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BETWEEN NARRATION AND MEDICINE: ON DISEASE AND DEATH OF PHILIP II ACCORDING TO THE WRITING OF ANTONIO CERVERA DE LA TORRE

Abstract: The paper is based on data from the work *History of the Death of Philip II* written by Antonio Cervera de la Torre and published in Spanish in Madrid, a year after the king's death. After Cervera's death in 1606, the idea came up to publish his work in Latin and thus make it available to the European public. The idea of organizing the work was for the purpose of the classic Habsburg propaganda dictated from the center, whose head was Archduke Maximilian III. This work was entrusted to Franz Guillimann, the official historian of the Habsburg dynasty, who translated the work into Latin and prepared it with minor modifications. The article discusses the segment that refers to the description of the disease and the last days of Philip II's life. The idea was to present Philip II as a ruler who dedicated his entire physical and mental potential to Christianity, that is, Catholicism, and the state. A special aspect of the work is the king's enduring and suffering from diseases that tormented him and tied him to his bed for the last fifty days of his life. Cervera drew data on the king's illnesses from the oral testimonies of doctors, but also from official records of treatment and death. Through the description of the illness and torment from which he died, an image of the king's martyrdom and strong faith was created, which portrayed him as a true Christian.

Keywords: Spain, medicine, diseases

Non MeSH: Philip II (1556–1598), Antonio Cervera de la Torre

According to Braudel, the death of Philip II was such an event: “[...] *about which the news went around the sea and the world.*” [1, p26] Nikola Samardžić concludes that with the death of Philip II, Spain “[...] *was for a long time left without a ruler who, with their strength, influence and devotion, would know how to surpass the main currents of its history.*” [2, p262] Braudel's opinion that the Catholic reform made Philip II the fla-

gbearer of Catholicism and the defender of the faith is confirmed by the idea of writing a work immediately after his death that emphasized his suffering, faith and piety. It was written in Spanish and by order of the Spanish crown by Antonio Cervera de la Torre († 1606), professor at the University of Salamanca and chaplain to Philip II. [3, p1395–1396] The book was published under the title *Testimonio auténtico, y verdadero de las cosas notables que passaron en la dichosa muerte Rey nuestro senor Don Phelipe segundo* and represented a kind of panegyric to Philip II. [4] The center for the promotion of the Catholic faith and Habsburg ideology, headed by Maximilian III (1558–1618), decided to publish Cervera's work in Latin and entrusted the task to the dynasty's official historian Franz Guillimann (1568–1612). [5] However, the work is also of great value for research into the history of health culture, in the context of research into the diseases from which this great Spanish monarch suffered at the end of his life. Research in the field of the history of medical culture leads to perceptions of the connection between social interactions. They are significant because they reveal the reality of society in the past and its values: health and disease, wealth and poverty, birth, death, physical and mental abilities, empathy and social solidarity. [6, p10]

Cervera obtained information about the diseases of Philip II on the basis of oral testimonies of doctors and official records of treatment and death. One of the important testimonies was told to him by the court doctor, Juan Gomez de Sanabria, who, like other witnesses of the king's final days, presented the facts related to that event under oath. Cervera writes that the witnesses stated everything that the king said during the whole illness and immediately before it. Everyone confirmed that there was something unusual in all this, very rare, and that it was a sublime example of a true believer that no one had seen or heard before. [5, p9] The work glorifies the faith and suffering of the king, who manifested so many virtues and love for God before his death, deserving of the glory and the greatest honor that can be given to a crowned head. That is why it was ordered that these virtues be revealed and that they must be known to everyone, in order to appreciate the state and its ruler as a true Catholic and Christian. Cervera emphasizes that the king, in addition to the above-mentioned virtues that came to the fore during his life, also possessed all the other values that one man could be proud of. They manifested themselves in the brightest sense during his illness and suffering, which especially emphasizes the character of the great ruler. [5, p2]

