Part Two
The Genealogy of National Identity
4 The Chronicler’s Background

Historical Discourse and National Identity in Early Modern Spain

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From antiquity until the modern age, the national background of the historian, and the extent and ways in which this might have determined his work, was an important and controversial issue in historiographic theory.¹ The rise of official historiography in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe led theorists to give serious thought to the key prerequisites of the state historian. Not only was he required to have political and military experience, literary skills and extensive knowledge of the ruling dynasties, the lands and peoples that he had to write about, but he also had to demonstrate his loyalty and commitment to them. And, like all good historians, the official chronicler was expected to be truthful, objective and fair. The fact that the writer was native-born was normally regarded as a guarantee of knowledge and ideological and emotional adherence to the object of his study; however, one also needed to consider that there was a greater risk that the historian’s affinities and feelings for his community might compromise his professional integrity if he were native-born rather than foreign.

My aim is to give an account of the development of this debate in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish historiographic theory. I shall try to show that the debate about the chronicler’s naturaleza evolved along with the changes that affected the ideas and uses of early modern historiography and in line with the dominant interests and biases of a wider and more complex ideological and disciplinary discourse.² The objective of this discourse, conditioned, in turn, by the political relations and international image of the Spanish monarchy, was the nationalisation of the official historiography of the Habsburgs, a process that its architects understood as the necessary precondition for the creation of a historical past on which to base Spanish national identity.³

Nebrija and the Italian chroniclers

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the Sicilian Lucius Marineus Siculus (1460-1533) and the Spaniard Antonio de Nebrija (1441-1522), both
professors at the University of Salamanca, were engaged in a bitter dispute over who should become the official chronicler of the history of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella, sovereigns of the crowns of Castile (1474-1504) and Aragon (1479-1516). The confrontation was fought out in the field of historiographic theory, by means of letters and speeches that reflected on the qualities of history and the prerequisites of the good chronicler; these writings were eventually published as prologues to the works of history of each of the authors. In one of these texts, Nebrija’s *Divinatio in scribenda historia* (*Divinatio about how to write history*) (1515), whose thinly veiled purpose was to discredit his Sicilian rival in the eyes of the monarchs, Nebrija argued that it was doubtful whether a foreign writer would be able to write an objective history of the rulers of another nation. In the specific case of the Italians, Nebrija assumed that they would not be wholly truthful because they were interested only in boosting their own prestige and they despised everything foreign. More particularly, Nebrija questioned the willingness of the Italians to write a faithful, honest account of the history of the Spaniards, since he understood that they harboured feelings of hatred and envy towards them.6

There was another reason of a different kind for doubting the suitability of Italian writers as the best royal chroniclers; it was common sense, Nebrija claimed, to suppose that there was no reason for them to know anything about the heroic exploits of the Spaniards, just as the Spanish generally had no idea about events in Italy, or any other foreign country, for that matter. It was the Seville humanist’s opinion that the king was better advised to follow the old adage that a fool knows more in his own house than a wise man does in someone else’s. So the presumption of ignorance was added to the foreign historian’s lack of objectivity. Perhaps Nebrija felt that the argument was not very solid or less than persuasive, for it was not so unusual in those days for princes to surround themselves with foreign writers, secretaries and counselors. Perhaps for that reason he tried to make the king see that the Italians were very hostile to monarchy and that there was no point in expecting any commitment from them in the defence of its interests. On the other hand, according to Nebrija, the Spanish were monarchists by nature and so were devoted servants of royalty. This collective ideological trait would disqualify the Italians from fulfilling one of the official chronicler’s most important and delicate duties, namely to slant the account in such a way that the virtues and wise decisions of the prince were thrown into relief, while his defects and errors were concealed. If the historian did not intercede with any kind of ideological support or sense of loyalty to the monarch, it was not sensible to expect him to tilt the truth in the direction that most favoured the king.
Once the Italian writers – including Lucius Marineus Siculus – had been discredited as qualified candidates for the post of official chronicler to the king, Nebrija dismissed the possibility of looking for historians in the ancient Roman province of Panonia, in France or in Germany, since it was his understanding that there were even fewer men of letters in those countries than in Spain. In light of all these constraints, the wisest decision was to appoint a Spanish historian as chronicler to the Catholic Monarchs. And with all the more reason if, as was the case with Nebrija, the domestic candidate turned out to be a writer with a sound mastery of Latin, who had been present at the events that he had to relate, and had full and detailed information that had been diligently gathered from people who had witnessed the events at first hand.

The national background of the historian was not a new debate in the critical tradition of historiography. The authorities of classical times and late antiquity had already addressed the question and laid down some commonplaces. In essence, critical tradition had established the principle that national historians were more credible than foreigners when it came to relating the events of their own countries. This conviction was based on the general assumption that the historian received better and earlier information about things close to home than those that happened elsewhere, either because he was interested in the past of his own country and its people – a tendency that was considered normal and natural – or because he would necessarily be more familiar with his own land and anything to do with it. The greater trustworthiness of national historians was endorsed likewise by the reproaches and accusations of ignorance and bad faith levelled at Greek authors who had narrated the events of the Romans, Hebrew writers who had explained the history of the Greeks, or Romans who had rendered an account of the actions of the earliest Christians. The suspicions that were aroused by historians who wrote about the events of foreign nations were only partly offset by the wariness caused by the partisan bias of national historians, which derived, in turn, from the criticism that Greek, Hebrew and Roman historians had received for having exaggerated the achievements and virtues of their princes and countrymen.

The presence of these topoi and their premises are easy to spot in Nebrija’s reasoning and, generally speaking, in the debate that developed about the national background of the historian in Spanish historiographic theory in the early modern age. Even though he might have been motivated by his rivalry with Lucius Marineus Siculus, Nebrija made a decisive contribution to inscribing this discussion within the theoretical reflection about official historiography, and more specifically, about the choice of the prince’s
chronicler. The issue of the national background of the historian may not be considered among the major topics of early modern historical thought, but there is no doubt that the Spanish treatise writers who paid most attention and attributed importance to it were those who showed most interest in regulating the writing, missions, uses and agents of official historiography.13

I shall try to explain the evolution of the debate by first reviewing the opinions of these theorists. To understand more thoroughly the drift of this discussion it is useful to focus on Nebrija’s conception of official historiography. One of the arguments that carry more persuasive weight in his reasoning is the one that questions the ability of a foreign historian to discharge effectively the responsibility of being propagandist for the monarchs of Spain. There is no doubt that, by appealing to the deep-rooted monarchic sentiment of the Spanish people, Nebrija helped identify the Spanish nation with the kingdoms and territories belonging to the crown of the Catholic Monarchs. This identification was consolidated by various of the chronicles and general histories of Spain commissioned by the successive sovereigns of the country.14 But what I should like to highlight here is that the nationalisation of official historiography was a requirement that Nebrija based on a standard of relevance with respect to the obligations of the profession; the prince’s chronicler had to be Spanish because this was how he would carry out his most important task, which was none other than to relate events to the greater glory of his king.

