

## Song and Source in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*

Alison Campbell

### Resumo

Este artigo pretende reposicionar a nossa visão das *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (CSM) em torno do seu estatuto de canções, e explorar as implicações dessa reorientação para a nossa compreensão das fontes manuscritas. Partindo do modelo de criação exposto no artigo de 2006 ‘Collection, Composition and Compilation in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*’, de Stephen Parkinson e Deirdre Jackson, argumenta-se a favor de uma visão mais lata do que constituirá ‘criação’ no contexto das CSM, e assume-se um potencial ‘processo de criação de canção’ alternativo aos três processos composicionais separados — para texto, música e miniaturas — propostos por Parkinson e Jackson. Defende-se também que o hiato entre conteúdo e documentação escrita inerente à canção nos permite estender o quadro de referência para além dos manuscritos, afluando questões de audiência e recepção, apesar de os dados disponíveis não sugerirem transmissão ulterior do repertório.

### Palavras-chave

*Cantigas de Santa Maria*; Canção; Fontes manuscritas; Composição; Compilação.

### Abstract

This paper seeks to re-orient our view of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (CSM) around their status as songs and asks how this might impact on our understanding of the manuscript sources. Building on the model for the CSM’s creation presented in the 2006 article ‘Collection, Composition and Compilation in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*’ by Stephen Parkinson and Deirdre Jackson, it argues for a broader view of what constitutes ‘creation’ in the context of the *Cantigas*, and posits a potential ‘song-creation process’ as opposed to the three separate compositional processes—for text, music and miniatures—proposed by Parkinson and Jackson. It also argues that the gap between content and written record inherent in song allows us to extend our frame of reference beyond the manuscripts towards questions of audience and reception, despite the lack of evidence of further transmission.

### Keywords

*Cantigas de Santa Maria*; Song; Manuscript sources; Composition; Compilation.

**T**HIS PAPER WILL BE CONCERNED WITH the question: how does considering the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* (CSM) as songs affect our view of the manuscript sources? At over 400 pieces, the CSM is one of the largest surviving repertoires of medieval secular song, yet this is often not fully taken into account in the discussion of the collection or its sources.

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This paper was presented at the conference ‘Confluências culturais na música de Alfonso X’, Lisbon, July 2007. It subsequently formed the basis of a section of Chapter 2 of my dissertation: Alison CAMPBELL (2011), ‘Words and Music in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*: The *Cantigas* as Song’ (MLitt thesis, University of Glasgow), pp. 92-8.

To start with, what does it mean to say that something is a song? That is a complicated question, to which there are many answers. One of the ways we can approach it, however, is to say that song is a medium *inherently intended* to be delivered orally and received aurally. It is not the only one, of course: at the time of the *CSM* the same could potentially be said of some types of poetry and other non-musical texts. But by the last quarter of the thirteenth-century the movement had already begun away from older oral practices towards those more typical of literate culture, resulting in the emergence of ‘literature’ as we know it, i.e., texts that are meant to be read rather than heard. That movement can make non-musical works harder to place within the spectrum of oral and literate practice, particularly since the dividing lines are not hard and fast, with some older techniques and stylistic gestures persisting into repertoires otherwise composed and disseminated through writing. Song, on the other hand, is still experienced in fundamentally the same way today, even in fully literate societies like our own. Song texts may get written down for reasons of preservation or transmission, but this is not envisaged as the main means by which they will be consumed by their audience. The role of the written record is therefore different for song than for what we now call poetry (with the exception of genres such as performance poetry)—there remains a disjunction between the set of written cues for realising a song and the song itself, experienced in performance. This in turn can change our view of the sources of song repertoires, particularly if these have traditionally been regarded as literary or non-musical texts.

Turning to a *Cantigas* context, I would like to consider this point against two lines of argument: the defence of the idea that the *CSM* are songs, and the view of the production processes behind the *CSM* put forward in a recent article by Stephen PARKINSON and Deirdre JACKSON (2006). Both of these will put pressure on the view of *CSM* as a ‘medieval multimedia experience’ in the form in which it has expressed by commentators such as KELLER (1987) and SCARBOROUGH (1995), basing themselves on the sumptuous nature of the manuscript sources. There will also be a potentially significant pay-off in terms of broadening our perspective on this collection. The separation between content and written record inherent in song allows us to look both backwards and forwards from the physical sources—backwards to uncover the creative processes that lie behind them, and forwards to allow these pieces a potential life beyond the manuscript, as circulating songs.

