

**Société Rencesvals Discussion Session on Tradition and Creation
in the Castilian Epic: Trends in Contemporary Research
December 29, 1978**

Each year a Special Session organized by the Société Rencesvals and devoted to the medieval Spanish epic takes place in conjunction with the Modern Language Association of America Convention. The 1978 meeting took place in the Royal B Ballroom of the Americana Hotel in New York City with some 200 persons in attendance. The organizer and discussion leader was Professor John S. Miletich of the University of Utah. The recording secretary and compiler of the discussion was Mr. Jean-Paul Carton also of the University of Utah.

Professor Alan Deyermond agreed to serve as organizer and discussion leader for the next MLA Special Session on the Castilian Epic to be held in San Francisco in December, 1979.

Briefer summaries of the papers appeared in *Olifant*, 6 (October 1978) 1, 35-38 and also in *La Corónica*, 7 (1978) 1, 5-7,

Summaries of Papers Presented

The Problem of Lost Epics: Evidence and Criteria

Alan Deyermond, Westfield College, University of London; Princeton University

Very few Spanish epics survive, and scholars disagree vigorously even about these. How can we hope to know anything about the poems that have been lost? Certainty is unattainable, but we should be able to distinguish between probabilities and remote possibilities if we apply a uniform set of criteria. It seems to me that there are eleven criteria that can usefully be applied to the forty or more cases in which scholars have postulated lost epics:

- A. Surviving verse fragment.
- B. Statement by chroniclers.
- C. Reconstructable verse lines in chronicle prose.
- D. Plot in chronicle prose which corresponds to an independently known epic tradition.
- E. Extensive plot in chronicle prose, with generally epic air.
- F. As E, but summary plot
- G. Independent occurrence of story in chronicles and ballads.
- H. Allusion in another literary work.
- I. Extant epic text that seems to include earlier strata.
- J. Formulaic system in chronicle prose.
- K. Composition by motif in chronicle prose.

A is the strongest, K perhaps the weakest (it is characteristic of other genres also). All except A need care (even C may derive from a Latin chronicle), but some combinations are at least as strong as A: CEJ is almost irresistible, CEGJ wholly so. At the other extreme, we have a summary plot of a story that is not at all obviously epic in nature.

I suggest that anyone who seriously proposes a lost epic should be able to point either to a surviving verse fragment or to some combination of the remaining criteria. This will often result in a case which, though strong enough to deserve consideration, falls well short of total conviction; but unless some such criteria are met, the case is hopelessly weak-as, for example, with *Covadonga*. An even more unlikely candidate is the story of the *Jueces de Castilla*. *Covadonga* at least has a plot, but the story of the Judges of Castile is a genealogical account, of a type frequent in the Bible and in medieval literature. At the other extreme, there is *Siete infantes de Lara*. There are many verse lines which can be reconstructed from the chronicles; the plot is preserved at great length and has an authentically epic flavor; the story turns up in ballads; there are references in other works; and the chronicle prose contains at least some traces of a formulaic system.

Between these extreme cases come, for example, the Aragonese *Campana de Huesca*, and *Abdicación de Alfonso el Magno*. For *Campana de Huesca*, a fair number of lines have been reconstructed from chronicle prose, the story is of a kind that might well form the subject of an epic, and there is a sixteenth-century ballad. *Abdicación*, on the other hand, has the narrative excitement and the unity proper to an epic, but proper also to a well told piece of history. Thus, although an epic may have existed, there is no satisfactory evidence.

Three final questions. First, can one judge the artistic quality of a text that no longer exists? It can be done only in exceptional cases: the style of *Roncesvalles*, sampled in the extant fragment, or the structure of the extensively prosified *Siete infantes*. We are obviously on safer ground in judging content than verbal detail, and no credence can attach to estimates of length. Secondly, can one recognize an epic flavor in prosifications? I think this can be done with a fair degree of accuracy by the process of comparison with the corpus of European and world epic. Thirdly, how can we decide whether several versions of an epic existed? In a few cases, prosifications are so detailed that we can clearly detect two versions, but usually it is hard to decide how much of the observable difference is due to epic poets and how much to chroniclers and ballad poets. We shall never know for certain how Spanish epic poets went about their work; we do not even know the relative importance of memorization and of improvisation in epic transmission. We

can only guess, but a due consideration of criteria and of categories of evidence may improve the accuracy of our guesses.¹

