Chapter Six

Drama, Ritual, and Incipient Opera in Alfonso's Cantigas

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[72] What may be regarded as a peculiar flaw, a mysterious lacuna, and a downright puzzle as concerns medieval Spanish culture is the apparent absence of drama in either Latin or Castilian in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, except in Catalonia. Can it be true of Castile, a kingdom ruled in the thirteenth century by an enlightened monarch, Alfonso X el Sabio, that only one piece of drama existed? Dramas flourished elsewhere in Europe, particularly in France, writes Ernst Curtius, due to the unbroken continuity running from classical times through the Renaissance. (1) Why not in Spain? I believe that the same continuity of drama also existed there. Yet our greatest scholars still maintain that no medieval drama in Latin, and only one in a vernacular, was available. Alan Deyermond, whose scholarship all respect, states that "the only vernacular play before the fifteenth century is that known as the Auto de los reyes magos." (2) I must respectfully disagree with him, even in the face of a definite lack of extant plays between the twelfth-century Auto and Gómez Manrique's Representación del nacimiento de Nuestro Señor. (The latter dramatizes the same subject matter as the Auto, each poet following the gospel account in Matthew 2:1-12.)

Scholars have made it clear that in other cultures premedieval and medieval dramatic activity was present--Clifford Davis, William Tyedeman, Bernadette Rey-Flaud, Richard Trexler, and O. B. Hardison, the last of whom has taken so much interest in the Drama de Elche. (3) The wisdom of such experts is comforting as I begin this treatment of drama in Spain which is based upon what can be regarded as a combination of intelligent speculation and plausible observation of drama, as depicted in some of the illuminations of the Cantigas de Santa Maria produced under the patronage of King Alfonso.

If one is to provide some background for this king's interest in drama, he must begin with the survivals of Roman drama after the fall of Rome. Some of the plays of Terence, Plautus, and Seneca survived in written form (73) (and perhaps also in oral tradition) into the Middle Ages. (4) Uneducated mimes must have inherited the traditions of late Roman theatre and acted in what may be considered to have been a kind of folk drama. When Christianity replaced paganism in the period erroneously called the Dark Ages, the clergy quickly realized the value of drama as a didactic tool for implanting and strengthening religious lessons. The church seems to have depended upon profane drama then, since it may have been the only drama it could use as a model. The time came when pietistic drama superseded the profane, of course, leading to the production of those tropes which some experts regard as the beginnings of European theatre. Some even see in the Mass the influence of earlier non-Christian rituals and believe that, without those rituals, the Mass could not have developed along the lines it did. Since Curtius's theory of continuity surely included Spain, and since sufficient proof can be marshaled of drama's continuity in the peninsula, I cannot accept that drama was unknown in Castile--or that, if known, it was stifled.

Before treating the possibilities of drama in thirteenth-century Castile, it is well to ask what Alfonso must have gleaned about drama from the past. The best references to drama in Latin would have been St. Jerome's adaptation of Eusebius's Universal Chronicle, but Jerome did not produce a systematic use
of chronology for a Christian theory of literature. It was St. Isidore's *Etymologies*, finished in the seventh century before Spanish vernaculars had emerged from Vulgar Latin, which offered the best explanations of drama of the past and quite possibly of the survival of Roman theatre still extant in southern Spain. Seville and considerable territory in the south preserved close ties with the eastern empire, and Constantinople periodically sent troops to keep at bay the incursions of Visigothic rulers. Isidore sent his brother St. Leander to Athens for books. In the *Etymologies*, Isidore described the theatre, the orchestra or stage, and how a narrator (often called an *auctor*) recited or read lines while mimes silently acted. This form of drama, the theatre of mimes, survived from the classical period through the so-called Dark Ages into medieval and renaissance Europe, surely including Spain. And some varieties of such drama, read or recited by a narrator, added original touches. Some mimes did not continue the age-old silent form of theatrical presentation: they began to speak or sing their parts.

