

THE NAME OF SIGISMUND IN THE SPANISH GOLDEN AGE: FROM SIGISMUND BÁTHORY TO SIGISMUND III OF POLAND

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Abstract: Our article focuses on the image that two of the important Sigismunds of our history have had in the Spanish mentality of the Golden Age: Sigismund Báthory, prince of Transylvania and Sigismund III of Poland. The details provided by the Golden Age literature are analysed with the instruments of comparative and cultural studies in order to depict the fascinating approach to a faraway land and characters.

Keywords: Transylvania, Poland, Spain, Sigismund Báthory, Sigismund III.

The name of Sigismund has given a lot to speak about in the Spanish Golden Age literature, personalising great historical figures. One of them was Sigismund Báthory, whom I have often used in order to establish the connection between the Spanish and the Romanian cultures¹. Sigismund Báthory, prince of Transylvania and *miles Christi*, has been the central character of all sorts of Spanish literature, from travel literature or diplomatic reports (Alfonso Carrillo) to *relaciones de sucesos (avisí)* or chronicles, until a more popular type of literature – the plays, accessible to a wider range of public, as Golden Age theater was a sort of social mass phenomenon.

Nevertheless, Sigismund Báthory is not the only Sigismund of the Spanish Golden Age literature, as Sigismund III of Poland had his own supporters, making him one of the most emblematical figures of the Baroque: Calderón's Sigismund.

The name of Sigismund belonged mainly to the field of Counter-Reformation, the homonymous name of the prince who in *Life is a dream (La vida es sueño)* plays the part of the false Dmitriy I, the Polish schemer who wanted to reinstall Catholicism in Russia. Once again and for the umpteenth time, the literary

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¹ See Oana Sâmbrian, *El gusto del público español por las comedias de carácter histórico en la España barroca – El prodigioso príncipe transilvano*, in "Bulletin of Hispanic Studies", 89.1/2012, Liverpool, pp. 31-43; Idem, *La imagen de Transilvania en El príncipe prodigioso y El rey sin reino de Lope de Vega*, in "Olmedo Clásico", Olmedo, 2010, pp. 951-960.

source and history go hand in hand, as Sigismund III, king of Poland (1587-1632) and Sweden (1592-1604) had fought the Protestants within his kingdom².

After having analysed quite a generous *corpus* of plays, we have reached the conclusion that there are two “Sigismundian” schools: one of them that groups the descriptions and avatars of the Transylvanian prince, Sigismund Báthory, an image that started to emerge towards the end of the 16th century when the first *avisi* about this prince were published, and a second school that presents an almost barbarian Sigismund, an image that Calderón himself disseminated, and which could refer to any of them, the Transylvanian prince or the Polish king.

All in all, our *corpus* of plays is integrated by the following works: *El capitán prodigioso* by Luis Vélez de Guevara, *El rey sin reino*, *La Santa Liga*, *El Argel fingido*, *El gran Duque de Moscovia* by Lope de Vega, *Peligrar en los remedios* by Francisco de Rojas Zorrilla, *El alcázar del secreto* by Antonio de Solís, *Afectos de odio y amor* and *La vida es sueño* by Calderón.

SIGISMUND AND HIS AVATARS

We are not going to insist on analysing the text of Luis Vélez de Guevara, *El capitán prodigioso*, as we have already done that on previous occasions (see footnote 3). We will just remind the reader that this tragicomedy, probably written between 1596 and 1599, brought to light the Spanish collective mentality about Sigismund Báthory, with a special outlook to the relationships of that period, e.g. the secret mission of the Jesuit monk Alfonso Carrillo at the Transylvanian Court. Alfonso Carrillo’s informs and correspondence, together with quite some numerous amount of *avisi* published in Seville by Rodrigo de Cabrera³, represent the main historical source for Vélez’s play. Our most recent studies have proved that with almost all certainty, the source that Vélez based most of his script on was *Relación de lo sucedido al Serenísimo Príncipe Sigismundo Batori, Príncipe de Transilvania, Moldavia y Valaquia desde el principio del año pasado de noventa y cuatro hasta último de octubre de ese año* (Seville, Rodrigo de Cabrera, 1596), which narrated many of the historical events from Sigismund’s Transylvania, such as the conspiracy of the nobles to overrule their prince, their defeat and beheading etc.

