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Neither Paid Nor Forced

The Myth of the King's Army

> If the Romans subjugated so many provinces, it was with greater or equal numbers of people, in known territories, provided with the usual sustenance, and with paid captains and armies. But our Spaniards . . . were never more than two or three hundred and even less. . . . And the many times they traveled, they were neither paid nor forced but went of their own will and at their own cost.
>
> —Francisco de Jerez (1534)

> Then a few days after [Governor Pedrarias] died, we got news of how Governor Francisco Pizarro was coming to be governor of this kingdom of New Castile. And so, hearing this news and having few prospects in Nicaragua, we came to this district, where there's more gold and silver than iron in Biscay.
>
> —Gaspar de Marquina (1533)

> I gave to the *adelantado* [my husband, Francisco de Montejo] a great quantity of money for the costs of the people and fleet that came to these provinces for their conquest and pacification, which assistance the *adelantado* took and thus carried out that conquest, as is common knowledge.
>
> —Doña Beatriz de Herrera (1554)

When Columbus returned on his second voyage to the Caribbean island that he had named Hispaniola, he was accompanied by a Spanish army. At least, this is the impression given by a dramatic scene in the 1992 movie *1492: Conquest of Paradise*, in which Spanish soldiers line up on the beach in disciplined ranks, in uniforms and with standard-issue weapons, banners waving, awaiting a drum roll before marching forward.[1]

This same impression is repeated in movies, illustrations, textbooks, and scholarly publications. According to this common portrait, the first Spanish invaders and settlers pursued careers "through the military" and constitute "forces" that "march" under the "command" of their captains, who plan and execute "military operations." All are part of "Spain's war machine." Most persistently, they are "soldiers." Cortés sets off with "three hundred foot soldiers." He talks to "his soldiers," and he gives away his interpreter and lover, Malinche, "to one of his soldiers." In addition to the predominance of military terminology to describe Spanish expeditions and the ubiquitous use of the term "soldier" to describe the conquerors, the Spanish royal state is typically granted a monolithic, directive role in Spanish expansion.[2] The sum of all this is what I have called the "myth of the king's army."

In the eyewitness account by Francisco de Jerez of the 1532 events at Cajamarca—the Pizarro-Atahuallpa encounter and subsequent massacre of Andeans—the conquistador reminds his readers that the Spaniards did *not* constitute an army. Jerez's point of reference was not the Spanish army, for such a thing was still ill defined even in Europe in the 1530s, but the Roman army of ancient times. The triumph of the Pizarro-led Spaniards, in what Jerez most prematurely calls "the conquest of Peru," is thus presented as even more extraordinary and impressive precisely because it was not the achievement of "paid captains and armies."[3]

Other accounts by Spaniards who participated in Conquest campaigns confirm Jerez's assertion. For example, some modern historians who refer to the "soldiers" who invaded the Mexica empire quote the letters written by Cortés himself, thereby lending apparent authenticity to the use of the term. But the word always turns out to have been inserted by historians or by Cortés's English translators; where the Pagden edition has "three hundred foot soldiers," Cortés himself writes *trescientos peones*, "300 men on foot."[4] Cortés not only avoids the word "soldier" but reveals in his letters to the king, despite his efforts to portray himself as firmly in charge, that the men following him are as much a motley bunch of individuals as Jerez's compatriots at Cajamarca would be.

If the conquistadors themselves made it clear in the 1520s and 1530s that no armies were sent by the king of Spain to the Americas during these decades, what is the origin of the myth? Are we simply influenced by our own senses of what modern armies are like? No doubt this has much to do with the perpetuation of the myth. We are accustomed to legal, armed activity being the monopoly of highly institutionalized national forces. Understanding sixteenth-century Spanish expeditions requires a leap of imagination.

But the myth also has roots in military developments in Spain in the mid-to-late sixteenth century and the changes in terminology that accompanied those developments. The 1615 illustration of Atahuallpa's seizure at the top of Figure 5 seems to contradict Jerez's eyewitness description and show the men of Cajamarca as soldiers. In fact, tracking the use of *soldado*, the Spanish term for "soldier," is revealing. Cortés does not use it in the 1520s, nor does Pedro de Alvarado writing of his invasion of Guatemala in the same decade, nor does it appear anywhere in the official 64-page report of the division of gold and silver among the men at Cajamarca in 1533 (or in a 1557 copy of that report).[5] In the account of the Conquest of Yucatan by the Franciscan friar Diego de Landa, the phrase *soldados españoles* appears just once. As the surviving version of the account is a compilation of excerpts and summaries made in the late seventeenth century, this could be a later addition. However, as Landa's original, long-lost manuscript was written around 1566, the single use of "soldiers" could also reflect the gradual shift in terminology and Spanish perceptions of who conquistadors were.[6] In one collection of letters written by conquistadors and other Spanish settlers in the Americas between 1520 and 1595, only one of the 36 documents uses the word "soldier." Significantly it was written relatively late and by a new arrival—in 1556 by a Spanish woman, doña Isabel de Guevara, in the recently founded town of Asunción, Paraguay.[7]

