[1] In 1984, many countries celebrated the seven-hundredth anniversary of the death of the most remarkable king in the history of the West, Alfonso X of Castile. The prototypical philosopher-king, he is aptly named El Sabio -- "the Learned" or "the Scholar." Half of his greatness lay in the man himself, in his polymath hunger to absorb all beauty and learning, to codify and reshape it, and to propagate it throughout his somewhat backward society with a missionary fervor. By the great creations he presided over and participated in, he intended more: nothing less than to reshape and elevate that society in its future generations. The other half of his greatness lies, as with any great man, in the extrinsic historical accidents down to the present day. For example, he is rightly called the founder of Castilian as a proper language, but he could not have foreseen that the language he helped fashion would by the commemorative year 1984 rank fourth in the number of native speakers on the planet. He created a vast encyclopedia of life and society, in the guise of a closet or literary code of law, but he could not have imagined how it would spread to Africa, Asia, and the New World and achieve "the widest territorial force ever enjoyed by any law book" and to become "one of the outstanding landmarks" not only of Spain's actual law but "indeed of world law." His code is vital even to the legal life of the United States; "civilized law began" with Alfonso's code "in a considerable group of jurisdictions" here and can still be cited from Louisiana and Louisiana Purchase states to California and the Mexican War acquisitions. [1] Alfonso's contributions to science, music, historiography, poetry, fiction, and art were each unique, but they also became lasting and endlessly influential.

All of this has been on public record and in restricted circles well enough known. Our English heritage has been impatient with Spanish history, however, and the historiography which prevailed from its nineteenth-century Romantic-nationalist origins until World War II glorified [2] instead the dominant northern countries of Europe producing that historiography. Alfonso was never wholly neglected outside of Hispanic countries, and for a generation now interest in him by outsiders has widened until it is reaching flood tide. The new balance, mostly on the literary and cultural side, was evident in the recent centennial celebrations in the United States, beginning at UCLA in 1981, culminating during the main year 1984 with symposia at universities such as the University of California at Berkeley, Catholic University, Colorado, Harvard, Houston, Kentucky, Western Michigan, Ohio State, Old Dominion in Virginia, Plymouth State in New Hampshire, and Wisconsin, and receding in 1985 with a flurry of belated academic festivities. The books and articles emerging from such exercises continued to appear throughout the late 1980's. The celebrations in Washington D.C., attended by the Spanish ambassador, were illustrated by an Alfonsine exhibit at the Library of Congress. In the Modern Language Association's general meeting in December 1984, Joseph Snow reviewed the phenomenon with his "The Alfonsine Year: A World Survey." [2]  

In 1221, the year of the great king's birth, his country seemed an unlikely garden for so exotic a plant as this man who saw himself as king or even emperor of all Spain and who struggled for most of his reign to validate his claims as Holy Roman Emperor over Christendom. Castile was then an upland frontier, far from the international maritime lanes of the urbanized Mediterranean, landlocked except for the
Bay of Biscay to its north, backward and feudal, but good cattle country. It was "a society organized for war," in Elena Lourie's phrase, especially along its advancing south whose frontier confronted the great Islamic civilization occupying half the peninsula. Castile itself was only one of several kingdoms sharing the peninsula's north--little entities straggling in a line along the Atlantic and Pyrenees, each recently grown into an oblong stretching south as the Muslims had yielded their less valuable borderlands to these unreasonably fierce warriors. From left to right stood Portugal, Leon, Castile, Navarre (blocked by the others from much advance), Aragon, and Catalonia (the last two yoked under one dynasty). This geography had just changed radically, as Alfonso's father, St. Fernando III, began his epic conquests against Spanish Islam, matched by the march of Arago-Catalonia down Mediterranean Spanish Islam. One by one, the great Islamic centers fell to Castile and Aragon--the Balearics, Cordoba, Valencia, Murcia, Jaen, and Seville--until only the rump-state Granada remained, enclaved between the mountains and the sea and tolerated as a vassal of Castile. When Alfonso was nine, his father had also inherited the kingdom of Leon, joining this [3] neighbor definitively into a superkingdom twice the size of Castile and more variegated. St. Fernando, now the hero of Christendom, was preparing to invade Africa when he died just after midcentury.

