

Of Intelligence: a previously unknown tract by Sir Thomas Roe

Of Intelligence is a hitherto unknown tract written by Sir Thomas Roe and preserved in manuscript form in the National Archives at Kew. It is kept among the papers of the Williamson Collection in a bundle (SP 9/201) containing a miscellany of original documents, treatises, notes and pamphlets from the 16th to the 18th centuries that appears to have been unopened for decades. These papers are mainly to do with the Holy Roman Empire and various city states in Germany, including documents such as “Genealogy of the Kings of Bohemia”, “Description of Austria” and “Convention of German Princes at Mainz”. In this context *A Small Tract of Sir Thomas Roe, intitled, Of Intelligence. Of great Use to all Ministers of State, Ambassadors, etc* is an oddity. Being about the importance of keeping a good network of “intelligence” in order to prosper at court, it is vaguely connected with the rest of the items because of its references to King Gustavus Adolphus and the Swedish participation in the Thirty Years War. Despite it being correctly catalogued, the fact that it is filed away in an obscure miscellany doubtless explains why this interesting document has not yet been incorporated into the canon of Sir Thomas Roe’s works and was left unrecorded by all previous editors and biographers of the famous diplomat and politician.¹

The manuscript is collected in a gathering of twelve folios made from three folded embedded sheets, and written in a neat seventeenth century secretarial hand different from Roe’s. The fact that each page ends in a catchword and the existence of marginal annotations only on 109v suggests that it was somehow left unfinished, as all subsequent quotations from the classics, after those on 109v, lack references. A different hand has pencilled the number 17 on the title page, as well as “Charles I”, clearly for archiving purposes, and then has numbered each recto (109, 110, 111a, 111a, 112 and 113). That 111a appears twice may be due to a mistake by the archivist.

¹ See Michael Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe 1581-1644, A Life* (London, 1989); Colin Paul Mitchel, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire* (Karachi, 2000); Michael Strachan, “Sir Thomas Roe”, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004; 2011); Michael J. Brown, *Itinerant Ambassador: The Life of Sir Thomas Roe* (Lexington, 2014); Nandini Das, *Sir Thomas Roe: Eyewitness to a Changing World* (London, 2018).

The catalogue describes this item (also erroneously) as comprising eight folios, and is dated loosely between 1625 and 1649, corresponding with the reign of Charles I. We may infer that, as the documents in the bundle are arranged in chronological order, the archivist attempted to find the right place for it, inserting it between “Verses of Prince Henry of Orange Concerning the War” (SP 9/201/16) – which was also dated within the same time span – and “Plan of seating at a meeting of the princes of the Empire” (SP9/201/18) which is dated to 1658. In fact, internal evidence provides a more precise date for this text as it refers to the “present contentions between the Imperialists and the Swedes” (113r). These were at their most intense between the years 1630 and 1634; given that Thomas Roe’s embassy to the Baltic took place from 1629 to 1630 a probable dating would be after his return to England in 1630 and prior to Gustavus Adolphus’s death on the battlefield in 1632.

Even in the tract’s title, *Of Intelligence* follows the formula of Francis Bacon’s *Essays* (1597, 1625). The text is short and to the point, developing a single idea by balancing the arguments and enumerating the different aspects with examples and classical quotations. The indebtedness to Bacon’s *Essays* is further revealed in a direct quotation from *Of Counseling* (an essay that has obvious thematic connections with this one), even though Roe never mentions Bacon’s name, only referring to him as “a great Pollititian”.² The question posed in Roe’s ‘essay’ concerns the best way to obtain power and influence in a court (never specifying which), and the answer is through intelligence, or to express it in modern terms, information. The courtier with the best information will be able to provide his king with two things that are necessary to prosper in court, good counselling and good entertainment – the means to obtain this information being not only books but, more importantly, a network of informers in distant places that can provide reliable news and accounts of events abroad. Therefore, *Of Intelligence* is an essay on the importance of establishing and maintaining an effective spy network. According to Roe’s argument the courtier that provides this type of intelligence will be in the best position to climb the ladder to power and influence.

² See note 24.

By the time of the composition of this tract Roe had already earned his reputation as an ambassador and traveller. His successive diplomatic missions in Spain (1605), Heidelberg and the Netherlands (1613), India (1615-1619), and Constantinople (1621-1629), and his mercantile expedition to South America (1610-11) had given him prestige and a notable experience abroad but had kept him away from the circles of influence at the English court.³ These are also the missions that have given him renown in modern scholarship since they deserve close scrutiny in the context of the history of East-West encounters. Most significantly his journey to Mughal India and the diaries he wrote thereby offer a wealth of examples illustrating early modern relations between the English and Moghul cultures, thus becoming “a standard case study in theorisations of cross-cultural encounters”.⁴ But, however much Roe’s *Of Intelligence* may be informed by his close contacts with the courts of Jahangir in India and successive sultans in Constantinople, there is no direct reference to these experiences in his tract.

