CHAPTER SIX

PEDRO DE VALENCIA, ROYAL CHRONICLER¹

Pedro de Valencia wrote many critiques and treatises following his appointment as Royal Chronicler for both Castile and the Indies in May 1607. As Chronicler for the Indies, he wrote various relaciones, which have published by Gaspar Morocho Gayo of the University of León.² Here we will analyse three critiques: Sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada (1607/1618), his critique of the Parchment and Lead Books of Granada and his two treatises on witchcraft. In both works the scepticism that he had studied in his Academica (1596) is a tool for the rejection of implausible, irrational superstition. As always, he uses his skills as a humanist and biblical scholar to refute, and at times ridicule, arguments that he finds untenable. Although chronologically later than the critique of the ‘apócrifos del Sacromonte’, we shall begin with the two treatises on witchcraft, which illustrate clearly Valencia’s critical skills. We shall also look at arguments from his personal defence of Arias Montano’s edition of the Pharaphrasis chaldaica in the Biblia regia. In the final section of the chapter we shall analyse another commission of Valencia: his design of a series of emblems to illustrate the political virtues.

Acerca de los quentos de las brujas

Valencia wrote two treatises on witchcraft and magic, Acerca de los quentos de las brujas y cosas tocantes a magia (Concerning the Witches’ Tales and and Matters Connected with Magic) and Suma de las relaciones de Logroño (Compendium of the Accounts from Logroño). They

¹ Some of the material in this section has been published in the following article: G. Magnier, “Pedro de Valencia, Francisco de Gurmendi and the Plomos de Granada”, Al-Qantara, XXIV, 2 (2003), 409–426. Quotations are from the my edition of Valencia’s critique of the plomos, which has been mentioned previously: P. De Valencia, Sobre el pergamino y láminas de Granada, ed G. Magnier (Oxford/New York: Peter Lang, 2006).
² Valencia, Obras completas, V/I.
were written in 1611 for Cardinal Sandoval y Rojas, following the *auto de fe* of Logroño of November 7 and 8, 1610, and are both rational and compassionate. Valencia had, in fact, been so moved by accounts of the trials that he read that he wrote to the Inquisitor General and offered to write a paper on them. Sandoval y Rojas took up the offer and urged Valencia to write with alacrity.

The first document proposes reasonable criteria for use in such trials and the second is a summary of the *relaciones*, or printed accounts of them, that the *cronista del reino* has read. He argues that one should not confuse witchcraft with mental illness and superstition. Each case must be tried with care and the evidence must be examined rationally and without prejudice. The veracity of accounts of supernatural happenings must be subjected to the test of common sense and firm evidence. Where there is any doubt, judgment must not be passed. He believes that all that happens at the *aquelarre*, or witches’ sabbath, is due to natural causes; unscrupulous people deceive the unwary in order to make use of them for sexual gratification. He compares the orgies he has read of to those of the bacchanalian rituals that were dramatized by Euripides in the *Bacchae* and described by Thucydides. Many stories of extraordinary events such as the power to become invisible, to pass through doors or to fly through the air on broomsticks may be due to hallucinations induced by soporific ointments. If witches had such powers why did they not escape from the officers of the Inquisition?

There is a great deal of similarity between Pedro de Valencia’s detailed account of the effect of hallucinatory drugs and ointments and the episode of the witch la Comacha in Cervantes’s *El coloquio de los perros* (*The Diologue of the Dogs*):

They rub themselves with magic ointments, which induce a very deep sleep, and then the devil, fulfilling his part of the pact, shows the witches’s sabbath (literally assembly) and all its activities in a similar dream to all these sleepers of his, and makes such a strong impression on their imagination they are convinced that it has really happened to them.\(^5\)

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\(^4\) Valencia, *Obras*, VII, p. 239.

\(^5\) “Se untan con los ungüentos mágicos, que causan poderísimo sueño; y luego el demonio, acudiendo al pacto, representa en sueños uniformes a todos estos sus