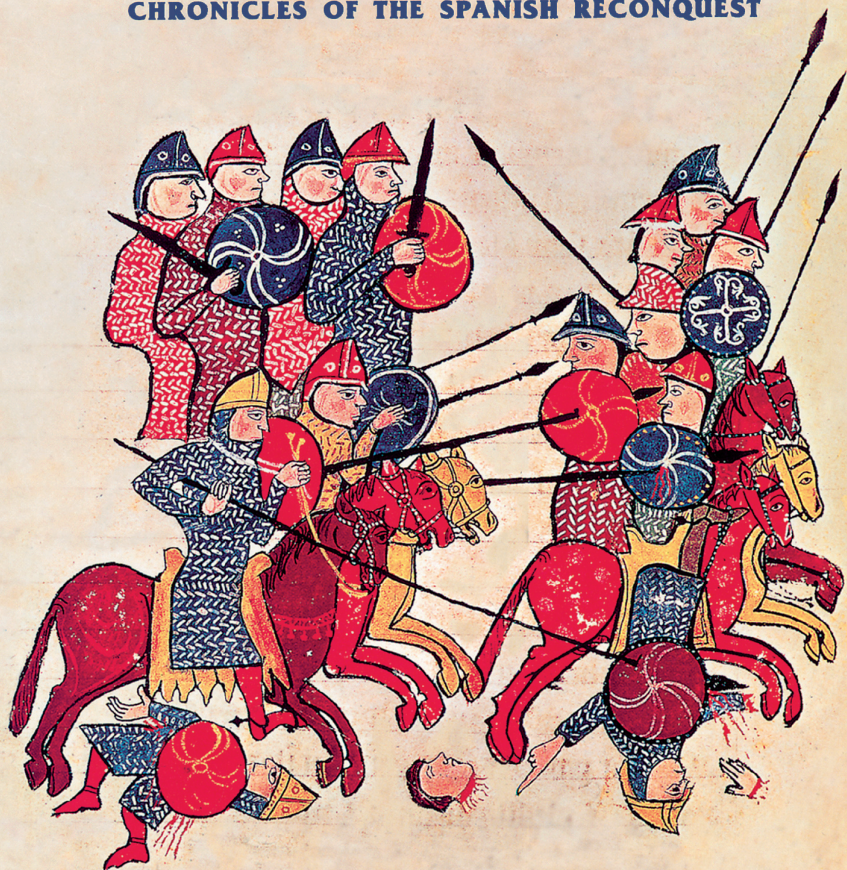


# THE WORLD OF EL CID

CHRONICLES OF THE SPANISH RECONQUEST



*Selected sources translated and annotated  
by Simon Barton & Richard Fletcher*

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## THE WORLD OF EL CID



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## CHRONICLES OF THE SPANISH RECONQUEST

*selected sources translated and annotated by*

Simon Barton *and* Richard Fletcher

Manchester University Press  
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## FOREWORD

Long relatively neglected by anglophone historians, the multiple histories of medieval Spain, thoroughly distinctive, post-Roman yet not wholly Latin-Christian, are now beginning to take their rightful places alongside other parts of Europe in the history of the Middle Ages. This welcome development has been due in large part to one of the authors of the present volume, Richard Fletcher, and has latterly been strongly assisted by the other, Simon Barton. Both with expert knowledge, on the historical as on the literary and Hispanist front, of the texts translated and commented upon here, these two scholars have joined forces to make available all the main narrative sources of eleventh- and twelfth-century Spain. This crucially important period, of cultural and social formation and flowering, of political conflict and crystallisation, has until now been fairly impenetrable for non-specialists. Visitors to León and Toledo, Burgos, Zaragoza and Valencia gain a vivid yet imprecise sense of the world of El Cid, negotiating his way between al-Andalus and the Christian north, and of successive Alfonsos ducking and weaving and battling their way to the creation of the medieval kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Richard Fletcher and Simon Barton now make it possible for those without Latin to read the key texts, to understand their authors' backgrounds and purposes, to appreciate their specific literary and historical contexts, and to analyse the structures of power they reveal. Above all, since, as Marc Bloch wrote, 'it is men that history seeks to grasp', these two fine historians acquaint us with the characters (and they include a few women too) who throng the chroniclers' pages. We gain a familiarity, at once vivid and precise, with the nobles and ecclesiastics, kings and royal kin, whose journeyings and campaigns we follow, and whose religious and material concerns emerge so clearly in these pages. This is exactly the kind of historical material that Manchester Medieval Sources aim to make accessible, and with this splendid volume alongside John Edwards' earlier one, it is a particular delight to have Spain now deservedly well represented in the series.

Janet L. Nelson  
King's College London.



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## PREFACE

The study of the medieval history of Spain in the English-speaking world has taken enormous strides over the last generation or so. In the mid-1960s, when the elder of these two collaborators embarked upon research for a doctorate, there were scarcely any reputable scholarly works to be had; by the year 2000 the list of them is ample and steadily growing. But the publication of surveys and monographs, of articles and editions, has not been matched – at least as regards the central medieval period between the tenth and thirteenth centuries – by comparable publication of extended translations from the original sources. It is in an attempt to take some modest steps towards redressing this imbalance that we have translated the four texts contained within this book. Together they constitute the principal narrative sources for Leonese–Castilian history in the century and a half between *c.* 1000 and *c.* 1150.

We have worked from the following editions:

- 1 *Historia Silense*, eds J. Pérez de Urbel and A. González Ruiz-Zorrilla (Madrid, 1959).
- 2 *Chronicon Regum Legionensium* by Bishop Pelayo of Oviedo, under the title *Crónica del Obispo Don Pelayo*, ed. B. Sánchez Alonso (Madrid, 1924).
- 3 *Historia Roderici vel Gesta Roderici Campidocti*, ed. E. Falque Rey, in *Chronica Hispana saeculi XII*, Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis, vol. 71 (Turnhout, 1990), pp. 47–98.
- 4 *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*, ed. A. Maya Sánchez, in the same volume of *Chronica Hispana saeculi XII*, pp. 149–248; together with the associated verses on the Almería campaign of 1147 edited in the same volume by J. Gil at pp. 255–67.

