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FROM THE BIBLE TO ÁLVARO DE LUNA. HISTORICAL ANTECEDENTS AND POLITICAL MODELS IN THE DEBATE ON THE VALIMIENTO IN SPAIN (1539-1625)*

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ABSTRACT: *The presence of a powerful favourite alongside the legitimate ruler has been a fundamental point in the history of the main European monarchies of the seventeenth century. In addition to the concrete political struggle at court, the conflict between opponents and defenders of the phenomenon of favouritism was fought even on a theoretical level, in the vast political literature focused on this issue from the sixteenth century and then, with increasing intensity, in the following century. This article aims to examine, through the analysis of political works centered on the figure of the favourite during the valimiento of the Duke of Lerma, in which way various characters and ages of the past were used and re-read for political purposes inside of this debate. The political use of history emerges as a central element to understand the characters who more than any other influenced an entire era of European history.*

KEYWORDS: *Minister-Favourite, Past, History, Duke of Lerma, Álvaro de Luna.*

DALLA BIBBIA AD ÁLVARO DE LUNA. ANTECENTI STORICI E MODELLI POLITICI NEL DIBATTITO SUL VALIMIENTO IN SPAGNA (1539-1625)

SOMMARIO: *La presenza di un potente favorito al fianco del legittimo sovrano ha costituito un fondamentale punto in comune nella storia delle principali monarchie europee del XVII secolo. Oltre alla concreta lotta politica che si svolgeva a corte, la contrapposizione tra oppositori e difensori del fenomeno del favoritismo si giocò anche su un piano di riflessione teorica, nella vasta letteratura politica centrata sul tema nel XVI secolo e dopo, con crescente intensità, nel secolo successivo. L'articolo si propone di esaminare, attraverso l'analisi di opere centrate sulla figura del favorito durante il valimiento del duca di Lerma, in che modo diversi personaggi ed epoche del passato furono usati e riletti a fini politici all'interno di tale dibattito. L'uso politico della storia emerge come un elemento centrale per comprendere le figure che più di qualsiasi altre influenzarono un'intera epoca della storia europea.*

PAROLE CHIAVE: *Ministro-Favorito, Passato, Storia, Duca di Lerma, Álvaro de Luna.*

The concept of history as *magistra vitae*, a repertoire from which it is possible to draw examples and identify patterns of behaviour and political conduct, was dominant throughout the entire Early Modern Age¹. Interpreting the past in search of anticipations, signals,

* Abbreviations: Ahn (Archivo Histórico Nacional); Asv (Archivo Segreto Vaticano); Bav (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana); Bne (Biblioteca Nacional de España); Rah (Real Academia de la Historia). I would like to thank Alistair Malcolm, Gonzalo Velasco Belenguer and James Novoa for their help and suggestions.

¹ According to some scholars, the second half of the eighteenth century, and in particular the French Revolution, constituted a turning point in this vision of the past, from which the ability of history to be a guide and an inspiration to the men's actions was questioned. On these positions, for example, R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1979; or F. Hartog, *Régimes d'historicité: présentisme et expériences du temps*, Seuil, Paris, 2003. The

justifications or condemnations of what was happening in the present is a characteristic feature of the political reflection of the time, based mainly on the sacred texts and the Greek-Roman history, but that often invested more recent characters and historical periods. Through a process of comparison between past and present, looking for similarities or contrasts in human actions, in political and social institutions, in ideas and values, or in military and revolutionary events, history was thus constantly used to describe, explain, but also to justify or condemn, facts and protagonists of the present. In the Spanish Monarchy of the opening decades of the seventeenth century, the dominant theme in the rich political literature focused on the court drew inspiration from the actual situation of that time, in which a powerful favourite exercised the power that in theory had been granted only to the sovereign.

The favourite of the king, the character who, thanks to the trust and affection of his sovereign, decides the fate of an entire kingdom and enriches himself and his family and allies with titles, honours and money, is traditionally a subject of debate in European history. Both on a theoretical level - in the political treatises - and on a more practical level - in the struggles at court - the nature of the power of the favourite, its limitations and the very need or opportunity for the existence of a privileged adviser alongside the legitimate king, have been for a long time topics of discussion and political confrontation in the main monarchies of the Old Continent². Within this debate, the references to the past, the instrumental use of history and its reinterpretation based on personal interests and their own reference group objectives, are very important elements in the understanding of

opposite view of other scholars has pointed out that the references to the past and a often instrumental use of history have continued to be present also in the political and intellectual reflections subsequent to 1789: see for example L. Canfora, *Analogia e storia*, Il Saggiatore, Milano, 1982; P. Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present. Modern Time and the Melancholy of History*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.)-London, 2004; G. Cubitt, *The Political Uses of Seventeenth-century English history in Bourbon Restoration*, «The Historical Journal», 50 (2007/1), pp. 73-95; G. Cubitt, *Revolution, Reaction, Restoration: The Meanings and Uses of Seventeenth-century English History in the Political Thinking of Benjamin Constant (1797-1830)*, «European Review of History», 14, 1 (march 2007), pp. 21-47. For more details on this debate, D. Di Bartolomeo, *Lo specchio infranto. "Regimi di storicità" e uso della storia secondo François Hartog*, «Storica», 49 (2011), pp. 63-94.

² The European historiography has produced countless studies on the favourites of the seventeenth century, especially from the 1970s. Leaving aside the texts that will be mentioned below, we can not overlook at least the model represented, for the Spanish case, by the studies of Francisco Tomás y Valiente (*Los validos en la monarquía española del siglo XVII*, Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Madrid, 1963) and John H. Elliott (see in particular *Richelieu and Olivares*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984; *The Count-Duke of Olivares. The statesman in an age of decline*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1986).

the issues and the main arguments developed by both detractors and defenders of the phenomenon of favouritism³. This article aims, in particular, to analyze which figures and political models of the past were used in the long debate on the *valimiento* in the Spanish monarchy in the sixteenth century, from the first thoughts on the subject during the reign of Charles V, until 1625, the year in which the Cardinal Duke of Lerma died, signalling the end of the political and judicial aftermath generated by his government⁴.

