

# FRANCISCO DE BORJA, PRÍNCIPE DE ESQUILACHE: RUINS POET

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One of the most blatant misstatements in the old *Pequeño Larousse ilustrado* had to be the following: “Esquilache (Francisco de Borja y Aragón, *príncipe de*), poeta español (1581-1658),<sup>1</sup> de gusto culterano, a quien se deben varias *Obras en verso* y el poema épico *Nápoles recuperada*” (1280).<sup>2</sup> To call a poet “de gusto culterano” when he was acclaimed by all his contemporaries to be the paragon of Castilian verse representing precisely the opposite values is simply not to know anything at all about Francisco de Borja, Príncipe de Esquilache. His real role was as the model of what I have called in another place “el estilo llano.”<sup>3</sup> Lope de Vega, who was a close acquaintance of Borja from at least as early as 1598,<sup>4</sup> dedicated his play *La pobreza estimada* to Borja in 1623 and praised him for his support in the dispute with the Cultistic poets, “pues a unos llaman Culteranos, deste nombre, Culto, y a los otros Llanos, eco de Castellanos, cuya llaneza verdadera imitan” (*La pobreza estimada* n.p.). Borja himself, in a verse epistle to the Conde de Valdereis, Governor of Portugal, referred to his own works as “de pies en los linderos Castellanos, / esto que os digo aquí, borro y escribo / con puros versos en cultura llanos (188).”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Borja was a close acquaintance of the other Madrid poets of the time, and was on intimate terms with the likewise anti-Cultistic twins Bartolomé and Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, to whom he dedicated a number of his poems (del Arco).

Given the above well-known facts, why would the anonymous encyclopedist who wrote the entry for “Esquilache” have declared so adamantly that the poet was “de gusto culterano”? The fault lies indisputably with Antonio Gallego Morell, who included his comments on “El Príncipe de Esquilache” within the section *La escuela gongorina* in *Historia General de las Literaturas Hispánicas*.<sup>6</sup> Since then, those who read the histories of literature rather than the works themselves simply assume that Borja is a Cultistic poet.

Nothing could be farther from the truth, which I hope to show herein by examining the seven ruins poems included in the final edition (1663) of Borja’s *Obras en verso*. I have chosen these works because they are either unknown or ignored by most twentieth-century scholars,

even by those who have written extensively on ruins poetry<sup>7</sup> and who have published supposedly complete anthologies of the poems in the genre,<sup>8</sup> and this despite the fact that Borja wrote more poems to ruined cities than anyone else in the Golden Age and has the only generic poem dedicated simply “A unas ruinas.” These poems will reveal that Borja is indeed a poet who practices “el estilo llano,” yet one who also belongs to the stoic *desengaño* school of philosophy along with his better-known friends Francisco de Quevedo and Gabriel Bocángel.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, there is a consistent moral theme of disillusionment throughout most of Borja’s serious poetry, and it is invariably associated with nature and the effects of time on the landscape.

The first ruined-city poem in Borja’s *Obras* is Soneto V, “A la codicia de juntar riquezas”:

Estos del Duero líquidos cristales,  
parto de un monte de la antigua Soria,  
Numancia un tiempo, que su ilustre historia  
conservan de los siglos los anales,  
por blanca arena o peñas desiguales,  
a serle lleva su ambiciosa gloria  
parte del mar, y en él tan acesoria  
que va a morir con pasos naturales.  
No hay fuente o río, en cumbre o vega llana,  
que no los lleve ufano de perdellos  
entre el furor de la inclemencia cana.  
Con ansia corre siempre de acogellos.  
Lo mismo quiere la codicia humana  
cargar de bienes para hundirse en ellos. (3)

The sonnet plays on the *nacer / morir* theme by describing the water that emerges from the very city of Numancia and eventually becomes part of the Duero’s current that runs to the sea. The poem moralizes this sharp image of eroding destruction by referring to the source water as the ambitious glory of Numancia, carried along by the river, and by stating that this glory is just another typical object that dies a natural death in the sea.

Furthermore, the springs and rivers that carry Numancia’s waters along do it proudly and assiduously, thereby accelerating the process of dissolution as much as possible. The last two lines—functioning as a kind of moral colophon—make the comparison broached in the title that human greed also anxiously accumulates material goods, to eventually sink with them in the sea of death. The equivalence is thus between “la antigua Soria” + “Numancia” + “ilustre historia” + “ambiciosa gloria” = “bienes” as one side of an equation and “los

líquidos cristales del Duero” + “fuente” + “río” + “ufano” = “codicia humana” as the other, with both ending a natural death in the sea. This is a new and interesting correlation that fits well with the typical theme of *desengaño* normally associated with ruins poetry.

