

Chapter 3

SPAIN: ENTRY AND DOMINION

Comme un vol de gerfauts hors du charnier natal,
Fatigués de porter leurs misères hautaines,
De Palos de Moguer routiers et capitaines
Partaient ivres d'un rêve héroïque et brutal . . .
Chaque soir, espérant des lendemains épiques
L'azur phosphorescent de la mer des Tropiques
Enchantait leur sommeil d'un mirage doré . . .

To castrate the Sun, for that the strangers came.

Beginnings on the Isthmus

The year 1519 was indeed a year of destiny for the Pacific. A month before Magellan sailed from San Lucar, the city of Panama had been founded; three weeks before he sighted Brazil, Cortes and his men were gazing at the Aztec palaces 'rising from the water . . . like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis. . . .'¹ Although there were still hankering after *el estrecho duvidoso*, 'the doubtful strait', by the time the *Victoria* returned to Seville (September 1522) probes north from Panama and south from Mexico were narrowing the gap within which it might yet be hoped for; and puny little shipyards were beginning to secure the Spanish grip on the eastern shores of the Pacific, a hold which in a territorial sense was not seriously challenged (despite Drake's Nova Albion and the Russians in the far north) until the Nootka crisis of 1790.

The Mar del Sur, however, was still only an exciting potentiality, not yet an exploitable maritime space, even though it would without doubt contain 'many islands rich in gold, pearls, precious stones, spices, and other unknown and admirable things.'² Balboa had revealed that the barrier, even were it to prove continuous, was in at least one area very narrow, and the first step was to tie in the new Sea with the already dominated Caribbean. In effect, this was secured by the founding of Panama City; 'In its origins, Panama belongs to the West Indies; in its later role, historically, to Peru and New Granada. . . .'³ This at least

José-Maria de Heredia, *Les Conquérants*, 1893: 'Like a flight of falcons from their charnel-house nest, the reivers and captains set out from Palos and Moguer, weary of the burden of their proud poverty, drunk with an heroic and brutal dream. Each night, hoping for an epic morrow, the phosphorescent blue of the tropic sea bewitched their slumber with a gilded mirage.' The Mayan Chilam Balam de Chumayel, cited in N. Wachtel, *La Vision des Vaincus*, Paris 1971, 59.

was the achievement of Pedrarias, who was as tough—he died at ninety—and realistic as he was unscrupulous.

He had arrived at Darien in June 1514 with some 1500 men, mostly gentlemen adventurers, carpet knights and their hangers-on, eager for easy pickings in Castilla del Oro, a name by now little better than a promoter's trick. The little settlement was in no case to cope with this influx; tension with Balboa's toughened veterans was inevitable and immediate, and something like half of the newcomers were soon dead of disease or hunger. Pedrarias's instructions stressed the importance of securing the Pacific slopes; his first action was to send a lieutenant on a savage foray against Balboa's Indian allies on the Atlantic side. It seems likely that Balboa's enterprise of 1517, the hauling of needless timber across the divide to build bergantins, was wished on him by Pedrarias to get him out of the way. The Governor was expecting a successor from Spain, and this meant a residencia, an official enquiry into his acts, at which Balboa would surely have stressed the ruin of his careful pattern of alliances by the new régime's atrocious mistreatment of the Indians. Despite sickening setbacks, Balboa did build ships, occupy the Pearl Islands, and carry out some coastal exploration before being trapped and judicially murdered by Pedrarias, who had the greatly undeserved good luck that the new governor arrived and died forthwith. A residencia was formally held and informally rigged; in such things Pedrarias was a master.⁴

Despite the penetration of 1512 of some 250 km up the Rio Atrato south of Darien—the first foray *into* South America—interest shifted from this promising but extremely difficult and hostile region to the west, where in 1511 Balboa had gathered the first news of the South Sea.⁵ His trans-isthmian journey had begun from Careta, renamed Acla by Pedrarias when he built a fort there; for some years this became the main base for penetration, superseding Santa Maria del Darien. A direct route from Santa Maria to the Gulf of San Miguel was indeed pioneered as early as 1514, but its name—Trepadera, 'the clambering'—indicates its limitations. The easiest way across, only some 65 km through fairly open country with a summit under 300 metres, was from the Gulf of San Blas to the mouth of the Rio Bayano or Chepo, where the estuary afforded a fairly good harbour. Balboa had intended to settle this place, Chepabar; but his recommendation of course ensured rejection by Pedrarias, and no more rational explanation of the latter's choice of a tiny Indian fishing village as the site of Old Panama can be found.

The site was indeed very central on the shores of the Gulf of Panama, but that is about all that could be said in its favour. The harbour was very poor, and much use had to be made of the tiny outport of Perico some 10 or 12 km to the west, to which neighbourhood the city was moved after Morgan's sack of 1671. The hinterland, although suitable for stockrearing, was of very little use for agriculture; flour had always to be imported, and was difficult to keep in the near-equatorial humidity.⁶ Chaunu stresses not only the pearls of the Pearl Islands (still, by exception, a source of wealth), but that the islands 'guard' the

Bay; but this cut both ways, as they became on occasion a handy temporary base for buccaneers.⁷ Nevertheless, given the geostrategical pattern, somewhere on this short stretch of coast there had to be a great base; and just as in the case of Madras on the Coromandel coast, a chance initial selection pre-empted the options.⁸ To begin with, Panama was a gateway leading nowhere very much, and in the next phase only to Nicaragua; but that was soon to change dramatically as the Conquista moved southwards to the riches of Peru and Potosi.

It is not very likely that so early as 1519 security was, as Chaunu implies, an important factor in the choice of the Pacific side of the Isthmus for the main base: rather that the unknown but surely great opportunities of the Mar del Sur could not be so readily exploited from across the land-barrier. But a northern port of entry was obviously essential, and pre-emption on the south carried with it pre-emption on the north. The Gulf of San Blas was thus set aside in favour of the nearer ports of Nombre de Dios and Puerto Bello, though these, and especially the former, were most miserable places, except during the seasonal fairs when the *galeones* came in from Seville; then they became miserably overcrowded. Communication across the Isthmus was by a land route for passengers and high-value goods, or more slowly and with more risk to health (it took a week in the best conditions but often two) by canoe up the Rio Chagres to Cruces, thence by mule-train to Panama.

Only the vaguest rumours of great wealth to the south were afloat when Panama was founded; there was still hope that the doubtful strait might be found to the north. Already in 1517 Gaspar de Espinosa had explored the Azuero Peninsula beyond Nata, west of Panama, devastating a rich maize-producing country; by 1522 Gil Gonzalez Davila had reached the Gulf of Nicoya and his colleague Andrés Niño that of Fonseca, in modern Costa Rica and Honduras respectively. From the former Gonzalez crossed the neck of land to Lake Nicaragua: there might not be a strait, but he was told that there was a navigable outlet to the Atlantic, the Desaguadero or Rio San Juan. He reported that from the Mar del Sur to the Lake was only three leagues, two of which could be crossed by waggons: 'It is narrow enough to permit the transport of spices . . .'—so early, as Mack says, began the Isthmian rivalry between Panamanian and Nicaraguan sponsors.⁹ But when the Desaguadero was explored, in 1529, it proved an outlet indeed, but disappointingly full of rapids and shoals and without even a proper anchorage at its mouth.

Forewarned again that a new governor of Castilla del Oro was on his way, Pedrarias determined to ensconce himself in this new land. In 1524 two of his lieutenants founded Granada and Leon on Lakes Nicaragua and Managua; but by this time there were competitors from the north. Gonzalez, eluding Pedrarias and obtaining from the authorities of Española a commission to discover the outlet of his lake, entered from the north coast of Honduras; Cortes's lieutenant Pedro de Alvarado, a notable swashbuckler even by conquistador standards, was

in control of Guatemala; another of Cortes's men, Cristobal de Olid, had been sent to find the by now more than doubtful strait, but was playing his own hand; and there were others. The struggle was confused and treacherous even beyond the normal annals of the Conquista; when it was over, Alvarado was in control of his own Captain-Generalcy of Guatemala, Pedrarias had in effect managed to exchange Castilla del Oro for Nicaragua. But, although not without resources, these were only marchlands.¹⁰ The weight of Spanish power had shifted north, to the 'New Spain of the Ocean Sea' so swiftly built up by Hernan Cortes who, almost alone of the conquistadores, had a genius for polity as well as for conquest.

Cortes on the Mar del Sur

Montezuma's lake-girt capital Tenochtitlan, the heart of an empire or confederation whose nominal subjects (many of them however far from submissive) may be counted as somewhere between fifteen and twenty-five millions,¹¹ fell in mid-August 1521. It was only forty months since Cortes had reached the already known northwest tip of Yucatan, with about 600 men, including the crews of his ships; of these only thirty-two were crossbowmen and thirteen musketeers, and they had seven small guns. He had quelled two near-mutinies, destroyed his ships, and set up a municipality at Vera Cruz before setting out with some 400 men and fifteen horses on the march of about 625 km to the central valley of Mexico. There by inducements and menaces Cortes brought Montezuma to accept Spanish suzerainty, and there he learnt that he himself had been proclaimed a traitor by Panfilo Narvaez, sent from Cuba to supersede him. He had to divide his little force and dash back to the coast, where he won over nearly all of Narvaez' army of over 800 infantry and 80 cavalry, twice his own numbers. But meanwhile a massacre of Aztec nobles by Pedro de Alvarado, left in command at Tenochtitlan, had provoked a rising. The useful puppet Montezuma was killed by his own people, disgusted by his capitulation;¹² and all was to do again.

