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LA POLÍTICA COMO CIENCIA EN LA ESPAÑA DEL SIGLO XVII. PRINCIPIOS DE GUBERNAMENTALIDAD EN EL *TÁCITO ESPAÑOL* DE BALTASAR ÁLAMOS DE BARRIENTOS

Politics as a Science in 17th-Century Spain. Principles of Governmentality in the *Spanish Tacitus* of Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos

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Resumen: El *Tácito español, ilustrado con aforismos* (1614), de Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, puede interpretarse desde un marco foucaultiano para explorar los cambios en el pensamiento político de la primera época moderna. Álamos traduce y organiza las obras de Tácito en aforismos y es pionero del tacitismo español al enfatizar la política como una disciplina pragmática informada por la experiencia histórica y elementos de la ciencia práctica aristotélica. Vincula las ideas de Tácito con los conceptos de razón de Estado, poder soberano y gubernamentalidad, anticipando temas posteriormente articulados por Michel Foucault en *Seguridad, Territorio, Población* (1977-1978). Álamos traduce las narrativas históricas de Tácito a un modelo político que equilibra la autoridad con la estabilidad política. Su obra promueve la transición de los ideales trascendentales a la gobernanza práctica y contribuye al discurso en evolución sobre el arte de gobernar en la España de la primera época moderna. Al combinar los principios clásicos con las estrategias políticas emergentes, Álamos anticipa aspectos de la racionalidad política moderna al conectar la autoridad clásica con la gobernanza de la primera época moderna.

Palabras clave: Tácito; Álamos de Barrientos; Aforismo; gubernamentalidad foucaultiana; Poder soberano; España moderna.

Abstract: Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos' *Tacito español, ilustrado con aforismos* (1614) can be interpreted through a Foucauldian framework to explore shifts in early modern political thought. Álamos translates and organizes Tacitus' works into aphorisms and pioneers Spanish Tacitism by emphasizing politics as a pragmatic discipline informed by historical experience and elements of Aristotelian practical science. He links Tacitus' insights to concepts of reason of state, sovereign power, and governmentality, anticipating themes later articulated by Michel Foucault

in *Security, Territory, Population* (1977-1978). Álamos translates Tacitus' historical narratives into a political template that balances authority with political stability. His work fosters the shift from transcendental ideals to practical governance and contributes to the evolving discourse on statecraft in early modern Spain. By joining classical principles with emerging political strategies, Álamos foreshadows aspects of modern political rationality by bridging classical authority with early-modern governance.

Keywords: Tacitus; Álamos de Barrientos; Aphorism; Foucauldian governmentality; Sovereign Power; Early Modern Spain.

I. Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos, the Pioneer of Spanish Tacitism

Early 17th-century Spain saw the works of Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus become pivotal in shaping political discourse. This phenomenon, known as Spanish Tacitism, aimed to embed Tacitean political strategies within the Spanish Monarchy[1]. Tacitus reemerged as a key political and cultural model in the late 16th century, a time of strengthening of national monarchies, rising state rivalries, and political clashes. This shift demanded a new political paradigm and cultural inquiry to promote viable political solutions in Europe's evolving political landscape. Tacitism manifests itself in diverse interpretations and applications of Tacitus in early modern political thought[2]. At that time, politics stood at a turning point. Indeed, Tacitus' reception was tied to the emerging debate on reason of state – a set of discourses that the prince needed to rule his subjects, eliminate or control his enemies and simultaneously strengthen the state[3]. Reason-of-State arguments were designed to consolidate the state as the tangible form of sovereign power. However, Italian thinker Giovanni Botero (1544-1617) condemned Tacitus as a poor politician, likening his Tiberius to Machiavelli's amoralism. This early reception shaped the roots of Spanish Tacitism[4], but it was the scholar Baltasar Álamos de Barrientos (1555-1640) who offered the most comprehensive view of Tacitus within the Spanish monarchy.

Álamos de Barrientos, recognised as the pioneer of Spanish Tacitism, wrote his major work, *Tacito español, ilustrado con aforismos* around 1594, at a time

[1] Tacitism, as a political phenomenon, encompasses a wide and dynamic range of innovative political practices. Interest in Tacitus' ideas began to take shape on a European scale in the early modern period. However, this article specifically focuses on Spanish Tacitism, distinguishing it from other forms of Tacitist thought.

[2] Various attempts have been made to analyse the special characteristics of Spanish Tacitism. I recommend: Antón Martínez (1991); Davis (2001); Álvarez (2010); Varo Zafra (2015); Ferraro (2024a).

[3] The bibliography on reason of state is very extensive. In order to understand the premises of this study, I recommend: Baldini (1992); Raviola, & Silvagni (2023). More specifically, on reason of state in Spain and Álamos' political thought, I recommend: Maravall (1944); Escalante (1975).

[4] When discussing the beginnings of Tacitism in Spain, a possible starting point is the Spanish translation of Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* produced by Antonio de Herrera (1593), together with Pedro de Ribadeneyra's controversy against the Machiavellian politicians in his *Tratado de la religion* (1595). Cf. Ferraro (2024a).

when the debate on new political discourses was intensifying. He underscored its significance by claiming that Antonio de Covarrubias, a member of the royal council, had authorised his work:

> quise publicarlos, por el año de mil y quinientos y noventa y quatro, y se cometio la censura dellos al Licenciado Antonio de Covarruvias, que antes avia sido del Consejo de la Magestad del Rey Don Felipe II nuestro señor[5].