The second ruined-city poem is Soneto X, “A Sevilla la Vieja”:

De estos campos que visten rubias mieses,  
Itálica es aquél, éste sus muros,  
que entre el arado vil no están seguros  
de la violenta mano de los meses.

La que de aceros, flechas, y paveses  
ceñidos vio sus homenajes duros,  
aún hoy del Betis los cristales puros  
ni la respetan mansos ni cortesés.

Deshecha yace en dudas y opiniones  
si fue otro tiempo Itálica gloriosa  
que honraron tantos triunfos y blasones.

¡O fuerza de los años poderosa!  
pues muros y arcos en olvido pones,  
¿qué harás de Silvia, solamente hermosa? (6)

It is similar to the many other poems dedicated to the ruins of Itálica, in particular to Juan de Arguijo’s “A las ruinas de Itálica” (Vranich 43), with which it shares agricultural imagery. Borja’s Itálica is a tilled field whose walls are subject to desecration from the lowly plow as well as from the violence of time (here personified as a destructive entity), and—as in the Numancia poem—there is a river (Betis) whose pure waters eat away at Itálica’s walls. All is undone and destroyed. Here also Borja uses the last two lines to shift the theme of general disillusionment caused by time’s destructive ways to the specifically human function of Silvia’s fading beauty. If time can destroy the walls of a large city like Itálica, what will it do to Silvia, who has only carnal beauty?

The next ruined-city poem is not until Soneto CI, “A las ruinas de Cartago”:

Deshechos muros, animadas piedras,  
que así callando amenazáis a Roma,  
y vuestra injuria coronada asoma  
con verdes lazos de ambiciosas hiedras,  
¡o sacro honor! que en la fatiga medras,  
venciendo al oro y al precioso aroma  
que el justo aprecio en el incendio toma,  
y tú en el ocio en crédito desmedras.

Admire tu piedad el<sup>10</sup> caminante,

tus prendas guarde el africano suelo,  
 Cartago ilustre, ejemplo de mudanza.  
 Si fue vencer a Roma honor bastante,  
 ¿por qué subiste a penetrar el cielo  
 y a dar a sus estrellas la venganza? (51)

This is a poem decidedly different from the earlier two. While it retains something of a natural aspect in the reference to the ambitious ivy which crowns the remains of Carthage's walls (an ironic commentary on the symbolic value of ivy as eternal recognition), its message is neither one of disillusionment nor of any kind of moral philosophy. The point rather seems to be a historical comment on Carthage's famous obstinance at opposing Roman hegemony in the western Mediterranean and which persists in the ruined city's efforts to avenge the injury of its destruction by Rome.

The first quartet is, in effect, a series of paradoxes that juxtapose, in line one, the inert with the animate, in line two, threatening words with silence, and, in line three, receiving an injury with being crowned. The "injuria" is the burning of the city by Rome, which in the second quartet leads to another juxtaposition with "medras" in line five and "desmedras" in line eight, while in between these words is the paradoxical image of a city still smoking from its fiery destruction that warrants more honor from the heavens ("*sacro* honor") than do the gold and incense proffered to the gods on Rome's altars, thereby conquering ("venciendo") those sacrifices with its immolation.

In the first tercet, Borja directs two imperatives to the city, commanding the pilgrim to admire the piety (referring to the fiery sacrifice-incense in the earlier quartet) and the earth to guard the treasures (referring to the ruins-gold in the earlier quartet) of this famous example of Fortune's whimsy. Finally, Borja creates the final paradox of the sonnet by questioning why Carthage attempts to avenge the injury done it by invading the heavens, occluding the stars with the dense smoke of its own destruction, when its many victories over Rome had already earned it eternal honor.

The overarching conceit in Soneto CI is thus one based on the idea of avenging an injury ("injuria" — "venganza") rather than one of disillusionment or moral rectitude. This separates it from all the other Carthage poems, which emphasize only the deleterious effects of time on even apparently permanent institutions, and makes it more an example of justified obstinance.

Soneto CIII, without a title, was certainly placed across the page from "A las ruinas de Cartago" because it treats the same theme, and

here also the topic of disillusionment is related neither to nature nor to time nor to a moral question, but rather to a historical reference.

