

**The Hybrid Genre of *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla* (1587)
by Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega**

Aaron M. Kahn
(University of Sussex)

Introduction

Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega's (1555-1615) play *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla* appeared in print in 1587 in a collection that included a full *romancero* of seventy-six ballads and Lobo's only other known play, *Tragedia de la honra de Dido restaurada*. Better known, perhaps, for his *romances*, his epic poem on the life and exploits of Hernán Cortés (1588 and 1594) and his *Elogios en loor de los tres famosos varones, don Jaime, rey de Aragón; don Fernando Cortés, marqués del Valle, y don Álvaro de Bazán, marqués de Santa Cruz* (1601), Lobo's plays have received comparatively little scholarly attention. Choosing as the main topic of this drama the fall of the Eastern Roman, or Byzantine, Empire to the Ottoman Turks in 1453, *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*, here after also referred to as *Constantinopla*, presents scholars with an event clearly anchored in the historical record; although the Iberian kingdoms and their other holdings had little or no presence in the final siege, Lobo Lasso de la Vega combines history, tragedy and even traits of epic poetry to make political statements about Spain of the 1580s and its existence in opposition to the Ottoman Empire that still occupied Constantinople.

The concept of dramatic genre in this era is fluid, and are derived in large part from Classical ideas of poetry. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle addresses distinct forms of poetry, such as epic, tragic and comic, as well as how they relate to concepts of history, and within Lasso's play, we detect aspects of all of them, creating a generic ambiguity. In the original 1587 publication, Lobo clearly labels his work a tragedy, but as the play unfolds, the tragic nature of the action and dénouement come into question.¹ We see qualities that are unique to this particular play, forming a hybrid genre that proves problematic when attempting to classify it; it is multiple things at once. What is clear about the structure and content of this play, particularly visible in the context of other Spanish plays from the 1570s and 1580s, is the lack of convention. The crossing of traditional literary structures is reflective of a constantly evolving political situation. There are three evident generic classifications that we can associate with *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*: tragedy, history play and epic.

This article contends that the composition of this play was intended to call Spain and Philip II to arms against the Muslim enemy.² The ambiguous and hybrid nature of the play's structure and content reflects the fast changes in the Spanish world from this time. In the years following the great naval victory for the Holy League at Lepanto in 1571, Catholic supremacy of the Mediterranean Sea began to diminish once again. By 1587, a series of events had taken place that compelled those with a voice, such as playwrights, to use the powerful visual medium of the commercial stage to make known their belief that the vast resources at Philip II's disposal should be used to regain control of the entire Mediterranean, rescue the thousands of Christians still held in bondage in Northern Africa and perhaps even retake Constantinople under Spanish rule. Antonucci establishes that *Constantinopla*

pertenece a un periodo en el que muchos intelectuales, entre ellos Miguel de Cervantes, apostaban por un renovado compromiso de Felipe II en el Mediterráneo, para completar

¹ The play was published again in 1603 as *Comedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla* in *Seis comedias de Lope de Vega*, with no reference to Lobo Lasso de la Vega as the author.

² See Fernández (2000) for a similar analysis of Cervantes's *Los tratos de Argel*, a contemporary of *Constantinopla*.

la empresa realizada en Lepanto acabando con los enclaves de los corsarios argelinos en las costas del norte de África. (Antonucci 2016, 123)

Depicting the demise of a Christian civilisation over 1100 years old and with a direct link back to Constantine the Great, who perhaps more than anyone in history is responsible for the pre-eminence of the Christian religion in Europe, at the hands of a Muslim empire that was Spain's great enemy of the day, Lobo Lasso de la Vega provides a warning from history that any empire that rises also puts itself at risk for a fall.

Elsewhere, I have studied the expression of political thought in Spanish drama of this era, namely from about 1570 to about 1590 (2008), and he adopted the label first put forward by Stefano Arata in his initial attribution to Cervantes of the play *La conquista de Jerusalén, por Godofre de Bullón*: the “lost generation” of Spanish playwrights (Arata 1992, 9). The group includes Juan de la Cueva, Cervantes, Cristóbal de Virués, Jerónimo Bermúdez, Andrés Rey de Artieda, Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, and, among others, Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. The intent behind the moniker is that although today we study their extant works, they quickly fell out of fashion in the late sixteenth century with the advent of the *comedia nueva*. The main points of criticism explored are the apparent abandonment of the fight against Islam, the maligned influence of ambitious courtiers, the invasion of Portugal, a fellow Catholic country, at a time of insecurity and the danger of Philip II's rule descending into tyranny. This was an era of transition in Spanish dramatic practices, evolving from the morality plays and university productions into the realm of professional, commercial theatres, and the intellectual playwrights studied used the stage for their own purposes. Therefore, this group of pre-Lopean writers devised their plays following certain previously established norms, while simultaneously developing new practices, some of which disappeared from the Spanish stage with the new style geared towards the entertainment of the theatre-goer.

Hybrid Dramatic Genres

Consistent with an era in generic flux on the stage, the history play emerges at a time in which the very notion of history, and historiography, took centre stage in the debate of imitation and verisimilitude. Unconcerned that the average theatre-goer might not understand the subtle differences between recorded historical fact and a dramatized representation of events, Lobo and his contemporaries shared an appreciation of history; however, they were not averse to forming it in their own manner in order to entertain an audience while simultaneously portraying a sometimes covert political messages. As Rackin has stated “historians studied facts; dramatists invented fictions” (Rackin 1990, 32). Playwrights like Lobo created “fictionalized histories” (35). It was acceptable to use historical examples to project commentary about the present situation, in negative or positive terms, even relaying criticism towards the crown.

At the same time, there were conflicting concepts and attitudes about whether or not the representation of history on stage was tantamount to misleading the public, a public that largely could not read or write. Cervantes's canon of Toledo in *Don Quixote* famously declares that plays with historical content are based on “cosa fingida” (I.48 2000, 557), meaning that it was the “prime suspect of that falsification of reality and distortion of truth with which contemporaneous literature and drama was continuously charged” (Kluge 2019, 227). Kluge goes on to describe how history plays indeed epitomised the problem:

For historical dramas challenged not only the classicist stylistic decorum and standing moral values, but also the very laws of temporal and physical reality. And they could therefore be considered even more reprehensible than the cloak-and-dagger plays—widely criticized for their irregular form and immoral content, but in the end wholly

fictive and therefore, in a certain sense, harmless: pure comedy. History plays, on the other hand, claimed to represent something which had actually taken place, something true; and yet mixed with historical facts and with fiction, contaminating truth with illusions and lies. In the eyes of contemporaneous critics of the theater historical drama therefore approached the blasphemies of hagiographical plays and other credulous forms of religious theater. (227-228)

Kluge's article provides a very useful overview of concepts of drama, including history and tragedy, and how the seemingly conflicting relationship between the historical record and its theatrical recreations butted heads. With Cervantes, and in turn Lobo Lasso de la Vega, we see innovation in the use of history on stage; not only do they represent well-known historical events, but they insert their own messages, revealing their intentions by how they choose to portray events.³

Although the collapse of Byzantium does not feature much in *romances* or theatre, there existed significant historical sources available to Lobo Lasso de la Vega that provide a more accurate picture of how Spaniards of his day, some 130 years after the events in question, viewed Constantinople, the Eastern Roman Empire and its eventual defeat to Spain's great enemy of the 1580s. Alfonso de Palencia's *Crónica de Enrique IV*, written in the 1480s and 1490s, and Vicente Roca's *Hystoria en la qual se trata de la origen y guerras que han tenido los turcos, desde su comienzo hasta nuestros tiempos* (1556) are perhaps the most prominent, giving us some insight into Lobo's purpose of composing this play in the manner in which he did.⁴ Crucial as well are three surviving contemporary accounts of the events of 29 May 1453: those of George Sphrantzes (1401-1478), Nicolò Barbaro (1427-28-1521?) and Hermodoros Michael Kritovoulos (c. 1410-c. 1470). All of these sources were available in Castilian or Italian, a language Lobo also knew thoroughly. Each of these three versions contain more similarities than differences, and they are reflective of the large Greek diaspora in southern Europe that pleaded for help in regaining Constantinople. By recognising their points of view and the purpose for putting their experiences to paper, we can gain a better understanding of Lobo's intentions with *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*.⁵

³ Although Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega does not seem to have written any specific treatises about the compiling or retelling of historical information, many of his works indulged in the chronicles of the past, recent and remote, as well as tales that bordered on legendary and included full-blown myths. The complete volume in which this play first appeared contained a full *romancero* of seventy-six ballads. Sixteen of these, numbers 60 to 75, are listed as *pastoral*, but most of the others depict events of the past: the end of Troy, ancient Greece, ancient Rome, Muslim Spain, the Reconquest and even the reign of Charles V.

⁴ In his article on the depiction of the conquest by European Chroniclers, Bunes Ibarra (1992) provides an invaluable overview of writers and their works.