Pedro de Navarra and the obligations of the historian

This propagandistic conception of official historiography was, in fact, consonant with the constant ideological and political instrumentalisation of history in the early modern era. But it was precisely this subordination of knowledge about the past placed in the service of partisan causes and controversial purposes that led the theorists to try and regenerate the discipline to preserve its status as knowledge that was legitimate and useful, not only to the king but to the whole community. The position of Pedro de Navarra (c. 1504-67) with respect to the background of the prince’s chronicler appears to be clearly determined by the need to rehabilitate history as an objective discourse that gives an impartial representation of events and their protagonists. Pedro de Navarra was not the official chronicler of any king or kingdom, and only occasionally devoted himself to cultivating historical literature. His interest in historiographic reflection must have arisen from his links with the courts of Philip II and the kingdom of Navarre,
for which he undertook several diplomatic missions. In the first of his five *Diálogos sobre cuál debe ser el cronista del príncipe* (*Dialogues on What the Prince’s Chronicler Should Be*), published in 1560, the character of Cipriano asks his interlocutor, Basilio, to accept the task of writing the history of a virtuous Italian prince who is determined to free his country of all its ills. Who this prince might have been does not concern us here, although it is of interest to bear in mind that he was Italian. Basilio turns down the request, but undertakes to instruct Cipriano on the subject of the six qualities of the good chronicler, which were, in his opinion, knowledge, presence, truth, authority, freedom and neutrality.\(^{15}\)

It was Basilio’s understanding that the nationality of the historian would affect his neutrality. In the second dialogue, it was established that the chronicler was neutral when he had neither passion nor affection, that is, when he was neither an enemy of the prince nor too friendly with him, and he was also neutral when he was under no obligation. Basilio explains that this obligation would exist only with historians who were native to the kingdom they had to write about; so it was primarily a form of the historian’s dependence on his homeland or nation, and secondarily on the prince of that nation. For this reason, the chronicler that Cipriano would be seeking for the virtuous prince should not be a native of Italy, since in that case there would be cause for doubting his neutrality.\(^{16}\) In other places in the dialogues, Basilio insists, but more succinctly, on the necessity for the prince to choose a chronicler who is ‘under no obligation’, as well as ‘not base, ignorant, depraved, sycophantic or mendacious’, and among those regarded as suspect or not ‘entirely upright’ historians, he includes those who are ‘natives’ and those who would write ‘under obligation to the homeland’, together with those who would be swayed by opinion, passion or the importance of a family name.\(^{17}\)

So, as Nebrija had done, Pedro de Navarra adopted a quality criterion in his dialogues for weighing up the effect of the chronicler’s national background on official historiography. His preference for foreign chroniclers reversed the logic of Nebrija’s argument; the feelings of loyalty and commitment that Spanish people professed towards the monarchy, to which Nebrija had appealed, now constituted an undesirable ‘obligation’. At any rate, the objective that justified the arguments of both theorists was that the official historian should properly fulfil his task. As we have seen, each could equally appeal to the authority of classical tradition to support his preferences. However, theoretical discourse in the second half of the sixteenth century had distanced itself notably from the propagandistic conception of official history held by Nebrija. In the time of Navarra, the idea that had started to
take hold, and would eventually prevail, was that the discipline was useful to society, and to rulers in particular, only if it served to improve their political performance. As a result, the chronicler was required to be able to explain and, above all, analyse and evaluate the actions of princes free from emotional, ideological or professional ties. In this way, the veracity of history and the usefulness of its lessons started to depend in large measure on the ethical integrity of the chronicler.

Luis Cabrera de Córdoba and the cultural prestige of the nation

In the treatise *De historia, para entenderla y escribirla* (On History: How to Understand and Write It) by the historian and royal secretary Luis Cabrera de Córdoba (1559–1623), published in 1611, half a century after Pedro de Navarra’s dialogues, the concern to preserve the moral and professional integrity of the historian was still there. Cabrera considered it indispensable for the historian to be able to work dispassionately. It was crucial for guaranteeing the veracity of the account that the view of events should not be conditioned by the writer’s excessive admiration for his own people. This fault, Cabrera reminds us, had been rightly censured in classical authors such as Theopompus, Livy and Plutarch, who were, in so many other respects, model writers. Cabrera condemns the fact that historians of his own day still had trouble resisting the impulse of ‘obligation’ towards their own country that Pedro de Navarra so distrusted, as could be deduced from the account of a French writer who had decided to omit the capture of King François I at the Battle of Pavia in the hope of sowing doubt among his readers about whether the event had actually taken place.

Cabrera was very familiar with the critical tradition and knew that the censure of national historians meant that foreign chroniclers were respected by some as more credible historians, as they were free of all passion, since, according to Polybius, they had neither homeland, nor city, nor king. Those who believed that this was a valid principle praised, for instance, the history of England that had been written by the Italian, Polydore Vergil, or the history of Poland by the Frenchman, Alexandre Gaguin, both modern authors whose names joined an ancient list of foreign historians as illustrious as Quintus Fabius Pictor and Dionysius of Halicarnassus, authors of chronicles of Rome written in Greek. Cabrera, however, is sceptical about the importance of this hierarchy of historians, and questions whether ‘denationalising’ historiography can resolve the problems arising
from patriotism. The examples in favour of this thesis, the treatise writer argues, can be countered with any number of other cases, both ancient and modern, in which foreign historians have been accused of being envious, liars, manipulators and slanderers.20

