

THE WRITING OF THE PRESENT IN ALONSO DE JAÉN'S *ESPEJO DEL MUNDO* (1468-1490)

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ABSTRACT

Espejo del mundo is an apocalyptic text, written between 1468 and 1490 by Alonso de Jaén, a royal chronicler who established himself in the city of Valencia. The fourth and last part of the work narrates the late reign of Henry IV of Castile and the early reign of the Catholic Monarchs by resorting to an allegorical piece of fiction, throughout which various prophecies are interspersed and applied to some of the figures and events mentioned. The objective of this article is to study this narration as a "history of the present" typical of the Middle Ages. To this end, we will analyse how [1] the social and ideological position of the author, [2] his political context, [3] the fifteenth century Castilian "protest literature", and [4] the medieval apocalyptic thinking are intertwined in the text's writing.

KEYWORDS

Espejo del mundo, Alonso de Jaén, medieval historiography, history of the present, medieval apocalypticism.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Espejo del mundo, Alfonsus Giennensis, historiographia mediaevalis, historia praesentis, apocalypticismus mediaevalis.

1. Introduction

The interest in the present is one of the most characteristic features of medieval historiography. In the absence of methodological or academic standardization, the speculation by medieval authors about lived events extended beyond the boundaries of chronicles, annals, and histories, permeating other, more heterogeneous media. This singularity resulted in texts that complexly intermingled different dimensions of the medieval world. On the one hand, the dynamics of the public sphere(s) and the political circumstances of each context ideologically guided the narratives. On the other hand, literary or discursive genres and mentalities formally and epistemically conditioned the perspectives of the authors.

In this article, we seek to approach the study of this issue by examining *Espejo del mundo*, an Aragonese text written by Alonso de Jaén in the late fifteenth century. Halfway between an apocalyptic treatise and an allegorical chronicle, it proposes a critical portrayal of the Christian society of its time, with particular focus on contemporary Spanish political developments. The fourth and last part of the text, devoted to the announcement and gloss of “some news that have reportedly happened not long ago in the mountains of *Llaticas* [a syllabic anagram of Castile]” (*unas nuevas que dicen haver acontecido poco tiempo ha en las montanyas de Llaticas [=Castilla]*), provides an account of the late reign of Henry IV and the early reign of the Catholic Monarchs by resorting to an allegorical piece of fiction. Throughout this fiction, various prophecies are interspersed and applied to some of the figures and events mentioned. In order to analyse this historiographical representation, we will work with several ideas simultaneously, rejecting to establish a hierarchy between them.¹ Thus, we will attempt to explain how [1] the author’s social and ideological position, [2] his political context, [3] fifteenth century Castilian “protest literature”, and [4] medieval apocalyptic thinking are intertwined in the text’s writing.

With these goals in mind, our article will be organized in four sections. Firstly, we will make a brief historical and historiographic introduction on the relevance of the present in medieval history writing. Secondly, we will approach *Espejo del mundo* as a “history of the present”, typical of the Middle Ages, and characterize its author and the structure of its content. Thirdly, we will analyse the role played by the use of allegorical fiction in the construction of the work, considering its links to the so-called “protest literature”. Lastly and fourthly, we will inquire into the apocalyptic reflections developed in the text and will propose a hypothesis regarding its connection to the allegorical fiction.

1. LaCapra, Dominick. *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.



2. The present as a matrix of the medieval historiographic field

The historiographic formulation of the notion of present and the theorization of methodologies built on this notion are two products of the historical discipline's evolution since the late twentieth century. From the 1970s onwards, the history of the present and immediate history have found in the "present time", the "immediate past", or the "time of experience" a work field for many historians. These trends have rekindled the interest in event-related dimension of historiography by emphasizing the interdependence between facts and their interpretation.² The issue of individual and collective memory has also received more attention, especially in connection with the writing of history.³ In parallel, the epistemic position of historians regarding their object of study has been profoundly reconsidered. When writing a "lived" history, whose end is yet to be known, the past-present-future time sequence is blurred. At the same time, the subjectivity and "partiality" of the resulting account increases.⁴

Although the implications of these approaches have mainly been developed within the domain of contemporary history (in a conventional sense), their impact has nonetheless reached the domain of medievalism. In the last few decades, several scholars have defended that speculating about the present is not a phenomenon confined to current times, but it is one of the axis around which medieval historiographic practices were developed.⁵ Gonzalo Pasamar argues that the turning of history into a discipline in the late eighteenth century, with its compartmentalization in different epochs or periods, was only possible once the "stationary present" ceased to be the central place of work for historians. In this respect, he put forward a distinction between the "traditional forms" and the "modern forms" of the history of the present time.⁶ Like ancient writers, the authors of the Middle Ages attached great relevance to the narration of near events, i.e., events corresponding to their generation or those immediately preceding them. This type of historiography shared its space with other, more standardized historiographies, such as Biblical history, ecclesiastical history, and royal or noble genealogies. It was, however, different from them in many respects. Let us see why.

Firstly, the "medieval forms of the history of the present" broke the time model and the social roles associated with the writing of the past. On the one

2. Soulet, Jean-François. *L'histoire immédiate. Historiographie, sources et méthodes*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2009.

3. Dosse, François. *La historia: conceptos y escrituras*. Buenos Aires: Nueva Visión, 2003; Erice, Francisco. *Guerras de la memoria y fantasmas del pasado. Usos y abusos de la memoria colectiva*. Oviedo: Eikasía, 2009.

4. Aróstegui, Julio. *La historia vivida: sobre la historia del presente*. Madrid: Alianza, 2004.

5. Pasamar, Gonzalo. "Formas tradicionales y formas modernas de la historia del presente". *Historia social*, 62 (2008): 147-169; Sanmartín, Israel. "El presente en la Edad Media: historia, imagen y discurso milenaristas", *Historia(s), imagen(es) y lenguaje(s) en América Latina y Europa*, Israel Sanmartín, Patricia Calvo, Eduardo Rey, eds. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, 2013: 61-78; Thiry, Claude. "Historiographie et actualité (XIV^e et XV^e siècles)", *Grundriss der Romanischen Literaturen des Mittelalters*, vol. XI. *La littérature historiographique des origines à 1500*, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, Ursula Link-Heer, Peter-Michael Spangenberg, eds. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1987: 1025-1063.

