Musical Performance: Wind Instrument

Solo Transverse Flute
Cantiga de Santa Maria #103
Quen a virgen ben sirvir
Spain ca. 1260

Introduction

This article focuses on the transverse flute, medieval performance technique and music history as it relates to the performance of Cantiga de Santa Maria, #103. The author performs the afore mentioned cantiga on a wooden, keyless transverse flute, that is a flute with the blow hole cut into the side. Flutes are wind instruments that date from pre-historic times (Zhang). Medieval miniatures and illuminations picture different flutes, whistle, fipple, end-blown, and transverse flutes. Flutes were made of a variety of materials wood, bone, bamboo, and ceramics.

Two examples of transverse flutes from medieval sources.

14th Century German Manuscript, University Library, Heidelberg

Alfonso X,. *Contigas de Santa Maria*, 13th C.

Another medieval manuscript illustration showing a transverse flute.

Heinrich von Meissen, called *Frauenlob* ('Praiser of ladies'), Minnesanger Manuscript, 13th Century German

Note the transverse flute on the far left.

Notes Specific to this Performance

Since music is an aural tradition, music stands are not used or not needed. Music stands are not depicted in 13th Century manuscripts. Costuming of the 13th Century is presented along with 13th century instrumentation. The flute, fyddle, and symphonium are made after medieval originals or from illuminations.

A facsimile of the original manuscript and illumination is included with this documentation. The language in this manuscript is Galician, medieval Spanish. Galician shares similarities with modern Portugese. This performance represents a period musical experience, reconstructed using medieval performance techniques. The author will be accompanied by organistrum and medieval fyddle.

Performance Style

Medieval musical performance provides the musician both a challenge and opportunity. Modern written music specifies tempo, dynamics, and interpretation. Musicians are expected to read the written musical notation without embellishment. Medieval music notation gives us but a skeletal framework. Ribera (1929) noted: "A musical composition lives only during its execution, and when the last echo has died no trace is left in space" (p. 14). Thus, to hear medieval music as it was performed in the Middle Ages requires medieval musicians. With no audio recordings to listen and analyze, we are left recreating the mind-set of a musician from the Middle Ages. Medieval culture was traditional, an aural tradition. That is, most people did not read. Musicians learned by oral transmission. Thus, musicologists suggest that we look to traditional cultures that continue to practice in this aural tradition.

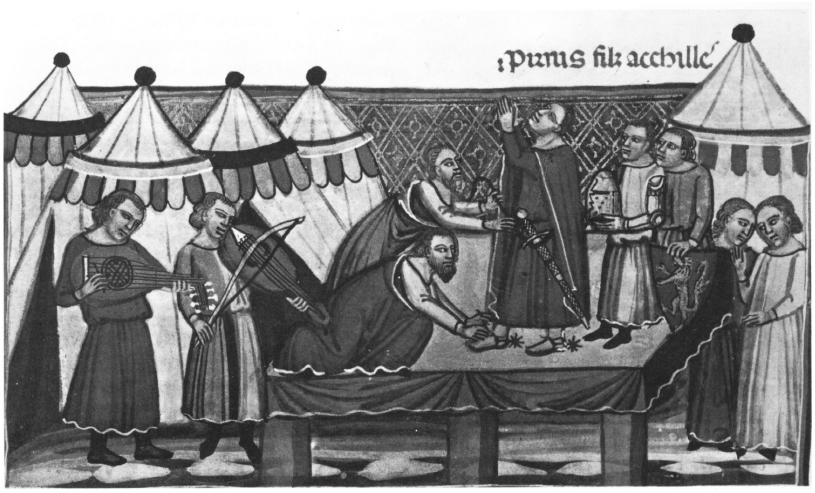
Sachs observes:

> Thus Medieval music shares with non-European primitive music the reliance on memory, tradition, improvisation, and non-intellectualism. This makes it basically different from later western music, which rests on the mentality of writers and readers, on subtilizing and puzzling out (1943).