Covarrubias' authorization praised Tacitus' historical value and highlighted the novelty of Álamos' translation, enriched with aphorisms. Álamos himself referred to his marginal notes as aphorisms. According to Covarrubias, this was a new genre, consisting of "short sentences taken from the cases of history" (Blanco (2006) 15-16). Despite the innovation of Álamos' work, it was not published until 1614. The release of Tacitus' aphorisms was delayed by a decade due to Álamos' political entanglements. Understanding these entanglements requires looking at his early career: after studying law at the University of Salamanca, he entered the service of Antonio Pérez (1540-1611), the influential secretary to Philip II[6]. Álamos' association with Antonio Pérez became the source of his difficulties. Pérez was convicted of orchestrating the murder of Juan de Escobedo (1578), who had gathered evidence of his illegal activities and support for Flemish rebels. Arrested in 1579, Pérez escaped to Aragon in 1590. Álamos was imprisoned alongside Pérez for complicity, exiled in 1587, and jailed again in 1590. He remained imprisoned until Philip II's death in 1598, when Philip III's favorite, the Duke of Lerma, secured his release[7]. It is therefore no coincidence that Álamos' *Tacito Español* was dedicated to the Duke of Lerma. Another reason for the delayed reception of Tacitus in Spain compared to the rest of Europe has been emphasised by Alexandra Merle (2014). She points out the hypothesis of scholars such as Fernández-Santamaría and Charles Davies that Philip II resisted the use of Tacitus because he feared comparisons with Tiberius[8]. In this regard, Merle claims:

> la aceptación de Tácito era difícil en los últimos años del reinado de Felipe II, época en la que se reafirmaba una interpretación cristiana de la historia que valoraba la

[5] Álamos de Barrientos (1614), *Al Lector*. The text is reproduced in its original form and not in modern Spanish. This editorial choice was made for all quotations that refer to the work of Álamos.

[6] On Antonio Pérez, see Marañón (1947).

[7] On the Duke of Lerma, see Williams (2006).

[8] Merle (2014), 10. A recent attempt to compare the portrait of Tiberius with that of Philip II was undertaken by Ferraro (2024a).

> acción de la Providencia. En el transcurso del reinado de Felipe III se produjo una evolución que permitió el auge de publicaciones abiertamente "tacitistas"[9].

Indeed, Philip III upheld his father's defense of Roman Catholicism but exercised less administrative control, allowing for greater freedom of thought. His reign marked the beginning of Spain's socio-economic decline in Europe. The reasons for this weakening were well explained by Patrick Williams (1973), who claimed that Philip III "symbolically inaugurated for History the effete era of the *privanza* in which the kings of Spain successively abandoned their kingship into the hands of their favourites"[10]. Notably, during Philip III's reign, institutional reforms were introduced to combat the monarchy's endemic corruption[11]. Notwithstanding, the cultural production of the 17th century went beyond the output of the previous century. Philip III actively promoted art and culture. During this literary revival, which aimed to reinforce monarchical power, Álamos' work was certainly considered a valuable resource in the field of history and politics.

> Translations of Tacitus allowed his works to be used for political as well as for moral and other lessons, but the intellectual foundation on which these interpretations rested was the idea of history. History, in the early modern era, was not simply a literary genre but an epistemic one[12].

According to Peter Burke (1966), Álamos de Barrientos, advisor to Philip III, translated Tacitus into Spanish and annotated the margins with aphorisms – some drawn from Tacitus, others devised by Álamos in response to Tacitus' statements[13].

Indeed, after his release from imprisonment, Álamos resumed practicing law and, under the patronage of the Count-Duke of Olivares, played a key role in shaping some of Olivares economic and administrative reforms. Álamos was a knight of the religious and military *Orden de Santiago*, served as a lawyer in the *Consejo de Guerra*, was a member of the *Consejo de Hacienda* and *Consejo de Indias*. He also held the title of *Protonotario de Aragón* and was an expert in overseas affairs. Legal education and political engagement were central to Álamos' view of politics as a science, with history as its foundation. According to Alicia Oiffer-Bomsel (2021), Álamos rejected universalist idealism and the providentialist outlook paradigmatically embodied in Counter-Reformation Spain by the Jesuit

[9] Merle (2014, p. 10).

[10] Williams (1973, p. 751).

[11] On Philip III' s monarchy, I recommend: Feros (2006); Martínez Millán & Visceglia (2007-2008).

[12] Bermejo (2010, p. 120).

[13] Cf. Burke (1966, p. 149).

Pedro de Ribadeneyra (1526-1611)[14]. Álamos championed pragmatic realism as the foundation of statecraft. As José A. Fernández-Santamaria (1979) aptly emphasised, the publication of Tacitus' aphorisms in Spanish settled the debate over how his works should be translated[15]. As early as the 15th century, the revival of classical humanism sparked a demand for translations that closely adhered to the originals. Tacitus' case stands out, as his works became bestsellers between the 16th and 17th centuries[16]. For this reason, as Saúl Martínez Bermejo (2010) highlights, a historical-political approach is essential when examining early-modern translations of Tacitus[17]. In Álamos' case, both this perspective and a scientific-empirical intent must be considered.

Álamos' work was an attempt to establish politics as a science grounded in historical experience. His translation included *Annales*, *Historiae*, *De Origine et situ Germanorum,* and *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*. Through this translation and systematisation, Álamos' aimed to highlight the key components of Tacitism, now distinct from Machiavellianism and drawn solely from Tacitus[18]. The very fact that he derived political laws from Tacitus confirmed his status as the master of political art. This implied that Machiavelli and those who wrote about reason of state were inspired by Tacitus as theories of reason of state stemmed from a particular understanding of sovereign power[19]. The next section examines how the aphorisms function within a broader examination of the problem of government – a central concern of Michel Foucault's lectures at the Collège de France in the years 1977-1978[20].

[14] Cf. Oïffer-Bomsel (2021, p. 141).

[15] Cf. Fernández-Santamaria (1979, p. 294).

