

On Absences: The Erasure of Black Women in the *Cantigas de Santa María* (*Biblioteca de El Escorial MS T.I.1 and Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze B.R.20*)

By Eileen McKiernan González

Abstract: The Escorial and Florentine *Cantigas de Santa María* (Esc. Ms. T.I.1 and B.R.20), lavishly illuminated thirteenth-century miracle cycles of 427 miracles and songs of praise, include forty-two miracles associated with Muslims. The representations of the Muslim community depict scenes of conversion and punishment to those who would do harm to the Eucharist, Marian images, churches, and Christian peoples. Muslims are also represented in times of war as leaders, victims, persecutors, and as members of a multi-ethnic community. Within these representations, Muslim men appear of two broad variants: light-skinned turbaned figures with long robes (indistinguishable beyond these markers) and dark-skinned, curly haired figures with shorter robes. The caricaturing of the faces of dark-skinned Muslim figures—rounder heads, fuller red lips, and curly hair—falls into the “Ethiopian” types of the era. Both of these peoples (Muslims and Ethiopians) appear in armies (as leaders, infantrymen, sailors, and cavalry) and as servants. Muslim women, like Jewish women, are not distinguishable to a great degree by clothing or physiognomy. Muslim women appear as wives and mothers, compliant with their husbands, defiant only in conversion in order to save their children. Dark-skinned women are not present in the *Cantigas*. This paper considers the complete absence of black female bodies in the representation of multifaith and multiracial communities in the *Cantigas de Santa María*.

The Virgin Mary of the *Cantigas de Santa María* is faithful to those who believe and pray to her. She protects people from a broad swathe of society. She does not distinguish by religion, so Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Polytheists find her protection. Likewise, she serves as patron for a long list of professions and social statuses: soldiers, sailors, scribes, and seamstresses are equally as likely to look to the Virgin in the *Cantigas*. The *Cantigas* finds Mary coming to the aid of victims as well as transgressors. Rapists, thieves, adulterers, nuns who abandon their vows, liars, gamblers, and all who repent and devotedly ask for her protection receive it. The pictorial representations of these peoples varies by profession, social status, as well as “race” and religion, though most appear in contemporary dress and are presented as types rather than individuals. The visual program of the *Cantigas* gives the appearance of Mary’s protection falling upon all segments of the society; suggesting, as Rhona Zaid notes, that “[e]very conceivable member of Spanish contemporary society is present here, from king to lowest peasant; the clergy, the court, the country are all recorded” (Zaid 146). The encyclopedic representation suggests that all peoples have access to Mary’s mercy and agency with a notable exception: for while black men are represented, there are no black women present. This absence of black women from the visual record implies their removal from Marian magnanimity.¹ While a

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¹This paper reflects work carried out for, and since, Celebrating Belle da Costa Greene: An Examination of Medievalists of Color within the Field in St. Louis, November 2018. At the conference, I considered multiracial armies in representations of Jaume I, king of the Crown of Aragon, in a miracle associated with the church in Arreixaca in Cantiga 169 of the *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial T.I.1. and the fresco cycle of the *Conquesta de Mallorca* (MNAC 071447-CJT)). After I noted the lacunae of black women in the session, Dorothy Kim encouraged the exploration of this theme. I continued this exploration at the 6th Biennial Conference of the Society for the Medieval Mediterranean in Barcelona, July 2019. The title of this

minority in Castile, the acquisition of slaves from raids and sieges into the Islamic south brought them (black females) into the domestic sphere. The differentiation, and access to mercy, of Muslim men of varied social and racial backgrounds and the representations of baptisms and conversion stories affirm the rise in the Mendicant drive for conversion in the thirteenth century. Yet, the absence of black Muslim women heightens the anxiety of racial difference and intimacy in the domestic sphere.

The *Cantigas de Santa María* is a miracle cycle, collected and composed in Galician-Portuguese and lavishly illuminated at the Toledan court of Alfonso X of Leon-Castilla (r. 1252-1284) and his son Sancho IV (1284-1295). There are four manuscripts: Toledo MS BNM Ms. 10069 is likely the earliest and incorporates illuminated initials; Escorial Ms. B.I.2 *Códice de los músicos* is the most complete and includes images of musicians performing the canticles before each new song of praise (Loor);² Escorial Ms. T.I.1 *Códice rico* is the most lavish in size and illumination, though contains half of the canticles; and Florentine Codex BNCF, Ms. B.R. 20 is similarly formatted to the *Códice rico*, but is smaller in size, incomplete, and begins where the *Códice rico* ends. The *Códice rico* is the earlier of the two heavily illuminated manuscripts and is generally accepted to have been completed during Alfonso's lifetime, between 1270 and 1282. The incomplete Florentine Codex was continued under the rule of Alfonso's son, Sancho. The images in this article come from these two manuscripts. The *Códice rico* has 210 full-page six-panel illuminations (See Figure 1) relating 195 Canticles (originally 203, the manuscript has lost 8 canticles) and it is within this richly illuminated manuscript that the dearth of visibly black women is most obvious. The Florentine Codex has 133 canticles, no musical notation, and only forty-eight of these are partial or complete full-page six-panel illuminations. Most critically, the only representation of a black female figure appears in this manuscript—not as a human woman, but as the serpent in the Garden of Eden in Cantiga 320. Here a black woman's head is added to the serpent's body. This absence and demonizing of black women's bodies are the central issues within this paper.

Castile: The Effects of Expansionism and Slavery

Toledo, where the scriptorium of the *Cantigas* was located, was a polyethnic society, having been the long-time capital of Muslim rule prior to Alfonso VI's conquest in 1085. Muslim peoples were allowed to continue living in the city with certain protections by the king. The descriptions of Toledo tend to emphasize a diversity of ethnicities, though two centuries later, the population would have shifted toward northern Castilians (Patton 236-237). Many would have also converted by this time, and these were integrated into the Christian society in ways that new Andalusian converts were not. The architecture and art of Toledo reflected the diverse, permeable interactions of peoples. Jerrilyn Dodds, María Rosa Menocal, and Abigail Krasner Balbale explore the rich exchange of peoples, customs, and literary and material cultures of the city and region. Under Alfonso's rule, "Toledo in the second half of the twelfth century became the undisputed center of this new cultural empire, one explicitly dedicated to the metamorphosis of the legendary wealth of Islamic Spain into what would become the foundations of modern European thought" (205).

Miracle stories recounted in the *Cantigas* reflect a geography with a broad Mediterranean reach: contemporary events take place in Castile and Andalusia, miracles may happen as far away as Constantinople, and classic tales from France, Italy, and beyond are recounted. These Iberian territories are of

article comes from this second paper. I would like to thank Pamela Patton, Maureen Quigley, and Ashley Elston for their encouragement and assistance with various stages of this project.

²Walter Mettmann used the *Codice de los músicos* in creating a comprehensive critical edition of the *Cantigas in Alfonso I, el Sabio: Cantigas de Santa María*. In this text I use Mettmann's numbering, most divergent from the respective manuscript in the *Florentine Codex* where the numbering is re-started at I. In the *Codice Rico*, the only divergence in the illuminations considered here is Cantiga 185 (Mettmann 186). The two images from the *Florentine Codex* are Cantiga 5 (Mettmann 205) and Cantiga 40 (Mettmann 320). When using translation, I work with the critical translation of Kathleen Kulp-Hill in *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X, The Wise: A Translation of the Cantigas de Santa María*, whose work is still the standard.

