

Franganillo Álvarez, Alejandra, *A la sombra de la reina. Poder, patronazgo y servicio en la corte de la Monarquía Hispánica (1615-1644)*, Madrid, CSIC, 2020, 321 págs. ISBN: 9788400106263.

While much work has been done in recent years on the households of kings and princes in Spain and other early modern European states, far less attention has been paid to the households of their wives and consorts, although here too the picture is less bleak than it was a few years ago<sup>1</sup>. To appreciate the historical significance of these households we are not solely dependent on contemporary descriptions. Alongside the verbal evidence, visual evidence can also be brought into play to illustrate the part played by female quarters in shaping the structure and operation of court life. The standard architectural lay-out of palaces in the Hispanic world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries offers valuable clues to the prominence of these female quarters in the fashioning of court culture. Following Philip II's decision in 1561 to make the fortress-like Alcázar in Madrid the permanent seat of his court, his architects embarked on major works of reconstruction and renovation. The large central patio was divided into two unequal parts, with the larger of the two, the *Patio de la Reina*, occupying the eastern side. During the reign of Philip III, the two Patios were linked by a royal chapel for joint use by the king and the queen. These architectural arrangements set the pattern for the design of viceregal and episcopal palaces throughout the *Monarquía* from the reign of Philip III onwards.

The queen who figures in the title of Alejandra Franganillo Álvarez's book, Isabel de Borbón, was the eldest daughter of Henri IV and Marie de Médici. Under the terms of the peace treaty of 1612 between France and Spain she was to marry Philip, the Prince of Asturias, the eldest son of Philip III, while Philip's daughter, the future French queen Anne of Austria, was to marry the young French king, Louis XIII. Isabel's actual marriage only took place three years later after numerous delays brought about by questions of protocol, reputation, and dynastic conflict. Once she was finally installed with her own household in her private wing of the Alcázar, the marriage between the new Princess of Asturias and her twelve-year-old husband was not consummated until November 1619, when her husband reached the age of sixteen. Their first child, the Infanta Margarita María was born prematurely in 1621 and died within twenty-four hours. By this time Isabel was no longer the Princess of Asturias but the Queen of Spain, following the premature death of her father-in-law on 31 March 1621, shortly after Philip's return from a state visit to Portugal, in which Isabel accompanied him along with his court.

Her family life was a tragic saga of miscarriages and of the early deaths of children and made all the sadder by the notorious infidelity of her husband. By the time

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Sánchez, M. S.: *The Empress, the Queen, and the Nun. Women and Power at the Court of Philip III of Spain*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

of her death in 1644 she had given birth to four daughters, of whom only one, the Infanta María Teresa, born in 1638, survived into adulthood, to be married to Louis XIV under the terms of the next great Franco-Spanish settlement, the Peace of the Pyrenees, in 1659. Her only son, Prince Baltasar Carlos, was born in 1629. His long-awaited birth was acclaimed almost as a miracle, guaranteeing the succession to the Spanish throne and the continuity of the dynasty in the male line. She did not live to see the prince's death in Zaragoza 1645, a year after her own.

Despite her historical importance, especially in the last period of her life when the *Monarquía* was shaken to its foundations by the revolts in 1640 of Catalonia and Portugal and the king was campaigning in Aragon, she remains a little known or studied Queen. Not even portraiture is of much help. The only known pictorial representation of her that is certainly by the hand of Velázquez is the majestic equestrian portrait painted to accompany the portraits of her husband and son which were given pride of place when the *Salón de Reinos* of the palace of the Buen Retiro was completed in the mid-1630's. Other surviving portraits appear to be studio works and cannot safely be attributed to the master himself.

By contemporary accounts Isabel brought with her to Spain her French vivacity; she enjoyed and contributed to the pleasures of court life; and she clearly had a sharp intelligence. But she remains an elusive figure. It is not surprising, in view of the elusiveness of Isabel both as a Queen and a woman, that Dr. Franganillo should have given her a secondary place in the title of her book and chosen instead her shadow -*a la sombra*-. Although the book has some valuable points to make about the Queen's political activity, this is essentially a study of her household, first as Princess and then as Queen. It is based on an impressive coverage of archival sources and of contemporary and later literature, as evidenced by the extensive bibliography, which is divided into works published before and after 1900. Such wide-ranging and careful reading has yielded a mass of detailed information about the structure and functioning of Isabel's household, the appointments made to it during her reign, and the patronage and clientage networks on which it was dependent. We learn much, for instance, about the conflicts and tensions between Isabel's Spanish and French ladies-in-waiting following her arrival in Madrid, and about marriage alliances between Castilian nobles serving the Queen in her household and elite members of other realms and regions of the *Monarquía*, including most interestingly Portugal.

