

# Open Iberia/América: Teaching Anthology

<https://openiberiaamerica.hcommons.org/>

## *Cantigas de Santa Maria*: “Como Santa Maria ajudou a Emperatriz de Roma” / “How the Virgen Mary Helped the Empress of Rome”

Dianne Burke Money Penny, Indiana University East and Alison Carberry Gottlieb, Boston University (2023)

### Introduction:

#### Alfonso X

The author, or perhaps more aptly named, the composer, of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* was Alfonso X, King of “Castilla, León, Sevilla, Córdoba, Murcia, Jaén, and el Algarbe.” As evidenced by his title, he came to have possession of various kingdoms in Iberia. He was born in Toledo in 1221 and died in Seville in 1284, at 63 years of age. He is called the Learned King because he was an author, poet, musician, and historian, and because he supported artists and translators. Furthermore, he employed Christians, Jews, and Muslims in his translation workshop in Toledo.

#### The *Cantigas*:

The work below is one of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, a repertoire of songs compiled in four manuscripts between 1257 and 1283. The *Cantigas* consist of 420 narrative songs that focus on the Virgen Mary and the miracles that she performs across Christendom. Originally, the text was written in Galician-Portuguese, from the northeast region of Iberia. Galicia is the site of Santiago de Compostela, the final destination of the pilgrimage route known as the Camino de Santiago (Saint James’s Way). The city received (and receives) many pilgrims with their tales and cultural material from diverse regions, including the poetry of traveling minstrels. A minstrel, or *juglar*, was a performer who traveled and recited, sang, danced, or played games before audiences. These audiences could be made up of commoners and nobility and royalty. One can imagine Santiago de Compostela as a place full of devout Christians, praising Mary in many celebratory ways, and full of a literary richness stemmed from this mixing of people and their distinct customs. Although Alfonso was a native speaker of Castilian, it is possible that he used Galician-Portuguese to emphasize the cultural and religious importance of this northern region that he ruled or merely as a homage to the renowned minstrel culture in Galicia.

*Cantigas de Santa Maria* is a fascinating collection. Each story is comprised of text, images, and music, which create a multisensory medieval experience. The combination of texts and images portrays day-to-day life and, often, the less-documented common peoples of the Middle Ages in Europe. There are 426 *cantigas* in total in four manuscripts: the *codice princeps*, or principal codex, and the *codice rico* or rich codex, in the Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, Madrid; the Toledo codex, in the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid; and the Florence codex, in the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Florence. Considering that there were no presses to print texts *en masse*, these handwritten copies are notably similar. However, only the two Escorial manuscripts have illuminations (meaning detailed images, similar to contemporary illustrations). The *codice rico* version consists of illuminations in panel form, similar to today’s comic books. Pages are divided in six or twelve frames with an abbreviated text above or below (see the illuminations included below). Usually, the images correspond to the text, but interestingly, sometimes they serve as a distinct narrator that contradicts the narrative.

Thematically, the narrative glorifies the Virgin Mary, focusing on her miraculous acts and divine interventions that benefit her followers, but they are interspersed with elements of fantasy and folklore. There are nine miracle stories, each followed by a hymn dedicated to Mary (*cantigas de loor*). These hymns portray Mary with



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/). You are free to download, share, adapt and republish, provided you attribute the source and do not use for commercial purposes.

an almost romantic tone, giving her such nicknames as “rose of roses” and the “spouse” of God, more typically associated with the idea of courtly love, but also present in the biblical *Song of Solomon*.

## Cantiga 5

### Como Santa Maria ajudou a Emperatriz de Roma

*Quen as coitas deste mundo ben quiser  
sofrer Santa Maria deve sempr' ante si  
põer.*

E desto vos quer' eu ora contar segund' a letra diz un mui gran miragre que fazer quis pola emperatriz de Roma, segund' eu contar oi, per nome Beatriz Santa Maria a madre de Deus ond' este cantar fiz que a guardou do mundo que lle foi mal joiz e do demo que por tentar a cuidou vencer. Quen as coitas deste mundo ben quiser sofrer...

Esta dona, de que vos disse ja, foi dun emperador moller, mas pero del nome non sei, foi de Roma sennor e per quant' eu de seu feit' aprendi foi de mui gran valor. Mas a dona tant' era fremosa que foi das belas flor e servidor de Deus e de sa lei amador e soube Santa Maria mais d' al ben querer

Aquest' emperador a sa moller queria mui gran ben e ela outrossi a el amava mais que outra ren mas por servir Deus o emperador com' ome de bon sen cruzou s' e passou o mar e foi romeu a Jerusalem. Mas quando moveu de Roma por passar alen leixou seu irmão e fez i gran seu prazer.

