

INTRODUCTION

Traveling the Cultural Frontier

History seems scarcely distinguishable from myth. Historians, whether critical or not, at one point or another in their work, embody in the past values which seem to them to be the most significant or enduring of a given peoples' experience. Since values are culturally or socially defined, historians, from this perspective, engage in a process of myth-building. This is a proper role for historians, although not the only role, and I do not mean to disparage the part played by myth in all cultures, particularly as a context which makes the past something worth preserving and something intelligible to the present.

Until the mid-1970s, Spanish medievalism exhibited considerable difficulty in disentangling present myths from past ones or to deal effectively and realistically with those aspects of the past which have been particularly productive of conflict or anxiety. I believe that the historian's role as interpreter of culture is analogous to that of the psychologist as interpreter of the individual psyche. In the middle ages conflict with the Muslims provided a very realistic basis for the fear of Spanish Christians, which became internalized both in individual psychologies and in collective norms regulating social distance among religious groups, and which finally were institutionalized in discriminatory laws and apparatus for enforcing them. To explain such phenomena as the Inquisition in terms of generalities like "intolerance" or "religious exclusivity," let alone such constructs as "nationalism," "capitalism," or the rise of the "modern" state, does not do justice to the social-psychological dimensions of the problem. For, long after the enemy was vanquished, the Jews expelled, and the Inquisition disbanded, the image of the "Moor" remained as the quintessential stranger, an object to be feared. Case histories in recent Spanish clinical psychology bear out this contention.¹

¹ Fear of strangers is a commonplace topic in psychoanalytic literature. Among Europeans, the Hindu frequently appears as an object of strangeness; see Angel Garma, *The Psychoanalysis of Dreams* (New York: Delta, 1966), p. 88. For references to fears of "Moors" in recent Spanish psychological literature, see Gregorio Nieto,

Transposed into the historiographical field, subconscious fears became transferred into bias that underlies historical interpretation and contributes to misinterpretation. Unless purged of such bias, the historian cannot play a valid role either as interpreter of the past or as a creator of myth for the present and future, no more than (and to the same extent as) a neurotic individual can interpret the strands of his own past conflicts that have brought him to his present state, or fashion functional guidelines for future adjustment.

Although, like most historians trained in the positivist tradition, I strive to be objective, I nevertheless know that my own values play a formative role in the picture that I present of medieval Spanish history. I believe that ethnocentrism is the bane of peoples and of history; that contact of cultures is inevitably creative, however conflictive; and that the mettle of a culture is manifested in its ability to adjust to other cultures without destroying them.

For all of my scholarly career I have traveled the interface between two cultures, Islamic and Spanish, able to identify strongly with both, but still feeling not quite at home with either. I was trained as an Islamist; my research has largely fallen on the Spanish side. For these reasons, possibly, my notion about what is distinctive or even normative about medieval society may differ considerably from those of either the Islamist or the Hispanist. Only by identifying with both cultures, and with one no more than the other, can the historian entertain any reasonable hopes of filtering out some of the more flagrant biases that have so persistently plagued this area of investigation.

This book is not intended as a general survey of the high middle ages in Spain, but rather as an analysis of central issues and phenomena that contributed to the formation of Islamic and Spanish cultures in the Iberian peninsula and that guided the interaction among both peoples. Underlying the narrative which follows is a concern for the processes whereby distinctive cultures and societies are formed. The two cultures here described had vastly different his-

“Sobre el estado de enajenación mental del procesado M. G. D.,” *El Siglo Médico*, 93 (1934), 695, where a psychotic dreamed that the “Moors” were invading Spain (“The Moors invaded Spain, carried off the dead on the backs of burros, and razed the houses. When the houses fell, serpents came out and I was so frightened, that I went to the cemetery with some children, and the dead spoke to us”), or the case of a man who suffered the delusion that his wife had committed adultery with a series of sixteen “Moors” encamped in his neighborhood; B. Llopis Lloret and A. Escudero Ortuño, “El delirio de infidelidad conyugal múltiple,” *Actas Luso-Españolas de Neurología y Psiquiatría*, 7 (1948), 218.

