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**An Exploration of Conformity to Medieval Male and Female**

**Roles in the *Chronicle of Alfonso X***

## Abstract

Gender is constructed by the society in which one lives, and due to this notion, it is essential to research and analyze the implications of being male or female during specific time periods. The Middle Ages is often labeled as a patriarchal society because of the rigid roles that assigned men to the public sphere, and women to the private. Males dominated feudal society, which was defined by the three orders of society (those who pray, fight, and work). Men were expected to exude dominance in order to be considered masculine, in terms of women, war, and authority. Though we know that women intervened within these orders of society, they were undoubtedly restricted to the private sphere and left out of the hierarchy. Instead, women were confined to the roles of mother, widow, or virgin. My project focuses on the royal sphere of medieval society, exploring whether or not kings and queens were restricted to the same, stringent roles that the Middle Ages was centered around. By analyzing the *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, I look at how male and female identities are represented. In order to portray these historical figures as an ideal male or female the chronicler explores what signified the archetypical mold of each gender to determine whether or not Alfonso X and Queen Violante did in fact conform to the traditional norms of medieval masculinity and femininity. Most importantly, it is vital to my research to look at the bias of the narrator of the chronicle and how his status and purpose in writing Alfonso's chronicle affected how the characters are delineated.

Throughout history, women have been seen as victims of men, their power, and historical circumstance. “Se veía a las mujeres como víctimas de los hombres, de su poder y de sus circunstancias históricas” (Morant 360). However, gender is constructed by the society in which one lives, and due to this notion, we must research and analyze the implications of being male or female during specific time periods (Benito Ruano 181). Medieval society is no different, and thus, is often instantaneously labeled as a patriarchal society, with no further exploration or questioning. But in order to define medieval society as patriarchal, we must look at the historical context and societal norms assigned to it. Scholars are obligated to explore what defines medieval society as patriarchal, but also why it remains distinctive from other patriarchal societies (Morant 360).

In order to determine whether or not medieval society was patriarchal, it is important to consider what medieval society signified for both men and women, and how the history of medieval women can be distinguished from that of medieval men. Medieval sources are limited not only in quantity, but also are limited to male views (Morant 361). Thus, males ultimately determine the history of medieval women. Men narrate the majority of medieval texts, and thus women had virtually no say in the documentation of medieval history. Generally, males dominated feudal society specifically in the public sphere. Relationships between men and the three orders of society (those who pray, fight, and work) are what defined the feudalistic Middle Ages.

Though we know that women intervened within these orders of society, they were undoubtedly restricted to the private sphere and left out of the hierarchy (Morant 365). Instead, women were confined to the roles of mother, widow, or virgin (Benito Ruano 192). Within these classifications, social status also divided women. Peasant women occupied very restrictive roles in medieval society: they were strictly limited to the private sphere, expected to remain in the house, and obligated to have and raise children (Benito Ruano 219).

Royal women were given more opportunities than peasant women because they were responsible for the sustenance of the royal familial line. Oftentimes, royal women were active in the public sphere to protect the interests of their husbands and children. Being politically active proved their capabilities to exceed the standard confines of the private sphere typically designated for medieval women (Carmi Parsons 9). Nevertheless, royal women were still only deemed mothers, wives, and daughters and were excluded from the orders of society. Their importance was only to help males maintain power, and their influence in politics was normally temporary and sanctioned only by the fact that they were to help their sons or husbands rule. Medieval society remains to be seen as patriarchal because men were permitted to actively participate in the public sphere, occupying positions of power and prestige, fighting in wars, and making important, finalized decisions. This being said, medieval society constructed a specific masculine identity that males were forced to imitate in order to avoid repudiation. Men were expected to remain superior to women, undertaking an authoritative role. They were also expected to physically dominate women and other men, be active in war, and reproduce

in order to carry out the male line. Thus, medieval society also created masculine ideals and condemned or feminized any male that did not live up to its expectations.

Understanding the medieval gender construct is essential to analyzing medieval literature, which overwhelmingly exhibits decisive male and female roles. The *Chronicle of Alfonso X* was written in the Middle Ages, and entails the reign of Alfonso X of Castile. Alfonso X, otherwise known as Alfonso the Wise, was born in 1221 in Toledo, Spain and died in 1284 in Seville, Spain. He married Violante of Aragon in 1246 and ruled Castile from 1252 to 1284 after the death of his father Ferdinand III. Shortly after assuming power, Alfonso instituted a series of financial changes, which altered the currency within Castile. Nonetheless, most of his fiscal policies faltered and had to be changed in order to prevent economic ruin for Castile. In order to gain international prestige, Alfonso X often aided other countries financially, which further deteriorated the Castilian economy. Throughout his reign, Alfonso X continuously dealt with both external and internal conflict. Fighting with the Moors was a regular occurrence that required Castilian forces to be in a constant state of war. Though he achieved some victories for Castile, he also suffered many losses, especially against the kingdom of Granada. Due to growing resentment of the nobility in regards to his economic, diplomatic, and regional policies, the majority of Alfonso X's reign was plagued by nobiliary rebellion. In addition to the dissatisfaction of the nobles, his family also became malcontented with his reign. Both the nobles and his family deemed Alfonso X an inappropriate ruler because of where his priorities laid, and called for a change of leadership, which ultimately resulted in a civil war with his son Sancho IV.

Violante of Aragon married Alfonso X in 1246. For the first few years of their marriage, Violante was unable to become pregnant, and as a result, Alfonso X seriously considered annulling their marriage so that he could marry another woman that would deliver him a male heir. Nonetheless, Violante ends up bearing Alfonso X multiple children, one of which becomes his eventual successor, Sancho IV. Violante remained politically active for the entirety of Alfonso's reign, acting as negotiator between her husband and the nobles of his kingdom. However, she maintains a position of inferiority to her male counterpart because she does not have the authority to make any important decisions independent of Alfonso X. Towards the end of Alfonso X's reign, Violante, chooses the side of her son Sancho in the civil war over the ascendance to the throne between them. This decision is critical in understanding Violante's role as queen, wife, and mother and demonstrates that she prioritizes her duty as a mother.

Sancho IV was the eventual successor of his father Alfonso X and ruled from 1284 up until his death in 1295. During the reign of his father, Sancho IV had made various ties with the nobility and gained their support in his becoming ruler of Castile. Because Alfonso X had more than one possible heir to the throne, Sancho recognized the importance of the nobility in his quest for power. Before Sancho IV, his brother Ferdinand de la Cerda was in line for the throne. However, after he died in a battle against the Moors, Sancho IV observed an opportunity to secure his future position as king. Alfonso X had contemplated who would succeed him, and both Ferdinand de la Cerda's male descendants and Sancho IV were possibilities. Sancho IV vied for his spot as king, and with the support of the nobility, he waged a civil war against Alfonso and when he died, Sancho took the throne. Sancho IV married Maria de Molina in 1282 and

had various children with her, including his successor Ferdinand IV. Unlike his father, Sancho IV prioritized matters of Castile before matters of empire, and for this reason, he was able to achieve their fealty.

