



## ‘Spanish Atlanteans’: Crisis of Empire and reconstruction of Spanish Monarchy (1672-1740)

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**ABSTRACT:** As a result of an internal crisis, the Spanish Monarchy underwent a process of redefinition between the end of the seventeenth century and the decade of the 1740s. By synthesizing traditional Spanish historiography with the insights of an incipient brand of European modernity, Spanish authors crafted a peculiar account of the “unknown past” of their body politic. The Spanish *atlántidas* rose to become creators of a great empire and protagonists in the founding of European culture. A new national imaginary emerged that legitimized the task of redefinition. With variations, this concern with origins dominated Spain’s introspection in the eighteenth century.

**KEYWORDS:** Identity; historiography; cultural history; José Pellicer, Spanish monarchy; early modern history.

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**RESUMEN:** *Atlantes españoles: Reescribir los orígenes de la monarquía española (1672-1740).*- Afectada por una profunda crisis interna, la Monarquía de España experimentó un proceso de redefinición identitaria entre el último tercio del siglo xvii y los años cuarenta del siglo xviii. En una particular síntesis entre la tradición historiográfica propia y las propuestas que llegaban desde la incipiente *modernidad* europea, los autores de ese proceso configuraron un primer relato del “tiempo desconocido” de ese cuerpo político. Los *atlántidas españoles* irrumpieron como protagonistas de un renovado imaginario nacional, como un pueblo instituyente de la cultura europea y creador a la vez de un imperio grandioso que legitimaba la propia tarea de reconstrucción. Con variantes, esa preocupación por los orígenes dominaría la reflexión del siglo xviii.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Identidad; historiografía; historia cultural; José Pellicer; monarquía de España; historia moderna.

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Between the late seventeenth century and the 1740s, the Spanish Monarchy went through a process of identity re-definition. This process inevitably entailed the revision of some of the assumptions on which the account of its own history had been founded. This is especially true of those assumptions affecting its *Ancient history*. This period saw the publication of a series of works aimed at the configuration of a new imaginary dealing with the remote past of this political entity; the past that was signalled as

‘unknown times.’ The Spanish Monarchy’s *Ancient history* and, especially, its *origins*, were at the centre of a debate presided at its beginnings by the omnipresent figure of José Pellicer de Ossau (Cepeda, 1992: 821-833; Villanueva, 2004: 138-143; Arredondo, 2011: 150-161, 264-292; Botella Ordinas, 2005a) and partially concluded by Francisco Huerta y Vega more than sixty years later. Pellicer’s *Población y lengua primitiva de España* (1672) and Huerta’s *España primitiva* (1738-1740) provide us

with a time frame for analysis during which there were other no less relevant proposals that will not be dealt with in this article. Our aim is to draw attention to the continuities present—in spite of their differences—in Pellicer and Huerta.<sup>1</sup> Through a particular and personal interpretation of the proposals that stemmed from an emerging *modernity*, both authors suggested the origins of *Spanishness* from a different perspective. This perspective was set apart from previous traditions and laid out a new account of these origins. The most relevant contribution was the establishment of a first and *constituent* people who, incarnated in the *Spanish Atlanteans*, was imagined as the real source of European culture and the originator, at the same time, of an empire including the Indies from which the majority of western kingdoms had emerged. The subsequent loss of credibility of this proposal at the hands of its enlightened critics in no way diminished its position as a point of departure for that identity reconstruction; that rethinking of the origins which dominated the second half of the century of the Enlightenment.

Neither the time when this reconstruction appeared nor the questions that stemmed from the process were fortuitous. They belonged to a broader context in which, abandoned the old order of Christendom, a new scenario emerged. This landscape was configured in European terms—as an idea of the new political order—and presided by the logics of reason of state. The development of renewed historical imaginaries occurred as the same time as a reorientation marked by an atmosphere of *nationist* conflicts in which Spain found herself in an especially delicate situation. In particular, the failure of the universal hegemonic policies initiated with the establishment of the House of Habsburg loomed large over the kingdoms of Spain. This failure was crudely emphasised by the peace treaties of Westphalia, the Pyrenees and Lisbon between 1648 and 1668. It was apparent in certain sectors of the court of Madrid that there was an anti-imperial climate. A need was felt to review the sense of maintaining an alliance which had, in the most dangerous times of crisis, ignored ‘the links of blood and unity’ which supposedly operated in both branches of the family. Furthermore, the convoluted process of Portugal’s separation and independence accentuated a feeling of despair within the peninsular context. As a consequence, some voices started to demand the adoption of a political discourse that could be termed *Iberian*. It involved the restitution of the strategic importance of the territories of the Iberian Peninsula within the Monarchy, thus emphasising the importance of the Hispanic identitarian background (Fernández Albaladejo, 2014).

