

73. MEMOIRS OF A CASTILIAN NOBLEWOMAN

Leonor López de Córdoba, *Memorias*

Translated from Castilian by Kathleen Lacey

Leonor López de Córdoba (ca. 1362–ca. 1412) was born in about 1362 into a noble Castilian family, supporters of King Pedro I (r. 1350–1369). She was also a descendant of Juan Manuel, author of the Libro de los estados (Chapter 63). After King Pedro's death at the hands of his half brother, Enrique de Trastámara (thereafter Enrique II, r. 1369–1379), on the field of Montiel, Leonor's father, Martín, continued to hold out against the new king from his fortress at Carmona, near Seville. From Carmona, where he held custody of King Pedro's daughters and much of the Castilian treasury, Martín López de Córdoba encouraged the claims of Fernando of Portugal to invade Castile and take over the throne from Enrique II. His efforts were thwarted, however, by a treaty between Portugal and Castile in 1371. A few months later, Martín surrendered Carmona to Enrique on the condition that his family and Pedro's children be allowed to leave the country in safety. This agreement was not honored; Martín was beheaded and his family was imprisoned until 1379. Even after her release, Leonor continued to meet with hardships. Among these was the plague, which persisted in Europe during the later fourteenth century after its devastating outbreak in 1348. (ORC)

Therefore, may whoever reads this document know that I am Doña Leonor López de Córdoba, the daughter of my lord, Master Don Martín López de Córdoba, and Doña Sancha Carrillo, to whom God gave glory and paradise. I swear, by the meaning of the cross that I adore, that all that is written here is true, that I saw it, and it happened to me. I write it for the honor and glory of my Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Virgin, St. Mary his mother, who gave birth to him, so that all creatures that were in tribulation may be secure—as I put my faith in her mercy—that if they commend their hearts to the Virgin St. Mary, she will console and succor them, as she consoled me. And so that whoever hears this knows the story of the deeds and miracles the Virgin St. Mary showed me, and as it is my intention that these deeds and miracles be remembered, I ordered this to be written, as you see.

I am the daughter of the said master who was Lord of Calatrava in the time of King Pedro. The king did my father the honor of giving him the commission of Alcántara, which is in the city of Seville. The king then made him master of Alcántara and, in the end, of Calatrava. This master, my father, was a descendant of the house of Aguilar, and the great-nephew of Don Juan

English text from *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, edited by Elizabeth A. Petroff (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 329–34. Reprinted with permission of the translator.

Manuel, son of his niece who was the daughter of his brother. He rose to a very high estate, as can be discovered in the chronicles of Spain. And as I have said, I am the daughter of Doña Sancha Carrillo, niece and ward of King Alfonso of most illustrious memory, to whom God granted paradise, who was the father of King Pedro.

My mother died very early, and so my father married me at seven years old to Ruy Gutierrez de Henestrosa. He was the son of Juan Fernández de Henestrosa, King Pedro's head valet, his chancellor of the royal seal, and head majordomo of Queen Blanca his wife; Juan Fernández married Doña María de Haro, mistress of Haro and the Cameros. To my husband were left many of his father's goods and several estates. He received three hundred mounted soldiers of his own, and forty strands of pearls as fat as chick-peas, and five hundred Moorish servants, and silver tableware worth two thousand marks. The jewels and gems of his house could not be written on two sheets of paper. All this came to him from his father and mother because they had no other son and heir. My father gave me twenty thousand *doblas* as a dowry; we lived in Carmona with King Pedro's daughters, my husband and I, along with my brothers-in-law, my sisters' husbands, and with one brother of mine, who was named Don Lope López de Córdoba Carrillo. My brothers-in-law were named Fernán Rodríguez de Aza, Lord of Aza and Villalobos, and Ruy García de Aza, and Lope Rodríguez de Aza. They were the sons of Álvaro Rodríguez de Aza and Doña Costanza de Villalobos.

That was how things stood when King Pedro was besieged at the castle of Montiel by his brother, King Enrique. My father went down to Andalusia to bring people to aid King Pedro, and on the way he discovered that the king was dead at the hands of his brother. Seeing this disgrace, he took the road to Carmona where the princesses were, King Pedro's daughters, who were very close relatives of my husband, and of myself through my mother. King Enrique, becoming King of Castile, came to Seville and surrounded Carmona. As it is such a strong town, it was surrounded for many months.

