

## “Terra de Espanha”: A Medieval Iberian Utopia\*

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“Et esto fiziemos por que fuesse sabudo el comienço de los espannoles et de qualles yentes fuera Espanna maltrecha;... et por contar la nobleza de los Godos et como fueron viniendo de tierra en tierra... fasta que llegaron a Espanna et echaron ende a todas las otras yentes, et fueron ellos senhores della; et como por lo desacuerdo que ouvieron los godos con su sennor el rey Rodrigo... passaron los dAffrica et ganaron lo mas dEspanna; et como fueron los cristianos despues cobrando la tierra; et del danno que vino en ella por partir los regnos, por que se non pudo cobrar tan ayna; et despues cuemo la ayunto Dios,... et quales reyes ganaron la tierra fasta en el mar Meditarreneo...”

This is an extract of Alfonso X Prologue to his *Estoria de España*, at the inaugural moment of vernacular Hispanic historiography. As it shows, long before “Spain” emerged as a state and appropriated the use of a name which had previously conveyed a wider and more complex concept, there was “Espanha”, or, as it was sometimes more thoroughly designated, “Terra de Espanha”. Far from being a mere geographic entity, this medieval territorial idealization is a good example of “Iberia” as this Symposium intends to study it: the Iberian Peninsula understood as “a common cultural space, with a shared history and destiny”. In fact, for many centuries, while the Iberian Peninsula was largely under Moorish domain and the Christian territory was politically divided into several kingdoms, the idea of a united “Espanha” seems to have been a culturally productive and ideologically mobilizing force for the peninsular warrior aristocracy, who in the course of time came to assume the memory of that lost unity as a heritage, an identity, or perhaps I should say an inherited identity. Therefore, the obligation to restore “Espanha” became a shared mission – the “Reconquista”. The purpose of this paper is to elucidate some aspects of the

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way in which this idealized “Espanha”, indissociable from both the concept and the progress of the “Reconquista”, was imagined and represented during the first brief century of vernacular peninsular historiography, approximately from 1270 to 1350.

In his study *El Concepto de España en la Edad Media*, José Antonio Maravall affirms the essential inter-dependency, in the Medieval Iberian context, of the idea of *Espanha* and the representation of *Reconquista*: “España designa, in nuestra Edad Media, el ámbito de una Reconquista y el objeto o término último de la misma”. Maravall is undoubtedly right. Yet, it would be misleading to suppose that both *Reconquista* and *Espanha* preserved the same ideological features and political functionality throughout the duration of Moorish presence and over the entire peninsula. In fact, the interweaving of concepts out of which this twofold construction emerges is a long term literary process that was from its early stages appropriated and manipulated by the Asturian-Leonese monarchy, but whose legitimizing political potential has only been fully grasped by other peninsular monarchies and by the warrior unruly aristocracy during the course of the thirteenth century and the first half of the fourteenth, having reached its most consensual historical moment in the Battle of Salado, in 1340. It should be borne in mind that the word *Reconquista*, commonly used by historians since the nineteenth century, is nowhere found in Medieval writings. Still, it seems to correspond to an operative concept in the social, political, religious and, in a broad sense, cultural dynamics of Iberian Middle Ages. Rather than contesting its use, this study will endeavour to enlighten a few of the ways in which it is represented in Iberian historiographic writings.

As far back as the early fifth century, Paulus Orosius allegorized the name *Hispania* into a complex concept under which he identified the Hispanic territory and the human community that inhabited it. That Orosius endows his allegory with the capacity to judge the cruelty which the Romans used to enforce their power, and shows “Universa Hispania” in indignant tumult against their actions, is perhaps not without bearing on the subsequent semantic overtones of the word. Isidore of Seville joined Orosius’ allegorical dimension to the literary tradition of the “laudes hispaniae” deeply rooted in antiquity. In his

*Historia de regibus Gothorum*, dating from roughly a century before the Moorish invasion, his celebration of the flourishing Visigoth kingdom gave form to an apologetic and exhortatory text, where he addressed “felix ... mater Hispania”, at once amorously praising it above all others and vigorously inciting it to maintain its state of glory. In 754, barely half a century after the fall of that kingdom, the author of the *Continuatio Hispania* or *Crónica Mozárabe*, perfectly in tune with Isidore’s Hispanic consciousness although far removed from his euphoric gaze at history, contemplates the extant “Spaniae ruinas” and answers his predecessor’s praise with an emotional lament over the loss of “Spania condam deliciosa et nunc misera effecta”. The coupling of the themes of “laudes” and “deploratio” of *Hispania*, that by lending *Hispania* the status of a shattered memory implicitly recognized the end of an era, was to remain absent from Iberian historiography for about half a millennium, until the thirteenth century.

