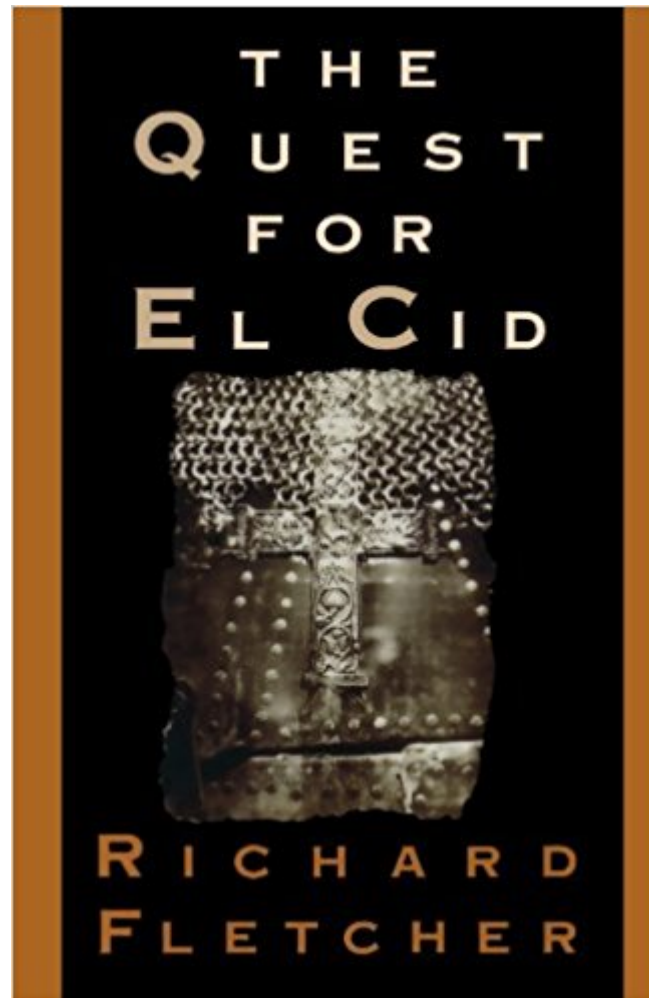




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The Quest For El Cid



Synopsis

Rodrigo Diaz, the legendary warrior-knight of eleventh-century Castile known as El Cid, is remembered today as the Christian hero of the Spanish crusade who waged wars of re-conquest for the triumph of the Cross over the Crescent. He is still honored in Spain as a national hero for liberating the fatherland from the occupying Moors. Yet, as Richard Fletcher shows in this award-winning book, there are many contradictions between eleventh-century reality and the mythology that developed with the passing years. By placing El Cid in a fresh, historical context, Fletcher shows us an adventurous soldier of fortune who was of a type, one of a number of "cids," or "bosses," who flourished in eleventh-century Spain. But the El Cid of legend--the national hero--was unique in stature even in his lifetime. Before his death El Cid was already celebrated in a poem written in tribute of the conquest of Almería; posthumously he was immortalized in the great epic *Poema de Mio Cid* and became the centerpiece for countless other works of literature. When he died in Valencia in 1099, he was ruler of an independent principality he had carved for himself in Eastern Spain. Rather than the zealous Christian leader many believe him to have been, Rodrigo emerges in Fletcher's study as a mercenary equally at home in the feudal kingdoms of northern Spain and the exotic Moorish lands of the south, selling his martial skills to Christian and Muslim alike. Indeed, his very title derives from the Arabic word *sayyid* meaning "lord" or "master." And as there was little if any sense of Spanish nationhood in the eleventh century, he can hardly be credited for uniting a medieval Spanish nation. In this ground-breaking inquiry into the life and times of El Cid, Fletcher disentangles fact from myth to create a striking portrait of an extraordinary man, clearly showing how and why legend transformed him into something he was not during his life. A fascinating journey through a turbulent epoch, *The Quest for El Cid* is filled with the excitement of discovery, and will delight readers interested not only in Spanish history and literature, but those who want to understand how myth can shape our perception of history.

