

GAMES THAT PEOPLE PLAYED IN EARLY MODERN EUROPA AND THE EMBLEM

LOS JUEGOS QUE SIRVIERON DE ENTRETENIMIENTO EN LA EUROPA
DE LOS SIGLOS XVI Y XVII Y EL EMBLEMA

Peter M. Daly
McGill University, Montreal, Canada

ABSTRACT: This study explores the existence and readership of board games in 16th and 17th century Europe of an emblematic nature. Such games may have derived from the conversation games featured in Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), a work which includes a passage on emblems. In the Spanish tradition, the *Filosofía cortesana moralizada* (1587) of Alonso de Barros is a book of instructions on how to play this highly emblematic courtly board game, the board of which has unfortunately been lost. Some English emblems of the 17th century also include emblems likely based on Castiglione that depict the courtier as both warrior and scholar. Future studies need to clarify the readership and social class of these emblematic books and their print history.

KEYWORDS: Emblematic Board Games, Readership, Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, Alonso de Barros, *Filosofía cortesana moralizada*.

RESUMEN: Este estudio explora la existencia y número de lectores de juegos de tablero de índole emblemática en la Europa de los siglos XVI y XVII. Tales juegos pueden haberse derivado de *El Cortesano* de Baltasar Castiglione (1528), obra que incluye un pasaje sobre los emblemas. En la tradición española, la *Filosofía cortesana moralizada* (1587) de Alonso de Barros es un manual de instrucciones sobre cómo jugar este juego de tablero cortesano de naturaleza emblemática, cuyo tablero, desafortunadamente, no se ha conservado. Ciertos emblemas ingleses del siglo XVII incluyen emblemas, inspirados probablemente por Castiglione, que retratan al cortesano como guerrero y hombre de letras. La investigación futura debe aclarar el número y posición social de los lectores de estos libros, y la historia de su publicación.

PALABRAS CLAVES: Juegos de tablero emblemáticos, Número de lectores, Baltasar Castiglione, *El Cortesano*, Alonso de Barros, *Filosofía cortesana moralizada*.

Fecha de recepción: 3-9-2013

If we exclude card games and look only at board games, it would seem that some people have always played board games of one kind or another. That assumes that some people had sufficient leisure for games. We all know that chess has been around for centuries or millennia. It seems that nowadays almost every year someone comes up with a new board game, which is printed and sold, and presumably also played. These pursuits are not always so trivial.

WAS IT SO DIFFERENT IN EARLY MODERN TIMES?

Is there such a thing as an emblem game? In his *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*,¹ which was first published in eight parts in Nuremberg in 1644-1649, the German baroque writer Georg Philipp Harsdörffer certainly described many conversation games that took emblems as their subject. It is difficult not to assume that Harsdörffer knew of Baldesar Castiglione's book on the courtier, since Harsdörffer was so well read. Castiglione's book became famous also north of the Alps, where it was also published in translation.

Readers of the *SES Newsletter* who read Spanish and either subscribe to, or have access to, the new Spanish journal *Imago* may have read of a board game based on a Spanish book *Filosofía cortesana moralizada*, published in 1587. The *Imago* article appeared in the second volume (2010) of *Imago*. This valuable and well researched article was written by Víctor Infantes,² who doubtless knows about the importance of Castiglione. The only thing that the present read-

er missed is a reference in Infantes's article to Castiglione. But that might perhaps have appeared too obvious to Infantes, and his primary concern was with the little known early modern publications, and with the whereabouts of the lost game board that would have accompanied the Madrid 1587 edition. Infantes also sees the apparently lost game board in the light of the *Juego de la Oca* [Game of the Goose]. The board game itself was evidently printed on a large folded sheet of paper that could be affixed permanently to a board or just folded away. If the Spanish board game was intended to be played by courtiers then perhaps one should also see it in the tradition of Castiglione's *El Cortegiano* (1528).³ Interestingly enough, quite early in Book One of *The Courtier* there is a short passage on emblems (44), by which were doubtless meant *impreses*, which we read «were devised for the occasion». (44) The «games» that were played in the courtly society of Urbino, as described by Castiglione, were evidently conversation games, played after the evening meal, and presided over by the Duchess.

