

THE CHAUCERS IN SPAIN:  
FROM THE WEDDING TO THE FUNERAL

*Chaucer Life-Records*<sup>1</sup> was the culmination of the extraordinary labours to attempt to cover Chaucer's biography. This handsome volume will be for many years the point of departure of any work on the poet's life. Since this excellent work was published in 1966, some books and articles have been published on this subject. Although there are significant and important contributions among them, such as *Chaucer and his world* (1978) by Derek Brewer, *Chaucer: his Life, his Works, his World* (1981) by Howard<sup>2</sup>, and *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (1993) by Derek Pearsall<sup>3</sup> some questions naturally still remain: the exact day of the poet's birth, his activity from 1360 to 1366 and nearly everything about his domestic life. "The problems of writing a life of Chaucer"<sup>4</sup> cannot lead us to the frustration of a natural wish to know everything about his life. We know that, as Derek Pearsall (1993: 2) says in answer to the question as whether it is worth writing a new biography of the poet:

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<sup>1</sup> I am chiefly grateful to Professor Martin M. Crow whose opinion on the most important results of this paper, after reading some of my works on Chaucer and Spain, has encouraged me. All quotations are from Crow Martin M. & Calir C. Olson C., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). All quotations are from this edition and the references to this volume will be incorporated into the text, under the abbreviation *Life-Records*.

<sup>2</sup> D. R. Howard, *Chaucer: his Life, his Works, his World*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1981. I am very grateful to Martha S. Waller, retired Professor of Butler University, for sending me Howard's references to Philippa Chaucer from this book, and for her advice and corrections on this article.

<sup>3</sup> I do not know how to express my gratitude to both these great scholars for their correspondence connected with some of my research on this subject. I have been greatly inspired by D. Pearsall's *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), and D. Brewer's *Chaucer and his world* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1978).

<sup>4</sup> This is the title of Derek Pearsall's paper in the VII SELIM. (Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature), Conference held in Cáceres, 1994.

there are many who would think not, arguing one or more of the following: that it cannot be done, that it is not worth doing and that it has been done.

Many aspects of Chaucer's biography can give controversy such as the identify of the real father of Thomas Chaucer<sup>1</sup>, the existence of two Philippas<sup>2</sup> or, even, the existence of two Chaucers<sup>3</sup>, although, so far as I know, his identity has never seriously been questioned.

It is not the intention in this paper to invent a part of a biography, unsupported by real evidence, in order to fill some gaps in the poet's biography. This paper is concerned with Chaucer's marriage and the connection between the Chaucers and Spain. I will try to show how there were two important years for Chaucer's marriage: in 1366 the poet was in Spain and this was also the year of the wedding; in 1387 Philippa Chaucer was in Spain and it was 1387, the year she died. I am going to support my work on historical data from two sources: *Chaucer Life-Records* and Ayala's *Chronicles*<sup>4</sup>. The results of this verification will not provide the unanswerable documentary evidence but, I hope, they can be a contribution to a new starting point which can lead us to a better knowledge of Chaucer's life.

#### I.- 1366: CHAUCER WAS IN SPAIN AND MARRIED PHILIPPA

The publication of a short article by Suzanne Honoré-Duvergé<sup>5</sup> revealing that Chaucer visited Spain with a safe-conduct, granted by the king of Navarre, cast some light on the obscurity of the period from October 1360 to

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<sup>1</sup> For a biography and discussion see K. B. McFarlane, "Henry V, Bishop Beaufort and the Red Hat, 1417-1421", *EHR* 60 (1945), pp. 316-348, 332-337; J. A. F. Thomson, "John de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk," *Speculum*, 54 (1979), pp. 528-42; E. A. Greening Lamborn, "The Arms on the Chaucer Tomb at Ewelme", *Oxoniensia*, 5 (1940), pp. 78-93.

<sup>2</sup> For this possibility, see D. Pearsall, *op. ct.*, p. 35.

<sup>3</sup> For this possibility, see, A. C. Baugh, "Chaucer the Man", *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, edited by Beryl Rowland. London: O.U.P, 1968, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> J. L. Martín, ed., *Pero López de Ayala. Crónicas* ( Barcelona: Planeta, 1991). All quotations are from this edition. The references to this book will be incorporated in the text under the abbreviation *Crónicas*.