It is unsurprising that Pellicer, acting as an organic intellectual, took a leading role in this context. He was supported by a formidable erudition, as not many could accredit a long trajectory of permanent reflection about the complex political body that was the Spanish Monarchy. In so doing, he was also one of the few who had looked into previous moments of crisis (1640) in detail and pointed out the challenges of assembling the very idea of *Spain* in a political domain hegemonised by the king-

doms. The need to keep delving into the history of this subject was a no less pressing requirement at the beginning of the 1670s. His interest for the remote history of *Spain*, his championing of the existence of *Spain* as a religious, political and cultural *construct* was offered as an unifying account on which to articulate the political landscape with certain guarantees of stability. A redirection of his research towards the origins under a European perspective, as was beginning to be customary since the newly established *Republic of Letters* had emerged, was now necessary. Afflicted by the tortuous religious conflict that was dividing Christendom, the members of this republic anxiously debated about the *primitive moment* of such origins. This group of erudite men reviewed and verified concrete places and peoples appearing in Biblical geography, questioning for the first time its cartographies, its genealogies and its chronologies. The Protestant Samuel Bochart’s *Geographia Sacra* (1646), which included theories about the primitive population of the Iberian Peninsula, was one of the most relevant examples of this trend (Pouloin, 1998: 106-128, 223-234; Grell, 1995, I: 851-890). In ‘Phaleg’, the first part of the *Geographia* dealing with the postdiluvian dispersion, Bochart named Tarshish (son of Javan and grandson of Japhet) as Spain’s first settler, taking that role away from Tubal (grandson of Noah and Tarshish’s uncle).

This displacement was not irrelevant. Aside from the removal of one of the most commonly assumed themes concerning Spain’s first settler, the reclaiming of Tarshish implied—according to the division established by Javan—a populating mission different from that entrusted to Tubal (Lida de Malkiel, 1970; Fernández Albaladejo, 2007: 287-321). These were the foundations for a new narrative account. Well-informed, as was usual in him, Pellicer immediately perceived the possibilities that would emerge through this. Interpreting and responding to that moment, with his *Población y lengua primitiva de España* (1672) he tried to immerse himself in the primitive times, enquiring about the first settler and the peoples that may have eventually populated Spain. This search was accompanied by a vehement call in favour of a different reading and evaluation of the sources. For the same reasons, it proposed a new methodology when studying the ‘remote times’; that is, the periods called *adelon* and *mythical* which went further back than the frontiers of *historical* times (Botella Ordinas, 2005b; Grell, 1995: 422-429 y 791-820). Rejecting a closed proposal, the option offered by Noah’s great-grandson presented an original parentage of Spain which, although impossible to be ‘affirmed absolutely’, still appeared as more likely than that offered by Tubal. In a more strategic turn, it also absolved the history of the country from the loss of credit fostered by the so-called *falsos cronicones* or ‘false chronicles’ (Godoy Alcántara, 1999).<sup>2</sup>

Already in the prologue of his *Población*, our chronicler announced that his aim was to ‘verify [...] the first population and origins of this great and always heroic and bellicose continent of the Spains.’ This inevitably forced him to bear witness of the ‘obstacles’ under which, in Pel-

licer’s view, ‘the greatest pens’ had succumbed. He did not intend to belittle ‘so many great men’ who had studied the primitive times, but it was also true that —due to diverse circumstances— he had not been ‘assisted by any Ancient histories of Spain.’ The only historiography that he had been able to use for his purposes did not cover more than four hundred and fifty years and was just a ‘history of the Goths, with no clauses belonging to the Ancient [histories].’ In this sense, his *Población* was the cornerstone of his *Aparato a la Monarchia Antigua de España* on which he had been working for some time. There were certainly some ‘memoirs’ of this period mentioned by Greek and Roman historians and poets. These ‘news’ had been accepted with no revision and, given the origins of their authors, they offered a peripheral if not outright superficial reading of the country. Thus the resulting history presented ‘deformations’ which clouded ‘the simple truth and purity of the Ancient Histories of Spain.’ Tubal’s very presence had for some time been considered uncertain. In fact, Pellicer pointed out, it was not until the publication of Giovanni of Viterbo’s (Annio) works in the late fifteenth century that Tubal’s condition as ‘settler and prince of Spain’ had been ‘so widespread and debated.’ Annio’s works had favoured the establishment of that role as fact.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from his account of the first settlers and the names of the primitive kings of the main western kingdoms, the Dominican added an assumption that Pellicer found especially disturbing. Annio’s catalogue of the alleged first twenty-four kings of Spain assumed that the history of the country had developed ‘always in a historical time, with no trace of the *Adelon* or the *Mythical* times.’ This ‘quality’, as Pellicer noted, ‘will not be found in any kingdom of the universe, or in any nation other than in God’s people.’ In Pellicer’s eyes, the equation was unacceptable as it was the result of the ruse of those with a determination to ‘privilege Spain, giving her a firm origin and continuation of historical kings,’ and, in this way, ‘to take her out of the *Adelon* times, when everything was ignorance, and of the *Mythical* times, when everything was allegory and fables.’ Consequently, it was impossible ‘to try to ascertain [through histories]... the origins of the first settler of Spain or the West.’ Neither Saint Isidore, nor Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo or Alonso de Madrigal could modify that conclusion. It did not matter how much one enquired into other sources; Spain did not appear in the ‘Sacred Geography,’ and was ‘far enough not to have been contained in it’ (Pellicer, 1672: points 20-25). Any attempts to compile an Ancient history of Spain had to start with the *adelon* times. With the conviction that it was possible to interpret ‘the thoughts’ of those authors of ‘antiquity’ and ‘authority’ who had written about ‘the first peoples of the universe,’ as well as the claims in some of the psalms in Scripture and even ‘profane histories,’ Pellicer felt authorised to conclude that ‘it was not Tubal who gave a beginning to this Crown and most of the others in the West, but Tarshish, his nephew, son of Javan, his brother.’ This had, of course, certain limits. Tarshish’s proposal as the first settler —even if supported by ‘men

