



Virtue, Nobility, and the Public Good: ‘de vera nobilitate’ and Spanish Humanism in Diego de Valera’s *Espejo de verdadera nobleza*

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RESUMEN:

Este ensayo analiza los argumentos de Diego de Valera en su *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* que pretenden (re) establecer y redefinir la nobleza, basándose en textos clásicos y las nuevas tendencias del humanismo cívico para resolver los desafíos sociopolíticos en Castilla durante el siglo XV. Aunque se fundamenta en la doctrina medieval de Bártolo de Sassoferrato, sobre todo su *De dignitatibus*, Valera demuestra un acercamiento humanístico con su fuente primaria, insertando referencias e ideas clásicas para sus propios fines sociopolíticos y para impresionar a sus lectores con su conocimiento del mundo grecolatino. Al involucrarse en el debate sobre la *vera nobilitate*, Valera promueve el reconocimiento personal y el avance social basados en la meritocracia para el bien común. Es más, procura acabar con el faccionalismo de la nobleza que destruía la sociedad medieval tardía, apoyando la monarquía castellana para instaurar un gobierno más estable y unido. Este análisis también compara el humanismo cívico castellano con su modelo italiano.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Diego de Valera, humanismo cívico, *vera nobilitate*, Bártolo de Sassoferrato, bien común.

ABSTRACT:

This essay analyzes Diego de Valera’s *Espejo de verdadera nobleza*’s arguments for (re)establishing and redefining nobility based on classical texts and the new trends of civic humanism in order to resolve the sociopolitical challenges facing fifteenth-century Castile. While basing his views on the medieval doctrine of Bartolo da Sassoferrato, especially the jurist’s *De dignitatibus*, Valera demonstrates a humanistic approach to his primary source, as well as inserts classical references and ideas to serve his sociopolitical needs and impress readers with his knowledge of the Greco-Latin world. By inserting himself into the debate on *vera nobilitate*, Valera promotes personal recognition and social advancement based on meritocracy for the public good. Moreover, he attempts to end the noble factionalism that was destroying late medieval society by supporting the Castilian monarchy for the sake of establishing a more stable, united government. The analysis also compares Spanish civic humanism to its Italian model.

KEY WORDS: Diego de Valera, civic humanism, *vera nobilitate*, Bartolo da Sassoferrato, public good.

Fifteenth-century Spain was an epoch of great sociopolitical turmoil, plagued by internecine conflict.¹ In order to confront the challenges of their time, some writers and political leaders used humanism and classical texts to construct a more stable, unified society, infusing public opinion with these new trends and creating a more varied dialogue for contemporary society. Moral treatises, in particular, helped to influence ethical discourses and, as Luis Fernández Gallardo hints at, form new ideals to which a society struggling to uphold feudal values could aspire:

Quizá la conciencia de vivir una época turbulenta en que las banderías se imponían sobre un auténtico compromiso por el bien común realzara el cariz paradigmático de un pasado que ofrecía valiosos elementos para la construcción de un ideal cívico. (1993: 127)²

In Diego de Valera's *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* (ca. 1441), the author defends a new social and ethical paradigm.³ By redefining and emphasizing the value of virtue, he challenges the traditional definition and role of nobility; further, his reevaluation of virtue and nobility has a clear target: to promote the public good, as well as personal recognition and social advancement based on merit, aligning the author with many civic-minded works of the humanist movement; further, though civic humanism is only a part of the movement, I shall primarily focus on this aspect, as Valera primarily addresses *nobleza civil* in his treatise and it is a fundamental aspect of his writing (Di Camillo 1996: 231). In order to do so, Valera turns to the legal texts of Bartolo da Sassoferrato (1313-1357) who, despite his fame as a Bolognese jurist —that is, anathema to the Florentine humanists—, became a pivotal figure for the fifteenth-century discussion on nobility among them. Yet the Cuenca appropriates Bartolian doctrine for his own needs and those of the Castilian crown, creating a text that is very much his own and curtailed for the purpose of criticizing the contemporary concept of nobility and improving the morality of those in this category for the benefit of Castilian society at large.

The civil wars of the late Middle Ages created much division among Spain's elite, making the nobility question of particular relevance. With the establishment of new noble lines and the loss of others, there was intense controversy between «la vieja y nueva nobleza y en segundo lugar por la integración de nuevos individuos al rango de los hidalgos» (Di Camillo 1996: 234). Along with this confrontation, there was another dating back to Alfonso X (1221-1284) over whether nobility should be hereditary or conceded by the monarch (Accorsi 2011: 9-14). *El Sabio* directly addressed these debates through his *Partidas* (1256-1265), which is the first Spanish text to legally define the role of the nobility. Under the Alphonsine definition, there is no clear distinction made between *caballero* and *noble*,

1.– I would like to thank María Morrás and Jeremy Lawrance for their input and feedback in crafting this paper, as well as for their constant encouragement and moral support. Words could never adequately express my gratitude.

2.– See also Di Camillo (1988: 81-82).

3.– Some witnesses use another title: *Tratado de nobleza o fidalguía* (Bne: MSS/9985, MSS/12701, MSS 7099; Rbme N-I-13). One copy of Juan Rodríguez del Padrón's *Cadira del honor* also includes both this title and *Tratado de nobleza o fidalguía* in the rubric (Rah 9/213). However, Valera calls his own work *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* in his *Tratado de las armas*: «espurios son todos los que son nacidos de no legítimo matrimonio, según más claro parece por el capítulo final del *Espejo de verdadera nobleza*, por my conpuesto» (Valera 1878: 297-98). This indicates that Valera was aware of the *de vera nobilitate* debate, but implies that some of the scribes were not. The dating of the Valera's treatise is also problematic (see discussion on p. 321).

but their roles are articulated as that of governors and warriors (*Partidas* 2.21), «creando progresivamente la idea de que los caballeros pertenecen a la nobleza» (Rodríguez-Velasco 1993: 72). Essentially, by attempting to (re)classify chivalry and knighthood, *Partidas* sought to institute regal authority by creating a new social category (Rodríguez-Velasco 2010: 17). The *Sabio's* court, therefore, advocated a public juridical system under the aegis of the monarchy over the insufficient private legal basis by which the nobility conducted justice (Rodríguez-Velasco 1993: 58, 67, 70). Nonetheless, these political moves did not go uncontested, as writers over the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries criticized and challenged royal supremacy as described in *Partidas* (Rodríguez-Velasco 2010: 33); in contrast, others like Valera defended the monarch's right to create and confirm nobility. Nonetheless, unlike the Alphonsine texts that did not challenge the validity of *nobilitas generis*, Valera directly questioned its legitimacy: lineage was not the only claim required to establish nobility, but needed to be considered in conjunction with virtue.