At the end of June 1520 the enlarged but still very small force had to cut its way out of Tenochtitlan over the lake causeways, losing over 400 men (some two-thirds of its Spanish strength) in the confused fighting of *la noche triste*. The remnant retreated to independent and friendly Tlaxcala, which after a stout initial resistance had joined the invaders to break the Aztec stranglehold on the little 'Republic'. Here Cortes reorganised, bringing his numbers up to 600 again by the seduction of reinforcements meant for Narvaez and from chance arrivals at Vera Cruz. Then came the building of the thirteen bergantins at Tlaxcala and their portage to the Lake of Mexico, the reduction of the lakeside towns, and the final assault, nearly three months of filling-in the constantly renewed breaches in the causeways and destroying the city block by block, against a most gallant and desperate resistance.¹³

Many factors contributed to this amazing triumph. Armour, horses, crossbows, firearms, disciplined tactics and valour, all important, would not by themselves have sufficed against the numerical odds. But the harsh, and often recent,

Aztec domination was bitterly resented by many of the tributary states, some of which were in chronic rebellion, and Cortes marshalled these discontents with surpassing diplomatic skill: this was perhaps the most important factor. Tlaxcala had never submitted to Aztec power, but was walled in by it and under constant attack, never pressed home since the wars provided a perennial source of prisoners for sacrifice on the altars of Tenochtitlan; it formed a loyal and secure forward base, and the Tlaxcalans were not alone in preferring the new yoke to the old. Gomara's estimate that Cortes had 200,000 men under his command at the siege may be a large exaggeration, but the indigenous allies certainly greatly outnumbered the Spaniards.¹⁴

Cortes was a master in the manipulation of men, and ably seconded by his Indian mistress Marina; Montezuma was cut off from reality by his almost sacerdotal position, which yet was more that of the head of a tribal confederacy than one of autocratic power, and both he and his people were unnerved by portents of disaster. Indeed, the 'Aztec Empire' was scarcely a consolidated state structure, but rather a very frangible one, and its chiefs were naturally unable to react decisively—until the bitter final struggle—to a crisis so novel as to be incomprehensible. Their wars had been bloody but not total: more important than the destruction of the enemy was the capture of victims for the human sacrifices which in their cosmogony were the only means of preserving the fabric of the universe. Their ruthlessness and that of the Spaniards were of different orders. They seem to have been gripped by a general premonition of doom; in Chaunu's words, an inner cosmic anguish, sapping resistance.¹⁵

Be this as it may, the Conquest of New Spain was now an achieved fact, and Cortes could turn his great administrative gifts to the task of building the new dominion. High on his priorities was the extension of that dominion to, and over, the South Sea.

Already in Montezuma's time Cortes had heard that this other sea was only about twelve or fourteen days' march from Mexico; and soon after the fall of the city he received an offer of vassalage from Michoacan, an independent territory lying to the west. He lost no time in sending out two pairs of Spaniards—such was their self-confidence—who were to take 'Royal and entire possession' of the South Sea; both assignments were carried out by the first weeks of 1522. Alvarado was despatched with some 400 men, a large force for the times, to the conquest or pacification of Tutupec, on the Pacific coast in Oaxaca, and before March 1522 possession had again been taken. During the next two years Alvarado pressed on, close to the coast, into southern Guatemala, and by October 1524 Cortes was able to claim that over 500 leagues along the South Sea were under Spanish subjection.¹⁶

'Possession' by rhetoric was one thing; exploitation another. Cortes's Third Letter to the King (15 May 1522) states that he had already, 'with much diligence', provided for the building on the South Sea of two caravels for exploration and

two bergantins for coastal work; in the Fourth Letter (15 October 1524) he speaks of sending expeditions south to explore the land discovered by Magellan and north to the supposed strait, precursor of 'Anian' (below, Ch. 9), linking the Mar del Sur with Los Bacallaos in the Mar del Norte—that is, with the cod fisheries of the Newfoundland region, known since around the turn of the century from the voyages of the Cabots and the Corte Reals, if not indeed to men of the Azores and Bristol a generation earlier. Such a discovery would shorten the distance between Spain and the Spice Islands by two-thirds.¹⁷

The beginnings of maritime history on this coast are known in fascinating but sometimes confused detail. There seems to have been pre-Spanish trade in sailing canoes between Tehuantepec and Panama, and there are vague and unsubstantiated references to a Portuguese ship blown from the Moluccas to the Mexican coast in 1520,¹⁸ but the first European craft actually to sail in Mexican Pacific waters was probably the pinnace *Santiago*, not locally built but direct from Spain. The *Santiago* had become separated from Loaysa's fleet (a follow-up to Magellan; below, Ch. 4) after passing the Straits and, being short of food, made for New Spain, ending up in July 1526 near Tehuantepec—it is said after fifty days on a daily ration of 2½ ounces of biscuit dust per man.¹⁹

Although shipbuilding had begun four years earlier at Zacatula, northwest of Acapulco, Cortes's reports to the King somewhat anticipated results. He brought in forty artisans, but two of his ships were burnt in the yards, and of the four completed in 1526 two sank and two went with Alvaro de Saavedra for the Moluccas in October 1527, sailing from Zihuatanejo. By 1526 Cortes's estate at Tehuantepec was an active building centre: the harbour was only a poor roadstead but there were fine stands of large 'pines', and gear could be brought from Spain via Vera Cruz and the Rio Coatzacoalcos, which was navigable to 120 km from the Pacific (or for small canoes 30 km), whence the portage to Tehuantepec was at only 200 or 230 metres above sea-level. It was soon rivalled by Guatulco or Huatulco, about 60 km to the southwest, which had a far better harbour, and became the principal Pacific port of New Spain from about 1537 until the rise of Acapulco in the 1570s. Guatulco had much better connections with central Mexico than that town, though even so the 'roads' were mostly unpaved trails, for the most part suitable only for pack-mules, though ox-carts could be used in the broader valleys. By the mid-1540s Guatulco was building substantial ships, and later in the century it had a church and a customs-house, 'very faire and large', some hundred brush and wattle huts, and a number of resident traders. Such as it was, it may stand as a type of the bush ports on this hot (in summer broiling) coast, ports for the most part even less developed. By 1538 Cortes had nine ships based in this region, employed in exploration to the north and in victualling other conquistadores from the produce of his estates; but he suffered from a shortage of pilots.²⁰

Thus within two decades of the first penetration to the South Sea in New

Spain, its shores were dotted with a great number of tiny ports and shipyards (Fig. 6),²¹ including from 1528 Acapulco, a fine harbour but set in a poor and unhealthy hinterland, and linked in 1531 with Cortes's seat at Cuernavaca by a difficult trail. The great days of the 'City of the Oriental Galleons and the Modern Sirens' were not to come for another four decades, when the return route from the Philippines was discovered.²²



Figure 6. EL MAR DEL SUR: FIRST PHASE. Dates shown thus, '33', are those of foundation or first mention, a preceding '15' being understood.

Compiled from various sources, but especially D. D. Brand (see Ch. 3, note 18).

Although suitable shipbuilding timber was available in several places, the ports of New Spain were not so well off for local raw materials as those beyond Tehuantepec: Nicaragua had pitch and excellent fibres for sails and cordage, while New Spain often fell back on second-hand gear from Europe. After mid-century Tehuantepec decayed and Guatulco was used mainly for repairs, but the yards at La Posesion, the fine port of Realejo in Nicaragua, were capable of bigger things, up to the 700-ton *Santa Ana* captured by Cavendish off Baja California in 1587. But this was very exceptional; the general run, even in the 1580s, would have been 12–15 tons for cabotage, 60–120 for inter-colonial trade. But the port was lively enough: discovered in 1523 by Davila and Niño, ten years later it

had between fifteen and twenty slaving caravels. This trade had been organised by Pedrarias, and was fostered by the impracticability of moving Indian slaves overland.²³ Much basic equipment for shipping, especially metal work, still had to cross the Atlantic and then the Mexican plateaus, although Cortes had begun the exploitation of the abundant copper and less rich tin and iron deposits of central Mexico, and the sulphur of the volcanoes for gunpowder.²⁴ Spanish building on the eastern shores of the Pacific never reached the high standard of the Manila yards, which could marry European technology with the traditional skill of Chinese shipwrights; in Borah's words, most American vessels were 'poor, nasty, brutish, and crank', and there is abundant evidence of this even in the eighteenth century.²⁵ Moreover, shipping in American waters was always highly vulnerable to the *broma*, the boring ship-worm which could make timbers 'like a honeycomb or a sponge', and although lead sheathing was tried on the ships with which Pedrarias came to Darien in 1514, a very early use, it was too expensive, too unreliable, and too cumbersome for general application.²⁶ Later, worm-resistant timbers were found, and contributed greatly to the rise of Guayaquil as the great shipbuilding centre of the American South Sea; but these of course were not available at all times and places. Crews were also a source of difficulty; they might have a core of real seamen, but were for the most part drawn from the scrapings of a badly mixed society.

Probes to the north

Conquistadores from the north and the south had met in central America by 1524–5, and there was no longer room for a doubtful strait in that region: if one existed, it must be well to the north. From 1528 to 1530 Cortes was in Spain, trying to mend his political fences; he had after all slipped away from Cuba in 1519 in disregard of authority, and his later legitimisation—first by his own obviously managed creature, the Vera Cruz town meeting, and then by royal favour after his triumph—had left him with many foes at Court. He returned to New Spain with the title of Marques del Valle de Oaxaca and vast estates in that valley and elsewhere, which he exploited with imaginative capacity; but he was cut off from real power. At the age of forty-five, a man of his temper could hardly be content with the life of an improving landlord, on however grand a scale (the original grant had perhaps a million souls)²⁷ and however much he excelled at it. He turned his attention to the exploration of the northern shores of the Mar del Sur; it was not yet realised that winds and currents would greatly hamper coastwise sailing to the north.