<sup>5</sup> S. Honoré-Duvergé, "Chaucer en Espagne? (1366)", *Recueil de Travaux offert & M. Clovis Brunel*, II (Paris: 1955), pp. 9-13.

June 1366. But, we cannot deduce (from this document) any clear reason for his journey.

Several possible explanations have been suggested. Suzanne Honoré-Duvergé believes "that Chaucer may have joined the forces of Trastámara and taken part in the military campaign"<sup>1</sup> There is a mistake in this opinion, as was pointed out by Thomas Garbaty in his important article "Chaucer in Spain, 1366: Soldier of Fortune or Agent of the Crown".<sup>2</sup>

If it can be accepted that one can accept that Chaucer came to Spain to take part in that campaign, he did so, of course, on the side of Peter, the Cruel, who was allied with Edward III whose military forces were led by his son the Black Prince.

Another possibility was offered by Crow and Olson suggesting that Chaucer was an ordinary pilgrim to the shrine of St. James. Baugh however, (1968: 56) rejects both possibilities and when, referring to the second one, he states that "*English pilgrims to Compostela habitually went to La Coruña, in Galicia, by sea.*"<sup>3</sup>

This argument is not strong enough to reject Crow and Olson's opinion: pilgrims also went to Galicia by the "*French route*"<sup>4</sup>.

Chaucer may have been sent on a diplomatic mission: to negotiate with the king of Navarre, Charles II, the passage of the English military forces through his territory, but this was quite unlikely. The safe-conduct was valid from February 22 to May 24 of 1366, and the agreement with the king of Navarre was in 1367.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert C. BAUGH, *op. cit.*, p. 56

<sup>2</sup> I cannot sufficiently express my gratitude to Professor Thomas J. Garbaty, who sent me his article published in *MLN*, 5, (1967) and encouraged me to work on this subject.

<sup>3</sup> Albert C. Baugh, "Chaucer the Man", *Companion to Chaucer Studies*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London: OUP, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> See Vázquez de Parga, J. M. Lacarra, & Uria, *Peregrinaciones a Santiago*, (Madrid: 1948).

<sup>5</sup> "...el rey de Navarra fuese para Pamplona, e estovo allí, e fizo otros tratos con el rey Don Pedro e con el príncipe de Gales en esta manera: que el rey de Navarra les diese el paso por el puerto de Roncesvalles," (*Crónicas*, p. 331) "The king of Navarre went to Pamplona and stayed there and made other treaties with king Peter and with the Prince of Wales as follows: that the king of Navarre would allow them free entry to enter through the mountain pass of Roncesval."

None of the above possibilities is supported by historical documents. However, this is my hypothesis: Chaucer went to Spain to persuade the English knights to abandon Henry of Trastamara so that the English military forces would fight on the side of king Peter. Baugh (1968: 69) and Pearsall (1993: 53) suggest the same idea but with no document to support it. And Baugh even casts doubt on Chaucer's success in his mission:

his mission was a last minute attempt to make contact with the Gascon knights and seek to detach them from the enterprise. Whether he ever caught up with them is doubtful.

If we follow the steps of Hugh of Calveley, the most important English knight in the Companies on the side of Henry of Trastamara, in Ayala's *Chronicles*, we can find the answer.

Calveley had been a decisive help for the English victory in the struggle for Brittany and had begun to invade Castile on March 1366<sup>1</sup>.

Ayala (1991: 331-333) tells how Henry of Trastamara, who had invaded Castile and was proclaimed king of Castile, was aware of the Black Prince's proposals: "... *que avía ya nuevas del príncipe de Gales como venía a ayudar al rey don Pedro... e esto fue en el mes de febrero deste año.*"<sup>2</sup>

Peter, the Cruel, had fled from Seville to Galicia and finally to Bayonne asking for the Black Prince's help. It is significant that the period which covered Chaucer's safe-conduct was from February 22 to May 24, and in February Henry of Trastamara had news about the Black Prince's departure to Castile. Calveley had been successful in his attack on Calahorra in "early March". Was Chaucer's mission successful? Ayala (1991: 341) answers the question:

... Mosen Hugo de Caureley, que era un caballero inglés con quatrocientos de caballo de su compañía, que tenía consigo de

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<sup>1</sup> "Early in March Calveley opened the attack by turning north and following the course of the Ebro, passed through the southern tip of Navarre, and reached Alfaro in Castilian territory. When the town refused to surrender he pushed on to Calahorra." Baugh, "*Chaucer the Man*", p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> " They had heard about how the Prince of Wales was coming to help king Peter.... and this happened in February of that year."