Growing up in the shadow of this intimidating saint and conqueror, Alfonso might have retreated into a quieter existence, like the obscure sons of so many great men. He passed his childhood in the rough Celtic countryside of Atlantic Galicia, with surrogate parents as was then the custom for royalty. When he was a teenager, his mother died. His education, which we can only conjecture from his later proficiencies, must have been solid and wide-ranging. He married at twenty-three, beginning a large family of six sons and three daughters. No saint himself, he also had mistresses and illegitimate children. Shortly after his marriage, Alfonso led the army that conquered for his father the Mediterranean Islamic kingdom of Murcia. He fought at his father's side too during the siege of Seville. Alfonso was already thirty, a minor patron of law, literature, and Islamic science, when he finally inherited the throne.

His country now was enormous, from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, with the beginnings of a proper navy and merchant marine. Metropolises like Seville (his favorite) now flew his Christian flag, and wealth from Spanish Islam filled his treasury. The three million people scattered over these spaces included a large minority of Muslims as well as an increased Jewish community; Alfonso had become, in effect, like his namesake Alfonso VI, "ruler of the three religions." As a German from his mother's side, he soon maneuvered his election as Holy Roman Emperor, beginning a twenty-year effort to move from title to reality, a doomed and endlessly ; expensive enterprise. His first decade on Castile's throne was bellicose, with armed adventures against Portugal on the west, Navarre and English Aquitaine on the north, and Morocco on the south (which he invaded at Sale in 1260). Against resurgent Islam, he clung to his father's conquests, painfully reconquering rebellious Murcia, taking the Atlantic holdout Cadiz, and stemming general countercrusades from North Africa and Granada in the 1260s and 1270s.- (3)
Alfonso was not a popular king. His attempts to act as a proper sovereign rather than a feudal suzerain alienated the nobility. His inordinate expenses at home and abroad alienated every taxpaying stratum of society. His championship of Roman law did not recommend him to a customary-law people. His adventurism irritated and disturbed his neighbors. The successful closing of the Iberian frontier of conquest against Islam left many of his knights without their lifestyle and source of ready wealth.

At the same time, past Islamic wars had long inhibited the development of a Castilian middle class. Alfonso managed to alienate even his churchmen. There are paradoxes here: wars, but not the right kind for his barons; wealth, but an inability to channel it effectively or to live within the limits of the king's share; exalted titles and a high profile elsewhere in Europe, in contrast to the rooted inclination of his people for a more parochial existence.

Historians have generally considered Alfonso a poor manager, despite his effective innovations in administration. They stress that his title El Sabio should not bear any echo of one possible translation, "the wise." And they ratify the judgment of the seventeenth-century Jesuit historian Mariana that he pondered the heavens but lost the earth. That judgment may be modified, as historians now begin to give to the historical side of his reign the manuscript and contextual attention that literary scholars have long given to his creative works. Perhaps his failures were less personal than they were the product of circumstance. At any rate, he ended his life afloat on a sea of troubles, repudiated abroad as emperor and dethroned at home in a civil war led by his son, all the discontents of his people and of neighboring lands converging. His major ally now ironically Morocco, Alfonso died suddenly in April 1284 in the city he had helped his father conquer, Seville.
I have focused on Alfonso and his Castilian background. What of the wider world of which he formed an integral part? The thirteenth century was remarkable for its glories, to the degree that some have too exuberantly claimed for it the title "the greatest of centuries." It saw the culmination and most notable protagonists of many movements on which the high civilization of the West was built. In philosophy, this was the age of scholasticism and Aquinas; in art, of Gothic and Giotto; in religion, of the Mendicants and the imperial papacy (with Innocent III and Francis of Assisi); in poetry, of the vernacular and Dante; in commerce, of the Mongol imperium and the world traveler Marco Polo; in medicine, of the new surgery and Arnau de Vilanova; and so in other spheres from music and mathematics to technology and mysticism. Truly great kings filled the age. St. Louis IX created France out of his native northern Francia together with the alien Occitania he took over down to the Mediterranean. Frederick II Hohenstaufen, the Holy Roman Emperor, ruled from a pluriethnic Sicily while enemies whispered that he was half-Muslim in his lifestyle and beliefs; his cultural achievements and patronage won for him the sobriquet *Stupor mundi*, "wonder of the world." James the Conqueror in Aragon and his son Peter the Great (Dante's hero) built a Mediterranean "empire," and presided over troubadours and such institutions as the great medical university at Montpellier and the Dominican schools of Arabic from Barcelona to Tunis. These kings also have claims to be called founders of their peoples' greatness and culture, with few peers in that context before or after. All these kings were patrons and active in their culture. None of them, however, can boast the range and depth of achievements of Alfonso the Learned. They and their contemporaries in every field do give a clue to the dynamism of the age itself, to its ambition, complexity, and energies.

