THE INDIAN MILITIA AND DESCRIPTION OF THE INDIES

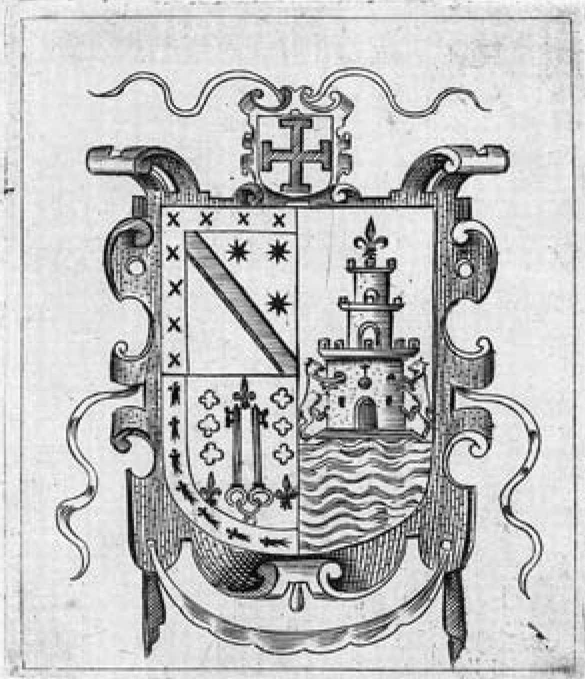
Captain Bernardo de Vargas Machuca

Edited with an introduction by Kris Lane and translated by Timothy F. Johnson

The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies

MILICIA Y DESCRIPCION DE LAS INDIAS, POR el Capitan don Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, Cauallero Castellano, natural de la villa de Simancas.

DIRIGIDO AL LICENCIADO PAVLO de Laguna Presidente del Consejo Real de las Indias.



EN MADRID,
En casa de Pedro Madrigal.

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Captain Bernardo de Vargas Machuca

Edited by Kris Lane

Translated by Timothy F. Johnson
from the original Spanish edition, 1599

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PREFACE

Described by the distinguished Hispanist and military historian Geoffrey Parker as "the first manual of guerrilla warfare ever published," Bernardo de Vargas Machuca's 1599 *Milicia Indiana* is in fact the world's first known manual of antiguerrilla, or counterinsurgency, warfare. A longtime veteran of what anthropologists have termed "war in the tribal zone,"[1] its author represented a large and little-known category of Spanish emigrants to the Americas: the luckless conquistador. Thousands of these men, many of them participants in Spanish wars in Europe and the Mediterranean, followed Cortés and Pizarro to the Americas in search of fame and fortune. The vast majority found neither, and many ended their lives fighting Native American *guerrilleros* in the jungles, deserts, mountains, and swamps that marked the outer limits of the Spanish Empire. Unwilling to support costly formal armies abroad given their huge commitments at home, Spain's Habsburg monarchs encouraged such men to defend royal interests in the colonies on their own account, promising them pensions, titles, and even indigenous wards and tributaries in return. Most were baited not by these promises, however, but by variations on the El Dorado legend—the chance at discovering another Mexico or Peru.

As prospects for new conquests dimmed, veteran militiamen and inexperienced greenhorns alike sought new solutions to their poverty as well as outlets for mounting aggression. As a result, by 1599 hundreds of bands of mixed Spanish, creole, mestizo, African-descended, and indigenous para-

militaries roamed the American backcountry from New Mexico to Chile participating in what were often called *castigos*, or "punishments," privately financed police actions against alleged indigenous rebels, thieves, and fugitives. Taking both law and defense into their own hands, the Indies militiamen, sometimes led by petty nobles such as Vargas Machuca, fought pirates, renegades, and even fugitive African slaves. They increasingly saw themselves as a professional class, albeit an often disparaged and officially unrecognized one. Many such soldiers, but more especially their leaders, were literate, and they wrote the king repeatedly requesting compensation in the form of government posts and pensions.

In many ways, Vargas Machuca's *Milicia Indiana*, or "Indian Militia," is an extended autobiographical plea of this kind, known as a *probanza* or *relación de méritos y servicios*. Yet it is much more besides: a list of pointers for the bounty hunter, a primer on field medicine, a taxonomy of tropical plants and animals, a moralistic handbook for Christian commanders, a town-founder's "how-to"—even a compact, geocentric guide to the cosmos. It is also, and perhaps most importantly for historians and anthropologists, a rare account of indigenous ways of life and war in colonial New Granada, roughly today's Colombia. Indeed, it serves as an unwitting testament to the will, ingenuity, and cultural resilience of the many Native American peoples that Vargas Machuca so desperately fought to subdue that his *Indian Militia* manages to be so "Indian."