In 1539, the publication at Valladolid of the *Aviso de privados o despertador de cortesanos* by Antonio de Guevara marked in some way the beginning of the discussion on the topic of the favourites in the Spanish political literature of the sixteenth century. Sometimes contained in works destined for the king's counsellors, as in the case of Fadrique Furió Ceriol⁵, or for the educators of the prince, as in the case of Pedro de Ribadeneyra and Juan de Mariana⁶, the reflections on the role and power of the *privados* grew during the reign of Philip II and especially in the last 15 years of the *Rey Prudente*, when old age and ailments of the sovereign allowed the rise of a small number of advisers by his side and, at the same time, of the future Duke of Lerma alongside Prince Philip⁷. The political literature on the topic was enriched as a result, dealing with an issue that had become very popular at the time. After Antonio Pérez⁸ and Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos (a member of Pérez's circle)⁹,

³ The theme of the political use of history, that is the use of characters and events of the past in the political and ideological struggle of today is very timely and is the basis of much recent research applied to different problems and historical periods. Some examples: E. Rawson, *The Spartan Tradition in European Political Thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991; E. Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores. Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville-London, 2009; R. Hammersley, *The English republican tradition and eighteenth-century France. Between the ancients and the moderns*, Manchester University Press, Manchester-New York, 2010; D. Di Bartolomeo, *Nelle vesti di Clío. L'uso politico della storia nella Rivoluzione francese (1787-1799)*, Viella, Roma, 2014.

⁴ G. Mrozek Eliszczewski, *Bajo acusación: el valimiento en el reinado de Felipe III. Procesos y discursos*, Editorial Polifemo, Madrid, 2015.

⁵ F. Furió Ceriol, *El Consejo y Consejeros del Príncipe*, Antwerp 1559.

⁶ P. de Ribadeneyra, *Tratado de la religión y virtudes que debe tener el Príncipe cristiano para gobernar y conservar sus estados, contra lo que Nicolás Maquiavelo y los políticos deste tiempo enseñan*, in *Obras escogidas*, Madrid 1952, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, LX, pp. 449-587; J. de Mariana, *De rege et regis institutione (la dignidad real y la educación del príncipe)*, Toledo 1599.

⁷ On the rise of Lerma in the last years of Philip II's court, see G. Mrozek Eliszczewski, «La hora de la mudanza». *L'ascesa del marchese di Denia e il dibattito culturale sul favoritismo nella corte di Filippo II*, «Società e Storia», 144 (II, 2014), pp. 219-247.

⁸ A. Pérez, *A un gran Privado*, 1594.

⁹ B. Álamos de Barrientos, *Discurso político al rey Felipe III al comienzo de su reinado*, Madrid 1598; Id., *Suma de preceptos justos, necesarios y provechosos en Consejo de Estado al Rey Felipe III siendo Príncipe*, Madrid 1599; Id., *Norte de príncipes*, Madrid

many other authors followed their example during the reign of Philip III, when the twenty-year government of the Duke of Lerma imposed itself as a kind of model of *valimiento* for his successors both in Spain and in other European monarchies. The total confidence of the king and the subsequent delegation of power to his favourite enabled Lerma to exercise a total control over the court, over the political, economic and military choices of the monarchy and over the system of patronage, monopolized in favour of his family and the members of his faction¹⁰.

Faced with such power, never seen before in European history, political literature was even more clearly divided into two opposing ideal fronts, who sought to discredit or to justify the power of the Duke. In this way, one can recall the reflections by many protagonists of the political fight at court, as in the case of Francisco de Quevedo, a key figure both in the court of Philip III, as an agent of the third Duke of Osuna¹¹, and in the court of Philip IV¹². Or also the contributions by some intellectuals linked in various ways to the competition for power, such as Pedro Maldonado, personal confessor of the Duke of Lerma and the author of the main text written in defence of the *valimiento* and the government of his patron¹³. On the other side, the Franciscan preacher Juan de Santa María, a relentless opponent of the Sandovals and their power, summarized the main arguments against the government of the favourites in his *Tratado de república y policía cristiana*¹⁴.

1600; Id., *Tácito español ilustrado con aforismos*, Madrid 1614. The link between Pérez and Álamos de Barrientos is confirmed by the fact that the works written by the second one have been attributed, for centuries, to the first.

¹⁰ About Lerma and his government, see F. Benigno, *L'ombra del re. Ministri e lotta politica nella Spagna del Seicento*, Marsilio, Venice, 1992; B. J. García García, *La Pax Hispanica. Política exterior del duque de Lerma*, Leuven University Press, Leuven, 1996; A. Feros, *Kingship and Favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598-1621*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000; P. Williams, *The great favourite. The Duke of Lerma and the court and government of Philip III of Spain, 1598-1621*, Manchester University Press, Manchester – New York, 2006; A. Alvar Ezquerro, *El Duque de Lerma. Corrupción y desmoralización en la España del siglo XVII*, Esfera de los Libros, Madrid, 2010.

¹¹ On Pedro Téllez Girón, third Duke of Osuna, and his relationship with Quevedo, see L. Linde, *Don Pedro Girón, duque de Osuna: la hegemonía española en Europa a comienzos del siglo XVII*, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid, 2005.

¹² F. de Quevedo *Discurso de las privanzas*, edited by Eva María Díaz Martínez, EUNSA, Pamplona 2000; id., *Política de Dios, gobierno de Cristo, tiranía de Satanás*, Zaragoza 1626; *Como ha de ser el privado*, edited by L. Gentilli, M. Baroni editore, Viareggio-Lucca, 2004.

¹³ *Discurso del perfecto privado*, in Bne, ms. 6778.

