

# IMAGE AND BIOGRAPHY OF CHANCELLOR AYALA: REPORT OF AN IMPOSSIBILITY<sup>1</sup>

ARSENIO DACOSTA  
UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE EDUCACIÓN A DISTANCIA  
SPAIN

“It is nearly impossible to break through these norms  
and platitudes to the true and unique personality”.  
*Aaron Gurevich*<sup>2</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

This study is an approximation to the historical figure of Pedro López de Ayala (1332-1407), the Castilian nobleman, chronicler, poet and politician. We examine the self-image that he projected and how it in turn influenced his subsequent biography. Starting from this example we reflect on the construction of medieval biographies, with historical interpretation depending not so much on the distinction between the authenticity and the falseness of individual texts as on their final significance. In other words, the analysis and interpretation of biographical data, even when placed into context, is of little use unless the relevant frames of reference are also taken into account.

## KEY WORDS

Pedro López de Ayala (1332-1407), Biography, Individualism, Propaganda, Subjectivity.

## CAPITALIA VERBA

Petrus Lupus de Ayala (1332-1407), Biographia, Insita cuiusque uirtus, Sententiae palam factae, Non aequus animus.

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1. Abbreviations used: AHN, Archivo Histórico Nacional; BNE, Biblioteca Nacional de España; BNF, Bibliothèque Nationale de France. This work is part of the inter-university research project, *De la lucha de bandos a la hidalguía universal: transformaciones sociales, políticas e ideológicas en el País Vasco (ss. XIV-XV)*, directed by José Ramón Díaz de Durana and funded by the ministry of science and technology of Spain in the research project BHA2000-0884.

2. Gurevich, Aron Iakovlevich. *Los orígenes del individualismo europeo*. Barcelona: Crítica, 1997: 24.

## 1. Chancellor Ayala: between biography and representation

The “revival” of the biographic genre in medieval studies in recent years speaks to us of the good health—at least in the editorial sense—of our discipline.<sup>3</sup> The impact of social history in Spanish medievalism has, in general, enabled biographies to avoid blurring the subject’s social context in favor of an individualized comprehension of the past. One exception, in the year of the 700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death, is Chancellor Ayala, whose image weighs heavily upon his biography.<sup>4</sup> One must question the reason for these limitations which have less to do with method than with perspective.

A recent critical revision of the biography of the Chancellor, completed by myself together with Professor Díaz de Durana, highlights the fact that all aspects of the Chancellor’s life can effectively be understood within the familial, social and political context of his time.<sup>5</sup> Also, the Chancellor knew well how to adapt himself—and his lineage—to the changes suffered by society in the time in which he lived, a large part of who he was as an active member of the social and political elite. Nevertheless, there is a clear tendency to consider the life of the Chancellor as out of the ordinary. Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz showed how two scholars with such different approaches as Américo Castro and Menéndez y Pelayo both consider Chancellor Ayala to be “the first modern Spaniard”—although for different reasons.<sup>6</sup> Does this definition really have any historiographic value?

This declaration—and the majority of other assumptions about Pedro López de Ayala—insists on his consideration more as a historical figure rather than a historical subject. And herein lies the problem, since from the moment of his death in 1407 approaches to the figure of the Chancellor have been based more on appearances rather than analysis. The majority of these studies are either mere sketches or focus on debates that, in the end, simply create flurries of opinion between his defenders and detractors, particularly concerning his supposedly fickle character in politics.

Upon his death, Chancellor Ayala left an impressive legacy. His merits built on those of his father, Fernán Pérez, who had already distinguished himself in the enlargement of his house. Pedro López multiplied his paternal inheritance, extending and consolidating the seignorial domain in Alava. He also gained the trust of several monarchs, as his father had, although for Pedro López this included a few European kings. Like Fernán Pérez, he took advantage of the teaching of his uncle, Cardinal Barroso, although with more notable results. He continued the genealogical ac-

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3. In the last ten years no less than 50 biographies have been published in Spain, mostly of Christian kings.

4. Regarding the uncertainty surrounding these two concepts refer to Romero, José Luis. “Sobre la biografía española del siglo XV y los ideales de vida”. *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 1 (1944): 113-138, particularly in 117 and 118.

5. Díaz de Durana, José Ramón; Dacosta, Arsenio. “La biografía de Pedro López de Ayala: una revisión crítica”, *Estudios sobre el Canciller Ayala en el VI Centenario de su muerte*, Julio Valdeón coord. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Diputación Foral de Álava, 2007: 22-95.

6. Sánchez Albornoz, Carlos. “El Canciller Ayala, historiador”. *Humanitas*, 2 (1953): 13-14.



count started by his father in addition to embarking on a large number of literary works that have gained him universal fame.<sup>7</sup>

The life of Pedro López de Ayala has been approached on different occasions from various angles with unequal results. The political relevance he attained in his time and the later influence of his works have made him a central figure of the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. From among the most complete biographies written—at least on a factual level—one must mention the classic work of Rafael Floranes, the enthusiastic work of his follower Marqués de Lozoya, and the descriptive work of Franco Meregalli. Far above and beyond these works is that of Michel Garcia, perhaps the only one in which a notable interpretive effort is evidenced.<sup>8</sup>

We have revisited his biography, yet this brings us to the present reflection on the limits of the biographic genre. In other words, if one can in fact write a biography about the Chancellor, it is not possible to also maintain the validity of his representations and descriptions, at least those which intend to communicate a moral model and, in the end, to recreate the model of an exemplary figure. Because, even today, many of the scholars analyzing the Chancellor's personality do not realize the futility of their undertaking. Above all, they do not recognize that those efforts hardly surpass the first known descriptions. In conclusion, is it possible to sustain these descriptions as introspective portraits or should they be relegated to the corresponding literary genre?

## 2. Biography and Sources

One of these descriptions, as yet unpublished, presents the Chancellor in the following terms:

*El Gran Pero Lopes de Ayala, señor de los balles, tierras, cassa de Ayala, condado de Salvatierra y valles de Quartango y el Ocio y Orozco, Chançiller Mayor de Castilla, del Consejo de estado, Alférez Mayor del Pendón de la Banda, Camarero del rey Carlos de Francia, Embajador Mayor en Roma por los reyes de Castilla, hijo del dichoso y bien afortunado caballero Hernán Pérez de Ayala [..]. Fue alto de cuerpo y algo delgado, de gran consejo y discreción y auctoridad, muy temeroso de Dios y tenía en su rostro una majestad tan grave que ninguno*

7. In spite of this, in the authoritative opinion of Robert Tate, the precursory character of Pedro López de Ayala's work in Castilian humanism of the 15<sup>th</sup> century has been exaggerated (Tate, Robert. "López de Ayala, ¿historiador humanista?". *Ensayos sobre la historiografía peninsular del siglo XV*. Madrid: Gredos, 1970: 54).

8. Floranes y Encinas, Rafael de. *Vida literaria del Canciller Mayor de Castilla (Colección de documentos inéditos para la Historia de España: XIX-XX)*. Madrid: Viuda de Calero, 1851-1852; Contreras y López de Ayala, Jesús (Marqués de Lozoya). *Introducción a la biografía del Canciller Ayala*. Bilbao: Junta de Cultura de Vizcaya, 1972; Meregalli, Franco. *La vida política del Canciller Ayala*. Varese: Istituto Editoriale Cisalpino, 1955; Garcia, Michel. *Obra y personalidad del Canciller Ayala*. Madrid: Alhambra, 1982, and: Suárez Fernández, Luis. *El Canciller Ayala y su tiempo, 1332-1407*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Diputación Foral de Álava, 1962; García de Andoin, Florentino. *El Canciller Ayala. Su obra y su tiempo (1332-1407)*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Caja Ahorros Municipal de Vitoria, 1976.