[16] At the beginning of the 17th century, translations of Tacitus into Spanish began to circulate, the first of which was made by Emmanuel Sueyro (1587-1629), secret agent and historian in the Habsburg, in 1613. This was followed by Álamos' aforementioned translation, then Antonio de Herrera's *Los cinco primeros libros de los Annales* (Madrid, 1615), Carlos Coloma's *Los anales de Cayo Cornelio Tácito* (Douai, 1629) and Alfonso de Lancina's *Commentarios políticos a los Anales de Cayo Vero Cornelio Tácito* (Madrid, 1687).

[17] Cf. Bermejo (2010, p. IX).

[18] This is not to undermine the role of Machiavellianism in the history of Tacitism, but to recognise that Machiavelli's own teachings are already present in Tacitus.

[19] Indeed, this article does not delve into the many treatises on princely education published across Europe in the 16th century, as its focus is on the concept of power itself. However, I recommend consulting some mirrors for princes treatises, such as Erasmo de Rotterdam's *Institutio principis Christiani* (Basileam, 1516), Jerónimo Osorio's *De regis institutione et disciplina libri VIII* (Coloniae Agrippinae, 1572), the already mention treatise of Pedro de Ribadeneira, and Juan de Mariana's *De Rege et Regis institutione libri III* (Toleti, 1599).

[20] Foucault (2009).

II. The Scientific Character of the Aphorisms. The Historicisation of Politics in Foucault's Lessons on Government

The use of aphorisms in political thought reflected an attempt to ground politics in a systematic, almost scientific framework. This approach, rooted in historical experience, aligns with Michel Foucault's analysis of government, where the historicisation of politics plays a crucial role. In this regard, Álamos' aphorisms illuminate the systematisation of new political practices. As Francisco José Aranda Pérez (2007) noted, aphorisms were the most commonly used method of conveying political knowledge during Philip III's reign[21]. Furthermore, Paloma Bravo (2014) placed Álamos within a group of thinkers who employed aphorisms for this purpose. Bravo also acknowledged the classical roots of the aphorism while highlighting a shift in perspective at the end of the Renaissance.

An etymological assessment of the word "aphorism" is useful to understand how it worked. The Greek *ἀφορισμός* means 'definition' and refers to short, precise statements. Hippocrates (460-377 BCE) titled his medical teachings *Aphorisms*, and over time the term developed to describe maxims of practical life. Emilio Blanco (2006) pointed out the differences between political aphorisms and moral *sententiae*[22]. Although they resemble *sententiae* and maxims, aphorisms are not of a moral nature. The moral aspect of the latter does not allow the act of interpretation that is required in the case of aphorisms. The aphorism is thus far from being a *dictum*, it does not express a general truth but shows a particular analysis of cases[23]. Álamos saw the aphoristic form as essential for establishing an apparatus of political rules. Blanco also discussed the use of aphorisms in the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam (~1466-1536) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Erasmus had already employed a similar form of *sententia* in his *Adagia* (Paris, 1500), a collection of Greek and Latin proverbs[24]. While, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), Bacon viewed the aphorism as an innovative tool for knowledge. He claimed that the aphorism was a tool that belonged to the core of the sciences because its content was closely linked to observation[25]. Álamos, however, took a different approach while using a similar method. Unlike Erasmus, he was more analytical and systematic, focusing on a single author and the problem of government. Like Bacon, however, Álamos applied a rigorous method, but his approach was that

[21] Aranda Pérez (2007, p. 23).

[22] Blanco (2006, pp. 5-8).

[23] Another important characteristic of aphorisms in the Baroque era is the length. In Álamos, for example, aphorisms are sometimes so extended that they take up entire paragraphs.

[24] Erasmus' *Adagia* are full of references to figures from classical Athens or republican Rome.

[25] Cf. Blanco (2006, p. 13).

of a historian rather than a scientist. Yet, Álamos' work remained closely tied to the relationship between aphorism and empirical knowledge. In short, as Julián Sauquillo (2008) pointed out, Álamos applied the inductive method to study historical experience and formulate general laws of political practice[26]. However, Sauquillo argued that Álamos was more influenced by Aristotle than by Bacon's approach:

> La apreciación de los casos puede ser percibida, en mi opinión, como propio de un método experimental; pero, leídos con detenimiento los Aforismos al Tácito español, no ofrecen tanto una extracción de leyes de comportamiento comprobables en el laboratorio del acontecer histórico como toda una prolija casuística de gran minuciosidad[27].

Hence, a closer reading of *Tácito Español* reveals not so much the extraction of universally testable laws from historical events, but rather a detailed and meticulous case-based analysis. In this context, Álamos' Tacitism evolves into political Tacitism through casuistry, which, in this case, aligns with a 'scientific' or inductive approach. This argument becomes even clearer when both science and politics are considered in Aristotelian terms. Aristotle viewed politics (the collective action of humanity) as a practical science, together with ethics (the individual action of a human being). For him, politics was a theory of human life, a reflection on how people organize their lives together[28]. Ethics and politics had to be considered together within the broader debate of the time, which sought to integrate politics with an ethical system that extended beyond religion[29]. Thus, Pérez and Rodrigues (2008) emphasised the importance of considering the legal dimension and the broader contributions of legal philosophy when analyzing politics in early modern Spain[30]. In short, Álamos' political thought was grounded in history and complemented by legal reasoning. At this point, Foucault's discussion of sovereign power is essential. At the heart of the matter is the question of how to govern and how to understand politics in order to resolve the complexities of power.

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[26] Cf. Sauquillo (2008, p. 236).

[27] Sauquillo (2008, p. 242).

[28] Cf. Rufino (2011, pp. 93-126).

[29] In this regard, it is important to mention the research project I am involved in: "The Secularisation of the West: Tacitism from the 16th to the 18th century", funded by the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences. This project assumes as a premise that Tacitism is part of the broader political and intellectual struggles of early modern Europe, where the relationship between politics and religion was being renegotiated. Tacitus was hence was crucial in an era when secularization – the gradual separation of political authority from religious control – was a contentious issue.

[30] Cf. Pérez & Rodrigues (2008, p. 26).