¹⁴ J. de Santa María, *Tratado de república y policía cristiana. Para reyes y príncipes y para los que en el gobierno tienen sus veces*, Madrid 1615. By the same author, see also a short text written immediately after the death of Philip III, *Lo que su Maj.d debe*

Many other authors, such as Pedro Fernández Navarrete¹⁵, Giulio Antonio Brancalasso¹⁶, Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado¹⁷ and Francisco Bermúdez de Pedraza¹⁸, devoted part of their reflections on the theme of the favourite, also becoming, in some cases, points of reference for the subsequent political literature on the topic. As it is well known, the death of Philip III and the beginning of the reign of his successor did not mark the end of the phenomenon of *valimiento*, and the trials against the Duke of Lerma and some of the key members of his government were based on many of the themes and arguments that the previous authors had exhibited and continued to exhibit in their works¹⁹.

Within this vast production of texts of political and theoretical reflection, the references to people, governments and ages of a more or less remote past were numerous and never casual, always functional to the development of a more general and complex discourse. Dividing into three groups the most common characters in these texts, the first and largest is the one that draws on the extraordinary heritage of the Bible, in which history and religious myth steadily intertwine. In the *Book of Esther*, in particular, the court of King Ahasuerus - usually identified with the Persian king Xerxes I - is the scene dominated by the two characters who were constantly indicated, in the early modern age, as the example par excellence of the bad and good favourite: Haman and Mordecai²⁰. If the figure of Mordecai is, overall, little described in biblical writings, more central is the role of Haman, “the second after the king”, as he is repeatedly mentioned in the *Book of Esther*. Haman presents many characteristics of the favourites of the

executar con toda brevedad, y las causas principales de la destrucción de la Monarchía, in Ahn, *Estado*, lib. 832, ff. 323-338.

¹⁵ P. Fernández Navarrete, *Conservación de monarquías y discursos políticos*, Madrid 1626; Id., *Carta de Lelio Peregrino a Estanislao Borbio, privado del Rey de Polonia*, in id., *Conservación de monarquías* cit., edited by M.D. Gordon, Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, Madrid, 1982, pp. 381-419.

¹⁶ G. A. Brancalasso, *El Laberinto de Corte*, Naples 1609; Id., *Los diez predicamentos de la Corte*, Naples 1609.

¹⁷ L. Ramírez de Prado, *Consejo y consejeros de príncipes*, Madrid 1617. Lorenzo Ramírez de Prado was also the defense lawyer of his father Alonso, a prominent member of the Duke of Lerma's faction arrested in 1606, who died in prison and was condemned in 1608. During that trial, many arguments and themes that had emerged in the theoretical debate on the favourite were used by both the public accusation and the defense lawyer: G. Mrozek Eliszczynski, *Las culpas del Rey y de su Favorito. El proceso a Alonso Ramírez de Prado (1607-1608)*, «Librosdelacorte.es», 6 (2013), pp. 27-49.

¹⁸ F. Bermúdez de Pedraza, *El secretario del Rey*, Madrid 1620.

¹⁹ M. Renzi, *El Privado perfecto*, in Bne, Mss. 5873, ff. 136r-192r; J. de Zevallos, *Arte real para el buen gobierno de los Reyes, y Príncipes, y de sus vassallos*, Madrid 1623; F. Lanario, *Discurso de que los Reyes han de tener privado*, Palermo 1624; Id., *I trattati del principe e della guerra*, Naples 1626; J.P. Mártir Rizo, *Historia de la vida de Lucio Anneo Séneca español*, Madrid 1625; Id., *Norte de Príncipes y Vida de Rómulo*, Madrid 1626.

²⁰ *Book of Esther*, 8, 12

following centuries and he is the subject of criticism very similar to those that were assigned to them. In fact, he enjoys the trust of the king, who has put him above all the ministers and princes of his vast kingdom²¹; and thanks to this trust he has accumulated wealth and power, for himself and his family. However, his insatiable greed and his anger at seeing a Jew, Mordecai, who refuses to bow down to him when passing by, push Haman to advise the king the extermination of the people of Israel, an act finally foiled by the intervention of Queen Esther and from the rise of Mordecai, who has become the new “second after the king”. The fight between courtiers for the favour of the sovereign and the resolute intervention of the queen, which marks the end of an era and the beginning of another, are also elements destined to repeat themselves, as well as the criticism of the ambition and arrogance of the man who, with incorrect advice, threatens to drag his king and the entire monarchy to ruin. The tragic end of Haman, executed on the gallows that he had set up for Mordecai, is a further source of fascination in the parallels with the favourites of later periods.

Joseph, the second to last but also the preferred among the sons of Jacob, who was sold by his brothers because of envy and later became the favourite of the Pharaoh in Egypt, is another excellent example taken from the biblical accounts²². The same can be said of John the Evangelist, listed as the favourite among the disciples of Jesus²³.

The second group of characters from which political authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took inspiration to illustrate strengths and weaknesses of the *privados* of their kings, refers instead to the classical Greek-Roman history. Hephæstion, a childhood friend, an army general and confidant of Alexander the Great was often cited as an example of unparalleled devotion and loyalty, a favourite who was also a friend of his sovereign, and was victim of one of the greatest dangers for any *privanza*: the envy of those who were excluded from the grace of the prince, or, in this case, the other generals of the Macedonian army²⁴. However, the praetorian prefect Lucius Aelius Sejanus was the most effective personification of the figure of the favourite in Antiquity. Thanks to the special relationship that he created

²¹ Ivi, 3, 1-2

²² The figure of Joseph is used as an example of good favourite in J. de Torres, *Philosophia moral de Principes, para su buena crianza y gobierno: y para personas de todos estados*, Burgos 1602 (original edition 1596), pp. 277-283; or also in J. de Santa María, *Tratado de república y policía christiana* cit., pp. 477-478.

²³ See for example E. de Narbona, *Doctrina política civil escrita en aphorismos*, Madrid 1779 (original edition 1621), pp. 129-130: «y el mismo Christo Nuestro Señor, Rey de reyes, tuvo a S. Juan Evangelista, a quien amaba con particular demonstración».

