

ENGLAND ACCORDING TO ANTHONY SHERLEY, AN ENGLISH ADVENTURER IN THE SERVICE OF SPAIN

Blanca Krauel
Universidad de Málaga

RESUMEN

El presente artículo trata de las opiniones que el barón Anthony Sherley tenía de su país (Inglaterra) y que están recogidas en su obra *Peso político de todo el Mundo*, que dedicó al Conde-Duque de Olivares. El autor se remonta al reinado de Enrique VIII para explicar la acogida que tuvo la herejía protestante en aquel país, pero la mayoría de sus observaciones se centran en el reinado de Jacobo I. También incluye algunos comentarios sobre la situación en Escocia e Irlanda en ese período, además de la relación entre España e Inglaterra.

PALABRAS CLAVE: literatura de viaje, historia, siglo XVII, Inglaterra, España.

ABSTRACT

In this article I wish to discuss the opinions that Baron Anthony Sherley (1565-1635?) held about his own country and which are to be found in his work *Peso político de todo el Mundo*, dedicated to the Count-Duke of Olivares, where he presents a whole programme for modifying the foreign policy of the Spanish monarchy. The author goes back to the reign of Henry VIII to explain the introduction of Protestant heresy in his country, but most of his commentaries refer to the reign of James I. He includes some curious observations about the situation of Scotland and Ireland at that time, not to mention the relationship between England and Spain.

KEY WORDS: travel literature, history, 17th century, England, Spain.

Anthony Sherley, the son of Sir Thomas Sherley, sheriff of Surrey and Sussex, had a distinguished military career in the English army that fought in the Low Countries and France between 1586 and 1591. He married the niece of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex and with Devereux's help he became privateer and in 1596 raided the Spanish West Indies. The following year he took part in an unsuccessful expedition to the Azores and in 1598 he went to Persia on an unofficial mission and for the purpose of establishing better commercial transactions between that country and England, and also an alliance treaty against the Turkish Empire. All these things he did under the patronage of Essex¹. Once Anthony Sherley ar-



rived there, however, he changed his plans. In May 1599 he came back to Europe together with a Persian embassy that brought official letters for the Pope and some European sovereigns in which alliance treaties against the Turks were offered. On his return journey he passed through Russia and on the 7 November 1600 was received by Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. Once in Rome Sherley fell out with the Persian emissaries as they accused him of having sold for himself most of the presents the Shah had sent to the European princes. The Persian mission failed because of this incident: the Shah's ambassador set out for Spain and from there he went back to his country while Sherley stayed in Italy². Sir Anthony had been in touch with the English Court during his journey. But according to Father Parsons, an English Jesuit, since his sojourn in Prague he had become a member of the Church of Rome. This was no recommendation in the eyes of Queen Elizabeth, and his letters to Sir Robert Cecil, the queen's chief minister, were now ignored³. Nonetheless, I think this rejection might be related to his protector death, as the Earl of Essex was executed for high treason in 1601⁴.

Sherley, after a short time in the service of Emperor Rudolf II, who appointed him Earl of the Empire, came to Spain in 1607. At the beginning he held important commissions, but he soon lost favour because of his misappropriation of public moneys. From 1610 onwards and for nearly a quarter of a century, he was a pensioner of Spain, and almost a beggar. He lived for the most part in Madrid, sinking into complete obscurity and he died there apparently in 1635. In the year 1622 he lived in Granada, and it was in this place where he wrote his work entitled *Peso político de todo el mundo*⁵. The work was written in Spanish because he had learned this language a long time previously⁶. Its content shows the experience he had accumulated throughout his journeys⁷, and how this knowledge helped him to

¹ Sherley's biography appears in DENISON ROSS, Sir E., *Sir Anthony Sherley and his Persian Adventure*. London, 1933. I follow the summary given by FLORES, X.A., *Le «Peso Político de todo el Mundo» d'Anthony Sherley ou un aventurier anglais au service de l'Espagne*. 2nd. ed. Paris, 1963. 19-34.

² We know this from the travel-book written by one of the Persian representatives who became a Catholic and stayed in Spain. See *Relaciones de Don Juan de Persia*. Introduction and notes by N. Alonso Cortés. Madrid, 1946. There is an English version in *Don Juan de Persia. A Shi'ah Catholic, 1560-1614*. Translated and edited with an introduction by G. Le Strange. London, 1926.

³ See *Don Juan de Persia*, 337, note 11.

⁴ Essex's arrogance and the opposition of the Cecil faction led to a decline in his position at court. In 1601 he attempted without success to raise a rebellion in London against the government and was condemned and executed that same year.

