

Historia magistra vitae: history as education for life in early modern Spain

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this article is to show the importance of history as an education and example for a good way of living in modern Spain, for the people and especially for princes. Therefore, first, we characterize history in the Modern Age and how it was constructed to show how different it is compared to nowadays. Next, we show the concept of history as a teacher of life in specific treaties on that subject throughout modern Europe. People and especially kings had to learn from good examples how to behave in life and from bad ones how not to. Afterwards, we focused particularly on Spanish historians and their chronicles, dividing the analysis into two parts. First, we show how the chroniclers in their introductions or prologues to the reader or patron explain what history is all about. The same arguments of the theoretical treatises appear again when the authors introduce their works. Second, we focus on how the same authors give special emphasis to the kings and how their works are supposed to contribute to their education, by learning from the examples and deeds of their Royal peers and predecessors.

KEYWORDS. Early modern Spain; history of education; history of historiography; chronicles; princely education.

Historia magistra vitae: historia como educación de la vida en la España moderna

RESUMEN. El objetivo de este artículo es demostrar la importancia de la historia como educación y ejemplo para una buena manera de vivir en la España moderna, para la gente y especialmente para príncipes. Por ello, primero, caracterizamos la historia en la Edad Moderna y cómo se construía para mostrar lo diferente que es comparado con hoy en día. A continuación, mostramos el concepto de historia como maestra de la vida en tratados específicos sobre esa temática en toda la Europa moderna. La gente y sobre todo los reyes debían aprender de los buenos ejemplos cómo comportarse en la vida y de los malos cómo no hacerlo. Después, nos enfocamos particularmente en los historiadores españoles y sus crónicas, dividiendo el análisis en dos partes. Primero, mostramos cómo los cronistas en sus introducciones o prólogos al lector o al mecenas explican de qué se trata la historia. Los mismos argumentos de los tratados teóricos aparecen de nuevo cuando los autores introducen a sus obras. Segundo, nos enfocamos en que los mismos autores dan un énfasis especial a los reyes y cómo sus obras deben contribuir a su educación, al aprender de los ejemplos de sus antecesores, ya que los reyes solamente o al menos principalmente aprenderían de las hazañas de otros reyes, es decir, sus iguales.

PALABRAS CLAVE. España moderna; historia de la educación; historia de la historiografía; crónicas; educación de príncipes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Around 1630 Philip IV of Spain, the most powerful monarch at the time, started to translate the *Storia d'Italia* by Francesco Guicciardini, a chronicle written almost one century earlier, which dealt with Italian history between 1494 and 1532. He did that in order to better understand his own present. In fact, Guicciardini's work is mainly about the wars between the Spanish and French kings over different Italian territories. In 1633, when Philip IV wrote the prologue, the Thirty Years War was already in its fifteenth year and Spain was on the verge of entering new war with France, which was declared in 1635. In this prologue, Philipp IV explains that he wanted to translate Guicciardini, because the past "is not only alike, but there is a lot to learn from them"¹ (Philipp IV, 1889, XVIII). It was probably not a coincidence that shortly before the king started his translation, Francisco de Quevedo had warned him in 1628 that his enemies were producing dangerous writings which aimed to dispute the Spanish domination in Italy in favour of France (Arredondo, 2011, p. 31). Kings often consulted historical chronicles for advice, yet it was very unique for a King to pen a translation by their own hand (Rivero Rodríguez, 2017, p. 105).

As we see, the goal to consult history books was not so much to learn about the past, but to better understand the present. This has to do with a completely different conception of history in early modern times, which to explain is precisely the objective of this article. We will show how history was understood as an educational guideline to life, especially for kings, princes and noblemen in general. In order to do that, we will show how history was constructed in those days, how special treaties in history conceive it and how historians introduce into their works explaining the goals they are pursuing.

2. HISTORY IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

As I already indicated, early modern history was different from today in several ways. To begin, it was not an academic subject in modern sense, but a recompilation of information and facts or what was assumed to be facts. This means that it was not about revealing new information about the past, but rather repeating and confirming information already written down by other authors.

