



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (194)

**TEXT:** Songs of The Cid

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### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

(Based on Dan Veach's introduction)

#### THREE FACES OF EL CID

##### A triptych of perspectives:

This volume presents, for the first time together in English, three distinct literary views of Spain's national hero, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, "El Cid":

**Carmen Campidoris** (Latin): an unfinished epic likely composed during or very close to the Cid's lifetime.

**The Song of The Cid** (*Cantar de mio Cid*): the great medieval Castilian epic, created while its hero was still within living memory.

**The romances of the Cid**: later Spanish folk ballads that expand, prequel, and sequel the epic story, "franchising" the legend much like modern media spin-offs.

##### National consciousness and myth:

El Cid holds in Spanish culture an emblematic status comparable to George Washington in the U.S.—but filtered through a single, powerful poetic narrative rather than a set of prose histories. The epic does not merely recount events; it shapes Spain's self-image of honor, loyalty, and courage.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND: FROM VISIGOTHS TO AL-ANDALUS

##### Visigothic inheritance:

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, Christian Visigoths took over Hispania, blending Roman law with Germanic customs. This dual legacy appears in the epic, which features both a "modern" court trial and an archaic trial by combat.

##### Moorish conquest and Al-Andalus:

Legend links the Muslim invasion (711) to the betrayal of La Cava and Count Julian, but historically Berber and Arab forces under Tariq and Musa crossed Gibraltar (Jebel al-Tariq) and overthrew Visigothic rule. Within decades, most of the peninsula became a sophisticated Muslim polity known as Al-Andalus, especially flourishing under the Umayyad caliphs in Córdoba.

##### Taifa fragmentation and Christian resurgence:

The breakup of the caliphate into rival *taifa* kingdoms (Seville, Granada, Córdoba, Toledo, Valencia) increased cultural brilliance but reduced military cohesion, making them tributary to emerging Christian kingdoms (León, Galicia, Navarra, Aragón, Castile). Politics were driven as much by pragmatism and profit as by religion: Christian and Muslim rulers frequently allied across confessional lines. The simplistic idea of a single, unbroken "Christian Reconquest" crusade is historically misleading.



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## RODRIGO DÍAZ DE VIVAR: BETWEEN HISTORY AND LEGEND

### *A “modern” epic hero:*

Unlike mythical Achilles or Odysseus, Rodrigo Díaz (c. 1043–1099) is a well-documented historical figure—“a miracle among the great miracles of the Almighty,” in the grudging praise of Moorish chronicler Ibn Bassam. Born into the lowest rank of nobility (*infanzones*) in the small Castilian town of Vivar, he rose by merit in an era when nobility still meant “horseman” (*caballero*) and military service.

### *Ballad Cid vs. epic Cid:*

The **romances** portray a fiery, impulsive young Rodrigo—avenging insults, defying kings and even the Pope, and marrying the legendary Jimena Gómez in recompense for killing her father. The **epic Cid** is more restrained: a model of self-control, prudence, and exemplary vassalage. These contrasting portraits show how oral tradition and later ballads “thicken” legend around a historical core.

### *Dynastic and political entanglements:*

Rodrigo grows up at court with Sancho, son of King Ferdinand I, serving as his champion. Ferdinand’s decision to divide his domains among his sons (Sancho, Alfonso, García) sparks fratricidal conflict, civil war, and the famous siege of Zamora. The ballads implicate Sancho’s sister Urraca in his assassination and dramatize the fraught politics and personal loyalties that shape Rodrigo’s career.

## ALMORAVIDS, VALENCIA, AND THE COST OF EXILE

### *From tribute system to fundamentalist backlash:*

By the late 11th century, Christian kings like Alfonso VI profited from Moorish tribute rather than outright conquest. Many taifa rulers lived luxuriously, often lax in religious observance. Under fiscal and religious pressure, some appealed to the Almoravids, austere fundamentalist rulers from Morocco. Yusuf ibn Tashfin and his Berber armies crushed Alfonso at Sagradas (1086), executing a “proper” jihad and deposing decadent taifa kings.