The topics of virtue and *de vera nobilitate* were central to the humanist movement that was, besides its overarching concern for language, interested in secular moral philosophy and the dignity of man (Burke 1990: 1). Among the many texts that discuss true nobility, the following are particularly noteworthy: *Liber de nobilitate* (Poggio Bracciolini); *De vera nobilitate* (Bartolomeo Platina); *De nobilitate* (Buonaccorso da Montemagno). The last was also translated into Spanish (*De toda condición de la nobleza*) around the middle of the fifteenth century, surviving in four manuscripts at the Biblioteca Nacional de España (MSS/23090; MSS/20217/1; MSS/17814; MSS/8631). Alfonso de Cartagena also considers the topic in his «Respuesta» (1444) and *Doctrinal de los caballeros* (1444); although he is not as adamant as Valera in disputing the legitimacy of *nobleza de linaje*, he shows a great deal of concern for virtue and the public good. In contrast, Juan Rodríguez del Padrón unequivocally defends hereditary nobility in *Cadira del honor* (ca. 1440), which likely caused Valera to write his own treatise in response.⁴ What is most relevant, however, is the humanist opposition to the medieval conception of nobility based on blood, insisting that what makes true nobility are virtue, erudition, and civic-minded moral education founded on classical models: the new noble, therefore, is defined according to his moral character and personal conduct.

These Greco-Latin texts and ethical models, however, brought about more than just ideas; there was a notable shift in perspective and intellectual thought during the transition to the Renaissance: while medieval historians and moralists defined historical processes within the confines of divine plan, humanists —and those who coincided with them— interpreted events and outcomes based on the moral values, circumstances, and contexts in which humans operated (Hankins 1996: 123). With the influx of this new worldview, feudal sociopolitical organization was no longer the only theoretical model: the legitimacy of power is called into question, creating a world of new possibilities.

The didactic value of history in shaping contemporary life and secular morality are fundamental aspects of Diego de Valera's works. This view was likewise shared with one of the most prominent Italian humanists, Leonardo Bruni, whose *History of the Florentine*

4.— Ferrán Mexía's *Nobiliario vero* (1492) likewise responds to and contradicts Valera in many ways, even though he does not explicitly acknowledge it.

People mentions the role history has in inspiring leaders to imitate the deeds of great men from the past:

For if we think men of advanced years are wiser because they have seen more life, how much greater is the wisdom history can give us if we read it carefully! For there the deeds and decisions of many ages may be scrutinized; from its pages we may learn with ease what behavior we should imitate and avoid, while the glory won by great men, as therein recorded, inspires us to perform acts of virtue. (Bruni 2001: 3)

History, therefore, has an essential pedagogical role in informing contemporary leaders through the experiences and views of the past's *great men*. Much like Bruni, Valera has a keen interest in historical and ethical texts with clear political intentions, and the «lucha de Valera en el terreno de la tratadística política es la de, ante todo, demarcar el ámbito de la nobleza del modo que más le permite a él mismo llamarse noble» (Rodríguez-Velasco 1996: 203). The political, and personal, interest in the virtue, or the lack thereof, exhibited by knights is apparent in *Espejo de verdadera nobleza*. In this treatise, he promotes the intrinsic value of virtue, especially for the benefit of the common good, much like the Italian humanists (Di Camillo 1976: 151). Furthermore, Valera praises many *claros varones* from the ancient world as models for his contemporaries, which is a common humanistic technique (Seigel 1968: 50). These examples also provide practical models for civic and bellicose virtues, helping form the basis of a new ethical and political ideology (Fernández Gallardo 1993: 127-28). That is, much like the new critical spirit of humanism and its frontal attack on contemporary society, Valera wields his pen to disseminate classical paradigms in order to create and legitimize a new nobility in which he may participate.

Humanism in fifteenth-century Spain, however, had a cultural and pedagogical program that developed in its own way, assimilating while adjusting its Italian model to sociopolitical circumstances. The civic strains of the movement were particularly apparent in Castile's courts, which played a pivotal role in propagating the humanist agenda. Much like early Italian humanism, coterie of men with interest in classical learning began to sprout up throughout Castile, eagerly pursuing vernacular translations of Latin works. The use of the *lengua vulgar*, however, was not to say that humanism did not exist, as even the most celebrated Italian humanists translated their own Latin works into the vernacular and even wrote in their mother tongue (Kristeller 1946: 59; Hankins 2006: 135, 140). In addition, before the apogee of Italian humanism, vernacular prose and translations began to develop and play a crucial role in laying the foundations for classical studies in thirteenth-century Florence, particularly among the rising business elite (Kristeller 1946: 54, 57-58; Witt 2000: 453-54). As in Italy, the evolution of Spanish vernacular humanism prepared the way for later literary developments within the peninsula (Lawrance 1986; González Rolán, Saquero Suárez-Somonte 1999: 581; Robbins 2005: 139-42). While the *lengua vulgar* was the primary vehicle in the early phase of Castilian humanism, by the end of the fifteenth century and at the start of the sixteenth, Spanish intellectuals, such as Antonio de Nebrija and Juan Luis Vives, began to produce texts very much in the same vein as the most renowned Italian humanists. However, in contrast to Italian civic humanism that was formulated for and applied to republican city-state communes, hispanic

civic humanism took the Italian model and used it to strengthen and defend the monarchy against noble factionalism.

The choice of Spanish was also an obvious one considering historical precedents. It had been the language of prestige since Alfonso X promulgated it via royal documents, laws, and chronicles, giving its development great impetus from the thirteenth century onward; further, after the Muslim conquest of the Iberian peninsula, many libraries were destroyed and texts were lost, making the search for classical works and a philological focus much more difficult than in other parts of Europe; and even Italians searched outside their peninsula to find manuscripts: Petrarch notably rediscovered books I, III, and IV of Livy's *Ab Urbe Condita* in Chartres, and Poggio found a copy of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* in Baden. However, in spite of the near absence of philological interest in Latin and Greek in the fifteenth century, there was a notable desire to study the texts through translations in order to find new civic models, which was fundamental to overcoming the political confrontations of the time (Lawrance 1985, 1986). Beyond the sociopolitical restraints, the writers of «vernacular humanism» were also following a rhetorical precept by accommodating their texts and arguments to the needs of their audience: through the medium of Castilian, the knowledge and views of ancient morals and literature slowly spread through a wider reading public, promoting new civic values.⁵

In spite of Valera's writing in the vernacular, the influences of classical rhetoric are apparent in *Espejo de verdadera nobleza*. One of the best and most humorous examples is when Marcus Atilius Regulus appears before Valera in a dream to complain about the latter's not including him among his *exempla*:

