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Patterns in Early Spanish Overseas Expansion

John E. Kicza

SPANISH expeditions ventured to the American mainland in the second and third decades of the sixteenth century only after an extended process of overseas expansion.[1] Spain had been trading and colonizing in Atlantic waters since the 1300s and had competed with Portugal for control over the Atlantic islands and the west coast of Africa.[2] Spain's movement into the Atlantic largely followed a mercantile approach embodying commercial practices also employed by Portugal and Genoa in dealing with non-Western peoples. This was to be expected, as the ports of southern Spain had long been integrated into the Mediterranean mercantile world. But Spanish expansion also enacted a new approach—that of full settlement or Reconquest—which emerged during Christian Spain's seven centuries of episodic warfare against Islamic Moorish kingdoms on the peninsula. This struggle reached a successful conclusion just as the Spanish undertook systematic colonization across the Atlantic.[3]

This article examines the practices and institutions brought by the

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[1] A thoughtful, comprehensive treatment of Europe's overseas involvement in this era is J.R.S. Phillips, *The Medieval Expansion of Europe* (New York, 1988). Still useful earlier studies include J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance, 1450–1650* (London, 1963), Boies Penrose, *Travel and Discovery in the Renaissance, 1420–1620* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), Carlo M. Cipolla, *European Culture and Overseas Expansion* (London, 1970), and G. V. Scammell, *The World Encompassed: The First European Maritime Empires, c. 800–1650* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981).

[2] An impressive contribution to this topic is Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus: Exploration and Colonization from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492* (Philadelphia, 1987). Detailed, more narrowly focused works are John W. Blake, *European Beginnings in West Africa, 1454–1578* (London, 1937), Florentino Pérez Embid, *Los descubrimientos en el Atlántico y la rivalidad castellano-portuguesa hasta el Tratado de Tordesillas* (Seville, 1948), and Antonio Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica*, 2 vols. (Madrid, 1956–1957).

[3] Important syntheses of the longer process of Reconquest are Angus MacKay, *Spain in the Middle Ages: From Frontier to Empire, 1000–1500* (London, 1977), Derek W. Lomax, *The Reconquest of Spain* (London, 1978), and Charles Julian Bishko, "The Spanish and Portuguese Reconquest, 1095–1492," in Bishko, *Studies in Medieval Spanish Frontier History* (London, 1980), 396–456.

Spanish to the American continent through a consideration of their evolution in the conquests of the Canary and Caribbean islands. It seeks to demonstrate how certain patterns persisted to the end of the conquest era in the mid-sixteenth century while others were abandoned or replaced. Most of these characteristics formed part of either the mercantile or the full-settlement approaches to expansion, as latent rather than conscious aspects of the participants' behavior. The intentions and deeds of colonizers sprang primarily from the prevailing practices and cultures of their regions of origin: men from the southern coastal trading zone commonly followed the mercantile pattern; men from the interior provinces followed the full-settlement one. The primary issues treated in this discussion are the organization and funding of expeditions, the limited and intermittent role of the Spanish monarchy, the function of the *adelantado* (expedition leader), the goals and expectations of the colonizers, the lack of religious motivation in these early years, the conduct of campaigns, and the colonizers' attitudes toward and use of the native societies they subjugated.

The article commences with the characteristics of the mercantile and full-settlement patterns of expansion as representing values and traditions from two different parts of Spain. It then examines the conquest and initial colonization of the Canary Islands and the Caribbean to illustrate how these traditions came into play in the two arenas, though not necessarily in every aspect or to the same degree. The final substantive section looks at early Spanish activity on the American mainland to demonstrate that full settlement became dominant and more fully realized there than on the islands, while the mercantile practice largely faded from the scene.

The southern coast of Spain had long been distinct from the rest of the country. It contained a much more diverse population and a vigorous mercantile community scattered among several ports, of which Seville was easily the most important. Italian commercial houses, particularly from Genoa, had for centuries maintained a substantial—sometimes preeminent—presence in such ports.[4] These branch operations could become so large and autonomous as to threaten the ascendancy of the founding firms. Resident Genoese businessmen married with some frequency into the families of Spanish merchants and local nobility, who themselves undertook trading ventures in the Mediterranean and along the North Atlantic coast of Africa.[5]

Such firms saw little gain in investing in colonial settlements involving substantial European populations. Instead, in the Atlantic, they operated in a manner similar to the Portuguese. This entailed the dispatch of small

[4] Ruth Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure: The Genoese in Seville and the Opening of the New World* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1966); Charles Verlinden, *Les origines de la civilisation atlantique* (Neuchâtel, Switz., 1966).

[5] Enrique Otte, "Los Sopranis y los Lugo," *II Colloquio de Historia Canario-Americana*, I (Seville, 1979), 241–244; Verlinden, "The Italians in the Economy of the Canary Islands at the Beginning of Spanish Colonization," in Verlinden, *The Beginnings of Modern Colonization*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Ithaca, N. Y., 1970), 253.

fleets that kept close to the African coast and nearby islands in pursuit of quick profits from trade with the indigenous peoples or from acquisition of commodities in great demand in Europe, such as gold, dyes, sugar, and slaves.[6] Spanish traders did not differentiate sharply between peaceful trade and armed extortion or raiding. They described most of their activity as *rescate* (barter), which had the virtue of disguising the considerable degree of duress that might be involved in the exchange.[7] The traders had no interest in placing permanent colonies where they landed. At most, they built a trading factory or a small fort at especially promising spots.[8]

Only the returns that might be garnered from the establishment of a sugar industry on the islands off the African coast greatly tempted maritime traders to vary from this pattern of operation. But even in the case of sugar, merchant houses did not seek to establish on these islands significant numbers of settlers who might then develop a diversified economy with a variety of occupations and a network of towns.[9] When sugar cultivation did begin to flourish in the second half of the fifteenth century, no cities of any importance emerged. The ports remained rudimentary and lightly populated. Europeans who resided permanently grew sugarcane for the scattering of mills constructed by mercantile firms.[10] Most cane growers labored personally in the fields alongside the few slaves whom they were able to acquire with the little capital available to them. The investment capital from commercial houses shifted quickly from island to island, chasing the best opportunities; merchants did not hesitate to abandon an area that had been productive for some years.

Iberian merchant houses entered the black slave trade without a second thought as their ships moved down the African coast. Before Iberians began to colonize the New World, they had developed a dual tradition of black slavery. Beginning at least as early as the 1440s, blacks were routinely brought to Iberian ports, particularly Lisbon and Seville, where they were employed as domestic servants, artisans, and transportation and market workers. Only a few were sent into the countryside to labor, and

[6] Bailey W. Diffie and George D. Winius, *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire, 1415–1580* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1977), chaps. 4–6; Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, chaps. 6, 7.

[7] The perspectives and activities of a participant in one of these trading/raiding expeditions are displayed in Alvise da Cadamosto, *The Voyages of Cadamosto*, trans. G. R. Crone, Works Issued by the Hakluyt Society, 2d Ser., LXXX (London, 1937).

[8] Gomes Eannes de Azurara, *The Chronicles of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea*, trans. Charles R. Beazley and Edgar Prestage, 2 vols. (London, 1896, 1899); Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica*; Blake, *European Beginnings*.

[9] Virgínia Rau, "The Settlement of Madeira and the Sugar Cane Plantations," *Afdelung Agrarische Geschiedinis Bijdragen*, XI (1964), 3–12; Sidney Greenfield, "Madeira and the Beginnings of New World Sugar Cane Cultivation and Plantation Slavery: A Study in Institution Building," in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, CCXCII (New York, 1977), 536–552; Fernández-Armesto, *The Canary Islands after the Conquest: The Making of a Colonial Society in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Oxford, 1982), chaps. 1–4.

[10] Fernández-Armesto, *Canary Islands*, chaps. 1, 2.

there they worked exclusively in the more lucrative agrarian enterprises, such as vineyards and olive groves, to supplement scarce labor, thereby quickly reimbursing their owners for their high initial costs. In the cities, blacks obtained their freedom with some frequency, usually through purchase rather than charity, because they were skilled workers, had regular access to cash through their involvement in the market economy, and could become intimate (emotionally or sexually) with their masters. Both enslaved and free black men had considerable opportunity for enduring relationships with Iberian women (seemingly few black women were yet in Iberia), and mulattos were recognized as a distinct social category before the Iberians reached the New World.[11]

But as Iberians colonized first Madeira and the Canaries and later, farther south, São Tomé and Fernando Po, they viewed the islands as propitious settings for the production of sugar, a commodity in great demand in Europe. The rigorous working conditions imposed by the industry called for a subordinate, rather than a free, labor force. Genoese and Iberian investors turned quickly to black slaves brought from Africa. By the time they began to colonize the New World, Europeans regarded sugar as a most lucrative colonial cash crop best grown on plantations by black slaves.[12]

This mercantile tradition would flourish in the Canary Islands and to a somewhat lesser degree in the Caribbean but would quickly recede in the densely populated and resource-rich setting of the American mainland. There, full settlement, which had manifested itself only somewhat in the Canary Islands and a great deal more in the Caribbean, would mature and eclipse alternative approaches.