In *Security, Territory, Population* (lecture 8), Foucault argues that reason of state is indeed a false novelty:

> because, in fact *raison d'État* has always been at work. You only need to read the historians of Antiquity to see that it was only ever a question of *raison d'État* at that time. What does Tacitus talk about? *Raison d'État*[31].

According to Foucault, this explains the renewed interest in history, the classics, and Tacitus in particular. Tacitus' works function as a kind of political bible, a guide to the art of government. To fully grasp what Álamos meant by governance or political practice, we must turn to Foucault's concept of 'governmentality', that is the combination of 'government' and 'reason' that leads to the exercise of a certain kind of power. While this clarifies the term itself, its deeper meaning lies in the distinction between governmentality and mere governance: the former encompasses not only the act of governing, but also how people are governed. Over time, the term has evolved to facilitate a more precise analysis of governmental practices within a given society. As Laura Bazzicalupo (2016) suggests, when considering the relationship between governmentality and government, it is precisely the subjectivation – the way individuals are shaped, influenced, and positioned as subjects within a system of power – to which it refers that ensures the effectiveness of governance (how power is exercised and maintained). In other words, governance is not just about ruling; it also involves shaping people's behaviors, identities, and ways of thinking in a way that makes governance function effectively. Bazzicalupo's perspective underlines the interdependence between institutions, governors and recipients in Foucault's system.

> È proprio questa interdipendenza d'altronde che pone a Foucault l'urgenza di un ripensamento del classico concetto di potere, piegandolo nel senso di potere/governo: all'antico diritto sovrano «di vita e di morte» si affianca e si sostituisce un «potere sulla vita» protettivo dell'esistenza «biologica di una popolazione» innestato sui grandi processi vitali[32].

Power works not just through laws and institutions but also through the way people internalize and respond to authority. This is already a biopolitical conception of power[33]. The idea of governmentality explored in this study leads to

[31] Foucault (2009, p. 240).

[32] Bazzicalupo (2016, p. 91).

[33] On a chronological level, Foucault locates the beginning of biopower in the 18th century. The analysis of Álamos's work opens the door to a chronological reconsideration of biopower. While it does not yet reflect a fully developed biopolitical government, by the 16th century, a discourse had already emerged around the

this conclusion. Early modern political thought is thus critical to understanding the path taken by such new political practices. In Álamos' work, political power can already be understood in Foucauldian terms – as a hierarchical system in which government techniques are orchestrated from the center of power. Foucault highlights the interplay between sovereignty, discipline, and biopolitics, particularly in relation to security and economy. This dynamic is central to the debate on reason of state, where Foucault identifies the emergence of modern governmentality. Governance is no longer tethered to a divine order but operates according to its own rational principles. As a result, the state establishes its own rules. What truly defines this paradigm shift, however, is the underlying problem of government, a question of power itself.

> What I would like to show you, and will try to show you, is how the emergence of the state as a fundamental political issue can in fact be situated within a more general history of governmentality, or, if you like, in the field of practices of power[34].

The connection between Foucault and Álamos lies in their shared approach to defining the stages of the art of government in conjunction with new historical perspectives. Sauquillo (2008) already suggested analyzing Álamos' aphorisms using a Foucauldian framework, though he refers to Foucault's archaeology. As Foucault explains, archaeology examines the emergence and evolution of the relationship between discursive and non-discursive formations, between knowledge and social behaviour. Its goal is to uncover the *episteme* of each era, revealing how experience is historically constituted[35]. In this sense, Foucault offered an effective alternative to the dialectical method for understanding historical change. Foucault subsequently refined his archaeological approach by developing a complementary historical methodology, namely genealogy. While archaeology examines the structures of discourse, genealogy situates these structures within broader networks of power relations. As Gary Gutting (2014) asserts, power relations constitute the central focus of what Foucault originally termed genealogy[36]. Through this method, Foucault highlighted the asynchronous nature of discourses on power as a key principle of historical analysis, allowing for a more nuanced examination of discontinuities and transformations in systems of thought. Genealogy encompasses the lectures he delivered in the 1970s on the subject of 'power', which he viewed as both the

techniques of security and power maintenance that would later form the foundation of biopolitics. For instance, also Prozorov (2022) made an attempt to rewrite Foucault's chronology of power.

[34] Foucault (2009, p. 247).

[35] Foucault (1966).

[36] Gutting (2014, p. 18).

foundation and consequence of practical life. In this context, Álamos' aphorisms must be analysed through the lens of the Foucauldian conception of power and subjected to the methodological framework of genealogy.

> I think we could reconstruct the function of the text, not according to the rules of formation of its concepts, but according to its objectives, the strategies that govern it, and the program of political action it proposes[37].

In essence, rather than treating the text as a self-contained intellectual system, this approach examines how it operates within its historical and political context, how it seeks to influence readers, and what practical political role it serves.

Just as Foucault aims to trace the genealogy or history of the state, Álamos, through Tacitus, extracts aphorisms that reflect the fundamental issues of statecraft. However, Álamos takes an intermediate approach. His systematic method extends beyond purely legal frameworks, aligning with Foucault's insight that sovereignty's ultimate objective is nothing more than its own exercise[38].

Having established how Tacitus' text is normalised through aphorisms, the focus now shifts to examples that frame the problem of government, rather than the state. The analysis of selected aphorisms reveals the connection between Álamos' concept of the art of government and Foucault's notion of governmentality. This analysis will result in an asynchronous yet conceptually illuminating framework.

III. Normalising historical Experience: *Tacito español, ilustrado con aforismos*

Álamos demonstrated how Tacitus' works could be distilled into aphorisms that function with broad applicability to varying political contexts. The previous section outlined essential elements for interpreting these aphorisms, positioning Álamos' vision of the art of government as a bridge between reason of state and Foucauldian governmentality. Central to this analysis are the interrelated concepts of 'reason', 'government' and 'governmentality'[39]. Following Foucault's assertion that early modern Spain offers a privileged framework for studying reason of state, Álamos emerged as a pivotal figure in understanding political Tacitism and its scientific aspirations[40]. Building on this discussion of Álamos' methodological

[37] Foucault (2009, p. 36).