tories but were nonetheless caught up in a situation where old cultural and social patterns had been broken and new ones were forming. The Muslims, who quickly established themselves, through conquest, as the dominant group, represented a new religious and social order which had not yet, in the eighth century, elaborated firm norms. That solid body of religious law which characterized mature Islamic society had not yet evolved, and the conquest created a body of culturally heterogeneous believers. The Christians had suffered the total destruction, by conquest, of their society and institutions and had to restructure them completely. Given the balance of power favoring the Muslims, the emergence of new patterns of social organization and cultural expression in Christian Spain had to reflect adaptation to the Muslim presence. The processes of social and cultural formation are analogous ones and are referred to in this book as crystallization (social, in Chapter 6; cultural, in Chapter 9). While the patterns of crystallization, both social and cultural, conform to general frameworks devised by sociologists and anthropologists, the case of medieval Iberia is doubly interesting because of the constant interchange between the two societies during the period of crystallization. Culture contact is a normal ingredient in the formation of cultures, but the length and variability of contact in medieval Spain lend the case unusual complexity.

Comparison and Diffusion

The comparative approach adopted in this book is in part a reaction to the general contrastive bias of medieval Spanish history, to view the two opposing blocs as radically dissimilar in religion, if not always in culture, and as therefore leading to assumptions of difference, rather than similarity, when in doubt. The adoption of this approach, an experiment at best, was suggested by a geographical intuition: the settlement of a unified geographical area by peoples of different cultures. From this perspective, the method works optimally in investigating the organization of formerly Muslim-held lands after they were conquered by Christians, an epoch beginning only in the late eleventh century. Nevertheless, in comparative perspective, there is some truth in the traditionally held view of the history of Christian Spain from the eighth century on as a preparation for the occupation of the entire peninsula which, when disengaged from the teleological overlay usually given it, further suggests the relevance of a comparative approach.

Because this book is cast in a civilizational perspective, the contact of cultures and the diffusion of discrete elements among them must play a major part in my narrative. But since the flow of elements from one culture to another and the processes by which such elements may have been adopted or rejected are to a great extent dependent on the structures of the societies involved, the comparative study of the two groups—Muslim and Christian—perforce presupposes making judgments of comparative or contrastive nature. Behind the constant recurrence of cultural diffusion as a theme of medieval Spanish history is more than a prurient interest in tracking the impact of Islamic upon Christian culture. There is the recognition that in the communication between two societies of unequal levels of socioeconomic integration, the difference in structure of the two societies sets in motion processes that are systemic in nature and exceed in impact the sum of the individual elements (techniques, ideas, institutions) transferred.

From the middle of the ninth century to the end of the period covered in this book (around 1300), the contact was between peoples not only of different cultures, but of different socioeconomic systems. One bloc, the Islamic, dominant until the eleventh century, was an expanding, “urban-artisanal” society, fully implanted in a larger economic network (the Mediterranean, in the first place, and beyond that the Islamic world as a whole). The other bloc, the Christian, was for most of the same period a heavily ruralized region which for the present we can characterize as “static-agrarian.”²

In each, therefore, all major social features were organized according to very different processes. In Islamic Spain, embedded in an international monetary economy, the cities were able to attract, mobilize, and partially direct agricultural production and thus to divert natural resources into burgeoning urban-craft industries which in turn required specific instruments of control.³ In Christian Spain (except for Barcelona, and this rather late in our period) the nature of state and society were shaped by the more rigid structure of the agrarian economy whose surpluses tended to flow, not to the cities, but to rural centers, organized by lay or ecclesiastic lords.

² On this typology, see Anthony Leeds, “Brazilian Careers and Social Structure: An Evolutionary Model and Case History,” *American Anthropologist*, 66 (1964), 1321–47, on p. 1322.

³ See Maurice Lombard, *Espaces et réseaux du haut moyen âge* (Paris-The Hague: Mouton, 1972), p. 63.

