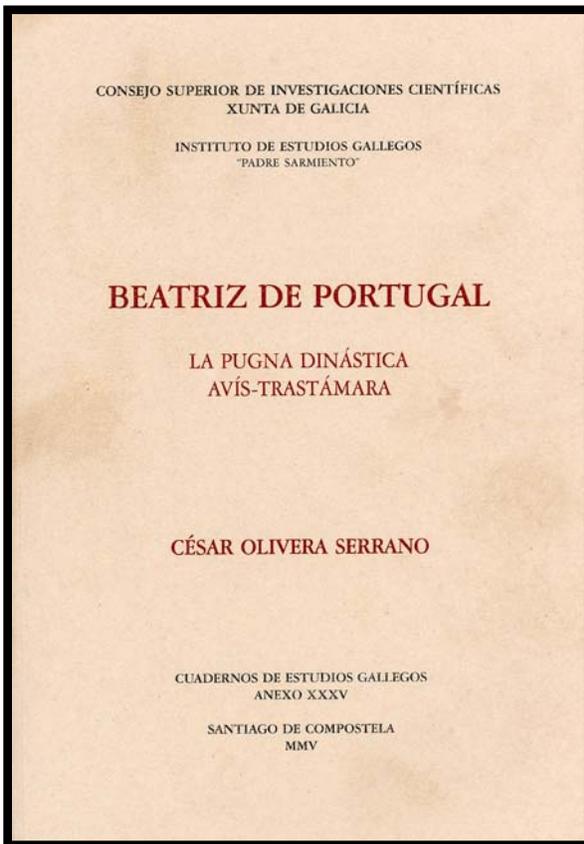


Olivera Serrano, César. *Beatriz de Portugal. La pugna dinástica Avís-Trastámara*. Prologue by Eduardo Pardo de Guevara y Valdés. Santiago de Compostela: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas-Xunta de Galicia-Instituto de Estudios Gallegos “Padre Sarmiento”, 2005 (Cuadernos de Estudios Gallegos, Anexo XXXV), págs. 590. ISBN 84-00-08343-1

Reviewed by Óscar Perea Rodríguez
University of California, Berkeley



In his essays, Miquel Batllori often argued that scholars researching Humanism should pay particular attention to the 15th century in order to gain a better understanding of the 16th century. This has been amply achieved by César Olivera Serrano, author of the book reviewed here, for in it he has offered us remarkable insight into 15th-century Castilian history through an extraordinary analysis of 14th-century history. As Professor Pardo de Guevara points out in his prologue, this book is an in-depth biographical study of Queen Beatriz of Portugal (second wife of the King John I of Castile). Additionally, it is also an analysis of the main directions of Castilian foreign policy through the late 14th and 15th centuries and of how Castile's further political and economic development was strictly anchored in its 14th-century policies.

The first chapter, entitled *La cuestionada legitimidad de los Trastámara*, focuses on Princess Beatriz as the prisoner of her father's political wishes. King Ferdinand I of Portugal wanted to take advantage of the irregular

seizure of the Castilian throne by the Trastámara family. Thus, he offered himself as a candidate to Castile's crown, sometimes fighting for his rights in the battlefield, sometimes through peace treaties. Between 1376 and 1383 Princess Beatriz was offered by her father as bride on four occasions: to the Duke of Benavente, to Prince Henry (future King Henry III of Castile), to Prince Ferdinand (future King Ferdinand I of Aragon) and, finally, to King John I of Castile. Olivera Serrano insists throughout this chapter that Beatriz –through all the political turmoil– remained an obedient daughter to King Ferdinand, never opposing her father's plans. Furthermore, the author stresses how her future was linked to the various solutions given in Castile and in Portugal to the Schism of Western Christendom.

The second chapter deals with *Los errores de Juan I* (John I's mistakes). Following in the footsteps of Luis Suárez Fernández, Olivera Serrano subscribes to the idea that most of John I's mistakes during his reign were related to his desire to become King of Portugal. After her father's death in 1383, Beatriz –the legitimate heiress of the Portuguese crown– married John I, King of Castile, who was considerably older than his bride. As a consequence of this marriage,

Portuguese subjects were increasingly suspicious of their new Queen (and of Castile in general). Nevertheless, in spite of the efforts of the legitimate Queen Beatriz, the Courts of Coimbra elected João, Grand Master of the Military Order of Aviz and the illegitimate son of King Ferdinand, as king in 1385. Some months later, when a Castilian army was defeated by the Portuguese soldiers in the battle of Aljubarrota (the so called *Aljubarrota mistake*, that is, the peak of John I's failure), Queen Beatriz was exiled, rejected in her native kingdom as a traitress and forced to live abroad.