⁵ This work is signed in Granada the 2nd November 1622.

⁶ In his first visit to Prague he spoke Spanish to the Emperor. See FLORES, X.A., *op. cit.*, 23.

⁷ The words are from his agent, Juan Nicolás, to Olivares: «...escribió un tratado general de todo el mundo, o a lo menos de lo que asta oy está descubierto, y se lo dedicó a V.E., parto se su espiriencia, no fundado en retórica sino en manera práctica por aver espirimentado, manejado y visto todo quanto en él dice...». See the agent's letter (Madrid, 11th January 1623) to Olivares in FLORES, X.A., *op.cit.*, 176.

study the strength and weakness of the Spanish Empire: if the former was based on the expansion of territories and control of raw materials, the latter depended on the lack of control over the sea routes and the necessity of trading companies similar to those of England. We know that Count-Duke of Olivares read the manuscript and appreciated Sherley's opinions very highly, even though no account was taken of them afterwards⁸.

Sherley's commentaries on England begin with a short survey of the wealth of that country. England is powerful because of her agriculture and stock of gold and silver obtained through the *contracts*; that is to say, the commerce round the world by the English system of trading companies. These companies will benefit from Spanish carelessness⁹. Apart from that, the population is rising rapidly. The English population is divided into different levels: *Titles of nobility, Knights, Squires, Officials, Merchants, Ploughmen and Servants*. This social division seems inspired in that given by Sir Thomas Smith in his book *De Republica Anglorum* (1583), where he writes: «We in England devide our men commonly into foure sortes: gentlemen, citizens or burgesses, yeomen, artificers and laborers» and he goes on to say that *gentlemen* are divided into *nobilitas maior* («títulos»), *nobilitas minor* or *Knights* («caballeros») and *esquiers* («hidalgos»)¹⁰. But Sherley adds one more group, «que se dizen eclesiásticos», and he writes about it:

que yo no me atrevo a llamar tales por ser tan diferentes y contrarios a la Iglesia, pero como por allá los llaman ministros, así los digo yo pues que administran con malos medios y con mal título las yglesias hasta que Dios es servido tomar cuenta de ellos¹¹.

This commentary is an excuse to recount the history of the spread of the Protestant Reform in his own country; he compares it with a bad cold that becomes pestilent. England that used to be the *flowery garden* of Catholicism, has become now *the straw loft of heresy*. Protestantism was tolerated by Henry VIII, and

tuvo algunos contrastes en los principios de su asiento, aunque los adversarios eran muy callados con tener sus gargantas apretadas con el catarro de los bienes eclesiásticos, los provechos de los quales repartidos entre todos o a lo menos entre los más poderosos eran recia enfermedad para quitarles el habla¹².

⁸ ELLIOT, J.A., *El Conde-Duque de Olivares*. Barcelona, 1990. 175.

⁹ The power of England is in these *contrataciones*, «y sacan el sembrado de ellas y para todas ellas destos reinos...». See *Peso político*, 97.

¹⁰ SMITH, Sir Thomas: *De Republica Anglorum*. Ed. M. Dewar. Cambridge, 1982. *Apud* COWARD, B., *Social Change and Continuity in Early Modern England, 1550-1750*. Harlow, 1988. 104-106.

¹¹ See *Peso político*, 91.

¹² *Ibidem*.



This disease spread under King Edward VI and even though Queen Mary started to purify the country her reign was short, and thus the victory of Protestantism under Elizabeth I was made possible. Sherley's analysis of the religious policy of this Queen seems quite right. At the beginning Elizabeth I cautiously supported the Protestants to exercise her rights to the throne, as the Catholic party questioned her legitimacy of birth and supported Mary Stuart. But her reticence disappeared soon after the Northern rebellion (1569-1570) and her excommunication by Pope Pius V. From then on penal laws for the Catholics were enacted and Elizabeth's power became stronger¹³.