Instead, *Of Intelligence* is entirely concerned with European politics and culture. Most of the exempla are taken from classical Roman sources, particularly Tacitus and Quintus Curtius. These Roman writers were particular favourites at the Inns of Court where Roe had completed his education after attending Oxford and where he made a circle of close friends which included Dudley Carleton and John Donne. Tacitus is also the most quoted writer in his most famous work, *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe to the Court of the Great Mogul, 1615-1619*, published in 1899 by the Hakluyt Society.⁵ According to Colin Mitchell ‘Sir Thomas Roe’s analysis of the Mughal empire through *The Annals* and *The Histories* suggests a political mind which agrees wholeheartedly with the Tacitean model of polity—avoiding absolute rule through republicanism’.⁶ In much the same vein, the classical quotations in *Of Intelligence* contrast the corruption of the Roman emperors Claudius, Nero and Vitellius with the virtues of Alexander and

³ After returning from Northern Europe Roe was to remain for most of his life in England except for two shorter diplomatic missions, one in 1638-9 to Hamburg for talks to forge an anti-Habsburg alliance and some years later to the court of the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand III for peace talks in 1642.

⁴ Das, *Sir Thomas Roe, Eyewitness to a Changing World*, 2.

⁵ Samuel Purchas included an abbreviated edited version *Roe’s Journal of his mission to the Mogul 1615-1619* in *Purchas, his Pilgrimes*, 1625, pt. I, book IV, 535-578. The journal after 11 Feb. 1617 has since disappeared. Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe*, 316.

⁶ Mitchell, *Sir Thomas Roe and the Mughal Empire*, 186.

Augustus, suggesting an opposition between the idle and the warrior rulers which could be applied to the differing attitudes to war of Charles I and Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden. Even though *Of Intelligence* does not offer a particular stance on English politics, the use of these quotations opposing the vices of the emperors to the virtues of Alexander the Great shows an inclination towards a political model that was closer to the one represented by the Swedish than by the English monarch.

Few are the direct references to more contemporary times: the first, a comment on Philip II of Spain's shrewdness and lack of gratitude as a sovereign can be seen as glancing at the Black Legend against Spain. Roe's participation at the age of twenty-five in the 1605 embassy to Spain to the court of Philip III in Valladolid must have been a useful training ground for his subsequent diplomatic career. Since he was among the thirty knights listed by name by Robert Treswell in his account of a mission famously composed of "six hundred heretics" he must have been in the midst of all the spectacles and celebrations that were lavished on the English visitors during their brief stay at the Spanish court.⁷ Less probable is that he was among those who entered local churches and were tempted to convert to Catholicism, as is reported on Iberian chronicles.⁸ Nonetheless, he certainly witnessed the various Catholic processions which passed through the streets while the English were in residence.⁹ His staunch Protestantism was not shaken by this visit but his belief in the importance of public performance as a basic component of international relations must have become ingrained.

However, the episode he recalls in this tract is not about Philip III, who supported a policy of peace in Europe, but about his more bellicose father, Philip II. This allusion to recent history places the emphasis on the lack of generosity of the ruler and what is most relevant to Roe's argument, the lack of recognition of his subjects' merits – an injustice that he himself would suffer with Charles I, since he would not get a public

⁷ Robert Treswell, *A Relation of Svch Things As were obserued to happen in the Journey of the right Honourable Charles Earle of Nottingham, L. High Admirall of England, his hignesse Ambassadour to the King of Spaine* (London, 1605), 4.

⁸ Tomé Pinheiro da Veiga, *Fastiginia o Fastos Geniales*, ed. & trans. Narciso Alonso Cortés, (Valladolid, 1973), 149.

⁹ Berta Cano-Echevarría and Mark Hutchings, "Valladolid 1605: A Theatre for the Peace," *Occasions of State: Early Modern European Festivals and the Negotiation of Power*, ed. J.R. Mulryne, K de Jonge and R. Morris, (London, 2018), 108.

office until 1636. Using this example of ungratefulness at this stage in his career when he was attempting to place himself in a position of favour with his monarch seems to be more a warning of what the unfair ruler should not do, than a complaint about his own situation, since presumably he retained hopes for some kind of reward for his diplomatic endeavours.