The full-settlement tradition emerged during the *Reconquista,* the Spanish term for the centuries-long process by which Christian Spain regained towns and regions from Moorish rule, culminating in the fall of Granada, the last Muslim center on the peninsula, in 1492. Until the roughly ten-year siege of Granada, warfare between Christians and Muslims rarely took the form of large armies directly commanded (let alone funded) by monarchs. Instead, military engagements were generally on a much smaller scale, with the limited objective of taking a fortified town or castle and its immediate hinterland. Members of the local nobility commonly organized such campaigns against nearby towns. Young men from noble and gentry origins—plus knights errant—would assemble local forces to

[11] Pike, *Aristocrats and Traders: Sevillian Society in the Sixteenth Century* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1972); A. C. de C. M. Saunders, *A Social History of Black Slaves and Freedmen in Portugal, 1441–1555* (Cambridge, 1982); A.J.R. Russell-Wood, "Iberian Expansion and the Issue of Black Slavery: Changing Portuguese Attitudes, 1470–1770," *American Historical Review.* LXXXIII (1978), 16–42.

[12] Greenfield, "Madeira and the Beginnings of New World Sugar Cane Cultivation," 536–552; Herbert S. Klein, *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York, 1986).

lead against the objective.[13] The participants were attracted by the spoils, honors, and titles to be gained from a successful campaign. By and large they had to supply their own armaments and equipment. Some funding usually came from the local leader but none from the monarch. The royal government played a negligible role in the entire process. The crown might sanction an expedition, but one without such authorization could receive royal blessing after the fact, if successful.

After victory, the leader could expect to be named governor of the conquered territory with a commensurate title. He and his men then received shares of the booty according to their rank, investment, and achievement during the endeavor.[14] The participants each gained title to some of the territory and also immediate political authority over the conquered population, which typically was allowed to remain and even to practice its traditional religion.[15] In addition, the victors expected to receive as tribute (a privilege that could be inherited by their descendants) all or part of the taxes that the conquered now owed to the crown.[16] Political and social life was heavily urban. The *municipio* (municipality) constituted the fundamental building block in the Spanish political system, and city councils, representing the community's leading families, enjoyed authority not only over the town proper but also over a vast hinterland extending to its boundary with another town and its surrounding countryside.

Spanish involvement in the Canary Islands began in the 1340s very much in the mercantile tradition of expansion. Early expeditions were concerned only to catch slaves and find gold. They did not attempt systematic subjugation of the indigenous peoples or large-scale colonization, nor did they distribute lands or introduce European crops and animals. Nonetheless, the Canary Islands were the first arena where the Spanish sought to subdue a non-European, non-Muslim people on that people's own territory. The process was erratic and extended, lasting more than a century and a half. The Iberians suffered numerous defeats and had

[13] Lyle N. McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World, 1492–1700* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1984), 4–9; Bishko, "Spanish and Portuguese Reconquest," 416–418; Julio Valdeón Baruque, "León y Castilla," in *Feudalismo y consolidación de los pueblos hispánicos (siglos XI-XV)*. Manuel Tuñón de Lara, ed., *Historia de España*, 10 vols. (Barcelona, 1980), IV, 19.

[14] Lomax, *Reconquest of Spain*, 100–101.

[15] Spanish monarchs routinely permitted the substantial Moorish and Jewish populations who came under their jurisdiction to practice their faith and retain their property. Both groups functioned as integral units in Spanish society for centuries. Ferdinand and Isabella's hostile initiatives against these religious minorities late in the 15th century emerged out of the political and social dynamics of their time and were not characteristic of the extended period of Reconquest that preceded their monarchy.

[16] Jaime Vicens Vives, *Colonizaciones. feudalismo. América primitiva*. I, in Vives, ed., *Historia social y económica de España y América* (Barcelona, 1957), 274; Robert S. Chamberlain, *Castilian Backgrounds of the Repartimiento-Encomienda* (Washington, D. C., 1939), 34–36, 38–40.

to make several full withdrawals; neither the crown nor a variety of private interests proved able to marshal a concerted effort at subjugation during much of this period.

Europeans initially learned of the islands through the voyage of Lancerotto Marocello, a Genoese sailing under Portuguese auspices, sometime before 1339.[17] The next voyage to the islands, that of Emanuele Passagno in 1341, initiated frequent European contact with the Canaries. Merchants of Mallorca were the first to mount a major effort to exploit the resources of the Canaries. In 1342, they sent at least four expeditions to the islands but gained little in return.[18] Mallorca and Aragón sent out ships sporadically for another fifty years, but no settlement was attempted and little trade was conducted. Even a growing Portuguese-Castilian dispute about sovereignty over the islands in the 1370s did not inspire the monarchs to sponsor colonizing efforts. Through the end of the fourteenth century, expeditions to the Canary Islands were predominantly slave-raiding endeavors, with the captives taken to Spain.[19]

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, Enrique III of Castile asserted sovereignty over the islands; while other monarchs did not recognize his claim, neither did they have the interest or resources to challenge it actively. Enrique also lacked the means to mount a colonizing expedition. Hence when he was approached by Jean de Bétancourt, a Norman lord whose relatives had lent valuable military assistance to the Castilian king, Enrique granted him a license to conquer the Canaries. Sovereignty was to continue to reside with the Castilian monarchy, and Bétancourt had to organize and finance the expedition for himself.[20]

Bétancourt and his partner, Gadifer de la Salle, invested most of their wealth to send men and supplies to the island of Lanzarote in 1402. After less than a year, the invaders ran short of necessities, and Bétancourt returned to Seville to obtain additional resources. The expedition's goal was not to colonize, however, but to mine gold. After several years, the organizers finally acknowledged that the islands contained no immediately profitable items for shipment back to Spain and began to encourage settlement as a way to recoup their investments.[21] Despite repeated military reverses, the remaining elements of the 1402 expedition were able to subdue Lanzarote and Fuerteventura and, years later, Gomera, the least fertile and least populated of the inhabited islands. The better

[17] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 153–155.

[18] Ibid., 157.

[19] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica*, 49; Juan de Abreu de Galindo, *The History of the Discovery and Conquest of the Canary Islands* (1630), trans. George Glas (London, 1764), 2–3.

[20] Abreu de Galindo, *History of the Discovery*, 3; Silvio Arturo Zavala, "Las conquistas de Canarias y América," in Zavala, *Estudios indianos* (México, D. F., 1948), 65; Pierre Bontier and Jean Le Verrier, *The Canarian: or, Book of the Conquest and Conversion of the Canarians in the year 1402, by Messire Jean de Bethencourt, Knight*, ed. and trans. Richard Henry Major (London, 1892).

[21] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 181.

endowed and more heavily settled islands—Grand Canary, Palma, and Tenerife—remained unthreatened.

In 1420 the Bétancourt family ceded its rights in the Canaries to the De las Casas family, prominent Seville merchants, but they, too, proved incapable of subjugating the major inhabited islands. The few colonists on the conquered islands lived in near poverty; they failed to develop a reliable export product, and the little wealth they acquired derived from slaving raids to the other islands or along the coast of Africa.[22]

In 1477 Ferdinand and Isabella finally asserted direct control over the unconquered islands, but the monarchy's limited resources hamstrung their efforts to subdue them.[23] Lacking capital to pay for an expedition, they endeavored to fund it by selling indulgences and by assigning anticipated income from the *quinto,* the royal tax imposed on all booty gained on such campaigns. These sources proved far from sufficient, and the invasion launched against Grand Canary in 1478 included both soldiers on salary and volunteers whose reward would be a designated share, contracted in advance, of whatever booty the operation might yield.[24] Four further expeditions, 1480–1483, also combined salaried soldiers and volunteers.