² Simon A. Vosters, *La rendición de Bredá en la literatura y el arte de España*, Londra, Tamesis Books, 1973, p. 120.

³ *Nuevos avisos. Venidos De Roma, de lo sucedido en el Exercito Imperial, y lo que agora de nuevo a hecho el Serenissimo Sigismundo Batorio, Principe de la Transilvania, y de otrs avisos de diversas partes*, Sevilla, Rodrigo Cabrera. 2 hs., 1599; *Verdadera relación de la insigne victoria que Michael Bayboda (de la Balachia); Capitan general del Principe de Transilvania a alcançado contra el Gran Turco, en la toma de la ciudad de Nicopoli, cabeça del Reyno de Bulgaria, con muerte de quinze mil Turcos, y presa de ciento y quarenta piezas de Artilleria. Succedido todo en el mes de Octubre del Año proximo passado de Nouenta y ocho*, Sevilla. Rodrigo de Cabrera. 2 hs., 1599; *Relacion de la gran victoria alcançada por el Serenissimo Principe de la Transilvania con el socorro del Señor Miguel Vayuada de la Valachia, Capitan general del Emperador [...]* Valencia, 1603.

Due to characters like Sigismund Báthory, the Transylvanian image of the *miles Christi* started to grow deeply into the Spanish mentality, following the footsteps of John Huniady from the previous century. After his victory in Belgrade against the Ottoman Empire (1456), Hunyadi's famous military deeds appeared in the chronicles of Pedro de Mejía and Vasco Díaz Tanco. The incredible success of this Transylvanian character determined Constantin Marinescu to affirm that one of the most important Spanish knights, Tirant lo Blanc, the main character of Joannot Martorell's homonymous novel, was based on John Hunyadi because of a series of coincidences, such as their similar coat of arms⁴. Subsequently, Hunyadi generated a cultural pattern of the Transylvanian soldier in the Spanish mentality, a pattern that Sigismund Báthory kept on perpetuating. The success of the character Sigismund Báthory was such that during the second half of the 17th century, Agustín Moreto and Juan de Matos wrote a new comedy play based on Vélez's, entitled *El príncipe prodigioso y defensor de la fe*, where the historical element is progressively replaced by the romantic one based on the triangle Sigismund Báthory – archduchess Maria Christina of Austria (Báthory's wife in real life) – the Sultan. Moreto's play was so "fruitful" that it was published in over twenty versions, an irrefutable proof of its massive notoriety.

So, how is the character Sigismund Báthory? According to Vélez's text, he is a good and faithful prince, trustworthy, loyal and good Christian, a good set of qualities, endorsed more or less by the historical texts; the *avisi*, for example, presented the Transylvanian prince as a violent and volatile person, far from the perfect traits depicted in *El capitán prodigioso* or in his subsequent adaptation (*Nuevos avisos. Venidos De Roma, de lo sucedido en el Exército Imperial, y lo que agora de nuevo a hecho el Serenissimo Sigismundo Batorio, Principe de la Transilvania, y de otrs avisos de diversas partes*, Sevilla, Rodrigo Cabrera. 2 hs., 1599; *Verdadera relación de la insigne victoria que Michael Bayboda (de la Balachia); Capitan general del Principe de Transilvania a alcançado contra el Gran Turco, en la toma de la ciudad de Nicopoli, cabeça del Reyno de Bulgaria, con muerte de quinze mil Turcos, y presa de ciento y quarenta pieças de Artilleria. Succedido todo en el mes de Octubre del Año proximo passado de Nouenta y ocho*, Sevilla. Rodrigo de Cabrera. 2 hs., 1599; *Relacion de la gran victoria alcançada por el Serenissimo Principe de la Transilvania con el socorro del Señor Miguel Vayuoda de la Valachia, Capitan general del Emperador [...] Valencia, 1603*).