⁵ George Sphrantzes had spent his life in the service of the Byzantine imperial family and was a chief advisor to Constantine XI. After the conquest of Constantinople, Sphrantzes was enslaved by the Ottomans before escaping to Western Europe, ending his days as a monk. Towards the end of his life, he composed his eye-witness account of the fall in his native Greek. As a Byzantine who suffered greatly physically and psychologically post-empire, his account, known as the *Chronicon Minus*, emphasises the valour of the emperor and his people while also highlighting the errors and the sins that brought about the city's takeover. The Venetian physician Nicolò Barbaro, whose version of events represents the most complete Western European account, is invaluable in our understanding of what took place, even though it also has its drawbacks. His *Giornale dell'assedio de Constantinopili*, written in Italian, is a day-by-day diary of Barbaro's observations and experiences; he refers to himself as a physician on the ship, but evidence also suggests he was a crossbowman. While he provides great detail, he highly praises the Venetian contingent at the battle while providing very critical and at times inaccurate descriptions of contributions from the rival Genoese, including the great captain Giustiniani. Finally, Hermodoros Michael Kritovoulos created his history, also written in Greek, during the events of the siege and fall. While his is a complete history, he focuses more on the Ottoman perspective of events, having a prominent civil service role in Mehmed II's empire. He certainly expresses mourning for the loss of the Byzantine Empire, while simultaneously accepting the shift in power to the conquerors.

The most apparent reason to create a historical drama would be to celebrate a significant event in the nation's history, often glorifying a decisive military campaign that holds prominence in national lore or even a hagiographic depiction of a national hero, canonised secularly or religiously. However, with this play, we see a very different, borderline-blasphemous depiction of the fall of Constantinople. The history play provides the playwright with the challenge of presenting a story the outcome of which the audience already knows, while still making it engaging and creating characters with whom we can relate. The audience needs to care about what happens to the central characters, whether we want to see their success or their demise. In *Constantinopla*, the emperor Constantino paints a pitiful picture of a monarch doomed to be destroyed. This is, in theory, the character that the audience is supposed to care about as we bear witness to his suffering and that of his empire. But do we, and would a sixteenth-century Spanish audience think that being Christian was enough to be pitied?

In an era when the word *comedia* could be used in the general sense of a play, Lobo clearly uses the generic classification of tragedy for this historical drama. The traditional Aristotelian concept of a tragedy, with a tragic hero whose tragic flaw leads to an inevitable downfall and thus invoking feelings in the spectators, exists in this play, but in an unusual manner. Constantino represents the most likely candidate of a tragic hero; he is the leader of a Christian civilisation combatting a Muslim invader who recognises the sins that will bring about their downfall as depicted in his prophetic dream that takes place just before opening of the play. The destruction comes to fruition, and the emperor fights valiantly to the death, but I question the tragic nature of this play.

Juxtaposed with the dramatic structures of history and tragedy, Lobo introduces characteristics in his play that are akin to epic poetry, as well as anti-epic poetry. As a student in his youth of Alonso de Ercilla, author *La Araucana*, and subsequently the author of a major epic poem himself, Lobo Lasso de la Vega was fully aware of the power of epic poetry in telling a tale. Typically, the epic poem recounts the tale of a central character, an epic hero, whose heroic exploits and values embody those of his civilization; his tale is of national importance, often supporting a foundation myth, and the epic hero's demise is often premature but portrayed as a vital step towards the empire that his efforts will eventually establish. Traditionally, then, the epic is only part of the story and not a complete tale in and of itself. In this sense, the death of the epic hero, decreed by an inalterable fate, coincides in form with that of the tragic hero on stage; a principal difference, though, is that the epic hero's moral path is on the ascendancy towards empire, whereas the tragic hero's passing provokes a catharsis in the audience that draws a line under the past and re-sets the pathway forward.

If we recognize components and characteristics commonly associated with epic poetry, then the conflicting interpretations of the plays cause us to also consider the counter-epic, or anti-epic, discourse that seeps to the surface. The counter-epic refers to literature that responds to form, convention and the heroic intentions of the epic, but in a manner that can negatively criticise and scrutinise the very imperial enterprise that it appears to celebrate. Barbara Simerka's still seminal monograph on counter-epic literature in Early Modern Spain demonstrates that the works she analyses "deploy a revisioning of epic values in order to examine a particular aspect of early modern martial aristocratic discourse" (2003, 4). Simerka includes Cervantes's *La Numancia* and Ercilla's *La Araucana* within the discussion that viewpoints on religion, empire and even literature were far from monolithic, and given the context in which Cervantes and Lobo wrote their plays, it becomes clear that their history plays do not conform completely to any dramatic structures that precede them. They were written at a time of oscillation of popularity of King Philip II (1556-1598) and his imperial policies.

Lobo creates two warring emperors that I contend are linked with the questioning of Philip's enterprises. Running parallel with Constantino's descent into oblivion is the ascendancy of the *Gran Turco*, Mahometo, himself an emperor whose authority and grasp on

victory become stronger as the play progresses. He is the strong leader whose demand of strength and discipline in his soldiers, when Constantino laments the moral decadence of his own people, are admirable traits. If this play had been written in exactly the same words, but with a Christian victory depicted at the expense of Muslim depravity, it would rightly be labelled a *comedia*. So how are we meant to interpret the positive attributes portrayed by the sworn enemy of Christianity? Lobo's quasi-celebration of the ultimate victory of Mahometo's pre-destined triumph appears to outweigh the suffering of the Christian people during the sack of Constantinople.

For Spaniards who saw their civilisation, one on which the sun never set, as the heirs to the Roman Empire, the Fall of Constantinople might not be seen in the same tragic light as we might first think. These were a Christian people, but Christian in the same misguided sense as the Protestants who threatened the supremacy of the Roman Church. The Western Latin Church and the Eastern Greek Church manifested their differences in language and liturgy from the early days of Christianity being the religion of the Empire. The very split of the Roman Empire between Rome and Constantinople precipitated the schism that became concretised in 1054 AD with a mutual excommunication, with each considering the other heretical. Subsequent attempts at reunification failed, as it inevitably meant that one would become dominant over the other.

By the beginning of the fifteenth century, both sides made more concerted efforts to form a union between the churches, culminating in the Council of Florence. In 1439, the reunification of communions from the Catholic West and various national churches of the East, including Byzantium, Serbia, Bulgaria and Russia, was proclaimed. It was signed by Byzantine Emperor John VIII, older brother and predecessor of Constantine XI, and Pope Eugene IV, but the agreement received widespread condemnation in the East. The agreement required the Eastern Churches to recognise the supremacy of the pope in Rome; instead of a new united church, it was tantamount to the absorption of the East into Catholicism. With the increasing threat of the Ottoman Turks and with the Byzantine Empire being reduced to the City of Constantinople, the Morea (the modern-day Peloponnesian Peninsula) and some scattered towns and villages, John VIII hoped that this treaty would ensure support and the defence of his territory by other Christian forces. Constantine XI continued to support the union of the churches, but there were too many concessions demanded on liturgy and spirituality for the wider Orthodox religious communities to accept it.⁶

Perhaps the one significant factor that enabled Ottoman success in conquering Constantinople was the complacency of the West and their lack of drive to come to the aid of the East. Other than a small Venetian contingent who had commercial interests in Byzantium and a Genoese presence led by Giovanni Giustiniani Longo (Justiniano in *Constantinopla*) from the powerful House of Doria, other Christians simply watched as the forces of Sultan Mehmed II put an end to this civilization that had endured for more than a millennium.⁷ Perhaps they thought that the fabled walls of Byzantium had protected the city this long that they could withstand yet another onslaught. Perhaps they felt that when the time was right they would send forces and that the Second Rome would still be standing. Perhaps it was in God's plan, after all, to make an example out of a civilisation that had lost its way.

⁶ See Gill (1959) for a complete history of the Council of Florence. This monograph is still the pre-eminent history of the Council, what preceded and succeeded it.

⁷ Palencia placed culpability on Constantine allowing the sin to amount, and simultaneously blaming Western apathy: "Este cruelísimo infortunio, que la insolencia y cobardía de los cortesanos de Roma hizo más amargo, acarrea de día en día al nombre de la Cruz calamidades sin número, de que no poca responsabilidad toca á los Príncipes cristianos, culpables de igual apatía, como dire en lugar oportuno" (1904, v. I, 132-133). Roca maintains that Constantine wrote to other princes, but they "guerreaban entre sí. (...) Aragón, Nápoles, Venecia y Génova mandaron barcos, pero muchos se perdieron por tormentas" (1556, XLVIIIr).