Cortes's first effort, two ships sent from Acapulco in 1532, was a fiasco, ending in mutiny, shipwreck, and the disappearance of the commander, though it did discover the Tres Marias, islands beautifully located to become a handy point of repair for pirates.²⁸ In the next year he sent out two more ships from Tehuantepec: one found Socorro in the Revillagigedos; the pilot of the other killed his captain and was himself killed by Indians at La Paz in Baja California,

now first seen by Europeans. Not surprisingly, Cortes decided to take personal command of the next voyage, devoted to gathering up the remnants of the earlier misadventures, searching for reported pearl-banks, and colonising the new country. He sailed from Tehuantepec with three ships and reached La Paz (also called Santa Cruz) in May 1535. Some exploration was done, but two ships were lost; the country was sterile, and it was impossible to support the little colony, which was abandoned about the end of 1536.

Cortes made one more effort before returning to Spain permanently in 1540; in July 1539 he sent out two or three small ships from Acapulco under Francisco de Ulloa. This voyage had notable results: both shores of the Mar Vermejo (the Gulf of California) were explored to its head, demolishing the hope that this long inlet might be the much-desired strait, and establishing the peninsular nature of Baja California—the idea of California as an island comes much later, and reaches its full flowering only in the seventeenth century. The ocean coast of the peninsula was also followed as far as 29°N, beyond Cedros Island, and perhaps indeed as far as the modern San Diego. But Ulloa himself was probably lost on the voyage, and it is more likely that Cabo Engano—‘Cape Deception’ or ‘Disappointment’—marks the end of the voyage. This was the last of the deeds of Cortes, and to some extent an anticlimax.

Nor did more success attend the expeditions sponsored by Cortes’s rival, the Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza. One of these, under Francisco de Bolanos (1541), may be responsible for the name ‘California’, the origin of which is literally romantic, stemming ultimately perhaps from the Chanson de Roland and more immediately from Queen Calafia in the romance *Las Sergas de Esplandian* (c. 1498): this lady ruled the Island of California, which lay quite near the Earthly Paradise but was inhabited solely by black Amazons. A concept worthy of Hollywood; but it is possible that the name was bestowed by Cortes’s enemies in irony, on a land that certainly did not flow with milk and honey. The only other voyage of note was that by Hernando de Alarcon in 1542, which entered the Colorado River but otherwise added little.²⁹

This first phase on the Mar del Sur, however, saw one more important voyage, that of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, a Portuguese, and Bartolomé Ferrello in 1542–3.³⁰ These men sailed from La Navidad, which was established about 1536 and for a time was a notable base: Villalobos and Legaspi sailed thence for the Philippines.³¹ Leaving at the end of June 1542, Cabrillo reached on 28 September a port ‘closed, and very good, which they named San Miguel’; this was the site of modern San Diego, and they were the first Europeans to land on the Pacific coast of what is now the United States. Here, and at other points, Cabrillo heard tell of white men to the east, presumably rumours of distant encounters with parties from Coronado’s great sweep in search of golden Quivira and the Seven Cities of Cibola, which began in 1540 and went past the Grand Canyon of Colorado and into central Kansas. Some of these encounters had been violent, and Cabrillo was careful to conciliate the Indians by generous gifts.

In October he discovered the Santa Barbara Islands off the present Los Angeles. The two little ships pressed on, despite adverse gales, and in mid-November made a landfall some 50 km north of San Francisco, close to the site where two and a half centuries later the Russians were to build Fort Ross. Driven south, they came to Drake's Bay, and were then forced back to the Santa Barbara Islands. Here on 3 January 1543 Cabrillo died from an accidental injury he had received at the same place in October, but in dying he charged his men to carry on. Ferrelo took over, and in late February reached his farthest north, probably off southern Oregon; at this point they met furious storms from the north and northwest and had to turn back, still exploring the coast; they returned to La Navidad on 14 April 1543.

This was a well and resolutely managed expedition, finding some 1300 km of new coast and pushing the doubtful strait to that extent northwards; in one voyage, they had paralleled the entire coast of the modern State of California. Cabrillo seems to have been an admirable leader; but his achievement was to be half or quite forgotten, and duplicated sixty years later by Vizcaino. His names were not retained on the map; his sorrowing crew renamed his 'Posesion', where he died, Isla de Juan Rodriguez; it is now San Miguel. It is strange that modern American piety has not revived so deserved a tribute to the true discoverer of Alta California; the more so as it seems likely that the original stone set up on his grave still exists.³²

The drive to the south

Nueva España by the early 1530s was settling down. The areas of high Indian civilisation and dense population were under control, and Aztec Tenochtitlan was being transformed into the great city of Mexico. But Indian stocks of gold had been ransacked, placer gold was falling off, and there was no Spanish market for cotton cloth, cacao (as yet), or maize. Many rank and file conquistadores had not done well in the scramble for grants of Indian lands or Indian labourers; the authorities, fearing a drain of manpower, forbade emigration and the export of arms or horses. But to many a veteran the sanction of losing his *encomienda*, if he had one, meant little, and it was impossible to police the ban. Some went north, still in search of gold and Indians, into New Galicia and its arid marches, beyond which might lie the golden cities of Cibola and Quivira; but probably more filtered south towards Realejo in Nicaragua, whence the first 'export trade' of New Spain was in soldiers and their gear, her first 'market' the new conquista beyond the Equator.³³ Later, as in the Californian and Australian gold rushes, those with some capital might find provisioning the rush a less arduous and much safer road to fortune.

In 1522, when Davila and Niño set out west and north from Panama, Pedrarias sent Pascual de Andagoya in the opposite direction. He did not get very far, but far enough to bring back fairly definite news of 'Biru', a strange and wealthy realm to the south. If, as some state, he reached the Rio San Juan in the south

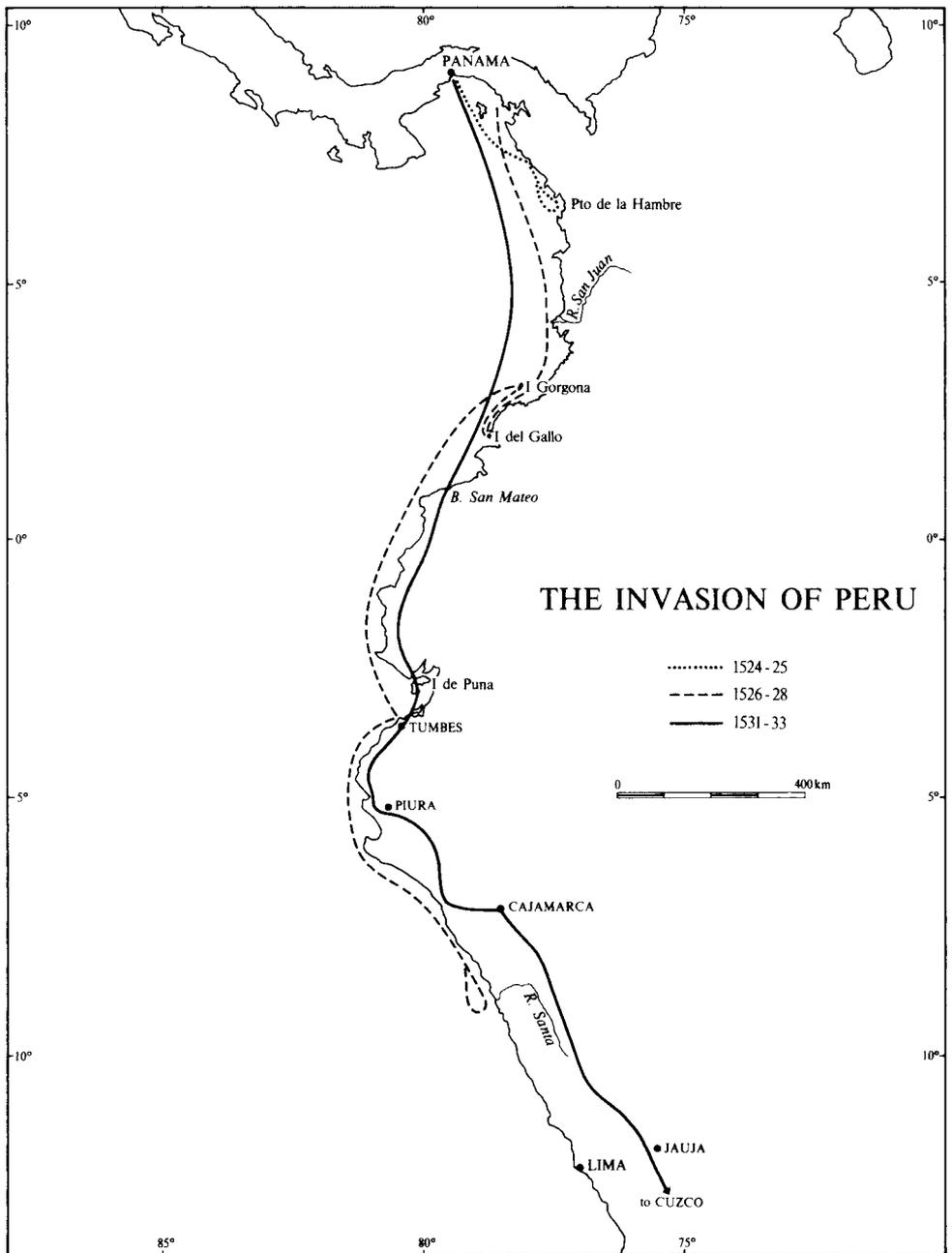


Figure 7. THE INVASION OF PERU. Adapted mainly from maps in J. Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* (London 1970).

of modern Colombia, he would be at about the northern limit of a lively balsa-raft traffic from Tumbes, which had been for some forty or fifty years a part of the Inca Empire. The trade was a luxury one: gold, pearls, conch-shells, emeralds, cacao.³⁴

Exploitation fell into the hands of Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro, both of them illegitimate and illiterate, with the financial backing of the priest Fernando de Luque, an associate of Pedrarias, who gave permission but no more—naturally against a share of the profits. The two ships which sailed under Pizarro in November 1524 and Almagro a little later included 'one of Balboa's brigantines which had miraculously escaped destruction by rot or shipwreck', and the crews included 'the vagabonds of Panama'; Pizarro lost a quarter of his men and ended at Puerto de la Hambre, 'Port Famine'.³⁵ Somehow Luque scraped together funds for a second venture, two ships and 160 men, in early 1526. On this expedition the pilot Bartolomé Ruiz became the first European to sail southwards across the Equator in the Pacific; he met a large balsa-raft sailing north from Tumbes and into the speculations of a modern Viking over four centuries later.³⁶ Of more immediate importance was its revelation of luxury and civilisation: a cargo of finely worked silver and gold, emeralds and chalcedony, richly coloured and embroidered fabrics. Almagro returned to Panama for new and better recruits, and then with combined forces they went on to modern Ecuador: a country well worth the conquest, but needing more men for the task, since the Indians were numerous and hostile. Once more Almagro went back, after a quarrel with Pizarro, who naturally resented being left on the outposts while Almagro shuttled back and forth to the comforts, and the useful contacts, of Panama.