Quando s' ouv' a ir o emperador, aquel irmão seu, de que vos ja diss', a sa moller a emperatriz o deu dizend': “Este meu irmão receb' oimais por fillo meu e vos seede ll' en logar de madre por en, vos rog' eu, e de o castigardes ben non vos seja greu . En esto me podedes mui grand' amor fazer.”

### How the Virgen Mary Helped the Empress of Rome

*Refrain: Whosoever bravely suffers through this world, should always shield themselves with Mary.*

1 I want to tell you, according to what is written, of a very great miracle that was done for the Empress of Rome, who, as I have heard tell, was named Beatrice<sup>1</sup>. Holy Mary, the mother of God, as I have heard tell, guarded her from the world that judged her unjustly and from the Devil that wanted to tempt and conquer her.

2 This woman, of whom I have already spoken, was the wife of an emperor, though I do not know his name. He was the ruler of Rome and, from what I have learned, was a man of great worth. But the woman was so beautiful that she was the flower of all flowers, and she served God and his laws and loved Holy Mary most of all.

3 This emperor loved his wife and she loved him as well, more than all things. But to serve God the emperor, as a man of good sense, launched a crusade<sup>2</sup> and crossed the sea from Rome to Jerusalem. But when the emperor departed Rome for the far away crusade, he was delighted to leave his brother behind.

4 When the emperor was about to leave, he called for the brother I have just spoken of, and he told the empress, “This brother of mine, receive him as my son and take your place as his mother. I beg you to guide him well, do not be harsh. In this you can show me great love.”

<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, there was never an Empress of Rome named Beatrice. However, Alfonso X's mother was Beatrice of Swabia (1205-1235). So, perhaps he is choosing to use her name in this story as a form of filial affection.

<sup>2</sup> The Christian church and Christian rulers initiated many religious wars termed “Crusades.” The most popular of these occurred between the 11th and 13th centuries in attempts to capture Jerusalem from Islamic rule.

- Depoi-lo emperador se foi. A mui pouca de sazón catou seu irmão a sa moller e namorou s' enton dela e disse lle que a amava mui de coração. Mai-la santa dona quando ll' oi u dizer tal traçon en ùa torre o meteu en mui gran prijon jurando muito que o faria i morrer.
- O emperador dous anos e meio en Acre morou e tod' a terra de Jerusalem muitas vezes andou e pois que tod' est' ouve feïto pera Roma se tornou mas ante que d' Ultramar se partisse, mandad' enviou a sa moller e ela logo soltar mandou o seu irmão mui falso que a foi traer.
- Quando o irmão do emperador de prijon saiu barva non fez nen cercẽou cabelos e mal se vestiu. A seu irmão foi e da emperadriz non s' espediu mas o emperador quando o atan mal parado viu preguntou lli que fora e el lle recodiu: "En poridade vos quer' eu aquesto dizer."
- Quando foron ambos a ùa parte, fillou s' a chorar o irmão do emperador e muito xe lle queixar de sa moller que porque non quisera con ela errar que o fezera por ende tan tost' en un carcer deitar. Quand' o emperador oi u, ouv' en tal pesar que se leixou do palafren en terra caer.
- Quand' o emperador de terra s' ergeu, logo, sen mentir, cavalgou e quanto mais pod' a Roma começou de s' ir e a pouca d' ora viu a emperadriz a si viür, e logo que a viu mui sannudo a ela leixou s' ir e deu lle gran punnada no rostro sen falir e mandou a matar sen a verdade saber.
- 5 Afterward, the emperor left. A short time passed, and his brother looked upon his wife and fell in love with her then and told her he loved her with his whole heart. But the saintly woman, when she heard him speak this treachery, placed him in a tower, in a great prison, swearing that he would die there.
- 6 The emperor stayed in Acre<sup>3</sup> for two and a half years, traveling across the land of Jerusalem many times. When this was done, before he headed overseas toward Rome, he sent an envoy to his wife. She then released his treacherous brother, and he betrayed her.
- 7 The brother dressed himself shoddily, with an unkempt beard and disheveled hair, and left the prison. He went directly to his brother without asking leave of the empress, and the emperor, seeing how poorly he looked, asked what happened. The brother replied, "I wish to tell you this in privacy."
- 8 When they both left to discuss this alone, the brother cried to the emperor and complained about his wife, saying that, because he did not want to commit sin with her, she threw him in the prison. When the emperor heard this, he was so stricken that he fell from his horse.
- 9 When the emperor arose from the ground, I say without exaggeration, he remounted and quickly headed for Rome. Soon he saw the empress heading toward him. Upon seeing her, he unleashed his fury upon her and struck her directly in the face. Ignorant of the truth, he ordered her to be killed.