Pues con tanto trabajo buscaste aquellos que de baxo linaje por sus virtudes a muchos nobles fueron antepuestos, yo te ruego entre aquéstos a mí no olvides, para lo qual no as razón alguna, ca si de baxa condición buscas, ¿quál más fallarás que a mí? y si mis obras dignas fueron de honor e memoria, pregunta a osadas, a Tito Libio e a Valerio Máximo, los quales no negarán cosa alguna de lo que yo diré. (Valera 1959: cap. V, 96ab)

The original source for the information appears to be Valerius Maximus (I.1.14) or Boccaccio's *De casibus* (v.3); however, though the content likely comes from one or both of these sources, the dream or vision of the Roman seems to be entirely original: while basing his ideas and arguments on his sources, Valera demonstrates his own style, curtailing his sources to fit his own argument. The influence of classical rhetoric, therefore, does show itself in Valera's literary style. In this imaginative passage, Valera inserts an interruption from the past as if Atilius Regulus were directly before the author, calling him out for not having included him among his *exempla*; that is, not only is Valera using classical sources to instruct the reader, but he also is literally conversing with the heroes of the past; and if Atilius Regulus's view about himself does not convince Valera nor the reader of the veracity of his claim to fame for rising from the low ranks of Roman society to its highest points, Regulus asks the reader to turn to the authoritative historians Titus Livius and Valerius Maximus for confirmation.⁶

5.– On vernacular humanism, see Lawrance (1986) and Di Camillo (1976; 1988).

6.– See also Gonzalo Pontón's (2014) analysis of classical rhetoric in Valera's epistles.

These early tides of Spanish humanism were especially evident in Juan II's court (1419-1452), as the monarch had a notable interest in obtaining classical texts (Lawrance 1990). Eager to (re)order society with the revival of antiquity, Juan II corresponded with leading humanists like Leonardo Bruni, who personally sent the king a collection of his works (González Rolán and Saquero Suárez-Somonte 1999: 586). Nonetheless, despite the monarch's and Álvaro de Luna's political failures to bring the rebellious nobles under the sway of the royal scepter, they did have success elsewhere:

[T]hey were strikingly prescient in their exploitation of certain cultural means — chief among them, the recourse to humanist-style literary publicity— to create the illusion, before the fact, of a distinctive court style, a show capable of representing the omnipotent majesty of monarchy. (Lawrance 2016: 180)

The use of literature to influence the public similarly occurred among the Florentine oligarchy: Bruni's *De militia* (ca. 1421) attempted to minimize the power of the *gente nuova* and gain control of the knights (Hankins 2011: 4-6, 14, 18). Juan II's court, therefore, grasped the political possibilities of «the ostentatious display of literary erudition as a primary form of access to prestige and power» (Lawrance 2016: 181). Furthermore, as court society started to emphasize the importance of humanistic curriculum, nobles and ambitious *letrados* used classical learning to obtain royal preference (Lawrance 2016: 198). As the monarch put more stock in these new trends, nobles increasingly demanded more classical texts and began to value literary erudition for the purpose of securing sociopolitical standing and influence: the royal court became the battleground of *armas* and *letras*.

In this very court, Diego de Valera (1411/12-1488) spent his most formative years (1427-35), surrounded by the ideas and texts that advocated the revival of classical culture.⁷ Personally and intellectually, Valera had much to gain from the humanist controversy over virtue, knighthood, and true nobility. As the son of Juan II of Castile's personal physician, the *converso* Alonso Chirino (1365-1429), Valera grew up in an environment that was permeated with the intellectual movement orienting Castilian literacy away from France and toward the new Italian models (Lawrance 1990: 222). The Cuencan was not only within the very court where many of the new humanist ideas were spoken about and beginning to be imitated, but saw a way by which he could advance himself in Castilian society, which is similar to many of the principal Italian humanists who did not come from patrician families either (Seigel 1968: 240). If nobility were based on virtuous acts, professional skills, and wealth, it would have enabled Valera to earn public recognition and status; however, like any other challenge to social norms and mores, these up-and-comers —*homini novi* in the Ciceronian expression— needed more than just money and to be associated with the court, but also had to base their arguments on solid historical, legal, and ethical texts. Further, by dedicating his treatise to Juan II, Valera was making as much of a political as an ethical statement, attempting to enhance the moral values of the nobility, as well as open up the fairly closed category of *nobleza*. Further, though Accorsi (2011: 134) believes that Valera had legitimate claims to a modest form of nobility, this cannot be the case, even if he frequently tried to claim noble status. One of

7.— For more biographical information, see Accorsi (2011: 129-136), Moya García (2009: XXI-XLIII), and Rodríguez-Velasco (1996: 195-246).

the main points of his treatise is to redefine nobility to include men like himself, which Accorsi acknowledges: «Era, pues, una nobleza 'relativa', válida solamente dentro de una precisa concepción teórica de la misma y sujeta a la autoridad del monarca, que podía confirmarla o menos; por tanto no extraña su esfuerzo por propugnar dicha concepción» (2011: 135). Moreover, the Cuencan's polemical nature and obsession with legitimacy and status are also connected to his context and upbringing: as for the first, Spanish royalty and nobility showed a proclivity for fixating on the legitimacy of their lineages, both trying to tie their ancestry to the Visigothic kingdom; and for the second, Valera's Jewish heritage further enhanced his insecurities about his social status, as he could not have claimed nobility because of his family's recent conversion (his grandfather was the first to convert to Christianity). Therefore, Valera's treatise was more than a polemical tract: it was a personal manifesto of his own self-worth, his own claim to the highest echelons of society, his own obsession with gaining legitimacy.⁸

In the opening arguments for a new conception of nobility, Valera distinguishes three types of virtue: *theological*, *natural*, *civil* (Valera 1959: cap. II-IV, 92ab). As for the first two, following his main source, Bartolo da Sassoferrato, he spends little time on them.⁹ Even though he holds theological virtue in high regard, he quickly dismisses the topic: «Pues aquesta nobleza dexémosla a los theólogos» (Valera 1959: cap. II, 92a). Instead, Valera focuses on the civil aspects of nobility much like the humanists. Along with the classical examples that lace the remainder of Valera's discussion, he makes frequent references to Bartolian doctrine. There are two completely different medieval Spanish translations of Bartolo's *De insigniis et armis* (Rodríguez-Velasco 1996: 46). However, Valera did not use either, but translated a Latin copy himself (Rodríguez-Velasco 1996: 46). Bartolo's *De dignitatibus* also served as a medium to Dante's ideas (Accorsi 2011: 137-41). Both of these texts, in their Latin original, serve as key elements to Valera's thought and arguments, but, as comparisons to the originals show below, he is not overly reliant on Bartolo's words or views; rather, Valera takes general concepts from the Perugian and frequently replaces the latter's legal arguments with classical *exempla*.