The Poema de Mio Cid in the Crónica de Veinte Reyes **Prosification**

Nancy Joe Dyer, Texas A&M University

The *Crónica de Veinte Reyes* (= *XXR*) account of the legend of the Cid is a complex, heterogeneous text, pieced together from more than one epic source and from a half dozen or more non-epic ones. A combination of circumstantial factors influenced the *XXR* historians' preference for *PMC* as the principle source for their entire Cid story. Among these were the abundance of precise details in the poem; decidedly its pro-Castilian perspective; the chroniclers' traditional predisposition toward the epic as history, dating from its pre-literary manifestations; confirmation of the historicity of the poem by Alfonso X's earlier authoritative approval of it as a framework for the exile narrative for the *Estoria de España* and the availability of the inherited Alfonsine redaction and its prime sources. The stylistic advantage of a concise narrative of balanced proportions must have enhanced the attractiveness of the epic for use in a chronicle of limited scope. It is possible that the secondary imposition of a rhetorical-literary style on the poem, as it advanced to the literary stage preserved in the Per Abbat poem, facilitated its subsequent adaptation to chronicles.

Our view of the epic source has been complicated by the subjective interventions of royal historians who wished to project a favorable image of the loyal Castilian hero and to perpetuate a "truth" compatible with their own bias. They modified the perspective of the epic to produce a narrative very different from their epic source. The passages which adhere most faithfully to *PMC* focus directly on the Cid's personal efforts to regain Alfonso VI's *gracia*, on his pious acts, on the total depravity of his enemies, and only occasionally on his martial feats. The material showing lighter treatment of the epic deals with secondary figures not directly involved in the Cid's vindication.

The language of the epic was converted into prose with a consistency and uniformity which is comparable to the elimination or revision of irrelevant or incompatible content. Internal evidence clearly suggests that elimination of rhyme was not a central concern of the historians: they allowed too many verses to remain in their text, perhaps to capitalize on the proven capacity of epics to influence the public. The prosifiers even seem to have had a penchant for capricious re-poetization, perhaps according to a medieval rhetorical innovation, "rhymed

¹ The full text of this paper is to be published in *Hispanic Review*.

prose." Prose, rather than aiming simply at the elimination of rhyme, involves a process of leveling, of reducing lexical and stylistic variety to a bare minimum in non-essential contexts.

XXR has a unique distinction in addition to corroborating critical emendations in the unique manuscript and giving glimpses of another version of an epic poem of the *Cid*. Effectively it is our earliest analysis of the thirteenth-century epic poem, enabling modern scholars to see, through the eyes of thirteenth-century historians, an assessment of the basic content and values embodied in their source. As we sharpen our focus on *XXR*, we discover substantial documentation of the vitality and the purpose of early Castilian epic poetry.

French Epic Legends in Spanish Hagiography: The *Vida de San Ginés* and the *Chanson de Roland*

John K. Walsh, University of California, Berkeley

The *Vida de San Ginés de la Xara* conserved in the inedited fifteenth-century MS 5580 of the Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid) is an example of the most fanciful elaboration of a sanctoral tale. Not only does it exploit the full gamut of standard hagiographic motifs, but it applies absurd supererogations from the Romance epic in recounting the life and miracles of the saint. I have found no antecedent Latin text for the *Vida* and assume that a goodly portion of the legendary material originated in the fifteenth century.

The genesis of the legend—and even the origin of the figure of San Ginés—is muddled and obscure. In its early stages, the cult was tied to the tales of St. Genesius of Arles, a martyr beheaded in the fifth century. Apparently, there was a special cult to Genesius of Arles in Cartagena; out of this local worship, the cult and separate identity of Ginés de la Xara developed. The French origin of Genesius (= Ginés) of Arles had an essential part in forging the kernel of the new legend of Ginés de la Xara. A whole sequence of French motifs is applied, and these references become the tenets of his cultus. As the legend evolves, Ginés is assumed to be of the royal line of France: the hermit son of the emperor and elder brother of Roland and Oliver. The legend not only brings the latter pair to Spain in search of their lost hermit-brother but develops ancillary legends in the life of San Ginés that are inspired by episodes in the Roland legend, perhaps from now-lost Spanish versions of it, from prose references in Latin documents or Spanish chronicles, or from early Carolingian ballads circulating in Spain at the time.

One passage that was surely inspired by motifs in the epic is the descriptions of the voyage of Roland and Oliver to Spain. Their ship lands just below Cartagena. In order to be more sure of finding their brother, Oliver and Roland decide that the

best method would be to sound Roland's Oliphant:

[folios 7v-8r] E dixo Roldán a Oliveros: "Señor hermano, plégavos de tañer el vuestro cuerno, e veremos sy ay aquí algunos de nuestro linaje." E Oliveros respondió e dixo: "Señor hermano, poca boz es la de mi cuerno, pero plégavos de tañer el vuestro cuerno." E Rolán puso sus beços en su cuerno, e sonó tres vezes. . .