²⁴ Although it refers to a following period and the English context, see H. Smith, S. Taylor, *Hephæstion and Alexander: Lord Hervey, Frederick, Prince of Wales, and the Royal Favourite in England in the 1730s*, «English Historical Review», 124/507 (April 2009), pp. 283-312.

with the emperor Tiberius, he exercised an extended and well-rooted power. The reflections on him received a vigorous impulse during the sixteenth century, with the discovery and exploitation of the work of Tacitus, the Roman historian who best described his personality and power²⁵. In the Sejanus described by Tacitus, the elements already highlighted in relation to the biblical figure of Haman return: the power obtained thanks to the trust of the emperor, his pride, his greed, his capacity to make his master share the responsibility for his faults, his fall from grace and his tragic end. Beyond that, two of the main characteristics that were attributed to the favourite in the early modern age stand out. One is the use of flattery, as an ideal tool for capturing the trust and favour of the sovereign: the figure of the flatterer was in fact one of those universally condemned by the authors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who spoke about the life at court. The other is the use, by Sejanus, of his privileged role to ensure “honours and provinces” to his *clientes*: the favourite emerges then as the head of a group that benefits from his power and that, in exchange, works for him in order to maintain his position²⁶.

From medieval history, until the years immediately prior to those of the ascent of the Duke of Lerma and his power group, numerous other examples of historical figures were used, re-reading their lives and careers as an anticipation of the rise and fall of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century favourites. Pier delle Vigne, trusted advisor of Frederick II but eventually arrested and cruelly tortured by order of the same emperor, was used as a symbol of how precarious and unsteady the career of a favourite was, totally dependent on the favour, by nature fickle and subject to sudden changes, of his sovereign²⁷. The parable of a courtier who, in just a very short time, reaches the maximum of power and, often suddenly, rushes into

²⁵ Publius Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales*, IV, 1-2.

²⁶ Among the texts which cite Sejanus as a perfect example of bad favourite, see P. Fernández Navarrete, *Conservación de monarquías y discursos políticos* cit., Madrid 1982, p. 38. Many other characters from Greek and Roman history have been used in the vast political literature about this topic, as in the cases of the historian Callisthenes (adviser of Alexander the Great) and the philosopher Panaetius of Rhodes (who had a close relationship with Scipio Aemilianus), mentioned by J. Fernández de Medrano in his *Republica Mixta*, Madrid 1602, p. 83. As for Roman history, one can recall frequent references to the “favourites” (in large part generals) of emperors like Vitellius (see for example in B. Álamos de Barrientos, *Norte de Príncipes*, edited by M. De Riquer, Espasa Calpe, Madrid, 1969, pp. 53-54), but also the good example represented by characters who refused to occupy an illegitimate power or to accumulate excessive goods and money, such as Scipio Africanus and Cato Uticensis (J. Horozco y Covarrubias, *Emblemas morales*, Segovia 1591, ff. 302r-303v).

²⁷ «No quiero hablar de Pedro de la Viñas, secretario y gran privado del emperador Federico el segundo, a quien su amo mandó sacar los ojos y entregar a sus enemigos»: P. de Ribadeneyra, *Tratado de la religión y virtudes que debe tener el Príncipe cristiano* cit., pp. 558-559. See also G.A. Brancalasso, *El Laberinto de Corte* cit., p. 8.

oblivion and a subsequent tragic end, is also at the center of the biography of the character who appears in almost all the works that explore the theme of favouritism in the Spanish political literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: Álvaro de Luna. Arriving at court in 1408, Luna had learned in a short time to win the trust and affection of John II since he was a child, remaining at his side through various events for over three decades. Nominated *Condestable de Castilla* and Master of the Order of Santiago, he was able to enter and remain in the Spanish collective memory as an unprecedented example of *privado*. His power was so great that he run up against the accusation of having usurped the authority of the rightful ruler and subjected the public interest to his own personal ends. His death sentence, executed in the *Plaza Mayor* of Valladolid on 2 June 1453, was transformed immediately into a never forgotten event, compared to which the destinies and especially the falls of many subsequent *privados* were read²⁸. Disliked, like Haman and many others after him, by his queen, Álvaro de Luna had also had a stormy relationship with the nobility of the kingdom, or at least with a large part of it. It was a characteristic in common with other European antecedents, as Piers Gavestone in the England of Edward II, or contemporary figures, such as Olivier Le Daim in the France of Louis XI²⁹.

But above all, Álvaro de Luna marked the beginning of the debate on the figure of the *privado* in Spain. Initially a discussion of literary nature, it later evolved also into a reflection of theoretical and political nature. Becoming a symbol of a theme that was typical of Baroque Europe, the mutability of Fortune, the fate experienced by the favourite of John II amply represented the thunderous fall that all the great favourites, sooner or later, had to face³⁰, and fully highlighted how the court of the kings was insecure and unstable, even for those who had dominated it for over thirty years³¹. When Luna was still alive, the poet

²⁸ For more details on Álvaro de Luna, see N. Round, *The Greatest Man Uncrowned: a Study of the Fall of Don Alvaro de Luna*, Tamesis Books, London, 1986; J.M. Calderón Ortega, *Álvaro de Luna: riqueza y poder en la Castilla del siglo XV*, Dykinson, Centro Universitario Ramón Carande, Madrid, 1998.

²⁹ The fight between Luna and a large parte of the high aristocracy is widely described by J.M. Calderón Ortega, not only in the already cited biography, but also, more briefly, in *Los privados castellanos del siglo XV: reflexiones en torno a Álvaro de Luna y Juan Pacheco*, in J.A. Escudero (ed.), *Los Validos*, Dykinson, Madrid, 2004, pp. 41-62. In this contribution, Calderón Ortega explicitly compares Luna and his "disciple" Juan Pacheco to the seventeenth-century *validos*, in particular the Count-Duke of Olivares, underlining all the common elements.

³⁰ I. Pastor Bodmer, *Grandeza y tragedia de un valido: la muerte de don Álvaro de Luna*, 2 voll., Caja de Madrid, Madrid, 1992.