The introductions to these editions furnish details of the surviving manuscripts, previous editions and so forth. No English translation of any of these texts has been published before in its entirety. Brief extracts from 1, 3 and 4 have been translated in Colin Smith's *Christians and Moors in Spain*, vol. I (Warminster, 1988). Modern Spanish translations have been published as follows:

- 1 (a) M. Gómez-Moreno, *Introducción a la Historia Silense* (Madrid, 1921), pp. lxxiii–cxxxvi.  
(b) J. E. Casariego, *Crónicas de los Reinos de Asturias y León* (Madrid, 1985), pp. 110–58.
- 2 Casariego, as above, pp. 172–81.
- 3 E. Falque Rey, “Traducción de la “*Historia Roderici*””, *Boletín de la Institución Fernán González* 62 (1983), pp. 343–75.
- 4 M. Pérez González, *Crónica del Emperador Alfonso VII* (León, 1997).

We divided responsibility for the introductions, translations and notes between us, to Richard Fletcher falling the *Historia Silense* and the *Historia Roderici* and to Simon Barton the *Chronicon Regum Legionensium* and the *Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris*. Each of us submitted his draft work to the other for criticism, on the understanding that absolute candour was required of the critic, absolute humility in the criticised. In the resultant shuffling of papers, the muted buzzings and pings of faxes and emails, extending over some two years or more, we hope that we have improved upon our first hesitant drafts. To our surprise and pleasure we found that harmonious co-operation was never once threatened by even the suspicion of a cross word so much as meditated, let alone uttered. Of the ancillary portions of the work, to which we applied the same routines, Richard Fletcher drafted the general introduction, Simon Barton the bibliography, map and genealogical table.

We are indebted to many colleagues and friends to whom we have turned, and never in vain, for advice, help or information. Specifically we wish to put on record our gratitude to Martin Brett, Roger Collins, Emma Falque, Christopher Holdsworth, John Keegan, Peter Linehan, Raymond McCluskey, Marcelo Martínez Pastor, Maurilio Pérez González, Bernard Reilly, María José de Vega Alonso, Geoff West, John Williams, John Wreglesworth and Roger Wright. A special word of thanks is due to Jinty Nelson, the series adviser, both for her enthusiastic encouragement of our project and for her constructive critique of our efforts; also to Louise Edwards and Vanessa Graham and their colleagues at Manchester University Press in watching over the progress of this book from its outset to its completion.

The dedication is the expression of a different sort of debt. Barrie Dobson has been a colleague, mentor and friend of us both over many years. In dedicating this book to him in the year of his retirement we register our gratitude.

Simon Barton  
Richard Fletcher

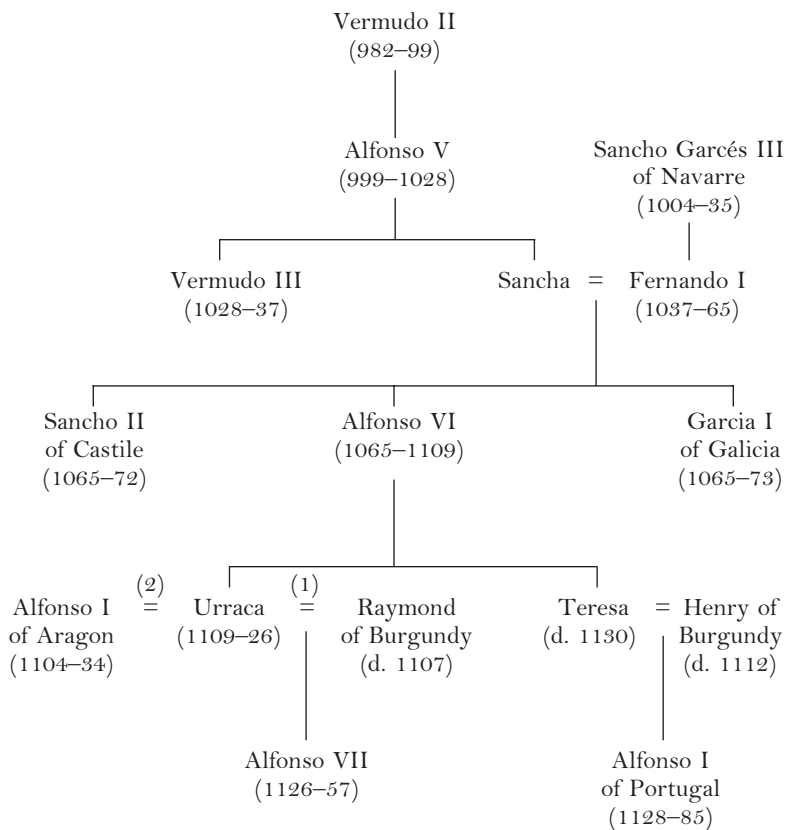
## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>AHDE</i>	<i>Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español</i>
AHN	Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid
BN	Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid
<i>BRAH</i>	<i>Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia</i>
<i>CAI</i>	<i>Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris</i>
<i>CCCM</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis</i> (Turnhout)
<i>CD Fernando I</i>	<i>Colección diplomática de Fernando I (1037–1065)</i> , ed. P. Blanco Lozano (León, <a href="#">1987</a> ).
<i>CHE</i>	<i>Cuadernos de Historia de España</i>
<i>ES</i>	E. Flórez, M. Risco <i>et al.</i> , <i>España Sagrada</i> , 51 vols (Madrid, <a href="#">1747–1879</a> ).
<i>HC</i>	<i>Historia Compostellana</i> , ed. E. Falque Rey, <i>CCCM</i> 70 (Turnhout, <a href="#">1988</a> ).
<i>HR</i>	<i>Historia Roderici</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Historia Silense</i>
<i>JL</i>	<i>Regesta Pontificum Romanorum ad annum 1198</i> , ed. P. Jaffé, revised S. Loewenfeld, <i>et al.</i> , 2 vols (Leipzig, 1885).
<i>JMH</i>	<i>Journal of Medieval History</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Poem of Almería</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , ed. J.-P. Migne, 217 vols (Paris, <a href="#">1844–64</a> ).
<i>RMP</i>	R. Menéndez Pidal, <i>La España del Cid</i> , 2 vols (7th edn., Madrid, <a href="#">1969</a> ).