Alfonso had the knowledge imparted by Isidore and Isidore's sources, then, and he demonstrated a great deal of interest in various aspects of theatre. His great code of laws, the *Siete partidas* or *Seven Divisions of law* [74] the most widely disseminated code, since it affected law in all parts of Spain's possessions, including regions that eventually became part of the United States--dictated certain restrictions and permissions regarding the presentation of plays. Some researchers argue that Alfonso and his legists were translating or paraphrasing rules regulating drama from books not written in Spanish--for example, from ecclesiastical decretals. To some extent this may be true; but even so, it is obvious that the *Partidas* were aimed at a Spanish audience. Would the Learned King have cluttered his legal code with prohibitions against nonexistent varieties of drama? Would he have employed a Spanish designation to identify such plays as *juegos de escarnio*, which his subjects knew were farces--plays, that is, which were often obscene and even blasphemous? Surely he condemned such dramas because he saw in them a present and active means of disseminating not only bad taste but even dangerous ideas.

The *Partidas* treat secular drama, of which Alfonso disapproved, and went so far as to suggest penalties for clerics who acted in such plays. These laws also offer considerable comment regarding religious drama--nativity plays, shepherd plays, and resurrection dramas. These were to be presented only in cities, under the jurisdiction of the higher clergy. Plays not monitored by such authorities were apparently forbidden. After warning priests against playing dice, entering taverns, and any association with gamblers, Alfonso continues:

> Nor should they be involved with farcical plays [i.e., *juegos de escarnio*] so that people may attend them and hear them. If other men perform these things, ecclesiastics should not be present, because many evil speeches are uttered and indecencies committed there; nor should any such things take place in churches, for we have previously declared that those who act in this manner should dishonorably be ejected from them, since the church of God is made to pray in, and not for the purpose of uttering farcical speeches.

The king then recommends some drama as beneficent:

> There are certain representations, however, which ecclesiastics have a right to perform, for instance that of the birth of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in which is shown how the angel appeared to the shepherds and told them that Jesus Christ was born; and also that of his appearance, and how the three kings of the Magi came to adore him; and the one relating to his resurrection, which shows that he was crucified, and on the third day arose.

Representations of this kind, which induce men to do good and have devotion for the faith, ecclesiastics can perform; and they are also beneficial, for they cause men to remember [75] that the other events actually happened. These things should be done in an orderly way,
and with great devotion, and should take place in large cities where there are archbishops or
bishops, and either by their command, or by those of others who occupy their places; and
they should not take place in villages, or in vile places, or for the sake of earning money by
means of them.

Such prohibitions of secular drama, and to some extent of religious drama when the latter were
unmonitored, would not have been written into the king's important code of law, unless such plays
existed. (7)

The Partidas were not promulgated until the reign of Alfonso's grandson, between 1310 and 1350, and
not printed until 1491. Thus they did not become the law of the land during Alfonso's lifetime. Many
communities may not have been aware of the prohibitions against drama or even aware that the higher
clergy were to regulate it. Although the Partidas (which we now believe Alfonso produced as a guide
for future laws) were studied in university law schools to the extent that they were becoming law
without formal promulgation, not even this would have made such unpromulgated laws known and
accepted everywhere. (8) There is reason to doubt, therefore, that the Partidas did much to smother
drama in far-flung parishes in which no higher clergy or their representatives were present. Nor can it
be that the ubiquitous juglares and actors in juegos de escarnio could have been monitored or would
have surrendered their means of earning a living. Illegal forms of entertainment have always been
integral parts of all cultures and, in spite of prohibitions, have prospered.

Commenting upon the early lack of drama in Latin or in Spanish, Deyermond states that the regulations
against drama by the monks of Cluny tended to smother medieval drama in Spain. (9) But Cluny's
influence was strong mainly in northern areas of Alfonso's kingdom. Moreover, Cluny in its homeland
of France did not curtail the rise, development, and flourishing of great dramatic activity either secular
or pietistic; nor was Cluny's influence great in Catalonia. The scholar must search for better reasons
than Cluny's disinterest in or antagonism toward plays, in order to explain satisfactorily the dearth of
drama in most of medieval Spain before the fifteenth century.

Dramas have usually been created for living audiences, and those who composed them in the Middle
Ages were interested surely in live drama rather than in plays written to be read. Plays, whether clerical
or secular, were not composed by great authors whose works would have been preserved. It is probable
that most plays, in both oral and written form, were learned by rote by actors, many of whom could not
have read a play if a written script had been available; and most of what is not written tends to
disappear. If the Auto had not survived by some fortuitous circumstance, some scholars would opine
that there was not even one vernacular drama in Spain before the fifteenth century, only plays written in
Latin in Catalonia. Aside from the lack of extant drama, other factors should be taken into
consideration: the abandonment or destruction of those churches with dramatic traditions, the loss of
written dramas when these had existed, and the death or removal of priests who favored drama and
their replacement by others who had no interest in plays (perhaps a sign of the influence of Cluny).