Chroniclers claimed to write history from the beginning of the earth. This implied a different periodization of time than historians do it today. The current division in antiquity, middle ages and modern times was made for the first time in 1702 by Christoph Cellarius in his work *Historia Universalis*. Since then, the different western historiographies divide time grosso modo in three or four major periods, depending on the sharper or softer cut around 1800 (Gloël, 2016). In 16th and 17th centuries, however, chroniclers maintained a traditional division of time of the six ages of the world, all of them based on the Bible: the first from Adam to Noah, the second from Noah to Abraham, the third from Abraham to David, the fourth from David to the Babylonian Exile, the fifth from the Babylonian Exile to the birth of Christ, which started the sixth one which was lasting until the current present of the authors (Ferdinandy, 1984, p. 25). Most of the events during those periods used to come with specific dates, orientated usually to the creation of the earth, the deluge or the birth of Christ. This biblical influence was not limited to chronicles, but also present in political treaties or other kind of works (Simon i Tarrés, 2016, p. 501).

This periodization, however, was not an invention of the Renaissance, but the continuation of a long medieval tradition, going back to its first use by Saint Augustine around 400 (Goetz, 2002; Villa Prieto, 2015). The frame set by the Bible furthermore provoked a strong sense of certainty

1. "son, no solo parecidos, sino que hay mucho que aprender de aquellos". All translations, unless indicated otherwise, are mine.

of its content, given that what was written in the Bible was generally acknowledged as truth. It was also not a phenomenon limited to Spain, but present in almost any part of Europe (Fueter, 1936, p. 222).

To fill the unavoidable gaps in the knowledge about very ancient periods, especially the centuries after the deluge, different myths were invented to make the chronicles look complete (Buescu, 1991, p. 50). Julio Caro Baroja (1992, p. 97) states for the Spanish case that the 16th and 17th centuries were a time of great falsifications of history. For example, the time after the deluge they created a history of repopulation, organized by Tubal, the first King of Spain, Noah's grandson and again a biblical figure (Gloël, 2017). Around 1500 a whole mythical dynasty of successors was invented and with that a whole monarchical tradition in ancient Spain (Gloël, 2020). Thanks to that, readers could look back in history to always find the same monarchical style of government, which could orientate the people in the past and this way they could learn even from those remote times.

As we can see, history was much more about facts than about research and the past, in a certain way it's adapted to the present. This made it possible for history to be an example to follow, given that the circumstances always seemed to be similar and the way the important people acted could serve as a model to their own society. This would be especially true for kings, noblemen and people linked to the government, because the chronicles used to be divided into the reigns of the different kings and those kings themselves were usually put into the centre of events and actions.

3. THEORETICAL TREATIES ON HISTORY AND HISTORIANS

The famous quote *historia magistra vitae* is originally from Cicero (106-43 b.C), expressed in his work *De Oratore* (II, 36; 1860: 92), published in 55 b.C. and dedicated to the role of public speakers: "By what other voice than that of the orator, is history, the witness of time, the light of truth, the life of memory, the directress of life, the herald of antiquity, committed to immortality?". As we can see, he meant to express that the study of the past should be considered as a lesson to present and future. It would turn out that there is a bond between history and truth and this truth is evidently who ultimately should teach us. All would be possible as human nature is considered to be constant, which would lead to a history that repeats itself over and over again and which could therefore be taken as an education for life. As we can see, the very concept of the relationship between past and present is completely different and opposed to the present idea of uniqueness of every moment.

This idea of history would be maintained for almost 2.000 years, until the 18th century. Still, in 1735, the *Großes Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, a very important German encyclopaedia at that time, stated that "on the things we cannot experience for ourselves, we have to follow the experience of others"². That means, that history would be the ensemble of experiences made by others, which we could learn. It was finally the French Revolution (1789) that gave history a new meaning and understanding of the past. History wouldn't show anymore what to do in certain or specific situations, but it would be the complete result of the events of the nation (Koselleck, 1979, p. 56). Or as Karl August Malchus, a bavarian serving Napoleon in Westphalia, put it in 1808, in this new state founded by his master, there is no past (Ramírez, 2008, p. 172). Experience, and with it history, would lose its orientating role to people because of this new unique concept of history just acquired, which erases the possibility of learning anything from the past (Dutt and Koselleck, 2003, p. 220).