In Lobo's play, there is nothing in the dialogue or action that differentiates between East and West in reference to the Christian characters of the city. There is no indication that they defied the pope, who also gets no mention in the play, or that the lack of union and prolongation of the schism play any part in the fall of the city. However, other issues are at play here that could have influenced the depiction of events on stage, even with Lobo choosing not to include them. From the Byzantine perspective, the emperor's insistence on and pursuit of the union with Rome is what angered God and contributed to their destruction. George Sphrantzes claimed that "the synod [Council of Florence] was the single most important cause for the attack that the impious launched against our City, which resulted in the siege, our enslavement, and our great misfortunes" (50). Although Constantinople in 1453 was weak and paled in comparison to its past strength and glory, it stood symbolically as a bulwark against incursions further westward into Europe of Muslim forces. Its destruction shattered the image of invincibility, and union or no union, Christianity was threatened.

From the perspective of Western Christians, no matter how tragic the fall might have been, tragic endings have been dictated by the fates, and one's destiny fulfilled, no matter how heart-breaking and sad, is just. From a Spanish point of view, we see further indications that Islam was destined to overtake Byzantium: "La mayor parte de las crónicas españolas hacen coincidir el nacimiento de Mahoma con uno de los momentos de mayor degradación moral y política del imperio bizantino, lo que explicaría la fácil y rápida extensión del Islam" (Bunes Ibarra 1992, 92-93). Spain blamed Constantinople for the lightning speed at which Islam spread, with the West often blaming the fall of Jerusalem to Byzantine indifference and reluctance to fight. Although the Byzantine civilisation identified as the Roman Empire, the West considered them to be just antiquated Greeks (91); in effect, the Greeks were being othered, in Spain as much as anywhere else in Western Europe.⁸ Being an "other" results in a lower regard, and in turn, a lack of empathy towards their plight:

La desaparición de Bizancio se debe exclusivamente a las formas de actuación de los griegos y de sus gobernantes. La Europa cristiana no los deja abandonados a su propia suerte, sino que los bizantinos se han ganado su destino durante siglos por sus comportamientos ostracistas (101).

The defeat of Byzantium should serve as warning to other nations that God will punish collective sin, and perhaps more importantly, He will punish the monarch who either sins or who allows sin in his realms to accumulate unhindered.

Lobo chose to depict Constantinople at its weakest point, militarily and morally, and although there are scattered references to the bravery of the emperor and his people, we can see in the violation and destruction of the Byzantine capital, ending with a Muslim ruler walking the streets of the sacred city, a wake-up call to the Spanish people, and perhaps to King Philip II himself; it is a sign that if it can occur to the Roman Empire, it could happen to the Spanish Empire. It was time to act, and Lobo's play reminds us that it was the King of Spain towards the beginning of the century who ruled a massive global empire. What better way to fight the spread of Islam than to take the title of Eastern Emperor as well as that of the West? In addition, the kings of Spain probably had the best claim to the Byzantine throne, at least in their eyes. The last of the Paleologos royal house, Andreas, nephew to Constantine XI, bequeathed the rights to the throne to the Catholic Monarchs in his will dated 7 April 1502, two months before his death, meaning that their successors, emperor and then king, considered themselves the true heirs to the Byzantine crown (Floristán 2004, 449).

⁸ In Covarrubias's definition of "Constantinopla", he states that the city fell "por pecados *nuestros*" (Covarrubias 1611, p. 233v; [s.v. *Constantinopla*]; my emphasis). The assertion that they were *our* sins here refers to Christianity as opposed to any faults committed by Spaniards.

In order to continue this line of analysis, a brief overview of the social, religious, political and military events that pertain to this study is necessary. As Spain, through its several kingdoms, grew in territory, power and wealth in the sixteenth century, it confronted the logistical challenges of maintaining such a vast empire in the face of competing powers in Europe and across the Mediterranean in Northern Africa. With the break-up of Charles V's holdings between his son and his brother, Philip II eventually looked North and West.

Upon the death of Mary Tudor in 1558 and England's return to Protestantism, Philip concentrated his attention on the Muslim enemy within and without his realms. The revolt in the Alpujarras of 1568-71 marked the start of another wave of fear about Islam and commenced a decade of action. A great deal of cruelty and severity came down on the Moriscos of this region, and with the rumours of reinforcements by sea from Africa, the widespread fear of a "quinta columna" (Hermenegildo 1983, 19) within the Peninsula fuelled calls to protect Southern Europe from Islam.

Estas dos coordenadas – el peligro morisco y sus implicaciones en las relaciones con los turcos, y la crisis de la ordenación del poder político instaurado por Carlos V y Felipe II – son las que aparecen como inspiraciones profundas del quehacer literario de Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega, miembro de la nobleza media o inferior del reino y beneficiario de los favores filipinos por sus servicios cortesanos. (8)

With the resounding victory for the Holy League at Lepanto in 1571, followed by conquests of Tunis and La Goleta, it can be understood that Spaniards felt the tide was shifting in their favour; however, by the end of the 1570s, the direction in which Philip aimed his military resources had shifted away from the Mediterranean. With the untimely death in October of 1578 of the hero of Lepanto, Don Juan de Austria, himself the subject of numerous epic poems and epic-style laudatory verses, hopes of action against the Turks dissipated.⁹

The apparent inaction on the part of Philip II regarding the Mediterranean and the redirection of his resources towards Portugal and the Protestant North are the consequences of the Spanish king's non-aggression pacts and full peace treaties with the Ottoman Empire. These, in turn, resulted from the realisation that the Mediterranean wars were costly, unprofitable and, in all probability, unwinnable. How does one feasibly eradicate a religion? All this as his treasure ships from the New World continued to be plundered by privateers. While we often consider Philip's state policies as stemming from an immovable duality of Christian versus Muslim, the pragmatic realities of the situation are starkly different from what Braudel, in his still seminal tomes on the history of the Mediterranean in this era, labels the illusions of Spain as the "embodiment of inflexible Catholicism" (Braudel 1995, 1143), particularly when interacting with people of other religions:

Such was already the view taken by the French ambassador Saint-Gouard when, in 1574, Spain was accused by the king of France of conspiring with French Protestants – and may very well have been considering it. But the faith militant did not always inspire Spanish policies. Where did arguments of *raison d'état* carry more weight than in the councils of Philip the Prudent? There is plenty of evidence when one looks for it: the squabbles and disagreements with Rome; the attitude, so clearly anticlerical in many respects, of Alva in the Netherlands; even the policy which, at least until 1572, Philip

⁹ Less than two weeks after Don Juan's death, Philip's heir, Ferdinand, Prince of Asturias, died at the age of 6. Ferdinand's birth, just two months after Lepanto, was heralded as a sign from God, as seen in Titian's *Allegory of the Battle of Lepanto* (1573-1575), with Philip offering his infant son in glory to a descending angel. The angel in the painting carries a palm branch with the motto *Majora tibi*; however, Ferdinand's life was cut short by dysentery before he could achieve any greater deeds than his father.

adopted towards Elizabeth's England. "Paradoxical though it may sound, the king of Spain has been called the involuntary ally of the English Reformation" (Meyer, v. I, p. 28). And his religious policy in the Portuguese dominions in the Indian Ocean of which he became master after 1580 was remarkable for its tolerance.

But nothing more clearly illustrates the attitude of the Spanish government than its negotiations and compromises with the states and power of Islam. (1143)

Between 1577 and the historic armistice between Spain and the Ottoman Empire in 1581, a series of one-year pacts ensuring that neither side would attack the other in the Mediterranean came out of mutual necessity to focus resources elsewhere: Spain into Europe and the Atlantic, and the Ottomans towards the growing threat in Persia.¹⁰

As Philip worked to this end, he denied full military support to his nephew, Sebastian of Portugal, on his crusade in 1578 that ended in a disastrous defeat, and, according to some points of view, simultaneously abandoning the tens of thousands of Christians, many of whom were Spanish, enslaved in North Africa. Compounding the questionable morality of invading Portugal in 1580, an incursion precipitated by his lack of support for Sebastian, securing a peace treaty with the infidel aroused anger, suspicion, fear and accusations of corruption and blasphemy. Perhaps the worst fear of all was that with the corrupt dealings of the king and his court, the entire kingdom would fall victim to the sins of the monarch, and perhaps even face the same Old Testament-style smiting that spelled the very real end to Byzantium in 1453.

In my 2006 article and 2008 monograph, I focussed primarily on Cervantes's *La Numancia*, written and performed in the early 1580s, as a negative criticism of Philip II and his imperial policies. He based my interpretation and analysis of censure on Anthony Watson's 1971 book *Juan de la Cueva and the Portuguese Succession*, which posits that Cueva's plays were influenced by the threat and subsequent invasion of Portugal.¹¹ In *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*, Lobo Lasso de la Vega does not make any direct or indirect reference to Portugal, yet we can interpret the same type of criticism of his king's actions and inactions. The play was published in 1587 but could have been written months or even years earlier,¹² and considering the political climate in which it appeared, together with the circle of writers with whom Lobo had contact, it becomes evident that the purpose of this play was more than simply portraying a historical event. Lobo creates a work with generic hybridity, much like Cervantes, that reflects the uncertainty of the era politically and the rapid transition of dramatic form taking place in the theatres.

Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla

The subject of the Fall of Constantinople received surprisingly little attention beyond the *crónicas*, and any inclusion of the city of Constantinople and the Turks that occupy it in literature of the sixteenth century often portrays them in vague terms: "Constantinopla es más un mito que una realidad tangible [...]" (Bunes Ibarra 1987, 266). In an era in which the popularity of the theatre was on the rise, *romanceros* abounded and epic poems were produced by the dozen, virtually nothing had been written in Spain about the actual transfer of power from Byzantine Greek to Ottoman Turk. Sait Sener posits that *Tragedia de la destrucción de*

¹⁰ See Skilliter (1971) for a comprehensive overview of the deal between Madrid and Constantinople in 1581.

¹¹ Burguillo (2011) outlines why he disagrees with Watson's thesis (363-365), and points to me specifically as the person who "ha propuesto el mayor número de interpretaciones teatrales antifilipinas que existe" (372). Moreno Hernández also takes issue with my interpretation of *La Numancia* as being critical of Philip II's absorption of Portugal into his dominions; however I counter his claims a year later using evidence-based analysis (Kahn 2013, 144-147). Neither Burguillo nor Moreno Hernández's interpretations preclude my own.

¹² There is no evidence that this play was ever performed. Hermenegildo posits that prose *argumento* and the *introito* in verse indicate that the play was possibly written to be read instead of viewed on stage (1983, 19).

Constantinopla “tiene el mérito de ser la primera tragedia que representa personajes turcos sobre la escena española” (Sait Sener 2018, 52).¹³ Even in the hundreds of *romances* that Lobo himself writes, the events at the Sublime Porte on that day in May 1453 do not materialise. Immediately following this statement, Sait Sener, echoing Albert Mas’s 1967 piece, also addresses the question of why Lobo Lasso de la Vega would compose a play that depicts the fall of an ancient Christian civilisation to a growing Muslim power and that “se deja brillar al Gran Turco” (53). This is the unique aspect of this play that prompts its study here.

In the first scene of the play, Emperor Constantino paints a pathetic figure who reveals to Clobando, described in the *dramatis personae* as a *caballero anciano*, that he has had a horrendous dream that prognosticates the fall of his empire; although the audience understands going into the play that this will be the case, Lobo Lasso de la Vega brings to the front of his work the full future history of the destruction of the Eastern Roman Empire. Curiously, Lobo employs the trope of the dream of destiny, although the dream takes place just prior to the opening scene; instead of the predictions of gods, angels or supernatural beings, the truth of Byzantium’s future is revealed through means that would appear more acceptable to the audience. Clobando, in just the second *octava* of the first act, attempts to calm his master’s fears:

¿En qué el pesado sueño te ha offendido
que así te quexas d’él, César invito?
¿Qué sombra vana en él se te ha ofrecido
que el color te robó del rostro aflito?
¿Quién por la ebúrnea puerta acá ha salido
a cometer tan áspero delito
o quién pudo atreverse a tu potencia
con engañosa y hórrida apariencia? (ll. 41-48)¹⁴

Here we see clear indication that the details Constantino is about to relay will come to pass and that Clobando either endeavours to placate his emperor despite the threat to their very empire or he is ignorant of the prophetic power of this dream. His reference to a “César invito”, whom the audience knows is destined to fall being afflicted by a “sombra vana”, represents the *hubris* of the Byzantines and the sins that have infected their existence. Clobando’s insistence that the same unnamed entity from Constantine’s dream has exited the beyond through the Ivory Gates to carry the message of doom to the sleeping monarch casts further doubt on our confidence in the old knight. In Book VI of the *Aeneid*, relying on an older Greek tradition, Virgil describes the gates of ivory and of horn that serve as the gateway through which dreams are sent to the living from the underworld; the Gate of Horn is for true shades while that of ivory is for false dreams.¹⁵

Evidently, Constantino does not agree with the assessment of false dreams, as his anxiety has not subsided. He informs the audience of the power of his oneiric visions in which

¹³ This statement should be taken to refer to plays whose content we know. The vast majority of plays written during the late sixteenth century were not published or kept for posterity, and consequently have disappeared. In some cases, we have titles only.

¹⁴ Quotations from *Constantinopla* come from the Hermenegildo edition (1983). Line numbers are continuous throughout this edition.

¹⁵ The use of dreams and visions in epic poetry is a common trope that we see mirrored here by Lobo Lasso de la Vega. In his own era, the *Felícísima Victoria* (1578) by Jerónimo Corte Real includes an entire canto in which Ali Baxá has a visionary dream in which Selim I, father of Suleiman the Magnificent, foretells the destruction of the Turkish fleet at Lepanto (Canto IV). Portraying the same naval battle, Canto XXIV in the second part of Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana* (1579), which takes place in the 1550s, reveals the future success of Don Juan de Austria more than a decade before the battle, all through the magic conjuring of Fitón.

an armed man presented himself and with fury dispossessed the emperor of his imperial crown, followed by bloodshed and conquest by the infidel:

Por mar y tierra la ciudad sitiada
 me ofrece el sueño puesta en punto estrecho,
 con la fuerte muralla portillada
 y el hondo foso ciego ya y deshecho,
 al cobdicioso saco señalada
 con que queda el contrario satisfecho
 pasando a hierro la vencida gente
 sin haber nadie en suerte diferente.
 Injusta y nueva ley introduciendo,
 la falsa de Mahoma se pratica;
 su torpe efigie en lugar poniendo
 que a Christo en nuestros templos se le aplica,
 de su pasión sagrada escarneciendo,
 mil oprobios el bárbaro publica.
 ¿Cuál sentimiento con aqueste iguala
 o qué contraria suerte habrá tan mala?
 Vi sobre mi garganta el presto filo
 del sangriento cuchillo victorioso,
 amagando a cortar el débil hilo
 de mi vivir, al Cielo ya enojoso.
 ¡Vilo Clobando, ansé! ¡Clobando, vilo!
 no fue sueño, cual piensas, engañoso,
 cuanto y más que del mal la sombra asombra
 a quien nunca del bien vio sino sombra. (ll. 81-104)

Again, the audience knows that this will come to pass; in this excerpt, Lobo establishes the contrast of the just and unjust in relation to Christianity and Islam, and this dichotomy will be personified by the two opposing leaders, Constantino and Mahometo. However, we see ambiguity as well. Ultimately, the fall of Constantinople is depicted as justified in the eyes of God due to the faults of the people, and the complacency of the emperor in particular. Clobando reminds him in a half-hearted tone “Solo puedes temer al justo cielo” (l. 113), and implores the emperor not to inform his court of the dream to avoid scandal;¹⁶ he promises dancing and partying as a diversion to Constantino’s worries.

Constantino, however, firmly believes that the message in the dream will come to fruition. He curses the heavy burden he carries. In response, the allegorical figure República emerges. Addressing the emperor directly with no obvious response and no stage directions to indicate a two-way exchange, República’s sad and wary tone reflects that of the emperor. She warns Constantino:

Ten de tu imperio cuidado.
 Reprime el pueblo atrevido
 de quien Dios está ofendido,
 que le tiene amenazado,
 porque es tal su atrevimiento

¹⁶ The concept of dreams and their power to foretell the future, along with the notion that they could originate from heaven or hell, requires more attention than space allows here. For a humble beginning towards this point of research, see: Carrascón (1998), Jordán Arroyo (2017), Kagan (1990) and Martín Morán (2023).

que en cosas de la fe duda.
 ¡Mira si es justo se acuda
 a tan torpe rompimiento
 sin mil vicios que no digo
 en lo público y secreto
 de su vivir imperfecto
 que requieren cruel castigo!
 Que no es visto un rey cumplir
 con castigar el pecado
 público y por tal notado
 sin el oculto inquirir.
 Soy tu República triste
 y hete venido a avisar,
 porque puedas remediar
 mi mal, do el tuyo consiste.
 Y con aquesto me voy,
 Constantino poderoso,
 temiendo un fin luctuoso
 de que recelosa estoy. (ll. 137-160)

República, or republic, should not be read in the modern sense of a state without a monarchy, but rather as a society with a common identity or purpose.¹⁷ On Lobo's stage, República represents the whole of Christian Byzantium,¹⁸ and at the same time serves as an externalisation of Constantino's worries and emotions. The emperor ends the play's first scene with a stark foreboding of things to come:

Por mil partes el hado me persigue
 y con señales tristes me amenaza.
 La suerte adversa y mísera me sigue
 y todo mal me halla y me da caza.
 De atónito no sé cómo investigue
 ni halle en mi aflicción de algún bien traza.
 Mas ¡ay! que nunca viene a un afligido
 sino uno y otro mal tras el venido. (ll. 161-168)

Although Constantino makes no direct reply to República, the former recognises the veracity of his dream, while the latter serves as the emperor's admission that the culpability of the coming destruction lies with the people themselves. They are facing divine retribution for their sins. And all this within the first scene of the play.

