

# Saints as vectors of catholic identity at a Lutheran court. An analysis of the hagiographic dimension of don Bernardino de Rebolledo's works (c. 1650–1659)

Święci jako wektory tożsamości katolickiej na dworze luterańskim. Analiza hagiograficznego wymiaru dzieł don Bernardina de Rebolledo (ok. 1650–1659)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21697/an.16219>

LUIS CONDE BLÁZQUEZ  
UNIVERSITY OF BARCELONA  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5278-9240

*En los Santos, y fieles de la Tierra  
puse mi voluntad con todo affecto<sup>1</sup>*

These biblically-inspired verses reflect personal devotion of Bernardino de Rebolledo, who in this regard was an idiosyncratic representative of Counter-Reformation Spain (ill. 1). They come from *Selva sagrada* (1657), an adapted translation of the Psalms by Rebolledo, an underrated author and a perfect illustration of the baroque courtier: Don Bernardino de Rebolledo (1576, León–1667, Madrid) excelled with his sword and his quill, and he also was an eloquent and successful negotiator. His vital trajectory was marked by his military service to Philip IV of Spain in the complex context of the Thirty Years' War, which he

<sup>1</sup> "In the Saints, and the faithful of the Earth / I placed my will with all my heart." B. de Rebolledo, *Selva sagrada*, Cologne 1657, p. 22.



1. Portrait of Don Bernardino de Rebolledo, engraving from his *Ocios*, Anvers 1660. Public domain

combined with mediation tasks in the Rhineland, affording him an imperial county.<sup>2</sup> This made Rebolledo the most suitable candidate to represent Madrid's interests in Copenhagen, a kingdom with strong cultural, economic, and dynastic ties to the German principalities. The one thing that really stands out about his mission was that it lasted so long, more than a decade in a century troubled by large-scale conflicts and hectic diplomatic activity. However, the Spanish count's long residence in the Danish capital was the product of something more prosaic: his excessive debts kept him tied to his creditors. This dramatic situation helped him overcome the greatest crisis during his service in Copenhagen,<sup>3</sup> and by the time he was allowed to return, the Spanish authorities extended his duties in Denmark.<sup>4</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> c., Northern Europe was regarded as a backwater, a remote station that for diplomats could be understood as a sort of ostracism. Moscow, Warsaw, Stockholm, and Copenhagen were distant destinations that lacked the elegance and sophistication of Southern courts, a situation made worse by their harsh climatic conditions. Because of their peripheral location, information reached them slowly and, in a society in which success depended on favour and influence, the possibilities of gaining and preserving social capital at the

home court suffered accordingly.<sup>5</sup> Rebolledo's experience confirmed this perception and, in order to overcome boredom, he found solace in writing.<sup>6</sup> During his years in Denmark, he sent numerous letters – not solely those related to his role as informer of the Crown – and produced a vast literary corpus in which literature and faith converged. This includes a version of the Book of Job, devoted to Christina of Sweden, *La constancia victoriosa: égloga Sacra* (1655); a history of Denmark addressed to the Danish kings, *Selvas dánicas* (1655); the aforementioned *Selva sagrada* (1657); and *Idilio Sacro* (1660), a versified passion of Christ whose dedicatee was the regent queen of Spain, Mariana of Habsburg (ill. 2).<sup>7</sup> Additionally, he invoked the Northern Muses to compose a vast array of poems, which formed the anthology *Ocios* (Anvers 1660). This title reflects the goal of his literary activity with precision: the Spanish word derives from the Renaissance term *otium*, which refers to the time invested in achieving intellectual perfection. Concurrently, verses helped Rebolledo verbalize his emotional unrest: loneliness, alienation,