*que le mirase no le tuviese en grande estima. Era de condición muy agradable que jamás hombre el que le conociese, aunque fuese su enemigo mortal, le dejó de tener grande amor; por su virtud y gracia no le impidió nada el balor y esfuerço de las armas [...]. Fue de gentil yngenio; fue gran Philósofo; dióse muncho a las letras; supo y entendió munchas lenguas, hiço munchos livros...<sup>9</sup>*

These words describing our protagonist come from an interesting manuscript held in the *Biblioteca Nacional de España* entitled *Suma y brebe relación de los señores y señoras que an sucedido en el señorío y casa de Ayala* (*Summary and brief description of the the succesion of lords and ladies in the lordship and house of Ayala*). Its author, Luis Miguel de Ayala, “eldest son of Atanasio de Ayala y Rojas, grandson of Sir Atanasio de Ayala y Rojas, count of Salvatierra”,<sup>10</sup> admits to writing these lines at seventeen years of age. Elsewhere, I have called this text “homework”,<sup>11</sup> although it is possible that I have underestimated its worth and it should be restored to the extraordinary series of genealogical texts that extend from those of the Chancellor’s father over several centuries.<sup>12</sup>

The text itself is not extraordinary. It simply repeats the formulae of other writers, perhaps within reach in the family archive. What is relevant to us is a series of constants that abound in the self-portraits of the Ayalas three centuries after the first text that began to appear in the tumultuous years of Peter I and Henry of Trastámara.

The reader will note in the text above echoes of the famous description of the Chancellor by Fernán Pérez de Guzmán a few decades after his death.<sup>13</sup> Some say that his description is not all together positive, in spite of the fact that the Chancellor is the primary person responsible for the strengthening of the Ayala lineage. The writer, who is the Chancellor’s nephew, criticizes Pedro López’s excessive love of women. This light critique by Fernán Pérez de Guzmán is that of the moralist, not

9. “The Great Pero Lopes de Ayala, lord of the valleys, lands, house of Ayala, county of Salvatierra and valleys of Quartango and Ocio and Orozco, Grand Chancellor of Castile, of the Council of State, Second Lieutenant and Standard Bearer, Steward to King Charles of France, Chief Ambassador to Rome for the Kings of Castile, son of blessed and fortunate knight Hernán Pérez de Ayala [...]. He was tall in body and somewhat thin, of excellent counsel and discretion and authority, God-fearing and having in his face a majesty so profound that none that looked upon him could not hold him in great esteem. He was of such an agreeable condition that no man who knew him, even if he were his mortal enemy, ceased to love him; for his virtue and grace did in no way impede bravery and strength at arms [...]. He was of kind ingenuity; a great philosopher; much given to his letters, he knew and understood many languages, made many books...”, BNE. Ms. 3086. Ayala, Luis Miguel de. *Suma y brebe relación de los señores y señoras que an sucedido en el señorío y casa de Ayala*, f. 160r and 160v.

10. BNE. Ayala, Luis Miguel de. *Suma y brebe relajación...*: 160r.

11. Dacosta, Arsenio. “Apuntes acerca de la dimensión castellana de los Ayala durante la Baja Edad Media”. *La tierra de Ayala: actas de las Jornadas de Estudios Históricos en conmemoración del 600 aniversario de la construcción de la Torre de Quejana*, Ernesto García Fernández, coord. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Diputación Foral de Álava, 2001: 111.

12. *El ‘Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala’ y otros textos genealógicos. Materiales para un estudio de la conciencia del linaje en la baja edad media*, ed. Arsenio Dacosta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2007.

13. Pérez de Guzmán, Fernán *Generaciones y semblanzas*, ed. Jesús Domínguez Bordona. Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1965 (original, 1450-1455): 36-37.



that of a historian or relative. Neither is it that of the common nobleman of that time, who in general boasts of his numerous offspring—if he had them—be they legitimate or not.<sup>14</sup>

These are by far the most complete descriptions we have of the Chancellor, at least in texts of the time. What remains then to allow us to sketch out the figure of the Chancellor?

There are clearly two relevant sources. First, we have the glimpse of personal testimony in the *Crónicas* of the Kings of Castile in the second half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The author, in a stroke of originality, narrates several events experienced in first person. By virtue of his position, he also had access to the documentation of the Royal Chancery, from which he extracted essential information for creating the history of the Castilian kings he served. As such, his narration is fundamental to the reconstruction of his life's itinerary; however, it should be interpreted with utmost care given the fact that Pedro López de Ayala, as one of the principal actors in Castilian political life of the time, tried to convey both a specific memory of the time in which he lived and an exhaustive justification in the political arena of both his actions and those of others of his class.<sup>16</sup> Secondly, we have numerous certificates and documents, many from chanceries outside of Castile, that allow us to follow the Chancellor through time and space and inform us of his activities as a nobleman and diplomat.

This documentation, studied to excess by scholars of the Chancellor, has generally been poorly analyzed, in that it has not been used to resolve some of the fundamental questions regarding his biography.

Other possible sources have been avoided, such as the actions and words of his enemies, which, although few, do exist. This is the case for the council of Orduña and the words of the nobility of Vizcaya and possibly of some of their vassals, for whom the Chancellor represented subjugation and extortion.<sup>17</sup> These testimonies, in addition to their scarcity, are also unreliable, coming from interested parties.

14. In the words of Bartolomé Clavero, medieval society is “un estado social jurídicamente monogámico y sociológicamente poligámico (a jurídicamente monogámico and sociológicamente poligámico)” (Clavero, Bartolomé. *Mayorazgo. Propiedad feudal en Castilla. 1369-1836*. Madrid: Siglo XXI, 1989: 98).

15. Here we follow José Luis Martín's edition of the *Crónicas* (López de Ayala, Pedro. *Crónicas*, ed. José Luis Martín. Barcelona: Planeta, 1991). However, the work being done in Buenos Aires by José Luis Moure and German Orduña since 1994 is more rigorous. (López de Ayala, Pedro. *Crónica del Rey Don Pedro y del Rey Don Enrique: su hermano: hijos del rey don Alfonso Onceno*, eds. Germán Orduña, José Luis Moure. Buenos Aires: Secrit, 1994).

16. José Luis Martín Rodríguez stated that the Chancellor conveys a nobleman's version of events in his chronicles (Martín Rodríguez, José Luis. “Defensa y justificación de la dinastía Trastámara. Las Crónicas de Pedro López de Ayala”. *Espacio, Tiempo y Forma. Serie III. Historia Medieval*, 3 (1990): 158).

17. Without being too systematic, here are a few examples: in 1394 Henry III specifically prohibits—upon petition from the Ayala's—that the Vizcaya Brotherhood enter the valleys of Llodio and Orozco, *Fuentes jurídicas medievales del Señorío de Vizcaya: Cuadernos legales, Capítulos de la Hermandad, y Fuero Viejo (1342-1506)*, eds. Concepción Hidalgo de Cisneros Amestoy, Elena Largacha Rubio, Araceli Lorente Ruigómez, Adela Martínez Lahidalga. Donostia-San Sebastián: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1986: 76 (doc. n° 8); the same king in 1399 confirms the properties the Ayalas had “situated” in the Orduña toll, *Colección documental del Archivo Municipal de Orduña (1271-1510)*, eds. Javier Enriquez, Concepción Hidalgo de Cisneros, Araceli



Frequently, other medieval texts that reveal an excellent knowledge of the Ayala lineage and his seigniorial activity in Álava have been forgotten. It is easy to turn to Lope García de Salazar who repeats and extracts texts by the Ayalas themselves, although he also takes the opportunity in the larger fragments of *Bienandanzas e fortunas*—those which describe struggles between factions—to take shots at the Chancellor's descendants.<sup>18</sup> The chronicler of Vizcaya and the Ayalas remained enemies in direct proportion to the perception of threats between their lineages in relation to their struggles for power in the Atlantic valleys of Álava, Castilla-Vieja and Vizcaya. The information extracted from Salazar, although openly biased, brings to light valuable data about the Ayala strategies, for the most part as designed by Pedro López himself at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The principal source of biographical information continues to be the extensive historiographic work on the Chancellor. From Floranes onward, historians and professionals of other fields have produced their works drawing on those who preceded them, trying to provide some original analysis that in general has not been any more pertinent than the aforementioned literary descriptions. As such, I also do not believe that the biography written by myself and Professor Díaz de Durana, has really surpassed the texts written to date. The problem, more than the scholastic method of the "*auctoritas*" still present in our discipline, is a problem of perspective: in absolutely everything written about the Chancellor, one easily finds signs and expressions of a profound admiration. We have all surrendered to the Chancellor's personality. There are therefore two possible hypotheses: either we have upheld for centuries an excessively positive image of the Chancellor, or we are truly faced with an extraordinary person.

