

The Head of Susana
Aztec Conquest of Spain

by

Lawrence H. Feldman
P.O. Box 2493
Wheaton Maryland 20915-2493
<Lawrenc846@aol.com>

November 12, 2002

Table of Contents

0. Before the Beginning
Europe in 1519
An Expedition Sails East
Notes for the Reader

1. In the Clouds, in the Mists. 1

2. The Sea. 17

3. Cadiz, The Island Gateway. 27
Ships from the West
Attack on Cadiz
Peace in Catic
War in the Provinces
A Raid, A Rising and a Battle

4. Mission to Cehuiyan. 62
The Head of Susana
Headquarters for Insurrection
Rebels from a Forgotten People
The Tall Dark Tower
A Rising, A Revolt and an Invasion
The City is Won and Lost

5. A Voyage to Granada. 88
Walking to Work
New Orders and Old Tasks
The Envoy Departs
A Family with a Taste for the Unexpected
At the Port of Malaga
A Ride through the Mountains and an Entrance to a Palace

6. A Princess in a Tower. 108
Golden Words and Paper Gifts
Of Two Legged Cattle and Dripping Hearts
Seduction as a Form of Diplomatic Protest
Soldiers Before the Battle
Old Lions and a Young Army
In Defense of Granada and Granadine Liberties

7. Castille Goes to War. 123
A Battle Won
The Forging of a Revolution
A New King for Castile
Laws
A Constitution for Castile
Queen of Castile

8. Gathering Storm. 170
The Envoy
Battle of Pavia
An Army in Aragon

9. The Coming of the Soldiers. 212
Consul in Cehuiyan
A King in a Distant Land
March to Castille
Advance from Aragon

10. Battles Won and Lost. 243
The March North
Encounters in the Wilderness
A City and Its Defenses
The Sacking of Castille's Capital
Decision at Simancas
Evacuation of Valladolid

Afterword. 283

Part of Chapter 3

I pulled out a coin, dropped it on a table next to the tray and asked
“What will this buy me? Can I get a meal for it here?” We had just been
issued coins in the local currency and I was still a little uncertain with
them. He responded in rhyme:

“Doblón de a dos, norabunea estedes

Pues con vos no topó Xevres”

which meant “Congratulations, double doubloon, on not falling into Xevres’s hands.”

“Who is this Xevres and why should one laud the coin for escaping him?” said I.

A low voice from my right side, murmured, “He means that it hasn’t been stolen by the thieving Burgundians and their German king.” The voice came from a thin, very thin and short brown eyed, thick black eye browed, long-haired woman. A bright smiling mouth, small straight nose set in a brown face seasoned with a little red, wearing worn black clothes, and a dagger at her belt, she cut a striking figure.

She added, “if you want to know more, buy me a meal. That coin of yours is enough to feed us both and then some.”

“Will it?” I asked the man at the table?

At his nod Clara Castillo, for that was the lady’s name, said “start with a whole roasted chicken and a pitcher of summer wine, unless his lordship,” smiling in my direction, “wants other.”

“Sounds good to me,” I said. “Let grab a seat in some quiet corner. “I’m looking forward to your tale of Burgundians and German Kings.”

“Just one German king, that’s quite enough for Castille,” taking my arm and leading me to a table in the back.

Carlos was the German king and Xevres was his minister. Between the two of them, they were busy taxing away all the money they could find and send it their northern homeland. Even worse they were placing foreigners to rule over Spaniards in the towns and cities of the Spains.

“Would you believe they even appointed a three-year-old child as Archbishop of Toledo?” said Clara. “Of course he can’t fill his duties, he can hardly even talk, but his advisers are all Burgundian and get paid out of Archbishopric funds. His father gets his salary.”

“Who’s his father” I asked?

Smiling once more her thin lipped narrow smile, she answered “Why Xevres of course.”

The north was in revolt against their king. Taxes, and their right to

determine who would pay what, was the principal issue. These rebels, they called themselves “comuneros” after the cities or “communities” in revolt, had joined in a league to defend their rights after the King had left for a country called Germany.

The southern lands, those here around Cadiz, had not risen in revolt but the commoners were not exactly happy.

