

Society for Emblem Studies - Great Britain and Ireland Branch

Emblems and Everyday Life

2-4 September 2015, University of Glasgow Library: Henry Heaney Room

**Introducing the Juan Baños de Velasco y Acevedo, *L[ucius]. Anneo Seneca* (Madrid, 1670)
Luís Gomes**

Conference note for the Round Table on Recent Acquisitions from the Bright collection

The Spanish emblem book in this collection, which I humbly present to you, is Juan Baños de Velasco y Acevedo, *L[ucius]. Anneo Seneca / Ilustrado en Blasones / Politicos, y Morales, / y su Impugnador Impugnado/ de si mismo/ al Serenissimo Señor/ el Señor D. Juan de Austria* (Madrid: Mateo de Espinosa y Arteaga, 1670) [Sp Coll S.M. Add. 476]. It contains 23 emblems followed by a commentary in the form of a rhetorical dialogue, published by a not very prolific printer, with engravings by two different artists of variable skill. And here endeth the lesson and brief description that could render this as a run of the mill emblem book – for this it is not. Indeed, there are various factors and events that make it a rather interesting book. This particular edition, probably unintentionally, encapsulates much of what was happening in Spain at the time. Though dealing with education of princes, the book, from its author, its production and relevance for the Spanish political scene is rather extraordinary. In these 9 minutes that we have left we will see issues of illegitimate princes and royal succession, victorious battles and defeats, engravers of varying ability, censors, scandals at court... all part of everyday life of the late 17th-century Spain.

We will begin with the first part of the title: [title page of Anneo Seneca], in English ‘Seneca, decorated by political and moral cartouches (with Latin mottos), AND its contesteer contested by himself.’ This is a direct reply to the 2nd edition of the earlier work of Alonso Núñez de Castro, *Seneca impugnado de Seneca en cuestiones politicas y morales* (Madrid: Pablo de Val, 1650 or 1651, later 1661), a deconstruction of Neostoicism’s shortcomings in Catholicism. Velasco y Acevedo rescues Seneca from himself (or his critics) whilst simultaneously converting his reply into a *specula principum*, or Mirror for Princes, where he offers political and moral advice to D. Juan José de Austria (John Joseph of Austria) in the form of It is a dialogue between two contesting voices (or interpretations of Seneca) where one voice – the contesteer, or ‘impugnador’, contests a moral or political lesson from Seneca, who is argued back, or ‘impugnado’, by the author himself. The almost labyrinthine introspective dialogue and Stoic posturing sits well in Spanish late 17th century baroque, which was already sensed as a declining Golden Age of the mighty Hapsburg Empire in many spheres. There is also a sort of patriotic duty in the choice of philosopher, which the censor Father Juan de Aguirre defends as ‘nuestro Español Seneca’ [image p. xvi] (born in Cordoba, Andalucia, around the year 4 B.C.), one of the classical authors of predilection in 17th-century Spain.¹

¹ See Karl Alfred Blüher, *Séneca en España: investigaciones sobre la recepción de Séneca en España desde el siglo XIII hasta el siglo XVII* (Madrid: Gredos, 1983).

The frontispiece: [image of frontispiece]. A 17th-century educated reader would have no difficulty in recognising the figure as D. Juan José de Austria, sometimes also called simply D. Juan de Austria (1629–1679), the addressee of the work - the flowing locks of dark hair [Carreño's Don Juan José de Austria, 1674, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest], the battle scenes and the coats of arms were a giveaway. D. Juan, a natural son of Philip IV [Philip IV of Spain, by Diego Velázquez (and studio), c.1650–1660, Stirling Maxwell Collection, Pollok House, Glasgow Museums], received a princely education. As fate would have it, his half-brother and heir to the throne, Baltasar Carlos, born in the same year, would die aged 17, and the next male heir would not be sired for another 15 years, giving D. Juan ample time to grow in popularity as a possible last-resort heir to the throne. D. Juan received high military distinctions after successfully pacifying uprisings in Naples in 1647, in Catalonia in 1651, and in Flanders in 1656. A popular figure in court at the height of his reputation (and remember that there was still no legitimate heir to the throne during this growth in popularity...), he was sent to settle, once and for all, the matters with the uprising of the Portuguese, who, on 1st December 1640, had unilaterally declared cessation from the Dual Monarchy in Iberia. D. Juan had a few successful incursions, but it turned into a disastrous military campaign, the small victories quickly overturned by larger defeats, culminating in the definitive defeat at Ameixial in 1663. On returning home defeated, Philip IV was displeased, and D. Juan was viewed with suspicion by consort queen Mariana of Austria, second wife of Philip IV and mother of the recently born legitimate heir prince Charles (born 1661) [Charles II, by Juan Carreño de Miranda, c. 1673, Stirling Maxwell Collection, Pollok House, Glasgow Museums] – in short, D. Juan fell from grace and after his father's death in 1665 he was forced into exile, leaving the new king Charles II, aged 4, in the care of his mother and regent queen. After favourable courtly intrigues and disputes against a suspected love affair of the Queen Consort, D. Juan was able to return and became Regent of Spain from 1677 till his death in 1679 (Charles II was still underage).