The Chancellor's importance is beyond question, at least as statesman, diplomat and man of letters. We know that he was no great warrior, or at least that he had poor luck in his military exploits. He was twice held captive, the second time being one of the longest captivities in the peninsular Middle Ages that ended well. The rest of his biography is based on an archetype, on an unblemished record. Almost. Let me explain.

As I mentioned before, as medievalists we have been unable to resolve several important questions regarding the Chancellor's life. One crucial example is his place of birth, about which opinions exist but no debate. Vitoria or Quejana? Why not Toledo, where his father was perhaps born and kept a house? Why not Murcia, where his grandfather of the same name lived when he was born? Why not the ancestral home of his mother, the Casa solar de Ceballos, it being customary to give birth in the place where one was born? This question has been put aside as there is no documented reference that allows for an answer. The extended excuse of lack of documentation hardly hides what Julio Caro Baroja simply and openly defines as

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Lorente, Adela Martínez. Donostia-San Sebastián: Eusko Ikaskuntza, 1996: 47-49 (doc. n° 8); royal order of 1380 in the suit between the council of Orduña and the lord of Ayala, Uriarte, José Eugenio de. *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Orduña, la Antigua*. Bilbao: Viuda de E. Calle, 1883: 157, notas.

18. García de Salazar, Lope. *Edición crítica del "Libro de las buenas andanzas e fortunas que fizo Lope Garçía de Salazar"*, ed. Consuelo Villacorta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2005: books XX, XXIII and XXIV.





laziness.<sup>19</sup> It could also be that an indisputable truth has been ignored: in contrast to today, in the Middle Ages one's place of death was more important than one's place of birth, and of even greater importance was one's place of burial.

Another topic to pass unnoticed, in spite of being documented, is the career Pedro López was destined for as a child and youth. He received two canonries and other ecclesiastical favors and was taught by his uncle, Cardinal Barroso, probably in Murcia, Toledo and Avignon. This superior education, although unusual for the firstborn of the nobility, could fit, given the context. But the canonries, and especially the wills of his parents, Fernán Pérez and Elvira Álvarez de Ceballos, should at least make us consider another plausible hypothesis.

The desire of Pedro López's parents was to divide their patrimony into two differentiated parts: The Ayala estate (that of the father) for the future chancellor, and the Ceballos estate (that of the mother) which would fall to Mencía, wife of the Lord of Oñate. The fact that this portion would go to a woman rather than a brother is not totally foreign to the practices of the time, although the general tendency was for the latter. What, then, was the reason for this division? The 1378 codicil to Fernán Pérez's will, which also covers the wishes of his late spouse, explicitly states the reasons for this division and the distribution between Mencía and Pedro López: "divide everything in this parcel so that they find peace and calm between each other."<sup>20</sup> In fact, Fernán Pérez's will of 1375 includes a formal renunciation of Mencía and Beltrán Vélez de Guevara in these terms:

*E con lo que vos pagado e dado haveades como dicho es nos otorgamos por bien pagados de toda la buena herencia de muebles e raíces de la dicha doña Elvira, nuestra madre, e juramos a Dios e a buena fe sin engaño de no ir ny venir en tiempo del mundo contra este dicho testamento ny contra el cobdicillo que faredes ni contra esta conveniencia e otorgamientos que facemos en todo ny en parte en tiempo del mundo. E si contra los dichos testamento e cobdicillo en todo o en parte contra la dicha partición e igualamiento en todo o en parte fuéremos, renunciarnos a que non nos / vala ny seamos oídos sobre ello en juicio ny fuera de juicio ante alcalde ny juez eclesiástico ni seglar.<sup>21</sup>*

The conclusion is quite clear: The choice of a juridical formula as solid as the estate, in addition to the previous allusions, reveals the interest of Fernán Pérez and

19. Julio Caro Baroja's criticism of "scientific objectivity" and their "critical apparatus" is highly illustrative (Caro Baroja, Julio. *Los vascos y la Historia a través de Garibay. (Ensayo de una biografía antropológica)*. Donostia-San Sebastián: Txertoa, 1972: 360).

20. *El Libro del linaje de los Señores de Ayala y otros textos genealógicos. Materiales para el estudio de la conciencia del linaje en la baja Edad Media*, ed. Arsenio Dacosta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2007: 162.

21. "And with that which you have paid and given, as it is said, we consider ourselves as well paid by the good inheritance of assets and properties of the aforementioned lady Elvira, our mother, and we swear to God and in good faith without deception not ever to go against this said testament, nor against the document you are creating, nor against this agreement and the concessions which we are making, neither in its entirety nor in part. And if we acted against the aforementioned testament and document in full or in part against the said division and distribution in full or in part, we would renounce our right to be heard neither in this court nor out of court before a mayor or judge, neither ecclesiastical nor secular". *El Libro del linaje de los Señores de Ayala...*: 169.



his wife to avoid conflicts between their heirs or, put another way, to nullify any possible subsequent claims made by the Oñate family on the Ayala holdings.<sup>22</sup> All of this cannot hide a conflict of dynasties—that which they try to end through the above methods—which in itself implies something of biographical consequence: perhaps Pedro López was not the firstborn.

In a way, it is paradoxical that the best sources on the Chancellor are those left by his own hand or related to his immediate surroundings. One such source is the Quejana altarpiece, today kept in the Art Institute of Chicago. There we find not the only portrait of the Chancellor, but the most authentic representation, one that he himself—or his wife<sup>23</sup>—commissioned. All too well analyzed by art historians, for medievalists the meaning of this representation lies in the conversation that here takes on the form of a painting.<sup>24</sup> It was important for the Chancellor to demonstrate who he was from a different perspective, almost a historical one. In other words, it was in his interest to make clear where he came from, where he was going, and above all, just how far he and those of his lineage had come. The altarpiece forms a part of the mausoleum and, far from the repugnance that we feel towards death today, in the Middle Ages dying, like living, was a question of class and ambition.

Other associated sources speak to us of the Chancellor. His own chronicles offer us glimpses on numerous occasions. Here, our protagonist places himself within the scenes and situations that he narrates. It is not the historian who writes in these texts, but the royal chronicler, servant of the Castilian crown. Even so, he takes the opportunity to justify not so much the change of camps during the civil war, but the initial decision to side with the eventual losers. Of much greater importance, in my opinion, is the extraordinary series of genealogical memories produced in the very bosom of the family. They were initiated by the Chancellor's father and continued by the Chancellor himself, then by his grandson of the same name and by other descendants in succession.<sup>25</sup> These texts, a unique series in late medieval Europe,

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22. We cannot forget that a few decades before the Guevara had claimed the vacant Ayala domain and that it made sense for this lineage to expand their dominion to the north of Álava. What is certain is that the formula works, possibly sustained by the Chancellor's long-lived and fertile political career and by the lack of genealogical interruptions in the subsequent generations of Ayalas. The most complete study on the Guevara continues to be that of María Rosa Ayerbe (Ayerbe, María Rosa. *Historia del Condado de Oñate y señorío de los Guevara* (s. XI-XVI). *Aproximación al estudio del régimen señorial de Castilla*. Donostia-San Sebastián: Diputación Foral de Guipúzcoa, 1985).

