

# An Overview of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula Culture: From the Pages of the Literature of Medieval Spain to its Cultural Context

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE MEDIEVAL IBERIAN PENINSULA CULTURE:  
FROM THE PAGES OF THE LITERATURE OF MEDIEVAL SPAIN  
TO ITS CULTURAL CONTEXT

by

MATTHEW J. BURNER

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Spanish  
in the College of Arts and Humanities  
and in the Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
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## ABSTRACT

The literature of Medieval Europe has been studied so extensively that there are a great number of academic contributions that can be analyzed by current and future generations. The purpose of this particular work is to examine this topic, but as it pertains to the Medieval Iberian Peninsula. The medieval age of Spain has been considered a period wrought with conflict and religious persecution throughout the confines of its borders. From the inception of the invasions of various European tribes into the Iberian Peninsula, the stage was set for a continual onset of conquest for many years to come. This conquest took place during the 800 years that the Muslims maintained control of the southern half of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula. Such an occupation was achieved by way of the Strait of Gibraltar in which a mixed force of Arabs and Moroccan Berbers overthrew the Visigothic kingdom, giving this Muslim power an unquestioned supremacy (O'Callaghan 1). In an effort to closely examine this period, this study analyzed *Las jarchas*, *El cantar de mío Cid*, and *Las coplas por la muerte de su padre*. The first two literary works written anonymously, the third by Jorge Manrique. With all three being key works from the Iberian Peninsula during the early part of the Middle Ages, the goal was to apply their principles to modern day culture. This work has interpreted in depth the code of honor and its use during the Middle Ages as a key element of its time, and has demonstrated that it is no longer followed as closely as it once was. It has supported the idea that although the Medieval Iberian Peninsula saw its conflicts, there was in fact a certain level of coexistence among the various religious groups sharing the peninsula. Along with these findings, this work presents the conclusion that although the distance in time is clear, it is important to analyze the literary works of the past in order to

have a clearer image of what the life and culture may have been like for the individuals who lived and breathed when the Middle Ages was their present time.

## **DEDICATION**

For my family,  
as time continues on,  
your supportive role in my achievements shall never perish

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The medieval age of Spain has been considered a period wrought with conflict and religious persecution throughout the confines of its borders. From the inception of the invasions of various European tribes into the Iberian Peninsula, the stage was set for a continual onset of conquest for many years to come. Though the Iberian Peninsula experienced occupation by groups such as the Celts, Romans, and Goths over the course of hundreds of years, not all of early Spain's encounters with unfamiliar powers caused such adverse effects. Perhaps the culturally richest of the groups that began occupying Spain in the 8<sup>th</sup> century was that of the Muslims. From the year 711 A.D. when they conquered the last of the southern Spanish-owned land for their people until 1492, the medieval territories—known today as Spain<sup>1</sup>—flourished with religion and culture, which governed the daily way of life for the Muslims. This occupation was achieved by way of the Strait of Gibraltar in which a mixed force of Arabs and Moroccan Berbers overthrew the Visigothic kingdom, giving this Muslim power an unquestioned supremacy (O'Callaghan 1). In between these periods, Spain saw the marriage of two Catholic reigns—Isabel de Castilla and Fernando de Aragón—which strengthened the Christian religion in Spain. The fortification of the Christian religion brought about unification of political dominance as well. This union came with the preservation of the royal courts, though better controlled by the King and Queen, and a permanent army that could defend these slowly strengthening territories as they made their way

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<sup>1</sup> Although much of this work contextualizes the many territories of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula as what we now know as Spain, it is important to remember that during the Middle Ages this area was not considered a unified country as it is now. In fact, the concept of *Spain* came much later, as in the medieval era the peninsula was an amalgam of different territories and reigns.

into future centuries.

In a panoramic view, with all of these existing situations taking place came the inevitable unification of religion as well. Authorized by the Pope in 1478, the Inquisition came to Spain with the goal of excluding those who did not practice Christianity within the Christian Kingdom. However this could only be achieved with support of the pontificate, so "the king and queen asked the pope in 1485 to grant the bull of crusade for way against Granada" and they made their desire known that "the holy Catholic faith would be increased and Christendom would be delivered from this continued threat at the gates [and] these infidels of the kingdom of Granada [will be] ejected and expelled from Spain" (O'Callaghan 214). The only possible option this group had—at that time—was to be converted, persecuted, or have to flee for religious freedom—the latter will be seen throughout many different points of view in history. As the *Reconquista* period came to an end in Spain in the year 1492 with the Muslim's loss of Granada, in which upon "embarking on the final stage of the reconquest, [the Christians] received the surrender of Muhammad XII (Boabdil), the last king of Granada" (O'Callaghan 214). With Muslim control of the Iberian Peninsula coming to an end, the peninsula was now stronger than ever under the Christian religion. Upon being under the rule of Charles V of Hapsburg (Charles I of Spain) who eventually obtained the throne through "purchased election" set a precedent. Being a King from Austria he did not initially speak Castilian, which would have made it difficult to communicate with his subjects, as he "occupied the throne without knowing a word of Spanish" (Galeano 24). From the 15<sup>th</sup> until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Spain was in the middle of experiencing its *Siglo de Oro*, or Golden Age period. During this time period came many masterpieces in the form of architecture, paintings, and literature. Many conflicts have stained the region we now know as modern day

Spain, and many had once conquered it. However the Muslim occupation that took place over the course of almost 800 years, created much more in exchange aside from war. Entire buildings were erected in the style of Muslim architecture, and an art style known as *Mudéjar* became very prevalent. Because of this, modern day Spain is able to benefit from structures such as the Church of San Andrés in Aragón and the Alcázar of Seville. Over time the Spanish language was also influenced by Arabic words, further increasing its lexicon over many generations. However, the timeless treasures that have been created for many to enjoy in modern times are that of the literature that came of this Muslim occupation. By reading and analyzing the *Jarchas*, *El cantar de mio Cid* and *Coplas por la muerte de su padre*, those who wish to further understand the antiquity of Spain may do so with great interest.

The *Jarchas* are the perfect representation of the mixture of language and culture that was brought to medieval Spain. Written anonymously, the *jarcha* was the final verse of a poem—which was written in Arabic or Hebrew—that was called a *muwashaha*. These poems, which were written predominately by males but using the female poetic voice as a means of communication, often depicted the “complexity of love or emotion”<sup>2</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 8). This sentiment can be seen from verse 6 of the *jarchas* where it is written that “...not being the spy tonight I want love”<sup>3</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 10).<sup>4</sup> Although the writing topics can be as general as seen in this verse, an over generalization of what an actual woman may write about is apparent. Therefore, the *jarchas* are a glimpse into how the woman was viewed in medieval Spain, both culturally and

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<sup>2</sup> My translation.

<sup>3</sup> My translation.

<sup>4</sup> Due to the lack of sources related to the *jarchas*, for this specific text, this source will be used for the purpose of citation.

socially. Women were not allowed to write and publish works; yet liberty was taken as an assumption in reference to content that they might write significantly well.

In complete contrast of the *jarchas* is the literary masterpiece *El cantar de mio Cid*, written by an unknown author. Instead, the basis of this epic poem encompasses the code of honor that was put into practice by medieval knights. Written in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, *El Cid* narrates the honorable life of Rodrigo Díaz from "the small town of Vivar, near Burgos"<sup>5</sup> who was treated brashly by "Alfonso VI, king of León and brother of Sancho II."<sup>6</sup> Because "Alfonso VI was not able to recover his own reign but instead added Castile to his territories, from that point forward his relations with Rodrigo were extremely tense: Alfonso VI sent Rodrigo into exile from 1081 to 1087"<sup>7</sup> (Michael 11). The code of honor, which was in place during the middle ages, becomes prevalent in *El Cid*, and demonstrates the three levels represented throughout the epic poem—these levels being God, the King and the lady and family: "God who gave us our souls, will also give us advice..."<sup>8</sup> (Michael 106). It is clear in this instance that God played a major role in the life of honor that existed in medieval times, being so the followed form of judgment for all. In other words, according to this perspective, everything that the individual may possess or achieve may represent the protection and approval of God. Not only did God play a role in everyday life, but also the King as well where "as el Cid arrived at the door, he found it well shut for fear of king Alfonso"<sup>9</sup> (Michael 80). Though a brief citation, the reason for no one wanting to support el Cid was the threat of castigation from the King. Because el Cid was banished from the land,

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<sup>5</sup> My translation.

<sup>6</sup> My translation.

<sup>7</sup> My translation.

<sup>8</sup> My translation.

<sup>9</sup> My translation.

anyone who helped or spoke with him would face impending punishment. This shows the sheer power that the King had over his loyal subjects. Finally, as el Cid meets his wife “doña Ximena before the altar”<sup>10</sup> his respect for the woman is apparent, as she is given the title of “doña”<sup>11</sup> (Michael 102). As a knight it was the duty of el Cid to show respect towards everyone, and he did so through his words and actions.

