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Global Conquistadors:
A Social History of the Early Spanish Empire, 1480-1521

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirement for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Kristian J. Fabian

Committee in charge:

Professor Dana Velasco Murillo, chair
Professor Ben Cowan
Professor Andrew Devereux
Professor Daniel Vitkus
Professor Matthew Vitz

2024

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The dissertation of Kristian J. Fabian is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

2024

DEDICATION

To my parents, Paul and Corinne

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AGI	Archivo General de Indias
AGS	Archivo General de Simancas
BNE	Biblioteca Nacional de España
CDI:	*Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista, y organización de las posesiones españoles en América y Oceania*
CODOIN:	*Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*

Other Archives and Collections Consulted:

AGN	Archivo General de la Nación
AHN	Archivo Histórico de la Nobleza
BNAH	Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia
HL	Huntington Library
JCB	John Carter Brown Library

List of Abbreviations for Archival Citations

fol.	folio
leg.	legajo
Ms.	manuscript
num.	number
vol.	volume

NOTE ON TRANSLATIONS

All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted. The names of peoples and places are in their original form, with the exception of a few that are commonly known in English such as Ferdinand, Isabella, Seville, and Oran. To prevent confusion, I refer to King Charles I of Spain by his more illustrious and prominent title, Emperor Charles V.

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Chapter 5 contains material as it appears in Fabian, Kristian Joseph. "Masters of the Land: Native Ship and Canal Building During the Spanish-Aztec War." *The Americas* 81, no. 1 (2024): 1-37. The dissertation author was the sole author of this material.

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2017 "Spanish-American War." In *Reforming America: A Thematic Encyclopedia and Document Collection of the Progressive Era*. 2 volumes. Edited by Jeffrey A. Johnson, vol. 1, 136-39. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio, 2017.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Global Conquistadors: A Social History of the Early Spanish Empire, 1480-1521

by

Kristian J. Fabian

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2024

Professor Dana Velasco Murillo, Chair

My dissertation recasts the early years of Spain's imperial formation, which has been long framed from the perspective of monarchs, to focus on the lives of conquistadors who fought in multiple theaters of the nascent empire. At this time, Spain underwent a remarkable string of territorial acquisitions, conquering various possessions in the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and Iberia, including Granada, the Canary Islands, Melilla, Oran, Naples, Navarre, the Caribbean, and New Spain. While scholars traditionally investigate the individual histories of the respective localities, my research posits a conceptual link between them, using the lives of several dozen conquerors whose footsteps crisscrossed these lands. Drawing on an array of archival documents housed in Spain and Mexico, such as letters, interrogatories, land grants, and royal contracts, my research tracks the movement and activities of this cohort of men across the empire, illustrating

how the skills and expertise that they acquired in one setting prepared them to excel in others. My dissertation demonstrates how the success of the early Spanish empire depended greatly on networks of peripatetic conquistadors, whose services in multiple areas of the realm connected the imperial polity and ensured its proper functioning. In scrutinizing the lives of Iberian conquerors, my dissertation seeks to contribute to several important strands of scholarship, including the historiography of conquest, empire, conquistadors, and transnational studies of the early modern world.

Introduction

In late February of 1534, Toledan conquistador Pedro Núñez de Guzmán embarked for Quito with a massive company of 500 Spaniards, 4,000 Native Guatemalans, some enslaved Africans, and over 100 horses.[1] The members of the expedition, led by Pedro de Alvarado, heard reports of fabulous treasure stowed in the northern Incan city, and raced south from Guatemala to sack the area of its riches.[2] Of the Spaniards within the company, Pedro de Guzmán was one of the most militarily experienced. The conqueror fought as a soldier in the Low Countries prior to sailing to the Americas, and gained precious experience on the battlefields of Europe.[3] His military vocation eventually brought him to the Indies, where he battled in the tropical environment of the Caribbean, the aquatic city of Tenochtitlan, and the Mexican districts of Pánuco and New Galicia. His martial pedigree would make him a valuable asset in the upcoming expedition to Quito, provided he could endure the arduous journey ahead.

After landing south of Guayaquil (in what is today Ecuador) on 25 February, the Alvarado company marched northwards along the Macul River toward Quito. The selected route, however, was poorly mapped out. It entailed having to traverse the highest mountain pass in the region, wedged between the two great volcanoes of Chimborazo and Carihuairazo. During the hazardous crossing, the expeditionaries encountered deadly snowstorms that wiped out a significant portion of the company. In fact, nearly 100 Spaniards froze to death in the frigid

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[1] *Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y organización de las posesiones españolas en América y Oceanía* (hereafter *CDI*), 42 vols., eds. Joaquín F. Pacheco and Francisco de Cárdenas, (Madrid, 1864-1884), vol. 10, 139, vol. 42, 93; and *Colección de libros y documentos referentes a la historia del Perú*, 3 vols., ed. Cristobal de Molina (Lima: Imprenta y Libreria Sanmarti y Ca., 1916), vol. 1, 119.
[2] See Fernando Cervantes, *Conquistadores: A New History of Spanish Discovery and Conquest* (New York: Viking, 2021), 293-97.
[3] Guzmán fought in Flanders, presumably in the Guelders Wars (1502-43). Hugh Thomas, *Who's Who of the Conquistadors* (London: Cassell, 2000), 218.

mountain passes, including Pedro de Guzmán, his wife, and two daughters.[4] The surviving force eventually reached the highland Inca road not long after, only to discover that they arrived too late. Diego de Almagro, a rival conquistador, arrived in Quito several days earlier and presided over the site with a sizable garrison. To avoid a bloody confrontation, Alvarado struck a deal with Almagro, selling off his equipment and ships at a favorable price if he agreed to return home to Guatemala.[5] With this agreement the Alvarado expedition came to a somber conclusion, with no spectacular treasure to make up for the calamitous excursion.

As for Pedro de Guzmán, while the conquistador did not survive the perilous trip to Quito, his journeys across the early modern world are fascinating nonetheless. Over the span of two decades, the soldier-turned-conqueror traveled extensively throughout the globe, participating in campaigns in northern Europe, north and central Mexico, and South America. His vast services illustrate, rather richly, the full extent of military action that a Castilian man-at-arms could expect to see during the early decades of Spain's imperial expansion. During this time, Spain embarked on a remarkable string of territorial acquisitions, acquiring large swaths of land in Iberia, the Atlantic, the Mediterranean, and the Americas. The rapid expansion of the imperial polity owed in no small measure to the emergence of a powerful and centralized monarchy, equipped with the resources to oversee and administer its vast collection of territories. However, it first required the efforts of conquistadors to travel to discrete lands and bring them under the jurisdiction of the crown. Between 1480 and 1530, thousands of Iberian conquerors occupied themselves on the frontiers of Muslim Granada in Spain, the Canary Islands, and the Saharan coast of Africa. Others joined the fight in the Mediterranean, participating in campaigns

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[4] Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño, *Sebastián de Benalcázar*, 2 vols. (Quito: Imprenta del Clero, 1936-38), vol. 1, 67; Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Maurice Keatinge, with an introduction by Arthur D. Howden Smith (New York: Robert McBridge & Company, 1927), 538.
[5] Cervantes, *Conquistadores*, 296.

against the North African sultanates in the Maghrib, the Ottoman Turks in the Levant, and the Valois Dynasty in Italy. With the discovery of the Americas, waves of soldiers and conquerors sailed to the Indies to pursue new conquest opportunities, initially in the Caribbean, *Tierra Firme* (the "Spanish Mainland"), and Central Mexico. From New Spain, the conquistadors fanned out in all directions, taking part in expeditions of conquest and exploration throughout South America for decades to come.

This dissertation investigates the entanglement of conquistadors in multiple theaters of this early Spanish expansionism.[6] It centers on the careers of roughly three dozen men, who over the course of several decades trekked from one area of the empire to the next, acquiring knowledge and skills in one territory and transferring their cumulative expertise to new settings. These men, typified by their mobility and adaptability, served as vital agents in extending Spanish influence and control across distant lands. By constantly moving and engaging with different environments, and circulating knowledge between them, they forged intricate networks between the metropole and its growing colonies. It was these bands of men, known for their peripatetic lifestyles, that were the cornerstone of Spain's early empire-building. I refer to this group collectively as the "global conquistadors."[7]

The ability of the global conquistadors to crisscross far flung regions of the globe owed greatly to the technological innovations of their day. In the early sixteenth century, significant advancements in navigational and maritime technology had revolutionized oceangoing travel. In particular, improvements to wayfinding instruments like the compass and the astrolabe (used to

[6] Although a small number of veteran soldiers fought at Cajamarca in Peru, the conquest of the Inca empire (Tawantinsuyu) rests outside the chronological purview of this dissertation.
[7] On the topic of global history, see Dominic Sachsenmaier, *Global Perspectives on Global History: Theories and Approaches in a Connected World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Lynn Hunt, *Writing History in the Global Era* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014); and Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

calculate latitude at sea), made navigating in open ocean more accurate and reliable than in the past. Notable advances in ship design, especially the engineering of sturdier crafts like caravels and galleons, allowed vessels to withstand harsher sea conditions and carry larger cargoes for distant voyages. These developments coincided, moreover, with the publication of updated sailing charts and maps, which reflected the latest geographical insights on coastlines, landmarks, and navigational hazards. The invention of the printing press around 1440 increased the production and circulation of these maps, making vital seafaring information more accessible to sailors and navigators.[8] Collectively, these innovations allowed Europeans to expand their maritime reach during the early modern period in unprecedented ways, enabling imperial agents—including the global conquistadors—to traverse vast stretches of ocean with greater ease and efficiency.

One global conqueror to capitalize on these developments was the individual who opened this chapter, Pedro de Guzmán. Over the span of three decades, Guzmán's soldiering took him from Toledo to Flanders, the Caribbean to Central Mexico, Pánuco to New Galicia, and Guatemala to Ecuador, where he eventually met his end crossing the *Cordillera de Los Andes* (Andes Mountains). His story is the perfect archetype of the other conquistadors of this dissertation. These men circulated the early modern world in search of glory, wealth, and adventure, and rendered vital services to the crown in two or more regions of the burgeoning empire. This dissertation considers, broadly speaking, the impact of those contributions to Spain's early imperial construction. But it also uses the lives of the global conquistadors to pose a series of more specific, interrelated questions. How did the experiences of these conquerors in

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[8] William D. Phillips Jr. and Carla Rahn Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 64-75. See also Abbas Hamdani, "An Islamic Background to the Voyages of Discovery," in *The Legacy of Muslim Spain*, ed. Salma Khadra Jayyusi (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992).

one military episode inform their actions in others, sometimes thousands of miles away? How did the itinerant nature of their careers connect remote regions of the empire, such as the Mediterranean and Central Mexico? How might the lives of the global conquistadors allow us to capture a better sense of the interconnectivity and simultaneity of the empire, two of its defining features? The following chapters seek to address these inquiries, analyzing the major episodes of early Spanish expansionism through a series of biographical case studies. Ultimately, I argue that the rise of Imperial Spain depended greatly on networks of peripatetic conquistadors, whose services in multiple areas of the realm connected the early empire and ensured its proper functioning.

Social Histories of Spanish Conquest and Empire

The rise of the Spanish empire has been a topic of longstanding interest to scholars. For centuries, scholars have accentuated the importance of the early modern state, especially monarchs, in the formation and maintenance of the imperial polity.[9] The ability of sovereigns to raise armies, dictate policy, and enforce allegiance has been marshaled as evidence to elucidate why kings and emperors, and not lesser subjects, were the main drivers of empire. In recent decades, however, postcolonial and revisionist scholars have reevaluated empire from "the bottom-up," investigating the presence, participation, and contributions of hitherto-ignored actors such as Native peoples, women, Africans, and Asians.[10] Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk

[9] William H. Prescott, *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic*, 3 vols., ed. John Foster Kirk (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1872); Roger Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire in the Old World and the New*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1918); John H. Elliot, *Imperial Spain, 1469-1716* (New York: The New American Library, 1963); John Lynch, *Spain, 1516-1598: From Nation State to World Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964); John Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire* (New York: Knopf, 1966); John Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001).
[10] For Native peoples, see Laura E. Matthew and Michel R. Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors: Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012). For women, Allyson Poska,

edited a rich collection of essays that explores the multiple ways that Indigenous allies, including cooks, porters, and interpreters, contributed to Spanish military success across Mesoamerica. Matthew Restall built on this theme in his article on black conquistadors, illustrating how African auxiliaries were not only omnipresent in conquest companies throughout Spanish America, but also served in critical and multifarious capacities. More broadly, Henry Kamen's *Empire* demonstrates how the transformation of Spain into a dominant world power owed just as much to the collective efforts of foreigners and subalterns as it did to Iberians. Kamen presents the creation of empire as a joint enterprise, "made possible only by the collaboration of many people from many nations," including "conquered populations, the immigrants, the women, the deportees, the rejected."[11] Taken together, these works highlight the importance of previously invisible actors in enacting empire, in turn upending many assumptions about the primacy of omnipotent monarchs, or Spanish subjects more generally, in forging the imperial polity.

While the emphasis on either "top-down" or "bottom-up" history has done well to balance the scholarly literature, their obvious divergence in methodology has obscured the contributions of middling agents to Spain's imperial formation. This void has sparked a number of studies on this tier of historical actors, such as merchant capitalists, administrative officials, and lower and mid-ranking nobles.[12] In respect to the latter group, Catia Brilli and Manuel

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Gendered Crossings: Women and Migration in the Spanish Empire (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016). For Africans, Matthew Restall, "Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America," *The Americas* 57, no. 2 (2000): 171-205. For Asians, Tatiana Seijas, *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For a study broadly detailing the contributions of these diverse groups to empire, see Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003).

[11] Kamen, *Empire*, xxiv.

[12] See, for example, Enrique Otte, *Sevilla y sus mercaderes a fines de la Edad Media* (Seville: Fundación El Monte, 1996); Bethany Aram, *Leyenda negra y leyendas doradas en la conquista de América: Pedrarias y Balboa* (Madrid: Fundación Jorge Juan and Marcial Pons., 2008); Kathryn Burns, *Into the Archive: Writing and Power in Colonial Peru* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Yuen-Gen Liang, *Family and Empire: The Fernández de Córdoba and the Spanish Realm* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); and Catia Brilli and Manuel Herrero Sánchez, eds., *Italian Merchants in the Early-Modern Spanish Monarchy: Business Relations, Identities and Political Resources* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

Herrero Sánchez organized a volume on the mercantile activities of Italian businessmen that operated in the main hubs of the Spanish and Portuguese empires, chiefly Seville, Cádiz, Naples, Madrid, and Lisbon. The contributors demonstrate how Italian merchants, namely of Florentine, Milanese, and Genoese descent, served as key imperial agents and intermediaries that drove the international exchange of goods and capital throughout the Iberian world. Aside from merchants, Bethany Aram investigated the career of the middle stratum lord, Pedrarias Dávila, who first gained distinction fighting in the conquest of Granada. After helping to vanquish the Islamic emirate, Dávila took part in the conquest of Oran and Bougie in North Africa, and later sailed to the Indies to pursue greater fortune and status. His decision to relocate to the Americas during this period set him apart from more distinguished aristocrats, many of whom showed little interest in risking their lives in a distant and precarious realm. Dávila's gamble, however, was successful. In July of 1513, the crown installed him as the first governor of Panama and Nicaragua, trusting the warrior lord to manage its imperial interests in those frontier realms. Dávila's story illustrates how middling nobles did not shy away from the hazards of conquest and relocation, but instead vigorously pursued new imperial opportunities for personal gain. In doing so, they rendered significant contributions to the empire on a number of distinct fronts.

The historiography of Imperial Spain is thus rich in illuminating how myriad actors helped construct the empire, ranging from kings and administrators, to foreigners and capitalists, to Native peoples and African conquistadors. But in respect to Iberian conquerors, more work remains to be done on those that enacted empire in multiple areas of the realm. My pioneering study seeks to fill this gap: it identifies clusters of conquistadors that circulated throughout the early modern world, amassing skills and knowledge in various areas and then transmitting it to

new ones.[13] Their movements across the realm uncover rarely-scrutinized webs of connectivity within the empire, including between regions as disparate as the Maghrib and Mexico or Italy and the Caribbean. The itinerant activities of these men are crucial to understanding the early stages of Spain's expansion, and as a result, our rendering of the imperial polity must account for the ways that they visualized and enacted this enterprise.

The Conquistadors

The meaning of the term 'conquistador' has evolved over the centuries, acquiring new connotations and definitions.[14] The etymology of the word comes from the Spanish verb *conquistar* (in Latin, *conquistare*), meaning "to conquer." One modern dictionary defines it as "a Spanish conqueror of Mexico and Peru in the sixteenth century," and another as "one that conquers; specifically a leader in the Spanish conquest of America and especially of Mexico and Peru in the sixteenth century."[15] While these definitions capture the term in its most limited sense, they are far too rigid to fully encompass its multilayered meanings. For example, they lend the assumption that the conquistadors were exclusively Europeans, namely of Spanish descent. Native peoples and Africans are thereby excluded from this category, even though they served as significant conquerors in their own right.[16] Further, the definitions encompass only those who

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[13] Some scholars have identified individual conquistadors who have circulated the realm. For instance, see Aram, *Leyenda negra*; Liang, *Family and Empire*; and Miguel Martínez, *Front Lines: Soldiers' Writing in the Early Modern Hispanic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[14] The literature on the conquistadors is vast. For some notable works, see Michael Wood, *Conquistadors* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Matthew Restall and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2012); and Cervantes, *Conquistadores*.
[15] Elizabeth Jewell, ed., *Oxford American Desk Dictionary & Thesaurus*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 159; *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, s.v. "conquistador," accessed December 30, 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/conquistador.
[16] There is a growing scholarship on the Indigenous and African conquistadors who served in Spanish conquest campaigns across the Americas. For instance, see Matthew and Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors*; Restall, "Black Conquistadors"; and Laura E. Matthew, *Memories of Conquest: Becoming Mexicano in Colonial Guatemala* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

fought in Spanish America in the sixteenth century. This representation still carries weight to this day, for seldom is the word ‘conquistador’ used to refer to individuals who subjugated territory in Granada, the Canary Islands, North Africa, or other areas of the early Spanish empire outside of the Americas.

A more accurate definition of ‘conquistador’ can be found in early modern conceptions of the term. The 1726 *Diccionario de Autoridades*, published by the Real Academia Española, defines a conquistador as: “he who wins and acquires any Province or Kingdom by force of arms.”[17] While appropriately broad in geographic scope, the use of gender-specific language (“he who wins”) ignores the roles of female combatants, or *conquistadoras*, that participated in conquest campaigns throughout Spanish America. Notwithstanding this oversight, the 1726 definition largely captures the essence of what it meant to be a conquistador. I employ the term in a similar sense: to signify a person who engages in land acquisition, particularly on behalf of the Spanish monarchy during the medieval and early modern periods. By this definition, all of the individuals who fought in the conquest of Granada, the Canaries, North Africa, and the Americas were conquistadors, as were the Indigenous, African, Asian, and female combatants that stood by their side. Although this dissertation centers primarily on Spanish conquerors, it does not neglect the roles of their non-European counterparts who frequently assisted them in critical ways.

Any study dealing with Iberian conquistadors must inevitably grapple with the complicated legacy of these historical figures. While some historians have lauded the role of conquistadors in acquiring the disparate parts of the Spanish empire, others have condemned the questionable methods by which they conducted their conquests, particularly in respect to their repression and enslavement of Native peoples. Depending on the sources used, and the optic

[17] Real Academia Española, *Diccionario de Autoridades* [1726-1739], Facsimile edition (Madrid: Gredos, 1984).

employed, these contrasting representations can invite scholars to insert conquistadors into two rigid categories: either as rapacious, ruthless men responsible for atrocities, or as heroes and crusaders who helped forge the empire. While some of the global conquistadors could fit either of those categorizations, the objective of this dissertation is neither to glorify their achievements, nor to condemn them as merciless conquerors. Rather, I seek to use them as windows into understanding the rise of the early Spanish empire, and the ways in which they helped to connect the realm. Along the way, I hope to present a more complex and nuanced portrait of these figures, situating their accomplishments alongside their failings, and their impressive feats alongside their more dubious conduct.

Moreover, while the conquistadors examined here came from diverse social and geographic backgrounds, they were not a random assortment of individuals. On the contrary, they shared a number of common traits and experiences that unified them within a unique subset. For one, many of the global conquistadors were the younger sons of their respective lineages who did not enjoy the benefits of primogeniture. In this system, known in Spain as the *mayorazgo*, the bulk of the family wealth was reserved for the oldest legitimate male heir, including the rights to succession of property and titles. Since the younger siblings needed to carve out their own fortunes, they often turned to war and conquest as a means of attaining wealth. The two most famous conquerors of the Americas, Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, were both products of this system.

Second, the majority of the global conquistadors grew up on frontiers in Iberia, especially Andalusia (southern Spain). During the late medieval period, the Christian residents of this region shared a precarious border with the Islamic emirate of Granada, then ruled by the Nasrid dynasty. While this zone was never in a state of all-out war, the close proximity separating the

two sides led to sporadic cross-border raids and captive taking by both Muslim and Christian parties. For the inhabitants of this area, the militarized nature of the frontier (a shared zone traversed or inhabited by people with diverse, and sometimes conflicting interests) provided an arena to hone and cultivate certain martial virtues, as well as gain diplomatic experience from negotiating with neighboring foes. More broadly, it trained a generation of warriors that would become critical to Spain's early imperial expansion.[18]

Third, many of the global conquistadors were aristocrats of varying distinction and came from positions of power. Given the relative wealth of the noble class, one might suspect that this group had little incentive to risk their lives fighting in dangerous conquest, yet this was not the case. Spanish lords not only joyfully enlisted in imperial enterprises that promised personal reward, but were often found at the vanguard of conquest. In southern Spain, the Marquis of Cádiz stormed the Islamic fortress of Alhama in 1482 with his own private forces and sparked the war of Granada. His Andalusian neighbors, Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo, rendered similarly impressive feats in the Atlantic, conquering the most formidable islands in the Canaries (Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife) by 1496. The following year, the Duke of Medina Sidonia sent his own army across the Strait of Gibraltar and seized the Moroccan entrepôt of Melilla, an act that preempted the Spanish invasion of North Africa. Cortés later followed in his footsteps, leading an ad hoc incursion into Central Mexico that resulted in the toppling of the Aztec empire (a multiethnic confederation of Native polities) in 1521. Collectively, the actions of these men reveal how aristocrats, at times, set empire in motion through the pursuit of their

[18] A rich scholarship exists on the role of frontiers in shaping identity across the early modern world, and not just in Spain. See Robert Browning, *Byzantium and Bulgaria: A Comparative Study across the Early Medieval Frontier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Terry Barry, Robin Frame and Katherine Simms, eds., *Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland: Essays Presented to J.F. Lydon* (London: Hamledon Press, 1995); Nora Berend, "Medievalists and the Notion of the Frontier," *The Medieval History Journal* 2, no. 1 (1999), 55-72; and David Abulafia and Nora Berend, *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

personal agendas, in turn forcing the monarchy to react to rapidly developing circumstances on the fly. The rise of the Spanish empire owed greatly to the semi-independent actions of nobles, whose personal ambitions, private resources, and military expertise helped gather the initial parts of the imperial polity.[19]

Fourth, and perhaps most important, all of the conquistadors that form the focus of this dissertation were cosmopolitan figures with peripatetic tendencies. Time and time again, these men constantly uprooted themselves from their homes in search of new opportunity, arduously traveling from one region of the world to the next. In each area they inhabited, they acquired skills, ideas, and expertise that they carried with them to subsequent locales. It was these individuals, known for their itinerant lifestyles, that helped connect some of the most far-flung regions of the empire.

Although the global conquistadors shared many common traits, their reasons for participating in empire varied greatly. Generally speaking, these men sought to earn status, titles, rewards, land, and fame for their military valor. This was especially true for the younger siblings of families, who often relied on war to reinforce or augment their social positioning. Of those considerations, treasure and spoils were always a massive lure for early modern men-at-arms. In Latin America, rumors of a mountain of silver (*Sierra de la Plata*), a "fountain of youth," or lost cities of gold (*el Dorado*) sparked countless expeditions into the unmapped wilderness. The majority ended in calamity, however, with Alvarado's ill-fated excursion to Quito but one representative example. Aside from material rewards, other conquerors appear to have been animated by contemporary chivalric fables, a literary genre still immensely popular in Europe in

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[19] Although not examined here, the Dukes of Alba also played prominent roles in Spain's imperial expansion. For scholarship on this lineage, see William S. Maltby, *Alba: A Biography of Fernando Alvarez de Toledo, Third Duke of Alba, 1507-1582* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); and Kamen, *The Duke of Alba* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).

the late medieval period. By and large, these tales lionized glory, adventure, and the perks of victory: to rule kingdoms, to achieve fame and accolades, to triumph over the enemy. While the precise extent to which this genre influenced the psyche of the conquistadors is uncertain, its influences cannot be summarily dismissed.[20] Some of the early adventurers and conquerors had folkloric names, such as Lancelot (Lançalotto Malocello), the Genoese explorer of the Canary Islands, or Gadifer de la Salle, the French noble who subjugated parts of the archipelago. Other conquistadors compared themselves to storybook characters or likened their situations to fables. In Central Mexico, for example, when Cortés and his companions first laid eyes upon the city of Tenochtitlan, they equated it to a scene from *Amadís de Gaula*, a popular chivalric romance of the period.[21] While the widespread popularity of this literary genre made it a prime target for parody—being famously satirized in Miguel de Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quixote*—it nonetheless had a clear, identifiable impact on the mental thinking of the early conquistadors.

An underlying objective of this dissertation, then, is to evaluate the diverse, complex, and personal factors that motivated the global conquistadors to participate in various episodes of war and conquest. I seek to situate each individual within their respective temporal and geographic context and to demonstrate how their private interests, more than monarchical impulses, propelled and sustained Spain's early expansion.

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[20] As Fernández-Armesto argues, "The rise of a Castilian overseas empire owed a great deal to the strength of chivalric values and to the influence of chivalric romance." *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic: 1229-1492* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994). See also Elliot, "The Mental World of Hernán Cortés," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 17 (1967): 41-58, 44-45.
[21] "When we beheld the number of populous towns on the water and firm ground, and that broad causeway, running straight and level to the city, we could compare it to nothing but the enchanted scenes we had read of in Amadis of Gaul, from the great towers and temples, and other edifices of lime and stone which seemed to rise out of the water." Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 160.

The Interconnectivity of Empire

Every empire has its own unique features.[22] Generally speaking, there are notable differences in respect to political organization, religious practices, economic structure, and methods of governance—all of which contribute to an empire's distinctive makeup. With that said, there are of course overlaps and similarities. Many empires intrinsically consist of an aggregate of lands, peoples, and cultures united under a supreme leader or oligarchy. The connection of these regions to a central metropole facilitated travel and interaction among its diverse territories, fostering greater interconnectedness within the empire. Imperial polities should therefore be thought of holistically, as an assemblage of converging and overlapping territories that only gain coherence when pieced together.[23] However, conventional histories of early modern Spain have not always conceived of empire in this manner.

In the traditional historiography of Imperial Spain, historians tend to isolate the various territories that comprised the realm, investigating the individual histories of the respective localities. For instance, relatively few connections have been made between the initial conquests in Latin America and the military campaigns occurring in Italy, North Africa, Navarre, or Flanders. This is in spite of the fact that these conflicts not only overlapped in time, but also involved some of the same participants. Admittedly, the extent to which scholars have attempted

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[22] See Charles Maier, "What Is an Empire," in *Among Empires: American Ascendancy and Its Predecessors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 24-77; and James Muldoon, *Empire and Order: The Concept of Empire, 800-1800* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
[23] Liang's monograph has greatly shaped my conception of empire. *Family and Empire*, 8-20. For studies of global history and comparative empire, see also Susan Reynolds, "Empires: a problem of comparative history," *Historical Research* 79, no. 204 (May 2006): 151-165; E. Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects Between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Tonio Andrade and William Reger, eds., *The Limits of Empire: European Imperial Formations in Early Modern World History. Essays in Honor of Geoffrey Parker* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012); Lauren Benton and Richard J. Ross, eds., *Legal Pluralism and Empires, 1500-1850* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); and Arndt Brendecke, *The Empirical Empire: Spanish Colonial Rule and the Politics of Knowledge* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2016).

to connect the early Spanish empire has changed drastically in the past several decades, partly due to the increased interest in global history. It is now quite normal (and indeed orthodox) for historians of early modern Spain—and other European polities, too, for that matter—to chart interconnections between discrete spaces of the imperial world. For the most part, this scholarship has employed three principal methods to do so: focusing on overlapping processes or developments in Afro-Eurasia and the Americas; tracing the movement of individuals or commodities to foreign lands; and concentrating on the acquisition of knowledge and skills in one land and its application to new milieus.

With respect to the first approach, the study of intersecting events in the early modern world has attracted considerable attention from scholars in the past three decades.[24] In his comparative article, "The Inter-Atlantic Paradigm," Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo investigated the similarities and differences between Spanish colonization efforts in the Canary Islands and the Caribbean in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century. While the colonizing strategies on both archipelagos were similar, Stevens-Arroyo contends that they produced markedly different results, primarily due to variations in ecology, violence, and the effects of disease. More recently, David Wheat published a monograph on the transatlantic slave trade that traces connections between two major African slave hubs, Upper Guinea and Angola, and a number of colonial port cities in the Spanish Caribbean. One of Wheat's most important contributions was to demonstrate how the surge in the transaction of enslaved people, chiefly in the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth century, formed a nexus that tightly bound the Iberian-African-Caribbean worlds.

[24] Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, "The Inter-Atlantic Paradigm: The Failure of Spanish Medieval Colonization of the Canary and Caribbean Islands," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 35, no. 3 (1993): 515-543; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*; Tamar Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession: Spain and Portugal in Europe and the Americas* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); and David Wheat, *Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean, 1570-1640* (Williamsburg and Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture and the University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Aside from these topics, other scholars have connected the Iberian Atlantic through the study of conquest and territorial formation. In *Frontiers of Possession*, Tamar Herzog explores how a wide array of actors—such as Iberian jurists, theorists, and non-Europeans—conceived of, engaged in disputes over, and approached land tenure in a number of Atlantic locales. Similar to Wheat and Stevens-Arroyo, Herzog moves beyond the traditionally separate histories of Europe and the Americas to delineate how converging or parallel developments in the early modern world bound territories on both sides of the Atlantic.

Other historians have linked the early Spanish empire through the movement of various personnel, including migrants, families, merchants, slaves, conquistadors, and soldiers.[25] Ida Altman traced the transatlantic travel of more than 1,000 Spaniards from certain regions of Spain (namely Brihuega, Cáceres, and Trujillo) to the Indies in the early colonial period.[26] Altman demonstrates how by preserving ties to their native land, and occasionally returning home to Spain, these emigrants formed a powerful bond that connected their place of origin to their new circumstances in the Americas. Jane E. Mangan added to this theme in her monograph, *Transatlantic Obligations*, investigating the lives of colonial families living in Spain, Peru, or aboard the vessels that sailed between these spaces. Mangan argues that the family unit, often not seen as an important force in shaping the transatlantic empire, instead acted as the connective

[25] For some representative studies, see Ida Altman, *Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and Spanish America in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Altman, *Transatlantic Ties in the Spanish Empire: Brihuega, Spain and Puebla, Mexico 1560-1620* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000); Bethany Aram, *Leyenda negra*; Liang, *Family and Empire*; Seijas, *Asian Slaves*; Jane E. Mangan, *Transatlantic Obligations: Creating the Bonds of Family in Conquest-Era Peru and Spain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Nancy E. van Deusen, *Global Indios: The Indigenous Struggle for Justice in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Martínez, *Front Lines*; José Carlos de la Puente Luna, *Andean Cosmopolitans: Seeking Justice and Reward at the Spanish Royal Court* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018); and Altman and Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).
[26] Altman, *Emigrants and Society*; and *Transatlantic Ties.*

fibers that helped tie it together.[27] Other scholars have merged spaces in the Old World and the New by tracing the movement of subaltern subjects across the empire. Nancy E. van Deusen explored the lives of Indigenous slaves living in Castile between 1530 and 1585 who filed over 100 lawsuits to procure their manumission. In a similar vein, José Carlos de la Puente Luna recovered the untold stories of native Andeans who sailed to Spain after the conquest of Cajamarca to seek indemnification in court. The collective stories of these actors illuminate how legal-minded Native peoples wielded the judicial system in Castile to improve their lot or attain justice. But they also point to the astounding degree of global mobility and interconnectivity that characterized the early modern period.

Aside from the circulation of human bodies through space, the transference of expertise between distinct regions of the globe constitutes another mechanism that connects empire. Recent historical studies have charted the movement of diverse agents, such as sailors, pirates, administrators, scholars, and soldiers across the early modern world, pinpointing the knowledge and skills that they acquired in one realm and their application to new theaters of operation.[28] For example, Yuen-Gen Liang investigated the careers of certain members of the Fernández de Córdoba lineage that served in multiple areas of the Spanish realm, including Toledo, Granada, Navarre, Oran, and Algeria. Liang illustrates how the administrative experience that these nobles gathered in one setting, like Granada, made them supremely equipped to manage other

[27] Or, in Mangan's words, "the pulse for moving people and goods over oceans and from generation to generation." *Transatlantic Obligations*, 3.

[28] Antonio Barrera-Osorio, *Experiencing Nature: The Spanish American Empire and the Early Scientific Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); Alison Games, *The Web of Empire: English Cosmopolitans in an Age of Expansion, 1560-1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Daniela Bleichmar, Paula de Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan, eds., *Science in the Spanish and Portuguese Empires, 1500-1800* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008); Barbara Fuchs and Liang, "A Forgotten Empire: The Spanish-North African Borderlands," in special issue of *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (September 2011): 261-273; Liang, *Family and Empire*; Mark G. Hanna, *Pirate Nests and the Rise of the British Empire, 1570-1740* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

borderland territories of the empire, such as the North African Maghrib. Alison Games identified a similar phenomenon in her work on early modern England. Her monograph examines the activities of English travelers who journeyed throughout the Atlantic, Mediterranean, Pacific, and Indian ocean worlds, gaining expertise in colonial or mercantile affairs in one area and transmitting this knowledge to other regions. The cosmopolitan nature of these travelers produced a dense web of networks, she contends, that allowed England to establish a formidable presence in the Atlantic and East Indies by the mid-seventeenth century. Historians of science have contributed further to this strand of scholarship. Daniela Bleichmar, Paula de Vos, Kristin Huffine, and Kevin Sheehan edited a volume on science in the Spanish and Portuguese empires that examines how specialized knowledge, with respect to navigation, exploration, cartography, technology, and medicine, diffused to faraway spaces via webs of sailors, merchants, and intellectuals. In this work, and that of Liang and Games, empire was formulated by individuals who moved freely across geographical space, formed social ties, and carried skills and knowledge to unfamiliar lands.

Examining the histories of global conquistadors builds on all three aforementioned historiographical approaches to connecting imperial worlds. First, the participation of these men in multiple episodes of conquest illuminates simultaneous and interconnected processes of expansion in both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. In the decades that span this study, Spain's ambitious foreign agenda entangled the imperial polity in several conflicts or regions at the same time. For example, the series of wars in Italy from 1494 to 1526 not only coincided with Spain's invasion of North Africa, but also overlapped with its rapid expansion into the Americas (including the West Indies, Tierra Firme, and Central Mexico). The simultaneity of these conflicts allowed for a crossover in participants, in which some of the same individuals who

fought in one war had the opportunity to take part in another. Empire thus entailed mobility, requiring early modern men-at-arms to continually uproot themselves, move around, and settle in new spaces. As this dissertation argues, the movement of global conquistadors across distinct territories formed connective threads that knit the early empire together. The acquisition of knowledge in different arenas and its transmission to new ones further strengthened those bonds. In this way, my research builds on conceptions of empire as interlocking threads of exchange, challenging traditional interpretations of imperial polities as a constellation of discrete, disconnected, or stationary entities. Furthermore, it aligns with emerging scholarship that has emphasized the importance of skilled, cosmopolitan personnel to empire-building across the early modern world.

Methodology and Sources

Scholars across a range of fields have shaped my methodological approach to studying empire. Of particular note is Sanjay Subrahmanyam's article, "Holding the World in Balance." In his study, Subrahmanyam employs the concept of 'connected histories' to analyze the cultural connections present in the inter-imperial union of the Spanish and Portuguese Crowns during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[29] This conceptual framework encouraged me to think of empire in a new way, namely as a patchwork of territories that achieve greater meaning only when merged together. I am especially indebted to the work of Liang, whose conception of empire has been central to the framing of this dissertation.[30] Liang's analysis of some of the

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[29] Subrahmanyam, "Holding the World in Balance: The Connected Histories of the Iberian Overseas Empires, 1500-1640," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1359-1385. See also Subrahmanyam, *Connected History: Essays and Arguments. Verso World History Series* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2022).
[30] Liang, *Family and Empire*, 8-20.

principal features of empire, namely its interconnectivity, multiterritoriality, and simultaneity, inspired me to use the lives of conquistadors to better illuminate those defining characteristics. The works of Altman, Mangan, Puente Luna, and Wheat have been equally invaluable. Their exploration into the histories of various early modern travelers and migrants led me to consider how conquistadors, in particular, can help us better understand, connect, and reconstruct Spain's imperial past.

While these studies have been instrumental to my research, illustrating some of the innovative way of linking the early modern world, they are notably constrained by their limited geographical scope. For instance, Liang does an excellent job connecting certain territories in Iberia to those in the North African Maghrib, but fails to draw any connections to the Americas. Although a number of recent studies have done precisely that, tying together the histories of distinct lands in the Old World and the New, the focus usually rests on linking specific regions: Spain and Mexico (Altman); the Andes and Spain (Mangan and Puente Luna); Atlantic Africa and the Caribbean (Wheat). However, to represent the empire more comprehensively, scholars must conceptualize ways to merge the histories of the numerous territories that coexisted, intersected, and emerged simultaneously with one another. The study of global conquistadors provides one such approach. By tracing their movements and activities throughout the empire, we can uncover interconnected networks of conquest, migration, and exchange that linked regions of the realm not traditionally associated in historical narratives, such as Central Mexico and the Maghrib. Their endeavors render a more cohesive image of empire, allowing us to connect and unify its disparate territories into a single integrative entity.

Encapsulating the distinct histories of various realms can present a number of conceptual challenges, notably the issue of connecting lands subject to their own geopolitical exigencies.

But when pieced together in a manner that accounts for particular local, regional, and international factors, scholars can capture a greater sense of the "composite" and "multiterritorial" nature of empire, thereby achieving a more coherent image of the imperial polity.[31] Thus, one of the main objectives of this dissertation is to advance the study of empire in a more global framework, extending beyond the local, provincial, and even metropolitan to chart broader connections. Yet, my approach does not ignore the idiosyncrasies and distinctiveness of the local lands, peoples, cultures, and landscapes that comprised the imperial. As Herzog contends, scholars must find ways to envision the constituents of empire as "vibrant entities that coexisted," rather than geographical entities teleologically contrived.[32] My dissertation upholds this view; it neither seeks to conflate the histories of disparate lands nor dilute them into a monolithic category. Rather, my research carefully examines how early modern conquistadors conceived of, adapted to, and experienced the unique milieus that were suddenly available to them via Spain's imperialist projects.

This project is based on archival research conducted in Spain and Mexico, and draws on an eclectic body of documents ranging from letters and correspondences, to interrogatories and royal privileges, to reports of merits and services (*probanzas de méritos y servicios*).[33] Within this corpus of documents, some of the most valuable sources are the reports and accounts produced by the global conquistadors themselves. Generally speaking, these documents were directed to the Spanish crown and had two primary purposes. The first was to inform the monarchy of events related to the exploration, conquest, or settlement of newly acquired

[31] Elliot, "A Europe of Composite Monarchies," *Past and Present*, no. 137 (1992): 48-71; and Liang, *Family and Empire*, 19.
[32] Herzog, *Frontiers of Possession*, 12.
[33] While two archives in Mexico, namely the Archivo General de la Nación and the Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, were consulted during the course of this research, the documents from these collections are not directly utilized in this dissertation. However, the insights gained from these archival visits have informed the broader understanding of this project and have laid the groundwork for potential future research projects.

territory, especially if that land held commercial or geo-strategic importance to the crown. The other was to highlight one's services to the king, chiefly in hopes of attaining royal rewards in the form of cash, titles, or grants of land. Because royal compensation was at stake, the writings of the conquistadors were often replete with hyperbolic or self-aggrandizing statements. For example, it was common for these men to accentuate their own heroics or exploits in battle, while the actions of their allies were comparatively minimized or ignored altogether. Logistical errors or mistakes in battle were usually downplayed, if not omitted entirely. The feats of their enemies (and sometimes their Spanish rivals), not surprisingly, were deemed unimportant and typically disregarded.

This source base is thus not without its flaws, but this is not to say it is of little value. By moving beyond the personal agendas of the conquistadors, and taking with a grain of salt their self-bolstering claims, we may find that their writings also provide rich details on more obscure aspects of their lives, such as their provenance, their personal motivations for engaging in war, social ties, kinship networks, and past military activities. This type of information rarely appears in contemporary histories and chronicles from the period, particularly for the humbler conquistadors. When pieced together, this information allows us to reconstruct more minutely the histories of the global conquerors, from their early experiences in Iberia to their later services in the Canaries, Italy, Africa, the Levant, and the Americas.

Aside from the writings of the conquistadors, this dissertation relies on various royal documents such as letters, correspondences, orders, and privileges (*mercedes*) issued by the Spanish crown. What makes these sources valuable in particular is that they include pertinent details on the major military campaigns from this period, as well as the contributions of certain global conquistadors to those conflicts. Because the crown had access to copious information on

these wars, often derived from the testimonies of multiple first-hand witnesses, the information that they provide is generally accurate and well-informed. However, given that these sources were concerned primarily with individual conquistadors, they tend to overlook the actions of other allies and collaborators. Most notably neglected are the roles of Native and African auxiliaries, as well as foreign mercenaries, who aided the Spanish in the vast majority of their campaigns throughout the empire. To account for these omissions, this dissertation draws on a handful of Muslim and Indigenous authored texts (mostly histories and chronicles) produced in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. While these sources do not treat the lives of the global conquistadors, they are critical for narrating the major episodes of conquest from the viewpoints of non-Europeans. They are incorporated whenever possible, namely to attain a more balanced version of the affairs.

Lastly, this dissertation draws greatly on the massive multi-volume collection referred to jointly as the *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España*. One of the main aims of the compendium, comprised of 113 volumes, was to make readily available various archival documents and chronicles relevant to the history of medieval and early modern Spain. Of particular pertinence in this collection are the dozens of documents (letters, reports, and correspondence) that discuss the campaigns in Granada, North Africa, Italy, and the Caribbean, as well as the actions of global conquistadors involved in those conflicts. These documents are used mainly to fill in the gaps in the historical record, as well as to corroborate or clarify information put forth in the other sources.

Overview of the Chapters

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters and follows primarily a chronological thread. It begins with an analytical overview of the history of medieval Spain, from the Muslim invasion of Iberia in 711 to the onset of the Granada War in 1482. At the start of this period, Arab and Berber raiders invaded the Iberian Peninsula and overthrew the Visigothic kingdom of *Hispania*—the Roman term for the land that stretched from southwestern France to the southern tip of Spain. Over the next seven centuries, Hispanic Christian conquered peoples gradually recovered land lost to the Muslims in a slow, intermittent process known as the *Reconquista* ("Reconquest"). The first chapter examines the lives of four warrior nobles who participated in this struggle, and uses their histories to understand the role of private initiative in the reclaiming of former Christian territory. It demonstrates that these lords engaged in conquest chiefly to advance their own personal agendas, leading privately financed armies against Muslims to enhance their honor and wealth, or to gain an edge over Christians rivals. Their actions set a precedent for future generations of conquistadors—including those of this dissertation—to follow, illustrating the possibilities of obtaining vast power and riches through private ambition. In this way, this chapter seeks to lay the contextual groundwork for this dissertation, investigating the background leading up to the rise of Imperial Spain, and identifying patterns of conquest that continued up through the early modern period.

Chapter two investigates the lives and feats of a handful of Andalusian nobles who participated in the conquest of Granada (1482-92), the last Islamic Iberian kingdom. In the years leading up to this war, the newly proclaimed monarchs of Spain, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, had been imposing increasing restrictions on the nobility so as to curb their power and ensure greater allegiance to the crown. During this period of rising monarchical

power, the assertion of royal authority supposedly eroded the power of the aristocracy and rendered them tools of the reign. However, the emphasis on the weakening of the nobility at this time has undermined the remarkable vitality of this group and the significant contributions that they made to the embryonic imperial state, particularly during the Granada War. Over the course of the conquest, southern aristocrats stood at the vanguard of the struggle: captaining the campaigns, sending seigneurial troops to the field of battle each year, loaning cash to the sovereigns, and serving as chief military advisers. Their extensive services illustrate how the nobility was neither enfeebled, nor thrust aside during this period of royal centralization, but played monumental roles in helping Castile secure victory over the Islamic kingdom. I argue that through their intervention in the war, nobles were able to project their immense power, exercise their traditional autonomy, and continue to pursue their own personal agendas. Moreover, once the war concluded, this group of nobles and their descendants did not disappear from military action, but continued to play significant roles in the formation of the early Spanish empire in the Mediterranean (see chapter 4).

The third chapter examines Spain's maritime expansion into the eastern Atlantic during the final two decades of the fifteenth century. With the royal treasury drained from the War of Castilian Succession and the Granada War, the Spanish sovereigns were in no position to finance expensive military operations in their main theaters of Atlantic interest: the Canary Islands and Northwest Africa. They instead forged private contracts with *hidalgos* (petty nobles), who agreed to organize these expeditions of conquest, trade, or colonization at their own expense. While Italian investors furnished much needed cash up front to jumpstart these enterprises, it was the military captains that ultimately brought them to fruition. This group not only collected the finances, but also recruited the soldiers, conceptualized the logistics, and executed the objectives

on the ground. Of particular note were the services of two Andalusian hidalgos, Pedro de Vera Mendoza and Alonso Fernández de Lugo, who led Spain's enterprises in the Canary Islands and Atlantic Africa over the course of the 1480s and 90s. This chapter demonstrates how the ability of these men to muster private cash and resources, forge contracts with investors, and tap into local soldiering communities were indispensable to the success of these expansionist projects. I contend that these efforts, more than those of the crown or bankers, enabled Spain to consolidate its power in the eastern Atlantic by the turn of the sixteenth century.

Chapter four follows the trajectory of the same nobles examined in the second chapter, or their descendants, who journeyed into the Mediterranean at the end of the fifteenth century to partake in new imperial enterprises. At this time, the onset of the early modern "Military Revolution" purportedly diminished the significance of the medieval knight and rendered them obsolete. By the same token, the growing consolidation of royal authority was said to have sapped the strength of the aristocracy and cast them further to the sidelines. Yet, the crown still desperately needed its nobles after the fall of Granada. Within a decade, Spain found itself embroiled in significant conflicts across the Mediterranean basin, chiefly in Italy, North Africa, and the Levant. With the monarchy immersed in multiple wars simultaneously, it depended on its aristocrats to lead the charge, whether by commanding campaigns, furnishing troops to the battles, or channeling their vast resources and expertise into those contests. This chapter centers on the efforts of four aristocrats in particular, and highlights their critical services as commanders, conquerors, diplomats, and administrators in multiple areas of the Mediterranean. What enabled these lords to succeed in those roles were the frontier skills and expertise that they brought with them from their early experiences in Spain. This background provided them with an arsenal of knowledge on how to conduct effective warfare, diplomacy, and administration in new

frontier settings in the Mediterranean. I argue, ultimately, that the nobility did not shrink in importance in the early decades of the sixteenth century, but instead stood at the forefront of Spain's Mediterranean expansion.

The final chapter explores the careers of two dozen veteran soldiers who fought in Italy, North Africa, or Flanders prior to sailing to the Americas to take part in the Spanish-Aztec War, traditionally known as the Conquest of Mexico (1519-21).[34] In the first section, I provide a detailed prosopography of this group of men, examining their age, provenance, past military training in the Old World, and other aspects of their personal histories. Particular weight is given to assessing the importance of the military expertise that they gathered in Europe or Africa, and its applicability to the unique environments of the Americas. What follows is an analysis of these conquistadors' participation in the conquest of the Aztec Empire. I argue that the past soldiering experience of this group in Afro-Eurasia made them highly valuable assets to the Spanish military leader, Cortés, who entrusted them with significant responsibilities within the company. These roles included serving as emissaries, advisers, strategists, captains, and leading artillerymen. When the war concluded, this group of veteran soldiers continued to play pivotal roles in consolidating Spain's imperial grip in the Americas. Over the next several decades, the majority of the surviving soldiers went off to fight in new areas of Spanish America, including Oaxaca, Pánuco, Baja California, Guatemala, and Honduras. Others transitioned to more tranquil lines of work, serving as local magistrates, notaries, and tax collectors in New Spain or its surrounding provinces. Through these newly adopted municipal responsibilities, the soldier-turned-conquistadors helped run colonial society and ensured its successful daily functioning.

[34] Restall avoids using the phrase "the Conquest of Mexico" to describe the collapse of the Aztec Empire, arguing that it promotes a triumphalist, one-sided narrative that glorifies the Spanish victory. Instead, Restall prefers to use the term, the Spanish-Aztec War, which is adopted in this dissertation. See *When Montezuma Met Cortés: The True Story of the Meeting that Changed History* (New York: Ecco, 2018), xxix-xxxiii, 278.

Chapter 1. For Glory and Riches: Warrior Lords in the Spanish Reconquest, 1050-1482

In July of 1093, the Castilian nobleman, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, assembled his army outside the walls of the Muslim principality of Valencia in what is today eastern Spain. Rodrigo, better known by his honorific title, el Cid (from the Arabic word "al-Sayyid," meaning "the lord" or "the master"), was not fighting to take Valencia on behalf of a Christian king or prince, but for himself. Nearly a decade before, the crusader lost favor with his sovereign, Alfonso VI, and had been exiled from the kingdom of Castile. With the bond of vassalage broken, Rodrigo relocated to the east of Spain, and raised his own private army with which to contend with Christian and Muslim opponents in the Spanish Levante (the coastal area of Spain bordering the Mediterranean). To assert his dominion in this region, Rodrigo directed his forces against Valencia in the summer of 1093, enveloping the city on all sides and starving its inhabitants into submission. The city fell on 15 June 1094, and the spoils of war were reportedly immense: large quantities of gold and silver were seized, along with silken textiles, fine gems, and other precious jewelry.[35] Given Rodrigo's past differences with his former king, Alfonso VI, the Castilian paladin refused to relinquish control of Valencia to the sovereign—or any other Christian potentate in Iberia for that matter. Rodrigo instead set himself up as the autonomous prince of Valencia, and ruled it for the next five years until his death in 1099.

Rodrigo's capture of Valencia illustrates the importance of lesser subjects, and not all-powerful monarchs, in the seizing of Islamic territory during the Spanish Reconquista (711-1492 C.E.). At the start of this epoch, in the early eighth century, Muslim forces comprised of Arabs

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[35] *Historia Roderici*, in Ramón Menéndez Pidal, *La España del Cid*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Editorial Plutarco S.A., 1929), vol. 2, 915-67, 957. Pidal's work has also been translated into English: *The Cid and His Spain*, trans. Harold Sunderland (London: J. Murray, 1934).

and Moroccan Berbers swept through the Iberian Peninsula and toppled the Visigothic Kingdom of Hispania. While some of the conquered Christians remained in the captured lands and submitted to Islamic rule, others fled to the Cantabrian and the Pyrenees mountains in the north, forming tiny, independent enclaves of resistance. Over the next three centuries, these Christian entities would grow in size and strength, and evolve into a cluster of sophisticated states: Aragón, Asturias, Catalonia, Castile, León, and Navarre. For the most part, the Christian polities remained on the defensive for much of the ninth and tenth centuries, but this changed in 1031 with the disintegration of the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba.[36] Following the collapse of the Islamic polity, the Christian states took to the attack, launching a series of military campaigns between 1085 and 1248 that led to the slow, sporadic recovery of lands formerly lost to the Muslims.[37] By the mid-thirteenth century all of Spain was back in the hands of the Christian rulers, save for the southernmost kingdom of Granada (eventually conquered by Castile in 1492).

This chapter explores the history of the Reconquista through the eyes of four warrior lords, including Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, who were instrumental to the recovery, safeguarding, and administration of land during this intermittent struggle. The emphasis on the importance of the nobility in this conflict stands in contrast to the traditional historiography of the Reconquista, which long stressed the roles of various Christian rulers in liberating land from Muslim dominion (be it by marshaling forces, raising finances, etc.).[38] Not until the 1970s did historians begin to

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[36] Joseph O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1-3.

[37] The Reconquista was not a deliberate, continuous, or concerted effort maintained over seven centuries, in which the sole Christian objective was to reclaim formerly-held land and to engage in continuous warfare with the 'infidel.' Rather, it was a slow, uneven, and sporadic process, punctuated by long stretches of peace and varying degrees of conviviality between Muslims and Christians. Although plenty of skirmishing and raiding did take place, particularly in frontier zones, full-scale warfare was far less common and typically occurred in short bursts.

[38] See, for instance, William Thomas Walsh, *Isabella of Spain: The Last Crusader* (New York: Robert M. McBride & Company, 1930); Julio González, *Las conquistas de Fernando III en Andalucía* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1946); José María Lacarra y de Miguel, "La reconquista de Zaragoza por Alfonso I," *Al-Andalus* 12 (1947): 65-96; Derek W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London: Longman, 1978); Joseph

consider seriously the participation of other, lesser agents in the Reconquest, such as ordinary townspeople, local militias, nobles, mercenaries, women, or the knights of the Military-Religious Orders.[39] Notably, scholars have made convincing cases for the significance of each of those groups in certain stages of this conflict, whether in conquering territory, settling towns, or protecting land. But few of those parties were involved in every phase of this struggle like the noble class. From the first battles of the Reconquest, warrior lords stood at the elbows of their sovereigns, fighting in virtually all of the major military engagements on the peninsula. On some occasions, nobles led their own privately financed campaigns against Muslim strongholds, such as the Cid, who carried out the conquest of Valencia independent of royal authority. After conquering new spaces, it was common for lords to stay in the recently captured territories to help settle them, not only administering them on behalf of the king (or themselves), but also defending them from Muslim and Christian foes. Nobles were, in this regard, major figures in determining the course of the Christian reconquest of Spain.

While this chapter seeks to illuminate the contributions of certain aristocrats to this struggle, the objective is not to aggrandize their role in the Reconquest, or to stress their comparative importance over other participants. Rather, I intend to use their histories to accomplish two main goals. First, the lives of these nobles can allow us to paint a more complex portrait of the Reconquista, one in which the recapturing of land was not necessarily a "top-

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O'Callaghan, *Reconquest and Crusade in Medieval Spain* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); and Peggy Liss, *Isabel the Queen: Life and Times*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

[39] O'Callaghan, "*Hermandades* between the Military Orders of Calatrava and Santiago during the Castilian Reconquest, 1158-1252," *Speculum* 44 (1969): 609-618; James F. Powers, "The Origins and Development of Municipal Military Service in the Leonese and Castilian Reconquest, 800-1250," *Traditio* 16 (1970): 91-113; Heath Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest: Women in Castilian Town Society, 1100-1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Powers, *A Society Organized for War: The Iberian Municipal Militias in the Central Middle Ages, 1000-1284* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Enrique Rodríguez-Picavea, "The Military Orders and the War of Granada (1350–1492)," *Mediterranean Studies* 19 (2010): 14-42; and Liang, *Family and Empire*, 26-53.

down" monarchical project spearheaded by various Christian rulers, but was also driven by the individual interests, personal initiatives, and local power concerns of noble subjects.[40] I argue that warrior lords, namely those operating outside the auspices of royal authority, held considerable sway over the direction of the Reconquest that rivaled, and at times challenged the jurisdiction of the Christian sovereigns. Second, this chapter aims to serve as a springboard for the later ones, in part for contextualizing the relevant history leading up to the rise of Imperial Spain, but also for identifying elements of continuity between the two epochs. One of the most important overlaps, no doubt, was the importance of private initiative to the expansion of the Spanish realm. In the medieval period, the nobles of this chapter used their own personal armies to seize enemy land without royal forces, and consequently won spectacular treasure or titles for their efforts. Their independent maneuvering created a template that would be mimicked across the nascent Spanish empire, including by Alonso de Lugo in the Canary Islands, Juan de Guzmán in North Africa, and Hernán Cortés in Central Mexico. That is to say, the actions of these later conquistadors did not occur in a vacuum. They followed a pattern built by the men of this chapter, and others, whose exploits set a precedent for how to win glory, wealth, and land through private ambition.

By centering on the careers of various noble protagonists, this chapter situates itself within a growing literature that has identified the importance of certain echelons of Spanish society, such as townspeople, militias, and women, to the recapturing or consolidation of land during the Reconquista.[41] For example, in *Daughters of the Reconquest*, Heath Dillard

[40] Admittedly, using the lives of just a few men to depict the unfolding of several hundreds of years of history is like trying to view a large mural through a pinhole. The tiny aperture does not allow one to view the entire picture, but what can be discerned comes across with finer clarity and detail, producing new insights into the ways that noble subjects were enmeshed in this conflict.

[41] O'Callaghan, "*Hermandades*"; Powers, "The Origins and Development"; Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest*; Powers, *A Society Organized for War*; Rodríguez-Picavea, "The Military Orders"; and Liang, *Family and Empire*.

demonstrated how the presence of Christian women in recently conquered territories was critical to consolidating Christian victories, as they helped to form stable centers from which to build families, neighborhoods, and towns. James F. Powers built on this theme in his study of urban militias in the Central Middle Ages, illustrating how local bands of ordinary Christians, namely those living in borderland areas, played monumental roles in safeguarding frontier towns and settlements from the incursions of Muslim foes. This chapter seeks to add to this scholarship, highlighting the participation of another tier of Spanish society—warrior nobles—in this multilayered process of territorial recovery, resettlement, and defense. It focuses on the lives of four men in particular: Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar (1043-99), Juan de Guzmán (1405-68), Enrique de Guzmán (1440-92), and Rodrigo Ponce de León (1444-92), and demonstrates how their personal agendas, frontier experiences, and independent jockeying made them critical to the recouping and defense of land during the Reconquest.

Although the nobles presented here came from different epochs, what tied their lives together was the frontier spaces that they grew up and thrived on. In the case of the Cid, the eleventh century crusader was born in the northern kingdom of Castile, which at the time neighbored three Muslim principalities: Zaragoza to the east, Toledo to the south, and Valencia to the southeast. The Cid carved out a rich career operating in these frontier zones, chiefly by waging war against various Christian and Muslim enemies for personal profit. The same held true for the other nobles of this chapter, Rodrigo, Juan, and Enrique, who accumulated great power and wealth living in the south of Spain during the mid-fifteenth century. At this time, Andalusia shared a precarious frontier space with the Islamic kingdom of Granada, ruled by the Arab dynasty known as the Nasrids. Like the borderlands inhabited by the Cid, the Castile-Granada frontier was a permeable zone, regularly traversed by Muslim and Christian warriors,

and thus susceptible to cross-border attacks by both parties.[42] While some Christians sought to avoid this area for the hazards it posed, others turned to it for the possibilities it presented, such as the chance to settle in fertile land, to acquire riches via raiding or captive taking, or to attain glory through combat. In highlighting the dynamic nature of these borderland areas, this chapter builds on a rich scholarship that has demonstrated how medieval Iberian frontiers, albeit dangerous, simultaneously offered a range of opportunities to diverse groups, including women, Jews, Muslims, nobles, and mercenaries.[43]

Finally, an analysis of this group of warrior lords can help to unravel a number of pervasive myths that enshroud this period of Spanish history. One of the most popular myths (and perhaps deeply entrenched) is the view of Hispanic Christians as locked in a continuous, united, and religiously motivated struggle against Muslims.[44] This representation has its roots in the early decades of the twentieth century, when nationalist schools of Spanish historians—namely those attempting to depict a heroic and harmonious vision of Spain's medieval past—conceived of Christian forces as a unified, homogenous front against Islam.[45] However appealing in its simplistic, black and white rhetoric, such an outlook is far too rigid to accurately capture the subtleties and sudden shifts in Christian-Muslim relations over the course of seven centuries.

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[42] On the persistence of frontier traditions and institutions after the conquest of Granada, see Claire Gilbert, "The King, the Coin, and the Word: Imagining and Enacting Castilian Frontiers in Late Medieval Iberia," in *Authority and Spectacle in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia*, eds. Yuen-Gen Liang and Jarbel Rodríguez (New York: Routledge, 2017), 33-45.

[43] See Angus MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000-1500* (London: Macmillan, 1977); Dillard, *Daughters of the Reconquest*; Jonathan Ray, *The Sephardic Frontier: The Reconquista and the Jewish Community in Medieval Iberia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Liang, *Family and Empire*; and Hussein Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean: Sovereignty, Religion, and Violence in the Medieval Crown of Aragon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

[44] For instance, O'Callaghan asserted that Christian rulers were uniformly united in their struggle against Islam. See *A History of Medieval Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 22. See also, Elena Lourie, "A Society Organized for War: Medieval Spain," *Past and Present* 35, no. 1 (1966): 54-76; Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain*; and Powers, *A Society Organized for War*.

[45] Point made by Richard Fletcher in *The Quest for El Cid* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 48. The view of harmonious Christians unified against the Islamic presence is perhaps best exemplified by Ramón Menéndez Pidal's influential study, *La España del Cid* (1929).

In fact, at many points during the Reconquest, especially during the eleventh and fifteenth centuries (the foci of this chapter), Christians lords and rulers were oftentimes more at odds with one another than they were with their Muslim neighbors. To gain an edge over rival co-religionists, Christian nobles at times allied with traditional enemies of the faith, and even employed Muslim warriors to fight on their behalf.[46] This was the case for Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar and Enrique de Guzmán, who hired Muslim mercenaries at various points in time to wage war against certain Christian adversaries. Such dissension points to a more messy and fractured landscape, in which allegiances did not always fall neatly along confessional lines; instead, they were fluid, malleable, and selected based on specific scenarios or local contingencies. In highlighting the complexity of Christian-Muslim interactions, as well as the frequently divisive relations between co-religionists, this chapter will add to a robust literature that has presented inter- and intra-faith relations in medieval Spain as a muddled and nuanced dynamic, guided not solely by religious difference, but also material interests, issues of power, and local conditions.[47]

To narrate the activities of nobles during the Christian reconquest of Spain, this chapter draws on various chronicles and archival documents produced in the late medieval period. Of particular import are the accounts of two Spanish historians, Diego de Valera (1412-88) and Pedro Medina (c. 1493-1567).[48] In respect to Medina, his chronicle documents the lives of the

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[46] On Christian and Muslim collusion during the Reconquista, see for instance MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*; Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*; Mark Meyerson, *The Muslims of Valencia in the Age of Fernando and Isabel: Between Coexistence and Crusade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); and Fancy, *The Mercenary Mediterranean*.

[47] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*: *Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Teófilo F. Ruiz, *Spanish Society, 1400-1600* (Harlow: Longman, 2001); Meyerson, *A Jewish Renaissance in Fifteenth-Century Spain: Jews, Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Ruiz, *Spain's Centuries of Crisis: 1300-1474* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011); and Dario Fernández-Morera, *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise: Muslims, Christians, and Jews under Islamic Rule in Medieval Spain* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 2016).

[48] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, *Crónica de Enrique IV*, in *Colección de Crónicas Españolas*, vol. 4, ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S.A., 1941); and Medina, *Crónica de los muy excelentes señores duques de Medina Sidonia, etc.*, in *Colección de documentos inéditos para la historia de España* (hereafter *CODOIN*), vol. 39 (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1861).

first twelve members of the Guzmán (Medina Sidonia) lineage, or as the introduction notes, the "various deeds of some of the gentlemen of that family."[49] Because the author resided in the house of Medina Sidonia for five decades, and also claimed that both of his parents lived there, his account provides a brazenly favorable view of the ducal house. In fact, his chronicle essentially takes the form of a hagiography, and frequently accentuates the actions of certain members of the Guzmán lineage. Nonetheless, if we can sift through this flattery, we may find that Medina's account also includes pertinent information on the noble family that is typically ignored in contemporary chronicles. This includes the personal reasons that the dukes partook in various episodes of conquest, as well as with their specific contributions to certain enterprises. Aside from this, Medina further claims in his prologue that he had access to private documents housed within the ducal archives, which are otherwise rare and inaccessible to modern scholars. This reason alone makes his chronicle invaluable, in spite of his easily discernible attempts to aggrandize the standing of the ducal house.

To balance Medina's narrative, his account is contrasted alongside that of Diego de Valera, a Castilian historian and intellectual who served in the courts of John II of Castile as well as the Catholic Monarchs, Isabella I of Castile and Ferdinand II of Aragon.[50] By virtue of having resided in various royal households (and lived practically the entire fifteenth century), Valera had access to direct and reliable accounts of many of the events that transpired in Castile. While much of that information came from trusted informants, it nonetheless needed to be vetted for accuracy. It was therefore in Valera's hands to determine what details were truthful; what was

[49] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 14-15.
[50] Between 1481 and 1487, Valera dedicated himself to writing his *Memorial*, a chronicle covering events in Castile during the reign of Henry IV (1454-74). On this figure and his works, see Cristina Moya García, "La Producción Historiográfica De Mosén Diego De Valera En La Época De Los Reyes Católicos," in *La Literatura En La Época De Los Reyes Católicos*, eds. Nicasio Salvador Miguel and Cristina Moya García (Frankfurt a. M., Madrid: Vervuert Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008), 145-166.

superfluous; and what should ultimately be incorporated or left out. The most pertinent information would then be filtered through Valera's historical voice and rearticulated based on his own understanding of the events. This of course tints his account with shades of bias, though it does not detract from its overall merit. Some of the highest authorities in Spain—including various kings—trusted his prudence, and esteemed greatly his attention to detail and precision. His propensity for accuracy makes him one of the more reputable Castilian narrators, and affords us reliable insight into the general affairs of late medieval Spain.

In addition to chronicles, this chapter employs various archival documents held in the Archivo General de Simancas (AGS) in Valladolid, namely *cartas* (letters) and *mercedes* (privileges) pertaining to the Guzmán family. These sources provide valuable insight into the actions of this noble lineage in the late medieval frontier, and particularly their role in the 1462 conquest of Gibraltar. Further, they also allow us to corroborate certain information put forth by Medina, including the dates of enterprises, the contributions of the Dukes of Medina Sidonia and other nobles, and the honors that they won for their services. While noteworthy in these respects, these sources are not without their shortcomings either. Given that these documents are concerned exclusively with the Guzmán family, they tend to disregard the actions of the other figures who assisted them in their campaigns. Most notably omitted is the Marquis of Cádiz, who captained the conquest of Gibraltar alongside the duke, yet receives no mention in any of these documents. Despite such absences, these sources are still useful for clarifying and enriching much of the information put forth in the chronicles. When set alongside those published accounts, they allow us to present a richer, more precise rendering of noble endeavors during this period.

The Rise and Splintering of Al-Andalus

In the year 711, North African Berbers and Arab soldiers of the Umayyad Caliphate crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to conduct raids against the Visigothic Kingdom of Hispania. Although the initial objective was not one of conquest, the invaders met little effective resistance in the south of Iberia, and thus pressed forward deeper into the interior. At an unknown location, perhaps near the Guadalete River in the province of Cádiz, the Islamic invaders encountered the forces of the Visigothic King of Spain, Roderick (also known as Rodrigo), on 19 July 711. In the ensuing meeting, the Christian army was decisively vanquished from the field, while Roderick himself was slain in battle.[51] Following this bloody clash, the Muslim army continued their march through Iberia largely unhindered, seizing most of the territory of the Hispano-Romans within the next five years, and incorporating that land within the Umayyad Caliphate (based in far-off Damascus).[52] As for the conquered Christian populace, while some agreed to live under Muslim rule and adopted Arabic language and culture, others fled to the mountainous regions of Asturias and Galicia to live outside the orbit of Islamic dominion. Over the next several centuries, these fugitive bands of Christians would reconstitute themselves in the north, perhaps with the hope of someday restoring their fortunes.

