

Reading the Gran Capitán: Leadership, Storytelling, and Political Transition after Queen Isabel I

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-Hermano mío —dijo el cura—, estos [otros] dos libros son mentirosos y están llenos de disparates y devaneos, y este del Gran Capitán es historia verdadera y tiene los hechos de Gonzalo Hernández de Córdoba, el cual por sus muchas y grandes hazañas mereció ser llamado de todo el mundo «Gran Capitán», renombre famoso y claro, y dél solo merecido.” (Miguel de Cervantes y Saavedra, *Don Quijote de La Mancha*, p. 323)

Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, known to history as El Gran Capitán, was a major figure in Mediterranean politics at the turn of the sixteenth century. A favorite of Queen Isabel I, he was named Viceroy of Naples following his military triumphs in Southern Italy and heralded as an exemplar of battle strategy and Renaissance sophistication. The story of the Gran Capitán’s feats -and rumors that he may have had amorous relations with Queen Isabel- have long inspired interest in this military hero. This analysis reexamines the idealized account of El Gran Capitán’s loyalty, bravery, and diplomatic tactics detailed in the chronicles of his successes in Italy and the disrespectful treatment of him at the hand of King Fernando after Queen Isabel I’s death in 1504. El Gran Capitán was purportedly hated by King Fernando, who withdrew Fernández de Córdoba’s court appointment in Naples following Queen Isabel’s death and destroyed El Gran Capitán’s ancestral home in Montilla (a town some 36km southeast of Córdoba), despite broad public support for the captain’s achievements and the powerful men who lobbied on his behalf. In light of recent trends to better contextualize the role of Queen Isabel I in Iberian society and clarify her influence and queenship, the chronicles written about Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba merit renewed scholarly engagement.¹ A new reading of these chronicles reveals political motivations of the chroniclers to underscore King Fernando’s poor judgment, which the authors connect to Fernando’s illegitimate claims to the Castilian throne after Isabel’s death. Though Queen Isabel I is not the primary focus of these chronicles, the chroniclers present an idealized portrait of monarchy and leadership that remains under examined, and, in glorifying the leadership style of Queen Isabel I, these chronicles further exaggerate the negative presentation of King Fernando. These accounts of don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba and his deeds in the Italian Peninsula thus present an opportune moment to reexamine political motivations of the chroniclers in the mid-sixteenth century as Castilian Imperialism spread worldwide.

Scholarship on Fernández de Córdoba over the past several decades has focused most on his contributions to military history, naming him one of the fathers of modern warfare and crediting him with the innovative implementation of firearms in battle.² The military strategies he

¹ Queen Isabel I and her legacy have been subject to intense and fruitful critical reassessments in the past several decades, revealing far more nuanced understanding of her autonomy and the ways that she constructed a public image of female subservience. For an introductory bibliography, I particularly recommend the studies by David Boruchoff, Theresa Earenfight, Peggy Liss, and Barbara Weissberger. For a recent study, please see also the 2023 edited collection by Hilaire Kallendorf.

² See Mallett and Shaw, Martín Gómez, and Prescott and McJoynt for detailed accounts of the Gran Capitán’s significance in the field of military history. Henry Kamen contends that the glorification of the Gran Capitán’s innovations was primarily Castilian propaganda. Kamen emphasizes instead the international character of the implementation of warfare strategies during the Napolitan campaigns, and attributes Castilian success to large numbers of Catalan troops, the implementation of infantry techniques pioneered by Swiss mercenaries, and the alliance with the Neapolitans who had invited the Castilians to assist in defeating the French (see Kamen, *Empire*: 27-28). For

spearheaded, including the successful integration of gunpowder and pike warfare led to widespread usage throughout Europe in the decades that followed. While the chronicles present a realistic portrait of the military hero and include detailed accounts of the Iberian victories in what is now Southern Italy, the works also emphasize virtues of heroism and diplomacy that underscore expectations for leaders of both genders. The story of the Gran Capitán thus provides a fruitful opportunity to reexamine Queen Isabel I's tacit role in the chronicles and the chroniclers' depiction of her support for expansion of Iberian power and in diplomatic relations across the Mediterranean. The chronicles are important historical documents written about Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba and his campaigns a generation after the events they describe, and they idealize this statesman and military hero as an exemplar of Queen Isabel I's court.³ Given that the composition and publication of the chronicles about El Gran Capitán date to the years following King Fernando's regency, the chronicles feature underlying partisan motivations as they idealize Iberian political stability as nostalgically having occurred during the Court of Isabel and Fernando. Reassessing the presentation of Fernández de Córdoba and the historical figures presented in the chronicles provides an illuminating glimpse into the world of political intrigues of the court and the chaotic transition of power after Queen Isabel's death. These works also demonstrate the fervor and passion that partisans of Isabel I felt in limiting the scope of Fernando's ability to shape Castilian policy at the cusp of colonial expansion of Spain into the Americas, Africa, and Asia.⁴