The above-mentioned reference to King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden is more revealing because it is described as contemporary with the time of composition and appears to be central to the argument of the essay. Certainly, the mission to northern Europe was probably Roe's most ambitious enterprise, even though it has not received much scholarly attention.¹⁰ While he was an ambassador in the East one would think that Roe's long periods away from Europe might have kept him away from the vicissitudes of national and continental politics, but his regular correspondence with friends at home means that he was punctually informed of all that was happening in the European sphere, to the point of feeling moved to participate in it.¹¹ During his time in Constantinople he had been in contact with Bethlem Gabor, the Protestant prince of Transylvania and brother in law to Gustavus Adolphus, to obtain his support for the restoration of the Palatinate to Frederick and Elizabeth of Bohemia. This was Roe's most cherished cause since early in his career he had become Elizabeth's loyal friend and confidant when he entered her household as a young courtier, and he had later accompanied her to be married to Frederick in Heidelberg. Thus, on his way back from Constantinople Roe paused in the Hague to present Elizabeth and her husband with his plans for a grand Protestant European alliance to defeat the Habsburgs. He also took the opportunity to seek out support from Frederick Henry, Prince of Orange. Back in England he had to embark on the more difficult task of convincing King Charles and his pro-Spanish counsellors to send him on an embassy to seek the backing of other Protestant powers in Northern Europe.

¹⁰ The most comprehensive study is in *Letters relating to the mission of Sir Thomas Roe to Gustavus Adolphus*, ed. Samuel Rawson Gardiner (London, 1875).

¹¹ See for example the letters Roe received from George Carew which are a sort of diary of all the events that happened at court between 1615-1617 in *Letters from Lord George Carew to Sir Thomas Roe*, ed. John MacLean (London, 1860).

But the mission to Northern Europe was only partially successful – he brokered a peace treaty between the Swedish and the Poles and secured Gustavus Adolphus’s military involvement in favour of the Protestant cause in Germany, but he was unable to obtain any benefits in trade for the Eastland Company that was suffering due to the higher tolls and seizure of goods provoked by war. However, what caused most anxiety was the feeling (expressed in his letters to Elizabeth) that he was being ignored by his king and government, “having in 6 moneths had no letter, order, nor answere, nor mony since my departure, which is but an ill symptome”.¹² This had caused him to describe himself “like a young hawke upon the branches ready to flye, but want my wings; the playne truth is, as if it were a sickness incureable, we doe all things too late”.¹³ It is upon his return to England from this difficult journey that *Of Intelligence* was most probably written.

What the Northern mission gave Roe (apart from some feeling of despair) was a considerable number of acquaintances among the main players on the European chess board, a capacity to influence in foreign affairs, and first-hand knowledge of what was happening on the war front. These are the main sources for the “intelligence” that he so earnestly endorses in his essay. Once he returned, after almost eighteen years abroad on diplomatic missions, Roe would spend most of the rest of his life in England. After all his commissions he believed that there would be some reward for his efforts abroad. As Michael Strachan relates, “He hoped for high office in the service of the Sovereign and considered that he deserved a peerage more than most of those whom the King was pleased to honour”.¹⁴ Thus, the writing of *Of Intelligence* appears to be an exercise on planning his way ahead at the court. When Roe refers in his tract to “whoso striveth to get his soveraignes neere favor” he might well be referring to himself. So, if we are to ask ourselves who were the expected readers of Roe’s piece and whether he ever thought of publishing it we may come to the conclusion that it was directed to those that could help him get the desired reward; no printing would be needed, therefore, just a strategic distribution. It is, more than a literary exercise, an endeavour for the promotion of his own position and talents. No one better than him

¹² *Letters Relating to the Mission*, ed. Gardiner, 83.

¹³ *Letters Relating to the Mission*, ed. Gardiner, 9.

¹⁴ Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe*, 210.

to give these pieces of advice to “ministers of state, ambassadors, etc” on how to handle a political career; but also no one in a better position to offer the intelligence he proposes in the tract. However, as it turned out, he did not receive the desired position: “He had been and remained far too outspoken in his criticism of government policy. The lack of support for Gustavus and the negotiations for peace with Spain were too odious to him, and he did not seek to disguise his disagreement.”¹⁵

Coinciding with the probable date of composition, the anonymous newsbook *The Swedish Intelligencer* (1632) appeared in print. Edited by the clergyman William Watts, it was (according to the STC) “sometimes attributed to Sir T. Rowe” as reported by Strachan, who then admitted he had not found any evidence to support this.¹⁶ Though it is highly improbable that Roe took the time to write this voluminous work consisting of eight volumes that appeared in print between 1632 and 1635 he may well have helped in providing much of the ‘intelligence’ necessary to compose it.¹⁷ What is most relevant about this early (and almost certainly mistaken) attribution of *The Swedish Intelligencer* is that the similarity in their titles may have been the source of confusion for the attribution, which invites us to infer that *Of Intelligence* was known to the early scholars that were interested in Thomas Roe and was subsequently lost until the present.

In 1859 John MacLean, at that time working on an edition of the letters of George Carew to Thomas Roe, published a letter in *Notes & Queries* asking for information about what had become of the collection of Roe’s papers that had been in the possession of Samuel Richardson. He also provides a summary of the early vicissitudes of Roe’s papers as far as he knew: originally owned by Richardson, he bequeathed them to The Society for the Encouragement of Learning, with whom he had a contract, for publication. The Society entrusted their study to the historian Thomas Carte (1686-1754) whose letter to the secretary of the Society recommending the publishing of

¹⁵ Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe*, 210.