A manual in four books, *Milicia Indiana* begins with a discourse outlining the ideal qualities of the *caudillo*, or militia commander. Book 2 treats the organization and outfitting of punitive or conquest expeditions, including a portion on how to incorporate priests, and with extended discussions of arms and medicine. Book 3 covers the proper behavior of soldiers, advice on marching through peaceful versus bellicose territories, crossing rivers, bivouacking in foul weather, and carrying out (and beating off) night raids and ambushes. Book 4 treats peacemaking, town founding, and proper treatment of conquered peoples. Appended to these four books is a brief geographical description of all of Spanish America, with special emphasis on the indigenous peoples of New Granada, followed by a very short guide to the southern coasts and heavens. To this we have added a translation of Vargas Machuca's posthumous service record and a brief selection from his unpublished attack on the writings of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As editor and translator of this, the first English translation of *Milicia Indiana*, we wish to thank the long-suffering staffs of the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, Rhode Island, and the Archivo General de la Nación in Bogotá, Colombia. Thanks also to the staffs of the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain, the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos in Madrid, and the Hispanic Society of America in New York City. We have also benefited tremendously from the general collections and interlibrary loan offices of the Rockefeller Library at Brown University and the Earl Gregg Swem Library at the College of William and Mary. A thousand thanks are also due to Prof. J. Michael Francis of the University of North Florida for his painstaking reading of our first draft manuscript and many pages of valuable suggestions. We would happily blame him for any remaining shortcomings, but that would be unfair to the anonymous readers for Duke University Press who just as kindly let us have it. Special thanks are also due to Professor Hiroshi Kitamura of the College of William and Mary who patiently guided us through the 1994 Japanese edition. We also warmly thank Valerie Millholland and the editorial staff at Duke University Press for shepherding this project through to completion. Finally, we must thank our book's *real* author, Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, who if he were alive today would probably hunt us down and kill us.

Funding for archival research in Colombia during the fall of 2005 came from the Fulbright Commission for the International Exchange of Schol-

ars. Work with original editions of *Milicia Indiana*, *Exercicios de la gineta*, and many other relevant early Americana imprints in the spring of 2006 was made possible by a National Endowment for the Humanities grant administered by the John Carter Brown Library. Research in Spain during the summer of 2006 was made possible by the generous endowment of David B. and Carolyn D. Wakefield administered by the College of William and Mary. These much-appreciated grants made possible not only the reading of Vargas Machuca's words in many forms and contexts, but also the partial retracing of his steps.

KRIS LANE
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The Indian Militia and Description of the Indies

A la Espada y el compas
Mas y mas y mas y mas

INTRODUCTORY STUDY

Kris Lane

It may be only fitting that the first manual of Spanish conquest was published well after the death of the last conquistadors. It was perhaps even more fitting that its author was Captain Bernardo de Vargas Machuca of Simancas, a hapless caballero so out of touch with his times he may well have inspired Cervantes. As he was born too late to be another Cortés or Pizarro, true fame was not Vargas Machuca's destiny. Neither was its opposite, infamy, a specialty of failed conquistadors such as the Basque rebel Lope de Aguirre. Instead, the valiant and loyal Vargas Machuca soldiered on for nearly five decades, unable to either locate a lost empire or contemplate rebellion.

The next best thing was to participate in whatever fight was at hand, be it against rebellious Amerindians, runaway slaves, heretic pirates, or mutinous fellow Spaniards. In short, if he was going to war in the Spanish Indies, Bernardo de Vargas Machuca was destined not for conquest, but rather for "mopping up." By the mid-1590s he had done enough of this, and under sufficiently varied circumstances, to consider himself an expert; hence *Milicia Indiana*. The title is ambiguous even in the original Spanish—hinting as much at Amerindian as at Spanish colonist, or *indiano*, input and content—so we have chosen to translate it directly as *The Indian Militia*. After a five-year wait in Madrid, Spain's grudging Indies Council at last responded to Vargas Machuca's incessant requests for promotion by granting him a minor post in 1602 as paymaster and magistrate of the new fortress town of Portobelo, on the Caribbean coast of Panama.