As Constantino leaves the stage, his Ottoman counterpart, Mahometo, enters with his Soltana and provides a stark contrast to the Christian leader. Where Constantino is dark, negative and almost resigned to the fate that his dream has prognosticated, Mahometo is cheerful and optimistic with his eyes described as "dos soles que alumbran cielo y tierra" (l. 259):

Mahometo, en quien la estrella radiosa

¹⁷ Covarrubias gives a Latin definition of the phrase: "libera ciuita status liberae ciuitatis" (1611, v. II, 9r [s.v. *Republica*]); within this same entry comes the term *repúblico*, defined as "el hombre que trata del bien común" (9r [s.v. *república*]).

¹⁸ This is very similar to the expression "nação cristiana" (III.62) in *La conquista de Jerusalén*.

del othomano tronco resplandece,
 cuya indómita diestra poderosa,
 temida por el orbe, en él florece,
 aunque con tal merced quedo gozosa,
 mucho más, gran señor, mi amor merece,
 que éste solo es igual a tu grandeza
 por ser, cual es, sin medio su firmeza. (ll. 185-192)

Swearing in the name of “Alá sagrado y santo” (l. 177), language that Christians would use to speak of their own faith in God, Mahometo shows he is in the ascendancy. Fuelled by the allegorical characters of Discordia, Embidia and Ambición, the young Ottoman leader fixes his attention squarely on Constantinople for conquest. He rattles off a long list of cities and states that he rules over, coming to the greatest prize in his sights:

Pues si aquesto es así, ¿por qué consiento
 que nadie Emperador pueda llamarse
 y que, con temerario atrevimiento,
 pretendan en el nombre a mí igualarse?
 Mas yo hare ¡por Alá!, con fin violento
 venga tal desacato a castigarse. (ll. 347-352)

There can be only one emperor in this newly formed empire. As the Byzantine Empire had shrunk to just the city of Constantinople itself and a few small holdings, Mahometo vows to become its overlord and occupy its throne.

When Mahometo appears again opening the second act, we see a strong and valiant leader, calling on his *baxás* to grasp this opportunity of conquest. Constantinople is the jewel, and the sultan assures his men that taking the opulent city will not be difficult to conquer “porque la gente en ella está metida / en ocios, en delicias y maldades, / cismas contra su dios y variedades.” (ll. 624-626). Lobo further emphasises here that the impending destruction of Constantinople could have been prevented if the Byzantines, and their leader, had taken more care to avoid *ocio* and sin and had concentrated more on discipline and righteousness. Mahometo’s language, if spoken by Christian characters looking to conquer a Muslim stronghold, would be considered noble, just and cause for celebration. He implores his captains to eradicate the “terror Christiano” (l. 606) and win the city at any cost. Tumumbeyo, first of his leaders to speak, refers to him as “alto invicto Emperador” (l. 651), using the same expressions directed towards Constantino in the play’s first scene, and when they attempt to convince Mahometo not to personally take part on the battle due to the lack of an heir to his throne, he flatly refuses. He will not sacrifice his honour.

At this point in the play, another allegorical character emerges: the personification of war. Unlike República, who speaks to Constantino in Act I with no reply, and Discordia, Embidia and Ambición who unilaterally address Mahometo in the following scene, Guerra and Mahometo appear to engage in conversation; there are no stage directions, but Guerra speaks to the sultan directly and Mahometo acknowledges his call to arms. In the epic fashion, Guerra serves as a messenger, sent from Hell by Solimán, Mahometo’s “abuelo valeroso” (l. 705), as a means to inform the sultan of his immutable fate:

Será por ti tu imperio acrecentado
 y de la sangre Antigua de othomanos
 el clarísimo nombre celebrado.
 Serás duro cuchillo de christianos

triumphando del potente visanciano
y hacienda en él estragos inhumanos.

Estas armas te envía, por la mano
con gallarda inventiva fabricadas
de la cíclope turba de Vulcano,
de flecha y bala ardiente reservadas,
de todo arma ofensiva y peligrosa
del consorte de Venus relevadas.

Yo soy la fiera Guerra belicosa,
que en el profundo y duro averno habito,
de hado, con mano atroz y poderosa,
a unos doy imperios y a otros quito. (ll.718-730)

Guerra's presence as a half allegorical, half supernatural character emboldens the Ottoman leader, convincing him that attack is just and assured of success. Lobo's messenger of fate and destiny comes from the depths of Hell, and sent by Solíman. No other epithets or information are provided about who Solíman is, but the audience would immediately think of Suleiman the Magnificent, who ruled as sultan from 1520 to 1566 and proved a formidable enemy to the Habsburgs and other Christian princes; this still in living memory in the 1580s. This is either an anachronistic reference made in error, as Suleiman was the great-grandson of Mehmed II not his grandfather, or Lobo has intentionally invoked the infamous reputation of Suleiman the Magnificent from Hell before he ever lived on Earth. Whatever the purpose of this passing reference, within the theatrical universe even the foresight of demons and Muslims should be respected as true. This is especially so when the audience already knows that the Christians will perish and the Muslims will triumph.¹⁹

As the men prepare for war, Lobo presents an intermediary scene with forlorn women afflicted by the prospect of their men going off to fight, but how are we meant to read this? The oft-used trope of love as a battle and a cause of torment being juxtaposed with warfare appears; the Soltana laments her husband's departure, and Darpha longs for the affections of Veyón, one of the sultan's captains. Such scenes are intended to increase the humanity of those who perpetrate war and those who are victims of it. The presence of love in situations of violence and destruction increases the sense of tragedy when physical or emotional suffering is inflicted on the guilty and innocent alike. The disruption of true love serves as a microcosm of the profound altering effects of warfare. Antonucci proposes that although *Constantinopla* is a tragedy, these scenes "anticipan la fórmula de la comedia nueva" and compares it with the lost love of Lira and Marandro in Cervantes's *Numancia* (124). However, these are Muslims preparing to fight against Christians, whom they will ultimately defeat. We the audience are drawn into their emotional plight as they are depicted as beings we are meant to pity, but their side will be victorious. Lobo has titled this play a *tragedia*, but pitying the victors does not seem very tragic, and there are no such scenes among the Christian characters..

Ending the second act, the Christian emperor appears on stage for the first time since the play's opening scene. As Lobo has built up the image of powerful Ottoman sultan, fanatical about conquering his enemy as has been dictated by destiny, Constantino continues his dark obsession with rectifying the sins of his people. The Byzantines are lost in sin, blinded by "carnales errores" (l. 974), but his attempts to cure his people of this illness have been

¹⁹ As mentioned above, in *Felicísima Victoria*, it is Soliman who reveals the Turkish defeat at Lepanto in the dream of Alí Baxá (Canto IV). In the first Canto of the same poem, Guerra comes from Hell to convince Selim II in a dream to attack Cypress, then the Balearic Islands and then all of Christendom. However, the poem also establishes from the beginning that Selim is weak and no longer feared by his enemy and that he has succumbed to sin and laziness: "No Selimo de quien temblaua el mundo: / mas el que perezoso, en vicios viue" (7r).

fruitless. He has delegated to Marciano and Claudino the public punishment of six men as a display of imperial justice and to placate God's ire, but the crowd extracts the prisoners *a hierro*; they threaten violence with weapons against their own emperor's men. Claudino sums up situation, followed by the emperor's resignation to the reality of the situation:

Claudino

Señor, la disolución
de tu pueblo miserable
y su vivir detestable
causa al mundo admiración.

Aborrece la justicia;
no la teme ni respecta
ni a corrección se sujeta;
solo aprueba su malicia.

Del Cielo temo no venga
algún justo y cruel castigo.
¡Plega a Dios que lo que digo
áspero efecto no tenga!

Constantino

¡Que a tanto llega el horror
de su vivir reprobado,
que a refrenar su pecado
no baste un emperador! (ll. 1003-1018)

Just as the emperor seems to reach his low point, the Turkish attack is sighted. The defeatist attitude that Constantino has developed from witnessing his city become more like Sodom and Gamorrah than the holy centre of Christendom brings him to new depths of gloom. The former galley slave, Cassiano, and Justiniano, the Genoese captain aiding the Byzantines, break Constantino's despair and, despite the "hado duro" (l. 1064) showing itself once again, the emperor vows to join the fight and defend his city at all costs.