¹⁶ Strachan, *Sir Thomas Roe*, 315.

¹⁷ According to Emma Turnbull the representation of Gustavus Adolphus in *The Swedish Intelligencer* as a confessionally driven hero earned him the support of different Protestant factions beyond the Calvinists, this is clearly the case with Roe that saw in him an icon of the Protestant cause. See Emma C. Turnbull, “Rethinking the Representation of Gustavus Adolphus: The Case of William Watts and *The Swedish Intelligencer*, 1630-1633,” *The Seventeenth Century* 34:4 (2019): 437-467.

Roe's oeuvre in three volumes survives. The first volume appeared in 1740, published by Samuel Richardson and edited by Carte, but then the society dissolved in 1749.¹⁸ A year after the *Notes & Queries* enquiry MacLean was able to provide some more information in the preface to his *Letters from George Lord Carew to Sir Thomas Roe* (1860). He had found some letters in the State Papers Office, and knew of others extant in Oxford in the Harleian collection; 'As these letters were found in the State Paper Office it would naturally be concluded that the bulk of the correspondence would be discovered there also; and there is, certainly, in that repository a great mass of Roe's paper, and these were formerly tied up in separate bundles, but some years ago were distributed among the various collections to which they belong, according to the system of arrangement which obtains in the office.'¹⁹ Thus, *Of Intelligence* was separated from other Roe papers and integrated into what is now SP 9/201.

The discovery of this manuscript is an exciting addition to Thomas Roe's writings. Excepting the dedicatory poems included in Ben Jonson's printed plays, it is the closest we come to a work that he composed with a readership in mind; whether to be printed or circulated in manuscript, is uncertain. The catchwords at the end of each folio incline us towards the printing hypothesis, but his defence of the superiority of manuscript over print in the tract itself can lead us to think that this would be the preferred option. Again, the inclusion of only two marginal annotations at the beginning can be interpreted as signs of a job left unfinished, but otherwise the neatness of the copy and scarcity of corrections may point to a clean copy from an earlier manuscript. His other extant writings (diaries, letters and discourses) were written for a different purpose and were later judged to merit publication, but in this case it is clear that Roe devised it as a work with an audience in mind and with an aim behind it, the recognition of his potential for achievement in England. We may read it also as an exercise in elegant writing and a homage (even if oblique) to Francis Bacon's *Essays*. By illuminating different aspects of Thomas Roe's career and his times we can interpret it as a direct presentation of his own credentials and a call for attention to his situation after his return home from his diplomatic endeavours. Hidden in plain sight

¹⁸ John MacLean, "Queries: Sir Thomas Roe," *Notes and Queries* 2nd S. VIII (1859), 351.

¹⁹ *Letters from George Lord Carew*, ed. MacLean, xii.

during all these centuries this manuscript bears witness to the treasures that archives can still produce in modern times.

The transcription of the previously unprinted tract *Of Intelligence* follows. I have maintained original spelling, punctuation and capitalization. Abbreviations have been expanded with the supplied letters italicized and superscript letters silently lowered. Cancelled words have been struck-through and interlineal insertions remain superscript marked by a caret symbol (^), while marginal notes are inserted between brackets. I have also observed the page numbering that was added in pencil by the archivist, and in the case when it was accidentally repeated (111a) I have used superscript and parenthesis to make the distinction thus [111^a] and [111(a)].

A Small Tract of Sir Thomas Roe, intituled,

Of Intelligence.

Of great Use to all Ministers of State, Ambassadors, etc

[109r] The cheife excellencie of a man is knowledge The greatest excellencie of knowledge is usefullness, the cheifest meanes to get knowledge & put it in use is good Intelligence of all such things as concerne that which a man hath to doe. By the word Intelligence I meane nothing else, but those informations *which* a man may collect from a frequent and iuditious correspondencie with severall industrious, and understanding men abroad, or by familiar acquaintance & conversation with those who have such correspondencie. Now & though this kind of information bee very necessary to any man, whose designes reach further than the good of his owne private family, yet noe man in my opinion can want it lesse, than he who liveth in court, &