All subsequent campaigns—they did not end until the surrender of Tenerife in 1496—were underwritten by their actual leaders and by merchants, often Genoese, of southern Spain.[25] As during most of the Reconquest, to encourage these undertakings the crown offered a combination of financial waivers, exemptions, concessions, and land grants but never any actual funds.[26] Further, the most lucrative concessions and the land grants could not be invoked until a conquest was successful. Consequently, the many failed attempts ran up substantial debts that led to prolonged litigation.

The Spanish expeditions had great difficulties and suffered heavy losses subduing the peoples of the Canaries. Roughly 30,000 people from several different racial groups in the Mediterranean and North African regions shared a neolithic material culture on the islands and were organized into rival tribal societies, seemingly with no communication among the islands, when Europeans arrived in the fourteenth century.[27] Com-

[22] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica.* 68–69.

[23] Fernández-Armesto, "La financiación de la conquista de las Islas Canarias en el tiempo de los Reyes Católicos," *Anuario de Estudios Atlánticos.* XVIII (1982), 343.

[24] Zavala, "Las conquistas de Canarias y América," 69–70.

[25] Dominik Wolfel, "Alonso de Lugo y la compañía sociedad comercial para la conquista de la isla de La Palma," *Investigación y Progreso.* VIII (1934), 246–248; Manuela Marrero Rodríguez, "Los genoveses en la colonización de Tenerife (1496–1509)," *Revista de Historia Canaria* (La Laguna de Tenerife), XVI (1950), 53–65.

[26] Fernández-Armesto, "La financiación," 11, 22. Verlinden has pointed out that granting such concessions to support colonizing and conquering expeditions had long been common in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic; see "The Transfer of Colonial Techniques from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic," in Verlinden, *Beginnings of Modern Colonization.* 12–14.

[27] A comprehensive recent study of the Canary Islands before the arrival of the

monly, defeats occurred when a Spanish commander unwisely led his force into a constricted area or into the mountainous upcountry, where the footmen could not effectively use their swords or the cavalry operate freely, and opponents could shower them with projectiles. The natives exploited the mountainous terrain against invaders either for refuge or for ambushes, using rocks, bows and arrows, and fire-hardened spears as weapons. They sometimes ascended to mountain strongholds and waited until the Spanish exhausted their supplies and became internally divided.[28] They sought to avoid pitched battles where they would have to fight person to person and face the superior weaponry and field tactics of the Europeans. The conquest became one of attrition: the Spaniards were able to mount repeated campaigns to wear down their opponents. Even the major islands were not so large that the inhabitants could ever withdraw into a safe region.

In their warfare against native forces, the Spanish, as was the case subsequently in the Americas, made very little use of arquebuses or artillery. They encountered no fortified settlements, where firepower offered the greatest advantage; against scattered, mobile adversaries, these inaccurate, slow-firing weapons served little purpose. Here and in the Americas, when the Spanish used projectiles, they much preferred crossbows.[29]

Early on the Spanish enslaved many captured natives and sold them on other islands or in Spain.[30] On Grand Canary, Pedro de Vera, the conqueror, in 1483 transported the natives to Seville and sold them. Alonso de Lugo later used many of these natives to assist his force preparing to invade Palma and Tenerife.[31] The Spanish recognized the differences among the native groups and played them off against each other. Given the deep and enduring animosities among these peoples, some proved most willing to assist the Spaniards with supplies and intelligence against their enemies.[32]

With their victory on Tenerife, the Spanish enslaved the vanquished but did not sell many natives away from the islands. More commonly, they

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Spanish is Antonio Tejera Gaspar and Rafael González Antón, *Las culturas aborígenes canarias* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1987).

[28] The best extended treatments of Spanish warfare in the Canaries are Abreu de Galindo, *History of the Discovery*, José de Viera y Clavijo, *Noticias de la historia general de las Islas Canarias*, II (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1951), and Rumeu de Armas, *La conquista de Tenerife* (Santa Cruz de Tenerife, 1975).

[29] Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (Cambridge, 1986), 84–94, provides an excellent analysis of the conflict between the Guanches and the Spanish and of the factors favoring each side. The chapter from which these pages are drawn, "The Fortunate Islands," is a compelling consideration of how the Atlantic islands fit into the larger process of European overseas expansion.

[30] Zavala, "Las Conquistas de Canarias y América," 51.

[31] Marrero, "La esclavitud en las Islas Canarias durante el reinado de los Reyes Católicos," in *Historia general de las Islas Canarias de Agustín Millares Torres*, III (La Palma, 1977), 41.

[32] Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, 208–209; Zavala, "Las conquistas de Canarias y América," 76.

were utilized as house servants for European settlers.[33] Surviving islanders, free or enslaved, were too few to constitute the labor force in the colonial economy. Instead, Europeans, including many Portuguese from Madeira, immigrated to work as artisans or small planters in the emerging sugar industry.

In a pattern typical of the Reconquest that would also become the rule in the Americas, the crown recognized the leaders of successful expeditions as the first governors of the areas they subdued, granting them also titles and honors.[34] The *capitulaciones* (agreements) between the monarch and these leaders might even permit them to bequeath these positions, and not just the titles, to their descendants.[35] The crown did not repudiate this practice until Spain had gained control over extensive parts of the American mainland containing large populations. Governors were sanctioned to distribute land or conquered natives, as best fit the situation, and they characteristically used this authority to reward followers.

The families, dependents, and warriors of the native lords who had provided the most assistance to the Spanish during the final campaigns also received land grants.[36] Further, with a shortage of European women, male colonists sought out the daughters of local rulers as marriage partners.[37] (That married men were eligible for additional grants made such action yet more attractive.) Throughout their expansion overseas, the Spanish, by both individual behavior and law, showed great respect for the social status of "natural lords."[38]

Neither the Spanish monarchs, the expedition leaders, nor the merchants involved in the extended process of colonization of the Canaries considered conversion of the natives to be a high priority. Few clerics came to the islands, and these worked primarily among the settlers, not among the indigenous population. The sole serious attempt to place missionaries in the Canaries occurred in 1351, when Pedro IV, the king of Aragón, persuaded Pope Clement VI to designate a bishop for the islands and to grant spiritual privileges to the organizers of the venture.[39] The initiative came to little, as it was not followed up by further expeditions, and the bishopric lapsed in 1393.

[33] Fernández-Armesto, *Canary Islands*. 40.

[34] Zavala, "Las Conquistas de Canarias y América," 84; Fernández-Armesto, *Canary Islands*, chap. 6.

[35] Zavala, "Las Conquistas de Canarias y América," 68, 76–77. An in-depth consideration of the nature of these agreements in the Americas is Bernardo García Martínez, "Ojeada a las capitulaciones para la conquista de América," *Revista de Indias*, LXIX (1970), 1–40.

[36] Zavala, "Las conquistas de Canarias y América," 82.

[37] Fernández-Armesto, *Canary Islands*. 127.

[38] Robert S. Chamberlain, "The Concept of the *Señor Natural* as Revealed by Castilian Law and Administrative Documents," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XIX (1939), 130–137.

[39] Rumeu de Armas, *España en el Africa Atlántica*. I, 45. Blake, *European Beginnings*, and Fernández-Armesto, *Before Columbus*, reveal the minimal efforts at Christianization by European traders and colonizers in this part of the world before at least the 15th century.

Genoese commercial houses and some Spanish merchants monopolized trade with the Canaries after the conquest.[40] Cloth was the primary item imported by the settlers; orchil, a dye derived from a lichen on the islands, and, more important, sugar constituted the only exports of note. As the processing and marketing of sugar in this period remained largely foreign to the Spaniards, Genoese businessmen asserted their preeminence—with the full approval of the Spanish residents and the royal government—in the organization and sale of the commodity, and non-Spanish Europeans who were familiar with sugar cultivation from residence either on the Mediterranean islands or on Madeira immigrated to the Canaries to exploit the fresh environment.[41] The Genoese established sugar mills on the major islands; by 1515, Grand Canary alone had twenty-five.[42] Sugar long remained the only cash crop that the Canary Islands had to offer the European market. When larger and more profitable sugar regions opened up, especially late in the sixteenth century, the Canaries were unable to compete or to find a replacement crop, and they entered an extended period of economic marginality.[43]

The failure of the mercantile approach either to subdue the major islands or to gain significant wealth thus led to its replacement by the full-settlement pattern during roughly the final quarter century of the fifteenth century. This entailed complete domination of the natives, the founding of cities to provide the colony with a suitable political structure, and distribution of land among the victors. However, the physical and human resources of the Canaries remained so limited that no substantial immigration occurred and no large towns developed.