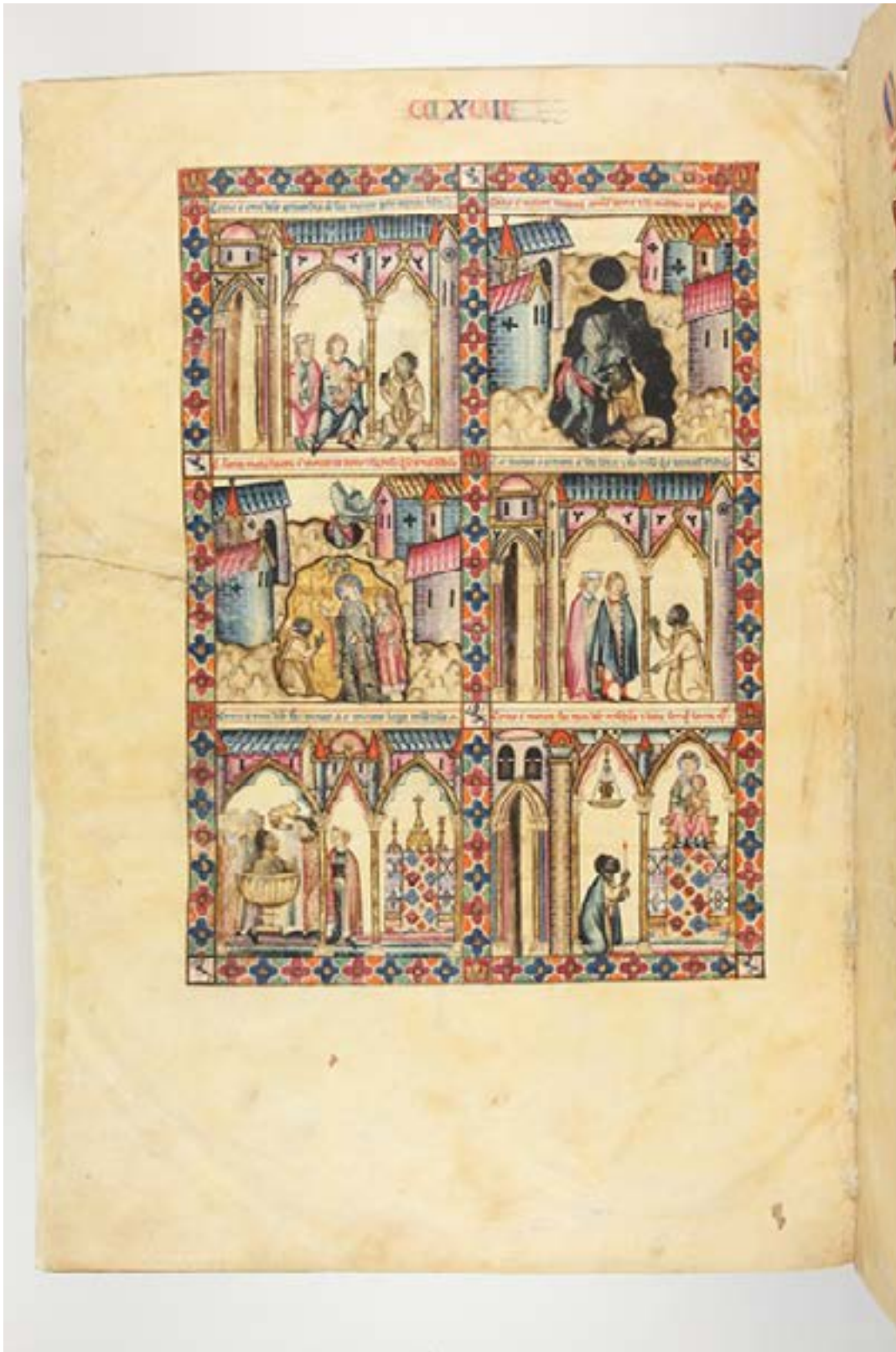


Figure 1. *Cantiga 192: "Muitas vegadas o dêm' enganados ten os homes" or The Muslim Servant* *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

mixed ancestry. Black Muslim women, like men in military companies, could have been present as townswomen—certainly as servants and slaves—to depict the multiethnic Andalusian and Castilian space. Indeed, as Pamela Patton summarizes, “Castile itself had seen a distinct growth in its numbers of black- and brown-skinned inhabitants, both men and women, slave and free, as the crown absorbed the population of conquered Islamic lands in the course of the later Reconquest” (Patton 236).³ The population of Muslims in Castile was a balance of *Mudejares* (Muslims who chose to remain under Christian rule post-conquest) or those forcibly brought to the region. Brian Catlos suggests that most of the Muslim population increase was a direct consequence of the practice of slave acquisition by raid or siege (*Kingdoms of Faith* 317-330). Given the breadth of the population and representation, the absence of the black female body is stark.

There is limited information about African Muslim women on the Iberian Peninsula beyond slave records, and these are heavily dependent on Arabic and Catalan sources. This literary and documentary lacuna begs the question of whether black women were present in thirteenth-century Castile. The demographics of medieval Iberia are complex and need more study, and much is lost from the archival record—particularly in Castile. Catlos notes that slaves in Castile (until the late fourteenth century) were almost exclusively Muslim in origin, and Castilian slavery was fed by the Reconquest and by raids into Muslim-controlled territory in the rapid military expansion post-1212 due to the military victory at Las Navas de Tolosa (*Muslims of Medieval* 262-263). The rise in Muslim slave populations in the aftermath of the territorial conquests are evident in the legislation provided for their treatment.

King Alfonso X’s law code, the *Siete Partidas*, was created between 1256 and 1265 and acknowledged the importance of slavery to Castilian society. The laws of the *Siete Partidas* governed the treatment and behavior of slaves in the territory. The *Siete Partidas* defined three types of slaves: prisoners of war; free men who gave up their freedom for servitude; and, children born of slaves (Phillips 28). It included rights mitigating the aspects of chattel slavery, including the right of slaves to own property (with the master’s consent), marriage (without the master’s consent), and limits on punishment (masters could not kill or mistreat slaves to the point of unbearable suffering). The existence of the law code confirms the presence of slaves in these territories.

Most studies looking at rising demographics of sub-Saharan peoples and the presence of racial pejorative stereotypes in Iberian literature and art focus on the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries due to the rapid increase of trading in slaves resulting from Portuguese maritime expansion, and possibly resulting from life and labor implications after the bubonic plague in the prior century. It is also the case that Castilian representation of black women in literature does not become active until the sixteenth century, even though black men had appeared in the fourteenth century: such as in *El Conde Lucanor*, which includes a black unnamed groom (Rueda 108). When they do actively appear, black women no longer are associated with Islam, as the Portuguese slave trade had moved beyond this region. Where documentation provides more information, it focuses on the Crown of Aragon and Andalucía. Studies on Castile still rely on the work of Charles Verlinden and Antonio Domínguez Ortiz, particularly his pre-fifteenth century work. Most studies note that Castile was not an active slave state at this time. Late medieval Castile was not greatly involved in the Mediterranean activity and purchased few slaves from Mediterranean merchants.

Documentation of slaves identify physical characteristics, often color and origin, though not race as conceived of today. These characteristics are also connected to monetary value.⁴ Studies of slavery on the Iberian peninsula by Roser Salicrú, William Phillips, Lynn Ramey, and others have

³Domínguez Ortiz likewise considers a rise of Muslim converts, or *moriscos*, migration north in the aftermath of Castilian conquests under Fernando and Alfonso in the early thirteenth century and due to the repressive policies of the Almoravids. The arrival of new Andalusian *moriscos* may have slowly given rise to the stress over false conversion of *conversos* and ultimately, to the obsession with “purity” of blood.

⁴As a side note, I was interested to see that the categories of color in use in Latin America are already found here, for example, *trigueño* (wheat toned) or *membrillo* (quince toned). Phillips, 75.

noted that women were generally held at higher monetary value, and in Catalunya and Valencia women outnumbered men, though not in Mallorca (Salicrú, 52-65). The skin color of slaves correlated to the resources expended by slavers; lighter skin led to greater monetary value. Relying on documentation from Arabic sources, these studies also consider the situation in Granada. Phillips provides an example through Muhammad al-Saqali, market inspector in the late-twelfth century and early thirteenth-century in Malaga (72). He associated origin—whether Berber, Roman, Meccan, Turkish—with physical attributes or suitability for certain skills. For example, Medinan women were associated with elegance; Ethiopians were associated activities of wet nurses. These attributes were connected to the slave's region of origin: a thirteenth-century Muslim slaver callously noted that to create the ideal slave woman one could take a nine-year old Berber girl, send her to Mecca for three years, Medina for another three, then finish her education in Iraq—looking to sell her at the age of twenty-five (72). This would bring together the voluptuousness of the Berber with the training and culture of Mecca, Medina, and Iraq.

Geraldine Heng and Peter Biller note that by the late middle ages, black female bodies already were associated with carnal pleasures, as these descriptions tend to suggest (Heng 212; Biller 486). Patton includes the positive representations of blackness in descriptions and representations of the bride in the Song of Songs and of the Queen of Sheba. Yet, even these emphasize aspects of sensuality and carnal pleasures and become increasingly pejorative in the next century (Patton 222; 231-232). These associations certainly led to the sexual exploitation of women in slavery. Brian Catlos and David Nirenberg present this exploitation in stark terms, including noting the limits that arise in Catalunya where the repercussions of forcing a slave into prostitution were stark. The physical exploitation of Muslim slave women in the domestic sphere included uses as wet nurses to such degrees that theologians like Ramon Llull explicitly argued against such domestic uses of black slave women in moral terms. Interestingly, Llull did not argue as regards the exploitation of the women, but for the moral health of the children (Winer 165-166). Simon Barton and Núria Silleras-Fernández include the possibilities of power that the association of beauty, exoticism, and intelligence could bring to a select few well-placed slaves.