2. "Was wir selber nicht erfahren können, darin müssen wir der Erfahrung anderer folgen".

Even though the meaning of history changed little from Cicero to the French Revolution, it can't be said that it was simply one and the same during this whole time. In the middle ages, important authors such as Isidore of Sevilla (560-636) did not include *historia magistra vitae* among the definitions of history, despite the fact that he used Cicero's work as reference. As María Belén Castañón Moreschi (2013, p. 44) points out, history as *magistra vitae* acquired a renewed force in the context of Italian Renaissance. This time consists, among other aspects, of the incorporation of ancient Greek and Roman legacy into the Christian world view (Burke, 1998).

In this new Renaissance context there were several authors inside and outside Spain who wrote extensive treaties on history and historians. In Florence, the very cradle of Italian and European Renaissance, Niccolò Machiavelli wrote about the importance of history when he discusses the work of the ancient Roman historian Titus Livius in his main work *Discourses on Livy*, written around 1517. He criticised the common attitude to admire antiquity, its protagonists, its events and its legacy without learning from their examples:

“When we consider the general respect for antiquity, and how often — to say nothing of other examples — a great price is paid for some fragments of an antique statue, which we are anxious to possess to ornament our houses with, or to give to artists who strive to imitate them in their own works; and when we see, on the other hand, the wonderful examples which the history of ancient kingdoms and republics presents to us, the prodigies of virtue and of wisdom displayed by the kings, captains, citizens, and legislators who have sacrificed themselves for their country, — when we see these, I say, more admired than imitated, or so much neglected that not the least trace of this ancient virtue remains, we cannot but be at the same time as much surprised as afflicted” (Machiavelli, 1882, pp. 93-94).

Nevertheless, this is not a call for blind imitation, but for learning. As Anna Maria Cabrini (1998) has shown in her study, in Machiavelli's texts there is also room for antimodels in Roman history and to learn from them could avoid or at least postpone a similar decadence the Roman Empire ended up suffering. This way, Machiavelli actually gives history an educating function, given that one can learn from good and bad examples, how to act and how not to. This is probably also why he uses the plural “histories” rather than the singular, as he does, for example in his work about Florence, given that every event constitutes a history and either a good or a bad example to learn from.

Also in other parts of Europe, important authors reflected on the role of history and historians. In France it was Jean Bodin who published in 1566 in Latin the book *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem* (Method for an easy understanding of history). From the background of his jurist formation he considered history as the best way to learn how to establish good laws (Desan, 1985, p. 126). This is very important in case of the monarchs, given that they were considered universal judges in that time. As Marie-Dominique Couzinet (1996, p. 19) puts it, Bodin “places history in the center of a philosophical project of the totalization of knowledge”³. So Bodin put history above all other sciences, because by learning from it, people would be able to enlighten their own present and even their future. Given his universal intellectual formation, Bodin is able to do a theological, humanist and jurisdictional reflection at the same time and to propose an integral history capable of covering all kinds of human experiences (Mesnard, 1950, p. 321).

3. “place l'Histoire au centre d'un projet philosophique de totalisation du savoir”.

In England it was the young Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), long before he wrote the *Leviathan*, who in 1629 published his translation of the famous *Peloponnesian War* by the ancient Greek historian Thucydides (460-400 b.C.). His definition of history is a completely educational one, similar to other authors already discussed: “For the principal and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by the knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future” (Hobbes, 1843: VII). And he adds immediately that no historian had fulfilled this task better than his author to translate, Thucydides (Hobbes, 1843, VIII). As Robin Sowerby (1998, p. 155) has shown, what Hobbes says on history can be considered as an echo of Thucydides himself who had stated that the hope he carried for his work would be to outlive time and teach future generations.