“Those thieves of high estate, have their own private armies of robbers and kill anyone who protests. Only last month the brigands of the Lord of Niebla hung the mayor of Puerto Real, just southeast of Cadiz, because he asked for help from the royal officials in Seville. Not that he would have got much help from them. Like the King, all they care for filling their own pockets.”

“All very interesting,” I said “but what’s your stake in all this. What do you do? Are you from Cadiz or this Puerto Real?”

“No, I’m from Seville.” Just then the summer wine arrived, and the servant of the inn said, “I’ll be back in a few moments with the food,” and left.

“Yes, I’m from Seville,” the lady repeated. Smiling her usual smile with one hand on her dagger: “You might say that I went to Cadiz for my health, that I needed the smell of salt air. What do I do? Oh, this and that but by trade I am a seamstress.”

The summer wine was watered wine. The chicken, broiled in olive oil was excellent, as was the rest of the meal and I got 1 gold escudo and 14 silver pesos back as change. 2 pesos for two meals, for Clara ate as much as I. “Meals are cheap in this town,” I thought as I left the Posada, “and the lady most interesting.” I arranged to meet with Clara at the Posada the following morning. She could be very useful for the expedition but first I wanted to get Moctezumah’s approval.

The meeting that evening was at the City Hall. Pedro Estopiñán and Fernando Cubas was there, as also (under flag of truce), Anton Bernalt. Finally there was Diego Sanchez, the most senior of the priests, although not the leader of the priests of Cadiz. We were told that their leader, the “bishop” of Cadiz, lived in Seville. Don Gonzalo Fernández, having been shot dead in the fight at the wells, was not able to attend the meeting. When Moctezumah entered the room, flanked by his officers, and followed by me as translator, the assembled citizens rose as a sign of respect. Moctezumah waved them down, and we took seats facing them, on one end of a broad table, I sitting on the left hand side of our General.

Pedro Estopiñán spoke first. “Your Excellency, we deeply regret the actions of yesterday taken at the behest of the King’s representative, the corregidor Don Gonzalo Fernández, and we would like to offer hostages as security until we can raise the money to ransom our city and also for the safety of our temples and homes.”

Moctezumah replied. “Lords and Rulers of Catic [for that is how the Mexica all pronounced this name], I want no ransom for Catic. My soldiers have done their duty. The land is now the land of the Master, the Portent, Huitzilopochtli. No longer are you, People of Catic, Lords of Catic, our foes!”

“We will protect you from your enemies, the Guzmans, the Ponce de Leons, noble lords who seek to rob and ruin you.”

“Your taxes, the alcabala on sales, the service you pay to the German King, the tithes you pay to him for your religion, the custom duties on goods entering or departing from your port, these are all abolished.”

“Catic need only pay, based upon the number of households, what is made here. Your people harvest fish, they plant the grape vine, prepare the cloth, in these goods and their harvest, you need pay your taxes. A calpixqui, a steward shall be placed in office, who shall watch over and levy the tribute. He is not your ruler. You will be free to govern your City as you please. He will be here only to guard the interests of Our Lord the Tlahtoani Maxtla and I, his Captain General in these lands.”

“Those who do not want to obey Our Lord are free to leave Catic. They can take their children in their arms, carry what they wish, and abandon this land. We will not detain them. But those who remain must obey us and follow our orders.” I translated the Tlahtoani’s speech to the assembly.

Diego Sanchez replied “what of our God, our lord Jesus Christ, will they be respected in this Catic of yours?”

Moctezumah answered, “I care not what Gods you worship. We only burn the temples of enemies. It matters not to me. We have our own Gods. We have no need to concern ourselves with yours.”

The Castilian half of our council asked, and received permission, to confer in another room. They returned in forty-five minutes.

Fernando de Cubas stepped forward out of the crowd of Castilian notables and said, “We accept your kind offer of protection in these dangerous times, subject only to the conditions that you respect the rights and privileges of our city to govern ourselves as we see fit, allow those who are dissatisfied to leave with their belongings, and require us to pay taxes in the manner you

have so indicated. Furthermore some of us, nodding toward Anton Bernalt, have asked if they can take service with you, sailing under your banner in peace and war.”