2 E. Gigas, *Grev Bernardino de Rebolledo, spansk gesandt i Kjøbenhavn (1648–1659)*, Copenhagen 1893, p. 6–7.

3 More details on the second section of the article.

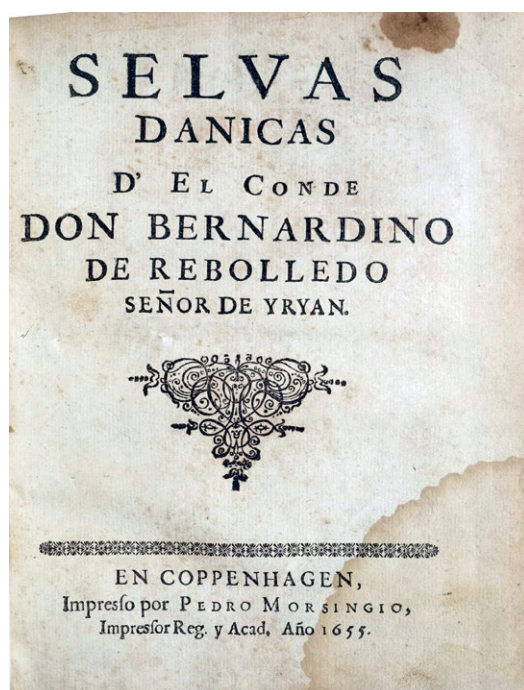
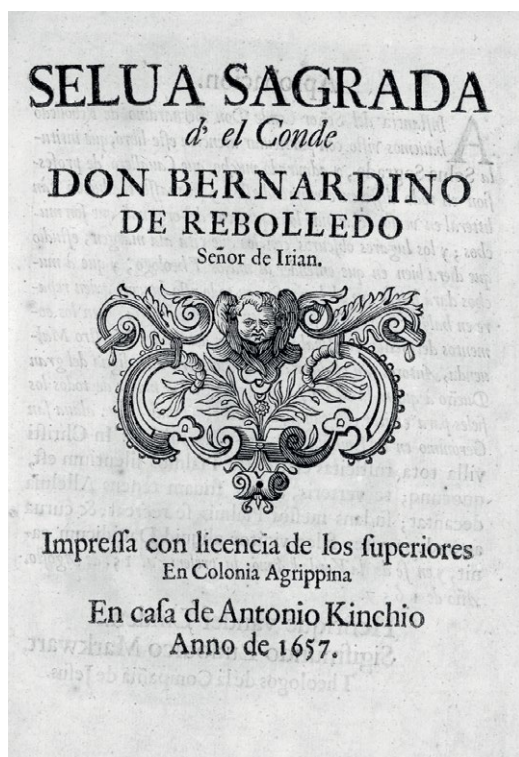
4 Rebolledo undertook diplomatic manoeuvres to consolidate the Habsburg strategy in Northern Europe, which implied the attempt of incorporating Copenhagen to the axis Madrid–Vienna–Warsaw. E. Corredra Nilsson, “Yo he hecho lo que he podido y en Praga lo que han querido”. *El papel mediador de Bernardino de Rebolledo en Copenhague y las limitaciones de la colaboración hispano-imperial en la guerra del Norte (1655–1660)*, in: *La dinastía de los Austria: las relaciones entre la Monarquía Católica y el Imperio*, ed. J. Martínez Millán, R. González Cuerva, Madrid 2011, p. 507–531.

5 The diplomatic sphere was shaped by transnational networks of sociability and patronage. P. Volpini, *Ambasciatori nella prima età moderna tra corti italiane ed europee*, Rome 2022; H. von Thiesen, *Diplomatie vom type ancien. Überlegungen zu einem Idealtypus des frühneuzeitlichen Gesandtschaftswesens*, in: *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, Hrsg. idem, Ch. Windler, Cologne 2010, p. 471–503; H. Droste, *Im Dienst der Krone. Schwedische Diplomaten im 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin–Münster–Vienna 2006, p. 35–39.

6 This strategy was quite frequent, as Bravo Lozano has attested for the Spanish ambassadors in London and The Hague: C. Bravo Lozano, *La aguda pluma del embajador. Ingenio y cultura política en la correspondencia entre los ministros españoles en Londres y La Haya (1675–1699)*, in: *Los embajadores. Representantes de la soberanía, garantes del equilibrio, 1659–1748*, ed. eadem, A. Álvarez-Ossorio Alvarino, Madrid 2021, p. 415–440.

7 M.C. Casado Lobato, *La biblioteca de un escritor del siglo XVII: Bernardino de Rebolledo*, “Revista de Filología Española”, vol. 46, 1973, no 3–4, p. 231–232.





2. Works by Don Bernardino de Rebolledo.  
Public domain

uncertainty, and neglect are recurrent feelings in his creations, coloured with heavy autobiographical hues.

### HAGIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES IN REBOLLEDO'S TEXTS

Don Bernardino de Rebolledo was a devout Catholic who found himself in a Lutheran dominion. The immunities afforded by the Peace of Westphalia (1648) enabled him to keep a chapel inside his residence in Copenhagen<sup>8</sup> and to possess religious books. Encrypted behind baroque formulas, a letter addressed by the Spanish envoy to his friend in León, don García de Villamizar (1651), reflects the role that spiritual exercises played in his everyday habits. In the long northern summer days,

<sup>8</sup> No evidence on the sacred objects of the chapel has been preserved. Nevertheless, his funerary chapel in the Cathedral of León has endured to the present and has attracted scholarly attention. This sacred space sets in contrast the count's sarcophagus, represented in a devotional, kneeling posture, with a Baroque altarpiece dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, which includes a depiction of his patron saint. F. Llamazares Rodríguez, *La capilla del Conde de Rebolledo en el claustro de la catedral de León (1667-1669)*, "Tierras de León", vol. 54, 1984, p. 95-110.