For all intensive purposes, I will be analyzing the original *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, supposedly written by Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid undertook the position of chancellor during both the reigns of Fernando IV and Alfonso XI. However, it was during Alfonso XI's reign that Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid became extremely involved in the political-bureaucratic sphere (Moxó 440). Alfonso XI hired Valladolid to write the Chronicles of both him and his predecessors. Possessing the important role of chancellor under Alfonso XI, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid had access to various vital historical documents that would help him in writing the Royal Chronicles of Alfonso X, Sancho IV, Fernando IV: "The incorporation of complete documents or summaries of documents into the middle section of the *Chronicle* suggests that the author had access to the royal chancery and was likely serving there." (O'Callaghan 13). It is noted: "Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid was chancellor of the privy seal and as such would likely have had access to these documents" (O'Callaghan 16). Thus, Valladolid's role as chancellor had an essential impact on his ability as chronicler. In order to exemplify his reign as being successful, Alfonso XI hired Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid to write the chronicles of his predecessors in a way that supported some models of behavior for a king, while opposing others (Gómez Redondo "La voz"). Because Alfonso X's reign differed from Alfonso XI's, in that Alfonso X tried to break with tradition by instituting new economic and political policies while prioritizing matters of the empire over matters of Castile, Fernán Sanchez de Valladolid wrote

Alfonso X's Chronicle in a critical manner. The chronicler delineates Alfonso X's reign as a failure in order to satisfy Alfonso XI's demands of writing a chronicle that uses the history of past reigns in order to foster values that further advocate for the present: "[...] et por que fuessen sabidas las cosas que acaesçieron en los tiempos del rey don Alfonso, su visabuelo, el sabio, e en tiempo del rey don Sancho el bravo, su abuelo, e en tiempo del rey don Fernando su padre, mandólas escivir en este libro [...]" (Gómez Redondo 967). Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid uses the reigns of past kings, such as Alfonso X, in order to make a comparison to that of the present ruler of the time, Alfonso XI. By doing so, the Royal Chronicles can be seen as a type of propaganda for Alfonso XI, with the purpose of establishing a positive reputation for his reign.

The *Chronicle of Alfonso X* is organized into three distinct sections: a summary of the reign of Alfonso X, the account of the rebellious nature of don Felipe and his men, and the civil war that ensued between Alfonso X and Sancho IV (Gómez Redondo 973). Then, specific chapters subdivide the three sections. In the first section, each chapter represents a different year. The second part is more detail oriented and more than one chapter is dedicated to a specific year. In the third section, there is noticeably more bias, specifically in the favor of Sancho IV. The first section includes the most misinformation and errors of chronology: "Es [...] la peor informada y la que adolece de mayors errors, especialmente de cronología" (González Jiménez xx). The reason for the abundance of errors in this section is the lack of sources that the chronicler had at his disposal. The second section is said to have the least amount of errors and is also the most coherent. "Es la mejor informada y coherente" (González Jiménez xxxi). However, it does still include instances of incorrect chronology and repetition of ideas. This section is a very

good representation of Alfonso X's reign: "la Sección II de la Crónica de Alfonso X reproduce casi al pie de la letra el relato de época alfonsí de la revuelta nobilitaria" (González Jiménez xxxiii). Much of the information in the second section is of utmost importance, such as a letter of Alfonso X's to his son, don Fernando. In the third section of the *Chronicle*, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid accounts for the civil war between Sancho IV and his father Alfonso X. In this section, the chronicler's bias is apparent. He seems to portray prince don Sancho in a positive light, saying that he is a capable, energetic, and sensible leader (González Jiménez xl). He clarifies that he believes that don Sancho was an effective replacement for his father, and so this section serves as a piece of propaganda for promoting don Sancho's reign: "En cualquier caso, salta a la vista que estos capítulos finales se redactaron con la intención clarísima de exalter la figura de don Sancho. El resultado fue una pieza maestro de propaganda" (González Jiménez xl). For the majority of the chronicle, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid (or his collaborators) uses the *Historia dialogada* for much of his sources, however it is not used at all in the third section of the chronicle. The chronicler supported the reign of Sancho, and because the author of the *Historia* oppositely supported the reign of Alfonso, he did not include this source in section III (González Jiménez xliii).

Beyond the bias, ambiguities, and errors in chronology, the *Chronicle of Alfonso X* appears to simply recount the reign of Alfonso X. Moreover, the compilation effectively explores gender identities in medieval society. Though the chronicle seldom focuses on women, the existing references demonstrate the contrast between the male and female identity. Focusing on the matrimony of Alfonso X and Doña Violante, the chronicle establishes their roles as husband and wife, king and queen, and fundamentally

man and woman. Furthermore, the chronicle explores what the ideal medieval masculine character looked like through the indirect comparison of Alfonso X and Sancho IV's reigns.

Throughout the work, certain traits and functions are associated and distinguished between the man and woman. Queen Violante is restricted to the role of wife and mother. Violante is politically active, acting as a mediator between Alfonso X and the nobles. However, she does not maintain autonomy and has to have the permission of her husband or sons before making any type of decision. It is clear that royal women had access to considerable amounts of authority when compared with peasant women. In most circumstances, however, reproduction and marriage remained vital to a woman's role, regardless if she was of royal descent or not. Meanwhile, Alfonso X, though representative of the dominant gender, is also confined to the masculine role. In medieval society, masculinity was measured by strength and success in war, politics, and the domination of women. On all fronts, according to Valladolid, Alfonso X failed. Within the chronicle, Alfonso X makes a series of economic and political decisions that consequently result in chaos for his kingdom. There are constant economic troubles, conflicts with the Moors, and an ongoing civil war that turns his own family and former followers against him. As a ruler, the chronicler portrays him as a failure and for this reason Alfonso X does not fulfill his masculine role within society. Thus, both Alfonso X and Doña Violante were restricted to the roles that medieval society imposed upon them, even though they belonged to the highest social class and exhibited prestige and power.

Valladolid's final commentary on the medieval gender construct is illustrated through the characterization of Sancho IV. In opposition to Alfonso X, Sancho IV

commanded the respect and popularity of the people and his rise to power symbolizes the prosperity of Castile. After spending the majority of the chronicle criticizing Alfonso X's role as leader and medieval male, Valladolid offers the shining example of Sancho IV as a successful, well respected king, who lives up to the masculine role imposed upon him. Therefore, not only does the chronicle explore what it signified to be male and female during the Middle Ages, but it also analyzes what constituted a successful example of a gender role truly being lived out during this time period.

Brief history of Violante and Sancho IV, before analyzing work.(look in this section, where it would fit most appropriately)

### **Representation of Alfonso X: A Correlation between Monarchical Success and the Fulfillment of the Medieval Masculine Mien**

Though the chronicler approaches each section differently, with varying levels of description and bias, (González Jiménez xiii) the entire text portrays how Alfonso X did not fulfill his masculine role within medieval society. Notably, the chronicler differentiates Alfonso X's reign to his son, Sancho IV's, to achieve his objective of characterizing Alfonso X as a weak king, whose policies differed from those of Alfonso XI's. "Por tanto [Valladolid] debe arreglárselas de tal manera para que las tres crónicas constituyan el soporte ideológico de la que dedica a Alfonso XI" (Gómez Redondo 967). Thus, the *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, along with the subsequent chronicles written by Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid, was composed in order to promote Alfonso XI's political ideologies by advocating for the reigns of those such as Sancho IV, whose administration most closely aligned with his.