Cervera writes that at the end of his life, Philip II endured all the hardships and temptations, persevered in the faith, which shows that he was worthy of the position. In order to understand the king's great faith, his sufferings had to be shown. Therefore, Cervera begins the story of the illnesses from which the king suffered and the testimonies of the most eminent court physicians who were with the king at the time. In order to emphasize their objectivity, he stated that they swore that they would faithfully convey everything they knew, and the Hippocratic oath obliged them to do so. The second chapter of this unique writing is entitled *On the origin of the king's illness and the pains that accompanied it*. In it, the author presents a chronology of events that preceded the king's illness. It all started with the king's arbitrary departure in July 1598 from Madrid to the Monastery of St. Lawrence, "called the Royal". It refers to the king's new capital, El Escorial, which included the Monastery of St. Lawrence. Cervera does not mention

that it is a new capital, by which he wanted to emphasize the spiritual character of the new capital, without stating its true purpose, because it was for this earthly purpose, and the king did not live for the earthly but for the eternal [5, pp5-8]. It is known that this monastery was called the Royal Monastery of St. Lawrence de El Escorial, the construction of which was ordered by Philip II in honor of the victory over the French at Saint Quentin in 1557. [2, p259; 7, p131]

The king was in poor health even before that, and the court doctors advised him not to go on the trip. Cervera could hear the stated fact of the from several sources. Immediately upon his arrival in El Escorial, he contracted "tertiary fever," a disease named after attacking the patient every three days. The fever kept him for a week, then stopped, and on July 26, in the middle of the night, the king fell into bed again. Doctors stated that the cause of this fever lay in the king's excessive movement, both in El Escorial and outside him. Cervera states that Philip II used to leave the monastery every second or third day and visit the surroundings. He also states that: [...] *on the seventh day of the king's illness, an ulcer grew on the muscle of his right knee, where dangerous pus had accumulated, and despite the use of all medicines, it did not mature; because of that, the doctors feared that it would be necessary to make an opening in that malignant place.* [5, p9] These were the key moments of the king's illness, the details of which are given because of the consequences they caused. It is known that Philip II died of sepsis, and that the appearance of these wounds on his body was an introduction to the agony of a disease that cost him his life. [8, pp300-301]

Considering on the basis of personal presence, creating conclusions about the further course of this disease, the author states that after the surgery, the wound matured, and that the mass, which filled the entire muscle, leaked from there. The medical procedure was professional, but there were two more outflows "[...] *life-threatening, even if there were no other reasons.*" This condition lasted for thirty days, after which "so much impurity was purified", and it happened is that over forty times in one day the liquid runs out. This condition followed the king until the last hour of his life. In addition, the king began to suffer from consumption and had a lot of accumulated fluid under the skin, in calves, abdomen and muscles that were visibly swollen. The king looked "like skin and bones" to his contemporaries, against whom viscous diseases joined forces, terrible for both doctors and court teachers of medicine. [5, pp9-10]

Of particular importance for this research is the third chapter of Cervera's book (*Comprehensive and accurate description of the king's diseases and weaknesses*), which describes in detail the history of the diseases from which Philip II suffered. The gout chronically plagued the king for years and did not pass, and the author also presents the dilemmas of the medicine of that time and its achievements in the diagnosis of the disease. The use of the achievements of ancient medicine is noticeable. The ancient physician Galen is also mentioned, as well as his discussion with Archegenes.¹ In the first place, he emphasizes gout and ulcers on the right knee "[...] *which stank to high*

¹ Galen of Pergamum (130-200), a Roman physician and philosopher of Greek descent, the most prolific and versatile writer in the field of medicine. The famous Roman scientist Archegenes (75-129) was a native of Apama in Syria, who worked in Rome during the time of Trajan (98-117). Among other things, he practiced medicine. [9, p106]

heaven”, as well as other numerous ulcers on the body. In addition to consumption, the king was also tormented by dropsy, and certain parts of the body were with “[...] *almost rotten skin and bones that could barely be held together.*” The king’s illnesses “[...] *were iron hammers that struck and tortured the king like an anvil.*” All this now justifies Archegenes’s theory opposite to Galen, according to which the whole body can become ill, which in fact befell the king. [5, pp10–12]