Robert Bartlett considers the language of racial differentializing, specifically the lack of a comparable word, in Medieval Europe. Instead of classifications of race, the use of *gens* or *natio* is used to present group identities and the varied approaches to diverse peoples (Bartlett 42-43). Heng, in considering approaches to critical race theory, notes that “race has no singular or stable referent: that race is a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences, rather than a substantive content” (Heng 19). In medieval Iberia, religion was used as a differential until the fifteenth century. The language of the *Cantigas* presents *crischão*, *pagão*, *mouro*, *mafomete*, *judeu*, and occasionally *negro*. In the images of the *Cantigas* only *judeu* and *negro* are differentiated in physiognomy, and only for men.

Representations of the “Other” in the Cantigas de Santa María

The textual and visual representations of Jews and Muslims in these canticles appear in some similar ways—conversion and punishment to those who would do harm to Christians and their beliefs and practices including the Eucharist, Marian images, and churches. These fall squarely into anti-Semitic rhetorical formats and that pejorative treatment is extended to the Muslim community. Muslims,

generally identified as mouros or “Moors,”⁵ are also represented in times of war, both as leaders and persecutors, and as members of a multiethnic community. Of the 427 miracles and songs of praise, forty-two include depictions of Muslims and twenty-three include depictions of Jews.⁶ These representations have received a great deal of scholarly attention, initially focused on the Jewish community. More recently, scholarship has focused on the Muslim community, including the image of the dark-skinned Muslim—at times designated as Black, African Muslim, or African Moor. The text of the canticles does not often distinguish between light- and dark-skinned Muslims, leaving that decision to the illuminators.

Zaid synthesizes approaches to representations of Muslims in the *Cantigas* into three broad categories: “conversionary; spiritual superiority of Christianity; and, temporary Moslem [sic] superiority, on a physical level, primarily seen as a Christian punishment of sinning” (Zaid 147). Separation of Muslims and Christians was constructed legally, spatially, and intimately—though the intermediacy of servants and slaves obscures this space.

In the *Cantigas*, Christian men and Muslim men are dressed differently, but their physiognomy look about the same with the exception of black Muslims. This is distinct from the representation of Jewish men, who do have differentiated physiognomy and clothing. The black men fall into the stereotypical representation of the “Ethiopian” during this period, with rounder heads, kinky hair, bulbous nose, and thick lips (though not necessarily red).⁷ They are usually of a lower status, though not always: in Cantiga 46 (see panel three in Figure 2), one of the black figures appears among generals dividing the spoils of war. Women’s physiognomies are even less distinct.

Scholarly attention of the pejorative representation of black figures in the *Cantigas* is not new; Albert Bagley and Miriam DaCosta addressed the appearance of both black humans and demons in the 1970s. Discussions of dark-skinned, or Ethiopian, demons note that the choices in illuminating African Muslim people in a similar manner confers a correlation of darkness to sinfulness. More recently, Zaid, Patton, and Nirenberg, among others, have pushed the analysis of these figures in light of broader approaches to the demonic, the sinful feminine, and the monstrous. More on this below.⁸

Nine *Cantigas* include dark-skinned men, presumed to be Muslims. In six of the nine illuminations, black men appear as soldiers:

Cantiga 46: “Porque hajan de seer séus miragres mais sabudos” or “The Moor who Venerated the Image of the Virgin Mary” (Footmen and leaders, Ultramar)

Cantiga 63: “Quen ben sérv’ a Madre do que quis morrer” or “The Knight who Missed the Battle” (Cavalry, San Esteban de Gormaz, Soria)

Cantiga 95: “Quen aos sérvos da Virgen de mal se traballa” or “The Hermit who was Captured by the Moors” (Sailors, Portugal)

Cantiga 99: “Muito se deven teer por gentes de mal recado” or “The Moors who Tried to Destroy the Image of the Virgin” (Footmen, Location unspecified)

Cantiga 165: “Niún poder destem undo de gente nada nan val” or “The Celestial Knights who Protected the City of Tartus” (Footmen and cavalry, Tartus, Syria)

Cantiga 169: “A que por nos salvar fezo Déus Madr’ e Filla” or “The Church of Arreixaca is Protected

⁵While the term *Moor* appears regularly in literature, it has fallen into disfavor due to the history of racializing and stereotype leading to a pejorative history of representation.

⁶Two searchable databases now ease this type of analysis. *The Centre for the Study of the Cantigas de Santa Maria of Oxford University* allows for searches by topic, keyword, location, and description at <http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/> and Musicologist Andrew Casson’s *Cantigas de Santa Maria for Singers* includes the full searchable text of the poems in the original Galician-Portuguese at <http://www.cantigasdesantamaria.com/>

⁷The dark skin, kinky hair, round eyes, rounder head, and thick lips began to appear in Roman art and continued through the middle ages. For an overview of the representation of black figures across the ancient and medieval Mediterranean, see *The Image of the Black in Western Art*.

⁸For consideration of aspects of race and the monstrous, Freedman, Hahn, and Strickland provide complex understandings of othering of the foreigner within and of peoples beyond the known borderlands.

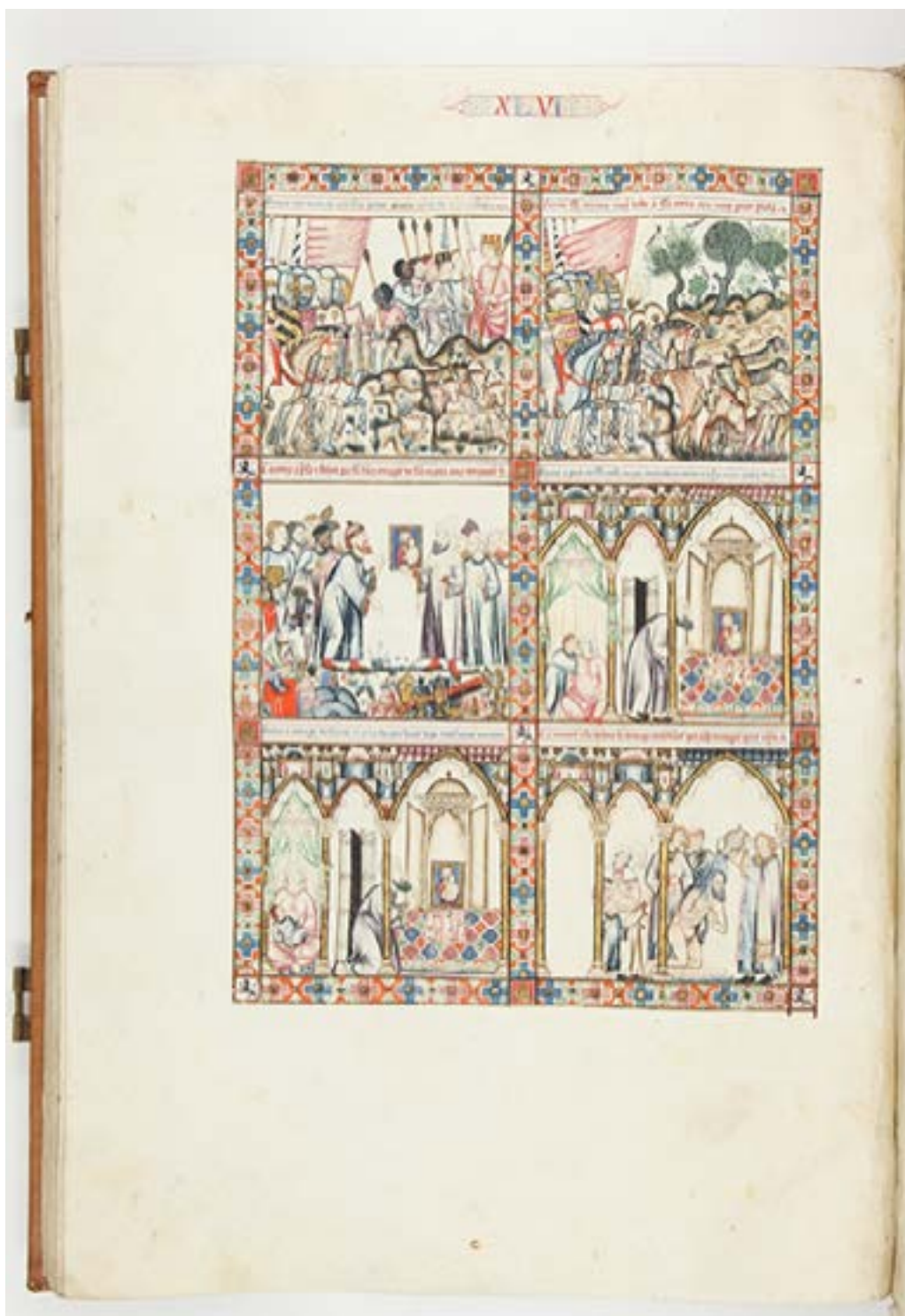


Figure 2. Cantiga 46: “Porque hajan de seer séus miragres mais sabudos” or *The Moor who Venerated the Image of The Virgin Mary*,” *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

by the Virgin” (Footmen, Arreixaca, Murcia)