Why write a manual for something as unglamorous as backcountry "Indian wars"? Was it sincerely meant to help fellow immigrants conquer phantom empires, or was it more likely intended to conquer the heart of the Spanish king, or at least his ministers or courtiers? It is difficult to say for sure, but like many freelance participants in the long and incomplete conquest of the Americas, Vargas Machuca fancied himself a literate soldier with a story to tell. Even in Cortés's day, thanks to the great distances and cultural gulfs entailed by overseas campaigns, one had not only to be tough and resourceful, but also to write well or at least persuasively in order to convince the distant monarch of the value of one's deeds. As the example of Cortés suggests, this was no easy thing.[1] Spain's early Habsburg kings had other, more pressing concerns than the affairs of the Indies, and they were frequently susceptible to the religious arguments of proindigenous priests, most notably the tireless Protector of the Indians, Bartolomé de Las Casas. Only talk of mineral wealth could compete with propagating the faith in pricking up the royal ear.

Vargas Machuca does not fail to mention treasure in his *Indian Militia*, and indeed all but threatens that its continued flow will cease if men like him go unrewarded. Still, he seems to want his book to be judged on its own merits as a neoconquistador's "how-to." Martial arts manuals were in fact common in western Europe by 1600,[2] and this was not Vargas Machuca's only one (as discussed below, he also wrote on horsemanship). Still, *Milicia Indiana* seems not quite to fit the genre, which tended toward highly technical discussions of fencing and other varieties of hand-to-hand combat. Spanish master swordsmen such as Gerónimo Sánchez de Carranza employed the compass not to mark out conquests, but rather for saber sweeps and dagger thrusts. Other experts, many of them battle-hardened soldiers like Vargas Machuca, advised aspiring peninsular cavaliers on wrestling, shooting, and old-fashioned knightly jousting.

Religious self-help manuals were another popular genre in both Spain and the colonies, often drawing metaphorically on soldierly discipline.[3] Against these, *Milicia Indiana* reads something like a colonial gunslinger's version of Ignatius Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. The format is standard in its rules and scolding tone; it is the content that is unusual. Vargas Machuca claims to offer nothing more than a collection of precepts and general advice for the frontier commander, but as is evident in the opening epistles and poems, even its contemporary promoters seemed to agree it was something else, a "curious" hybrid. (After all, how many self-help books could

claim to teach one how to cure rattlesnake bites with amethysts or make saltpeter for gunpowder from concentrated human urine?)

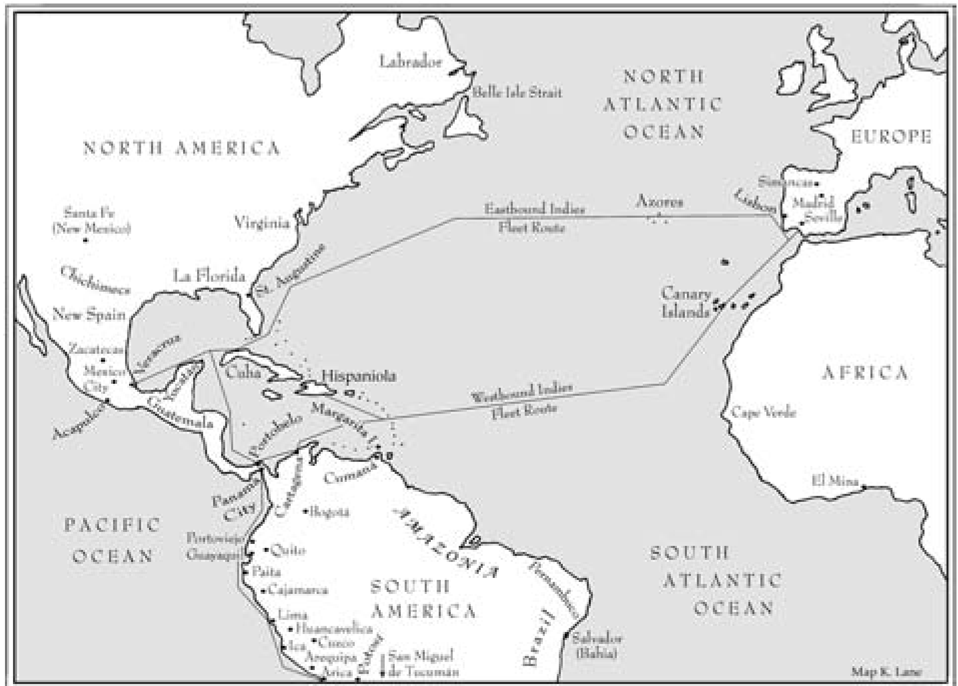
This weirdness, or "curiosity," of the text raises the question of readership. On whose shelf or in whose saddlebags might one have found *Milicia Indiana?* We know that Thomas Jefferson owned a copy, but what about Spanish contemporaries in the years just after 1599? Would the book have appealed to newly appointed governors? Restless young nobles hoping to reinvent themselves or get rich in America? Aspiring corporate raiders? The title does not appear in Irving Leonard's classic *Books of the Brave*, which catalogues and characterizes the many vernacular imprints heading to the Indies in precisely this period, but certainly a few copies must have reached colonists' hands.[4] Vargas Machuca claims he simply wants to help ill equipped, Indies-bound Spanish greenhorns of any kind to pull up their bootstraps and be done with the conquest once and for all. Yet it becomes clear after reading only a few pages that the author is doing something else, as well: writing an angry letter to the king. In this regard, *Milicia Indiana* is an extended *probanza de méritos y servicios*, a common, stylized boast meant to impress the monarch, or at least the Indies Council (to whose president it is lavishly dedicated). Compensation was expected in the form of an honorable sinecure, at the very least a governorship.

