

THE SCIENTIFIC
REVOLUTION

Lawrence M. Principe

SCOTLAND Rab Houston

SEXUALITY Véronique Mottier

SHAKESPEARE Germaine Greer

SIKHISM Eleanor Nesbitt

SLEEP Steven W. Lockley

and Russell G. Foster

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL

ANTHROPOLOGY

John Monaghan and Peter Just

SOCIALISM Michael Newman

SOCIOLOGY Steve Bruce

SOCRATES C. C. W. Taylor

THE SOVIET UNION Stephen Lovell

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

Helen Graham

SPANISH LITERATURE Jo Labanyi

SPINOZA Roger Scruton

STATISTICS David J. Hand

STUART BRITAIN John Morrill

SUPERCONDUCTIVITY

Stephen Blundell

TERRORISM Charles Townshend

THEOLOGY David F. Ford

THOMAS AQUINAS Fergus Kerr

TOCQUEVILLE Harvey C. Mansfield

TRAGEDY Adrian Poole

THE TUDORS John Guy

TWENTIETH-CENTURY

BRITAIN Kenneth O. Morgan

THE UNITED NATIONS

Jussi M. Hanhimäki

THE U.S. CONGRESS Donald A. Ritchie

UTOPIANISM Lyman Tower Sargent

THE VIKINGS Julian Richards

VIRUSES Dorothy H. Crawford

WITCHCRAFT Malcolm Gaskill

WITTGENSTEIN A. C. Grayling

WORLD MUSIC Philip Bohlman

THE WORLD TRADE

ORGANIZATION Amrita Narlikar

WRITING AND SCRIPT

Andrew Robinson

Available soon:

CHINESE LITERATURE Sabina Knight

ITALIAN LITERATURE

Peter Hainsworth and David Robey

HISTORY OF MATHEMATICS

Jacqueline Stedall

ANAESTHESIA Aidan O'Donnell

RUSSIAN HISTORY Geoffrey Hosking

For more information visit our web site

www.oup.co.uk/general/vsi/

Matthew Restall and Felipe Fernández-Armesto

THE CONQUISTADORS

A Very Short Introduction

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Yet for all the success of Cervantes's great novel, *The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha*, its eponymous protagonist was a conquistador who never left Spain. The ostensible target of the poet's wit was the knight of the age of chivalry, not the captain of conquest campaigns in the Indies; only very indirectly was don Quixote a Vargas Machuca or a Montejo, let alone a Cortés or an Aguirre. There are of course literary reasons why Cervantes chose to lampoon the chivalrous knight, rather than directly making the New World conquistador a farcical figure. But his choice is also explained by Spain's larger cultural and political context in the early seventeenth century. That context was not conducive to making mockery of the conquerors, even less so by the end of the seventeenth century.

For example, a look at the portraiture of the period reveals that conquistadors were eager to be seen on canvas as regal, dignified, and authoritative—a far cry from Cervantes's comical knight. Conquistador portraits drew inspiration and legitimacy from two other genres of portrait, the royal and the viceregal. Portraits of kings tended to set the visual tropes, which were then imitated in official portraits of Mexican and Peruvian viceroys, and in official and unofficial portraits of conquistadors. Vargas Machuca's imitation of Philip II's pose of a half century earlier (see fig. 8) was not simply a direct loan but part of a larger claim to status by association. Likewise, the half-length and three-quarter view of Jiménez de Quesada (see fig. 2) was a conventional pose of early modern painting, most notably that of official portraits of viceroys and governors of the empire's provinces. In Mexico City's royal palace, the seat of government for New Spain, there hung during the colonial centuries a series of half-length portraits of New Spain's viceroys—beginning with the first governor, Hernando Cortés.