6. Pasamar, Gonzalo. "Formas tradicionales y formas modernas...": 147-148.



hand, contemporaneity opened a discursive space for the dissemination of a wide variety of historiographical perspectives on events that were still unfolding. On the other hand, it placed history at the centre of the medieval public sphere(s) and its ideological battles. These particularities resulted in a radical relativization of historical knowledge, whether due to its submission to the many colliding interests or, more importantly, due to the impossibility of interpretatively closing social and political processes that continued beyond the temporal scope of the works themselves.⁷ In the same vein, looking at the present meant new motivations for authors. The aim of historiography was no longer to use the past as a repository of *exempla* or moral lessons to face contemporary situations or to assimilate past and present in the construction of an idea of “tradition”, but to directly intervene in the future evolution of the events narrated. This symbiosis between history and historiography caused, among other things, a development of closer ties between the texts and their respective contexts. The meanings of the historical accounts become relational; in other words, they only emerge when the works are placed within the social and political relations that are organized around them and which, in turn, they try to shape.⁸

Secondly, the media that channelled the production of these “histories of the present”, typical of the Middle Ages, were more heterogeneous than those governing the writing of the past. The absence of an academic or methodological framework that regulated speculation on contemporary matters led to an epistemic plurality that manifested itself also at the level of forms.⁹ Obviously, the chronicles played a key role in the narration of the events lived by the medieval authors who wrote in their capacity as “witnesses”.¹⁰ We can find, however, accounts and reflections on the present in many other textual models. Satirical poems, travel books, biographies, or mirrors of princes are among the most relevant examples. The apocalyptic texts, in their various forms, were also very widely used tools to discuss the links between the past, present, and future from a variety of points of view.¹¹ In conclusion, the idea of the present as an entity that falls under the purview of history expands the frontiers of the medieval historiographic field to domains that are not usually associated with historiography, thus increasing the possibilities for analysis.

All these sociopolitical, epistemic, and formal characteristics led to a particular development of the “histories of the present” in the final centuries of the Middle Ages. The late medieval crisis, in its different manifestations, revived the interest of intellectuals in current events and encouraged speculation on its causes and its

7. Spiegel, Gabrielle M. *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997: 200.

8. Spiegel, Gabrielle M. *The Past as Text...*: 210-211.

9. See: Brandt, William J. *The Shape of Medieval History: Studies in Modes of Perception*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

10. See Ainsworth, Peter. “Contemporary and Eye-Witness History”, *Historiography in the Middle Ages*, Deborah Mauskopf Deliyannis, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2003: 249-276.

11. Sanmartín, Israel. “El presente en la Edad Media...”. See also Mitre Fernández, Emilio. *Historiografía y mentalidades históricas en la Europa medieval*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1982: 67-76.



consequences.¹² Everyday instability thus translated into a temporal instability, which, to a greater extent, explains the constant presence of apocalyptic thinking throughout the period.¹³ At the same time, the introduction of new political structures at different territorial domains increased the instances of production of historiographic texts (courts, local and regional authorities, noble patronage, universities, etc.).¹⁴ It also paved the way for the public expression of increasingly varied interests. The result was a multiplication of the number of authors and readers (the “political society”),¹⁵ both before and after the invention and spread of the printing press.

If we focus our attention on the Hispanic Kingdoms, we will see that several scholars have established a correlation between the “historiographic boom” of the fifteenth century and the speculation on the present.¹⁶ The machinations of the nobility and the social conflicts that spread throughout Castile and Aragon during these years, together with the emergence of new professionals specializing in intellectual work (the *letrados*),¹⁷ sparked interest in writing on contemporary issues.¹⁸ This materialized in a closer attention to the local realities in terms of both form and content. On the one hand, texts began to address the governance issues themselves, the embassies, negotiations, and agreements through which the exercise of power is manifested.¹⁹ The direct involvement of many authors in the court or other institutional environments facilitated the task. On the other hand, narration progressive gave way to analysis and reflection. Authors showed an interest in commenting on their methodology and glossing some events. It was far from uncommon to add documents or *cartas de relación*, which can be seen as providing some sort of evidence in its own right.²⁰

At a wider level, the “localization” of historiographic practices was ensued by the redefinition of the relation between power and authors, as well as by a strengthening of the authors’ position as social actors. The creation of the post of Royal Chronicler in Castile in the early fifteenth century was a first attempt at administratively controlling the writing of history. Generally, royal chroniclers were

12. Thiry, Claude. “Historiographie et actualité...”: 1027.

13. Delumeau, Jean. *El miedo en occidente (siglos XIV-XVIII): una ciudad sitiada*. Madrid: Taurus, 1989.

14. Chopin-Faron, Myriam. “Écrire le temps au Moyen Âge”. *reCHERches*, 27 (2021): 32.

15. See: Genet, Jean-Philippe. “Les langages de la propagande”, *La sociedad política a fines del siglo XV en los reinos ibéricos y en Europa: ¿élites, pueblo, súbditos?*, Vincent Challet, Jean-Philippe Genet, Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrero, Julio Valdeón, eds. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2007: 89-110.

16. Tate, Robert B. *Ensayos sobre la historiografía peninsular del siglo XV*. Madrid: Gredos, 1970: 280-296; García, Michel. “Noticias del presente, memoria del futuro. Escribir la historia en Castilla en 1400 y más adelante”, *Memoria e historia. Utilización política en la Corona de Castilla al final de la Edad Media*, Jon Andoni Fernández de Larrea, José Ramón Díaz de Durana, eds. Madrid: Sílex, 2010: 15-37; Bautista, Francisco. “Historiografía y poder al final de la Edad Media: en torno al oficio de cronista”. *Studia historica. Historia medieval*, 33 (2015): 97-117.

17. See *infra*, footnote 60.

18. Tate, Robert B. *Ensayos sobre la historiografía peninsular...*: 280-282.

19. Bautista, Francisco. “Historiografía y poder...”: 98.

20. García, Michel. “Noticias del presente, memoria del futuro...”: 36.



individuals from the Chancellery, fully conversant with bureaucratic work, such as clerks and registrars, whose services had been particularly appreciated by the king or his entourage.²¹ The many tensions revolving around the post from the outset, however, paint a much more complex picture. Authors developed tools to channel the historiographic discourse toward their own ideological positions, which often resulted in their dismissal and ostracism. Besides, works were often rewritten to serve a variety of angles and interests.²²

3. Alonso de Jaén's *Espejo del mundo* as 'history of the present'

Alonso de Jaén's *Espejo del mundo* is one of the texts that emerged from this historical and historiographic process. Starting from an apocalyptic point of view, it develops both a critical portrayal of the late fifteenth century Christian society and an allegorical "chronicle" about Spanish topical political developments. The text has reached us in a single autograph manuscript: Ms. 273 of the Biblioteca de Catalunya, partially edited by Eulàlia Duran and Joan Requesens in 1997.²³ So far, the works of these authors are the only ones that have made an in-depth analysis of the content of *Espejo del mundo*, although there have also been some other approaches from wider perspectives. Ana Isabel Carrasco Manchado and David Nogales Rincón have included the text in their studies on "political propaganda" in late medieval Castile.²⁴ Also, Mònica Colominas Aparicio has examined the figure of Alonso de Jaén by approaching his social and cultural environment.²⁵

Espejo del mundo was written between 1468 and 1490, in a context of political effervescence which materialized in the Castilian succession crisis (1474-1479) and

21. Bautista, Francisco. "Historiografía y poder...": 100-101.

22. Bautista, Francisco. "Historiografía y poder...": 104-105.

23. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement: texts profètics catalans favorables a Ferran el Catòlic*. València: Tres i Quatre, 1997: 189-297. This edition includes an introductory study on the text and its author. Besides, Duran further elaborated on her research in the following works: Duran, Eulàlia. "La cort reial com a centre de propaganda monàrquica: la participació morisca en l'exaltació messiànica dels Reis Catòlics". *Pedralbes*, 13/2 (1993): 505-514; Duran, Eulàlia. "Una singular narració coetània del procés d'unió de les corones de Castella i Aragó sota els reis Catòlics en clau de fauna d'animals", *Miscel·lània en homenatge a Joan Ainaud de Lasarte*. Barcelona: Publicacions de l'Abadia de Montserrat, 1998: I, 459-468.