Within the first section of the *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, the chronicler retells the beginnings of Alfonso X's reign. The section encompasses the years of 1252 to 1272 (Chapters 1 through 19), with each chapter indicative of a different year of his regime (González Jiménez xx). For the majority of the first section, the chronicler depicts Alfonso X as a weak ruler due to his ineffective and unintelligent decisions regarding political and economic endeavors. Throughout the first years of his reign, Alfonso X's decision-making lacked the hindsight to efficaciously determine his priorities as king, which often resulted in the political unrest of his kingdom. Chapter 1 is titled "How King Alfonso Ruled, and of the Currency that Circulated at this Time," and recounts how in just the first years of Alfonso's rule, he decided to change the currency and economic system that had been in place when his father, King Fernando, was in power. "His son King Alfonso, at the beginning of his reign, ordered the *pepiones*<sup>i</sup> melted down and minted the coins called *burgaleses*, of which ninety equaled one *maravedí*. [...] During this time, because of the changes in currencies, all things increased in price in the kingdoms of Castile and León and went up a great deal" (Sánchez de Valladolid 28). After the chronicler notes the change that Alfonso made to the official currency, the editor emphasizes in a footnote that "more than ten years elapsed before Alfonso X altered the coinage, he certainly did not do so in the first years of his reign" (qtd. in Sánchez de Valladolid 29). Thus, the footnote demonstrates how not only did Valladolid make an error in chronology, but he may have done so for the specific purpose of making Alfonso X appear to be more irresponsible and capricious in nature. Further on in the chapter, the chronicler states: "In that first year, the king engaged in doing things he thought were of benefit to his kingdom" (Sánchez de Valladolid 28). Fernán Sánchez de

Valladolid stresses that Alfonso X made important economic and political strategic choices that *he thought* would have benefitted his kingdom. The chronicler avoids stating that Alfonso X's decisions were in fact for the benefit of his kingdom, but rather elects to say that "he thought" that his decisions would be for the betterment of his people. This demonstrates the opinion of the chronicler on the matter of Alfonso X's decision-making tendencies; the chronicler does not think that Alfonso's decisions benefitted his kingdom, and thus notes this difference in the text. The first chapter, though succinct and somewhat indirect, immediately portrays Alfonso X in a negative light by highlighting Alfonso X's impulsive and ineffective skills as ruler, as well as exhibiting a sense of disapproval of his policies.

In the fourth year of his reign (chapter 5), the king responded to the increase in prices because "many complaints came before him from all over his realms to the effect that prices had increased so much that people could not afford anything" (Sánchez de Valladolid 37). Therefore, Alfonso "instituted the *cotos*, which set a price on all things, what amount each one should cost. However, when the *cotos* was initiated, Alfonso's kingdom experienced even more adverse outcomes:

[People] had it much worse afterward, since the merchants and other people who had things to sell hoarded them and refused to display them for sale. Therefore, everyone was in dire straits; in response, the king had to remove the *cotos* and order that things be sold freely at whatever prices the parties might agree upon. And in this year, nothing else is found that deserves to be related by the *History* (Sánchez de Valladolid 37).

Though the chapter is extremely brief, Alfonso's development of this economic policy, *cotos*, demonstrates his lack of hindsight and ineffectiveness as a ruler. Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid illustrates how Alfonso's policies encountered opposition, which proves his incapacity of being a successful king.

Further contributing to the characterization of Alfonso X as an irresponsible, perfunctory ruler, Chapter 17 is extremely important to the first section of the chronicle. This chapter demonstrates how Alfonso X conducted himself as king in relation to his political and economic strategies. In 1267, or the fifteenth year of his reign, "Alfonso heard that an empress from Constantinople whose husband was captive in the land of the Sultan was coming to see him" (Sánchez de Valladolid 65). The empress asks of Alfonso X for a third of the sum of her husband's ransom price. However, instead of agreeing to give her the third that she needed:

[Alfonso X] "asked her what sum was set, and she said it was fifty quintals of silver but that the King of France had given her one third and the pope another third. King Alfonso took the empress by the hand and went to seat her at the table, and he gave her his hand, promising her that in twenty days he would give her the fifty quintals of silver [...] and he ordered her to give back what she had taken from the pope and the King of France, and she returned what was theirs, telling them how it happened with King Alfonso" (Sánchez de Valladolid 66).

In the same chapter, we find out that the emperor dies shortly thereafter, and the "electors came together to decide whom they would make emperor. Amid dispute, some of them elected King Alfonso as emperor and agreed to send for him to come and receive the empire" (Sánchez de Valladolid 67). Within this chapter, two very significant events

occur: Alfonso's "generous" donation to the empress and the death of the Emperor of Germany. Perhaps the chronicler groups these two events based on chronology, or he more feasibly includes the two episodes to demonstrate an association between the two. The empress from Constantinople comes to Alfonso because she needed a third of the money in order to free her imprisoned husband, the emperor. Even though the empress already had two thirds of the sum she needed, Alfonso X insisted on providing her with the total amount and demanded her to return the two-thirds she previously received from the pope and King of France. However, at about the same time, the emperor dies, and Alfonso is offered the position to become emperor, which the chronicler makes clear is the cause of the destruction of Castile: "But although this was to the great and good repute of King Alfonso in other lands, this and other matters the king did brought great impoverishment to the kingdoms of Castile and León" (Sánchez de Valladolid 67). While Alfonso is preoccupied with matters of becoming emperor, his kingdom is falling apart. Thus, Alfonso X's overly generous donation is connected to his desire to become emperor. Throughout the chronicle, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid emphatically suggests that Alfonso's obsession with becoming emperor ultimately leads to the destruction of his kingdom, and turns his people against him. While he regularly traveled outside of Castile to better his relations with other countries and make a worldwide renowned reputation for himself, he ignored the internal issues that existed within his own realm.<sup>ii</sup> Thus, Alfonso was often more concerned with his international reputation, rather than his national regard as king. Because he wanted to establish the universal image that he was generous, kind, friendly, and helpful to others, he donated a large sum of money to the empress from Constantinople without any regards for the economical needs of his own kingdom.

Alfonso did not donate the money out of the goodness of his heart, but rather looked to improve his own standing for becoming emperor in the future. The chronicler implies that his peoples were unhappy with his unnecessary spending, which eventually leads to the “impoverishment of Castile and León” (Sánchez de Valladolid 67). Almost simultaneously and with impeccable timing, the emperor dies and Alfonso is considered for his position as emperor. Therefore, within Chapter 17, there is a direct connection with Alfonso’s political strategies — his focus on external affairs, rather than on internal — and the proposition of his becoming emperor. The fact that the chronicler makes a statement that correlates specific actions of Alfonso X with the failure of his kingdom shows the negative impact that Alfonso had as king.

The first section of the *Chronicle* exemplifies Alfonso’s lack of skills as king, as he contributes to the economic downfall of Castile and León. Alfonso X’s change in currency, economic system, and generous donations to foreigners indicate where his priorities laid. While the king was preoccupied with matters of empire, his kingdom suffered due to his lack of attention to important economic and political issues. Alfonso also lacked hindsight in his decisions. A reason for this was his impulsive behavior; the chronicler states that in the first year of his reign, (whether or not this is entirely accurate, we do not know, but what is significant is the fact that Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid wrote it to be true) Alfonso X immediately changed the currency. As a ruler, Alfonso’s economic and political policies led to his demise. He did not conduct himself appropriately as king, according to the chronicler, and for this reason, Castile and León experienced many negative economic side effects (such as inflation). In the Middle Ages, masculinity was determined by how well men conformed to the rigid roles imposed on