When the Spanish reached the Caribbean, they implemented full-settlement colonization. Though this was not Columbus's own inclination, his report of the first voyage contained three items of information that greatly influenced the crown's response: the islands reconnoitered were sizable; they contained large populations that practiced agriculture and whose leaders were initially receptive to his fleet; and the land promised to hold considerable gold. The crown thereupon entered into a company with Columbus to dispatch a colonizing voyage to Hispaniola. The monarchy provided most of the funding—a major exception to the nearly universal pattern of private financing and organization of expeditions to the New World—and Columbus agreed to serve as governor. The fleet consisted of about 1,500 men on seventeen ships; equipped with artisans,

[40] Verlinden, "The Italians in the Economy of the Canary Islands at the Beginning of Spanish Colonization," in Verlinden, *Beginnings of Modern Colonization*, 132–157; Otte, "Los Sopranis y los Lugo," in *II Coloquio of Historia Canario-Americana*, I (Seville, 1979), 239–259.

[41] Verlinden, "The Italians in the Economy of the Canary Islands"; Fernández-Armesto, *Canary Islands*, chaps. 1, 4, 8.

[42] Miguel Angel Ladero Quesada, "La economía de las Islas Canarias a comienzos del siglo XVI," in *Historia general de las Islas Canarias de Agustín Millares Torres*, III (Las Palmas, 1977), 136.

[43] Ladero Quesada, "La economía de las Islas Canarias," 136.

animals, seeds, and plants, it departed in October 1493, only five months after Columbus had met with the Spanish rulers.[44] Most of the settlers were initially salaried by the crown; upon their arrival, however, the vast majority ignored their commitments and set about to prosper for themselves. Among them were a scattering of men from prominent Castilian families and others who were affiliated with politically powerful men in government and church. Unlike the majority of the colonists, who were commoners and salaried, these individuals had not joined the voyage to function as employees of either the crown or commercial interests.[45]

As with the Canary Islands, none of the parties in this first large-scale expedition to the New World put much emphasis on conversion of the natives. Only five clerics were included among the passengers, and they intended primarily to minister to the colonists.[46] Franciscans had probably arrived in Hispaniola about 1500, but over the next decade they converted few Indians and scarcely made their presence felt. Only later, after more than a decade of voyages and settlement, when Spain had become better informed about the scope of its new possessions and could see that long-term settlement was both desirable and possible, did the Church, with staunch royal backing, begin systematic evangelizing. The coming of four Dominicans in 1510 marked Spain's first concerted effort to spread the gospel in the Americas.[47] This pattern of few clerics ministering to great numbers of Indians typified the first generation of settlement on the American mainland also.[48]

Columbus had made his early career as a member of the Italian merchant community in Iberia and had repeatedly engaged in commercial activities throughout the eastern Atlantic.[49] He envisioned his second voyage to America as consistent with the mercantile tradition. Placing the personnel on salary from the crown, his superior partner in this enterprise, was thoroughly in accord with this approach. The emphasis was to be on trade rather than colonization, and while the natives might be enslaved for sale in Spain as part of this pattern of commerce, Columbus did not conceive of transforming them into a permanent dependent labor force on the islands themselves. Expecting *rescate* to be the primary source of revenue, he carefully restricted it to his company and forbade individuals

[44] Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley, Calif., 1966), 71.

[45] Troy S. Floyd, *The Columbus Dynasty in the Caribbean, 1492–1526* (Albuquerque, N. M., 1973), 18–20.

[46] Ibid., 37–39, 54.

[47] Frank Moya Pons, *Después de Colón: Trabajo, sociedad y política en la economía del oro* (Madrid, 1987), 79–81.

[48] A 1570 census of *doctrinas* (Indian parishes) in the Valley of Mexico found only 86 clerics serving 35 native provinces containing 95,300 tributaries (roughly equivalent to male heads of household). See Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519–1810* (Stanford, Calif., 1964), 103.

[49] Samuel Eliot Morison, *Admiral of the Ocean Sea: A Life of Christopher Columbus*, 2 vols. (Boston, 1942); J. W. Cortada, "Myths, Facts, and Debates: Christopher Columbus and the New World before 1492," *Renaissance and Reformation*, XII (1976), 89–95.

to engage in barter on their own accounts.[50] He himself undertook further exploration and trade within the Caribbean and showed little interest in functioning as an on-site administrator of a permanent colony.[51]

Hispaniola's settlers had very different interests and views from their governor. They sought to mine the island's gold deposits by mobilizing native labor. They soon founded a city—first the short-lived Isabela, then, in 1496, Santo Domingo—with a municipal council to direct local affairs.[52] Further, they rankled at being ruled by Columbus, who, as a foreigner and a mariner, was held in very low regard in Castilian society.[53] Under these circumstances, there was little possibility that Columbus could establish effective authority over the colonists.[54]

Because the natives did not initially resist, the Spanish were able to plant themselves quite firmly before opposition took the form of regional revolts on the part of an already decimated population. European epidemic diseases ravaged the island, not only undermining the local economy but dashing Spanish plans to export Indian slaves to Iberia.[55] Hispaniola's population of perhaps three million in 1494 plummeted to 33,000 by 1510.[56]

Early colonists on the larger Caribbean islands found available land in such abundance that its distribution was not a controversial issue. However, the only cash commodity of importance at this time was gold. Further, the ore had to be placer mined, with great labor. Hence access to and control of indigenous workers quickly became preeminent concerns. Some natives, termed *naborías*, became permanent retainers of individual Spaniards. Far more important was the *encomienda*, a variant of Reconquest practices toward subjugated peoples, which in this version entitled a

[50] Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso, "La negociación colombina de las Indias," *Revista de Indias*, LVII-LVIII (1954), 311.

[51] Kirkpatrick Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy* (New York, 1990), chronicles the activities of Columbus during his years as governor and shows his lack of interest in administration.

[52] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 75.

[53] For Spanish views of sailors and foreigners and for a consideration of the position of these two groups in early colonial society see James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560: A Colonial Society* (Madison, Wis., 1968), chap. 7.

[54] The strongest apologist for Columbus's administration in Hispaniola among the early chroniclers, largely because of his policy toward the natives, was Bartolomé de Las Casas. Book 1 in his *Historia de las Indias*, 3 vols. (México, D. F., 1951; orig. pub. 1875), addresses Columbus's first two voyages and administration.

[55] The writings on the impact of imported diseases on indigenous societies in colonial Latin America are voluminous and very sophisticated; for some indication of their scope and character see John E. Kicza, "The Social and Ethnic Historiography of Colonial Latin America: The Last Twenty Years," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XLV (1988), 470–471. On Hispaniola proper see the debate: David Henige, "On the Contact Population of Hispaniola: History as Higher Mathematics," *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, LVIII (1978), 217–237, and R. A. Zambardino, "Critique of David Henige's 'On the Contact Population of Hispaniola: History as Higher Mathematics,'" and Henige, "Reply," ibid., 700–712.

[56] Moya Pons, *Después de Colón*, 184.

settler to rotary draft labor service from a group of natives assigned to him by the governor.[57] Indian slavery was never common in Spanish America. It emerged briefly in the Caribbean in the first twenty-five years of the sixteenth century only to supply laborers to settled areas on islands where the indigenous population had virtually disappeared.[58] On the mainland it only endured in peripheral areas.

The mercantile tradition of expansion, so important in the incorporation of the eastern Atlantic islands into the European sphere, also transferred itself to the Caribbean, but there it was from the start secondary to the full-settlement approach.[59] It evinced itself mainly in three ways: the character of most of the exploring expeditions throughout the greater Caribbean basin until roughly 1510; the nature of overseas trade between the Caribbean islands and Spain until about 1550; and efforts to establish an export sugar industry.

Numerous voyages of exploration and trade set out from Spain during the first two decades after 1492. These were almost invariably in the mercantile tradition, conducting *rescate* with native societies and returning to the home port.[60] Merchants of southern Spain, representing both native and Italian firms, dispatched ships to northern South America under the command of such proven sailors as Juan de la Cosa, Vicente Yáñez Pinzón, and Amerigo Vespucci. As they did not encounter advanced cultures or lucrative commodities along their routes—with the notable exception of some pearl-rich zones, most of them generated little profit—they were not followed up by similar efforts.[61] They attempted no settlement, and the trading outposts or forts they set up here and there along the coasts were eventually destroyed by native assaults.[62]

Overseas trade constituted the most vibrant and enduring aspect of the mercantile tradition in the New World, even as Castile and the northern provinces of Spain continued to suffer from an underdeveloped maritime

[57] The natives would remain in their villages under their customary rulers, but they would place unpaid work squads at the disposal of their *encomendero*, one squad replacing another on a regular schedule, usually every 4 to 6 months. A vital contribution to this often misunderstood labor institution is Chamberlain, *Castilian Backgrounds of the Repartimiento-Encomienda*. Important articles on the *encomienda* in the New World are Lockhart, "Encomienda and Hacienda: The Evolution of the Great Estate in the Spanish Indies," *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, XLIX (1969), 411–429, and Robert G. Keith, "Encomienda, Hacienda, and Corregimiento in Spanish America: A Structural Analysis," ibid., LI (1971), 431–446. On Hispaniola more narrowly see Floyd, *Columbus Dynasty*, 64–65.