In 1465, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba entered the service of the royal family as page to Isabel's little brother, Prince Alfonso, when both men were twelve years old. When Alfonso died two and a half years later, in 1468, Fernández de Córdoba devoted himself to young Princess Isabel's service. At that time, Isabel was not widely assumed to be a likely successor to her half-brother King Enrique IV's crown. Fernández de Córdoba's service to Princess Isabel eventually led to his participation in military battles on her behalf against the Portuguese as she vied for the throne against King Enrique IV's daughter, Princess Juana "la Beltraneja." Fernández de Córdoba distinguished himself in the war that eventually led to Isabel's rise to become Queen of Castile, and his commander particularly emphasized his honor and leadership in the battle;⁵ later, he was again signaled out for his military prowess in several important battles against the Kingdom of Granada.⁶ By the 1490s, Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba had distinguished himself as a loyal

additional biographical studies on Fernández de Córdoba and his impact, see the studies by Ruiz-Domènec, Vaca de Osma, and Valdecasas.

³ Manuel Fernández Álvarez affirms Queen Isabel's secondary and yet crucial role in the Iberian strategy in Naples: "Aunque en la política desarrollada por Fernando el Católico en Italia no intervenga de lleno Isabel, sino en un plano secundario, es importante tenerla en cuenta, al menos en sus rasgos principales. Y ello porque los triunfos cosechados en Italia se lograron en buena medida gracias a la colaboración de la Corona de Castilla, empezando por el envío de la persona clave que acabó decantando la victoria, en el enfrentamiento con Francia en tierras napolitanas, a favor de la Monarquía católica. Y nos estamos refiriendo a uno de los personajes más famosos de la Historia de España, a Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, al que los contemporáneos distinguieron ya con el título de Gran Capitán" (371-2).

⁴ Throughout this analysis I will use of the terms "Spain" and "Spanish" as those are the terms used in these chronicles. Nevertheless, the use of these terms to refer to this period is fraught: the provinces of Iberian courts were fragmentary during this period, and Queen Isabel and King Ferdinand maintained separate sovereignty over their own realms. There was no united "Spain" during the period when Fernández de Córdoba lived. I have likewise used the term "Italy" as that is the term included in the chronicles, despite the lack of territorial cohesion in that peninsula as well.

⁵ Montoliu recounts Fernández de Córdoba's uniquely decorated armor as part of his triumph in the battle against the Portuguese (13-14).

⁶ Fernández de Córdoba was praised by Alonso de Cárdenas of the Order of Santiago for his distinguished service in battle. This anecdote is mentioned in several sources; see especially Montoliu (14-15) and Prescott (152-3).

member of the court who had served the family since Queen Isabel I's adolescence,⁷ but also as a proven military leader and strategist who earned accolades for his skills on and off the battlefield.

The annexation of southern Italy formed part of the strategy of Isabel and Fernando in the years following their victory over the Kingdom of Granada.⁸ Fernández de Córdoba was sent to Italy presumably to aid Fernando's uncle King Federico of Naples defend himself against the French who had claimed the region in the early 1490s, but primarily so that King Fernando himself could claim the lands and rents of the Southern Italian peninsula. Fernández de Córdoba was successful during his time in Italy, not only on the battlefield, but also at court, gaining supporters among Italian noblemen and the Papacy. It was in Italy that he came to be called *Il Gran Capitano*, a nickname that caught on throughout Europe. According to biographer Mary Purcell, negotiations with Italians required "more than a good captain. An able negotiator, a linguist, an intelligent man, conversant with and capable of deciphering secret codes, was needed. An elegant courtier, a man of parts was called for, one who could mix with the Medici and the Colonnas, with the Farnese, the Sforzas, and the Orsini; someone able to cope with the excitable Italians, and with the Spanish Pope. It was essential to gain the good will of the Neapolitans and the Italian princes as to win the campaign" (105-6). Indeed, the chronicles about the Gran Capitán emphasize his military innovations but also that his successes were buttressed by his mastery in negotiations and diplomacy. As a result of his successes on and off the battlefield, he was named Viceroy of Naples and given control of three important territories in Italy (Terranova, Santángelo, and Sessa). After Queen Isabel I's death in 1504, relations between King Fernando and the Gran Capitán quickly became quite strained. King Fernando told Fernández de Córdoba that if he stepped down from his appointment as Viceroy and returned to the Iberian Peninsula, the King would reward him with the title of Maestre de Santiago, but this promise was not carried out. After the Gran Capitán's nephew publicly supported the rights of young prince Charles to serve as future leader of Castile, King Fernando destroyed the ancestral home of Fernández de Córdoba in Montilla. One of the more infamous interactions between Fernando and the Gran Capitán involves a scene in which King Fernando accuses Fernández de Córdoba of misappropriating funds in Italy and requires him to detail his expenditures, which led to the famous idiom in Spanish popularized during the sixteenth century, "las cuentas del Gran Capitán," which refers to an absurdly minute detailing of the exorbitant expenditures of a costly military campaign. The fact is that, despite his popularity and renown, his glorious military successes and his close relationship with the monarchy, his connections and network that allied him to other European elites, the Gran Capitán died in relative isolation from European courts, primarily due to King Fernando's machinations.