Both Japanese and East Indian music harken back centuries. As a resource of traditional performance practices, musicologists refer to them often. Bouterse (1983) citing Walpert, "We must understand the role of notation in an oral society. In a tenth century Japanese lute manuscript we find the seemingly anomalous direction, 'for oral transmission only'." Again, Bouterse notes that Ravi Shankar, among other modern Indian musicians, declines the use of notation. They view written music as only an outline. This opinion is expressed by other traditional musicians. "Surely musicians in medieval Europe had similar attitudes toward notation."

In the oral tradition, manuscripts represent the crystallization of a living musical performance. Context and style is paramount. In folk cultures music occupies an integral part of life. Performed at weddings, celebrations, and during everyday

activities, such as sewing, cooking, and harvesting, music serves to express emotion and bring a community together. Period manuscripts confirm that music held the same importance in everyday medieval life. For example, "Knights brought fiddlers in their retinue and bade then play in preparation for battle" (Ebersole, 1996).



14th Century miniature, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris

In traditional music, different melodies hold mystic effects. Witness the Moroccan *nawbas,* where the musical modes and branches correspond to the four cosmic elements and bodily humors. Healing properties are attributed to these modes (Lui & Monroe, 1983). In another example of the importance of context, each Indian *raga* is designated to be performed at certain times of the day.

We find an modern example of the importance of style in American jazz. Imagine a jazz ensemble's interpretation of a well-known melody, such as *Mary had a Little Lamb* (Ebersole, 1996). Musical improvisation and interaction between the musicians and listeners is critical to the musical experience.

In his master's thesis, The Performance and Theory of South Indian Classical Music with Special Emphasis on the Characteristics of the *Raga Kalyani*, Siagian reminds us of the importance of the listener in traditional musical performances. He writes:

> Karnatak music is a tightly integrated system of performance and theory. Within its cultural setting the living musical tradition is strongly supported by a close relationship between the performer and the listener. The performer spontaneously creates and presents an abstract musical idea through his musical creativity and aesthetic effort, while the listener constantly endeavors to understand the music more deeply in order to appreciate it fully, and is consequently indispensable to the total musical process (1985).

Ahmad al-Tifaši (1184-1253), a Tunisian writer provides us with eyewitness accounts of medieval Andalusian music in his *Muta' at al-Asthma' fi 'ilm al-sama'* (Pleasure to the Ears, on the Art of Music) from volume 41 of *Fasl al-Hitab fi madarik al-hawaaa al-hamas li-'uli l-albab* (Unerring Method for the Intelligent to Perceive with their Five Senses). Al-Tifaši quotes Abu l-Hasan al-Waqqaši, the son of a Toledan vizier and a student of Ibn al-Hasib of Murcia. Residing in Málaga, he wrote a well-known poem in 1170 (Lui & Monroe, citing Farmer).

Al-Tifaši (translated by Liu and Monroe) writes:

> Abu l-Hasan al-Waqqaši, one of the eminences in this art during our age, said: "Slave girls and masters of the instrumental art have made marvellous [sic] and moving additions, *ad libitum*, to the charming poems which are sung at this time, consisting of notes that delight their hearer, for the need to arouse emotion has induced them to [add] what none of the ancients, removed from then in time, ever mentioned. Thus Al-A'ma ibn Hlwh, who flourished in Seville, became famous for making additions to every poem, so [charming in nature], that they almost moved inanimate objects [to ecstasy]. These additions were not mentioned by Ibn Bajja, Ibn al-Hammara, Ibn Judi, Ibn [...or] others from an earlier period. The same is true for others such as the eminent experts in the instrumental art, namely the moderns living in Andalus during our times, both men and women."