of antiquity and authority’— lacked ‘the necessary firmness to be an absolute certainty.’ The *adelon* kept its condition of ‘dark night of the world’ (Pellicer, 1672: points 38, 40-47, 71).

Whilst acknowledging this permanent uncertainty, not everything was lost for the writing of an account of that period. The Spanish history of the *adelon* times could be developed; it was not an impossible enterprise. According to the criteria expounded, the strategy was to free oneself before anything else of the ‘novelties’, ‘fictions’ and ‘delusions’ introduced by Annio. The next step to be taken was that which ‘our men back then had not had the courage to take’; that is, to immerse in primitive history going further than the ‘brief and simple news left by our first settlers’ by using ‘the fragments that time had spared’ which could be found in ‘the ancient Chaldean, Egyptian, Phoenician and Greek monuments.’ Ancient history could be taken back to a period oldest than that studied by Jiménez de Rada or Lucas de Tuy. The result of this investigation, Pellicer noted, brought forward ‘a Spain that is very different from that previously studied by historians.’ What emerged was ‘a different Empire,’ inhabited by ‘diverse (even uncertain) settlers.’ The resulting sequence presented ‘the long series of indigenous —or native— kings that ruled there since the times of the dispersion of the peoples.’ With unavoidable swings, ‘with more or less sovereignty,’ that empire endured despite the ‘invasions’ of Carthaginians, Romans and Goths. In the midst of these invasions a ‘king natural to the Spanish’ had never been lacking, even if ‘secluded in this or that corner of its provinces.’ In fact, Pellicer recorded up to ‘sixty-five kings’ previously unknown (1673: *prefacion*, fols. III-V).

The chronicler did not hide that, in all honesty, his work could not be considered a ‘History of the Ancient Monarchy.’ Therefore the use of the label *Aparato* or ‘Apparatus’ —in the strict sense of material transportation— which headed the title of his book excused him from the fact that the ‘readers’ would not find an accurate sequence ‘in the historical chain that links some events and periods with the others.’ In essence, he was fighting against the ‘fables’ and ‘lies’ present in the accounts of antiquity. However, did this not imply the rejection of the former as a resource when dealing with the *adelon* or *mythical* times. Behind this methodological claim lay a no less emphatic vindication of the greatness of his own country. After all Spain had been, ‘since primitive times,’ ‘the Theatre and Prince of the West,’ from which ‘were taken to the Orient most of the heroes of the fables’ (Pellicer, 1673: VII and 31). In fact, what Plato mentioned ‘in his *Atlantis*’ was used as a valuable chronicle of ‘the Primitive Spain’. In this work one could find the ‘History’ of Spain’s ‘ancient and primitive kings.’ There could be no doubts about its authenticity, for there were ‘true kings and names, without allegories,’ as confirmed in the eleventh century by authors such as Kedrenos or, more recently, Marsilio Ficino, ‘illustrator’ of Plato’s works. According to this account, the ‘Atlantean’ Spaniards built a vast empire from whose colonies ‘were formed most of the kingdoms in the West.’ They were the ones who, pass-

ing to the continent from their island, perpetrated the invasion of Athens described by Plato. The greatness of its history was beyond doubt —Spain had been the place in which ‘all the gentile fables had originated’ (Pellicer, 1673: 35, 49, 53, 65-66, 335).<sup>4</sup>