1 The Iberian peninsula at the death of El Cid, 1099



## 2 Genealogical table of the Leonese–Castilian royal house

To Barrie Dobson

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Visigothic monarchy of Spain which flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries was the most sophisticated of the misleadingly so-called barbarian successor states which replaced the Roman Empire in western Europe. It was sophisticated in its grasp of the institutional inheritance from Rome, in its nurturing of the wealth of the rich provinces of the Iberian peninsula and in its encouragement of a lively Christian literary and artistic culture. Later generations would look back nostalgically to the revered figures of the seventh-century golden age: godly lawgiving kings like Sisebut and Wamba, towering giants of Christian learning like St Isidore of Seville and St Julian of Toledo, the devout prelates who attended the long series of ecclesiastical councils of Toledo and elaborated the splendid liturgy of the Visigothic Church. This cultural achievement was shattered and dispersed by the Islamic conquest of Spain in the early years of the eighth century.

'Islamic conquest' is shorthand. The conquerors were led by Arab Muslims, but their rank-and-file were Berbers from north-west Africa, recently subdued with great difficulty by the Arabs and as yet, little touched by Islamic teaching. The Christians who were vanquished did not regard the conquerors as the adherents of a new religious faith but as heretics, deviants from Christian orthodoxy. That the Visigothic state could be destroyed as the result of a single defeat in pitched battle may be seen as paradoxical tribute to the very effectiveness of its monarchy. But Christian Spanish society continued to function, albeit under more-or-less severe dislocation in the course of the eighth century, under the new masters. It was only very gradually that a distinctively Islamic society came into being in what the Arabs called al-Andalus, by which they meant that large part of the Iberian peninsula under Islamic rule. The Berbers became more Islamicised. Some indigenous Christians started to drift across the religious divide and embrace the faith of Islam. Others abandoned their homeland and departed to make new lives for themselves under Christian rulers elsewhere.

Some of these refugees sought asylum in distant places beyond the Pyrenees. Others remained within the peninsula, finding refuge on its northern fringes. Up in the north-west, from the Basque country of



the western Pyrenees along the Cantabrian coast to Galicia and the Atlantic, the Arab hold had been uncertain, even reluctant. The area was ecologically unappealing to them: distant, mountainous, cold, wet, a waste land where camels ailed and no dates grew; it was not worth the striving for. The rulers of al-Andalus accordingly withdrew their northern frontier to the line of the River Duero, which they fortified with a network of strongpoints. To the north of that line there grew up in circumstances of some obscurity a Christian mini-principality, initially clustered about the royal residence at Oviedo in the Asturias, later expanding to the east and west, and then spilling southwards over the Cantabrian mountains into the valleys of the northern affluents of the Duero and finding a new focus and centre, early in the tenth century, at the town of León. It is with the activities of the kings of León that three out of the four narratives in this volume are principally concerned.

León was not the only Christian principality in early medieval Spain. In the western Pyrenees a kingdom of Pamplona, later to be known as Navarre, emerged in desperately obscure circumstances in the ninth century. An eastern subdivision of Navarre, taking its name from the River Aragón in whose headwaters it had its nucleus, would be constituted a separate kingdom in the eleventh century. Further to the east, in Catalonia, the Frankish aristocracies of southern Gaul set up frontier lordships, collectively known as the 'Spanish March' (or 'Frontier'), in a kaleidoscope of eastern Pyrenean counties – of Urgell, Conflent, Cerdanya, Besalú, Empúries, Girona and Osona (to name only the most important) which, bit by bit, would be amalgamated into a single county of Barcelona. The authors of the works translated here were not much concerned with Navarre or Aragon or the Catalan counties. A partial exception must be made for one of them, the anonymous author of the *Historia Roderici*, whose hero, Rodrigo Díaz (better remembered as *El Cid*), spent much of his turbulent career fighting in eastern Spain and had dealings with both the kings of Aragon and the counts of Barcelona.

Rodrigo was a native of Castilla, or Castile. This region was the south-eastern frontier province of the kingdom of León, taking its name from the *castella*, the castles which defended it from Andalusí raids. Restive under Leonese control, the counts achieved a *de facto* independence in the course of the tenth century, and Castile was constituted a kingdom in the eleventh. The confusing shifts of relationship between the kingdoms of León and Castile need no further

comment here: we hope that a tortuous path is adequately signposted in our notes. What needs emphasis here is that the ruling élites of León consistently thought of themselves as the primary political authorities in Christian Spain, heirs to the unitary monarchy wielded by the kings of the Visigoths back in the seventh century.