In Cabrera’s opinion, the writer’s national background is not a factor that can prevent suspicions and controversies from arising when the historical narrative concerns nations that are engaged in conflict or are ‘enemies of each other’. It would make no difference in such a case how faithful to the truth the account was, or how fair and balanced the opinion of the chronicler, the common ‘attachment’ to one’s own would cloud the reader’s good judgement. In short, for Cabrera, the chronicler’s naturaleza would not have a significant effect on improving the quality and public image of historiography, because the discipline would be subject to the forces and interests of agents (critics, readers) who would be beyond the control of the historian. The writer, at any rate, should act with integrity and impartiality and resign himself to receiving criticism that, on occasions, would be based on prejudices about his national background. 21

The question had wider implications for the choice of the prince’s chronicler, about which Cabrera explicitly states his preference for a native historian. The criterion used as the basis for this preference had nothing to do with observing any ethical or methodological principle or the ability of the chronicler to effectively carry out his task, but with the image of the monarchy, kingdom or nation that the prince would project to the world through his choice of chronicler. For this point, Cabrera reworked a commonplace of the critical tradition that was often employed to persuade rulers of the importance of the patronage and good use of historiography, since it had the power to determine whether the memory of the prince would be glorious or shameful. The topos laid down that the prince should choose his chronicler with the utmost care, not only because he would be responsible for shaping the prince’s historical image, but also because the prince’s reputation would be forever associated with the historian’s. 22 Cabrera amplifies the responsibility of the prince by pointing out that, with the choice of the official chronicler, the cultural prestige of the nation of which he is the sovereign is also at stake. If the king considered it necessary to resort to foreign historians, it would signal to the world that he ruled a nation of ignoramuses. Cabrera suggests that, if the only viable option is to go looking in ‘foreign kingdoms’, the prince should make sure that he finds a historian who is wise and capable, because, if not, his nation and his own judgement will be questioned.23
Jerónimo de San José and the instinct to protect the nation

My brief survey of theories about the national background of the historian ends with the treatise *Genio de la historia* (*The Genius of History*), by Fray Jerónimo de San José (1587-1654), published in 1651. San José was the chronicler general of his order, the Carmelites, and lost this position for refusing to accept the changes and deletions that the order’s censors tried to impose on his *Historia de la Reforma* (*History of the Reformation*).²⁴ His own experience as official historian probably contributed to magnifying his concern to safeguard the integrity of the chronicler, which, at the same time, had been a prominent topic on the agenda of theoretical discourse for decades. As Cabrera had done, San José deployed an extensive repertoire of rules and advice in his treatise in pursuit of dispassionate historiography. In his opinion, various factors could jeopardise the integrity of the historian and the veracity of his work: the writer’s lack of diligence, his affection, hatred and fear. The treatise writer defines ‘affection’ as a forceful inclination of the will towards oneself, towards another or ‘some relative or some thing belonging to him’.²⁵ The historian’s home country or nation would count as one of the ‘things’ that he would have affection for. San José does not condemn this propensity, which he regards as natural, but he does insist that the chronicler should dignify this patriotic affection and use it as a stimulus to learn about the deeds of his countrymen more comprehensively and in greater detail. However natural this inclination might be, it did not entitle the chronicler to be economical with the truth or to exaggerate the achievements of his compatriots.²⁶

In this way, San José invalidated the implications of Nebrija’s conviction that only Spanish historians could deviate in the appropriate fashion from the truth in order to serve the interests of the monarchs of Spain. Even so, he did not stipulate that official chroniclers should be foreigners, and, in fact, there is no explicit pronouncement on this question anywhere in San José’s treatise. Nevertheless, the position he adopted with regard to other theoretical debates suggests that his discourse was dominated by a strongly nationalistic conception of historiography. San José maintains, for example, that it is the duty of the historian with integrity not to shy away from controversy in serious matters; in other words, if his professional colleagues attack the rights and honour of his religion, state or nation, he is obliged to defend them straightaway, and to condemn and respond to anyone who, out of ignorance or self-interest, questions the reputation of these institutions.²⁷ The treatise writer specifically states that those who insolently write in bad faith against religion or the nation deserve a strong,
angry and immediate riposte. San José argues in the first instance that it is lawful to defend the nation provided it has been unjustly attacked, but then goes on to explain that this reaction is the obligation of historians who are natives of the insulted nation. This reaction is at the same time presented by San José as a consequence of the protective instinct of historians towards their homeland, analogous to the instinct of children to protect their mother if she were being attacked.28 This selfsame 'naturalist' assumption, imbued with a certain morality, sustains San José's advice to readers of historical literature, who are called upon to study, first and foremost and with greater commitment, the history of their own country, because, he says, 'it would be the ugliest of disorders to be well versed in things strange and foreign and to know nothing of one's own'.29

It seems obvious, then, that for San José either there would be no room for debate over the national background of the official chronicler or it would be resolved naturally, always in favour of the home-grown historian. From San José's reflections on the matter, it can be deduced that his conception of historiography was instrumental and belligerent, one that distanced itself from the tendency of early modern theoretical discourse to dissociate the discipline from political and ideological purposes and uses, but did, however, chime with the convictions, attitudes and ways of working of a large part of Spanish historians who were contemporaries of San José. It should be remembered that some of these were immersed at the time in disputes about sacred and ecclesiastical history, others in controversies between official historiographies of the various kingdoms of Spain, and yet others in polemics about the interpretation of Spanish actions in the New World. In fact, towards the end of Philip II's reign (1556-98), his advisers had already defended the need to promote an official historiography that took a more aggressive stance against the anti-Habsburg, anti-Spanish propaganda that Huguenot and 'rebel' Dutch authors, among others, had been disseminating in the form of historical and political literature. The foreign origin attributed to the fabrication and dissemination of the 'Black Legend' of the Spanish monarchy favoured the nationalisation of official historiography, especially that which had to give an account of the recent past and contemporary events. The court justified it as a measure that was both necessary and effective for contesting prejudiced, defamatory foreign historiography in order to protect the reputation and honour of the king and the Spaniards. The national historians' 'natural obligation towards their own country' was placed at the service of reasons of state. This same principle was used to legitimise a stricter policy of control and censorship of official historical discourse, which was called upon to administer information and opinion responsibly and with caution,
and to adopt strategies of ‘light deceit’ in the treatment of events that might damage the interests of the monarch and the country.30