Inglaterra, partió del rey don Enrique, e fuese para Navarra, por quanto su señor el Príncipe de Gales venía de la otra parte, e non podía ser contra el. E el rey don Enrique, como quier que sopo que el dicho mosén Hugo partía del, e le pudiera facer algun enojo, non lo quiso facer, teniendo que el dicho caballero hacía su debdo en se ir a servir a su señor el príncipe, que era fijo de su señor el rey de Inglaterra.<sup>1</sup>

Chaucer's arguments convinced not only Sir Calveley but Henry of Trastamara himself. And Ayala's *Chronicles* reaffirm this success: Sir Calveley not only abandoned Henry of Trastamara but also he took part in the battle of Nájera against him<sup>2</sup>, and some days after the victory of Nájera he, as a reliable person at the Black Prince's service, was sent as a messenger to the king of Aragon<sup>3</sup>. Chaucer's success is beyond all doubt.

Was Philippa one of Chaucer's three companions, "not separately identified" who went with him to Spain in 1366? There is no record to prove it, we only can deduce a positive answer from other historical data. We know that Philippa is named as Chaucer's wife in a transaction on the Receipt Roll under 21 December 1381 (*Life-Records*, p. 77). Crow and Olson (1966: 68) say that:"

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<sup>1</sup> (*Crónicas*, p. 341) "The knight Hugo of Carvely, who was an English knight with four hundred cavalymen from England, abandoned king Henry, and went to Navarre because his lord, the Prince of Wales was coming from the other direction and he could not fight against him. And when king Henry knew that this Hugo had left him, and he could have done him some harm, nevertheless he did not wish to do so, considering that this knight was doing his duty by his lord the Prince, who was the son of the king of England."

<sup>2</sup> "De la parte del rey don Pedro fue ordenada la batalla en esta guisa. Todos vinieron a pie, e en la avanguardia venía el duque de Alencastre, hermano del príncipe, que decían don Juan, e mosén Juan Chandós, que era condestable de Guiana por el príncipe, e mosén Raúl Camois, e mosén Hugo de Caureley, e Mosén Oliver, señor de Clison, e otros muchos caballeros e escuderos de Inglaterra e de Bretaña." (*Crónicas*, 344). "On the side of king Peter the battle was planned as follows: everyone was on foot, and the Duke of Lancaster, who was called John, the Prince's brother, was in the vanguard with the knight John of Chandos, who had been appointed by the prince the military chief of Guiana, and Raul Camois, and Hugo of Calveley, and Oliver, lord of Clison, and many other knights and squires from England and Brittany."

<sup>3</sup> "Otro sí el príncipe de Gales envió luego al rey de Aragón por mensajero a mosén Hugo de Caureley, un caballero de Inglaterra a tratar con él sus amistades." (*Crónicas*, 360). "And afterwards the Prince of Wales sent Hugo of Calveley, a knight from England, as a messenger to the king of Aragon to draw up a treaty of friendship with him."

*The recipient of these annuity payments of 1381 had borne the name Philippa Chaucer when the annuity was granted on 12 September 1366."*

We know that one " *Philippa Chaucer una domicellarum camere Philippe regine Anglie*" (*Life-Records*, p. 67) received an annuity of ten marks on 12 September 1366. So, as Pearsall (1993: 50): says " *she was given her husband's surname*". And once again Crow and Olson (1966: 68) provide a valuable clue to support my hypothesis:

The maiden name of the wife occurs so frequently in grants and payments made soon after marriage as to suggest that Philippa Chaucer had been married long enough by 12 Sep. 1366 to be already identified in the court as Geoffrey Chaucer's wife.

If "*Chaucer had been married long enough by 12 Sep. 1366*", was he married in the period of his safe-conduct (February 22 to May 24)? There are only three months from June to September. Was this period of time "*long enough as to be identified in the court as Geoffrey Chaucer's wife*? If we think that a positive answer to these two questions is a reasonable argument, the possibility that Philippa Chaucer's was in Spain in 1366 becomes more plausible. In any case, I believe, as Crow and Olson (1966: 68) that "*Chaucer must have married her on or before 12 September 1366 unless her maiden name was Chaucer*". This 1366 was the year of Chaucer's stay in Spain and the year of his wedding: an important year in his life.