Hobbes himself seemed to have put into practice his own recommendation, given that researchers have found important influences of the Greek historian on Hobbes’ philosophical and political thinking (Klosko and Rice, 1985). And it was probably no coincidence that he translated the work he did at the time he did it. Just as his contemporary, the already quoted King Philip IV of Spain, Hobbes did see the similarities to his own time. Let us remember that the war Thucydides wrote about, lasted from 431 to 404 b.C. and Hobbes found himself, at the moment he published his translation, in the middle of what later would be called the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Hobbes was certainly familiar with the ongoing war, since he translated several diplomatic papers between 1615 and 1628 (Wilkinson, 2019, p. 113). He believed in the possibility or even necessity to learn from similar situations in the past, however remote this past may be.

In Spain, where our focus lies, there were several books published whose authors wrote specifically on history and historians. According to Santiago Montero Díaz (1948, XVI), it was in Spain where chroniclers wrote “most freely and most widely”⁴ on the issues of historiography, a fact that he interprets as a Spanish superiority over other nations in this field at that moment.

In 1557 Sebastián Fox Morcillo published *De historiae institutione dialogus* (Dialogue on the institution of histories). Before that he had already written comments on Plato and Aristotle reclaiming their teachings. His treaty calls for a commitment with truth, something only achievable if an author remains impartial before the events he writes about (Fox Morcillo, 1557, p. 2). The need to be neutral was highly esteemed in any kind of text in early modern times (Granduque José, 2014, p. 199). This is why some chroniclers criticized historians with an official position such as official chronicler of a kingdom, which was supposed to compromise their impartiality. Richard Kagan (2009, p. 4) in his major work on early modern Spanish chroniclers reminds us of the judgement made by the Genoese historian Girolamo Franchi di Conestaggio (1530-1616) who called those official historians as “commissioned to lie”, given that they would not stick to the truth, but to what the crown wants them to write.

The Aragonese chronicler Bartolomé de Argensola was as a matter of fact a historian who tried to obtain in 1590 the position of official chronicler of the Kingdom of Aragon. To achieve this, he wrote a treaty called *Sobre las cualidades que ha de tener un perfecto cronista* (About the qualities a perfect chronicler should possess), dedicated to the Aragonese members of parliament. He distinguishes the historian from the poet explaining that the latter could write whatever he wanted, while the chronicler acts by divine providence to write what actually happened in the monarchies (Argensola, 1889, pp. 257-261). His task would be to fight against oblivion and to keep alive everything worthy of being preserved. He warns about the risk to become partial and to lose this truth when a chronicler writes about his own homeland (Argensola, 1889, p. 269). In this sense, Argensola is aware of the necessity to write impartial, so history can fulfill its role to teach in the present.

4. “Más libre y ampliamente”

Maybe the most complete treaty on history in early modern Spain was written in 1611 by Luis Cabrera de Córdoba (1559-1623) who lived many years at the royal court of Philip II and Philip III, writing several historiographical works (García López, 1998). In the first chapter about the importance of history, the author highlights the educational function: "Who looks closely on the history of ancient times and keeps what it teaches, will have the light for the things of the future, because the world is made up of one single way"⁵ (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, p. 1). According to the author its nobility lies in its eternity, which would give life to the memory and this way become a universal teacher for life (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, p. 5). He even gives his own definition: "I say that history is the narration of the truth, told by wise men in order to teach for a good life"⁶ (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, p. 11). This means that it would take exceptional people to be historians and if they are, it can teach everything one needs to learn. Cabrera de Córdoba defines therefore a lot of qualities a good historian would have to possess. Among many others he has to know about almost any possible subject, he has to recognize the good and the bad in any given author and he needs to have a good writing himself (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, pp. 15-16). These are essential qualities to produce history that can teach, because *magistra vitae* has to be capable of orientating people in any matter; It must show which examples are to be followed and which are to be avoided presented in a well written way to be easily understood. Therefore, he concludes, the purpose of history is not only to avoid that great things may be forgotten, but its fundamental goal is public utility, because by teaching how to live a good life contributes essentially to a good society and a good government (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, pp. 19-20).