In the further consideration of the king’s disease and its individual segments, gout is discussed. This disease “*among Spaniards, French and Italians means a drop, because drop by drop in the joints of the legs and arms drips harmful fluid that causes great pain to these parts, because they are very sensitive.*” Some formulations related to this disease are significant, which testify to the achievements of medicine at that time. Namely, Cervera especially pointed out: “*that liquid separates the connections between the joints, like the ground that rests on the door, first it bounces and immediately breaks in.*” In the text we can find a common medical opinion from the end of the 16th century, that this disease “[...] *affects kings and nobles.*” There is an inevitable parallel with ancient or biblical characters. Cervera cites the example of King Asa, who was “[...] *led to the end of his life*” by gout. He also mentions the Holy Spirit, who says: “*In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa suffered from very severe pain in his legs and died in the forty-first year of his reign.*” Here is a clear attempt of the author to emphasize Philip II on the pedestal of biblical figures and to give him, through stories about his suffering, the importance of immortality and impermanence that they have. The author compares the king’s suffering with the suffering of the biblical Job, to whom the pain in his bones was unbearable. Of all the severe pains that Job endured, he especially complained of the gout, comparing it to shackles. He believed that “[...] *there is no difference between gout and the pressure of a tombstone or foot shackles.*” The king suffered from this disease for many years and because of it he suffered the greatest pain. [5, pp12–13] “*And he weary him with the pains of his bed, with a grievous disease, so that he was disgusted with bread and his soul’s favorite food.*” [10, p534]

The fifth chapter is dedicated to the description of “*ulcers on the hands and feet*”, which caused the king the most trouble. They were “*malignant and dangerous wounds*”, like those “*which God punished Egypt with*”. Cervera decided that the best example for comparison is the part of the Old Testament which deals with Moses’ choice of punishment for those who break and despise the laws. Here we have one of the many examples of references to moments from the Bible, to which the author pictorially brought his story closer to the reader and the believer, for whom this reading was intended. The most experienced among the king’s doctors said that a surgical procedure should be reported in order to drain the ulcer fluid and then apply a compress of hot urine to treat this disease. The author illustrates what kind of disease it was with the old writings of Philo of Alexandria and Pliny, who state that the Egyptian kings suffered from the same disease, as well as that they usually died. Thus, the author compares the *wise king* with the Egyptian pharaohs, whom, like him, God ordained to torment and to be broken with gout. [5, p13]

The king was especially tormented by an ulcer² on the muscle of his right leg, to which the sixth chapter of the first book is dedicated. It was a wound that tormented Philip II until his death and which contributed to “*the rotting of the muscles of the right knee to the bones.*” According to Cervera, that was enough to endanger the king’s life. In a further exposition, he cites the example of King Hezekiah, who died from one such ulcer, and the prophet Isaiah wrote that even God himself could not save him. It is important for the author to determine that this is the same type of disease, in order to show that kings die from this disease, and that it is in a way God’s will. Philip II was able to endure and withstand all these hardships, which no one had until then - neither persons from the *Old Testament*, nor pharaohs, let alone ordinary mortals. One learned king’s physician applied the fig balm treatment recommended by the prophet Isaiah, succeeding in temporarily healing the ulcer, but not completely, “[...] *so great was its insidiousness.*” “*A very patient Job had a similar type of ulcer,*” Cervera writes. Again, he compares the king’s sufferings to Job’s because it is a biblical example of the suffering of the righteous and the believers, stating that it is written how Satan exceeded God’s permission and punished Job with the worst pimple. Undoubtedly, they both had the same ulcers, Job and Ezekiel on their knees, since the Bible says: “*May the Lord punish you with a wicked ulcer on your knees and the soles of your feet so that you cannot be healed.*” [5, pp15–16]

In the seventh chapter, the author continues his exposition about the king’s suffering and the “*constant fever*” that tormented him. He further compares the king’s torments with Job’s, stating that he called the consumption *cauma*, because of which “[...] *his bones were dry*”. He wrote that the fever was called *Marasmus* by the Bede the Venerable and the priest Filip,³ while Galen called it “[...] *fever with consumption*”. Of particular importance are the chronological data given in the text, which are related to the king’s biography. The fever worsened especially on July 22, 1598, and turned into a double tertiary fever. The pains that the king suffered from “[...] *dropsy*” are described in the eighth chapter of the first book. It, and other harmful accumulations of fluid, attacked the king’s viscera and caused an unbearable temperature and thirst, only comparable to Tantalus’ torments. The author makes an interesting comparison here when he says that the king’s sufferings are comparable to “[...] *the temptations of Epulon.*” [5, p17] This is certainly one of the rare and valuable mentions of the Istrian king Epulon who fought in the Istrian war against the Romans in 177 BC, and decided to commit suicide so as not to fall into the hands of enemies. [11, p573; 12, p189]