24. Carrasco Manchado, Ana Isabel. "La metáfora animal en la propaganda política de los Reyes Católicos (1474-1482)". *Cahiers de linguistique et de civilisation hispaniques médiévales*, 25 (2002): 399-420; Carrasco Manchado, Ana Isabel. *Isabel I de Castilla y la sombra de la ilegitimidad. Propaganda y representación en el conflicto sucesorio (1474-1482)*. Madrid: Sílex, 2006; Nogales Rincón, David. "Animalización, sátira y propaganda real: la metáfora y la alegoría animal como instrumento político en la Castilla bajomedieval (siglos XIV-XV)". *Signum*, 11/1 (2010): 267-296.

25. Colominas Aparicio, Mònica. "Profecía, conversión y polémica islamo-cristiana en la Iberia altomoderna (siglo XV): Alfonso de Jaén y el círculo del obispo don Martín García", *Visiones imperiales y profecía: Roma, España, Nuevo Mundo*, Stefania Pastore, Mercedes García-Arenal, eds. Madrid: Abada, 2018: 53-80.



Catalan “civil war” (1462-1472). Since the final years of the reigns of Henry IV and John II, the construction of the “legitimacy” of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon activated a whole set of ideological resources which combined the denunciation of the present or the immediate past with an assertion of demands and expectations for the future.²⁶ In these circumstances, the public sphere of the Hispanic Kingdoms became a breeding ground for the dissemination of messianic prophecies, representations of the Antichrist, and predictions about the end of the world. In the case of Castile, the apocalyptic materials were used mainly in song books and chronicles, such as Comendador Román's *Coplas de la Pasión con la Resurrección* (ca. 1479-1491), Pedro Marcuello's *Cancionero* (1482-1502), and *Historia de los hechos de don Rodrigo Ponce de León* (ca. 1492-1495). In Aragon, we can mention, for example, the poems *Per Barcelona* (ca. 1472-1473), *Lucidari* (ca. 1482), and *Despertar-s'à la àguila* (ca. 1492). There are also other apocalyptic texts that were circulated in both Spanish and Catalan, among which we may single out the so-called *Libro de los grandes hechos* or *De la venguda de Antechrist* by Juan Unay/Joan Alamany.

Within this collection of works, *Espejo del mundo* presents several particular features. His author, Alonso de Jaén, was a master in arts and medicine from the Kingdom of Granada, but lived in Valencia since at least 1476 until his death in 1490.²⁷ According to notarial sources, he held the position of royal chronicler for several decades, although we do not know for what king(s). In recent times, testimonies have been found of his links to a variety of Aragonese figures of the time. We know that Pedro Panivino, the chaplain of Ferdinand of Aragon, sent him a prophecy related to the end of Islam in 1486.²⁸ Three years later, in 1489,

26. Carrasco Manchado, Ana Isabel. *Isabel I de Castilla...*: 517-537.

27. Duran and Requesens hold that Alonso de Jaén may be of Moorish descent: *El seu nom, Alonso de Jaén, podria fer pensar que pertanyia a un llinatge de la petita noblesa castellana vinculada al regne de Jaén, però la vinculació amb el regne de València i amb els estaments menestrals de la ciutat fa dubtar d'aquest parentiu. Una hipòtesi podria apuntar a un jueu convers o més probablement a un morisc apadrinat en ésser batejat per algun membre de la família Jaén o, simplement, que es tractés d'un mudèjar resident al regne de Jaén i, en ésser batejat, li haguessin posat el nom d'origen o de residència. Ara sabem que Alonso de Jaén procedia del regne de Granada. La mobilitat dels mudèjars valencians i el regne de Granada, que consideraven en certa manera llur pàtria, eren molt freqüents els segles XIV i XV. A vegades intentaven cercar-hi fortuna i si no se situaven tornaven al regne de València.* (“His name, Alonso de Jaén, could lead one to believe that he was part of the petty Castilian nobility associated with the Kingdom of Jaén, but the link to the Kingdom of Valencia and to the guildsmen of the city cast doubt on this tie. It may be hypothesized that he was a converted Jew or a Moorish who was christened and the godchild of the Jaén family, or it may simply be that he was a Mudejar living in the Kingdom of Jaen and at his christening he was given the name of origin or of residence. We now know that Alonso de Jaén hailed from the Kingdom of Granada. In the fourteenth and fifteenth century, it was frequent that Mudejars from Valencia moved to the Kingdom of Granada, which to a certain extent they considered their homeland. Sometimes they tried to find fortune there and if they did not achieve it, they returned to the Kingdom of Valencia”). Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 136.

28. The prophecy was copied by Pedro Panivino in the current ms. H-III-24 of the Biblioteca del Monasterio de El Escorial, along with several spiritual treatises in the Franciscan tradition (e.g., *De triplici statu mundi* by Francesc Eiximenis). On this matter, see Colominas Aparicio, Mònica. “Profecia, conversión y polémica islamo-cristiana...”: 60.



Alonso de Jaén incurred in a debt with convert priest Juan Andrés, who, in 1515, would publish the anti-Muslim treatise *Confusión de la secta mahomética y de Alcorán*. All this led Duran to place Alonso de Jaén in a group of intellectuals linked to the court of Aragon and specialized in the manipulation of apocalyptic materials, which included, among others, Pedro Azamar (*Repetición e obra del derecho militar e armas*) and Jerónimo Torrella (*De imaginibus astrologicis*).²⁹ Colominas Aparicio identified Martín García Puyazuelo, general inquisitor, bishop of Barcelona, and chaplain of the Catholic Monarchs as the head of this group.³⁰

Regarding the composition of the text, *Espejo del mundo* contains two different versions, which overlap throughout the manuscript. The first version, with some passages in Spanish and others in Catalan, is devoted to “Prince” Ferdinand of Aragon. Several contextual references allow us to date it around 1468-1469 and, in any case, before 1472. The second version, longer and in Spanish only, is addressed to “Queen” Isabella and was written from around 1480-1481. On the basis of these data, Duran and Requesens deduce that Alonso de Jaén would have started writing the text as a result of Ferdinand of Aragon marrying Isabella of Castile. However, following Ferdinand’s access to the throne in 1479, the author would have decided to dedicate his work to Isabella as the queen consort of Aragon. Finally, Alonso de Jaén died before being able to complete his project, as suggested by the erasures, corrections, and unconnected passages in the manuscript.³¹

These vicissitudes in the writing hinder a fluid reading of the text and, especially, the definition of its internal structure. In his dedication to the queen, which is written on the first folio, Alonso de Jaén announces that *Espejo del mundo* will consist of three sections. The first, according to him, *cuenta la perdición de los estados de todas gentes del mundo e de como todos van al revés faziendo cada uno el contrario de lo qu’es tenido e obligado de fazer* (“tells the downfall of the realms of all peoples in the world, with everyone going in the opposite direction, each of them doing the opposite of what ought to and must be done”). Next, the second *recuenta la perversión de las gentes de las montanyas de Llaticas [=Castilla]* (“recounts the perversion of the people in the mountains of Llaticas [=Castile]”). Lastly, the third *tracta de cómo Nuestro Senyor, para castigar e corregir las gentes tan desordenadas, ha dembiar un hombre, mero executor suyo, e quién ha de ser aqueste hombre e qué actos tiene de fazer* (“discusses how Our Lord, to punish and correct such disorderly people, shall send a man, a mere executor of His, and who this man shall be and what acts he shall perform”).

