

Culture and Society in Medieval Galicia

A Cultural Crossroads at the Edge of Europe

Edited and Translated by

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BRILL

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Language and Literary Culture

From Latin to Galician-Portuguese

James D'Emilio

This section brings us—all too briefly—to the Galician language and vernacular literature. Language has become a cornerstone of modern Galician identity, as Ramón Villares points out in the final section. The revitalization of the Galician language was a key pillar in the political and cultural programs of nationalist movements from the late nineteenth century onwards. For the last generation, its promotion stands as one of the successes of the Galician autonomous community.

Vernacular lyric poetry may also be the most familiar area of medieval Galicia, after the pilgrimage, for English-speaking medievalists. Like the pilgrimage, the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas* forge links to an international culture, and they reach a wider scholarly audience through comparative studies of the emergent vernacular literatures of other Romance-speaking communities, most notably the poetry and music of the Occitan troubadours and the *trouvères* of northern France. In North American and British universities, language studies have thrown a lifeline to the literatures of medieval Iberia, even if there is, not surprisingly, a decided tilt towards Castilian. In Galician-Portuguese literature, the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* of King Alfonso X (*Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, the Wise*, tr. Kathleen Kulp-Hill, 2000) are well known for their integration of lyrics, music, and images, and they are important in the history of Marian devotion and miracle tales. The remaining corpus of over 1600 Galician-Portuguese lyric poems is preserved in three *cancioneiros* (songbooks). One is medieval, the unfinished *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*, compiled in Portugal, possibly under King Dinis (1279–1325), himself the author of 137 poems. The others were assembled in Rome by commission of the humanist Angelo Colocci: the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana* and the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* (now in Lisbon and known as Colocci-Brancuti).

As I explained in the preface to the volume, we do not pretend to survey, much less ‘cover’, this wealth of literature in a short space within this interdisciplinary collection. It brings us to the chronological limits of our study and would demand fuller treatment of Portuguese history and culture, across a border that remained more political than cultural long after its creation in the eleventh- and twelfth-century circumstances that Ermelindo Portela described. In addition, this corpus of poetry boasts a large and diverse international bibliography, shaped by both a tradition of textual and philological analysis and

the contemporary apparatus of literary theory. For its part, the poetry of King Alfonso X is most often considered together with the cultural, intellectual, and legal activity of his court outside a specifically Galician framework. Here, a very selective approach to vernacular language and literature is in order, addressing scholars across disciplines to encourage further interest in Galician culture and history.

Like the cult of St. James, the vernacular literature of Galicia had deep roots in the region and should not be divorced from traditions of Latin learning. We have seen widespread literacy and education in early medieval Galicia, the erudition of its charters, and the sophistication and breadth of the Compostelan school. As Adeline Rucquoi demonstrated, the school's activities encompassed the composition of Latin verse, bold experimentation in music, the citation of Roman poets and historians, the collection of Arabic scientific treatises in translation, and the study of the liberal arts and secular subjects. One of the great achievements of the early Romanesque sculptors of the cathedral of Compostela was, as Manuel Castiñeiras argued, "the integration of secular subjects into a sacred discourse," and these included figures and exempla from epic poetry and romances. Expounding programs devised a century later for the Pórtico da Gloria and the cathedrals of Ourense and Tui, Rocío Sánchez concluded by casting "the opposition between courtly and clerical culture" as "a simplistic and reductionist dichotomy" in a world where "profane and sacred discourses were...tightly interwoven." Here, William Paden recognizes the literary debt of the *cantigas* to "stylistic and rhetorical devices" from ancient and early Christian literature, medieval Latin verse, and the liturgy.

This section, then, opens with Roger Wright posing the question of when the Galician language "had an identifiably discrete existence." His contention that we must wait until nearly 1300 before detecting general recognition of Galician as a distinct form of Romance is not likely to appeal, as he warns, to "politicians, administrators, and other professional obscurantists," greatly invested in the authority and presumed antiquity of sharp lines etched on maps. Instead, Wright offers a linguist's more fluid understanding of language variation over time and space, and within the very same texts. Crucial to his argument about Galician is his larger thesis—set forth in a series of studies since his seminal book, *Late Latin and Early Romance in Spain and Carolingian France* (1982)—about the development of Latin, first into Romance, and "only later...into separate Romance languages," a division that he places "in many cases after 1200." While individual features of these languages had long existed, "their collective conceptual coherence as a distinct entity did not." That final step hinged on the introduction of distinct ways of writing.

In Iberia, the use and dissemination in the thirteenth century of the “new Romance *scripta*,” a written mode that was “more isomorphic with pronunciation,” was the result, as Wright explains, of a process initiated by the “introduction of medieval Latin *grammatica* on the French model” after the acceptance of the Roman rite c. 1080. With this, the notion that Latin and Romance were separate entities took hold, and efforts to represent Ibero-Romance in writing encouraged the idea of separate Romance languages as well. Distinctions within Ibero-Romance were hastened by “the separatist political fashions of the thirteenth century,” as written forms of Romance won official support in Castile and Portugal, for example, through their adoption in royal chanceries and law codes.