Fig. 5. Title page to the sixth volume of Antonio de Herrera's Historia General de los Hechos de los Castellanos *(1615).*

Bernal Díaz uses *soldado* often in his narrative of the Conquest of Mexico, but his book was drafted around 1570, finished in 1576, and edited for its first publication in 1632.[8] By this time, a century after Jerez had written of the events at Cajamarca, the conquistadors were well on the way to becoming soldiers. They certainly looked the part in Herrera's title-page illustrations (see Figure 5), and in the Conquest paintings that were fashionable in seventeenth-century Mexico. In Figure 6, for example, Cortés appears at the head of a fully armored and well-organized military force that includes galleons, cavalry, and artillery. Conquistadors were soldiers and nothing else when Ilarione da Bergamo heard of the Conquest from Spaniards in Mexico in the 1760s,[9] by which time

engravings and paintings of Columbus and Spanish conquistadors routinely showed them in full armor, backed by uniformed soldiers.[10] In the nineteenth century the terminology of "soldier" and "army" was unquestioned (even though a close read of Prescott's histories, based as they were in large part on early colonial accounts, reveals a wealth of evidence as to the true nature of the conquerors). In the early twentieth century, books on the Conquest tended to include illustrations that further perpetuated the myth. For example, the 1923 frontispiece to Francisco de Icaza's "biographical dictionary" of the conquistadors depicts the first settlers coming ashore as a unit of professional soldiers with standard-issue dress and equipment.[11]

The gradual adoption of *soldado* in the late sixteenth century, and the assumption that soon followed that the early conquistadors were soldiers, related to broader shifts in the way Europeans waged war. Significantly it was the Spaniards—and close behind them their archenemies of the day, the French—who led the way in creating what historians have come to call the "military revolution." This revolution took many forms. For one, the size of military forces grew dramatically; whereas Ferdinand and Isabella had taken Granada in 1492 with 60,000 men, their grandson Charles V besieged the German city of Metz in 1552 with 150,000. By the end of the century, Spanish (and French) armies had again more than doubled in size.

Fig. 6. "Veracruz N2": The arrival of Cortés in Veracruz and the reception by Moctezuma's ambassadors. The second painting in the Strickland/Kislak Conquista de México *series, Mexican School, seventeenth century. Cortés, Bernal Díaz, and Marina (or Malinche) are identified by number.*

Furthermore, developments in artillery meant that numbers of guns, tonnage of gunpowder used, and gunner numbers doubled three times over during the century. Artillery was just one aspect of the revolution in firearm technology and the tactics and strategy with which weapons were used. Finally, campaigns grew longer as well as larger and more complex, so that war became a permanent state of affairs; there were just nine years of peace in sixteenth-century Europe. Created by Castilian expansionism, Spain had only just become a loosely defined nation at the end of the fifteenth century. Yet within decades, Spain's Hapsburg rulers had acquired a European empire stretching from Italy to the Netherlands to the Canary Islands. Thus because Spain was not the only concern of its Hapsburg kings, they were obliged to maintain multiple, large forces—that were dedicated well into the seventeenth century to crushing French, Dutch, English, and German Protestant opposition to Hapsburg hegemony over Europe.

All of this might be taken to show that the conquistadors really were soldiers in a Spanish war machine. But this was not so. During the foundational decades of Spanish expansion, from the first Caribbean settlements of the 1490s to the spread of conquest expeditions throughout much of the American mainland in the 1530s, the military revolution was still in its genesis. Most of the important technological changes—the invention of the musket, the use of volley-fire techniques; the building of faster, larger, and better-armed ships—would not occur until the second half of the century. And while the numbers of men at arms grew dramatically in the sixteenth century, that growth was even greater in the seventeenth. By 1710 there were 1.3 million Europeans at arms.

