

LATIN AND POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN EARLY MODERN CATALUNYA:



the case of the Guerra dels Segadors

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Latin played an important role as the language of political discourse and propaganda in the Catalan-speaking lands in the early modern period. As with the Germanies rebellion in sixteenth-century Valencia and the War of Spanish Succession in the early eighteenth century, Latin assisted Catalan scholars and politicians during the war of 1640 to 1652, the so-called Catalan Revolt or Guerra dels Segadors (Reapers' War). In this essay I examine three tracts written during the conflict, in which Latin was used by Catalan scholars in attempting to offset the arguments employed by their political counterparts.

Despite noble calls to cross academic boundaries and to avoid linguistic divisions, approaches to the literary culture of early modern Spain have tended to concentrate exclusively on vernacular literature, to the detriment of Hispano-Latin humanism and the vast corpus of Latin literature produced by Spaniards between 1500 and 1700. Prone to overlook the fact that, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Latin and vernacular literatures were seen as part of a continuum and not as two sharply divided bodies, critics have frequently underestimated the role of Latin within the literary scene of early modern Spain. This is particularly obvious in recent publications devoted to the study of the construction of political and cultural identity in early modern Iberia. Elizabeth Davis's *Myth and Identity in the Epic of Imperial Spain*, Diana Sieber's *Historiography and Marginal Identity in sixteenth-century Spain*, and Barbara Simerka's *Discourses of empire: counter-epic literature in early modern Spain*, are all good examples of this trend.¹ In their otherwise stimulating monographs these three critics convincingly show how, throughout the second half of the sixteenth century and the first

¹ Davis 2000, Sieber 2002 and Simerka 2003.

two decades of the following epic poetry, drama and historiography proved instrumental in exalting or attacking the political status quo. Yet, Davis, Sieber and Simerka's innovative examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century epic, dramatic and historiographical writing is at times heavily marred by their lack of attention to texts written in languages other than Spanish. In all cases even a brief mention of Latin texts would have shown how the political preoccupations of better-known authors writing in the vernacular were also shared by contemporary figures whose choice of the Latin language may have resulted in their exclusion from the canon.

Since the mid-sixteenth century Latin was invaluable to the ruling circles of the Spanish monarchy, which employed it to frame the image of the Empire during the period of expansion and conquest in Europe and the New World. As Brian Tate has shown, at the peak of Spanish domination in Europe and America, the Spanish monarchy needed instruments able to support its claims to supremacy both among the unruly local powers and the other kingdoms competing in the international scenario of early modern Europe.² A series of works by Latin historians of Iberian origin was published doubtless contributing to the dissemination of the country's past and contemporary political achievements. Latin also played an important role as the language of political discourse and propaganda in the Catalan-speaking lands in the early modern period. The Latin writings produced during the *Germanies* rebellion in sixteenth-century Valencia, and the large corpus of texts in Latin (above all, epic poetry, historiographical and juridical text, as well as collections of letters) written at the time of the Spanish War of Succession at the beginning of the eighteenth century are good examples of how Latin assisted Catalan scholars and politicians in the construction of a political consciousness at times of conflict with Castile.³ In what follows I would like to focus on a case-study: a series of tracts written around the war of 1640 to 1652, the so-called Catalan Revolt or *Guerra dels Segadors* (Reapers' War) as it is known in Catalan. In this essay I hope to show how Latin was central to the historiographical construction of nationhood in seventeenth-century Catalunya.

Let us consider briefly the historical events around which these writings emerged. The dynastic union between the Crowns of Castile and Aragon in 1492 was a decisive step towards the formation of a Hispanic feudal bloc under a monarchy that was tending towards absolutism. Nevertheless, during the sixteenth century Catalunya retained its own independent institutions and type of government, based on a constitutional structure. The laws by

² Tate 1996.

³ On the Latin texts written during the *Germanies* revolt see Anyés 2001 (=1545). For the eighteenth century see Coroleu 2006, Campabadal 2008 and Coroleu & Paredes 2010.

which Catalunya was governed were agreed upon between the prince and his subjects at meetings of *les Corts* or parliament. After the death of Philip II in 1598 the Spanish kings, however, tended to summon the Courts less and less frequently. From the second decade of the seventeenth century, relations between the Spanish monarchy and the Principality of Catalunya gradually deteriorated, particularly as a result of the policies of the Count-Duke of Olivares (1587–1645), the favourite and chief minister of Philip IV (1605–1665), and his attempts to use Catalan resources to fight Spain's foreign wars.