There is still much to do if we are to uncover the creative processes that have resulted in the *CSM* as we know them today. The difficulty of working with the available editions should be well known to anyone working in the field—much of the crucial information regarding the relationship between words and music is either hard to come by or obscured, for example. This is particularly important if, as I am suggesting here, we are dealing with a song repertoire. Matters may be about to

improve, however. A new edition of the texts is currently under way (directed by Stephen Parkinson)<sup>1</sup> and the project ‘Confluências culturais na música de Alfonso X’, directed by Manuel Pedro Ferreira, has produced new and more accurate transcriptions of the melodies than those previously available.<sup>2</sup> Together these resources may well lead to a clearer understanding. In the meantime, the existing work which does attempt to offer insights into compositional technique has often been limited by its choice of perspective. Antoni ROSSELL (1998), for example, describes the functioning of small cellular elements and similarities of contour in the make-up of the *CSM* melodies, but does not provide any means of linking this to anything happening in the texts or the manuscripts. The picture we have of how texts, melodies and manuscripts are produced—and might function in concert—is therefore a fragmented one.

A more integrated perspective has been offered, however, by Stephen Parkinson and Deirdre Jackson in their article ‘Collection, Composition and Compilation in the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*’ (PARKINSON - JACKSON 2006). Not only do they offer the most detailed hypothesis to date, but do so against a clear and comprehensive understanding of the manuscripts and the issues that surround them (the different ‘editions’ of the collection and the way these are structured relative to the existing miracle collections they draw on). Parkinson and Jackson suggest three phases which take us from the source material (the narrative content of the *miragres*) right through to the manuscripts in their final form. The first of these is *collection*, defined as ‘the process of acquiring narrative or literary materials’; the second, *composition*, consists of ‘the process of production of narratives’; while the third, *compilation*, corresponds to ‘the assembly of the component narratives into the ordered and structured sequences found in the manuscripts’ (PARKINSON - JACKSON 2006, 160-1). Within this model, the composition phase is further broken down, with Parkinson and Jackson arguing against the existence of a single unified compositional process in favour of three separate ones ‘resulting in texts, music and miniatures respectively’ (PARKINSON - JACKSON 2006, 160). According to this model, the combination of the texts and music produced (along with the miniatures) is reserved for the final compilation phase, i.e., it is not until this point that the two elements are brought into contact (PARKINSON - JACKSON 2006, 160-1).

This model has many attractive features to commend it, with which I would agree wholeheartedly. Firstly—and very importantly—it gives due credit to the complexity of the processes involved, especially with regard to the construction of the manuscripts. Secondly, it makes clear the nature of the *CSM* as a grand project with an overall purpose (to create a collection

<sup>1</sup> A sample corpus of fifty texts is available via the Centre for the Study of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria* webpage at <<http://csm.mml.ox.ac.uk/>>.

<sup>2</sup> See <<http://cesem.fcsh.unl.pt/investigacao/linhas-de-investigacao/estudos-musica-antiga/projectos-financiados/confluencias-culturais-na-musica-de-alfonso-x>> for details.

of Marian pieces in honour of the Virgin—and through her, Alfonso) and identifies different phases of activity in the production of the manuscripts as we have them today. The degree of stylistic uniformity among the finished pieces they contain suggests that this is a repertory that has been created rather than collected, a fact reinforced by the almost total lack of evidence of subsequent circulation or contact with the wider world, despite the sourcing of narrative content from elsewhere. Whatever the materials that go into the collection, there appears to be very little that comes out. Thirdly, it breaks down the assumption that each piece is the result of a single unified process of composition in which all three elements (words, music and pictures) represent different facets of the same object, so that any one element can be used to gain information about the others. It seems clear to me, for example, that there is a separate compositional process behind the miniatures and that these offer a parallel—rather than equivalent—version of the narrative they depict. This is something that is worth remembering even in those cases where the miniatures are clearly based on or responding to the texts they accompany.

The latter assumption underlies the view of the *CSM* as a ‘medieval multimedia experience’ which has enjoyed considerable popularity over the years,<sup>3</sup> and has also given support to the idea that—however many hands were involved—the collection can be considered the product of a single mind, namely that of Alfonso.<sup>4</sup> Both these positions are simplifications of a much more complex reality, and as such can be misleading. The narrative content may indeed link text and pictures, but links between text and music are much harder to draw (apart from a few cases of word-painting<sup>5</sup> or response to prominent structural features of the text).<sup>6</sup> My own work has suggested that it is not helpful to regard text and music as facets of the same object—on the level of structure, never mind that of content.<sup>7</sup> The second position is an over-extrapolation from the fact that in the *CSM* we are dealing with a project, whose ultimate purpose is the glorification of its patron. It may well be true at a macro-level, in terms of general intention, but at a more grassroots level the signs of many hands seem clear: the volume of material, the overlapping layers of editing and so on. To regard these people as transparent risks masking their contribution. On both counts Parkinson and Jackson provide a more grounded view that retains, rather than elides, the evidence from the manuscripts.