San José’s appeal to the defence of the homeland obeyed this historiographic policy and was heeded by historians, such as the chief chronicler of the Indies, Antonio de Solís (1610-86), who was ‘under the obligation’ to write the Historia de la conquista de México (History of the Conquest of Mexico), published in 1684, in defence of the colonial enterprise of ‘persecution’ of foreigners ‘who are unable to endure the glory of our nation’ and who would have written about the discoveries and conquests of the Spaniards ‘with great temerity, and no less malice, in order to invent whatever they liked against our nation’. Nor, it should be noted, was Solís satisfied with the way in which the ‘different home-grown authors’ had accounted for the conquest, above all because their chronicles gave rise to accounts that were of ‘little uniformity and consistency’, and so diverse in their information that they managed to ‘obscure and distort’ the truth of the events and to favour, therefore, the propagandistic purposes of foreign chroniclers.31 Hence, defending the nation entailed preserving the quality and prestige of its historiography, which had to be purged of errors that could have been the result of a lack of diligence and reflection, as Solís put it, or, according to Nicolás Antonio (1617-84), of the ‘excess of affection that one feels for one’s own excellence’, that is, of the ‘unbridled’ patriotism of Father Jerónimo Román de la Higuera, the author of some false chronicles invented to demonstrate Spain’s remote Christian origins.32 Father Román’s forgery was the most extreme manifestation of the damage that could be done to historiography by the chronicler’s patriotism. It was necessary for criticism to safeguard the proper exploitation of the natural affection that the historian felt for his own people. Pedro Abarca’s ability to write about his country ‘with the impartiality of a foreigner’ and to ‘conquer either the strength or the sweetness’ of that ‘natural bewitchment’ that had so often compromised the veracity and judgement of the chronicler, was therefore worthy of praise.33 In short, Pedro de Navarra’s fear that the national background of the chronicler would jeopardise the quality of his work still prevailed at the end of the seventeenth century, but within the framework of a heavily nationalised official historiography, in which the possibility that the solution might be to hire foreign writers was hardly contemplated. Nicolás Antonio declared that he had written his Censura de historias fabulosas (Criticism of Fabulous Histories) in ‘defence of the truth, the homeland and the honour of our nation’. Correcting patriotic excesses had become one of the surveillance tasks of the orthodoxy of the discipline, and this, in its turn, had become a service to the nation.
Concluding remarks

The nationalisation of official historiography and, more specifically, of the state historian was a process that was closely related to, but at the same time distinct from, the nationalisation of history, or the historic past. Its role and impact on the formation of modern national identities were less visible than that of the formation of a collective memory and a national mythology. It was not the view of the past, or the memory, or the product of historical discourse that was finally nationalised by means of this theoretical debate, but its agents and, with them, the principles and methods of the discipline. Its function, then, perhaps more discreet but no less necessary, was the intellectual legitimation of modern national histories.

In their turn, the theories about the national background of the chronicler and the process of nationalisation of official historiography were both products and formative agents of a typically early modern nationalist discourse. The framework of discussion for the debate is illustrative of the learned, elitist nature of a nationalism that served as an instrument for dynastic, corporative and personal interests, as the Nebrija case clearly demonstrates. The awareness and feeling of national identity were promoted by making use of the ‘natural’ links with the native community, that is, with the nation understood as the place of origin, whether it was a city, province, kingdom or group of kingdoms. The values and language of patriotism formed the basic structure of the discourse about the nation, which was identified on occasion with the monarchy, while at other times it was presented as the object of the enemy’s envy or hatred and was often defined on the basis of symbolic capital such as honour and cultural prestige. Perhaps more than the rulers and the state, it was the historians and the discipline of historiography that were the main beneficiaries of that nationalism and its results, which would have served not only to strengthen awareness of the political importance of history but also to reinforce the conviction that historiography had progressed as a branch of knowledge.

Notes

2. To be a natural of a nation, province or republic was the commonest way in Spanish at the time of referring to a person's link with his place of birth. The Tesoro de la lengua castellana by Sebastián de Covarrubias, published
in 1611, points out that ‘Natural de Toledo, el que nació y tiene su parentela en Toledo’ [a natural of Toledo is one who was born in that city and whose family is there] in Martín de Riquer (ed.), S. de Covarrubias, Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española (Barcelona: Editorial Alta Fulla, 2003), 824.

There is an abundant bibliography about the role of history in the formation of national identities in early modern Europe, especially that which gives an account of the function of historical narrative in the formation of foundational stories and myths about the origins of the nation. For the case of Spain, see Ricardo García Cárcel (coord.), La construcción de las Historias de España (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2004), 45-193. I am unaware of any studies about the historiographical theory of Early Modernity, whether in Hispanic or other European historiographies, that have specifically tackled the debate about the national background of the historian.


5. It seems that the first version of the Divinatio was an epistle or speech that Nebrija addressed to Ferdinand the Catholic in 1509 to express his gratitude to the king for appointing him to the post of royal chronicler and for commissioning him to write the history of his reign. The Divinatio was subsequently published as the prologue to the Aelii Antonii Nebrissensis Rerum a Ferdinando et Elisabe Hispaniarum felicissimis Regibus gestarum Decades Duae, Granada, 1515. I quote from the Divinatio in its modern version in Latin with a Spanish translation by Hinojo Andrés, Obras históricas de Nebrija, 124-31.

6. Nebrija, Divinatio, 126 and 128: ‘Non tamen opinor satis tuto peregrinis hominibus historiae fides concredetur, Italis maxime, nullius rei magis quam gloriae avaris. Invident nobis laudem, indignantur quod imperi- temus, coniururunt inter se omnes odisse peregrinos, nosque Barbaros opicosque vocantes infami appellione foedant’. ‘In short, I do not believe that the objectivity of history can be entrusted with absolute confidence to foreigners, and even less to the Italians, covetous only of their prestige. They are envious of our glory, they are angry because we rule over them, they have colluded to despise all foreigners and, by calling us barbarians and bumpkins, they insult us with defamatory names’.

7. Ibid., 128: ‘Quid? quod res nostrae non minus ignotae sunt illis quam nobis Italicea, atque ut est in adagio illo vulgari: Multo callidior est insipiens domi suae, quam sapiens alienae?’. ‘What? Aren’t our heroic exploits just as
unknown to them as those of Italy are to us, and, as a common adage has it, isn’t a fool in his own house more competent than the wise man in someone else’s?’.

