

Luis Francisco Martínez Montes

**SPAIN,
A GLOBAL HISTORY**



BIBLIOTECA DIPLOMÁTICA ESPAÑOLA
Sección estudios 36

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On the cover: Spanish and Mestiza, Castiza. Miguel Cabrera, 1763. Museum of America. Madrid.

*CIVILISATION IS A MOVEMENT AND NOT A CONDITION, A
VOYAGE AND NOT A HARBOR.*

ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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CIVILISATION: ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW

From the late fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Hispanic Monarchy was one of the largest and most diverse political communities known in history. At its apogee, it stretched from the Castilian plateau to the high peaks of the Andes; from the cosmopolitan cities of Seville, Naples, or Mexico City to Santa Fe and San Francisco; from Brussels to Buenos Aires and from Milan to Manila. During those centuries, Spain left its imprint across vast continents and distant oceans contributing in no minor way to the emergence of our globalised era. This was true not only in an economic sense—the Hispano-American silver *peso* transported across the Atlantic and the Pacific by the Spanish fleets was arguably the first global currency, thus facilitating the creation of a world economic system—but intellectually and artistically as well. The most extraordinary cultural exchanges took place in practically every corner of the Hispanic world, no matter how distant from the metropolis. At various times a descendant of the Aztec nobility was translating a Baroque play into Nahuatl to the delight of an Amerindian and mixed audience in the market of Tlatelolco; an Andalusian Dominican priest was writing the first Western grammar of the Chinese language in Fuzhou, a Chinese city that enjoyed a trade monopoly with the Spanish Philippines; a Franciscan friar was composing a piece of polyphonic music with lyrics in Quechua to be played in a church decorated with Moorish-style ceilings in a Peruvian valley; or a multi-ethnic team of Amerindian and Spanish naturalists was describing in Latin, Spanish and local vernacular languages thousands of medicinal plants, animals and minerals previously unknown to the West. And, most probably, at the same time that one of those exchanges were happening, the members of the School of Salamanca were laying the foundations of modern international law or formulating some of the first modern theories of price, value and money, Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, Velázquez was painting *Las Meninas*, or Goya was exposing both the dark and bright sides of the European Enlightenment.

Actually, whenever we contemplate the galleries devoted to Velázquez, El Greco, Zurbarán, Murillo or Goya in the Prado Museum in Madrid; when we visit the National Palace in Mexico City, a mission in California, a Jesuit church in Rome or the *Intramuros* quarter in Manila; or when we hear Spanish being spoken in a myriad of accents in the streets of San Francisco, New Orleans or Manhattan we are experiencing some of the past and present fruits of an always vibrant and still expanding cultural community.

As the reader can infer by now, this book is about how Spain and the larger Hispanic world have contributed to world history and in particular to the history of civilisation, not only at the zenith of the Hispanic Monarchy but throughout a much longer span of time. It is a contribution that has not always been recognized and, when it has, has too often been relegated to the margins, particularly in English-speaking narratives, even those of a scholarly nature.¹ There is one egregious example that due to its paradigmatic character and long-lasting influence I will refer to as a counterpoint in the following chapters.

When asked why he had omitted Spain from his renowned 1969 BBC television series and book *Civilisation*, Kenneth Clark, the British art historian, humanist and publicist, replied that had he intended writing an essay on the history of art, “Spain would have had an important and honourable place”,² but since his goal was to dwell on those contributions that had elevated and expanded the human mind and spirit, he had serious doubts that Spain ever did “fit in”, to use his own words (he did not even mention the rest of the Spanish-speaking nations). Naturally, this supercilious assertion by one of the most prominent scholars and one of the finest minds of his generation explains why, to this day, the name of Kenneth Clark comes up in cultured conversations in Spain only rarely and then with slight annoyance. Regrettably so, I am inclined to say. True, Lord Clark could be one of those bores who all too frequently conjure up the names of Spain, bullfighting, the Inquisition and the Armada in the same breath. In the second part of his memoirs, *The Other Half*, he candidly confessed his qualms about “how to fit the Spain of the Conquistadores, Philip II and the persecution of the Spanish Erasmians, the Escorial and the Inquisition into the rational humanistic plan” he had in mind.³ In the end, he decided to leave Spain out of *Civilisation*, saying that he did not know enough about Spanish history. He confessed his ignorance, but he could not conceal that he was well versed in the standard anti-Spanish clichés. It is almost impossible to utter more of them in a single sentence. Imagine another scholar openly affirming that Great Britain does not “fit in” into any narrative of civilisation because of Henry VIII and the Tower of London, piracy, slavery and the Opium wars, what would one think? Would it be fair? In the end, the BBC board accepted Clark’s explanation and that was it.⁴ But apart

¹ See John Elliot (ed.), *The Hispanic World*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1991. In his recent memoirs, Elliot traces such attitudes back to Protestant prejudices combined with the indictment of Spain and of Spanish culture by the eighteenth-century French rationalist *philosophes*. In the article on Spain in the 1783 *Encyclopédie*, Nicolas Masson de Morvilliers questioned, “*What do we owe to Spain? What has it done for Europe in the last two centuries, in the last four or ten?*” See Elliot, *History in the Making*, p.125.

² Kenneth Clark, *The Other Half*, p. 211.

³ Ibid.

⁴ As a riposte to Kenneth Clark’s omission, in 1973 the Venezuelan novelist and essayist Arturo Uslar

from his undisguised prejudices, Lord Clark had some agreeable virtues. He was, in a way, a learned and cosmopolitan man, at ease with continental habits and mannerisms, a *rara avis* in his native cultural milieu at the time. He felt equally at home in the English countryside, at a ducal palace in Tuscany or dining in the Louvre's private rooms. He brought a profound erudition, an original approach to old scholarly problems and a liberal mind to diverse domains in humanist studies. A connoisseur of Leonardo da Vinci, Piero della Francesca, Rembrandt or Fragonard, he could equally draw broad, imaginative canvases on genres like the nude or the landscape tradition.

Above all he was a great communicator. In the conference halls or in front of a camera, he managed to strike that almost impossible pose of the people's favourite patrician. His manners, his impeccable diction, the peculiar way of softly rounding his shoulders back and keeping his head erect while composing a dignified yet congenial gaze towards the mesmerized audience, all these idiosyncrasies forged a unique public persona whose time was ripe for capturing a large public on both sides of the Atlantic, eager to be educated beyond the increasing doses of sports, pop music and family comedies. Of course it helped that he was able to quote at length from the great classics of poetry, drama or the novel, as well as some lesser authors, to illuminate this or that point he wanted to bring home. Those points were few and formed a persistent and persuasive argument, like a recurring motif in Bach or Wagner. For at the end of the day, *Civilisation*, among many other things, was a superb piece of propaganda. Basically, its storyline can be summed up in three or four easy-to-remember ideas. First, that civilisation is an invention of Western European man, since women hardly figured in the narrative and other world regions were apparently unworthy of attention. Second, that civilisation consists in the enlarging and perfecting of man's powers of mind and imagination, normally an achievement only within the reach of a minority of superior individuals. Third, that in order to persist, the products of that minority of geniuses must be inserted and to a certain extent shared in a social, economic and political fabric wide and inclusive enough to be sustainable, lest the masses become excessively disenfranchised and tempted by revolution and anarchy. Finally, that Western civilisation, the only one deserving that lofty name, is a fragile vase that can easily be destroyed whether from within, by the barbarians at home, or from abroad, by the barbarians at the gates, particularly at the eastern gates, wrapped in red flags adorned with hammers and sickles. Remember, after all, that *Civilisation* was written and aired at the height of the Cold War, when détente was moribund and the Helsinki Process was still in its first, indecisive stages.

Pietri published an article entitled "Los expulsados de la Civilización" ("Expelled from Civilisation"). See *Ensayos sobre el Nuevo Mundo. Antología de textos políticos*. Madrid: Tecnos, 2002.

This political subtext at the core of Lord Clark's personal view of *Civilisation* takes me back to my initial preoccupation, the absence of Spain from the picture. I must confess that when trying to explain to myself Lord Clark's omission, one that fatally erodes his attempt at presenting a comprehensive, though highly personal, view of (Western) civilisation, I am inclined to attribute it to politics and particularly to his dislike of Franco's regime, which he, rightly, considered to be beyond the pale of the Western European political landscape. Granted, he was no born Hispanophile. In fact, he thought that Spaniards were hardly Europeans, meaning civilised in the French or the English sense of the word. But I would never judge him on the shaky grounds of his personal likes or dislikes, of which he had a few too many. On the contrary, if one has to challenge his attitude towards Spain and the Hispanic world in general, it has to be done on a more elevated intellectual battlefield.

To start with, if one of the reasons for excluding Spain from *Civilisation* was its dictatorial regime at the time, then at some point or another every single country occupying the central stage of Lord Clark's narrative, be it France, Italy, Germany, the Dutch Republic or England, should have been expelled from that highest realm where Spain was never allowed to enter. Was France in the times of Montaigne or Descartes or Watteau or David a liberal democracy? Was England under Elizabeth I a tolerant country? What about the Penal laws, the anti-Catholic persecutions, the wars of conquest and destruction launched against the Irish? Was Leonardo's and Bernini's Italy—then only a geographical expression—a constitutional state with separation of powers? Was the Dutch Republic during most of its history anything more than a glorified oligarchy? And, well, about Germany, an admirable country in so many respects, it is better not to touch any raw nerves. To affirm that Spain in the sixties was not politically evolved enough is one thing, to pretend that Spain had no place in the evolution of European or Western civilisation because the Spanish Hapsburgs or Bourbons were not liberal, democratic rulers and Franco was a dictator is unjustly to apply a harsher yardstick to Spain than the one used to measure those other European countries considered to be at the core of the continent's supposedly unstoppable march towards Enlightenment and Freedom. Not very fair, not very gentlemanly, not very sporting, it seems to me.

Secondly, there is the question mark over the very concept of civilisation according to Clark's personal view. Let us assume, only for the argument's sake, that we confine it to Western Europe and that within the boundaries of that limited space it is a notion only related to those contributions aimed at expanding the human mind and spirit.⁵ Well, I can hardly think of a better contribution to

⁵ Obviously, the current essay does not pretend to offer a panoramic view of all civilisations. Its main

that worthy ideal than the Iberian Ages of *Convivencia* and Exploration or the long list of names that would start with St Isidore of Seville, the great encyclopaedist of the Middle Ages, and culminate in Picasso, whose boundless creative genius summed up and at the same time pushed to new heights both the Hispanic and the Western artistic traditions.

So even sticking to Lord Clark's restrictive choice of weapons, it is clear that Spain, using his own terms *ad adversum*, did "fit in" a work like *Civilisation*. But since it did not figure in the original, and most things human can be perfected, I have dared, with more modest means and a far more limited command of the beautiful English language, to try to correct that mistake. In doing so I am not trying to settle old scores. After all, for the new generations Lord Clark belongs to another era and his highly subjective and elitist approach to interpreting the past has been largely relegated to the margins of historiography, not always for the better, I must say. When, much closer to our times, another British historian, Niall Ferguson, set about writing a more up-to-date survey of civilisation (with the revealing subtitle *The West and the Rest*, published in 2011 and also made into a television series) he explicitly dismissed what he called "de haut en bas manner" of his predecessor in favour of a "broader, more comparative view... more down and dirty than high and mighty".⁶ Ferguson's purpose was, in a sense, commendable, but unfortunately his broader, more comparative approach did not prevent him from following a similar Anglo-centric, or rather, North Atlantic view of the Western world and of world history.⁷ Not surprisingly, when he mentions Spain or the larger Hispanic world in his book, he ends up adopting the same disparaging, patronising tone as the one used by Kenneth Clark in his 1969 series to justify the exclusion of the Spanish-speaking community of nations from the realm of the civilised. In Niall Ferguson's particular version of *Civilization*, in the chapter where he devotes some space to Spain and Spanish America he does so with the main purpose of (mis-) using their historical records as anti-models, as negative examples to be opposed to the ascending march experienced by Great Britain and its former North American colonies. Typically, when trying to find a cause that would explain the current divide between Anglo-America and Spanish-America he attributes it to the different patterns of colonisation.

purpose is to examine the contributions of Spain and the Hispanic world to the Western heritage and thus to our common human experience, enriched, of course, by many other traditions.

⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Civilization. The West and the Rest*, p.2.

⁷ The term "North Atlantic" is used throughout this essay to denote a worldview according to which the axis of modern Western history—and of world history to that matter—follows a line that connects the North Eastern coast of the United States, with London, Paris and Berlin. In this highly selective view almost nothing south of that imaginary line matters in terms of civilisation. For an insightful reflection on the place of Spain and the Hispanic world in the North Atlantic worldview thus defined, see Salvador de Madariaga, *The Rise of the Spanish American Empire*, p. xvi.

In his view, “North America was better off than South America purely and simply because the British model of widely distributed private property rights and democracy worked better than the Spanish model of concentrated wealth and authoritarianism”.⁸ Well, as one of the Founding Fathers of the American Republic, John Adams, used to say “facts are stubborn things” and, as we shall see in due course, the “pure and simple” fact remains that from the mid-sixteenth century to the end of the eighteenth century the main urban and regional centres of Spanish America were at least as materially developed as most of the original Thirteen Colonies, more advanced culturally and far more inclusive of human diversity than their Anglo-American counterparts. The gap between the two Americas to which Ferguson refers to in his essay started to grow during the nineteenth century, not before, and it is actually narrowing as of this writing, as most Latin American countries are considered middle-income economies and quite a few of them are negotiating the rough waves of the Great Recession better than many in the North.⁹ Besides, if we enlarge the field of vision, the contention that those countries that were colonised by Britain are better off than those that were under Spain’s control is simply and plainly false. The United States may be richer per capita than Mexico and New Zealand wealthier than Uruguay. Fine. But, according to 2016 World Bank statistics, Chile (23.960 \$) or even Mexico (17.862 \$) are richer than other former British colonies like South Africa (13.225 \$), India (6,562 \$) or Nigeria (5.867 \$).

We can find an even more extreme view of the Hispanic world as alien to Western civilisation—as construed in the narrow Anglo-American or North Atlantic versions—in the work of the late Samuel Huntington. In *Who Are We?*, his controversial essay on the essence of the United States of America, he explicitly mentioned the “spread of Spanish as the second American language and the Hispanicization trends in American society” as one of the main threats to the “Anglo-Protestant culture that has been central to American identity for three centuries”.¹⁰ He even went as far as to consider the imaginary Hispanic menace as an existential challenge to the Western roots of the United States, urging his countrymen to choose between the two “identities” in their dealings with the rest of the world: “If the United States is primarily defined by its European cultural

⁸ Ferguson, *ibid.*, p 138.

⁹ In 2007, the British historian of the world economy Angus Maddison published his *Contours of the World Economy*, which included a list of countries and world regions ranked according to their per capita income from 1 to 2003 AD as measured in 1990 international dollars. In 1700 New Spain (a territory far bigger than today’s Mexico that included a large part of what is now the United States) had a per capita income of 568 while the Anglo-American colonies lagged behind with 527 (both in 1990 international dollars). See www.ggdc.net/Maddison.

¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We?*, p xvi.

heritage as a Western country, then it should direct its attention to strengthening its ties with Western Europe. If immigration is making the United States a more Hispanic nation, we should orient ourselves primarily toward Latin America”.¹¹

Mr Huntington had a rather peculiar view of history, geography, culture and ethnicity. Whatever their race or nationality, Hispanics, as their very name implies, ultimately derive their cultural roots, partially or in their entirety, from Hispania, the province of the Roman Empire on the Iberian Peninsula, in Western Europe, from the third century BCE to the fifth century CE. Spanish, the language spoken by most Hispanics, is a Western European language, in fact the most widely spoken vernacular derived from Latin and the second largest international language (or the fourth if we take into account Chinese and Hindi, which are largely confined to their respective countries of origin),¹² not precisely an exotic philological curio. The names of Inca Garcilaso, Cervantes, Góngora, Velázquez, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Goya, Rubén Darío, Picasso, Diego Rivera, García Márquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Octavio Paz, Mario Vargas Llosa, Isabel Allende or Jaime Manrique belong to a variety of Hispanic nations and traditions, but at the same time all of them are members of the same broad cultural family as Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Molière, Rubens, Blake, Proust, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, Jackson Pollock or Jonathan Franzen. Contrary to what Huntington feared, by becoming a more Hispanic nation, if that is in fact turning out to be the case, the US is not cutting its umbilical cord with the West, but actually reinforcing, broadening and enriching its Western heritage. Hispanicization means neither cultural pauperization nor moral degeneration, it means reaching out to an exceptionally diverse, dynamic and growing community within an increasingly globalised world. By becoming more Hispanicized and with its citizens more bilingual—without renouncing English as the main shared language or its Constitution and values—the United States could become culturally wealthier and more able to compete in the brave new world of the twenty-first century.

The purpose of the following pages is, therefore, to show—against the backdrop of a North Atlantic narrative exemplified by the likes of Clark, Huntington, Ferguson *et alii*—that Spain and the larger Hispanic world are an integral and substantial part of Western Civilisation and by no means alien or inimical to it. Furthermore, because of its unique historical trajectory, characterised by its capacity to absorb, mix and transform different cultures, the Hispanic world represents an original and expanded version of the West, one that has shown its

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹² Nicholas Ostler, *Empires of the Word*, p. 526. Measured by the number of native speakers, Spanish is actually the second most-spoken language after Chinese.

capacity for survival and adaptation while at the same time contributing in no minor way to the enlargement of mind and spirit that constitutes the essence of Western civilisation and in fact of any civilisation worthy of the name.

As an additional introductory remark I will just add, for clarity of exposition, that the current essay is divided into ten chapters broadly corresponding to successive episodes in Lord Clark's original series and book. Each chapter starts with a brief introduction to each epoch according to the Clarkean point of view and then proceeds to offer the reader an alternative take on the same period from a Hispanic perspective. I do not use here the term Hispanic in an ethnic or national sense. Hispanics are not a single race or ethnicity and they are citizens of different nation-states to which they usually owe their political allegiances. In this work, by Hispanic I mean a person who participates in a pluralistic cultural and geopolitical area—the Hispanic world—that is the result, to date, of four successive historical cycles of incorporation and amalgamation of various civilisational influences. Roughly speaking, the first cycle took place between the third century BCE and the fifth century CE, when most of the Iberian Peninsula and its various peoples were part of the Roman Empire. The second cycle lasted from the fifth to the eighth centuries and it started when the Visigoths, a Germanic tribe, invaded the Roman province of Hispania, broadly encompassing the borders of current Spain (Portugal would become a different political unit which would also come to play an instrumental role in the inception of modernity and globalisation). This second cycle was characterised by the uneven admixture of the Visigoths with the original Hispano-Roman population, producing a blend of Germanic, or Nordic, and Latin, or Mediterranean, elements. The third cycle, which I will call the Great Iberian Exchange, occurred during a longer span of time, when Christian, Muslims and Jews coexisted from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries in the fragmented Hispania that resulted from the Muslim invasion in 711. During that extended period, the Hispania of the Three Cultures became a cauldron where North and South, East and West met in an uneasy combination of conflict and *convivencia*. Finally, at least so far, the fourth cycle was set in motion at the end of the fifteenth century, when the fall of Granada, the last Islamic enclave, in 1492 and the dynastic union between the Kingdom of Castile and the Crown of Aragon coincided with the beginning of the Age of Exploration, paving the way for the first Global, or Columbian, Exchange. The turning outwards of the newly united Spanish state led to the formation of a worldwide empire that, at the outset of the Modern Era, ignited a simultaneous process of destruction, blending and creation whose repercussions were felt in large parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Entire regions of the world that had remained largely disconnected were for the first time systematically linked with each other. The Hispanic world as we now know it was, in great measure, one of the main

catalysers and, at the same time one of the main products of the age of Western expansionism and hegemony, an age that may be coming to a close in our own times. What will the next cycle in the history of the Hispanic world bring? Ideally a period when it contributes to facilitating the transition from a fading Western-centric world to a truly cosmopolitan civilisation. Only time will tell.

Finally, let me explain that the choice of Lord Clark as a guide on our journey instead of his later day's epigones is not arbitrary: he still remains the most accomplished and articulate, in his idiosyncratic manner, among the North Atlantic historians of Civilisation. It is also the result of my sincere, though critical, admiration for the man and his, alas, incomplete legacy.

CHAPTER I

THE ORIGINS: THE LONELY ENCYCLOPAEDIST

As a television series and book, Kenneth Clark's *Civilisation* starts with a chapter entitled *The Skin of our Teeth*. It is about how close Western Europe came to being destroyed in early mediaeval times by the weakening and waning of the classical heritage, by the incursions of Northern peoples, particularly the Vikings, and by the irruption of Islam.

In Lord Clark's personal narrative, that the outcome was different was mainly due to a few monks perched upon the farthest Irish promontories facing the Atlantic and to the towering personality of Charlemagne.

This seems an unsatisfactory explanation, if only because the origins of Irish monasticism in the late fifth century and the Carolingian revival in the ninth century, though important in the retrieval of classical civilisation from its almost assured demise, were not in themselves influences that were powerful and lasting enough to save Europe from the verge of the abyss, let alone to bridge the enormous gulf that separated Late Antiquity from the Renaissance.

To help fill in that gulf we have to search beyond those remote northern cliffs or the misty valleys along the Rhineland and focus our imaginary camera on the luminous plains of Andalusia, the endless Castilian *meseta* or along the Cantabrian and Valencian shores of the Iberian Peninsula and its adjacent islands. For it was in those landscapes that the early encounter of Gothic and Hispano-Roman bloods and minds was to produce a most particular blend of Western culture. This mixture was enriched with the sudden appearance and lasting imprint of Islam, along with the Jewish heritage, and these would become, in due time, one of the most fertile components of a resurgent European civilisation. For that potent Iberian blend was the major innovative force that would dramatically project Europe to the farther confines of new worlds yet to be discovered.

Needless to say, the problem with the solution to the dilemma of the decline and resurrection of Western civilisation presented here is that it does not fit in with the main thrust of Lord Clark's narrative. This was namely that the evolving North Atlantic man—whether Irish, English or Frankish; monk, emperor or troubadour—was the missing link connecting the culture of Late Antiquity, into the Dark Ages, through the successive mediaeval revivals and all the way up to the Renaissance, that felicitous moment when the impulse provided by the jubilant Italian city-states mingled with the Northern Weberian forces of capitalism and Protestantism, both predestined to take the future of Western man in their uniquely creative and productive hands.

It is without doubt a very compelling storyline, one that has been enthusiastically endorsed, not surprisingly, by many historians of Northern European stock on both sides of the Atlantic and by their numerous epigones elsewhere. Thus, it seems all too natural that many books on the Middle Ages devote just a few pages to Spain whilst dedicating a disproportionate amount of attention to the most intimate details of the life of Saint Columba or to minor disputes among long-forgotten jesters in a minute Provençal court. Fortunately, recently, that way of telling stories instead of writing sound history is being superseded by an increasing number of thoughtful essays aimed at a larger public in which the extraordinary outcome of the many centuries of *convivencia* and confrontation among the diverse religions, cultures and polities on the mediaeval Iberian Peninsula is given, belatedly, its well-deserved attention.

So, instead of evoking the “Twelve Apostles of Erin”, visiting the monasteries of Clonard, Clonmore and Bangor and from there, by a leap of imagination, travelling to the Carolingian Cathedral of Aachen, I would rather start this alternative view on *Civilisation* by invoking a single name: St Isidore of Seville (1).



Plate 1. All knowledge in a single book: St Isidore as painted by Murillo in 1655, Cathedral of Seville.

He is not a household name in our days. Perhaps for some computer geeks it brings faint echoes of a curiosity news item about an enquiry launched by the Catholic Church to find the patron saint of the Internet. It was no joke, the Church does not take such things lightly, and, after much deliberation, the winner was St Isidore, for many good reasons, as we will see.

St Isidore was born in about 560 of Hispano-Roman parents in a country dominated by the Visigoths, one of the barbarian tribes formerly associated with Rome that took advantage of the plummeting fortunes of their masters to pick and choose the remains of the Empire. Like the Merovingians, the Ostrogoths or the Lombards, the wandering Visigoths had to struggle with other migratory peoples and with a few scattered imperial remnants to establish their own hegemony over parts of the former Roman lands. In their case, after several unsuccessful attempts at defeating the Franks and forming a powerful Gothic kingdom bestriding the provinces of Gaul and Hispania, they finally settled and almost unified the entirety of the Iberian Peninsula. Theirs was the first independent polity that prevailed over most of what is now Spain.

After decades of neglect, the nature and importance of the Visigoth rule over Hispania is becoming more familiar terrain for scholars. The Goths were few, no more than 200,000 at the time of their crossing of the Pyrenees, but rapidly imposed their will on a much larger though demoralized Hispano-Roman population. They were warriors on the move who had been exposed to the decadence of Rome and to some extent had been inoculated with the debilitating desire to emulate their former masters. For instance, and uniquely among their brethren, during their rule over the more evolved Hispano-Romans the Visigoths were the only barbarians who founded cities following the Roman and Byzantine models. *Victoriacum*, within the *limes* of the Basque tribes, *Ologipus* and *Reccopolis* were the only urban settlements erected in Western Europe in between the fifth and eighth centuries

It was an endearing as well as an enduring habit. Wherever they went, the Spaniards always founded cities destined to last. They were planned and ruled according to the best Hispano-Roman urban traditions: with their plazas, churches or cathedrals, markets and towns halls, whether on the Mexican plateaus, in the outskirts of the Amazonian jungle, in the Bay of Manila or on the heights of the Andes. Spain at its apogee, like Rome before it, always had, in Menéndez Pidal's words, an *infinita cupiditas aedificandi*, an infinite desire to build, to persist (2 and 3).



Plate 2. Mexico City and Cuzco around 1572, from *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg: two examples of classical urban planning in the New World.



Plate 3. Jamestown in 1607: compare the Anglo-American settlement with the Hispano-American urban splendour.

Thus, despite their barbarian origins, the Visigoths were the most Romanised of the Germanic tribes. It had been a peculiar acculturation, with some twists that were to determine their fortunes. Their laws were written in Latin, true, though they had been converted to a variety of Christianity, Arianism, which had at one point been popular in Germanic lands but was deemed heretical by Rome and was to set them apart from their Catholic Hispano-Roman subjects, whose beliefs they mostly tolerated, albeit with periods of religious oppression.

The Arians held that the Son was a creation of God the Father and was not equal to Him: the two persons did not share the same substance and the Son was not eternal. In contrast, the orthodox Roman creed as enunciated in the Council of Nicaea of 325 held that the three persons of the Holy Trinity, including the Father and the Son, were made of the same substance and were therefore equals. This religious schism was one of the main sources of discontent and discord within the Visigothic monarchy. Besides, as their heresy was successfully relegated to the margins by the established Church even among other Germanic peoples, the Visigoths felt more and more isolated also from their neighbours, particularly the Franks, who had converted to the Nicene Catholic creed under the inspiration of their king, Clovis.

So it happened that despite their thin patina of culture and willingness not to confront the beliefs and customs of the Hispano-Roman population headlong, the Visigoths were increasingly at a loss about how to manage the constitutional diversity of their Hispanic kingdom as well as their relations with other foreign polities. In fact, their cultural and political inability to adapt to their role as settled masters, together with the nasty custom of deciding the succession of their kings by the sword instead of by any more peaceful procedure, explains why their early rule over Hispania was a slightly mitigated disaster. This was so particularly from the point of view of the preservation of the Latin heritage, which was withering away in most of Europe. To ensure its survival, people like Isidore, who saw themselves as the rightful descendants of Rome, considered it essential to convert their masters to civilisation in a form that the Hispano-Roman elite understood it. Isidore devoted the best of his energies to this goal. Since the barbarians were there to stay, as he persuaded himself, educating and converting them to the culture and faith of their vassals offered the only way to create a Hispano-Gothic community worthy of its Roman origins. In this endeavour, almost everything had to be started anew.

First, Isidore and his brother Leander, also a prominent religious figure and Bishop of Seville, set about convincing the Visigoth rulers that it made neither theological nor political sense for them to maintain their adherence to Arianism. They succeeded. In 587, King Reccared I embraced Catholic Christianity and at

the Third Council of Toledo in 589, the Visigoth kingdom was converted to the Roman faith. It was a truly fateful decision that would influence the rest of Spanish history. For from that moment on, and particularly after the completion of the Reconquest, the recurrent, almost determining factor in Spanish civilisation was the association of the political, social and cultural essence of the country with the Roman Catholic faith. I am not making a judgment here. At the time of writing, British monarchs still have to be heads of the Anglican Church. In the cases of both Spain and Great Britain, what were political and religious choices made at a precise moment for a variety of reasons became salient features in their respective national trajectories.

Be that as it may, as a result of the conversion in Toledo, a new political and cultural entity emerged in the Iberian Peninsula setting it apart from other Germanic kingdoms, which were far less affected by their respective pre-Gothic Roman and local influences. For Hispania had been one of the most Romanised territories of the Empire prior to the Germanic invasions. At the same time, it was a very particular region, with a strong sense of identity and considerable influence in the Roman decision-making centres. The *Hispani* had provided a formidable list of personages to the Empire's élite in a multitude of domains, from the highest political offices to philosophy, poetry or the nascent Christian establishment: Seneca, Lucan, Martial, Quintilian, Columela, Marcus Aurelius, Trajan, Hadrian, Theodosius I, Osius, Prudentius, Prisciliano... Each of them was not only "*Hispaniensis natus, sed Hispanus*", that is not only born in Hispania, but also *Hispani*, Hispanics in the original sense of the word. For despite their different and sometimes convoluted origins, those who are called Hispanics, or Latinos in the misapplied term common in some parts of the United States, have one thing and mainly one thing in common: that either because of their language, their culture or their blood they are all related to the original Hispania, one of the jewels of the Roman Empire, the very cradle, together with Greece, of Western civilisation. Indians of Maya or Aztec or Quechua stock, *mestizos*, *gachupines* or *criollos*: as long as they speak Spanish and partake of the culture born and developed in the former Hispania, later Spain, they can be members of a larger Hispanic world, itself an integral and essential part of the West. (4 and 5).



Plates 4 and 5. Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, two Hispanics (in the original sense of the word) and among the greatest Roman emperors.

Let us get back to the moment when the Visigoths were converted to Roman Catholicism in 589. Though the religious dimension of that event was no doubt of the utmost importance, it symbolises something even deeper and of greater consequence. It was the high point in the process of the Visigoths' Hispano-Romanisation and as such it marked the first major Hispanic contribution to the emergence of an embryonic reality: Western Europe. Let me explain this assertion. What is known as Western Europe is the result, mainly, of the merging of two formidable forces that confronted each other in Late Antiquity: the established but decadent Mediterranean world and the irruption of the Germanic—and proto-Slavic—tribes. That confrontation was both destructive and creative. In every one of the former Roman provinces the outcome of this titanic clash was different. Generally, it involved the intrusion of a vibrant Northern influence into a more passive Roman stratum, infusing and dominating it. But there were many different degrees and ways in which the unequal fusion was accomplished. In the Italian Peninsula, the Ostrogoths under Theodoric preserved most of the legacy of Rome, meaning what remained of Rome after the collapse of the Imperial order. In the case of the Franks under the Merovingian dynasty the merger, though tilted towards the Frankish invaders, was slightly more balanced. The newcomers and the Gallo-Roman population achieved a rapid entente based, mainly but not only, on the sharing of the same form of Christianity thanks to the early conversion of King Clovis to the Roman faith. Besides, the Franks,

though bearers of a vibrant tradition of Germanic craftsmanship, had no qualms in adapting their motifs and techniques to the classical artistic heritage. However, when it came to legislation, the Merovingian codification, known as the Salic law, had a distinctive and more prevalently Germanic component. As to the situation in the British Isles, the invasion of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes—tribes known collectively as the Anglo-Saxons—led to the almost total subjugation of the hardly Romanised local Celtic population. The complete victory of the barbarians and their relatively late conversion to Christianity, and then mainly by monks and missionaries of Celtic origin, meant that the Latin tradition was a minor factor and that Roman Catholicism had a hard time winning favour, though it did eventually and in great measure due to the labour of the Venerable Bede, later in the eighth century.

In contrast to all the cases mentioned above, the Visigoths' relation with the existing Latin heritage was most singular. As noted, they had adopted many Roman features on the way towards their political independence and in Hispania they found a local Hispano-Roman population with a strong identity. This was not the case, certainly not so markedly, for the Franks or the Anglo-Saxons, who created mainly Frankish and Anglo-Saxon polities out of the crumbling Imperial remnants. As for the Ostrogoths and their successors, all they had to do was to preserve what they could of the former Roman strongholds. For the Visigoths it was not so straightforward. By trial and error and confronted with the stubborn resilience of their vassals, they finally came to find a compromise that, though not lasting, contained the seeds of that merger between the Mediterranean, classical world and the Germanic element that would constitute the core of the European ideal, should one day be truly accomplished. It is in that middle ground that we find again the name of Isidore of Seville for it was due to his vision and patience that the compromise between the Goths and the heirs to the Romans was almost achieved.

At a time when Lord Clark's favourite Irish monks were busy founding monasteries to convert the Picts and confronting head on the power of Rome on the important theological point of whether or not the tonsure had to be formed by shaving the top of the head in a circle leaving a crown of hair around it or by shaving all the hair in front of a line drawn from ear to ear, Isidore of Seville had another, relatively minor preoccupation on his mind: saving the remains of classical culture from total oblivion and passing them on to his Gothic masters. And so he did amidst the most strenuous circumstances.

The fruit of his efforts was the *Etymologies*, the single most influential and lasting work of scholarship accomplished by one pen in the so-called Dark Ages. For the *Etymologies*, in Ernst Robert Curtius' words, was the "handbook

of knowledge” the encyclopaedia that “served the entire Middle Ages as a basic book” containing a “stock of information... which the Middle Ages could find in no other writer”. For this reason, again according to Curtius, a German scholar not given to exalted eulogies, St Isidore was “epoch making”.¹³ It is an opinion that was shared by Isidore’s contemporaries. The *Etymologies* contained, for Bishop Braulio of Saragossa, “*quaecunque fere sciri debentur*”, practically everything that it is necessary to know.¹⁴ That “practically everything” was, and this explains the relationship between St Isidore and modern computer databases and the Internet, systematised in an Index—the precursor of the thesaurus—later subdivided into chapters and chronologically arranged according to a method of synchronic correspondences between the Eastern, that is Biblical, and the Classical sources of knowledge. Hence the other title given to the *Etymologies*, the *Origins*, because for every entry in the Index there was a mention of both its Christian and pagan sources. And here we find another of Isidore’s crucial contributions to the Clarkean advancement of learning and the expansion of the human spirit since, though he gave priority to the Christian authors, he nevertheless attributed to pagan luminaries, be they Greek or Roman, almost equal right to be named as sources of authority. Thus Homer, Aristotle, Plautus or Terence were freely quoted to illuminate the origins of writing, poetry or history. In this way the treasures of Antiquity became an integral part of the Christian edifice of knowledge, and it was to be so for the rest of the Middle Ages up to the Renaissance. Bishop Braulio, whose words inspired St Isidore with the idea of writing the *Etymologies* and who was responsible for its subdivision into twenty books, saw this very clearly when he said that: “whoever meditatively reads this work, which is in every way profitable for wisdom, will not be ignorant of human and divine matters”.¹⁵

An enumeration of the books making up the *Etymologies* is a better indication of how far St Isidore’s *magnum opus* achieved the union of the human and divine than any erudite comment. I quote from the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*:

“The first three of the books were related to the *trivium* and *quadrivium*, the liberal arts as understood in Antiquity. The entire first book is devoted to grammar, including metre. Imitating the example of Cassiodorus and Boethius he preserves the logical tradition of the schools by reserving the second book for rhetoric and dialectic. Book three is interested in mathematics. Book four, treats of medicine and libraries; book five, of law and chronology; book six, of

¹³ Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, pp. 450-457.

¹⁴ Quoted in Ernest Brehaut, *An Encyclopedist of the Dark Ages: Isidore of Seville*, p.31.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p.25.

ecclesiastical books and offices; book seven, of God and of the heavenly and earthly hierarchies; book eight, of the Church and of the sects, of which latter he numbers no less than sixty-eight; book nine, of languages, peoples, kingdoms, and official titles; book ten, of etymology; book eleven, of man; book twelve, of beasts and birds; book thirteen, of the world and its parts; book fourteen, of physical geography; book fifteen, of public buildings and road making; book sixteen, of stones and metals; book seventeen, of agriculture; book eighteen, of the terminology of war, of jurisprudence, and public games; book nineteen, of ships, houses, and clothes; book twenty, of victuals, domestic and agricultural tools, and furniture". (Vol. VIII, 187)¹⁶.

It was an impressive compilation, particularly bearing in mind the historical context in which it was written. By the early seventh century classical knowledge had contracted dramatically. Whereas the *Etymologies* had 448 chapters, Pliny the Elder's *Encyclopaedia* written in the first century contained more than 2,000. St Isidore's *Etymologies* was the desperate effort by a stowaway to recover the last remains of a shipwreck. Those remains were not objects, but words. The *Etymologies* was a last minute attempt at rebuilding a crumbling edifice by creating a new architecture made not out of marble, stone or bricks, but out of nouns, adjectives and verbs. Isidore of Seville was not interested in the reality that lurks behind or beyond language. For him, the road to the truth was not to be found in the outer appearance of things or in their relationships as expressed by the laws of causality, but in the search for the origin of words. The result of his work was, so to say, a palace of meaning, a semiotic cathedral. And it was destined to last. The *Etymologies*, written around the year 627, was the single most important reference book through the Middle Ages and during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries there were more than ten new editions. Imagine an edition of the *Esapa* or the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* being written in our time and still being in daily use in the year 2900 (6).

¹⁶ The Catholic Encyclopedia can be accessed at: www.catholic.org.



Plate 6. First printed version of the *Etymologies*, 1472, Augsburg.

Furthermore, to understand fully the exceptional nature of Isidore’s undertaking, we have to be reminded that it was not intended as a display of a single man’s erudition, but as part of a programme aimed at educating a new Romano-Gothic élite. At the Fourth Council of Toledo in 633, presided over by Isidore, already Bishop of Seville, it was decreed that seminaries should be established in all cathedral cities where the liberal arts, Greek and Hebrew would be studied. This educational project was itself a building block within a larger political vision: the creation of a Romano-Gothic polity worthy of the great classical heritage. To this end, St. Isidore devoted another book, the *Historia de regibus Gothorum, Wandalorum, et Suevorum*, whose purpose was to present a somehow idealized genealogy of the new masters of Hispania and a summary of the Gothic kings’ main feats from their mythological ancestors Gog and Magog to King Sisebute, who died in 621. On the other side of the coin, in the book’s introduction, known as *De Laude Spaniae*, the encyclopaedist turned political engineer and tried to sell the virtues of their adopted country to the Gothic masters: “of all the lands from the west to the Indies, you Hispania... are the pride and the ornament of the world, the most illustrious part of the earth.... you are rich with olives... your mountains full of trees and your shores full of fish”.¹⁷

¹⁷ Quoted in Chris Lowney, *A Vanished World*, p. 21.

Well, there are still plenty of olives in southern Spain, but far fewer trees and as for fisheries they are almost depleted by over-exploitation. Quite apart from these discrepancies, St Isidore's description of Spain as the "ornament of the world" was intended as an embellished piece of political rhetoric for the benefit of his political benefactors.

Unbeknownst to him at the time of his writing, other people coming from the East would also think so highly of Hispania that they decided to take it all. For at the end of the day, while Isidore's cultural program to save the classical legacy and to merge it with the Christian canon was to be a resounding success, we cannot say the same about his political acumen. The monarchy he envisaged was to last for slightly more than another century, but it was not a glorious period. On the contrary, it was a descent into chaos, punctuated by some brilliant episodes. In the field of the farther development of a legal corpus, there was the imposing *Codex Visigothorum*, which was applied both to the Visigoths and the Hispano-Romans, thus creating a unified Hispanic people under the same law; in the domain of coinage, the Visigothic kings developed a highly elaborated and centralised system for minting gold coins, following the model of the Roman *tremisses*. In the arts, the Visigothic era is mainly remembered today in connection with the mastery of metalworking techniques and the survival of some fine examples of architecture, especially in the form of small churches, quite a few of which still exist scattered throughout the Iberian landscape. In particular, the Treasure of Guarrazar, a collection of twenty-six votive jewels, crowns and crosses, offered by the converted kings to the Catholic Church, best represents Visigothic craftsmanship. The most impressive piece is the crown of King Recceswinth, made with blue sapphires from Ceylon. Hidden to avoid its capture by the invading Muslim armies, the treasure was long forgotten and rediscovered near Toledo in 1858, then divided between the Archaeological Museum and the Royal Palace in Madrid and the Musée de Cluny in Paris, as it remains to this day. As a piece of art, the Treasure is interesting inasmuch as it tells of the fusion, also common in other post-Roman Germanic kingdoms, between the barbarian style of incrusting with gems and use of lettering from the Byzantine tradition. It also conveys the importance attached by all wandering peoples to portable forms of art that also, through the magic qualities of precious minerals, allowed them to keep in permanent touch with the numinous, the bright side of an otherwise short and brutish life. Whatever the spiritual considerations, the Treasure of Guarrazar, though diminished by plundering and, as mentioned, scattered, still constitutes one of the most elaborate and beautiful collections of art preserved from those remote, allegedly dark times (7).



Plate 7. The votive crown of the Treasure of Guarrazar. Archaeological Museum, Madrid.

As to the Visigoths' buildings, they are now considered part of a sequence maintained from paleo-Christian architecture all the way through the Germanic period up to the pre-Romanesque art practised in the kingdom of Asturias, the cradle of the Reconquista. From there, Visigothic and Asturian motifs merge with the full Romanesque influence that came into the peninsula via the Way of St James, the *Camino de Santiago*. This linear process can, in fact, be traced though a peculiarly Iberian contribution to the history of architectural morphology: the horseshoe arch. We see it first in León and in southern Portugal, used in some paleo-Christian steles as a decorative motif and from there it reappears, probably around the fourth or fifth centuries, as a structural element in the entrance door of a small church, built over a pre-existing Roman *nymphaeum*, in the province of Lugo, in the north-western region of Galicia. I am referring to the chapel of Santa Eulalia de Bóveda, one of the most enigmatic edifices in the history of Spanish architecture due to the syncretism of Roman, Celtic and Christian figures and symbols to be found in its plan and murals. But interesting as these are, what is really important in this context is the novelty represented by the horseshoe arch. Today it is known as the Moorish arch, because of its prevalence, in a more elongated and curved form, in Hispano-Muslim architecture as seen in the Great

Mosque of Cordova, and it visually represents the continuities and disruptions experienced by Spain by the invasion of Islamic armies at the beginning of the eighth century (8 y 9).



Plate 8. Chapel of Santa Eulalia de Bóveda with the horseshoe arch at the entrance.



Plate 9. The interior forest of arches at the Mosque of Cordova.

The Muslim irruption and its aftermath will be dealt with in the next chapter of our narrative. Suffice it to say here that it put an abrupt end to St Isidore's dream of a unified and independent Hispano-Gothic monarchy. But it was an outcome that cannot shadow his great contribution to Western civilisation. Lord Clark was surprised that the literature of pre-Christian antiquity was preserved at all, adding that "in so far as we are the heirs of Greece and Rome, we got through by the skin of our teeth". He was wrong. We "got through" thanks, mainly, to people like St Isidore who, far away from the North Atlantic coasts and almost two centuries before Charlemagne, took conscious pains to salvage, compile and bequeath to future generations the wisdom of the classics. As Bishop Braulio said of the wise and lonely encyclopaedist, quoting Cicero: "while we were strangers in our city, and were, so to speak, sojourners who had lost our way, your books, brought us home, as it were, so that we could at last recognize who and where we were".¹⁸

What St Isidore could not have foreseen in his books was the extraordinary course that Spain, the ornament of his world, would soon be destined to follow.

¹⁸ Brehaut, *ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

CHAPTER 2

CONQUEST, *CONVIVENCIA* AND RECONQUEST

The second episode in Clark's *Civilisation* is entitled *The Great Thaw*. It is devoted to the reawakening of European civilisation in the twelfth century, in the footsteps of the Irish monks and the great Charlemagne. The revival started with the first manifestations of the Romanesque at the Abbey of Cluny, continued with the work of Gislebertus at Autun, and reached its apex with the building of the Chartres Cathedral. From there, the third episode—*Romance and Reality*—takes us to the diffusion of the Gothic spirit, the appearance of courtly love in the songs of the troubadours and the first glimpses of those intermingled spiritual and secular branches of an emerging humanism that would produce the prodigious figures of St Francis of Assisi and Dante.

It is, no doubt, an appealing itinerary, a journey it would be nice to make at least once in our lives. But, frankly speaking, it is quite linear and, well, slightly monotonous if we compare it with the swirling, panoramic road that leads us from the Mosque of Cordova, the visions of the Sufi poets of Murcia or the perambulations of the Hebrew mystics of Guadalajara or Gerona. Then that path continues through the epic of El Cid, the Toledo of King Alfonso X the Wise - as imposing a figure as Charlemagne and a far more complete, cultivated and complicated human being than he was, if I may say so- to the shores of Majorca, around Raymond Lull's Tree of Science and from there to the palaces of Granada and the shadow of the last Nasrid kings projected upon the gardens of the Alhambra. This is the path to civilisation that the reader is from this point on invited to take.

Thus, our trip starts not at the ruins of Cluny, but at the modest cistern in the Umayyad fortress at Merida, in the Spanish south-western province of Extremadura (10).



Plate 10. Visigoth lintel used as a decorative element within the Muslim fortress at Merida.

The Umayyad *Alcazaba*, or fortress in Arabic, was built in the year 835, slightly more than a century after the Arab and Berber armies swept over the Iberian Peninsula. The building was a symbolic affirmation of Muslim power over an increasingly restive Hispano-Gothic population for whom the city had a special significance. Under the name of Emerita Augusta, the city of Merida had been the capital of the Roman province of Lusitania. Actually, it was one of the most important urban complexes of the entire Empire. Its theatre -still in use today for the display of classical plays in summer festivals- its amphitheatre, aqueducts, temples and bridges are, on the whole, one of the best preserved and most comprehensive Roman archaeological sites to this day. The Visigoths, cognisant of the need to appease the feelings of their vassals, maintained Merida, particularly during the sixth century, as one of their vital political and religious centres, a place where the Catholic Church convened many of its more important meetings once it became the official religion of the state. In contrast to the Imperial past, well represented and now on display both in the open air and in the elegant Museum of Roman Art built by the architect Rafael Moneo, the remains of the Visigoth era are few. But those that are still visible tell us more than any thoughtful essay about the future that awaited St Isidore's dream for his nation (11).



Plate 11. Moneo's elegant Museum of Roman Art, Merida.

The ability of the Arabs to collect, conduct and preserve water where there is almost none in sight is legendary. They are people of the desert and know what it means to be thirsty. In this regard, the *aljibe*, or water deposit, of the Alcazaba at Merida is not extraordinary. We can find thousands like it around the dry Muslim lands. What is of interest for our narrative is that, as it happened in many other territories where they settled, the Arab architects and engineers made use of pre-existing structures and materials, in this case Roman masonry and Visigothic pilasters and plinths decorated with characteristic Germanic motifs. The remains of the Roman-Gothic dream that the encyclopaedist had envisioned for Spain were thus reduced to just auxiliary and ornamental elements in a new type of construction inspired by Islam. While St Isidore's cathedral of words survived for posterity, his political project was swept away, though not completely forgotten, by the unexpected irruption of a new, formidable force on the Iberian horizon.

How did it happen? Why so suddenly? The answers to these vital questions are still being discussed and disputed. The how is relatively straightforward. Despite St Isidore's best efforts, the Visigoth nobility proved to be an unruly lot and quite impervious to being taught good classical manners. Their quarrels were endless. Every time they had to choose a king the succession debate turned to violence and more likely than not to murder. This was what happened after the death of Wittiza around 710. A king whose legacy was the subject of much controversy by later chroniclers – he was viewed either as the joy of his people or a deprived

woman-chaser - his succession opened another round of bitter quarrels among the would-be heirs. It was to be the last such dispute. Roderick, a noble of possibly royal blood, managed to stage a coup against Wittiza's son, Achila, with the help of the aristocracy but apparently without the blessings of the bishops, who were by that time the most powerful men in the land. He was therefore considered a usurper. The tainted origins of his reign explain why he never got the entire support of the kingdom and, more importantly, of the army. Part of the men at arms backed Achila and a civil war ensued. It was the moment chosen by an expedition led by Tarik Ibn Ziyad, a Berber general under the command of Musa Ibn Musair, the Arab governor of Northern Africa, to cross the Strait of Gibraltar from Ceuta and strike a fatal blow to the fragile Hispano-Gothic state. It was the 30 April 711, a date for history. In July of the same year the Muslim army crushed the Visigoths at the battle of Guadalete. Shortly afterwards, an Arab army under the direct command of Musa came to the reinforcement of the Berber contingent and, in a decisive push northwards, reduced what was left of the former kingdom to a small pocket of resistance in the northernmost province of Asturias and some surrounding areas

The sequence of events that led to the almost total conquest of the Peninsula by Islam is well documented. It is the interpretations of those events that diverge. For some, they represented the main reason why Spain deviated from its natural course as part of the European mainstream, a detour that explains many of the twists and turns of its later history and lies at the roots of its exclusion from the privileged fraternity of the civilised: its alleged fanaticism, *caudillo*-ism, its exoticism so cherished by travellers in the Romantic age, in short its otherness, are all to be traced to seven hundred years of overbearing Muslim influence (12).



Plate 12. Washington Irving and Spain as the exotic other. Illustration of the *Legend of the Three Moorish Princesses*, by Edwin Lord Weeks.

For others, at the opposite end of the spectrum, the period of Islamic hegemony in the Iberian Peninsula represents an apex of civilisation, unsurpassed by anything that the Europe of that age, a backwater of barbarism, was able to achieve. For this school of thought, 1492, the year when the Nasrid dynasty fell, is a date to be lamented, not celebrated.

I will not enter into this kind of debate. Spanish and foreign historians have filled volumes with their disquisitions. They are historiographical curios and, at their most valuable, a window through which is possible to glimpse the shifting paradigms that have been applied when trying to grasp and fix the essence of Spain, whatever that means. Within my personal vision of civilisation, the Islamisation of most of the Iberian Peninsula had a much wider significance whose echoes reach as far as our own troubled times. Through its various ebbs and flows, the Spain of the three cultures that resulted from the Islamic invasion was and still is a dart aimed not only at the notion of an essential and immutable Spain entrenched in its classical and biblical past, but also at the very notion of a monolithic Western civilisation.

For Spain during the period of the Islamic presence, from 711 to 1492, throughout the intermingled phases of *convivencia* and conflict, was at the core of mediaeval Western Europe and not a distant periphery or alien to it. This assertion, counter-intuitive as it seems at first sight, is simple logic. If we accept, as is self-evident, that geography places Spain in the west of Europe, then it follows that Islamic Spain—as well as its Christian, Jewish and everything-in-between mediaeval incarnations—was as integral a part of the West as, say, the Carolingian or Ottonian empires or the France of the Capetians or Angevin England and Normandy. Therefore, for more than seven centuries, Islam, both the faith and its associated culture, was a European religion, one that ultimately, but not completely, failed to take root in that continent, at that time.

But think of it: Christianity was in its origins a Semitic, Eastern cult that came to dominate the heart of the Roman Empire and its provinces by a chain of events that could have been broken at any moment. And from those exotic origins Christianity was to become, for many, the bedrock, the quintessence of European civilisation. So far, so good, though many accounts of the central Middle Ages tend to forget these simple facts. To these basic premises we must add that many of the cultural and scientific products of Islam and Judaism, two religions that had been already in contact with the Graeco-Roman heritage and had ventured even further, were adopted, translated and, in the process, transformed in Spain. Finally, we know that from there, the reclaimed knowledge flowed into the rest of Europe and became instrumental in the renewal of thought and the arts in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

At this time the heirs to Charlemagne were busy copying and re-copying in delightfully intricate manuscripts what was left of the Carolingian *renovatio* and the monastic movement was yet to build its Romanesque and later Gothic structures, infusing new life into the old Roman and Germanic forms, with the exotic flourishes provided here and there by second-hand Byzantine and Islamic influences. In contrast, Spain was experiencing a whole new flush of life and at first-hand, with far more diverse and innovative creations of the mind and the spirit. The results were astonishing. But to understand their significance fully we have to return to the point in our narrative when the Arab and Berber armies crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and swept away the Visigoth kingdom. As I have said, we know the how and I have alluded to some of the why of these events. But this second part requires further elaboration.

Kenneth Clark attributed Islam's strength to its simplicity. He thought that Islam was the simplest doctrine ever preached. He was clearly out of his depth here, for in terms of theological complexity and doctrinal elaboration Islam is second to no other religion. The same can be said about the literature inspired by Islam, or its science, both original or derivative, but always transformed by those searching minds that from Samarkand to Fez and from Baghdad to Cordova embraced the faith of Allah. No, Islam's expansion was not due to its superficial simplicity, it was its plasticity that mattered. The Arabs and other Islamised peoples at their most vital and agile were masters at adaptation, at giving that Toynbee-esque right response to every challenge they encountered. That is the secret of Islam's early success. In the history of empires only the Spanish overseas expansion, from the Caribbean (1492) to Mexico (1520s), to Peru (1530s and 40s), to Argentina (1536) and then to the Philippines and the Spanish Pacific (1565), covered a greater extent of land and sea with such impetus and speed. In the case of Islam, the thrust of its conquests, from the Four Righteous Caliphs (632-661) to the end of the Umayyad dynasty in 750 brought into a single empire, in roughly a century, an immense territory encompassing the border lands of the Indian Subcontinent, Transoxiana, the Persian Empire and the Middle East, the Caucasus and parts of the Byzantine Empire, Northern Africa and most of the Iberian Peninsula. By the middle of the eighth century, Islamic powers occupied an enormous stretch of land that included what had been the Roman Empire of the southern Mediterranean and its strategic flanks from Hispania to Syria. Islam was, therefore, an heir to Rome in the western Mediterranean basin and to Sassanid Persia in the east, bringing together in a territorial, political and cultural continuum two formerly separated and adversarial spheres (13).



Plate 13. Map of the territories under the Umayyad dynasty circa 750.

It was into this expanding world that the wrecked Hispania of St Isidore was incorporated. This incorporation, forceful and dramatic as it was, had two lasting impacts for the history of Spain in the longer term towards the Modern Age. First, it enlarged enormously the horizon of its inhabitants, at least those with a thirst for learning. Their mental and experiential landscapes could reach via the northern Christian enclaves up to the rest of Europe and via the new Muslim masters to the farthest confines of the East. During the mediaeval period in Europe only the French Midi and southern Italy, particularly Sicily under the rule of Frederick II Hohenstaufen and his court at Palermo, had a similar privilege, though on a far more modest scale and for a briefer, more temporary span than the day-to-day interaction that took place in Spain over centuries. The second effect was that the continuous interplay, peaceful or otherwise, of different cultures created a combination of lifestyles and outlooks, spiritual and material, and of conflicting and convergent political and intellectual enterprises unparalleled in other contemporary societies.

Though it is an over-simplification, at least three or four powerful projects emerged from this simmering cauldron, projects that played off each other in the years up to 1492. Let us start with the extremes.

On the one hand we have the project represented by the Hispano-Gothic survivors who refused to be assimilated by the victors. To cut a very long story short, this was to be, with caveats, the winning side at the end of the Reconquest. For its proponents, their ideal polity was to be a completion of St Isidore's frustrated dream: Catholic and steeped in the Graeco-Roman tradition as reinterpreted through the Middle Ages up to the Renaissance. Those Isidorians, as we might call them, put all their vigour into the creation of kingdoms that,

sometimes as allies and at others as enemies, were to form the core of mediaeval Christian Spain: Leon, Castile, Aragon, the Spanish March (what was to become Catalonia), and Navarre. For the noblemen, priests, and laymen inhabiting those kingdoms, the Muslim south represented complete otherness. True, it was an otherness that it was necessary to deal with: to converse, to trade and sometimes even to befriend, but only as a respite whilst both implacable enemies gathered more strength and until the complete victory of one side over the other could be achieved. Peace was conceived of as a Cold War, “*una guerra fría*”—and this was the first time that the term was coined—not as a permanent state of affairs.

Of course, this mentality was reciprocated almost symmetrically at the other extreme. I say “almost” because, originally, the Muslim polity did tolerate diversity in its midst. Christians and Jews, as peoples of the Book, were allowed to live among Muslims provided that they paid their taxes and renounced proselytising. Ultimately, as the Reconquest launched by the northern kingdoms slowly encroached into Islamic Spain, known as al-Andalus, some Muslim rulers called to their aid successive contingents of North African Berbers—the Almohads and Almoravids—whose idea of tolerance was much more limited or simply nil.

Between these two extremes, there were those people who were caught in one another’s territory—the Christian Mozarabs in Muslim Spain, the Muslim Mudejars in Christian Spain, the Jews on both sides—and those who, on a more elevated plane, tried to create or at least to imagine a composite realm where diversity was allowed to flourish, under more or less lenient constraints. This sounds familiar, does it not? We can find almost an identical cast of groupings in today’s world, from the tortured lands of Afghanistan or Iraq to our streets in Madrid, Paris or London. There is nothing new under the sun, apparently.

Despite attempts to identify the theoretical essence of Spain with one and only one of the solutions proposed to the conundrum created by the Muslim invasion, my personal view is that all of them represent a repertoire of possibilities that have been and continue to be tested with different degrees of success. In any country’s history, as in the biography of every individual, there are always a number of alternative paths available to follow. Some of them are taken, others not, or are just tentatively trodden and then abandoned. In any case, those forking paths, if not forgotten or demonstrated to be fatal for the community, are part of a toolbox with which to confront the different challenges that may later be encountered. In the case of Spain, all those possibilities mentioned above are still present in its midst and are always to hand, either as beliefs, ideas, images, metaphors, ideologies or tangible realities. It is up to Spaniards to privilege one or the other and they have done so at different moments of their history. Of course, if asked my modest opinion about it, I recommend that, conditions allowing, priority

be given to the third way, the one representing, to different degrees, the middle ground. This option was tried by many fine Iberian minds from every extraction and was represented, in their respective idealised forms, by the Cordova of the Umayyads and by the School of Toledo. I said idealised, but not unreal. In any case, sometimes ideals are necessary and more powerful than the sober reality to guide our lives as we strive for the best.

At this point, let me return to Lord Clark's vision of the Middle Ages. For him, all was crystal clear. No need for nuances or forking paths in his storyline from which he hardly allowed himself, or the audience, to depart. No alternatives were needed in the ascent of Western man. Once the threat of the Vikings and other Norsemen receded and, after the battle of Poitiers, Islam was relegated to the exotic periphery of Europe, all the energies of European man were concentrated in making his way along a pristine avenue. Thus, under the patronage of the Church, an extraordinary, linear expansion of the human spirit took place. Its first visible form was the Abbey of Cluny, built in the tenth century. It became the single most formidable ecclesiastical force from around 1040 to 1109, with the extension of its patronage to almost all Christian Europe. The Cluniac style was highly elaborated. In its most extravagant expressions, like at the Abbey of Moissac or the church of Souillac, in southern France, we can trace its original influence back to the same impulse that produced the intricate decoration of the Germanic tribes. It is as if the mobile art of the barbarians, with its floral and animal motives intertwined with fanciful geometrical filigrees, was finally fixed in stone, into a kind of eternity, and put at the service of an increasingly assertive Church, proud of its place as the rightful, spiritual successor to the Empire. For at the end of the day, the Germanic, or Frankish elements in the Cluniac style became an addition to the basic structure of Romanesque architecture, that is to say, the Roman and, specifically, the Byzantine basilica. Thus the Cluniac innovation, and its more puritanical Cistercian variety, represent a late and more perfected step in the ideal fusion of the classical and the barbarian that came to epitomise Western civilisation in its Clarcean, and Isidorian, mediaeval version. But as I said at the beginning of this chapter, there were other paths. And we are going to explore them.

For that, let us return to the situation in the Iberian Peninsula around the eighth and ninth centuries, in the aftermath of the Muslim conquest. Those two centuries are known as dark in the history of Spain, mainly because of the absence of reliable sources that could tell us the objective sequence of events. But from the shreds of evidence that we have and their interpretation, we can build up an approximate picture of that period. In fact, the crumbling of the Visigoth monarchy and the looting and pillaging of its remains by various Muslim

expeditions reduced the conquered territory to a status comparable to the failed states of our days. Here and there, some cities were able to resist, but they were ultimately conquered and sacked.

When in 714 the Caliph of Damascus recalled Musa, the governor of Northern Africa, to give an account of his exploits, the latter took with him a large quantity of riches and slaves. It was a mistake, for the new Caliph, Sulayman, accused him of having overstepped the boundaries of his duties as a mere provincial governor, confined him to prison and sent officials to depose and kill Musa's son, who had remained behind and was harbouring rather extravagant ambitions of independence from Damascus. It was not a promising outset for the presence of Islam in Spain, since this cycle of revenge and murder too closely resembled the end of the Visigoths' rule. But unlike their predecessors, the Umayyads were able to retain control of their distant and newly gained possessions by sending governor after governor and letting them dissipate their energies in the vain attempt to conquer the land beyond the Pyrenees. The battle of Poitiers in 732 put an end to those northerly expeditions. Their only tangible result was the establishment of a temporary Muslim stronghold in and around the city of Narbonne, the former capital of the Visigothic province of Septimania and all that remained of the Visigoths' ultimately failed goal to vanquish the Frankish kingdom. Thus, as their defeated Visigothic enemies had been forced to do centuries before, the Muslims had to retreat to the Iberian south where, unlike the Visigoths, they succeeded in ensuring for themselves a lasting presence. This they did gradually and methodically. Even in those first decades, there were signs of a will to endure and to try to assimilate the Hispano-Roman population. We can see this through the first coins, minted with the inscription in Latin and with Arabic calligraphy, that said "*Feritossoliinspan*"—"coins minted in Spain". Or in the first tax and land reforms that tried to harmonise the conflicting interests of the Berber and Arab masters, who spent a great deal of their time quarrelling among themselves, and their new subjects. And, above all, in the emergence from relative obscurity of that poetic name by which the former Isidorian lands came to be known: al-Andalus.

Al-Andalus was a name that, with the passage of time, came to define different realities. It was first intended as an act of affirmation by the new rulers, a break with the immediate past. But it so happens that its first known occurrence—on a dinar, an Arab coin dated 716—bears a legend in Arabic, "*al Andalus*", on one side, and in Latin, on the other: "*Span*". It was not so easy to erase the Hispano-Roman memory, as the Muslim overlords came to know the hard way. The double denomination was a premonition of things to come (14).



Plate 14. Coin with inscriptions in Arabic and Latin.

Politically, al-Andalus was in its humble beginnings, a remote province of the Umayyad Caliphate whose capital was Damascus. As such, it was far from the centres of religious and cultural power in the Islamic world. But it was not immune to the influences emanating from them. For most of the period preceding the collapse of their dynasty, the Umayyads presided over a vast syncretic effort whose first artistic fruits can be seen in the palace of Qusayr Amra, built around 720 AD near modern Amman, in Jordan. Within its walls we can find a graphic testimony to the new place Hispania occupied in the developing House of Islam. The limestone complex, most probably erected during the rule of Caliph al-Walid, blends formal elements of Roman, Persian and Byzantine inspiration with an Islamic message of triumph. Structurally, it is divided into a hall for receptions and a bath with its tripartite classical division: the *apodyterium*, the *tepidarium* and the *caldarium*. On the ceiling of the ceremonial hall there are painted frescos depicting several kings humbled or defeated by the armies of the conquering religion. One of them is King Roderick, the last Visigoth monarch. At his side, represented making deferential gestures towards the haloed and canopied image of the Caliph, there are other dignitaries including— identifiable from the Arabic and Greek inscriptions by their heads—the Emperor of Byzantium, the Negus of Ethiopia and the Shah of Persia. Visigothic Hispania was thus visually subordinated to a distant ruler who, according to other painted scenes, used to pass a great deal of his time hunting and frolicking among naked women.

St Isidore of Seville would not have been happy at this sight and not only because of his religious scruples. The kingdom he had envisioned as a proud successor to the Roman world was just another trophy in a distant collector's gallery. But had he been alive at that time he could have found a modicum of solace in observing that the ruthless overlords from the Arabian deserts were not immune to the influence of the classical world- far from it. In fact, if anything, Islamic civilisation would become a great acquirer, mixer and conveyor of cultures. By connecting the Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Persian and Far Eastern traditions it would decisively move history a step forward towards the creation of

a global stage for humankind to display its uniquely creative and, alas, destructive potential (15).



Plate 15. Frescos at the Qusayr Amra palace depicting the six humbled kings in Byzantine poses and clothes. Parts of the palace were restored by a Spanish archaeological mission in the 1970s.

A great part of that preserving, mixing and advancing took place in al-Andalus once the conditions proved ripe for the former Roman Hispania to become a creative hub where many different threads would converge. This was to happen due to an unforeseen event in a faraway place: the collapse of the Umayyad dynasty in Damascus. When we think of ourselves as inhabitants of an exceptional era when everything seems instantly connected to everything else regardless of distance because of our technological prowess, we would be well advised to curb our hubris. Already in the eighth century, a political upheaval in the Middle East could send shock waves that would echo from the Pillars of Hercules to a Sogdian oasis on the Silk Road in a matter not of years, but of months. And so it was with the fall of the Umayyads.

Their final demise in 750 was the result of a civil war caused by the ambitions of another family who claimed to have a more legitimate title as the rightful successors of Mohammad: the Abbasids, descendants of Abbas, the Prophet's

uncle. The change of dynasty forced rulers from al-Andalus to the confines of the Indus River to revise their allegiances, unbalancing the fragile equilibrium between the Muslim masters and the local populations that resulted from the first wave of Islamic expansion. The main result of that momentous change was a shift in the core of the House of Islam from its original Arabian heartland closer to the former Persian periphery, a move that would have enormous cultural consequences. From then on, though still mainly expressed in Arabic, the content of Islamic civilisation was to be even more infused with Iranian influences, from poetry to medicine, from theology to astronomy. It is at the same time ironic and fascinating that the legacy of the two former mortal enemies, the Graeco-Roman and the Persian worlds of Antiquity, would be fused and given a new lease of life in the hands of a people that, centuries before, would have been considered by the sages of Athens, Rome or Persepolis as no better than desert beasts.

On a more modest scale, but in no way less important in our narrative, the fall of the Umayyads led to the transformation of al-Andalus from being a minor dependent province in the far west of the Dar-el-Islam to becoming a gradually independent polity with a vibrant civilisation of its own, itself the result of the inflow of the three main cultural and religious tributaries of the same monotheistic river: Muslim, Jewish and Christian.

That it was to be so was not the result of destiny or some blind historical forces, but of the vagaries of human ingenuity and sheer serendipity. It happened that the young Abd al-Rahman, the sole survivor of the Umayyads, was forced to flee Damascus and decided to seek shelter in the remotest, westernmost corner of the empire. There he hoped to find protection with the local Berber population. Five years after his daring escape, and having survived several attempts on his life, the fugitive finally crossed the narrow strait that separated northern Africa from Iberia and reached the city of Cordova, then a small provincial town on the banks of the River Guadalquivir. Being of mixed Berber and Arab blood, Abd al-Rahman pinned his hopes on a welcoming reception on the part of the local governor, or emir, whose allegiance to any distant dynasty, whatever its lineage might be, was tepid to say the least. Encouraged by his initial reception by his host, who even promised to marry his daughter to him, the newcomer was soon to prove his real mettle by turning against his prospective father-in-law. Taking advantage of the long-festered dissensions among Berbers and Arabs and among Yemeni and Syrian Arab tribes, Abd al-Rahman formed a rebel army that dealt successive defeats to his rival, who was finally captured and executed.

Abd al-Rahman's victory provided him and his followers with a territorial base distant enough from the new Abbasid capital in Baghdad to resist any assault from his enemies and strong enough even to attempt the bring the heart of the

empire back into Umayyad hands. Though there is little doubt that avenging his slaughtered family figured prominently in the new emir's mind, he nevertheless avoided a direct confrontation by refusing to claim the title of Caliph, or supreme ruler. Besides, he had to concentrate his attention and energies closer to home. His reign proved to be a rough one, as he had to defend his domains both from internal rebellions and from external assaults from the European north and the Middle East. Ultimately those challenges converged when an alliance was forged between the Carolingians and the Abbasids against the renewed presence of the Umayyads in southern Spain. Actually, this unlikely marriage of convenience between the Christian Franks and a Muslim power against an emergent Iberian polity was to be repeated again in the Modern Age, when the French kings allied themselves with the Ottoman sultans to contain an ascendant Spanish Empire.

Apparently, the initiative to strike the deal against the nascent Umayyad reincarnation in al-Andalus came in 777 from some pro-Abbasid governors in north-eastern Spain who were frightened by Abd al-Rahman's push to unite all the Muslim lands in Iberia under his rule. On the Carolingian side, the request was accepted not only as a means to prevent an Umayyad invasion from the south—as had happened in the past—but also as part of a larger strategy consisting in seeking the Abbasid's help against the Byzantine Empire, which was opposed to any further Frankish encroachment into the Italian peninsula and was, at the same time, trying to avoid any further advances of Islam into the north-eastern Mediterranean. As a result of these diplomatic combinations, Charlemagne crossed the Pyrenees at the head of a powerful army. His intention was to join forces with the local Abbasid potentates of Barcelona, Gerona and Saragossa and with the reinforcements sent from Baghdad, so that they all could march against the Umayyad strongholds in the south. Ultimately, the plan failed due to internecine quarrels in the resulting motley coalition. Frustrated, Charlemagne decided to return home, not without availing himself of the opportunity to sack several cities on his way back, including Pamplona, a Christian centre mainly populated by Basques, which was completely razed to the ground. As revenge, Basque guerrillas attacked and annihilated the rear of Charlemagne's army at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass on August 15, 778. The embellished episode, much distorted to present as a heroic feat of arms against the Muslims what was in fact an ignominious defeat at the hands of some backward mountain tribes, was of course the source of the *Chanson de Roland*, one of the epic poems that would flourish at mediaeval courts around the eleventh century.

Charlemagne's retreat paved the way for the consolidation of a *de facto* independent emirate in al-Andalus ruled by the descendants of the Umayyads. The rest of Abd al-Rahman's rule, until his death around 788, was dedicated

to laying the foundation stones of the political and cultural edifice that was to replace St Isidore's dreams in most of the former Visigoth domains. In many respects, it proved to be a richer, far more complex construction, one that was to elevate civilisation in its Clarkean sense to new heights.

Civilisation requires a sustained sense of purpose and this can only be achieved when there is a sense of permanence. It also needs the existence of a group of men and - when conditions allow it, which unfortunately has not always been the case - of women, with the leisure time and at least the basic skills to be able to devote themselves to the cultivation of mind and spirit. For Lord Clark, after the Dark Ages this was only made possible in Western Europe thanks to the Carolingian revival in the ninth century, the precursor of the great mediaeval renaissance that took place around 1100 and also originated in Frankish lands. But, though lavish in his praise of the bearded emperor, even Clark had to accept that the cultural renewal associated with his name had a very narrow base and a limited scope. Indeed, the cultural horizons of those either directly involved in or indirectly touched by the revived Western civilisation in Europe north of the Pyrenees were quite constrained. They were mainly confined to the recovering and recopying of scattered Latin and patristic texts, though in a much embellished calligraphy known as the Carolingian minuscule, the recuperation of classical, mainly Roman and Byzantine, artistic forms and the establishment of a standardised curriculum based in the *trivium*—grammar, logic and rhetoric—and the *quadrivium*—geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and music—which was to form the basis for the education of the elite at mediaeval universities.

Though in many regards it was a leap forward for Western civilisation from the depth it had fallen into, the Carolingian revival was not a revolutionary moment in the expansion of man's intellectual and spiritual reach. It added nothing new to what was already known or imagined before. In fact, it was a very conservative movement. What Charlemagne was interested in was the consolidation and legitimisation of his imperial power by associating it with the secular legacy of the classical past and with the spiritual seal of approval conferred upon his bejewelled crown by an assertive Church.

To achieve those goals, what he did—and this redounds to his credit—was to assemble in his court at Aachen some of the best Western European minds of the times, irrespective of their places of origin. The name of Alcuin of York is well known in this regard. Less so is the figure of Theodulf of Orleans, a Visigoth who was forced to leave his native Spain as a result of the Islamic invasion, an Isidorean exile, so to say. Settled in Aquitaine, he received a religious education and soon his reputation as a man of learning brought him to the attention of the emperor, who named him Bishop of Orleans. Considered to be the main author

of the influential *Libri Carolini*, Bishop Theodulf was an advocate of employing images for liturgical purposes and as ecclesiastical ornaments for the instruction of the mainly illiterate mass of believers, paving the way for the rich iconographic display of later Romanesque and Gothic churches and cathedrals. Accustomed as we are to seeing Catholic places of worship filled with representations of God, Christ, the Virgin and all the Saints, such an assertion is now taken for granted. But at that time the use or abuse of religious images was part of a divisive debate between the Latin and Byzantine branches of Christendom. In fact, the *Libri Carolini* were intended by Charlemagne's entourage as a refutation of the alternative extreme positions that at different instances were held by the Eastern Church, either accepting images, or icons, as objects of adoration or, on the contrary, rejecting and even destroying them, as in the Iconoclast persecutions.

Actually, the confrontation between the two Christian realms at the time of Charlemagne had been provoked by a misunderstanding due to a bad translation into Latin of the Greek word *proskynesis* in connection with the attitude to be adopted in front of sacred images. When the acts of the Seventh General Council held in Nicaea in 787 were translated into Latin, the Greek term, meaning simply to revere in a prostrate attitude, was translated as *adoratio*, absolute adoration or worship. The idea that a simple representation could be the object of veneration was repulsive for the Carolingian descendants of the pagan barbarians, whose not so distant conversion to Roman Catholicism had forced them to abandon their ancestors' idolatrous practices. This mistake in translation, one of all too many in an era when literal accuracy was not common currency, was one more cloud in the already charged atmosphere surrounding relations between the Western and Eastern Churches that would ultimately lead to the great schism in 1054.

While the artificial controversy on images was dividing Christendom and rallying hearts and minds from Aachen to Constantinople, the remnants of the Hispano-Gothic Church that had not surrendered to the Islamic armies were just struggling for survival, retrenched in some mountain valleys tucked away in the kingdom of Asturias, the last stronghold of the Visigoth monarchy and cradle of the Reconquest. These were not the best conditions, it would have seemed, to foster any cultural renewal as was being experienced north of the Pyrenees. The precarious life in those pockets of resistance, surrounded by the enemy and far from any possible succour, did not augur well for the preservation and transmission of the classical and biblical legacies in Iberia according to the Isidorean plan. It is true that under the charismatic leadership of Pelayo, the last free Hispano-Goths had been able to defeat an Islamic army in the battle of Covadonga some years before, in 722, thus raising the locals' depressed morale. But nothing at that time could anticipate the final outcome of the Reconquest in favour of the Christian side seven centuries later.