The story of the Gran Capitán is available in many manuscripts throughout Europe but the most cited modern edition is that by Antonio Rodríguez Villa from 1908 as part of the Nueva

⁷ The anonymous chronicler emphasizes the long personal acquaintance of Don Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba and Queen Isabel I when he learns of her death, "[En aquel tiempo] la Reina doña Isabel estaba doliente con poca esperanza de salud, la cual murió pocos días después, con increíble dolor y llanto de Gonzalo Hernández, el cual confesaba que de su Alteza, como crecido y criado en su Corte, había recibido toda la grandeza de virtud y dignidad que desearse pueden" (243).

⁸ Although the monarchs are often referred to as the Catholic Kings, in fact, Isabel and Fernando retained authority over the realms they controlled prior to the marriage and their marriage contract detailed divisions in their power and autonomy. King Fernando retained sovereignty over the kingdom of Aragon and its satellites, including Corsica, and the ties to Sicily that date to the court of Alfonso V el Magnànim. Following French movement into the Italian Peninsula, Fernando decided to renew Iberian hegemony in the Italian Peninsula, and Fernández de Córdoba was selected to form part of the military expedition to southern Italy. It is not clear whether Isabel's influence was key to Fernando de Cordoba receiving this appointment or whether the decision was made in conjunction with King Fernando.

Biblioteca de Autores Españoles series, and it is a tome that is a compilation of several different chronicles and a series of letters related to Fernández de Córdoba, including the correspondence written to or from the Gran Capitán as well as those epistles written to his heirs and family from the royal family upon the Gran Capitán's death.⁹ The first of the chronicles included in the compilation, *Corónica llamada las dos conquistas del reino de Nápoles* does not include an author's name. It was originally published in Zaragoza in 1554, though many subsequent copies were printed. The text is a nearly three-hundred-page treatise charting the exploits of the Gran Capitán over four tomes. The chronicles about his adventures have rarely been subjected to a literary critical lens, which is striking, because to those readers familiar with chivalric romances, many features of this chronicle are extraordinarily similar to the conventions of that genre, including long lists of genealogy, the narrative tone and style of the descriptions of battles, and the episodic tendency in the narration.¹⁰ As frequently occurs in romances of chivalry, the opening of the chronicle begins not with the story of our hero, but jumps backward in time some eighty years earlier, well before Don Gonzalo was born, to enumerate the scandals caused by Queen Giovanna (referred to in the chronicle as Juana) II of Naples in the early part of the 15th century. The work begins with a lurid description of Queen Juana, the elder sister of Ladislaus of Hungary, who inherited the kingdom of Naples when her brother died in 1414. The unnamed chronicler assures us that her realm had enjoyed prosperity and stability, but the lascivious inclinations of Queen Juana led to a power vacuum that she was ill equipped to resolve on her own:

[Doña Juana] comenzó á usar tan indiscretamente de la libertad, que en breve tiempo dió señales de sus malos deseos, cometiendo toda la administración del reino á un Pandulfo Malatesta, con quien ella tenía deshonesta conversación. De donde sucedió que su nuevo señorío, que por muy estable tenía, comenzase á vacilar, siendo como era fundado sobre tan mal cimiento, atreviéndose muchos á pedirle el reino; lo cual visto por ella, creyendo que esto le venía por estar tan sin sombra de marido, acordó de se casar con un caballero, Conde que era de la Marca, el cual, aunque pequeño estado tenía, venía de los reyes de Francia. (3)

Before the author even mentions our hero, indeed some four decades before he was born, the need for his military skills and diplomatic intervention are set into motion due to the scandalous wiles

⁹ Antonio Rodríguez Villa, *Crónicas del Gran Capitán*. Madrid: Nueva Biblioteca de Autores Españoles 10, 1908. The collection includes "Cartas del Gran Capitán," a collection of epistles that date from 1497 to approximately 1515, a list of documents relevant to the Gran Capitán held in the Archivo General de Simancas (including receipts for a variety of expenditures), an account of the life of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo; *Chrónica del Gran Capitán Gonzalo Hernández de Córdoba y Aguilar* (anónimo, Alcalá de Henares 1584, believed to be based on an earlier Zaragoza 1554 edition), *Historia del Gran Capitán* (anónimo, BN R-6^a-6, no publication date or place given but thought to date to mid-16th century), *La vida y chrónica de Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, el Gran Capitán*, orig. Paolo Jovio, Florence 1550, trans. by Blas Torrellas, Zaragoza, 1554, *Breve parte de las hazañas del Gran Capitán* by Hernán Pérez del Pulgar (Sevilla, 1527), *Breve suma de la vida y hechos* by Diego García de Paredes, 1586.