striveth to get his soveraignes neere favor, or having already gotten it, would maintaine it in vigour and encrease it continually. For I find but 3 wayes, *which* being carefully observed, may lead an able courtier into his soveraignes favour, which are, aptness to the undertaking of great actions & enterprises or skillfulnes to give good Counsell & direction in weighty & important affaires, or lastly readiness, & sweetnes in the discourse of such matters as the Prince liketh best to heare of. Neither of these can well be obtained without the helpe of good intelligence. But before I goe about to demonstrate this I must neede advertise you, that these three wayes here sett downe have place onely in a virtuous, and wise Princes Court. How with such Princes as have not the greatest wisdom, or are in their life very corrupt and vitious it is cleane another case. If a man of great parts bee esteemed and preferred by them, it is not for his rare *parts*, but oftentimes for some small trifle [109v] trifle, or at least for some agreeablenes with them in their conditons and manners. {Tacitus} Claudius the Roman Emperor who was often besides himselfe, and moreover of a servile disposition made none very familiar with himself but three of his basest slaves Pallas, Calistus & Narcissus, who when they had gotten their owne libertie, they made both the Emperor Claudius, and the Senate and State of Rome Slaves to them. Nero having alwaies from his yonger yeares given himselfe to all manner of riott, and lasciviousnes as soone as his grave, valourous and faithfull Burrhus was gone, could find none soe fitt to bee putt in that place of dignitie and familiarity as Tigellinus, and why? Erat saith the historian, *ex intimis libidinibus assumptus*. {Tacit Annal 14 p.361. edit in 12^o.}²⁰

Vitellius who loved nothing soe much as gluttony advanced such onely as knew how to fitt *that* humor of his {Hist.1.2. p.546}. Nemo saith Tacitus in illâ aula probitate et industria certavit, unum ad potentiam iter prodigis epulis satiare inexplēbiles Vitellii libidines.²¹ On the contrary Alexander the Great, and Augustus *the* Roman Emperor,

²⁰ "he was the associate of his most secret profligacy" *Tacitus: The Annals: Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero*, trans. J.C. Yardley (Oxford, 2008), 329. Most of Roe's Latin quotations differ in several ways from the original, it is therefore possible that he was quoting from memory. Cf. "Tigellinus in animo principis et intimis libidinibus adsumptus." Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales* 14, 51.

²¹ "At such a court no one sought distinction by honesty or hard work. The one and only avenue to influence was to glut the insatiable appetite of Vitellius with lavish junketing, expenditure and debauch." *Tacitus: The Histories*, trans. Kenneth Wellesley rev. edn. (Penguin, 1975), p.141. Cf. "nemo in illa aula probitate aut industria certavit: unum ad potentiam iter, prodigis epulis et sumptu ganeaeque satiare inexplēbilis Vitellii libidines" Cornelius Tacitus, *Historiae* 2, 95.

the two greatest Monarchs *that* ever were, admitted into their more inward acquaintance none but such as were fitt for the Employmente formerly exposed. Alexander had his Haephestion & Parmenio, with whom above many other brave & valiant men hee especially divided as it were the burden of his greatnes, and of them was his minion & darling of whom hee did not sticke to say to the Siligambis Darius'es mother when shee took him for Alexander himselfe. Non errasti Mater, nam et hic Alexander est,²² The other was his Vicegerent in his greatest affaires [110r] affaires, and his cheifest instrument in the obtaininge soe many admirable conquests over his enimies. Curtius giveth him this comendation, quod is multa sine Rege prospere, Rex sine illo nihil magnae rei gesserit.²³ Augustus his two great favourites Agrippa & Maecenas had the like different shares and degrees of love with their Sovereigne. Agrippa was beloved because of his great valour and wisdom especially in managing military affaires, a man of a very aspiring mind, without whom Augustus, though himselfe were in person, never effected any great matter. Mecaenas's presence could never welbee wanted, because of his sweetnes in conversation, & deepe skill in ordering ^{of} civill matters, & frameing learned & pleasing discourse, *which* were the more acceptable to the Emperor because hee could conceive noe reason to bee afraid of him. For Mecaenas was soe farr from raising the least suspition of attempting any thing preiuditiall to his sovereigne, *that* hee would never take upon him the dignity of a Senator, but led a life little differing from a private gentleman, it were too tedious to sett downe all other instances of the like nature, therefore I passe them by for the present, It appeares now, *that* there are but three wayes open, in *which* an honest man may deserve a good Princes favor, & it is noe hard matter to prove how much all of them depend uppon good Intelligence. As for great Actions & enterprises in civill or in military occatons, it is evident without any prooffe, how unhappily they succeed, if hee to whose care they ^{bee} committed bee not fully informed [110v] informed in all the circumstances and casualties *which* such a business is subiect too on all sides, *which* informaton can never be gotten except by constant and faithfull intelligence. The King

²² "My lady, you made no mistake. This man is Alexander too." *The History of Alexander*, trans. John Yardley (Penguin, 1984), 46. Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* 3, 12, 17-18.