In the eighth century, most of the inhabitants of the small Asturian enclave lived in a state of anxious anticipation. They thought that the end of their world was approaching and that the Islamic armies that periodically raided their country were the embodiment of the Anti-Christ. Some of them sublimated that psychological state into, literally, apocalyptic nightmares. A monk known as Beatus was convinced that the world would end in 800 and accordingly spent his remaining days and nights writing a *Commentary on the Apocalypse* of St John in his remote monastery at St Toribio de Liébana, a picturesque county in the kingdom of Asturias. Some 34 manuscripts survive to our day of this book, known as *Beatus of Liébana*, in honour of its author, and at least 26 are lavishly illuminated by successive generations of artists. One of the most beautiful ornamented copies, among the oldest known, dated around 950, is on display at the Morgan Library in New York. Famous for his banking prowess John Pierpont Morgan was an avid collector of bibliographical gems. In 1905 he hired as his personal librarian the formidable Belle da Costa Greene, a sensuous beauty and socialite who happened to be an expert in mediaeval literature. Probably on her advice, J. P. Morgan's son acquired in June 1919 at Sotheby's the Beatus now on display in the enlarged Palladian mansion at 225 Madison Avenue (16).



Plate 16. Illustration from the Morgan Beatus depicting the breaking of the sixth seal. Morgan Library, New York.

The finely crafted Morgan Beatus was most probably illustrated at the scriptorium in the monastery of St. Salvador de Tavera by an artist-monk known as Maius. Like most other illuminated versions of the Beatus, the one exhibited at the Morgan Library is in an idiosyncratic Hispanic style known as Mozarabic, after the Christians who lived under the rule of Islam in al-Andalus. As the Reconquest advanced southward, many Mozarabs left their occupied lands and resettled in territories recently recaptured by their religious coreligionists. They brought with them not only their Arabised customs and language, but also an artistic style that, when applied to the illumination of manuscripts, was characterised by a peculiar choice and disposition of visual elements. In the case of the Beatus's decorations, the original arrangement of figures and colours was not random but followed a predetermined theological and particularly eschatological plan whose goal, according to the colophon attached to the Morgan exemplar, was "that those who know may fear the coming of the future judgment of the world's end". In other words, every Beatus was conceived of as a means to prepare the soul for salvation by inducing the reader to remember that the cataclysmic end of the world was near. Every single word, line and image had an interrelated meaning connected to the author's plan for salvation, his soteriology. But it is the striking selection and application of colours in wide, flat horizontal planes on the parchment that constitutes the most appealing and strangely modern characteristic of the Beatus. The predominance of hot colours, mainly red, yellow or orange could have something to do with the link that St Isidore had made between them and the heat of the sun, playing on the phonetic similarity in Latin between the words "*color*" and "*calor*". However, the main reason for their selection and combination seems to be partially related to the symbolic meaning attached to each colour in mediaeval thought and, specially, to a Mozarabic stylistic technique called '*varietas*', consisting in the creation of different chromatic patterns that were combined in prearranged designs. In principle those designs, when interpreted in conjunction with the narrative, had to conform with the biblical message and were intended as a mnemonic tool to imprint it in the mind of the believer. The image and the form were thus detached from natural reality and reattached to a different spiritual plane. The dematerialisation and spiritualisation of space and colour were devices used in other examples of mediaeval apocalyptic literature, but found their most visually astounding expression in the Beatus cycle. When some abstract or non-figurative artists in the twentieth century tried to find ways to create a new reality beyond the world of appearances they ended up producing works of art eerily resembling the world of the Beatus. Maybe it was not by chance. We know that by the time Mark Rothko was beginning the series of paintings known as the *Sectionals*, those vast canvases depicting rectangular variations of colour, he had visited the Morgan Library accompanied by Meyer Shapiro, the great art historian who specialised in the Romanesque period and had spent some time studying mediaeval monasteries in Spain.¹⁹

¹⁹ On the relationship between Rothko's *Sectionals* and the Beatus tradition see: Vega Esquerria,

There is no way to tell to what extent Rothko was influenced by his encounter with the Morgan Beatus. But one thing is certain, placing an example of the Beatus illuminated in the tenth century by a visionary monk in a remote monastery of Castile side by side with a painting by the abstract master of twentieth century New York, we cannot avoid being overwhelmed by both the continuity and the strange resonances that transcend time and space in the history of art and the unfolding of civilisation. When experiencing a breakdown in their respective worlds, both artists, though centuries apart, reacted with very similar strategies to escape from reality and left behind the orthodox means of expression they had inherited. For Rothko, the answer was to dispense with the representation of the human figure and with references to nature altogether, substituting them with abstract rectangular forms delimited by space and colour. The absence of harmony and proportion in day-to-day reality is replaced by an artificial order in the canvas, where it is elicited by the use of geometrical figures. Nevertheless, even ideal abstract perfection is never achieved in Rothko's *Sectionals*, since in them there remain artefacts of unavoidable imperfection: here colours cannot be confined within their rectangular spaces and tend to overflow their assigned boundaries through the fuzzy edges whilst an undifferentiated background lurks behind the aspiring individuality of the rectangular masses (17)



Plate 17. Rothko's *Untitled* 1962. Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart.

Amador, *Sacrificio y creación en la pintura de Rothko* (2010).

The confrontation between order and chaos is even more dramatic in the Morgan Beatus. Initially, each horizontal strip of colour represents a section of God's Creation, arranged according to a hierarchy of beings or *scala creaturarum*. But instead of being confined to their respective preordained realms, figures in some illuminated pages of the Beatus are shown crossing the boundaries separating them as if the coming of the Final Days would imply the destruction of any sense of order and the return to the chaos that preceded the appearance of the Cosmos by an act of divine intervention (18).



Plate 18: Morgan Beatus: fight among men, angels and beasts. Morgan Library, New York.

The world of the Beatus, on the edge of utter destruction and at the same time hopeful about the possibilities of regeneration and salvation, is an example of the human capacity to create lasting works of art and, in a broader sense, culture in the most challenging circumstances. The generations of monks who, far from the great centres of civilisation, were devoted to perpetuating the apocalyptic tradition inaugurated by the Beatus of Liébana carried on with their task even though they were convinced that when they woke up every morning it might be their last day on earth. But they did not despair. Though their inner motivation was no doubt to reaffirm the faith of those isolated and fragile Christian communities scattered through northern Hispania in the face of the Islamic threat, the result of their artistic devotion showed a

bewildering capacity to absorb and transform different stylistic traditions, not only of Hispano-Gothic lineage — entire excerpts from S.t Isidore's works were interspersed in the Beatus — but also foreign influences that either originated with or were merely transmitted by their religious enemies (19 and 20).



Plate 19. Gerona Beatus: Mozarab or Mudejar rider with Sassanid dress. Museum of Gerona Cathedral.



Plate 20. The Whore of Babylon dressed in Moorish garments. Morgan Beatus. Morgan Library, New York.

In Lord Clark's view, when in the eighth century the Muslim armies overran the Mediterranean basin from East to West, the classical sources of civilisation were sealed off, the former Graeco-Roman fields were reduced to barren land and a new civilisation had to be born facing the Atlantic, the product, as he saw it, of the Irish monks and the Carolingian scribes. Their legacy, following the same plot, was the origin of the Great Thaw of the twelfth century and the subsequent Mediaeval Renaissance, with the birth of the Gothic style, vertical and vigorous, the blossoming of Provençal literature with its cult of courtly love and the peaks of Scholastic philosophy at the University of Paris. The human figure that best embodied the outburst of vital and intellectual energies in those momentous ages for the advancement of Western civilisation was Peter Abelard. He was a philosopher in the best peripatetic tradition, a man who loved a good argument, even if it put him at loggerheads with the ecclesiastic establishment. Unfortunately for his physical integrity, he also desired a forbidden woman, Heloise, whose relatives, upon finding that the passionate teacher had impregnated her, exacted a terrible revenge on his manhood. Abelard became a monk and Heloise entered a nunnery, but they never stopped longing for each other and their letters are still among the most moving and eloquent expressions of love at its most divinely human, or humanly divine. Rousseau was inspired by the story of the two tragic lovers when he wrote his epistolary novel *Julie ou La Nouvelle Heloise*, set in the Swiss Alps, one of the founding texts of the Romantic Movement and probably the biggest bestseller in the eighteenth century.

In the prevailing narrative, the successive renewals that marked the end of the Dark Ages and produced men like Peter Abelard or, later, St Thomas Aquinas, radiated from an advanced North Atlantic core to a backward Club Med periphery, a kind of mediaeval eurozone, so to say. Recently opened channels of communication, like the Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) from Carolingian Europe to the remote northwest corner of Hispania, were the main avenues through which the artistic and technological innovations incubated in the rich and dynamic North were transmitted to a culturally subsidised and stagnant South (21).



Plate 21. St James of Compostela Cathedral and the *Camino de Santiago*, Hispanic links to North Atlantic Europe.

As we see, old prejudices die hard. In reality, far from being a one-way process of patronage from North to South, the awakening of the West was the result predominantly of a massive South-to-North transfusion of cultural funds. Its main initiators were not stern Celtic monks, illiterate emperors or lustful Parisian orators, but a varied assembly of Arab, Jewish and Hispano-Gothic philosophers, physicists, cosmologists, alchemists, poets, architects, musicians and translators, who for centuries laboured in the great Iberian centres of knowledge in Cordova, Seville, Lisbon, Toledo, Gerona or Majorca. In fact, as the crossroads where North and South, East and West met, mediaeval Hispania, itself an integral part of Europe in its different incarnations, became a unique civilisational cauldron in ferment with a rich variety of ingredients without equal beyond the Pyrenees.

From the eighth to the twelfth centuries, as the Beatus cycle spread across the Atlantic frontier, incorporating visual influences from the Orient, an even more hybrid and startling process of transculturation was taking place in Muslim Iberia. By the time of Abd al-Rahman's death, around 780, al-Andalus was already showing signs of the prodigies to come. Under his successors, Cordova, including its area of influence, was to become both the Athens of mediaeval times and the forerunner of modern centres of scholarship and innovation we tend to associate with the great Western university tradition. Seduced by the munificence and intellectual ingenuity of its rulers, al-Andalus started to attract and also to nurture some of the most adventurous minds from across the Islamic world and

soon even from Christian lands. The latter would form an important contingent at the different Iberian schools of translation, with Toledo at the core of a vast network of workshops where multicultural teams of scholars were devoted to translating into Latin and a nascent form of Spanish the scientific, philosophical and theological works of the great Arab, Persian, Hebrew and Greek sages.

Among the first precursors to the Great Iberian Awakening, soon to surpass the much-vaunted Carolingian Renewal, were some wayward, colourful types, whose like, apart perhaps from some eccentric mediaeval monks, would not be seen again in Europe until the modern age of exploration and the scientific revolution, when some inquiring minds started to examine and question nature with a playful but analytical attitude.

Take, for instance, Abbas ibn Firnas, a son of al-Andalus, born in the city of Ronda, who by the first decades of the ninth century had created a planetarium, invented a metronome, designed a room where natural phenomena like thunderstorms and lightening were recreated, discovered a method to transform quartz into glass and was so fascinated by the mystery of flying that, around 870 and already at an advanced age, he became the first man recorded to have flown. He jumped from a hill close to Cordova by means of a glider covered with silk and vulture feathers and was able to maintain himself in the air for a considerable time. Unfortunately, his descent back to earth was not smooth. According to a witness who could not conceal his satiric vein in “landing again on the place he had started, his back was very much hurt, for not knowing that birds when they alight come down upon their tails, he forgot to provide himself with one” (34).²⁰

Abbas ibn Firnas never recovered from his injuries and died a few years later. His bold attempt at defying the laws of gravity was emulated by Eilmer of Malmesbury, a Benedictine monk in England at the beginning of the eleventh century. Like his Muslim predecessor, he also forgot to attach a tail to his flying devise, had a hard landing and broke both legs. Since then, some other would-be pioneers of aviation, like Roger Bacon, contented themselves with letting their imagination fly instead of physically taking to the air themselves. We do not know if such was the case with Leonardo da Vinci, whose designs of flying machines could have been tested personally by him, fearless as he was—if he did, it might lend some credence to a probably apocryphal quotation that is attributed to the Italian sage: “once you have tasted flight you will walk the earth with your eyes turned skywards, for there you have been and there you will long to return” (23).

²⁰ Quote attributed to the Moroccan historian al-Maqqari in Lynn Townsend White, Jr., “Eilmer of Malmesbury, an Eleventh Century Aviator: A Case Study of Technological Innovation, Its Context and Tradition”, *Technology and Culture* 2:2 (Spring, 1961), 97-111 [100f].



Plate 22. Statue of Abbas ibn Firnas at Baghdad's airport.



Plate 23. One of Leonardo da Vinci's designs of a flying machine. Codex Atlanticus, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

The kind of experimental science that was conducted in al-Andalus at the turn of the ninth century by the likes of Abbas ibn Firnas was accompanied by a veritable revolution in the way of living of its inhabitants and—by a process

of osmosis—of those of the Iberian Christian kingdoms, from gastronomy to fashion, from literature to music. In the case of Muslim Spain, though politically Abd al-Rahman's successors could rule as virtually independent monarchs, free from the influence of the Abbasid capital in Baghdad, culturally and religiously al-Andalus was still a part of the larger House of Islam and was therefore connected by myriad threads to the rest of the Islamic world and beyond, from Berber northern Africa to the borders of India and China. Whilst the rest of the West was practically cut off from the great centres of civilisation and had to rely on the fragmentary Graeco-Roman remains that could be salvaged and painstakingly copied by Carolingian monks in isolated monasteries, Spain was becoming the privileged hub for cultural exchanges and innovation on a scale that was probably unprecedented, at least in European lands, since the last, cosmopolitan days of the Roman Empire.

Cordova, Gerona, Toledo, Majorca, Granada. These evocative city names, like many others across the Iberian peninsula, absent though they are from Clark's narrative, are as central to the history of Western, and human, civilisation as Aachen, Chartres, Sienna or Florence. They well deserve a visit and that is what we are going to do in the following pages. Just to sum up what went on in mediaeval Spain between the tenth and the thirteenth centuries simply makes the mind reel. There was no other place in Europe at that time, and probably in the world except Baghdad, where so many and so different inquisitive and creative minds and spirits converged, where so many diverse cultural influences were exchanged and goods traded. It would be necessary to go back to the Athens of Pericles, the Rome of the Late Empire or the Silk Road during the T'ang dynasty in China or move forwards to the Italian city-states of the early Renaissance to find something similar, until globalisation started in earnest. In the period between Late Antiquity and the modern era, the number of material and cultural products that were first encountered or tried systematically for the first time in Europe thanks to the interaction of Muslims, Jews and Christians in Spain makes an impressive list indeed. And we have to bear in mind that the first great Iberian exchange was, in a certain way, a tasty appetiser in terms of geographical reach and depth for the global Iberian, or Columbian, exchange that was to take place, as we will see, as a result of the explorations and discoveries spearheaded by Spain and Portugal from the fifteenth century onwards.

Sugar, spinach, aubergines, artichokes, saffron, watermelons, apricots, rice, lemons... the history of mediaeval Spain can be told from many angles, and we shall explore some of them, but none had more impact on the daily life of people than the expansion of their dietary routine thanks to the import and cultivation of new crops and fruits brought to al-Andalus from as far away as

India, China and Persia through the many avenues of trade and diplomacy that crisscrossed the lands of Islam. Compared with the monotonous scarcity of the average mediaeval Christian table, and the no less monotonous bouts of gluttony indulged in by the privileged few, the variety of dishes that could be served at an Andalusian meal was a salutary contrast. Even the order and presentation of the different courses as an integral part of a civilised, decorous way of life, which would become a favourite literary subject in the early Renaissance—as in Domenico Platina's *Honest Pleasure and Good Health*, 1474—had already been perfected in the Caliphal capital of Cordova. The improvements in stewardship and other arts of civility was in great measure due to a fascinating figure, a kind of Muslim Petronius (the arbiter of taste and elegance in Ancient Rome), known as Zaryâb, or Melting Gold, and also as Blackbird, due to his dark complexion and melodious voice. A Persian slave of probable African descent, he studied music and singing in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid dynasty, around 800. At that time, the severity of Arab mores was giving way among the elite, by means of Persian influences, to a more relaxed *joie de vivre* that infused most manifestations of music, poetry and, in general, the arts of the stage and the table. Persian musicians, singers, dancers, craftsmen or cooks were the most sought-after imports at the Abbasid court and a kind of not always fair competition for the favours of the local aristocracy prevailed among those vying for a place in the halls of fame. As a rising star fond of showing off his many talents, Zaryâb made some powerful enemies among the artistic establishment. As a result, he was forced to escape Baghdad and, like the last descendant of the Umayyads, to seek refuge in al-Andalus, where he had received an invitation by the local ruler al-Hakam I to entertain his court. Upon reaching Cordova in 822 he found that his would be mentor had died, but his son, Abd al-Rahman II, not only extended his own invitation, he also granted the talented performer a regular salary in golden dinars in exchange for his services. Zaryâb reciprocated by transforming the primitive leisurely customs of his Andalusian hosts beyond recognition. He brought Mesopotamian melodies and lyrical motifs to that remote outpost of Islam and introduced a modified form of the oud, related to our lute, adding an additional pair of strings to the previous four, thus enlarging its tone and range. It has been said that he also created the first conservatory in Europe, devoted to the teaching of new musical and singing techniques from Persia, based on the understanding of melody and rhythm, and assembled a large orchestra with a hundred oud and flute players. Many of his compositions, called *Nobeh*, are still part of Andalusian and North African musical repertoires, whose origins can be traced to Persia and the Indian ragas (24).

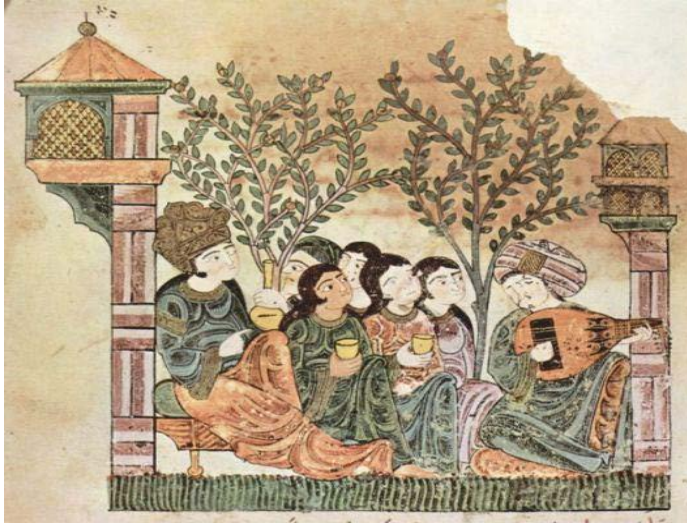


Plate 24: A musician playing in an Andalusian garden, from the *Story of Bayad and Riyad*. Manuscript Vaticano Arabo 369 at the Library of the Vatican.

But Zaryâb's impact was not only confined to the realm of music; probably his most lasting influence was related to gastronomy and fashion. When charged with the management of the regal kitchens of Cordova he dispensed with the mixed, crude legacy received both from his Arab masters and the local Hispano-Gothic population and introduced for the first time, probably by his own invention, the three-course meal we now take for granted, starting with a soup or appetiser, followed by the main course and ending with a sweet dessert, nuts or fruits. He also insisted on cleanliness in the kitchen, in using crystal glasses instead of metal goblets for drinking and in dressing the bare tables with leather cloths. Taking advantage of the increased array of products cultivated in al-Andalus he enriched the culinary taste of his adopted country by adding new vegetables, like asparagus, and inventing delicate recipes, particularly sweet desserts that are still served as a final flourish to Spanish meals.

In fact, the influence of Zaryâb's Andalusian cuisine reverberated beyond Spain to the larger Hispanic world, accounting for dazzling culinary connexions. When in the 1960s the Mexican poet and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz was Ambassador to India, he reflected on the similarity between Mexico's national dish, known as mole, and India's favourite sauce, curry. According to tradition, mole, an accompaniment or sauce made up of different ingredients like cinnamon, cloves, coriander, almonds, chocolate, chilli and tortillas, was first invented in the

convents of eighteenth-century Puebla, then the second-most-populated city of New Spain. As such, it is an integral part of Mexican national identity in the same way that curry is considered to be a quintessential Indian staple. In fact, apart from contributions from their respective pre-Muslim and pre-Columbian traditions, both mole and curry are debtors to Islamic gastronomy brought almost at the same time to America by the Spanish conquistadors, missionaries and settlers, and to India by the Mogul dynasty. In the case of Hispanic America, the culinary transmissions from Muslim Spain were not limited to Mexico, but reached the entirety of its lands, from California to Patagonia, and even Asia via the Philippines and the Iberian presence in Japan—think of the missionary origins of tempura—through different channels. The typical *empanadilla*, or fried pastry filled with meat, vegetables, fish or a combination, was most probably brought to America by settlers from Galicia, where it is still a regular feature in that Spanish region's meals. But, ultimately, its origins can be traced to Persia and Arabia, from where it was exported to al-Andalus as attested by an anonymous Andalusian cookbook entitled *The Book of Cooking in Maghreb and Andalus in the era of Almohads* from the thirteenth century. In a variety of ways like these the First Great Iberian Exchange became a part of the First Global Exchange by means of the inescapable Iberian connexions. In Spain proper, even after the end of the Reconquest and the instauration of the Catholic Hapsburg dynasty, the legacy of Islamic gastronomy was strong. In his celebrated *Art of Cooking, making Pastries, Biscuits and Conserves*, first published in 1611, Francisco Martínez Montañón, Head of the Office of the Royal Kitchen under Philip II and Philip III, mentioned numerous ingredients and recipes of Andalusian descent, like *conduchos*, a kind of nougat eaten in Christmas now known throughout the Hispanic world as *turrón*, or the *empanadillas* already mentioned, though with the addition to their stuffing of some typically un-Muslim foodstuffs like the tasty chorizo and other pork derivatives. More than a century later, the *New Art of Cooking*, published in 1747 by Juan de Altamira, a Franciscan monk, though addressed to novices and the lower echelons of society, contained quite a few references to Arab, Asian and American products common in Spanish markets. In this way, the dazzling creations of the Spanish new, molecular or deconstructivist school of gastronomy as understood by Ferrán Adriá, with his imaginative concoctions and his stress on playing with the texture and flavor of the ingredients that make up even the most simple of dishes, is to a great extent the sophisticated culmination of a long history of global culinary exchanges and experimentation, best represented by the original cultural mediators like Zaryâb or the nuns of Puebla (25, 26, 27).



Plate 25: Christians eating *empanadas*, an Islamic dish made up of fried dough filled with meat, vegetables and fish, as shown in a carved decoration at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

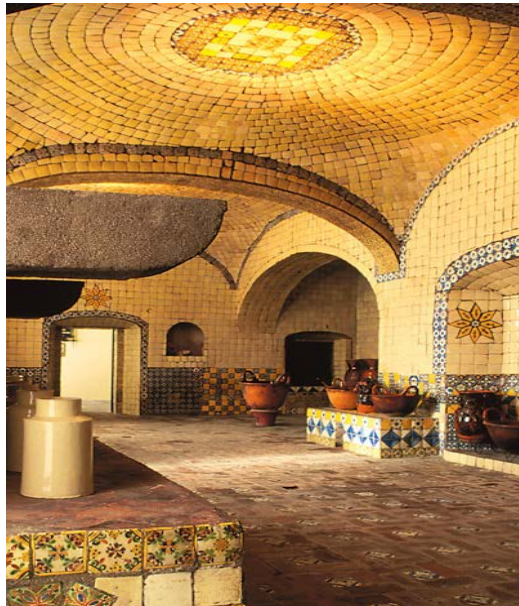


Plate 26: Kitchen at the Dominican convent of Santa Rosa, in Pueblo, Mexico, with Moorish decorative influences.



Plate 27: *Arte de Cozina, Pasteleria, Vizcocheria y Conserueria*, edition of 1617, by Francisco Martínez Montño, Head of the Office of the Royal Kitchen under Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV.

Zaryâb's omnivorous genius also touched other Epicurean domains. He invented Europe's first toothpaste, extended the practice of shaving among men, designed elaborate hair styles and opened beauty parlours for women, contributing to the popularisation of new cosmetics and perfumes. As the *arbiter elegantium* of the age, he imposed by the sheer force of his arresting personality and influence in the emir's entourage, new codes of dress. As in table manners with the three-course meal, he introduced the seasonal calendar in fashion, matching fabrics and colors to fit in with the natural rhythm of the seasons, an Andalusian novelty without which the modern fashion industry would not exist as we know it.

As if all of the above were not enough, Zaryâb is also credited with bringing the Indian game of chess to al-Andalus and from there to the rest of Europe. Spaniards of all creeds took to the game with supreme gusto. King Alfonso X the Wise, a fascinating man we will encounter soon in our promenade across mediaeval Hispania, commissioned his celebrated *Book of Chess, Dice and Tables*, also known as the *Book of Games*, in 1283. In the existing illuminated manuscript, now at the library of El Escorial, different games are shown as crossroads between reason and chance, science and faith, and between the astrological macrocosms and the human microcosm, with chess representing the supremacy of the intellect over hazard and of strategy over improvisation. Later on, the Spanish contribution was

to prove decisive in the transition from the traditional to a modern way of playing chess. The prominence of the Queen on the chessboard was a Spanish invention linked to the instrumental role of Queen Isabella the Catholic at the end of the Reconquest and at the inception of a composite Spanish monarchy. The first printed book devoted to the game was also Spanish, published in Salamanca in 1497 by Luis Ramírez de Lucena and entitled *Repetition of Love and the Art of Playing Chess, with 150 Chess games*.²¹ As would happen during the Cold War, with the titanic clashes between American and Soviet masters, in early modern Europe chess championships were also conceived of as contests for supremacy by proxy. In 1560, coinciding with the coronation of Pope Pius IV, a match was arranged between Spanish and Italian masters. The winner was Ruy López de Segura, considered by many the first modern chess champion and also author of another influential manual about the game named *Book of the Liberal Invention and Art of the Game Chess*, printed in Alcalá de Henares in 1561. In his essay, Ruy López devoted particular attention to the opening moves in a game, their variations and developments, with such a lasting success that even today one of the most popular chess openings, also known as the Spanish Gambit, is named after him (28, 29).



Plate 28. Two Muslims play chess in the presence of King Alfonso X, from the *Book of Games*, 1282. Library of El Escorial.

²¹ According to some sources, it was a Valencian author, Francesch Vicent who wrote the first treatise of modern chess, entitled *Libre dels jochs partits dels schachs en nombre de 100* (1495). No copy of this book has apparently survived.



Plate 29. *Repetition of Love and the Art of Playing Chess, with 150 Chess Games*, 1497, by Luis Ramirez de Lucena, the oldest existing printed book of chess.

Zaryâb died a few years later than his protector Abd al- Rahman II, who passed away in 852. At that time, Cordova was on its way to becoming the artistic and cultural metropolis of Europe, a position that was enhanced once Abd al-Rhman III proclaimed the city as the capital of a Caliphate independent from Abbasid Baghdad on 16 January 929. Slightly more than two centuries after the arrival of the first Berber and Arab armies in the Iberian Peninsula, Muslim Spain was confident enough to sever its political ties with the distant metropolis and stand on its own. Al-Andalus thus became the second fully sovereign polity to rule over most of the Iberian Peninsula after the fall of Rome and the disintegration of the Visigothic kingdom. As a symbolic gesture of the newly gained status, in 936 the Caliph ordered the construction of a palace, or better said, a palatine city, on the outskirts of Cordova. Its name was Madinat al-Zahara. The city, with its commanding views of Cordova and the adjacent valley, was built as the visible symbol of the new power and, at the same time, as a reminder of the continuity of the Umayyad dynasty as revived in the Islamic Far West. After the death of the first Cordovan Caliph in 961, the royal complex was completed under the reign of his son, Al-Hakam II, in many ways the epitome of the long Islamic Golden Age of Spain that would survive and even reach new zeniths after the demise of the Caliphate in 1031.

Today Madinat al- Zahara is an expanding archaeological site where the visitor can catch glimpses of its former magnificence, which included, apart from

various ornamental gardens, a zoo with exotic animals, astronomical observatories and a network of laboratories and research institutions where the best scientists of the epoch were assembled in teams under their respected masters. Prominent among them was Maslama al-Majriti, a mathematician, proto-chemist and astronomer who revised and adapted the astronomical tables of al-Khwarizmi to the geographical coordinates of al-Andalus, forming the basis for the Alfonsine Tables, much used in the Age of Exploration. He also wrote a short *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, translated the *Planisphere* of Ptolemy into Arabic, and composed the celebrated *Rutbat al-Hakim*, though perhaps completed by one of his many disciples. This was later translated into Latin in 1252, under Alfonso X's patronage, as *The Step of the Sage*, better known in the history of science as the *Picatrix*, an influential compendium of esoteric alchemy and observational chemistry, where for the first time there is a reference to the principle of conservation of mass observed while conducting an experiment on mercury oxidation, one of the many he made on the purification of metals.

Mentioned only in passing or simply ignored in most accounts of mediaeval European history, Madinat al-Zahara was the major newly built urban centre in Western Europe at that time, probably the most civilised, and certainly the most luxurious. It was, however, razed to the ground by an invasion in 1009 of Berbers, eager to impose a more rigorous version of Islam than the one adhered to in Umayyad Spain (30).

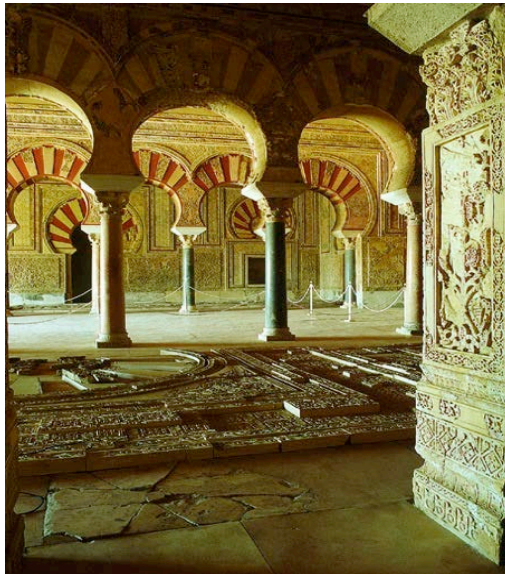


Plate 30. The remains of Madinat al-Zahara, just a shadow of its former splendour.

Al-Hakam II deserves to figure not only in Islamic, but also in European history as one of the most enlightened rulers of all times. Under his patronage, the Great Mosque of Cordoba was expanded to accommodate a growing population, creating in fact a new mosque within the previous holy place of prayer. The ornamental plan was also lavishly renovated. As a clear statement of regal authority, a separated space, the Maqsura, was enclosed by an intricate, bewildering forest of interlaced, bicoloured arches and covered by a sumptuous dome that still dazzles the eyes of the beholder. It is one of the most technically and artistically accomplished examples still extant of architecture and interior decoration in Western Europe from the period between Late Antiquity and the Renaissance, on a par with the Alhambra at Granada, another intrinsic Islamic contribution to our common Western heritage (31).



Plate 31. Dome of the Maqsura, Great Mosque of Cordova.

The second Caliph of Cordoba had two passions: beauty, both carnal and spiritual, and books. His library, reputed to be the largest in those times, needed a catalogue of forty volumes. At its most glorious, the Caliphal library, one of many throughout al-Andalus, had more than 400,000 volumes, and this at a time when beyond the Pyrenees the best endowed monastic bookshelves would contain, with luck, no more than several hundred manuscripts, just a few of them

illuminated. It was not only a huge difference of quantity, but also enormous in terms of quality. Nowhere else in Western Europe was it possible to drink, figuratively, from so many diverse and rich wells of wisdom. And to those wells the thirstiest minds from all corners of the House of Islam, the Jewish world and Latin Christendom flocked in droves. To pretend, as so many Clarkean scholars do, that Muslim Spain was just a remote, exotic, mostly isolated excrescence, appended to the Europe of Chartres, La Sorbonne or Florence, is to forget, unforgivably, that for more than three centuries the best and the brightest in the Latin West had to rely, mostly, on sources of knowledge, practical and theoretical, that were only available in the Iberian Peninsula and, in a lesser degree, Sicily.

By the end of the tenth century, at the time of al-Hakam II, al-Andalus and some parts of an increasingly more dynamic Christian Spain had already received, absorbed and transformed a steady transfusion of civilisational nutrients unavailable in North Atlantic Europe, even after the Carolingian revival. Also at that time, although intermittently entangled in border skirmishes and devastating *razzias*, Hispanic Muslims and Christians, as well as Jews, far from remaining in isolated bubbles when they did not fight each other, were involved in a fluid three-way traffic that touched, literally, all aspects of their daily lives. The existence of those open channels of communication made possible the extraordinary story of Gerbert d'Aurillac, the future Pope Sylvester II who, around 967, after having received a cursory education in his native French region of Auvergne, moved to the Spanish March, the shifting borderlands between Christendom and Islam roughly corresponding to modern day Catalonia, to obtain there some grasp of Muslim science non-existent in his homeland. In that corner of Hispania, he studied under the auspices of Atto, Bishop of Vic, and most probably at the monastery of St María de Ripoll. The role played by the scriptoriums of Ripoll and other monastic centres in Catalonia in bringing Islamic science and philosophy into Christian Europe, is not sufficiently known. There had been sporadic glimpses from other sources, but in the tenth century these monasteries saw the first systematic reception in mediaeval Europe of classical, Persian and Indian science and philosophy, as mediated and perfected in Islamic lands, as Arabic texts started to be translated into Latin, possibly by Mozarab monks who had previously lived in al-Andalus. While staying in the Spanish March, Gerbert became familiar with those texts and the desire to read and assimilate more of them led him to travel to Toledo, Seville and most probably to Cordova, where he could have marvelled at the sight of al-Hakam II's copious library.

When he left Spain in 969 he was cognisant of how much more advanced the Arab scholars were than their Christian counterparts in subjects like mathematics, astronomy or medicine, and he was determined to disseminate as much as he could

of their science beyond the Pyrenees. With that goal in mind, when teaching at the cathedral school of Rheims, he wrote a letter to Sunifred Llobet, or Lupitus, Archdeacon of Barcelona, asking him to send some Latin translations of Arabic texts, particularly those related to the use of the astrolabe and other instruments of measurement. One of those translations, the famous Manuscript Rivipullensi 225 was found in the nineteenth century in the Archives of the Crown of Aragon, having been rescued from the monastery at Ripoll after a devastating fire (32).

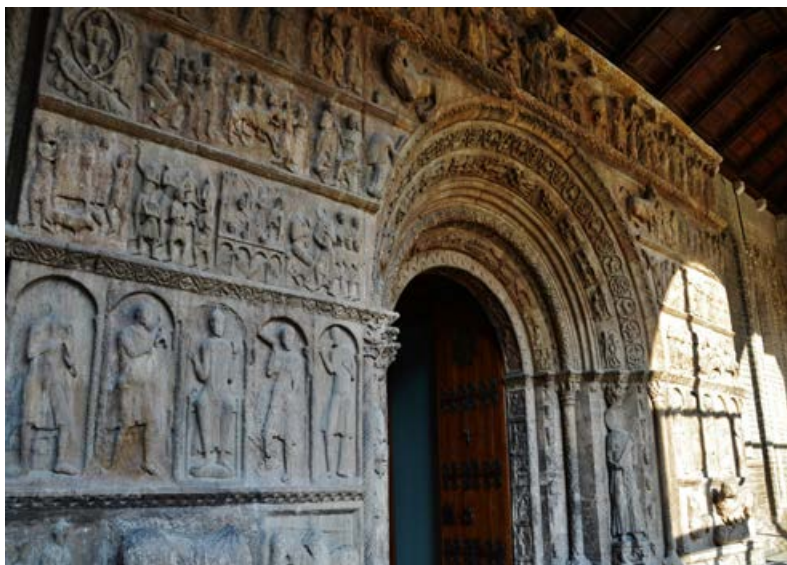


Plate 32. Gateway to knowledge: Romanesque main doorway at the monastery of St María de Ripoll.

The importance of this manuscript is that it contains the first evidence of the transmission of Islamic science into Christian Europe. Its two hundred folios of parchment amount to a compilation of different topics, ranging from how to resolve practical problems of astronomy, geometry and mechanics, to methods for constructing astrolabes, sundials or water clocks. With regard to the astrolabe, a measuring instrument that the Arabs had inherited from the Greeks, its diffusion across Western Europe can be traced along the cultural pathway that, in the tenth century, started at the Spanish March, continued to the Abbey of Fleury and then led to the monastery of Reichenau, in today's Germany, where in the eleventh century a talented monk, Hermannus Contractus, wrote a treatise on its use that is a slightly modified copy of the Ripoll manuscript. Gerbert himself is credited with building an astrolabe, together with armillary and celestial spheres and an

abacus with Arabic numerals to teach his pupils at Rheims, always following the instructions he had learned in al-Andalus and the Spanish March. Thus originated the legend that he had obtained his knowledge from a Muslim magician and that while in Spain he had signed a secret pact with the devil—and such was the prevalent state of mind in most of Western Europe.

In fact, the use of Hindu-Arabic numerals was another dramatic innovation introduced into the North Atlantic domain thanks to the Spain of the Three Cultures. Invented in India and developed by the great Persian and Arab mathematicians, like al-Khwarizmi and al-Kindi, their first known representation in Christian Europe was made in the Codex Vigilanus, an illuminated manuscript dated 976 from St. Martin de Albelda, in the Northern Spanish region of La Rioja, and now preserved at the Library of El Escorial (33).

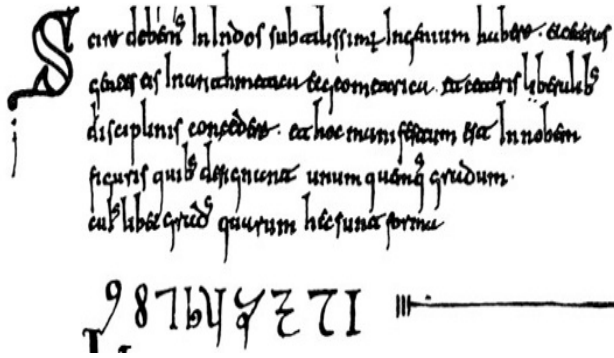


Plate 33. The Codex Vigilanus with the first Western representation of Hindu-Arabic numerals, except the zero. Library of El Escorial.

It is fascinating to compare the hearts and minds that produced manuscripts like the Codex Vigilanus or the Codex Rivipullensi with the apocalyptic anxiety prevalent in the world of the Beatus, just a century earlier, and note the radical change of attitude. The scribes who in those northern borderlands translated into Latin the marvels of Islamic wisdom and in some cases dared to comment on and correct some of its findings were not overshadowed by dark premonitions of total annihilation at the hands of the infidels. Quite the contrary, somehow some of them had started to form the conviction that, by learning from their enemies, they and their fellow Christians could not only overcome their relative backwardness but also, in due time, regain the confidence to fulfil the truncated Isidorian dream of a united Hispanic polity under the tutelage of the Church. That was the main thrust behind the Reconquest. But the triumph of this vision of the future of

Spain was still many centuries ahead. In the long interim, the pulsating instinct of war was constantly balanced by the more immediate convivial needs born out of the daily co-existence and *convivencia* among the different peoples and faiths that shared the former Hispano-Roman and Hispano-Visigoth domains. From the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, this precarious balancing act, progressively tilted towards the Christian side, was to produce some of the most astonishing figures in the history of civilisation, without parallel in the contemporary North Atlantic world.

As noted earlier, Lord Clark devoted two episodes of his series to the twelfth century—from Cluny to Chartres, from the glory of the Romanesque to the triumph of the Gothic spirit—and to the ensuing blossoming of courtly love and the first glimpses of humanism. In those episodes, he mused about Suger, the Abbot of Saint Denis, as being one of the first men in the Middle Ages whom one can think of in modern terms and he enthusiastically praised the harmonious composition of Chartres as the epitome of the first great awakening of European civilisation, with its boundless intellectual energy, its contact with the great minds of Greece and Rome, its belief that God may be approached through beauty and reason, and the new, all-pervading attraction for change and movement.

Ironically, most of the alleged novelties enumerated by Lord Clark as pertaining, exclusively, to the great awakening of the North Atlantic civilisation either originated in or were influenced by the myriad developments that were taking place, more intensely and for a longer period of time, in mediaeval Spain. During the twelfth and subsequent centuries it was difficult to find north of the Pyrenees the boundless intellectual energy, the knowledge of the great classical minds, the love and understanding of God through beauty and reason, or the astonishing capacity for change and adaptation that characterised the lives of Ibn Gabirol, Averroes, Ibn Hazm, Maimonides, El Cid, Dominicus Gundisalpinus, Alfonso X, Raymond Lull or the Archpriest of Hita to name but a few representative names in different fields of the human experience. Furthermore, in purely artistic terms, Lord Clark's favourite terrain, nowhere in North Atlantic Europe was there to be found such a formidable variety of visible manifestations of faith, beauty and reason as is to be encountered in mediaeval Hispania. It is a cornucopia of first-rate aesthetic diversity, represented, for instance, by the synagogues of Toledo, the Mudejar tower of the church of St Salvador in Teruel, the Romanesque church of St Isidore in Leon, the Gothic cathedrals of Burgos, Palma or Toledo, the Almohad tower of La Giralda in Seville or the Nasrid palaces and gardens of La Alhambra in Granada (34, 35, 36, 37, 38 and 39).



Plate 34. Synagogue of El Tránsito, Toledo. Interior.



Plate 35. Mudejar Tower, Church of St Salvador, Teruel. Romanesque, Moorish and Gothic elements under the same crenellated roof.



Plate 36: Frescos at the interior of the Church of St Isidore, León. A Sistine Chapel of Romanesque Art.



Plate 37. Burgos Cathedral, Gothic splendour.



Plate 38: La Giralda Tower, Seville. Originally inspired by the Koutubia Mosque in Marrakesh with later Renaissance additions.



Plate 39: La Alhambra, Granada. Exterior with Sierra Nevada in the background.

Such a diversity of ways of living and creations, an essential prerequisite for the existence of civilisation, far from remaining limited to the physical boundaries of the Iberian Peninsula, transcended its porous borders and left a lasting, undeniable imprint on the rest of Western Europe. Of course, the reverse is also true, intellectual and artistic developments beyond the Pyrenees were imported and assimilated by the different communities that shared, uneasily, the Iberian space. Far from being a world apart, Hispania—and later the larger Hispanic world—was and always has been, an integral part of the intricate system of intercommunicating elements that constitutes the very fabric of the West, by no means excluded, minor or peripheral.

Let us take the example of literature and, in particular, the apparently French invention of the lyrical poem as composed by the troubadours and played in the Gothic aristocratic courts by the *jongleurs*, though it was not unusual to find both metiers combined in the same person. There are many records, some contemporary, others written at a later time, chronicling their artistic endeavours and entanglements of the heart. We know the fanciful names of many of those bohemian spirits, devoted to the cult of the ideal, unattainable woman: Marcabrun, Cercamon, Bernard de Ventadour or the first known representative of the type, Guillaume IX, Duke of Aquitaine. Some of them were members of the nobility, but the bourgeoisie and even the ecclesiastical orders were represented among their ranks. Though most of them were men, there were also female troubadours, or *trobairitz*, like the Countess de Dia, whose poems extolled her adulterous desire for a fellow troubadour, Rambaud d'Orange. We do not know whether her husband, the powerful lord Guillaume de Poitiers was abreast of what was going on under his marital roof, but some of his wife's songs that have been preserved were quite explicit: "I would truly love to hold/ my knight, naked in my arms one night/ and that he would consider himself in ecstasy/ if only I could serve him as a pillow". As Lord Clark liked to say, marriage without love leads to love without marriage...and to some fine poetry, one might add.

For a long time it was taken for granted in scholarly circles that the poetry of those wandering, irredeemable romantics, written in the vernacular of southern France, the *langue d'oc*, was the first Western manifestation of love as an ideal worth pursuing by itself, devoid of any sacred connotations. Consequently, the *langue d'oc* was considered the first language derived from Latin to produce, in the twelfth century, a written literary tradition. Then the unexpected happened. For a long time it had been known that an original poetic form, called the *moaxaja*, from the Arabic *muwassaha*, had been in vogue since the ninth century in Muslim Spain. The *moaxaja* was considered to be a local variation within a larger literary continent encompassing the whole of the lands under the sway

of Islam. In particular, in the Eastern regions under the control of the Abbasids, there was a poetic tradition devoted to praising a kind of restrained, chaste love, as shown by the *Kitab al-Zahara*, the *Book of the Flower*, a compilation of prose and verse authored by Ibn Dawd that was not that far in its conception from the refinements of the Provençal *mal d'amour*. In al-Andalus, this tradition had been represented around the same epoch by Ibn Hazm, the author of the celebrated *The Ring of the Dove*, a treatise on the art of love composed in 1022. At that time, the Caliphate of Cordova was immersed in a cycle of civil wars that ultimately led to its demise and replacement by a motley collection of petty kingdoms known as Taifas. As the son of a civil servant from a family of converts loyal to the Umayyads, Ibn Hazm suffered political persecution during his life and spent frequent spells in prison. In between he composed essays on ethics, law, history, science and theology, but he owes his posthumous fame to his only incursion into literary prose interspersed with some bouts of verse. In essence, the *Ring of the Dove*, follows the strictures of the *adab*, the code of behaviour that the Arabs tried to apply to all aspects of their conduct in human affairs, a sort of refined etiquette aimed at erasing the traces of their rather harsh tribal manners. In matters of love, the *adab* was close to exalting the virtues of Platonic, unfulfilled love, similar to the kind that inspired the troubadours. Here Ibn Hazm seemed to follow, except in some piquant passages, the established chains of transmission, the *ilm al hadith*, so that he would not be seen as abandoning the orthodox path. He most probably had enough with his political tribulations and did not need any more quarrels with the arbiters of literary taste. Now, in contrast with Ibn Hazm's accomplished example of conformity, both in form and mostly in content, with the established pan-Arabic canon, the *moaxajas* present a striking deviation from its rules on both accounts. In terms of form, the Andalusian authors of these poems introduced some variations in the rhyme and the strophic structure unheard of in their Arab counterparts, whilst in content, the multinational and multilingual origins of their composers, mainly Hispano-Arabs and Hispano-Jews, led to a far more complicated pattern of situations and relations. But the differences do not end there. As mentioned, at a time when almost everyone accepted the originality and uniqueness of the Provençal literary revolution with its discovery of courtly love and vernacular lyrical poetry, around 1948 *moaxajas* were found with their final verses written in a Romance language and whose composition predated the poems of the troubadours, which turned the accepted wisdom upside down. For in those verses, called *jarchas*, or *khardjas*, we have the first examples of lyric poetry written in a language derived from Vulgar Latin and expressing different variations of love as felt by a female voice:

“Amanu, ya habibi!
Al-wahs me no faras
Ben, bega mia bokella
awsak tu no iras”.

(Mercy, my lover!// I know you will not abandon me/ Come, kiss my little mouth/ and you will not soon run away).

Verses like these, written in Arabic or Hebrew modified scripts, with a combination of words in dialects of Arabic and Romance tongues, are the closest we can get to the feelings of those men and women from different ethnicities, faiths and cultural backgrounds, who were living together in that house with so many connecting doors and windows that was mediaeval Spain (40).



Plate 40. Musicians playing an Arab-Andalusian rabab, from the illuminated manuscript of the *Cantigas de Santa Maria*. Library of El Escorial.

Since their discovery, a fascinating debate about the exact nature of the *jarchas* and their possible influence on the poetry and music of the troubadours rages to our days, with scholars trying to advance their respective nationalistic agendas as to whose country, France or Spain, if such countries as we know them now existed at those times, produced the first vernacular literature in Western Europe. I do not know whether Lord Clark was aware of this quarrel when he was busy writing the script of his programme, or adapting it to its book form. If he was, I believe that he could not have cared the least. For him, the *jarchas* or the *moaxajas*, in fact everything produced south of the Pyrenees was not worthy of his attention: it was

not Western, it was not civilised. A kind of iron curtain was drawn in his mind separating Spain from the rest of Europe, from the beginning to the end of his narrative. We know that it was a mental construction, but its reification by means of the documentary and the subsequent book, both enormously successful, tended to reinforce the stereotype ingrained in the cultural map created and perpetuated by many influential North Atlantic minds even in our days. A highly distorted map, as we are seeing. There was no such barrier either within the Spain of the Three Cultures or between Spain and the rest of Western Europe. To demonstrate it we need look no farther than the city of Toledo (41).



Plate 41: The city of Toledo, Toletum for the Visigoths and Tulaytula for the Arabs, a unique superposition of cultures.

The former political and spiritual capital of the Visigoth kingdom, Toledo had been the epicentre of many an uprising against the Emirate and later Caliphate of Cordoba, forcing Abd al-Rahman III to besiege and capture it during its reign. After the final fall of the Caliphate, Toledo became the capital of one of the most prosperous Taifas and as such, and also because of its symbolism, it was the prize most coveted by the kingdom of Castile-Leon, a unified, dynamic Christian polity that had emerged during the Reconquest. After several attempts, King Alfonso VI, the self-proclaimed Emperor of all Spain, conquered the city in

1085, thus dealing a major, though by no means definitive blow to the Muslim presence on the Peninsula.

Alfonso VI was a brave warrior and an accomplished diplomat. By successive marriages he secured an alliance with the Frankish nobility and, indirectly, with the powerful order of Cluny and the Papacy, thus obtaining much needed political, religious and military help for his fight against the Islamic kingdoms. But, at the same time, through a series of political and extramarital affairs, like the one he famously entertained with Zaida, the daughter-in-law of King al-Mutamid of Seville, he also was on good terms with some Muslim rulers, who were by then more preoccupied with fighting each other, and waves of invaders from northern Africa, than with confronting their Christian nemesis. It was within this shifting, tangled state of affairs—when fellow Christians could turn out to be the most treacherous enemies and Muslim enemies could become the most faithful of allies—that the story of El Cid emerged, first as the real life and deeds of Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, a nobleman and general of Alfonso VI's armies, and later as a literary cycle that was to serve as one of the foundational myths of a Spanish identity gradually stripped of its hybrid fabric. As a real man, El Cid, meaning “the Lord” in Arabic dialect, exemplified the complexities of the age. He was a devout vassal of his king, but having fallen into disgrace, he was banished into exile together with his own helpers and had to seek refuge in one of the Muslim taifas, Saragossa, whose ruler, al-Muqtadir, gave him the command of his mixed forces. As a hired gun, El Cid proved enormously successful, dealing crushing defeats to both rival Christians and Muslims. However, the inner turmoil he must have experienced because of his divided loyalties became more acute when an invading Almoravid army vanquished his king, Alfonso VI, and his allies at the Battle of Sagrajas in 1086. The Almoravids were members of a Berber dynasty from today's Morocco, who had been called in to buttress the weakened taifas after the Christians had taken Toledo. After their victory, which proved to be indecisive due to the heavy casualties suffered by both sides, El Cid was recalled to help his defeated king and he did so, perhaps reluctantly. Most probably, by that time he had made up his mind to carve out his own fiefdom. Taking advantage of the enfeebled conditions of both Almoravids and Christians after the Battle of Sagrajas, in 1094 El Cid besieged and conquered Valencia, a coastal town with a fertile hinterland, where he ruled for five years before being killed during a siege of the city by another Almoravid army. According to a legend, later incorporated into the epic poem that bears his name, the corpse of El Cid, in full armour, riding erect on Babieca, his noble horse, and wielding his victorious sword Tizona, led a final charge and won a posthumous victory against his enemies. It was a feat of such legendary proportions that many centuries later it captured the imagination of the ambitious producer Samuel Bronston, who in

1961 turned the epic into a technically grandiose but, to my taste, dramatically flawed movie directed by Anthony Mann and featuring Charlton Heston as the valiant knight and Sophia Loren as Jimena, his devoted wife (42).



Plate 42. The great philologist Menéndez Pidal, centre, one of the main experts on the epic of El Cid greeting director Anthony Mann in the presence of Charlton Heston.

As a literary work, the *Lay of El Cid* belongs to a genre of mediaeval epic poems that were common in Europe, particularly in Frankish lands, from the beginnings of the eleventh century. Its date of composition and authorship are unknown, but both the style and the content bear witness to the multi-layered nature of Spain, especially in the moving borderlands between its Christian and Muslim composite polities. In such uncertain territory, the moral black-or-white simplicity that characterised Frankish heroes like Roland as presented in his eponymous Song, was out of question. Whilst in the *Chanson de Roland* the pagans were always wrong and the Christians always right, in the *Lay of El Cid* there was no shortage of Christian villains, like the evil noblemen of Carrión, while there are honest, pious Muslim characters, like the inhabitants of Castejón or the Moor Abengalbon, the loyal friend who took El Cid's wife and daughters under his care whilst the hero roamed along the barren frontiers with his troops in search of booty. This ambivalence, mirroring the real conditions of Spain at those times, was to be conveniently ignored or concealed by later generations of scholars and commentators, more interested in nation-building than in the

faithful exegesis of the text. Even Menéndez Pidal, the great sage who devoted most of his life to retracing the steps of El Cid—including his honeymoon—and to placing him in his historical context, considered that the epic expressed the nascent consciousness of a Christian Castilian nation, the cementing glue of a unified Spain to be based on the fusion of ethnicity and religion. In fact, the reality was far more complex than that. True, as far as we know, King Alfonso VI, to whom El Cid owed his loyalty, had plans to rule over an entity that would encompass the entirety of Hispania, thus his chosen title as *Adefonsus imperator totius Hispaniae*, Emperor of all Spain. But it is also true that, later on he or his chroniclers introduced other variations on the same theme in order to reflect the diversity of the lands and peoples he was determined to incorporate under his throne. Thus he was called *Adefonsus, Hispaniarum imperator*, Emperor of the Spains, or, more elaborately, *regnante rex domno Adefonso in Toledo et imperante christianorum quam et paganorum omnia Hispanie regna*, meaning “the king Don Alfonso reigning in Toledo and ruling the Christians and the pagans in all the kingdoms of Spain”. The reference to Christians and pagans as equal subjects to the king is echoed in some contemporary Arabic texts where Alfonso VI is called *al-Imbratur dhi-l-Millatayn*: Emperor of the Two Religions. Whatever his chosen title, upon conquering Toledo the Christian king extended in practice a policy of toleration to Muslims, Jews and local Mozarabs, fellow Christians who followed a different rite at mass from the one prescribed by the Roman Church.

As to the Jews, a thriving community in Toledo at the time of its conquest, they had been a minority in Hispania first under Roman and then under Visigoth rule, when bouts on anti-Semitic persecution culminated in outright discrimination and the prohibition of their religious practices. Under Islam, their luck improved. As the smallest and feeblest minority, they did not represent a direct threat to the new masters of al-Andalus; quite to the contrary, they soon became the indispensable go-betweens in various spheres of activity, from commerce to public administration. There were even some examples of an extraordinary rise to prominence, as demonstrated by the lives of Hasdai ibn Saprut, Abd al- Rahman III’s personal physician, or Samuel ha-Nagid, known as the Prince. The latter was the son of a Jewish merchant and became one of the most powerful Jews in the history of mediaeval Europe due to the excellence of his penmanship and his knowledge of the scriptures in both Hebrew and Arabic. His fame brought him to the attention of the king of the Taifa of Granada, who named him his Vizier, or Prime Minister, and Commander of his armies. As the self-proclaimed David of his age, Samuel ha-Nagid led several successful campaigns against the enemies of Granada, but it was to his command of the pen that he attributed his triumphs among the infidels and he wrote a poem to this effect that should inspire any aspiring writer with worldly ambitions: “Man’s wisdom is reflected in his writing

/ And his intelligence in the use of his quill / Thus man can reach to the royal sceptre / Through his penmanship and his writing skill".²² Unfortunately, when he died and was succeeded as Vizier by his son Joseph, the local Muslims of Granada, divided between Arabs and Berbers, grew alarmed about the growing power of a minority that they had tolerated as long as it was kept in a subordinate position. Their hatred acquired such proportions that it led to the infamous massacre of Granada in 1066, when Joseph ha-Nagid was assassinated and part of the Jewish community was killed in the ensuing pogrom. Toleration was a fragile thing indeed and it was to become even more so in the following decades, when Muslim Spain fell under the influence of the Almoravids' rigorous branch of Islam, whilst its Christian counterpart fell under the spell of the Crusading spirit preached by Pope Urban II.

Fortunately, Alfonso VI was wise, or astute, enough to avoid being trapped by fundamentalists on either side. It helped that the majority of the population in Toledo was equally interested in carrying on with their daily lives, all mixed up and with porous divides as they had been before the conquest. When, during Alfonso VI's absence, a group of Christians tried to turn the local mosque into a church, the king himself upon his return saw to it that the place of worship was restored to its original function and that those who had participated in its desecration were executed for contravening the royal policy of *convivencia*. Those were the times.

Thus protected, the local Muslim and Jewish communities of learning could carry on their scholarly pursuits. During the reign of its last taifa rulers, al-Mamun and al-Qadir, Toledo became a magnet for scientists in a variety of disciplines. Among the most prominent, al-Zarqali (known in Latin as Azarquiel) and Ibrahim ibn Said al-Sahli excelled as astronomers and constructors of tables, astrolabes and celestial globes; al-Bajunis advanced the fields of medicine and logic; and, above all, Ibn al-Wafid was one of the greatest mediaeval luminaries in agronomy, pharmacology and botany. On the two latter subjects he wrote, among other treatises, the immensely successful *Kitab al-adwiya al-mufrada*, translated into Latin as *De Medicamentis Simplicibus*. As to his influence on agronomy, Al-Wafid's manuals, themselves the product of both received classical wisdom and direct experience, were one of the main sources for the first book on agronomy written in Spanish, and in fact the first written during the Renaissance in a Romance vernacular, by Gabriel Alonso de Herrera in 1513, entitled *Obra de Agricultura*, or *Art of Agriculture*. Herrera's practical handbook, with its descriptions and empirical analysis of the meteorological and soil conditions of the dry lands in south-western Spain, proved to be particularly useful for the

²² Curt Leviant, *Masterpieces of Hebrew Literature*, p.175.

adaptation of Old World crops in the arid territories of northern New Spain, the area that now straddles the border between Mexico and the United States. In such a way, the cultivation and irrigation techniques invented by the Arabs were adopted both by Spanish settlers and natives in America, another example on how the first Great Iberian Exchange was integrated into and geographically expanded by the first Great Global Exchange (43).

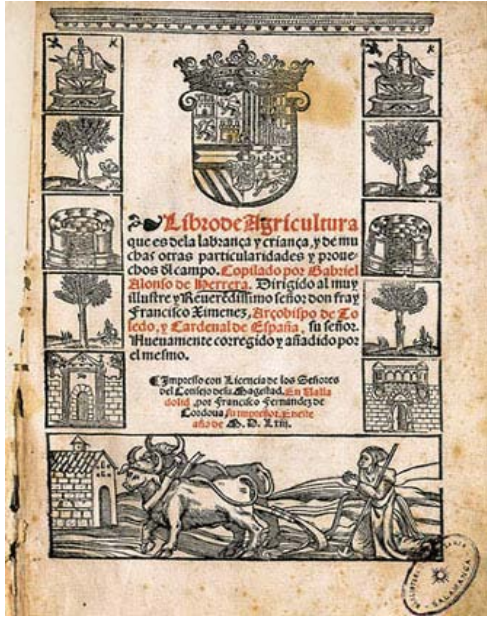


Plate 43. *Libro de Agricultura* by Gabriel Alonso de Herrera, edition published in 1563.

The policy of tolerance pursued by Alfonso VI in Toledo had astonishing results. As in many other taifa kingdoms, the search for knowledge and beauty had characterised the city during the Islamic period, and, far from regressing, it was to reach new heights under the new Christian masters, culminating in the so-called Toledo School of Translators or, to be more precise, Schools of Translators. There is a tendency to depict the Christian warriors and monks of the Reconquest as illiterate brutes in comparison with their Muslim counterparts. No doubt, at the beginning of their century’s long confrontation, they were far less advanced in the cultivation of science, philosophy and the arts, but some of them came to master the achievements of al-Andalus, or at least to know how to appreciate and incorporate them. The use and display of elaborately intricate ivory caskets and reliquaries crafted in Madinat al-Zahara, of sumptuous silk

textiles made in the *tiraz* or workshops of Seville and Cuenca, or the adoption of paper from the factory of Xativa to substitute parchment in sacred books for the first time in Western Europe, are all sumptuary and pragmatic examples of how Islamic craftsmanship and ingenuity were imported or found their way as booty or tribute into the Iberian Christian kingdoms long before the conquest of the most important centres of Muslim power (44,45)



Plate 44. Ivory casket of al-Mughira, Madinat al Zahara, circa 968. Louvre Museum, Paris.



Plate 45: The Mozarabic Missal at the monastery of Santo Domingo de Silos, eleventh century. The oldest extant book written on paper in Western Christian Europe.

Important as those examples of material culture exchange were, the most relevant contribution of multicultural mediaeval Spain for the development of Western civilisation had more to do with the realm of the mind.

The rediscovery of Aristotle in twelfth-century Spain and its reverberations throughout the main centres of learning in Christian Europe north of the Pyrenees constituted, arguably, the most important intellectual revolution in the period between the fall of Rome and the beginning of the Renaissance. True, some works by the ancient philosopher had survived the collapse of the classical world and could be found in scattered monasteries across Europe. Those sources were painstakingly copied and recopied by monks in secluded scriptoria, but remained, mostly, inert from the point of view of their impact on the way people, particularly influential people, thought or behaved. The turning point occurred when the Christian West had access to the works of the Greek sage as translated and commented by the two greatest Arab and Jewish minds who lived and toiled on the Iberian Peninsula: Averroes and Maimonides.

Averroes, or Ibn Rushd, was born in Cordova in 1126. The former Caliphate capital had become the favourite prey of successive waves of Muslim invaders from northern Africa, the Almoravids and the Almohads, who had traversed the Strait of Gibraltar to succour their fellow Muslims who were succumbing to the advances of Christian Iberia and ultimately to subjugate them under more stringent moral rules. Though conditions in Cordova were not, on the face of it, as conducive to a life of intellectual or artistic pursuits as it had been in the past, Ibn Rushd managed to get a comprehensive education under the tutelage of great teachers. He soon became a master of law, philosophy and science, particularly medicine and astronomy. His passion for learning, however, did not preclude him from having an active political and diplomatic career before he fell into disfavour at the Court and was banished for life by the increasingly fundamentalist Almohad rulers of Cordova, who consigned many of his books to the flames. He died in exile in Morocco in 1198. It would be far beyond the confines of our present endeavour even to touch on Ibn Rushd's enormous intellectual output, which covered more than 20,000 pages. Here we will be content with examining his contribution to the attempted marriage of faith and reason through his many commentaries to the works of Aristotle, a task that earned him the nickname of the "Commentator". According to his own recollections, his interest in the Greek philosopher was born at the instigation of one of his masters, Ibn Tufail, author of a philosophical novel that prefigured Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Ibn Rushd's interest became almost an obsession after he read al-Ghazali's *Tahfut al-Fal sifa*, or *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, a work in which the great Persian Sufi mystic and philosopher rejected attempts at incorporating Aristotle's ideas into the

Muslim corpus, as had already been tried by the Uzbek polymath, Avicenna. Set on refuting the refuter, Ibn Rushd wrote his most influential work, the *Incoherence of the Incoherence*, in which he tried to restore Aristotle to his former pedestal. This cycle of incorporation, destruction, reconstruction and ultimate refutation of the Aristotelian heritage was to occupy some of the most brilliant minds in the Muslim world for several centuries. In that process, whilst the Islamic orthodoxy ended up rejecting a great part of his legacy, Ibn Rushd made a most important contribution, one that was to be contested both by religious and scientific extremists: the theory of the twofold truth. In this theory, religion and philosophy were not conceived of as irredeemable enemies, but as complementary sources of knowledge, each one having its own internal logic and its own constituency, so to say. Whilst religion was intended for the uncritical masses, philosophy was the preferred way of approaching the truth for a chosen minority. Did this separation mean that religion was an inferior way of knowledge as compared to philosophy? Most probably Averroes thought so, but he did not consider that religion was worthless, far from it, only that in it the truth is reachable through allegories, easy to grasp by the common man without much effort, whilst the philosophical mind, more demanding, operates by the use of reason. By the use of reason alone? one could ask, as his most suspicious contemporaries surely did. Yes, even the existence of God can be proven by reason and by reason alone, he replied. With this assertion, Ibn Rushd became a *non sequitur* for Islamic thought, but he was to find a new, ambiguously receptive audience in Christian lands as Averroes, his Latinised name. His *Commentaries* were read by St Thomas Aquinas and themselves became the object of further scrutiny, including some harsh criticism, in European universities. Commenting on the *Commentaries* became one of the favorite pastimes among the learned few. Later on, at the end of the thirteenth century, those scholars who followed Averroes' interpretation of Aristotle to the letter, particularly denying individual immortality and the finitude of the world, were known as Averroists. They were deemed to be dangerous for the orthodox interpretation of the basic tenets of the Christian faith and therefore were condemned, together with the teaching of St. Thomas, who was thought to be contaminated by his reading of the Muslim heretic, a case of throwing the baby out with the bath water. But not all was lost for Averroes' legacy as the Middle Ages were coming to a close. This was firstly because, as we will see, his reputation and vindication, though not necessarily his interpretation of Aristotle, had become a part of the mainstream Western currents of thought thanks to the devoted efforts of several generations of translators, especially, but not only, at the Toledo School of Translators and in Frederick II's Sicily. Secondly, because one of the greatest writers of the Western canon was to stake his reputation, and probably more than that, by including him, halfway and through the backdoor, into the small group of pagans who are not utterly condemned and expelled from the circle of the elect. In Dante's

Divina Commedia, Averroes is spared the torments of hell and is conceded, as a measure of favour, the more mitigated punishments of Limbo. It was a daring move on the part of the author, since he wrote his masterpiece at a time when Averroes' reputation in the Latin West was at its lowest and when his followers were being furiously persecuted by the guardians of orthodoxy. Of course, the canonisation of Averroes himself as a member of the group of humanity's great thinkers can be found in Raphael's *School of Athens*, where he is one of the few non-Greek sages to be accepted in that most exalted company, together with Zoroaster, a woman—perhaps the painter's lover, La Fornarina—and the artist himself (46).

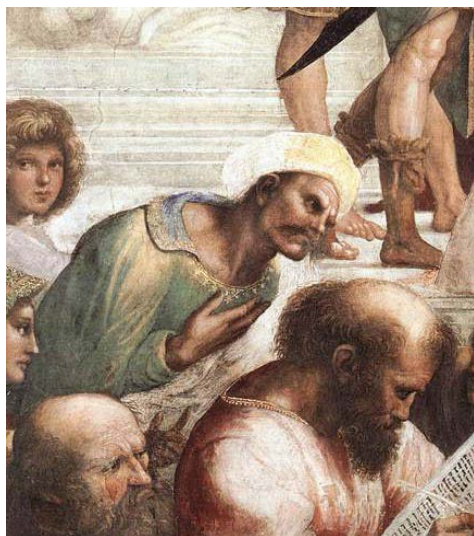


Plate 46. Averroes close to Pythagoras, a Hispanic Muslim in the Western canon, in Raphael's *The School of Athens*. Vatican Museums.

Averroes was not the only thinker who was testing religion to its limit in mediaeval Spain. A similar and even more radical penchant for the uses of reason can be found in Ibn Rushd's Jewish contemporary, Moses ben Maimon, usually known as Maimonides. Also a native of Cordova, he was born in 1135 and suffered, like his fellow Muslim sage, the rigours of the religious zealots, with the aggravating circumstance that he belonged to a minority that was not to the liking of the new Andalusian masters. While still young, though after having acquired a more than decent philosophical, religious and scientific education in his home city, he had to flee Cordova together with his family. For several years they wandered through the south of Andalusia and northern Africa and

finally they settled in Egypt. During those nomadic years, Maimonides' thirst for learning did not abandon him. On the contrary, while in Fez he studied at the famous local university and composed his commentaries on the Mishnah. He also tried his hand at business, but when his beloved brother drowned on his way from Persia in the Indian Ocean with all the family's wealth, he had to devote himself to the practice of medicine to survive. He excelled at it. So much so that he became the Court physician to the Great Vizier. Soon he was complaining about his incessant travails, caring not only for the Muslim aristocracy, but also for the more destitute. He was also successful at concocting remedies for ailments that still haunt the average male in our days: he invented potions to increase sexual virility or to prevent baldness, bringing some much needed money to his household. In his practice, he followed the instructions of the great Greek and Arabic masters, and even in his many medical treatises he did not depart from the well-trodden path, though his mastery at compiling and commenting on the best medical works of the tradition made him the most studied author both in Muslim and Christian lands until well into early modern times. If anything, he added what we would call a holistic approach to the arts of healing, extolling the virtues of maintaining a balance between body, soul and the environment and promoting the curative powers of fresh air and a balanced diet, a rarity in mediaeval times.

But beyond his accomplishments as physician and his place as the author of the Mishneh Torah, his great but controversial codification of Jewish law, Maimonides went down in intellectual history as the conciliator between faith and reason in the Jewish world. In fact, he went even beyond Averroes in his attempt at marrying Aristotelian rationalism with the strictures of a monotheistic faith. In principle, nothing could be more alien to the Jewish conception of an all-intervening, moral God than the mechanistic, Aristotelian description of the Supreme Being as a primary cause and not much more. His intellectualised conception of the divinity, which ran counter to the anthropomorphic features attributed to the God of the Torah, was compensated by the acceptance of a more populist approach to everyday morality as interpreted in the Jewish tradition. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, written in 1190, Maimonides seemed to embrace a Gnostic, unabashedly elitist approach to salvation open to a minority able to follow the narrow path of reason towards God: only through knowledge can superior men be saved. For the rest, the path to salvation could follow other less difficult, broader avenues, illuminated by prophecy and faith. The doubt remains whether Maimonides considered that this second path ultimately led to real contemplation and unity with God or just to a mirage intended to keep the majority of the believers under a spell so that they would not question the established order at whose pinnacle would be the chosen, intellectually superior few (47).



Plate 47. Statue of Maimonides in Cordova.

The rational approach championed by Averroes and Maimonides in the Muslim and Jewish worlds and their vindication of Aristotle was influential in the blossoming of philosophical studies in the Latin West. It was not, however, a path that was chosen by some of the finest minds among believers in both religions, nor among some Christians on the Iberian Peninsula. For them, the way out from Maimonides' perplexity or from the exegetical labyrinth of Averroes' commentaries was neither to be found by eating the fruits of the tree of knowledge nor by adhering to the literality of the Scriptures, but by delving inside the inner recesses of their individual souls, there to communicate with a transcendental reality. It was the road to wisdom chosen by great Iberian Muslim, Jewish and Christian poets and mystics alike. It was the inner path of Sufi masters like Ibn Arabi, the Kabbalists of Gerona, and the one followed by Ramon Llull in his bewildering *Arbre de ciencia*, or Tree of Knowledge.

I must confess that I discovered the life and work of Ibn Arabi far away from his birthplace in Murcia, a region in eastern Spain. At the time, I was posted as a diplomat in Kazakhstan. While studying Kazakh history and culture I came across the figure of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, one of the country's national heroes. He lived in Turkistan at the turn of the twelfth century and became one of the major Sufi poets and founder of the Sufi *tariqah*, or order, of the Yasaviyya, which was profoundly influenced by Central Asia's rich shamanistic tradition pre-dating the

arrival of Islam. The mausoleum where Yasawi is buried was built by Timur the Lame (Tamerlane), and is located in the Kazakh city of Turkistan, now a sacred place of pilgrimage for Muslims (48).



Plate 48. Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi in Turkistan, Kazakhstan.

It was while visiting the mausoleum that the local guide, after having learnt that I came from Spain, enthusiastically mentioned the name of Ibn Arabi as the other great Sufi mystic and almost exact contemporary of Ahmed Yasawi. I therefore acknowledge with gratitude that my love for Ibn Arabi was born thanks to a cultivated Kazakh lady who was able to quote at length entire poems written by both Sufi sages in Arabic and in their Russian and English translations. I found it truly fascinating that, thanks to their belonging to the same spiritual brotherhood, two men living at opposite ends of the Eurasian continent were able to produce such beautiful and profound poetry while they were inspired by the same quest and thirst for knowledge, acquired not exclusively or predominantly by reason, but by exploring the visible, the invisible and the everything-in-between realms of reality. In Ibn Arabi's vision, all kind of transmutations and permutations are allowed in that intermediate realm and the resulting multiplicity of beings is structured in a hierarchy of ladders or stages, each of them defined by a divine name, through which the seeker has to ascend. The ultimate stage is the "Station of No Station", or *maqâm lâ maqâm*, the place, or non-place, where man attains a state, or non-state, of Perfection, by which Ibn Arabi means that he is able to contain in himself all possible forms of existence without identifying with any of them: a permanent state of transitoriness infused by infinite love, as expressed

in one of his poems. I can not refrain from quoting a few lines in the English translation by Michael A. Sells:

“Marvel, a garden among the flames!
My heart can take on
any form:
a meadow for gazelles,
a cloister for monks,
For the idols, sacred ground,
Ka’ba for the circling pilgrim,
the tables of the Torah,
the scrolls of the Qur’án.
I profess the religion of love;
wherever its caravan turns along the
way,
that is the belief,
the faith I keep”²³.

Ibn Arabi’s rejection of Averroes’ cold rationalist conception of God was also shared by some brilliant Jewish minds that were turning their back on the Aristotelian teachings of Maimonides. In their case a form of esotericism known as the Kabbalah substituted the alternative path to the truth offered by Sufism among the Muslims. Poetically, the Kabbalah had an antecedent in the writings of Ibn Gabirol, born in 1021 in Malaga, in al-Andalus. He was one of the first exponents of Neo-Platonism in his book *The Fountain of Life*, translated into Latin from Arabic as *Fons Vitae* and studied by some of the most influential Christian mediaeval philosophers and theologians, from Albertus Magnus to Thomas Aquinas.

Platonic ideals, as expressed by Ibn Gabirol, found a more elaborate rendition in accordance with the Jewish mystic tradition in the works of Abulafia, a native of Saragossa, and ultimately in the appearance of the *Zohar*, or *Book of Splendor*, the founding text of the Kabbalistic tradition. As is well known, the authorship of the *Zohar* has been a bone of contention among scholars for centuries. It was published, and probably written or at least compiled from different sources, by Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon, born in the Castilian town of Guadalajara in 1250. He was a prominent member of a circle of Hispanic Jews who, after having being under the influence of Maimonides’ rigorous teachings, were attracted to a more adventurous play of the mind in its search for the ultimate nature of God. For the

²³ From www.ibnarabisociety.org.