Apart from the already mentioned plays, Sigismund Báthory is also included in *La Santa Liga* and *El Argel fingido*, although his name is just a mere reference. *La Santa Liga*, a historical play about the battle of Lepanto (1571), presents Sigismund ruling Transylvania "in gifted peace"⁵. Nevertheless, by the time the

⁴ Constantin Marinescu, *Du nouveau sur Tirant lo Blanch*, in "Estudis Romànics", IV, 1953-1954, pp. 137-203.

⁵ Lope de Vega, *La Santa Liga*, in "Decima Quinta parte de las comedias de Lope de Vega", Madrid, por la Viuda de Alonso Martín, 1621, f. 97r.

events of *La Santa Liga* were taking place, the king of Hungary was not Sigismund Báthory, but Maximilian I of Habsburg; the first one became prince of Transylvania in 1581. Our belief is that Lope intentionally altered the chronology in order to allude to a character that was well known by the public (we should not forget that *La Santa Liga* was first published in 1621, meaning that her representations must have been prior to that year and subsequently could have been contemporaneous with Vélez's staging of *El capitán prodigioso*). We also base our supposition on the excerpt of *La Santa Liga* in which Sigismund rises up against the Ottoman Empire alongside Transylvania, just as it had occurred in 1595: "they told me that Philip was menacing Morocco and Fez (...) whereas Sigismund was rising up with Transylvania"⁶. It would not be the first time when a writer changed the order of the historical facts in order to enhance the opposition against the common European foe, the Ottoman Empire.

Subsequently, in *Argel fingido*, Sigismund is evoked in different moments, his name being a synonym of great bravery, integrating the Transylvanian prince to a wider cultural pattern, together with Alexander the Great, Cesar or Trajan, among many others: "and on earth the bravery of Sigismund/that has eclipsed so many moons".

By the middle of the 17th century (1651), Matos and Moreto published their *El príncipe prodigioso, defensor de la fe* that enhances once again the bravery of Sigismund Báthory against the Ottoman Empire, as well as his devotion to Christianity, something he is not willing to give up even knowing that it might cost him his crown and his head: "But Sigismund (...) /will rather give up his crown/ than taking action against the Emperor/ who is a Christian as I am".

A prominent role in the transmission of a positive image of Sigismund Báthory in Spain was played by the Jesuit Alfonso Carrillo that since the beginning of his mission in Transylvania in 1589 had become one of Sigismund's propaganda agents in Europe. Carrillo did not only limit himself to writing informs about Sigismund's bravery and plans to attack the Ottoman Empire, but also forged an unrealistic image of the prince of Wallachia, Michael the Brave, deliberately defaming his name, claiming that he was "miser Michael Voivoda olim... nunc vero turco facto"⁷. The "confusion" that led to this affirmation was the islamization of prince Mihnea II Turcitul ("Mihnea the Turned-Turk"), ruler of Walachia in two occasions (1577-1583 and 1585-1591), who had converted to the Islam together with his eldest son, in an desperate attempt to regain his throne after he had been removed for the second time by the Turks. Moreover, Carrillo accuses the Wallachian prince of treason, insisting that solely the Transylvanian army, completely omitting the fundamental contribution of Michael the Brave, had achieved the victories against the Turks. Vélez's play has obviously based its text

⁶ *Ibidem*, f. 100r.

⁷ Maria Holban (coord.), *Călători străini despre Țările Române*, vol. III, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, 1971, p. 312.

on the informs of Carrillo, as he illustrates the idea of the Wallachian prince having been forced into collaborating with Sigismund against the Turks⁸: “Sigismund (...) has forced the Wallachian prince into following him”.

