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VSEBINA / INDICE GENERALE / CONTENTS

Žiga Oman: Enmity After the Feud: Violence and Its Control
in Inner Austria, 1500–1750 529
L'inimicizia dopo la faida: la violenza e il suo controllo nell'Austria Interiore, 1500–1750
Sovražnost po fajdi: nasilje in njegov nadzor v Notranji Avstriji, 1500–1750

Jeppe Büchert Netterstrøm: Feuding and Peacemaking among
Peasants in Seventeenth-Century Denmark 587
Faide e riconciliazione tra contadini nella Danimarca del seicento
Fajde in pomiritve med kmeti na Danskem v 17. stoletju

Vicent M. Garés Timor: Los hermanos Colomer de
Valldigna ¿salteadores o miembros de una facción? 607
The Colomer Brothers from Valldigna: Robbers or Members of a Faction?
Brata Colomer iz Valldigne: roparja ali člana frakcije?

Umberto Cecchinato: Everyday Violence and Natural Disasters
in Early Modern Treviso. News of Homicides in the
Libro Macaronico of Zuanne Mestriner (1682–1731) 627
Violenza quotidiana e calamità naturali nella Treviso di età moderna.
Notizie di omicidi nel Libro macaronico di Zuanne Mestriner (1682–1731)
Nasilje in naravne nesreče v zgodnje novoveškem Trevisu. Novice o
ubojih v Libro macaronico Zuanneja Mestrinerja (1682–1731)

Alejandro Llinares Planells: The Songs of the Scaffold: Characteristics,
Creation, and Diffusion of Execution Ballads in
Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Catalonia 647
Canzoni da patibolo: caratteristiche, creazione e diffusione della
letteratura dei giustiziati in Catalogna nei secoli XVI e XVII
Pesmi z morišča: značilnosti, nastanek in razširjanje balad
o usmrtitvah v Kataloniji 16. in 17. stoletja

Andrew Vidali: When Peace is not Enough. Marco Michiel and the Council of Ten
in Early Sixteenth-Century Venice: Shifting Judicial Paradigms and Noble Violence ... 673
Quando la pace non è sufficiente. Marco Michiel e il consiglio dei dieci
nella Venezia di inizio cinquecento: paradigmi giudiziari
in cambiamento e violenza nobiliare
Ko mir ni dovolj. Marco Michiel in Svet desetih v Benetkah na začetku
16. stoletja: spreminjanje sodnih paradigem in plemiško nasilje

Amanda Madden: The Peace and the Duel; the Peace in the Duel 689
La pace e il duello; La pace nel duello
Mir in dvoboj; Mir v dvoboju

Matjaž Grahornik: Duelling in the Habsburg Hereditary Lands,
 1600–1750: Between Law and Practice 707
I duelli nelle terre ereditarie asburgiche, 1600–1750: tra legge e pratica
Dvoboji v habsburških dednih deželah, 1600–1750: med zakoni in prakso

Darko Darovec: The Genesis of Koper Medieval Statutes (1238–1423) 743
La genesi degli statuti medievali di Capodistria (1238–1423)
Geneza koprskih srednjeveških statutov (1238–1423)

Darja Mihelič: Gli statuti di Capodistria e la vita cittadina 777
Medieval Statutes of Koper and City Life
Koprski srednjeveški statuti in mestno življenje

Martin Bele: Grad Lušperk in njegovi prebivalci med 13. in 15. stoletjem 807
Il castello di Lušperk e i suoi abitanti tra il duecento e il quattrocento
Lušperk Castle and its Inhabitants Between the Thirteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

POROČILA RELAZIONI REPORTS

Veronika Kos: Conference Report on *After the Feud? Dispute Settlement*
Between Custom and Law in Early Modern Europe, 21–22 June 2023,
 Maribor & Čentur (online) 831

Veronika Kos: Conference Report on *Violence and its Control in*
Early Modern Europe, 4–5 July 2023, York 834

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THE SONGS OF THE SCAFFOLD: CHARACTERISTICS, CREATION, AND DIFFUSION OF EXECUTION BALLADS IN SIXTEENTH- AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CATALONIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes songs of the scaffold in Catalonia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a hitherto unknown subject that has been paid little attention to date. On the one hand, I will analyze their creation and dissemination using different documentary and literary evidences to demonstrate that they were highly demanded texts composed when an execution was going to be held. On the other hand, I focus on the propagandistic role that these printed texts had, using a micro-historical analysis of two examples: the famous bandit Antoni Roca (1546) and the Morisco witch hunter Joan Malet (1549).

Keywords: execution ballads, Catalonia, banditry, witchcraft, death penalty, popular print, early modern history

CANZONI DA PATIBOLO: CARATTERISTICHE, CREAZIONE E DIFFUSIONE DELLA LETTERATURA DEI GIUSTIZIATI IN CATALOGNA NEI SECOLI XVI E XVII

SINTESI

In questo articolo analizziamo la letteratura dei giustiziati in Catalogna nei secoli XVI e XVII, un argomento finora sconosciuto a cui è stata dedicata poca attenzione. Da un lato, analizzeremo la loro creazione e diffusione sulla base di varie testimonianze documentarie e letterarie, per dimostrare che si trattava di testi molto ambiti, composti in occasione di un'esecuzione. Dall'altro lato, ci concentreremo sulla funzione propagandistica di questi testi a stampa, basandoci sull'analisi micro-storica di due esempi: il famoso bandito Antoni Roca (1546) e il cacciatore di streghe moresche Joan Malet (1549).

Parole chiave: letteratura del patibolo, Catalogna, banditismo, stregoneria, pena di morte, letteratura popolare, storia moderna

INTRODUCTION¹

In 1759, Paul Sandby RA, a British map and landscape artist, produced a drawing entitled *Last Dying Speech and Confession*.² The illustration features a man and a woman as the principal figures, who are orally sharing the contents of a bundle of unbound papers. A public execution is depicted in the background with a blurry outline of a scaffold surrounded by a crowd. Therefore, it is apparent that the materials in the hands of the presumed peddlers reproduce the convict's final discourse and admission, which was either scripted or rehearsed while in prison and is now being prepared for an impending execution.

This is the very definition of gallows' literature, a term invented by Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink in his 1982 article titled *La letteratura del patibolo. Continuità e trasformazioni tra '600 e '800* (Lüsebrink, 1982). Printed material is a good example of "intermediality", representing a form that blends various communicative and cultural techniques or resources, including popular literature concerns with the celebration of an execution. In this particular instance, an interrelation between oral tradition, written literature, and visual elements can be observed through popular poetry. These were all integral parts of the public sphere during the modern period. These texts were designed not only for individual reading but also for communal recitation by figures such as blind men or street vendors (Rospoche et al., 2019).