Act III opens with alternating speeches from the Christian and Muslim leaders in an attempt to prepare their sides for the imminent battle. Although Constantino repeats throughout the play that destiny is not on the side of the Christians, he encourages them to fight the enemy and valiantly joins the battle as the Turkish assault commences, reminding them that defeat will translate into perpetual slavery (ll. 1151-1152). The allegorical character Fama ventures on stage to narrate the action, informing the audience that Justiniano has been wounded by an arrow and must leave the fighting, leading to the Christian morale, followed by their defence, falling apart; Constantino remains to witness the destruction and suffer his own death. The emperor's dying words reflect regret and self-pity (ll. 1404-1419). His life and that of his city are cut down by their individual and collective sins, and although Lobo's audience might be driven to pity the emperor's plight, and maybe even admire his courage and resolve, they would also determine his fate to be just. From the beginning of the play, the emperor feared divine retribution, and as he decides to fight until his death, an unnamed Christian citizen of Constantinople narrates the carnage enacted by the Turkish invader, which occurs off stage: rape, murder of people of all ages, torture and prolonged, agonising deaths:

Hizo el cruento bárbaro indignados
que a un Christiano en una cruz pusiesen,
a imitación de Dios crucificado,

y que en lo alto un rétulo escribiesen,
 que dijese “Este es rey de los cristianos”,
 y los turcos con risa le leyesen,
 con que todos qudaron muy ufanos
 dicienco: “Vuestro Dios en cruz muriendo,
 ¿cómo no os escape de nuestras manos?” (1467-1475)

This narration as recounted by a *ciudadano* represents the worst of all scenarios for the Spanish audience of the late sixteenth century; it, in effect, relates the death of Christianity. Jesus endured the mocking and beating of Roman soldiers, who inscribed the *titulus* of his cross with the phrase “Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews”;²⁰ however, He rose on the third day to eternal life. In Constantinople, with the emperor slain, this unnamed commoner captured by the victorious Ottomans suffers the same earthly fate as Christ, but without the eternal spiritual glory. After all, the punishment of his sins is justified, but the imagery conveyed by the narrator demonstrates that this man’s fate serves as a microcosm to all Christians, commoner and monarch alike, of the power of God’s vengeance against those who sin without seeking absolution.

Triumphant for his people and his religion, Mahometo enters Constantinople with the pomp and circumstance of a global monarch (ll. 1527-1542). The Turkish sultan had undertaken the mission to conquer Constantinople secure in his belief that he will become a universal monarch, a *Rex Mundi*, and his victory emboldens his confidence, and makes his intentions concrete. Given the events that occur between the Ottomans and the Christian West between 1453 and the play’s composition, we begin to see the city and its conquest not as a completed affair; rather, Constantine’s city is representative of Christendom in general. Lobo ends his play with the dire image of a dungeon for Christians and a stronghold for Muslims, and a stark warning that despite the bravado in the following decades of Christian princes articulating the need to relieve the city from Muslim control, such liberation never materialises. Nor do any Western princes make a realistic attempt at such a Crusade.

When reading *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*, there is a glaringly apparent comparison with two extant history plays by Miguel de Cervantes that deserve mention here: *La destrucción de Numancia* and the attributed *La conquista de Jerusalén, por Godofre de Bullón*. There have been numerous studies that include the former, some with a passing reference to possible influences on *Constantinopla*, and others going into much more depth. Canavaggio (1977, 229) and Hermenegildo (1983, 16) each have noted the similarities, and given that one of Lobo’s *romances* published in the same volume of the play recounts the fall of Numancia, this is a valid point of exploration. In my 2011 study that includes these two plays and an excerpt of Alonso de Ercilla’s *La Araucana*, the analytical comparison is fuller, demonstrating that because all three men knew each other, the mutual influence in style and expression of political thought is probable.

The latter, however, has yet to be studied at any length alongside *Constantinopla*, and it is this play that appears closer to Lobo’s in terms of theme and structure. In a similar vein to how Antonucci (2016) has studied this play in relation to Lope de Vega’s *La santa liga*, one portraying the rise of the Turk and the other his defeat, coupling *Constantinopla* with *La conquista de Jerusalén* is perhaps more intriguing analytically due to the fact that they are true contemporaries.²¹ We know from an actor’s sheet, folios from which actors learned their lines, that *La conquista de Jerusalén* was performed in 1586, and as Lobo’s play was printed in 1587,

²⁰ See John 19:19-20 and Matthew 27:37.

²¹ Lope de Vega’s *La santa liga* was published in 1621 in the *Parte XV* of his comedies, but was likely written between 1598 and 1600 (Antonucci 2016, p. 123). Antonucci does refer to *La conquista de Jerusalén* at the end of this article in reference to off-stage action being narrated by allegorical characters (130).

he and Cervantes could have composed their plays simultaneously and having had access to each other's work.²²

This notion is speculation, of course, but the point of interest here is that in both plays their creators chose historical battles between Christian and Muslim forces, and despite the fact that none of the characters in either is Spanish, the political interpretations of them include criticism directed at Philip II of Spain. In *La Jerusalén*, Cervantes's title character, Godofre de Bullón, represents the ideal of Christian kingship, and after a full play of crusade, battles, love intrigues and riding the tide of destiny to the capture of Muslim occupied Jerusalem after conducting a siege, the leader of the First Crusade enters the city barefoot to assume the role of its leader:

El cargo açeto, vuestros intentos preçio,
y creo que de rrey podré el decoro
guardar sin esta ponpa que despreçio.
Rey podré ser sin púrpura ni oro,
que [en] la humildad en este punto pongo
mi riqueza mayor y mi tesoro,
y aunque a vuestros acuerdos no me opongo,
por esta vez, descalço y sin corona,
entrar en la çiudad santa dispongo. (III.1278–86)

In an era in which the Holy Land was again controlled by Islam, this depiction of this great Christian victory indicates a desire to continue the fight against the infidel. "Godofre maintains that there can be only one king in Jerusalem, Jesus Christ. His faith prevents him from accepting the crown except under the most humble conditions, attributing his triumph to the glory of the Christian God" (Kahn 2010, 104). The new Kingdom of Jerusalem will be a place where all Christians can feel welcome and safe, with Godofre serving as the chief pilgrim.

Written at almost exactly the same time, Lobo Lasso de la Vega's Christian monarch is burdened by the destiny revealed to him in a prophetic dream just prior to the start of Act I. The sins of people of Constantinople and the emperors complacency result in God's divine castigation:

Ya la debida deuda se ha pagado.
ya la inestable, varia y cruel fortuna
se ha con solo este golpe desquitado,
con que ya no le debo cosa alguna.
Triste del que en sus bienes se ha adeudado,
que paga ha de hacer tan importuna.
Y quán presto verá que la subida
dista muy poco de la cruel caída.
Yo conozco, Señor, que mis errores
más áspero castigo merecían
y que de mi ciudad los moradores
con notables excesos te ofendían,
mas para los culpados pecadores
que sospiros con lágrimas te envían
quiso el Padre qual hombre padecieses

²² For more on the actors' sheets from *La conquista de Jerusalén*, found in a collection of *hojas sueltas* that also includes actors' sheets for the roles of Ocasión and Necesidad from Cervantes's *Los tratos de Argel*, see Arata (1997) and Kahn (2013).

para que como tal d'él te dolieses. (ll. 1404-1419)

He is a pathetic figure whose concerns about the fate of his people increase as the play progresses. Although he shows courage individually, with these, his final lines, coming just prior to his final fatal attack of the enemy, God has already decreed His vengeance. In contrast, the Ottoman sultan, whose own dream confirms his fate as the conqueror of the Eastern Roman Empire, engages in siege warfare and much like Godofre in Cervantes's play, enters Constantinople in triumph with the play's final lines:

Gracias te doy, Alá, pues conseguido
 hoy he con tu favor tan gran victoria.
 Y por el beneficio recibido
 un templo sumptuosísimo en memoria
 prometo de hacerte, do servido
 seas con nunca oída pompa a gloria
 de la merced hoy hecha por tu mano
 con que el nombre eternizas othomano.
 Prometo más de hacer Visancio sea
 cabeza de mi imperio y de habitarla,
 porque mi gran poder el mundo vea
 y que no la gané para dejarla.
 En que venga mi corte se provea
 a ella. Y comencé a redificarla,
 que ésta será mazmorra de cristianos
 y fuerte defensión de mahometanos. (ll. 1527-1542)

The *octavas* delivered by Godofre and Mahometo mirror each other in terms of their sentiment and context. They both assume supreme command of a sacred city, giving thanks to God; they both provide deliverance to their faiths and ensure safety for their people; they both mark the beginning of a new era in which their people's dominance of the newly conquered territory affects all of Christendom.

The obvious difference, of course, is that the content of neither of the two plays give genuine cause to celebrate. *La conquista de Jerusalén*, labelled in the title of the manuscript version as a *comedia*, ends with a legendary Christian victory, but at the time of the play's composition, Jerusalem had been back in Muslim control for nearly three hundred years; this despite the fact that the Kings of Spain in the sixteenth century held on to the title of King of Jerusalem. Lobo's play, entitled a *tragedia*, must have stirred feelings of anger at seeing such a decisive Ottoman victory on stage, but perhaps more salient is the notion that, like Jerusalem, Constantinople was still the centre of the infidel empire.

