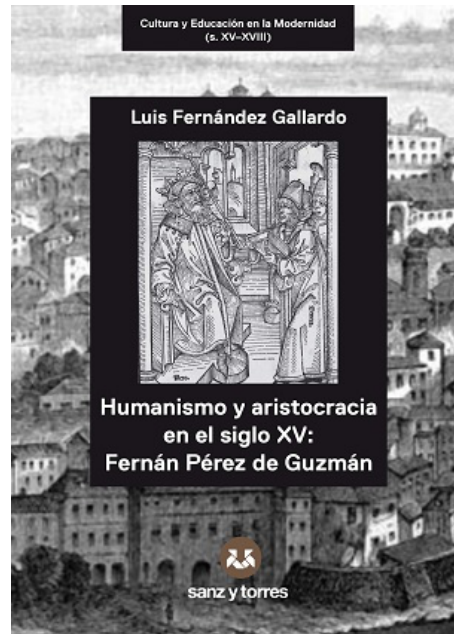


Luis Fernández Gallardo. *Humanismo y aristocracia en el siglo XV: Fernán Pérez de Guzmán*. Madrid: Editorial Sanz y Torres, 2025. ISBN: 978-84-10409-18-7. 594 pgs.

**Reviewed by:** Antonio Cortijo Ocaña  
University of California, Santa Barbara



The fifteenth century in the Crown of Castile has long been characterized by historiographical tension. On one hand, it is traditionally viewed as a turbulent era of civil strife, fractured noble leagues, and weak monarchies—most notably exemplified by the reign of Juan II (1406–1454). On the other hand, it represents a golden dawn for Castilian letters, witnessing the burgeoning of what scholars like Peter Russell and Jeremy Lawrance termed "vernacular humanism." Luis Fernández Gallardo's massive, meticulously researched monograph, *Humanismo y aristocracia en el siglo XV: Fernán Pérez de Guzmán*, steps directly into this tension. By offering an exhaustive biographical and intellectual autopsy of Fernán Pérez de Guzmán (1376–1460)—Lord of Batres, soldier, poet, and chronicler—Fernández Gallardo demonstrates that literary creation and political action were not mutually exclusive escapes for the late medieval aristocracy. Rather, they were deeply integrated facets of a unified class consciousness struggling to redefine its social utility (*función estamental*) in a rapidly centralizing state.

Fernández Gallardo opens his study by adopting an anthropological framework reminiscent of Julio Caro Baroja and Julián Marías: the concept of "installation" (*instalación*). He maps Pérez de Guzmán's life through concentric geographic and political circles: the Trastámara kingdom of Castile, the local urban oligarchy of Toledo, and the rural lordship of Batres.

The author skillfully demonstrates how Pérez de Guzmán's lineage positioned him at a crucial nexus of Castilian power. As the nephew of the seminal chancellor-chronicler Pero López de Ayala, Pérez de Guzmán was raised within a family tradition that viewed historical writing as an extension of political duty.

Fernández Gallardo provides an excellent, nuanced reading of how the violent dynastic transition from Pedro I to Enrique II (the Trastámara triumph) shaped Pérez de Guzmán's

worldview. The "Enriquean grants" (*mercedes enriqueñas*) that enriched his family also bound them to a model of monarchy that required constant dialogue with the high nobility.

The tragedy of Pérez de Guzmán's life, as the biography details, is his forced retirement from court in 1432 following his alignment with the political faction of the Infantes de Aragón and his relative, Bishop Gutierre de Toledo. Fernández Gallardo brilliantly unpacks the dialectic of *corte* (the court) versus *cortijo* (the rural manor). Rather than succumbing to political rancor or bitter isolation in his castle at Batres, Pérez de Guzmán transformed his exile into a space for *otium honestum* (virtuous leisure).

Chapter III transitions into Pérez de Guzmán's early literary output, which was rooted firmly in the courtly *cancionero* tradition. Fernández Gallardo avoids the common pitfall of dismissing this early verse as mere superficial galantry. Instead, he traces a clear evolutionary arc from standard courtly love poetry (*galanteos cortesanos*) to a deeply serious "political and moral muse."

Even in his youth, Pérez de Guzmán's verse was intensely reflexive. The author breaks down the formal elements of his metric and rhetorical frameworks, highlighting how the poet utilized his verse to process the fluid, dangerous nature of royal favor.

The court is depicted not merely as a physical space, but as a moral hazard—a "fire and flame" that threatens wealth, reputation, and the soul. Fernández Gallardo shows that these early metrical exercises laid the linguistic and philosophical groundwork for the weighty prose works of his later years.

One of the most significant and original contributions of Fernández Gallardo's monograph is found in Chapter IV, where he rescues Pérez de Guzmán's *Mar de Historias* from relative scholarly obscurity. The work, an adaptation and translation of Giovanni Colonna's Latin universal chronicle *Mare Historiarum*, is analyzed not as a passive translation, but as a deliberate act of cultural mediation (*interpres* and *compilator*).