23. Melero-Moneo, Marisa. "Retablo y frontal del convento de San Juan de Quejana en Álava (1396)". *Locus Amoenus*, 5 (2000-2001): 33.

24. Apart from the study by Marisa Melero-Moneo, see: Lahoz, Lucía. "Quejana: promoción y mecenazgo de los Ayala", *La Tierra de Ayala. Actas de las Jornadas de Estudios Históricos en conmemoración del 600 aniversario de la construcción de la torre de Quejana*, Ernesto García Fernández coord. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Diputación Foral de Álava, 2001: 197-217; Lahoz, Lucía. "De palacios y panteones. El conjunto de Quejana: imagen visual de los Ayala", *Exposición Canciller Ayala. (Catálogo)*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Diputación Foral de Álava, 2007: 45-103.

25. These materials have been edited jointly under the title: *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' y otros textos genealógicos. Materiales para el estudio de la conciencia del linaje en la baja edad media*, ed. Arsenio Dacosta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2007. Of the five, only the first two have been recently edited by Michel García, Béatrice de Florès and the Marqués de Lozoya.





offer abundant information that sheds light on various aspects of the Chancellor's biography. It is disturbing to realize, however, that apart from Michel Garcia and Isabel Beceiro,<sup>26</sup> these texts have practically passed unnoticed.

### 3. Political Propaganda and Genealogical Justification

Political propaganda was a constant in the literary life of late medieval Castile. The Ayalas were familiar with it and participated in it. For example, it is quite significant how the battle of Aljubarrota is presented in a victorious tone in texts by the Ayalas prior to the reign of Henry IV, while in the text by Garci López de Ayala it already takes on a tone of historical reality.<sup>27</sup>

It makes sense that the Ayalas would concern themselves with a matter that affected them more directly, taking into consideration the arguments of the anti-Peter propaganda. At least this is the affirmation regarding Chancellor Ayala, both in his genealogical writings and in more general form in his historiographic works.<sup>28</sup>

The fact is that Pedro López could not hide the link between his father and Peter I, even omitting his own connection and that of his siblings, although this was a consequence, in part, of the plan of his work.<sup>29</sup> The first reference that we find

26. Beceiro Pita, Isabel. "El uso de los ancestros por la aristocracia castellana: el caso de los Ayala". *Revista de Dialectología y Tradiciones Populares*, 50 (1995): 55-82.

27. *Este dicho don fray Fernán Pérez de Aiala murió en edad de más de ochenta años en el año que fue vencida la batalla de Aljubarrota* (This good sir fray Fernán Pérez de Aiala died at more than eighty years of age in the year that the battle of Aljubarrota was lost.) (BNE. Ms 3036. Ayala, Luis Miguel de. *Suma y brebe relación de los señores y señoras que an sucedido en el señorío y casa de Ayala*, II, f. 32v.; en términos similares III, f. 221v). "Fue este don Pedro López preso en Portugal en la batalla que perdió el rey don Juan 'el Primero'" (This sir Pedro López was imprisoned in Portugal in the battle that the king sir Juan lost.) (BNE. Ms 3036. Ayala, Luis Miguel de. *Suma y brebe relación de los señores y señoras que an sucedido en el señorío y casa de Ayala*, II, f. 32v; en términos similares, IV, f. 35r).

28. Robert B. Tate does not hesitate to qualify certain passages in the *Crónica del rey don Pedro* (Tate, Robert. "López de Ayala : 37) as autojustification. Jesús Rodríguez Velasco remembers that *La composición de la Crónica de Pedro I tiene, sin duda, varias motivaciones. Una de ellas, señalada por Michel Garcia, atiende a la necesidad de Pedro López de desprenderse de alguna manera del clásico emperigilamiento que su padre y él mismo habían practicado. [...] Pedro López se sentía obligado a difuminar su pasado mediante la exposición crítica y protrastamarista de aquellos años* (Rodríguez Velasco, Jesús. *El debate sobre la caballería en el siglo XV. La tratadística caballeresca castellana en su marco europeo*. Valladolid: Junta de Castilla y León, 1996: 168). For a general vision of the problem, I refer to Martín Rodríguez, José Luis. "Defensa y justificación de la de la dinastía : 157-180. For the matter of political propaganda in Castile in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century we have as reference the works of José Manuel Nieto Soria (especially: Nieto Soria, José Manuel. *Las ceremonias del poder en la España Medieval. Propaganda y legitimación de la realeza Trastámara en Castilla*. Madrid: Nerea, 1993), and the more recent work of Shima Ohara (Ohara, Shima. *La propaganda política en torno al conflicto sucesorio de Enrique IV (1457-1474)*. Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid (PhD. Dissertations), 2004); Ohara, Shima. "La propaganda política en torno al conflicto sucesorio de Enrique IV (1457-1474)", *La Biblioteca Virtual del Español. Edición de tesis*. 2004. Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. 10<sup>th</sup> January de 2006. <<http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/FichaObra.html?Ref=12764&ext=pdf>>.

29. José Pellicer takes pains to exonerate the Chancellor and his father of their participation in the Petrist camp: *Mas antes de pasar adelante nos a parecido desatar una duda y equivocación en que hasta oy están los histo-*



alludes to Fernán Pérez's services in Vizcaya ("he won Las Encartaciones for King Peter and took the castle of Aragua"), clearly highlighting that with this service "the king awarded him a poor prize as he was not fond of the Ayalas".<sup>30</sup> Thus the Chancellor justifies that his father switched to the "service of the good King Henry", earning him the kingdom of Murcia.<sup>31</sup> Peter I's hostility extended to other relatives, more concretely to the Chancellor's uncle, Dña Gutiérrez de Ceballos, master of Alcántara, who "was killed by order of King Peter in Córdoba".<sup>32</sup> The Chancellor presents the Ayalas as victims of royal caprice, that is, as good servants of the monarchy treated unjustly. This all fits well within the archetype of the tyrant given to the figure of Peter I, again justifying the Ayalas' and other "Petrists'" disaffection after the battle of Nájera.<sup>33</sup> Behind this argument one finds another of a higher order. In distinguishing between service and servility, the Chancellor presents the Ayalas on a superior moral plane.

To a certain point it is understandable that the Chancellor put forward this version of events given their chronological proximity. It is harder to explain the persistence

*riadores de España. Pues todos están en firme creencia que don Pedro López de Ayala, que se alló en esta batalla de Nájera, siendo alférez maior de la Vanda y con su Pendón, de la parte del señor rey don Pedro, es el gran Chanciller, hijo de don Fernán López de Ayala y successor en su Casa, siendo así que no fue sino su hermano menor llamado también don Pedro López de Ayala como el sobrino. Porque demás de la repugnancia tan disonante que haze que el padre siguiese voluntariamente la voz de un rey y el hijo la del otro, y que en una batalla siguiesen exércitos contrarios, tenemos evidencias de lo que decimos* (Before going forward a doubt and mistake that until today has confounded historians of Spain appears to us undone. All are in the firm belief that sir Pedro López de Ayala, who found himself in this battle of Nájera, being second lieutenant of the Camp and with his Banner, on the part of the king Peter, is the grand Chancellor, son of sir Fernán López de Ayala and successor of his House, being as such that it was not but his younger brother also called sir Pedro López de Ayala like the nephew. Because beyond the discordant repugnance that makes the father voluntarily follow the voice of one king and the son the voice of the other, and that in a battle they follow opposing armies, we have evidence of what we say) (Dacosta, Arsenio. *El "Libro del linaje de...": 214-215*). The connection between the future Chancellor and the court of Peter I, as second lieutenant of the banner of the Order of the Camp among other functions, is known only too well. We also know that Juan Sánchez de Ayala, his brother, died in 1362 in Morón when Peter I's troupes took Calatayud.