As to the Auto, Deyermond states, with good reason, that a Gascon living in Toledo may have
translated it from his own French dialect. He suggests that since the play seems to be a translation, one
might prefer to think of it as not true Spanish literature. But Calila e Digna, and the Libro de los
engaños translated from Arabic, and Barlaam e Josafat translated from Latin along with Berceo's
Milagros and Vidas, have always been regarded as genuine Spanish literature. (10)

My own theories concerning medieval Spanish drama have not been influenced greatly by previous
scholarship, since there is so little of it. Aside from what Isidore and Alfonso's Partidas reveal, I have
relied upon the suggestions of only a few scholars with regard to drama depicted in the miniatures of
the Cantigas de Santa Maria and upon my own suppositions concerning these illustrations. Alfonso,
always avant-garde, seems to have arranged for portrayals of drama, ritual, and incipient opera to be painted in many of the miniatures, especially in those of the Códice Rico, manuscript T.I.I at the Escorial library. This monarch's originality and innovativeness concerning art has been stressed by José Guerrero Lovillo and concerning drama and art by Ana Domínguez Rodríguez, each of whom is a renowned art historian. Ana Domínguez particularly inspired me to expand my studies of art and drama in the miniatures illustrating the Cantigas miracles into a study of those illustrating the cantigas de loor or songs of praise. She states (my translation): "In these representations of the troubadour king [Alfonso], we see him standing, kneeling, pointing to the evangelical scene, always in the presence of the docile group of courtiers who listen attentively to him; are perhaps some of these scenes a graphic testimony of dramatic presentation, in which the king and his courtiers act in the palace's own chapel or in some of its annexes?" I shall attempt to answer her question affirmatively through detailed interpretations of certain pages of miniatures, relating these to the texts that accompany them. [77]

I am equally grateful to Maricel Presilla, with whom I have exchanged ideas on drama in the miniatures. Her insights into Alfonso's political ideology, as she sees it demonstrated in the Cantigas as to text and miniatures, may serve as an important link between drama and Alfonso's intent in producing this remarkable work. She believes that Alfonso intended to broadcast his message--that is, his ideology--insofar as possible, and to attempt to reach the entire social structure of his realm. And what better way than the use of drama, the most apt tool for indoctrination, aided by the pleasure obtained through the threefold impact of presentation--visual, verbal, and musical? After all, large audiences might have seen some of the cantigas staged, while the number of viewers of the precious codices must of necessity have been limited to a few favored individuals.

Richard Kinkade states convincingly that a kind of theatre-in-the-round accompanied sermons. He and I have also taken exploratory steps in the investigation of drama in some of the Cantigas miniatures that illustrate miracles. From these studies, it is clear that Alfonso and his collaborators brought staging techniques into book illustration, especially in the form of "dramatic arches" so convincingly treated by Otto Pachte, which can be seen in such pages of miniatures as those illustrating cantigas 13, 18, 20, 42, 59, and 63, to cite only a few. The device of the arches, often used outside Spain in manuscripts, in triptychs, and on stage, could make a scene enclosed by arches in a book acquire the characteristics of a tableau vivant. This concentrates the viewers' attention and leads them to feel that they are actually observing a dramatic event, or even participating in it. The viewers of Alfonso's miniatures would have known that arches were used to frame theatrical tableaux or scenes in medieval staging. If indeed Alfonso's viewers had not observed such arches in their own Castile--and surely they did observe them there--those who traveled abroad, especially to France, would have seen them in dramas.

The device of the dramatic arches in Alfonso's miniatures may with reason be regarded as an adaptation of stagecraft to the art of illumination. Quite probably, those who viewed the miniatures were well aware of such adaptation, savoring therefore various typological elements modern viewers have not observed. Since the miniatures are perforce static representations, whose dynamism depends upon the intrinsic properties of book art and drama to stimulate viewer imagination, one can believe that the creators of these pictures, through the conscious application of dramatic stratagems or theatrical techniques, strove to enhance their vitality and animation, of which arches would be one of the most important devices. [14] [78]

