

Military Lives in the Medieval and Early Modern Iberian World

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If, as the often-repeated ancient precept would have it, money comprises the sinews of war, during the medieval and early modern periods the written word increasingly comprised its other connective tissue.¹ Against the backdrop of burgeoning administrative correspondence, technical treatises, and the bureaucratic testimony and self-narrative required for oversight and career ascent, the evolving armies of the period became sites of a vibrant textual culture.² Access to paper and familiarity with writing practices in various registers were among the material conditions that allowed military writing, including life writing, to flourish. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the heterogeneous character of armies, the precarious status of non-noble soldiers, and the contested nature of the means and justification for warfare were all debates in which soldiers themselves could intervene by writing. In such works it is often the lived experience of the soldier - figured in either a biographical or (pseudo)autobiographical frame - that is offered as entertainment, edification, or the grounds for authoritative argumentation.

The present volume focuses on this singular thematic element in the multifarious military textual ecology: the military *vida* or life, defined broadly here as an account of a life (real or imagined), marked by service in arms. Beyond the writing required for basic military functioning, the institution - along with the conflicted figure of the soldier - left a distinctive literary footprint, in genres including the chivalric biography and humanist dialogue, which rehearsed problems associated with military ethics, to comic and dramatic literature, which alternately satirized or idealized military experience through the contradictory figures of the *valiente* and the braggart soldier. The present volume brings together eleven articles examining different aspects of medieval and early modern military life, as it is refracted through the prism of a variety of textual genres. The essays are organized in a roughly chronological arc, although a web of shared themes connects them to each other. By bringing together different approaches to the study of military lives and their textual manifestations, spanning the global empires of Spain and Portugal, this volume aims to explore these works as aesthetic laboratories, engines of knowledge production, and sites of ideological articulation.

The volume begins with three essays that explore how the military ethos of medieval Castile and Portugal was inflected by humanist culture and chivalric ideals. Grant Gearhart's contribution analyzes the late fifteenth-century chivalric biography of Rodrigo Ponce de León, *Historia de los hechos del Marqués de Cádiz* (c. 1492), focusing particularly on the presentation of the subject as a leader who exemplifies the military virtues of *fortitudo* (signifying physical strength, weapons dexterity, and boldness) and *sapientia* (encompassing prudence and cunning, as well as rhetorical facility). Through

¹ See Geoffrey Parker, quoting Thucydides, in *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567-1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars*, Cambridge University Press, 2004 p. 107. See also Niccolò Machiavelli, "Money is Not the Sinews of War, Although It Is Generally So Considered." *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, Christian E. Detmold, trans (Modern Library, 1950)

² For a compelling account of this military textual culture and the material conditions that facilitated it, see Miguel Martínez, *Front Lines*. See also Abigail Castellano López and Adrián Saéz, *Vidas en armas*.

close readings of the text and comparisons with contemporary chronicles, Gearhart demonstrates how the biography presents Ponce de León as a figure of both physical strength and intellectual vigor, a heroic ideal of classical origins that the courtly culture of the period sought to insert into contemporary discourse. In a similar vein, João Nisa analyzes the anonymous *Crónica do Condestabre* (c. 1431-1443), which recounts the life of famed Portuguese general Nuno Álvares Pereira, a decisive figure in the struggle for Portugal's independence from Castile. Through a comparison with other contemporary textual sources, Nisa interrogates the lapses in the *Crónica*, including the text's omission of Nuno Álvares's celebrated skill at jousting and other episodes that would illustrate his personal bravery. Instead, the *Crónica* highlights Nuno Álvares's achievements as a skilled commander and a strict disciplinarian capable of strategically wielding the virtue of mercy. Much as the Castilian Ponce de León's anonymous chronicler fashioned his life as a synthesis of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, the Portuguese Nuno Álvares Pereira's chronicler emphasized the exemplarity of the hero (who would be canonized in 2009) through a representation of his martial achievements tempered by religious virtues, including humility, the capacity to forgive, and the inclination towards a life of spiritual contemplation.