6. HISTORY AS *MAGISTRA VITAE* IN SPANISH CHRONICLES

In this part we will show that those theories and principles are not only theories written down in theoretical treaties, but that the very same chroniclers thought likewise and adhered to them in their historiographical works. In 1595 Diego Pérez de Mesa published an extended version of Pedro de Medinas *Grandezas y cosas memorables de España* (1548), he added a second part and a new prologue. In this prologue he refers to the usefulness of history. Pérez de Mesa compares the life of men without history to the life of children. He uses this analogy, because according to him those children wouldn't know about the things of the past nor about the things yet to come (Pérez de Mesa, 1595: prologue without pagination). Once again we observe the connection between past, present and future and that only the knowledge of the past teaches us to understand what the future brings.

About 20 years earlier Ambrosio de Morales had published his *La Coronica General de España* (1574). He was Philip II official chronicler and his work was in fact the continuation of the chronicle written by Florián de Ocampo, one of Morales predecessors, thirty years before. He explains that the history is justly praised because of its many important and useful things for human life. These things would be worth to be written over and over again. With these words, Morales justifies to "write history that has already been written"⁷. It could give more certainty to the things and sometimes those things could be said more beautifully (Morales, 1574: prologue without pagination). Here we can see that a work on history is not supposed to reveal something newly researched, but rather to reinforce what has already been said. The only amendment it could make is to explain something more clearly, so it could easier be understood and learnt from. As Morales (1574: prologue without pagination) himself states, the fundamental importance of history is the fact that it has to be the example to follow.

5. "El que mira la historia de los antiguos tiempos atentamente, y lo que enseñan guarda; tiene luz para las cosas futuras, pues una misma de mundo es toda".

6. "Yo digo, es la historia narración de verdades por hombre sabio, para enseñar a bien vivir".

7. "escribir historia, que ya está escrita".

Four years after Pérez de Mesa, the famous Jesuit Juan de Mariana published his *Historia General de España*, a translation of his book written in Latin a couple of years earlier. His objective was to preserve the greatness of Spain for eternity, because in his opinion history maintains itself while all the other greatness and memories would vanish as time goes by (Mariana, 1854, LII). So only history can assure the preservation of great deeds and the people who did them, and only history can assure that future generations can learn from them.

In 1678 the *Cataluña Ilustrada*, by Estevan de Corbera, was published, although it must have been written much earlier since the author had died in 1635. For him, history is the teacher of life and the mirror of all that has happened. To be a teacher for life, the author goes on, it has to stay away from the fables and tales, because not everybody would be able to distinguish between those and the truth (Corbera, 1678, p. 7).

At the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century the Portuguese chronicler Bernardo de Brito composed several of his works. It has to be remembered that at that time Portugal was part of Spain, not in a political sense even though the crowns were united, but in a cultural and geographic one. Spain in early modern days referred to the whole Iberian Peninsula, which was divided politically in several kingdoms (Castile, Aragon, Catalonia, Valencia, Portugal etc.), although they all shared the same monarch (Gloël, 2018).

In 1597 Brito published the first volume of the monumental work *Monarchia Lusitana* and in 1603 the much smaller *Elógios dos Reis de Portugal*. In the latter work, he explains that ancient people had history in such high esteem that it was carefully regulated by laws as to who was allowed to write it, giving examples from ancient Rome and Alexander the Great (Brito, 1603, prologue without pagination). In the *Monarchia Lusitana*, Brito uses a similar entrance to praise history by writing that the ancient people, in order to express the excellence, dignity and greatness of history, used to call it the soul of virtue (Brito, 1597, prologue without pagination). The analogy with the human body would consist in that the body wouldn't be perpetual without a soul, in the same way the great deeds and achievements of humanity would be doomed to rest in a cemetery without history, which would be the one to make them eternal. In this educational sense, Brito affirms that history would offer a thousand things to learn from and that nothing it teaches could be dismissed without a very good reason (Brito, 1597, prologue without pagination).