The study of scaffold literature holds a prominent place in current historiography. Notably, important works have addressed the issue at the national level, for instance the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Germany. For instance, in Italy, the book *Delitto e Perdono* by Adriano Prosperi stands out for its thorough analysis of the subject. Prosperi compared Italian works with those from other countries and examined an array of printed materials, including *lamenti di condannati*, *storie romanzesche*, and *l'avviso* and *autos da fé* (Prosperi, 2013).³ French literature on execution ballads draws on recent studies by Pascal Bastien, who offers a fresh cultural perspective on capital punishment, examining the relationship between justice, its participants, and the public execution ritual (Bastien, 2006, 2011). Richard Evans' works on the German context (Evans, 1996) and Gatrell and Sharpe's research on England (Gatrell, 1996; Sharpe, 1985, 144–167) complement these contributions. In recent years, scaffold literature has been approached from a new methodological perspective, which involves analyzing similarities and differences across different countries. Una McIlvenna's work has been instrumental in highlighting the unique characteristics of this literature at the European level (McIlvenna, 2015, 47–88). In

1 This work is part of the research project *Las barricadas del recuerdo. Historia y memoria de la Era de las revoluciones en España e Hispanoamérica (1776–1848)* (PID2020-120048GB) financed by el Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad del gobierno de España.

2 Located at Yale Centre for British Art.

3 For Northern Italian scaffold literature cf. Rospoche & Salzberg, 2017, 164–185.

her monograph *Singing the News of Death: Execution Ballads in Europe 1500-1900* (McIlvenna, 2022), she analyses German, English, French and Italian couplets performed by the prisoners, taking into account lyrics and melodies.⁴

Spanish execution ballads have received much less research attention than their European counterparts. Although the existence of such documents had previously been noted by Cesare Acutis (1978, 163–180) and Pierre Civil (1989, 139–151), it was Juan Gomis (2016, 9–33) who confirmed the presence of an executioner’s literature with a long tradition in the Hispanic Monarchy, in a study that also highlighted the need for further research on this topic, as many questions remained unanswered. Gomis’ work has been followed by others, such as my own work on death-row inmate’s poems in the Crown of Aragon (Llinares, 2017, 108–125). In this work, I present solid evidence that this type of story was inspired by judicial documents from criminal files and that they began to be printed in the opening decades of the sixteenth century in places such as Catalonia, the Kingdom of Valencia or Aragon.

Thus, this article aims to examine the traits of Catalonia’s execution ballads during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, along with their production and distribution. During the late fifteenth century, the principality of Catalonia had abundant printing presses which produced material in a wide range of topics, including those related to public executions, which were predominantly a reflection of widespread banditry. This was a serious problem in Catalonia from the early sixteenth century to almost the conclusion of *Guerra dels Segadors* or Reapers’ War (1640 to 1652). In the opening section, I shall examine how this type of text was created in Barcelona and how it then spread to various rural areas. Furthermore, based on documentary evidence, we will explore the methods used by the poets who composed these factual verses to gather information. Finally, I shall examine this literary genre through the microhistorical analysis of two particular incidents from the sixteenth century: namely, the case of the outlaw cleric Antoni Roca (1544 and 1546) and that of the Morisco witch hunter, Joan Malet (1549).

DISSEMINATION AND PRODUCTION OF EXECUTION BALLADS

Dissemination: an urban and rural literature

Virtually, all the texts of the Catalonia’s executioners were printed and stamped in Barcelona under license.⁵ Catalonia’s capital was the epicenter of print production during the Baroque period, and there the texts would be advertised and disseminated by blind men and peddlers. In spite of this, as noted by

4 Cf. McIlvenna et al., 2021, 123–159. On the death of the French bandit Cartouche in Dutch folk poems cf. Salman, 2019, 20–47.

5 In spite of that, I have not been able to find the applications for these printing licenses. The only extant record is an application to print a sheet in Catalan about the famous bandit Joan Sala i Ferrer “Serrallonga” in 1635 (Valsalobre, 2021).

Ricard Expósito in his doctoral thesis, the factual accounts, gazettes, *romances*, etc., were in demand by rural society. Well-off peasants, clergymen, or millers like Menocchio (Ginzburg, 1976), were consumers of printed news and entertainment, in Spanish and Catalan, Catalanian, national or international topics such as the French Wars of Religion or the sighting of a comet (Expósito, 2016). Some peasants bought and consumed this type of printed material, including stories of bandits from the early seventeenth century, whose protagonists ended their days on the scaffold.

In this way, Roc Soler, from the parish of Nostra Senyora de les Encies (Garrotxa, Girona), bought *Aquí se refereix llargament la molt grandiosa y memorable expulsio de lladres y bandoles feta per ordre del excelentissim senyor don Francisco Fernandez de la Cueva duc de Alburquerque lloctinent y capita general...* published by Esteve Liberós in Barcelona 1616, sold in bookshop of Geronyma Bosca (Lopes, 1616). Soler himself noted that this account was “bought today, July 20, 1616 in Barcelona, Roc Soler from *las Entías*” (*comprat vuy a 20 de julio de 1616 en Bar[celo]na Roch Soler de las Entias*). In this case, Soler went to Barcelona and purchased this propagandistic print reporting the good news of the capture of bandits “Trucafort” and “Tallaferro”. Despite this, as Expósito himself explains, he not always had to travel to the cities of Barcelona or Girona to buy these stories, as peddlers used to walk assiduously in the area (Expósito, 2014, 519). It is precisely by this method that another peasant, heir of the Fontanil de Cogolls farmhouse, in the parish of Sant Cristòfol de Cogolls (Garrotxa, Girona), acquired the account in Catalan of the death of the famous robber Francesc Margarit composed by an Isidre Violer from Moia (Barcelona) (Violer, 1627).

In the family documentation, the countryman explains that before purchasing these verses he heard the narration or recitation, abbreviated or complete, made by a peddler named Jerònim Plana. According to Expósito, it is not unreasonable to think that this itinerant seller returned, some time later, to the Cogolls farmhouse or its surroundings to sell printed material with which the local population kept informed about the Thirty Years’ War, the fight against Ottomans, or French diplomacy, among other issues (Expósito, 2014, 519). Likewise, the family books contain verses taken from a banditry tale from 1627, linked to the publicist working for the bishop of Solsona, the viceroy at that time (Expósito, 2014, 792). This text is dated to the same year as Margarit’s, and, therefore, it is likely that Soler purchased it from the same hawker or, failing that, that he heard it sung and remembered some verses that, in the event, he decided to write down in his account’s book as “news about bandits.”