Pellicer was aware that ‘the most laborious action of the historian’ was to ‘talk about the origin of his homeland and kingdom’ and as such he reiterated the observance of the ‘precepts’ that had been lately debated within his profession, especially after the emergence of Pyrrhonism. The ‘perspective’ from which Pellicer himself admitted to tackle his subjects sought not only the highest ‘probability’ but also the highest ‘certainty’. This perspective, as he himself acknowledged was as ‘new’ as it was ‘difficult.’<sup>5</sup> The concerns of the chronicler with the methodology were the result —as he himself pointed out— of the ‘battles of the intellect’ that were taking place in some of the *tertulias* of the period. These previous and equally important battles were inescapable when it came to addressing the biggest enterprise to which Pellicer had committed himself: the elaboration of a history of his own homeland and kingdom. ‘Laborious’ as the task may have been, no one had worked on it with more dedication and continuity than him. Although deprived of the aura surrounding the primary moment of Tarshish, the Goths were a no less integral part of this self-defining account. A consistent historiographical tradition remarked their prominence in the configuration of Hispania. This tradition assumed them a provenance —an *origin*— about which Pellicer also wanted to point out some clarifications. His aims were not an isolated phenomenon. For some time, the European historiography had taken a fresh look at the presence and role of the Goths in the old continent. In essence, they were trying to replace the traditional Greco-Roman filiation of the *origins* of the European peoples (enunciated by Annio of Viterbo) with Nordic myths and to relocate the role played by the peoples of Northern Europe beyond its Anti-Roman epic tale. This trend was opportunely framed by *Atlantica sive Manheim* (1679), the work of Olaus Rudbeck, a professor from the University of Uppsala and by Abbot Paul-Yves Pezron’s *L’antiquité de la nation et de la langue des Celtes* (1703) (Kidd, 2004:185-210; Pouloin, 1998:506-510). In his *Prefación a la Monarchia de los Godos* —a text just six pages long— Pellicer surveyed this new tendency, describing an evolution of the Goths which differed notably from the traditional account. (Pellicer, 1671: 134-137; Johnson, 1950). Far from its usual location in Scandza, the primitive settlement of the Goths was actually located in Scythia, even if some branches may have settled in Scandza later. In fact, Pellicer presented his location as an authentic ‘disillusion’ of what had been claimed in *Corona Gótica, Castellana y Austriaca* (1645) by Saavedra Fajardo, who ‘brings the Goths from the confines of the North to Spain,’ when it was apparent ‘how far the Goths were from originating in Scandza or Septentrion.’ The triple crown alluded to by Saavedra may have been of Goth origins and its greatness inseparable from the House of Habsburg, but what Pellicer wanted to stress were the *Spanish* aspects of that crown.

To distance oneself from the Nordic perspective of the Goths was essential to the Hispanicising reorientation of the monarchy proposed by Pellicer. The key lay in the Scythians, it was to them that eyes had to turn. Linked to those origins, the actions of the Goths were to be understood as ‘united with the rest of the body of the Scythians, their progenitors.’ This did not exclude that these Scythians may have evolved later to ‘create their own and separate Crown.’ The evolution of their monarchy was a mirror for the monarchy of Spain. Throughout history, ‘the nature of Scythia’ had been maintained as an irrepressible basis for a dynamic of identity continuity which was not unknown to the Spanish Monarchy. Its history proved that ‘whenever the actions of the Castilians are spoken about, they are always [referred to as] Spain; and those of the Aragonese, they are [referred to be] Spain too; and in consequence, those of the Navarrese, the Andalusians, the Catalans, the Valencians or the Biscayans, they are all the actions of Spaniards.’ This was a piece of evidence that the militantly Pan-Hispanic Pellicer could not overlook.

Considered in its entirety, Pellicer’s proposal presents a seldom studied parallelism with the proposal offered by Rudbeck in his *Atlantida* only a few years later, in 1679. Just like in the Spanish case, the imperial moment that Sweden was experiencing—even if in a different phase— pervaded in the same fashion the approach in Ludbeck’s book. This great man of science and chancellor of the University of Uppsala created an impressive picture which described his country as the ‘mother’ of all other nations. Japheth, the father of all of them, was actually *Atlas* and Sweden was *Atlantis* (Eriksson, 1994). Its primitive inhabitants, the *hyperboreos* could only be the *Atlanteans*. Their language was also the oldest in the world; it could not have been otherwise. The Swedes, possessing an older history than that of the Greeks, had even instructed the latter. This reorientation was a significant one: the origins of European culture would have to be located in Sweden. Despite the essential differences which make them distinct, Pellicer’s and Rudbeck’s proposals indicate the existence of a certain Atlantean myth and even of an Atlantean nationalism that would feed the European imagination after the last third of the eighteenth century, as Pierre Vidal-Nacquet’s works have pointed out (Vidal-Nacquet, 1982). This reorientation, however, did not lack its critics, who were not necessarily stubborn defenders of previous proposals. It is convenient to remember that it was Leibniz, after all, who proposed the verb *to rudbeckise* to mock some of the ideas of the chancellor of Uppsala (Pouloin, 1998: 508).