In continuation of the respect for others that was present for many in medieval Spain, we find *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique which shows the relationship with death and the consideration that existed for it in this time period, especially since Manrique "became an eminent figure of his era only on his death in April of 1479" (Marino 3). Not only are the *Coplas* a remembrance of Manrique's father, but also of the military greats that had once existed before: "...Julius Caesar in victory and battle...Hannibal in knowledge and work...Marco Atilio in the truth that he promised...Constantine in faith...Camilio in the great love of his land..." (Manrique 14). Although these exemplary individuals had passed on into the next journey—known as death—they are remembered for the great things they had done, and recognized by their strengths and not their weaknesses: “[t]hat of good coat, loved by the people for being virtuous, Master Don Rodrigo, both famous and brave...” (Manrique 13). Manrique's father, Rodrigo, is also recognized by both his son and the people who knew of the remarkable things he had done during his existence. However due to a shorter life expectancy than experienced in today's world, acceptance and a close relationship with death existed at that time. Rodrigo Manrique had a peaceful death, and his son Jorge was able to cope with this departure fairly well. The message

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<sup>10</sup> My translation.

<sup>11</sup> The word “doña”, which means *señora*, reflects a noble status. Today “doña” is still used in some Hispanic countries to show respect, admiration and consideration.

is apparent that life is short and that man or woman is not in total control of his or her destiny: “Let us not waste time in this petty life...in my death with peaceful will, clear and pure, so that for man to want to live when God wants that he dies, is lunacy”<sup>12</sup> (Manrique 19).

By analyzing these three works from a broad stretch of time throughout Spain’s early history, and in relation to this brief synopsis and history mentioned here, there are still many questions to delve into in this direction. This study will explore some of the aspects that may require further consideration. For instance with various codes of honor in place at the same time during the medieval era in Spain and its strong tie to religion, for what reason was an acceptance of the coexistence of Christianity, Islam and Judaism not considered? With such a strong emphasis on God being at the top of the code of honor and in chivalry, why did the Kings and reigns in existence exhibit such strong power and influence over its subjects? This fact may be especially disquieting when all those who pass on into the afterlife have God to answer to in the end, not their King or ruler in life. For that reason, what does it mean in the end for those who take the King’s desires over God’s desires? What does it mean in the end for the royalty who neglected their power and authority in such a manner? It is also understood, as well, that wars of any sort are not cost effective for any country at any point in time, nor is the funding of a movement such as the Inquisition. Based on the number of conflicts that took place in this period of Spain, how was the economic standing of the peninsula as a whole? Was this economic state a precursor for what was to happen in the future to create the social changes that occurred?

Finally, with the many years that it took the Spaniards to reclaim Spanish territory from the Muslims, was it necessarily imperative to fund the conquistadors that traveled to the new world

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<sup>12</sup> My translation.

so soon after? As the more famous conquistadors began their travels in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, this meant that not much time elapsed in between the fall of Granada in 1492 and the departure of conquistadors such as Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro—as well as the navigator Christopher Columbus who sailed for Spain in the same year. In fact, were these travelers taking their chances to line their own states with wealth, or doing the bidding of their King to pay for the destruction of Spain that may have happened over the course of almost eight centuries? This research will explore each of these questions in order to provide possible answers to these facets of the history of Spain that are present in the literature of the period in a tangible and acute manner.

With this research project I hope to explore all these inquires based on the analysis of the texts written in medieval Spain mentioned previously. Within this period in Spain, many events took place, and these events along with many masterpieces of literature contributed to shape what is now considered modern-day Spain. From the three pieces of literature analyzed that come from this period, those living in the now and even the years to come may have an opportunity to deeper understand the past. As time goes on and as these original resources become scarcer with age, it is more likely that we will have these studies to reference and learn from them. As technologies and modes of living are always advancing, interpretations will also change with the new generations taking part of this important process. With having a steady flow of academic studies, we would be able to decrease the growing disassociation that may occur with the studies of ancient periods as the time progress towards different interpretations and approaches. Inharmoniously, the world is becoming more and more desensitized to antiquities, and more emphasis is being placed on the now—*carpe diem* as seen by those who lived in more

ancient times. Academically, we need these studies of past times in order to remember what once was, so that we may move forward with the knowledge of how to function in a more significant and pragmatic mode, not only for today's societies, but for the interests of the future generations of learners and scholars.

## CHAPTER 1

### Coexistence of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Medieval Spain

Although the everyday way of life may have been somewhat unique for the different groups of individuals living in the Iberian Peninsula between the years of 711 and 1492 A.D., it could be implied that they would have been able to get along based on the codes that the Cid lived by as an example of the cultural and social context. With various religions and ideologies in place at the same time during the medieval era in Spain and its strong tie to religion, for what reason was an acceptance of the coexistence of Christianity, Islam and Judaism not considered? In hearing tales of the Crusades, the assumption seems to be made that there was nothing but fighting and blood-shed during this era. For that reason it is not surprising that one might believe there was never peace. However based on the way of life of the medieval era, the proverbial "code of honor" should have been practiced and accepted for all types of individuals, even if throughout certain cultures there were subtle differences in the way in which this code was applied across borders. For this reason it was speculated that the Muslim, Jewish and Christian people should have been able to interact with each other on an affable and peaceful basis. This kind of social interaction would have to include tolerance of creed, fair trade, and low presence of warfare enterprise. It is known however that there was a real tension between these people, especially during the time of the Cid. Although wars existed it would also be impractical to assume that the period between 711 and 1492 A.D. was riddled entirely with combat and lack of peace. In other words there must have been periods of relative well-being. However it is discernable to have a glimpse into the interaction of Muslims and Christians during wartime based on the interaction between the Cid and the Muslims on the battle field, where there is evidence of an apparent

mutual respect between the two cultures, which alludes to the fact that perhaps peace between the Christians and Muslims was possible to achieve and maintain at a certain level of interaction

Listen to me Álvar Fáñez – and all caballeros! In this castle – we have achieved plenty;

Muslims lay dead, – I see few alive. The Muslim men and women – we will not sell them, and to decapitate them – we will gain nothing; we will take them in, – here we will have nobility; we will stay in their houses – and we will make them servants.<sup>13</sup> (Michael 124)

If the Cid were to follow the wishes of his King, he more than likely would have had to kill the entire group of Muslims he had encountered—women and children included. However we observe based on the epic story of *El Cid* that this individual had a human respect for this culture, and saw no need for unnecessary killings. It can be inferred that by making servants out of the conquered group of Muslims in place of killing them, that the Cid aims to treat them with a certain level of dignity. This noble decision made by the Cid is one piece of evidence in support of the possible coexistence of the Muslim and Christian people. The second piece of proof of possible coexistence that exists within the legend of *El Cid* takes place after the battle that Rodrigo Díaz and his vassals have with Yúcef, where "the Cid was elated – as were all of his vassals that God gave them mercy – that they were victorious in the field; when the King of Morocco won as well, he left Álvar Fáñez – to account for everything" (Michael 198). After dethroning Yúsuf, the Cid decided not to kill Fáñez possibly so that someone could account for the honorable battle that took place. A knight with a sheer hatred for the Muslim people surely

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<sup>13</sup> My translation.

would not leave anyone seen as an opponent alive as Rodrigo Díaz had been portrayed in *El Cid*. Therefore this epic decree may serve as a confirmation that any individual that truly lived by the code of honor in this time surely would not kill a Muslim in the battlefield in a dishonorable manner. It could also be inferred that Fáñez was left as witness to tell the Muslim people of the honorable battle that had taken place, which showed the consideration that the Cid demonstrated for his opponents in war. The noble actions of Rodrigo Díaz in *El Cid* displayed the honorable interactions that may have occurred between Christian and Muslim soldiers in battle, but it does not answer the question as to whether or not they would have been able to truly coexist—as periods during war are entirely different from peacetime.

Teófilo F. Ruiz in his book *Spain's Centuries of Crisis: 1300-1474*, explains that the everyday interaction between the Muslim, Jewish and Christian people was different from what one might assume especially taking into account the idea of the Reconquest and the Crusades. In fact Ruiz states that

there was a slow reoccupation of the soil, that is, the settlement of Christians in empty or semi-empty areas in the north but no fully formulated ideology of reconquest, even if there was a grooming sense among the clerical elite and royal courts of the antagonism and differences between Christians and Muslims.

(Ruiz 14)

In the idea of *Reconquista*, the sentiment appears to be that something—such as land or an entire kingdom—has been taken back by force. Based on the description given by Ruiz, the idea behind "Reconquest" seems to have been done less forcibly than one might have imagined. Instead it appears as though the Christian people casually and indifferently made their way into less

inhabited parts of Spain, set up camp, and considered said land taken from the Muslims and conquered for the Spanish forces. While enacting this "reconquest"—or settlement as Ruiz more or less describes—at some point in time the pockets and areas of Christian inhabitants in Spain would have met with and had the opportunity to interact with the Muslims, as the Iberian peninsula was only so big. This interaction could range anywhere from everyday conversation and acquaintanceships to more practical matters such as business transactions. For example, one of the most common forms of interaction that occur between any groups of people who may not normally cross paths was trade. This practice came about due to cultural differences which eventually led to a sharing of this culture, which further led to bartering for any goods that one side found to be grown accustomed to and accepted by individuals and authorities.