Mario, después que el límite africano  
 pisó, desobligado a la fortuna,  
 y en parte a sus tristezas oportuna,  
 miró a Cartago en el desierto llano.  
 —Ruinas<sup>11</sup> —dijo—, ejemplos de la mano  
 del tiempo, que hasta el cerco de la luna  
 no consintió jamás firmeza alguna,  
 a que el poder caduco aspira en vano,  
 aliento sois a la desdicha mía,  
 que siempre alegra<sup>12</sup> la enemiga suerte  
 tener en sus afrentas compañía,  
 mas no igualdad, porque en rigor tan fuerte,  
 si el más soberbio mal en su porfía  
 le cura el tiempo, a mi dolor, la muerte. (52)

The source for this statement by “Mario” is probably a similar sonnet by Fernando de Herrera, “Del peligro del mar, del hierro abierto” (Vranich 29), although Borja would have certainly known also the *locus classicus* in Plutarch’s life of Caius Marius, a Roman general and seven-times consul who was well-known by Spanish humanists as Scipio’s companion at the siege of Numancia.<sup>13</sup> The man must have interested Borja, because of only two historical ballads in his poetic corpus, one concerns Caius Marius (Romance XXVII, “A Caio Mario desterrado” [424-25]). The episode in Plutarch is as follows. Although an old and broken man and honored with all the wealth and glory he could desire, Marius insisted on leading the troops in a war against Mithridates and sided with Sulpicius against Sylla to do so. Sylla then marched against Marius and forced him to flee by sea. Marius eventually landed at Carthage, where he implored the Roman governor Sextilius for refuge, to be summarily refused. Upon hearing of the refusal from Sextilius’s messenger, “Marius answered him with a deep sigh: ‘Go tell him that you have seen Caius Marius sitting in exile among the ruins of Carthage’; appositely applying the example of the fortune of that city to the change of his own condition” (*Plutarch’s Lives* 2.108).

As did Herrera (who actually followed the source more closely than Borja), our poet translates the historical moment with its dialogical context into an address to Carthage itself, adjusting thereby the moment to the standard apostrophe to a ruined city used by all the other poets who practiced the genre. Also as did Herrera (but not Plutarch), our poet here and in Romance XXVIII views Mario sympathetically as an *exemplum* (both Herrera and Borja use the word “ejemplo”) of adverse

fortune; but where the fall from fortune's summits is the sole topic in Herrera's poem, Borja again introduces the metaphysical concept of time. As time eventually cured the prideful ambitions of Carthage, so death will cure the pain Mario feels in his exile. The ruins thus serve as a prompt for Mario to consider his own mortality rather than as merely a similar case of fortune's inexorable destitution of the proud and mighty.

Soneto CXIX, "A las ruinas de Sagunto," is an apostrophe to the Iberian spirit of loyalty to Rome in the defence of the city against Hannibal's troops.

Vivos al tiempo, que acabó su mano,  
 deshechas torres y asolados muros,  
 de nueva injuria vivirán seguros  
 los cielos y el poder del africano.  
 Tu nombre (o gran Sagunto) en este llano  
 conserva la piedad, no en bronces duros,  
 sino en ruinas y en ejemplos puros  
 del honor propio y del amor romano.  
 Firmeza y cuerpo ofrezco a tu memoria  
 si la igualdad honrosa de fortunas  
 de tenerme a su lado no se afrenta,  
 y si pretende lágrimas tu gloria,  
 tanto lastima quien su agravio cuenta  
 como teatros, arcos, y columnas. (60)

As José Lara Garrido has explained in a perceptive study of Sagunto poems,<sup>14</sup> the poet sees Sagunto as a kindred spirit in the city's ability to remain firm and honorable while under siege, something the poet also wishes to do in regards to an unnamed offence inflicted upon his honor.

The final ruined-city poem, Soneto CLXXX, is much lighter in spirit.

Aquí fue un tiempo Troya, Mariquilla,  
 y las hermosas letras son borrones  
 adonde la beldad tome lecciones,  
 aunque esté tan deshecha la cartilla.  
 ¿Cómo trocó tu ilustre maravilla  
 en plata del cabello los doblones,  
 y, a entrambos desmintiendo, ahora pones  
 los rizos que encerraba una capilla?  
 Del tiempo pasa la veloz carrera,  
 mas de ella no podrás vivir quejosa,  
 pues no afrentó tu verde primavera.  
 ¿Cómo tanto duró la flor hermosa?

pues nunca su hermosura presevera  
si llegan muchas manos a la rosa. (91)

This untitled sonnet is an apostrophe to Mariquilla, an old woman who has attempted to hide her age by tinting her silver hair blond and adding lots of curls. Nevertheless, the tercets are very serious moral statements about time's logical destruction of beauty, something that Mariquilla wrongly is attempting to thwart.