However, the redrafts of the text resulted in major changes to this initial planning. Throughout the years, Alonso de Jaén altered the order of the above sections and added new elements that were not included in the introduction. As a result, *Espejo del mundo* eventually consists of four blocks of very disparate content, namely: [1] a brief account of the wreck of an expedition consisting of ships from all over Europe to retake Jerusalem (fols. 1^v-3^v); [2] several theoretical considerations regarding the

29. Duran, Eulàlia. “La cort reial com a centre de propaganda monàrquica...”.

30. Colominas Aparicio, Mònica. “Profecía, conversión y polémica islamo-cristiana...”.

31. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecía i poder al Renaixement...*: 145-149.



end of the world and the arrival of a Hispanic king called to redeem the Catholic faith (fols. 12-12^v, fol. 17^v, fols. 22-22^v, fols. 31-44^v); [3] a discussion on the submission of Christianity to three types of "Turks" (the temporal, the spiritual, and the temporal and spiritual) and the identity of those to blame for this situation (the churchmen or the kings) (fol. 8^v, fols. 45-49^v); and [4] the declaration and gloss of *unas nuevas que dicen haver acontecido poco tiempo ha en las montanyas de Llaticas [=Castilla]* ("some news that have reportedly happened not long ago in the mountains of *Llaticas* [=Castile]") (fols. 4-5, fols. 6-8, fol. 8^v, fols. 9-9^v, fol. 11, fol. 18^v, fol. 19, fols. 23-28, fols. 50-85^v).³²

In this article, we will confine our analysis to the fourth block of contents. This is an allegorical account on the late reign of Henry IV of Castile and the early reign of the Catholic Monarchs, in which several prophecies are applied in a reasoned manner to some of the events and figures mentioned. The first part of the block (*Declaració*, in the edition by Duran & Requesens) begins with the marriage of Princess Isabella to Prince Ferdinand in 1469 and ends with the enthronement of the latter in 1479. Alonso de Jaén particularly elaborates on the description of political conflict at a local scale, including fictional dialogues between the social actors involved. In the case of Castile, most of the narration is devoted to the founding of the *Santa Hermandad* in 1476 and to detailing his demands against seigneurial abuse and corruption in the administration of the kingdom. In the case of Aragon, particularly noteworthy are the criticisms directed at Valencian people because of the risk derived from the Muslim demographic surge in the region (a figure in excess of 60,000 is mentioned).

Alonso de Jaén, however, represents all the individuals and groups he mentions as different types of animals. Besides, he changes the proper nouns (both of people and places) into syllabic anagrams.³³ Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, for instance, respectively become *la leona Belsay nado* [=dona Ysabel] ("lioness *Belsay nado* [=Lady Isabella]") and *una gran águila cabdal* [...], *rey de las aves de Alicice* [=Cecilia] ("a great eagle [...], king of the birds of *Alicice* [=Sicily]"). The nobles, the favorites and municipal authorities are depicted as "predators" or *animales de rapinya* ("foxes", "red dogs", "thieving wolves", etc.), while the peasants, artisans and merchants are personified as *animales que biven del rocío del cielo e de la grasseza de la tierra* ("animals living on the dew of the sky and the fruits of the earth"), like "sheeps", "lambs", and "partridges". An excerpt from this first section follows:

32. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 156-160.

33. Animalization was not an exceptional device in late medieval apocalyptic texts, especially in those influenced by Merlin tradition. *Libro de los grandes hechos*, for instance, announced a clash in "the grand forest of Hercules" (*la grand selva de Ércoles*) between *pobres desollados* ("the poor") and a pack of *grandes lobos fanbrientos, e todos los adives, e rraposos, et gatos rreligiosos e lagostas* ("huge starving wolves and all the jackals and foxes and religious cats and locusts"). The author does not explicitly identify the groups or figures behind these symbols, although based on other references throughout the text, we may surmise that he is referring to noblemen, clergymen, and Muslims. See the edition of the Spanish version in Guadalajara Medina, José. *Las profecías del Anticristo en la Edad Media*. Madrid: Gredos, 1996: 405-425.



Y estando en esto, vinieron una gran multitud de liebres e de conejos diciendo con muy doloroso llanto delante l'águila e la leona: 'Senyores reyes: aved compassi3n de nosotros, vassallos vuestros, e fazednos justicia de los perros que nos comen bivos e nos corren, e de los furrones que dentro de nuestras madrigueras nos toman y nos matan, e de las culebras que nos destruyen a nosotros e nuestros fijos'. E dizen que l'águila e la leona, abiendo desto grandissimo sentimiento, demandaron a las liebres e a los conejos que d3nde estaban estos perros furrones e culebras de quien tantos danyos avien recebido e recibien de cada d3a. Respondieron: 'Senyores reyes: en unas montanyas que solien ser nuestras que se llaman de Danagra [=Granada] e XXII valles en Acilenva de noyre [=reyno de Valencia]'. (...) E dizen que l'águila e la leona, oyendo aquestas palabras, demandaron a las liebres e a los conejos que quánto tiempo avía que assí eran maltrattados de aquestos perros e furones, respondieron: 'Senyores reyes: desde que un gran traydor animal de rapinya que llaman Anliju don decon el [=el conde don Julian] los traxo en tiempo del le3n Godriro [=Rodrigo] don en aquestas montanyas de Llaticas [=Castilla] e las tomaron por fuerça fasta las montanyas de Aciliga [=Galicia], donde XXXXV leones despu3s an regnado que fasta oy no los an querido lançar de all3.34

The second part of the block (*Glosa* in Duran & Requesens' edition) reproduces the contents in the first part with slight changes but does away with the syllabic anagrams and reveals the real referents of the animal symbols. Thus, if we pay attention to the episode told in the above excerpt, we find the following clarifications: *Las liebres e los conejos que delante l'águila e la leona demandan justicia (...) son los fieles cristianos que biven en los vuestros regnos d'Espanya especialmente en el regno de Valencia; se quejan de los perros moros, enemigos de la santa fe cath3lica, e de los furones, que son los almogáraves que dentro en las madrigueras (que son las casas) los cativan e llevan a tierra de moros; en Acilenva de noreg el (que quiere decir en el regno de Valencia) veynte e dos valles están llenos dellos: la vall d'Alfandech, la vall d'Albayda, la vall de Gallinera...35*

34. "And while at this, there came many a hare and rabbit before the eagle and the lioness saying amidst painful wailing: 'Our King and Queen; may you have mercy on us, your vassals, and we plead justice from you as the dogs eat us alive and chase us, and the ferrets attack and kill us in our warrens and the snakes destroy us and our offspring'. And the story goes that the eagle and the lioness, deeply moved by this, inquired the hare and the rabbits about the whereabouts of these dogs, ferrets and snakes that had caused so much pain and continued to do so. To this, they answered: 'Our King and Queen, they are in a mountainous area that used to be ours by the name of *Danagra* [=Granada] and XXII valleys in the *Acilenva de noyre* [=Kingdom of Valencia]'. (...) And upon hearing this, the eagle and the lioness asked the hares and the rabbits how long they had been mistreated by these dogs and ferrets, to which they answered "Our King and Queen: since one traitor predator by the name of *Anliju don decon* [=Count Don Julian] brought them in the times of lion *Godriro* [=Rodrigo], lord of the mountains of *Llaticas* [=Castile], which they took by force reaching as far as the mountains of *Aciliga* [=Galicia], where XXXXV lions after him have reigned and they have never been expelled from there". Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 204-205.

