

Cavallero de prestar.
**The Chivalric Ethos in the Iberian Peninsula of the 12th and 13th c.
in the light of the *Cantar de mio Cid* and other selected epic poems**

Literature is a perfect source to study the history of mentalities, which is one of the most popular research areas among historians conducting their research within the scope of Historical Anthropology. As a product of time and place in which it was composed, literature presents not only the mentality of the author but also that of the environment in which he was creating, thus, it constitutes a mirror of mentality and collective consciousness. Surprisingly, this type of text is relatively rarely used to a wider extent by historians, who even if do include literature in their research, generally locate it at the margin of their reflections. In turn, literary scholars, also those focused on distant past, are usually considerably interested in the works whose topic reflects the pattern “The image of the phenomenon X in the work Y”. Those texts, even if read by historians, are often unambiguously classified as examples of works written within the scope of literary studies, not also of history.

There are two possible reasons for that. Firstly, the absence of a broader quantity of historiography that widely uses literature in studies on mentality, ideas, collective consciousness, social relations, customs, and everyday life—that is to say, all the research areas in which literature is a valuable source—causes that there are no points of reference, examples, with which it would be possible to illustrate the methodology of using literature as a historical source. Secondly, the works of literary scholars often insufficiently apply the comparative perspective, also in terms of other historical sources. Because of that, one of the main aims of the project is providing historians with an example of the research method that allows treating literature as the main category of sources in studies on mentality.

The project concerns chivalric ethos, thus, the *caballeros de prestar* (excellent knights), in the Iberian Peninsula in the High Middle Ages. The topic has yet to be addressed by scholars from Spain and other countries where Iberian Studies are popular. Also, the origin and evolution of Iberian chivalry are quite enigmatic since they have not been addressed by scholars to a larger extent. Due to this fact, one of the sections in the research plan of the project is a short study on the status and function of the chivalry in selected texts, which will be conducted with the application of the method of lexical archaeology, applied by the project mentor, Prof. Alberto Montaner Frutos, from the University of Saragossa, a philologist and a historian specialising in medieval Iberia, the leading world expert in the studies on the *Cantar de mio Cid* and the author of the best edition of the poem since the times of the father of Spanish philologists, Ramón Menéndez Pidal; the edition that was published by the Royal Spanish Academy.

The *Cantar de mio Cid* (also known in English as the *Poem of the Cid*), created c. 1200, is the first epic poem written in Old Castilian, a distant ancestor of today’s Spanish. As usual for the High Middle Ages, the work is anonymous. The poem represents the genre called *cantares de gesta* (songs of heroic deeds), close to the French *chansons de geste*. Those songs were designed to be performed in front of an audience in the form of chanting, recitation or reading aloud. The characters served as role models—which were particularly important in the Middle Ages—for the audience.

The studies on the *Cantar de mio Cid* are one of the most important research areas among the medievalists from Spain (but also from other countries). While getting acquainted with thousands of works on the topic, what strikes a reader is the number of publications that analyse the historical realism of the poem, especially when it comes to factual material. This, the events mentioned in the poem have often been compared with the relations of other historical sources to find similarities and differences. Taking into consideration that the *Cantar de mio Cid* is the second, after *Don Quixote*, most important work of Spanish literature, this fact should not amaze. Nonetheless, from the historical point of view, those works are of minor importance in establishing the value of the poem as a historical source. After all, already Aristotle wrote in *Poetics*: “(...) a historian and a poet do not differ from each other because the one writes in verse and the other in prose (...). But they differ in this, that the one speaks of things which have happened, and the other of such as might have happened”. Putting aside the reflections of the complicated matter of the truth in history and the status of historical narrative, there is no way to contradict the philosopher. The value of poetry, or in a broader sense—literature, lies elsewhere, in the ability to mirror the mentality, collective consciousness, and various aspects of everyday life.

Therefore, the project will contribute not only to filling the gap in the international studies on the *Cantar de mio Cid* and Iberian chivalry and its ethos but also to creating the methodological basis of using literature and the main category of sources in the studies on mentality, in comparative perspective. Last but not least, the poem of the Cid and the history and literature of medieval Iberian Peninsula are entirely unknown topics in Poland—what is best attested by the fact that there are no works on the topic written by Polish scholars—the project, thus, will contribute to broadening the research area in medieval studies in Poland.