Perhaps most significantly, only in the seventeenth century were permanent, professional armies created of the kind that we associate with the term "army" today. Such armies were loyal to a state, rather than an individual leader. They evolved as nation-states came into being and concepts of citizenship took shape. It was thus not until long after the heyday of the conquistadors that the European states, Spain included, achieved the level of centralization and institutionalization to be able to field forces in which the majority of men were trained, salaried, permanent, veteran soldiers with uniforms and standard-issue weapons. Even then, this was an ideal by no means always realized. [12]

In addition, these changes were driven by wars in Europe and it was there that professional armies developed and changes were implemented. In the sixteenth century, Spain lacked the resources to dispatch large forces and significant quantities of weapons across the Atlantic. The formal fleet system linking Seville to the American colonies was not well established until the 1550s. It also lacked the motive to do so, as serious European competition in the Americas did not develop

until the next century. Furthermore, Spain's involvement in European conflicts was increasingly complex and challenging during the sixteenth century. Spain's response to the tactical, logistical, and technological demands of these conflicts has been hailed by military historians as remarkable and revolutionary. But Spanish conquest endeavors in the Americas were peripheral to this process and cannot be attributed to Spain's admittedly foundational contributions to the military revolution in Europe.[13]

Finally, Spaniards soon learned that the New World required different military methods. In his 1599 book, *The Armed Forces and Description of the Indies*, the Spanish captain Bernardo de Vargas Machuca argued that in the Americas the patterns and practices of European warfare were irrelevant. Called by one prominent military historian "the first manual of guerrilla warfare ever published," the treatise proposed that linear formations, hierarchical units, and permanent garrisons be abandoned in favor of small, covert fighting units dedicated to search-and-destroy missions carried out over several years.[14]

Vargas Machuca seemed unaware that much of what he was advocating had already been common practice among Spaniards in the Americas for a century. Cortés's 500 men and the 168 at Cajamarca were relatively large companies of conquistadors. Beyond the central regions of Mesoamerica and Peru, most expeditions comprised less than 100 Spaniards (almost always outnumbered by African slaves and servants and by Native American "allies"). Their tactics included display violence and the treacherous treatment of native rulers. Search-and-destroy threats were usually made and often carried out. Furthermore, when Spanish imperial authorities did begin to establish a network of permanent garrisons and other features of a professional standing army in the seventeenth century, their purpose was not to enforce colonial rule over Native Americans but to defend the empire from English, French, and Dutch pirates. Nor did the descendents of conquistadors man such units, which were overwhelmingly black or *pardo* militias—that is, small companies of enslaved and free Africans and free "coloreds" (men of mixed Spanish-African descent).[15]

In short, the Spanish Conquest was not carried out by soldiers sent by the king, as the conquistadors themselves were well aware. But the military revolution that developed in Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries altered subsequent Spanish perceptions of the early conquerors. Modern historians followed suit, likewise influenced by assumptions regarding the nature of men at arms. Thus the conquistadors, long after their deaths, all became soldiers.

If the conquistadors were armed and in some sense organized and experienced in military matters, is it not accurate enough to call them soldiers? One military historian has said as much, arguing that although "few of the men who fought . . . in the conquest of Peru were soldiers . . . militarily useful skills, values, and patterns of socialization were so deeply embedded and so widespread in early sixteenth-century Spanish society that the distinction is, from our standpoint, functionally unimportant."[16] To an extent, this was true. But arguably such skills and values were equally widespread among other Europeans, and, for that matter, among native groups such as the Mexica.

Furthermore, the conquistador acquired his martial skills not from formal training, but from conflict situations in the Americas. Expedition members tended to be recruited in recently founded colonies, creating a relay system of conquest that meant most participants already had some experience in the New World. For example, of the 101 Spaniards at Cajamarca whose pre-1532 experience is recorded, 64 had prior Conquest experience and 52 had spent at least five years in the Americas.[17] But none of this amounted to formal training.

The conquistadors' lack of formal training was paralleled by a lack of formal ranking. Spanish forces in Europe at this time were led by commanders from the high nobility and organized into various ranks (the names of some being the root of English terms of rank—*cabo de colonela* for "colonel," for example, and *sargento mayor* for "sergeant major").[18] In contrast, conquistador groups were headed by captains, the sole named rank and one that varied in number, with the other men divided only into those on horseback and those on foot—the latter rising to the former simply through the purchase of a horse. The record of the division of spoils at Cajamarca listed the men in two categories only, *gente de a cavallo* (people on horseback) and *gente de a pie* (people on foot).[19]

If conquistadors identified themselves not as soldiers, but as men on foot or on horseback, how else did they see themselves? How did they become conquistadors? And why did they end up fighting in the Americas?

The beginning of an answer to these questions is implied by Jerez's remark that the invaders of the Inca empire were "neither paid nor forced." A fuller answer is suggested by the words of one of Jerez's compatriots at Cajamarca, a young Basque Spaniard named Gaspar de Marquina, who sent the following letter to his father in Spain from Cajamarca in July 1533:

> Sir, I want to tell you the story of my life since I came to these parts. You already know how I went to Nicaragua with Governor Pedrarias as his page, and I was with him until God was pleased to take him from this world. He died very poor, and so all of us dependents [*criados*] of his were left poor too, as the carrier of this letter can very well tell you when he sees you.