In practice, traditional music tends toward solo performance or ensembles of twos and threes. Larger musical groups are saved for courts and state occasions, where wealth and opulence prevail. Solo performance allows the musician more freedom to show technical expertise, to take advantage of the unique character of their instrument. Listeners hear ornamentation, including register and rhythmic changes as well as diverse articulation and phrasing. Bouterse (1983) observes that, "Many flute players hum while they play, or deliberately use a breathy, fuzzy timbre to make the sound more complex. He cites Kodaly, who with Bela Bartok, exhorted Hungarian pipers to stop growling during recording sessions. This "proved impossible since the technique was such and integral part of the performance."

A Repertory of Medieval Style and Technique (Ebersole, 1984)

Drones: A continuous sound, that is either stationary or movable. Drones should complement the tonic. To chose a pitch, determine the basic tonal center of the melody. It should be compatible with the final note, in most cases.

Percussion: Percussion should never be an afterthought in performing medieval or renaissance music. It requires skill, polish and a high level of complexity. Skill in cross-rhythm and texture does not come easily. A master teacher and extensive study is a necessity. Some Western trained percussionists may find the demands of medieval percussion, as approached through Middle Eastern, Indian, and Mediterranean traditional music, beyond their skills. A common practice in early music performance circles is to relegated percussion to someone whose main instrument is something else, typically vocals. Percussion is used to keep musicians busy instead of sitting-out a piece. Both of these customs result in less than adequate performance . Rhythm is not a by-product of the innate melodic structure. Percussion is particularly important for dance music, but none the less important in all aspects of medieval music performance. One feature common to all traditional music is rhythmic complexity that generates tension and resolution. This moves piece beyond a basic interpretation of the melody. Never bothersome, well-executed percussion should add interest through variety.

Some examples of counter-rhythms:

X	O	O	O	**X**	O	O	O	**X**	O	O	O	**X**
X	O	O	**X**	O	O	**X**	O	O	**X**	O	O	**X**

The grid above shows beat 3 against 4. In this example “X” marks the beat. Note where the accented first beats converge

1	2	3	4	**1**	2	3	4	**1**	2	3	4	**1**
1	2	3	4	5	**1**	2	3	4	5	**1**	2	3
^				^	^			^		^		^

This example is 5 against 4. The emphasized beats are first in either set. The symbol “^” reveals the pattern as the strong beat moves.

1	2	3	**1**	2	3	**1**	2	3	**1**	2	3
1	2	**1**	2	**1**	2	**1**	2	**1**	2	**1**	2
1			2			3			**1**		

The final example demonstrates 3 against 2, with a double-slow count 3 shown at the bottom of the grid. The musician playing standard 3 might switch to the slower speed, then back to the faster 3, while the 2-count remains the same.

Preludes: Traditional music performance supplies ample evidence of the practice of

preludes in both vocal and instrumental music. Two examples of preludes are the Indian *alap* and the Arabic taqsim (Bouterse, 1983). Usually performed without strict measure, it serves several purposes. While letting the audience know that a musical piece is about to begin, it provides string players an opportunity to check tuning. In addition, the prelude defines a modal pattern and tonal center. Regarding preludes, Bouterse cites Stevens (1960), who refers to a medieval poem, "the minstrel tuned-up, drawing attention to himself by playing several strings at once, then going on to a prelude that brought in notes of a quite different kind." The prelude was formalized in the Baroque Period. It is improvised in the modal centers and the scale of the work to follow. It should stay in the mode and reveal a dramatic show of technique. In a free-form prelude, the performers must agree to move from the lower notes to the upper notes of the scale and then back again to the lower notes, producing a wave motion within the scale.

Doubling: The simultaneous playing of the melody either in octaves, fifths, fourths, or in unison. Doubling survives in folk music as heterophony, which allows for different, even clashing, variations. Doubling in fifths and fourths is well-documented for music of the Middle Ages.

Alternating: All performers need not play all the time. Changing the combinations of instruments from verse to verse lend contrast. Musicians continue playing the piece while changing the arrangement over and over, accenting those changes with drones, percussion, improvisational interludes, and doubling.