For Vargas Machuca, self-fashioning in a humorless, self-righteous way appears to have been as natural as breathing. Whether in dozens of surviving manuscript requests for promotions, complaints about superiors, recommendations for how to put down indigenous uprisings, or in *Milicia Indiana* itself, the author's tone is the same: that of a short-tempered and arrogant Renaissance pragmatist. What makes him interesting despite his pedantry, at least in part, is how and when he shows his discomfort with a Spanish imperial world that was rapidly changing around him. His confidence alone was an anachronism amid Spain's transition to Baroque reflection—a new sensibility marked by self-doubt, "disenchantment," and bewildering complexity. (Cervantes and a few others responded—after failing to get their own government posts—with irony.) This creeping discomfort—though hardly enough to diminish Vargas Machuca's considerable reserve of self-confidence—emerges in *Milicia Indiana* but finds fullest expression in his impassioned refutation of Las Casas, which he called *The Defense of Western Conquests*, composed shortly after his appointment as castle keep in Portobelo. As if to further vex its author, publication of the *Defense* was suppressed despite support from ranking Dominicans—

members of the same order as Las Casas (see appendix 2 for translated selections).

Part of Vargas Machuca's difficulty in becoming a bona fide conquistador was timing. When he left Spain for the Indies in 1578, might was still right, or seemed to be, and even Spain's enemies unhappily agreed that much of the known world was King Philip II's oyster. Upon Vargas Machuca's return to Spain in 1595, however, things were different; the mood had darkened considerably, and would continue to do so through much of the next century. The king was on his deathbed, the royal treasury was empty, and the multiplying heretic nations of Europe were ascendant.[5] But did not the good knight still get his due despite this changed scenario? In Vargas Machuca's case the Indies Council finally yielded, but not in the desired way. The six-year Portobelo post proved a huge disappointment, and what came next was not much better. Instead of a marquisate or command of a Chilean invasion force, the middle-aged indiano got only a Sancho Panza–like booby prize: the governorship of the moribund desert island of Margarita, off the coast of Venezuela. Booby prize or not, Vargas Machuca ruled it like a personal fiefdom until a few years before his death in 1622.