In the same way, Francesc Regàs, from Santa Maria de Lliors, a landowner in the region of La Selva (Girona), collected a propaganda leaflet on the expulsion of the bandits from Catalonia in 1616 and another on the execution of the famous Serrallonga in 1634, which is the only one preserved in Catalan about an outlaw (Expósito, 2014, 529). Therefore, we know that these texts, printed in Barcelona,

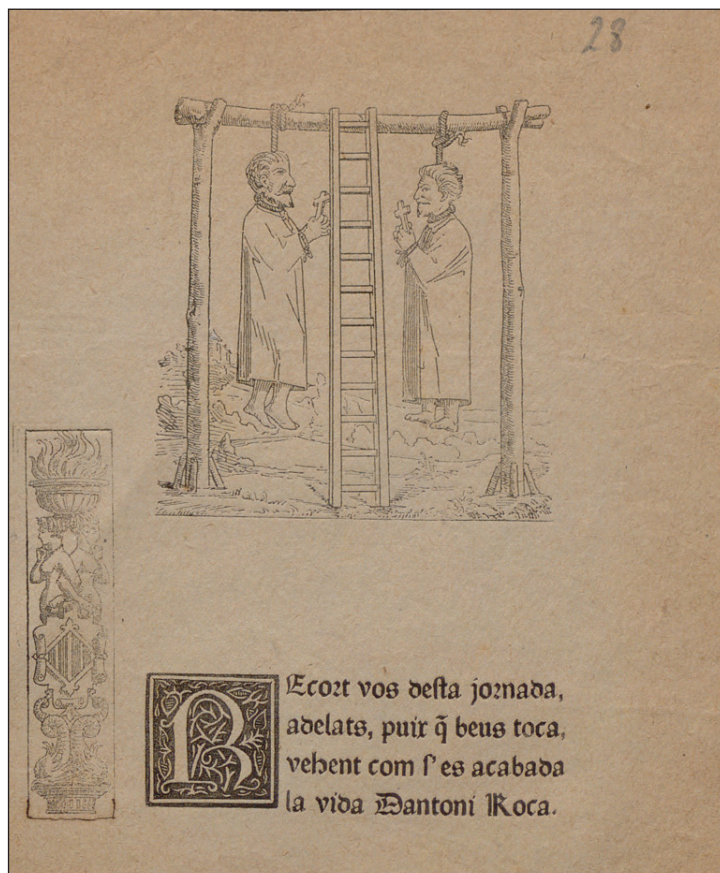


Fig. 1: Cobles fetes ara novament sobre la justícia i cruel mort d'Antoni Roca, escandalitzador de tota Catalunya, i la de con companyó Sebastià Corts, 1546. *Cançoners Popular de Catalunya, Sèrie A, Materials Aguiló, carpeta A-15, VI, num.1.*

were bought by travelers who passed by the city and took them to their places of residence. Besides, the peddlers were responsible for bringing them to the rural villages and selling them. It is not unreasonable to think that, as was done in the cities, there were also collective readings, usually in verse, in the villages and hamlets in which a person who was literate read to the others. To this should be added the recitation of these papers by the sellers themselves, whether they were blind or not.

In the same way, many Catalan songs about death row inmates were printed on the occasion of a recent or incoming public execution. We know that on 18 June 1616 twenty-eight bandits were executed, as recorded by the subtitle

of *Aquí se refereix llargament la molt grandiosa y memorable expulsió de lladres y bandolers feta per orde del excelentissim senyor don Francisco Fernández de la Cueva Duc de Alburquerque...* 1616, Barcelona, Esteve Liberós imp. Jeroni Biosca's book shop, with ordinary license, Lopes, 1616; in addition, the purchaser of two poems noted on them the date on which he got them. As such, *La bona Fortuna del excelentissim don Francisco Fernandez de Cueva Duch de Alburquerque lloctinent i capità general en lo Principat...* 1616, Barcelona, Llorens Deu imp., Martí, 1616, was purchased on the same *18 de juny de 1616* also noting that on that day 28 people had been hanged in the city of Barcelona. On the other hand, the *Relació verdadera de la transformació de Cathalunya y inmemorial justícia...* Barcelona, Llorens Deu imp. (Pelegrí, 1616), was obtained the following day, and it seems safe to assume that the execution that it describes was the one carried out the day before. Likewise, we also have evidence that these poems were still being sold in Barcelona sometime after the event they describe, since, as noted, the farmer Roc Soler from *les Encines* (Garrotxa, Girona), bought the first of these long after the execution it describes. These are, therefore, texts written and disseminated at the foot of the scaffold, and printed before, during, and after the death of the prisoner in question.

For example, in 1573 the neighbors of Conca d'Òdena (Barcelona), captured and executed more than 60 bandits at the same time. Seven texts about this event came to light, being printed as the events progressed (Llinares, 2021a, 105–128).⁶ Specifically, on 6 and 7 of April the following texts were published: *Summa del testament de part dels bandolers de la companyia de Moreu Palau, Cascavell y Camadall, a sis de abril, 1573*, Barcelona, book shop Joan Burguès, (BC, Sig: 6-IV-39), and the *Testament y Codicil, en lo qual sa legats la presó de Barcelona, als bandolers de la companyia de la ànima pecadora, fet a set de abril de 1573*, Barcelona, book shop Plaza del Blat, (BNE, R/36459). They are *testaments de mort*, wills of the dead, which, a priori, intend to justify the death sentence and to show the reconciliation of the souls of the executed (Llinares, 2023, 39–63). In addition, they served to publicize the sentence issued by the *Generalitat* in those days, because between 6 and 7 April, the wrongdoers were tortured, the heads of those killed in the conflict were publicly exposed and the sentences of the prisoners were published. Therefore, it is very likely that among the crowd that came to the *Generalitat* courtyard to contemplate the heads of the bandits, there were already blind men and hawkers singing these sheets. This can be seen in the content of the second text itself, since it is specifically stated that it was publicly recited on 6 April:

6 I am currently preparing a specific article on this subject, paying closer attention to the poems.

En la ciutat	In the city,
devant la gent	before the people,
públicament	publicly,
en la dita summa	in said <i>summa</i> ,
de tots en una	of all with one voice,
un testament	a testimony,
en l'any corrent,	in the current year,
setanta y tres	the seventy-third,
del present mes	of the present month,
que.s sis d'abril	which is the sixth of April

At least four popular poems were printed about Serrallonga (1594–1634). In the 1630s it came out: *Relación verdadera de la vida, robos y delitos del famoso bandolero Juan Sala Serrallonga, y de su prisión, siendo Virrey de Cataluña el Excelentísimo de Cardona*, Barcelona Esteve Liverós (Meluco, 1633; AHCB, LIB-14 B), and *Xacara y relación verdadera de los hechos y prisión del famoso bandolero Sierrallonga*, Barcelona, Esteve Liberós imp. (Lamuela, 1633), came out in 1633, when the criminal was imprisoned and awaited sentencing. That is to say, these texts were printed and disseminated before the prisoner was taken to the scaffold on 8 January 1634.