Kabbalists, God was conceived of as an infinite reality manifested through a series of attributes whose decipherment was only possible through a given combination of words and numbers contained in the Torah (49).



Plate 49. Mantua edition of the *Zohar*, 1557.

At its most literal, the Kabbalah became the equivalent of a numerological game of alchemy, whose goal was to find the magical incantations that would transmute certain combinations of signs into, for instance, a human being, as in the legend of the Golem, the semi-human creature created by Judah Loew, the rabbi of Prague, who would later inspire the celebrated poem by Jorge Luis Borges:

“So made of consonants and vowels,
there shall exist a terrible Name, that in its essence
encodes God’s Omnipotence
hidden in letters and measured syllables”.²⁴

The esoteric, mystical appeal of Sufism and the Kabbalah among Muslims and Jews in thirteenth-century Spain was not matched at the same scale among contemporary Christians. Christian mysticism was to flourish three centuries later with such extraordinary figures as Fray Luis de León, St. Teresa de Jesus or St. John of the Cross. There was, however, an exception: Ramon Llull. He was born around 1232 in Majorca, one of the Balearic Islands, which belonged to the Crown of Aragon. In his autobiography, *Vita Coetanea*, written at an

²⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, *Selected Poems* (edited by Alexander Coleman), p.193.

advanced age, he candidly narrated his process of conversion from a dissolute youth and a married life into first a path of penitence and ascetic meditation and then one devoted to preaching among the infidels. To this latter end he spent several years educating himself in the tenets of theology and studying both Arabic and Arabic literature and science. His first two works, the *Logic of Algazel* and *The Book of Contemplation on God*, show the influence of Islamic and eastern thought and modes of discourse. In the *Logic* there is already a mixture of mystic and algebraic symbols—deployed in the form of trees, circles and triangles, not unlike a mandala—combined in such a way that they can represent the four instruments of knowledge—the sensual, the sensual- intellectual, the intellectual, and the intellectual-sensual—each of them able to comprehend a different, but closely interrelated, dimension of reality. The knowledge thus obtained by using those different epistemological tools was then transformed, by means of an *ars combinatoria* that prefigured modern-day computational logic, into an abstract grammar that transcended the different languages spoken by members of the three monotheistic religions. In this way, the semiotic abyss that separated Christians, Jews and Muslims could be bridged and the infidels could better be converted to the true faith. Theology and logic were thus put at the service of a proselytising programme, the ultimate goal of which was to put an end to the very religious diversity that made possible such extraordinary intellectual and spiritual adventures (50).



Plate 50. Ramon Llull's Tree of Knowledge.

Averroes, Maimonides, Ibn Arabi, Moses de León or Ramon Llull were unique individuals who represented the prodigious variety of ways of thinking, believing and living in mediaeval Hispania at a time when the fragile fabric of *convivencia* was fraying beyond repair. Islamic and Christian extremists were trying to translate their respective interpretations of faith into an exclusivist political agenda. Before long, the balance was to tilt towards one of the sides. In retrospect, historians use expressions like “vanished” or “lost” to define the final demise of the spirit of the Three Cultures in mediaeval Spain, as if the modes of life of Jewish and Muslims and their respective fruits in science, philosophy or the arts completely disappeared without a trace. But in the cultural history of humankind and in the evolution of civilisation, as in Lavoisier’s Law, almost nothing is created *ex nihilo* or utterly destroyed, but merely transformed...or translated.

Though the Toledo School of Translators, the symbolic locus where most of that transformation took place, is strictly speaking a misnomer, it is a highly successful one and so for practical reasons we will stick to it. There was no single continuous school with such a name, but several under different denominations in different epochs. Besides, as we have seen, since at least the ninth century there were various centres throughout the Iberian Peninsula, mostly located in monasteries or, in the case of Muslim Spain, in academies under the patronage of the Caliphate or the taifa kingdoms where translations from and into different languages and the exegesis of classical, Biblical, Hebrew, Muslim and Oriental literary, scientific, philosophical and religious texts were undertaken. The reason why we talk about a Toledo School is because it was in that city that many of those separate efforts converged and were given a new impetus after its seizure by King Alfonso VI. His decision not to disturb the local Muslim and Jewish communities favoured the continuation of their scholarly pursuits and attracted many other people in search for knowledge from the Christian kingdoms, even beyond the Pyrenees. Among those who came to Spain to search into those precious *armariis Araborum*, or Arabic treasure troves, two figures deserve to be singled out. The first was Bishop Raymond of Toledo, originally a Dominican monk from Gascony, who in the mid-twelfth century transformed Toledo Cathedral into an institution of higher learning staffed with the best Arabic, Hebrew, Latin and Mozarabic translators of the times. The second was Gerard of Cremona, who learnt Arabic in Toledo and translated from that language into Latin a wide range of works originally written in Greek by authors such as Ptolemy, Euclid, Archimedes and Aristotle on astronomy and geometry, as well as some of the best scientific contributions made in Arabic by masters like al-Farabi, al-Kindi or al-Khwarizmi. Apart from them, there were Hispanic Christians who also

participated in the School from an early stage. Two of the most prominent were John of Seville and Domingo Gundisalvo, the Cathedral School's first official director, a prolific translator from the Arabic canon and an original author in his own right. His influential *De Divisione Philosophia*, a work of encyclopaedic synthesis inspired by St Isidore's legacy, further advanced the transmission of the classical tradition into the mediaeval West (51).



Plate 51. Gerard of Cremona's translation of Ptolemy's *Almagest*, one of the many classical and Arabic texts transmitted to the West through the various Toledo Schools of Translators.

During the first period of its existence, most translations conducted at the School of Toledo were done from Arabic into Latin, the *lingua franca* of the West among the ecclesiastic and intellectual elites. But that situation was to change radically with the accession to the throne of Castile-Leon of one of the most fascinating ruler in the history of the mediaeval West, one who epitomises all the contradictions, failures and achievements of mediaeval Spain: King Alfonso X (52)



Plate 52. Alfonso X presides over the presentation of his *Cantigas* by a group of musicians, singers and poets. Miniature from a manuscript kept at the Library of El Escorial, or *Códice Rico*.

Alfonso X presided over and personally participated in the most ambitious, comprehensive and pluralistic cultural programme undertaken in the West in the period from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance. Compared to Charlemagne he was a more accomplished figure, particularly taking into account that he had to deal with a far more complex reality in his kingdoms. From the point of view of civilisation, his legacy was richer and, in several respects, more lasting. His compilation of laws, the *Siete Partidas*, was to become the Western juridical corpus applied over the widest territorial extent in early modern history, as its provisions were effective in most territories of the Spanish Empire, including a large part of what is now the United States. The *Siete Partidas* was, in fact, the most important Western compilation of laws from the Justinian Codex in the sixth century to the Napoleonic Code in the nineteenth century. Castilian Spanish, the vernacular he favoured over Latin as the linguistic receptacle of his vast humanistic and scientific design, was destined to become the most widely spoken Romance language in the world. Of the many scientific works sponsored by him, the one known as the *Alphonsine Tables*, was to become the most popular astronomical treaty until Copernicus, who used it in his own observations, and later on until the publication in 1627 of Johannes Kepler's *Rudolphine Tables*. In fact, the practicality of the *Alphonsine Tables* had been shown as they were used by most navigators at the onset of the Age of Exploration, including Columbus in his first voyage (53, 54).



Plate 53. High relief head of Alfonso X at the US House of Representatives, among humanity’s great lawmakers. The other Hispanic who is represented there is Maimonides.



Plate 54. *Alfonsine Tables*, Spanish National Library. The astronomical computations start from January 1, 1255, the date of King Alfonso X’ coronation.

Unlike Charlemagne, who hardly learnt to write and had to rely on his advisors, Alfonso X was a fine writer of poetry, sacred and profane, that was accompanied by music and written in Galician-Portuguese and Castilian, interspersed with Provençal, since he befriended and accepted in his Court some of the best troubadours from beyond the Pyrenees. His almost universal curiosity led him personally to advance the most varied fields of knowledge, from law to astronomy, from the game of chess to mineralogy, and from music to historiography. Among his closest collaborators there

were Jews and Arabs. His design was all encompassing because his main aim was no less than to elevate an entire multicultural society constantly ravaged by war and dissent to new heights. He lived in a period when the fragile balance of power in Spain was tilting decisively in favour of one of the sides. It would have been all too natural, in the logic of those times, for him to have used the advantage obtained by the Christian kingdoms to impose a political, social and cultural agenda based on uniformity. Though faithful to his Christian creed and not immune to intermittent bouts of anti-Semitism, he mostly refrained from doing so. He preferred to be, like his predecessor Alfonso VI, “king of different religions”. Politically, he had two main objectives: to subdue the rebellious nobility so that he would be recognised as an effective sovereign, not just as first among equals, and to be elected as Holy Roman Emperor, a quixotic enterprise that alienated the sympathy of many and depleted his kingdom’s coffers. At the end of his life, suffering from a particularly nasty form of degenerative cancer, he had to confront a civil war provoked by one of his sons and had lost any chance of becoming Emperor, his greatest goal in life. It is believed that his many failures as a ruler contributed to his restless pursuit of cultural enterprises: since he had lost the earth he tried to find consolation in the heavens. I am not that sure. He was not a complete political fiasco. During his reign, the recently formed kingdom of Castile and Leon consolidated its borders and gathered the formidable energy and resources that would propel it to become, in due time, the main force behind a united Spain. There is a misconception that when modern Spain emerged under Ferdinand and Isabella, it did so as a monolith at the expense of its previous diversity. This is a half-truth since that alleged monolith was itself composed of many different materials, absorbed from diverse sources and transformed into a new reality during the eight centuries of *convivencia* and confrontation. A high point, perhaps the highest, in that process took place under the impulse and with the direct involvement of Alfonso X, known as the Wise, and for good reasons.

The figure in the Hispanic past that most resembles him was St Isidore of Seville. In the great encyclopaedist we also find an attempt at using a cultural program as an instrument to further political goals. In his case, it was a failure because the Visigoth monarchy was not up to the task and due to the dramatic and unforeseen Muslim invasion. In the case of Alfonso X, though he did not live to see many of his accomplishments being brought to fruition, the final result was more successful. We can see the fruits of his endless labours reaching maturity in a multiplicity of domains, most of them instrumental in transforming Spain into the leading Western nation at the onset of the Modern Era: a common but multi-layered legal corpus, a shared language, the blending of power and different sources of theoretical and practical knowledge that would make possible the discovery and incorporation of new worlds. Those fruits, resulting from centuries of cultural hybridism, reached a ripening point due to the king’s efforts at further recovering and adapting the Latin tradition to Castilian mediaeval conditions and also at perfecting the merger of Islamic, Jewish and classical influences

that had come to coexist and compete in the former Roman and Gothic Hispania since St Isidore's distant dreams.

In times like ours, when the Muslim world and the West are again seen as irreconcilable entities by the proponents of the "clash of civilisations" we must not forget that both, as well as Judaism, share a common origin as cultures of the book and that at times, like in mediaeval Spain, they have not only passively coexisted but benefited from an extraordinarily active and enriching exchange in all the domains that pertain to the realms of the flesh, the mind and the spirit. In the mediaeval Hispanic experience both the West and Islam were able, at best, to find ways to accommodate a degree of human diversity unknown in ancient times or in the European Dark Ages. For in Hispania, contradicting Rudyard Kipling, the East met the West and the West met the East, and subsequently learnt how to live with each other. This learning process continues to this day and maybe will never end, but at least we know that it is not impossible.

In the first chapter of Lord Clark's *Civilisation*, our slightly misguided guide affirmed: "without Charles Martel's victory over the Moors at Poitiers in 732, western civilisation might never have existed." I will turn his phrase around completely: without Islam in Spain and the cross-fertilisation that took place during the Iberian encounter of the three cultures, Western civilisation as we know it, including its extraordinary expansion, would have never existed (55).

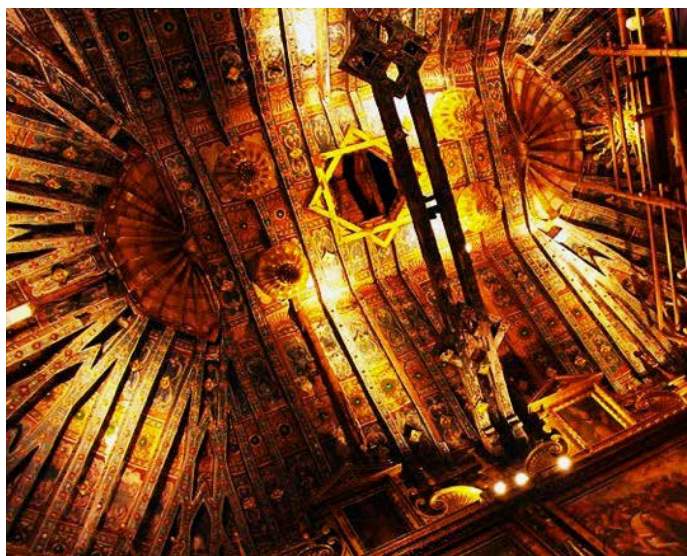


Plate 55. A magnificent Mudejar ceiling in the interior of the church of St Peter, in the small village of Andahuaylillas, in the Andes, one of the many places where the First Iberian Exchange merged into the First Global Exchange.

CHAPTER 3

TURNING OUTWARDS

Chapter IV of Lord Clark's *Civilisation* is devoted to the idea of man as the measure of all things as expressed in the city states of Italy in the fourteenth century. The transition from the Gothic world to the Renaissance takes the author and his readers from the Ducal Palace of Urbino and the Library of San Marco in Florence to the realist portraiture of Van Eyck and the Venice of Giorgione

The Clarkean presentation of the Renaissance corresponds to the pervading image of that era as a humanist paradise *par excellence*, a world of harmonious proportions where the sages of the age could spend weeks, months and years immersed in the recovery of and commentary on the Greek and Latin classics, unmolested by the chaos and fury that characterised politics in the Italian city-states of those times. It was a world where artists like Donatello or Masaccio could make visible the newly found dignity of man according to the models inherited from the classic ideals of beauty and *gravitas*, rendered, so it was thought, more real than in old Rome or Athens thanks to the art of perspective (56,57).



Plate 56. *Saint George*, by Donatello, circa 1415. Orsanmichele, Florence.



Plate 57. *The Tribute Money*, by Masaccio, circa 1420. Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.

The *studia humanitatis* - the study of grammar, rhetoric, poetry, history and philosophy according to Latin and Greek precepts- were the privileged way to be considered an accomplished man, as understood in the most civilised courts of Italy and later in those parts of Europe exposed to their influence. The composition of essays and poetry in the Latin mould, the translation of Greek texts into Latin and their punctilious exegesis, the study of the original sources of ancient philosophers and moralists, not mediated as in mediaeval times by Arabic or Jewish translators and commentators, constituted the favourite pastime of generations of scholars in the academies of Florence, Padua or Mantua and soon they were imitated elsewhere. Neo-Platonists, neo-Stoics, neo-Sceptics and neo-practically-everything schools of thought seemed to sprout everywhere provided that there was a columned piazza at hand for their members' peripatetic ruminations and a pastoral landscape to rest their sight from the close scrutiny of classical manuscripts in the dim light of wax lamps.

Unfortunately, that idyllic Arcadia was limited to a handful of cities and to an even more restricted minority of people with the means, or the enlightened protection of a powerful ruler, that allowed them to indulge in a life of leisurely self-perfection. As Lord Clark was ready to admit, the world of Italian humanism in the early Renaissance had too narrow a social base to be sustained in the long run. That is how Episode IV of his series ends and Episode V moves from Florence, the city of moneyed freedom and graceful intelligence, to Rome, the

See of sacred power and cumbersome pomp. For it was in Rome that the world of man-the-measure gave way to a world of giants and heroes, the world of the Pope Julius II, Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and, above all, Michelangelo (58).



Plate 58. *David* by Michelangelo, 1504. Galleria dell' Accademia, Florence.

As we can see, the difference between Donatello's St. George and Michelangelo's David is not only one of proportion, but of outlook. While St George is all harmony and delicacy, David appears to us as defiant young man, ready to take on the world of his elders with his enormous hands. Ultimately, such shows of defiance, and the spiritual and material ambitions that lurked behind them, were to transform the never fulfilled promise of the early Renaissance into the turmoil of the mid-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was then that, for the second time in history and with equally dramatic consequences, the irruption of the Northern European man took place, with his uncompromising, violent quest for the Reformation of the established world inherited from Classical times, Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The result was the series of wars among religions and nationalities, which were to engulf the West for the following generations. So the cycle of Western civilisation initiated in the fourteenth century with the emergence of humanism comes to an end, and to a new beginning, in the sixth episode of the series, devoted to the world of protest and communication as manifested in the lives and works of Erasmus and Hans Holbein; Dürer, Grünewald and Lucas Cranach; Montaigne and Shakespeare and, of course, the quintessential North Atlantic man, Luther.

Apart from the great Italians, whose southern names unquestionably belong to any history of civilisation, we can all agree that the northern figures mentioned above deserve a honourable place in the expansion of man's mind and spirit. But there are some caveats. Even Lord Clark was fair-minded enough to recognise the flaws, and in some instances, the disturbing traits, the grim determination, the truculent passion present in some of those symbols of the Northern revival. For instance, whilst commending the curiosity, the mastery of detail and the fertile imagination of Dürer, he was also conscious of a deeper, more troubled side to his character and his work. In the portrait of Oswald Krell, one of the most accomplished renderings of a human being in the Germanic style, one cannot fail to notice the mixture of envy and resentment in the sitter's disturbing look (59).

The same feelings, together with a burning zeal and the absolute conviction of being chosen by God, inspired Luther in his virulent crusade against the evils of the Roman Church. Just look at his portrait painted by Lucas Cranach the Elder to see what I mean (60). Even Dürer, an artist and no priest or prophet, was so sure of his mission and the redemptory nature of his creative genius that he had no doubts about posing as Christ in one of his best-known self-portraits (61).



Plate 59. *Portrait of Oswald Krell* by Dürer, 1499. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.



Plate 60: *Luther as a monk*, by Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1520. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Plate 61. Dürer, *Self-portrait*, 1500. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

As we might expect, the episodes of Lord Clark's *Civilisation* encompassing the fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries completely ignored Spain, even though those were the times when from both a European and a global perspective it was the power—and the version of Western civilisation—that, together with Portugal, was ushering in a new era in the history of humankind. As we will see in the following chapters of our narrative, it was in the Iberian Peninsula where what we have called the Great Iberian Exchange among the Three Cultures was to be expanded and transformed into the First Global Exchange. Initially the changes that took place in the Italian city-states and the first intimations of the Protestant Reform in Central Europe were geographically confined to those limited spaces. In contrast, the Great Iberian Expansion, animated by a very modern quest to test the limits of the known world, was universal from its inception. This is seen in the irruption of the great Portuguese explorers into the Indian Ocean; the discovery, from a Western perspective, of America by three Spanish caravels and of the Pacific Ocean by the Spanish explorer Balboa; and, above all, by the first circumnavigation of the globe by Magellan and Elcano. It is also evident in the creation and maintenance of the first global economic network thanks to the synchronised Spanish trans-Atlantic fleets and the trans-Pacific Manila galleons.

But even if we accept Lord Clark's choice to restrict himself to Europe and forget about the rest of the world (except, as we will see, a couple of detours to the United States of America), and even if he happily limited his attentions to the Italian Peninsula, it is still difficult to understand why he did not mention, even if just in passing, the evident fact that Spain was, for almost two centuries, the biggest player and main power-broker in many of the fragmented and fractious Italian polities, including Rome.

Actually, from a merely artistic point of view, it is almost impossible to walk around Rome without encountering examples of the overwhelming Spanish presence there. If the visitor, for instance, walks up the Janiculum Hill, on the outskirts of the Eternal City in those days, the place where St Peter was allegedly crucified is now occupied by the church and convent of San Pietro in Montorio. Since 1480, this sacred place has been under the patronage of the Spanish kings and in 1502, as a Spanish commission, one of the architectural jewels of the High Renaissance was built: Bramante's Tempietto. The Residence of the Spanish Ambassador and the Spanish Academy of Arts in Rome are also close by (62).

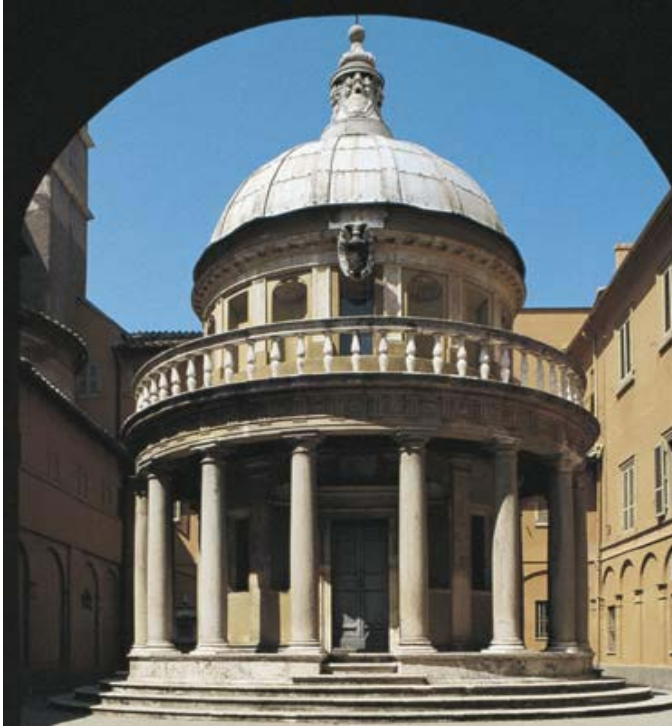


Plate 62. The Tempietto of San Pietro in Montorio, by Bramante, 1502. The earliest sign of Spanish influence on the early modern political and cultural landscape of Rome.

If by contrast the modern visitor prefers not to wander too far away from the touristic heart of Rome, then with all probability he or she will not be able to avoid the famous Piazza di Spagna and the equally renowned Spanish Steps, both named after their close proximity to the premises of the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, adorned with statues by Bernini. Not too far from there, in the Piazza Navona, close to the old Spanish church known as the Church of San Giacomo degli Spagnoli, are the sites of the Cervantes Institute in Rome and the celebrated Spanish bookshop. And of course, one cannot fail to visit the Jesuit Church of the Gesù, conceived of in 1551 by St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the most Spanish and at the same time most multinational of the Catholic orders (63,64).



Plate 63. Interior of the Jesuit's Gesù Church in Rome.



Plate 64. Façade of the Spanish Embassy to the Holy See, Piazza di Spagna, Rome.

In 1469 the marriage of the Queen of Castile, Isabella I, and the King of Aragon, Ferdinand II, brought about a dynastic union with far-reaching consequences, and together they are known in Spain as “los Reyes Católicos”,

“the Catholic Monarchs”. However, Hispanic involvement in Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, in a reversal of Antiquity’s dynamic, was the result of earlier dynastic marriages by the rulers of Aragon and dated back to the Sicilian Vespers of 1282, when a popular revolt against the rule of the Angevin French culminated in the coronation of Peter III of Aragon as King of Sicily.

The landing in Sicily of Peter III (by the way, one of the main characters in Shakespeare’s play *Much Ado about Nothing*) heralded the era of the great Aragonese expansion across the Mediterranean from the thirteenth century onwards. It culminated in Catalan mercenaries capturing most of Sardinia and the duchies of Athens and Neopatria—eventually lost—and, above all, with the Aragonese Alfonso V’s seizure of the strategic kingdom of Naples from the French in 1442. Despite numerous French attempts to recover their lost Italian territories in the ensuing decades, the skilful diplomacy of Ferdinand II and the repeated victories of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba at the head of the formidable Spanish infantry consolidated Spanish ascendancy over most of Italy until the eighteenth century. In fact, it was Ferdinand II’s talent for international politics that was to lay the foundations of the Spanish hegemony in Europe before the merger of the Hispanic kingdoms and their fledgling overseas territories into the supranational Hispanic Monarchy.

It is a fact in the history of world political systems that is usually forgotten or neglected, but is nevertheless undeniable, that the Spanish Monarchy was the first large modern Western polity able to create and hold together a lasting trans-oceanic and trans-continental Empire of global proportions. Portugal can rightly claim precedence in this regard, but despite its early move to focus outward, the Portuguese Empire did not exert direct control, or even indirect hegemony over so many territories, including in Europe, as Spain did. The Spanish regime was based on a complex, but on the whole quiet flexible and—judging from its remarkable resilience—efficient system of government designed to manage an enormous array of countries, peoples and cultures of a most varied nature and different levels of development. The kingdoms of Castile and Aragon, Naples, Sicily, Sardinia, Milan, the Duchy of Burgundy (which encompassed at the time Flanders, the Low Countries and the Franche Comté) as well as the recently discovered lands of the New World were part of a supranational entity already at the beginning of the sixteenth century. With the ascent of Charles V to the Imperial dignity in 1519, continuing until 1556, the expanding Spanish-centred polity further included the lands of the Holy Roman Empire in Central and Eastern Europe. From 1580 to 1640 it incorporated Portugal and its overseas territories in America, Africa and Asia. During the eighteenth century, under the new Bourbon dynasty, though it had lost most of its European possessions beyond the Pyrenees as the result of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, the Spanish Monarchy nevertheless reached the apex of

its expansion in the Americas, from Tierra del Fuego to British Columbia while retaining its possessions in Asia. All in all, from the late fifteenth century to the second decade of the nineteenth, more than three centuries, Spain governed the largest Western political entity ever known until the British Empire reached its zenith during the reign of Queen Victoria, only to collapse in the mid-twentieth century. It is difficult to imagine a more important contribution to the expansion of Western civilisation, in this case in the crucial realm of political practice (65, 66).



Plate 65. Hispania as the head of the European political system. *Europa Regina*, in the 1570 edition of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*.



Plate 66. Territories governed at different epochs by Spain.

The first architect of such an imposing political edifice was, as mentioned, the Catholic King. It was no accident that Ferdinand II was a model for Machiavelli's *The Prince* and can rightly be considered the first modern statesman. At the very beginning of modern European power politics, he devised a complex system of diplomatic alliances to encircle and ultimately to rein in the power of France, check one Italian state against the other and keep England at bay, at the same time that he contained the threat of the redoubtable Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean. No small feat, indeed. He managed to do so, and to bequeath a solid legacy to his successors, thanks to two instruments of the modern state that Spain was to master and take to new heights under his command: first, a dense diplomatic network of resident ambassadors and, second, a modern army that was to revolutionise the conduct of war on European and overseas battlefields giving Spanish arms an edge that their many enemies could only try to emulate. Both in the arts of war and diplomacy, as in many other fields, Spain was a pioneer of modernity, and not, as is claimed in so many North Atlantic narratives, a reluctant follower. In the case of modern diplomacy, an Italian invention, Spain was to develop during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the most comprehensive and effective network of permanent embassies in Europe. As the historian Garret Mattingly recognised in his classic study on Renaissance diplomacy, Spain had “for a century and more the most impressive diplomatic service in Europe”.²⁵ According to Mattingly, even at the time of the so-called Spanish decline in the seventeenth century—a North Atlantic myth if ever there was one for, as we will see, Spain kept on managing the largest Western overseas Empire until the early 1800s—“no group of resident ambassadors... were such virtuosos of diplomacy or moved on the board of European politics with such formidable, independent life as those who served Spain in the second half of the reign of Philip III”.²⁶ Among them, a place of honour belongs to the name of Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga, author of the classic 1620 manual for the perfect *Ambassador*, still a recommended read for would-be diplomats; to Baltasar de Zúñiga, Ambassador at the Hapsburg Court at the beginning of the Thirty Years War; to the Count of Gondomar, who befriended King James VI of Scotland and I of England and had Sir Walter Raleigh executed for contradicting the orders of his King aimed at keeping the peace with Spain; and, pre-eminently, to the diplomatic giant and man of letters, Diego de Saavedra Fajardo, author of a book on statesmanship, the *Political Maxims*, that still speaks to our own troubled times (67,68,69).

²⁵ Henry Kissinger attributed the origins of modern Western diplomacy to Cardinal Richelieu, ignoring, in a typical North Atlantic way, the seminal Italian and Spanish contributions to the conduct of international relations. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.



Plate 67. *Ferdinand II of Aragon*, also known as Ferdinand the Catholic, the first modern statesman, painted by Michael Sittow, an Estonian who became court painter for the Spanish monarchs. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.



Plate 68. *The Ambassador*, by Juan Antonio de Vera y Zúñiga. 1620. Generations of European diplomats trained by reading this book.



Plate 69. *Diego Hurtado de Mendoza* by Titian, 1541. Pitti Gallery, Florence. Hurtado de Mendoza was Ambassador to Rome under Philip II and an accomplished poet, historian and humanist.

The feats of arms and diplomacy that characterised the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella were accompanied at home by the flourishing of the Renaissance on the pre-existing fertile Iberian soil. In particular, the *studia humanitatis* and the influence of Italian letters in prose and poetry were introduced at an early stage thanks to the constant exchange of professors and students between the two Mediterranean peninsulas, favoured by the links that bound many Italian polities to the Crown of Aragon. There was also the famous institution of the Spanish College in Bologna, established in 1364 at the oldest university, and founded by the warrior-cardinal Gil Álvarez Carrillo de Albornoz for the benefit of Castilian, Aragonese and Portuguese students. It numbered among its alumni such princes of Spanish humanism as Elio Antonio de Nebrija and Juan Sepúlveda. Nebrija is renowned for having written, in 1492, shortly after the fall of Granada and just before the “discovery” of America, the first grammar of the Spanish language—in fact, the first modern grammar of any Romance vernacular. In his prologue to Queen Isabella, Nebrija already foresaw the extraordinary expansion of Spanish—today the most widely spoken language derived from Latin and the second international language after English—when he boasted that “My grammar shall serve to impart to them [the inhabitants of the newly ‘discovered’ worlds] the Castilian tongue, as we have used grammar to teach Latin to our young” (70).



Plate 70. First edition of Nebrija's *Spanish Grammar*, 1492.

Apart from studies in Bologna and other Italian cities, another channel of exchange was the patronage of humanist studies by Spanish nobles who were literati, like Nuño de Guzmán or Íñigo López de Mendoza, the famous Marquis of Santillana, a great writer in his own right and a devoted follower of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, whose well-provided library contained a wealth of rare Italian and Spanish translations of Latin writings (71).



Plate 71. *Portrait of the Marquis de Santillana*, by Jorge Inglés, 1455.

The portrait of the humanist and classicist Marquis de Santillana shown above, painted by an English painter trained in the Flemish style is an example of the way Spain, even before the marriage of Isabella I and Ferdinand II, was already open to the influences brought about by the connexions of Castile and Aragon with two of the most vibrant European economic and cultural centres: Flanders and the Italian city states. The other one was Spain itself. The Reconquest was completed with the fall of Granada, but the unified Spanish kingdoms had already assimilated the most valuable legacies bequeathed by the Muslim and Jewish communities that had shared mediaeval Hispania. Though the expulsion in 1492 of the Jews who refused to convert to Christianity and, in 1609, of the last Muslims, put a long-lasting stop to the age of *convivencia*, most of their philosophical, scientific and artistic contributions became a part of Spanish heritage and many of them were to be transplanted and adapted to new worlds. Such an extraordinary point of confluence and cauldron of novelties as early modern Spain was at the time of the Catholic Monarchs fascinated the inquisitive eye of Hieronymus Münzer, a German envoy from Nuremberg, acting as the messenger of Emperor Maximilian I to Isabella and Ferdinand shortly after their conquest of the Nasrid kingdom. The conversation that took place on October 1494 between Münzer and Inigo de Mendoza, the recently appointed mayor of La Alhambra, was a symbol of the new times inaugurated in Spain and a premonition of things to come: the place was one of the magnificent Islamic rooms of the Nasrid palace; both men spoke in Latin; the streets of Granada were being beautified with emblems proclaiming the glory of the Catholic Monarchs; and just two years before, from a port a few hundred miles south of the city, a small expedition had set sail to return some months later with the news of a portentous discovery. A new world was just beginning in more than one sense.

One of the most widespread ideas about the Spanish expansion in the Early Modern Age is that Spain at that time was a backwater in Western Europe, which in turn was a backwater of the entire Eurasian landmass. While I was doing some research for this book in the libraries of Harvard and bookshops of Cambridge, Massachusetts, I stumbled by chance upon an essay written in the mid-1970s by an Italian historian, Antonello Gerbi, about the study of nature in the New World. The book has been recently translated into English and among its pages I found the following sentence, reminiscent of a cast of mind which is still quite frequent, though increasingly less so, in some intellectual quarters: the author marvelled at “the historical paradox that it should have fallen to one of the most backwards countries of Western Europe to take the decisive step in the worldwide expansion of European civilisation”.²⁷ Well, I am going to be blunt: it is truly difficult to be

²⁷ Antonello Gerbi, *Nature in the New World*, p.121

more mistaken. The question so frequently posed: “Why should poor, peripheral Iberia have spearheaded the age of European hegemony and created, in the case of Spain, the most successful modern pre-industrial Empire?” has no answer because, for starters, it is simply the wrong one. The Iberian kingdoms, when compared to most of the rest of Europe at the start of the Modern Era, were neither particularly poor nor in any sense peripheral. As we have seen in the previous chapters and will explore in the following ones, if there was any place where the inhabitants had had access for centuries to knowledge and techniques beyond the reach of most contemporary European societies—except perhaps the small city-states of Genoa and Venice—and had been exposed to more diverse cultural and material influences, then that place was, by far, the Iberian peninsula and its adjacent islands, particularly Majorca. In particular, Spain in 1492 brimmed with vigour, energy, vitality and above all, confidence, all the essential ingredients of a new civilisation in the making according to Lord Clark.

Besides the formidable energy and knowledge—theoretical and practical—accumulated by the Iberians during the cycle of Islamic Conquest, *Convivencia* and final Reconquest, some of the Iberian kingdoms had already been making tentative steps since at least the late thirteenth century to venture beyond their geographical confines and engage in worldwide diplomatic schemes. In this regard, my favourite true story, which I cannot refrain from sharing with the reader, is the embassy of Ruy González de Clavijo to the Court of Timur in Samarkand, at the beginning of the fourteenth century.

At the time of Clavijo’s extraordinary adventure Castile was ruled by King Henry III (1379-1406). After securing his throne from rebellious noblemen and once he had established law and order within its boundaries, Henry III put Castile on an active foreign policy agenda whose main goal was to protect Christianity from the advance of the Ottoman Turks. To that end, he sent several documented diplomatic missions to the rulers of Persia, Fez, Tunisia and to the powerful Ottoman Sultan himself. Thus, in 1401 two Castilian envoys—Payo Gómez de Sotomayor and Hernán Sánchez de Palazuelos—were charged with the difficult endeavour of reaching Bayezid and trying to convince him not to proceed further west.

Finally, meeting the Turk a year later, they had success, albeit in unexpected circumstances. As is well known, on July 20, 1402, when he was planning the conquest of Constantinople, the Ottoman Sultan was decisively defeated at the Battle of Angora by the army of a man who claimed to be the heir of Genghis Khan, Timur the Lame, also known as Tamerlane.

Surging from the mythic lands of Transoxiana, over the previous decades Timur’s armies had built an empire stretching from Moghulistan (modern-

day Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Xingjian) to Anatolia (modern Turkey). Furthermore, after his victory over Bayezid, the conqueror of Central Asia was on the verge of shifting the geopolitical order in the eastern Mediterranean.

By a twist of destiny, the two Spaniards witnessed that momentous event on the plains of Angora (Ankara), where they had arrived just some days before the battle. Once the victory over Bayezid was completed, they were captured and brought into the presence of Timur, who personally made inquiries upon the nature of their mission. His curiosity fully satisfied, he finally let them depart back to Spain with a letter and some lavish presents to be offered to their king as a token of friendship, including several Christian ladies of noble birth freed from Bayezid's entourage. The ultimate fate of some of these ladies was registered in Spanish contemporary chronicles and poetic annals, as their beauty and gracious manners made quite an impact at Henry III's court. Accompanying the Castilian envoys, Timur also sent a personal representative, Muhammed al-Kazi, who was later to become an invaluable asset as both guide and translator to Clavijo's own embassy.

Upon receiving the news of Timur's rising star from his envoys Sotomayor and Palazuelos, Henry III reacted rapidly. Eager to know more about the man who had saved Constantinople and all of Christendom from an imminent danger—although, needless to say, that had not been Timur's objective in confronting the Ottomans—the Spanish king made hasty preparations to despatch another embassy.

This time the final destination was the capital of the new Lord of the East, Samarkand. The mission was sent as both a fact-finding expedition and as an attempt at establishing a lasting understanding between the two sovereigns. For that undertaking, the King selected one of his closest counsellors, Ruy González de Clavijo, a nobleman from Madrid.

Little is known about Clavijo's life prior to his entering into the select group of the great literary travellers, apart from his being married at the time of the departure, his love of letters, and his reliable character. At any rate, the important post he held at court means that his being chosen to lead the embassy was a way of underlining the importance attached by the king to the mission's success.

As his personal retinue, Clavijo was provided with an official from the king's guard, Gómez de Salazar, a priest and expert in oriental languages, Alfonso Páez de Santamaría, Timur's envoy, Muhammed al-Kazi, and several unnamed soldiers and servants. They numbered fourteen in total. The embassy was obviously well equipped with victuals and included valuable presents as a means to reciprocate Timur's generosity. Prominent among them—not least for the care required in

their safety during such a perilous journey—were several well-trained gyrfalcons to amuse the ruler of Samarkand.

Thus prepared, the expedition set sail from the port of Santa María in southern Spain on May 21, 1403. Following an established itinerary along the Mediterranean coast (Cartagena – Messina – Rhodes – Chios – Pera and Constantinople) the ships finally dropped anchor at the Black Sea port of Trebizond. From there, the expedition continued overland along the route covering Arzinjan – Erzerum – Tabriz – Sultaniyah – Teheran – Kesh and, finally, Samarkand. The ambassador and his retinue arrived at the capital of Transoxiana on September 8, 1404 and remained there more than two months, until November 21. The way back to Spain took almost two more years, for the embassy reported back on March 24, 1406 in the Castilian town of Alcalá de Henares.

Almost nothing more was known about Ruy González de Clavijo and his embassy to Samarkand until the first edition of his memoirs was published in Madrid in 1582. The book soon achieved the rank of a classic in its genre, for it gave the most detailed descriptions written by a westerner about Central Asia at the time of Timur, as well as details about the great ruler himself. Despite early accounts from those who had ventured into its vast stretches of desolate lands and imposing mountain ranges for both religious and mundane purposes, Central Asia was, in Clavijo's time, an almost unknown region. Apart from the historical figure of Genghis Khan and the legendary and ubiquitous Prester John, a hazy image of supposedly ferocious nomadic hordes eager to prey on their civilised neighbours prevailed in the mediaeval West. Challenging that view, made out of fear and ignorance, Clavijo wrote an objective testimony of the people he encountered in his journey along the Silk Road. Perusing the pages of the Spaniard's narrative, the modern-day reader can find a complete ethnographical survey of the nomadic way of life from the "portable tents" to the gastronomic mores, from the role of horses in everyday life to the complexities of social hierarchy. Yet the main strength of the book lies in its vivid description of Timur's court in Samarkand and the political analysis it contains on the formation and structure of the Timurid Empire.

From Clavijo's own recollection of the facts we know that the embassy was solemnly received by Timur in one of the many gardens he had created on the outskirts of his capital. Modern scholars have identified the venue of this first encounter between the Spanish envoys and the Central Asian ruler. According to Norah Titley and Frances Wood, the place described by Clavijo was the Garden of Heart's Delight, or "Dilkhusa". Praised by poets and depicted in numerous miniatures, Dilkhusa followed the Persian model of geometrical arrangement—a classic pattern in the Near East, in contrast to the irregular gardens of the Far East.

At its centre was a pavilion surrounded by water channels and irrigated orchards. Timur, then 69 years old and almost blind, was seated on embroidered silk cushions or *almadraques* (a Spanish word borrowed from the Arabs), and was leaning rather casually on round pillows. He was dressed in a light silk cape and wore a white, tall hat adorned with precious stones. Clavijo and his companions knelt thrice before Timur, who then started a rather rhetorical questioning about their journey and expressing his wishes for the good fate of “his son”, the King of Castile.

After carefully reading the letter sent to him by Henry III as a reply to his own previous communication, Timur invited the Spaniards to a stately banquet. The momentous occasion was attended by Timur’s many wives, courtiers and foreign dignitaries, among whom Clavijo identified some “Christians in the Chinese manner from a land close to Cathay”—quite possibly one of the last references to the moribund remnants of Nestorians in Central Asia.

Thus, several weeks ensued in an endless succession of festivities without the Spaniards receiving a formal response to the letter of the Castilian king. When their patience was finally running thin, they were suddenly and abruptly told by a high-ranking Timurid official that his master could no longer meet the envoys. The reason was that Timur had fallen extremely ill. It was suggested that it was better for them to leave his lands before major turmoil could erupt, preventing the embassy from returning home. Timur was, in fact, to survive three more months during which, at the limit of his strength, he was to attempt his most ambitious design: the conquest of China. He died at the head of his army in Otrar, located in modern-day Kazakhstan in January 1405.

A year later, Henry III also passed away and the prospect of an alliance was forgotten. The Timurid Empire crumbled amid internecine divisions, only to revive in the form of the brilliant Mughal dynasty in India. Meanwhile, a united Spain started to look westwards towards the New World. The Hispanic world and Central Asia followed diverging routes.

So, was Clavijo’s amazing adventure a failure? From a strictly diplomatic point of view, the answer may be a conditional yes. After all, the embassy returned home safely and the king obtained his precious first-hand news about the man who could have changed the world. But the merit of Clavijo’s travel cannot be judged on mere political terms. Its result was, above all, a successful attempt at describing human diversity without falling into any kind of prejudice or cultural Eurocentrism. In effect, what strikes the modern reader most is the author’s objective, almost absolutely impartial tone in presenting foreign lands and people. There is also the very modern outlook of this protagonist of history: in the preface to his book, Clavijo confessed that he wrote the narrative of his

extraordinary journey as a means “to prevent the facts from falling into oblivion so that they can be known by future generations”. His account of the fascinating lands of Central Asia allowed him to attain his much-desired posthumous glory (72).

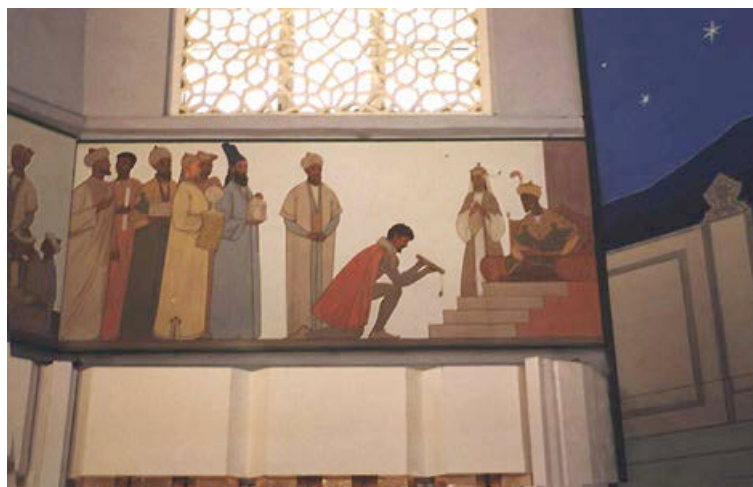


Plate 72. A modern depiction of Clavijo's Embassy to Timur at the Ulug Beg Observatory in Samarkand. In the famed Silk Road city there is a street dedicated to the Spanish Ambassador close to Timur's mausoleum.

Clavijo's embassy demonstrates the very forward-looking and broad-minded outlook of a ruler of Castile almost a century before Columbus's trip. As we have seen, at that time the kings of Aragon were even more advanced, and more successful, in fostering their crown's foreign policy in the Mediterranean, whilst the Portuguese were starting to venture along the western shores of the African continent. Sooner or later, the Iberian breakthrough was inevitable: enter Columbus and the fateful decision by the Catholic Monarchs—when other European rulers had recoiled in disbelief or pleaded lack of sufficient funds—to finance his dream of reaching the mythical Cipango via the Atlantic, thus avoiding the Muslim, Venetian and Portuguese obstacles in the way of Asia's riches. The rest, as we know, is Big History.

We are not going to dwell on the well-trodden account of the explorations and discoveries of the Spaniards and their Portuguese neighbours. In our narrative of civilisation, following Lord Clark's lead, what is important now is their effect on the opening up of the Western mind to new material and intellectual horizons. In this sense, the path we are going to follow is the impact of the Iberian, and particularly, the Hispanic discoveries on humankind's mental representation of the

world. Then we will round off this chapter with an evocation of the figure of the conquistador as the quintessential Renaissance man, the dynamic counterpoint to the sedentary humanist of the epoch which started it.

That the entire earth constitutes humanity's natural habitat had never been taken for granted before the Modern Era. For most of history the prevalent idea was that apart from some privileged regions where the civilised few lived, the rest of the planet was *Terra incognita* or *nullius*, inhabited, if that was the case, by beings that the real humans had difficulties in recognising as members of the same species, beings that, not surprisingly, were usually depicted with monstrous features: humans and "not so humans" were thus separated by a huge moral and physical abyss.

To be true to the facts, it was the Stoics in Graeco-Roman Late Antiquity who first glimpsed the novel perception that there is a common humanity beneath or above human diversity and then passed their intuition on to Christianity. In mediaeval times, the theoretical conception of a universal ecumene of inhabited lands was thus preserved, though the world of the believers and that of the pagans, especially the Muslims, remained irreconcilable unless mediated by conversion, which was rare indeed. Thus, the vision of the world inherited by Europe in the Early Modern Age was a conflation of the classical and Church traditions. Let us take, for instance, the mediaeval representation of the world in the so-called T-O, T and O, or *Orbis Terrarum* maps, as first drawn in the works of our old acquaintance, Beatus of Liébana (73).



Plate 73. Mappamundi in the Beatus of Osma, 1086. It is intended to represent the expansion of the Church by the Twelve Apostles throughout the limited known world of Aristotelian and Isidorian thought. Observe the curious creature to the right of the map.

In the prologue to the second book of his *Commentaries on the Apocalypse*, the visionary monk depicted in a most enchanting manner the world according to the strictures of the Bible, Ptolemy and St Isidore of Seville. In his *Etymologies*, the latter had described the Earth in this way: “the inhabited mass of solid land is called round after the roundness of a circle, because it is like a wheel. Because of this, the Ocean flowing around it is contained in a circular limit, and it is divided in three parts, one part being called Asia, the second Europe and the third Africa”.²⁸ St Isidore’s tripartite division of the round, inhabited earth owed something to the Aristotelian conception of three climate zones, two of them inimical for human life, the frigid and the torrid regions, and only one, the temperate region, habitable. In the mediaeval mind, the two inhabitable regions, the antipodes, were out of each other’s reach due to the extremity of their physical conditions and the insurmountable barrier posed by the equatorial ocean. “*Deserta terra vicina soli ab ardore incognita nobis*”: deserts are near the sun and unknown to us because of the heat, so let us better forget about them. That was the prevailing state of mind that prevented many cautious, would-be mediaeval adventurers from venturing beyond the narrow confines of their world (74).



Plate 74. The Ptolemaic vision of the world before Columbus, represented by Donnus Nicolaus Germanus in the edition printed by Lienhart Holle of the *Cosmographia*, *Claudius Ptolemaeus*, Ulm, 1482.

From that time on, the peculiar perspective used by Ptolemy, together with new methods for projecting space onto a two-dimensional surface devised by

²⁸ Ernest Brehaut, *ibid*, p.244

the likes of Leon Battista Alberti, were put to practical use by cosmographers in Lisbon, Genoa, Venice or Seville who drew charts, portolan charts and maps with which to guide explorers and merchants as they entered into previously unmapped, uncharted lands and oceans. Thus the recovery of antique knowledge, an enterprise as we know greatly advanced by the Muslim world before the Renaissance, made possible the modern expansion of Europe. It has been said that the successive visualisations of the ecumene as projected by using Ptolemy's method of representation were a shock to the Renaissance mind, comparable only to the effect produced by the first photographs of the Earth taken from outer space. As we can see, it is an apt parallel (75).

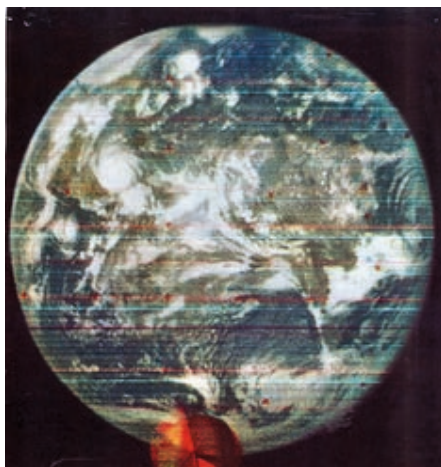


Plate 75. First colour photo of the Earth from outer space.

The refinement of Ptolemy's method by Mercator, Ortelius and other cartographers, with the drawing of the first world atlases and representations of the recently "discovered" new lands inspired in their contemporaries not only scientific or aesthetic delight, but also an all-pervading, mind-enhancing sense that the world was there for them to possess, both physically and philosophically. In some cases, as in that of the Spanish sailor and cosmographer Juan de la Cosa, a truly trans-Atlantic man who traversed the Atlantic seven times in his lifetime, the figures of the explorer, conqueror and man of science were intimately intermingled. Juan de la Cosa's Mappamundi is the first known empirical representation of the world as it was known in 1500, just when the first great Portuguese and Spanish voyages of discovery were being completed (76).



Plate 76. Juan de la Cosa's 1500 Mappamundi. Naval Museum, Madrid. A new view of the world.

In the European minds of the time, representation and knowledge of the precise position of a place led all too naturally to its conquest and appropriation. We can like it or not, but that is how imperialism works. When the Spaniards and Portuguese pleaded with Pope Alexander VI to divide the world between them by means of the Treaty of Tordesillas, in 1494, they did so brimming with confidence, thanks to their recently gained knowledge of the contours of the physical world, expanded by their sailors and explorers. Conquistadors, settlers, missionaries and administrators were not far behind those pioneers. Geography, cosmography, diplomacy and war were all put into the service of expansionary policies that, for the first time, were global in scope.

The extraordinary Iberian extroversion, important as it was for the geographical expansion of Western civilisation would not have had such an extraordinary impact in the history of humankind had it not been accompanied by a process of incorporation unprecedented, both in scale and intensity. The most important agents at the beginning of that process were the conquistadors. In many North Atlantic inspired narratives no other historical figure has been subject of more hatred and contempt than the Spanish conquistador. It would be easy to dismiss such a view as no more than the logical process of trying to find a convenient scapegoat for the iniquities perpetrated by the North Atlantic nations against the victims of their respective imperial histories. I will go beyond that line of defence and not mince my words, regardless of what in our days is hypocritically considered to be politically or culturally correct. I am ready, of course, to accept any reasonable criticism here, and I am not judging here morality

or ideology, which were shaped by the times. To me, and this is of course a personal view, but one supported by historical facts, men like Hernán Cortés or Francisco Pizarro were in their military and empire-building accomplishments at least equal, if not superior, to the likes of Alexander the Great or Julius Cesar. I will explain myself immediately. Take the case of Alexander the Great. When in 334 BC he crossed the Hellespont—a narrow stretch of water of a few kilometres wide—he did so at the head of an army of 160 warships and around 35,000 soldiers to confront an enemy that was already well known to the Greeks. When he died in 323 BC, eleven years later, he had conquered the Persian Empire and extended his domains as far as the river Indus. He passed away naming as his successor “the strongest” among his retinue of officers. A week after his death, his empire was in ruins, fragmented into several Hellenistic kingdoms. Though the cultural legacy of his conquests was long lasting, politically his empire was a resounding failure.

When it comes to Julius Caesar, his conquest of Gaul, crossing of the Rhine and invasion of Britain are well known, as is the fact that behind those victories was the full might of the Roman military machine, which was well trained to fight the northern barbarians. Those same victories, however, paved the way not only to his political confrontations and physical assassination, but also to the crumbling of the Roman Republic and the emergence of a different political regime: the Roman Empire.

Now, let us compare those great figures of antiquity with the Spanish conquistadors, like Cortés, Pizarro, Jiménez de Quesada or Hernando de Soto. They were neither emperors nor dictators able to act as formal sovereigns in their domains and ruling over entire armies, but captains and soldiers who had staked their own fortunes and provided their own weapons and horses to spend their own lives in the service of a distant ruler in exchange of an hypothetical gain. In this sense, they have been defined, rightly, as typical Renaissance businessmen. And contrary to the political legacies of Alexander or Julius Cesar, the result of their businesses was to be a far longer lasting source of power and legitimacy for their ultimate stakeholder, the Spanish monarchy, whose overseas territories were to endure for the next three hundred years while, during his lifetime, Alexander’s empire lasted little more than a decade as a unified entity and Caesar’s dictatorship would not survive his tyrannicide.

Besides, unlike the Greeks or the Romans, when they started their expeditions the conquistadors knew next to nothing about the extraordinary peoples and geographies they would encounter. If anything, they could only vaguely imagine that both were completely different from the peoples and territories they had left behind in their native Hispanic kingdoms. Nevertheless, they were more familiar with diversity and hardship than most of their European contemporaries, because many of them had experienced the conduct of diplomacy, war and victory against the Muslims or against other Europeans on the Italian political

minefields and battlefields or had heard from their relatives and friends first-hand stories about those same enemies and conflicts. That was an advantage that many conquistadors would turn to their benefit, as they negotiated their way through the intricate labyrinth of the Aztec or Inca polities and learned to exploit their respective troubled relationships with their tributary subjects, many of whom were to prove valuable allies to the Spaniards. For we must not forget that most of the conquests, and particularly the victories over the mighty Aztec and Inca empires, were undertaken by just a few hundred Spaniards at the most. When he started on his way to Mexico, Cortés had fewer than 500 men, 11 ships and a dozen horses. Pizarro had even less: fewer than two hundred armed men and about sixty horses. But, apart from their enormous courage and will to power, both Cortés and Pizarro could count on the help of thousands of native warriors who were all eager to enlist the Spaniards as their allies in their fight against the Aztec or Inca tyrannies. It comes as no surprise that, when the Amerindian allies of the conquistadors made their case for advancement in the subsequent Hispanic regime, they usually presented themselves as equal to the Spaniards in the epic of the conquest. Such is the case of the famous Tlaxcala Codex, authored by a mestizo named Diego Muñoz Camargo around 1581 as a response to an imperial questionnaire. In the image below we can see a scene where Tlaxcala warriors and Spaniards charge against the Aztecs with equal zeal(77).



Plate 77. The Tlaxcala Codex, circa 1581. A more balanced image of the conquest from the point of view of the Spaniards's allies.

Though it is the larger-than-life epics of men like Cortés and Pizarro that have captured the imagination of generations of historians, the figure of the conquistador is far more complex and comes in more shades of grey than is usually thought. I find the life of a far less well-known, latter-day conquistador particularly telling with respect to the sagas of so many of his comrades, representing a more colourful, versatile version of the Renaissance man and, for better and worse, an equally important chapter in the expansion of Western civilisation.

“To the compass and the sword, more and more and more and more”: this bombastic motto is engraved on the frontispiece of a book entitled *The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies* written by Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, a military officer who spent part of his career dealing with native uprisings in the borderlands of the New World, after having fought in Italy and against the Turks in the Mediterranean as well as against piratical incursions in the West Indies. It was published in Madrid in 1599 and can be considered, among other things, the first manual about waging guerrilla and counter-insurgency wars in hostile territory, including survival techniques borrowed from the local populations and advice on how to use psychological tactics to win the hearts and minds of the enemy. Though Vargas Machuca thought of himself as an emulator of Cortés or Pizarro, by the time he put pen to paper the dramatic era of the conquest had long passed and most of the imposing Hispano-American political, economic and cultural edifice that was to last until the nineteenth century had already been erected. However, in the minds of people like Vargas Machuca, the legendary deeds of the conquistadors were always present as examples to follow and as a reminder of the fragility of the Spanish presence in the Americas, bound to be challenged by restive Indians or by other European powers, against whom only the strength of an always vigilant sword could prevail. Fortunately for the Spanish crown, both challenges, when they did materialise, could be mostly put down or confined to manageable proportions thanks to men like our belated conquistador. But Vargas Machuca was not only a loyal and efficient soldier. As a man of his times, he considered that long-lasting fame could also be achieved thanks to literary prowess, and so when he returned to Spain after an active career in the Indies he became a member of the circle of Juan de Tassis, the Count of Villamediana, a renowned poet, swordsman and lover, so much so that he would become the model for the legendary Don Juan. But, after several incursions into the realm of the muses, the call of the Indies took Vargas Machuca back to America, this time as mayor of the city of Portobello and later as governor of Isla Margarita, where he demonstrated his skills as a civil and military administrator, strengthening the coastal defences, studying the hydrological currents that most favoured the movement of the fleets, and devising methods for the profitable exploitation of the pearl industry. Once his term was completed, he returned to

Madrid, where he died in 1622 while preparing to return again to America, this time as the recently appointed governor of the province of Antioquia, in today's Colombia (78).



Plate 78. Frontispiece of *The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies*, by Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, 1599.

Even more than the first generation of conquistadors, it was men like the mestizo Diego Muñoz Camargo, translator, chronicler and mediator between the two cultures, and the old veteran, man of letters and imperial administrator, Vargas Machuca, who really made the Hispanic world. As we are going to examine in the next chapter, their varied lives and deeds—heroic and human, all too human—were to contribute to the formation of a new conception of humankind that was bound to resonate throughout the ages.

CHAPTER 4

FROM NEW WORLDS TO ONE WORLD

The “discovery”, “conquest”, “invention” or “encounter” of America—whichever terms the reader prefers— and the subsequent creation of a new, hybrid Hispano-American reality had two most important consequences not only for the Clarkean enlargement of mind and spirit, but also for the emergence of a Western conception of man and the world. I am referring to the first intimations of a global theory of international law by the Spanish School of Salamanca and in particular, but not only, by Fathers Francisco de Vitoria and Francisco Suárez. Of equal importance was the formulation of universal human rights by the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, to whom we owe the following resounding statement of faith both in reason and in the oneness of mankind: “all the peoples of the world are humans and there is only one definition of all humans and of each one, that is that they are rational.... Thus all the races of humankind are one”.²⁹ It is a powerful assertion. And at that time it was strikingly bold, bearing in mind the context in which it was uttered, at the very beginning of the Age of European Imperialism. It is truly remarkable that the very nation that, together with Portugal, opened up the world for the West to assert its supremacy, was, at the same time, laying the foundations on which anti-imperialism was to grow and ultimately triumph. Whoever maintains that Imperial Spain was the anti-modern bastion *par excellence* has got it pretty wrong.³⁰ On the contrary: in an essential sense it was the first modern nation, for it was in Spain where self-criticism in its best Western style, the very litmus test of modernity, first flourished and became part of the public debate to the extent that it was incorporated into the official discourse. From there it was translated into an imposing body of legislation and into policies without parallel in early-modern comparative imperial theory and practice. But even more bewildering is the fact—surprisingly overlooked in many accounts of those times if I may say so—that no other colonial power, neither “liberal” England, nor “enlightened” France, nor the “tolerant” Dutch Republic produced, at the very outset of their respective expansionist ventures, men like those Spaniards who dared to question the validity of the conquest and to confront the most powerful rulers on earth on the grounds that, theological reasons or power politics apart, there is a law

²⁹ Bartolomé de las Casas, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (edited by Nigel Griffin) London: Penguin Books, 1992. p.14.

³⁰ See, for instance, Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990. I comment further on Toulmin in Chapter 10.

applicable to all people because we all share a common humanity which is based on our common rationality. That was, truly, a revolutionary, Copernican moment in the development of the human conscience and deserves to be recognised as such. I am convinced that if, instead of being Catholic priests and Spaniards, the men whose names I mentioned above had been Anglican English or Calvinist Dutch or Catholic, but French, their fame and rightful place in the development of Clarke's *Civilisation* would be undisputed. As they were what they were and nothing else, it is not surprising that their contribution is not acknowledged for what it is and that there still remain some recalcitrant minds who deny their role in the creation of International Law, in the inception of a modern concept of human rights and, in fact, in the birth of modernity. Let us prove them wrong. To do so, we have to visit the University of Salamanca, around the mid-1520s and meet there a maturing professor, Francisco de Vitoria (79).



Plate 79. Francisco de Vitoria. The American legal scholar and practitioner James Brown Scott, an admirer of the Spanish School of Law, posed for this portrait of the great Spaniard. The portrait was commissioned to embellish the newly built US Department of Justice in Washington DC and painted by Boardman Robinson in 1937.

Today, the city of Salamanca, and in particular its famous Plaza Mayor, throbs with the voices and energy of thousands of young foreign students who come to study Spanish language and culture, and to have a good time, as befits their



Plate 80. Cradle of Modernity. Lecture Hall at the University of Salamanca, where the old world pondered the wonders of the new.

The University of Salamanca was originally founded in 1134 as a Cathedral and then General School. It was the first institution of learning in Europe to receive the official title of University, granted by King Alfonso X the Wise in 1254 and recognised by Pope Alexander IV in 1255. Its motto, to this day repeated in Spanish conversations as an axiom, is “*quod natura non dat, Salmantica non praestat*”, that is, what nature does not give, Salamanca will not provide. Though highly reputed during the Middle Ages, the prestige of the University was to peak during the Age of Exploration and its aftermath, when it became the home of the famous School of Salamanca. During the sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, the School came to be identified with a variety of disciplines, including Neo-Scholasticism, natural law, morality, *ius gentium* and economics. Its main drive was to reconcile the teachings of St Thomas Aquinas with the new realities brought about by humanism, the New World and the religious divisions of Europe. On the whole, the School of Salamanca was a bridge between mediaeval and modern thought, a veritable cradle of modernity. Unlike Protestant reformists, its members did not break with the received mould of the Church, but they tested it to its limits, a far more delicate and balanced intellectual exercise than the path of abrupt condemnations and total rupture with the established religious hierarchy followed by Luther or Calvin and their followers.

In was in this milieu that a Dominican father, educated in Paris, came to teach in 1524. Francisco de Vitoria had been born in the town of Vitoria, the current capital of the Basque country, in northern Spain, around 1483, and was received as a very young man into the Dominican Order, whose members were famous for their penchant for learning. Upon demonstrating his talents, Vitoria was sent to the college that the Order had in Paris, named after St James.

Now, the most famous Dominican had been, of course, St Thomas, the man who in 1274, the year of his death, had left the unfinished but supreme edifice of Christian mediaeval knowledge, the *Summa Theologica*. Conceived of as a search for the ultimate truth regardless of the paths leading to it, the *Summa* became a compendium of several carefully filtered sources, patristic, Hebrew and Muslim, cemented upon a faithful exegesis of Aristotle's realism. One of its main tenets, which came to be associated with Thomism, was that there are aspects of reality, even of divinity, like the existence of God that can be grasped by reason, whilst others could only be ascertained by faith, like the Trinitarian doctrine. Alas, this attempt at harmonising philosophy and theology was not enough for Bertrand Russell to consider St Thomas a great thinker. Russell concluded that his appeal to reason was bogus since whenever he was not able to find a rational answer for a question he could always fall back on divine revelation. Ultimately, Russell suspected that, unlike Socrates, who always took a path without knowing where it would lead him, the Angelic Doctor already knew the way in advance, since its end, no matter the thousand meanders that could diverge from it, had to be consistent with Catholic faith. In short, "the finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy, but special pleading"³¹ therefore Russell felt that St Thomas did not deserve to be put on a level with the best philosophers either of Greece or of modern times. Well, contemporaries felt otherwise, and for the following two centuries, apart from some temporary lapses into lesser favour, the writings of St Thomas formed the basic curriculum in Catholic institutions of learning.

That was the scholarly state of affairs that Vitoria found upon his arrival at the Sorbonne. But with a substantial difference: by the 1500s, Thomism had declined into an endless disputation about words and sentences, Scholasticism at its worst. Erasmus, who was in Paris at the end of the fifteenth century, was so taken aback by the state of affairs he found there that he pronounced this memorable opinion: "are there any brains more imbecile than those of theologasters? I know nothing more barbarous than their speech, more coarse than their understanding, more thorny than their teaching, more violent than their discussions".³² His friend, the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives, who stayed in Paris in 1531 reached a similarly

³¹ Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 453-454.

³² Brown Scott, *The Classics of International Law*, accesible at www.constitution.org.

disheartened conclusion: “there is disputation before dinner; there is disputation after dinner; there is disputation in public and in private, in every place and at every time”.³³ So it seems that Vitoria did not find in Paris a place conducive to quenching his thirst for knowledge. But he found some congenial souls with whom he could start a fruitful conversation rooted in a common sympathy for the new humanistic current of thought inaugurated by Erasmus and best represented in Spain by Vives. In fact, in a letter written to Erasmus, when his writings were assailed from several Christian quarters, Vives confided to his friend that in Spain there was a man, Vitoria, who adored him and was ready to go great lengths to defend his name. So it seems clear that when Vitoria returned to Spain in the early 1520s he was already won over to the cause of humanism and moderation. In this worthy state of mind, he was appointed first regent of the Dominican College of St Gregory, where the seminal Valladolid Debate would take place later in the century, and in 1526 he obtained the primary Chair of Theology at the University of Salamanca, where he was to remain until his death in 1546. His election to the chair was to be a turning point in the history of the institution. Equipped with a powerful intellect and the best qualities of administrative leadership he turned upside down the way of teaching and of organising knowledge when it was most needed, since Salamanca was slowly following the Paris model of endless and senseless disputations. Instead of relying on received formulas to be discussed in the abstract, Vitoria was fond of applying his analytical mind to real, concrete problems. As one of his pupils said, Vitoria brought theology down from the heavens as Socrates had brought philosophy down to earth. This is the approach he used when his attention was brought, by none other than the Emperor Charles V, to the vexing question of the legitimacy of the conquest of America by the Spaniards. It was not the first time that the Emperor had consulted the wise man of Salamanca. On one notorious occasion, the Emperor had asked his opinion about the reasons given by Henry VIII of England to procure the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. On another he was consulted about a question submitted to the Emperor by Father Bartolomé de las Casas, whom we will encounter later in this chapter, concerning the validity of baptisms without previous religious instruction, as practised with the Indians in America. In passing I will say that Vitoria’s verdict came down in favour of his fellow Dominican. In fact, the professor was well versed in matters pertaining to the New World because many of his pupils had been or were bound as missionaries in those lands. Thus it was not surprising that around 1539 he partly devoted two of his lectures, known as *Relectiones theologicae*, to the topic of the Indies. It is important to say that these *Relectiones* were not printed during Vitoria’s life. They were written down by his pupils and published after his decease. The first

³³ Ibid.

edition of those notes appeared in Lyons in 1557; a second edition in Salamanca in 1565, with the many mistakes in the first one corrected; and a third was printed in Ingolstadt in 1580. There were many more editions during the seventeenth century in Antwerp, Venice, Cologne, Salamanca and Madrid. In the edition of 1565, the lectures are entitled as *De Indis recenter inventis relectio prior* and as *De Indis, sive de jure belli Hispanorum in barbaros, relectio posterior*. Both are devoted to the question of Spain's entitlement to domination of the Indies and together they constitute one of the most fascinating texts ever produced on the interplay of theology, philosophy, law, politics and morality when applied to one of the few really decisive moments in the history of mankind: the discovery, conquest and transformation of America by the Old World—with much participation by the locals in both the conquest and the transformative process, as we have seen in the previous chapter—and the subsequent creation of a brave New World encompassing both sides of the Atlantic and the Pacific, thus putting into motion the wheels of globalisation as we know it.

The interest that Vitoria took in matters concerning the law of nations derived not only from the historical context in which he lived and taught, it was also rooted in a Spanish tradition that dated back, at least, to the time when our old acquaintance St Isidore wrote the *Etymologies*. Following Roman jurists, like Ulpian, the lonely encyclopaedist left for posterity his rendering of the meaning of *ius gentium* in the fifth chapter of his book. There, *ius gentium* is defined as “the seizing, building, and fortifying of settlements, wars, captivities, servitudes, postliminies, treaties, peaces, truces, the obligation not to violate an ambassador, the prohibition of intermarriage with aliens. And it is called *ius gentium* because nearly all nations observe it”.³⁴ This definition seems to our mind a motley list of subjects more than a scientific classification, but if we read its last phrase attentively we immediately realise that the rooting of *ius gentium* in the “observance by nearly all nations” and not in some natural or divine pre-ordained order is quite close to our understanding of the legitimacy of International Law. This empirical, matter-of-fact perspective was to be found in a continuous Spanish tradition of elucidating matters pertaining to the law among nations and the laws of war as represented by Alfonso X and his legal codes; later by Alfonso Tostado, Bishop of Avila and a man of near universal erudition; by Gonzalo de Villadiego, auditor for the affairs of Spain in the tribunal of the Roman Rota; or by Francisco Arias de Valderas, author of the *Libellus de belli iustitia iniustitiae*, a forerunner of the Salamanca School and precursor to Vitoria.

Besides, when Vitoria delivered his *Relectiones*, there had already been in Spain a thoughtful debate about the nature of the Indians, about whether or not it

³⁴ Ernest Brehaut, *ibid.*, p. 168.

was permissible to wage just war against them and about whether or not it was permitted to enslave them. The debate dated back to the years immediately after the discovery of the first Caribbean islands by Columbus. In the previous chapter we gave an account of the state of matters and minds prevalent in Spain and the rest of Europe at the time of the great Iberian expeditions and discoveries. We shall turn our attention now to the repercussions of those events in the formation of a set of ideas that underpins our contemporary, emerging global vision of the world, a body of theory that has been up to now relegated to the margins of the history of ideas because of the imposition of a narrow view on the ascent of *Civilisation*.

The notion that mankind is one and that its individual members constitute a single political community or commonwealth irrespective of their national, dynastic or imperial allegiances was advocated in early modern Europe not in Anglican Oxford or Calvinist Geneva: it was advanced in Spain by a group of intellectuals, most of them men of the Church, and the University chair, when they were confronted with the almost simultaneous encounter of a New World and the fragmentation of the Old due to the religious schism provoked by the Protestant movement. Members of a Catholic, meaning universal, Church and subjects of an Empire that also claimed to have an universal reach, those Spaniards had to adapt their theological, political and philosophical frame of mind rapidly to the shocking news coming from all corners of the world, with the discoveries and conquests of their adventurous compatriots and Portuguese neighbours, creating a fascinating and disturbing new reality whose echoes and reflections reached their cells and classrooms, intruding on the tranquillity of their Castilian churches and universities.

When the question about the origin of the differences between Spanish-America and Anglo-America is posed, most of the time the ensuing debate misses the crucial point. They were different because, though both Spain and England were interested in exploiting the natural and human resources of the continent for their own benefit, and that is beyond doubt, Spain did so while putting into motion a gigantic effort to incorporate the pre-Hispanic element into a new social order based on the understanding that the natives were rational human beings worthy of being assimilated into the structures of the Church and the monarchy, in a word, of Western civilisation as it was then known. By contrast, the English colonial experience was predicated upon the basic Protestant tenet that there was a radical separation between those chosen by God and the rest, among whom the Indians, naturally, were to be included. Contrary to the North Atlantic dismissive narrative, the Spanish project was in fact the one that corresponded to a modern conception of the world, in the sense that it was centred on the human and

the relations between human beings, while the English or Protestant project was in essence anti-modern, in the sense of being predicated upon the theocentric conception of a hierarchy among individuals and ethnic groups: those chosen by God were members of the unique society worthy of such name while the rest belonged to a completely different order, so that they were, in a very Clarkeian way, excluded from the realms of civilisation.

Granted, there were Spaniards who thought that the Indians were irrational beings who had to be prevented from having any contact with the superior Europeans, and there were English who admitted that the natives could be converted into Christians and thus be counted among the selected few. But, on the whole, those individuals were not influential enough to impose their views on the fabric of their respective societies in the Americas.

There was also another, more general difference about how each version of the Americas came to be conceived. For the composite Spanish monarchy, which was at the intersection of the universal views of Church and Empire, European expansion was justified insofar as the peoples of the new worlds were converted and brought into a single human community. For England and other Protestant powers their expansionist ventures were predicated upon the irreducible conception of the nascent nation-state as the main, if not the only and exclusive, locus of sovereignty. Thus after the first shock of the conquest, Spain initiated and brought to fruition an immense policy of assimilation—based ultimately on exploitation, true enough—whilst the Protestant powers devoted themselves primarily to a policy of exploitation based on exclusion and, when deemed expedient, seclusion or decimation of the local populations, who were considered aliens with regard to the main body of the colonising nation.³⁵ The two approaches could appear the same from the point of view of those on the receiving end of European imperialism, but they were not, quite far from it. We just have to take a look at how many Amerindians are left in the United States (according to the 2010 United States census, those who described themselves as Native Americans and Alaska Americans either alone or in combination with other races represented 1.7% of the population)—or aborigines in Australia (2.5% according to the 2006 census) or Canada (4.01% in the 2006 census)—and how many are there in Hispanic America, where in countries like Ecuador, Peru, Mexico or Paraguay they constitute, together with the mestizos, the majority of their nations. No matter how hard one tries, one can hardly see an Amerindian

³⁵ As John Elliot writes, “Where the Spaniards tended to think in terms of the incorporation of the Indians into an organic and hierarchically organized society which would enable them to attain the supreme benefits of Christianity and civility, the English, after an uncertain start, seem to have decided that there was no middle way between anglicization and exclusion”, in John Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World*, p. 85

walking the streets of Manhattan, Boston or Philadelphia and the thought of an Algonquian occupying the White House rarely occupies the thoughts of pundits and commentators at the *New York Times* or the *Wall Street Journal* editorial boards. In contrast, as of this writing, there are democratically elected Amerindian heads of state in Bolivia and Peru. In fact, the first Amerindian president of an American country was the Zapotec Indian Benito Juárez, who occupied Mexico's highest office several times from 1858 to 1872.

Naturally, the course adopted by Spain was politically and intellectually far more complex, needed much more in the way of resources and, from its starting point, required a degree of self-scrutiny and self-criticism unheard of in its main North Atlantic rivals. When in 1634 English and Dutch settlers ignited the so-called Pequot war and the Indians inhabiting what is now the state of Connecticut revolted against the foreigners' impositions, the leader of the Hartford militia, John Mason, ordered his troops to encircle a native enclave on the banks of the Mystic River where several hundred women, children and elderly Pequot people had taken shelter. Upon orders of their captain, the English settlers set fire to the Indian fort, burning alive most of its inhabitants and massacring those who tried to escape. In a later account of his exploits, Mason proudly declared that God had laughed at the sight of the Mystic River filled with charred native bodies. As a reward he was later named Deputy Governor of the colony. When the war ended, no more than 200 Pequot survived. Most of them were captured and sold to rival tribes or sent as slaves to plantations in the West Indies. English colonists appropriated all the Pequot lands and even the name of the tribe was proscribed from being pronounced in the future. Well, there were no massive protests either in the metropolis or in its new colonies about the crimes committed in the Pequot War. On the contrary, the victory of the settlers was generally interpreted as a signal of God's approbation of their methods, which were conveniently replicated most of the time when there was an Amerindian uprising.