Cervera also compares the king’s suffering to Abraham’s thirst. The apostle Luke says that Abraham asked for nothing but a drop of water to cool his tongue. Thirst was the greatest punishment with which God punished the Jews who wandered in the de-

² In Latin, this ulcer was called *Hebraici Sechin*, which the Pagans translated as inflammation, because the ulcer was accompanied by an inflammation that Galen calls *Cacoethes*.

³ Philip of Harveng (? –1183), prior and later abbot of the Bonne-Espérance Abbey, was a famous stylist who masterfully mastered stylized prose. He wrote a treatise *De institutione clericorum*, several biographies of saints and letters. [9, p99]

sert without water, in which there were dipsades.⁴ “Such was the king’s dehydration and thirst, whether from fever or dropsy, that words cannot describe it.” And the ninth chapter is devoted to the sufferings of fever which occurred every third day and in whose description the author quotes Pliny, who wrote that God tamed the lions with it. As an illustration, the horrors of tertiary fever are mentioned, and Moses’ curse by which he cursed those who sinned excessively: “[...] may the Lord punish them with fever and cold.” [5, pp18–19]

In order to show the king’s martyrdom as faithfully and vividly as possible, Cervera presented the development of his illness chronologically. In the enumeration of all diseases, he kept to the testimony of doctors and other witnesses, so that he did not skip any diseases. He dedicated the tenth chapter to *dysentery*,⁵ which “[...] appeared after the thirtieth day of his illness, and ended with the king’s life.” Through the author’s further description of this disease, the scope of the medicine of that time and its knowledge of the pathology of certain diseases can be seen. The medicine of that time believed that dysentery starts with cholera that attacks the insides, and that is followed by fluid from ulcers, which doctors called *cacoethes*. Cervera states that there were also those who interpreted dysentery as cleansing the stomach – *tenasmus*. However, it was determined that the dysentery from which the king suffered was not the same as *tenasmus*. Again, there are examples of biblical sufferers who are connected with the king throughout the work. Job was punished by God with the same disease, which some call diarrhea, for a whole two years. Is there a better example of martyrdom than the biblical Job, whose examples of suffering permeate the whole work? He is the best parallel to the king who remained a believer until the end, enduring all temptations. [5, p19-20]

Cervera cites the testimony of the court doctor Garcia de Onante, who pointed out the king’s great torments with dysentery, which was especially a problem for him due to his inability to move. The king was so weak in the last days of his life that it was impossible to turn him around, and he had to lie in the “filth” that produced the rotting of the skin of his back. The eleventh chapter of the first book is dedicated to the *Impossibility of moving to the side*. The author identifies this terrible situation with the Egyptians who lay in the shackles of the dungeon for three days, without being able to turn to the other side, which is written in the Holy Scriptures. The king’s illness was presented as the repentance of a sincere believer, with it came insomnia, as well as long vigils that made him a real slave. He was awakened at night “[...] by those unrests that suddenly surrounded and tortured him”, and there were certainly psychological problems, and the author emphasizes that “[...] he avoids mentioning the agitated thoughts with which the king was tortured.” [5, pp20-21]

⁴ Dipsa - a mythical snake that attacked in a similar way as dropsy. It is the most thirsty among snakes, whose venom kills in heat and drought. That is why those who are bitten by it, since they have exhausted all their body fluid, are so exhausted by thirst, they drank a large amount of water, causing dropsy. That is why even dropsy is called *dipsacos* which means thirsty, even thirst is called by this name. Myth claims that many Jews in the desert were bitten by these snakes, contracted dropsy and died in the most cruel torments.

⁵ Pliny and Galen also wrote about dysentery, describing it as a disease that ends in great suffering.