When the Umayyad conquest of Iberia ended around 716, the Arab-Berber invaders resettled in a number of cities across the Peninsula. What followed was the migration of some

[51] The original Islamic forces consisted of 7,000 men, but later swelled to 12,000 with reinforcements. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 53.

[52] O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 92-94. The relative rapidity of the Islamic takeover has begged the question: how could a relatively small group of Arab and Berber warriors, whose initial objective appeared that of an exploratory raid, vanquish the once mighty Goths? Scholars have put forth a host of explanations to explain the Muslim takeover, which typically consist of the Goths' military unpreparedness, civil strife and dynastic rivalries, epidemic disease, and Christian/Jewish collusion with Muslims. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 49-54, 92; Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 12-15; and Fernández-Morera, *Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*, 35-38.

one million Muslim immigrants (spouses, children, vassals, and enslaved peoples) over the course of the eighth century, with 150,000 to 200,000 of those migrants consisting of Arab and Berber warriors.[53] Within a few short years, the city of Córdoba emerged as the seat of Islamic government in Iberia; by 756, it was converted into the capital of the Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba (756-929).[54] Under the reign of Córdoba's successive emirs, the territory in Iberia under Muslim rule, known as *al-Andalus*, witnessed a period of general prosperity in the ninth and early tenth century.[55] Of particular note was the city of Córdoba, which transformed into the cultural epicenter of the Mediterranean, European, and Islamic worlds, boasting a population of 250,000 inhabitants in the tenth century that rivaled the great eastern cities of Baghdad and Constantinople.[56] However, after the death of Abd al-Rahman III (the ruler of the Caliphate of Córdoba) in 961, Islamic Spain would fall into a period of rapid decline. With a power vacuum opened, infighting among rival contenders seeking to assume control of al-Andalus fractured the Caliphate from within, resulting in its splintering in 1031 into multiple petty kingdoms, known as *taifas*, or "factions."[57] By the mid-eleventh century, six principal taifas came to dominate the landscape of al-Andalus: Badajoz to the west, Toledo in the center, Zaragoza in the northeast,

[53] While traditional estimates cite around 150,000 to 200,000 migrants, Fletcher argues that these figures must be multiplied severalfold on account of the wives, children, enslaved peoples and other dependents who accompanied or later joined the Arab and Berber warriors. *Quest for El Cid*, 15.
[54] An emirate is a territory ruled by an emir, or an Islamic ruler. The Umayyad Emirate of Córdoba was a politically independent Muslim kingdom that controlled the affairs of Spain for the next two centuries. Although politically independent of the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad, the Umayyad emirs of Córdoba, at least in theory, accepted the authority of the eastern caliphate as the legitimate successors to Muhammad and the supreme spiritual and temporal leaders of the Muslim community. This changed in 929, however, when the emir of Córdoba, Abd al-Rahman III, assumed the title of caliph. In doing so, he proclaimed himself as the legitimate successor of Muhammad, and thus the absolute spiritual and temporal authority of the entire Muslim community.
[55] At this time, al-Andalus experienced a rise in agricultural production, the minting of new coinage, an increase in the production of commodities, advancements in irrigation, and a demographic boom. Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 17-21. For a comprehensive study on the rise and development of al-Andalus, see Manuela Marin, ed., *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part 1: History and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1998); and Maribel Fierro and Julio Samsó, eds., *The Formation of al-Andalus, Part 2: Language, Religion, Culture and the Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1998).
[56] O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 116.
[57] The taifas were ruled predominantly by families of Arabs, Berbers, and Slavs, who presided over an ethnically and religiously diverse body of inhabitants, including *dhimmis* (non-Muslims living in Islamic lands), African blacks, Hispanics, Slavs, Berbers, and Arabs.

Valencia on the eastern seaboard, and Granada and Seville in the south.[58] Though nominally united under the crescent of Islam, the taifa principalities remained politically fragmented, and lacked the military might of the once unified Caliphate of Córdoba.

While the Islamic kingdoms were suffering the pangs of civil strife, the small Christian polities in the north of Spain, though initially diminished, were slowly regaining strength. By the turn of the eleventh century, these formerly isolated Christian enclaves had matured into seven complex states: Aragon, Asturias, Catalonia, Castile, León, Navarre, and Portugal.[59] Like the taifas, the Christian polities were by no means a united front, but rather a patchwork of fractured entities with distinct customs, institutions, and identities, further imposed by differences in landscape, regional affinities, and historical antecedents. Adding to these dissimilarities were the various linguistic forms spoken in the Christian kingdoms: Gallego-Portuguese (spoken in Galicia and Portugal), Basque (native to Navarre and adjacent regions), Catalan (spoken in Northern Catalonia and in Andorra), and Castilian (originally native to Central Spain, but later spread to the reconquered regions of Extremadura and Andalusia).[60] These linguistic and cultural differences were not insurmountable barriers to political union, per se, but they did stimulate regionalism. This meant that the Christian polities did not always act as cohesive units of a singular entity, but rather pursued distinct interests and agendas that routinely thwarted efforts at reunifying the peninsula.[61]

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[58] In the first few years of the caliphate's dissolution, approximately 23 taifas existed, but as time went on, war and competition led to the absorption of the weaker kingdoms into the stronger ones.
[59] On the development of those states, see O'Callaghan, "Government, Society, and Culture in Christian Spain, 711-1035," in *A History of Medieval Spain*, 163-90.
[60] Differences in linguistic forms continue to create rifts in contemporary Spain, serving as reasons for Basques and Catalans to seek autonomy.
[61] A similar sort of factionalism beset Visigothic Spain prior to the Arab and Berber invasion, helping to pave the way for the eventual Islamic takeover. O'Callaghan, *A History of Medieval Spain*, 49.

For Wealth, Honor, and Glory: The Story of the Cid

It was within this divided landscape that emerged one of the most famous figures in Spanish history, Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, also known as the Cid, or *El Campeador* ("Master of the Battlefield").[62] The Castilian crusader is arguably best known for his stunning conquest of Valencia in 1094—a feat so impressive that it has garnered the Cid considerable treatment in both literature and popular cinema, spanning from medieval times until the present day.[63] But in spite of this noteworthy attention, it is still worth taking a moment to examine Rodrigo's career. For one, it sheds light on the colorful landscape of eleventh-century Spain, and helps us dispel several notable myths from this period—such as the notion that the Iberian Christian kingdoms represented a united front against Islam, or that Muslims and Christians were constantly at odds. Equally important, the life of the Cid can allow us to better understand the actions of later generations of Castilian conquerors. Indeed, through his successful exploits, the Cid established a model for how to acquire power, riches, and glory through private ambition, creating a blueprint that future conquistadors would emulate.

Born around 1043, Rodrigo was raised by a middling-level aristocratic family in the village of Vivar, located roughly six miles north of Burgos.[64] Like other members of the Castilian lesser nobility, Rodrigo travelled to the royal household at a young age, and eventually occupied

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[62] For scholarship on this figure, see Pidal, *La España del Cid*; Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*; Simon Barton and Richard Fletcher, eds., *The World of El Cid: Chronicles of the Spanish Reconquest* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); and Barton, "El Cid, Cluny and the Medieval Spanish Reconquista," *The English Historical Review* 126, no. 520 (2011): 517-543.

[63] This is perhaps best exemplified by the 1961 Oscar-winning film, *El Cid*. The sprawling epic, which sported a three-hour run-time, was overseen by the near ninety-year-old Spanish historian, Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who was brought on set to serve as the film's historical adviser. Despite its lengthy run-time, the film performed well at the box office, reeling-in some $26.6 million, and also receiving critical acclaim with two Academy Award wins, including for Best Original Score and Best Production Design.

[64] The year of Rodrigo's birth is unknown. Fletcher believes that he was likely born around 1043 based on his known military activity in 1063. *Quest for El Cid*, 107.

the important position of *armiger* (in Latin, meaning "the bearer of the king's arms") in the court of Ferdinand I of Castile (1035-65). In addition to carrying the king's sword, lance, and shield, the armiger was also in charge of the royal militia, that is, the contingent of forces that comprised the king's personal escort and army.[65] This suggests that Rodrigo would have acted as one of the king's chief military strategists, and would have been highly esteemed for his martial and tactical abilities. Such talents would be on full display at the Battle of Graus in 1063, when Rodrigo helped King Ferdinand—along with the Muslim ruler of Zaragoza, Ahmad al-Muqtadir—defeat his brother King Ramiro I of Aragon. While the engagement allowed Rodrigo to gain notable distinction at court, things slowly unraveled for the aristocrat not long after the campaign had ended.

In 1065, King Ferdinand had passed away, resulting in the eventual ascendancy of his middle son, Alfonso VI, as ruler of the kingdoms of León, Castile, and Galicia.[66] Although Rodrigo transferred his loyalties to the new king, his relationship with Alfonso took a bad turn after humiliating several prominent Christian knights in battle, as well as raiding land belonging to the sovereign's Muslim ally, Yahya al-Qadir, ruler of the taifa of Valencia.[67] As punishment, Rodrigo was stripped of his property and exiled from Castile in 1081, leaving him without any source of income. While Rodrigo first directed his attention to Catalonia, hoping to seek sanctuary with the powerful Count of Barcelona, Berenguer Ramón II, his Christian neighbor turned him away. With few options available to him in Christendom, Rodrigo next traveled across the frontier to the northeast taifa of Zaragoza, and enlisted in the service of its Muslim ruler, al-Muqtadir, as a mercenary soldier.

[65] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 114.
[66] O'Callaghan, *History of Medieval Spain*, 198-200.
[67] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 129-130.

While the decision of Rodrigo to serve an Islamic ruler may come across as unusual, his actions at this time were not wholly unexpected. In eleventh-century Spain, mercenary-warriors of Rodrigo's stature dotted the medieval landscape, and eagerly searched for opportunities to channel their military vocation. If Christian rulers could not provide them with ready employment, these knights would be forced to seek it elsewhere, including with Muslim rulers.[68] For some Christian mercenaries, these men did not see an issue fighting in the pay of an Islamic lord. This was a world in which self-interested pragmatism, such as the desire for personal glory, monetary wealth, or advancing one's career could at times supersede religious convictions. Such things held true for the Cid, who after being cast aside by fellow Christians had little recourse but to turn to an Islamic lord to restore his honor and fortunes. His Muslim host, in a similar vein, appeared to have no qualm hiring a Christian mercenary. Rodrigo's knowledge of the Christian world and its political dynamics made him an invaluable vassal and adviser to the taifa ruler. Besides, the Castilian noble was a highly talented warrior who had distinguished himself in battle, most notably during the 1063 campaign at Graus. In a world punctuated by war and conquest, there was always need for a skilled military commander of Rodrigo's ability, and someone unafraid to assume the eminent vanguard position on the battlefield. Over the next five years (1081-86), Rodrigo would showcase his military talents, winning a number of key battles on behalf of al-Muqtadir and his successor.[69] Aside from earning him glory and treasure, these victories cemented Rodrigo's status as a military savant, and continued to prepare him for more significant battles ahead.

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[68] Fancy has pointed to a similar process in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, during which time the Christian kings of Aragon employed thousands of foreign Muslim mercenaries, known as *jenets*, to serve in their armies and as members of their royal courts. See *The Mercenary Mediterranean*.

[69] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 134-140.

When Rodrigo's service in Zaragoza ended in 1086, the nobleman relocated to the east of Spain, and used his own wealth and connections to raise a private army. With these forces, Rodrigo launched intermittent strikes in the Spanish Levante in the late 1080s against various Muslim and Christian opponents, including his then archrival, the Count of Barcelona. After a series of successful campaigns, Rodrigo managed to establish *de facto* control over this rich, coastal zone by 1090, usurping both Alfonso VI and the Count of Barcelona's dominion in the Levante.[70] Rodrigo's actions exemplify the rapidly shifting regional power dynamics in medieval Iberia, and the intricate web of rivalries, alliances, and local struggles that shaped the political landscape of the time. They further illustrate the wealth of opportunities accessible to Castilian warriors operating in these contested frontier spaces, and the possibility of carving out significant spheres of influence through individual initiative. Yet, to further expand the scope of his power, Rodrigo next set his sights on conquering the Islamic principality of Valencia, located just south of Zaragoza. In the summer of 1093, Rodrigo laid siege to Valencia with a mixed army of Christian and Muslim mercenaries, erecting a tight blockade of the city that led to its surrender the following year (on 15 June 1094).[71]

The conquest of Valencia represented a significant moment in the history of eleventh-century Iberia, as it led to the capture of a major Islamic principality on the peninsula. With that said, we must be careful not to mistake this conquest as a concerted or unified strategy on behalf of Hispanic Christendom to recover land from Muslims. In Rodrigo's day, as Richard Fletcher reminds us, "there was little if any sense of nationhood, crusade or reconquest in the Christian kingdoms of Spain."[72] The Iberian Christian polities were politically fractured at the time, and

[70] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 156-57.
[71] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 163-64. Rodrigo also took advantage of an internal revolt in the city in October 1092, directed against the Muslim ruler, al-Qadir.
[72] Fletcher, *Quest for El Cid*, 4.

chiefly concerned with advancing their own personal agendas. In many respects, the Cid's actions at Valencia reflect this highly individualistic landscape. The Castilian warrior was not conducting the conquest to carry out a unified goal on behalf of Christendom, or to dutifully fulfill the wishes of his sovereign, Alfonso VI. Rather, he was fighting to procure greater honor, power, and riches for himself.[73] This was evidenced by the fact that once the city was taken, Rodrigo refused to cede control of it to anyone, and instead set himself up as the independent prince of Valencia. His actions suggest that he was no mere subordinate to Alfonso VI, but his own man fighting for personal gain.[74] Moreover, only after the death of Rodrigo in 1099 did Valencia ultimately fall out of Christian hands, seized by the Almoravids (a Berber dynasty of North Africa) in 1102.

It is easy to see why the life of the Cid resonated so deeply with contemporary and modern audiences. The Castilian paladin was not a king or high aristocrat born into privilege and power, but a middling-level noble who carved out his own fortunes through war and conquest. His spectacular success offered a template for future generations of Spanish knights, demonstrating the near limitless possibilities available to ambitious men willing to traverse the Iberian Peninsula for personal enrichment. In fact, we will see a similar process play out in the first half of the thirteenth century, when bands of Christian nobles from the north rushed to Andalusia, hoping to take part in the reconquest of southern Spain and to reap the rewards of conquest. It is to the southern borderlands where we now turn, namely to consider the roles of

[73] Fletcher upholds this view. See *Quest for El Cid*.
[74] Still, some historians have painted the Cid as a loyal vassal to his sovereign. For instance, O'Callaghan remarked that the Cid "was not a bandit or *condottiere*, fighting only for material profit, as he has sometimes been pictured, but rather a true champion, the defender of Christian Spain and a faithful vassal to his king." *History of Medieval Spain*, 212.

other frontier nobles in the capture of Muslim land, and to understand how their personal agendas, like the Cid's, created the impetus for those assaults.

"Frontier Identity," and the Rise of the Andalusian Nobility

After the death of the Cid in 1102, al-Andalus remained in the hands of the Almoravids for another seven decades, that is, until its eventual takeover by the Almohads (another North African Berber dynasty) in 1172. Although the rulers of those dynasties kept Christian Spain on its heels for much of the twelfth century, this changed in 1212, when Christian forces routed the Muslim army of the Almohad Caliphate at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa. The Christian victory was significant, as it served as a gateway to the conquest of much of Andalusia, leading to the capture of Baeza in 1227, Córdoba in 1236, Valencia in 1238, Murcia in 1243, Jaén in 1246, and Seville in 1248.[75] By the mid-thirteenth century, all of southern Spain (with the exception of Granada) was under Christian control.[76] While this remarkable string of conquests created an abundance of opportunities for Christian settlers in Andalusia, opening up vast swathes of fertile land in the south for settlement, the major problem was that the emirate of Granada lay nearby.[77] Although the kingdoms of Castile and Granada were not at war during the

[75] León-Castile took possession of Andalusia; Catalonia-Aragon controlled Valencia, the Balearic Islands, and part of Murcia; and Portugal held the Algarve.
[76] There are a number of reasons why Spanish Christians failed to retake Granada. Politically, treaties negotiated in the late-twelfth century between Castile and the other Christian kingdoms (Aragon and Portugal) prohibited those other polities from extending their string of conquests south of Valencia or east of the Algarve. The conquest of Granada, in other words, was to be the exclusive prerogative of Castile. Second, the Muslim prince and founder of the Nasrid dynasty, Muhammad I al-Ghālib, struck his own accord with the Castilian ruler, Fernando III, agreeing to provide *parias* (tribute rents) and military backing to Castile in exchange for peace. Third, Castile was more or less in a state of constant war with its Christian neighbors, and was unable to concentrate its resources on a coordinated offensive. Fourth, as Hillgarth suggests, there was not enough popular desire to conquer Granada during this period, namely since it "ceased to be dangerous." Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250-1516*, *Volume I, 1250-1410, Precarious Balance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 20.
[77] Compared to the arid and mountainous regions of the north, these lands were among the most agriculturally productive in Spain, attracting thousands of settlers in the mid-thirteenth century who flocked to the south to take advantage of its rich and fertile soils. In Seville, it is estimated that 20,000 settlers migrated to the city following the

late medieval period, the frontier space that separated the two polities was still a dangerous zone, fraught with cross-border raiding by both Christians and Muslim parties. This meant that for those desirous of taking advantage of Andalusia's rich soil, one needed to be prepared to defend it from hostile incursions.

Among those to relocate in the south, the group most capable of defending it were warrior lords, whose military vocation made them indispensable to safeguarding the land.[78] From an early age, southern noblemen sought to inculcate in their sons certain military virtues to prepare them for the dangers of frontier life. This included horsemanship and mastery in hand-to-hand combat, such as learning by practice how to wield a sword or lance, or knowing how to fire a crossbow and other projectiles, including arrows and darts. Because the frontier was the battleground in which all military encounters took place, these skills would be custom-fit to the landscape, meaning that nobles would be trained in the specific features and contours of their immediate environment. Hunting (a favorite pastime of the elites) would have been one way in which the nobles familiarized themselves with the lay of the land.[79] This might entail knowing the best places to mount an ambush, or the dead ground to avoid; the most suitable routes to launch a surprise attack, or the ones to use for a hasty retreat. In a world where warfare was tightly interlocked with daily life, knowledge of the specific features of the landscape, coupled with prowess in horsemanship and swordsmanship, could very well determine the fate of one's existence.

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conquest in 1248, many of them Castilian, but also fair numbers of Italians, French, and Catalans. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 1, 24.

[78] On the role of high nobles in Andalusia between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Miguel Ángel Ladero Quesada, *Los señores de Andalucía: investigaciones sobre nobles y señoríos en los siglos XIII a XV* (Cádiz: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Cádiz, 1998).

[79] According to the *Siete Partidas*, a code of law published during the reign of Alfonso X of Castile (1252-84), hunting was "an art" that "imparts knowledge of war and conquest." As cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 1, 62.

Besides the nobles' military vocation, their heavily fortified and well-positioned estates bestowed them with further significance in defending the frontier. During the late medieval period, the lords' horizontal column of seigniorial properties lined the narrow strip of borderland stretching from Seville in the west to Murcia in the east (with Córdoba and Jaén in the center), forming a formidable barrier that shielded the kingdom of Castile from the emirate of Granada. The various castles and towns belonging to these lords acted as the first line of defense, ensuring that no Muslim incursion would go undetected and penetrate into the heart of Castile. For these reasons, the lords' seigniorial estates were strategically perched on promontories so as to assume a defensive position against attackers, and also generally equipped with lookout towers (*vistas*) that offered a bird eyes view of the surroundings—in this case, the critical roads leading in and out of the emirate.[80] Hilltop castles also meant that nobles had first knowledge of any sort of attack emanating from the emirate, and would therefore be expected to be among the first to respond. Moving quickly, the nobles would relay this information to other lords in the region, dispatching letters or messengers for short range communications, while also using a system of lit beacons placed in the mountains to indicate Muslim activity in far off regions of the frontier. This constant vigilance of the border and system of communication between nobles meant that when the time came for battle, detachments under their command could be dispensed rapidly with the objective of repelling intruding armies or sacking Muslim expeditions.

What was perhaps most impressive about the Andalusian lords was their ability to raise small armies at a moment's notice. One of the most striking examples was the Guzmán (Medina Sidonia) lineage, who after participating in the reconquest of Andalusia established their power

[80] Liang, *Family and Empire*, 39-40.

base in Seville.[81] From within the city center, the Guzmán family constructed a series of magnificent palaces that were encircled by the homes of commoners, allowing them to bond with the urban populace and construct close, interpersonal relationships to those in the city. This was critical in times of war, as the Guzmáns could draw on thousands of men to fight by their side, including kinsmen linked to the lord through familial bonds, vassals living in *acostamiento* (salaried vassals subject to military obligations, yet disbanded after each campaign), troops from within their own private retinues, as well as peons or villagers from nearby localities. Though expensive to fund such a private army, the Guzmáns had little trouble paying these men. The noble lineage presided over vast territorial possessions in some of the most lucrative towns and ports in the south of Spain, including Medina Sidonia, Niebla, Vejer, Huelva, and Sanlúcar de Barrameda (totaling some 40,000 inhabitants).[82] The latter port was particularly profitable, as its maritime location allowed the ducal house to invest in prosperous mercantile and maritime ventures in the Atlantic, as well trade directly with Genoa, Flanders, Brittany, and the Canary Islands. The income generated from these investments and trade, along with the collection of rents, was massive. By 1509, the earnings of the ducal house were estimated at a stunning 1,237,666 *maravedíes* (a billon coin); this would have placed them within the highest echelons of royal families in all of Europe.[83] Over many generations, the Guzmáns became massively enriched in this manner, and eventually came to dominate the Andalusian countryside and all of its affairs.

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[81] The Guzmán lineage held various noble titles, including the counts of Niebla, dukes of Medina Sidonia, and Marqueses of Cazaza. For the single best study on this family, see Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán: La casa ducal de Medina Sidonia en Sevilla y su reino: 1282–1521* (Madrid: Dykinson, 2015).

[82] Juan Ruiz Jiménez, "Power and Musical Exchange: The Dukes of Medina Sidonia in Renaissance Seville," *Early Music* 37, no. 3 (2009): 401-15, 401. For a map of the Guzmán's township possessions at the beginning of the sixteenth century, see Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 240.

[83] Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 251, n. 47. This equaled some 36,382 *reales* (silver coins).

The only true opposition to the Guzmáns in the south, aside from the emirate of Granada, were other high nobles. By the mid-fifteenth century, their most powerful rival to emerge was undeniably the Ponce de León (Arcos) lineage, who monopolized much of the power in the old kingdom of Seville. Like the Guzmáns, various members of the Arcos family rushed to the south to take part in the reconquest of Andalusia and consequently earned lands and honors for their valor. After resettling in Seville, the Arcos clan slowly broadened the parameters of their power, seizing control of the immediate spaces around them such as land, municipal posts, and local institutions. As they jostled with other lords for preeminence in the region, their individual ambitions oftentimes collided with those of their neighbors, leading to divisive disputes that frequently turned violent. Perhaps the most illustrative example was their bloody rivalry with the Guzmán family, whose quarreling in the 1460s and 70s plunged Seville into decades of turmoil. While this feud is a gripping tale in its own right, offering themes of violence and honor, pettiness and bickering, it also reveals much about the internal landscape of late fifteenth-century Andalusia, such as how frontier lords interacted with one another, how they sidestepped royal authority in carrying out their own private interests, and how they were just as willing to wage war against fellow Christians as against the Muslims with whom they shared the frontier.[84] Further, this rivalry can do much to enrich our understanding of the conquest of Granada, as members from both noble families went on to play significant roles in the ten-year war, chiefly Rodrigo Ponce de León (the future Marquis of Cádiz) and Enrique de Guzmán (the second Duke of Medina Sidonia).

[84] For an exploration of the fifteenth century political struggle between the monarchy, Andalusian provincial oligarchy, and urban populace of the region, see Ladero Quesada, *Andalucía en el siglo XV: Estudios de historia política* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Instituto Jerónimo Zurita, 1973).

Noble Ambitions in the Late Medieval Frontier

The great feud between the Guzmán and Ponce de León lineages could be said to have begun at the conquest of Gibraltar in 1462, during which time members of both noble families laid siege to the Nasrid fortress, but appeared more interested in fighting among themselves than against the actual inhabitants of the city. The desire to conquer Gibraltar was by no means a sudden impulse, but rather a longstanding desire by the residents of Andalusia who for generations had been harassed by Muslim raids emanating from the city. The fortress loomed especially large in the mind of the great Andalusian lord, Enrique de Guzmán (the second Count of Niebla, 1391-1436), who possessed as a royal monopoly a tuna catch that operated off the southwestern coast of Andalusia. His export business, which distributed the preserved tuna to markets throughout Europe, had been routinely attacked by Muslim corsairs who used Gibraltar as a nest for their operations.[85] In an effort to eliminate the Muslim threat, Enrique launched an ill-fated expedition to conquer the mighty fortress in 1436, culminating in his death at the hands of the Gibraltarians. His son, Juan de Guzmán, the first Duke of Medina Sidonia (1445-68), had always been deeply troubled by his father's passing, and according to the infante, Don Alonso, had a great desire "to avenge his death."[86]

The duke's opportunity for vengeance would come in August of 1462, when the *alcalde* (municipal justice) of Tarifa, Alfonso de Arcos, learned that the fortress of Gibraltar was

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[85] Helen Nader, "The Spain That Encountered Mexico," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. William H. Beezley and Michael C. Meyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010): 11-44, 23-24.

[86] A royal document conferring a privilege (merced) upon Enrique de Guzmán acknowledges how his father, Juan de Guzmán, went to Gibraltar to avenge his own father's death: "…por vengar la muerte del dicho Conde Don Enrique de Guzman." AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 1, núm. 12 (Córdoba, 3 June 1469). See also Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 242.

negligently guarded and vulnerable to an assault.[87] With this news Alfonso acted quickly, penning a letter to a number of frontier towns and nobles to help assist him in the siege. Among those included in the summons were the nearby towns of Alcalá de los Gazules, Arcos, Castellar, Jerez, Medina, and Vejer, as well as two powerful lords, Rodrigo Ponce de León (the illegitimate and younger son of the Count of Arcos), and Juan de Guzmán. As we know, the duke lost his father at Gibraltar some years prior, and according to the infante would not miss the opportunity to avenge his death. But something oftentimes neglected in the contemporary sources is that the duke would also have been interested in attaining honor and glory through conquest. If he could subdue so mighty a fortress—a feat in which so many before him had failed, including his own father—he would not only acquire great wealth and fame, but also sow his reputation as a military savant. A similar conviction probably rang true for the young Rodrigo Ponce de León, who at the time would have been about 19 years old, and would have looked to Gibraltar as an ideal opportunity to channel his martial ambitions. After recruiting many relatives, servants, and friends from the nearby regions of the frontier, the two nobles embarked on the road to Gibraltar, which lay over 100 miles south of their Sevillian estates.

As the two nobles set out for Gibraltar, they must have been keenly aware of the problems associated with the enterprise. The first, and perhaps biggest issue, was that the siege of Gibraltar did not receive royal authorization from the crown. Both Rodrigo and Juan raised their armies privately from the countryside, outside the auspices of the monarchy. Second, and slightly related to this issue, because there was no single authority orchestrating the siege, it was not clear and obvious who would direct the assault once all of the forces assembled at Gibraltar. Both nobles possessed the requisite authority to direct the enterprise, but it was uncertain who

[87] L.P. Harvey, *Islamic Spain, 1250-1500* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 263. Tarifa was a Spanish municipality in the province of Cádiz.

would ultimately spearhead the attack. The matter was further complicated by the fact that the nobles set out to besiege the city at their own costs.[88] This meant that all parties involved were more likely to storm the fortress for their own personal gain, rather than share the spoils of war among its manifold participants. Under these circumstances, it is not entirely surprising that when the time came to carry out the siege, the Christians appeared just as eager to bicker among themselves as they were to fight the actual enemy.

Among the first to reach the city of Gibraltar was Rodrigo Ponce de León and his contingent of private retainers. The Gibraltarians, knowing that the city was far too weak to contend with the Andalusians' forces, already drew up the terms of surrender, informing Rodrigo that if he were to accept them, then the city would be his.[89] "I have seen those terms," Rodrigo replied, "but I cannot grant them. The Count, my father, will be here tonight or tomorrow, as will Don Juan de Guzmán, the Duke of Medina Sidonia. Given that they are my family members and friends, it is only fitting that we receive the honor of the surrender together."[90] Despite this show of good faith, when Juan de Guzmán at last arrived at Gibraltar with his personal retinue, he wasted very little time in finalizing the negotiations for himself. When night approached, he sent one of his own men to negotiate the terms of surrender with the Muslim camp, thereby excluding Rodrigo from the parley. After discovering what the duke had done, Rodrigo withdrew from the city altogether in disgust, and later issued a challenge to Juan de Guzmán from his encampment at Guadiaro, which was resolutely ignored.[91] Rodrigo eventually returned to Seville several days later bitter and disgruntled, and from that point forward, Valera indicates, he and the duke

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[88] A 1467 letter written by the infante, Don Alonso, acknowledged that the siege of Gibraltar was conducted at the Duke of Medina Sidonia's "own cost." AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 1, núm. 11 (Toledo, 6 June 1467). See also AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 1, núm. 12 (Córdoba, 3 June 1469).
[89] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 263.
[90] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 78.
[91] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 264.

"remained vicious towards each other, with great disputes, deaths, and damage to come."[92] For the duke, however, the feelings of his adversary mattered very little. Of greater import was that Gibraltar, a city that long tormented him and his ancestors, was now in his command. In fact, once the city was secured, the duke refused to let it pass into royal possession, and instead attached Gibraltar to his own private estates.[93] From his perspective, the conquest was a familial enterprise, prosecuted by his ancestors many decades before, and consummated in the present with his own private army. The city, fittingly, was to remain in his hands.[94]

The actions of the duke at Gibraltar bear close resemblance to those of the Cid at Valencia. In both cases, Juan de Guzmán and Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar mobilized their own personal armies to seize a Muslim-held locale on behalf of themselves (and not the king or Christendom). Their independent actions illustrate how territorial gains made during the reconquest of Spain, at times, were products of private and local initiative. However, this is not altogether surprising. With the Christian kingdoms busily absorbed in other affairs, or occupied fighting against one another, it was semi-autonomous nobles that sometimes stood at the helm of the conquests—planning the strikes, marshaling the troops, directing the assaults, and negotiating the terms of surrender. In return for their actions, they typically won great fame and spoils, arguably none more so than the Cid, whose capture of Valencia earned him "innumerable" treasure in the estimation of one contemporary.[95] Such remarkable exploits established an important precedent for subsequent generations of nobles to follow (such as Alonso de Lugo,

[92] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 83.
[93] Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 115.
[94] After the conquest in 1462, the ducal house retained possession of Gibraltar and managed it on behalf of Castile for the next four decades, that is, until the Catholic Kings seized it in 1501-2. The royal act sparked considerable hostility between the Guzmán family and the monarchy, culminating in a rebellion in 1506 against the crown. For the various privileges awarded to the duke for the capture of Gibraltar, see AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 1, núm. 12 (Córdoba, 3 June 1469); and AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 1, núm. 13 (Madrid, 16 May 1470).
[95] *Historia Roderici*, in Pidal, *La España del Cid*, vol. 2, 957.

Juan de Guzmán, and Hernán Cortés), illustrating the lucrative benefits of conquering cities, islands, or kingdoms with privately raised forces.

While the enterprise at Gibraltar resulted in the capture of a major Muslim fortress, it simultaneously initiated a bitter feud between the two great families of Seville, the Guzmáns and Ponce de Leóns.[96] After returning to Seville, the hostility simmering between the noble lineages did not dissipate, but instead erupted into deadly violence. On 25 July 1471, Valera informs us that: "there was a great uproar between the men of these two lords which lasted for four days, and during which time many men on both sides were killed and wounded, and various segments of the city set on fire, and many houses burned to the ground."[97] The feud was conducted with all the fierceness of a civil war, and sustained through local alliances with the *banderizos* (factions) of neighboring regions, including Muslim frontiersmen.[98] The employment of Muslim allies in this conflict suggests a considerable degree of continuity from the past. Similar to the conquest of Valencia, where Muslim mercenaries fought within the ranks of the Cid, Islamic warriors in the late medieval period continued to offer their services to Christian lords in exchange for pay. The willing collaboration of this group indicates a more fluid and dynamic relationship between frontier Christians and Muslims, who were not constantly in conflict during this epoch but sometimes worked in concert with one another.

As for Rodrigo Ponce de León, while he and his vassals fought valiantly against Enrique de Guzmán, in the end they could not compete with the duke, who not only had a far greater number of retainers at his disposal, but also the support of the *adelantado* (governor) of

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[96] A small glimmer of hope for reconciliation between the two lineages appeared in the late 1460s, when the heads of the houses of Medina Sidonia and Arcos died in 1468 and 1469, respectively. However, the feud between the two lineages showed no signs of fading, and instead passed down to the new heads of the house with a renewed vigor.
[97] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 192.
[98] Carriazo, *En la frontera de Granada* (Sevilla: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, 1971), 216.

Andalusia, Pedro Enríquez.[99] As a result, Rodrigo was forced to flee Seville and seek refuge at Alcalá de Guadaira, a strategic site that controlled the majority of the flour mills supplying the city.[100] Yet during Rodrigo's absence from Seville, the duke's cronies sacked his estates, while the homes of his close friends, supporters, and family members faced similar destruction. Perhaps as many as 1,500 houses belonging to the Ponce de León faction were burned down during this bloody episode, later remembered as the Seville riots.[101]

The series of incidents between the Ponce de León and Guzmán factions reveal, among other things, the immense power that the southern nobility wielded, the full extent of damage they were capable of inflicting on the countryside, and the inability of the monarchy to stymie these dangerous feuds. As we already know from the events at Gibraltar, Christian disunity had the potential to disrupt an entire military operation, but as the Seville riots demonstrated, the very same dissension could lead to outright warfare. The problem with full-scale war between these two lineages in particular was that both sides were immensely powerful. By the mid-fifteenth century, each family possessed dense networks of kinsmen and supporters whom they could summon to the battlefield, and also controlled vast resources for whatever the occasion. This meant that when the two sides went to war, they had the potential to thrust the entire countryside into violent upheaval. Such a massive scale on which both sides could conduct war—and the resultant fallout from such—was by no means a secret, but something recognized by contemporaries. In a letter written to the Dean of the cathedral of Toledo, Fernando de Pulgar remarked how, "our majesty already knows that the Duke of Medina Sidonia along with the Marquis of Cádiz…have the potential to destroy the entire land of Andalusia, and recruit moors

[99] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 193.
[100] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 194.
[101] William H. Prescott, *The History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella the Catholic*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1872), vol. 1, 216.

when some part of it is in trouble."[102] In this excerpt, Pulgar clearly laments the nobles' capacity for destruction, but he also hints at something less obvious: the ineptitude of the monarchy to quell the fierce contests between the aristocrats. Between 1465 and 1474, the crown of Castile was passing through a period of weakness, brought on by internal strife and infighting over succession to the throne. The nobility recognized the disintegration of royal authority during this period and sought to exploit it, carrying out local rebellions or factional disputes in various portions of the realm, including in Vizcaya, Murcia, Toledo, Seville, and Medina del Campo.[103] The bitter feuding between the Ponce de León and Guzmán families was in this sense neither unique nor unusual. Rather, it was emblematic of the larger disruptions and violence that plagued Castile during this period.[104]

Despite a landscape pockmarked by dissent, the Andalusian nobility were not all vehemently pitted against one another. More often than not, the nobles did act in concert with one another, such as relaying information back and forth when Granadan raiders were penetrating some part of the border, or calling upon one another in times of war against Muslim foes. At the end of the day, the southern lords understood that they needed to remain connected to an extent, so as to preserve the delicate balance of power along the frontier. They did not wish to be overrun by the emirate, and if they were not careful, their dissension could very well be their demise. With that said, the nobles of the south frequently possessed their own individual ambitions, and when those interests collided with neighboring Christian lords, they had no problem waging war against one another or enlisting the support of Muslims in the process.

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[102] Fernando del Pulgar, *Letras. Glosa a las coplas de Mingo Revulgo*, ed. Jesús Domínguez Bordona (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1929), 127. Quote cited in Carriazo, *En la frontera de Granada*, 216-17.
[103] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms 1250-1516*, *Volume II: 1410-1516, Castilian Hegemony* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 330-41.
[104] The persistent internal strife led Pulgar to cynically remark that "there is no Castile [not at war]. If there was, there would be war there." *Letras*, ed. Bordona, 131.

Many frontier Christians did not see a contradiction in colluding with Muslims; it had been part of a longstanding pattern of coexistence in the peninsula, embodied by one of the most famous figures in Spanish history, the Cid. And thus, when war erupted in Andalusia in 1482 against the Nasrid kingdom of Granada, it was not readily apparent how the southern lords would respond. Would they come together and act in unity for so important an enterprise, casting aside the petty differences that long thwarted Christian endeavors on the peninsula? Or would they instead continue to subvert one another for personal glory and gain, as so often had been the case in the years leading up to 1482?

Chapter 2. A Noble War: Andalusian Aristocrats in the Conquest of Granada, 1482-1492

In early February of 1482, the illustrious Andalusian noble, Rodrigo Ponce de León, was at his frontier estate in Marchena when one of his *adalides* (guides) rushed in to deliver an important message. The scout, named Juan Ortega de Prado, had just returned from a reconnaissance mission conducted deep within the kingdom of Granada, and reported that the Muslim fortress of Alhama, situated in the heart of the emirate, was lightly garrisoned and vulnerable to an attack.[105] The news must have intrigued the venerable lord. The capture of Alhama would not only deliver a devastating blow to the Muslim emirate but also provide the opportunity to attain rich spoils and other monetary rewards from the Spanish crown. With that said, the feat would not be easy. The fortress of Alhama possessed highly defensible features, as it was perched atop a steep rocky cliff and additionally surrounded by high walls and thick bulwarks. If the nobleman were to capture such a mighty fortress, he would need to do so through a surprise assault. With this intention, Rodrigo acted without delay, gathering thousands of his close friends, relatives, and vassals from various parts of the frontier, and ordering them to equip and assemble themselves before the castle gates. Since the feasibility of the attack hinged entirely on the element of surprise, his men were not informed of the true nature of the enterprise.

With limited instructions, the Andalusian expedition set out across the rugged mountain passes of Alzerifa in the cold winter month of February, marching clandestinely over the difficult terrain, until they at last reached the outskirts of Alhama just hours before dawn. Still cloaked in the darkness of night, Rodrigo Ponce de León ordered his *escaladors* (soldiers employed to scale

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[105] Andrés Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos Don Fernando y Doña Isabel*, 2 vols. (Sevilla: Imprenta D. José María Geofrin Siérpes, 1870), vol. 1, 149.

the walls of fortresses) to climb the enemy ramparts.[106] They were instructed to enter Alhama silently, and to open the gates of the city so as to permit the entry of the rest of the Andalusian militia, who were lying outside the city walls in ambush. When the escaladors reached the top of the walls, they found several Muslim guards sleeping at their posts; these unfortunate men were violently dispatched, though the rest of the Muslim garrison were soon startled from their repose. The somnolent defenders sprang into action and raised alarm to the rest of the city, yet their efforts were largely in vain. The escaladors already succeeded in thrusting open the gates to their fellow countrymen, allowing for Rodrigo and the rest of the Christian militia to flood into the city. The residents of Alhama were unable to repel the invaders, and soon after surrendered the city to the Christians. With this act, the Granada War was said to have commenced.

The capture of Alhama in 1482 was a stunning exploit, chiefly because it was orchestrated not by a royal force, but a local frontier lord—Rodrigo Ponce de León, also known as the Marquis of Cádiz. Despite the Spanish sovereigns' claim that they authorized the attack on the fortress, it was nevertheless this noble who had seized the initiative and captured it, delivering the first successful strike to the kingdom of Granada and sparking the ten-year war.[107] Over the next decade, the Marquis of Cádiz and other southern lords did not disappear from the action, but stayed actively engaged in the war effort.[108] Their support took various forms, such as sending thousands of seigniorial troops to the field of battle each year, commanding the vast

[106] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 150.

[107] A 10 March 1482 letter from the Catholic Monarchs notes that the expedition of the Marquis of Cádiz was authorized "by our command" (por nuestro mandado). Archivo Municipal de Sevilla, Tumbo de los Reyes Católicos, II, fol. 130 v. Noted in Ladero Quesada, *Castilla y la conquista del Reino de Granada* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1967), 20-21, n. 5.

[108] While it is true that the northern nobility made important contributions, too, on the whole, they did not engage fully in the war on the same level as the nobles in the south—except for the few who were made captain general of the frontier, such as the Duke of Alba, Don Fadrique de Toledo. Rather, most of the lords in the north largely sidestepped military service by providing monetary payments to the Catholic Monarchs, or by sending armies led by proxies to the field of battle. Ladero Quesada, *Castilla y la conquista*, 229-31. See also Liang, *Family and Empire*, 66.

majority of campaigns, furnishing generous sums of money to the crown, and serving as key military advisers and strategists.[109] Through their extensive participation in this conflict, southern aristocrats stood to gain a great deal. The war not only presented them with opportunities to earn honor and prestige through combat, but also to secure lucrative rewards such as land, titles, and cash from the monarchs. Perhaps most importantly, it provided nobles with an arena to exercise their traditional power and autonomy, particularly in response to the crown's attempts to limit their authority in the years leading up to the Granada War.

Ever since the union of the Catholic Monarchs in 1469, the Spanish sovereigns made gradual but systematic attempts to curtail the power of the nobility. For a long time, stretching back to the reconquest of greater Andalusia, Castile's reliance on aristocrats to reclaim and safeguard land from the Muslims allowed nobles to accumulate considerable measures of power. The lords of the south wielded particularly notable jurisdiction over local affairs, possessing miniature armies that allowed them to virtually carry out their own private agendas (see chapter 1). Ferdinand and Isabella recognized the threat of a powerful, often unruly aristocracy, and implemented measures in the 1470s and 80s to restrict their authority: castles erected without royal permission were torn down; the most important political offices in Castile were conferred to "new men" of lesser nobility (and not to those of the principal houses); and the Masterships of the three Military-Religious Orders of Castile, long seen as the prerogative of high nobles, reverted to King Ferdinand once they fell vacant (Santiago: 1476, Calatrava: 1487, Alcántara: 1494).[110]

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[109] The southern nobility ranked among the largest purveyors of seigneurial troops over the course of the war, most notably the Count of Cabra, the Marquis of Cádiz, and the Duke of Medina Sidonia. On the number of troops provided by the nobility and other groups by year, see Ladero Quesada, *Castilla y la conquista*, 227-82.
[110] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 84-96.

In this period of growing state consolidation, the centralization of royal authority supposedly diminished the power of the nobility and shunted them to the sidelines.[111] However, few studies have considered the many and diverse ways that Spanish aristocrats resisted the impositions of a centralizing state, and largely maintained their military and political might in the face of tightening monarchical control. This chapter seeks to do precisely that, highlighting the considerable degrees of power, influence, and autonomy that the southern nobility continued to wield over the course of the Granada War. I argue that the aristocracy was not cast aside, weakened, or reduced to royal subordination at this time, but played crucial roles in helping the crown win its critical Peninsular War. Through their willing, extensive participation in this conflict, nobles were able to flex their authority, stay connected to channels of royal power, and pursue their own personal interests. In this way, this chapter aims to move beyond the conventional literature that has emphasized the suppression of aristocratic authority during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, and stands alongside recent scholarship that has shown how nobles in Spain, and indeed across much of Europe, fought vigorously to preserve their power and privileges in the face of increasing royal consolidation.[112]

Despite the noteworthy contributions of the southern nobility to the conquest of Granada, their actions in this war have been largely downplayed in the historiography. For the most part,

[111] Jean H. Mariéjol described the succession of Isabella to the throne as signaling "the end of the feudal aristocracy." Joseph Calmette asserted that nobles at this time were converted into mere courtiers, serving as "décor and tools of the reign." Mariéjol, *L'Espagne sous Ferdinand et Isabelle: Le Gouvernement, Les Institutions Et Les Mouers* (Paris: Librairies-imprimeries réunies, 1892), 278; and Calmette and Eugène Déprez, *Les premières grandes puissances* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1892), 571. Quotes cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 497. See also Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2, 107; and Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 84-96.
[112] Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, ed., *Las redes del imperio: élites sociales en la articulación de la Monarquía Hispánica, 1492–1714* (Madrid: Marcial Pons Historia, 2009); Liang, *Family and Empire*; Charles Lipp and Matthew P. Romaniello, eds., *Contested Spaces of Nobility in Early Modern Europe* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013); Juan Hernández Franco, José A. Guillén Berrendero, and Santiago Martínez Hernández, eds., *Nobilitas. Estudios sobre la nobleza y lo nobiliario en la Europa Moderna* (Madrid: Doce Calles, 2014); and Carmen Sanz Ayán, "Spaces of Power of the Spanish Nobility (1480–1715): Introduction," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 43, no. 4 (2020): 9-18.

traditional histories of the Granada War tend to present this conflict as a monarchical achievement, one in which Castile's victory owed principally to the actions and impulses of the Catholic kings, Ferdinand and Isabella.[113] This view stretches as far back as the late fifteenth century, when court historians and royal chroniclers narrating the war, such as Fernando del Pulgar, depicted the sovereigns as the principal agents in leading the charge against the Islamic emirate.[114] Since then, the emphasis on the significance of the monarchs has persisted in the historiography, with historians to this day underscoring the importance of Ferdinand and Isabella in uprooting the last Muslim kingdom from Iberia.[115] While this interpretation cannot be readily dismissed, for the sovereigns did play crucial roles in the conflict, the longstanding focus on the crown has veiled the contributions of other important figures in the war, particularly the Andalusian nobility.[116] This chapter aims to reclaim the services of this group in every major phase of the conquest, from the very first moments of the struggle in 1482 until its conclusion a decade later. I seek to demonstrate how Castile's success at Granada depended primarily on the efforts of the Andalusian noble class, whose private ambitions, immense resources, and frontier knowledge made them, and not the crown, the main drivers of this struggle.

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[113] Prescott, *History of the Reign*, see vols. 1-2 on the Granada War; Walsh, *Isabel of Spain*; Liss, *Isabel the Queen*; and O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West: Castile and the Conquest of Granada (The Middle Ages Series)* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

[114] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Señores Reyes Católicos Don Fernando y Doña Isabel de Castilla y de Aragon* (Valencia: Impresa de Benito Monfort, 1780), 180: "The King and Queen…knowing that no war should be started, except for the faith and for security, always had it in mind to conquer the kingdom of Granada, and to expel from Spain the dominion of the Moors and the name of Muhammad." See also Alonso de Palencia, *Guerra de Granada*, trans. Antonio Paz y Meliá (Barcelona: Linkgua, 2006), 12, 22. This interpretation was later reinforced by Prescott and Walsh. See Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 484; and Walsh, *Isabella of Spain*, 174-76.

[115] In her study of Queen Isabella, Peggy Liss dedicated two chapters to the conquest of Granada, both of which are titled "The Queen's War." She additionally noted of the conquest that "it was, from the outset, Isabel's war." Liss, *Isabel the Queen*, 216. See also Fletcher, *Moorish Spain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 165-166; and O'Callaghan, *The Last Crusade in the West*, 122-96.

[116] This point was made quite clearly by Hillgarth, who remarked how, "in the past the incense burnt before the Catholic Monarchs has often obscured, however, the figures of the Andalusian leaders to whom victory was largely due." Admittedly, scholars in recent years have made greater strides in uncovering some of those feats, though the full extent of noble participation in this war has not been adequately explored. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 374. See Liang, *Family and Empire*.

What bestowed this group of aristocrats with such pivotal importance, among other things, was the frontier experience that they acquired in their homeland of Andalusia. For many decades, the nobles of the south accumulated a rich repository of skills and expertise that they would channel into the struggle against Granada.[117] This not only included topographical knowledge of their environmental surroundings, but also other valuable skills such as a cultural understanding of the customs and practices of their Muslim "enemies." Many years of near constant interaction with Muslims along the frontier instilled in southern nobles a deep understanding of the traditions, beliefs, values, and language of their neighbors across the religious divide. It was for this reason that when the time came to negotiate terms with the various hamlets and cities that comprised the kingdom of Granada, it was frequently the Andalusian nobles who were put in charge of the task, being the ones who best knew how to interact and strike arrangements with their Muslim neighbors. By highlighting the different types of frontier skills that nobles acquired in Andalusia and then transmitted to the Granada War, this chapter will build on a robust historiography that has analyzed the ways in which frontier spaces in Iberia molded identity, influenced decision-making, or impacted the development of Spanish society more broadly.[118]

Furthermore, this chapter in many ways aims to serve as an origin story for this group of aristocrats. Following the destruction of the Islamic emirate in 1492, many of the nobles presented here or their immediate descendants refused to retire to their southern estates, and

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[117] For a broad, comprehensive study on the high nobles of Andalusia between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Ladero Quesada, *Los señores de Andalucía*.

[118] MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages*; Manuel González Jiménez, "Frontier and Settlement in the Kingdom of Castile (1085–1350)," in *Medieval Frontier Societies*, eds. Robert Bartlett and Mackay (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1989), 49-74; Teófilo F. Ruiz, "Fronteras: de la comunidad a la nación en la Castilla bajomedieval," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 27, no. 1 (1997): 23-41; Carlos de Ayala Martínez, Pascal Buresi and Philippe Josserand, eds., *Identidad y representación de la frontera en la España medieval, siglos XI–XIV* (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2001); and Enrique Rodríguez-Picavea, "The Frontier and Royal Power in Medieval Spain: A Developmental Hypothesis," *The Medieval History Journal* 8, no. 2 (2005): 273-301.

enlisted in new imperial enterprises opening up in different parts of the empire. Between 1494 and 1505, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the future *Gran Capitán* ("Great Captain"), served as the leading Spanish commander in the First and Second Italian Wars, and devised revolutionary military tactics that foiled the plans of some of the most astute military minds of Europe. Juan de Guzmán, the third Duke of Medina Sidonia, financed a private army in 1497 that conquered the North African coastal city of Melilla, thereby initiating Spanish expansion into the Maghrib. His southern neighbor, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, known as the *Alcaide de los Donceles* ("Captain of the Royal Pages"), later added to those North African gains, helping conquer Mers-el-Kebir in 1505, Oran in 1509, and Navarre in 1512.[119] Through their participation in new imperial ventures, this group of nobles uprooted themselves from their local origins and went on to become truly global figures, playing key roles in the expansion of the imperial polity in other regions of the empire (see chapter 5). Their collective trajectories illuminate how aristocrats continued to make significant contributions to the emerging nation-state well after the fall of Granada.

To reconstruct the histories of certain nobles in this war, this chapter relies on the accounts of the principal Christian chroniclers of the period, chiefly Fernando del Pulgar, Andrés Bernáldez, Medina, and the so-called Anonymous Author.[120] Bernáldez in particular remains one of the definitive voices on the conquest. The chronicler served as chaplain to Diego de Deza (the archbishop of Seville) and was made curate of Los Palacios y Villafranca in the province of Seville. Because Bernáldez resided in Andalusia while the war was being prosecuted, he was not

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[119] The Donceles were young men who served as pages in the royal household, but also formed an elite corps in the army.
[120] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*; Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*; Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39; and Anonymous Author, *Historia de los hechos de Rodrigo Ponce de León, marqués de Cádiz (1443-1488)* in *CODOIN*, vol. 106 (Madrid: Imprenta de José Perales y Martínez, 1893).

only immersed in the military action, but also had connections to some of the most distinguished men-at-arms, including the Marquis of Cádiz. Pulgar, on the other hand, was appointed royal historiographer of Castile in 1482, and is similarly considered to be one of the most valuable narrators on the Granada War. During the conquest, Pulgar accompanied Isabella on her numerous trips into Muslim territory, and would have witnessed personally or had direct accounts of many of the battles and events that materialized. As the official court historian, he also had access to copious documents and reliable sources of information surrounding the war, making his account far more precise than any of the other chroniclers.[121] With that said, because his chronicle was dedicated to Isabella and Ferdinand—and presumably revised under their supervision—his account would have omitted any sort of critique of the Catholic Monarchs and their decision making. His account is therefore contrasted alongside the other chroniclers (Bernáldez, the Anonymous Author, Medina) to enhance the veracity of the events.

This chapter balances these chronicles alongside an array of archival documents housed in the Archivo General de Simancas in Valladolid, the Biblioteca Nacional de España in Madrid, and the Archivo General de la Fundación Casa Medina Sidonia in Cádiz. This corpus includes letters, reports, testaments, privileges, and military correspondence between certain aristocrats and the Spanish sovereigns. Of the documents produced by the nobles, the majority were directed to the crown in hopes of receiving rewards and honors for their services. For this reason, the nobles often employed appealing rhetoric aimed at appeasing the Spanish sovereigns, such as framing their actions in terms of serving God or the broader interests of the monarchy. They also tend to conceal the other personal factors that motivated them to participate in this conflict,

[121] See Miguel Ángel Pérez Priego, "Caballeros y prelados biografiados por Fernando de Pulgar," in *La Literatura en la época de los Reyes Católicos*, eds. Cristina Moya García and Nicasio Salvador Miguel (Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra, 2008): 207-27, 210.

including the desire to attain glory, honor, or material rewards for themselves. Notwithstanding these limitations, these sources still illuminate matters not discussed in the chronicles, such as specific military instructions given to the nobles, or the particular rewards and privileges that they won for their services. When read alongside the other sources, they help to fill in the gaps in the historical record, as well as corroborate or clarify various claims put forth.

Finally, it is necessary to note that there are few Muslim accounts of the conquest published, and those that are appear in Arabic. A notable exception is the Arabic source known as the *Nubdha*, of which many segments are translated into Spanish and published in Carlos Quirós's, *Fragmento de la época sobre noticias de los Reyes Nazaritas*.[122] The *Nubdha* is used primarily to balance the Christian-authored documents and to provide a Muslim interpretation of events whenever possible.

Noble Pursuits and the Spark of the Granada War

In the years leading up to the war, the relations between the Castilian monarchy and the kingdom of Granada were relatively cordial. Since the reign of Fernando III (1217-52), Granada was more or less perceived as a tribute-paying vassal kingdom, and for centuries the rulers of Castile elected to profit from the flow of taxed goods that funneled in from the emirate, allowing for the transfer of valuable commodities such as silk, sugar, and African gold that enriched the crown without the need to expend resources on its conquest. The newly proclaimed rulers of Castile, Ferdinand and Isabella, largely continued this policy, renewing truces with Granada in 1475, 1476, and 1478; although it is also true that their involvement in a Christian civil war,

[122] *Nubdha—Kitāh nubdhat al-asr fī akhbār mulūk Banī Nasr* (hereafter *Nubdha*), trans. Carlos Quirós, ed. Alfredo Bustani, *Fragmento de la época sobre noticias de los Reyes Nazaritas* (Larache: Instituto General Franco para la Investigación Hispano-Árabe, 1940).

known as the War of Castilian Succession (1474-79), prevented them from paying any serious heed to the emirate.[123] For Granada, too, the pacts with Castile were equally advantageous. Over the past several decades, the emirate was in a state of near constant civil war, with outbreaks of violence escalating between its rival ruling families. As political strife beset the emirate, the economy was steadily declining, while taxes continued to be levied at a high rate to support Granada's frontier defenses and a large army.[124] Confronted with a string of internal issues, the emir of Granada, Abū'l-Ḥasan Alī (1464-85), had little time to concentrate on his powerful Christian neighbors to the north, and readily agreed to truces with Castile in the late 1470s. However, relations with Castile broke down in December of 1481, when Abū'l-Ḥasan launched a surprise attack against the frontier city of Zahara in southern Spain and captured it from the Christians.[125]

While Abū'l-Ḥasan's assault was not necessarily atypical of frontier engagements during periods of armistice, it nevertheless triggered a profound reaction from the Andalusian nobles, who perceived it to have violated the truce of 1478. Now with proper pretext, the nobles in the south sought to capitalize on the incident by launching their very own attack against one of the emirate's most prized possessions, the city of Alhama. The dramatic storming of this Muslim fortress (described in the opening pages of this chapter) was a significant exploit. Carried out by

[123] The War of Castilian Succession began after the death of King Enrique IV in 1474, during which time his younger sister, Isabella, declared herself successor to the Castilian throne, disputing the claims of the Portuguese claimant, Juana "la Beltraneja," the daughter of the former king. The discord sparked a civil war in Castile that lasted for five years, and ultimately resulted in a treaty that recognized Isabella as sovereign of Castile. For a succinct account of this conflict, see Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 354-63.
[124] It has been estimated that the subjects of the Muslim emirate were taxed nearly three times higher than their Castilian counterparts. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 368.
[125] The Marquis of Cádiz later recaptured Zahara on 29 October 1483. In return for his services, he received the honorific title Marquis of Zahara. See Archivo Histórico de la Nobleza, Pasa A Osuna, CP. 83, D. 2-3 (Córdoba, 16 August 1484).

the Marquis of Cádiz and other southern lords, the capture of Alhama not only signaled the commencement of the Granada War, but also delivered its first successful blow.[126]

At the time that the attack on Alhama was orchestrated, the Marquis of Cádiz was thirty-nine years old and boasted over two decades of experience in frontier warfare. His most memorable frontier bouts arguably came at the battles of Gibraltar (1462), Cardela (1472), and Ortejícar (1478), where he helped procure those Muslim-held localities on behalf of Castile.[127] Aside from earning him honor and distinction, these engagements provided the southern lord with a training ground to sharpen his martial acumen, preparing him for the rigors of war that he would later encounter at Granada. Moreover, as one of the richest lords in the south at the time, Rodrigo held vast possessions in the most fertile regions of Andalusia. This included numerous towns, villages, and seaports that he presided over, as well as large numbers of vassals and retainers that he could mobilize to defend those properties.

Because Rodrigo's estates lined the frontier and were subject to sudden incursions, he always had enlisted in his service a number of spies and adalides, some of them converted Muslims who were forced to swear an oath to protect the realm. In the most limited sense, adalides guided troops safely through difficult or unfamiliar terrain, but they also knew the best places to establish lookouts, as well as the most secure places to station the troops. It was oftentimes this group that went out in front to lead the company, incurring much of the risk if

[126] On the role of various Andalusian towns in the conquest of Granada, see Manuel González Jiménez, "La guerra en su vertiente andaluza: Participación de las ciudades, villas y señoríos andaluces," in *La incorporación de Granada a la Corona de Castilla*, ed. Ladero Quesada (Granada: Disputación Provincial de Granada, 1993): 651-74.
[127] In a 1483 letter written by the Marquis of Cádiz to his nephew, Juan de Pineda, the noble describes some of his most important services to the crown, chiefly his participation in various military battles in Andalusia. The letter was intended to support Rodrigo Ponce de León's claim to receive as a reward (merced) the city of Zahara, which he recaptured on 29 October 1483. See AGS, Guerra, leg. 1, fol. 150. The letter is also published in Ladero Quesada, *Los mudéjares de Castilla en tiempos de Isabel I* (Valladolid: Instituto "Isabel la Católica" de Historia Eclesiástica, 1969), doc. 7, 94-97.

there was an ambush waiting on the path ahead.[128] Spies, too, played equally critical roles, issuing reports that revealed crucial information about enemy whereabouts, organization, and the status of its garrison. Such was the case in early 1482, when one of Rodrigo's spies approached him in his town of Marchena, and reported that the Muslim fortress of Alhama was poorly guarded and might be taken by surprise.

The opportunity to assault Alhama would have been an exciting prospect for the Marquis of Cádiz. As the base from which the Nasrid dynasty collected its tribute and taxes, Alhama was one of the wealthiest cities in the emirate, with annual rents amounting to some 500,000 ducados (gold coins).[129] If captured, Rodrigo could acquire rich spoils and honor through chivalric combat, something that long appealed to noble knights of his stature. Second, the attack would be the perfect form of retribution for Abū'l-Ḥasan's recent strike on Zahara, a small Christian town located a few miles east of Rodrigo's estates in Cádiz. Given that Zahara practically lay in his backyard, the loss of this locality seemed almost a personal affront to the Marquis of Cádiz, who long prided himself as a champion of Christianity and protector of the frontier.

Third, and something oftentimes overlooked, was that the taking of the Muslim fortress could provide Rodrigo with the perfect chance to regain favor with the crown. In the years leading up to the Granada War, the Marquis of Cádiz was not on particularly good terms with the Catholic Monarchs. During the War of Castilian Succession, Rodrigo was among those to support the cause of the rival claimant, Juana "la Beltraneja," against Isabella. However, after the death of Rodrigo's powerful father-in-law, Juan Pacheco (the Marquis of Villena), as well as Juana's father, king Enrique IV, Rodrigo was left devoid of any powerful allies. Sensing a change

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[128] The Christian chroniclers make repeated reference to this group going out in the front of the company. For instance, Bernáldez notes of a 1483 campaign how "accompanying the lords in the front were the adalides…" *Historia*, vol. 1, 128.

[129] Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 415.

in the wind, he appeared before the Catholic Monarchs in 1476 to implore them for forgiveness and affirm his loyalty to the sovereigns. The monarchs pardoned the Marquis of Cádiz, though his past transgressions and dubious allegiances would not be easily forgotten. With this in mind, did Rodrigo perhaps perceive the capture of Alhama to be a way of demonstrating his allegiance to the crown, and otherwise wipe the slate clean for his former implication in the royal rebellion? Similarly, did he believe that the conquest might provide him with a chance to prove his indispensability to the crown, and to thus stay anchored to royal power? More than likely, it was a combination of these above factors—local reprisal, material rewards, spiritual service, indelible glory, and royal favor—that weighed on the mind of the Marquis of Cádiz, ultimately convincing him of the need to orchestrate this assault.

After gathering men and resources from various parts of the frontier, Rodrigo set out for Alhama in secret with a contingent of some 2,500 horse and 3,000 foot.[130] Under the cover of darkness, the Andalusian military force approached the city in silence, and quickly took control of the citadel after its gates had been thrust open.[131] The sacking of the city was said to have been immense, with vast quantities of gold and silver seized, along with expensive clothing, furniture, jewels, pearls, silks, horses, grain, honey, and oil. Nevertheless, the Christian victory could not be celebrated for long. Because Alhama lay in the heart of the Islamic emirate, it was not long before Muslim couriers delivered a message to Abū'l-Ḥasan that the fortress was lost. With Granadan reinforcements likely on the way, what was to be the Andalusians' next move? While some proposed to sack the citadel, making off with the spoils and retreating to Seville, the

[130] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 149. Pulgar notes that there were 3,000 horse and 4,000 foot. *Crónica*, 181. Given their past differences, Rodrigo's powerful Sevillian neighbor, Juan de Guzmán, was excluded from the summons.
[131] According to Bernáldez, some 800 Muslims were killed in the action, while an additional 3,000 men and women had been taken prisoner. *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 151.

Marquis of Cádiz supposedly rejected such terms, pleading with his men to stay inside the city and take possession of it.[132] For the common man, the spoils of Alhama would have been sufficient reward, but for a distinguished noble like Rodrigo Ponce de León, capturing and holding the fortress provided the opportunity to attain additional honors, distinctions, rewards, and glory. It was perhaps for these reasons that the Marquis of Cádiz ultimately elected to remain in the city, though his decision would put his men in extreme peril.

Once Abū'l-Ḥasan received word of Alhama's surrender, he mobilized a remarkable number of troops, some 80,000 foot and 5,500 horse, and instructed them to retake the city.[133] When the Muslim army arrived at Alhama, the Christian forces lined the walls of the fortress so as to coordinate a defense, knowing that if their breaches were broken they stood little chance of withstanding the enemy. In the meantime, the Marquis of Cádiz dispatched last-ditch envoys to solicit assistance from the Andalusian countryside, as well as from the king and queen who were holding court in Medina del Campo (Valladolid) some 350 miles away.

With time of the essence, the only ones truly capable of coming to Rodrigo's rescue were fellow frontier lords, whose close proximity to the border meant that they could rapidly assemble forces and rush to his relief. King Ferdinand recognized this, and personally appealed to the Duke of Medina Sidonia, then one of the most powerful lords in the south of Spain, for aid: "In order to relieve the city of Alhama," declared the king, "I beg and order you to send me all of the men that you can muster."[134] While Ferdinand's words certainly carry a sense of authority, his willingness to use the verb "*rogar*" (to beg) suggests that there was some degree of negotiation.

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[132] Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 420.
[133] Bernáldez notes 80,000 foot and 5,500 horse. The Anonymous Author cites 7,000 horse and 100,000 foot. Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 152; and Anonymous Author, *Historia de los hechos de Rodrigo Ponce de León,* in *CODOIN*, vol. 106, 203.
[134] ADMS, leg. 2396, "Carta del Rey al Duque" (14 April 1482): "yo vos ruego e en cargo que luego me envieus la dicha gente e mas toda la otra que pudiesen."

The crown had not yet succeeded in bringing its nobles under its tight control, even in spite of systematic efforts in recent years to curtail their power and ensure greater allegiance to the monarchy. Ferdinand's inclination to beg the duke for assistance indicates both his dependence on Enrique de Guzmán (and his nobles more broadly) to consolidate this crucial conquest, as well as his potential concern that the duke might ignore his mandates. Indeed, from the perspective of the king, there was no guarantee that Enrique would comply with his request. The duke was a powerful, intractable man, known for disobeying or ignoring the crown's wishes when they conflicted with his own personal interests. In addition, Enrique and Rodrigo Ponce de León were deadly foes with a lengthy history of bloody feuds, most notably the Seville riots, which ravaged the Andalusian countryside in 1471. Given these past differences, how would the duke react upon seeing a royal letter soliciting aid for his longtime adversary, the Marquis of Cádiz? On this occasion, honor, glory, and service to God bested pettiness.

Enrique de Guzmán immediately wrote back a letter vowing to raise all the forces that he could to rescue the Marquis of Cádiz from peril. He followed this up with several trips throughout Andalusia, gathering many men, horses, armor, and provisions, and offering all those who participated a generous pay ("*sueldo grande*").[135] Within a few short weeks, he and the other lords in the south raised an astonishing force, some 10,000 horse and 35,000 infantry, all of whom were paid directly from their private coffers. The ability to summon such a massive war party reflected the enormous power and wealth of the southern nobility, who were capable of fielding an army at a moment's notice. But it also revealed the dense interpersonal connections

[135] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 300. Among those to join his relief were people from the nearby cities of Seville, Córdoba, Jerez, Écija, and Carmona, as well as men from the highest echelons of Spanish society. This included Don Rodrigo Girón (Master of the Military and Religious Order of Calatrava), Alonso de Aguilar (head of the house of Aguilar and Priego), and Diego Fernández de Córdoba (the Count of Cabra).

that they held to those in the countryside. In less than one month, these nobles were able to draw upon vast numbers of vassals, friends, retainers, and relatives, and ultimately convince them to prosecute such a risky enterprise. At a time when royal consolidation was said to have weakened the power of the aristocracy, the mustering of this massive army indicates that the Andalusian nobility was still immensely powerful and a force to be reckoned with.