At most of the events in history where two different groups of people interact there is almost always trade, and since the Iberian Peninsula was split between the Muslims and Christians there was a definite possibility that drastic differences between the two groups would provide for good trade: "it was a trade dominated by Muslim luxury goods, spices, silk, iron works, leather, and other products, and resulting from Muslim mastery of some of these trades" (Ruiz 18). Based on the types of goods that the Muslims traded the Christians, it is evident that they had something positive to offer to the peninsula. Although the types of spices and silks for example were not specifically stated, it could be reasonable to infer that they were not in abundance in this area and were sought after to some degree. The trade that the Muslims offered showed their good will to some extent, especially because of the level of interaction they would have had to show to the Christians. On the other side of the peninsula "the Christian north, the kingdoms of Castile and León, sent agricultural goods, livestock and raw materials south, while it continued the long

process of extracting surpluses from Al-Andalus through raids and tribute" (Ruiz 18). The Muslims came through and conquered much of the Iberian Peninsula around 711 A.D., it is quite possible that they were not used to this type of land or soil, which would lend to difficulties in farming and produce. To answer the question stipulated at the beginning of this chapter, this outcome could be one of the reasons why the Muslims trade with the Christians, who were more than likely generations of Spaniards that were used to the given conditions; it may have been needed to be taken into account for successful farming and raising of livestock. However, the unfair trade that the Christians made—in reference to Ruiz's explanation on how they gained surplus from the Muslims—shows that unlike the Muslims, the motives of the Christians were not as honorable as it may be portrayed in *El Cid*. While the Muslims were more than likely accepting their neighbors to the north and trading out of necessity, the Christians merely were setting out to attain the resources of the Muslims to satisfy only their own needs.

Due to the tumultuous relationship between the Christians, Muslims and Jews during this period of coexistence and trade, perhaps this relationship could also be interpreted as a metaphor representing the constant change that the Iberian Medieval Peninsula experienced. With the interchanging of culture and religion also came a change in ideals or basic common beliefs: "[t]here was also a related change in medieval encyclopedias, owing as well to the influence of Arabic upon Latin thought" (Glick 171). Over time changes to a specific people's thought process—be they cause for advancement or lack of progress—can provide a fresh outlook on the technologies or customs which have been both practiced and accepted for much time. The changes that occurred in al-Andalus "led to a redefinition of principles the generation or reception of new sciences unknown to the ancients" (Glick 171). It could be determined that the

cognitive process was affected by the cultural changes happening in the Iberian Peninsula, but what of these changes of the religious type aside from that of the Inquisition? As discussed in Thomas F. Glick's book *From Muslim fortress to Christian castle*:

Conversion in the Islamic world was not an individual or personal phenomenon but a civic and legal one. Therefore, the moment that Visigothic governance was replaced by a Muslim one, pagans converted *en masse* to avoid being killed.

There were individual Christians in Valencia, of course, but lacking an organised community, they would have been considered officially Muslim. (Glick 54)

Considering this general description of the rate of Islamic conversion and the law stipulated in the Dhimma that took place in the Iberian Peninsula at this time, it could be construed that these conversions may not have been as severe as Christianity in relation to the Inquisition, but were quite possibly comparable or at a level of severity all on their own. In an area of the peninsula where Christianity may have been weaker due to Muslim control, any Christians living in the area would have been faced with the choice to convert or flee for their lives.

Taking into account conversion of religion, change in cultural practices and economic trade, in an attempt to address the research question proposed at the start of this chapter, the following observations might be made. It does not appear that a coexistence between the Christian, Muslim and Jewish people happened after any specific thought to achieve this balance. Instead, it appears that along with a desire to make life easier to live in an environment wrought with sociocultural and economic differences, it could instead be determined that a certain level of coexistence was achieved by causality. Even though there were times of fighting, in order to truly exist within the confinements of a given territory, there should be times of peace. In other words it is plausible

that the different religious groups simply accepted the differences among each other. It could also be speculated that these specific groups lived autonomously and only interacted on a level of necessity, such as the trade that occurred between the Muslims and Christians mentioned earlier in this chapter. In regards the latter of these two hypotheses, the interaction between these cultural and religious groups would have been so minimal that perhaps it might not qualify to be thought of as coexisting. Instead it appears that any interaction was due to the space that they all shared within the borders of the Iberian Peninsula.

## CHAPTER 2

### Differences between Christian Military Life and Muslim Military Life

Due to the nature in which *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* was written by Jorge Manrique—more specifically the manner in which he writes about not only his father but of other military greats from history—this literary work can possibly be used to better understand the military life that may have existed between the Christians and Muslims during the Medieval Ages. By citing other specific traits or feats of the great individuals that came before him, Manrique puts both their and his late father's accomplishments on a level playing field of discussion. However it may be risky to speak so highly of individuals in a sense of idolization because with such a strong emphasis on God being at the top of the code of honor and in chivalry, what does it mean in the end for those who take the king's desires over God's desires? The vassals who followed the king's wishes instead of God's ran the risk of doing harm to their experience in the afterlife, which is a gamble that traded the short-term experience that is their life for their long-term experience in the afterlife. At the same token what could be said about the end of days for the royalty who neglected their power and authority in such a manner? Surely as a role model to the system, it could be hypothesized that between the king and the vassals and *common people* below him, the king being in a higher demand of expectation would surely have the most at stake.

It is debatable as to whether Manrique's father truly was as comparable soldier to the individuals mentioned by Manrique, but using the *Coplas* as a guide it becomes quite apparent as

to how Manrique or other writers of his time may have seen such military service as honorable in general.<sup>14</sup>

In adventure, Octavio;  
Julius Cesar in victory  
and battle;  
in virtue, Africano;  
Hanibal in knowlege  
and work.<sup>15</sup> (Manrique 14)

In the same way that Manrique wrote *las Coplas* to honor his father, the small list of individuals named from the past are in a way also honored, remembered by their feats as military men. Due to the fact that these soldiers were not living in the period in which the *Coplas* were written, nor are they living during modern times, by being placed in Manrique's work for the feats by which he recognizes them, they in turn have been immortalized for such feats. It is however important to remember that the feats cited by Manrique are by no means unattainable to the common person or soldier, but can quite easily be attributed to any common human—thus putting Manrique's father on an equal level to these men who, historically speaking, may have been the inspiration for his very own military involvement. With this we see through literature how past soldiers may have been seen as a positive influence to those who desired to strive for excellence.

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<sup>14</sup> It is not the purpose of this study to examine the particularities of military history or methods of medieval warfare, but mainly to use the literature of this time to better understand the underlying issues that may have inspired works such as *las Coplas* and to better understand what the literature may tell us about everyday medieval life in the Iberian Peninsula.

<sup>15</sup> My translation.

Although military personnel during the Middle Ages may have been respected for their feats both in their time of living and in the many centuries to come, the simple fact still exists that these individuals—though they may have come near to death to gain their achievements—are not invincible. Through the literature of the time the reader may come to the realization that a life can only be lived so long regardless of how well it has been lived, and everyone must answer to death at an inevitable but certain point

After having well served  
the crown of the true king;  
after many feats  
that cannot stop at  
certain accounts,  
in its villa d'Ocaña  
death came calling  
to its door.<sup>16</sup> (Manrique 17)

No matter what an individual has accomplished or what possessions she or he may have gained throughout their life, she or he still must be prepared to embrace the reality of mortality.

However, it is also noticeable through the literature of this period that the person who has passed away can only be remembered by how others choose to define them, thus paving the way for future generations to make their own contributions. Towards the end of his *Coplas*, Manrique mentions something in his verse that perhaps best defines the outlook on death and the military life of the Christians

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<sup>16</sup> My translation.

Let us not waste any time  
in this miserable life  
such that,  
my will is  
in agreement with the divine  
with everything;  
and I allow my peaceful death  
with clear and pure will,  
that man wants to live when God wants that he dies,  
is madness.<sup>17</sup> (Manrique 19)

With the basic impression of this *copla* it is made known that life cannot be expected to last indefinitely, and at any rate it shall be controlled by the concept of God Himself—the all knowing, all seeing ruler of the Heavens that offers His judgment in the after-life. For that reason there was a need to accept the life that was predestined by the Creator and embrace the time of death peacefully and whole-heartedly. For a member of the Christian military venturing on a crusade into Muslim territory for example, their pass is imminent and well-accepted—or at least understood due to the life in the battlefield.