Alfonso did not merely preside over his Castilian renaissance but was both instigator and personal participant in its multiple manifestations. Nor did he merely plunge into cultural activities as an aesthete, indulging a voracious appetite; he proposed by those activities to reshape society, to bring Castile itself into the mainstream of high civilization and to set afoot a process that would produce a united, educated, artistic, and religious people. The vision here is as remarkable as the means. Alfonso himself can be seen, therefore, more in his mighty works than in his routine political history; even his portrait is several times depicted in them realistically. A major component of his work, indeed the indispensable tool, was intensive further absorption of Islamic culture by translation, adaptation, and influences. Another dominant tool was Roman law, at that time occupying elsewhere in Western culture the status and ubiquity that science was to boast in the nineteenth century.

An overview of Alfonso's work may suitably start with the several individual projects most highly prized today. The *Siete partidas*, or *Seven Divisions*, of his Roman law code (the number seven held powerful symbolic meanings for Alfonso) makes as good an entry as any. It is like no other law code but is unique in intention and nature, monumental in size and scope, with an influence even today that is incalculable. Its present shape includes further developments in Alfonso's name for a half-century after his death, though their number and importance have been exaggerated by Alfonso Garcia Gallo and others during a recent polemic. Even had the *Siete partidas* evolved considerably, Alfonso's other legal works would serve as guide to his intentions and vision. Though it has been a working public code since 1348, Alfonso himself apparently had no hope of imposing it generally upon his custom-law people. Their society would eventually need such a system, he knew, as its level of political and commercial sophistication was raised. For the time being, he would create an instrument for appeals, a closet code or work of literature, and a program. It would become familiar and be at hand. Alfonso was also responsible for five legal treatises (as distinct from lesser bodies of actual regulations), whose interrelation, partial authorship, practical intent, and sequence in appearing continue to be subjects of debate. He promulgated only one of these legal works, and only as supplementary law. All five seem to have been stages or echoes of the monumental *Siete partidas* itself, a kind of encyclopedia of medieval man's institutions and values as viewed by university jurists and through legal concepts. Basically, Alfonso directed the construction by his legal experts of an ample code, much as Justinian and
Napoleon did (though Alfonso's presence in his wonderfully literary production is far more personal). The schools and lawyers then improved his product for over fifty years until its present form was ready to promulgate.

The first division, or partida, discussing the church under twenty-four headings and some five hundred subheadings, includes among its chatty little essays such topics as burial—why near a church, how to measure off a cemetery, who can be buried within a church, why knights killed in tournaments are excluded, the expenses of funerals, and that valuables must not be buried with the corpse. The second division, on public law and government, includes among weightier matters little talks on how a king should dress, stand, sit, hunt, act toward his wife, and how he should educate his children and relate to his female relatives. This section includes a small handbook on castles— their kinds, repair, provisioning, surrender, and defense. On knights, it tells us how to become one and how they should ride, dress, and eat (two pages on this) as well as train and talk. Warfare of all kinds gets multiple treatises for nearly a hundred pages, covering cavalry, infantry, and naval warfare, drill, tactics, flags, logistics, artillery, spies, sentries, and ranks. This partida's long discussion of universities is itself worth the price of admission: where to build one, teachers and salaries, student bookstores, labor unions, tax exemptions for teachers, and the students' need for fresh air, good food, and resting the eyes.

