

## The Fall of the Spanish Armada: Historiography, Identity and Reception

Péter Illik\*

This short study is based on the monograph titled *A spanyol armada pusztulása (1588) Historiográfia, identitás, recepció* [The Fall of the Spanish Armada. Historiography, Identity and Reception], Budapest, 2017. The book was written by the author in Hungarian language. This article offers a short analysis of the major lines in English historiography, political speeches, works of art, journals and secondary school education in order to show how the topic of the fall of the Spanish Armada evolved and became part of the English reception.

[Reception; Historiography; Spanish Armada; Identity; Patriotism; Nationalism]

*“Look. In 1588, the British navy successfully fought off the Spanish Armada. They had little plates of squid and we had scurvy, but we did it. We held off the mighty forces of Napoleon, fuelled by nothing but vegetables that had been cooked in porridge.”*  
(The Guardian)

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

*“I have not written news of the Armada, as the rumours have been so various, and I like to send trustworthy intelligence. Statements, however, are now current from many quarters, Calais, Dieppe, Holland, etc., and it is considered certain that the Armada has fought the English, and dealt them a mortal blow – sending many of their ships to the bottom, and capturing others, whilst the rest of the English fleet, to the number, they say, of 27 sails, has returned much damaged to the port of London. These are all that could escape.”<sup>2</sup>*

\* Secondary School Teacher, former part-time lecturer at Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Két Tanítási Nyelvű Baptista Secondary School, Szentendrei út 83, 1033 Budapest, Hungary. E-mail: peterillik@hotmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> This short study is based on the following book: P. ILLIK, *A spanyol armada pusztulása (1588) Historiográfia, identitás, recepció*, Budapest 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt of the letter of Pedro De Alava, Rouen, 1588. September 1. (<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/simancas/vol4/pp411-425>).

The invasion attempt of the Spanish Armada sent by King Philip II (1556–1598) could have happened as mentioned above. But it did not. The Armada led by the duke of Medina Sidonia could not rendezvous with the ground forces of the Duke of Alva in the Netherlands, and after the battle at Gravelines (8<sup>th</sup> August 1588) it was forced to the North-Atlantic by ferocious winds. Therefore, it could not transport the Spanish invasion force (of Parma and of those carried on the Armada) to England and had to skirt around the British islands to get back to Spain. The Spanish fleet lost approximately half of its ships as well as circa 18,000 soldiers and sailors. The story sounds simple upon first sight, however, it contains many contradictory and ambiguous facts which have been interpreted in different ways for hundreds of years. That's why the problem of the Spanish Armada is partly similar to the question "*Is the glass half empty or half full?*", as it is a matter of point of view and not merely of the specific facts. During the last 430 years there were several ways of interpretation in English historiography, literature and journalism.

The Spanish Armada was not defeated (in its traditional meaning) by the English fleet, as the latter could scuttle circa five Spanish ships only.<sup>3</sup> The Spanish lost half of their ships during their travel to and from the British isles and half of their sailors and troops carried on the Armada vessels.<sup>4</sup> But whether it was a terrible loss or not is also questionable, as for example in the battle at Mohács (1526) the Hungarians lost 80 % of their forces to the Ottomans.<sup>5</sup> Bad weather and storms also had a significant role in the failure of the expedition of the Armada, so the Spanish were victims of the unfortunate circumstances, which is ironic as they called their fleet the "*most fortunate Armada*". Thus "*The most Fortunate Armada*" was not fortunate at all. From the very beginning the enterprise was accompanied by disasters, as a storm scattered the fleet shortly after it had left from Corunna (La Coruña).<sup>6</sup> Later, it was only crawling toward its aim due to the lack of a strong backwind. After the battle at Gravelines (8<sup>th</sup> August) the wind started to push the Spanish fleet towards the shallow and deadly waters of the

<sup>3</sup> R. HUTCHINSON, *The Spanish Armada*, London 2013, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 202.

<sup>5</sup> See J. B. SZABÓ, *Mohács. Régi kérdések – új válaszok. A Magyar Királyság hadserege az 1526. évi mohácsi csatában*, Budapest 2016.

<sup>6</sup> HUTCHINSON, p. 109.

Dutch coast.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the wind changed and saved the Spanish this time, but pushed them towards the North Atlantic, forcing them to skirt around the British islands on the savage, unknown and dangerous waters of the North Atlantic. Because of the storms near the Irish coasts, around 60 ships were sunk, while only 5 ships were scuttled by the English fleet during the dogfights in the channel and the battle at Gravelines.<sup>8</sup> Historical studies confirm that in the late summer of 1588 the weather was the worst in the century.<sup>9</sup> What's more, the Spanish Empire definitely did not collapse as it could muster four more armadas (1596, 1597, 1598, 1601)<sup>10</sup> and was able to finance them. As Simon Adams writes: "A further fifteen years of hostilities lay ahead, but the Anglo-Spanish maritime war now became only a part of a much wider conflict in which the struggle for France was the vital theatre. The English made two major landings on the Iberian coast (at Lisbon in 1589 and Cadiz in 1596), and the Spaniards a raid on Cornwall in 1595 and a landing in Ireland in 1601, but none of these had any decisive effect. The Anglo-Spanish war was to all intents a stalemate, for neither side was able to attack the other effectively, but even this result showed that there were limits to Spanish power. On a one to one basis England was clearly much weaker than Spain, but Elizabeth had demonstrated successfully that of all Philip's contemporaries in Europe she was the most dangerous enemy."<sup>11</sup> In addition, the latest economic study claims: "Philip's debts did not exceed future discounted primary surpluses. Rising debt was met with rising revenue. Contrary to received wisdom, Philip II's debts were sustainable throughout his reign. Castile's fiscal position only weakened after the defeat of the 'Invincible Armada,' and this deterioration was mild. Far from being undermined by reckless spending and weak fiscal institutions, Castile's finances mainly suffered large, temporary shocks as a