Pizarro waited it out on the desolate but secure Isla del Gallo, about 2°N; discontents naturally arose, and he sent back his remaining ship, perhaps in emulation of Cortes, more likely to get rid of dissidents. Shocked by the appearance of Almagro's men and the smuggled accounts from some who had stayed, the new Governor of Panama, Pedro de los Rios, sent two ships to bring back the foolhardy adventurers; but they also carried counsels of persistence from Almagro and Luque. At this point took place the famous incident of the thirteen who dared accept Pizarro's challenge to cross a line on the sand and stand by his fortunes; an episode much inflated, perhaps all but invented, by the chroniclers.³⁷ The fourteen moved to the larger and less depressing island of Gorgona, further north. Here, after seven months, they were rejoined by Almagro, bringing no reinforcements beyond his crew: de los Rios would not allow any more wastage of men, had any been willing to volunteer. With new heart, they set out again, through the Gulf of Guayaquil to Tumbes; and here at last they were actually within the Inca realm: a sizeable town, an active coasting trade, paved roads, admirable irrigation, a civil people—and gold in the temples. Relations were friendly—this was only a reconnaissance, and not in force, and Acts of Possession were not understood. After reaching the Rio Santa, in 9°S,

the expedition returned to Panama eighteen months after its departure. The contrast between the horrors of the beginning and the amenity and promise of the ending was doubtless well displayed in official relations and in tavern tales.

So much was prologue to the great enterprise. Pizarro went to Spain, reaching the Court at Toledo in mid-1528; he returned in 1530 with full powers as Governor and Captain-General and with three half-brothers; volunteers came especially from the tough and poor minor gentry of backward Extremadura, Pizarro's own country and that of Cortes, who was helpfully in Spain at the time. Almagro was allotted only the commandancy of Tumbes—perhaps because the Court foresaw friction if both men were promoted too high. But he was naturally furious, and only pacified by the promise of an independent conquista beyond Peru; whence the conquest of Chile, but also the first of the civil wars which within ten years were to provide a dreary preview of the history of Peru and Bolivia in the nineteenth century, a rehearsal for the plague of *caudillismo*, the turbulence and tyranny of local magnates and war-lords.

Pizarro sailed from Panama at the end of 1530, with three ships and about 180 men. After two weeks he landed in the north of Ecuador, which had taken nearly two years to reach in the preliminary reconnaissances; thence he advanced slowly, partly by land and partly by sea, exploring the country, receiving reinforcements, fighting local resistance, pillaging towns and villages. Tumbes was in ruins, the first evidence of the civil war which perhaps made the conquest possible. Over a year was spent on this approach: Pizarro was building a base before risking an entry into the great wall of mountains always visible to the east. In mid-1532 he founded San Miguel de Piura, the first Spanish town on the Pacific coast of South America. After leaving sixty men there, he had sixty-two horses and 106 infantry for his field force. The stage was set for the assault on the Inca realm, which was much more of an Empire than that of the Aztecs. It was fortunate for the Spaniards that it had recently been ravaged by a great epidemic spreading from the north, and was riven by a wide and bitter civil war.

The conquest of Peru

The Inca power, unlike that of Montezuma, was absolutist, based on control by a hierarchy of officials over the forced labour of the core area of Cuzco and of tribes subjugated in about a century and a half of expansion. Most aspects of life were meticulously regulated from above, and the net effect was that the resources of the Empire, apart from the necessary subsistence of the masses, were channelled into providing the power, the glory, and the luxury of 'the Incas', the ruling family and its associates, and above all of 'the Inca', the autocrat at the head of the pyramid; but this was a cosmic structure, as much sacred as secular, and the Inca, the son of the Sun, was the source from which all blessings flowed—light, life itself.³⁸ Elaborate records were kept by the *quipus* or knotted cords; two paved roads, along the coast and along the plateau, with transverse links through the

mountains (altogether some 15,000 km), ensured communications from Ecuador to northern Chile; they were well provided with *tambos* or post-inns and an elaborate system of relay runners, so that it took only five days to send a message from Quito to Cuzco, 2000 km.³⁹ The roads and runners were important factors in the rapidity of the Spanish conquest of the country, the tradition of massive forced labour in its exploitation when conquered. As in Mexico, local discontents and revolts and political rivalries greatly facilitated the conquista.⁴⁰ There was no lack of Indian agents, puppets, and allies; nor of terrorised porters to provide the transport services of the armies. If the weakness of the Aztecs was that they were not yet consolidated into a firm state structure, but caught at the 'moment of crystallization' from a tribal to an urban-centred society, the weakness of the Incas was the converse—a state structure too rigid and centralised to take the shock of a blow directly to its head—the Inca Atahualpa.⁴¹

At the time of Pizarro's arrival, Atahualpa had recently defeated his half-brother Huascar in a bitter succession war, and was endeavouring to exterminate any possible rivals in the imperial family. He waited for Pizarro at Cajamarca, high up on the plateau, apparently thinking that there this strange but tiny invasion could be crushed or absorbed; and it is fair to say that the fate he envisaged for them was probably a ghastly one: it was slay or be slain.⁴² Within an hour or two of the meeting of the two men, on 16 November 1532, the Spaniards had seized Atahualpa's person—which was sacrosanct—and slaughtered thousands of his followers, too bewildered to resist. Some months later, having collected a huge ransom, they charged Atahualpa with 'treason': he accepted baptism to purchase death by strangling rather than by burning alive. Some of the conquistadores were horrified by this foul play, although probably more were in favour, and may indeed have enforced it on Pizarro. There yet remains a beautiful but heart-rending native elegy for Atahualpa: all things, all people, are engulfed into suffering. . . .⁴³ For now the Empire seemed no more than a headless trunk, utterly at the disposal of the victors.

This was at the end of July 1533; a year less a day from the meeting at Cajamarca, Pizarro entered Cuzco. By the middle of 1534 the Quito provinces had been secured; Pedro de Alvarado of Guatemala, who had diverted a projected South Seas voyage to the nearer and surer riches of Quito, was bought off, leaving his ships and many of his men as reinforcements to the more authorised conquistadores. The seal was set on the conquista by the formal establishment of Spanish municipalities at Jauja, Cuzco, and Quito.

More significant than these was the foundation, on 6 January 1535, of the Ciudad de los Reyes (the Three Kings of the East), better known as Lima. The contrast with Cortes's rebuilding of Mexico is striking: although its fabled and its real wealth lay on the high Andean plateaus, Spanish Peru, much more than Nueva España, was oriented to the Pacific. Simple climatic factors played a part, for one can hardly envisage a metropolis in the unhealthy *tierra caliente* of Mexico, while Lima is not only more hospitable than the plateaus, with their

