

La Mancha



Detail of painting of Don Quixote.

LA MANCHA is an area of both historical and agricultural significance. Castile—La Mancha is located south of Madrid and is made up of the provinces of Ciudad Real, Albacete, Cuenca and Toledo. The name 'La Mancha' comes from the old Arabic word ma-ansha (no water). La Mancha is the largest plain in the Iberian Peninsula and is made up of plateaus averaging 500—600 meters in altitude. The region is hydrated by the Guadiana, Javalón, Záncara, Cigüela and Júcar rivers.

Until the 16th century, the easternmost part was called Mancha de Monte-Aragón because of the name of the mountains that were the old border between La Mancha and the Valencia. La Mancha was also divided into Mancha Alta and Mancha Baja due to the level and flow of its rivers.

La Mancha has always been an important agricultural area. Vineyards abound in Valdepeñas, Manzanares, Ciudad Real and Villarrobledo in Albacete. Other crops are cereals and

saffron. Sheep are also raised in this region providing the famous Manchego cheese.

There are two national parks in La Mancha: Las Tablas de Daimiel and Cabañeros; along with one national park: Las Lagunas de Ruidera.

Some people believe that through his work Don Quixote, Cervantes was making fun of the region. The word 'mancha' can also mean a stain on one's honor and Cervantes could have been making a pun as this would have been a totally inappropriate homeland for a dignified knight. Others think La Mancha is the perfect place for an idealist to originate as it is a very harsh area. The fictional Don Quixote started his adventures in the Campo de Montiel in the south part of the area.

Famous sons of the region include movie director Pedro Almadóvar, painters Antonio López and Antonio López Torres. ♦