¹⁰ Cervantes humorously and famously references this genre hybridity when the priest saves the book of the Gran Capitán because it is a "*historia verdadera*" in the famous scene in the *Quijote* referenced in the epigraph to this discussion. In spite of Cervantes' ironic reference in this scene to the contrast made by authorities between History and stories [*Historia e historia*], the chronicles about the Gran Capitán have rarely been subjected to rhetorical or literary analysis and are usually read as historical sources to document the Iberian incursions into Italy. I do not intend to suggest the chronicles do not convey the facts as the chroniclers believed them, but rather to highlight ways that these accounts are more subjective than they have been traditionally treated in critical scholarship.

of a woman whose passions have not been properly contained. Her “dishonest conversation” with a man with whom she is not married unsettles the kingdom. The chronicler emphasizes Juana’s lack of chastity and her lack of discretion, faults that lead her to policies of self-interested decisions, rather than thinking of her citizens before herself. Her decision to marry is presented as a whim to stave off a barrage of suitors, men that she encouraged through her thoughtless flirtations, rather than a deliberate decision made in conjunction with advisors for the benefit of her kingdom. The characterization of Queen Juana reads as a composite of misogynistic stereotypes of female rulers and their incapacity to govern their destructive emotions for the good of the realm. This chronicle incorporates the narrative conventions popular in romance, folk tales, and even fairytales that the battle savvy knight (in this case Fernández de Córdoba) will save the kingdom from the pernicious female whose emotional leadership style has resulted in chaos and created a power vacuum that plagues society decades later.

The chronicler’s choice to begin the lengthy narrative by introducing an example of poor leadership that led the kingdom into disarray is a standard rhetorical trope, a convention intended to contrast Queen Juana’s inability to lead others effectively with Fernández de Córdoba’s seemingly effortless leadership skills and the devotion he earns from his troops. In addition to establishing the reasons that the Kingdom of Naples needs the intervention of a strong military and cultural leader and negotiator, the vignette concerning Queen Juana II of Naples also serves as an important contrast that highlights the ways that Queen Isabel I of Castile defies the stereotypical hysterias of femininity –in the author’s eyes– by properly yoking herself into a suitably uxorial role.¹¹ The chronicler suggests that, in contrast to the properly pious and submissive nature of Queen Isabel I, Juana II of Naples acts impetuously, self-interestedly, and autonomously, vices that result in a kingdom with claims of succession contested across European courts. According to the chronicler, the origins of the battle of Naples can be traced directly to Juana II’s liaisons that lead several courts to claim sovereignty over the region after her death. In contrast to Juana, Queen Isabel I’s matrimonial fidelity assures a legitimate continuation of her line, even though her two eldest children died before they had the opportunity to inherit their respective crowns. The tacit comparison serves to highlight Queen Isabel I’s unquestioned virtue, along with her strong leadership skills and political savvy, which position Iberia to be the power that saves the threatened Neapolitan realm. As the chronicler has the perspective of several decades beyond the events described, emphasizing the virtues of successful Iberian leadership also establishes the precedent for Iberian intervention in its territorial expansion throughout the globe.

A key motif throughout the chronicle is the problems caused by misuses of power by those in leadership roles. Although the chronicler attributes the source of the discord in the kingdom of Naples to Juana’s abuse of power, her later mistakes are not blamed primarily to the vices supposedly typical of her gender, but rather are the result of poor governance more generally. The chronicle describes various leadership styles to highlight the ways that the Gran Capitán is especially adept at leading others. Furthermore, the attributes that condemn Queen Juana: her impetuosity and self-interest, are the very characteristics that that most closely parallel the presentation of widowed King Fernando as he desperately clings to his tenuous hold on the Castilian monarchy after Queen Isabel’s death. The idealized model of Queen Isabel, as an exemplary leader whom the Great Captain emulated, and who served as his patron and supporter,

¹¹ Peggy Liss emphasizes Queen Isabel’s personal role in broadcasting a public image of herself as Fernando’s helpmeet, rather than as the autonomous sovereign as Isabel was. For example, Queen Isabel ordered scribes to sign both monarchs’ names to decrees, even when Isabel was the only monarch present. See Liss, “Isabel, Myth and History,” 60. See also Liss’s biographical study of Queen Isabel, 2004 (orig. 1992, revised 2004).

contrasts with many of the descriptions of feeble and underqualified leadership that result in power vacuums and challenged lines of succession as presented in the chronicle.

To emphasize the key traits of successful leaders, one of the most frequent and important attributes presented throughout the chronicle is the Gran Capitán's eloquence and rhetorical skill when rallying his troops. The chronicle includes several passages that demonstrate the captain's oratory abilities. For example, prior to the siege of Laurino, where the Spanish troops will go on to rout the French holding the city, he speaks to his troops about the importance of a battlefield victory for nation and King. The Spanish troops are outmanned, outgunned, and the French soldiers have been paid significantly more than the troops led by Fernández de Córdoba. Morale is low and the Gran Capitán must persuade his countrymen to want to win this fight that seems doomed before it has even begun:

Agora se nos ofrece causa para dejar la bondad que heredamos á los que nos han de suceder, que malaventurados seríamos si por flaqueza en nosotros se acabase la honra de nuestros progenitores. Así, señores, pelead que libréis de vergüenza nuestra nación y mi sangre. En esta jornada se acaba ó confirma nuestra honra y la de nuestro Rey, que por los más escogidos aquí nos ha enviado y esta empresa cometido. (38)

