

## Segismundo, Sigismundo, and the Power in Europe

Por Michael Cohen

[mjcohe02@syr.edu](mailto:mjcohe02@syr.edu)

In the Syracuse University library, there is an exhibit called “The Power and the Piety” that informed us about the medieval and renaissance world of Europe. There are two images there in a book by Vegetius that show the army of Paris during the time of the Roman Empire. “This work on the operations of the military in the Later Roman Empire (4th Century CE) was a very popular text throughout the medieval period.” The images face each other on two pages. On the left, there is an illustration of an apparatus used as a medieval elevator. A battalion would enter the apparatus in order to reach the top part of a castle. And on the right hand page, there is an illustration of an apparatus that works like a ladder. The troops would put it on the side of the castle in order to climb the wall.

There are similarities between these images and certain aspects of “La vida es sueño,” a dramatic work by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. The author was born in 1600 and died in 1681. Scholars do not know exactly when his work was written, but it was published in 1635 (Pedro Calderón de la Barca). The protagonists are the King of Poland, whose name is Basilio, and his son, whose name is Segismundo. And in my opinión, the role of Segismundo is based on the life of a real person. There was a King of Poland named Sigismund III Vasa. This man held the throne for 40 years (1587-1632), a part of which overlaps with

the live of Pedro Calderón de la Barca. I think that Segismunod is a representation loosely base don Sigismund III Vasa.

In *La vida es sueño*, Basilio resides in a large castle to rule over Poland. Segismundo lives in the castle as well, but his father put him in a jail in one of the castle's towers. Basilio had heard a prophecy that indicated that Segismundo would be a horrible prince. But in the end, Seguisundo reclaimed the throne by showing his compassion. As a result, Segismundo lived in the castle, just like Sigismund III Vasa, who lived in Wawel Royal Castle in Poland. This castle, like the one in the photos of the aforementioned exhibit, was made of stone with tall walls and towers. The medieval castle served two purposes 1) it converted into a splendid house for the king and 2) it protected the king by serving as a fort. As a result, if anyone wanted to attack the king, an apparatus like those Vegetius drew in his book would have been necessary to climb the walls.

Continuing with the parallel between Segismundo and Sigismund, we move to the end of the work by Pedro Calderón de la Barca. Before taking the throne, Segismundo and Basilio had a confratation outside of the castle. Segismundo had escaped from the castle and formed his own army. Basilio, as the kind, already had his own army. The two converged, and Basilio asked Segismundo to kill him to complete the prophecy. But Segismundo did not do it.

“Mi padre, que está presente,  
por excusarse a la saña  
de mi condición, me hizo  
un bruto, una fiera humana;  
de suerte que, cuando yo

por mi nobleza gallarda,  
por mi sangre generosa,  
por mi condición bizarra,  
hubiera nacido dócil  
y humilde, sólo bastara  
tal género de vivir,  
tal linaje de crianza,  
a hacer fieras mis costumbres.”

And Basilio said his son was ready, at that point, to take the throne.

“Hijo, que tan noble acción  
otra vez en mis entrañas  
te engendra, príncipe eres.  
A ti el laurel y la palma  
se te deben. Tú venciste;  
corónente tus hazañas.”

With Sigismund, the final was slightly different. He didn't fight with his father, but he did fight with his uncle, Charles, who was the Duke of Sodermanland. Charles formed an army with the people of Sweden and the two had a confrontation in 1597 that came to be known as the Swedish Civil War. The war lasted two years, and Charles won the Battle of Stangebro in 1598 to take the throne. Sigismund was captured during the battle. But since he was the king, Sigismund was granted liberty and returned to Poland. This represents an inversion of the events in the play, where Segismundo doesn't kill his father. Though the events aren't perfect matches, it is important to consider the

similarities between the two. And perhaps the character of Segismundo is supposed to be Pedro Calderón de la Barca's interpretation of what Sigismund III Vasa's reign should have been like.

In the photos from the exhibit, there are soldiers as well. They are wearing armor to protect themselves, helmets on their heads and wield swords to attack. *La vida es sueño* doesn't have images, but we can assume that the characters dressed the same. Photos of the Battle of Stångebro prove this hypothesis. And the soldiers in the photos of this battle show the use of horses to travel as well.

## References

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### Photos

1. La torre de Sigismund III Vasa, construida en 1595. Es parte del Castillo Wawel.

Autor: Jakub Halun

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

File:Krakow\_Wawel\_20070804\_0930.jpg

2. Una foto de la Batalla de Stangebros (Swedish Civil War).

Autor: Huokko

Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f3/Slaget\\_vid\\_Stångebro.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f3/Slaget_vid_Stångebro.jpg)

3. Una foto de Sigismundo III Vasa antes de pelear.

Autor: No hay

Source: <http://strv102r.tripod.com/stangebros.htm>