Autonomy, Reconciliation, and the Consolidation of Alhama

As Enrique de Guzmán and his forces set out toward Alhama in early March of 1482, King Ferdinand in the meantime raced southward to rendezvous with the Andalusian militia.[136] But when the king arrived within the outskirts of Córdoba, the Duke of Albuquerque apparently admonished him about rushing into enemy territory without greater protection. According to Pulgar, Ferdinand heeded the duke's warning, and dispatched a letter to Enrique ordering that he withhold his approach until reinforcements arrived.[137] Nonetheless, neither Enrique, nor any other aristocrats in his party felt an inclination to pause their journey. Enrique sent back couriers informing the king that they had penetrated deep into enemy territory, and that pausing or withdrawing would pose too great a risk. Enrique thereafter proceeded with his forces toward Alhama, much to the frustration of Ferdinand who sought to direct the relief himself.[138] What

[136] Anonymous Author, *Historia de los hechos de Rodrigo Ponce de León*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 106, 205. Just prior to departure, the duke thought it best to draw up a will at his estate in Sanlucár de Barrameda, indicating that he was aware of the dangers of the mission, and the potential that he might perish on it: "I, don Enrique de Guzmán, duke of the city of Medina Sidonia, count of Niebla, lord of the noble city of Gibraltar, will go with the help of Our Lord to relieve the knights and other men trapped inside Alhama, besieged by the king of Granada…I will carry out this relief or die trying, in the service of Our Lord, the Holy Catholic Faith, and the king and queen, my lords." Testament of the Duke, ADMS, leg. 929 (Sanlucár de Barrameda, 13 March 1482). The testament is also published in Laureano Rodríguez Liañez and Ana Maria y Anasagasti Valderrama, "Niebla, Huelva y Gibraleón en las hermandades concejiles en la Baja Edad Media," *Hespérides* 7 (1989), doc. 405, 137-166.
[137] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 183.
[138] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 183; and Ladero Quesada, *Castilla y la conquista*, 22.

this incident reveals, among other things, is the continued autonomy of the aristocracy, as well as the inability of the crown to ensure their obedience. Whether or not Enrique's concerns about being too deep in the heart of Granada were valid (which they seemingly were), he still had the power and authority to ignore the king's mandates. His defiance of royal orders indicates how Spanish aristocrats, far from docile subjects, continued to act in accordance with their own personal interests or convictions, even if it meant subverting the crown's own authority.

With Abū'l-Ḥasan's army poised to recapture Alhama, it was the Duke of Medina Sidonia that ultimately consolidated this triumph for Castile. Once Abū'l-Ḥasan's informants reported that Enrique de Guzmán and tens of thousands of Andalusian troops were marching toward Alhama, the Muslim ruler must have thought twice about continuing a sustained siege. He soon dismantled his army and departed for Granada.[139] Upon witnessing the withdrawal of the Muslim army, cries of exultation burst forth from the Christian militia within Alhama, while the great orchestrator of the conquest, the Marquis of Cádiz, exited the city to thank the Andalusian relief.[140] To many present at the scene, it must have been uncertain how Rodrigo Ponce de León would embrace Enrique de Guzmán, given the lengthy history of feuds between the two rivals. According to Pedro Medina, Rodrigo initiated the first words in the exchange: "Sir [duke], today you put an end to all of our quarrels…and freed me from the cruel agendas of our past." To which the duke solemnly replied: "Lord Marquis, regardless of enmity or friendship, I will always be at the service of God, and do what I owe to my honor and integrity."[141] With this terse exchange, and the city of Alhama secured, the Marquis of Cádiz returned to his town of Marchena and threw a sumptuous banquet in honor of his new friend, Enrique de Guzmán, as

[139] Abū'l-Ḥasan had other good reason to abandon the siege, including word of a rebellion fomenting against him in Granada. Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 274.
[140] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 301-2.
[141] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 302.

well as all those who accompanied him in the relief of Alhama. After much merriment and festivities, and when it was time for the duke to return to his estate, the Anonymous Author described the embrace of the two former foes: "[When] the duke left for his village of Sanlúcar, the Marquis went with him more than a league, and there they embraced, passing between them some secrets, and with great pleasure they bid each other farewell."[142] From that moment on, adds Pedro Medina, the ex-rivals "made peace and stayed in good friendship."[143]

The significance of the reconciliation of the two illustrious nobles, and more broadly the capture of Alhama, could not be understated. In former reigns, the feuding between the two potent lords meant that they could rarely be brought together for any length of time, and if this feat was somehow managed, the slightest hint of jealousy on either side had the potential to fracture the Christian camp and jeopardize the success of the entire campaign. The ending of so epic a feud, and one that had desolated Seville for decades, could very well ensure the success of future enterprises. And yet, the capture of Alhama had far more significant ramifications than the mere coming together of two ancient foes. Although small in size, Alhama was widely considered one of the most formidable fortresses in the emirate, possessing thick walls and natural defenses that rendered it virtually unassailable. Only through a surprise assault did it fall to the Andalusians, whose clandestine movement through the mountain passes caught the Muslim garrison off-guard. Further, because Alhama lay in the very heart of the Muslim emirate, it held enormous geo-strategic importance for the Castilians. If properly fortified, Alhama could serve as a locus from which the Christians could launch attacks against neighboring locales,

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[142] Anonymous Author, *Historia de los hechos de Rodrigo Ponce de León*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 106, 207.
[143] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 302.

whereby further dismembering the constituent pieces of the emirate. It was for these reasons, among others, that Alhama was regarded as "the key of the enemy's country."[144]

If we accept the significance of the capture of Alhama, then we must also credit the Andalusian nobles in seizing it. Even though the Catholic Monarchs sanctioned the strike on Alhama, it was nevertheless the Marquis of Cádiz and his men, not a royal force, that led the charge and captured the Muslim fortress. The feat owed in no small measure to the careful planning of its leader, Rodrigo Ponce de León, who as a longtime resident of the southern borderlands possessed unrivaled knowledge of the land: knowing the best routes to take, the time needed to traverse those distances, and the safest places to lodge his troops so that they could remain undetected in the mountain passes. Only a local lord with decades of frontier experience, guided by his trusted adalides, would be capable of pulling off such a clandestine operation. By contrast, royal forces mobilized from the northern districts of Castile would have aroused suspicion of an attack and eliminated the possibility of a surprise assault. It was the independent actions of the Marquis of Cádiz that thus secured the all-important fortress of Alhama, paving the way for the eventual conquest of the entire emirate.

Frontier Lords and the Capture of Boabdil

Following the Andalusians' significant exploit at Alhama, the Catholic Monarchs sought to capitalize on the victory by assaulting Loja, a geo-strategic city located on the road to Alhama. Despite sending ahead their best warriors to spearhead the attack, including the now famous Marquis of Cádiz, the Castilians were handed a resounding defeat on 15 July 1482. While devastating for the Christians, the loss would quickly be offset, namely by an internal revolt

[144] Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 432.

brewing within the city of Granada. In fact, the very same day that Abū'l-Ḥasan achieved victory at Loja, his son, Boabdil (Muḥammad XII), launched a rebellion against him within the city of Granada. Through a series of bloody street fights, Boabdil and his factional supporters seized control of the capital, forcing Abū'l-Ḥasan to seek asylum in Málaga.[145] The Castilians, aware of the civil strife, attempted to exploit it. They launched an incursion in March of 1483 into the rugged hinterland east of Málaga, known as the Ajarquía. But here, the Christians suffered a more disastrous defeat than at Loja, losing as many as 1,800 men in the mountain campaign.[146] With Castilian morale low in the early months of 1483, it would be the actions of two southern lords, the Count of Cabra and the Lord of Lucena (both members of the Fernández de Córdoba lineage), that completely turned the tide of war.[147]

In April of 1483, one month after events in the Ajarquía, Boabdil launched an ill-advised raid deep into Christian territory behind Loja and Rute. The emir suspected the frontier to be diminished of warriors following the recent Castilian defeat, and intended to deliver yet another blow to the Christians' morale. Yet, as soon as his army crossed into Christian territory, word reached the Lord of Lucena, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, that Granadine forces were approaching his estates.[148] The noble acted without delay, ordering the beacons on the mountains

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[145] With the insurrection successful, the kingdom of Granada splintered into two autonomous fighting zones, with Ronda and Málaga to the east (controlled by Abū'l-Ḥasan), and Granada and Almería to the west (ruled by Boabdil). From these territories, the rival Muslim kings continued to wage reckless war on one another in the vicinity of Granada.

[146] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 167. The Arabic source claims that 2,000 Christians were transferred to the prisons in Málaga. Pulgar further adds that "the Christians lost all the weapons they brought and the majority of horses…the military governors of Antequera and Moron were taken prisoner…along with many of the other distinguished cavaliers." *Nubdha*, 12; and Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 207.

[147] There were four houses of the Fernández de Córdoba lineage: Aguilar and Cabra, and their cousins, the Comares and Alcaudete. The noble lineage first rose to power in the south through their participation in the reconquest of Andalusia, earning honorific titles and landed estates from the crown in recognition for their services. After relocating to the south, the noble family would play a major role in the political and martial life of medieval Andalusia, serving as local magistrates and town officials in Córdoba, and also defending the numerous frontier towns that lay in their jurisdiction. By the late fifteenth century, the Fernández de Córdoba lineage ranked among the most powerful families in the south of Spain. Liang, *Family and Empire*, 26-53.

[148] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 207; and Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 171.

of Horquera to be lit, indicating to the other lords in the densely seigniorial region that a Muslim force was penetrating the frontier. Diego's uncle, the Count of Cabra, was residing in his town of Baena when he received word of his nephew's imminent danger. The Count of Cabra moved quickly to assemble his own men, sounding trumpets throughout the town to summon his numerous bands of vassals and retainers. But when he reached Lucena the next morning, he found Boabdil had already assaulted the town and retreated to the frontier, together with a large train of spoils and captives. Desirous for revenge, Diego and his uncle mobilized a miniature army of friends and vassals, and set out towards the Sierra de Rute to catch up with Boabdil's forces.[149] After locating his army in one of the surrounding valleys, the Andalusian militia inflicted heavy damage to the Muslims, killing or capturing all 700 cavalrymen.[150] Among those taken prisoner in the fray was the emir himself, Boabdil, who was subsequently transferred to Diego's castle at Lucena and placed in detention. In the meantime, the Andalusians proceeded to recover all that had been stolen from them in the raid, including Christian prisoners and weapons, rich treasures (silks, gold, silver, horses), and numerous Muslim hostages, some belonging to the most noble lineages of Granada.[151]

A Political Captive: The Significance of Boabdil's Imprisonment

For the Castilians, the triumph at Lucena decisively shifted the course of the war. After suffering consecutive defeats at Loja and the Ajarquía, the recent Christian victory not only provided a major morale boost, but also dealt a crippling blow to the Islamic emirate. Among those lost on the Muslim side were some of Granada's most important military advisers and

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[149] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 208.
[150] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 172.
[151] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 173.

commanders, including Ibrāhīm b. Kumāsha, Boabdil's vizier (chief counselor), and Alī al-Aṭṭār," the governor of Loja and father-in-law of Boabdil.[152] While the loss of these captains certainly crippled the Granadans' high command, it was arguably the death of countless other Muslim warriors that more deeply afflicted Granada's defenses.[153] Nearly the entire Muslim cavalry was either captured or killed in the action, while the infantry also suffered heavy losses. The Master of Santiago, Alonso de Cárdenas, affirmed the devastation of the Muslim army, noting to the Castilian royal council shortly after the incident how the Muslims "are now diminished of trained soldiers, weapons and horses from the defeat they suffered."[154] The chronicler Pulgar concurred, adding in a later letter how "the enemy are so weak, famished, divided, and fallen, that it is thought that they may soon be overthrown."[155] And yet, the biggest ramification of the battle was not that it contributed to the loss of so many distinguished Muslim warriors, or that it helped offset the devastating defeat in the Ajarquía, but rather that it culminated in the capture of Boabdil. According to various scholars, the imprisonment of the Muslim king was believed to have led to the direct unraveling of the emirate, as the Catholic Monarchs would eventually use him as a political tool with which to further exploit the internal divisions afflicting the Nasrid ruling dynasty. One seventeenth-century observer, Alonso de Comarca, noted this point exactly, asserting how with the capture of the Muslim king, "the Catholic Kings afterwards won the entire kingdom of Granada." The Arabic source, too,

[152] Alī al-Aṭṭār in particular was one of the most distinguished commanders in all of Granada. Carriazo referred to him as "the best spear in his [Boabdil's] army," while Harvey described him as "the hero of the defense of Loja." Carriazo, *En la frontera de Granada*, 331; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 278.
[153] Bernáldez claims that 700 mounted troops and 7,000 foot soldiers were either killed or captured in the rout. Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 172.
[154] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 215.
[155] Pulgar, *Letras*, ed. Bordona, 142. As cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 381-82.

attributed the imprisonment of Boabdil to the downfall of the emirate, referring to his capture as "a shameful disaster…because from that stemmed the ruin of our homeland."[156]

Given the significance of the Castilian victory at Lucena, we must acknowledge the importance of the Córdoban nobles in orchestrating it. Whether in pursuit of revenge, honor, or glory, the Count of Cabra and the Lord of Lucena acted upon their own private interests to apprehend the Muslim emir, chasing him across the frontier and vanquishing his army without a trickle of royal support. Only local lords of their prestige and stature, and ones with dense local bonds to the community, could have gathered enough men in such short time to succeed in this endeavor. The Spanish sovereigns did not fail to recognize the significance of the act. In a royal letter penned to the Lord of Lucena on 20 November 1483, the monarchs expressed their immense gratitude to the aristocrat: "[We] thank you, Diego Fernández de Córdoba…for the many good and loyal services that you have done for us, especially the imprisonment of the King of Granada, who you and the Count of Cabra captured in battle and handed over to me in the city of Córdoba. Because of this, your services will remain in memory."[157] In further recognition of this feat, Diego received a *juro* (perpetual bond) of 150,000 maravedíes annually; a second juro of 100,000 maravedíes for life; and the privilege of passing along his military title, Alcaide de los Donceles, to his descendants forever.[158] The Count of Cabra received an even more remarkable

[156] Comarca, "Información sobre el privilegio…al Alcaide de los Donceles" [1616], BNE, MSS/18642/21; and *Nubdha*, 12 (quote cited in Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 278). See also José Antonio Conde, *Historia de la dominación de los árabes en España*, 3 vols. (Madrid: Marín y Compañía, 1874), vol. 3, 313; Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 307; and Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 47.

[157] AGS, Registro General del Sello, leg. 148311, 3: "…por hacer bien y merced a vos don Diego Fernández de Córdoba, alcalde de los donceles, del nuestro Consejo acatando los muchos y buenos y leales servicios que nos habéis hecho y hacéis de cada día, especialmente en la prisión del rey de Granada, que el Conde de Cabra y vos prendisteis en batalla, el cual entregasteis a mí, el Rey, en la ciudad de Córdoba, y porque de vos y de los dichos vuestros servicios quede memoria."

[158] Archivo Ducal de Medinaceli, Archivo Histórico, leg. 180, n. 7.

sum, 300,000 maravedíes annually.[159] While such high marks of favor could have bred complacency in the nobles, this would be anything but the case. The two lords stayed actively involved in the war effort for the remainder of the conquest: engaging personally in combat, furnishing money for the upcoming campaigns, and sending seigniorial troops to the field of battle.

With Boabdil in detention, the Castilian royal council next debated how to best take advantage of the emir's captivity.[160] While some considered it more advantageous to release the emir immediately (to keep the Granadans divided through factional strife), others believed it wiser to keep Boabdil imprisoned (so as to shatter the enemy's morale by incarcerating their ruler).[161] After careful deliberation, the monarchs decided on the former, seemingly under the conviction that releasing the emir would continue to polarize Granada's resistance: "To put Granada in division and destroy it we have decided to free him," exclaimed Ferdinand. "He [Boabdil] has to make war on his father."[162] The young emir would not simply be allowed to walk away freely, however. In exchange for his freedom, Boabdil agreed to a tribute of 12,000 *doblas* (gold coins), a two-year truce, the release of 400 Christian captives without ransom, the unrestricted passage of Castilian troops through the territories he controlled, and the provision of ten Muslim youths of noble lineage as collateral (including Boabdil's own son, Ahmad).[163] The terms were overwhelmingly in favor of the Castilians, so much so that when the residents of

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[159] The Count of Cabra also received the right to pass the honorific title of "don" to his descendants forever. AGS, Registro General del Sello, leg. 148311, 2: "The memory of you and your services will forever remain in your lineage, and from now on you and your children and descendants, and those who come from you and from them will forever and ever have the title of don." On the sum of maravedíes, see Liang, *Family and Empire*, 206, n. 15.
[160] The council consisted principally of various nobles (marquises, dukes, and counts) as well as the Masters of the Military Orders. Pulgar provides an excellent description of the various arguments debated in the council. See Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 212-17.
[161] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 214.
[162] Quote cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 381.
[163] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 282. Elliot believes that Boabdil additionally agreed to secret terms behind closed doors, in which he promised to direct war against his father and relatives in exchange for his freedom. *Imperial Spain*, 36.

Granada received news of the agreement, it sparked overwhelming hostility within the capital. When Boabdil was released, he did not dare to enter Granada, but instead sought refuge in Guadix.

During Bobadil's detention, many of his supporters (as the Castilian royal council predicted) redirected their allegiance to his father, Abū'l-Ḥasan, who in turn used the opportunity to consolidate his power in Granada. Yet during this time, the Arabic source also notes how Abū'l-Ḥasan fell victim to a serious illness "similar to epilepsy, which affected his sight and which caused loss of sensation in parts of his body."[164] Presumably because of his infirmity he was supplanted in 1483 by his brother, Muḥammad b. Sa'd (better known as al-Zagal, meaning "the valiant").[165] While the new Muslim king proved a capable and effective ruler, he was unable to stymie the Castilian advance, which was gaining major traction in the early months of 1484.

Destruction, Resistance, and Negotiation

With the two-year truce solidified with Boabdil, the Catholic Monarchs concentrated their undivided attention on the western portion of the emirate, now ruled by al-Zagal. Between 1484 and 1486, the Castilians assaulted and captured numerous strongholds within his domain, principally Álora, Setenil, Ronda, and Loja, each of which fell swiftly within the span of just several weeks. The relative rapidity to which these conquests were conducted has provoked the question: how could these fortresses surrender to the Castilians after just a few weeks, when they typically could hold out for months (if not years) before ultimately capitulating? For the most part, scholars attribute the rapid conquest of these sites to the deadly effects of Christian artillery,

[164] *Nubdha*, 30-31. As quoted in Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 281.
[165] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 281.

which ripped through Muslim defenses and tore down the walls of the cities.[166] But the attention paid to artillery in the historiography, and described in great detail by the Castilian chroniclers, creates the illusion that Christian victories during this period were achieved solely with gunpowder.[167] While cannon fire undeniably hastened the duration of the fighting, the swift collapse of these localities also owed in considerable measure to the efforts of the southern lords, whose tactful diplomacy, strategic council, and calculated destruction of the Granadan countryside led to the quick surrender of the western chunk of the Muslim emirate.

Perhaps the most important service that the Andalusian nobility rendered during this period was their execution of the *talas*, a Castilian tactic involving the systematic and widespread destruction of Granada's standing crops and arboriculture.[168] Although the strategy was developed many decades before the Granada War, it was most pronounced during this period, with some 30,000 Castilians(!) mobilized with the sole purpose of laying waste (*talar*) to granaries, mills, and farmhouses, and the eradication of other rich products native to the region, such as olive-gardens, mulberry, orange, and almond groves.[169]

This policy was primarily entrusted to the southern aristocrats, including the Marquis of Cádiz, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the Count of Cabra, the Alcaide de los Donceles, and Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, whose close proximity to the border and familiarity with the land allowed them to penetrate the frontier safely to carry out these destructive operations. In the spring of 1484, these men were instructed to gather as many of their kinsmen and vassals as they

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[166] Harvey, *Islamic Spain,* 284, 286; Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*: *A History of the Sixteenth-Century Ibero-African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 20; and Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 376.
[167] For instance, Bernáldez wrote how the Castilians' artillery caused a string of Muslim towns to fall "within a month, the least of which in the past could have held out a year and could not have been taken except by hunger." Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 223. See also Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 230-34.
[168] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 254.
[169] In 1483 alone, the Crown assembled 30,000 men with the sole purpose of destroying crops and eliminating muleteers. Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 376; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 281-82.

could muster, and to enter the rich and fertile lands surrounding Málaga (including Álora, Allazayna, Almexia, Coin, and Cartama). The objective was not to capture any of these sites, but to plunder, burn, and destroy so as to destabilize the region and pave the way for its eventual conquest.[170] Over the next 40 days, these nobles and their men, some 6,000 horse and 12,000 foot, burnt and destroyed "all the grains, vines, and trees that they found," including numerous cornfields and orchards, vineyards, mills, grain fields, verdant valleys, and virtually anything green from which food could grow.[171] According to Pulgar, the inroad was remembered as one of the most destructive to ever lay waste to the kingdom of Granada, insofar as some of the Muslim residents went out and pleaded with the Andalusians, offering up Christian captives in exchange for the safe preservation of their fields.[172] While devastating for the Granadans, the ability of the Andalusian lords to execute the talas was significant for the Spanish sovereigns, as it allowed them to preserve their royal forces and commit them to other pressing tasks.

Now confronted with a dire war of attrition, the Muslim inhabitants of the emirate fell back upon their strongholds as a means of storing and cultivating precious foodstuffs. Many Granadans looked to these fortresses with great confidence, knowing that in the past they had provided a certain degree of invulnerability from conquest, for they were typically perched on some high rock or precipice, and enveloped by high-towering walls constructed of solid masonry.[173] The Catholic Monarchs themselves recognized the strength of the Muslim ramparts, and looked to artillery as perhaps the only effectual means of toppling them. At this time,

[170] Some scholars argue that the system of talas was one of the principal reasons for elucidating the collapse of Granada. For instance, Fletcher wrote how this long-term strategy of destruction was "how Granada was ultimately to be reduced to submission." Harvey concurred, noting how the long-term policy eventually wreaked havoc on local food-producing farmhouses and granaries, "making it difficult for even the hard-working and skilled Granadan farmers to survive." Fletcher, *Moorish Spain*, 164; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 267.
[171] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 232.
[172] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 232.
[173] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 230; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 284.

thousands of engineers were employed to construct roads along the precipitous mountain passes leading up to these fortresses, thereby allowing the horses and carriages to transport the massive lombards, known to measure up to twelve-feet in length, and which additionally required iron or marble balls that could weigh up to 175 pounds.[174] The flattening of these roads proved well worth the toil. Despite remarkably slow rates of fire, the larger pieces of artillery did the most significant damage, producing substantial breaks in the walls. As the heavier lombards reloaded, the smaller pieces were brought up and fired at the already damaged sections of the wall, thereby creating an exploitable breach. The artillery fire was sustained continuously in this manner, thundering down upon the defenders in order to prevent them from repairing any sections of the wall and to exhaust them into submission. The fortresses of Álora, Setenil, Ronda, and Loja fell swiftly in this manner, presumably after their inhabitants had not slept for many days and were too enervated to conduct any further repairs.

While negotiating the surrender of these places, it was oftentimes Rodrigo Ponce de León who was put in charge of adjudicating the terms. Having grown up in Spain's southern borderlands where warfare, conflict, and diplomacy were everyday features of frontier society, the Marquis of Cádiz was supremely equipped for the task. Rodrigo had previously fought in a number of battles across Andalusia, at places like Gibraltar, Cardela, and Ortejícar, and was typically the one to negotiate the terms of surrender with its Muslim inhabitants. This gave him the opportunity to hone his diplomatic skills, and to learn that clemency and magnanimity, rather than callousness and force, were the most effectual means of brokering peace with his Muslim neighbors. When the time thus came to reach terms with the residents of Álora, Setenil, Ronda, and Loja, Rodrigo's approach did not differ much from in the past. The Marquis of Cádiz

[174] On the size of the lombards, see Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 478-79.

avoided any sort of stringent punishment, and instead granted the Muslims favorable arrangements, offering them liberty from enslavement and the ability to depart the city with their personal belongings.[175] The benign nature of the terms was noteworthy, for it convinced much of the surrounding countryside to relinquish their respective towns to the Castilians without a fight. And therefore with eloquence and words (and not gunpowder), Rodrigo Ponce de León pacified much of the Granadan countryside, enabling his sovereigns to consolidate their resources for the forthcoming campaigns.

Noble Council and Enemy Collaboration

With the recent string of victories achieved in the western portion of the emirate, the Christians now possessed a direct pathway to the 'outer shield' of Granada, comprised of fortresses such as Montefrío, Illora, and Moclín. Because those places were more or less situated along the Christian-Muslim border, the Spanish sovereigns again called upon the council of local frontier lords to guide their military campaigning. Among those to offer key advice was the Count of Cabra, whose extensive network of adalides kept the noble apprised of Muslim operations in advance, and also informed him of the internal weaknesses of some of those fortresses. With this intelligence, the Count of Cabra penned a letter to the Catholic Monarchs from his frontier estate in Baena, informing them that one of the Muslim localities, the village of Moclín, was negligently garrisoned and vulnerable to an attack.[176] The Count of Cabra's southern neighbor, Rodrigo Ponce de León, issued similar council to the crown in late 1486, advising the kings to attack Illora and Moclín, noting how these fortresses "although standing on high peaks,

[175] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 285-89.
[176] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 261-62.

are too weak to sustain your artillery, since they are small, with few people, and no exterior bulwarks with walls and ditches, and [their garrisons] cannot make new defenses by digging down within the town since these places stand on living rock."[177] Rodrigo's intelligence proved correct. Illora and Moclín fell within just a few days from the onslaught of artillery. Notably, only local lords with decades of frontier experience, and various adalides in their pay, could have known the precise faults of these fortresses as well as the condition of its garrison. Furthermore, their strategic guidance illustrates how aristocrats did not merely hold important posts as military combatants, but also as counselors and war strategists, issuing pivotal advice to the crown that determined the viability of entire campaigns. With their support and council, the Spanish sovereigns were able to secure the outer shell of the Muslim capital by the autumn of 1486, allowing the Castilians to virtually dominate the lands within Granada's immediate vicinity.

Around this time, too, the emir Boabdil had taken up residence in the Albaicín (suburbs) of Granada, and was found back on the streets fighting against his uncle, al-Zagal.[178] To buttress Boabdil's position within the capital, King Ferdinand sent a detachment of Castilian troops to assist the emir in his fight against his powerful relative. At the head of those Castilian forces was the southern lord, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, whose selection for the mission was not coincidental. Back during the surrender talks at Loja, Gonzalo served as one of the chief Castilian negotiators alongside the Marquis of Cádiz, and reportedly cultivated a close rapport with Boabdil. Their bond of friendship was not entirely surprising—Gonzalo himself was proficient in Arabic, and also known for his arresting familiarity with Islamic customs and culture. If we had to surmise, it was Gonzalo's linguistic skills and cultural knowledge of Islam, acquired from decades of living and interacting with Muslims along the frontier, that left a

[177] Quote cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 374-75.
[178] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 291.

favorable impression upon the young emir.[179] It was seemingly for these reasons also that the Catholic Monarchs appointed Gonzalo with the vital mission in the first place, trusting him to be the perfect fit for communicating, collaborating, and maintaining good faith with the young emir.

At some point in late 1486, Gonzalo departed for the Islamic capital with his forces and rendezvoused with Boabdil in the Albaicín district of Granada. In the words of Pulgar, "the king [Boabdil] received them with great pleasure, which was more than doubled when Gonzalo Fernández provided him with money, cloth, and silks with which to pay his knights."[180] These Castilian gifts, aside from demonstrating good faith between the two parties, may have had a more concrete political purpose. With Boabdil's political position in the city precarious at best, these monetary offerings would have helped him pacify his most powerful supporters (the knights) and also ensure their allegiance. While little is known about the day-to-day affairs of Gonzalo and his men in Granada, what is certain is that the noble ultimately succeeded in the mission. In April of 1487, Boabdil seized control of Granada during al-Zagal's absence from the city, forcing his uncle to take up residence in Guadix.[181] Although al-Zagal retained sovereignty over the wealthier portions of the emirate, principally Guadix, Almería and Baza, his ousting from the capital was symbolic, signifying the continued erosion of Granada's resistance from within.[182]

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[179] Prescott*, History of the Reign*, vol. 2, 92.

[180] Pulgar, *Breve Parte de las Hazañas del Excelente Nombrado Gran Capitán*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Antonio Rodríguez Villa (Madrid: Librería Editorial de Bailly/ Bailliére e Hijos, 1908), 555-89, 563.

[181] In addition to Granada, Boabdil now ruled over Vélez Blanco, Vélez Rubio, and Vera, which constituted the northeastern zone of the emirate.

[182] According to various scholars, it was the internal divisions within the Nasrid ruling dynasty that best explain the collapse of the Muslim emirate. For example, Kamen noted how, "the decisive factor that ensured the defeat of Granada was the collaboration of the Muslims in their own downfall," while Prescott described how the "division among the Moors themselves did more for the Christians than any successes of their own." Others have additionally pointed to the Castilian crown's diplomatic dexterity in exploiting this disunity. According to Elliot, "The Nasrid kingdom was rent by internal feuds, which Ferdinand exploited with his customary skill." Harvey echoed the sentiment, adding that "Granadan resistance was fatally weakened by feuds within the ruling Nasrid family, feuds which the Castilian leadership managed to exploit with great skill." Kamen, *Empire*, 18; Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 1, 442; Elliot, *Imperial Spain,* 47; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain,* 274.

Noble Services by Land and Sea

With the expulsion of al-Zagal from Granada, the Castilian objective in early 1487 was categorical: capture Málaga, the prize jewel of the Muslim emirate. The city itself was situated in a fertile valley and enclosed by mountains on all sides, except for the part that faced the sea. Its unique position on the Mediterranean made it a bustling entrepôt; one with access to the highly-coveted trade networks of the inner sea and to other distant regions, most notably the Indian subcontinent and the nearby African Maghrib, where it could exchange jewelry and woven products for Sudanese gold. Yet it was not necessarily the commercial richness of the city—and the concomitant lure of rich spoils—that made it a desirable site for Castilian conquest. Málaga was also the hand and mouth of Granada, providing much of the emirate with its foodstuffs, troops, and equipment, which flowed richly through its ports via the North African coastal emirates of Tripoli, Tunis, and Fez. Málaga's ability to furnish much of the emirate with resources from the Barbary coast conferred it extreme importance, making its existence critical to the very livelihood of Granada itself. The Castilians recognized the importance of Málaga for these reasons and resolved to destroy it.

In the spring of 1487, the Christians underwent preparations to take the mighty city, mobilizing men and resources from the various parts of the kingdom and assembling them in the ancient city of Córdoba. While the historical literature has largely glossed over the efforts of the Andalusian nobility in the later stages of the conquest, the martial and monetary contributions that they rendered during the siege of Málaga, deemed "the most important battle of the whole war," illustrates their continued significance to the subjugation of the Islamic emirate.[183]

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[183] Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2; Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs*; and Edwards, *Ferdinand and Isabella* (London: Routledge, 2014). Quote from Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 295.

The prodigious strength of Malaga made it unlike any of the other fortresses taken in the previous campaigns. Its formidable natural defenses (the sea and the surrounding mountains) served as protective barriers shielding the city from any considerable danger, and affording it very few weak points from which the enemy could exploit. The city was additionally protected by thick bulwarks, numerous towers, and two immensely powerful castle-fortresses: at one end, the Alcazaba (perched on a high mound near the sea), and directly above it, the Gibralfaro (derived from "Gibel-faro," meaning "the hill of the lighthouse").[184] Given such defensible features, the Catholic Monarchs sought to avoid a military engagement altogether, and first looked to take the city by diplomacy, entrusting the Marquis of Cádiz with the critical mission of negotiating the surrender: "I leave this business and my treasury in your hands," said Ferdinand to the marquis, "act, stipulate, and distribute in my name as you see fit."[185] That the Spanish sovereign bestowed Rodrigo Ponce de León with this task indicates, quite clearly, the considerable confidence that he held in this noble to conduct the crucial negotiation. Time and again, the monarchs repeatedly relied on the diplomatic prowess of the Marquis of Cádiz, and routinely placed him in charge of securing Granada's most obstinate fortresses. Nonetheless, the Andalusian negotiator who had been so successful in the past on this occasion would fail. The Malagan commander, Hamete Zeli, expressed little interest in negotiating with the Castilians, and rejected all offers put forth.[186] With the possibility of a negotiated surrender off the table, the Castilian council next pursued two main strategies to take Málaga: a close-quarters military assault, combined with a naval blockade of the harbor.

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[184] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 300-301.
[185] Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 230.
[186] The offer was as such: in exchange for Gibralfaro, the Castilians would provide Hamete with the city of Coin in perpetual inheritance, four thousand doblas in gold, as well as thousands of additional doblas to be distributed amongst his principal lieutenants, officers, and soldiers.

Because the castle of Gibralfaro was considered the most formidable of Málaga's defenses, the first objective was to seize this mighty fortress. It should come as no surprise, then, that the Marquis of Cádiz was given the unenviable task of seizing it. As the most experienced commander in the war, Rodrigo Ponce de León had been consistently placed at the eminent vanguard position of the battlefield. After setting up his headquarters at the base of the castle, the Marquis of Cádiz instructed his legion (some 2,500 mounted men and 14,000 foot soldiers) to dig deep trenches and to construct from timber and earthworks an enormous palisade to defend themselves against the Muslims' artillery. Five massive lombards were next situated on the mount so as to hail continuous fire upon the fortress. Both sides then "engaged in static warfare," with "each side making use of artillery to equal effect."[187] Meanwhile, at sea, the Catalan admiral Requesens commanded the Christian blockade of the harbor. This involved the near constant vigilance of the shoreline by the Castilian navy, whose impressive fleet of armed vessels, caravels, and galleys prevented North African merchant ships and smaller crafts (*zabras*) from routing supplies to Málaga. The battle raged on land and sea for several months in this manner, with both sides gradually wearing down in strength. While no Islamic accounts of life in the city exist from this time, we do know that the Christians suffered heavy losses in the field, further exacerbated by food shortages and a grave pestilence that debilitated the Castilian camp.[188]

With the strength and morale of the Christians dwindling, it was the Andalusian nobility that helped revitalize the war effort. After many weeks of intense warfare, the Castilians' troops and supplies were depleting rapidly, and by this point Ferdinand and Isabella were sending urgent dispatches to the countryside, calling to arms all those in the cities of Toledo, Segovia, Madrid, Trujillo, Cáceres, Badajoz, and other nearby localities to join the war effort. The Duke

[187] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 296.
[188] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 305.

of Medina Sidonia was seemingly exempt from the summons, given that he already purveyed a large number of foot soldiers and horsemen at the beginning of the siege. But this did not prevent the noble from contributing further. According to Medina, the duke scrambled to "compile all of the provisions that he could," including men, money, and supplies gathered from various parts of the frontier.[189] In offering this additional support, Enrique de Guzmán not only had the opportunity to demonstrate his indispensability to the crown, but also to flex his immense power, and potentially win greater rewards from the monarchs after the conquest. With the provisions assembled, the duke sailed to the port of Málaga in mid-July with a massive armada, consisting of 100 ships(!), some armed, and most laden with provisions and equipment. He additionally presented the Spanish sovereigns with a massive loan of 20,000 gold doblas to help cover the expenses of the siege.[190] Such substantial offerings stand in for the ongoing significance of the southern nobility in general, who far from fading in importance in this war continued to underpin the crown's most important objectives.

Upon seeing all that the duke had provided, Pulgar describes how the king and queen "thanked him extensively" for raising the cash, soldiers, and resources on his own volition.[191] According to Medina, "with the few supplies that were available, it was well-understood that the battle would not have been won had the Duke of Medina Sidonia not come."[192] Such a claim is rather bold and speculative, despite Medina stating it so categorically, and further adding that "it was well-understood" (by whom, the reader might ask). But Medina's assertion is not altogether surprising. His *Chronicle of the Very Excellent Gentlemen Dukes of Medina Sidonia* was a

[189] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 305.
[190] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 305; and Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos,* 315.
[191] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 315.
[192] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 309.

celebratory history of the ducal house, where Medina himself claims to have resided for 50 years. The chronicler's desire to attribute the victory at Málaga to the duke was a clear attempt to elevate the status of his beloved protagonist, Enrique de Guzmán, and to aggrandize his role in the Granada War. Notwithstanding, Medina's fundamental claim about the importance of the duke's contributions cannot be refuted altogether. The cost of the war was massive, estimated at some 800,000,000 maravedíes.[193] At this particular juncture, the duke's loan of 20,000 doblas would have gone a long way in sustaining the costly siege of Málaga, while his provision of ships and equipment helped to replenish the Castilians' depleted arsenal of supplies. Perhaps more importantly, the duke's purveying of men provided a fresh stock of warriors to replace the enervated and dispirited Christian camp, who according to Pulgar were exhausted "by the numerous battles and fights over the course of so many days," conducted "in the fields, in the mines, by the sea, and in other parts."[194] From these vantages, Enrique de Guzmán's contributions to the most important campaign of the war cannot be steadfastly ignored.

Despite the emphasis on firepower, the city of Malaga eventually succumbed to starvation. According to the *Nubdha*, when food ran out, the Málagans "had to eat whatever was edible: horses, asses, donkeys, dogs, skins, the leaves from the trees, and when even these things ran out, the pangs of hunger were indeed terrible. Many of the finest of those who had sustained the siege died, and at that point many gave up and sought peace."[195] The principal leaders of Málaga, recognizing the gravity of their condition, penned a letter to Ferdinand promising the keys of the city in return for the safe treatment of the inhabitants: "We your vassals and servants know our mistake. We place ourselves in your hands, and assure you that everyone in this city, as

[193] Estimate by Ladero Quesada, *Castilla y la conquista*, 202. The bulk of the support came from Pope Sixtus IV, who issued a Bull of Crusade offering indulgences for those contributing financially to the Granada War.
[194] Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 315. Bernáldez notes a similar point. *Historia*, vol. 1, 241.
[195] *Nubdha*, 24-5. Quote cited in Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 299-300.

well as everything that is in it, belongs to Your Highness."[196] In spite of this plea, the bitter resistance of the Málagans, coupled with the heavy loss of Christian life, convinced the Catholic Monarchs of the need for stringent punishment. After rounding up the prisoners, Christian deserters and *conversos* (Jewish converts to Christianity) were set on fire and burnt alive, while some renegades met a darker fate, executed by being *acañaveados* (pierced through the skin with reeds). The Spanish sovereigns further ordered all of the inhabitants of the city (some 8,000) to be enslaved, and set at a ransom of 30 doblas each.[197] Those who could not muster up the miniature fortune were either exchanged for Christian captives in North Africa, awarded as gifts to the principal Christian nobles, or sold into slavery to liquidate the crown's expenses.[198] With the fates of the prisoners settled, and the Castilian conquest of Málaga at last complete, Granada's demise appeared to be imminent.[199]

The Capitulation of Granada

With the Castilians now in possession of Granada's seacoast and all of its major ports, the Christians could virtually ensure that no significant assistance reached the emirate from abroad. The *rey viejo* ("old king"), al-Zagal, was aware of the futility of the situation, and proceeded to sign a general treaty with the Castilians on 10 December 1489, surrendering Almería and Guadix (the final remnants of his power).[200] With the acquisition of those lands, the Christians were now

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[196] "Letter from the moors of Málaga to the Catholic Monarchs," in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 307-8.
[197] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 384.
[198] The African garrison (perhaps 3,000) were additionally enslaved and distributed as gifts: nearly 100 were added to the Pope's guard, 50 maidens went to the queen of Naples, 30 to the queen of Portugal, and various others to the major Castilian leaders and captains. Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 309; and Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 300.
[199] Prescott, *History of the Reign*, vol. 2, 42; Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 37; Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 295.
[200] The willingness of al-Zagal to hand over these territories to the Castilians without a fight is a bit curious, considering that he had been the stalwart of resistance to Castile, with a war policy typically punctuated by a 'fight to the death' mentality. Why did the Muslim ruler suddenly reverse course, ultimately leaving the capital of Granada to fend for itself? The question is impossible to answer categorically, but Harvey speculates that with the Castilians

in control of the entire outer shell of the emirate, with all but the city of Granada standing. In early 1490, the Catholic Monarchs sent a diplomatic party to the Islamic capital to enter talks with Boabdil, and to finalize the terms of the surrender. However, for reasons that can only be guessed, the Muslim ruler refused to relinquish the city to the Christians, and soon initiated hostilities against them.[201] With the young emir now proposing a fight, Ferdinand and Isabella underwent their own preparations for war, assembling all of the money, weapons, and men that they could muster for this final campaign.

The siege of Granada officially began in April of 1491 and lasted eight months. During this time, there were no major military assaults or artillery bombardments, but instead small-scale skirmishes, raids, and a tight encirclement of the city so as to starve the inhabitants into submission. The Castilian system of talas—which previously spared the lands that Boabdil ruled—was now ruthlessly directed against the surrounding countryside, causing severe shortages of food and resources in the city. Despite various accounts of Muslim heroics during the military engagements, the capital was so deeply afflicted by hunger and fatigue that eventually there was little recourse but surrender. In late 1491, Boabdil agreed to a parley with the Christians.

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now in possession of virtually the entire outer rim of Granada, the Muslim king perceived the defense of Almeria and Guadix to be indefensible. Furthermore, the Arabic source offers an additional clue: "Many people assert that the Emir Muḥammad b. Sa'd [al-Zagal] and his commanders sold these villages and districts ruled by them to the ruler of Castile, and that they received a price for them. All this was with a view to taking revenge on the son of his brother Muḥammad b. 'Alī [Boabdil] and on his commanders who had remained in Granada…By his action he [al-Zagal] wanted to cut Granada off, so as to destroy it in the way that the rest of the country had been destroyed." Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 305; and *Nubdha,* 27-8 (as quoted in Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 304-5).

[201] According to various scholars, Boabdil appears to have been suspicious of the Catholic Monarchs, namely that they would not award him all that had been promised. By threatening to continue the war, Boabdil may have been leveraging the situation in order to obtain greater contractual rewards. Further, following the news of al-Zagal's defeat, much of the city was experiencing sorrow and indignation, with a large segment of the populace keen on fighting the Christians to the bitter end. It is plausible that Boabdil's decision to prosecute the war stemmed from his inability to convince the opposing side to give up, and believed it to be in his best interests to ride the waves of popular sentiment before he was inundated by them. See Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 307-8; and Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 385.

In the forthcoming surrender talks, Ferdinand sent ahead his two best men to conduct the negotiations: Martín de Alarcón and Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba. Of those individuals, the latter was particularly well-qualified for the diplomatic mission. Gonzalo had already dealt with Boabdil at Loja back in 1486, when he convinced the emir to surrender the city to the Christians—likely in return for control over the crescent-shaped zone of Guadix-Baza-Mojácar. He also collaborated with Boabdil later that year, helping him to wage war in the city of Granada against his uncle, al-Zagal.[202] Such experiences gave Gonzalo several opportunities to deal intimately with Boabdil and to gain his trust, making him the perfect candidate to finalize the critical arrangements with the Muslim ruler.

In November of 1491, the terms between Castile and Granada were at last settled.[203] Within sixty days, the city of Granada was to be handed over to the Castilians, with all of the Christian prisoners released from captivity without ransom. The inhabitants of Granada, now subjects of the Spanish monarchs, would be allowed to retain all of their possessions (except for artillery), practice Islam without interference, maintain their own judges and officials, and avoid paying taxes for the first three years. Those who wished to relocate from Granada were encouraged to do so, and would be provided free passage to Africa from any of the Christian ports (permitting that this travel was conducted within three years).[204] As some historians have noted, the generosity of these terms is a bit perplexing, considering that they were practically the same as those offered to the cities and fortresses that surrendered swiftly in the earlier stages of

[202] Pulgar, *Breve Parte*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 562-63.
[203] For a clear and concise overview of the Capitulations of 1491, see Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 314-22.
[204] In addition, secret agreements were struck with Boabdil and the royal family, in which the former emir was awarded lavish estates in and around Granada, including sovereignty over numerous towns and lands in the most lucrative regions of the Alpujarras, as well as an enormous sum of gold, said to have amounted to some thirty thousand *castellanos* (gold coins). Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 313.

the war.[205] It is additionally surprising if we consider the ravaged state of Granada at this time, namely when compared to the considerable manpower and resources still available to Castile. With that said, we must not forget that the Castilians suffered their own trials and tribulations during the war, and did not wish to prolong the affair any further. The exhaustion of Andalusia from plague, floods, and combat greatly weakened morale, and the cost of the war itself was monumental. By 1489, all of the monetary reserves had been emptied, and Isabella herself was pawning her jewels in Valencia in order to help finance the war.[206] "No Castilian negotiator," writes Harvey, "would wish to quibble over minor concessions when what Ferdinand wanted above all else was to hold the keys of the city safely in his hands."[207] In this respect, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba fulfilled his duties consummately, delivering the keys of the Alhambra to the Catholic Monarchs without risking any further bloodshed.

With the surrender of Granada, the fragmented pieces of the ancient Visigothic kingdom were finally re-sown, and placed under the head of a reinvigorated and powerful Christian monarchy. While the Spanish crown did not reap major rewards from the conquest, their ability to consolidate the peninsula allowed them to look to new horizons, namely to the Atlantic, where the Castilian conquest of the Canary Islands was nearing its completion, as well as to the Mediterranean, where military expeditions would soon be dispatched to North Africa and Italy.[208]

[205] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 387. For studies on the Muslim population of Granada after the conquest, see Ladero Quesada, *Granada después de la conquista: Repobladores y mudéjares* (Granada: Disputación Provincial de Granada, 1993); and Harvey, *Muslims in Spain, 1500-1614* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).
[206] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 385.
[207] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 312.
[208] Elliot acknowledged that the crown "benefitted surprisingly little from the spoils of victory." *Imperial Spain,* 49.

Conclusion

On 27 August 1492, months after the fall of Granada, the widely acclaimed hero of the war, Rodrigo Ponce de León, passed away at his palace estate in Seville at the age of 48. The noble was believed to have suffered from an illness brought on by the exposures and exhaustions of the decade long war, which was not surprising given that he participated in virtually every one of its battles. While the city of Seville was in great mourning over the death of the Marquis of Cádiz, it would be remiss to neglect that its residents had another, equally saddening reason to grieve. Two days earlier, on 25 August, the Duke of Medina Sidonia had passed away in Seville. The concurrent deaths of these nobles are somewhat remarkable, considering that the two men inflicted such great damage upon one another in the years leading up to the Granada War, and only in the crucible of war did they forge the unlikeliest of friendships. Now, with the conquest finished, it only seemed fitting that they would be laid to rest during the same week, yet no longer as enemies, but close companions.[209]

This chapter has examined the roles and feats of a handful of Andalusian nobles during the decade-long conquest of Granada. In the years leading up to this conflict, the Spanish sovereigns made piecemeal yet systematic attempts to check the power of the nobility and bring them under the jurisdiction of the crown. However, the emphasis in the traditional literature on the sapping of aristocratic strength during this period has obscured the vital contributions that this group made to the emerging nation state, particularly during the Granada War. From the earliest moments of the conquest, nobles could be found at the forefront of the action, capturing the Islamic fortress of Alhama in 1482 and the Muslim emir, Boabdil, in 1483. Over the next

[209] At least among their contemporaries, both nobles received tremendous praise for their participation and feats in this memorable war, though none more than the Marquis of Cádiz, who some likened to the Cid. Bernáldez, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 313.

decade, southern lords continued to stay actively involved in the war effort: purveying thousands of seigniorial troops to the crown each year, serving as leading captains in the majority of campaigns, loaning cash to the monarchs to help finance the war, and acting as chief advisers and war strategists. Through their extensive participation in this struggle, nobles were not only able to exercise their traditional autonomy and authority, but also remain linked to conduits of royal power, and continue to pursue their own private agendas. More broadly, aristocrats clearly demonstrated their indispensability to the crown, ensuring that they (the noble class) would be kept around for future imperial enterprises.

In the aftermath of the war, one might suspect that the Andalusian nobility retired to their landed estates to enjoy a life of tranquility—but this was not the case. With new imperial enterprises opening up in different parts of the empire, chiefly in Italy and North Africa, many of the nobles examined here or their offspring enlisted in these forthcoming ventures (see chapter 4). Yet, before we consider those campaigns, we must first turn to Spanish involvement in the Atlantic, where the conquest of the Canary Islands was nearing its conclusion, and had equally important ramifications for Spain's empire-building as did the conquest of Granada. In fact, by the turn of the sixteenth century, the Canaries would become the locus of Spain's imperial expansion in the Atlantic, providing a geographically close point to sail east to Northwest Africa, or west to the newly discovered Americas.

Chapter 3. Petty Hidalgos on the Frontiers of the Eastern Spanish Atlantic, 1480-1500

In August of 1481, a group of Castilian conquistadors disembarked along the remote, sandy shores of northwest Gran Canaria (one of the seven main islands in the Canaries).[210] Under the command of their captain general, Pedro de Vera Mendoza, the soldiers proceeded to march inland, trekking through the island's thick underbrush before pausing at Agaete. Here, Pedro de Vera ordered his men to begin construction of a tower fortress (known as "*La Torre de Agaete*"), intended to open up a second front of warfare against the island's Native peoples. The fort was complete in September of that year, and entrusted to Alonso Fernández de Lugo, a prominent *caballero* (gentleman) of Seville.[211] Over the next several months, Lugo and his men worked to fortify their position at Agaete, all the while fending off attacks by nearby Indigenous enemies. But the tables turned in February of 1482, when Lugo launched a surprise assault against the hostile kingdom of Gáldar and captured its ruler, Tenesor Semidán.[212] The imprisonment of the king, who later defected to the Spanish, paved the way for the Castilian conquest of Gran Canaria in the spring of 1483. As captain general of the enterprise, Vera was rewarded handsomely for his wartime services, though the conquistador had little chance to enjoy the fruits of his labor.

In February of 1482, war erupted against the Islamic emirate of Granada, forcing Pedro de Vera to sail back to Spain to join the war effort. Over the next decade, the Spaniard would

[210] Juan de Abreu Galindo, *The History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands*, 2 vols., trans. George Glas (Dublin, 1767), vol. 1, 131.
[211] Alonso de Lugo was born around 1456. Of his noble status, Bernáldez described him as, "a gentleman of Seville, of noble lineage," and Alonso de Santa Cruz as a "gentleman and resident of the city of Seville, of noble birth." Bernáldez, *Memorias del Reinado de los Reyes Católicos*, eds. Manuel Gómez-Moreno and Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid: Real Academia de la Historia, 1962), 338; and Santa Cruz, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 2 vols., ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo (Seville: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1951), vol. 1, 100.
[212] Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest*, vol. 1, 140-41.

play a prominent role in the struggle, purveying troops to the royal army, loaning cash to the crown, and serving as a military commander in some of the most decisive campaigns: Álora, Illora, Loja, Velez-Málaga, and Málaga.[213] When the war concluded in January of 1492, the distinguished conqueror hung up his sword and armor for good, retiring to his estates in the south of Spain. Meanwhile, his former companion-at-arms, Alonso de Lugo, was busy planning the conquest of the final two unconquered islands in the Canaries, La Palma and Tenerife. Lugo succeeded in these endeavors in 1492 and 1496, respectively, and given his spectacular success was elevated to captain general of Africa in 1499.[214] Over the next three years, Lugo would launch several oceanic expeditions to Northwest Africa, carrying out royal orders to establish fortified trading factories along the Barbary shoreline. In recognition of these services, as well as his conquest of the principal islands in the Canaries, Lugo was awarded the illustrious governorship of the Canary Islands in 1503. With this new distinction, the old conquistador returned to the Canaries to assume control of this post, administering the archipelago until his death in 1525.

The impressive careers of these two Atlantic frontiersmen, Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo, reveal the importance of *hidalgos* (petty noblemen) to the expansion and maintenance of Spain's early empire. With warfare occurring simultaneously in multiple Atlantic realms in the 1480s and 90s (Granada, Northwest Africa, the Canary Islands, and the Caribbean), the duties of empire oftentimes fell into the hands of ambitious conquistadors—men like Vera and Lugo—who over the span of several decades rendered vital contributions on behalf of the Spanish

[213] Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador Pedro de Vera en la conquista del Reino de Granada," *Anuario de Estudios Atlanticos*, núm. 12 (1966): 105-116.
[214] See AGS, Diversos de Castilla, leg. 9, fol. 25. This document is also published in José M. Doussinague, *La política internacional de Fernando el Católico* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, S. A., 1944), 528-30; and Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Africanos, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1956-57), vol. 2, 82-84.

monarchy. Perhaps the most impressive of those services was their conquests of the principal islands in the Canaries: Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife. Collectively, these possessions became vital staging points in the Atlantic Sea, providing Spain with key steppingstones to advance its imperial interests into Africa and the Americas. However, these two conquistadors also performed noteworthy services in other regions of the Atlantic, including in Granada and the Saharan coast of Africa, where they fought at various points in time to extend Castile's imperial reach into Muslim controlled domains. The activities of these men in multiple Atlantic realms—whether to conquer land, establish trading outposts, administer distant spaces, or defend territories—became vital to the expansion and nurturing of Spain's early empire. Nonetheless, these two individuals are seldom credited with laying the foundations of Spain's Atlantic empire, and appear mostly as obscure figures within the scholarly literature of Imperial Spain.[215]

Where historians do highlight the importance of specific personnel in the formation of the eastern Spanish Atlantic, they tend to emphasize the role of the monarchy or various financiers (chiefly Italian investors).[216] In particular, there is a rich literature on the activities of bankers and mercantile communities in Seville, Cádiz, Madrid, and Naples, and the significant roles that these groups (mostly Genoese and Florentine capitalists) played in financing Iberian expeditions of exploration, conquest, and colonization in the Atlantic.[217] While these studies have enriched

[215] Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo have received little, if any, treatment in some of the most well-known histories of the Spanish Empire. See, for instance, Elliot, *Imperial Spain*; Kamen, *Empire*; and Maltby, *The Rise and Fall of the Spanish Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).
[216] Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese in Seville and the Opening of the New World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); Ladero Quesada, *Historia de Sevilla, 2: La ciudad medieval (1248-1492)* (Seville, University of Seville, 1976); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, "La financiación de la conquista de las Islas Canarias en el tiempo de los Reyes Católicos," *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos*, núm. 28 (1982): 343-77; and Enrique Otte, *Sevilla y sus mercaderes a fines de la Edad Media* (Seville: Fundación El Monte, 1996).
[217] Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*; Otte, *Sevilla y sus mercaderes*; Nader, "Desperate Men, Questionable Acts: The Moral Dilemma of Italian Merchants in the Spanish Slave Trade," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 33, no. 2 (2002): 401-422; Catia Brilli and Manuel Herrero Sánchez, eds., *Italian Merchants in the Early-Modern Spanish Monarchy: Business Relations, Identities and Political Resources* (New York: Routledge, 2017); and Richard Paul Ibarra, "Pious Merchants, Honorable Hidalgos: The Ambiguous Integration of Italian Merchants in Seville and the Atlantic, 1450-1650" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2023).

our understanding of how merchants and investors helped give rise to Spain's Atlantic empire, they oftentimes overlook, or downplay, that these enterprises also required the work of military leaders to carry them out on the ground. Indeed, in the final decades of the fifteenth century, the Castilian monarchy often found itself strapped for cash, and was forced to contract with *caballeros hidalgos* (noble knights) in order to conduct overseas expeditions of conquest or exploration. These military leaders not only collected the majority of the finances for the enterprise, but also recruited the men, invested their own personal savings, and literally risked life and limb to conduct it in the field. This chapter explores the actions of this cohort of Spanish society, the caballeros hidalgos, and demonstrates how Castilian expansion into the eastern Atlantic between 1480 and 1500 was largely made possible by the private initiative of this group. It focuses on the careers of two lesser-known conquistador captains, Vera and Lugo, and argues that their personal determinations, frontier identity, and alliances with bankers and soldiers made them indispensable to the crown at this moment of early overseas expansion.[218]

Castile's maritime expansion into the Atlantic signaled new changes in the processes of conquest. For one, the social dimension of these ventures, especially the support of bankers and the prevalence of hidalgos in the leadership positions, put an entirely new imprint on the pattern of conquest. Throughout much of the Reconquista, it was predominantly middling or high nobles that spearheaded the military campaigns in Iberia, but in the Atlantic, we begin to see men of lesser distinction (the hidalgos) taking the vanguard. Such a shift was not coincidental. Given the limited fortunes of hidalgos, this group was more apt to relocate to faraway spaces and place themselves in positions of danger compared to their more illustrious counterparts. What's more,

[218] For several notable studies on these men, see Rumeu de Armas, *Alonso de Lugo en la corte de los Reyes Católicos, 1496-1497* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Cientificas, 1952); Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*; and Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador."

the crown seemingly preferred to install its hidalgos (rather than its great magnates) in the Canaries. This was a period of rising monarchical authority, in which the Spanish kings were trying to lessen the power of the aristocracy, not augment it.[219] From the perspective of Ferdinand and Isabella, the entrusting of high nobles with leadership roles in distant, less supervised areas of the empire could consolidate too much power in the hands of an already potent, unruly group. Hidalgos, by contrast, could be controlled more easily, and were less likely to ignore the mandates of the crown. Their appointment to leadership posts in the Atlantic was thus a sign of the changing times, as was the increased involvement of bankers in Spain's expansionist enterprises. Indeed, because petty nobles lacked the financial resources of wealthy magnates, they relied on third-party bankers or investors to help finance their military campaigns in the Atlantic, typically in exchange for a share of the profits. Both Vera and Lugo received substantial pecuniary support from investors, mainly Italian and Majorcan merchants, who helped jumpstart their enterprises in the Canary Islands and Northwest Africa.

What was perhaps most vital to the success of Vera and Lugo in the Atlantic was the frontier skills that they acquired in their homeland of Andalusia. In the late medieval period, the south of Spain was a conspicuously hazardous realm, pockmarked by three distinct frontiers. The first frontier, the Strait of Gibraltar, was the narrow strip of sea separating the south of Spain from northern Africa. Over the course of the fifteenth century, Andalusian mariners frequently crossed this maritime frontier to conduct raids in the Maghrib for booty and enslaved peoples, including Pedro de Vera, who took part in a handful of cavalcades in North Africa in the 1470s. The second frontier, and a land-based one, was the porous zone dividing the Islamic emirate of Granada from the kingdom of Castile. As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the volatile nature of this

[219] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 84-96.

space provided the residents of Andalusia with ample opportunities to gain military experience from fighting Muslim foes. Yet, this frontier also enabled them to acquire martial skills from battling fellow Christians. Indeed, the extensive infighting among nobles in Andalusia frequently erupted into bouts of bloody conflict. Pedro de Vera himself was dragged into the internecine fighting, and on at least one occasion was compelled to take up arms against a rival Christian lord. This civil strife created a third (and equally perilous) frontier: an internally fractured Christian landscape. As this chapter argues, growing up in this sort of triple frontier had important ramifications for Vera and Lugo. It not only prepared them for the hardships of war and conquest, but also gave them the tools to thrive in other borderland areas of the empire, namely in the Canaries and Atlantic Africa. In highlighting the utility of those frontier skills, this chapter contributes to a burgeoning scholarship that has identified the roles of other imperial agents, such as sailors or administrators, in gathering relevant expertise in one region and transmitting it effectively to new areas of the globe.[220]

Furthermore, this chapter also adds to a rich historiography that has sought to connect discrete spaces in the early modern Spanish Atlantic.[221] In her pioneering work, *Transatlantic Ties*, Ida Altman traced the lives of migrants from Brihuega, Spain to Puebla, Mexico in the late sixteenth century to illustrate larger connections and continuities between these two textile manufacturing cities. More recently, David Wheat examined the tight links between some of the major African slave centers in West Africa and various Spanish colonial port cities (Havana, Santo Domingo) via the transatlantic slave trade. Wheat also edited a volume with Altman on the

[220] Games, *The Web of Empire*; Subrahmanyam, “Holding the World in Balance”; Buchs and Liang, “A Forgotten Empire”; Liang, *Family and Empire*; and Hanna, *Pirate Nests*.
[221] Altman, *Transatlantic Ties*; Mangan, *Transatlantic Obligations*; Wheat, *Atlantic Africa*; and Altman and Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean and the Atlantic World in the Long Sixteenth Century* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

sixteenth-century Spanish Caribbean that analyzed this region's close ties to a number of disparate locales in the Atlantic, including Iberia, Western Africa, the Spanish American mainland, and various islands in the Atlantic Sea. Taken together, these studies have done an excellent job linking territories on both sides of the Atlantic, and also inserting Latin America into a more global context. With that said, much of the emphasis has been on charting transatlantic connections. Rarely have scholars attempted to link the entire eastern Spanish Atlantic zone, specifically the Canary Islands, Andalusia, and Northwest Africa.[222] These regions were also tightly bound during this period, partly through the transaction of African and Canarian commodities, but also through the footsteps of conquistadors who crisscrossed these spaces and connected them. This chapter uses the movement of two conquistador captains to highlight these lesser scrutinized webs of connectivity in the Atlantic, namely ones that stretched vertically from Iberia to Africa, rather than horizontally from the Old World to the New. By uncovering another "web of empire," I seek to add to the studies of Altman, Wheat, Mangan, and others by painting the early modern Atlantic as a vibrant zone, and one of unprecedented interconnectedness.[223]

Lastly, while charting the movement of Vera and Lugo across the eastern Spanish Atlantic, this chapter aims to bring greater attention to the oft-neglected military conflicts occurring in this region.[224] When compared to the vast literature on the western Atlantic, there

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[222] For exceptions, see Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*; and Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1.

[223] This phrase is borrowed from Alison Games's monograph, *The Web of Empire*.

[224] While there is a relatively sizable scholarship on the conquest of the Canary Islands, much of it is published in Spanish, and otherwise inaccessible to English audiences. See, for instance, Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife, 1494-1496* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Aula de Cultura de Tenerife, 1975); Sabino Berthelot, *Etnografía y Anales de la Conquista de Las Islas Canarias* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Goya Ediciones, 1978); Eduardo Aznar Vallejo, *La integración de las Islas Canarias en la corona de Castilla (1478-1526)* (Seville: Universidad de Sevilla, 1983); José Juan Suárez Acosta, Félix Rodríguez Lorenzo, and Carmelo L. Quintero Padrón, *Conquista y Colonización* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Centro de la Cultura Popular Canaria, 1988); and Juan Gabriel Santiago Casañas, *Cronología y Síntesis de la Conquista de Gran Canaria* (Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Bilenio Publicaciones, 2013). For the single best study on Spanish involvement in Atlantic Africa, see Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1.

are comparatively few studies (particularly in the Anglophone scholarship) that treat the early modern military campaigns in the Canaries or Atlantic Africa.[225] This is somewhat understandable, considering that in the decades to come, the prodigious quantities of silver generated from Mexican and Peruvian mines (chiefly Zacatecas and Potosí) sustained Spanish military expansion throughout much of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and eventually transformed Spain into a European powerhouse.[226] But at least in the final decade of the fifteenth century, the spectacular wealth of the Americas was yet to be discerned. Not until the conclusion of the Spanish-Aztec War in 1521 would Spanish adventurers and conquistadors, and even the crown itself, view the Indies as a viable and lucrative region for conquest and colonization.[227] By contrast, the Spanish sovereigns perceived the colonization of the Canary Islands and the establishment of *presidios* (forts) in Northwest Africa to be far greater imperial assets than the buttressing of remote outposts in the Caribbean. For one, the Barbary shoreline could serve as a gateway to the commercial markets of the African interior, providing access to valuable products such as leather, honey, wax, and most importantly, Saharan gold.[228] The Canaries also yielded important commodities (dyestuff and sugar) that could meet a burgeoning demand in European

[225] Where scholars do focus on the Canary Islands, they tend to explore topics in the post-conquest period, such as European settlement and colonization, the organization and resistance of the Native inhabitants, the economic activities on the islands (the cultivation of sugar), or juridical concerns over the treatment of the Indigenous populations. See Antonio Pérez Voituriez, *Los problemas jurídicos internacionales de la conquista de Canarias* (Tenerife: Universidad de La Laguna, 1959); Fernández-Armesto, "La financiación de la conquista"; Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands After the Conquest: The Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); and Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*.
[226] For silver mining in New Spain, see Dana Velasco Murillo, *Urban Indians in a Silver City: Zacatecas, Mexico, 1546-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016). For works dealing with silver production at Potosí, see P. J. Bakewell, *Silver and Entrepreneurship in Seventeenth-Century Potosí: The Life and Times of Antonio López de Quiroga* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); and Nicholas A. Robins, *Mercury, Mining, and Empire: The Human and Ecological Cost of Colonial Silver Mining in the Andes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011).
[227] For instance, Hillgarth remarked how, "Even in 1516 the real importance of the New World discovered by Columbus had not been realized." Devereux agreed, adding how: "During these decades it was not yet clear, to Iberians or to inhabitants of other Mediterranean polities, that the Spanish monarchy's fortunes lay in the Atlantic." Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 578; and Andrew Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire: Just War in the Mediterranean and the Rise of Early Modern Spain* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), 99.
[228] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 275.

markets and help to raise the crown's rents. Even more importantly, the archipelago provided critical bases in the Atlantic Sea that made the voyages to the Americas viable, offering conquistadors, settlers, and explorers—including Christopher Columbus—a geographically close point to journey to the Indies.[229] Given the commercial and strategic significance of the eastern Atlantic in the early years of Spain's imperial formation, the military campaigns occurring in this realm deserve far greater historical attention, as do the principal conquistadors who carried them out.

To reconstruct the lives of Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo in the Atlantic, this chapter relies on the early modern chronicles of Valera (1487), Alonso de Espinosa (1594), and Juan de Abréu Galindo (1632).[230] Of those writers, Galindo provides one of the richest accounts on the conquest of the Canary Islands, derived in large measure from the archival records of the Count of Lanzarote, along with a historical text of the Canaries that is today missing.[231] For this latter reason alone, Galindo's history is invaluable to consult, even though it was written many decades after the events it relates, and is based primarily on Spanish voices. In addition to chronicles, this chapter draws on an array of archival documents ranging from testimonies and letters to military correspondence and royal contracts. The richest of those sources, at least in respect to Pedro de Vera, is the 1537 *interrogatorio* (questionnaire) compiled by his grandson, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca.[232] Organized some two decades after Vera's death, the interrogatory details the

[229] It was for this reason, among others, that Fernández-Armesto lauded the Canary Islands as "the key to everything that is most spectacular in the rise of Castile." *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic: 1229-1492* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 221.

[230] Valera, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, ed. Juan de Mata Carriazo (Madrid: José Molina, impresor, 1927); Espinosa, *Del origen y milagros de la santa imagen de Nuestra Señora de Candelaria* (Seville: Casa de Juan de Leó[n], 1594); and Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest.*

[231] Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife, 1494-1496* (Santa Cruz: Aula de Cultura de Tenerife, 1975), 10-11.

[232] A transcription of the interrogatorio appears in Hipólito Sancho Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes del archivo del marqués de Casa Vargas Machuca* (Cadiz: Imprenta M. Alvarez, 1943): 1-43. It is classified as, "Un documento interesante de sus servicios hecha en Xerex en 1537 a instancia de su nieto Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca."

conquistador's extensive services and sacrifices to the Catholic Kings, voiced through the testimonies of various witnesses who knew him personally. Because the source was intended to help Cabeza de Vaca secure a lucrative post in the Americas, it must be read with caution, as all of the questions were designed to accentuate the contributions of his ancestor to the crown. Even so, the interrogatorio is still of great value to this chapter, as several witnesses discuss matters not treated in the chronicles, making it crucial for illuminating relatively unknown or obscure aspects of Vera's life.

As for Alonso de Lugo, dozens of archival sources pertaining to the conquistador's tenure in the Canary Islands and Northwest Africa are published in various works by Antonio Rumeu de Armas. Among them are rarely-utilized letters, dispatches, correspondence, and economic transactions such as records of financial expenses and stocks of merchandise.[233] Aside from these documents, the most significant source on Lugo is the 1508 inquiry into his governorship of the Canary Islands, known as the *Residencia de Lugo*.[234] The *Residencia* sought to investigate Lugo's conduct and behavior while governor of the Canary Islands (1503-25), and contains brief statements from a handful of Spanish witnesses regarding some of the most significant aspects of his career, including his enterprises in the Canary Islands and Africa. While these testimonies should not be accepted at face value, given that they were made primarily by friends and acquaintances of Lugo, they are still indispensable for enriching, clarifying, and corroborating much of the information put forth in the other sources.

[233] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 2; Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife*, 413-81; and Rumeu de Armas, *Alonso de Lugo en la corte*, 180-216.

[234] The *Residencia* was particularly concerned with Lugo's treatment and enslavement of the Native peoples in the Canaries. For a transcript of this document, see Leopoldo de la Rosa Olivera and Elías Serra Ráfols, eds., *El Adelantado don Alonso de Lugo y su residencia, por Lope de Sosa*, Fascículo III de "Fontes Rerum Canariarum" (La Laguna de Tenerife: Instituto de Estudios Canarios, 1949).