This same chivalric-humanist framework persisted well into the following century and was transported to the representation of conflicts far beyond the Iberian peninsula, in an attempt to endow the lives and fortunes wrought in these conflicts with exemplary weight. Luis Gómez Canseco demonstrates how, a century after the appearance of chivalric biographies of figures like Rodrigo Ponce de León and Nuno Álvares Pereira, the chivalric ethos was a key element in the soldier-poet Alonso de Ercilla's education in the court of Carlos V. In Ercilla's epic poem *La Araucana* (1569/1578/1589), which narrates the bloody and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to fully subjugate the Mapuche people of present-day Chile, the poet fashions an eyewitness persona who conducts himself in accordance with the principles laid out in treatises like Ramon Lull's thirteenth-century *Libro del Orden de Caballería*, among other sources. As Gómez Canseco shows, Ercilla structures the behavior and observations of his first-person narrator around the concepts of selfless service to the crown, including the repudiation of greed as a motive for service, and the courteous treatment of the fallen enemy. In opposition to the unrestrained violence and avarice associated with the conquistadores - and amply documented in the Arauco War - and in contrast to the usurious methods by which Ercilla amassed his own personal fortune, in *La Araucana* Ercilla's poetic persona embodies the chivalric code, granting artistic and ideological coherence to grim experience.

Beyond inscribing an individual life as exemplary, employing chivalric ideals to narrate contemporary events forged a literary and ideological continuity between the medieval past and the imperial enterprise. As weapons evolved and strategies shifted, and conflicts unfolded across the globe, a certain amount of anxiety accompanied the evolving military institution. Debates on military ethics and functioning, including just war and its prosecution, as well as issues of training and remuneration of soldiers were rehearsed in a variety of different textual forms that offered first-person experience as proof of knowledge and justification for authority. A key genre among these is the dialogue, a didactic form with classical roots, in which multiple viewpoints are articulated as speaking characters whose divergent ideas draw them towards dramatic confrontation. Sara Bellido's essay in this volume charts the intersections among several sixteenth-century military dialogues, including Diego Núñez Alba's *Diálogos de la vida del soldado* (1553), Francisco de

Valdés' *Diálogo militar* (1578), and Diego García de Palacio's *Diálogos militares* (1583), among others. Through a careful analysis of these texts, Bellido demonstrates the convergence of reflections and critiques that cover the arc of the soldier's career, from training to retirement. Common themes include an enumeration of the qualities desired for different kinds of military leadership (defensive, strategic, tactical), as well as arguments for the state's duty to provide for aging soldiers in recompense for their service. As Bellido shows, in placing their critiques in the mouths of speaking soldiers whose experience often mirrored their own, these soldier-authors exploited the affordances of the dialogic form to describe a precarious reality often elided in other forms of elite discourse.

Leonardo Coppola's contribution to this volume further expands our understanding of the military dialogue, particularly its intellectual referents and moral ambitions. Coppola analyzes Francisco Mexía's *Diálogo del soldado* (1555), which takes up the question of military retirement and the reintegration of soldiers in civil society. Mexía - unlike Diego Núñez Alba, Francisco de Valdés, and Diego García de Palacio - was not himself a military man, but rather a Dominican friar who wrote with the aim of reforming the excesses associated with military life. The dialogue is organized as a conversation between fellow travelers, Machicao (an old soldier fantasizing about a retirement of ease after a vice-ridden career) and Fulgencio (a Dominican friar, like Mexía himself, who dispenses sounds moral and financial wisdom). Their conversation concludes with a dramatic reversal: Machicao renounces his career of avarice and licentiousness and takes communion, in part due to Fulgencio's counsel on the proper approach to money. Coppola traces the Aristotelian underpinnings of Fulgencio's advice to the theory of chrematistics elaborated in the *Ethics* and *Politics*. According to Aristotelian chrematistics, the excessive accumulation of value is to be avoided. There is a practical reason for this prohibition on excessive wealth: communal life requires that money be constantly exchanged rather than hoarded, thus strengthening social ties rather than favoring social disintegration. In this way, Coppola reads Mexía's dialogue as a rejection of the stereotypical soldier's motivations - the amassing of material wealth and worldly fame - favoring instead the spiritual and humane virtues of generous friendship, social charity, and the practice of penitence for the transgressions facilitated by the dislocations of military life.