The speech convincingly contends that the Castilian troops indeed have a stake in the battle they are about to fight, even though they will not personally benefit from the lands conquered. The Gran Capitán unites the troops as fighting on behalf of their nation, demonstrating to the world the strength and honor of their lineage. The battle will either end their hopes, and those of their King, or justify their exclusive status as the elite guard specifically chosen for this expedition. Don Gonzalo insists that their very honor will be defined by this battle and that they must defend the trust that their king had in their selection and deployment abroad with a victory. The Gran Capitán's reported deference to King Fernando is an important feature of this passage and one repeated frequently throughout the chronicle. The chronicler implies that the Great Captain consistently and unerringly acts in the loyal service of his sovereign but, in the end, King Fernando repays this dedication with pettiness and jealousy when the monarch revokes his vicerealty, lies to him about compensation, and destroys the Gran Capitán's ancestral Montilla estate.

In comparison to the retelling of Fernández de Córdoba's passionate pleas for the troops to commit to success in this battle, the description given of the actual combat is relatively dispassionate and terse by comparison; the Spaniards ambush the French troops before dawn, and it is a decisive victory for the Spanish. The chronicler's focus in the description of the battle and its aftermath again emphasizes the virtues of Fernández de Córdoba as a leader and model strategist:

[U]n día bien de mañana, que sería una hora antes que amaneciese, llegó todo el ejército á vista de la ciudad de Laurino, adonde el francés, como dicho es, estaba aposentado, y metiendo el Gran Capitán Gonzalo Fernández su gente en orden, con mucho sosiego y quietud llegó hasta dar en los enemigos, los cuales estaban muy seguros y descuidados del sobresalto que les vino... Y como los españoles llegasen con muy grande ánimo y fortaleza, allende de la que ellos de su natural tienen y la que el señor Gran Capitán con su tan abundante oración les había puesto, y hallando que les sucedía como creían y el Gran Capitán les había dicho, y viendo la honra y provecho que se les ofrecía, los unos cargaron sobre el campo del francés con la presteza y fortaleza que se requería, y los otros,

dividiéndose por consejo de los capitanes, fueron á ponerse en las puestas de la ciudad [para prevenir socorro de los habitantes e impedir que las tropas francesas retiraran a la ciudad]...Los franceses que en este trance murieron fueron muchos, y muchos se dieron á prisión, entre los cuales murió el Conde Ameri, persona de mucha virtud y fortaleza...Este antes que muriese en confesión descubrió al Gran Capitán muchos secretos de los franceses, de los cuales no poco provecho resultó...El Gran Capitán, viendo la suma bondad de sus capitanes y soldados y cuán á su salvo habían alcanzado aquella tan impensada victoria, distribuyó como buen capitán todo el despojo que en aquella batalla hubo, dejándolo á todos muy contentos y satisfechos de su largueza y magnificencia. (38-39).

The chronicler provides a laudatory assessment of Fernández de Córdoba's behavior as a leader of his troops and in his treatment of enemies. The predawn raid catches the French completely unprepared for battle and the chronicler extols the martial prowess of his countrymen, a trait presented as "natural" to their character.¹² He adds that the Spanish troops were especially animated and inspired to victory due to the Gran Capitán's rousing speech. When the battle is won, the Gran Capitán again displays his largess when the spoils of war are divided fairly and generously, leaving his men satisfied. The passage also describes the imprisonment of French Count Ameri.¹³ The hero is an effective interrogator, though the chronicler is rather elusive in his description of the Gran Capitán's treatment of the captured French count, from whom he learns "muchos secretos de provecho" before the prisoner dies. The details of this interview are not included, and readers must imagine for themselves how the French nobleman was treated during his brief imprisonment that led Conde Ameri to reveal French military plans, intelligence that resulted in continued successes for the Spanish troops in the battles that followed. The portrait of Fernández de Córdoba in this chronicle is one of idealized virtue: he is far more than a tough soldier; he is a rousing and persuasive orator, a skilled battle strategist, a fair leader who generously rewards his troops and benevolence toward his allies and the opposition, and a capable intelligence officer strategically anticipating the enemy's next move and planning ahead for the next battles. In his treatment of enemies, the chronicle presents him as a formidable opponent because he follows a careful strategy and maximizes the tools he is given, including the information gleaned from captured noblemen. As presented by this anonymous chronicler, Fernández de Córdoba is a model citizen and subject of the King. He shines in his role as leader but properly defers to his superiors in the social hierarchy. He earns the sobriquet the Gran Capitán because he is a leader who thinks of the people under his command and exemplifies selfless leadership.

Historia del Gran Capitán is the other lengthy primary source chronicle focused on the Gran Capitán from the mid-16th century.¹⁴ In this work, the anonymous chronicler explicitly sets up a contrast between the leadership techniques and military strategies of Fernández de Córdoba

¹² Historians of warfare and military strategy have noted that one of Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba's strongest assets against the French troops was his guerrilla-style warfare tactics and ability to mount sneak attacks on the enemy during nighttime sieges. See Mallett and Shaw, 70 and Martín Gómez, 45-48.

