

FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY

GOLDEN AGE OF EXPLORATION

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## Golden Age of Exploration

It is human nature to want to seek, explore, and conquer. These are intuitive capabilities that are exemplified in a person who is trying to achieve goals that he has set, and then trying to determine the best means for accomplishing his objective goals. It is this same nature that was responsible for sixteenth century Spaniards having the desire to embark on the exploration, conquest, and settlement of the “New World” in the Americas. By reading about the life of the conquistador and encomendero Francisco Noguero de Ulloa in the book, *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy*, it is possible for one to come away with an understanding of why people went to the New World and how they amassed fortunes once there.

As a young man, Francisco Noguero de Ulloa is threatened and coerced into an undesired marriage to Beatriz de Villasur by his mother, who has legal control over her son after the death of her husband. Being the young man that he was, and required to follow the traditions that were set in place for him, Francisco unwillingly married his arranged bride. However, he refused to have anything further to do with her after the marriage, even to consummate the marriage. But in the eyes of the church and the state, he was considered married. He must have sought endlessly for an answer to his predicament when conveniently and ironically, Francisco came away with the idea that he could use the dowry money that his wife brought into the marriage as a means to finance an overseas trip for himself to the New World in order to escape his new bride.<sup>1</sup> As the authors Alexandra Parma Cook and Noble David Cook explain, the New World

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<sup>1</sup> Cook, Alexandra Parma and Noble David Cook. *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 9.

was “a world that promised riches as well as freedom.”<sup>2</sup> Simply put, it promised everything that a desperate young man could hope for.

In the New world, the young Noguero de Ulloa, being one of the original settlers, was granted land where he could build a house and an *encomienda*, a grant of tribute-paying Indians, that would work on his land and provide an income for the conquistador. But the Indians were not given without cost. It was the responsibility of the owner of these Indians to instill in them the virtues of Christianity and to convert them to the Christian faith. But this process of conversion had to be done humanely as was ordered by King Charles V of Spain.<sup>3</sup> Masters were ordered not to hurt or injure their subjects that worked on their land in any way. However, the noble King’s desires of treating the Indians humanely were not always followed. As a result, he sent a viceroy, Nunez Vela, to enforce his royal order and also to free Indians from their service to the conquistadors. This mission that Vela was sent on had the inevitability of causing a rebellion from the landowners, such as Francisco who benefited from the service of the Indians.<sup>4</sup>

Landowners switched allegiances routinely in the New World when laws threatened their freedom and then, consequently, sided with rebel leaders that better served their interests. But at the same time, there was money and power that could be gained if an individual played for both sides, like Francisco Noguero de Ulloa had done. He sided with one rebellion long enough to try to preserve his interests, while at the same time siding with the crown in the end to gain favors from representatives of the Spanish crown.<sup>5</sup> In returning to the side of the crown, Francisco would battle his former allies

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 28.

and at the same time, suffer battle scars that he could later use to demonstrate his loyalty to the Spanish monarchy. From playing both sides, Nogueroles managed to earn more encomiendas that could make him more money by working on his land. In all, “Nogueroles controlled several thousand Indians, who cultivated wheat, corn, oca, potatoes, and other food stuff to satisfy their obligation” to him.<sup>6</sup> It was believed by many others who switched allegiances that they could attain more wealth and prosperity by switching their allegiance to the King after being, or at least pretending to be in rebellion than if an individual was honest and loyal to the crown to the bitter end.<sup>7</sup> Appearances were very important. As a result of Nogueroles’s deceit, he gained a great amount of wealth, which gave him a distinguished status in colonial Peru.

As an attempt to increase settlement in the New World and to ensure that it continued to thrive, King Charles V wanted all encomenderos, holders of Indian grants, to be married. If an encomendero was already married, his wife would be sent on a transatlantic journey to the New World to join her husband. This royal demand is the cause for a major obstacle in the life of Francisco Nogueroles de Ulloa. Two of his sisters, credible and respectable nuns in the church wrote and informed him that his wife, who Francisco wanted nothing to do with, had died.<sup>8</sup> Having that information, Francisco felt obliged to follow the King’s orders and so he remarried. He decided on his new bride, Catalina de Vergara after hearing flattering descriptions of her from a mutual friend. Catalina was a widower like Francisco and she also belonged to the upper class in Peru. Those traits, along with her beauty were the reasons that he chose to marry her when he had the chance to marry any female in the Indies since he was one of its richest citizens.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 31.

He also favored his new bride because she had the desire to return to Spain, where he would no longer have to hide because his first wife, Beatriz de Villasur was dead.<sup>9</sup>

Once Nogueroles returned to Spain with his new wife, he was quick to learn the details of a case that was pending against him. He was charged with bigamy and with not properly registering silver bars that he sent from Peru to Spain. He had discovered that his first wife, Beatriz was not dead. She was alive and he was now married to two women because of the deceit of his sisters, the credible and respectable nuns.<sup>10</sup> As soon as he found out that his first wife was alive, he separated himself from the love of his life, his second wife, Catalina.<sup>11</sup>

However, the authors believe that Nogueroles only separated himself from his second wife as a ploy to strengthen his claim of innocence and the authors further maintain the belief that Nogueroles must have received letters stating that there was a case against him while in the Indies, even withstanding disasters. However, there were no letters or and no evidence exists to support their claim; there was only their belief that the mail eventually got through. The authors' claim that Francisco was living a life in the Indies as a known bigamist is only based on conjecture. Defense witnesses tried to explain to the judges that if Francisco had known that his wife was alive, he would have had to be out of his mind to send money to Peru, let alone show up in person.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, there exists "no evidence that Nogueroles had known on his wedding day that dona Beatriz was alive."<sup>13</sup> So, based on the available evidence, he should have been

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 68.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 64.

found innocent of bigamy. Above all, he had not consummated his marriage with Beatriz de Villasur nor cohabitated with her, like he did with Catalina de Vergara. Therefore, his marriage to Beatriz de Villasur was never finalized so he was not really married twice.

The Spanish courts on the other hand, did not understand this logical reasoning and forced Nogueroles into exile for three years and also forbade him from seeing his second wife. As for the charge of illegally sending silver bars into Spain, he was cleared of that charge due to logs and witnesses that attested to the honest intentions of Nogueroles.<sup>14</sup> Luckily, after papal intervention, Nogueroles and Catalina de Vergara were returned to each other as husband and wife. The authors tried to draw the conclusion that this was because they sent money to Rome as was documented, implying that they bribed people influential to the Pope into allowing their union. While there was a possibility of this, again, it is a conclusion that cannot be proven and remains as conjecture.

The authors having to conjecture throughout the book and to draw conclusions from limited information that has been historically documented is one of the limitations of this book. For a large part, the book achieves the purpose that the authors wanted of being able to visualize the reasons, desires, goals, and achievements of sixteenth century Spaniards, but when it comes down to fine details, either some of the information did not survive to the present day, or claims that the authors passed off as things that likely had happened, possibly did not happen. Another limitation of this work was that there was a lack of anecdotal information about the daily lives of the characters. For instance and understandably, the book did not depict leisure activities or personal interests of the major characters. It only covered major events in the lives of the characters and tried to force some conclusions about things that may or may not have happened. But as a whole,

the reader attains a new understanding of the type of lives that early conquistadors in the New World faced by taking dry legal documents and making their story come to life.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 109.

## Works Cited

Cook, Alexandra Parma and Noble David Cook. *Good Faith and Truthful Ignorance: A Case of Transatlantic Bigamy*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.