

The Cardinal's Farewell: Viseu, 1541

CARLOS C. DA FONTE

Universidade do Porto (Portugal)

Abstract

The Cardinal's Farewell: Viseu, 1541 Semiotics is rarely a first-choice tool in determining historical facts. Local history, contrastingly, with so many unresolved questions, could be a fertile field for semiotic research, helping to establish semantic patterns and observe evolution with time and culture. An epigraphic monument dated from 1541 has remained incomprehensible, known only to locals in a small Portuguese village. The transcribed text led initially to D. Miguel da Silva, bishop of Viseu, cardinal in pectore since 1539, chased then by King D. João III and thought to have escaped to Rome by 1540. It was very difficult, however, to assert such a hypothesis using only conventional methods. The initial suspicion was extended, based in historical facts, knowing that, if true, the message should be cryptic. Conjectured expected anomalies were investigated using convergent semiotic analysis, in order to find the intended original meaning. It was possible to confirm the epigraph's authoring with a reasonable degree of confidence. Both semioticians and historians could encourage such interactions, using either analytic or synthetic approaches, and benefit in the long run. Keywords: Epigraphy, Local History, Portugal, Text Analysis, Renaissance.

1. INTRODUCTION

An inscription on stone dated 1541 in a small village named Masgalos, 12 km away from Viseu, northern Portugal, remained unknown except for villagers. Their enigmatic words have puzzled many generations, including several priests during the Easter visitation. As the house where it appears now belongs to close relatives it has been the subject of our curiosity for years.

In the development of our Master thesis for the Industrial Design course at FEUP (Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto) it was possible to find a regular pattern in the heraldic semiotic organization regarding the modality of medieval canting arms^[1]. As a frontier between text and image it would make easier the understanding of the progressively more complex two-dimensional and three-dimensional cases we envisaged to study later. An archaic but well documented environment, it delivered a rich corpus, unharmed by modern artificial elaborations and was expected to let us perceive its organization more easily.

During that study we rehearsed an extension of the same concepts to Numismatics and proposed further studies in other fields akin to the developed methodologies. Epigraphy wasn't immediately perceived as a fruitful field for our visual semiotic approach, being fundamentally a written media. Images could appear accessorially but lacking the significance and strength of coats-of-arms and coins. Fortunately, the inscription we were trying to decrypt showed an unusual blank, which could be interpreted both as an image and a text pattern. After applying the organizational rules found previously in our thesis, which can be briefly described as a multi-leveled metonymic chain^[2], it was possible to extend their principles to our subject. It is obviously impossible to infer any conclusions to the whole of Epigraphy without further studies.

2. METHODOLOGY

Our heraldic study was centered in the hypothesis of allowing the existence of *heraldic parophony* for primitive territorial coats-of-arms. We defined it as: «Association by phonetic correspondence of the designation of one or more original visual heraldic elements, the *designant*, and the denomination, direct or indirect of the blazon's referent, the *denominant*». This definition was needed considering that the concepts used in Heraldry, canting arms and *rébus*, were vague and frequently overlapped different meanings.

In order to evaluate the phonetic similarity between two words we developed a formula based in the metaplasmatic transformations and evaluated with empirical coefficients. It should be stressed that, although the mechanisms of transformation and transposition are the same, we were not looking for the linguistic evolution of sounds in time. The purpose was to detect a synchronic transformation of words representing a territory transformed into other similar sounding words, suitable to be depicted as a heraldic tinctured image (Fonte 2009: 51-53).

[1] Type of heraldic representation where text representing the person or territory and the depicted drawing nomination are phonetically similar, as in the Kingdom of *Léon* x lion.

[2] We refer indirectly metaphors in this sense of metonymic connections chain (Eco 1979: 68, 78).

$$k = \left[\frac{2}{\max(n_D, n_d)} \sum_{i=1}^j (c \cdot p + t) \right] - \frac{j}{\max(n_D, n_d)^2}$$

Discretion index *k*: Accepts the parophony if $k \leq 1$, rejects otherwise. The lower the value, the better the parophony. It is not suitable for comparison among different indexes.