Brito would publish the second part in 1609, but his life would not last long enough to finish the *Monarchia Lusitana*, so António Brandão took over and in 1632 the third part, written by him, was printed. In the tradition of his predecessor, he too lauded history in his prologue. He speaks about the useful and necessary lesson that history teaches, alluding to Plutarch. In order to have that lesson rightly taught, it is necessary to distinguish the truth from the false, something not always easy when it comes to ancient things (Brandão, 1632, prologue without pagination). Brandão (1632, prologue without pagination) thinks that his work does improve Portuguese history, as he claims to have incorporated several things unknown until that moment and his book would represent now "the truth of Portuguese history"⁸.

Even at the beginning of the 18th century we can find the Catalan chronicler Narcís Feliu de la Penya who characterizes history in this very same way. The prologue of the first volume of his *Anales de Cataluña* initiates with the following words of praise: "History is the living memory, teacher of life, messenger of antiquity, witness of time, light of the truth (until here it is a direct quote from Cicero), north of the wise choice and guide to avoid stumbling"⁹. Immediately after

8. "a verdade da história de Portugal".

9. "Es la Historia, vida de la memoria, maestra de la vida, mensajera de la antigüedad, testimonio de los tiempos, luz de la verdad, norte del acierto y guía para no tropezar".

this he adds the history would give form to the political life and build up the spiritual one (Feliu de la Peña, 1709, p. 6). History here is present as almost a universal truth which teaches us the right path in life, as much in the worldly as in the spiritual.

7. HISTORY AS EDUCATION FOR KINGS

The most important person in early modern societies was without any doubt the king himself. He was considered Gods vicar in earthly matters, such as it was the pope in spiritual ones. He was furthermore, as we already mentioned, considered a universal judge, so to fulfill that role he needed to be perfectly prepared. As we have already seen, history was considered one of the key parts of a virtuous education and in this sense there had to be a special focus on the figure of the king himself. To this end it was very convenient that early modern chronicles were usually divided in the subsequent reigns of the monarchs and that they focused essentially on the life of the kings. So the history of a kingdom was in a good part the history of their kings and the current king could learn a lot from the actions and experiences of his predecessors.

Cabrera de Córdoba in his treaty we already mentioned, does insist on several occasions of the special importance history has for the princely formation. The very opening phrase of the first chapter states that the knowledge of history is one the most important aims for the prince to reach the necessary prudence for the art of government (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, p. 1). It has to be remembered that prudence in early modern times did not only have the modern sense of caution, but it referred to the ability to know how to act in any given circumstance. Its importance can be seen in the fact that Philip II was called “the prudent” already in those days. So its acquisition was the key to good government and history had a crucial part in it.

Because of this importance to Cabrera de Córdoba, it is essential that only the king himself can designate the official chroniclers: “The princes are responsible and in charge of the histories”¹⁰. This why he has to search carefully for the best possible historian all through his kingdom and even outside of it if it became necessary (Cabrera de Córdoba, 1611, p. 16).

The very same Spanish king Philip IV confirms this key role history played in his formation. In the prologue we mentioned at the beginning, he explains that reading history was essential to his formation, given that it would be “the true school where the prince and the king will find examples to follow, cases to note and means to lead his monarchy on a good path”¹¹ (Philip IV, 1889: X). Next he gives a long list of chronicles of kings and territories he read in different languages, to get a complete education and to be a good king.