<sup>7</sup> J. BARRATT, *Armada 1588. The Spanish Assault on England*, Barnsley 2005, pp. 110–111.

<sup>8</sup> It is part of the common knowledge as even the English Wikipedia page admits: "As a result, more ships and sailors were lost to cold and stormy weather than in direct combat." ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish\\_Armada#Historiography](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spanish_Armada#Historiography)).

<sup>9</sup> See K. S. DOUGLAS – H. H. LAMB – C. LOADER, *A Meteorological Study of July to October 1588: The Spanish Armada Storms*, Norwich 1978; S. DAULTREY, The Weather of North-West Europe during the Summer and Autumn of 1588, in: P. GALLAGHER – D. W. CRUICKSHANK (eds.), *God's Obvious Design. Papers for the Spanish Armada Symposium, Sligo, 1988*, London 1990, pp. 113–141.

<sup>10</sup> See: W. GRAHAM, *The Spanish Armadas*, London 1972.

<sup>11</sup> S. ADAMS, The Spanish Armada ([http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/adams\\_armada\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/adams_armada_01.shtml)).

result of military events. [...] Our findings suggest that earlier assessments of Philip's finances have been too pessimistic."<sup>12</sup>

If we accept that the English did not defeat the Armada and the failure of the expedition was only a battle and an incident among many other wars waged by the Spanish Empire, then the obvious conclusion is that only the English reception attached special significance to this affair, in other words, it created the symbol of the fall of the Spanish Armada which became a strong pillar of English national pride, identity and patriotism.

For the author of this study, it is not difficult to accept the axioms mentioned above as he is not affected by English patriotic feelings and cultural indoctrination. However, for English historians it may not be evident, which is marked by the fact that the first monograph in English language claiming the statements above was written by a Spanish historian. Nevertheless, the book of Felipe Fernández-Armesto was not condemned by English historians for his approach<sup>13</sup> since the 20<sup>th</sup> century-English historiography has critical tendencies on the topic, but it does not question the basic English axiom that the English fleet defeated the Armada. On the contrary, the conclusion of Fernández-Armesto was that the fall of the Armada represents only a strategic failure and a single episode in the 16th-century history of warfare.<sup>14</sup> He also claims that the Armada was defeated by the stormy weather and not by the English efforts.<sup>15</sup> As Fernández-Armesto does not attach too much importance to the fall of the Armada in 1588, he also doubts that this event would have marked the beginning of the rise the English naval superpower.

Consequently, this study supposes that the way English historiography and reception regards the Spanish Armada is not correct or is incorrect but a result of nearly five hundred years of evolution during

<sup>12</sup> M. DRELICHMAN – H. J. VOTH, The Sustainable Debts of Philip II. A Reconstruction of Castile's Fiscal Position, 1566–1596, in: *The Journal of Economic History*, 4, 2010, pp. 814–815.

<sup>13</sup> The only one exception is: G. PARKER, The Spanish Armada: The Experience of War in 1588, by Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, in: *The Journal of Military History*, 2, 1990, pp. 233–234.

<sup>14</sup> F. FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO, *The Spanish Armada. The Experience of War in 1588*, Oxford 1988, pp. 6–7.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 268–269.

which the Armada appeared in political speeches, historiography, literature, secondary school education and journalism.<sup>16</sup>

Writing a summative study on this topic including English historiography is also justified, firstly because monographs on the Spanish Armada do not summarise their historiographic precedents and there is only one (as far as the author knows) summary on them written by Eugene L. Rasor.<sup>17</sup> Secondly, monographs and studies on English national identity only mention the role of the Spanish Armada.<sup>18</sup>

### English Political Interpretations of the Success

The English had to find an explanation to the failure of the Armada. The first one was of religious nature. The saying “*Jehovah blew with His winds, and they were scattered*” (“*Flavit Deus et dissipati sunt*”) became a well-known phrase after the victory, when the Spanish fleet was broken up by a storm which was also called “*the Protestant Wind*”. The quotation seems to have had its origin in an inscription on one of the many commemorative medals minted to celebrate the occasion.

This kind of religious argumentation also appears in Queen Elizabeth I’s speech which she delivered at Tilbury a week after the battle at Gravelines, when the Armada was heading back to Spain. “[...] *I have always so behaved myself that under God I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and goodwill of my subjects. Wherefore I am come among you at this time not for my recreation and pleasure, but being resolved in the midst and heat of battle to live and die amongst you all to lay down, for my God and for my kingdom and for my people, my honour and my blood even in the dust. [...] Not doubting but by your concord in the*

<sup>16</sup> This study does not analyse films and radio programmes on the topic, as it focuses on written sources.