Character coefficient *c*: gives a value $c = 0$ if the sound is the same, $c = 0.5$ for similar phonemes and $c = 1$ for dissimilar ones.


Position coefficient *p*: takes into account where the transformation takes place, equals $p = 1.5$ if in the initial character, $p = 0.5$ in the last, $p = 1$ in between those.

Transposition coefficient *t*: should be treated first whenever it occurs and then apply the other coefficients. It worth $t = 1$ if there is a transposition and $t = 0$ if not.

Total number of transformations *j*: the quantity of operations made.

$\max(n_D, n_d)$: the greater number of phonemes between denominant and designant.

As an example we examine in Figure 1 the use of calyxes in the blazon of Galicia. They appear first in a XIIIth century armorial, the Segar's Roll, and has been described as attributed arms^[3]. After the analysis we've found a puzzling result that gives Galician as the most favorable language for parophonization, instead of others, necessarily used in an English armorial. This could incentive deeper historical scrutiny.



| | C | Á | L | I | Z | _ |
|---|------------|------------|---------|---|---|-----|
| | G | A | L | I | Z | A |
| $c \rightarrow$ | 0.5 | 0.0 | - | - | - | 1.0 |
| $\times p \rightarrow$ | 1.5 | 1.0 | - | - | - | 0.5 |
| $+ t \rightarrow$ | 0.0 | 0.0 | - | - | - | 0.0 |
| $= \rightarrow$ | 0.8 | 0.0 | - | - | - | 0.5 |
| $k = 0.41$ | $n_D = 6;$ | $n_d = 5;$ | $j = 2$ | | | |

FIGURE 1 - DISCRETION INDEX K: CÁLIZ / GALIZA

Other definitions appear in this case from which we select as useful for our discussion the *complementary prop*, a drawing not directly involved in the sematization but auxiliary for semantics as a specifier or identifier. It occurs in the modern arms of Galicia where the white wafer tell us that the heraldic figure is not an ordinary cup: it is a Eucharistic calyx^[4].

[3] Representing imaginary blazons for persons or territories.

[4] Not necessarily dependant from any semantic relations with the Segar's Roll version.

The *corpus* we analyzed referred mainly to the XII-XIV centuries. Nevertheless we could find articulate pragmatic developments even in the beginning of the XVI century. Moreover, in a later unpublished investigation we could detect the inception of a new territorial coat-of-arms obeying the same organization, coexisting with the facts under investigation in this paper. It is reasonable to suppose that someone with an adequate education or condition would be aware of this heraldic code.

3. DISCUSSION

The inscription itself appears in two granite stone blocks. The one at the top is fractured which is readily seen by the disposition of the letters. They are not in their original position, due to recent building works but the relative position is maintained. The two initial characters «VE» show regular height, the first even exhibit serifs atop. The following letters don't observe a regular alignment and seem to be made hastily, somewhat like much older roman tombstones. Dating however appears explicit and implicit in the S-shaped «5», a larger lower arm in the first «E» and the seriffed «V». The two last can be seen in São Miguel O Anjo, a lighthouse erected by D. Miguel da Silva in S. João da Foz by 1527 (Carvalho & Pacheco 1999). The reading is clear, we detached the second stone with extra line spacing:

VERAPROFESSORVI
SENSIS.M.S.F.AN.IS41

NOSCE.TE

Interpreted as:

VERA PROFESSOR VISENSIS
M[?] S[?] F[ECIT] AN[NUS] 1541
NOSCE TE

We can then establish:

Where: Viseu (VI/SENSIS)
When: 1541 (IS41)
Who: M[?] S[?] (M.S.F[ECIT])

Remain to be explained the anthroponyms following «M» and «S» as well as «VERA PROFESSOR». We will only deal with the first part, well fitted to our academic research. Grammatical gender is inconsistent for the two words in the second part; it could be *vera professio*, for example. This points to a defective understanding of the information by the interpreter. A chronological list can help us for a first advance towards «Who» (Castro 1945-1946):

- 19 Dec 1539 – D. Miguel da Silva, Bishop of Viseu: Cardinal *in pectore*
- ?? Jul 1540 – The King, D. João III, orders the arresting of D. Miguel
- 22 Jul 1540 – D. Miguel escapes to Rome
- 27 Aug 1540 – Letter to the King giving notice of D. Miguel in Hondarribia