## II.- 1386-87: PHILIPPA CHAUCER WAS IN SPAIN AND DIED OF PESTILENCE

This conflict was to be the origin of John of Gaunt's claim to the Crown of Castile and Leon because, as it is well known, he married Constance of Castile, Pedro's daughter in 1371, and this was his most important link to Spain. His efforts to realise succeed in this claim would last sixteen years. The history of this period of time is included in Ayala's *Chronicles*. The last attempt was in 1386 when the Duke arrived at Galicia on 25 July, with his family:

Dende a pocos días llegaronle nuevas al maestre Davis cómo el duque de Alencastre era aportado con pieza de navíos e de gentes en la villa de la Coruña, que es en Galicia, día de Santiago, e cómo

tomara y algunas galeas que falló del rey de Castilla, e que la gente que el dicho duque traía eran mil e quinientas lanzas, e otros tantos archeros, e todo de muy buena gente. E traía consigo su mujer doña Constanza, que era fija del rey don Pedro, e una fija que avía della, que decían doña Catalina. E traía otras dos fijas que el duque oviera primero de otra mujer con quien fuera casado antes, fija de otro duque de Alencastre e conde de Dervi que fuera antes que dél, e a la mayor decían doña Phelipa, la cual casó entonce con el maestre Davis que se llamaba rey de Portugal, segund adelante diremos, e a la otra decían doña Isabel, la cual casó entonce con un caballero que venía con el duque, que decían mosén Juan de Holanda, que fuera hijo de la princesa e de mosén Thomas de Holanda, e era entonce mosén Juan de Holanda en esa cabalgada, e el duque de Alencastre fízole su condestable.<sup>1</sup>

If Philippa was in Constance's service, she ought to have been at her service in Galicia in 1386. Her husband's daughters were to marry important men and her own daughter Catherine would marry Henry III of Castile. Constance's need of household chores might be important enough to get rid of Philippa, who was not only granted but highly esteemed by her as Crow and Olson (1966: 86) clarify when they explain that the term "*nostrre bien ame damoysele*' is applied elsewhere in the register of John of Gaunt to ladies in immediate attendance upon the Duchess Constance.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, her son Thomas Chaucer was probably of the party.

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<sup>1</sup> (*Crónicas*, p. 614) "the Grand Master Davis had news a few days previously of how the Duke of Lancaster had arrived with ships and militarymen in the town of La Coruña, which is in Galicia, the day on St. James, and how he took some ships of the king of Castile, and among the soldiers there were 1500 lancers and a like number of archers and all of them were good. And he brought with him his wife Constance, who was the daughter of king Peter and a daughter who had been born of her, who was called Catherine, and he brought two other daughters the Duke had of another woman whom he had previously married, who was the daughter of the former Duke of Lancaster and Earl of Derby; the elder daughter was called Philippa, who married the Grand Master Davis, who was called king of Portugal, as we shall tell later on, and the other daughter was called Elisabeth, who then married a knight who came with the Duke, who was called John of Holland, who was son of the princess and Thomas of Holland, because the Duke of Lancaster had made him his military chief."

<sup>2</sup> For further clarification, see the reference to the annuity of ten pounds granted to Philippa Chaucer on 30 August 1372 in *Chaucer Life-Records*, pp. 85-86.

There is no record to prove that the Duke of Lancaster was Chaucer's patron<sup>1</sup> but there some records to demonstrate a close connection between the Chaucers and John of Gaunt:

- \* Philippa Chaucer received an annuity on 30 August 1372 for attendance upon the Duchess Constance and some gifts from 1373 to 1382.
- \* Geoffrey Chaucer and his wife received an annuity from Gaunt on 13 June 1374.

I agree with Derek Pearsall (1993: 83) when he comments on the Chaucers' annuity from Gaunt, in 1374, and says that "*the annuity most probably continued to be paid until Gaunt's death in 1399*". Although it is true, as he says, that "*there is no documentary evidence of any futher personal connection between the poet and the prince*", I think that, if there is anything, we would find it connected with the Duke of Lancaster's intervention in Spain. We know that there are no records of Gaunt's grants to Philippa after the gift on 6 May 1382 because, indeed, there are no records of any kind of Gaunt's household expenses since the Register broke off in 1383.