<sup>17</sup> E. L. RASOR, *The Spanish Armada of 1588: Historiography and Annotated Bibliography*, London 1993.

<sup>18</sup> K. KUMAR, *The Making of English National Identity*, Cambridge 2003, p. 162. See others in general on nationalism: G. SLUGA, Identity, Gender, and the History of European Nations and Nationalisms, in: *Nations and Nationalism*, 1, 1998, pp. 87–111; D. M. ROTHÏ, National Attachment and Patriotism in a European Nation: A British Study, in: *Political Psychology*, 1, 2005, pp. 135–155; H. KOHN, The Genesis and Character of English Nationalism, in: *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1, 1940, pp. 69–94; M. RODRÍGUEZ-SALGADO, Christians, Civilised and Spanish: Multiple Identities in Sixteenth-Century Spain, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 8, 1998, pp. 233–251.

camp and valour in the field and your obedience to myself and my general, we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God and of my kingdom.”<sup>19</sup> The speech itself is meticulously analysed by Janet M. Green who says that: “The Tilbury oration is the prize of Elizabeth’s succinct English mode. It is a demonstrative (or epideictic or declamatory) oration, a type that could express praise or blame, and the shortest formal address of Elizabeth’s we have. About 250 words, it takes about two and one-half minutes to deliver. Most Elizabethan orators spoke, in church and in Parliament, for at least an hour, but Elizabeth did not like other people’s long harangues. In her own orations she was unusually brief. Her main purpose in speaking was to set forth the royal will and message, and for this, she did not need a great deal of talking.”<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, many historians consider this speech delivered on 18<sup>th</sup> August as a cynical and hypocritical act of propaganda since there was no imminent danger any more, and the English ground forces were disbanded a day later.<sup>21</sup> What’s more, Susan Frye claims that Elisabeth did not give her speech at all, although she admits that: “While the spatial association of Elizabeth with the defeat of the Armada remained important after her death, Elizabeth’s arms and armour became increasingly important to her seventeenth-century iconography. William Rogers’ engraving of a peaceful if triumphant empress, so rarely reproduced, contrasts with the better-known allegorical engraving of Thomas Cecil, ‘Truth Presents the Queene with a Lance’ (c. 1625) [...], which, while the Armada is defeated in the background, an armoured Elizabeth receives a lance and tramples the dragon of Catholicism. The picture is an allegory, but, like Spenser’s Britomart, it provides us with image that is difficult not to superimpose on Elizabeth at Tilbury. Seventeenth-century history plays about Elizabeth illustrate a similar increase in the Queen’s militarism.”<sup>22</sup> The other question connected to the Tilbury-speech is what

<sup>19</sup> HUTCHINSON, pp. 179–180. About the Tilbury speech: A. J. COLLINS, The Progress of Queen Elizabeth to the Camp at Tilbury, 1588, in: *The British Museum Quarterly*, 4, 1936, pp. 164–167; S. FRYE, The Myth of Elizabeth at Tilbury, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 1, 1992, pp. 95–114; J. M. GREEN, “I My Self”, Queen Elizabeth I’s Oration at Tilbury Camp, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 2, pp. 421–445; R. LEICESTER – M. CHRISTY, Queen Elizabeth’s Visit to Tilbury in 1588, in: *The English Historical Review*, 133, 1919, pp. 43–61.

<sup>20</sup> GREEN, p. 423.

<sup>21</sup> N. HANSON, *The Confident Hope of a Miracle. The True Story of the Spanish Armada*, London 2004, p. 522.

<sup>22</sup> FRYE, p. 108.

would have happened if the Spanish had landed? The majority of the Hungarian historians stigmatize the question, “*What if?*” However, it is justified as contemporaries had to evaluate the consequences of their actions, so they often asked what would have happened if they had done something this way or in the other way around. Even at the height of English patriotism it was claimed that the English ground forces would not have had even the slightest chance against the Spanish: “*Truly they [burghers of London] and the rest of the English militia would have been as chaff before the veterans of Parma. It was clearly then to her fleet that Elizabeth had alone to look for the safety of herself and her subjects; yet she laboured hard to render even its bravery and skill unavailing. In evil plight the crews went forth to meet the enemy, whose power they had throughout feared less than the dangers to which their own sovereign had exposed them; and in still worse plight they returned from that memorable conflict, thinned by the pestilence which their poisonous rations had bred, till in some ships there were not men enough left to weigh anchor. Even then the survivors could not obtain their long arrears of pay, or much prospect of an alleviation of their sufferings. It was indeed small policy, as Howard perhaps ironically suggested, to defer their pay till none were left to claim it, because in that case it went to the relatives.*”<sup>23</sup> Other historians also represented this theory.<sup>24</sup> They were opposed by those who claimed that the English defense forces were well-prepared for the onslaught: “[...] *the Spanish army could not possibly have faced the combined armies of Leicester and Hunsdon outside of London before August 14. By that time the English forces would have numbered at least 46,000 men, having been reinforced by a further 17,000 due to arrive from the counties on August 12. Finally, this does not include the approximately 20,000 men from the southwest who, if they continued shadowing the Armada along the coast, would be approaching the area of battle by August 14, possibly even threatening Parma from the flank and rear. While the outcome of such a battle would have been far from certain, especially considering the dissension in the English command, the inexperience of the English troops, and the apparent awe in which the earl of Leicester held Parma, the Spanish army would have been attacking an army nearly twice its own size, a challenge that not many commanders as skilled as*

<sup>23</sup> H. HALL, *The Imperial Policy of Elizabeth*. From the State Papers, Foreign and Domestic. Discussion, in: *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 3, 1886, p. 232.