Although not to that extent, Pellicer could not avoid the criticism of some *modernists*. In this case, it was an illustrious fellow countryman, Gaspar Ibáñez de Segovia, Marquess of Mondéjar. His *Cádiz Phenicia*, written throughout the 1680s, was presented as the demonstration of what the new historiography could offer to a subject which, like Cádiz’s remote past, was a perfect laboratory in which to test the new methods (Ibáñez de Segovia, 1805).<sup>6</sup> This was a monumental work composed of seventeen detailed and erudite ‘disquisitions’. Its interest lay -

just as much as or even more so than in the defence of Cadiz’s Phoenician origins—in the introduction of a new method from which to approach the remote past. This inevitably entailed a thorough revision of the works of those who were still ignoring these basic conditions and of those who, although apparently sharing the same concerns—as was Pellicer’s case—did not seem to have understood them fully. Strictly speaking, this was not a confrontation with an *old-fashioned* man, but Mondéjar’s misgivings reflected serious doubts about Pellicer’s condition as a *modernist*. Significantly, Mondéjar’s first disquisition aimed to prove that ‘Plato’s Atlantis cannot be taken for Cadiz nor for Spain, whether through a fable, an allegory or through history,’ following this up with a remark about the ‘absurdities’ in which Pellicer incurred. In Mondéjar’s view, Pellicer’s criticisms of the manuscript of the ‘false Berossus’—the forgery upon which Annio of Viterbo’s book was sustained—had eventually led the critic to adopt the methods that he had so openly condemned. His efforts to dispel the fiction had ended up distorting his own account, bringing it closer to Annio’s. Pellicer had offered a view in which he indifferently mixed up ‘the uncertain with the implausible and the fabulous with the historical.’ Both the list of Spain’s primitive kings founded upon Plato’s information and Cadiz’s position as the head of a vast empire which would have comprised the whole of Spain were unfounded. This was so, among other things, because these facts were far from representing the sense and interpretation that was to be given to Plato’s text, which Pellicer had misunderstood.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that Mondéjar’s book was manuscript makes it difficult to evaluate the impact of his work, something which is not exclusive of his *Cadiz Phenicia*. In any case, the presence of Atlantis in the Spanish past had *a life of its own* and, as we shall see, it will remain having one outside the misgivings of our *modernist*. Perceived as a *discovery*, America conferred new perspectives to the Platonic texts about Atlantis which had become fashionable again after Marsilio Ficino’s translation and commentary of 1485. The new continent and the origins of its peoples became a part of that revision of Biblical geography that we have alluded to. This revision now had to be confronted to the problem of localising the American novelty. The greatest concern lay in the possibility of presenting the New World as completely autonomous from the Biblical World, as certain circles of the Republic of Venice did not long after the discovery.<sup>8</sup> The exclusion of sacred history from this explanation was emphatically contested, especially in the Hispanic world, where the identification with the biblical account was not something that could be doubted. For obvious reasons, the papacy also took an interest in that point of view, being as it was the supreme guarantor of that identification and—ultimately—of the cession to the Spanish kings of control over the Indies. Independently of these facts, the debate about Spain’s settlers was still active and it was in this Spanish context that the island of Atlantis came to play a strictly strategic role. Populated from the very beginning by primitive Spaniards, the island-continent would have

allowed—do to its closeness to Cadiz—a connection and settling dynamic from the peninsula to the new continent since primitive times. This was not without legal consequences, as manifested in Sarmiento de Gamboa’s *Historia Indica* (1577) and Gregorio García’s *Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo* (1607). Whereas the papal bulls conferred the authority of canon law to occupy the Indies, the account of the Spanish historians added the legitimacy of civil law that resulted from that first occupation. This right of reversion ultimately opened an autonomous path against any subsequent political shifts on the part of the papacy (Gliozzi, 1977: 87-103).

Some of this was expanded with the publication of Diego Andrés Rocha’s little treatise *El origen de los indios* in 1681 (1988: chapters I and IV). The background of this publication was a gradual deterioration in the relations between the Church and the Spanish Monarchy due to some rights that the Crown claimed for itself in the Indies.<sup>9</sup> In defence of these rights, the author re-claimed previously explored proposals about a Spanish presence in America since the primitive times of Japheth and Tubal. Their position as ‘neighbours’ of the Atlantic isle would have enabled the descendants of Noah’s grandson to ‘settle [the island]’ and then to arrive ‘at *terra firma*, on the side that runs along Cartagena de Indias.’ The ancient history of the new continent was thus marked by this foundational event. It was therefore unsurprising to observe the similarities that could be observed between the customs, rites and qualities of the primitive Spaniards and the Indians or the presence of ‘many places, rivers, mountains and words which are in concordance in primitive Spain and in America.’ The characteristics of this primitive moment defined some sort of cloning of later history which allowed an explanation of similarities in both cases which had been hitherto unexplored. In the context in which Rocha wrote, this point of departure had enabled that—according to a plan designed by divine providence—the islands discovered by Columbus later on ‘were restored to the Crown of Spain’ to which they belonged ‘by just title and good right, as so many years before they had belonged to, and had been settled by the first kings of Spain.’