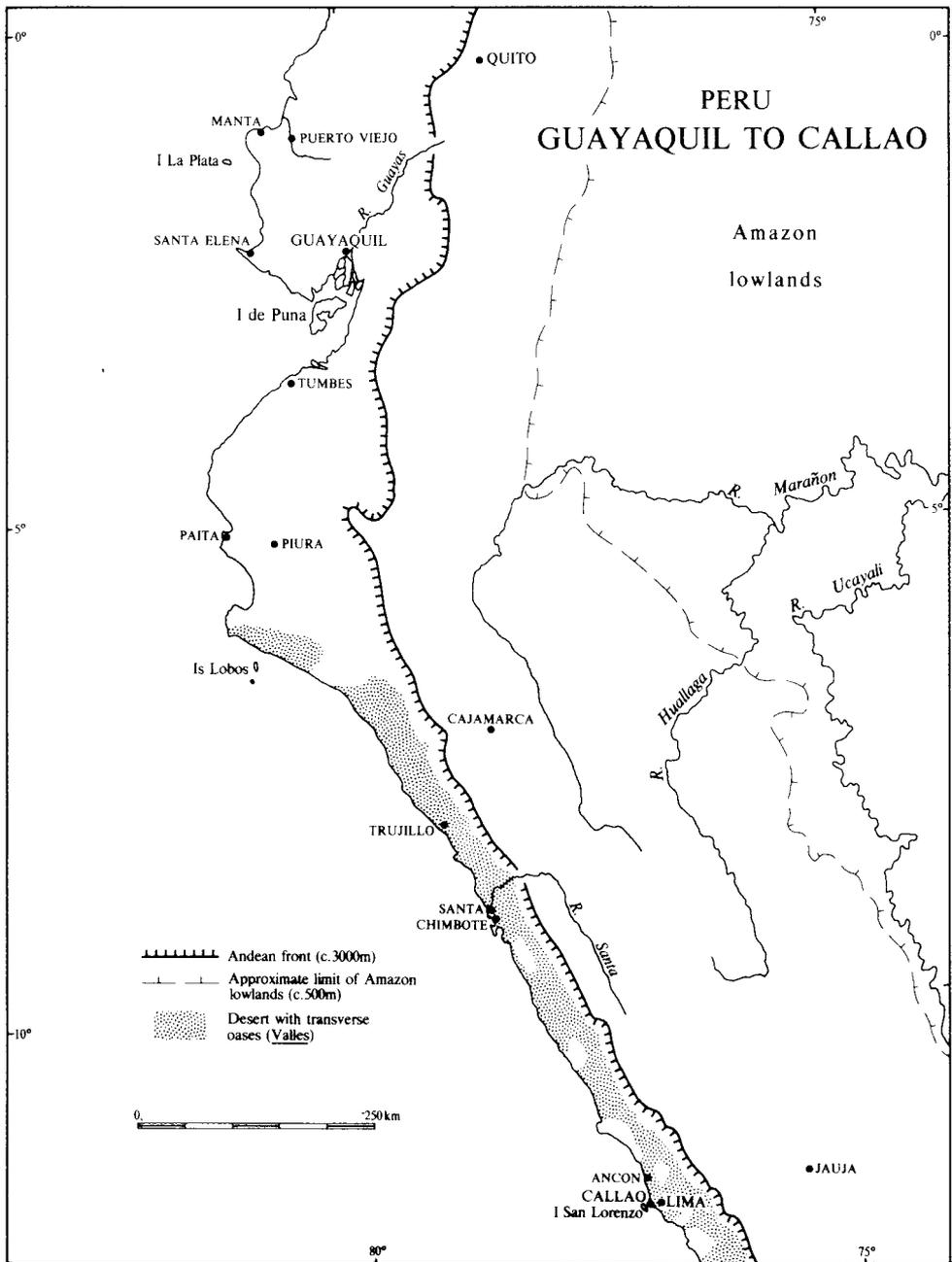


Figure 8. PERU: GUAYAQUIL TO CALLAO. Blanks within desert areas are not oases but *lomas*, dew-fed grazing land—see P. James, *Latin America* (London 1942), 173.

extreme temperatures and rarefied air, but owing to the Humboldt or Peru Current is remarkably cool for its latitude.⁴⁴ The Conquista at this stage was looking to landed settlement rather than mining—there was still much Indian gold to be collected, and the silver of Potosi was unknown—and the irrigated coastal valleys were again much more favourable than the plateaus for Iberian agriculture and horticulture. But the *raison d'être* of Lima and its adjacent port Callao was to be a secure base by the sea; the more so as, after the first shock, Inca resistance was rallying.

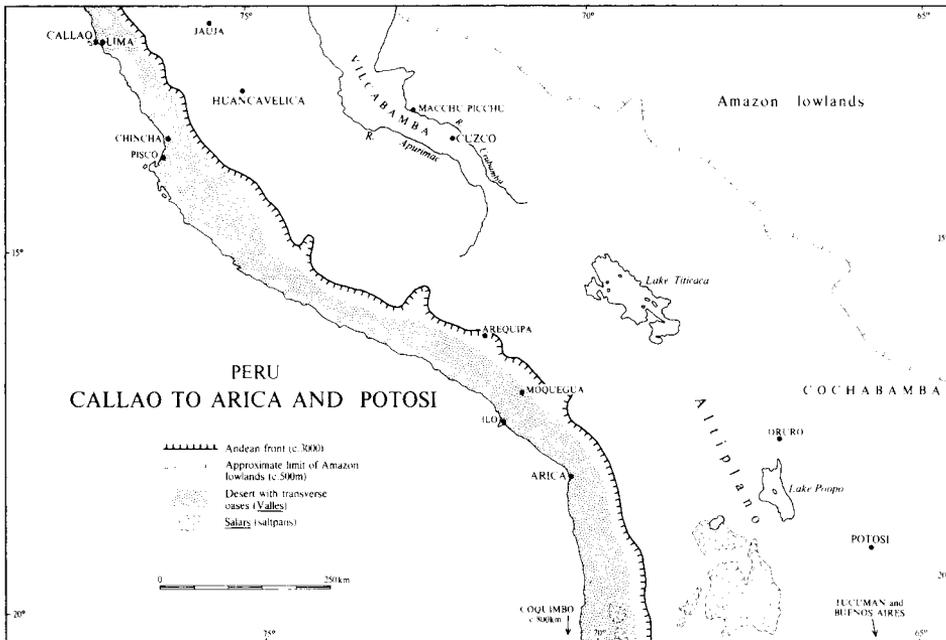


Figure 9. PERU: CALLAO TO ARICA AND POTOSI

Resistance culminated in 1536, after Almagro's departure with a large proportion of the Spanish force on the first *entrada* into Chile—the 'New Toledo' promised him beyond Pizarro's 'New Castile'; this was clearly Pizarro's diversion of an over-strong rival. But during Almagro's absence a great rising was led by the Inca Manco Capac, whose brother Paullu, however, had gone with Almagro and on his return was to prove the most committed of Spanish associates. Manco himself had been recognised as puppet Inca, but suspicion was mutual; he was subjected to (literally) obscene outrage and escaped to seek revenge. There was very desperate fighting at Cuzco, and Lima itself was threatened. Appeals for aid brought responses from Cortes—probably with ulterior motives—in New Spain and Espinosa in Panama, and Alvarado came from Guatemala, though he merely added another element to the internecine factions of the conquerors.

Once the first major effort at Cuzco had failed, Manco was unable to maintain his immense but ill-organised forces. By the end of 1539 resistance was broken; Manco retreated to the tangled mountains of the Amazonian slope, between the Apurimac and the Urubamba. Here, only some 125 km from Cuzco, he reigned in sadly diminished state until in 1544 he was murdered by Spanish refugees from the civil wars, to whom he had given hospitality. This pathetic relic of Inca power around Vilcabamba survived, a thorn in the flesh of Spanish authority, until 1572, when the last of the Incas to rule, Tupac Amaru, was captured and 'executed'—after the customary 'conversion' to the Faith; a judicial murder by the Viceroy Toledo which shocked the more settled colonial society of the time. The name Inca lived on as an honorific for those Indian grandes of the royal line who had come to terms, which might be very comfortable terms: Manco Capac's great grand-daughter, whose father was a great-nephew of St Ignatius Loyola, was created Marquesa de Oropesa, the only hereditary fief in Peru. But in the last great nativist rising, in 1780–1, a direct descendant of Tupac Amaru, Jose Gabriel Condorcanqui, proclaimed himself Tupac Amaru II: with his failure and barbarous execution, even the name of Incas was blotted out, being proscribed as a formal signature.⁴⁵

Aftermath: the first naval campaign

Almagro's return to Cuzco in 1537 initiated the civil wars—seven between that year and 1554—which at one time threatened to tear the New Castile from any allegiance to the Old, and which saw the death in battle of the first Viceroy from Spain, the execution of Almagro by Pizarro, and his own assassination by Almagro's *mestizo* son. By 1550 the shrewd and resolute little lawyer Pedro de la Gasca had restored royal power, in the form of an Audiencia which was able to cope with the last two risings, in the interim (1552–6) between the death of the second and the arrival of the third, the first effective, Viceroy. But the victory of law in the abstract was secured only by discarding the particular 'New Laws' intended to protect the Indians against their brutal exploitation by the *encomenderos* to whom Pizarro had parcelled out land and serfs.

The bloody details of these coups and counter-coups do not concern us, except for one 'campaign' in which hardly any blood was shed: the competition for command of the sea between the royalist leaders and Gonzalo Pizarro, brother and successor of Francisco and at least strongly tempted to set up as an independent, and undeniably wealthy, monarch. Just as the civil wars in general are a preview of post-Independence internal strife, so this episode is a preview of the paramount importance of seapower in the Wars of Independence and the 1879–81 War of the Pacific. All three emphasise the fact that the littoral communities, till at least the end of last century, were really to all intent islands, 'oases', or 'compartments' freely accessible only by sea.⁴⁶

Gonzalo was able to secure the King's ships off Peru, and to build others, and correctly decided to seize Tierra Firme, or at least the Isthmus, to forestall

a counter-attack. His captains twice occupied Panama; they did not take over the administration, but men were sent across the Isthmus to Nombre de Dios, and there was some seizing and burning of ships on the Nicaraguan coast. But when la Gasca arrived at Panama, with offers of amnesty and annulment of the hated New Laws, Gonzalo's fleet went over. He made the mistake of burning five ships at Callao, to prevent desertions; and with nothing to stop it, the now royalist fleet proceeded methodically down the coast. Whatever local successes the Pizzarists might achieve, they had no possibility of reinforcements. Panama was the key—the only blood spilt was in a skirmish at Nombre de Dios—and the events there the turning-point. But as Garcilaso sums up, 'it was the revocation [of the New Laws] and the general pardon that fought the war and gave the empire to La Gasca.'

The Peruvian conquistadores have traditionally been regarded as a rough, not to say ruffianly, lot; and certainly Pizarro was well below the moral and intellectual stature of Cortes. But Lockhart has shown that they were much more a fair cross-section of Spanish society than has been generally believed, and beneath the savage tumults the solid work of colonisation was going on. This was based, it is true, on extremely brutal exploitation of the Indians; against the greed of the men-on-the-spot and the need of the Treasury, the numerous and sincere royal ordinances to remedy abuses were simply unenforceable. 'Though the King's allies always won in the civil wars, the King's legislation was soundly defeated' and the 500 encomenderos became virtually absolute lords of the land, and of Indian lives, while 'Conversion of the Indians seems to have become a major casualty'⁴⁷—and this last, in the eyes of respectable Spain, was the justification of the Conquista.