There was neither a cry of indignation in London nor among the white settlers in its North American colonies when, in 1646, after years of European encroachment on the aboriginal lands, the rebel leader of the local Powhatan Confederacy, Opchanacanough, was captured and treacherously shot in the back by the English. Years before, in 1623, other English colonists had poisoned hundreds of Indians at a "peace ceremony" with a potion concocted by the infamous Dr. John Pott, later named Governor of Virginia. Instead of denouncing those acts, the English authorities imposed leonine treaties on the Powhatan forcing them to pay yearly tributes and confining them to the so-called Mattaponi and Pamunkey reservations, which are, to this day, considered to be legal and enforced by state law in the United States, odd as it might sound.

In contrast to the English or, as we shall see, Dutch tendency to turn a blind eye to their own iniquities, the Spanish overseas experience was characterised from its beginnings by a constant attitude of soul-searching that led to a crucial reevaluation of humanity and the emerging world order. There were undeniable cruelties but there was also an unprecedented attempt to redress them as far as those times allowed and even further. This is best shown by the train of events that led from the indicting sermons of Father Montesinos in La Española, through the controversial figure of Father Las Casas, all the way up to the Valladolid Debate and the *Leyes de Indias*. Along the way, via Father Vitoria and the School of Salamanca and culminating in Father Francisco Suárez, came the creation of a legal conception of a “*totus orbis qui aliquo modo est una republica*”: the entire world conceived as to some extent a republic, as a single moral and political community ultimately based on Christian tenets and eschatology, but primarily founded on reason and natural law.

The origins of the *Duda Indiana*, or *Indian Question*, as the problems of conscience related to the conquest of America came to be known, are conventionally attributed to a single figure, Father Bartolomé de Las Casas. This is a misconception. Through his fiery sermons and prophetic voice, with relatively little concern for factual accuracy, he was no doubt the man who did the most to bring the dark side of the conquest to his compatriots’ attention. Of course, Spain’s enemies immediately took advantage of the good friar’s vehemence and blatant exaggerations to initiate a smear campaign that lasts to our own times, the so-called Black Legend, but let us not dwell now on this unfortunate side effect. The important thing is that Las Casas was not the first in Spain to raise his voice in defence of the Amerindians and was not to be the last. What he did was to elevate the tone of the debate, giving it a universal resonance. But the first bells of alarm were sounded by none other than Queen Isabella, the Catholic Queen, and the first recipient of her criticism was none other than Christopher Columbus. When the Admiral returned to Spain with the news of the discovery he did it in triumph, but with very few tangible results that showed a profit with which to cover the expedition expenses. Then it dawned on him that the Indians he had encountered, the Tainos, could be sold as slaves, following a well-established practice in the Mediterranean, where Christians, Arabs and Africans captured by their enemies were frequently sold at the markets. One of the first beneficiaries of Columbus’s mercantile zeal was a certain Pedro de las Casas, the father of the turbulent priest. He was a merchant who had travelled with Columbus on his second voyage to America in 1493 and returned to Spain from Santo Domingo in 1498 with a gift for his son, an Indian named Juanico who had been given to him by the Admiral himself. Actually, Juanico was part of a larger number of slaves sent by Columbus to Spain as part of his commercial endeavours. But

the great navigator made a fatal mistake. The Queen had not been consulted on an initiative that ran counter to her religious scruples and on hearing the news she ordered the slaves to be freed and returned immediately to their land, threatening anyone disobeying her orders with capital punishment. In contrast, Queen Elizabeth I, after initially protesting John Hawkins's role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, decided to make a profit from it as a partner in the business.

There is no doubt that Columbus was less lucky than Hawkins, the favourite slave trader of the Virgin Queen. He never really recovered from his blunder. On one occasion he was sent to Spain in shackles after having been accused of heavy-handedness by settlers and, though he was compensated by the Catholic monarchs and had the opportunity to make a final voyage back to America, he was deprived of many of his privileges. Nicolás de Ovando was appointed to substitute him and his successor, Bobadilla, as governor of the new lands, sailing to Santo Domingo in 1502, entrusted with suppressing the simmering Indian rebellions and starting economic exploitation of the islands. Las Casas and his father embarked with the same trip, together with a large number of Spaniards representing most sections of society. As he was fond of recollecting at a later age, for the young and ambitious merchant's son, his arrival in the New World was like the discovery of paradise. But paradise it was not. The seven years that coincided with Ovando's rule, despite the temperance of the sovereigns' instructions, were characterised by a brutal confrontation between the Indians and the new settlers. After the first friendly overtures on both sides, suspicions and skirmishes inevitably flared as the Spaniards made clear their will to stay and behave as overlords. La Navidad, a fortification built by Columbus during his first voyage was destroyed by the natives and most of its inhabitants disappeared. Retribution came swiftly and a cycle of violence came to dominate life in La Española, as the island was named. Meanwhile, more and more Iberian settlers arrived, trying to strike it rich by mining, herding, farming or, as in the case of the Las Casas family, by trade. It was an unstoppable flow that carried many human destinies with it. In its midst, the young Las Casas was to find his voice and his mission. He did so by following a twisted path of inner searching and outer exploration that led him gradually away from his early life as just another settler who had profited, like his father, from the conquest of La Española, to becoming the patron protector of the exploited. Along the way, he adopted the pose and the trappings of Biblical prophet, transplanted from the scorching sands of Sinai to the lush tropical forests. Like so many prophets and visionaries before him, his call was in the form of a conversion from a life devoted to the search for riches to a life consecrated to the spirit. In this new life he was not alone. In September 1510, three Dominicans had arrived on the island and their accusing sermons and admonitions against their compatriots moved Las Casas to take holy orders.

The Dominicans, together with the Franciscans, were in the vanguard of the reformist movement within the Catholic Church, initiated long before Luther had even thought of nailing his theses to the door of Wittenburg Cathedral. The Dominicans and other mendicant orders also thought that the Catholic reformation had to reach the shores of the new found lands so that America would become a New Jerusalem. In achieving this goal, some hard truths had to be brought home to the settlers, before it was too late for the salvation of their souls, tainted by their treatment of the locals. And so, on Christmas Eve 1511, one of those friars, Antonio de Montesinos, referring to the Indians, pronounced those moving words that were to resonate throughout the ages: “Are these not men? Do they not have rational souls?” (81).³⁶



Plate 81. Statue of Antonio de Montesinos in Santo Domingo. The first proclamation of universal human rights in America, long before Jefferson.

The effect of Montesinos’s words, though not immediate, was long lasting. At first, they provoked anger in those who were at Mass listening to the sermon. But no retribution was meted out to Montesinos nor to the rest of the Dominicans. Actually, after that shocking sermon, Las Casas was to follow a kind of double life for a while, chastising his fellow settlers for their sins against the Indians, while he himself kept on profiting from the system of *encomiendas* and using locals to

³⁶ Quoted in Lawrence A. Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas*, p.42.

mine gold and plough the land. It was later, when participating in the campaign to subdue the larger island of Cuba, that he decided to abandon his ambiguity and threw himself entirely into defence of the Indians. He was to do so with the utmost determination and ruthlessness. He was now a man with a destiny and no obstacle was to be allowed to stand in his way or stop the justice he sought for his adopted, chosen people.

If Spanish settlers in the Caribbean would not listen to him, the king would. With this idea, he travelled back to Spain in September 1515, on one of the many trips he would make back and forth across the Atlantic. Upon his arrival in Seville he immediately got to work on his contacts and secured an audience with King Ferdinand, a widower since Queen Isabella had died in 1504. The king was also close to his last days—he would pass away the following year, in 1516—but he lent a sympathetic ear to the news brought by the priest who was convinced that God was speaking through him to defend the rights of the Indians. Had the king not convened a committee or Junta of jurists and theologians to debate the thorny issue of the Just Titles of the Conquest in 1512? That Junta had originated the Laws of Burgos, the first piece in the body of legislation passed by the Spanish crown to regulate the conduct of Spaniards in America with regard to the treatment of the Indians. Though criticised because of their ineffectiveness, the Laws of Burgos provided the mental and legal standards by which the crown considered itself bound to act and to be held accountable in matters pertaining to the New World and its inhabitants, native as well as Spaniards. As such, and judged by the nature of the times, the provisions contained in the laws and their successive amendments were impressive in their humanity. Never before, and never afterwards in the context of other early-modern European colonial experiences, had a victorious side proposed that, after two years of remunerated service, the vanquished should be freed from serving their conquerors, or that their children under fourteen should be exempt from the work of adults (Dickens would have been surprised, for sure) or that the victors had duties towards as well as rights over their temporary servants, not slaves. Did the Romans pass any such kind of norms when they conquered Iberia? Did the Muslims pass such laws when they stormed the Visigoth kingdom? Did the English pass such laws when they implanted their colonies in North America? Did the Dutch pass such laws when they occupied modern day Indonesia? I will let the reader find the answers.

So Las Casas, though eager to depict himself as a voice crying alone in the wilderness, found in Spain an atmosphere conducive to receiving his moral indictments without putting him on the gallows or incarcerating him for life in the equivalent of the Tower of London, where so many real or imagined adversaries of the English monarchy were confined, tortured and executed, like Sir Thomas

More, just for opposing the views of their royal masters. To the contrary, the Regent Cardinal Cisneros named Las Casas, who was so vigorously denouncing the conduct of his own kingdom, as a member of the commission convened in June 1516 to discuss the implementation of the Laws of Burgos.

The results of the commission were summarised in an extraordinary document, largely inspired and drafted by Las Casas, entitled *A Remedy for the Indies*, where he started by declaring that the Indians were free human beings and that the propagation of the Gospel had to be done by peaceful means and not by forcing the natives into submission in order to convert them. To be honest, he also proposed that to ensure that abolition of the *encomienda* system, a kind of bonded labour, did not lead to total disruption of the economy in the Indies, the colonists could use slave labour from Africa instead of the local natives. That was the price that he considered necessary to pay to guarantee the survival of the Indians, though in his final days Las Casas condemned the African slave trade in equally forceful terms, trying belatedly to correct the wrong he had already done.

Cardinal Cisneros, far from rejecting the proposals of the single-minded priest, named him “Protector of all the Indians” and sent him back to America to unfold his reform programme, which in fact amounted to a complete overhaul of the incipient imperial enterprise. Not surprisingly, upon his return to America he encountered stiff opposition on the part of those who were benefiting most from the exploitation of the Indians. Mutual recriminations and some death threats were exchanged, including some on the part of a hot-headed and, in this instance, not very Christian Las Casas against the settlers. The priest, though backed by his religious colleagues, was in a dangerous position. The stakes on both sides were high and neither was ready to concede defeat. Determined as always, Las Casas returned to Spain to advance his claims to the new king of Spain and future Emperor Charles V. Using his formidable lobbying skills, and his known penchant for self-aggrandisement, he was able again to advance his agenda at the new Court to the point that, in December 1519, the recently crowned Emperor was convinced by his advisors to convene a new committee on the situation in the Indies. As on previous occasions, Las Casas won the argument and, this time, the sympathy of the young Charles.

So back he sailed to the Indies with a renewed zeal and the support of his powerful allies in the Emperor’s entourage. But the timing was not the best for his moralising ideals, as he soon realised. The main arc of the conquest was about to reach new heights with the seizing of the mighty Aztec and Inca empires by Cortés and Pizarro. Those victories meant that now the Empire was in possession of vast resources, human and natural, with which it could more effectively defend itself from the assaults of its enemies. The incentive for putting a more humane face to

the imperial enterprise in the Americas seemed slim or, judging by the way other European powers were to behave in their own colonies as soon as they were able to establish them, practically nil. But Las Casas and his allies in the metropolis did not relent in their tireless campaign in the defence of the Indians. It is a testimony to the integrity of the Emperor's character that, involved as he was in the early 1540s in a myriad of troublespots through his enormous territories, he had the patience and moral stamina to pay heed to the invectives of those among his own subjects who kept on undermining the very foundations on which his realm was founded: the conquest and exploitation of his American possessions.

By then, as we have seen, the challenge to Spanish domination over the Indies came not only from some hot-headed missionaries, like Las Casas, but also from some of the most sober and sharpest minds in Spain, like Father Vitoria, who had just given his lectures on the just and unjust titles of the Empire and the Church to claim any secular or spiritual right over the New World. Basically, what Vitoria said in those seminal disquisitions was that the seven titles usually mentioned as just by the advocates of the Emperor and the Pope were illegitimate. This was a shocking conclusion, for until then those titles had been considered to be the basis of the legitimacy from both sources of power in the acquired lands. It was predicated upon a chain of interlocked statements that was no less outrageous for those times: that neither the Emperor nor the Pope could claim temporal or spiritual sovereignty over the whole world, least of all over the New World, since the latter was inhabited by rational human beings who were "true owners in both public and private law" of their land and personal properties. In other words, neither was the Emperor the lord of the whole earth nor could the Pope claim to have temporal powers by which to entrust to some secular prince or princes the right to conquer and administer foreign territories, even under the justification that it was necessary to evangelise their inhabitants. To understand the enormity of Vitoria's assertions, we have to remember that it was precisely the various Papal Bulls given by Alexander VI in 1493 that gave the main title claimed by the Spanish monarchy and the Empire to establish their rule over the Indies. One can be sure that if at that time some English, Dutch or French legal scholars had dared to deny the legitimacy of their respective sovereigns, monarchical or republican, to do as they saw fit with their overseas colonies, the heads of the said scholars would have suffered a severe concussion on hitting the ground after having been drastically severed from their bodies.

But Vitoria did not stop at that. He also denied that the Spaniards, or any other power for that matter, had any just title over the Indies or any other inhabited lands based upon the right of discovery, or the refusal of barbarians to accept the Gospel, or the voluntary submission of their rulers to a foreign sovereign, in this case the

Spanish monarch, unless with the consent of their people. This was a complete salvo of deadly juridical darts aimed at the very heart of the imperial enterprise.

Which then, if any, were the just titles that could be rightfully claimed by the Spaniards to justify their occupation of the New World? At this point it is important to clarify further. Vitoria, a legal mind of the first order, was the first person to see that if his arguments both against and in favour of Spain's claim over the Indies were to have more than just a territorially restricted appeal, their premises as well as their conclusions had to have a universal reach. So every title discussed had to be examined not only from the point of view of Spain, or the Empire, but also from the perspective of the French, or the Muslims, or the Indians for all of them had the capacity to be members of a "natural society and fellowship", in Vitoria's terminology. So when he posited that, regarding the New World, "the Spaniards have a right to travel into the lands in question and to sojourn there, provided that they do not harm the natives, and the natives may not prevent them", he immediately added that "it is reckoned among all nations inhumane to treat visitors badly without some special cause".³⁷ Again and again he used in his lectures the same technique of referring some particular point of law affecting the relations, let us say, between Indians and Spaniards or Spaniards and the French, outward to a more general framework encompassing "all nations" or "all peoples". For him, the determination of rights and wrongs in the intercourse among nations was not a matter of temporary arrangements or transient relations of power among a limited number of sovereigns. It had to be grounded in a universal, stable legal order based on natural law or, at least, on the "consensus of the greater part of the whole world, especially on behalf of the common good of all". In his lecture on *De Potestate Civili*, that is *On the Civil Power of the State*, he made his case even more explicitly, in what constitutes one of the most potent statements as to the oneness of the world and the effectiveness and universality of international law, when he said that "international law has not only the force of a pact and agreement among men, but also the force of a law; for the world as a whole, being in a way one single State, has the power to create laws that are just and fitting for all persons, as are the rules of international law... In the gravest matters... it is not permissible for one country to refuse to be bound by international law, the latter having been established by the authority of the whole world".

Notice that in this definition there is not a single reference to religion or empire as sources of international law, but to "the world as a whole, being in a way a single State", meaning a single commonwealth.³⁸

³⁷ Quoted in James Brown Scott, *The Catholic Conception of International Law*, pp. 21-27.

³⁸ Quoted in James Brown Scott, *ibid.*, p.59.

For Vitoria, among the rights and obligations recognised in such a universal or quasi-universal legal order there were the rights to travel, to sojourn and to trade in foreign lands—three of the pillars of our modern conception of globalisation, by the way—and it was by upholding those rights, together with the right to preach the Gospel, the right to protect the converts, and the right to depose a tyrannical ruler, that the Spaniards could claim to have just titles to wage war, but only in the case where those rights were denied to them by the Indians. Of those just titles, the one related to the right to intervene to stop crimes committed by a ruler against his own population sounds particularly familiar to our ears and in fact, can be considered to be a prefiguration of the so-called humanitarian, or liberal, interventions in our days, controversial as they have again proved to be.

Vitoria's lectures and Las Casas's admonitions, the most visible expressions of a wider criticism of the way the enterprise of the Indies was proceeding, were enough to convince the Emperor to convene a new council in Valladolid in 1542, with instructions that its members should revisit the Laws of Burgos in the light of their actual implementation or lack thereof. The result of the deliberations, influenced by Las Casas's dramatic accounts on the crimes committed against the native Americans, were the so-called *Leyes Nuevas* or New Laws, passed by Charles V in Barcelona on November 20, 1542. At the time they were passed, the New Laws were a giant step forward for humanity: the dignity of the Indians was recognised, their slavery was forbidden, the *encomienda* system was banned, and any further war of conquest was prohibited. For the first time an Empire, and the mightiest known at that time, not only voluntarily put its own expansion on hold but also limited, by its own volition, its capacity to exploit what had been conquered by the force of arms. Even more stunningly, it did so out of respect for the dignity and humanity of the vanquished and not because of any external pressure.

Not surprisingly, when news of the Laws was received in the Indies, it was a shock to many Spanish conquistadors and settlers, who threatened to ignore them and, in some instances, such as in Peru, resorted to open rebellion. Many of them asked by what right they were to be deprived of what they had obtained in a just war. Las Casas, held responsible for the new legislation, was declared *persona non grata* in most parts of the Indies. Far from thinking twice and stepping back at the possibility of facing a general uprising against his power, the Emperor pressed forward with enactment of the New Laws. Not only that, in March 1544 Las Casas was rewarded with the bishopric of Chiapas, in southern Mexico, so that he could supervise their implementation on the ground.

In the following years, a war of attrition was fought between the priest and his allies, on one hand, and those hostile to the new legal and administrative regime, on the other. As in the past, the enraged priest came to the conclusion that the

stalemate could only be broken through by the intervention of the highest secular authority and so he sailed back to Spain in 1547 to renew his tireless campaign at the Imperial court. In 1550 he obtained his most resounding success thus far. In that year the Emperor instructed the Council of the Indies, the supreme governing body on matters pertaining to the New World, to summon the best theologians and jurists of the realm to Valladolid. It was to be a debate on human nature and rights unlike any other before or afterwards. To start with, on 16 April 1550 the Emperor decreed that any farther conquest should be suspended until a decision was reached on the nature of the Indians and the right of Spain to wage war against them, a suspension that lasted seven years.

The stakes were so high that both sides of the argument, for and against the natural rights of the natives, recruited the best polemicists of the times. Backing the first colonisers was the redoubtable Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, one of the sharpest brains of his generation, counsellor of Popes and princes, translator of Aristotle and editor of a Greek version of the New Testament. Far from being the reactionary bigot depicted in some gross caricatures of the Valladolid Controversy, Sepúlveda was a typical humanist of the times, devoted to the study of the Bible and the classics, familiar with the ideas of Erasmus, indeed he maintained an intermittent epistolary exchange with the Dutch controversialist who praised the Spaniard's scholarship. Sepúlveda's defence of slavery, based on Aristotle's distinction between the civilised and the barbarians, was widely shared in the Europe of those times, as was also his advocacy of the traditional titles invoked by settlers and conquistadors to legitimise the acquisition of new territories and the subjugation of its inhabitants. In fact, Sepúlveda's position on the superiority of the West and its civilising mission with regard to "backward" populations was replicated in all imperial policies conducted by other European powers practically until the triumph of the decolonising movement in the twentieth century. For instance, the "Mandate" system instituted by the League of Nations after the First World War was predicated upon very similar premises: the most advanced nations, at least those which were on the side of the victors, had a right to administer their colonies, and those of the defeated powers, provided that they accepted the responsibility to educate, meaning to civilise, the local populations until they were able to manage their own affairs. Not a great leap forward since the sixteenth century or in fact since antiquity, as we can see.

By contrast, the opposite side in the Debate of Valladolid, vocally represented by Las Casas but conceptually sustained by the authors of the School of Salamanca, advocated the humanity and rationality of the Amerindians and their belonging to a global community based on international law, to which both natives and Europeans were subject. Granted, Las Casas departed from

Victoria's vision inasmuch as Las Casas only accepted the pacific incorporation of the Indians into the Hispanic realm as a necessary prerequisite for their evangelisation while, as we have just seen, Vitoria had elaborated a legal rationalisation to justify the Conquest that was far more modern, since it was in great part based on principles of natural and positive law, as well as on the realities on the ground, and not just on theological motives. In this sense, as in many others, Las Casas had not completely rid himself of a mediaeval cast of mind, while Vitoria and his followers were pioneering a way of thinking much closer to ours, not least perhaps in its opportunism.

To better grasp the difference between the two characters we can think of Vitoria as a precocious Descartes, with his doubting and his logical demolition of the accepted juridical titles for the Conquest followed by his attempt at founding an international legal edifice by applying logic and reason, while in Las Casas we can see a prefiguration of Rousseau, with whom he shared the same exalted, almost morbid sensibility, the idealisation of nature and the "natural" man and the belief that civilisation is a corrupting force. Ironically, one important difference between the two men of genius is that Las Casas, though at one point questioned by the Inquisition without any serious outcome, enjoyed the protection or at least the toleration of the Spanish crown and most of the religious establishment, whereas Rousseau, who lived in a supposedly more liberal era, was hounded from country to country in fear of persecution by both the religious and secular authorities of his times.

Sceptics usually say that the Debate or Controversy of Valladolid was inconclusive; that it was restricted to a narrow circle of jurists and theologians, without any echo beyond the walls of the Monastery of St Gregorio, where it was held; and that, in any case, as had allegedly happened with the previous attempts at correcting and humanising the effects of the Conquest, the ideals defended by the likes of Las Casas or Vitoria were totally ineffective when it came to ameliorating the lot of the Amerindians. Of those criticisms, only the first holds any water. The other two are, as we have seen, wide of the mark. Even so, though it is true that the Debate did not produce a winner or loser in the form of a clear-cut judicial verdict either in favour of or against Las Casas or Sepúlveda, we must not forget that we are not talking about an isolated event without either antecedents or continuation, but a high landmark on the long road leading to universal justice and the proclamation of universal human rights (82).



Plate 82. Façade of the Colegio de San Gregorio in Valladolid, a spectacular example of late Gothic in its Spanish-Flemish version at the beginning of the Age of Exploration.

There are those who, despite all the evidence to the contrary, still deny the School of Salamanca its seminal role in the birth of modernity on the basis that, ultimately, their conception of a global community founded on reason and natural law was dependent on and subservient to the tenets and goals of either the Church or the Empire, or both. In answer to them, there is a very neat counter-reply. By the same logic, were the views of Hugo Grotius, the alleged founder of modern international law in the North Atlantic narrative, not contaminated *ab origine* by the fact that he was a proponent of Dutch Imperialism and a paid legal advisor to the VOC, the notoriously predatory Dutch East Indies Company? (83).



Plate 83. The Slave Lodge of the VOC in Cape Town, South Africa. Built in 1679 to house the slaves brought from Indonesia and the rest of Africa who were working in the gardens of the Company.

Those who defend the founding role of Grotius to the detriment of Vitoria and his compatriots, usually rest their claim on the Dutch scholar's lack of allegiance to any God or any secular power when it came to establishing the pillars of a modern international system. Nothing could be further from the truth. Grotius's vision was put into the service of a very powerful master: the nation-state, and not any nation-state, but a very specific sort, the Protestant Dutch Republic which was all too eager to carve a new colonial empire for its own profit by undermining the legitimacy and the territorial and maritime possessions of its two main Catholic rivals, Spain and Portugal. In Grotius's allegedly aseptic and above-the-fray legal order, when it came to fighting those two providential enemies, everything was allowed. The lofty references that Grotius made in *De Jure Praedae* (1604-1608) and *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (1625) to a natural international order devoid of any religious references, in the best Roman, Stoic traditions, should not cloud our judgment. *De Jure Praedae* was commissioned by the VOC board of directors to defend the continuation of the war against their Portuguese and therefore Spanish enemies, since Portugal was a part of the Spanish monarchy from 1580

to 1640, in the East Indies. Even though those two powers and the Dutch were in a state of cessation of hostilities brought about by the Twelve Years Truce (1609-1621), the VOC claimed, following Grotius's advice, that it was entitled to attack the Portuguese and Spanish in the East since they were barbarians acting outside the civilised community of nations, against whom it was legitimate to wage war at all times and in all places. Well, it seems that despite his modernity, Grotius's reasoning was not very different from that of Sepúlveda, Las Casas's contender at the Debate of Valladolid. The only gap separating them is that the civilised men in Sepulveda's pre-modern world were acting on behalf of God, or Aristotle's conception of man, whereas in Grotius's interpretation they were acting on behalf of the market and freedom. Of course, none of them spared any thought for "collateral effects". In fact, and this is the fatal blow to Grotius's credibility as an objective thinker, ethically superior to those cruel Catholic Spaniards, he never raised a finger against the Dutch atrocities in the East Indies. Neither did most of his compatriots. When, for instance, in 1621 the VOC governor-general Jan Pieterszoon Coen, with the blessings of his headquarters in Amsterdam, enforced a monopoly over the Banda archipelago's spice trade by killing most of its population—and not by importing unknown diseases unawares, but by the very consciously brandished sword—he was able to return to a hero's welcome in the Netherlands, where there are still statues, like the one in the town of Hoorn, celebrating his dubious exploits (84).



Plate 84: Statue of Jan Pieterszoon Coen.

The Dutch Republic figures prominently in Lord Clark's *Civilisation* where almost an entire episode, *The Light of Experience*, is devoted to Holland and its role in the "revolution that replaced Divine Authority by experience, experiment and observation". Well, to my knowledge, experience, experimentation and observation were the qualities that distinguished the Spanish and Portuguese pioneers in the Age of Exploration long before the seventeenth century. But, of course, the likes of Lord Clark must think they sailed to India, discovered America or circumnavigated the globe by following the star of Bethlehem or by the power of magical incantations. Be that as it may, Lord Clark is right in bringing Holland to our attention as a model, as he said, of a bourgeois democracy—an oligarchic republic by a more sophisticated name—unlike Italy or Spain at that time. Actually, this chapter is one of the few where Lord Clark names Spain, and as always in derogatory terms. Elsewhere, for instance, he says that "The greatest of all pictures based on the facts of vision wasn't painted in the scientific atmosphere of Holland, but in the superstitious, convention-ridden court of Philip IV of Spain: Las Meninas".

In contrast to the alleged lack of correspondence between art and the general conditions of society in Spain, Lord Clark attributed the blossoming of group portraiture, a symbol, together with the still life, landscapes and interiors, of Dutch painting during its Golden Age to the sense of corporate responsibility so characteristic of bourgeois capitalism. That sense of collective responsibility was made possible because people had some leisure, and they had some leisure because they had money in the bank, according to his reasoning. He never went farther than that, for instance by questioning where the Dutch got their money from. By advancing free trade, championing freedom of the seas and promoting tolerance in the four corners of the world? Just ask the Indonesians.

Do not misunderstand me. It is far from my intention to belittle the country that produced the inventor of the microscope or the likes of Rembrandt, Franz Hals or Vermeer of Delft. But the way Kenneth Clark presented the Dutch Golden Age, its scientific, artistic and capitalistic triumphs, whilst concealing its many dark sides makes me wonder whether he would have been capable of uttering the following phrase: "I left this country out of *Civilisation* because I did not know how to fit the Netherlands of the VOC, the persecution and execution of the Arminians and other dissenters, the cultivation system and the brutal colonisation of Indonesia into the rational humanistic plan that I had in mind".

CHAPTER 5

EL ESCORIAL OR THE NEW ATLANTIS

El Escorial is one of the reasons perfunctorily alluded to in his memoirs by Lord Clark when he tried to justify Spain's expulsion from his garden of *Civilisation*. Had he decided to exclude Philip II's most cherished monument on a purely aesthetic or personal criterion, that opinion would have been hardly understandable but at least arguable. He was not at ease with Spanish art and, like Verdi, he did not like Philip II, and that was it. He rather preferred a rococo church tucked away in a secluded corner of southern Germany—and quite a few of them appeared in the programme—over, let us say, the Cathedral of Toledo or the Alhambra of Granada.

But instead of restricting his choice to the realms of art, and therefore taste, he rather concluded that El Escorial did not fit in with the humanistic plan he had in mind for his version of *Civilisation*. Here he made another fatal mistake. For El Escorial was, among many other things that will be revealed in this chapter, the symbolic keystone of a vast spiritual, scientific and humanistic program unsurpassed at its time and whose range of ambition we can just glimpse in Tibaldi's frescos adorning the vault of the Royal Library. In them are represented allegories of Theology and the Liberal Arts, mixing classical and Biblical motifs in a very Isidorian manner, visually deployed in an Italianate style much influenced by Michelangelo (85).



Plate 85: El Escorial Library and Tibaldi's frescos.

The man who was at the centre of that project was, until relatively recent times, subject to one of the most savage image demolition campaigns ever witnessed. I will not enter into the details of the so-called “Black Legend”, extended not only to the man of El Escorial but to the entire Spanish modern historical experience. Philip II was too complex a man to be attacked or defended in a single line. To define him we have to avoid extreme, easy epithets. He was no devil and no saint. He was a man who had to rule over the mightiest Western polity since Rome, much larger in territories, and far more diverse. It was no easy task. Unlike the contemporary United States president he did not have satellites and the Internet at his disposal. CNN could not bring to his Situation Room at El Escorial the latest news from Manila, Naples, Amsterdam, Buenos Aires or Florida. He came to the highest office equipped with a cast of mind and proclivity of spirit that were his own and, at the same time, a product of his unique upbringing. From childhood he was taught that his mission was to preserve the unity of Christendom and the integrity of his kingdoms. He was no expansionist. He abhorred war but was ready to wage it with all the resources available when no other solution was at hand. He preferred the pen to the sword, and ink to blood. Unlike his father, depicted by Titian as an Imperial warrior at Mühlberg, he was more comfortable seated at a clerk’s desk endlessly amending reports than on the battlefield (86,87).



Plate 86: Charles V, the warrior Emperor triumphant at the battle of Mühlberg, painted by Titian, 1548. El Prado Museum.



Plate 87: The bureaucratic King as painted by Juan Pantoja de la Cruz, circa 1590. El Escorial.

His was, for better or worse, the first modern bureaucratic state in Western Europe. Artistically and intellectually, he was a man of catholic, that is, universal tastes, as attested by his collection of paintings, books and scientific instruments. With time he became more reserved and more intolerant of dissent, a trait of character that was to grow in his inner soul and was expressed in his unforgiving eyes. In daily affairs he was no nonsense, all *gravitas*, except in the most private intimacy of his family life. He died a disenchanted man, but most probably comforted in his faith. Contrary to legend, the crown he bequeathed to his successors was not in a state of irreversible decline. On the whole it was more powerful than ever. The defeat of the Armada in 1588, though important for England's myth-making, was followed by the even bigger disaster of the English Counter-Armada in 1589, the attempt by the Drake-Norris expedition, with Queen Elizabeth I's blessing, to destroy the remnants of the Spanish Armada, take Lisbon and disrupt the trans-Atlantic fleets. On all three counts the English enterprise was a resounding fiasco and, during the following centuries and despite numerous attempts, London was unable to elbow Spain out of the bulk of her overseas territories (88).



Plate 88: Maria Pita defending La Coruña against the Drake-Norris Expedition.

Philip II's reign can be told from many angles. The one privileged here illuminates an aspect of his efforts as a ruler mostly unsuspected from a North Atlantic perspective: the institutionalisation of a community of learning and, in particular, of a scientific community inspired by the principle that knowledge is power, that the systematic collection, organisation, interpretation and focused dissemination of empirical data was an absolute necessity for the acquisition, expansion and preservation of such a complex and extended polity as the empire ruled by the Spanish crown.

Of course, the equation of knowledge with power is associated in standard narratives of the history of science with the name of Francis Bacon and his *New Atlantis* or his *Instauratio Magna*, the alleged founding epistemological pillars on which the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century would be erected. But long before the Englishman even dreamt of putting into written form the project of creating an academic centre to collect the news belatedly brought home by his compatriots, the Spanish and Portuguese had devised and put into practice new policies, organs, methodologies, terminologies, filters and criteria of authority to determine whether the amazing and mind-numbing discoveries made by their explorers and conquerors corresponded with the wisdom received from Biblical and classical sources. Since most of them did not and the new found reality stubbornly imposed its consistency over ancient tradition, those tentative first steps into a new form of scientific humanism were immediately transformed into formidable machines for the assimilation and utilisation of the new knowledge for the benefit of the crown.

Spanish science in the early modern age was conceived of mainly as an instrument of power and not as a purely intellectual enterprise, exclusively aimed at unveiling the secrets of nature. As children of the twentieth century, when the most noble and apparently altruistic scientific advances were used for the benefit of the great powers and many became handmaidens to the most destructive forces ever imagined, the Spanish and Portuguese experiences should not come as a surprise to us. On the purely epistemological side, put into their context, they represented one of the main forerunners of the modern Western conception that the uplifting and expansion of the human faculties has to be a product not only of the imaginative powers of the mind and the spirit, but also a fruit of the confrontation between reason and experience through trial and error. On the practical front, the political use, and abuse, of those empirical fruits was the logical conclusion of the fact that, then as now, most scientific enterprises on a grand scale were encouraged and funded, or at least inspired, by the state or by organisations in one way or another related to the state.

As a precursor to the New Atlantis, El Escorial was thus the culmination of seven decades of close association between knowledge and power on Iberian lands. I would go even further: it was the compendium of the Hispanic historical experience to that date. We started our personal survey of *Civilisation* invoking the name of St Isidore and his lonely enterprise to collect all available Biblical and classical knowledge. We saw how his purpose was not purely intellectual. There was also a political undertone to it: the *Encyclopaedia* was a means to create a Hispano-Visigoth kingdom that could allow the identification of the Gothic masters with their Hispano-Roman subjects, thus creating a new nation.

After St Isidore's dream crumbled with the irruption of Islam we saw how, from the exhaustions of war and the travails of peace, there emerged several simultaneously competing and co-operative centres of knowledge where Christian, Muslim and Jewish scholars from different disciplines enlightened each other to create varied constructions of knowledge and beauty. Again, the rulers of Cordova, Seville or Toledo saw the utility of those creations for further advancing their respective political ambitions and conflicting ideals on how a unified Iberian peninsula should be governed.

The final triumph of one of those ideals of Spain coincided, in one of the most extraordinary twists of history, with the discovery, from a Eurocentric point of view, of a New World. Far from being the result of a coincidence imposed by destiny upon the unprepared peoples of the Iberian Peninsula, we have seen how, of the whole of Western Europe, the Iberians were the most apt and the best equipped, both intellectually and materially, to be the pioneers in the Age of Exploration. This is also true when it came to the modern association of knowledge and power as embodied by El Escorial's uncompromising silhouette.

It is a fact not sufficiently remarked, but, in the case of Spain, the creation of an entire scientific, economic and political structure to deal with and to put to practical effect the enormous flow of information coming from all the newly discovered corners of the Earth was amazing and unprecedented in its expeditious development except for the case, at a smaller but nevertheless admirable scale, of Portugal. The Casa de Contratación or House of Trade of Seville was founded in 1503, just eleven years after the discovery of America. From its inception, its role was not only to coordinate and supervise all business transactions with and migratory flows to the Indies, but to serve as a focal point for the collection and study of geographical, astronomical and nautical data as well as for the education of pilots bound to cross the oceans. It was veritably a Chamber of Knowledge, or, more accurately, of Trade and Knowledge or of Profit and Wisdom, a very modern combination. It employed the best scientifically inclined and practical men available at the time for one simple purpose: the overseas expansion of Spain and the strengthening of its composite crown. Now, by way of comparison, let us just remember that it was as late as 1599 that Richard Hakluyt wrote his *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*. In this work, the imitative Englishman had to concede that the Spaniards were far more advanced in their maritime and New World enterprises because they were familiar with “those bright lampes of learning, I mean the most ancient and best Philosophers, Historiographers and Geographers, to shoue them light” and also, and more importantly, because they had “the loadstarre of experience... whereby to shape their course”.³⁹

More than a century after Columbus's voyage, an Englishman was encouraging his countrymen to follow the Spanish example of empirical learning if they wanted to correct their backwardness. Not only that, Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, where he proposed the creation of a “House of Salomon” for the advancement of a new method of knowledge, was published in 1624. Now, it happens that the House of Salomon was just an elaborate, imaginative remake of the real thing: the Spanish Casa de Contratación, which had already been up and running for 121 years. As could not be otherwise, most accounts of the history of science omit this simple fact and tend to attribute to Francis Bacon's powers of insight the creation of modern scientific institutions, of which they say the first was the Royal Society, founded in 1660. That so many writers still follow this deceptive narrative when there is so much evidence to the contrary is a testament to the way that North Atlantic narrative can ignore or distort the historical record (89, 90).

³⁹ Quoted in Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, *Nature, Empire and Nation*, p.18.



Plate 89: The original location of the House of Trade, the Hispanic House of Salomon, founded in 1503.



Plate 90: Frontispiece to the *Instauratio Magna*, published in 1624 showing a ship sailing through the Columns of Hercules, a typically Iberian motif.

As said, El Escorial was the symbolic expression of an enterprise aimed at bringing together under a single roof faith, reason, art and power. As a highly elaborate monument, with many layers of meaning, the expression of that project was not homogeneous, but multiple though connected by a single thread. Let us then follow its traces into the centre of the labyrinth where an unexpected Minotaur awaits us.

The religious side to El Escorial has been thoroughly studied but not well understood. Most probably it was this dimension to the building that caused Lord Clark's revulsion. For in the North Atlantic mind El Escorial has been almost exclusively associated with the movement erroneously known as the Counter- Reformation, a pejorative term invented in the nineteenth century. True, baroque is the style which came to symbolise the formidable response launched by the Church to the Protestant challenge and Lord Clark, though educated as an Anglican, had a rare soft spot for baroque art as demonstrated by his enthusiastic remarks about, say, Bernini. But El Escorial is different. It is obviously deprived of any ornamentation and the geometrical purity of its lines is a far cry from the convoluted, theatrical forms so characteristic of the high baroque, designed to excite the senses and move the human mind away from earthly aspirations and towards a more elevated spiritual realm closely controlled by the Church. Well, nothing in El Escorial is aimed at pleasing the senses, quite the contrary.

The Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset said that El Escorial was the outstanding example of a de-humanised style. Its aesthetic was prevalent in Spain for more than a century and was known as Herreriano, after the king's favourite architect, Juan de Herrera. In a sense, Herrera and his deornamented style, in vogue in Spain during the final phase of the national version of the Renaissance, was an antecedent of the functional, rationalist movement associated at the beginning of the twentieth century with Adolf Loos, who famously equated ornament with crime and was convinced that the evolution of culture marches with the elimination of decorative elements from useful objects, such as human dwellings. From this point of view at least, El Escorial was the pinnacle of aesthetic achievement for, apart from the surrounding landscape, there is nothing that can distract the viewer from the simplicity of its geometrical composition (91).



Plate 91: Plan of El Escorial by Juan de Herrera. The geometry of its lines and the lack of external ornaments account for its rational and very modern outlook.

Confounded by the lack of Catholic extravaganzas in a building commanded by a most Catholic king, critics have tended to point out that El Escorial's asceticism was a direct reflection of the dry, uncompromising cast of mind of Philip II and as such it came to represent the dogmatic, anti-progressive spirit of Spain forever cast in stone. This predominantly Protestant vision is wide of the mark. If anything, El Escorial was the very embodiment of early modernity, an epoch, let us not forget, when the sacred and the profane were everywhere intermingled, not only in Catholic countries: just look at some portraits of Elizabeth I as a prototypical Goddess-Queen, saviour of the nation and as such endowed with thaumaturgical powers (92).



Plate 92: Elizabeth I, the Goddess Queen of England in the so-called Armada portrait by George Gower in the Woburn Abbey version.

In essence, El Escorial was planned as a Renaissance building intended to serve as a monastery, a palace and as a repository of art and knowledge. Its religious dimension is undeniable. At its inception, the monastery and the basilica were conceived of as homage to St. Lawrence and as a show of devotion by the king to the Church as reformed by the Council of Trent, which closed its deliberations the same year when the first stones of the new construction were laid, 1563. At the same time, the project was closely related to the secular aspect of Philip II's reign, since 20 August, the day when the armies of the composite Spanish monarchy, including an English contingent sent by the king's wife Mary I, crushed the French at the battle of Saint Quentin in 1557, was dedicated to St Lawrence. All these aspects of El Escorial are well known and we are not going to dwell upon them. In contrast, we will concentrate our attention in some of the far less well-known scientific and humanistic projects envisioned by the king and his advisors, many of them centred either practically or conceptually around the monastic palace but organised to encompass the farther confines of the first Empire where the sun never set.

The Spanish imperial experience was underpinned by the mastering of the best technologies available at the time and by a massive investment, material and human, in the accumulation and use of knowledge obtained not only from tradition but above all by empirical means. Nowhere is this more evident than in the launching of some of the first transoceanic and transcontinental scientific expeditions under the patronage of the Spanish crown at the time of Philip II.

Standard accounts of the Scientific Revolution written by North Atlantic authors rarely, in fact practically never, mention the demonstrable fact that modern European science was born not only in Protestant England or the Netherlands, but also, and in fact earlier, in Catholic Iberia. At the heart of Spanish and Portuguese scientific endeavours was the discipline of cosmography, not surprisingly the one most useful for the purposes of empire-making, closely followed by the sciences of navigation, metallurgy, medicine, botany, engineering and agriculture. In most of those fields, the Iberians had the advantage of having taken in mediaeval times parts of the best of the classical and Islamic traditions and innovations. What was needed was to put that legacy to the best possible use for the benefit of their expansionist ambitions, and they did so with the greatest efficiency and long before their North Atlantic rivals (93).



Plate 93: Frontispiece to the *Regimiento de Navegacion*, by Andrés García de Céspedes, published in 1606. The real *Instauratio Magna* was Hispanic by right of precedence.

When we think of Big Science we tend to conjure up images of multibillion budgets, multinational teams of researchers and, inevitably, the backing of some dark and powerful military-industrial complex of some sort or another. The Large Hadron Collider, the Human Genome Project or those huge astronomical telescopes dispersed across entire continents and connected by state of the art computers are some of the projects that we tend to associate with the advances of the late twentieth century. Actually, it was the Spanish crown as a collective entity that undertook the first experiments in Big Science in the sixteenth century. They were not only big, but also amazingly planetary both in scale and scope. This is not idle boasting. Let us examine three examples of global Hispanic science which, taken together, were without parallel until the eighteenth century: Francisco Hernández’s botanical, medical and commercial expedition to New Spain; the *Relaciones Geográficas* devised by Juan López de Velasco; and the bi-oceanic expedition designed by Juan de Herrera to find the true meridian and determine the boundaries of the Spanish Empire.

Contrary to the popular image of Philip II as a reclusive hermit whose pale countenance was due to his lack of exposure to the open air, the king was a lover

of nature. Apart from work and family, nature was his true passion as attested by his plans to surround El Escorial with forests and gardens, part of a vaster design to cultivate and conserve tracts of land that had remained barren across his possessions. In this regard, Philip II was a typical Renaissance prince. The taming of nature was one of the most fashionable tenets of the new humanism and many royal and aristocratic courts embarked on exuberant displays of herbal and arboreal imagination. Gardeners were all of a sudden in great demand and the search for exotic and beautiful botanical exemplars became all the rage. But, though the aesthetic delight obtained from the contemplation of pleasure gardens was valued as an end in itself, the long-lasting association of plants with edible and medicinal virtues, and therefore with profit, was also a powerful force behind the new trend. And here, there were limits that prevented those practical and artistic dimensions of botany from being fully exploited. Fortunately, that situation was about to change radically.

At the time of the major Iberian explorations, the knowledge of plants in Europe was still indebted to the Greek physician Dioscorides, whose main legacy, *De Materia Medica*, was rescued and expanded by the great Arab naturalists, many of them, like Ibn al Baytar, natives of al-Andalus. Despite their efforts, no more than 600 species were registered in the existing herbariums by the mid-sixteenth century, though the Romans had known up to 1400. Enter our protagonist, Francisco Hernández, the unheralded pioneer of modern natural science in two worlds, the new and the old (94).



Plate 94: *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides translated into Arabic.

Hernández was a physician at the court of Philip II. He had been trained at the humanistic university of Alcalá de Henares and had befriended the great Flemish anatomist Vesalius. A fact not sufficiently known is that Vesalius was the Imperial physician to the Court of Charles V and later received the patronage of Philip II. In 1551, when Vesalius was under attack by his numerous enemies, who considered his methods beyond the pale of orthodoxy he was exonerated by a board of experts convened by the Emperor at the University of Salamanca. As to Francisco Hernández, he was for a time, like many in his profession, a peripatetic doctor trying to make a living for himself and his family in the cities of southern Spain. He was so successful that he soon became appointed to several of the highest-ranking medical positions in the kingdom and, finally, by 1568 he was named Physician to the King's Chamber. His true vocation, however, was the advancement of botanical medicine and it was in that capacity that he was chosen in 1570 by Philip II to head the first scientific expedition to the New World with instructions to search out and describe the natural history of New Spain, assess the medical usefulness of new-found plants there and to obtain ethnographic information that could be useful for the ruling of those distant territories.

Hernández did so with a passion and dedication that led him during seven years to scout the most farthest-flung corners of Mexico. During that time, assisted by Nahua doctors and botanists, whose knowledge he vastly esteemed, he learned the local language and taxonomic methods. As a result of such collective efforts, he compiled sixteen folio volumes with the narrative and visual descriptions of more than 3000 plants previously unknown in Europe and a smaller number of animals and minerals. Besides, as the official physician of New Spain, during his last year in America he had to deal with the 1576 deadly epidemic of *cocolitzle*, which followed an exceptionally dry season and wiped out a great part of the indigenous population. Contemporary witnesses made reference to the devoted efforts of Hernández and many religious and secular authorities to alleviate the suffering of the victims using the network of hospitals for the natives already established in the Viceroyalty.

Unfortunately, when Francisco Hernández returned to Madrid after having completed the king's instructions, he found that his position at the court had changed, and that he no longer had privileged access to the king. Probably petty politics were behind the new situation and as a result the task of making a summary of his work, under the surveillance of the royal architect Juan de Herrera, was entrusted to Nardo Antonio Recchi, a physician from Naples, then a part of the Spanish realms. Afterwards, the original manuscript and the summary were housed at the Library of El Escorial, there to be consulted by experts, but the fire that devastated part of the library in 1671 consumed them. Fortunately, some

copies had been made and in 1615 an abridged edition of Hernández's work was published in Spanish in Mexico by the Dominican friar Francisco Ximénez under the title *Quatro Libros: De la naturaleza y virtudes de las plantas y animales*. Other heavily modified editions of Hernández's treatise were published from 1628 onwards in Rome, the first by the Academia dei Lincei, under the patronage of the Spanish ambassador Don Alfonso Turiano, with the cumbersome name, in Latin of *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus seu Plantarum, Animalium Mineralium Mexicanorum Historia ex Francisci Hernandi* (95)

266 RERVM MEDICARVM NO. HISP.

DE COATZONTE COXOCHITL, Lyncis flore .
seu Lyncea . Cap. VII.



alijs quarundam herbarum congenerum , & ex rubro Maizio, parabantur

HERBA est Coatzonte Coxochitl, fundens Iridis, sed long ora, & caules tenues, virentes, breues, læu flores capitibus serpentum similes, vni men, rubeoque colore, punctis camen flincto candido & pallecente, prout radices verò oblongas, ac præcoci Fic huc virefcenti valde similes, striatas, a tortas. Calidis provenit, & interdum temperatis regionibus, iuxta rupes, : borum truncis adhærescens . licet is hortos, cultaque loca descenderit, viri que exornet, in quibus excolitur, delic ac florum gratia. Est enim flos forma t bilis, Liliacei odoris, & quem quispi posset verbis exprimere, aut penicillo p gnitate imitari. à Principibusque Indi ob elegantiam, & miraculum, valde e tus, & in magno habitus prærio. blan & cultura non eget, sed vnica radice se diffimus fit prouentus. Ex hisce flori bu

Plate 95: Image of an orchid named *Stanhopea Hernandezii*, as it appeared in the *Rerum Medicarum Novae Hispaniae Thesaurus*, published in Rome in 1651 based on the manuscripts of Francisco Hernández's expedition to New Spain.

The work of Francisco Hernández would not have been possible without the collaboration of a vast network of local helpers in New Spain. Many of them had been trained at the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, active since 1533 and formally chartered in 1536 on the initiative of the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and the enlightened bishop and protector of the Indians, Juan de Zumárraga. The College, the first European institution of higher learning in America, was devised as a Hispanising *Calmeacac*, as the schools for the education of the Aztec nobility had been known before the Conquest. The goal was to create a polyglot Indian elite educated in Nahuatl, Latin, Spanish and some rudiments of Greek, as well as in the Western arts and crafts. Among his most formidable teachers was Bernardino de Sahagún, a

Franciscan friar who is rightly considered the founder of modern anthropology and is one of the most fascinating figures of the Renaissance. The result of his field researches among the Nahua was the *General History of the Things of New Spain*, written in Nahuatl with Spanish commentaries. The best-preserved manuscript of the *General History* is known as the *Florentine Codex* and it contains beautiful illuminations made by Nahua artists. It was, in its purpose and scope, a truly American version of St Isidore's *Encyclopaedia* since both were attempts at rescuing the remnants of vanishing worlds, the world of Late Antiquity, in the case of St Isidore, and the world of the pre-Conquest civilisations, in the case of Sahagún (96).



Plate 96. Image of an Aztec courtesan, or *Abuiani*. Florentine Codex, circa 1580. The manuscript found its way into the Medicean-Laurentinian Library in Florence, hence its name.

We know that Francisco Hernández spent some time at the College of Tlatelolco and that there he became familiar with the ethnographic work of Bernardino de Sahagún, which he used in his own scientific enquiries. Before the doctor's arrival in New Spain a first compilation of pre-Columbian botanical knowledge had been made in 1552 at the same College by two native professors, Martin de la Cruz and Juan Badiano, the latter being instrumental in translating the Nahuatl names of plants and their curative powers into Latin. The resulting text, also illuminated, was entitled the *Libellus de Medicinalibus Indorum Herbis* or *Little Book of the Medicinal Herbs of the Indians* and the existing manuscript is known as the *Codex De la Cruz-Badiano*, now in the Vatican Library (97).

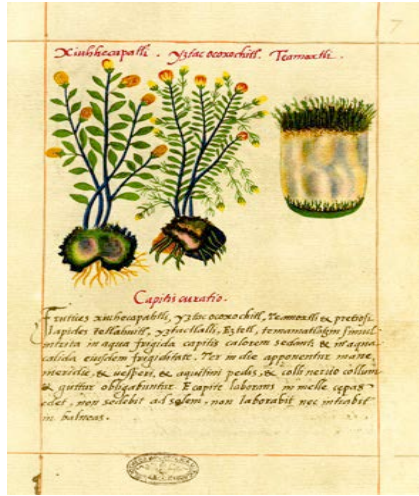


Plate 97. A remedy for head ailments. *Codex De la Cruz-Badiano*, 1555. Vatican Library.

Expanding the known realms of nature can be considered the main contribution of Hispanic science in America during the age of the Renaissance and at the beginning of the Scientific Revolution. The efforts by the Nahua physicians at the College of Tlatelolco and the expeditions sent from Spain produced an unprecedented number of new botanical, animal and mineral specimens. The discovery for the West of rich and completely unheard of ecological realms in America was the equivalent to the opening of a treasure trove for physicians, botanists, and food lovers alike, as well as for the practically minded traders, eager to cash in any novelty brought home from exotic lands by explorers and conquistadors. But the Great Iberian Exchange did not just move in one direction. We all know about the addition of American food staples to the markets and tables of Europe, but the exchange also worked the other way around and when the Spanish trans-Pacific networks became operational with the Manila galleons, as we shall see in next chapter, the circulation of foodstuffs, recipes, fabrics, medicinal plants and many other kind of goods became truly global.

From an epistemological point of view, the first descriptions and taxonomic classifications of flora and fauna made by Nahua and Spanish physicians and botanists paved the way to more elaborate conjectures about nature in relation to man that ran counter to the received wisdom from classical antiquity. The daring Iberian explorers had already demonstrated that many of the assumptions of the inhabitability of the torrid zones, as sustained by Aristotle, as well as the Ptolemaic

vision of earth, were incompatible with their own empirical experiences. The result was the questioning of old paradigms and the emergence of a new method of enquiry centred not on why things work, but on how things are the way they are. The best example of this new trend in thinking was the writings of the Jesuit José de Acosta, author of the *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, published in 1590 (98).

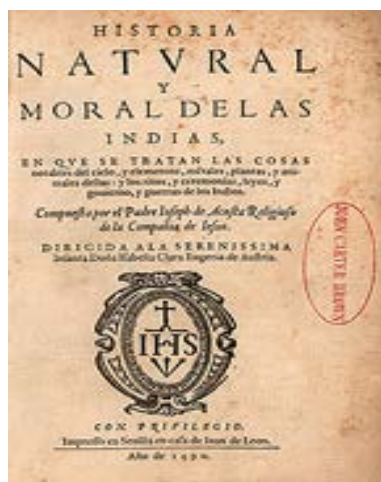


Plate 98. First edition of the *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, by José de Acosta, 1590.

Acosta followed in the footsteps of the first Western natural historians of America, such as Álvarez Chanca, a medical doctor who accompanied Columbus in his first expedition; Fernández de Oviedo, the first appointed official Chronicler of the Indies; or the court physician, Francisco Hernández. He moved a step forward to challenge openly and, literally, laugh at traditional sources of authority, venerated until then. As he himself recounts, when he crossed the equinoctial line... “which was when the sun was there for Zenith, being entered into Aries, in the month of March, I felt so great cold, as I was forced to go into the sun to warm me. Here I confess that I laughed and mocked at Aristotle’s meteors and his philosophy, seeing that in that place and at that season, when all should be scorched with heat, according to his rules, I, and all my companions were cold, because in truth there is no region in the world more pleasant and temperate, that under the Equinoctial”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Quoted in Diego Cagueñas-Rozo, “Imagination, Writing and the Devil. Preliminary Remarks on José de Acosta’s ‘The Natural and Moral History of the Indies’”. Accessed at www.newschool.edu/uploadedFiles/NSSR/Centers_and_Special_Programs/Diego_Caguenas_070221.pdf in August 2013.

Deprived of the solid footing that was provided by tradition and authority, Acosta then had to find a new anchor for searching the truth and this he found, in his own words, in the empirical method: “First state the truth as certain experience has revealed it to us and then attempt (although this will be an arduous business) to provide the proper conclusions according to good philosophy”⁴¹. And then he added that if the products of our imagination are not supported by reason it follows that they cannot stand. Such a statement of faith in the value of experience guided by reason, applicable both to the realms of nature and morality, was pronounced by a Spanish Jesuit at the end of the sixteenth century, before Bacon, Descartes or Newton. But, of course, he was Spanish and Catholic, so by definition he could not have a place in a proper history of science as perceived from a North Atlantic perspective.

The insistence on having access to the true facts as ascertained by reason and experience was also behind the first major attempt by a modern Western state systematically to collect, store and retrieve information related to its overseas possessions: I am referring to the *Relaciones Geográficas*, a set of questionnaires sent from the Council of Indies in 1577 to the authorities in America requesting answers to a series of questions about the territories and populations under their responsibility with the goal of advancing “good government”. Those questions covered, among other matters, the fields of demographics, health conditions, transport and infrastructure, political jurisdiction, ethnography and linguistics, geography, botany, zoology and mineralogy. The questionnaires, though, already had a precedent in the 1528 Provisions of the Emperor Charles V and in a series of Instructions elaborated by the great geographer Alonso de Santa Cruz, and were devised in their final form under the patronage of Philip II by the Royal Cosmographer and Chronicler of the Council of the Indies, López de Velasco. The answers from the local authorities were in many cases accompanied by maps of the territories then under the control of Spain, many of them combining the Amerindian and European cartographic traditions (99).

⁴¹ Ibid.

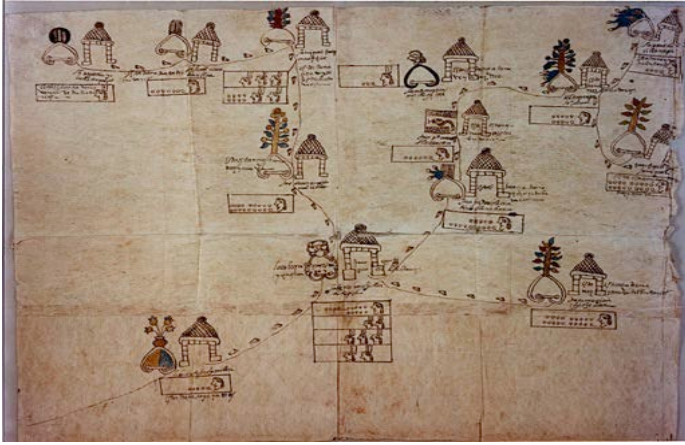


Plate 99. Map of Muchitlan accompanying one of the answers to the Royal questionnaires, 1582. The maker uses Nahuatl pictorial techniques. Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

Apart from his official responsibilities as the head of Spanish scientific policy, López de Velasco had other occupations and preoccupations for he was a man of boundless curiosity. He wrote a book on grammar and for a time worked at the Library of El Escorial helping to collect astronomical instruments and rare books. But his true passion was cosmography and, in particular, how to devise instruments and experiments to make more accurate measurements of the new discovered lands under the Hispanic crown. He was also interested in the movement of populations, particularly in the Americas. In his 1574 *Universal Description and Geography of the Indies*, after having considered Plato's hypothesis about the existence of Atlantis as expounded in the *Timaeus* as a possible explanation for the arrival of the first men to the New World, he concluded from the data gathered first hand by explorers that its first inhabitants, "until more facts are known", would have arrived from the north, since in those northern parts "the coasts of China and New Spain run along to the verge of convergence".⁴² He demonstrated that he was truly ahead of his times, for now we know that the Bering Strait was the "bridge" most probably used by the first human beings to cross from Eurasia to America.

Francisco Hernández's expedition and the *Relaciones Geográficas* were two of the most visible examples of Spanish applied science at its best during

⁴² On López de Velasco's *Universal Description*, see María Portuondo, *Secret Science*, pp.172-183.

the age of the Renaissance. No other European power was able to conduct experiments on that scale and magnitude at the time. But, even they pale in comparison with the sustained effort deployed by the royal cosmographers to describe and explain the expanding realms of nature, at the terrestrial, maritime and astronomical levels, as they were being explored and incorporated into the mental map of the West by their fellow countrymen.

The Space Race during the Cold War is the closest equivalent we have in recent times to the Age of Exploration at a time of nascent European empire building and competition for lands and oceans afar. As pioneers, Spain and Portugal not only tried to surpass each other, but they also had a shared stake in keeping other potential rivals at bay and as blind as possible. Not unlike the United States and the Soviet Union with their closely guarded space programmes, Madrid and Lisbon tried to prevent their discoveries of new territories and sea lines from falling into foreign and hostile hands. Of course, big news like the landing in America or the crossing of strategic straits could not always be kept secret from avid ears and, ultimately, prying eyes, but more detailed information, strenuously obtained by experience and theoretical work, was guarded as close to the heart and mind of the State as possible.

With such determined adversaries as the English or the Dutch, so eager to strike a fatal blow to their hated Catholic archenemies, caution was essential. That explains why many of the scientific endeavours undertaken in Spain at the House of Trade, at the Council of the Indies or at El Escorial remained unknown, even to this day, by many North Atlantic specialists in the history of science. It is also true that, at the time of this writing, many of those projects have already been the subject of numerous and well-documented studies. This is for instance the case of one of the most impressive among those undertaken at the time of Philip II, both when it comes to their goals and their geographical—and also in this case astronomical—reach. This project was planned by Juan de Herrera, the main architect of El Escorial palace, and was intended as an experiment to measure the size of the Empire on which the sun never set. More mathematically minded than many of his contemporaries, Herrera was in fact a driving force behind the foundation of the Royal Academy of Mathematics in 1582, and he designed a bi-oceanic expedition that would sail from Spain to America and then to the Philippines in order to determine essential longitude and latitude coordinates. Those coordinates would be fixed by using instruments designed by Herrera himself and by registering the lunar eclipses and magnetic declinations observed along the journey. Once in Manila, the expedition was instructed to recover

the papers of the late Martin de Rada, a priest who had visited China and made numerous observations on the geography and natural history of the Philippines. The voyage, under the command of the young astronomer Jaime Juan, started in 1583 and in 1584, after a stay in Havana, arrived in Mexico, where the Spanish astronomers observed the lunar eclipse of the same year. Unfortunately, the project was suspended when Jaime Juan died before arriving in Manila, though he left copies of the measurements made in New Spain so that they could find their way back to the Court (100).



Plate 100: Illustration of Pedro de Medina's *Regimiento de Navegación*, 1563, with instructions for the proper measurement of the height of the sun with an astrolabe.

Practical science was one of the aspects associated with El Escorial's prototypical Renaissance nature. Another one was related to the creation of what was, at its time and, in terms of quality, is still today, one of the major libraries in Europe, built on a plan—how could it be otherwise?— designed by Juan de Herrera. More than just an interesting curio, the Library of El Escorial was the first to introduce the modern system of arranging the books horizontally on shelves contained in linear wall bookcases as opposed to previous, ancient and mediaeval systems of book storage (101).



Plate 101. Bookcase at El Escorial Library.

The man who put Philip II's bookish project into practice was one of the greatest humanists and scholars of the sixteenth century: Benito Arias Montano. He was born in Extremadura in the same year as the king, 1527. This region was the land where many of the conquistadors originated, but it was also able to produce men given to more tranquil inclinations. But only apparently so, for Arias Montano's mind was one of the most adventurous of his times, always eager to test the limits of Catholic orthodoxy and Protestantism's vaunted toleration. After obtaining his degree from the University of Alcalá de Henares, one of the beacons of humanism in Spain, he became a member of the Order of Santiago and got to work as advisor to Bishop Ayala at the Council of Trent. There, his brilliance in opposing Protestant ideas brought his name to the attention of the king, who appointed him his chaplain in 1566. Two years later, he was entrusted with supervising a new edition of the polyglot Bible, also known as the *Biblia Regia* or the Antwerp Bible, the pinnacle of the king's scriptural endeavours, and an integral part of his all-encompassing edifice of knowledge. The *Biblia Regia* was intended to perfect the *Complutensian Polyglot Bible*, the first printed version of the Bible in three languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin, plus Aramaic for the Pentateuch. Inspired and financed by Cardinal Jiménez de Cisneros, the reformer of the Spanish Catholic church and founder of the University of Alcalá—Alcalá's Roman name of *Complutum* gave the Bible its name—the first Polyglot Bible, initiated in 1502 and published in 1520, was a monument of erudition and the finest fruit of early Spanish humanism applied, in Cisneros's words, "to revive the languishing study of the Sacred Scriptures".

The problem was that by Philip II's reign many copies of the original 600 six-volume sets had been lost and the price of the remaining copies was exceedingly high. Thus arrangements were made with the French book printer Christopher Plantin, who had set up shop in Antwerp, then under Spanish rule, to produce a new Polyglot Bible which would surpass the original one by expanding the Aramaic version and adding Syriac as a fifth language. And here Arias Montano's contribution was essential since he was the greatest Orientalist of his time, fluent in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Chaldean, Aramaic, Syriac and Arabic, to which his frequent travels added German, French and Italian. No doubt the king came to the conclusion that he was the man for the job and so he was dispatched to Antwerp.

To reach his destination he had to make a detour via Ireland to avoid the chaotic situation in France. Along the Irish coast his ship was wrecked and he had to traverse Ireland and England, where he was mistreated like many other Spaniards who had the misfortune of finding themselves at the mercy of the islanders. Fortunately, Arias Montano was able to continue his trip and reach Flanders. When in Antwerp, he contacted Plantin and set about his work with eagerness. Also, in a letter to the king he recommended that since His Majesty was determined to have the grandest library in Europe, no effort should be spared to obtaining as many of the finest books that were available in the entire world as possible, in all languages and pertaining to all the arts and this was to be done for the benefit of reason and the public well-being alike. The method to achieve this was to instruct the king's ambassadors, governors and prelates to buy the best pieces available on the market. Arias Montano himself was entrusted with obtaining books in his frequent travels and he did so with the eagerness and acumen of an expert bibliographer.

The library was the core of Philip II's plan. It was conceived of not as a mere deposit of rare books but as a cabinet of studies, humanistic and scientific, and as an institution for the education of future rulers destined to govern different nations, hence the variety of languages and cultures represented on the shelves. Father José de Sigüenza, the Royal Librarian and author of a history of the foundation of El Escorial, wrote that in the bookcases of the Library there were manuscripts and texts in Greek, Latin, Arab, Hebrew, Italian, Spanish, Persian and in Chinese, though the latter were not hand-written. The assembling of the library was also the perfect excuse to rescue jewels of the multicultural Hispanic past, from St Isidore's *Encyclopaedia* and Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria* to numerous literary, scientific, philosophical and religious manuscripts in Arabic and Hebrew, many of them part of the legacy bequeathed by Arias Montano personally after his death.

Apart from working on the new Polyglot Bible, Arias Montano took advantage of his long sojourn in the Low Countries to befriend many of the best humanists there, many of them related to Spain. His varied interests were advanced by the contacts he made with botanists like Clusius, translator into Latin of the treatise entitled *Medical study of the products imported from our West Indian possessions*, published in 1565 by the Spanish physician Nicolás Monardes; mapmakers like Abraham Ortelius, cartographer to Philip II; or mathematicians like Frisio, who helped expanding his already ample knowledge of the natural and physical worlds. Concomitantly, and perhaps contradictorily, he was also attracted by a fringe Christian group known as the *Familia Charitatis*, of which Plantin was a prominent member; this group tried to overcome the religious divisions in Europe by proposing a more spiritual, quasi-mystical approach to faith. They were ardent defenders of pacifism in a world beset by religious wars. Arias Montano himself would write to his king several proposals to advance the cause of concord in Europe, though extremists on both sides of the divide finally prevailed.

One aspect of *Familism*, however, found a positive reception in the court of Philip II. Visitors to the Prado Museum can find in that veritable temple of art one of the best collections of Flemish painting outside Belgium and the Netherlands. This is not chance. In a previous chapter we have already mentioned the strong connexions that had existed between the Iberian kingdoms and the Low Countries since the late Middle Ages, which explains the constant traffic of artists and works of art between the two regions. Those relations intensified under Emperor Charles V and his son Philip II. And here we enter into another dimension of El Escorial: its conception as the king's art gallery. It is well known that many of the paintings exhibited at El Prado were at some point part of the Royal Collections. Many Spanish kings, particularly during the rule of the Habsburg dynasty, had one thing in common: they were passionate art lovers. Three of them surpassed the rest, even among their European royal contemporaries: Philip II, Philip III and Philip IV. Each of them had his own distinctive artistic tastes as is shown in their respective purchases of works of art across Europe, conducted by a dedicated network of ambassadors and special envoys instructed to get the best deals, sometimes in the most recondite and difficult art markets. In some cases, a combination of favourable politics, economic trends and chance helped. Such was the case with the so-called "Sale of the Century", documented by Jonathan Brown and John Elliot in an essay of that name. The Anglo-Spanish Peace Treaty signed in 1604, putting an end to two decades of open hostilities, made it possible for English travellers to visit Spain and the other way around, favouring an increasing familiarity on the part of each with the other nation's artistic traditions, art collections and markets. On

this latter account, the Spanish got the best deal. When in 1649 the collection of Charles I was put up for sale by the new Parliament at the end of the English Civil War, many of the best pieces, which had previously been acquired by the king from the Gonzaga family in Mantua, were bought by Alonso de Cárdenas, the Spanish ambassador in London acting under instructions from the Duke of Lerma, the powerful *valido* at the court of Philip IV. The machinery of the Spanish crown was put in motion to facilitate the purchase, insurance, shipping and safe storage of hundreds of sculptures, paintings, including works by Raphael, Tintoretto and Correggio, and other decorative works of art. Some of the best pieces were bought for the royal collections—managed by none other than Velázquez—which at that time were housed at the Alcázar, the Palace of the Buen Retiro and, of course, El Escorial, where the English purchases came to join Philip II's legacy.

Philip IV had an eye for Italian painting, but his formidable predecessor, whilst appreciating the Venetians, was infatuated with the primitive Flemish school. Was this infatuation due merely to his artistic tastes or was something else behind it? In a certain way, Philip II was continuing a tradition inherited from his ancestors, since both Queen Isabella and his grandfather, Philip the Fair, had already demonstrated a penchant for those northern masters. But the zeal with which he pursued the acquisition of works by his favourite Flemish artist, Hieronymus Bosch, has to reveal some inner recesses in his character, or it may even be a key to his religious and political ideals—a few pieces remain at El Escorial, but most are now on show at the Prado in one of the largest permanent exhibitions of Bosch. Now, it happens that the painter of Hertogenbosch is the least Flemish of the early Flemish masters, many of whom were already influenced by Italy, in the sense that they adopted a more idealising and less realistic style in their paintings. Though a devoted Christian and Catholic, Hieronymus Bosch was part of a spiritual movement led by the contemplative priest Jan van Ruysbroeck, an advocate of the *Devotio Moderna*, a reformist current that preached a life of inner spirituality and detachment with regard to the artificial shows of devotion that, in the transition between mediaeval and modern forms of religious practice, so often masked the debauchery and hypocrisy of many spiritual and secular rulers, and also of many lesser mortals. Ultimately, that line of criticism would lead to the Reformation, but within the Catholic Church such expressions of dissent came to be, if not encouraged, at least tolerated for a while. Erasmus, of course, was a follower of the *Devotio Moderna*, and he had actually spent his youth in the same village as Bosch, where most probably they came to know each other, since it was a small community. Though there was a time when the orthodox interpretation of Bosch's paintings attributed their strangeness to fantasies and hallucinations, either induced artificially or due to

a sort of mental condition, today it is widely accepted that they correspond to his inner religious life, itself a by-product of the world he lived in, that was so profoundly disturbed in moral and spiritual terms.

With these antecedents in mind, we can now understand the presence of men in the circle of Philip II, in particular occupying positions related to El Escorial Library, who were close to Bosch's interpretation of Catholicism and the more intellectualised form of Erasmus. One of them was, of course, Arias Montano, but even more intriguing was the figure of José de Sigüenza, a monk and historian who was the author of the Library's catalogue, which also included its works of art. Like the king, he was an admirer of Hieronymus Bosch, but was also one of the first interpreters of his work. While many of his contemporaries were attracted to or repulsed by the nightmarish creatures and surrealist scenes depicted in Bosch's paintings, considering him little more than a renderer of monstrous curiosities, Sigüenza saw more clearly than that. For him, "whilst others often try to represent man's exterior appearance, he alone has the audacity to represent them as they are inside"⁴³. Perhaps it was that capacity in Bosch's paintings that attracted Philip II to the Flemish master, since he, as a ruler, also had to look into the interior of men in order to judge them beyond their outer trappings. The king might also have found to his liking the obvious moral side to Bosch's depictions of men's foolishness, which included the rich and the powerful, as a way to call their attention away from their sinful shenanigans, something that the king himself was not free from, at least in his imagination. Despite his stern fame as a man of uncompromising religious rectitude, we know that the king had a soft spot for the series of six poetic inventions painted for him by Titian, which depict several scenes inspired after Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with more than erotic undertones. They were meant for the king's private rooms in El Escorial. Were Bosch's moralising paintings a way of compensating and atoning for those lustful meanderings into the realms of mythology? We cannot know for sure. Anyway, I concur with those who think that the real key to Philip II's affinity with the master of Hertogenbosch was the title with which Bosch's most famous painting, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, was catalogued by Father Sigüenza: "A Painting on the Variety of the World". Despite the different moral—or amoral—meaning attached to a painting like Titian's enticing *Danae and the Shower of Gold* in contrast to Bosch's allegories of lust in his famous triptych, what unites both works of art is that they are devoted to the same theme, which is change and metamorphosis resulting in a variety of human situations and creatures: gods, angels, men, animals, vegetables and every kind of hybrid being (102, 103).

⁴³ Quoted in M. Gauffreteau-Sévy, *Hieronymus Bosch "el Bosco"*, p.12.



Plate 102. Titian's *Danae*, circa 1550. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Plate 103. Allegory of Lust, detail from Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, circa 1500. Prado Museum, Madrid.

Philip II's passion for the diversity and variety of the world, as manifested by his artistic tastes, and his toleration of religious dissenters in his close entourage, seems to fit ill with both his image as a champion of orthodoxy and the purity and monotony of lines of his chosen residence in San Lorenzo del Escorial. The fantastic world of Bosch and the chromatic sensuality of Titian's brush also seem to diverge from his patronage of the exact sciences and his passion for bureaucratic taxonomy. But if we consider El Escorial and the extraordinary range of political, artistic and scientific projects associated with it, encompassing the known and recently discovered diversity of the world and of humankind alike, then we can better understand why he could be seduced by the idea of possessing works of art depicting precisely that same tantalising variety and its ambiguous moral implications.

Many years ago a former roommate from school in the United States came to visit me in Madrid. For a week we did the usual round of sightseeing and to cap it all I took him to El Escorial. He was to become a widely travelled, brilliant scholar in political science, but I have to say that in those days he belonged to the Woody Allen provincial school of liberal Americans for whom France and particularly Paris is everything they think of when they think about the world beyond the New England Atlantic seaboard. Not surprisingly he did not like El Escorial. Listen, he said, that is the difference I have been trying to explain to you all along. The French know how to build marvellous things for tourists, like Versailles, whilst you Spaniards, at the peak of your power did something as boring as this. Precisely so, I retorted: Versailles is a triumph of vanity; El Escorial is a triumph of the mind and its infinite creative possibilities. You are free to choose. I know where I stand.

CHAPTER 6

A HISPANIC GLOBALISATION

The Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset once famously said that Spaniards are the Chinese of the Western world, since both nations have gone through many ups and downs (“las hemos visto de todos los colores”), though, he could have added, both have always managed to bounce back. There are other similarities apart from their rich historical experiences. Both China and Spain (together with Portugal) were pioneers in the rise of the first modern wave of globalisation. The Manila Galleons, also known in Spanish as the “*Naos de China*”, and the Spanish Atlantic fleets were its most potent embodiments. In what constituted at their time an unprecedented feat in the annals of navigation, for more than two centuries they connected the Atlantic and the Pacific, Asia, America and Europe in a regular flow of goods, money, peoples and culture (104).