The Muslim rulers of al-Andalus – *amirs* until 929 when they took the spiritual title of *caliph* or ‘successor’ (to the Prophet) – had laboriously constructed an impressive centralised state, governed from Córdoba, which was at the peak of its power and renown in the tenth century. If, in retrospect, the Caliphate of Córdoba looks a little less stable than some of its historians have claimed, this was not visible to contemporaries. It loomed over the kingdom of León much as Constantinople at the same epoch loomed over the principality of Kiev. Relations between the two ill-matched neighbours were not invariably hostile but could easily become so. This happened during the last twenty years of the tenth century. The Caliph of the day had been effectively sidelined by his first minister, the *vizir* known to Christian chroniclers as Almanzor, from his honorific title *al-Manṣūr*, ‘the Victorious’. Between 981 and his death in 1002, Almanzor struck repeatedly at the principalities of the Christian north in a series of campaigns which left a scarred memory in the collective consciousness of their inhabitants: their impact can be felt in Bishop Pelayo’s *Chronicle of the Kings of León* and in the *Historia Silense*. Shortly afterwards, however, the terms of Leonese–Andalusi relations were entirely reversed. For reasons which are not wholly understood, the Caliphate of Córdoba lapsed into civil war and fragmented. By 1031 it had been replaced by a score of petty principalities, typically based upon a city and its surrounding territory, known to historians as the *Taifa* states (from an Arabic word meaning ‘party’ or ‘faction’) or simply the *Taifas*. The kings of León, notably Fernando I (1037–65) and his son Alfonso VI (1065–1109) became skilful in exploiting and manipulating the factious rulers of the Taifas. They operated what Angus MacKay has called ‘a protection racket’, offering their services as military ‘protectors’ in return for payment, normally in gold but sometimes in other forms such, for example, as the mortal remains of St Isidore, whose relics were ‘translated’ from Seville to León in 1063 as related at length in the *Historia Silense*. These payments of tribute were known as *parias*. There were opportunities here too for the royal henchmen, the nobilities of León and Castile, to profit by playing the same system, and indeed for freelance operators to break away from royal service

and to run their own rackets. The most famous of these men was Rodrigo Díaz, *El Cid*, whose astonishing exploits were narrated by the anonymous author of the *Historia Roderici*.

Christian rulers in eleventh-century Spain in general preferred tribute and plunder to gains in land. Some historians have claimed that they were, and had been since the eighth century, imbued with the zeal for *Reconquista*, 'reconquest', the all-consuming imperative of repossessing the homeland for Christian Spaniards. The claim has played a significant part in the Spanish national mythology. The truth would seem to be rather less straightforward. It is reasonably clear that from at least the latter part of the ninth century Asturo-Leonese ruling circles cherished ideas of continuity with the Visigothic past and, at any rate, from time to time dreamed of a restored Christian order which would supersede the alien Islamic presence. It is also indisputable that slow territorial expansion did take place: by the eleventh century the southern frontier of the kingdom of León lay along – very roughly speaking – the valley of the Duero; the no man's land separating Muslim and Christian had shifted to the south. But it would be imprudent to connect expansion with ideology alone. There were less exalted impulses at work. One of these was demographic. The mountainous north was probably densely populated in the early medieval period – in Catalonia, where records have survived in great abundance, it is demonstrable that the Pyrenean valleys were far more thickly settled a thousand years ago than they are today. The pressure of humans upon resources was a powerful stimulus to expansion, as was farming practice. Pastoralism played an important part in the Leonese economy. Surviving documents from the tenth and eleventh centuries reveal big herds of cattle, sheep and goats, and sizeable stud-farms for the stockmen and their lords. Ample pastures were needed. So too were armed men to patrol them and to garrison the strongpoints where a refuge could be found when Almanzor's cavalry was sighted. Eleventh-century León was an expanding kingdom, a frontier society imbued with a militant code of conduct; but that is not quite the same as being wholly animated by an ideal of reconquest.

Of course, some territorial adventures had a special resonance. In 1085 Alfonso VI captured Toledo. The diplomatic background to this was the king's ever-closer involvement, as protector, in the affairs of the unstable Taifa principality of Toledo. Eventually it made more sense to take over the principality than to go on trying to shore up a feckless ruler. But Toledo was no ordinary city: capital of the

Visigothic monarchy, seat of the Primate of the Spanish Church, where Isidore and Julian had sat in council and where the visible monuments of that golden age were a constant reminder of past glory – the gain of Toledo was the most resounding blow for Christendom yet struck in the century which was to close with the even more resounding capture of Antioch and Jerusalem by the armies of the First Crusade. And it was not only in Christian ears that it resounded. The remaining Taifa rulers were scared out of their wits. In their panic they sought help from Morocco and in doing so, signed their own death warrant.

In the middle years of the eleventh century a movement of what today would be styled Islamic fundamentalism had taken root in Morocco. The Almoravids were a sect of austere, unflinching Islamic rigour. Their armies crossed the Straits in 1086 to answer the appeal of their co-religionists and did indeed inflict a heavy defeat upon Alfonso VI at Sagrajas, near Badajoz, and went on to threaten his possession of Toledo. But they were also shocked by what they saw as the religious backslidings of their Taifa hosts. Shortly afterwards the Almoravid leaders turned upon the Taifa rulers and deposed them one by one. By 1095 all the Taifa states of southern and central Spain – the exceptions were Zaragoza and Albarracín in the north-east – had been taken over by the Almoravids. Al-Andalus was once more united, as in the great days of the Caliphate of Córdoba.

The early twelfth century was a time of peril for the Leonese, as the Almoravids kept up their pressure upon Toledo and the Tagus valley. Alfonso VI's empire seemed about to crumble, as the Aragonese seized eastern Castile and the county of Portugal began the drift towards independent statehood which would be realised a generation later when its count assumed the title of king. The author of the *Historia Silense* was a troubled man who wrote for an anxious generation, and the early chapters of Book II of the *Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso* are witness to the strains of life in Toledo under siege. Clerical contemporaries blamed the sins of the people, of course, for provoking the wrath of God into visiting another Almanzor-like scourge upon them. They also had it in for their ruler, Queen Urraca (1109–26), daughter of the son-less Alfonso VI, who has had a bad press from nearly every historian of her reign until quite recently; a woman who in fact – and like some other twelfth-century queens – did her best in exceptionally difficult circumstances and nursed her kingdom through the worst testing it had had to face for over a century.