Later in the legend, when Roland and Oliver return to Spain and are attending the burial of their saintly brother, their ship—anchored and awaiting them in the harbor—is attacked by Muslims from the kingdom of Granada. All of the Frenchmen aboard are slaughtered. When Roland and Oliver come to the port, they discover that their ship has vanished; Roland rushes to the monastery and prays to San Ginés for a solution to the dilemma. Soon after, a messenger enters and implores Roland and Oliver to go to the port at once; in the interim, San Ginés has fought the Muslims, "brought the sea to the port" ([17r] "truxo la mar al puerto"), and revived all the Frenchmen who had been killed in this encounter, a battle that could rival only the later defeat at Roncesvalles in its devastation. After the battle, it is Don Beltrán who recounts the events in detail:

[17v-18r] "Señores, sabed que vinieron a la hora del alva gentes sobre nós. E atán apresuradamente nos dieron el conbate, que nunca podimos tomar armas. E a mí diéronme luego tres golpes: el uno en la frunte, e el otro en la cara, e el otro en la teta yzquierda. . . Luego vino el santo Ginés, e con él un hombre de una barba blanca, e pregunté a Ginés que quién era aquel ome. E dixome que era maestro de sanar llagas. E luego que fue acabado de curarme, luego fui sano. . ."

Don Beltrán is sometimes included as one of the twelve peers; while he is not cited in the *Chanson de Roland*, he is registered among the peers in the *Nota Emilianense* and is prominent in related French epics. In the ballads circulated and later printed in Spain, he is given a conspicuous rôle as the most awesomely mutilated victim of the battle at Roncesvalles; perhaps the emphasis upon the multiple wounds of Beltrán in the *Vida* was inspired by the descriptions of the death in the early Carolingian ballads.

There are reflections of the French epic tradition even in the post-burial miracle-stories that follow the core of the legendary biography in the *Vida*. One episode involving the son of Oliver who returns to Spain to recover the remains of his saintly uncle would appear to be modelled upon the figure of Galien, the son of Oliver and the survivor or avenger of the tragic battle at Roncesvalles. The outline of a sub-myth of a son of Oliver who was to avenge the military defeat may have

been in mind in the creation of the son of Oliver in the *Vida*, who was to bring the relics back to France.

In turning to French epic material to fill out the legend of San Ginés, the *Vida* has provided a document of the knowledge of French epics in fifteenth-century Spain. We might even venture to say that the muddled hagiography of the *Vida* tells us more about the epic tradition than it does about the life of San Ginés. In projecting fictional events from the legend of Roncesvalles upon the hagiographic legend and in creating a complex fiction that blends the heroic and the miraculous, the author provides proof that details of the epic itself—the pairing of Oliver/Roland, the motif of the Oliphant, the mutilation of Don Beltrán, and the tragic battle that is prefigured in the *Vida-were* known by all intended readers.

Discussion

The participants in the following edited transcript of the discussion were Professor Nancy Joe Dyer and:

Professor Samuel G. Armistead, Department of Romance Languages, University of Pennsylvania

Professor Luis Lorenzo-Rivero, Department of Languages, University of Utah

Professor Leticia R. Tatinclaux, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Northern Illinois University.

Professor Tatinclaux: It is very interesting to see in the *Crónica de Veinte Reyes* evidence of both oral and written transmission and of a selection of epic material, some of which may be traced back to the *PMC*. It must be pointed out, however, that Professor Dyer's first example from the *Crónica*: "Amigos, bien sepades que tornaremosnos a Castilla rricos e onrrados e con gran onrra," is not a direct prosification of the *PMC*. The verse of the *PMC*, "mas a grand ondra tornaremos a Castiella," is, in fact, an example of the inverse process: the *Crónica de Veinte Reyes* was used as a source by Menéndez Pidal in his "reconstruction" of this line, which I do not think is found in the Per Abbat manuscript.

Professor Dyer: Some scholars feel that the material to which you refer reflects a unique verse, i.e., one which is not in the extant manuscript of the *PMC* or the other chronicles. Because the content deals with honor and the context is direct speech, which the chroniclers characteristically alter less than narrative passages, I feel it is likely that it originated in an epic source different from the Per Abbat manuscript.

Professor Lorenzo-Rivero: Do I understand from your remarks, Professor Dyer, that you believe the *PMC* to belong to an oral tradition rather than a written or learned one?

Professor Dyer: It seems that the core of the written epic preserves something that originally was an oral legend.