Between 1532 and 1548 fourteen towns were founded, most of which remain important. Perhaps about a quarter of Spanish males were really rootless adventurers; but of something over 4000 Spaniards in Peru in 1555, about 500 were artisans (though the backbone of the artisan labour force was Negro), and there were probably over 750 women; there were respectable Spanish matrons—one or two—at Piura and Jauja as early as 1533 and 1534. By 1537 Lima had already 2000 Spanish *vecinos* (burgesses), while Callao, in 1537 merely 'a tavern by the sea', was developing into a flourishing port, striving to secure autonomy from the Lima town council.⁴⁸ But the beginnings were nasty and brutish: in 1535 it was forbidden to throw dead Indians into the Lima streets: penalty, twenty pesos.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, twenty years after Cajamarca there was an articulated and ordered society in Lima and the major towns.

The farthest frontier: Chile

Farthest, not last; there were still *entradas* to be made in the jungles of the Andean/Amazonian borderland, and Spain's northern frontier in the Americas had a last expansive phase which reached Nootka in 1790, while in the south her heirs, the Argentine and Chilean Republics, did not overcome the last Indian

resistance in Patagonia until the late 1870s and 1880s. But Chile was the last phase of the Conquista proper, and its farthest reach.

Almagro set out from Cuzco in July 1535, in detachments totalling at least 500 Spaniards.⁵⁰ He went past Lake Titicaca and down the Atlantic slope into the northwest corner of Argentina, thence across the desolate Puna de Atacama, at some 4000 metres; gruelling journeys in which thousands of his Indian supply-train died of cold, hunger, and mountain sickness. He recuperated near Copiapo; only one of the supply ships for which he had arranged made contact, and probably reached the bay of Valparaiso. His main body advanced as far as the Aconcagua valley, a little to the north of modern Santiago, and patrols to the Rio Maule. This was in the depths of a probably unusually severe winter, for the reports of this beautiful and now productive country were gloomy. But

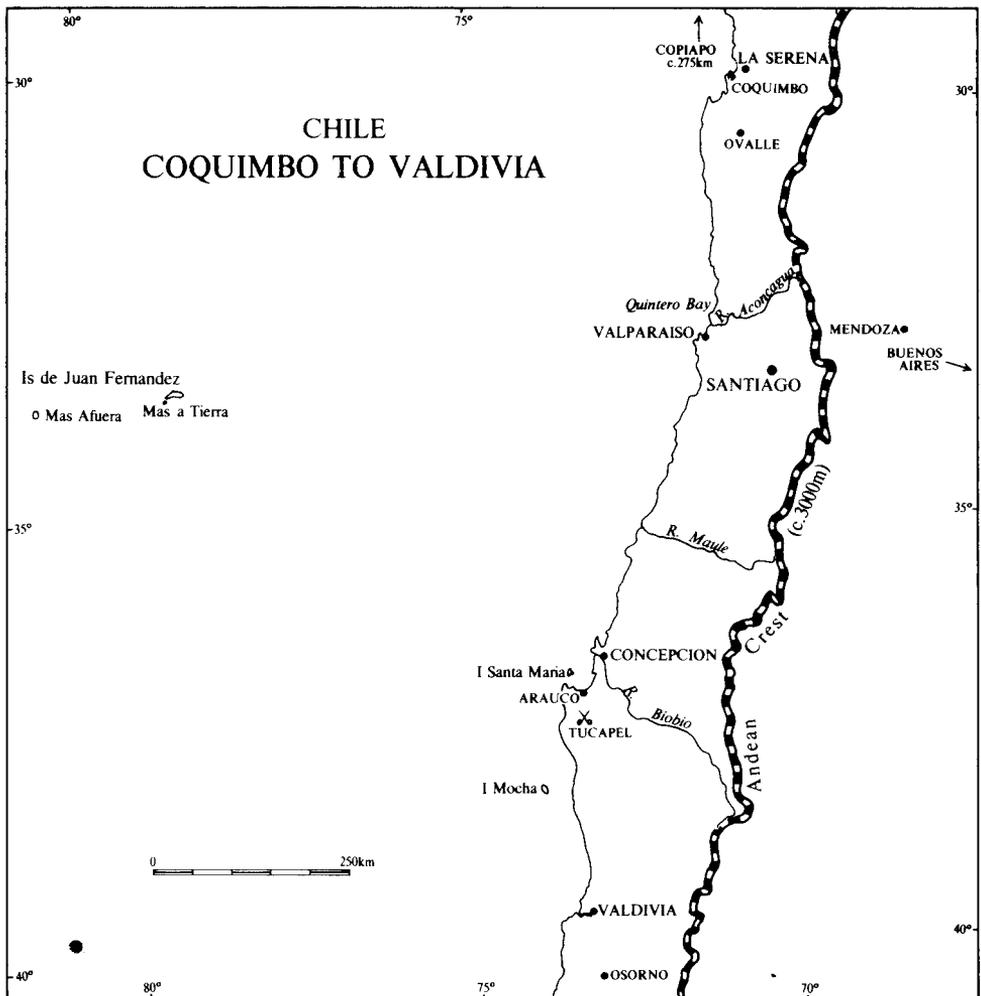


Figure 10. CHILE: COQUIMBO TO VALDIVIA

here, on the very verge of Inca influence, they met only a few rude and tough tribes; there were no roads, no cities, no possibility of a coup as at Tenochtitlan or Cajamarca; above all no gold. The return was made along the coast; the first entrada was a failure.

The Conquistador of Chile, Pedro de Valdivia, was a man of better stamp than the average of his fellows; nearer to Balboa or Cortes than to Pizarro or Almagro. His first force consisted of only about 150 Spaniards; in effect the defeated in the first civil war, and with each upheaval in Peru there were new recruits from the losing side. Indeed, it is clear that on the local level, and sometimes on the viceregal one, the entrada was practically an instrument of policy to rid the community of the failures and the more intolerable swashbucklers of the Conquista.⁵¹

Valdivia left Cuzco in January 1540; avoiding Almagro's dreadful Andean route, he pushed slowly down the coast, taking a year to reach central Chile, now—it was summer—a smiling country. Here, on 14 February 1541, he founded the city of Santiago. Indian resistance, slight at first, now stiffened with this evidence of a permanent intrusion; in September the Indians sacked and burnt the primitive townlet. They were repelled, but for two years the 'captives of their conquest', isolated from Peru, could achieve no more than modest consolidation, and at times they even faced extinction. In 1544 what is now the delightful little town of La Serena was founded, with thirteen citizens, to be destroyed by the Indians and rebuilt in 1549, by which year the total Spanish population was about 500. Political events in Peru now gave Valdivia a freer hand and reinforcements, which could enter through the new port of Valparaiso. Some placer gold was found, but the colony was already becoming, as it was long to remain, one of agricultural and pastoral settlement. There were more city foundations: Concepcion in 1550, Valdivia in 1553.

However, as the expansion sought to pass the Rio Biobio, it became apparent that there was a new dimension in the Indian resistance. The Spaniards were now face to face with the Araucanians, a numerous loose confederacy of determined warriors who proved able to marry Spanish fighting methods with their own. Valdivia himself was killed at Tucapel in December 1553, and his tiny force annihilated. It seemed that the limits of the Conquista had been passed. But the Indian leader Lautaro could not induce his people to undertake what might well, at that stage, have been a decisive counter-offensive across the Biobio. He in turn was slain in battle in 1557, and thenceforward the Araucanians were on the defensive. But most of the country south of Concepcion, except for Valdivia, remained a debatable ground for generations. In this 'Flanders of the Indies', with no organised state to overthrow and take over, the conquest had to be piecemeal and 'There was no possibility of applying the "Cortes plan"'.⁵² Some advanced positions lost in the sixteenth century were not regained until the nineteenth; Osorno, sacked by the Indians in 1600, was rebuilt in 1796, following the original plan of 1558. The final settlement was not reached until

1883, after the War of the Pacific. In Chaunu's words, 'Chile was saved by amputation', and 'Araucania remained, for three centuries and to its misfortune, in the hands of the Araucanians'⁵³—though it might be thought that if one must be conquered, it is better to wait, if one can, till the conquerors have themselves gained something in conscience and in civilising capacity.

The frontier struggles left their mark on Chilean colonial society; with so much of it a marchland, and its economy based on the land, colonial Chile never became so diversified a society as Mexico and Peru, never attained their wealth and sophistication. An outlier, cut off from the flowering of Peru by the Atacama deserts, walled in by the Andes (some spillover on to the Argentine glacis was a source of weakness rather than strength), fronted by 'the greatest desert of all', the South Pacific, Chile could not really break out of its shell until the opening of that Ocean as a locus of world trade: then Valparaiso could become one of the great relay-ports. Till then, the mark of Chile was a modest but tough provincialism, in fact rusticity: the first university dates from 1756, the first printing press was almost unbelievably late, perhaps not until 1812. The corresponding dates for Mexico and Peru are (at latest) 1553 and 1539, 1571 and 1584.⁵⁴

The nature of the Conquista

The Conquista from the beginning was with rare exceptions not so much directed by the Crown of Castile as authorised by it. The bands of at most a few hundred men that in a scant half-century had fanned out first from Española, then from Mexico, Panama and Peru, were private enterprises, working as it were under licence and to guidelines laid down from Spain, but themselves normally setting the immediate targets: 'profit-making enterprises financed by contracts stipulating how the profits were to be shared. These enterprises resembled government in some respects, business in others.'⁵⁵ This flexibility enabled the expansion to be extraordinarily rapid—with each new focus of Indian wealth taken over, new options appeared, until by the end of the 'exponential phase' about 1536, before the first check in Chile, it covered some 2.5 to 3 million square kilometres, from the 500 mm isohyet bounding humid Mexico to the southern frontiers of the Inca Empire; basically the great plateaus and the littoral strips essential for access to them. The Spanish hold was of course by no means even: the Conquista was most solid where it seized upon and supplanted solid economic and political structures; there was a net of towns, the nuclei of control, surrounded by zones more or less completely farmed out in *encomiendas* but with interstices and a vast penumbra where Indian life went on much as before. Chaunu stresses that the Conquista acted much more on men than on their land, basically seeking to control the Indian labour force and to take over its surplus product.⁵⁶ Hence the leap-frogging over non-productive pockets and the much slower extension of control—hardly completed even in this century, with its new forms of mobility—over the marginal areas of the Amazonian slopes.