- 12 Feb 1541 – D. Miguel announced as Cardinal of the XII Holy Apostles
- 23 Jan 1542 – D. Miguel lost citizenship, positions, benefits and properties
- ?? Feb 1542 – His nephew D. Jorge da Silva is imprisoned and exiled
- 16 Dec 1545 – Henry of Portugal, the King's brother, appointed as Cardinal
- 22 Apr 1547 – Apostolic Administrator of Viseu: D. Alessandro Farnese

It is clear from the above that D. Miguel da Silva could be a viable supposition. Let us develop a bit more the applicable historical events. See also (Couto 1990):

- 1480 – Born in Évora son of D. Diogo de Menezes, later a Count
- 149? – Studies Latin and Greek in Paris
- 150? – Goes to Italy, starts to compose poems in Latin
- 1514 – Portuguese ambassador to the Pope in Rome
- 1525 – Returns to Portugal, appointed Bishop of Viseu
- 1540 – Runs away from the King, returns to Rome
- 1541 – Announced as Cardinal of the XII Holy Apostles
- 154? – One of his Latin poems is inscribed in the Capitol
- 1556 – Dies in Rome

Some fundamental conclusions can be drawn:

D. Miguel was a noted Latinist: Latin would be a natural method of expression as well as metaphors and metonyms for a poet, both adding to the cryptic.

And a nobleman: in contact with some of the brightest Renaissance minds, he certainly wouldn't ignore the canting arms fundamentals, even if not in the sophisticated medieval sort.

He stayed in Viseu during 15 years: long enough to cultivate many relations in the town and vicinity.

The King's persecution was fierce: therefore any written manifestation of support should be hidden or disguised. The cardinal's nephew was imprisoned only for exchanging letters with him.

D. Miguel was in Italy at the time: he never returned, suggesting that any instructions for the inscription would use indirect means, maybe a letter.

We will try now to build the semantic organization of our problem, departing from the person, plausibly D. Miguel, and arriving at the stone inscription.

REFERENT: D. Miguel da Silva.

REFERENT METONYMIES: D. Miguel appears as a *BISHOP*, as himself (*MYSELF* in his point of view) and as living in *ROME*. The latter branches into: *ROME* > *NOT IN PORTUGAL* (where the stone is) > *ABSENT* and further into: *ABSENT* > *VACANCY*.

VERBALIZATION: Latin is the language used in the inscription so we've chosen it for abstract developments, except for the Italian *Sede Vacante*, a current usage, instead of *Sede Vacans*^[5].

[5] *Sede Vacante* designates the state of a diocese when its bishop is absent to rule.

We had then: *BISHOP* > *EPISCOPUM*; *MYSELF* > *ME*; *ABSENT* > *APSUM*; *VACANCY* > *SEDE VACANTE* (under the influence of *BISHOP*).

DENOMINANT METONYMIES: *EPISCOPUM* changes to its abbreviation *EPM* (Cappelli 1999: 122); *ME* transforms into *IPSUM* (himself) influenced by *APSUM* (absent), as D. Miguel could not speak in the first person.

ACCOMMODATION: *EPM* changes to *IPM*, abbreviation of *ipsum* (Cappelli 1999: 187), influenced by *IPSUM* (2) derived from *ME*; *APSUM* is transformed into *IPSUM* (3), influenced by the same channel in the opposite direction; *SEDE VACANTE* is shortened to *VACANTE*. The Discretion Indexes, applied to parophony are respectively $k_1=0.9$, $k_3=0.6$ and $k_4=0.0$. Parography, using writing characters instead of sounds, would give comparable values in this case.

SEMANTIZATION: The three concepts, *IPM*, *IPSUM* (2) and *IPSUM* (3) converge into one idea of *HIMSELF*; *VACANTE* implies *EMPTY*.

SIGNIFIER: *HIMSELF* leads to the concept of *NAME*; *EMPTY* adapts into *BLANK*.

EPIGRAPHIC TRACE: Finally, *NAME* emerges in the concrete words M.S. chiseled on the stone, whereas *BLANK* and *HIMSELF* appear as the absence of [IPSUM] or [IPM].

