



Fatal Prognostications and Messianic Faith: The Legend of King Rodrigo and the Spain of the Catholic Monarchs

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To my friends at the University Erlangen-Nuremberg

In 1504, Queen Isabella passed away and the armies of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the Great Captain, took over the city of Naples. At the same time, Ferdinand the Catholic decided to undertake the recapture of the Holy Land, benefiting from the high morale of the Spanish Army. It was not the first time that he entertained the idea of reconquering the Holy Land and even Byzantium, for he had dreamt of this ever since the end of the Spanish Crusade following the fall of the Kingdom of Granada in 1492. [Several witnesses to the great jubilation felt at this time could be adduced here, but I wish to bring forward the example of the famous historical painting by Aragonese Francisco, *Capitulación de Granada* (1882) (*The Surrender of Granada*); see figure 0.1.]



Figure 0.1: *Capitulación de Granada*, 1882

This time, the military enterprise would be undertaken by Spain alone. King Ferdinand decided to take from the Turks and Mameluks a territory considered mythical in both temporal and spiritual terms, since it included the city of Constantinople (the door to Asia) and Jerusalem (the door to heaven). Nonetheless, neither objective was finally achieved as, contrary to King Ferdinand's expectations, in 1517, the Ottoman Turks defeated the Mameluks, conquering a city considered 'three-times sainted'.

Ferdinand was influenced in his vision by the fact that the crown of Naples (upon his victorious campaign reconquering this city) was related to the crown of Jerusalem. The first crowned king of Jerusalem had been Baldwin, the brother of Geoffrey of Bouillon, a figure still kept alive in the European imagination thanks to works such as *Historia Hierosolymitana*

by Fulquer of Chartres (1100-1106); now Ferdinand's time had come, for he was called to be crowned the new King of Jerusalem. In order to assert his rights, he decided to undertake a military campaign to liberate the Holy Land. He was energetic and enjoyed high morale, for he was an eschatological and messianic monarch, and felt justified by all of his previous victories, the defeat of the Spanish Moorish Kingdom, the peace achieved in the Iberian Peninsula and his hegemony in the international arena (the claim to Spanish hegemony during the Church Councils of the 15th century by John II's diplomats had proved unsuccessful). Pope Julius II—in what can be considered an endorsement of Ferdinand's policies—recognized the monarch's right to the Jerusalem crown on 3 July, 1510. I will add here a detail that tends to be ignored by critics: the Spanish kings, included the current Spanish monarch, Juan Carlos, remain (to this day) the kings of Jerusalem. Since the title could not be backed up by territory, Ferdinand decided to modify this highly frustrating situation by undertaking the recapture of Jerusalem.

What could have been the reasons for Ferdinand's failure to undertake the reconquering of Jerusalem, as expected? In my opinion, some visible obstacles appear at a glance. First, the enterprise was no doubt overwhelming in scope. Secondly, the Holy Land was far distant from Spain, and the extensive intervening territory was inhabited by numerous enemies. In order to have an open path, Melilla was taken in 1497, and Oran in 1509, this time after a war promoted by Cardinal Francisco de Cisneros himself. [Detail of John of Bourgoigne's mural, *Cisneros in the last battle for Oran*, Cathedral of Toledo (1514); see figure 0.2.]



Figure 0.2: *Cisneros in the last battle for Oran, 1514*

In addition, it was necessary to halt the piracy that repeatedly afflicted the Spanish coast from Tunisia and Argelia. If the African coast posed a formidable problem, the European one proved no less difficult. To attack the Holy Land from Cyprus, which was in Venetian hands at that time, did not appear viable. Before reaching their final destination, the Spanish troops would have been so exhausted as to thwart any possibility of victory.

Another reason for delaying the near-eastern campaign was called *América*. The New World was so vast as to require large numbers of people which Spain could barely supply because of its low demographic numbers. Aragon and Castile had a population of only six million inhabitants. A further reason was the imminent war against France in Navarre.