---

<sup>3</sup> A city in northern Palestine on the coast of the Mediterranean's Levantine Sea. The journey from Rome to Acre is around 2000 miles. For reference, the United States is between 2500 and 3500 miles from east to west coast. The siege of Acre, 1189-1191, is the most famous military campaign of the Third Crusade.

- Dous monteiros, a que esto mandou, fillaron a des i e rastrand' a un monte a levaron mui preto dali e quando a no monte teveron, falaron ontre si que jouvensen con ela per forza, segund' eu aprendi. Mas ela chamando Santa Maria, log' i chegou un conde que lla foi das mãos toller
- O conde, poi-la livrou dos vilãos, disse lle: "Senner, dizede-m' ora quen sodes ou dond'." Ela respos: "Moller são mui pobr' e coitada e de vosso ben ei mester." "Par Deus," diss' el conde, "aqueste rogo farei volonter ca mia companneira tal come vos muito quer que criedes nosso fill' e façades crecer."
- Pois que o cond' a questo diss' enton atan toste sen al a levou consigo aa condessa e disse ll' atal: "Aquesta moller pera criar nosso fillo muito val ca vejo a mui fremosa, de mais semella me sen mal e por en tenno que seja contra nos leal e metamos lle des oimais o moç' en poder."
- Pois que a santa dona o fillo do conde recebeu de o criar muit' apost' e mui ben muito se trameteu mas un irmão que o cond' avia, mui fals' e sandeu, pediu lle seu amor e porque ela mal llo acolheu degolou ll' o meniõ ùa noit' e meteu ll' o cuitelo na mão pola fazer perder.
- Pois desta guisa pres mort' o meniõ, como vos dit' ei, a santa dona que o sentiu morto diss': "Ai, que farei?" O cond' e a condessa ll' disseron: "Que ás?" Diz: "Eu ei pesar e coita por meu criado que ora mort' achei." Diss' o irmão do conde: "Eu o vingarei de ti que o matar foste por nos cofonder."
- Pois a dona foi ferida mal daquel peor que tafur e non viia quen lla das mãos sacasse de nenllur se non a condessa que lla fillou mas esto muit' adur ùs dizian: "Queimen al!" e outros: "Moirá con segur!" Mas poi-la deron a un marieiro de sur que a fezesse mui longe no mar somerger
- O marieiro poi-la ena barca meteu ben come fol disse lle que fezesse seu talan e seria sa
- 10 Two huntsmen, whom he ordered to do this, dragged her to a wooded hill nearby. When they got there, they talked to each other about forcing themselves upon her, I learned. But she called out to Holy Mary and then suddenly a count arrived and liberated her from their hands.
- 11 The count, when he freed her from the villains, said to her, "Madam, tell me now who you are and from where you come." She responded, "I am a poor, unfortunate woman, and in need of your mercy." "By God," responded the count, "This request I will fulfill because my wife has need of your help raising and educating our son."
- 12 Having said this, the count then took her with him to see the countess and he said, "This woman is qualified to help raise our son because she is very beautiful and has no bad qualities that I can see. She will be loyal to us. Let us leave the boy in her care."
- 13 The saintly woman then received the son of the count and raised him appropriately and well for a time. But a dishonest and foolish brother of the count meddled in the situation. He sought her love, and because she rejected him, he cut the throat of the boy one night and snuck the knife in her hand to ruin her.
- 14 Because of this, the child died, as I have told you, and the saintly woman said "Oh, what shall I do?" To which the count and countess said to her, "What is it?" She said, "I grieve my charge, whom I have found dead." The brother of the count said, "I will have vengeance on you who killed him to bring us ill fortune."
- 15 Then the woman was badly hurt by that scoundrel, who was worse than a swindler. And she saw that there was no one that could save her from his clutches but the countess, who, with great difficulty, got her away from him. Yet a crowd was shouting, "Burn her!" and others, "Kill her swiftly!" Then they gave her to a sailor from the south so he could drown her far out to sea.
- 16 The sailor then put her in the boat and said that she should provide him pleasure, that it would be

prol mas ela diss' enton: "Santa Maria, de mi non te dol nen o teu fillo de mi non se nenbra como fazer sol?" Enton v'eo voz de ceo que lle disse: "Tol tas mãos dela se non farei te perecer."