But by chance my father had left Carmona, and those of King Enrique's camp knew how he was gone, and that it would not remain so well protected. Twelve knights volunteered to scale the town, and they climbed the wall. They were captured, and then my father was informed of what had happened. He came to Carmona then, and ordered them to be beheaded for their audacity. King Enrique observed this, and because he could not enter Carmona by force of arms to satisfy himself about this deed, he ordered the constable of Castile to discuss terms with my father.

The terms that my father put forward were two. First, King Enrique's party was to free the princesses and their treasure to leave for England, before

he would surrender the town to the King. (And so it was done. He ordered certain noblemen, his kinsmen and natives of Córdoba bearing his family name, to accompany the princesses and the rest of the people who intended to leave with them.) The second condition was that my father, his children, his guard, and those in the town who had obeyed his orders would be pardoned by the king, and that they and their estates would be considered loyal. And so it was granted him, signed by the constable in the king's name. Having achieved this, my father surrendered the town to the constable in King Enrique's name, and he left there—with his children and the rest of the people—to kiss the king's hand. King Enrique ordered them to be arrested and put in the dungeon of Seville. The constable, who saw that King Enrique had not fulfilled the promise he had made in his name to this master (my father), left the court and never returned to it.

The king ordered my father to be beheaded in the Plaza de San Francisco in Seville, and his goods confiscated, as well as those of his son-in-law, guardsmen, and servants. While he was on his way to be decapitated, my father encountered Mosen Beltran de Clequin, a French knight, the knight, in fact, whom King Pedro had trusted and who had freed him when he was trapped in the castle of Montiel, but who had not fulfilled his promise, and instead surrendered him to King Enrique to be killed. As Mosen Beltran met with my father, he said to him, "Master, didn't I tell you that your travels would end in this?" And my father replied, "Better to die loyal, as I have done, than to live as you live, having been a traitor."

The rest of us remained in prison for nine years, until King Enrique died. Our husbands each had seventy pounds of iron on their feet, and my brother, Don Lope López, had a chain between the irons in which there were seventy links. He was a boy of thirteen years, the most beautiful creature in the world. My husband especially was made to go hungry. For six or seven days he neither ate nor drank because he was the cousin of the princesses, the daughters of King Pedro.

A plague came into the prison, and so my brothers and all of my brothers-in-law and thirteen knights from my father's house all died. Sancho Miñez de Villendra, my father's head valet, said to my brothers and sisters and me, "Children of my lord, pray to God that I live for your sakes, for if I do, you will never die poor." It was God's will that he died the third day without speaking. After they were dead they took them all out to the smith to have their chains taken off, like Moors.

My poor brother, Don Lope López, asked the mayor who had us in his charge to tell Gonzalo Ruíz Bolante that much charity was shown to us, and much honor, for the love of God. "Lord Mayor, it would be merciful of you

to take off my irons before my soul departs, and not to take me to the smith." The mayor replied to him as if to a Moor, "If it were up to me, I would do it." At this, my brother's soul departed while he was in my arms. He was a year older than I. They took him away on a slab to the smith, like a Moor, and they buried him with my brothers and my sisters and my brothers-in-law in the church of San Francisco of Seville.

Each of my brothers-in-law used to wear a gold necklace around his throat, for they were five brothers. They put on those necklaces in Santa María de Guadalupe, and they vowed not to take them off until all five lay themselves down in Santa María. Because of their sins, one died in Seville, and another in Lisbon, and another in England, and so they died scattered. They ordered that they be buried with the gold necklaces, but the monks, after burying them, greedily removed the necklaces.

No one from the house of my father, Master Don Martín López, remained in the dungeon except my husband and myself. At this time, the most high and illustrious King Enrique, of very sainted and illustrious memory, died; he ordered in his will that we were to be taken out of prison, and that all that was ours be returned. I stayed in the house of my lady aunt, Doña María García Carrillo, and my husband went to demand his goods. Those who held them paid him little attention, because he had no rank or means to demand their return. You already know how rights depend on one's petition being granted. So my husband disappeared, and wandered through the world for seven years, a wretch, and never discovered relative nor friend who would do him a good turn or take pity on him. After I had spent seven years in the household of my aunt, Doña María García Carrillo, they told my husband, who was in Badajoz with his uncle Lope Fernández de Padilla in the Portuguese War, that I was in good health and that my relatives had treated me very well. He mounted his mule, which was worth very little money, and the clothes he wore didn't amount to thirty *maravedis*, and he appeared at my aunt's door.