<sup>24</sup> HUTCHINSON, p. 210; MC ALEER, pp. 604–605; G. PARKER, *If the Armada had Landed*, in: *History*, 203, 1976, pp. 358–368.

*Parma would have cared to undertake. [...] While the queen's visit to Tilbury and the celebrations that followed focused popular attention on Leicester's muster, they have obscured the more effective measures taken for the defence of England during the days of crisis. Hunsdon's army and the forces on the South coast have been very nearly forgotten, lost in a pile of state papers and muster books. Even more surprising, the use of extensive planning to meet the challenge of invasion has been largely over-looked, despite the fact that it reflects the administrative skill of Elizabeth's government. Always careful of excessive expenditure, the queen and her council had found a way to conserve resources, particularly precious financial resources, by avoiding early mobilization. [...] By taking gambles such as this, Elizabeth was able to avoid the kind of financial disaster that eventually wrecked Philip II's war effort."*<sup>25</sup>

The topic of the Armada often appears in political speeches in the 20<sup>th</sup> century as well. These speeches echo the patriotic viewpoint on the Armada and use it as a model of English national character. For example, Stanley Baldwin's speech in 1929: *"The new world, when it came into being, acted as the force of gravity on the old, and it dragged new world empires in its train. More than three centuries ago – more than four centuries ago – when Henry VII was building his Chapel at Westminster, Columbus of Spain and Vasco da Gama of Portugal sought the new world across the seas, and at that moment, although we knew it not, our destiny was conceived in the womb of time. Slowly our seamen were pushing their way into Arctic seas, our sailors were raiding Spanish settlements, and in that struggle they learnt their seamanship, and they brought to that seamanship the courage and audacity of their race. England had been but a few centuries, as history goes, the home of those who had pushed their way from Scandinavia and the Teutonic forests, and once more they felt the urge of the South Seas to the new world open to them. The urge was upon them again, the call came upon them once more. Our apprenticeship of the sea concluded with the Armada, and at that time unconsciously the soul of the nation turned aside from Europe and cast out to sea."*<sup>26</sup> Later Clement Attlee says in his *Memorial Speech to Winston Churchill* (1965) that "I think of him also as supremely conscious

<sup>25</sup> J. S. NOLAN, *The Muster of 1588*, in: *Albion, A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 3, 1991, pp. 406–407. The same standpoint is confirmed by N. YOUNGER, *If the Armada Had Landed: A Reappraisal of England's Defences in 1588*, in: *History*, 3, 2008, pp. 328–354 ([https://classroom.kleinisd.net/users/1243/docs/if\\_the\\_armada\\_had\\_landed.pdf](https://classroom.kleinisd.net/users/1243/docs/if_the_armada_had_landed.pdf)).

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=90>.



of history. His mind went back not only to his great ancestor Marlborough but through the years of English history. He saw himself and he saw our nation at that time playing a part not unworthy of our ancestors, not unworthy of the men who defeated the Armada and not unworthy of the men who defeated Napoleon. He saw himself there as an instrument. As an instrument for what? For freedom, for human life against tyranny. None of us can ever forget how, through all those long years, he now and again spoke exactly the phrase that crystallised the feelings of the nation."<sup>27</sup> Strategically, it was a very creative idea to connect Churchill with the fall of the Armada and Napoleon as one of the favourite cats of Churchill was called Nelson,<sup>28</sup> named after Admiral Nelson who died in the battle at Trafalgar. In addition, the Armada appears in David Steel's speech in 1986: "I do not doubt that when the Spaniards of the 16th century planned their Armada there were many who discussed in the minutest detail the galleons and guns that were to reduce England to servitude. These preoccupations hid from them the truth of Spain's national weakness – the sterility of its social order, the bankruptcy of its economy."<sup>29</sup> This one mirrors the English common thinking, however, English historiography confuted every sentence of it: there was only the Spanish king Philip II (1556–1598) who compiled one master plan out of the plans his subordinates had designed, and even this one could not answer the most important question: how will the Armada and the ground forces of Parma rendezvous. So, not the "minutest detail", but even the biggest problem was not solved.<sup>30</sup> The aim of the Armada is questionable as the duke of Medina Sidonia carried a secret letter in which Philip claimed that the aim was to force England to pay reparations to Spain, stop supporting the Netherlands and allow religious freedom for Catholics in England.<sup>31</sup> That's why Colin Martin states that the Armada was only a bluff made up by Philip II.<sup>32</sup> In addition, Spain did not go bankrupt, as is mentioned above.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/clement-attlee-1965-memorial-speech-to-winston-churchill/>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.thegreatcat.org/cats-20th-century-history-sir-winston-churchills-cats/>.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=48>.