From a Eurocentric point of view, the Age of Exploration is considered to be the starting point of modernity and the herald of Western supremacy over the rest of the world. Using their superior weapons, technology and organisational capacity the Europeans discovered, conquered and administered large parts of the globe. With characteristic arrogance, Hegel concluded in the nineteenth century that those regions that were not under European control were simply unworthy of attention. But as we move from a Eurocentric to a global perspective, there is another way of telling the story. The early European expansion pioneered by Portugal and Spain was part of a larger narrative. True, by encountering America, rounding Africa, reaching Asia and circumnavigating the globe, the Iberian seafarers, traders, missionaries and conquistadors extricated Europe from a long period of introspection and limited contacts with other cultures, except, as we have seen, in those regions under the influence of Islam, where the exchange between East and West was not just occasional and limited to a handful of traders and diplomats, but took place on a daily basis and touched all echelons of society. In his magisterial *A Study of History*, Arnold J. Toynbee, recognised that the Iberian pioneers “expanded the horizon, and thereby potentially the domain, of the society they represented (Western Christendom) until it came to embrace all the habitable lands and navigable seas of the globe” adding that “it is owing in the first instance to this Iberian energy that Western Christendom has grown, until it has become the ‘Great Society’: a tree in whose branches all the nations of the Earth have come and lodged”.⁴⁴ Well, we are now in a different age and the Western tree Toynbee was referring to seems considerably less imposing than many other arboreal manifestations of civilisation, that grow to the East and to the South.

⁴⁴ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, pp 124-125.

But the Iberians actually did something far more important than expanding the physical and mental range of the West. They connected worlds that had previously remained apart and in the process they literally made globalisation possible. For sure, dislocated regional networks had existed before the arrival of the Iberians, partially linking centres of civilisation with one another. The overland Silk Roads, the Tea Road between Russia and China, the trading networks of Western Africa, or the maritime routes between the Muslim world and East Asia were examples of a proto-globalisation in the making. On the other side of the world, China had spearheaded efforts from the East to stitch together some of those fragmented networks. Travellers like Zhang Qian, Fa Hsien and Xuanzang were daring trailblazers whose exploits enlarged the reach of the early Asian regional system encompassing China at its core, the Indian Ocean, Central Asia and the near East—with branches in peripheral areas, such as western Europe. However, the truncated maritime expeditions of Zheng He (between 1405 and 1433) under the Ming dynasty represented the great hiatus in Chinese overseas expansion. Though there were internal reasons to explain why the rulers of the Middle Kingdom took such a momentous decision, from a wider perspective, halting those voyages and dismantling their fleet was a grave mistake. According to the predominant Western narrative, the failure to push forward on the path of further explorations placed China on the road to irreversible decline and facilitated the rise of the West.



Plate 104. Mappamundi with the Spanish navigation routes by Battista Agnese, 1540, at the John Carter Brown Library. The map was commissioned by Emperor Charles V as a gift to his son, the future King Philip II.

In reality, as we know now, the Ming renunciation of overseas empire-building did not entail the end of Chinese predominance in the nascent world economic system. On the contrary, until the late eighteenth century China remained the most dynamic centre of production and the biggest market worldwide. This feat was possible, to a large extent, due to an extraordinary convergence of apparently disparate trends. In fact, as China was turning its back on the sea, the world was about to reconnect with China by maritime means. When the Iberian navigators appeared on the Far Eastern horizon, it seemed that they would be submerged in the immensity of Asia, becoming nothing more than redundant intermediaries in the existing channels of intra-Asian trade. But as the first permanent Portuguese and Spanish trading posts and cities were established in places like Macao, Nagasaki or Manila, a different and more complex pattern emerged. At the core of this new relationship was money—great amounts of it flowing from the Hispanic world to the emerging world market.

As the Iberians were infiltrating the Far East, Spain completed its conquest of the pre-Columbian Empires of the Incas and the Aztecs. By putting into circulation the massive quantities of gold and silver found in its new possessions, Spain together with its New World territories revolutionised the global economy and became the world's mint. As even Adam Smith recognised in 1776, Spanish-American silver was the main means by which “distant parts of the world are connected with each other”.

The Spanish crown's control over the flow of precious metals from the New World was dependent on its Armadas doing what the Royal Navy did for British trade in the nineteenth century and what the U.S. Navy does today, namely protecting the trans-oceanic trade routes. For more than two centuries, the Spanish Armadas were the primary custodians and conveyors of massive quantities of silver and gold coins: the lifeblood of the first global economy. That massive accomplishment, either ignored or curiously dismissed as inconsequential by many historians of the international economic system, was the result neither of serendipity nor of the willing collaboration of the Spanish crown's enemies, as historians like Henry Kamen would have it⁴⁵, but of a conscientious policy decision made by Philip II and sustained by his successors under two different dynasties. The mastermind charged with putting into practice the king's plans to protect the ships that carried the treasures from America was the great naval

⁴⁵ In his book *Empire, How Spain Became a World Power, 1492-1763* New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003, the British historian Henry Kamen tried to demonstrate that the Spanish Empire was everything but Spanish because from the beginning, ‘Castilians (sic) were reluctant imperialists, disinclined to expand their territorial or cultural horizons’, p.488. In Kamen's most peculiar interpretation the Spanish Empire was basically created and sustained by everyone but the Spaniards themselves.

commander Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, whose name merits being included among the greatest strategists ever. As a conquistador, he successfully and ruthlessly dislodged a French Huguenot colony in Florida, founding in 1565 the village of St. Augustine, the oldest continually inhabited settlement in the current territory of the United States, thus forging a buffer zone between the Hispanic territories and the Anglo-American colonies. As a supreme commander overseeing the defence of an expanding overseas empire and its main maritime routes he envisioned and implemented a defensive system of massive trans-oceanic fleets and a chain of fortified bases along key strategic posts which was without equal in military history until the nineteenth century. Furthermore, together with another great admiral, Álvaro de Bazán, he actually contributed to the design and building of the formidable Spanish galleons, those sailing fortresses that would constitute the core of Spain's global naval might for more than two-and-a-half centuries (105).



Plate 105. Pedro Menéndez de Avilés, engraving by Francisco De Paula Martí, 1791. He was the architect of the Spanish system of armed fleets and fortified ports that would protect the core of the Spanish overseas Empire and its trans-oceanic routes for two centuries and a half.

The myth of the English and Dutch seadogs preying on undefended Spanish ships and plundering at will Spanish forts in the Caribbean or the Pacific is precisely that: a well-publicised tale. As a matter of fact, the likes of Drake,

Hawkins or Raleigh failed to capture any complete treasure fleet and only managed sporadically to seize some isolated ships and to conduct occasional raids on some scarcely defended ports in mainland Spanish America or on the Caribbean islands. Actually, the three English seadogs died either during or as a result of failed expeditions against their Spanish archenemies. As to the other great rival of the Spanish monarchy in the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic—supposedly at the height of its power, particularly in Asia, while Spain was supposed to be immersed in a process of irreversible decline—suffered defeat not once, but three times, in its attempt at invading the Philippines: at the First and Second Battles of Playa Honda (1609 and 1617) and, more decisively, at the Battle of La Naval de Manila, in 1646, when just three Spanish galleons and five minor warships smashed three Dutch squadrons of eighteen warships which had attempted to conquer Manila. The Dutch never tried again. Even more tellingly, in all the 250 years history of the Spanish trans-Pacific fleets the English only managed to capture four Manila galleons. As to the Atlantic fleets not even one was captured on the open seas in their entire existence. On the only four occasions when the Dutch or the English were able to disrupt an Atlantic fleet, they did it when their prey was close to a port and only once, in the case of the Dutch admiral Piet Hein in 1628, were they able to seize an entire cargo with its treasure intact, an exceptional occasion that was triumphantly celebrated by North Atlantic propagandists but was never to be repeated (106).



Plate 106. Seizure of a Spanish fleet by the Dutch admiral Piet Hein in 1628 off the Bay of Matanzas, Cuba. The author was the well-known Protestant propagandist Theodore de Bry.

The overall success of the Spanish Armadas in protecting the core of the Hispanic world and its vital sea lanes in the Atlantic and the Pacific had important consequences for the emergence of a global economy, even once the peak of Spain's power had passed. For a long time, the Spanish American silver peso—rather than the pound or the guilder—was the currency of choice for merchants in China, North America and parts of Europe. When the Founding Fathers tried to find a model for the currency of the new and mostly bankrupt United States, they ended up choosing the Spanish piece of eight. As the first secretary of the U.S. Treasury, Alexander Hamilton ensured the adoption of the 1792 Coinage Act, which set the value of the U.S. dollar equal to “the value of a Spanish milled dollar”. Thus, the currency that was a testimony to the Hispanic origins of the first international monetary system was transmuted into an instrument of U.S. economic hegemony.

For Ming China in particular, the formation of the Spanish Empire and its essential role in the emerging financial networks were an unexpected bonus. From the earlier Song dynasty, China had relied on paper money as a means of exchange. After a succession of fiscal crises, trust in the value of paper money decreased. As the Chinese economy under the Ming continued manufacturing huge amounts of goods, the only way to avoid a collapse was to find alternative means to finance trade. American silver was the solution. Under Spanish rule, from 1500 to 1800, the mines of Mexico and Peru produced around 85% of the world's available silver. It is estimated that over 40% of that silver ended up in China. No wonder that such a massive influx of precious metals caused a massive distortion in its economy. So by an extraordinary twist of history, the exploits of the Spanish conquistadors in America dramatically affected the course of the Chinese Empire for the next two centuries. The twin questions are: why, and how, did this happen? Exploring the answer will give us an unexpected perspective on the origins of early modern globalisation.

Since 1522, when Juan Sebastián Elcano completed the first circumnavigation of the globe initiated by Magellan in 1519, an insoluble problem had confronted the Spanish crown. Even though the Pacific Ocean was navigable towards the west, there was no apparent way back towards the east. For three decades, the Spanish monarchy launched expedition after expedition to find a practical way to get from America to the Philippines and back to no avail... until a remarkable character entered the story: the sailing monk Andrés de Urdaneta (107).



Plate 107. Andrés de Urdaneta, by Víctor Villán de Aza, 1890.

Andrés de Urdaneta is not a celebrated figure. Actually, he hardly appears in standard books of world history. Nevertheless, in the hidden history of civilisation, he is one of its most prominent heroes. His biography is a compendium of an entire era and deserves to be far more popular than it is at the moment. In the hands of a good scriptwriter and translated into cinematic language by a competent filmmaker, it would certainly be a smashing blockbuster. Just imagine this dramatic storyline: A young man, just fourteen years old, living in a remote village in the Basque country hears the astonishing news of the first circumnavigation of the globe by Juan Sebastián Elcano, the early modern equivalent to the moon landing. Adventurous by nature, he dreams of taking to the sea and emulating his compatriot. Quite naturally, his parents want nothing of it. Three years later, by a fortuitous chain of events, Elcano, on a tour of northern Spain aimed at enlisting willing sailors for a new maritime adventure, sets eyes on the intelligent youngster and chooses him to be his personal attendant. This time Urdaneta's parents give in -how could they object to a decision made by the greatest hero, the Neil Armstrong of those times?- and let their child go.

In 1525 Urdaneta finally fulfilled his dream and went to sea. He did so as a junior member in an expedition intended to reach the Pacific and the Spice Islands by navigating westward, thus trying to avoid the Portuguese claims on those regions. Commanded by Loaisa and benefiting from Elcano's skills as main pilot,

the party of seven ships set sail on the route previously taken by Magellan along the shores of Patagonia and through the Strait named after the famed explorer. There, confronted by powerful winds, extreme weather and treacherous tides, the members of the expedition suffered all kind of misfortunes. Many perished, deserted or got lost. Trying to rescue some of his companions who had been cast ashore, Urdaneta, who just a few months before had never ventured away from his native Basque valleys, had to survive among the native Patagonians, learnt to hunt seals, buried himself by night in the sand to fight against the biting cold and overcame a powder explosion, which almost put a premature end to his life. Back on board, he joined his surviving compatriots and the four remaining ships to reach the end of the Straits. No sooner had they started on the Pacific leg of their voyage, than a devastating storm scattered the fleet. Three of the ships were lost and only the flagship could continue on its way to the Moluccas. Further tragedy stroke when Elcano—the man who had received from Emperor Charles V the fitting coat of arms of a globe with the legend *Primus Circumdedit Me*, You were the first to encircle me—passed away in the presence of Urdaneta, who became one of the seven witnesses to his will and would never forget the lessons learnt from one of the greatest sailors in a century of formidable navigators.

Thus reduced to a ragtag band aboard a single, badly damaged ship, the remaining Spaniards miraculously sailed across the Pacific, made some landings for victuals in Guam and Mindanao and finally reached the archipelago of the Moluccas, the legendary Spice Islands. There they were well received by the ruler of the island of Tidore, with whom Elcano, on his previous voyage back to Spain while circumnavigating the earth, had struck an alliance. Besides, the rajah of Tidore was the sworn enemy both of the Portuguese who had settled in the neighbouring island of Ternate and of their local allies. So the Spaniards found themselves entangled in a regional conflict with international repercussions. The Portuguese of course were determined not to let their Iberian rivals encroach on what they considered to be their exclusive sphere of influence and used their superior force to convince the Spaniards to surrender. With characteristic pride, Urdaneta and his companions refused to give in. Though reduced to a pitiful condition, theirs proved to be more than an empty bravado. For the next nine years, completely isolated and with no possible reinforcements at hand, they were able to resist the attacks of their Iberian adversaries and their native associates. Hopping from island to island, using guile here, resorting to arms there, surviving poisoning and betrayal, serving as trading and diplomatic intermediaries among the different native fiefdoms, always tailed closely by the Portuguese, Urdaneta and his fellow countrymen, just a few dozen of them, became supreme masters at the arts of surviving. Only when the Portuguese produced irrefutable proof that, in the context of tangled European diplomacy, Emperor Charles V had

renounced any claim to the Spice Islands already occupied by the Portuguese, did the Spaniards surrender.

Together with his companions, Urdaneta was taken to Lisbon as a prisoner. By his own confession, we know that during his time in the Portuguese gaols he had to abandon a natural daughter, most probably the fruit of a love affair with a Pacific islander. His heart was broken by the separation but, fortunately for him, thanks to a plan devised by the Spanish ambassador in Lisbon, he managed to escape and make his way back to Spain, a country he had left eleven eventful years before. By the time he arrived in the Imperial capital of Valladolid, news about his exploits and capacity as a pilot and cosmographer had already reached the Court and he was invited to make a presentation of his journey across the Pacific in the presence of the Emperor and his closer advisers. Always a man of courage, even in the presence of such exalted dignitaries, he did not mince his words when it came to reproaching the Emperor for his betrayal of those loyal Spaniards who had risked, and in many cases given their lives while trying to expand His Majesty's domains across the Pacific. The Emperor was not amused, it seems, and so Urdaneta fell on hard times. As with so many countrymen in similar circumstances, in 1538 he decided to enlist in one of the numerous expeditions sent to New Spain, and thus he found himself back to a world of adventure and hardship, battling rebellious Indians along the northern borders of Mexico. But the years were passing by and he was no longer young. After several attempts at fulfilling administrative and judicial responsibilities in the viceroyalty, in 1552 he finally decided to give up everything, became an Augustinian monk and entered a monastery on the outskirts of Mexico City where he was determined to spend the rest of his life, forgotten by and forgetting about the rest of the world.

But it was to be otherwise. The passage of time did not diminish his fame as one of the surviving members of the dramatic expedition that had tried to reach the farther confines of the Pacific. Memories of his sailing skills and undaunted courage became legendary. In vain the authorities of New Spain tried to convince him to help them in their renewed attempts at establishing a route between Mexico and Asia: the reclusive monk always refused. And then, the unexpected happened. One day he received a letter from none other than King Philip II urging him to join an expedition aimed at establishing a base in the Philippines and thus challenging the Portuguese monopoly in Asia. This time, it was a call that was difficult to refuse. And so, on the condition that he would not accept the command of the ships but only act as a pilot, Urdaneta took to the sea for a last time on November 1564. The expedition, under the captainship of Miguel López de Legazpi was to reach the Philippines, there to set up a permanent outpost, but the secret instructions under which it was dispatched went beyond that, since

their true purpose was to find a return route to New Spain from the Islands of the West. And to that end, the message was explicit that the man who should try to find the way back was to be Urdaneta.

And so he did, reluctantly. Starting his trip in 1565 from the island of Cebu, Urdaneta defied conventional wisdom from the beginning. Instead of sailing across the trodden path, he decided to head north towards Japan in order to link up with the Kuro-Shiwo current. He then proceeded east towards California and Acapulco. Four months later he had completed the first *tornaviaje* or round trip between the Philippines and America: he had just opened the first regular trans-oceanic route between Asia and America, and by extension between America and Europe in human history. Far from accepting the glory accorded to the great pioneers, he returned to his monastery in Mexico, to die quietly after having fulfilled in maturity the dreams of his early childhood. In doing so, he had made globalisation possible.

Apart from constituting the longest maritime trading enterprise known in pre-industrial times, the Manila Galleon sea route was also the longest lasting: it operated almost uninterruptedly for more than two-and-a-half centuries, from 1565 to 1815. Its endurance was due to two basic facts. First, it was profitable for all sides involved: the Chinese received a constant flow of silver and the Americans and Europeans had access to Asian staples and luxury products, from spices to porcelain and silk. Second, despite frequent wrecks provoked by rough seas and uncharted coasts, it was quite secure by the standards of the times. The galleons were formidable ships, sometimes reaching over 1,500 tonnes of cargo capacity. The size, frequency and overall reliability of the Manila Galleons explain why in the seventeenth century China received more silver from the Hispanic world than from its trade with the English, Dutch and Portuguese combined.

The economic success of the Manila Galleon can also be examined in terms of orthodox economic theory. Spanish settlers in New Spain were constantly complaining about the cost of silk products manufactured in America. Since the Laws of the Indies forbade the enslavement of native Indians, *encomenderos* had to provide them with a salary. Minimum as this remuneration might be, it was enough to make silk production in America uncompetitive. So, contrary to received wisdom, the Spanish crown's moral qualms over the treatment of the Indians constituted one of the factors behind the trans-Pacific trade. Since Chinese silk was cheaper, it made sense to buy it in exchange for lower-cost American products. American silver was available in more than sufficient quantities, so the terms of the trade were clear from the beginning. The Manila Galleon did all the rest.

For the Chinese, the Manila Galleon presented two obvious advantages. First, it provided a regular channel, financed and defended by foreigners, through which it could export part of its excess production to a wider market without incurring the cost of running an overseas empire. Secondly, the Galleon was a reliable source of much needed money in times of financial distress. The Spanish-American silver was so much in demand that even after Spain had lost control of America in the nineteenth century, Spanish colonial dollars were widely used among merchant communities in coastal China. “Pillar dollars” with the effigy of Charles IV, of Goya fame, were called the “fatty Buddhas”.

As to the Spanish Empire, the *Nao de China* represented the main way to turn a profit from the Philippines, thus helping to secure a permanent presence for Spain in Asia. The trade route was also vital for lubricating the commercial wheels of the vibrant Viceroyalty of New Spain (as Mexico was then known). Many trading communities there were dependent on the timely arrival of the Manila ships with their cargo. Furthermore, as the German traveller Alexander von Humboldt witnessed in his travels through Spanish America around 1803, Far Eastern spices and textiles became part of the Indian and *Mestizo* populations’ daily life thus contributing to a quintessentially Hispanic mixing of habits and customs. More luxurious goods were purchased by the Spanish American elite, or found their way to Spanish and European markets via Seville.

Finally, for the global economy, the unsung Manila Galleons were the link between two of the largest geopolitical entities until the beginning of the nineteenth century: the Chinese Empire and the Hispanic Monarchy. Thanks to their respective roles, it was possible to create and sustain the first global economic network encompassing more or less the same actors—the Americas, Asia and Europe—that constitute the three main pillars of the current wave of globalisation (108, 109).



Plate 108. 1812 Spanish-American pieces of eight incised with Chinese characters. The pieces of eight were the first global currency.



Plate 109. Jar with Chinese figures and Islamic ornamental motifs made in Puebla, Mexico, seventeenth century.

But early modern globalisation was not only about bread and butter (or silver). As the history of the Manila Galleon demonstrates, from its very inception it had also an important cultural dimension. Most accounts of modern cultural exchanges between China and Europe start with a reference to the Italian, Spanish and French Jesuits in the Ming Court—Mateo Ricci prominent among them. Allegedly, the first “reliable” news about Chinese civilisation in Europe had to wait until the comparative studies of French encyclopaedists and philosophers later in the eighteenth century. Yet in reality, the first post-Marco Polo European best-seller about China was written as early as 1585 by a Spanish author. Juan González de Mendoza’s *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del Reino de la China* became a pan-European hit with more than 38 editions in Spanish, Italian, French, German, Dutch and English before the end of the sixteenth century. It was also the first Western book where Chinese characters were depicted in a chapter devoted to explaining the nature of the Chinese language (110).



Plate 110. Mendoza's best-seller on China depicting Chinese ideograms, published in 1585.

Mendoza was just one of a number of Spaniards, many of them friars, who came into contact with China thanks to the connection made possible by the Manila Galleon. The principal locus of that contact was Manila itself. A sizable Chinese community was established around the city's *Parian*, the main market where Chinese and other Asian products were exchanged for silver. Coexistence between Chinese merchants and Spanish settlers was not always easy, but that fact did not preclude a fruitful cultural exchange between representatives of both nations. If we consider the Hispanic world primarily as a civilisational mediator, mixer and disseminator, then the *Parian* market in Manila deserves to occupy a place of honour together with Cordova, the monasteries of Liébana and Ripoll, Toledo, El Escorial and the Imperial College of Tlatelolco, in Mexico City, as one of the main centres where that mediating, mixing and disseminating took place (111).



Plate 111. The Manila market, or *Parian*, drawing by Juan Francisco de Ravenet y Bunel, a painter on the Malaspina expedition, 1789-1794.

The conversion and care of the restive Chinese community in Manila, known as the *sangleyes* in Spanish chronicles, were entrusted to the Dominican friars by the Spanish crown. Though less reputed for their intellectual leanings than that other renowned Spanish order, the Jesuits, the Dominicans were nevertheless men of profound learning. They also had a penchant for foreign cultures. No wonder that many of them were second to none in mastering Oriental languages. For instance, in 1703 a Dominican friar from Seville, Francisco Varo, published the first dated grammar book of Chinese published in a European vernacular, the *Arte de la Lengua Mandarin* or “Grammar of the Mandarin Language” (112).



Plate 112. Francisco Varo’s *Grammar of the Chinese Language*, published in Canton in 1703. It offered the first systematic study of the tonal system.

It was not the only Spanish contribution to early Western sinology. Even before Varo, his compatriots Juan Cobo and Juan Bautista de Morales had also written Chinese grammars or bilingual dictionaries that were not published. More importantly, Juan Cobo was the first translator of a Chinese book into a European language, the *Beng Sim Po Cam*, beautifully rendered in Spanish as the *Espejo Claro del Claro Corazón* or “The Luminous Mirror of the Luminous Heart”, a collection of maxims and aphorisms of classical Chinese philosophers, published in 1592. The translation was presented to King Philip III in 1595 with the following words: “The Chinese take to be their great and true wealth not gold, nor silver, nor silk, but books, wisdom, virtues and just government”. Conversely, the first European work to be translated into Chinese, by Tomás Mayor in 1607, was “*The Introduction to the Symbol of Faith*”, a Spanish encyclopaedic work of natural theology written by Luis de Granada (113).



Plate 113. Juan Cobo’s translation of Chinese classics, 1592.

Manila did not only serve as a meeting point between the Hispanic world and China. It also became a privileged and turbulent place of encounter with the mythical land that Columbus, Elcano, Urdaneta and so many other Western explorers had fixed their eyes and dreams on without ever being able to set foot there: Cipango.

The attraction Japanese feel towards many things Spanish surprises most Spaniards visiting Japan for the first time. Japanese women, as any expert will corroborate, are particularly apt at mastering the infinite nuances of flamenco dancing. At the heart of the Shibuya trendy shopping district in Tokyo there is a narrow pedestrian street named *España*. Not far from the temple of Ise there is an entire amusement park inspired on Spanish history and architecture. One of

the most delicious Japanese spongy cakes is called *Castela*, after Castile, one of the formative kingdoms of Spain. Tellingly, the best Castela cakes are still made in Nagasaki, a port city opened for limited foreign trade at the instigation of a Spanish missionary, Cosme de Torres, in 1571. Although all these facts could be considered as just anecdotal examples, ranged among many others, of Japan's appetite for everything foreign, they are related to a fascinating, albeit frustrated episode in the early modern history of globalisation.

If the reader makes the trip back from Japan to Spain and visits Coria del Rio, a small town close to Seville, he or she will see the statue of a Japanese nobleman by the name of Hasekura Tsunenaga, who led an embassy from the land of the Rising Sun to Spain in 1614, during which he converted to the Catholic faith and was later received in Rome by Pope Paul V. As a side effect to his trip, since some members of his retinue never returned to Japan and settled among the local population, *Japón* (Japanese in old Spanish) became a not uncommon family name in Andalusia. Even today, there are around a thousand *Japones* in Spain tracing their origins back to that diplomatic episode (114,115)



Plate 114. Statue of Ambassador Hasekura Tsunenaga in Coria del Rio, Spain.



Plate 115. Fresco in the Quirinal Palace, Rome, showing ambassador Hasekura conversing with the Spanish friar Luis Sotelo, 1615.

The Embassy led by Hasekura to Spain was part of a pattern of interaction between both countries, which started with the arrival of the Jesuit Francisco Xavier in Kagoshima, in southern Japan, on 15 August 1549. He was accompanied by two other Spaniards and by a renegade Samurai, Yajiro, whom they had encountered in Malacca and was to become Xavier's interpreter during his mission.

The Spanish presence in Japan, preceded by the arrival of some Portuguese, was to last several more decades, until the edicts promulgating the ban on foreigners were issued by the Tokugawa regime. Thus Japan entered a period of self-imposed semi-isolation that was broken by Commodore Perry's gunboat diplomacy more than two centuries later. During that interval, only a token Dutch presence was allowed to remain in Japan, confined to the remote island of Dejima.

To English-speaking audiences accustomed to the televised version of *Shogun*, the best-selling novel by James Clavell, the Iberian presence in Japan is associated

with the Black Ship run by avaricious Jesuits and with papist conspiracies seeking to impose Catholicism by force on a tolerant land. Of course, Clavell's protagonist, an English pilot in the service of the Dutch, was meant to be commended for his efforts at disrupting any contacts between the Japanese and the Spaniards and Portuguese.

In fact there is a tradition of American scholarship on Japan dating back to the late nineteenth century, which is based on the denigration of the Iberians. The purpose, of course, was to show that the best possible version of Western civilisation, the one the Japanese and other Asians should follow, was represented by the rising spirit of capitalism embodied by the Anglo-Saxon and other Protestant nations. Besides, at that time the United States already had an eye on the Spanish possessions in the Pacific, so any means towards weakening the moral stance of the adversary were useful. So, it is in that context that we can quote the words of William E. Griffis, an American teacher in Tokyo and respected author of one of the first histories of Japan in English, dated 1876, for whom the arrival of the Iberians to Japan brought to the island nothing more than "troubles innumerable. The crop was priestcraft of the worst type, political intrigue, religious persecution, the inquisition, the slave trade, the propagation of Christianity by the sword, sedition, rebellion, and civil war"⁴⁶.

Needless to say, the reality of the encounter between the Iberian nations and Japan was far more nuanced than the apocalyptic picture depicted by Mr. Griffis and his followers to this day. Exploring and divulging that experience may teach us something about how globalisation is constantly being made and unmade by the complex interweaving of myriad threads. It can also demonstrate that the history of globalisation has many dimensions and protagonists other than the archetypical City banker or the Californian computer geek. It can finally show us the possibilities and limits of dialogue and understanding among civilisations in testing times.

Prior to the Spanish missionaries' setting foot on Japanese soil, some Portuguese traders and adventurers had landed in the country in 1543. The most revolutionary effect of their arrival on the history of Japan was the introduction of the musket. The mastery and dissemination of the new weapon was to prove instrumental in tilting the balance of power among the different warlords in the civil wars that were ravaging the archipelago. The two other novelties brought by the Iberians were a new religion and alternative patterns of trade and interaction with the outer world.

Since they had reached Japan from the south, the Japanese called both Portuguese and Spaniards *Nanban-jin* or Southern Barbarians, a term used for

⁴⁶ William E. Griffis, *The Mikado's Empire*, p.268.

people like the Vietnamese or Malays with whom the Japanese had established relations long since. Later on, *Nanban* came to denote both an art style blending Iberian and Japanese influences and a period in the history of Japan from 1543, the date of the arrival of the first Portuguese, to 1614-1639 and the promulgation of the successive Seclusion Edicts by the Tokugawa regime.

Contrary to the prevailing American vision, the arrival of the *Nanban-jin* was not the cause of civil war or religious discord in Japan. The country had been in a state of upheaval long before the first encounter with the Europeans. Significantly, in Japanese history that long period of inner strife is known as *Sengoku Jidai*, the “Country at War” or “Warring States”. What was at stake was nothing less than the final destiny of Japan as either a motley collection of fiefdoms or a unified polity.

There is no doubt that those were troubled times for Japan. Conflicts among disputing feudal warlords were prevalent in the absence of an effective central government, as the Emperor was kept secluded and isolated in Kyoto. The Shogunate was also a declining force, a shadow of what it had been under the powerful Ashikaga family. Religion was also involved in the state of anarchy, since the numerous Buddhist sects confronted each other, sometimes violently, in order to secure the favour of the most powerful warlords. Zen monasteries in particular were notorious for their efforts at monopolising the limited trade exchanges with China to the exclusion of other Buddhist schools.

So when Francisco Xavier and his Jesuit companions landed in Japan they had to face a number of apparently insurmountable difficulties. Ignorance of the language, the strangeness of the customs, fierce opposition by the local priests and the maddening intricacies of the Japanese political scene were only the main ones. But against all odds, after a few years they had succeeded in establishing a burgeoning religious and, yes, trading presence in Japan. Ultimately, that very success was to cause the final undoing of the first encounter between Europe and Japan.

Although the Jesuits were funded by a Spaniard and are usually associated with Spain, theirs was from the beginning a multinational enterprise that combined a high degree of centralisation with an outstanding capacity to adapt to local circumstances. In short, they were probably the first—and remain to our days one of the most successful—“*glocal*” enterprises. Their experience in Japan is paradigmatic of the way they operated when entering into a foreign “market” for converting souls and, when necessary to sustain their mission, also for making profit.

To start with, the first Jesuit missionaries in Japan were masters at changing tactics when appropriate. It was not necessarily out of duplicity, but out of necessity.

At first, following their earlier experience in India, Xavier and his followers tried to approach the local population in a humble way, trying to reach out to the poor. But when they were despised and humiliated by the proud *daimyos* and the powerful Buddhist monks of Kyoto because they were behaving like beggars, they tried a different tack. From then on, while caring for the lower classes, by erecting the first hospitals and orphanages in Japan, the Jesuits concentrated their efforts on converting some of the most powerful *daimyos* together with their closest entourage.

To achieve this goal two means were put into effect. The first was to act as intermediaries with the Portuguese trading posts in mainland Asia, ensuring that Portuguese carracks and later Spanish galleons would touch land in territories controlled by converted warlords, so adding to their wealth and power and concomitantly helping to secure much needed financing for the missions.

The second and more innovative method was to start a policy of “Japanisation” so that the missionaries would eat, speak and conduct themselves generally in accord with Japanese customs. It was the beginning of one of the most interesting, but alas short-lived, processes of mutual acculturation in modern history.

Thus the Jesuit missionaries pioneered a cultural exchange between Europe and Japan with repercussions still in our days. The first European books printed in Japan were translations into the vernacular of religious works by Spanish authors like Fray Luis de Granada. Japanese classics like the *Heike Monogatari* were also printed in romaji transliterations (using the Roman alphabet) for the benefit of Europeans learning Japanese. Furthermore, in this period the first systematic grammars and dictionaries of Japanese were compiled with the phonetic kana adjacent to the Chinese ideograms, thus inaugurating the method by which generations of foreigners have tried to master Japanese to this day.

Apart from bringing the first printing press with movable metal type to Japan, the Jesuits and other *Nanban-jin* also introduced Western painting, music, astronomy, cartography, medicine and gastronomy, so that many European and American products entered the Japanese diet then, along with some fashions in dress and language.

Many Japanese *daimyos*, samurais and even kabuki actors adopted the habit of wearing Iberian dresses and the Japanese language became interspersed with words of Portuguese and Spanish extraction: *tabako* (tobacco), *karuta* (card), *kappa* (coat), *bidro* (crystal), *pan* (bread) or even *tempura*, the Japanese food whose etymology is related to the Latin “*tempora*”, the “times” of Lenten fasting before Easter.

Even the *chanoyu* or tea ceremony was influenced by the *Nanban* style, since quite a few tea masters either became Christians or were seduced by the aesthetics

of the Catholic liturgy. As an example, there still remain several tea bowls of the renowned Oribe School with a Christian cross designed on them. Significantly, all the major Jesuit residences in Japan had a tea- room with the corresponding utensils to receive local dignitaries.

But probably the most visibly attractive products of the *Nanban* era were the *Nanban byobu* or picture screens depicting Iberian motives with a Japanese technique, normally the *yamato-e* used by the local Kano school. Many of those screens, now in European, American and Japanese museums or private collections, show scenes with *Nanban-jin* arriving in Japanese ports or mingling with the locals in the streets, markets or theatres. Invariably, for the amusement of the local viewers, the Iberians were painted with prominent noses and exaggerated moustaches. The Japanese also adapted their mastery of lacquerware techniques, or *maki-e*, to make European-style furniture, particularly coffers and chests of drawers (116, 117).



Plate 116. Nanban inspired maki-e, or lacquerware, coffer with Japanese designs, circa 1600. Kyoto National Museum.



Plate 117. A *byōbu* or folding screen depicting the arrival of Nanban ships in a Japanese port.

Forced as they were by circumstances to be comparative anthropologists, the first Jesuits in Japan soon started to draw parallels between their new country and their land of origin. In this respect, the situation in Japan at the time of Francisco Xavier's arrival resembled that of Spain some generations before. Xavier's aristocratic family had been involved in the fight for Spanish unification, albeit on the defeated side. So he could well understand the psychology and motivations of the different warlords. He and his fellow Jesuits were soon also attracted by many aspects of the Japanese code of conduct prevalent in the upper classes. The importance attached to honour and personal dignity, the strict discipline and sense of duty towards the superiors and the readiness to risk one's life in the pursuit of a higher goal, were traits of character praised in imperial Spain as well as in the statutes of the Jesuit order. No wonder that on receiving the first reports from Japan, the most prominent Jesuit author of the time, Baltasar Gracián, whose books on ethics in a changing world are still read in business schools today, concluded that the Japanese were "the Spaniards of Asia".

Unfortunately, that comparison also held some truth when it came to the methods used in both countries for achieving political unity. Spain had expelled the non-converted Jews in 1492 (as both England and France had done centuries before, which is no excuse, of course) and, under the first rulers of the Tokugawa

dynasty, Japan was about to apply the same policy to most foreigners. Intolerance is not the patrimony of just one country, continent or religion, it seems.

So, when at the end of the sixteenth century Toyotomi Hideyoshi emerged as the most powerful warlord and effectively put an end to the period of civil war in Japan, he rapidly realised that his dreams of political hegemony might be endangered by the success of the *Nanban-jin* and in particular of the Jesuit missions. He feared divided loyalties on the part of the many Christian daimyos and their servants. He then thought of dispensing with the foreigners and their religion as the easiest solution to his predicament, but there was a practical problem. Though he promulgated some edicts forbidding *Nanban* religion, he soon realised that he could not do without *Nanban* trade. So he initiated a policy of limited toleration punctuated by episodes of outright persecution, like the one culminating in the first public execution of the Spanish and Japanese Christians in Nagasaki in 1597.

Meanwhile, he explored possibilities to open up trade with other parties apart from the Portuguese and the Jesuits. He also tried to divert the attention of the Christian daimyos by sending them off in his ill-fated attempts at conquering Korea. In fact, the first European to enter Korea was the Jesuit Gregorio de Céspedes, who accompanied the Christian Japanese army as a chaplain and wrote a detailed description of the military campaign.

Furthermore, several events came to complicate the position of the *Nanban-jin*. Paradoxically, the first one was the opening up of Japan—to other religious orders apart from the Jesuits in 1593. From that moment on, Dominicans, Franciscans and Augustinians were allowed to enter Japan from Manila thus undermining the ascendancy achieved by the Jesuits and entering into competition with them in the “market” for souls. In reciprocity, several Japanese ships were permitted to visit Manila every year. A small Japanese community settled in the Philippines and the Spanish authorities even enlisted Japanese samurai warriors to defend the Manila Galleons.

Ultimately, as relations between the Spanish Philippines and Japan grew closer, the climate of political mistrust became more evident. The Governor General of Manila was worried by alleged attempts by Hideyoshi to use the Japanese community there as a fifth column to evict the Spaniards. Conversely, the Japanese *caudillo* and his successor, the first Tokugawa, Ieyasu, resented the ever-growing presence of *Nanban* merchants and priests in their territories. In this context, the arrival of the English and the Dutch, two Protestant nations eager to challenge the dominant position achieved by the Iberians proved to be fatal for the first European encounter with Japan. The newcomers soon engaged in a

negative propaganda campaign against the Iberians, who reciprocated in kind. While Protestants were conspiring against Catholics and the other way around, it was all too easy for the Japanese to manipulate them and set European against European. At the end of the day all became losers.

As political relations worsened, the Spanish crown and the religious orders tried to mend fences. To that end, several diplomatic missions were sent to Japan from Manila and vice versa. As a result of those contacts several more additions were made to the catalogue of *Nanban* novelties reaching Japan. For instance Ambassador Luis Navarrete brought the first elephant to Japan as a gift to Hideyoshi in 1597. The elephant was called “Don Pedro” and its arrival was celebrated in Japanese contemporary chronicles. Another ambassador, Sebastián de Vizcaíno, was the first to bring Jerez wine (sherry) as a compliment to his Japanese hosts in 1611. Most significantly, in his second Embassy, Vizcaíno came into contact with Date Masamune, the daimyo of Sendai, in northern Japan. The daimyo asked to establish direct commercial relations with Mexico and Spain. With the help of Spanish experts in 1613 he built a Japanese galleon, the San Juan Bautista, also called in Japanese the “*Date Maru*”. A full-scale replica of this ship can be viewed nowadays in the port of Ishinomaki (118).



Plate 118. A replica, following the original plans, of the Japanese- built galleon San Juan Bautista at the port of Ishinomaki. The modern-day galleon resisted the 2011 tsunami and earthquakes that devastated the neighbouring coastline.

It was precisely on board the San Juan Bautista that Ambassador Hasekura and his retinue travelled to Mexico and then to Spain with the consequences already noted. But Hasekura's embassy was ill timed. While he was negotiating further contacts between Spain and Japan an important development took place in his own country. In 1614 Tokugawa Ieyasu issued the Christian Expulsion Edict prohibiting all Christian activity among Japanese. The shogun also limited foreign trade first to Hirado and Nagasaki and finally only to Dejima under the most restrictive terms. The edict of 1614 initiated a fully-fledged campaign of extermination against Christians in Japan. At the time of its promulgation, the number of Japanese Christians was around three hundred thousand. Thirty years later only several thousand hidden converts had survived the executions and forced recantations. For centuries, Christians in Japan had to pray underground and in secret. As in the extraordinary novel of 1966 by Endo Shusaku, himself a Christian, an ominous *Silence* fell on them.

When, in 1853, the country was forced to open at gunpoint by the Black Ships of Commodore Perry, the West, this time embodied by the then fledgling power of the United States, had almost forgotten about the existence of Japan and, even in the most learned circles, knowledge about its art and culture had receded to pre-Nanban times. Under the Meiji Restoration, conscious of their limited capacity to maintain their domains closed behind a fragile rice-paper curtain, the Japanese elites decided to implement a policy of modernisation and adaptation of foreign technologies to the national character as they understood it. As a result, even among the Japanese intelligentsia, a sense of dislike and rejection of the country's traditions grew up. Many Buddhist and Shinto temples and their artistic treasures were abandoned to rot and decay since the prevailing mood, inspired from above, was to favour those aesthetic styles and fashions imported from abroad. This situation was not very different among many influential art historians and critics in the West, who usually considered Japanese art and Oriental art in general as a deviation, even as an aberration with regard to the ideal model represented by the Western canon. Such views only came to be challenged thanks, mainly, to the collaborative efforts of two eccentric figures in their respective milieus. One was a US citizen of Spanish descent, Ernest Francisco Fenollosa. The other was his Japanese pupil, cultural mediator and would-be tea-master, Okakura Kazuko (119).



ERNEST FRANCISCO FENOLLOSA
Born February 18, 1853. Died September 21, 1908.

Plate 119. Ernest Francisco Fenollosa, the Schliemann of Oriental Art.

Ernest Fenollosa was the son of a Spanish virtuoso violinist and piano-player and professor who had settled in the New England town of Salem and had married into one of its wealthiest families. The Silbees, for such was the family name, had acquired their riches through the flourishing trade with the East. When one of their younger daughters became enamoured of the musical Spaniard, he had already become a local celebrity entertaining the affluent members of the community and teaching music to their children. They married and Ernest was born in 1853. He became with the passage of time a sensitive and curious young man interested in philosophy, art history and poetry. Upon graduating from Harvard with honours, he found himself at a loss about his future and was glad to accept an invitation extended by Edward Morse, a professor from the same town of Salem, to join him as a guest lecturer at the Imperial University of Tokyo, whose board was interested in attracting foreign brains to educate the new Meiji elite. So in 1878 and recently married, Fenollosa made his way to the East. Once in Japan he immediately realised that the country was rapidly turning its back on its own past and in the process was endangering its national heritage. Accompanied by one of his most brilliant pupils, Okakura, he spent entire summer recesses touring isolated monasteries and pagodas, trying to convince the local priests to uncover their hidden and, for the most part, neglected artistic treasures, like the famous statue of Kannon in the temple of Horyuji in Nara. Through hard

lobbying he persuaded some members of the Government and even the Imperial Household to modify their cultural policy in favour of identifying, preserving and cataloguing the islands' decaying artistic legacy. He also became involved in mobilising the remaining living treasures of Japanese culture, like the last painters of the Kano school, as well as some interested aristocrats so that they would start a movement to educate the young in the appreciation of their own heritage. Fenollosa thus became a cultural agitator in his adopted country, whose Buddhist religion he even accepted as his own. He was so successful that soon there was an active minority of the Japanese who advocated a return to the country's national tradition as a counterbalance to the excesses the Meiji obsession with everything foreign. One of the first practical effects of the new attitude was the passing of legislation to protect the national heritage and prevent its removal abroad. Okakura was one of the main proponents of the law and could not but contemplate with disgust how his mentor, Fenollosa, despite his protestations in favour of the preservation of the national art, had amassed a considerable collection of Japanese paintings and crafts which ended up in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, where it can be contemplated today.

Despite their disagreements, both Okakura and Fenollosa accepted an invitation of the Japanese Government to tour the West and study the best European and American methods of art education to be implanted in Japan. During the trip, their ways parted and while Okakura became a feted celebrity among the United States *beau monde*, particularly among rich widows seduced by the exotic chic, Fenollosa devoted part of his time to touring cities in Europe and America explaining to sympathetic audiences the marvels of the East and arranging collections of Eastern art in Western museums. He spent the rest of his time, until his premature death in 1908, writing articles and essays on Oriental art. From a collection of unfinished notes, his widow, Mary Fenollosa, was able to complete what was to be his major posthumous legacy, a monumental and original study entitled *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, where Fenollosa expanded his idea of the underlying unity of art and of civilisation, in its Western and Eastern incarnations. In the introduction to this work he made clear his cosmopolitan credo when he wrote: "we are approaching the time when the art work of all the world of man may be looked upon as one, as infinite variations in a single kind of mental and social effort"⁴⁷. He also inadvertently contributed to the further meeting of East and West: unsuspected by him at the time of his death, his notes on Noh theatre and classic Chinese and Japanese poetry would be borrowed from his widow by Ezra Pound, who would use them as material for his own translations of Oriental poetry and as inspiration for his celebrated

⁴⁷ Ernest F. Fenollosa, *Epochs of Chinese and Japanese Art*, p.xxiv.

Cantos, one of the foundational texts of Anglo-American Modernism. Pound in his turn introduced the great Irish poet W. B. Yeats to Fenollosa's work on Noh drama, which radically influenced Yeats's approach to theatre and the plays of his later years bear witness to the inspiration of Japan. Thus Ernest Fenollosa, a Hispano-American lover of the Orient became another bridge between East and West, the Ancient and the Modern.

CHAPTER 7

GOLDEN FRUITS FROM THE GOLDEN AGES

As many Spaniards were pioneering the era of globalisation, connecting worlds that had remained far apart from each other, others chose to follow paths closer to home, but by no means less adventurous or fruitful for the enlargement of the mind and the spirit. Their journeys were not across continents and oceans, but into the inner recesses of the soul in search of a deeper meaning to their lives and to better understand the complex nature of man, not an easy trip by any conceivable means. Some of them did so by following the Mystic Way explored by sages of all times and places, including those who had lived in Hispania at the age of the Three Cultures: Sufi Muslims like Ibn Arabi, esoteric Jews like Moses de Leon, or militant Christians like Raymond Lull. They were the exponents of the great Spanish mystic Renaissance, a narrow and swirling path to wisdom and bliss that offered -and still offers to those willing and perseverant enough to walk it to the end- an alternative to the broad, trodden roads to knowledge and profit that came to prevail in the West.

The Mystic Way in Spain is usually associated with three names: Fray Luis de León, St Theresa de Jesús and St. John of the Cross. But their well-deserved prominence must not make us forget that, like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, they were just the summits of a subterranean and very powerful current that swept through Spain following the publication in 1500 of the *Book of Exercises for the Spiritual Life*, authored by a Benedictine monk and abbot of the Monastery of Montserrat, García de Cisneros. The *Book* was envisaged as a manual for the instruction of monks in prayer and contemplation, so that through ascending steps their souls could achieve unity with God. This work by García de Cisneros was one of the main sources of inspiration that led St Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit Order, to write his own *Spiritual Exercises* in which mysticism is understood not as a goal in itself, but as a means to fortify the soldiers of God as they prepare for the spiritual conquest of the world. The Jesuit order was created, in this respect, at the very intersection where the inward and outward energies of early modern Spain, and of early modern Europe since it was a multinational corporation from its very outset, converged.

A less active path than the one chosen by the Jesuits, though only in external appearances, was the one taken by Fray Luis de León. He was an Augustinian monk and professor at the University of Salamanca, whose role in the birth of early modernity we have examined before. But, in contrast to Victoria and his

fellow clerics of Salamanca, Fray Luis was less interested in the developments that were taking place in the New World and their legal and moral consequences than in delving into his self and in exploring poetic means of expression that could better convey the mysterious beauty to be found there. For, contrary to the exploits of so many of his compatriots, his was not to be a discovery of distant lands and oceans, but the search for a geography of the spirit whose description, instead of the language of cosmography or astronomy, would require a new language of the soul.

What makes the case of Fray Luis de León special in comparison with his great contemporaries, particularly St. John of the Cross whose mysticism was far more passionate, is his unmatched mastery of the classical poetic mould to convey a spiritual message mediated by a very humanist cast of mind. Such a difficult equilibrium was possible because Fray Luis was, above all, one of the finest poets produced by any literature ever. One does not have to be a devout Catholic to enjoy the delicately crafted balance between form and content, sound and meaning that pervades his best lyrical pieces, particularly the *Prophecy of the Tagus* and, for many, his masterpiece: *The Retired Life*. Dámaso Alonso, a twentieth-century poet and literary critic, wrote that Fray Luis's poetry was akin to Horace's *Odes* because of his measured meters and sense of proportion, though it was far more complex in the use of stylistic devices, some of them almost cinematographic in their dynamism. There is another good reason for the comparison. Horace was a man of Classical antiquity who lived in times of transition between the Roman Republic and Empire and found it difficult, though no impossible, to accommodate his political allegiances to the new regime. Fray Luis lived also in a transitional political and cultural period in Spain when the world of mediaevalism, though still lingering, had given way to modernity, and the assertiveness of Church and Empire, with their aspiration towards order and their suspicion of dissent, was increasingly inimical to a pugnacious character like his. It was this trait in his personality that led him to have a more than unpleasant encounter with the Inquisition. In the most dramatic episode of his life, the jealousies of other scholarly priests, who accused him of heresy, led to his imprisonment for more than four years. Finally declared innocent, he returned to his university chair and started his lesson after this prolonged absence with the famous words: "*As we were saying yesterday...*". The tribulations of his life and times incited him to try to find peace and solace in the search of truth and beauty. The search adopted sometimes the form of a neo-Platonic journey, as in his *Ode* to his friend, the musician Francisco Salinas, where the poet was closer than ever to a mystic union as he ascended the musical scales to the realm where life and death are one and the same. Though there are good translations in English I cannot but yield to the unsurpassed sonority of the original:

“El aire se serena
y viste de hermosura y luz no usada,
Salinas, cuando suena
la música extremada
por vuestra sabia mano gobernada
(...)
¡Oh, suene de continuo,
Salinas, vuestro son en mis oídos,
Por quien al bien divino
Despiertan los sentidos
Quedando a lo demás amortecidos;”⁴⁸.

In most instances, the quest for a shelter from the travails of life, led Fray Luis not to mystical summits, but to a Horatian *Beatus ille*, following not the ultimately self-destructive way of the mystic, but the hidden path of the sages of all times, far away from the noise and bustle of the world, leading to a earthly blossoming orchard:

“! Qué descansada vida
la del que huye del mundanal ruido,
y sigue la escondida
senda por donde han ido
los pocos sabios que en el mundo han sido;
(...)

Vivir quiero conmigo
gozar quiero del bien que debo al cielo,
a solas, sin testigo,
libre de amor, de celo,
de odio, de esperanzas, de recelo.

⁴⁸ The air becomes serene/ and puts on an unusual beauty and light/ Salinas, when that exceptional music resounds/ which is controlled by your skillful hand (...) Oh, let your music sound forever/, Salinas, in my ears/ for it awakens/ to divine delight one's senses/ and makes them deaf to all else. Translated by Elias L. Rivers, in *Renaissance and Baroque Poetry in Spain*. Illinois: Waveland Pr Inc, 1988. pp. 94-96.

Del monte en la ladera
por mi mano plantado tengo un huerto,
que con la primavera
de bella flor cubierto
ya muestra en esperanza el fruto cierto ⁴⁹.

The mundanely ascetic evocation in which the poetry of Fray Luis de León culminates does not belong, properly speaking, to the Way of the Mystic. For Fray Luis the appeal of the world, though idealised in pastoral reminiscences, is still too strong and his poetic nature is too attracted to the serene harmony of the classics to let him go astray into the highest realms of spirituality. Such was not the case with St John of the Cross or St Theresa of Ávila, for whom lyrical beauty was not an end in itself, but a station on the journey towards the total fusion of the self with the ultimate reality. No wonder then that, at its most sublime, the poetry of both mystics, though cognisant of the established Classical and Renaissance canons, radically departed from them to explore new formal avenues whose sources are closer to popular tradition and, in the case of St John, connect through a myriad subterranean channels with the legacy of the Sufi Muslims and the Jewish Kabbalists. Such varied wells from which St John drank converged, nevertheless, in a unity of expression made possible only because it was of a piece with a diamantine unity of purpose which infused all his life and his work: the divinisation of the world, the mystic union of the mundane and the sacred, of man and God. In St John's poetry we witness the sacralisation of language so that it becomes an instrument able to convey the encounter of the Lover and the Beloved. Thus sublimated, poetry and the poet can take on, as in Ibn Arabi's song to his soul, any form... and its opposite:

“Mi Amado las montañas,
Los valles solitarios nemorosos,
las ínsulas extrañas,
los ríos sonorosos,
el silbo de los aires amorosos.

⁴⁹ How tranquil is the life/ of him who, shunning the vain world's uproar,/may follow, free from strife/ the hidden path, of yore/chosen by the few who conned true wisdom's lore! (...) I to myself would live,/ to enjoy the blessings that to Heaven I owe/ alone, contemplative,/ and freely love forgo,/ nor hope, fear, hatred, jealousy e'er know/ Upon the bare hillside/ an orchard I have made with my own hand/ that in the sweet springtide/ all in fair flower doth stand/ and promise sure of fruit shows through the land. Translated by Aubrey F. G. Bell, in *Ten Centuries of Spanish Poetry: An Anthology in English Verse with Original Texts, from the 11th Century to the Generation of 1898* (ed. by Eleanor L Turnbull). Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1955.

La noche sosegada,
en par de los levantes de la aurora,
la música callada,
la soledad sonora,
la cena que recrea y enamora”⁵⁰.

The aesthetic and spiritual summit represented by Spanish lyrical mysticism was only reachable because the Spanish language had become, from the linguistically uncertain and hybrid times of Alfonso X, a medium mature and subtle enough to convey a multiplicity of meanings in the most refined and varied literary forms. And the same can be said, as we will see, about the visual arts where the influence of the early Italian Renaissance and of the northern masters gave way to one of the most powerful pictorial schools in the history of Western art and, in fact, of any art.

The poetry of Fray Luis, St John or St Theresa was just a resplendent island in the prodigious artistic archipelago known as the Spanish Golden Age. As happened when we visited cities like Cordova, Seville or Toledo during our trip to the mediaeval Era of *Convivencia*, merely listing what was going on in Spain during the sixteenth and first half of the seventeenth centuries in the domains of poetry, both religious and secular, drama, the novel, painting and architecture makes us simply wonder in awe. It is difficult to find any other early modern national tradition, except in Italy that could surpass such a continuous display of sheer creative genius in so many diverse areas. And that happened, let us not forget, at the same time that Spain was forging and sustaining a more politically complex and geographically extended polity than any yet known.

The first intimations of things to come can be found during the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella. It was at that period that the first fruits of the Spanish Renaissance started to ripen. We have already made reference to the channels through which Italianate influences made their way into Spain, both in Italy, because of the growing Spanish presence there, and in the Iberian Peninsula thanks to a generation of scholars immersed in the *studia humanitatis*. The vogue for learning Latin, though as elsewhere in Western Europe, still the preserve of a minority, reached a pinnacle in the fledgling state when Queen Isabella decided to study the classics with her children’s tutor, the remarkable Beatriz Galindo, one of the first humanist women in Europe, also known as “La Latina” because of her

⁵⁰ My love is as the hills,/ the lonely valleys clad with forest-trees,/ the rushing, sounding rills,/ strange isles in distant seas,/ lover-like whisperings, murmurs of breeze./ My love is hush-of-night,/ is dawn’s first breathings in the heav’ n above,/still music veil’ d from sight,/calm that can echoes move,/the feast that brings new strength – the feast of love. Translated by B. Allison Peers, in *The Mystics of Spain*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1951.

command of Virgil's language. But her talents did not stop there. After having studied philosophy and literature in Italian universities, most probably with the great grammarian Nebrija, she learnt medicine and taught at the University of Salamanca. However, according to the historian and humanist Lucio Marineo Sículo, the honour of being the first female university professor in Spain and probably elsewhere belonged to an almost forgotten figure, Luisa de Medrano, who in 1508 taught at the same university. To give an idea of her precocity it should suffice to mention that the first woman to hold the post of assistant professor at Harvard was Alice Hamilton, appointed in...1919. As to Oxford or Cambridge, the first female professor was the archaeologist Dorothy Garrod in...1939 (120).



Plate 120. Beatriz Galindo, *La Latina*, anonymous portrait now at the Lázaro Galdiano Foundation, Madrid.

The prevalence of Latin among the learned Spanish elite and the influence of Italian fashion in the field of letters, best represented in the works of Garcilaso de la Vega and Juan Boscán, introducers of Italian meters such as the hendecasyllable into Spanish poetry, soon gave way to a national style with fewer and fewer foreign affectations and tending towards a more natural and simple rendering of feelings and thoughts. It is already glimpsed in the last poetry that Garcilaso wrote prior to his premature death. The exemplary Spanish style, according to the humanist Juan de Valdés, had to make it possible “to write as I speak, choosing

words that better reflect what I mean, in the simplest manner that I can, avoiding any mannerism”.

Apart from the reaction at the top, the most effective resistance to classical and foreign influences came from a strong nativist current. This current had its more immediate origins in the works of the “*mester de clerecia*”—a kind of learned poetry written by priests at the beginning of the thirteenth century—best represented by Gonzalo de Berceo and his conscious decision to write in plain Spanish, or “román paladino”, the language spoken among neighbours, because, by his own confession, trying his hand at it was worth at least a glass of wine, something that could not be said if he had written in Latin, a language which was hardly understood by ordinary folk. The same inclination to find sources of inspiration among the simplest mores and customs of the people can be found in the *Romanceros*, or collections of popular poetry and songs which were compiled during the late Middle Ages and reached a greater audience at the beginning of the fifteenth century thanks to the printing press, contributing to the introduction of a powerful realist vein in the nascent modern Spanish literature, both in form and content.

The triumph of realism, though not completely devoid of classical references, is best exemplified by the picaresque novel, one of the most genuine and long-lasting contributions of Hispanic literature to Western civilisation. Though the inception of the genre is usually associated with the first edition of *El Lazarillo de Tormes*, in 1554, some of its main characteristics—the figure of the antihero; the first person point of view from which the story is narrated; the satirical and in many instances openly amoral stance of the protagonist; and the pervading pessimism about human nature and its limited possibilities of redemption, at least while on this earth—had precedents in two masterly works, one from the late Middle Ages and the other from the onset of the modern age. The first is the *Book of True Love*, written by Juan Ruiz, Archpriest of Hita, around 1343. In its stanzas, deployed as a sort of narrative poem, there is a condensation of all the literary, mundane and sacred currents that had converged in Spain in the preceding centuries, from the Latin classics and colloquial Arabic to the proverbs of the popular Castilian folksongs, and also including Provençal poetry and the goliardic tradition. The result, however, far from being a *pastiche*, another allegory or a succession of moralistic sermons, was one of the most vivid, raucous, socially critical and psychologically insightful works of the entire Middle Ages. It is on a par, for some critics, and I can mention here Gerald Brennan, with Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, and at least when it comes to the maturity of the style, the reflection of a greater ethnic and religious diversity and its appeal to a wider audience, it is more modern than the great English bard’s poem. Furthermore, some of the characters evoked by the protagonist—the author himself, though in

a stylised form—particularly the lovers Don Melón and Doña Endrina and the bawdy go-between *Trotaconventos*, were to reappear under different names but with similar functions in what is wildly considered to be the first proto-novel in the modern Western tradition, *La Celestina*, written by a converted Jew, Fernando de Rojas and published in 1499 as the *Comedy of Calisto and Melibea* (121).



Plate 121. The *Comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, Burgos edition, 1499.

Conceived of as a succession of dialogues among the main characters—Calisto and Melibea, the two lovers; the go-between la Celestina, plus two servants and two prostitutes—the plot is deviously simple. It deals with a conventional tale of love between a young man and a young woman that ends tragically with the deaths of both. What constitutes the real centre of gravity of the drama—or tragicomedy as it came to be known—is la Celestina, the old hag whose multifarious designs spin a web of intrigues that ends up entangling and suffocating all lives around her and causing ultimately her own demise. But far from being presented to the reader as a inhuman sum of all evils and more than deserving her punishment, the central character is shown to us as a very real and, one is tempted to say, likable person, one whose past indulgence in all kind of hedonistic pleasures and devotion when older to procuring satisfaction for others as a go-between with wicked and witty arts make her almost ascetic in her depravity. Hers is not a world governed by morality or reason, but by the pursuit of a sort of natural (in the sense of down-to-earth), material and

passionately carnal happiness, a pursuit that, carried to its extremes, destroys everything in its way, including the purest and most reasonable of lovers. *La Celestina* is therefore not a larger-than-life character, but a true-to-life one, hence her striking modernity and universal appeal.

Many of *La Celestina*'s traits are also found in the subsequent picaresque genre: its amorality rather than immorality; its flouting of social conventions; making the lower classes' point of view the very centre of the story; its use of popular language; naturalistic descriptions not as subordinate additions, but as the main stylistic devices in the narrative; the prevalence of the satiric vein and the emphasis put on the development of character as driven from within, and not from any external supernatural force, be it pagan or Christian. Indeed they recur in many modern and contemporary novels that trace their origins to this most Spanish invention. It is true that there are anticipations of the genre, for example Apuleius and his *Golden Ass*, in the Byzantine novel or in some Italian authors like Boccaccio, but those trends were condensed, expanded and perfected in the tradition inaugurated by Archpriest of Hita and his *Book of True Love*, and then *La Celestina* and *El Lazarillo de Tormes*. It gave them a new lease of literary life in a powerful medium that would have immense repercussions in Western literature, particularly, but not only, in Anglo-American letters, from Defoe, Fielding and Dickens to Mark Twain and Saul Bellow.

The Mystical Way and the picaresque novel are two extremes explored by the Spanish creative genius during the first half of the Golden Age. The former tended towards an inward analysis of the self, discovering and expressing deep and fluctuating states of the mind that would much later be analysed by Freud and the modern neurosciences. More than Montaigne and long before the stream of consciousness was invented as a term by William James, it was St. Theresa in her plain, sincere writings, mostly devoid of any *a posteriori* rationalisation, who first revealed to a wider audience the more intimate and recondite mental processes of a human being immersed in an everyday, matter-of-fact life, from the clatter and rattle of the communal kitchen to the quietude of the monastic cell.

Despite the fact that the mystics did not shy away from experiencing in their own soul and flesh the torments and frustrations that accompany the search of a higher form of life, their journey ended, or so they hoped, with the rewards of a union of their souls with God in ecstasy, famously given sensuous rendering in Bernini's sculpture of St. Theresa (122).

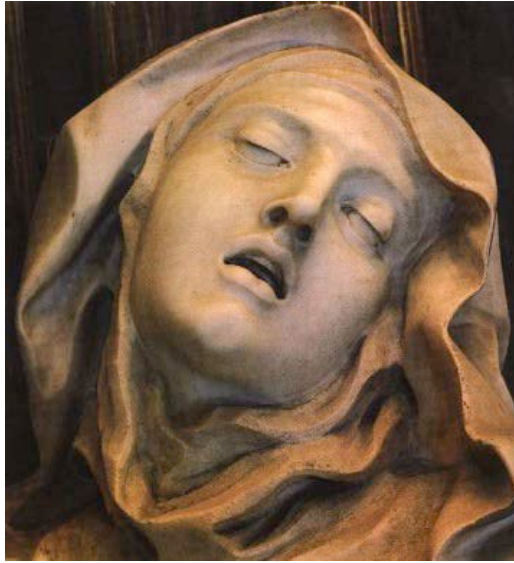


Plate 122. Expression of ecstasy in the face of St Theresa of Jesús, as rendered by Bernini.

It was not necessarily so in the picaresque novel. Though there are intimations of redemption at the end of *El Lazarillo* or *Guzmán de Alfarache*, an even more sordid *pícaro* invented by Mateo Alemán who ended up purging his sins in the galleys, they deal with lives largely devoid of any possibility of sublimation. For the *pícaro*, or rascal, normally a boy growing up in a world of adults, life was far from being a bed of roses with the occasional thorn to prove their devotional mettle. It was a bed of thorns, full stop. A picaresque story reads like a succession of episodes and characters collected to show the worst side human nature. Caught in such an environment, the *pícaro* cannot count on divine grace, but only on his own skills and wits, honed on the go, to survive. In a world of sinners and criminals he has to sin and commit crimes even if they go against his better nature, or what is left of it. When they do appear in the narrative, beauty and charity are shown as the most exotic flowers in a jungle of weeds and carnivorous plants. Obviously, such an unabashedly pessimistic view of the world, though offering a salutary contrast to the stylised and spiritualised literary modes followed by the humanist and mystic authors, with their emphasis in the harmony and beatitude of this world and the next, risked ending up in a *cul de sac* from the point of view of the capacity of humankind to progress both culturally and morally. The figure of the *pícaro*, though alluring in its capacity to survive against all odds and its comical effects *malgré lui*, offered very few opportunities for development: once a *pícaro*, always a *pícaro*.

Thus, the modern novel had to find other ways to present and make a character evolve within a narrative framework—or else. And then the miracle happened. Enter Cervantes and his creation Don Quixote, or is it the other way around? Did the very real Don Quixote dream fictional Cervantes, as Unamuno suspected?

The fact that the previous question can even be posed and be the subject of many a metaphysical disquisition demonstrates the revolutionary innovation represented by Cervantes' novel in the broader context of Western civilisation. In it all the clear-cut borders between the realms of reality inherited from ancient and mediaeval times are blurred beyond recognition, starting from the most basic ontological distinction of all: the separation between the creator and the world created. In *Don Quixote* we are made witness to the astonishing spectacle of an author who grows with his characters and with characters that change as they interact with each other and with their maker: Don Quixote becomes more like Sancho Panza and the later increasingly resembles his master as conversations are endlessly exchanged and the plot advances. And would Cervantes have been Cervantes without Don Quixote and Sancho? At the end of the novel, when the *hidalgo* has serenely passed away, the author's alter ego, the Moorish chronicler Cid Hamete Benengeli, recognises the unity of the creator and the creature in this most sincere declaration of mutual dependency: "for me alone Don Quixote was born and I for him; it was for him to act, for me to write, and we two are one" (123).



Plate 123. Don Quixote in the Romantic imagination, illustration by Gustave Doré for the 1863 French edition of Cervantes' novel.

Even more marvellously, the characters themselves acquire such a consistency that they end up intruding into reality whilst the world outside the novel keeps on influencing the plot, as when the appearance of a vulgar imitation of the novel by Avellaneda provokes Don Quixote into bouts of indignation. Then, of course, there are those vexing questions about the multiple authorships—Cervantes refers to many anonymous narratives devoted to the life and deeds of Don Quixote and mentions at least one co-author in the figure of Cid Hamete Benengeli, just mentioned—and the multiplicity of personas blended into one character. Who is Don Quixote really, or Alonso Quijano, or Quesada? A madman who decides to become a knight-errant after having read too many chivalric novels and aims to right all wrongs only to be the subject of scorn and ridicule even by those who he tries to succour? An old man, sexually frustrated, who in the autumn of his years falls madly in love with a young rustic girl who remains impervious to his advances? An Erasmian who by his deeds hopes to unveil the follies of the world? A social revolutionary who, appealing to a higher law of humanity, dares to challenge the King's justice by freeing those condemned to the galleys? A noble but somehow nutty *hidalgo* loved and appreciated by his family and neighbours who, after having fantasised about a life of adventure, settles down to die in tranquillity, calmed in spirit and reconciled with the world? All of them? Or none?

We seem to be on a firmer ground when it comes to Cervantes' biography. Unlike Shakespeare, the other great pillar of the Western canon, according to Harold Bloom, whose life as far as we know was largely uneventful, Cervantes could have been the protagonist in a novel of adventures. He was the son of a barber-surgeon who had the habit of falling into dire financial difficulties, so that he was forced to keep his family on the move. Cervantes was able, nevertheless, to acquire a solid education before moving as a young man to Italy, where he served as attendant to a cardinal and had ample opportunities to enlarge his knowledge both of the classics and of the Renaissance humanists. But the love of letters was not his only calling. As a typical Spaniard of those times, his heart longed for military glory and so, and perhaps to escape from past misdeeds, he enlisted into the elite *infantería de marina*, the oldest existing Marine Corps, specialised in fighting in the Mediterranean against the Turks. It was in this capacity that he participated in what he later called the highest occasion seen by the centuries, the Battle of Lepanto, where he behaved bravely and lost the use of his left hand—to the glory of the right, as he later boasted. After serving in more military campaigns and, while he was returning to Spain, his ship was captured by Berber pirates. He spent the next five years as a captive in Algiers, plotting escapes that invariably ended up in failure until he was ransomed and brought back home. He then married and tried to settle down, but all his efforts to make a decent living out of discharging official duties as state agent or tax collector were unsuccessful.

Problems with his book-keeping landed him in jail more than once whilst his marriage was floundering and his sisters and only daughter led quite licentious lives. Broken in more than one sense, he then pinned his late hopes on carving a name for himself in the republic of letters. He tried his hand at the pastoral novel, theatre and poetry, without stirring great waves of enthusiasm in the public, and that is an understatement. Now, we have to bear in mind that the first decade of the seventeenth century in Spain was a hotbed of literary effervescence. Poetry and the theatre were being redefined by the prolific talent of Lope de Vega, the prodigy of the times, whose creative drive was only equalled by his legendary love-making prowess. Lope's ability and his innate vitality took him away from the increasingly rigid moulds of classicism and humanism into a more popular and proto-Romantic mood. It helped that the tastes of a growing urban middle class—and Spain in the Golden Age had a good share of sizable and prosperous cities beyond the seat of the court, Madrid—were inclined towards demanding a constant outpouring of *comedias* and ballads written in a more agile, refreshingly dramatic way than was the case in previous generations. Lope was ready to live up to the task and it was with enthusiasm and, as he recognised, at the demand of a public avid for novelties that he devised a “New Art of Writing Comedies in this Age”, in which he departed from the traditional meters, adapting the form of his verses and the structure of each play to the nature of the story and not the other way around (124).



Plate 124. The Teatro Español in Madrid, where a *Corral de Comedias* was located in the time of Lope de Vega, Cervantes and Calderón.

Under Lope's influence, the Spanish theatre of the Golden Age was so innovative and varied that it served as a model both for the French seventeenth-century classicist playwrights and for the German nineteenth-century Romantics. Authors like Corneille or Racine borrowed heavily from Spanish models both in form and content though, characteristically, the French Neo-classicist critic Nicolas Boileau would later deplore the corrupting influences of the Spanish drama on his country's *belles-lettres*. Far more enthusiastic in his recognition of the ground-breaking path opened by the Spanish dramatists was one of the fathers of German Romanticism, August Wilhelm Schlegel. In his 1808 Vienna lectures on *The Dramatic Art and Literature*, he extolled the virtues of Spanish playwrights, especially an idealised Calderón, as the first modern representatives of a national spirit, or *Volk*, able to free the theatrical arts from the shackles of the classical mould and to open the stage for the liberating intrusion of life in all its extravagant diversity.

During his own lifetime, Lope de Vega's break with the inherited conventions made him an extremely popular author. He reciprocated the favour of his devoted public by producing more than 1500 plays, a couple of novels and hundreds of poems, and all that while he participated in military campaigns, maintained at some point several simultaneous love affairs, worked as secretary for a number of aristocrats, maintained an active social life, exchanging a copious correspondence with friends and enemies alike, and finally had time for devotional exercises, taking holy orders late in life without renouncing the pleasures of the flesh. Such a monstrous display of energy in so many fields could have led him to dissipation and to producing a kind of frivolous, light literature that, whilst lucratively seductive at some point, would not have withstood the test of time. On the contrary, some of his plays and poems stand at the peak of Spanish letters and world literature, and the best of them can be counted among the greatest contributions to civilisation, because of their range of characters and situations and intensity of feeling, the quality of their language and their sheer life-enhancing power. Who could surpass, in any language, a description of the varieties and effects of love as clear-sighted as this one?

“Desmayarse, atreverse, estar furioso
áspero, tierno, liberal, esquivo,
alentado, mortal, difunto, vivo,
leal, traidor, cobarde, animoso.
No hallar, fuera del bien, centro y reposo.
Mostrarse alegre, triste, humilde, altivo,
enojado, valiente, fugitivo,
satisfecho, ofendido, receloso.

Huir el rostro al claro desengaño,
beber veneno por licor suave,
olvidar el provecho, amar el daño;
creer que un cielo en un infierno cabe,
dar la vida y el alma a un desengaño;
esto es amor, quien lo probó lo sabe⁵¹.

Well, I can only think of another poem devoted to love that is even more moving and deeper; it is entitled “*Amor constante más allá de la muerte*”, “*Constant Love beyond Death*”:

“Cerrar podrá mis ojos la postrera
sombra que me llevare el blanco día,
y podrá desatar esta alma mía
hora a su afán ansiosa lisonjera.
mas no, desotra parte, en la ribera,
dejará la memoria, en donde ardía:
Nadar sabe mi llama en agua fría,
y perder el respeto a ley severa.
Alma a quien todo un dios prisión ha sido,
venas que humor a tanto fuego han dado,
Médulas que han gloriosamente ardido:
Su cuerpo dejará no su cuidado;
serán ceniza, mas tendrán sentido;
polvo serán, mas polvo enamorado⁵².”

It was written by Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas, another prodigious talent living in the Spain of the long Golden Age. In character he was almost the exact opposite to Lope de Vega. While Lope was outgoing, joyful, the type of person who delights in the minor pleasures of life without rejecting its more refined

⁵¹ To be fainthearted, to be bold, possessed,/abrasive, tender, open, isolated,/spirited, dying, dead, invigorated,/loyal, treacherous, venturesome, repressed./ Not to find, without your lover, rest./ To seem happy, sad, haughty, understated,/emboldened, fugitive, exasperated,/satisfied, offended, doubt-obsessed./To face away from disillusionment,/to swallow venom like liqueur, and quell/all thoughts of gain, embracing discontent;/to believe a heaven lies within a hell,/to give your soul to disillusionment;/that's love, as all who've tasted know too well. Translated by David H. Rosenthal, accessed in http://www.unsplendid.com/4-1/4-1_lopedevega.

⁵² The final shadow that will close my eyes/ will in its darkness take me from white day/and instantly untie the soul from lies/ and flattery of death, and find its way,/ and yet my soul won't leave its memory/ of love there on the shore where it has burned:/ my flame can swim cold water and has learned/ to lose respect for law's severity./ My soul, whom a God made his prison of,/ my veins, which a liquid humor fed to fire,/ my marrows, which have gloriously flamed,/ will leave their body, never their desire;/ they will be ash but ash in feeling framed;/ they will be dust but will be dust in love. Translated by Willis Barnstone, in *Six Masters of the Spanish Sonnet*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993.

offerings, Quevedo was the resentful, killjoy kind of chap, perhaps a psychological reaction to his physical deficiencies. But he was no introvert. His life was full of drama: he had a talent for picking fights with people who were more powerful than he was and, in some cases, at least equally talented. As a political agent he was involved in several diplomatic imbroglios while posted in Italy. Back in Spain, he tried to reconcile himself with the circle of favourites in the court of the new king, Philip IV, and particularly with the all-powerful *valido*, the Count-Duke of Olivares. When the *valido* was falling into disgrace, he changed horses and, with characteristic lack of discretion, launched a series of ferocious satirical attacks against the corruption of the entire monarchical system. The king was not amused and Quevedo found himself in the monastic prison of San Marcos in León. When he was released in 1643, he was an ill man and died shortly afterwards.