It follows from this dichotomy that the diffusion of any cultural element, whether technological, economic, or institutional, involves its adaptation to a sharply different socio-economic context and may therefore cause ripples throughout the entire system. Here again, comparative analysis is called for; because if cultural diffusion between two societies of unequal socio-economic organization leads to structural changes in the recipient culture, the structures of both must be understood in order to gauge the impact of diffusion. Thus we shall argue, for example, that contact between al-Andalus and Christian Spain, particularly Castile and Aragón, had the effect of inducing, stimulating, and determining specific forms of urbanization, which cannot be explained adequately without reference to the structure of the urbanized Islamic society.

The New Historiography

Since the first edition of this book appeared in 1979, a revolution has occurred in Spanish medieval studies which, of necessity, has obliged me to bring this edition up to date and to emend, reconsider and alter those positions and conclusions which recent historiography may have cast in a new light.

Three phenomena in particular have contributed to this historiographical revolution:

(1) The first is the stimulus that the new Spanish federalism of regional autonomy has given to local and regional history. It is only in this context that one can explain the flowering of Islamic studies, in a markedly regional context, in eastern Spain—Valencia, Alicante and the Balearics, in particular. As a result of this shift in influence away from the Caliphal heartland, a wealth of new data and interpretations has emerged.

(2) The second element of the historiographical revolution has been the amazing development of medieval archeology which has opened new vistas on Christian and particularly Islamic society, in view of the relative paucity of written documentation on Islamic Spain compared to that of the Christian kingdoms. The findings of the archeologists have contributed to a broad range of topics including medieval technology, the nature of peninsular feudalism, basic patterns of human settlement in al-Andalus, urban morphology, and the organization of agricultural production.

(3) Finally, the mythic dimensions of the old historiography which portrayed Spain as a society that had been “incompletely feudalized”

have been fully exposed and the myth overthrown. In its place, and in the wake of an important and ongoing discussion over the meaning of "feudalism" and "feudal society," is a new vision of the social structure of the medieval Christian kingdoms, now viewed as comparable in their social development to the other societies of medieval Europe.

The recent discussion of the nature of Spanish feudalism has had the following benefits:

(1) By first breaking out of the narrowly institutionalist and legalistic framework of the traditional historiography of this topic and adopting a more general model similar to Marc Bloch's "feudal society." Barbero and Vigil⁴ and others have demonstrated the pervasiveness of dependent relations in medieval Christian Spain. The old view of the predominance and persistence of "small free proprietors" associated with Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz has been shown to be, if not entirely mythic, then at least of sharply limited chronological and social scope.

(2) Freed from having to defend an unreal perspective of Spain's "incomplete feudalism," institutional and social historians have been able to reassess the nature of the feudal aristocracy, enriched by a new understanding of kinship relations.

(3) The emphasis on the universality of dependent relations both benefited from and strengthened the development among Spanish medievalists of classical Marxist analysis.

However the analytical limitations of this approach soon became evident at two specific points:

a) the admission that the ownership of the means of production was split between lords and peasants, with the latter retaining control both of their property and of simple means of technological transformation, and

b) the recognition that the seigniorial nobility extracted the surplus produced by the peasants by "extraeconomic means." Once one admits that power variables are "extraeconomic," entirely new methods of analyzing the political culture must be developed, in order to overcome the limitations of a traditional class analysis which, by definition, can only produce ambiguous results when applied to medieval society. Hence the importance of kinship and the culture of aristocratic soci-

⁴ Abilio Barbero and Marcelo Vigil, *La formación del feudalismo en la Península Ibérica*, 4th ed. (Barcelona: Crítica, 1986).

ety in a medievalist like J. E. Ruiz-Domènec, or of economic models that admit the coexistence of competing modes of production in the same society (in the place of the vague ambivalences implied in a concept like the “feudal” mode of production), in the work of Paulino Iradiel.⁵

In comparative perspective, it becomes clear that feudalism, however conceived, is not the most appropriate way of describing medieval social structure. At the level of the civil or military aristocracy, it has been amply demonstrated that there were no European-style fiefs in the Islamic world, thus limiting the utility of comparative institutional analysis within this framework.

