

IMPERIUM AND PEACE Deciphering Tacitus in Early Modern Spain

In 17th-century Spain, the work of the Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus was widely acknowledged. Since the 16th century, the works of Tacitus had become a significant model for policy-making and state-building. At the beginning of the 17th century, Tacitus's works were finally translated into Castilian. In this context, the translation and interpretation by Baltasar Alamos de Barrientos (1555 - 1640) is essential both in form and content. Alamos was a statesman, jurist, but also a humanist. This paper aims to interpret the text *Los Aforismos al Tácito español* (1614), in particular the section *Vida de Iulio Agricola*. Alamos' work is functional in that it demonstrates a mechanism of appropriation, ways of understanding the historical text.

The Romanisation of the provinces as an imperialist strategy was strongly justified by Tacitus on an ideological level. The historian, in the *Agricola*, exalts the work of the general, an *exemplum* of political and 'institutional' moderatism and 'conservative' *prudencia*. This established Alamos's ideas as a valuable manifesto for political practices. One must take note of the idea of 'justice' behind a civilisational war. The passage from Calgaco's speech (Agr. 30) in which we read "ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant", is symbolic and particularly problematic in relation to the political actions of the Spanish monarchy. It is clear from the aphorisms in the margin of the passage that Alamos was well aware of Spain's colonialist policies, just as Tacitus was aware of the effectiveness of the means used by the Romans to implement their imperialist policy.

Another aspect of the political mechanisms of the empire is revealed later (Agr. 42), when it is said that even in a tyranny (Domitian) there can be great virtuous men (Agricola). Their virtue is in part due to their ability to cooperate with a government. Alamos explains the content of these sentences by praising their practical sense. However, some of his aphorisms are perplexing when one considers the Spanish monarchy. On the one hand, there were debates about the legitimacy of the conquests in America, which were based on the occupation and expropriation of resources; on the other hand, there were debates about Spain's position in Europe as a guarantor of stability, particularly with regard to the Italian peninsula.

Against this background, the aphorisms of Alamos simultaneously justifies and accuses such political mechanisms or practices. His contribution marks the beginning of a Spanish Tacitism that is still struggling to be clearly defined in its policies. Alamos' work can well be understood as a form of political realism, which is more attuned to social dynamics. Tacitus is not being reinvented. Instead, Alamos decodes Tacitus in his translation defining new keys for interpreting his own time. This presentation overcomes the structures of traditional interpretation of Tacitus, either a republican or a monarchical author. Tacitus has become an author who reconciles theory and practice. This was not a concern of the Spanish empire, but it still beleaguers us.

Tacitus is indeed recognized as a model for decision-making. The aim of this presentation is indeed to show the possibility of reading the aphorisms of Alamos not as erudite quotations or allusions, but as authentic reflections that overcome the ambiguity inherent in Tacitus' text and propose a more pragmatic policy-making. Alamos is considered a 'pioneer' of Spanish Tacitism, or at least of one type of Spanish reception. He certainly

had the merit of combining ethics and politics with the help of history: if both can find their rules in history, then it is enough to study history in order to reconcile them. This type of reception, focusing more on reconciliation rather than conciliation, will be a cornerstone of the Spanish political debate just after the publication of the “Spanish Tacitus”.