



# Claros Varones de Castilla

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## GOALS

My goal in translating *Bright Men of Castile* is to share the histories of some of Spain's most influential men of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and to examine how Castilian nobles and humanists of this time compare themselves to Roman historical figures at a crucial period in the formation of the modern Spanish state. While language is a significant barrier in attempting to study medieval texts, this English translation allows modern scholars to benefit from what this work has to offer. In translating this text, I provide the opportunity for English speakers to learn about these historical figures from the unique insight of a court historian, Hernando de Pulgar. *Bright Men of Castile* models itself after Latin biographical collections that chronicle the lives of prominent Romans, such as *Plutarch's Lives*, although the men that Pulgar describes have not had the same notoriety as some of the famous Romans. By portraying his contemporaries in the style of Plutarch and comparing them directly with Ancient Romans, Pulgar elevates his own times to the level of Ancient Rome.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Lew Wentz Foundation for providing me the opportunity to pursue this research, the Office of Scholar Development for guiding me through the process and finally, my mentor, Dr. Erik Ekman, for standing beside me and helping through it all.

## INTRODUCTION

My research focuses on translating and studying the biographical collection entitled *Claros varones de Castilla*, or *Bright Men of Castile*. This work was written in 1486 by Hernando del Pulgar, the court historian to Queen Isabel of Castile.

The text is a collection of short biographies detailing the lives of some of Castile and León's most famous knights, noblemen and clergy in the style of the Roman historian Plutarch's *Lives*.

The biographies in *Bright Men* are formulaic, each following Pulgar's system. They each begin with the individual's name and title, followed closely by the person's ties to the crown and both domestic and foreign aristocracy. Other information included ranges from physical descriptions of weight and attractiveness to moral characteristics. Finally, each biography tells the individual's famous deeds and sacrifices for the Isabel's Kingdom. This systematic portrayal of prominent contemporaries ultimately aims to place the deeds of fifteenth-century Castilians on par with those of ancient Romans.

## Queen Isabel I



Isabel was born to King Juan II and Isabella of Portugal, his second wife, in 1451. Isabel took power in 1474 and faced extreme dissension from her people. She is considered to be one of Europe's first female monarchs,

which did not agree with the patriarchal culture of late fifteenth century Spain. She struggled to prove herself as a capable ruler. Isabel handpicked Pulgar to be the court historian; probably knowing she could have him in her favor. Pulgar, through his work in the court, had the opportunity – and did – craft history. By choosing who to write about and what to say. He shaped how we view her times even today.

## King Enrique IV

Enrique IV, considered among the least successful Castilian monarchs, was the son of the King Juan II, a man considered to be among the most successful. Nevertheless, he was an extremely important figure in Castilian history. His reign is one of the most controversial in Spanish history due to the mystery and taboo surrounding his sexuality.



Enrique's detractors portrayed him as effeminate and questioned the legitimacy of his daughter, Juana, and her claim to the throne. Civil war ultimately led to the decision that Juana was not the rightful heir and power would be placed in the hands of Isabel I, Enrique's younger half-sister. To this day, historians are unsure about the events surrounding Enrique's marriages and daughter.

## SPAINARDS VS. ROMANS

### Original Text:

“Loan los istoriadores a Bruto, cónsul romano, que mató sus hijos porque contra el bien público de Roma trataban de reducir al rey Tarquino. Y dicen que la grand cobdicia de loor venció al amor natural, y alega Virgilio que fue caso infelice, y si infelice, no sé cómo la infelicidad deva ser loada, ni qué loor puede conseguir aquel que repugna la natura y contraria la razón.”

### Translated Text:

“Historians praise Brutus, the Roman consul, who killed his children because going against the public good of Rome they tried to bring back the King, Tarquinius. And they say that the great desire for praise overcome natural love, and Virgil alleges that the case was unfortunate, and if unfortunate, he doesn't know how misfortune is to be praised, not what praise can be obtained by that one that fights nature and contradicts reason.”

**This passage represents one of many examples Pulgar uses to compare Spaniards and Romans, showing the desire to portray his own people as equal to or better than the Ancient Romans.**

## METHOD OF TRANSLATION

*Bright Men* was published in 1486 and was written in late medieval Spanish. In my translation I study the concepts of *ad litteram* translation, literal or word-by-word, and *ad sensum* translation, conveying the original meaning of the author while translating the text more freely. This proved to be the greatest challenge because often times the *ad litteram* translation produced text that did not match what Pulgar meant. In order to grasp the true nature of these important deeds, *ad sensum* translation is required.

This struggle between *ad sensum* and *ad litteram* often happens with specific words. One such example is the word *caballero*. This word can be translated to mean ‘knight’ or ‘gentleman,’ while its *ad litteram* meaning is ‘horseman’. *Bright Men* includes the biographies of both knights and noble gentlemen, which made it a challenge to pick the word. If the translation were to call someone a knight when Pulgar had meant for it to say gentleman, it would misconstrue the true meaning of the text.



Title page of the 1486 edition of *Claros varones*