The growing tension led ultimately to a rising in 1640, staged by the Catalan peasantry and soon supported by the dominant classes. During the revolt – which began on the day of Corpus Christi, 7 June – the Spanish Viceroy was assassinated. Pau Claris, head of the *Generalitat* (Catalan Government), turned the social unrest into a political cause and proclaimed a Catalan Republic, independent from the King of Spain. However, in order to ward off a Spanish attack, the *Generalitat* was obliged to submit to the vassalage of the King of France in January of the following year. For the next decade the Catalans and French fought as allies until a Spanish offensive in 1652 captured Barcelona bringing the Catalan capital under Spanish control again. That same year the French authorities renounced Catalunya, and though the Catalan institutions were still of use in resisting absolutism, the *Generalitat* governed much less efficiently.⁴

The conflict whose major events I have just summarized was waged as much on the battlefield as on the printed page. As with other early modern European societies, in Catalunya epic poetry, political tracts and historiography proved instrumental to the ruling elites in creating a genealogy that either exalted and legitimized the political *status quo* or sought to subvert it. The revolution of June 1640 and subsequent War of Separation from the Spanish monarchy is indeed a good case in point in this respect. On the Castilian side the propaganda machine engaged luminaries such as Francisco de Quevedo, unscrupulous historians who resorted to legends and made-up material such as José Pellicer's *Idea del Principado de Catalunya* of 1642 (even though examples of this also abound in the Catalan camp), and several other pamphleteers who supported the monarchy's position during the Catalan revolt. In Catalunya too contemporary events gave rise to a large body of political and propagandistic writings, a literary corpus mostly in Catalan (and to a lesser extent in Spanish) which was assembled in 1993 by Henry Ettinghausen in his four-volume study of the press of the time.⁵ Broadly

⁴ For a detailed analysis of the revolt see Elliot 1984.

⁵ Ettinghausen 1993. For a different approach see Simon i Tarrés 1999, where attention to Latin texts is duly paid.

speaking, texts in the vernacular (most of them poetry) circulate in manuscript form and aim at awaking resistance and revolt against the enemy.⁶ By contrast, Latin texts are printed and are written in a style (and engage in modes of argument) reminiscent of legalistic and historiographical texts of the previous century. Significantly, and despite their importance, in Ettinghausen's vast compilation Latin texts go totally unnoticed, even though Latin was also used by Catalan scholars in attempting to offset the arguments employed by their political counterparts.⁷

Olivares's policies – in particular his insistence on maintaining Spanish troops in Catalunya as well as his utter disrespect for Catalan privileges – could be easily dismissed and attacked by political thinkers and pamphleteers at the service of the Catalan government. The decision by the *Generalitat*, on 23 January 1641, to place the Principality under the rule of the king of France was certainly harder to justify given the hostility large groups of the Catalan populace felt towards the French. The Catalan government therefore soon necessitated ideological instruments and historical foundations able to support the agreement by which Catalunya declared its allegiance to Louis XIII in return for France's military protection. This may account for Joan-Lluís de Montcada's *Annales Cataloniae* (ca. 1585–1653), a work in which the author linked Gallic tutelage over the Principality to the invasion of Catalunya by the French king in the eighth century.⁸ Montcada's attempt has a clear parallel in France, where the monarchy employed political historians to justify the annexation of Catalunya.⁹

From the outset, rather than depicting the war against Castile as a local affair, the propaganda machine of the *Generalitat* sought to emphasize the international dimension of the conflict. It did so chiefly by drawing parallels with other anti-Castilian confrontations, past and present, and by attempting to arouse the sympathy of other rebellious territories against the Spanish Habsburgs which had succeeded in regaining independence. This may account for the publication in Lisbon of histories of Catalunya such as the *Noticia universal de Cataluña* (Lisbon, 1640) of Francesc Martí i Viladamor, an author to whom I shall shortly return, and of reports of the war of 1640 and 1641 against Castile, which came off the press of Pere Lacavalleria (*Epítome de los principios y progressos de las guerras de Cataluña*, Lisbon,

⁶ Torrent 1984.

⁷ To my knowledge, no parallels can be found on the Castilian camp of the use of Latin in political tracts, except for attempts on the part of Philip II to justify his invasion of Portugal in 1580 (see Giovanni Viperano's *De obtenta Portugalia a Rege Catholico Philippo historia*, Madrid, 1583).