Os mar'eiros disseron enton: "Pois est' a Deus non praz leixemo-la sobr' aquesta pena u pod' aver assaz de coita e d' afan e pois morte, u outra ren non jaz ca se o non fezermos en mal ponto vimos seu solaz. E pois foi feito, o mar non a leixou en paz ante a v'eo con grandes ondas combater.

A emperadriz que non vos era de coraçõn rafez com' aquela que tanto mal sofrera e non ùa vez tornou, con coita do mar e de fame, negra come pez mas en dormindo a madre de Deus direi vos que lle fez, tolleu ll' a fam' e deu ll' ùa erva de tal prez con que podesse os gafos todos guarecer

A santa dona pois que s' espertou non sentiu null' afan nen fame come se sempr' ouvesse comudo carn' e pan e a erva achou so sa cabeça e disse de pran: "Madre de Deus, b'eitos son os que en ti fiuza an ca na ta gran mercee nunca faleceran enquanto a souberen guardar e gradecer."

Dizend' aquesto, a emperadriz muit' amiga de Deus viu v'ir ùa nave preto de si, ch'ea de romeus, de boa gente que non avia i mouros nen judeus. Pois chegaron, rogou lles muito chorando dos ollos seus dizendo: "Levade-me vosc', ai, amigos meus." E eles logo consigo a foron coller

Pois a nav' u a emperadriz ia aportou na foz de Roma logo baixaron a vea chamando: "Aioz." E o maestre da nave diss' a un seu ome: "Vai, coz carn' e pescado do meu aver que te non cost' ùa noz." E a emperadriz guariu un gaP e a voz foi end' e muitos gafos fezeron s' i trager

advantageous for her. And she then said, "Holy Mary, do you have no pity for me? Does your son not remember me? What shall I do?" Then a voice came from heaven that said, "Take your hands from her. If you do not, I will cause you to perish."

17 The sailors then said, "Well, this does not please God. We will set her free on this rock where she will die after pain and suffering. And if we don't do it, we will regret ever having seen her beauty." And, this done, the sea offered her no peace but rather battered her with great waves.

18 The empress, who was not of a faint heart, turned black as pitch with all her suffering and the torments of the sea and hunger. I will tell you what the mother of God did for her. While she was sleeping, she fought off her hunger and gave her an herb of such worth that it could cure all lepers.

19 The saintly woman, when she awoke, did not feel any suffering or hunger as if she has always had meat and bread to eat, and she found the herb under her head and she said earnestly "Mother of God, blessed are those who believe in you. Your great mercy will never fail them as long as they keep and thank you."

20 Having said this, the empress, a great friend of God, saw a boat approaching her. It was full of pilgrims, good people who were not Moors or Jews.<sup>4</sup> When they arrived, she begged, tears streaming from her eyes, "Take me with you, my friends." And then they left and took her with them.

21 Then the boat with the empress anchored near Rome and they lowered the sails calling "Glory be to God!" And the master of the ship said to one of his men, "Go cook meat and fish from my stores and it will cost you nothing." And the empress cured a leper and then news of it traveled far and many lepers brought themselves to her.

<sup>4</sup> This writing reflects a Christian bias. It was common for texts to slander those of other faiths.