35. "The hares and the rabbits that before the eagle and the lion seek justice [...] are the faithful Christians that live in your kingdoms of Spain, especially in the kingdom of Valencia"; "they complain of the Moorish dogs, foes of the holy Catholic faith, and of the ferrets, who are the Almogavars, who inside the warrens (which are the homes) take them prisoners to the lands of the Moors"; "in *Acilenva de noreg el* (which means the Kingdom of Valencia) twenty-two valleys are full of them: the valley of Alfandech, the valley of Albayda, the valley of Gallinera...". Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 233-234.



Finally, Alonso de Jaén closes the second part with an apocalyptic projection of the narration. The text is particularly focused on identifying Ferdinand of Aragon as the “Last Emperor”, a messianic figure charged with reforming the Christian society before the end of the world.³⁶ He is assigned a political program consisting of [1] a reorganization of the orders of chivalry, [2] the dispossession of the titles of those nobles who are *inobedientes a sus senyores naturales y destruydores de los regnos* (“disobedient to their natural lords and destroyers of kingdoms”), and [3] a purge in the judicial administration and municipal governance.

In the following sections, we will reflect on the historiographic strategy which underpins this fourth block of the text, and we will propose an explanation about the author's intentions. To this end, we will start by analysing the possible functions of the allegorical fiction (*Declaració*) in the discourse constructed by Alonso de Jaén. We will compare the case of *Espejo del mundo* with other fifteenth century Castilian texts (“protest literature”) and present some interpretation problems for our particular case. Subsequently, we will try to understand the link between the allegorical fiction and the *Glosa* that follows or, to put it differently, between the “fictional present” and the “real present”. This way, we will be able to link the contents of the fourth block of *Espejo del mundo* with Alonso de Jaén's authorship and medieval apocalyptic thinking.

4. The ‘fictional present’ in Alonso de Jaén's *Espejo del mundo*

The creation of allegorical fiction was one of the most widely used tools by authors in the Middle Age to write about their present. The dependency of the medieval historiographic field on the dynamics that characterized the public sphere(s) of its time resulted in authors being more interested in speculation and the dissemination of ideas than in the empirical or systematic analysis of material reality.³⁷ The referential function of historiography was in the service of other types of functions (of a moral, political, or intellectual nature, to name but a few). This made it possible to adapt the form and the content of the discourse to the specific needs of each situation. As a result, the historical accounts became devices of persuasion,

36. Specifically, Alonso de Jaén associates Fernando de Aragón with [1] the “small horn” or the “small king” of the prophecies of the Book of Daniel, the Babylonian Sibyl, Joachim of Fiore, and John of Rupescissa; [2] the “king of the Greeks” of the prophecies of the Book of Daniel and the Tiburtine Sibyl; [3] the *vespertilio* of the prophecy *Vae mundo in centum annis* by Arnau de Vilanova; [4] the “crowned lion” of the prophecies in the Book of Ezra, Joachim of Fiore and the Babylonian Sibyl; [5] the *rey cristianísimo* (“most Christian king”) of the prophecies of Pseudo-Methodius; [6] the “King of Aragon” of the prophecy *Initio magnorum dolorum erunt in mundo*; and [7] the *encubierto* (“undisclosed”) of Juan Unay's *Libro de los grandes hechos*. For a more general study of the figure of the “Last Emperor”, see: Reeves, Marjorie. *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism: A Study in Joachinism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969: 293-393.

37. Spiegel, Gabrielle M. *The Past as Text...: 89*; Orcástegui, Carmen; Sarasa, Esteban. *La historia en la Edad Media*. Madrid: Cátedra, 1991: 51.



partially linked to an objective control of facts.³⁸ This does not necessarily mean that the boundaries between history and fiction were more blurred in the Middle Ages than in modernity. Medieval rhetoric clearly distinguished between the notions of *fabula* and *historia*, and both underwent independent theoretical elaborations.³⁹ It is true that, as the territory of medieval reality was different from the current one (the marvellous, the magic, etc.), the boundaries of the world of fiction were not exactly the same as ours. Medieval authors, however, were aware of the possibility of building worlds that their potential readers would identify as unreal and even implausible, and they used these worlds for very specific purposes.

One of the roles attributed to the allegorical fiction in the Middle Ages was that of facilitating writing between the lines.⁴⁰ In the absence of a legal safeguard of freedom of speech, this was a strategy that made it possible to express a discourse in the public sphere while preserving the advantages that characterize private communication. Using the terms coined by James C. Scott, the medieval allegorical fictions acted in some cases as vehicles for “hidden transcripts”, that is to say, as codes designed to spread criticism against certain individuals of institutions in a surreptitious way.⁴¹

Several specialists have defended that fifteenth century Castilian “protest literature”⁴² habitually resorted to allegorical fiction for this reason. In a context of growing internal unrest, the intellectuals found in it a protection before potential political reprisals. In the 1420s or 1430s, for instance, the so-called *Libro de Gracián*, an anonymous text written around Archbishop Diego de Anaya, dramatizes the fictional journey of a young man across an unspecified kingdom to make a negative representation of the reign of John II of Castile. The author is especially critical with the figure of the favorite, which may hide an attack on Álvaro de Luna.⁴³ Later, around 1456, Alonso de Palencia wrote in Latin and Spanish *Batalla campal de los perros contra los lobos*, a *fabliella* featuring monarchs Antartón and Hilipa and the dog Harpaleo. The work has been interpreted as a reflection on the Battle of Olmedo (1445) and a denunciation against the two opposing noble factions.⁴⁴ In a similar vein, we may mention *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo*, probably written by Íñigo de Mendoza or Hernando del Pulgar during the reign of Henry IV. Its argument is focused, in this case, on the laments of

38. Ginzburg, Carlo. *El hilo y las huellas: lo verdadero, lo falso, lo ficticio*. Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010: 30.

39. Orlemanski, Julie. “Who Has Fiction? Modernity, Fictionality, and the Middle Ages”. *New Literary History*, 50:2 (2019): 156-157.

40. See Strauss, Leo. *La persecución y el arte de escribir*. Buenos Aires: Amorrortu, 2009.

41. Scott, James C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. Ann Arbor: Yale University Press, 1990.

42. On this concept, see Rodríguez Puértolas, Julio. *Poesía de protesta en la Edad Media castellana*. Madrid: Gredos, 1968.