Moreover, it is precisely at the point of comparison of Christian with Islamic Spain that Barbero and Vigil’s “feudal society” model dissolves completely. Having convinced themselves that all peasantries were normatively dependent, they simply apply an inappropriate European model to Islamic society. Yet, herein lies a clue to part of the solution: namely, that the most arresting characteristic of medieval European society was the near universality of dependent relations, whereas the social role of peasantry in the Islamic world was less monolithic and more varied. Class analysis also dissolves in comparative perspective because social ascription was not class-based in the Islamic world of the high middle ages.

Inasmuch as institutions relate directly to what I call processes of social crystallization, my interest in feudalism is, in this sense, traditional. Nevertheless, process and pattern are what interest me, not the analysis of each separate element (fief, homage, etc.). Too much of the feudalism debate, old and new, founders on the problem of implicit norms. In the comparative perspective, normativity dissolves.

We do not know nearly as much about the Andalusi peasantry as about their Christian counterparts, but we have some good inferential information on the significance of tribalism, of kinship, and the relation of these to the organization of production. Above, I noted the unavoidable ambiguity in the concept of “ownership of the means of production” in medieval society and that such ownership determined power relations even less in Islamic society than in Christian. The organization of agricultural production is both constrained

⁵ J. E. Ruiz-Domènec, *La memoria de los feudales* (Barcelona, Argot, 1984); Paulino Iradiel, “Feudalismo agrario y artesonado corporativo,” *Studia Histórica*, II, 2 (1984), 55–88.

by social structure and also lends characteristic form to it.⁶ For example, irrigation agriculture was better fitted to the communal structure of the Arab/Berber clan than was dry farming. The relationship of communal groups to irrigation agriculture, moreover, obeyed objectives consonant with the values of those communities and was not oriented necessarily either to the market or to the production of surpluses. One of the principles of tribal settlement design was precisely *not* to maximize the exploitation of potential resources, but to reserve a portion for future growth. In this sense, analysis of the organization of production can yield more significant information about medieval agrarian societies than does legalistic wrangling over the nature of “ownership.”⁷

In general, and viewed again from the comparative perspective that motivates this volume, the study of medieval Spain, of the conflict between two opposing and radically different cultural and social blocs, has suffered from an inadequate theory of culture or, from the incomplete conjugation of cultural and social theory. In the “polemic of Spanish history” of the 1950s and 1960s, for example, Sánchez-Albornoz had a notion of social dynamics and change, but this was linked to a theory of culture in which culture was viewed as genetic, and change (acculturation) was precluded structurally. His antagonist Américo Castro had an appropriately rich and complex theory of culture but lacked any concept whatever of the social dynamics driving cultural processes.⁸ A medieval historian must have both a theory of culture and a theory of social action. Medievalists operating broadly in the Marxist tradition have a theory of culture inadequate to the problems of analysis caused by culture contact. This book attempts to redress some of these deficiencies.

My theory of culture is that of classical American cultural anthropology in the tradition of A. L. Kroeber. It stresses diffusion as a

⁶ Miquel Barceló, “La qüestió de l’hidraulisme andalusí,” in *Les aigües cercades (Els qanat(s) de l’illa de Mallorca)* (Palma de Mallorca: Institut d’Estudis Baleàrics, 1986), pp. 9–36.

⁷ See Thomas F. Glick and Helena Kirchner, “Hydraulic Systems and Technologies of Islamic Spain: History and Archeology,” in P. Squatriti, ed., *Working with Water in Medieval Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), p. 294.

⁸ Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz, *España, un enigma histórico*, 2 vols. (Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 1956); Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); *The Spaniards: An Introduction to their History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). On Castro, see my article, “Américo Castro”

standard mechanism of culture growth, and it identifies the boundaries of ethnic groups and the mechanisms accounting for their degree of "enclosure."⁹ My theory of social action is close to the "structurationist" perspective of Anthony Giddens which stresses the salience of power relations in society.¹⁰ I regard such relations as multivalent, involving a variety of interacting structures including, but not limited to, social class, and certainly including cultural factors not directly relatable to infrastructures as generally portrayed. That is, I view "social reproduction" as constrained by cultural factors, and vice versa.