Production: different ways of writing a scaffold poem

It still remains to be clarified how these stories were composed, and whether they are fictional stories or have a factual, documentary basis. These are difficult questions to answer, however, since the documentary evidence is scarce, and the texts need to be compared with other sources: archival material and theater, suggesting great heterogeneity in the writing processes that lie behind these stories. For example, the play *El Catalán Serrallonga, y bandos de Barcelona*, written by the playwrights Antonio Coello, Francisco de Rojas, and Luís Vélez de Guevara in 1635 illustrates this process. When the protagonist, Joan Sala i Ferrer, alias “Serrallonga”, is in prison waiting to be executed, he is accompanied by “the blind man who sells songs” and at the exact moment when the sentence against the famous bandit is going to be made public, the blind man shuts up the other inmates saying

“let’s hear the sentence”, and then calls the Student, a friend of the robber himself who could read and write:

CIEGO: ¿Señor Licenciado?	BLIND MAN: Mr. Bachelor?
ESTUDIANTE: ¿Quién me llama?	STUDENT: Who is calling me?
CIEGO: El ciego.	BLIND MAN: The blind man.
ESTUDIANTE: ¿Y qué quiere?	STUDENT: And what does he want?
CIEGO: Que, pues, es tan gran poeta, unas coplas me escribiese de Serrallonga, ese bravo bandolero, ese que tiene toda Cataluña en arma; que yo daré un dobloncete por el metro.	BLIND MAN: That, since he’s such a great poet, that he would write me some verses about Serrallonga, that brave bandit, the one who has all Catalonia in arms; that I’ll give a doubloon for the verse.

Likewise, in the play, Serrallonga complains that, while in prison “before they arrest me, they write songs, couplets and verses/, because the ladies cry for me,/ before they look at me as a prisoner”. This source, in this case literary, indicates that collecting information about a prisoner who was going to be executed was an everyday action, something normal in Baroque society. On the one hand, a blind man is shown asking a friend of the criminal to compose the account, that is, he uses a third person who had information about the case. On the other hand, we deduce that the blind man in the play wanted the verses to be finished so that he could sell them when Serrallonga was about to go to the scaffold or even a little before, as is clear from the second quote where the bandit himself is aware that poems about him were being published. This was also happening in England, where, if a prisoner was to be executed in the afternoon, that very morning the couplets about his death were already being sold, usually a speech written by none other than the criminal himself, encouraging the population to attend the spectacle (Ezell, 2014, 1–14).

Likewise, in England, the regular priest in the prisons of Newgate, who was in charge of providing spiritual comfort to those who were going to die also transcribed their last words (The last Dying Speech), and had them printed and made money

from their sale. We have no evidence that this happened in Catalonia as well, as in the Catholic world the sacrament of confession was a secret between the priest and the believer. In spite of this, the printed document about the death of Antoni Roca, apart from praising the marquis, recounting the punitive ritual, and warning the bandits, devotes an important part to justify the judicial sentence from a religious point of view. Thus, *lex talionis*, St. Augustine, the Commandments, and the Bible, among other documents, are cited, arguing that the death penalty was the way to purge sins on earth. This led Joan Fuster to interpret that the anonymous poet could be a clergyman or jurist (Fuster, 1963, 29).⁷

Clearly, the author had read St. Augustine and dealt with sacred books, which he used to elaborate a discourse related to the person who was going to be executed, justifying the punishment, and giving it a clear moralizing component. All this leads me to interpret that the anonymous subject who wrote these verses could be the priest assisting the prisoner in the chapel, who would launch a harangue before or after the death of a bandit on the scaffold. In other words, it is very likely that the chaplain who consoled the bandit before he died used his religious training and the information he acquired after giving spiritual comfort to the prisoner to write some verses, either by order of the viceroy, to earn money, to reinforce his speech after Roca's death, or by a combination of different factors.

Likewise, we know that between 1748 and 1767 the brotherhood of *Nuestra Señora de la Visitación y Almas de Purgatorio* in the city of Madrid received the monopoly over the *coplas de ajusticiados* and that they asked the court clerk for a report with which to write a song about it (Botrel, 1973, 417–482).⁸ We have no evidence that this privilege also existed in other parts of the monarchy, although, everything seems to indicate that in Catalonia many stories were also inspired by the judicial process or other official documents such as banns or published court rulings. For example, in the *Relación verdadera de la vida, robos y delitos del famoso bandolero Juan Sala Serrallonga...* when the protagonist is in jail suffering different forms of torture, the text alludes to the judicial process, a cause in which many people testified, and that altogether adds up to more than 1,000 sheets, something that did not go unnoticed by the poet:

7 Almost all the texts have a part reserved for the salvation of the prisoner's soul. Despite this, Roca's text goes a step further and shows a more learned knowledge of the sacred scriptures.

8 This is a topic that I am developing extensively in my doctoral thesis, and I am also working on a book about scaffold literature in Spain.

De muertes y robos hechos de este forajido se halla, en la Audiencia Real un proceso, de hojas tantas, que por tomos le dividen y ay algunos de una quarta.	Of deaths and robberies made this outlaw is found in the Royal Audience a process, with so many pages, that it is divided into volumes and there are some of a quarter.
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That is to say, the writer knew of the existence of this judicial process and its magnitude. The inspiration of the poet in question in official documentation of the case to compose a text can be corroborated by crossing sources of different typologies. Thus, in *Cobles ara novament compostas sobre la presa y sentencia de Montserrat Poc*.⁹ Barcelona, Jaume Galvan (printer), 1578 (digital copy in BIDISO), it is explained that this Catalan bandit spent some time in the Balearic Islands, besieged in the house of “Honofre Penya”, besides narrating the details of his escape from the island and his subsequent capture and execution. The bandit’s presence in Mallorca is confirmed by the historian Miguel Deyà, since he located a process in the *Arxiu del Regne de Mallorca*, where he explains that this was aligned with the Puigdorfil side, which were in enmity with the Torrelles,¹⁰ and, in addition, he documents that Montserrat Poc was pursued and besieged in the village of Deià, in the house of the cleric “Guillem Penya” (Deyà, 2016, 83–98; Llinares, 2021b, 211–236)¹¹. Therefore, these are “non-fictional” texts inspired by official documentation, a situation that is repeated in other printed documents of the time, such as those explaining the deaths of “Trucafort”, “Tallaferro”, Miquel Morell or Jaume Clua, alias “Bord Clua”, among others.