COMPLEMENTARY PROP: NOSCE TE as seen in the inscription has no other function than to indicate [IPSUM], using the well known latinized Greek aphorism *Nosce te ipsum*.^[6]

The schematic semantic organization can be seen in Figure 2.

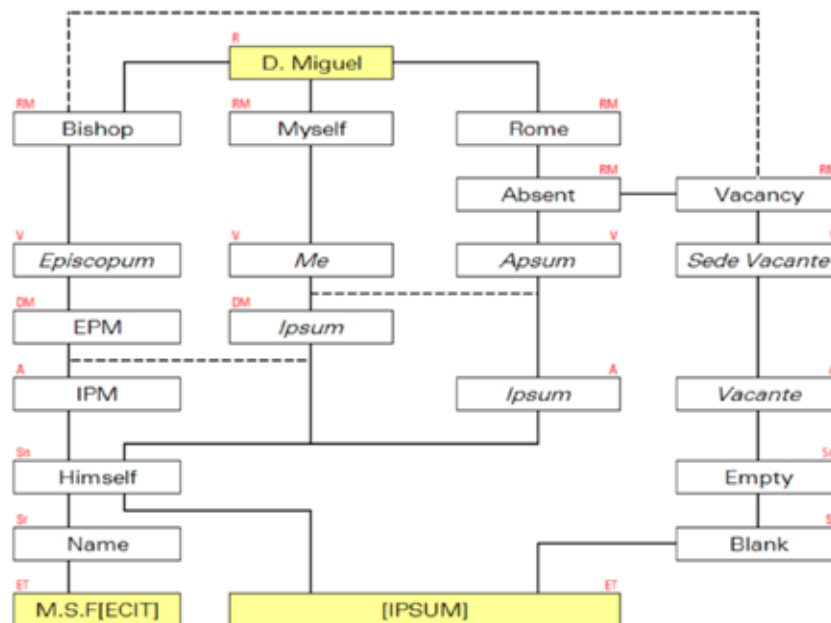


FIGURE 2 - SEMANTIC ORGANIZATION FROM REFERENT TO EPIGRAPHIC TRACE

[6] Know thyself.

4. CONCLUSION

It was possible to apply the same semiotic organization used previously in the study of canting arms. Nevertheless we should describe most of the phenomena observed as parographic rather than parophonic. This is not a surprise as Epigraphy is concerned mainly with text, and images play a limited role, the case studied here was an exception.

We concluded from our analysis that our initial suspicion for D. Miguel da Silva as the name hidden under the initials «M.S.» result considerably reinforced. The probability for arising such a refined semantic organization, in fair resonance with facts and environment, out of a coincidence seems to us quite dim. This doesn't mean that we guarantee as intentional all the semantic lines shown or that some other couldn't be found in the future.

We hope that other works will follow this in other rich research territories as Numismatics, Paleography or Branding. The use of Semiotics for the resolution of scientific problems is maybe the most visible demonstration of its power. This seeding will help to spread and develop applied methodologies among experts that, still nowadays, barely know its key significance.

5. REFERENCES

- Cappelli, Adriano (1999): *Dizionario di Abbreviature Latine ed Italiane*, Milan: Ulrico Hoepli.
- Carvalho, Luís; Pacheco, Luís P. (1999): «A Capela Farol de S. Miguel o Anjo - Contributo para a sua Caracterização Histórica», *O Tripeiro*, Vol. XVIII nº 6.
- Castro, José de (1945-1946): «O Cardeal de Viseu», *Beira-Alta*, Vol. IV-V nº 4, 1: 267-276, 3-15.
- Couto, Aires P. do (1990): «O Grande Senhor do Fontelo do Século XVI - D. Miguel da Silva», *Beira-Alta*, Vol. XLIX nº 3/4: 295-310.
- Eco, Umberto (1979): *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Fonte, Carlos C. da (2009): *A Marca de Portugal – Semântica Primitiva das Armas Nacionais e alguns dos seus Aspectos Sintáticos e Pragmáticos*. Porto: Faculdade de Engenharia da Universidade do Porto.