Also the Spanish chroniclers themselves gave special emphasize on the importance of history to princely education. Pérez de Mesa calls history absolutely necessary for good government of a republic, understood in the early modern sense of state, not at all as an opposition to monarchy. According to him and similar to what Cabrera de Córdoba mentions, history would be like a school of prudence for governors (Pérez de Mesa, 1595, prologue without pagination). Diego Saavedra Fajardo in his *Corona Gothica, Castellana, y Austriaca políticamente ilustrada*, first published in 1646 and often reprinted along the centuries to follow, points to the same idea. He considers his main duty to contribute to the princes’ education, given that this would be the key to political happiness and the conservation of the kingdoms, which would be in the interest of

10. “Las historias están por cuenta, y cargo de los Príncipes”

11. “la verdadera escuela en que el Príncipe y Rey hallarán ejemplares que seguir, casos que notar, y medios por donde encaminar a buenos fines los negocios de su Monarquía”.

everybody. This is why the best teacher to princes would be precisely history, which teaches how to act in government and which shows political documentation which would be the main fruit that history could give (Saavedra Fajardo, 1677, prologue without pagination).

Bernardo de Brito points directly to the examples of the predecessor kings. By looking at the representations of former kings and taking notes of what they did and how they acted, a prince could learn how to govern and how not to (Brito, 1597, p. 3). Again we see that history can give good and bad examples, also, to the kings. The intention to provide a completely positive example can be seen in the case of António Paez Viegas who published in 1641 his chronicle on the first Portuguese king Afonso Henriques (1109-1185). It is dedicated to crown prince Teodósio, son of João IV who recently in 1640 had separated the Portuguese kingdom from the Spanish monarchy. In his prologue, directed to the prince, he encourages him to imitate a heroic example his ancestor represents (Paez Viegas, 1641, prologue without pagination).

In his other work on the Portuguese kings, Brito (1603: prologue without pagination) complains specifically about the lack of memory there is on Portuguese monarchs, when they were actually the most heroic ones in the history of the world. In a similar sense, Duarte Nunes do Leão dedicates the prologue of his *Genealogía verdadera de los Reyes de Portugal* (1590) to King Philip II, who only ten years earlier had obtained the Portuguese throne and incorporated the kingdom into the Spanish monarchy. He claims that the objective of his chronicle would be to help the king understand the Portuguese matters (Nunes do Leão, 1590, prologue without pagination). Those examples reveal another interesting political focus of those times. In this composite monarchy (Elliott, 1992), the monarchs had to rule differently in every kingdom, as if they were kings only in that specific territory. In this sense it can be understood that not all histories could be a good master to any given monarch. What these authors seem to imply is, for example, Castilians chronicles would not teach a prince or a king how to be a good monarch of Portugal. To become that a prince would have to learn from the history and examples of the previous Portuguese kings and from nothing else.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay we analyzed the role history played in people's education and especially that of the princes. To understand this very different role from today's history as an academic discipline we first had to understand how it was constructed in those times. The periodization was based on the Bible and history rightly written was considered the truth and example to orientate people. The teaching role of history had been immortalized by Cicero and his famous quote *historia magistra vitae*.

This comprehension of history can be evidenced in theoretical treaties in different parts of Renaissance Europe, where ancient knowledge was recovered and newly valued. They all emphasize that the ancient things and events brought to us by history may serve as good and bad examples, so people and especially kings could learn from them for their own life. History was less about learning about the past, but rather about understanding the present.

Particularly in Spain there were several of those treaties written on history and also the chroniclers themselves, in their works, used to make special reference to the importance of history and historians in the introductions or prologues of their works. The connection between past, present and future is highly emphasized, such as the fact that human nature does not change, which is why the past would make such a good example to the present. This differs very much from today where each historical moment is considered as unique.

The educating role of history was particularly important in the case of princes and kings, given their essential role in society and government, where basically everything depended on them. Chronicles were essentially divided into the reigns of the different kings and the focus is usually on the royal person as well. In this sense, history could provide a special teaching to the monarchs, given that those could highly benefit from the several examples of their predecessors, either good or bad ones. It has to be considered that everybody could only learn from examples of their kind, which means that kings could learn only from the deeds of princes, not from other people.

Given the current pandemic context, learning from previous experiences has become important again and maybe even with today's conception of history it could be possible and even necessary to look back in time to learn from measures that worked and to avoid mistakes that were made in other pandemic situations.

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