In the meantime, the view that the Gothic kingdom had come to an end was shared by texts originating from the peripheral regions of the ancient Visigoth realm, while Asturian-Leonese historiography had constructed, step by step, the neo-Gothic legitimization of the kingdom. In short, that process consisted of effacing the peripheral ethnic origin of the conquerors and rulers of the new Christian enclave, and endowing them with a Visigoth ancestry. This strategy had its starting point in the postulated Gothic origin of Pelayus, first explicitly stated in the *Chronicon Albeldense* in 881, and culminated about twenty years later in the *Crónica de Alfonso III*, with the forgery of an unbroken lineage of Visigoth and Asturian kings. The confirmation of monarchs by a patrilineal principle of succession made the Asturian kingdom appear the legitimate heir of Visigoth domain over the land and instituted it as a survival of the superseded Christian empire of *Hispania*, implicitly subordinating to it all neighbouring political entities. Asturian appropriation of the legitimacy of political power over Hispanic territory naturally passed on to the Leonese monarchs, and deeply marked the historiographic images of the founding heroes of the Christian kingdoms that were later to split off from Leon claiming their share of Christian territory and the right of conquest over Moorish land. This is the case of Fernán González and Afonso Henriques, the architects, respectively, of the

territorial independence of Castile and Portugal. In early Castilian and Portuguese historiography both men are portrayed as ferocious and shrewd opponents of the king and kingdom of Leon, but their fights against the moors, although historically based and vital to the cohesion of the territories under their political domain, seem to have been ignored or underestimated in the early local narratives that concerned them. Well, one may ask, where, in all this, is the *Reconquista*? Where is *Hispania*?

Odd as it may seem, under such contrary circumstances, the idea of *Hispania* as a unity of some kind remained. The word, later to become *Espanha* in vernacular texts, continued to be used with both a geographical and an historical scope, alternating with other much less frequent totalizing designations of the peninsular territory, *Iberia* or *Hisperia*. It sometimes took the plural form, *Hispaniae*. The plural, especially when issuing from a clerical source, may bear an echo of the ancient Roman geographical division between *Hispania citerior* and *ulterior*, which, though long out of use, to some extent matched the division of the land into Christian-north versus Moorish-south. However, it is possible that the plural was meant without a definite geographical sense, and expressed instead the conflicting image of the idealized historical Hispanic unity of the past versus the scattered territorial reality of Moorish and Christian kingdoms and counties of the present. It may even have conveyed elation at the idea of overcoming such a chaotic state of the land by reuniting the “Spains” under one single ruler, as seems to be the case when, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, Alfonso VI, Urraca I and Alfonso VII are each emphatically called *Hispaniarum Rex, Regina* or *Imperator*.

Very significant in that respect, even if at first sight somewhat puzzling, is the reference to the Moorish occupied territory as *Hispania* (Alberto Pimenta). In fact, this apparent yielding of sovereignty serves an opposite purpose: it testifies rather to a refusal to accept that the change of domain over the land can alter its essential unity. *Hispania* is *Hispania*, whoever rules it. Even when politically divided, even when shared with an occupying power, the historical identity of *Hispania* stays conceptually unchanged. From the Christian point of view, or at least from some Christian peninsular ideological perspectives, so tenacious was

that idealized unity that in the course of time it came to affect the way the invaders' were perceived. "Facta igitur concordia inter Sarracenos, Hispanos et Africanos...", Lucas de Tuy writes, explaining a double status recognized in the case of peninsular Moors. As if *Hispania* had partly absorbed the otherness that ought to characterize them, thus opening a breach in their alien identity and creating a breed of hybrid creatures in which "Hispanitas" and Islam ambiguously coexisted.

As for *Reconquista*, if we understand it not as the erratic circumstantial conquest of Moorish land protagonized by an individual or a group of individuals on behalf of a restricted Christian community, but as a concerted and conscious program of restoration of Christian sovereignty over *Hispania*, undertaken in the name of the people that had been robbed of it, we can see it emerge in the formulation of the *Crónica Profética*, dating from 883. This text displays an acute consciousness of the unity of *Hispania* that goes far beyond the self-legitimizing neo-gothic rhetoric built around the Asturian monarchy. Georges Martin has shown its coherence as an ideological proclamation of the bond between the Gothic people -- not as chosen lineage but as an ethnic unity, "gotica gens" -- and *Hispania*, whose integrity and sovereignty it is their destiny to restore and maintain: "l'assimilation ... providencielle, immuable, ontologique, figurée dans l'écriture, d'un peuple et d'un espace". The analyses of the text makes clear that, in spite of the sacred character of this mission, it is guided by an ethnic imperative, not by a confessional one, and that its intended outcome is political, not religious. Christianity happens to be the identifying factor that distinguishes, as a whole, those who consider themselves the rightful owners of the territory from the invaders; so, at least conceptually, religious restoration is assimilated to the recovery of the land. However, this is a consequence of the *Reconquista*, not its primary motivation.