The executants came for the most part from the gentry, younger sons of

the minor nobility, and semi-professional soldiery. One cannot escape the impression that for such people the enterprises of the Indies provided a vast liberating hope; not only of material wealth, though that was a most material factor, but also of adventure, honour, fame, self-expression, and for those so inclined, ample sexual opportunity. Attaining these, however, entailed not only a commitment to months or years of most desperate hardships and hazards, but first of all getting the royal warrant, often in the face of cut-throat competitors, and arranging finance, usually on hard terms: 'The small and informal armies . . . were bound together by personal loyalty, by joint hope of gain and by debt.'⁵⁷ There was a constant tension between a fantastic individualism and an equally fantastic legalism; and between the lure of another Eldorado in the next valley but two and the desire to settle down as a man of property. Those who lost out in the scramble for *encomiendas*, habituated as they were to the hand-to-mouth but exciting existence and the rough mateship of the *entrada*, provided the raw material for new ventures, and indeed were often eased on their way by the more provident (or lucky) and respectable. The clearest case, but it is only one of many, is the quest for Eldorado by Pedro de Ursua in 1560, which was taken over by Lope de Aguirre, of whom Peru was obviously better rid: Aguirre, a vicious psychopath, left a trail of rape and murder all along the Rio Negro and the Orinoco to the sea.⁵⁸

Gold and God, in that order, were at bottom the main motivations of the average conquistador; the official vindication of the Conquista put God first, and the Crown from time to time made efforts, usually unavailing, to live up to this priority. In effect, the Indians were to mediate the gold to the Spaniards, the Spaniards to mediate the true God to the Indians. This was at the root of the greatest tension of Spain in the Indies: that between the Crown's struggle for social justice, and the tempering, or rather blunting, of its efforts by the sheer brute facts of colonial life.

Once the immediate loot, the tangible gold, silver and jewels had been shared out (the Crown taking its *quinta* or fifth), the aim of the more sober conquistador was to obtain an *encomienda*. This was not exactly a feudal fief, though it became something like it; it was not a grant of land, but rather a grant of the labour service of the Indians of a given tract of land; a concept stemming from the Reconquista from the Moors in Old Spain. The *encomendero* was supposed in turn to 'instruct the Indians in the Christian religion and the elements of civilized life, and to defend them in their persons and property'.⁵⁹ But, since any economic life beyond sheer robbery depended on the exploitation of Indian labour, the possibilities of abuse were obvious and enormous. The question of tenure was important: it could be argued that a mere life tenure meant more racking exploitation for a quick fortune; but, apart from humanitarian considerations (which however bulked large), the Crown was naturally fearful of allowing a hereditary feudality in these distant scarce-controllable realms.

The first royal attempts to protect the Indians were in 1502; *encomiendas* were accepted by the Laws of Burgos in 1512, with careful (but unenforceable) regulation in Indian interests; there was an attempt at abolition of *encomiendas* in 1530, with such disastrous economic results in New Spain that in 1535 life grants were extended to the life of a widow or one child. The New Laws of 1542 forbade new *encomiendas* and the inheritance of old ones; we have seen their fate. But in New Spain, at least, they did to some extent ‘tame the *encomienda*’, and the continuing decline in Indian numbers enforced attention by *encomenderos* to their more positive functions; in the seventeenth century the system faded away as a really significant economic factor, being succeeded by debt peonage. The exploitation went on, and indeed the public sector took an increasing share with the Viceroy Toledo’s codification of the Peruvian *mita* in the 1570s; this massive *corvée* swept the Indians by thousands into Potosi and the yet more hellish mercury mining of Huancavelica.

Yet it is difficult to see that, given the premise of spreading the Faith by Empire and the agents available for the task, any other system could have worked; and in the conditions of colonisation, no government could have controlled it effectively. The Crown’s efforts were sincere, its discussions anguished, caught between economic and political necessity, and the claims of human—or divine—justice. The reiteration of protective ordinances attests their failure; nothing could bridge the inevitable gap between the impeccable humanity and morality of the *cédula real* and the inhumane immorality of the very peccant frontier; a problem of empires in all ages.

This is perhaps best illustrated by the procedure of the *Requerimiento*, which might sardonically be described as a strange form of Justification of Empire, or murder, by Faith. Since the moral justification of conquest was to mediate the Gospel to those sunk in blind idolatry, they had to be given the opportunity to freely embrace the new Faith:

Bar this pretence, and into air is hurl’d

The claim of Europe to the *Western World*.⁶⁰

This was to be secured by insisting that a formal and sonorous proclamation should be read to the Indians for their acceptance or rejection; if they persisted in their blindness, their blood would be upon their own heads. The results were of course a bloody farce: the *Requerimiento* was read out of arrow-range, in deserted villages, in camp before moving out, even from shipboard. . . .⁶¹ It should be recalled also that if many royal laws were entirely humane in intent, others were exceedingly discriminatory and exploitative; and these there was no difficulty in enforcing. The royal interventions ‘proposed to commit iniquities humanely, and to consummate injustices equitably’.⁶²

The human suffering of the Conquista cannot be estimated but was certainly immense, probably more terrible even than that of the greater wars and revolutions of our times. In its own day the burning protests of Dominican

Bartolomé de las Casas—himself a one-time *encomendero*—provoked much heart-searching and some real, though mostly ineffective, action by the royal authorities. It is undeniable that the unscrupulous use of his work, illustrated by the gruesome and perennially reprinted engravings of de Bry, fixed on the Spanish name the disgrace of the *leyenda negra*. Perhaps the best attitude to this ‘black legend’ should be Dryden’s to another black legend, the Popish Plot: complete acceptance, complete rejection, are alike mere foolishness.⁶³

Certainly some of the modern ‘revisionist’ defences seem naïve or disingenuous in the extreme; it is difficult to find in the Third World the ‘universal plebiscite’ in favour of ‘that genial colonising Europe which has radiated its high culture and its well being over all the earth’s round’ of which Menéndez Pidal speaks; truly, Don Quixote rides again!⁶⁴

Concentration of the debate on the highly emotional las Casas obscures the evidence of the conquistadores themselves; their matter-of-fact recording of their own atrocities is as terrible as any of his searing protests.⁶⁵ It also obscures the fact that las Casas was far from alone in his stance: many a missionary friar and some courageous officials made full use of the right, positively encouraged by the Crown, to comment freely to the authorities in Spain on any aspect of Spanish activities in the Indies: the testimony and the protest are not from partisan outsiders but from Spaniards themselves. (Nor should we overlook the fact that many aspects of Aztec and Inca society were very far from idyllic, in fact extremely brutal.) This internal criticism contributed to the very high intellectual and moral standard of the debate on the very fundamentals of Faith and Empire initiated by Francisco de Vitoria, the virtual founder of International Law, at the University of Salamanca in 1539. For another example of a great empire permitting such profound questioning of its very right to be an empire, one might have to go back to Buddhist India, to Asoka’s reaction to the horrors of his Kalinga war. This is highly to the honour of Spain; the dishonour of the Conquista is black, but in the last resort we are all the children not only of Adam, but of Cain who slew his brother. . . .⁶⁶

The vast destruction of Indian life, and lives, cannot of course be ascribed mostly to direct assault; the disruption of the norms of social life, hunger and over-work in the mines and perhaps above all as human beasts of burden, accounted for very much; but most was due to epidemics of new diseases—Chaunu makes the point that, unlike such devastating invasions as those of the Mongols in Eurasia, the Conquista ‘came by sea, not by land; this implies fewer invaders, but an incomparably greater microbiotic shock’.⁶⁷

On these ruins, from these remnants, the Spaniards built a unique and fascinating culture; but this was not the work of the conquistadores themselves—though they laid the foundations of power—but of the officials, clerics, lawyers, merchants and artisans who followed them. The Crown very soon took in hand the taming of its too individualistic and too turbulent advance agents:

Private commanders like Cortés, Pizarro, Belalcázar, and Nuño de Guzmán, if they escaped the knives of their rivals, were for the most part soon displaced by royal nominees . . . Some succeeded in settling down as *encomenderos*, ranchers or miners; . . . some, like Bernal Díaz, lived on in obscure poverty in America; some, like Cortés, returned to Spain with their winnings and spent their last years in bored and litigious retirement. Very few were trusted by the Crown with any real administrative power. They were not the stuff of which bureaucrats are made.⁶⁸

The organisation of the Indies

All great empires depend on their bureaucracies; but few can have been so totally bureaucratic, from top to bottom, so given to the recording of everything, as that of Spain. Over all hung the shadows of the notary and the priest, more immediate figures than the King; no entrada was without its notary, few if any without its priest. 'One day in 1544 two shoemakers . . . had an impressive document drawn up devoted to nothing more than their arrival in Lima'; for a brief, a very brief, spell the Crown sought to ban lawyers from Peru, but 'Reality soon repealed the law'.⁶⁹ And it was not the first Viceroy but the lawyer la Gasca who reduced Gonzalo Pizarro's recalcitrant satrapy to its allegiance. In the seventeenth century the famous *Recopilacion de leyes de las Indias* managed to reduce over 11,000 laws, drawn from about 400,000 cédulas, to around 6400.⁷⁰

The Crown of Castile, under God (a limitation taken seriously), was absolute in the Indies, and in theory very little indeed could happen without the specific approval of the Crown through its Council of the Indies, a body which naturally soon became notorious for procrastination. A classic, if extreme, case of bureaucratic delay is afforded by the University of Chile, as we have seen a late starter. The first letter to Spain on this subject was in 1602, but that century was not propitious. With better, Bourbon, times, a proposal was made to the Cabildo of Santiago in December 1713 and referred to the Council of the Indies for twenty years of correspondence. The Council approved in 1736 and in 1738 issued a decree which arrived in Santiago in 1740, but owing to lack of funds the University was not formally inaugurated until 1747, and courses started in July 1756:⁷¹ 154 years betwixt the first motion and the acting; truly, if no empire has been vaster, none has been more slow.