I think it is important to focus attention on the last and most important record concerning Philippa Chaucer's connection with The Lancaster House: her admission to the fraternity of Lincoln Cathedral. This admission does not only imply her relationship with her nephews (John Beaufort and Thomas Swynford), as it seems natural, but the importance of a "*bien ame damoysele*" (*Life-Records*, p. 86) in Gaunt's household. This important ceremony was held on 19 February 1386.

Regarding Gaunt's campaign in Spain in 1386 Derek Pearsall (1993: 142) thinks that "Philippa was not of the party. In 1386 she was probably residing more permanently with her sister in Lincolnshire."

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<sup>1</sup> John of Gaunt styled himself "roy de Castille et de Leon duc de Lancastre" in all documents from 1372 to 1388 and as I will try to show in a forthcoming article in the *Chaucer Review*, Chaucer supports this claim in *The Book of the Duchess* when he defines him as "*this kyng*" (1314).



Where was Philippa Chaucer? I consider that the strong negative "*was not of the party*", in Pearsall's opinion, is weakened by the uncertainty of "*probably residing...*" We know that her sister Katherine Swynford sometimes dwelt at her manor in Kettlethorpe and that some of her payments were received in Lincolnshire by a sheriff (*Life-Records*, p.77) in 1379. I believe that her relationship with Gaunt's mistress does not imply a relief of her duties in connexion with her "immediate attendance upon the Duchess Constance" just when Gaunt was very much interested in using his wife as a coin of exchange. It is well known, however, that John of Gaunt lost interest in Constance of Castile after returning from Spain in 1389. Pearsall (1993: 142), himself, says that,

During the early 1380s, Philippa probably shared her life between the household of her husband and that of the Duchess Constance, who spent more time with her husband now that his hopes of a throne in Spain were his main political ambition.

Can 1386 be included in these "*early 1380s*" taking into account that Gaunt's "*hopes of a throne in Spain*" were supported now by the king and by a subsidy of Parliament?

On the other hand, "*in June 1386, Geoffrey and Philippa received an assignment upon William Barwell, who had been sheriff of Worcestershire in 1383,*" (*Life-Records*, p. 335) but this does not imply that Philippa Chaucer was there. It is not significant that, the fact that:

After June 1386 Chaucer's payments were always in cash drawn at the exchequer by his own hands until, after the surrender of his annuity to John Scalby, he received a *pro rata* payment in February 1389 by the hands of Scalby. (*Life-Records*, p. 335)

Gaunt and the king of Portugal decided that they would stay in Galicia from 25 July 1386 until the following summer. But instead of increasing their power by making preparations for the attack they were defeated, before fighting, by the worst enemy: "*pestilence*". Therefore they did not wait until the summer, and in March 1387 they invaded Castile. Ayala narrates the situation

Después que entró en Castilla, siempre ovo grand mortandad en sus compañías, en guisa que perdió muchas gentes de las suyas; e segund se sopo por cierto, morieron trescientos caballeros e escuderos, e muchos archeros e otras gentes.<sup>1</sup>

Philippa Chaucer might have been among these "*otras gentes*", and probably died in Spain or Portugal of "*pestilence*". We do not have any record of her death but if, as Pearsall (1993: 25) says as regards those who died of plague, "*there were not enough living to bury the dead, and there were certainly not enough priests to give all the dying the last sacraments*" it would be very difficult to find any record, mainly knowing how elusive Chaucer was about autobiographical references in his poetry.

Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (1966: 84) conclude that:

Because for several terms Philippa Chaucer had drawn her annuity through her husband and because Geoffrey Chaucer drew only his own Michaelmas instalments on 7 November 1387, it would appear that her death occurred sometime between 18 June 1387, when she drew her last payment, and 7 November of that year.

I hope that the new information drawn from our conclusion would help from now on in future research concerning this subject.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> (*Crónicas*, p. 627) " After entering Castile, there was a large number of victims among his entourage, so that he lost many of his people, and as it was well known, three hundred knights and squires and many archers and other people died."

<sup>2</sup> I am preparing a new article with the valuable help of Professor William Askins, who has provide new and important data to complete this research. The most striking and convincing data may be the finding of a record to support the hypothesis of Philippa's death in Spain.

*The Chaucers in Spain*

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