The analysis and descriptions produce some fascinating nuggets, of which the best is provided by an observation made by the Duke of Monteleón to Lerma in 1616: "la vida humana ya sabe V.E. que no es reloj concertado, y que quiere Dios que haya siempre algo en que padecer" (p. 43). This is one of those comments that illuminate an age. Yet must be said that there is a price to be paid for such a massive accumulation of detailed information. Although a substantial part of the book consists of numerous pages containing fresh and indispensable information about the functioning of the Queen's household and about the individuals, both male and female, who staffed it, these pages are best treated as being for consultation only. They are simply too comprehensive in their coverage to be read in coherent sequence. The number of words could in my view have been sharply reduced if the author had at times sacrificed the verbal for the visual. For example, it would have made life easier for the reader if marriage alliances and clientage networks had been charted and mapped rather than simply described.

Isabel herself finally emerges from the shadows when the king is away from Madrid and campaigning in Aragon and leaves his wife in nominal charge of the government during his absence. Following earlier precedents of feminine rule when the king is absent, Philip set up early in 1642 a Junta presided over by the Queen and named its membership in consultation with Olivares. Essentially those appointed were the Count-Duke's *hechuras*, his relatives and dependents. Some of these were too sick or too old to be of much use, and in practice the bulk of the Junta's business was handled by Don García de Haro, second Count of Castriello, and a close relative of the Count-Duke on his wife's side. Acting as the intermediary between the Queen and her absent husband, Castriello seems to have struck up a close working partnership with the Queen, based on mutual dependence. The Queen relied on Castriello's knowledge and his experience of the workings of government, while Castriello in turn needed the royal stamp of approval to legitimize his decisions and those of the Junta.

Over all the events of his last years of power loomed the forbidding presence of the Count-Duke, who would eventually be permitted by the king on 23 January 1643 to give up the cares of office and retire from the court. He went first to his rural palace in Loeches, before moving to Toro, further from harm's way in the eyes of his enemies. They remained convinced that the Queen's Camarera Mayor, the Countess of Olivares, who continued as before with her household duties, was plotting with his adherents a return to power.

A vast contemporary literature developed around the dramatic fall of the king's favourite, and Dr. Franganillo re-examines it in attempt to determine the degree of truth, if any, in the so-called *conspiración de las mujeres*, an alleged conspiracy given a new lease of life by Gregorio Marañón in his 1936 biography of the Count-Duke. This conspiracy theory held that a group of influential women, with the Queen at their head, had long been hostile to Olivares and now sought revenge. After an exhaustive survey of the literature and of ambassadorial reports, Dr. Franganillo main conclusion is that there are no solid proofs of the Queen's participation in the growing movement of hostility to the Count-Duke before 1640 (p. 275). On the other hand, as she acknowledges, there were good reasons for Isabel to tell Philip on one of his return visits to Madrid that it was time for his favourite to go. Olivares was worn out, in poor health, and perhaps by now mentally unbalanced. His policies had led to disaster, abroad in the war with the French and the Dutch, and at home in the peninsula itself. This was enough to justify his removal from office, but there were also vital personal and family interests at stake. The Count of Castriello was one of the Count-Duke's relatives which who had every intention of keeping power in the hands of the Guzmán-Haro connection. With the gradual rise to prominence of the Count-Duke's nephew, Don Luis de Haro, as the King's principal minister, they achieved their goal.

The closeness of the working relationship between Castriello and the Queen was to taint Isabel historiographically with guilt by association. In recounting and analysing these dramatic events and placing them in the context of the queen's household arrangements, Dr. Franganillo has made a useful and balanced contribution to this ever-expanding historiography.

John Elliott  
Oriel College, University of Oxford  
[john.elliott@history.ox.ac.uk](mailto:john.elliott@history.ox.ac.uk)