[38] Cf. Burchell, Gordon, & Miller (1991, p. 95).

[39] Álamos' work itself was read in the light of this threefold structure. The translated text of Tacitus was seen as the component of 'reason', the aphorisms in the margin as the component of 'government', and the relationship between these two parts as a first attempt to explain 'governmentality'.

[40] Foucault (2009, p. 293).

approach, it is useful to examine the frontispiece of *Tacito español*, as it provides insight into the visual strategies employed to frame the work's political message. Saúl Martínez Bermejo (2013) highlighted the significance of the frontispiece in understanding how Baroque culture deliberately used visual elements to shape the reception of a text. The frontispiece under analysis is structured into three levels, each containing three panels, with the title prominently positioned in the second quadrant of the central level. Notably, Tacitus himself is depicted in the first panel of the second level, reinforcing his authoritative presence within the work's framework. As Bermejo wrote:

> Entre las columnas de la derecha aparece un «doctor» u hombre de letras cuya mano derecha lo descubre en actitud de pronunciar un discurso. En la otra sostiene una filacteria que dice: «ni siervo, ni señor» y a sus pies aparece el texto «Los peores emperadores aman la dominación sin límites, de igual modo que los más nobles gustan de una cierta libertad». Ambos lemas sugieren que la figura es el propio Tácito, con vestuario contemporáneo y dando lecciones en el siglo XVII. Esta representación del autor clásico como «hombre de letras», refuerza la idea de la participación activa del letrado en la conservación del reino[41].

Bermejo underscored that frontispieces should not be viewed as standalone engravings but as integral components of the book as a whole[42]. This perspective extended to other paratextual elements, including the licence, privilege, fee, approval, dedication, and the pages devoted to the reader[43]. The latter two, in particular, provide crucial insights into the work's purpose and reading instructions. In the dedication to the Duke of Lerma, Álamos not only outlines its key features but also articulates its central premise: the doctrine of the state is best understood through historical lessons, which encompass nations, families, customs, rulers, advisors, courtiers, subjects, rebels, and enemies[44]. In Álamos' words:

> en el conocimientos de unos, y de otros, consisten los medios inmediatos, y mas fuertes de adquirirse; conservarse; y aumentarse; o disminuirse los estados[45].

This passage defines reason of state as a form of Aristotelian practical knowledge. For Álamos, it entails the ability to comprehend the monarchy's

[41] Bermejo (2013, p. 336).

[42] Cf. Bermejo (2013, pp. 333-341).

[43] On the Spanish printing market, I recommend Moll (1997); Garvin (2021); Ferraro (2024b).

[44] Cf. Álamos de Barrientos (1614), *Dedicatoria* † (I-II). Since the preliminary pages were added after printing, the page numbers are missing. Hence, the dedication leaves are labelled with † every two pages. In the brackets I have added in Roman numerals whether it is the first or second part of the leaf.

[45] Álamos de Barrientos (1614), † (II).

condition, along with the relationships and functions of its various components. Only through the study of historical examples can one derive a set of rules that facilitate such political understanding. Notably, Álamos strengthened his text by adding marginal references to Tacitus' works, each paired with the corresponding aphorism number. For example, here the reference is to *Annales*, IV af. E. 187:

> En tiêpo de Republica son buenas y necessarias las historias de Republicas, y conocer por ellas el natural, y costûmbres del vulgos; y en tiempo de un Principe las de la Monarquia; para entêder su condicion, y la de sus dependientes; y valerse deste conocimiento[46].

The aphorism suggests that the study of history should be tailored to the political system of the time. Hence, under a monarchy, histories of monarchies are essential for understanding the nature of the ruler and the dynamics of those who depend on him. The ultimate goal is to use this historical knowledge effectively in governance. Álamos argued that historical examples, being fixed and unalterable, offer a more reliable foundation for political knowledge than contemporary events. This empirical approach to politics finds its ultimate authority in Tacitus, whom he regarded as both a historian and a statesman[47]. *Historiae*, II af. C. 341 (p. 750) also points to the usefulness of history. The underlying principle is that customs remain constant over the centuries, even as human affairs evolve. This enduring continuity embodies the wisdom of Tacitus. Tacitus challenges the widespread view that successes and failures are due to fortune by emphasising the underlying causes of historical events[48]. The necessity of history is further reinforced through references that connect it to prudence – the foremost political virtue – acknowledged by thinkers such as Giovanni Botero, Justus Lipsius, and Antonio de Herrera. As stated in *Historiae*, I af. F. 13:

> En las historias es necessario, que se entiendan las causas de los sucessos, y no los accidêtes solos, q~ a opinion del vulgo son obras del caso, y de la fortuna, para cobrar prudencia en nuestras acciones[49].

Indeed, this aphorism emphasises the importance of understanding the causes behind historical events rather than focusing solely on their outward appearances or accidental occurrences. The emphasis is stronger when looking at prudence in *Annales* IV af. A188:

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[46] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 215). In this work, each specific aphorism is cited with its number, which is introduced by 'af.'.

[47] Cf. Álamos de Barrientos (1614), † 2 (I).

[48] Álamos de Barrientos (1614), † 3 (I). With the reference to *Historiae*, I af. D. 189.

[49] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 612).

> Pocos son los que por sola su prudencia pueden hazer la diferencia justa de las cosas, que se les ofrecen: y muchos los que se pueden enseñar por los sucessos agenos[50].