The twelfth chapter describes the king's *insomnia and vigils*, in detail about the insomnia that tormented the king and the pain that did not allow him to fall asleep, "[...] *and when sometimes a dream came, it all ended with a strong heartbeat, sudden fear, moments of sadness and strong melancholy that came together.*" Insomnia also tormented Job, who said: "*You will scare me in my sleep.*" Through the depiction of his illnesses, not only suffering is shown, but also the king's virtues. A special difficulty was the fact that "[...] *between the third and the fiftieth day, as long as the illness lasted,*" the king could not get out of bed, and at the same time he performed physiological needs there, which was most difficult for the king. Doctor Andreas Zamudius de Alfaro testified that the king could not stand a thread in his bedroom and at home, nor a freckle or a wart on himself. [5, pp22-24]

The king's death hour was to be presented as a special moment. The king opened his eyes with great vivacity and pointed them at the crucifix, which was worn by Fernando de Toledo (it was the crucifix with which his father died). After taking it from him, he immediately kissed it several times with the greatest respect, no less than the icon on the candlestick he held in his other hand. [5, pp27-28] This moment in the book testifies to the importance of the decision of the Council of Trent, which rejected the Lutheran view (which was accepted by all Protestants) that, among other things, Christ should not be walked in processions and carried to the sick. This act seemed so famous, as Diego de Yepes, the king's confessor, testified, that Garcia de Loaysa concluded, like the others present, that it was a miracle. They agreed that it was impossible for the king to compose and gather himself so suddenly and unexpectedly, in a good mood, with such vivid and effective prudence. Their opinion was that it was God's providence, a special heavenly ecstasy, a miracle that brought the king back and strengthened him. [13, p68]

The king wished to attend Mass and receive communion only the day before his death, on September 12. The king's insistence on communion was postponed with the explanation that the doctors had to agree with that. It was especially important for Cervera to emphasize that the king took communion and that he died during the Mass, on September 13, 1598. Emphasizing the spiritual aspect of the king's thread, Cervera emphasizes that in the end God blessed the king with calmness for "[...] *one and a half days*", freeing him from all pain. According to Juan Ruiz de Velasco, God did another mercifulness, at the hour of his death he gave the king spirit, reason, heart and soul, so that he could prepare for the eternity. The king managed to show everyone that he was not tired and exhausted, he spoke and answered everyone he talked to, and there were many of them, both spiritual and secular people. [5, p31] This is how the death of the great ruler of that time, Philip II the Catholic was described, tormented by various diseases but finally touched by the grace of God, which gave him reason and faith with which he died. Cervera's work *The history of the death of Philip II* was created during the time of the Catholic Reformation and was presented in that spirit, in accordance with the awakened Catholic spiritual, literary and historical creation. It aimed to portray the king as a martyr and a believer, and the descriptions of his illnesses in the text were made in that context. However, they also have significant value as a source for the history of health culture at the end of the 16th century.

Rezime

Rad se zasniva na podacima iz dela Istorija smrti Filipa II koje je napisao Antonio Servera de la Torre a objavljeno je na španskom jeziku u Madridu, godinu dana nakon kraljeve smrti. Posle Serverine smrti 1606. godine došlo se na ideju da se delo objavi na latinskom jeziku i time postane dostupno evropskoj javnosti. Ideja priređivanja dela bila je u cilju klasične habzburške propagande koja se diktirala iz centra, čija je glava bio nadvojvoda Maksimilijan III. Taj posao je poveren Francu Gulimanu, zvaničnom istoričaru Habzburške dinastije, koji je delo preveo na latinski jezik i priredio sa manjim izmenama. U članku se razmatra segment koji se odnosi na opis bolesti i poslednjih dana života Filipa II. Ideja je bila da se Filip II prikaže kao vladar koji je ceo svoj fizički i umni potencijal posvetio hrišćanstvu, odnosno katolicizmu, i državi. Poseban aspekt dela predstavlja kraljevo trpljenje i stradanje od bolesti koje su ga mučile i vezale za postelju zadnjih pedeset dana života. Servera je podatke o kraljevim oboljenjima crpeo iz usmenih svedočanstava lekara ali i zvaničnih spisa o lečenju i smrti. Kroz opis bolesti i muka od čijih je posledica umro, stvorena je slika o kraljevom mučeništvu i jakoj veri, koja ga je prikazivala kao istinskog hrišćanina.

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