As early as 1437, while traveling across Europe as an itinerant knight, Valera already had a strong grasp of the Perugian's texts (Moya García 2009: xxiv); using the latter's legal authority, the Cuencan defended Juan II's right to bear his arms after Castile's flag was captured at Aljubarrota (1385) by the Portuguese, in an episode recounted in *Crónica de Juan II* (Rosell 1875-78: II, 533-34); this account, however, could have been interpolated by Valera (Moya García 2006: 153-55). Nevertheless, despite Valera's reliance on Bartolo's *De dignitatibus* for the first eight chapters of his treatise —translating parts of it almost verbatim—, he does show much independence in his own ideology by molding the jurist's views to his own needs. For example, Bartolo, after introducing a legal theory, cites many juridical texts and examples from Italian city-states and ancient Rome to support his arguments. Valera, nonetheless, substitutes the Italian's evidence with classical *exempla*; that is, the Cuencan excises the scholastic proofs, replacing them with a litany of classical references as a rhetorical weapon to impress his readers, doing *cosas humanísticas* with

8.– Rodríguez-Velasco notes the critical and controversial tendency of Valera's father, as well (1996: 201).

9.– For more information on the Bartolo's impact on medieval society and law, see Woolf (1913).

traditional materials (Cappelli 2014: 8). With legal concepts as his foundation, he fortifies his arguments with classical erudition and name-dropping to give them credibility and the resemblance of unquestionable historical truth and erudition: the medieval Bartolian doctrine, then, is altered and adjusted by Valera using humanistic methods and approaches.

A couple of examples will suffice to show how Valera uses and alters Bartolian doctrine. When discussing the opinions of *los sabios antiguos* on nobility, Valera argues that «antiguas buenas costumbres fazen al onbre noble, no curando de riqueza» (Valera 1959: cap. I, 90b). After giving a litany of classical and biblical examples to defend his point, Valera turns to Bartolo; however, after citing the latter, Valera replaces the Perugian's legal and biblical references with Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*:

E como quier que estos actores no demanden antigüedad de los progenitores, en cada un onbre se deve entender esta antigüedad, segunt Bártulo dize en el lugar suso alegado; e si alguno biviere honestamente diez ó veinte años, llamarse han antiguas buenas costumbres; e como Aristóteles dize en el primero de las *Éticas*, capítulo quarto: Así como una golondrina no faze verano, así un acto de virtud no faze al onbre virtuoso, mas conviene para lo ser larga continuación. (Valera 1959: cap. I, 91b)

Certe ista antiquitas potest esse in uno homine, nam si duravit longo tempore decem vel viginti annis in bonis moribus dicentur antiqui boni mores. (Bartolus 1530: §48)

Una enim hirundo ver non facit, neque una dies. Ita utique neque beatum et felicem una dies neque paucum tempus. (Grosseteste 2019: 118, 1098a 18-20)

After introducing the point of view from Bartolo, Valera turns to Aristotle to complete his point; however, he is not even entirely faithful to the Stagirite, altering the original *beatum et felicem* to *virtuoso* to continue his discussion on nobility. Valera also at times replaces legal citations with biblical ones and Alphonsine texts:

Aquí es mucho de notar lo que Bártulo dize, que así como según la nobleza theologal es noble aquel a quien Dios por su gracia ante sí faze gracioso, así cerca de nos es noble aquel a quien el príncipe o la ley fazen noble. Ca los príncipes tienen el lugar de Dios en la tierra, e la ley tiene el lugar de príncipe, segunt es escrito en los *Proverbios* octavo capítulo, onde Salomón en persona de nuestro Señor dize: 'Por mí los reyes reinan a los fazedores de las leyes discernen justicia; por mí los príncipes mandan e los poderosos fazen justicia.' E asimesmo es escrito en la *Segunda partida*, título primero, ley quarta, onde dize que los reyes tienen el lugar de Dios en la tierra. (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 92b).

Quid ergo dicendum? Respondeo: Nobilitas apud nos inventa est ad similitudinem et imitationem illius nobilitatis quae est apud Deum [...]. Sicut ergo ille apud Deum est nobilis quem Deus sua gratia sibi gratum facit, ita in foro nostro ille est nobilis quem princeps sua gratia vel lex sibi gratum vel nobilem facit. (Bartolus 1530: §61)

After introducing his argument with Bartolo, Valera substitutes a series of legal citations that follow with Proverbs (8:15–16) and *Partidas* (II.i.5). Once again, Valera's approach to texts is flexible: he takes what is useful and needed, but is not above altering them so

that they fit his own objectives and arguments; further, as Bartolo's legal citations would not have been interesting nor persuasive to the nobles and other members of the royal court, Valera uses the Bible and the well-known *Partidas* to defend his point.

Valera's use of this renowned Italian legal theorist is of particular interest because of the latter's relationship with civic humanism: «It was Baldo's and Bartolo's recognition of the 'vita civilis' and its possessions [...] to which the rising civic spirit felt akin» (Baron 1938a: 18). Valera, therefore, takes Bartolian doctrine to support his arguments concerning both virtue and wealth, attacking greed and avaricious behavior that go against the public good and the pursuit of virtue; however, the Cuencan does defend modest wealth for the sake of dedicating one's life to virtuous deeds, a view shared by Leonardo Bruni (Baron 1938a: 20). But Valera did not need to read Bruni's Latin translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1416-17) to grasp his Peripatetic ideal of the *aurea mediocritas*. Cartagena was at Juan II's court at the time he wrote his famous *Declinationes* (ca. 1432), so Valera had to be aware of the polemical arguments between the bishop and the Florentine over the latter's translation, as well as the former's works on Aristotle (Morrás 2002). Further, Bruni sent a Latin manuscript to Juan II that included some of his letters, *Isagogicon moralis disciplinae*, *De militia*, and *Oratio in hypocritas* (RBME g. iv. 3). There is also one extant manuscript of the Spanish translation, which Montserrat Jiménez San Cristóbal believes was translated either directly from the Latin manuscript that arrived at the Castilian court in 1435 or a copy of it (2010: 203-209). This would approximately coincide with the time period when Valera was writing his own treatise. Moreover, Bruni's high estimation of «the active life, wealth, military valor, and the family [...] can be documented everywhere in Italian humanist writings of the fifteenth century» (Hankins 1995: 328). In addition, the treatise's first gloss mentions Cicero's *De officiis*, which Cartagena translated into Spanish ca. 1422 (Morrás 1997). This work could have contributed to Valera's view, shared by many contemporary Italian humanists, that virtue was tied to social and political prestige (Baron 1938b: 92). Valera's treatise was also translated into French —surviving in thirteen manuscripts— around the middle of the fifteenth century (Willard 1967: 38-39; Vanderjagt 1981: 3, 93); this shows the influence Spanish humanism was having on other parts of Europe, as well. Moreover, a Latin copy of the *De militia* may have also originated in the same Burgundian court ca. 1460 (Bayley 1961: 366). In other words, bearing in mind Valera's context and contacts, his references to classical culture were not falling on deaf ears, but rather were being listened to, or read by, those who were at least familiar with these topics and authors.