Furthermore, the reports about Mameluk's revolts reaching the Spanish court from Egypt were unfavourable. I wish to remark that, in 1501 and 1502, the Spanish mhad sent an ambassador to the sultan of Egypt, the Italian humanist Pedro Mártir de Anglería, who reported on his journey and embassy to Venice and Egypt in his *Legatio Babylonica* (1511). Finally, the Turkish presence on the coast of Barbary moved the scene of war closer to the Iberian Peninsula. Around 1515, Turkish vessels were frequently invading Spanish waters, where they could count on the help of the moriscos, as can be deduced from contemporary documentation from both sides (read now, among others, J. E. López de Coca Castañer ("Mamelucos, otomanos y caída del reino de Granada", *En la España medieval*, 28 [2005], pp. 229-258).

But I must stress the fact that Bizantium and Jerusalem were not felt by King Ferdinand as something exotic or removed. For an Aragonese, they were certainly neither neighbouring territories nor alien: on the contrary, they considered them their own territory. Ferdinand inherited from his ancestors the idea that the Mediterranean was a natural space for territorial expansion. It was the same *Mare Nostrum* of Roman times, and they certainly felt legitimate in claiming it as their own. Between the Iberian territories of the Crown of Aragon and the Levant lands lay not only the newly acquired fortresses mentioned above (Melilla, Orán or Mazalquivir), but also certain historical landmarks from not such a distant past. James I initiated preparations on two occasions for reconquering the Holy Land; the Infants of Aragon in 1269 and 1270 participated in the Crusades with a small Aragonese army (I refer the audience to Alain Milhou and his remarkable book *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica en*

el ambiente franciscanista español [Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1983], p. 349), and, of course, at the beginning of the 13th century, the emperor of Byzantium placed his troops under the leadership of Roger de Flor (Roger von Blume, son of a German officer in Frederick II's army) and his *almogavers*, who kept the Turks at bay.

At around the same time, the *almogavers* (elite troops of the Aragonese army) took a series of strongholds in Greece, Byzantium and the Cyclades. Finally, in 1379, Greece recognized the rights of Peter IV the Ceremonious, who visited Athens, full of emotion, exclaiming: "el Castell de Cetines és la pus richa joya qui al mont sia", i.e., 'the castle of Athens is the most valuable jewel that ever existed'; in addition, his possessions on the Hellenic Peninsula included ancient Thessaly, what explains why Spanish monarchs are called to this day the Dukes of Athens and Neopatria. Aragonese hegemony in the Eastern Mediterranean and its international strength are two reasons why the Great Master of the Order of Saint John of the Hospital was Aragonese. I am referring to Juan Fernández de Heredia, a crucial figure in the recuperation of Greek culture in Spain and Europe (Petrarch, for instance, sought insistently his translation of Plutarch). Apart from the relevance of his literary works (a subject of my interest, as shown in "Juan Fernández de Heredia, ¿humanista?", in Aurora Egido & José María Enguita, eds., *IV Curso sobre Lengua y Literatura en Aragón: Juan Fernández de Heredia y su época (Zaragoza-Caspe, 29-30 de noviembre y 1 de diciembre de 1995)* [Zaragoza: Institución 'Fernando el Católico', 1997], pp. 57-68), I would remind you that he commanded the expedition that conquered Morea (or the Peloponnese) and Corinth, which

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became Aragonese possessions at the time, thus halting the Turkish expansion to the West. [By the way, we have several portraits of Fernández de Heredia, as this one, in a capital letter of his *Grant Crónica de Espanya* (1385); see figure 0.3.]



Figure 0.3: *Grant Crónica de Espanya*, 1385

Regretfully, the Aragonese attempts to sign a collaboration agreement with the Tartars or Mongols proved fruitless, as Albert-Guillem Hauf i Valls has clearly shown (“Texto y contexto: de *La flor de las historias de Oriente*: un programa de colaboración cristiano-mongólica”, in Egido & Enguita,