According to Álamos, Tacitus is an exceptional source of wisdom and prudence (*grande investigador de la prudencia*)[51], two essential qualities for anyone who wields power or participates in governance. The significance of prudence is also acknowledged by Sauquillo, who stated:

> Para Álamos la ciencia es una cualidad prudencial que ha de ser puesta al servicio del monarca, para seguridad del Imperio, de mayores y menores, e impregna a ciencias, artes y oficios, si han de ser útiles y provechosos[52].

For Álamos, knowledge was a form of prudence that serves the monarch, ensuring the empire's stability and the welfare of its people. Álamos then included a discourse on aphorisms, highlighting their value in guiding human actions[53]. He explained that his decision to translate Tacitus was accompanied by a desire to clarify key points relevant to his own time, allowing readers to avoid errors through historical comparison. Since human life is too short to acquire wisdom solely through experience, studying history becomes essential. Two important teachings emerge in *Annales*, IV af. F. 193 and G. 194. The first warns of the dangers of writing about contemporary events, as those portrayed negatively, or their descendants, may suffer repercussions. The second cautions that negative judgments in history not only harm individuals but also their families and those with similar customs. These are unavoidable warnings for the historian. The attentive and wise historian is then able to convey those principles that are necessary for human life. Tacitus' works are a universal experience in the sense that they propose universal rules and principles. The list of aphorisms taken from *Annales* and *Historiae* is particularly remarkable[54]. The selected aphorisms primarily highlight principles of political action. The following section analyses a number of these aphorisms, illustrating their connection to classical antiquity, reason of state, and Foucauldian governmentality.

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[50] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 216).

[51] Álamos de Barrientos (1614), † 3 (II).

[52] Sauquillo (2008), 249.

[53] Álamos de Barrientos, *Discurso para inteligencia de los Aforismos, uso, y provecho dellos*. This speech develops in 6 pages, which are not numbered.

[54] Unfortunately, it is not possible to analyse all the aphorisms in question. However, it is appropriate to list them for future research. Referring to *Annales*, I (af. 2, 3, 55, 106, 120, 169, 183, 399); II (af. 117, 148, 288, 370); III (af. 183); IV (af. 119, 187, 263, 409, 410); VI (af. 45); XI (af. 42, 56, 141); XII (af. 54, 112); XIII (af. 141, 265, 288); XIV (af. 201); XV (af. 26, 277); XVI (af. 60). Referring to *Historiae*, I (af. 94, 438); II (af. 28, 143, 149, 215); III (af. 173); IV (af. 37, 43, 44, 300, 350, 351, 352, 382, 383).

IV. On Governmentality: Tacitus' *Exempla*

Álamos recorded four general governmental practices in his aphorisms, one for each of Tacitus' works. While in the *Annales* the main focus seems to be on tyranny, in the *Historiae* one can gain a more general view of the topic of 'principality'. These works are exemplary for politics. A special reflection on government can be found in *De origine et situ Germanorum*, an ethnographic work in which the problem of government is above all the problem of others[55]. In this text, Álamos' aphorisms focus on the passages that deal with the way in which two different populations treat each other. The reason for this observation is the logic of imperialism. The aphorisms showed how to acquire knowledge in order to conquer other peoples by emphasising their differences. Lastly, the fourth form of government practice is that of "false peace". Indeed, in *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*, Roman imperialism is criticised because it thrived on massacres and robberies, and Calgacus' speech (*Agr.* 30-31) is the clearest example of this criticism. In all these examples, the idea of governmentality emerges as a mechanism of the intertwining of freedom (*libertas*) and tyranny (*principatus*). This relationship survives in every form of sovereign power. So it seems that the exercise of power increases to the extent that freedom is restricted. The core of political power is revealed in the imbalance between it and freedom. *Agricola*, in particular, illustrates how power employs key rhetorical strategies to expand itself, especially when dealing with the kind of peace 'imposed' by Rome. The idea of apparent (controlled) freedom runs through the entire work of Tacitus and is a symptom of an intelligent ruler, because he knew that his subjects would submit to sovereign power in this way.

The violence inherent in sovereign power was a cause for concern for many Spanish intellectuals working in institutions such as Álamos. However, an important form of governance has not yet been mentioned. Although it does not emerge from the aphorisms to Tacitus, it clearly appears in other political treatises at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries[56]. It is pastoral power, a form of power that was better suited to the political practices of the Spanish monarchy, which was inspired by the greatness of the Roman Empire but could not imitate its emperor. Hence, a reference to (Christian) pastoral power cannot be overlooked. Indeed, before

[55] In this sense, Álamos can be seen as a forerunner of Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy dialectic. In this regard, I recommend: Maschke (2017).

[56] For instance, the figure of the good shepherd in connection with the ruler can be found in Giovanni Botero's *Della Ragion di Stato* (1589), Pedro de Ribadeneyra's *Tratado de la religion y virtudes que deue tener el principe christiano, para gouernar y conseruar sus estados* (1595), and Juan Márquez's *El Governador Christiano, Deducido de la vidas de Moysen, y Josue, Principes del Pueblo de Dios* (1612).

he turned to analysing modern governmental practices, Foucault had dealt with pastoral power. Pastoral power equalises the contradiction with sovereign power because it proposes the good shepherd as the leader of the freedom of the individual. In this way, the good shepherd leads the subjects to their own good, which they could not otherwise achieve themselves. In Foucault's view, pastoral power is not a form of governmentality but rather the secularization of power. Essentially, the figure of the good shepherd foreshadows the emergence of biopower. The choice of the pastoral office was not accidental. As discussed by Chris Barker (2023):

> Pastoral individuation of the person is in Foucault's telling a key bridge between ancient and Hellenistic practice, medieval sovereignty, and modern governmentality[57].