Of the three virtues Valera classifies, he focuses on civic virtue, underscoring two central points: that it confirms nobility, and that the king may reward nobility based on virtuous acts. As Valera believes virtue is a prerequisite to nobility, he begins by defining the concept according to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: «Ayamos por más virtuoso al que más fuye los extremos e se acerca al medio en el qual está la virtud, segunt dize Aristóteles en el primero de las *Éticas*, capítulo noveno» (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 94a). The passage summarizes *Nicomachean Ethics* (II.6-9, 1106a14-1109b26), agreeing with Bruni's similar positive evaluation of the *aurea mediocritas* as his basis for understanding what virtue entails. The treatise also discusses the origins of nobility and virtue themselves, showing a clear interest in secular historiographical explanations, which is a key characteristic to

modern historiography (Di Camillo 1992: 73). In the beginning, however, both of these concepts were irrelevant, as «en la primera edad todas las cosas fueron comunes, sin alguna diferencia entre los onbres aver» (Valera 1959: cap. v, 95a). Virtue only became important when corruption destroyed equality: «después la malicia en el mundo creciendo, quien pudo más ocupar quebrantando el derecho de la humanal compañía, fizo suyo lo que primero de todo era» (Valera 1959: cap. v, 95a). First, it is interesting to note that Valera does not make any religious references. Second, he attributes the change to human actors who altered sociopolitical circumstances, and, now that equality does not reign over the world, he offers a new virtue based model that adjusts to current reality.¹⁰

After the collapse of this communist world, the most capable tyrants created a new society that equated power with virtue. Once again citing the Stagirite, this time *Politics* (I.6, 1255a39–b1), Valera states: «Ninguna otra cosa que virtud e malicia determinaron los libres e siervos e nobles e plebeos» (Valera 1959: cap. v, 95a); however, the direct source is Bartolo's *De dignitatibus*:

Secundo modo potest considerari prout cedit in homines ista nobilitas naturalis, et tunc debet intelligi naturalis, .i. naturali ratione inducta, quod nos iuristae appellamus de iure gentium primæuo, quod apparet quia solis hominibus congruit. Et de ista nobilitate agit Philosophus I Eth. [*var. Polit.*] 4 c. ubi dicit *quod nihil aliud quam virtus et malitia discriminat servum et liberum, nobiles et ignobiles.* (Bartolus 1530: §59)

By implying the evil foundations of power and nobility, one detects a shrouded criticism of the unethical grounds on which the older lines of nobility make their claims to power; that is, he attacks the basis of authority and legitimacy in the Middle Ages and, in its place, proposes a new civic model that goes against the private concerns of medieval chivalry in favor of those of the collective good. Valera continues by giving a list of examples of humble individuals who —by virtuous living, force, or fortune— rose to the level of the first nobles (Valera 1959: cap. v-vi, 95-97). The examples suggest two points: first, nobility is not an inherently closed group founded on ancestry alone, but a status that has been reached by many through their own doing and favorable circumstances; and second, nobility does not always imply virtue, as some lowly born Romans acquired noble status through tyranny.

As virtue is not necessarily guaranteed to someone based on his birth and virtue itself is the argument used to defend nobility, then one must consider two key aspects of Valera's conception of *vera nobilitas*: it is the result of virtuous deeds and behavior, and the king has the power to reward it. As for the first, Valera describes it, according to Bartolo's *De dignitatibus*, as the following:

Dize que la nobleza es calidad; esto es verdad, porque puede estar e mudarse o perderse. (Valera 1959: cap. iv, 93a)

Dixi quod nobilitas est qualitas. Hoc esse verum apparet: quia posset adesse vel abesse preter subiecti corruptionem. (Bartolus 1530: §61)

10.— Bartolo also tried to adapt Roman law to his contemporary society (Woolf 1913: 52).

Valera faithfully adheres to the original text, highlighting that, much like previously mentioned arguments, nobility is not contingent upon blood, but virtuous acts. Referencing the pseudo-Aristotelian *De secretis secretorum* (see Bizarri 2010: 67) —which, according to medieval belief, he wrongly attributes to Aristotle— and *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV.3, 1123b15-1124a12), the Cuencan argues that «el honor es galardón de la virtud, y por ende sólo a los virtuosos deve ser dado» (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 93b-94a). Moreover, the phrase is strikingly similar to Cartagena's «Discurso»: «la honor es galardón verdadero de la virtud, segunt que comúnmente muchos disen» (Cartagena 1959: 206b). The reference to *honor* has much significance to Valera's contemporaries, as it begins to mean —along with *honores* and *honras*— rewards, social prestige, and wealth (Di Camillo 1976: 182). Virtuous deeds, therefore, should be followed by social recognition and pecuniary compensation.

On discussing what nobility is and how one acquires it, Valera also argues that *dignidad* and *nobleza* are one and the same. First, he states that «dignidad es una calidad que faze diferencia entre el noble y el plebeo, y ésta es nobleza segunt dicho es» (Valera 1959: cap. VII, 98a). The phrase closely imitates Bartolo's *De dignitatibus* again: «quandoque dignitas accipitur pro quadam qualitate quæ facit personam differre a plebeis, et ista est nobilitas secundum vulgare nostrum, ut statim dicam» (Bartolus 1530: §44). Essentially, as he goes on to discuss, nobility is tied to power; the latter creates the former; and both create status (Valera 1959: cap. VII, 98ab). Valera is aware that these arguments will be controversial, so he resorts to an *ad hominem* opprobrium of those who will oppose his viewpoint:

Bien parescerá dura de creer aquesta definición de civil nobleza o fidalguía a la muchedumbre ruda del pueblo *caresciente de letras* [...]. Pues, diga el vulgo lo que querrá, que de reír es lo que por razón no se prueba, e tanto es de creer cada uno quanto prueba lo que dize por razón nescesaria o auténtica abtoridad. (Valera 1959: cap. VIII, 100ab)

What is interesting, however, is his open challenge to feudal values, both political and linguistic; that is, the traditional definition of nobility is no longer the only *abtoridad*. With the influx of new ethical principles, not to mention the intense focus placed on language and its usage, old sociopolitical standards are not the sole authority. The study of classical culture and *letras*, therefore, allowed writers to come into contact with traditions beyond Christian theology and philosophy, helping them form a more independent and nuanced view of the world (Holmes 1990: 135-36). Reason, as well as secular views and *auctoridades*, were becoming necessary, and authority was no longer accepted without being subjected to conflicting ideas and rational challenges, diluting the dogmatic precepts of any single source.