Moctezumah agreed to these conditions and noted that one of our ships would be returning to Tampico shortly and that of Anton Bernalt could accompany it. He suggested that Bernalt speak with me with regard to a possible cargo. Moctezumah would provide a cargo on the return trip to Catic. One and all, they all promised to stand by us, to obey any orders we might give them, and to join their forces with ours against our enemies and all their allies. Then in the presence of Diego de Godoy the Notary they took the oath of obedience to the Tlahtoani Maxtla and his Captain General, and sent messengers to all the other royal towns in the province to relate what had happened.

War in the Provinces

Time was need to repair the walls of Catic, prepare two ships (one being that of Anton Bernalt with a cargo of cloth, olive oil and wine) for a voyage back to Tampico with a report of our activities and a request for certain resources. Our two Spanish prisoners Alvarez and Bernal Díaz, who had by now learned something of the Mexica language, would recross the Ocean as translators for Anton Bernalt. We also needed to find out more about the lands around us. Clara would prove most valuable in this regard. Not so much for the politics around the thrones, she was hardly privy to that, but on the needs and desires of the merchants, peasants and artisans who made up most of the population.

The morning after the Catic notables swore allegiance to Maxtla, I met her at that same Posada. We didn't stay there long. She was curious about the Mexica, their origins, beliefs and yes, even weapons. I told her that there was someone who could tell her more than I and, as prearranged the previous day after recounting her helpfulness, led her to to the fortress housing the offices of our officers in Catic.

“So,” she asked as we approached the entrance to the castle “who is this marvel who knows all?”

“You will see in a moment,” said I.

Then I approached one of the two guards, a Yellow, at the gateway. I asked him to “Please inform the Commanding General that the person he wished to see awaits entry below.”

Snapping to attention, the guard said “ Yes, Sir,” about faced and entered the building.

I explained to Clara, who looked amused at the performance of the guard, Castilian soldiers were far more informal, that we would know in a moment how soon we could meet her informant.

Doing an exaggerated version of the snapping to attention of the guard and his about face, Clara said “will he also dance his way to us?”

“Er, not exactly,” said I.

At that moment the guard returned and said “Sir, His Excellency the Commanding General, the Captain General, will see you now. Please follow me.”

I told Clara that we needed to follow the guard and we ascended the stairs to an office on the second floor.

The office had a guard at the door, who opened it for us. By this time Clara had gathered that we going to see some officer but, as Clara told me afterwards, she did not expect to meet the great Moctezumah himself.

Inviting us to sit and I remaining as interpreter, Moctezumah greeted the lady from Seville and told her that the information she had provided had been most helpful. “Therefore,” he said, “I am interested in employing your services to help us learn more about this land.”

“But first,” and his voice shifted to a less pleasant, louder tone, “We need to know more about you. Why did you, alone, offer to tell us more about the leaders of this land?”

Clara, reckless and perhaps a little naive, had misinterpreted her role that day. Rather than interrogator she was the one being asked the questions. But she still answered with a question of her own.

“Why should I care one maravedi for the Lords of Castille? They burnt my parents at the stake. They force me to live with cutthroats and thieves to earn my daily bread. I starve while they grow fat on the labor of the commoners. I wish they, all of them, could be drawn and quartered ! ”

Apparently she, and her followers, had broken into the mansion of the Ponce de Leon family in Seville. She said “the family and most of the retainers were elsewhere, we only had to kill a few guards.” They didn’t stay long, just grabbed some silver and ran. But they were recognized by a hidden retainer and had to hide. She figured that Catic, where the Ponce de Leon’s had tried to reduce all the citizens to serfs and therefore were hated by the townsmen, was safer than Seville.

Why not be reckless? The citizens of Catic feared for their livelihood and family. Clara had no family, and few resources. All she had to gamble with was her life, and that wasn't worth much anyway. So she spoke up, when most were silent.

Pleased with her answers. Moctezumah offered her a position with the Mexica forces. Urging her to learn the Mexica language, since he would like her to be able to communicate directly with all members of his force, he offered her the position of my assistant and promised that she would be treated as any Mexica officer with, upon retirement, a grant of land, a sum of 2000 gold ducats and all the rights and privileges of any of the Mexica.

“And what is his position?,” asked Clara, “Samuel never told me he was an officer.”

I was also very interested in this answer because this was the first time that anyone suggested that I was an officer. But if Clara was to become one and she was to be my assistant, as she deduced then so was I.