The Search for the 'River of Gold': Iberian Maritime Competition in the Early Atlantic

Sometime before 1339, the Genoese explorer, Lançalotto Malocello (Lanzarote or Lancelot) set sail into the Atlantic sea, and stumbled upon a chain of islands off the coast of Northwest Africa.[235] The mariner's findings, referred to jointly as the 'Canary Isles' (*Islas Canarias*), sent shockwaves of excitement across much of Iberia and Italy.[236] Among the most interested parties were Genoese, Castilian, Portuguese, and Majorcan interlopers, who launched a cluster of voyages to the archipelago over the course of the fourteenth century in order to conquer, enslave, evangelize, or trade with the aborigines. Due to fierce Native resistance, as well as a lack of requisite manpower and resources, these early expeditions failed to conquer any of the seven main inhabited islands, which the Spanish came to call: Lanzarote, El Hierro, Fuerteventura, La Gomera, Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife. Moreover, if we use these incursions as the starting point for when initial efforts at conquest began, it would take another 150 years before the Canary Islands were definitively subjugated and incorporated into the crown of Castile (by 1496). This lengthy period of conquest can best be broken into several distinct stages: Early Contact and Exploration (c. 1339-1402); the Béthencourt Conquest (1402-5), and the Castilian Nobility Conquest (1418-96). While the crux of this chapter centers on the final phase, the earlier stages form the immediate backdrop of this story and are therefore essential to reconstruct.

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[235] Discrepancies in the sources prevent us from placing a more precise date on Malocello's landing, as well as knowing the exact motivations for the voyage. Fernández-Armesto suggests that Malocello probably reached the archipelago before 1339, though whether the expedition was one of conquest, exploration, or trade has been debated. *Before Columbus*, 155.

[236] The "Canary Isles" was a nomenclature seemingly borrowed from Pliny the Elder, who used the word "Canaria" to describe one of the seven inhabited islands. *The Natural History of Pliny*, 2 vols., trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855), vol. 2, 108.

Ironically, the first successful expedition of conquest in the Canaries was not conducted by Iberian conquerors, but by two French noblemen in 1402, Jean de Béthencourt (Lord of Grainville in Normandy) and Gadifer de la Salle (of the cadet branch of the Poitevin house). The precise motives of the Frenchmen for launching the enterprise are unclear, though it has been suggested that gold may have been the main impetus.[237] There had been rumors circulating of a route to the mythical 'River of Gold' in Africa by way of Cape Bojador, located just southeast of the Canary Islands. If the Canaries were to be conquered, it would provide a suitable entry point into the lucrative gold trade, as well as the other coveted commercial products of the African interior: ivory, jewels, leather, and precious feathers.[238] Perhaps with this in mind, the French company departed from the port of La Rochelle, France, on 1 May 1402, and eventually made landfall on Lanzarote, the northeastern-most island in the Canaries. After settling on the island, however, the military captains found their men too decrepit to conduct any meaningful incursions, forcing Béthencourt to sail back to Castile to procure additional aid.[239] The return trip of the Frenchman to Castile proved consequential.

In addition to receiving reinforcements, Béthencourt also arranged a secret agreement with the Castilian king, Henry III, pledging himself a vassal to the monarch. In return, Béthencourt was guaranteed the sole rights to any of the conquered islands, meaning that his partner, La Salle, was effectively shorn of any claims to the islands. While the terms that

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[237] David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 76; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 181.

[238] Ever since the lavish pilgrimage (hajj) of Mansa Mūsa (the ruler of the Islamic state of Mali) to Mecca in 1324, European adventurers, merchants, and nobles looked to the African interior as a place of near limitless gold to exploit. The Mali ruler's hajj, which took over a year to complete, allegedly transported so much gold to Mecca that it required a caravan of 80-100 camels to carry approximately 300 pounds of gold dust each, with thousands of additional enslaved peoples tasked with transporting individual bars of the precious mineral. See Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 146-47.

[239] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 177. O'Callaghan suggests that Béthencourt returned to Castile because his men mutinied, forcing him to return to Castile to seek royal assistance. *The Last Crusade in the West*, 38.

Béthencourt secured for himself were favorable, the true winner of the arrangement was arguably Henry III, whose patronage of the French lord meant that if the venture proved successful, it would provide Castile with a means of asserting claims of dominion over the Canaries—particularly over the Portuguese, who similarly professed pretensions to the archipelago.[240] If the endeavor failed, on the other hand, the pecuniary setback was only minor and rather irrelevant. The gamble paid off for Castile. By 1405, Béthencourt and his then comrade-in-arms, La Salle, managed to subdue three of the populated islands: Lanzarote, El Hierro, and Fuerteventura. As for La Salle, when he eventually learnt of Béthencourt's treachery, he returned to Castile to appeal his case before the royal court, but his pleas were cast aside. The unfortunate adventurer soon vanished from the archipelago, dying in relative obscurity in 1422.[241]

When Béthencourt settled in the Canaries after the conquest, he was quick to discover that the actual profits from the subjugated islands proved lackluster. The conquered lands were dry and poor to European eyes, and yielded little wealth (except for the dye orchil, Canary slaves, and seal skins). The route to the coveted gold markets in Africa was not as close as it initially seemed, and the costs of maintaining the Canarian outposts were quite high in comparison to the returns. The dismayed Frenchman returned to Normandy permanently in 1412, ceding his rights and holdings to his nephew, Mathieu, who apparently did not see great value in holding onto the islands either. In 1418, Mathieu sold them to the Andalusian magnate, Enrique Pérez de Guzmán (Count of Niebla), who in turn transferred them to his wealthy Sevillian neighbor, Hernán Peraza the Elder, for a price of 5,000 doblas of gold.[242] This series of

[240] See Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 171-80.
[241] Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 79.
[242] Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 103-4. Galindo describes the Peraza's as "ancient gentlemen in the city of Seville" (caballeros antiguos en la ciudad de Sevilla). *Historia de la conquista de las siete islas de Gran Canaria*, ed. Alejandro Cioranescu (Santa Cruz de Tenerife: Goya Ediciones, 1955), 106.

transactions is noteworthy, as the passing of the Canaries into the hands of Spanish nobles continued to strengthen Castile's claims to suzerainty over the archipelago.[243] At least for the time being, though, ownership of the Canaries remained with Hernán Peraza, who of all the recent proprietors was perhaps the most serious about conquering the rest of the archipelago. In 1440, he relocated to the Canaries with his son, Guillén, and initiated a series of privately mounted incursions that resulted in the conquest of La Gomera.[244] Peraza's ability to capture this island, and without the use of any royal forces, illustrates the continued importance of private initiative in orchestrating the initial conquests in the Canaries. Like Béthencourt and La Salle, Peraza stepped forward to conduct this enterprise at his own monetary risk, making his acquisition of La Gomera a decidedly noble feat.[245]

After the conquest of La Gomera, Hernán Peraza failed to secure any additional islands during his lifetime. With his death in 1452, ownership of the Canaries passed to his daughter and sole heir, Inés, along with her husband, Diego Garcia de Herrera.[246] Though the couple retained possession of the archipelago for several decades, they began to encounter growing pressure from the crown of Castile to relinquish their rights to the remaining unconquered islands (Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife).[247] In 1477, the Herrera-Peraza family reached an agreement

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[243] Claims to sovereignty of the islands was a major subject of debate at the Council of Basel (1430-49), a general council of the Roman Catholic Church. On this topic, see Luis Suárez Fernández, *Castilla, el cisma y la crisis conciliar (1378-1440)* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciónes Científicas, 1960), 117; Fernández, *Relaciones entre Portugal y Castilla en la época del Infante D. Enrique, 1393-1460* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciónes Científicas, 1960), 244-72; and James Muldoon, "The Avignon Papacy and the Frontiers of Christendom: The Evidence of Vatican Register 62," *Archivum Historiae Pontificiae* 17 (1979): 125-95.

[244] Juan Álvarez Delgado, "Primera conquista y colonización de la Gomera," *Anuario de estudios atlánticos*, VI (1960): 456-89. Guillén Peraza de las Casas was later killed on La Palma while conducting military operations. His death was memorialized in a popular poem of the time, believed to be one of the first literary compositions ever documented of the Canary Islands. The poem appears in Galindo's, *Historia de la conquista*, 108.

[245] Although Kamen referred to Alonso de Lugo as "the first and least known of the conquistadors who created the Spanish empire," it was Béthencourt, La Salle, and Peraza who acquired the initial pieces of Castile's overseas empire. *Empire*, 12.

[246] With the marriage of Inés and Diego, the Peraza lordship of the islands passed to the Herrera family.

[247] See Rumeu de Armas, "La reivindicación por la corona de Castilla del derecho de conquista sobre las Canarias Mayores y la creación del Condado de la Gomera," *Hidalguía* 7 (1959): 33-60.

with the Catholic Monarchs, renouncing their claims to the islands in exchange for the title of Count of La Gomera and monetary compensation (some 5,000,000 maravedíes).[248] The agreement had the effect of creating one less obstacle for Ferdinand and Isabella in subjugating the final islands in the Canaries, though if they were to lay uncontested claim to the archipelago, they still needed to contend with the crown of Portugal, who since the mid-fourteenth century laid claim to it on a number of bases, including their contention that a 1341 expedition to the Canaries was conducted under their auspices, or the dubious assertion that "the said islands stand closer to us than to any other prince."[249] The Iberian polities eventually reached a compromise in 1479, known as the treaty of Alcáçovas. As part of the stipulations, Afonso V of Portugal acknowledged Castilian sovereignty over the Canaries, and in exchange, Ferdinand and Isabella recognized Portugal's claims to the other Atlantic islands, namely the Azores, the Cape Verde islands, and the Madeira archipelago.

With this agreement forged, Ferdinand and Isabella were finally in position to prosecute the conquest of the Canary Islands unhampered, but this did not mean that the subjugation of the final islands would be an easy affair. Following the denouement of the War of Castilian Succession in 1479, the Catholic Monarchs were left deeply in debt and lacked a dependable tax income to boost their repositories. With a depleted central treasury, how were the sovereigns to pay for the expensive weapons, ships, and soldiers needed to orchestrate the conquests in the Canaries? The answer, in short, was that they could not. They instead elected to forge contracts with ambitious military men who agreed to organize, finance, and conduct these expeditions at

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[248] Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 97. In addition, Inés and her husband would be allowed to retain ownership over the four lesser islands in perpetual inheritance (La Gomera, Hierro, Fuerteventura, and Lanzarote). These islands would remain in their possession until the end of the eighteenth century.
[249] Clément, *Clément VI: Lettres se rapportant à la France*, Eugène Déprez, Jean Glénisson, and Guillaume Mollat, eds., (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1958-1961), no. 1314. Quote cited in Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 177.

their own expense. Like the Reconquista, these captains had the faculty to recruit mercenaries, friends, kinsmen, and vassals for the expedition at their own discretion, and in return, they could expect to receive a portion of the spoils, or more desirably, a grant of land and hereditary title linked to the conquered territory. Unlike the Reconquista, if the military leader lacked the means to raise the requisite funds for the expedition, private investors and ad hoc companies interested in the economic exploitation of the island's resources were invited to help raise the remaining sum.[250] In this way, the conquest of the final islands in the Canaries became a collaborative affair, with the crown, investors, and military leaders all working together to ensure the success of the enterprise. Of particular note were the efforts of two conquistador captains, Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo, who were among the first—and least known of the conquistadors—to forge the early Spanish empire.

Pedro de Vera: A Résumé of Frontier Services, 1472-80

In 1477, as soon as the Catholic Monarchs solidified their agreement with the Herrera-Peraza family over the rights to the unconquered islands in the Canaries, they immediately dispatched the Aragonese captain, Juan Rejón, to prosecute the conquest of the archipelago. After setting up his base in the north of Gran Canaria, Rejón soon directed assaults against the two Indigenous power bases on the island (Gáldar in the northwest and Telde in the northeast), but the incursions proved largely ineffective.[251] The mercenaries recruited on behalf of the conquest

[250] Among the central merchants in Seville that helped finance the conquest of the Canaries (La Palma and Tenerife) were principally Italian capitalists, who long played vital roles in financing Iberian exploration, conquest, and colonization of the Atlantic. See Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*; Fernández-Armesto, "La financiación de la conquista"; and Otte, *Sevilla y sus mercaderes*.
[251] The Castilian expedition was comprised of some 900 infantry and 30 horsemen, and landed in Gran Canaria in June of 1478. Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 97. Galindo cites a smaller number of forces, some 600 infantry and 30 horsemen. *Historia de la conquista*, 179.

were paid wages, and not the spoils of war. With little monetary incentive to engage in dangerous land acquisition, these men contented themselves with mere survival and sporadic raids. What's more, the sources inform us that in between raids, the conquistadors at the encampment were at one another's throats. This internal strife reached its boiling point after the lead commander, Rejón, ordered the execution of another captain in the expedition, Pedro de Algaba.[252] Apprised of this turmoil, the Catholic Monarchs relieved Rejón of his duties in early 1480, politely telling him to conduct military operations on one of the other unconquered islands (La Palma or Tenerife).[253] In February of that year, they appointed as his successor the Andalusian native, Pedro de Vera, who would prove an excellent choice for the mission.

What made Vera an ideal candidate for the leadership position in Gran Canaria was his early career as a soldier and administrator in Andalusia. Born around 1430, Pedro de Vera grew up in the southwestern Spanish town of Jerez de la Frontera, located approximately fifty miles south of Seville.[254] As the *segundogénito* (second-born child), Pedro de Vera did not inherit any formal possessions from his father, yet what he failed to acquire from his predecessors, he aspired to make up for through his own services.[255] During the late 1460s and 70s, Pedro de Vera made a name for himself serving as alcalde of the towns of Jimena, Arcos, and Cádiz; all

[252] The executed captain was the brother-in-law of Alonso de Lugo, then a member of the expedition. After this incident, Lugo traveled to Castile to demand justice for his deceased relative. Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 309.

[253] In Pedro de Vera's appointment letter as captain general of Gran Canaria, the Catholic Monarchs allude to the discord within the Rejón company: "between the said captains and men there has been some differences, divisions, and scandals, and because of this the island of Gran Canaria has not been taken." AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 11 (Toledo, 4 February 1480). Document published in Benjmain González Alonso, *Gobernación y Gobernadores. Notes sobre la Administración de Castilla en el período de formación del Estado moderno* (Madrid: Universidad de Madrid, Faculty de Derecho, Sección de publicaciones, 1974), 237.

[254] One of the testimonies in the 1537 interrogatorio testifies to Pedro de Vera's noble status, referring to him as a "*cavallero fijo dalgo*" (noble knight). Sancho de Sopranis, "Un Documento Interesante," 19.

[255] His father, Diego Gómez de Mendoza, was a respected, yet lower member of the professional community of Jerez, serving at various times as a public notary (*notario público*), chief constable (*alguacil mayor*), and chief standard bearer (*alférez mayor*). Roleno Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz, *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca: His Account, His Life, and the Expedition of Pánfilo de Narváez*, 3 vols. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), vol. 1, 324-25.

possessions of the powerful Count of Arcos, Rodrigo Ponce de León (later the Marquis of Cádiz). These towns were conspicuously hazardous, as they were situated in a region of Spain that shared a precarious frontier space with the hostile kingdom of Granada. For the young Pedro de Vera, this presented the hidalgo with ample opportunities to engage in military combat, whether to defend his homeland from enemy incursions, or to launch assaults on nearby Islamic settlements.

Such was the case in 1472, when Pedro de Vera assisted his lord and employer, Rodrigo Ponce de León, in the capture of the Granadan village of Cardela in southern Spain. According to a letter written by the Count of Arcos himself, Vera played a prominent role in the battle, helping to not only discover an entrance into the city, but also suffering grave injuries in the fray: "you [Pedro de Vera] were the reason that I took and won the town of Cárdela that was in the power of the Moors, the enemies of our holy Catholic faith. You gave me the scheme to recover the said town, and in the combat in which you were wounded, your blood was shed in my service and honor."[256] In recognition of his distinguished services, Vera received a juro of 10,000 maravedíes from Rodrigo Ponce de León, as well as the prestigious honor of being entombed in the royal chapel of Santo Domingo el Real in Jerez de la Frontera. The burial site in particular later became a tremendous source of pride to Vera's descendants, evidenced by the 50,000 maravedíes pledge that they made on 16 March 1506 to maintain the chapel and preserve the family honor.[257]

While the capture of Cardela ranked high among Pedro de Vera's military accomplishments, the battle was merely one of many frontier forays that the resident of Jerez

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[256] Letter from Rodrigo Ponce de León to Pedro de Vera (Jerez, 13 October 1472), in Manuel Muñoz Pacheco, *La nobleza jerezana y la orden de Predicadores durante la Edad Media* (Sevilla: Tipografía Católica, 1929), 77. As cited in Sancho de Sopranis, "Pedro de Vera en los bandos andaluces entre Ponces y Guzmanes," *Revista de Historia Canaria* 88, (1949): 363-393, 373.

[257] After being granted the honor of being interred in the chapel, Pedro de Vera promised to donate 10,000 maravedíes annually to the monastery. On 16 March 1506, his descendants later pledged an additional 50,000 maravedíes. Adorno and Pautz, *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, vol. 1, 331.

participated in over the course of his early career. In fact, according to the interrogatorio compiled by his grandson, Cabeza de Vaca, Pedro de Vera's military services extended far beyond the frontiers of Andalusia, including to the nearby coast of North Africa. Here, Vera fought in several *entradas* (raids) against the Moroccan cities of Larache and Fedala, as well as in the attempted conquest of Azemmour in 1480.[258] The presence of Pedro de Vera in these lands was noteworthy, as these territories fell within the sphere of conquest reserved for Portugal (as outlined in the 1479 treaty of Alcáçovas), meaning that the conquistador would have been infringing on the Portuguese zone of possessions in Africa. Although illicit, Vera's actions were not unusual for Andalusian residents at the time. Throughout the late fifteenth century, Spanish mariners living along the Atlantic strip in southern Spain regularly engaged in acts of piracy off the waters of North Africa, with the men of Palos particularly notorious for encroaching on Portuguese territories stretching from the coast of Iberia all the way down to Guinea.[259] For these *Andaluceños* (Andalusians), the African shoreline provided a source of economic revenue too lucrative to ignore, inviting many residents in southern Spain, including the young Pedro de Vera, to violate the Luso-Spanish treaty for personal gain.

While Pedro de Vera acquired notable military experience in Andalusia and North Africa fighting against traditional enemies of the faith, some of his most memorable military bouts came not against Muslims, but fellow Christians. One of his most remarkable services came during his tenure as alcalde of Jimena (appointed in 1468), during which time he helped defend this village from the aggression of the Sevillian noble, Enrique de Guzmán. According to various witnesses, the duke sought to incorporate Jimena (then ruled by his archrival, Rodrigo Ponce de León) into his own private estates, and summoned a large band of private vassals and retainers to

[258] See the testimony of Francisco Zarco, in Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 23.
[259] Nader, "The Spain That Encountered Mexico," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, eds. Beezley and Meyer, 18.

lay siege to the village. The duke's forces encircled Jimena so as to cut off food supplies from entering, prompting the alcalde, Pedro de Vera, to take to the sea and solicit aid from the Muslim commander of Málaga, Alquizote. The Muslim ruler provided wheat to sustain the inhabitants of Jimena, and in return, Pedro de Vera was forced to leave two of his sons hostage until he could secure the loan to repay him.[260] A witness to the incident, Francisco Ramires Calderero, later recalled "the great tears in the house of the said Pedro de Vera, for having pawned his children in the land of the Moors."[261] While such testimony may have accurately captured the sentiments of the Vera family at this time, it failed to mention that this sort of behavior was common practice in the late medieval Spanish frontier. During outbreaks of violence between neighboring lords, it was routine for Andalusian leaders or local officials to enlist the support of Muslim allies, and to offer their kinsmen as collateral until that debt was repaid.[262] In the case of Pedro de Vera, his gamble paid off. With the help of Alquizote, Vera was able to deter the powerful Duke of Medina Sidonia from annexing Jimena, garnering him immense prestige that seemingly caught the attention of the Spanish sovereigns themselves.

Indeed, Pedro de Vera's extensive résumé of frontier services must have impressed upon the Catholic Monarchs an image of a skilled and trustworthy caballero. While his political responsibilities as alcalde proved him a competent administrator, his military experience on the frontiers of Andalusia and North Africa demonstrated his aptitude in the art of war. It was presumably for these reasons that Ferdinand and Isabella appointed him *corregidor* (governor and captain general) of Gran Canaria in 1480, trusting him, in the words of the monarchs "to protect our service well, and to carry out everything that is commanded of you faithfully and

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[260] See the testimony of Fernando Riqquel, in Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 25. See also Sancho de Sopranis, "Pedro de Vera, alcaide de Ximena," *Revista de Historia Canaria* 81 (1948): 33-53.
[261] Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 20.
[262] Carriazo, *En la frontera de Granada*, 216-17.

diligently."[263] And yet, while Pedro de Vera's past services likely earned him the enviable position of corregidor, they simultaneously prepared him for the challenges that he would encounter on Gran Canaria.[264] Similar to Andalusia and the Maghrib, the island of Gran Canaria was essentially another frontier space: situated in relative isolation from nearby Christian outposts, susceptible to unpredictable forays, and replete with unfamiliar and difficult terrain. The frontier experience that Pedro de Vera previously accumulated in Andalusia and North Africa, be it on land or sea, made him supremely fit to tackle the obstacles awaiting him in the Canaries.

Amphibious Operations, Native Allies, and the Conquest of Gran Canaria

As soon as Pedro de Vera was appointed corregidor of Gran Canaria, the next step for the conqueror was to raise the finances needed to pay for the costly military operations. Since Spain's coffers were depleted in the aftermath of the War of Castilian Succession, the monarchs were unable to provide Vera with any serious monetary support, and mandated that he fund the expedition at his own expense.[265] According to Francisco Calderero, a witness in the 1537 interrogatorio, the Andalusian captain was forced to sell off private holdings including certain "plots of lands, possessions, and other things" to finance the enterprise.[266] For an individual of Vera's economic stature, a monetary investment of this nature posed no small risk. If the

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[263] AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 11 (Toledo, 4 February 1480).
[264] Ladero Quesada upholds this view, suggesting that the Catholic Monarchs selected Pedro de Vera as compensation for his past services in Andalusia. "El Gobernador," 106.
[265] In a royal document dated 17 January 1481, Queen Isabella acknowledges that Pedro de Vera was sent to complete the conquest of Gran Canaria "at his own cost" (a su costa). AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 194. This document is also published in Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife*, doc. 1, 413-17.
[266] Testimony in Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 19. According to Ladero Quesada, Pedro de Vera also received the financial support of Pedro Fernández Cabrón, a Genoese merchant based in Cádiz, as well as the royal *contador* (accountant), Alfonso de Quintanilla. *La España de los Reyes Católicos* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 2019), 484.

enterprise were to fail, hypothetically, the conquistador would be fortunate to recoup a fraction of the cash invested into the expedition, and would likely be faced with financial ruin. Even more concerning, there was no guarantee that he would even survive the expedition. Conquest was a dangerous and unpredictable business. At any given moment Vera and his company could be subject to unforeseen circumstances or a stroke of bad luck: a dangerous tempest could wipe out the entire fleet, or an ambush in the field could result in heavy casualties. With such attendant risks, the willingness of Pedro de Vera to agree to the enterprise indicates the great lengths that he and other early modern conquistadors were prepared to go for the sake of reinforcing or augmenting their social position. With that said, these risks may not have appeared all that great in the mind of Vera. The conquistador came from a region of Spain punctuated by near constant warfare, making him no stranger to the perils of war and conquest. It was perhaps for this reason that he ultimately looked to the Canaries expedition less as a hazardous enterprise, and more as a propitious one to carve out greater fortune and status.

In the summer of 1480, Pedro de Vera departed from Cádiz with a company of 20 horse and 150 crossbowmen, and landed in Gran Canaria in August of that year.[267] Prior to his arrival, it was well-known that the previous corregidor, Rejón, not only made virtually no gains on the island, but also managed to drive the Castilian encampment into violent discord. As soon as Pedro de Vera arrived on the island, he quickly brought order to the beleaguered camp and also implemented more effective military strategies. At this time, Vera's principal objective appeared to be the establishment of a second front at Agaete, located several miles south of the hostile Indigenous kingdom of Gáldar.[268] Due to the island's rugged contours and difficult undergrowth,

[267] Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest*, vol. 1, 125. On his forces, see Valera, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 108.
[268] Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest*, vol. 1, 128-34.

the conquistador recognized the futility of launching an overland expedition to this site, and instead organized naval voyages to the island's remote northwest shore.

The decision of Pedro de Vera to utilize seafaring tactics on this occasion perhaps stemmed from his early life growing up on a maritime frontier. Over the course of the 1460s and 70s, Vera periodically crossed the Strait of Gibraltar to participate in raids in present-day Morocco, and also fought in various naval battles in and around Andalusia. One of his more memorable naval engagements came in 1471 when he helped his lord, Rodrigo Ponce de León, battle the Duke of Medina Sidonia's armada in the waters of Sanlúcar.[269] By virtue of his participation in this maritime conflict, one sixteenth-century Castilian writer regarded Vera as an "expert in battles on land as on the sea."[270] It was precisely these sorts of experiences that gave the conquistador the confidence to conduct amphibious operations on Gran Canaria, as well as the ability to ultimately succeed in this aquatic environment.

When Pedro de Vera's ships landed on the deserted northwest shoreline of Gran Canaria, his company of conquistadors were able to penetrate the interior with far less resistance, allowing them to erect a second stockade at Agaete in September of 1481. Over the next five months, the soldiers stationed at this fort defended it ardently from the incursions of nearby Native groups. However, the tables turned in February of 1482, when the conquistadors at Agaete captured the Indigenous kingdom of Gáldar and its sovereign, Tenesor Semidán. After being transported to Spain, Semidán agreed to become a vassal of the Catholic Monarchs—presumably under the condition that he would receive a plot of land in the interior of Gran Canaria, and that he could continue to exercise a form of local sovereignty over his people within

[269] Valera, *Memorial de diversas hazañas*, 196.
[270] Juan Sedeño, *Suma de varones ilustres* (Toledo: En la Oficina de Juan Rodriguez, Impresor y Mercader de libros, y a su costa, 1590), 145.

that allotted area.[271] He was subsequently baptized as Don Fernando Guanarteme, and later returned to Gran Canaria to assist the Castilians in the general pacification of the island (namely by convincing many of his compatriots in the north to submit to Spanish rule).[272] With the aid of Semidán, Pedro de Vera was able to subjugate much of Gran Canaria by the summer of 1483, minus the few insurgents who continued to roam the barely accessible mountainous region in the south.[273] Moreover, the collaboration of the Native lord signaled a recurring theme in the history of the early Spanish empire. As in Granada, Naples, Mexico, and Peru, Castilian conquistadors benefited greatly from the support of Native allies and local rulers.

While Native divisions may have sealed Pedro de Vera's victory on Gran Canaria, the Andalusian captain must still be credited with orchestrating this important conquest. Prior to sailing to the Canaries, it was Vera who financed a sizable portion of the enterprise, selling off private holdings and possessions to carry out the expensive military operations. His ability to front much of the money for the expedition was critical, as his sovereigns were both unwilling and incapable of paying for the costly ships and equipment needed for the conquest. Aside from this financial support, Vera also proved himself a capable military commander: bringing order to the ruptured Castilian camp, inaugurating effective military schemes, and winning a number of key battles over technically competent Native foes. Through such efforts, Spain was able to

[271] Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 98.
[272] Various contemporaries and modern scholars tend to agree that Native division was the most important factor in elucidating Pedro de Vera's success on Gran Canaria. Pulgar, for instance, remarked that "the island of Gran Canaria was difficult to win. [But] because it had two opposing kings pitted against one another, one [Don Fernando] joined with Pedro de Vera in order to have vengeance on the other, his enemy. With the help that he [Don Fernando] provided, the opposing king was defeated." Fernández-Armesto acknowledged how in the later campaigns, "Pedro de Vera was able to play off rival factions as a means to final victory." Abulafia agreed with the sentiment: "The key to conquest was, predictably, the division of the enemy: the defection of Semidan was the guarantee that before long Grand Canary would fall under Spanish rule." Pulgar, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 203; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 209; and Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 98.
[273] In total, 240 Canarians had been taken as slaves of war: 100 had been sent to Castile, while the remaining 140 were brought along to the conquest of Tenerife. Valera, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 114.

secure yet another strategic foothold in the Canaries, and one that could be used as a steppingstone to the conquest of other nearby islands. For these reasons, the Catholic Monarchs did not fail to recognize the significance of Vera's acts, and granted him various estates and Native labor services on Gran Canaria in return for his services. Nevertheless, if the conquistador hoped to settle down in Gran Canaria after the conquest to find respite, he would be sorely disappointed. The Granada War erupted in his homeland of Andalusia in early 1482, and the Spanish sovereigns needed their talented soldier back in Spain to assist in the war effort.

The Simultaneity of Empire: From Granada to the Canaries

Among all of the aspects of Pedro de Vera's lengthy military career, some of the more challenging dimensions to reconstruct were his services during the conquest of Granada. There are relatively few references pertaining to the conquistador's participation in the war in the historical record, and the details that do exist are typically rather paltry in detail. One of the reasons seemingly pertains to the monumental scale of the war, which not only spanned ten long years, but also involved a broad spectrum of Spanish society. With its manifold protagonists, and a lengthy temporal scope, the dominant histories and chronicles of the Granada War could only focus on the most significant elements, such as the major military campaigns or its widely deemed heroes (Ferdinand and Isabella, the Marquis of Cádiz, the heads of the three Military and Religious Orders, etc.). It is therefore understandable why Pedro de Vera went largely unnoticed during the Granada War—he was, by no stretch of the imagination, one of the heroes of the conquest. But if we draw on fragments of information gleaned from archival records and other sources, we can see that Vera's intervention in the war was far greater than the Castilian

chroniclers acknowledged.[274] In fact, over the course of this conflict, Pedro de Vera rendered a number of vital services on behalf of the Spanish crown: purveying troops to the royal army, captaining some of the most decisive campaigns, helping to conquer several Muslim citadels, and furnishing the Catholic Monarchs with a loan of 500,000 maravedíes to help cover the expenses of the war.[275] These impressive contributions illustrate that even in the aftermath of the conquest of Gran Canaria, Pedro de Vera continued to play a significant role in the formation of the early Spanish empire.

After securing Gran Canaria in the summer of 1483, Pedro de Vera departed for Andalusia later that year to take part in the upcoming campaigns in Granada.[276] His first recorded actions came in June of 1484, when he assisted his former employer, Rodrigo Ponce de León, in the siege of Álora. Aside from offering his military talents in battle, Pedro de Vera also provided twenty-three Canary Islanders to fight on behalf of Castile—most, if not all of whom had likely assisted him during the conquest of Gran Canaria.[277] The presence of Native peoples in this engagement is fascinating, given that very little is known about Indigenous participation in the conquest of Granada. Yet their involvement in this conflict was not altogether surprising. In Granada, and indeed across much of the early Spanish empire, Native peoples accompanied conquistadors in virtually all major episodes of conquest, including in Northwest Africa, Italy, Central Mexico, Yucatán, Guatemala, Honduras, and Peru.[278] Although the precise role of this

[274] The two principal Christian chroniclers of the war, Andrés Bernáldez and Fernando Pulgar, provide only snippets of information concerning Pedro de Vera's intervention in the war. Pulgar, for instance, cites Pedro de Vera only twice in his chronicle. *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, 203, 322.
[275] AGS, Estado, leg. 1, fol. 116. See also Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador."
[276] Ladero Quesada indicates that Pedro de Vera arrived in Andalusia as early as the fall of 1483. "El Gobernador," 108-9.
[277] Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 109. See AGS, Sección de Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, leg. 106.
[278] On the role of Native allies in conquest expeditions across Spanish America, see Matthew Restall, *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Matthew and Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors*; Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*; and Steve J. Stern, "The Rise and Fall of Indian-White Alliances: A Regional View of 'Conquest' History," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 61, no. 3 (1981): 461-491. On the

group of Canary Islanders at Álora is unknown, we do know that with their help, the Castilians toppled the Muslim fortress after a few weeks of battle. The victory was significant for the Castilians, culminating in the elimination of a major Islamic fortress in Granada, but the triumph for Pedro de Vera could hardly be celebrated.

During Vera's absence from the Canaries, the Indigenous inhabitants of La Gomera launched an insurrection against the lord of the island, Hernán Peraza "the Younger" (son of Inés Peraza and Diego Garcia de Herrera), over his reported abuse and mistreatment of the Native peoples. The rebellion quickly escalated to dangerous levels, so much so that Peraza and his wife, Beatriz de Bobadilla y Ossorio (known as "La Bobadilla"), ensconced themselves in their tower-fortress until Castilian reinforcements arrived.[279] For the Catholic Monarchs, news of this revolt could not have come at a worse time. With the conquest of Granada in full swing, the sovereigns were completely consumed by the exigencies of the war, and could little afford to send precious royal troops and resources to the faraway Canary Islands. Therefore, to suppress the rebellion they needed someone capable of doing so independently and without royal support. In the minds of the sovereigns, Pedro de Vera was the perfect candidate. The conquistador not only had years of experience battling and interacting with the Native peoples of the Canaries, but he also had connections to various soldiers on the archipelago who could be summoned to help silence this threat. After receiving an urgent dispatch detailing the precarious situation, Pedro de Vera immediately departed for La Gomera with 100 men and several ships to relieve his countrymen from their conspicuous peril.[280] Upon landing on the island, Vera resorted to forcible

presence of a small cohort of Indigenous peoples who accompanied Alonso de Lugo on his expeditions to the Saharan coast of Africa, see AGS, Consejo Real, leg. 106, fol. 12. In respect to the involvement of Native peoples in the Italian campaigns, Kamen notes that a group of Canary Islanders were "recruited in 1510 to go to Italy to fight in the wars there." Kamen, *Empire*, 12.

[279] Sancho de Sopranis, "En torno a Pedro de Vera y los gomeros," *Revista de Historia*, núm. 105-108 (1954): 47-56; Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 109; and Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 210.

[280] See the testimony of Lope de Ocaña, in Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 21.

measures to squash the revolt, imprisoning or hanging the most rebellious Gomeros while enslaving numerous others.[281] Though effective in reestablishing order, Vera's violent tactics exacerbated the already tense relations on the island between the Europeans and Native peoples, setting the stage for more bloody confrontations to come.

After restoring Spanish rule on La Gomera, Pedro de Vera later returned to Granada in 1486 to continue fighting on behalf of the Castilian crown.[282] In June of that year, the conquistador could be found at the critical siege of Íllora, where he was given control over a group of royal vassals living in acostamiento.[283] While little is known about Pedro de Vera's precise role in this campaign, the battle resulted in another important victory for the Castilians, as it opened up a more direct path towards the most important city in the Muslim emirate, Málaga. In early 1487, the Catholic Monarchs launched a major offensive against this citadel, entrusting Vera with the captainship of 110 to 120 *jinetes* (light cavalrymen) and foot soldiers, many of whom were close friends and kinsmen from his home town of Jerez de la Frontera.[284] The conquistador was additionally tasked with the surveillance of the royal camp at Málaga, and would have borne witness to the failed assassination attempt on Ferdinand and Isabella made by the North African holy man, Ibrāhīm al-Jarbī.[285] The bestowing of Pedro de Vera with these significant responsibilities indicates that he was no ordinary, obscure soldier in this war, but rather a principal figure put in charge of key tasks. Given the conquistador's growing reputation as a loyal and trustworthy soldier, Ferdinand and Isabella probably wished to keep him stationed

[281] Sancho de Sopranis, "En torno a Pedro de Vera," 52-54.
[282] Prior to his return to Spain, Pedro de Vera appeared to have spent much of 1485 in Gran Canaria, where he served as governor of that island (1480-91). Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 109.
[283] Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 110.
[284] Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 111, n. 26. See also AGS, Contaduria del Sueldo, leg. 38, fol. 218.
[285] The testimony of Francisco Zarco confirms Pedro de Vera's presence in the conquest of Málaga: "A siege was placed on the said city of Malaga, which was taken, and the said governor [Pedro de Vera] was seen taking part in the capture." Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 23. On the attempted assassination of the Catholic Monarchs, see Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 298-99.

in Andalusia for the remainder of the war, but another urgent (and indeed dire) situation was unfolding in the Canaries.

In late 1488, the Native inhabitants of La Gomera launched a second rebellion against Hernán Peraza, yet this time the insurgents managed to kill the Castilian lord. A royal decree issued on 4 March 1489 ordered Pedro de Vera to return to the Canaries to assist Peraza's mother, Doña Inés Peraza (señora of Lanzarote and Fuerteventura), in subjugating the rebels:

> We have been told that some of the inhabitants in the Canaries have killed her [Doña Inés Peraza's] son, Hernán Peraza. The residents of the island have mobilized their neighbors and risen up in revolt to extricate (*substraer*) themselves from her lordship. If that were to happen, she [Inés Peraza] says that she would suffer great indignity, and has asked us for mercy, begging that we provide her with justice. As we consider ourselves merciful and righteous, we order that you [Pedro de Vera] protect and defend the islands in the possession of Doña Inés Peraza, that you do not allow its residents to remove themselves from her obedience, and that you bring to justice the evildoers (*mal fechores*).[286]

Pedro de Vera complied with the mandate. Between 1488 and 1489 he made two devastating forays on the island, enslaving or putting to death any Natives who took part in the revolt, including the spouses and children of the rebels. The brutal tactics were conducted with suspect legality, and as will be seen, drew numerous complaints from contemporaries that would come back to haunt the conquistador.[287] For now, though, with peace uneasily assured on La Gomera, Pedro de Vera eventually sailed back to Andalusia to partake in the final stages of the Granada War. In 1489, Vera purveyed troops to the royal army during the critical siege of Baza, and afterwards, helped patrol the seacoast of Málaga, thereby preventing foreign aid in the form of weapons and resources from reaching the shores of the peninsula.[288] This latter service was particularly important, as it further contributed to the cutting off of supplies and provisions from entering the emirate of Granada. With the capital fully encircled by land and sea, the inhabitants

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[286] AGS, Registro General del Sello, III-1489-300 (Medina del Campo, 1489).
[287] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 210.
[288] Ladero Quesada, "El Gobernador," 115.

of the Muslim city eventually succumbed to starvation, inducing them to press for terms with the Castilians in late 1491.

The circulating movement of Pedro de Vera back and forth between Granada and the Canaries over the course of the 1480s held important ramifications for the rise of the early Spanish empire. With the Catholic Monarchs embroiled in the Granada War, they depended almost entirely on Pedro de Vera and his privately raised forces to contain multiple outbreaks of violence on La Gomera. After reimposing order in the Canaries, the conquistador dutifully sailed back to Andalusia to assist the crown in its critical Peninsular War: commanding troops in the royal army, helping to conquer multiple citadels, and patrolling the Andalusian shoreline to prevent outside aid from reaching the Muslim emirate. The ability of Vera to perform the duties of empire in not one, but two frontier realms over the course of the 1480's bestowed him with monumental significance to the crown. During a busy epoch when Castile was entangled in war on several fronts, the myriad services of Pedro de Vera helped nurture the nascent empire and ensure its proper functioning. Furthermore, his contributions to the crown signaled a broader shift taking place during the rule of the Catholic Monarchs. With the crown occupied in multiple conflicts simultaneously, hidalgos like Pedro de Vera were given unprecedented opportunities to assume important leadership posts within the empire, particularly in overseas lands far removed from the Iberian Peninsula. This contrasts to previous reigns, when tasks of paramount importance were typically entrusted to middling or high-ranking nobles, and rarely to those of lesser social standing.

The Spiraling Fortunes of Pedro de Vera

Despite the noteworthy services that Pedro de Vera rendered to the monarchs over the course of the 1480s, the conquistador would ultimately fall into personal ruin following the conquest of Granada. Indeed, ever since Vera's arrival in Gran Canaria in 1480, numerous complaints and lawsuits had been piling up against him (mostly from colonists and royal officials) concerning his alleged misconduct in the Canaries.[289] While some of the accusations alleged that he was monopolizing the best lands in the archipelago for himself and his relatives, others pertained to his brutal repression and enslavement of the Native inhabitants, such as his actions during the Gomeros rebellion of 1488-89.[290] To make matters worse for Vera at this time, his son, Hernando, publicly expressed criticism in 1490 against the powerful magistrate of Jerez de la Frontera, Juan de Robles, as well as the Catholic Monarchs themselves.[291] Hernando's words of contempt came at a dangerous time, as an infamous libel against the bad governance of Ferdinand and Isabella had been circulating in Castile, and his criticism would not only have aggravated the situation, but also roused suspicion that he was the composer of the inflammatory verses. In order to escape the sure-fire wrath of the sovereigns, Hernando fled to the Canary Islands on one of his father's private vessels, though he was later arrested and brought back to Castile in chains.[292]

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[289] One of the most egregious cases occurred in 1481, when Pedro de Vera allegedly convinced a group of Canarians to embark on one his ships, promising them the opportunity to participate in the conquest of the island of Tenerife. Instead, the Native peoples were enslaved and transferred to the other islands, where they were sold as war captives in the Levant or Andalusian slave markets (principally in Jerez de la Frontera, Palos, Seville, Valencia, and Ibiza). This incident, along with similar ones, would draw the ire of the Spanish governor of Ibiza, as well as the bishops of Málaga and the Canaries. Adorno and Pautz, *Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca*, vol. 1, 328.

[290] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 210.

[291] Hernando's criticism of the Catholic Monarchs was directed mostly at the continuation of the Granada War and the tremendous demands required to sustain it.

[292] Sancho de Sopranis, "Las contrariedades de los últimos años de Pedro de Vera," *Revista de Historia Canaria* 92 (1950): 324-338, 331. Although the monarchs ultimately pardoned Hernando and banished him to Melilla, the rebel

Although Pedro de Vera managed to escape much of the royal wrath incurred by his son's contempt, the incident irrevocably worsened his already deteriorating position at court. In March of 1491, the crown officially revoked his governorship of Gran Canaria.[293] The loss of the post ultimately equated to financial ruin for the conquistador, who despite all of his services to the crown soon fell into economic despair.[294] His helplessness was exacerbated by the fact that one of the few individuals capable of restoring his honor and fortunes, his former employer and close friend, Rodrigo Ponce de León, died shortly after the Granada War, depriving him of a much-needed ally. The next decade of Vera's life would be spent reflecting, in the words of Sancho de Sopranis, "the bitterness of being forgotten and neglected," all the while facing new claims and lawsuits concerning his past tenure as governor.[295] In 1506, the accomplished conqueror died an impoverished man, and without any estates to pass along to his heirs.[296] His only comforting assurance was the distinguished honor of being buried in the main chapel of the *Convento de Predicadores* ("Convent of Preachers") in Jerez; a privilege granted to him some three decades before for his role in the capture of Cardela.

The dramatic decline in Pedro de Vera's career demonstrates how quickly one could fall out of favor with the crown and into relative obscurity, a pattern that mirrored the lives of many early modern conquistadors. A famous later example is the conquistador-historian, Bernal Díaz

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would eventually meet his end on the Barbary coast, perishing while carrying out his exile. Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest*, vol. 1, 167-68.

[293] See AGS, Registro General del Sello, 30, III, 1491, fol. 64. Vera was additionally prohibited from traveling to the Canaries altogether.

[294] Although Pedro de Vera still retained possession of his principal estate in the Canaries, and attempted to control it from Andalusia, difficulties in communication and the inept exploitation of the estate yielded negligible profits, and his descendants were ultimately forced to sell it in 1516. Sancho de Sopranis, "Las contrariedades," 335.

[295] Sancho de Sopranis, "Las contrariedades," 336.

[296] One of the witnesses in the 1537 interrogatorio, Francisco Ramírez Calderero, acknowledged how Pedro de Vera failed to be properly compensated for his services: "Despite the many services that the said governor [Pedro de Vera] made in the glorious memory of the Catholic kings, [he was not] compensated for them [that] this witness saw. The said Pedro de Vera died poorly, which is public (*publica*) and well-known (*notorio*) in this city." Sancho de Sopranis, *Documentos interesantes*, 19.

del Castillo, who after fighting in the Spanish-Aztec War later fell into a penniless state, and published his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain* as a way of attaining royal recognition for his services.[297] The old conquistador was unsuccessful and died a relatively poor man in 1584 on his estate in Guatemala. His life, much like Pedro de Vera's, reveals the dramatic highs and lows of a conquistador, who even after participating in a successful enterprise all too often fell into obscurity and economic hardship. But unlike Pedro de Vera, Díaz del Castillo was never a military commander or an upper echelon conquistador; in fact, besides being a man of letters, he was more or less an ordinary foot soldier. Pedro de Vera, by contrast, was far more distinguished, with an outstanding résumé of services that extended to three frontiers: Andalusia, North Africa, and the Canaries. Administratively, he was at various points in time alcalde of Jimena and Arcos, corregidor of Carmena and Cádiz, *capitán general* (captain general) of Gran Canaria, La Palma, and Tenerife, and *gobernador* (governor) of Gran Canaria. Militarily, he not only helped expand the empire by conquering Gran Canaria and fighting in the Granada War, but also worked to maintain it, squashing various revolts that erupted in the Canaries over the course of the 1480s. With such an extensive list of méritos y servicios, it is a bit astonishing that Pedro de Vera has been largely neglected in the dominant histories of Imperial Spain. Along with Alonso Fernández de Lugo, the future conqueror of La Palma and Tenerife, it was Pedro de Vera who laid the foundations of Spain's empire in the eastern Atlantic.

[297] Díaz del Castillo was one of the more famous members of the expedition, and later published his own account of the conquest, *Historia Verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, in 1568.

Merchants and Conquistadors: Alonso de Lugo in the Capture of La Palma

The fall of Pedro de Vera from royal favor coincided with arguably the most significant year in Spanish history, 1492.[298] Months after the conquistador's governorship of Gran Canaria was revoked, Spain had finally vanquished the last Islamic kingdom in Iberia, signaling the end to over 700 years of Muslim rule on the peninsula. With the consolidation of the Iberian Peninsula, and the freeing up of time and resources, the monarchs could now concentrate their energies on new projects and ventures, including Columbus's daring scheme to reach Asia by sailing west across the Atlantic Sea.[299] But something oftentimes downplayed, or overlooked, was that the conquest of Granada also enabled Ferdinand and Isabella to focus on the other critical piece of their Atlantic plans: the conquest and consolidation of the Canary Islands. In fact, compared to Columbus's 'Enterprise of the Indies' proposal, which court functionaries at the time perceived to be outrageous—and at best, a complete gamble—the Canaries were a known entity, and a top priority for the Catholic Monarchs in the Atlantic. In addition to increasing royal rents through the cultivation of sugar and dye, the conquest of the Canaries could provide a gateway to the lucrative gold markets of the African interior. To take advantage of these possibilities, the monarchs forged a contract in 1492 with the Sevillian caballero, Alonso de Lugo, who agreed to prosecute the conquests of the remaining unconquered islands in the Canaries at his own expense. Yet, given the absence of any notable royal support, it was perhaps unclear to the sovereigns whether the new appointee would be able to overcome the obstacles

[298] It is not by coincidence that the scholarly literature abounds with books dedicated to the events leading up to, or culminating, in the year 1492. For the Catholic Monarchs, and indeed all of Spain, 1492 proved a fateful year. On this moment in Spanish history, see Alvin M. Joseph Jr., *America in 1492: The World of the Indian Peoples Before the Arrival of Columbus* (New York: Vintage, 1993); and Fernández-Armesto, *1492: The Year the World Began* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009).
[299] For an excellent study of this figure, see Phillips and Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*.

that long befuddled his predecessors, chiefly that of fierce Native resistance. One dimension that perhaps reassured the monarchs of Lugo's potential to succeed was his impressive military résumé, and especially his years of service in the Canary Islands.

Prior to Lugo's appointment in 1492, the conquistador fought for several years in the conquest of Gran Canaria under the leadership of Pedro de Vera. During that time, Lugo played a key role in helping Vera establish a second front of combat at Agaete, and was consequently appointed *alcaide* (warden) of the fort. After Pedro de Vera returned to the main Castilian encampment in the northeast of the island, Lugo and about 30 soldiers were left stationed in the dangerous frontier at Agaete, and instructed to direct incursions from this base.[300] Recounting the ordeals and deprivations suffered at this time, Lugo remarked in his *Residencia* (a judicial review of an official's conduct in office) how: "every day we fought and many times were injured. We suffered many hardships, including the hunger and deaths of various servants and relatives, as well as many other offenses and dangers."[301] While no doubt trying, the misfortunes that Lugo endured at Agaete would prepare him for the hardships ahead. Many months of battling on this frontier taught Lugo how to survive in austere conditions and harsh environments, and allowed him to develop critical wartime routines from his near-constant interactions with Indigenous foes. These frontier skills and know-how did not disappear after the conquest, but carried with him to future imperial enterprises in the Canaries and Northwest Africa. At least on Gran Canaria, though, the major turning point for Lugo came in February of 1482, when he led a successful incursion into the Indigenous kingdom of Gáldar and captured its ruler. In recognition of this feat, Lugo received the lucrative lands of Agaete in *repartimiento* (a grant of land and

[300] Galindo, *History of the Discovery and Conquest*, vol. 1, 131.
[301] Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 45.

Native labor), and here constructed a profitable sugar mill.[302] While the conquistador tended to those properties for much of the next decade, the desire to subjugate the final islands in the Canaries would slowly grow on the mind of the caballero.

In June of 1492, Lugo petitioned the crown to conquer La Palma, the smaller and somewhat less formidable of the remaining unconquered islands in the Canaries. The request, undeniably, came at a difficult time for the Catholic Monarchs. Their treasuries were recently drained from the costly war with Granada, and they were in no position to pay for expensive conquest operations in the Canaries.[303] They therefore granted Lugo's request under the condition that he conduct the enterprise entirely at his own expense, though they offered him a worthy incentive: a bonus of 700,000 maravedíes if he subjugated the island within one year.[304] The forging of this contract stands in for the persistence of hidalgos during this period, who vigorously sought out imperial appointments to augment their modest wealth and social standing. But it also illustrates the close, symbiotic relationship between these two parties, and particularly the crown's dependence on petty nobles to enact its imperial ambitions abroad.

After accepting the terms of the *capitulación* (contract), Lugo proceeded to procure the costly finances for the expedition. As a caballero of appreciable means, Lugo was capable of financing a portion of the enterprise himself, but he could not possibly hope to afford all of the ships, weapons, and supplies needed for the complex military operations. He therefore organized a private contract with two interested partners, the Florentine banker, Juanoto Berardi, and the wealthy Genoese merchant, Francisco de Riberol. These men invested a considerable sum of

[302] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 310.
[303] Phillips and Phillips describe the royal treasury in 1492 as "dangerously drained," adding that "by the next year the monarchs would have to pay over 24 million maravedíes to the Muslims for relinquishing Granada." *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*, 132.
[304] Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, vii.

cash into the expedition with the hope that if it were to succeed, they would receive a staked claim in the spoils of war (namely enslaved peoples or a plot of the conquered territory).[305] While their collaboration is noteworthy, given that they subsidized a large portion of the enterprise, it was by no means unusual. In the history of early modern exploration, conquest, and colonization in the Atlantic, it was characteristic for Genoese and Florentine merchants to work alongside Iberian mariners and conquistadors to help fund commercial ventures in return for a share of the profits. This would be the case throughout much of the sixteenth century, too, as Italian patrons continued to play formative roles in backing Spanish imperial projects in the Atlantic, most notably in the Americas.[306]

On 29 September 1492, Lugo and his invading forces landed on the island of La Palma, disembarking on the western seaboard at Tazacorte.[307] After securing the outer shell of La Palma without any serious difficulties, the Castilians proceeded to march inland, where far greater resistance would be awaiting them at the Native kingdom of Aceró.[308] The Indigenous polity rested in a volcanic depression known as *La Caldera* ("the cauldron"), which was enclosed on all sides by precipitous cliffs and slopes. Lugo was aware of the logistical difficulties of subduing this natural fortress, and thus looked to take Aceró through negotiation. He sent a converted Canarian to speak with its king, Tanausú, and instructed his envoy to promise the Native ruler

[305] Both Italian investors went on to finance a number of future imperial enterprises. Pinelli, for instance, later played an important role in financing Alonso de Lugo's conquest of Tenerife (1496), and became a key administrator in the West Indies trade. Riberol also provided loans to fund the military campaigns in La Palma and Tenerife, and eventually became the wealthiest merchant in the Canaries, principally through the cultivation of sugar and dyestuffs. He later helped finance Columbus's fourth voyage. See Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 206.
[306] Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*; Ladero Quesada, *Historia de Sevilla*; and Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*.
[307] There is considerable discrepancy in the sources as to the dates of this enterprise. Galindo notes that the conquest commenced on 29 September 1490 and ended on 3 May 1491. Kamen writes that Lugo landed in La Palma in September of 1491, while Fernández-Armesto says the invasion began in 1492. Rumeu de Armas assigns a later date, stating that Lugo landed at Tazacorte in 1493. Given that the conquest took less than a year, and was believed to have been completed by the summer of 1493, Fernández-Armesto's date appears to be the most accurate. Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 287; Kamen, *Empire*, 12; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 210; and Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 310.
[308] Rumeu de Armas, *La Conquista de Tenerife*, 123.

"good treatment and gifts" if he recognized the lordship of the Catholic Monarchs.[309] Yet as soon as Tanausú departed from La Caldera to parley with the Castilians, Lugo ambushed him en route to the meeting place and imprisoned the Indigenous sovereign. Such a tactic, that is, of seizing an Indigenous ruler by surprise, was a common practice later utilized in conquest campaigns throughout Latin America, including by Cortés at Tenochtitlan and Pizarro at Cajamarca. In the case of Lugo, at least, it seemed that his plan all along was to lure the Native ruler out of his unassailable volcanic enclosure, namely so as to hasten the conquest and receive his promised bonus of 700,000 maravedíes.[310] His willingness to resort to deceit on this occasion tends to confirm, rather than contradict, much of what we already know about Lugo's character, namely that he had no qualm using cruelty or malice to achieve his military objectives. Like other conquistador-captains of his day, such as Cortés or Pizarro, Lugo's success was sometimes predicated on ruthlessness. With Tanausú effectively removed, the rest of La Palma capitulated rather rapidly, allowing the Castilians to control the island by the summer of 1493.[311]

Investors, Germs, and Native Allies: The Conquest of Tenerife

With La Palma secured, Alonso de Lugo left its administration to his nephew, Juan, and quickly petitioned the crown to conquer the final island in the Canaries. Given his latest triumph, the Catholic Monarchs granted Lugo's request without waver, knowing that he was one of the few individuals capable of carrying out such a complex operation.[312] Indeed, from a tactical standpoint, the conquest of Tenerife posed a logistical nightmare. The island was not only the

[309] Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 286.
[310] According to Galindo, Lugo only authorized the ambush because his Native ally, Juan de Palma, informed him that Tanausú had no intention of keeping his word, though such an explanation rings with suspicion. *Historia de la conquista*, 286.
[311] Rumeu de Armas, *La Conquista de Tenerife*, 123.
[312] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 311.

largest in the archipelago, making it foreboding to traverse, but also had rugged terrain and precipitous mountains that neutralized one of the Castilians' greatest tactical advantages, cavalry. An even greater obstacle, perhaps, was the political fragmentation of the island. Tenerife was comprised of a patchwork of nine tribal chieftaincies, each governed by its respective king (*mencey*) and divided into distinct territorial zones. The decentralized nature of the Native chieftaincies made the island daunting to subdue in its entirety, as it would entail the process of having to conquer multiple kingdoms instead of a single unified entity. However forbidding in its logistical challenges, such obstacles did not appear to dissuade Lugo from taking up the task of conquering the island.

After receiving royal authorization to conduct the conquest, Lugo proceeded to gather all of the men and resources needed for the military operations, and more importantly, worked to settle the financial aspects of the expedition. According to various witnesses, Lugo sold off his entire patrimony in order to raise the necessary funds for the enterprise, including all of his holdings in Sanlúcar, Seville, and the Canary Islands, as well as many estates belonging to his relatives.[313] Lugo's decision to invest the entirety of his savings into an enterprise of this nature—one in which success was not a guarantee—illustrated the tremendous risks that hidalgos were prepared to take to elevate their social standing. Like his counterpart, Pedro de Vera, Lugo was largely confined by his hidalgo status, and appeared ready to gamble away his money and assets to augment his limited fortunes and prestige. While such monetary offerings appeared to have helped Lugo cover a sizable portion of the expenditures, the Spaniard still needed to procure outside investments if he were to fund such a monumental undertaking.

[313] Various witnesses in *La Residencia de Lugo* confirm these sales. See Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 110-11.

As a distinguished caballero of Seville, Lugo fortunately held connections to some of the most powerful individuals in Andalusia, including a wealthy cohort of Sevillian investors and bankers. This allowed him to secure a company contract with three Genoese merchants, Francisco Palomar, Mateo Viña, and Guillermo de Blanco, as well as the Majorcan churchman, Nicolás Angelate. These men pooled their money and resources together in hopes of profiting off the spoils of war, furnishing Lugo with six ships, seventy horses, and one thousand men.[314] The remainder of the forces, according to Bernáldez, were recruited from Andalusia and Gran Canaria, including an indeterminate number of Native auxiliaries.[315] That the bulk of these recruits came from spaces that Lugo formerly inhabited is worth emphasizing. By virtue of having lived or fought in each of these places, Lugo had cultivated dense connections to the soldiers within those communities, and would have known personally, or been acquainted with, many of the men who joined the enterprise. His ability to tap into social networks within the soldiering and mercantile communities, whether to raise money, gather resources, or recruit soldiers, was just as vital to the success of the conquest as the actual fighting itself.

When Lugo landed in Tenerife in 1494, he quickly garnered the support of four Indigenous kings who pledged to assist him in the conquest.[316] These alliances, much like the ones that the Castilians forged with Native polities on Gran Canaria and La Palma, provided the invaders with precious insight into the complex political dynamics of Tenerife. Indeed, during his meeting with the Indigenous rulers, Lugo learned about the general political situation on the island, and namely how the other five kingdoms on Tenerife formed a bellicose confederation to oust the invaders. According to the friendly kings, the strongest of the hostile polities was the

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[314] Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind*, 100.
[315] Bernáldez, *Memorias del Reinado*, 340.
[316] The Indigenous rulers represented the kingdoms of Anaga, Adeje, Abona, and Güímar.

kingdom of Taoro, ruled by its venerable leader, Bencomo.[317] Despite the relative strength of this Native lord, Lugo sought to attack his kingdom first, hoping to divide the resistance with a quick victory. His decision in the end proved disastrous. On the march towards Taoro, Lugo and his men were ambushed along a narrow mountain pass at Acentejo near the Orotava valley.[318] The invaders found it difficult to flee on account of the broken terrain, and were forced to fight along the narrow precipices of the rugged sierra. Lugo only narrowly averted the death trap, for after being knocked off his horse, he was struck in the face by a stone that broke several of his teeth.[319] After retreating to the port at Santa Cruz, Lugo and his men hastily embarked for Gran Canaria—though the extent of the damage had been considerable. Perhaps as many as 600 Castilians perished in the disastrous defeat, later remembered as *La Matanza de Acentejo* (the Acentejo Massacre).[320]

When Alonso de Lugo returned to Gran Canaria, filled with "much grief and disgust," he found solace in the warm reception of his friends and acquaintances, many of whom promised to help restore his crippled enterprise.[321] Among those to offer support were the four Sevillian merchants who initially backed the enterprise, Palomar, Viña, Blanco, and Angelate, each of whom furnished Lugo with a new supply of cash.[322] The continued aid of this group underscores the deep entanglement of merchant capitalists in Spain's Atlantic projects, and the lengths to which they were willing to go to bring them to fruition. In addition to this backing, the Catholic Monarchs sent an order to Doña Inés Peraza mandating that she purvey Lugo with all of the foot

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[317] Galindo, *Historia de la conquista,* 316-17. Also referred to in the sources as Bentomo or Benitomo.
[318] Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 317-18.
[319] Espinosa, *Del origen*, 78.
[320] Galindo estimates the death of 600 men at Acentejo, and 700 if counting the previous incursions on Tenerife. *Historia de la conquista*, 318-19.
[321] Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 319.
[322] Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 319.

soldiers and horsemen that she could muster.[323] Inés acquiesced and routed men and supplies to the Andalusian captain, though she held two of Lugo's sons as hostages (Pedro and Fernando) as collateral for the debt, which totaled some 600,000 maravedíes.[324] The most significant aid, however, came from the Sevillian nobleman Juan de Guzmán, who had recently succeeded as head of the ducal house of Medina Sidonia in 1492. As one of the wealthiest grandees in Spain, the duke generously furnished Lugo with a massive quantity of men and resources, including six ships, 650 infantry(!), and 40 cavalry.[325] To put those figures in perspective, the duke's armada doubled the three caravels that Columbus initially sailed with to the Americas in 1492, and outnumbered his ninety-man crew by approximately sevenfold. At this juncture in the conquest, such a remarkable provision of manpower and resources completely resurrected Lugo's decrepit venture. Moreover, if we consider the support of the duke on this occasion, along with that of his father during the Granada War, then this was another occasion in which the distinguished Guzmán lineage made a critical endowment to Castile's imperial enterprises.[326]

Despite the rejuvenation of Lugo's 'Tenerife enterprise,' it is worth questioning why the conquistador felt the need to continue prosecuting this conquest, namely after nearly losing his life at Acentejo. Had the Andalusian captain fallen so deeply in debt, for instance, that he had little recourse but to resume the expedition and recoup his invested funds? Could it have been that he was simply blinded by glory and fame, and a burning desire to emerge as the hero of this

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[323] AGS, Libros de cédulas de la Cámara, núm. 1, vol. 195 (8 November 1494): "We order you to provide all the foot soldiers and horsemen and outlaws (*forajidos*) that you can." Document published in Rumeu de Armas, *La Conquista de Tenerife,* doc. 15, 433.
[324] AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 23 (Morón, 29 May 1496). Document published in Rumeu de Armas, *La Conquista de Tenerife,* doc. 22, 441.
[325] The collaboration of the Duke of Medina Sidonia is corroborated by various witnesses in *La Residencia de Lugo*. For instance, see the testimonies of Juan Benítez and Rodrigo Alvarez, in Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 116-17. Number of ships and men according to Galindo, *Historia de la conquista*, 319-20.
[326] In return for his support in the conquest of Tenerife, the duke was believed to have received compensation in the form of several lucrative estates and sugar mills on the archipelago. Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 299.

conquest? Or, was he instead driven by vengeance, and a desire to seek reprisal against the Native peoples of Tenerife for the massacre at Acentejo? While each of those reasons may have motivated the conquistador to some extent, what is clear is that the Sevillian captain ultimately refused to forsake the enterprise.

In late 1495, Lugo sailed to Tenerife to resume the conquest, arriving on the island with a "*grande flota*" (great fleet) comprised of 32 ships, 200 cavalry, and 1,500-foot.[327] After taking up residence in the northeast of the island, and resting there for the winter, Lugo marched on Taoro again in early 1496, intending to deliver a fatal blow to the Indigenous kingdom. But as the Castilians and their Native allies made their way across the rugged terrain, encountering the site of their previous defeat at Acentejo, they discovered the workings of an invisible ally: epidemic disease. For millennia, the relative seclusion of the Canary Islands from Afro-Eurasian civilizations meant that the inhabitants of the archipelago had less biological protection against deadly diseases such as smallpox, measles, flu, and other mainland pathogens.[328] Unbeknownst to the Castilians, the unidentified malady in Tenerife had been inadvertently introduced by the invaders themselves, and was presumably the same set of germs that later caused a demographic collapse in the Americas.[329] While precise numbers of enemy combatants afflicted by the pestilence are difficult to discern, the pathogens appeared to have seriously crippled and debilitated the Native resistance, paving the way for the invaders' subsequent victory in the valley of Taoro (later remembered as the Second Battle of Acentejo).[330] With the most powerful

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[327] Rumeu de Armas, *Alonso de Lugo en el corte*, 23, n. 25. Galindo notes that Lugo arrived with more than 1,000 foot and 70 horse. *Historia de la conquista*, 320.
[328] Alfred Crosby, "The Fortunate Isles," in *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993): 70-103, 103.
[329] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 212.
[330] After the last king of Taoro, Bentor, witnessed his army's defeat in battle, the Native king was said to have committed ritual suicide, flinging himself from the mountain top of Tigaiga (the tradition, known as Guanche Tigaiga, was considered a more honorable alternative to surrendering). The place where the Native king died is commemorated with a large statue in the present municipality of Los Realejos, perched atop the rocky seaside cliff.

kingdom on Tenerife eliminated, the remaining constituents of the hostile confederation stood little chance of defeating the joint Castilian-Native alliance. These enemy tribes soon sallied forth and sued for peace, allowing Lugo to effectively control the island by June of 1496.

For King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, the conquest of Tenerife marked a significant milestone in their illustrious reigns. After nearly twenty years of unrelenting military campaigns in the Canaries (1478-96), the sovereigns at last completed the long, drawn-out conquest; a process that began nearly a century before, when the two French lords, Béthencourt and La Salle, acquired the initial pieces of the archipelago. To reward Alonso de Lugo for his recent heroics, the Catholic Monarchs granted him the illustrious governorship of Tenerife, a title promised to him back in 1493 should he succeed in the conquest.[331] They additionally took the time to praise the efforts of the conquistador, acknowledging in a 5 November 1496 letter how: "at the time of our mandate, you [Alonso de Lugo] went to conquer the island of Tenerife…It has pleased Our Lord that the said island was won by your hand and labor, [and by] putting yourself in many dangers in the conquest."[332] In this hectic decade for the crown, the monarchs had good reason to express gratitude to the Andalusian captain. In the past four years, the sovereigns had been deeply absorbed in other imperial ventures, chiefly Columbus's 'Enterprise of the Indies,' as well as dealing with the unexpected outbreak of war in Italy in 1494 with the French. With the crown's attention diverted to these affairs, it was Alonso de Lugo who stepped forward and petitioned the crown to subjugate the final unconquered islands in the Canaries at his own expense. Furthermore, even though his success clearly owed to a confluence of benefactors and

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[331] The original document is held in the AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 189 (Zaragoza, 28 December 1493). In 1496, the monarchs confirmed this privilege once the conquest was completed. See AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 122 (Burgos, 5 November 1496). Both documents are published in Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife*, doc. 5, 421-22; and doc. 26, 447-48.

[332] AGS, Registro General del Sello, fol. 122 (Burgos, 5 November 1496). The monarchs additionally granted Lugo the governorship of La Palma one month later. See the Archivo Histórico de Protocoles Notariales de Tenerife, leg. 49, fol. 584. Also published in Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, doc. 7, 154-55.

accomplices—Native allies, Sevillian investors, the Duke of Medina Sidonia, Inés Peraza, and, if we consider biological forces an ally, the incidental introduction of foreign microbes—Lugo must still be credited with seizing the initiative and orchestrating these enterprises at his own risk. Through his personal ambition, pulling together of private resources, recruitment of soldiers, and forging of contracts with foreign investors, Lugo was able to consolidate the Canary Islands for his kings, allowing them to focus their attention and energies on the next phase in their Atlantic plans.

Alonso de Lugo on the Frontiers of Northwest Africa

With the Canary Islands secured, the crown now controlled a series of strategic outposts in the Atlantic that could facilitate its imperial agenda in other realms. For one, the archipelago offered a convenient point of departure to the recently-discovered Americas, providing explorers, settlers, and soon-to-be conquistadors with a suitable launching off point to the western Atlantic. But apart from serving as a gateway to the Indies, the Canaries also acted as a springboard to the nearby Barbary shoreline, located roughly sixty miles east of the archipelago across the *Mar Pequeña* (Little Sea). At this time, the sovereigns already possessed a lucrative factory in Northwest Africa at Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña, which specialized in the transaction of enslaved peoples, leather, honey, wax, and other valuable commodities, exchanged with merchants from Aguer, Messa, Ifni, and Tagaos.[333] With the recent consolidation of the Canaries, the Spanish sovereigns could further exploit this African trade, utilizing the archipelago as a base from which to establish a string of trading factories (presidios) along the Barbary coast.