*Las Coplas* written by Manrique can be used to analyze and interpret the military life that may have existed in the medieval Iberian Peninsula, however his work may have been useful to analyze more as well "[s]cholars have found in Manrique's wistful recollections of the aristocratic life – represented also by his references to military actions, especially his father's

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<sup>17</sup> My translation.

exploits – a sense of loss for the social order that was undergoing transformation during his lifetime" (Marino 11). Taking into account the analysis of Nancy Marino, the reader may observe that the *Coplas* can also be used to not only understand a little more about the military life in the time of Manrique, but also how members of the military cope with the everyday life of this period:

Despite Don Jorge's assertions that every man must die there is little trace of any man in his text who is not of royal or noble blood. He makes the usual Dance of Death mention that "papas y emperadores/ y perlados" share the same destiny as "los pobres pastores/ de ganados" (stanza 14); toward the end of the work he mentions "los buenos religiosos" who gain eternal life through prayer.

Nevertheless, these remarks are impersonal. (Marino 12)

In reference to the lack of inclusion of "non-elites" in Manrique's *coplas*, it is plausible that being of a military status meant being of a more elite status. If this interpretation is valid and the military life was categorized on such a pedestal, then in reality the *Coplas* would serve only to negate the sentiment of "death brings equality." By choosing to omit any class below the ranking of military simply by lack of mention, the *Coplas* serve to equalize the elites to the less fortunate, but do not equalize the less fortunate to the elites—in death the common people maintained their status in life, thus traveling along a linear path. It is to say that in death every person shall be treated as an elite, and this shall not be based on the amount of greatness one has achieved over another individual.

However perhaps the best literary evidence that we have in reference to the coexistence between Christians and Muslims in the medieval era Iberian Peninsula and how they experienced

life are the *jarchas*. The "jarchas are the last grouping of verses of a poem called a muwashaha<sup>18</sup> and were written in Arabic script but by using colloquial dialects of the Iberian Peninsula" (Paredes-Méndez 8). Therefore if the cultures were not only interacting on a religious and economic level, but also in reference to the poetry emerging from the peninsula, there exists good evidence as to how life—both common and military—was interpreted in the medieval Iberian Peninsula. The description of the *jarchas* given in the preliminary chapter of *Voces de España* states that "even though the majority of the jarchas were written by men, generally women were the protagonists"<sup>19</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 8). Beside the information registered in the Sharia Law, this explanation gives us valuable social insight as to how the women were seen and treated during the time that the *jarchas* were written. They represent the hardships that women endured by not having the privilege to speak for themselves. *Las jarchas* also often were written from a perspective that made women of this period seem helpless and highly vulnerable:

Mother, this insolent and unruly person

He takes me by force

and I do not see the future.<sup>20</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 10)

It can be interpreted by the reader that in this excerpt either the woman has figuratively fallen madly in love with this "insolent and unruly" individual—if the description does not represent a poetic hyperbole by the author—or the woman literally could have been taken over by force. However perhaps another important verse from this specific *jarcha* to analyze is the first verse

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<sup>18</sup> As per my translation of this citation "the muwashaha was a poetic creation in Arabic or Hebrew, whose theme was constructed by taking some verses that appeared at the end of the poem as a basis for writing" (Paredes-Méndez 8).

<sup>19</sup> My translation.

<sup>20</sup> My translation.

Mother, the merchant of necklaces does not want  
to lend me jewelry.

My white neck will see air my love:  
it will not see jewelry.<sup>21</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 9)

The aforementioned examples surely demonstrate the social structures of the Iberian Peninsula, and these structures are very relevant samples of how female could be utilized during times of military occupancy. During the Middle Ages, the woman was seen as the caretaker of the home and of the children. Though they should have been respected due to the code of honor, it might be plausible that they were taken advantage of by soldiers because they were not seen as being in a position of power at that time.

Using the general idea of the *jarchas* as an example and especially the two verses cited in this chapter, it is difficult to say if they represented the military life of the Christians or that of the Muslims, however it is understood that they represent some form of this interaction among both cultural groups. If we use these examples to understand the context of this cultural encounter, it could be applied to a Muslim soldier fighting and living in Christian territory or a Christian soldier fighting and living in Muslim territory. The fact of the matter is that these soldiers may have been out in the field for some time, and witnessed a certain level of combat or even death. Because of this ordeal placed on the human body, it could not be unusual that these soldiers would have been weak or drained physically, emotionally and even mentally. When this setting is taken into account, it is quite possible that at the sight of a woman, a soldier, or military personnel could have been over taken by emotion, and their reaction was to take advantage of the

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<sup>21</sup> My translation.

women during these hardships. However a scenario less severe could be paired with the other citation referenced in this chapter, the protagonist and the jeweler.

Given the same idea that the military of both a Muslim and a Christian Iberian Peninsula struggled to make the best of their situation, there is also the possibility of love or emotional interactions that took place between soldiers and the women that they may have come across in their journeys. What the future theatrical work of *Celestina* would come to introduce as *amor cortés*<sup>22</sup> was quite possibly alluded to hundreds of years prior in the variations of the *jarchas*. During a time where the Muslims and Christians were more than likely hesitant to enter into partnerships—although it may have not been uncommon—the verse referencing the jeweler could be a direct representation of a soldier trying to win a female's hand with jewels and other expensive goods. It is difficult to determine whether it was the Muslim or Christian side that was perpetrating this, it is sensible that such interactions could have been common in the dually controlled Iberian Peninsula at this time. Following the same analogy as to how the women of the medieval Iberian Peninsula may have been treated when met with the everyday military life, the final verse of the *jarchas* could depict a dark yet possible outcome that may have occurred if the soldier's advances were not accepted by the woman

Friend, do not kill me! No,

I do not want the one that does causes damage!

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<sup>22</sup> During the more humanist periods of Europe and possibly as early as the medieval ages, there existed a term known as *amor cortés*. This phrase meant that an individual had feelings for or loved another, yet the other individual did not reciprocate nor share these emotions. As the *amor cortés* reflected by *Celestina* represents a unique severity in its own, the significance of the relation between this work and the term *amor cortés* is merely to demonstrate that such a term existed, even if such a term may not have been utilized by authors during the time *las jarchas* were in use.

My blouse is fragile. Stop!

I reject everything.<sup>23</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 11)

Although it may just be a slight correlation, the severity of the words in the aforementioned phrase depicts a scenario in which the protagonist may have indeed been taken by force. However this apparent violation and mistreatment of women that could be represented by this verse is not surprising, as in being towards the bottom of the honor code, it might be plausible that these forceful advances were seen as non-punishable by those committing the act. By using this piece of the text to represent the military life of nuisance for the Christians and the Muslims, this correlation could bring some insight of daily life instances in the culture of the Spanish medieval period.

As the eight hundred years that the Iberian Peninsula was under Muslim control is referred to as a "reconquest", it is readily seen that the military of this time treated women as objects. Much like the land that each side was desperately trying to control after years of the constant retaking of land, all that the soldiers knew was how to function by force and obtain what they thought belonged to them in a strong and imperative manifestation of quest and request, yet had no means to acquire. Unfortunately due to the close proximity in which the military life had interacted with the common life, the female population was drawn into the constant give and take that is war, and had no say in the matter. Upon analyzing the text and the creation of the *jarchas*, the women were represented in various verses based on how they were seen by the author without any resistance from her part, which solidifies that the honored women in this time period may have constantly been taken advantage of or being used as objects of forces beyond her will.

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<sup>23</sup> My translation.

As poetry and literature can greatly vary to the individual in reference to semantics, it is also very important that this analysis takes into consideration the thoughts and contributions of several academic studies.

In the prologue of his book *Las jarchas mozárabes: Forma y significado*, Álvaro Galmés de Fuentes gives a brief background on the terms associated with the Christians that lived in the Muslim-prominent areas of Spain "[a]s it is known, we call the Christians that continued practicing their religion while living among the Muslims of al-Andalus mozárabes. In a strict sense, jarchas or the Mozarabic dialect would be the little songs that were sung or the language spoken exclusively by the Christians of a Muslim controlled Spain"<sup>24</sup> (9). It stands to reason that these terms could very easily be applied to Christian soldiers either living or being stationed in areas controlled by Muslims, and that a number of *jarchas* were created in the Mozarabic dialect in an effort to preserve their ideas, religion and practices. Galmés de Fuentes also mentions further into his prologue that "the Mozarabic designation applied to the jarchas would signify that among friends these songs were sung by a bilingual population of al-Andalus that practiced, or at least understood the romance language"<sup>25</sup> (9). At any rate the initial observations that Galmés de Fuentes proposes are a demonstration that the interaction between the Muslim and Christians in areas of coincidence may have at least been accepted and appreciated in times of peace. However with every culture, language or custom there comes a time that old ways die out or are replaced—either they begin to fade away over time, or they are forcibly brought to an end when the interaction does not take place

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<sup>24</sup> My translation.

<sup>25</sup> My translation.