So why bother to translate and annotate Vargas Machuca's *Indian Militia* if he seems almost a comic loser on the one hand, and an angry, Indian-hating pedant on the other? My own initial interest in the text was as a source for the history of mining and prospecting in early colonial Colombia. As will be seen, Vargas Machuca offers brief descriptions of mineral deposits, mining techniques, and even medicinal uses for gemstones. His will includes mention of an apparently unworked emerald mine. What became clear in reading on, however (and I am hardly the first to notice this), is that scattered throughout *Milicia Indiana* are unwitting fragments of indigenous and rural Spanish colonial history. Perhaps the main gap this book helps to fill, if only partially, is the story of early and unconquered "backcountry" New Granada. For its incidental ethnography alone, *The Indian Militia* seemed a text worthy of translation and annotated study. From a broader perspective it may serve as well, especially when read along with portions of the *Defense of Western Conquests*, as an example of a conservative soldier's understanding of his emerging nation's global empire. Many of the ideas and opinions that Vargas Machuca expresses below in more or less inchoate form would later be expanded and codified by the creole jurist Juan de Solórzano Pereira. Vargas Machuca was in fact al-



Map 1
The Spanish Atlantic in the sixteenth century

most ahead of his times in arguing for imperial retrenchment. The present book's more narrowly defined value as a neotropical bestiary and manual of field medicine has also been noted, although it is not unique in either case.[6]

Despite its simple format and no-nonsense prose, *Milicia Indiana* is not a self-explanatory text. It begs many questions. Where did Vargas Machuca fit into the story of Spanish American imperial consolidation and indigenous resistance? He was a latecomer, after all, and not a participant in the much better known conquests of Mexico or Peru. Does his text fit into a peculiarly New Granadan model of conquest (or "Indian policing"), or might it reflect a certain moment or step in a larger hemispheric or even global process of imperial consolidation? If the author's main contribution relates to indigenous matters, how does one see and understand colonial Colombia's nonstate native societies through the distorted mirror of a foreigner bent on destroying or at least profoundly altering them? What was the role of so-called friendly Indians, Vargas Machuca's constant allies and fellow soldiers, in these backwoods police actions? Were they really "friendly," or were they simply pursuing their own agendas by allying with

the Spanish? Finally, to what extent was what Vargas Machuca repeatedly calls *his* sage advice in fact *theirs*?

As will be seen, Vargas Machuca was as often admiring of indigenous arms, tactics, medicine, and perseverance as he was hostile or dismissive. To be sure, he never doubted the Spanish "right" to rule over indigenous Americans, nor did he ever question the need for a heavy hand. Was he a racist? One can certainly come to that conclusion after reading this book, and much more so if one reads his no-holds-barred refutation of Las Casas (again, see appendix 2 for selections). Yet the label, so full of modern connotations, attaches clumsily to even the most unabashed sixteenth-century European imperialist. "Barbarity" for Vargas Machuca was the natural and unfortunate result of environmental circumstances coupled with inadequate education—bad leadership, really. He is hesitant to declare Native Americans inherently inferior or naturally servile. Still, he is quick to stereotype and judge in the often contradictory, sweeping, and self-serving style of later racists, and he proclaims without reservation that Native American cultures have virtually nothing to offer European settlers beyond a few wilderness survival tips.

Thus, while the possibility of "going native" was the furthest thing from Vargas Machuca's mind, he was nevertheless an indiano through and through, an "American" (but not a creole) and proud of it. Vargas Machuca's life-changing experience as an Indies militiaman, rather like Don Quixote's delusion by way of books of chivalry, had the unexpected consequence of rendering him not a hero but a misfit when he returned to Spain. Like so many imperial outliers, and so many war veterans in general, he was a man who knew too much—about the blunt violence and tough choices that defined politics at the edge of empire. For all its hardships, however, the wild frontier was a simpler place that seemed to suit Vargas Machuca's gun-toting, equestrian, take-charge personality very well. The more subtle machinations of the center, the knowing winks and nudges of prudent King Philip's court, seemed to escape him. Thus, despite the glowing praise of his supporters (who took great pains to declare him famous when hardly anyone, even in New Granada, knew his name), the hard-bitten veteran's frustration shows through like a beacon in both the *Indian Militia* and the *Defense of Western Conquests*.

Vargas Machuca has recently drawn the attention of literary scholars interested in the substantial corpus of "late," ignored, and otherwise obscure chronicles of the Habsburg imperial enterprise, particularly those

produced by colonists amid the uneasy transition from Renaissance to baroque ideas and tropes. This transition, which some scholars prefer to label a crisis brought on by early modernity or proto-globalization (or just too much money), was not a simple or complete one. The task of disentangling its complexities and contradictions from the American side has in fact only begun, even as debate on materials produced in Spain rages.[7] Why the delayed attention? In part it is only reasonable that these lesser, often clumsy and derivative indiano works have emerged slowly from the long shadow of Cervantes, Lope de Vega, and other hugely talented contemporaries. (It has also taken a long time to plow through some of them, including Rodríguez Freile's disorganized and unfinished but fascinating anecdotal history of New Granada, known today as *El Carnero*, and Juan de Castellanos's *Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias*, to date the longest poem in the Spanish language.)