⁸ Joan-Lluís de Montcada, *Annales Cataloniae* (Biblioteca Nacional de Catalunya, ms. 495–496).

⁹ For example, Sorel 1642, Chanut 1642 and Caseneuve 1644.

1641). Indeed Lacavalleria seems to have played an extremely active role in promoting Catalan interests. He was, for instance, responsible for the publication of the anonymous *Catalonia iterum ad Lilia perfugiens* (Barcelona, 1642).¹⁰

Dedicated to King Louis XIII, *Catalonia iterum* sets out to justify Catalunya's association with France on historical grounds. After chronicling, in highly dramatic style, the events of 1641 and the military successes of the Franco-Catalan troops, the text goes on to discuss the inherent differences between Catalans and Castilians, comparing, for example, Castilians to Scythians (in Antiquity the archetypical barbarian), and pointing to the constitutional structure of the Principality as the main difference between Catalunya and other nations. According to the anonymous author, it is precisely the contractual character of this constitutional system that legitimized the election of Louis XIII as king of Catalunya. By this election – the author concludes – Catalans, as with the Portuguese two years previously, have returned to their true masters (p. 22):

Quia clarum est arcano altissimae providentiae et iustitiae ictu Lusitaniae et Cataloniae regna ad veros dominos hoc saeculo, tanto post iniustissimae dominationis intervallo, esse revolute.

(For it is known that, by means of a secret stroke of the highest Providence and justice, the kingdoms of Portugal and Catalunya in this century, after a long period of most unjust government, have been returned to their true masters.)

The combination of proto-ethnographical arguments, resort to recent history and thorough knowledge of Catalunya's political institutions exhibited by the author of *Catalonia iterum* is echoed in the work of the lawyer and Royal Chronicler Francesc Martí i Viladamor (1616–1689). In April 1642, under the *nom de plume* of Marc Tixell, Martí i Viladamor published a booklet entitled *Catalonia sub Urbano foeliciter renata, amota vi iustitiaque eminente. Politica vera, regimen certum optimae Reipublicae*.¹¹ The title of Martí's work refers to Urbain de Maillé, marquis of Brézé and Richelieu's brother in law, who had been appointed first French Viceroy of Catalunya a few months earlier. The text opens with a reminder of the deep love and loyalty the Counts of Barcelona and Kings of Aragon had always felt towards their princes and in particular towards Philip IV:

¹⁰ Unknown author 1642. I use the copy at Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional de España, VE 170/13.

¹¹ Martí i Viladamor 1642. I use the copy at Barcelona, Biblioteca Nacional de Catalunya, F. Bon. 5952.

Praedicaverunt antiqui Barcinonis Comites Catalanum amorem, fidelitatem Catalanam Aragonum Reges; nulli tamen suo Principi enixius inservivit Civitas, profundius Catalonia, quam Philippo quarto Catholico Hispaniae Regi [...] Philippus ipse fatetur epistola Barcinonensibus remissa 1 Martii 1631 tunc, cum adhuc passionis nebula regium non penetraverat scrinium [...] Scripsit ille se Barcinonensibus recognoscere arctioribus vinculis teneri, quam coeteros antecessores suos. O regalis gratia, si immutabilis! (A 3v)

(The ancient Counts of Barcelona professed a fidelity which was typically Catalan, the kings of Aragon, a loyalty which was typically Catalan; no other prince was served by the city with more zeal, and by Catalunya with more depth, than Philip IV, Catholic king of Spain. [...] He himself stated this in a letter sent to the citizens of Barcelona on the first day of March of 1631, when the mist of ambition had not yet poisoned the royal office. [...] He wrote to them saying that he felt bound to them with tighter links than his ancestors. Oh, royal Grace, even if immutable!)

Recalling – with a subtle reference to Olivares’s negative influence upon the king – “how Philip himself in a letter sent to the citizens of Barcelona in March 1631 admitted he felt bound to them by tighter links than his other ancestors”, the author laments the king’s attitude and shows how Philip IV had contravened Catalunya’s ancient laws and liberties.