In connection with the miniatures illustrating miracles and not songs of praise, I elsewhere mention another factor, which suggests dramatic presentation. "If so much French influence is felt in other Spanish artistic manifestations, why not in drama based upon the miracles" in the Cantigas de Santa Maria? Nor is it difficult to imagine the Miracle de Théophile staged in Spain. Many other miracles might just as well have been adapted to drama. In fact, any might have been dramatized, except those whose miniatures depicted events and scenes too vast for staging--ships at sea in cantiga
36, a hunt in 142, or an entire city under siege in 99. Nor has it been pointed out previously that the statues of the Madonna and the Child in certain miniatures assume different positions in separate panels or scenes on the same page. These differences are not due to the fact that the images are supposed to have moved, because in a case such as cantiga 18 the images are no more than parts of the background scene. And yet in this cantiga both figures move, in the sense that they change position. If an artist were sketching, as he watched a dramatic presentation, he might have caught the actress who served in the play and the child who portrayed the infant Jesus, as they shifted positions in order to rest.  

When I began to study the cantigas de loor in the Cantigas for traces of the visualization of drama, guided by the observations of Ana Domínguez, I realized how correct she was in her suppositions and how helpful it would have been had she discussed this matter in more detail. Since her primary interest lies in art history, however, it is understandable that she did not elaborate upon ideas concerning drama as it may be depicted in Alfonso's miniatures. Songs of praise appear in far fewer numbers than do miracles. Every tenth cantiga is a cantiga de loor; but sometimes overlooked is the fact that, toward the end of the manuscript, the number of such songs increases. After number 399, which is a miracle, there are twenty-six additional numbers and, of these, eighteen are songs of praise.

We know that the Cantigas were to be sung to the accompaniment of some sixty musical instruments--trumpets, finger cymbals, drums, bagpipes, recorders, and others which (though illustrated in the Escorial manuscript B.1.2) have not been identified. Alfonso in his last will and testament decreed that on feast days of the Virgin in the church in which his remains would lie--the cathedral of Seville--cantigas were to be sung, presumably to the accompaniment of instruments. To this day, these instructions are occasionally carried out.

Singing, especially when more than one singer performs and when dialogue is present, can result in a production not far removed from opera. Modern groups of professional vocalists and instrumentalists, such as the Waverly Consort and the Trio Live Oak, which often feature the Cantigas, present both miracles and songs of praise in a fashion which may parallel that employed under Alfonso's patronage. One singer narrates the miracle or song of praise while one or more repeat the refrain to the accompaniment of music.

This leads back to earlier remarks about intent, a question that has never been settled to the satisfaction of all researchers. Alfonso, it was noted, desired to make all his works known to his subjects. He seems to have been exceptionally anxious to do so in the case of the Cantigas. Presilla asserts that Alfonso wanted to use the Cantigas as a form of propaganda, through which he could bring to all his people certain aspects of life and belief not supported by the church. Perhaps, she suggests, Alfonso depicts the Blessed Virgin as a kind of iconoclast who enabled her devotees to rise above or circumvent various ecclesiastical regulations that people found difficult to obey--prohibitions against signs of excessive grief, the Virgin as panacea against the terrors of purgatory and hell, and her willingness to save her devotees from damnation even when their sins were virtually unpardonable, as for example with incest, murder, and theft. In other words, Santa Maria offered salvation and comfort to her devotees; and even though these people realized that she could not, or would not, come to the aid of everybody, she had done so for many, leaving each devotee with the hope that he or she out of many might be the lucky one. Presilla's convincing suggestion is that Alfonso, through the Virgin of his Cantigas, hoped to draw his subjects from under the complete influence of ecclesiastical rule.

To return to drama, as depicted in some of the cantigas de loor as well as in some of the miracles, it will be necessary to see how the king injected himself into his work. Joseph Snow has written extensively on the troubadour persona of Alfonso in the Cantigas, adding to our understanding of Alfonso's own intensely intimate connections with his work. Snow derived his findings from a study of the text of both varieties of cantigas, but he did not relate what the text states to what the miniatures illustrate. What follows can make even more evident Alfonso's human and personal ties with...
his miracles and hymns.