30. In *Crónica del rey don Pedro*, Pedro López de Ayala narrates the attempted transfer of Vizcaya to the Duke of Lancaster, an event in which his father participated: *el rey don Pedro envió por su parte para que ge la entregar a don Ferrand Pérez de Ayala, que estoviese con los de la tierra de Vizcaya* (the king Peter sent on his behalf so that Ferrand Pérez de Ayala, who was with those of the land of Vizcaya, would be given to him) (Year 1367, chapt. XX; I note the José Luis Martín edition: López de Ayala, Pedro. *Crónicas...: 374*).

31. *El Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala...: 156*.

32. *El Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala...: 156*.

33. In light of the Chancellor's *Crónica*, there is something not altogether true: in the battle of Nájera he was among Henry's troops as the second lieutenant and standard bearer, but his father still followed Peter I after the victory. (Year 1367, chapt. IV and XX, respectively; I note the José Luis Martín edition: López de Ayala, Pedro. *Crónicas...: 343, 374*). According to Michel García, Francisco Abad elaborates how Sir Pedro arrives at the level of propaganda in his *Crónicas*, making Henry of Trastámara the providential savior before the cruelty of his half brother. Chancellor Ayala, in constructing this archetype, turns to the doctrine of John of Salisbury which justifies tyrannicide in favor of the common good of the kingdom (Abad, Francisco. "El canciller Ayala desde la Historia de las Mentalidades. *Actas del II Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval. Segovia, del 5 al 19 de octubre de 1987*, José Manuel Lucía Megías, Paloma García Alonso, Carmen Martín Gaza, eds. Alcalá de Henares: Universidad de Alcalá, 1993: I, 123-125).



of anti-Peter sentiments in subsequent texts, such as those by his grandson and Garcí López de Ayala.<sup>34</sup> I will discuss here a highly revealing example that was doubtlessly known to the Chancellor if not explicitly encouraged by him. To wit, the genealogical writings of his grandson and great-grandson include, with few variations, the biography of Teresa de Ayala, daughter of Día Gómez de Toledo and Inés de Ayala, the Chancellor's sister.<sup>35</sup> As was the custom, Teresa was sent to king to be brought up with the princesses. Both the maternal and paternal lines were bound in service to the king, as justified by the offices held by Día Gómez during this period.<sup>36</sup> However, the texts state "that King Peter took her by force" although Teresa was "a very young maiden". To the king's felony is added a complete disregard for fostering as covered in legal doctrine and as understood by the Castilian nobility since the *Partidas*.<sup>37</sup> Abuse, arbitrariness, disregard for the law and mockery of the noble customs are implied by this act of the king. Of this rape is born Doña María, who "was a nun in the Santo Domingo del Real monastery in Toledo, and was a very noble lady and very devout religious woman." The story told by the Ayalas is complemented by the rest of the biography of both women: Teresa marries a nobleman, Juan Núñez de Aguilar, with whom she has no children, and once she is widowed she enters the same convent as her daughter, although "she was still of quite a marriageable age." There, converted to the model prioress, she would stay until her death at age 71, followed shortly thereafter—"twenty days after her"<sup>38</sup>—by her daughter, Maria. The texts bring us a positive image of Maria—a "very noble lady and very devout religious woman"—but fall more frequently to descriptions of Teresa. On the one hand, she is presented as an important actor in the convent: "one could say she founded it and built it".<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, she is shown as an exemplary Dominican: "of those that in their time had skill or regimentation in monasteries, none were her equal." Lastly, she appears as the exemplary family member:

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34. The second case is more valuable since the great-grandson, born Garcí López de Herrera, is not of the line of primogeniture but rather a side branch of the family. Garcí López de Ayala not only takes on the surname, but also the genealogical undertaking started by Fernán Pérez de Ayala.

35. The story appears contained in the following texts, with few variations: Anónimo (atribuido al entorno de Pedro López de Ayala, nieto del Canciller, en fecha anterior a 1443). "Relación fidelísima de las sucesiones del linaje de Ayala", *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' y otros textos genealógicos. Materiales para un estudio de la conciencia del linaje de la baja edad media*, ed. Arsenio Dacosta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2007: 176; Anónimo (ordered by Garcí López de Ayala, great grandson of Chancellor, to 1470). "Esta es la generación y linaje que descendió de don Fernán Pérez de Ayala". *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' y otros textos genealógicos. Materiales para un estudio de la conciencia del linaje de la baja edad media*, ed. Arsenio Dacosta. Bilbao: Universidad del País Vasco, 2007: 190-191.

36. *Alcalde mayor* of Toledo, *notario mayor* of Toledo and *caudillo de los escuderos del rey*.

37. Regarding the behavior of the king towards those of his house and court (*Partida Segunda*, title 9), as with fostering (*Partida Cuarta*, titles 19 and 20). (Alfonso X. *Las siete Partidas (El Libro del Fuero de las Leyes)*, ed. José Sánchez-Arcilla Bernal. Madrid: Editorial Reus, 2004: 212-228; 277-286).

38. *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' ...*: 190: *Veynte días después ella*.

39. *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' ...*: 191: *muy noble señora e muy devota religiosa*.



*como quier que en el linaje de Ayala, donde ella era, ovo muchas buenas e notables dueñas, pero a juyzio de muchos, ella fue la mejor dellas.*<sup>40</sup>

The opposition between the virtuous Teresa and her rapist is clear; it is the same as the construction of an exemplary model for the Ayalas. Morality and political propaganda come together in apparent harmony.

If this argument is absolutely legitimate and possibly true in the heart of the matter, we cannot avoid highlighting the biased discourse of the Ayalas in this story. Accepting Peter I's felony for what it was, it is still worth examining his subsequent relationship with Teresa and her daughter. A recent study revealed that Teresa de Ayala and her daughter, Maria, were considered "relatives" of Peter the Cruel, as evidenced by the royal heraldry on Maria de Ayala's sepulchral stone.<sup>41</sup> If Peter I's coat of arms was granted to Maria de Ayala, we must believe that she was considered his daughter and, as such, their relationship does match the version put forth by the Ayala family. On the other hand, it is very well established that Teresa de Ayala was an influential Dominican, with connections in the sphere of the hereafter, which is expressively noted in the analyzed genealogical writings and abundant certificates from the Trastamaran era.<sup>42</sup>

In conclusion, the Chancellor and his descendants made a notable effort to justify their association with the losing side in the civil war, presenting themselves as victims of a tyrant they had, nevertheless, tried to serve.

One more text should serve to throw light on the subject, which is not so much concerning historical reality as the perception of such by the protagonists. The text is the codex that Fernán Pérez de Ayala ordered in 1378, with his son as witness, to complete his earlier will. It contains an explicit reference to Peter I that is not in keeping with the discourse constructed by his descendants, particularly that of Pedro López:

*Otrosí les encomiendo el alma del rey don Pedro que me dio a Quartango. Otrosí les encomiendo que rueguen por la vida del rey don Enrique e de la reina doña Juana, su muger, e del infante don Juan, su fijo, e después de su vida por sus ánimas, porque el rey me fizo e faze mucha merced.*<sup>43</sup>

40. "as with the Ayala lineage, which she was, there were many good and notable proprietresses, but in the judgement of many, she was the best of them".

41. González de Fauve, María Estela; Las Heras, Isabel J.; De Forteza, Patricia. "Simbología del poder en un linaje castellano: los descendientes de Pedro I excluidos de la línea sucesoria". *Cuadernos de Historia de España*, 78 (2003): 47-65; siguiendo en esto a Surtz, Ronald E. *Writing women in late medieval and early modern Spain. The mothers of Saint Teresa of Avila*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995. 41-67.

42. Regarding this topic, see the works of Major Verardo García Rey, especially: García Rey, Verardo. "La famosa priora doña Teresa de Ayala. Su correspondencia íntima con los monarcas de su tiempo". *Boletín de la Real Academia de la Historia*, 96 (1930): 685-773.