There are other areas, however, where the Parkinson-Jackson model of the *CSM*'s production is less successful. My main concern is a simple one: that it sells the creative effort behind the

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<sup>3</sup> This view of the collection was first expressed by KELLER (1987) in his article ‘The Three-Fold Impact of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*’ and has been highly influential. It is also adopted by SCARBOROUGH (1995) who attempts to apply reception theory to recover something of the experience behind the *CSM*. I will return to this discussion later on.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the treatment given in SNOW (1979).

<sup>5</sup> *CSM* 103, 147.

<sup>6</sup> *CSM* 160.

<sup>7</sup> CAMPBELL (2011, chapters 2-3).

collection short. To take miracle stories, possibly in other languages such as Latin and French, in prose or other verse forms, and to generate such a large body of strictly versified Galician-Portuguese versions is a substantial task. And that merely describes the production of *miragres*—the *loores* are much less clearly dependent on pre-existing material. Furthermore, what has been created is not just a body of texts: we are talking here about a sizeable corpus of fully worked-out, performable songs. From what we see in the sources, the pieces that comprise the *CSM* are neither theoretical constructs nor decorative objects. The effort needed to do this, in my view, would have been considerable—particularly if the combination of words and music was postponed to such a late stage of production as Parkinson and Jackson suggest. However insights into song production gained by musicologists working with oral traditions and notationless cultures<sup>8</sup> suggest it may have been more likely that words and music were combined earlier, perhaps even before any stage of writing down. This is after all the presumption with which we approach other medieval secular song repertoires such as the output of the Occitan troubadour tradition (although theirs reaches back long before the creation of the *CSM*, towards a time when orality was the principal means of both composition and transmission). It is therefore legitimate to ask whether we might be looking for some kind of *song-creation process*, as opposed to separate text- and music- creation processes which are then combined. The miniatures, in this light, become an added extra, tied as they are to the physical sources and limited to one incarnation of the collection (the two volume set *T/F*).

With so many issues surrounding the manuscripts, many of which have yet to be fully elucidated, it is also perhaps natural to focus on the trajectory of their production. However I think it is worth drawing a distinction—or trying to—between composition and compilation phases, i.e., between the creative processes of content and vessel. This is worthwhile because it opens the door to creative possibilities that lie outside the frame of reference of the extant sources, and it also gets us beyond the monumentalism inherent in the *CSM* project, so clearly reflected in the manuscripts. But we have so little evidence of the practical circumstances surrounding the production of these pieces that this area that is bound to remain open to debate. We know a certain amount about the copying of the manuscripts, such as we can deduce from the physical evidence. But there remain questions as to whether there are other stages of production hiding behind what survives—missing exemplars or rough copies from which the manuscripts might have been assembled, for example, or aids to composition. We should also remember that the processes of writing down and copying themselves were not neutral at this time. Their potential impact on the content and transmission of the *CSM* has yet to be fully evaluated.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, BEISSINGER (1991) or the essays contained in REICHL (2000). For an application of similar ideas to medieval song, see EDWARDS (1993).

It is probably clear by now that I am adopting a broad view of what constitutes ‘creation’ or ‘creative process’, as opposed to adaptation, translation or some other way of describing the transformation of content. If we insist that creation has to mean ‘newly created, from scratch’ then for one of the elements—music—there may, in some cases, be no creation process at all. (That is, if we are entitled to extrapolate from the links between the *CSM* and other medieval musical repertoires indicating the presence of borrowed melodies in the collection). This may not be a problem, however. Evidence from elsewhere in the medieval period suggests that the effort involved in creating a song was genuinely appreciated, whether the melody was newly composed or borrowed from elsewhere: *contrafacta* were still valued in creative terms. We are talking about a time when people were probably closer to the practices and patterns that today obtain in traditional and folk repertoires, where the attitudes to musical property and what constitutes a musical text can be quite different, than to the formality and intellectual property characteristic of Western art music. Rather than being considered the unique creative output of an individual, to be attributed to them and reproduced exactly, melodies could circulate widely, being re-used, reworked or alluded to in different contexts. Nor do I think there are any contradictions in this respect with the *CSM* being the product of a courtly or learned setting: the experience from other repertoires suggests that these are compositional practices that would have spanned all sectors of society.<sup>9</sup>

Returning to Parkinson and Jackson’s hypothesis, it has to be acknowledged that it may not be possible to draw a clear distinction between the processes of compilation and composition in the way suggested above. Along with Martha Schaffer they are right to stress the active nature of the *CSM*’s editing processes, which in some cases result in composition or recomposition.<sup>10</sup> Again, however, I would find it hard to ascribe the creation of such a large repertory in a strictly defined ‘house style’ entirely to a team of assemblers working on the manuscripts. It seems more likely to me to be the work of a team of expert song practitioners, with many capabilities shared across both tasks. This would enable those charged with the writing down of the collection to police the material passing through their hands for errors and inconsistencies, accounting for the editing visible in the sources, while relieving them of the entire burden of creation as well as copying. We know that Alfonso’s court was a centre for such practitioners from both Occitan and Galician-Portuguese troubadour traditions, even if the names of those responsible for the *CSM* pieces have not come down to us.