43. Sampedro López, Roque. *Historia y pensamiento en el Libro de Gracián*. Santiago de Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela (PhD dissertation), 2023.

44. Corral Sánchez, Nuria. “Perros contra lobos. Ideología política y ¿sátira antinobiliaria? en una obra de Alonso de Palencia”. *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 48:2 (2018): 639-668.



pastors Gil Arribato and Mingo Revulgo because of the wolf attacks (the nobility) and the negligence of Candaulo (Henry IV).

The fourth part of *Espejo del mundo* directly connects with this type of “protest literature”.⁴⁵ Beyond the formal or stylistic similarities, all the above texts share a historiographic association, which is manifested in a shared manner of perceiving social relations and interpreting certain events of the present. In this regard, the allegorical fiction takes on an ideological dimension as well as a practical function; it is not just a mere wrapping of the political message, but it is part of the very message.⁴⁶ In line with the symbolic mentality characteristic of the Middle Ages, the allegorical fictions allowed the authors to navigate more easily between real and ideal societies by coupling the historiographic account with intellectual speculation.⁴⁷ The resulting products were often close to modern dystopias, at least at a functional level.⁴⁸ From this perspective, the fourth block of *Espejo del mundo* becomes an attempt at using the abstraction of the “no-place” (the “mountains of *Llaticas*”) to make a social criticism similar to those in *Libro de Gracián*, *Batalla campal de los perros contra los lobos*, or *Coplas de Mingo Revulgo*:

*Los malos duques, condes, vizcondes, marqueses e malos cavalleros continuamente tienen [spías] en las casas de los reyes para saber e sentir lo que se tratta en el consejo de aquellos, en manera que ningún consejo real puede tener público ni secreto que luego, por los malos privados, malos secretarios e consejeros, sus contrarios no sean avisados. [...] E la causa de tan grandes males dizen ser estada los reyes tomar por privados, secretarios e consejeros ombres apassionados, viciosos e sin alguna virtud, assí como fizo el rey don Anrrique, que seyendo el gran león d'Espanya tomó los corderos, por ser más benignos que los otros animales, por secretarios e privados. E quando fueron en secreto y en la privança tornáronse raposas e perros bermejós descubridores de sus secretos, amigos de sus enemigos, blasfemando de su persona real toda, deposándolo de sus regnos contra toda razón e justicia e procurando con todo su poder la destrucción e perdición de su estado.*⁴⁹

45. Alonso de Jaén even copies several short satirical stanzas throughout the text. An example of such stanzas follows: *E por esto van diciendo / Si el rey viesse tal robo / no diré, pardíós, al lobo / mis ovejas t'encomiendo*. (“And for that they say / should the king see such a plunder / he would not say to the wolf / my sheep I entrust you”). Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 228.

46. See: White, Hayden. *Ficción histórica, historia ficcional y realidad histórica*. Buenos Aires: Prometeo Libros, 2010: 63-64.

47. Le Goff, Jacques. *La civilización del Occidente medieval*. Barcelona: Paidós, 1999: 293-297. For a practical case, albeit from after the fifteenth century, see: Ferrás García, Iago Brais. “La utilidad ‘ideal’ de las maravillas en la *Historia General de España* de Juan de Mariana”, “*Conjúrote, triste Plutón*”: *Estudios sobre la literatura hispánica fantástica y sobrenatural*, Alberto Ferrera Lagoa, Nicolás Mateos Frühbeck, Julen Romero Ayuso, eds. Madrid: Philobiblion-Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 2023: 15-38.

48. See: Lochrie, Karma. *Nowhere in the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

49. “The evil dukes, counts, viscounts, markees, and evil knights continuously have [spies] in the houses of the kings to learn and be advised of what matters are discussed at their counsels so that no royal advice whether secret or not may be given that their foes fail to learn because of evil favorites, evil secretaries, or royal councilors. [...] And the cause of such ills may be attributed to the kings as they appoint passionate, vicious, and unvirtuous men as their favorites, secretaries, and councilors, as did King Henry who, being the great lion of Spain, appointed lambs as his secretaries and favorites for they were more benignant than other animals. And upon being privy to secrets and private matters, they turned into foxes and red dogs who revealed his secrets and became friends of his foes, cursing the king



Hipólito Rafael Oliva Herrer has defended the existence of a political identity built around the “contestation discourse” in fifteenth-century Castile. Tracking the trope of the “prisoner king”, his research detects a political imaginary expressed at the same time in chronicles, treatises, callings or public discourses, judicial statements, and *peticiones de Cortes*.⁵⁰ The indications begin during the reign of John II, but they reach at least until the Revolt of the Comuneros in 1520. Both *Espejo del mundo* and the rest of the texts mentioned above can be seen as a historiographic manifestation of this political identity. The concepts and arguments used by Alonso de Jaén in the fourth block of his work (the predation of the royal patrimony by the nobles, the lack of justice in the kingdom, the association between “people” and the monarchy, etc.) have a genealogy that goes beyond the limits of the intellectual world and the “protest literature”. In this regard, the allegorical fiction in *Espejo del mundo* is not just a mere literary and theoretical exercise, but also a device designed to intervene in some of the social and political conflicts of its time in a very specific manner.

5. The ‘real present’ in Alonso de Jaén’s *Espejo del mundo*

The case of *Espejo del mundo*, however, presents an important difference with respect to most allegorical fictions within its tradition. As previously noted, Alonso de Jaén includes a *Glosa* at the end of his work in which he makes explicit the hidden meaning of the narration. This operation divides the historiographic content of the fourth block of *Espejo del mundo* in two strata: [1] an unreal and implausible “fictional present”, created to be interpreted allegorically; and [2] a “real present”, that is to say, one constituted by the text as a referent outside itself. Needless to say, this “real present” is also a representation.⁵¹ However, the categories and perception frameworks that make it up are different to those in the allegorical fiction. In the process of rewriting, the text slowly moves away from the codes that characterize “protest literature” to enter into the domain of medieval apocalyptic thinking. The names and biographical details of the figures, particularly those of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, lead to reflections on the medieval history of the Hispanic Kingdoms and its eschatological development. Similarly, the animal symbols mesh with messianic prophecies of different origins:

and depriving him of his kingdoms against all reason and justice and using all their power to bring the destruction and downfall of his realm.” Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 216.

50. Oliva Herrer, Hipólito Rafael. “La prisión del rey: voces subalternas e indicios de la existencia de una identidad política en la Castilla del siglo XV”. *Hispania*, 71:238 (2011): 363-388; Oliva Herrer, Hipólito Rafael. *Justicia contra señores: el mundo rural y la política en tiempos de los Reyes Católicos*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2004.

51. See: Chartier, Roger. *El mundo como representación: estudios sobre historia cultural*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 1992.



