

Preface



We did not set out to write biographical narrative as we began research in the General Archive of the Indies in Seville in the early months of 1985. Our subject was the history of an entire people, the native inhabitants of the Colca valley of Peru, from the time of the European conquest in the 1530s. During the course of research we came across a bundle of documents relating to first one, then more, legal claims against one of the settlers of the valley. We found no good information to complete the intended ethnohistory in these *legajos*, but we did become more and more engrossed by the court case that daily unfolded before our eyes. As we read, we became slowly convinced that the story of the protagonists deserved a hearing.

The rise of Spain, beginning with the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile in 1469 to the death of Philip II in 1598, is stunning. Many important events took place in that span of time, but perhaps the most significant was the discovery of a new continent in 1492 by Christopher Columbus. The exploration and conquest of that distant and vast territory, and the hitherto unimaginable quantities of silver and gold found there, helped support Spain's pretensions to European hegemony. During the sixteenth century thousands of young men from all sectors of Iberian society, often born far from the sea-coast, took to the waters of the Atlantic. With the exception of the major conquistadores, men such as Cortés, Ponce de León, de Soto, Orellana, the Pizarros—the leaders whose exploits were described meticulously by contemporary chroniclers—we know precious little of the less illustrious men and women who settled in the colonies.

Why did so many break roots in Spain, leave their homes, their mothers and fathers, their sisters and brothers, and risk the voyage to the unknown lands in the west? The promise of riches was often one of the reasons, but there were other, more complex, and at times personal motives. How did they pay for the passage, who did they associate with, and how did they establish themselves in the New World? What of the women, generally ignored in the primary accounts of the events of discovery and conquest? We know that although many remained in Spain, there were enough courageous women who ventured to the Indies in the early expeditions to leave an indelible mark on colonial

Hispanic society. How did the men who succeeded overseas invest their wealth, and how did those who returned to Europe early, the men known in Spain as *indianos*, fare in the land of their birth?

Francisco Noguero's story provides tantalizing answers to many of these questions, and much more. We hope that through him and his wives, doña Beatriz de Villasur and doña Catalina de Vergara, as well as the men and women who surround them, we can understand the mentality and ambitions of sixteenth-century Spaniards, especially those who embarked on the exploration, conquest, and settlement of the New World. The book is written from the point of view of the conquerors, not those vanquished in the brutal clash of two hitherto separate worlds. Here we have tried to see events through the eyes of the Europeans, not the people who inhabited the Americas and whose sometimes ruthless exploitation and decimation is a theme of past and future inquiry.

This book tells the tale of a man and his two wives, and of the labyrinthine legal world that ultimately entrapped a successful conqueror. The case, argued before the august Council of the Indies, has special appeal and takes on a life of its own. Fortunately for historians, every action and reaction, numerous questionnaires prepared by all parties in the lawsuit and conscientiously answered by many witnesses, in short, every minute detail was recorded by the busy scribes of the court and survive as a testament of not only the lawsuit itself but also as a window into the operation of the sixteenth-century legal system. The day-by-day maneuvers of the lawyers, and the charges and countercharges of the litigants, all come to life, and we have attempted to recreate the excitement, the slow building of tensions, as the lawsuit progressed. As we followed the daily litigation in the records, reviewing hundreds of pages, the protagonists and their lives took on reality from the dust and fading ink of the deteriorating papers. Litigations often took years, and they did not always proceed in a logical sequence, making a modern reader puzzled over certain actions and perhaps impatient with the questions and answers of the witnesses. We have included only a fraction of the multitude of details, yet we feel that in order to illustrate the complexity, slowness, and repetition involved, it is necessary to let the readers get a small taste of the surviving documents.

The story of Francisco Noguero de Ulloa and his two wives is intended to be a mirror of a segment of Spanish society in the sixteenth century, the middle class and minor nobility. Francisco dominates the book, but through him and his interaction with others the general

milieu of the period, on a familial rather than global level, springs into view. As Noguero's adventures and tribulations unfold, we can glimpse the world he lived in: the religious and moral values of the period, and the surprising degree of freedom and openness that existed in spite of the highly structured and hierarchical society under the shadow of the Inquisition.

It is difficult enough to piece together the lives of the sixteenth-century elite, the monarchs, members of the aristocracy, the major military and clerical leaders. It is doubly arduous to reconstruct the careers of those of the lower rungs of the social order. The *legajos* of litigation assisted us in the quest for the personalities of our figures. The court cases involving Noguero filled much of the middle block of our history, and part of the first as well. But for the initial activities in the Indies, we were forced to review the published materials on the conquest of Andean America, then go to the service report filed by the man as he petitioned for royal favors. The search resembled a detective's slow and methodical investigation. We were surprised often by new twists, some with unexpected resolutions. At times working as genealogists, we consulted the parish registers, unfortunately with less than hoped-for success, for the years of our protagonists were missing from the record. But we were able to trace descendants into the seventeenth century. In contrast to the church rolls, the notarial information abounds. But anyone who has used these documents for tracing individuals knows well the pitfalls of such research. The scribal script is often the most difficult of all for even the most adept paleographer. Thousands of pages of transactions, contracts, or wills, for example, might be included in a notarial bundle for a single year, especially in a major city, and there are usually no indexes. Notarial research is monotonous; a clue may be followed by hundreds of pages of irrelevant entries. By educated guesses, and often just luck, we were able to finally locate the key materials to complete the puzzle of the later years of the lives of our principals.

Professor Woodrow Borah, kindly commenting on an early version of our manuscript, pointed out its striking similarity with Spanish picaresque novels of the period. That is true. The novelists created parallels to the real world that surrounded them. But we are not novelists. We have not strayed from what we can prove or reasonably assume on the basis of the documentary evidence. If we describe the seasickness of the protagonist, for example, it is because he more than once complained of its agonies.

We not only followed Francisco Noguero de Ulloa through the

extant documentation, but we also visited all the places, with the exception of Chile, that our often infamous conquistador trod. We contemplated the same countryside and surveyed the vestiges of the sixteenth century in the villages and cities that figure in the narrative. More often than not, however, we were forced to use our imagination as we tried to visualize the sites as Noguero and his two wives saw them. The present work, however, is not the product of imagination; rather, it is a tribute to the Spanish record keepers who made it possible to reconstruct the lives of ordinary people who lived in an extraordinary age. Francisco Noguero and doña Catalina de Vergara attempted in manifold sixteenth-century ways to assure a legacy of remembrance. But a fatal series of events effaced that memory. In these pages we hope, assisted by doña Beatriz de Villasur's search for justice, to resurrect the couple from the abyss of oblivion to which they have been assigned.