



La princesa de Éboli cautiva del rey: Vida de Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda (1540–1592)

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Helen H. Reed and Trevor J. Dadson. *La princesa de Éboli cautiva del rey: Vida de Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda (1540–1592)*. Marcial Pons, 2015. 539 pp.

This meticulously researched biography by Helen Reed and Trevor Dadson represents a major contribution to our knowledge of one of the most misunderstood feminine figures of early modern Spain. An aristocratic woman from the illustrious Mendoza family, the Princess of Eboli, the title by which she is popularly known, moved in the most powerful circles of sixteenth-century Spain, enhanced by her marriage to Ruy Gómez, trusted advisor and secretary of state to King Phillip II. Although her life has both captured the popular imagination and been the subject of serious scholarly study, her image has been distorted by myth making and speculation, perhaps a natural outcome of a woman who sparked rumors and gossip about her indiscretions and her later imprisonment by the king. But thanks to Reed and Dadson, both respected scholars of early modern Spain, we now have a reliable account with which to assess the life of Ana de Mendoza. Although the Princess of Eboli did act in some ways contrary to the gendered expectations of obedience and silence imposed on women, as the authors reveal, she was in fact a flesh and blood woman who used all available means at her disposal to promote her family's best interests and to protect and augment her domains. To the very end of her life, she fought to recuperate her position as guardian of her children and administrator of her estates.

The prologue (11–27) begins with examples of the numerous modern cultural manifestations inspired by the life of Ana de Mendoza, followed by a summary that traces the origins of her maligned reputation in the opinions of her contemporaries and through the mainly negative judgments on the part of early historians. The authors also present a balanced reassessment of the past and present scholarship that contributed to their biography, the

editorial criteria used, and the origins and method of their working relationship. The success of their collaboration is evident by the univocal narrative voice that guides the reader through the political and social complexities of sixteenth-century Spain. The authors clearly articulate their purpose in presenting as truthful and dispassionate a version of her life as possible (25). They seek to avoid adding to the myth making by situating their subject in the context of the second half of the sixteenth century and assessing her actions accordingly (26). For example, they shed new light on her financial competence, especially in the face of economic hardship, and on her dedication to the well-being of her children. Although Ana was exceptional in that she was a prolific letter writer, few letters directed to her remain. The authors fill in the gaps with correspondence written by her contemporaries, both friends and enemies, that includes mention of her. Especially invaluable, and their justification for a new biography, are newly discovered materials, including letters and documents written by Ana and edited in their 2013 edition, *Epistolario e historia documental de Ana de Mendoza y de la Cerda, Princesa de Eboli* (22).

A brief “introduction” (29–32) serves as a type of prequel that recounts the murder of Juan de Escobedo, the family’s trusted advisor and secretary to Don Juan de Austria, the event that proves to be the catalyst for Ana’s imprisonment without trial by King Phillip. The volume then presents Ana’s life chronologically divided into four main sections that are further subdivided into chapters. Some of the topics found in each section are highlighted in the following paragraphs.

“Parte Primera: La heredera” and “Parte Segundo: La esposa” trace the early years of her life from the origins of her family’s lineage to the humanistic and intellectual circles to which she was exposed as a child. One notes that throughout her life, Ana was surrounded by strong female figures. Her mother, Catalina de Silva, was a highly respected member of the humanist literary world and extremely well read, as the inventory of her impressive library indicates. Her paternal aunt, María de Mendoza, managed to lead an independent life and avoid both marriage and the convent. But the warring between her parents due to her father’s volatile nature and a very public and scandalous affair complicated her years as a young woman and wife, particularly after she sided with her mother. This situation is in contrast to her own marriage to Ruy Gómez, which was a productive one, both in progeny and in enriching the family estate in Pastrana, Spain. They founded religious houses and established a flourishing silk industry that benefited the town economically and brought in *moriscos*, Italians, and Portuguese for their skills.

In “Parte Tercera: La viuda,” one follows the devastating effects of Ruy’s sudden death, leaving Ana a young widow with six children and many debts due to the various estate and municipal projects in which the couple were engaged. Her first reaction was to enclose herself within the convent the couple had founded and take on the name Sor Ana de la Madre de Dios. Eventually, with outside pressure including pressure from the king, she emerged to take on her duties of guardian to her children and administrator of her estates. After the death of her mother who named Ana her heir, she spent the next five years in Madrid, Spain. While occupied with arranging the marriages of her children and other business, Ana renewed her acquaintance with Antonio Pérez, former protector of her late husband, Ruy, and now secretary of state to King Phillip. Gossip circulated about the two of them, and after the murder of Escobedo and secret inquiries into Pérez, Ana was not only invoked as a “Jezebel” due to her indiscretions, but herself became a target in the investigations as Phillip sought to avoid any scandal about his own role in the murder.

The last section, “Parte Cuarta: La Cautiva,” involves the darkest episodes of the princess’s life as she is imprisoned by King Phillip without formal charges brought against her and without legal recourse to defend herself. The authors explore the reasons that would

lead Phillip to want to silence Ana. They trace her imprisonment in the harsh confines of the Pinto prison to her final house arrest in the family home in Pastrana, where she suffers abuse at the hands of Pedro Palomino, the appointed administrator of every aspect of her life after Phillip strips her of her rights as guardian of her children and administrator of her estates, thus depriving her of her “razón de ser como mujer y como noble” (379). They document Ana’s tenacity in attempting to recover her rights and subvert the authority of her jailors through various clever strategies. Throughout her hardships, Ana remains obstinate in continuing to find ways to help Antonio Pérez, who himself was the subject of secret investigations ordered by the king. While Pérez was able to escape Spain and thus avoid punishment, Ana spent her last days essentially a prisoner enclosed within two small rooms of her estate. The work concludes with an “epílogo” that informs the reader about the fate of Ana’s contemporaries after her death. An exhaustive *Bibliografía* as well as a helpful *Índice de ilustraciones* and *Índice onomástico* complete the volume.

By thoroughly contextualizing Ana’s life through a detailed account of the complex milieu of Hapsburg, Spain, Reed and Dadson do not lose sight of their protagonist but instead succeed in presenting an objective analysis of the Princess of Eboli based on thorough documentation and reasoned arguments. We owe them a debt of gratitude for providing a valuable resource for specialists of early modern Spain in shedding light on a remarkable woman whose image has been obscured throughout the centuries.

Works cited

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