Given the extra-dramatic state of the Islamic occupation of these two cities, I question the status of *comedia* of Cervantes's play and that of *tragedia* of Lobo's. *La Jerusalén* ends with a Christian victory and *Constantinopla* with Christian defeat, but what is covertly referenced rings perhaps more loudly than what appears on stage. They both quite clearly recall the need to face down the Muslim enemies of the Mediterranean, showing the splendour of Christian glory and the ignominy of what was its very possible destruction. All fingers would have pointed squarely at the powerful monarch holed up in El Escorial whose gaze on the great sea had done an about face towards Portugal, the Atlantic and Protestantism.

I do not intend to insinuate that these two works were written in cooperation, but read together, we see a holistic representation of Philip II. Godofre de Bullón, revered in Early Modern Spain for his devotion to Christ and his military prowess, which brought him to be

included as one of *los nueve de la fama*, represents what Philip should be: humble, powerful and committed to retaking the Holy Land from Islam.²³ Constantino, last emperor of a doomed Christian civilisation, condemned by unrepentant sin, represents what Philip and his realms could suffer if they venture down a similar path. Mahometo, adversary of Christendom whose conquest violates the sanctity of the now-defeated Byzantium, reminds Philip of the violence and greed that the Turkish enemy can unleash at any time if left unchecked. The Ottomans cannot be trusted to abide by their word, no matter how many treaties they sign and how vehemently they had sworn peace.

Conclusion

In the 1580s, many would have viewed Philip II of Spain as the perfect candidate to spearhead a Holy War in the Eastern Mediterranean and quell any fear or frustration that people would have felt at the Muslim threat and Constantinople's continued occupation. His paternal great-grandfather Maximilian I, Holy Roman Emperor from 1493, entertained the notion of uniting the imperial crowns of West and East once more, but it never materialised (Heer 1968, 139). Ferdinand of Aragón, Philip's maternal great-grandfather, was the legal claimant to the Byzantine throne after being bequeathed the rights in 1502 in the will of Andreas Paleologos, nephew and *de facto* heir to Constantine XI; in addition, as King of Naples, Ferdinand held the title King of Jerusalem. Charles V, who was frequently referred to as "césar", inherited these titles from Ferdinand, held *de jure* with his mother Juana, and bequeathed them to his son Philip II. Philip, then, as son of a Caesar, as King of Naples and of Jerusalem, and as the claimant to the imperial throne of the East should have taken his fight in that cardinal direction and reclaim for the glory of God the New Rome and Jerusalem.

At its heart, *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla* emphasises human flaws in a sinful empire with a monarch who regrets allowing such degradation to occur; his sin of omission offends God as much as the behaviour of his people, and the apocalyptic punishment must have left the audience contemplating the same potential fate for Spain. Although the fall of Constantinople extended beyond living memory, the consequences of the Ottoman conquest were still acutely felt by Spaniards of the 1580s. Unlike the Biblical destruction of ancient cities such as Sodom and Gomorrah, the telling of which might have abstract moral warnings, Constantinople as a centre of Christian civilisation formed part of their era. The Greek diaspora that flooded Cypress and many Italian states found its way as well to Spain where the legends and the tales of suffering at the hands of the infidel abounded through to Lobo's time.²⁴

In an era of uncertainty and transition, politically and dramatically, Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega combines history, tragedy and epic in his play. The use of history to display exemplarity of thought, action and general values was a common and legitimate practice, but here we see a historical event that indirectly affects Spain. Despite the chronological and geographical distance, Lobo Lasso de la Vega brings the importance of events closer to home. This is a cautionary tale for those who might have felt secure in the pre-eminence of Christianity in Spain, emphasising the antiquity of the Byzantine Empire and its swift and decisive overthrow. It was intended as a call to arms to Philip II of Spain, the great defender of Catholicism in Europe, to march on Constantinople itself and assume the imperial crown once again for Christendom; and this time, it would be Western Latin Catholicism that would rule

²³ Don Quixote likens himself to *los nueve de la fama*, a group which includes Godofre de Bullón (I.V) and refers to Godofre again in I.48. In addition, the *Crónica llamada el Triunpho de los nueve mas preciados varones de la Fama* by Antonio Rodríguez Portugal was published in 1586, so contemporary to *La conquista de Jerusalén* and *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*.

²⁴ There are numerous studies about the Greek diaspora and their pleas for help from Western powers, as well as how Spaniards of the sixteenth century viewed them: Ayensa (2003), Bunes Ibarra (1987; 1992), Díaz-Más (2003) Floristán (1994, 2004, 2005, 2011, 2012, 2014) and Hassiotis (2006)

from the Golden Horn. History can tell us what is the right thing to do, but also the wrong thing. What is moral and what is immoral. What will put us in God's graces or what will condemn us to oblivion.

Within Lobo's depiction of the fall of Constantinople, the characterisation of the emperor Constantino reveals a tragic hero, who from the beginning of the play is destined to be destroyed. Aristotle defined a tragedy as a work that evokes strong emotions of melancholy from the audience, but also as one that has a completed action (1975, 45). He also instructs that in tragedies, "good men should not be shown passing from prosperity to misery, for this does not inspire fear or pity, it merely disgusts us. Nor should evil men be shown progressing from misery to prosperity. This is the most untragic of all plots" (48). Even when the demise of the tragic hero is dictated as just and follows the commands of destiny, a force that even the ancient Greek and Roman Gods could not control or counteract, we still clearly demarcate the two opposing sides and feel sorrow for the hero's destruction. In *Constantinople*, however, I question the appellation of tragedy; we hear the narration by the *ciudadano* of the wholesale slaughter and enslavement of Byzantine Christians, but is Mahometo's entrance into the city truly cathartic? I also hesitate in labelling the play a tragicomedy. Unlike *La Numancia*, for example, which has been called as such for the "feliz remate" (l. 2448) of the story and the notion that the Numantians sacrifice will live eternally in the people's memory as paving the way for the Spanish Empire, *Constantinople* does not give the audience the same satisfaction. I contend that the intended catharsis is yet to come, when a new crusade is launched to retake the Constantinople and then Jerusalem.²⁵

Grasping onto tropes typically related to epic poetry, Lobo's hybrid genre relays to the audience the desire to expand Spanish Catholic dominance to the Sublime Porte. The prophetic dreams of both leaders introduce a chain of events already predestined by God, and by implementing characteristics of the epic, Lobo Lasso de la Vega's serves as just a midway point in the story; similar to Aeneas's premature death being necessary for the advent of the Ancient Roman Empire, so too must Eastern Greek Byzantium perish so that Western Latin Catholicism can forge a future empire by eradicating the Turks from Constantinople.

Despite the blame, despite the attempts to explain away any guilt from the Spanish perspective and despite the failed plans for another Crusade to retake Constantinople, one of the most outstanding aspects of this play is that the Turkish victory is viewed as justified in the eyes of God. This is the most tragic component of this *tragedia*. Lobo's dramatic depiction of the final siege and destruction of the Byzantine Empire has its completion on stage with the sultan's triumphant entry into the city, but the insinuation must be one of continuing the fight, against Islam generally and the Ottoman capital specifically. Ultimately, this play challenges the very sense of the power of the monarchy and the image of Philip II, although Lobo shows himself as a supporter of the established order of things. Mahometo is not to be admired, but what is clear is that on this day the vicar of Allah's claim to Constantinople had more moral strength than did the Greek vicar of Christ's. His representation is as contradictory as Lobo's feelings about his own country, as reflected in the indeterminant generic structure of this play. Spain has the strength to conquer the world, but she is not living up to her potential, and the blame for this could lie squarely on the shoulders of the Prudent King.

²⁵ See Wright (2016) for more on the proposal to revive the title of Emperor of the East in the context of Juan Latino's poetry on Lepanto (92).