The miracles situate the multiracial armies as far as Syria, and as close as Soria. Additionally, not all armies categorized as *mouro*, on the peninsula or across the sea, include black soldiers. How to represent these armies falls to the illuminators; the text of the *Cantigas* rarely refers to figures as black. This is also the case of the remaining three *Cantigas* with dark-skinned figures: two involving servants, likely slaves (*Cantigas* 186 and 192), and one involving a dark-skinned figure as a witness in an image of the Holy Sepulchre (in *Cantiga* 9 regarding the transportation of a miraculous icon).

The text of the *Cantigas* may use darkness to connote evil, in descriptions such as “chus negros que Satanás” (Canticle 186), or blacker than Satan. Still, in many images *mouro* can be depicted as dark-skinned or light-skinned, turbaned or bareheaded, soldier or leader, even low or high status. For example, two *Cantigas* present Muslims going through a process of conversion to Christianity. While the dark-skinned Muslim in *Cantiga* 192 (“Muitas vegadas o dém’ enganados ten os homes,” or “The Muslim Servant” (Figure 1)) is in a servile position and is tormented by demons prior to conversion, the convert in *Cantiga* 46 (“Porque hajan de seer séus miragres mais sabudos,” or “The Moor who Venerated an Image of the Virgin Mary” (Figure 2)) is neither servile nor tormented. The high-status *mouro* in *Cantiga* 46 is captivated by the icon of Mary and selects this object as his part of the spoils of war in the aftermath of a battle. His devotion to the image, and by extension to Mary, increases and eventually he is rewarded by the image miraculously lactating; his conversion follows. The Muslim devotion to Mary is in keeping with religious tradition; as noted by Amy Remensnyder, the veneration of her in a figural form, challenges religious precepts (*La Conquistadora* 139-146). The *mouro*’s wife seems unconcerned by his devotions to the image, and her parallelism to Mary in the fifth panel—seated on cushions versus the throne in the icon—connects the women through the sustenance that they provide their children. The final panel incorporates the mother and the child as witnesses to the husband’s conversion. The text does not note their conversion, but does affirm the conversion of the Muslim general’s followers, and other acquaintances (Kulp-Hill 62).

Cantiga 46 is also the only *Cantiga* that includes a high-status dark-skinned figure: one of the generals who shares in the spoils of conquest appears bearded, unusual though not unique, already having collected some garb. He is in line with the other leaders, though his robes are not of the length of the soon-to-be convert. By contrast, the text of *Cantiga* 192 (“Porque hajan de seer séus miragres mais sabudos,” or “The Muslim Servant”) presents the torments of a black slave. The text of the *Cantiga* does not describe the *mouro* as black, only as a captive, *cativo*; it is the illuminator’s interpretation, likely based on the servile position of the Muslim in the household. The lyrics of the poem simply describe the servant of “d’Almaria mouro” and a “Mafométe.” The canticle is often entitled “The Black Servant,” likely due to the illuminator’s approach to the figure. Servants (and slaves) of this period could be both light or dark-skinned. The term of slave does not appear in the *Cantigas*, instead, capture and ransom communicates this status, using the term “*cativo*.” The term is most used in the case of Christians captured and sold, then ransomed (*Cantigas* 83, 325, and 359). The physical torment of slaves is reserved for the mistreatment of Christian captives by Muslim captors.

In *Cantiga* 192, the Christian man actively seeks to convert his servant/captive through persuasion and then through bribery; but, the slave rejects the Christian doctrine. The master then places the captive in a cave where demons torment the captive at night. After Mary saves the captive from the demons, the servant confesses his vision and his desire to convert to the master. The captive servant is then baptized. The two stages—as relates permission to be baptized—further suggest that the servant is a slave. The final scene depicts the convert kneeling before the image of Mary. Most conversion miracles end with the baptism.

Jean Devisse and Robert Burns posit a connection between the representation of a black *mouro*'s conversion and the increased proselytizing activity among Mendicants in Aragón and in Castile (Devisse 82-83; Burns 1432). The connection highlighted by Devisse and Burns would emphasize the grace open to all who would seek baptism.⁹ As opposed to the conversion of Jews—where Sara Lipton suggests a modifying, or lightening, of features such as the prominent nose of the Jewish convert in Cantiga 25 (“Pagar ben pód’ o que dever,” or “The Jewish Moneylender and the Christian Merchant)—no shift in physiognomy accompanies the baptism of the black *mouro*. In the end, both converts kneel in their devotions to the image of Mary. The contrast is striking, however. While the kneeling convert in Cantiga 46 appears naked and full length, emphasizing his whiteness and masculinity, the convert in Cantiga 192 appears in the more typical baptismal font, perhaps feminized through this format.

While the black Muslim slave in Cantiga 192 is brought into the Christian fold post-torture, the second representation of a black Muslim slave is condemned to death. In Cantiga 186 (“Quen na Virgen santa muito fiará,” or “The Woman whose Mother-in-law Plotted her Death” (Figure 3)), the servant/slave is described as black: “mouro, que éra ben tan negro com pez” (moor who was black, as black as pitch).¹⁰ In this canticle, a woman who despises her daughter-in-law plots against the daughter-in-law with the aid of her servant, referred to as *séu mouro*, “her Moor,” likely a slave. She orders the servant to lay in bed with the sleeping woman in order to accuse her of infidelity with a Muslim—a transgression punishable by death. The *Siete Partidas* stipulates that “if a Moor has sexual intercourse with a Christian married woman, he shall be stoned to death, and she shall be placed in the power of her husband who may burn her to death, or release her, or do what he pleases with her” (Barton 51). The *mouro* complies with the order and both are condemned to death by fire. Mary protects the young woman from the flames, while the Muslim slave, described as false and treacherous, is consumed until “not a single sign of him remained” (Kulp-Hill 223). Seeing the miracle, the mother-in-law repents, confesses to her treachery, accepts the daughter-in-law, and the two women live on in harmony. No punishment is wrought on the mother-in-law by state or divine hands.

Cantiga 186 speaks to the social and legal anxiety over interreligious sexual relations, particularly relations between Christian women and non-Christian men. Yet, this anxiety over women’s bodies was as profound for both the Jewish and Muslim communities on the peninsula. Barton explores a variety of cases surviving in documentary records on both sides of this issue (Barton 46-56). Adultery outside of co-religionists carried severe punishment, even death. Yet, conversion to Christianity could be a way out of the sentence of their own community or of entry into slavery. Cantiga 107 speaks to this anxiety and to Mary’s role in protecting women in this situation through miracle and conversion.

Cantiga 107 (“Quen crevér na Virgen santa, ena coita valer-ll-á,” or “The Jewish Woman who was Thrown from a Cliff” (Figure 4)) depicts a Jewish woman condemned to death by her community, likely for taking a Christian lover. Although, this is not specified in the text. The Cantiga only notes that “It was for a Jewess who was caught in a crime and arrested and taken to be hurled from a high and rugged cliff in that place (Segovia)” (Kulp-Hill 134). Remensnyder notes the close connection to the story of Marisaltos: a Jewish woman, accused of adultery with a Christian knight, whose hands were bound (as in panel three), who was hurled from a cliff, and who survived due to miraculous intervention (*La Conquistadora* 175-178). The mira-

⁹The documentation of conversion is complex, as it could lead to manumission, especially if the slave was property of Jewish or Muslim peoples living in Christian lands. While the Franciscans may have been actively learning Arabic, with Jaime II’s great support, and actively seeking to bring Muslims to Christianity, the status-quo was maintained, and few Muslims chose conversion (Catlos, 2014, 272-276).

