

"The Rosary Cantoral: Ritual and Social Design in a Chantbook from Early Renaissance Toledo" by Lorenzo Candelaria

Kenneth Kreitner

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Kenneth Kreitner

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The Rosary Cantoral is a large (103 vellum folios, each about 38 inches tall and 24 inches wide), very richly illuminated chant manuscript acquired by the Beinecke Library at Yale University in 1989. Its provenance is mysterious and has been confounded further by alterations to its original structure, the presence of a number of more or less similar leaves scattered in libraries and private collections around the world, and a number of conflicting theories about almost every element in the puzzle. Lorenzo Candelaria's solution occupies his first chapter, which lacks only murder to make it a first-class thriller as it takes us deep into the world of rare book dealers, wealthy collectors, the libraries that depend on them both, and the bits of disparate and questionable information that need to come together to transform a mere beautiful artifact into a source of cultural understanding. I really hate to spoil the story for anyone out there, but since Candelaria puts it in his title, it probably does no harm to reveal here that the manuscript was made around 1500 for the Convent of San Pedro Mártir in Toledo.

This convent, then, is his next subject. It was a fascinating place, with an important role in the Inquisition in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and in the early printing industry; most immediately to the point, it was closely associated with the rosary confraternity of Toledo, which was itself allied with the brotherhood of silk weavers in one of the city's most prominent and wealthy industries. San Pedro Mártir remained a powerful and wealthy institution until 1836, when its friars were expelled under the Mendizábal Laws, and its books—including our hero—moved to another convent, whose buildings in 1936 were mostly destroyed in the early days of the Civil War.

Candelaria then turns back to the Cantoral to devote three chapters teasing out the main visual symbols in its illuminations: the legend of the Knight of Cologne (chapter 3), the Emblem of the Five Wounds (4), and a border painting of Hercules modeled on a famous print by Albrecht Dürer (5). All very absorbing stuff, and if the musicological mind may be inclined to wander a bit during this section, I urge patience.

Finally, in chapter 6 he gets down to the music of the Rosary Cantoral, which proves to be at least as eccentric as the illustrations. The manuscript is dominated by troped Mass Ordinary movements, in an era when tropes were elsewhere falling distinctly out of fashion; it has a number of notational peculiarities, notably the mixing of mensural and non-mensural chant notations and the use of odd little chevron-like signs to indicate ornaments that were commonly added to the chant in a local Toledan practice; and perhaps most curiously of all, it has two short four-voice settings of the *Et incarnatus* section of the Credo, added quite a bit later in the sixteenth century—one from Josquin’s *Missa sine nomine* and one anonymous and based, rather loosely but recognizably, on the *L’homme armé* tune. These last, he shows, reflect a Spanish practice, which must have been sensationally effective, of singing only the *Et incarnatus* in polyphony during penitential seasons.

At this point we the readers are left to stare into space for a moment, mentally contemplating a gorgeous but baffling book, full of interesting and unusual liturgical music that is surrounded by a great many pictures that don’t quite go together in any really obvious way. And in chapter 7, only twelve pages long, Candelaria brings it together in a way that makes you catch your breath a bit. The Rosary Cantoral was made for the convent by the Rosary confraternity of Toledo, which was made up largely of silk weavers who were mostly *conversos*—Jews converted either recently or in a previous generation—and thus subject to waves of terrible persecution as the Inquisition took deadly root in the late fifteenth century. What better way, then, to show one’s Christian sincerity than in conspicuous devotion to the Rosary? In the pictures of the Knight of Cologne, we see a legend associated with the founding of the Rosary: a murderer prays to the Virgin and is seen by his victim’s brother with roses issuing from his mouth, which she weaves (note: *weaves*) into a garland for his head. The five wounds of Christ are tied symbolically with the five Pater nosters of the Rosary and are always depicted on a sheet of cloth (note: *cloth*). And Hercules, a very strange character indeed to be appearing in a Christian manuscript like this, is actually connected with a widespread belief that he founded Toledo and lived in a cave that was still there and being explored in the sixteenth century. So the silk weavers were taking great pains to ensure that everyone saw their loyalty to both the Virgin and the city; and such pains, it would appear, were very necessary in their day. In an epilogue that is easy to miss—it comes after the thirty pages of figures that follow chapter 7—Candelaria makes it personal, attaching this world of terror and hatred chillingly to our own after September 2001, and the lives of Muslims in our midst under the same kind of constant pressure to prove their loyalty.

It is a terrific book, and I want to say that loudly because I confess that it took me twice through to realize it. It came to my mailbox, after all, from *Performance Practice Review*, and I suppose my first thought upon opening it was that performers (like me) of Spanish Renaissance music would welcome an accessible modern edition of one of their local chant repertoires. This, obviously, is not that edition, though it includes a few transcriptions, including both of the polyphonic pieces. Nor is it really a conventional manuscript study at all: there is, for example, no complete annotated inventory of the cantoral’s musical contents, only a two-and-a-half-page “conspectus” buried in Appendix E. Nor, apart from the short discussions of the ornaments and

the mensural chant, is there much concrete information for performance practitioners to put to use. So please don't read it with my initial expectations. Read it as a story of solid musicological detective work that goes far beyond written music; read it as a porthole into a fantastically complex symbolic world; read it as a reminder that there was a time when liturgical chant was not merely a musical performance, or only an act of spirituality, but might mean the difference between life and death here on earth.