Aqueste [Fernando] es el rey de Aragón que dize la prophecía Initio magnorum dolorum que erunt in mundo que con quatro mill de cavallo e con quarenta e un mill de pie ha de vencer la gente del turco e passar l'estrecho de Gibraltar e ganar e conquistar fasta la Casa Santa de Iherusalem. Aqueste es el león coronado dormidor que según posa la Sibilla Babilónica saldrá de las cuevas de Ércules, el qual ha de aver tres fijos, e subjugará l'África para la consignar a aquellos. Aqueste es el león bramando que vido Esdras sallir de la montanya que increpara l'águila (conviene saber el imperio romano) según es escrito en Esdre 3º, capítulo onzeno. Aqueste es el fijo adoptivo de los reyes de Castilla que ha de sallir del poniente e ss'á de despertar como ombre que se levanta del vino, delante del qual todos sus enemigos caerán, según posa la Sibilla Alexandrina. Y es aquell rey de poniente sobre el qual l'Espíritu Santo tiene de descender e todos los reyes lo an de obedecer. Aqueste es el rey de Aragón que, según fue revelado a sant Francisco s'á de levantar tan poderoso que súbito e miraculosamente será emperador de Italia, e conquistará Granada e toda la Barbería e la tierra de promisión, a Egipto e Suria. Aqueste es el rey que la prophecía que comiença Ve mundo in centum annis lo llama vespertilion, diziendo quel fuego de guerra duraría en la Spanya fasta quel vespertilion (conviene saber el rey d'Aragon), viniendo a Castilla a regnar, destruyrá los moros de la Spanya. Aqueste es aquel virtuosissimo capitán llamado Nyapaes dorrapeem mossidigran Dorrانfe don, rey de los animales y de las aves, que en nuestro común vulgar quiere dezir don Ferrando, grandíssimo emperador de Spanya, león rey de los animales racionales de Castilla y águila rey de las aves de Aragón y de Cicilia, el qual para todos los estados que van desordenados e perdidos tornar en debido estado, nuestro Senyor Dios lo ha elegido.⁵²

The strategy used by Alonso de Jaén could be explained from an epistemic point of view. Different scholars have pointed out the relation between medieval apocalyptic thinking and the “readability” of the present, i.e., the ability to “read” the sense of immediate history in the manner of a text.⁵³ The messianic or eschatological prophecies allowed medieval authors to place their present within wider temporal

52. “This [Ferdinand] is the king of Aragon who, according to the prophecy *Initio magnorum dolorum que erunt in mundo*, with four thousand men-at-arms and forty thousand footmen shall defeat the Turks and cross the Strait of Gibraltar and prevail and conquer his way to the Holy House of Jerusalem. This is the sleeping crowned lion that according to the Babylonian Sibyl will come out of the caves of Hercules; he will have three children, and subjugate Africa so that he may bequeath it to them. This is the roaring lion that Ezra saw coming out of the mountain that chided the eagle (i.e., the Roman Empire) as written in Ezra 3º, eleventh chapter. This is the adoptive son of the kings of Castile who shall come from the west and wake up like a man with a hangover, before whom all his foes shall fall, according to the Alexandrine Sybil. And he is that western king upon whom the Holy Ghost shall descend, and whom all kings shall obey. This is the king of Aragon, who, as it was revealed to Saint Francis, shall awake so powerful that he will suddenly and miraculously become the Emperor of Italy and shall conquer Granada and all Barbary territories and the Promised Land, Egypt, and Syria. This is the king who, in the prophecy that starts with *Ve mundo in centum annis*, is called *vespertilion*, saying that the fire of war shall last in Spain until the *vespertilion* (i.e., the king of Aragon), upon his coming to Castile to reign, destroys the Moors in Spain. This is the most virtuous captain called *Nyapaes dorrapeem mossidigran Dorrانfe don*, king of the animals and the birds, which in plain, everyday language means lord Ferdinand, the greatest emperor of Spain, king of rational animals in Castile and king eagle of the birds in Aragon and Sicily, whom our Lord God has chosen to revert to proper state all the realms that are in disorder and lost”. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 270-271.

53. McGinn, Bernard. “John’s Apocalypse and Apocalyptic Mentality”, *The Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, Bernard McGinn, Richard K. Emmerson, eds. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992: 3-19; Yarbro-Collins, Adela. *Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984; Hubbes, László. “Apocalyptic as a New Mental Paradigm of the Middle Ages”, *A Companion to the Premodern*



sequences where they mixed their memories with their expectations. The idea that their own time had an extraordinary relation with the past and the future filled the events lived with meaning and channeled their speculations towards specific purposes, especially in contexts of social and political change.⁵⁴ During the War of Castilian Succession and the early years of the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, the construction of the present as a time of transition between a past of crisis and an ideal future was one of the core elements of historiographic reflection. Updating the crisis-punishment-redemption apocalyptic structure, many authors identified Isabella of Castile and, particularly, Ferdinand of Aragon as those entrusted with purging the sins of their kingdoms through political reform and opening a period of social justice and expansion of Christianity. Alonso de Jaén expresses this very idea at the end of his work:

*Muy alta e muy excellentísima senyora Reyna: aquestas son las cosas quel muy alto e muy poderoso senyor rey don Ferrando, marido vuestro, tiene de fazer para tornar en devido estado todos los estados de las gentes susodichas que van al revés. E para que Dios sea loado, la cristiandad deffendida, la justicia prosperada, las virtudes ensalçadas, los vicios destruidos, los malos punidos, los buenos remunerados. E para que en esta vida las gentes puedan aconseguir paz e reposo y en la otra la eternal bienaventurança para que fueron creados. E para que después de publicadas quatro Santas Hermandades e una santíssima ordinación que vosotros, senyores reyes, tenés ordenadas (en que consiste todo el bien, reposo e tranquilidad de vuestros regnos), con su real senyoría, todos vamos a conquistar Granada y subjugar l'África e destruir la secta mafométrica, según por las prophecías e relaciones susodichas es estado declarado que su muy alta senyoría tiene de fazer.*⁵⁵

There may be, however, a second explanation for the introduction of the *Glosa* in *Espejo del mundo*. The sociology of culture and cultural studies have shown how, in many occasions, the use of a specific practice or discourse is not explained by its intrinsic qualities but by the symbolic capital accrued by its creators or habitual

Apocalypse, Michael A. Ryan, ed. Leiden: Brill, 2016: 144-176. See also: Kermode, Frank. *El sentido de un final: estudios sobre la teoría de la ficción*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 2023.

