Whoever visits the western strip of the Iberian Peninsula cannot ignore the powerful presence of the sea. Galicia, to the north, features an intricate coastline on two sides. It is a land crossed by a myriad of rivers running into the ocean and deeply penetrated by a multitude of bays and inlets known as *rias*, with ports and cities dating back to medieval times. These include Vigo and Pontevedra, the homes of the poets Martim Codax and Pai Gomez Charinho, the admiral of Alfonso X the Wise.¹

Portugal, to the south, completes the central and southern section of western Iberia. It, too, enjoys an extensive coastline, varying from long sandy beaches to towering rocky promontories sculpted by the stormy winds of the Atlantic. Most rivers in Portugal also run into the ocean, offering local communities many sheltered areas along their estuaries suitable for ports such as Viana da Foz do Lima, Oporto, Aveiro, and Lisbon, the city of Johan Zorro’s songs.² Here were, and still are traded either general goods or the product of local industrial activity from fish to salt or even seaweed, all significant exports in medieval times.³ In fact, a quick glance at medieval charters will demonstrate that the Atlantic coast was cut by deeper bays and estuaries than today. Ports like Paredes on the Lis River, which received royal charters, have since disappeared.⁴ Rivers were navigable much further inland: Alfeizerão, the port serving the Cistercian

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* In memory of my father, Capitão Luis Malaquias Pereira.

1 *Lírica profana*, vol. 2, pp. 609–612, 709; Cotarelo (1934), 18–19. Interestingly, seven centuries later, the Galician fishing sector is “the most important in Europe, in terms of employment, income, fleet, catches and landings.” In a study for the European Union (García-Negro et al. [2004], 1), Galicia counted “more than 8,000 fishing enterprises.” Shipbuilding, incipient in medieval times, is now also an important sector of the Galician economy.

2 For Johan Zorro: *Lírica profana*, vol. 2, p. 572. Aveiro was a busy port until the end of the 16th century when the silting of the Vouga River and a storm-created sandbar cut it off from the sea until modern times.

3 Serrão et al. (1996), 443–454. Shipbuilding is still an important sector of the Portuguese economy, although in the past decades commercial shipping and fishing have contracted considerably as a result of international competition and lack of investment. See Cristovam (2000), 1.

abbey of Alcobaça, is now eight miles inland. Not only has it lost the significance it once had, but it is no longer remembered as a port.

Galicia and northern Portugal share common origins in Celtic tribes which occupied the northwestern edge of the Iberian Peninsula. They became part of the Roman province of Gallaecia, and in the fifth and sixth centuries were taken over by the Sueves who established a kingdom, the first Iberian kingdom, whose borders could occasionally reach south of the Tagus River.5 This was roughly the geographic region which five and a half centuries later would produce most poets of the Galician-Portuguese cancioneiros, or songbooks. Elías de Tejada, quoting Ramón Otero Pedrayo, stresses that it was the Sueves who were culturally absorbed and became Galician, contrary to what would be expected of a dominant invader.6 If so, this is an early example of a strong regional culture, if not identity, that would become even more cohesive over the following centuries.

By contrast, the Arab and Berber tribes which came from North Africa in the early eighth century did not leave as deep an imprint in northern Iberia as in the south. Four centuries later, however, the 'kingdom' of Galicia, and the fiefdom of Portugal, took active part in the early stages of the Reconquest and beyond, once Portugal was declared a separate kingdom in 1139 under Afonso Henriques and later recognized as such by the papacy and the kings of León and Castile. By 1249, King Afonso III, a major patron of the poetical arts and importer of Provençal trends into Portugal, had pushed the Portuguese border as far south as the sea. This brought to an end Muslim rule over what had been al-Gharb al-Andalus, the western province of the Muslim states in Iberia. In fact, the theme of the lover departing for the fossado, i.e. to serve his king in battle, leaving his beloved behind, was singled out, many years ago, by H.R. Lang as a distinguishing feature of Galician-Portuguese poetry. This and other elements of originality discussed below exclude Galician-Portuguese lyric from the total indebtedness to Provençal influence proposed by other critics.7

The political breach caused by Afonso Henriques's self-coronation as king of an independent Portugal did not suddenly affect the cultural heritage shared with Galicia. Both nations continued to speak the same language until the early fourteenth century, when divergences became more noticeable. A conventional date accepted for this linguistic distinction is 1325, the year of the death of King Dinis of Portugal, a prolific poet in his own right. This marks also

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5 Elías de Tejada and Pércopo (1966), 25–52.
6 Ibid., 41–42.
7 Lang (1894), lxiii.