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Martínez, H. Salvador. *El "Poema de Almería" y la épica románica*. Madrid: Gredos, 1975. Paper. 478 pp.

The publication of this book only four years after Gredos issued the study of Marcos Marín, who defends the Arabic origins of Castilian epic poetry, illustrates well how new theories about the epic, confusing in their diversity and often exclusive of each other, are being explored after the death of Menéndez Pidal, to whom Martínez makes a presumably obligatory genuflection in the introduction. Prof. Martínez's thesis, certainly incompatible with the theories of Pidal, can be easily summarized: there existed in Spain a semi-popular Latin epic poetry, distinct from the Classical Latin epic and sharing some of the stylistic features of vernacular poetry, and this Latin epic is a more immediate and far more probable source for the Castilian epic than are either the Arabs or the Goths, whose oral poetry in Spain is completely hypothetical.

Martínez defends his thesis by a study of the "Poema de Almería," the surviving Hispano-Latin text most similar to the vernacular epic. He provides a bilingual edition of the poem. Although this text has been known to medievalists for many years, Martínez assigns it new value by establishing it as earlier in date than the *Cantar del Mio Cid*; therefore the apparent reference in the "Poema de Almería" to vernacular poems about the Cid could not refer to the *Cantar*, and the unhistorical association of Alvar Fáñez with the Cid could not have been taken from the Castilian poem. Martínez suggests that Alvar Fáñez was first

linked with the Cid by the author of the “Poema de Almería”—identified as Arnaldus, bishop of Astorga—in a deliberate attempt to create a pair of heroes in imitation of the “Roland-Olivier” couple of the *Chanson de Roland*.

Martínez’s theory is attractive and carefully constructed. That it will be universally accepted is unlikely, both because there are so many scholars who vigorously espouse different positions and because, like most writers on the origins of the epic, he moves from the very finite number of hard facts and known texts to a series of suppositions and hypotheses. What is true about the “Poema de Almería”—that, for example, it was born immediately following the events it discusses—need not have been true about other texts which have been lost. That Martínez’s “tradición épica latina medieval” was born as a result of the Moorish invasion (p. 397) seems to this reviewer both unproven and unlikely.

What Martínez has done, however, by examining the concept of a popular Latin epic and the “Poema de Almería” is to reconstruct another important link of a chain which is still too incomplete to allow any firm conclusions about the order in which the links were arranged. This in itself is no mean accomplishment, and Martínez’s well-written and erudite study is a substantial contribution to our knowledge of twelfth-century literature and a step forward in the search for the origins of the epic in Spain.

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