Although for this chronology we do not find the last mortuary speeches in Catalan, since this type of document would take a few years to arrive, as noted, in the sixteenth century wills of the executed were printed. In general, these are poems, written in the first person, which showed the population that the prisoner in question was repentant and that he faced death with courage and resignation in order to purge his sins on earth and, therefore, to be able to enter the Kingdom of God. It was believed that what was written in these stories was what the prisoner had written or said while in prison, being, theoretically, composed in this way. Even so, we can argue that what appears in these writings was invented by the authorities in order to make it look like the prisoner had incriminated himself of the crimes he was accused of, and thus justify capital punishment even more.

9 Montserrat is nowadays a very common female name in Catalonia, but in the Ancien Régime it was a male name.

10 In Mallorca there was factional violence much like in Catalonia or Valencia.

11 It is likely that the clergyman’s name was changed to protect his identity.

Overall, it is likely that the poets who wrote these texts used all the means at their disposal, resorting, even, to their own visual experience, attending the execution personally or through someone close to them. As noted, there are many texts that were written after the prisoner died on the scaffold and that describe it in print in greater or lesser detail. On the one hand, in some stories the writer limits himself to saying that the sentence was rigorously applied and does not go into much detail, and, at most, they provide general information. On the other hand, in other stories the public execution is described much more precisely and in greater detail, which leads us to assume that the writer was telling his own experience as a spectator, as in the text *Relació verdadera de la transformació de Cathalunya y inmemorial justicia...* Barcelona, Llorens Deu imp. (Pelegrí, 1616), where the protagonist describes, in detail, what he feels or sees during a public execution in Barcelona in the first half of the seventeenth century.

BANDITRY AND WITCHCRAFT: TWO PROBLEMS TO BE FOUGHT

Catalonian banditry during the Baroque period goes back to medieval feuds and aristocratic conflicts and was widespread across Europe (Torres, 1993). The laws of the different kingdoms of the Crown of Aragon accepted the right of the nobility to bear arms and to wage “private war” against their enemies if they followed the legal channels for doing so. Catalonian society until the Reapers’ War was divided into factions: the Pujades, the Setmnats, the Morells and the Voltors, the Nyerros and Cadells, etc.; they were a parallel power to the king in the territory.¹² The bishop of Vic in 1615, not in vain, came to say that “the bandits are more lords of the land than the king” (Soler, 1909, 417). Honor, personal or family revenge for economic reasons, or conflict over public office were some of the causes that led different subjects with resources to hire and protect gangs to do their dirty work for them. In other words, nobles, members of the Church, feudal lords, municipal officials and the Principality itself made use of bandits to solve their problems, in both rural and urban areas. In this context, the king struggled to control and monopolize violence in the territory.¹³

Propaganda sheets at the service of the viceroy: the case of Antoni Roca

Facing a society divided into violent factions that controlled part of Catalonia’s institutions, both at the Principality and the local levels, some viceroys, as well as imposing repressive measures, also had to resort to culture war, using popular poems when a specific rule was adopted. I have been able to count a total of 47 poems printed between 1500 and 1635, mostly written in Catalan, and, to a lesser extent, in Spanish, linked to the Catalonian banditry of the Baroque period, 44 of which I was able to identify.¹⁴

12 For a European overview on enmity and violence cf. Carroll, 2023.

13 For the historiography of banditry in the Crown of Aragon cf. Casals, 2019, 581–602.

14 A question I address extensively in my doctoral thesis.

However, although in this article I shall highlight the “official” or “officialist” uses of the Catalan poems, it is very likely that these printed works were interpreted differently and even that a “subversive” reading could be made. In this process, they could include multiple variables such as the personal context of the person to be executed, the socio-political outlook of the moment, the gender and ideological components, etc.; a circumstance that leads to multiple interpretations most of which will never be known (Chartier, 1993).

Therefore, much of this propagandistic literature was printed when an important bandit was going to be executed, as happened with Catalonia’s first great bandit, Antoni Roca (?–1546). After Moreu Cisteller, an evildoer linked to the side of the Pujades, was executed in 1543, Antoni Roca, a bandit linked to the opposite faction, the Sentmenats, gained enormous prominence. He was a bandit priest who brought Francesc de Borja (1539–1543) and the Marquis of Aguilar (1543–1553), viceroys of Catalonia, to their knees. This character was one of the most wanted men in the sixteenth century Catalonia, defined by Àngel Casals as “one of the most feared and persecuted bandits of Catalonia” (*un dels bandolers més temuts i perseguits de Catalunya*) (Casals, 2011, 9). This bandit, from Sant Joan de les Abadesses, was ordained chaplain, probably to avoid capital punishment in case he was captured, although, if he was a famous criminal, being a priest did not eventually free him from this tragic end. The brigand was immersed in the factional fights in the Viscounty of Castellbò (1538–1544) (Obiols, 2004, 203–251), and when truces were signed, he placed himself under the orders of the nobleman Bernat de Pinós, member of the Sentmenat faction, which had important connections with members of the royal court and administration.

The Marquis of Aguilar could not put an end to this criminal, a situation that worsened notably after Pere Malaveniz de Gasca, known as “Galipapo”, Roca’s lieutenant, and Joan Puig, of the Sentmenat faction and the bandit’s protector, killed Gabriel Orriols, son of the mayor of Caldes de Montbui (Barcelona) (ACA, Real Cancillería, Reg.4.220, f.187v). Finally, “Galipapo” and two more bandits involved in this killing were captured and were to be executed in Barcelona in 1544. Therefore, after his continuous failures, Antoni Roca’s constant mockery and his protection by part of the ruling class of the Principality, the imprisonment of the bandit’s lieutenant, and his subsequent execution, were the viceroy’s first great triumph and a check to banditry and the Sentmenat faction. It was the perfect occasion to lay their cards on the table and to launch a clear warning to Roca and Catalan banditry, which was done by means of the popular couplets entitled *Cobles novament fetes per Pere Giberga contra tots los delats de Cathalunya i secaços d’Antoni Roca, recordant-los la cruel sentència y mort del Galipapo y altres dos de lur companyia, la qual passarà per tots ells, si no buyden prest la terra*, Barcelona, s. imp (Giberga, 1544).¹⁵ According to Josep Gisbert, this print is “the oldest bandit song that is known from a Catalan songbook” (*la més*

15 This poem can be consulted online through the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes.

antiga cançó de bandolers que es coneix del cançoner català) (Gisbert, 1989, 24).¹⁶ In spite of this, the execution of Pere Malaveniz and the other criminals was only an excuse to write and disseminate the poem. I think that the purpose of this text was to inform the population that some bandits have been put down and to do so while the execution was being carried out, to make it stand as an example to all. In this way, most of the document is overshadowed by political propaganda or “official or officialistic journalism”, in Richard Kagan’s terminology (Kagan, 2012, 87–100). The intentionality of the narrative can be divided into three fields: messages of warning to Roca and the highwaymen still roaming Catalonia; the stanzas addressed to the gangs and protectors of highwaymen; and praises to the Marquis of Aguilar.