Vélez's play presents an idealised image of Sigismund Báthory, calling him “the new Godfrey” (an obvious allusion to the medieval knight that had led the first Crusade), presenting him “armed with the Cross and the Faith” as his predecessors “Constantine, Heraclius, Titus Vespasianus” (vv. 3504-3515) etc.

As previously announced at the beginning of our article, Báthory is not the only famous Sigismund that appears in the Spanish Golden Age; the other emblematic character is Sigismund Vasa, king of Poland between 1587-1632 under the name Sigismund III and Sweden (1592-1599), where he was known as Sigismund I. His reign was not easy in any of the two countries. In Poland, his regime was marked by popular uprisings, whereas in Sweden he was overthrown because of his support of the Counterreformation. Lope de Vega was the first one to dramatise the Polish history, in both *El rey sin reino* and *El gran duque de Moscovia y emperador perseguido* (1606). The interest shown by Lope towards the foreign history should not surprise us, as out of his approximately 400 plays, 90 of them are set in an international background, in a likely attempt of the Fenix to approach the Spanish court to far geographical spaces.: from Persia, Hungary or Denmark to Poland, Russia or Japan.

Chronologically speaking, the interest towards Poland arises in Spain during the reign of Philip II, when in 1563 the report of the pope nuncio, Giulio Ruggieri, about Poland is translated into Spanish. In this favourable context, the story of Sigismund III could not escape Lope's wittiness: a historical character whose parents had been incarcerated, Sigismund himself having spent part of his youth imprisoned in a tower. The *relaciones de sucesos* published in Spain illustrated Sigismund in the following way: “Sigismund III, by the Holly Grace, king of Poland and Great Duke of Lithuania, Russia, Prusia, Masovia [...], one of the most humble servants of the true God and of his crucified son, Jesus Christ”⁹.

Sigismund III, one of the important representatives of Counterreformation, has benefited from a big amount of literature, as the Christian officers were normally portrayed through hyperbolic praises that mythologized them. Therefore, we find ourselves in front of another case of manipulated information, as we have to take into account that the message that both the monarchy and the Church were giving in those times was highly Counter reformist. The texts focused on the morality, the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the Spanish spirit, as well as on enhancing the crusade spirit, offering a triumphant and messianic image of the Monarchy and her allies. This is the reason why in the Golden Age plays that bring Sigismund on stage or use him to inspire the creation of new characters, he is depicted as a

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 310.

⁹ Jesús Fernández Álvarez, *Información, control e identidad. El relato sobre el Turco en las relaciones de sucesos granadinas*, in “Revista del CEHGR”, nr. 25/2013, pp. 176-177.

profoundly catholic man, exiled, in permanent conflict with his subjects (a glimpse at the Reformist – Counter reformist conflict), devoid of his royal prerogatives, living in a forest or in a tower.

In Lope's play, *El gran duque de Moscovia* (1606), Sigismund of Poland does not have a very extensive role, although he appears to be very involved in the political events of the Russia of his times. His expansionist interests in Eastern Europe were well known, which is why he interfered in the fight for the Russian throne, supporting Dmitriy I (better known as False Dmitriy I) against Vasili IV. The historical events of the play were compiled in *Relación de la señalada y como milagrosa conquista del paterno imperio, conseguida del serenissimo Príncipe, Juan Demetrio de Moscovia*, translated from Italian to Spanish on which Lope de Vega based his famous play, *El gran duque de Moscovia*, donde Segismundo asistía a Demetrio en su empresa política.

Two are the interventions of Sigismund in Lope's play. In the first of them, Sigismund supports Dmitriy's innocence in a letter signed as "Sigismund, king of Poland": "The bearer of this message has come, Count, to see me. He has told me countless stories and lies about the innocent Dmitriy (...)"

In his second intervention, towards the end of the third act, Sigismund appears next to Dmitriy, supporting his reign: "Long may you enjoy your wife and your kingdom". Both episodes are confirmed by the historical reality.