²³ "he had gained many successes without the king, while the king had achieved nothing of significance without him" *The History of Alexander*, trans. Yardley, 152. Cf. "Multa sine rege prospere, rex sine illo nihil magnae rei gesserat" Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* 7, 2, 33-4.

of Sweden oweth his greatest victories more to his many trusty Espialls and Intelligencers than to the Cunning of his Counsellors, or the experience of his Captaines, and hee had every where in his enimies army & Countries such Scoutes, by whose meanes hee could alwaies prevent the enterprises of his enimies & outshoot them with their owne bow. Many instances of the like nature might bee produced if need were, but because in it selfe it is most manifest, wee will leave it & examine further, how requisite good intelligence is as well to the giving of good Counsell, as to the framing of an accurate and pleasing discourse, *which* two are the more worthy of a little deeper consideration because they are to be preferred before great exploits, though very glorious, by him who placeth the sume of his fortune only in the countenance of his Princes favor, & love towarde him. Concerning Councell it is first the most necessary, for nothing can bee well executed, unles it bee before hand wisely plotted. Things (saith a great Pollititian) will have their first or second agitaton, if they bee not tossed uppon the Argumente of Councell, they will bee tossed uppon the waves of fortune, & bee full of inconstancy doing, & undoing, like the reeling of a Drunken man,²⁴ whereas the whole plott being laid & true & full direction ^{being} given to him by whose hands it is to bee performed the very boldnes oftentimes will carry him happily through the greatest dangers and [111^ar] and difficulties whereof diverse examples as well moderne as antient might bee alleadged. Secondly the giving of councell is in it selfe the more honourable. for good execution may in a manner bee extorted by the commands of supreame powers, if formerly they have had notice of their servants Abilitie therein Phillipp King of Spaine did take the Duke of Alba from the place to which hee was confined, and sent him to bee Generall in the warr against the Portugalls –yet would not grant him the honor to come to the Cort and kisse his hand, neither before his going to the warr nor after his returne although within the space of 56 daies hee had brought the whole Country under the subiection of the King.²⁵ But

²⁴ Direct quotation from Francis Bacon “Of Counsel”. Also notable is how Roe starts his essay in a similar fashion to the same essay by Bacon. Cf.: “The greatest trust between man and man is the trust of giving counsel [...]”

²⁵ Refers to the Battle of Alcántara (1581) where the Duke of Alba entered Lisbon to claim the Portuguese crown for Philip II of Spain thus starting a period of dynastic union in the Iberian Peninsula. English opposition to Philip’s claims to the throne of Portugal resulted in a propaganda campaign against the victory of Alba, the most famous piece being Thomas Kyd’s play *The Spanish Tragedy*. Roe’s information about the episode was thus biased, the Duke of Alba had been banished by Philip due to his disobedience concerning his son’s marriage, but he was pardoned and they had an interview in Merida

good Councill can never bee forced out of any man, but must alwayes bee obtained by a friendly way, and rather by alluremente of love, than angry threatnings. For even that suggestion which a Councillor giveth according to the Princes humour, and protesteth it is the best hee can find out may perhaps be nothing but a cunning device, to divert him from harkening to better direction, and soe by a faire meanes without danger to him selfe worke even the Princes hurt Whereof the Scripture in the history of the two great Councillors to Absolon Achitophel and Husai doth not let us want good evidence.²⁶ Lastly giving of councill is a great deale more safe and fit for the purchasing a Princes love than employmente in great affaires For whosoever taketh uppon him such a matter must of necessity bee often absent from the King, and soe expose himselfe to the danger of false reporte made of him, and give way to others to worke him out, and themselves into the Princes favour Besides if the busines *which* hee went about [111^av] about have an unprosperous successe though it happen through the Churlishness of the enterprise, and not by his owne default, that alone is enough to procure his sovereigns displeasure: if it succeeds well, the more authoritie hee getts amongst his equalls, the more fame amongst strangers, the more love amongst the comon people, the more hee loseth of that intimacie which hee had before with his Prince becoming thereby more formidable and suspect then gratefull to him *tan quam plus quam Civilia agit, et nomen suum supra Principis extollere nitatur.*²⁷ Nay the meere greatnes of the benefitt, though there bee noe danger at all in it, is often odious to haughty Princes as derogating to much from their Magestie: by making them too much obliged to their servant. *Beneficia eousa laeta sunt, dum videntur exsolvi posse, ubi multum antevenere pro gratia odium redditur.*²⁸ On the contrary, hee that keepeth alwaies within the bounde of Councill and information, shunneth first all those dangers, seeing noe body is bound to make good the event of his Councill as suggesting onely what hee thinketh to bee best, but constraining noe

before the battle. Philip also visited the Duke on his deathbed the following year. Henry Kamen, *Felipe de España* (Madrid, 1997), 186.

²⁶ 2 Samuel 15-17. Hussai sabotaged Absalom's plans to attack David with purposeful misleading advice.

²⁷ "As if he agitated more than the people and aspired to elevate his name above the Prince's". Probably Roe's own Latin dictum.