<sup>30</sup> HUTCHINSON, pp. 29–33.

<sup>31</sup> J. DE LAMAR, The Spanish Armada: The Worst-Kept Secret in Europe, in: *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 4, 1988, p. 641.

<sup>32</sup> C. MARTIN, *Full Fathom Five. Wrecks of the Spanish Armada*, London 1975, p. 232.

It is common in the analysed political speeches that they reflect national pride and handle facts and interpretations quite generously.

### Major Narratives of the English Historiography

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this protestant interpretation was interlocked with English patriotism, and resulted in the following type of argumentation: “[...] *gratitude to God, who frustrated the purposes of our enemies and detected the treacheries of the Church of Rome.*”<sup>33</sup> Although this viewpoint ceased to exist in professional historical writings, it appears at the level of vox populi. It’s opposite, the catholic religious interpretation also exists: “*Among the many side-issues which meet the student of the history of the Armada, that of the cooperation or favour of the Pope, and of the Catholic party among the English, is naturally important for Catholics. There can be no doubt, then, that though the Spanish predominance was not at all desired for its own sake by the Catholics of England, France, and Germany, or of Rome, yet the widespread suffering and irritation caused by the religious wars Elizabeth fomented, and the indignation caused by her religious persecution, and the execution of Mary Stuart, caused Catholics everywhere to sympathize with Spain, and to regard the Armada as a crusade against the most dangerous enemy of the Faith. [...] Great as were the effects of the failure of the Armada, they are nevertheless often exaggerated. The defeat no doubt set bounds on the expansion of Spain, and secured the power of her rival. Yet it is a mistake to suppose that this change was immediate, obvious, or uniform. The wars of religion in France, promoted by Elizabeth, ended in weakening that country to such an extent that Spain seemed within two years of the Armada to be nearer to universal domination than ever before, and this consummation was averted by the reconciliation of Henry IV to Catholicism, which, by reuniting France, restored the balance of power in Europe, as was acknowledged by Spain at the peace of Vervins in 1598.*”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> T. LATHBURY, *The Spanish Armada, A. D. 1588, or the Attempt of Philip II and Pope Sixtus V to Re-establish Popery in England*, London 1840, p. 21.

<sup>34</sup> The Spanish Armada (<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01727c.htm>). From the very beginning, the catholic interpretation was present besides the protestant. E. g. “*The Spanish defeat have set in motion a vigorous reaction against Spanish hegemony in Europe. A major reason that this did not happen was the religious factor. The Armada, although launched for a combination of reasons, sailed under the aura of a religious crusade.*” R. E. SCULLY, “*In the Confident Hope of a Miracle*”: The Spanish Armada and Religious Mentalities in the Late Sixteenth Century, in: *The Catholic Historical Review*, 4, 2003, pp. 643–657. And “*In 1588, Pope V sent forth the Spanish Armada with his blessing the*

Taking look at Elisabeth I's speech at Tilbury, the state-planned indoctrination and propaganda is also visible. It was so effective that it could define the interpretations of future times. During the following four months several – mainly false – aspects of later reception were born:

1. the arrogant Spanish called their armada invincible. It is not true, it was called grand or most fortunate armada.
2. The English Catholics fought against the Spanish in unison with their protestant English fellows. It is not correct, either. Many Catholics supported the Spanish.
3. It was the battle of David and Goliath, the small English fleet against the huge Spanish Armada. In fact, the English fleet was at least as numerous as the Spanish.
4. God supported the protestants by his storms.<sup>35</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> Baron of Burghley, the chief advisor of Elizabeth I, William Cecil (1520–1598) asked William Camden (1551–1623) in 1597 to write the chronicle of the reign of Elizabeth I. The book was published in English only in 1625: *“The elaborately symbolic title page of the 1625 Annales highlights the hagiographical nature of Camden’s text. Its woodcut border portrays events that shaped the heroic myth of an Elizabethan ‘golden age’ of imperialistic triumph: Sir Francis Drake’s circumnavigation of the globe in 1577–79, his 1587 attack on Cadiz, the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the earl of Cumberland’s 1591 raid on San Juan de Puerto Rico, and the 1596*

*hope that it would accomplish the long-threatened invasion of England which would depose Elizabeth. William Allen, a man of ability and of character, who thought that the restoration of England to papal control was the highest patriotism, had been made a Cardinal at the request of Philip II Spain of before the despatch of the Armada, so that when the conquest of England was accomplished he might reorganize the Church of England on a Roman basis. It was the last attempt of a foreign prince to conquer England for the pope. After the prospect of England’s return to Roman obedience was a fading ecclesiastical vision. English Roman Catholics were thoroughly divided as to the particular policy which should followed [...].”* H. M. SHIRES, *The Conflict between Queen Elizabeth and Roman Catholicism*, in: *Church History*, 4, 1947, p. 228.

<sup>35</sup> B. T. WHITEHEAD, *Brags and Boasts. Propaganda in the Year of the Armada*, Stroud 1994, p. XI.