> Then a few days after he died, we got news of how Governor Francisco Pizarro was coming to be governor of this kingdom of New Castile. And so, hearing this news and having few prospects in Nicaragua, we came to this district, where there's more gold and silver than iron in Biscay, and more sheep than in Soria, and great supplies of all kinds of food, and much fine clothing, and the best people that have been seen in the whole Indies, and many great lords among them. One of them, who rules over 500 leagues, we have prisoner in our power, and with him prisoner, a man can go by himself 500 leagues without getting killed; instead they give you whatever you need and carry you on their shoulders in a litter.[20]

The prisoner to whom Marquina rather casually refers is none other than the Inca, Atahuallpa, but Marquina is more concerned with conveying to his father the enormity of his own reversal of fortune. He skips over months of travel, hardship, uncertainty, and a great battle, in order to create the contrast within one paragraph between his low point after Pedrarias's death and his present high point. From his letter it is clear that Gaspar de Marquina is not a professional soldier, but a page, a fully literate, high-ranking servant, first of the governor of the colony of Nicaragua and then of the governor of Peru (that despite the events at Cajamarca, was not really conquered and certainly not colonized by 1533). He is in the "Indies" of his own free will, pursuing opportunity—in order, the rest of the letter reveals, to return to his father in Spain a wealthy man and, most likely, take up a career as a notary or merchant. He pursues that opportunity through his connection to important patrons, successfully attaching himself to another when one dies without apparent benefit to Marquina. (Incidentally, by the time his father received the letter, and the gold bar accompanying it, Gaspar had been killed in a skirmish with native Andeans.)[21]

Spaniards, then, joined conquest expeditions not in return for specified payments, but in the hope of acquiring wealth and status. They were, in the words of historian James Lockhart, "free agents, emigrants, settlers, unsalaried and ununiformed earners of *encomiendas* and shares of treasure."[22] An *encomienda* was a grant of native American labor. The holder, or *encomendero*, had the right to tax the natives of a given community or cluster of towns in goods and labor. Such grants allowed the recipient to enjoy high status and often a superior lifestyle among his fellow colonists. The first *encomenderos* were men who had fought to win their grants, but they were not soldiers. As there were never enough *encomiendas* to go round, the most lucrative grants went to those who had invested the most in the expedition. Lesser investors received lesser grants or simply a share of the spoils of war.[23] Had Gaspar de Marquina lived longer, he might have won for himself a modest *encomienda*. At the very least his future share of the spoils of conquest would have doubled due to

the horse he purchased with his newly won wealth in Cajamarca (and upon which he was killed). To some extent, all participants were investors in commercial ventures that carried high risks but potentially the highest of returns. Spaniards called these ventures "companies." While powerful patrons played important investment roles, it was the captains who primarily funded companies and expected to reap the greatest rewards. As the governor of Panama, Pedrarias de Avila, told King Charles of early Conquest expeditions into Nicaragua and Colombia, "it was done without touching your majesty's royal treasury."[24] The spirit of commercialism thus infused conquest expeditions from start to finish, with participants selling services and trading goods with each other throughout the endeavor. The conquerors were, in other words, armed entrepreneurs.

Marquina refers to himself as a page (*paje*), and a dependent (*criado*). An Englishman of the day would have called him either a "servant" or a "creature," although no English word fully conveys the way in which a *criado* was both subordinate and a real member of the household. The identity of Marquina's patrons and other details of his life also give us a sense of his social status within the broad category of *criado*. Fully identifying a conquistador can thus take multiple sources of information. Conquistadors had various reasons to identify themselves in writing, but their self-identities did not necessarily match those given to them by others, and they shift according to circumstances. The circumstances under which the identities of each conquistador company were recorded were seldom the same. Still, these records help us to know the conquistadors better.