Rebolledo followed a strict reading routine, dominated by biblical figures and prominent saints of the Catholic Church: “When it is time to withdraw into these and other weighty considerations, I enter, as into the Temple, into the Scriptures, to hear of divine marvels and praise; I inquire into the meaning of the ceremonies and the mystery of the Chants, consulting some among the Holy Expositors and the Sacred Ministers, who lead me, as if in painted visions, to behold — in *Kings*, *Maccabees*, *Saint Matthew*, *Saint Luke*, *Saint Paul*, and the *Revelation* — Purgatory depicted just a little less clearly than in Dante. In *Malachi*, I behold the perpetual, present, pure, and holy Sacrifice of the Mass; in *Tobias*, the Angel offering up prayers; in *Zechariah*, his intercession before God, on behalf of the People. *Saint Matthew* teaches me that the just are in Heaven as Angels. [...] I listen to questions of scholastic Theology; at times I ascend the mount with the contemplatives, and though I reach not Heaven by the ladder of *Saint John Climacus*, nor by the dwellings of *Saint Teresa*, I yet strive to measure its distances with Ptolemy and Clavius.”<sup>9</sup>

In his poem *Tercetos II*, the author renders this catalogue in lyric form, adding brief comments to emphasise his familiarity with the books. After accounting for the

chapters that integrate the Gospels, Rebolledo combines erudition and piety by presenting his personal selection of religious works. The Spanish theologian Fray Luis de Granada (1504–1588) stands out because of his Catechism, characterized as “a guide for sinners [...] that dost draw them out of so blind an abyss”.<sup>10</sup> In terms of mysticism and theology, the diplomat recommends non-canonised authors such as the Benedictine Louis Blosius (1506–1566), the Minims Francis de Sales (1567–1622) and Fernando Caldera (d. 1633), and, of course, the Augustinian Thomas von Kempis (1380–1471), source of “humility and confidence”. Some saints also feature in the poem, for instance Saint Bonaventure and two emblems of Spanish religiosity, Saint Teresa of Ávila (1515–1582) and Saint Peter of Alcántara (1499–1562).<sup>11</sup>

Later in the work, Rebolledo emphasizes that devotional exercises and theological training have to be reinforced by models of sanctity:

“Stir the fervent love that sets you burning, by the Saints’ most potent, shining example, whose glorious labours seek celestial yearning.

Though their lives have been celebrated by so many

let Rivadeneira’s [account],

and Cairasco’s devout chants be your

guide.”<sup>12</sup>

In this context, the poet highlights two relevant Spanish Golden Age – hagiographies, echoing the fervent veneration of

9 “Quando es hora ya de recojerme a estas y otras consideraciones importantes, entro, como en el Templo, en la Escritura a oír divinas maravillas y alabanzas; pregunto la significacion de las ceremonias, y misterio de los Canticos, a algunos de los Santos Espositores y Ministros sagrados, que me llevan a ver, como en pintura, en los Reyes, Macabeos, San Matheo, San Lucas, San Pablo, y el Apocalipsi, el Purgatorio, poco menos claro que en el Dante: en Malachias perpetuo el presente, limpio, o Santo Sacrificio de la Misa: en Tobias a el Angel presentando sus oraciones: en Zacarias rogando a Dios por el Pueblo: enseñanme en San Matheo, que los justos son en el cielo como Angeles [...] oygo quēstiones de Theologia escolástica, subo tal vez al monte con los contemplativos, y ya que no al cielo por la escala de San Juan Climaco, o moradas de Santa Teresa, a medir sus distancias con Ptolomeo, y Clavio.” B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios*, Anvers 1660, p. 191–192.

10 Ibidem, p. 185. Rebolledo plays here with the original title of Luis de Granada’s work, *Guía de pecadores*, (in English, “Guide for sinners”) to introduce the subordinate clause.

11 Ibidem.

12 “Excitad el afecto que l’enciende, / al eficaz exenplo de los santos / que con glorioso esfuerço el Cielo enprende / aunque sus vidas celebraron tantos / las de Riudadeneira os acredito, / y de Cairasco los deuotos cantos.” Ibidem, p. 184.

saints during Philip II's reign. The first one refers to *Flos Sanctorum*, a translation of the Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* by the Jesuit Pedro de Ribadeneira (1527–1611); the other corresponds to *Templo militante y triumphos de sus virtudes*, a widely disseminated poem by the Canarian canon Bartolomé Cayrasco (1538–1610), inspired by another major hagiographer of the same period, Alonso de Villegas (1533–1603).<sup>13</sup>

This rosary of sacred references may be interpreted as proof of Rebolledo's devotion. He presented himself as a model Catholic exposed to the dangers of heresy in the barbaric North. This martyrial self-image has already been detected in letters sent to Madrid and Brussels. As Corredera has noted, in these documents the count adopted a sacrificial rhetoric, reporting his lack of involvement in court feasts, complaining about his suffering from financial shortcomings, and portraying himself as a loyal servant devoted to his affairs.<sup>14</sup> However, additional religious references were present in his library, including two sacred biographies by Felipe Colombo (*Compendio de la vida de San Pedro Pascual* and *Vida de San Pedro Nolasco*), as well as a French version of Saint Augustine's *De civitate Dei contra paganos*; another French translation of Saint Peter Crisologus's sermons; López de Zárate's *Poema heroico de la invención de la Cruz*; Saint Catherine of Siena's *Spiritual Letters* (also in French); the manuscript *Analogía del nuevo y el viejo testamento* by Martín Becano; *Corónica general de San Benito* and sermons of the Virgin in Italian.<sup>15</sup>