“Galipapo’s” execution is not the relevant theme of the composition, since he is only mentioned once in the whole text to say that he and two others were bound and executed for the crimes they had committed. At the end of the stanzas there is a refrain that says “save yourselves from disgrace, /from Regomir Street” (*guarda-vos de la desferra,/del carrer del Regomir*) in allusion to the street in Barcelona where the convicts walked before being executed and where they received some corporal punishment. These words being chosen as a refrain is already a declaration of intentions, but not more than the first stanza when it says:

Malfactors Buydau la terra, no us vullau més detenir: Guardau-vos de la desferra del carrer de Regomir.	Evildoers, empty the earth, do not stop any longer, save yourselves from disgrace, from Regomir Street.
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The text warns the bandits committing crimes in the Principality that the pincers with hot irons, torture, and death will be the end of them. For this reason, it advises them to leave the territory or hide well. In addition, the name of “Toni Roca” is mentioned twice in order to emphasize that the viceroy would soon catch him and that he would no longer be protected by his French friends. Likewise, this officialist literature does not miss the opportunity to make direct allusions to the factions and people who harbor bandits, directly mentioning the Pujades and the Sentmenats, rivals and protectors of Roca, respectively:

16 Nowadays, we know that before this one, other sheets about bandits were printed, although most of them have not been preserved.

No us engan fer de pujades, ni de semanat valença, que sols no us faran parença, quels dolguen les tenallades.	Do not deceive yourselves, being of pujades, nor of semenat protector, which only will not make you appearance that the pincers hurt them.
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It is noted that part of the 1539 royal decree is reproduced, which prohibited the harboring of bandits, among other things (Borràs, 1953, 159–180). It is also known that the king ordered successive viceroys to promulgate and enforce it. Therefore, it is likely that this *pliego* served to disseminate this legislative text through a song and took advantage of the population's eagerness to know the lurid details of Galipapo's death as well. In the same way, I think that the different warnings to the Pujades and Sentmenats and to Roca himself were expected to reach them, directly or indirectly.

Despite the viceroy's triumphalism, Roca was still at large and a real headache for the king's representative in Catalonia. It must be understood that Roca counted on *fautores* in Catalonia and in France, where he fled when the persecutions against him intensified (AGS, Estado, leg.294, num.238). This circumstance was taken advantage of by the French monarch, Francis I, to put Roca at the head of three thousand men in the context of the war between France and the Hispanic Monarchy, with the aim of sacking Cerdanya and laying siege to Puigcerdà (Casals, 2011, 57). It was at this moment that Roca became a problem for the emperor's international interests and, therefore, he indicated to the viceroy that his capture should be the priority. His apprehension was the result of a complicated diplomatic operation to get his companions to betray him, among them, the governor of Narbonne himself. The hypothesis suggested by Casals is that the bandit was no longer useful to the French monarchy because the Peace of Crépy had been signed in September 1544 and the king's secretary, Francisco de los Cobos, authorized negotiations with the French to imprison Roca (Casals, 2011, 62). So, if the capture of Galipapo inspired a popular *copla*, the imprisonment and death of Roca was not going to be less so. This is behind the anonymous verses *Cobles fetes ara novament sobre la justícia i cruel mort d'Antoni Roca, escandalitzador de tota Catalunya, i la de con companyó Sebastià Corts* (Aguiló, 1900, 345–348), which must have been very popular at the time, since at least three versions, with three different headings, were printed.

Analyzing these works, we can say that the one about Roca's execution is clearly a scaffold poem, while in the one about Galipapo, the focus is on the messages and threats sent to the bandits and their protectors, with the main bandit still at large. On the one hand, the 1546 poem tries to inform that Roca has been executed, and on the



Fig. 2: *Cobles fetes ara novament sobre la justícia i cruel mort d'Antoni Roca, escandalitzador de tota Catalunya, i la de con companyó Sebastia Corts, 1546 (Aguiló, 1900, 345–348).*

other hand, we find an exhortative and moralizing function, in this case, exemplified by the reproduction of the “baroque terror” in these texts: the bloodcurdling and dramatic details, such as the amputation of the ears, the *atenallament* (clamping of the skin with hot iron), or reproducing the scene where Roca’s mother visits him in prison, in order to “educate” and “direct” the population for moralizing purposes (Maravall, 1975). In other words, the intention is to teach by reproducing the basic premises of *lex talionis*, and for the propagandistic message to last and extend beyond the city of Barcelona. Likewise, this print also aspired for the wrongdoers

to be its primary audience, as reflected in the first stanza:

Recort-vos desta jornada [la ejecución], adelats, puix que beus toca, vehent com l'és acabada, la vida d'Antoni Roca.	Remember this day [the execution], bandits, to you it is your turn, seeing how it ends, the life of Antoni Roca.
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In spite of this, the intention is to show that the prisoner is repentant, and that justice has managed to redeem his soul with an exemplary death. It is the triumph of justice, embodied in the figure of the viceroy. Likewise, in this sheet, the Marquis of Aguilar is shown as both a victor, the one who has put an end to the main bandit of Catalonia, and as the *alter ego* of the monarch, as well as pious, righteous and fair towards the prisoner who was going to die. It is made clear that the highest royal authority in Catalonia did not have a bloodthirsty character. If someone had to be executed, it was for the good of society. Thus, after learning that Roca's mother had visited him in prison and that he was suffering and repentant, he ordered that the bandit should not receive any corporal punishment other than what his death sentence ordered.

Renata Bojničanová conducted a study where she compared Roca's two accounts with a Slovak song from 1543 about the death of the outlaw Matíáš Bazald. She was able to note some similarities between the two poetic forms, such as the criminalization of the outlaw, the narration of the details of the punishment and humiliation connected with the execution, biblical quotations, and references to the protectors of evildoers. For Bojničanová, these similarities between the two texts are due to the fact that both are part of the literary network that served the political propaganda of the Habsburgs (Bojničanová, 2007, 11–24).¹⁷

I think that we can only come to understand these texts and others of the same style if we examine the person who persecuted Roca day and night, Viceroy Aguilar. He wanted to gain recognition so he could go to the Court, but he also had trouble with Catalonia's governor, Pere de Cardona, because he thought that the viceroy was interfering with the persecution of bandits, which was his responsibility (Buyreu, 2005, 195). The tensions between Aguilar and the *consellers* of Barcelona were continuous throughout his reign for different reasons, such as the prohibition of shotguns of *pedrenyal*, arbitrary arrests, and his refusal to accept some appointments; for these reasons, his reputation among the Catalonians was low. In March 1544, this situation led the representatives of the Principality to present an embassy in Valladolid to complain about the emperor's *alter ego* (Buyreu, 2005, 238).