[333] Rumeu de Armas referred to Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña as "one of the most important commercial factories in West Africa." *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 275. See also Rumeu de Armas, "La torre africana de Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña. Su segunda fundación," *Anuario de estudios atlánticos*, vol. 1 (1955): 397-477.

The major issues with erecting these coastal forts were the lack of royal funds, resources, and manpower to construct them. Spain was recently drawn into an expensive war with France in 1494 over control of portions of Italy, and was forced to rout most of its men, weapons, and supplies to the Central Mediterranean. If Ferdinand and Isabella were to extend their commercial ambitions into Northwest Africa, as they did in the Canaries, then they needed someone willing to do so at their own expense.[334] From the perspective of the Spanish kings, the logical and somewhat obvious choice was Alonso de Lugo. The conquistador recently gained distinction in the conquests of La Palma and Tenerife, where he proved himself a capable, resourceful, and trustworthy commander. He also possessed extensive networks of support in the Canaries and Andalusia, including many close friends and kinsmen whom he could recruit for this African enterprise. Perhaps more importantly, the conquistador had a reputation for intrepid daring and audacity—two characteristics that would be needed to undertake such a risky and bold project.

In the summer of 1499, Ferdinand and Isabella summoned Lugo to Granada to discuss with him their plans for Atlantic expansion. In simple terms, the Spaniard was instructed to establish a series of presidios along the Atlantic shore of Africa at strategic points, namely along the stretch of land in western Barbary from Cape Aguer to Cape Bojador (within the kingdom of Bu-Tata and the large surrounding regions of the north and south).[335] Once erected, Lugo was to ensure the peaceful submission of its inhabitants to Spanish rule, avoiding by all means violence, raiding, and other depredations that could risk Spain's tenuous position in these lands. In fact, the Catholic Monarchs made it explicitly clear in their instructions that the best approach to

[334] Although these expeditions were typically iterated as crusades on behalf of Christendom, they were instead designed to access the highly coveted and lucrative commercial markets of the African interior (ivory, jewels, leather, and precious feathers), and especially the Saharan gold trade.
[335] These instructions appear in the 2 October 1499 contract that Alonso de Lugo signed with the monarchs, known as the "Capitulaciones para la conquista del Africa Occidental." See AGS, Diversos de Castilla, leg. 9, fol. 25. The document is also published in Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 2, 82-84.

achieving their ambitions in Africa was the good treatment of the Muslims, stipulating that: "all of the Arabs and moors that are under our obedience are to be treated in every manner as our vassals. They are not to be done any harm, nor mistreated, since treating them well will better preserve our services."[336] With the terms squarely laid out, Lugo signed a formal contract with the monarchs in October of 1499, securing himself a salary of 365,000 maravedíes per year and the illustrious title, Captain General of Africa.[337]

Despite the elevation of Alonso de Lugo to this high post, there is scant mention of his appointment in the historiography of the early Spanish empire, nor any reference to his travels to the Barbary coast.[338] The reason seemingly pertains to the ultimate failures of his expeditions, which encountered a number of devastating setbacks. But it is also tied to Castile's contemporaneous expansion into the western Atlantic, and the preference of historians to focus on the foundational years of Spain's Latin American empire. Nonetheless, Lugo's trips to the Saharan coast of Africa are still essential to reconstruct, as they illuminate the full range of Spanish imperial activity during this period, and allow us to capture a better sense of the multiterritoriality and simultaneity of the early empire. Equally important, they illustrate Ferdinand and Isabella's ongoing reliance on skilled, experienced hidalgos to prosecute their most coveted aims in the Atlantic.[339]

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[336] AGS, Diversos de Castilla, leg. 9, fol. 25 (Seville, 20 June 1500). Published in Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 2, 92-95, 94.
[337] AGS, Diversos de Castilla, leg. 9, fol. 25.
[338] For instance, there is no mention of these expeditions in Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*; Lynch, *Spain, 1516-1598*; Parry, *The Spanish Seaborne Empire*; Elliot, *Imperial Spain*; and Kamen, *Empire*.
[339] On Lugo's involvement in Northwest Africa, see Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*; and Buenaventura Bonnet Reverón, "Alonso Fernández de Lugo y sus conquistas en África," *Revista de Historia*, núm. 37 (San Cristóbal de La Laguna: Facultad de Filosofía y Letras de la Universidad de La Laguna, 1933): 138-49.

The Price of Empire: Lugo's Disaster in Barbary

At some point in the summer of 1500, Alonso de Lugo sat down with the royally appointed *veedor* (advisor) of the Barbary enterprise, Antonio de Torres, to discuss the most advantageous points to construct the crown's fortifications in Northwest Africa.[340] The fact that Lugo was allowed to handpick these sites suggests that he was far more than a talented warrior; he was also an important adviser and strategist, entrusted with overseeing the crown's broader imperial goals in Atlantic Africa. After some deliberation, Lugo and Torres selected three sites along the Barbary coastline to construct the presidios, with the first fort to be erected at San Miguel de Saca.[341] As stipulated in his contract, Lugo was to finance the enterprise on his own behalf, and thus sought out investors to help pay for the military operations. Unlike the conquests of La Palma and Tenerife, we do not know the names of the specific individuals who helped fund the expedition to San Miguel de Saca, though it probably included Lugo's friends and kinsmen from Seville or Sanlúcar, as well as local bankers and merchants based in those locales.[342] What is certain is that Lugo recruited many close relatives and friends, including at least three nephews and two kinsmen.[343] The other recruits, some four hundred, were drawn mainly from the Canary Islands, including a small cohort of Indigenous peoples.[344] Notably, the ability of Lugo to pull the enterprise together in this manner, and namely without any royal support, indicates the

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[340] Torres was appointed to this position in June of 1500. According to Rumeu de Armas, he was a "decorated figure of his time and one of the most loyal vassals of the monarchs of Spain." Torres was in charge of overseeing the economic rents of the African establishments, including estimating the costs of maintaining the factories. *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 322-28, 322.

[341] The three towers would be erected at Galevarba del Cabo de Aguer, San Miguel de Saca, and San Bartolomé. The fourth tower, Santa Cruz de la Mar Pequeña, had already been constructed.

[342] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 320.

[343] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 340. The three nephews were Pedro Benítez, Francisco de Lugo, and Antón Sánchez.

[344] The recruits came mostly from Tenerife (about 150), but also from La Palma, Gomera, and El Hierro. Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 343. On the presence of Native peoples in the enterprise, see AGS, Consejo Real, leg. 106, fol. 12.

continued significance of private initiative to Spain's imperial projects. Like the conquest of the Canary Islands, Castilian expansion in the Atlantic continued to depend on the efforts of the caballeros hidalgos, whose ability to raise the finances, gather the equipment, and recruit the soldiers determined the overall feasibility of these ventures.

After setting sail from Tenerife, Lugo landed at San Miguel de Saca in the autumn of 1500, though in the midst of a troublesome silence.[345] The friendly Berber tribes of Bu-Tata who previously agreed to submit to Spanish rule did not arrive to welcome the expeditionaries at the landing site.[346] Despite this ominous sign, the invaders proceeded with their plans, establishing their camp and raising the turret that served as the main defense of the site. But as Lugo and his men worked to fortify their tower, they saw off in the distance a large Berber army poised for war.[347] Ill-fortified at their semi-constructed tower, the Castilians suffered a crushing defeat in the ensuing battle, forcing Lugo to order a hasty retreat back to the shoreline. The Berbers, refusing to let the Castilians escape alive, pursued them to the beach and once again engaged them in battle. This time, writes Rumeu de Armas, "there was hardly a fight; some [of Lugo's men] defended themselves, preferring to die fighting, while others let their throats be cut by the Berber. Some were taken captive because their armor and weapons, rich and valuable, appeared to promise a large ransom."[348] When the battle was over, the grisly scene was discovered by a

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[345] Jerónimo Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragón*, 7 vols. (Zaragoza: Diego Dormer; Herederos de Pedro Lanaja, y Lamarca, 1669-1671), book 5, 185. The exact dates of the expedition are uncertain, but Rumeu de Armas surmises that the expedition departed from the port of Santa Cruz in Tenerife in late September or early October. *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 350.

[346] The Muslim tribes also promised to pay tribute and rents to the Catholic Monarchs equal to what they had paid the previous Muslim kings. This stipulation was part of a larger agreement between Spain and the Muslim kingdom, known as the "Capitulation of the Kingdom of Bu-Tata" (Sumisión del reino de la Bu-Tata). The document is published in Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica,* vol. 2, 73-79.

[347] While it is uncertain what tribes these Berber warriors belonged to, Rumeu de Armas surmises that they were likely coastal residents of Barbary, and namely the ones who did not agree to the previous pact of submission to Spain. *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 352.

[348] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 354.

second group of Berbers, who unlike the previous one had professed loyalty to Spain.[349] These friendly Muslims scoured the beach for survivors, and what they found was the near lifeless body of Lugo, teetering "on the brink of death."[350] The captain was transported back to Tagaos, where he received medical treatment for the numerous lacerations to his body and face.[351] As for the rest of his crew, nearly all four hundred men lost their lives in the engagement, later dubbed the *Batalla de las Torres* (Battle of the Towers).[352]

The disastrous incident at San Miguel de Saca illustrated, quite glaringly, the tremendous dangers attached to territorial expansion. The results of the expedition were as catastrophic as one could possibly conceive, with the entire company virtually wiped out on the sandbanks of Northwest Africa. Now, while one might suspect the calamity to have convinced Lugo to hang up his armaments for good, so that he might live out the remainder of his existence in relative tranquility, this would be anything but the case. In fact, when Lugo reappeared in Tenerife in September of 1501, he not only refused to renounce his title as captain general of Africa, but also began new plans for another expedition to the Barbary coast.[353] If we are to pause here, and take a moment to scrutinize this decision, what makes it somewhat astonishing (if not head-scratching), was that Lugo seemingly had little incentive to continue prosecuting this African enterprise. The caballero was already considerably wealthy and famous for his conquests in the Canaries, possessing lucrative estates and profitable sugar plantations on the archipelago. Not to mention, he was the active governor of La Palma and Tenerife, and received yearly salaries for

[349] The group of Muslims were presumably from Agaos, Tagaos, Tiçigunen, who already agreed to terms with Spain in 1499.
[350] Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 106.
[351] One witness, Fernán García, described how Lugo was "wounded with many lacerations to the body and face." Testimony in Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 60.
[352] According to several testimonies, only seven or eight men survived the expedition in total. See Olivera and Ráfols, *El Adelantado*, 60, 106, 107.
[353] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 379.

this royally appointed position. With no shortage of titles, glory, and monetary earnings, why did Lugo feel the need to continue risking his life on behalf of Castile's dangerous expansionist projects? Did it stem, for instance, from his indefatigable loyalty to Ferdinand and Isabella, and the desire to continue demonstrating unremitting allegiance to the monarchs? Was he instead driven by the pursuit of greater glory and titles, and the possibility of carving out an even more magnificent legacy? Or, could it have been that the conquistador was merely too stubborn and bullheaded to abandon this enterprise, and perhaps sought to prosecute it as a means of attaining redemption, either for himself or his fallen countrymen? Arguably, each of these motives may have at least held some sway in Lugo's mind, but it is important to note that they are purely speculative, for it is impossible to know the precise or secret reasons for why Lugo did what he did. But, if we had to surmise based on what we know about the conquistador's comportment, it seems plausible that he was motivated precisely by this sort of reckless, if not obsessive quest to attain fame, riches, redemption, or royal favor—and no matter the cost.

A Chance for Redemption: The Expedition to Cabo de Aguer

Just as the expedition to San Miguel de Saca did not prevent Alonso de Lugo from continuing on as captain general of Africa, nor did it dissuade the Catholic Monarchs from prosecuting their African plans. As soon as Lugo resettled in the Canaries, royal plans were already underway to launch an expedition to Cabo de Aguer, a territory far more fertile, rich, and well-connected to the lucrative commercial trades of the African interior than San Miguel de Saca. The major problem with erecting a fort at this site, though, was that Cabo de Aguer lay precariously close to the Portuguese sphere of influence, as demarcated by the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas. If the Castilians were to erect a factory that encroached on Portugal's territorial

possessions, it had the potential to create a secondary theater of conflict with their Iberian rivals in Africa.[354] Despite this concern, the Spanish sovereigns were seemingly convinced that Cabo de Aguer did, indeed, lie within their rightful zone of possession, and on this basis authorized Lugo to move forward with the African enterprise. Their commitment to this enterprise reveals the paramount importance of Northwest Africa in the minds of the sovereigns, and their willingness to confront their Iberian adversaries if it meant reaping the commercial benefits of the African trade.

With royal permission secured, Lugo proceeded to gather all of the ships, horses, cannons, and supplies needed to conduct the expedition to Cabo de Aguer. But his biggest obstacle, and without question, would be recruiting the men for this mission. Considering that roughly 98% of his crew perished in the last expedition to Barbary, a proposed trip to the same treacherous coast did not exactly sound like the most enticing of prospects! Under these circumstances, how was Lugo to convince any men to join such a perilous enterprise? According to the testimony of Antón de Vallejo, the *escribano* (notary) of the Council of Tenerife, the conquistador-captain resorted to forcible measures: "After [Lugo] assembled the residents of the said islands [the Canaries], many kept saying they had been brought against their will, and that they were forced to abandon their estates, leaving them poorly tended."[355] The historical record does not offer additional evidence to corroborate the accusation. But if we consider the cataclysmic nature of the last expedition, and its high mortality rates, it is likely that Lugo would have needed to resort to exactly these sorts of dubious measures.

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[354] On the Luso-Hispanic competition for dominion in Africa, see Rumeu de Armas, "La expansión europea en Africa: la rivalidad hispano-lusa por el dominio político del Continente," *Jornadas de Estudios Canarias-América,* VII (1985): 241-264.
[355] AGS, *Consejo Real*, leg. 106, fol. 12. Quote cited in Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 381.

After assembling his forces in Tenerife, Lugo departed from the Canaries in late 1502 and landed in Cabo de Aguer in autumn of that year.[356] To avoid a disaster similar to the one at San Miguel de Saca, the Andalusian captain immediately went to work constructing a tower-fortress (known as Galevarba) to fortify his defenses in the area.[357] However, after laying much of the foundation for the turret, and finishing many of its finer details, Lugo and his men received solemn news from Castile. Effective immediately, the expeditionaries were to suspend their enterprise in Cabo de Aguer and depart at once from the African coast. The reason for the evacuation, as Lugo soon discovered, was the Portuguese Crown.

Once King Manuel I of Portugal learned of Lugo's enterprise to Barbary, he promptly dispatched ambassadors to the Spanish court to protest the expedition. The diplomatic mission typified decades of bickering between the Iberian polities over territorial possessions in the Atlantic, stretching all the way back to the fourteenth century when Castile and Portugal both asserted pretensions to the Canary Islands. On this occasion, at least, Manuel's diplomats succeeded in convincing the Catholic Monarchs to renounce their claims to the disputed zone in Africa, arguing that Cabo de Aguer fell within their rightful zone of interest and therefore violated the Treaty of Tordesillas.[358] While this realization undoubtedly frustrated the Spanish sovereigns, whose designs in this rich region of Barbary were virtually squashed, it was arguably more exasperating for Lugo, who invested a considerable amount of time, cash, and resources

[356] Rumeu de Armas believes the expedition departed sometime between August and November of 1502. The expeditionaries, according to the testimony of Antón de Vallejo, consisted of Native Gomeros, Portuguese, and Castilians. Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 380. Testimony in AGS, Consejo Real, leg. 106, fol. 12.

[357] The precise number of expeditionaries are unknown, though the testimony of one of the participants, Diego Fernández Amarillo, informs us that Lugo brought with him "many foot soldiers and horsemen." Olivera and Ráfols, *El adelantado*, 113.

[358] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 384.

into the expedition.[359] After departing from Northwest Africa, Lugo immediately made way to the royal court in Madrid, intending to make clear his economic ruin following the abandonment of Cabo de Aguer.[360]

When the disgruntled caballero at last appeared in Madrid, in December of 1502, he may have been surprised to find that his appeals for monetary compensation were met with an even greater reward. In recognition of his services in Africa, as well as his earlier role in the conquest of the principal islands in the Canaries, Lugo was granted the honorific title of adelantado of the Canary Islands on 12 January 1503. In the royal letter conferring this title, the monarchs took the time to commend the distinguished efforts of the conqueror: "We give thanks to you, don Alonso Fernández de Lugo…for the many good and loyal services that you rendered to us, especially during the conquest of Tenerife and La Palma...and for your service in Barbary. It is our gift to call you, from this point forward, our governor of the Canary Islands."[361] With this new, decorated honor, Lugo sailed back to the Canaries to assume control of the prestigious post, and administered the archipelago adeptly for the next two decades (1503-25).[362] His effective governance of the islands allowed his monarchs to consolidate this important realm, and to ultimately turn their imperial gaze to new horizons.

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[359] In a subsequent letter directed to the Spanish kings, the clearly vexed Lugo took the opportunity to air out his frustrations and annoyance with the abandoned enterprise: "[after] completing most of the work for the fort of *Galevarba* and a large part of the foundation, and being close to finishing it, where I had spent a large sum of maravedíes in the service of Your Highnesses…they dispatched a royal decree ordering that I leave everything in the state that it is in and to return. In compliance with the said decree, and having spent everything that I had to better serve Your Highnesses, I did what I had been ordered." Testimony of Alonso de Lugo in Olivera and Ráfols, *El adelantado*, 46-47.
[360] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 387.
[361] AGS, Registro del Sello (Madrid, 12 January 1503). Document published in Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 2, 113-14.
[362] In 1509, Lugo conferred his rights of captain general of Africa to his firstborn son, Pedro Fernández de Lugo (1475-1536). Rumeu de Armas, *España en el África Atlántica*, vol. 1, 414-17.

While Lugo neither obtained great fame nor riches in Africa, and nor succeeded in extending Castile's dominion in this realm, his expeditions to Barbary still reveal much about the conquistador's importance to Spain's early empire-building. With the fortification of the African coastline among the crown's top priorities in the Atlantic at this time, the monarchs' appointment of Lugo to this mission indicates his centrality to their larger imperial agenda. Indeed, ever since the fall of Granada, the crown consistently placed Lugo at the forefront of their expansionist projects, entrusting the conquistador with vital assignments in La Palma, Tenerife, and the Barbary shoreline. With the imperial polity expanding rapidly into a number of Atlantic arenas during this epoch, the efforts of this hidalgo, along with that of Pedro de Vera, were indispensable to sustaining that growth.

Conclusion

Over the course of the 1480s and 90s, the Catholic Monarchs found themselves preoccupied with a number of pressing affairs in the eastern Spanish Atlantic, chiefly the conquest and colonization of the Canary Islands and the establishment of presidios in Northwest Africa. With the royal treasury depleted at this time from the Granada War, the monarchs opted to forge private contracts with military captains who agreed to conduct these enterprises at their own expense. If those conquistadors lacked the finances to pay for the expedition on their own, private investors and bankers seeking a stake in the economic profits were invited to help raise the remaining sum. In this manner, the conquest and colonization of the Atlantic became a joint enterprise, with the crown, bankers, and military captains all working alongside one another to bring these ventures to fruition. While the historical literature has centered largely on the role of Italian capitalists in these efforts, pointing to the much-needed cash that bankers and investors

provided to these expeditions up front, the contributions of the military leaders by contrast are often overlooked or downplayed.

This chapter has sought to recover the careers of two military captains, Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo, who helped lay the foundations of Spain's overseas empire in the eastern Atlantic. What is particularly noteworthy about these men is that they both grew up in Andalusia, and came from a frontier society in which violence, conflict, and warfare were tightly interlocked with daily life. These experiences not only helped them to navigate the dangers of other frontier worlds, namely the Canary Islands and Northwest Africa, but also gave them the tools and skills to thrive in those settings. Such was the case in the Canaries, where Lugo and Vera conquered the largest and most important islands in the archipelago: Gran Canaria, La Palma and Tenerife. During those enterprises, these men organized all aspects of the expedition—recruiting the men, raising the finances, investing personal money and resources into the enterprise—and also jeopardized their life to carry it out in the field. These services were critical to consolidating the Canary Islands. However, Lugo and Vera also rendered key services in other areas of the Atlantic, serving as principal agents and advisers to the crown in Granada and Northwest Africa. As this chapter has argued, it was the extensive services of these men in multiple realms that helped Spain cement its power in the eastern Atlantic in the late fifteenth century, allowing the imperial polity to consequently shift its attention west to the Americas, and east to the Mediterranean.

Chapter 4. Medieval Lords and the Rise of Spain's Mediterranean Empire, 1494-1512

The fall of Granada in 1492 would have been a bittersweet moment for Juan de Guzmán (the third Duke of Medina Sidonia). While the destruction of the Islamic emirate eliminated the dangerous frontier zone separating his estates from the kingdom of Granada, the duke also lost his father, Enrique, who died shortly after the war. As the new head of the house of Medina Sidonia (1492-1507), Juan de Guzmán did not seek to ride on the coattails of his father's past achievements, but sought to carve out his own distinguished legacy. A significant opportunity presented itself in 1496. The duke received word from one of his vassals, Pedro Estopiñan, that the Moroccan entrepôt of Melilla was suffering from civil strife and vulnerable to an attack.[363] Such news must have enthralled the powerful grandee. The North African enclave was situated at the end of caravan routes that transported gold from beyond the Sahara Desert. If captured, he could attach it to his own private estates and acquire the lucrative rents from those lands. The duke, ambitious by nature, would not miss out on such an opportunity. In September of 1497, he mobilized an army of 5,000 men and dispatched it to Melilla, securing the negligently guarded city with relative ease.[364] The capture earned him all the individual fame, honor, and rewards he may have been seeking, but it also held significant implications for the rise of Spain's Mediterranean empire.

Now in possession of a fortified base in the western Mediterranean, the crown eventually utilized Melilla as a strategic foothold to extend its dominion in North Africa. Between 1505 and 1511, Spain captured a string of coastal cities in the Maghrib, most notably Mers-el-Kebir, Oran,

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[363] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia,* in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 318.

[364] Bernáldez, *Memorias del Reinado*, 380-81; and Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 319-21.

Bougie, and Tripoli. The acquisition of these sites greatly benefitted the monarchy, as they provided waypoints for Spanish ships to stop and be provisioned in the Mediterranean Sea, along with crucial access points to the lucrative merchandise of the African interior. While the duke, Juan de Guzmán, did not take part in any of those later conquests in the Maghrib, his capture of Melilla nonetheless paved the way for those eventual victories. With his assault on Melilla, the duke not only furnished the blueprints on how to orchestrate successful strikes in North Africa, but also offered a concrete stepping stone that made them possible.[365] He was, in this regard, a major figure in helping to forge Spain's North African empire.

This chapter explores the significance of a handful of Spanish nobles, including Juan de Guzmán, to the rise of Spain as a redoubtable power in the early modern Mediterranean (c. 1494-1512). During this time, the increasing centralization of royal authority was said to have further quelled the power of the nobility and eroded their autonomy.[366] Similarly, changes in the nature of warfare during the 'Military Revolution' supposedly undermined the role of the mounted, medieval knight and diminished their importance on the battlefield.[367] However, in the decades following the conquest of Granada, the monarchy still relied greatly on the services of the Spanish nobility. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Spain became entangled in war on a number of fronts, fighting against the French in Italy, the Islamic coastal polities in North Africa, and the Ottoman Turks in the Levant. With the crown heavily engaged in all corners of the Mediterranean basin, it needed its warrior lords to help expand, maintain, and defend its interests

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[365] The Portuguese can be said to have provided the initial blueprints on how to conduct conquests in the Maghrib. In 1415, Portugal captured the strategic city of Ceuta, located on the Strait of Gibraltar, and followed this up with a string of acquisitions along the Atlantic coast of Morocco in the 1450s and 1470s. See Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 27-30.

[366] Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2, 107; and Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 84-96.

[367] Christopher Storrs and H.M. Scott, "The Military Revolution and the European Nobility, c. 1600–1800," *War in History* 3, no. 1 (1996): 1-41, 2. The term "Military Revolution" was introduced by Geoffrey Parker in his classic study, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

in this realm, mostly against Islamic foes, though also at times against fellow Christians.[368] Nobles did not fail to miss the charge.

As relatively wealthy individuals, aristocrats furnished private cash, equipment, and manpower to assist in these Mediterranean conflicts. They also engaged personally in combat, serving as leading commanders in all of the major military engagements in North Africa, Italy, and the Levant in the years following the fall of Granada. After helping conquer new spaces, nobles stayed on as viceroys or administrators to manage those territories on behalf of the crown, thereby ensuring their successful incorporation into Spain's imperial sphere of influence. This chapter argues that the Spanish nobility, far from being cast into a weakened, subsidiary state during this period, played paramount roles in orchestrating Spain's triumphs across the early modern Mediterranean basin. With the help of the noble class, Spain established a formidable presence in the Mediterranean by 1511—gaining control over half of Italy, and exercising dominion over a massive stretch of North African coastline that stretched from Morocco in the west to Tripoli in the east.

Notwithstanding the significant contributions of the Spanish nobility, little has been written about the roles of this group in Spain's Mediterranean conflicts. Where scholars do highlight the participation of certain individuals in these endeavors, they tend to focus on the church militant or the monarchy, especially King Ferdinand. Historians have been especially interested in analyzing the king's manifold reasons for intervening in the Mediterranean, including his desire, if not obsession, to protect his Aragonese patrimony in Italy from French

[368] Andrew Devereux has referred to this period as Spain's "Mediterranean moment"—a time when both Muslim and Christian polities became heavily preoccupied with the Mediterranean basin for its geo-political, religious, and commercial significance. *The Other Side of Empire*, 10-11.

and Ottoman foes, or his designs to carve out a North African empire.[369] Other historians, by contrast, have centered on the life and aspirations of the warrior priest, Cardinal Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros (the Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Castile). After the fall of Granada, Cisneros emerged as a major proponent of extending warfare into North Africa, and even patronized many of the campaigns at his own expense. The churchman tends to receive much of the credit for Spain's intervention and success in the Maghrib, insofar as one scholar described him as "the real hero of the story of Spanish expansion in North Africa."[370] While both Cisneros and Ferdinand were undeniably important figures in the rise of Spain's Mediterranean empire, the focus on these individuals has obscured the actions of others, particularly Spanish nobles, who also made signal contributions in this realm. Rarely have scholars paid heed to the intervention of the Spanish nobility in this region, and if they do, they tend to focus on their experiences solely in North Africa.[371] This chapter seeks to build on this scholarship, examining the activities of aristocrats across the entire Mediterranean zone. It demonstrates how Spanish success in this region was due chiefly to the willing participation of the nobility, whose services as captains, conquerors, financiers, and administrators made them the principal drivers behind Spain's eastern expansion.

While a number of nobles contributed to Spanish success in the Mediterranean, this chapter centers on the actions of four individuals in particular—Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba,

[369] Doussinague, *La política internacional*; Doussinague, *Fernando el Católico y el cisma de Pisa* (Madrid: Espasa-Calpe, 1946); Doussinague, *El Testamento político de Fernando el Católico* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1950); and Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*.
[370] Merriman, *The Rise of the Spanish Empire,* vol. 2, 249. For other studies that treat the role of Cisneros in North Africa, see Marcel Bataillon, *Erasme et l'Espagne* (Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1937); and Beatriz Alonso Acero, *Cisneros y la conquista española del norte de África: cruzada, política y arte de la guerra* (Madrid: Ministerio de Defensa, 2006).
[371] For an exception, see José Miguel Escribano-Páez, *Juan Rena and the Frontiers of Spanish Empire, 1500-1540* (New York: Routledge, 2020). For studies that treat the role of certain nobles in the Maghrib, see Aram, *Leyenda negra*; and Liang, *Family and Empire*.

Juan de Guzmán, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, and Pedro Navarro.[372] What is noteworthy about this cohort of men is that their lives paralleled and intersected in many respects. Of the nobles examined here, all of them grew up in frontier regions of Spain and were born in war. Three of the men (Gonzalo, Diego, and Juan) hailed from Andalusia, and all of them engaged personally in combat during the conquest of Granada.[373] The fourth noble, Pedro Navarro, was born in Navarre—a frontier region in northern Spain bordering France—and fought as a soldier in Italy and the Levant prior to his service in North Africa. Years of fighting on frontiers allowed these men to acquire precious experience as a soldier and to become hardened warriors molded in the crucible of continuous warfare. But it also provided them with a training-ground in other areas, such as diplomacy and administration. As custodians of the frontier, nobles were typically the ones to negotiate the terms of peace with neighboring foes, as well as administer the numerous towns that lay in their jurisdiction. Such experience would help them to excel as conquerors or administrators in other borderland regions of the empire, in this case the Mediterranean. In highlighting the importance of this set of cultivated frontier skills, this chapter will add to the scholarship that has identified the significance of other imperial subjects, such as sailors or

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[372] The vast majority of the scholarship on these nobles is published in Spanish, with the notable exception of Diego Fernández de Córdoba, who received significant treatment in Liang's, *Family and Empire.* On this figure, see also María Concepción Quintanilla Raso, *Nobleza y señoríos en el reino de Córdoba: la Casa de Aguilar (s. XIV y XV)* (Córdoba: Publicaciones de Monte de Piedad y Caja de Ahorros de Córdoba, 1980). For scholarship on Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, see Mary Purcell, *The Great Captain Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba* (London: Doubleday, 1962); Luis Díez del Corral, "El Gran Capitán, figura hispano italiana," *La monarquía hispánica y el pensamiento político europeo* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1975): 195-214; and José Enrique Ruiz Doménec, *El Gran Capitán: retrato de una época* (Barcelona: Ediciones Península, 2002). For literature on Juan de Guzmán, see Isabel Galán Parra, "El linaje y los estados de los duques de Medina Sidonia a comienzos del siglo xvi," *En la España Medieval* 11 (1998): 45-78; Ana María Anasagasti Valderrama and Laureano Rodríguez Liáñez, *Niebla y su tierra en la Baja Edad Media: historia y documentos* (Huelva: Diputación Provincial de Huelva, 2006); and Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*. On Pedro Navarro, see Martín de los Heros, *Historia del Conde Pedro Navarro* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1854); Lucas de Torre, "La Academia del Gran Capitán: Pedro Navarro," in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, volume 22 (Madrid: Montepio del Cuerpo Facultativo del Ramo, 1910): 198-396; and Juan Vigón Suero-Díaz, "Pedro Navarro, soldado en África," in *Curso de conferencias sobre la política africana de los Reyes Católicos, tomo II* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Africanos, 1951): 7-36.

[373] At the start of the Granada War, Juan de Guzmán had not yet succeeded his father as head of the ducal house, though he still participated in the struggle and represented his father's interests on a number of occasions. Ladero Quesada, *Guzmán*, 227.

merchants, in gaining knowledge and expertise in one area and then transmitting it to new areas of the empire.[374] Further, it will build on one of the main points of this dissertation: showing how peripatetic men, especially those who grew up on frontiers, made among the most signal contributions to the early Spanish empire.

While highlighting the roles of nobles in the early modern Mediterranean, this chapter will also add to the paltry literature on the military conflicts occurring in this region.[375] For many decades, the historiography of the early Spanish empire has centered on Spain's westward expansion into the Atlantic, focusing on early contact and colonization in the Caribbean, or the later clashes on the mainland with the Aztecs and Incas.[376] The overwhelming interest in Spain's Atlantic theater has cast a long shadow over the simultaneous campaigns occurring in North Africa, Italy, and the Levant, along with its central protagonists. Such historical neglect is a bit astonishing, considering that Spanish intervention in the early modern Mediterranean was a major and defining moment in the history of the imperial polity. It was marked by the clash with France for hegemony in Italy, confrontation with the Ottomans in the Levant, and rapid expansion into North Africa. These sites were fundamental theaters of conflict, and perceived by

[374] Games, *The Web of Empire*; Subrahmanyam, "Holding the World in Balance"; Fuchs and Liang, "A Forgotten Empire"; and Liang, *Family and Empire*.
[375] For recent works on the early modern Mediterranean, see Eric Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity, and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits, and Spies in the Sixteenth Century Mediterranean World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Daniel Hershenzon, *The Captive Sea: Slavery, Communication, and Commerce in Early Modern Spain and the Mediterranean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Mayte Green-Mercado, *Visions of Deliverance: Moriscos and the Politics of Prophecy in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019); and Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*.
[376] The literature on the early modern Mediterranean pales in comparison to the innumerable articles and books on Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro. See for example, Pauline Moffitt Watts, "Prophecy and Discovery: On the Spiritual Origins of Christopher Columbus' 'Enterprise of the Indies,'" *American Historical Review* 90, no. 1 (1985): 73-102; Phillips and Phillips, *The Worlds of Christopher Columbus*; Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); Rafael Varon Gabai, *Francisco Pizarro and His Brothers: Illusion of Power in Sixteenth-Century Peru*, trans. Javier Flores Espinoza (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997); Roberto Barletta Villar, *Breve Historia de Francisco Pizarro* (Madrid: Nowtilus, 2008); and Buddy Levy, *Conquistador: Hernan Cortés, King Montezuma, and the Last Stand of the Aztecs* (New York: Bantam, 2009).

the crown and court functionaries at the time to have enormous implications for not only the fate of Spain, but all of Latin Christendom.[377] Still, the military conflicts in this realm tend to be brushed aside in the historiography, arguably none more so than in the North African Maghrib, which Andrew Hess once referred to as the "forgotten frontier."[378] Admittedly, since Hess's work first appeared in 1978, scholars have paid greater heed to Spain's entanglement in sixteenth-century North Africa, including the military conflicts in this region.[379] But following the example of Hess, more work remains to be done in scrutinizing the other Mediterranean campaigns, chiefly those in Italy and the Levant, and connecting them to Spain's contemporaneous expansion in the Atlantic.[380]

Indeed, an analysis of the military conflicts in the Mediterranean can better inform our understanding of the unfolding of conquest in other parts of the empire, especially the Americas. In the early conquest and colonization of the Indies, many conquistadors and first arrivals in the New World had previous military experience fighting in the Mediterranean wars. This includes the middle-stratum lord, Pedrarias Dávila, who fought in the conquests of Oran and Bougie before sailing to the Indies. Once the conquistador reached the Americas, he played an important role in expanding the empire on new fronts, leading expeditions to Panama and Nicaragua and

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[377] Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 70-72, 80.
[378] Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier.*
[379] This region, long overlooked in the historiography, has now been the subject of significant scholarly treatment in the past four decades. On Spanish involvement in North Africa, see Mercedes García-Arenal Rodríguez and Miguel Ángel de Buenos Ibarra, *Los Españoles y el Norte de África: Siglos XVI-XVIII* (Madrid: MAPFRE, 1992); Rafael Gutiérrez Cruz, *Los presidios españoles del Norte de África en tiempo de los Reyes Católicos* (Melilla: Ciudad Autónoma de Melilla, 1997); Aram, *Leyenda negra*; Fuchs and Liang, "A Forgotten Empire"; Miguel Ángel de Bunes Ibarra and Alonso Acero, *Orán: Historia de la Corte Chica* (Madrid: Ediciones Polifemo, 2011); Liang, *Family and Empire*; and Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*. For a review of the recent literature on this topic, see Abigail Balbale, Andrew Devereux, Camilo Gómez-Rivas, and Yuen Gen-Liang, "Unity and Disunity across the Strait of Gibraltar," *Medieval Encounters* 19, nos. 1-2 (2013): 1-40.
[380] To date, there are few monographs that provide a comprehensive summary of Spanish military involvement in Italy, North Africa, and the Levant during the early years of Spain's imperial formation. The need for further investigation into those conflicts is made clear by the title of Devereux's study, *The Other Side of Empire*, which suggests how Spain's intervention in the Mediterranean has long been overshadowed by its simultaneous expansion into the Atlantic.

becoming the first governor of those places in 1513.[381] Aside from Dávila, the future governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar, had seventeen years of wartime experience in Italy prior to embarking for the Americas.[382] After settling in the West Indies, Velázquez led the conquest and pacification of Cuba in 1514, and was appointed governor of the island in recognition of his services. In 1519, Velázquez dispatched an expedition to the mainland under the command of Hernán Cortés, the future conqueror of Mexico. Within Cortés's own company were two dozen men with military experience in North Africa and Italy, including some who fought in the ranks of the Gran Capitán.[383] Given the presence of these veteran soldiers in the Indies, which I explore in chapter 6, the need to reconstruct the conflicts in the Mediterranean becomes more apparent. If we can understand the nature of how the Mediterranean campaigns unfolded, then we can determine the extent to which they, or their participants, later influenced or shaped conquest campaigns in other areas of the empire, especially in the Americas.

An array of sources must be woven together to reconstruct the lives of the nobility in the Mediterranean. Of particular note are the written accounts of various chroniclers, chiefly Bernáldez, Pulgar, Medina, and Martín de los Heros.[384] Generally speaking, these histories provide succinct overviews of the Mediterranean campaigns, and also discuss in detail the participation of certain nobles in those conflicts. One of the most important works in this regard is Heros's, *Historia del Conde*, a detailed biography of the northern lord, Pedro Navarro.[385]

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[381] On the career of this figure, see Aram, *Leyenda negra*.
[382] Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, with an introduction by James Lockhart (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 163. A royal document (*real cédula*) addressed to Diego Velázquez confirms his past military service in Italy. AGI, Indiferente, 419, L.5, F.379R(1) (29 January 1515).
[383] For the names of those men, see chapter 5, chart 1.
[384] Bernáldez, *Memorias del Reinado*; Anonymous Author, *Chrónica del Gran Capitán Gonzalo Hernández de Córdoba y Aguilar*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 1-254; Heros, *Historia del Conde Pedro Navarro*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25 (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1854); and Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39.
[385] Heros was born in the province of Biscay around 1786, and was a renown military man, intellectual, and writer. During the Spanish American Wars of Independence, he served as chief trainer of cavalry officers and possessed the

Written some two decades after the Spanish American Wars of Independence, Heros's work reflected a growing trend among contemporary historians to recover Spain's imperial past and to trace its ascent and eventual decline. Yet, his narrative seemed equally shaped by the prevailing "great man" histories of his day, in that he underscores the importance of a single exceptional individual (Navarro) while largely downplaying his mistakes or flaws.[386] Nonetheless, despite Heros's adherence to the historical conventions of his time, it would be unfair to dismiss his account as erroneous or unreliable. Heros enjoyed considerable renown in his lifetime as an intellectual and scholar, even holding the esteemed position of Director of the National Library of Spain between 1840 and 1843. He took seriously the craft of the historian, evident in his reliance on some of the principal chroniclers of the period such as Luis de Mármol Carvajal, Prudencio de Sandoval, and Jerónimo Zurita. Even so, his account is still juxtaposed with those of other reputable historians (chiefly Bernáldez and Pulgar) from the period to confirm or dispute the information put forth.

Aside from these sources, this chapter draws on a large corpus of archival documents such as letters, privileges, correspondence, and dispatches produced by the crown, court functionaries, or the nobles themselves.[387] Collectively, these sources contain a treasure trove of information pertaining to the intervention of the nobility in North Africa, Italy, and the Levant, including their contributions to the enterprises, their exploits in battle, or their activities in the aftermath of the campaigns. When read alongside the chronicles, they provide a richer, more

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rank of lieutenant colonel. He was later appointed Director of the Biblioteca Nacional and published various historical works on the history of Spain.

[386] One of the best examples is Prescott's, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, which sold so well in 1843 that booksellers found it difficult to keep his work in stock. Peter O. Koch, *William Hickling Prescott: The Life and Letters of America's First Scientific Historian* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2016), 145. Even to this day, Prescott's history is perennially re-published.

[387] Many of those documents are published in *CODOIN*, while others are dispersed across a number of archives and libraries in Spain, including the AGS in Valladolid, the ADMS in Cádiz, and the BNE in Madrid.

complete portrait of noble involvement in Spain's Mediterranean conflicts, as well as another basis with which to corroborate information presented in the other sources.

From Granada to Italy: The Transfer of Wartime Experience

The brief period of peace that the Catholic Monarchs enjoyed in the aftermath of the conquest of Granada was abruptly cut short in 1494. In September of that year, King Charles VIII of France launched a full-scale invasion of the Italian Peninsula, with his sights set on conquering the geo-strategic Kingdom of Naples. If taken, the Neapolitan realm would provide easy points to launch his armies into the Mediterranean, as well as access to the emporia on both sides of the inner sea. As one might suspect, the French king made no mention of any such ambitions and instead rendered his actions as a recuperation of ancestral lands, highlighting his dynastic claims on Naples and Sicily through his Angevin patrimony.[388] Whatever his precise justifications, they did not sit well with Ferdinand of Spain, who as the king of Aragón ruled over several Mediterranean possessions, including Sicily, Sardinia, and the Balearic Islands, and similarly had hereditary claims to the crown of Naples.[389] To protect his own dynastic interests in Italy, the Spanish king mobilized an army of 2,000 infantry and 300 light horsemen in late 1494 to uproot the French from the Peninsula.[390] At the head of those forces was Gonzalo Fernández

[388] Ladero Quesada, *La España de los Reyes Católicos*, 528-29. He additionally couched his invasion in religious terms, presenting his actions as part of a larger strategy to defeat the Ottoman Turks and ultimately recapture Jerusalem. Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 67-68.
[389] From Ferdinand's perspective, the French invasion not only posed a direct threat to his Aragonese patrimony, but also, as the Spanish king argued vociferously, to all of Latin Christendom. Ferdinand expressed concern that the Italian Peninsula was already volatile and fractured from internal politics, and that the disruption caused by French forces could invite a possible Ottoman assault of Italy. See Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 70-71.
[390] In a royal letter directed to Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, the Catholic Monarchs noted how they were sending forces to Italy "in the service of God and the well-being of our subjects." See AGS, CCA, CED, 1, 201, 3 (Madrid, 29 November 1494). Number of troops according to Anonymous Author, *Chrónica del Gran Capitán*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 30.

de Córdoba, an experienced military commander who first rose to fame during the Granada War. Within several years of his appointment, the Córdoban lord would succeed in extricating the French from the peninsula, distinguishing himself as one of the great soldiers of the epoch.[391]

At the time of Gonzalo's appointment to captain general of Italy in 1494, some contemporaries may have questioned why this noble, and not some other, was selected to carry out this critical enterprise. Certainly, the Córdoban lord exhibited considerable promise during the Granada War, but so, too, did various others, including Gonzalo's more illustrious relatives: the Count of Cabra and his eldest brother, Alfonso Fernández de Córdoba (Alonso de Aguilar). Nonetheless, the problem with appointing one of those other high nobles was that their private ambitions and egos frequently induced them to act semi-autonomously of royal authority. To prosecute the war in Italy, the sovereigns needed an experienced commander accustomed to the hardships of war, but also someone who was reliable, trustworthy, and willing to heed orders. Gonzalo met all of those requirements.

The Córdoban lord was known for his humble and deferential comportment, as well as his longstanding allegiance to the royal family. Since the age of twelve, Gonzalo had been in the service of the royal household, first traveling to the Castilian court in 1465 to serve as a page to the infante, Prince Alfonso of Asturias. After Alfonso's unexpected death in 1468, Gonzalo transferred his loyalties to Princess Isabella, and gradually secured the trust of the future Queen of Castile. In 1479, he helped Isabella solidify her claim to the throne during the War of Castilian Succession by fighting against her political adversaries at the battle of La Albuera.[392] Three years

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[391] There is a large body of documents on the Gran Capitán housed at the BNE in Madrid. Many of those documents have been published in Villa's, *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, as well as in Luis Suárez Fernández's, *Política Internacional de Isabel La Catolica: Estudio y Documentos, Tomo VI, 1500-1504* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 2002).

[392] For an account of Gonzalo's role in the battle, see Pulgar, *Breve Parte*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 560.

later, Gonzalo continued to render notable services to the crown during the Granada War, participating in some of the most vital campaigns, and serving as the chief Castilian ambassador during the surrender talks in 1491.[393] By the time of the French invasion in 1494, Gonzalo had constructed an impressive résumé of services, and one that exuded both skill and loyalty. Based on the royal letter appointing Gonzalo to captain general in Italy, it appeared to be these two traits, in particular, that won him the prestigious post: "[We are appointing] you as our captain, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, trusting that you will protect our service with skill (*hábil*) and loyalty (*fiel*), and that you will carry out diligently what is commanded of you."[394]

For Gonzalo, to be in charge of the Spanish army in Italy was a prodigious opportunity.[395] Since his youth he lived in the shadow of his older brother, Alonso de Aguilar, who as *primogénito* (first-born son) of the house of Aguilar and Priego lay heir to the family's lavish estates and fortunes. The war in Italy would have provided Gonzalo the perfect opportunity to chisel out his own fortunes and honor, while escaping the familial shadow that his brother long cast over him. In the spring of 1495, Gonzalo landed in Italy with his expeditionary force, comprised chiefly of close friends and acquaintances, veterans of the Granada War, and recruits from various localities, such as Andalusia, Murcia, and Vizcaya.[396] However, at this early juncture in the war, Gonzalo's forces would be ill-matched for the French's heavy cavalry and mercenary Swiss pikemen, known as *landsknechts*.[397] In the first major engagement between the

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[393] At Loja, Gonzalo notably commanded 120 lances. E. Michael Gerli and Samuel G. Armistead, *Medieval Iberia: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2003), 324.
[394] AGS, CCA, CED, 1, 201, 3 (Madrid, 29 November 1494).
[395] For a comprehensive overview of the political and military campaigns in Italy, see Michael Mallet and Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars, 1494-1559: War, State and Society in Early Modern Europe* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2012).
[396] On the employment of soldiers from the Granada War, see Jiménez, "La guerra," in Ladero Quesada, *La incorporación de Granada*, 663.
[397] In a letter to the crown, even Gonzalo acknowledged to the Spanish monarchs the "great advantage" (*gran ventaja*) of the Swiss infantry. BNE, MSS. 20.211.1 (7 July 1495). Numbers from Ladero Quesada, *La España de los Reyes Católicos*, 531.

two sides, at the battle of Seminara (June 1495), the joint Spanish and Neapolitan army suffered a resounding defeat.[398] While dispiriting, the battle served as a salutary lesson for Gonzalo, who understood the need to restructure his army before engaging in another bout with the French. He subsequently reorganized his army into distinct units, increasing the number of infantrymen and harquebusiers, and also training his men in mobile warfare.[399] The tactical adjustments proved effective, for in the upcoming campaigns Gonzalo and his Italian allies seldom suffered defeat.

Marching town by town, Gonzalo and his army assaulted the French-occupied fortresses in Italy, relying greatly on artillery and explosives to blast through the enemy fortifications. This style of warfare greatly favored the Spanish captain, who possessed years of experience fighting in this manner during the Granada War. Indeed, over the course of the ten-year conquest of the Islamic kingdom, Gonzalo engaged in numerous sieges of the individual hamlets and cities that comprised the emirate of Granada, including Álora, Loja, Illora, and Montefrío. In those places, Gonzalo witnessed first-hand the importance of mobile warfare, and especially the effectiveness of sustained artillery fire in tearing through the thick walls of those fortresses. These experiences allowed Gonzalo to accumulate a reservoir of knowledge on the intricacies of siegecraft, and provided him with an arsenal of tried-and-true military tactics that could be channeled into the Italian campaigns.[400] This transfer of wartime expertise helps to explain, at least in part, why Gonzalo frequently succeeded in isolating and capturing numerous French strongholds during the Neapolitan campaign of 1495-6. Though other factors also contributed to these victories,

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[398] Gonzalo's army was comprised of 3,000-4,000 foot soldiers and 800-1000 light cavalrymen. Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 32.

[399] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 131. See also John Keegan and Andrew Wheatcroft, *Who's Who in Military History: From 1453 to the Present Day* (London: Routledge, 2001), 62-63.

[400] Various historians have pointed out how the Granada War provided a training ground for the type of warfare that the Gran Capitán and his men would later encounter in the Mediterranean. See for instance, Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 45; Jiménez, "La guerra," in *La incorporación de Granada*, ed. Ladero Quesada, 663; Keegan and Wheatcroft, *Who's Who*, 62; and Liang, *Family and Empire*, 80.

such as the lack of pay to French soldiers, the aid of Italian allies, and an internal revolt within the city of Naples against French occupation.[401] With this additional support, Gonzalo was able to seize all of the French-controlled cities in Italy by August of 1496, save for Taranto and Gaeta. However, his victory on the peninsula was sealed after a decisive triumph at Atella, which culminated in the temporary expulsion of French troops from Naples. On account of these victories, Gonzalo received a torrent of praise from his Italian allies, along with the venerable nickname, El Gran Capitán.[402]

When Gonzalo returned home to Spain in the summer of 1498, Ferdinand and Isabella honored him with a hero's welcome in the city of Zaragoza. In more formal recognition of his services in Italy, the monarchs awarded Gonzalo a string of towns and castles within the vicinity of Granada and Illora, including civil and criminal jurisdiction over the vassals living in those lands, as well as the rents yielded from those localities.[403] In the royal document conferring those privileges, Ferdinand and Isabella also took the time to express their profound appreciation for the Great Captain: "We give thanks to you…Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, our captain and adviser, for the many good and loyal and distinguished services that you have done for us… After having sent you to those parts [in Italy] to captain some foot soldiers and horsemen, you [carried out] the destruction and recovery of the fiefs and lands of the Roman church that had been occupied, and in doing so, rendered us very important and distinguished services."[404] Such services were, indeed, distinguished. Within the span of three years, Gonzalo skillfully extricated the French and their reputedly indomitable Swiss mercenaries from the peninsula, helping to

[401] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 553.
[402] Pope Alexander VI awarded him the highest pontifical honor, the Golden Rose, while the King of Naples granted him the prestigious title, Duke of Santángelo, in 1497.
[403] The lordship of these possessions would also pass to Gonzalo's descendants after his death.
[404] AGS, Registro General del Sello, leg. 149909, 1 (26 September 1499).

safeguard Ferdinand's Italian possessions of Sicily and Sardinia and defending his hereditary claim to Naples. Now, with the French threat in Italy temporarily neutralized, the monarchs could shift their attention back to other imperial priorities, including the colonization of the Canary Islands, the fortification of the North African shoreline, the buttressing of outposts in the Caribbean, and the containment of the Ottoman Turks in the Levant.

As for the Gran Capitán, the exhausting campaigns in Italy induced the southern lord to seek a temporary respite from military duties. In late 1498, Gonzalo retired to his landed estates in Andalusia, where he spent the next year of his life in relative tranquility with his wife and two daughters. However, his hiatus from service would be short-lived. While Gonzalo was off fighting in Italy, Turkish navies had been mounting increasing forays into the eastern Mediterranean, with aims of asserting greater dominion over the Adriatic, Ionian, and Aegean Seas. With the specter of the Turks growing in the Levant, the Catholic Monarchs needed their talented soldier, Gonzalo, to confront the Islamic threat.

A New Maritime Frontier: The Gran Capitán in the Levant

Ever since the fall of Granada in 1492, Ottoman penetration into the eastern Mediterranean had been a major cause of concern for the Catholic Monarchs. For a long time, the Italian states (chiefly the Genoese and Venetians) were able to keep the Ottomans at bay in the inner sea, using their superior naval force and fortified strongholds—Modon, Koron, Crete, Cyprus, and Rhodes—to prevent any serious incursions from penetrating into the heart of Christendom.[405] But after the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) in 1453, the Turkish sultan, Mehmed "the Conqueror," began to pour massive monies and resources

[405] The term "inner sea" is used in reference to the Mediterranean basin.

into the construction of a powerful seaborne force, recognizing the utility of the sea as a means of excising imperial adversaries from the Levant.[406] Over the next two decades, the Ottomans ramped up the production of war galleys, recruited veteran sailors and carpenters from the coastal regions (chiefly those who previously served the Byzantine empire), and offered talented Muslim corsairs salaried positions as sea captains, such as Piri Reis, Burak Reis, and Kemal Reis.[407] With this impressive new fleet, and technically competent commanders, the Ottomans executed a string of victories over their Italian opponents in the final decades of the fifteenth century, seizing the Neapolitan town of Otranto in 1480 (held until 1481), the Venetian port of Lepanto in 1499, and the Greek fortress of Modon in 1500.

The loss of these ports, and more broadly the rise in Turkish maritime power, elicited major concern from the Christian rulers bordering the inner sea. There may have been few more perturbed than King Ferdinand, whose treasured island possessions of Sicily and Sardinia, perched like ripe fruit in the Central Mediterranean, could very well be the target of the next Ottoman assault. In order to protect his dominions from the depredations of the Turks, as well as shore up the defenses of Latin Christendom, Ferdinand dispatched an armada into the Levant in early 1500 to confront the Islamic threat.[408] At the head of that fleet was none other than Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, whose selection for the mission was not altogether surprising. Over the past several years, Gonzalo had proven himself a brilliant war tactician, vanquishing technically

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[406] Hess, "The Evolution of the Ottoman Seaborne Empire in the Age of Oceanic Discoveries, 1453-1525," *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 7 (1970): 1892-1919, 1901.

[407] Hess, "The Ottoman Conquest of Egypt (1517) and the Beginning of the Sixteenth-Century World War," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 4, no. 1 (1973): 55-76, 62-66.

[408] In a 14 April 1500 royal letter appointing Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba as captain general of the armada, the Catholic Monarchs articulate their reasons for dispatching a seaborne force to the Levant: "For what we owe to God, and for the obligation that we have to defend Christianity, as well as the defense of our islands that we have in those parts, we have ordered an armada to travel to our kingdom of Sicily, and from there to other parts, as necessary." This document is published in *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, volume 20 (Madrid: Montepio del Cuerpo Facultativo del Ramo, 1909), 458.

competent foes in Italy through shrewd military planning. What was perhaps most impressive about these triumphs was that they were conducted on foreign soil, far removed from the familiar terrain of Andalusia where Gonzalo had honed his military skills. This signified something of paramount importance to the Catholic Monarchs, that is, that its warrior aristocrats did not merely possess localized expertise relevant in Iberia, but a versatile skill set that could be transplanted to other distinct locales. It may have been for this reason that the monarchs selected Gonzalo for the critical mission in the Levant, trusting his ability to succeed in yet another unfamiliar frontier space.

The Gran Capitán's most significant actions in the Levant arguably came in November of 1500, when he directed his armada against the Turkish-held island of Cephalonia.[409] In the past, Cephalonia had served as a defensive bastion for the Venetians in the Ionian Sea, forming one of the first lines of defense that barricaded the heart of Christendom from the Islamic east. From the perspective of Venice, its recovery was essential for reasserting their maritime supremacy in the Mediterranean, and also for pushing the Christian-Muslim religious frontier deeper into the expanses of Islamdom.[410] The Venetians thus made a massive effort to take Cephalonia prior to the arrival of the Gran Capitán, besieging it for five months "at the expense of much men and money, but still they could not capture it," wrote Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba.[411] To assist the Venetians in its recovery, Gonzalo joined forces with the Venetian commander Benedetto Pesaro in late 1500, and prepared his men for what would be a bloody siege. In the ensuing battles, the

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[409] For a detailed account of the siege of Cephalonia, and particularly the role of the Gran Capitán, see Anonymous Author, *Chrónica del Gran Capitán*, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 63-71.

[410] The isle was also of tremendous interest to the Venetians because of its dual ports, which provided its masters with two points to launch its fleets into the inner sea. Even Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba referred to the port of Cephalonia as "the best in the world." See "Letter from the Gran Capitán to the Catholic Kings" (Cephalonia, 7 November 1500), in *Política Internacional de Isabel*, *Tomo VI*, ed. Fernández, document 42, 181. Original document located in the BNE, mss. 20.211, fol. 12.

[411] "Letter from the Gran Capitán to the Catholic Kings" (Cephalonia, 7 November 1500), in *Política Internacional de Isabel*, *Tomo VI*, ed. Fernández, doc. 42, 181.

Great Captain turned to his heavy artillery, reminiscent of his time in Granada and Italy, to reduce the enemy to submission. He directed his massive lombards at the Muslim defenses, and additionally instructed his military engineer, Pedro Navarro, to plant gunpowder mines beneath the enemy bulwarks. The combined effects of the artillery and gunpowder explosions dealt devastating damage to the enemy fortifications, paving the way for the Christian capture of the island on 25 December 1500.

The significance of the retaking of Cephalonia cannot be overstated. At a time when the Ottomans were gaining steady ground on the Venetians in the Levant, the recovery of the strategic island helped turn the tide of the Turks' alarming maritime expansion. The sixteenth-century historian, Jerónimo Zurita, noted this point precisely, describing how "The victory was celebrated widely in all parts, principally because those of the Turkish house, since the taking of Constantinople, had done nothing but destroy the great estates of [Christian] Princes, along with various cities and towns."[412] At least from Zurita's perspective, the victory served as a turning point for Christendom, signaling the end to decades of successive defeats at the hands of the Turks. However, the Gran Capitán's capture of two additional Turkish islands (Corfu and Santa Maura, in what is today Lefkada) at this time would have given the Christians further reason to celebrate. Like Cephalonia, these islands acted as defensive strongholds in the Levant, forming an outer shield that screened the heart of Christendom from Ottoman seaborne incursions. The retaking of these islands refortified the Venetians' defensive posture in the Levant, and more broadly stemmed Turkish pretensions to carve out an eastern Mediterranean empire.[413] In this

[412] Zurita, *Historia del Rey Don Fernando el Católico: De las Empresas, y Ligas de Italia*, *etc.* (Zaragoza: Por los Herederos de Pedro Lanaja y Lamarca, 1670), 199.
[413] While the Gran Capitán's maritime victories in the Levant were celebrated across Christendom, for the Ottoman Turks, by contrast, their defeats proved only a minor setback. In the decades to come, the Ottomans would execute a remarkable string of territorial acquisitions in the Mediterranean, none more lucrative than the conquest of Mamluk Egypt in 1517. The subjugation of this state generated enormous profits for the Ottoman sultan, Selim the Grim, exceeding what Emperor Charles V later reaped from his American empire, and sustaining Turkish military and

sense, Gonzalo executed his mission in the Levant consummately. However, his success illustrated far more than a mere capacity to execute royal mandates—it also revealed his impressive adaptability to new circumstances and environments. Unlike Gonzalo's previous engagements in Granada and Italy, which were more or less characterized by land warfare, his battles with the Turks were conducted in a maritime arena. Gonzalo's ability to adapt to this new milieu stands in for the malleability of the nobility in general, who similarly adjusted to new imperial roles and responsibilities at this time and continued to make themselves indispensable to the crown.[414]

The Second Italian War: A New Template for Imperial Conquest?

While Gonzalo and his armada were off fighting in the Levant, Spain and France were busy finalizing a secret agreement to partition Naples, known as the Treaty of Granada (November 1500). The arrangement rested on the basis that both countries held rightful claims to the Neapolitan kingdom, and therefore joint possession of Naples was a fair compromise. Despite the show of good faith between the two parties, some scholars suggest that neither side intended to uphold their end of the bargain, and that the treaty was more a way to temporarily halt war so that both sides focus their energies on other affairs, namely to form a unified opposition against the Turks.[415] Even so, both sides were committed to preserving peace in late 1500, or at least for the time being. This meant that when the Gran Capitán wrapped up his campaigns in the Levant, and sailed back to Italy at the beginning of 1501, he was instructed not

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maritime expansion for the remainder of the sixteenth century. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 61-70; and Hess, "The Ottoman Conquest of Egypt," 74. See also Giancarlo Casale, *The Ottoman Age of Exploration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[414] See Liang, *Family and Empire*.

[415] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 58-59.

to initiate any hostilities against the French.[416] Apparently, this was easier said than done. With Spanish and French armies both occupying Naples, skirmishes between the two sides eventually spiraled into all-out war, and by late 1502, the Gran Capitán was again called into action. In the forthcoming struggle, known as the Second Italian War (1501-4), Gonzalo would cement his reputation as one of the most astute military tacticians of his day. Indeed, the revolutionary stratagems that the Gran Capitán developed not only helped Spain win its critical contest against the French, but also sustain its military success in other areas of the empire.

The tactical brilliance of the Gran Capitán was on clear display at the Battle of Cerignola (28 April 1503), one of the most critical engagements of the Second Italian War. After establishing a defensive position in the hillside of Cerignola, Gonzalo followed the advice of one of his leading Italian captains to deepen a ditch in the field, namely so as to slow the advance of the enemy cavalry and infantry.[417] Within this trench the Gran Capitán situated his pikemen, whose long, iron-topped pikes were designed to ward off enemies attempting to traverse the man-made barrier. Meanwhile, the supplemental dirt and earth extracted from the ditch were used to augment an embankment, behind which the Gran Capitán positioned his harquebusiers and artillery. When the time came for war, these battlefield modifications unraveled the enemy forces. The French were unable to figure out how to traverse the ditch, and in the resulting confusion, the Gran Capitán's harquebusiers assaulted the enemy flanks, firing repeated volleys into the enemy formations and inflicting heavy casualties.[418] The battle lasted only half an hour, after which the French forsook the field and retreated across the Garigliano River. While the French deemed this position secure, namely due to the river's strong current, the joint Spanish-

[416] "Correspondence of the Catholic Kings with the Great Captain during the campaigns in Italy" (13 July 1502), in *Revista de Archivos*, vol. 21, 559.
[417] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 64.
[418] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 64-65.

Italian forces manufactured a makeshift wooden bridge to cross the supposedly impassable body of water, allowing them to take the French by surprise on 28 December 1503. With this stunning victory, French resistance in Italy thereafter crumbled. The last of the French strongholds, Gaeta, fell several days later. On 30 January 1504, King Louis XII agreed to a three-year truce with Spain, acknowledging himself that the kingdom of Naples "was lost beyond the hope of recovery."[419]

The battles of Cerignola and Gaeta, besides paving the way for Spanish victory in Italy, solidified Gonzalo's reputation as a military savant and tactical genius. The Great Captain's manipulation of the natural terrain, reliance on infantry, and use of heavy pikemen in conjunction with increased firearms revolutionized the way that war was waged on the battlefield.[420] Particularly noteworthy was the manner in which Gonzalo modified the structure of his army, creating distinct units with its own tactical capabilities: one-half yielded pikes, one-third short swords and javelins, and the rest equipped with firearms (harquebuses).[421] Each formation was capable of operating independently, which had the effect of maximizing mobility on the battlefield, though each sector still enjoyed the protection of artillery and cavalry. As some historians have suggested, the implemented changes transformed the Spanish army into one of the most formidable forces on the continent.[422] However, few scholars have acknowledged that the Gran Capitán's tactics also extended far beyond the theaters of Europe. During the Spanish invasion of Oran (1509), the military captain Pedro Navarro replicated the Great Captain's precise infantry formation in his assault on the Maghribian city.[423] The famed conqueror of

[419] Quote cited in Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 558.
[420] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 65.
[421] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 131-32.
[422] Gerli and Armistead, *Medieval Iberia*, 324.
[423] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 192, plate 4.

Tenochtitlan, Hernán Cortés, similarly employed Gonzalo's principal military strategies—the use of volley fire, heavy artillery, and distinct fighting brigades—in his engagements in Central Mexico (see chapter 5).[424] This extensive, far-reaching influence of the Gran Capitán's tactics illustrates how this noble not only helped Spain achieve success in Italy, but also in other regions of the rapidly expanding empire. Furthermore, his success demonstrates how Spanish knights were neither cast aside, nor rendered useless at the dawn of the Military Revolution, but rather stood at the forefront of early modern warfare, developing revolutionary stratagems that transformed Spain into a dominant European power.

Much to the concern of Ferdinand, the Gran Capitán's popularity ballooned to unprecedented heights following his recent triumph in Italy.[425] During Gonzalo's celebratory entry into Rome, Pope Julius II (the "Warrior Pope") threw a grandiose ceremony for the Córdoban lord reminiscent of those occasioned for ancient Caesarian emperors.[426] It was partly this admiration that worried Ferdinand, along with Gonzalo's newfound tendency to act independently. Gonzalo refused, for instance, to disband his army following the conquest of Naples, and also distributed many of the confiscated estates in Italy (which were now royal lands) to his soldiers and captains without direct assent from the crown. Most vexing of all, perhaps, was the Gran Capitán's failure to obey repeated summons to return to Spain.[427] This became especially concerning after the death of Isabella on 26 November of 1504, as Gonzalo was a Castilian nobleman, and his primary allegiance had been to the queen. With Gonzalo's

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[424] John Pohl, *The Conquistador*, 1492-1550 (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001), 18.
[425] Gonzalo was also awarded several hereditary titles in 1507 for his services, including Duke of Andría, Duke of Montalto, and Duke of Sessa. He was previously made Duke of Santángelo in 1497, Duke of Terranova in 1502, and the viceroy of Naples in 1504.
[426] Juan Claver, the Spanish ambassador in Naples, confirmed the adulation of the noble, referring to Gonzalo in a letter to Ferdinand as "the most well-liked man in the world, beloved by Castilians as well as by many Italians." "Letter from Juan Claver to Ferdinand concerning the internal situation in Naples," in *Política Internacional de Isabel, Tomo VI*, ed. Fernández, doc. 187, 508.
[427] See Villa, *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, doc. 38, xliv.

power in Italy swelling, Ferdinand was not to take any chances allowing the noble to continue wielding influence over his Neapolitan realm. In 1506, the Aragonese king departed for Naples to relieve Gonzalo of his command, promising him the prestigious position as Master of the Military-Religious Order of Santiago upon his return to Spain.[428] The Gran Capitán had little choice but to acquiesce. He sailed back to Spain with Ferdinand in 1507, but in the end never received the promised appointment. Instead, Queen Doña Juana conferred upon him the governorship of Loja, which was not a commensurate reward for his herculean services to the crown.[429] Without being appointed to any new enterprises, the decorated soldier retired to Loja to assume his post as governor, perhaps in wait for new imperial opportunities to spring forth.

Despite ultimately losing favor with Ferdinand, the services that the Gran Capitán rendered to the monarchy between 1494 and 1505 held crucial implications for the rise of Imperial Spain. At a time when Spain was facing mounting threats abroad, it was the Gran Capitán who brought order to the beleaguered empire: stymieing the Ottoman advance in the Levant, and vanquishing French forces in Italy (twice). What enabled the noble to succeed on these fronts were the frontier skills that he accumulated in his homeland of Andalusia. Here, Gonzalo learned the intricacies of siege warfare and tactful diplomacy, and acquired a cache of expertise that helped him excel in his engagements with the Turks and the French. And yet, while such skills could have been employed in other regions of the empire, chiefly North Africa, the Spanish king clearly lost faith in Gonzalo, ensuring that he would never again be appointed to any meaningful enterprises. His sidelining from future imperial projects was noteworthy, though, as it created an opening for other ambitious nobles to assume important leadership roles within

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[428] In 1504, the Kingdom of Naples became an autonomous realm under the direct rule of King Ferdinand, though it was governed by his viceroys. Kamen, *Empire*, 29.
[429] The royal document conferring the governorship of Loja to Gonzalo is published in Villa, *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, doc. 55, li.

the empire. Such was the case for Juan de Guzmán, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, and Pedro Navarro, who would go on to captain the invasion of North Africa between 1497 and 1511. Much like the Gran Capitán, these aristocrats were eager to gain distinction in the aftermath of the Granada War, and willingly agreed to carry out Ferdinand's ambitions in Africa for personal gain. Their impressive services paved the way for Ferdinand's entry into the inner sea, and further transformed Spain into a formidable Mediterranean power.

Noble Pursuits Along the Moroccan Coast

Before war erupted in Italy in 1494, the Catholic Monarchs already had their sights set on expanding into North Africa for political, religious, and commercial reasons. Those motives, as articulated by various scholars, consisted of a desire to extend warfare into the Maghrib as a continuation of the Reconquista; to create a larger buffer zone separating the Christian-Muslim military frontier; to safeguard the shores of Andalusia from piracy; to exercise tighter control over the commercial lanes of the inner sea; to gain an upper-hand over Iberian rivals; and to exploit the commercial markets of the African interior (namely the Saharan gold trade).[430] Still, if those reasons were not enough, the three dominant ruling families of the Maghrib were passing through a period of discord that had divided the region into autonomous zones.[431] With political divisions within the Muslim community sharply pronounced, and a reservoir of veteran soldiers from Granada seeking new employment, the moment appeared ripe for an African crusade—that is, until France's invasion of Italy quickly put a damper on those plans.