8. Ibid., 128 and 130: ‘Sed esto, aeque illis ac nobis res Hispaniae sint notae, utri magis ex animo res ipsas scribent, illi qui simulatae cuiusdam libertatis amore regium nomen odere, regumque imperia detrectant, an nos qui sine Regibus degere nescimus, qui religiose Reges salutare consuevimus, de quorum salute non minus quam de nostra solicii sumus, quos non minori observantia colimus quam ducem suum apiculam? Et quoniam, ut inquit poeta, vitiis nemo sine nascitur, optimusque ille est, qui minimis urgetur, uter vitia mtiorem in partem nominabit, qui diligat, an qui negligat? ... Atque dicet quispiam, prima historiae virtus est, ut vera narrat. Sit ita sane: sed si paululum est a veritate declinandum, quia non est cuiusque mediumassequi, tutius atque magis ingenuum in favorabiliorem partem declinare’. ‘But let’s concede that they know the history of Spain as we do. Who will narrate the events with greater interest, those who hate the title of King, under the guise of an apparent freedom, and discredit monarchical rule, or we, who cannot live without a King, who salute him with genuine veneration, who are no less concerned for his health than for our own, and whose respect for him is no less attentive than that shown by the bees to their Queen? And since, as the poet says, nobody is born without defects and the best is the person with the weakest ones, who would tend to minimise a description of the defects, the one who loves or the one who despises? ... Now, someone will tell me that the first law of history is to tell the truth. Let it be so; but if one has to stray a little from the truth because it is beyond the scope of anyone to find the middle way, it is safer and more honourable to stray towards the most favourable side’.

9. Ibid., 130: ‘Quando igitur ab Italia his rationibus excludimur, forsan ex Pannonia, aut ex Germania, aut ex Gallia suppetias implorabimus? Quid si apud nationes illas non minus literatorum hominum penuria est, quam in Hispania?’. ‘If, for these reasons, we must steer clear of Italy, do we really need reinforcements from Pannonia, France or Germany? And, is it not the case that there is no less a dearth of men of letters in those countries than in Spain?’ From Nebrija’s reflections, it can be deduced that it was in Italy where the best trained men of letters were to be found in abundance, which was why it made most sense to look for competent chroniclers there, particularly if what was required was to promote the writing of historical literature in Latin. That conviction persisted among the counsellors and intellectuals who surrounded Charles V and Philip II and who mediated, for example, in the attempts to hire the services of Paolo Giovio and Uberto Foglietta; see E. García Hernán, ‘La España de los cronistas reales en los siglos XVI y XVII’, Norba. Revista de Historia 19 (2006), 125-50, at 138.

10. Nebrija, Divinatio, 130: ‘Quod his in rebus quas scripturis sumus, aut ipsi interfuimus, cum gererentur, aut ab iis qui interfuerunt, accepimus: & quasi
divinarem fore, ut aliquando hanc operam navaturas essem, ita omnia inquirebam, omnia explorabam, omnia notabam. ‘Besides, in what we are going to narrate, we were either involved in it as it was taking place, or we received eyewitness accounts; and, as if I had an inkling that I would some day have to carry out this task, I conscientiously investigated all the details, asked questions and made notes of them.’

11. Thucydides, Cicero, Macrobius and Strabo are some of the names most often quoted by treatise writers to lend authority to the argument attributing greater credibility to historians who were natives of the countries that they were writing about. This principle of greater reliability and veracity was also granted, as a matter of tradition, to historians appointed by public powers, as against private historians; to authors who related contemporary events, as opposed to those who narrated events that had occurred in the remote and distant past; and to chroniclers who had been eye witnesses, in contrast to those who explained events on the basis of other sources of information. See, for example, Annius of Viterbo, _Commentaria super opera diversorum auctorum de antiquitatis loquentium_ (Rome, 1498), Bk. 11 and 14; Melchor Cano, _De locis theologicis_ (Salamanca, 1563), Bk. IX, Ch. 6; Antonio de Herrera, ‘Discurso sobre los provechos de la historia’ (c. 1605) in Juan Antonio de Zamácola (ed.), _Discursos morales, políticos e históricos inéditos de don Antonio de Herrera cronista del rey don Felipe Segundo_ (Madrid: Imprenta de Ruiz, 1804), 1-20, 7; Luis Cabrera de Córdoba, _De historia para entenderla y escribirla_ (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1611), Bk. I, Disc. 14, 34; Jerónimo de San José, _Genio de la historia_ (1651) (Madrid: Imprenta de don Antonio Muñoz del Valle, 1768), I, Ch. 4, 21-2.

12. Plutarch, Josephus and Livy are perhaps the classical authors most often criticised for giving preferential treatment to their countrymen, although the tradition of complaints and accusations of patriotic partiality affected many more writers and continued into the sixteenth century, brought up to date by the controversies that faced French, Italian and Spanish historians, as well as Catholic and Protestant writers. See Juan Costa, _De conscribenda rerum historia libri duo_ (Zaragoza, 1591), Bk. II, 4-5; Cabrera, _De historia_, Bk. I, Disc. 6, 17-8.

Identification or strong ties between the monarchy and the idea of the Spanish nation—a distinct entity and of greater scope than the homelands and provinces (in other words, cities, regions and kingdoms) that comprised it—can be appreciated in Esteban de Garibay’s *Compendio historial* (1570) and Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas’s *Historia general del mundo* (1601-12) and intensified particularly in the historiography of the first part of the reign of Philip IV, during the years when the Count-Duke of Olivares was the royal favourite, and which ended in 1643. However, this identification was developed in a Spanish historiography in which the term nation was often used to designate the cities, regions and kingdoms that made up the dominions of the Spanish monarchy; see Xavier Gil Pujol, ‘One King, One Faith, Many Nations: Patria and Nation in Spain, Sixteenth-Seveteenth Centuries’, in Robert von Friedeburg (ed.), *Patria und Patrioten* vor dem Patriotismus (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2005), 105-38; Richard L. Kagan, ‘Nación y patria en la historiografía de la época austriaca’, in Alain Tallon (ed.), *Le sentiment national dans l’Europe méridionale aux XVIe et XVIIe siècles* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2007), 205-25, at 212.