In some of the miniatures illustrating songs of praise, Alfonso can often be seen playing the role of narrator or troubadour, enabling the viewer to visualize dramas in progress. It would seem that the avant-garde king brought the attributes and presentation of the theatre of mime into the miniatures and even changed the mimes into singers. He had no need to invent such varieties of drama; the continuity extolled by Curtius had carried such plays across the centuries from Roman times. (20) Curtius even states that in some plays not only the narrator but also the actors spoke or sang. Ana Domínguez writes:

> The king seems to act before his public, simply to recite the poems, or rather to explicate them. This pertains, in all cases, to every tenth cantiga or song of praise, more complex than the miracles as to being understood by the ignorant public. Their originality is great, and I believe I can affirm that it is a case unique in medieval art: the presence of a king in pictures which show him reciting or explicating his poems for the Virgin to a group of courtiers and even acting as though in an authentic religious or liturgical theatre in the palace. (21)

One might respectfully add two concepts. The first is that Alfonso is not always playing the role of narrator, explicator, or troubadour with courtiers. In some of the miniatures, he speaks to people who, by their costume, are not of the nobility—to women in number 90, to men not dressed as noblemen in 80, to clergy and physicians in 40, and to the clergy and nobles in 180. Secondly, the statement that the cantigas de loor might have been too complex for comprehension among the general public contradicts Presilla's and my own opinion that the king was attempting to reach all strata of his subjects. Intent again must be taken into consideration.

Specific pages of miniatures must now be considered, and it will be necessary therefore to describe detailed aspects of their composition. Each page that illustrates a miracle or a song of praise is divided into six parts, or panels (all except the first cantiga, which contains eight). Much has been written about the influence of six-paneled triptychs upon the miniatures. (22) These are not the only models Alfonso's artists might have seen and utilized. Urban T. Holmes mentions that, in a French jeu dealing with the resurrection, the décor simultané was arranged so as to appear in six scenes to be viewed from left to right, as is true in the miniatures of the Cantigas. (23) This offers further support for drama's influence and how Alfonso and his artists utilized it.
The page of miniatures that visualizes cantiga I will now be studied in detail (Fig. 6-1). Viewed as a whole as one might see a multifaceted tapestry or dramatic presentation, in eight scenes or tableaux which present important incidents in the Virgin's life, this page shows the annunciation, the nativity, the visit of the angels to the shepherds, the Magi and their gifts, the Magdalene's report to the Virgin that Jesus has risen, the ascension of the [82] Lord, Pentecost, and the coronation of St. Mary in heaven. Every panel, as is the case with all but a few pages of miniatures, is captioned by a brief statement as to what is illustrated; and these captions may well be what a narrator, in many instances Alfonso himself, recited. Alfonso simply is the narrator or troubadour; this is made manifest not only by the king's appearance, but also by the first-person wording of the poem. This indicates strongly that such presentations--verbal, musical, and visual--are modeled upon drama. Since each of the eight panels visualizes what is reminiscent of a dramatic tableau, it seems worthwhile to explicate the contents of each panel, so as to compare and contrast visualization and verbalization and to relate how these pictures seem to illustrate staging. I translate the wording of each caption and remind the reader that all captions and all pages in the manuscript, together with a transcription of all the cantigas and their translations into Spanish, can be found in José Filgueira Valverde, and that Kathleen Kulp-Hill has translated all of the cantigas--text and captions--into English. (24)

If readers think of Alfonso as the narrator or troubadour, who states (might not Alfonso have sung?) what each panel explains in its caption, they will sense the dramatic quality. Panel 1 (How the Angel Greeted St. Mary) clearly tells what the viewer of the miniature is to see. Dramatic arches play a significant role, just as arches did in actual dramas outside Spain and possibly within her borders. The central arch encompasses a large jardiniere in which grows a five-blossomed lily, the flower symbolic of Mary's virginity and of her five joys. Ana Domínguez writes:

> It is the typical iconography of the thirteenth century. The only Alfonsine peculiarity lies in the stage setting [escenario] with its huge flower container. Here also we can accept a theatrical setting. This is not certain, but that it is different from such French representations is certain. (25) Here also we can accept a theatrical setting. This is not certain, but that it is different from such French representations is certain.

It will be recalled that the account of the annunciation in Scripture (Luke 1:26-38) states that Gabriel visited the Virgin in Nazareth of Galilee. Alfonsine artists usually painted the city mentioned, so one is easily persuaded that, when they did not do so in this miniature, they were painting a theatrical setting. The words of the cantiga expand upon the statement in the caption. Speaking in the first person, the narrator (surely Alfonso) in stanza 2 puts words into the mouth of the angel.