¹⁰The only other poem that I found that includes the qualifier of black to Muslims was in Cantiga 329, not illuminated, that notes “Aquel mouro que estava mui mas negro que o pez” (blacker than pitch). In this canticle a group



Figure 3. Cantiga 186: “*Quen na Virgen santa muito fiará*” or “*The Woman Whose Mother-in-law Plotted her Death,*” *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

of Muslim men give alms to a statue of the Virgin, one of them, described in the quote, takes the coins for himself and is paralyzed. Once the coins are restored, the man recovers. Blackness here suggests greed and disrespect of Mary’s image juxtaposed against his ‘good Muslim’ friends. The devotion of Muslims to Mary in the context of Iberian reconquista is discussed by Amy Remensnyder in *La Conquistadora*, 139-146 and Alexandra Cuffel 38-43.

cle described by the Dominican Rodrigo de Cerrato has the Jewish woman falsely accused by a Christian neighbor and the Christian authorities condemning her. In panel one, Jewish and Christian men surround the woman and the decree appears as an agreement between the communities' authorities, although it has the semblance of mob summary judgement. Upon her survival, the woman requests baptism and changes her name to Marisaltos (Maria and saltus "jump").



Figure 4. *Cantiga 107: "Quen crevêr na Virgen santa, ena coita valer-ll-á" or "The Jewish Woman who was Thrown from a Cliff," Cantigas de Santa María, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)*

Lipton argues that representations of conversions of Jewish women suggest that the illuminators have followed the idea of the “Jewish witness” and “effectively embodied in the sign of the Jewish woman, whose face and body encode weakness and pliability, receptivity to dominance and potential for change” (Lipton 160). Lipton’s characterizations of Jewish women apply to Muslim women as well. They appear as pliable, open to conversion, irrespective of the reality. Yet this idealized vision does not reflect the reality as Remensnyder notes:

... it took rare circumstances to make Muslim women freely convert to Christianity. Even Muslim women living under Christian rule were far less likely than their male counterparts to convert, unless they found themselves in one of two situations: either they were captives of Christians or they were women who, having slept with Christian men, could escape harsh punishments that would otherwise be their lot by converting. (“Christian Captives” 663)

Jonathan Ray describes this stress within the Jewish community relative to conversion and integration into the Christian fold. He notes the praise of one rabbi of another for his quick and harsh action after a Jewish woman is accused of taking a Christian lover (Ray 8). The rabbi ordered the disfigurement of the woman’s face before she could convert. The implication being that in the aftermath of the punishment she would have remained within her religious community as a visible sign of the penalties of interreligious sexual transgression. Interfaith sexual relations also could lead to further exploitation of Jewish and Muslim women. The community’s penalty of death was not generally observed for women, as the complicated relationship of these communities to their kings meant they could not be killed. Instead, their sentences would be commuted to slavery dictated by the king. The danger of even an unsubstantiated accusation for a Christian woman, however, could lead to death, as represented in Cantiga 186. Brian Catlos and David Nirenberg, respectively, consider the legal exploitation of women in these cases. Both use Catalan sources, by and large, though Amy Remensnyder’s discussion of the case of Marisaltos is within the Castilian context (*La Conquistadora* 175-180).

Cantiga 107 is one of twelve conversion stories in the *Cantigas* illuminations (ten are represented in the *Códice rico*). Four illuminations depict the conversion of women. Two depict Jewish women. Two depict Muslim women. The three additional illuminations of women’s conversions emphasize maternal devotion in Cantigas 86, 167, and 205. In these miracles, non-Christian women place their faith in Mary for a safe birth, the revival of a dead son, and to survive a siege with their child.

The first of these, Cantiga 89 (“A Madre de Deus honrrada chega sen tardada,” or “The Jewish Woman who was Helped in Childbirth” (Figure 5)), depicts a woman whose delivery is so long and painful that neither the midwives nor doctors can help, yet the Virgin helps her and a healthy son is born.

The illuminators emphasize the difficult delivery by using three panels to heighten the size of the woman’s belly. In each panel, her daughter attends to her, as do other women, and in panel three a small cloud at the top of the image reveals the miracle. Her companions hear the birthing-woman’s beseeching of Mary and the companions flee, denouncing the woman as a heretic, apostate, and Christian convert (Kulp-Hill 114). The women in the fourth panel can be seen shaking their hands and departing in the doorway. The mother recovers from the activities of birth for thirty days in convalescence and then requests baptism for herself and for her two children; the three appear in the last panel together in the baptismal font.

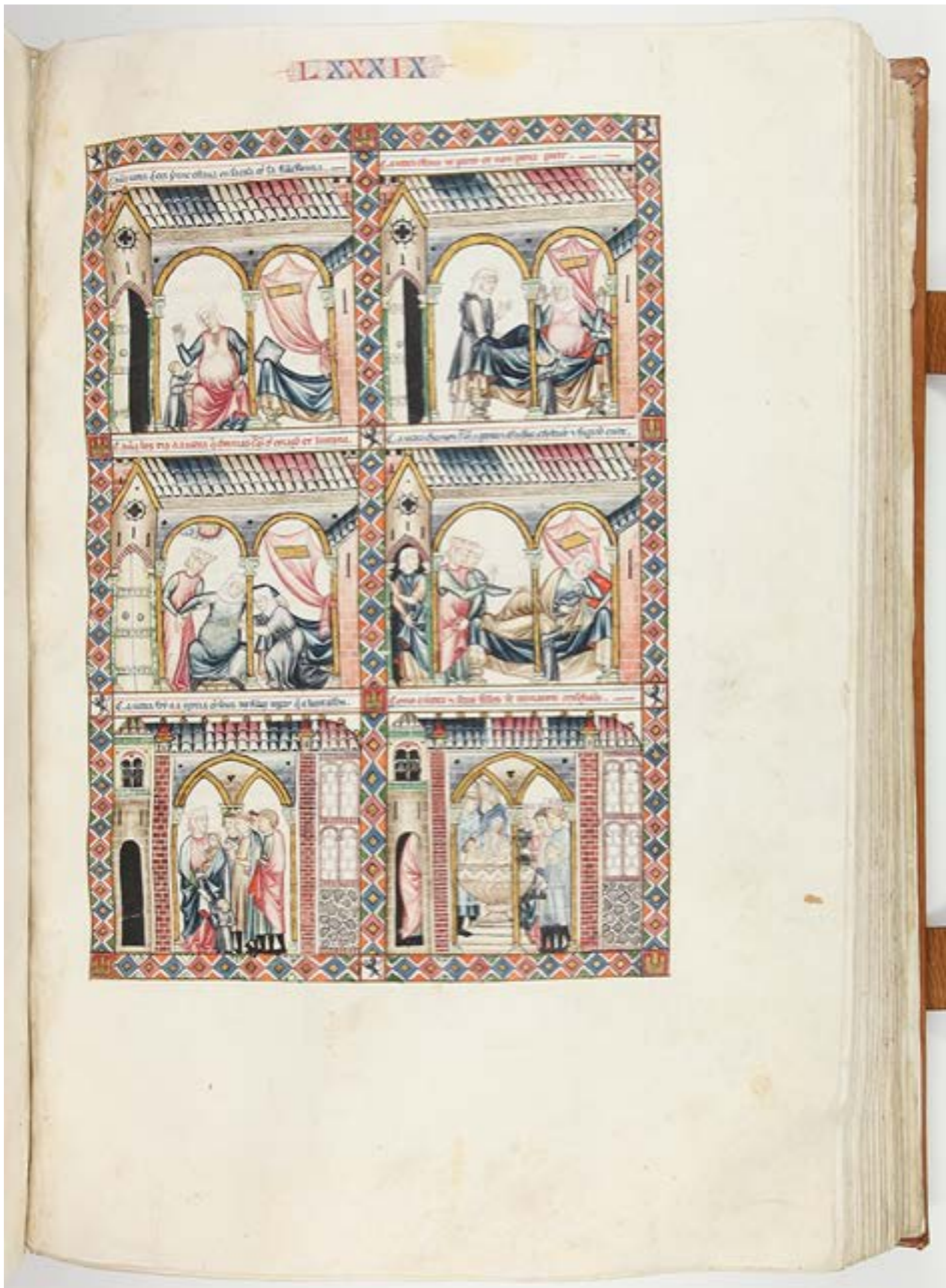


Figure 5. Cantiga 89: “A Madre de Déus honrrada chega sen tardada” or “The Jewish Woman who was Helped in Childbirth,” *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

Cantiga 167 (“Quen quer que na Virgen fia,” or “The Muslim Child who was Revived in Salas” (Figure 6)) depicts the miracle of a Muslim mother, who, after the death of her son, takes him to the Virgin in Salas, and he is revived.