them. A major part of maintaining one's masculinity was being successful in one's job or position within society. Men were placed within "the functional social order that divided men into those who pray, those who fight, and those who labor" (Lees 3). The king was placed at the very top of this hierarchy, and being that he maintained a major position of power also signified that he was supposed to act as an example for others and protect his people. Thus, Alfonso X was expected to exert a significant effort to ensure the prosperity of his kingdom. Nonetheless, Alfonso X's internal policies lacked planning on his part, and for this reason, he failed as a ruler, and in turn, as a medieval male. Though there seems to be a single, distinct version of the definition of being a successful medieval male, it is apparent throughout the chronicles that there are two very different and inconsistent paradigms for being a prosperous medieval king. Throughout his reign, Alfonso X is focused on international affairs; he wants to become Holy Roman Emperor, and the majority of his resources as king go towards achieving this end. Alfonso X deems matters of empire of the utmost importance because becoming emperor would signify yielding prestige and power for Castile. As a result, Alfonso allows regional affairs to be dealt with by other members of his kingdom, such as his wife and sons, while he concentrated on attaining international fame for him and his kingdom. That being said, the chronicler approaches the chronicle from a different perspective of what it meant to be a successful ruler. Being hired by Alfonso XI to document the royal life of Alfonso X, among others such as Sancho IV, Fernando IV, and Alfonso XI himself, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid had the obligation to show support for models of behavior that coincided with the policies of Alfonso XI and show distaste for those that differed from them. Therefore, Alfonso X, who differentiated himself from other rulers because of his

incessant aim of becoming emperor, is portrayed in a negative light as a king, while Sancho IV was much more similar to Alfonso XI in his policies, and thus depicted in a more positive manner.

The second section of the chronicle encompasses chapters 20 to 58, and describes the revolt of the nobility. When compared with the first section, it “is much more detailed [...] occupying nearly half of the entire text, but it only relates the events occurring over a period of about four years” (O’Callaghan 12). Throughout this section, information is more reliable, the chronology is mostly correct, and information and official documents are abundant (O’Callaghan 13). Throughout the middle section, Alfonso’s internal affairs are exposed, and deal mostly with the dilemmas he faced with both the nobles and his family. In chapter 23 of the *Chronicle* the nobles list their grievances and pinpoint the failings of Alfonso X’s rule. They desire more land, compensation, and positions of power within their internal government (Sánchez de Valladolid 93). Fed up with the lack of attention paid to his internal affairs, the nobles want that the king reorganize his priorities. Throughout the chronicle, they rebel multiple times with the hope that Alfonso X would redirect his attention towards them and the regional affairs of Castile. Particularly, the imagery of the scene is strikingly powerful and clearly exhibits the utter animosity the nobles felt for king Alfonso X: “They all came armed and with a great crowd. [...] When the king saw that they were coming in such fashion, he considered it very strange, because they were not coming as men who go to their lord but like those who come to look for their enemies” (Sánchez de Valladolid 91-92). The nobles are overly dissatisfied with Alfonso’s policies and demand change. Though this is only the beginning of the nobles’ complaints, this chapter brings to light Alfonso’s ineffective

style of leadership from the perspective of the chronicler. Alfonso X's policies as ruler did not coincide with others of his time, such as the nobles and his successors, which ultimately led to unrest and explains the particular perspective that the chronicler has towards his leadership.

Later on in the chronicle, the nobles are disobedient to King Alfonso X and instead show their loyalty to the Moors. The nobles formulate a peace treaty with the King of Granada in spite of him being Alfonso X's greatest enemy. In chapter 43 of the chronicle, "Of the Letter and Treaties That Were Processed Between the King of Granada and the Noblemen," there are a series of epistolary communication exchanges between the King of Granada the noblemen of Castile and León. One such reply by the noblemen is as follows:

Regarding this is the treaty and fealty that we are making with you, and what you should do for don Alfonso, King of Castile: Keep the treaties and agreements that he made with you at Alcalá de Benzaide, and if he were not to keep them, then we, the aforementioned, should help you with our bodies, our men, and with our might in the war you might wage against him.[...] And I, Prince Don Felipe, and these above-said good men grant you that we shall not make peace nor any treaty with the King of Castile unless you do, and may this treaty be during the days of don Alfonso, King of Castile[...] (Sánchez de Valladolid 140-141).

Alfonso X is unable to maintain peace within his kingdom, and his nobles act directly against him because of their unhappiness with his rule. The nobles want proper compensation, more prestigious positions of power, and more aid from Alfonso X. When they are not accorded these demands, they look elsewhere for support. Thus, not only has

Alfonso X failed to satisfy his nobles' needs and desires, but he also has indirectly encouraged them to seek allies outside of his kingdom, those of which are his enemies.

The multitudinous letter exchanges between Alfonso X and the members of the nobility also characterize the second section. Alfonso X attempts to convince each of the nobles that they should remain loyal to him and provide him service, and that "If some of them had a complaint against him, he wanted to compensate them [...]" (Sánchez de Valladolid 93). Throughout this section, the king constantly contradicts himself from letter to letter among different nobles, sometimes accepting blame for his shortcomings (noted in the aforementioned citation) and at other times, trying to attain their services by placing the blame on them and their unfaithfulness. For example, in the chapter "Of the Answers That the Heralds of King Alfonso, On his Behalf, Gave to Don Nuño," the king states:

Moreover, being the king's vassal and having his money, you made a covenant and a pact with the King of Granada, and now you go to serve and assist him against Alfonso, your lord, whose vassal you are. You know that the King of Granada and his Moors are God's enemies, the enemies of the Faith, of the king, and of all of those of noble descent of Castile and León [...] And so you encroached upon all of the kingdom and should ponder what might come to you from this deed (Sánchez de Valladolid 115).

The chronicler notes in chapter 39 that "all of these things the king grants to them so that they go along with him to the empire and so that they may serve him just as they promised him" (Sánchez de Valladolid 132). Thus, even though Alfonso did not deem appropriate the demands of the nobles because of their disloyalty, his commitment to

maintaining his image in light of becoming emperor inclined him to give in to their demands. The letters in the second section expose Alfonso's weaknesses as ruler, as he fails to satisfy the nobles of his kingdom, despite granting them what they had asked for. Further on the chronicle, Valladolid makes clear where Alfonso X's priorities lie and is extremely critical of his political and diplomatic policies, even disregarding Alfonso X's affairs that are international in nature. "The author of the section of the *Chronicle* makes the point that he knows nothing of what happened on Alfonso's journey to the empire, so he focuses on the internal affairs of the kingdom [...]" (Sánchez de Valladolid 197). This being said, the chronicler makes it seem as if Alfonso had already committed too many errors in order to redeem himself as ruler and instead focuses on Castilian affairs. Not only does this part of the chronicle exhibit the chronicler's bias towards Alfonso X as being an ineffective leader, but the utter lack of disregard for anything other than internal affairs demonstrates the type of leader that he supports.

A significant turning point in the *Chronicle* concerns the infamous letter between Alfonso X and his son Fernando de la Cerda. Previous to the letter, chapter 51 exposes don Fernando's disobedience to his father, Alfonso X. He sends for the Master of Calatrava to negotiate treaties between the noblemen and the Moors on behalf of Alfonso X's kingdom. However, Fernando never consults Alfonso X, and "concerning the statutes, the inheritances, the towns, and all the other things that they were requesting, the master signed with them the treaties as best he could, but not according to what King Alfonso wanted" (Sánchez de Valladolid 163). Because he did not believe that his father would negotiate with the Moors and nobles according to what would best benefit Castile and León, Fernando de la Cerda takes it upon himself to call for the Master of Calatrava

to finalize the details of the treaties. Fernando then goes to the king to tell him that he carried out “what he considered good” (Sánchez de Valladolid 163). Highly doubting the competency of his father, Fernando takes matters into his hands and without permission of the king, decides to act on behalf of Alfonso X in order to ensure the best possible outcome for Castile and León. Then in chapter 52, King Alfonso X sends prince don Fernando a letter concerning his disobedience, but rather than coming off as angry, Alfonso X seems distressed that now even his own family has begun to doubt him:

Don Fernando, now I wish to speak concerning how this matter has reached this point and tell you that there is need to keep faith so that you know how better to deal there and to show people how the matter is. These noblemen did not go against me for reason of statute nor for the wrong that I did to them. [...] Also, I never did them any wrong; but even if I had done the greatest in the world, I wanted to right it for them well within their sight so that they had no cause to demand more. [...] For, don Fernando, I trust in God that we will quickly have great justice over them, for we would not want anything greater. For we hold with the law, and we want to expand it and defend it as much as they diminish it [...]