Not having known that my husband was wandering lost through the world, I requested my lady aunt, my lady mother's sister, to speak with Doña Teresa Fernández Carrillo, who was a member of the Order of Guadalupe, which my great grandparents founded; they have given an endowment to support forty wealthy women of their lineage who should join the order. I sent my aunt to petition that Doña Teresa would wish to receive me into that order, for through my sins my husband and I were lost. She, and all the order, agreed to this, for my lady mother had been brought up in their monasteries. King Pedro had taken her from there and had given her to my father in marriage because she was the sister of Gonzalo Díaz Carrillo and

of Diego Carrillo, sons of Don Juan Fernández Carrillo and Doña Sancha de Rojas. Because these uncles of mine were afraid of King Pedro, who had killed and exiled many of his lineage and had demolished my grandfather's houses and given his property to others, these uncles of mine left there, in order to serve King Enrique when he was count, because of this outrage. I was born in Calatayud, in the king's house. The lady princesses, his daughters, were my godmothers, and they brought me with them to the fortress of Segovia, along with my lady mother, who died there. I was of such an age that I never knew her.

And after my husband arrived, as I said, I left the house of my lady aunt, which was in Córdoba next to San Ipólito, and my husband and I were received into some houses there, next to hers, and we came there with little rest.

For thirty days I prayed to the Virgin St. Mary of Bethlehem. Each night on my knees I said three hundred Ave Marias, in order to reach the heart of my lady aunt so she would consent to open a postern to her houses. Two days before my praying ended, I demanded of my lady aunt that she allow me to open that private entrance, so that we wouldn't walk through the street, past so many nobles that there were in Córdoba, to come eat at her table. In her mercy she responded to me and granted it, and I was greatly consoled. Another day, when I wanted to open the postern, her servants had changed her heart and she would not do it. I was so disconsolate that I lost patience, and she that had caused me the most trouble with my lady aunt died at my hands, eating her tongue.

Another day, when only one day remained to complete my prayer, a Saturday, I dreamed I was passing through San Ipólito touching the alb. I saw in the wall of the courtyard an arch, very large and very tall. I entered through it and gathered flowers from the earth, and saw a very great heaven. At this I awoke, and I was hopeful that my Virgin St. Mary would give me a home.

At this time there was a robbery in the Jewish quarter, and I took in an orphan boy who was there, so that he would be instructed in the faith. I had him baptized so that he would be instructed in the faith.

One day, coming with my lady aunt from mass at San Ipólito, I saw being distributed among the clerics of San Ipólito those grounds where I had dreamed there was the great arch. I implored my lady aunt, Doña Mencía Carrillo, to purchase that site for me, since I had been her companion for seventeen years, and she bought it for me. She gave these grounds to me with the condition—which she indicated—that I build a chapel (erected over the houses) for the soul of King Alfonso, who built that church in the name of San Ipólito because he was born on that saint's day. These chaplains have another six or seven chapels built by Don Gonzalo Fernández, my lady aunt's

husband, and Don Alfonso Fernández, lord of Aguilar, and by the children of the marshal. Then, when I had done this favor, I raised my eyes to God and to the Virgin Mary, giving them thanks.

There came to me a servant of Master Don Martín López, my lord and father, who lives with Martín Fernández, mayor of the doncells [young women], who was there hearing mass. I sent a request with this servant to Don Martín Fernández that, as a kinsman, he thank my lady aunt for the kindness she had shown me. He was greatly pleased, and so he did it well, saying that he received her kindness to me as if it were shown to him.

Now that possession of these grounds had been given to me, I opened a door on the very place where I had seen the arch which the Virgin Mary showed me. It grieved the abbots to hand over that site to me, for I was of a great lineage, and my children would be great. They were abbots, and had no need of great knights so near them. This I heard from a reliable voice, and I told them to hope in God that it would be so. I made myself so agreeable to them that I opened the door in the place that I wanted. God helped me by giving me that beginning of a house because of the charity I performed in raising the orphan in the faith of Jesus Christ. For thirty days before this, I had gone at Matins to the image of St. Mary the Fainting, which is in the Order of San Pablo of Córdoba, barefoot and with tears and sighs, and I prayed to her the prayer that follows sixty-three times, with sixty-six Ave Marias, in reverence for the sixty-six years that she lived with bitterness in this world, so that she would give me a home, and she gave me a home, and houses better than I deserved, out of her mercy. Here begins the prayer: "Mother St. Mary, your well-taught son took on great pain for you. You saw him tormented with great tribulation; your heart fainted after his tribulation. He gave you consolation; Lady, you who know my pain, give the same to me." It was the Virgin St. Mary's will that with the help of my lady aunt, and by the labor of my hands, I built in that yard two mansions, and an orchard, and another two or three houses for servants.