With Amanda Kapp's essay on Fernando Oliveira's *Arte da Guerra do Mar* (1555), the volume moves from the multi-voiced conceit of the dialogue to the single viewpoint of the treatise, an exploration in essayistic form of new knowledge production. Kapp analyzes Fernando Oliveira's *Arte da Guerra do Mar* (1555), considered the first treatise on maritime war in Portuguese, in light of the author's "practical humanism," the experiential epistemology that accompanied the Age of Exploration. Oliveira, a Dominican by training, authored the work based on first-hand experiences with shipbuilding, navigation, logistics, and marine warfare. As Kapp notes, the treatise is both a manual for the production and systematization of knowledge about nautical strategy and tactics, as well as a broad reflection on military ethics. Oliveira claims lived experience and expert knowledge as grounds for the authority to pronounce upon sensitive topics intimately connected with imperial expansion, including just war and slavery. In this way the *Arte da Guerra do Mar* does not limit itself to the practical details of navigation and sailing, but also examines the ideological motivations and political consequences of overseas exploration.

From the chivalric and humanist ethos employed to render modern military experience legible and valuable, to the emergence of new questions, debates, and forms of knowledge brought about military-technological transformation and imperial expansion, the

following pair of articles points to the emergence of a recognizable character type in the theatrical representation of the soldier. In his contribution to this volume, Manuel Olmedo Gobante draws upon popular sixteenth-century fencing treatises to construct a genealogy of a burgeoning military-meritocratic ideal in which strength and skill grant social and economic advancement far beyond inherited status. This concept frames an analysis of the shared themes and dramatic structure of four seventeenth-century plays that spectacularize the life of the *valiente* - the soldier whose most salient features are his physical strength, dexterity, and fearless aggression. Through a careful reading of four comedias, including *Julián Romero* (1597-1604), *El valiente Céspedes* (1612-1615), *El asombro de Turquía y valiente toledano* (1621-1624), and *El valiente negro en Flandes* (1625), Olmedo Gobante shows how these plays grant exemplary status to the relatively low-born *valiente* who conquers his own Fortune, rising spectacularly through the ranks when his temperament and abilities are placed in the service of the the Crown. Olmedo Gobante persuasively concludes that, beyond the particulars of each play, together they may be read as part of a subgenre of the comedia that dramatizes, in a martial key, the thesis memorably articulated by Don Quijote: that social value is not necessarily linked to birth, but rather one is "hijo de sus obras" (*DQ* I, 4).

While the *comedia de valientes* showcases one version of the ideal soldier - an individual worthy of the social and economic capital with which his labor is eventually recognized - the *soldado fanfarrón* embodies the inverse of this archetype in the figure of the braggart soldier who clamors for recognition, without the sacrifice and skill that ideally precede it. In his essay for this volume, Adrián Sáez analyzes Miguel de Cervantes's entremes *La guarda cuidadosa* in light of the voluminous bureaucratic production of *memoriales* and *relaciones de méritos y servicios*, military service papers and petitions for advancement that Cervantes, like most literate soldiers, also had occasion to prepare. Sáez perceptively demonstrates how the humor of the short theatrical piece hinges on the parodic presentation of the soldier's documents, in particular, the marked contrast between the braggart's surplus of discursive proclamations and his practically useless service papers that are declined as sureties and repurposed for a love letter of equally dubious persuasiveness. In the entremes, the braggart soldier's *memorial* is shown to be worth no more than the paper that it's written on, thus illuminating from a different angle the concept that Manuel Olmedo Gobante sees articulated in the *comedia de valientes*, the idea that one's status is rightly earned through effort, bold but baseless claims - written or spoken - notwithstanding.

As both Saéz and Olmedo Gobante observe in their respective essays, the possibility of social mobility alternately celebrated and parodied in dramatic form was the driving force behind the production of soldierly service papers and petitions, in which the soldier narrated his life and achievements in the hopes of receiving promotion or reward. In his contribution to this volume, Nelson Marques examines one such petition, composed by Antonio Dias Marques around 1654 and addressed to the Conselho Ultramarino, the Portuguese administrative body tasked with responding to such requests. As Marques notes, the same qualities lauded in the valiant soldiers of the comedia were also rewarded by the military bureaucracies of Spain and Portugal - at least in theory, if not always in practice. Like the *relación de méritos* required for promotion within the Spanish armies, the Portuguese *requerimento* included a professional biography of the petitioner, along with supporting testimonies written by superiors. As Marques notes, these petitions were collaborative efforts that often exemplify what constituted an ideal soldier in the period. In

the case study that Marques examines here, the primary values evinced in the petition are the soldier's capacity for sacrifice as well as his physical bravery and daring (*bizarria*), qualities that are likewise lauded in the *comedia de valientes* but, as we see in the next article, do not always achieve the intended outcome.