43. "Furthermore I entrust you that you will pray for the life of the king, Henry, and that of the queen, Juana, his wife, and for the prince, Juan, his son, and after their lives, for their souls, because the king has granted me, and grants me, many favors". *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala'...*: 162. Pellicer frequently goes on about the *señor rey don Pedro a quien sirvió con grande fineza* (king Peter whom he



Fernán Pérez de Ayala's gratitude toward "the benefactors that were, are, and will be in the future" should be interpreted as a demonstration of the spirit of service of his lineage.<sup>44</sup> The soul-searching implied in a testamentary order is not neutral, but it does serve to reveal intimate truths. The vital justification implicit in Fernán Pérez's codicil does not share in the protagonistic force of his son's or other descendants' writings, but they do have in common the construction of a ideology of service that represents the ascension of the new Castilian nobility after the change of dynasty.

#### 4. Stereotypes and Psychological Introspection

Returning to the figure of the Chancellor, in addition to the sources described above, we can also pursue his likeness through his literary works. *Rimado* is perhaps the most introspective source, but I am reluctant to look there for psychological clues that the Chancellor did not plant. Nevertheless, some historians and literary critics have used his verses to look for explanations into his character. The analyses are indisputable: the best *Rimado* has to offer does not relate to the Chancellor himself but rather to his opinions—unsettled, of course—regarding the principal international political conflict of his time: the crisis of the papacy.<sup>45</sup> It is true that some of the literary texts allude to his imprisonment in Portugal, but I do not believe that the literalness and historicity of the iron cage in which he was allegedly imprisoned can be upheld.<sup>46</sup> It is not unreasonable to believe that Pedro López did not write his falconry manual and part of *Rimado* in a gloomy dungeon.

Another insufficiently analyzed question is the matter of the delay of the Chancellor's rescue. The sources do not agree on the length of his sentence, although we believe it to have been about 30 months. Two things account for this delay, one

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served with great refinement) in the memoirs of Fernán Pérez de Ayala. ("Unión de las Casas de Ayala y Cevallos", *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' ...*: 214).

44. We find an explanation of motives similar to an agreement established between Garci González de Herrera and Prince Ferdinand in 1404: *considerando que una de las mayores noblezas e honrras que pueden ser en el corazón del home es el agradecimiento e reconocimiento de los bienes e honores, el qual naturalmente todo home es tenuto de reconocer, por quanto yo one e resçebí muchas grandes mercedes, gracias a donaciones de los reyes de Castilla Don Enrique e Don Juan e del conde Don Sancho de Alburquerque, mi señor difunto, e después de sus días del rey Enrique e de vos el muy alto e poderoso príncipe e muy esclareçido señor infante Don Fernando* (considering that one of the greatest nobilities and honors in the heart of men is thankfulness and recognition of good deeds and honors, that which naturally all men must recognize, as such I honor and received many great mercies thanks to donations of the kings of Castile, Sir Henry and Sir John, and from the Count Sir Sancho de Alburquerque, my late lord, and after his days King Henry and from you the very high and powerful Prince Sir Fernando, (AHN Sección Nobleza. Ducado de Frías, leg. 113, num. 2, c; edited by Franco Silva, Alfonso. "La hacienda de un noble castellano a comienzos del siglo XV". *En la España medieval*, 8 (1986): 366).

45. See: Gimeno Casaldueiro, Joaquín. "La personalidad del Canciller Pedro López de Ayala", *Estructura y diseño en la literatura castellana medieval*. Madrid: Porrúa, 1975: 146 and following.

46. *estubo en Portugal en Algubarrota siete meses en una xaolla de yerro* (He was in Portugal in Algubarrota seven months in an iron cage) (Anónimo. "Genealogía de la Cassa de Ayala en el año de mill y ciento y ocho", *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala' ...*: 203).



known and one that we propose. The first is the high sum he had to gather with the help of his family, the king of Castile and, above all, Charles of France.<sup>47</sup> The second is related to the exceptional nature of the sum and to the fact that at the given moment the Chancellor was the only person relevant to the Castilian Court imprisoned in Portugal. To our judgment, the Portuguese king deliberately delayed the manumission of the future chancellor for obvious reasons of propaganda and political praxis.

In conclusion, attempts of psychological analysis based on these sources have utterly failed. The lines entice, but do not tell us who Pedro López de Ayala really was.

Lastly, we have the aforementioned genealogical texts, started by Fernán Pérez and continued by the Chancellor, his grandson, great-grandson and other successors in the modern era. All these texts are riddled with eulogistic descriptions, such as this one written by the Chancellor concerning his father:

*Este D. Fernán Pérez de Ayala fue el mejor de todos los de su linaje, e amava e temíe mucho a Dios.<sup>48</sup>*

This opinion is further elaborated in the Chancellor's *Crónica del rey don Pedro*: "he was a prudent and reasonable knight".<sup>49</sup> This description, like the others we have seen, is sustained by the idea of *historia magistra vitae*. As Joaquín Gimeno has shown, his strong doctrinal character becomes a "lesson in good conduct".<sup>50</sup> This use of the model story is frequently employed in the Chancellor's historiographic works and, especially, in the prologue to the *Crónicas*, following the example of Alfonso X's *General Estoria*.<sup>51</sup> One could conclude that the Chancellor's text tried to make a

47. *e fue doña Leonor su muger por él e quitólo por treinta mil doblas de oro, e pagó luego dellas veinte mil, e pusose Fernán Pérez su fijo maior en rehenes por las diez mill. Estas diez mill las pagó el rey don Juan de Castilla. Y el rey de Francia le dio para ayuda de la dicha redención, diez mill francos de oro* (and Lady Leonor, his wife, went for him and brought him out for thirty thousand gold doubloons, and later payed twenty thousand of them, and his oldest son Fernán Pérez put himself up for the ten thousand. This ten thousand was payed by the king, Sir John of Castile. And the king of France gave as assistance in this redemption ten thousand golden francs) ("Esta es la generación y linaje que descendió de don Fernán Pérez de Ayala...", *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala'...*: 185). A document published by Daumet, to which Merengalli alludes, confirms the content of the genealogical text of Mariscal Ayala being that it is already known that Charles VI condones around this time a debt to John I of 100,000 francs, with the exception of 10,000 that the Castilian king would need to pay to Pedro López de Ayala (Merengalli, Franco. *La vida política del Canciller Ayala...*: 89-90).

48. "This Sir Fernán Pérez de Ayala was the best of all his lineage, and loved and feared God very much." López de Ayala, Pero. "Continuación del "Libro del linaje" y "Andanzas" de Fernán Pérez de Ayala", *El 'Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala'...*: 156.

49. López de Ayala, Pero. *Crónica del rey don Pedro...*: año 5º, chapt. XXXII.

50. Gimeno Casalduero, Joaquín. "La personalidad del Canciller Pero...": 144.

51. "The historiographic work of the Chancellor is based on "exemplum literature" being, above all, a moralist instruction destined for nobles and princes" (Tate, Robert. "López de Ayala"...: 40-41) Not in main, Tate finds clear affiliations with the literary objectives of Sir Juan Manuel, in spite of the differences between the two, which was pointed out by Menéndez Pelayo when he said: "under the mantle of the historian, the moralist persists in the style of Juan Manuel" (Tate, Robert. "López de Ayala"...: 40). See also Rodríguez Velasco, Jesús. *El debate sobre la caballería...*: 161 and following.





model of his father, entailing both the construction of such, and, for that reason, the discussion. Fernán Pérez is presented to us as one of the great men of his lineage, a founding father, I dare say almost a reformer.

This is not the place to put forth the abundant examples of models of good conduct or exemplary family members scattered throughout the genealogical texts of the Ayalas. My last book, in addition to the texts themselves, offers a detailed analysis. However, I cannot resist commenting on a revealing description that indirectly informs us about the life of Pedro López de Ayala.