eds., *Juan Fernández de Heredia...*, *ibid.*, pp. 111-154). A hundred years earlier, the Tartars were considered the arm of the Devil on earth, and their campaigns (which took them all the way to Hungary) were regarded as a sign of the end of the world. At that time, Frederick II sought the opposite: an alliance with the Turks to stop an enemy that reminded him of the Huns. Conversely, in the second half of the 13th century, Aragon sought to ally itself with the Tartars in a bid to avoid what eventually happened two centuries later: the defeat of the Eastern Roman Empire. Mehmed II Fatih's troops took over Byzantium, but, as had been announced by a lunar eclipse of May 24, 1453, the city fell five days later. The 1453 hecatomb caused everything to crumble. The territories conquered by the Turks were part of the common reference of every Aragonese citizen and, although they could do nothing in real life, at least in the fictional world, an Aragonese chevalier crushed the infidels and returned Asia Minor to the faith of Christ. This success was achieved by the Valentian Joanot Martorell in his admirable chivalric romance, *Tirant lo Blanc*, a work of such realism that it gives us the impression that we are reading a chronicle rather than a roman or romance. Tirant, the eponymous hero, gave his Catalan readers great literary satisfaction between 1460 and 1490 (the dates of the composition and *editio princeps* of this work); the book was translated into Spanish in the momentous year of 1511 (in the midst of the historical period on which I am presently focusing). It is also a well-known fact that Cervantes, the hero of Lepanto, had this chivalric novel very much in mind when working on his *Don Quixote*. [This woodcut is taken from the title-page of the Castilian *princeps* edition (1511); see figure 0.4.]



Figure 0.4: *Tirante el Blanco* (Castilian version), 1511

Encouragement to King Ferdinand to undertake his campaign in the Levant came also from Castile. In 1403, we can recall that Henry III had the same objective as the Aragonese Crown: to ally himself with the Tartars or Mongols in order

to halt the Turkish power. With this intention in mind, Henry III commissioned Ruy González del Clavijo to travel to Samarkand in order to sign an agreement with Tamerlan. This journey, taking from 1403-1406, has been recorded in one of the most beautiful books from the Middle Ages: the *Embajada de Tamorlán*. The Castilians obtained nothing from it, since Tamerlan's unexpected death put an end to González del Clavijo's embassy. In 1499, another Turkish people, the Uzbeks, reconquered Samarkand, and the city, which had been taken by Gengis Khan, reverted to the Muslim faith.

This fact allows me to prove that the obsession with Byzantium and Jerusalem was equally pervasive among the Aragonese and Castilians. It was irrelevant that, after the death of Isabella in 1504, Ferdinand lost the Castilian Crown. His daughter Juana was proclaimed Queen in 1506, and her husband, Philip of Austria 'le Beau' became Felipe I of Castile. In turn, Philip died that same year and Ferdinand regained his hegemonic power by becoming the de facto King of Castile, particularly after his daughter was deemed unfit to hold the Crown for medical reasons. Several witnesses attributed her dementia to a love sickness, the same one that proved fatal to Prince Juan (who will be discussed shortly). [Once again, Francisco Padilla captured the drama of this situation in his large painting, awarded the first prize in the National Exposition of 1877, entitled *Doña Juana la Loca*, now in the newly enlarged Museo del Prado; see figure 0.5.]

Ferdinand, conversely, experienced Philip's decease in a different fashion, feeling relieved by it, for the union of the Crowns of Aragon and Castile had proved so costly to him.

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Figure 0.5: *Doña Juana la Loca*

The joining of both kingdoms was also a legitimation of the name *Hispania*, now *España*, even though part of the peninsula, the kingdom of Portugal, remained independent. I would like to remind you that, even later, any Portuguese would have been glad to be called *español* (a Spaniard). The unity of Spain, albeit without Portugal, meant not only the overcoming of a malediction but also the aversion of danger. The malediction involved the legend of Don Rodrigo, the rape of La Cava and the prognostication of the House of Hercules in Toledo, the place erected by the semihero Hercules during his foundational and civilizing mission on the Iberian Peninsula. This legend was recounted by the Muslim historiographers, particularly Rasis (10th century). Among the Christian writers, Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada, known as