In this period of time a very cruel plague came. My lady aunt did not want to leave the city; I requested of her the kindness to permit me to flee with my children so that they would not die. She was not pleased but she gave me leave. I left Córdoba and went to Santa Ella with my children. The orphan that I raised lived in Santa Ella, and he lodged me in his house. All of the neighbors of the town were delighted by my coming. They received me with warm welcome, for they had been servants of the lord my father, and so they gave me the best house there was in that place, which was that belonging to Fernando Alonso Mediabarba. Being without suspicion, my lady aunt came there with her daughters, and I withdrew to a small room.

Her daughters, my cousins, never got on well with me because of all the good their mother had done me. I suffered so much bitterness from them that it cannot be written.

The plague came there, so my lady left with her people for Aguilar, and she took me with her as one of her own daughters, for she loved me greatly and said great things of me. I had sent the orphan that I raised to Ezija. The night that we arrived in Aguilar, the boy came from Ezija with two small tumors in his throat and three carbuncles on his face, and with a high fever. In that house there were Don Alonso Fernández, my cousin, and his wife and all of his household. Though all of the girls were my nieces and my friends, knowing that my servant came in such a condition, they came to me and said, "Your servant, Alonso, comes with the plague, and if Don Alonso Fernández sees it he will be furious at his being here with such an illness."

And the pain that reached my heart anyone who hears this history can well understand. I became worldly wise and bitter. Thinking that through me such great sorrow had entered that house, I had Miguel de Santa Ella called to me. He had been a servant of the master, my lord and father, and I begged him to take that boy to his house. The wretched man was afraid, and he said, "Lady, how can I take him with the plague, which will kill me?" And I said to him, "Son, God would not want that." Shamed by me, he took the boy; and through my sins, thirteen persons who watched over him by night all died.

I made a prayer which I had heard, which a nun said before a crucifix. It seems that she was a great devotee of Jesus Christ, and she says that after she had heard Matins she came before a crucifix. On her knees she prayed seven thousand times "Pious Son of the Virgin, may piety conquer you." One night, when the nun was near that place, she heard that the crucifix answered her, and it said, "Pious you called me, and pious I will be for you." I found great devotion in these words. I prayed this prayer each night, begging God to free me and my children, and if he had to take someone, let it be the eldest, for he was very sick.

One night it was God's will that there was no one to watch over that sorrowful boy, for all who had until then watched over him had died. My son, who was called Juan Fernández de Henestrosa like his grandfather, and who was twelve years and four months old, came to me and said, "Lady, is there no one to watch over Alonso tonight?" And I told him, "You watch over him, for the love of God." He replied to me, "Lady, now that the others have all died, do you want to kill me?" I said to him, "For my charity, God will take pity on me." And my son, so as not to disobey me, went to keep vigil. Through my sins, that night he was given the pestilence, and another day I buried him. The sick one lived after all the others had died.

Doña Teresa, the wife of my cousin Don Alonso Fernández, became very angry because my son was dying in her house at that time. She ordered that he be removed from the house on account of his illness. I was so transfixed by grief that I could not speak for the shame that those words caused me. My poor son said, "Tell my lady Doña Teresa not to cast me away, for my soul will leave now for heaven." He died that night. He was buried in Santa María la Coronada, which is in the same town. Because Doña Teresa felt very hostile to me, and I did not know why, she ordered that he not be buried within the town. When they took him to be buried, I went with him. As I went through the streets with my son, people came out, making a great hue and cry, ashamed for me. They said, "Come out, lords, and see the most unfortunate, forsaken, and accursed woman in the world!" with shouts that trespassed the heavens. Like those of that place, all who were there in that crowd were servants of the lord my father, and had been brought up by him. Although they knew that it grieved their present lords, they made a great lament with me as if I were their lady.

This same night, after I came from burying my son, they told me to return to Córdoba. I went to my lady aunt to see if she had ordered this. She said to me, "Lady niece, I cannot fail to do it, for I have promised my daughter-in-law and my daughters, for they are acting as one. In the meantime, it distresses me to have you leave, although I have granted permission. I do not know what annoyance you have caused my daughter-in-law Doña Teresa, that makes her so hostile to you."

I said to her with many tears, "Lady, if I have deserved this, may God not save me." And so I returned to my house in Córdoba.

The Christian Kingdoms and Muslim Granada (Fifteenth Century)