The essays of the Siete partidas do not resemble the terse law codes promulgated by Frederick II and James the Conqueror in this century; both codes are now landmarks in European legal history. The Partidas are instead reflective historico-moral disquisitions such as one might expect from Plato's philosopher-king. Like Aquinas's Summa or a Gothic cathedral, this vast structure is an exhaustive and systematic interweaving of age-old wisdom. Alfonso's code is an integral component of United States law today, and the only English translation is the exact and painstaking volume commissioned a half-century ago by the American Bar Association. It was not for this linkage, however, that the United States House of Representatives commissioned a high-relief bust of Alfonso to grace the gallery doors of its chambers. Alfonso is present there, among some twenty renowned heads, simply as one of the greatest legislators in world history.

More remarkable as a creative achievement, though less well known, was Alfonso's own favorite work, the Cantigas, or Canticles of Holy Mary. A collection of over four hundred lyric and narrative poems, set to as many musical compositions, the songs accompanying and enlivening its nearly 1,300 realistic miniature paintings of daily life, the book defies categorizing. Some see it as an encyclopedia of art forms, others as the most impressive trove of medieval secular music, and others as a great work of literature. It is more than all of these because it combined these elements into a unity, to be performed on feasts of the Virgin in the cathedral of conquered Seville. Jealously guarded in its main codex at the Escorial palace-museum, the Cantigas has moved into general modern awareness only in our own day-- its musical code broken, its corpus of pictures just recently reproduced in full color, and its poetical text given both a critical edition and (soon to be published) an English translation from the troubadour-Galician of the original. Each page captivates the reader by showing its narrative in a picture series like a modern comic strip; the technique is cinematic and lively. Had Alfonso done nothing besides the Cantigas, his fame would still be established; this unique production ranks with Dante's Divine Comedy or with the best Gothic cathedral. These "sacred" canticles overshadow Alfonso's other major body of poetry, the Profane Canticles of troubadour bawdry, satire, and love.

A major contribution to Castilian prose, and a strong contribution to the self-definition of Alfonso's enlarged Castile, was his history projects. A staff working under his direction produced two seminal works, a history of Spain down to his father's reign, and a far larger history of the world through antiquity almost to the time of Christ. Their titles can be confusingly similar: the first, General Chronicle of Spain (Crónica general de España or Estoria de España, or more often today Prim-em crónicas general); and the second, General Chronicle (Crónica general or Gran e general estoria or
Historia universal). These two became the foundation stone of Spanish historiography, previously a feeble growth. Their use of sources—Christian, Arabic, and ancient—was exemplary for their day, though epics and other literary productions were incorporated. This new history was distinguished not only by its vernacular style but by a concern to include social and cultural as well as political history. Again we see Alfonso bringing his Castile into the European mainstream, projecting his task on a monumental scale with a team to sort through and analyze the sources, and by the moral-educative tone of these histories both elevating public taste and reinforcing a protonational identity. Here again, he left a legacy that would continue to be cherished and to work like a leaven toward his vision of a new society.

Alfonso continued a grand tradition of Spanish monarchs by his scientific activity, specifically in translations from Arabic astronomy, with its accompaniment, astrology. The staff here was largely trilingual Jews. Unlike the famed translators in Spain during the previous century, such as Gerard of Cremona, Mark of Toledo, and Robert of Chester, these men produced Castilian rather than Latin works. Scientific translation was a lifelong preoccupation with Alfonso, resulting in five major works. The *Alfonsine Tables* was perhaps the most original, transmitting and updating the charting of the movements of the heavens by al-Zarqâlî. The work [9] involved painstaking observations by teams of scientists for a decade at Toledo, a government project both expensive and, for science itself, stimulating. The *Tables* would spread over Europe and serve astronomy for several centuries. As part of this enterprise, Alfonso's scientists translated over a dozen crucial treatises from the heritage of Spanish Islam, collected as The Books of the Wisdom of Astronomy (Libros del saber de astronomia), revising Ptolemy's astronomy; and The Book of the Judgments of Astrology (Libro de las cruzes, or Libra de las juicios de las estrellas). These and his other astrological works shade off into pseudoscientific works, such as his Lapidary (Lapidario) --a brilliantly illustrated treatise on medical and other properties of gems and stones. In technology, Alfonso joined contemporaries like Louis IX of France and Emperor Frederick II in the search for a perfect clock--in Alfonso's case, a mercury-controlled, weight-driven mechanism. Such clocks primarily forecast the movements of heavenly bodies and only incidentally told time.