*Cadiz expedition of the earl of Essex. Inset portrayals of naval scenes illustrate these events along with stentorian captions like ALBIONS COMFORT, IBERIAS TERROR.*<sup>36</sup>

The book written by John Pine (1690–1756),<sup>37</sup> following the 16<sup>th</sup>-century-interpretation also considers the fall of the Armada as the most significant event in the history of the English nation.<sup>38</sup> It distinguishes real causes and pretexts of the Spanish enterprise. After that, it meticulously and factually (lacking religious aspects) describes the events in a manner and structure (causes, number of the two fleets, dogfights on sea, the Battle at Gravelines, numbers of losses and consequences) which is followed by even nowadays. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, most of the monographs follow this fashion of writing on the Armada.

English patriotism reached its peak during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the tercentenary of the fall of the Armada (1588) also gave birth to many writings such as poems,<sup>39</sup> popular historical books for young readers,<sup>40</sup> historical monographs<sup>41</sup> as well as source publications.<sup>42</sup> In the latter, Laughton argued against the “*Flavit Deus et dissipati sunt.*” the-

<sup>36</sup> J. N. KING, Queen Elizabeth I: Representations of the Virgin Queen, in: *Renaissance Quarterly*, 1, 1990, pp. 69–70.

<sup>37</sup> English engraver. J. PINE, *The Tapestry Hangings of the House of Lords: representing the several engagements between the English and Spanish fleets, in the [...] year MDLXXXVIII, with the portraits of the Lord High-Admiral, and the other noble commanders, taken from the life. To which are added, from a book entitled, Expeditionis Hispanorum in Angliam vera descriptio, A.D. 1588 [...]*, London 1739. The historical notes were written by the historian Philip Morant (1700–1770).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> “For, while the flota hither sailed,  
Drake sent out burning ships,  
Then, fiery missiles on them hailed,  
And blew their hulls to chips  
[...].”

Excerpt from: C. ALFIERI, *The Memory Work of the Battles and Sieges and English History, on a System on Mnemonics and Essay Rhymes, including the chronology of the sovereigns on England, and an account of the principal battles in which the country has been engaged, from the Norman Conquest to the Battle of Waterloo*, Hanley 1880, p. 40.

<sup>40</sup> W. P. NIMMO, *In the brave days of old: or, the story of the Spanish Armada, in the Year of Grace 1588. For Boys and Girls*, Edinburgh 1871.

<sup>41</sup> F. JONES, *The Life of Sir Martin Frobisher, Knight. Containing a Narrative of the Spanish Armada*, London 1878.

<sup>42</sup> J. K. LAUGHTON (ed.), *State Papers relating to the Defeat of the Spanish Armada, anno 1588. Vol. I–II*, [London] 1894.

ory, as the Spanish fleet was defeated before the divine help. This statement is questionable, as the wind prevented the Spanish from moving fast against England, what's more, in July a storm scattered the fleet during their voyage. In addition, strictly speaking, the English fleet did not actually defeat the Spanish, because they could scuttle only five ships out of the circa 130.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, more critical historical researches and explanations appeared and culminated in the 4<sup>th</sup> centenary of the fall of the Armada. In addition, Spanish authors (e. g. the above-mentioned Felipe Fernández-Armesto) also published their works in English. Military historians also tried to find an explanation for the Spanish failure in the battle at Gravelines as the Spanish could not scuttle any English ships. According to Michael Lewis, the English cannons were more effective in close-quarter fights than the Spanish ones.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the English cannons were of better quality and the gunners were more skilled than their Spanish counterparts.<sup>44</sup> Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker claim that the Spanish guns used smaller projectiles shot by less power, and the Spanish fired only one salvo, and after that they made an attempt to board the enemies' ships, while the English continuously fired volleys and could move the carriage of the guns faster and easier.<sup>45</sup>

Naturally, from an English point of view, there were national heroes and Spanish scapegoats as well. One of the greatest generals is Sir Francis Drake, who embodied the English nation itself. *"We must not judge past as if they were possessed of the light and the present. We see in Drake a rude daring seemed wonderful in his own age. There is not merely the greedy love of gain, but a desire British flag in seas and lands where before unknown. The honour of his nation lured it was, he was buccaneer-discoverer-hero-character deemed great and noble-held up the days in which he lived."*<sup>46</sup>

Among the scapegoats, there are the Dukes of Medina Sidonia and Parma, as well as Philip II. The English historiography systematically

<sup>43</sup> M. LEWIS, *The Spanish Armada*, London 1960, pp. 166–167.

<sup>44</sup> M. LEWIS, *Armada Guns, a Comparative Study of English and Spanish Armaments*, London 1961, pp. 190–191.

<sup>45</sup> C. MARTIN – G. PARKER, *The Spanish Armada*. 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition, Manchester 1999, pp. 192–201.