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[430] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 573-74; Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 26, 37; Liang, *Family and Empire*, 142; and Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 8-9, 96-99, 134. See also Devereux, "North Africa in Early Modern Spanish Political Thought," *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies* 12, no. 3 (2011): 275-291.
[431] Those ruling families were the Waṭṭāsids of Fez, the Zayānids of Tlemsen, and the Ḥafṣids of Tunis. Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 46.

With the crown's resources tied up in the Central Mediterranean, how was Spain to conduct any of the costly assaults in the Maghrib? And, if any territory was actually conquered in North Africa, who would stay on to occupy and safeguard it in otherwise dangerous and far-off provinces? These questions had no easy answers, and Ferdinand was ultimately convinced of the need to shelve the proposal. However, renewed interest in North Africa resumed in 1496, when the Duke of Medina Sidonia, Juan de Guzmán, volunteered to go in person to take possession of the Moroccan entrepôt of Melilla.[432] Though some historians have portrayed the duke as a "delegate" in a royal scheme to seize Melilla, a closer inspection of Juan's private interests reveals how he was no mere representative of the crown, but rather the primary agent in this conquest.[433]

While the Spanish sovereigns had manifold reasons to conduct war in North Africa, so, too, did Juan de Guzmán. In 1492, Juan inherited the ducal house of Medina Sidonia after his father, Enrique, passed away after the fall of Granada. To solidify his newfound authority, the duke looked to the nearby coast of North Africa as a means of asserting his seigneurial influence over new realms. In 1496, he dispatched two of his vassals, Bernardo Pinelo and Francisco Castellano, to the Moroccan coast to take possession of several territories that lay between Cape Aguer and Messa, including Zebedique, Tarucuco, Gugarti, and Galebarba.[434] His vassals succeeded in this mission, convincing the sheiks, lords, and leaders of those places to submit to the lordship of the duke. Yet, while the acquisition of those sites provided Juan de Guzmán with a steady stream of tribute payments to generate revenue, none of those African territories could

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[432] Lorenzo de Padilla, *Crónica de Felipe 1 llamado el hermoso*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 8 (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1846), 49; and Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 317-19.
[433] Juan Carlos Losada Malvárez, *España contra el imperio otomano: La lucha por el control del Mediterráneo desde el siglo XVI al XVIII* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2021), 53: "…the expedition and the subsequent settlement [of Melilla] were organized by the initiative of the monarchy, and not by the Duke of Medina Sidonia, who acted as a mere delegate."
[434] AGS, Medina Sidonia, caja 2, núm. 25.

possibly rival the lucrativeness of Melilla, located at the end of the caravan routes that delivered gold from the Sahara Desert. If the duke could extend his string of Moroccan victories to this entrepôt, he could augment his economic fortunes greatly by acquiring a territory with connections to the coveted gold trade. Therefore, when Juan de Guzmán learned from one his retainers, Pedro Estopiñan, that Melilla had fallen into ruin from internal strife, the duke moved quickly to request royal permission to conquer this enclave.[435] With the sovereigns busily absorbed in Italy, they authorized the duke's request, trusting his ability to raise the requisite troops and resources needed to succeed in the enterprise.[436] And thus in the Maghrib, as in Granada, the Canaries, and Atlantic Africa, the crown would once again rely on its nobles to extend its imperial reach into new realms.

With royal confirmation, Juan de Guzmán gathered 5,000 foot soldiers, some horsemen, cannons, lances, crossbows, and other munitions for the conquest of Melilla. He also assembled large quantities of wood to repair and fortify the city if taken, as well as flour, wine, and wheat to sustain its inhabitants.[437] This rapid mobilization of men, supplies, and equipment reflects in part the military preparedness of the residents of Andalusia, who after generations of living along an unpredictable frontier were conditioned to spring into action at a moment's notice. But it also underscores the substantial power of Juan de Guzmán, who was among the few individuals in Spain capable of raising a vast army and immense private resources for such an occasion. In September of 1497, the duke's armada departed from Cádiz under the command of his *contador mayor* (senior accountant), Pedro Estopiñan.[438] Despite the large assemblage of forces, Juan's

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[435] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 318. See also Doussinague, *La política internacional*, 76-79.
[436] The sovereigns additionally thanked the duke for his service, adding that his project would "fulfill our service well and that of God." ADMS, leg. 2396 (Burgos, 24 April 1497).
[437] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 319.
[438] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 319. Doussinague notes that the duke personally joined the enterprise and directed the military operations. *La política internacional*, 80.

army would have little work to do in the end. Prior to the invasion, the Maghribian kingdoms of Fez and Tlemcen had been at war over control of Melilla, which lay on the geopolitical border separating the two Islamic polities. Many of the residents caught in the crossfire decided to abandon Melilla, and "for this reason," Pedro Medina informs us, "they [the inhabitants] departed."[439] With the city half-deserted, the duke's forces easily captured the poorly garrisoned enclave (defended by some 1,200 men).[440] Once the city was secured, the duke's next actions were telling.

Like his grandfather had done at Gibraltar in 1462, Juan de Guzmán refused to relinquish Melilla to the Spanish monarchy, but instead attached it to his own private estates (on behalf of the House of Niebla). From the duke's perspective, the conquest was his own private enterprise, prosecuted with his ships, money, equipment, and soldiers, and all conducted without a trickle of royal support. Such an act, of taking possession of Melilla for himself, indicates that the duke was no mere delegate of the crown as some have suggested, but the chief orchestrator in this assault.[441] Like the other Moroccan territories that he seized previously (Zebedique, Tarucuco, and Galebarba), Melilla was part of a larger scheme by the duke to acquire territories in North Africa as a means of bolstering his power, status, and rents. With that said, it is important to emphasize that the duke, even in pursuit of his own agenda, still made a significant contribution to the monarchy with his capture of Melilla. With the taking of this enclave, the crown now presided over a critical base in the western Mediterranean, and one that would eventually become the bedrock of its North African empire.

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[439] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 317.
[440] Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 37.
[441] Merriman instead credits Cisneros, and not the duke, with inciting the attack on Melilla: "it was doubtless his [Cisneros's] enthusiasm that inspired the monarchs to take the first steps towards the realization of this project in the years that followed the conquest of Granada." *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2, 242.

Administering the Frontiers of North Africa

Despite the easy capture of Melilla, the duke's conquest was for all intents and purposes only half the battle.[442] It was well-known that the Moroccan enclave was surrounded by a multitude of hostile sultanates, and could be subject to the sudden incursion of neighboring Islamic polities at any given moment. To thus maintain and safeguard the new acquisition, the Spanish sovereigns appointed Juan de Guzmán as the military governor of Melilla, entrusting him with 700 soldiers, 4,080 bushels of wheat, and an annual juro of 2,949,789 maravedíes.[443] While the written accounts of the chroniclers do not expound on why the duke was selected as the governor of this site, several factors likely converged to make him the logical choice.[444] First, the governorship of Melilla would have been awarded to the duke in recognition and indemnity for his role in capturing the city.[445] Juan de Guzmán not only furnished his own cash and resources to conduct this assault, but also summoned an immense private army paid directly from his own coffers. Second, the duke was among the most powerful grandees in Spain at the time, and had a vast network of vassals, friends, and kinsmen who could help populate and safeguard Melilla. With the sovereigns embroiled in war in Italy, they needed someone of the

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[442] The lack of resistance on the part of the Muslim defenders has invited some scholars to debate the appropriateness of the term "conquest." Some historians instead prefer to use words and phrases such as the "occupation" or "taking possession" of Melilla. Regardless of the level of resistance, I still regard this as a conquest, as it involved the acquisition of a major Muslim city by force of arms. Rafaela Castrillo Márquez, "Melilla Baja Los Medina Sidonia, a través de la documentación existente en la Biblioteca Real de Madrid," *Anaquel de Estudios Árabes*, núm. 11 (2000): 171-189, 173-74.

[443] ADMS, Libro de Cartas Reales (Alcalá de Henares, 13 April 1498). Document published in *CODOIN*, vol. 36 (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1860), 469-483. Of that total sum, 300,000 maravedíes went to the duke annually for his service as governor. In June of 1500, the allotted 2,949,789 maravedíes was raised to 4,400,000. See AGS, Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas, primera época, leg. 303 (Seville, 14 June 1500). As the military governor, Juan de Guzmán's responsibilities would have primarily entailed the defense, security, and administration of Melilla.

[444] For a study on Melilla under the governorship of the Guzmán family, see Márquez, "Melilla Baja Los Medina Sidonia."

[445] The governorship was gifted to the duke in perpetuity, allowing Juan de Guzmán to pass control of the enclave to his heirs upon his death.

duke's stature to hold and defend this tenuous acquisition. Third, and perhaps most significantly, Juan de Guzmán hailed from a long line of distinguished imperial administrators: he and his forefathers had managed a number of critical frontier spaces over the course of the fifteenth century. Perhaps the most notable example was the city of Gibraltar, which the Guzmáns administered adeptly on behalf of the crown for four decades. With an impressive administrative pedigree, and extensive private resources, the monarchs must have felt considerable assurance entrusting the duke with yet another key frontier settlement, that of Melilla.[446]

Notwithstanding Juan de Guzmán's clear capacity to protect Melilla, the defense of this locale still became a source of tremendous concern to the sovereigns. The Moroccan entrepôt provided them with their first major base in the Maghrib, which, if properly fortified, could serve a number of the crown's interests. This included diminishing the threat of piracy off the coast of Andalusia, allowing for Christian ships to stop along the African shoreline to be provisioned, and providing a strategic base in the Maghrib to defend Ferdinand's Aragonese possessions in southern Italy (Sicily, Sardinia, and Naples). Perhaps most vitally, Melilla could be used as a stepping stone to the conquest of the other great ports and enclaves that lined the Mediterranean rim of North Africa, including Mers-el-Kebir, Oran, Tripoli, and Bougie.[447] For these reasons, the sovereigns could not afford to lose Melilla, and would come to rely greatly on the duke to safeguard it. In fact, upon hearing of Juan de Guzmán's intentions of returning to court in 1497 to mourn the death of their son, prince Don Juan, the Spanish sovereigns immediately dispatched

[446] The monarchs' confidence in Juan de Guzmán is illustrated well in a royal letter sent to the duke on 13 December 1500, in which the sovereigns commend his efforts at fortifying and safeguarding Melilla: "Cousin Duke, we saw the letter that our overseer (*veedor*) in Melilla, Diego Reinoso, sent to us, giving an account of what you did, and how you paid the men who came to Melilla and fortified it well with both people and supplies, so that that city is in safe hands. We are confident in your services and your capacity to fulfill our wishes, as you and your predecessors have always done, and we therefore entrust you to continue it." AGS, CCA, CED, 4, 246, 3 (13 December 1500).
[447] A number of contemporaries and later historians have acknowledged this point. For example, see Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 321-22; Fernández, *La politica internacional, Tomo V (1497-1499)* (Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, 1972), 80-81; and Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 98.

a letter forbidding his return: "As you know," expressed the monarchs, "the situation in Melilla is in such a state that it is necessary that you stay in that domain, so that you can provide it with all that is necessary, as your absence from there could bring much danger…Wherever this letter finds you, we entreat you to return there as soon as possible."[448] The duke, who was already out on the road, presumably returned to his post. What this incident reveals is the maximum importance of Melilla in the minds of the sovereigns, and their utter dependence on Juan de Guzmán to defend it. The monarchs recognized that the duke was one of the few individuals in Spain capable of safeguarding the remote enclave, and needed him stationed in Melilla at all times to ensure its successful incorporation into the empire. Juan de Guzmán would heed the orders of his kings, administering the locale dutifully until his death in 1507.[449]

Diego Fernández de Córdoba in the *Empresa de África*

After the capture of Melilla in 1497, Spanish penetration into North Africa halted for almost a decade. With the resumption of war in Italy in 1502, the Spanish sovereigns neither possessed the manpower nor the resources to carry out an *Empresa de África* (African Enterprise)—or at least not yet. It was not until the end of the Second Italian War, in 1505, that royal soldiers and equipment suddenly became available for an African crusade. With this freeing up of men and resources, royal plans were already underway in the spring of that year to assault the great Mediterranean port of Mers-el-Kebir (in modern day Algeria), set on a rocky peninsula that juts out into the western bay of Oran. If captured, the port would provide another key base

[448] ADMS, Libro de cartas reales, leg. 2396 (Endrinal, 18 October 1497). Document published in *CODOIN*, vol. 36, 468.
[449] The ducal house of Medina Sidonia administered the North African entrepôt until 1556, but were ultimately forced to relinquish it to the crown, as they were no longer able to pay for its costly expenditures.

from which to attack the other cities that lined the North African shoreline, most notably Oran, situated just a few miles to the east. To carry out the important offensive, Ferdinand appointed yet another prominent Andalusian noble, Diego Fernández de Córdoba (Alcaide de los Donceles), whose selection for this mission was not coincidental. Throughout the illustrious reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the monarchs routinely appointed individuals with extensive wartime experience to the most significant positions within empire, especially those who grew up in precarious frontier spaces. Diego, as a longtime resident of the southern borderlands, epitomized this imperial practice.

Like the Gran Capitán, Diego first made a name for himself fighting in the ten-year war of Granada. His most critical service came in 1483, when he and his uncle (the Count of Cabra) captured the Muslim emir, Boabdil, at the battle of Lucena. In recognition of this feat, Diego was showered with monetary gifts and privileges from the crown, including the honor of passing along his military title, Alcaide de los Donceles, to his descendants in perpetuity. While such rewards and distinctions were noteworthy, they did not foster idleness in the ambitious lord. Following the conclusion of the Granada War, Diego helped his monarchs establish peace in Andalusia during the rebellion of the *mudejars* (Muslim residents living under Christian rule) between 1499 and 1501.[450] During this time, Diego was elevated to captain general of Almeria, and with his own private army vanquished the Muslim insurgents in the Sierra de los Filabres near the village of Belefique in 1501.[451] Such heroics did not elude the eye of the Spanish king.

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[450] The rebellion had its roots in a series of anti-Islamic religious policies imposed by the Archbishop of Toledo, Cisneros, who recently arrived in Granada to assist in the evangelization efforts of the mudejars. To hasten the process of conversion, Cisneros implemented a more militant approach, burning Arabic books and sacred texts, seizing mosques, and instituting a policy of forced conversions. The intransigent measures were met with serious resistance among the mudejars, who argued with good reason that the policies breached the Capitulations of Granada (1492). On this rebellion and the Muslim population in Spain after the fall of Granada, see Ladero Quesada, "La repoblación de Granada antes de 1500," *Hispania*, no. 110, XXCIII (1968): 489-563; and Harvey, *Muslims in Spain*.

[451] Santa Cruz, *Crónica de los Reyes Católicos*, vol. 1, 242.

With Ferdinand in need of an experienced and trustworthy leader to command the upcoming offensive of Mers-el-Kebir, Diego would have been an excellent candidate for the mission. In July of 1505, Ferdinand elevated Diego to captain general of the enterprise, entrusting him with a substantial armada of some 120 ships and 5,000 combatants.[452] Notably, this was a massive seaborne force, nearly equaling the some 130 ships in the Spanish Armada sent against Protestant England in 1588.[453]

For Diego, to be in charge of an expedition of this magnitude would have been a watershed moment in his career. If he were to succeed in this campaign, he could solidify his reputation as one of Spain's most trustworthy and valiant knights, and maybe secure another prestigious appointment as an imperial commander or administrator. If he were to fail, on the other hand, the defeat might tarnish his honor and legacy, possibly ensuring that he is never again entrusted with another high post or responsibility. Perhaps with this in mind, the Córdoban lord began his arrangements for the upcoming assault in the summer of 1505, gathering men, weapons, equipment, and resources for the conquest, and assembling them at his base of operations in Andalusia.[454] As a lord of considerable stature, Diego additionally mobilized a contingent of private forces to fight alongside the royal guard, including 150 squires and 250 *espingarderos* (carriers of an *espingarda*, or firearm).[455] The purveying of these soldiers was no small contribution, given that they comprised nearly one-fifth of the total Christian army. Notably, it was these forms of support, among others, that made the nobility so crucial to Spain's early imperial expansion. With the ability of aristocrats to dispense private monies and

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[452] Ladero Quesada, "La toma de Mazalquivir y el retorno de Nápoles, Julio de 1505-Junio de 1506," *En La España Medieval*, núm. 36 (2013): 183-224, 193.
[453] Colin Martin and Geoffrey Parker, *The Spanish Armada*, Revised Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 265.
[454] Much of the expedition had been financed by the archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Castile, Francisco Cisneros. Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 38-39.
[455] Ladero Quesada, "La toma de Mazalquivir," 187.

manpower for Spain's military enterprises, the crown could conserve its precious resources and channel them to more needy areas of the empire.

As Diego Fernández de Córdoba was mobilizing his army in the south of Spain, the inhabitants of Mers-el-Kebir were undergoing their own preparations for war. The residents of this enclave received word of a large Christian army assembling in Andalusia, and fearing a possible assault on their port mobilized men from nearby provinces to bolster their garrison. However, as these Muslims scrambled to fortify the coastline, contrary winds off the coast of Andalusia delayed Diego's assault, forcing his armada to remain stationed in the ports of Malaga and Almeria for another two weeks.[456] The postponement of the attack was consequential. When the Castilian army at last departed for Mers-el-Kebir, on 3 September 1505, the Muslim inhabitants already withdrew their army, thinking that the Christians by now sailed further east to assault some other port. Thus diminished in numbers, the residents of Mers-el-Kebir were easily defeated by Diego's superior forces and heavy artillery, which tore down the thin bulwarks protecting the port.[457] On 13 September, the Muslims proceeded to strike terms with Diego Fernández de Córdoba, surrendering the city in exchange for safe passage and the retention of their personal belongings.[458]

Diego's acquisition of Mers-el-Kebir was a major exploit for the Spanish crown. The enclave's bustling port was reputed to be one of the best in Africa, principally on account of the rich commercial products (gold and enslaved peoples) that passed through its harbors for export into the Mediterranean.[459] With possession of the lucrative entrepôt, Spain now controlled a crucial access point to the wealthy commerce of the African interior, and perhaps more

[456] Ladero Quesada, "La toma de Mazalquivir," 193.
[457] Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 38.
[458] Ladero Quesada, "La toma de Mazalquivir," 194.
[459] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 120.

importantly, another strategic foothold to assault the other great cities that lined the shoreline: Oran, Bougie, Tunis, and Tripoli.[460] Given Mers-el-Kebir's commercial and strategic importance, Ferdinand needed one of his most reputable soldiers to stay on to protect it. He therefore appointed his valiant knight, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, who would have been suited well for this administrative post.[461] The warrior lord grew up in the southern borderlands of Spain, and had long been accustomed to safeguarding this frontier space from Muslim foes. Diego's transition from defending the frontier in Andalusia to that in the Maghrib, in other words, would have fallen comfortably within his realm of expertise.

Meanwhile, as Diego was installing himself as governor of Mers-el-Kebir, the Duke of Medina Sidonia was busy coordinating his next strike against Cazaza. The rocky promontory, located on the western coast of Cape Three Forks (in what is today Morocco), belonged to the Waṭṭāsid kingdom of Fez, and previously offered a point of disembarkation for Boabdil after his exile from Iberia in 1493.[462] From the perspective of the duke, the capture of the Moroccan port promised great reward. Back on 4 October 1504, the Spanish crown already offered Juan de Guzmán as a privilege (merced) jurisdiction over Cazaza, "with its forts, towns, and land," along with the illustrious title of Marquis of Cazaza in perpetual inheritance.[463] This was in spite of the fact that Cazaza had not yet been brought under Spanish sovereignty. The duke, in short, first

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[460] One of the participants in the offensive of Mers-el-Kebir, Gonzalo de Ayora, alluded to this point exactly, remarking in a letter to King Ferdinand how the capture was something of "such great importance for all of your Majesty's kingdoms, and especially…for the conquest of [North] Africa. In my opinion, Your Highness must place it among the most important and honored sites of your kingdoms." Quote cited in Kamen, *Empire*, 31. Ayora later penned an account of the offensive in a letter to Ferdinand. See "Carta de Gonzalo de Ayora a Fernando el Católico sobre la toma de Mazalquivir" (15 and 17 September 1505), in *CODOIN*, vol. 47 (Madrid: Imprenta de la Viuda de Calero, 1865), 536-555. Original in BNE, ms./ 10415.
[461] Ferdinand additionally conferred upon him the title, Captain General of Barbary, and granted him authority over Oran and Tlemcen, even though Spain had not yet subjugated those territories. Doussinague, *La política internacional*, 137.
[462] Doussinague, *La política internacional*, 140.
[463] For the granting of this privilege to the duke, see "Conquista de Cazaza por el duque de Medinasidonia" (Medina del Campo, 4 October 1504), in *CODOIN*, vol. 36, 489-92, 490.

needed to conquer the enclave in order to receive the promised rewards. While this lure of money and titles was probably enough incentive for Juan de Guzmán to capture Cazaza, the illustrious grandee had other motivations for seizing the port. His North African estate of Melilla was situated just ten miles east of Cazaza, making it vulnerable to a possible incursion emanating from this site. If he could conquer Cazaza, he could at once eliminate this threat, and establish a larger buffer zone cushioning his esteemed Moroccan territory.

Perhaps with this intention, the duke assembled a large private army in Melilla in the spring of 1506 and dispatched it to Cazaza at his own expense.[464] Under the command of his brother-in-law, Gonzalo Mariño de Ribera, the duke's forces seized the nearby port in April of that year, incorporating yet another critical territory to Spain's now burgeoning African empire.[465] The ability of Juan de Guzmán to execute this feat, namely with his own private resources, indicates how the feasibility of the Empresa de África depended greatly on the willing participation of the Spanish nobility. Without their personal resources, martial prowess, administrative expertise, and private ambitions, the initial conquests in the North African Maghrib would have been immeasurably more difficult, if not altogether infeasible.

Noble Dissension and Rebellion

With Diego Fernández de Córdoba tied up in the administrative affairs of Mers-el-Kebir, Ferdinand was in need of other talented captains to continue his conquest of the North African

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[464] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 322.

[465] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 322. With this conquest, the duke earned the title, Marquis of Cazaza, promised to him in 1504. To this day, the title is still retained by descendants of the duke.

shoreline.[466] The Gran Capitán would have been the obvious choice for the mission, having recently distinguished himself in the Second Italian War. But his previous misconduct in Naples worried Ferdinand, along with his recent implication in a rebellion orchestrated by his nephew, Pedro Fernández de Córdoba (the Marquis of Priego). This revolt had its roots in the succession crisis following Isabella's death in 1504, during which time a faction of Castilian nobles shifted their support away from Ferdinand to his daughter, Juana "the Mad" of Castile, and her husband, archduke Philip "the Handsome" of Burgundy.[467] Among those to back Juana and Philip's faction was the Marquis of Priego, who recognized Ferdinand's disintegrating authority and sought to exploit it.[468] Between 1506 and 1508, the Marquis carried out a number of seditious acts against royal authority, seizing control of Córdoba's municipal government, inciting an attack on the city's Inquisition prisons, and kidnapping one of Ferdinand's royal magistrates.[469] To castigate the rebellious noble, Ferdinand personally marched on Córdoba in the summer of 1508 with a contingent of royal forces and imprisoned the Marquis of Priego.[470] As for the Gran Capitán, the decorated noble was not the subject of any royal wrath himself, for he was not believed to have carried out any acts of subversion against Ferdinand. Nonetheless, his mere implication in the

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[466] Merriman suggests that Diego Fernández de Córdoba was not selected to prosecute the conquests in North Africa because Ferdinand lost confidence in the noble, namely following one of his failed raids in the Maghrib that resulted in the death and capture of many Spanish troops. *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2, 246-47.

[467] On this rebellion, see Edwards, "La Révolte du Marquis de Priego à Cordoue en 1508: Un symptôme des tensiones d'une société urbaine," *Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez* 12 (1976): 165-172; Yun-Casalilla, *Crisis de subsistencia y conflictividad social en Córdoba a principios del siglo xvi: una ciudad andaluza en los comienzos de la Modernidad* (Córdoba: Diputación Provincial, 1980); and Margarita Cabrera Sánchez, *Nobleza, oligarquía y poder en Córdoba al final de la Edad Media* (Córdoba: Cajasur, 1998).

[468] Pedro Fernández de Córdoba was the son of Alonso de Aguilar (the older brother of the Gran Capitán), who perished in 1501 during the mudejar rebellion in the Alpujarras. After his tragic death, Pedro inherited his father's enormous holdings and emerged as one of the most powerful lords in the south.

[469] Ironically, Pedro's only major opposition in Andalusia came from his own kinsmen, Diego Fernández de Córdoba (Alcaide de los Donceles), who not only refused to betray Ferdinand, but also dutifully took up arms to defend the monarch.

[470] As additional punishment, Ferdinand confiscated the Marquis of Priego's estates and offices, tore down his ancestral castle at Montilla, and banished him from Spain. Liang, *Family and Empire*, 72.

rebellion appeared to have raised further doubts in the mind of the Spanish king, who resolved to keep Gonzalo sidelined for the upcoming enterprises in North Africa.

With the Gran Capitán out of contention, one might expect that Ferdinand next looked to Juan de Guzmán to spearhead the invasion of the Maghrib, though the duke was causing problems of his own for the crown. On 2 January 1502, the Catholic Monarchs stripped the ducal house of Gibraltar, a territorial possession that had been awarded to the Guzmáns as a privilege back in the 1460s, after the first Duke of Medina Sidonia helped seize the Muslim fortress in 1462. The revocation of the privilege sparked considerable hostility between the crown and the Guzmán family, so much so that in 1506, the Duke of Medina Sidonia sent his own son, Enrique, to besiege the city of Gibraltar with his private army. The assault crumbled during the winter months of 1506-7, and the duke was ultimately forced to withdraw from Gibraltar, failing to recover what he considered his rightful patrimony.[471] Nevertheless, his rebellion was still calculated and symbolic, sending a clear message to Ferdinand that he was no mere pawn of the crown, but one of the most powerful individuals in Spain. Should the monarchy continue to threaten his interests or possessions, he would not sit by idly and accept the crown's will, but instead mobilize a massive army to rebel against it.

For King Ferdinand, by contrast, the rebellions of the Duke of Medina Sidonia and the Marquis of Priego served as cautionary warnings. Following the death of Queen Isabella, Ferdinand recognized that few of his Castilian nobles could be trusted, especially with positions of great significance within the empire. This was exemplified by the actions of the Gran Capitán in Naples, where the Córdoban lord repeatedly defied royal orders to disband his army and return

[471] Medina, *Crónica de los duques de Medina Sidonia*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 39, 324. Not long after this incident, the Duke of Medina Sidonia died on 14 July 1507. His titles and estates passed to his primogeniture, Enrique de Guzmán. For the duke's final testament, which discusses the distribution of specific properties and holdings to his heirs, see ADMS, leg. 931, fol. 26 (Seville, 12 July 1507).

to Spain. Gonzalo's unruliness confirmed to the crown one of the principal concerns of its imperial expansion, namely that its military leaders could amass considerable power in these wars, and use them as opportunities to consolidate their authority in less monitored areas of the empire. To therefore prosecute the conquests in North Africa, Ferdinand needed to appoint a military commander first and foremost whom he could trust. I believe it was for this reason that Ferdinand chose the northern hidalgo, Pedro Navarro, who first rose to fame fighting alongside the Gran Capitán in the Mediterranean, and was one of the few individuals to remain loyal to the king during the aristocratic revolts.[472] After being elevated to captain general of Africa in 1508, Navarro would quickly prove his worth to the crown. Within two years of his appointment, Navarro subjugated a number of coastal cities in the Maghrib and reduced numerous others to vassalage. His distinguished services in this realm underscore the continued importance of Spanish aristocrats, especially frontier ones, to the expansion of the early Spanish empire.

Pedro Navarro: A Petty Noble, and the Growth of Spain's North African Empire

Like other ambitious soldiers of his generation, Pedro Navarro's early career involved circulating the early modern world in pursuit of greater wealth and status. At a young age, the hidalgo left his home in Navarre and departed for Italy, where he enlisted in the service of the Marquis of Croton, a knight of the Kingdom of Naples. In the Central Mediterranean, Navarro fought as a mercenary in the various internal wars that beleaguered the fractured Italian States, and acquired precious experience as an armed combatant. When the First Italian War ended, in 1496, Navarro departed from Italy and took to the sea as a privateer. While sailing around the

[472] According to Heros, Navarro was the son of the hidalgo, Pedro de Roncal. *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 13.

Mediterranean rim, Navarro battled North African pirates, assaulted Turkish and Portuguese ships, and consequently earned the nickname, *el salteador* ("the marauder").[473] Despite Navarro's success at sea, his stint as a corsair proved short-lived. In a confrontation with a Portuguese craft in 1499, Navarro was wounded by a harquebus shot "that took most of his buttocks."[474] While tending to his injuries at the port of Civitavecchia, northwest of Rome, Navarro ran into the armada of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, who was en route to the Levant to assist the Venetians in their maritime battles against the Turks. Perhaps desirous of new opportunity, Navarro forsook his career in piracy and joined the Gran Capitán's forces.

In the upcoming battles against the Turks, Navarro played a major role in helping the Spanish-Italian coalition achieve victories in the Levant. At Cephalonia, in particular, Navarro gained considerable repute for his deployment of gunpowder mines, which helped tear down part of the walled fortifications of its castle-fortress, San Jorge. His talents as a military engineer demonstrated quite clearly to his superior, the Gran Capitán, that he could be a valuable asset in the struggle against the Valois Dynasty in Italy. When the maritime campaigns in the Levant thus ended in 1501, Navarro sailed back to Italy with the Gran Capitán, serving under his command for the duration of the Second Italian War. During this conflict, Navarro fought in virtually every major battle on the peninsula, including at Naples, Canosa, Taranto, Altamura, Gaeta, and Roccasecca.[475] The participation of Navarro in a vast array of campaigns was noteworthy, as it awarded him the opportunity to observe closely the brilliant military science and strategies of the Gran Capitán. This experience would serve him well in his later campaigns in North Africa,

[473] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 17-29.
[474] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 32.
[475] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 33.

especially in the conquest of Oran, in which he would replicate some of the Great Captain's core military tactics.

For now, though, Navarro was remunerated well for his wartime services in Italy. In 1505, he received in full ownership the village of Oliveto (in the county of Abruzzo), where he assumed the title of Count on 1 June of that year.[476] Given his already accomplished military career, Navarro had every reason to settle down on his new estate to enjoy a life of tranquility. But this was not the case. He instead vigorously searched for new military appointments to bolster his status and wealth, akin to what his noble counterparts, Pedro de Vera and Alonso de Lugo, had done in the Atlantic. Navarro was given a significant such opportunity in August of 1508, when King Ferdinand elevated him to captain general of Africa.

The appointment of Navarro to this high post may have come as a shock to some contemporaries. The Navarrese man was an autodidact who lacked formal education, and spent a portion of his life ingloriously sailing the Mediterranean Sea as a corsair. At least from a social standpoint, there were far nobler gentlemen from the upper echelons of Spanish society who should have overshadowed him for this appointment. With that said, Ferdinand clearly appreciated Navarro for the loyalty that he showed during the nobles' rebellion (1506-8), and may have been rewarding the hidalgo for his allegiance. Besides, the Navarrese man carved out an exemplary military résumé over the course of a decade, gaining great fame for his deployment of gunpowder mines. Planted beneath the enemy bulwarks, these explosives helped to demolish the Turkish fortifications at Cephalonia as well as various French-controlled fortresses in Italy.[477] It was this martial prowess, coupled with his allegiance, that were arguably the most important

[476] The document conferring this title is published in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 407.
[477] According to Heros, it was "the novelty and terrible effects of the mines [that] were the foundations for the elevation and deserved fame of Navarro," which, he adds, were "famous in all corners of the earth." *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 96, 385.

factors to Ferdinand when conferring this appointment. Indeed, the same could be said for his selection of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba to captain the Spanish army in Italy, or Diego Fernández de Córdoba to lead the expedition to Mers-el-Kebir. These men did not necessarily edge out their competitors because of their military talent, per se, but more so for their longstanding allegiance to the crown. The newest appointee, Navarro, proved no exception to this pattern.

The first major test for Navarro came in May of 1509 with the invasion of Oran, a strategic outpost that Spain held designs on since the fall of Granada.[478] The main problem with conducting an assault on this city, however, was that the royal treasury had been depleted by Castilian politics and the war in Italy.[479] With the crown's monetary reserves exhausted, Ferdinand allowed the Archbishop of Toledo, Cisneros, to finance the campaign at his own expense, assuring the warrior priest that if captured, Oran would be linked to the diocese of Toledo (and not the crown).[480] Because of this financial support, the churchman is often considered the chief architect of the conquest, so much so that one historian deemed it "Cisneros' crusade."[481] However, when the time came for actual battle, the 73 year-old priest was barely able to muster the strength to conduct the attack. He was ultimately persuaded, with some degree of reluctance, to retire to Spanish headquarters.[482] With Cisneros sidelined from the fight, it was

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[478] Hillgarth, *The Spanish Kingdoms*, vol. 2, 573. Prior to the assault on Oran, Navarro already succeeded in capturing the tiny promontory of Peñón de Vélez de la Gómera in July of 1508. Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 107-8.
[479] Remarkably, the expeditions to Naples cost the Spanish crown a reported 1,200,000 ducats (200,000 ducats in 1495, and 1,000,000 ducats between 1501-3). Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 214.
[480] Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 39.
[481] Braudel, "Les espagnols et l'Afrique du Nord de 1492 à 1577, in *Autour de la Mediterranée* (Paris: Éditions de Faillois, 1996): 31-89, 39, 52. Merriman went one step further, remarking how: "The real hero of the story of Spanish expansion in North Africa during the first ten years of the sixteenth century is neither King Ferdinand nor Queen Isabella, but Cardinal Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros." At Oran, he continued, "nothing short of the heroic determination of Ximenes could have set the expedition in motion at all." *The Rise of the Spanish Empire*, vol. 2, 241, 249.
[482] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 122. See also Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 39.

Pedro Navarro who led the enterprise on the ground, and he also made the tactical decisions that won the city. Indeed, when the time came for battle, the Count of Oliveto looked to his heavy guns and gunpowder, as he had done in Italy and Cephalonia, as the most effectual means of subduing the Muslim city.[483] After laying down his artillery in the hillside, Navarro's cannons "inflicted great damage to the Moors," writes Bernáldez, forcing the defenders to retreat into the confines of the city.[484] With the doors to Oran bolted, the Christians proceeded to scale the walls of the city, and eventually succeeded in thrusting open the gates to the rest of the army. The Christians secured the city within a few hours, claiming victory on 17 May 1509.[485]

Navarro's conquest of Oran was a significant triumph for Ferdinand's Empresa de África. Only thirty or forty Christians were said to have died in combat (compared to some 4,000 Muslims), while the spoils of war were massive, estimated at an astounding 300,000 ducados.[486] Yet the real significance of the victory did not lie in the plundered booty, but in the geo-commercial advantages of the city. Oran existed at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, connecting various spaces and polities in the Christian and Islamic worlds through geography and trade. Of particular note was the lucrative merchandise that funneled through its ports from sub-Saharan Africa, namely gold and enslaved peoples, as well as grain and other agricultural products collected from the surrounding coastal communities.[487] In order to safeguard this

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[483] Navarro assumed overall military command of the Christian troops (10,500 foot, 550 horse, and 2,650 mariners), and led the assault by land. Ladero Quesada, *La España de los Reyes Católicos*, 558.
[484] Bernaldez, *Memorias del Reinado*, 550. Heros also describes in detail the devastating impact of the Spaniards' artillery. *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 123.
[485] Doussinague, *La política internacional*, 197.
[486] Bernáldez and Heros claim that 4,000-5,000 Muslims died in the battle, while 5,000 were taken prisoner. Heros also states that only 30 Christians were killed. Ducados according to Bernáldez. Bernáldez, *Memorias del Reinado*, 551; and Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 124. Doussinague believes the spoils of war were even higher, around 500,000 ducados. *La política internacional*, 198.
[487] For a commercial study of Oran and Tlemcen in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, see José Enrique López de Coca Castañer, "Oran y el comercio genovés en la transición a los tiempos modernos," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 24, no. 1 (1994): 275-298.

precious territory, as well as administer it, Ferdinand installed as its captain general none other than his trusted knight, Diego Fernández de Córdoba. As one might recall, Diego was previously in charge of overseeing Oran's adjacent port of Mers-el-Kebir. After relocating to Oran, Diego would continue to showcase his administrative excellence, managing the presidio adeptly for the next several years.[488] The crown's dependence on Diego to supervise its frontier possessions in North Africa indicates how Spain's aristocrats, far from relegated to the sidelines, continued to occupy the most vital positions within the empire.

As for Pedro Navarro, his swift conquest of Oran ensured that he would continue on as captain general for the next two targets in North Africa: Bougie and Tripoli. Like Oran, these places were highly desirable sites for conquest, chiefly due to their access to the rich agriculture and lucrative commerce of the eastern Maghrib.[489] If captured, the establishment of Christian garrisons at these places would allow the crown to nearly monopolize the trade that passed through its ports into the Mediterranean, as well as exploit the commercial markets of the African interior. After assembling his forces in Sicily, Navarro seized Bougie in January of 1510, and later captured Tripoli in July of that year. The victories earned Navarro considerable acclaim throughout Christendom, though there may have been few individuals more pleased with his efforts than King Ferdinand.[490] Within three years of his appointment, Navarro virtually

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[488] Diego was ultimately forced to relinquish the administration of Oran to his son, Luis, in 1511. At this time, Ferdinand was planning the conquest of Navarre, a Basque-speaking kingdom in northern Spain that declared itself neutral in the war against France in Italy. Utilizing this as a pretext for the invasion, Ferdinand instructed Diego to return to Spain to help seize the tiny mountain kingdom. With the noble's help, the Spanish vanquished the token opposition in the northern fringes of Spain by 1513, claiming Navarre on behalf of King Ferdinand (the kingdom was initially attached to the Crown of Aragon, but later annexed to Castile in 1515). In return for his services, Diego received the illustrious title, Marquis of Comares, and was additionally appointed first viceroy of Navarre. See Biblioteca de la Real Academia de la Historia (RAH), Colección de Salazar y Castro (SyC) M-45, fol. 91, "Queen Juana to Diego Fernández de Córdoba" (Burgos, 27 December 1512). On Luis Fernández de Córdoba's governorship of Oran, see AGS, Guerra y Marina, leg. 1317, fols. 1-3.

[489] Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 39.

[490] After the conquest of Bougie, Pope Julius II extolled Navarro's "invincible army" and the "valor of the soldiers." The Italian humanist, Peter Martyr d'Anghiera, added to the extolment, remarking: "A feat worthy of praise! There is nothing too arduous nor difficult for the Spaniards, and nothing they cannot undertake, for they frightened Africa,

completed Ferdinand's designs in the Maghrib, capturing an array of coastal cities while reducing numerous others to vassalage, including Cherchell, Dellys, Mostaganem, and Tlemcen.[491] The ability of Navarro to orchestrate these victories was telling. It confirmed to the monarchy a phenomenon that they had already witnessed in the Canaries, that is, that men of lesser distinction—and not just middling or high nobles—could carry out the most significant tasks of empire. The same would hold true in the Americas, where the predominance of petty nobles and humble Spaniards in the leadership positions would put a unique stamp on the later phases of Spain's imperial expansion.

Navarro's exploits in the Maghrib held major ramifications for Ferdinand's broader Mediterranean objectives. Now in possession of a vast stretch of the North African shoreline, Ferdinand could move his armies freely throughout the Mediterranean basin, allowing him to assert greater supremacy over the inner sea and all its affairs. While these strategic advantages were of tremendous import to the king, no doubt, the true value of these African lands—at least in the minds of some contemporaries—lay in their political and religious implications. Ever since the taking of Melilla in 1497, there had been a growing sentiment within Christian political circles that the North African enclaves could be utilized as stepping stones to extend warfare deep into the heart of Islamdom.[492] Emery d'Amboise, the Grand Master of the Knights Hospitaller, was one such proponent. In a 8 September 1510 letter to King Ferdinand, the Grand Master advised the Spanish king to continue his string of conquests in Africa as far east as

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and filled it with dread." AGS, Patronato Real, leg, 60, fol. 68 (Rome, 15 February 1510). Document published in Doussinague, *La política internacional*, 589-90. Quote from Martyr cited in Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 138.

[491] The Crown of Aragon incorporated Bougie, Algiers, and Tripoli, while Castile incorporated all the earlier territories: Melilla, Cazaza, Peñón, Mers-el-Kebir, and Oran.

[492] Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 98.

Egypt.[493] Other contemporaries, such as Pedro Navarro, advocated a more ambitious proposal. In a lengthy supplication to the king, the Count of Oliveto urged the monarch to abandon his conquest of Africa, arguing that the costs of maintaining the presidios were too high, and that Spain did not possess enough settlers and soldiers to occupy and hold these points.[494] Instead, he opined that the king channel his monies and resources into the conquest of the eastern Mediterranean, including Greece, Anatolia, Palestine, Egypt, and the Holy Land. Unequivocally, such appeals for the recovery of Jerusalem would have captivated the ears of any Christian sovereign, let alone the ambitious King Ferdinand. Yet the monarch still understood the logistical challenges of such an enterprise, along with the enormous risks attached to it.[495]

For these reasons, Ferdinand would settle for a more conservative policy of limited occupation in Africa, sufficient for defending his Aragonese claims in Italy, and protecting the southern shores of Spain from a Muslim attack.[496] This is not to say, though, that the king's African plans were complete by 1510. To the contrary, the Spanish monarch was already mobilizing an army of 3,000 soldiers to attack Tunis the following summer, seemingly with the

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[493] "Letter from the Grand Master of Rhodes congratulating the Catholic King on his capture of Bougie and Tripoli" (Rhodes, 8 September 1510), in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 467-68, 467. This figure was also known as the Master of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem as well as the Grand Master of the Order of Rhodes.

[494] Navarro, *Memorial para la Majestad en orden a la Conquista de Jerusalen*, Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, ms./ 19699, caja 60. See also Devereux, *The Other Side of Empire*, 137-41.

[495] Navarro was not the only notable figure at this time to press for the conquest of the Holy Land. A number of scholars have shown how Columbus similarly held a longstanding, if not obsessive, interest in the Christian conquest of Jerusalem. On this topic, see Hamdani, "Columbus and the Recovery of Jerusalem," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 1 (1979): 39-48; Alain Milhou, *Colón y su mentalidad mesiánica en el ambiente franciscanista español* (Valladolid: Casa-Museo de Colón, 1983); Watts, "Prophecy and Discovery"; Leonard I. Sweet, "Christopher Columbus and the Millennial Vision of the New World," *The Catholic Historical Review* 72, no. 3 (1986): 369-382; and Carol Delaney, *Columbus and the Quest for Jerusalem* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

[496] In the decades to come, this policy of limited occupation would slowly unravel, as the Ottoman Turks would eventually sweep into the inner sea, recapturing a number of these coastal states and reversing many of the Spanish gains in North Africa. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 42.

intent of furthering his dominion in the Maghrib.[497] No such plans came to fruition in the end, however, as new complications in Italy once again sidetracked Ferdinand's African agenda.

Royal Neglect, and Shifting Allegiances

In the summer of 1510, the French reinvaded the Italian Peninsula under the command of their talented young general, Gaston de Foix (Duke of Nemours). Within a year, Gaston executed a number of impressive victories in Italy, perhaps none more so than his capture of Bologna from papal control in May of 1511. In response to this act, Spain entered into a coalition with the Papacy and Venice in October of 1511, known as the Holy League, designed to curb French aggression in Italy and help recover Bologna for Pope Julius III.[498] Despite the formation of this alliance, the French continued their march east to Ravenna in early 1512, intending to deliver a decisive blow to Spanish and Papal troops.[499] With a major military engagement looming, Ferdinand called upon his accomplished soldier, Pedro Navarro, to confront the brilliant Gaston de Foix. After receiving instructions to abandon the African campaigns, Navarro was summoned to Ravenna and awarded overall command of the Spanish infantry forces.[500]

The entrusting of the Count of Oliveto with this responsibility was no inconsequential matter. Given Ferdinand's Aragonese patrimony in Italy was at stake, his decision to appoint Navarro to this high post indicates the considerable confidence that he held in the noble to protect his esteemed interests. Furthermore, Navarro's appointment also reveals the potential for

[497] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 168.
[498] Spain contributed the most to the alliance. Ferdinand was expected to furnish 1,200 men-at-arms, 1,000 light horse, and 10,000 infantry. Venice was obligated to provide galleys and as many troops as it could muster. The papacy and the Venetians additionally needed to raise 40,000 ducats a month to support the Spanish troops. Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 103.
[499] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 106.
[500] Heros, *Historia del Conde*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 169.

talented soldiers, particularly of lesser social distinction, to elevate themselves to significant positions within the imperial regime. In this sense, the ensuing meeting at Ravenna could have been another defining triumph in Navarro's career—but it instead ended in disaster for the soldier. In the aftermath of the battle, Navarro not only lost favor with the Spanish crown, but also became one of its chief adversaries. In fact, the soldier would find himself enchained in a Spanish prison in 1522, awaiting a death sentence from Holy Roman Emperor Charles V (King Charles I of Spain). What had happened to the distinguished warrior at Ravenna? And what does his story tell us about the relationship between the crown and its nobles in Spain's age of empire?

On Easter Sunday, 11 April 1512, French forces crossed the nearby river of Ronco towards Ravenna, together with their German and Italian allies. As the invaders closed in on the city, Navarro worked to coordinate a defensive posture with his infantry forces, hoping to use his firearms and heavy artillery to drive back the enemy advance. The major issue for Navarro, however, was that the French attackers held a significant numerical advantage, possessing some 30,000 troops compared to the 20,000 on the side of the Spain-Venice-Papal coalition. With inferior manpower, how was Navarro to withstand the full brunt of the enemy, who were not only greater in number and better disciplined, but also had perhaps twice as many pieces of artillery at their disposal?[501] The answer, in short, was that he could not. By mid-afternoon, the French and their allies had secured victory on the battlefield, albeit at a hefty cost.[502] Among those killed in action were numerous French nobles and captains, including their skilled general, Gaston de Foix. With the loss of this talented commander, and much of the French high command, King Louis of France was forced to withdraw most of his forces from Italy in the summer of 1512,

[501] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 107.
[502] The battle would be recorded as one of the bloodiest campaigns to be waged on Italian soil for centuries, with an estimated 10,000-20,000 deaths. Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 108.

failing to secure the northern stretches of the peninsula. For King Ferdinand, there was little to celebrate either. Nearly his entire army had been destroyed in battle, while some of the principal knights of Spain had been taken prisoner, including Pedro Navarro, who was brought back to France in chains.[503]

While imprisoned by the French, the Count of Oliveto probably expected his sovereign to pay his ransom at whatever the cost. Over the past four years, Navarro rendered a number of significant services to Ferdinand, acquiring a host of strategic African territories on his behalf, and fighting to protect the king's interests in Italy. Not to mention the fact that Navarro was one of the few individuals to back Ferdinand during the rebellion of 1506-8, particularly at a time when most of his former collaborators had turned against him. For these reasons alone, the monarch should have returned the favor and paid the ducados for his soldier's ransom; nonetheless, Ferdinand made no significant bid to secure his release. While it is possible that the ransom was simply set too high—and the king, out of mere frugality, refused to pay the exorbitant price—it is also plausible that Ferdinand felt threatened by the success and astronomical fame of Navarro, and perceived his capture at Ravenna to be the perfect moment to dispose of the distinguished warrior. Whatever Ferdinand's precise reason(s), the disgruntled Navarro was not pleased with the monarch's negligence and soon took matters into his own hands.

Whether in exasperation, or bitterness, Navarro elected to forge his own deal with the French monarch, Francis I, promising to forsake his ties to Spain and serve the sovereign in

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[503] Some of the more notable men taken prisoner on the side of the Holy League were Fabrizio Colonna (one of the principal Italian captains), Ferrante Francesco d'Avalos (the Neapolitan Marquis of Pescara), and Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici (the papal legate). Anonymous Author, "Relación de los sucesos de las armas en España en Italia, en los años de 1511 á 1512, con la jornada de Rávena," in *CODOIN*, vol. 79 (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1882), 233-98, 292.

exchange for his freedom.[504] While noteworthy, Navarro's change in allegiance was not unprecedented in the annals of Spanish history. The legendary Castilian crusader, the Cid, did the same in the eleventh century, electing to serve the Muslim ruler of Zaragoza for five years after losing favor with the king of Castile. For the Cid, as well as later generations of mercenary-soldiers, the prospect of acquiring individual wealth, glory, honor, and distinction could sometimes supersede political allegiances and even religious convictions. For Navarro, however, his decision to shift his loyalties seemingly owed less to the prospect of personal enrichment, and more to the desire to earn his freedom. For much of the next decade, the Count of Oliveto fought under a French banner in Italy, at one point commanding an army of 10,000(!) infantry.[505] But as fate would have it, Spanish forces captured Navarro while on campaign in Genoa in 1522, and transferred him to Naples where he was to await the indictment of Emperor Charles V. If the soldier expected clemency from the monarch, he would not be shown it on this occasion. The turncoat was sentenced to death.

In the end, Navarro did not live to see his execution day, perishing at the hands of his captors while imprisoned in Naples. But if we take a moment to reflect on his death, a clear connection can be drawn to the fate of the Gran Capitán. Similar to Navarro, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba was cast aside and forgotten by the Aragonese monarch, in spite of rendering colossal contributions to the crown. The near simultaneous fall of both nobles from royal grace is not coincidental. After the death of Queen Isabella in 1504, the king's authority in Castile had diminished greatly, and with the subsequent, meteoric rise to fame of the Gran Capitán and the Count of Oliveto, the monarch seemingly would not take any chances allowing the power of these lords to swell. It may have been for this reason that Ferdinand ultimately refused to pay

[504] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 127.
[505] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 127.

Navarro's ransom, perhaps to prevent the noble from acquiring a more legendary status in Spain, lest he became a serious political threat. If this did, indeed, inform any part of Ferdinand's thinking, then his decision would backfire in a way. In the years to come, Navarro would emerge as one of the crown's chief antagonists in the Central Mediterranean, leading thousands of French troops in Italy against Spain and its Italian allies. It was precisely this shift in allegiances, though, that makes the Count of Oliveto such a unique and fascinating figure. Unlike other conquistadors of his generation, Navarro would be remembered as both a great hero, and great enemy of the early Spanish empire.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the significance of a handful of Spanish nobles to the success of Spain's early modern Mediterranean projects (c. 1494-1512). During this time, Spain became deeply preoccupied with the Mediterranean basin for its political, economic, and religious significance, leading to violent clashes with Christian and Islamic foes over control of strategic ports, islands, and broader swathes of land. In the traditional literature on these Mediterranean conflicts, historians of Spain have focused mostly on the policy or actions of the crown and the church militant. Far less attention has been paid to the intervention and services of Spanish aristocrats in those clashes. In fact, the growth of royal centralization during this period was said to have stifled the power of the nobility and converted them into mere ornaments of the crown. However, the emphasis on the suppression of aristocratic authority in the historiography has obscured the remarkable vitality of this group and their contributions to the early modern state. The most vital of those services arguably came in the Mediterranean basin, where aristocrats served as key conquerors, commanders, and imperial administrators on behalf of the crown.

One of the most significant figures in this regard was Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, who led the fight against the Valois Dynasty in Italy, and devised revolutionary military tactics that expelled the French from the peninsula twice. Gonzalo also played a key role in protecting Spain (and the rest of Christendom) from the Ottomans in the Levant, serving as captain general of the Spanish Armada that stymied the Turks' maritime advance in 1500. Gonzalo's southern neighbors, Juan de Guzmán and Diego Fernández de Córdoba, performed similarly impressive feats in the Mediterranean. Both nobles captained the conquests of key North African cities, chiefly Melilla, Mers-el-Kebir, and Cazaza, and later stayed on to manage those lands on behalf of the monarchy. As men thoroughly accustomed to frontier living, Juan and Diego excelled in the governorship and defense of these borderland sites, insofar as the crown prohibited them at various points in time from forsaking their posts. Between 1508 and 1510, the Count of Oliveto added to those North African acquisitions, conducting a string of conquests in the Maghrib that solidified Spain's imperial grip in this region. Collectively, it was the efforts of these nobles that transformed Spain into a formidable Mediterranean power, allowing the imperial polity to grow greatly in size and influence in the early decades of the sixteenth century.

Despite Spain's newfound ascendancy in the Mediterranean, the desire to fight in this realm appeared to be diminishing in the minds of some soldiers by the mid-1510s. In Italy, the fighting offered few attractions for the individual warrior interested in material wealth, and despite King Ferdinand's best attempts to vilify the French and depict them as a greater threat to Christendom than the Turks, Spanish soldiers, at times, expressed discontent with fighting fellow co-religionists.[506] In North Africa, furthermore, the campaigns could be treacherous and

[506] For example, the Anonymous Author describes how the Spanish forces that were supposed to go to North Africa in 1511 were instead routed to Italy, causing much dismay among the soldiers, who "desired to go to Barbary, and not to Bologna to fight Christians." "Relación de los sucesos de las armas marítimas de España en los años de 1510 y 1511," in *CODOIN*, vol. 25, 479-582, 567.

unpredictable, and similarly offered few monetary rewards. Even if soldiers succeeded in capturing territory in the Maghrib, there was little interest in settling in the hazardous North African frontier. The Maghrib was isolated from Iberia, and surrounded by a multitude of hostile sultanates inclined to forge alliances with their powerful Islamic brethren, the Ottoman Turks. This threat became more palpable after 1511, as Turkish fleets under the command of two seafaring brothers, Khayr and Aruj al-Din (the former nicknamed "*Barbarossa*," or Redbeard), launched a series of incursions into the Western Mediterranean, seizing control of Algiers and attacking several Spanish presidios (including Bougie).[507] With the Turks sweeping into the inner sea, and the campaigns in North Africa and Italy showing little promise, Spanish soldiers were inclined to search elsewhere for military opportunities.

Aside from North Africa or Italy, one of the few available pathways at this time lay to the west, in the Americas. Though the spectacular riches of this realm were still unknown, the Indies nonetheless offered a range of enticing possibilities to early modern men-at-arms, including adventure, social advancement, spoils, and land. It may have been these attractions that enflamed the imaginations of veteran soldiers, who were beginning to sail to the Americas with greater frequency in the second decade of the sixteenth century.

[507] Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 61-70.

Chapter 5. From Soldier to Conqueror: Global Conquistadors in the Spanish-Aztec War, 1519-1521

In 1508, the Sevillian native, Diego de Marmolejo, departed from Spain at the age of eighteen to pursue a career as a soldier.[508] While the young Spaniard might have considered traveling west, toward the Americas, he instead decided to test his luck in North Africa, and set sail to the Moroccan city of Melilla. For the next decade Marmolejo remained stationed in the Maghrib, fighting virtually everywhere along the coast at places like Melilla, Cazaza, Oran, and Tlemcen. His fortunes changed abruptly, however, during the attempted conquest of Algiers in August of 1519.[509] While en route to capture the city, a storm capsized his vessel in the Mediterranean Sea, causing him and his companions to become shipwrecked on the island of Ibiza. Perhaps the near-death experience convinced Marmolejo that it was time for a change, since not long after he departed the Mediterranean and embarked for the Americas.

Fortunately for Marmolejo, the timing of his arrival in the West Indies could not have been more opportune. After reaching port in Santo Domingo (modern-day Dominican Republic), Marmolejo received word of a conquest expedition, led by Hernán Cortés, undergoing preparations for a siege on a wealthy Indigenous kingdom known as Tenochtitlan.[510] As a career soldier accustomed to the winning of riches through war, the enterprise would have been the perfect opportunity to carve out his fortunes in the New World. In February of 1521, Marmolejo sailed to Veracruz to enlist in the expedition, which went on to topple the mighty city of Tenochtitlan in August of that year.[511]

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[508] Archivo General de Indias (hereafter AGI), Patronato 55, N.1, R.3. Published in Francisco del Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario de Nueva España*, *1533-1539*, vol. 3 (Mexico: Antiguo Librería Robredo, de J. Porrúa e hijos, 1939), 35-37.
[509] On the attempted conquests of Algiers, see Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier*, 64-66.
[510] Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 3, 35-36.
[511] Marmolejo arrived to the mainland on the fleet of Julián de Alderete. See Thomas, *Who's Who*, 282-83.

The career trajectory of Marmolejo was nothing short of remarkable. After fighting all over the North African Maghrib, the soldier eventually crossed the hazardous Atlantic Sea and participated in one of the most famous conquests of his generation, the Spanish-Aztec War. While little is known about Marmolejo's precise feats in this conflict, we do know that he was not the only conquistador in the Cortés *compañía* (company) with military experience in the Old World. Indeed, of the roughly 2,200 conquerors who fought in the Spanish-Aztec War, at least two dozen served in Italy, North Africa, or Flanders prior to joining Cortés in Central Mexico.[512] Though not a significant portion of the expedition, at least not numerically, these men—whom I refer to as veteran soldiers (*soldados viejos*) or global conquistadors—became prized assets in the company due to their extensive wartime experience. To clarify, when I use the term 'veteran soldier' in this chapter, I am referring to the members in the Cortés company with professional military experience in Europe or Africa, and not those who fought in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Tierra Firme, or elsewhere in the Americas prior to joining Cortés. Although those latter individuals were still technically veterans—having prior military experience in different parts of the Indies—I do not consider them to be soldiers, since they did not fight in professional armies in the Old World as did the global conquistadors.

Despite the modest number of veteran soldiers within the Cortés company, this group of men shaped the direction of the conquest in profound ways. As individuals schooled in the intricacies of war, the soldados viejos were oftentimes entrusted with the most prominent positions within the Cortés expedition, such as captains of the artillery brigade or commanders of

[512] For the number of conquistador-participants, see Thomas, *Who's Who*, xv. Bernard Grunberg believes there were at least 2,100 individuals who fought in the Cortés company, while Restall cites a much higher number, estimating that some 2,600-3,000 Spaniards sailed to the Mexican mainland over the course of the war. Grunberg, "The Origins of the Conquistadores of Mexico City," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 74, no. 2 (May 1994): 259-283, 261; and Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 312.

the Spanish warships (brigantines). At critical junctures in the conquest, they were called upon to carry out vital tasks and responsibilities, such as securing alliances with Native peoples, fetching weapons and supplies from nearby provinces, or providing military training to other members in the company. These contributions made the veteran soldiers indispensable to the Spanish military captain, Cortés, during the 1519-21 campaigns in Central Mexico. But it is worth emphasizing that their services in the Indies did not end at Tenochtitlan. Once the Spanish-Aztec War concluded in 1521, many of the veteran soldiers refused to put down their arms, and fanned out across the Americas to participate in new conquest expeditions, such as to Oaxaca, Guatemala, Honduras, Yucatán, and Ecuador. In charting the movement of this group across the empire, what becomes apparent is that these men were ubiquitous figures in Spain's early imperial expansion, with military careers spanning four continents (see figure 1). Yet, despite the entanglement of these individuals in multiple regions of the early Spanish empire, this group of conquerors has been largely neglected in the historiography of early Latin American conquest.

Figure 1: Military Service of the Global Conquistadors, 1494-1533

One reason for the lack of scholarship on the global conquistadors is because some of the earliest sources on the war tend to disregard them. The Spanish military leader, Cortés, never acknowledged the presence of any of these men in his famous *cartas de relación* (account) of the war, and neither did his personal secretary and historian, Francisco López de Gómara.[513] Some of the only references to the global conquistadors in the early conquest literature comes from one of the members of the company, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who described a dozen or so men in his 1576 account, *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. Most of those men are mentioned only briefly, such as Portillo, "a gentleman who had served in Italy," or Pedro de Briones, "a great

[513] Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, trans. and ed. Anthony Pagden, with an introduction by John H. Elliot (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); and López de Gómara, *Cortés*: *The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*, trans. and ed. Leslie Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964).

officer in Italy." Others are described in greater detail based on their physical features or occupation in the company, like Juan González de Heredia, a Biscayan harquebusier with a "fierce and scarred face, great beard, one eye, and lame leg."[514] Nonetheless, beyond the fragments of information and anecdotes that appear in Díaz del Castillo's work, there is little mention of the global conquistadors elsewhere in the early literature, and for this reason they seldom appear in the later historiography. If they are brought up, though, they are typically described in a sentence or two; characterized as being few in number; or portrayed mostly as "picturesque characters" within Cortés's company.[515] While it is true that the global conquistadors did not constitute a large segment of the expedition, the depiction of this group as mostly colorful figures, or scarce in number, creates the impression that they had a rather negligible impact on the Spanish-Aztec War. This chapter aims to bring greater attention to this cohort of men, considering some of the dynamic roles that they played primarily in the conquest of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, but also in other parts of the early Americas such as Oaxaca, Guatemala, and Honduras. I argue that the global conquistadors were by no means trivial figures in the early conquest saga, but principal agents in the rise and consolidation of Spain's overseas American empire.

By centering on this cohort of soldier-turned-conquistadors, this chapter situates itself within the revisionist school of scholarship known as the New Conquest History (hereafter the NCH).[516] The NCH developed in part as a reaction to the celebratory histories of the conquest of the Americas, which for centuries lionized the actions of a few prominent Spaniards (such as

[514] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 332, 376, 101.
[515] See Martínez, *Front Lines*, 129; and Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 280-81.
[516] On the development of this school, see Restall, "The New Conquest History," *History Compass* 10 (February 2012): 151-160.

Cortés and Pizarro) and accentuated their roles in the destruction of powerful empires.[517] In recent decades, scholars of the NCH have pushed past these triumphalist narratives by focusing on the lives of those traditionally ignored in the conquest literature, such as Africans, women, ordinary Spaniards, and Indigenous peoples.[518] While Native peoples have become the subject of significant scholarly inquiry in the past twenty-five years, forming a relatively robust element within the conquest scholarship, historical investigation into the lives of rank-and-file Spaniards has lagged in comparison.[519] A notable exception is John F. Schwaller and Helen Nader's *The First Letter From New Spain*, which investigated the lives of the more than 300 members of the Cortés company present at the founding of Veracruz in 1519.[520] One of the authors' main contributions was to illuminate the heterogeneity of the compañía, in which ordinary individuals from all different backgrounds, typically clustered into cohorts with fractured interests, came together to form this expedition. Building on this study was Matthew Restall's, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, which illuminated in greater detail the importance of humbler Iberians in the Spanish-Aztec War. Both works demonstrated how by decentering Cortés and other

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[517] Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico*; Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Peru*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1847); and Hubert Howe Bancroft, *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft: History of Mexico, 1883-1888*, vol. 2, 1521-1600 (San Francisco: The History Company, 1886). For more recent publications, see for instance, Thomas, *Conquest*; Gabai, *Francisco Pizarro*; Villar, *Breve Historia de Francisco Pizarro*; and Levy, *Conquistador: Hernan Cortés.*

[518] For a few representative studies, see Restall, "Black Conquistadors"; Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahua Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003); Florine Asselbergs, *Conquered Conquistadors—The Lienzo de Quauhquechollan: A Nahua Vision of the Conquest of Guatemala* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2004); Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006); Matthew and Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors*; Altman, *The War for Mexico's West: Indians and Spaniards in New Galicia, 1524-1550* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010); Laura Matthew, *Memories of Conquest*; John F. Schwaller and Helen Nader, *The First Letter from New Spain: The Lost Petition of Cortés and His Company, June 20, 1519* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015); and Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*.

[519] As Kevin Terraciano and Lisa Sousa assert: "We have reached a point, ironically, where we know as much, if not more, about indigenous society as we know about Spaniards, other Europeans, and criollos in New Spain." See Terraciano and Sousa, "Historiography of New Spain," in *The Oxford Handbook of Latin American History*, ed. Jose C. Moya (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011): 25-64, 34.

[520] See also María del Carmen Martínez Martínez, *Veracruz 1519: los hombres de Cortés* (León, Spain: Universidad de León, 2014).

famous Spaniards from the unfolding drama, it could provide a new window with which to gaze into the conquest, one in which commoners also played influential roles.[521] This chapter seeks to further the approach of the NCH, foregrounding the importance of a little-known group of conquerors, the global conquistadors, at critical junctures in the Spanish-Aztec War. It demonstrates how veteran soldiers were among the most highly valued members of the Cortés company, possessing critical wartime knowledge that profoundly shaped the strategic planning and overarching direction of the conquest.

This chapter is also aligned with a burgeoning literature that has attempted to connect distinct regions of the early Spanish empire, particularly in the Old World and the New.[522] Over the past thirty years, scholars have employed a number of compelling approaches to link the imperial polity, including through topics of migration, family, colonization, or litigation. Few scholars, however, have connected Imperial Spain through the lens of war and conquest, with very few connections made between the military campaigns occurring in the early modern Mediterranean and the Americas (c. 1494-1521).[523] This neglect is somewhat surprising, considering that the conflicts in those areas not only overlapped in time with one another, but also involved some of the same participants (such as Diego de Marmolejo, the conquistador whose exploits opened this chapter). By highlighting various connections between the wars in

[521] As Restall argues, "If Cortés is no longer exceptional, nor the man in control, an opening is created–a whole world of openings–into which other people and other explanations can be discovered." *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 278.
[522] For a few representative studies, see Altman, *Emigrants and Society*; Stevens-Arroyo, "The Inter-Atlantic Paradigm"; Altman, *Transatlantic Ties*; Mangan, *Transatlantic Obligations*; Deusen, *Global Indios*; Martínez, *Front Lines*; Puente Luna, *Andean Cosmopolitans*; and Altman and Wheat, eds., *The Spanish Caribbean*.
[523] If scholars do highlight connections between the conquests in the Old World and the New, they tend to focus on the Canary Islands or Granada, either as a stepping stone to overseas expansion, or as a laboratory for conquest and colonial experience. Charles Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 124; and Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 2nd ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2006), 9. See also Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 212-17. For an exception, see Martínez, *Front Lines*.

the Mediterranean and the Americas—in terms of tactics, personnel, and temporal scope—this chapter posits a conceptual link between two seemingly disparate regions of the empire. The objective is to situate the early conquest wars in the Americas (especially the Spanish-Aztec War) within a more global framework, illustrating how they unfolded alongside, and in conjunction with Spain's broader imperial expansion in Europe and Africa. Along the way, I seek to build on the transnational works of Altman, Mangan, Martínez, Deusen, and others, who have similarly investigated the lives of human subjects (migrants, families, merchants, Native peoples, soldiers) thrust into global imperial networks, and used their experiences to chart interconnections within the empire.

In addition to contributing to studies on the interconnectivity of the early Spanish empire, this chapter will add to a growing literature that considers the importance of soldiers to Spain's overseas expansion. For many decades, at least since the 1970s, a number of social histories have appeared on the lives and experiences of early modern soldiers who served in Spain's armies across Europe.[524] Perhaps the most prominent example is Geoffrey Parker's, *The Army of Flanders* (1972), which explored in detail the internal composition of this so-called army, along with other related aspects such as the pay of its soldiers and its organization. Only since the 2010s, however, have scholars begun to delve deeper into the lives of European soldiers fighting outside the orbit of Europe, such as in Spain's overseas colonies.[525] Stephanie Mawson's article, "Convicts or *Conquistadores*," represents a recent step in this direction. In her study of the early

[524] See for example, Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Ruth MacKay, *The Limits of Royal Authority: Resistance and Obedience in Seventeenth-Century Castile* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Lorraine White, "Spain's Early Modern Soldiers: Origins, Motivation and Loyalty," *War and Society* 19, no. 2 (2001): 19-46; White, "The Experience of Spain's Early Modern Soldiers: Combat, Welfare and Violence," *War in History* 9, no. 1 (2002): 1-38; and Paul Scannell, *Conflict and Soldiers' Literature in Early Modern Europe: The Reality of War* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).
[525] Stephanie J. Mawson, "Convicts or *Conquistadores*? Spanish Soldiers in the Seventeenth-Century Pacific," *Past & Present* 232, no. 1 (August 2016): 87-125; and Martínez, *Front Lines.*

colonial Philippines, Mawson demonstrates how Spanish soldiers, long seen as "murky" figures in the historiography of the seventeenth-century Pacific, were in fact pivotal to extending and solidifying Spain's imperial control in this realm.[526] The contributions of these soldiers took many forms, such as helping to defend the archipelago from Dutch interlopers, manning the galleons carrying silver from Acapulco to Manila, or bonding the local community through marriage and alliances with Native populations. The present chapter seeks to build on these themes, illustrating the significance of other groups of soldiers—or in this case soldier-turned-conquistadors—in enacting Spain's overseas empire in the Americas. Though the emphasis rests primarily on their role as military conquerors, it also highlights their significance in other capacities, whether as *pobladores* (settlers) tending to recently conquered land, or as local municipal officials helping to run early colonial society.