In medieval heterophony, the first and third beats of a melodic rhythmic pattern are the notes of importance. These notes should be consonant with the mode. Thirds were not considered consonant in the Middle Ages, while fourths, fifths, unison, and octaves are. Passing discord is not wrong. The relationship of individual lines to the tenor line is more important. While playing heterophonic music the musicians must decide who shall carry the melody and remain consonant with the tenor melodic line, or written musical notation.

Sachs (1957) provides this observation:

> The medieval melodies that we see on paper, the archaic quadrangular notes so neatly written on staff lines or in the spaces between, look innocently diatonic and European– just as do the native melodies that modern Orientals try to write down in Western notation. But were these medieval melodies actually sung as they sound when played on an equal-tempered piano? Hardly. Give them the many unwritable shades of Arabian intervals from note to note, now a little wider, now narrower than ours, try to give them the color, the intonation, the strange mannerisms of Oriental singing, and the whole illusion of Western style is gone.

In conclusion, modern musicians endeavoring to reconstruct medieval musical

performance must look to traditional musical practices, must be adept at their instruments, and draw the listener into the magic and emotion of the music.

Alfonso X,. *Contigas de Santa Maria*, 13th C.

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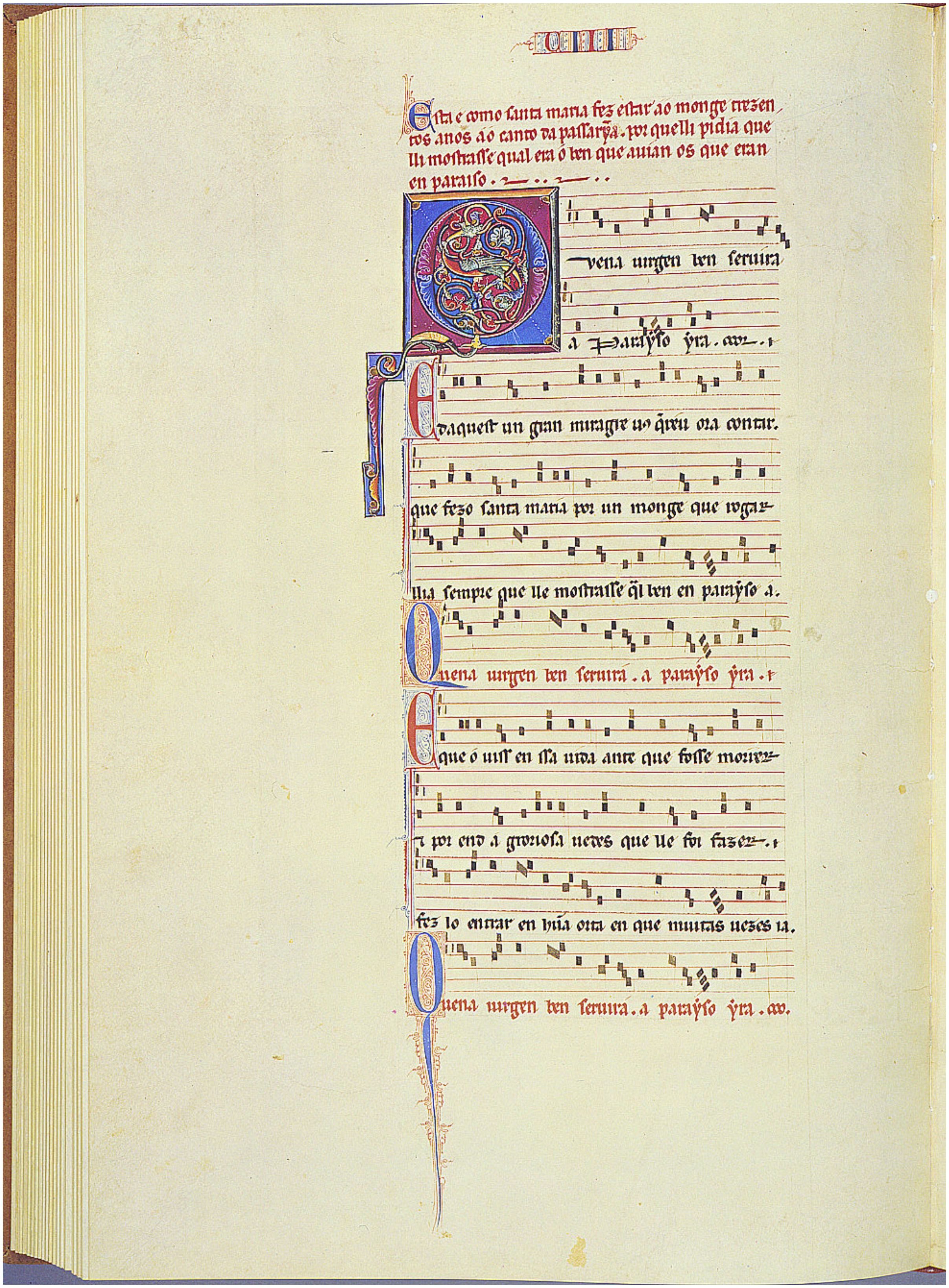
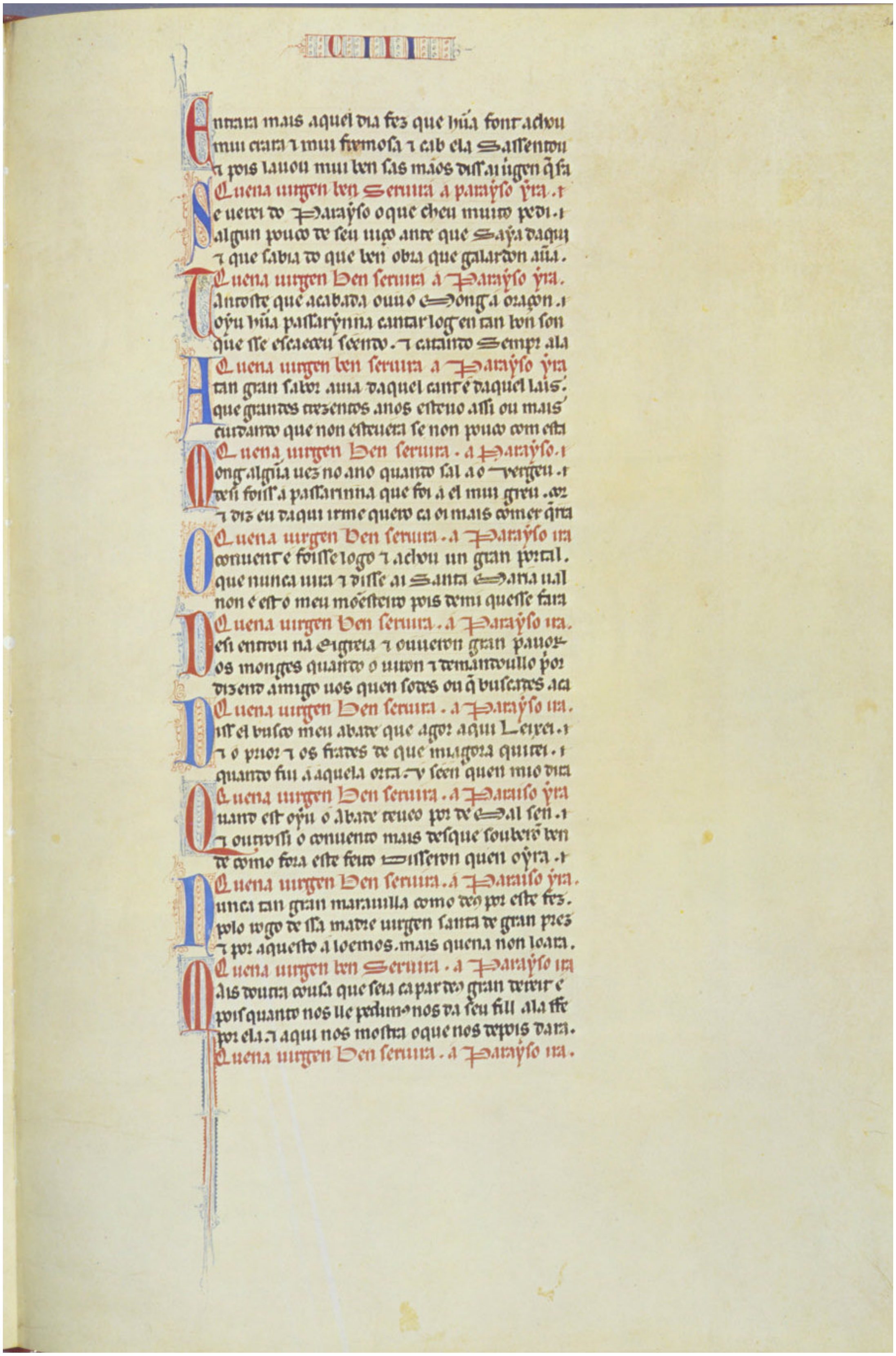