In the kingdom of León, the very success of the early twelfth-century Latin reform and the high level of Latin learning in the school of Compostela slowed change. Romance would not be welcomed into the Leonese chancery until after the union with Castile in 1230, and Wright contends that Alfonso X “used his authority to establish the credentials of Galician as an independent written language, in this case for literary purposes, with his *Cantigas* of the 1270s.” Countering common arguments, Wright rejects purportedly earlier evidence (the *Descort* of the Provençal poet Raimbaut de Vaqueiras and the *cantiga* known as *Ora faz ost’ o senhor de Navarra*) to conclude that it was only in the late thirteenth century that the distinctive features of Galician “were becoming bundled” in the written mode, and thereby seen as conceptually independent “both of Ibero-Romance as a whole and of Portuguese.”

Vernacular lyric, more than property deeds and recordkeeping, acquaints most medievalists with texts in Galician or, as the language of the lyrics is generally termed, Galician-Portuguese. William D. Paden and Amélia Hutchinson introduce this treasury of poetry with two case studies. Paden centers on the meager surviving examples of musical notation accompanying lyrics on two parchment sheets known respectively as the *Pergaminho Vindel* (Morgan Library, New York), and the *Pergaminho Sharrer* (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, Lisbon). The first contains the entire known oeuvre of Martín Codax, seven *cantigas de amigo*—love poems sung in the character of a woman—with musical notation for six; the second preserves lyrics and music of seven *cantigas de amor*—poems typically of unrequited love sung in the character of a man—by King Dinis of Portugal.

Paden focuses upon the two leaves, particularly the *Pergaminho Vindel*; the genres their poems exemplify; and the interpretations of their musical notation by the musicologist Manuel Pedro Ferreira. The rare opportunity to consider the music of these poems invites further reflection on the *cantiga de amigo* and *cantiga de amor*. Scholars have hardened these into sharply distinct

genres with contrasting origins, structures, social environments, and musical forms. Paden questions these conventional categories and topples some of the postulates—historical, literary, musical, codicological—on which they stand. Instead, he argues that the two genres “may be considered on a metatextual or generic level as a dialogue.” In addition, he proposes that sets of poems, like those on the two parchments, should be read—and performed—as cycles. Paden’s scepticism about the thoroughgoing distinctions between the two genres informs his careful and systematic critique of Ferreira’s reconstruction of the melodies, rhythms, accentual patterns, and musical accompaniment of these poems, for these go hand in hand with “an extensive distinction between the two genres.” He concludes by reflecting on the recorded performance of these songs by the baritone Paul Hillier, and he suggests that reading them as a cycle would encourage experimentation “with more varied tempi and emotions.”

Amélia Hutchinson approaches the poems of the *cancioneiros* differently by exploring references to the sea, and reading the poems, in part, as “expressions of historical experiences” and a window onto the life and society of the people of medieval Galicia and Portugal. She does not limit herself to the so-called *mariñas* or *cantigas de mar*—mostly drawn from among the *cantigas de amigo*—which explicitly “relate to the sea, seascapes, boats, or travel by sea or take place within a specific marine setting.” Instead, she searches more widely for references to the sea and to maritime communities, paying particular attention to the *cantigas de escárnio* and *de maldizer*, biting satirical and often humorous poems of social criticism, and of personal, political, and poetic insult and invective. Besides highlighting the historical and social setting for these poems and their potential value as historical sources, her discussion, like that of Paden, reminds us that conventional definitions of genres heighten our appreciation of some characteristics at the expense of hiding features and themes that cut across these categories.

These articles conclude our presentation of medieval Galicia, for the last section—with the final article by Ramón Villares—addresses the place of the Middle Ages in the modern Galician political, historical, and cultural imagination. As I explained in the preface to the volume, there is certainly more to be written about the late Middle Ages in Galicia, but that is beyond the goals of this book. These articles on Galician language and literature, however, like the articles of Francisco J. Pérez Rodríguez, Melissa Katz, and others in earlier sections, point to some of the issues, raised throughout this book, that might be applied to the broader interdisciplinary study of the thirteenth century and the later Middle Ages in Galicia.

The lyric poetry of the thirteenth and early fourteenth century is but one example, alongside the religious activity of the monastic and mendicant

orders, the undervalued presence of Gothic art, and the steady flow of pilgrims from northern Europe, of Galicia's continuing participation in international cultural and religious movements after the heyday of Compostela. Besides such direct connections, the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries invite the same kind of comparative approach to culture, society, and politics that Jeffrey Bowman appealed for in the study of the tenth and eleventh centuries. Comparative studies of European regions that constituted internal frontiers in an age of state formation and the increasingly centralized activities of the Roman church and the religious orders could be most illuminating. Within Iberia, the recognition of Galician as a distinct language, its cultural importance at the court of Alfonso X, and the larger cultural community of Galician-Portuguese lyric that ignored the recent political frontier between the two lands all serve as reminders that boundaries and realms that proved to be enduring ones were still fluid in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and that we need to approach Galician culture, society, and politics in this period within the context of different and overlapping Iberian communities.