The years spent in Copenhagen allowed Rebolledo to expand his hagiographical knowledge to include the histories of northern saints. The Spanish envoy had access to the libraries of the Stadholder and the (Lutheran) archbishop of the city, Jesper Brochmand (1585–1652),<sup>16</sup> whose books might have familiarized the diplomat with the regional evangelization. An eloquent fragment in *Selvas dánicas* proves that don Bernardino was able to consult the *Chronicon Roskildense*: “[King Sven] subdued Norway, and once more conquered England: free from the burdens of war, and brought to the true worship of Saint Popon by exhortations, and the wondrous miracle of donning the burning iron glove without harm to his hand, [once] his faith was confirmed, he turned the Church of Roeskild [sic] into a bishopric.”<sup>17</sup>

These verses allude to the ordeal of the red-hot iron endured by Poppo, a monk sent by Libencius of Bremen to Denmark, who convinced the Danes of God's existence through this miracle. As a result, he was awarded the see of Roskilde and became a sacred figure in the Nordic countries.<sup>18</sup> This episode was not easily found in hagiographies outside Denmark, at least not in Spanish works, which suggests that Rebolledo took advantage of his contacts in Copenhagen to satisfy his interest in saints and miracles. Even if his *Selvas dánicas* did not enjoy a great literary success in Spain,

16 B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios...*, op. cit., p. 195.

17 “Sojuzgó la Norwega, / y conquistò de nueuo a Inglaterra: / libre de los Cuidados de la Guerra, / y al verdadero culto reducido, / de San Popon por las exhortaciones, / y el insigne milagro / de calçarle de Hyerro el guante ardiendo / sin lesion de la mano, / en la Fè confirmado / l'Iglesia de Roeskild hizo Obispado”. B. de Rebolledo, *Selvas dánicas*, Copenhagen 1655, p. 41.

18 M.Cl. Gertz, *Scriptores minores historiæ danicæ mediæ ævi*, Copenhagen 1917, p. 21.

13 J.M. Perera, *La buena nueva de Templo militante, de Bartolomé Cairasco. Un testimonio*, “Almoragen”, vol. 73, 2024, p. 205–206.

14 E. Corredera Nilsson, *Confessional public diplomacy? Bernardino de Rebolledo's defence of Catholicism in Denmark, 1655–1656*, “The Seventeenth Century”, vol. 36, 2021, no. 3, p. 472.

15 M.C. Casado Lobato, op. cit., p. 250–255.





3. Saint Helen's Spring in Tisvilde (Denmark). Phot. Tisvildevejen 2022, <https://esrum-tisvildevejen.dk/ramloese-tisvilde/> [access 26.6.2025]

by referring to the prodigious event in Castile's tongue, the count served as a conduit for the transmission of northern sacred history.

A similar example concerns the iron-ic epigram dedicated to Saint Helena of Skövde:

"A Swedish Catholic  
Saint Helena favours,  
a land that is not her own,  
one that professes a different faith.  
And all chimeras forge  
unbelief, she disproves  
through a miracle as manifest  
as giving them water to drink."<sup>19</sup>

Once again, Don Bernardino de Rebolledo demonstrates his familiarity with a very specific legend, little known outside Scandinavia: the miracles of Saint Helena. This 12th-century Swedish woman was falsely accused of killing her son-in-law to defend her mistreated daughter, and to survive, she travelled to the Holy Land. At her return, the dead man's family took her life in revenge, and she was canonised in 1165. Because Brynolf Angoltsson, bishop of

Skara, composed the *Helenaofficiet* in the late 13th Century, it has been argued that Helena (Elin) provided the oldest Swedish archdiocese with its own saintly figure.<sup>20</sup> Several legends around the healing properties of the saint spread in Northern Europe, accounting for two curative springs: one to the south of Swedish Skara, the other by the Danish village of Tisvilde, in Northern Sealand (ill. 3). A contemporary of Rebolledo, Ole Worm, had written in 1617 that the spring was afterwards called "en fra Sverige kommen hellig kvinde ved navn Sankt Lene",<sup>21</sup> which matches the information provided by Rebolledo. Although it is difficult to know whether the latter consulted Worm's text, we know through an autobiographic comment that what inspired the epigram was his pilgrimage to the spring.<sup>22</sup> This underscores Rebolledo's spirituality, shaped by his devotion towards saints and miracles. Furthermore, the persistence of popular devotional practices in a seemingly

<sup>19</sup> "Catolica Suedesa / favorece Santa Elena, / patria de la suya agena, / que otra religion profesa. / Y quantas quimeras fragua / la incredulidad, desmiente / con milagro tan patente / como hacerles beber agua."

B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios*, op. cit., p. 253.

<sup>20</sup> T.A. DuBois, *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto 2008, p. 210; S.A. Mitchell, *Margrete of Nordnes in Cult, Chronicle, and Ballad*, "Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift", Bd. 74, 2022, p. 280.

<sup>21</sup> A. Schück, *Har S.ta Helena av Skövde existerat?*, "Fornvännen", Bd. 52, 1957, p. 260-261.

<sup>22</sup> B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios*, op. cit., p. 657.

Lutheran society<sup>23</sup> enabled this devout Catholic to reconcile his Hispanic origin with his present surroundings.