Therefore, I wish to begin with how She was hailed [83]

> By Gabriel when he went to summon her:
> "Oh, Blessed Virgin, beloved of God,
> You now bear within you him Who will save the world,
> and your kinswoman,
> Elizabeth, who doubted,
> is thereby proven wrong." (26)

The threefold impact intended by Alfonso and his collaborators--verbal, visual, and melodic--must have been impressive to those who were present when the cantiga miniature was viewed by a group, while
singers and instrumentalists rendered the hymn.

Panel 2 (How St. Mary Gave Birth to Jesus Christ and Placed Him in a Manger) presents a simple nativity scene of the kind presented in churches in accordance with the regulations of the Partidas. Its setting on stage would have been feasible. The arches lead the eye from left to right, offering a dramatic succession of events or incidents. Under the left-hand arch, St. Joseph sits, gazing into the central arch which frames the manger placed beside the Virgin's bed. The luxurious quality of the Virgin's bed in that humble stable, with its fine covers and its canopy, leads me to believe that the miniaturist was copying a scene in a drama or ritual in the palace, in which Alfonso ordered the Virgin to be portrayed not in the bed of straw she would have had to use in Bethlehem but in a bed worthy of the future Queen of Heaven.

The two animals, the ox and the ass often seen in nativity scenes, are also presented in a fashion uncharacteristic of cantiga miniatures. Alfonso's artists were accustomed to paint human and animal bodies in their complete forms, unless for some reason some of their parts were concealed by a wall or other object. In this panel, the artist could easily have depicted the entire animals, following the usual habit of depicting everything in great detail, since there is space for both creatures. Why are only their heads portrayed? I suggest that in dramatic scenes indoors the presence of living farm animals would have been impractical, not to mention the inconvenience and impropriety. In stage settings, where animals were needed, painted animals or parts of animals may well have been utilized by those who set stages. Having viewed such stage props, the artist would have sensed the connection between drama and book-art, and would have accepted the convention and savored it. Indeed, he may have painted the scene just as Alfonso had staged it.

The words of the hymn itself narrate more than the scene in the panel; even so, they describe the most important concepts of the Holy Family's arrival at the stable. The narrator speaks in the first person again in stanza 3:

Then I wish to relate to you
how She arrived in Bethlehem, being weary. She took shelter
in the gates of the city
and thereafter gave birth to Jesus Christ, like a poor woman.
She laid him in a manger,
where they provide the barley, and they place him
among the beasts of the field.

Panel 3 (How the Angel Appeared to the Shepherds) is another tableau vivant and shows similarities to a staged scene. There is a conventionalized landscape. Why did the artists limit themselves, painting so little of the landscape, when characteristically the out-of-doors was painted more realistically? Were they copying a staged scene? In this panel, there are no arches. Only one angel appears--not in the sky but standing on a ridge. The angel holds an unrolled scroll. The two shepherds gesticulate, as would actors on stage. The two dogs, the goat, and the rather numerous flock of sheep convey a rural atmosphere. On a stage, the animals would have been represented by artificial ones or by pictures of animals. The wording of the stanza that matches this illustration relates more than the picture reveals, as was the case in panel 2. Neither the shepherds nor the animals are mentioned, but we read words familiar to all Christians, which the angels sang, as the first-person narrator here voices them:

Also I must not forget
how the angels sang a hymn of praise to God
and "peace on earth,"

nor how the star showed the way to the three kings
from far away
by which they came to offer their gifts
precious and rare.

Panel 4 (*How the Three Kings Gave Their Offering to Jesus Christ*) reminds one of the church tableaux also. Dramatic arches are important stratagems here, since they divide the panel into two separate incidents in [85] time. Framed by the arch at the left, a man holds the reins of the horses belonging to the kings. The central arch encapsulates the kings. All are white men, without the African king so popular later. The two blond kings stand near one another and seem to converse, as one holds up his offering and with his other hand points to the Virgin and the Child in the central and right-hand arches, providing one of the types of visual transition so prevalent in medieval narrative art. The oldest king, white-haired, kneels and extends his gift into the right-hand arch, emphasizing transition from arch to arch. In that arch, the Virgin is seated on the bed, and the Child, no longer depicted as an infant, stands in his mother's lap and extends a hand as though to receive the gift. The verbalization, as seen in the stanza above, includes the events of this panel also.