It is evident that up until the end of the 11th century, according to well known testimonies that are needless to repeat here, many educated Muslims, the same as the Mozarabics and rebels, were bilingual. Having said that, it is equally made known that the invasions of the Almoravids<sup>26</sup> (as of the year 1086), and above all the invasion of the Almohads<sup>27</sup> (as of 1146) decimated the Mozarabic communities of al-Andalus, with the consequential progressive loss of the romance language. (Galmés de Fuentes 81)

Based on this observation by Galmés de Fuentes, it is conceivable to analyze further the following verse from the *jarchas*

So much to love, so much to love,  
Friend, so much to love,  
My eyes were sick before happy  
and now they suffer such great sicknesses. (Paredes-Méndez 10)

As a result of the adverse effect that the Almoravid and Almohad invasions may have had on the growing Mozarabic culture in Spain, it is possible to analyze this verse based on a love or desire to preserve the culture of the Mozarabic people during this period. However given the "great sickness" that the author is describing, it could refer to the fact that the Mozarabic people watched their culture and ideas crumble in vain due to the wars and violence from the Almoravid and Almohad invasions. In reference to the military life of both the Muslims and Christians, the

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<sup>26</sup> According to Robert A. Messier in his electronic work *The Almoravids and the meanings of Jihad*, the Almoravids emerged from the Sahara desert in the mid-eleventh century and were a Berber Dynasty. (xi)

<sup>27</sup> The Almohads were a "Berber Muslim dynasty that ruled Morocco and Spain in the 12th and 13th century" (Almohads).

extensive work on the *jarchas* by S.M. Stern<sup>28</sup> can also be used to try to understand the meanings behind these mysterious poems. What can be said about the themes of the *jarchas* is that "in every case, the verses of the *kharja* are ordinarily said spoken from the mouth of a character who is not the poet. For the most part, the *kharja* imitates the words of a woman, of young generations, of alcoholics, or even innocent singing during Palm Sunday" (Stern XV-XVI). With this more developed list of possible themes, Stern has created more avenues by which the *jarchas* can be interpreted in the academic world. As mentioned before in this work, the mistreatment of women that existed during the medieval era Iberian Peninsula surely might have been a cause for inspiration during the writing of these *jarchas*. This writing topic along with the other topics mentioned by Stern represent the "young generations" who watched their world change before their eyes as the warfare between the Muslims and Christians ensued. Any themes in reference to "alcoholics" could represent the time spent unwinding by the soldiers who fought and saw nothing but death, and the celebration of "Palm Sunday" would have been an opportunity to regain any faith lost in the battlefield. By taking these brief descriptions into this conversation, the *jarchas* become more relevant to interpret in reference to how both the Muslim and Christian militaries may have influenced the writing of this time period. Therefore, interpreting such literature is vital in analyzing the intricate details of such a dated and quasi-furtive civilization.

Upon analyzing the *Coplas* and the *jarchas* with the earlier presented academic criticism, possible connections could be made to the aforementioned questions contained in this chapter. As for the kings and royalty, it might be interpreted that their actions held little importance, as in

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<sup>28</sup> All citations coming from Stern in this work were translated from French to English with the help of Professor Maria Spina.

death they would only live on through those that remembered their feats. With the possibility of being forgotten over time and considering the sentiment of *carpe diem* that existed, perhaps what was done in life by these individuals carried more weight than what they might experience in the afterlife. Therefore along with death not being feared as per the basic characteristics of *carpe diem*, punishment for their sins and lack of respect towards God also did not strike them with fear. Keeping in line with the proper order of the code of honor as well, the vassals would have to answer first to the king in earth and then God in the afterlife, whereas the king only had to answer to God. By default the fear of angering God came second to the life of torment that an angry and corrupt king could deliver, further supporting the notion of *living in the now*. With having to answer to two separate authorities—each governing a separate realm of existence—whether the vassals and *common people* decided to follow the king instead of the desires of God. It may seem likely that they might have faced many difficulties in this decision—suffer through a life that will end inevitably and try to reach salvation in eternal death, or enjoy the present moment to sacrifice the long-term.

## CHAPTER 3

### Sacred and Secular Kingdoms and Reigns in the Medieval Spain

During the medieval period of Spain, especially the time of the Muslims' control over the peninsula, there was an emphasis placed on the *code of honor*. This code which was often depicted as the pyramid of honor code—God and religion at the top, the king in the middle, and the lady and family at the base—and it provided an emblematic understanding on how an individual should live an honorable existence. At the base of the pyramid the *common people* (fief) were an instrumental factor in the construction of the medieval values and culture. This structure highly contributed to creating an atmosphere of stability among the members of a specific medieval society. Within this hierarchy, a knight or even the *common people* could live their daily lives with a good reputation and know that they were living as orderly and honestly as possible—at least by the standards of the honor code. With this also being a period that was filled to the brim with disheartening events—such as violence, war and death—religion was used to cope with the difficult life that the medieval *common people* perceived, and for that matter religion was also used as a form of guidance. However on more than one occasion the hierarchy of this code had become inverted, especially in reference to the epic story of *El Cid*.<sup>29</sup> Therefore it is a concern that with such a strong emphasis on God being at the top of the code of honor and in chivalry, why did the Kings and reigns in existence exhibit such strong power and influence over its subjects? In the poem when the great Cid reaches Burgos in his travels, he is faced with both

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<sup>29</sup> It is not the intent of this study to elaborate about the difference between the fictional Cid and the historical Cid, for that reason the study will concentrate on what the text *El Cid* offers in relation to the culture and the historical events of the low middle ages in Spain, as what we now know as the *El cantar de mio Cid* was greatly based on the life of the real person.

disrespect and oppression based on the unilateral decisions of the king—even though the people of Burgos may not have meant to treat him in this way. Because the Cid was exiled by Alfonso VI, the king requested that no one provided food or lodging to the weary traveler. King Alfonso issued an order which mandated "that no one give lodging to El Cid, and anyone who dared do such an act knew by the King's word that they would lose their home and even the eyes from their head"<sup>30</sup> (Michael 79). Based on the honor code during this time period, Rodrigo Díaz should have received these amenities due to the respect that he has earned through his actions. However under threats of having their eyes taken from their heads—literally speaking—or even death, the *common people* of Burgos do not offer aid to the Cid. This would represent a serious abomination to the code itself, as in no way does it provide order and stability. It seems as though that while death is always imminent or impending during this time period, it was never feared but accepted, and for that reason the *common people* of Burgos for example were more afraid of the violent actions of their King than the loss of life as a result of more natural causes. In the case of Rodrigo Díaz's visit to Burgos, it would have been quite hard for him to receive aid when the mandates of King Alfonso placed fear in the citizens of Burgos, and stated that "if the door was not entered by force, it should not be opened for anyone"<sup>31</sup> (Michael 80). Despite the inability to help the Cid for fear of losing their lives, the town of Burgos knew that it was erroneous that they should not be able to help Rodrigo in his time of need: "you already see, Cid, that in our evil, you have not gained anything, as The Creator forgives you with all his holy grace"<sup>32</sup> (Michael 80). Although Rodrigo is facing the trials and tribulations of a banishment, he

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<sup>30</sup> My translation.

<sup>31</sup> My translation.

<sup>32</sup> My translation.

is now reminded that it is not his ultimate end and that he will still be welcomed by God with open arms. However even the promise of salvation did not make it easier for the Cid to be denied comforting lodge and amenities, for "our Cid Rodrigo Díaz, who in good time kept to the sword, camped in a sandy area because nobody would take him into their home"<sup>33</sup> (Michael 81).

However Rodrigo knew what was taking place and seemed to accept it as his duty in saying "[f]or the love of king Alfonso who banished me from the land"<sup>34</sup> (Michael 166). Not only does Rodrigo honor King Alfonso by following his wishes and leaving town, he also honors his wife doña Jimena when he goes to bid her and his daughters farewell at the Monastery of San Pedro de Cardena. During the farewell conversation that doña Jimena and Rodrigo have together, the Cid tells to his wife "you, honored woman, by me you will be served" (Michael 99). By saying these words, Rodrigo is showing that he follows the code of honor in regards to how the woman should be treated by all knights and warriors who have respect for the *caballería* of the medieval ages. In addition to the Cid obeying the King's wishes and treating his wife with the utmost respect, Rodrigo also supports financially the monastery where he is visiting the abbot and his family "and since I am leaving the land, I will give you fifty marks....I do not want the monastery to make expenses for me" (Michael 97). What we see is that Rodrigo, despite the negative things he has gone through, still follows and respects the *code of honor*. Although King Alfonso has banished him from his land, he has been separated from his family and the monastery has taken the risk to help him, Rodrigo still puts the wishes of the king, the financial needs of the monastery and the well-being of his wife and family all before his own individual needs. Rodrigo Díaz obeys the King's selfish rule, he vows to serve his wife and he pays back his debts to the

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<sup>33</sup> My translation.

<sup>34</sup> My translation.

Church so that he self-supports himself, his family and contributes to his kingdom from a distance. Despite the threats that any particular king may have represented to Rodrigo during this time period, the people of Burgos in *El cantar del mío Cid* proves to be an outlier, and it demonstrates how the epic hero circumnavigated his challenges while still maintaining his honor and respectability. To be sure, Rodrigo Díaz was the very personification of the code of honor, of the *caballería*, and a reliable role model, not only in the fiction narrative, but in his historiography as well. Though this work will not cover in depth the life of the true Rodrigo Díaz, it seems fitting to mention that his feats were so great during the course of his life, that such a poetic work as *El cantar de mío Cid* was composed about him to highlight his achievements.