It is easier for us than it was for contemporaries to see that the Almoravids were, or at any rate rapidly became, paper tigers. The Almoravid empire was a mushroom-in-the-night Berber creation which quickly lost its impetus, after a pattern which Ibn Khaldūn would delineate two centuries later. The leadership quickly shed its idealism, and in Spain became just a corrupt colonial regime. Within a generation Almoravid rule there began to unravel, the process assisted by widespread revolts which were encouraged by opportunistic Christian rulers. Once more, al-Andalus started to fragment into its component parts, the so-called Second Taifas.

This was the background to the exploits of Urraca's son Alfonso VII (1126–57), the first two-thirds of whose reign were vividly recorded by the author of the *Chronicle the Emperor Alfonso*. Briefly, after establishing his authority within his realm, Alfonso followed in the footsteps of his grandfather and embarked upon a mixture of tribute-taking and territorial expansion which culminated, for our author, in his conquest of the Mediterranean port of Almería in 1147. But there was a novel ingredient in the wars of Alfonso VII. The Almería campaign was contemporaneous with the Second Crusade and perceived as a crusade by, among others, the author of the *Poem of Almería*. Little by little, an ideological edge which would have seemed foreign to Alfonso VI or the Cid had sharpened the encounter between Christian and Muslim in Spain. At the time of writing the emperor's chronicler did not know that Almería would fall back into Muslim hands a mere ten years later, recaptured by yet another sect of Moroccan fundamentalists, the Almohads (who make, indeed, some brief appearances in his pages). But that story lies beyond our scope.

The century that elapsed between the latter years of Fernando I and the death of his great-grandson Alfonso VII saw far-reaching changes in the Leonese kingdom: unprecedented territorial expansion; unprecedented peril. It also saw entirely novel developments in León's relationship with the world of western Christendom beyond the Pyrenees. Though never entirely insulated from the rest of Europe – the tomb of St James at Compostela being alone sufficient to ensure a regular stream of foreign visitors – the kingdom of León had had little contact with the extra-Pyrenean world in the ninth and tenth centuries. From the middle years of the eleventh century, immigrants, especially from France, began to make their way to Spain in considerable numbers – royal brides and their households, Cluniac monks, secular clergy, architects and craftsmen, aristocratic adventurers, farmers,

businessmen, artisans and mercenary soldiers. At the same time, the reforming popes of the Hildebrandine age were turning their attention upon Spain for the first time and finding much about its Christian observance which did not fit with their notions of seemly standardisation. They used the incoming French clergy, alongside their own legates, as agents of change. A good example is Bernard de Sédillac, native of the Agenais in south-western France, monk of Cluny, abbot of the Leonese monastery of Sahagún (a dependency of Cluny) and as archbishop of Toledo from 1086 until 1124 the most influential figure in the modernising of the Church in Spain. The reformers changed much that native Spaniards had cherished: they swept away Spain's ancient liturgy; they forced Spaniards to learn to write with a new script – and the change from 'Visigothic' script to that called *francesa* (i.e. 'French' writing) is one with some implications for the dating of two of the works here translated; they introduced a new canon law. They may have introduced many other new books as well. It is likely, though unprovable, that Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*, so significant an influence upon the author of the *Historia Silense*, found its way to Spain at this epoch.

These cultural changes were stressful. It may not be wholly implausible to associate with these stresses the remarkable upsurge in historiographical activity during this age. The Leonese tradition of historical writing was feeble. A chronicle attributed to the Asturian king Alfonso III (866–910), surviving in several different versions, provided an outline of the doings of the kings from the accession of Wamba in 672 to that of Alfonso III himself in 866 (thus grafting the Asturo-Leonese monarchy onto the stock of the Visigothic). A continuation of this was composed, perhaps by the royal notary and subsequent bishop of Astorga (1035–41), Sampiro, which carried the same story down to the death of Ramiro III in 985 (possibly to that of Vermudo II in 999). And that, apart from a few jejune king-lists and annals, is all that we have from the leading Christian kingdom in Spain from a period of some four centuries. If the dates that will be proposed for the four works translated here are found persuasive, these varied histories were all composed within little more than a single generation: the (arguably) earliest, the *Historia Silense*, not before 1109; the (almost certainly) latest, the *Chronicle of the Emperor Alfonso*, in about 1150. Neither are these four the only historical works from this period. To them we should add the *Historia Compostellana*, the first part of the anonymous *Chronicle of Sahagún*, and perhaps the early

Portuguese annals. (There are in addition works concerning Iberian affairs written by foreigners, for example the English *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi* and Caffaro of Genoa's *De Captione Almerie et Tortuose*.) It is further to be remarked that the four works translated here differ markedly from one another. And while Pelayo's *Chronicle* is in the same genre as the *Chronicle of Alfonso III* and the *Chronicle* of Sampiro, and may indeed have been conceived as a continuation of the latter, the others strike out in different literary directions. Even when most indebted to literary models, as in the case of the *Historia Silense*, they are not slavish imitations but, albeit in a modest way, genuinely original and experimentative. Furthermore, they had no immediate successors. Leonese narrative history remained absolutely mute from c. 1150 until the composition of Lucas of Tuy's *Chronicon Mundi* nearly a century later. The works translated here, varied as they are, stand together as witnesses to a distinct and creative phase of medieval Spanish historical writing.

## Further Reading

This introduction is intended as the most basic form of orientation for the newcomer to medieval Spain. For more detail, recourse may be had to the following, listed in order of ascent from the simple to the more complicated.