- Ontr' os gafos que a dona guariu que foron mais ca mil foi guarecer o irmão de conde eno mes d' abril mas ant' ouv' el a dizer seu pecado que fez come vil. Enton a condessa e el conde changian a gentil dona, que perderan por traçon mui sotil que ll' aquel gafo traedor fora bastecer.
- Muitos gafos sãou a emperadriz en aquele mes mas de grand' algo que por en lle davan ela ren non pres mas andou en muitas romarias e depois ben a tres meses entrou na cidade de Roma u er' o cortes emperador que a chamou e disse lle: "Ves? Guari m' est' irmão gaf, e dar-ch'-ei grand' aver."
- A dona diss' ao emperador: "Voss' irmão guarrá mas ante que eu en el faça ren, seus pecados dirá ant' o apostolig' e ante vos como os feitos á." E pois foi feito, o emperador diss': "Ai Deus, que será? Nunca maior traçon desta om' oirá." E con pesar seus panos se fillou a romper
- A emperadriz fillou s' a chorar e diss': "A mi non nuz en vos saberdes que são essa, par Deus de vera cruz, a que vos fezestes atan gran torto com' agor' aduz voss' irmão a mãefesto tan feo come estruz mas des oimais a Santa Maria, que é luz, quero servir, que me nunca á de falecer."
- Per nulla ren que ll' o emperador dissesse, nunca quis a dona tornar a el, ante lle disse que fosse fis que ao segre non ficaria nunca, par San Denis, nen ar vestiria pano de seda nen pena de gris mas ùa cela faria d' obra de Paris u se metesse por mais o mund' avorrecer
- 22 Among the lepers that the woman cured, which numbered more than a thousand, was the brother of the count. In the month of April she cured him after he confessed all of his vile sins. Then the countess and the count mourned the gentle lady, whom they lost by the cunning treachery of the traitorous leper who plotted against her.
- 23 Many lepers were cured by the empress in that month. But of the grand wealth they offered her in return, she accepted nothing. She went on many pilgrimages and then, after three months, she entered the city of Rome where the courtly emperor was. He called for her saying, "Behold, cure my leprous brother and I will give you a great reward."
- 24 The woman said to the emperor, "Your brother will be cured, but first, before I do a thing, he must confess his sins in front of the Pope and in front of you and tell you all he has done." Once this was done, the emperor said, "Dear God, how can this be? Never will a greater treason than this man's be heard of." And, with grief, he began tearing his clothes to shreds.
- 25 The empress began to cry and said, "To me it can do no harm for you to know that I am she, by the God of the true cross, whom you subjected to such great injustice, for I adduce that your brother has confessed to being as ugly as an ostrich. From this moment on, I want to serve Holy Mary, who is the light, for she will never fail me.
- 26 No matter what the emperor said, the woman would never to return to him. Instead, she assured him that she would never again lead a worldly life. By Saint Denis<sup>5</sup> she would never wear silk cloth or gray squirrel fur. She would make herself a cell of plaster and enclose herself therein to forever leave the world behind.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A 3rd century bishop who was beheaded and is rumored to have carried his head for miles while preaching a sermon. Later he was venerated as the patron saint of France and Paris.

<sup>6</sup> Here Beatrice is choosing one option for religious women of the time. She is becoming what is called an " anchoress," more common between the 11th and 15th centuries. An anchoress chooses to live alone, take religious vows, and be forever bound to her cell. These cells were small rooms often attached to a house or church. Those in these spaces practice deep asceticism and religious devotion in near total isolation.



## The Miniatures:

In two of the manuscripts illuminated miniatures accompany the narrative. In the *codice rico* (see above), the text is divided into two pages per sheet of parchment. Each sheet has six images that follow the plot events chronologically. The pages include captions that mark each point of the storyline.



1. *Como o emperador se despediu da e(m)peradriz e lle comendoi seu irmão.* / How the emperor bade farewell to the empress and commended her to his brother.

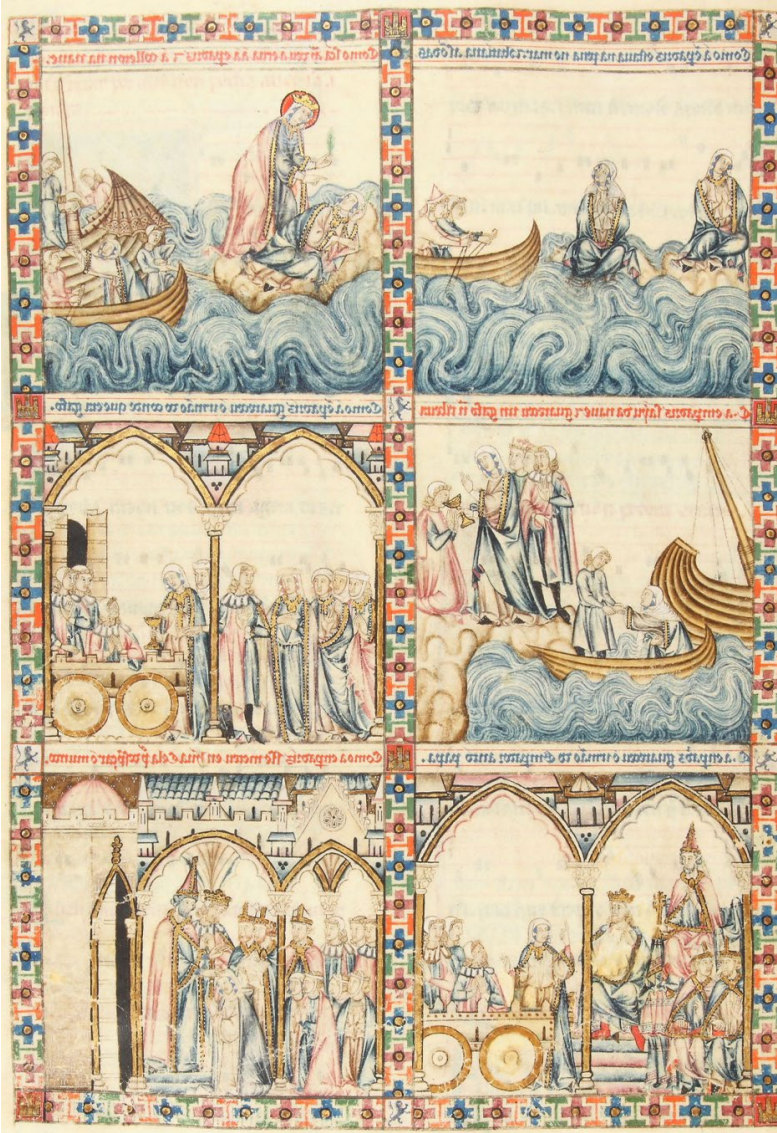
2. *Como o irmão do emperador tentou a emperadriz e ela o deitou a una torre.* / How the brother of the emperor tempted the Empress and she threw him into a tower.