Because I am sympathetic to the "structurationist" perspective, I do not accept the efficacy of "deep structures" in the explanation of society or culture. Societies and cultures are always in a state of becoming and never in a steady state. Moreover, according to Giddens, structures change recursively; that is, the continuous, daily actions of human actors have the effect of introducing constant, incremental change in both social and cultural structures. In this context, I criticize, for example, the concept of the action of cultural or linguistic substrates so dear to the philological tradition of Spanish medievalism.

The cultural theories of Sánchez-Albornoz, so retrograde and at odds with any kind of modern anthropological perspective, died with him and are unlamented. Today's historians who persist in raging against "continuism" (the notion of the persistence of cultural traits across through Roman, Gothic, and Islamic peninsular societies) are fighting, if not a dead man, at least a straw man. But Castro and the issues that he raised have been unduly put aside. In part the nature of professional cultures in Spain ensured that his influence would be limited mainly to philologists and literary historians. Abroad his works enjoyed greater currency among historians and even anthropologists than perhaps they had in Spain itself. If I have criticized him, it is because to support his historical and cultural findings and

in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, Kelly Boyd, ed. (London, Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp. 184–186.

⁹ See my articles "Acculturation as an Explanatory Concept in Spanish History," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 11 (1969), 136–154 (with Oriol Pi-Sunyer), and "The Ethnic Systems of Premodern Spain," *Comparative Studies in Sociology*, 1 (1978), 157–171.

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984); and my comment, "History and Philosophy of Geography," *Progress in Human Geography*, 11 (1987), 405–409.

to give substance to his fine intuitions he searched for a theoretical context and chose poorly. The philosophical idealism of Dilthey was an inadequate tool with which to define, much less explain, the nature, substance and meaning of culture contact, whose immense anthropological literature was a closed book for Don Américo.

In recent years, Spanish medievalism has acquired an interesting and dynamic sociology which has been enriched by the perspectives of a new generation of medievalists, Arabists and archeologists. But its theory of culture lacks articulation. It is to this task that this book is in part addressed.

A Question of Names

The names found throughout this book describing the geographical hearths of the ethnic groups that have inhabited the Iberian peninsula have been used at different times in different senses. The historical emergence of such names as Spain, Castile, Catalonia responds to discrete processes of cultural differentiation and ethnic ascription and, as Castro indicated, signals diachronic boundaries between different cultures. Because such processes are among the central themes of this discussion, they require meticulousness in the use of geographical terms with ethnic connotations, lest careless usage give rise to anachronistic confusion of people of one culture with those of another.

Spain is meant herein as a geographical term, defining the territory presently occupied by the Spanish state. Referring to all the medieval Christian territories together, I prefer to allude to the "Christian kingdoms," or to specific ones. In the high middle ages, Arab writers referred to all territory south of the Duero (and later any Iberian territory held by Muslims) as al-Andalus, whereas Spain (Isbāniyya) referred to the peninsula at a geographic entity. Regions to the north of the Duero were sometimes lumped together as Qashṭallah (Castile) or defined more specifically. Those regions of the Upper Ebro Valley and Old Castile where summer raids were made were called Alaba wa'l-Qilā^c ("Alava and the Castles"); or reference was made to Jillīqiyya (Galicia) or Banbalūna (meaning either Pamplona or Navarre, in any case the homeland of the Basques—al-Bashkūnish).¹¹ For the Christians, on the other hand, Spain (Spania)

¹¹ To al-Idrisī, nevertheless, Castile lay to the north of the central mountain system, "Spain" to the south; José Antonio Maravall, *El concepto de España en la edad*

was more of a cultural concept, defining broadly the area which had fallen within the Visigothic sphere of influence, sometimes even including the region of Narbonne, on the northern side of the Pyrenees. According to Castro, the Romance form *España* was first used by those living in Septimania and Provence to refer to Muslim-held territory, the origin of refugees (*Hispani*) seeking a home in Carolingian lands.¹²

