

FOREWORD

Long relatively neglected by anglophone historians, the multiple histories of medieval Spain, thoroughly distinctive, post-Roman yet not wholly Latin-Christian, are now beginning to take their rightful places alongside other parts of Europe in the history of the Middle Ages. This welcome development has been due in large part to one of the authors of the present volume, Richard Fletcher, and has latterly been strongly assisted by the other, Simon Barton. Both with expert knowledge, on the historical as on the literary and Hispanist front, of the texts translated and commented upon here, these two scholars have joined forces to make available all the main narrative sources of eleventh- and twelfth-century Spain. This crucially important period, of cultural and social formation and flowering, of political conflict and crystallisation, has until now been fairly impenetrable for non-specialists. Visitors to León and Toledo, Burgos, Zaragoza and Valencia gain a vivid yet imprecise sense of the world of El Cid, negotiating his way between al-Andalus and the Christian north, and of successive Alfonsos ducking and weaving and battling their way to the creation of the medieval kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Richard Fletcher and Simon Barton now make it possible for those without Latin to read the key texts, to understand their authors' backgrounds and purposes, to appreciate their specific literary and historical contexts, and to analyse the structures of power they reveal. Above all, since, as Marc Bloch wrote, 'it is men that history seeks to grasp', these two fine historians acquaint us with the characters (and they include a few women too) who throng the chroniclers' pages. We gain a familiarity, at once vivid and precise, with the nobles and ecclesiastics, kings and royal kin, whose journeyings and campaigns we follow, and whose religious and material concerns emerge so clearly in these pages. This is exactly the kind of historical material that Manchester Medieval Sources aim to make accessible, and with this splendid volume alongside John Edwards' earlier one, it is a particular delight to have Spain now deservedly well represented in the series.

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