[58] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 159–160.

[59] Perhaps the most developed argument for the centrality of the mercantile model even in the case of the Caribbean is Verlinden, "Italian Influence in Iberian Colonization," *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, XXXIII (1953), 199–211.

[60] Demetrio Ramos Pérez, *Determinantes formativos de la "hueste" indiana y su origen modélico* (Santiago, Chile, 1965), 42–44.

[61] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, chap. 8. For the 16th-century history of these pearl zones see Enrique Otte, *Las perlas del Caribe: Nueva Cádiz de Cubagua* (Caracas, 1977).

[62] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, covers the fate of these voyages and their encampments in detail.

trading sector. They relied, therefore, on the southern Spanish ports—and their powerful Italian trading houses—for the bulk of their overseas commerce, including that with Castile's own colonies.[63] These firms dominated trade with the Caribbean in this period, and Genoese enterprises placed agents in Santo Domingo to deal with settlements throughout the region. Making loans to organizers of expeditions, and even entering into company agreements with them, composed an integral part of the business activities of these agents.[64] But by the time that the Spanish undertook expeditions of conquest in Mesoamerica and along the Pacific coast of South America, merchant houses from Spain proper, and in some cases local traders, had supplanted the Genoese. Even in the Caribbean, the Genoese commercial presence had disappeared by 1550.[65]

Only precious metals outranked sugar as the colonial commodity of preference during the early modern era. Sugar shared gold and silver's prized characteristics of high unit value, durability if properly stored, and reliable demand and profitability in European markets. Understandably, then, as the gold rush faded in Hispaniola in the second decade of the sixteenth century, colonists sought to fill the economic void through sugar cultivation. Over the next quarter century, perhaps twenty sugar mills appeared on the island.[66] Genoese commercial firms, some with agents in Santo Domingo, were vital to the transition.[67] Technicians arrived from the Canary Islands, and the trading houses provided capital and marketing expertise.

Black slaves were imported in some quantity to work on sugar estates. In the early decades of the sixteenth century, they were brought over only from Spain; direct importation from Africa did not develop until the second half of the century.[68] The Spanish Caribbean and its traders lacked the capital reserves and the dependable marketing networks—both to supply a sufficient number of slaves from Africa and to sell the commodity itself in European ports—required to enable that region to compete effectively against other suppliers at this early stage of overseas sugar production.[69] Despite efforts by colonists, merchants, and the government, the sugar industry did not thrive. It was eclipsed by the Brazilian

[63] For descriptions of these larger commercial patterns and their trends through the 17th century see Clarence Henry Haring, *Trade and Navigation Between Spain and the Indies in the Time of the Hapsburgs* (Cambridge, Mass., 1918), and Huguette Chaunu and Pierre Chaunu, *Seville et l'Atlantique (1504–1650)*, 8 vols. (Paris, 1955–1959).

[64] Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, chaps. 3, 5.

[65] Ibid., 126–127; James Lockhart and Stuart B. Schwartz, *Early Latin America: A History of Colonial Spanish America and Brazil* (Cambridge, 1983), 74–76.

[66] Mervyn Ratekin, "The Early Sugar Industry in Española," *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, XXXIV (1954), 1–19; Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 208–210.

[67] Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure*, chap. 6.

[68] Ibid., 55–58.

[69] Franklin W. Knight, *The Caribbean: The Genesis of a Fragmented Nationalism* (New York, 1978), 46–48. For more on the slave trade to 16th-century Spanish America see Frederick P. Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru* (Stanford, Calif., 1974).

sugar industry in the second half of the sixteenth century and endured only as a marginal field of enterprise, exporting little of its output to Europe over the next couple of centuries.[70]

The considerable period of time that passed before the Hispaniola colonists mounted expeditions to other islands and the mainland reflects the ascendancy of the full-settlement pattern of expansion in the Caribbean. The hundreds of Spaniards residing on Hispaniola sought to achieve prosperity by using Indian labor to exploit whatever gold deposits they could find and to cultivate grains and vegetables from seeds and plants brought from Europe for sale to the other settlers.[71] Some also ran substantial herds of cattle and pigs to supply leather and meat.[72] No group of colonists attempted to settle any of the nearby major islands before 1508, even though another 2,500 settlers arrived on Hispaniola in 1502 and the limitations of the island's resources were becoming apparent.[73]

The rapidly declining number of native laborers finally inspired the colonists to send contingents to Puerto Rico in 1508, Jamaica in 1509, and Cuba in 1511, seeking gold and slaves.[74] Puerto Rico and Jamaica barely survived as viable colonies, as they had little of either. Cuba had sufficient resources to rival the fading Hispaniola.

As on Hispaniola, the Spaniards did not have to undertake true conquests on these other islands; hardly any systematic campaigns or large-scale battles were required. The natives initially tried to accommodate themselves to the intruders. Only after a few years, as the Spaniards raided their compounds for slaves to be exported or for laborers for the gold diggings—and as disease also decreased their numbers—did some of these peoples rise up. Though several revolts resulted in substantial losses to the colonists and the destruction of some of their enterprises and settlements, the colonies themselves were not eliminated. Once the survivors reorganized and responded through coordinated and well-equipped expeditions, they were able to subdue the natives quickly.[75] By 1550 the depletion of

[70] The emergence of the Brazilian sugar industry in the 16th century and its impact on other early producers is covered in Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society: Bahia, 1550–1835* (Cambridge, 1985).

[71] A detailed list of the many European plants and animals introduced into Hispaniola within just the first 20 years is in David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change since 1492* (Cambridge, 1987), 116.

[72] Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, Bk. 1, chap. 119; Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, 156–157; Alfred W. Crosby, Jr., *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn., 1972), 75–76, 87.

[73] Floyd, *Columbus Dynasty*, 53–54; Watts, *West Indies*, 101–103. The lack of expansion onto other islands in the first 15 years after the settlement of Hispaniola is explored in Néstor Meza Villalobos, "Significado del período 1493–1508 en el proceso de la conquista," *Revista Chilena de Historia y Geografía*, CX (1947), 41–55.

[74] Watts, *West Indies*, 105–112.

[75] Salvador Brau, *La colonización de Puerto Rico. Desde el descubrimiento de la Isla hasta la reversión a la Corona española de los privilegios de Colón* (San Juan, P. R., 1930); Francisco Morales Padrón, *Jamaica Española* (Seville, 1952); Amando

the Caribbean's limited gold deposits and the elimination or suppression of its indigenous peoples had made the region an imperial backwater, valued only for the defense and supply of the fleets going back and forth from Spain to the mainland.[76]

Although a scattering of outposts arose along Tierra Firme—the Caribbean coast from western Panama to Lake Maracaíbo—during the first decade of the sixteenth century, Spain lacked a firm footing on the mainland until the large Pedro Arias de Avila (commonly referred to as Pedrarias) expedition landed in Panama in 1514. The Spaniards had failed to discover any valuable resources, could not sustain themselves independently, and did not control the indigenous peoples in their tropical hinterland.[77] Some expeditions, beset by chronic lack of supplies and effective resistance by the local peoples (including the use of poison arrows), and finding negligible possibilities for quick gain, gave up and sailed for one of the Spanish islands.[78]

The Pedrarias expedition, consisting of at least 1,500 men, was the last such venture of any size to receive substantial financial backing from the crown. It was dispatched to impose governmental control over the petty settlements on the mainland, which in their isolation and desperation had become quite autonomous, and to make a concerted effort to pacify this region and transform it into a self-sustaining enterprise.[79] Over the following decade, Pedrarias and his lieutenants led their forces through Central America as far north as Nicaragua and subdued numerous native tribes. Despite these incessant efforts, Castilla del Oro, as the colony was then called, never prospered under his administration because of lack of both a cash crop and a substantial Indian population for use as labor. In fact, under Pedrarias, *cabalgadas*, as raids on native villages for booty were called, increased in number as a temporary measure to supplement the meager economy.[80] The situation remained so tenuous in the mid-1510s that Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who had come to Tierra Firme from Spain in the Pedrarias fleet, joined a group of men who with the governor's

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Melón y Ruiz de Gordejuela, *Los primeros tiempos de la colonización*, vol. 6 in Antonio Ballesteros y Beretta, ed., *Historia de América y de los pueblos americanos* (Barcelona, 1952).