The tension between sometimes reckless individual displays of bravery and the cool detachment required for command marks a defining difference among the biographical accounts of the late sixteenth-century military figures Blas Ruiz, Diogo Veloso, and Juan Juárez de Gallinato. In his essay for this volume, Isidro Luis Jiménez turns to early seventeenth-century sources recounting Iberian expansion in Cambodia, focusing on the ways in which the larger-than-life pair of the Castilian Ruiz and the Portuguese Veloso were portrayed as freewheeling Pacific conquistadors, in contrast with the Canarian Gallinato, a professional officer whose movements were scrupulously subordinated to the Crown's interests. In particular, the first-person testimony of Blas Ruiz cited in the account produced by the Oidor of Manila Antonio de Morga indicates an audacious sense of self-regard, as the soldier describes his attempts to inspire both fear and love in the local populace. In a similar fashion, both Ruiz and Veloso register bitter complaints against the perceived cowardice of Gallinato's strategic decision to withdraw military support for their expansionist ventures. As Jiménez notes, both Ruiz and Veloso disappeared under uncertain circumstances after 1596, leaving behind only textual traces of lives marked and ultimately consumed by violence.

To different degrees, the chivalric biography, the humanist dialogue, military treatises, service papers, contemporary chronicles of military exploration, as well as the *comedia* all rehearse to some extent the hotly debated question of merit: what actions and dispositions, in the panorama of military service, deserve praise and emulation? Relatedly, upon what basis should material reward and social elevation be bestowed, and to whom? Who gets to compete for such recompense in the first place? The volume concludes with David Abián Cubillo's essay, which traces how the discourse of merit was defined in the Spanish army during the eighteenth century. In an analysis of documents detailing the establishment of the Real Academia Militar de Matemáticas y Fortificación in Barcelona, founded in 1720 and granted a royal ordinance in 1739, Abián Cubillo reconstructs the interpersonal and ideological struggle between two key figures: Mateo Calabro, artillery expert and the academy's first director, and the engineer Jorge Próspero de Verboom. Each man identified with a different social and professional faction, with predictable results. Calabro wanted the academy to prefer Spaniards, regardless of pedigree, and he routinely admitted candidates regardless of their non-noble status. As an artilleryman, he wanted the academy to provide general training that could be useful for a wide variety of military specialties. In contrast, the Flemish noble Verboom prized nobility as an admissions requirement, and he envisioned the academy producing not generalists but engineers - adjuncts to the military institution, with their own organizational system. Nearly twenty years after the academy's establishment, these questions were ultimately settled by royal ordinance. Notably, the ordinance finally established academic credentials as an official "merit" alongside years of service and family circumstance, thus officially recognizing scientific study in the formal confines of the military academy as a valuable experience for soldiers requesting promotion and preferment.

In delimiting the boundaries of the present volume to the medieval and early modern Iberian world - beginning with two chivalric biographies from fifteenth-century Castile and

Portugal and ending in Barcelona with the implementation of one of many Bourbon military reforms - the intention has been to bring together scholarship in Spanish, Portuguese, and English that reflects upon the multilingual and polycentric military-textual production of what has been called the global Iberian world.³ The intentionally broad scope of the geographical, linguistic, and temporal lens employed here allows us to uncover striking parallels in how military bureaucracy functioned, in the forms of textuality it fomented, and the cultural values subtending and contesting it. It is our hope that the essays in this volume contribute to a rich body of interdisciplinary scholarship and point to further possibilities for uncovering and understanding military textuality in the period.

³ Among recent scholarship adopting a global Iberian framework, see Ivonne del Valle et al, *Iberian Empires*. See also Pedro Cardim et al, *Polycentric Monarchies*.

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