(Sánchez de Valladolid 168).

Alfonso X is reaching out to his son so that he may find an ally in him. The fact that Alfonso X now seems more desperate than before to maintain a connection with his family and internal allies shows that Alfonso’s duties as king and father have not been carried out thus far, and he is attempting to make up for his past deficiencies. Throughout his reign, Alfonso X was more focused on gaining international prestige rather than ensuring the satisfaction of his own people. The chronicler suggests here that Alfonso X’s

history of disregarding his kingdom for matters of empire makes him unfit as a ruler, and he does not understand the needs of Castile. Thus, his son Fernando deems necessary his own intervention in Castilian affairs, an act that is normally the sole responsibility of the king. Despite his father's dissatisfaction with his involvement on the king's behalf, Fernando does not regret his decision to intervene because he believes that his Alfonso X would have made a lapse in judgment. Because of his absence from the internal kingdom, Alfonso X does not and cannot understand what is best for Castile, Fernando felt that he had no other choice but to interfere in what would have been the decision of the king.

Throughout the second section of the *Chronicle*, the nobles exhibit disobedience towards Alfonso X and rebel against his rule. Alfonso X lacks popularity within Castile and León because of his poor decision-making and even his own family begins to doubt his capabilities as king. Alfonso X is unable to maintain peace within his kingdom, and his nobles act directly against him because of their unhappiness with his rule. In the Middle Ages, masculinity was shown by maintaining “dominion over not only women, but men as well” (Lees 142). Thus, Alfonso loses control over his own people and fails to uphold his dominance as king, a role that he was expected to conform to, but ultimately does not. Alfonso does not accept his role as leader. Instead, he acts in a way that he deems appropriate—in the context that becoming emperor is of utmost importance—and ignores the societal responsibilities imposed upon him. He does not understand the desires of his people nor does he believe that internal affairs should take precedence over external pursuits. Nonetheless, because of the discrepancy over what defines an ideal ruler, Alfonso X experiences overwhelming conflict within Castile. The chronicler,

having a different opinion of how a king should act accordingly portrays Alfonso X as an unsuccessful male in the Middle Ages.

In chapter 22, while simultaneously trying to appease the nobles, King Alfonso is confronted with a dilemma with the Moors: “a large army of Moors, which the King of Granada had sent for, had crossed from beyond the sea and had overrun the territory and killed and captured many men” (Sánchez de Valladolid 85). Then the chronicler includes Arabic letters addressed to the nobles that demonstrate the discontent that not only the Moors have with Alfonso X, but also the unhappiness that the nobles have previously voiced about their king. Chapter 22 is just one example of the continuous war that Alfonso X has with the Moors, while also exposing the developing relationship that the Moors and the nobles have begun to form in opposition to the king. Towards the end of the chronicle, Alfonso X is virtually absent from his kingdom, leaving his men to fend off the Moors: “the king departed from Toledo in the month of March and went to his empire. And now the History will relate the things that happened in the Kingdoms of Castile and León while the king went on this journey, because what he did and how things transpired where he went the chronicler did not know nor did he place them here” (Sánchez de Valladolid 197). Even though the chronicle is titled *Chronicle of Alfonso X*, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid ceases from recounting the events of Alfonso X’s life, and continues to describe the kingdom of Castile and León in his absence. The chronicler’s choice in breaking with Alfonso’s story demonstrates how he believes that the affairs of his kingdom were of utmost importance, rather than the affairs of the empire. As the Moors advance on the kingdom of Castile and León, Alfonso’s men find themselves unprepared for the conflict that ensues. Many nobles die in war, including don Nuño, the

Archbishop of Toledo, and Fernando de la Cerda, successor of Alfonso X. In chapter 72, the Christians are almost defeated by the Moors, and the chronicler makes it known that Alfonso's lack of involvement is to blame: "We have already related how King Alfonso was in Seville while the city of Algeciras was besieged" (Sánchez de Valladolid 227). The king also failed to provide for reinforcements, and "for this reason these men of the fleet became seriously ill" (Sánchez de Valladolid 227). Thus, Alfonso's lack of leadership skills ultimately leads to the demise of his troops. "The [tripartite] schema [of the Middle Ages] [...] aimed also at subjecting the warriors [...] and making them the protectors of the Church and of religion"(Le Goff 258). Alfonso's lack of command in Castile and Leon's fight against the Moors was the inherent cause of the calamities and mortalities of his men. In medieval society, being warrior like and maintaining a position of power over others, especially in the name of religion, were considered signs of masculinity (Lees 142).

In the midst of utter defeat against the Moors, however, Alfonso X's son, Sancho IV, undertakes the role of leader in the third section of the chronicle. Because Fernando de la Cerda, the presumed heir to Alfonso X dies in a battle against the Moors, Sancho sees the perfect opportunity to establish himself as a leader. In addition to the death of his brother, Alfonso X remains absent from the kingdom, which results in Castile's desire for an effective ruler to lead them. This part of the *Chronicle* constitutes chapters 59 to 77, and though it is not as detailed as the second section, includes a greater breadth of information than the first. This section "appears to be biased in favor of Infante Sancho, whose relationship with his father steadily deteriorated and culminated in his rebellion in 1282" (O'Callaghan 17). Scholars have noted that within the third section in particular,

Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid's writing style is indicative of his involvement in the events he documented (O'Callaghan 17). Because Sancho IV more closely resembled Alfonso XI as ruler (as opposed to Alfonso X), Valladolid was obliged to portray him as an effective ruler and replacement for his father. Immediately, the chronicler demonstrates Sancho IV's success as warrior and leader in his father's absence:

[Prince Don Sancho] set out for the Vega, and he came close to Granada, burning wheat and laying waste, and tearing down all that he found. As soon as the entire Vega had been devastated, Prince Don Sancho went back with all of his army to Jaén, and from there to his father, the king, in Córdoba. The way Prince Don Sancho had managed the army so well pleased the king greatly (Sánchez de Valladolid 235).

Though Alfonso X was pleased with Sancho's military prowess, he soon becomes angered by the fact that Sancho IV had made economic decisions without his approval. Thus, Alfonso expresses doubt in automatically choosing Sancho as his heir to the throne, and instead contemplates naming Fernando de la Cerda's son as his successor. Because of his uncertainty for naming Sancho IV as future ruler, along with his policies that have left both his kingdom and family unsatisfied, a civil war between Alfonso X and his son Sancho IV commences. The chronicler emphasizes that because of his interest in maintaining the loyalty of the nobles, Sancho IV is the preferred heir to the throne by the majority of the kingdom. In the subsequent chapters, the chronicler highlights Sancho's success as a ruler, through his strength in war and his popularity among the nobles. In chapter 75, the nobles complain of the wrongdoings they have suffered at the hands of Alfonso X and beg Sancho to replace him as king:

They said that he, Prince don Sancho, knew very well how many deaths, how many outrages, and how many cruelties and sufferings the king, his father, had brought about in the kingdom, for which all of them were angry at him. They begged Prince Sancho to protect and defend them and that he cleave to them so that they would not be as endangered as they were (Sánchez de Valladolid 242).