Fighting between the two religious creeds was, of course, during centuries, an inescapable reality of the Iberian way of existence, marked by brutality on either side, and historiographic writings often describe the relations of peninsular Christians and Muslims in terms of a mortal enmity. Yet, historical evidence shows that such an extreme antagonism is often to be understood more as a literary convention used to give an adequate narrative shape to an

otherwise too complex ideological and political setting than as a realistic depiction of inter-religious peninsular tensions. A substantial part of the effort to re-establish Christian sovereignty over Hispanic territory is known to have been diplomatic, not military, involving truces, treaties and tributes that led to the suzerainty of Christian kings over Moorish *taifas*. That suzerainty based on tribute was considered to confer domain over the concerned territories is shown by the death-bed discourse of Fernando III to his son the future Alfonso X, included in the late thirteenth century *Crónica de San Fernando*:

“... señor te leixo de toda a terra delo mar aca, que os mouros del rrey Rodrigo d’España gãanado ouuerõ; et en teu senorio fica toda: a hũa conquirida e a outra tributaria.” (quoted from the Galego-Portuguese translation)

While this process assured political dependency, it did not restore the pre-eminence of the Christian church in the realms involved. Moreover, it is a well known fact that even when military action was involved, tacit or effective alliances between Christians and Muslims were not at all uncommon, and members of the warrior aristocracy commonly shifted their loyalty from their Christian lord to a Moorish one, and back. What we are talking about here was in no way regarded as unpardonable treason: it corresponded, in fact, to the extension of feudal political and social practices to a world whose boundaries naturally included the Moors.

A good example of this ambiguous mode of co-existence is given by none other than Alfonso VI, who in his youth took refuge from his brother Sancho II of Castille with the Moorish King of Toledo, and later, when he was already King of Leon and Castile, profited from his special knowledge of the surroundings to conquer the city where he had once been an honoured guest. The historiographic rendering of the surrender of the ancient capital of Visigoth *Hispania*, recovered after four centuries of Moorish occupation, lacks any hints of hatred or vengeance between victor and vanquished. As if it were merely the exchange of a piece on a chess board, the inhabitants accept Alfonso VI authority, “*ipsum recipientes honorifice in domimium et in regem*”, and the new Christian ruler gracefully and magnanimously lets them go on with their lives as

if nothing much had changed, allowing them to “remanere in civitate, retinere domus et possessiones suas”.

The subordination of the religious to the politic implicit in the *Crónica Profética* will underlie both the practice and the theory of the *Reconquista*, even if, from the eleventh century onwards, the influence of Cluny and the holy war spirit of the Crusade will slowly work to undermine it. Well into the fourteenth century, Don Juan Manuel, in *El Libro de los Estados*, will still vehemently deny that there is any crusading aspect to the *Reconquista*:

“... á guerra entre los christianos et los moros, et abrá fasta que ayan cobrado los christianos las tierras que los moros les tienen forçadas; ca, quanto por la ley nin por la secta que ellos tienen, non avría guerra entre ellos.”

Apart from the pre-eminence of ethno-politics over the call of faith, there is yet another innovative feature of the *Crónica Profética* that will prove of particular importance in the ideological shaping of the *Reconquista* through the centuries. Since the first Latin historiographical versions of the Moorish invasion, the political undoing and religious submission of a once united Christian *Hispania* was involved with a deep sense of guilt. One after another, the chroniclers attributed the fall of the Visigoth kingdom to the faults of its last kings – various faults and various kings, depending on which text, that eventually were subsumed by King Rodrigo’s multiple transgression. However, it was the *Crónica Profética* that changed the perception of fault from a circumstantial factor in the fall of the kingdom to a constitutive element in the destiny of the Visigoth people. In fact, this chronicle offers an interpretation of the history of *Hispania* according to a providential system where past, present and future are articulated in a logic of righteous destruction, transitory captivity and promised restoration; and the trigger that set the system in motion was none other than the sin of King Rodrigo.