Esta e como santa maria fez estar ao monge trezentos anos ao canto da passarya. por que lli pidia que lli mostrasse qual era o ben que avian os que eran en paraiso.
Quena virgen ben servira
a Paraýso yra.
E daquest un gran miragre vos quero ora contar.
que fezo santa maria por un monge que rogar
lla sempre que lle mostrasse qẽl ben en paraýso a.
Quena virgen ben servira. a paraýso yra.
E que o viss en ssa vida ante que fosse morto.
E por end a groriosa vedes que lle foi fazer.
fez lo entrar en hũa orta en que muitas vezes ia.
Quena virgen ben servira. a paraýso yra.



CIII

Entrara mais aquel dia fez que hũa font achou
mui crara ⁊ mui fremosa ⁊ cab ela s'assentou
⁊ pois lavou mui ben sas mãos diss'ai virgen que sa
Quena virgen ben serviria a parayso yria.
Se veirei do Parayso o que cheu muito pedi.
alguun pouco de seu viço ante que saya daqui
⁊ que sabia do que ben obra que galardon avia.
Quena virgen ben serviria a Parayso yria.
Tantoste que acabada ouve o Monge a oraçon.
oyu hũa passarynna cantar log'en tan bon son
que sse escaeceu seendo. ⁊ catando sempr'ala
Quena virgen ben serviria a Parayso yria
Atan gran sabor avia daquel cant'e daquel lais.
que grandes trezentos anos esteuo assi ou mais
cuidando que non esteuera se non pouco com'esta
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso.
Mong'algũa vez no ano quando sal ao vergeu.
des i foiss'a passarinna que foi a el mui greu.
⁊ diz eu daqui irme quero ca oi mais comer querria
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso ira
O convent'e foisse logo ⁊ achou un gran portal.
que nunca vira ⁊ disse ai Santa Maria val
non é est'o meu moesteiro pois de mi que sse faria
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso ira.
Desi entrou na eigreia ⁊ ouveron gran pavor
os monges quando o viron ⁊ demandoullo por
dizendo amigo vos quen sodes ou que buscades aca
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso ira.
Diss'el busco meu abade que agor'aqui Leixei.
⁊ o prior ⁊ os frades de que mia gora quitei.
quando fui a aquela orta. u seen quen mio diria
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso yria
Quand'est oyu o Abade teveo por de Mal sen.
⁊ outrosi o convento mais desque souberon ben
de como fora este feito Disseron quen oyra.
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso yria.
Nunca tan gran maravilla como deus por este fez.
polo rogo de ssa madre virgen santa de gran prez
⁊ por aquesto a loemos. mais quena non loaria.
Quena virgen ben Serviria. a Parayso ira
Mais doutra cousa que seia ca par deus gran dereit'é
pois quanto nos lle pedimos nos da seu fill a la ffe
por ela. ⁊ aqui nos mostra o que nos depois dara.
Quena virgen ben serviria. a Parayso ira.