17 In this sense, the *coblas* of Galipapo and Antoni Roca present some differences that I have been pointing out throughout these pages, although both are part of the propaganda system of Viceroy Aguilar.

The complaints of Catalanian representatives against viceroys are a constant throughout the modern period, and banditry was a clear element of friction. This largely explains the existence of a prolific scaffold literature, like that linked to Antoni Roca and texts printed during the viceroyalties of the Duke of Alburquerque (1616–1619) or the Duke of Segorbe and Cardona in the 1630s (Llinares, 2018, 53–80). In other words, these compositions reveal the viceroy’s attempt to entrench his contested authority and that of the monarch.

The poem of the witch-hunting Morisco Joan Malet (1549)

Parallel to the fight against banditry, hundreds of women were hanged for witchcraft across the Principality of Catalonia, accused of causing deaths, especially of children, and the meteorological phenomena that ruined the crops (Alcoberro, 2020; Castell, 2013). Unlike those of bandits, these executions had little publicity. We do not know the real reasons for this, but we understand that the contexts for banditry and witchcraft are different. The former was a powerful organizational system, parallel to the king’s, and at times, it held unofficial control over the territory. The latter always developed clandestinely, since they would not exist without the secret covens, and it was the civilian population and the Inquisition who fought it.¹⁸ In the case of Catalanian witchcraft, most of those denounced and prosecuted were “marginalized” women, i.e., single women, widows, old women, poor women excluded from society, etc. Normally, it was a neighbor who accused a defenseless person of having made a pact with the devil. A famous bandit had weapons and powerful allies, that is, the highwayman, for better or worse, had a certain “social status” and instilled terror and respect alike among the population. In addition, some people helped outlaw gangs out of fear or for economic benefit. Thus, banditry had to be combated by all means, for the reasons mentioned above. Therefore, we must think that witchcraft, despite the theological debates of the period (Llinares, 2021c, 119–140), was unprotected nor had the approval of virtually anyone.

Despite this, there is a song linked to the world of witchcraft about the execution of a witch hunter. As noted, most of the witches were persecuted by the local authorities, who received enormous popular pressure from the neighbors who accused some women, whom they used to know, of the harm that had befallen animals, people or crops. In this context, in the first half of the sixteenth century, some subjects considered becoming witch hunters as a highly lucrative business, as was the case of the Morisco Joan Malet, who acted in the towns of Tortosa, Reus, Valls or Tarragona, among others, reporting, before the local authorities, dozens of neighbors (Alcoberro, 2020; 2023). Malet’s actions caused the death of a large number of women, and this initiative was followed by the Grand Inquisitor of Barcelona, Diego Sarmiento, seeking “an increase in power, prestige, and income for the Holy Office” and convened

18 The Inquisition condemned and fought witchcraft, but was also quite skeptical of this crime, especially from the seventeenth century onwards (Llinares, 2021c, 119–140).

a board of theologians who approved that important repressive measures had to be taken against witches (Alcoberro, 2012, 100). The jail of the Holy Office was filled with alleged sorceresses, and six women were executed on 18 January 1549; but Sarmiento’s methods and harshness did not seem correct to the Inquisition, and therefore the Grand Inquisitor ordered the release of the women because of lack of evidence, and ordered the execution of Malet. The Holy Office stopped what could have been the first great collective execution of Catalonian witches, revealing a lack of severity or even some skepticism about this crime. Finally, Malet was captured in Valencia and executed in Barcelona in July 1549 (Campagne, 2003).

The popular sheet entitled *Cobles ara novament fetes sobre la mort d’en Malet, feta en Barcelona als dos de juliol any mil e cinc-cents quaranta-e-nou from 1549* (BC, Ms. I-IV-42) was printed to set an example to the population and make them aware that abuses committed by witch hunters would not go unpunished. This scaffold text is dated to the first half of the sixteenth century and was probably circulated where the witch hunter was executed. The verses provide a little information about Malet’s life, as, for example, that he accused two women, one of whom was pregnant, of being witches in Tortosa. Even so, most of the text focuses on justifying Malet’s punishment because he falsely accused women for money:

Moltas bruxas a accusat y ha altrás falsament. Bé mostrava ser malvat, que açò fes per argent. Mirau bé, si són bejans! Qui farà lo que ell feu? Qu’en Malet y fos engans han pagat lo deute seu.	Many witches he has accused and others falsely. Well he showed himself to be evil, For this he did for money. Look well, if they are evil! Who does what he did? that Malet and his deceits has to pay his debt.
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It must be understood that the profession of witch hunter was respected by the population, who trusted their judgment; characters like Malet became popular in Catalonia after a while. In any case, denouncing witches also became a profit-driven profession. I think that these two reasons lie behind the publication of this popular text. It is, first, a warning to the other witch hunters in the area to be careful with their “condemnatory sentences”, as they could end up like Malet. Second, it denounced Malet’s deceptions and falsehoods, making the population aware that this type of characters could not be trusted, and that the death penalty was fully deserved for his continuous deceptions.

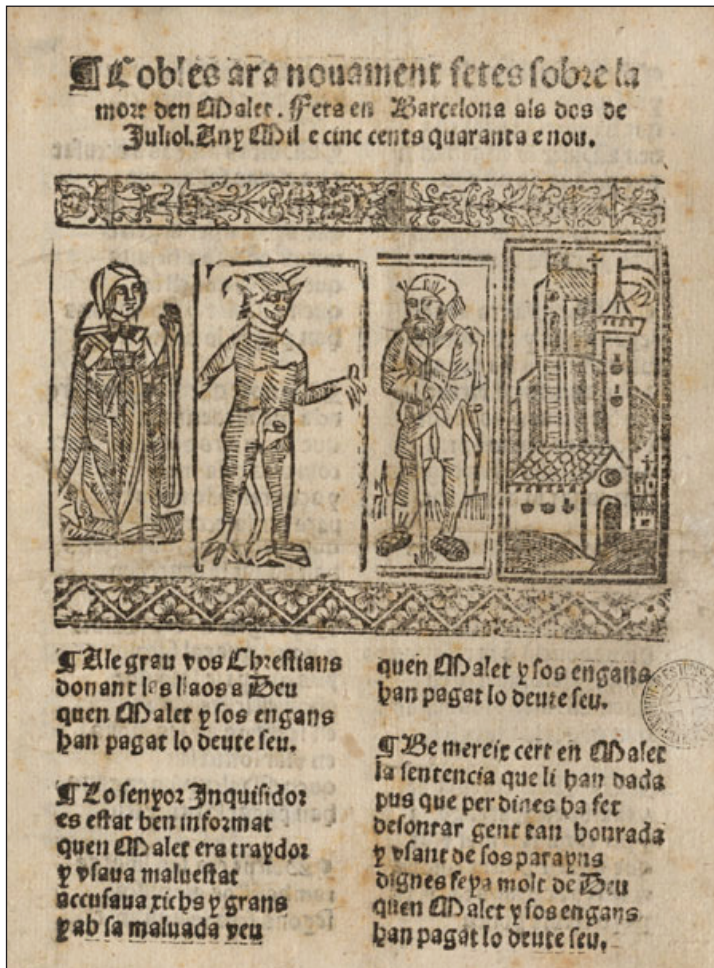


Fig. 3: *Cobles ara novament fetes sobre la mort d'en Malet, feta en Barcelona als dos de juliol any mil e cinc-cents quaranta-e-nou, 1549 (BC, Ms. I-IV-42).*