<sup>46</sup> Sir Francis Drake, *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, 14, 1854, p. 98.

and gradually became more critical of the English heroes and more lenient with the Spanish leaders during the last two hundred years. The best example for the latter attitude is the latest monograph on Philip II.<sup>47</sup>

### Outlines of the Other Fields of Reception: Literature, Journalism and Education

From the very beginning, the fall of the Armada had a serious effect on other fields of English reception as well. In the Stationers' Register there are 27 ballads on the Armada, registered between 29 June and 27 November 1588.<sup>48</sup> They focus on three topics: preparations, victory and thanksgiving.<sup>49</sup> By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the genre of ballads declined.<sup>50</sup> In English dramas, "[...] *the defeat of the Armada symbolized the failure of an empire that had neglected to cultivate the population, the commerce, the industry, and the agriculture necessary to maintain a powerful state.*"<sup>51</sup> On poetry, there were harsh debates as J. C. Lapp claimed that English contemporary poets were not interested in the theme of the Armada: "*The spectacular victory which delivered England from the great Armada inspired no triumphal song among contemporary English poets. English poetical record of the event was confined to Spenser's brief salute to Lord Howard in a dedicatory sonnet to the Faerie Queene, Warner's stiff lines in Albion's England, a rough poem by the Scottish poet, Alexander Hume, and the popular ballads of the day. Curiously, one of the greatest moments in England's history received its worthiest treatment in the obscure pages of Pierre Poupou's Muse Chrestienne, published in 1590, only two years*

<sup>47</sup> G. PARKER, *Imprudent King. A New Life of Philip II*, Yale 2014.

<sup>48</sup> "During the period the Stationers Register was kept, of the sixty seven ballads entered there which dealt directly or indirectly with Spain, twenty-seven, all dealing with the Spanish Armada, were entered between 29 June and 27 November 1588. Another on the same subject was registered the following March 1. Only one of these ballads appeared in June. July produced two, August ten, September four, October one, and November nine. The sudden revival of interest in November is probably ascribable to the fact that 19 November was set aside by Elizabeth, in token of England's deliverance, as a national day of thanksgiving. This fact would explain also why seven of the nine November ballads appeared between the fourteenth and the twenty-seventh of the month." J. J. MC ALEER, *Ballads on the Spanish Armada*, in: *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4, 1963, p. 602.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 603.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 611.

<sup>51</sup> B. ORR, *Poetic Plate-Fleets and Universal Monarchy: The Heroic Plays and Empire in the Restoration*, in: *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 1/2, 2000, p. 75.

after the event.”<sup>52</sup> This theory was refuted by Bradner who found more poems, although the majority of them were written in Latin.<sup>53</sup>

After the defeat of the Armada, journalists immediately started to cover the topic.<sup>54</sup> One of the most famous of them was Robert Greene

<sup>52</sup> J. C. LAPP, *The Defeat of the Armada in French Poetry of the Sixteenth Century*, in: *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1, 1944, p. 98.

<sup>53</sup> “Although the Armada was driven out of the English Channel in July, final reports of its dispersal and of the return of the remnant to Spain were not received until November. In the remainder of 1588, which in those days meant until March 25 of the following year, two poetical volumes appeared in London on this subject. James Aske issued his *Elizabetha triumphans*, conteyning the damned practizes used ever sithence her Highnesse first coming to the crowne, which contains an account of the Queen’s speech to the army at Tillbury and the naval battle with the Armada, and Théodore de Bèze sent over from Geneva a collection of epigrams in various languages which were printed in London on a single sheet. In the following year three volumes of poetry relating to the Armada were published in England. The first of these, published both at Oxford and London, was the anonymous *Skeltonicall Salutation*, an amusing satire on Spanish pretensions in Skeltonic verse. The second is the *Elizabethis* of Christopher Ockland, a narrative poem of considerable length in Latin. It formed the third and last installment of a Latin-verse history of England by Ockland, the other two volumes having appeared in 1580 and 1582. Since the *Elizabethis* dealt only with events after 1582, it devoted a great deal of space to the Armada. The third book is an anthology, *Triumphalia de victoriis Elizabethae*, edited by the principal contributor, who calls himself N. Eleutherius. Who is concealed behind this pseudonym has never been discovered, but from the contents it would seem that he was a Continental Protestant, perhaps from the Palatinate of the Rhine. The names of the other contributors are Richardus Hemelius, Iulius Riparius, and Olympia Frontina. Hemelius probably also was living near Heidelberg, since he published a poem there in 1613 celebrating the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and the Elector. I have not been able to locate Riparius and Olympia Frontina. The volume was dedicated to Daniel Rogers, whose diplomatic career had frequently taken him to Germany. The book was printed in London by John Wolfe. In 1590 another Latin anthology appeared, this time at Geneva, which celebrated the defeat of the Spanish fleet. Its first section, entitled ‘Iberica’ contains eight poems on the Armada, all signed with initials. [...] Another volume containing poems on the Armada was published at Geneva in 1591. This was the *Lyrice* of the well-known French Protestant Jean Jaquemot (*Iacomotus*). In it are two short poems on the Armada which I have not seen; the only known copies are in Europe. The last poem of any significance on this subject was the *Ad Thamesin* of Thomas Campion, published in London in 1595. This Latin poem in epic style attributes the enmity of Spain to the powers of Hades and develops the supernatural machinery at great length. The naval battle is disposed of in about twenty lines. It is by far the most ambitious and most poetical of these Armada Pieces. Another example of the use of infernal machinery which probably refers to the defeat of Spain is found in the sixth eclogue of Thomas Watson’s *Amintae Gaudia*, London, 1592.” L. BRADNER, *Poems on the Defeat of the Spanish Armada*, in: *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 1944, 4, pp. 447–448.