³¹ On these reflections, see J.M. Boyden, "Fortune Has Stripped You of Your Splendor": *Favourites and their Fates in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Spain*, in J.H. Elliott, L.W.B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London, 1999, pp. 26-37, in particular pp. 26-31.

Juan de Mena had already portrayed him at the zenith of his power in *El laberinto de Fortuna* (1444), predicting at the same time his future fall. After the death of Don Álvaro, also Íñigo López de Mendoza, Marquis of Santillana, wrote verses on him and on his end. Even though he had been a bitter enemy of Luna, Santillana used his story to compose a work with didactic and moral purposes, launching a general warning to all the favourites. In *Doctrinal de privados, fecho a la muerte del Maestre de Santiago don Álvaro de Luna* he indicated, in fact, a series of mistakes made by Luna and that his successors would not have to repeat in the future, trying instead to follow a line of straight morality. The more general issue was that of the mutability of Fortune, together with the consequent criticism of human vanity. It was a theme present also in *Coplas por la muerte de su padre* by Jorge Manrique, a poet who had not had the opportunity to personally meet Luna, but used his story to attack the excessive attachment of men to the goods of material life³².

So, using and re-reading the biographical paths of various biblical and historical figures, the favourite had already assumed, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, some specific characteristics. Thanks to the trust of the king, who put him above all the ministers and counsellors of the kingdom, he accumulated wealth and power, for himself and his family and allies. The insatiable greed, the inordinate ambition, the arrogance and the use of flattery were faults frequently charged to the favourites, though they were destined to struggle with other courtiers for the king's favour, with members of the royal family – in particular with queens –, with a large part of the great nobility and in general with the envy of those who were excluded from power. The tragic end, which brought together both the biblical story of Haman in the *Book of Esther* as well as the story of Álvaro de Luna, was a warning and, at the same time, a fate considered inescapable for all the favourites.

Countless works and authors cited these characters to rebuke the sins and vices of the favourites, to describe their power within the court and their influence on the king, but also to point out, at times, the

³² On fifteenth-century poetry centered on the figure of Álvaro de Luna, and more generally on the *privado*, see the observations of R. MacCurdy, *The Tragic Fall: Don Álvaro de Luna and other Favourites in Spanish Golden Age Drama*, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1978, pp. 38-53. MacCurdy also emphasizes that, not coincidentally, on the occasion of Luna's death and in the years immediately before and after it, the works on the theme of Fortune and its mutability multiplied. Among them: *fray* Lope Barrientos, *Tratado de caso y fortuna*; *fray* Martín de Córdoba, *Compendio de la fortuna* and Mosén Diego de Valera, *Tratado de Providencia contra Fortuna*, in addition to the already cited *El laberinto de Fortuna* by Juan de Mena. Besides the analysis of MacCurdy, see also the interesting study of D. Havener, *Some Literary Treatments of Don Álvaro de Luna*, Louisiana State University 1942.

importance of a trusted advisor and a sincere friend to the side of the sovereign. We may recall, among many other examples, the aforementioned Juan de Mariana and Pedro de Ribadeneyra, who in the delicate moment of transition between the reign of Philip II and that of Philip III, wrote works for the education of the heir to the throne which also contain interesting references to the debate about the power of the favourites. In *De rege et regis institutione*, published for the first time in 1599, Mariana³³ refers to Álvaro de Luna for the great power he was able to reach: a power for which, however, he “paid with his head”. For his part Ribadeneyra³⁴, in his *Tratado de la religion y virtudes que debe tener el Principe cristiano para gobernar y conservar sus estados* (1595), presents a real list of biblical and historical examples; he points out, in addition to the usual Haman, Mordecai, Sejanus, Pier delle Vigne and Luna, even lesser-known characters, like Parmenion, the loyal general of Philip II of Macedon and his son Alexander eventually killed by order of the latter³⁵, or the praetorian prefects Tigridius Perennis and Marcus Aurelius Cleander, both favourites of the emperor Commodus and then put to death by their lord. Both for Mariana and Ribadeneyra, the intent was to warn the protagonists of the political fight at court about the inevitability of their fall and the temporary nature of their power, especially in the context of a monarchy, as the one ruled by the Habsburg kings, where the favourites were, for both authors, unnecessary and potentially dangerous.

In that same period, in 1594, Antonio Pérez, one of the characters that were more successful in gaining the trust and esteem of Philip II³⁶, wrote a letter to a *gran privado* (great favourite), addressed to the Marquis of Denia - the future Duke of Lerma - and traditionally reported as an introduction to the *Norte de Príncipes* of Álamos de Barrientos. The brief text is significant, in our discourse, for the historical reference to a figure who had passed away a few years earlier: Ruy Gómez de Silva, Prince of Éboli, one of the main characters in the political struggle at the court of the *Rey Prudente*. Éboli, who died in 1573, is defined by Pérez as «el mayor maestro de esta ciencia que ha habido en estos siglos», the word «ciencia» meaning the ability of a

³³ On Mariana and his political thought, see H.E. Braun, *Juan de Mariana and early modern Spanish political thought*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2007; J. Mejías López, *Juan de Mariana (1535-1624): un pensador contra su tiempo*, ALMUD, Ciudad Real, 2007.

³⁴ J.M. Iñurritegui Rodríguez, *La gracia y la república. El lenguaje político de la teología católica y el «Príncipe cristiano» de Pedro de Ribadeneyra*, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, Madrid, 1998.

³⁵ References to Parmenion and other generals and “favourites” of Alexander the Great who were finally killed by the same Macedonian king, such as Clitus and Philotas, are also present in other authors, for example in G.A. Brancalasso, *El Laberinto de Corte* cit., p. 5.

³⁶ G. Marañón, *Antonio Pérez. El hombre, el drama, la época*, Espasa-Calpe, Madrid, 1947.

courtier to win and, especially, to retain the favour of his king, thus giving continuity to his *privanza*³⁷.