Panel 5 (*How the Magdalene Tells St. Mary that Her Son Has Risen*) contains elements that come closest of all to the depiction of staging, since what the miniature depicts, as well as what the verses relate, is reminiscent of a *Quem quaeritis* play. In tropes, as is well known, a coffin or sometimes nothing more than a small chest represented the tomb in which the Lord was laid to rest. The concept of a coffin, rather than a tomb, had become an accepted staging device. A tomb of the dimensions described in all four Gospels would have been too difficult to provide on stage; hence, the coffin in lieu of it. Recall that in Scripture Jesus' tomb had been sealed by a great stone, so heavy that it required several men to roll it aside. It was on this stone that the Magdalene and the other Mary saw the angel seated (Matthew 28:1-10). The miniaturist could easily have painted a tomb large enough to contain several people; if he had so depicted Jesus' burial place, however, he might have confused the viewers, since those who knew *Quem quaeritis* plays would have been accustomed to seeing the open casket with the angel seated on its lid. And so the scene was painted, a scene possibly taken from the living drama mentioned in the *Partidas* and played in much of Christendom.

The angel seated on the coffin's lid appears in the left-hand arch. The right-hand arch frames three women with halos, one of whom is the Magdalene who kneels with her hands steepled in devotion before the Virgin; the Magdalene delivers to the Virgin the message that her Son has risen. The words of stanza 5, told in the first person by the narrator who puts the words into the angel's mouth, is very reminiscent of drama:

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Another event I wish to relate,
which was told by the
then I wish to relate to you [86]
Magdalene, of how she
perceived the stone
rolled away from the sepulcher
and guarded by an angel,
who spoke to her and said:
"Unhappy woman, be comforted,
for Jesus, whom you come to seek,
aroise this morning."
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Panel 6 (*How Jesus Christ Ascended to the Skies in a Cloud*) would have needed little staging. Nothing would have been required beyond eleven kneeling apostles and an actress or statue to portray the
Virgin—with, of course, artificial clouds and paintings of two angels flying between them with their scrolls.

Panel 7 (How the Holy Spirit Came Above the Apostles) contains three arches. The left-hand arch shelters six apostles; the central one frames the Virgin; and the right-hand one contains the other six disciples. The Holy Ghost is portrayed as a white dove, from whose beak crimson streams of light fall upon the apostles. The miniaturist may have modeled the panel upon a dramatic tableau or may have simply depicted Pentecost from his own imagination. In the sky above the human figures, three clouds appear. The one in the center represents the ascension, but the Lord is not seen in it. Between the clouds, which appear at the right and the left of the central cloud, fly two angels carrying scrolls which announce the event. Stanza 6 matches very well what the miniature displays. The first-person narrator directly addresses his hearers:

And I also wish to tell  
the great and wondrous joy  
She had when She saw  
the luminous cloud lift up  
Her son, and when he had  
ascended, angels appeared  
walking among the crowd  
of bewildered people, saying  
'Thus he will come to judge.  
This is a proven thing.'

Panel 8 (How Jesus Christ Crowned St. Mary in Heaven) might have been sketched from a dramatic piece, but it is more likely that the miniaturist used as a model some picture or tapestry or else created it from his own imagination. The poem parallels what is visualized: [87]

And, in God's name, I must  
not fail to mention  
how She was crowned. When She  
had passed from this world,  
He took Her to be united with  
Him in heaven to sit at His side  
and be called Queen, Daughter, Mother  
and Handmaiden. Hence  
She must help us  
for She is our Advocate.

Ana Domínguez was the first to describe this panel. "Heaven is represented in a scientific manner: we see the successive spheres, not the nine mentioned to us in the Libros del saber de astronomia of Alfonso X but only two, filled with a series of angels, and the great sphere with Christ and the Virgin seated on their thrones at the moment of the Coronation." (27)