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**15.** Pedro de Navarra, *Diálogos, qual debe ser el chronista del príncipe* (Tolosa: en casa de Iacobo Colomerio, s.a. [1560?]), Dialogue I, 3-4: ‘C. What qualities are required to be a good chronicler? B. In my opinion, he should have six things: and if he starts on it without having them, he will cause an affront to the prince that he is writing about, and even to himself, because he will be rightly judged as insolent, even reckless: and they are these: Knowledge, Presence, Truth, Authority, Freedom and Neutrality’. See G. Cabello Porras, ‘Pedro de Navarra: revisión de un humanista. Bibliografía repertoriada de los siglos XVI-XVII’, *Lectura y Signo* 3 (2008), 65-115.


**17.** Navarra, *Diálogos*, Dialogue II, 7-8: ‘B. These [los cronistas] are the ones who can make the world good or bad. And by both’. **THE CHRONICLER’S BACKGROUND**
ser electo el chronista con gran diligencia, y prudencia: no vil, no ignorante, no interesado, no apasionado, no obligado, no vicioso, no adularor, no audaz, no verboso ni ministro: sino vero, experto, Cristiano, virtuoso, illustre, o noble ... Otros escriben por adular al príncipe, esperando más premio de hacienda, que de buen nombre en la república. Otros escriben mandados y premiados del príncipe, y estos tales (como está dicho) no sé si serán del todo rectos. Otros escriben por la obligación de la patria, por la opinión, por la pasión, amistad, o apellido. E aun (a veces) algunos por vengarse con la pluma de quienes no osan o no pueden vengarse con la espada. De todos estos se puede tener poca fe, pues su fin es interés o pasión. 'B. These [the chroniclers] are the ones who make us who we are and give us a good or bad reputation throughout the world. And for this reason the chronicler should be chosen with great diligence and prudence; [someone who is] not base, not ignorant, not self-serving, not passionate, not obliged, not depraved, not sycophantic, not audacious, not verbose, nor mendacious; but true, expert, Christian, virtuous, illustrious, and noble ... Others write in order to flatter the prince, expecting to be rewarded more with wealth than with a good name in the republic. Others write on the orders of the prince and are rewarded by him; I do not know whether such as these (as it is said) will be altogether upright. Others write under obligation to the homeland, swayed by opinion, passion, friendship or a family name. And there are even those who (at times) use the pen to take revenge on those whom they dare not or are unable to take revenge on with the sword. Little faith can be placed in any of these, since their aim is self-interest or passion'. Dialogue IV, 13: 'C. Tú pretendes en efecto, según lo que colijo de tus palabras, que el perfecto chronista ha de ser neutral: para que escriba sin odio, pasión ni obligación'. 'C. You claim, in effect, from what I gather from your words, that the perfect chronicler must be neutral so that he can write without hatred, passion or obligation'.

18. Although he never became royal chronicler, Cabrera carried out diplomatic and military missions for Philip II and became secretary to the queen on the death of the king, and a servant of Philip III. He wrote Historia de Felipe II, Rey de España (Madrid, 1619) and some Relaciones de las cosas sucedidas en la corte de España desde 1599 hasta 1614 (unpublished until 1857); see Kagan, Clio and the Crown, 290-93.

19. Cabrera, De historia, Bk. II, Disc. 3, 56: 'Libre siempre el escritor de admiracion, conmiseracion, ambicion, adulacion, para no afectar la narracion. Por las exageraciones que hace Livio de sus Romanos, desplace a Trogo Pompeyo, diciendo que parece su orador demasiadamente llevado del amor de ellos, como Plutarco del de sus griegos y odio de los romanos cuando habla de Coriolano. Halicarnasco reprende a Teopompo también en esto. Un francés escritor moderno, de la batalla memorable del Parque de Pavia, pasa en silencio la prisión de su rey Francisco Primero, y objetado respondió: servirá de hacer dudar a largo tiempo en si fue preso o no'. 'Let the
writer always be free of admiration, commiseration, ambition and flattery so as not to affect the narration. Because of Livy's exaggerations about his Romans, he displeases Pompeius Trogus, who says that his [Livy's] orator seems too carried away by love of them, like Plutarch's love of his Greeks and his hatred of the Romans when he speaks of Coriolanus. [Dionysius of] Halicarnassus also reprehends Theopompus for the same thing. A modern French writer on the memorable Battle of Pavia passes over the capture of his king, François I, in silence and when taken to task about it, replied: it will serve to sow doubt for a long time about whether he was taken prisoner or not.

20. Ibid., Bk. I, Disc. 6, 17-8: 'Dicen autores, escribe mejor el que no es natural de la provincia de quien hace historia, y que dijo bien Polibio, que no ha de tener patria, ciudad ni rey, porque está más libre de toda pasión. Ponen por ejemplo a Polidoro Virgilio escritor de Inglaterra, Alejandro Guaguino de Polonia, Filipe Calimaco de Ungria; dicen que Dionisio Alicarnaseo Griego sobrepugjó a Livio, Tranquilo y Tácito, que escribieron de sus romanos. Fabio a Salustio y a Catón, que en su república florecieron, alegando, que de la ajena escribieron: y así mejor. Si esto fuese así, no tienen razón los griegos de quejarse de que Polybius put it well when he said that he should not have a homeland, city or king, because he is all the more free from passion. They hold up as examples Polydone Vergil, who wrote about England, Alexander Guaguinus, who wrote about Poland, and Philippus Callimachus, who wrote about Hungary; they say that the Greek Dionysius of Halicarnassus surpassed Livy, [Suetonius] Tranquillus and Tacitus, who wrote about their Romans; that Fabius surpassed Sallust and Cato, who flourished in their republic, citing the fact that they wrote about a republic that was not theirs, and it is much better so. If this were the case, the Greeks would have no reason to complain about Cicero's and Iamblichus's criticisms, accusing them of a lack of rigour when writing about their affairs; about Juvenal, who accuses them of being mendacious; about Valerius who brands them long-winded and boastful; and neither would the French have any reason to complain about the Italians ...