While Lope's work is a celebration of the diversity of life and is full of praise for the accomplishments of his countrymen, Quevedo's is full of bitter recriminations and admonitions. Where others saw glory and happiness, he only saw decay and ruin: "I gazed upon my country's walls / Once powerful, now reduced to rubble", he mused in one of his sonnets. But he was no social or political reformist. He was a moralist of the most uncompromising kind and an ontological pessimist. Man and the world were in a perpetual state of fall, a free fall from which there was no escape. Change was the essence of nature: "only what is transitory remains". While for the mystics there was always the possibility of redemption through the renunciation of the self and communion with God and, for the likes of Garcilaso, Fray Luis de Leon or Lope de Vega, there was a cure for the ills of this existence either through harmony with nature or by indulging in the many pleasures, and disappointments, of human love, such ways out were not allowed in Quevedo's gloomy universe where everything is "fragile, miserable and vain". His way out, if any, was a sort of Christian Stoicism, but one devoid of any sympathy for the plight of his fellow creatures, whom he despised. While his metaphysical poems and his mastery of the literary conceit place him as one of the most accomplished intellectual writers ever, as well as a great stylist, there is no denying that he was also a very twisted character in real life, something that comes across in his satirical verses, full of personal, scurrilous attacks against his enemies —one could say almost all of humanity—particularly women and Jews. Political correctness would have him expelled from any narrative of civilisation, but he should not be. Quevedo, like so many other creative minds, is a mirror of the best and, more frequently, the worst traits hidden in our nature. His *Sueños*, or *Dreams*, are a monstrous, Bosch-like description of the evils affecting the society he was living in, full of grotesque scenes encompassing all walks of life. His more modern visual equivalent are the *Caprichos* by Goya, in so many respects the heir to Quevedo, as Picasso would also later be in his more socially and politically critical paintings.

But unlike Goya and Picasso, Quevedo lacked the capacity to create or imagine other alternative universes. In his own words, he could not break the spell of the world as it is, or as he saw it through his tainted, blackened glasses: “Nada me desengaña / El mundo me ha hechizado”, “Nothing breaks the spell / The world has bewitched me”.

Quevedo offers us images reflected by a mirror distorted by his character and by the nature of his times. Like so many Baroque minds he always strived for a synthesis that could resolve the tensions that had superseded the unfulfilled humanistic promise of a harmonious universe in which man could find his proper place as a measure of all things. His way of doing so was to stretch reality to its limits, sweeping it off its feet. The literary results of his efforts were bewildering. As the Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges, a great admirer, said of him, Quevedo was not a writer, he was an entire literature. But ultimately, he failed to find a firmer footing on which to build a new, more solid edifice, because he himself lacked any moral, religious or aesthetic point of reference apart from his negativism and his extraordinary gusto for literary conceits. He was, in a most modern sense, a nihilist and I tend to think that the only human being with whom he could have felt any affinity was Dostoyevsky.

Two other Spaniards of the Baroque Age were also tempted by the same impulse to resolve the conundrum of the world by flights of imagination, though in different directions. The first one was Luis de Góngora y Argote, a native of Cordova. If Quevedo's poetry is identified with an insistence on content over form, Góngora's poetry is identified with the other powerful current in Baroque literature, the so-called *culteranist* style, which contrariwise placed form over content. His work, resuscitated in Spain by the poets of the “Generation of 1927” and since then considered a precursor of the formalist strands in modernist and avant-garde poetry, is the lyric equivalent of St Isidore's cathedral of meaning. Like the mediaeval encyclopaedist, Góngora tried to rescue the real world from degeneration and chaos by sublimating it into a verbal cosmos, a new order of words and rhythm. Whilst St Isidore's new order was prosaic in its arrangement, since it responded to an educational program devoid, mostly, of any aesthetic criteria, Góngora's new word (and world) order was a stylistic *tour de force*. His aim was not to explore the lowest or highest realms of existence, but to create a brave new, self-sustained reality made out of words, images and music. His method was to choose those elements of the linguistic universe that had most potential to be enhanced by the exercise of any possible rhetorical device, particularly the formation of obscure neologisms derived from Latin and Greek; the use of the hyperbaton, the radical alteration of syntax; and of the elliptical metaphor, the comparison of dissimilar terms but with one element left outside the text to be guessed by the reader. The perfect convergence of Góngora's aim and method can be found in his incomplete poem

Soledades, Solitudes: probably the purest and more self-conscious poem ever created in any language, and one of the most challenging for the reader, who, like a pilgrim cast ashore after a tempest, finds himself in a strange land where mountains are made out of water and oceans are made out of mountains, where darkness and clarity are confounded, dogs wear tiaras and butterflies dissolve into ashes:

“Desnudo el joven, cuanto ya el vestido
Océano ha bebido
Restituir le hace a las arenas;
Y al Sol le extiende luego,
Que, lamiéndole apenas
Su dulce lengua de templado fuego,
Lento lo embiste, y con suave estilo
La menor onda chupa al menor hilo.

...

Vencida al fin la cumbre
-Del mar siempre sonante,
De la muda campaña
Árbitro igual e inexpugnable muro-,
Con pie ya más seguro
Declina al vacilante
Breve esplendor de mal distinta lumbre:
Farol de una cabaña
Que sobre el ferro está, en aquel incierto
Golfo de sombras anunciando el puerto.

«Rayos -les dice- ya que no de Leda
Trémulos hijos, sed de mi fortuna
Término luminoso.» Y -recelando
De invidiosa bárbara arboleda
Interposición, cuando
De vientos no conjuración alguna-
Cual, haciendo el villano
La fragosa montaña fácil llano,
Atento sigue aquella
-Aun a pesar de las tinieblas bella,
Aun a pesar de las estrellas clara-
Piedra, indigna tiara
-Si tradición apócrifa no miente-

De animal tenebroso cuya frente
 Carro es brillante de nocturno día:
 Tal, diligente, el paso
 El joven apresura,
 Midiendo la espesura
 Con igual pie que el raso,
 Fijo -a despecho de la niebla fría-
 En el carbunco, Norte de su aguja,
 O el Austro brame o la arboleda cruja.

El can ya, vigilante,
 Convoca, despidiendo al caminante;
 Y la que desviada
 Luz poca pareció, tanta es vecina,
 Que yace en ella la robusta encina,
 Mariposa en cenizas desatada”⁵³.

Góngora’s revolutionary attitude towards the word and the world was, of course, subject to criticism and sparked a fierce controversy between his detractors and advocates that has lasted, albeit in a more subdued manner, to the present day. One of Góngora’s fiercest critics was of course the champion of the opposite literary current of the Spanish Golden Age, Quevedo, who, true to his venomous nature, used his sharp satirical vein to launch an *ad hominem* attack on his rival, accusing him of being a Jew as in this poem entitled, not surprisingly, Góngora:

⁵³ The young man strips, and all that his apparel/ had drunk of Ocean’s water/he causes to be returned to the reef’s sand;/ he spreads the clothes in the sun,/ which, barely licking at them/with its soft tongue of moderating fire,/ sets upon the slowly, and in gentle fashion/ sucks the smallest ripple from the smallest thread (...) Vanquishing at last the peak/ - to the always sounding sea/ and countryside ever mute/ the neutral judge and wall impregnable-/ now with more certain step/ he descends to the vacillant /brief gleam of a distant, an indistinct light:/ a beacon in a cabin/ lying at anchor amid the hazards of/ a dark gulf of shadows to announce the port./ “Beams” – he calls- “ if not the lights of Leda’s / glistening sons, then be to my ill fortune/ a luminous conclusion.” And – fearful of/ the envy of uncultivated trees/ interposing between, or/ any kind of conspiracy of winds-/ moving like a rustic who/ turns the overgrown slope into easy plain,/ attentive he pursues the/ - even in spite of darkness beautiful,/ even in spite of starlight radiant-/ gem, undeserved coronet/ - if apocryphal tradition does not lie-/ of a tenebrous gloom-loving beast, shoes brow/ the brilliant carriage is of nocturnal day:/ like that, diligent, the lad/ hastens and speeds his pace,/ measuring the undergrowth/ with the same step as clear ground,/ fixed – in defiance of cold misty fog-/ on the carbuncle, polestar to his compass,/ through Austral wind roar or woodlands creak and groan./ Canis now, vigilant,/ calls out, bidding the walker leave, depart;/ and light that seemed so far/ and so small is now so near and now so great/ that a mighty, robust oak lies within,/ a butterfly that crumbles into ashes. Translated by Edith Grossman, in Góngora, Luis de, *The Solitudes*. New York: Penguin Books, 2011.

“Yo untaré mis versos con tocino
porque no me los muerdas, Gongorilla,
perro de los ingenios de Castilla,
docto en pullas, cual mozo de camino.
Apenas hombre, sacerdote indino,
que aprendiste sin christus la cartilla,
hecho carnero en Córdoba y Sevilla
y bufón en la corte, a lo divino.
¿Por qué censuras tú la lengua griega,
siendo sólo rabí de la judía,
cosa que tu nariz aun no lo niega?

No escribas versos más, por vida mía;
que aun aquesto de escribas se te pega,
pues tienes de sayón la rebeldía”⁵⁴.

Now, though Góngora is thought of as a man, like his poetry, too aloof to descend into this kind of petty tug of war, he was not. His pen could be as acerbic as his adversaries’ and, in fact, his character lacked no combative vein. In his case it was directed not so much towards Quevedo, though he was not spared some biting verses, as against Lope de Vega, his true natural opponent. For Lope, a man too eager to satisfy the demands of the average audience, poetry had to “cost great trouble to the poet, but little to the reader”, a remark that Góngora, who, like Quevedo, did not care to lower his standards to meet the demand of the populace, took personally. The great divide between the two giants was not literary, though, but political. Lope was a poet at ease with the monarchy and its imperial designs. His social criticism, as in his popular drama *Fuenteovejuna*, where an entire village revolts against the local authorities, was directed not towards the system and its highest representatives *per se*, but against bad governance at the practical level. And when he dared to challenge the narratives of the Conquest he did so by contrasting the greed and violence of the conquistadors with the high evangelical goals that they were meant to serve.

⁵⁴ I will anoint my works with bacon juice/ so you won't try to bite them, Gongorilla,/ dog of the men of genius of Castilla,/ learned in farts, a streetboy on the loose./ Hardly a man, not worthy as a priest,/ learning creed like a Christless imbecile,/ a cuckold in Cordoba and Seville,/ and in the Court a clowning preachy beast./ Why do you look for faults in Greek tongue/ when you are just a rabbi of the Jews,/ a matter which your nose can not deny?/ Don't scrawl more poems – save us, God in the sky!-/ though being a scribe is right for one among/ those executioners and vengeful crews. Translated by Willis Barnstone, *ibid*.

By contrast, Góngora, a more individualistic character, did not mind introducing a subtle critique of the entire imperial enterprise, in both its material and spiritual dimensions, in fact of the entire European age of expansion and discovery, in the first part of the *Soledades*, when the old and disillusioned *serrano* recounts his past as an explorer and conquistador, and blames his tragic destiny on greed and hubris, since he and his companions had tried to infringe upon the limits of the world, unlike the sun who does not seek to know the extent of its domains:

“Piloto hoy la Codicia, no de errantes
árboles, mas de selvas inconstantes,
al padre de las aguas Océano
(de cuya monarquía
el Sol, que cada día
nace en sus ondas y en sus ondas muere,
los términos saber todos no quiere)
dejó primero de su espuma cano,
sin admitir segundo
en inculcar sus límites al mundo”⁵⁵.

The irruption of a political discourse into the refined realm of Góngora’s poetic universe might come as a surprise. It should not. When I referred above to his attempt at creating a cosmos made out of words and images I did not mean that the world thus created was deprived of meaning or of the human touch. Quite the contrary, his universe was, like any other creation of man’s imagination, subject to the laws of change and to imperfections. Even more, Góngora consciously introduced time and intimations of mortality as part of his artificial creation. As a man of the Baroque, steeped in the idea and the reality of change as the ultimate essence of being, he tried not to suppress it but to tame it into a manageable, and bearable, condition of our existence in this life and, more disturbingly, the next. For, in the last instance, Góngora’s shifting verbal architecture and fleeting imagery are just means to reflect both the nature of this world and an ultimate reality which is not permanent but transitory, not whole, but fragmentary, with the consistency, perhaps, of a dream.

⁵⁵ Appetence now is pilot, not of errant/ trees, but of entire, mutable forests,/ and first to leave the Ocean, the father of waters/ - of whose vast royal domain/ the Sun, who day after day/ is born in his waves and in his waves finds death,/ does not wish to know boundaries or extent- /with hair turned white by the spume greed leaves behind,/though he admits no second/ in professing those limits to the world. Translated by Edith Grossman, *ibid.*

“Yo sueño que estoy aquí
de estas prisiones cargado,
y soñé que en otro estado
más lisonjero me vi.
¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí.
¿Qué es la vida? Una ilusión,
una sombra, una ficción,
y el mayor bien es pequeño:
que toda la vida es sueño,
y los sueños, sueños son”.

“For all life is a dream and dreams are nothing but dreams”. The immortal lines delivered by Segismund at the end of Act III of *Life is a Dream*, Calderón de la Barca’s 1635 play, are the culmination of the Baroque worldview, with its tendency to blur the limits of reality. It would be, however, erroneous to identify the entire Spanish Golden Age with a single movement. As we have seen, Garcilaso de la Vega’s classical humanism; Fray Luis de León’s human mysticism; St John’s radical mysticism; St Theresa’s subconscious explorations; the naturalism of the picaresque genre; Lope de Vega’s vitalism; Quevedo’s ontological pessimism; Góngora’s experimental formalism or Calderón’s dramatic metaphysical disquisitions: all offer such a vast array of vital, literary and philosophical possibilities that any attempt at simplification would be a vain exercise on our part. And then, of course, there was Cervantes (125,126,127,128, 129).



Plate 125. Garcilaso de la Vega, the vernacular classicist.



Plate 126. Lope de Vega, the prodigy of nature.

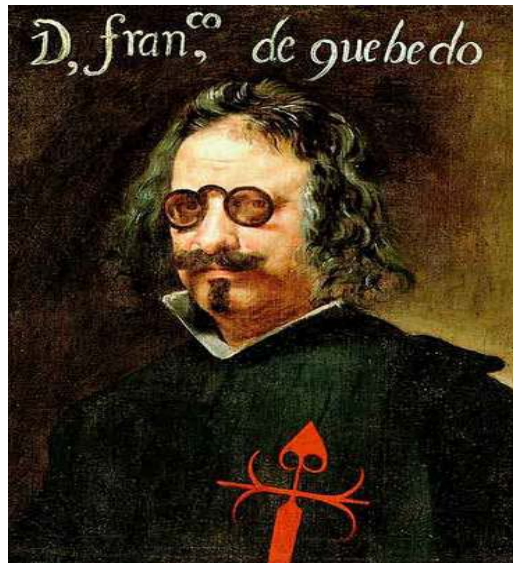


Plate 127. Francisco de Quevedo, the ontological nihilist with an acerbic wit.



Plate 128. Luis de Góngora, by Velázquez, 1622. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. The architect of metaphorical worlds.



Plate 129. Calderón de la Barca. Lázaro Galdiano Foundation, Madrid. Life as a dream.

I will refrain from making an elaborate exegesis of Cervantes' masterpiece, *Don Quixote*, or from trying to summarise its contribution to civilisation. Better minds have already done so, though Lord Clark seems not to have noticed. I will limit myself to quoting, *ad libitum*, three of my favourite lines and then letting the reader reflect on them. After all, in doing so I will be following Cervantes' own prescription when he called upon all of us to judge his novel not by following the precepts of the classics or of Biblical scriptures, but by "exercising your free judgment":

“Sábeta, Sancho, que no es un hombre más que otro si no hace más que otro.”

“Bear in mind Sancho, that one man is worth no more than another unless he does more” (Don Quixote; Part I, Chapter 18).

“Cada uno es hijo de sus obras.”

“Everyone is the son of his own works’ (Sancho; Part I, Chapter 47).

“La libertad, Sancho, es uno de los más preciosos dones que a los hombres dieron los cielos; con ella no pueden igualarse los tesoros que encierra la tierra ni el mar encubre; por la libertad así como por la honra se puede y debe aventurar la vida, y, por el contrario, el cautiverio es el mayor mal que puede venir a los hombres.”

“Freedom, Sancho, is one of the most precious gifts that heaven has bestowed upon men; no treasures that the earth holds buried or the sea conceals can compare with it; for freedom, as for honour, life may and should be ventured; and on the other hand, captivity is the greatest evil that can fall to the lot of man.” (Don Quixote; Part II, Chapter 58).

In Cervantes’ immortal novel, man—not the ideal entity invented by the humanists, but the very real and tangled bundle made of flesh, reason and madness that, like Don Quixote or Sancho, we all are—is for the first time master of his own destiny. It is a destiny that is not predetermined by one God or many, by fortune or chance or even by the whims of any omnipotent authorial writer, but made out of our own thoughts and deeds as deployed in the journey of life leading to the ultimate self-realisation: this is neither the mystic’s union with God and surrender of the self, nor the Cartesian and abstract “*I think therefore I exist*”, but the Cervantesque, and very Spanish, affirmation of the uniqueness and potential of each individual on this earth: “I know who I am, said Don Quixote, and who I may be, if I choose”.

But, ultimately, maybe generations of readers and critics have been wrong when we have tried to see in Don Quixote and Sancho’s adventures more than is there: a tale told not by a Shakespearian idiot but by a reasonable, very humane

man whose main purpose when putting pen to paper was none other than the one the author himself recommended to past and present writers as the only one worth pursuing:

“Procurad también que, leyendo vuestra historia, el melancólico se mueva a risa, el risueño la acreciente, el simple no se enfade, el discreto se admire de la invención, el grave no la desprecie, ni el prudente deje de alabarla.”

“Let it be your aim that, by reading your story, the melancholy may be moved to laughter and the cheerful made merrier still; may the simple not be bored, but may the clever admire your originality; may the serious not despise you, but may the prudent praise you.”

Modest words, wise words, humane words. Words aimed at making our lives more bearable and better. Simply by following them, and not by adhering to any intricate philosophy, political ideology, religion or lofty literary precepts, Cervantes created the modern novel, no small achievement. For, from Cervantes on, every work of fiction is but an addition to Don Quixote's endless conversation with Sancho.

And then, there is Cervantes' lesson as a human being facing the ultimate truth. His literary and living testament, his farewell to life as contained in the Dedication to the Count of Lemos and in the Prologue to *Los Trabajos de Persiles y Segismunda* contains some of the most moving words ever said by a man as he is dying:

“Puesto ya el pie en el estribo, con las ansias de la muerte, gran señor, ésta te escribo”.

“With one foot already in the stirrup and with the agony of death upon me, great lord, I write to you”.

“El tiempo es breve, las ansias crecen, las esperanzas menguan, y, con todo esto, llevo la vida sobre el deseo que tengo de vivir”.

“Time is short, my pains are increasing, my hopes are diminishing, and yet, with it all, the desire I have to live keeps me alive”.

“Adiós, gracias; adiós, donaires; adiós, regocijados amigos; que yo me voy muriendo, y deseando veros presto contentos en la otra vida!”.

“Good bye, thanks; good bye, compliments; good bye, merry friends. I am dying, and my wish is that I may see you all soon again, happy in the life to come”.

Vale.

Farewell.

Apart from Cervantes, one of the most conspicuous omissions in Kenneth Clark’s original *Civilisation*—and, as we are seeing, there are many of them—is the name of Velázquez. Even if we take our guide’s word literally, in the sense that he did not intend to present a series on art history but on the history of civilisation, it is still hardly understandable that he left out this most sublime of painters. For here was a man who elevated painting to the pinnacle of man’s aesthetic and intellectual achievements and whose very career as courtier at the Court of Philip IV, the great patron of the arts, was the epitome of a civilised life as it was understood in the seventeenth century.

Velázquez was a genius and as such he defies any attempt at confining the person or his work within the strict limits of a style or a period. In fact, if we believe art critics who have tried to pin him down to a particular “*ism*,” he has been considered to be, in succession, the quintessential naturalist, court painter, intellectual, realist and even the first impressionist. For most of us, however, he is simply the painter of painters, as Manet, who did so much to revive Velázquez’s name among his nineteenth-century contemporaries, considered him.

The general outline of Velázquez’s life is well known through several biographies written either during his lifetime or afterwards. His years of apprenticeship in Seville from 1610 to 1617; his marriage to his master Pedro Pacheco’s daughter; his first steps in the cosmopolitan Andalusian capital as a painter of religious works and portraits; his move to the Court in 1623 as one of King Philip IV’s painters; his subsequent career as a Assistant to

the Wardrobe, Usher of the Bedchamber and *Aposentador Mayor de Palacio* in charge of decorating the royal palaces and staging courtly ceremonies; the knighthood in the Order of Santiago, which he sought for many years and belatedly got; and his death in Madrid in July 1660 shortly after having attended the peace ceremonies between Spain and France on the Isle of Pheasants. An accomplished life and an extraordinary professional progression, particularly bearing in mind that the social esteem accorded to a painter was quite limited at the time.

But though, as said, the profile of our painter's outer life is well delineated, we know precious little about his character or about the recesses of his inner life. We have hardly any personal papers revealing his feelings or thoughts about art, love, politics or his everyday life. He was not a man of letters or given to confidences. Most of what we know about him is by resorting to official records, third-person accounts and, above all, through his paintings. Velázquez is what we see. And what we see is astonishing, a feast both for the eyes and for the mind.

To understand Velázquez's contribution to the history of art and civilisation we have to place him within the context of the two most powerful European traditions for representing reality and the idealised worlds of religion and classic mythology he had to reckon with: the Italian and the Northern European. Both get the attention they deserve in Lord Clark's chapters covering this period, regrettably not so the third and probably most original one emerging at that precise point in time: the Spanish tradition which in fact both absorbed and transcended the other two. Of this third branch of the European tree of representation, Velázquez, though not the only exponent, was the most accomplished and the man who became the mandatory reference for all the other Spanish and foreign aspiring great artists who dared to cross the threshold leading to the innermost sanctums of Art: from Goya to Francis Bacon; from Manet to Picasso. For any would-be geniuses, masterpieces like *Las Meninas*, which has been called the "theology of painting", *The Spinners* or the *Portrait of Innocent X* have to be studied, deciphered, learnt by heart, recreated and then forgotten before the new artists find their own way and, if they ever do so, only after having lost their bearings many times (130, 131)



Plate 130. *Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Innocent X*, by Francis Bacon, 1953. Des Moines Art Center, Iowa.



Plate 131. *Las Meninas*. After Velázquez, by Picasso, 1957. Picasso Museum, Barcelona.

Velázquez's confrontation with the Italian and the northern masters is well documented and can be traced almost to the slightest brush stroke and in the composition of many of his works. He first travelled to Italy with the king's permission from 1629 to 1630 and again from 1649 to 1651. It was during this second visit that he painted the portrait of Innocent X, probably the most disturbingly penetrating portrait ever made of a human being, and a visually dazzling work of art, a veritable symphony in red (132).



Plate 132. *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*, by Velázquez, 1650. Doria Pamphilj Gallery, Rome.

By the time of his first trip to Italy, the period of Velázquez's apprenticeship in Seville was already years behind. Before his move to the Court in Madrid, or slightly afterwards, the young painter had already shown his potential in two extraordinary renderings of everyday scenes he could have witnessed on any street corner of the Andalusian capital: the *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* and the *Waterseller* (133, 134).



Plate 133. *Old Woman Cooking Eggs*, by Velázquez, circa 1618. National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh.



Plate 134. *The Waterseller*, by Velázquez, circa 1620. Wellington Museum, Apsley House, London.

Both paintings, ascribed to a naturalist style in vogue in Seville in the first decades of the seventeenth century, can be considered a visual equivalent to the realist strand in contemporary Spanish literature as best exemplified by the picaresque novel. If we look at the urchins in both scenes we could be easily be convinced that we are in the presence of the Lazarillo, or the Buscón Don Pablos, two examples of the *pícaro*, the difference being, obviously, that the boys in Velázquez's paintings belong, judging from their dress, to a higher social class than the two minor delinquents. And, if we look closer, both the elderly woman and the old waterseller display a nobility in their countenances and gestures that would hardly fit with the image we have of the blind beggar who cruelly teases Lazarillo or of any other adult populating the morally bankrupt world of the picaresque genre. In fact, both paintings by Velázquez, although corresponding to the Spanish tendency to incorporate naturalist scenes into works of art, are highly intellectual elaborations. In style, composition and content, there is a clear influence of Italianate elements, particularly the chiaroscuro championed by Caravaggio, along with Biblical and Classical wisdom—the old generations teaching the younger ones. There is even, a very Gongoran gusto for rendering, here through visual images and composition instead of words and metaphors, the evanescence and transitoriness of things as they are fused into a new, not less ephemeral reality: the light piercing through and being reflected by the glass of water; the transformation of the materiality of the eggs as they pass from a liquid state to a more solid one.... Above all, there is a sense of dignity in the most ordinary aspects of life and in the humblest human beings, that is, if I am allowed to say so, very Hispanic and that finds in Velázquez its most perfect expression. It is shown in two of its most famously sublime paintings: *The Triumph of Bacchus*, also known as *The Drunkards*, and *The Fable of Arachne*, popularly known as *The Spinners* (135, 136)



Plate 135. *The Triumph of Bacchus*, or *The Drunkards*, by Velázquez, circa 1628. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Plate 136. *The Fable of Arachne, or The Spinners*, by Velázquez, circa 1657. Prado Museum, Madrid.

Both paintings represent mythical allegories and, as such, they follow a well-established Western tradition perfected by Renaissance artists. But they are also much more than that. Bacchus, the Latin version of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and ecstasy, is shown not in an idealised form, but as a plump, slightly inebriated youngster surrounded by a group of peasants whose ruddy complexions and sheer joyful earthiness consciously deflect any attempt at interpreting the scene as Olympian. Though the subject is related to the world of Antiquity, its rendering, including the combination of naturalist and impressionist techniques could not be more modern in a very Spanish way. We can compare the overall effect of Velázquez's powerful, idiosyncratic manner with Caravaggio's depiction of the same theme (137).



Plate 137. *Bacchus* by Caravaggio, circa 1595. Galeria degli Uffizi, Florence.

The Triumph of Bacchus was painted by Velázquez before his first trip to Italy and it shows the lingering influence upon him of the Sevillian School in the combination of light and colours and in the solidity of the figures, even those that, like the beggar in the background are just a shadowy, but nevertheless manifest presence. By contrast, *The Spinners* was done when the painter had reached his maturity as an artist. We see that Velázquez has acquired full command of his powers in the easy, impressionist brushstroke; in the mastery of the aerial perspective so that even the atmosphere, the very air, is visually brought to our senses; or in the subtle use of colour instead of volume to hold together the complex layers of meaning. But despite the differences of style, there is a unity in purpose. The figures in the scene are supposed to be inspired in the mythological contest between Athena and the mortal Arachne, the young woman transformed into a spider for daring to challenge the jealous goddess, but, as in *The Drunkards*, the figures of Antiquity are brought down to earth, placed in a tapestry workshop and rendered as humble spinners.

Now, the question remains as to what the real purpose behind Velázquez's "mythological" paintings was. Was it to demonstrate that gods are like mortals or that mortals are like gods in disguise? I suspect that the truth lies in the middle. Like Cervantes, Velázquez was a master at blurring the limits among the different domains of the real and the imaginary. If Don Quixote and Sancho move

freely between madness and reason, reality and illusion, Velázquez's paintings represent the artist's capacity to humanise the divine and to divinise the human, and also, as in his portraits of classical authors, to make the world of Antiquity contemporary and transform even the most humble of his contemporaries into timeless figures (138).



Plate 138. *Esopo (Aesop)*, by Velázquez, circa 1639. Prado Museum, Madrid.

There are other similarities between the two giants of the Spanish Golden Age. Cervantes and Velázquez were extremely proud of their talents and achievements and knew how to use their respective literary and pictorial skills to show it. Furthermore, neither confined himself to mirroring the surrounding world but tried to create a new one by means of their art, by the sheer power of their technique and imagination. As Harold Bloom has said, Cervantes managed to write a novel that includes all of us and is, in a certain manner, a play of the world. Velázquez accomplished the same feat in his masterpiece, *Las Meninas*, *The Ladies-in-Waiting*, a painting where the artist, the posing figures, and we the viewers share the same space and the same timeless reality, transmuted by the miracle of art (139).



Plate 139. *Las Meninas*, by Velázquez, 1656. Prado Museum, Madrid.

Las Meninas is more than a painting. It is the culmination of the Western tradition of representation from the Classical world to the Renaissance and, at the same time, it constitutes a radical departure from it. As with *Don Quixote*, the questions that it poses and the paths that it suggests are infinitely more complex and diverse than the answers or directions that it offers. Is it a reflection on the art of painting?; a celebration of the act of creation?; a proclamation of the nobility of the artist?; an elaborate metaphysical conundrum aimed at questioning the relationship between subject and object?; just a courtly group portrait, though more informal, less conventional than was usually the case?

For me, together with Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637) and Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (1687), *Las Meninas* (1656) represents the philosophical

turning point of Modernity. At the same time, it goes beyond both seminal texts, anticipating what, with lack of imagination we have tended to define as the post-Modern condition. *Las Meninas* both represents and goes beyond Modernity because it does not rest on any fixed point—either Descartes’ existential thinking or Newton’s absolute conception of space and time—but on the Einsteinian principle of relativity and, I would dare to say, on the even more radical principles of quantum physics. I am not implying that Velázquez knew about either scientific proposition with mathematical precision. But as a great artist he had the insight to anticipate them and to render them visual. If we look closely at the painting, we immediately realise that its composition is not so much based on colours or volumes or lines of perspective, but on gazes. Every character, including the viewer, is defined by two relative coordinates: the person or people at whom he or she is gazing and the person or people by whom she or he is being gazed at. The act of gazing is, at the same time, as in quantum experiments, an act of creation. It modifies the reality being observed. And that is exactly what is implied in *Las Meninas*. Velázquez, representing himself in the noblest act of painting, paints the real canvas known as *Las Meninas* and at the same time creates us as observers who, in turn, are constantly recreating him as we look at how he paints us as if we were those ghostly shadows fleetingly reflected in a mirror.

And so, turning Lord Clark’s argument upside down, it was in Spain, in Madrid, the most religious and convention-ridden of Europe’s secular capitals that a new, revolutionary cult was born: the cult of reality transformed and transcended by art.

CHAPTER 8

HISPANIC WORLDS

Like Don Quixote, “Spain died devotedly, from the later seventeenth century until the death of Francisco Franco”. These words were written by Harold Bloom, the famous literary critic as a foreword to a book on the Iberian Three Cultures published some years ago: *The Ornament of the World*, by María Rosa Menocal.⁵⁶ Though beautiful, the epitaph could not be more erroneous. There is a widespread assumption that with the last monarchs of the Habsburg dynasty, Spain ceased to be a political and cultural actor worthy of attention. Nothing is farther from the truth. Spain did not die at the end of the seventeenth century either politically or culturally. During the eighteenth century, under a new dynasty and a new reformist and dedicated leadership, Spain was in geopolitical terms a formidable force. Despite some setbacks, it was able to repel, either by force or through diplomacy, most of the repeated assaults of Britain in the Americas and the Pacific and the misleadingly more friendly approaches by France, a prelude to the Napoleonic onslaught across the Pyrenees in the early nineteenth century. Actually, by the reign of Charles III (1759-1789), Spain was at the head of the largest European overseas empire of the time. Three decades later, by the 1820s, it had ceased to exist except for some still-important possessions in the Caribbean and the Pacific, finally lost to the United States in 1898. But even so, the astonishing resilience of Spain’s overseas empire—four centuries all in all—compares quite favourably with its main rivals. By 1783, Britain had already lost its Thirteen Colonies in North America, which had been established in 1607 with the foundation of Jamestown. As to the British Raj—which in 1858 had taken over the responsibilities of the British East India Company, almost bankrupt and mostly incompetent, except when it came to replenishing the pockets of its agents and bribing corrupt politicians in London as well as local rulers—it ended with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. Regarding the rest of British colonial territories or protectorates in Asia and Africa, mostly subjugated during the nineteenth century, most of them gained their freedom during the 1960s.

As for France—which since the early seventeenth century had carved some colonies for itself in North America, mainly in what is today the Canadian province of Quebec and parts of the current US Midwest and New Orleans—it lost most of them, as well as its footholds in the Indian subcontinent, as the result of the Seven Years War, from 1756 to 1763. The second version of the French Empire, mainly in Africa and Southeast Asia, roughly lasted from the 1830s, with the invasion of the

⁵⁶ Menocal, María Rosa, *The Ornament of the World*, p.xii.

Maghreb, until the mid-twentieth century, marked by the defeats in Vietnam and Algeria, so slightly more than a century and two decades. The Dutch colonial empire was even shorter-lived and, especially from a cultural point of view, far less successful: how many people speak Dutch in the world nowadays? The main instrument of the Dutch Empire, the Dutch East India Company, known by the acronym VOC, was created in 1602 and dissolved at the end of the eighteenth century, after having lost most of its Asian trade monopoly in wars against the British, mainly due to the appalling venality of its agents. Not precisely an example of Calvinist efficiency and probity. Its debts and responsibilities were then assumed by the Dutch state which ruled what is today Indonesia until the late 1940s.

More to the point, a neglected but nevertheless decisive episode in the history of great power rivalry demonstrates the fact that Spain was not dead during the eighteenth century. When in 1741 a British force commanded by Vice-Admiral Vernon tried to capture the city-port of Cartagena de Indias, in modern day Colombia, as part of a larger design to dislodge Spain from its entire American and Pacific territories, the outcome proved disastrous for the supposedly infallible Royal Navy. The British fleet, composed of 186 ships and more than 20,000 men, bigger than the Spanish Armada of 1588, was crushed by a Spanish army of around 4,000 troops, including 600 Amerindians and just 6 ships of the line under the orders of the legendary Admiral Blas de Lezo, also known as “half-man” since he was deprived of his left leg, left eye and had an incapacitated right arm as a result of numerous war wounds (140).



Plate 140: Portrait of Admiral Blas de Lezo at the Naval Museum, Madrid.

So sure was the British side of its victory over a “dead” Spain that even before the main military engagement took place, a celebratory ball was held in honour of the Prince of Wales, enlivened for the first time by the tune of *Rule Britannia* by the way, and commemorative coins circulated in London with the legends: *True British heroes took Cartagena April 1, 1741* and *Spanish pride pulled down by Admiral Vernon* (141).



Plate 141: Commemorative coin with the effigies of a “victorious” Vernon and a “humbled” Blas de Lezo.

Even before landing the bulk of his invading forces in Cartagena, in what was one of the largest amphibious assaults in history until Alhucemas in 1925 and Normandy in 1944, Vernon had sent news to London announcing the Spanish defeat. His was to prove one of the worst blunders in world military annals. As a result of British incompetence in the chain of command and the superior strategic and tactical skills deployed by Blas de Lezo and his men, the sure seizure of Cartagena turned into one of the most humiliating defeats endured by Great Britain in its entire naval history, with 50 ships lost and more than 18,000 men dead or wounded, a rout even more disastrous in its magnitude than the defeat of the Drake-Norris expedition of 1589, also at the hands of Spain. Both Spanish victories over Drake and Vernon, in the late sixteenth and mid-eighteenth centuries, though less known than the episode of the Spanish Armada, were essential for the survival and consolidation of the Spanish Empire and for the creation of a vibrant Hispanic world that still exists to this day. And it is to this by no means small feat that we turn our attention now.

In Lord Clark’s original *Civilisation*, America, meaning its particular Anglo-Saxon version, appears for the first time in Chapter X, devoted to the Age of Enlightenment as exemplified by the smile of reason in Voltaire’s sardonic face, modelled by Houdon (142).



Plate 142. Voltaire, by Houdon: the smile of Reason.

The American who has a place of honour in Lord Clark's series is Thomas Jefferson. From the British historian's point of view, America enters into history with the Revolutionary generation and the mythical Founding Fathers, among whom, it is precisely Jefferson who would best embody the lofty ideals of the Enlightenment as assimilated and transformed into political action in the original thirteen colonies. In this way, the seeds of progress engendered by the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Age of Reason found in the United States of America a promising new land to grow and flourish. Thus emerged the new transatlantic—meaning North Atlantic—axis of civilisation represented by an imaginary straight line drawn from New England to London, Paris and Berlin. From then on, almost nothing south of that line matters, whether looking into the future or, retrospectively, into the past, which came to be increasingly judged from that particular and partial vantage point.

The reason Jefferson, considered in our days one of the most enigmatic and controversial Founding Fathers, occupies such a prominent place in Lord Clark's predominantly Eurocentric plot, has to do, I think, more with his aesthetic choices than with his political ideals or his dubious morality. We know that, though in theory he was enthusiastic about freedom, political representation and the equality of men—not for nothing was he the main author of the 1776 Declaration of Independence—in practice he had no qualms about being the

owner of at least two hundred fellow human beings and having a quite unequal affair with one of his female slaves, a mulatto named Sally Hemmings, with whom, as a DNA test conducted in 1998 demonstrated, he fathered at least one child. He was also one of the most vocal proponents of the new Republic's territorial expansion at the expense of the native Amerindians, whom, despite rhetoric sometimes worthy of Bartolomé de las Casas, he considered as little more than a temporary nuisance, people who had to give way to the new masters of the land or risk being deprived of everything, even their lives. In a response to a letter addressed to him by James Monroe, the Governor of Virginia, who had suggested the removal of the remaining Indian populations to the remote West, Jefferson made it clear that, in his mind it was "impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will... cover the whole northern, if not the southern continent, with a people speaking the same language, governed in similar forms, and by similar laws; nor can we contemplate with satisfaction either blot or mixture on that surface".⁵⁷ For a man who did not recoil from satisfying his most basic passions with, at least, one of his slaves, the abhorrence of any kind of contact with the "lower" races lest they contaminate the purity of the new republic sounds, at least, hypocritical. But it should not come as a surprise if we consider that, at the end of the day, Jefferson was a believer in the supremacy of the Anglo-Saxon race, a sort of American Cecil Rhodes who, like the late-nineteenth-century British imperialist thought that the world, particularly its coloured inhabitants, would be better off under the benign yoke, or the empire of freedom as the American preferred to say, of the English-speaking nations, the rightful inheritors of Republican Rome. For the vision that Jefferson had for his ideal America was in fact a replica of an idealised ancient community inhabited by Anglo-Saxon yeomen living in perfectly proportioned Italianate mansions surrounded by immense expanses of virginal nature, unsullied by the detritus of industry and untouched by the corrupting influences of finance. Many of his contemporaries, but not probably he himself, cognizant as he was of the many flaws in his own character, saw him as the reincarnation of a Roman patrician, all gravitas and virtue, though there was also a lighter, more joyful side to his private life and a more radical bent to his political activism. True, he was the main creator of his dignified public persona, since as a more than decent architect and designer, he tended to surround himself with visual representations of Palladian harmony, such as his mansion at Monticello or the University of Virginia, conceived of as a pastoral house of knowledge (143).

⁵⁷ Quoted in Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx. The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, p. 240.



Plate 143. Jefferson's Monticello, the myth of an unsullied Arcadian America.

It is this attempt at creating an Arcadian republic in America, aesthetically inspired by Classical and Renaissance models and governed by reason, that really made Jefferson, in Lord Clark's mind, the archetypical American representative of the North Atlantic civilisation at its most enlightened. I wonder whether he knew, and if he knew whether he cared, that Monticello was constructed by African-American slaves on originally Amerindian territory. For all his democratic and egalitarian ideals, Jefferson did not put his reputation or his sources of income at risk by matching his lofty words about the inherent right to freedom of all men with his deeds, unlike Montesinos, Las Casas and so many other Spaniards who staked everything, including their lives, to defend the rights of the Amerindians. But of course, this is a small detail that it is not worthy of being mentioned in the standard history books.

Setting aside those insignificant inconsistencies in the way history is usually told and looking at the broader picture, we are going to focus now on the real big difference that existed between both versions of America prior to the United States' independence and the Latin American emancipations. It is not the one that most readers would probably be expecting. The Anglo-American mass media, particularly in the form of Hollywood movies about the conquest of the Far South West, has accustomed us to imagine the typical Mexican or Latin American of the nineteenth century as the degenerate, brown offspring of the lascivious and greedy Spanish conquistador and a raped Indian woman.

By a curious leap in time it seems as if from the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century, Spanish America had produced nothing more than inferior mongrel peoples destined to be subjugated by their more advanced northern neighbours, as in the original Jeffersonian design later carried to its extremes by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt, the one who walked with the big stick and added his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, thus legitimising any interference in Latin American republics on the pretext that those countries were not civilised enough to handle their own affairs (144).



Plate 144 Theodore Roosevelt carrying his big stick.

The Roosevelt Corollary, as it went down in international-relations texts, was the result of a most dramatic reversal of fortunes in the balance of power, both hard and soft, between the two halves of the Americas. Many scholars, and the popular imagination, tend to think that the reversal I am referring to was the logical result of the different ways Anglo and Spanish America were conceived of by their respective European settlers, with the advantage being, of course, conceded to the English over the Spanish variant. I am not now going to enter into this debate from its economic point of view, one of the ways at looking into it, but, in accordance with our purposes, I will do it in the Clarkeian way, that is from a civilisational perspective. In this regard, if we compare the contributions of the Anglo-American colonies to civilisation before the independence of the United States with those of the Spanish American viceroyalties, the result might surprise those brought up on an anti-Spanish or anti-Hispanic diet, using Hispanic here in the restrictive US sense. I am not going to deny that the Anglo-Americans made important contributions to the history of political ideas or to the practice of government. But there is another way of looking at the matter,

namely by enlarging the terms of comparison to other no less important cultural dimensions, and here the roles of the two Americas are dramatically reversed. The image of an intellectually backward Spanish America, tyrannised and held back by obscurantist priests and cruel peninsular authorities from conquest to emancipation, has been so pervasive in North Atlantic pseudo-historical accounts that it is only by the cumulative effect of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, and with the recent emergence of a counter-narrative grounded in solid theoretical and empirical foundations, that the clouds of prejudice are being dispelled. It should have not taken so long.⁵⁸

In previous chapters we have seen how Spanish and Amerindian epistemological traditions merged already in the early years of the American encounter to form an innovative corpus of knowledge predating the Scientific Revolution. We have also seen how that body of knowledge came to be expressed in Spanish, Latin, Quechua or Nahuatl with the active participation of the surviving local elites, and, at a more popular level, of the Indian masses and the new mestizos. Those were not isolated incidents without consequence. As times evolved, something similar happened during the Enlightenment, so often considered to be the monopoly of the North Atlantic man, a radiant era from which, again, there has been a tendency systematically to exclude the Hispanic world in all its diversity. In fact, the history of the Hispanic world before its fragmentation in the nineteenth century is one of the most intriguingly original and enriching, though hitherto undervalued, contributions to Western and global civilisations.

Spanish American viceroyalties were in practice highly autonomous political communities and at the same time integral parts of a composite kingdom. Even the centralising efforts of the new Bourbon dynasty during the eighteenth century could not disguise that fact. The Spanish overseas territories were not just milk cows exploited by a distant autocrat or an oligarchic republic, as was mainly the case with the British or Dutch colonies. In most North Atlantic overseas dependencies no sign of an evolved, sophisticated cultural life can be

⁵⁸ For an early reassessment of Hispano-Indian America's contributions to civilisation it is still useful to read the essay by the great Colombian diplomat and scholar Germán Arciniegas. See Germán Arciniegas, *Latin America: A Cultural History*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967. Unfortunately, the myth of a retrograde Spain suppressing any creative effort in its American possessions still lingers on. A recent example of this anachronistic view can be found in the work of the Peruvian-American writer Marie Arana, and in particular in her biography of Bolívar, see Marie Arana, *Bolívar, American Liberator*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013. In an interview with *Time* about her book, Ms Arana affirmed that "The Spanish model was always to drain everything out of Latin America- they invested very little in the people, in the land. There was very little effort for education-the church did it as best as it could—but the Spanish colonial structure wanted to keep the population ignorant and submissive. This is very different from the American model...", in "Bolívar, the Latin American Hero Many Americans Don't Know", *Time*, May 31, 2013.

discerned until quite late and hardly ever was there a serious, sustained effort aimed at integrating the indigenous peoples into the new, transplanted societies. The Spanish Crown, on the contrary, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, took extraordinary pains, from the beginning of its overseas expansion, to create a mixed civilisation that at some point took on a life of its own. One of the first and finest products of such a fascinating hybrid world was the astonishing figure of Gómez Suárez de Figueroa, better known as Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. He was the first transatlantic man, and in fact the first cosmopolitan man issued from the interbreeding of European and American civilisations. He was the son of a Spanish conquistador, Sebastián Garcilaso de la Vega, and an Inca princess, Chimpu Ocllo, christened Isabel Suárez. He was born in Cuzco, the former Inca capital, in 1539, the same year that another conquistador, Hernando de Soto, left La Habana (Havana) and started the exploration of La Florida, an immense territory that then encompassed the current US states of Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas and Texas. In his later years, this coincidence inspired Inca Garcilaso to write a chronicle known as *La Florida del Inca*, published in 1605. It was the first work written on the history of the Americas by an American of mixed descent in a European language.

As a child, Inca Garcilaso was raised in a bilingual environment, learning Spanish from his paternal side and Quechua from his maternal relatives. As he later said, he absorbed Quechua with his mother's milk. As he grew, his life became enmeshed in the complex interethnic and interclass relations that resulted from the mixing of the first generation of conquistadors with the local nobility. Under pressure from the authorities, his father was forced to marry a Spanish lady, whilst the Inca princess had to do the same with a Spaniard of lesser means. Their young son remained under paternal custody. When his father died, he did not do so without recognising his natural son and bequeathing him a considerable sum so that he could complete his education in Spain. When he left Peru, on January 1560, he was already familiar with the history of the Incas and had acquired some knowledge of Latin and the classics with the canon of Cuzco Cathedral. Upon his arrival in Spain, he settled in the Andalusian town of Montilla. Still bearing his Christian name of Gomez Suárez de Figueroa, he was determined to obtain the Crown's recognition of his late father's deeds and he travelled to Madrid with this in mind. Unfortunately, his father had made powerful enemies in the Council of the Indies, who accused him of having aided and abetted the rebellious party in Peru's civil wars. To demonstrate his betrayal to the king, some of the counsellors quoted the chronicles of the conquest of the Inca Empire, to the despair of the aggrieved young Peruvian who never afterwards forgot the power of the written word and its capacity to distort what he knew, or thought he knew, to be the real

facts. Frustrated by his lack of success but better educated in the complexities of Spanish-American relations as seen from the distant Court he returned to Andalusia and started a new phase in his life, first as a soldier in the fight against the uprising of the Moors, or *moriscos*, and then, enriched by a series of family legacies, as a man of leisure and humanist writer. In fact, he became the first American-born humanist. Another, more decisive change took place when he decided to reaffirm his maternal identity by emphasising his Inca ancestry. So he created in his first work, published in Madrid in 1590. It was a translation from the Italian of the Neo-Platonist *Dialogues of Love* by Juda Leon Abravanel, a Sephardic Jew born in Portugal of Spanish descent who had settled in Italy after the expulsion in 1492. In his dedication to King Philip II, he described himself as Garcilaso Inca de la Vega and his work as the first fruit of Peruvian, and thus, American letters. His was the first book written and published in Europe by an American. It was a momentous event. Through his mediation the cycle of the Conquest was coming full circle: for the first time the New World was discovering and interpreting the Old (145).



Plate 145. *The Indian's Translation of the Three Dialogues of Love by Leon Hebreo from Italian into Spanish by Garcilaso Inca de la Vega, 1590.* The first book written in Europe and on a European topic by an American was also the first example of American humanist letters.

Whilst, as a humanist outsider, Inca Garcilaso was attracted to the mixture of classic and cabalistic traditions in Juda Leon's writings, as a mestizo he became

increasingly interested in studying the origins of the new civilisation that was emerging from the confluence of his two ancestries. Fascinated since early childhood by the exploration of La Florida, a distant and exotic, for him, part of the New World, he devoted several years in Spain to tracing and interviewing the survivors of De Soto's expedition. With the results of his quest he started writing the *Florida of the Inca*, a narration of the journey to La Florida and the deeds of the "heroic gentlemanly Castilians and Indians" in those remote North American regions. The manuscript was published in Lisbon in 1605 and it was another first, in this case the first history of America written in a Western language by an American, the first modern American historian: Inca Garcilaso, half Spanish, half Inca.

Garcilaso's mixed origins are evident in his treatment of De Soto's expedition. Until then, the history of the New World had been written either from the perspective of the conquerors or, less frequently, from that of the vanquished. *La Florida del Inca* is the first instance where there is an attempt at merging both views, thus creating an original American narrative.

Shortly afterwards he embarked on a more ambitious journey. Always conscious and increasingly proud of his maternal origins, he set about writing a history of the Inca Empire, the Tahuantinsuyo or the kingdom of the "four divisions" in Quechua. Before him, Pedro de Cieza de Leon, a Spanish conquistador and man of letters—as we have seen, the idea that all the conquistadors were illiterate brutes is just another myth—had already published in 1533 a *Chronicle of Peru*, the first European history of the lands conquered by Pizarro and his men. Though highly balanced in its treatment of the Incas and the conquistadors, Cieza's work reflected a Eurocentric point of view. Even so, he did not fail to convey the virtues of the Inca rule. I cannot refrain from quoting him at some length on this regard:

"It is told for a fact of the rulers of this kingdom that in the days of their rule they had their representatives in the capitals of all the provinces, for in all these places there were larger and finer lodgings than in most of the other cities of this great kingdom, and many storehouses.... In all these capitals the Incas had temples of the Sun, mints, and many silversmiths who did nothing but work rich pieces of gold or fair vessels of silver; large garrisons were stationed there, and a steward who was in command of them all, to whom an accounting of everything that was brought in was made, and who, in turn, had to give one of all that was issued.... The tribute paid by each of these provinces, whether gold, silver, clothing, arms and all else they gave, was entered in the accounts of those who kept the quipus and did everything ordered by the governor in the matter of finding the soldiers or supplying whomever the Inca ordered, or making delivery to Cuzco; but when they came from the city of Cuzco to go over the accounts, or they were ordered to go to Cuzco to give an accounting, the

accountants themselves gave it by the quipus, or went to give it where there could be no fraud, but everything had to come out right. Few years went by in which an accounting was not made....” (146).



Plate 146. Image of the Inca in Cieza's *Chronicle of Peru*, 1553.

Not surprisingly, the positive appraisal of the Inca's rule offered by Cieza was repeated, with caveats, by Inca Garcilaso in the first part of his history of Peru, entitled the *Royal Commentaries*, published in Lisbon in 1609. The second part, *The General History of Peru*, appeared in 1617 and it was devoted to the time of the conquest by Pizarro, the ensuing civil war among the Spaniards and the final imposition of royal power. Through his work, the author's mixed identity is reaffirmed and the attempt at elevating the Inca past from the debris of defeat to a status similar to that of the new masters' constitutes the main thrust of the narrative. This is so even visually since, to emphasise his main purpose, Inca Garcilaso invented a coat of arms, which appears in *The Royal Commentaries*, where both his paternal and maternal lineages are given a similar heraldic treatment (147).

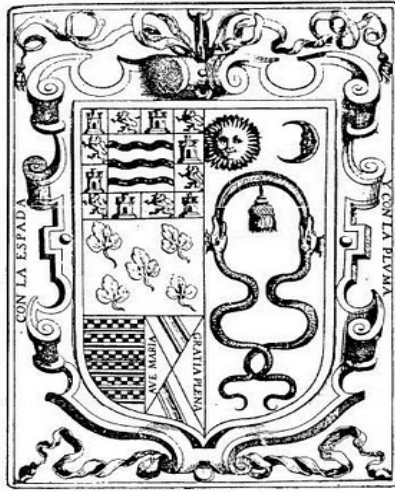


Plate 147: Coat of arms of the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega representing his mixed Spanish and Inca ancestry. The emblem reads: “with the sword and with the pen”.

Despite their autonomy as separate works, the *Florida del Inca*, the *Royal Commentaries* and the *General History of Peru* constitute a unitary attempt to give voice to the defeated in such a way that their deeds and memory could be considered worthy of becoming an integral part of the emerging Hispano-American reality. In his effort at bridging the two worlds, Inca Garcilaso did not shy from depicting the most tragic aspects of the conquest, like the execution of Atahualpa, and echoed the local nobility’s anguish at seeing that their rule had been turned into serfdom. At the same time, always proud of his paternal heritage, he also exalted the heroic deeds of the conquistadors. This apparent ambiguity has being the source of much debate among scholars, but in my opinion, though interesting from a psychological or social perspective, it is secondary to the true importance of Inca Garcilaso as a real example, contrary to Jefferson’s idealised status, of the emerging, contradictory American man. And even such a description is subsidiary to his relevance in the history of civilisation, of literature to be more precise, since he was, more than anything else, a man of letters, a creator, and it is to this essential dimension that we shall turn our attention.

Though a faithful follower of Cervantes in his condemnation of the fantastic chivalric genre, in his chronicles Inca Garcilaso mixed facts and fiction, subjective reminiscences and documentary evidence, all filtered through his powerful imagination in a way that prefigures the great Latin American novelists of the twentieth century. For, as his fellow countryman, the novelist and Nobel Laureate Vargas Llosa has written, he was above all a literary genius, whose graceful use of the Spanish language, his lyrical evocation of the Inca past, conceived almost as a Platonic republic, and his epic recreation of the conquest rank him among the best writers of the Golden Age. He was, as well, the first Hispano-American to be conscious and proud of his multiple identities: his *General History of Peru* is dedicated to “Indians, Mestizos and Criollos of the Kingdoms and Provinces of the great and rich Peruvian Empire, by the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, their brother, compatriot and countryman, health and happiness”.

What a pleasure it must have been to meet this elderly Inca, Spanish and cosmopolitan man in his Andalusian garden, listening to his stories and seeing him pausing for a moment, gazing beyond the undulating landscapes towards his beloved Andes, an ocean and half a continent away. Thanks to him, Vargas Llosa concludes, Spanish, the vernacular born at the remote border between the Basque country and Castile, became a universal language, shared and enriched by men and women of all races, inhabiting all the varied geographies of a vast and expanding Hispanic world.

The type of early modern man represented by Inca Garcilaso was nowhere to be found in colonial Anglo-America. To grasp his originality, imagine a mestizo of mixed Algonquin and English bloods educated in England in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, fluent in his paternal and maternal languages plus Latin and Italian, translating a Neo-Platonic Jewish author and writing in elaborate Elizabethan English a chronicle of North America from the point of view of the Amerindians as well as of the new settlers. The reader can keep on imagining, because there is no Inca Garcilaso in the history of Anglo-American culture. Neither was there in the thirteen colonies the equivalent of Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, a pure Quechua who in the early 1600s wrote, in the language of the conquerors, a proposal to ameliorate the treatment of the natives addressed to the King of Spain. His *First New Chronicle and Good Government*, illustrated with the author's own drawings, some of them with an acerbic satirical vein, is one of the first accounts of post-Columbian America written from the point of view of the native populations in a European language (148).

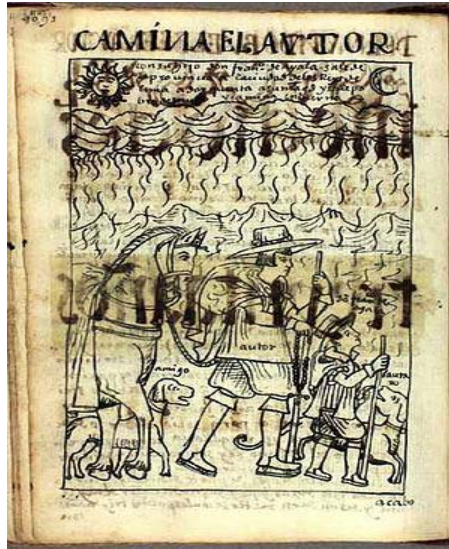


Plate 148. Poma de Ayala walking with his son towards Lima, the capital of Spanish Peru, to protest against the abuse of the indigenous peoples.

Actually, to find the first example of an Amerindian writer in English we have to wait until 1768, a century and a half after the foundation of Jamestown. The name of the writer was Samson Occom. He was a Mohegan Indian who was raised in a Presbyterian environment. After becoming a preacher, he was devoted to the education of his fellow Native Americans and to that end tried to establish a school for them, a real rarity in Anglo-America. Unfortunately, his partner in the venture, an English missionary called Eleazar Wheelock diverted the money Occom had obtained from charity to the foundation of Dartmouth College, one of the still existing Ivy League universities, where English colonialists were accepted instead of the natives. Frustrated by the episode, and by the discrimination he was subjected to among the Anglo-American Protestants, in 1768 Occom wrote a brief autobiography entitled *A Short Narrative of my Life*, where he recounts the ill treatment he and his fellow tribesmen had suffered at the hands of the English and expresses the resentment he felt about it:

“I owe them nothing at all; what can be the Reason that they used me after this manner? I can't think of any thing, but this as a Poor Indian Boy Said, Who was Bound out to an English Family, and he used to Drive Plow for a young man, and he whipt and Beat him almost every Day, and the young man found fault with him, and Complained of him to his master and the poor Boy was Called to

answer for himself before his master, and he was asked, what it was he did, that he was So Complained of and beat almost every Day. He Said, he did not know, but he Supposed it was because he could not drive any better; but says he, I Drive as well as I know how; and at other Times he Beats me, because he is of a mind to beat me; but says he believes he Beats me for the most of the Time “because I am an Indian”⁵⁹.

Occom’s manuscript was only published in 1982 (149).



Plate 149. Samson Occom, the main, and practically only example of an Amerindian writer in the history of colonial Anglo-America.

When we turn our attention to the literary achievements in the Americas from the arrival of Columbus until the era of the emancipations the difference between the Hispanic territories and the English, Dutch or French colonies is significant. One can write a history of English, French or Dutch literature up to the eighteenth century without mentioning a single major literary work that originated in their respective American or, more generally speaking, overseas possessions. By contrast, no serious history of Spanish literature in the Golden Age can fail to include, among dozens of names, the likes of Bernal Díaz del Castillo and his *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*; Inca Garcilaso and

⁵⁹ The text can be accessed in www.historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5788/

his *Royal Chronicles*; Alonso de Ercilla, and his epic poem *La Araucana*, about the conquest of Chile; Bernardo de Balbuena and his *Mexico's Grandeur*; or Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, one of the greatest female poets in the history of world literature, whose *First Dreams* are one of the highest summits of the Baroque in any language.

The same can be said about the visual arts. The richness and variety of the architectural and pictorial Hispano-American tradition, and particularly its successful integration of human diversity, is mostly absent from its Anglo-American counterpart. When in January 2012 the new American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York was inaugurated, many people were ecstatic: “Sensational!” exclaimed the *New York Times*, as its art critic reviewed the renovated rooms full of colonial New England portraiture and furniture, post-revolutionary landscapes and, above all, the all-dominating imagery consecrated to the closest figure the US has to a mythical founding demiurge: George Washington (150).⁶⁰



Plate 150. Washington Crossing the Delaware, by Emanuel Leutze, 1851. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

I must confess that I was not moved when I first visited the American Wing, particularly the sections devoted to exhibiting the colonial period. Neither was I particularly touched at the magnificent Boston Museum of Fine Arts when I

⁶⁰ See Holland Cotter, “The Met Reimagines the American History”. *The New York Times*, January 16, 2012.

contemplated there the galleries devoted to the same era. The portraits displayed in both cases are a dull apotheosis of white male and female figures dressed in imitative English attire, surrounded by imitative English furniture and trying to strike the poses of the English petty nobility and moneyed bourgeoisie. There is hardly any originality in those paintings, either in style or content, except, perhaps, a more realistic approach than in the idealised renderings of prominent figures in vogue in the metropolis, as produced by Joshua Reynolds and other exponents of the Grand Style. If I had been told that many of those American portraits had been painted in a London workshop, as in fact many of them were, I would not have doubted it for a moment. In fact, the best Anglo-American painter of the epoch, John Singleton Copley, was as obsessed by obtaining fame in England as most of his subjects, particularly women, were eager to be shown according to the fashionable precepts dictated by the distant capital or by Paris. There is not that much that can be called peculiarly American about them, which is all the more striking since some of the sitters were to become ardent participants in the fight against the British tyranny in the name of their natural and inalienable rights. There are also very few hints, apart from the occasional flying squirrel, that they lived their American lives surrounded by American landscapes, as if the painter had made abstraction of the fact that most of his clients were merchants or lawyers from New England and not from England proper (151, 152).



Plate 151. *Portrait of Ward Nicholas Boylston*, a Boston merchant, by John Singleton Copley, 1767. Boston Museum of Fine Arts.



Plate 152. *Portrait of Mercy Otis Warren*, patriot and historian of the American Revolution, by John Singleton Copley, 1763. Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

For me, the three most remarkable aspects of Anglo-American colonial painting, apart from its imitative impulse and almost complete lack of what the Romans would have called *genius loci*, are, first, how long it took for a genuinely local manifestation of art to be born—more than a century after the first English settlements; second, the almost complete absence of representations of Amerindians and the mixed races, particularly interacting with the Anglo-American settlers in non-virginal environments; and, third, the non-existence of a non-white school, or schools, of colonial painting. I shall clarify what I mean with some examples in a moment. Though there are some paintings of natives, and individuals of mixed races in colonial Anglo-America, they are invariably shown in the tradition either of the noble savage or as frightful warriors, sometimes as enemies, at other times as occasional allies, but always separated by an insurmountable barrier from the white colonialists and never as equal members in a mixed Anglo-Amerindian family (153).



Plate 153. An all-English-American family, *Isaac Winslow and His Family*, by Joseph Blackburn, 1755. Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Now, to see my point I invite the reader to take a look at the following family portraits. They belong to so-called *casta* painting, a genre that flourished in Mexico and, to a lesser degree, in Peru in the eighteenth century, at the same time that the colonial Anglo-American portraitists were at their busiest taking orders from the rich Anglo-American elite (154,155,156).



Plate 154. *From Spanish and Mestiza, Castiza*, by Miguel Cabrera, 1763. Museum of the Americas, Madrid.



Plate 155. *From Spanish and Black, Mulato*, by Miguel Cabrera.

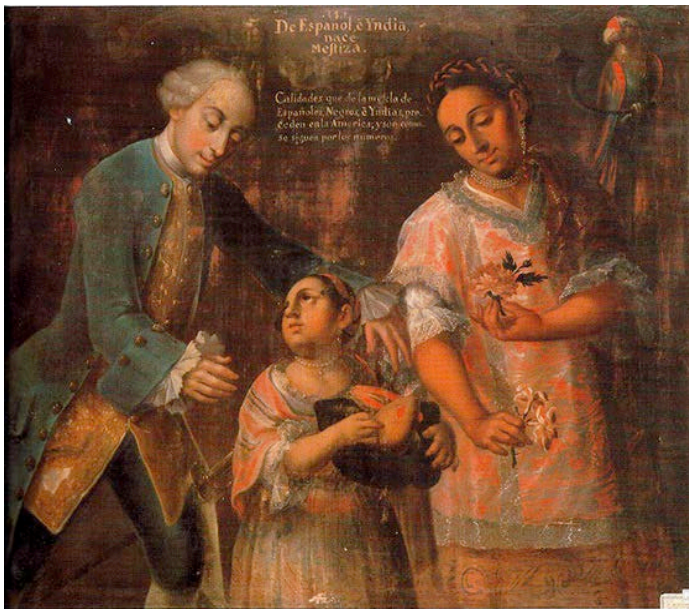


Plate 156. *From Spanish and Indian, a Mestiza*, by José Joaquín Magón, 1770. Museum of Anthropology, Madrid.

The difference between Hispano-American family paintings and their New England counterparts, produced at exactly the same period and on the same continent, is striking. Whilst in the latter case the posers are models of racial purity, in the *Casta* genre we can find a bewildering display of human diversity. I ask the reader the following question: can you imagine Mr. Winslow posing with his legitimate Indian wife, if he would or could have had one, or Mr. Jefferson sitting with his slave mistress? Or would the good society of Boston or Salem have permitted the public representation of a white woman walking in a public park with her black husband? And if the answer is negative, as is most probably the case, why was it so? (157).



Plate 157. *From a black man and a Spanish woman, Mulato*. Anonymous, circa 1780.

The reason is obvious. The *Casta* genre is the pictorial culmination of two centuries and a half of cultural and racial mixing, itself the by-product of a giant effort of civilisational miscegenation. By contrast, eighteenth-century colonial Anglo-American paintings, whether in the form of individual or family portraiture, were a clear manifestation of a deliberate policy of racial and cultural exclusion, with very few exceptions. Experts can endlessly discuss the social, political and even scientific meaning of the *Casta* genre: was it an expression of a society obsessed by race or just fascinated by the almost infinite possibilities of attraction among racially diverse human beings? Was it a neutral description of

genetic differentiation, the natural result of sexual intercourse in ethnically diverse communities? Or did it respond to an implicit moral agenda, namely to demonstrate that the blending of “pure” people—European, Indian and African—produces a “better” lineage than the mixing of or among “derivative” races? Whatever their meaning, and it might be a combination of all of the possibilities mentioned above, these paintings represent, at least for me, a higher standard of civilisation than the one reflected in colonial Anglo-America, for in them, and through them, we have access to a world that, though by no means egalitarian in terms either of race or class -what society was at the time, or at any time for that matter? -had at least learnt to live with, and to a certain degree to accept, all the shades in which human diversity can present itself to the eye of the beholder.

An even more revealing difference between the Hispano-American and Anglo-American artistic and cultural experiences is that many of the authors of the *Casta* paintings were themselves from mixed blood. In fact, one of the most reputed and probably the most accomplished painter in any genre in eighteenth century New Spain was Miguel Cabrera, a mestizo of Zapotec Indian roots brought up in a mulato family. He was a native of Oaxaca and started his career at a time when some prominent Mexican painters were already making their mark. I am referring to figures like Cristóbal de Villalpando, Juan Correa or José de Ibarra. All of them were educated in the Western tradition, which in New Spain and the rest of the overseas Hispanic lands meant the confluence of mainly Spanish, Italian and Flemish currents. We should not forget that, from their very beginnings, the arts of the Spanish viceroalties in the Americas were opened to a variety of international influences, mediated by the power of the Church and the Crown. Those who think that there was an interest on the part of the Spanish authorities in isolating their New World subjects in a sort of exotic, retrograde cocoon simply forget that through myriad channels the best of Europe’s artistic production was rapidly available throughout the Hispanic territories: these include the direct labour of Spanish and foreign artists who crossed the ocean to explore an exciting new market, the distribution of printed materials and the import of Spanish and other foreign works of masters, like Dürer, Rubens, Zurbarán or Murillo, under the patronage or simply to the taste of the Spanish kings and priests. With the passage of time, American-born artists, though at first overwhelmed by the weight of those foreign masters, started to develop a multiplicity of local styles, enriched, particularly in the case of painters, craftsmen or architects of mixed ethnicity, by surviving pre-Columbian visual and conceptual elements, often as transformed themselves by the impact of the Conquest.

Though both situations are dizzyingly complex and aesthetically bewildering, I am going to try to summarise through some visual snapshots the course that led

two separate pre-Hispanic and Western traditions to a gradual convergence and the final emergence of varied local styles that blended a multiplicity of artistic threads. Mainly through the global connections made possible by the Manila Galleons, those threads included artistic influences that originated in the Far East as well as, of course, the Islamic and Hebrew legacies already incorporated into Hispanic civilisation from the age of the Three Cultures. Thus, the First Iberian Exchange of the Middle Ages became, from the sixteenth century onwards, embedded in the First Global Exchange, of which the Hispanic world was one of the main originators and, at the same time, one of the most fascinating products.

The place to start our itinerary is not one of the imposing cathedrals, palaces or plazas that ennobled and beautified the great capitals and cities of the American viceroyalties, but in the humble church of St Michael Archangel in the small village of Ixmiquilpan in central Mexico. In the mid-1950s, during some repair work on the church's interior, a series of astonishing mural paintings were discovered. They represent a series of battles between two Amerindian nations and were painted by Otomi natives under the guidance, or at least the oversight, of Augustinian monks. The factions depicted are in fact, on one side, the Otomis, dressed in typical Mexica battle garments as Jaguar and Eagle warriors brandishing shields and obsidian swords, and, on the other, the nomadic Chichimec, shown half-naked and helped by supernatural monsters. All the murals are decorated with a variety of vegetal, animal and geometrical motifs derived both from local and Western, in this case Renaissance, iconographies (158).



Plate 158. Scene from the Ixmiquilpan frescos depicting an Otomi warrior battling against a nomadic Chichimec in the midst of classical decorative motifs.

The mixture of Mesoamerican, Christian and classical images and techniques in a remote village of New Spain has of course attracted the interest of scholars, who have tried to explain the origins of such an unexpected iconography in the interior of a sixteenth-century Catholic church. The conundrum is compounded by the fact that the paintings were the work of local Otomi artists. Why were they allowed to cover the walls of a place of Catholic worship with pagan imagery devoted, as it seems at first sight, to glorifying the feats of arms of a Mexican tribe over its mortal enemies? Many interpretations have been proposed to explain the mystery of these paintings, but one seems to be closer to the mark. At the time when they were made, Ixmiquilpan was, as it had also been in pre-Hispanic times, on the border between the settled and the nomadic ways of living. As the Spaniards pushed north to acquire new grazing and mining lands, they had to confront the fiery, wandering Chichimec. In their fight, they enlisted the latter's inveterate enemies, the Otomi. Thus, the frescoes covering the walls of the church of St Michael were part of a canny recruiting campaign to co-opt the Otomi by pandering to their self-image as virtuous and victorious warriors and inciting them to assist the Spanish side against their common threat. Of course, from the Otomi point of view it most probably looked the other way around: it was they who were using the Spaniards to help them defeat their old nemesis. The outcome of such a marriage of convenience, not unlike the compromise found between the first conquistadors and their local allies, was, from a cultural point of view, the merger of two iconographic and cosmological traditions in a completely new visual panorama.

The Otomi were not the only indigenous people who found it convenient to adopt, and to adapt to their own interests and strategies of survival, the Western artistic traditions. During the following centuries, Mexican and Andean nobles, though many of them were successfully integrated into society of the vice-royalty and fairly Hispanised, liked to be represented as pure Indians and to claim their pre-Hispanic royal or aristocratic ancestry, but they did so by commanding portraits made within the Western pictorial conventions and combining their traditional symbols of power and clothing with European style garments and poses (159).



Plate 159. *Portrait of Marcos Chi guan Tope*, Cuzco School, circa 1740. Inka Museum, Cuzco.

The visual acceptance of pre-Hispanic nobility into the new Hispanic-American, Westernised order was part of a larger experiment in social engineering. As Spanish and Criollos were, after all, a minority in the New World, they had to resort to different devices to survive and to preserve their status. Marrying into the local elites was one of them, accepting claims to lands and property based on noble Inca or Mexica lineages, was another one. But it was not sufficient to integrate the majority of the Indian population. In this case, a variety of means was put into effect, including the celebration of local festivities and the celebration of sacred rituals in which indigenous and Western, mainly Christian, motifs were hybridised. Again, the visual arts were used as a powerful instrument to multiply the reach and effect of the different acculturation tactics tried, mostly with success, by the religious and secular viceregal authorities. At the same time, those very same tactics were adapted by each native group to affirm its own identity with regard both to the Hispanic order and vis-à-vis other indigenous communities.

We have a magnificent example of those ambivalent stratagems in the paintings made by Indian and Mestizo artists belonging to the so-called Cuzco School. The Cuzco School was the first continuous artistic centre that emerged in the post-Conquest period and one of the most original ever formed in the Western tradition. Under the

patronage of local archbishops and with the impulse of leading artists, many of them of Inca ancestry, like Diego Quispe Tito, Basilio Santa Cruz Pumacallao and many other anonymous painters, this Andean school produced a number of masterpieces in which the skilful appropriation of European and even Byzantine techniques and genres was mixed with virtuoso displays of native colours and designs. Let us just take a look at three different examples to demonstrate the bewildering range and power of those artists as well as the diversity of messages they were able to convey.

The first one is a rendering of the marriage between the Spanish officer Martin de Loyola and the Inca princess Beatriz Ñusta, yet another example of the way in which the Spanish and local elites became intermingled, thus creating a distinctive Hispano-American nobility (160). The second belongs to the Zodiac cycle painted in 1681 by Diego Quispe after a series of engravings of the “*emblemata Evangelica*” by the Flemish artist Adrian Collaert. The chosen painting shows to what extent native painters were able to master most cosmopolitan styles, in this case the Flemish landscape genre, so exotic, in principle, to the conditions of the Andean altitudes (161). Finally, in the canvas entitled “Return of the Procession”, a part of the Corpus Christi series, we can see to what extent the indigenous element is blended into a typical Hispanic festivity in a multiplicity of ways. As the procession enters the Cuzco Cathedral the local Indian militia, in full gala uniforms and holding firearms, escorts the municipal authorities and the Spanish and Mestizo bearers of the patron saints. Meanwhile, the commissioner of the painting, a devout Indian, is shown in a gesture of prayer in the lower right-hand corner of the canvas (162).



Plate 160. *Marriage between Don Martin de Loyola and Doña Beatriz Ñusta*. Anonymous, circa 1680. Church of the Jesuit Order, Cuzco.



Plate 161. *Series of the Zodiac, Pisces*, by Diego Quispe Tito, 1681. Museum of Religious Art, Cuzco



Plate 162. *Return of the Procession*, Cuzco School, circa 1675. Museum of Religious Art, Cuzco.

The blossoming of the arts and of culture generally speaking in Spanish America was not confined to the Viceroyalty of Peru. An even more striking

example of how the global connections made possible by the Iberian expansion produced a dizzying array of cosmopolitan fruits and, in the process, a new kind of globalised humanity, can be found in the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Visually, its most fascinating representation is the series of Japanese folding screens, or *biombos*, that were decorated with scenes of the Conquest of Tenochtitlan or the celebration of Indian festivities during viceregal times (163,164).



Plate 163. Folding screen representing the fall of Tenochtitlan, Mexico, late seventeenth century. Franz Mayer Museum, Mexico City.



Plate 164. Folding screen with Indian Wedding and Flying Pole, circa 1690. Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Japanese *biombo*, Flemish landscape, Aztec

dances and games and Spanish, Criollo and Mestizo onlookers: the first modern globalization at its most fascinating.

The cosmopolitan nature of Mexico City also had an interesting literary expression in the works of two writers who lived in New Spain at the turn of the seventeenth century. One was an Amerindian of Nahuatl ancestry, Domingo Chimalpahin; the other, a Spanish poet, Bernardo de Balbuena. Coming from different traditions but sharing a common vital experience, both extolled with their respective pens the pivotal role that their city was playing in the first global exchange.