Works by Rebolledo not only made erudite hagiographical references, but also exploited their semantic content to create ironic word plays, a common feature of Baroque rhetoric. This literary strategy illustrates the embeddedness of the sacred in the author's mental universe, especially in more intimate compositions like Romance LIX. This 192 verse-poem recounts his life through Rebolledo's *alter ego*, don Francisco de Bel,<sup>24</sup> who, after being forced to serve the king in Denmark, finally feels the imminence of his return to Spain. The poet admits to his own uncertainty by analysing his possible destinations in his homeland, including León and its Monastery of Saint Mark, "upon whose founding the name sprang / of the knights' Order of Santiago". However, he promptly qualifies this point with the following desideratum: "if I could choose, / Saint Martin would be my saint".<sup>25</sup> Here, González Cañal has detected the contraposition of two allegories: on the one hand, during the Golden-Age the cloister in

León operated as a prison ruled by the powerful Order of Santiago – among others, the Spanish major author Francisco de Quevedo (1580–1645) was jailed there; on the other hand, Saint Martin stands as a metaphor for pleasure, since, according to the philologist, Rebolledo is alluding to San Martín de Valdeiglesias and its highly reputed wines.<sup>26</sup> The choice of these opposing figures, Saint James (Santiago) – Saint Martin, (i.e., punishment-pleasure), is not accidental: Rebolledo was born in an important city in the *Camino de Santiago*, so he surely knew that the Apostle Saint James and the soldier Saint Martin competed over the pilgrims' patronage.<sup>27</sup>

Saints could also be used as national allegories through astute homophonic associations. This is the case with the pairing of Poland (*Polonia* in Spanish) and Apollonia in Romance LXI, a lyrical letter with which Rebolledo gave his friend Father Pedro Tamayo, *definitorio* in the Philippines, the latest news in Northern Europe. Although the text is undated (day and month are mentioned in the final verses, but not the year), this literary piece might have been written in 1654 or 1655, based on the events reported: "It is said that the Muscovite suffers from a toothache and prays to Saint Poland for miracles by force."<sup>28</sup>

The author is clearly referring here to the voracity of the Tsar toward the

23 Asche noted that the Reformation in Scandinavia and Northern Germany, an eminently urban phenomenon, struggled to penetrate in rural areas, where Catholic rites, syncretised with pre-Christian traditions, remained firmly rooted: "Insgesamt behielt das skandinavische Luthertum viele altkirchliche Formen bei und erwies sich so -ähnlich wie im Norddeutschland und dem deutschen Osten- als eine bewahrende Kraft". M. Asche, *Zentrum und Peripherie in der Geschichte Nordeuropas im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung*, in: *Dänemark, Norwegen und Schweden im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Nordische Königreiche und Konfession 1500 bis 1660*, Hrsg. idem, A. Schindling, Münster 2003, p. 13–25 (p. 18: In fact, Saint Helen's spring in Tisvilde had already been a cult space for the locals before the adoption of Catholicism).

24 Don Bernardino grounds the selection of anthroponym on a hagiographical image: "Of the saint who beheld visions, / His name was bestowed upon me". B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios*, op. cit., p. 166.

25 Ibidem.

26 R. González Cañal, *Edición crítica de los Ocios del Conde de Rebolledo*, Cuenca 1997, p. 603. It is worth noting that food and wine were part of the repertoire of conventional images employed by Spanish mystics to confront the discursive challenge of articulating the sublime. F. Gómez Solís, *Índice de metáforas y de imágenes de la literatura espiritual española (ss. XVI–XVII)*, Cáceres 1990 (PhD dissertation).

27 J.R. Hernández Figueiredo, *El nuevo modelo de santidad de Martín de Tours y su relación con el comienzo de la Via Turonensis del Camino de Santiago*, "Salmanticensis", vol. 64, 2017, p. 403.

28 "Dizese qu'el Moscouita / con dolor de muelas anda, / y pide a santa Polonia / milagros a fuerça de armas." B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios*..., op. cit., p. 275.



4. Zurbarán, *Saint Apollonia*, c. 1635–1640,  
Musée du Louvre

Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, which marked the beginning of the Polish–Russian War (1654–1667). Moscow’s fury is metaphorically described as a “toothache”, a rage that only Saint Apollonia – the patroness of dental ailments, transfigured here into a national allegory of Poland – could soothe through territorial concessions. Naturally, such a “miracle” could only come about by force of arms.