21. Ibid., Bk. I, Disc. 6, 18: 'Estas dificultades y objeciones nacen de las pasiones, no de culpa de los que escriben. A todos parecen mejores las cosas que se tratan de los hombres de su nación, de su parte, seguido, y amigos. Es difícil el dar satisfacción a todos, aun contando la verdad, escribiendo de dos naciones enemigas una de otra. Cada cual tiene su devoción y adherencia muchos, cuya afición particular no deja juicio a los lectores, y viene a parar sobre el historiador, pagando la pena de la culpa que no tiene, porque puede hacer fiel y legalmente lo que debe'. ‘These difficulties and objec-
tions arise from the passions, and are not the fault of the writers. Everybody thinks that things to do with the men of their own nation, of their own side, followers and friends are the best. It is difficult to satisfy everyone, even telling the truth, when writing about two nations that are enemies of each other. Each one has his particular loyalty and many have their attachments, and this affection clouds the readers’ judgment, and it ends up falling to the historian to pay the penalty for something that is not his fault, because he faithfully and legally does what he must.


23. Cabrera, *De historia*, Bk. I, Disc. 6, 16: ‘Las historias están por cuenta y a cargo de los príncipes. El que desea acertar en la elección de persona tan importante, con cuidado la mande buscar en sus reinos, y si no se hallare, en los extraños se busque. Va en esto la reputación de los príncipes, y de la nación de quien se ha de escribir, y más si es natural de ella. Habiendo de elegir entre buenos y sabios el mejor, si en lo que escribe muestra ignorancia, tendrán a toda la nación por bárbara. Por la estimación de la persona elegida por un rey, aprobada por sus consejos, miden los extranjeros las letras de aquella provincia.’ ‘Histories are on behalf of and at the behest of princes. Whoever wishes to make the right decision when choosing such an important person, should take care to have him sought in his own kingdoms, and if he should not be found [there], let him be sought in foreign ones. The reputation of princes is at stake here as well as of the nation that is to be written about, and more so if he is a native of that nation. He should choose the best one from among the good and the wise because if he demonstrates his ignorance in what he writes, the entire nation will be held to be barbarous. Foreigners measure the literary culture of that province according to their assessment of the person chosen by the king, and approved by his councils.’

24. For Fray Jerónimo de San José and his treatise, see Gonzalo Fontana Elboj, ‘El *Genio de la historia* de Fray Jerónimo de San José en el marco de la tratadística histórica del humanismo’, *Alazet: Revista de Filología* 14 (2002), 139-56.

25. San José, *Genio de la historia*, III, Ch. 7, 163-4: ‘Comenzando pues, por el afecto que es una vehemente inclinacion de la voluntad a alguna cosa: ó la tal cosa, á que el Historiador está inclinado, es el mismo Historiador,
o es algun deudo y cosa suya, o es alguna otra persona estraña; respecto de los quales, y por afecto a ellos, puede flaquear, y torcerse la rectitud de su entereza en lo que escribe'. 'Beginning, then, with affection, which is a forceful inclination of the will towards something: or the very thing that the Historian is inclined towards is the Historian himself, or some relative or some other thing of his, or it is some other foreign person; with respect to these, and because of his affection for them, he may weaken and his integrity concerning what he writes goes awry'.

26. Ibid., III, Ch. 7, 166: 'Y a este notorio achaque de propio afecto no solo en sí mismo es algun tropiezo á la entereza del que escribe; sino tambien en lo que por qualquer camino pertenece á sus deudos, á sus amigos, á su patria y á su nacion: que son una buena parte, si yá no un otro todo de sí. Debe tambien templarse con la rectitud de la justicia, para tratar de las cosas destos, quando en la Historia se ofrciere alguna ocasion de referirlas ...

Confieso que algo más se ha de conceder a los propios, que a los estraños; pero ese algo y ese más sea nacido, no de la diligencia o el afecto que debe ser igual para con todos, sino de la mayor ocasión, que por la propinquirad, o familiaridad con ellos tiene de mayores noticias y de averiguaciones más exactas. Por lo cual podrá y será obligación escribir sus cosas con más particularidad que las ajenas; pero nunca violando la entereza de la verdad'.

'Now this well-known weakness of affection for himself and his own is not only a stumbling block in itself to the integrity of the person writing, but also to anything along the way that pertains to his relatives, his friends, his homeland and his nation, which are a large part, even if not the whole, of himself. He should also be restrained by the rectitude of fairness in order to deal with matters such as these, whenever the occasion in History presents itself to give an account of them ... I admit that something more has to be granted to one's own than to foreigners; but let that something more be born, not of diligence or the affection that ought to be the same for all, but of the greater opportunity he has, through his proximity to or familiarity with them, which should enable the historian to obtain more important information and more precise checking. Because of this, he will be in a position, and indeed under an obligation, to write about his own things in a friendlier way than about foreigners; but never violating the integrity of the truth'.

27. Ibid., III, Ch. 8, 175: 'Por donde publicandose escritos contra el honor y dignidad de una Religion, de una Nacion, de una Republica, justisima y necesarisma obligacion es responder a los contrarios, y deshacer sus argumentos y calumnias con eficaces pruebas de relaciones y testimonios verdaderos, sopena de quedar la tal Comunidad o Republica despojada en cuatro dias de sus honores, lustre y reputacion en el mundo'.

'Wherever writings are published against the honour and dignity of a Religion, Nation or Republic, it is the most just and necessary obligation to respond to the adversaries and to dismantle their arguments and calumnies with effective
evidence from true accounts and testimonies, or the said Community or Republic risks being divested in no time of its honours, glory and reputation in the world.

28. Ibid., III, Ch. 8, 181-3: ‘Y si alguna vez se hubiere de herir, ha de ser en justa y necesaña defensa de su Republica, a quien fuera culpa no defender, y a cuya causa, así a él, como a los demas naturales della arma el respeto de hijos: obligacion, que no solo reconozcan las bestias, mas aun acusarian de ingratiitud mas que bruta al hijo, que hallando a su madre ofendida, no le viesen arder en corage, solicitando la venganza. Que si es lícito con daño del contrario defender cada uno su cuerpo: por qué no el de su madre la Repub-lica, de quien los que en ella viven son miembros? No hay dolor que llegue a este; y a un gran dolor debese perdonar, quando algo excede. Esta escusa tuvieron los que escribieron Apologías en defensa de sus Patrias, y Reli-giones’. ‘And if ever the historian has to inflict harm, let it be in the just and necessary defence of his republic; whoever does not defend it is blameworthy. Both the historian and the rest of those born in the republic owe it the respect expected of its children, an obligation that even beasts recognise. The child who finds his mother insulted and does not burn with anger and seek vengeance would be accused of barbarous ingratitude. If it is lawful for each one to defend his body by inflicting harm on the adversary, why will it not also be [lawful] to defend the body of his mother, the republic, which those who live in her are members of? There is no greater sorrow than this, the excesses of which should be forgiven. Those who wrote apologies in defence of their homelands and religions had this excuse’.