Two works written in the second half of the reign of Philip III were, instead, absolutely opposed to Lerma and his power. In his *Tratado de república y policia christiana* (1615), Juan de Santa María, a tough and strict opponent of the Sandovals and their government, left open the possibility that there were favourites useful and valuable for their sovereign, as was Joseph for the Pharaoh. In historical reality, however, favourites more often followed the example of Haman, putting his own interests before the public ones and forgetting how inevitable, sooner or later, their disastrous fall would be. The judgment of Francisco de Quevedo on Lerma and in general on the figure of the *valido* was instead more changeable and fluctuating over the years³⁸, but in the first part of his *Política de Dios* (written in 1617), he certainly took sides in favour of an ideal form of monarchy in which the king had to make use of more advisors, always leaving the final decision to himself. Drawing inspiration from many passages in the Bible, Quevedo identified in the envy of the excluded people the main danger to the favourites: the same envy that motivated the murder of Abel by Cain³⁹. If Jesus had disciples, but not favourites, the rulers had to follow the same example, also remembering how many Roman emperors were damaged more by the greed and lust for power of their favourites, than by the force of their enemies. The relationship between Tiberius and Sejanus was again taken as a paradigmatic case⁴⁰.

In addition to these and many other possible examples from works of political reflection, the references to characters and events of past ages were numerous in other contexts. A major theme of theatre literature of the Spanish *Siglo de Oro* revolved around the *Próspera* or *Adversa fortuna* (prosperous or adverse fortune) of various *privados* of the Iberian medieval history, such as Ruy López de Ávalos, Bernardo de Cabrera, and, as usual, Álvaro de Luna. Damián Salucio del Poyo and Antonio Mira de Amescua were the principal authors of this genre⁴¹, in the same period in which, in England, Christopher Marlowe

³⁷ On Ruy Gómez de Silva, prince of Éboli, see J.M. Boyden, *The Courtier and the King: Ruy Gomez de Silva, Philip II and the Court of Spain*, University of California Press, Berkeley-Los Angeles-Oxford, 1995.

³⁸ For more details on Quevedo's swaying judgment on the figure of the favourite, which was changeable depending on the personal relationship that linked him to the *valido* of the moment (Lerma or, later, Olivares), see P. Jauralde Pou, *Francisco de Quevedo (1580-1645)*, Castalia, Madrid, 1998.

³⁹ F. de Quevedo, *Política de Dios* cit., edited by J.O. Crosby, Castalia, Madrid, 1966, pp. 44-45.

⁴⁰ Ivi, p. 246.

⁴¹ Salucio del Poyo wrote two works centered on the figure of Ruy López de Ávalos, favourite of Henry III of Castile and then his successor John II: *La próspera fortuna del*

wrote *Edward II* (1592), Ben Jonson *Sejanus His Fall* (1605) and William Shakespeare *Henry VIII* (1612-1613)⁴².

Rodrigo Calderón, in some ways the human symbol of the government of the Duke of Lerma, the *valido* of the *valido*, was the only member of the Sandoval faction who paid for his unbelievable social and political rise with a public execution, on 21 October 1621, in the *Plaza Mayor* of Madrid⁴³. The death, which took place at the hands of the executioner in a *Plaza Mayor*, was not, however, the only point in common with the life of the most famous *privado* in Castilian history. In February 1619, shortly after his arrest in Valladolid, Don Rodrigo had been locked up in the same house that had belonged to Álvaro de Luna, maybe wanting to establish a historical parallel that his accusers would certainly have enjoyed.

The figure of Luna returned also at the end of the historical period dominated by the Sandovals. After the death of Philip III, being a cardinal protected Lerma from a criminal trial, as happened for his relatives and *criados*⁴⁴. The old *valido* ended up being involved in just a civil trial, which dealt with the many *mercedes* (noble titles, land holdings, pensions) received by him during the reign of Philip III, in particular the privilege, granted to him in 1601, for the annual export of 15,000 *salmas* of wheat from Sicily, later replaced with an annual income of 72,000 ducats. The order of the new king to cancel with immediate effect this annuity and confiscate any donations received by Lerma started a trial that the Cardinal Duke, in truth, initially tried to avoid in every way⁴⁵. An important part of this trial dealt with the past of the Sandoval family and the interpretation of a delicate phase of Castilian history.

After the decision of Philip IV to promote a judicial inquiry in charge of Lerma and his family, the old favourite inaugurated his defensive

famoso Ruy López de Ávalos and *La adversa fortuna del muy noble Caballero Ruy López de Ávalos*. The protagonist of the third work of Salucio del Poyo is instead Álvaro de Luna: *Privanza y caída de Don Álvaro de Luna*. On this author, see L. Caparrós Esperante, *Entre validos y letrados. La obra dramática de Damián Salucio del Poyo*, Universidad de Valladolid, Valladolid, 1987. Mira de Amescua used the same structure introduced by Salucio del Poyo in *La próspera fortuna de Don Álvaro de Luna y adversa de Ruy López Dávalos*, dated around 1624 and followed by *La adversa fortuna de don Álvaro de Luna*.

⁴² L. Bradner, *The Theme of Privanza in Spanish and English Drama, 1590-1625*, in D. Kossoff, J. Amor y Vázquez (eds.), *Homenaje a William L. Fichter. Estudios sobre el teatro antiguo hispánico y otros ensayos*, Castalia, Madrid, 1971, pp. 97-106; B. Worden, *Favourites on the English Stage*, in J.H. Elliott, L.W.B. Brockliss (eds.), *The World of the Favourite* cit., pp. 159-183.

⁴³ S. Martínez Hernández, *Rodrigo Calderón, la sombra del valido. Privanza, favor y corrupción en la corte de Felipe III*, Marcial Pons Historia, Madrid, 2009.

⁴⁴ For more details about the trials against Alonso Ramírez de Prado, Pedro Franqueza, Rodrigo Calderón and the Dukes of Uceda and Osuna, see G. Mrozek Eliszezynski, *Bajo acusación* cit.