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Customer Reviews

Known as El Cid ("the leader"), Rodrigo Diaz is Spain's first national hero, the 11th-century warrior whose conquests liberated the fatherland from the Moors. But the El Cid celebrated in epic and verse bears little relation to the real Diaz, claims British historian Fletcher (Saint James's Catapult). Instead of the shining Christian knight, family man and loyalist of legend, he gives us a mercenary soldier who switched sides and spent five years in the pay of a Muslim ruler, fighting Christians. Arrogant and insubordinate, this Cid was "the scourge of his time," in one contemporary's words, a stern overlord of his conquered subjects, driven by an unquenchable thirst for money. Noting that there was little sense of nationhood in the Spain of the time, Fletcher overturns more myths, e.g., the so-called Arab conquest of Spain in the eighth century was carried out mainly by Berbers. Graceful prose and seamless scholarship buoy this idol-smashing portrait. Illustrated. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Beginning students, sophisticated scholars, and the general reader interested in Spanish medieval history will benefit from this provocative, learned, and elegantly written study of Rodrigo Diaz (c.1043-99)--El Cid--the 11th-century soldier of fortune who became the Spanish national hero. Fletcher begins by sketching the historical scene in Spain and Europe. After an imaginative discussion of the complicated sources of El Cid's life, he describes his aristocratic family background, knightly education, early military campaigns, service at the court of king Sancho II, exile spent as a mercenary soldier in Muslim service, and ultimate triumph as Prince of Valencia. The concluding chapter, as exciting as a murder mystery, explains the growth of the El Cid legend. As an important story fascinatingly told, and as a rich mine of information about many facets of Spanish and Muslim medieval cultures, this book is highly recommended.- Bennett D. Hill, Georgetown Univ., Washington, Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book outlines the life and career of Rodrigo Diaz (also known as El Cid) as it can be

reconstructed from contemporary or near-contemporary historical sources. This is opposed to previous efforts which relied strongly on the legends and poems dealing with the Cid to reconstruct his activities and motivation. The goals in doing this are twofold: to demonstrate that his career can be reconstructed using only these historical sources and to show how poorly the legends match the reality. There are several obvious problems with this approach. First: the original sources are too poor to provide the detailed biography that the poems can provide. And second: the Cid (despite the excellent film) is not as well known in English-language legends and history books. This means that many of the ideas he's trying to refute have never made it over to the English-speaking world leaving many of his refutations confusing. It'd be like writing an expose on King Arthur in Mongolian; it just doesn't have the same impact. Fortunately, the book does not succumb to either of these problems. The holes in the original sources can be filled in somewhat with a detailed study of the background and lead up to the Spain of the Cid. The taifa states of al-Andalus offer detailed information on life in Muslim Spain and are less commonly discussed in English making an outline of their history necessary in any event. The first half of the book in fact, is simply setting the stage for the exploration of the Cid's career. The second half discusses what is known of the Cid's life and provides basic literary criticism of the chronicles and poems. Whether he succeeds in disproving the ideas which he is trying to refute is a bit harder to judge. He outlines many of these, and many of the nationalistic ones are fairly obvious in any event, but someone who never grew up on legends of the Cid or engrossed themselves in Cidian historical criticism is unlikely to know how effective his arguments are against the more compelling mythical view. This is the primary book on the Cid in English and as such is likely to form the basis for future English-language interpretations of that figure. People wanting to know more about the Cid and Spain of the eleventh century should check out Pindar's *The Cid and His Spain*, which is the chief book that Fletcher is arguing against. Some areas do fall a bit flat here and there. The chapter on similar mercenaries from across Europe went a bit far in seeking comparable examples. Rodrigo's career is best understood within a Spanish context, something that he makes very clear in the rest of his book, which makes it confusing to see that forgotten here. But on the whole the book does a good job of both keeping the readers' interest and explaining the background even while arguing against an approach that few readers will be familiar with.

This book gives you the whole deal. You discover who El Cid was, his life and the times he lived in. The author does an excellent job explaining the sources for the book, why they are credible and why, at times, we have to view them with a grain of salt. A book that tells the true story, warts and

all, of an extraordinary figure in Spanish history.

This little book is a interesting history of El Cid and his times

It is very good in having various sources and complementary info, and a lot of text for the size of the book, but some of his reasonings about el Cid for me are wrong, but brings good info about it.

Great book, great price, fast delivery.

Great

Excellent

This book gives a great environment of the CID. My wife being a decedent of the CID is a great picture of his life and times.

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