Castiglione's book, which in many ways is a compendium of renaissance thought, is likely today to be out of touch with modern views and sensibilities, if the English translator, George Bull, writing presumably in the early 1960s is correct (see 15-17). But readers of the *SES Newsletter* are presumably historically sensitive.

Readers will already know that *The Courtier* describes the perfect courtier, who ideally was experienced in the arts of war and peace: in short a man of the sword and book. But Castiglione constantly stresses the courtier's grace and nonchalance, which are qualities perhaps not so often found or expected today

1. Harsdörffer's *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele* is also available in a facsimile reprint edited by Irmgard Böttcher (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968-1969). The title-pages of the first six volumes have in capital letters *GESPRAECHSPIELE*, or *GESPRAECHSPIELE* whereas the title-pages of the last two volumes have *Gesprächspiele* set in lower case and with «ä».

2. I am indebted to Professor John T. Cull for advising me on the details of the Spanish text of the Infantes's article.

3. I shall refer to and quote from the Penguin translation by George Bull first published in 1967. Castiglione's book was first translated into English by the Elizabethan Sir Thomas Hoby.

in government ministers, advisors, and civil servants. Grace and nonchalance are certainly not expected in politicians today, as one will know from the newspaper reports on the Republican race for the presidential nomination in 2012.

One must resist the temptation to write about Castiglione and concentrate on what would appear to be the similarities between Castiglione and the *Filosofía cortesana*, which was published some 59 years after Castiglione's book appeared in print. However, it must be acknowledged that by the time Castiglione's book was published, it was probably already passé in Italy, although north of the Alps it exerted considerable influence both in the original and in the various translations. In Elizabethan England it was virtually required reading of all who considered themselves gentlemen, not all of whom were courtiers. Sir Philip Sidney became the English equivalent of Castiglione's perfect courtier, combining as Sidney did, the qualities of a warrior, scholar, and poet.

We are not surprised to discover in some English emblems of the early seventeenth century echoes of this combination of the qualities of warrior and scholar or man of letters. The *Mirroure of Majestie*⁴ was first published in 1618 in London.⁵ The work contains 31 coats of arms and 32 emblems, at least three of which combine motifs of warfare and scholarship.⁶

Castiglione's book about the ideal courtier is, however, more than a compendi-

um of renaissance ideas, and more than a courtesy book. It represents something of a synthesis of some medieval and renaissance ideals: those of the warrior and scholar, the classical hero and the Christian, the man of virtue (*virtú*) and the individual (perhaps in the sense of the individualist). Above all, it sets out to describe the ideal courtier as the loyal servant of his prince. Such a courtier, whether at a small local court or a larger court at the centre of power, was in some ways the predecessor of today's politicians, civil servants and advisors. Castiglione was also writing at a time in Italian history when the question whether Latin or some national Italian language was preferable. This question, whether Latin was preferable to a national vernacular, would occupy minds north of the Alps for some time.

Returning to the *Filosofía cortesana*, which can also be regarded as a sort of manual to accompany the game, it would appear that already in 1987 the English hispanist, Trevor J. Dodson, had published a facsimile of the unique copy (see *Imago* 2, 128). Before him in 1968 it also appears that the British hispanist, Edward M. Wilson, had noticed a Naples edition of 1588, printed for Josep[h] Carrachij⁷ (see *Imago* 2, 128).

Unfortunately, the boards reproduced in the *Imago* article contain very small and almost illegible wordings (only the upper case headings can be read with some difficulty), some of the figures in other illustrations are too small to identify. But it

4. Quotations and page references are taken from *The English Emblem Tradition*, vol. 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

5. A modern facsimile edition was edited by Henry Green and James Crosten and published in London by Treubner and in Manchester by Brothers for the Holbein Society in 1870.