Fernández Gallardo systematically details how Pérez de Guzmán restructures the Latin text into a bipartite vernacular format to educate the Castilian knightly class. The review of the contents is exhaustive, showing how Pérez de Guzmán filters classical history—ranging from the Trojan War and Alexander the Great to the Roman Republic and Empire—through a providentialist, secularized lens.

Crucially, the author highlights how Pérez de Guzmán filters out purely mythical elements in favor of historical exemplars that stress civic virtue, cautioning rulers against the dangers of indolence and the unchecked power of royal favorites (*privados*).

Chapters V and IX consolidate the book's core argument regarding the intellectual profile of the noble class. Fernández Gallardo contextualizes Pérez de Guzmán's sponsorship of translations—including Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium* (translated under his patronage) and Sallust's major works (translated by his relative Vasco Ramírez de Guzmán)—as a manifestation of "civic vernacular humanism."

The author provides a brilliant analysis of the marginal glosses and prefaces (*accessus*) attached to these texts. For Pérez de Guzmán, classical antiquity was not a dead, aesthetic object to be worshiped in Latin; it was a living manual of ethics for the vernacular ruling class.

By framing Seneca's stoicism through a lens of Christian sanctity, and using Sallust to highlight the decay of political institutions due to avarice, Pérez de Guzmán and his circle constructed an intellectual armory designed to defend the traditional role of the aristocracy against the perceived autocracy of the royal favorite, Álvaro de Luna.

The climax of the monograph arrives in Chapters VI and VII, which analyze Pérez de Guzmán's undisputed masterpieces: *Generaciones y semblanzas* and the poetic historiography *Loores de los claros varones de España*.

In analyzing *Generaciones y semblanzas*, Fernández Gallardo provides an innovative reading of the text as an alternative, non-official history of Castile. Pérez de Guzmán moves away from the teleological providencialism of royal chronicles to pioneer the art of the psychological and physical portrait in Castilian prose, heavily influenced by Suetonius and Sallust.

The author classifies Pérez de Guzmán's portraits into specific thematic registers:

- "Semblantes" and "façiones": The physical features, used as a physiognomic window into character.
- Voice, speech, and reason: The capacity of the subject for eloquent, rational discourse.
- "Condiçiones" and "costumbres": Estamental virtues divided into royal virtues (secularized governance over religious piety), knightly/chivalric attributes, and prelatial responsibilities.

Fernández Gallardo demonstrates that Pérez de Guzmán uses these portraits to redefine nobility. True nobility is uncoupled from mere inherited bloodlines; it must be authenticated through personal virtue and active service to the common good (*bien común*). His famous, devastating portrait of the weak-willed Juan II and the voracious Álvaro de Luna serves as a structural warning of what occurs when a monarch abdicates his moral agency to a *privado*.

In *Loores*, Fernández Gallardo identifies a potent, early form of cultural and political patriotism. Pérez de Guzmán synthesizes a grand narrative of Spain (*patria*) that spans from the pre-Gothic and Visigothic past, through the Asturian resistance, to the pinnacle of historical restoration under Fernando III. Remarkably, this patriotism is not exclusively military; Pérez de Guzmán explicitly includes intellectual and religious figures—wise prelates, moralists, and poets—as foundational heroes of the nation.

In Chapter VIII, the monograph treats Pérez de Guzmán's late-career moral and religious poetry, including *Diversas virtudes y vicios*, *Proverbios*, and *Coronación de las cuatro virtudes*. Fernández Gallardo argues convincingly against the traditional view that these works represent a conservative, purely ascetic retreat from the world.

Instead, the author uncovers a robust naturalist anthropology. Pérez de Guzmán's late poetry champions the *vida activa* (active life) over passive monastic contemplation. Even within his religious verse, his focus remains steadfastly anchored on how the human being operates within society.

His writing on gender and family structures, particularly in *La Doctrina que dieron a Sara*, is analyzed with sharp social insight: Fernández Gallardo reveals how Pérez de Guzmán codifies the role of the aristocratic matron as an essential economic and moral manager of the estate, blending biblical exegesis with pragmatic social realism.

Luis Fernández Gallardo's *Humanismo y aristocracia en el siglo XV* is an extraordinary academic achievement. Supported by an impeccable bibliographic apparatus and an elegant prose style, this monograph effectively deconstructs the false dichotomy between the sword and the pen in late medieval Iberia. In Fernández Gallardo's reevaluation of Pérez de Guzmán, the *señor de Batres* goes from a minor cancionero poet and conservative chronicler isolated in exile to a sophisticated civic humanist utilizing *otium* to construct an alternative history; his *Mar de Historias* goes from a passive, redundant translation to a deliberate, highly structural adaptation aimed at educating the knightly class; his concept of moral poetry goes from a medieval, ascetic

rejection of secular reality to a naturalist, stoic ethics that champions the active life and civic engagement.

Ultimately, this book will stand as the definitive study on Fernán Pérez de Guzmán for decades to come.