As part of a great tirade against “Castellanae tyrannidis acerbitates” (the violence of the Castilian tyranny), Martí’s pamphlet goes on to list the excesses committed by Spanish troops on Catalan soil which ultimately were to blame for the riot of June 1640. The arrival of the new Viceroy sent by Louis XIII – he claims – guaranteed the immediate restoration of order and initiated a period of prosperity and peace under French protection. Yet, whereas it was easy to prove that the Spanish king had broken his sacred contract with his Catalan vassals, Martí was all too aware of the difficulties in justifying the substitution of Philip IV of Spain by Louis XIII of France. Once the immediate aim of expelling the Spanish soldiery had been achieved, the logic of events in 1640 suggested the possibility of transforming Catalunya into an independent republic. The behaviour of the Spanish king and the conduct of his troops is not the only target of Martí i Viladomor’s diatribe. Rather, he devotes the second part of his work to demonstrate how the reversal of allegiance on the part of the Catalans was no more than the proper exercise of the Principality’s privilege of choosing its own ruler. It is at this point where Martí’s text becomes a fully-fledged manifesto in which the Catalan jurist formulates his theory of a “politica vera” based on a perfect balance “inter principem et subditos” (between the prince and his subjects), of which Catalunya would be the most conspicuous example.

Catalunya's freedom – Martí concludes – was emphasized by the voluntary election of her prince.

Two years later, in 1644, Martí elaborated upon some of the ideas outlined in the *Catalonia sub Urbano...* in a longer political tract entitled *Praesidium inexpugnabile Principatus Cataloniae pro iure eligendi Christianissimum Monarcham*.¹² Commissioned by the *Consell de Cent*, the Council of One Hundred, the city council of Barcelona, this text was circulated in the town of Münster at the peace conference of Westphalia, at which Martí – on behalf of the city council – acted as Catalunya's principal delegate between 1646 and 1648.¹³ He refers to the ongoing negotiations in the opening paragraphs of his text and singles out the right of the Catalans to elect their own prince as one of the main items on the agenda at Münster, an issue which in fact was only secondary:

Nunc vertitur apud Munsterium celebris disputatio de iure Principatus Cataloniae eligendi Christianissimum Monarcham. Ex inde pro ipso iure stabiliendo praesidium extruo inexpugnabile.

(A famous dispute is currently taking place in Münster on the right of the Principality of Catalunya to elect the most Christian monarch as her king. Thence I erect an impregnable defence of such a right.)

The principal target in the *Praesidium inexpugnabile* are Olivares's plans for unity and his ideal of a unified nation marked by “una ley y un Rey” (a single law and king). Martí was careful to write in detail on the many sufferings of Catalunya after the twenty years of government by Olivares, summarized by the Catalan jurist as “eius politica destestabilis” (his abominable administration). The revolution of 1640 after all had been a revolution against the Court of Spain, and in particular against the rule of Olivares. In January 1643 Olivares had, however, been given formal permission by the king to retire from office. Arguments therefore had to be found elsewhere. At this junction Martí also resorted to history and sought to place Catalunya's renunciation of allegiance to Spain into its historical context.

Historical precedents could indeed become the most effective (and perhaps only) weapon to justify Catalunya's new association with France. By invoking history, Martí was also responding to a group of Spanish pamphleteers, best represented by José Pellicer, who in his *Idea del Principado de*

¹²Martí i Viladamor 1644. I use the copy at Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 37 P. 59.

¹³The term “Peace of Westphalia” denotes a series of peace treaties signed between May and October of 1648 in Osnabrück and Münster. These negotiations ended the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) in the Holy Roman Empire, and the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) between Spain and the Dutch Republic.

Cataluña (1642) had gone as far as to claim that “toda la Corona de Francia pertenece a los Reyes de España” (the whole Crown of Spain belongs to the king of France). A rather loose interpretation of Catalunya’s historical origins and the use of conventional contractual arguments based on historical precedent enabled Martí to state that the right of the Catalans to elect their own Prince – what Martí describes as “lex regia principatus Cataloniae” (the royal law of the Principality of Catalunya) – was confirmed under the government both of the Goths and Carolingian kings, and had remained intact ever since. According to Martí, the laws issued by Louis the Pious and Charles the Bald in the ninth century would therefore include the “pacta legis regiae”, some “pro rege” and others “pro populo”. These pacts, upon which the “lex regia” would be based, would be: (p. 42) “quod Catalani liberi sint et maneat” (that Catalans are free and should remain so); “quod Catalani nullum censum praestare cogantur” (that Catalans should not be forced to keep a census); “quod causae minores apud eosdem Catalanos et non comitem more antiquo, idest Gothico, decidantur” (that minor matters should be decided among Catalans themselves and not by the prince according to ancient custom, that is the custom of the Goths); “quod leges Gothicae retineantur et observentur inter Catalanos” (that the laws of the Goths should be retained and observed among Catalans); “quod leges in Catalonia ferendae sint non per Principem solum, sed per Principem et populum in curiis generalibus, convocatione praecedente” (that the law in Catalunya should be passed not by the prince alone, but by the prince and the people in general assemblies, after these have been summoned). To Martí’s mind, the “lex regia” (royal law) was implicit in Catalunya’s constitutional system, since those primitive pacts could only be amended or confirmed at meetings of the parliament within the principle of a contractual agreement between the king and his subjects. He concluded that the events of 1640, would have led – as a response to the tyrannical government by the Spanish king – to the derogation of the “lex regia” which was only restored, after an all too brief republican experiment, with the election of Louis XIII in January of the following year.