In Álamos' interpretation, pastoral power was ultimately superseded by sovereign power, reflecting the broader debate on reason of state, which consistently affirmed that governmental practices were designed to preserve power. As Foucault suggests, the challenge of government arises from the absence of a clear definition of power, making sovereign power a defining moment in the emergence of modern political thought. To explore this issue further, selected examples will illustrate the problem of government in Álamos, particularly the relationship between sovereign power and freedom, or the dynamic between *principatus* and *libertas* in Tacitus. In the *Annales*, Tacitus asserts that the only remedy for national discord was the rule of a single leader, thus justifying the principate. However, while recognising the inevitability of the principate, he does not endorse it with unwavering conviction. The problematic character of the principality lies in the paradox of the government of a single person over a vast empire. This ambiguity is evident from the outset of the *Annales*, which opens with a brief preface summarising Roman history from monarchy through republican *libertas* to the establishment of the principate.

> Urbem Romam a principio reges habuere; libertatem et consulatum L. Brutus instituit. Dictaturae ad tempus sumebantur; neque decemviralis potestas ultra biennium, neque tribunorum militum consulare ius diu valuit. Non Cinnae, non Sullae longa dominatio; et Pompei Crassique potentia cito in Caesarem, Lepidi atque Antonii arma in Augustum cessere, qui cuncta discordiis civilibus fessa nomine principis sub imperium accepit[58].

In response to this passage, Álamos issued two fundamental warnings: one concerning the dangers of tyranny (af. B. 2) and the other regarding the potential for civil war (af. C. 3).

[57] Barker (2023, p. 2).

[58] Tac., *Ann*. I, 1.

> B.2. La tirania, (siendo señorio violêto,) nunca es durable para los primeros autores della. C. 3. Quando alguno se viniere a hazer señor de una grande, y poderosa ciudad libre, lo mas ordinario será despues de una larga guerra civil[59].

Tyranny and civil war, however, are threats that primarily endanger the principality in its early stages. Once established, strategies emerge to stabilise and sustain the political system. In the *Annales*, the prince was *legibus solutus*, free from legal constraints, because he had to prevent the disintegration of a vast state. The central idea to the ideology of the principality is that without a leader (*sine rectore*; *Ann*. I, 15), the empire cannot be maintained or kept in balance.

In the *Historiae*, Tacitus examined the institutional dimensions of the principality. The first book, in particular, reflects on the theme of *ungovernability*, characterized by political instability, uncertainty, and conflicting reports (*rumorum avidi*; *Hist.* I, 4). Álamos introduced his aphorisms by highlighting the transition from republic (*af.* A. 1) to monarchical rule, which he equated with the loss of liberty (*af.* B. 2).

> A. 1. En tiempo de Republicas se pueden escrivir libremente las historias. B. 2. Quâdo el poderío público se reduce de Republica a un solo Monarca, acaban se los grandes historiadores: porque en tales siglos ni son tan grandes los premios, que incitâ a esta virtud, ni tanta la seguridad, con que escriven, como en tiempo de Republica[60].

However, Álamos contended that it is precisely under tyranny that true virtue – rooted in nature – emerges most clearly.

> D. 11. Los siglos de tiranos dan exemplos mas esclarecidos de virtud: porque en su crueldad, y efetos della se aguza el buen natural, para mostrar su Fortaleza, y valor[61].

Freedom, and virtue in relation to it, should be considered within the framework of *arcana imperii* (af. B. 15). Álamos, in line with the principles of reason of state, asserted that the secrets by which a monarchy is sustained and preserved must remain undisclosed. His reasoning reflects a clear concern for the stability of monarchical rule. The emperor Galba himself deemed a return to the principate impossible (*Hist*. I, 16). However, the legitimacy of monarchy ultimately depends on the excellence of the ruler. The phrase in *Hist*. 1.49 ("*capax imperii nisi imperasset*"), which Tacitus uses in reference to the late Galba, concisely captures the paradox of leadership. In connection with this passage, Álamos formulated aphorism G.276,

[59] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 2).
[60] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 610).
[61] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 612).

emphasising that a prince could not be deemed great merely for lacking vices; true greatness required the constant exercise of virtue.

> En los Principes, para merecer nombre de Grandes, no basta no tener vicios, sino que es menester posseer virtudes[62].

The virtue of the prince is the key to resolving the challenges of the principate. This idea is echoed in *Agr.* 3, where Tacitus commended Nerva and Trajan for successfully reconciling monarchy with freedom.

In *De Origine et situ Germanorum*, however, Tacitus adopted a contrasting approach, simultaneously critiquing his fellow Romans and expressing admiration for the customs of the Germanic tribes. The first aphorism plays a crucial role in initiating the discussion on the concept of "otherness" among foreign peoples. Recognising and defining otherness is essential for legitimising or questioning governmental practices, as well as for understanding the dynamics of friend-foe relations.

> A. 1. El miedo que una naciõ tiene de otra, es el mayor reparo, que puede haber entre las dos; para que unos, ni otros no entren en los terminos agenos[63].

There is a dense network of aphorisms that refer to *Ger.* 33, 34, 35 and 36, chapters in which the customs of other peoples are described.

> Maneat, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostri, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatis nihil iam praestare fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam[64].

Tacitus employed clichés. Basically, he stated that divisions and internal conflicts among barbarian groups enabled Rome to maintain its dominance. In addition, Álamos asserted that in the decline of an empire there could be no greater happiness for the people than to have discord among their enemies, as it led to their downfall (af. A. 47). Furthermore, in discussing customs and the notion of otherness, Álamos reflected on key political and ethical concepts: faith, which must be accepted rather than scrutinized (*Ger.* 34; af. A. 48); virtue, which can only be claimed by rulers who have gained power without committing injustice (*Ger.* 35; af. B. 49); and peace, drawing from *Germania* 36 (af. C. 50). Politics thus emerges as a form of social science. Additionally, the contrast between monarchy and *libertas* is particularly pronounced in *Germania* 37.

[62] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 646).

[63] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 929).

[64] Tac., *Ger*. 33.