However, most of Sherley's commentaries on his former country refer to the reign of James I, whom he presents as: «rey nuevo, rey estrangero y de nación odiada, rey no assentado en su reyno ni savedor de la buena o mala disposición de sus vasallos»¹⁴. Sir Anthony states that the accession of James I to the throne of England is the result of a compromise between the followers of the late Essex and his opponents who look forward to facing them. Thanks to this, «y con haver el Cecilio comprado con sus dineros y con el de sus valedores la miserable pobreza de los escoceses que más podían con el rey...»¹⁵. When Sherley refers to «el Cecilio» he is talking about Robert Cecil (1563-1612), second son of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, whom he succeeded as Elizabeth's chief minister in 1598. The ease of the Stuart succession owed much to this statesman's management, and in 1605 James I made him Earl of Salisbury. An able administrator, he served James as chief secretary and, from 1608 as Lord Treasurer. But, towards the end of his life he lost James's favour because of his failure to obtain additional revenues from parliament. Sir Anthony Sherley notices that the relationships between King and Parliament had worsened since Robert Cecil's death. And, in this sense he says that James's experience in Scotland failed to prepare him adequately for the English throne. He was soon in conflict with his parliaments on the question of the extent of his sovereignty and its refusal to grant what he considered adequate revenue. But most problems came about because the King carried out his foreign policy in a very personal way¹⁶. We know that James I aspired to the role of peacemaker of Europe, acceptable to both Catholics and Protestants. But it meant, according to Sherley, breaking with the tradition of Elizabethan foreign policy which enjoyed

¹³ See *Peso político*, 91-92. The northern rebellion was a rising inspired initially by the resentment felt by Thomas Howard, 4th Duke of Norfolk, at the influence at court of Cecil. Norfolk sought Spanish assistance for his plan to release Mary (Queen of Scots), but immediately submitted to Elizabeth I. Leadership of the revolt then passed to the great northern families, the Percies of Northumberland and the Nevilles of Westmorland, who demanded the restoration of Catholicism and of Mary to the Scottish throne. Government troops easily imposed order on the north and some 800 rebels were executed. See FLETCHER, A., *Tudor Rebellions*. Harlow, 1983. 92-96.

¹⁴ See *Peso político*, 93.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, 94.

stirring up discord between Protestants and Catholics and avoided interfering in the continental wars¹⁷.

This discrepancy between the English King and Parliament made Sherley put forward to Count-Duke of Olivares what he considered «uno de los mayores secretos del regno de Ynglaterra»; this is that the army and navy would not work without «dineros», and he adds, «los quales, con todo que parecen sembrados entre los particulares del reyno, son arto limitados con los reyes dél» because those «dineros» came from compulsory payments

y de muy mala y torcida voluntad los particulares los alargan a los reyes, principalmente quando las acciones de los reyes no dan gusto al paladar del general estado (the Commons) el qual es el dueño de los dineros¹⁸.

According to Sherley, England wants the Kings to follow her state policy,

que es de echar guerra entre sus vecinos y fomentarla con socorros, pero de no hazer guerra con reales fuerzas en ninguna manera mas que arremetimientos para tener sus armas en estimación y hazer creyentes a las naciones que quieren hazer más que en verdad no quiere ni puede¹⁹.

The relationship between Spain and England plays a very important part in the work of Sir Anthony Sherley, who sends his memorandum to Olivares when the matter of the Spanish match was seething; this is the project of the marriage between Charles, Prince of Wales and Princess María, the sister of King Philip IV of Spain. Let us remember that soon after his accession to the throne James I made peace with Spain, realising England could no longer afford the costs of war. Yet if the war was over, the tradition lived on. A tiny minority of privateers and military persons resented being unable to attack Spain and the Indies, but these were men without influence. According to S.H. Houston, more dangerous were the myths. By the 1620s many MPs believed that the English navy had once chased the Spanish half way round the world, plundering treasure ships to help pay for war. Baiting Spaniards was firmly established as a national sport. But James I underestimated and at times ignored his subjects' distrust of Spain and Catholicism²⁰.

As I have mentioned above, the English King schemed throughout his life to avoid war on the Continent, but he soon realised that there was little hope of preserving the peace of Europe without Spanish cooperation. James looked to matrimony to keep the peace. His daughter Elizabeth he married to Frederick, Elector Palatine of the Rhine (1613). His eldest son he hoped would marry a princess of

¹⁷ *Op. cit.*, 96-97.

¹⁸ *Op. cit.*, 97.

¹⁹ *Op. cit.*, 98.

²⁰ HOUSTON, S.H., *James I*. Harlow, 1973: 67-68.



Spain. Related thus to both Catholic and Protestant royalty, he would be in a strong position to mediate and pacify²¹. This idea had been suggested as early as 1604 and received new life with the arrival in England in 1613 of a new Spanish ambassador, Don Diego Sarmiento de Acuña, Count of Gondomar. Two years later the King received the marriage articles which the Spaniards had prepared. James was shocked by the conditions. If, when the children of the marriage came of age, they wanted to be Catholics, they must not lose their right of succession; the penal laws must be repealed and English Catholics allowed full freedom of worship, a necessary condition if the Pope was to find the marriage acceptable. These proposals were political dynamite, and all were rejected by King James, who knew that Parliament would never agree. In July 1618, Gondomar returned home on sick leave and the dream of the Spanish marriage faded with his departure²².

