



History 101

El Cid

Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (c. 1043 – 10 July 1099) was a Castilian nobleman and military leader in medieval Spain. The Moors called him El Cid, which meant *the Lord*. He was born in Vivar, near the city of Burgos. After his death, he became Castile's celebrated national hero and the protagonist of the most significant medieval Spanish epic poem, *El Cantar de Mio Cid*.

El Cid was brought up at the court of King Ferdinand the Great and served Ferdinand's son, Sancho II. He rose to become the commander and royal standard-bearer of Castile upon Sancho's ascension in 1065. Rodrigo went on to lead the Castilian military campaigns against Sancho's brothers, Alfonso VI of León and García II of Galicia, as well as in the Muslim kingdoms in Al-Andalus. He became renowned for his military prowess in these campaigns, which helped expand Castilian territory at the expense of the Muslims and Sancho's brothers' kingdoms. When Sancho was murdered in 1072, the throne passed to his brother Alfonso, the same whom El Cid had helped remove from power. Rodrigo lost his ranking in the new court. Finally, in 1081, he was ordered into exile.

El Cid found work fighting for the Muslim rulers of Zaragoza, whom he defended from its traditional enemy, Aragon. While in exile, he regained his reputation as a strategist and formidable military leader. He repeatedly turned out victorious in battle against the Muslim rulers of Lérida and their Christian allies, as well as against a large Christian army under King Sancho Ramírez of Aragon. In 1086, Alfonso offered terms for the return to the Christian service, and Rodrigo soon found himself fighting for his former Lord. Over the next several years, He gradually increased his control over Valencia; the Islamic ruler. Valencia finally fell in 1094, and El Cid

established an independent principality on the Mediterranean coast of Spain. He ruled over a pluralistic society with the popular support of Christians and Muslims alike.

El Cid's final years were spent fighting the Almoravid Berbers. He inflicted upon them their first major defeat in 1094, and continued resisting them until his death. In 1099, his wife, Jimena Díaz, succeeded him as ruler of Valencia, but she was eventually forced to surrender the principality to the Almoravids in 1102. To this day, El Cid remains a Spanish popular folk-hero and national icon, with his life and deeds remembered in plays, films, folktales, songs, and even video games.



Tomb of El Cid and his wife Doña Jimena