- R. Fletcher, 'The Early Middle Ages' in R. Carr (ed.), *Spain: a History* (Oxford, 2000), 48–68.
- S. Barton, 'Spain in the Eleventh Century' in D. Luscombe and J. Riley-Smith (eds), *The New Cambridge Medieval History IV* (Cambridge, forthcoming).
- A. MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: from Frontier to Empire 1000–1500* (London, 1977).
- D. W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London, 1978).
- B. F. Reilly, *The Contest of Christian and Muslim Spain 1031–1157* (Oxford, 1992).

# I: *HISTORIA SILENSE*

## Introduction to the *Historia Silense*

This is a deeply problematic text. *Historia Silense* (henceforward *HS*) is the misleading name given to a composite historical miscellany whose main claim upon the attention of historians has been that it includes our principal narrative account of the Leonese monarchy between 1037 and 1072. Its interest extends well beyond this, as will emerge in due course. The work owes the title by which it is conventionally known to a supposed origin at the Castilian monastery of Silos. This attribution was defended tenaciously by the work's most recent editor, the late Dom Justo Pérez de Urbel, himself a monk of Silos for almost seventy years of a long life and one of her most loyal sons.<sup>1</sup> There are, however, few things to be said in its favour, but plentiful indications of an origin elsewhere. To lay my cards on the table at the outset, I shall suggest – as others have done before – that there is a strong probability that the work was composed by a member of the religious community of San Isidoro in the city of León, at a date certainly after 1109 and probably before 1118.

All those who have studied it are agreed that the text of the *HS* as it has come down to us is desperately corrupt. The earliest surviving manuscript (Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional 1181) is of the latter half of the fifteenth century and appears to be at least two removes from a presumed original. A glance at the notes to the translation which follows will show how frequently, if reluctantly, the translator has had to resort to emendation of the Latin text in an attempt to make sense of it. The principal editions of the work are not flawless, which further complicates the translator's task. It has also to be said that the author's literary tastes and pretensions, of which more below, constitute a further obstacle to ease of understanding.

1 *Historia Silense. Edición crítica e introducción*, eds J. Pérez de Urbel and A. González Ruiz-Zorrilla (Madrid, 1959) at pp. 68–77. The introduction which follows shares its theme with an earlier paper: see Fletcher, 'A Twelfth-century View of the Spanish Past' published in *The Medieval State. Essays presented to James Campbell*, edited by J. R. Maddicott and D. M. Palliser (London, 2000) pp. 147–61: although there is a considerable degree of overlap between the two pieces they are intended to complement, rather than to duplicate, one another.

Fortunately for us, the author made his intentions unambiguously plain in chapter 7. He proposed 'to write of the deeds of the lord Alfonso, the orthodox emperor of Spain', that is, Alfonso VI (1065–1109). Unfortunately he never completed his task, thus denying to historians a *Gesta Adefonsi* to set alongside other eleventh-century royal biographies such as Wipo's *Gesta Chuonradi*, the anonymous *Vita Edwardi Regis* or the *Gesta Guillelmi* of William of Poitiers. The *HS* is no more than the lengthy preamble to a work which was apparently never written.

Because the *HS* is too long to be translated for this volume in its entirety, it is appropriate to begin by briefly sketching the outline of the entire work, so that the reader can grasp the overall structure. In doing so I follow Pérez de Urbel's somewhat puzzling chapter-numbering. Chapters 1–6 contain introductory materials on the Visigothic monarchy of Spain, embedded in which lies the enunciation of themes which will be sounded more strongly later on. In chapter 7 (as we have seen) the writer stated his intention of commemorating Alfonso VI; he also offered some cryptic information about himself, with which we shall have to wrestle presently. Chapters 8–13 furnish a guarded narrative of the strife between Alfonso and his brothers Sancho II of Castile and García of Galicia which occupied the years 1065–72 and close with a forward look to the death and burial of García in 1090. The author closed chapter 13 with an announcement of the need to 'unravel the kingdom's origin'. This 'unravelling', which takes up about two-thirds of the entire work, is accomplished by the insertion into the text of three blocks of narrative (which are omitted from the present translation). These are:

- 1 The *Chronicle of Alfonso III*, a narrative of the deeds of the Christian rulers from the Visigothic king Wittiza (d. 710) to the Asturian king Ordoño I (d. 866), composed under the inspiration of the latter's son Alfonso III (866–910), perhaps even by him.<sup>2</sup> This occupies chapters 14–38 inclusive of the *HS*. The text is differentiated from other recensions of the *Chronicle* by numerous small verbal variants and interpolations whose character is such as to identify the editorial hand of the author of the *HS* (as we shall see in due course).

<sup>2</sup> An English translation of this work is to be found in K. B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain* (Translated Texts for Historians, vol. 9: Liverpool, 1990), pp. 159–77.

- 2 A *Continuation* of the preceding work which narrates the deeds of Alfonso III and his sons García (910–913/14) and Ordoño II (913/14–924). This runs from chapter 39 of the *HS* to chapter 47, where it breaks off in the middle of a sentence. There is no consensus as to whether this was the composition of the author of the *HS* or an editorial insertion by him: a knotty problem which is not relevant to our concerns here.<sup>3</sup>
- 3 The *Chronicle of Sampiro*, a narrative of the reigns of the kings of Asturias and León from the accession of Alfonso III in 866 down to the reign of Alfonso V (999–1027), attributed to Sampiro, notary, courtier and towards the end of a long life, briefly bishop of Astorga (1034–6). In Pérez de Urbel's edition of the *HS* Sampiro's narrative is, confusingly, given a separate enumeration of chapters (1–30), matching the chapter divisions proposed by the same scholar in the edition of Sampiro which he had published seven years earlier.<sup>4</sup> There are discrepancies between texts 2 and 3 in their treatment of the years between 866 and 924. Furthermore, there are no interpolations into Sampiro's text characteristic of the authorial tastes and habits of the writer of the *HS*. These two considerations have led to the suggestion that Sampiro's work either came late to the knowledge of the author of the *HS* or was inserted into his text by a later hand: another knotty problem. I am not persuaded that the final chapter (30) of Sampiro was wholly and exclusively the work of that chronicler and believe that its text shows traces of the editorial attention of the author of the *HS*. Accordingly, that chapter *is* included in the present translation, re-numbered as chapter 30\*.