After Jacques Le Goff’s study *The Birth of Purgatory*, it has been suggested (Madeleine Pardo, Israel Burshatin), that the *Reconquista* acquired in the Medieval Hispanic imaginary a similar expiatory role. The providential logic inaugurated by the *Crónica Profética* provides a perfect frame for such a conception of *Reconquista* as a time of penitence and of *Hispania* as the place

where the Hispanics would suffer and struggle to be worthy of salvation. Significantly, in the thirteenth century, when the notion of Purgatory was already fully active, historiography revived that old Mozarabic coupling of “laudes” and “deploratio” of *Hispania*. Instead of a eulogy, it could, under the new eschatological view, be read as the metaphorical setting of a scene where the providential expiatory quest of *Reconquista* was to be pursued. First Lucas de Tuy, though not very explicitly, then Rodrigo de Toledo, in perfectly articulated form, gave the topic a new twist, endowing it with a meaning that Alfonso X accepted and elaborated in his vernacular historiographic project.

At the same time, we can observe in the chronicles the recurrence of another coupling of motives: the loss of *Hispania* and the sin of King Rodrigo. Expressed in an almost formulaic way – variations over the words “Espanha, perdida por rei Rodrigo” –, that double reference periodically actualizes in the texts the interdependency of sin and fall, and crystallizes the notion of guilt arising from the memory of the destruction of Visigoth *Hispania*. This insistent codified reminder of what was felt to be the most grievous episode in the history of Iberia may seem odd, but, on second thought, is not surprising. The assumption of Gothic heritage had entailed the incorporation of Gothic guilt; however, in the thirteenth century, through the power of expiation, guilt had become an effective constructive force. Hence there emerges from the texts the image of an Edenic “Terra de Espanha”, held in glory and bliss by the Goths and lost through the quasi-Adamic sin of King Rodrigo, yet to be fully expiated.

The expiatory reconfiguration of *Reconquista* brought about by the advent of Purgatory may be useful to understand the ideological aim of a number of narratives, inserted in early vernacular historiographic works that feature a gallery of mixed blood characters, arising from both legend and history -- Mudarra Gonzalez de Lara, Alboazar Ramirez da Maia, and the *Infante* Sancho, son of Afonso VI by the Mooress Zaida.

One of these narratives is legendary episode concerning King Ramiro II of Leon, who lived in the first half of the tenth century and under whose reign the *Reconquista* took a considerable step forward. As the forefather of the Portuguese lineage of Maia, he seems to have been a favourite amongst

Medieval genealogists. The episode in question was first rendered by the *Livro Velho de Linhagens*, an anonymous Portuguese geneological work dating probably from the decade of 1280, which was reformulated around 1340 by Pedro, Count of Barcelos, bastard son of King Dinis of Portugal, in his elaborate *Livro de Linhagens*, a book that was to have an extraordinary fortune in peninsular history. The episode concerns the abduction of Ramiro's queen by a Moorish king and the vengeance of Ramiro, who went in disguise to his rival's castle to retrieve his wife, but upon realizing that she had betrayed him to her lover, kills them both; Ramiro then returns to his kingdom accompanied by his accomplice, a Moorish girl whom he marries after her baptism and who bears him a son. The fourteenth century reformulation is much more extensive, the plot is complicated by multiple abductions of both Christian and Moorish women, and it becomes hard to say who the villain is -- the Moorish king, Alboazar, or the Christian one, Ramiro. Be that as it may, the outcome of the second version is identical to that of the first: Ramiro marries a baptized Moorish girl, this time Alboazar's sister, and she bears him a son, who is named Alboazar Ramires. In both cases, the boy will become a great warrior and champion of the *Reconquista*. Moreover, although the first version does not mention it, the second briefly traces for each of the rivals a lineage of conqueror kings whose rivalry and struggle over "terra de Espanha" dated back from the time of King Rodrigo.

This is one of several Medieval Hispanic historiographic adaptations of the misogynous oriental tale of the infidelity of the wife of Solomon, abducted by a pagan king, which, as I have argued elsewhere, are symbolic re-enactments of the collective drama brought about by the division of *Espanha* and by the anguish, perplexity and frustration at the possibility that its full recovery by the Christians would never be achieved -- an inference supported by half a millennium of inconclusive fighting against the invaders. In short, this particular representation of the dispute of *Espanha* between Christians and Moors was rendered possible by the well established homology between woman and land typical of the archaic imaginary that shapes many Medieval works of literary fiction. In fact, the abduction of a bride or queen by the lord of the "other world", used in myths representing alternation between the worlds of fertility and earthly

sovereignty in order to symbolize the cyclical nature of time is a common motif in Medieval tales. Consider Arthurian romance, where such symbolism is connected with the motif of the wasteland, and is likewise used to characterize the negative political situation of kingdoms.