For example, following the founding of the city of Panama in 1519, the 98 Spanish conquistador-settlers were asked to contribute to such a record, to which 75 responded (see Table 1). Only two of them claimed to be professional soldiers whereas 60 percent claimed to be professional men and artisans, occupations from the middle ranks of society. A similar analysis of the conquerors of the New Kingdom of Granada (today's Colombia) is less precise as to occupations and probably exaggerates the numbers of middle-ranking men. Nevertheless, the data clearly show that men of some means or property, professionals, and entrepreneurs of some kind predominated.[25]

Comparable information on Peru's conquistadors is likewise patchy, but sufficiently revealing. Of the 47 of the 168 men at Cajamarca who gave their occupations, it is clear that these men were not professional soldiers, but professionals and artisans who had acquired various battle experience and martial skills. The 17 artisans included tailors, horseshoers, carpenters, trumpeters, a cooper, a swordsmith, a stonemason, a barber, and a piper/crier.[26] The same kinds of artisans had also accompanied Francisco de Montejo on his first expedition into Yucatan in 1527, along with the usual professional men—merchants, physicians, a couple of priests, and a pair of Flemish artillery engineers. An unspecified number of the artisans and professionals invested in the company were

confident enough of its outcome to bring their wives (although, following customary practice, these Spanish women probably remained with the merchants at the last Caribbean port before Yucatan was reached).[27]

Table 1: The Occupations of the Conquistadors of Panama, Peru, and the New Kingdom of Granada (Colombia)

	Panama (1519–22)	Peru (1532–34)	Colombia (1536–43)
Low nobility	2 (3%)		10 (7%)
Merchants			4
Artisans	20	17	13
Aides, secretaries, and similar employees	15	2	10
Professionals	4	6	12
Ecclesiastics		1	
Notaries	2	4	9
Rentiers	2		2
Shipowners	1		5
Royal officials	1		7
Other leaders			31
Horse owners			44
Slave owners			2
(Middle ranking totals)	(45 [60%])	(43 [92%])	(139 [90%])
Farmers	16		1
Sailors	10	2	
Soldiers	2		3
Artillerymen		2	
(Plebeian totals)	(28 [37%])	(4 [8%])	(4 [3%])
TOTALS	75 (100%)	47 (100%)	153 (100%)

Source: Lockhart, *Cajamarca*, 1972: 38; Avellaneda, *Conquerors*, 1995: 91, 93.
Note: These numbers do not represent all members of these expeditions, only those for whom there is such information. The methods and circumstances in which the original information was gathered were not standardized, and the table should thus be viewed as giving an approximate impression.

In addition, Conquest records often contain information on the age and birthplace of conquistadors. It is available, for example, for 1,210 members of the original expeditions to Panama (84 men), Mexico (743), Peru (131), and Colombia (252). The makeup of each expedition was similar, with an average of 30 percent from the southern Spanish kingdom of Andalusia, 19 percent from neighboring Extremadura, 24 percent from the core kingdoms of Old and New Castile, and the remainder from other regions of the Iberian peninsula. Other Europeans were rare, restricted to the odd Portuguese, Genoese, Flemish, or Greek man. In age, the conquerors ranged from teenagers to the occasional 60-year-old. The average age of the men who went to both Peru and Colombia was 27, with the vast majority in their twenties or early thirties.[28]

In terms of education, again the range was broad, from men who were completely illiterate and uneducated to the occasional man of considerable learning. Although the availability of and attention

given to conquistador narratives certainly gives the impression that the conquerors were handy with a pen if not well read,[29] the fully literate were among the minority in Spain as among conquest expeditions. Literacy rates among the conquerors and early settlers were slightly higher than average rates in Spain, if only because few farmers and other plebeians were among the migrants. The classic eyewitness narratives—Bernal Díaz and Cortés on Mexico; Gonzalo Jiménez on Colombia; Francisco de Jerez and Pedro Pizarro on Peru—are classics in part because they are rare. Most conquistadors wrote or dictated "merit" reports in the standardized style of the *probanza*, and about a quarter of the conquerors of Peru and Colombia were unable to sign their names. Despite the myth that literacy gave Spaniards an advantage over Native Americans, members of conquistador companies could probably read and write no better than the most literate native societies, such as the Mayas. Most Europeans and Mayas were semiliterate, with minorities being fully literate and fully illiterate. The correlation between social status and literacy among conquistadors was not as close as might be expected. The colonial chronicler Juan Rodríguez Freyle, a Bogotá native, claimed that some city council members of the New Granada settlements used branding irons to sign documents.[30] Most famously, the chief early conquistador of Peru, Francisco Pizarro, remained illiterate all of his life.[31]

The excerpt from Marquina's letter pointed to networks of patronage that bound individuals and groups of families together, often from the same Spanish town or region, through social ties, political alliances, and economic activities. Central to such networks was the tension between inequality and codependency among its members. Patrons and dependents, senior and junior members, relied upon each other to represent their interests in ways appropriate to their means and standing in society. In the context of conquest companies, patrons organized and made major financial investments in expeditions, calling upon their dependents to man the companies and in turn to recruit additional participants, investment, and supplies. Simple recruitment—the persuasion of relative strangers that the risks of a conquest venture were worth the potential gains in wealth and social status—was thus subordinate to patronage-based recruitment.