Based on the epic story of the Cid the readers notice how an honorable person's life can be affected by a wayward monarch, but what of the individuals who may have also gone down a wayward path along with their king? In analyzing *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique, it is stated very early on in this elegy:

Our lives are the rivers  
that lead to the sea,  
which is death;  
there is where nobilities go  
to die and waste away;  
there the rivers of fortune, the average ones, and smaller ones,  
they arrive, they are equal  
those that live by their hands

and those that live by their riches.<sup>35</sup> (Manrique 2)

Taking into account the writings of Manrique, even though a number of vassals, servants or soldiers that may have done the bidding of their king throughout their life or service time, at the end of their existence, they are given the opportunity in the afterlife to be treated equally no matter what their rank or profession was at a specific moment in the physical existence. This equilibrium in position is important to address especially when analyzing the relationship between a king and his servants, and how this particular liaison could affect the lives of individuals as life continues or even ultimately comes to a material end. However it is also important to take into account that for the medieval knight what was achieved in life does emphatically matter in relation to what they expected to experience in the afterlife. Manrique also writes in *Coplas* that:

This world is the path to the other,  
which is a dwelling without aim;  
but it maintains having great care  
in order to take the journey  
without failing.<sup>36</sup> (Manrique 2-3)

It could be argued that blindly following the ways of an erring king would be just the kind of mistakes that Manrique wrote about in his literary work, but this hardly answers the question as how these actions may have affected these individuals, or what kind of response may have been perceived in medieval Spain whether or not they possessed any fear of repercussions to their actions in life. It can be inferred through an honorable death in the battlefield any of the riches

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<sup>35</sup> My translation.

<sup>36</sup> My translation.

and worldly possessions obtained by these servants would have become insignificant:

The excessive gifts,  
the royal buildings filled with gold,  
the decorated dinner services,  
money from treasure,  
equestrian adornments,  
the horses  
of their people and bold decorations,  
Where will we go to find them?  
What were they but the dew drops  
on the meadow.<sup>37</sup> (Manrique 9)

By equating all riches and ornamental material possessions to "dew drops on the meadow", Manrique demonstrates that for the individual functioning according to the medieval culture what was gained in life may mean nothing in death. It could also be interpreted that this intangible cultural concept in such a way that these rarities of life become as common as early morning precipitation, which also diminishes their value by labeling them as trivial.

As criticism to this material relationship between kings, the wealthy and even the servants and vassals who did the bidding of their masters, Teófilo Ruiz explains that "in Christian society, the accumulation of wealth, the lending of money at interest, and other such activities that demanded a close involvement with the material world had always raised deep suspicion and fear of eternal damnation" (19). It is not surprising then that the institution of the Church may have had some

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<sup>37</sup> My translation.

concerns with such activities because essentially, these individuals would have been worshipping their material possessions over God, which would have been considered worshipping idols. This perspective provides a more concrete background to the ideas behind the *Coplas* in the sense that for the medieval soldier, material possessions were worthless compared to which the concept of God could have provided to them in His Kingdom. In a sense the medieval soldier had to choose between worldly possessions in life, or eternal salvation in death. However with any fear of damnation that went hand-in-hand with material possessions, surely the thought of purgatory<sup>38</sup> crossed the minds of any God-fearing individual as well.

In this regard, Ruiz describes the scenario that "purgatory came into being (as a spatial place in the same sense in which property was also now thought of as spatial) as an alternative. It allowed those with wealth and dubious occupations to enter into a bargain for salvation" (19). This description of Christian society given by Ruiz also sheds light on the possible ideology behind the backing of a greedy and immoral liege. One plausible scenario is that the individual did the bidding of their king in hopes of achieving riches that would not only allow them to live comfortably, but would allow them to pay off any substantial debts or obtain their release of the feudal society. Having a debt-free life would surely keep the individual out of purgatory when they pass on into a metaphysical stage. However there exists another case scenario that originated from a change of ideology in how purgatory was seen, where the individual did the bidding of their king to become rich and ultimately buy their salvation. Therefore the individual risked following their monarch into purgatory or even Hell, yet still portrays the pathway to

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<sup>38</sup> As defined by *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, purgatory is "a place or state of punishment wherein according to Roman Catholic doctrine the souls of those who die in God's grace may make satisfaction for past sins and so become fit for heaven."

acquire their way out, which was more than likely done through obtaining a penance from the Church.

Taking into account all the temptations that a king could present in exchange for his vassal's unwavering servitude, it is not surprising that a subject would follow their king so blindly. It could be determined that as kings, knights and *common people* made their way through their lives, the end justified the means. For those following the direction of the king who reigned so powerfully and influentially over them, it is possible that they may have simply answered to their higher power on Earth, forgetting about the wrath of the higher power existing in death—God. However with the promise of riches to substitute a meager life, the idea of wealth and commodities had more worth, as even the wealthy lose their riches in death. Even though God existed at the top of the code of honor, it appears that for some He may have only existed in the background, as he would have his time of judgment only in the afterlife. However this was of little importance with the advent of the earlier mentioned penance that was available for purchase from the Church. This meant that not only could those below the ruler serve him in life, but also due to this belief in such penance they could then practically buy their way into salvation, making following of the sovereign over God a moot point or arbitrary occurrence.

## CHAPTER 4

### A Brief Analysis of the Economic Standing of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula through Its Literary Works

Just as the various religions and cultures of the Iberian Peninsula can be interpreted and studied through *El Cid*, the *jarchas*, and *Coplas*, it is also possible to gain a glimpse into the cultural value of money and wealth in this medieval society and how it may have driven future events to their outcome. There exists different evidence on how money was viewed in each of the three literary works on which this study focuses, and paired with additional information it is possible to contribute to a number of research questions. Based on the number of conflicts that took place in Spain, how was the economic standing of the peninsula as a whole? Although war can be used as a catalyst for change—to achieve both negative and positive change—what remains apparent is the monetary strains it could cause for both short term and long term economies. As financially taxing as the near 800 years of struggle between Christian and Muslim powers may have been, was the economic state a precursor for what was to happen in the future to create the social changes that occurred? Surely with economic changes come the probability of struggle and hardships for the least financially stable party as well as possibly for those with more stability. However with the many years that it took the Spaniards to reclaim Spanish territory from the Muslims, was it necessarily imperative to fund the conquistadors that traveled to the new world so soon after? Being that the Christian powers struggled for so long just to maintain their hold on the territories that still belonged to them, spending the time and financial resources to journey to new lands would prove to be a great risk historically speaking. Were these travelers taking their chances to line their own states with wealth, or doing the bidding of

their monarch to pay for the destruction of Spain that may have happened over the course of almost eight centuries? Although it is not the principle focus of this analysis to examine the economic situation of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula in detail, through investigating these research questions, this study stands to gain an interesting perspective on how the use of currency or wealth may have possibly driven communication and interaction between the varying peoples of the peninsula.

In order to analyze the *jarchas* with the goal of relating this work from an economic standpoint, it is important to reread the *jarcha* containing the mention of jewelry and the merchant of necklaces:

Mother, the merchant of necklaces does not want  
to lend me jewelry.  
My white neck will see air my love:  
it will not see jewelry.<sup>39</sup> (Paredes-Méndez 9)

In analyzing this verse of the *jarchas* it is shown in the text that society may have strictly been a monetary society and not one of bartering. It could be interpreted that such an importance was placed on the value of the merchant's necklaces, which in turn alludes to the value of money. Although it may not be clearly demonstrated in the text and that it may be dependent on the interpretation of the investigator, in some degree this verse may represent at least the presence of the prominence of the monetary value.

Following along with the proper succession of this study, it is vital to next analyze the epic poem of *El Cid* for evidence of economy within its pages. Throughout the epic tale of *El Cid*,

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<sup>39</sup> My translation.

money is a constant factor that drives the events that take place in this poem based on historical facts. In order to survive during his travels, the Cid must have had enough financial resources in order to pay for the care of his family and also to sustain his vassals that support him out on the battlefield—not to mention the Cid's innate desire to send King Alfonso a percentage of his wartime spoils after each battle. To achieve all this, the Cid must first acquire the means to make this accounts possible:

Martín Antolínez does not delay  
He went to ask Rachel and Vidas with haste;  
He passed by Burgos, the castle he entered,  
He went to ask Rachel and Vidas with haste.<sup>40</sup>

(Michael 85)

Rachael and Vidas are speculated to be the names of two individuals in the business of loaning money, and in order to successfully combat the Muslims in the battlefield, the Cid needed to gain the necessary funding to succeed in this endeavors. With the closing of the loan in agreement and the money given to Antolínez and the Cid, unlike in the *jarchas* there is a direct reference to the importance of money during the time of the *Cid*. Not only currency is sought after to use as survival by the Cid and his vassals, but it also is used as a means for a higher financial status. This shows that aside from the trading that this study has investigated between the Christians and the Muslims, coinage also existed in the realms of banking and loans, placing an everyday importance on its value. Based on the text not only was money seen as a necessity, there was also a certain emphasis placed on it within the code of honor itself:

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<sup>40</sup> My translation.