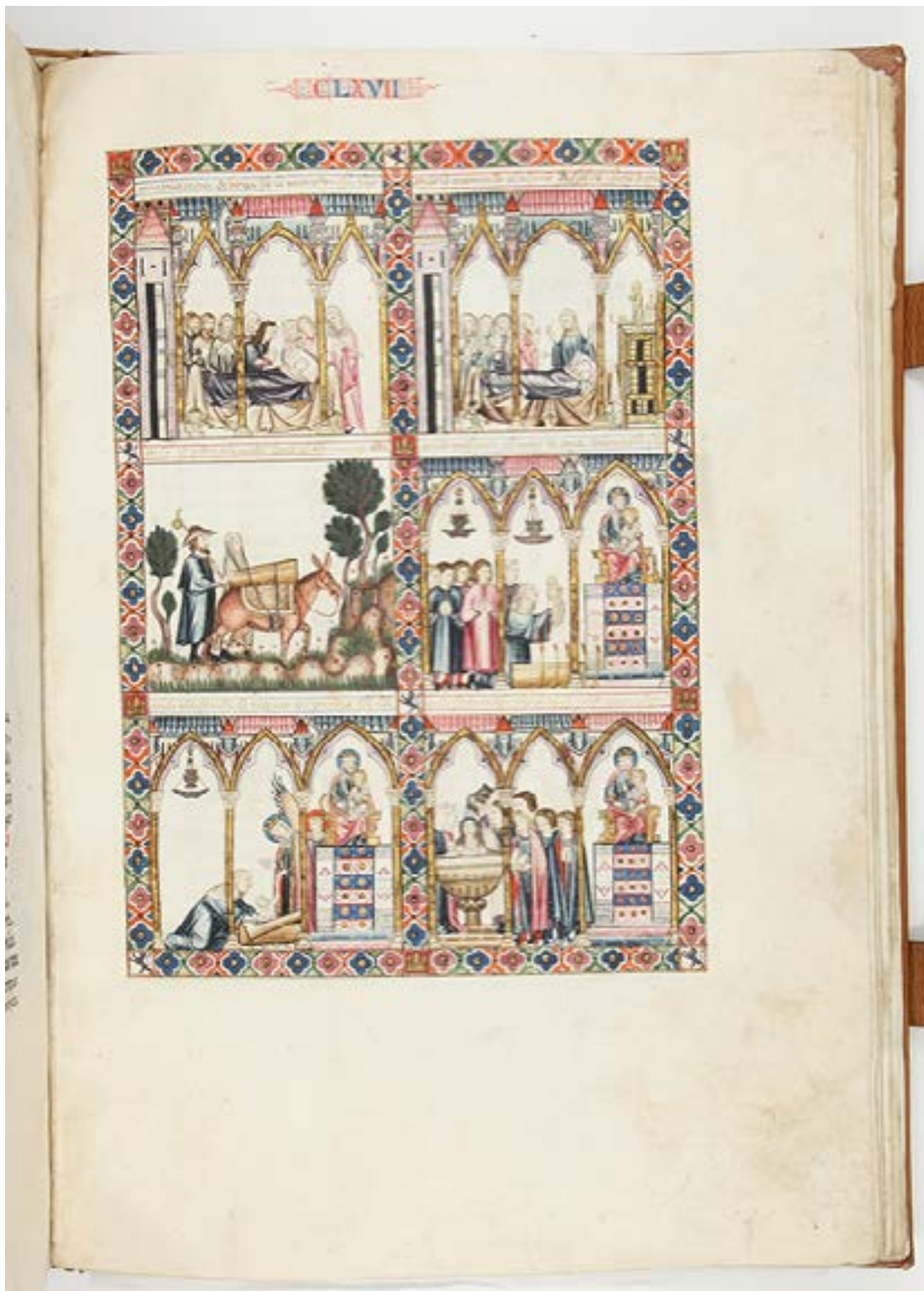


Figure 6. Cantiga 167: “*Quen quer que na Virgen fia*” or “*The Muslim Child who was Revived at Salas*,” *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

As in the prior miracle, the Muslim mother is challenged by her community in her decision to call upon Mary, but she prevails, going on pilgrimage to the shrine of Santa María de Salas. Marian devotion did cross the lines of religious devotion among Muslim and Christian believers as Remensnyder explores in *La Conquistadora*, yet Muslims reviling the devotion to Mary from coreligionists is a regular trope in the *Cantigas* (*La Conquistadora* 147-148). After a vigil that carries the distraught mother through the night, her son is revived. He had been dead for three days. He “at once became a Christian” (Kulp-Hill 202).

Finally, in Cantiga 205 (“Oraçõn con piädade oe a Virgen de grado,” or “The Muslim Woman who Survived a Seige” (Figure 7)), the mother holds her son in the midst of the destruction of the castle by flames, and is saved.

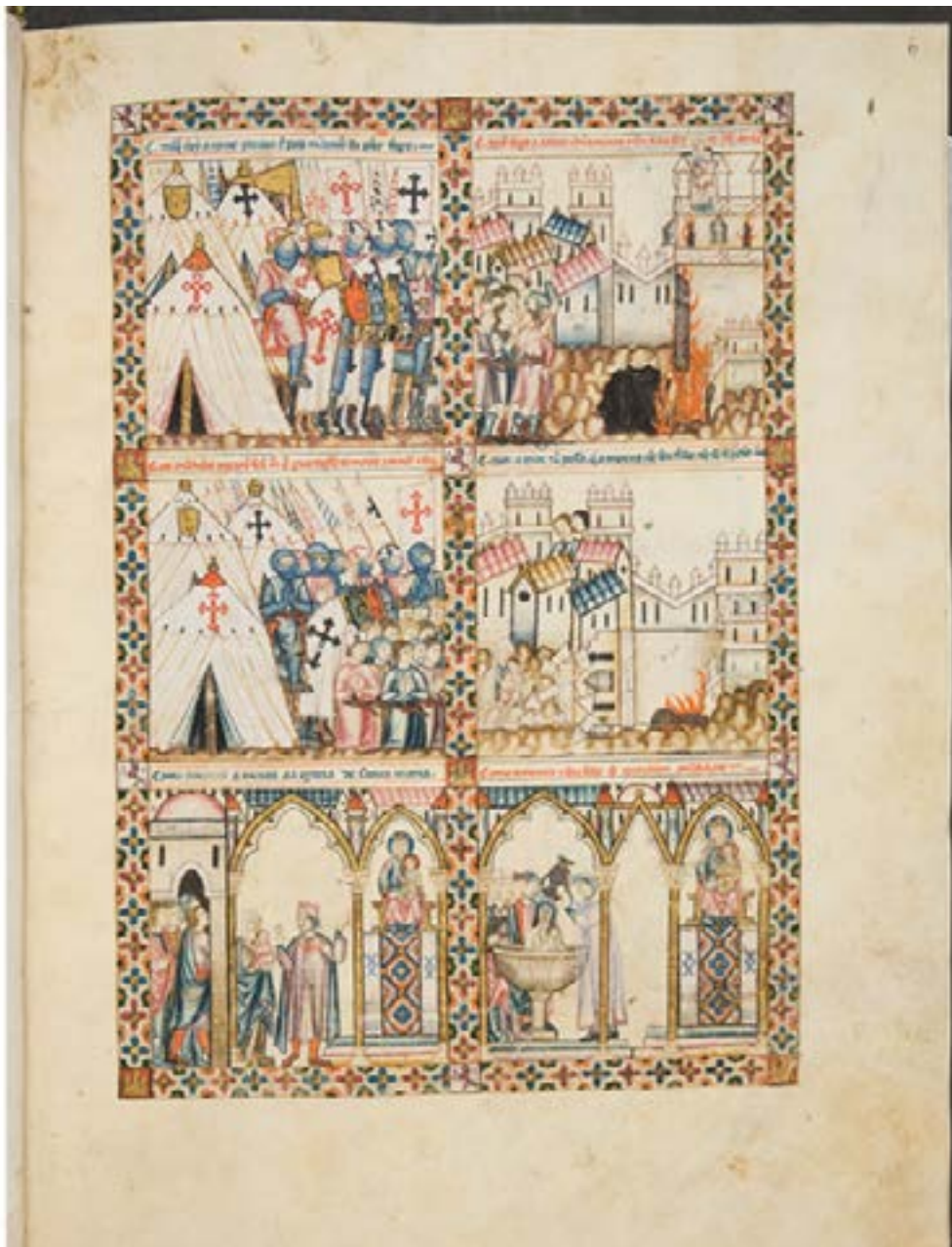


Figure 7. Cantiga 205: “Oraçõn con piädade oe a Virgen de grado” or “The Muslim Woman who Survived a Seige,” *Cantigas de Santa María*, early 1290s, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS B.R.20 (by concession of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo/Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)