A variety of sources are woven together to reconstruct the lives of the global conquistadors. Among the most significant are the prosopographical studies of several historians, chiefly Robert Himmerich y Valencia, Hugh Thomas, Bernard Grunberg, John F. Schwaller and Helen Nader.[527] These scholars painstakingly combed through scores of sixteenth-century Spanish documents—such as chronicles, letters, interrogatories, and *relaciones* (accounts)—to compile definitive lists and biographies of the first conquistadors and settlers of Mexico City. With this information, I was able to identify the names of all the known conquerors in the Cortés company with past military experience in Africa or Europe. However, because the

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[526] Mawson, "Convicts or *Conquistadores*," 88.

[527] Robert Himmerich y Valencia, *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521-1555* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); Thomas, *Who's Who*; Grunberg, *Dictionnaire des conquistadores de Mexico* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2001); and Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*. For other important prosopographical studies, see Francisco A. de Icaza, *Conquistadores y pobladores de Nueva Espana: diccionario autobiográfico sacado de los textos originales*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Impresa de "El Adelantado de Segovia," 1923); Peter Boyd-Bowman, *Indice geobiográfico de cuarenta mil pobladores españoles de América en el siglo XVI*, 2 vols. (Bogota: Instituto Caro y Cuervo, 1964, and Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1968); and Victor M. Álvarez, *Diccionario de Conquistadores*, 2 vols. (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1975).

prosopographies only provide thumbnail sketches of the men, they tend to omit more detailed anecdotes and information pertaining to their lives. To augment this information, I draw on some of the principal histories of the conquest and the colonial period, especially Díaz del Castillo's, *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*.[528]

Completed in 1576, Díaz del Castillo's account was written to refute Francisco López de Gómara's immensely popular *Historia General de las Indias* (1552), which was essentially a hagiography of the Spanish military leader, Cortés. In his work, Gómara lauded the wit, cunning, and tactical ingenuity of his then-employer, Cortés, and presented the capture of Tenochtitlan as virtually the single-handed achievement of the Spaniard. The amount of credit that Gómara awarded to Cortés bothered Díaz del Castillo, who received poor monetary compensation in comparison, and believed that he and his fellow companions deserved far greater recognition and rewards for their services. Díaz del Castillo's account thus removed Cortés from the center of the drama, and instead focused on the actions and feats of more humble Spaniards, including the global conquistadors. His revisionist history is therefore of significant value to this chapter, as it provides some of the richest and most detailed information that we have on this cohort of peripatetic men. Yet like Gómara, Díaz del Castillo's account must also be scrutinized for its biases.

Given that Díaz del Castillo centered his narrative on ordinary Spaniards, his account may have overstated the importance of this group of men, especially if they were his close friends or acquaintances. Conversely, if Díaz del Castillo harbored grievances against certain

[528] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*; and López de Gómara, *Cortés*. This chapter draws on three versions of Díaz del Castillo's account: (1) *The Memoirs of the Conquistador Bernal Díaz del Castillo: Written by Himself Containing a True and Full Account of the Discovery and Conquest of Mexico and New Spain*, 2 vols., ed. John Ingram Lockhart (London: J. Hatchard and Son, 1844); (2) *True History*; and (3) *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, trans. A.P. Maudslay, with an introduction by Hugh Thomas, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2003).

conquistadors in the aftermath of the conquest, it is possible that he minimized their importance in his narrative or omitted them altogether. Despite these concerns, Díaz del Castillo is generally regarded as the most reliable narrator on the war, given that many aspects of his history are corroborated by other sources, including Native accounts, archaeological findings, and the writings of fellow conquistadors. Further, his first-hand account is meticulous in detail, providing vivid descriptions of people, places, and events that make it more comprehensive and precise than most other conquest or colonial-era histories. When set alongside the other sources, Díaz del Castillo's account offers a rich and invaluable window into the unfolding of the conquest.

This chapter also draws on a rich corpus of archival documents produced by the conquistadors or their kinsmen, such as cartas, interrogatorios, and probanzas de méritos y servicios. Generally speaking, these documents were written a number of years after the fall of Tenochtitlan, and were intended to petition the monarchy for titles, offices, monies, and other privileges for services rendered during the conquest. Given that the documents had a clear objective—to press for royal compensation—they were crafted in a way so as to accentuate the feats of the specific conquistador while downplaying or ignoring those of others. Such omissions and biases make these sources inherently problematic, as they naturally give way to hyperbolic statements and the overstating of one's individual actions. But if we can read past the self-aggrandizing claims, and focus less on personal agendas, the writings of the conquistadors can also illuminate little known information about these men, such as their provenance, past soldiering experience, and precise occupations or responsibilities within the company. Further, when read alongside the chronicles and colonial histories of the war, they provide a significant basis with which to clarify, confirm, or contradict much of the information put forth, making them critical for attaining a more balanced understanding of the events.

Moreover, it is important to note that to date, there are no Native sources that treat the lives of the global conquistadors. Much like Spanish accounts of the conquest, Indigenous ones tend to accentuate the roles and achievements of the particular *altepetl* (city-state) to which they belong, and in general, are not concerned with the actions of ordinary Spaniards.[529] Even so, this chapter still draws on Native sources to provide an alternative perspective to the Spanish version of events and to narrate all of the major episodes in the conquest.

Lastly, before delving into the story of the global conquistadors, it is first necessary to address one of the more contested debates within the field, namely as to whether we should classify the conquerors of Tenochtitlan as "soldiers," "adventurers," "armed capitalists," or something else. Since the early sixteenth century, members of the Cortés company have commonly been referred to as "*soldados*" (soldiers)—a term rooted in the written accounts of the invaders, who frequently used this word to describe themselves or their companions.[530] Given the tendency of later historians to scrutinize the same Spanish sources, the term soldado became entrenched in the historiography, and persisted that way for centuries.[531] Even well into the 1960s, scholars continued to refer to the men of Tenochtitlan as "professional soldiers" belonging to an army.[532] However, the issue(s) with referring to these men as soldiers, and especially professional ones, was that they were neither paid nor forced to travel to the Americas,

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[529] See, for example, Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *The Native Conquistador: Alva Ixtlilxochitl's Account of the Conquest of New Spain*, eds. and trans. Amber Brian, Bradley Benton, and Pablo García Loaeza, Latin American Originals 10 (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015); Bernardino de Sahagún, "Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex," in James Lockhart, *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2004), 48-255; and Chimalpahin, *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahua Historian's Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara's La Conquista de Mexico*, eds. and trans. Susan Schroeder, David Tavârez, Anne J. Cruz, and Cristian de la Carrera (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).
[530] Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*; and Díaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*.
[531] For example, see Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*; Thomas, *Conquest*; and Elliot, *Imperial Spain*.
[532] Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 62.

but instead went of their own volition.[533] In addition, many of the participants were not experts in warfare, but held non-combatant occupations within the company, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, clerics, merchants, musicians, notaries, and shoemakers.[534] Third, these men did not receive wages like soldiers, but rather a portion of the booty or plot of conquered land directly proportionate to the investment that they put in.[535] For these reasons, scholars have shifted away from labeling these men as soldiers, and instead prefer to view them more as militant investors, or "armed entrepreneurs."[536]

While the phrase "armed entrepreneurs" and its variations are useful for classifying the bulk of the company, it does not function well as an umbrella term for all of its members, particularly the soldados viejos. This cohort of men had extensive soldiering experience in Afro-Eurasia, and formerly belonged to professional armies in Italy, including that of the illustrious general, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba. Though not constituents of a professional army in the Americas, they did belong to a private army assembled by Cortés, and knew how to fight like a soldier: whether it be by reloading firearms, taking orders, remaining in formation, and operating sophisticated weaponry such as the artillery or the brigantines. The global conquistadors thus fall closer on the spectrum to that of a soldado than to an 'armed investor' or 'adventurer,' and for this reason are referred to in this chapter as soldiers.

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[533] The presence of professional soldiers in the early Americas is one of Restall's 'seven myths of the Spanish conquest'. See Restall, "Neither Paid Nor Forced," in *Seven Myths*, 27-43.
[534] On the occupations of the conquistadors in the Cortés company, see Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 280.
[535] James Lockhart and Enrique Otte, *Letters and People of the Spanish Indies: Sixteenth Century*, Cambridge Latin American Studies, num. 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 39.
[536] Restall, *Seven Myths*, 35.

Who Were the Global Conquistadors? Regional Origins, Social Status, and Wartime Experience

The exact number of global conquistadors who participated in the Spanish-Aztec War is difficult to deduce. Of the approximately 2,200 conquerors who fought at Tenochtitlan, over half perished in the conquest, and many left behind no trail in the documentary record. Because of this absence in documentation, scholars have only been able to identify the names of around 1,200 or so conquistadors who took park in the Cortés expedition, with the amount of information on each individual varying greatly.[537] Nonetheless, based on the lists of conquerors of which some information exists, this study has identified 24 men (roughly 1.1 percent of the company) who served in Italy, North Africa, Flanders, or the Mediterranean Sea prior to enlisting in the Spanish-Aztec War (see table 1).[538] This tally is likely much lower than the actual number, given that the social backgrounds for all the conquistadors are not known. For instance, there are a number of individuals that scholars suspect to have fought in European armies, such as Antón de Veintemilla, but there is no verifiable proof.[539] Even so, there is still substantial enough information on this cohort of two dozen soldiers to deduce certain themes and trends about this group as a whole, as well as compare that data with the rest of the Cortés compañía.

[537] In his study of the conquistadors of Tenochtitlan, Grunberg identified 1,212 conquistadors (55 percent of the company) of which some information exists, ranging from lengthy documents detailing their services in the conquest to mere signatures denoting their presence in the company. Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 261.
[538] The number of global conquistadors is derived mainly from the prosopographical studies of Grunberg, Thomas, and Schwaller and Nader. See *Dictionnaire*; *Who's Who*; and *First Letter*.
[539] Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 133.

Table 1: Men Who Served in the European or African Campaigns

Conquistador	*Born circa*	*Birthplace*	*Served in*	*Age in 1519*
Francisco de Arcos	—	—	Italy	—
Hernando de Barrientos	—	—	Italy	—
Pedro de Briones	1490	Salamanca, León	Italy	29
Canillas	1490	—	Italy	29
Leonel de Cervantes	1482	Seville, Andalusia	Italy	37
Sebastian de Ébora	—	Yelves, Portugal	Mediterranean	—
Rodrigo de Guipuzcano	1490	Medina del Campo, Valladolid	Italy	29
Pedro Núñez de Guzmán	—	Toledo, New Castile	Flanders	—
Juan González de Heredia	1470	Vizcaya, Basque Country	Italy	49
Amador de Lares	—	Burgos, Old Castile	Italy	—
Cristóbal de Maeda	1480	Seville, Andalusia	Italy	39
Diego de Marmolejo	1490	Seville, Andalusia	North Africa	29
Alonso de Mata	1491	Santander, Cantabria	Italy/ French Wars	28
Francisco de Mesa	1483	Seville, Andalusia	Italy	36
Pedro de Morón	1495	Morón?	"guerras pasadas"	24
Francisco de Orozco	1490	Seville, Andalusia	Italy	29
Juan Portillo	1490	Toledo? Valladolid?	Italy	29
Francisco de Santa Cruz	1498	Burgos, Old Castile	Italy	21
Rodrigo de Segura	1465	Seville, Andalusia	Italy/ Africa/ France	54
Juan de Solís	—	—	Italy	—
Antonio de Sotelo	1490	Zamora, León	Italy	29
Juan de Torres	1480	Córdoba, Andalusia	Italy	39
Andrés de la Tovilla	1485	Baeza or Jaén, Andalusia	Italy	34
Benito de Vejer	1490	Véjer de la Frontera? Cádiz?	Italy	29

The regional origins of the global conquistadors vary quite a bit. Of the nineteen conquerors whose birthplace is known, almost half came from Andalusia (9/19), with the city of Seville accounting for six of those men.[540] While noteworthy, the high representation of Andalusians within this cohort is not altogether surprising. Residents from Andalusia constituted the highest percentage of overall emigrants to the Indies between 1493-1519 (39.7 percent), and also formed the largest segment within Cortés's company, representing 35.6 percent of the total forces.[541] The rest of the men, by contrast, came from a mixture of locales across Iberia, namely León (4), Old Castile (2), New Castile (1), Cantabria (1), the Basque Country (1), and Portugal (1). Within this regional distribution, one of the more glaring absences is that none of the men hailed from Extremadura, the southwest area of Spain bordering Portugal. This is unusual if we consider that 16.5 percent of the overall company came from this region of Spain, including the Spanish military leader himself, Hernán Cortés.[542] It is additionally noteworthy given that plenty of *Extremeños* (Extremadurans) went off to fight in Italy, North Africa, or elsewhere in Europe after the fall of Granada in 1492. Some of the most famous examples include Gonzalo Pizarro (father of the future conqueror of Peru, Francisco Pizarro), Cortés's uncle, Pedro de Monroy, and Diego García de Paredes (known as the "Samson of Extremadura").[543] The reason(s) for the lack of Extremeños within the cohort of global conquistadors is thus unclear, perhaps owing to the relatively modest number of known veteran soldiers overall.

[540] This number represents a slightly higher percentage than the rest of Cortés company, in which 34.2 percent hailed from Andalusia. Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 270.
[541] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 20; and Thomas, *Who's Who*, xxi.
[542] Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 271. Extremadurans also constituted the bulk of the conquest leadership in other parts of early Spanish America, most notably in Guatemala (Pedro de Alvarado) and Peru (Francisco Pizarro).
[543] Collectively, these men fought in Granada, Italy, Navarre, and along the Danube River against the Turks. Thomas, *Conquest*, 125.

There is considerable variation in respect to the ages of the global conquistadors. At the start of the Spanish-Aztec War in 1519, most men were aged between 24 and 29 (10/17), with the mode and median being 29, and the mean 33.[544] Compared with the rest of the Cortés company, in which the mean age was 25.6 years, the veteran soldiers were almost eight years older than their counterparts on average.[545] This age gap is understandable, considering that the veteran soldiers served at least a few years in the European or African wars before sailing to the Americas. Moreover, one of the more exceptional individuals in this regard was Rodrigo de Segura, who fought for over two decades in the Mediterranean prior to joining Cortés, and was believed to be 54 years old at the start of the conquest. His older age, however, did not appear to hinder his martial ability. As the historical record indicates, Segura was among the roughly 50 percent of conquistadors to survive the perilous Spanish-Aztec War, and even earned grants of land in New Spain in recognition of his distinguished services.[546]

As far as the precise military services of the global conquistadors in the Old World, the overwhelming majority fought in Italy (20/24), whether in the First Italian War, the Second Italian War, or the War of the League of Cambrai (1508-16).[547] At least three men served under the leadership of the Gran Capitán, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, who was arguably the most illustrious general of his generation, and the widely deemed hero of the Spanish wars in Italy.[548] One of those men was Amador de Lares, who served in Italy for twenty-two years, and spent a portion of that time as "*maestrasala*" (steward; head of the household) to the Great Captain.[549] While on the island of Hispaniola, Lares crossed paths with the great Dominican friar, Bartolomé

[544] The two youngest were Francisco de Santa Cruz (21) and Pedro de Morón (24), while the oldest were Juan González de Heredia (49) and Rodrigo de Segura (54).
[545] Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 117.
[546] Percentage of conquistador survivors according to Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 261.
[547] For these conflicts, see chapter 4.
[548] Keegan and Wheatcroft, *Who's Who*, 62-63; and Gerli and Armistead, *Medieval Iberia*, 324.
[549] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 204.

de Las Casas, who once referred to the Spaniard as an "*hombre astutísimo*" (cunning man).[550] Two others, Antonio de Sotelo and Andrés de la Tovilla, fought alongside the Gran Capitán at one of the most critical engagements of the Second Italian War, the battle of Garigliano (1503). Here, they would have witnessed the masterful wartime tactics of the Córdoban lord, and had the opportunity to learn his battlefield stratagems firsthand.[551] Moreover, it should be noted that there was a notable outcast within this cohort of veterans from Italy, a man by the name of Francisco de Santa Cruz. The Spanish soldier did not serve in these wars on behalf of Spain, but the Valois Dynasty of France.[552] The decision of Santa Cruz to do so underscores the fluidity of allegiances during this period, in which some early modern soldiers did not see a contradiction fighting under a French flag one day, and a Spanish one the next. Most European men-at-arms fought primarily to make a living, and enlisted in the service of those who could guarantee ready employment.

Only four conquistadors in this cohort were known to have fought in Africa, Flanders, or in the Mediterranean Sea in the years leading up to the Spanish-Aztec War. This includes Diego de Marmolejo (the soldier who opened this chapter), as well as Sebastian de Ébora, a "*mulato*" (person of mixed European and African ancestry) born in Yelves, Portugal.[553] Both Marmolejo and Ébora claimed to have battled the brilliant Ottoman sea captain, Barbarossa ("Redbeard"), who had terrorized the North African frontier in the mid-1510s with his seafaring brothers.[554] Considering that the Turkish admiral was widely-feared in the Mediterranean, any man who battled him would be looked upon with admiration and respect in the company. A third soldier,

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[550] Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, 3 vols., ed. Agustín Millares Carlo, with an introduction by Lewis Hanke (Mexico: Mexico City, 1981), vol. 3, 220.
[551] Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 281.
[552] Álvarez, *Diccionario de Conquistadores*, vol. 2, 521; and Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 503.
[553] Ébora was part of the roughly 6 percent of foreigners who fought in the conquest, most of whom were of Portuguese or Italian descent. See Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 123.
[554] Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 3, 35; and Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 281.

Pedro (Pero) Núñez de Guzmán, was the only member in the Cortés company believed to have fought in Flanders.[555] Like most other humble conquistadors, much of Guzmán's early life is shrouded in mystery, including his soldiering in the Low Countries. However, a more complete picture of his life emerges after the conquest of Tenochtitlan, during which time he participated in numerous expeditions to places like Pánuco, New Galicia, and Ecuador. Lastly, the fourth and final soldier in this group, Rodrigo de Segura, was said to have fought for twenty years in the Mediterranean, including in Barbary, Lombardia (Italy), and France. The presence of this soldier on multiple battlefields was noteworthy, as it allowed him to accumulate precious wartime experience in distinct corners of the Old World. This background made him an expert in frontier warfare, and an otherwise valuable asset in the diverse and unpredictable environments of the Americas.

Of this cohort of two dozen veteran soldiers, none had experience fighting in the conquest of Granada or the Canary Islands. Two principal reasons may account for this. First, the campaigns against the Nasrid ruling dynasty of Granada ended over two decades before the start of the Spanish-Aztec War (in 1492), while the final conquest in the Canaries, that of Tenerife, wrapped up in 1496. By the time of the Cortés expedition in 1519, this 'Granadine' and 'Canarian' generation of fighters would have been mostly older veterans, and no longer in the prime of life. Further, among those who fought in the Canary Islands, most individuals received repartimientos on the archipelago as rewards for their military services. Seemingly content with their plots of land, these older veterans would have had little incentive to roll the dice and test their luck in the Americas.

[555] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 218.

The records are sparse on the precise year that the veteran soldiers arrived in the Indies. While most sailed to the Americas after 1515, a few landed as early as 1505 (and perhaps earlier). Of those early arrivals, a handful participated in expeditions of conquest and exploration in the Greater Antilles, including Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico, as well as in Tierra Firme. One example was Rodrigo Guipuzcoano (Lepuzcano), who arrived in the Indies sometime before 1506, and later took part in the conquest and pacification of Cuba (1511-14).[556] There, Guipuzcoano had the chance to fight alongside the future conqueror of Tenochtitlan, Cortés, and perhaps gain his trust. But also, the conquest enabled him to begin adapting to life as a soldier in the Americas, and to gain valuable experience fighting in its unique geographies.

Aside from Guipuzcoano and a few others, most of the global conquistadors for whom we have information did not arrive in the West Indies until after 1515. Based on wartime developments in the Central Mediterranean, the influx of soldiers at this time was not coincidental. In 1516, Spain and France temporarily negotiated peace in Italy, leaving a reservoir of soldiers in Europe without ready employment.[557] While some went to North Africa to help Spain defend its presidios, this was not an enticing option, as the pay was infrequent, and the duties of safeguarding the frontier conspicuously hazardous. One of the few other pathways at this time was the far-off Americas, which was by no means a highly desirable site for relocation, but one that nonetheless offered new opportunities to restive soldiers, including a chance to acquire land and spoils. Between 1517-18, waves of soldiers fresh off the campaigns in the Mediterranean arrived in the Indies, "all, or mostly all of whom," writes the *licenciado* (governor) of Santo Domingo, Alonso de Zuazo, "had been in Italy with the Great Captain."[558]

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[556] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 223; and Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 192.
[557] In this agreement, Spain was allowed to retain control of Naples while France held onto Milan.
[558] Letter from Alonso de Zuazo to Monsiuer Xevres (Santo Domingo, 22 January 1518), in *CDI*, vol. 1 (Madrid, Imprenta de Manuel B. de Quirós), 313-14.

Within that pool of veteran soldiers, at least fourteen would enlist in the Cortés expedition in 1519, while nine others would join the company later on, either coming with Pánfilo de Narváez in April of 1520 or Julian de Alderete in February of 1521.[559]

Taking into account this cohort of global conquistadors as a whole, one might reasonably question the extent to which their military experience in Europe or Africa mattered in the diverse geographies of the Americas. First, the topography of Central Mexico differed greatly from the battlefields in Italy or the Maghrib, and presented its own set of unique geographical obstacles. Second, the fighting styles of the Native peoples, characterized by ambushes, raids, and fast-moving attacks, were completely different from the traditional type of combat (siege or open battlefield) that veteran soldiers were accustomed to in Europe or Africa. In this sense, the global conquerors would not have been perfectly equipped to navigate the unique environs of the Americas, or the military tactics of the Indigenous peoples. That said, they would have adapted to those challenges more effectively than their non-soldiering counterparts. Unlike the bulk of the men who fought in the Spanish-Aztec War, the global conquistadors were accustomed to fighting in precarious frontiers and locales across Europe and North Africa—at Melilla, Oran, Bougie, Tripoli, Naples, Ravenna, Gaeta, and Flanders—and would have learned to adapt to new and evolving circumstances in each of those places. They additionally had experience interacting with and fighting against different cultures and enemies, including French, Swiss, Germans, North African Muslims, and Ottoman Turks. When the time came for war in the Indies, this experience would give them a decided edge over the other conquistadors in the company, namely those who did not possess such a soldiering background.

[559] It is unknown who Francisco de Arcos accompanied to the mainland.

A final note, of the twenty-four global conquistadors examined here, not all of them were professional soldiers in the Old World or battle-tested for that matter. Amador de Lares served as the steward to the Gran Capitán in Italy, while two others, Canillas and Benito Vejel (also Bejer, Bejar, Vejer), had been drummers in the Italian Wars. Even so, these men still served on the front lines of war, and observed closely how battles were waged. If called upon, they could readily impart knowledge and wisdom from these conflicts.

Independent Maneuvering, and the Defiance of Royal Authority

When the Cortés expedition embarked for Mexico on 10 February 1519, with eleven ships, sixteen horses, and about 500 men, it was under strict orders from the governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, that it was not to conquer or settle, but merely to explore the land and trade with its Native inhabitants.[560] At least initially, Cortés and his men heeded the instructions of the governor. After landing in Yucatán, the Cortés expedition made contact with a number of coastal dwelling Maya groups, some of whom offered provisions and gifts to the foreigners, while others engaged them in military combat.[561] In the aftermath of one of those battles, the Spanish were awarded as a prize a young female slave known as Malinche (also doña Marina or Malintzin), whose linguistic skills in Maya and Nahuatl (the lingua franca of Central Mexico) would allow the Spanish to communicate with all of the Native groups in the area.[562] In addition to enslaved peoples, the Spanish received other gifts from the Maya, including food, cloth, and most notably gold—the object interest of the conquistadors in the Americas. After pressing the Maya about

[560] Díaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest*, 40-41. The historical literature on the Spanish-Aztec War is quite vast. See Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*; Restall, *Seven Myths*; Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*; and Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*.
[561] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 59-64.
[562] See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*.

where to find greater quantities of the precious metal, the Native peoples informed the Spanish that the gold came from the west, in Central Mexico. With this news, the Cortés company departed from the Maya region in late April of 1519, and sailed west along the shoreline toward the outer fringes of the Aztec Empire.

The arrival of the Spanish in Central Mexico would introduce a new layer to the intricate power dynamics of the region. For centuries, Mesoamerica was marked by intense warfare between rival city-states and ethnic polities. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Mexica, better known as the Aztecs, had emerged as the dominant power in the region, presiding over a burgeoning empire that encompassed much of present-day Mexico. The Mexica's ascent to power was the result of various factors, including adept political maneuvering, military conquests, and strategic alliances with powerful city-states. In particular, their 1428 coalition with Tetzcoco and Tlacopan, known as the Aztec Triple Alliance, allowed the Mexica to embark on a larger imperial project involving the subjugation of outlying territories far beyond the Valley of Mexico.[563] However, Aztec expansionism did not go uncontested. Rival altepetls such as Tlaxcala and Huejotzingo steadfastly resisted incorporation into the Aztec state and maintained their independence even up until the arrival of the Spanish. Discontent also simmered among Aztec tributary states that resented the Mexica for their onerous tribute demands, forming internal fractures that additionally threatened the stability of the Aztec state. Although the Spanish possessed limited knowledge (if any) of this complex political landscape, they would nonetheless be the beneficiaries of the deep rifts among the Mesoamerican city-states. Indeed, not long after the Spanish landed in Central Mexico, a number of disgruntled altepetls would

[563] See Geoffrey W. Conrad and Arthur A. Demarest, "The Aztec Imperial Expansion," in *Religion and Empire: The Dynamics of Aztec and Inca Expansionism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984): 11-60.

forge alliances with the foreigners, viewing them—and their formidable military weaponry—as a means of potentially altering the balance of power in the region.

After dropping anchor off the coast of Central Mexico, near Cempoala, the Spanish were soon greeted by a local Mexica governor who had been sent by the emperor of Tenochtitlan, Montezuma, to collect information on the foreigners. In the meeting between the two parties, the Mexica showered the Spanish with lavish gifts and gold inlaid objects that far exceeded what the Spanish had obtained in the Maya area. The exchange was a noteworthy one, as it confirmed to the Europeans that this was indeed a wealthy region, teeming with gold, jewels, and other valuable riches. Once the talks concluded, the Mexica made clear that the Spanish should not come to Tenochtitlan, but instead remain stationed on the coast for the time being. With these instructions the Mexica departed, leaving Cortés and his captains to ponder their next steps. In the meantime, the Spanish were approached by yet another Indigenous group, the local Totonacs who dwelled along the Cempoalan shoreline. Although subject to the imperial city of Tenochtitlan, the Totonacs held a deep aversion for the Mexica, who reduced them to vassalage and levied upon them a hefty tribute. In their talks with Cortés, the Totonacs promised to support the Spanish, so long as they agreed to oppose the Mexica. This was yet another critical moment for Cortés, as it was the first indication that the Aztec Empire was not a unified, homogenous polity, but a composite of tributary states with significant grievances—and ones that could be potentially exploited.[564] This made the prospect of penetrating into the interior even more enticing, though there was still a glaring issue—the conquistadors did not have legal authorization to do so.

[564] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 65-71; and Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 15.

The governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, merely authorized Cortés to trade and explore the land, not to engage in land acquisition. If the conquistadors were to disobey his orders, at least hypothetically, they would need to search for a legal loop hole. In a clever maneuver, the Cortés company erected a town at Veracruz and pledged its loyalty directly to Emperor Charles V. If the sovereign recognized its founding, then the company could function as an independent political entity directly under the Spanish crown, notably with the power to authorize the conquest and settlement of new territory. After drawing up a legal petition, which sought empowerment from the crown, Cortés ordered two envoys to sail back to Spain with the "Veracruz letter" to present their case in court.[565] Meanwhile, Cortés left a small fraction of his forces at Veracruz to defend the fledgling settlement, and proceeded to march inland with the rest of his company. While much ink has been spilled on this act of defiance, Cortés's decision to act semi-autonomously of royal authority was not unique in the annals of Spanish history. In fact, the famous Castilian crusader El Cid had done so at Valencia in 1094, as did Juan de Guzmán at Gibraltar in 1462, Rodrigo Ponce de León at Alhama in 1482, and Juan de Guzmán at Melilla in 1497. In other words, Cortés was merely among a long line of figures in Spanish history to launch a military operation without royal backing or approval.

The Transference of Soldiering Expertise

The shift in the nature of the expedition from one of exploration to conquest was significant. Because the initial objective of the enterprise did not involve land acquisition, the

[565] The Veracruz letter was "lost" for several centuries, only to be found in the AGI amidst a bundle of letters from cities of New Spain to the crown. The document suffered considerable damage and is missing small pieces. What is clear is that 318 signatures appear, although Schwaller and Nader estimate that there were perhaps as many as 100 more. *First Letter*, 2, 60. For studies dealing with the Veracruz petition and the founding of the town, see Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*; and Martínez Martínez, *Veracruz 1519*.

bulk of Cortés's company consisted of men not particularly known for their military prowess, including sailors (22% of the total forces), ship pilots (15%), notaries or secretaries (11.1%), carpenters (10.5%), blacksmiths (5%), and clerics (4%).[566] But now, with warfare and the winning of battles essential to the success of the expedition, this meant that those in the company with military experience would be particularly prized assets. This included the veteran soldiers from Iberia who as war-hardened individuals occupied some of the most vital martial positions in the company, chiefly as crossbowmen, artillerymen, musketeermen, and horsemen (see table 2).

[566] Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 280.

Table 2: Service in the Cortés Company

Conquistador	*Arrived in the Indies*	*Accompanied to Mainland*	*Occupation*
Francisco de Arcos	—	—	—
Hernando de Barrientos	—	Cortés	—
Pedro de Briones	—	Alderete	Captain (brigantine)
Canillas	—	Cortés	Drummer
Leonel de Cervantes	1519	Narváez	—
Sebastian de Ébora	1519	Narváez	—
Rodrigo de Guipuzcano	before 1506	Cortés	—
Pedro Núñez de Guzmán	—	Narváez	—
Juan González de Heredia	—	Cortés	Musketeer
Amador de Lares	—	Narváez	—
Cristóbal de Maeda	—	Narváez	—
Diego de Marmolejo	after 1516	Alderete	—
Alonso de Mata	—	Narváez	Crossbowman; Notary
Francisco de Mesa	—	Cortés	Captain (artillery)
Pedro de Morón	c. 1515	Cortés	Horseman
Francisco de Orozco	c. 1513	Cortés	Captain (artillery)
Juan Portillo	—	Cortés	Captain (brigantine)
Francisco de Santa Cruz	1519	Narváez	—
Rodrigo de Segura	1518	Cortés	—
Juan de Solís	—	Cortés	—
Antonio de Sotelo	—	Cortés	Captain (brigantine); Weapons man
Juan de Torres	—	Cortés	—
Andrés de la Tovilla	—	Cortés	Weapons man
Benito de Vejer	—	Cortés	Musician (tambourine)

While each of those occupations held value to the company, of particular import were men skilled with guns (harquebuses) and artillery. Compared to horsemen or crossbowmen, there were far fewer individuals in the company with expertise in operating cannons.[567] This did not merely entail knowing how to load the balls into the cartridges, but also how to distribute the powder properly, aim the cannons, measure the distance to the targets, and select the most advantageous positions on the battlefield to place the weapon. The position, in short, required men with specialized knowledge and experience. It is therefore noteworthy that at least two men from the Italian Wars served within the tiny artillery brigade.[568] The first, Francisco de Mesa, came from a military lineage, with his father having fought as a soldier in Granada and Melilla.[569] Francisco himself had been a gunner in Italy, and was regarded by his companions in Mexico as "a very good soldier."[570] The second man, Francisco de Orozco (Horosco), also served as a cannoneer during the Italian campaigns, and on the basis of his merits abroad was selected to captain the artillery unit.[571] Orozco's appointment to this high post is revealing, as it indicates that at the earliest juncture in the war, Cortés entrusted his veteran soldiers with one of the most critical responsibilities within the company. Further, there may have been a third veteran soldier within the ranks of the artillery unit, a man by the name of Juan de Solís. This man had the reputation of fighting in the wars in Italy, and later served as the chief of artillery in Cortés's expedition to the province of Pánuco, though it is unclear whether Solís served in this capacity during the Spanish-Aztec War.

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567 Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 133-34.
568 The precise size of the artillery unit is unknown, though we can surmise that it was a relatively small cohort, given that the Spaniards only possessed a modest number of artillery pieces at the start of the war (some fourteen pieces). Schwaller and Nader uphold this view. See *First Letter*, 132.
569 Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 331-32.
570 AGI, Mexico, 211, N. 17. Several witnesses in the interrogatorio compiled by Mesa referred to him as either a "buen soldado" or "muy buen soldado."
571 Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 134, 224.

Aside from artillerymen, individuals proficient with the harquebus occupied an equally important role within the company. Similar to cannons, the wielding of harquebuses required considerable skill and training, partly because the process of firing and loading a matchlock was incredibly elaborate. According to Jacob de Gheyn's 1607 training manual, *The Exercise of Armes for Calivres, Muskettes, and Pikes*, harquebusiers needed to follow a twenty-eight-step procedure just to prime the weapon.[572] This involved readying the powder in the pan, inserting both powder and bullet into the muzzle, using the ramrod to press them down the barrel, adjusting the match in the lock, and blowing on the match before firing. Additional training was needed to learn how to steady the weapon, aim down the barrel, manage recoil, and clean the matchlock.[573] At least one of the global conquistadors in the company possessed this set of expertise: the one-eyed Biscayan soldier, Juan González de Heredia. Two other veteran soldiers, Sotelo and Tovilla, also probably had familiarity firing the harquebus, as they were reputed to be skilled weapons men, and presumably knew how to handle an array of weaponry. Considering that there were only thirteen harquebusiers present in the company at this time, the skills of these individuals would have been highly valued.[574] In battle, harquebusiers were typically positioned in the front lines of infantry formations, alongside pikemen, swordsmen, and other foot soldiers, to increase the firepower of this contingent. Their primary role was to provide close-range support to the infantry and to engage the enemy at relatively short distances. Depending on the specific tactics employed by Cortés, harquebusiers might also be deployed on the sides of the formation to protect the infantry's flanks or in the center to support the main thrust of the attack.

[572] Jacob de Gheyn, *The Exercise of Armes*, trans. J. B. Kist (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1971).
[573] Kenneth Warren Chase, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25-26.
[574] Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 132.

Their overall versatility, along with the vital protection that they provided to the infantry unit, made them invaluable assets on the battlefield.

As Cortés and his forces penetrated deeper into the heart of the Aztec Empire, they encountered a number of hostile Native altepetls, though none quite as powerful as the Tlaxcalan confederacy.[575] Unlike the other Indigenous polities of Central Mexico, Tlaxcala managed to remain independent of Aztec rule for over a century, forming a tiny enclave of resistance some eighty miles east of the imperial city. Cortés recognized the value of a strategic alliance with the Indigenous city-state, and initially sought to strike peace with Tlaxcala. However, the Tlaxcalteca did not yet trust the Spanish—suspecting them to be allies of the Mexica—and instead mobilized their provinces for war.[576] Outnumbered by the thousands, the only chance for Spanish victory (let alone survival) was to assume a defensive posture, and to rely on their military advantages such as artillery, harquebuses, crossbows, and horses to fend off the Tlaxcalteca assault. The global conquistadors, though few in number, would soon prove vital in this regard. This group of veteran soldiers was not only accustomed to the dangers and intensities of war, but also had far greater experience in these sorts of high leverage moments, particularly when compared to the non-soldiering members of the company (the scribes, clerics, shoemakers, and blacksmiths).

While little is known about the precise feats of the global conquistadors in the battles against the Tlaxcalteca, the collective impact of this group is evidenced by the nature of the Spaniards' tactics. For instance, the military strategies employed against the Tlaxcalteca bore close resemblance to those used in the European and African Wars. This includes a reliance on firearms and artillery to disrupt enemy formations, the interval launching of volley fire into the enemy defenses, the division of men into distinct brigades (artillery, infantry, cavalry), and their

[575] The confederacy consisted of four provinces: Quiyahhuiztlan, Tepeticpac, Tizatlan, and Ocotelolco.
[576] Díaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest*, 142.

organization into tight ranks.[577] The use of these Old World tactics is highlighted, rather vividly, in Díaz del Castillo's description of the battles:

> Yet we durst not venture to open our ranks; for the instant any one stepped out to assist any other soldier or officer he was that moment dangerously wounded. We were, therefore, obliged to keep our ranks firmly closed…The crossbow-men received orders that some were merely to load, while others fired, and this always in platoons. The musketeers received similar orders, and the remaining portion of our men, who were armed with swords and shields, were principally to strike at the enemy in the region of the belly, in order to stop them from venturing so near to us as they had the time before. Everyone was also particularly cautioned not to leave the ranks. It was also the particular duty of our cavalry not to leave each other in the lurch, always to attack in full gallop, and only aim at the face and eyes…They fell upon us like the very furies themselves, with the most horrible yells; we employed, however, our heavy guns, muskets, and crossbows, with so much effect, and received those who pressed eagerly upon us with such well-directed blows and thrusts, that considerable destruction was made among their ranks.[578]

In this excerpt, the transference of military strategies and techniques honed in Europe, and particularly in Italy, is apparent. The keeping of close ranks, the reliance on firearms and heavy guns, and the use of volley fire were key features of warfare in the Old World, and the very same ones that the Gran Capitán used to dominate the battlefields in Italy. It is therefore not surprising that the conquistadors emulated these strategies in their engagements with the Tlaxcalteca: these were tried-and-true tactics mastered in the European Wars.

Yet, where might the notion to employ those tactics have derived? Could it have been that Cortés, or perhaps his second-in-command, Pedro de Alvarado, were familiar with the stratagems from Europe? This is certainly plausible. The Gran Capitán was one of the greatest European generals of his generation, and news of his exploits circulated widely in the early modern world.[579] However, it seems far more likely that it was one (or perhaps several) of Cortés's global conquistadors that imparted this knowledge and wisdom. Two men in his company,

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[577] See Parker, *The Military Revolution*.
[578] Díaz del Castillo, *Memoirs of the Conquistador*, vol. 1, 147, 151.
[579] Keegan and Wheatcroft, *Who's Who in Military History*, 62-63; and Gerli and Armistead, *Medieval Iberia*, 324.

Tovilla and Sotelo, fought directly alongside the Gran Capitán in Italy, and would have been closely familiar with his military tactics. At least eleven other veteran soldiers were present at this moment in time, including the captain of artillery, Orozco, the Biscayan harquebusier, Heredia, and the native of Medina del Campo, Guipuzcano. If we consider their firsthand military experience in Europe and Africa, it is very plausible that the global conquistadors introduced the aforementioned tactics into battle, arguably more so than Cortés, who himself never laid foot on an Old World battlefield.

Although the Spaniards' weaponry and tactics did not win them the battle against the Tlaxcalteca, they did impress upon the Native peoples an image of formidable warriors worthy of alliance. From the perspective of the Tlaxcalteca, if they entered into a coalition with the foreigners, then they could use them and their impressive military technology to shift the regional balance of power in their favor, potentially destroying their longtime adversaries, the Mexica, in the process.[580] But if they continued to fight against the Spanish, then they would run the risk of losing more experienced warriors, putting them in a more untenable position against the Mexica. For the Europeans, by contrast, they desperately needed the support of the Tlaxcalteca. Their numbers had dwindled in the various skirmishes and pitched battles en route to Tenochtitlan, and at this particular juncture, there were no more than 250 Spaniards and 100 Native allies left to fight.[581] If the Spanish were to stand any reasonable chance against the Mexica, they not only needed more armed combatants to bolster their ranks, but also other critical forms of support that only Indigenous allies could provide. This included guides to navigate them through unfamiliar land, spies to inform them on the numbers and whereabouts of the enemy, cooks to nourish them in between campaigns, porters to carry their equipment over

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[580] Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 17; and Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 88.
[581] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 86.

difficult terrain, interpreters to communicate with other Indigenous groups, and advisers to instruct them on the internal dynamics of Mesoamerican politics.[582] The fate of the entire expedition, in short, depended on the willing and active collaboration of the Native peoples.[583] Hence, the Spaniards must have been delighted to learn that after several days of combat, the Tlaxcalteca agreed to forge an alliance with them, promising to channel their considerable resources into a war against the Mexica. With this new pact formed, the Indigenous-Spanish coalition marched on the imperial city of Tenochtitlan in early November of 1519, approaching the capital from its southern fringes.

Tacticians and Advisers: The Soldados Viejos

When the conquistadors and their Native allies reached Tenochtitlan on 8 November of 1519, Emperor Montezuma went out in person to greet them on the Itztapalapa causeway, one of the three main land bridges connecting the island-city to the outer rims of the lakeshore. In a curious, oft-scrutinized move, the Native sovereign did not oust the Spanish-Indigenous coalition from the city, but instead invited them into Tenochtitlan as “guests,” offering them residence in his massive Axayacatl palace complex. The precise reasons as to why Montezuma did so are still unclear, and the debates on this matter continue to this day.[584] A likely theory is that the Native

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[582] On the role of Indigenous allies in the early conquest campaigns across Mesoamerica, see Matthew and Oudijk, eds., *Indian Conquistadors*.

[583] In recent decades, scholars of early Latin America have largely agreed that Indigenous allies were one of the most (if not the most) important reasons for Spanish success in Central Mexico. See for instance Restall, *Seven Myths*; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*; and Matthew and Oudjik, eds., *Indian Conquistador*s.

[584] In the traditional historical literature, scholars long held the assumption that Montezuma welcomed the Spanish into Tenochtitlan because the emperor believed Cortés to be the returning Aztec deity-king, Quetzalcoatl, who disappeared east many years ago and promised to someday return to claim his throne. However, historians in recent decades have dismissed this interpretation, suggesting that Nahua elites invented the legend in the aftermath of the conquest to redirect the blame on to Montezuma and justify the conquest. A more recent theory, and a riveting one, is that Montezuma invited the Spaniards into the city so as to incorporate them into his exotic zoo collection. See Restall, *Seven Myths*, 114; Stuart B. Schwartz, *Victors and Vanquished: Spanish and Nahua Views of the Conquest of Mexico* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000), 1; Townsend, “Burying the White Gods: New Perspectives on the

sovereign invited the Spaniards into the city intentionally so that he might observe them, learn their weaknesses, and potentially trap them inside. Whether or not this was the actual plan, Montezuma's decision would eventually backfire.

Not long after the Spanish crossed over into Tenochtitlan, Cortés took Montezuma prisoner and kept him as a political hostage, seemingly with the intent of trying to subjugate the city without a fight. From within the confines of the Aztec palaces, Cortés ruled the city indirectly through Montezuma for the next five months, until the situation changed abruptly in April of 1520.[585] Infuriated with Cortés's disobedience, the governor of Cuba sent a large contingent of forces, under the command of Pánfilo de Narváez, to arrest the Spanish military leader and transport him back to Cuba. When news broke of Narváez's arrival off the coast of Mexico, Cortés knew he was in a serious predicament. He needed to confront Narváez directly, lest the Spaniard attempt to march into Tenochtitlan and complicate matters further, but he was also acutely aware that he was sorely outnumbered. Narvaéz's company consisted of nineteen ships and 1,200 troops. Cortés, in comparison, had no more than 250 Spaniards.[586] While contemplating the best course of action, one of Cortés's first maneuvers was to call upon three of his veteran soldiers, Andrés de la Tovilla, Hernando de Barrientos, and Juan González de Heredia for a series of important missions.

In simple terms, the trio of global conquistadors was instructed to gather Native allies, weapons, and supplies from the surrounding countryside to be used in the upcoming engagement with Narváez. Of the missions, the most important task perhaps fell to Andrés de la Tovilla, the

Conquest of Mexico," *American Historical Review* 108, no. 3 (June, 2003), 667; and Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés,* 119-48.

[585] It is unclear why Montezuma cooperated with the Spanish during this time, though Hassig presumes that it was out of fear for his personal safety as well as his political future. *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 105.

[586] Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 20.

veteran soldier known to be "good with the pike."[587] According to Díaz del Castillo, Tovilla was ordered to fetch weapons and Indigenous warriors from Chinantla (modern-day Puebla), a province renowned for manufacturing a special type of lance much longer than Spanish ones, and forged with sharp double-edged points made of stone. Tovilla was to request 300 such lances to distribute amongst the Spanish, but to increase the lethality of the weapon, he was to arrange for the lances to be stripped of the flint heads and affixed with copper ones. The conquistador, who possessed a deep knowledge of weapon technology, including "the best method of fixing points to lances," was the ideal candidate for the mission.[588] After arriving in Chinantla, Tovilla was not only able to convince the Indigenous lords of that province to furnish the coveted lances, but also secured 200 Native warriors to help fight against Narváez and his forces. In addition, when the conquistador returned to the Castilian encampment, he proceeded to train the other members in the company on how to wield the lances to thwart cavalrymen, a technique he would have learned experientially in Italy.[589] Such training suggests that Tovilla's value to the company extended far beyond simply being "good with the pike"; he was also a military adviser and strategist, renowned for his expertise in the intricacies of warfare. What's more, his role in this capacity in many ways challenges the dominant histories of the conquest, which long depicted Spanish victories as products of Cortés's tactical ingenuity.[590] Tovilla's actions illustrate how ordinary Spaniards (and not just Cortés or one of his captains) were also important military tacticians and advisers within the company.

As for the missions of the other two veteran soldiers, Barrientos gathered 2,000 Native warriors from Tuxtepec (the area that today comprises northern Oaxaca and southern Veracruz)

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[587] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 133.
[588] Díaz del Castillo, *Memoirs of the Conquistador*, vol. 1, 311.
[589] Díaz del Castillo, *Memoirs of the Conquistador*, vol. 1, 311.
[590] López de Gómara, *Cortés*; and Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*.

but failed to reach the coast in time. Heredia succeeded in his assignment, by contrast, and later rendezvoused with the Cortés company, bringing "as many men [Native warriors] as he could muster."[591] The support from Heredia and Tovilla was significant, since when the time came to confront Narváez's forces at Cempoala, Cortés now had over 1,000 Indigenous allies to fight on his behalf.[592] Even so, the ensuing encounter between the two sides proved easier than Cortés had feared. According to Cortés's own account of the battle, the military captain caught Narváez off guard in the late hours of the night, encircling and capturing many of his forces while losing just two men.[593] Cortés failed to mention that before the engagement began, several members of his company infiltrated Narváez's camp in secret, convincing many of their friends and kinsmen to switch sides with promises of treasure and slaves from Tenochtitlan.[594] It was behind-the-scenes actions like this that prompted many soldiers to cross over to Cortés before the battle commenced, thereby greatly facilitating his victory.

The Addition of New Veteran Soldiers

While the Narváez battle might have put an end to Cortés's incursion into Central Mexico, it instead resulted in a favorable outcome for the military leader. With Narváez defeated and subsequently imprisoned, hundreds within his camp elected to join Cortés, including six veteran soldiers from the wars in the Old World.[595] Those men were: Leonel de Cervantes,

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[591] This was according to the testimony of García Holguín, a member of the Cortés company. See *Hernán Cortés: Copias de documentos existentes en al Archivo de Indias y en su Palacio de Castilleja de la Cuesta sobre la conquista de Méjico* (Seville, 1889), 227. For more on the role of Heredia in this episode, see *CDI*, vol. 35 (Madrid: Imprenta de Manuel G. Hernandez), 394-95.
[592] Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 255.
[593] Cortés, "Second Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 126-27.
[594] Of the 1,100 men that Narváez brought with him, many had regional affinities or kinship ties to those in Cortés's company. Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 255.
[595] The Narváez recruits now ballooned the company to 1,300 soldiers, 96 horses, 80 crossbowmen, and 80 musketeers. Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 111.

Sebastián de Ébora, Amador de Lares, Cristóbal de Maeda, Alonso de Mata, and Francisco de Santa Cruz. Collectively, the recruiting of these new veteran soldiers continued to add experienced warriors to the stock of conquistadors. As men thoroughly accustomed to the rigors and hardships of war, these individuals were comfortable fighting on an array of battlefields, and would bring specialized martial skills and expertise to the company.

One of those veterans, Sebastian de Ébora, was a Portuguese soldier who helped defend the chateau of "Baxia" in southern France from Barbarossa in 1515.[596] In the upcoming engagements in Central Mexico, Ébora's bravery would earn him great respect among his fellow conquistadors, along with the nickname, the "*mulato valiente*" (valiant mulatto).[597] A second recruit, Alonso de Mata, claimed to have fought in Italy for a number of years on behalf of the Catholic Monarchs in the First and Second Italian War. As will be seen, Mata's exceptional services during the siege of Tenochtitlan won him significant honors and rewards from the crown, including a highly coveted coat of arms.[598] A third individual, and perhaps the most socially prominent member of the Narváez contingent, was Leonel de Cervantes, a "*caballero hijodalgo*" (noble knight) descended from an aristocratic family of Extremadura.[599] Prior to sailing to the Americas, Cervantes had been honored in the wars in Italy, and was a *comendador*

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[596] Álvarez, *Diccionario*, vol. 1, 166.
[597] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 183.
[598] Letter from Alonso de Mata to the King (Ciudad de los Angeles, 26 February 1552), in Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 6 (Mexico: Antiguo Librería Robredo, de J. Porrúa e hijos, 1939), 143-45. For the document conferring Mata a coat of arms, see Antonio Paz y Mélia, *Nobiliario de Conquistadores de Indias* (Madrid: Impresa de M. Tello, 1892), 313-15. For his proof of merits and services, see AGI, Patronato 169, N.1, A. 1531, R.4.
[599] AGI, Patronato 76, N.2, R.1. This document was organized in the form of an interrogatorio, and compiled by Leonel's grandson, Gonzalo Gómez de Cervantes, in order to call attention to the merits and services of his grandfather. In this document, numerous witnesses testify to Leonel's noble status, referring to him as a "distinguished person" (persona de mucha calidad), and a "noble knight" (caballero hijodalgo). It is worth noting that Leonel's son, Diego de Cervantes, was also a knight of the Order of Santiago. On the history of this lineage in Mexico, see Schwaller, "Tres Familias Mexicanas del Siglo XVI," *Historia Mexicana* 31, no. 2 (1981): 171-196.

(officer) of the Military-Religious Order of Santiago.[600] After transferring his loyalties to Cortés, Cervantes was said to have contributed substantially to the company, furnishing his own "weapons, horses, slaves, and servants at his own cost."[601] Such contributions, especially the provision of horses, would have been critical at this moment in the conquest. Along with swords and crossbows, horses were among the most important weapons at the disposal of the Spanish, and particularly devastating in open battlefield engagements where the charge of the cavalry could effect large, exploitable gaps in the enemy defenses. Furthermore, because there were relatively few horses alive at this juncture in the war, the addition of a few more could effectively tilt the advantage of war, turning even the most inauspicious situations into a rout.[602]

In the early summer of 1520, the new recruits underwent the long journey back to Tenochtitlan, relying on Indigenous guides to navigate them through the unfamiliar land.[603] However, when the company reached the outer fringes of Tenochtitlan in early June, they were apprised of the monumental disaster that occurred a few weeks before. During Cortés's absence from the city, his lieutenant Pedro de Alvarado—who had been left behind in Tenochtitlan to maintain Spanish influence—ordered the massacre of unarmed Mexica nobles during the festival of *Toxcatl* (a celebration in honor of their patron deity, Tezcatlipoca).[604] The unprovoked

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[600] The king of Portugal made Cervantes a knight of Santiago, a title that the Catholic Monarchs allowed him to use in all of their domains. All of the witnesses in his interrogatorio confirm his status in this regard. Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 121-22; and AGI, Patronato 76, N.2, R.1.
[601] AGI, Patronato 76, N.2, R.1.
[602] On the importance of horses in the conquest, see Townsend, "Burying the White Gods," 677; and Schwaller and Nader, *First Letter*, 134-35.
[603] Alonso de Mata did not undergo the journey back to Tenochtitlan since he had fallen ill. He would later rejoin the company, and was among those to participate in the final siege. Thomas, *Who's Who*, 210-11.
[604] According to Díaz del Castillo, the attack was intended to prevent the Mexica from launching a rebellion against the Spanish contingent left behind in the city, but such claims have not been substantiated. Moreover, some scholars believe that it was Cortés, and not Alvarado, who was responsible for the massacre in Tenochtitlan. Hassig suggests that Cortés no longer trusted Montezuma and feared that he might forge an alliance with Narváez during his absence from the city. While away from the capital, Cortés could eliminate Montezuma's most seasoned and powerful warriors, and also use his absence as an alibi to deny any involvement. On the one hand, this would explain why Cortés never seriously reprimanded Alvarado for his actions, whereas other conquistadors were punished for the slightest of offenses. On the other, it does not explain why Cortés afterwards demoted Alvarado from second-in-

bloodshed raised an uproar among the Mexica, who launched a series of assaults against the Indigenous-Spanish coalition, then held out in the palaces of Tenochtitlan. In order to escape the city, Cortés orchestrated a risky evacuation on 10 July 1520, attempting to flee the imperial capital clandestinely under the cover of darkness. Upon discovering the flight of the invaders, the Mexica dealt devastating damage to their enemies on the Tacuba causeway, striking down some 800 Spaniards, 5 Spanish women, and 2,000 Indigenous allies.[605] When dawn approached, only a scant band of survivors escaped the city alive, including Cortés. In the months to come, the Spanish and their allies would regroup in Tlaxcala, where they worked to rebuild their forces anew.

Inspiration from the Italian Wars: The Construction of a Naval Fleet

If there was one lesson to take away from the disastrous flight from Tenochtitlan, later remembered as *la Noche Triste* (the Sad Night), it was the vulnerability of the Spanish on the causeways. The Mexica's fleet of canoes dominated the lake waters surrounding the island-city, and easily picked off the Spanish cavalry and infantry fleeing on the raised land bridges. In order to level the playing field, and otherwise tilt the advantage of war, Cortés understood the need to establish mastery over the lake. Hence, as soon as he arrived in Tlaxcala in July of 1520, he ordered his master shipbuilder, Martín López, to begin the construction of a fleet of thirteen brigantines to increase striking power on Lake Texcoco.[606] But as the shipwright must have

command and elevated Gonzalo de Sandoval to this position. Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 245; and Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 110.

[605] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 119-20.

[606] Martín López recorded those instructions from Cortés in his 1528 interrogatorio: "Go to the city of Tlaxcala with your tools and everything you need and look for a place where you can cut a lot of oak, evergreen oak, and pine wood, and fashion them in a manner so that we can make thirteen brigantines." AGI, Patronato 57, N.1, R.1 (interrogatory, 1528).

realized, the request was a patently difficult, if not preposterous one. The wood needed to construct the vessels lay in the forests of Tlaxcala, located some sixty miles east of Lake Texcoco.[607] This meant that once the logs were felled and dressed, they would need to be transported a considerable distance across forest and mountain—through the lands of various enemies—to the main base of operations in the northeast district of the lake. The decision to move forward with the plan nevertheless, and in the face of serious logistical obstacles, has long been credited to the genius and audacity of Cortés.[608] However, the idea to transport the ships overland was not a novel one.

In 1502, the Gran Capitán implemented a similar strategy during his siege of Taranto, an Italian lakeside city bearing some likeness to Tenochtitlan.[609] Prior to the assault, the Great Captain ordered a segment of his fleet, then anchored in the outer bay of the Ionian Sea, to be rolled across the narrow isthmus separating the ocean and the Italian lake.[610] Once launched into the body of water, the Great Captain directed a naval bombardment of Taranto that ultimately led to its capitulation. Cortés, more than likely, was aware of this feat. The Gran Capitán was one of the most famous generals of the epoch, and reports of his exploits had circulated widely. But also, two members in his company, Sotelo and Tovilla, had fought directly alongside the Great

[607] Martín López was a wealthy Sevillian noble (hidalgo) who came to the Indies in 1516 as a merchant. After helping to construct the thirteen brigantines, he was later entrusted with captaining one during the final siege. His life and career have produced several studies. See C. Harvey Gardiner, *Martín López: Conquistador, Citizen of Mexico* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1958); and Guillermo Porras Muñoz, “Martín López, carpintero de ribera,” *Revista de Indias*, 31-32 (1948): 307-329.
[608] Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, 639.
[609] Point made by Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*, 639, n. 24. Few modern histories of the Spanish-Aztec War have posited this connection. For an exception, see Iván Vélez, *La conquista de México: Una nueva España* (Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros, 2019), 216.
[610] Paulo Giovio, *La Vida de Gonzalo Hernández de Córdoba Llamado por Sobrenombre El Gran Capitán*, trans. Pedro Blas Torellas, in *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*, ed. Villa, 96-98. The Great Captain may be credited with the execution of the project, but he cannot be credited with its genius. In 209 B.C., the famed Carthaginian general, Hannibal, laid siege to Tarentum (Taranto) during the Second Punic War, and was first recorded to have employed these tactics.

Captain in Italy, and may have put forth the idea to mimic his naval tactics at Tenochtitlan.[611] What is certain, though, is that the plan to transport the brigantine parts overland would succeed. With the assistance of tens of thousands of Tlaxcalteca allies, the prefabricated fleet was carried an astounding sixty miles to the lakeshore altepetl of Tetzcoco in late February of 1521.[612] Once the nautical materials were laid down in the improvised shipyard, López immediately went to work on finishing the crafts with his team of Spanish and Indigenous carpenters: assembling the planks, rigging the masts, fastening the sails to the spars, and mounting the guns in the bow of each vessel.[613]

As the naval project unfolded, additional supplies and reinforcements continued to arrive from the coast, along with two veteran soldiers with military experience in the Mediterranean wars. One of those men, Pedro de Briones, arrived in February of 1521 in the fleet of Julián de Alderete.[614] According to Díaz del Castillo, Briones had been "a great officer in Italy," and claimed to have lost the lower lobes of his ears because he refused to surrender in one of the campaigns.[615] Whether or not the story was apocryphal, the veteran soldier appeared to have quickly garnered the reverence of Cortés, who later selected him to captain one of the thirteen brigantines in the upcoming siege. The second newcomer, Diego de Marmolejo, was arguably the most militarily experienced soldier now present in the company, having fought all over the

[611] Still, if Cortés did not get the idea from the Gran Capitán, he may have drawn inspiration from Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the famed discoverer of the Pacific. In 1516, Balboa constructed four brigantines on the Isthmus of Darien and ordered them to be transported over eighty miles to the coast. Considering that this took place only a few years prior to the Cortés expedition, it is possible that someone in the company was apprised of the undertaking and put forth the idea. Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia general de los hechos de los Castellanos en las Islas y Tierra Firme del Mar Océano* (Madrid: Emprenta Real, 1601-1615), decade 2, book 2, ch. 11.
[612] For the role of Native peoples in this naval episode, see Kristian J. Fabian, "Masters of the Land: Native Ship and Canal Building During the Spanish-Aztec War," *The Americas* 81, no. 1 (2024): 1-37.
[613] AGI, Patronato 57, N.1, R.1 (interrogatory, 1528). López de Gómara, however, claims that the project did not begin until four days after the arrival of the wood in Tetzcoco. *Cortés*, 251.
[614] Alderete was previously the *tesorero del rey* (treasurer of the king) in Santo Domingo. His fleet was sent by a wealthy merchant in Santo Domingo, Rodrigo de Bastidas, to assist his old friend, Cortés, in the upcoming siege. Thomas, *Who's Who*, 276-77.
[615] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 376.

southern shores of the Mediterranean at Melilla, Cazaza, Oran, and Tlemcen.[616] His extensive wartime experience, along with that of Briones, would be immensely valuable in the upcoming phases of the conquest. With the final assault on Tenochtitlan looming, Cortés needed stalwart soldiers of Briones and Marmolejo's stature—men accustomed to waging war, heeding orders, and operating the more sophisticated weaponry (namely the brigantines). These men quickly readied themselves for war, as the final stage of preparations was nearing its completion. By 28 April 1521, Cortés and his contingent of troops, some 900 soldiers, set out for their positions, together with thousands of Native allies from Tlaxcala, Tetzcoco, Huejotzingo, Cholula, and Chalco.[617]

Artillery, Brigantines, and the Siege of Tenochtitlan

It is difficult to know exactly how many global conquistadors were present during the final siege of Tenochtitlan. Before the battle took place, four men in this cohort perished in the earlier campaigns: Pedro Morón had been struck down in the battles against the Tlaxcalteca, while Canillas, Andrés de la Tovilla, and Amador de Lares were believed to have been killed during the Noche Triste.[618] A fifth member, Leonel de Cervantes, received license to return to Spain in late 1520 to retrieve his family, and did not return to New Spain until after the fall of

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[616] AGI, Patronato 55, N.1, R.3.

[617] We cannot know for sure how many Native allies accompanied Cortés in the final siege of Tenochtitlan, but we may assume that they outnumbered the Spaniards many times over. López de Gómara states that Cortés first arrived in Tenochtitlan with 6,000 Native allies, but according to Hassig, the final assault on Tenochtitlan was carried out with over 200,000 Native allies. If López de Gómara's number underestimates Indigenous involvement, then Hassig's probably exaggerates it. Oudjik and Restall estimate a more moderate number, claiming that at least 24,000 thousand Indigenous allies took part in the final battles against the Mexica. López de Gómara, *Cortés*, 138; Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 175; and Oudijk and Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," in *Indian Conquistadors*, eds. Matthew and Oudijk, 33.

[618] Díaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest of Mexico*, 126; and Thomas, *Who's Who*, 25, 133, 204.

Tenochtitlan, sometime in 1524.[619] Aside from these individuals, there may have been other veteran soldiers absent for various reasons, such as those wounded or too sickly to fight. But if we assume that this was not the case, and that the other known global conquistadors were present at this moment in time, then the number of veterans who fought in the final siege would have tallied 19 men (roughly 2.1 percent of the total Spanish force).[620] Though a small fraction of the company, this group of veteran soldiers would play prominent roles in the three-and-a-half-month assault, serving as brigantine captains, military engineers, and leading members of the artillery brigade.

The entrusting of the global conquistadors with these important duties was not coincidental. At this stage in the war, most members in the company had merely been exposed to relatively small-scale combat in the Indies, be it in the various skirmishes and clashes with Native peoples in Santo Domingo, Puerto Rico, Tierra Firme, or en route to Tenochtitlan. The veteran soldiers, by contrast, had experience fighting in massive military engagements in Italy and North Africa, some of which involved the large-scale encirclement and besieging of castles and fortresses. This expertise in siege-style combat distinguished the global conquistadors from their non-soldiering counterparts and bestowed them with the utmost importance for Cortés during the final assault.

From the onset of the siege in the spring of 1521, Cortés believed that his heavy artillery would be one of the keys to winning the struggle against the Mexica. His approach in this respect did not differ much from the past military leaders at Granada, North Africa, and Italy. In each of those places, the leading Spanish commanders—Rodrigo Ponce de Léon, Pedro Navarro, and

[619] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 141.
[620] This percentage is based on the 900 Spanish troops believed to have participated in the final siege. Numbers according to Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 206.

Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba—relied chiefly on cannons and sustained artillery fire to break through enemy fortifications and capture individual towns and fortresses.[621] At Tenochtitlan, Cortés similarly understood the advantage that artillery brought to the attackers, namely in eliminating the numerous blockades that the Mexica erected along the causeways and edges of the city. Cortés's only real limitation in this regard was the modest number of artillery pieces at his disposal: "three large iron guns, fifteen small bronze field guns and ten hundredweight of powder."[622] With a limited number of cannons, and a finite quantity of gunpowder, Cortés needed his precious artillery to be placed in proper hands.

Within the artillery unit, two of Cortés's veteran soldiers from the Italian Wars, Orozco and Mesa, were entrusted with the command of certain pieces. The latter conquistador, Mesa, was part of the initial 500 men to sail to the mainland with Cortés, and according to Díaz del Castillo, had exhibited great skill with the cannons in the previous campaigns.[623] Orozco, on the other hand, had been in charge of the artillery brigade up until this point, and presumably because of his competence was allowed to continue in this capacity for the upcoming siege.[624] While little is known about their individual feats during the final assault, we do know that the artillery regiment, collectively, played a prominent role in compromising the Mexica's

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[621] Harvey, *Islamic Spain*, 283-89; Hess, *Forgotten Frontier*, 20, 21, 38; and Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 66, 79.
[622] Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 206-7.
[623] Díaz del Castillo, *Memoirs of the Conquistador*, vol. 1, 87.
[624] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 538. In December of 1520, Cortés ordered Orozco to remain in Tepeaca (Segura de la Frontera) to tend to the sick and wounded. For this reason, Grunberg believes that Orozco was not among those to participate in the final assault of Tenochtitlan, though this contradicts the statement of Díaz del Castillo, who acknowledged that Orozco served as a captain in the final siege (presumably as commander of the artillery brigade). Regarding this matter, I side with Díaz del Castillo for two principal reasons. First, Orozco was a highly skilled artilleryman. If we consider the lack of men in the company with experience in this position, then Orozco would have been far too valuable to have kept sidelined for the entirety of the final siege. Second, Orozco had been ordered to stay in Tepeaca in December of 1520, some five months before the start of the final siege. It is very possible that he fulfilled his duties at Tepeaca, only to join the siege later on. Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 394; and Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 286.

defenses.[625] For example, in an effort to reduce Spanish mobility on the main causeways leading into the city, the Mexica set up a number of parapets at strategic points to impede the charge of the enemy cavalry. The Europeans' high-powered cannons, nonetheless, could reportedly tear through those barricades in two or three shots.[626] This was significant, because after blasting through the enemy defenses, mounted Spaniards in range of the opening and carrying long metal lances were able to exploit the breach it caused and forge a path through the throngs. This opening paved the way for a second wave of Spanish infantrymen, along with thousands of Native allies, who could pour through the openings and exploit the breaches. Spanish victories were frequently achieved in this manner—that is, by large numbers of Native allies exploiting the gaps wrought by artillery fire.[627]

Meanwhile, as war waged on the causeways, the Spanish brigantines dominated the naval engagements on Lake Texcoco.[628] One of the main advantages of the ships was the fact that the Europeans' heavy cannons, known to weigh several hundred pounds each, could be placed on the decks of the floating vessels. The mobile nature of the artillery allowed the Spanish to assault areas of the lake inaccessible by land, as well as strike safely from distances where Mexica weapons could not reach.[629] Perhaps more importantly, the brigantines provided lateral protection to the Spanish infantry and calvary battling on the causeways, as they absorbed many of the projectiles that Mexica canoe-borne warriors fired from the flanks. It was for these reasons, among others, that Cortés praised the virtues of the brigantines in his third letter to

[625] The precise number of men who served in the artillery unit during the final siege is uncertain. However, because each of the brigantines had its own piece of artillery, this meant that there would have been at least thirteen artillerymen present. Díaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest*, 392.
[626] Sahagún, "Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex," in Lockhart, *We People Here*, 192.
[627] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 178; and Townsend, "Burying the White Gods," 678.
[628] On the impact of the Spanish brigantines, see Gardiner, *Naval Power in the Conquest of Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012), 196-200; and Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 158-61.
[629] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 158.

Charles V in 1522, referring to the vessels as "the key to the war."[630] However, it is worth pointing out that even his adversaries, the Mexica, recognized the potency of these craft. In Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex, which chronicles the Spanish-Aztec War from the viewpoint of the Mexica, the Native peoples recorded the devastation of the brigantines in the lake waters surrounding Tenochtitlan: "the two boats [of the Spaniards] went along contending with the war boatmen; there was skirmishing in the water. A gun went in the prow of each of their boats, and where the [Mexica] boats were close together and assembled, they fired on them; many people died from it. [When hit, each boat] quickly lifted its prow, wavered, and sank."[631] That the Mexica called attention to the deadly effects of the brigantines, and particularly their mounted cannons, suggests that they perceived the Spaniards' navy to be one of the more noteworthy aspects of their military capabilities.