In addition, the text also intends to make clear that the power to judge and sentence witches was not held by the witch hunters, but by the Inquisition, the competent body that ensured compliance with Catholic dogma and fought to eradicate heresy. In other words, I think that this text does not seek to condemn witchcraft or to publicize the public execution of women accused of this crime, but rather to reafirm the role of the Inquisition in the matter. Put differently, it is a propagandistic poem, in all probability linked with this ecclesiastical institution to sway public

opinion in its favor and to make the population understand that crimes against the mother Church were within its competence:

Molt noble Inquisidor, Deu vos vulla mantenir, bé mostrau esser senyor, en tot quant se pot ben dir, pus llevau tots los engans, de Malet y qui es feu, [...] Ya no us cal tenir més por, de les bruxes ni bruxots, que'l senyor Inquisidor, los farà cremar a tots, en Malet paga sos mals, calcun pagarà lo seu, pues Malet y los engans, han pagat lo deure seu.	Most Noble Inquisitor, may God protect you, for you show that you are a lord, in all that can be said, for you eliminate all the deceptions of Malet and the one who does it [...] Do not be afraid of witches and sorcerers, that the lord inquisitor, will order them all to be burned, Malet pay for his wrongs, each shall pay for his own, for Malet and his deceits have paid what they owed.
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Therefore, the Morisco Malet was not a witch, on the contrary, he fought witchcraft throughout in Catalonia and came to gain certain status in many Catalan villages, and his death stood as a warning. Those who admired him and wanted to follow his footsteps for gain were told where that ended, which was at the stake. The authorities had to make it clear that the fight against evil practices was the competence of the ecclesiastical authorities and that private individuals had no say in the matter. I think that this was the aim of this popular poem, the death on the scaffold of Joan Malet, which reached a large number of people through the use of a popular format, to hammer the idea home. Ultimately, the texts referring to Roca and Malet, different as they were, aimed to convey the notion that the monarchy held a monopoly on violence and that the Inquisition ordered over spiritual matters.

CONCLUSIONS

In this article I have approached the basic characteristics of scaffold literature in Catalonia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the first section, I analyzed the distribution and creation of these narratives. I highlighted the fact that this form of literature underwent a significant growth during this period, and that Barcelona was the main production center, owing to the abundance of publishers in the city. We know that many texts ran several editions, although today only a few copies have survived, since, for instance, at least three versions of Antoni Roca's poems were printed with different engravings. Likewise, travelers passing through Barcelona and itinerant peddlers brought these printed to the rural areas.

I examined the various techniques used by poets to create their "non-fictional" narratives. This revealed a diversity of methods, ranging from incorporating contemporary rumors or interviewing those familiar with the prisoners, to drawing from personal experiences as witnesses to the execution or as participants in the judicial or religious system that dealt with the criminals. Other texts draw inspiration from official documents, legal proceedings, rulings, admonishments, and possibly even writings authored by the criminal themselves.

In the second section of the article, I examined two specific instances to gain additional insight into the unique characteristics of this type of literature. I analyzed two poems connected to banditry during the mid-seventeenth century and associated with the notorious bandit-priest, Antoni Roca, in order to contextualize the poems and better understand their significance. Although the two compositions are different, both aim to teach the public through "baroque terror" – by narrating the agony prisoners went through torture, and corporal punishment. Additionally, printed songs were distributed to persuade other perpetrators to stay away from crime, illustrating the fate that awaits them if they choose to continue living outside the law. Furthermore, the songs were connected to power, specifically those of Antoni Roca's songs linked with Viceroy Aguilar's attempt to sway public opinion in his favor. These songs justified the implementation of the death penalty and the success of the viceroy's police operation at a time when the monarch's alter ego in the territory faced serious legitimacy issues.

Secondly, I analyzed a poem that refers to the witch-hunting in Catalonia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The poem specifically focuses on dealing with the execution of Joan Malet, a Morisco witch hunter, in 1549. This text tries to educate the public about witchcraft, without condemning the practice itself. Rather, the focus lies on the authority of the competent institution, in this case the Inquisition, to judge heresy and superstitions. Its purpose was to serve as a cautionary message for those who may consider witch hunting as a profession. In conclusion, it can be argued that the literature of public executions was a significant genre in Catalonia.

PESMI Z MORIŠČA: ZNAČILNOSTI, NASTANEK IN RAZŠIRJANJE BALAD O USMRITIVAH V KATALONIJI 16. IN 17. STOLETJA

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POVZETEK

Ta študija analizira balade o usmrtitvah v Kataloniji zgodnjega novega veka. Prvi del članka se osredotoča na nastanek in razširjanje tega žanra. V zgodnjem novem veku je večina teh besedil nastala v Barceloni, popotniki in trgovci pa so jih razširili na druga območja, kjer so jih prevzeli lokalni kmetje. Podobno so različni anonimni pesniki sestavljali take pesmi z uporabo različnih metod, kot so pridobivanje informacij iz pravnih dokumentov, govoric, pogovori z ljudmi, ki so poznali zapornika, ali osebne izkušnje iz udeležbe na usmrtitvi. Možno je, da so bili nekateri avtorji člani pravosodja ali verskih skupin, ki so spremljale zločince na morišča. Obenem nekatere pesmi kažejo, da so bili njihovi avtorji kar zločinci sami. V drugem razdelku obravnavam dva posebna primera in analiziram značilnosti natisnjenih besedil. To sta slavni bandit Antoni Roca, o katerem sta leta 1544 in 1546 nastali dve pesmi, ter lovec na čarovnice, Morisk Joan Malet, ki so ga leta 1549 sežgali na grmadi. Malet je bil obtožen, da je goljufal pravosodje, ko je prijavil več deset žensk pod pretvezo, da so sklenile pakt s hudičem. Ti dve pesmi ponazarjata, da so bile katalonske balade o usmrtitvah informativna, moralizirajoča in propagandna besedila, namenjena vplivanju na vest javnosti.

Ključne besede: balade o usmrtitvah, Katalonija, banditizem, čarovništvo, smrtna kazen, ljudski tisk, zgodnje novoveška zgodovina

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