Valera's definition of *nobleza* also supports the essential role of the monarch, once again according to Bartolo's *De dignitatibus*:

E Bártolo pone tal difinición de aquesta nobleza cevil, o fidalguía por nosotros llamada: Nobleza, es una calidad dada por el príncipe, por la qual alguno parece ser más acepto allende los otros onestos plebeos. (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 92b)

Prout vero loquimur de nobilitate apud nos, pone diffinitionem veram et examinabo eam, ex qua apparebit theorica et practica huius materiae. Nobilitas est qualitas illata per principatum tenentem qua quis ultra honestos plebeios acceptus ostenditur. (Bartolus 1530: §62)

However, he is quick to emphasize:

E como propiamente fablando, dignidad sea un resplandescimiento de honrra a quien es reverencia devida, ésta deve ser dada a los virtuosos, y el príncipe que a otros da las dignidades, peca mortalmente, segunt dize Santo Thomás en la segunda parte de la segunda quistión, distinción setenta e tres, e Aristótilen en el primero capítulo del *Regimiento de los Príncipes* a Alixandre, onde dize: ‘El príncipe que da a los que no han menester, muy pequeño loor gana; e el que da a los indignos, pierde lo que da e peca mortalmente.’ (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 93b)

Valera’s reference to Aristotle is actually from pseudo-Aristotle’s *Secretum* (Bizzarri 2010: 67); as for Aquinas, his source is Bartolo’s *De dignitatibus*:

Item quod dixi quod propter vitia conceduntur dignitates verum est loquendo civiliter; fateor tamen quod concedens preferens indignum digno peccat, ut dicit beatus Thom. de Aquino in II-II q.63, ubi tractat utrum acceptio personarum sit peccatum. (Bartolus 1530: §68)

Despite the king’s power to reward individuals, he should do so within an ethical framework guided by civic virtue and merit; therefore, only virtuous deeds should cause the ruler to bestow monetary rewards and social recognition on the individual. By wisely rewarding people for their acts, then, the monarch is able to «conservar su fama» (Valera 1959: cap. IV, 94b). *Fama* is used to entice nobles and kings to take an interest in *letras* (Russell 1978: 224); further, in the case of the ruler, his *fama* is attached to the kingdom’s name: on one hand, this is a reference to the regal *corpus mysticum* (Penna 1959: CXXVI-II); and on the other, one notes a preoccupation for fame itself, which would likewise be interpreted as a historical concern for the monarch’s standing in posterity. This anxiety for the future, therefore, demonstrates an interest in reputation that is similar to the reasons for producing and reading historiographical works: propaganda and power in one’s lifetime, immortality in the collective memory, and serving as an example to others, as the imitation of great men is one reason for studying history according to the humanists (Seigel 1968: 50). Furthermore, if the king acts virtuously, he would, by inference, equally serve as an *exemplar mundi*, an equally important classical political concept (Cappelli 2014: 11).

Valera’s interest in origins and concise definitions also extends to the «muy noble orden de cavallería» (Valera 1959: cap. X, 105b). This order had three guiding principles: «la primera fue amor del bien público; la segunda deseo de atribuir honor devido a la virtud; la tercera dar a la orden devidos ministros e servidores» (Valera 1959: cap. X, 105b-106a). These precepts boil down to the following: those chosen and part of the order should dedicate themselves to virtuous deeds in service to the well-being of the *res publica*. Valera upholds the Roman soldiers as paradigms of *cavalleros*, falling into the same mistake as other contemporary writers of falsely equating medieval knights with Roman soliders (Penna 1959: CXVI). Cartagena’s «Respuesta» to Santillana also tackles the same topic, but differentiates between Roman soldiers and medieval knights. The bishop praises the Roman soldiers’ defense of the republic and their obedience, showing a clear desire to see the Spanish *cavalleros* be as disciplined and civic-minded as the Roman *equites* (Cartagena 1988: 427-33). Much like Cartagena, then, Valera admires the order and self-restraint of the Romans, mentioning an oath taken by them: «que guardasen el honor e servicio del

príncipe, el bien de la república, la ordenança del capitán, el onor de la orden e de los compañeros a ella recebidos» (Valera 1959: cap. x, 106a). Intriguingly, Valera also mentions the Roman civic *juramento* (Valera 1959: cap. x, 106a); this leaves open the possibility that it was taken from Bruni's *De militia*, although Santillana's «Questión» (1444) and Cartagena's «Respuesta» are also possible sources, raising further doubts about the dating of Valera's treatise.¹¹ Whichever the source, these tenets have one unifying message: put the collective good over that of the individual. Moreover, Valera highlights not only the virtues of the Roman *knights*, but also underscores the serious punishment meted out on those who broke the *sacramentum militare*. To give just one of Valera's examples, he writes:

Tan gravemente fueron en Roma los cavalleros punidos quando contra su orden erravan, que como Pitulio cónsul fuese muerto por los Milanese por la floxedad de sus cavalleros e defensores, todos los que dende volvieron fueron lançados de la orden de la cavallería e privados del salario e mantenimiento que de la cibdad avían. (Valera 1959: cap. x, 106ab)

Taken from Valerius Maximus (II.7.6), Valera upholds the Romans as models for the medieval knight, following this example with more from Valerius Maximus: *Mantino* (II.7.1) and *Quinto Fabio* (II.7.8). However, he points out that if the Romans were severely castigated for breaking their code of conduct, they were publicly celebrated for their virtuous deeds:

¡O bien aventurado tiempo aquel en el qual la virtud así florescia, onde, bien tanto quanto los vicios eran punidos, así eran las virtudes loadas e los virtuosos remunerados! Onde dize Valerio en el libro e título cerca alegado, que a los príncipes o cabdillos vitoriosos era dado triunfo [en esta guisa: el triunfante todo solo seía en una cadira ricamente guarnida, vestido de purpura, sobre un carro el qual tiravan quatro cavallos, levando delante todos los prisioneros las manos atadas; e con muy grand gozo todos los de la çibdad lo salían a reseçbir]. (Valera 1959: cap. x, 106b-107a)¹²

The original source is Valerius Maximus (II.8), but Valera's description of the triumph comes from Juan Alfonso de Zamora's version in a headnote:

En la qual onor se fazían tres cosas: primera, ivan los presioneros que traía delant'el carro en el qual era levado valerosa e reverente e gloriosamente el dicho cavallero, e los presioneros ivan con las manos atadas atrás. Segunda, todos los cibdadanos salían con grant gozo e conssolación para reseçbir el dicho triunphante. Tercera, el dicho cavallero entrava en Roma aconpañado por todos los cibdadanos e seía todo solo sobre un carro muy fermoso, el qual traían quatro cavallos, e el dicho triunphante vestía una vestidura muy fermosa de púrpura. (Zamora 1999: 41^v)

Valera, therefore, again shows himself to be flexible with his sources, cutting, pasting, and rewriting them according to his own needs and style. The overall point, however, is to un-

11.– For more information concerning the problems of dating the treatise, see Accorsi (2011: 191-98), Amran (2009), and Netanyahu (1995: 525, 1151).