“El Toledano”, took advantage of Rasis when assembling the different parts of *De rebus Hispaniae*, in which our legend appears for the very first time. In Romance vernacular literature, the legend, understandably, only spreads in the 15th century, as shown in Gutierre Díaz de Games’ *El Victorial*, in the Archpriest of Talavera’s *Atalaya de las corónicas* and, more than in any other work, in Pedro del Corral’s *Crónica sarracina*. Afterwards, several ballads ensured that every inhabitant of the Spanish Peninsula were familiar with the legend of the tragedy of Dom Rodrigo and the loss of Spain. Everything happened because an unstoppable curiosity made Dom Rodrigo break a prohibition so far obeyed by his predecessors: the entry into the House of Hercules in Toledo, barricaded by several locks (24 or 27 depending on the source). A second warning referred to a coffer kept inside this house which nobody should ever try to open. When Rodrigo undid the lock, he found a piece of parchment or material (depending on the source) on which some Muslim soldiers were depicted together with a text stating that the day after the opening of the lock and coffer some warriors, such as those depicted on the parchment, would conquer Spain. Spain was therefore doomed to be lost, but Rodrigo’s felony ought to be complete and he was responsible for activating the mechanism of the final hecatomb: the rape of Count Julian’s daughter. According to this legend, it was insufficient to fulfill a prototype established by the Old Testament which associated unhealthy curiosity with death (Lot’s wife, for instance, or Original Sin). The same pattern is also followed, for instance, in mythological stories such as that of Pandora’s box or in folkloric narratives, such as that of Blue Beard.

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Everything happened in Toledo, the capital city of Visigothic Spain. Even today, the tradition has preserved the memory of Rodrigo's crime, at a bend in River Tajo, where there still stand today some Roman ruins known as the Baths of La Cava. The legend states that Rodrigo was eager to sleep with La Cava after seeing her naked there. In addition, these Baths of La Cava are located underneath a small hill known as Roca Tarpeya (Tarpeya Boulder), the same name given to the summit of the Capitoline Hill in Rome, from where criminals who had been sentenced to death were thrown in Roman times. In addition, in this same place remains to this day the Sinagoge of Transit in Toledo. [Tower and Baths of La Cava in a picture dated ca. 1900.]



Figure 0.6: *Tower and Baths of La Cava*, ca. 1900

So far, we have described the role of the Catholic monarchs

in averting a danger or menace, but we should also make reference to a prognostication that coincided with the dissemination of the Rodrigo legend and the loss of Spain. According to this prognostication, a personification of Spain (or some undetermined character) proclaimed in an oracular tone a warning regarding the wars among the nobility and between the nobility and the king. This civil strife only weakened Christianity and gave strength to the Muslim power. Even the Church participated in this 'civil-war-like' atmosphere, as the two archbishops of Toledo, from the same Carrillo family, were permanently involved in bloody quarrels. The most relevant titles dealing with this topic are as explicit as *Lamentación de España*, attributed to the Marquis of Santillana, or *Consolación de España*, an anonymous work from 1434-1439. The same idea appears in the writings of highly reputed intellectuals such as Alfonso de Cartagena, Bishop of Burgos, who pointed out that continuous civil strifes (*cibdadanas*, as he terms them) would bring about a new Muslim defeat of the Christian kingdoms and the consequent destruction of Spain. With a similar background, Pedro del Corral wrote his *Crónica sarracina* (Muslim Chronicle), the point of departure for the very successful *Crónica del Rey don Rodrigo*.

These literary laments in the mouth of Old Spain continued to echo in texts such as the anonymous *Exclamación de España*, dating from 1462-1463 (see Carmen Parrilla García, "La 'Exclamación de España' dirigida al arzobispo Carrillo. Un ejemplo de la *fictio personae* al servicio del alegato político", *Scriptura*, 13 [1997], pp. 67-99). Some time later, Jorge Manrique stated in his *Coplas* (finished between 1476 and 1479) that his father, Dom Rodrigo, had served his king and his God in the only just war—that against the Moors; that is, the

Iberian Crusade. If he ever fought against other Christians (he states), it was only because, being unbelievably disloyal, they had taken advantage of his absence while away fighting this war to enter his lands and pillage his property. Also, this situation (offering several remedies in order to avert another Muslim invasion) is the topic of *Divina retribución* (*Divine Retribution*, 1479) by Bachiller Palma.