The eschatological conceptualization of the *Reconquista* as a transitory period of expiation was a way of neutralizing the spectre of a permanent stalemate in the political situation, as represented in peninsular narratives with the motif of abduction. Amongst them, the ones concerning King Ramiro have greater relevance to my present purposes because their narrative strategy clearly reflects symbolic needs created by providential expectations: they depict a messianic hero. That is the role of the son of Ramiro and his Moorish bride, who takes the place of the dead queen: this son will again set in motion the process of *Reconquista*, thus announcing the end of the period of penitence.

Another of these narratives whose oldest written version is inserted in early vernacular historiography is the well known legend of the *siete Infantes*, which constitutes the founding episode of the lineage of Lara. First reported shortly after 1270 in Alfonso X's *Estoria de España*, it was slightly reformulated in the *versión crítica* of the same work, and drastically rewritten in a much longer form by the Count of Barcelos in the *História Geral de Espanha de 1344*. I will not deal here with the unfortunate fate of the seven riotous *infants*, but would like to focus for a moment on the figure of their young half-brother, Mudarra. It so happens that, just like Alboazar Ramires, Mudarra González is the offspring of a Christian and a Moorish woman, in this case Gonzalo Gustioz de Lara, a Castilian nobleman, and an unnamed cousin or sister of the Moorish king Almanzor. Unlike Ramiro of Leon, Gonzalo Gustioz does not marry Mudarra's mother, neither does she convert. Mudarra is conceived in Cordova, while his father is Almanzor's captive; he is brought up in that city as a Moor and when he finds out about the murder of his brothers he goes to Castile to avenge them, becomes a Christian and never goes back to Cordova. Alfonsine chronicles do not care much about Mudarra's adventures. However, according to the Count of Barcelos' tale, upon his arrival in Castille he found a world paralyzed by a sense of sorrow and defeat, forever expecting a sign of grace. So, in addition to taking vengeance, he restores his father's domain, reduced to

wasteland since his brothers' death; he then conquers most of Castile, left defenceless by his brothers' death and occupied by their murderer, and gives it back to its rightful owner, Count Garcia Fernandez. He is also said to have fought many victorious battles against the Moors.

Once again, it is the role, indeed the destiny, of the son of a Christian man and a Moorish woman to be the long awaited hero that will bring order to a distraught and unruly *Espanha*. The fact that in both cases the very names, Alboazar Ramires, Mudarra Gonzalez, call attention to the mixed origin of these offspring makes it clear that their double nature is hardly irrelevant. One might argue that this is a mere coincidence, not a pattern. At any rate, the late thirteenth century's *Crónica de Castilla* presents yet another narrative with the same ideological implications even if, dealing as it does with historical characters, it cannot alter the inexorability of death in order to realize the messianic destiny of the hero.

I am referring to the story of Alfonso VI, *Imperador de España*, Çaida, the Moorish princess, and their son. According to both Latin and vernacular *Crónicas*, Çaida falls in love with Alfonso, or rather with his fame, after the conquest of Toledo. She wants to marry him and to confer on him domain over the rich cities in her possession. Alfonso accepts the advantageous offer, provided Çaida agrees to be baptized, which she does. So they marry and have a son, Sancho. When a new Moorish menace arises, Alfonso, old and ill, bestows on his very young son the command of the Christian army. Sancho is killed at the battle of Uclés. More than a century and a half later, the *Crónica de Castilla* adds a new trait to the story, and portrays the Emperor uttering a desolate lament over his son's death:

“Ay, meu filho, alegria do meu coração, lume dos meus olhos, solaz da minha velhice! ... Ay, meu espelho em que me soya ueer e con que tomava muy grã prazer! Ay, meu herdeiro mayor!” (quoted from the Galego-Portuguese translation)

This is a very significant text, not because of any presumed historicity, but precisely because it is unlikely that what it reports could correspond to the words of the Emperor, and yet the author of the *Crónica* thought it fitting to assign him this speech. In fact, it is a lament not only for the son, but for the

heir, and for the bereaved hopes that Sancho, Alfonso's mirror (as the lament puts it), might provide continuity to the empire of *Espanha*. It is a lament over a messianic hero who by his very existence signified the essential indivisibility of *Espanha*, the one whose moral right to finally reunite the whole of the "Terra de Espanha" under Christian rule could not be questioned.