⁴⁵ Lerma sent various letters to the king in order to avoid the trial: see for example Bne, Mss. 7377, ff. 321r, 324r. The last one is also in Bne, Mss. 8252, ff. 22v-23r.

strategy⁴⁶. With specific reference to the *merced* of 15,000 *salmas* of wheat, he reminded that it had been granted, in 1601, as a reward for the many services provided by the Duke to the Crown, and further justified by all the merits, the works and the huge costs incurred by Lerma in the following years passed alongside Philip III. In addition to these motivations, one could consider the will of the king of celebrating the deeds and the blood spilled by the Sandovals in the history of Castile. 15,000 *salmas* of wheat, a prize inevitably insufficient to compensate so many services given to the kings of Castile, were later converted to an annuity of 72,000 ducats, and Lerma had not gained anything from that switch. The Cardinal Duke also asked why he was the only one who had to justify the *mercedes* received, while so many aristocratic families, which in the past had been benefited in the same way, continued to enjoy the just rewards bestowed on their ancestors.

Investigations continued slowly in the months and years that followed⁴⁷. In 1623 the public prosecutor presented his indictment against Lerma⁴⁸. In the *petición* of 19 December, Juan Chumacero⁴⁹ specified as the laws prescribed that the assets and incomes of the Crown could be alienated only when there was an urgent need to award great and loyal services, and always following the approval of the competent council and six *procuradores* of the *cortes*⁵⁰. This process had not been respected, especially because the Sandovals, unlike all the other aristocratic families who had shed their blood in defense of the Crown of Castile, continued to claim honours and riches by virtue of deeds for which they had already been amply rewarded in the past and did not require additional awards. Then the Duke of Lerma, with all the posts and honours he had received, “*tubo maior gratificacion que hasta oy se ha dado a vassallo*”⁵¹.

⁴⁶ Bne, Mss. 8512, ff. 2v-4r.

⁴⁷ In 1622, both the prosecution and the defense presented the inventory of the assets and incomes of Lerma: Bne, Mss. 13239, *Relación de las mercedes hechas al Duque de Lerma, de Domingo de la Torre y Ureca*. Madrid, 8 de marzo 1622, ff. 418-421v; *Relación de las rentas del Duque de Lerma, embargadas por Domingo de la Torre*, ff. 429r-433r; *Descripción e inventario de las rentas, bienes y hacienda del cardenal duque de Lerma*, Valladolid 1622. See P. Williams, *The great favourite* cit., pp. 253-255; A. Alvar Ezquerria, *El Duque de Lerma* cit., pp. 465-473.

⁴⁸ Bne, Mss. 2355, *Chumacero (Don Juan) petición que dió contra el Duque Cardenal de Lerma; sobre las exorbitantes mercedes que gozaba desde el tiempo que estubo en la gracia de Phelipe 3º*, ff. 466r-473v; Rah, 5-805, *Por el real patrimonio de Su Magestad con el señor Cardenal Duque de Lerma sobre la donación de las quinze mill trasas de la medida mayor de saca perpetua del reyno de Sicilia, que se comutó en setenta y dos mill ducados de renta, moneda de castilla*, ff. 1-84r.

⁴⁹ S. Granda Lorenzo, *Chumacero, Juan*, in *Diccionario biográfico español*, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 2009, vol. XIII, pp. 564-567.

⁵⁰ Rah, 5-805, ff. 1r-2v, 23v-24r.

⁵¹ «He had more gratification than any other vassal until now»: Bne, Mss. 2355, f. 470r.

The defense of the Duke of Lerma, led once again by the *licenciado* Francisco de la Cueva y Silva⁵², specified that the *mercedes* had been granted to the favourite as a result of a *contrato remuneratorio*, ie the obligation, on the part of the sovereign, to reward adequately those who had best served him⁵³. It was therefore unthinkable and unproven, according to the defense, that Lerma had obtained the *merced* of the wheat bypassing the king or deceiving him about its real value. Indeed, Philip III had given it voluntarily, even judging it insufficient for the merits of the Duke and his ancestors, and there was no reason to question, twenty years later, the evaluation of the king. Financial issues did not release the sovereign from the obligation to reward his subjects, because the observance of the agreements by the king and the just reward for deserving vassals were more important than the debt situation. Many historical examples of *mercedes* similar to those attributed to Lerma could be recalled, but nobody was asked to return rights and properties which had been enjoyed for so long.

Great emphasis was also placed by the defense on the historical merits of the Sandoval clan, on the generations that had followed in the service of the Crown and that fully justified the awards conferred to the Cardinal Duke. In a memorial presented by the lawyers of Lerma⁵⁴, the whole family history was revisited starting from Diego Gómez de Sandoval, Count of Castro, who in 1448 was stripped of all his properties: unfairly according to the defense, which identified in the sequestration the aversion of Álvaro de Luna to all the aristocrats disinclined to accept his power; rightly according to the prosecution, who reproached the ancestor of Lerma for an act of insubordination against the king. From that date, the history of the Sandovals had developed as an endless pursuit of the lands and properties lost, that in the meantime had been assigned, in many cases, to members of

⁵² Francisco de la Cueva y Silva and his brother Antonio were the lawyers who defended Calderón, Lerma, Osuna and Uceda in the trials that marked the beginning of the reign of Philip IV. About them, E. Lucero Sánchez, *De la Cueva y Silva, Francisco*, en *Diccionario biográfico español*, Real Academia de la Historia, Madrid, 2009, vol. XV, pp. 460-462.

⁵³ Bne, Mss. 3999, *Francisco de la Cueva y Silva: memorial a Su Majestad defendiendo al Duque de Lerma de la acusación de haber hecho despachar en su favor la merced de quince mil salmas de trigo al año sacado de Sicilia*, ff. 51r-84v; Rah, 9-3646, *Por el señor Cardenal Duque de Lerma contra el señor fiscal sobre el amparo de posesión en la merced de las 15.000 salmas y commutación dellas*, ff. 1-19v; Rah, 5-805, *Por el señor Cardenal Duque de Lerma con el señor fiscal sobre el amparo de posesión*, ff. 1-4v. Furthermore, see the reflections on this theme of B.J. García García, "Fermosa gracia es la quel rey faze por merecimiento de servicio". *Proceso y justificación de las mercedes otorgadas al valido (1618-1624)*, in A. Esteban Estringana (ed.), *Servir al rey en la Monarquía de los Austrias. Medios, fines y logros del servicio al soberano en los siglos XVI y XVII*, Sílex ediciones, Madrid, 2012, pp. 321-359, pp. 333-343.