### SAINTS AS PROTECTORS AGAINST HERESY?

The saintly landscape created by Rebolledo’s literary universe must be understood in the context of other religious initiatives undertaken by the envoy. His activity in the Danish capital, which remained relatively autonomous due to the distance from Madrid, was underpinned by his staunch defence of Catholicism, supported by a network of Jesuit priests that included Willem van Aelst, Gottfried Franken, and Michiel de la Fuente. These clergymen preached daily in the private chapel of Rebolledo’s residence, a cultic space tolerated by Frederick III due to the immunities agreed in Westphalia. However, the chapel welcomed anyone who wished to attend Catholic mass, which was in clear violation of the private nature of said immunities and could be construed as an attack on Lutheranism, the official creed in the dominions of the Danish king. The Spanish ambassador and his religious entourage thus became an outpost of the Tridentine doctrine in Northern Europe, with strong links with Hamburg and, during Queen Christina’s reign, also with Stockholm.<sup>29</sup>

If creating such a militant hub was not daring enough, Rebolledo had the



audacity to write a confessionally driven Danish history inspired by Saxo Grammaticus’s *Selvas dānicas* (1655). Invoking Denmark’s triumphs under its ancient faith, the count attempted to persuade Frederick III and his wife, Sofia Amalia of Braunschweig–Lüneburg, to convert to Catholicism.<sup>30</sup> In truth, in religious terms, Denmark was at that time the most tolerant of all northern kingdoms. In contrast to Sweden, which adopted its own official doctrine very early (Västerås’s *Riksdag*, 1527), the institutional apparatus of the Danish national

29 L. Conde Blázquez, *El conde de Rebolledo y los jesuitas del norte* (1648–1659), in: *El món d’Ignasi de Loiola. Religió, cultura i societat als segles XVI i XVII*, ed. J. Dantí, X. Gil, I. Mauro, D. Sola, Barcelona 2023, p. 726–730.

30 B. de Rebolledo, *Selvas dānicas...*, op. cit.



Church needed several centuries to crystallise, while the crown tended to prioritise pragmatic interests;<sup>31</sup> indeed, a brother of the queen, Johann Friedrich, had recently embraced the Roman faith without being banned from the Danish court.<sup>32</sup> All of this may have convinced Rebolledo of the viability of an actual conversion of the monarchs, with all its implications.

The author failed in this endeavour, but the royal reaction was at least not as heavy-handed as it could have been in another capital. With great subtlety, Sofia Amalia, whose beauty and virtues were so highly valued by the Spaniard, offered him one of her states, Hørsholm, to cultivate his *otium*. In other words, Rebolledo was being removed from the court. But other incidents surely contributed to this ambiguous gift. In the summer of 1654, the Spanish embassy was attacked by a group of young men, to screams of “Let’s kill these Catholic Spaniards!” This was at least Rebolledo’s version, as recounted to the castellan of Copenhagen. Months later, the residence was again subject to an assault led by the vicar of Saint Nicholas’s Church, Hans Brochmand. A member of the Spanish legation, Diego Ugarte, was suspected of inducing a moribund woman to convert to Catholicism on her deathbed, unleashing the wrath of the mob. The Lutheran preacher claimed to have been the victim of an attempted murder at the hands of the Spanish residence’s staff; the accusation reached the chancellor of the realm, which severely undermined Rebolledo’s standing in Denmark. Thanks to his good relations with the chancellor, Thomesen Sehested, the ambassador managed to remain in Hørsholm without further trouble.<sup>33</sup>

At any rate, these risks did not stop Don Bernardino from promoting the Catholic interests in his Lutheran destination. The embassy was once again embroiled in controversy in 1656, when one of his subordinates, Antonio de Sandoval, reported Rebolledo for abusing the royal secretary Don Gerónimo de la Torre. Tensions rapidly escalated, and Sandoval finally escaped, taking shelter in his conversion to Lutheranism. From then on, the ambassador was forced to contend with a Spaniard attempting to sabotage his mission in Copenhagen; Sandoval published two pamphlets attacking both Philip IV of Spain and the Pope, and Rebolledo suggested that the king should have the “traitor” face an inquisitorial court.<sup>34</sup> The Spanish envoy in Copenhagen not only worried about the health of the Catholic faith, but also took a highly orthodox view, even in such a remote court.

Rebolledo’s mission was soon impeded by further hurdles. In November 1655, Frederick III issued an edict against the use of private diplomatic chapels as spaces for proselytism, a legal decision forced upon him by Sweden’s pressure to establish a temporary alliance. This encouraged Don Bernardino to fight back by requesting an audience with the Danish king and by sending a translated copy of the edict to Philip IV. Aware of his limited leverage in Copenhagen, Rebolledo sent another copy to the Spanish ambassador in The Hague, urging him to pass it on to the Staaten Generaal, at a time when the United Provinces had no diplomatic representatives in Denmark.<sup>35</sup> The operation failed, but it demonstrated the strength of Rebolledo’s religious commitment.

These contextual notes, strongly coloured by their confessional tone, redefine the significance of saints in Rebolledo’s

31 M. Asche, op. cit.

32 B. de Rebolledo, *Ocios...*, op. cit., p. 283.

33 E. Corredra Nilsson, *Dealing with the North: Spanish ambassadors in the Scandinavian Kingdoms (1648–*

*1660)*, Madrid 2016 (PhD dissertation), p. 292–293.