The civil war between Alfonso X and Sancho IV ensues, and in the last few pages of the chronicle, we find that Alfonso X has become ill and dies (Sánchez de Valladolid 258). In the process of the civil war and the worsening illness of Alfonso X, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid depicts Sancho IV as an effective, strong ruler, and succeeds in differentiating him from his father, Alfonso X. In many medieval sources, “the idea of chivalry is paralleled with manhood”(Lees 54). Therefore, Sancho’s strength in war proves his masculinity as he brings his men to victory against the Moors. Alfonso X fails to conform to his role within society, demonstrated by his demise in regards to his ongoing conflict with the nobles and Moors. Sancho IV is also able to gain the favor of the nobles, which demonstrates his ability to maintain control over others, unlike his father, Alfonso X. Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid brings Alfonso’s dilemmas to a culmination point during the civil war between Sancho and himself. After examining Alfonso X’s failure in both internal and external conflicts for the majority of the *Chronicle*, the chronicler quickly describes Sancho IV’s success and rise to power in response to the growing resentment and dissatisfaction of the nobles: “Prince Sancho sent the messengers to say that they should all come to him in Valladolid and he would hand over to them all their inheritances that the king, his father, had taken from them. He also said he would restore their lands and soldiers very well and would act with much goodness and grace”

(Sánchez de Valladolid 245). By analyzing Sancho IV's role within the chronicle, it is evident that the chronicler is representing Sancho IV as the ideal male, as opposed to Alfonso X, by virtue of his success as warrior and ruler.

### **Representation of Queen Violante: The Royal Strata Enforces the Objectification of Women and their Expected Conformity to the Medieval Feminine Role**

Throughout the chronicle, it is clearly demonstrated that Violante never attains the same power that her husband or sons are capable of because of her obligation to the female role imposed upon her by society.

As seen in the introduction, women were confined to the private sphere, expected to stay at home to fulfill their feminine roles. Generally, women from all levels of society were characterized by her status as wife, mother, or virgin. Because conjugality was deemed crucial to the functioning of society, it divided women into married and unmarried women. “La conyugalidad fue fundamental y dividió a las mujeres entre casadas y no casadas” (Benito Ruano 192). Matrimony was a crucial sacrament to fulfill because of the necessity for reproduction, for both peasants and nobles (Benito Ruano 192). However, for those of the upper nobility and royal realm, reproduction was of even more importance. Matrimonial alliances were significant for the maintenance of power, and reproduction among the royals ensured for the legitimacy and durability of the lineage:

Fue así por que, necesariamente, para afianzarse o consolidarse, las formaciones políticas de los reinos y de otras unidades menores, se tuvieron que ir apoyando,

como parte de las múltiples facetas de su juego político, en la estructuración de linajes y, paralelamente, en la de vínculos de vasallaje y clientelares. Para consolidar esa estructuración de linajes, se fue intentando ordenar formas de transmisión de derechos del poder formal. Una muy importante fue [...] la de la alianza matrimonial, legitimada por el matrimonio sacramental, que permitía transferir derechos *in uxorem e in genitricem* sobre la mujer y definir las formas de filiación de los hijos (Benito Ruano 193).

A king's choice of a marriage partner was determined by the woman's "*desirability*, which came from her male kin's sphere of influence, but her high lineage established her *suitability* for matrimony and maternity"(Carmi Parsons 3). Thus, women were judged based off of their family's power and their anticipated success for reproduction. A woman's personal attributes that make her an individual were not taken into consideration, which shows how women were confined to such rigid social roles. These conditions for royal women being made queens are demonstrated multiple times throughout the chronicle. For example, in chapters 3 7, and 17 of the *Chronicle*, women such as Violante of Aragon, Doña Beatriz, and Doña Blanca of France, are referred to as mere objects, whose only worth are their reproductive capabilities (Carmi Parsons 102). There are more documented royal women, rather than peasant women, present in medieval sources. The reason for their presence in medieval documents is because they were directly involved in preserving the royal lineage, and thus their importance was defined by their ability to reproduce a son (Morant 372). Unlike peasant women, however, royal women were able to partake in political matters, acting as negotiators and regents for their husbands or sons, allowing them to "transcend these boundaries and

were often involved in the public sphere” (Carmi Parsons 9). Nevertheless, though regencies gave royal women a certain amount of power, they were also limited by these same roles. Women could not have attained their power as regents or queens if it had not been for their husbands or sons, who maintain the real authority in the royal realm. The terms “daughter,” “wife,” and “mother” that royal women continued to be classified as, limited their mobility within society (Carmi Parsons 7).

Even as the queen was ceremoniously exalted, rituals prescribed a submissive role that secluded her from authority. [...] The liminal spaces recall as well as the many boundaries queens traversed—geographical and cultural as they were changed from daughters into wives and mothers, or those between margin and center—and again insinuate the family sphere, for whether such boundaries should include those between the “public” arena and the “domestic,” “familial,” or “private” domain to which medieval women are said to have been marginalized, is a question to which the present anthology turns implicit attention (Carmi Parsons 9).

Thus, many scholars explore the question of whether or not royal women truly did play an active enough role in the public sphere to be considered a part of it. My research concludes that although royal women were active within the public sphere, acting as negotiators or regents, they were ultimately limited to what their husbands or sons assigned them to do. Though they had access to certain amounts of power because of their position within royal society, they lacked the authority to make decisions independent of the men that had a considerable amount of control over their lives. Analyzing Queen Violante’s societal function within Castile’s royal realm, it can be

concluded that her exercise of political power did not exclude her from the traditional constrictions of medieval society, which forced her to conform to the medieval feminine role.

At the very start of the *Chronicle*, it is discernible that Violante of Aragon was subjected to the same rigid gender roles as other women of the Middle Ages. In chapter 2 of the chronicle, the first year of Alfonso's reign, he "married doña Violante, daughter of King Jaime of Aragón and sister of King Pedro. He had no son by her, and he became very unhappy; seeing that this was due to a lack on her part, he therefore sent his envoys to the King of Norway to entreat the king to send his daughter in marriage" (Sánchez de Valladolid 30). Violante was chosen as a marriage partner for Alfonso X because of her familial background, but was then assessed on her reproductive capabilities. The fact that Violante had failed in giving Alfonso X a male child within the first few years of their marriage, made him search elsewhere for a wife and he seriously contemplated divorcing her. Thus, the matter of reproduction was even more essential for royal medieval women. "A queen thought to be barren was often repudiated due to impotence" (Carmi Parsons 102). In the subsequent chapter, the chronicler relates the events that occurred in the second year of Alfonso's reign, telling of how the King of Granada came to Toledo in order to establish beneficial relations with Alfonso X. We also find out that Violante is pregnant with a daughter, Princess Berenguela, and as result Alfonso informs the King of Norway that his daughter, doña Cristina, will no longer be desired a marriage partner for Alfonso. There is then a jump in chronology within this chapter, where the chronicler takes note of all of the children that Violante bore Alfonso X during his reign. "Then some ten months after the birth of Princess Berenguela, Queen Violante bore another

child, named Prince Fernando, the first son and heir of King Alfonso. Later, the king had more children by this queen: Prince Sancho, Prince Pedro, Prince Juan, Prince Jaime, another daughter named Isabel, and another named Leonor, who married the Marquis of Murcia[...]" (Sánchez de Valladolid 33). It is important to note that the chronicler strays from the traditional chronology of the text that he has been following thus far to emphasize all of the children that Violante had during Alfonso's reign. There is a direct correlation between Alfonso's change of mindset regarding his marriage to the King of Norway's daughter as a wife, and Violante bearing him children. Violante's ability to reproduce affected Alfonso's decision to send doña Cristina to be married to another male within his family, instead of marrying her himself. Furthermore, the act of her marriage to another male family member emphasizes women's roles as commodities: they can simply be bartered for and exchanged without any concern for their opinions and desires.