¹³ The capture of the French count is also mentioned in the *Historia del Gran Capitán* chronicle in Rodríguez Villa's tome, but the name of that person in that account is given as el señor Amerigo. In that version, he is not interrogated, but dies after confessing his sins and commending his soul to God (pp. 290-291).

¹⁴ Based on the descriptions included, editor Rodríguez Villa believes the author to have formed part of Fernández de Córdoba's closest associates while in Italy ("Introducción," IV).

and the weak management style of King Fernando.¹⁵ In this chronicle, the descriptions of King Fernando emphasize him as a weak monarch characterized by his bellicose nature and avaricious desire to benefit personally from the war:

El Rey don Fernando determinó de salir de Semenara, porque mos de Aubery le invió un trompeta convidándole con la batalla si fuera de Semenara saliesen. El Rey Fernando rogó muy ahincadamente á Gonzalo Hernández tuviese por bien de salir y de los dar la batalla, que tenía esperanza en Dios y en su buena ventura que vencerían. Gonzalo Hernández dijo que á él le parecía muy al revés de lo que su Alteza quería, con tan desigual número de gente de armas, porque estaba allí lo más del ejército francés y todo su principal caudal. «Ninguna necesidad nos obliga á pelear, dijo Gonzalo Hernández; esto que vuestra Alteza quiere, se debe hacer cuando la necesidad nos obligare á ello y estuviésemos en estado de ser ó muertos ó vencidos. En tal caso debe el hombre pelear; mas agora, habiendo tanta ventaja del un campo al otro, es tentar á Dios, y al fin no conseguir el fruto que deseamos. Tomemos ejemplo de Quinto Fabio Máximo, que con pocos, sin venir á las manos, fué gastando á Aníbal cada día, hasta que le fué apocando su gente y le hizo perder la jornada». (283)

The king insists that the Gran Capitán engage in a battle at Semenara but Fernández de Córdoba enumerates for his majesty the disadvantages they face against the French, allied as they are with the locals. The Gran Capitán's speech shows him to be a cautious and thoughtful leader who relies carefully on strategy and logic before sending men into battle. In contrast to the Fernández de Córdoba's cautious approach to engaging in combat, King Fernando's self interested, reactionary, and impulsive nature fails to weigh carefully the risks involved in major military campaigns. As part of his persuasive strategy, the Gran Capitán also references a classical example, that of the Second Punic War and the strategy of Quintus Fabius Maximus, to justify his arguments for delaying the battle. The Gran Capitán is presented as a learned man whose oratorical training allows him the skills to reason with the king. His charisma and ability to relate effectively with others at all levels of the social hierarchy contrasts with King Fernando's inability to heed the advice of his advisors. As presented by this chronicler, King Fernando's blood-thirsty, hotheaded desire to rout the French outweigh all other considerations and he rejects the Gran Capitán's advice:

El Rey Fernando, después de haber oído lo que Gonzalo Hernández le persuadió, dijo: «Yo, señor Gonzalo Hernández, estoy determinado de dar á los franceses la batalla, como ellos piden, aunque quede tenido en aquel campo». Por ende, que le rogaba se apercibiese para la batalla. (283)

King Fernando's refusal to listen to reason and passionate insistence that the French have invited Spanish intervention through their audacious alliance with the people of Semenara leads him to order the Gran Capitán to ready the troops for battle. The Spanish forces do indeed prepare to attack, which the chronicler recounts in a brief description of the quick skirmish, leading to the defeat of the Spanish. The Spanish do not win this fight against the French and must retreat. In the

¹⁵ *Historia del Gran Capitán: Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba y de las guerras que hizo en Italia* (BN R-6^a-6). This manuscript is not signed, does not include a publication date or place, but Rodríguez Villa estimates it was published mid-16th century.

summary at the end of the incident, the chronicler explicitly blames their Italian allies, as the Spanish troops would have been more equally matched had the Italian soldiers arrived as promised; it is clear however, from the description of the interaction between King Fernando and the Gran Capitán, that no small part of the blame can be attributed to the king's lack of military skill and refusal to listen to his primary military strategist.

The conquest of Naples, like many military campaigns, was not a straightforward victory for the Spaniards.¹⁶ Lands were gained and lost over a period of several years and although the Gran Capitán's leadership skills resulted in a strong Spanish position, ultimately the fighting ceased due to political alliances that King Fernando pursued after Queen Isabel's death. The description of the truce between the French and Spanish is presented in the chronicle as a whim of an aging man determined to marry advantageously:

El Rey D. Fernando hizo paz y concluyó el concierto con el Rey Luis de Francia y á la verdad por muchas causas, las cuales no son necesarias contarlas en este lugar...Fué tan bien ayuntado el parentado á fin que la concordia...se viniese á confirmar que el Rey D. Fernando, aunque viejo, tomase por mujer á Germana, hija de la hermana del Rey Luis (243).

