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.

INTRODUCTION

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.

PERSPECTIVES

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.

METHOD OF TRANSLATION

Bright Men was published in 1486 and was written in 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.

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