[76] Knight, *Caribbean*, 32–33.

[77] Mario Góngora, *Los grupos de conquistadores en Tierra Firme (1509–1530)* (Santiago, Chile, 1962), 11–12.

[78] The character of these efforts and their generally dismal outcomes are well related in Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*, chap. 8. Map 7 on p. 313 in Guillermo Céspedes, *La conquista*, in *Historia de América Latina*, I (Madrid, 1985), well depicts the limited Spanish hold on Tierra Firme as late as 1515, still the only region Spain occupied on the mainland over twenty years after the arrival of the first major colonizing expedition in the Caribbean.

[79] Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, *Historia General y Natural de las Indias, Islas y Tierra-Firme del Mar Océano* (Madrid, 1851–1855), III, is an excellent chronicle of this expedition and its actions. Oviedo sailed on this voyage and subsequently spent many years in the area.

[80] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores*, 19–20.

permission abandoned the colony for the recently conquered island of Cuba.[81]

Perhaps the movement of the capital from the unhealthy site of Darién to the newly founded city of Panama on the Pacific in 1519 best marks Tierra Firme's transition from a precarious to a more secure footing.[82] It certainly served to tie the area's long-term future to activities along the Pacific coast of South America. By the mid-1520s, Castilla del Oro was well established and seemingly permanent, since it was a vital point of transit between the oceans. The colony was not yet entirely secure, however, because little wealth had been found, trade with Spain continued slight, no town of substantial size had developed, the natives were dying in great numbers, and no significant expedition of conquest had been undertaken outside of the colony itself.[83]

Virtually all subsequent campaigns of conquest on the mainland were mounted either from Cuba or from Tierra Firme.[84] Once a region was conquered, it in turn served as the base for further *entradas* (expeditions). These ventures were locally initiated; the royal government played no role in them.[85] Thus the colonization of Puerto Rico, Jamaica, and Cuba originated in Hispaniola. The conquest of Mexico and De Soto's campaign across southeastern North America began in Cuba. Hernán Cortés's victory over the vast Aztec empire in 1521 inspired a dramatic expansion in the number of *entradas* undertaken over the next quarter century or so. It led directly to the conquests of the Yucatan, Guatemala, and even the Philippines. Francisco Vázquez de Coronado's trek began there also, to be followed about a half century later by more successful expeditions to the north. Francisco Pizarro's expedition to Peru led to others into Ecuador, southern Colombia, Bolivia, Chile, and northern Argentina, as well as into a number of fiascos in tropical jungles or endless plains.

The importance of these endeavors originating in the colonies and being headed by men experienced in such undertakings is evidenced by an example to the contrary. In 1535, a nobleman named Pedro de Mendoza set out from Spain in command of a fleet of eleven ships containing 1,300 settlers to colonize the Río de la Plata region. It was an unmitigated

[81] Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*. trans. J. M. Cohen (Baltimore, 1963), 15–16.

[82] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores*. 24.

[83] Sauer, *Early Spanish Main*. chaps. 13–16, covers the course of developments of this colonizing venture. A useful earlier work is Angel de Altolaguirre y Duvale, *Vasco Núñez de Balboa* (Madrid, 1914). On the demographic and environmental impact of the Spanish enterprise in Central America see Linda A. Newson, *The Cost of Conquest: Indian Decline in Honduras under Spanish Rule* (Boulder, Colo., 1986), and *Indian Survival in Colonial Nicaragua* (Norman, Okla., 1987).

[84] See the excellent map in J. H. Elliott, "The Spanish Conquest and Settlement of America," in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*. vol. 1: *Colonial Latin America* (Cambridge, 1984), 150–151.

[85] Bernal Díaz del Castillo's chronicle provides excellent accounts of the organization and victualing of the three expeditions from Cuba in which he participated in the second half of the 1510s. See *Conquest of New Spain*. 15–16.

failure, with most of the participants (including Mendoza) dying from disease, Indian attacks, or famine within a year.[86] The survivors fled upriver until they entered the land of the Guaraní Indians in central Paraguay. The Guaraní themselves were beleaguered by incessant attacks from surrounding Indians and viewed the Spaniards as useful allies. The Spaniards founded the town of Asunción and enjoyed a certain localized prosperity based on their enduring association with this native group.[87]

These mainland expeditions all followed the full-settlement pattern of expansion. The Spaniards never considered merely setting up lightly manned trading bases. They intended to colonize and to employ indigenous laborers and resources in their enterprises.

European merchant houses played a greatly reduced role in financing these expeditions; settlers and colonial merchants, most of whom were Spaniards, now provided much of the funding. Communications were maintained and trade was initiated even while a campaign was underway, if at all possible, since additional information and matériel were always needed. Further, a new colony's linkage into the European commercial system was indispensable to its viability. The conquerors had to be able to ship their gains profitably to Europe and to receive its manufactured goods in return for their province to endure and prosper. Thus they welcomed merchants into their midst and sought to augment their trade with the other colonies and with the mother country.

In the process of expansion, the governor of a colony characteristically authorized each new undertaking. Sometimes he helped in its financing or supply, expecting to profit personally from its success. Nonetheless, in the normal course of events, expeditions repudiated their sponsoring governor whenever the participants realized that they had chanced upon a rich new territory. They then declared autonomy and installed their commander as governor of the region being claimed for Spain. To execute this disavowal in proper legal fashion, they founded a town complete with a council. The municipality then declared itself independent of any preexisting colonial government and sent an emissary laden with documentation to Spain to gain royal approval.[88] The arrival of this agent—perhaps quickly followed by another from the repudiated governor—could well be the first that the crown heard of the expedition. The monarch commonly decided in favor of the successful leader, as there was little else he could do, but might order him to pay compensation to the rejected official.

The idea for an expedition usually originated with a man of prominence or authority. To gain the necessary backing, he had to be a highly regarded

[86] Ernesto J. Fitte, *Hambre y desnudeces en la conquista del Río de la Plata* (Buenos Aires, 1963).

[87] Julián María Rubio, *Exploración y conquista del Río de la Plata: Siglos XVI y XVII* (Barcelona, 1953); Elman R. Service, *Spanish-Guaraní Relations in Early Colonial Paraguay* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1954).

[88] The founding of Veracruz by Cortés's expedition so that it might assert its independence of the governor of Cuba is the best known and described of these actions. See Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, ed. and trans. A. R. Pagden (New York, 1971), 24–28, 37–46; López de Gómara, *Cortés*, 81–91.

veteran of the Indies, a man the colonists termed a *baquiano,* preferably with experience in commanding men against native societies. The *adelantado* (leader) would secure the approval of the governor and then set about to staff and supply the venture, typically by selling or mortgaging his holdings in the colony. Officials and merchants also made loans or investments, sometimes in the form of partnerships, for set shares of the proceeds.[89] Thus expeditions usually departed with their leaders already deeply in debt. The capitalists' shares and the crown's standard claim to one-fifth of all gains (*quinto*) took precedence over all others.[90]

Assembling a force of men was not a simple task. First, the organizer needed several loyal lieutenants. He therefore turned to relatives, who might already be living with him, or to men from his home province in Spain. When Pizarro, for instance, was in Spain to gain royal approval for the expedition he was organizing to Peru, he traveled to his home town of Trujillo to recruit several brothers as his primary aides, as well as other men to form a reliable retinue.[91] Such assistants stood to gain far more than the common recruit at the end of the enterprise.

Recruits for the rank and file were not always readily available. Men joined *entradas* to obtain quick wealth, land, and laborers. A colonist who had assembled such assets or established himself as an artisan, merchant, or professional, typically displayed no desire to set off on another dangerous venture with unsure rewards.[92] Thus the term "adventurer," so often applied to the *conquistadores,* could hardly be more inappropriate or misleading. When still without holdings, these men were prepared to risk their lives to make their fortunes and were ruthless in assailing those—native peoples and sometimes other Spaniards—who stood in their way. Once comfortably set up, however, the conquerors proved to be satisfied and sedentary sorts.

