

Medieval Manuscripts: Seven Songs for an Absent Lover

By Harvey L. Sharrer

The *Pergamino Vindel* leaf is famous for its 13th century collection of seven songs written in the voice of a young woman awaiting her absent lover.



The year 1914 remains an important one in the study of medieval Galician-Portuguese poetry and music accompanying it. In that year the Madrid bookseller Pedro Vindel revealed his discovery of a single parchment leaf in the 18th-century binding of a 14th-century manuscript copy of Cicero's *De officiis*. The leaf, known as the Pergamino Vindel, was ultimately acquired in 1977 by the Pierpont Morgan Library of New York.

The major significance of Vindel's discovery, in addition to bringing to light a unique manuscript witness, perhaps contemporary with the composition of the songs it contains, was that it offered the first known example of musical notation for any of the poems in the large corpus of medieval secular Galician-Portuguese lyrics. The leaf contains seven songs written in the voice of a young woman awaiting her absent lover by the Ría de Vigo, part of a poetic genre known as *cantigas d'amigo*, with monophonic musical notation for six of them. The manuscript attributes the songs to a male poet named Martin Codax, ostensibly a Galician minstrel from the second half of the 13th century.



The poetic texts of the seven songs were already known to scholars through their presence, in the same sequence, in two songbook manuscripts copied in Italy in the early 16th century, known today as the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Vaticana* and *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional*, but these copies lack musical notation. The *Cancioneiro da Ajuda*, a late 13th- or early 14th-century manuscript containing Galician-Portuguese troubadour lyrics written primarily in the male voice, *cantigas d'amor*, includes space for musical notation but without the execution of such. Monophonic music for the corpus of Galician-Portuguese songs of miracles attributed to the intervention of the Virgin Mary and other Marian lyrics, composed at the 13th-century court of Alfonso X of Castile and León, was previously known through three Alfonsine royal scriptorium manuscripts, the so-called *Códice Toledano*, the *Códice Rico* and *Códice de los Músicos*.



After making my own discovery of what has become known as the Pergamino Sharrer, I had the privilege of examining firsthand the Pergamino Vindel at the Pierpont Morgan Library and to marvel at its generally excellent state of conservation compared to that of the Torre do Tombo fragment. Little did I know then that 25 years later I would also have the privilege and honor of introducing a collection of essays about the Pergamino Vindel with images and editions, produced by five leading scholars whose analyses complement one another and make new and original contributions to our knowledge of the history and transmission of Galician-Portuguese secular poetry and the music that accompanied it.

This is an excerpt from the preface on the Pergamino Vindel commentary volume by Harvey L. Sharrer. The facsimile edition of the Pergamino Vindel is available from: www.moleiro.com