The term universally used by Arabic-speakers for those lands under Islamic control was *al-Andalus*. The origin of this term has confounded philologists and historians for years and there is no conclusive explanation to date. It has generally been supposed to relate to the Vandals, who passed through the peninsula in the fifth century on their way to North Africa. Thus it is puzzling why the Arabs should have named their Iberian Province after people who no longer lived there. One conjecture is that Berbers of North African regions adjacent to the peninsula may still, in the early eighth century, have referred to it as the “land of the Vandals,” a hypothetical *zamurz Wandalus* or *tamurt Wandalus*. Since many Berber nouns have genitives with a prefixed *w-*, the Arabs would have translated this as *bilad al-Andalus*, “land of the Andals.” Another theory, less contrived, ascribes the name to a mythical Atlantis, which later Arab geographical writers tried to relate to the Atlantic Ocean. The term *al-Andalus* appears as early as 716 in bilingual coins, as the translation of *Spania*.¹³

Thus the name of this medieval Islamic province (and then nation) located on the Iberian peninsula is *al-Andalus*. Its inhabitants were Andalusis; to call them “Andalusians” is misleading because that usage connotes the present-day region of Andalusia, whose boundaries are smaller than those of the historical *al-Andalus*.

Countless books and articles refer to Islamic, Muslim, Arabic, or Moorish Spain. Although the juxtaposition of “Islamic” and “Spain” implies, as Castro has said, a contradiction in terms, it is preferred

media, 2nd ed. (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1964), p. 199. On Arabic terms for Christian regions, see *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (hereafter cited *EI*²), 10 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960–2002), I: 348, 1011–1012, II: 541–542.

¹² Maravall, *Concepto de España*, chapter 2; Américo Castro, *Español, palabra extranjera: razones y motivos* (Madrid: Taurus, 1970), pp. 7–21.

¹³ Werner Wycichl, “Al-Andalus (sobre la historia de un nombre),” *Al-Andalus*, 17 (1952), 449–450; Joaquín Vallvé, “Sobre algunos problemas de la invasión musulmana,” *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 4 (1967), 361–363.

to the others. The form Muslim can, in correct Arabic usage, modify only a person, not an inanimate object. It is also preferable to the others because it connotes the dominant religion, Islam, as an apposite to “Christian Spain.” Arabic Spain is culturally appropriate, since Arabic was the primary language spoken there, but ethnically misleading, since the population was composed mainly of Hispano-Roman converts to Islam and Berbers and there were few Arabs in the population. Moorish Spain, besides being archaic and romantic (conjuring up images from Washington Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra*), is also misleading on a number of grounds. Strictly speaking, Moors were the Mauri, Berbers who lived in the Roman province of Mauretania; therefore its use stresses, sometimes by design, the Berber contribution to Andalusí culture. The etymology of *moro*, however, is Greek *mauros*, meaning black. In English, Moor still bears its original racial connotation of blackness (e.g., Othello, Moor of Venice, understood to be black, or the “black-moor” of the standard English version of Aesop’s fables), whereas many Berbers are fair-haired and blue-eyed. In Spanish, the term *moro* is derogatory. It should not be used in scholarly—or any—discourse.

The standard Hebrew term for Spain, *Sefarad*, offers an interesting parallel to al-Andalus and its origins are equally mysterious. It is clear enough that the name—a biblical toponym referring to a place in Asia Minor—was the result of a process of Judaization (changing a “non-Hebrew linguistic element” in the language(s) spoken by Jews, “to make it resemble a Hebrew term of similar form and function,”)¹⁴ whereby the Biblical name was applied to substitute for a non-Hebrew name that sounded like it. That name might well have been Punic *i sephanim*, isle of rabbits, the probable ancestor of the Latin placename, Hispania. The Jews were the only medieval inhabitants of the peninsula who required a word connoting the areas on *both* sides of the medieval political frontier, on the supposition that Jewish culture was presumed uniform throughout.¹⁵

¹⁴ Paul Wexler, *The Non-Jewish Origins of the Sephardic Jews* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 76.

¹⁵ See Wexler’s discussion in *ibid.*, pp. 75–78. A competing hypothesis is a derivation from Gothic, *swarts*, black, presumably owing to the Visigoth’s perception of the indigenous people of the peninsula as swarthier than themselves. Although this solution strikes me as far-fetched, the semantic equivalence of *swarts* and *mauros* is striking and may not be adventitious.