The solution was quite clear: the military orders, the nobility and the Church ought to be deprived of their excessive power which was deemed the real cause of the countless deaths and disorder. Thus, those speaking for the Spanish Crown were claiming that Spain's calamities could be solved by a strong Crown who subdued the other powers and, in fact, this strengthening of the Crown was the final result of the internecine wars of the 15th century and the unification of Spain under the Catholic monarchs. Ferdinand and Isabella accomplished the long-cherished dream of King John II, Queen Isabella's father, of creating a centralized royal power. His attempt to control the high nobility proved unsuccessful, although he kept his life (unlike his Prime Minister, Álvaro de Luna, who was publicly beheaded in Valladolid in 1453). Let's take a look at another historical painting, that by José María Rodríguez de Losada, *La ejecución de don Álvaro de Luna* (1866), Museo del Prado:

King John II's dream was preserved for posterity in a literary monument with great prophetic overtones, an epic poem entitled *Laberinto de Fortuna* (*Fortune's Maze* or *Labyrinth*). This poem was later utilized by the Humanist Hernán Núñez, also known as Pinciano or the Greek Master. By means of an extensive commentary on the poem, Núñez attempted to trans-



Figure 0.7: *La ejecución de don Álvaro de Luna*, 1866

form this work into a great national poem to the glory of the Catholic monarchs.

Within the poem, I would like to highlight the episode relating to the witch or sorceress of Valladolid, who resuscitated a dead man and made him talk from the Netherworld. The use of black magic or necromancy is of no relevance here, for what is important is the so-to-speak the forging with smoldering iron in the collective consciousness of the following prognostication in the mouth of the resuscitated man: *Castile is called to a great future in the hands of a powerful king* but, before this could take place, it was necessary to complete the Reconquest. Consequently, the dead man called for a peninsular Crusade. The Christians, therefore, should stop fighting among themselves and join forces for this most just cause

(*Laberinto*, copla 255, vv. 2037-2040):

Por ende, vosotros, esos que mandades,
la ira, la ira bolved en los moros;
non se consuman así los thesoros
en causas non justas como las hedades.
Therefore you, you who command,

Your wrath, your wrath revert onto the Moors;
Do not consume in such a way your treasure,
In causes as unjust as the times we live in.

In his edition (princeps, Seville, 1499, revised, Granada, 1505), Hernán Núñez gave fresh impetus to a poem which, with the turn of the century, was felt to be full of literary value. It was also interpreted as a literary work that might enable Spain and the Spanish language to compete with Italy and the Tuscan language, a work that could rival Dante's *Commedia*, but we should bear in mind that its literary and aesthetic values were as important as its ideological one: the poem defended a strong monarchy in the person of king John II and predicted a brilliant future for Castile and Spain. This dream would eventually come true with the Catholic monarchs, and so the poem becomes a prophetic work. The fact that John II did not accomplish the feat but his daughter Queen Isabella was deemed irrelevant, thus fulfilling a centuries old desire. Before that could happen, Isabella and Ferdinand had to eliminate three major obstacles preventing them from concentrating and unifying their power. By demolishing numerous nobility strongholds (cutting down the crenelated towers of their palaces and fortresses), they were able to subdue the high aristocracy. The Church never again voiced

disagreement with the Crown, either in Toledo or in other dioceses. Finally, the military orders surrendered to King Ferdinand, who even proclaimed himself the great master over all of them. The vigorous strength resulting from the unification of Spain was also augmented exponentially by eliminating all opposition, as also happened in the rest of Europe (a parallel example would be the strengthening of English Protestantism by eliminating Catholicism in England). Intellectuals and artists involved themselves in this enterprise to a large degree, through chronicles, treatises on different topics, laudatory poems, works of erudition, prologues, dedicatory preambles, and so on. In addition, they revived old works which fitted well with the new historical reality, as was the case with the *Laberinto de Fortuna*.