Translations of various kinds formed a daily backdrop to the king's other creative projects. His nephew Juan Manuel describes how Alfonso had "the whole sect of the Moors" (taken today to mean the Qu'rân) translated, "and the whole Jewish law and even their Talmud, and another very secret science the Jews have which they call cabala." [7] Alfonso also had the most celebrated book on games—*Chess, Dice, and Backgammon* (Libra de ajedrez, dados y tablas)—translated, bountifully illustrated, and revised to improve it over the original and even over the genre in Islam or the West. He is credited also with a translation of Muhammad's Ladder, whose detailed trip through heaven and hell influenced Dante's otherworldly cosmos. Among these translations, a collection of oriental tales, called *Calila e Digna* after the protagonists of one story, had a large popular impact and influenced the development of fiction in Europe. Other Alfonsine works are now lost. Though we have one book on hunting, for example, another codex on hunting animals has only recently turned up.

All of Alfonso's work demonstrates his determination to advance the Castilian language, at that time a rough instrument struggling to achieve literary form. Eschewing the Latin which was then the language of academe, business, diplomacy, and the educated classes in general, the king had his scientific, literary, historical, juridical, and other works, both originals and translations, put into Castilian. This lessened their universal influence, thus contrasting with the more famous translators of twelfth-century Spain. But it helped achieve the elevation of Castilian society and culture which was Alfonso's aim. He also decreed that most documents, of the [10] thousands from his chancery, be drafted in Castilian instead of Latin. Together with his legal productions, this spread his encouragement of the vernacular over a broad, grassroots range.
Francisco Marquez Villanueva has noted that Alfonso's choice of Castilian was related to the lamentable state of Latin schools and study in Castile. But Alfonso could readily have overcome that obstacle by employing Latinate Jews or importing more Italians. Other scholars have suggested that the example of his father-in-law, James the Conqueror, in Catalonia, inspired his opting for the vernacular; in his advanced Catalan society, James had ordered official versions of his pioneering Valencian code both in Catalan and in Latin and was preparing his autobiography in Catalan. The examples of Occitania and Italy may also have influenced Alfonso as his now enlarged kingdom related ever more to their affairs. In any case, the impact Alfonso had on language alone has won him the epithet "father of Castilian."

Though scholars will continue to argue the precise participation of Alfonso personally in each of his works, it is clear that he not only presided as patron but organized as editor, and often directly took part. For some books, we have revealing descriptions; speaking in the third person, for example, Alfonso says "he corrected it and ordered it written, and he struck out the words which he understood to be superfluous and of doubtful meaning and which were not in pure Castilian," and in general "set the entire writing in order." Alfonso tells us, in the case of his universal history, how "I had caused to be assembled" the various sources, and then "I selected from them the most reliable and the best that I knew," and "made this book" and "commanded" the contents to be written. He was a gifted poet and, because of that profession at that time, therefore also a musician. He did not merely encourage the scholars and artists at his court but recruited them, set grand projects afoot, and financed, directed, and sustained them in teams. This farsighted, indefatigable king was a one-man renaissance.

How shall we finally explain this great man? The many-sided studies proliferating during the decade before his seventh centennial and now during these years of celebration are already offering clues and hinting at solutions. It is no longer enough to dismiss him as an artist-intellectual, unsuitable like all intellectuals to the practical business of government. One interesting thesis recently proffered by Cayetano Socarras rejects the argument that Alfonso neglected political affairs, escaping into the cultural sphere; on the contrary, he plunged enthusiastically into politics and even led Castile onto the central stage of European history. Many believe that he lacked the managerial skills necessary for success in his various political situations. Further study and reflection, I suspect, may reveal him as a better manager than certain crises or failures indicate and that perhaps he was a victim of intrinsically unmanageable situations arising from Castile's stunning expansion, its altered and pluriethnic demography, its destabilized power balances within society, and the problems of a Europe entering more general crises from midcentury to 1300.