It would be revived only when a crisis in Europe gave the negotiations a significance they lacked before. The extension of the conflict which became known as The Thirty Years War, would make James I revive the old project in 1622. Therefore he sent instructions to his ambassador in Madrid, Sir John Digby, Earl of Bristol. At this time Sherley was writing his *Peso político de todo el mundo* somewhere in Granada, and he considered the project «malsonante matrimonio» and wrote his own opinions about it in the general conclusion at the end of his work²³. From his point of view Protestants resemble a huge body whose members are scattered and England is the head, he writes,

Y aunque el rey de Inglaterra con la ansia de este casamiento hiziesse que la caveza doliesse y que el príncipe enlazado con el casamiento hiziesse lo mismo, ésta fuera merced sola de dos vidas y remiendo muy temporal para una monarquía la qual debe hazer todos sus efectos sustanciales y a la par de su propio natural, ser y constitución²⁴.

Sir Anthony Sherley is against Gondomar's reasonings in favor of this wedding. Gondomar was possessed by the chimera of England's conversion to the Catholic faith. He reasoned that if England's future King became a Catholic then the English would become Catholic, too. But this idea was not rooted in reality: English Protestantism was much more firmly established than Gondomar realised²⁵. Sherley is conscious both of this and the anti-Spanish feeling of his countrymen. So he thinks the projected marriage is going to be useless. As years pass by England will get involved in wars against Spain,

²¹ *Op. cit.*, 70.

²² *Op. cit.*, 72-73.

²³ He summarizes here the opinions that appeared in a previous memorandum. See «Discurso Excelentísimo de la conveniencia de los casamientos del Principe de Inglaterra con la Señora Infanta de España». Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid), Ms. no. 10.794, 151-200.

²⁴ See *Peso político*, 153.

²⁵ See HOUSTON, S.H., *op. cit.*, 72.

y puede ser con más violento apetito y desseo, por ser una regla ynfalible y abonada por verdadera con continuos exemplos en la nación española, que sus más capitales y mortales enemigos son los hijos de padres españoles y madres estrangeras, o de madres españolas y de padres estrangeros nacidos en otros reynos como en Nápoles o Sicilia y en las Indias²⁶.

I cannot finish this article without commenting on Sherley's view of Scotland and Ireland, which is of great interest. Scotland is presented as a kingdom lacking in food and with an abundant but poor, rustic population. He says,

Es muy francés por la compra que los reyes de Francia han hecho y hazen de los más principales de ellos; y aunque cuestan caro valen mucho por lo que pueden servir en inquietar a Inglaterra²⁷.

Sherley's opinion agrees with the stereotyped image that Englishmen had of the Scots, as violent, uncivilised, poor and rapacious. An image which took a very long time to be dispelled and it was certainly much alive when James VI ascended to the throne of England. But, as Keith M. Brown points out, it is difficult to find evidence to sustain the view that money had a very great influence in determining Scotland's domestic politics or international friendships in this period²⁸. Ireland is presented as a rich and well populated country and «de mucha estimación y de harta fruta a Inglaterra». But he notices,

Pero, a mi parecer no pasarán dos generaciones sin que se rebelen por tener el terreno tal ynfluencia y el cielo della tal constelación que los ingleses nacidos en ella son más mortales enemigos de los naturales ingleses que los mismos irlandeses; y será más peligroso el movimiento por ser hecho por hombres más activos, más bien armados y más hombres que no son los irlandeses²⁹.

To tell the truth I do not know whether the author is referring to the tenant-farmers of the Elizabethan *Plantations* or to the so-called *Old English* who are the descendants of the Anglonorman colonization. If he refers to the latter his testimony turns out to be prophetic as those *Old English*, who are Catholics in their great majority, will head the famous Ulster conspiracy of 1641.

²⁶ See *Peso político*, 153.

²⁷ *Op. cit.*, 99.

²⁸ The Scots had a reputation for providing good mercenaries, and one suspects that it was based on the activities of these hired companies that this venal tradition attained such widespread acceptance rather than on the behaviour of the political elite within Scotland. See BROWN, K.M., *The Price of Friendship: the «well affected» and English Economic Clientage in Scotland before 1603*, in Roger A. Mason (ed), *Scotland and England, 1286-1815*. Edinburgh, 1987. 140-142 and 155.

²⁹ See *Peso político*, 99.