Queen Violante is not the only example within the text of how women were expected to adhere to the medieval confines of femininity. In chapter 7, the King of Portugal comes to Toledo in order to ask for Alfonso X's help because his brother, Afonso, rebelled against his rule and some of his people have now started to support him. The King of Portugal needs Alfonso's help in order to regain his kingdom. However, when the king's brother, Afonso, learns that he went to King Alfonso X for aid, he tries to negotiate a deal with him:

[King Afonso] sends to request that King Alfonso see fit not to interfere in that affair nor oppose him, and that he would marry Alfonso's daughter doña Beatriz, [...]. King Alfonso, out of the great favor in which he held his daughter, and

seeing that it was a great honor to marry her to that king, granted what King Afonso requested and the marriage took place (Sánchez de Valladolid 41). Thus, not only were royal women used for their reproductive abilities to continue the royal lineage, they were also used as political pawns. In order to negotiate a deal, King Afonso offers himself in marriage to Afonso's daughter. This demonstrates how women were objectified and rarely treated as individual human beings.

Chapter 17 of the chronicle is also extremely significant to understanding royal women's roles within medieval society. Within the first paragraph of the chapter, the chronicler discusses the issue of his son's future marriage partner:

King Alfonso, seeing that Prince Fernando, his son and heir, was of age for having a wife, while in Toledo sent messengers to Saint Louis, King of France, asking him to give him the hand of his daughter doña Blanca so that she might marry his son Prince Fernando. This doña Blanca was the daughter of Saint Louis and sister of don Felipe, and in the year here cited, Saint Louis was yet alive, as he died in the year of our Lord 1270 (Sánchez de Valladolid 65).

Repetitiously, the chronicler emphasizes the "arrangement" of receiving a wife. The woman was chosen based on her family's position of power, with no other considerations. The woman had no choice in the matter because it was up to the men to decide whether or not a couple would be wed. Fundamentally this chapter focuses on the visit from the empress of Constantinople. She approaches King Alfonso in order to ask for his monetary aid in rescuing her husband. The empress is very successful in achieving the money she needed to bail out her husband, as Alfonso X agrees to pay the full sum of money. The chapter demonstrates how royal women often acted as regents for their

husbands and negotiated on their behalves. Like Queen Violante, other royal women such as the empress from Constantinople, also used their negotiating skills to support their husbands. More importantly, the empress's visit maintains the fact that women held inferior positions to men during the Middle Ages. Despite the fact that the emperor and empress hold a higher positions of power than a king or queen, the empress comes to Alfonso X, essentially begging for his aid in rescuing her husband: "I heard tell of the nobility and goodness and generosity that there is in your lord, so I have come here to ask his help to free my husband, the emperor, from captivity, and until then I have an answer in this, I shall not eat" (Sánchez de Valladolid 66). Even though the empress maintains a position of higher power than Alfonso X, she resorts to begging for his financial aid. Therefore, the empress serves as another example of how medieval women, regardless of their political station, remained inferior subjects to men.

Later on in the chronicle, the queen is often politically involved in the king's affairs, especially when he continues to encounter dilemmas with his nobles. The nobles often rebel against his rule because they are unhappy with his economic and political policies. Frequently, the king sent his wife to deal with the issues of his kingdom while he was preoccupied with matters of the empire. Violante often acted as a mediator in many of Alfonso's conflicts. For example, chapter 39 is titled "Of the Things That the Queen and the Archbishop of Toledo Requested the King to Grant to the Noblemen and discusses what both the queen and archbishop negotiated between the king and his nobles. Violante often represented her husband, acting or speaking for him. The chronicler emphasizes: "These are the things that the queen, the archbishop, and the bishops asked of the king through his grace so that he might grant them to Prince Felipe

and the noblemen concerning the demands they made” (Sánchez de Valladolid 131).

Thus, even though the queen acted as negotiator, it was ultimately the final decision of the king that mattered. Chapter 53 also encompasses the queen’s role as negotiator. This chapter emphasizes how Alfonso’s conflict of interests often led to Violante’s involvement in his political affairs. Nonetheless, the king does not trust Violante to resolve the affair with the nobles without his specific instructions, demonstrating how she still lacked independence and autonomous authority:

The king, realizing how convenient it was for him to appease the affairs of the noblemen in order to go to the empire—which was something he coveted much—considered it good to send his wife, Queen Violante, to Córdoba so that she and Prince Don Fernando could resolve the affairs of the noblemen and bring them back to the king’s service. Notwithstanding that the king gave her in writing the things she had to resolve, he ordered her and pleaded with her to resolve it to his honor. And for his reason the conditions that he ordered to place on the treaties were not placed here, also because she resolved it better than what the king ordered her (Sánchez de Valladolid 174).

This section also emphasizes how women often acted as better negotiators than men did, and thus generally occupied these political positions. However, though Violante successfully acted as negotiator within the public sphere, the king begged that she resolve the conflict in “his honor.” Therefore, queens were not acting out of their own self-interest, but out of loyalty to their husbands. Chapter 56 continues to discuss the conflict between the king and the nobles, but within this chapter treaties are being drawn up and the queen and a few of the king’s men are in charge of negotiating them:

[The nobles] also asked the queen and don Fernando to grant that the king pay them for the lands that they held for him during these two years in which they had been in Granada, for they said that because during this time they did not do harm or damage in the land of their lord the king, and hence, they should not lose the *maravedís* they held as land from him. The queen said that this was an addition to what was discussed and placed in the agreements and that she could not grant it until she sent to tell the king (Sánchez de Valladolid 184).

Though the queen is in charge of the conciliation with the nobles, she ultimately is unable to make any final decisions, stating that she must get the permission of the king in order to make any promises to the nobles.

At the end of the chronicle, Queen Violante changes her political and familial loyalty ties. She exhibits disobedience to Alfonso X, and instead shows her allegiance to her son, Sancho IV. Within this section of the chronicle, because of Alfonso's futile economic and political strategies and decisions, the nobles rise up against him and give support to Sancho IV instead. Though Sancho does not immediately seize the opportunity to become king, both the nobles and his mother show him support. Queen Violante shows disloyalty to the king as she disobeys his orders, which is the beginning of her demonstration of loyalty towards her son, Sancho IV.

Queen Violante, wife of King Alfonso, sent letters to her brother don Pedro of Aragón about the agreements that those of the kingdom had made for Prince Sancho, and that concerning these she wanted to go and speak with him, and that she would bring with her don Alfonso and don Fernando [her grandsons]. The queen departed from Segovia, and with her went doña Blanca [Prince Fernando's

widow], and they brought with them don Alfonso and don Fernando. [...] When King Alfonso found out how the queen and doña Blanca were gone, it grieved him. He ordered the advisors to watch the roads and to not let them pass or go out of the kingdom (Sánchez de Valladolid 221).