Works Cited

- Antonucci, Fausta. "Del turco vencedor al turco derrotado: *La santa liga* de Lope de Vega y su relación con *La destrucción de Constantinopla* de Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega." *eHumanista* 33 (2016): 123-34.
- Arata, Stefano. "La conquista de Jerusalén, Cervantes, y la generación teatral de 1580." *Criticón* 54 (1992): 9-112.
- . "Notas sobre *La conquista de Jerusalén* y la transmisión manuscrita del primer teatro cervantino." *Edad de Oro* 16 (1997): 53-66.
- Aristotle, *On the Art of Poetry (Poetica)*. In T. S. Dorsch ed. and trans. *Classical Literary Criticism*. London: Penguin, 1975.
- Ayensa, Eusebi. "'Volverá a ser vuestra': La caída de Constantinopla y su recuerdo en la tradición popular griega." In Pedro Bádenas de la Peña and Inmaculada Pérez Martín eds. *Constantinopla 1453: mitos y realidades*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003. 353-393.
- Braudel, Fernand. *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds. London: Collins, 1995 [1st ed. 1973]. 2 vols.
- Bunes Ibarra Miguel A. de. "Constantinopla en la literatura española sobre los Otomanos (ss. XVI-XVII)." *Erytheia* 8.2 (1987): 163-274.
- . "La conquista turca de Bizancio según los cronistas europeos de los siglos XVI y XVII." *Erytheia* 13 (1992): 89-102.
- Burguillo, Francisco Javier. "De la interpretación política a la lectura cultural en los dramas españoles de la generación de 1580." *Romanistisches Jahrbuch* 62 (2011): 254-379.
- Canavaggio, Jean. *Cervantès dramaturge: un théâtre à naître*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1977.
- Carrascón, Guillermo. "Dormir en escena: usos simbólicos del sueño en el primer Lope." In *Acti del XVII Convegno [Associazione Ispanisti Italiani]*. Milan: Bulzoni, 1998. I, 101-108.
- Cervantes, Miguel de. *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. Ed. John Jay Allen. Madrid: Cátedra, 2000.
- . *El cerco de Numancia*. Ed. Robert Marrast. Madrid: Cátedra, 1999.
- , atribuida a. *La conquista de Jerusalén, por Godofre de Bullón*. Ed. Hector Brioso Santos. Madrid: Cátedra, 2009.
- Corte Real, Jerónimo. *Felicissima victoria concedida del cielo al señor don Iuan d'Austria en el golfo de Lepanto de la poderosa armada Othomana en el año de nuestra saluacion de 1572 / compuesta por Hieronymo Corte Real, cauallero portugues*. Lisboa: por Antonio Ribero, 1578.
- <https://data.cervantesvirtual.com/item/634870>
- Covarrubias Orozco, Sebastián de. *Tesoro de la lengua castellana or española*. Madrid: Luis Sánchez, 1611.
- Díaz-Más, Paloma. "El eco de la caída de Constantinopla en las literaturas hispánicas." In by Pedro Bádenas de la Peña and Inmaculada Pérez Martín eds. *Constantinopla 1453: mitos y realidades*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003. 318-349.
- Fernández, Enrique. "Los tratos de Argel: obra testimonial, denuncia política y literatura terapéutica." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 20.1 (2000): 7-26.
- Floristán Imízcoz, José M. "La corona de Aragón y el imperio bizantino de los Paleólogos." In *Mallorca y Bizancio*. Palma de Mallorca, Asociación de amigos del castillo de San Carlos Aula General Weyler, 2005. 103-156.
- . "Felipe II y la empresa de Grecia tras Lepanto (1571-78)." *Erythea* 15 (1994): 155-190.

- . "El emperador y la herencia política bizantina (1519-1558): Ἡ Κόρολος Ε' βασιλεὺς καὶ αὐτοκράτωρ Ῥωμαίων?" In Inmaculada Pérez Martín y Pedro Bádenas de la Peña eds. *Bizancio y la Península Ibérica. De la antigüedad tardía a la edad moderna*. Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004. 449-495.
- . "Bizancio y la herencia paleóloga en la política exterior de los reinos peninsulares (1400-1502)." In José Francisco González Castro et. al. eds. *Actas del XII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos*. Madrid: Sociedad Española de Estudios Clásicos, 2011. III. 13-52.
- . "Linajes imperiales bizantinos en la corte de España (C. 1571-1621): Comnenos, Láscaris, Cantacuzenos y Paleólogos." *Erytheia* 33 (2012), 117-163.
- . "'Bizancio después de Bizancio:' La herencia imperial de Constantinopla y la política exterior de los Austrias españoles (1517-1621)." In José María Maestre Maestre et. al. eds. *Baetica Renascens*. Sevilla: Federación Andaluza de Estudios Clásicos, 2014. II. 863-875.
- . "La diáspora griega del Renacimiento en los territorios de la monarquía española: el caso de El Greco en Toledo." *Erytheia* 35 (2014), 87-120.
- Gill, Joseph. *The Council of Florence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959.
- Hassiotis, I.K. "El mundo neohelénico en la literatura española del Siglo de Oro." In Javier Alonso Aldama and Olga Omatos Sáenz eds. *Cultura neogriega: tradición y modernidad: Actas del III Congreso de Neohelenistas de Iberoamérica (Vitoria-Gasteiz, 2 de junio – 5 junio de 2005)*. Gipuzkoa: Servicio Editorial de la Universidad del País Vasco, 2006. 289-306. [DOI](#)
- Hermenegildo, Alfredo, "Introducción" to *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla* de Gabriel Lobo Lasso de la Vega. Ed. Hermenegildo. Kassel: Reichenberger, 1983.
- Jordán Arroyo, María V. *Entre la vigilia y el sueño: soñar en el siglo de oro*. Madrid: Iberoamericano/Vervuert, 2017.
- Kagan, Richard L. *Lucrecia's Dreams*. Oxford: University of California Press, 1990.
- Kahn, Aaron M. "Moral Opposition to Philip II in Pre-Lopean Drama." *Hispanic Review* 74.3 (2006): 227-50.
- . *The Ambivalence of Imperial Discourse: Cervantes's La Numancia within the "Lost Generation" of Spanish Drama (1570-1590)*. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2008.
- . "Idealizing the Present with Future Histories: Ercilla, Cervantes, and Lobo Lasso de la Vega." In Kahn Ed. *On Wolves and Sheep: Exploring the Expression of Political Thought in Golden Age Spain*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. 23-50.
- . "Towards a Theory of Attribution: Is *La conquista de Jerusalén* by Miguel de Cervantes?" *Journal of European Studies* 40. 2 (2010): 99-128.
- . "Even Further Towards a Theory of Attribution: Returning to the Cervantine Attribution of *La conquista de Jerusalén por Godofre de Bullón*." *Cervantes: Bulletin of the Cervantes Society of America* 33.1 (2013): 133-164.
- Kluge, Sofie . "Waking the Dead: Miguel de Cervantes's *Numancia* and the Problem of Golden Age Historical Drama." *MLN* 134.2 (2019): 225-249.
- Lobo Lasso de la Vega, Gabriel. *Primera parte del romancero y tragedias*. Madrid: Juan Gracián, 1587.
<https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Primera parte del romancero y tragedias/koWYrKQCbkC?q=&gbpv=0#f=false>
- . *Tragedia de la destrucción de Constantinopla*. Ed. Alfredo Hermenegildo. Kassel: Reichenberger, 1983.

- Martín Morán, José Manuel. “Los sueños premonitorios en la obra cervantina.” In Elvezio Canonica de Rochemonteix, Pierre Darnis and Alberto Montaner Frutos eds. *A la sombra de la Camacha: formas y funciones de la superstición en Cervantes* Anejos 13, *Etiópicas: Revista de letras renacentistas* (2023): 61-77.
<https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/libro?codigo=940387>
- Meyer, Arnold O. *England und di katholische Kirche unter Elisabeth und den Stuarts*. Rome: Loescher & Company: 1911.
- Moreno Hernández, Carlos. “‘El jirón lusitano’ en *La Numancia*: Siglo de oro e imperio católico.” *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 89.1 (2012): 15-30.
- Palencia, Alonso de. *Crónica de Enrique IV*, trans. D. A. Paz y Melia. 4 tomos. Madrid: Colecciones de Escritores Castellanos, 1904.
<https://bibliotecadigital.jcyl.es/es/consulta/registro.do?id=3711>
- Parker, Geoffrey. “David or Goliath? Philip II and His World in the 1580s.” In Parker and Richard L. Kagan eds. *Spain, Europe and the Atlantic World: Essays in Honour of John H. Elliott*. Cambridge: CUP, 1995. 245-266.
- Rackin, Phyllis. *Stages of History: Shakespeare’s English Chronicles*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1990.
- Roca, Vicente. *Hystoria en la qual se trata de la origen y guerras que han tenido los Turcos*. Valencia: Juan Navarro, 1556.
- Rodríguez Portugal, Antonio. *Chrónica llamada el Triumpfo de los nueve mas preciados varones de la Fama*. Barcelona: Balthasar Simón, 1586.
<https://bdh-rd.bne.es/viewer.vm?id=0000170684>
- Sait Sener, Mehmet, “El tema turco en el teatro español de los siglos XVI-XVII.” unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Complutense Madrid, 2018.
 URL: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14352/15681>
- Simerka, Barbara M. *Discourses of Empire: Counter-Epic Literature in Early Modern Spain*. University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2003.
- Skillitier, S. A. “The Hispano-Ottoman Armistice of 1581.” In C. E. Bosworth ed. *Iran and Islam*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1971. 491-516.
- Sphrantzes, George, *The Fall of the Byzantine Empire: A Chronicle by George Sphrantzes (1401-1477)*. Trans. Marios Philippides. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Watson, Anthony. *Juan de la Cueva and the Portuguese Succession*. London: Tamesis, 1971.
- Wright, Elizabeth. *The Epic of Juan Latino: Dilemmas of Race and Religion in Renaissance Spain*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3138/j.ctv1005db5>