### *What exile costs Spain:*

Historically, Alfonso exiled Rodrigo multiple times, partly under the influence of jealous courtiers such as García Ordóñez. At Sagradas, Alfonso’s defeat can be read as the political price of sidelining his best general. By contrast, the Cid never lost a battle—against Christian or Muslim foes—and successfully defended Valencia against Almoravid forces. The poem underscores the tragic folly of a king misled by envy.

### *Valencia in history and epic:*

In reality, the conquest of Valencia was a prolonged, intricate episode involving shifting Moorish factions and careful diplomacy. The epic compresses this into a more straightforward heroic siege and victory, foregrounding martial valor and loyalty while downplaying the long, frustrating political process that made the conquest possible.



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## THE POEM: FORM, ORALITY, AND STORYTELLING

### *The surviving manuscript:*

Only one manuscript of *The Song of The Cid* survives, copied by Per Abbat (likely a monk) in 1207. The poem is conventionally divided into three **cantares** (songs), each roughly 1,000 lines—paralleling *Beowulf*'s tripartite structure and likely meant for performance over three evenings.

### *Meter, assonance, and laises:*

The verse is irregular in line length and meter, unrhymed but organized by **assonance**: groups of lines (laises) sharing the same final vowel pattern. Changes in assonance often signal shifts in episode or focus. This “rough-riding” rhythm, far from a flaw, intensifies the sense of riding with the Cid’s troops and grounds the poem in oral composition techniques.

### *Oral-formulaic features:*

Like Homeric epics, *The Cid* uses repeated epithets and stock phrases (“born in a fortunate hour”) that function as compositional “placeholders” for an oral poet performing live, rather than as lazy clichés. Such formulas, plus the poem’s vivid specificity in names, places, and legal structures, suggest a composition that straddles oral tradition and emerging written culture.

## ETHICS, LAW, AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE

### *Virtue vs. birth:*

A central theme opposes true virtue (courage, loyalty, generosity) to inherited nobility. The Cid, of modest lineage, consistently outshines high-born but cowardly nobles—especially the Infantes of Carrión, whose brutal abuse of the Cid’s daughters in the Oak Grove of Corpes dramatizes the moral emptiness behind their titles.

### *Justice in two legal systems:*

The resolution of this outrage combines:

Roman-influenced law: a formal court in Toledo and financial penalties.

Germanic tradition: a judicial duel (trial by combat) where challenged parties must prove their honor and claims with arms. The epic thus stages competing visions of justice while endorsing a synthesis: law must be backed by lived courage and honor, not merely fines or words.

### *Poetry vs. history:*

Veach emphasizes that while the poem often aligns with historical facts (names, kinships, locales), it is art, not chronicle. It idealizes Alfonso, simplifies the conquest of Valencia, downplays some figures (the Cid’s son Diego), and centralizes others (his daughters). Yet again and again, archival discoveries confirm details long preserved in poetic form—warning against underestimating epic as a historical source.

## THE TRANSLATION: CHOICES AND GOALS

### *Modern, fast-moving English:*

Rejecting artificially archaic English, Veach aims to recreate the poem’s original function as “news” and gripping entertainment. He favors a lean, forward-driving line



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consistent with the poem's cavalry rhythm, sometimes adjusting line breaks and tense (past vs. vivid present) to enhance clarity and immediacy.

**Structure and readability:**

Laisse numbers, brief section headings, and paragraph-like breaks introduce "air" into what are often printed as dense text blocks in Spanish editions. Marginal line numbers correspond to the original manuscript. The goal is a text that is both faithful and genuinely enjoyable—a version that invites modern readers and students into the world of the *Cid*.

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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

### *History and Myth: A National Hero Between Two Worlds*

How does *Songs of The Cid* present Rodrigo Díaz as both a historically grounded figure and a mythic hero? Identify scenes where factual detail (named places, legal procedures) coexists with idealization, and discuss how this duality shapes Spanish national identity.

### *Ethics Across Enemy Lines: The Cid and the Moors*

Examine moments when the Cid expresses empathy or fairness toward his Muslim adversaries (e.g., freeing captives, sharing plunder, acknowledging "we do them all kinds of damage"). How does this contrast with later crusading narratives? What does it reveal about frontier society in medieval Spain?