I very much appreciate it, famous Campeador<sup>41</sup>;  
of this fifth [of the spoils] that you have given to me  
pay it to Alfonso the Castilian.<sup>42</sup>

(Michael 114)

After every successful battle, the Cid always sent a portion of the winnings to the King Alfonso out of respect. Even though he was banished from his home, the Cid still maintains his image of honor by paying a man who in today's situation would not be respected or revered due to a style of ruling highly arbitrary. It could be speculated then that the Cid felt this portion rightly belonged to the King Alfonso and that is why he sent it, but based on the overall character of the Cid, the *campeador* did it because it was in his nature and in his chivalry formation. This behavior shows a discretionary value being placed on money. It is the sense that one will utilize what is necessary of their wealth, and allocate what remains elsewhere depending on the individual's given situation. However to complete the sequence of literary works analyzed in this study, it is now important to see what Manrique's *Coplas* offer in the realm of monetary value.

Contained in the text of the *Coplas* there exists a number of references to wealth or money, for instance the "señoríos" and "los ricos"<sup>43</sup>, which directly apply to those who were wealthy based on the context of the literary work (Manrique 2). However it is important to not forget the implicit message that the *Coplas* provides, and that is the belief that in this time period life was considered short and death was therefore accepted in a more idealistic context. Upon saying that,

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<sup>41</sup> The term *campeador* is a title often given to *el Cid* throughout the entirety of the epic poem. It can be translated as *champion*, and very much fits the characteristics of *el Cid* based in both the literary and historical contexts.

<sup>42</sup> My translation.

<sup>43</sup> Both being terms that are synonymous with wealth, *señorío* is a term that translates to nobility and *los ricos* is a reference that Manrique made in general to the rich people.

one would imagine that money did not carry an importance, because ultimately it had no value in death:

The pleasures and sweet things  
of this hard-worked life  
that we have,  
What are they but pathways,  
and death the trap  
in which we fall?<sup>44</sup> (Manrique 6)

Based on this verse from the *Coplas*, it can be inferred that riches and wealth are merely a distraction from the inevitable end that the individuals must experience at the moment of passing away. In many instances life is lived very similarly in today's world, in which an individual strives to achieve a certain level of wealth or status, only to have everything removed away from them at their time of death. Upon analyzing *Las jarchas*, *El Cid* and *Las Coplas*, this study has opened to the door to a very interesting concept when these three works are looked at sequentially. In the *jarchas* we see a glimpse of currency in the sense of its use to benefit a sole individual. In *El Cid* there exists the use of money to not only make life more comfortable for the individual, but also it was used to the benefit of multiple people. Finally with the *Coplas* there is the connotation that money was again used to benefit the individual, but on a grander scale it was commonly viewed by society that this wealth would only benefit the individuals until their death, thus rendering wealth virtually useless. Although good evidence exists within these three works,

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<sup>44</sup> My translation.

more evidence is needed to further the research towards answering the proposed research questions contained in this chapter.

In order to further investigate the economic situation of the Iberian Peninsula and its various culture's views of everyday monetary value, it is vital to further analyze the historical side of possible evidence in order to provide a more balanced investigation:

When Christopher Columbus headed across the great emptiness west of Christendom, he had accepted the challenge of legend. Terrible storms would play with his ships as if they were nutshells and hurl them into the jaws of monsters; the sea serpent, hungry for human flesh, would be lying in wait in the murky depths. According to fifteenth-century man, only 1,000 years remained before the purifying flames of the Last Judgment would destroy the world, and the world was then the Mediterranean Sea with its uncertain horizons. (Galeano 11)

With such a dangerous perception of the world outside of the known continents, any venture out into the unknown surely would need to be done for compelling reasons, and it is still debatable as to if the validity of this voyage would include taking the risk for monetary gain. As any motivation to obtain immense riches comes with certain challenges and obstacles, the stage was set for the journey into the unknown to be a difficult one. Not only would the success of this mission have given worth to the dangerous feat, new doors also would have been opened for further exploration and conquest; not only are riches found in unknown lands recently conquered, but other items of value may have been highly sought after as well. These new discoveries may have been used to make everyday life more gratified and secure, or possibly may have even been brought back to Spain for trade. That being said, in reference to the trade

that occurred between the Muslim and Christian territories, changes may have indefinitely been made with the acquisition of new land and amenities on the side of the Christians:

Pepper, ginger, cloves, nutmeg and cinnamon were prized...Spain's Catholic rulers decided to finance the adventure to get direct access to the sources and to free themselves from the burdensome chain of intermediaries and speculators who monopolized the trade in spices and tropical plants, muslins and sidearms.

(Galeano 12)

Taking into account the description of how new acquisitions may have affected or aided in trade between the Christians and Muslims as the Christians further explored and expanded its territory, a Christian Spain could find any desired resources on their own terms, thus further limiting or putting to a complete stop to any trade between them and their neighboring Muslim territories. If in fact in this *New World* the highly sought after spices and materials that the Christians once had received from the Muslims did exist, there stood a chance to vanish Muslim Spain entirely which subsequently could have driven the Muslims to defeat and ultimately abandon the peninsula permanently. It is also quite possible that the Catholic reign possibly had no intention of financial gain traveling to what one day would be the Americas, but instead there existed an underlying motive which just brought about an embargo in trade as a result:

The feat of discovering America can only be understood in the context of the tradition of crusading wars that prevailed in medieval Castile; the Church needed no prompting to provide a halo for the conquest of unknown lands across the ocean. Pope Alexander VI, who was Spanish, ordained the Queen Isabella as

proprietor and master of the New World. The expansion of the kingdom of Castile extended God's reign over earth. (Galeano 12)

Based on the description made in Galeano's book *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, it stands to reason that perhaps the underlying goal in traveling to territories that would become the future Americas was solely a step in the direction of achieving global conquest. With approval from the Catholic Church for this expansion and the overall threat of the Muslim power in Spain virtually curtailed, there did not appear to be any power-within reason- that could keep Queen Isabella from reaching the Crown's goal. These factors would have only aided in making Isabella's reign all the more formidable.

In paring this analysis with the prior analyses of the three main literary works discussed in this chapter, it becomes now more possible for this study to further look at the research questions proposed in this chapter. It is difficult to say for sure what the overall economic state of the peninsula was during this epoch, however it seems to be based on the evidence there existed a great deal of trade, usage of merchants and loan and business agreements. These basic principles alone are indications that if the economic standing of the peninsula was not fully stable, it was vibrant and provided a basis for relative comfort in day-to-day living. Whether or not the medieval peninsula's economy or its changes may have been a catalyst for future social changes it is still a debatable question, and may require further investigation outside of the scope of this study's purpose. However built on the previously investigated information in this chapter, any changes that may have taken place involving regular trade between Christians and Muslims surely would have affected their daily interactions as well. Along with becoming more unified under Christianity and furthermore receiving support from the Church, the situation with the

power struggle in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula would have changed greatly. The fall of Granada in 1492, the unification of Christian Spain and the backing of the Church are just a few of the many events that fell into place during what may be debatable as the "most opportune time" for the Christian territories of the peninsula, which in turn allowed them to regain control rapidly and forcefully.

In reference to the funding of the voyages to the New World so soon after the Christians regained control of the peninsula, this investigation is in agreement with the description given by Galeano in the sense that the voyages could easily be considered a continued conquest of territory. It is plausible to interpret the voyages to the New World in a sense of conquest in order to explain the haste that the Christian reign had in traveling overseas. Due to a constant power struggle that lasted eight centuries in their homeland, it would have been very easy to get carried away with this idea of conquest. It is also quite plausible that the newly united peninsula was in need of resources, and sought to find them elsewhere in the world. However, achieving such a task would prove to be perilous and full of risk. Whether or not those who ventured out to the New World would survive the journey would have been unknown at the time, therefore it seems more plausible that these individuals may have done so for their own personal gain. Once finally separated by a vast sea from a life of change and recuperation in the peninsula after the 800 years of power struggle, the opportunity would have existed for the voyagers to start a new life among the new lands which they explored. Therefore they more than likely would have sought to take no responsibility for any destruction or unrest that may have been caused over the 800 years of Reconquista.

