CHAPTER 10

Galicia and the Galicians in the Latin Chronicles of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*

Emma Falque

The kingdom of Galicia, the city of Santiago, and the Compostelan cult of St. James loomed large in the politics, culture, and religious life of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Iberia. The Latin chronicles—to use the term in the most ample sense—written in Iberia during this period offer one lens through which to examine the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, perspectives of contemporaries on the place of Galicia and Compostela in the medieval Iberian landscape. Approaching these texts as a philologist, I will consider how they treat Galicia and the Galicians, for their notices and information provide historians and medievalists with material on various social, political, and cultural questions concerning medieval Galicia, its place among the Iberian kingdoms, and the impact of the cult of St. James.

1 The Twelfth-Century Chronicles

1.1 The Historia Roderici and the Chronica Adefonsi Imperatoris

Setting aside debates over the dates of their composition, one may begin with two Latin chronicles that center their attention on particular historical figures. The Historia Roderici (HR) focuses upon the Castilian hero, the Cid, and the Chronica Adefonsi imperatoris (CAI) is dedicated to the reign of King Alfonso VII.

The Historia Roderici mentions neither Galicia nor the Galicians. More remarkably, it is silent about the apostle St. James. 1 Of course, the absence of

---

* I am grateful for Professor D’Emilio’s careful reading of this article and his valuable suggestions and corrections. Of course, any errors that may have slipped into these pages are my own.

1 We refer to this 12th-century Latin chronicle as either the Historia Roderici or the Gesta Roderici Campidocti. Different editors have used one title or the other. Faced with this, I used both in my edition: Historia Roderici uel Gesta Roderici Campidocti. The first goes back to the editio princeps of Manuel Risco and finds support in the edition of R. Menéndez Pidal; the second is certified by the authority of the manuscripts that have preserved the work. I translated the chronicle into Spanish (Falque [1983b]) and Barton and Fletcher (2000), 90–147, published an English translation.
references to Galicia is not surprising, since this work is centered on the figure of the Cid and his heroic deeds. Moreover, various scholars have argued that its author could have been from Aragón or Catalonia, or even Navarre. The chronicle’s silence about St. James merits more attention because the pilgrimage had become an important phenomenon and the apostle’s cult was well established by the years in which the Cid lived (c. 1043–1099). The kings themselves traveled to venerate his relics or prayed for his help before battle, as Fernando I did before the conquest of Coimbra in 1064.

By contrast, the Cid directs his prayers elsewhere in the Latin chronicle, entrusting himself only to God or Jesus Christ, and honoring the Virgin Mary. In the four oaths which he swears before King Alfonso VI to excuse himself for not joining the king in Aledo (HR 35, pp. 64–68), he calls on God as witness and swears by God and the saints without specifying any by name (iuro per Deum et per sanctos eius, 35.40, 62, 63, 71, pp. 65–66). Faced with the attack of the Almoravid troops, Rodrigo defended Valencia, trusting in God, according to the chronicler (Rodericus invincibilis bellator in Domino et in eiusdem clementia toto suo animo confidens..., 62.29–31, p. 89). Similarly, in the siege of Murviedro, he entrusted himself directly to God (Deus eterno, qui scis omnia, antequam fiant, quem nullum latet secretum..., 68.5–6, p. 93), and he set the feast day of St. John as the deadline for surrendering the fortress, a demand which, in fact, was met (71.28, 72.1–3, p. 96). He roused his troops before the battle of Bairén, saying that Jesus Christ would place the Muslims in their hands (hodie tradet eos Dominus noster Ihesus Christus in manus nostras et in potestatem nostram, 66.19–20, p. 91). After the siege of Almenara, he allowed the men who were there to leave and he ordered that a church be built in honor of the Blessed Virgin (altare et ecclesiam Domino in honore beatissime Virginis Marie ibidem edificari precepi, 67.8–10, p. 92).

For its part, the Chronica Adefonsi imperatoris makes more mention of the Galician nobility and the region itself. This work is dedicated to the reign of Alfonso VII of León-Castile (1126–1157). It is divided into two books which are followed by a poem known as the Poem of Almería, celebrating the king’s conquest of Almería. The first book describes the struggles among the Christians which the king had to face following his succession to the throne. The second focuses on the Christian advance against the Muslims. Despite its omissions,