One of the most important plays about Sigismund III is undoubtedly *La vida es sueño* by Calderón that presents some differences regarding Lope's play. If in *El gran duque de Moscovia*, Sigismund supports Dmitriy, in Calderon's play, the first becomes the heir to the throne. This variation is due to the different intentions of the two plays. While Lope is more interested in the Russian history, Calderón is more focused on the Polish one. Apart from this, Dmitriy, who in real fact was the son of Sigismund III under the name of Vladislav IV, is presented in the play as Sigismund's father and these are not the only differences.

Afectos de odio y amor (1658), another one of Calderon's plays, dramatizes the events of Sweden, where an important role belongs to the Duke of Moscow, son of the queen of Sweden. Once again, there are references to Poland and to Sigismund, presented as prince of "Gocia", an ancient Spanish name for Sweden. In *Afectos de odio y amor*, Casimir, duke of Russia, seduces queen Christine of Sweden. Christine of Sweden manifests her aversion towards marriage, not for religious issues, but for the fact of not wanting to subdue to the power of any man. This is why she rejects the love of Casimir, giving up the salic law. In the end, she weds Casimir, giving him the crown. Apart from the romantic plot, the play illustrates the imprisonment of Sigismund of Sweden in a tower towards the end of act I.

Another play that portrays Sigismund is *Peligro en los remedios* by Francisco de Rojas, a comedy play written towards the end of 1634, represented by Roque de Figueroa at the Palace on the 6th of April 1635. The plot is once again set in a non-Spanish space, in an unknown temporal unity, which, according to Frida

Weber, allows the author to manipulate the historical reality, through vast argumentative licences. The play is set in Naples, in an yet to be determined historical time, shortly after the dynastic war between Sigismund, king of Naples and Edward of Sicily, was over. The Neapolitan troops had won the war, reaching a truce period during which three weddings should have been celebrated in order to ensure a lasting peace: the wedding of the king of Naples with the princess of Sicily, the one of his brother, Carlos, with the infant of Sicily and the one of the Neapolitan duchess, Violante, with the Admiral of Sicily. Rojas' play depicts an undefeated Sigismund, a common leitmotiv in many of the plays that make use of this name.

Finally, another play that illustrates the name of Sigismund, inspiring itself in the story of the Polish-Swedish character is *El alcázar del secreto* by Antonio de Solís, a play that was represented in front of their Spanish Majesties in the Palace of Buen Retiro. In this play Sigismund is the prince of Epirus, banished from his country after having lost an important battle against the prince of Cyprus, whom he had slaughtered. Subsequently, he was defeated by the prince's soldiers, finally living undercover in a cave. Sigismund III plays once again a relevant influence in this play full of secrets and mysteries, where the leitmotiv of the exiled, renegaded and imprisoned prince is omnipresent.

In conclusion, in the Spanish Golden Age theater there are, of course, more characters named Sigismund. As it is impossible to present them all, we have tried to expose some of the most representative. Nevertheless, we can undoubtedly affirm that in the plays, Sigimund is never a common character, but a king or a prince associated to a faraway land (Transylvania, Epirus, Greece, a timeless Naples) or to the Counterreformation. The fact that several plays that had him as a character were performed in front of the Spanish court justifies the historical intertext, as generally the court men were informed about the contemporary political events. At the same time, the further the geographical space to which the character is circumscribed, the more possibility there is for the text to play with the information, to plot troubles and to conceal the identities of the dramatic characters.

Sigismund Báthory and Sigismund III have each of them created a different "school". In our article, we have tried not only to gather the information that the Spanish Golden Age includes about this topic, but also to investigate the possible ways and sources of transmission of this information. All in all, since the historical event "happens" until the information is performed on stage, therefore becoming cultural memory, there is a whole path to undertake. A path that in this case is as controversial and exotic as the characters that led to it: Sigismund of Transylvania and Sigismund of Poland, two of the great heroes of their time.