12.– The bracketed words have been supplemented to Penna's edition, as he omitted this part, based on the manuscripts that I have been able to consult online.

derscore that unlike the Roman love of virtue and communal good, Valera finds a stark contrast in his compatriots, revealing the treatise's *raison d'être* in chapter ten: the virtuous classical *caballería* no longer exists in medieval Spain, and in its place is an unethical knighthood in which every man looks after himself in detriment to the common good:

Ya son mudados por la mayor parte aquellos propósitos, con los quales la cavallería fue comenzada: estonce se buscaba en el cavallero sola virtud, agora es buscada cavallería para no pechar; estonce a fin de honrar esta orden, agora para robar el su nombre; estonce para defender la república, agora para señorearla; estonce la orden los virtuosos buscavan, agora los viles buscan a ella por aprovecharse de solo su nonbre. gora los viles buscan a ella por aprovecharse de solo su nonbre. Ya las costunbres de cavallería en robo e tiranía son reformadas; ya no curamos cuánto virtuoso sea el cavallero, mas cuánto abundoso sea de riquezas; ya su cuidado que ser solía en conplir grandes cosas es convertido en pura avaricia; ya no envergüençan de ser mercadores e usar de oficios aun más desonestos, antes piensan aquestas cosas poder convenirse; sus pensamientos que ser solían en sólo el bien público, con grant deseo de allegar riquezas por mares e tierras son esparzidos. ¿Qué diré? En tanta contrariedad son nuestras cosas a las primeras que remembrarlo me fase vergüença. (Valera 1959: cap. x, 107a)

The anaphora of *estonce, agora* has a profound rhetorical effect in this *peroratio*, hitting right at the core of the failings of Valera's society, of the medieval Castilian knight; after praising the high ideals of the Romans, Valera points out the obvious and shows the originality and importance of his own arguments in relation to fifteenth-century Castile: the golden age of chivalry is gone and all that remains is the mirage of a once honorable past; a new civic framework based on classical principles is now needed. Anticipating Cervantes's criticism and ultimate destruction of medieval knighthood, he shows that traditional values are no longer upheld and have no public benefit. Valera is also quick to note that, despite his contemporaries' not having to take an oath or be guaranteed public salaries, by accepting knighthood they must honor the *regla de cavallería* (Valera 1959: cap. x, 107b-108a; see also Cartagena 1998: 432-33). That is, by becoming a knight, one must follow the customs and rules of knighthood, and ignorance is no excuse for not abiding by its mandates. Valera raises a further point to underscore the now defunct medieval chivalry:

Ni menos pueden dezir que no aviendo mantenimiento de los príncipes o cibdades, a ellos sea lícito conprar o vender e las otras cosas ya dichas, ca éstos no fueron forçados ni rogados ni menos elegidos a la orden de cavallería para que a los príncipes convenga de necesidad mantenerlos. (Valera 1959: cap. x, 107b)

Valera likely has *caballeros villanos* in mind; they began to participate in commercial and agricultural enterprises once the city's defense was less of a concern, distancing them from their conventional roles (Rodríguez-Velasco 2010: 49). This ties into Bruni's and Petrarch's view that virtuous living can only be pursued and maintained by those who have enough financial security to not have their choices dictated by need or desperation (Baron 1938a). Further, if by chance one loses his knighthood, Valera proposes that «tal cavallero sirva señor, labre heredad, críe ganado, ca no puede vida menos torpe escoger viviendo a enxemplo de los padres primeros» (Valera 1959: cap. x, 107b). Valera shows a deep appreciation for humility and the virtue of *paupertas*, which was a view shared

among the early humanists, as well as the Franciscans (Baron 1938a: 4); this demonstrates, then, that one can live an upstanding and useful life even in the most humble of jobs, which further emphasizes the importance of virtue over all other factors.

Valera further considers nobility as it relates to the personally and politically important topic of religious conversion in Spain. Though *limpieza de sangre* was specifically about *conversos*, there was also a connection to «blood» nobility. With the increase of new nobles, both the arguments against new nobles and for *limpieza de sangre* attempted to control who could hold administrative posts and powerful positions (Di Camillo 1992: 71-72; Accorsi 2014: 46-49). Valera opens his defense by asseverating that converts to Christianity do not lose noble status, but rather «la acrescitant» (Valera 1959: cap. IX, 102b). His rationale is quite simple: if converts were from the *nobleza civil* before becoming Christians, then they are further ennobled once they take part in theological nobility (Valera 1959: cap. IX, 102b-103a). After these opening remarks, Valera reveals his main reason for discussing converts: defending Jewish *conversos*, telling the reader that «si de la nobleza de los judíos abtoridades queremos, muchos podemos fallar» (Valera 1959: cap. IX, 103a). In contrast to the classical texts he mostly uses throughout the treatise, Valera relies on religious references when advocating *converso* claims to nobility. Although this may seem unusual, a few reasons can be offered: first, as conversion is primarily a religious issue, discussing it from this perspective is sensible; second, as Jewish converts were often marginalized and distrusted in fifteenth-century Castile, perhaps Valera believed that the only way to make an argument that might be acceptable to Christians—as well as ward off potential attacks against his own ancestry and orthodoxy—was through biblical allusions; and third, I cannot think of any secular text available to Valera that would have been an authoritative and persuasive voice among his contemporaries.

Valera only dedicates a paragraph to the defense of Muslim converts, but asserts that there are many examples of powerful Islamic nobles and kings: «Muça» (Musa ibn Nusair, 640-716) and «Abdelmón Abderramén» (Abd al-Mu'min, 487-558) were competent warriors (1959: cap. IX, 105a);¹³ and Muhammad was a capable leader who conquered much of Africa and even had victories against the Romans.¹⁴ However, Valera says much less about Muslims for three reasons primarily: first, given the very personal nature of the treatise, he clearly wants to defend Jewish converts with much more vigor, as he hopes to gain and maintain legitimate noble status despite his Jewish ancestry; second, Muslims are still a threat during the middle of the fifteenth century, so he naturally shies away from defending them too much; and third, Valera uses *Estoria de España* for much of his historical information concerning Muslims: however, as it does not give an accurate account of the origins and developments of Islam, he may have seen it as an untrustworthy source, focusing instead on the civic virtues of the Muslim leaders.