Given the impact of the brigantines during the final siege, to be in command of one was clearly a major responsibility. It not only required an individual well versed in naval warfare, but also a military strategist of sorts, capable of making quick, tactical decisions in the heat of the battle. It is thus telling that of the thirteen brigantines, three of the global conquistadors were entrusted with commanding one: Antonio de Sotelo, Juan Portillo, and Pedro de Briones.[632]

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[630] Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 212. While significant, the brigantines were not unstoppable war machines, but also had their limitations. Due to the sizable nature of the crafts, they were mostly restricted to the deepest areas of the lake, and could not pursue Mexica rowers in the shal lower areas. Second, the Mexica grasped the significance of the vessels early on and made concerted efforts to destroy them, such as erecting stakes on the lakebed to try to sink the crafts. Third, because the ships were massive targets on the lake, their safety depended greatly on thousands of allied canoes, which crowded around the brigantines and helped shield them from the Mexica fleet.

[631] Sahagún, "Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex," in Lockhart, *We People Here*, 188.

[632] On Sotelo captaining a brigantine, see Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica de la Nueva España*, eds. Agustín Millares Carlo and Manuel Magallón (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1971), 105; Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquia Indiana*, 7 vols., ed. Miguel Leon Portilla (Mexico: Porrua, 1975-1983), vol. 4, 88; and Alonso de Zorita, *Relación de la Nueva España*, ed. Ethelia Ruiz Medrano, 2 vols. (Mexico: Conaculta, 1999), vol. 2, 594. On Portillo, see Díaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest*, 394; Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica*, 105; Torquemada, *Monarquia Indiana*, vol. 4, 88; and Zorita, *Relación*, vol. 2, 594, 598. Diaz del Castillo only refers to this individual as "Portillo," though Grunberg and Thomas suspect this was Juan Portillo, the soldier who fought in Italy. See Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*,

Notably, Briones was one of the newer recruits in the expedition, having recently arrived in New Spain some three months before the start of the final siege. Considering his late arrival to the company, it is a bit surprising that Cortés assigned him one of the treasured brigantines. The veteran soldier had yet to prove himself in battle in the Americas, and nor had the time to sufficiently gain the trust of Cortés. With that said, Briones had been an officer in Italy, which made him something of rarified air in the company. In fact, the presence of high-ranking officers in the Spanish-Aztec War was virtually nonexistent, meaning that Cortés would have prized Briones for his leadership skills and military acumen.[633] This not only encompassed overseeing troops in battle, but also strategizing and coordinating tactical movements, and serving as a liaison between the infantry and the higher chains of command. As for the other two veterans, Sotelo and Portillo, these men were not quite as distinguished militarily as Briones, though this is not to say they were tactically incompetent. Sotelo had fought under the Great Captain in Italy, and also participated in one of the most significant engagements of the Second Italian War, the battle of Garigliano.[634] Cortés would have been aware of this, and perhaps for this reason felt considerable confidence entrusting him, along with the other veterans, with one of the more vital responsibilities of the entire war.

A Botched Contrivance: Limitations of the Global Conquistadors

While the presence of the global conquistadors appeared to have helped during certain situations in the final siege, namely in the naval battles and in the deployment of artillery, they

429; and Thomas, *Who's Who*, 109. On Briones, see Diaz del Castillo, *Discovery and Conquest*, 394; Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica*, 105, 155; Torquemada, *Monarquia Indiana*, vol. 4, 88, 94; and Zorita, *Relación*, vol. 2, 594.

[633] Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 280.

[634] For Sotelo's merits, see AGI, Mexico 169, N.34.

did not always award the Spaniards the upper-hand. For example, in late July of 1521 (some three months into the final siege), Cortés found himself low on gunpowder, and had been deliberating on strategies to compensate for the diminished stockade.[635] One of the veterans from Italy, Antonio de Sotelo, had been privy to these conversations, and proposed a solution to his captain. According to Díaz del Castillo:

> This man [Sotelo] was eternally talking of the wonderful military machines which he knew the art of constructing, and how he could make a stone engine [catapult] which should in two days destroy the whole quarter of the city where Guatimotzin [Cuauhtémoc; the Mexica Emperor] had retreated. He told Cortés so many fine things of this kind, that he persuaded him into a trial of his experiments.[636]

And thus with formal permission, Sotelo immediately went to work on his catapult, ordering two strong cables to be constructed, large stones "the size of a bushel" arranged, and lime, stone, and timber brought to his team of carpenters.[637] After four days of labor his apparatus was completed, and erected atop a fourteen-foot-high platform of masonry in the Tlatelolco district of the city.[638] When the time came to test the highly touted siege engine, on 6 August, a crowd of onlookers assembled in the square to bear witness to the mysterious contrivance. With great suspense, one of the large stones was loaded into the sling and fired at the Mexica quarter, but "instead of taking that direction," writes Díaz del Castillo, "the stone flow up vertically in the air, and returned exactly into the place from whence it had been launched." According to the same chronicler, "Cortes was enraged and ashamed: he reproached the soldier [Sotelo], and ordered the machinery to be taken down; but still it continued the joke of the army."[639]

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[635] Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 256.
[636] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 352. Cuauhtémoc ascended to the throne after the deaths of Montezuma and Cuitláhuac in June and December of 1520, respectively.
[637] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 352.
[638] According to Cortés, the platform had previously been used as a sort of theatrical stage by the Mexica, in which actors would use the elevated stone to perform plays for the onlookers below. Cortés, "Third Letter," in *Letters from Mexico*, ed. Pagden, 256-57.
[639] Diaz del Castillo, *True History*, 352-53.

The embarrassing incident involving Sotelo reveals, quite clearly, the limitations of European military technology. As evidenced in this episode, the transference of siege machinery and tactics from the Old World did not always translate well in new circumstances, and nor did it routinely award the Spaniards the advantage. In fact, the Mexica at this stage did not appear to be overwhelmed or stunned by the foreigners' technological capabilities, but instead actively responded to the technology gap with intelligence and craft. Their response took many forms, such as zigzagging to counter crossbow arrows, wielding pikes to thwart cavalrymen, crouching down during artillery fire, constructing blockades to restrict Spanish mobility and striking power, and placing sharpened spikes in the lake floor to pierce or block the brigantines. The Mexica, in short, had formulated a number of well-conceived strategies to mitigate the impact of certain Spanish weaponry and in some cases neutralize it.[640] Further, and alongside this point, the global conquistadors were not indomitable super-soldiers capable of winning wars through ingenious inventions or military science. The martial experience that they acquired in the Old World allowed them to make an imprint in certain areas of the conflict, but it did not enable them to turn the tide of war. This was effected, rather, by the Spaniards' tens of thousands of Native allies, whose multifarious forms of support (as warriors, advisers, cooks, and interpreters) allowed the Cortés company to contend with a large and militarily adept Mexica force.[641]

While the episode with the catapult highlights some the shortcomings of Spanish military technology, it also illuminates ones of the main themes of this dissertation—the circulation of ideas and knowledge throughout the empire. On this occasion, we have a clear example of a

[640] See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 117; Townsend, "Burying the White Gods," 685; Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 155-158; and Restall and Fernández-Armesto, *The Conquistadors: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 76-77.
[641] See Oudijk and Restall, "Mesoamerican Conquistadors in the Sixteenth Century," in *Indian Conquistadors*, eds. Matthew and Oudijk, 28-64.

veteran soldier drawing on military science from the Old World, and attempting to transfer that expertise to the New. Even though Sotelo's machine malfunctioned, and badly so, his attempt to replicate technology and tactics from the Italian wars suggests that these campaigns left a notable mark on the minds of its former soldiers, and later came to influence their actions in the Americas. Moreover, what is additionally telling about this incident is what it reveals about the relationship between Cortés and his global conquistadors. Throughout the war, Cortés continually relied on his veteran soldiers to carry out some of the most critical tasks and assignments. The entrusting of Sotelo with this mission stands in for the ongoing faith that Cortés held in his global conquistadors, whom he esteemed highly for the tactics and techniques that they learned in Africa or Europe. While one might argue that Cortés agreed to the catapult project more because of the lack of gunpowder, and less out of faith in his soldier, it is important to emphasize that Sotelo was a student of the Gran Capitán, who was considered one of the most astute military minds of his age. Anyone in the company who fought alongside the illustrious general would be taken seriously, and would have commanded at least some sway when it came to discussing military matters.

Despite the continued emphasis on firepower, the city of Tenochtitlan ultimately fell to starvation and disease. Like in Europe, when a besieged castle or fortress managed to withstand the onslaught of artillery fire, the next step for the attackers was to erect a blockade with which to starve the defenders into submission. As the campaigns against the Mexica wore on, Cortés's strategy gradually shifted to one of strangulation. The aqueduct carrying fresh water from the springs of Chapultepec into Tenochtitlan had been severed, leaving the residents of the city with lake water too brackish to drink. On land, thousands of Mesoamerican allies occupied the central causeways leading into the city, while Spanish brigantines and allied canoes vigorously patrolled

the lake, enveloping the city on all sides and further preventing food and water resources from entering. Moreover, the effects of the blockade were exacerbated by another, arguably more debilitating issue: the spread of deadly germs.[642] Already in October of 1520, the residents of Tenochtitlan had been grappling with the unexpected outbreak of a smallpox plague introduced by the foreigners.[643] Although the effects of the epidemic largely receded by the start of the final siege, much of the damage had already been done.[644] Within the first year of the outbreak, an estimated 40 percent of the population of Central Mexico perished, including Emperor Montezuma's successor, Cuitláhuac, who died in December of 1520 after contracting the disease.[645] With the Mexica still reeling from the devastation of the plague, the Spanish-Indigenous blockade would only have worsened matters considerably, further crippling an already compromised population.[646] By 13 August 1521, the Mexica had reached their breaking point and formally surrendered the city to the Spanish and their Native allies.

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[642] See Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1973); Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism*; and Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

[643] In Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex, the Mexica inform us of the devastation wrought by the germs: "Before the Spaniards appeared to us [to commence the siege], first an epidemic broke out, a sickness of pustules. It began in Tepeihuitl. Large bumps spread on people; some were entirely covered…The pustules that covered people caused great desolation; very many people died of them, and many just starved to death; starvation reigned, and no one took care of others any longer...The Mexica warriors were greatly weakened by it." Sahagún, "Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex," in Lockhart, *We People Here*, 180, 182.

[644] In the estimation of Crosby, the introduction of these invasive species constituted the 'shock troops' of the invasion, and helped to facilitate and consolidate Spanish military success at Tenochtitlan. Crosby coined the term "ecological imperialism" to describe this biological conquest. See *Ecological Imperialism*.

[645] Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 124-25.

[646] Some scholars argue that disease worked as much against the Spanish as in their favor. For instance, Hassig contends that while disease decimated the Mexica population, the same was true of the Spaniards' Native allies, who were no less vulnerable to European diseases as the Mexica, and were in reality closer to the source of infection. However, Hassig does admit that disease had more pernicious consequences for Mexica leadership (such as Cuitláhuac, who perished after ruling for 80 days) than for Spanish leaders who had greater immunity to the germs. Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 124-25.

The Expansion of Empire: Veteran Soldiers in the Post-Conquest Period, 1521-1550

Since the mid-sixteenth century, historians of the Spanish-Aztec War have long romanticized the conquistadors and their role in toppling the Aztec Empire.[647] William H. Prescott was perhaps the most emblematic contributor to this sort of idealized rendering. In his *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, he depicted how a gallant band of conquistadors, against remarkable odds, blazed a path through Central Mexico and seized the mighty city of Tenochtitlan from the Mexica. What Prescott failed to mention were the stark realities of the conquest, and namely that the majority of the conquistadors did not live to tell the tale.

Conservative estimates place the mortality rate among the conquistadors at over 50 percent, while some suggest that this number was even higher, perhaps as great as 70 percent.[648] If we compare that to the mortality rate of the global conquistadors, a noticeable disparity can be discerned (see table 3).[649] Of the twenty veteran soldiers whose fate is definitively known, only six perished during the conquest: Morón, Canillas, Lares, Tovilla, Portillo, and Heredia (30 percent of the cohort). Of those six men, two were among the oldest members of the group, and not quite in the prime of their life. This included Heredia, the musketeer with one eye and a lame leg, believed to be in his fifties, and Amador de Lares, the former steward to the Gran Capitán who served over two decades in the Italian Wars.

[647] López de Gómara, *Cortés*; Prescott, *Conquest of Mexico*; and Bancroft, *History of Mexico*.
[648] Grunberg notes that over half of all known conquistadors who took part in the campaigns in Central Mexico perished. Restall believes that the rate was around 65 percent, and may have been as high as 70 percent. Grunberg, "Origins of the Conquistadores," 261; and Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 312-13.
[649] The fates of Arcos, Barrientos, Torres, and Sotelo are unknown. It is more than likely that they died during the final battle of Tenochtitlan, since there is no trace of them in the documentary record after 1521. However, it is still possible that they survived the siege, only to have perished in one of the subsequent expeditions in and around Mexico.

Table 3: Post-Conquest Survivors

Conquistador	*Expeditions to:*	*Encomiendas*	*Resident of*	*Death*
Pedro de Briones	Tuxtepec, Coatzacoalcos, Honduras, Guatemala	—	—	c. 1528
Leonel de Cervantes	—	Xalatlaco, Atlapulco	Mexico	1550
Sebastian de Ébora	Zacatula, Michoacan, Tarasco, Colima, New Galicia, Baja California	Axapoteca	Zacatula	c. 1560
Rodrigo de Guipuzcano	Coatzacoalcos, Colima, Jalisco	Milpa, Manatlan, Pascoatlan	Colima	c. 1546
Pedro Núñez de Guzmán	Pánuco, New Galicia, Ecuador	Oxtitipa	Santiago de Guatemala	c. 1534
Cristóbal de Maeda	Tuxtepec, Michoacan, Colima, Zacatula, Pánuco	Xicayan, Ayutla, Tetipec	Mexico	c. 1528
Diego de Marmolejo	Tuxtepec	Ozumacintla, Tlatecla	Veracruz	c. 1546
Alonso de Mata	—	Xicotec, Tuzantla	Puebla	1562
Francisco de Mesa	Popocatépetl	Iguala	Mexico	1533
Francisco de Orozco	Coatlan	Tecuicuilco, Atepec	—	1524
Francisco de Santa Cruz	Pánuco, Honduras	Axapusco, Zacuala, Tlacamama	Mexico	1557
Rodrigo de Segura	Tuxtepec	Azcastan, Zapotitlán, Tiltepeque	Puebla	1565
Juan de Solís	Pánuco	Comanja, Uruapan	—	1582
Benito de Vejer	New Spain	Axacuba	Mexico	1543

Though a small sample size, the gap between the mortality rates of the veterans (30 percent) and the common conquistador (50-70 percent) is conspicuous—the global conquerors survived at higher rates. This disparity is not entirely surprising if we consider the extensive wartime training of this group in the Old World. Overall, the global conquistadors were better prepared for the hazards of war and conquest. With that said, their past soldiering experience in Africa and Europe did not appear to win them any greater portion of the booty at Tenochtitlan. In fact, the global conquistadors received the same division of spoils as their non-soldiering counterparts, and a measly one at that. Much of the collected riches sunk to the bottom of the lake during the Noche Triste, and for the ordinary conquistador, the distributed treasure was lackluster.[650]

To quell the discontent over the dearth of spoils, Cortés turned to a practice not fully endorsed by the crown, and eventually abolished with the New Laws in 1542. This was the allocation of the *encomienda*, by which the tribute and labor obligations of a specific group of Indigenous people were awarded to a particular conquistador. While the lucrativeness of each encomienda varied greatly, even the less profitable ones might allow conquerors to repay debts incurred in the conquest, whereas the most productive ones could lead to the amassing of great wealth through a steady stream of annual income. For these reasons, all of the participants in the Spanish-Aztec War would have greatly desired an encomienda, and most probably believed they deserved one. Nevertheless, Cortés was rather selective in bestowing this privilege, and only awarded them to about 300 of his men (40 percent of the survivors).[651] This decision, quite

[650] Díaz del Castillo captures well the dismay of the conquistadors over the lack of spoils: "Our captains and soldiers were then curious to know what the shares came to for each man. On casting it up it appeared, that to each horseman there came one hundred crowns, and to each infantry soldier I forget how much, but no one would accept it. This did not quiet the soldiers; they murmured loudly and accused the treasurer…The soldiers of Narvaez who never liked Cortes thoroughly, would not take their paltry shares." *True History*, 363-64.
[651] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 12.

naturally, fueled great anger and resentment among those not selected, and helps to explain in part the innumerable legal cases that Cortés was embroiled in after the conquest.[652] Yet, for those not fortunate to receive an encomienda in this first wave of allotments, there was still an opportunity to attain one through participation in a subsequent *entrada* (an expedition organized for trade, raiding, exploration, or land acquisition). Hence, in the aftermath of the conquest, a large number of conquistadors would fan out across the Americas to take part in new expeditions, including many of the global conquerors.

Of the fourteen global conquistadors known to have survived the conquest, nine participated in at least one entrada in the post-conquest period (see table 3). One of the more notable examples was the former officer in the Italian campaigns, Pedro Briones, who accompanied Cristóbal de Olid to Honduras in 1524. The expedition was intended to locate a number of rich mines rumored to exist in this region, and to search for a highly-desired sea route to Asia and the so-called "Spice Islands" (the Moluccas, located in present-day Indonesia).[653] But upon settling in Honduras, Olid had other plans. The Spaniard soon cut ties with Cortés, and established himself as an independent leader in the region—not unlike what Cortés had done himself in Central Mexico. Olid's decision was supported by the majority of his men, including Briones, who even urged his commander to launch an armed rebellion against Cortés.[654] After learning of the revolt, Cortés organized a costly military expedition to stamp out the insurrection, though the action ultimately proved unnecessary. In 1525, two of Olid's prisoners escaped from imprisonment and killed the rebel leader in the town of Náis in Honduras.[655] As for Olid's co-

[652] A large number of conquistadors sued Cortés in the decades following the fall of Tenochtitlan over the allegedly unfair distribution of treasure. Many of those legal documents, along with various others pertaining to the conquest, can be found at the AGI in *Justicia* 220-225, with additional documents located in *Justicia* 1004, 1005, 1018, as well as in *Patronato* 180.
[653] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 399; and Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 273-74.
[654] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 85-86.
[655] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 101.

conspirator, Briones, the conquistador managed to escape the bloodshed (and the wrath of Cortés), and subsequently went off to fight in the conquest of Guatemala.[656] But here, Briones continued to stir up drama with Cortés, and was consequently put to death for instigating a new uprising against him.[657]

Although Briones's seditious acts appear to be extreme, or out of the ordinary for an erstwhile supporter of Cortés, they were in reality a microcosm of the larger political conspiring that overtook many conquistadors following the Spanish-Aztec War. During this time, a large number of conquerors expressed their disgruntlement with Cortés for taking the lion share of the spoils at Tenochtitlan (that is, one-fifth of the total treasure), and for his alleged favoritism in allocating lands and property to certain conquistadors.[658] Briones was merely among a long list of conquistadors to turn his back on Cortés in some form, be it in organizing opposition groups, taking legal action in court, or launching an outright rebellion against him.

While Briones's life after the fall of Tenochtitlan was eventful to say the least, he was not the only global conquistador with a lively post-conquest career. Diego de Marmolejo, the soldier who fought all over the North African shoreline, went off to fight with Gonzalo de Sandoval in Tuxtepec, and helped the Spanish achieve dominion over the Mixtec-Zapotec zone by 1524.[659] Marmolejo eventually settled down as a *vecino* (municipal resident) of Veracruz, and was

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[656] On the conquest of Guatemala, see Restall and Asselbergs, *Invading Guatemala: Spanish, Nahua, and Maya Accounts of the Conquest Wars*, Latin American Originals (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007).
[657] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 85-86.
[658] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 364. Because Cortés received one-fifth of the booty, and the Crown another one-fifth, this meant that the remaining three-fifths were shared among the manifold participants in the war. However, the final distribution of the spoils was not equal, as some conquerors received a larger portion depending on their investment in the company or promises made by Cortés. Schwaller and Nader*, First Letter*, 140.
[659] For an account of the conquest and pacification of this region, see Sousa and Terraciano, "The 'Original Conquest' of Oaxaca: Nahua and Mixtec Accounts of the Spanish Conquest," *Ethnohistory* 50, no. 2 (April 2003): 349-400.

assigned the nearby encomiendas of Ozumacintla and Tlatectla.[660] The Portuguese veteran, Sebastián de Ébora, was arguably the most active of the global conquistadors following the collapse of the Aztec empire. After taking part in the campaign to Zacatula (present-day Jalisco), Ébora later served as an infantrymen in the conquest of Michoacan, and additionally participated in expeditions to Colima, New Galicia, and Baja California.[661] He later became a vecino and *corregidor* (local magistrate) in Zacatula, and received Axapoteca in encomienda in 1550.[662] Pedro Núñez de Guzmán, the only soldier known to have fought in Flanders, accompanied Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán (to whom he was probably related) to Pánuco in 1526, and later served as his *alférez* (flag bearer) and *camarero* (steward) during the conquest of New Galicia in 1531.[663] Two years later, he departed for Ecuador with Pedro de Alvarado, but froze to death with his wife and two daughters while attempting to cross the Andes Mountains.[664] Taken together, the stories of these men reveal how even in the aftermath of Tenochtitlan, with mortality rates higher than 50 percent, the global conquistadors continued to risk their lives participating in new conquest opportunities. Having fought in a number of precarious spaces across the globe—in North Africa, Italy, the Caribbean, Tierra Firme, and Central Mexico—these men were accustomed to the hardships of war, and seemingly felt themselves well-equipped to tackle the dangers of conquest in other parts of the empire. Through their extensive military services, this group of men continued to play important roles in extending Spain's imperial dominion in the Americas.

[660] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 189.
[661] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 156-57.
[662] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 156-57; and Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 152.
[663] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 229.
[664] Díaz del Castillo, *True History*, 538.

From Conquistadores to Pobladores

Following their participation in various entradas, many of the global conquistadors returned to Mexico to manage their estates and help establish permanent settlements. The formation of these towns marked the beginning of a new phase of conquest, one characterized by political, cultural, religious, and economic subjugation of the Indigenous peoples. Oftentimes, Native altepetls were forcibly relocated or displaced to make room for settler communities, strategically positioned in resource-rich areas to facilitate the extraction of natural resources. While pre-Hispanic Indigenous political systems remained partially intact, the introduction of Spanish governance structures led to the restructuring of those entities to primarily serve the interests of the metropole. The imposition of Spanish culture, language, and customs upon the Indigenous peoples, especially conversion to Christianity, was often carried out through acts of coercion, threats, and violence, fracturing communal bonds and traditional religious structures.[665] Spanish settlement thus entailed various forms of domination, control, and dislocation of the Native peoples of Mexico—a process in which the global conquistadors, as first settlers of New Spain, played an active part.

Of the global conquistadors that settled in and around Mexico City, a handful became actively engaged in political and social life. The most notable example was the comendador Leonel de Cervantes, who emerged as one of the more powerful figures in New Spain in the 1520s and 30s. As one might recall, Cervantes accompanied Narváez to the mainland in the

[665] On the persistence of Native political structures and identities under Spanish colonial rule in Mexico, see Nancy Farriss, *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Yaqui Resistance and Survival: The Struggle for Land and Autonomy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth Through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); and Velasco Murillo, *Urban Indians*.

spring of 1520, but later defected to Cortés after the battle at Cempoala. After serving in the Cortés company for several months, Cervantes received permission to return to Spain in late 1520 to retrieve his family, and thereafter departed from Central Mexico.[666] He later returned to the Indies in 1524 with his spouse Leonor de Andrada, his son Alonso, and his five daughters.[667] After settling down as a vecino of Mexico City, Cervantes came to exercise a fair degree of control over its local government and communal affairs, serving as *alcalde ordinario* (municipal magistrate) for all of 1525, *regidor* (municipal councilman) for several weeks in 1526, and alcalde ordinario again in 1534.[668] Perhaps most notably, Cervantes managed to wed each of his daughters to respectable hidalgo partners, all of whom were either conquerors or settlers of Mexico City.[669] Through these marital engagements, Cervantes was able to establish an extensive kinship network in New Spain that tethered the early pobladores together, forming a thread of interlocking family units. It also enabled him to create powerful connections to some of the more distinguished residents of Mexico City, allowing him to cement his socio-political positioning within local society. By his death in 1550, the Cervantes lineage controlled at least thirteen encomiendas in and around Mexico City, with an estimated 40,000 tributaries assigned to the family in this year.[670]

The social and political prominence that Cervantes attained in the aftermath of the conquest was an outlier among the global conquistadors. Most of the survivors never became

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[666] According to one of the witnesses in his interrogatorio, Cervantes was badly wounded during his brief stint in the Cortés company, likely during the Noche Triste: "salió herido entonces de malas heridas" (he was injured with bad wounds). AGI, Patronato 76, N.2, R.1.
[667] He also had a sixth daughter, Beatriz, born in New Spain.
[668] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 67.
[669] Three daughters married pobladores, two married first conquerors, and one married a conqueror. Notably, one of his daughters, doña Beatriz de Andrada, married first conqueror Juan Jaramillo de Salvatierra, who was previously married to doña Marina, the Indigenous interpreter to Cortés. Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 64-65.
[670] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 65-66. The peso was the primary currency in New Spain, and valued at approximately 450 maravedíes.

greatly enriched in this manner, and tended to assume more modest posts within early colonial society. One example was Benito Vejel, the tambourine player, who after the conquest of Tenochtitlan settled down in Mexico City and ran a dance school.[671] After years of military service in Italy and the Americas, the conquistador may well have felt a certain inclination to transition to a more tranquil line of work. If we are to believe the words of fellow conqueror Jerónimo López, who referred to Vejel as "the most miserable man in the army," we can assume this was a positive transition for the conquistador.[672] Francisco de Santa Cruz, the youngest of the veteran soldiers, chose to work for Cortés in the aftermath of the conquest, serving as a labor supervisor and tribute collector (1522-24), the *mayordomo* (chief steward) of agricultural affairs (1531-34), and the manager of a sugar mill at Tlaltenango (from 1536 onwards).[673] He additionally held responsibilities as a regidor of Axapusco, Tlacamama, and Tuzantla, and was assigned encomiendas in those places. A third global conquistador, Alonso de Mata, served as corregidor of Guautlan in 1536, of Atlatluaca and Maxinaltepeque in 1539, and of Guautinchan in 1541 and 1542. In 1542, he served as an *escribano de los Reinos* (notary employed by the crown), as well as corregidor and *alcalde mayor* (deputy governor) of the mines of Tuhuacan.[674] While rather mundane work, especially when compared to the dangers of soldiering, this sort of service was still of great significance to the ordering of the post-conquest world. By occupying these administrative duties as municipal councilmen, judges, and labor overseers, the global conquistadors helped to run early colonial society and ensure its successful day-to-day functioning. This would have been of particular import during the chaotic years following the fall

[671] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 258.
[672] Vejel lived on his encomienda of Axacuba until the early 1530s, when it was eventually stripped from him by the second *Audiencia* (high court and advisory council to a governor or viceroy) and reassigned to the conqueror Jerónimo López in 1543. Quote from Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 4 (Mexico: Antiguo Librería Robredo, de J. Porrúa e hijos, 1939), 173.
[673] Himmerich y Valencia, *Encomenderos*, 241.
[674] See Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 318-20.

of Tenochtitlan, as much of colonial society was still in formation, and in need of individuals to help manage, administer, and supervise the humdrum affairs of everyday life.

While some of the global conquistadors generated income through political and administrative work, and others as participants in various entradas, nearly all of the men were able to supplement their savings as holders of an encomienda. In fact, of the fourteen veteran survivors, thirteen received at least one encomienda in the decades following the fall of Tenochtitlan (93 percent of the men).[675] Such a high percentage of recipients suggests that in the eyes of Cortés, the global conquerors rendered services deemed to be significant, and thus worthy of great reward. With that said, not all of the encomiendas were lucrative or equally profitable. The most productive ones belonged to Leonel de Cervantes, who received an astounding 1,200 *pesos* (silver coins) annually from the production of corn, cloth, wood, and hens.[676] Beneath him in earnings were men like Rodrigo de Segura, whose encomiendas of Azcastan, Zapotitlán, and Tiltepeque amounted to 400 pesos per year.[677] The sources inform us that Segura lived a comfortable existence in Puebla, where he maintained a *casa poblada* (a large estate), filled with numerous relatives, guests, and servants, and went on to live a very long life, dying in 1565 at the age of 100.[678]

At the middle-to-low end of the spectrum were individuals like Ébora, whose encomienda of Axapoteca yielded a tribute of 100 pesos (from cacao and *mantas*, or blankets) in 1560.[679] While certainly modest, his encomienda was still more profitable than those assigned to Marmolejo, worth a meager 46 pesos in annual revenue.[680] Such lowly earnings left Marmolejo

[675] The only exception was Pedro de Briones, whose precarious relationship with Cortés in the post-conquest period must have forced the Spanish military leader to think twice about awarding him a coveted encomienda.
[676] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 121-22.
[677] Álvarez, *Diccionario*, vol. 2, 528-29; and Thomas, *Who's Who*, 121.
[678] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 508-10.
[679] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 156-57.
[680] Marmolejo held two encomiendas: Ozumacintla and Tlatectla. Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 303-4.

impoverished in the aftermath of the conquest, and also apparently quite disgruntled. On 23 February 1533, the conquistador penned a statement to the Spanish crown requesting greater rewards for the "*grandes servicios*" (great services) that he rendered on its behalf.[681] In his letter, Marmolejo did not fail to mention how his services extended far beyond the Americas, including to Melilla, Cazaza, Oran, Tlemcen, and Algiers, where he helped defend Spain's imperial interests in the Maghrib for over a decade. At least in theory, such a rich tapestry of services should have attracted the interest of crown officials—that is, if any of those individuals actually read Marmolejo's statement. Because scholars have not been able to locate any documents indicating that Marmolejo or his wife ever received royal compensation, his letter was probably shelved by royal officials and never physically read. Without crown support, Marmolejo would die a poor man, perishing in the Indies around 1546.[682]

Marmolejo was not the only embittered global conquistador to petition the crown for greater rewards in the aftermath of the Spanish-Aztec War.[683] In 1552, Alonso de Mata penned a letter to the monarchs boldly requesting 1,000 pesos annually for the rest of his life in remuneration for his services.[684] To make a case for why he deserved such high rewards, the old conquistador similarly felt it necessary to highlight his military services in not only the Americas, but also in the Old World: "Fifty-three years ago," he remarked, "I fought in the service of your grandparents, the Catholic Monarchs, against the French. [Now] I am already

[681] AGI, Patronato 55, N.1, R.3.
[682] Grunberg, *Dictionnaire*, 303-4.
[683] Of the conquistadors who perished during the conquest or in its aftermath, it was common for their siblings or descendants to take up the task of petitioning the crown for rewards on their behalf. One example was Juan de Villaseñor, who organized the merits for his brother, Francisco de Orozco (a global conquistador), who drowned in 1524 while attempting to cross a river. For Orozco's merits, see AGI, Mexico 203, N.1.
[684] Letter from Alonso de Mata to the King (Ciudad de los Angeles, 26 February 1552), in Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 6, 143-45.

very old and suffer from destitution and poverty, so much so that I do not have bread to eat…"[685] Mata was ultimately successful in his petition. The veteran conquistador received 400 pesos from the crown in 1554, and an additional 300 pesos in 1561. Even more impressively, he was granted a coat of arms in 1561 commemorating his singular service during the siege of Tenochtitlan.[686] In the document conferring that award, the crown acknowledged his many heroics in the final battles against the Mexica: "in the capture of Mexico City, you [Mesa] stormed many houses, towers, and strongholds where the enemies were fortified, including the tower of Tlatelolco, which was eighty-three steps high, and where you were badly wounded."[687] The reception of this coat of arms was an exceptional honor, as it was one of the most prestigious rewards that a conquistador could receive from the crown.[688] Most other global conquistadors never received such high forms of recognition in their lifetime, and the majority died in possession of more modest encomiendas and honors.

Conclusion

This chapter has tracked the movement and activities of a group of veteran soldiers who fought in Italy, North Africa, or Flanders before sailing to the Americas to take part in new conquest opportunities. For the most part, this cohort of men have not received great attention in

[685] Letter from Alonso de Mata to the King (Ciudad de los Angeles, 26 February 1552), in Paso y Troncoso, *Epistolario*, vol. 6, 144.
[686] See AGI, Patronato 169, N.1, A. 1531, R.4 (Toledo, 18 May 1561).
[687] Paz y Mélia, *Nobiliario de Conquistadores de Indias*: 313-15, 314.
[688] Only 145 individuals received this distinction from the King of Spain between 1525 and 1589, including 22 Native peoples (mostly Tlaxcalteca nobles). Some of the most notable conquistadors from Tenochtitlan to receive this honor were Pedro de Alvarado, Martín López, Juan Ochoa de Elejalde, Francisco de Montejo, and Diego de Ordaz, to name a few. On the Native peoples who received a coat of arms, see María Castañeda de La Paz, "Central Mexican Indigenous Coats of Arms and the Conquest of Mesoamerica," *Ethnohistory* 56, no. 1 (Winter, 2009): 125-161; and María Castañeda de La Paz and Miguel Luque Talaván, *Para que de ellos e de los quede memoria: La heráldica indígena novohispana del centro de México* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2021).

the historiography of early Latin America, and if they are brought up, they tend to be discussed only briefly, typically in a sentence or two. One of the main objectives of this chapter was to build on our understanding of this collection of individuals, illustrating how they played far more prominent roles in the early conquest wars than previously acknowledged. As men with extensive wartime experience in Europe or Africa, the soldados viejos were frequently entrusted with some of the most important tasks and responsibilities within the Cortés company, including as emissaries, military advisers, captains of the brigantines, or commanders of the artillery. And, when the Spanish-Aztec War concluded in 1521, they continued to help Spain extend its imperial grip in the Americas by participating in new expeditions of conquest. Among those who did not go off to fight in new areas, these men assumed important posts within early colonial society, serving as local magistrates, notaries, labor supervisors, and tribute collectors, to name a few. Given the chaotic ebbs and flows of the conquest era, the ability of the global conquistadors to occupy these posts brought much needed stability to settler society, helping to smoothen the transition between the conquest and colonial periods. Through their range of services as conquerors, administrators, politicians, settlers, and encomenderos, the global conquistadors contributed significantly to the formation of early Spanish American society.

By 1565, all of the global conquistadors who fought at Tenochtitlan had passed away, with the sole exception of Juan de Solís, said to have lived until 1582.[689] In the minds of these men, it is impossible to know whether their adventures in the Americas lived up to their initial expectations. Aside from Cervantes, Mata, and Segura, most of the global conquistadors never attained spectacular riches in the Indies, and nor received high forms of recognition for their services. In fact, quite a few of them later claimed in various documents to be destitute and poor

[689] Thomas, *Who's Who*, 122.

following the Spanish-Aztec War, including Mata, who claimed that he did not have enough bread to survive. Nonetheless, while the booty in the Indies surely proved disappointing, what these men did find in the Americas was ready employment, and a change of pace from soldiering opportunities in the Old World. In return for their services in the New, the majority of the global conquistadors received at least one encomienda, providing them with a steady source of income and a plot of land to live on. What's more, the fact that none of these men returned to Spain permanently after the war indicates that by and large, they perceived life in the Americas to be an improvement from what the Old World had to offer.

Chapter 5 contains material as it appears in Fabian, Kristian Joseph. "Masters of the Land: Native Ship and Canal Building During the Spanish-Aztec War." *The Americas* 81, no. 1 (2024): 1-37. The dissertation author was the sole author of this material.

Epilogue: Global Conquistadors on the Peripheries of Empire

This study ends, more or less, with the conquest of Tenochtitlan. But the movement of global conquistadors across the empire continued for decades to come. After the fall of the Aztec empire, a steady stream of veteran soldiers sailed to the Indies to enlist in new expeditions of conquest and exploration. These men, seasoned in the crucible of conflicts in Italy, Navarre, France, North Africa, and the Low Countries, brought with them valuable skills and expertise cultivated in diverse corners of the Old World. Their arrival in the Indies, and their circulation of knowledge to new areas of the realm, intensified the webs of connectivity that bound Europe, the Maghrib, and the Americas in the early modern period. This epilogue tells the story of three such veteran soldiers, emblematic of this 'new generation' of global conquistadors. It highlights their experiences in remote reaches of Spanish America, including Florida, Texas, Paraguay, Venezuela, Chile, and Peru, where they explored unfamiliar territory, conquered land, or administered vast spaces on behalf of the crown. When properly contextualized, their careers can help bridge the histories of some of the most far-flung regions of the empire, uniting realms as disparate as Chile and the Netherlands or Florida and Italy. Equally important, they reveal the continued significance of global conquistadors to the expansion of the early Spanish empire.

After the fall of Tenochtitlan, one of the most seasoned soldiers to venture to the Americas was Alvár Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, grandson of renowned conqueror Pedro de Vera. Like his eminent forebear, Cabeza de Vaca recognized in his youth that military service offered one of the best pathways to earn rewards and enhance social standing. During the War of the League of Cambrai, Cabeza de Vaca fought alongside the forces of the Holy League, from 1511 and 1513, as it clashed with France for control over portions of Italy. The Spaniard saw action at the siege of Mirandola, the battle of Bologna, and the bloody rout at Ravenna in which 10,000-

20,000 died.[690] In those engagements, Cabeza de Vaca experienced first-hand the austerity of soldiering, of vigorous campaigning, and the pangs of defeat and deprivation. His exposure to these rigors, as well as to new lands, enemies, and cultures, would prepare him for the obstacles awaiting him in the Americas. After departing Italy in 1513, shaken and "muy destroçado" (very broken) in the words of one witness, Cabeza de Vaca entered the service of the Duke of Medina Sidonia in Seville.[691] Here, he earned notable distinction during the 1520-21 Revolt of the Comuneros (Castilian citizens opposed to the administration of Emperor Charles V), during which time he aided the duke, a royalist leader, in recapturing the Alcazár of Seville from the rebels.[692] The Spaniard's services in this conflict distinguished him from his earlier efforts in Italy, namely because the revolt constituted a year-long threat to Castile's internal security, and occurred at a time when the royal treasury had been depleted by Charles V's enterprises abroad.[693] Cabeza de Vaca's dutiful services did not go unnoticed.[694]

In February of 1527, the crown appointed Cabeza de Vaca royal treasurer and first lieutenant of the Pánfilo de Narváez expedition to Florida.[695] His appointment to this high post, entailing both fiscal and martial duties, illustrated the competence of the Spaniard as an adept

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[690] Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 108.
[691] Testimony of Rodrigo León, in AGI, Justicia, 1131, 8A. Cabeza de Vaca served as a chamberlain, a position that entailed soldierly duties and overseeing the broader affairs within the ducal house.
[692] The Revolt of the Comuneros had its roots in the unpopular administration of Emperor Charles V, son of Juana "the Mad," who had been raised in Flanders with little knowledge of Castilian language or customs. When the monarch arrived in Spain in 1517, he brought with him an entourage of Flemish clerics and aristocrats and appointed them to high offices in Castile. This maneuver, along with the siphoning of Spanish wealth (clothes, bullion, jewelry) to the Netherlands, drew the ire of discontented Castilian citizens and urban nobles who launched a series of uprisings against the king. Elliot, *Imperial Spain*, 141-49.
[693] Cabeza de Vaca also helped liberate the city of Tordesillas from the comuneros in December, and fought at the battle of Villalar in April of 1521 that put an end to the insurrection. See Morris Bishop, *The Odyssey of Cabeza de Vaca* (New York: The Century Company, 1933), 10.
[694] Cabeza de Vaca additionally contributed to thwarting King François I's invasion of Navarre by fighting for Charles V in the battle of Puente de la Reina in 1521. Bishop, *Odyssey*, 10.
[695] As one might recall, Narváez was previously defeated by Cortés at the battle of Cempoala in 1520, and had been imprisoned in Veracruz for three years. Following his release, the military commander returned to Spain and was selected to lead the expedition to Florida. The main purpose of the enterprise was to reconnoiter the vast unexplored lands that lay beyond the northern boundaries of New Spain and Pánuco, stretching from the Florida Peninsula to the Pacific Coast, and to search for gold, silver, and other precious commodities in this region.

administrator and soldier, as well as the crown's continued reliance on hidalgos to carry out key leadership roles abroad. Nonetheless, the expedition would end in calamity for the conquistador.[696] After landing in southeastern Florida, Narváez instructed his on-land crew of 300 men to trek 30 to 45 miles northwest until they reached a desired port near Pánuco; the actual distance was approximately 1,500 miles.[697] As a result, Narváez's company became lost in the unmapped expanses of Florida and coastal Texas for nearly eight years, with Cabeza de Vaca being one of four ultimate survivors. While luck and fortune were certainly on the Spaniard's side, his survival does not appear to be entirely coincidental. The conquistador's decades of military service in Europe, accumulated on various fronts, readied him for the hardships and privation that he encountered on the frontiers of Spanish America.

Cabeza de Vaca eventually returned to Spain in 1537, and thereafter organized a petition to be considered for another royal appointment in the Americas.[698] His determination to return to the Indies, despite the setbacks he faced in Florida, illuminates an enduring pattern in Castilian society. Since the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, Castilian men-at-arms (especially hidalgos) long demonstrated a willingness to risk their lives in undertaking imperial roles, typically to augment their limited wealth and prestige. From the perspective of the crown, it was precisely these sorts of individuals that were needed to carry out its dangerous expansionist projects. The ability of Cabeza de Vaca to navigate multiple frontiers (in Florida, Iberia, and Italy) suggested to the monarchy that he could do the same in other precarious regions of the empire. It was seemingly for this reason, together with his distinguished résumé, that the crown appointed him

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[696] The conquistador later penned an account of the expedition and his journeys. See *The Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, eds., trans., and with an introduction by Rolena Adorno and Patrick Charles Pautz (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).
[697] Adorno and Pautz, *Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, 57.
[698] Adorno and Pautz, *Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, 24-25.

adelantado of the province of the Río de la Plata in 1540, an illustrious post based in the remote region of Asunción. Moreover, after relocating to this faraway province, Cabeza de Vaca led exploratory expeditions within the surrounding region and searched for possible overland routes to Peru. But due to maladministration, and a rebellion among his men, his tenure was ultimately revoked.[699] In 1545, the conquistador was forced to return to Spain, where he was tried for multiple offenses including malfeasance in office, abusing Native peoples, and elevating his own heraldic banner instead of the king's.[700]

Among the charges brought against Cabeza de Vaca, the hoisting of his armorial flag would have been particularly concerning to the crown. In this period, the king's royal banner was a symbol of the power, authority, and control that he held over his territorial possessions. By raising his heraldic standard instead of Charles V's, Cabeza de Vaca was in essence asserting his own sovereignty over that of the king. This act would have been viewed as a grave offense, as Cabeza de Vaca was a direct representative of the crown, and was expected to uphold the king's authority—not undercut it. It was also worrisome given the lengthy history of disobedience against royal authority in Castile. This was perhaps best exemplified by the Gran Capitán, who committed a number of insubordinate acts against the crown while serving as viceroy of Naples, most notably ignoring royal mandates to return to Spain. Military leaders like Hernán Cortés, Cristóbal de Olid, and Pedro de Alvarado later followed suit, defying royal orders at various points in time by carrying out their own private aims in Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala. The unruliness of Spain's imperial agents was a recurring problem throughout the empire, and one that the monarchy hoped to diminish—if not curtail altogether. It was perhaps for this reason

[699] Over a thousand pages of documentation surrounding his governance in the Río de La Plata can be found at the AGI in *Justicia* 1131.
[700] Adorno and Pautz, *Narrative of Cabeza de Vaca*, 4.

why the Royal Council of the Indies administered a hefty punishment to Cabeza de Vaca, seemingly to send a message to his peers about the consequences of insubordination. Back in Spain, Cabeza de Vaca was stripped of his offices and titles, forever banished from the Indies, and condemned to serve the king in Oran at his own expense. While his sentence was later reduced, the loss of his prestigious titles remained intact—a fate strikingly reminiscent of his grandfather Pedro de Vera, whose governorship of Gran Canaria was rescinded in 1491.

Despite Cabeza de Vaca's fall from grace, his career still served as a potent illustration to his contemporaries. It signaled the wealth of opportunities available to early modern soldiers in the Americas, and namely those willing to brave the hazards of conquest and resettlement. In the decades to come, countless veteran soldiers would emulate his example, traversing hazardous seas and vast distances to seek their fortunes abroad.

One soldier to mimic the path of Cabeza de Vaca was Pedro de Valdivia, a conquistador born in the province of Badajoz, Extremadura around 1500. The Spaniard began his military career fighting in the Netherlands and Milan, where he purportedly rendered great services to the crown: "I served Your Majesty in Italy, as I was obliged, in conquering the State of Milan and imprisoning the king of France in the times of Próspero Colonna and the Marquis of Pescara."[701] Valdivia later relocated to South America in 1534 to serve under Francisco Pizarro, the famed conqueror of Peru. In the faraway Andes, Valdivia became actively involved in the military contests in this region and its surrounding parts, participating in campaigns in Venezuela, as well as the wars in Peru against Manco Inca (son of Huayna Capac, the eleventh emperor of the Inca Empire). In 1538, he additionally fought in the bloody civil war that erupted in Cuzco between

[701] Pedro de Valdivia, "Carta al emperador Carlos V, 15 October 1550," in *Cartas de Pedro de Valdivia que tratan del descubrimiento y conquista de Chile*, eds. José Toribio Medina and Jaime Eyzaguirre (Santiago de Chile: Fondo Histórico y Bibliográfico José Toribio Medina, 1953), 147. Quote cited in Martínez, *Front Lines,* 131.

the rival conquistadors, Diego de Almagro and the Pizarro brothers.[702] According to Valdivia, Pizarro trusted his "experience in the matters of war," and appointed him *maestre de campo* ("master of the battlefield"), a rank inferior only to that of captain general.[703] This would suggest that Pizarro valued Valdivia's military expertise gathered on the fronts of Italy and Flanders, and believed his European training might provide an edge in this Andean conflict. With Valdivia's aid, the Pizarrists defeated Almagro and his supporters at the Battle of Las Salinas on 6 April 1538—though civil strife between the two factions persisted for years to come.[704]

In 1541, following the death of Francisco Pizarro, Valdivia seized the opportunity to carve out his own territorial enclave in the Andes. Backed by the *cabildo* (municipal council) of Santiago, Valdivia appointed himself Royal Governor of Chile in 1541—a maneuver that the crown provisionally approved.[705] From his base of operations in Santiago, Valdivia led successful campaigns of conquest in and around the Biobío region, and founded several cities including Valdivia, Concepción, and La Imperial by 1552. Valdivia's semi-autonomous actions in this region, reminiscent of Cortés's in Central Mexico, underscore the continued importance of private initiative to the expansion of the empire. As during the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, the monarchy depended on ambitious conquistadors to extend its imperial influence into new realms, oftentimes rewarding their successful conquests with titles and jurisdiction over local affairs. However, like many other imperial ventures, the Spanish conquest of Chile relied greatly on military force, coercion, and violence to achieve its objectives. Indeed, many of Valdivia's campaigns involved brutal tactics such as the destruction of Indigenous villages, the enslavement

[702] Martínez, *Front Lines*, 131.
[703] Valdivia, *Cartas de Pedro de Valdivia*, 97.
[704] On this engagement, see Paul Stewart, "The Battle of Las Salinas, Peru, and Its Historians," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 19, no. 3 (1988): 407-434.
[705] The crown officially confirmed Valdivia's status as Royal Governor of Chile in 1549 in recognition of his services in this region, which comprised most of present-day Chile and southern parts of Argentina.

of Native peoples (including women and children), and the forced relocation of local Indigenous communities. Valdivia's campaigns exemplify the violent methods employed by conquistadors, and European empires more broadly, to subjugate Native peoples and assert control over their territories.

Despite Valdivia's earlier successes in the Biobío, the conquistador would experience a major setback on a 1553 expedition to Tucapel. While en route to suppress an Indigenous uprising in the Arauco region, the conquistador was ambushed and captured by the Mapuche (the Native peoples of south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina). There are multiple versions of how Valdivia died, though the sixteenth-century chronicler Pedro Mariño de Lobera gives us one colorful rendition:

> The Indians were with extraordinary joy seeing the great captain of the Spaniards in their hands, and had many celebrations with him out of mockery and ridicule. As a finishing touch, they brought a burning pot of gold and presented it to him, saying: 'well, since you are such a friend of gold, fill yourself with it now, and so that you can keep it safe, open your mouth and drink it.' They did as they said, forcing him to drink the molten liquid to his death.[706]

While the exact details of Valdivia's death remain uncertain, his demise would have nonetheless been a satisfying moment for the Mapuche. The Spanish military leader led a series of bloody campaigns that left a trail of destruction through the Arauco region. From the perspective of the Native peoples, Valdivia's capture and subsequent death not only represented possible retribution for his actions, but also a symbol of Indigenous resistance. With this victory, the Mapuche demonstrated that they were capable of resisting Spanish expansionism and defending their territory against European encroachment.[707] Their military defiance stands in for the resilience of

[706] Lobera, *Crónica del Reino de Chile*, ed. Francisco Esteve Barba (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1960), 337.
[707] See Vincent Clément, "Conquest, Natives, and Forest: How Did the Mapuches Succeed in Halting the Spanish Invasion of Their Land (1540–1553, Chile)?," *War in History* 22, no. 4 (2015): 428-447.

Indigenous communities across the early modern world to contest powerful empires, and still maintain varying degrees of sovereignty and autonomy.

Just as the Indies continued to attract veteran soldiers like Valdivia and Cabeza de Vaca, it correspondingly repelled those from the upper echelons of Spanish society. At the time, most aristocrats in Spain understood that the dangers of the Indies generally outweighed its potential benefits. The transatlantic voyage was long and perilous, and those that managed to survive the ocean crossing needed to contend with unfamiliar geographies, tropical maladies, and the threat of Native violence. Only those from the lower stratums of Spanish society were daring enough to endure the hardships of relocation, along with lesser nobles desirous of attaining greater wealth and distinction. Needless to say, there were exceptions to this pattern.

Though rare, some high nobles undertook the journey to the Americas in the sixteenth century as a means of augmenting their modest resources. One example is Don Alonso Enriquez de Guzmán, a knight of Santiago, who found himself desperately impoverished in 1534 and traveled to Lima to restore his fortunes: "My intention is to bring back [to Spain] 4,000 ducats or 40,000, depending on the lay of the land. If it turns out 4,000, I'll take a thousand and repair my houses and increase my flock of sheep…If it turns out to be 40,000 ducats, things will go as they desire…"[708] Guzmán's decision to relocate to Peru set him apart from most other high nobles of the period.[709] Rather than risk one's life journeying to the Americas, the majority of eminent aristocrats preferred to stay in Spain and enjoy the relative safeties of the metropole.[710] Guzmán, on the other hand, apparently had a knack for adventure. When about twenty-one years old, the

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[708] As cited in Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532-1560: A Social History*, 2nd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 46.
[709] This noble later penned an autobiography of his life, known as *Libro de la vida y costumbres de don Alonso Enríquez de Guzmán*. The original manuscript is preserved in the National Library of Spain, and was published for the first time in 1862. It is also published in *CODOIN*, vol. 85 (Madrid: Imprenta de Miguel Ginesta, 1886).
[710] Alonso de Guzmán was born in Seville in 1499 to a family of illustrious heritage. He was a descendant of King Henry II of Castile, and linked to the great houses of Medina Sidonia and Niebla.

noble marched with the army of Hugo de Moncada on the sandy plains of Djerba in North Africa. He had been to the Italian cities of Naples, Sicily, and Rome, and fought against the *Germanías* ("Brotherhood") rebels in Mallorca in 1523.[711] The Spaniard had clearly exhibited great intrepidity in his youth, and was seemingly unafraid to undertake another odyssey to augment his limited fortunes.

When the residents of Lima learned of Guzmán's arrival, they threw a celebration in honor of the momentous occasion—after all, a noble of this stature was rarely seen in those parts.[712] As Guzmán drew closer to the city, the entire town went on to receive him, while Francisco Pizarro showered him with a generous sum of 2,000 pesos to subsidize his expenditures.[713] Despite the show of good faith, Guzmán would ultimately turn his back on Pizarro in the years to come. During the civil war that gripped the Pizarrists and Almagrists, Guzmán emerged as an ardent supporter of Almagro, and was ultimately imprisoned and banished to Spain. Back on the peninsula, the noble penned a series of fiery statements addressed to the monarchy aimed at restoring his honor and liberties:

> For the offenses that have been done to me, especially a man who has done so many services, [I write] with anger, in the name of my lineage…I was captain of the Germans in the taking of Tornay when the emperor won it from the King of France, and of 500 men when I helped Don Manuel de Gurrea, Viceroy of Mallorca, recover this kingdom in the service of Your Majesty. With the same number of people, I spent thirteen months defending the island of Ibiza from the Moors and the French. I went on to conquer Djerba from the Moors, and defended the land of Peru.[714]

Guzmán's pleas won the sympathy of the crown. The noble was granted his freedom relatively swiftly, unlike his companion Hernando Pizarro, who was forced to reside in the Castle of La

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[711] Alonso de Guzmán, *Libro de la vida*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 85, 16-27, 40-48.
[712] Lockhart notes that there would have been less than ten "dons" in the entire country. *Spanish Peru*, 45.
[713] Lockhart, *Spanish Peru*, 45.
[714] Alonso de Guzmán, *Libro de la vida*, in *CODOIN*, vol. 85, 328.

Mota for the remainder of his life.[715] Even so, Guzmán was still subjected to the humiliations of returning to Castile in chains, a situation that bore resemblance to that of Cabeza de Vaca. Indeed, both Spaniards looked to the Americas to improve their lot, but due to adversity, misfortune, or internal fighting, were sent back to Spain forcibly and compelled to defend their honor. At the end of the day, these men were merely instruments of empire. While their services to the crown were valued, they were not indispensable, and could still be discarded if their interests diverged from the crown's.

When taken together, the biographies of Guzmán, Valdivia, and Cabeza de Vaca offer more than just intriguing snapshots of early modern men-at-arms. They reveal how after the fall of Tenochtitlan, global conquistadors continued to play important roles in Spain's imperial expansion. Between 1520 and 1555, this trio of men participated in expeditions to distinct lands—Djerba, Mallorca, Tornay, Florida, Venezuela, Bolivia, Peru, and Chile—and helped to map out, conquer, defend, or administer parts of those territories. In return for their services, they often won high imperial posts or monetary compensation from the crown. Their successes, often overshadowing their failures, carved out a trail that many conquistadors would follow.[716]

Conclusions and Avenues for Potential Scholarship

This dissertation has centered on the lives of conquistadors who participated in multiple theaters of Spanish expansionism. Since the medieval period in Spain, restive lords such as the Cid and the Duke of Medina Sidonia traversed the frontier lands of Iberia, leading privately

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[715] Pedro de Cieza de León, *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble Cook, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 143.
[716] Indeed, when Cabeza de Vaca returned to Spain after his expedition to Florida, his report of the various lands and people he encountered generated so much excitement that it prompted two subsequent expeditions to this region: one led by Hernando de Soto (1539) and the other by Francisco Vásquez de Coronado (1540).

financed campaigns against Muslims and Christians to enhance their honor, glory, and prestige. Their most notable actions came against the Islamic cities of Valencia and Gibraltar, which they seized without royal backing and governed in their own names. These exploits created a template for how to acquire power and riches through individual initiative, establishing a precedent that subsequent generations of Castilian conquistadors aimed to emulate. In 1482, the Marquis of Cádiz continued this tradition by capturing the Muslim fortress of Alhama with his own private army, thus igniting the Granada War. Afterwards, he and other southern nobles worked in concert to complete the lengthy conquest of the Islamic emirate. They furnished seigneurial troops to the campaigns, served as prominent captains, loaned money to the crown, and negotiated the terms of surrender. Their invaluable contributions, made during a period of tightening restrictions against the nobility, illustrated the broader significance of aristocrats to the formation of the early modern state. Further, they ensured that nobles would be kept around for future imperial enterprises.

Following the conclusion of the conquest, many of the lords who fought at Granada ventured into the Mediterranean basin, where they assumed pivotal responsibilities as imperial captains and administrators. The renowned diplomat, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, commanded Spanish battalions in Italy and the Levant, and secured crucial victories over French and Ottoman adversaries. His kinsman, Diego Fernández de Córdoba, conquered and administered a collection of territories in North Africa, as did the great southern magnate, Juan de Guzmán. Though not a "Granadine" fighter, the pirate-turned-conquistador Pedro Navarro added to those triumphs, defeating militarily adept opponents in every corner of the Mediterranean, including in Italy, the Levant, and the Maghrib. What allowed these men to succeed in these efforts, above all else, was the military, diplomatic, and administrative

experience that they previously gathered on the frontiers of Spain. The accumulation of skills relevant to conquest and colonization gave them a tool kit to enact empire, enabling them to excel in and navigate more effectively new frontier areas in the Mediterranean. Through their collective efforts, Spain grew greatly in wealth and influence in the early decades of the sixteenth century, ascending as a dominant power in the central and western Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, in the eastern Atlantic, two little known hidalgos took up the task of conquering the final islands in the Canaries. The first, Pedro de Vera, seized the island of Gran Canaria in 1483, while his former companion-at-arms, Alonso de Lugo, captured La Palma and Tenerife by 1496. While both men rendered noteworthy services in Granada and Northwest Africa, too, it was their actions in the Canary Islands that proved most consequential to the rise of Imperial Spain. With possession of the archipelago, the crown now controlled a vital staging point in the Atlantic Ocean that could facilitate the movement of various personnel to the Americas. Among those who capitalized on its strategic position were veteran soldiers from the wars in Europe and the Mediterranean. Between 1519 and 1521, at least two dozen men who served in Italy, Flanders, or Africa joined Cortés in the battle for Tenochtitlan. Due to their wartime experience in the Old World, these men were entrusted with critical posts within the compañía, including as artillerymen, emissaries, advisers, or captains. Once the conquest concluded, this group of men continued to play vital roles in extending Spain's influence in the Indies. Of the fourteen veteran soldiers that survived the final siege, the majority went off to campaign in unconquered regions, such as Oaxaca, New Galicia, Pánuco, Guatemala, and Honduras. Others transitioned to more peaceful occupations, serving as local magistrates and tax collectors in colonial New Spain. Through their multipronged services as conquerors, settlers,

and officials, these men helped expand and consolidate Spain's imperial presence in the Americas, laying the foundation for a soon-to-be sprawling overseas empire.

In scrutinizing the lives of Iberian conquerors, this dissertation has sought to make several important contributions and interventions to the historiography of conquest, empire, conquistadors, and transnational studies of the early modern world. For one, the study of global conquistadors adds to a growing literature that has underscored the importance of peripatetic personnel to empire-building. Over the course of several decades, the men of this study circulated the globe and stockpiled an array of valuable skills and expertise. This gathering of knowledge and its transmission to new settings allowed them to excel in and exert greater influence over various imperial conflicts, especially when compared to their more inert, stationary counterparts. Second, the experiences of this group of men challenge traditional notions of imperial expansion as primarily the byproduct of a powerful, centralized early modern state. While the monarchy undoubtedly played important roles in the forging of empire, it largely oversaw its expansionist efforts from afar. It was the services of mobile conquistadors on the ground, rather than kings or administrators in faraway palaces, that gathered and consolidated the initial pieces of the empire. Third, the careers of the global conquistadors have allowed us to capture a better sense of the interconnectivity of empire. For a long time, scholars have envisioned Imperial Spain as a constellation of discrete and detached territories. Situated in distinct geohistorical contexts, these lands, upon first glance, were united only nominally by their attachment to a common metropole. Yet, this dissertation has suggested that we view the spaces of the empire as intimately connected, particularly through the activities of conquistadors who crisscrossed them. Between 1480 and 1521, the movement of the global conquistadors across

Iberia, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic formed webs of connectivity that bound the early empire together, helping to unite its disparate territories into a single unified entity.

The study of global conquerors has uncovered other possibilities for future scholarship. Given the temporal restraints of this dissertation, the exploration of conquistadors has been limited to those that fought in the earliest phases of imperial expansion. Apart from prominent figures like Cabeza de Vaca, Valdivia, and a select few others, relatively little is known about the veteran soldiers who engaged in later episodes of conquest, especially in more peripheral areas of Latin America such as Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela, Chile, and Argentina.[717] Similarly, even less has been written about the conquistador-combatants who journeyed to the Pacific during the early modern period. While Mawson's article on Spanish soldiers in the Philippines fills this void to an extent, its emphasis rests on the seventeenth century and is not concerned with the early stages of conquest.[718] An investigation into the social histories of the first combatants in the Philippines and their connections to Latin America would contribute greatly to our understanding of Spain's Pacific colony. Equally important, such research would enable scholars to build on the limited scholarship that has sought to connect the early modern Latin American and Pacific worlds.[719]

Aside from investigating the careers of other veteran soldiers, the study of families can provide another valuable mechanism to structure and tell imperial history.[720] Interestingly, many of the subjects of this dissertation had forefathers, relatives, or descendants who also made

[717] On the conquistadors of Peru, see Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972).
[718] Mawson, "Convicts or *Conquistadores*."
[719] Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr L. Frank, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Seijas, *Chinos*; Diego Javier Luis, *The First Asians in the Americas: A Transpacific History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2024); and Kristie Patricia Flannery, *Piracy and the Making of the Spanish Pacific World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2024).
[720] See Liang, *Family and Empire*.

critical contributions to the Spanish empire. We already know of Pedro de Vera's grandson, Cabeza de Vaca, who took part in a number of imperial enterprises that rivaled, if not exceeded, that of his forebear. But there were various other individuals, too. Alonso de Lugo's children, Pedro and Fernando, participated in a series of entradas from the Canary Islands to the neighboring coast of Atlantic Africa over the course of the 1510s.[721] Several decades later, Pedro traveled to the Indies at the age of fifty-nine to join an expedition backed by two Florentine investors, Cristóbal Francesquini and Juan Alberto Gerardin, though he died shortly thereafter, sometime in 1536. The Guzmán lineage, regarded as one of the most eminent families of Iberia, was perhaps most deeply involved in Spain's empire-building. Over the span of four decades, members of the ducal house helped conquer Gibraltar, Granada, Tenerife, Melilla, and Cazaza. They additionally contributed to Columbus's first voyage to the Americas, outfitting him with two caravels, a crew, and several months' worth of provisions. Several generations later, the crown selected the seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia to command the ill-fated Spanish Armada, sent to England in 1588 to overthrow the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I.[722] When merged together, the stories of these individuals reveal how members of the same lineage, over the course of multiple generations, rendered vital services to the monarchy in a collection of discrete lands. Their collective histories can provide an unconventional, albeit useful framework for narrating how the embryonic empire came to be formed.

As for the global conquistadors of this study, some of them are still remembered in Spain for their imperial services in Europe and Africa (see figures 2, 3, 4, 5). While these monuments can serve as symbols of national identity, cultural heritage, and local memory, they are also

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[721] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica*, vol. 1, 414-17.
[722] See Peter Pierson, *Commander of the Armada: The Seventh Duke of Medina Sidonia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Geoffrey Parker, *The Grand Strategy of Philip II* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); and Robert Hutchinson, *The Spanish Armada* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2014).

contested sites, reflecting ongoing debates about the complicated legacy of conquistadors as agents of empire.

Figure 2: Palacio de San Telmo, Seville. In the old town district of Seville, a statue of Rodrigo Ponce de León (the Marquis of Cádiz) rests atop the Palace of San Telmo, situated alongside Bartolomé de las Casas, Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, and other famous figures from the epoch. Photo by Kristian Fabian (May 2022).

Figure 3: Statue of the Marquis of Cádiz atop the Palacio de San Telmo. Photo by Kristian Fabian (May 2022).

Figure 4: “Monumento al Gran Capitán.” In the Plaza de Las Tendillas in Córdoba, an equestrian statue of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba figures prominently in the center of the square. Photo by Kristian Fabian (January 2022).

Figure 5: "Monumento a Pedro de Estopiñán." In Morocco, a statue of conquistador Pedro Estopiñán (a vassal of the Duke of Medina Sidonia) still stands in the historic sector of Melilla. To this day, Spain retains control of the ancient Moroccan city, a remnant of the duke's private conquest conducted over 525 years ago. Wikimedia Commons contributors, "File:PEDRO DE ESTOPIÑÁN.jpg," *WikimediaCommons,* https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:PEDRO_DE_ESTOPI%C3%91%C3%81N.jpg&oldid=804327026 (accessed 10 May 2024).

Glossary

Acostamiento: salaried vassals subject to military obligations, yet disbanded after each campaign.

Adalide: scout and guide.

Adelantado: governor.

Al-Andalus: the Arab term for the territory in Iberia under Muslim rule.

Alcaide: warden; overseer of a local jail.

Alcalde mayor: deputy governor.

Alcalde ordinario: municipal magistrate.

Alférez mayor: chief standard bearer.

Alguacil mayor: chief constable.

Altepetl: Native city state; ethnic polity.

Audiencia: high court and supervising body to a governor or viceroy.

Caballero: gentleman.

Caballero hidalgo: noble knight.

Cabildo: municipal council.

Capitulación: royal contract.

Carta: letter.

Castellano: a gold coin minted during the reign of King Henry IV of Castile (1454-74).

Comendador: military officer.

Compañía: company.

Contador: accountant.

Contador mayor: senior accountant.

Corregidor: local magistrate and administrator.

Crónica: chronicle.

Dobla: medieval Spanish gold coin. Its value was twice that of a gold maravedí (originally referred to as the "double maravedí"). It was eventually replaced by the ducado.

Ducado: gold coin used as the standard coin denomination throughout the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile (1469-1516).

Encomienda: grant by which Spanish settlers received the right by the crown to extract tribute and labor obligations from certain Indigenous communities.

Encomendero: owner of an encomienda.

Entrada: expedition intended for conquest, exploration, raiding, or trade.

Escalador: soldier employed to scale the walls of fortresses.

Escribano: notary.

Guanarteme: Indigenous ruler of Gran Canaria.

Gobernador: governor.

Hermandad: "brotherhood"; a local militia and judicial tribunal in medieval Castilian towns designed to help preserve peace.

Hidalgo: petty noble.

Hispania: the Roman term for the land that stretched from southwestern France to the southern tip of Spain.

Interrogatorio: questionnaire; interrogatory.

Jinete: light cavalryman.

Juro: perpetual bond.

Mayordomo: chief steward.

Maravedí: medieval and early modern Spanish coin, originally minted in gold during the eleventh century. Its value decreased over time, and by the late medieval period, it was a low-denomination coin used for everyday transactions.

Mencey: Indigenous ruler of Tenerife.

Merced: grant or privilege.

Mudejar: Muslim resident living in Spain under Christian rule, though still allowed to maintain their religion.

Notario público: public notary.

Peso: silver coin. This was the standard monetary unit used in colonial Spanish America.

Poblador: settler.

Presidio: outpost or fortress.

Primogénito: first-born son.

Probanza de méritos y servicios: proof of merits and services.

Reales: silver coin used throughout the height of the Spanish empire.

Reconquista: a lengthy period in Spanish history, between 711 and 1492, involving the intermittent reclaiming of territory lost to Muslims in the early eighth century.

Regidor: municipal councilman.

Relacion: account.

Repartimiento: a Spanish labor system in which Indigenous peoples were assigned to colonists to provide forced labor and tribute.

Residencia: an inquiry into the conduct of an official while in office, carried out at the conclusion of their term.

Segundogénito: second-born son.

Servicio: service.

Soldado viejo: veteran soldier.

Taifa: literally "faction"; it refers to the fragmentation of the Caliphate of Córdoba in the early eleventh century into numerous smaller kingdoms, or taifas, each ruled by its own Muslim dynasty.

Talas: a Castilian tactic in the late medieval period involving the systematic and widespread destruction of Granada's standing crops and arboriculture.

Tesorero: treasurer.

Tierra Firme: Spanish mainland.

Vecino: municipal resident.

Veedor: financial adviser; inspector.

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