Moctezumah replied: “Samuel is like any good sponge. He absorbs data but doesn't release any unless, of course, he is ordered to do so. He has been in charge of liaison with the people of this land. Although we have others, Castilian prisoners captured elsewhere, he is our best translator and thus been assigned this role.”

The Captain General then advised her that her liaison duties, like mine, didn't mean she would not have any military responsibilities. That she would be assigned a room in the garrison and expected to report to Captain Huemac for training in Mexica weapons.

Clara was amazed that women could serve as soldiers in the Mexica armies and delighted with all the conditions. Her agreement to join us loud and heartfelt. I think she would have even kissed the Captain General if the wide desk between him and her, and his imposing presence did not discourage it. During the next two weeks, while Clara was learning Mexica weapons, drill and language, I was learning more about the lands about us. Tasks, incidentally, not by any means mutually exclusive, since I was assigned by Huemac to be her instructor. Strong willed and free spirited, Clara had more than her fill of instruction and the instructor who gave it. It wasn't an easy two weeks for either of us but better learn from me now than have her die at enemy hands because of lack of necessary knowledge. Meanwhile the Duke of Medina Sidonia, the hereditary military commander of all the lands near Catic, was said to have begun organizing an army to attack Catic.

However what began the new campaign was the brigands of the Duke of Arcos who were harassing the citizens of Puerto Real. Puerto Real declared for

Maxtla and begged us for help. At this this time there were four jurisdictions, four powers near Catic. There were the royal cities of Jerez and Puerto Real, the lands of the Duke of Arcos (those of the Ponce de Leon's), the lands of the Duke of Medina Sidonia (the Guzmans) and a town of the Duke of Medinaceli (the Ribera family). It was the feuding Guzman and Ponce de Leon's, with their private armies and vast holdings, that posed the greatest danger.

Moctezumah decided the send out an expeditionary force to defend Puerto Real and conquer the lands of his enemies. Cuauhtemoc would be its commander. He would have 200 Browns as foot soldiers, 80 Blacks divided equally among artillery and cavalry and a 100 Greens who would all have horses. The sub captains were Chimalpahin of the Browns and Huemac of the Greens and we, Clara and I, would go along to provide liaison.

We used teams of four horses, attached in double files, to pull our 6 pounder howitzers and 3 pounder field guns to Puerto Real. Since it was horse artillery, not just horse drawn artillery, with everyone from powder boy on up mounted, it was able to keep up with the cavalry and us Greens. By the time the Browns had arrived, a few hours after, Cuauhtemoc had devised a plan of attack. There wasn't much to defend at Puerto Real, it was just a small village, so he decided rather than wait he would go after the enemy. His forces would be divided into two groups. He, and most of the Browns would march on Medina Sidonia from the north; the closest Guzman garrison and the likely point of concentration for the enemy army. Clara would go ahead of the force and try to make contact with dissatisfied inhabitants of the town. The hope was to open a gate, allowing Mexica forces to surprise Medina Sidonia. Half of the Blacks and most of the Greens would capture Chiclana, Conil, and Vejer. All of these were unfortified Guzman holdings which could supply us with horses and perhaps, if what Clara was telling us about the feelings of the people was true, some recruits. Then they would attack Medina Sidonia from the south. After capturing the Guzman strongholds we would deal with the Ponce de Leon's. I and the other members of the southern force would be leaving for Chiclana the next morning.

Leaving the meeting where Cuauhtemoc announced these plans to the assembled officers, I said to Clara

“Take care, I would not like to see your body hanging in front of the city gate when we arrive in Medina Sidonia.”

“And why should you care” asked she with some anger in her voice, “what's one soldier more or less?”

Truly I didn't know why I cared, except that she was pretty and I was attracted to the forceful, strong willed woman.

I stuttered, “there’s no war between us, is there? And you’re too valuable to waste. Shalom, Clara, Shalom. Peace, Clara, Peace.”

“Yes, I know what it means,” she said irritably, “my parents used the same word. How come you idol worshipers know Hebrew?”

“Because I’m not an idol worshiper and we use Hebrew to say prayers in the Khanate,” said I.

“I thought you were a Mexica,” said she with a questioning tone in her voice. Her voice rose to a higher louder pitch, “So what are you then?”

“Just like you Clara, a Mexica ally from a distant land.”

Saying “Good Night Clara and Shalom,” I left her and walked to my sleeping quarters.