Thus the history of primitive times revealed the property links through which, apart from the papal bull, the Indies were united to the metropolis. This was the legitimisation of an ownership argument that had already been used before in the continent and which, in this case, hinted at the new power practices that were being attempted in the kingdoms of the Indies. This situation was reinforced by its overlap with the succession crisis that the monarchy had recently undergone. This reinforcement is evident in the reports entitled *Sobre la verdadera unión de las dos Coronas de España y Francia* which Francisco de Xejias y Lobera sent to Louis XIV in 1703 and the details of which will not be explored in this article.<sup>10</sup> It is revealing to note how Xejias assumed as fact the presence, between the old and the new continents of the ‘great Atlantic island’ which was visible ‘from the coasts of Spain.’ It had also acted as a platform for commerce with the Indies that had been in operation even before the ar-

rival of the Romans. In fact, the island would have allowed an early penetration of the Spaniards into the ‘empires’ and ‘kingdoms’ of the Indies, which explained why ‘the emperors and other kings of the said West Indies originated from noble families of the provinces of Spain.’ The intensity of this penetration had been such that the Indians ultimately represented, alongside the *batuecos* of Spain, the most genuine version of the *primitive Spaniards*.

Strategically, the memory of that community of origin became an invaluable support in a moment when, the war of Succession concluded, the new dynasty was making efforts to construct a historiographical discourse which deliberately blurred the Austrian past to emphasise a trajectory allegedly based on the country’s own glories; the ‘glories of Spain’, as Feijóo remarked in 1730 (Fernández Albaladejo, 2004). This was not vindicated indiscriminately. Feijóo himself had mocked the identification of the *batuecos* as the primitive Spaniards in his discourse on the ‘Fábula de las Batuecas, y Países imaginarios.’ Located within the domain of the *imaginary countries*, Atlantis did not escape Feijóo’s *criticism*, which did not mean, however, that it had disappeared from the scene. Significantly, in his 1729 re-edition of Gregorio García’s *Origen de los Indios del Nuevo Mundo*, Andrés González de Barcia inserted his own annotations supporting García’s arguments and he even incorporated Pellicer’s later proposals. As an editor and founding member of the Real Academia Española de la Lengua, González de Barcia was in charge of a programme to edit Spanish classics on the history of the New World. The context for these editions was a climate of ‘patriotic anxiety’ in which, as Jorge Cañizares has pointed out, the Spanish credentials as the first presence in the continent—with its subsequent capacity of naming places—was indispensable against the movements of other countries (Cañizares, 2001: 155-160).

In this context, Atlantis made sense. It also made sense in the Peninsula, where Antonio Fernández Prieto, with the same *nationist* impetus, published in 1738 an *Historia del Derecho Real de España*. Its intent was to prove the existence of an unyielding native law which had been present since ‘the primitive foundation of Spain’ (Fernández Albaladejo, 2006: 135-159; Fernández Prieto, 1738: 21, 31, 36-38 y 49). It began with ‘the primitive laws’ and it concluded with the *Partidas*, offering an account dominated by the prominence of royal actions which endorsed Philip V’s role as ‘supreme legislator.’ To this effect, no other text but that of Plato could certify the presence of a monarchical regime with its corresponding laws among the primitive Spaniards. In that text one could actually find the key to understanding the type of government under which ‘our Nationals’ had lived. At the same time, it could explain the laws that regulated the lives of ‘the first Spaniards, known as Atlanteans,’ as the philosopher’s text implied.

The journey to Atlantis undertaken by the new *Spain* of the Bourbons culminated with the publication, between 1738 and 1740, of the two volumes of Francisco Xavier Manuel de la Huerta y Vega’s *España primitiva, historia*

*de sus reyes y monarcas desde su población hasta Christo*. This culmination must be understood in a chronological sense, as the last work on the subject to emerge. It should not be understood as a fundamental contribution for a better understanding of the topic. It cannot be said that it added anything new to what had already been explored by Pellicer, whose theses Huerta y Vega appropriated with as little doubts as little was his explicit recognition for Pellicer’s work. From the very beginning its contents were subject to critics who, headed by censors as significant as Mayans and Sarmiento, directly opposed their ‘divulgation.’ In Mayan’s view, *España primitiva* was no more than an ‘imaginary Spain’, an ‘improper fable opposed to the true glories of Spain.’ This position was further supported by Sarmiento who, even if conceding the author’s erudition, deplored his working ‘system.’<sup>11</sup> That Huerta ended up being branded a *falsario* or ‘forger’ is evidently understandable; at least for some. However, independently of the criticisms and critics of the book, it still deserves some additional comments before being discarded.