The *Laberinto* had the advantage of its design as a prognostication, which made any change to this work unnecessary in order to connect it to the present. The penultimate stanza (estr. 296) asserts that all divinatory sciences agree with the prophets when interpreting 'signals' in eschatological fashion: thus, in the last stanza, the poet requests from John II a course of action designed to fulfil the prognostications ("Fazed verdadera la gran providencia", 'Make this great prognostication come true'). In case this were insufficiently clear, he insists on the idea of the Crusade "por que la vuestra real excellencia // aya de moros puxante victoria" ('so that his royal excellency // could achieve victory over the Moors'). At the threshold of the 16th century, the *Laberinto* could be envisioned as a premonitory book, similar to the Old Testament with regard to the New Testament and, because the Catholic monarchs had fulfilled such prognostications, they adopted a messianic halo as if they were characters

from the Old Testament (see Ángel Gómez Moreno y Teresa Jiménez Calvente, “Entre edenismo y *emulatio* clásica: el mito de la Edad de Oro en la España de los Reyes Católicos”, Silva. *Estudios de Humanismo y Tradición Clásica*, 1 [2002], pp. 113-140).

Although this value was not present in the original *Laberinto*, this work acquired such a meaning over time. Ignoring the calamitous figure of Henry IV, the speakers for the monarchy drew a dotted line joining the Crusade of the time of King John II with the campaign of the Catholic monarchs, resulting in the retaking of Granada and the ending of the Reconquista. Ideologically and aesthetically, the *Laberinto* satisfied the expectations of any contemporary reader from the time of the Catholic monarchs, and let us remember that, among the most enthusiastic admirers of this work, was the great Spanish humanist, Antonio de Nebrija (as shown by Juan Casas Rigall, *Humanismo, gramática y poesía. Juan de Mena y los autores en el canon de Nebrija*, Santiago de Compostela: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, 2010).

Once again, the *Laberinto* could be reutilized without having to modify a single line or introduce any addition to it, for the work exalted the figure of John II and his minister De Luna. This same attitude towards the figures of Queen Isabella's parents can be observed in the mortuary hall in the Chartress of Miraflores (Burgos).



Figure 0.8: Chartres of Miraflores (Burgos)

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This architectural space was completed in the time of the Catholic monarchs. Nonetheless, we do not find there all those marks that are so frequently abundant in their own buildings: the F of Fernando and the Y of Isabel, the bunch of fennel (*ynojo* with a 'y' in medieval Spanish orthography, like *Ysabel*; and *fenajo* in Aragonese, with the same initial letter as the proper name *Fernando*), the yoke and arrows, 'yugo y flechas' in Spanish (with a Y like *Ysabel*; and an F [flechas] like *Fernando*), or the omnipresent pomegranate, in memory of the defeat of the Nazari kingdom of Granada. Given the absence of all of those signs and architectural marks, it was clear that the space of the Mortuary Hall in the Chartress of Miraflores did not belong to the Catholic monarchs but to Isabella's parents.



Figure 0.9: San Juan de los Reyes, Toledo (detail of the ceiling)

The atmosphere at the time was impregnated by a prophetic and messianic air. In Castile, and particularly Aragon, there abounded numerous apocalyptic literary works that announced the imminent arrival of the Antichrist. The person in charge of bringing this fear from Aragon to Castile was the Dominican priest, Saint Vicente Ferrer, who, departing from his native Valencia, traveled through Murcia and New Castile. He was followed by a procession of self-flagellating penitents (*flagellanti*), reciting *creatura liberabitur a servitute corruptionis*, etc. ('man shall be freed from the servitude of corruption...'). The preacher's voice resounds as an oracle in the *Sermón del Anticristo* (*Sermon on the Antichrist*), that I found while working at the Real Academia de la Historia and gave to Pedro Catedra, his reliable modern editor. Upon the advent of the 'Son of Perdition', God would come again to earth to judge humankind.

With these ideas in mind, we can understand the particular spirituality and ascetism of the Devotio Moderna, the Brethren of the Common Life or the reformed Franciscans. Religious literature had a particular penchant for the most human aspects of Jesus Christ (the Jesus of the Passion) and these works developed the idea of the need for an imitation of Christ, *imitationes Christi* (for instance, that by Thomas a Kempis, enormously successful and in circulation from 1418), or for meditating in front of an image of Christ on the Cross (following the model of Saint Buenaventure, a 13th century Franciscan). At the same time, the Virgin Mary was exalted to such a high degree when dealing with the Holy Trinity that it seemed, at times, as if we could speak of a Quaternity. If we look at the printed products and plastic artifacts from Spain and Europe from around this time (1500), we can easily

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observe the omnipresence of the topic of Death, a democratic and egalitarian figure who takes every opportunity to make an appearance. [This xylography [woodcut] curiously comes from the revised edition of the Commentary of Hernán Núñez on the *Laberinto de Fortuna* of 1505).]