An important dimension to the pattern of patronage-based recruitment was the way it perpetuated the chain of conquest. As Marquina's story illustrates, most conquests and newly founded colonies served as stepping stones to other conquest enterprises. Certainly, some expeditions were assembled in Spain, but most originated in one Spanish colony in order to conquer an adjacent territory. Even if

a company was assembled in Spain, it was likely to be launched from a colonial site. Gonzalo Jiménez's 1536–38 expedition into Colombia, for example, comprised hundreds of young recruits brought from Spain, but it was in Santa Marta, on Colombia's Caribbean coast, that specific plans were made and veteran conquistadors added to the company—largely through the patronage networks of Jiménez himself and his patron, Santa Marta's governor, don Pedro Fernández de Lugo.[32]

The most vivid way to illustrate this pattern is to follow the links of patronage that made up the chains of the Spanish Conquest. One section of one of these chains began in the year 1518 on the island of Cuba, where Governor Diego Velázquez was deciding who should lead a third expedition of exploration to the mainland. This was not intended as a great enterprise of conquest. That was supposed to come later, led by Velázquez himself, when a license for such had come through from Spain—a license that (like Columbus's contract of 1492) would ensure Velázquez the governorship of the conquered mainland. This expedition would pave the way and required someone close to Velázquez, a man willing to finance most of the company and be bolder than the leaders of the first two voyages along the Yucatec and Mexican coasts. Velázquez's first choice, a nephew of his, turned him down. The expedition would be too expensive, he said. His second and third choices, both his cousins, likewise declined, unwilling to risk the comfort of their *encomiendas* on Cuba for a trip into the unknown.[33]

Governor Velázquez's fourth choice was his one-time secretary, a native of Medellín, Extremadura, who had fought alongside Velázquez during the Conquest of Cuba and received an *encomienda* from him, and who had asked Velázquez to be godfather to his illegitimate *mestiza* (mixed-race) daughter. In a letter of 1519, Velázquez described this man as *criado mío de mucho tiempo* (a long-time dependent of mine). His name was Hernán Cortés.[34]

The two conquistadors of Cuba had had their differences, but even these stemmed from their patronage-based relationship. Cortés had seduced one of the maids-in-waiting to Velázquez's wife, and the governor had forced Cortés against his will to marry her. Now, in the autumn of 1518, Cortés made such efficient use of his own and Velázquez's networks of patronage, as well as his persuasive powers of simple recruitment, that the governor tried to stop the expedition—fearing that Cortés would break his connection to his patron and appeal directly to the king.[35]

Velázquez's fears were well founded, not just because that was precisely what Cortés did, but because this was standard conquistador practice. Indeed, even before the climax of his two-year war of conquest against the Mexica empire (1519–21), Cortés was obliged to tolerate efforts by other

leaders of the company under his patronage to make their own marks on the mainland. The nature of patronage relations and the relay system of conquest meant that it was inevitable that the *criados* of Cortés would before long seek to become their own men—or rather, more direct *criados* of the king. But there were different ways to do this. Cristóbal de Olid, one of Cortés's valued captains in the war against the Mexica, showed how not to do it; he so infuriated his patron that in 1525 Cortés traveled by land all the way from Mexico to Honduras in order to see Olid beheaded. Other captains from the original Cortés expedition succeeded in carving out their own colonies, namely Francisco de Montejo and Pedro de Alvarado.

Francisco de Montejo was one of the early settlers of Havana and a *criado* of Velázquez. He was recruited by Cortés to be a major investor and captain on the expedition, having played a similar role and provided a well-stocked ship on the ill-fated Grijalva expedition to the mainland coast earlier in 1518. It was Montejo's good fortune, however, to avoid almost all the fighting of 1519–21 and yet still receive a share of the spoils appropriate to his investment and status—an *encomienda* in the Valley of Mexico. This was because Montejo was chosen by Cortés to fight the political battle in Spain while Cortés himself set out against the Mexica empire. In July 1519 Montejo sailed from the Mexican coast across the Atlantic with a cargo that included letters and gold for Cortés's family and, most importantly, numerous "gifts" for the Spanish emperor and a letter predictably requesting Cortés's appointment as governor of everything he could conquer. Velázquez heard of Cortés's treachery and sent a ship on an unsuccessful transatlantic chase after Montejo. Some sources suggest that Montejo, playing a double game, himself leaked the news to the Cuban governor.[36]