Socarras himself sees a man caught between two personally interiorized traditions, so incompatible as to make him at first seem "a dual personality." In the creative sphere of his life, "he was moved by a desire to recreate the brilliant intellectual world of the Muslim Caliphate of Córdoba," so that he boldly organized "a gigantic Summa of the best of two worlds that came into contact in Spain." He had no such freedom in the world of politics, or at least could not break out of the "great political tradition" which dictated his responses and options but which was no longer "appropriate for his own times." The result of his failure was "almost two centuries of civil strife and turmoil."

The clue for Socarras here is "imperialism." In its cultural expression, Alfonso "wanted to give a final form and unity to all disciplines: law, history, astronomy and other sciences, to the meters of poetry according to the different themes," and to language as the instrument for unifying Spaniards under Castilian predominance—in short, "dominating everything, centralizing everything around himself" as an "emperor of Culture." In its political expression, however, "this same imperialism" drove him to attempt to validate the peninsular "empire," which his forebear Alfonso VII of Castile and León had dreamed of when he took the title Emperor a century before, and to widen it and link it to the Holy Roman Empire of Christendom—a Mediterranean unity of Christians and conquered Muslims, a new
Roman Empire. Unlike his cultural imperialism, for which the time was uniquely ripe, his political imperialism was untimely and impossible—"in complete disregard of the actual conditions" in Spain. Alfonso resembled in this his contemporary Dante, who dreamed ineffectively of a Holy Roman Empire under Henry VII leading all Christendom, but whose reality and accomplishment was his own creation of a transcendent empire of the artist-intellectual in his summa, the Divine Comedy.[10]

Within this larger framework, inner patterns can be discerned. Joaquin Gimeno sees the turmoil and civil war from Alfonso onward, for example, as a process of radical changes gripping Castile. This period "of incredible dynamism, of incessant clash of ideas, of audacious innovations" now changed Castile, changed its system of government, [and] changed in a [12] very special way the powerful institution of the nobility." Nobles, cities, and kings had entered a new world of possibilities because of the situation Alfonso inherited and presided over. The interests, expectations, and ideas of these incompatible, "bellicose antagonists" pointed anarchistically to "three quite different Castiles" in the future. As Alfonso tried to transform himself from feudal suzerain to Roman-law king, to change the very "image of the monarch," he provoked his nobles to resist on the battlefield. On all sides—in taxes, laws, city privileges, and the very vision of Spain—radical innovation and radical conservatism clashed. By this view, Alfonso's political failure was inevitable from the domestic situation alone, and it was less a failure than an inescapable confrontation and dialogue of values in a changed world. (11)

A final reflection must be offered, on Alfonso's incorporation or adaptation of Islamic learning and culture. This is too often seen, after the fashion of Américo Castro, as uniquely Castilian, so that Alfonso's great projects arose in a non-European context and "remained obscured, like an eccentric recluse," in their own language and culture, with Alfonso "not interested in including contemporary Europe in the panorama of his culture." (12) Castro's position here seems extreme. Alfonso's country was indeed a special mix of Muslim, Christian, and Jew; and its underdeveloped and ruralized context had just absorbed the main cultural centers of Spanish Islam. Alfonso did see the need to create and stimulate a high culture for his newly aggrandized people, to elevate them as proper colleagues for their Mediterranean Christian neighbors. And from long tradition he appreciated both the necessity of some borrowing from the Islamic high culture at hand and the special opportunity of doing so at this moment of conquest-conjuncture. It was Alfonso, after all, who had entombed his warrior-father in conquered Seville with burial inscriptions in Latin, Arabic, Castilian, and Hebrew. The mixture of cultures was more grossly apparent in Alfonso's Castile, precisely because the leap of cultural elevation was so much higher, within so much shorter a time, and with so powerful an assist from the alien culture now conveniently resident within. Nothing so drastic happened in King James the Conqueror's massive conquests, for example, where a Catalan culture had already reached the point of producing (from 1250 to 1350) its high culture with a real but not so pronounced and artificial Muslim component. The architecture, crafts, and language of Valencia would profit from and be marked by Islam; the medical advances of Arnau de Vilanova and the philosophical-literary outpourings of Ramon Llull are inconceivable without Islam; but they form part of a balanced Mediterranean Christendom.[13]

