors (*guardara dos mouros*).

Cantigas 215 similarly recounts one of Abū Yūsuf's crossings, describing the terrible destruction that he brings to the frontier: "passou el come a furto con muitos mouros barvudos; / e poren forn as vilas e os castelos corrudos / e polos nossos pecados muita eigreja britada" (he slipped across the border with many bearded Moors. Hence the cities and castles were sacked, and, because of our sins many churches were destroyed) (2.273).[78] The poetic voice employs the common trope of assigning blame for the incursion not on any specific oversight or military floundering, but on the sins of the realm itself (*pelos nossos pecados*). The North African army ravages the countryside as far as Jaen, some 150 kilometres inland, where they snatch a statue of the Virgin Mary from the local church. In attempting to destroy Her likeness, they first try to smash it with a sword, then burn it, then finally sink it to the bottom of a lake. In the first two instances, God intervenes to prevent the statue's destruction, while in the third Holy Mary prevents Her likeness from sinking. It is after the third instance that they finally realize the Virgin's potency, and promptly remove it from the water and send it to Granada, where Muḥammad II has it returned to the Castilian monarch.

As these *cantigas* demonstrate, the legacy of Alfonso's Salé crusade was not imperial stability but rather continuing warfare in the form of Marinid counterattacks in the heart of Castilian territory. Beginning with the Mudéjar Revolt of 1264, the second half of Alfonso's reign was defined in opposition to his first. Whereas the decade of the 1250s was spent in preparation for the African crusade, the latter half of the 1260s and 1270s were spent in defensive wars that demonstrated the ineffective consequences of the Salé campaign as well as threatened the future stability of the realm. Despite these political uncertainties, or perhaps because of them, Alfonso transposed these martial episodes into inspirational narratives that demonstrate Mary's allegiance to God and the crown at the expense of African invaders and Castile's own subversive subjects.

[78] *Cantigas* 215 appears in manuscripts "F" and "E."

V. Conclusions

The final verses of *Cantigas* 169 are perhaps the most explicit indication of Alfonso's designs for his Castilian empire. Having just attributed the recovery of the church of Murcia to the power of the Virgin Mary, the poetic voice continues by declaring that She will moreover thwart Islam in the Peninsula and beyond: "que nunca Mafomete poder y averá; ca a conquereu ela e demais conquerrá / Espanna e Marrocos, e Ceta e Arcilla" (for never can Mohammed hold power there because She conquered it, and furthermore, She will conquer Spain and Morocco and Ceuta and Asilah) (2.174). With these words, Alfonso conflated two of his most urgent political goals: to fight Islam and expand the kingdom into North Africa. As this essay has demonstrated, the *Cantigas* collection repeatedly invokes this message in songs that narrate local crusading miracles as well as feats in the Holy Land. In many narratives, such as the recounting of the 1260 African campaign, historical accuracy is replaced instead by a rhetorical flourish that turns problematic losses into victories made possible through Alfonso's devotion to, and faith in, the Holy Mary. Through Her power of intercession on behalf of Christian armies and strongholds, Mary becomes an ally in Alfonso's imperial projections.

In the very final years of his rule, Alfonso turned his attention once again to the southern shores of his kingdom. Securing yet another crusading indulgence from Pope Nicholas III, his fleet laid siege in 1278 to the port city of Algeciras in efforts to cut off the Marinid invasion route that had so distracted his quest for control of the Holy Roman Empire. The siege was even more disastrous than the Salé campaign, and like his previous naval assault it too led to more all-out war, this time against the kingdom of Granada. However, by this point, Alfonso's illness had progressed to such a state that he was forced to cede control of most of his kingdom to his son, the infante Sancho, with whom he had feuded almost constantly since the beginning of the succession crisis some years earlier. Neither the siege of Algeciras nor the subsequent war with Granada is recounted in any substantive detail in the *Cantigas* collection. By this very late point in his career as poet-politician, Alfonso either ran out of time to include these events in the collection or was simply too infirm to oversee the delicate process of turning such historical losses into literary feats of Castile's Marian-inspired strength.
On 4 April 1284, Alfonso passed away. In his final will, he ordered that his heart be taken to "the Holy Land of Ultramar to be buried in Jerusalem on Mount Calvary, where some of our grandparents lie."[79] This was the same document in which he designated that his *Cantigas* collection be stored in the cathedral of Seville and engaged on the feast days of the Virgin. Of course, his body never

[79] J. O'Callaghan, *Poetic Biography*, 98.

made the journey east, but was instead interred at the foot of his parents' tomb in the cathedral of Seville. In many ways, the king's *Cantigas* collection serves as a testament to some of his most personal and urgent desires. As expressed in the pages of his miracle accounts, he desired to worship his patron Lady, and he hoped that She would, in turn, offer aid to his plans for crusade and conquest. Like the *Cantigas* collection, however, these plans were only partially realized.

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