At the apex of the hierarchy in the Indies were the Viceroys. The Viceroy was also Captain-General over his immediate province; the subordinate Captains-General of the outer provinces, however, became 'more and more regarded as little Viceroys.' These were the executive heads; but the most important other officers were directly appointed by the Crown and could correspond directly with it: whence divided counsels. Even the routine activities of the Viceroys were subject to the minute detail of the all but uncountable royal ordinances, many of them *ad hoc*. This over-centralisation was of course mitigated by local

circumstance, ‘the unconscious influences of the widely varying nature in the different provinces . . . events and forces [which] rarely rose above the Madrid horizon’.⁷² It was also mitigated by the time it took to communicate with Spain; an able and enterprising man could get away with a good deal ‘in anticipation of sanction’, to borrow a phrase from another great imperial bureaucracy, that of the British Raj. If the royal commands were too hopelessly unsuited to the situation, they could be accepted with the respectful formula *obedezco pero no cumpla*—‘I obey, but do not comply’ (or rather ‘fulfil’), in effect a referral back, an informal decentralising device.⁷³ In the sixteenth century and after the Bourbon reforms in the eighteenth, many of the Viceroyalties were remarkably able men; but in the interim, probably most were mediocrities, taking away with them when they went home a good deal, and ‘leaving little behind but their portraits’ in the museums. Where so much depended on the interpretation of a mass of often conflicting and half-forgotten regulations, there was room for much assistance to favourites or for financial consideration; the main check was the *residencia* or open post-mortem on an incumbency, but that could often be swamped in contradictory detail or otherwise fixed.

The main territorial sub-divisions were styled the *Audiencias*, each of which generally corresponded to a Captain-Generalcy. The *Audiencia* itself was in effect the provincial supreme court and an advisory council to the Viceroy or Captain-General; it had also the important task of carrying on government during accidental vacancies of the chief executive post. The Viceroyalty of New Spain, established in 1535, included the *Audiencias* or Captain-Generalcies of New Galicia, Mexico, Guatemala, the West Indies, Venezuela, and Panama, until in 1567 the last was definitively attached to Peru, for which it was of course the vital link with Seville. After some administrative vicissitudes New Granada, based on Bogota, became an independent Captain-Generalcy in 1563 and under the Bourbons (1739) a Viceroyalty, taking over Panama. Although the Vice-royalty of Peru was founded nine years after that of New Spain (1544), it became the superior office, the apex of a colonial career; under the Viceroy at Lima were Peru itself, Quito, Charcas (the nucleus of Bolivia), and the outlying and definitely inferior *Audiencias* or *Presidencias* of Chile and Buenos Aires. In 1776, however, the last of the Viceroyalties, Buenos Aires, was set up, and included Charcas: a belated recognition of the significance of the La Plata-Potosi routeway.⁷⁴ There were of course changes in the administrative layout from time to time, but these are the general lineaments, which alone concern us.

Municipal traditions in Spain had always been strong and—as we have seen with Balboa, Cortes, Pedrarias, Pizarro, Valdivia—the formal establishment of a municipality was among the first priorities of the successful conquistador: it gave him a quasi-legitimacy and a power base. At first these little towns were virtually self-governing, but this did not last for long: the patronage was too useful, and the Crown too suspicious of local privilege. From 1528 royal life

nominees constituted the *cabildo* or town council of Mexico, and only in a few cases, mostly on the frontiers, did an elective element survive—Quito, Santiago de Chile, turbulent Potosi, isolated Buenos Aires. In common with most offices, membership of the *cabildo* was open to purchase, and with commissions (also purchasable) in the later militias, this provided the principal opportunity for Creoles, the locally-born Spaniards, to hold office, since many posts, and practically all of importance, were reserved for *Peninsulares*. Moreover, in times of emergency a *cabildo abierto* or ‘open council’ might be convened; this was not open to all, only to invitees, but was obviously subject to local pressure. As a centre for mobilising Creole opinion and action, the *cabildo abierto* was one of the most effective agencies in the opening struggles for Independence.

By 1574 there were said to be something over 150,000 Spaniards in the Indies, probably an overestimate; of these only some 6000 were *encomenderos*.⁷⁵ Basically life was oriented around two or three hundred ‘towns’, from great cities like Mexico, Lima, and Potosi, with total populations numbered in scores of thousands and with thousands of Spaniards, to wretched little ports and bush hamlets, where a few poverty-stricken *vecinos* held sway over a few score Indians. The real towns were nearly all built to a rectangular grid—laid down in royal ordinances—with central plazas and *alamedas* or main boulevards;⁷⁶ and the more substantial had splendid baroque buildings, especially churches and monasteries. The Church itself was the most active builder, as well as practically the only purveyor of educational and hospital services, which ranged from the miserable to institutions of high standard.

The Church was in important respects an arm of the State; it was obviously at once the protector, to the extent possible, of the Indians, and the main instrument by which they were subsumed into the new hybrid culture and kept safe for the Establishment. The Inquisition was less rigorous than in Spain; it was most active in Lima, where Portuguese New Christians and crypto-Jews infiltrated from La Plata and were important in commercial life.⁷⁷ Spanish culture in the Indies was more lively and diversified than might be expected; books were not only freely imported, in very large numbers, but exempt from all but one of the taxes levied on other imports. It is true that in 1531, 1543, 1575, and 1680 ‘books of romance, vain and profane stories such as that of Amadis’ were prohibited imports; but it is believed that most of the first edition of *Don Quixote* in 1605 was—not inappropriately!—shipped direct to the Indies. Even books on the papal *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* found their way thither in the eighteenth century.⁷⁸

Economically, all this activity was organised on the strictest mercantilist lines: the *raison d’être* of the Indies was to provide a continual stream of bullion to Spain, and to receive Spanish manufactures. With few exceptions (such as Huancavelica mercury, an essential factor in silver production), the State left economic activity in private hands, but subjected it to minute and often self-stultifying regulation.

The system has been called, picturesquely, a gigantic Common Market, in which 'The defence of the consumer was the sole law'.⁷⁹ This view seems difficult to defend in view of the activity of the *Consulado* or chamber of commerce of Seville, whose powerful influence was persistently exerted for the material interests of a small ring of merchants; it was responsible, for example, for the legal suppression in 1631–4 of the very lively and valuable trade between New Spain and Peru.⁸⁰

The driving-belt of the whole immense system was the corporate activity of the Casa de Contratacion in Seville, which will be a significant theme in Chapters 7 and 8. The Casa was originally intended to be a royal monopoly trading in spices, on the Portuguese model; but 'ni llegan especias ni hay contratación'—it received no spices and it had no trade.⁸¹ It became a government agency which organised the *flotas* and *galeones* of the Carrera de Indias; collected duties and taxes and the revenues remitted by colonial treasurers; trained and licensed pilots; kept up-to-date the official master-chart or *padron real*; ensured (or tried to) that ships were adequately manned and provisioned, and seaworthy; acted as a court for commercial cases and shipboard crimes; ran the postal services and the *avisos* or despatch boats for the Indies.⁸² A unique institution, it was not only remarkably comprehensive but in many ways remarkably competent; and yet it was the main component in a top-heavy structure of over-regulation which ended up crushing itself by its own weight; a standing invitation to corruption and the contraband trade which sapped not only the wealth but the actual power of the Empire.

It was certainly an extraordinary achievement to cover, so swiftly, such enormous and enormously diversified realms with a net of law and common administrative practice. Clumsy, inordinately time-consuming, a fine culture for the bacteria of corruption, crammed with tensions and frictions, this extraordinary bureaucracy was for three centuries the stout skeleton of one of the most astonishing empires the world has ever seen. In the seventeenth century, with Spain itself, it was grievously afflicted with a Parkinsonian creeping paralysis; yet it was largely revitalised by the Bourbon reforms of the eighteenth century. One must agree with Ramos that the mere maintenance of this gigantic edifice, some of whose components were founded merely on their own 'functional apparatus', was almost a miracle, considering the distances, the terrain and climate, and the diverse environments, linked with Seville by shipping routes which in times of war were often worse than tenuous.⁸³

The Pacific littorals of Nueva España and Peru were the bases by which, in the half-century succeeding the half-century of the Conquista, the Ocean was turned into virtually a Spanish lake. Mexico was the middle term of a highly organised commerce which spanned both Oceans, from Macao and Manila via Acapulco and Vera Cruz to Seville; Peru not only the financial heart of the system, but the base for the probes in depth by Mendaña and Quiros, the essential first steps through which

The Pacific no longer appeared as it had done to Magellan, a desert waste; it was now animated by islands, which, however, for want of exact astronomical observations, appeared to have no fixed position, but floated from place to place over the charts.⁸⁴

To this oceanic endeavour we now turn.