The treatise continues its line of arguments when discussing *las armas*. Valera, following Bartolo's *De insigniis et armis* (1358), first differentiates between *armas de dignidad* and *armas de linaje*: the former are only reserved for him who *tiene la dignidad*, while the latter, which Valera shows less interest in, are described as follows:

13.— Cf. *Primera crónica general* (Alfonso x 1906): Musa ibn' Nusair, cap. 308–09, 317–18; Abd al-Mu'min, cap. 658–59.

14.— Cf. *Primera crónica general* (Alfonso x 1906): cap. 466–467, 469, 471–472, 478, 483, 486–487, 493–494.

Armas de linaje: éstas se han en una de quatro maneras: o por herencia de los antecesores, o dadas por el príncipe, o ganadas en batalla, o tomadas por sí mismos. En qualquier manera destas que las armas se hayan, pasan a todos los descendientes legítimos de derecho común. (Valera 1959: cap. IX, 108a)

These arguments and views on *armas* are likewise forwarded in Valera's *Tratado de las armas* (1462-65), where the author makes similar references and even refers to his *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* (Valera 1959b; see especially p. 132-136). Like Valera, Bartolo has limited interest in *armas de linaje*. However, the Perugian does accept the hereditary principle: «Quero qualiter ista arma seu insigna transeant ad successores? Respondeo: quedam sunt unius domus seu agnationis, et ista transeunt ad omnes de illa agnatione descendentes, sive sint heredes patris sive avi, sive non» (Bartolus 1570: §10); nevertheless, there is no discussion of gaining arms in battle, but he only states that they can be given by royal grant. As in the case of Valera's other reliances on Bartolo, he uses the text for his own needs, but is not overly tied to the jurist's objectives or views; rather, Valera updates and contextualizes Bartolo's points for his own purposes. When it comes to who can *ganarse* or *perderse* these *señales*, Valera asserts that *armas de dignidad* are restricted to those who hold the *oficio*, as «en ninguna otra manera ganarse pueden, salvo ganando la dignidad» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 108b). In contrast, *armas de linaje* can be lost in several manners, some of which are the following: «seyendo vencido sin ser muerto o preso» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 108b); «en fuir o las no defender» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 109a); «pierde las armas el que por delictos o malas costumbres pierde la fidalguía, ca perdiendo aquélla pierde todas las preheminiencias que por aquélla se han» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 109a). Beyond these negative aspects, Valera also makes clear that the best *armas de linaje* are the ones given by the monarch:

Aquí conviene notar, segunt Bártulo dize en el logar suso alegado, que las armas dadas por el príncipe son más nobles e de mayor actoridad; en tanto, que si entre dos onbres eguales en dignidad, seyendo en hueste o en otro qualquier manera, oviese contienda, quáles armas devían preceder o ser antepuestas, deben preferir las que fuesen dadas por el príncipe. Asimesmo a quien el príncipe oviese dado armas, no le podía ser vedados que las no troxiese, aunque otro tal las oviese traído antiguamente. (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 108b)

Sed secundum hoc quero, quid relevet habere ista arma ex consensu principis? Respondeo: multum. Primo, quia est maioris nobilitatis, ut dicimus in testamento facto coram principe, c. de testamentis l. Omnium [*Cod.* vi.23.19]. Secundo, quia non potest alius prohibere illi portare [...]. Tertio, quia si duo assumunt eadem arma seu insignia, nec de prioritare nec posterioritate apparet, preferitur qui a principe habuit [...]. Quarto, quia si esset in exercitu vel alio loco et quereretur quis debet precedere, debent precedere [*var.* preferri, praeferre] illius arma que a príncipe concessa sunt [...]. Et predicta intelligo ceteris paribus, scilicet quod isti qui habent arma sint equalis dignitatis, alias preferuntur arma illius qui esset in maiori dignitate. (Bartolus 1570: §9)

Valera follows Bartolo's arguments, but summarizes the overall points here and throughout the chapter, omitting the legal references. Valera also highlights that kings «acostumbren dar armas a los que nuevamente ennoblecen» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 108ab). Even

when considering hereditary *señales*, therefore, Valera defends the monarch's power and legitimacy to create new *linajes*. Moreover, he shows that this is a common European practice (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 108b); and these assertions must be taken seriously considering the extent and duration of Valera's travels across the continent. Interestingly enough, Valera also supports «*armas tomadas por sí*» (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 109a). Essentially, he states that as these emblems are used to recognize someone just as a name is, then everyone has a right to take his own *señal* as long as it is not used by another, citing the *común costumbre* and his experiences to defend such views (Valera 1959: cap. XI, 109b). That is, by universalizing this practice, Valera is opening up to all a once noble and royal prerogative, putting the hereditary practice of both the rich and the poor on the same level. In this section of the treatise on *las armas*, therefore, Valera's further supports the king's authority and the high place of virtue. Nonetheless, in contrast to the rest of the treatise that polemically argues against medieval power structures and views of nobility, Valera is unable to let go of his medieval interpretation of heraldic emblems. Considering the Cuencan's obsession with outward appearances and legitimizing his own claims to nobility before his peers and the general public, it seems that he cannot discard the display of *armas* as a pretentious way of announcing his belonging to the noble class.

Diego de Valera's *Espejo de verdadera nobleza* is a personal and political manifesto. By advocating a new sociopolitical power structure founded on humanistic civic virtues and models, Valera attacks the very core of medieval nobility's claim to authority and prestige. Basing his arguments on medieval Bartolian doctrine, but excising legal references and replacing them with classical ones to give his views a learned flare, Valera attempts to formulate a legal and social theory of nobility in hopes of replacing the defunct, inept medieval conception of knighthood and chivalry with a new one founded on talent, merit, and literary skills; that is, the «clásico ofrece un poderoso *plus* de credibilidad, un apoyo infinitamente más firme, un modelo incomparablemente más convincente» (Cappelli 2014: 16). Like many of the leading Italian humanists who showed a very personal interest in promoting views that would lend themselves to their professional goals and social advancement, Valera used the new humanist ideas to overcome the failures and chaos associated with late medieval Castile; in its place, under the auspices of the royal crown and guided by meritocracy, the Cuencan offered a new sociopolitical model on which to establish a more ethical and just society. However, if egotistical goals were part of his polemical tract, Valera proposes views that, ultimately, help to bring about the modern state, as well as the Spanish absolutist monarchy. By reinterpreting nobility, sociopolitical reality was redefined, opening up the reins of power and prestige to him who could by his own efforts and favorable circumstances seize the opportunity.

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