This is the beginning of Violante's disobedience to King Alfonso. Then, in chapter 76, the Alfonso's conflict with the nobles culminates when they overthrow his kingdom and claim Sancho IV as king. The queen's ultimate act of rebellion occurs within this chapter, when she supports the uprising against her husband. "[Don Sancho] went to Valladolid and found there Queen Doña Violante, his mother, who was awaiting him there. She was very pleased with his position that he had taken against King Don Alfonso, her husband" (Sánchez de Valladolid 246). Violante ultimately must choose between her husband and son, and she elects to support her son Sancho IV. A reason for her loyalty to Sancho IV is the fact that a woman's first priority is her children. Though it seems as if the queen is attempting to reverse the constrictive female role imposed upon her by rising up against a man's rule, she is actually demonstrating maternal love. Ultimately, Violante chooses her son over her husband, indicating her commitment as a mother.

Throughout the *Chronicle*, the chronicler relates how Queen Violante was confined to the traditional feminine role of being loyal mother and wife, with reproduction as her most important responsibility. Queens were often very limited in their decision-making, especially concerning marriage. Men, often family members, made arrangements for the matrimonial ties of their daughters, in order to make alliances with other countries and leaders. Matrimonial alliances were essential in order to continue the family line and maintain political hegemony (Morant 375). Thus, women's importance

was determined by their role in conserving the familial union and genealogical transmissions (Morant 377). The destiny of women was inevitably marriage, and a marriage that they had no choice over the matter. For example, in the beginning of the *Chronicle*, doña Violante entered an arranged marriage with Alfonso X because of her family's background. The issue of reproduction also limited Violante to the rigid feminine role, as Alfonso X nearly divorces her when she does not immediately bear children. Queen Violante does not become or remain the wife of Alfonso X because of her personality or individual characteristics, but because of her political ties and ability to reproduce. Conjugal and raising children is what transformed the status of women within the Middle Ages: "La conyugalidad daba ese estatus porque transformaba la mujer en la reproductora, la que engendra y cría un hijo, en la que, por ello, transmite la herencia" (Benito Ruano 193).

However, the *Chronicle* also describes how Queen Violante was frequently politically active, and unlike medieval women of peasantry, had access to the public sphere in addition to the private. Throughout the majority of Alfonso X's reign, Queen Violante played the role of negotiator, either because the king was preoccupied with matters of the empire or because he believed that the queen acted as a better negotiator. Most often, Castilian queens exercised political power and often had impressive capabilities as mediators within the public sphere. Although queens had the ability to maintain a certain amount of power, they did so with the goal of aiding their husbands and sons:

Para el caso de Castilla, al tratarse en parte de un reino sin ley sálica, la historia muestra casos muy principales e ilustrativos, aunque no fueron los únicos; tales

son los de las mujeres reinas que ejercieron directamente el poder[...]Todas se destacaron por sus capacidades de mando, de gestión, de participación militar directa y de comprensión del juego político, y sobre todo por su capacidad para defender sus derechos como reinas o como reinas madres (Benito Ruano 199-200).

Violante did have the power to participate in the affairs of Castile; however, she was never given the authority to make decisions independent of her husband. Also, her responsibilities were limited to that of negotiator, and she was expected to make decisions that were for the benefit of her family. Thus, even though she was active in the public sphere, her decisions were based off of her overarching role in the private sphere. “Queens were “marginalized” to a “private” sphere in the narrow sense that patrimonialization of authority or bureaucratization of administration lessened their direct role in government, but they retained power, however “unofficial” or informal, and it was by paths inarguably linked to family roles that they preserved a share in rulership on a not-insignificant basis” (Carmi Parsons 10). Medieval society, being patriarchal in nature, called for males to be superior over women by dominating and also protecting them, thus women always had a passive role, with no regards for their social status: “puede deducirse que las mujeres principals, aun las de la más alta nobleza y los linajes reales, tuvieron siempre un papel pasivo” (Benito Ruano 199). While many royal women participated in political matters, they did so in order to defend their rights as queens, either as wives or as mothers (Benito Ruano 200).

Throughout the *Chronicle*, there is continual civil war between the nobles and Alfonso X, and it culminates when they choose Sancho IV over Alfonso to overtake the

kingdom towards the end of the text. Within this section of the Chronicle, not only do the nobles and the king's son demonstrate their disobedience for Alfonso, but Queen Violante does as well when she supports the take over of her husband by her son. At first glance, her act of disobedience seems as if it represents her rebellion against the traditional female role that has forced her to remain submissive to her husband. However, within medieval society, a woman's children were first priority. The royal realm was no different from the other orders of society, and queens were expected to support, educate, and care for their children as any other medieval woman would (Morant 467). Thus, Queen Violante's act of disobedience further demonstrates how she remained confined to the medieval feminine role, as her maternal instincts kicked in and she maintained support for her son. "The most positive images of medieval queens grew from their maternal role [...] in queenship's ritual context" (Carmi Parsons 8). Though she had access to political power, Queen Violante could not escape the traditional constrictions of medieval society. She was expected to remain a wife, and mother above all things, and her primary commitment was to protect the well being of her family.

Most scholars look at how in many patriarchal societies such as the Middle Ages, women are expected to carry out a specific role, related to marriage and reproduction. While this remains to be true, it is also vital to realize that men, too, were confined to certain roles within society, aside from their profession. "Scholars have rarely considered how being "masculine" is yet another role that men are expected to undertake" (Lees 129). By looking at Alfonso X's faulty actions and behaviors within the chronicle, it is clear that the chronicler depicts Alfonso's reign as a failure. Through my analysis of the work, his failure to live up to society's expectations of him as ruler also signifies his

failure to fulfill the masculine role. Queen Violante, though permitted to exercise certain amounts of political control, remained confined to the female role, and ultimately could not escape the traditional constrictions of medieval society. Lastly, by analyzing Sancho IV's role within the chronicle, it is evident that the chronicler is representing Sancho IV as the ideal male, as opposed to Alfonso X, because of his success as a warrior and ruler. However, in order to interpret the results of my research, it is vital to be knowledgeable of the time period and historical circumstances in which the chronicle was written.

Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid was employed by Alfonso XI to write this chronicle, among others (Gómez Redondo 967). Therefore, the chronicler had an objective in mind: advocate for the reign of Alfonso XI. In order to accomplish this, he had to favor Sancho IV over Alfonso X. Because Alfonso X and Sancho IV differed so greatly from one another, it would be nearly impossible to endorse both reigns. Being that Sancho IV's policies as ruler more closely resembled those of Alfonso XI's, while Alfonso X had a completely different approach to ruling, Fernán Sánchez de Valladolid's *Chronicle* ultimately had to portray Sancho IV as a more effective leader. With this objective in mind, the chronicler used the past in order to promote the present (Gómez Redondo 967). After analyzing my results, the bias of the chronicler is apparent. He clearly defines both medieval male and female roles through the characterization of Alfonso X and Violante, and then uses Sancho IV to represent the truly masculine medieval ruler.

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## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> “In King Fernando’s day, *pepiones* circulated as the coinage in Castile and in the kingdom of León. One hundred and eighty *pepiones* were worth one *maravedí*. Small

<sup>ii</sup> Other examples of Alfonso’s traveling exhibitions are included in chapters 18, 19, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66 (Sánchez de Valladolid).