## CONCLUSION

Although this study has been able to open the windows to the social and cultural nuances of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula through the discernments of its literature, this period has been extensively studied by many scholars to date. However the period still possesses a realm of interest for those inquisitive scholars about its contents, which only serves to open more doors in reference to future academic investigations. In a time when a code of honor existed that defined society's expectations of living a just and noble life, a code in existence for individuals of all status levels, the time periods between 711 A.D. and 1492 A.D. have been long separated from current day not only in a sense of time and space but also ideals. Due to a constant interaction—both positive and negative—between Christians, Muslims and Jews, there existed many differences in cultures and beliefs. Therefore throughout the 800 years that the Iberian Peninsula was occupied by these three religious groups, there existed the need to resolve issues or suffer a constant struggle due to their discrepancies. Without having the intentional desire to achieve coexistence, the various interactions and interrelations between these groups—such as trade and financial loans—helped them to survive the era as they learned to live in a world with friction and instability. Such changes, or transitions, were due to different or unique interpretations about how the *medieval code of honor* should be interpreted and practiced among the three cultural contexts. With these dissimilarities in the social system of beliefs, the medieval peninsula witnessed monarchs who were unfit to rule—by the ideal standards of the code—and subjects being taken advantage of by their rulers. These changes marked a very influential period in the medieval peninsula, as it ruptured the ideology of living by the very code of honor that the Cid represents harmonically. The world of medieval Spanish literature saw this rupture best with the

banishment of *El Cid*, which in turn marked a turning point for the changes yet to come. The people were faced with having to make very difficult decisions in the face of their sovereign, such as decide to follow the word of God or instead their wayward monarch that ruled on earth. By being in this position the *common people* of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula were faced with a difficult life filled with fear, as no matter what their choice was, they faced judgment—either by their king on earth or the Creator in death. The kings of this era were in turn faced with their own difficult decisions, such as deciding if they should rule justly or make advances to benefit only their own personal wealth and increase their ownership of territories in the name of God, but for their kingdoms. This meant that aside from the good rulers, a substantial number of monarchs may have still decided to exercise their authority on their own terms, further separating their kingdoms from the ideals of chivalry. In general those that followed the word of God would say that any poor decisions made in life would be met with God's judgment in death as it could be visible in Manrique's *Coplas*, and those who decided their own path would say that they were following the steps of progression, the consequences of the warfare as it could be interpreted in the *jarchas* or it could be adjudicated to the beginning of a new interpretation of the ideals and values of those that came before them as the conquest of the *Nuevo Mundo* may suggest to the modern reader.

However one concept that may be virtually the same between medieval era and the *common era* is the economic state at any given point in time. As possibly the most unstable concept of a basic civilization, an economy can remain consistently strong or can fumble abruptly. Although the medieval era may have functioned during a time that was less complex than the present, it is important not to underestimate how sporadically things could change and cause significant

detours in the path of the history of the human kind. With the constant nuptial arrangements among royalty, allegiances were made that either strengthened or weakened any given reign's power at any point in time. However, the inner workings of the economic system of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula are not as beneficial to this study unless it influenced directly the literature of its time. As *El Cid* is recognized as possibly the best representation of the medieval code of honor, he also best provides a glimpse into the function of a medieval economy, at least for the purpose of this study. By taking a loan out to fund the care of his family and his operations drifting from battlefield to battlefield and further sending more than the expected percentage of his spoils to a king who banished him unjustly, *El Cid* single-handedly shows the importance of currency in the time in which he had to live and function in the warfare. However this interpretation only offers an angle into how monetary transactions may have taken place in the Medieval Iberian Peninsula and does not solidify the idea that the economy that may have evolved by 1492 influenced in any way the voyages to the New World. That being said, this study further stands by the evidence that describes the Iberian Peninsula as a territory with an economy that was in good standing, but also cannot strongly sustain the future changes that occurred as a result of the acquisition of new territories.

Certain inferences could be also be made taking into account how life is lived common era and the sentiment that was in place during the time Manrique wrote his work *Las coplas por la muerte de su padre*. Throughout Manrique's work, it is apparent that it was encouraged to live by the standards of the *carpe diem*. That is to say, seize the day for no one knows when their life will be over, and for that reason it is also best to not get attached to material possessions. Based on the writings by Manrique, it is also futile to go through life being defined as someone of

nobility by others for heroic actions, as death has a way of leveling the playing field—that is to say the nobles and the *common people* are treated the same. We find that in today's societies the concept of *carpe diem* is still present, however it has been adjusted to fit a more modern audience, and quite possibly has become less figurative. This scenario is present within the concept of living life to the fullest, or the popular saying of “you only live once.” While Manrique represents figuratively these same ideas in his work, in a contemporary context the outlook is expressed in a more practical demonstration such as attempting excessive or dangerous feats. While this is a difference that we find between the two case scenarios, there also exist likenesses. For example the remembrance of his father that Manrique expresses in *las coplas* is very similar to the same response that people may experience today when their loved one passes. These individuals are going to be remembered for the great things they have done, and the wonderful moments that they enriched other’s lives with their presence and contributions. To the same extent Manrique’s father was remembered for his nobility and greatness on the battlefield, much like the other leaders that Manrique referenced in his work as well. However we may decide to live our lives, whether it is to the fullest or in a more timid manner, it is important to extract from *las coplas* what we have available to us for interpretation. No matter the greatness in life that one has achieved or number of goals accomplished, it is more important to have done these things to the highest standard possible—quality over quantity—so that as we make our way into the afterlife that Manrique referenced, it shall be done without regrets. As both *El poema del mío Cid* and *Las coplas* have maintained a certain level of connection with today’s perceptions, similar ties can also be seen from the previously studied verses of *las jarchas*.

As *las jarchas* were transcribed directly from either Arabic or Hebrew, and translated into Spanish, these verses could be related not only to the different languages and cultures of the medieval Iberian Peninsula, but also to the mosaic architecture that is the modern world today. Within almost every part of the world there exists some type of cultural and lingual mixture of some degree, much like the shared territory of the entire Iberian Peninsula, even though the groups were mostly limited to followers of either Christianity, Islam or Judaism. It is to say that encounters between individuals of different cultural backgrounds was almost completely inevitable, much like the many personal exchanges take place today. It is possible to learn from the verses of *las jarchas* in a sense of cultural interchange, as they demonstrate the possibility that any custom or language can be adapted into another, allowing for them to grow or live on as periods change. However the most visible aspect that could be taken from *las jarchas*, perhaps the most important piece, is in regards to who the verses were written by and from what point of view. In the middle ages, especially during the time of the code of honor, the female persona was respected among society but still placed at the bottom of the code's hierarchy. Because the *jarchas* were written by men but from the perspective of a woman, they represent the drastic separation that existed between genders at the time that the *jarchas* and other poetic or literary works were written in the medieval Spain. Even though in today's western society still women encounter opposition and challenges, there also exists a large number of women who have achieve the success and recognition that they deserve in their fields or lines of work. Although women, or *la dama*, were greatly respected by noblemen during the medieval ages, it was unheard of that they could had been admitted to attend universities and educate themselves. Instead their role in those societies was *only* to raise the children and care for their husbands or

join the convent and become devout servants of God—without any other acceptable and honorable alternatives. Although in some cultures today the female’s role is to do the same, it has now become common place for women to earn degrees and also put themselves on an equal level with men both socially and professionally—a luxury that was not afforded when *las jarchas* were written. In addition, women are able to have their own voice in current times and can represent themselves in their own narrative unlike their representation in *las jarchas*. For that reason many beneficial contributions have been made to academia--and these works cannot only be limited to writers such as María Rosa Menocal or Maya Angelou, for there exists an extensive list of female individuals that have and will keep flourishing and growing as time continues its progress.

The events that took place between 711 A.D. and 1492 A.D., in what is now considered Spain, have long been separated from the events that have happened in common era. For that reason it is important to educational advancement to return to the past and reexamine the wonders of the Medieval Iberian Peninsula. Not only this practice may lead to a better understanding of the time period and its literature may come into account, but also rereading the literature of the past may provide the piece of evidence to formulate and examine new hypotheses to benefit our knowledge in a more comprehensive panoramic vision. Therefore the goals of this study were centered on an analysis of *Las jarchas*, *El cantar de mio Cid* and *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* in an effort to contribute to the academic world with hopefully a fresh interpretation in a current day point of view. This work could be utilized for future investigations involving analyses not limited to the three aforementioned literary works but also an endless array of hypotheses that future generations may formulate as they read and reread, question and

answer, and interpret and reinterpret what the literary texts tell the readers during their journeys and voyages of the exploration of the past, which at the same time facilitates the understanding of the present and may assist in formulating more accurate projections for the future. This work could also be used in juxtaposing the literature of the Medieval Ages and the works later in history with the goal of interpreting how ideals may evolve over time, especially in reference to the possibility of the current day existence of chivalry. The analysis presented in this study may also invite the readers to consider other opportunities for further research into the medieval world pondering its literature and culture. As the Medieval Ages set the tone for the Renaissance period, and the Renaissance period set the tone for the Baroque, culturally speaking it is important to understand that the modern world we live in today was without a doubt shaped by everything that came before. This description is fitting, as the three works covered in this thesis all occupied slightly different areas of the time period, linking in turn the themes discussed in this work across the same time span. For this reason it was important that this study investigate medieval Spanish literature, as it was written by the individuals who lived, suffered, depleted, wrote, and survived in that time. Literature is the best sample to transfer knowledge century after century and thankfully the reader counts with these samples to interpret the past through the eyes that saw it in front of them and live it firsthand. This study hopes that the same may be done in the future when present time becomes the distant past.

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