34 E. Gigas, op. cit., p. 222–223.

35 E. Corredra Nilsson, *Confessional public diplomacy?...*, op. cit., p. 470–471.

work, turning them into identity markers that stand out from his Lutheran environment. After all, the Tridentine affirmation of the value of sanctity had turned the cult of the saints and the Virgin into a symbol of the Roman faith and a mechanism of cohesion for the community of believers.<sup>36</sup>

Saints boosted the devotion of a community whose identity was materially expressed in processions, relics, festivities, and literary compositions.<sup>37</sup> Concerning written works, Catholic Europe witnessed a revival of hagiographies and martyrologues, as illustrated by the Spanish texts cited by Rebolledo and by Bosio's study of Rome's catacombs (*Roma sotterranea*), which used martyrs as a weapon to destroy Lutheran claims to the first Christians.<sup>38</sup> Another outstanding example can be found in seventeenth-century Ireland, which had successfully preserved its pre-Reformation saintly fabric. Now invigorated by the impetus of *De Propaganda Fide*, it fostered a renewed sacred landscape that stood in stark contrast to the iconoclastic beliefs of England's protestant churches. Irish historians, like Seathrún Céitinn (1569–1644) and Michael Ó Cléirigh (1590–1643), emphasized Ireland's religious outlook as a source of political identity, as illustrated in the recurrent use of the phrase "insula sanctorum".<sup>39</sup> Rebolledo's

*Selvas dánicas* likewise aimed to reorient the identity of the Danish monarchy toward its Catholic past, presenting a particularly reverent view of canonized kings, whose exemplary lives were emphasized to underscore the troubled path Denmark was navigating in the mid-seventeenth century.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Count of Rebolledo represents a paradigmatic example of the Counter-Reformation *ethos*: he linked his political praxis with the creation of a Catholic network in the hostile Nordic milieu, while simultaneously deploying the codes of diplomatic conduct — such as the strategic use of *dona* — to uphold Tridentine values within Frederick III's Denmark. His actions attest to a deep spirituality, illustrated by an emphatic Catholic fervour that permeated his daily life. The cult of the saints delineates a devotional framework expressed through multiple registers: from the erudite sphere shaped by patristic and ascetic traditions to the magisterium of hagiographic *vitae*, the performative pilgrimage to Tisvilde, and the allegorical recourse to saints for ironic and literary purposes.

These elements allow for an epilogue: Don Bernardino de Rebolledo also represents a more intimate face of the Counter-Reformation, one that unfolded in the shadow of clandestinity. In contrast with public displays of faith and all their social and identity-related components, the confessional agency of the Spanish ambassador in mid-seventeenth-century Denmark was deeply personal, a reflection of his isolation as the sole Catholic representative in a Lutheran court. His ecclesiastical retinue, household servants, spiritual readings, and saints were the structural elements of the Catholic universe confined within the walls of his chapel.

36 R.J. Barro, R.M. McCleary, *Protestant Competition is Good for Saints*, Harvard, 2017, p. 1.

37 These public manifestations of faith played a particularly prominent role in keeping Catholic communities in confessionally-divided regions, such as Bohemia, Flanders, or Bavaria, distinct and cohesive. H. Louthan, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation*, Cambridge 2009, p. 265–269; P.M. Soergel, *Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria*, Berkeley 1993, p. 11–12.

38 S. Ditchfield, *Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World*, "Critical Inquiry", vol. 35, 2009, no. 3, p. 561–562.

39 J. McCafferty, *The Communion of Saints and Catholic Reformation in Early Seventeenth-century Ireland*, in: *Community in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. R. Armstrong, T.Ó hAnnracháin, Dublin 2006, p. 199–214.

## SUMMARY

This article revisits the literary production of a Spanish Golden Age author, Don Bernardino de Rebolledo, in light of its abundant hagiographic references. Works such as *Ocios*, *Selva Sagrada*, *Selvas dánicas*, and a handful of poetic letters must be understood in the confessional and personal framework of their inception: Rebolledo's diplomatic mission in Copenhagen (1648–1659). In a Lutheran country, where he took decisive steps to protect the Catholic community, the recurrent mention of saints emerges as a feature in Rebolledo's personal identity.

## KEY WORDS

Bernardino de Rebolledo, Denmark, Spain, saints, Counter-Reformation

## STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł dotyczy licznych odniesień hagiograficznych w twórczości literackiej hiszpańskiego autora Złotego Wieku don Bernardino de Rebolledo. Dzieła takie jak *Ocios*, *Selva Sagrada*, *Selvas dánicas* oraz pełne poetyckich odniesień listy należy rozumieć w kontekście konfesyjnym i osobistym: misji dyplomatycznej Rebolledo w Kopenhadze (1648–1659). W Danii – kraju luterańskim – podjął on zdecydowane kroki w celu ochrony społeczności katolickiej. Powtarzające się wzmianki o świętych w jego twórczości są charakterystyczne dla Rebolleda.

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Bernardino de Rebolledo, Dania, Hiszpania, święci, kontrreformacja

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Sources

- Rebolledo Bernardino de, *Ocios*, Anvers 1660.  
 Rebolledo Bernardino de, *Selva sagrada*, Cologne 1657.  
 Rebolledo Bernardino de, *Selvas dánicas*, Copenhagen 1655.