The canticle is very specific about the circumstances of the miracle. Don Alfonso Téllez, a worthy nobleman, was part of a Christian army coming from Uclés and Calatrava. The fierce attack leads to the community taking refuge in a tower; the Christian soldiers then set the tower on fire. The community within begin to throw themselves from the tower in an attempt to survive the flames, but many perish from the fall. The mother climbs to the top, sitting between two merlons with her son, “who she loved more than herself” (Kulp-Hill 246). As the fire rages, mother and child sit untouched. Then, Don Gonzalo Eanes of Calatrava and Alfonso Téllez order the final assault on the tower. The tower is completely destroyed. Yet, the mother and child are found alive between the merlons and the mother “looked to them [Don Eanes and Téllez] like the statue of the Holy Virgin Mary depicted with Her son held in Her arms” (Kulp-Hill 247). In the illumination in the fourth panel, the parallelism is depicted not just through the woman’s body, but in her son lifting his hand as he reaches for his mother’s cloak, replicating the statue’s Christ Child’s hand lifted in blessing. The mother and child are transported down miraculously and all present are astounded, represented by combining two panels to create the scene—yet still suggesting separation through the frame. Rather than death or enslavement, the mother and son are baptized surrounded by their new community in the final panel. The canticle describes the terror of what siege warfare entails. In this miracle, the faith of a mother, love of her son, and openness of the soldiers to this Muslim mother in the aftermath of carnage are complex representations of the religious dimensions of this conflict.

These three depictions emphasize the role of motherhood in the conversion process. Three of the four women beseech Mary for aid in helping their children survive. Of the four conversion miracles, only Cantiga 107 presents a woman transgressing. The conversion stories associated with Jewish and Muslim men tend to emphasize their initial wrongdoing and miracles that chastise them for attempted deception or abuse. Paternal qualities are not emphasized. In fact, two Jewish fathers attempt to kill their sons in Cantiga 4 (“A Madre do que livrou dos leões Daniél,” or “The Murdered Jewish Boy”) and Cantiga 108 (“Dereit’ é de s’ end’ achar mal quen fillar perfia,” or “Merlin and the Jew”).

Women’s roles as mothers are celebrated in the *Cantigas*; motherhood is one of the characteristics that unifies all women. It is also the one that is often used to connect to Mary. One of the aspects of Cantiga 46 (“The Moor who Venerated the Image of the Virgin Mary”) is the parallel that is made between the convert’s wife, suckling their child, and the miraculous image of Mary lactating. The mother and child support the husband in his baptism. Ana Domínguez Rodríguez and Connie Scarborough reflect on the primacy of motherhood within the narratives in the *Cantigas*. Both scholars consider miracles of Jewish and Muslim women coming to conversion as part of the maternal drive to protect their children, particularly their male children (Domínguez Rodríguez 39-40; Scarborough 59-87). It is in this role that they transgress the borders between the faiths.

Women in the Cantigas, Representation, and Erasure

Women in the *Cantigas*, as noted by Lipton, are not strongly differentiated in appearance. They are depicted as mothers and wives, with typical long tunics, cloaks, and head coverings. Status is demonstrated through embellishments of the tunic, varied head coverings, and their physical contexts. Jewish and Christian women’s physiognomies and items of clothing are indistinguishable; Muslim women’s physiognomies are likewise generic, though clothing may include a longer veil (as in panels four and five in Canticle 46).¹¹ In essence, women are raceless, not distinguishable in their physiognomies, just as regards their respective stations—queens, nuns, wives, tradeswomen.¹²

¹¹There are also seventeen *Cantigas* that include nuns. These are generic in representation and differentiated by order through variations in the color of their robes (Cistercian vs. Benedictine, as are monks).

¹²Girls are not present, babies are—such as the baby princess, daughter of don Fernando, likely the infanta Berenguela, who survives an illness and is given as an oblate to the Cistercian Monastery of Las Huelgas in Canticle 122: “Mirages

Lipton addresses the conversion story of a Muslim woman in Cantiga 167. She suggests that in the baptismal scene, which includes the woman's uncovered hair and shoulders, the representation of long luscious hair is a singular moment of Muslim stereotype and exoticism (Lipton 159). Yet, Jewish women receive that same representation in these scenes. At the time of baptism, all appear with the same flowing hair and are not differentiated by whether the miracle represents a Muslim or Jewish woman's conversion, or whether they are associated with a mother's devotion or the woman's salvation from punishment (Figure 8 is a composite of the four baptismal scenes). The distinction between Jewish and Muslim converts appears in the representation of the women in profile (Jewish) or frontal (Muslim) views. The frontal views, interestingly, parallel the statue of the Virgin and Child appearing in the two Muslim women's conversions.



Figure 8. Details of four baptisms: From top left to right: Cantigas 89, 107, 167, and 205. First three from *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL), the last from *Florentine Cantigas de Santa María*, early 1290s, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS B.R.20 (by concession of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo/Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)

muitos pelos reis faz Santa María” or “The Infanta who was Brought Back to Life.” In Cantiga 89: “The Jewish Woman who was Helped in Childbirth”, the Jewish mother's conversion is accompanied by her miraculous child and by her older daughter. The daughter appears in several panels as a miniature adult woman. She also appears in the baptismal font as slightly larger than the baby.

Many of the images depicting secular women are set in urban areas or within the domesticity of households. These have few referents to identity beyond womanhood. The misogynist stress over women's behavior tends toward the vilifying of sexual activity.¹³

While the ideal of chastity is emphasized repeatedly in the miracle stories, Marian mercy does protect those who transgress those boundaries. Two canticles have sex workers as the main protagonists: in Cantiga 237, Mary provides solace and keeps alive a woman who is raped and murdered by a client in order for the woman to confess her sins and in Cantiga 305, when a moneylender tries to dismiss the devotee, the miracle provides her wealth and punishes the moneylender. Both of these cases include language of poverty and of sinful behavior. In Cantiga 305, for example, the woman is described as a poor woman who is a sinner, “mesquinna mollér que pecador éra,” balanced with deep devotion to Mary.¹⁴ That devotion could also protect a woman from rape. In Cantiga 317, a dissolute knight purchases a beautiful maiden from her father, who has agreed to the transaction due to his poverty and greed. The young woman is spared by the knight who sends her to a monastery instead of raping her.

Cantiga 317, sale, and Cantiga 205, siege, present two modes of entry into slavery for women on the Iberian peninsula. The vulnerabilities of these women to exploitation, particularly of their bodies, forced or sold into concubinage, domestic servitude (including as wet-nurses), even prostitution, given the rise of legislation to stop this abuse, are represented in varied ways within the *Cantigas*. The vulnerabilities of women varied within thirteenth-century Iberian society.

As with the Muslim servant in Cantiga 192, miracle stories touch on, though do not address directly, slavery. Yet, as opposed to the representations of black or African Muslim men, there are no miracle stories with black Muslim women and no women are described as black in the text. The only textual references to blackness and the feminine appear in illness or shock, such as in Cantiga 84. In Cantiga 84, a wife's face turns black as coal (“mais negra que un carvôn”) from the shock of hearing of her husband's supposed infidelity. The illuminators do not depict this shift in physiognomy. Just as the presences of black and brown women do not manifest in pictorial or textual forms within the *Cantigas*, the abuse of slavery is not addressed explicitly.