After his imprisonment in the battle of Aljubarrota, Leonor de Guzmán takes on the position of leadership formerly held by her husband:

*estando allá preso, labró su muger la casa fuerte en Baracaldo. E estorváronlo algunos vizcaínos, señaladamente el solar de Butrón e de Múxica; vinieron en aiuda de doña Leonor los de Avendaño e todos los de Gamboa. E aún estubo en fierros en Portugal el dicho don Pedro López treinta meses en el castillo de Ovedos; e fue doña Leonor su muger por él e quitólo por treinta mil doblas de oro, e pagó luego dellas veinte mil, e pusose Fernán Pérez su fijo maior en rehenes por las diez mill.<sup>52</sup>*

These texts do not give us a passive image of the Ayala women, although they generally have an abundance of feminine virtues such as honesty, beauty and nobility.

In conclusion, neither the tone nor the syntax of the genealogical texts and the likenesses they provide should be surprising. The descriptions of the Chancellor written by his descendants (including Fernán Pérez de Guzmán) soon after his death are in equally eulogistic terms. They bring us little new information, although one should take note of the constant and positive assessment made of the Chancellor in his time. Meta-languages aside, these must also be based on an objective greatness of character.

The Chancellor has appeared to us in eulogistic terms in his deeds and words. Deeds that were interpreted and manipulated by both himself and his descendants. Words that form messages and discourses that should not be interpreted out of context. What happened with the interpretation is that he made his last connection — in his old age — to the Jeronimos. Much has been said about the “Jeromic spirit” of the Chancellor’s work, remembering that he spent long months at Morcuera, near Miranda de Ebro. Let us not fool ourselves: taking the habit on the deathbed as a shroud was a well-established custom among the Castilian nobles of the time. His father dressed as a Dominican and, at the end of his life, took on the title of “fray”. This did not prevent him from continuing to give orders to his son or bring material

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52. “being there in prison, his wife worked the strong house in Baracaldo. And this was hindered by some vizcayans, especially the lord of Butrón and of Múxica; those of Avendaño and all those of Gamboa came to the aid of lady Leonor. And the good Sir Pedro López was still in prison in Portugal, in the castle of Ovedos, for thirty months, and Lady Leonor went for him and brought him out for thirty thousand golden doubloons, and later paid twenty thousand of them, and his oldest son Fernán Pérez put himself forward for the other ten thousand.” *Esta es la generación y linaje que descendió de don Fernán Pérez de Ayala*, *El ‘Libro del linaje de los señores de Ayala’...*: 185.



petitions to the king. The Chancellor did it his own way, although his tomb depicts him as a knight and not as a monk, living a productive old age, without withdrawing completely, seeking the favor of the king for his children, and finishing or reworking many of his works. That he lived with the Jeronimos is a fact, although it might be forgotten that he did not live in the monks' quarters but rather in "a room beside the monastery, where he lived a long time, with his wife and his household".<sup>53</sup> Always a courtier, I have the impression that his sponsorship of the Jeronimos had much to do with the need for scribes, with his funeral wishes and with the geographical location of Miranda. The Chancellor died nearby, in Calahorra, trying to insure that his post and position, would be inherited by his firstborn. The old man held out a few days longer than the king, who met the desires of his loyal servant exactly in his will.<sup>54</sup> He died as he had lived, near the monarch, serving his own interests and those of his lineage, but also those of the Crown, announcing a spirit of servitude that subsequent history would consider utopian. This line of conduct would be broken a century later by his *comunero* descendant who, with his opposition to Charles V, endangered both his personal future and that of his whole lineage.

## 5. Biography and historical consciousness

In short, we know the character: the accidental firstborn, the traveler by office, the man of letters in prison, the wise old man. We are also familiar with the exemplary figure that he himself helped construct as a model for his contemporaries and relatives. To try to explore his psychology in depth is absurd, even if we do know his life goals, which is no small achievement.

The principal problem in approaching a historical character is, without a doubt, finding the right tools, but also, above all, that of the adopted perspective. The underlying use of concepts such as "personality" and "individual" in biographies of the Chancellor is surprising. These categories are used freely, adding to many others that invalidate the work of the medievalist, just as Alain Guerreau has shown.<sup>55</sup> But this, we are left with two complementary avenues of investigation. The first deals with the equivalence—or lack thereof—between the conceptual categories as understood by medieval men and contemporary scholars. Aaron Gurevich, who has studied the birth of the concept of "person" in western Europe, warns that personal identity in the Middle Ages is determined from the outside without sub-

53. Sigüenza, José de. *Segunda parte de la historia de la orden de San Jerónimo*. Madrid: Imprente de la Real por Iuan Flamenco, 1600: I, chapt. XXXV; cited by Meregalli, Franco. *La vida política del Canciller...*: 125.

54. An unedited document held in the Bibliothèque Nationale of France suggests that his son, Fernán Pérez, could fulfill diplomatic functions in the year of the Chancellor's death (BNF. Manuscrits Espagnols, 115, f. 88v).

55. Guerreau, Alain. *El futuro de un pasado. La Edad Media en el siglo XXI*. Barcelona: Crítica, 2002: 140 and following, 190.



jectivity.<sup>56</sup> In light of this statement, the case of the Chancellor is highly revealing since interpretations of texts of his time have generally pursued this subjectivity. This is particularly serious in the attempts at introspection based on the Chancellor's works, both the chronicles and the literary creations. They have not noticed a fact that is as evident as it is forgotten: the ideas of authorship and personality in the Middle Ages do not correspond to contemporary categories. The movement from morphological individuation (*morphologische Individuation*) to organic individuation (*organische Individuation*) belongs to the Renaissance, as shown by Georg Misch.<sup>57</sup> To paraphrase Gurevich, the genuine "I" of the medieval individual and author escapes our glance, and this evidence should be reflected in the battery of hypotheses that we medievalists try to verify.<sup>58</sup> In the case of biography, interpretation depends less on the discrimination between authentic and false texts,<sup>59</sup> and more on their meaning. In other words, to order and interpret biographical data, including doing so in relation to context, is a worthless operation if we are not aware of the categories of reference.

On the other hand, the latter, meaning the establishment of its literary or historiographic nature, concerns biography as a genre. The most recent works in the Iberian Peninsula on the noble mentality, nourished in good measure by biographic and genealogical sources, abound in the same constants of propaganda and the exemplary. Elegy and the mentality of the lineage dominate the texts produced by late medieval nobility or those in close proximity.<sup>60</sup> We do not find convincing explanations in any of these cases relative to the individual as understood

56. Gurevich, Aron Iakovlevich. *Los orígenes del individualismo europeo...*: 83.

57. Misch, Georg. *Geschichte der Autobiographie*. Frankfurt: G. Schulte-Blumke, 1949-1962, cited by Gurevich, Aron Iakovlevich. *Los orígenes del individualismo europeo...*: 128. Karl Weintraub expresses the same idea, calling Petrarca the hinge in this change of perception of the individual, (Weintraub, Karl Joachim. *La formación de la individualidad*. Madrid: Megazul-Endymion, 1993: 167; cited by Tortosa Garrigós, Virgilio. *La construcción del "individualismo" en la literatura de fin de siglo. Historia y autobiografía. La Biblioteca Virtual del Español. Edición de tesis*. 2004. Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes. 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006 <[http://descargas.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/12365075321259384654435/005091\\_1.pdf](http://descargas.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/12365075321259384654435/005091_1.pdf)>.

58. Gurevich, Aron Iakovlevich. *Los orígenes del individualismo europeo...*: 136.

59. In the exegesis of medieval texts one must recall the old, yet still valid, warnings of Marc Bloch (Bloch, Marc. *La Sociedad Feudal*. Madrid: Akal, 1987: 115). On factual interpretation in history I refer to Chesnaux, Jean. *¿Hacemos tabla rasa del pasado? A propósito de la historia y de los historiadores*. Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1977: 72.