In fact, Montejo was playing a triple game. While he remained for a time prepared to switch sides back to Velázquez, should occasion require it, he also persisted in arguing Cortés's case in Spain for over three years. At last, in October 1522, the emperor ruled in Cortés's favor, granting him the governorship of New Spain, although Cortés did not receive word of this until the following September.[37] By this time, the Mexica empire was no more, Cortés had been the effective ruler of Mexico for over two years, and Montejo had been assigned in absentia the lucrative *encomienda* of Azcapotzalco. Meanwhile, Montejo was busy laying the groundwork for his own, independent conquest career. In 1526 these efforts paid off, and Montejo was given a conqueror's license for Yucatan, whose coast he had sailed twice, with Grijalva and Cortés, and that he hoped would turn out to contain another Tenochtitlán or something like it.

Comments by Diego de Landa, the bishop of Yucatan, on Montejo's activities in Spain are revealing, both for their defensive tone and for their insights into how conquistadors relied on personal enterprise, rather than royal backing, to finance expeditions. Wrote the Franciscan:

> During the time that Montejo was at court he negotiated for himself the conquest of Yucatan [i.e., the license that would grant him the governorship should he conquer the region], although he might have negotiated for other things, and received the title of *adelantado* [licensed conqueror]. . . . He then exchanged marriage vows with a lady of Seville, a rich widow, and was thus able to gather 500 men whom he embarked in three ships.[38]

Later, this rich widow, doña Beatriz de Herrera, came looking for Montejo in Mexico. According to Landa: "The *adelantado* had married doña Beatriz de Herrera secretly in Seville, and some say that he denied her, but don Antonio Mendoza, the viceroy of New Spain, intervened and as a result he [Montejo] received her.[39] Doña Beatriz de Herrera would write to the king in 1554, in one of a series of petitions for a royal pension, that she had been the principal investor in Montejo's company. She claimed to have been left "in extreme poverty" after giving him "a great quantity of money" to cover the costs of the company.[40]

Thus armed with a conqueror's license and his new wife's fortune, Montejo's hopes were high. But there was no Maya empire, and his first invasion of Yucatan proved to be a disaster. Only 18 months after reaching Cozumel in the autumn of 1527, he was forced to withdraw to Mexico with the bedraggled survivors of his company. He returned later in 1529 with more Spanish recruits, African slaves, and hundreds of armed Nahuas, native warriors from his Azcapotzalco *encomienda*. But by 1534 the Spaniards were still battling Mayas and controlled barely any territory. In putting together both his expeditions, Montejo had made use of his own network of patronage, as well as the related Cortés network. One such associate was Alonso de Ávila, who had been with Montejo back in the days of the 1518 Grijalva company and had then fought with Cortés against the Mexica. However, the principle of reciprocity and mutual interest was at the heart of the Spanish patronage system. During two invasions, stretching over seven years, Montejo had failed to deliver to his associates and dependents any investment returns. Therefore, when in 1534 word reached Yucatan of the events at Cajamarca of 1532 and the gold and silver acquired in Peru, Montejo's company fell apart. As he himself wrote to the king, "with the great news that came of Peru, all the [Spanish] men went away and depopulated all the [colonial] towns of the land."[41]

Some of these men, like Ávila, judging that they had missed the Peru boat, returned to Mexico.[42] Those who followed the third Montejo invasion of Yucatan, this one led by his son and nephew, would end up in the 1540s with *encomiendas* of Mayas. But many of the Yucatan veterans went to Peru, seeking new patrons and better opportunities. And some of them ended up in the company

assembled for a 1534 invasion of Ecuador by Pedro de Alvarado—whose career took him to southern Mesoamerica and into South America.

Pedro de Alvarado had captained a vessel owned by Velázquez on the 1518 Grijalva expedition and that year apparently joined his fellow Extremaduran Cortés with much enthusiasm. Although he was not one of Cortés's original 11 captains, he rose to prominence during the many military encounters of the long trek from the coast to the Valley of Mexico. Alvarado was a loyal Cortés *criado* but had a reputation for impetuosity and belligerence. His assertion of independence in Tenochtitlán in 1520 proved fatal to many of his compatriots. During Cortés's temporary absence from the city, Alvarado had ended the Spanish-Mexica standoff and initiated a bloody massacre that led to weeks of hostilities climaxing with the desperate Spanish flight that the conquistadors dubbed *La Noche Triste* (The Tragic Night). Yet Alvarado served his patron and his compatriots well in the final months of siege and assault on Tenochtitlán, and in 1522 Cortés granted him the first major *encomienda* in the immediate environs of Tenochtitlán–Mexico City, the native Nahuas of Xochimilco.[43]