Alfonso's fusion of some Islamic influences into European patterns (stronger in some works such as the translations, useful and innovative in others such as the law code or the histories, and feeble or absent in others such as music) did not separate Castilian culture from its neighbors, however, in any but a manneristic or superficial sense. The Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II had enjoyed a pluriethnic court and translations from the Arabic; the troubadour literature in Provence-Languedoc and the medical learning at the University of Montpellier had living roots in Islamic invention; universities themselves and their scholastic methods, as George Makdisi has instructed us, were profoundly influenced by Islamic schools; (13) the contemporary mathematics of Fibonacci of Pisa, the mysticism of Francis of Assisi, and the metaphysics of Thomas Aquinas (not the least in his collaboration with Ramon Marti on the Islamic-Catalan frontier) owed a debt to Islam. Commerce linked the Islamic and Christian worlds
more closely than we previously realized, with commercial colonies of Italians and other Christians as privileged enclaves in the North African cities, and fondus or hospitality centers for Muslim merchants in the Christian ports. King James, when he was not conquering Muslims, rented armies to Islamic rulers. The interchange was constant, at formal and informal levels, deliberate as well as subconscious, in technology, trade, mutual absorption of slave populations, entertainment, learning, and art. But all these regions, including Castile, were solidly established in the general European culture, and borrowed out of that position of strength.

Thus, Alfonso is not a freak or a break with European tradition, however idiosyncratic the Castilian model seems on the surface. It is more true to say that we moderns broke with him, when the northern industrial countries of the early nineteenth century invented a nationalist historiography that moved Europe's medieval center north to jibe with its more modern center and marginalized the heartlands of its earlier Mediterranean-centered self. As we recapture our wider history in our own day, Alfonso the Learned can be seen as a major actor in a widely based transfer of learning and letters from Islam to the West, particularly but by no means exclusively for his own country in that universal transfer. When we add his role as transformer of Castilian society, language, and law and his world role as father of Spanish law in all its many countries including our own, we recognize how richly he deserves his titles "El Sabio" and "emperor of Culture." Much more than his contemporary, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II Hohenstaufen, he is the true Stupor mundi--a royal wonder of the world.

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Notes for Chapter One


2. Various nonuniversity celebrations included an international conference at the Spanish Institute in New York in April 1981, whose proceedings were published as Studies on the "Cantigas de Santa Maria": Art, Musk, and Poetry, ed. I. J. Katz, J. E. Keller, S. G. Armistead, and J. T. Snow (Madison, Wisc.: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1987). The most spectacular congress was in Spain, linked at seven cities in April 1984; its acta are in press as Alfonso el Sabio: vida, obra, época.


4. On Alfonso see the chapters by R. I. Burns, J. F. O'Callaghan, J. F. Powers, and R. A. MacDonald in Burns, Worlds of Alfonso; the excellent brief review of the king's cultural work by John E. Keller, Alfonso X, el Sabio (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967), chs. 1, 2,3, and 10; Evelyn S. Procter, Alfonso X of Castile, Patron of Literature and Learning (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), on his patronage; and the ambitious political biography by Antonio Ballesteros Beretta, Alfonso X el Sabio (Barcelona:


6. The *Cantigas* manuscripts and studies are discussed in this volume, particularly in the chapters by Kosmer and Powers, Keller, Holloway, Katz, and Snow, including the English translation by Kathleen Kulp-Hill (see below, ch. 6, n. 24). Written in Galician, the *Cantigas* has an accent on the initial *a*, now usually omitted in writing.

7. See Hillgarth, *Kingdoms*, 1: 218, and his analysis of Alfonso's work. See also Keller, *Alfonso X*, chs. 4 on *Calila*, 5 on the *Cantigas*, 8 on the scientific works and games, and 9 on the historical works. On use of Castilian, see Kasten below in ch. 3.


10. Ibid., 10-12,109-12. See also my study in *Viator* 21 (1990), in press.