Figure 0.10: *Laberinto de Fortuna*, 1505

In this atmosphere, the success achieved by the so-called

artes bene moriendi is unsurprising, which are being recently vindicated by scholars as a meaningful literary genre in such a milieu. The old treatises that advocated stepping out of this deceiving world and think of death, such as *De contemptu mundi* (or *De miseria humanae conditionis*), by Pope Innocence III (1194-1195), became once again famous, together with contemporary works such as those by Thomas a Kempis and Jean Gerson, which in turn invite the reader to turn towards a contemplative and genuine inner spiritual life, quite apart from the external and empty manifestations of religiosity.

Finally, reference should be made to the hagiographic literature in Latin and vernacular languages and to a best-seller, the *Legenda aurea*, by the Dominican Jacopo da Voragine or Verazze, the second most widely read and copied book after the Bible. In every story about saints included in this book, the crown of sainthood is obtained after the saint willingly sacrifices his or her life in front of infidels or chooses a life of prayer and suffering. Saints offered a model of behaviour to a society characterized by its spirituality as never before. This spirituality not only explains certain of the apocalyptic and messianic beliefs, but also some of the defeatist or triumphalistic attitudes: either pessimistic when observing the moral degeneration of the world, or optimistic as a consequence of the reforms of the Augustine, Franciscan and Jeronimite friars.

Victory in all of their endeavours confirmed that God was with the Catholic monarchs. In addition, Ferdinand also had a role as an eschatological or redeeming king, derived from the Aragonese Royal House. In this messianic atmosphere, the king's eschatological character was an insurance against

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two dooming prophecies: the arrival of the Antichrist and the second destruction of Spain. The first brought about a new spirituality and the creation of new devotional books and religious literature; the second created numerous enterprises and gave impetus to the writing of historiography, encomia, and Latin and vernacular epic works, such as those by Fray Gonzalo de Arredondo, Pero Marcuello or Juan Barba.

Patriotic praise enhanced and praised the redeeming aspects of the policies of the Catholic monarchs, prognostication about whose future work started from the day of their birth. Optimism transformed into near jubilation with the birth of the monarch's son, Prince John, a moment that became associated with the beginning of a new era, along the same lines as the interpretation made of Virgil's Fourth Eclogue. [Once again, Francisco Pradilla focused on this fact in his painting, *The Baptism of Prince John, Bautizo del príncipe don Juan* (1910)].



Figure 0.11: *The Baptism of Prince John*, 1910

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Understandably, it came as hard news when the prince died (apparently because of his immoderate passion for Princess Margarita of Austria). Such was their passion that reports agree on their refusal to leave their marital bed.

In the impressive ballad, *Romance del Príncipe don Juan*, Doctor de la Parra prognosticates the imminent death of the young Prince. While the other doctors do not give any relevance to his physical conditions, Doctor de la Parra advises him to prepare for *bene moriendi*: “Your Lord, do you confess, properly arraign your soul. // You have three hours left, one is about to expire”. From around the same time, the *Ballad of the Lover and Death* uses the motif of a summoning to an imminent death, equally morbid and thrilling. [I invite all of you to listen to Joaquín Díaz singing this ballad on Youtube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JaZdAwcRRE>.]

I happened to be resting
Yesterday night, as I use to,
Dreaming that my love
Had fallen asleep in my arms
When I saw a white lady coming in,
And she was white, more than cold snow.

-Where from have you entered, my Love?
How have you entered, my Life?
The doors are all shut,
As well as the windows and door panes.

- I am not your Love, my Lover,
For I am Death (it is God who sends me)

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- Alas, rigorous Death,
Allow me to live one more day!

- I cannot grant you one more day,
I can, though, give you just one hour.
He got up suddenly in a hurry,
In a hurry he got dressed.