In accordance with Conquest patterns, the following year Alvarado led a major expedition down into Guatemala—either sent by Cortés or with his blessing, depending on one's perspective. In addition to Spanish recruits, many from the Mexican wars, African slaves, and Nahuas from his *encomienda*, Alvarado also took his three brothers, two of his cousins, and other members of a patronage circle he had cultivated as an *encomendero*.[44] Through a classic divide-and-conquer strategy, Alvarado played the two major native groups of the highlands off against each other, the Quiché Mayas and the Cakchiquel Mayas. Although Alvarado and his relatives achieved the rapid submission of these two groups, as well as the neighboring Tzutujil, just two months of fighting in 1524, the wars of conquest in highland Guatemala would drag on for a decade.[45] As was often the case, the quick Spanish victory was a myth that masked years of conflict among Spaniards and among natives as well as between them.

The prolonged hostilities had multiple causes: the fragmented and diverse nature of native polities in the highlands; excessive Spanish demands and actions that were frequently counterproductive to the imposition of colonial rule; and Alvarado's apparent view of Guatemala as little more than another stage in his Conquest career. Both loyal to Cortés and yet keen to replace him—typical of patronage patterns in the Conquest—Alvarado communicated by letter with his patron regularly. He set off to Chiapas in 1525 in a vain attempt to meet up with Cortés on the latter's Honduras trip, and the following year traveled to Honduras himself at Cortés's request. However, earlier in 1526 Alvarado had gone half way to Mexico on the strength of reports that Cortés had died

and a faction of fellow veterans from the Mexican wars was ready to make Alvarado governor of Mexico.[46]

His uneven commitment to Guatemala, and the problems inherent to divided Spanish colonists attempting to "pacify" divided highland Mayas, helps to explain why Alvarado's response to early news of the lands and potential wealth of South America was to use his resources and status to form another large Conquest company. Despite his *encomiendas* in Mexico and Guatemala and his confirmation in 1530 as governor of the latter, Alvarado set his sights on Peru as early as 1531. But his ambitions should also be seen in the larger context. As free agents seeking opportunity both through patronage networks with compatriots and in competition with other Spaniards, the conquistadors were seldom committed to any one region. Just as they were not sent by the king to conquer as his soldiers, nor were they sent to settle as his colonists. Both king and conquerors talked much about settlement, but more as a means to the extraction of wealth than an end unto itself. Alvarado's apparent restlessness was entirely consistent with the logic of Conquest patterns.[47]

Alvarado's well-financed expedition brought veterans from the Conquest wars in Mexico, Yucatan, Guatemala, other parts of Mesoamerica, and even the Caribbean, to Peru. It did not represent the first links in the chain of conquest into South America, but through its personnel it further connected Andean events to conquests in the north. In view of Pizarro's success in 1532–33, the Guatemalan governor's purpose in 1534 seems to have been either to bypass Pizarro and sieze Cuzco or to carve out a separate colony in the northern territories of the Inca empire, the region of Quito (today's Ecuador). This never happened, for the simple reason that Diego de Almagro, one of Pizarro's captains, rushed north to meet Alvarado. Rather than fight, the two conquistadors made a deal. Although Alvarado was paid to disband his expedition and return to Guatemala, even richer than before, Almagro was permitted to recruit men from Alvarado's company. As Almagro was in the throes of breaking patronage ties to Pizarro and acquiring his own as-yet-unconquered governorship in the southern Andes, many of these men ended up fighting in Chile's conquest wars.[48]

Thus did two relay systems or chains of conquest—forged by the ties of patronage and the impetus of individual opportunity—begin as one in the Caribbean, run to Mexico, diverge into Yucatan and Guatemala, and then converge again in northern Peru, where they met another one, the Pizarro-Almagro chain that came from Panama and ran down the Andes into Chile.

The variety of identities, experiences, and life stories in the “Indies” renders the concept of the typical conquistador somewhat nonsensical. But if we were to create such a figure, constructed from the averages and patterns of conquistador biographies, he would be a young man in his late twenties, semiliterate, from southwestern Spain, trained in a particular trade or profession, seeking opportunity through patronage networks based on family and home-town ties. Armed as well as he could afford, and with some experience already of exploration and conquest in the Americas, he would be ready to invest what he had and risk his life if absolutely necessary in order to be a member of the first company to conquer somewhere wealthy and well populated. He would not in any sense be a soldier in the armies of the king of Spain.

The armed Spanish entrepreneurs that our imagined typical conquistador represents were not, of course, the only members of conquistador expeditions, although their own accounts and those of so many historians since have given that impression that they were. It is thus to the other conquerors, largely invisible in such accounts, that we turn in the next chapter.