Chimalpahin wrote a variety of books in his native Nahuatl, including a history of the peoples of New Spain using the methods of the classical and Biblical authors to demonstrate that pre-Hispanic societies were an integral part of world history and thus were also eligible in God's plans for the salvation of humankind. But even more interestingly, he also wrote a kind of diary in Nahuatl, an *Annal of his Time*, in which he recorded the events that occurred not only in Mexico City and in New Spain, but also around the globe between 1577 and 1615. Judging from the enormous reach of his sources, it seems as if his humble rooms in a monastery on the outskirts of Mexico City were the equivalent of the headquarters of a global media network, a sort of early modern CNN.

Among the news that caught the attention of his almost boundless curiosity were the assassination of Henry IV of France on 12 May 1610, the solar eclipse of 10 June 1610, and the arrival in Mexico, in November of the same year, of a Japanese embassy accompanying the Spanish officer Rodrigo de Vivero, who had just negotiated a trade agreement with the Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu. The Japanese delegation, composed of around 23 representatives, traders and at least one mining specialist, Tanaka Shosuke, sent to study the extraction of silver in Mexican mines, was received by the Viceroy Luis de Velasco and led to a promising diplomatic exchange between New Spain and the Land of the Rising Sun that was ultimately frustrated. But what really caught Chimalpahin's eyes, more than the diplomatic or trading details of the visit, was the exotic spectacle of Japanese men parading across the streets of Mexico city: "and they came dressed up as they are dressed up there; they wear something like an ornamented jacket, doublet, or long blouse, which they tie at their middle, their waist; there they place a katana of metal, which counts as their swords.... They seem bold, not gentle and meek people, going about like eagles"⁶¹. The Japanese delegation stayed in New Spain for about two months before returning to Japan. Some of their members, according to Chimalpahin's account, chose to be baptised and several decided to remain in Mexico, part of a growing Asiatic community that commuted between the Far East and America following the route of the Manila Galleons or *naos de la China*.

⁶¹ Quoted in Serge Gruzinski, *Las cuatro partes del mundo*, p.32.

The globalised world of Chimalpahin knew few boundaries. In his diary's entries there are references to Greece, Armenia, Muscovy, Ethiopia, Persia, Morocco, Tunis, Persia or China, besides numerous European countries. He also was conversant with philosophy and astronomy, politics and, well, gossip. He considered himself a member of an “*altepetl cemanahuac*”, or Universal Kingdom, governed by a “*cemanahuac tlahtohuani*”, or Universal Sovereign, the King of Spain. In fact, though he never left the region around Mexico City, as an inhabitant of the capital of New Spain he had direct access to a replica of the world in miniature, for during his lifetime Mexico was home to men and women of most known races and cultures. It was truly a place where the entire world got connected, a veritable theatre of the world.

The planetary dimensions of New Spain did not escape the more poetic, baroque gaze of Domingo de Balbuena, the author of *Mexican Grandeur*, an epistolary poem addressed to Doña Isabel de Tobar, published in 1604. Written in exalted verses, the author did not refrain from defining Mexico as the main nexus in the expanding networks of globalisation for “Here Spain meets China, / Italy meets Japan, and in sum /An entire world (meets) in traffic and learning”. It is the main locus of world trade, according to Balbuena's description, “Silver from Peru and from Chile gold/ Comes to lodge here and from Ternate / Fine cloves and cinnamon from Tidore / From Cambrai fabrics, from Kinsai ransom / From Sicily coral, from Syria nard / From Arabia incense, and Ormuz garnet / Diamonds from India, and from valiant /Scythia fine rubies and emeralds/From Goa ivory, from Siam dark ebony....”. After having examined the saga of the Manila Galleons and the Atlantic Fleets and read the works of men like Chimalpahin or Balbuena, who would seriously dare to affirm that globalisation is an invention of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, the Victorian Great Britain of the nineteenth century or the United States of America in the twentieth century? (165).

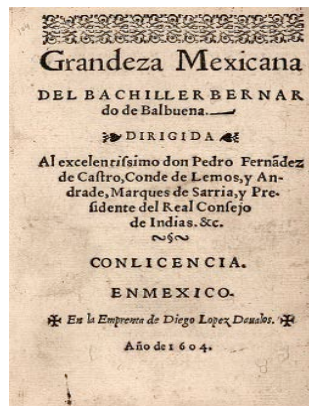


Plate 165. First edition of *Mexican Grandeur*, by Bernardo de Balbuena, published in Mexico, 1604.

At this point it is necessary to dispel a persistent misinterpretation. Artefacts like the Casta genre; the Cuzco School of painting; the *biombos* of New Spain or the literary works of Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Domingo Chimalpahin and Bernardo de Balbuena, and many others, were not the outcome of some spontaneous generation, neither were they created out of nothing by the stroke of a magic wand. They were made possible because of the existence and continuous development of a specific form of civilisation whose origins we can trace back to the old Hispania of the Romans, the Hispano-Visigoth project envisioned by St Isidore, the First Iberian Exchange during the era of the Three Cultures and the early modern expansion of the Iberian kingdoms. The globalised and globalising Hispanic world of the sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries was not an aerial tree without roots in the ground. It was firmly built on very solid foundations, which accounts for its longevity and its capacity to survive and to adapt to very different configurations of world power, as it has continued to do to this very day.

Furthermore, at the time of its becoming a global reality, the Hispanic world already had two of the defining characteristics that are necessary prerequisites for the expansion of mind and spirit in the Clarkean sense: a quest for permanence, as represented by its love of the cities as locus of the civilised man, and a great zest for acquiring and disseminating knowledge, a feature that explains the proliferation of universities, academies and the early use and diffusion of the printing press and the printed book in the territories incorporated into the Spanish monarchy.

In fact, the Hispanic world, in its modern overseas incarnation, was, and still is, a world of cities. Not since the Roman Empire had another great power built so many urban centres in such a sort span of time, with the added difficulty that Spain founded cities over a far greater physical extent and in the midst of far more varied geographic and environmental conditions. In the Hispanic mind, so Roman in many respects, the classical city is the place of civilisation par excellence and therefore, when it was necessary to transplant the institutions of Spain to new lands, the first explorers and settlers carried with them, literally, a plan of the ideal city as understood in Latin Antiquity though adapted to their Christian faith. Theirs was not the typical colonisation based on plantations or trade posts, as was the case with the English, the Dutch or even the Portuguese. From the beginning of Spain's expansion, the will to continue in the recently discovered lands was best expressed by the chronicler López de Gómara in his *General History of the Indies* when he affirmed that “*to conquer is to populate*”, meaning to establish permanent urban settlements where the newcomers and, according to the

Royal Instructions, also the indigenous peoples could start a new civilised life similar to the one left behind in old Europe. Thus, hidden behind the mask of the conqueror as the quintessential destroyer there is the face of the conqueror as the great builder: Cortés in Veracruz; Valdivia in Santiago de Chile; Pizarro in Lima, as soon as they set foot in a new territory their first impulse was to found a lasting city. In fact, the main thrust of the conquest ran in parallel with the biggest building fever ever experienced by an Empire since the times of the Romans. It was so not because of a passing whim, but as the result of a clear political design. In his letter to Cortés dated 1523, Emperor Charles V instructed the great conquistador to found cities according to a predetermined plan which contained precise regulations to build, in every urban centre “a plaza, a church, a town hall, a prison, a market, a slaughterhouse and a hospital...being sure that all streets are straight”. As a result of such a clearly formulated policy, from 1492 to 1579 more than 200 cities were created in the New World, including Santo Domingo (1494); La Habana (Havana; 1514); Panamá (1519); San Juan de Puerto Rico (1521); México (1523); Guatemala (1524); San Salvador (1525); Quito (1534); Lima (1535); Buenos Aires (1536 and 1580); Asunción (1537); Bogota (1538); Santiago (1541); La Paz (1548); San Agustín (1565); Caracas (1567) and Tegucigalpa (1579). Across the Pacific Ocean, Manila was founded in 1571.

The overseas Hispanic city was conceived of as the centre of both secular and religious power, of commerce and industry and, in the case of the main viceregal or provincial capitals, also as a place of acculturation and social mobility for the local elites and, through different channels, of those Amerindians of a lower social extraction who were able or allowed to partake in the new hybrid universe. The idea was that the city was to be a magnet for attracting the loyalty and, if possible, the love of peoples of very different origins. A magnificent early eighteenth-century painting by the Criollo artist Antonio Ramirez representing the construction, or repair after an earthquake since here interpretations differ, of the Cathedral of Santiago de los Caballeros in Guatemala was precisely intended to show the capacity of the Hispanic city, of its main monuments and landmarks, to harmonise and embrace the lives and interests of everyone, rich and poor, Spanish, Criollo, Indian or Mestizo (166).



Plate 166. *Cathedral of Santiago de los Caballeros*, Antonio Ramírez, circa 1676.

The building of a cathedral, even in a provincial capital like Santiago de los Caballeros, was, of course, a specialised endeavor in which a highly skilled and diversified workforce was required. In the painting of Antonio Ramirez we can see many different kind of labourers of diverse ethnicities involved in different stages of the construction work, which is enlivened by a band of musicians playing on top of one of the roofs. The same diversity can be observed at ground level, where a variety of activities is taking place, including a vibrant market where Spaniards, Criollos, Amerindians and Mestizos intermingle, buying and selling products, and what seems to be a procession of religious dignitaries. In fact, the involvement of Amerindians and Mestizos in several types of labour activities under the new Hispanic regime is attested from very soon after the conquest. Already around 1568, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, the famous conquistador and chronicler of the *True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, reported that the Indians had mastered all the professions of Castile and had established their own textile mills and worked in their own workshops as hat-makers, silversmiths and goldsmiths, painters and sculptors, or earning their living from their own talent as artisans and farmers,

cultivating every kind of crop that had been imported into the New World from Europe. He added that many children of the local nobility had learned to read and write in Spanish and even to compose music in the Spanish manner. Actually, the process of acculturation went both ways. As the shock of the conquest gave way to a period of unequal accommodation, the Spaniards, particularly the missionaries, made great efforts to master and systematise the local traditions and languages. One example of this has already been mentioned in connection with the birth of modern anthropology with Bernardino de Sahagún and, in particular, his debt to the previous work done at the College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, where Andrés de Olmos, the author of the first grammar of Nahuatl in 1547, had taught Latin to Mexica students. Another friar, Alonso de Molina, composed a Spanish-Mexica dictionary published in 1555, with a revised and enlarged second edition in 1571, with the help of a native pupil, christened as Hernando de Ribas, who had been educated at the same convent and was fluent in Spanish, Latin and, of course, his own vernacular Nahuatl (167).



Plate 167. *Vocabulary of Spanish and Mexican languages*, by Alonso de Molina, published in Mexico in 1571.

Similar grammars and bilingual vocabularies were compiled by Spanish authors, assisted by local collaborators, for most Amerindian languages during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a gigantic philological effort that was only surpassed in quantity and quality by the emergence of the German Romantic, and fiercely nationalistic, school of Comparative Linguistics in the late eighteenth century. Along with most of the other Mexican and Central American

vernaculars, this was also the case with the language of the Maya, whose grammar was compiled by Juan de Coronel and Diego Landa around 1590, and Quechua, for which the first modern grammar was written in 1560 by Domingo de Santo Tomás. When it came to Quechua, the language imposed by the Inca on their culturally diverse Empire, the Spanish administrators made a deliberate decision to renew and push forward its arrested expansion as a means of furthering their own dominion over a more linguistically homogeneous population. To that end, the first Chair of the Quechua language was instituted in 1551 at the Cathedral of Lima, and 1608 saw the publication of the *Vocabulary of the Quechua Language* by González Holguín, who recognised that the authorship of his imposing work was equally due to “the many Indians of Cuzco, to whom must be attributed all the positive things that can be found in it “.

The comparative and systematic study of American languages and cultures that the Spaniards carried out in their possessions from the very beginning was unrivalled, both in speed and comprehensiveness, by the efforts made by the European powers of the era in their respective empires. By way of comparison, the East India Company—chartered in 1600 by Queen Elizabeth I as an instrument of English, later British, imperialism in East Asia, particularly India—was extremely reluctant to let its agents to study and learn the local Indian customs and languages for fear that too much familiarity might make them more sympathetic to the plight of the natives under foreign oppression. It was only in 1784—almost two centuries after the arrival of the English in the Indian subcontinent—that Warren Hastings, in his capacity as Governor General of India, authorised the creation of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. (In passing, it is interesting to note that the Asiatic Society was the brainchild of the great Orientalist William Jones, who after having studied Sanskrit came to the conclusion, already reached by the French Jesuit Gaston-Laurent Coeurdoux, that it belonged to the same family of languages as Greek and Latin, a family dubbed Indo-European.)

Now, to give a further idea of the huge gap between the efforts made by the Spaniards to master the Amerindian languages and educate about them and those belatedly made by Great Britain in its East India possessions, it should be sufficient to point out that the first English grammar of the Hindi language was printed by John Gilchrist in 1796 and that the first college financed by the East India Company to teach its agents the languages and customs of India and to translate many of its literary works into English, Fort William College, was only founded in 1800. Even more tellingly, London and the English imperial establishment showed a similar disregard for the native languages and customs of colonial Anglo-America. In 1617, James VI and I launched a plan to build schools where “those barbarians”, the Amerindians, could be educated and instructed in

the tenets of the Christian faith. The following year, the Virginia Company made plans to put aside some money and acres to erect a building to that end, but the intention never came to fruition and the money found its way into some other more profitable ventures. Several decades elapsed before, in 1650, the charter of Harvard College made provisions for the education of Indian youth. The so-called Indian College at Harvard functioned for four decades and never housed more than six Indians, of whom only one graduated, before it was finally demolished in 1693. That same year, the College of William and Mary was founded in Virginia with the purpose of spreading the Gospel among the Western Indians, but its results were negligible in terms of native enrollment. Meanwhile, the College of New Jersey, later Princeton, had three Amerindian students during its entire colonial history. Those were the pitiful results of attempts at creating a Western educated elite among the aboriginal peoples of Anglo-America. By contrast, the emergence of a thoroughly Hispanised Amerindian class was one of the main priorities of the Spanish overseas enterprise from its inception. There were two main instruments to that end: opening schools and universities where the natives could follow a Spanish curriculum and the circulating books, either imported from Spain or printed in the first printing houses in America. Actually, the first printing press in the New World was founded in or before 1538 in Mexico City, a full century before the first printing press appeared in Anglo-America, in 1638 in Cambridge, Massachusetts (168).



Plate 168. The first printing press with moveable types in America was founded in Mexico City in or before 1538.

The first book known to have been printed in America is a *Christian Doctrine in Spanish and Mexican Languages for the Benefit of these Indians*, published in 1539, followed in the ensuing decades by hundreds of printed texts on theology, philosophy, medicine, astronomy, economics, and a great variety of catechisms, grammars and vocabularies in vernacular languages. Far from being the only centre of printing in the Hispanic world, Mexico had to compete with other American and Asian cities where the new technology was put at the service of Hispanic expansion and the acculturation of the original populations. These included Lima, where the first book was printed in 1584; Guatemala, where the printing press arrived in 1641; the Guarani missions in Paraguay, where the Jesuits published the first printed books in the first decades of the eighteenth century; La Habana (Havana), where the first known printed book, a treatise on the prices of medicines, appeared in 1723; and Bogotá, where the first printed book on record dates to 1738, although there are references to a printing press as early as 1582. To give an idea of the precocious contribution of the Hispanic world to the expansion of Western civilisation through the book, we can mention that the first printed text in the Philippines was published in Manila in 1593. It was a summary of the Christian doctrine written both in Spanish and Tagalog, the archipelago's main language (169).



Plate 169. *The Doctrina Christiana en lengua española y tagala*, published in 1593 in Manila.

The fascinating saga of the printing press in the Hispanic overseas world, from Mexico to Paraguay and from La Habana to Manila, is another example of the fallacy of the North Atlantic image of an obscurantist, backward Spain. Another fatal flaw

in that biased image is also related to fact that it completely disregards the massive circulation of printed books throughout the Spanish realms worldwide after the early sixteenth century. Many accounts of that period written by North Atlantic historians, or those under their spell, repeat *ad nauseam* the topic that both the Inquisition and the secular authorities exerted such complete control over the distribution of texts that only pre-modern sacred books sanctioned by the Church were available in Hispanic lands, thus precluding their inhabitants from having access to the enlightened fruits of the modern era. Again and again these authors repeat that the prohibition of fiction and scientific books in the Americas by successive Royal decrees kept people there in absolute ignorance of what was going on in Europe, including in Golden Age Spain.

A look at the bare facts, which are always stubborn things, tells us otherwise. For a starter, the goal of the prohibitions they mention was to avoid exposing the Indians to works of fiction, particularly the chivalric genre so in vogue in Spain at the time, that could distract them from the concentration required to acquire the basics of a religious and more pragmatic secular education. Secondly, traders, settlers and custom officers circumvented those same rules in practice through myriad different channels. The records available at the House of Trade of Seville and a number of notarised registries in the Viceroyalties, studied in the 1940s by historians including Francisco Rodríguez Marín and Irving A. Leonard, show that tens of thousands of books of all genres were exported to America from Spain, a commerce favoured by exempting the selling of printed texts to the New World from most taxes. As a result of such a deliberate policy, and the avidity with which novelties were received in Hispanic America and Asia, we know, for instance, that many volumes of the first edition of Cervantes' masterpiece, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, were exported to Mexico and Lima in 1605, the very year that it was published. And the same goes for another literary jewel of the Spanish Golden Age, the *Guzmán de Alfarache*, an apex of the picaresque genre published in 1599 by Mateo Alemán. Apart from religious texts, novels and other fictional works, many other classic, humanistic and scientific books made their way across the globe in the Atlantic fleets and the Manila Galleons, which thus became instruments, long before the mass media and the Internet, of a nascent global culture dominated by the West. So in a cargo bound for Mexico, Lima or Manila it was possible to find Greek comedies by Aristophanes, Latin poems by Virgil or rhetorical manuals by Cicero; the *Praise of Folly* by Erasmus; a *Treatise on Agriculture* by Alonso de Herrera; a translation of *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides; instruction on the *Secrets of Surgery* by Pedro Arias de Benavides; the *Grammar of the Castilian Language* by Nebrija; the *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* by José de Acosta; practical handbooks on pharmacopoeia, mining, music, painting or sculpting; and, of course, the works of the great Spanish authors of the Golden Age, from *La Celestina*, the poems of Boscán and Garcilaso or the *Coplas* by Jorge Manrique to the latest literary production by Lope de Vega, Calderón, Góngora and, of course, Cervantes.

The distribution of the book was one aspect of the massive process of incorporating the new worlds into Western civilisation, as well as the concomitant material and cultural transformation of the West due to the contact with other peoples, geographies and cultures, experienced in Spain. Another was the extension of Western education through a vast network of colleges and universities where, from the beginning, and unlike in other imperial enterprises, the natives were allowed and even encouraged to study. Among the first such institutions were the College of San Francisco, founded by a Flemish friar, Pedro de Gante, and the Imperial College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco, whose role in the birth of a distinctive American culture and the early formation of a Hispanised native elite we have already mentioned.

Less sufficiently known is the role of such colleges of primary and secondary education in the emergence of local adaptations of Western music. The same Pedro de Gante urged Charles V to encourage the teaching of music to the natives as an instrument of acculturation. The local students soon obliged and it was not long before they were able to master the most complex elements of polyphonic composition and to play, and even to build, the most difficult instruments. Could anyone mention where in the Anglo-American or Dutch colonies the natives were taught or allowed to play the violin or the oboe or to compose music in the European style? Could any North Atlantic music historian trace in Virginia, Massachusetts or Borneo the equivalent of Juan Perez de Bocanegra, the Quechua compiler of a book of songs where the first piece of vocal polyphony known in the New World appears in 1631: the *Hanacpachap cussicuim*, probably composed by himself, in his native language (170).



Plate 170. The organ of the church of St Peter in the small parish of Andahuaylillas, near Cuzco, the oldest organ in America.

Equally important for the dissemination of Western knowledge and the appropriation of native wisdom was the creation of the first Western-style universities in America. Those who think that Harvard is the first university in America should be interested to know that the first institution of higher learning in the New World was founded a century before by Spain in Santo Domingo in 1538, followed by the Universities of Mexico and Lima, both in 1551. In total, until the age of the emancipations, Spain founded twenty-six universities in America. And not only that, the oldest Western-style university in Asia still in operation is the University of Santo Tomás in Manila, chartered in 1611 (171).⁶²



Plate 171. The University of Santo Tomás, founded in 1611, the oldest Western university in Asia.

The overseas territories of the Spanish crown during the Enlightenment were an integral part of a composite but nevertheless solid edifice, the result of two previous centuries of cultural amalgamation. Many of their economic and political centres, and even some provincial capitals and provinces, compared favourably in material and intellectual terms with their counterparts in many European countries and they were far more advanced than those colonies that were under the domination of North Atlantic empires. With hindsight and the

⁶² As John Elliot recalls, “by 1700, Spanish America could boast nineteen universities, as against two colleges in British America—Harvard and William and Mary—rising to three with the founding of the future Yale University in 1701”, in *Empires of the Atlantic World*, p. 245.

knowledge that in the following century the Hispanic world was destined to be radically altered in its political and socio-economic constitution by powerful centrifugal forces (though far from disappearing as a civilisational entity), it would be easy to underestimate both its longevity as a united whole and its achievements during that period. This is the approach of many scholars and ideologues turned historians. Their attitude is tantamount to dismissing the entire Greek experience because the polis was submerged in the Roman Empire; the Roman Empire because it ultimately fell to the barbarians or, closer to our times, Victorian England, the Dutch Republic or Republican France because their respective empires were reduced to ruins by the twentieth-century decolonisation processes. And of course, for a radical critic, all those political artefacts, including their artistic or cultural expressions, are condemned *ad initium*, and should be erased from historical records, because of their exploitative nature. Obviously that is not the path followed by this author.

When pondering the Hispanic experience from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, when the new Hispano-American republics were born, as was their right, I rather adhere to the words of Pal Kelemen, the great Hungarian Americanist and pioneer in the study of viceregal Ibero-American art, when he said in his essential 1937 essay on the *Vanishing Art of the Americas*:

“it should be realized that literary, humanistic and scientific life of a high order existed in the Spanish-American colonies. This was a living, thinking continent, cognizant of European thought but by no means always provincially dependent on it. The more we go back into colonial history, the more we find that those 300 years produced original thinkers, scholars, poets and musicians as well as artists and sculptures. More books were read than most would imagine.... Wealthy “amateurs” set down details of local history that are invaluable to later research; clerics meditated on philosophy, poetic works appeared in neat editions”⁶³.

The more we know about the culture of the pre-Emancipation Hispanic world, the more we have to concur with Dr. Kelemen’s refreshingly contemporary views.

Actually, those were views closely shared by a German who visited New Spain at the turn of the nineteenth century during a trip to the New World. Alexander von Humboldt is of course known as a polymath whose contributions to the domain of the natural sciences greatly advanced the cause of European Enlightenment. Between 1799 and 1804, under the patronage of the Spanish

⁶³ Pal Kelemen, *Vanishing Art of the Americas*, p. 101.

Secretary of State, Mariano Luis de Urquijo, Humboldt travelled extensively in Cuba, New Spain and South America. While in Mexico, he conducted extensive surveys of the social, economic and cultural conditions both in the capital and in the provinces he visited, mainly those specialised in mining, since Humboldt was interested in both the practical and theoretical aspects of geology and mineralogy. As to the capital, while recognising the great inequality of income among the social classes, he did not hide his enthusiasm: “Mexico is undoubtedly one of the finest cities ever built by Europeans in either hemisphere. With the exception of Petersburg, Berlin, Philadelphia, and some parts of Westminster, there is not a city of the same extent which can be compared to the capital of New Spain”.⁶⁴ He mentioned in eulogistic tones the city’s Botanic Gardens and the School of Mines, in this latter case referring both to the edifice, designed by the local architect Francisco de Tresguerras, and the institution as a centre of learning and disseminating the latest mining technologies.

Its founder and director was the Spanish chemist Fausto de Elhuyar, one of the great mineralogists of his time and discoverer, with his brother Juan José, of tungsten, also known as wolfram. It was not the only chemical element discovered by Spaniards in the New World: in 1801 Andres Manuel del Rio, a professor of mineralogy at the same School of Mines, identified vanadium, whilst half a century earlier, in 1735, the great astronomer, explorer, and colonial administrator Antonio de Ulloa had found platinum, one of the rarest metals in the Earth’s crust and used today for a vast array of purposes. Though this noble element had already been utilised by pre-Columbian civilisations in some jewellery artefacts, the modern method to produce malleable platinum was perfected in Spain by the Elhuya brothers and the French chemist Pierre Francois Chabaneau under the patronage of the Count of Aranda. The process, kept a secret until 1914, was commercially exploited in a Royal laboratory-cum-workshop during the so-called “Platinum age of Spain” which came to an end when Napoleon’s armies invaded the country, destroyed the platinum industry and dispersed the experts who were working in it. A fascinating reminder of that almost forgotten period is a chalice made in 1778 by the Spanish goldsmith Francisco Alonso out of the first platinum produced in malleable form. The chalice was a gift from King Charles III to Pope Pius VI and can now be admired at the Treasury of St Peter’s in Rome (172).

⁶⁴ Alexander Humboldt, *Selections from the Works of the Baron De Humboldt*, p.26.



Plate 172. The platinum Chalice presented to Pope Pius VI by Charles III.



Plate 173. Plaza Mayor, Mexico City, Cristóbal de Villalpando, circa 1704.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

For a long time, scientifically speaking, the results of Humboldt's perambulations across America were thought to have single-handedly contributed to the emergence of new disciplines like geobotany and even ecology. In fact, Humboldt drew extensively on three centuries of Hispano-American observations of the relationships between microclimates, like those prevailing in the Andean regions, and biodiversity, as well as on a network of local Spanish and Creole scientists, including José Gumilla, Vicente Maldonado and José de Caldas, a Colombian naturalist who had participated in the expeditions of the great physician, botanist and mathematician Celestino Mutis, whom Humboldt also met and admired.

In 1783, under Royal patronage, Mutis, following in the footsteps of the great scientific expeditions of the sixteenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries, initiated a journey to explore the region of New Granada—encompassing today's Colombia, Venezuela and Ecuador—with the purpose of researching the local flora, fauna and general geographical conditions there. Mutis was already familiar with the region, where he had been working as private physician to the Viceroy since the early 1760s. Interested, like his predecessor Francisco Hernández, in the medical properties of plants, he had made his speciality the study of quinine, an alkaloid found in the bark of the cinchona tree used for curing malaria. The therapeutic uses of quinine were already known by the Quechua and had reputedly been used to cure the countess of Chinchón, wife of a viceroy of Peru, hence the name given to the tree by Linnaeus. Mutis would die in 1808, but as leader of the grandly titled Royal Botanical Expedition, and accompanied by a team of botanists and more than forty painters, he spent the remainder of his life collecting, describing and analysing more than 5,000 specimens of plants and compiling more than 6,700 drawings of astounding beauty, all now digitalised by the Royal Botanical Garden in Madrid. Besides botany and pharmacology, Mutis' range of knowledge and interest extended from the realm of the smallest creatures—he wrote a treatise on ants and termites, being one of the founders of the branch of entomology called myrmecology—to the vast heavens, since he founded the Astronomical Observatory in Bogotá, in 1803, the first of its kind in America (174, 175).



Plate 174. *Mutisia Clematis*, named by Linnaeus in honour of Celestino Mutis. The aspect of the Royal Botanical Expedition to New Granada devoted to artistic representations of flora was unprecedented in its range, accuracy and chromatic beauty, and was mainly created by the Creole artist Salvador Rizo Blanco.



Plate 175. The Astronomical Observatory of Santa Fe de Bogotá, founded in 1803, the oldest functioning in America in the European scientific tradition.

Mutis' extraordinary scientific exploits—including his 25-year-long botanical expedition across more than 8,000 square kilometres—were not an isolated event in the eighteenth-century Hispanic world. Hardly mentioned in North Atlantic narratives of overseas voyages during the Enlightenment, which mainly focus on the likes of Captain Cook or Bougainville, the fact remains that the Spanish crown was one of the greatest patrons, if not the greatest, of overseas scientific expeditions during the eighteenth century, having sponsored more than sixty to the Americas and the Spanish territories in the Pacific. One of them, led by Alessandro Malaspina, from 1789 to 1794, was global in scope. Strategic considerations played a part in the choice of its route, particularly when it came to exploring the feasibility of a Northwest passage connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans via the Arctic and to further consolidating Spain's claims to the American north-western coast at a time of increasing competition in the area among rival great powers.

In fact, by the time of Malaspina's journey, many of the territories that are now part of the western United States along the Pacific coast had been explored, and some of them settled and fortified as a precautionary measure to protect the core of New Spain and the mines in its northern provinces. Thus villages like San Blas or Mazatlan were born, and they were reinforced, particularly their ports, during the eighteenth century. Preventing incursions from English and French colonisers and marauders and furthering missionary work were also responsible for the establishment of a series of posts and *presidios* in today's northern Mexico and the US Pacific coast and south-west. Monterey was founded in 1770 and San Francisco in 1776.

In 1774, the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio Buccareli, sent an expedition to the far Pacific Northwest commanded by Juan Pérez. In the summer of the same year, the Spanish ships reached Queen Charlotte Island, in today's British Columbia, and a short while later they found a good anchorage, which was named as the Bay of San Lorenzo de Nootka, a place sporadically visited by Russian fur traders. In 1775, another expedition, led by Juan Francisco de Bodega y Quadra returned to Nootka and took possession of the harbour. Shortly afterwards the Spanish settlement was visited by the English explorer George Vancouver, who, despite the long animosity between the two nations was well received and provided with letters of introduction to rest at the port of San Blas. The late-eighteenth-century presence in Nootka marked the northernmost expansion of the Spanish American Empire. Soon trading links were forged between that remote outpost and Spanish possessions in Asia, with Nootka exporting furs and pelts to Manila and mainland China. By the Nootka Convention, Spain allowed other nations to participate in that trade. One interesting side effect of the Spanish push into

the American Northwest was that it revived the colonising zeal of Russia, which could claim a long-lasting interest in the region. In 1812 a Russian party landed in Bodega Bay and set up a post not far from San Francisco. It was the closest that the Spanish and the Russian empires ever came to meeting and fortunately, despite the wary eye they kept on each other, it resulted in a profitable exchange of goods between both nations' remote outposts (176)



Plate 176. Engraving depicting a local festivity in Nootka Sound, by José Cardero, a painter in the Malaspina expedition, 1792.

The cycle of the Enlightenment expeditions and with them of a politically united Hispanic world was frustrated by the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and by the subsequent process of emancipation of the former American vicerealties. The end of this exceptional chapter in history is normally told from the angle of conflict and war leading to fragmentation and decline. As we shall see in the next two chapters, it also led to a radical rethinking of the place of Hispanic peoples in a world dominated by other powers and, from a civilisational point of view, to an explosion of new creative artistic and intellectual energies that would eventually contribute to the radical questioning of many assumptions on which the modern era had been founded.

There is also another way to round off the history of a united Hispanic world at the turn of the nineteenth century: by evoking the final expedition launched by Spain to circumnavigate the world. Contrary to the first girdling of the globe by Magellan and Elcano or to the bi-oceanic journeys of the Manila Galleons and the Atlantic fleets—both inscribed in a context of imperial expansion and

Western domination—the last worldwide enterprise of the Spanish Empire was designed and carried out for strictly humanitarian purposes. Known as the Balmís expedition, or perhaps more accurately unknown, since it is largely ignored in most conventional accounts on the history of science, it was designed as the first global vaccination, and thus health-care, campaign in history. Its purpose was to inoculate the smallpox vaccine, discovered in 1779 by Edward Jenner, in the populations of the Spanish overseas territories. King Charles IV, whose family had been affected by a smallpox epidemic and who had lost a brother as a result of the illness, inspired the project. Led by the royal physician Francisco Xavier de Balmís, the expedition set sail from Spain in 1804. In the absence of refrigeration and modern sterilisation procedures, the expeditionaries carried the cowpox vaccine *in vivo* by injecting it into orphaned children under the supervision of a nurse and it was passed, as it were, arm to arm, so it could last for the entire voyage. After its departure, the Balmís expedition proceeded to the Canary Islands, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, Cuba, the viceroyalties of Peru, New Granada and New Spain, the Philippines and the Chinese ports of Macau and Canton and then, via Saint Helena, back to Lisbon, where it arrived in 1806. Upon receiving news of the Spanish expedition, Dr. Jenner wrote to a friend: “I don’t imagine the annals of history furnish an example of philanthropy so noble, so extensive as this”⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Rafael E. Tarrago, “The Balmis-Salvany Smallpox Expedition: The First Public Health Vaccination Campaign in South America”. *Perspectives in Health*, Volume 6, No. 1 (2001).

CHAPTER 9

THE AGE OF GOYA

After the ephemeral smile of reason, the last three chapters of Lord Clark's *Civilisation* are an anti-climax, a kind of slow descent into the shallow waters of philistine materialism and the anguish of the twentieth century. Of course, the descending curve was not abrupt; it experienced some punctuated periods of hope and produced some sparks of genius. What happened first was that, after the heights of the Enlightenment, the Western mind was suddenly tired of too much light and scientific speculation and was seduced by a new cult: the cult of nature. The ruins left behind by the collapse of established religion and of reason were occupied by a pantheon of natural forces, whose main worshippers were not priests or scientists, but the new heroes of the times: the Romantic poets and the painters of nature. Romanticism was the new religion of the solitary, searching types, of the wandering young noblemen and women who started roaming valleys and mountains trying to find in remote, untouched landscapes a source of inspiration that could ignite their barren souls. It was the mood that can be found in English Romantic poetry, in the likes of Wordsworth or Coleridge, eager to find the Absolute in the shape of a mountain or in a meadow or in the midst of torrential storm. It was also the spirit visually rendered by Caspar David Friedrich in his visions of lonely men surrounded by an all-encompassing nature or in Constable's depiction of a rain cloud (177, 178).

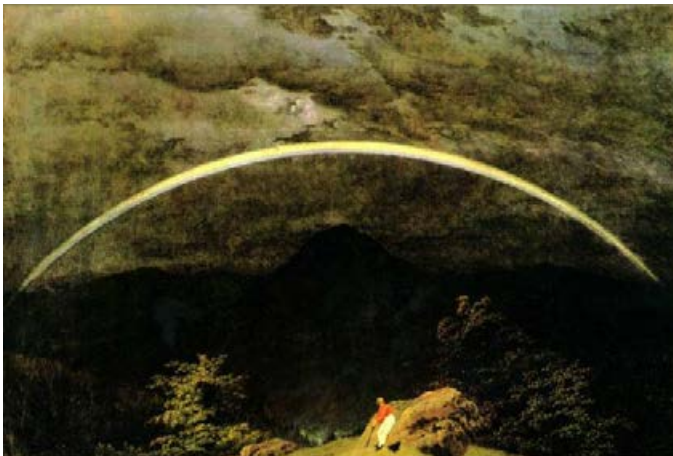


Plate 177. *Mountain Landscape with Rainbow*, by Caspar David Friedrich, circa 1809. Museum Folkwang, Essen.



Plate 178. *Seascape Study with a Rain Cloud*, by John Constable, 1827. Royal Academy of Arts, London.

The sense of communion with nature typical of the Romantic spirit was accompanied and in some instances superseded by a sense of communion with the community of men, a substitute for the mystic union with the numinous. The idea of a social contract based on popular will, advanced by Rousseau on the basis of previous theories that dated back to mediaeval times, as the only source of political legitimacy above throne or altar had potentially destabilising implications for the perpetuation of the old order. And so the melancholic Romantic mood was transmuted into revolutionary passion.

Like his compatriot Burke, Lord Clark did not hold the French Revolution in high esteem. He considered it a flight from reason leading to a fallacy of hope, and a most bloody escape at that. Millions perished in the name of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, as later ever more millions would die in the name of those two monsters of the last century, the Totalitarian State and Class Struggle. These two were in fact both legacies of the highly ideological late eighteenth century further radicalised in the nineteenth century: the Totalitarian State, a nightmarish creature whose modern ancestors were the Jacobins and Monsieur de Guillotine, and the Class Struggle, a child of scientific Socialism as understood by Marx and adulterated by his followers. Furthermore, the French Revolution erased or vandalised some of the best visible manifestations of Western civilisation, Cluny and Saint Denis among them, something that Lord Clark did not take lightly. In

fact, the French Revolution was a great destroyer, though in painting, at least, it left some worthy legacies, for instance in the form of David's sublime pieces of propaganda, put first at the service of the Romantic revolutionaries and then of the great usurper of their dreams, Napoleon (179).



Plate 179. *The Coronation of Napoleon*, by Jacques Louis David, 1807. Louvre Museum, Paris.

Napoleon's megalomaniacal project was a great disaster for Europe and, particularly, for Spain. The North Atlantic mind relishes an exotic image of Spain, the country of material backwardness and violent passions, the homeland of Carmen and Don José (incidentally a product of the French Romantic imagination of Prosper Mérimée and Georges Bizet). Well, if that Spain ever existed, and I am not denying that during part of the nineteenth century it lagged behind some other European countries in many respects, it was the product not of some genetic predisposition or of an inborn defect of the national character, whatever that means, but of the disruption provoked by the cataclysmic effects of the French invasion and the subsequent destruction brought about by the War of Independence (known to the English-speaking world as the Peninsular War) on a country that for most of the eighteenth century had steadily marched along a pragmatically enlightened, reformist path, progressively distancing itself from the excesses of both Church and Reason. And still it was the country that at the end of that century would produce the most revolutionary painter in the history of Western art until the arrival of Picasso. Francisco de Goya y Lucientes was the

man who would introduce the modern, dare I say the contemporary, world with all its contradictions, splendours and horrors into the limited space of the canvas; the man who has been called the last of the Old Masters and the first fully modern artist; the man who, when looking at the disasters of war, instead of turning his eyes away from the carnage would say “Yo lo vi, I saw it”, and would force us, even against our will, to look into face of the real devastations provoked not by God’s fist or nature’s wrath, but by the monsters of reason.

Many biographers of Goya wonder how such a genius could have been born in retrograde Spain and not in France or England or the Netherlands. In a classic history of European culture from 1750 to 1850, the US author Robert S. Salomon famously said, comparing the situation of eighteenth-century Spain with that of France or Germany (which did not, of course, exist as such at the time) that Goya had the misfortune to live in “the most backward, reactionary and corrupt country in Western Europe”⁶⁸. Again, one cannot be too blunt. It is difficult to utter more nonsense in a single phrase: was there a sort of Transparency International to measure the level of corruption in the eighteenth century? Were the Spanish ruling elites more venal than the Court of Louis XV or than the British parliamentarians in the pay of the East India Company or than the board of the Dutch VOC? But it is an image that, since it fits with the general North Atlantic narrative, still lingers in the popular imagination.

Goya was born in 1746 in a small village near the provincial capital of Saragossa, and actually, the first half of his life coincided with an era when Spain was experimenting with a comprehensive reformist programme that encompassed both the metropolis and its enormous overseas territories. We have mentioned in a previous chapter how far Bourbon policies were able to modernise, defend—thanks largely to a revamped Navy—and scientifically study the American viceroyalties and its Pacific dependencies. As we have seen, it was also the epoch when, for instance, Spain launched some of the largest scientific expeditions undertaken by any European country. On the peninsula itself, Bourbon reformism, particularly under the reigns of Ferdinand VI (1746-1759) and Charles III (1759-1788), touched virtually all aspects of life, including the Church and the powerful order of the Jesuits, which was expelled in 1767. Of course, as was the case with most of the rulers known as Enlightened Despots, the goal of the Bourbons in Spain was not to change the system, but to rationalise it, to make it more efficient and, in the best cases, to bring about an amelioration in the lives of their subjects according to the main goal of the Enlightenment, the pursuit of happiness. In France, the

⁶⁸ Robert C. Solomon, *History and Human Nature*, p. 184.

reluctance of the monarchy and the aristocratic circles to accept the demands of the bourgeoisie and the popular classes, which were mobilised by the radical activism of an intellectual minority, led to the Revolution. In Great Britain, after the ravages of the civil and religious wars of past centuries, the mood had been tempered and it was possible for the system to evolve towards a representative form of government that slowly but gradually enlarged its electoral base.

The reformist programme in Spain did not follow either of these paths. It was closer in outlook to the sort of change seen in Prussia or Austria, brought about from above. It was, mainly, a matter of a benign ruler, or at least one passive enough not to meddle in politics or who cared just for hunting and courtly pleasures, surrounded by a more or less efficient team of what we would now call technocrats to conduct the business of the State on his or her behalf. And Spain was lucky for half a century, in that it had some of the most competent ministers of the times. These included men like José Patiño, who under the first Bourbon monarch, Philip V, established the basis for strengthening the Royal Navy, instituting a modern census and reforming the tax system; or his brilliant successors under Ferdinand VI, José de Carvajal and the Marquis de la Ensenada, who, by adhering to a foreign policy governed by the neutralist principle of “at peace with everyone and at war with no-one”, set about programmes of reforms aimed at radically improving physical infrastructure, communications, industry, commerce—particularly with America and the Philippines—and the administration. And, to cap it all during the reign of Charles III, there were the towering figures of the Count of Aranda and the Count of Floridablanca, whose confrontational relationship made possible the pragmatic dynamism that characterised the last phase of the Spanish Enlightenment before the dramatic rupture provoked by the French Revolution and the Napoleonic invasion. Both were, one could say, the two last great Spanish politicians who were able to think in truly global terms. They had to. Just by reading their memoranda and secret instructions we can realise, contrary to prevailing opinions, how much the Spain of the late eighteenth century counted on the world stage. There was not a single important international initiative undertaken either by London or Paris that would not consider first what the reaction of the Court of Madrid would be. The instrumental role of Spain in the independence of the United States was a case in point. The contribution of the Spanish armies, led by Bernaldo de Gálvez, to the victories over the British in the south and west of the current United States of America, in particular in the battles of Mobile, Pensacola and New Providence, were simply essential for diverting the British forces from other theatres of operation, thus allowing Washington and his militiamen to

deliver a fatal blow to their enemies further north. Equally important was the hand played by the Spanish officer Francisco Saavedra y Sangronis, who, together with the French Admiral de Grasse, helped planning the decisive battle of Yorktown and masterminded the fundraising efforts in Havana making its financing possible (180).

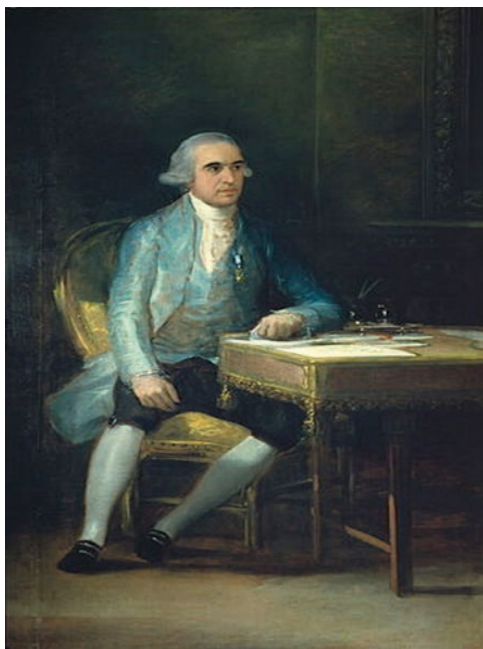


Plate 180. *Francisco Saavedra y Sangronis*, by Francisco de Goya, 1798. Courtauld Institute Galleries, London.

The effects of this sequence of political and administrative events on the domains pertaining to culture and civilisation in Spain were not negligible. Far from it, any visitor to the Spanish capital can see them first-hand just by taking a stroll through so-called Bourbon Madrid. This could start with the Golden Mile of Art, one of the densest concentrations of the best Western paintings in the world—with the Queen Sophia Museum of Contemporary Art, the Prado Museum (222) and the Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection all a short walk from each other along what is known as the *Salón del Prado*—taking a detour to the astronomical observatory near the Retiro Park (223) and culminating in the Royal Palace, which, with its 3,418 rooms, 44 staircases, 870 windows, 270 balconies and 135,000 square metres is still the largest palace in Europe (183).



Plate 181. The Prado Museum, designed in 1785 by Juan de Villanueva. It was conceived of as a Cabinet of Natural History, but in 1819 was opened to the public as a Royal Museum of Paintings and Sculptures.



Plate 182. Royal Observatory in Madrid, designed in 1790 by Juan de Villanueva.



Plate 183. The Royal Palace in Madrid, built between 1738 and 1755 following designs by Juvarro, Sachetti, Sabatini and Ventura Rodríguez.

As had been the case with Philip II's painting collection in El Escorial, the pictorial dimension that accompanied the protracted building of the Royal Palace, which lasted from 1738 to 1755, attracted a great number of talents from across Europe. The new infusion of foreign influences in Spain had already commenced during the reign of Philip V, the first Bourbon king at the Court in Madrid, who not surprisingly had a penchant for French and Italian painters—his second wife was Isabel de Farnesio from Parma. They brought about a radical departure, both in form and content, from the style of the final masters of the Spanish school that had flourished during the reign of the last Habsburg, Charles II. We just have to compare the depiction of a royal scene by Claudio Coello, charged with religious connotations and a masterpiece of High Baroque composition (184), with the group portrait of the family of Philip V by Louis Michel van Loo to see the end of one era and the beginning of a new one, the transition from an illusionistic play of perspectives put at the service of the alliance between Throne and Altar to the splendour of pomp and circumstance, magnified by the Rococo style at its zenith, put at the service of the regalist Court of Philip V (185).



Plate 184. *The Adoration of the Holy Form*, by Claudio Coello, 1685. El Escorial.



Plate 185. *The Family of Philip V*, by Louis Michel van Loo, 1743. Prado Museum, Madrid.

The supplanting of the religious Baroque style by the more secular Rococo was, however not as linear as it might seem. In fact, when Charles III commissioned the decoration of the ceilings of the Throne Room of the Royal Palace in 1761, the Venetian painter Tiepolo, known for his allegorical figures in the old style, was selected to carry out the project. The result was the spectacular *Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy*, a panegyric to the glory of Spain and a superb piece of political propaganda (186).



Plate 186. *The Apotheosis of the Spanish Monarchy*, by Giambattista Tiepolo, 1762-1766.

The late Baroque represented by Tiepolo however, finally lost the favour of Charles III who came to prefer the neoclassical style represented by another foreign painter at the Court of Madrid, the Bohemian master Anton Raphael Mengs. Mengs obtained the commission to decorate the banqueting hall of the Royal Palace over Tiepolo, who is said to have died a bitter man due to his fall into disgrace (187).

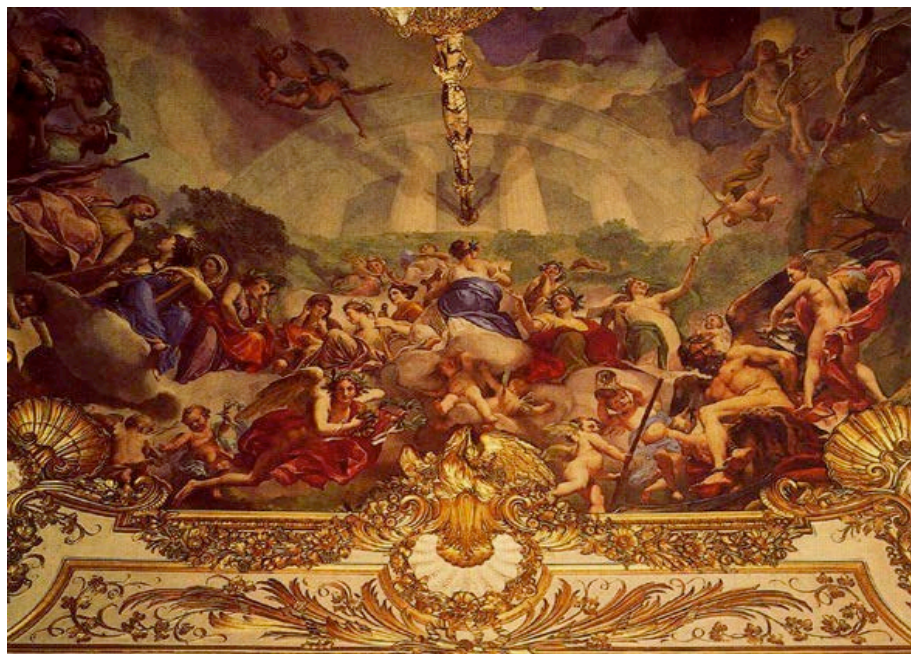


Plate 187. *The Apotheosis of Trajan*, by Mengs, detail, Gasperini Room in the Royal Palace.

I cannot be sure, but one of the reasons that might explain Charles III's preference for a return to the purity of lines and to the equilibrium of classical antiquity over the more sensuous, tortuous compositions of the Baroque may have had to do with his experiences while still King of Naples. There he had sponsored the archaeological excavations that led to the rediscovery of Herculaneum and Pompeii, the two Roman towns obliterated by the eruption of the Vesuvius in the year 79. Actually, under the patronage of the king, both sites were first unearthed and studied by the Spanish military engineer Roque Joaquín de Alcubierre between 1738 and 1748, who was followed in his endeavours by Francesco de la Vega, another Spanish military officer. The work of both men and their collaborators—who included Winckelmann, the father of the neo-classical style—preceded by more than a century Schliemann's discovery of Troy, usually considered the first modern archaeological discovery of an ancient city. By the way, Charles III also sponsored the first archaeological studies of a pre-Columbian site, the Mayan ruins of Palenque, conducted in 1787 by Antonio del Río and the draftsman Ricardo Almendáriz, who made thirty drawings of the

architecture, reliefs and glyphs that accompanied the manuscript written by del Rfo (188, 189).

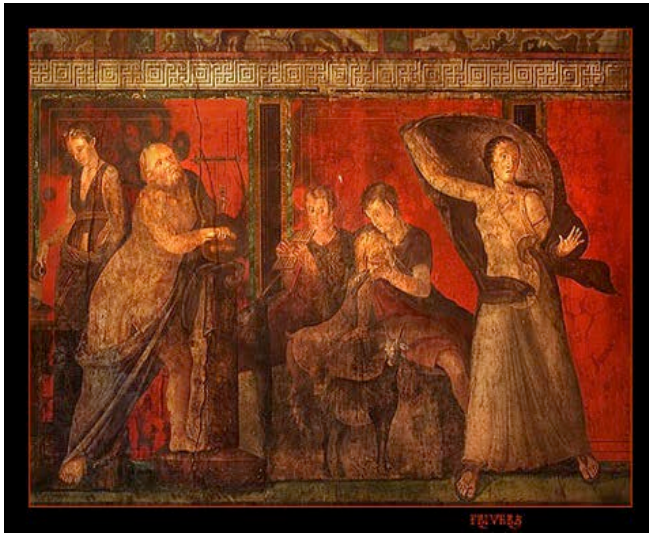


Plate 188. Frescos at Pompeii, a city rediscovered by Joaquín de Alcubierre under the patronage of the future Charles III of Spain.



Plate 189. A Maya figure with glyphs from the ruins of Palenque by Ricardo Almendáriz.

To what extent could Spain under the Bourbons, and particularly during the reign of Charles III (1759-1788), be considered an enlightened country? For the North Atlantic mind, as we have seen, it was not: quite the contrary. The fact that the eighteenth century in Spain did not lead either to a revolution, as in France, or towards a parliamentary system in the British mould are usually mentioned as sufficient evidence to corroborate this. My answer is that the reason why France had a revolution was precisely because it was not evolved enough to produce a gradual and peaceful transition towards a more liberal and ultimately democratic system, and that the reason why Great Britain did proceed in a gradual way was precisely because it had already experienced the traumatic upheavals of its seventeenth-century civil and religious wars. By contrast, the reason why Spain did not follow either the French or the British models was simply because, after the crisis of succession that put an end to the composite monarchy of the Hapsburgs, it was experiencing, at its own rhythm, its own transition from the *ancien régime* towards a different system of government more in accordance with the new times and with its own historical nature. Unfortunately, that enlightened path of gradual trial and error was traumatically aborted by outside factors. It was an external shock that was aggravated by the incompetence of Charles IV, the new king who succeeded Charles III in 1788, and his entourage. It was a most unfortunate coincidence or, in Toynbee's terms, a question of giving the wrong response to the sudden challenge posed by the beginnings of the revolutionary era in European politics.

Fortunately, I have an exceptional witness to the hypothesis I have just presented as an explanation to the final collapse of Spain's Enlightenment project at the end of the eighteenth century. When we are told that Goya emerged in a country that was a model of superstition and backwardness as attested in his *Caprichos* or in his "black paintings", we just have to look at the first part of his career and its subsequent evolution to demonstrate how wrong such an interpretation of his figure is and how little account it takes of the inner motivations behind his ground-breaking artistic evolution. Like Velázquez, Goya moved to the Court in Madrid after having learnt his craft in a provincial town, in this case not Seville but Saragossa. Again, like the great master, Goya's apprentice phase was followed by a trip to Italy, where he stayed from 1770 to 1771 and was influenced by the then triumphant neoclassic style. Fortunately, it was a passing whim or, most likely, a necessary step in his progression (190).



Plate 190. *Sacrifice to Vesta*, by Francisco de Goya, 1771. Félix Palacio Remondo Collection, Saragossa.

In the Spanish capital, where we find him from 1774 onwards working at the Royal Tapestry Workshops, he immersed himself in the ambience of the city, then dominated by a most Spanish combination of aristocratic refinement and democratic gusto, as exemplified, at its most popular, in the figures of the *majos* and *majas*, whom he depicted with delight in his cartoon designs for tapestries and in some extant oil paintings (191).



Plate 191. *The Kite*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1777. Prado Museum, Madrid.

We can see the same blend of aristocratic and popular tastes in a still life painted by the great master of the genre in eighteenth century Spain, Luis Meléndez. If we take a look at his *Still Life with Chocolate Service*, 1770, we can see, contrary for instance to the Dutch still-life tradition and its overtly luxurious ostentation, the deliberate combination of a refined cosmopolitanism represented by the cup of Chinese porcelain and the humbleness of the chocolate set and the accompanying chunks of bread (192,193).



Plate 192. *Still Life with Chocolate Set*, by Luis Meléndez, 1770. Prado Museum, Madrid. Observe the fruits of the Hispanic globalisation in a XVIII century setting: porcelain from China and chocolate from the Americas.



Plate 193. *Still-Life with a Nautilus Cup*, by Willem Kalf, 1662. Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid.

But the seductions of the popular *demimonde* of the *majos* and *majas* were not enough for Goya; as socially ambitious as Velázquez, he strove to be accepted by the nobility and the circle of enlightened ministers at Charles III's court. More than frequenting the festivities at the fields of San Isidro, where the populace of Madrid celebrated its patron's festivities, he aspired to be seen in the company of the aristocratic, leisurely strollers along the posh *Salón del Prado*. And, more than anything else, he wanted to be known by everyone who counted (194)



Plate 194. *Stroll in front of the Botanical Garden*, Luis Paret y Alcázar, circa 1790. Prado Museum, Madrid.

It is as wrong to consider Goya was solely or mainly the painter of “Black Spain” as it is to think of him as a man only obsessed with revealing the obscure, demonic side of Reason, a kind of Freud *avant la lettre*, as he is too often described. In fact he started his career in Madrid as a celebrator of the Enlightenment as he experienced it all around him, in its Spanish variety. He wanted desperately to be a part of it. And for a while he managed it, for as long as it lasted. In 1783 he obtained a commission to paint the portrait of the powerful Count of Floridablanca. Here we can see him presenting the portrait, like a humble servant, to the minister, who for a moment interrupts his examination of the plans for the Channel of Aragon, an important waterway and one of the engineering feats of the epoch. The Count gestures to receive the offering from the hands of the artist, even at a busy time and at a late hour, as we can infer from the clock, which seems to symbolise both the esteem with which he holds the artist and the place of the arts to the crown’s reformist programme (195).



Plate 195. *Count of Floridablanca*, by Francisco de Goya, 1783. Bank of Spain, Madrid.

Goya's social ascent was further advanced thanks to the patronage of the Duke of Osuna and his wife, the intelligent socialite María Josefa Pimentel. The couple would become some of the artist's best clients and posed for some of his most accomplished portraits (196, 197)

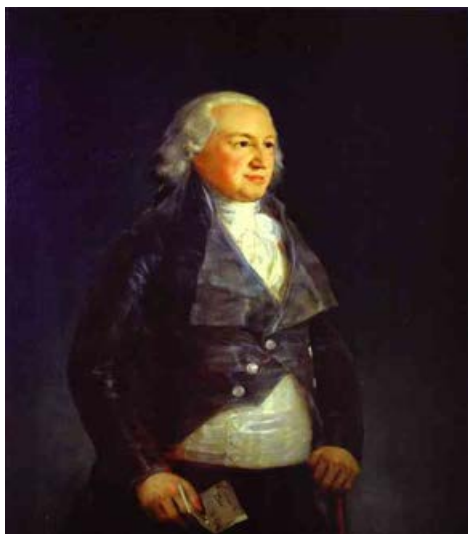


Plate 196. *Don Pedro, Duke of Osuna*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1785. Frick Collection, New York.



Plate 197. *María Josefa Pimentel, Duchess of Osuna*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1785. Bartolomé March Foundation, Palma de Mallorca.

The Duchess of Osuna was a typical representative of the aristocracy and her attire and pose shows the influence of the French pre-revolutionary fashion. Goya, of course, was an acute observer of women and, legend has it, a bit of a womaniser himself, though in his entanglement with the Duchess of Alba—and whether this love was Platonic or Aristotelian in nature is still debated—he seems to have been at the mercy of the capricious lady, cutting a rather pathetic figure. There is also his relationship with his friend Martín Zapatero, whose intimacy, as revealed in his letters, has been the subject of numerous speculations. In fact, it can be said that Goya was fascinated by human nature in all its variety and entertaining friendships with the most diverse specimens of either sex served to perfect his sharp skills as the keenest observer and describer of its many individual manifestations. As such, he was lucky, as are we, that during his life he had the opportunity to meet so many interesting figures who were willing to be represented for posterity by his brush. It would require an entire volume to do him justice as a portraitist but if I would be forced to choose just one among his truly Dickensian variety of characters I would pick Doña Isabel de Porcel without hesitation, and I know I would not be the only one in doing so (198):



198. *Doña Isabel de Porcel*, by Francisco de Goya, 1804. National Gallery, London.

What an extraordinary woman. She was, or she is, because she belongs to the gallery of immortals, Doña Isabel de Porcel, the second wife of Antonio Porcel, a liberal merchant whom Goya had befriended. She is dressed, unlike the Duchess of

Osuna, following the Spanish fashion. By social position, Doña Isabel was not a *maja*, a woman of the popular classes, though. She was a member of the upper echelons of society, but in Spain there have never been such rigid social distinctions as in England. An aristocratic woman would suffer no recrimination by her peers because she dared to dress like the *majas*, who, in turn, could compete in elegance or, at least, in dignity, which is no small thing, with the nobility. Dignity is the word that best describes Doña Isabel as painted by Goya. It is neither the cold, artificial attitude shown in so many rococo or neoclassical portraits of the epoch, nor dignity understood as an ethical ideal, or a mere pose. No, here we have the dignity of the flesh, the dignity of natural femininity asserting her presence beneath the unctuous black shawl and the silk fabrics of the blouse. The wide brown eyes; the sensuous lips; the rosy complexion of the cheeks, whose tonality is delicately reflected in the pinkish touch on the chemise; the arms akimbo; the gaze directed over the shoulder, not in a gesture of defiance but of supreme self-reliance; the voluptuous assertiveness of the round forms, even in the incipient double chin... everything speaks of a woman who knows who she is and who is perfectly at ease with herself as she is... and she does not mind showing it off to the world.

Now, we should not move to the other extreme and delude ourselves thinking that Goya was the archetypical social arriviste or the artist easily seduced by and bewildered in the presence of natural beauty. Even his attraction for women did not blind him to other less flattering sides to the eternal feminine. He could feel perfectly comfortable depicting women as heartless prostitutes who, as in *Capricho 20*, chase away their clients after having “plucked” them; or as odious creatures subject to the ravages of time and illness, as in the merciless *Time of the Old Women* (199, 200).



Plate 199. Capricho 20, *There they go, plucked*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1798. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Plate 200. *Time of the Old Women*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1810. Musée de Beaux Arts, Lille.

Goya's darkening mood is usually attributed to the illness that afflicted him after 1782 and ultimately caused his deafness. His plight was compounded by some sentimental setbacks and by the unravelling of the reformist program under Charles IV and Godoy, the favourite of Charles's wife Maria Luisa of Parma. Of course, the degeneration of the French Revolution into a bloody pantomime and its final transmutation into an imperialist venture under Napoleon, with its dramatic impact on Spain and the rest of Europe, also played a part in Goya's personal descent into hell. In this, his vital and creative cycles are comparable to those experienced by Beethoven, his only real rival in the artistic pantheon of the epoch. Like Goya, Beethoven was a firm believer in the virtues of the Enlightenment and at some point thought that the French revolutionaries would be the exemplary bearers of Reason's torch illuminating a world of darkness. He was in for a big disappointment. The anecdote about his ripping the page of his dedication to Bonaparte off the *Eroica* Symphony upon learning the news that the little man had literally crowned himself Emperor, is well known, as is his despair when French troops mercilessly bombarded Vienna, where he lived. And, of course, the great composer also became deaf, adding an even more dramatic point of similarity to the comparison between both men.

But the real resemblance has to do not with the tragedies of their respective lives, but with their nature as creative geniuses. Creators can be divided in two groups: pushers and breakers. The first push the realms of their arts to the limit, enlarging the reach of mind, or the senses, but staying within well-defined borders defined either by social conventions or by stylistic traditions. The breakers simply do away with borders and set about conquering new lands for the mind and the senses. I can think, for instance of Raphael as a pusher and Michelangelo as a breaker within the timeframe of the Renaissance. Raphael visually carried the humanistic programme to its perfection; Michelangelo ventured into something new with his Last Judgment or his unfinished statues of the slaves (201, 202).



Plate 201. *La Fornarina*, by Raphael, the pusher, circa 1518. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antiqua, Rome.



Plate 202. *The Awakening Slave*, by Michelangelo, the breaker, 1525-30. Galleria dell' Accademia, Florence.

Both Goya and Beethoven were breakers of a particular kind. They started off their careers within the strictures of neo-classicism; then moved to Romanticism and explored its outer limits, guided by their search not for balance in the composition or for an ideal beauty, but for truthfulness and expression. Finally, both broke into new worlds of visual and musical representation, but it was a break that had more to do with the content of what they had to say than with how they said it. Formally, they both anticipated the twentieth-century avant-garde, but they both stopped on the verges of non-formalism.

Were they breakers, in a way, because of a well-thought-out plan? I doubt it. Goya and Beethoven were, in their peculiar manner, thinkers, but of a very special kind. They did not think in the abstract terms of the philosopher or the

scientist, the abstract painter or the twelve-tone composer, but in concrete images and notes and melodies and cadences. In character, both suffered from cyclothymic disorders and were given to bursts of extroversion and introversion, of optimism and depression. When they were in a tormented mood they could sink to unfathomable depths. Unlike the mystics of yore, when they were traversing the dark night of the soul they could not expect to be relieved by the unveiling of a divine presence in their inner self. On the contrary, more often than not, their inner journeys only revealed a multitude of nightmarish creatures, more so in the case of Goya, though Beethoven was not immune to the portentous knocks of destiny either (203).



Plate 203. Capricho 43, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1789. Prado Museum, Madrid.

Capricho 43 has acquired a symbolic status. It is usually interpreted as the most potent image representing the end of the Enlightenment and the premonition of an era of irrationality. But did those monsters appear because

of the excesses of Reason or because, as the engraving's title suggests, Reason went to sleep and, in doing so, abdicated its responsibilities as the gatekeeper preventing our inner demons from escaping to the surface? It is difficult to say. I think that Goya preferred to remain ambiguous. He was, after all a son of the Enlightenment but he saw deeper and farther than most of his contemporaries. Was he trying to warn them, or us? If so he was condemned to play the role of Cassandra, whose prophetic visions were ridiculed and ignored by the inhabitants of Troy. No wonder that from then on Goya renounced the role of prophet in the desert and devoted himself to being a witness to the follies of his contemporaries. *Yo lo ví*. And what he saw makes us shudder in terror. Goya the painter of the frivolous demi-monde and the progressive nobility, the court portraitist, the aspiring lover of the most desired woman of his times became the chronicler of the popular uprising of 2 May 1808 and its bloody aftermath (204), the witness to the Disasters of War and the atrocious cruelties committed by both sides (205) and, finally, the painter of existential anguish and the bleak recorder of his own and humankind's descent into the chaos of madness: Goya as the King Lear of the Western pictorial canon in the *Pinturas Negras* (206, 207).



Plate 204. *The Third of May 1808*, by Francisco de Goya, 1814. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Plate 205. The Disasters of War, *The Same*, by Francisco de Goya, 1810-1814.

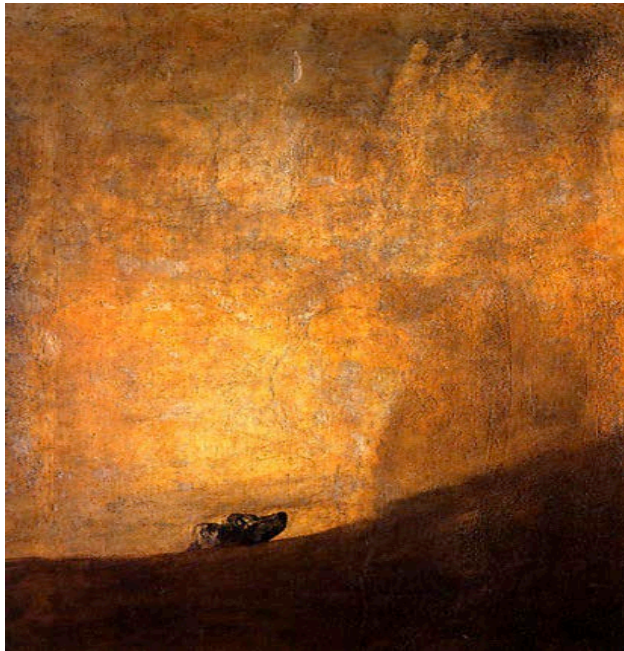


Plate 206. *The Dog*, by Francisco de Goya, 1819-1823. Probably one the most moving reflections on existential anguish. Prado Museum, Madrid.



Plate 207. *Saturn Devouring his Son*, by Francisco de Goya, 1819-1823. Goya's descent into the heart of darkness. Prado Museum, Madrid.

How could a man survive such visions, such inner demons? It would be too easy to interpret Goya's dark paintings as the result of the effects of war on a sensibility already unhinged by illnesses and bad fortune. Both external and internal factors contributed to the change in the painter's world vision and his choice of new, radical means of expression, for sure. But there were many other people, including other excellent artists at that time who suffered similar predicaments and did not produce such revolutionary works. It would be closer to the point to think that the vagaries of his life only accentuated a predisposition to choose, as an artist, the path of invention and freedom over the restrictions that forced most academic painters to limit their abilities to represent only what was considered worthy of an artist's attention. Goya's chosen way was not to put up artificial barriers to what his eyes could see and his mind could imagine. He was the first truly free artist in the history of Western art. Whether it was a madhouse, a prison, the scene of a rape, a brutal and vulgar assassination, a war

execution or a creature set loose in his own mind, his goal was always the same: to represent the truth no matter what, to render visible what had remained willingly untold or visually unrepresented in the plain sight of everyone before him or during his lifetime. He was not interested in passing moral judgements or in beautifying the ugliness in this world, but in bringing it to our attention so that we could acknowledge its presence all around us and within ourselves. If there is a parallel with Freud it is precisely that both men did not refuse to contend with the darkest depths in our nature, not because he relished plunging into them, renouncing our better angels, but in order to let light in upon them, to bring them to the knowledge of our reason, from which they had remained hidden or suppressed. Love of truth was Goya's supreme guide and redeemer, his best antidote against madness and the anguish of death (208).

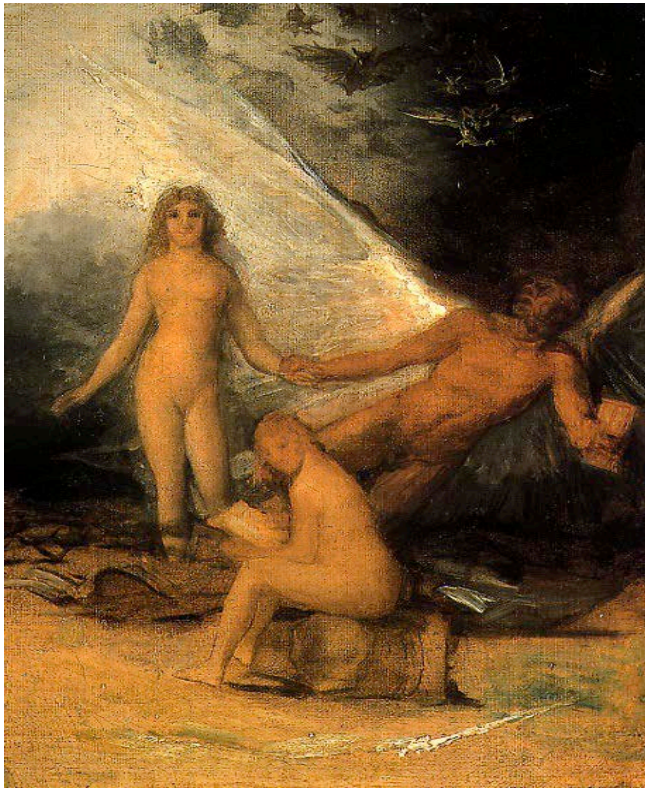


Plate 208. *Truth, Time and History*, a sketch painted by Francisco Goya, 1797-1800. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

But in Goya's time Truth had ceased to be an absolute given, it could not be. If it ever had existed as such in people's minds, such a belief had been shattered by the upheavals of the epoch. Truth had to be created anew, it had to emerge from Time and recounted by History. Goya's journey was an attempt at unveiling a new Truth that was more genuine and more inclusive. Its realms had to be expanded with the help of the artist's skills and imagination and no limits could restrain the quest. It was a journey that could not be completed in a life's time, but it was worth effort to the end. At a very old age, in 1828, the year of his death, Goya made an etching summing up this lesson. It represents a venerably bearded man walking with the help of two canes. As he advances towards the end he says "*Aun aprendo*", I am still learning... and so are we (209).



Plate 209. *I am Still Learning*, by Francisco de Goya, circa 1828. Prado Museum Madrid.

CHAPTER 10

THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY

The nineteenth century was a period of strife and divisions within the larger Hispanic world, both in the former metropolis and in the new republics. In many Latin American countries, it was also an era characterised by bouts of modernisation syncopated with the search for alternative material and ideological blueprints that would help them navigate the uncharted and turbulent waters of independence in the midst of an extremely competitive and aggressive international environment. As to Spain, the reformist drive, which characterised most of the previous century, continued to be present even in the midst of the upheavals brought about by the French invasion. Though, again, it is usually a forgotten episode in the history of political ideas and practice, it was in that country, at a time when most of its territory was occupied by Napoleonic troops and a brutal liberation war was taking place, that one of the first modern liberal constitutions was proclaimed and this was where, in fact, the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* first took on a clear political connotation.

The Spanish Cortes sheltered in the Andalusian city of Cadiz—a free and mercantile enclave under siege by the French army and plagued by an epidemic of yellow fever—adopted the 1812 Constitution on 19 March of that year. Since the patron saint of the day was Saint Joseph, the text was familiarly nicknamed by Spaniards as *La Pepa*. It was the first written Spanish constitution. It proclaimed the sovereignty of the nation, established a parliamentary system of government and recognised universal, albeit indirect, male suffrage and a free press. It was also the first constitution negotiated and adopted by an assembly composed of representatives from the European, Asian and American continents since practically all parts of the Spanish Empire were represented in Cadiz, including deputies from the Philippines. In fact, the 1812 Spanish Constitution was the first modern fundamental law to be enforced in some territories that would later become part of the United States, before the 1787 US Constitution applied to them. In the town of San Agustín, in Florida, the oldest continuously inhabited city founded by Europeans in the continental US, there is still a monument erected in 1813 to commemorate the event (210).



Plate 210. Monument erected in 1813 in San Agustin, Florida, to commemorate the 1812 Spanish Constitution.

Another interesting and not sufficiently well-known fact regarding the 1812 Constitution was that among the American deputies represented in Cadiz there was one of Amerindian origin, Dionisio Inca Yupanqui from Peru, who made a passionate intervention in defence of the rights of the natives to the general applause of the assembled. Since the sixteenth century *Leyes de Indias* had already recognised the Amerindians as subjects of the Spanish Monarchy and granted them special protection, so it came quite naturally to most representatives who were meeting in Cadiz that the Amerindians should also become equal citizens under the new liberal regime.

As a result of the deliberations, the Constitution defined the Spanish nation as being composed by Spaniards of both hemispheres—Europe and America, since the Philippines were at the time a dependency of New Spain—and recognising the right to citizenship, and therefore to voting, of the indigenous peoples. By way of comparison, the Amerindians in the United States of America were granted citizenship only in 1924, more than a century later.

Though the 1812 Constitution was in effect for only two years, since it was abolished in 1814 when an absolute monarch, backed by the full might of the post-Napoleonic “Concert of Powers”, returned to the Spanish throne, it had lasting repercussions both in Spain and abroad. The liberal Spanish Constitution was the reference for many reformist movements during the nineteenth century, both in Europe and in the new Latin American states, where it served as a model for many of their own constitutions.

As for Spaniards, it was inscribed in the collective consciousness as a reminder of the liberties and rights already won and lost and as a constant incitement to recover and improve them.

Despite their rich and evolving heritage as former members of a composite Hispanic world, during the first decades after their independence, part of the new elites accepted uncritically the North Atlantic narrative about their past: since they had been dominated by an anti-modern country, Spain, they had been deprived of all the fruits of the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. It was time for them to catch up and make up for lost time by joining in the group of nations led by the standard bearers of modernity...of course not as travellers in first class, which was reserved for the proper North Atlantic nations, but as third-class passengers.

Thus Hispanic countries, which in previous centuries had never been a part of the Third World—a denomination invented in French intellectual circles in the 1960s—found themselves trying to get rid of the remaining links with Spain only to fall under the material hegemony of the Anglo-American world and the cultural spell of France: two new forms of dependency despite their progressive appearance. The process of de-Hispanisation seemed irreversible. Would Spanish follow in the footsteps of Latin and be fragmented into several American languages?. Would an Argentinean end up speaking a variation of Cockney or a Mexican singing *rancheras* in French? It seemed possible at one point, but the threat did not materialise. The important question is why? There are many reasonable answers, but for the sake of simplicity I will invoke just one name: Andrés Bello (211).