From a position that was to a certain extent immodest, Huerta noted in his introduction the support he had received for his project from the two Royal Academies (of Language and History). This project was a ‘demand’ stemming from his ‘love for the homeland,’ considering the ‘gaps’ affecting Spain’s history, especially those relating to the ‘ancient times’. Without second thoughts, he moved on to list the limitations in which a long chain of historians (from Ocampo to Ferreras) had incurred. Huerta believed himself to be the last link of this chain, although he possessed the necessary equipment to surmount the shortcomings of others. Not even Pellicer was spared in this settling of the score, even if the object of *España primitiva* did not differ much from that of Pellicer’s *Población primitiva*. The aim was to prove that ‘during the Adelon and Mythical times, Spain was the head and ruler of all the West,’ an empire of colossal dimensions which already included America. From the very beginning it would have had its own kings, too. Aware of the significance of his proposal, the author dropped in the prologue some methodological hints about the crucial role that mythology played in his research. To begin with, he rejected as an unforgivable mistake the idea that mythology and its poets could be considered as ‘mere fable with no historical ground.’ The Church Fathers had clearly established that the gods of the gentiles had been ‘mortal princes’ whose events had been described by the poets ‘with the veil of mythology.’ Furthermore, this interpretation had been accepted by ‘all modern erudite men.’ Through this explicit acknowledgement of the possibilities opened by poetry and fables in the construction of the historical account of ancient times, Huerta appropriated one of the crucial issues that had characterised the debate between *ancients* and *moderns* since the latter half of the seventeenth century. The issue evolved round the possibility that the construction of a new historiographical *episteme*, with its demands for *certainty*, could be reconciled with the acceptance of the figures and motifs of fables.

Feijóo had already taken a stance concerning this issue, and Huerta wished to develop this further. He had actually completed a ‘Disertación sobre si la Mitología es parte de la Historia y como deba entrar en ella’ which would later be published in the *Fastos de la Real Academia de la Historia* of 1740 (I:1-42). A simple glance at the vast list of authors quoted that can be found in the last pages of this work is sufficient to notice that Huerta was well-versed in the subject. The authors mentioned ranged from Kircher, Vossius and Banier to Bochart, Huet, Tommasin and Montfaucon, including Olaus Rudbeck himself. Huerta thus invoked the main characters of the European *erudition* that had been battling throughout the endless *Querelle*. In this sense his dissertation was more than an acceptable *misse au point*. Supported by these premises, Huerta posited a more flexible and open understanding of the two times (*adelon* and *mythical*), the intelligibility and *truthfulness* of which was made possible through fables. The debate had reached a point in which the ‘exclusion from the body of pure History’ of the elements ‘appertaining to the Adelon and the Mythical’ could no longer be affirmed. The fact that it was both ‘notorious’ and ‘faithful’ that the Jews ‘had a continuous history from Creation to the Maccabees’ did not preclude the same being applied to Egyptians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Chinese and Africans.

The Spanish were part of the peoples that could immerse themselves in the obscurity of the *mythical* times and even in that of the *adelon*. Evidence was not lacking, including their own memories of Atlantis. Proof was not lacking to create a chronological timeline locating the Spanish directly ‘in the times of the patriarch Abraham.’ Thus in the ‘memoirs of Spain’ there were no ‘neglected’ times (*Fastos*, 30). The history of the country could be taken further back and that was in essence the purpose of *España primitiva*. Succinctly presented, the book’s contention was organised according to two propositions. On the one hand, it declared Tarshish as the first king of Spain and head of its monarchy. On the other hand it highlighted the alignment of the history of those first kings with the Atlantean fable or, in Huerta’s words, of ‘our Spain’ and the theogony of the Atlanteans.’ Moreover, the history of the country was ‘evident proof that the fables and mythology of the gentiles had its source and origin in real Spanish princes.’ So much so, that ‘most of the gods idolatrously worshiped in the Ancient world were... Spanish monarchs... or their sons and grandsons.’ Without a doubt, this was ‘one of Spain’s greatest glories,’ the nation being, as it was, unique ‘among all the other nations of the globe’ for having a ‘continuous history since its settlement after the Deluge’.<sup>12</sup> This was a significant piece of information. Led by its monarchy, Spain thus attained the condition of a *constituent people* of humankind, serving at the same time as an effective myth-maker for humanity.<sup>13</sup>

The impact of *España Primitiva* does not seem to have survived for long the death of its author in 1752. A year before, the great jurist and author of the crucial *Apparatus Juris Publici Hispanici*, Pedro José Pérez Va-

liente, had hailed Huerta’s work as a ‘most elaborate treatise’, placing its author among ‘the most modern.’<sup>14</sup> Knowing as he did that Tarshish’s candidacy was contested, the jurist avoided taking a stance. He warned, however, that some other ‘moderns’, such as Pedro de Peralta Barnuevo in his *Historia de España vindicada*, had publicly shown their disagreement with Huerta and, significantly, with Pellicer himself. (Peralta Barnuevo, 2003: especially chaps IV-VII in Book I; on Peralta see also Hill, 2000: 147-190). Therefore, it was somewhat ironic that that ‘criticism’ made, in Pérez Valiente’s words, ‘with much erudition,’ emerged precisely from a printing press in Lima, as if the new continent refused to acknowledge the mediator role allegedly played by the *island* in its first settlement. This refusal may not have been entirely detached from the process of revising the American past, which did not exclude the historical moment prior to the conquest, which was taking place in the Peninsula and to which we have already alluded to.