29. Ibid., III, Ch. 10, 208: ‘Digo pues, que lea enhorabuena el curioso mucho y varia historia; pero sea con tres cautelas importantes. La primera, que se afi-cione y emplee más en las que pertenecen a su patria, y a su estado: porque sería feísimo desorden ser muy versado en las cosas estrañas y ajenas, e ig-norar las propias’. ‘I say, then, may the curious have the good fortune to read plenty of varied history, but with three important provisos. The first, let him be more interested in and spend more time on those [histories] that belong to his homeland, and his state, because it would be the ugliest of disorders to be well versed in things strange and foreign and to know nothing of one’s own’. See Gil Pujol, ‘One King, One Faith, Many Nations’, 109.

30. Ricardo García Cárcel, La construcción de las historias de España, 16, identifies the Black Legend, along with ‘linguistic and cultural narcissism’ and the Providentialist awareness of the religious and imperial function of the Spanish monarchy as the factors that most contributed to endowing the meaning of Spain with ‘national’ content during the reign of Philip II, especially from the 1580s onwards; Kagan, Clio and the Crown, 126-30.

31. Antonio de Solís, Historia de la conquista de México (Madrid: Imprenta de Bernardo de Villa-Diego, 1684), ‘A los que leyeren’, n.p.: ‘Puse al principio de la historia su introducción, o proemio, como lo estilaron los antiguos, donde tuvieron su lugar los motivos que me obligaron a escribirla, para
defenderla de algunas equivocaciones que padeció en sus primeras noticias esta empresa, tratada en la verdad con poca reflexión de nuestros historiadores, y perseguida siempre de los extranjeros, que no pueden sufrir la gloria de nuestra nación'; 'I placed the introduction, or the proem as the ancients styled it, at the beginning of the history, which is the place for the reasons that obliged me to write it, in order to defend it from some errors that this undertaking suffered from in its earliest news, which was in truth treated by our own historians with little reflection and constantly targeted by foreigners who cannot abide the glory of our nation'; Bk. I, Ch. 1, 1-2: ‘... pero como las regiones de aquel Nuevo Mundo son tan distantes de nuestro hemisferio hallamos en los autores extranjeros grande osadía, y no menor malignidad, para inventar lo que quisieron contra nuestra nación, gastando libros enteros en culpar lo que erraron algunos, para deslucir lo que acertaron todos; y en los naturales, poca uniformidad y concordia en la narración de los sucesos: conociéndose, en esta diversidad de noticias, aquel peligro ordinario de la verdad, que suele desfigurarle cuando viene de lejos, degenerando de su ingenuidad todo aquello que se aparta de su origen.' ‘... but as the regions of that New World are so distant from our hemisphere, we find great temerity, and no less malice, in foreign authors who invented what they liked against our nation, spending entire books on finding fault because of the errors of a few, in order to detract from what everyone did right; and in the native writers, [there is] little uniformity and agreement in the narration of events: it is noticeable, then, how diversity of information endangers the truth which, since it comes from afar, is disfigured, for the innocence of everything that strays far from its origin'.

32. Nicolás Antonio, Censura de historias fabulosas (Valencia: Antonio Bordazar de Artazu, 1742), Ch. I, 1-2: ‘Escribo en defensa de la verdad, de la Patria, del honor de nuestra nación. El intento es encender una luz a los ojos de las naciones políticas de Europa, que claramente les dé a ver los engaños que ha podido introducir en ella la nueva invención de los Chronicos de Flavio Dextro, i Marco Máximo, y los de Luitprando, y Julián Pérez, con lo demás que se les atribuye ... No se ha de medir el crédito entero de la nuestra [nación], por los que han flaqueado en la facilidad con que admitieron esta invención, y con afecto mal gobernado la defienden [...] Ha padecido en esto nuestra nación la injuria que suele hacer a todas la destemplanza del afecto, con que se desea la propia excelencia, sin reparar en la honestidad de los medios, ni en el detrimento que se causa, o a la fama ajena, o a la propia.' ‘I write in defence of the truth, the homeland, and the honour of our nation. The intention is to open the eyes of the political nations of Europe to the light, which will make them see clearly the falsehoods that have somehow been inserted into the new invention of the Chronicons of Flavius Dexter and Marcus Maximus, and those of Liutprand and Julián Pérez, with everything else that is attributed to them ... The entire credit of our nation is not to be measured by those who have so easily given way and ac-
cepted this invention and defend it with unbridled affection [...] Our nation has suffered in this the damage that the excess of affection that one feels for one’s own excellence usually does to all of them [i.e. nations] regardless of the honesty of the means, or the detriment that is caused, either to the reputation of others or to one’s own’. The work was written around 1652, but was not published until 1742.

In Diego de la Cueva’s ‘Censura’ of the Segunda parte de los Anales históricos de Aragón by Pedro Abarca (Salamanca: Lucas Pérez, 1684), n.p.: ‘Escribe de su patria, pero escribe con la indiferencia de estraño, porque en todo es peregrino; y para vencer o la fuerza o la dulzura de este hechizo natural, supo hallar otro Logos, más eficaz que el de Homero, en la severidad de su genio y de su juicio. De un escritor tan pródigo en alabanzas con los suyos como escaso con los forasteros se dijo festivamente que ni era mal ciudadano ni era buen historiador. Nec maius est Civis, nec bonus Historicus. Pero el nuestro, qué descansado podrá dormir y qué libre de esta nota!’. ‘He writes about his homeland, but he writes with the impartiality of a foreigner, because he is unusual in everything; and to conquer either the strength or the sweetness of that natural bewitchment, he managed to find another Logos, more effective than Homer’s, in the seriousness of his temperament and his judgement. It was said humorously of a writer as prodigal in praise of his own as he was parsimonious with strangers that he was neither a bad citizen nor a good historian. Nec maius est Civis, nec bonus Historicus. But how soundly ours will be able to sleep and how free from this censure!’.