> Non Samnis, non Poeni, non Hispaniae Galliaeve, ne Parthi quidem saepius admonuere: quippe regno Arsacis acrior est Germanorum libertas[65].

The themes of tyranny and *libertas* resurface in *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae*. Here, opposition to tyranny is exemplified through the life of Agricola, who ultimately fell victim to its mechanisms. A crucial element in this context is Tacitus' critique of Roman imperialism, which, he suggests, thrived on conquest, plunder, and violence. This perspective is most explicitly conveyed through Calgacus' speech (*Agr.* 30), where the nature of tyranny is exposed. By allowing Calgacus to voice these criticisms, Tacitus momentarily assumes the perspective of Rome's adversaries. This rhetorical strategy serves as a filter, revealing the ideological underpinnings of Roman imperialism without outright condemnation, while simultaneously reinforcing the superiority of Roman civilization. Tacitus thus acknowledges both the brutality and the efficacy of Rome's imperial policies.

> A. 188. Los que tratan que conquistas, el robar, matar, y saquear, llaman señorío; y no ver quien lo resista, muertos, y acabados los enemigos, y reducida la tierra enferme, y soledad, llaman Paz; pero falsamente; siendo lo primero tiranía, y lo segundo efectos de ella[66].

This passage illustrates how Roman imperialism employed the rhetoric of a false peace to justify its conquests.

> Auferre trucidare rapere falsis nominibus imperium, atque ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant[67].

Another significant aspect of empire emerges in *Agr.* 42, where Tacitus asserted that great men could exist even under despotic rulers. This suggests the necessity of cooperating with the government despite its flaws. Agricola served as a model, demonstrating that submission to power did not necessarily equate to subjugation by tyranny. The aphorisms reinforced this idea, highlighting the dangers posed by a tyrant's jealousy and cruelty, which had to be approached with caution. Af. F. 254 warns that once a ruler executes an honorable man without fear of repercussions, he is likely to repeat the act. Af. D. 260 further observes that prudence and moderation provoke a tyrant's hostility, necessitating careful conduct by those who embody these virtues. Similarly, af. E. 261 contends that excellence can persist even under a corrupt regime, as obedience and modesty,

[65] Tac., *Ger*. 37.

[66] Álamos de Barrientos (1614, p. 1004).

[67] Tac., *Agr*. 31.

coupled with diligence and competence, may earn recognition where others have met downfall. *De vita et moribus Iulii Agricolae* is thus more than a tribute to Tacitus' father-in-law; it also outlines a vision of governance that seeks a balance between *principatus* and *libertas.* As Alain Michel (1973) argued, Tacitus' work as a whole constitutes "a meditation on freedom" and offers "a moral of action in civil society"[68]. At the same time, he claims the ability of the senatorial elite to govern without necessarily having to endorse a tyrant[69].

These examples collectively outline a principle of governmentality. The first addresses tyranny, the primary danger threatening one-man rule. The second explores the principality's inherent challenges, which is not a tyranny, yet constantly at risk of being perceived as such when it fails to safeguard liberty. Preventing this outcome requires a virtuous and capable ruler who can maintain order. The third example underscores the necessity of propaganda and the construction of a political identity – what could be termed in modern terms as a 'national' identity – to differentiate allies from enemies. Finally, the last example revisits the tension between *principatus* and *libertas* not only from the ruler's perspective but also from that of the governed. This remains the fundamental dilemma of monarchy, one for which there appears to be no resolution – unless one considers Foucault's reflections on governmentality, which illuminate both the debate on reason of state and the structural causes of the problem of government itself.

V. Final Remarks

In conclusion, Álamos' work presents a structured and pragmatic approach to politics, deeply rooted in the Roman legal tradition and the classical discussions on the state in early modern times. His reading of Tacitus serves as a guide for governance, offering practical insights into the preservation of power. By systematising Tacitus' aphorisms, Álamos transforms them into principles of political action, reinforcing the idea that history is a reservoir of wisdom essential for statecraft. His approach aligns with the Aristotelian conception of practical science, where political knowledge is action-oriented rather than theoretical. His engagement with *prudencia de estado* and reason of state underscores this pragmatic dimension, demonstrating how governance relies on a calculated balance between authority and stability.

Tacitus plays a central role in this discourse. Álamos legitimises Tacitus as a political thinker whose insights transcend moral considerations and provide a

[68] Cf. Michel & Salsano (1973).

[69] Cf. Gajda (2009, pp. 253-268).

framework for understanding power dynamics. Moreover, Álamos' aphorisms reflect the adaptability of Tacitism to different political contexts, making it a foundational element of early modern governmentality. Álamos' attempt stands for both the rulers and the ruled. It is a political – and therefore scientific – form of Tacitism that is legalistic in nature, Aristotelian in its emphasis on practical knowledge, and casuistic in its application. In short, the versatility of Tacitism evolved into a genuine principle of governmentality. Politics moved away from transcendental or universal ideals, becoming a matter of practice. Reinterpreted as a Spaniard, Tacitus' works became the material and intellectual foundation for Álamos' aphorisms, which came to embody the causal principles of governmentality in early 17th-century Spain.

Foucault's tripartite model of power – sovereignty, governmentality, and biopolitics – provides a useful lens for situating Álamos within a broader genealogy of governance. While Álamos primarily operates within the framework of sovereign power, his emphasis on history as a tool for political prudence contributes to the gradual transformation of governance into a more strategic practice. This shift highlights the rising influence of security and economic concerns, gradually undermining sovereign power. At its core lies the tension between principality and *libertas*, which, according to Álamos, shapes the foundations of common life and modern politics. As economic considerations gain prominence, governance extends to the regulation of population behavior, marking the emergence of biopolitics. Foucault defines biopolitics as a broad set of political strategies centered on the governance of bodies and populations. While Álamos remains within the framework of sovereignty, his work anticipates the historicization of politics, a process that culminates in a biopolitical system using diverse mechanisms of power.

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