In the end, *España Primitiva* never managed to shake off its condition as an ‘imaginary Spain’ that had been ascribed to it mainly by Mayans and Sarmiento. In the mid-1760s, the monumental *Historia literaria de España* by the Mohedano brothers treated with irony the work’s label of ‘modern novel’ with which it circulated among the *Diarists*.<sup>15</sup> This readjustment included Atlantis, reduced to a mere ‘chimera.’ For obvious reasons, Pellicer and Huerta did not fare well in this review. Drawing from the most recent bibliographical erudition, the Mohedanós took a long journey through ancient Spain. They were less interested in emphasising the existence of ‘fabulous kings’ than in highlighting the successes and trajectory of a national culture. In a certain way, it seemed as if the monarchy must cede its central role to the vitality of a *kulturation* as neglected by the national sages as it was intentionally blurred by foreigners due to its lack of *enlightenment*. In this respect, the Phoenicians offered an alternative which was more consistent, more well-founded and better adjusted to the historiographical and political demands of the new times (Cruz Andreotti and Wulff Alonso, 1992). Paradoxically, the disappearance of the Atlanteans from the history of Spain’s origins is in stark contrast with the renewed presence of Atlantis in the European cultural domain in the late eighteenth century, immersed as it was in the *grand tournant* which defines the transition from the *Lumières* to *Romantisme*. This volte-face implied the restoration of the possibilities opened by the imagination against the rationalist approach previously imposed in the interpretation of the remote past, Atlantis and Atlanteans included (Vidal-Naquet, 2005: 99-121; Grell, 1995: 72-976). Perhaps because of this, Pellicer and Huerta could be considered under a different light, one less conditioned by the imperialism of the enlightened paradigm. If the identity of men ultimately depends on ‘the ability to create a credible account of the world,’ it would not be entirely unjust to acknowledge—with their limitations—that the ‘Spanish Atlanteans’ played an effective role as disseminators of a renewed national imagination (Starobinsky, 1999: 121-136).

## NOTES

- 1 This research has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. HAR2011-27562.
- 2 Pellicer's proposals aroused a firm opposition from the very beginning see Fr. Gerónimo de la Concepción *Emporio del Orbe* (2003: 5-6, 39-40), written between 1681-1687.
- 3 The quotes are taken from points 6, 7, 8 and 20 in *Población* (1672); on Anno's figure and his impact in Spain see Caro Baroja, 1992: 49-83.
- 4 On Plato's influence in this context see Pierre Vidal-Naquet, 1987 and 2005.
- 5 On this historiographical reorientation see Borghero, 1983: chapters 1-3; the references to Pellicer come from the 'Dedicatoria' in *Aparato*, and its first point.
- 6 Although it remained manuscript until the early nineteenth century, this work enjoyed, nevertheless, certain dissemination. On its author see Villanueva, 2004: 214-221.
- 7 The quotations can be found, as has already been pointed out, in the 'disquisición Primera' of the first volume, pp. 1-47.
- 8 By authors such as Girolamo Fracastoro, 1530; Hieronimo Garimberto, 1549; Giambattista Ramusio, 1553; essential in this context is Gliozzi, 1977: part II, chap. I.
- 9 The book was published in Lima in 1681 by the printing press of Manuel de los Olivos.
- 10 The *Memoria sobre el gobierno de las Indias* comprises 14 manuscript books preserved in the Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères in France; *Sobre la verdadera Unión de las dos Coronas de España y Francia* is the third book (AMAE, Espagne, vol. 118, fols. 245-285). Part of the material has been edited by Pablo Emilio Pérez Mallaina, 1986.
- 11 Mayans criticism can be found in his *Obras completas* (1983, 1:265-305, esp. 263); Sarmiento's in Santos Puerto, 1999: 547-564.
- 12 The quotations that follow can be found in the prologue (pages unnumbered) of *España Primitiva*.
- 13 On the myth of the *people instituteur* see Grell, 1995: 962 and ss.; see also Manuel, 1967: 85-125.
- 14 The Latin translation of the *Apparatus* was carried out by M<sup>a</sup>. A. Durán Ramas, with a preliminary study on Pérez Valiente by Pablo Fernández Albaladejo, 2000; the commentary on Huerta in p. 268.
- 15 Rafael and Pedro Rodríguez Mohedano, 1766: 236, italics in the original (quoting from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of 1766); on the meaning of the term see Valero, 1996.

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