⁵⁴ Ahn, sección Nobleza Toledo, Osuna, c. 2455, d. 3, *Por el señor Cardenal Duque de Lerma con el señor fiscal*, ff. 443r-459r.

other great and illustrious Castilian families. The promises of the various rulers who followed one another on the throne had never been fully kept, according to the reconstruction of the lawyers of Lerma, until Philip III commissioned the best jurists of his kingdom to find the most equitable solution to the centuries-old question. The properties that were returned to the Sandovals were not therefore the result of a king's act of generosity, as alleged by the prosecution, but an act of justice that the same Philip III, in 1607, had tried to make unassailable⁵⁵.

For the defense of the old *valido* also his heir, the son of Uceda and second Duke of Lerma, intervened in 1624. He wanted to fight for the recognition of the Sandovals' merits, and in particular the Cardinal Duke's work at the service of the king of Spain. Through a dense memorial⁵⁶, the new head of the Sandoval clan was able to repeat the main arguments introduced in previous years by his grandfather and his lawyers. Faced with such a difficult economic situation, the *mercedes* granted to a single subject had certainly not been the trigger of the crisis, considering moreover the merits of the subject in question and his ancestors.

Despite the attempts of the Cardinal Duke to delay the judgment as much as possible⁵⁷, the *mercedes* which had been awarded by Philip III were officially revoked on 23 March 1625⁵⁸. In the weeks that followed, the heirs of Lerma, represented by the second Duke of Uceda and the new Count of Lemos⁵⁹ and backed by the nuncio Sacchetti⁶⁰,

⁵⁵ Ivi, f. 456r.

⁵⁶ Bne, VE/182/95, ff. 118r-148r.

⁵⁷ Bne, Mss. 2355, *Cédula real despachada por la junta particular sobre las mercedes hechas al Cardenal Duque de Lerma, sus hijos y criados por el Rey Phelipe 3º para que se le notificase al dicho Cardenal el estado que tenía este negocio en la dicha junta y le parase perjuicio*, ff. 463-465.

⁵⁸ Ahn, *sección Nobleza Toledo*, Osuna, c. 2040, d. 1.

⁵⁹ Francisco de Castro became the VIII Count of Lemos after the death of his elder brother Pedro, who had been a loyal ally of his uncle Lerma in the court of Philip III. See V. Favaro, *Carriere in movimento. Francisco Ruiz de Castro e la monarchia di Filippo III*, Associazione Mediterranea, Palermo, 2013; G. Mrozek Eliszczynski, *Service to the King and Loyalty to the Duke. The Castro Family in the Faction of the Duke of Lerma*, in R. González Cuerva, V. Caldari (eds.), *The Secret Mechanisms of Courts: Factions in Early Modern Europe*, «Librosdelacorte.es», Monográfico 2 (2015), pp. 68-79.

⁶⁰ In addition to the arguments of prosecutors and defenders, a key role in the resolution of the affair that dealt with Lerma and his *mercedes* was done by international diplomacy, especially by nuncios Innocenzo de' Massimi and Giulio Sacchetti. The work of the two nuncios about this matter, with the repeated instructions they received from Rome, can be reconstructed through their correspondence. For the years 1623-1625, the original correspondence of Innocenzo de' Massimi that contains references to the trial on the *mercedes* of Lerma is in Asv, *Segreteria di Stato, Spagna*, 64, ff. 12r-189v; the references to the same trial in the original correspondence of Giulio Sacchetti are instead in Bav, Barb. lat., 8297, 8298, 8299 and in Asv, *Segreteria di Stato, Spagna*, 64, ff. 11r-858v.

continued to lobby until they obtained an annual annuity of 24,000 ducats for their relative, 16,000 of which would then be passed to the same heirs after the death of the Cardinal Duke⁶¹. Lerma died just three days after reaching this agreement, on 17 May, at his residence in Valladolid⁶².

Beyond the final judgment, the trial against the old *valido* of Philip III is a clear example of re-interpreting of the past in order to condemn or justify facts and characters of the present. The political use of history was therefore an instrument that was used not only in the rich political literature on the favourite, but also in some concrete episodes of political struggle. The entire career of the man who dominated the court of Philip III was reinterpreted in the light of a series of events that had involved his family in the previous centuries. The origin of the misfortunes of the Sandovals was identified, both by the prosecution and the defense, in an era dominated by the most famous historical antecedent of the favourites of the seventeenth century. The lawyers of Lerma chose different strategies to demonstrate how the donations made by the sovereign to his chief adviser had been lawful and legitimate⁶³. One of these strategies drew inspiration from the story of the Sandoval family, and presented all that Lerma had achieved during the reign of Philip III as a just compensation for the titles, feuds and honour that had been unjustly taken from the Sandovals during dynastic struggles that had divided the Castile of the fifteenth century. The responsibility for these events was attributed, in the reconstruction of the lawyers, just to Álvaro de Luna, the favourite of John II who had punished those who had rebelled against his sovereign, taking away their lands and titles and condemning them to exile from Castile. Once again, Luna was accused of having exercised an arbitrary and illegitimate power, which answered only to his lust for power and wealth. Once again, he was cited as an example par excellence of the bad favourite. In this way, a thread ideally linked him, the most powerful *privado* of fifteenth century Castile, to the *gran valido* of the Spain of Philip III.

⁶¹ Bav, Barb. lat., 8298, ff. 112r-v; 8299, ff. 10r-v.

⁶² Cfr. P. Williams, *The great favourite* cit., pp. 259-260.

⁶³ G. Mrozek Eliszezynski, *Bajo acusación* cit.; B.J. García García, "*Fermosa gracia es la quel rey faze por merecimiento de servicio*" cit.