Samuel G. Armistead: I would like to comment briefly upon each of the papers we have just heard. Alan Deyermond's splendid presentation concerning "The Problem of Lost Epics: Evidence and Criteria" constitutes a major landmark in Spanish epic criticism. The problem is obviously of enormous complexity. There can be no easy answers. It will not do simply to reject all chronistic evidence, nor, on the other hand, will it do to go about postulating lost epics where obviously none existed. Now, for the first time, we have been given a well thought-out set of guidelines, reasonable criteria with which to go forward and work toward solutions—at least tentative ones. There is practically nothing that even a dyed-in-the-wool traditionalist such as myself can find to object to in Professor Deyermond's proposals. This would indicate, along with other recent scholarly *buenas aves* and *cornejas diestras*, that we may perhaps be moving towards an obsolescence of both theoretical extremes (individualist and traditionalist) and toward a more productive scholarly eclecticism.

Nancy Joe Dyer's paper on "The *Poema de Mio Cid* in the *Crónica de Veinte Reyes* prosification" is particularly welcome as a follow-up to Professor Deyermond's presentation. Here we have a splendid demonstration of just how complex the problem really is. Professor Dyer's analysis of how the chroniclers have selected and evaluated, stressed or de-emphasized, what they found in their epic source speaks eloquently to just how careful we must be in approaching chronistic evidence of lost epics—even when, as in the present case, we have a well preserved, closely related poetic text with which to compare the prosification. Together with some recent contributions by Charles Fraker (*Romania*, 1974; *Hispanic Review*, 1978), Professor Dyer's fine paper will be "must" reading for anyone concerned with the problem of epic-historiographic relationships.

In "French Epic Legends in Spanish Hagiography: the *Vida de San Ginés* and the *Chanson de Roland*," John Walsh has made a sensational discovery. Professor Walsh's juxtaposition of epic and hagiographic narrative lends support to his previous findings concerning the *Cantor de Mio Cid* (*Revista Hispánica Moderna*, 1970-71). I would like to explore briefly the problem of epic and ballad in the present context. We may indeed perhaps simply have here a reflection of some early versions of *La muerte de don Beltrán* ("En los campos de Alventosa") and *La fuga del rey Marsín* ("Ya comiençan los franceses"), but it seems to me equally possible that the author may have known some late, lost epic narrative of *Roncesvalles*. We will probably never know for sure. But perhaps something more can be said in favor of the latter possibility. Professor Walsh has already demonstrated very effectively the probable influence of one epic poem, *Galiens li Restorés*, in the person of

young Ginés, son of Olivier and nephew of St. Ginés. The *Galien* epic did not come over into the *Romancero*, although it did, of course, significantly influence the second redaction of the **Cantar de los Infantes de Lara* (Menéndez Pidal, *Mélanges R. Lejeune*, I, 499-500). I would like to suggest the possible presence of another epic feature in Walsh's hagiographic story, a feature which again, to our knowledge, did not carry over into the *Romancero*. Roldán el Magno is quite clearly a transformation of Charlemagne—Carlomagno. His being the father (and not the uncle) of Roland responds, of course, to the exigencies of the narrative itself. I wonder, however, if this circumstance may not also perhaps reflect some memory of the *Péché de Charlemagne* legend, in which, in a very different context, Charlemagne is also the father, rather than the uncle of Roland (Rita Lejeune, *Homenaje a Dámaso Alonso*, II, 339-371). The epic legend also has, of course, its connection with hagiography in the *Vita Aegidii*. The epic, hagiographic, and ballad sources underlying Professor Walsh's text would then seem to be quite complex. That Roland and Olivier are brothers here is also of great interest, reflecting as it does a reality of Medieval French life and popular enthusiasm for the heroic pair, in that, from the early eleventh century on, so many brothers, twins or otherwise, all over France actually were named Roland and Olivier. I wonder too if the drawing of lots during the ocean voyage (a widely known commonplace—witness the ballad of *Nau Catarineta* and many another story) may not all the same be related here to the famous *romance* verses of *La muerte de don Beltrán*: "Siete veces echan suertes / quien le volverá a buscar" (*Primav.* 185-185a). Professor Walsh has given us a splendid discovery and a delightful text in its own right. Together with Francisco Rico's recent study of the lyric versus *Çorraquín Sancho, Roldán y Oliveros* (*Homenaje a la memoria de Rodríguez-Moñino*), the *Vida e estoria de Señor San Ginés de la Xara* offers dramatic new evidence of the French epic's popularity in Medieval Spain.

Jean-Paul Carton
University of Utah