In the wake of these three inserted narratives the author resumed his own account in or after chapter 30\* with a chapter numbered 69 by Pérez de Urbel (it is not clear why). Chapters 69–79 narrate the history of the Leonese kings between 956 and 1037, with a diversion on the early history of Navarre in chapter 74. The final section of the work, chapters 80–106, offers a fairly detailed account of the reign of King Fernando I (1037–65), the father of Alfonso VI. Into this narrative is inserted at chapters 96–102 the text of the *Translatio Sancti*

<sup>3</sup> Inconclusively discussed by C. Sánchez-Albornoz, 'El anónimo continuador de Alfonso III' in his *Investigaciones sobre historiografía hispana medieval (siglos VIII al XII)* (Buenos Aires, 1967), pp. 217–23.

<sup>4</sup> J. Pérez de Urbel, *Sampiro: su crónica y la monarquía leonesa en el siglo X* (Madrid, 1952): the cronicle is edited at pp. 275–346.

*Isidori*, an account of the movement of Isidore's relics from Seville to León in 1063, with some distinguishing editorial changes.<sup>5</sup> It is possible that the author also drew, for much of chapters 105 and 106, upon a contemporary account of Fernando's last days which has not survived independently. The *HS* closes with the obsequies of Fernando I on 2 January 1066. The author could now have turned to the deeds of his son Alfonso VI. If ever he did so, the text has not come down to us. But I suspect that, for reasons about which we can only speculate, he never committed his *Gesta Adefonsi* to writing.

The author did his work after 1109, the year of Alfonso's death, because he tells us in chapter 7 that 'the whole length of his fragile life has been run'. In chapter 13 he informs us that Cardinal Rainerius 'who later became pope' was in León as papal legate and holding a church council there at the time of the death of Alfonso's brother García in 1090. Rainerius became pope as Paschal II in 1099 and died in January 1118. There is no hint in the *HS* that he was anything but still alive. This does not prove that composition occurred before 1118, but it certainly suggests it. All recent commentators accept this dating more or less cautiously.

Two misreadings might suggest that the lost autograph of the *HS* was written in Visigothic script, and this too would point to an early date in the twelfth century. In chapter 8 the word *perlabor* was misread as *profabor* and in chapter 13 *dolore* was read as *dolose*. Abbreviations and letter-forms in Visigothic script were such that copyists unfamiliar with it frequently misread *per-* as *pro-* and confused *l* with *f*, *r* with *s* (the latter with especial frequency). It would be unwise to make too much of this point, given the manifold corruptions of the text, but it might be allowed a little weight.<sup>6</sup>

We offer, accordingly, as a working hypothesis that the author was writing between 1109 and 1118. Where did he do his work? In a tantalising sentence in chapter 7 he tells us: 'I, then, submitted my neck to the yoke of Christ from the very flower of youth and received the monastic habit at the monastery called *domus seminis*.' Much ingenuity has been squandered in attempts to identify this mysterious *domus seminis*, literally 'the house of (the) seed'. Identification with the Castilian monastery of Silos appears to descend only from a marginal

<sup>5</sup> See F. Santos Coco (ed.), *Historia Silense* (Madrid, 1921), pp. 93–9.

<sup>6</sup> See further the introduction to the *Historia Roderici*. The point did not escape Pérez de Urbel, *Historia Silense*, p. 91.

note reading 'Santo Domingo de Silos' inserted beside the words *domus seminis* in a lost manuscript, now known as the Fresdelval MS, allegedly copied c. 1500. This manuscript was used by the antiquary Francisco de Berganza for the earliest printed edition of the *HS* in his *Antigüedades de España* published in 1721. Three copies of the Fresdelval MS have come down to us, of which the earliest dates from c. 1600: it contains the attribution to Silos. In other words, one sixteenth-century reader – between the putative dates of Fresdelval and of its earliest derivative – thought that *domus seminis* was Silos. This is very shaky testimony; neither is it strengthened by all the special pleadings of Pérez de Urbel. To this may be added other points that have struck most critical readers of the work: that the author never mentioned Silos; that he displayed little interest in Castile (as against León); and that at one juncture (ch. 92) he showed himself ignorant of Castilian topography. In the light of these considerations nearly all scholars now judge it well-nigh impossible to sustain the case for a Castilian origin for our text.

A much more promising approach lies in the suggestion that the words *domus seminis*, or the single word *seminis*, arose from a copyist's misreading or the mistaken expansion of an abbreviation. Two possibilities have been canvassed. One is that *domus seminis* is a mis-copying of the words *domnis sanctis*, perhaps originally abbreviated as *dms scis*. This would point towards the monastery of Sahagún, some fifty kilometres to the south-west of the city of León, whose dual dedication to Sts Facundus and Primitivus led to its being frequently referred to in its abundant documentation as the monastery *domnis sanctis*, literally 'at the lord saints', more loosely 'of the holy patron saints'.<sup>7</sup> In support of this identification there may be adduced, first, that Sahagún was thrice mentioned in the *HS* (in chs 41, 71 and 104); second, that given that Alfonso VI was buried there it would make sense to locate his biographer there too; and third, that Sahagún's library and intellectual traditions were sufficient to furnish resources,