Another of the most interesting pages of miniatures is that which illustrates cantiga 90 (see Fig. 6-2). It is here, along with the illustrations of cantiga 1, that the probability of drama is best represented. The page is unusual also in that the spaces normally occupied by captions are blank. This is a great pity, since not all experts agree as to what the six panels represent. The narrator-troubadour, definitely Alfonso since he is clearly depicted, speaks directly to the Virgin, telling her, "You were alone, Virgin, without a companion." The first stanza relates that she was alone when Gabriel spoke to her and that she conceived alone—that is, by herself, with no companion—and that she destroys the devil. But the
What appears to be staging is seen in panel 3 which is divided into two parts by a band of alternating castles and lions *rampant*. The right-hand division is separated into two dramatic arches. The Virgin is under the right-hand arch, seated with seven women, each with a halo. Ana Domínguez believes that this scene represents "St. Mary, now an adolescent, in the temple in which she is being educated with her companions." (29) The women seem not to be adolescents, however, and the Virgin, though young, is a mature woman. Why, too, is she accompanied by so many women, when the poem repeatedly states that she was always alone? What seems to be a stage appears in the left-hand division of the panel. On this stage the women sit. A stairway leads up to the stage, and underneath the steps appear three closed doors. To Ana Domínguez these seem to be the trapdoors placed beneath stages to provide entrances and exits for devils and other actors. It is difficult to imagine what else these doors could represent--leading one to suppose, with reason, that the artist had a stage before him as he painted or that he had a stage in mind.

The right-hand side of this panel may also depict a stage setting. It too is divided into two arches. Both appear to contain the depiction of a stage with doors beneath. In the left-hand arch sits a Jewish priest who looks into the right-hand arch under which the Virgin is seated while she embroiders. It would be possible to continue to develop the thesis that the cantigas *de loor* were staged or that the artists had staging in mind when they painted the miniatures. What has been stated thus far, however, should suffice.

In summation, Alfonso was familiar with the extant types of drama from his knowledge of what was customarily played in churches, from what he learned about drama from Isidore's *Etymologies*, and from what he had seen in Spain as well as abroad. He knew the theatre of mime, then, and also that theatre which Curtius mentions as having existed, namely the kind of drama in which a narrator spoke.
and in which actors sang or spoke as they played their parts. Alfonso caused these kinds of drama to be illustrated in his *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. It is likely too that, not content with playing such dramas in the royal chapel for courtiers, he may have had such plays presented in more public places, even if he himself did not appear in these as narrator. It seems possible that he allowed his miniaturists to copy his stage settings and even his drama in action, as models for their work. It is logical to believe that Alfonso had drama on his mind, as the *Partidas* indicate. And it makes sense to suppose that he produced drama bordering upon opera, or perhaps it might better be termed dramatic ritual set to music and sung. In this way, through book-art and through the drama used as models for that art in the form of miniatures, the Learned King was able to bring his message to his subjects.

Notes for Chapter Six

4. Urban Tigner Holmes, Jr., *A History of Old French Literature from the Origins to 1300* (New York: F. S. Crofts, 1937) is the most substantial history of this literature to be found. Holmes includes virtually all works in Old French, and his extremely sage criticism has not been bested.
5. Antonio Ubieto, et al., *Introducción a la historia, de España*, 10th edn. (Barcelona: Editorial Teide, 1974), 46-47, treats Byzantine occupation of the area from Alicante to the Algarve, including the Balearic Islands, which lasted some seventy years. The Byzantines came to the aid of Athanagild in his struggle with Agila, and this assistance and occupation paralleled a period of the life of Isidore of Seville. This cultural enclave, the last flickering of Greco-Roman civilization in the West, meant a great deal to the production of Isidore's *Etymologiae*.
11. Guerrero Lovillo, *Las cantigas, estudio arqueológico* (above in ch. 4, n. 2), 93. Domínguez,


15. Alfonso X, 92-93.

16. Ibid.

17. Ballesteros Beretta, Alfonso X, 1053, quotes from the king's will (my translation): "Likewise we order that all the books of the Songs of Praise of Holy Mary be in that church where our body shall be interred, and that they be sung on the feast days of Holy Mary. And if that one who inherits legally and by our will what is ours should wish to own these books of the Songs of Holy Mary, we order that he therefore make good compensation to the church from whence he removes them so that he may have grace without sin."


20. European Literature, 417.


23. Old French Literature, 246.

24. Filgueira Valverde, "Introducción histórica-crítica, transcripción, versión castellana y comentario de las Cantigas de Santa María" (Madrid: Edilán, 1979), 35-264. Kulp-Hill kindly allows scholars, who request it, the translations of cantigas they need for their articles or books. Her address is Department of Modern Languages, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, Iowa 50614.


26. This and all English verses from the Cantigas are by Kulp-Hill (see n. 24 and text), based on the critical edition of the poems by Walter Mettmann (above, ch. 4, n. 1).

27. "Iconografía evangélica," 64.
