

Rita Foster

History 348

19 June 2019

El Cid the Conqueror

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, also known as El Cid, lived and fought in Medieval Spain. El Cid was an extremely important and is a large part of Valencian history. He was born into a Castilian aristocratic family around 1043 but the exact date is unknown. From a young age he was illiterate, good at war, and had good horsemanship. El Cid was very loyal to King Alfonso VI the king of León-Castile. Doña Jimena was El Cid's wife, their marriage arranged by the King. This arranged marriage shows the trust that was originally built. Together they had a few children, a son and two daughters. Unfortunately he was exiled by King Alfonso but that didn't stop El Cid from becoming the conqueror and champion he is remembered as today. With his determination, El Cid became a very important part of Valencian history by taking Valencia back from the Moors and helping build an empire which, today, is what we know as Spain.

In Medieval Spain, King Alfonso became king after fighting to take the crown. Previously El Cid had been loyal to King Alfonso's brother Sancho who was previously king. By this time, El Cid had a short résumé of fights. There was a bit of a patchy history between the King Alfonso and El Cid. Their relationship took a turn for the worst when El Cid jeopardized the King's paria from Toledo. Parias were payments/tribute for military support and peace to prevent Christian armies from attacking essential sources of income for the armies and kingdoms. The parias from the other lands financed architecture among other things and were very financially important to the kingdom. When doing this, El Cid attacked Toledo which the

king did not appreciate which got El Cid exiled from Castile and León. El Cid attacked Toledo because they had previously attacked and raided his personal land. King Alfonso couldn't have anyone hindering the amount of money that he was bringing in to his kingdom.

After his exilement, El Cid became a merchant before becoming the conqueror we know him as today. After his exile, he worked his way up to mercenary captain with considerable distinction. This helped him gain momentum and fame. In repent to the king, as he conquered land, El Cid sent money and riches back to the king. *The Poem of the Cid* portrays him as a somewhat ruthless conqueror. After his exilement when he becomes a conqueror, while in Castejón, he attacked and captured many Moorish men and women. In one specific raid, he kills fifteen Moors. While doing so, his knights return with gold and silver that they have stolen. Beyond riches, they take cattle among other things of value. Some good things came out of El Cid being put into exile. He regained his reputation as a respected military leader. Also he helped unite much of the church and government. He gained much support from both Christians and Muslims. El Cid had a growing army to help him. When sending money home to the church, he also made sure to take care of his soldiers. The leader got one-fifth of the money left over. Foot soldiers were paid half of what the mounted soldiers received. Any other type of soldier didn't make much money.

Overall the movie El Cid was more fictionalized than *The Poem of the Cid*. Throughout El Cid Ben Yussuf was portrayed as the antagonist. In the book, the Moors were simply the enemy. The movie was extremely americanized and over glorified the achievements of El Cid. A great example of this is in El Cid when El Cid dies and his soldiers put him on a horse and a dead El Cid rides out into battle. Ben Yussuf was also portrayed as dead which heightened El Cid's

success. El Cid's death in the movie was completely fictionalized as this was not portrayed in the book nor did it happen during the actual fight in history. It is shown that he was hit by an arrow. Historically, El Cid laid siege on Valencia and it finally fell in 1094. He did not die in this fight, he later died after ruling over Valencia after it fell. Both in the book and history, El Cid died of natural causes. Also in El Cid he was portrayed to fight for Spain which is historically incorrect.

The manuscript of *The Poem of the Cid* can be dated back to around 1207 which is shortly after his death which was in 1099. This could be a reason for why it was more historically accurate than the movie. Originally the story of El Cid was told orally and passed down through the generations orally before it was finally written down. It can only be assumed that the story was slightly altered in translation. *The Poem of the Cid* exaggerates the number of enemies that El Cid faced and changes his daughter's name. All the messages are true based on myth. The message from the book is that the hero (El Cid) helped a lot of people, which is historically accurate. He was a man of faith which is seen in him sending money to the church. While doing this he also showed his loyalty and humbleness to King Alfonso VI by sending back victory gifts which includes claiming Valencia for him. During his exile he asked to have his family sent to him which the king allowed. In *The Poem of the Cid* History and the book portray El Cid as a well rounded person. However, historically he fought both Christians and Muslims and sometimes fought Christians for the Moors. *The Poem of the Cid* portrayed that he only fought Moors. Historians are unsure of King Alfonso VI tolerability of Muslims.

In “*The Purest Knight of All*”: *Nation, History, and Representation in El Cid (1960)*” brings to light the discrepancies between the movie, the book, and history. There are many different movies all with varying degrees of accuracy. As seen in El Cid the movie was very

overdramatic and hollywoodized to draw interest and viewers. On the flip side, people watching were misinformed through inaccuracies like how they portrayed El Cid's death. El Cid was depicted as very heroic and charismatic. Its inaccuracies can possibly be attested to it being made by American filmmakers. It seems that the movie was made in a series of other foreign based movies on the road looking for fame. Franco was ruling during the production of the film. Spain was worried about its international image which also could have affected the information in the film to help preserve a good country image. There was an absence of Spanish government involvement in the filmmaking process. This led to the target audience being more American. The information between the poem and the movie is only slightly similar. The movie ends with the fight that supposedly killed El Cid while the poem portrays the same fight as a stepping stone to him gaining power. The poem depicts him as a national hero which is more accurate. Throughout the film, Alfonso is depicted to be almost jealous about El Cid because of his bravery, in turn these circumstances made Alfonso resent El Cid. This does not seem to be historically accurate as they seemed to have a good relationship for most of the time. Instead he was a faithful defender of the crown.

It's very interesting to find out Valencian people's take on El Cid. He is more important in Valencia than he is to just Spain however the students in Valencia do not learn a lot about him in school. Even people aged 30-50 years old even knew little to no information. People over 50 years old, like most everyone's host moms knew a lot more information. This can be attributed to the fact that Franco, the dictator, was inspired by El Cid. Most of our host moms were alive but young when Franco ruled and Franco only died a little over 45 years ago. For the question of the day, everyone I asked knew he was a conqueror and that he was honorable but many did not

know beyond that. No one even knew about his past before becoming the conqueror he is known as today. Without El Cid Valencia might not be a part of Spain today. El Cid was a very loyal person, especially to King Alfonso VI even after the king had him exiled. Despite their differences, El Cid strove to help the church and government work together. When he took and conquered more land he would have a lot of money and treasure collected. El Cid would send a majority of the money back to the king which, of course, the king liked. It is very evident that El Cid is still glorified. Today in Valencia there are streets and even a metro stop named after him. Here in Valencia there is even a statue of him.

El Cid's career as a conqueror and Valencian hero really took off after he was exiled by King Alfonso VI. Without his ambitions, Valencia might not be part of Spain as we know it today. Although many younger generations don't know a lot about El Cid, there is a lasting impact seen in *The Poem of the Cid* and El Cid. There were some discrepancies between the movie, the book, and history which all influenced people when we asked them our Question of the Day. “*“The Purest Knight of All”: Nation, History, and Representation in El Cid (1960)*” shows further discrepancies between the poem and the book than we talked about in class. The movie was definitely Americanized and the poem was more historically accurate. All historical inaccuracies aside, El Cid provided us with the Valencia we know today.