### *Virtue vs. Nobility: The Infantes of Carrión Episode*

Analyze the Corpes incident and the Toledo trial. How does the poem use the Infantes' betrayal of the Cid's daughters to critique inherited status and empty titles? How do the two forms of justice (Roman law and trial by combat) interact to restore the Cid's honor?

### *Oral Epic Techniques and Translation Choices*

Identify several repeated epithets or formulas in the poem. How do these support oral composition? How does Veach's decision to use contemporary, "chatty" English affect our reception of an epic text? Should translators preserve archaic flavor or prioritize immediacy?

### *Religion, Politics, and the Reconquest Narrative*

Using the introduction, discuss how *Songs of The Cid* complicates the notion of a monolithic, religious "Reconquest." How do alliances, marriages, and mutual dependence blur the lines between Christian and Muslim camps? How might this perspective challenge or enrich students' understanding of medieval Iberia?

### *Manuscripts, Laises, and the Shape of the Story*

What does the survival of a single 1207 manuscript (Per Abbat) imply about transmission, loss, and chance in literary history? How do assonance-based laises function structurally and thematically in the poem? In what ways can layout and paratext (section titles, spacing) influence interpretation?

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## PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary texts

*Cantar de mio Cid*. Various critical Spanish editions (e.g., Menéndez Pidal, Alberto Montaner).

*Carmen Campidoctoris*. Latin poem on the Cid, likely late 11th or early 12th century.

*Romances del Cid*. Traditional Spanish ballads (multiple collections and anthologies).

### Historical and critical studies

- **Menéndez Pidal, Ramón.** *La España del Cid* and editions/commentaries on *Cantar de mio Cid*.
- **Fletcher, Richard.** *The Quest for El Cid*.
- **O'Callaghan, Joseph F.** *A History of Medieval Spain*.
- **Fletcher, Richard.** *Moorish Spain*.
- **Hillgarth, J. N.** *The Spanish Kingdoms, 1250–1516*. (For broader context.)
- **Colin Smith, ed.** *The Cid: Poem of My Cid*. (Critical English edition.)
- **Parkinson, Stephen.** *The Cid: A Spanish Hero and His Legacy*.

### On oral epic and translation

- **Lord, Albert B.** *The Singer of Tales*. (On oral-formulaic composition.)
- **Hatto, A. T.** (trans.). *The Song of Roland*. (For comparison of epic styles.)
- **Heaney, Seamus.** *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. (As a model of modern epic translation.)



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**PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)**

*Which three types of texts about El Cid are included in this volume?*

- A) A Latin poem, a prose chronicle, and a modern novel
- B) A Latin poem (*Carmen Campidoctoris*), the Castilian epic (*Song of The Cid*), and later Spanish ballads (*romances*)
- C) Only the *Song of The Cid* and its English prose summary
- D) A collection of royal letters and legal documents

**Correct Answer: B**

*What best describes the political and religious situation in Iberia during the Cid's lifetime, according to the introduction?*

- A) A simple, continuous Christian crusade against unified Muslim forces
- B) A clear racial division with no alliances across religious lines
- C) A complex web of Christian and Muslim kingdoms, frequently allying with or fighting each other for reasons of power and profit as much as religion
- D) Total dominance of Christian kingdoms over a few isolated Muslim enclaves

**Correct Answer: C**

*How does the poem portray the Infantes of Carrión in relation to the Cid?*

- A) As brave warriors who rescue the Cid from danger
- B) As model Christian princes and ideal husbands
- C) As high-born but cowardly and treacherous nobles who abuse the Cid's daughters and are later disgraced
- D) As Moorish allies of the Cid

**Correct Answer: C**

*What is one key feature of the poem's form that reflects its oral origins?*

- A) Strict rhymed couplets in iambic pentameter
- B) Regular stanzaic forms with end-rhyme
- C) Irregular line lengths organized into assonance-based laises, with repeated formulas and epithets
- D) Use of prose narrative with occasional lyric interludes

**Correct Answer: C**

*Why does Dan Veach choose a modern, fast-moving English style for his translation?*

- A) Because he wants to rewrite the story in contemporary slang
- B) Because the original was intended as vivid, current "news," and he wants to capture its immediacy and oral energy for today's readers
- C) Because he dislikes medieval literature
- D) Because he omits all historical details

**Correct Answer: B\*\***

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