54. Cohn, Norman. *En pos del Milenio: revolucionarios milenaristas y anarquistas místicos de la Edad Media*. Madrid: Alianza, 1983; Landes, Richard. *Heaven on Earth: The Varieties of Millennial Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

55. "Highest and Most Excellent Lady, our Queen: these are the things that the very high and very powerful lord, King Lord Ferdinand, your husband, must do to turn into a proper realm all the states of the above people, who do the opposite, so that God may be praised, Christendom defended, justice done, virtues extolled, vices destroyed, the wicked punished, and the good rewarded; and so that in this life people may achieve peace and quiet and in the other life they may achieve the eternal, blessed life for which they were created. And so that after announcing the establishment of four *Santas Hermandades* and a holiest ordination that you, our Queen and King, have ordered (on which all the good, relief and tranquility of your kingdoms relies), with your royal lordship, we will conquer Granada and subjugate Africa and destroy the cult of Mohammed in accordance with the above prophecies and accounts which set down what Your Majesty must do". Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 297.



users.⁵⁶ Using the terms coined by Pierre Bourdieu, we may speak of a fundamental opposition between “learned” and “worldly” discourses, whose definition would be merely determined by the social position of those using them.⁵⁷ In the Middle Ages, one of the most recognizable “learned” discourses was the apocalyptic exegesis. The interpretation of the historical sense of apocalyptic texts was an activity reserved to small intellectual elites, usually made up exclusively of clergymen. But around the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, a new social group with aspirations to “cultural nobility”⁵⁸ appropriated this type of exegetic practices (among many other cultural objects of the ecclesiastic world).⁵⁹ In the space of the Hispanic Kingdoms, the members of the groups were known as *letrados*, that is to say, civil servants with university education whose social promotion depended on their performance of diplomatic and intellectual tasks in the service of the monarchy.⁶⁰ It is significant that both Alonso de Jaén and most Castilian and Aragonese authors that added apocalyptic elements to their texts at the end of the fifteenth century were *letrados*. Pedro Azamar, for instance, was a doctor in law and regent of the Royal Chancellery for Catalonia, while Jerónimo Torrella was a medical doctor, who even held the position of physician to King Ferdinand of Aragon.⁶¹

Approaching the *Glosa* of the fourth block of *Espejo del mundo* from this perspective may offer us some keys for its analysis. There are several indications suggesting that the final part of the work seeks to simulate the exegesis of an apocalyptic text. The clearest indication is the constant repetition of the formula *dizen los maestros en theulugía* (“masters in theology say”) before revealing the meaning of the different symbols used in the allegorical fiction (*Aqueste león Toquar Querrian don dizen los maestros en theulugía que fue el rey don Anrrique, hermano de vós, senyora reyna muy esclarecida*).⁶² Besides, the method of exposition used in this section is consistent with that in the remaining content blocks of *Espejo del mundo*, which are closer to treatises and theoretical speculation. Alonso de Jaén details the arguments that underpin his interpretations and even discusses conflicting views (*Sobre quién es aqueste famosísimo rey, son diversas opiniones. E por esta causa, nosotros, sin por los maestros en theulugía sernos*

56. See: Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinción: criterio y bases sociales del gusto*. Madrid: Taurus, 1998; Williams, Raymond. *Sociología de la cultura*. Barcelona: Paidós, 1994; and: Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge, 2002.

57. Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinción...*: 66-73.

58. Bourdieu, Pierre. *La distinción...*: 21.

59. Verger, Jacques. *Gentes del saber en la Europa de finales de la Edad Media*. Madrid: Complutense, 1999: 238-255.

60. Maravall, José Antonio. “La formación de la conciencia estamental de los letrados”. *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, LXX (1953): 53-81; di Camillo, Ottavio. *El humanismo castellano del siglo XV*. Valencia: Fernando Torres, 1976: 19-25.

61. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 328, 370.

62. “The masters in theology say that this lion *don Toquar Querrian* was King Lord Henry, your brother, your grace and most enlightened Queen”; “these rams, sheep, and lambs, say the masters in theology are your natural vassals, your Majesty, who live in the cities, towns, and hamlets of your kingdoms”. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 228.



declarado, determinadamente no podemos saber quién es este rey).⁶³ Because of this, there is the possibility that, along with the functions discussed in the previous section, one of the purposes of resorting to allegorical fiction in the text was the introduction of a *Glosa* which showed the exegetic position of the author while slanting his account to the domain of a socially relevant discourse.

If that were the case, the historiographic strategy of Alonso de Jaén could be similar to that used by the authors of the so-called *post eventum* or *ex eventu* prophecies. This type of prophecy, extremely common in the Middle Ages, was characterized by telling events of the past as if they were prophecies of the future by passing them off as older than they really were. In some cases, the account led to authentic predictions, but in other cases, it ended when it reached the present.⁶⁴ Thus, we can presume that the form of the apocalyptic discourse had some value beyond its content. The esoteric writing worked within the “credit economy” that governed communication between authors and readers.⁶⁵ The notion that what is truly relevant or significant was hidden (behind the words of the Bible or behind the development of the historical events) meant that in many cases the hidden became something relevant and significant in itself.⁶⁶ Devices like the *post eventum* prophecies and the *Glosa* of the allegorical fiction of *Espejo del mundo* are a testament to this phenomenon.

6. Conclusions

Throughout this article, *Espejo del mundo* has served as a laboratory to examine some particularities of writing about the present in the Middle Ages. We have argued that the main objective of its author, Alonso de Jaén, was to intervene in the public sphere of the Hispanic Kingdoms through a critical representation of their immediate past and a messianic idealization of their future. We have also proposed that, to this end, the text used a historiographic strategy whereby several of the discourses available within medieval culture were combined. For all these reasons, we can conclude that *Espejo del mundo* embodies a historiography that rejects the

63. “On who this most famous king is, there are several opinions. And for this reason, without the masters in theology having manifested it, we cannot know for sure who this king is”. Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 239-240.

64. The *Lucidari*, dated by Duran and Requesens at around 1482, is presented as a “prophecy” on the children of Fernando de Antequera written *en l’any de la nativitat de nostre Senyor MCCCCXV a XIII de nohembre* (“in the year 1415 on the 13th day of November”). The account begins with a description of the reign of Alfonso the Magnanimous and ends with the victory of his son Ferdinand I of Naples against the Turks in 1481. See Duran, Eulàlia; Requesens, Joan. *Profecia i poder al Renaixement...*: 343-368.

65. On this issue, see: Simmel, Georg. “The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies”. *American Journal of Sociology*, 11/4 (1906): 441-498. For a similar reflection applied to the medieval world, see von Stuckrad, Kocku. *Locations of Knowledge in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Esoteric Discourse and Western Identities*. Leiden: Brill, 2010: 54-59.

66. Simmel, Georg. “The Sociology of Secrecy...”: 425.



conceptual opposition between [1] history and present, [2] history and ideology, and [3] history and fiction. Let us examine this in more detail:

1. Since the institutionalization of the discipline in the nineteenth century, the writing of history has been identified with the writing of the past. It is for this reason that the history of the present and immediate history became “new histories” by late twentieth century. The present, however, was also one of the axes of medieval historiography. *Espejo del mundo* and other similar texts show that medieval authors got deeply involved in narrating and speculating about the events they lived, although these practices were not accompanied by a theoretical or methodological systematization.
2. In many cases, the reasons that nurtured the interest in the present in the Middle Ages were ideological. It was common that authors associated with this type of historiography wrote under the protection of the monarchy or other institutions, although that did not mean that their work was mere propaganda. In the case of Alonso de Jaén, his role as royal chronicler is relevant for the analysis of *Espejo del mundo*, but the narration ends up drifting into the defence of a political program of his own (linked to “protest literature”).
3. Medieval historiography was a porous field of genres and texts where there was room for a wide formal heterogeneity. In the absence of academic standardization, medieval historians could consciously introduce fictional elements in their texts without breaking the coherence of their discourse. It is likely that Alonso de Jaén used allegorical fiction to facilitate the connection between the real and the ideal dimension of his work. However, we have also raised the possibility that he tried to underpin his position as a *letrado* by simulating an apocalyptic exegesis.