All this comes from looking backwards from the manuscripts, but what can we see looking forwards? Briefly, treating the *CSM* as songs again allows us to exploit the gap between content and

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<sup>9</sup> In that I would disagree with ROSSELL (1996, 42) who sees a ‘flagrant contradiction’ in attempting to reconcile the potential popular origins of the content with the ‘*música aristocrática*’ of the *CSM*.

<sup>10</sup> PARKINSON - JACKSON (2006, 161-2); see also SCHAFFER (1995) and SCHAFFER (2000).

written record. To put it simply, a song implies a performance which implies an audience, inviting us to ask who that audience might have been and what the experience might have been like. I think the key thing that matters here is the performability of the material rather than actual performance—that is enough to justify asking such questions. Whether a song has ever actually been performed is immaterial, provided that it can be: the intention is inherent in the choice of medium. This is helpful in a *CSM* context since we have next to no information to indicate that they had any life beyond the manuscripts. Some commentators, like Elvira Fidalgo, have nonetheless begun to speculate that they may have had some very reduced form of circulation, possibly never breaching the bounds of Alfonso's court (FIDALGO 2002, 87). She does so on the basis of references in the texts to the *mirages* being delivered orally: I would be reluctant to take these entirely at face value (they may represent fossilised gestures surviving from older performance-oriented traditions), but granting the *CSM* the status of song provides some reinforcement in this direction, over and above the content of the texts. There also remain questions around the choice of the *miragre* as a genre for the bulk of the collection. While the *CSM* draw heavily on written miracle collections (as is clearly identified by Parkinson and Jackson), perhaps pointing up their learned origins, we should remember that miracle stories were a genre aimed at attracting the attention of a lay public and may well have circulated orally in addition to the written transmission evident from their sources. Alfonso and his compilers may therefore have picked a genre—the *miragre*—and a médium—song—which imply future dissemination, however limited.

It should also be clear that there is less room in this song-oriented model for the miniatures. As has already been noted, their transmission depends on contact with the relevant manuscripts. This is not to decry their contribution, both as an alternative narrative and in making *T/F* (and to a lesser extent *E*) the imposing artifact that it is. But the fact remains that their potential routes of transmission are greatly limited compared with texts and melodies, both of which are capable of circulating independently. Most commentators acknowledge that the 'threefold impact' of the *CSM* would have been available only to a few. If we accept that, looking instead for the 'twofold impact' (at most) of song, then the experience becomes easier to understand. What would the ideal experience of the *CSM* have been like? Listening to a story expressed through song, admiring the artistry of words and melody and the skill of the performer. Contrast this with Connie Scarborough's vision of the ideal modern experience, which would involve listening to renditions of one or more pieces while reading a printed edition of the texts and consulting a facsimile of the miniatures, thus re-uniting all elements of the supposed 'multimedia experience' (SCARBOROUGH 1995, 175). I would argue that this is as misleading a model as those which refer only to the content of the texts. As songs, the ideal modern experience of the *CSM* is not so very different from the ideal medieval one: the passage of time may have made it harder to find suitable conditions (an

audience capable of following the texts, for example) but the fundamentals of the situation remain the same.

In summation: thinking of the *CSM* as songs is a reorientation worth making since it enables us to extend our frame of reference beyond the manuscripts. We can then ask more pertinent questions about the creative processes that have produced this repertory and start to consider issues of function otherwise hampered by lack of evidence of transmission. As the only contemporary witnesses, however, the *CSM* manuscripts will always be crucial to our understanding of their contents. There is still much we can learn from the variant readings provided by the scribes engaged in their construction, for example. Parkinson and Jackson have however made an important contribution to a debate that has been somewhat neglected till now, but will surely continue long into the future.'

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**Alison Campbell** studied Hispanic Studies and Music at the universities of Glasgow and Oxford and holds an MLitt in Music from the University of Glasgow. Her research interests are primarily centred around the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, but extend from there to cover other medieval bodies of secular song and romance literatures. She currently works in academic publishing in Oxfordshire and can be contacted at <asac9135@btinternet.com>.

Recebido em | *Received* 17/07/2014  
Aceite em | *Accepted* 02/09/2014

