CHAPTER 22

The Prince of Transylvania: Spanish News of the War against the Turks, 1595–1600*

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Introduction

Among the most important news events in Europe in the early days of the Modern Age was the war against the Turks in the east. In Spain in particular, a set of news pamphlets addressing this topic is considered to be the first example of journalism in the full sense of the word.1 These were the news pamphlets published by the Sevillian printer Rodrigo de Cabrera between 1595 and 1600 about the exploits against the infidels of the Prince of Transylvania, Sigismund Báthory, along with other Christian knights.2 This is the first set of news pamphlets in which, although they had no fixed periodicity, each of the numbers was plainly part of a semi-regular series. In some of them, this is apparent in the titles, in which the pamphlets refer to themselves as the second, third, or fourth instalment of a numbered series relating to the same news.

After an extensive review of this corpus in collaboration with the project ‘Biblioteca digital Siglo de Oro IV’ I have managed to add to the number of news

* This paper is part of the Project Biblioteca digital Siglo de Oro IV (código FFI2012–3436), Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad del Gobierno de España, v1 Plan Nacional de I + D + i 2008–2011. All translations are our own.


2 News pamphlets on this war were not only published in Seville nor just by Cabrera. News about the conflicts between Christians and Turks in the Eastern frontier motivated numerous printed sheets in the latest years of sixteenth century in Spain, in cities like Valencia, Mallorca, and, to a lesser extent Granada and Saragossa, besides Seville.
pamphlets included. Thanks to the finding of hitherto little-known collections, we have been able to conclude that there are 30 news pamphlets surviving from those which Rodrigo de Cabrera published in Seville on the Turkish war. (This has allowed us definitively to add a small biographical detail to Cabrera’s career, which is the fact that the Sevillian printer, whom most monographs suggest died in 1599, should be considered active until at least 1600, the date of his last surviving news pamphlet).

However, the objectives of our work go further and seek to determine the channels through which information flowed in these first moments of modernity. We will use Cabrera as a case study for enquiring into the forms or formats (printed, handwritten, etc.) in which the news circulated, into the speed (frequency, the lapse of time between when events actually occurred and when they were reported, etc.) with which they were produced, and into the infrastructure that carried them (the postal service, and, principally, the agents who took on the task of reporting the news in a professional or semi-professional

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3 The most important set of prints by Rodrigo de Cabrera about the Turkish wars is kept in the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid. Another important set is kept in Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla. These collections and other minor ones have been described in repertoires and catalogues from the beginning of the 20th century onwards: Uriarte describes 16 prints in the series; Agulló describes 20 and Domínguez 24; P.J.E. de Uriarte, Catálogo razonado de obras anónimas y seudónimas de autores de la Compañía de Jesús pertenecientes a la antigua asistencia española con un apéndice de obras de los mismos, dignas de especial estudio bibliográfico (Madrid: Sucesores de Rivadeneyra, 1906); Mercedes Agulló y Cobo, Relaciones de sucesos I: Años 1477–1619 (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1966); Domínguez, ‘El periodismo’. Of late, Catálogo Colectivo del Patrimonio Bibliográfico Español (ccpb) has included a few more records, belonging to the same series about war in the Turkish frontier and not previously noticed. These records list the prints kept in Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas de Madrid, donated as part of the legacy of D. Francisco de Cárdenas y Espejo. Cárdenas was the President of the Academy and passed away in 1989, and a famous Sevillian politician and scholar. He donated his rich library to the Academy. Our prints are to be found in a volume including 253 printed and handwritten documents, all of them from Seville, with a generic title “Relaciones históricas originales desde 1588 hasta 1631”. I want to acknowledge the support and advice of D. Pablo Ramírez, librarian at Real Academia de Ciencias Morales y Políticas.

4 We have included an inventory of the series as an Appendix: Relaciones de Sucesos de Rodrigo de Cabrera sobre la guerra contra los turcos (1595–1600). A more exhaustive list is included in Domínguez, ‘El preperiodismo’, but she does not include some of the news pamphlets mentioned here.

5 The date of his death, 1600, is correctly pointed out in Domínguez, ‘El preperiodismo’, p. 175. See also Carmen Álvarez Márquez, La impresión y el comercio de libros en la Sevilla del Quinientos (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 2007).