<sup>7</sup> The case for a Sahagún provenance has been developed at greater length by J. M. Canal Sánchez-Pagín, '¿Crónica Silense o Crónica Domnis Sanctis?' *CHE* 63/64 (1980), pp. 94–103. Cautious support for it was shown by R. McCluskey, 'Malleable Accounts: Views of the Past in Twelfth-century Iberia' in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-century Europe*, ed. P. Magdalino (London, 1992), pp. 211–25 (at p. 214, n. 13): even more guarded is P. Linehan, *History and the Historians of Medieval Spain* (Oxford, 1993), p. 223. For an example of the phraseology from the very period when our author was at work see R. Escalona, *Historia del Real Monasterio de Sahagún* (Madrid, 1782), escritura cxlv, p. 510: 'loco quo dicitur Domnis Sanctis'.



context and perhaps stimulus to our unknown author. As against these points, it has to be said that indications of specific and strong Sahagún loyalties are lacking in our text. For example, although Archbishop Bernard of Toledo was mentioned in chapter 13, the author failed to draw attention to his earlier abbacy at Sahagún between 1080 and 1085; neither did he allude to Alfonso VI's burial at Sahagún when referring in chapter 7 to the king's death. Sahagún is a much stronger candidate than Silos: but there is one yet stronger.

A more economical and a more convincing emendation of the single word *seminis* was proposed in 1961 by the distinguished codicologist and palaeographer Professor Manuel Díaz y Díaz.<sup>8</sup> The word *seminis* is most plausibly explained as a mistaken expansion of the abbreviated words *sci ihnis, sancti Iohannis*, 'of St John'. This makes sound palaeographical sense: the letters *c* and *e* were frequently confused by copyists, and the rapid single downstrokes of the pen, known as minims, employed to render the letters *h, i, j, l, m, n, t, u* and *v* were (and are) a notorious source of muddle. One monastic 'house of St John' immediately suggests itself, and that is the community in the city of León whose dedication was to St John the Baptist.<sup>9</sup> This was a royal foundation, established by King Sancho I of León in or about 966, and enjoying thenceforward a close and warm relationship with the royal family. It was founded as a double house for both monks and nuns, the monks under the patronage of St John and the nuns under that of the Leonese child-martyr Pelayo. Properly, therefore, 'the house of St John and St Pelayo', it could in practice be referred to as either 'the house of St John' or 'the house of St Pelayo'.<sup>10</sup> Damaged by the destructive raids of Almanzor in the late tenth century, the house was restored by King Alfonso V (999–1028). Lavishly patronised by the latter's daughter Sancha and her husband King Fernando I (1037–65), the community received its most spectacular piece of royal largesse in 1063 when king and queen presented it with the relics of St Isidore,

8 M. C. Díaz y Díaz, 'Isidoro en la edad media hispana', first published in the collection *Isidoriana* (León, 1961), pp. 345–87, repr. in his *De Isidoro al siglo XII. Ocho estudios sobre la vida literaria peninsular* (Barcelona, 1976), pp. 141–201 (at p. 190 n. 139). The writer observed that he had already suggested this emendation on a number of occasions ('ya me pronuncié en varias ocasiones') which I take to refer to unpublished lectures.

9 See R. McCluskey, 'The early history of San Isidoro de León (X–XII c.)', *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 38 (1994), pp. 35–59.

10 See, for example, *Colección Documental del Archivo de la Catedral de León (775–1230)*, vol. III (986–1031) ed. J. M. Ruíz Asencio (León, 1987), no. 711, from the year 1013.

lately translated from Seville, an occasion described at length in the *HS*. The arrival of Isidore's relics began the process by which his patronage slowly replaced that of St John the Baptist. It is necessary to stress that this was a gradual process. The dual patronage of both St John and St Isidore for the masculine half of the establishment can be found in later documents such as a diploma issued by Alfonso VI in 1099.<sup>11</sup> It is not implausible that a writer active between 1109 and 1118, especially if he were an elderly man of conservative temper, should refer to the community as 'the house of St John'. It is even possible, if we press the sense of that puzzling sentence in chapter 7 to the limits, that the author was trying to tell us that he had received the monastic habit there *before* the arrival of Isidore's relics in 1063.

But this is to run ahead of the argument. Are there other indications in the text of the *HS* of a connection with this distinguished royal foundation in the city of León? Yes, and three of them are particularly telling. One of these lies in a minor editorial change which the author of the *HS* made when reproducing the text of the *Translatio Sancti Isidori*. Early on in the *Translatio*, Bishop Alvito of León was referred to as *Legionensis urbis episcopus*, 'bishop of the city of León'. But the author of the *HS* (ch. 96) changed the phrase to *huiuscemodi regie urbis episcopus*, 'bishop of this royal city'. León was often referred to as 'the royal city' in the documentation of the eleventh and twelfth centuries; and the community of San Isidoro – as we may for convenience now call it – lay within its walls. One could hardly ask for a clearer pointer to a place of composition within the city of León.<sup>12</sup> Second, when referring in chapter 103 to the rebuilding and embellishment of the church of San Isidoro by Fernando I and Queen Sancha, the writer named it as *hanc ecclesiam*, 'this church', thus localising himself and his primary audience within the community of San Isidoro. Third, in chapter 12 the author stated that he was aware of the wisdom and goodness of Alfonso VI's elder sister Urraca 'more by experience than by report'. Now the Infanta Urraca, who died in 1101, was closely

11 Printed in M. E. Martín López, *Patrimonio cultural de San Isidoro de León I/1: Documentos de los siglos X–XIII. Colección Diplomática* (León, 1995), no. 9, pp. 31–2. For the correct date of this diploma, 17 January 1099, see B. F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León–Castilla under King Alfonso VI 1065–1109* (Princeton, 1988) p. 292, n. 44.

12 G. West has uttered a caution in 'La "Traslación del Cuerpo de San Isidoro" como fuente de la Historia llamada Silense', *Hispania Sacra* 27 (1974) pp. 365–71 (at p. 366, n. 8): I have explained elsewhere why I consider this unnecessary; see Fletcher, 'A Twelfth-century View', p. 150, n. 7.