3. *Como o emperador mandou a dous monteiros que matasen a emperadriz.* / How the emperor ordered two huntsmen to kill the empress.

4. *Como o conde livrou a emperadriz de morte e levou a consigo.* / How the count rescued the empress from death and took her with him.

5. *Como o conde deu a nodrid seu filloa a e[m]peradriz e seu irmão la tentó.* / How the count gave his son to the empress to raise and his brother propositioned her.

6. *Como o irmão do conde matou seu sobrio e fíriu a emperadriz.* / How the count's brother killed his nephew and wounded the empress.



1. *Como a emperadriz estava na pena no mar e combatian a as ondas./* How the empress was in danger at sea and struggled against the waves.

2. *Como Santa Matia deu a erva aa e[m]peradriz e a colleron na nave./* How Mary gave the empress an herb and she boarded a ship

3. *Como a emperadriz saliu da nave e guareceu un gafo na ribeira./* How the empress left the ship and cured a leper on the shore

4. *Como a emperadriz guarreceu o irmão do conde que era gafo./* How the empress cured the brother of the count who was leprous.

5. *Como a emperadriz guareceu o irmão ant' o papa./* How the empress cured the emperor's brother in front of the Pope.

6. *Como a emperadriz se meten un úa cela per desprecar o mundo./* How the empress entered a cell to leave the world behind.



## Musical Transcription

On the first page of the story, one finds the music to accompany the tale.

XV

**E**sta e. como santa maria auudou a Emperadris de Roma  
a soffrelas grandes coitas per que passou. .av. —. .cxv.

ven as coitas deste mundo  
ven quiser soffrir. Santa ma  
ria teue sempre ante si por. **E**vesto uos que  
reu ora contar segund a leua diz. vn mu gran  
imagine que fazer quis pola Emperadris. ve  
Roma. segund eu contar oy per nome Beatis.  
Santa maria a madre de deus ondo este cantar fiz.  
Que a guardou do mundo que ue foi mal jor.  
E do vemo que por tentar a euyton vencer.  
**Q**uenas coitas deste mundo ven quiser soffrir. .av.

## Bibliography:

- Alfonso X, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid. Manuscript. T-I-Códice Rico. Biblioteca nacional. ff. 26v-27r.  
<https://rbdigital.realbiblioteca.es/s/rbme/item/11337#?c=&m=&s=&cv=&xywh=3673%2C-313%2C11089%2C6240>
- Keller, John E., and Annette Grant Cash. *Daily Life Depicted in the Cantigas de Santa Maria*. University Press of Kentucky, 2014
- The Oxford *Cantigas de Santa Maria* Database, Oxford University, 2021, <https://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/>

## Online resources:

- Casson, Andrew. *Cantigas de Santa Maria* for Singers, 2019. <http://www.cantigasdesantamaria.com/csm/5>
- St. Cecilia at the Tower, “*Quen as Coitas*: CSM#5.” *YouTube*, July 10, 2017.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=06GKJ2pyptU>