He came out into the street
Whereby his Lover resided.
- Open that door, my white Love,
Open that door, my sweet child.

- That door! How could I open it?
How come? Is the moment ripe?
- My father did not leave for the palace yet,
My mother is not yet asleep.

- If you do not open tonight,
You will never do it again;
For Death is looking after me;
But I would remain alive at your side.

- Go under the window
Where I used to sew and embroider,
I shall throw down to you a silk rope
So that you can climb up here;
Were I not to have enough silk,
I shall make a rope from my own hair (braids).

Here he comes up the silk rope,
Here he reaches the window sill,
The silk is weak, the silk is breaking,
He is falling down heavy as lead.

Death is finally awaiting him
Down there by the cold earth.
- Let's go, let's go, my Lover, --she says--
Your time has finally come.

Yo me estaba reposando
anoche como solía;
soñaba con mis amores,
que en mis brazos se dormían.
Vi entrar señora tan blanca
muy más que la nieve fría.

- ¿Por dónde has entrado, amor?
¿Cómo has entrado, mi vida?
Las puertas están cerradas,
ventanas y celosías.

- No soy el amor, amante:
la muerte que Dios te envía.
- ¡Ay, muerte tan rigurosa,
déjame vivir un día!

- Un día no puedo darte,

una hora tienes de vida.
Muy deprisa se levanta,
más deprisa se vestía.

Ya se va para la calle,
en donde su amor vivía.
- ¡Ábreme la puerta, blanca,
ábreme la puerta, niña!

- ¿La puerta cómo he de abrirte
si la ocasión no es venida?
Mi padre no fue a palacio,
mi madre no está dormida.

- Si no me abres esta noche,
ya nunca más me abrirías;
la muerte me anda buscando,
junto a ti, vida sería.

- Vete bajo la ventana
donde bordaba y cosía,
te echaré cordel de seda
para que subas arriba,
si la seda no alcanzare,
mis trenzas añadiría.

Ya trepa por el cordel,
ya toca la barandilla,
la fina seda se rompe,

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él como plomo caía.

La Muerte le está esperando
abajo en la tierra fría:

- Vamos, el enamorado,
la hora ya está cumplida.

After destiny and fate, omens and prognostications, only death remains. Contemporary artists tried to express a deep, ever-lasting pain, but soon only oblivion was left and, with it, the loneliness of the dead. Everyone can experience a feeling of desolation when visiting Prince John's tomb in the Dominican Monastery of St. Thomas in Ávila. [Prince John's marble tomb by Domenico Fancelli (1513).]



Figure 0.12: Prince John's marble tomb, 1513

The legend of Dom Rodrigo was reactivated as a warning. At

the same time, the idea of freeing Jerusalem and expelling the Turks from the Eastern Mediterranean became a real obsession. After the death of Ferdinand the Catholic, that dream persisted active, as Pedro Cátedra found from *El sueño caballeresco. De la caballería de papel al sueño real de don Quijote* [Madrid: Abada Editores, 2007], p. 60), although this enterprise did not seem easily achievable, despite the intense messianism with which the Emperor was viewed by almost everybody: Tizian in his paintings, Alfonso de Valdés in his prose writings, and Aldana and Acuña in their poetry.

Despite what has been recently affirmed by Patricia E. Grieve in her *The Eve of Spain. Myths of Origins in the History of Christian, Muslim and Jewish Conflict*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), we cannot consider this legend as a foundational myth: the main idea that it represents, the form it adopts and its date of creation and dissemination do not fit with what is required of a foundational myth. None of the literary and artistic testimonies that have transmitted to us the legend of the loss of Spain proposes it as the birth of Spain as a nation and of Spaniards as a people. On the contrary, when these testimonies speak of the arrival of Tariq and the battle of Guadalete, they are alluding to a historical breaking point. Recovered and updated in the 15th century, this legendary episode constituted a warning to all Spanish patriots, considered the confluence of different factors, such as civil wars and the arrival of the Antichrist. As we have seen, if fear of the Spanish Muslim is the catalyst reactivating the legend of Rodrigo and La Cava in the 15th century, the permanent menace of the Turks and Barbary pirates was to keep it alive throughout the 16th century also.