For this reason, the men who had lost out during the initial founding of a colony, plus others newly arrived from Spain, composed the *entradas* from any area. In fact, by the middle of the sixteenth century, when the major conquests had already been carried out and considerable immigration to the Americas was taking place, colonial authorities regularly authorized expeditions designed to remove surplus population from their regions.[93]

[89] Pike, *Enterprise and Adventure,* chap. 5, enumerates a series of cases from the Caribbean of Genoese commercial agents funding such enterprises. López de Gómara, *Cortés,* 18–19, relates how Cortés raised money from both a merchant and local officials. The partnership that Pizarro maintained with two other men in his early ventures along the Pacific coast is well known; see John Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (New York, 1970), 24–27. Góngora describes a complicated company in a conquering expedition in Central America in *Grupos de conquistadores,* 43–46.

[90] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores,* 55–56.

[91] Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca: A Social and Biographical Study of the First Conquerors of Peru* (Austin, Tex., 1972), 6.

[92] Ibid., 19–20.

[93] Lockhart, *Spanish Peru,* 143–145.

Entrada members came from a wide range of social backgrounds, with the vast majority from the broad middle sector of Spanish society. All types except the upper nobility and the desperately poor were represented, with generally a higher proportion of urban dwellers than countryfolk.[94] The list of ninety-three men present at the founding of Panama in 1519 identifies three *hidalgos* (gentry) and eight squires, six professionals (such as notaries and medical practitioners), twenty artisans, eleven farmers, thirteen sailors and pilots, and five foreigners (three Italian and two Greek).[95] Among the 168 men who participated in the capture of the Inca emperor Atahuallpa at Cajamarca in 1532 were thirty-eight *hidalgos,* one cleric, twelve clerks, thirteen merchants, nineteen artisans, two seamen, two foreigners (both Greek), one black, and one mulatto horseman.[96] The 150 or so men who accompanied Pedro de Valdivia to Chile in 1540 included five notaries, three clerics, three merchants, five miners, ten artisans, one sacristan, five foreigners (from Germany, Flanders, Greece, Italy, and Portugal), and one black slave (who later became an *encomendero*).[97]

Expeditions were not organized along military lines, and the members rarely had previous experience as soldiers.[98] The participants did not use the term "soldier" when describing each other.[99] Military experience was hardly necessary, since strict discipline and complex tactics were not called for in the type of warfare conducted against the indigenous societies. From the conquest of the Canary Islands, through their experiences in the Caribbean, and continuing on to mainland America, the standard approach of the Spaniards was to capture the local headman and to rule through him and the native social hierarchy. The seizures of Montezuma by Cortés and of Atahuallpa by Pizarro were representative.[100]

The salient division of forces in an expedition of 250–500 men (more or less the size of most of them) was between cavalry and footmen, with the number of horsemen rarely exceeding twenty. Footmen were organized into several squads, each commanded by one of the leader's trusted associates. There were no military ranks or serious training. The partici-

[94] Group biographies of conquering expeditions include Tomás Thayer Ojeda and Carlos J. Larraín, *Valdivia y sus compañeros* (Santiago, Chile, 1950), José Armando de Ramón Folch, *Descubrimiento de Chile y compañeros de Almagro* (Santiago, Chile, 1953), Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores,* Lockhart, *The Men of Cajamarca,* and Carlos Meléndez, *Conquistadores y pobladores: Orígenes histórico-sociales de los Costarricenses* (San José, Costa Rica, 1982).

[95] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores,* 75–81.

[96] The previous occupations or social backgrounds of 87 men were found; see Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca,* 36–38.

[97] The previous occupations or origins of 34 of the men were discovered; see Thayer Ojeda and Larraín, *Valdivia y sus compañeros,* 108–109.

[98] Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca,* 21.

[99] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores,* 10; Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca,* 18–19.

[100] Nor, in fact, do the chronicles of the conquests treat them as immense innovations or as anything more than an accepted major step in the process of gaining authority over the native societies. Great disagreement would develop later, however, over the issue of responsibility for the deaths of these two emperors.

pants already knew how to wield swords and pikes. Few carried arquebuses. Firearms were of limited utility, as they had little impact on the massive armies the imperially organized peoples of the Americas could muster, and artillery was of negligible importance given that the force would not have to invest any fortified towns. Crossbows remained the weapon of choice for launching projectiles.[101] The Spaniards always preferred close combat, where they could use their metal weapons to excellent advantage, to a prolonged exchange of projectiles, where even their superior protective garments could not protect them fully against the waves of arrows and spears of their far more numerous opponents. Even in close combat, the Spanish tried to remain in compact fighting groups and avoid individual confrontations.

Expeditions were organized as companies; with the end of the venture, the agreement lapsed, and all parties became free agents to do as they wished, including joining other such endeavors.[102] A well-equipped man usually received one share; one with a horse commanded a double share. The *adelantado* and his lieutenants claimed a number of shares each.[103] Merchants supplied the weaponry and other items men needed in return for a half share. People residing in the colony where an expedition was assembled could invest in the venture by sending along retainers, slaves, or horses. They usually obtained a third to a half of the gains of any servant they contributed, with the actual participant getting the remainder. A man who contributed a horse while himself remaining behind could claim a full share.[104]

Entrada members often had to provide much or all of their food and other supplies. These costs forced them to contract substantial debts before the expedition ever set forth and added more during its course.[105] Bernal Díaz del Castillo relates how he and other impoverished settlers helped organize and supply two expeditions from Cuba in an effort to improve their fortunes.[106] Participants often formed companies among themselves to cover logistical and other needs.[107]

Expedition members were understandably very sensitive to the final

[101] An in-depth analysis of how a small group of Spaniards could prevail against a vast indigenous army that besieged them for about a year is Thomas Flickema, "The Siege of Cuzco," *Revista de Historia de América*, XCII (1981), 17–47. A consideration of military change in Europe in this period and the advantages that it gave to Europeans in warfare against non-European peoples is Geoffrey Parker, *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1988), chap. 4.

[102] Silvio Arturo Zavala, *Los intereses particulares en la conquista de la Nueva España* (México, D. F., 1964), 19–20; Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores*, 10; Ramón Folch, *Descubrimiento de Chile*, 34.

[103] For the distribution of shares in Pizarro's expedition see Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 78–82.

[104] Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores*, 42.

[105] Zavala, *Intereses particulares*, 19, 54–55.

[106] Díaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, 16–17, 27.

[107] There were numerous company agreements among the men in Pizarro's expedition; see Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, 69–75.

distribution of proceeds. They characteristically complained that they were receiving far too little and that the captains had either changed the rules or had hidden some of the booty.[108] Of course, a failed *entrada* could wipe out the fortunes of investors and participants.[109]

Without military discipline and regulations to control behavior and because the participants had diverse allegiances and interests, the *adelantado* was always hard pressed to maintain morale and a sense of common cause among his men. This is one reason why leaders sought to enlist their own cadres of relatives, friends, and persons from their regions of birth in positions of importance. When an expedition faced a threat from hostile forces or perceived that it was likely to gain immense wealth, the leader could expect good conduct and cooperation, but when it enjoyed little success, the leader faced open challenges, rebellions, or the formation of splinter groups that threw off his authority and went their own way.[110] The ill-fated early campaigns into Paraguay, for example, broke into factions that fought each other and deposed, even killed, their governors.[111]

As in Spanish settlement of the Atlantic and Caribbean islands, evangelization was not initially an imperative in the subjugation of the Americas.[112] In fact, even the major campaigns on the American mainland—those of Cortés, Pizarro, Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, and Valdivia, for example—included few ecclesiastics, and these went to minister to the Spaniards. (A friar in Cortés's expedition, in fact, repeatedly restrained the conqueror's religious fervor, reasoning that he might make native lords and priests irate by arguing with them or desecrating their sacred sites.)[113] The era of evangelization closely followed the age of conquest in the core areas of the emerging empire, but it followed nonetheless. A zeal to convert did not drive Spain's expansion across the Atlantic. True missionary efforts developed later, centered among desert, mountain, and jungle peoples along the frontiers, against whom conquering expeditions had experienced little success.

The participation of the royal government in this movement was sporadic even at its height and quite negligible by the time *entradas* were penetrating Mesoamerica and South America. The crown generally encouraged such efforts, but lack of resources and weak governmental structure limited it to offering concessions and exemptions. As had been the case during the Reconquest, the leader of a successful expedition was

[108] Zavala, *Intereses particulares*, 45, 69; Góngora, *Grupos de conquistadores*, 57.

[109] Ramón Folch, *Descubrimiento de Chile*, 108.