<sup>54</sup> “Several Newspapers are still preserved, which were printed in 1588, while the Spanish fleet was in the English Channel. The earliest Numbers are lost: but it is probable that the publication commenced in April, when the Armada approached the shores of England; and continued

(died in 1592) who depicted the Spanish and the leaders of Catholicism as the worst hypocrites in the world.<sup>55</sup> His book mirrors the English common knowledge of the contemporaries that there was a Catholic conspiracy aimed at destroying the Protestant England.<sup>56</sup> Modern journalism is not motivated by the religious interpretations but by the novelty of a topic. Therefore, the topic of the Armada has been linked, for example, to the Brexit: *“The first thing about the idea of England as a nation state that governs itself and only itself is that it is radically new. The Brexit campaign is fuelled by a mythology of England proudly ‘standing alone’, as it did against the Spanish Armada and Adolf Hitler. But when did England really stand alone? The answer, roughly speaking, is for 300 of the past 1,200 years. England has been a political entity for only two relatively short periods. The first was between the early 10th century, when the first English national kingdom was created by Athelstan, and 1016 when it was conquered by Cnut the Dane. The second was between 1453, when English kings effectively gave up their attempts to rule France, and 1603, when James VI and I united the thrones of England and Scotland.”*<sup>57</sup>

The same happened in secondary school education, as in historiography. Until the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the major aim was to strengthen patriotic feelings and the topic of the Armada was everywhere in the education.<sup>58</sup> This fact is shown by the following allegory

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*till the alarm subsided, about the end of the year. It was what we would now call an Extraordinary Gazette; published occasionally, by the orders of Burleigh, to communicate information, or rouse the spirit of the people, during the alarms of that eventful period. It, accordingly, seizes with dexterity on topics calculated to rouse the patriotism, and even the prejudices of the nation; and employs that gracefulness of diction, which might be expected in a courtly publication. One of the Numbers, under the head of News from Madrid, mentions the intention of putting Elizabeth to death, and speaks of the instruments of torture that were on board the Spanish fleet; – circumstances evidently calculated to operate on the terrors of the English, their resentment against Spain, and their attachment to the Queen. The earliest Number preserved is the fiftieth, and contains news from Whitehall, of the 23rd and 26th July, 1588.”* Periodical Publications. No. II. Sketch of Their Early History, in: *The Belfast Magazine and Literary Journal*, 2, 1825, p. 148.

<sup>55</sup> A. ESLER, Robert Greene and the Spanish Armada, in: *English Literary History*, 3, 1965, p. 318.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 322.

<sup>57</sup> F. O'TOOLE, Brexit is being driven by English nationalism. And it will end in self-rule (<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/18/england-eu-referendum-brexit>).

<sup>58</sup> P. YEANDLE, *Citizenship, Nation, Empire. The Politics of History Teaching in England, 1870–1930*, Manchester 2015, p. 80.



at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “Alarmists are beginning to cry aloud that patriotism is declining in our precious native land. It is probably true that the era of buoyant, boasting patriotism is forever past, but of calm and, if necessary, obstinately resistant patriotism, there certainly is no lack. Yet the first indication of a decline of patriotism should be watched for as Elizabeth’s scout-ships watched for the Spanish Armada, and every resource should be strained to prove that the lion of patriotic love but seemed to drowse.”<sup>59</sup> However, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the interpretation of the expedition of the Armada became more rational and critical with regard to national pride.<sup>60</sup>

**Summary: a Few Words on the Hungarian Reception of the Fall of the Armada<sup>61</sup>**

The Hungarian reception of the fall of the Armada reflects more the Hungarian historical thinking than what happened to the Armada. Only two monographs written on the topic were translated into Hungarian,<sup>62</sup> because the story of the Armada is not closely connected to Hungarian history. Many of the Hungarian lexicons, summative books on early modern European history, secondary school books and internet articles do not even question the “taboos” which are bravely disputed by the English historiography. Therefore, they condemn the zealotry of Philip II and the Spanish in the name of the leyenda negra<sup>63</sup> and they also claim that the English defeated the Armada, which brought about the collapse of the Spanish Empire as well as the rise of the English naval superpower. They do not ask the most interesting questions of the English historiography: Was the Tilbury-speech an act of cynicism? What would have happened if the Spanish ground forces had landed? Did Elizabeth I do everything to prepare for the war and did she care about her subjects after the war? Was the Armada defeated by the English at all?

<sup>59</sup> J. R. BISHOP, How the High School May Advance Patriotism. Part II, in: *The School Review*, 5, 1895, p. 293.

<sup>60</sup> C. PENDRILL, *Spain 1474–1700*, Oxford 2002.

<sup>61</sup> See in detail: P. ILLIK, *A spanyol armada pusztulása (1588) Historiográfia, identitás, recepció*, Budapest 2017.

<sup>62</sup> D. HOWARTH, *The Voyage of the Armada. The Spanish Story*, London 1981; R. WHITING, *The Spanish Armada*, London 2004.

<sup>63</sup> FERNÁNDEZ-ARMESTO, pp. 6–7.