Demonizing and the Exotic in the Cantigas

The *Cantigas de Santa María's* representation of blackness also includes representations of the demonic in large percentage. However, representations tend toward figures that include greater deviation from the human form. In Cantiga 192 of the Muslim Servant, the tormenting demon is an example of the more typical representation: dark blue-grey skin and fur, bat wings, horns, bird feet or hooves, and mostly uncovered (See Figure 9 for a detail). On occasion, when in a group, the skin might also be a dark ochre, but not the dark brown of the “Ethiopian” figures. While all tend to be grouped as dark-skinned figures, there is a distinction by virtue of the zoomorphic elements and ink color.

¹³Perhaps the exception to this condemnation is the story of the adulteress in Cantiga 68: “A Groriosa grandes faz miragre,” or “The Wife and the Mistress.” In the canticle, a wife discovers her husband's infidelity, she prays to the Virgin for misfortune to be visited upon the mistress. In one of the few examples of Mary refusing one of her devotees, Mary protects the mistress as she is also a devoted follower. The wife seeks the mistress's forgiveness.

¹⁴There are also many Cantigas that include sexual transgressions of nuns and wives. In four of the seventeen miracles associated with nuns (Cantigas 7, 55, 94, 285), for example, Mary hides pregnancies or takes the nun's place until they



Figure 9. Detail of panel two from *Cantiga 192*: “*Muitas vegadas o dém’ enganados ten os homes*” or *The Muslim Servant*” *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I. (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

Two examples of demonizing dark-skinned “Ethiopian” type figures appear in these manuscripts. The first, *Cantiga 82* (“*A Santa María mui bon server faz*” (Figure 10)) is generally referred to as “The Demon Swine” and depicts a Canterbury monk tormented in his bedchamber. The poem notes that the monk saw a black man enter, “*viu entrar un hóme negro de coor.*” The demon who guides the swine into the monk’s chamber is stereotypically “Ethiopian,” having been described as a black man instead of a demon. The one concession to the demonic status is a short tail visible in panel three, along with the figure’s nudity.

repent and return to their communities.

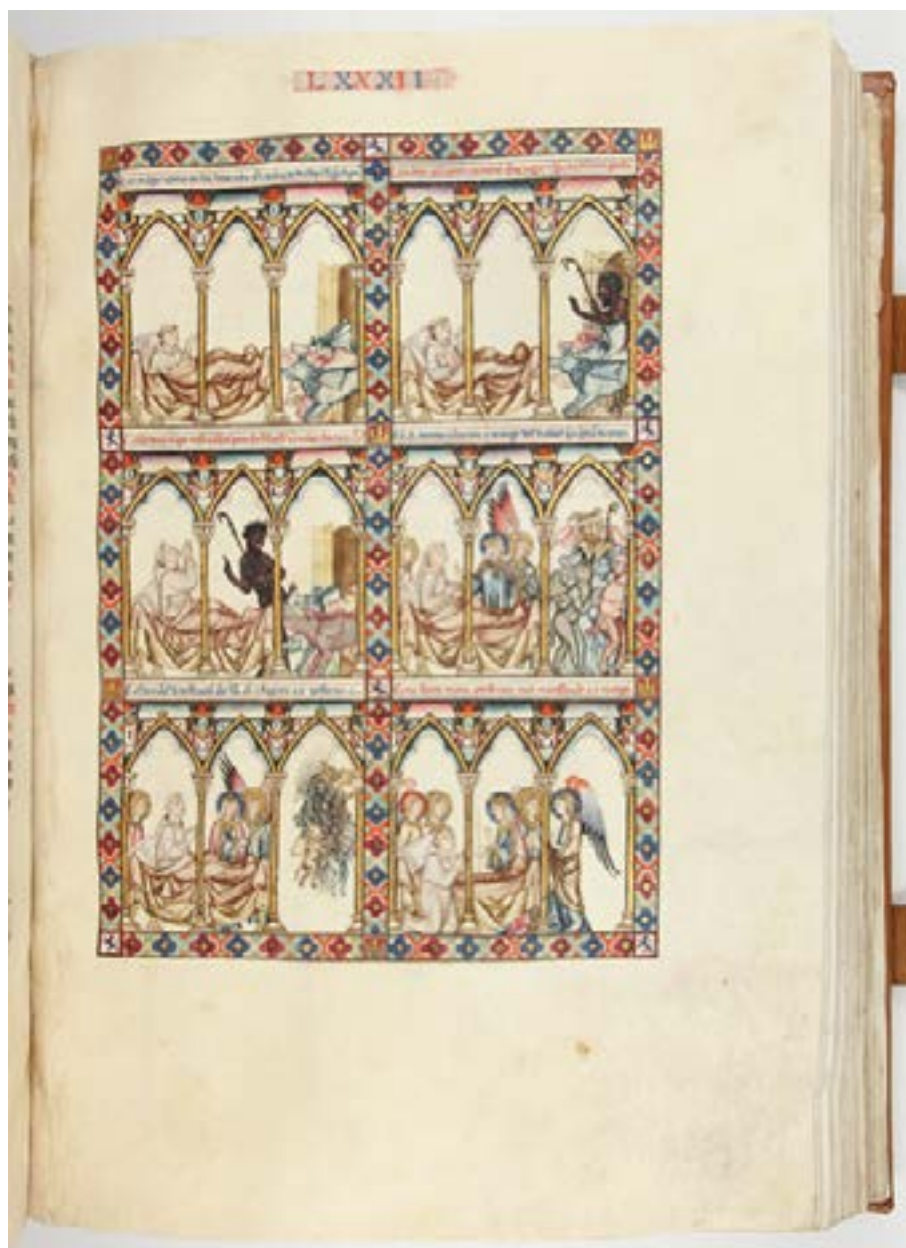


Figure 10. Cantiga 82: "A Santa Maria mui bon server faz" or "The Demon Swine." *Cantigas de Santa María*, ca. 1280, Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, MS T.I.1 (© PATRIMONIO NACIONAL)

The poem describes the fear of the monk before the black demon's demand of the swine to disturb his sleep. It is the swine that notes the impossibility of tormenting the monk due to his great saintliness, "gran santidade que en ele jaz" (Kulp-Hill 106). The demon conducts the torment only to have Mary come to the monk's aid, brandishing a stick against the demon. The stick is visible in the next three panels.

Cantiga 320 ("Santa Maria leva o ben que perdeu Eva," or "Holy Mary Restores the Good Which Eve Lost" (Figure 11)) is partially illuminated in the *Florentine Codex* and goes further to depict the tempting serpent as both female (typical of this time period) and dark-skinned.¹⁵ This canticle is one of the songs of praise, as opposed to miracle stories, known as *Cantigas de Loor*. The poem juxtaposes Eve's loss of temerity and fear of God, breaking of God's commandments, and folly to Mary, who restores the "good" through humility by befriending God, believing in God without question, and understanding.



Figure 11. Cantiga 320: "Santa Maria leva o ben que perdeu Eva" or "Holy Mary Restores the Good Which Eve Lost." *Cantigas de Santa María*, early 1290s, Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, MS B.R.20 (by concession of the Ministero per i beni e le attività culturali e per il turismo/Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze)

¹⁵In Cantiga 219, unfortunately not illuminated, the Virgin turns a white marble sculpture of the devil black, emphasizing the association of darkness with sin.

Patton has quite recently analyzed Cantiga 320 in light of the dichotomies of the Eva/Ave paradigm, adding the elements of darkness to that of the sinful feminine. Her focus on the representations and pejorative stereotypes of a black woman's body adds to the ongoing scholarly focus on blackness (Patton 219-222). She notes that the dark-skinned temptresses "merged familiar stereotypes concerning the sexuality of Ethiopians with similarly venerable conceptions of the female body as both inherently lascivious and dangerously tempting" (229). In these images it is not just the dark skin, but the artist's exaggerations of large reddish lips and large eyes that heighten perceived differences.

The hypersexualization and exoticism embedded in the representations and associations of black women's bodies and their dangerous threats to the established aspects of social order—particularly the racial and the religious—appear present in thirteenth century Castile. Núria Silleras-Fernández explores the exoticization of black female bodies in the next century in the Catalan courts, including the possible avenues to wealth for a few for whom the connections of sensuality, exoticism, and beauty have been found salient. For most though, sexual exploitation would have been a reality of slavery and of poverty. Patton notes, in looking at Cantiga 320, that "the artist's audacious decision to represent Satan with the head of a black-skinned woman seems ideally calibrated for a Castilian viewer in whose daily experience black skin and femininity bore salient and complex meanings" (237). The absence of black Muslim women in the remainder of the manuscript heightens the anxiety of racial difference and intimacy in the domestic sphere.

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