6. See «emblem» 13 featuring a split male figure; his right half is armoured, holding a lance and a shield rests on the ground, while his left half resembles Mercury with winged feet and winged hat, holding a *caduceus*. The *subscriptio* speaks of reconciling «Arts and Victory». «Emblem» 25 shows a lion passant and guardant holding an upright sword over an open book. «Emblem» 30 depicts another male figure, his right side in the cap and gown of a scholar, holding a book, while his left side in armour wears a sword and holds a lance. The *inscriptio* reads «Virtus unita fortior» [Virtue united is stronger]. For these emblems, see either the Green and Crosten facsimile or the *The English Emblem Tradition*, vol. 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998.

7. There is a copy at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna with shelf mark 35 V 49 (*Imago* 2 (2010) 128, footnote 2).

would certainly appear that the board reconstructed as figure 3 showing the game of the *Filosofía cortesana* by Alonso de Barros, printed in Madrid in 1587, displays a board with only one spot recurring, in fact nine times, and that is «El Trabajo» (Work), which can also be translated as toil or labour. The implication is that such work is physical and arduous, unlikely to be undertaken by a courtier, except perhaps in time of war. On the second reconstructed board (figure 4 in *Imago* 2) we find small images, rather than written statements. In place of the phrase «El Trabajo» we see two oxen drawing a plough across a field. One may wonder which courtier would want to be associated with a farmer ploughing a field. The image also occurs nine times. On the board reproduced as figure 5 (in *Imago* 2), which appears to have been printed in Naples for Joseph Carrachij in 1588, two oxen again are shown some nine times.

So who would be likely to have played these board games? The question of leisure for board games is not as politically incorrect or naive as might appear. To the extent that these games are related to the book *Filosofía cortesana* and perhaps to Castiglione, the first answer must be courtiers. But as we know from the impact that Castiglione had north of the Alps, perhaps also gentlemen would have read it, who may not have been courtiers, but who copied them in some regards. Of course, it would be nice to know something of the printing history of the *Filosofía cortesana*, even whether the book will be found today in libraries outside of Spain.

Books in Spanish were published outside of Spain, also in Italy, as we now know. Many European intellectuals could read Spanish, but one may wonder how many. Clearly, the book and game could be regarded as important to courtiers, both Spanish and Spanish-reading courtiers. But much of our modern knowledge is accidental. And the question remains, who would have known about the book and the game. We

moderns can probably only make guesses, at best supported by hard information on printing history and the presence of such books in our libraries. What was, or would have been, the print run of such a book and its board game? How many people, tens or perhaps thousands, can be supposed to have read it? And where? There is also the economics of printing and publishing to be considered. Especially in the early modern period, books with illustrations were more expensive to produce than unillustrated books.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- BARROS, Alonso [1587]. *Filosofía cortesana*, Madrid.
- BARROS, A. de [2010]. *Filosofía cortesana moralizada*, Ed. Marcos Méndez Filesi, Madrid, Musgomachias.
- H. G. [1618]. *The Mirrour of Majestie*, London, W.I. Quotations and page references are taken from *The English Emblem Tradition*, vol. 4. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998. H.G. may or may not have been Sir Henry Goodere (spelt variously as Godyere, Goodier, Goodyear and Goodyer).
- HARSDÖRFFER, Georg Philipp [1644-1649]. *Frauenzimmer Gesprächspiele*, Nuremberg. The volumes are also available in a facsimile reprint edited by Irmgard Böttcher (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1968-1969).
- INFANTES, Víctor [2010]. «'Una pintura que se contiene en un pliego grande'. El tablero de la *Filosofía cortesana* de Alonso de Barros: Una Oca emblemática entre España e Italia (1587 y 1588)», *Imago. Revista de emblemática y cultura visual*, 2, 127-135.
- MARTÍNEZ MILLÁN, J. [1996]. «*Filosofía cortesana* de Alonso de Barros (1587)», in *Política, religión e inquisición en la España moderna: Homenaje a Joaquín Pérez Villanueva*, 1996. 461-482.