A 1666 description of the portraits in Mexico City's royal palace also claims that Titian's famous painting of Charles V hung in the same room, sent to Mexico by the emperor "when he had the good news of the conquest of these kingdoms." That would have been an impossibility; the canvas must have been a copy of Titian's original, which was painted in 1548, two decades after word of the fall of the Aztecs reached Spain. No matter, the message was surely clear: king, viceroy, and conquistador were posed and juxtaposed in a relationship of legitimacy, authority, and loyalty.

The same message was displayed publicly in other paintings in the seventeenth century, most notably in dozens (perhaps scores) of serialized paintings depicting the Conquest of Mexico. Most of these series came in one of three formats: sets of between twenty and twenty-four panels, called *enconchados* ("shell-encrusted," after the mother-of-pearl mosaic around the edges); the sets of four to twenty folding screens called *biombos* (see fig. 3); and



2. A portrait of Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada. This 1886 etching of the conqueror of Colombia is based on colonial-period portraits: the facial features and pale beard match sixteenth-century depictions of Jiménez de Quesada; the half-length, three-quarter view, arm on parapet, is characteristic of early modern portraits; the armor and helmet evoke military status. Despite his wealth and high local standing as a veteran conquistador, reflected in this image, Jiménez de Quesada remained bitter over his denial of the governorship of the province.



8. Philip II and Bernardo de Vargas Machuca. The frontispiece to don Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's *Indian Militia and Description of the Indies*, published in Madrid in 1599 (above). The veteran of South American conquest campaigns and apologist for the entire enterprise of the Spanish Conquest appears to imitate the pose of the Spanish king Philip II in the influential Titian portrait of 1551 (opposite).

sets of narrative paintings (such as the Kislak series, a set of eight wall-hung canvases). For decades scholars viewed such images as expressions of Mexican proto-nationalism. But recently the art historian Michael Schreffler has persuasively argued that “their representation of the narrative [of the conquest] glorifies (rather than displaces) the authority of the Spanish monarchy in New Spain.” The popularity of Conquest of Mexico painting did not anticipate the resistance to imperial control of later centuries but was instead evidence of the increasing appropriation of the conquest and its conquistadors by Spanish imperialism.

The heyday of all this art—the enconchados, biombos, and wall paintings—was the late seventeenth century. For decades they served as visual siblings to the triumphalist versions of conquest history then in vogue. Most notable and influential among these was the official, new version of the Conquest of Mexico written by Philip IV’s and Charles II’s *cronista del rey*, Antonio de Solís y Rivadeneyra. First published in 1684, Solís’s *History of the Conquest of Mexico* began with an attack on earlier historians of the Spanish Conquest, in whose writings he found “great daring and no less malice in the invention of whatever they wanted against the Spaniards, spending entire volumes citing the errors committed by some in order to discredit the achievements of all.”

In glorifying Cortés and the heroic deeds of his fellow captains and “soldiers,” Solís paid lip service to the conquistador spirit of individual initiative and enterprise. But the individualism that in reality lay at the heart of conquistador culture was ultimately buried by Solís, obscured beneath his recasting of the conquest as the achievement of Charles V and the direct manifestation in the New World of his empire. Conquistador culture in the sixteenth century had always nourished a thinly veiled disdain for imperial authority, a potential for disloyalty that sat on the thin line between the bitterness and crankiness of Bernal Díaz and Vargas Machuca, and the brute rebelliousness of Gonzalo Pizarro and Lope de Aguirre.



3. The white horses of Hernando Cortés. In a scene from a Conquest of Mexico *biombo* now in the Franz Mayer Museum in Mexico City (*this page*), Cortés and his men are depicted anachronistically as seventeenth-century soldiers, with Cortés's pose on a rearing white horse intended to evoke the Moor-slaying saint, Santiago (*opposite page*, shown in this 1610 bas relief by Miguel Mauricio). The *biombo* (from the Japanese *byōbu*), a decoratively painted set of 4 to 20 folding screens, was introduced into Mexico by the Japanese embassy in 1614 and was a popular medium into the mid-eighteenth century for portraying conquistador achievements.



A great many hardships