In summary, Borja's six ruined-city sonnets run the gamut of traditional sites (Troy, Carthage, Numantia, Sagunto, Itálica) and preach the same theme of disillusionment about the effects of time on our lives as did the more well-known poems by Borja's contemporaries. But Borja has another ruins poem that breaks the traditional mold in a number of ways.

Canción III  
*A unas ruinas*

Ruinas fatigadas de los años,  
tristezas mudas ofreceros puedo,  
pues siendo naturales desengaños  
os hace nuestro olvido ocioso miedo.  
Si fuistes edificio,  
huesped del sol que os animó propicio,  
si hermosa pesadumbre  
donde naciendo trasladó su lumbre  
los mismos rayos que os vistieron antes  
lisonjas fabricando de diamantes  
cuando al cielo amanecen,  
miserias vuestras sin piedad le ofrecen,  
siendo la propia luz que os representa  
honra en la vida y en la muerte afrenta.  
¡O luciente embarazo de los vientos  
y de esta selva honor, lustre, y decoro,  
quién vio afrentar los montes tus cimientos  
y a la cuna del sol tus campos de oro!  
Y aquí entre humildes señas  
las más incultas y erizadas peñas,  
cuando las mira el día,  
se afrentan de su inútil compañía.  
¿Quién, mudas piedras, lo advirtiera entonces,  
mirando entre los mármoles y bronces,  
con engaño escondida,  
la mayor ignorancia de la vida,  
que levantar sin miedo de su ofensa  
eternos muros contra el cielo piensa?

¡O cuántas veces al soberbio engaño  
 mostráis que puede la mayor belleza  
 pasar de presunción a desengaño  
 y a lástima el temor de la grandeza!  
 No ve la edad gallarda  
 las prendas tristes que la selva guarda  
 y el poder insolente  
 besar los pies lo que adornó la frente,  
 viviendo sus coronas vencedoras  
 sujetas al imperio de las horas,  
 y a su fiera inclemencia,  
 con más dolor y menos resistencia,  
 siendo menor empresa a sus asaltos  
 la humana pompa que los muros altos.

No sois de sus blasones hermosura,  
 ornato inculto, sí, viva memoria  
 de cuanto entre los años asegura  
 su inútil vida la ambiciosa gloria.  
 Del tiempo sois trofeo,  
 freno y temor del bárbaro deseo,  
 que afrentar determina  
 de siglos tantos la común ruina  
 sin ver atento a sus prolijos daños  
 pasar los tiempos y morir los años,  
 mostrando a las edades  
 en mal formadas rústicas verdades  
 con cuanta admiración en breve espacio  
 murió despojo el que nació palacio.

Si atentas voces a mi vida distes,  
 yo, piedras, agradezco la advertencia;  
 si lágrimas pedís, lágrimas tristes  
 os dan mi desengaño y mi paciencia.  
 Si es del tiempo en la injuria  
 alivio siempre la común injuria,  
 cualquier ciudad o templo,  
 si no es consuelo, servirá de ejemplo;  
 que al hombre en sus ruinas naturales  
 aun no le quedan de qué fue señales,  
 y guarda destruído  
 estrecha cárcel de perpetuo olvido,  
 y a vosotros os buscan verdes yedras,  
 y lo que fuistes soís, lloradas piedras.

*Canción, lo dicho baste,  
 y cuando más la envidia te contraste,  
 si a proseguir te inclinas,  
 más tendrás que decir a más ruinas. (276-78)*



The disparities abound in this unusual poem. First, it is a long, seventy-line apostrophe with a four-line coda in the typical *canCIÓN* format (also used by Caro for his “A Itálica”); but rather than being directed to a particular ruined city, as are all other ruins poems, this one is titled generically “A unas ruinas.” Second, although this poem has the standard *desengaño* theme linked integrally to the concept of time (as do all Borja’s poems), the sense of nature that permeates every strophe is one of a vital and independent force in one’s life, and it adds a new factor untouched by other poets. It is not uncommon to find personifications of ruins as “fatigadas,” “mudas,” or “tristes,” nor is it uncommon to refer to the birth and death of edifices (“murió despojo el que nació palacio”), nor is it unique to give to ruins “voces” which alert the spectator to the effects of time, as did Caro also in a more sophisticated way in his “A Itálica.”<sup>15</sup> What is unusual is the emphasis on “naturales desengaños” at the beginning of the poem (as opposed to both a supernatural disillusionment through divine illumination and the functional disillusionment of errant actions, as in the Baroque picaresque novels). Borja is aware—and makes his reader also aware—of the difference between an iconic mechanism like a ruined palace—typical of the genre but also of the popular emblem literature of the time<sup>16</sup>—and a functional mishap or divine visitation. The ruined palace in his poem becomes a natural “composition of place” to be contemplated as a symbol of disillusionment about the effects of time on things. The palace can thus be treated as a living object—an animate body—whose youth is spent as a host to the sun<sup>17</sup> and whose adulthood brings honors and eventually proud haughtiness about the permanence of human pomp (“la humana pompa”), to then be affronted by the prolific damages of time, to end as a ruin what began as a palace.