²⁸ "For favours are welcome only to the point where reciprocity seems possible. When they go far beyond that, hatred replaces gratitude." *Tacitus*, Trans. Yardley, 146. Cf. *Nam beneficia eo usque laeta sunt dum videntur exolvi posse: ubi multum antevenere pro gratia odium redditur.* Cornelius Tacitus, *Annales* 4, 18.

body to follow his direction. Nemo said Darius onre stolidum consilium capite luere debit De futuri sunt qui suadeant si suasisse periculum sit.²⁹ Besides the better his suggested plotts and devices thrive the more familiarly the Prince will reveale himselfe to him, and put the more trust in him, especially if hee finds a mutuall love in his favourite, whereby hee will not onely be beloved by him but in processe of time will make himself necessary to him, as being most fit to spinning out that thread *which* hee hath begun. Moreover the envy of his equalls may easily bee avoided if hee hinder none from making their proposalls as occasion and respects requires but maketh the [111(a)r] the soliditie of his advice in it selfe overweigh the slightness of the others, nay hee may soe handle the matter, that though the King dependeth wholly upon his councill yet none shalbe able to discerne that hee is the fountaine the Prince drinketh at, before hee goeth to his Councell Table. As for readines to discourse of matters acceptable to the Prince, it may bee made manifest by many examples, that men who had noe other comendation in them then that, and knew how to recreate and delight their soveraigne either with merry Tales, or sometimes with a serious discourse of naturall and artificiall things have outstripped in honor and wealth the greatest Statists and polititians in the Court, and from indifferent discoursers have risen to bee the most intimate and greatest instruments of the enterprises of their Prince. Certainly never any man hath had cause to repent of his familiarity with a Prince this way gotten, except those whose insolent behavior made them unworthy of so great a friend. This now beinge made cleere, that skill in giving good Councell concerning matters of state and pleasingnes in conversation and discourse are the likeliest and safest wayes to procure any virtuous and wise Princes favor, let us now see how requisite Intelligence is to the procuring either of them. As for Councell if wee looke but in generall into the nature of it the necessitie of good Intelligence will instantly discover it selfe. What is it to give Councell, but to show an other man either that hee must doe such and such a thing, or if to doe it be resolved before hand, to intimate unto him, how the proposed end may best bee accomplished. But how is it possible for

²⁹ "Nobody's life should be forfeit for making stupid recommendations, he said: if giving advise involved risk he would run out of advisers" *The History of Alexander*, trans. Yardley, 46. Cf. "Neminem stolidum consilium capite luere debere; defuturos enim qui suaderent, si suasisse periculosum esset." Quintus Curtius Rufus, *Historiae Alexandri Magni* 3, 8, 6.

him to persuade another to prosecute or to give over such and such a business, if himselfe be [111(a)v] be ignorant of it? How will he instruct *which* way to take to goe through with a busines, that hath not foreseeene the oportunities to be embraced, the inconveniencies and difficulties to bee avoided in it? And how can hee foresee them that hath not truely looked into the busines it selfe? how can hee looke into it, who is not fully informed of the circumstances of it before hand? In private matters about which friends may meete together, and consult, the whole businesse consist in the truth of his relation that asketh Counsell. And soe much counsell hee is to looke for as the quantitie hee revealeth of the thing it selfe to his friends doth require: But in state matters especially concerning forraigne Kingdomes how can that man afford good advice to his Prince in them, who hath not friends about him, that are throughly acquainted with the present state of such and such a Country, nor doth receive in due time true informations by letters from some acquaintance *that* sojourneth there, and taketh notice of all notable occurrences Councells devices and enterprises preiudiciall or advantagious to his friends Country? Is it not a great folly in matters of moment to rely uppon ordinary weekly avises commonly stuffed with forged tales, which for the most part take their offspring rather from a Merchants shopp then a Courtiers study, and are to usually the children of the ignorant multitude, who noise such things abroad, as they either wish most or feare most? What shame is it for a statesman especially a Councillor to goe about to debate a matter when hee knoweth not whether it bee necessary or feisable at all, but must end all his consultatons with likelihoods, coniectures and probablities? Certainlie to make a determinaton uppon a question, *whose* nature is not fully knowne differeth little from madnesse [112r] nesse and ~~xxx~~ is running headlong as it were blindfold and haphazard uppon a businesse. It is true that dilligent reading of Histories and good bookes of policie helpeth much for readiness in Councell, For by that *which* to others have succeeded well or ill, wee may easily discerne what wee are to looke for if wee take the same Course. Experience is yet a surer Teacher of good Councell. For hee that is carefull of his friends good, or of his owne creditt will never persuade men to begin a thing after that manner which hath soe often frustrated himselfe. But observations made both from historie and experience although they lay the ground of good Councell, yet can they never bring it to any perfection, soe long as they are destitute of full and true information