Even though Catalunya’s own “lex regia” as formulated by Martí could be regarded as a precedent for the idea of popular sovereignty, Martí’s political thought as reflected in the *Praesidium inexpugnabile* had about it a faded, almost anachronistic air in the circumstances of the seventeenth century. The highly conventional arguments he used had already been deployed by Latin historians of the two previous centuries. Paradoxically, however, these writings had served a very different political function from that of Martí’s *Praesidium inexpugnabile*. This had been particularly the case in Castile, where historiography had provided ideological instruments in order

to support centralist and unifying policies. Martí's use of Latin, I would argue, was not only a way of aiming at an international readership, and at Münster at an international audience, but was determined by a long-standing historiographical tradition in Iberia.

This can be illustrated with one example. The legendary foundation of Spain by Tubal, one of Noah's sons, from which time allegedly stemmed the natural liberty of Catalunya, featured – through a direct borrowing from Annius of Viterbo's *Antiquitates* – in the *De origine ac rebus gestis regum Hispaniae* (Antwerp, 1553) of the Barcelona archivist Francesc Tarafa (ca. 1495–1556).¹⁴ Dedicated to Philip II, the *De origine...* sought to reconcile respect for the historical rights of the Crown of Aragon within the overall structure of the Spanish monarchy. In spite of all its pan-Hispanism, Tarafa's research proved however extremely valuable to Martí since one of the documents unearthed by the former in Barcelona was the precept issued by Charles the Bald in 844. The text, included by the historian Francesc Calça (1521–1603) for the first time in his *Liber primus de Catalonia* of 1588, supported the various arguments used by Martí in order to account for the replacement of the Spanish King for the French monarch.

Despite its shortcomings and contradictions, Martí's political thought constitutes an important attempt, however hesitant, to overthrow (or at least to question) a government at Madrid by means of agitation from the periphery. In retrospect Martí's ideas also helped perpetuate for a further fifty years a form of government in Catalunya which was however bound to be challenged once more, in 1700 with the enthronement of Philip V and the ensuing War of Spanish Succession. In these circumstances Latin also assisted anti-Bourbon pamphleteers in their defence of Catalan rights and liberties.

The tracts examined in this essay may appear minor in a wider European context. Yet, alongside works of similar subject matter written in the vernacular, these writings played an important role in early modern Catalunya. For one, they are yet another example of how Latin at the time became the acquired speech of an elite community that identified itself by this linguistic marker. More relevant to this discussion, these texts also reveal the existence of a defensive form of patriotism even as early as the seventeenth century. Furthermore, this body of tracts helped preserve a sense of political and historical consciousness which later generations were to exploit more effectively. When Catalanism in the last decade of the nineteenth century became a fully-fledged political movement, it drew heavily – as Joan-Lluís Marfany has argued – upon the imagery and discourse of political thinkers

¹⁴ On Tarafa see Eulàlia Miralles's contribution in this volume.

of the 1640s.¹⁵ It invented traditions closely related to the conflict I have discussed in this essay. Thus, it adopted as the national anthem a popular song which appeared during the War of Separation explaining the reasons for the insurrection. More importantly, by way of reprints of anti-Castilian texts from the seventeenth century, contemporary Catalanism also revaluated the task accomplished by authors who some two hundred years earlier had proudly invoked medieval Catalunya's unrivalled liberty in order to oppose Spain's centralist policies. In the end the political awareness of writers such as Francesc Martí i Viladamor set a precedent for those intellectuals and politicians who at the turn of the twentieth century directed their discontent against Spain into proper political channels.

¹⁵ Marfany 1995. An example of late nineteenth-century interest, among Catalan historians of the time, in the 1640 revolt is Josep Coroleu's *Clarís y son temps* (Barcelona, 1880).

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