Only Francisco de Quevedo in his widely-acclaimed “Miré los muros de la patria mía” produced a similar complete equivalence of a ruined structure with the human body (Darst). The last strophe of Borja’s poem, however, deviates from Quevedo’s sonnet by acknowledging the functional purpose of a ruined edifice to awaken the spectator to the end which awaits the human body.

Much like the last stanza of Caro’s “A Itálica,” the last strophe of Borja’s “A unas ruinas” is an apostrophe of thankfulness to the mute stones for the attentive calls they voiced to awaken the poet to the deconstructive nature of time. The ruined palace, returned now to its natural state of humble rocks, is an emblem of the natural ruins that are the human body. Even more disconcerting, remarks the poet, is that nothing will remain of the body nor of the person who inhabited it, and the palace at least remains as ivy-covered stones.

"A unas ruinas" thus functions as an *alarum* to the proud youth deceived into thinking that the beautiful structure of his present existence will last forever. The contemplation of the ruined palace initiates a series of ruminations about places of honor ("el sol"), wealth ("diamantes"), fame ("mármoles," "bronces," "eternos muros"), youthful vigor ("la mayor belleza," "la edad gallarda") and power ("el poder insolente"),<sup>18</sup> which end in the *desengaño* about the permanence of them all. Borja's poem therefore covers all the material usually included in the genre, ingeniously organized around the simple palace/body comparison.

This poem and the six sonnets establish Borja as an important Golden Age poet who practices the very best "estilo llano" of the time—acknowledged repeatedly by his contemporaries—and who expresses directly the prevalent conservative seignorial philosophy of *desengaño* proffered by all the great Golden Age moralists. Perhaps the very mainstream nature of Borja's thought and style is what has diminished scholarly appreciation of his work; although, as these ruins poems make apparent, much can be learned about the inner workings of the Golden Age poetic psyche by examining the evidence of poets like Francisco de Borja, Príncipe de Esquilache, who, while forgotten today, were cited by their contemporaries as the very best of their generation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>For a complete biography of Borja's life to 1621, see Ángel González Palencia. There is no reliable account of Borja's life after his return to Spain from his tenure as Viceroy of Peru.

<sup>2</sup>The new multicolored Larousses now state only that Borja was a "poeta de corte clasicista."

<sup>3</sup>*Imitatio* 51-82; and "Las palabras y las cosas en la iniciación del cultismo español."

<sup>4</sup>Lope directed the Prologue of *La Dragontea* to Borja in that year. See *Obras sueltas* 169-75.

<sup>5</sup>"Edición postrera revista y muy añadida." All references are to this final edition.

<sup>6</sup>Although Gallego vacillates about whether Borja really practices *culteranismo* or *conceptismo* (sic!), he closes the section by hypothesizing on "cuanto existe de común entre su musa popular y la de Góngora" (387).

<sup>7</sup>Specifically, Bruce W. Wardropper, Félix Fernández Murga, and Begoña López Bueno.

<sup>8</sup>The only monographic volume is still the one done by Stanko B. Vranich.

<sup>9</sup>For a thorough study of the Christian-Stoic philosophy of *desengaño* in seventeenth-century Spain, see the excellent study by Maricarmen Martínez.

<sup>10</sup>All three editions (1648, 1654, 1663) have "al."

<sup>11</sup>Borja consistently uses “ru-i-nas” as a three-syllable word.

<sup>12</sup>All three texts have “alarga.”

<sup>13</sup>In effect, he is the character Cayo Mario in Cervantes’s *La Numancia*.

<sup>14</sup>Borja’s poem is analyzed pp. 254-56.

<sup>15</sup>For a complete interpretation of this poem, see my study “The Conceptual Design of Rodrigo Caro’s ‘A Itálica.’”

<sup>16</sup>See, for example, Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Emblemas morales*, Centuria I, número 9 (*cuncta fluunt*).

<sup>17</sup>An image Elías Carpena considers related to Borja’s stay among the Incas in Peru from 1615 to 1621 as the royal viceroy (27).

<sup>18</sup>It is probably not a coincidence that these five acquired values are identical to the wealth, power, high offices, renown, and pleasures of the body denounced repeatedly by Boethius in his *Consolation of Philosophy*.

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