When Velasco y Acevedo's book was first proposed for publication in 1669, and up to its official circulation in March 1671, D. Juan was still not welcomed at court, and one cannot but wonder why Velasco y Acevedo would be dedicating a book to a former affable leader by then fallen out of favour. One theory we could advance would be that as the king, Charles II, was still a child, and a sickly child at that, D. Juan would still have a claim to the throne if the Charles II's health were to fail. Much has been said about Charles II's poor health, his looks and consanguinity taking their toll on successive generations (although he did go on to live a respectable 39 years). In any case, Velasco y Acevedo could well be hedging his bets in paying homage to D. Juan in his own right as a still possible ruler of Spain,² thus deserving (or needing) some moral and political guidance for his affairs. Ironically, this ambiguous stance of the figure of D. Juan, the preparation of the work and the artists involved criss-crosses over the affairs of Portugal, the bane of D. Juan's misfortunes.

The engraver of the frontispiece, [frontispiece] Pedro de Villafranca Malagón, trained by the court painter Vicente Carducho,³ is also the author of the engravings of some inferior quality in a text of Portuguese exultation, the *Vida y echos heroicos del gran condestable de Portugal, D. Nuño Álvarez Pereyra* (1640) [Rodrigo Méndez Silva, *Vida y echos heroicos del gran condestable de Portugal, D. Nuño Álvarez Pereyra* (1640)], and others of a better quality, like the 1639 engraving of Camões [Luís

² Ignacio Ruíz Rodríguez: *Don Juan José de Austria en la Monarquía Hispánica: entre la política, el poder y la intriga*. Dykinson, 2007

³ Curiously, Baños de Velasco y Acevedo had also been one of the censors signing the permission to print of Carducho's *grand oeuvre*, the *Dialogo de la Pintura* (1633).

de Camões, *Lusíadas.. comentadas por Manuel de Faria i Sousa...* (Madrid: Juan Sánchez, 1639)] for a commented edition of the Portuguese epic poem *The Lusíads* (Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Lusíadas... comentadas por Manuel de Faria i Sousa, Cavallero de la Orden de Christo, i de la Casa Real* (Madrid: Juan Sánchez, 1639), 2 vols., 4 tomos), which was taken from Andries Pauli's exquisite *Portrait of Luis de Camões* (dated 1610–1639) [Andries Pauli, *Portrait of Luis de Camões* (dated 1610–1639), Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam], presently at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. In Velasco y Acevedo's work the frontispiece [frontispiece] is carefully arranged to display a subtle, but present, message of daringness. In the lower foreground two figures are chained to the Pillars of Hercules, which frames scenes of an immense battle in the background. Fortune, on the left, is beaten but obstinately present and holding an upstanding wheel, and time as a winged old man with a scythe and an hourglass⁴ looking up hopefully at the herald trumpeting of what can still come to be. In the upper section of the engraving the dashing D. Juan is enclosed by not one, but two, Habsburg coats of arms of the Dual Monarchy, which persist in including Portugal [coat of arms close up] (the cessation had been agreed bilaterally a few years earlier, in 1667), which, in the whole, suggests that D. Juan is stubbornly still laying claim to the territory, [frontispiece] a sentiment echoed by the motto [motto] 'DUM PLUS ULTRA, PLUS ET ULTRA VIDETUR' ['even further beyond, further and beyond will be seen'].

The pictura of the emblems themselves are mostly by Marcos Orozco (1654-1707), with four being by Diego de Obregón (1658-1699), though the engravings of both artists are rather similar in style [image of both, side by side]. To bring this note to a conclusion, I think we have time to at two emblems. We start with No 14, then finish with No 1.

Emblem 14 has a pictura of everyday life [emblem 14], 'AB INCOMMODO SPLENDIDIOR' [from hardship becomes more splendid, or brilliant]. A furnace, gold smelting on a crucible, and an open door, to alert the prince that, just as the harsher the fire burns the crucible [focus on crucible and fan], the better the gold will be, so the Prince is at liberty to be severe with his servants. However, the prince cannot control the servants' free will [focus on open door], which can even lead to great achievements and sacrifices for the prince [focus on gold], so the prince is advised to be liberal with his severity, to obtain the best from his servants. [full pictura]

To conclude, Emblem 1 [emblem 1], 'NATURAE GENIUM PRIMA VISIONE' [he believes at first site in his innate nature] cuts it very close to the bone with the inevitable allusion to the problems of succession mentioned earlier. Velasco y Acevedo argues, through Seneca, that just as the perfume of the resin of a tree in India (Panchaya region) is evidence of its superior progeny, so, too, do sons inherit the merit, morals, and achievements of their fathers. The argument is construed using Seneca, illustrated with other authors, amongst which are other emblematisers, such as Diego Saavedra Fajardo's *Idea de un Principe Politico Christiano* (1642), emblem 17, who mentions a possible contestation to this this argument – that as the trophies of war to some become the weight to others (like the tree), so should honour and bravery not be prescribed from father to son, but rather on merit. Velasco y Acevedo deconstructs the argument little by little, and then providing the counterarguments to each objection to reach his conclusion. The association of this topic to D. Juan's political state of affairs is, surely, obvious.

⁴ See a similar example in Embleem met Vader Tijd als symbool voor het voorbijgaan van de tijd, Boëtius Adamsz, Bolswert, 1620, <http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.294171>

[title page] *L. Anneo Seneca* is a wonderful mirror for princes, who must improve themselves through introspection and reflexion on political theory and other more mundane matters (emblem 22 is on how to write letters). At the same time, because of its dedicatee, the tone of the argument and the political and cultural context in which it appeared; *Anneo Seneca* is also a mirror that reflects a snapshot of 1668-71 Spain. Although Stirling Maxwell already owned one copy, currently in our collection (shelfmark SpColl S.M. 1245, with Portuguese provenance), this excellent addition to our collection continues to highlight everyday information surrounding Baños de Velasco y Acevedo's work.