This passage suggests that the vicious battles and high casualty rates described on the previous several hundred pages were an unnecessary sacrifice of Iberian lives since the entire conflict is resolved when King Fernando takes Germana (Germaine) de Foix, the niece of King Louis XII of France, as his second wife. The chronicler also sets up a contrast between the Gran Capitán's deep mourning of the loss of Queen Isabel in opposition to King Fernando's self-interested rush into a hasty second marriage:

En aquel tiempo que el Duque Valentino fue llevado prisionero en España, la Reina doña Isabel estaba doliente con poca esperanza de salud, la cual murió pocos días después, con increíble dolor y llanto de Gonzalo Hernández, el cual confesaba que de su Alteza, como crecido y criado en su Corte, había recibido toda la grandeza de virtud y dignidad que desearse pueden.

Capítulo II.

El Rey D. Fernando hizo paz y concluyó el concierto con el Rey Luis de Francia y á la verdad por muchas causas, las cuales no son necesarias contarlas en este lugar...Fué tan bien ayuntado el parentado á fin que la concordia...se viniese á confirmar que el Rey D. Fernando, aunque viejo, tomase por mujer á Germana, hija de la hermana del Rey Luis. (243)

By including the description of the truce arranged between France and Spain in the paragraph following the description of Isabel's death, the chronicler suggests that King Fernando is an impulsive, power-hungry man who realizes that his position is a precarious one and who wildly grasps at opportunities to save himself without considering the consequences for his subjects. Unlike the characterization of the Gran Capitán, a leader who is strategic and logical, and whose solid rapport with his troops leads them to fight committedly on his behalf, King Fernando seems hopelessly out of touch with reality in this story. The narrative inclusion of the description of

¹⁶ For additional information about this period from the Italian perspective, see Bentley and Dandeleit.

Queen Isabel's death alongside the arrangement of Fernando's next marriage suggests that rather than mourn Isabel's passing –as Fernández de Córdoba does– 54-year-old King Fernando is off arranging a new marriage with a young woman three and half decades younger than himself. In truth, there was nearly a year separating these events as Queen Isabel I died 26 November 1504, and the marriage between King Fernando and Germana (Germaine) de Foix was formalized by proxy 19 October 1505, but the couple did not actually meet until 18 March 1506. The chronicler's decision to mention these events in subsequent paragraphs emphasizes to the reader repeated flaws in King Fernando's leadership and contrasts the monarch's flaws with the virtues that made the Great Captain praiseworthy.

The contrast between the two men is further exemplified in their unequal generosity in the ways they compensate their subjects. This section of the chronicle distinguishes the liberality of the Gran Capitán and emphasizes the penury and miserliness of King Fernando:

La nobleza y todo el pueblo lo veneraron [al Gran Capitán] y cada uno según su opinión lo loaba: los unos la bella presencia del cuerpo y hermosura de rostro, otros de la gravedad de capitán, otros se admiraban de su excelentísima justicia con una maravillosa templanza de severidad y clemencia, pero todos se espantaban de su liberalidad merecedora de igualarse con la Majestad Real. Porque él había dado á capitanes ciudades y villas; y entre capitanes de caballos y infantes había repartido casas, villas, posesiones, tenencias de fortalezas y había dado comúnmente á soldados. También había consignado promisiones ordinarias, particularmente á aquellos que habían sido valerosos, teniendo grande memoria en reconocer los merecimientos de cada uno con tanto juicio en el hacer las mercedes, que con justa estimación los envidiosos atestiguaban que no había dejado un solo soldado sin hacerle larga merced. (242)

People everywhere venerated Fernández de Córdoba for his benevolence toward his troops and his subjects. He is so generous that people worry that he confers rewards on the order of royalty. There is not a single soldier who does not personally benefit for his participation and, according to the chronicler, the Gran Capitán has a marvelous memory that allows him to thoughtfully record individual efforts and reward his men according to their achievements. This description serves as an ironic allusion to the lack of generosity displayed by King Fernando, and this passage foreshadows the scene presented a few pages later when the king's worries about his own mounting debts lead him to challenge the Gran Capitán's expenditures in Italy. This is one of the passages that results in the infamous idiom, "las cuentas del Gran Capitán":

...el Rey entre sí mismo, considerando que habiéndose habido un tan gran reino ganado y defendido por esfuerzo y valor de Gonzalo Hernández, tenía sufrimiento que todo lo que le pudiese se le debía de conceder, aunque las rentas del reino por la nueva guerra y por las muchas disensiones y mercedes estaban menoscabadas y de hecho se venían del todo á perder, pero el Rey no quería que le tuviese por ingrato. Había Gonzalo Hernández en aquellos días burlado de la diligencia y curiosidad de los tesoreros envidiosos, y á él enojados y pesados y al Rey poco honrosos, que siendo llamado como á juicio, para que diese cuenta de lo gastado en la guerra y del recibo asentado en la tesorería, y mostrando ser muy mayor la entrada que no era lo gastado, respondió muy severamente que él traería otra escritura muy más auténtica que ninguna de aquellas, por lo cual mostraría clara y patentemente que había mucho más gastado que recibido... El día siguiente presentó un

librillo con un título muy arrogante con que puso silencio á los tesoreros y al Rey y á todos mucha risa. En el primer capítulo asentó que había gastado en frailes y sacerdotes, religiosos, en pobres y monjas, los cuales continuamente estaban en oración rogando á Nuestro Señor Jesucristo, y á todos los santos y santas que le diesen victoria, doscientos mil y setecientos y treinta y seis ducados y nueve reales. En la segunda partida asentó setecientos mil y cuatrocientos noventa y cuatro ducados, á las espías de los cuales había entendido los designos de los enemigos y ganado muchas victorias, y finalmente, la libre posesión de un tan gran reino. (244-245)