[110] A thorough treatment of a stagnating expedition's deterioration is provided in Demetrio Ramos, "Funcionamiento socioeconómico de una hueste de conquista: la de Pedro de Heredia en Cartagena de Indias," *Revista de Indias*, CXV-CXVIII (1969), 393–526.

[111] Ulrich Schmidel, *Derrotero y viaje a España y las Indias* (Buenos Aires, 1944); Enrique de Gandía, *Historia de la conquista del Río de la Plata y del Paraguay: los gobiernos de don Pedro de Mendoza, Alvar Núñez y Domingo de Irala, 1535–1556* (Buenos Aires, 1932); Rubio, *Exploración y conquista del Río de la Plata*.

[112] McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World*, 95.

[113] Díaz, *Conquest of Mexico*, 177–178, 201, 235.

recognized as the first governor of the territory that he subdued, and the crown did not take an irrevocable position against such posts being hereditary until the mid-sixteenth century.[114] The *municipio* remained the fundamental governmental institution conveying power and legitimacy.

Conquistadores subdued new territories in order to settle, not to raid and depart. Members of expeditions such as those of Cortés in Mexico and Pizarro in Peru remained in overwhelming numbers in the lands they subjugated even after the distribution of booty. Enduring wealth and status came through full settlement of a region and exploitation of its human and physical resources.[115] Some settlers did ultimately return to their homeland, but most of them did so only after they had made substantial fortunes through postconquest economic and professional activities. Also, return migration must be understood within the framework of the family and local networks through which much of the migration in both directions functioned, for successful colonists were far more likely to promote the immigration of others from their home regions than they were ever to return to Spain.[116]

None of the labor systems that became so central to the Spanish American colonial economies—rotary draft labor systems, personal retainers, and slavery—had to be invented on the scene. All had precedents in the Iberian experience before colonization in the New World commenced, though they might be modified or expanded in this new setting. The extensiveness and longevity of each of these labor institutions in any particular region, as well as the mix among them, were determined by the

[114] Floyd, *Columbian Dynasty*, is excellent on the government's vacillation into the 1520s on the authority of the Columbus family in the Caribbean. On the royal government's cautious assertion of authority in early colonial Mexico see Peggy K. Liss, *Mexico under Spain, 1521–1556: Society and the Origins of Nationality* (Chicago, 1975).

[115] The centrality of the first conquerors in the formation of the early colonial societies and the continuing preeminence of some of their families has been overwhelmingly demonstrated. Besides the studies cited in note 93 see, for Mexico, Robert T. Himmerich, *The Encomenderos of New Spain, 1521–1555* (Austin, Tex., 1991), Julia Linn Bell Hirschberg, "A Social History of Puebla de Los Angeles, 1531–1560," (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1976), and Ida Altman, "Spanish Society in Mexico City After the Conquest," *Hispanic Amer. Hist. Rev.*, 71, (1991), 413–445; for Peru, Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560*, Karen Spalding, *Huarochirí: An Andean Society Under Inca and Spanish Rule* (Stanford, Calif., 1984), Robert G. Keith, *Conquest and Agrarian Change: The Emergence of the Hacienda System on the Peruvian Coast* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), Susan E. Ramírez, *Provincial Patriarchs: Land Tenure and the Economics of Power in Colonial Peru* (Albuquerque, N. M., 1986), and Keith A. Davies, *Landowners in Colonial Peru* (Austin, Tex., 1984); for Chile, Mario Góngora, *Encomenderos y estancieros; Estudios acerca de la Constitución social aristocrática de Chile después de la Conquista, 1580–1660* (Santiago, Chile, 1970).

[116] Altman, "Emigrants and Society: An Approach to the Background of Colonial Spanish America," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, XXX (1988), 170–190, and *Emigrants and Society: Extremadura and Spanish America in the Sixteenth Century* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989); Lockhart, *Men of Cajamarca*, chap. 3.

character of the indigenous peoples and the nature and dynamism of the economy.

The Spanish government acted slowly to incorporate the American colonies into its central administrative framework. As long as the possessions were in the Caribbean, they remained of peripheral interest to the home government, since the region contained no valuable resources or large, advanced civilizations. Individual islands and Tierra Firme were placed under governors who acted largely as autonomous authorities: not until the 1520s did they have to answer to a powerful oversight agency in Spain. The monarchs regarded these early settlements as trading factories.[117] In 1503, the government placed them under the newly created *Casa de Contratación,* a royal trading house modeled after a Portuguese institution founded a half century previously to handle commerce along the African coast and eventually in India. In 1511, Santo Domingo, the capital of the Caribbean region, was assigned an *audiencia,* a court of appeals that also exerted considerable executive authority. The precedent-setting court was established in the Canary Islands in 1497, just as the conquest ended. Also that year, administration over the Indies was placed under a special section of the Council of Castile, but not until 1519 was Hispaniola annexed to the Castilian monarchy.

The conquest of Mexico in 1521, and the Spanish government's resultant comprehension that the Americas contained resources and peoples on a scale previously unimagined, impelled the crown to integrate this now very substantial colonial empire more tightly into its administrative structure. In 1524, Carlos I created the Council of the Indies with permanent authority over all of his territories in the Americas. Despite this, Cortés faced few obstacles to his near total authority in Mexico until an *audiencia* was finally assigned there in 1528. (Although royal notaries and treasury officials accompanied a number of *entradas,* with only a couple of notable exceptions, they did not concern themselves with issues of authority and patronage but rather sought to ensure that royal interests were protected, particularly in the distribution of booty.)[118] The first viceroy arrived in Mexico in 1535, fourteen years after the defeat of the Aztecs and, incidentally, three years after the conquest of the Incas. Peru was long left to the governorship of Pizarro. The first viceroy and *audiencia* did not arrive there until 1544, fully three years after Pizarro's assassination. Columbus in Hispaniola, Velázquez in Cuba, Valdivia in Chile, and yet other *conquistadores*/governors also enjoyed extended periods in command of the lands they had colonized without other government officials or agencies to obstruct or modify their actions.

Spain's initial efforts at conquest and colonization in the Atlantic and the Caribbean, as described here, were not vastly different from other European countries' early undertakings in the Americas. Spain initially fol-

[117] Lockhart and Schwartz, *Early Latin America,* 64.
[118] McAlister, *Spain and Portugal in the New World,* 186.

lowed the mercantile pattern of expansion, but this approach was soon subordinated to the full-settlement one when expeditions reached territories with substantial populations and resources. The government played a very circumscribed role in both types of endeavors. No entity or individual coordinated the expeditions. Private initiatives, characteristically by persons with some experience in exploration or settlement (or at least associates of others who had such experience), spearheaded the movement. Merchants in Europe and in the first colonial ports acted as the primary agents. Established colonists invested in the undertakings but did not participate in them. Religious motivation had not yet become a major force.

The first Spaniards to settle in the New World also broadly resembled their counterparts from other European societies.[119] Studies have shown that many *conquistadores* and other early settlers came from locally respected families that lacked substantial resources; literate professionals were also well represented, as were mercantile agents and skilled artisans.[120] Few military men were present. Family networks provided the conduits of information and recruitment through which many came initially to the Americas. A scattering of foreigners was not unusual. Blacks—slave and free—participated in the initial settlement of Spanish America.

The early colonists enjoyed considerable autonomy. The Spanish monarchy acted quite slowly to dispatch authorities to the Americas. The first royal representatives on the scene of a conquest or new settlement were generally treasury agents; political officials came later. Thus the emerging colonial society was formed by the settlers themselves. By the time judges and viceroys arrived, they could do little but confirm the structures and relationships that already prevailed and try to exploit them.

Reconquest tradition and the presence of substantial native populations impelled the Spanish to incorporate the conquered peoples into their nascent colonial societies, commonly as a subordinate labor force, a practice without parallel in North America. The Spanish, nonetheless, showed considerable respect for the established indigenous hierarchy—honoring their landholdings and claims on labor service from their people—to the extent that the first generation of colonists considered marriage with local noblewomen to be most suitable and sometimes even socially advantageous.

Given the range of characteristics broadly shared by the initial colonizing endeavors of European countries, the most productive approach to the comparative study of the Americas may be to focus on the nature of the indigenous societies, resources, and environments that the settlers encountered upon their arrival. Perhaps the uniqueness of the colonies that developed lay not so much in the peoples who came to them as in what they encountered when they arrived.

[119] An excellent comparative analysis and up-to-date bibliography are provided in Ida Altman and James Horn, eds., *"To Make America": European Emigration in the Early Modern Period* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991).

[120] I refer here to the works cited in notes 92, 111, and 114.