In the third chapter, *De la espera al olvido*, Olivera Serrano highlights the irony of the fights between the two Iberian kingdoms, for

los bastardos usurpadores de antaño (los Trastámara) estaban ahora dando lecciones de legitimidad a los bastardos usurpadores de hogaño (los Avis). Las coronas de Portugal y Castilla se atascaron de este modo en una ciénaga de la que tardaron muchos años en salir, creando un problema muy serio de comunicación. (106)

Beatriz, who was just 18 years old, was always careful to remain in the background, discretely defending her rights as Queen of Portugal but distancing herself from Castile's court fights. She was helped by Ferdinand *de Antequera*, the future Ferdinand I of Aragon, who "jamás ocultó sus simpatías hacia la mujer que primero fue prometida y después madrastra" (138). Nevertheless, Beatriz became progressively an uncomfortable figure, herself the reminder of certain "herida que jamás cicatrizaba" (162). Gradual oblivion was the only sad companion of Queen Beatriz until her death, which occurred most likely around 1421-23, as professor Olivera Serrano explains convincingly in this chapter.

What could be considered as the second part of this book begins in the fourth chapter, entitled *El patrimonio y la casa de la reina Beatriz de Portugal*. Here Olivera describes the patrimonial dominions of Queen Beatriz, focusing on those locales with which Beatriz had formed a special relationship, such as Ciudad Real, Cuéllar, Arévalo, and, above all, Toro. It is in this last city that she developed a personal circle of servants and devotees and where she hoped to be buried, providing further proof of her profound connection to this town.

In the fifth chapter, *Parientes y exiliados*, Olivera Serrano shows evidence of his extensive documentary research. This chapter deals with one phenomenon that characterized relations between Castile and Portugal in the early 15th century: the migration of several Portuguese families to Castile, many of whom acquired high Castilian nobility status. This fact has already been pointed out by several scholars including Professor Emilio Mitre in his research on the nobility under King Henry III's reign. This phenomenon is the reason why the Fonseca, the Portocarrero, and the Silva lineages –all originally from Portugal– became protagonists of Castilian history in the 15th century. Olivera points out that several of these families were relatives of Queen Beatriz –and sometimes enemies–, such as the Inés de Castro's heirs, who introduced their own political faction to the Castilian court.

The sixth chapter focuses on how Beatriz of Portugal became a historical conundrum, particularly for the two principal chroniclers of her age: the Castilian Pedro López de Ayala and the Portuguese Fernão Lopes. Each of them reached a very different conclusion when analyzing and interpreting the figure of Beatriz. It is Olivera's contention that this is so because both Ayala and Lopes carefully presented a reconstructed national identity of their respective countries rather than a historical reality. Thus, the result is an attack against the figure of Queen Beatriz,

who was presented in the chroniclers' works and in other documents in a fashion far removed from her individual reality.

The seventh chapter, *El perfil biográfico de una reina exiliada*, demonstrates an original way of looking at Queen Beatriz through some 'literary' writings of her time. In particular, the author examines those writings related to the Crown succession, such as the treaty by Arias de Balboa, and poetical works that reflect upon her problems, such as several poems in the *Cancionero de Baena*. Spanish historians have not frequently used literary sources, but Olivera Serrano does so with precision, always in search of a rigorous profile of Queen Beatriz.

The eighth chapter is one of the most original contributions of this book to our knowledge of 15th-century Castilian history. In it the author shows the connection between the past frictions between Castile and Portugal and the fights between Isabella, the Catholic Queen, and her niece Joan *the Beltraneja*, King Henry IV's daughter. Previously, Olivera had stated that both Beatriz and Joan were "personajes intencionadamente borrados de la existencia" (27). In this chapter he further develops this idea and demonstrates how

el acoso y derribo de la hija de Enrique IV tiene los mismos elementos que habían hundido a Beatriz en las Cortes de Coimbra de 1385...Y no es un hecho desdeñable, como decíamos en páginas anteriores, que los autores de esa campaña fuesen precisamente los descendientes de algunos exiliados portugueses. (406)

Once again, the past and the present were linked.

Lastly, the book concludes with a lengthy documentary section in which the author reconstructs what might have been –according to him– the chancellery of Queen Beatriz. In addition, there are four indexes (documents, bibliography, places and persons cited) and some genealogical tables, which help make this study a valuable research tool for scholars.

In short, this book is the clear result of Olivera Serrano's mastership and remarkable knowledge of chronicles and studies of Spanish and Portuguese history. The author has rescued Queen Beatriz from oblivion through deep and insightful research, making of this book not only a paramount biographical study but also an obligatory reference for scholars interested in the study of Spain and Portugal during the 15th century.