According to the chronicler, the King is selfishly concerned about the dwindling royal treasury but refuses to appear ungrateful to the Gran Capitán. The entire exchange is therefore presented as a pretext by which King Fernando can challenge Fernández de Córdoba without seeming unappreciative of the Gran Capitán's military successes. Unlike the previous passage, in which the Gran Capitán demonstrates detailed familiarity with individual soldiers and appropriately divides the spoils of war to compensate each of them for their contributions, this representation of King Fernando suggests that he is unaware of the details that pertain to a military expedition or viceroyalty, which allow his jealous treasurers to sway his opinion and malign the Gran Capitán. The chronicler emphasizes King Fernando's lack of personal knowledge regarding military expenditures, the monarch's inability to recognize which of his courtiers and advisors are trustworthy and loyal, and ultimately his self-interested attempt not to appear ungrateful. The chronicle distinguishes Fernández de Córdoba for his military savvy, his unwavering loyalty to the monarchs, and his generosity to the men in his company that inspired their devotion and willingness to risk their personal safety on his behalf. The idealized portrait presents the captain as a faultless citizen who is subjected to the unfair whims of a jealous, greedy, and power-hungry king.

The Gran Capitán is an intriguing case in the history of European portraits of chivalry because, on the one hand, he boasts attributes expected of an ideal hero from the pages of almost any romance: he is magnanimous, generous, personable, witty, accustomed to luxury and fine things, loyal, deferential, eloquent, and well connected. On the battlefield he is strategic, pragmatic, and his leadership style wins devotion from his troops. And yet, despite his faithful service and consistent, well lauded successes, his troubled relationship with King Fernando leads to his downfall. The chronicles highlight his renown to emphasize the ways he was unable to enjoy the fruits of his labors. The captain's successes for the Spanish crown, leading to lasting influence of Castilian court on the Southern part of the Italian Peninsula,¹⁷ did not result in Fernández de Córdoba's ability to benefit personally from these victories in his later years. The chronicler instead suggests the fickleness of fate in the monarchy one serves. Rather than the idealized glories one might expect from the hero's unparalleled success and virtuosity, the Gran Capitán ultimately dies under-compensated, rejected from inner circles of the court, and with the shame of seeing the ruin of his ancestral home.

King Fernando was in a difficult position in the years following Queen Isabel I's death. The royal coffers were suffering from half a century of wars; there was little cash to finance the expansions into southern Italy or the Americas.¹⁸ The lands gained from the Gran Capitán's

¹⁷ See Stephen Cummins for a thoughtful summary of scholarship and the complex relationship of the influence of Spain on the Neapolitan region.

¹⁸ The essay collection edited by Aurora Egido and José Enrique Laplana provides a thoughtful introductory bibliography to studies focused on King Fernando.

successes in the Kingdom of Naples were important enhancements to Fernando's European holdings, but they had come at steep costs. The narrative events in these chronicles highlight King Fernando's impetuosity and self-interest: as the authors suggest, he acts without considering the long-term consequences of his actions. The works imply that when Queen Isabel ruled by his side, her own temperance modified his hot-headed character, but after her death, Fernando's true nature is no longer restrained. Everyone suffers; even honored subjects like the Gran Capitán are left to the whims of the king's impulsivity. Fernando's ambitions to assume the throne of Castile are nearly immediately challenged on several fronts and, writing from a position from which the outcome of the line of succession is clear, the chronicler is unequivocal in his assertion that Prince Charles is the rightful heir and appropriate leader for imperial expansion. Ultimately, the stories of the Gran Capitán highlight Iberian military ambitions, the tenacity of Spanish troops, and the ability of Iberian subjects to gain the respect and admiration of nobility throughout the known world.¹⁹ The fall of Fernández de Córdoba was probably most important to King Fernando as a way of projecting an image of power to other European nobles: by quashing the ambitions of the well-known, universally respected, and popular Gran Capitán, King Fernando illustrates to European elites his own power to decide the fate of even a loyal subject.

The story of the Gran Capitán thus provides a fruitful opportunity to reassess the Catholic Monarch's role in the expansion of Iberian power and in diplomatic relations across the Mediterranean, and to consider the projection of power, courtliness, and heroism of this military figure and Iberian subjects more broadly in the years just prior to the colonial expansion of the Iberia into the Americas, Africa, and Asia.

¹⁹ Henry Kamen signals the apparent irony in that Castile produced very few military commanders of distinction, despite the military dominance of the expanding empire. Kamen lauds Fernández de Córdoba as one of the few military commanders from the Iberian Peninsula and explains that during most of the 16th century the great military leaders came from other places, like Alessandro Farnese (of Parma), who became Governor of the Spanish Netherlands from 1578 to 1592 (2004, 157).

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