### Literature

- Asche Matthias, *Zentrum und Peripherie in der Geschichte Nordeuropas im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung*, in: *Dänemark, Norwegen und Schweden im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung: Nordische Königreiche und Konfession 1500 bis 1660*, Hrsg. idem, Anton Schindling, Münster 2003, p. 13–25.  
 Barro Robert J., McCleary Rachel M., *Protestant Competition is Good for Saints*, Harvard, 2017.

- Bravo Lozano Cristina, *La aguda pluma del embajador. Ingenio y cultura política en la correspondencia entre los ministros españoles en Londres y La Haya (1675–1699)*, in: *Los embajadores. Representantes de la soberanía, garantes del equilibrio, 1659–1748*, ed. eadem, Antonio Álvarez-Ossorio Alvaríño, Madrid 2021, p. 415–440.  
 Casado Lobato María Concepción, *La biblioteca de un escritor del siglo XVII: Bernardino de Rebolledo*, “Revista de Filología Española”, vol. 46, 1973, no 3–4, p. 229–328.  
 Conde Blázquez Luis, *El conde de Rebolledo y los jesuitas del norte (1648–1659)*, in: *El món d’Ignasi de Loiola. Religió, cultura i societat als segles XVI i XVII*, ed. J. Dantí, X. Gil, I. Mauro, D. Sola, Barcelona 2023, p. 710–737.  
 Corredera Nilsson Enrique, *Confessional public diplomacy? Bernardino de Rebolledo's defence of Catholicism in Denmark*,



- 1655–1656, "The Seventeenth Century", vol. 36, 2021, no. 3, p. 463–483.
- Corredera Nilsson Enrique, *Dealing with the North: Spanish ambassadors in the Scandinavian Kingdoms (1648–1660)*, Madrid 2016 (PhD dissertation).
- Corredera Nilsson Enrique, "Yo he hecho lo que he podido y en Praga lo que han querido". *El papel mediador de Bernardino de Rebolledo en Copenhague y las limitaciones de la colaboración hispano-imperial en la guerra del Norte (1655–1660)*, in: *La dinastía de los Austria: las relaciones entre la Monarquía Católica y el Imperio*, ed. J. Martínez Millán, R. González Cuerva, Madrid 2011, p. 507–531.
- Ditchfield Simon, *Thinking with Saints: Sanctity and Society in the Early Modern World*, "Critical Inquiry", vol. 35, 2009, no. 3, p. 552–584.
- Droste Heiko, *Im Dienst der Krone. Schwedische Diplomaten im 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin–Münster–Vienna 2006.
- DuBois Thomas Andrew, *Sanctity in the North: Saints, Lives, and Cults in Medieval Scandinavia*, Toronto 2008.
- Gertz Martin Claurentius, *Scriptores minores historiae danicae medii aevi*, Copenhagen 1917.
- Gigas Emil, *Grev Bernardino de Rebolledo, spansk gesandt i Kjøbenhavn (1648–1659)*, Copenhagen 1893.
- Gómez Solís Felipe, *Índice de metáforas y de imágenes de la literatura espiritual española (ss. XVI–XVII)*, Cáceres, 1990 (PhD dissertation).
- González Cañal Rafael, *Edición crítica de los Ocios del Conde de Rebolledo*, Cuenca 1997.
- Hernández Figueiredo José Ramón, *El nuevo modelo de santidad de Martín de Tours y su relación con el comienzo de la Via Turonensis del Camino de Santiago*, "Sal-manticensis", vol. 64, 2017, p. 403–435.
- Llamazares Rodríguez Fernando, *La capilla del Conde de Rebolledo en el claustro de la catedral de León (1667–1669)*, "Tierras de León", vol. 54, 1984, p. 95–110.
- Louthan Howard, *Converting Bohemia: Force and Persuasion in the Catholic Reformation*, Cambridge 2009.
- McCafferty John, *The Communion of Saints and Catholic Reformation in Early Seventeenth-century Ireland*, in: *Community in Early Modern Ireland*, ed. Robert Armstrong, Tadhg O'Hanracháin, Dublin 2006.
- Mitchell Stephen A., *Margrete of Nordnes in Cult, Chronicle, and Ballad*, "Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift", vol. 74, 2022, p. 262–286.
- Perera José Miguel, *La buena nueva de Templo militante, de Bartolomé Cairasco. Un testimonio*, "Almoragen", vol. 73, 2024, p. 205–210.
- Schück Adolf, *Har S:ta Helena av Skövde existerat?*, "Fornvännen", Bd. 52, 1957, p. 259–263.
- Soergel Philip M., *Wondrous in His Saints: Counter-Reformation Propaganda in Bavaria*, Berkeley 1993.
- Thiessen Hillard von, *Diplomatie vom type ancien. Überlegungen zu einem Idealtypus des frühneuzeitlichen Gesandtschaftswesens*, in: *Akteure der Außenbeziehungen. Netzwerke und Interkulturalität im historischen Wandel*, Hrsg. idem, Christian Windler, Cologne 2010, p. 471–503.
- Volpini Paola, *Ambasciatori nella prima età moderna tra corti italiane ed europee*, Rome 2022.

Text submitted: 25.06.2025, reviewed: 1.08.2025,  
accepted for publication: 29.08.2025