concerning the busines uppon *which* their advice is inquired. Indeed men may learne from historie and experience what to incquire in the proposed busines, but a full and satisfactorie answere they must fetch onely from true Intelligence. Hee *that* hath partly read and examined diverse antient & modern warrs and partly beene a soldier himselfe, may at any time beinge asked Councell and diversion suggest many good Cautions necessary to bee observed in any warr. But to prescribe distinctly the whole manner of proceedinge in the Princes warr against such a one, it is impossible as to tell to an other the way from hence to Constantinople whether hee never travelled himselfe, nor hath read any Itinerary of it. For let these generall rules and cautions bee never soe good, yet they are alwayes marvellously limited by the many Circumstances in every [112v] every particular matter, and if one of them be neglected it will hazzard the marring and hindring of the whole proceeding, But hee who by good Intelligence, hath betimes informed himselfe in all the most pettie Circumstances concerning *the* matter in hand, cannot want even by reason of his very naturall instinct those generall Cautions *with out* of history and former experience may bee drawn and collected, if hee have but any reasonable quicknes of witt and mettle in him, soe easy it is to bee effected being furnished with intelligence. To exemplify this would be too tedious nor is it necessary, for it is an invincible axiome that no man can know any thing in any busines unlesse hee hath bin present at the performing of it. or hath bin made acquainted with it, by such as either were Actors on the stage or at least spectatours.

Concerning discourse it cannot bee denied, but *that* the greatest comendation of it is varietie, novelty and rarity. The best thing is loathsome to heare if it bee too often repeated. On the other side meane matters delight soe they are new and never knowne before. But nothing befitteth princely eares but great and rare things As their Cares and troubles are extraordinarie, soe must their recreations needes bee too But by what meanes may such manifold new and rare matters of discourse bee more easily and abundantly afforded then by a continuall streame of true and cleere correspondencie whereby weekly sometimes dayly may bee conveyed to one Center all that is practised, begun, and devised in *the* circumstance of [113r] of the whole world? I confesse matters of variety & raritie may bee picked out of bookes also abundantly especially out of histories, where is more variety more rarity? And to an

ignorant man such things because hee knew them not before are Novelties though amongst the learned they bee stale & quite out of date. Nor do I any way confine a Courtiers discourse with his Prince onely within the letters of his friends Nay it will be very necessary for him to looke backe to former times if hee perceive his Sovereigne hath a desire to bee satisfied about a question of that nature, yet I cannot choose but say, *that* naturally a man heareth with far more delight a full relation of things now in hand and but newly performed then of things past and already described by others whether it be, because wee can bee more sure of those as of which wee may have true eie witnesses, these wee must ~~xxx~~ sometimes take meere upon Trust, and that from an author who scarce cunningly enough dissembleth his partialitie, or because it is more profitable to know matters which are now in use, then those *which* were once in use and are not now: since to those wee must (though against our wills) accomodate our actions, these unles they bee in practise againe are but a superfluous burden to our memorie. Whatsoever the cause bee, the thing is sure out of doubt *that* every one desireth rather to heare now a certaine relation of the present Contentions betweene the Imperialists and the Swedes then a long narration of the conflict of Scipio with Hannibal, This may bee [113v] bee ready at large in Livie, the other hee must still bee ignorant of unlesse it bee told him by some who hath certainty of it. Who is not more delighted with a relation of certain great inventions nearly brought to light, than along tedious coniectural discourse of Archimedes's Engines whereby hee alone preserved Syracusa a great while from the expugnation of the Romans. Who is not more greedy to read a copy in manuscript *which* is but in one or two mens hande only, then a booke which is to bee had in every bookesellers shopp?³⁰ Even those men that are so mightily taken with antiquities have indeed noe other reason but that they are presented unto them under the habit of novelties. Hee therefore that would never want matter of pleasant discourse and worthy of a Princes attention let him bee carefull hee want noe Intelligence Whereby besides the pleasure *which* hee doth to his Prince hee shall alsoe much enlarge his reputation both with the Prince and with the chieftest in the Court, as being a knowne man in matters of consequence which passeth

³⁰ The defence of the value of manuscripts over printed texts can lead us to think that Roe was not planning to send this tract to the press but intended it to circulate in manuscript form among his acquaintances.

abroad in the world sooner than any other of his ranke and besides being alwayes very certaine of that hee relateth and never can bee baffled with uncertaine Rumours of devised tales.

ABSTRACT

Of Intelligence is a hitherto unknown tract written by Sir Thomas Roe and preserved in manuscript form in the National Archives at Kew. It is located in a bundle (SP 9/201) containing a miscellany of original documents that are mainly connected with the Holy Roman Empire and the different city states in Germany. *A Small Tract of Sir Thomas Roe, intituled, Of Intelligence. Of great Use to all Ministers of State, Ambassadors, etc* is related to the rest of the items because of its references to King Gustavus Adolphus and the Swedish participation in the Thirty Years War. The piece addresses the way to obtain power and influence at court through intelligence or, more specifically, through the control of information. It follows the formula of Francis Bacon's *Essays* balancing the arguments and enumerating the different aspects of it with examples and classical quotations. By illuminating different aspects of Thomas Roe's career and his times we can interpret it as a direct presentation of his own credentials and a call for attention to his situation after his return home from his diplomatic endeavours. I provide a transcription with introduction and notes that contextualize the composition and relevance of this recent discovery.