Plate 211: Andrés Bello, by Raymond Monvoisin.

Andrés Bello's fascinating vital and intellectual journey represents a bridge spanning three different periods in the history of the Hispanic world: from unity to fragmentation to reconfiguration. He was born in 1781 in Venezuela to Spanish parents from the Canary Islands. As a child he received a solid classical education. He was able to translate Virgil's *Aeneid* into Spanish when he was just fifteen years old. Attracted also to the natural sciences, he became acquainted with Alexander von Humboldt during the latter's visit to Venezuela, a meeting that left a profound impression on the life of the future pan-American humanist. Later on, Bello graduated in Arts and at the onset of the revolutionary processes in Latin America he chose the camp of emancipation. In 1810 he travelled to Britain, accompanying Simon Bolívar on a diplomatic mission, married locally and remained in London for the next nineteen years. Facing continuous financial difficulties he tried his hand at different diplomatic, editorial and scholarly enterprises. While in London he wrote, though left unfinished, his most celebrated long poem, entitled *America*, an epic celebration of the continent's nature and historical evolution leading towards a Virgilian Arcadia, not very far in its idealism from the Jeffersonian vision.

In 1829 he was invited to serve at the Chilean Foreign Ministry and so he left Europe and returned to the New World. There he found the Bolivarian dream of a united America in tatters and the new republics in a state of political turmoil. To borrow René Dumont's dictum about sub-Saharan Africa in the 1960s, Latin America had started off badly. But Andrés Bello was not a pessimist by nature and upon his arrival in Chile he became tirelessly immersed in educational, political and legislative initiatives intended to lay the foundations of a liberal polity for his new adoptive country. The University of Chile and the Chilean Civil Code, a model for other Latin American republics, were among the most important fruits of his activism, while his incursions into the field of International Law contributed to the extraordinary development of this discipline in Spanish America. But important as these were from a nation- or region-building perspective, Bello's main accomplishments were in the realm of philological studies and the preservation of the unity of the Spanish language. That Hispanic America did not end up speaking French or English or in a variety of pidgins derived from Spanish was mainly due to the efforts of Andrés Bello and his followers to accommodate the many varieties of spoken American Spanish into the common fold of a shared set of linguistic norms, into a pan-Spanish *koine*. Confronting those who, like the Argentinean Sarmiento, advocated a total break with Spain and its alleged anti-modern shackles in favour of embracing everything French or Anglo-American, Bello sought the preservation of the Spanish heritage without surrendering either immersion in new stylistic and intellectual currents or further enlargement by exploring new cultural and material horizons. Instead of fragmenting the inherited Hispanic world, he was in favour of its reconfiguration and expansion so that it could be enriched with the incorporation of native and foreign influences without compromising its intrinsic nature. His main contribution to such

a worthy goal was his *Grammar of the Spanish language for the usage of Americans* in which, for the sake of simplicity, he advocated several far-reaching orthographic reforms that ran counter to the accepted norms dictated by the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language. Many of Bello's proposals were adopted by the Chilean educational system, but failed to take root in the rest of Hispano-America. With enormous generosity of spirit, Bello renounced his more radical orthographic proposals and made a call to all Spanish speakers to follow the accepted rules in order to preserve the integrity of the language while respecting its diversity. Such equanimity was echoed by the linguistic authorities in Madrid who, unlike their political counterparts, showed a commendable agility in recognising the reality of the new independent republics. In 1853, Rafael María Baralt, born a citizen of Venezuela, a poet and diplomat, was the first Latin American to be elected as a fully fledged member of the Royal Spanish Academy. Soon, other prominent Spanish-Americans were accepted as associate members and, in 1870, at the instigation of Juan Eugenio Hartzerbusch, a dramatist and librarian of fame, the decision was adopted to create the Associated Academies of the Spanish Language in all Spanish-American republics, a move that was later replicated in the Philippines and, closer to our days, in the United States of America. Not surprisingly, given the vitality of philological studies in that country, the first American Academy was inaugurated in 1871 in Colombia by three figures who were instrumental in the preservation and refinement of the Spanish language: Rufino José Cuervo, Antonio Caro and Marco Fidel Suárez, three names, together with Bello's, that deserve a place of honour in any history of Hispanic civilisation (212).



Plate 212. The Colombian Academy of Language, founded in 1871. The first Associate Academy of the Spanish language in America.

The preservation of the unity of the Spanish language despite political fragmentation was mainly possible because the process of Hispanisation carried out in the preceding three centuries had been largely successful, but also due to the active role played by a number of leading Spanish-American intellectuals, conscious of the need to maintain the civilisational unity of the emancipated New World. Their decision, however, did not necessarily mean that the Hispanic republics had to bow to the cultural and artistic lead of Spain. In fact, in what constituted a novelty in the history of the West, an extra-European region was to pioneer an aesthetic and, in fact, all-encompassing cultural movement that would be first adopted by and then adapted in its former European mother country.

It strikes me, as it did to the Mexican poet and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz, who was incensed about it, that many renderings of Modernism and Late Modernity, those two sides of the same coin, written by Anglo-American or French or German scholars simply ignore the contribution made to the critique of Modernity, the birth of Modernism and the triumph of the avant-gardes by the Spanish-speaking world. The standard North Atlantic narrative of Modernism and Late Modernity starts with the French departure from Romanticism by the likes of Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Rimbaud, referring to their celebration of the present and conceptualisation of art as detached from any social utility and morality; then it mentions in passing Ralph Waldo Emerson's rhapsodies about evolutionary naturalism and technological change; it continues with a series of European, particularly French, "-isms" including Decadence, Symbolism, Parnassianism; it incorporates a blend of Anglo-Irish-American ingredients—with Ezra Pound and his Imagism, T. S. Eliot's mixture of conservatism and apocalyptic cosmopolitanism, James Joyce's Dublin perambulations or Virginia Woolf's immersions in the stream of consciousness—and culminates in the succession of avant-gardes: Italian and Russian Futurisms; French Cubism and Surrealism; German Expressionism; Abstract Expressionism... Usually, there is not a single mention of any Hispanic contribution to such marvellous effervescence except for the unavoidable reference to some single, isolated figures: Picasso, Lorca, Dalí... as if they had surged out of nowhere, or to an exotic Mexican muralist here and a Chilean surrealist painter there. This is not very surprising: since, in the North Atlantic mind, Spain and the Hispanic world were absent from the inception and first manifestations of the modern world it would be strange that they could have participated in any movement pertaining to Late Modernity. As an example of this cast of mind we can mention the oft-quoted 1990 essay entitled *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, by Stephen Toulmin. While examining alternative attitudes to the crisis of the modern world, Toulmin follows Lord Clark's example by completely ignoring Latin America and justifying his exclusion of Spain from any narrative of modernity in derogatory and factually erroneous terms: "early in the 16th century, Charles I of Spain (Emperor Charles V) had faced the guerra de las comunidades... and had made it the excuse for converting or expelling Muslims, Jews and Protestant alike" (in fact the non-converted Jews were expelled under Charles's grandparents, Ferdinand and Isabella, and

the remaining Muslims would be deported in 1609, under Philip III). “A century later, Spain’s declining economic power was leading to a fossilization of its institutions, which continued after a Bourbon dynasty succeeded the Habsburgs” (in fact the change of dynasty was followed by a complete reform of the Habsburg institutions, which had already undergone continuous adaptations to changing circumstances both in Spain and in its overseas territories).⁶⁹ It is truly difficult to encompass more mistakes in just a single sentence. Any student who made such obvious errors in a History examination would automatically fail, but incredible as it might seem, Toulmin’s ruminations on Modernity are still considered a reference in this field.

In fact, *Modernismo*, as it was first called in the Hispanic world, was so named in 1888 by a Nicaraguan poet, Rubén Darío, the year T. S. Eliot was born and Ezra Pound was little more than an infant. But since it is inconceivable to the North Atlantic mind that a movement of such transcendental importance could be born in Spanish America the result is that, even in the most recent Northern accounts, the Hispanic roots of Modernism are either ignored or relegated to footnotes. Fortunately, as happens in many other chapters of this narrative on *Civilisation*, there is a new generation of scholars who are challenging the fortress of prejudice. From this challenge a new picture is emerging that radically alters the preconceived view of independent Latin America as a backward and culturally marginal bad copy of the Northern West. For the real story of *Modernismo*, the Hispanic precursor to Anglo-American Modernism, and, in fact, the Hispanic response to the crisis of Late Modernity, shows how the Hispanic world was an intrinsic and essential contributor, in more than one domain, to the dazzling revolution of the mind and the spirit that took the West by storm in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the onset of the twentieth (213).



Plate 213. Rubén Darío. Diplomat, poet and spiritual father of *Modernismo*.

⁶⁹ Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, p. 93.

Rubén Darío's choice of the terms *Modernista* and *Modernismo* to describe favorably first an aesthetic attitude and then a stylistic movement that was taking root among Spanish American writers in the 1880s stood in sharp contrast with the derogatory use of the term "modernism" in English letters, when it was coined in 1734 by Jonathan Swift in a letter addressed to Pope condemning the corruption of Shakespeare's language. Though it was considered at first a mere imitation of French contemporary models, *Modernismo* soon acquired a consistency and clarity of purpose that was absent in its French literary counterparts, divided as they were among myriad currents and petty factionalisms. Darío's frequent travels across Spanish America and his personal contacts with writers of many different nationalities allowed him to identify what was common to many of them above and beyond their artistic idiosyncrasies. He saw in those shared traits the emergence of a new spirit of cosmopolitan openness, mediated specially, but not only, by the influence of France, and, at the same time, a desire to affirm a Spanish American identity inclusive of both the Spanish tradition and of indigenous elements, celebrating the pre-Columbian past and America's exuberant nature.

Such an eclectic movement and, particularly, its attempt to challenge the long-established authority of letters in Spain itself, provoked ambiguous reactions in Spanish literary circles, from utter rejection to enthusiastic reception. Actually, the history of *Modernismo's* incorporation into *fin-de-siècle* Spain has filled an enormous number of pages in literary studies. The main bone of contention among critics is whether or not the allegedly quintessential Spanish movement known as "the Generation of '98" was derivative or original, meaning whether it was a local manifestation of a pan-Hispanic version of Modernism or something different. Those who have maintained the distinction between the two, like the Spanish poet Pedro Salinas, consider that Spanish-American *Modernista* authors were more interested in aestheticism and embellishments than in the message of their poems or novels, whilst the Generation of '98 was motivated less by perfection of style than by a radical ontological questioning of Spain's historical trajectory after the defeat in the 1898 war with the United States and the loss of its remaining overseas territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific.

Contrary to that notion, most authors, without denying the existence of differences between *Modernismo* and the Generation of '98, point towards their underlying unity as two variants of a Hispanic response to the crisis of Modernity. That the response was initiated in Spanish America and not in Europe also has a profound meaning. In this view, *Modernismo* was originally thought of by many as a purely aesthetic strategy aimed at substituting Spanish influences with French ones, a kind of cultural liberation movement that, to all intents and purposes, only managed to trade an old dependency for a new cultural subordination. But it was far more than that. The alluring temptations of France were just one of the avenues explored by *Modernistas*

as, in the words of the Mexican writer Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera in 1894, they tried to absorb the best that other countries could offer, while preserving the essential characteristics of their race. The call to import culture from other latitudes was not the reflection of a passive disposition on the part of Spanish American authors. On the contrary, it was deemed to be a means to enrich their imaginations so that they could create more and better artistic products.

This positive spiritual attitude coincided with a period of material growth in many of the main Spanish American countries. Vibrant civic centres like Buenos Aires, Santiago and Mexico City were becoming magnets for attracting new investments in infrastructure, urban planning and iconic cultural public works. Journalism flourished. Population was on the rise, in part due to immigration from Southern Europe. José Martí, the hero of Cuban independence, wrote in 1882 about an era when “trains vanquish the wilderness; newspapers, the human wilderness. Sunlight penetrates the fissures in old tree trunks. All is expansion, communication, contagion, diffusion”⁷⁰. Martí was not talking about some far-away feats of nineteenth-century modernisation, which Latin America had been deprived of. In fact, whilst still under Spanish rule, Cuba had been in 1837 the first Latin American country and the seventh in the world where a railway line for steam locomotives was built, linking La Habana and the village of Bejucal for the transport of passengers and sugar cane (214,215).



Plate 214. Museum at the Cuban station of Bejucal. The first railway using steam locomotives in Spanish America was built in 1837, twelve years after Stephenson inaugurated the first such line in Great Britain and seven years after the first one was operative in the United States.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Aníbal González, *A Companion to Latin American Modernism*, p.2.



Plate 215. Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, inaugurated in 1908. The first opera performed in America was Tomás de Torrejón y Velasco's *La Púrpura de la Rosa*, in Lima in 1701. The first opera composed in America was *The Partenope*, written in Mexico by Manuel de Zumaya in 1711.

As Early Modernity had been the cradle of the Hispanic world, Late Modernity was to become the midwife to a cultural renewal that had profound repercussions both within and beyond the porous borders of the Spanish-speaking community. When confronted with a period of accelerated change that was shaking the very material and intellectual foundations of the West, including in their own countries, *Modernista* authors in Latin America set out an agenda that combined a profound renovation of their Hispanic heritage—by enlarging and enriching both its inner roots and its external appearance—with a cosmopolitan project aimed at inserting the revived Hispanic world into the broader epochal currents that were challenging the assumptions on which Western civilisation had been founded. A mixture of particularism and universalism was present from the outset of *Modernismo* and manifested itself in different degrees in the works of its main representatives. One of the founding fathers of the movement, José Martí, was at the same time a Cuban patriot, interested mainly in the future of its own homeland, and a man immersed in all the major trends that were shaping the world around him whether he was dwelling in Caracas, Saragossa or New York. Rubén Darío, his anointed successor, had an even more nomadic life, serving as a diplomat in a variety of postings, and a more ecumenical cast of mind, as attested

in the different stages of his poetic output, but he always remained faithful to his Latin American roots. This was even stronger when the Colossus of the North, as he named the United States in one of his most celebrated poems, after defeating Spain, threatened to extend its menacing shadow over its southern neighbours. Actually, together with the appreciation and revival of the linguistic links with Spain, the crisis of 1898 was the other great instigator of pan-Hispanic solidarity and tentative reconciliation with the former colonial power after decades of mutual suspicions and recriminations.

True, the terrain had been prepared by Rubén Darío's first visit to the mother country in 1892. He was already a celebrity in the making after having published his ground-breaking collection of poems and short stories *Azul*, in 1888. In Madrid he was received favourably by some of the greatest Spanish intellectuals and artists of the time, from the polymath Menéndez Pelayo to the novelist and influential literary critic Juan Valera who hailed him as the towering representative of a Spanish American renaissance. This position was cemented by the publication in 1896 of *Prosas Profanas*, whose prologue, despite the author's protestations to the contrary, was hailed as a *Modernista* manifesto. Darío imagines a visit to a white-bearded Spanish grandfather who points towards portraits of illustrious literary ancestors displayed in a row and goes: "this one is the great Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, the one-armed genius; this one is Lope de Vega; this one Garcilaso; this one Quintana". Darío then replies by asking for the noble Gracián; for Teresa the Saint; for brave Góngora and for the best of them: Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas. And then, exclaims: Shakespeare! Dante! Hugo...! (muttering "Verlaine" in his mind).

With the passing of time, Darío's eclecticism and brilliant formal experimentations gave way to a more sinister and introspected tone, a turn that was aggravated by his bouts of drinking and frequent marital crises. He was also less sure about the future of Latin America, which he saw menaced by the encroachments of Anglo-American materialistic imperialism. In his 1904 *Ode to Roosevelt*, learnt by heart by generations of Spanish speakers on both sides of the Atlantic, he addressed the US President, and by extension the version of civilisation embodied by his larger than life political persona in prophetic verses:

"You are the United States
you are the future invader
of the naïve America that has Indian blood
that still prays to Jesus Christ and still speaks Spanish...
When you shake there is a deep temblor

that passes through the enormous vertebrae of the Andes...
Be careful. Spanish America is still alive!
There are a thousand cubs loosed from the Spanish lion
Roosevelt, you would need to be God himself,
the terrible Rifleman and fearless Hunter
to manage to grab us in your iron claws.”

The darkened mood announced by the later Darío and his call to react in the face of the United States’ increasingly aggressive stance—exemplified by its interference in carving Panama out of Colombia to facilitate the construction of the bi-oceanic canal in 1903—was turned into an ideological rallying cry by the Uruguayan writer José Enrique Rodó. In his 1900 essay *Ariel*, Rodó laid out a vision of a regenerated Latin America based on its Graeco-Roman roots as mediated by Spain and France and in opposition to what he called “*nordomanía*”, the fatal attraction exerted by North American utilitarianism and crude materialism. Rodó’s appeal to a pan-American audience, though it did not materialise in a concrete political movement, did nevertheless have a profound influence in the consolidation of a sense of belonging to a shared cultural universe which traced its origins to the Mediterranean world of Classical Antiquity, the ultimate source of Hispanic and Western civilisation.

Whilst in Spanish America the *Modernistas*’ critical dialogue with Late Modernity was characterised, even among the most “nativist” authors, by cosmopolitan references, their first counterparts in Spain followed, initially, a more introverted path. The Generation of ’98, considered by many the foundational movement in contemporary Spanish letters, tried to find an answer to the crisis triggered by the defeat in the war against the United States by an exercise of soul searching. In literary terms the outcome of that exercise led to a radical renovation both in language and style of the national tradition, which had for the most part become stalled since the Golden Age and the period of the Enlightenment, but in intellectual and even in political terms it risked ending up in an essentialist *cul de sac*. Absorbed in their attempts at finding out the true nature of the Spanish nation, the one that had been lost somewhere along the road that led to the so-called Disaster, many authors of the Generation of ’98 and their acolytes ended up either in excessive bouts of pessimism—particularly when comparing the lot of Spain and Latin Europe in general at the *fin de siècle* with the dynamism of the Anglo-American and Germanic races then at their peak—or in dreamy reformist projects with little practical impact (216).



Plate 216. *My Friends*, by Zuloaga, 1920-1936. Unfinished group portrait of some members of the Generation of '98 and other intellectuals.

Standing out among the first generation that spearheaded the intellectual and artistic reaction to the country's prostration following the war of 1898, there are two apparently opposite figures: Miguel de Unamuno and Juan Ramón Jiménez. Unamuno was, without doubt, one of the most original thinkers, both in content and ways of expression, living in Europe at the turn of the century. Philosopher, philologist, poet, novelist, dramatist, master of origami (the Japanese art of making figures with folding paper), and always an inveterate polemicist, he is usually considered to be one of the first representatives of existentialism, though he always resisted being labelled in any way. In his influential *Tragic Sense of Life*, published in 1912, so often considered an Existentialist manifesto, he simply went beyond the philosophical and abstract connotations associated to the term, disengaged from the real conditions of the individual, and moved directly to address, literally, matters of flesh and bone and blood as lived by "me". True to a powerful Spanish tradition, as represented by Cervantes or Velázquez among many others, Unamuno considered that the only subject worthy of great art or great philosophy was the real, whole, indivisible self with all its real, whole, indivisible contradictions, made out of whole, real matter and of whole, real spirit. In one of his most memorable metaphors, worthy of the worldly paradox

that he was, he said that a fulfilled individual should be able to “enjoy the flesh of one’s own soul”, “gozarse uno la carne del alma” in his unmistakable Spanish. This radical affirmation of the self was, of course, in agonistic contradiction with the consciousness, and the certitude, of death. Hence Unamuno’s insistence on the experience of conflict as the existential principle that confers meaning on life. For him the goal of life is not to attain a state of ceaseless bliss or, on the contrary, of everlasting hellish damnation, but to be in a permanent Purgatory, in a state of eternal agony, etymologically from the Greek *agon*, the struggle among the main characters in a dramatic play. This anguish gives structure to his fictional work in the form of some of the first existential novels. Particularly in the most famous of them, *Niebla*, published in 1914, the author resorts to a very Cervantesque dialectic between the writer and his creation, in this case named Augusto, who, upon discovering that he is just a character in a novel threatens his author with the revelation that he himself is a fictional creature in God’s dream:

“You want me to die as a fictional being? I am to die as a creature of fiction? Very well, my lord creator, Don Miguel de Unamuno, you will die too!... You’ll return to the nothingness from which you came. God will cease to dream you! You will die... even though you don’t want to. You will die, and so will all those who read my story, every one... They are all fictional beings, too, creatures of fiction like myself... you, my creator, my dear Don Miguel, you are nothing more than another ‘nivolist’ creature.”

Niebla is a Borgesian short story—or *nivola*, as Unamuno used to say—before Borges and hints at a very modern existential drama, the absence of any essence, long before Sartre.

Tough Spaniard to the bone and to the soul, it would be a mistake to consider that Unamuno was the quintessential representative of the inward-looking ’98 intellectual, devoted to ruminating endlessly on the meaning of Spain and of Spanishness. That he did so in some of his writings and polemics must not make us forget that he was, in knowledge and in lived experience, one of the most universal men of his time. A professor of Greek, he mastered the most recondite literatures produced in dead and living languages and was prodigiously abreast of the latest political and intellectual European and world developments. He was able to discuss the meaning of an obscure Scottish term in the poetry of Robert Burns with an expert of the vernacular, read Slavic novels in the original or dissertate about the latest work by Walt Whitman with equal passion and minute knowledge.

As was inevitable, Unamuno was also interested in the latest novelties produced in Spanish America. Here, his reaction to the currents of fresh air infused by the *Modernistas* was ambivalent, to say the least. As a poet influenced by Fray Luis de León or Quevedo and being a spiritual agonist by definition, his sensibility could not be more diametrically opposed to the musical lyricism and apparent frivolity of the new American poets. His *Poem to the Christ painted by Velázquez*, one of the most moving religious poems in the Spanish language, belongs to the tradition of the Golden Age and as such could be read as an anti-modernist manifesto, as an attempt to recover in form and content the old national religious and literary tradition (217).



Plate 217. *Christ*, by Velázquez, circa 1632. Prado Museum, Madrid.

“En qué piensas Tú, muerto, Cristo mío?/ Of what do You think, Christ, after your death?”

But, even the nostalgic yearnings of the poem for the redeeming powers of Christ suffering on the cross and the use of classical metres could not obscure the radical character of Unamuno's thought. In another existential novel, or *nóvola*, *San Manuel Bueno, Mártir*, he very clearly states his position. The protagonist, a curate in a remote village, does not believe in God. Nevertheless, using a kind of argumentation that ultimately derives from Averroes, and the doctrine of the two truths, and from Maimonides, with his distinction between the elites able to use reason and the populace in need of being guided by faith, the priest comes to the conclusion that in order to be able to bear the burden of a life devoid of meaning, and in order to help his rural flock do the same, he has to behave as if the creed he no longer believes in is true. It is a compromise derived both from conviction and from the necessity to find a strategy to cope with the ultimate absurdity of existence.

As we see, Unamuno was no lightweight when it came to dealing with deep philosophical problems and had a superb talent for expressing them in a literary form. In this respect, the figure he most resembles is Leo Tolstoy. Both were omnivorous egocentrics, shared the same obsession with death, the same ambivalent attitude towards reason and faith as mediated by the teachings of Christianity, either in its Catholic or Orthodox versions, and the same messianic individualism that they thought was the real path to salvation for their respective nations.

When all the previous elements in Unamuno's character are taken into account it is easier to understand the uneasiness with which he reacted to the mighty irruption of the *Modernista* movement, and particularly of Rubén Darío, into the firmament of the Hispanic world. Though he wrote some favorable reviews of some less-known Spanish American authors and recognised the need to revitalise the stale Spanish language, his overall negative attitude towards novelties and his praise of what he called "*eternismo*" in contraposition to "*modernismo*" tended to prevail. It was a reaction that was shared by other members of his Generation, who, though fully cognizant of the prostrate state into which Spain had fallen, were reluctant to accept its loss of centrality even within its own family of nations.

In a recent seminal work, one that should be required reading in both Hispanic and North Atlantic intellectual circles, Alejandro Mejías-López has rightly defined what happened as an "Inverted Conquest", using a term coined in 1908 by the Venezuelan novelist Díaz Rodríguez. Rubén Darío's trip to Spain in 1892 was to initiate, four hundred years after the landing of Columbus on La Española, a sort of cultural colonisation of the former mother country. And as had happened when the conquistadors relied on local allies to seize the powerful Aztec and Inca empires, so the Hispano-American *modernistas* could count on the aid of some valuable Spanish mediators. Such was the case with Juan Valera's positive reception of Darío's *Azul* in his collection of *Cartas Americanas*, where the Spaniard hailed not only the cosmopolitanism of the Nicaraguan, but also his role as

a cultural innovator, a creator who does not limit himself to following Parisian fashions compliantly, but who is able to be ahead of them and even to set new trends. Even more tellingly, Valera ends his review of Darío's work seeing in him a future glory of Spanish American letters and recognising that as a Spaniard, he could not ask him to follow Spanish literary instruction, since he was, like his nation and the rest of Spanish America, politically independent. Of course, other peninsular self-proclaimed cultural authorities did not share the acceptance of the important literary contributions made by the former subjects of the Empire. But little by little, the delightful poison of *modernista* verses, images and concepts started to infiltrate the blood system of a new generation that was emerging in Spain from the shadow of 1898's Disaster.

Fresh from their reading of Spanish American writers, authors like Salvador Rueda, Ramón de Valle-Inclán, Francisco Villaespesa, Manuel Machado and Juan Ramón Jiménez were to become the bridge that would reunite, this time from the European shore of the Atlantic, both sides of the Hispanic world. Among them, the most influential for the renaissance of Spanish letters and culture in the so-called Silver Age—though as we will see it was more of a new Golden Age—was Juan Ramón Jiménez (218).



Plate 218. Juan Ramón Jiménez by Daniel Vázquez Díaz, Museum of Huelva

As a young poet, Juan Ramón Jiménez had fallen under the influence of Darío and Rodó as well as under the spell of the French symbolists. Though a man devoured from a most tender age by morbid premonitions of death and introspective by nature, he had by his own confession “a passionate relationship with poetry”. Poetry for him was a way to apprehend what lurks behind the transitoriness of things. As he matured as a poet, he found that the elusive ultimate reality was inside him: it was, as he called

it, “la Obra”, “the Work”. There are few other examples of a man so totally devoted to his own poetic vocation at the expense of anything else. Like a meticulous sculptor trying to extract a perfect figure from a mass of shapeless marble, he was constantly carving his own feelings into verses that were increasingly devoid of any artificiality, at the opposite extreme from his *modernista* beginnings. His most elaborated poetics consisted in invoking intelligence to give him “*the exact name of things*”:

¡Intelijencia, dame
El nombre exacto de las cosas!
...Que mi palabra sea
la cosa misma
creada por mi alma nuevamente.”

Such an exacting appeal to the operations of intelligence as a means of finding the right poetic expression did lead Jiménez to exalt the role of the creative minorities in a society, as did his contemporary and friend, the philosopher Ortega y Gasset. While Jiménez provocatively dedicated his books to the “immense minority”, Ortega analyzed the abdication of the aristocracy—etymologically understood as the government by the best and brightest—and the rise of the masses as the defining signs of the times in his influential *The Revolt of the Masses*, published in 1930. Determined to form an educated elite that could act as a bulwark against the increasing power of the “mass-men”, Ortega actively participated in, and even instigated, some of the most interesting cultural initiatives in Spain during the first decades of the twentieth century. His main goal was to expose a new generation of young Spaniards to the main aesthetic, philosophical and scientific currents in Europe so that they could reach and surpass what he called “the level of the times”. To that end he enlisted Juan Ramón Jiménez, to whom he entrusted the role of renovator of the literary scene, and other prominent figures in different fields. Though those efforts found various avenues of expression, many of them converged in two of the most ambitious cultural projects of the epoch in Spain and Europe: the *Residencia de Estudiantes* and the magazine *La Revista de Occidente*. This “Review of the West” was initiated by Ortega in 1923 and soon featured collaborations by the most creative and influential Western minds. Contemporary sociology, psychoanalysis, modern literary criticism, ethnology, philology, the advances in the domains of the sciences, particularly physics and biology... practically no major intellectual enterprise escaped the interest and close scrutiny of the *Revista*. True to the cosmopolitan cast of mind of its editors, particularly Ortega himself, the magazine became the major Spanish contribution to the emergence of an international community of intellectuals beyond national boundaries, devoted to the pursuit of truth and the preservation and enlargement of the West’s cultural heritage (219).



Plate 219. First issue of the *Revista de Occidente*, directed by Ortega y Gasset, July 1923.

Many of the Spanish contributors to the *Revista* had in fact been educated in the other pillar of Spain's cultural modernisation, following a similarly cosmopolitan path, *La Residencia de Estudiantes*, the Students' Residence. The *Residencia* of the 1920s can be placed alongside Cordova, Seville, Toledo, Salamanca, El Escorial, Tlatelolco, Cuzco or the Parian in Manila as one of the main centres of multicultural assimilation and creative innovation in the history of Hispanic and thus Western civilisation. Founded in 1910 by Alberto Jiménez Fraud and located on the Colina de los Chopos (Hill of Poplars), on the outskirts of Madrid, it was the brainchild and showcase of a pedagogic programme initiated by Professor Francisco Giner de los Ríos in 1876 with the creation of the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, the Free Institution for Education, a secular Institute of higher learning whose goal was to form a Spanish elite educated in the principles of free thinking, social and political responsibility and open to the most advanced intellectual and artistic currents of the age. Another offshoot of the Free Institution was the *Junta de Ampliación de Estudios*, established in 1907 to foster scientific research and finance the exchange of Spanish students and professors with other European and Latin American countries. The first President of the *Junta* was named Santiago Ramón y Cajal, who, as discoverer of the neuron doctrine, had received the Nobel Prize in 1906 for his seminal contributions to modern neuroscience. Having experienced the horrors of the 1898 war with the United States as a young military doctor and determined not to be influenced by the depressing mood that pervaded many

sectors of Spanish society, Cajal saw education and scientific research as the paths to redemption for Spain to follow. While most literary-minded members of the Generation of '98 got lost in endless melancholic reflections on the ontology of Spain, the great scientist offered a more practical approach to the ailments that plagued his country. His advice to the younger Spanish generations was summed up in a 1900 conference at the University of Madrid entitled "A patria chica, alma grande" -the smaller the homeland the greater the soul- where he challenged his students not to lose time searching morosely in the inner recesses of the Spanish essence, but first to get down to the brass tacks of the day-to-day, and only then to venture out like Don Quixote into the open field, not to tilt at windmills but "to contribute to the increase of Spanish ideas circulating in the world" (220).

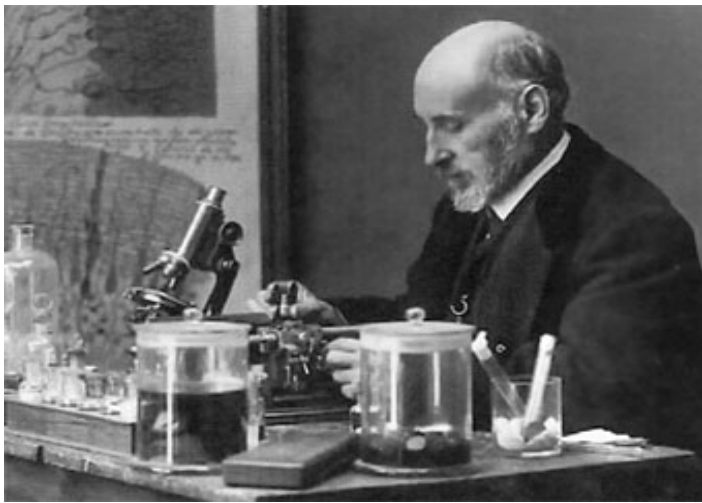


Plate 220: Ramón y Cajal, father of the modern neurosciences, working in his laboratory.

Like Juan Ramón Jiménez in poetry and Ortega y Gasset in philosophy, Ramón y Cajal was one of the brightest figures in a period of intellectual agitation and innovation in Spain that also led to important contributions to the domains of science and technology. Many of them are, once more, unfortunately neglected in most intellectual histories of the period. Take, for instance, the astonishing figure of Leonardo Torres y Quevedo, an engineer and mathematician who designed the Astra-Torres airships, used by the French and American forces during the First World War. He also designed and built the first computer game, the Chess Player, which was an automaton able to play chess without human interference and thus the first precursor to Deep Blue—in 1912. In 1916, he designed the

Spanish Aerocar, an aerial cable car spanning the Niagara Whirlpool, which is still running; he invented the Telekino, a pioneering remote control; and he built several analogue calculating machines based on the logarithmic scale. Or consider Isaac Peral, inventor of the first electrically powered submarine completed with an underwater navigational system, tested in 1888; or Juan de la Cierva, who designed the first Autogiro in 1920, which was tested in 1923, and is a precursor to the modern helicopter (221, 222,223).

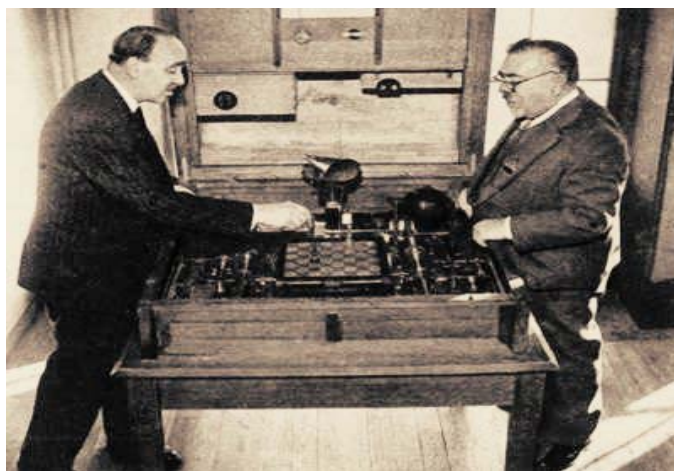


Plate 221. Torres y Quevedo's son demonstrates his father's invention of the Chess Player to Norbert Wiener, the founder of cybernetics.

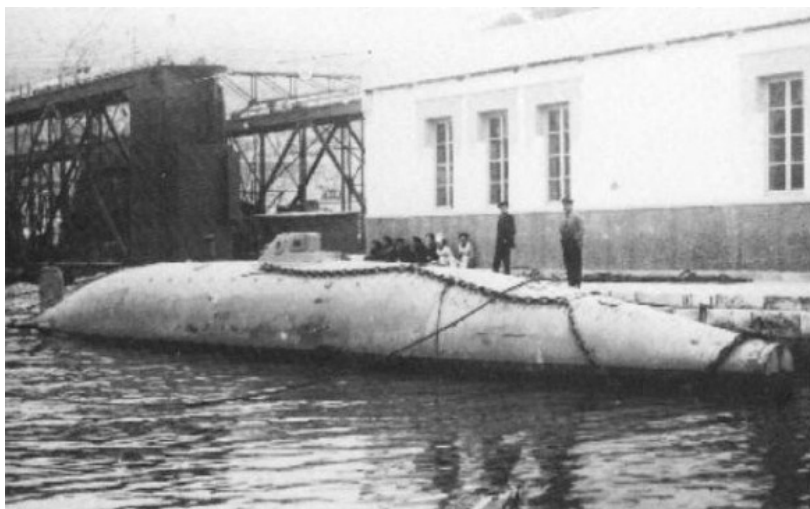


Plate 222: Isaac Peral's first electrically powered submarine, 1888.



Plate 223. Juan de la Cierva and his Autogiro, precursor to the helicopter.

As said, the seedbed for the blossoming of a modern and cosmopolitan Spanish elite was the *Residencia de Estudiantes*. Inspired by the example of the colleges at Oxford and Cambridge, as institutions where Great Britain educated its ruling class, the Spanish counterpart did not become famous for producing imperial warriors and administrators, but, ultimately for serving as the place where some of the most creative minds of the twentieth century first met and influenced each other in their formative years. The poet Federico García Lorca, the film maker Luis Buñuel and the painter Salvador Dalí were students at the *Residencia* during the early 1920s, and it was there that their friendship flourished before their individual destinies and the broader Spanish and European political context led them to different vital and creative directions, and in the case of Lorca to a tragically premature death (224).



Plate 224. Dalí (left), Buñuel (centre), Lorca (second from the right) and two other friends, around 1925.

The progressive, eclectic atmosphere of the *Residencia de Estudiantes* exerted a great appeal on the three budding artists and contributed decisively to their future careers. Architecturally, the pavilions where the students lived and received their classes had been designed in a historicist neo-Mudejar style, in a nod to the country's rich multicultural past, but the content of the lectures, the personalities who regularly visited the Hill of Poplars and the activities initiated by the students themselves had a truly forward-looking and cosmopolitan air. Though the study of the humanities and the hard sciences were the main focus, no cultural domain was neglected. The students, irrespective of their specific field of interest, were exposed to the latest novelties in music, cinema, physics, chemistry, psychology, economics or archaeology. Among the foreign luminaries who visited the *Residencia* to share their wisdom with the avid pupils there were Albert Einstein, John Maynard Keynes, Marie Curie, G. K. Chesterton, Rabindranath Tagore, Howard Carter or Le Corbusier... there was hardly a first-class mind in Europe and beyond who did not visit Madrid at the invitation of the institution (225).



Plate 225. Einstein visiting the *Residencia de Estudiantes*, 1923.

The history of the twentieth century's cultural transition from Modernism to the avant-garde is usually narrated from the vantage point of five or six cities: Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Moscow (or St Petersburg), London and New York, with Milan/Rome and Zurich sometimes added to the lot. The main artistic movements of the epoch—in painting, architecture or literature—are normally associated with one or several of those privileged Western centres of civilisation: Vienna and the Secession movement; Berlin and Expressionism; Milan, Rome and Futurism; Zurich and Dada; London and Anglo-American modernism; St Petersburg, Moscow and Acmeism or Suprematism... and, of course, Paris and later New York—whose iconic skyscrapers became the symbol of the twentieth century—as the epicentres of everything

A recent essay on the radical transformations experienced by Western societies between 1900 and 1914, *The Vertigo Years*, authored by Philip Blom in 2008, is a typical example of this very Clarkean, North Atlantic method of writing cultural history. The book sets off, characteristically, from the 1900 Universal Exposition in Paris, continues with a survey of the changing landscape in the Germanic and Russian literatures, visits Edwardian Britain and Imperial Vienna, explores the world of the new scientific discoveries, from Madame Curie to Rutherford and Einstein, mentions the arms race and the series of confrontations among the great powers that ultimately led to the carnage of the First World War and finally returns to the domains of social history by examining the impact of homosexuality, feminism, spiritualism,

pacifism, the new cult of the moving image and psychoanalysis on the intellectual profile of the epoch. Throughout the essay hundreds of people and places are mentioned, but there are no Spanish Americans and only four Spaniards who are privileged with a cursory glance—Goya, Unamuno, Manuel de Falla, Ortega y Gasset—and a fifth whose name receives more attention but only once, *en passant*, in connexion with his native country, as if he had been born in a kind of no-man’s land: Pablo Picasso. If we take a look at other classic North Atlantic essays on the evolution of early twentieth-century Western civilisation by following the traces of the different branches of Modernism until the 1930s, the overall impression is not very different. In *Modernisms*, Peter Nicholls focuses his lenses on the literary movements and the larger artistic scene from the nineteenth-century French symbolist poets up to a sunny spring day in 1934 when Breton, the father of Surrealism, and Alberto Giacometti, the Italian sculptor, were strolling along the Paris flea market. Again, among the hundreds of names examined in between the opening and closing pages of the essay, whose second edition was published in 2009, there are references to just five Spaniards: Gabriel Alomar (as a failed poet who coined the term *Futurismo* before Marinetti made it famous in its Italian version); Luis Buñuel (in an endnote); Salvador Dalí (in two endnotes); Juan Gris and Pablo Picasso, both in relation to “French Cubism” (as if the fact that Hemingway wrote some of his most poignant stories in and about Spain would rank him as a Spanish novelist in the realist tradition). Even more incredibly, in Nicholls’s only mention of the founder of the first Hispano-American version of Modernism, the Nicaraguan author Rubén Darío is named as a Spanish poet and as a mere follower of Symbolism in a less developed nation. Well, again, if anyone committed a similar mistake in an examination by saying, for instance, that Ezra Pound was just an Irish imitator of the Parnassians, or anything to that effect, and not the creator of Imagism from the United States and one of the brightest exponents of Anglo-American High Modernism, what grade would the offender obtain? When it comes to Spain or to the Hispanic world, apparently such errors, distortions or just sheer ignorance go unnoticed. For how can one possibly write a serious history of Modernism and the avant-garde without taking into consideration the role played by Spanish and Hispano-American creators in their respective developments? How can one write a history of Modernism without considering the seminal role of Hispano-American *Modernismo*? How can one write a history of the pre-1920s avant-garde movements in literature without mentioning the names of Ramón Gómez de la Serna and his *greguerías* (experimental aphorisms predating the Surrealist metaphors), the Chilean poet Vicente Huidobro and his Creationism, or the Ultraist

movement of Guillermo de Torre and the young Jorge Luis Borges? How can one write a history of Surrealism without according a place of honour to the essential contributions of Buñuel in film-making; Dalí and Miró in painting and the members of the Generation of '27—Lorca, Vicente Aleixandre, Luis Cernuda, Rafael Alberti—in poetry? How can one keep on ignoring the fact that Picasso was not a French Cubist but the most Spanish and, at the same time, the most universal artist of the twentieth century and, probably, in the entire history of art? How can one, in sum, deny the fact that Madrid and Barcelona (or Mexico City for that matter) contributed in no minor way to the early twentieth-century cultural revolution? Just take a look at the Barcelona of the *Renaixença* and Gaudí's extraordinary buildings, or at the Madrid of the *Gran Vía*, where one of the first skyscrapers in Europe was built between 1926 and 1929, to see how far both Spanish metropolises were immersed in and were contributing to the sweeping changes that were ushering the West, and the world, into a new era (226,227).



Plate 226. Casa Milá, by Gaudí in the 1920's, an example of Catalan modernist civil architecture.



Plate 227. The Gran Vía in Madrid in the late 1920s with the Telefónica Building under construction. At 89 metres, when it was inaugurated in 1929 it was one of the first skyscrapers, probably the first, in Europe, designed by the Spanish architect Ignacio de Cárdenas.

In 1929, the same year that the Telefónica Building was being completed, Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí premiered their film *Un Perro Andaluz*, *An Andalusian Dog* (normally known in the English-speaking world by its French title *Un chien andalou*). It was the first Surrealist film ever made and still remains a landmark in the history of cinema if only for the sheer potency of its distressing imagery. Its shocking scenes, particularly the opening shot with a razor cutting the eye of a woman or the ants surging from a hand; its dreamy associations and the absence of a plot, all point to the strong influence of psychoanalysis and, in fact, many of the images that would become so emblematic had been dreamed or imagined by both Spaniards separately and then used as the fabric of the film (228).



Plate 228. Poster of *An Andalusian Dog*, a film by Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí, 1929.

At the time of the premier of *An Andalusian Dog*, both budding artists had already abandoned the *Residencia de Estudiantes* and were trying to make their mark on the wider world. And they did so with a big bang and in their very individualistic ways. Though their careers would take on a cosmopolitan flavour, they could not mask the fact that they remained always rooted in the Spanish tradition. The uneasy mixture of universalism and Spanishness would in fact be one of the salient characteristics shared by the most important Spanish creators in the early twentieth century. Buñuel, Lorca, Dalí or Picasso suffered what Harold Bloom has termed the “anxiety of influence” to an extraordinary degree.

In many instances, their agonic attempt to incorporate, while at the same time reject, their Hispanic heritage—particularly its unflinching attachment to the real—surfaces in the most unsuspected ways. Dalí, whose eccentric character and outrageous antics must not make us forget his mastery of the most diverse pictorial techniques and, of course, his creative genius, enjoyed experimenting with different international styles but throughout his long life retained his admiration for Velázquez as the ultimate painter of reality. He even imitated the great master’s moustache as part of his public persona. And in fact, although he ended up finding himself viewed as the quintessential Surrealist painter, he

was unable, or unwilling to dispense with the intrusion of the real even into his most dream-like canvases. We see this struggle early on in his career when in 1924, under the influence of Cubism but still retaining a strong figurative vein, he painted the likeness of his friend Buñuel. Indeed, Buñuel himself was also unable to get rid of the powerful shadow of another Spanish giant, despite his many efforts, and Dalí hints at this presence. In Dalí's portrait we see the determined young man with his bulging eyes eager to take in and transform the world through the lenses of a cinematic camera in a way reminiscent, though in a different medium, of Goya's *Caprichos* and *Dark Paintings* than those films where his countryman, more than a century later, would expose the vices, follies and existential anguishes of the religious and social establishments of his time, from *Viridiana* to *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* or the *Exterminating Angel* (229).



Plate 229. *Portrait of Luis Buñuel*, by Salvador Dalí, 1924. Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid.

Despite his youthful dalliance with Cubism, Dalí soon tried other means of expression. For a time he experimented with other arts, poetry and, particularly, the theatre, hand in hand with his other great friend at the time Federico García Lorca, who in turn was waging his own agonistic combat with the tradition of

Spanish drama and with the influence of the popular *Romancero* on his poetry. Thus in 1927, Dalí collaborated in designing the sets and costumes for the play *Mariana Pineda* (230).



Plate 230. *Mariana Pineda*, a play by Lorca, designed by Dalí, 1927.

Again, the incursion onto the stage, a habitat that would always appeal to his histrionic character, was a detour for Dalí. He finally found his home in what he would call his paranoiac-critical method. A key moment in his formative years was the visit he paid to Picasso, whom he met in 1926. The example of Joan Miró, who had already joined the Surrealist movement in 1924, was also important in his decision to depart from more realist means of representation, though without completely dispensing with the prevalence of the figure. To all extents and purposes, Miró was more radical in this than his fellow Catalan. Though his initial Surrealist paintings still contain references to the natural world—for example, his *Tilled Field* of 1924 indicates a house, a tree, flags—his later works would show a far more detached relationship from reality and an almost total immersion in the domains of an imaginary world made up of dreamy signs and symbols, creating a very appealing universe, at the same time childlike and sophisticated (231, 232)



Plate 231. *The Tilled Field*, by Joan Miró, 1924. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.



Plate 232. *Figures at Night Guided by the Phosphorescent Tracks of Snails*, by Joan Miró, 1940. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

In Dalí we witness an almost opposite journey from the one undertaken by Miró, though, whimsical as he was, he took many detours on the way. After his semi-Cubist *Portrait of Buñuel* he retraced his steps back to the figurative, which he combined with an exquisite mastery of chromatic harmony in *The Girl at the Window*. At the peak of his powers, he demonstrated, like no-one before or after him, the possibility of employing the most perfect and detailed realistic technique to depict the imaginary. Such inner worlds could be either the product of the scientific mind in its relativistic twentieth-century version—as in *The Persistence of Memory*—or of the timeless religious, mystic experience—as in *The Christ of St John of the Cross* (233,234,235).



Plate 233. *The Girl at the Window*, by Salvador Dalí, 1925. Reina Sofía Museum, Madrid.



Plate 234. *The Persistence of Memory*, by Salvador Dalí, 1931. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

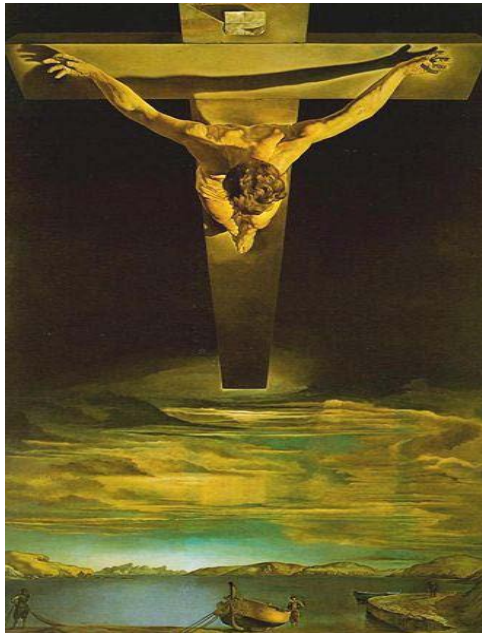


Plate 235. *Christ of Saint John of the Cross*, by Salvador Dalí, 1951. Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow.

Within the larger Hispanic world, Spanish artists were not the only ones struggling to cope with the anxieties of influence from their past while at the same time fully participating in the dramatic cultural changes experienced during the first half of the twentieth century. Long ignored or neglected, like their *modernista* predecessors, the powerful contribution of Hispano-American artists to the last century's visual revolution is finally, gradually, and belatedly, being recognised. For how could one pretend that the likes of Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros or Frida Kahlo in Mexico; Wilfredo Lam in Cuba; Roberto Matta in Chile; Joaquín Torres-García in Uruguay; Alejandro Xul Solar in Argentina; the Anglo-Mexican Leonora Carrington or the Spanish-Mexican Remedios Varo were just secondary, derivative figures with regard to their contemporary European or North American colleagues? No one who has carefully examined the original blend of the Renaissance, Constructivism and Indigenism in Rivera's murals; the cosmopolitan esotericism of Torres-García; the mixture of Cubism and African and Caribbean influences in Wilfredo Lam; the original fusion of Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism in Matta; or the strangely deranged beauty of Remedios Varo's paintings could deny the profound originality and intrinsic artistic value in those artists and their works (236, 237, 238, 239, 240).



Plate 236. *The Great Tenochtitlán*, by Diego Rivera, 1945. National Palace, Mexico City.



Plate 237. *Universal Art*, by Joaquín Torres-García, 1943. National Museum for the Virtual Arts, Montevideo.



Plate 238. *The Jungle*, by Wilfredo Lam, 1943. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

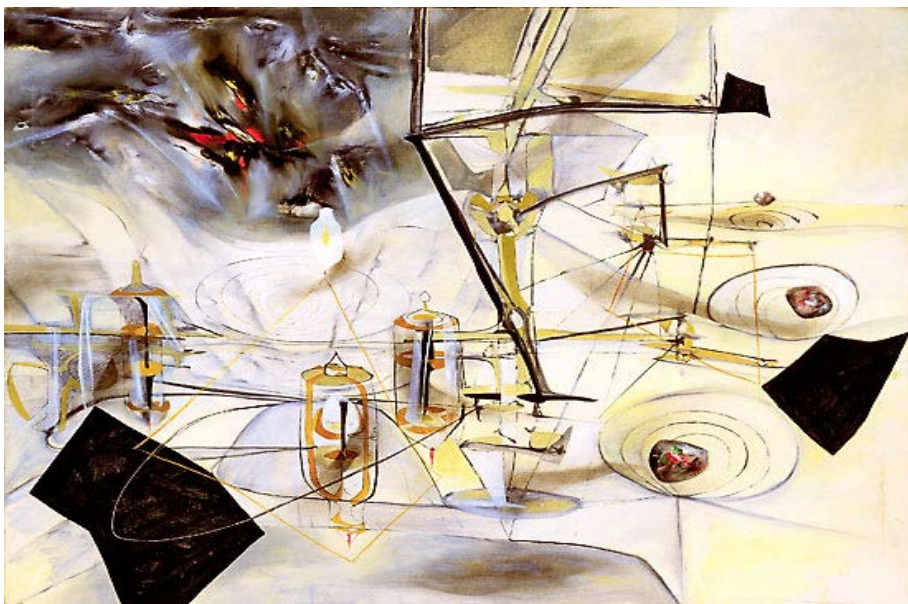


Plate 239. *The Bachelors Twenty Years After* by Roberto Matta, 1943. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

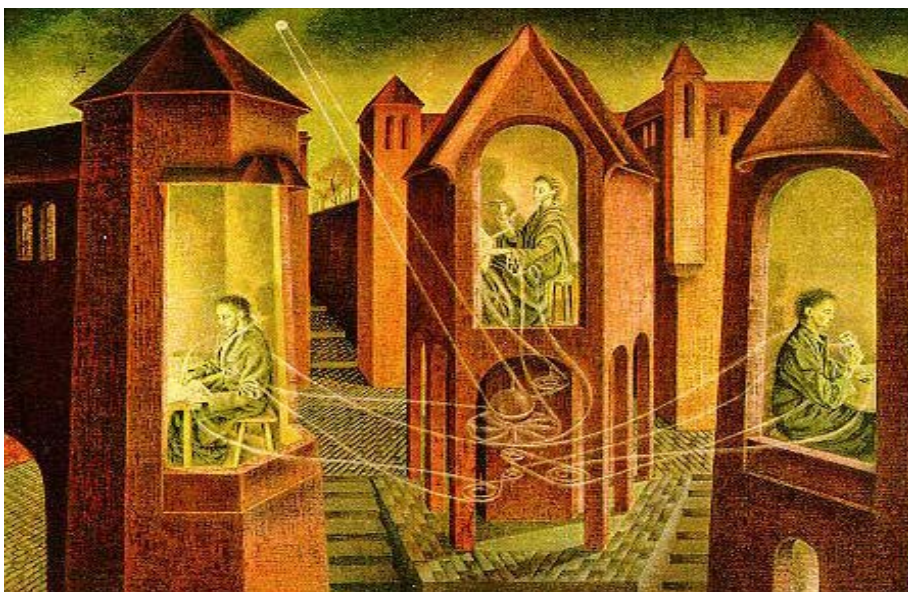


Plate 240. *Three Destinies*, by Remedios Varo, 1956. Private Collection.

We are now approaching the end of our journey. The history of Civilisation from a Hispanic perspective, or of the Hispanic contribution to Civilisation—whichever way the reader prefers it—is not over, obviously. But at some point the writer has to stop and part company with his fellow travellers lest his company and conversation become redundant or, worse, boring. Even so, I will ask you to bear with me for a moment, just time enough to make a final statement as to the figure who, in my very personal view, represents the culmination, though fortunately not the signal of inevitable decline—well, almost—of both Western Civilisation and of its Hispanic version in the domain of the arts and, I would dare to say, beyond. I am, of course, referring to Pablo Picasso(241,242,243).



Plate 241. *Self-Portrait*, by Pablo Picasso, 1901. Musée Picasso, Paris.

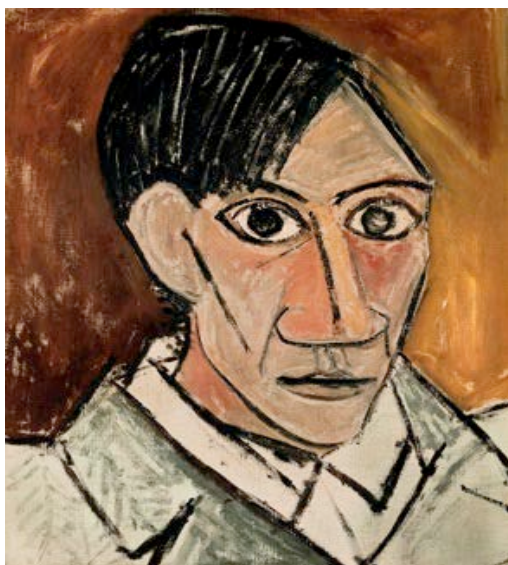


Plate 242 *Self-Portrait*, by Pablo Picasso, 1907. Národní Galerie, Prague.



Plate 243. *Self-Portrait Facing Death*, by Pablo Picasso, 1972. Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo.

How many Picassos are there? To what extent can he be considered a representative of the Spanish, or Hispanic, version of Western civilisation? Is not Picasso universal? Does he not belong to all of us and to none? What right do I have to mention him in the context of this work?

Those are very pertinent questions, but not very difficult ones. Therefore I will venture simple, quick, tentative answers to each of them so that the reader can make up his or her own mind.

There are many Picassos and they are always one and the same, for Picasso was a metaphor of Time, always changing, always unchanged. He was also a metaphor of Space, always moving, always remaining at the same point, which is everywhere. You could not chase him; when you got there, he was always anywhere else. He was the Theory of Relativity made human: mass transmuted into energy; energy reverting into mass. His workshop was a laboratory where he did not search, he only found. In doing so, like Einstein in the realm of the sciences, he for ever changed not only our perception of reality, but reality itself. And this anticipates the answers to the second and third question, and, incidentally, also to the last one. Yes, Picasso was Spanish and universal. He belonged to the same world as the Beatus in his apocalyptic transmutation of the order of things; as the Spanish explorers and conquistadors in his unremitting, ruthless desire to push to the frontiers of the known world and to possess it in the process; as Lope de Vega in his prodigious vitality and sexual voracity; as Quevedo and his mordant wit; as Cervantes and his blend of the real and the fantastic, of reason and imagination; as Velázquez and Goya in their explorations into the new frontiers of representation both in form and content. He was the quintessential Spaniard because he himself said so and also because, like Don Quixote, he knew who he was and that he could be whoever he wanted to be. And because he was a Spaniard to the bone he belonged to the Western world and because he was a Western man he was a universal man. As the living embodiment of the twentieth century he was at the same time past, present and future. In him all art and all history became contemporary (244, 245, 246).



Plate 244. *Two Sisters*, by Pablo Picasso, 1902. Ermitage Museum, Saint Petersburg.

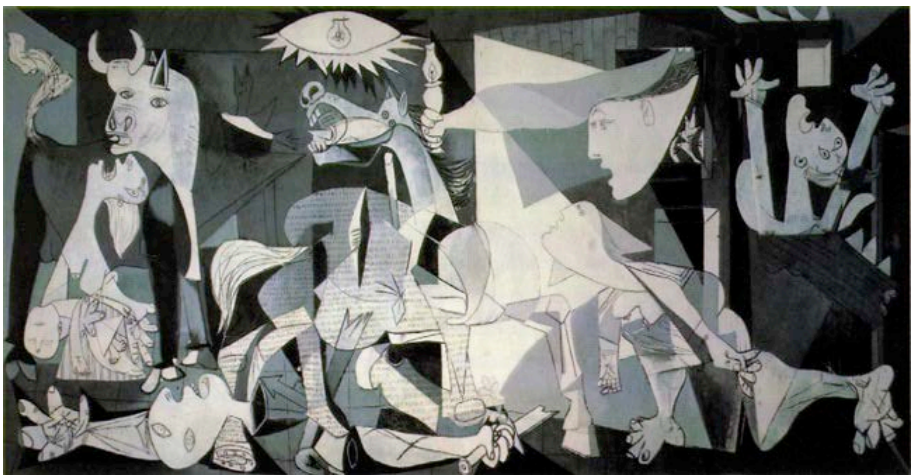


Plate 245. *Guernica*, by Pablo Picasso, 1937. Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid.



Plate 246. *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)*, by Pablo Picasso, 1911-12.

The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

AFTERTHOUGHT.

SPAIN, THE WESTERN TRADITION AND CIVILISATION

It has been noted that the opening shots of *Civilisation*, with Lord Clark's soon to be familiar profile silhouetted against those elegant Parisian buildings bordering on the Seine, were filmed whilst, only a few streets farther from the cameras, the French capital was engulfed in the chaos of May '68. The years when the series was conceived of and brilliantly delivered coincided with one of the most tumultuous periods in Cold War politics, particularly on the international arena, but also in some home fronts. Inevitably, the pessimistic atmosphere of the time permeates the images and Lord Clark's all-too-often admonitory remarks about the frailty of the Western fabric. Well, it seems that we are in the same place again (247).



Plate 247. Kenneth Clark in front of Notre Dame while Paris was burning.

We Europeans, and Westerners in general, are once more visited by familiar ghosts, though in slightly new disguises. We are repeatedly told that the historic cycle that started five centuries ago with the rise of the West is giving way to its decline and to a new era dominated by...whom? The East, some say; the Global South, retort others; a shadowy and greedy financial elite according to many. Chaos, conclude the prophets of doom, of whom there is no scarcity these days. Whatever the case, the prevailing mood is one of Spenglerian anticipation. I am

tempted to say that Beatus of Liébana would most probably have found new sources of inspiration for his apocalyptic musings had he been able to read some trendy columnists and opinion-makers in our days. But I will not go that far. The same Beatus, if in our midst, would have concluded that the end of the world he and many of his contemporaries thought as imminent around the year 900 failed to materialise then and that the same might happen today, or at least most of us hope so. In fact, despite or maybe because of their end-of-the-world nightmares, Beatus and his followers contributed to the continuity of civilisation. We can still admire, more than a millennium later, the dazzling products of their creative anxieties. Will our descendants be able to do the same a thousand years down the road? What will our legacy to them be?

The Beatus is, also, a fitting metaphor to express the resilience and capability of Spain, the Hispanic world and of Western civilisation at large, to survive and adapt to the most challenging circumstances. The scribes and illuminators who perpetuated the Beatus tradition lived through centuries of turmoil. The borderlands they lived in and the peoples they lived with had changed and would change their religious and political identities and allegiances over and over again. Iberians, Celts, Romans, Hispano-Romans, Visigoths, Arabs, Berbers, Jews, Mozarabs, Mudejars, subjects of a variety of Christian and Muslim polities... living with each other, fighting each other, loving each other... exchanging recipes, songs, poems, science, creeds, philosophies, art... learning from each other and rejecting each other.... Then came the victory of one side over the rest and the demise of *convivencia*. But the victorious side, though identified with a single religion and political ideal, was itself the outcome of centuries of cultural and ethnic interbreeding—the very fabric of Spain and of Hispanic civilisation—and no purity of blood or Inquisitorial persecutions could erase that fact.

It has been said by many authors that the centuries-long saga of Islam and Judaism on the Iberian Peninsula do not belong to the history of Spain—or of Europe and the West, for that matter—that they were excrescences or transitory deviations from a course that goes in a straight line from the Romans and the Visigoths through the Christian kingdoms all the way up to the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic Monarchs. Well, this is a very Clarkean, and plainly wrong, vision of the course of Spanish, and thus Western, history. The Jewish and Muslim statesmen, poets, doctors, architects, priests, philosophers, courtiers, craftsmen, farmers, matrons, traders, soldiers, lovers, parents and their children, who for more than eight centuries were born, lived all or part of their lives and died in the Iberian Peninsula or far from it, whilst belonging to a larger Hebrew or Muslim cultural and religious domain, were also an integral part in the making of Spain both as a polity under different constitutional manifestations and as a

Hispanic civilisation. This signifies the evolving outcome of the Romanisation of different Iberian tribes, followed by the Isidorian project to Hispanise the Visigoth kingdom; it continues through the cultural blending in the Spain of the Three Cultures and culminates in the extraordinary processes of turning outwards and incorporating new territories that gave birth to globalisation and modernity.

In fact, when a Spanish state was formed at the outset of the modern era, it was in the shape of a composite monarchy ruling over a society in a mixed state of nuclear fusion and fission. There was no time for such an unstable combination to find a state of equilibrium, which explains many of the later developments in Spanish history, for better and worse. The identification, through a series of dynastic alliances, of the emerging polity with a revived imperial ideology coincided with an age of exploration that led to the formidable expansion of Western civilisation. The Iberian explosion was thus transmuted into the first wave of globalisation, spearheaded, in more than one sense, by Portugal and Spain and followed by the rest of the West.

In the case of early modern Spain, the powerful forces of history ushered a nation-state in the making and a society in state of flux into an empire-making role of global proportions. Some historians insist that the outcome, particularly when it came to the organisation of the new overseas dominions, was the result of improvisation and North Atlantic technologies and capital. I do not entirely agree. The nascent composite Spanish monarchy was able to create, by design and by trial and error, a global community that lasted in political union for more than three centuries. It was able to do so by harnessing and projecting a formidable array of political, military, diplomatic, scientific, technological and cultural forces. Generations of explorers, conquistadors, missionaries, traders, artists, administrators and average people belonging to the professional classes and most other echelons of society, all left Spain to settle in the remotest corners of the fledging Spanish realms. As they moved across continents and oceans they put into motion a cycle of destruction, creation and consolidation that was unprecedented in intensity and scope and whose main results were the making of a new Hispanic world and the birth of an era dominated by the West.

Whereas the Hispanic experience from the Romans to the early modern age had been, mainly, the outcome of foreign invasions followed by long cycles of centripetal amalgamation within Iberian lands, the modern Hispanic world was made possible by an opposite centrifugal expansion that reached, mixed and linked parts of the world that had remained separated previously. In sum, the role of Spain in the history of civilisation, both Western and universal, has been that of a meeting point between East and West and also between North and South. Subsequently, the meeting point became a platform for the resulting cultural

blend to be projected globally, creating a specifically Hispanic civilisation as the result of both inward- and outward-bound processes.

With regard to the Western tradition in particular, from which they were so arbitrarily excluded by Lord Clark, though there can be no doubt that they are an integral part of it, Spain and the larger Hispanic world occupy a most peculiar place. Hispanic civilisation belongs in the West but at the same time transcends it. Whilst Great Britain, France and other North European countries also had overseas possessions and exported their respective national cultures to different parts of the world, they were either unable or unwilling to create a new version of the West by integrally incorporating peoples and cultures that were deemed alien to them into their inner folds.

In the Hispanic version, by contrast, the West is conceived of from its inception as a composite reality that kept on incorporating new cultures as it expanded. And it is precisely this capacity to absorb not just intellectually, but also vitally and creatively, new elements into its core and to enlarge not just its field of vision but also its very essence, that has been the main and most noble contribution of Spain and the Hispanic world to the West and to human civilisation in general.

At this late stage in our essay, the reader will most probably have noticed that the author has used throughout, almost interchangeably, the terms Spain, the Hispanic world and Hispanic civilisation. This requires a clarification that I have opted, for good reasons, to expound at the end of our journey as we look retrospectively towards its beginnings.

In his controversial essay *The Clash of Civilisations*, the late Samuel Huntington, while keeping Spain as part of the West, described Hispanic America as a separate and distinctive civilisation, outside the Western tradition. In his last work, *Who are We*, he went even farther and considered the Hispanics, as the term is used in United States, to be an existential threat to the Protestant and Anglo-American essence of the United States, the main guarantor of the West's survival, confronted by manifold threats, stemming mainly, but not only, from Islam. Huntington's decision both to establish a cleavage between Spain and Hispanic America and to consider the Hispanics as an internal threat to the survival of his native United States, as a kind of fifth-column of barbarians within the puritan citadel, was by no means neutral.

Far from it, it represented a typical North Atlantic strategy of trying either to ignore any alternative version of the West different from its prevailing narrative or to relegate it to the margins: Spain to the periphery of Europe and Hispanic America to the periphery of Anglo-America. For we must never forget that to divide the Hispanic world and, with it thus weakened, to co-opt its resources and peoples so that they could serve the North Atlantic heartlands, has been one of the principal goals of the

main centres of power in the West since the fragmentation of the overseas Spanish territories since the nineteenth century.

Challenging such strategies by confronting them with alternative visions of history and civilisation, while at the same time contributing to the construction of a West that is not just more inclusive but also more humane in its version of a truly global, polycentric civilisation should, in my very personal view, be a priority for current and future generations of Hispanics, whatever their nationality, ethnic origins or ideological leanings.

The first and most important step in doing so is to elaborate narratives of the Hispanic historical experience that are told from within, and not from a perspective imposed by others' self-proclaimed centrality. I have used the term narratives deliberately to underline the fact that the Hispanic world is, by definition, plural. The Spanish voice, of which the author's is but a minor example, is just one among many other tonal inflexions and it is right for it be so. Spain itself, as a modern avatar of the former Hispania, is just a fragment of a larger Hispanic universe. Once upon a time, it had an instrumental role in that universe's formation and early expansion, but we would be wrong to assume that such a position was granted for eternity. There is nothing eternal in human affairs.

The Hispanic reality of today is far more conscious of its diversity than was the case ever before. Its all-important and increasingly assertive Amerindian component; the assimilation of other Western influences and in particular the current exposure to the Anglo-American version of Western civilisation, above all, but not only, among the large and growing Hispanic minority in the US; the opening up to the dynamic East; the forging of networks with other regional groupings in the "Global South"; and the cosmopolitan cast of mind of its new intellectual and economic elites—all these make it impossible for the current incarnation of the Hispanic world and its civilisation to pivot around a single or even a limited number of centres. That is the greatest difference, for instance, from the French-speaking world and the obdurate resistance by France, and Paris in particular, to relinquishing its leading role within the so-called *Francophonie*.

A plural Hispanic world, with many innovative nodes is the best guarantee for the blossoming of its intellectual and material energies and also for fostering its capacity to be an influential actor in the forging of a truly global civilisation. Along the way, we Hispanics should not forget our origins. Recovering, studying and reviving our roots, whether Amerindian, European, African, Asian or mixed, must be a part of the task that lies ahead us, not to remain mired in the past, but to learn from it and to put that knowledge, so often ignored or neglected, in its honourable place in the rich commonwealth of human experience so that others can also benefit from it.

In this regard, it is of particular importance that Hispanic civilisation, while not restricting itself to being considered Western, because, fortunately, it is much more than just that, plays a constructive role in the revival of the West. This is not to let it harbour dreamy ambitions of reclaiming its hegemonic position of yore. On the contrary, as members of a cultural and human community that has also been on the receiving end of foreign hegemonies, it is one of our main moral duties to prevent the West from again following the path to domination, which, as we know, leads to all too familiar destinations.

If I were asked how to go about revitalising the West, my preference would be a way that, I admit, is hardly a popular one, being a slightly modified form of George Steiner's suggestions for the study of humanities in an age of science and globalisation. For it is the path that was not fully taken, the broken promise of humanism at the turn of the modern era, which is the way the West should rediscover and the promise that it should fulfil. But, obviously, it has to be a different humanism than the one envisaged by our Renaissance forebears. For a start, the new Western humanism cannot restrict itself to the study of the Graeco-Latin classics and the Biblical scriptures. They must be known, for sure, and the more the better, but a civilised Western gentleman, or gentlewoman, to use Steiner's terminology, has to include in his or her education other non-Western cultural references, necessarily including the other great civilisations. If we are able to convince ourselves to make the effort to know by heart some passages from Homer, Ovid or the New Testament, it should not be that difficult to dedicate a few more hours to learn a poem by Du Fu, some suras from the Koran or some *shlokas* from the Mahabharata, if possible in their respective vernaculars. A few regular moments taken away from the many numbing hours spent in front of television or the Internet would suffice—this should not be too much to ask, surely.

Secondly, the new humanism has to bridge the growing gap between the Two Cultures, to use C. P. Snow's classic expression: the study and command of humanities and of the hard sciences, the cultivation of the arts and the mastery of technology. In fact, that gap was non-existent, as we have seen, among the great minds of mediaeval Iberia or in the Renaissance. St Isidore, Maimonides, Averroes, Alfonso X, Juan de Herrera, Bernardino de Sahagún, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo... each of them was able to assimilate and contribute to the advancement of philosophy, poetry, drawing, anthropology or astronomy, ignoring any artificial division between a poem, a painting and a mathematical equation, for they are equally the product of man's unmatched powers of imagination and plasticity of mind. The Scientific Revolution and the growing specialisation cultivated in our educational systems put an end to the age of the universal man, barring some exceptions. We men and women of the twenty-first

century should not give up becoming or at least trying to become equal to the best that have lived among us at each stage of humankind's history, and the best have always wanted to know more and to know about practically everything. Sounds ambitious? So be it.

Finally, and this is a more particular part of the agenda in front of us, the new humanism in the West has to integrate fully the Hispanic tradition into a revised Western canon. It must not be a limited humanism based almost exclusively on a North-Euro-Atlantic view, with due deference to Italy and Greece, but an inclusive and expanding one. A humanism that accepts St Isidore and Alfonso X as at least the equals of the Venerable Bede and Charlemagne; that places the best Visigothic and Asturian churches and palace pavilions, Catalan Romanesque painting, the varieties of Mudéjar and Mozarabic architecture, the Gothic of Leon Cathedral and the *Cid Campeador*, the Mosque of Cordova or the palace of La Alhambra at the same level as Souillac, Chartres, the *Chanson of Roland*, Florence or Mantua; that quotes the *zejeles* and *moaxajas*, Ibn Arabi, Ibn Gabirol and the Archpriest of Hita in the same breath with the poetry of the Provençal troubadours or Chaucer; Maimonides and Averroes together with St Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus. We should be contented with nothing more and nothing less than that.

In the end, if I am allowed to conclude on a most personal note, for me the single most important contribution made by a Spaniard—some would say Catalan, which is equally fine for me—to the history of civilisation was the rediscovery of Johann Sebastian Bach's Cello Suites by Pau Casals (248).



Plate 248. Pau Casals playing Bach in the Abbey of St Michel de Cuxa, 1954.

Hardly anyone had heard those miraculous sounds since their composition in 1720 in the small German town of Köthen. It was due to Casals' tireless efforts to master the long-forgotten notes, to his public performances and first recordings in the '30s that the Suites came alive anew. Since then, no master cellists—Rostropovich, Maisky, Yo-Yo Ma...—have considered themselves fully accomplished until they have confronted their skills with Casals' masterful rendering of Bach. For if Velázquez's *Las Meninas* is rightfully considered to be the theology of painting, Bach's Six Cello Suites are the theology of music, and Casals the doctor of theology. Their resurrection in the midst of Europe's hour of destiny, when all its destructive forces, from right and left, were unleashed, was a beacon of Western Civilisation at its best: music composed by a German, interpreted by a man of the classical Mediterranean, echoed from a small Romanesque abbey through the Americas and the wider world with the deep, human resonance of the cello. I am sure that Lord Clark, himself a lover of Bach, would have agreed with me, which is no small satisfaction, after I have dared to confront him in a most civilised manner, or so I hope. *Vale.*

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New York, 2016.

*To my parents, to whom I owe the love of
books and knowledge.*

From the late fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the Hispanic Monarchy was one of the largest and most diverse political communities known in history. At its apogee, it stretched from the Castilian plateau to the high peaks of the Andes; from the cosmopolitan cities of Seville, Naples, or Mexico City to Santa Fe and San Francisco; from Brussels to Buenos Aires and from Milan to Manila. During those centuries, Spain left its imprint across vast continents and distant oceans contributing in no minor way to the emergence of our globalised era. This was true not only in an economic sense—the Hispano-American silver peso transported across the Atlantic and the Pacific by the Spanish fleets was arguably the first global currency, thus facilitating the creation of a world economic system—but intellectually and artistically as well. The most extraordinary cultural exchanges took place in practically every corner of the Hispanic world, no matter how distant from the metropolis. At various times a descendant of the Aztec nobility was translating a Baroque play into Nahuatl to the delight of an Amerindian and mixed audience in the market of Tlatelolco; an Andalusian Dominican priest was writing the first Western grammar of the Chinese language in Fuzhou, a Chinese city that enjoyed a trade monopoly with the Spanish Philippines; a Franciscan friar was composing a piece of polyphonic music with lyrics in Quechua to be played in a church decorated with Moorish-style ceilings in a Peruvian valley; or a multi-ethnic team of Amerindian and Spanish naturalists was describing in Latin, Spanish and local vernacular languages thousands of medicinal plants, animals and minerals previously unknown to the West. And, most probably, at the same time that one of those exchanges were happening, the members of the School of Salamanca were laying the foundations of modern international law or formulating some of the first modern theories of price, value and money, Cervantes was writing *Don Quixote*, Velázquez was painting *Las Meninas*, or Goya was exposing both the dark and bright sides of the European Enlightenment.

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