60. There are many editions and monograph studies referring to the different noble houses of the peninsula. On the Portuguese Royal House see: Fonseca, Luis Adão da. "Una elegía inédita sobre la familia de Avis. Un aspecto de propaganda política en la Península Ibérica a mediados del siglo XV". *Anuario de Estudios Medievales*, 16 (1986): 449-463; and Córdoba, Alonso. *Conmemoración de los reyes de Portugal*, Pedro M. Cátedra, ed. Barcelona: Humanitas, 1983. On the Velasco: *Origen de la Ilustrísima Casa de Velasco por D. Pedro Fernández de Velasco*, ed. Cristina Jular, dir. *Proyecto CRELOC*. 2006. Creloc. Clientelas y Redes locales en la Castilla Medieval. Estudio Histórico y Tecnologías Documentales. 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006 <<http://www.creloc.net/admin/archivo/docdow.php?id=29>>. On the Haro: Prieto Lasa, José Ramón. *Las leyendas de los señores de Vizcaya y la tradición melusiniiana*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2005. The Estúñiga: *La Historia de la Casa de Zúñiga, otrora atribuida a mosén Diego de Valera*, Pedro Cátedra, ed. Salamanca: Semyr, 2003. Sobre los Ponce de León: Carriazo Rubio, Juan Luis. *La memoria del linaje. Los Ponce de León y sus antepasados a fines de la Edad Media*. Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla-Ayuntamiento de Marchena, 2002.



contemporarily, which is a notable step forward although this conceptual background is not stressed. In the words of José Luis Romero, “biography offers a sparse repertoire of paradigms for life”.<sup>61</sup> There are a few examples contemporary to the Chancellor that could contradict this. I have alluded to Fernán Pérez de Guzmán, but his *Generaciones y semblanzas* do nothing but renew the old genre initiated by Seneca and Sallust, putting through the filter of “Roman knighthood” that of which the Chancellor is the first Castilian exponent.<sup>62</sup> Another more suggestive example is that of Lady Leonor López of Córdoba who, in her *Memorias*, brings us an apparently more personal vision of her life. Arturo Firpo’s analysis has revealed the true content of an apparently autobiographic text: Lady Leonor, above all, shows herself to us as a representative of a group of nobles, that of the *emperejilados*, disadvantaged by the change of dynasty. In the end, the lady’s reflections speak to us more of a collective social aspiration than anything else.<sup>63</sup> Noble aspiration, at least in Castile, is fixed on a perfectly studied idea of fame or glory.<sup>64</sup> It is a competitive ideology whose most intense expression appears in the formula of “valer más” (to be worth more). Paradoxically, the individual is the actor here, but not the direct subject. For this reason, the initial question regarding the pertinence of the biographic genre in the Middle Ages should perhaps be answered in the negative. It is true, as Alan Deyermond points out, that this exceptional text, dictated to a notary by the lady herself, allows a personal inner voice to emerge. But as the same scholar recognizes, examples of medieval Castilian prose are very scarce and it does not appear to be by chance that they are produced by those on the margins, such as converts and women.<sup>65</sup> The usual answer is to date the birth of the individual in the Renaissance, although this is not without problems either.<sup>66</sup>

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61. Romero, José Luis. “Sobre la biografía española...: 122.

62. See: Rodríguez Velasco, Jesús. *El debate sobre la caballería...*

63. Firpo, Arturo R. “L’idéologie du lignage et les images de la famille dans les “Memorias” de Leonor López de Córdoba (1400)”. *Le Moyen Âge. Revue d’Histoire et de Philologie*, 87/2 (1981): 243-263.

64. Fradejas Rueda, José Manuel. “Prolegómenos a una edición “común” del “Libro de la caza de las aves” de Pedro López de Ayala”, *Actas del III Congreso de la Asociación Hispánica de Literatura Medieval (Salamanca, 3 al 6 de octubre de 1989)*, María Isabel del Toro Pascua, ed. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1994: I, 335-342. On the idea of fame among the Castilian nobility, see: Lida de Malkiel, María Rosa. *La idea de la Fama en la Edad Media Castellana*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1983; and more recently, Gibelo Bravo, Víctor M. *La imagen de la nobleza castellana en la baja Edad Media*. Mérida: Universidad de Extremadura, 1999.

65. Deyermond, Alan. “La voz personal en la prosa medieval hispánica”, *Actas del X Congreso de la Asociación Internacional de Hispanistas*, Antonio Vilanova, coord. Barcelona: Promociones y Publicaciones Universitarias, 1992: I, 161-170.

66. This argument is put forward in the now classic study by José Luis Romero. He compares the differences in the birth of the biography in Italy and Spain. The author’s primary argument is to consider biography as a “historiographic form” discovering, however, that the content of the texts like those by Pérez de Guzmán, Díez de Games or Pulgar are structured in a literary format. The conclusion of the study is, in this sense, revealing: “Since, in general, Spanish biographies of the 15<sup>th</sup> century never break out of the vigorous structure of medieval ideals, just as social and spiritual life did not break these bonds, we shall say that rather they conform by incorporating certain circumstantial aspects or exceptions that, on the other hand, reduce this general conception to its framework. In contrast, certain ways of living



Returning to the case at hand, perhaps it is useless to look for the Chancellor's "I". The analysis of the texts and even the biographical information on Pedro López de Ayala show us a very clear self consciousness of the lineage —admitting variations and specific justifications that accord with the context of the author or character. The ideological construction of class, particularly that of the "nobility of service", the group that most benefited from the change of dynasty in late medieval Castile, is also clear. We can conclude, at least, that biography as phenomenology of the individual is not feasible until after Petrarch.<sup>67</sup> The precedents, the "autobiographies" of Saint Augustine and Abelard, waver between the canonical and the marginal, but always in terms of exceptional intellectual nature.<sup>68</sup>

In conclusion, the biographical sources do not allow us to capture the individual. Analysis will bear meager fruit if we continue to apply contemporary categories and concepts to realities so different from our own. The paradox resides in the fact that perhaps the biographical texts are the least appropriate sources for approaching the medieval individual, concretely or abstractly.<sup>69</sup> However, biography can be a valuable analytical tool in understanding the historical reality of this period and the elusive medieval individual. In this sense, we must not forget the fruits of the exquisite and suggestive biography by Georges Duby on William the Marshal, which is potentially the work that has most inspired medievalists.

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and certain values, purely from the Renaissance, never appear." (Romero, José Luis. "Sobre la biografía española...": 133).

67. Colin Morris moves this birth back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century with figures such as Abelard or Guibert of Nogent, although his theory is not without problems (Morris, Colin. *The Discovery of the Individual, 1050-1200*. New York: Harper and Row, 1973). A critique documented in Clanchy, Michael. "Documenting the self: Abelard and the individual in history". *Historical Research*, 76/193 (2003): 293-309.

68. The Augustinian model of autobiography has Hispanic referents such as that of Valerio del Bierzo (see the recent translation by Renan Frighetto: *Valerio del Bierzo: autobiografía*. Noia: Toxosoutos, 2006), and the next critical edition of the writing of Valerio by José Carlos Martín Iglesias (in press). There is also a notable precedent in Andalusian historiography, which was very given to the biographic genre between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries (see Romero, José Luis. "Sobre la biografía española...": 116, nota 1). We also have the repertoire of "vidas ilustres" started in Castile by Juan Gil de Zamora, lamentably underused by historians. See Dacosta, Arsenio. "El rey virtuoso: un ideal político del siglo XIII de la mano de fray Juan Gil de Zamora", *Historia. Instituciones. Documentos* 30 (2007): 98-121).

69. In this context, analysis of textual and discursive structure of the diplomatic sources of the period offer interesting possibilities: the idea of "comunitas" and the role of the individual, the personification of witnesses, etc. The same analysis that proved fruitful in the study of Christian anthroponymy of the period. For a sample: Martínez Sopena, Pascual, coord. *Antroponimia y sociedad. Sistemas de identificación hispano-cristianos en los siglos IX al XIII*. Santiago de Compostela-Valladolid: Universidad de Santiago de Compostela-Universidad de Valladolid, 1995.