To take but one of the many questions raised by scholars of Golden Age indiano literature: What role did Indies militiamen and neoconquistadors such as Vargas Machuca play in reshaping imperial narratives that since at least the mid-sixteenth century had been dominated by priests and nonparticipant, peninsular-born Spaniards such as Cortés's chronicler, López de Gómara? And even if they dared to challenge Las Casas, as Vargas Machuca rather brazenly did, was anyone listening? Whom did they really hope to convince? What literary conventions or philosophical models could they now draw on to make their case for a unique, Spanish American heroic?

Treating a somewhat earlier period (ending around the 1566 death of Las Casas), classicist David Lupher has asked how various colonial and peninsular writers' visions of the Spanish Empire in relation to antiquity, specifically the Roman Empire, changed between the period of conquest and royal consolidation. Had the Spanish outdone the Romans, at last? If so, in what specific ways had they bested the ancients? Where did Native Americans fit in a New World "republic" (a term Vargas Machuca repeatedly uses)? Were Amerindians going to be citizens or permanent wards of the state? How were rebels to be treated? Should they be enslaved? Exiled? Annihilated? *Milicia Indiana* is a good test case for such inquiry in the years following Las Casas's death.

A third reason for translating Vargas Machuca is to situate his manual in the larger context of European military history. Given the overtly martial focus of the work, this theme affords many avenues of exploration.

Not being military historians ourselves, however, translator Tim Johnson and I have chosen just three angles we felt at least partly competent to explore: (1) Vargas Machuca's notions of warfare in relation to the so-called military revolution taking place in sixteenth-century Europe; (2) the Indies militia compared with early modern notions of what are today called counterinsurgency and paramilitary conflicts; and (3) where Vargas Machuca's "how-to" fits within the early modern European tradition of the martial arts manual. To this last theme we have added (again, despite our lack of special expertise) observations on the book's potential value to the history of medicine. A significant part of it purports to be a tropical militiaman's first-aid manual.

We address these and related themes following a brief foray into historical background, both global and local, and also a short biographical sketch of the author. Throughout, we feel it should be kept in mind that, as editor and translator, Vargas Machuca's story disturbs us. He lived in the midst of, and actively participated in bringing about, the most precipitous population decline in world history. Many of the indigenous groups he fought were soon after annihilated by disease and abuses not unlike those condemned by his nemesis, Las Casas. Worse, some of Vargas Machuca's own deadly attacks were described by contemporaries as unprovoked or misdirected, and he himself admitted participating in what would today be called war crimes. Our intention is not to judge or moralize. Still, as is no doubt already obvious, we could not help but wince as the evidence about our book's apparently troubled and frustrated author accumulated. In sorting through hundreds of handwritten testimonies and autobiographical musings that more than amply proved Vargas Machuca's fondness for terror as the surest means to make a point—to kill even children in order to save his men—it was difficult not to wonder if paramilitary violence, like economic underdevelopment, was yet another Latin American, or just plain American, colonial legacy.[8]

BERNARDO DE VARGAS MACHUCA IN A CHANGING SPANISH EMPIRE

> I remember having read that a Spanish knight by the name of Diego Pérez de Vargas, having broken his sword in a battle, tore a heavy branch or trunk from a live-oak and with it did such things that day, and crushed so many

> Moors, that he was left with the nickname "Machuca" [The Smasher], and thus, from then on he and his descendants were called Vargas y Machuca.
>
> —Don Quixote to Sancho Panza following an especially painful attack on a windmill, CERVANTES, *Don Quixote*

When he wrote *Milicia Indiana* in the late 1590s, Bernardo de Vargas Machuca was both an indiano and a *perulero*, that is, an old Indies hand trying to make good on his deeds abroad in Greater Peru—which at this time encompassed almost all of Spanish South America—while cooling his heels at court in Spain.[9] The figure of the perulero, lovingly skewered by Cervantes in his exemplary novella "The Jealous Extremaduran" was not a rare sight in late sixteenth-century Spain.[10] Almost by definition, such men had been born on the Peninsula rather than in the colonies, and nearly all had trouble gaining respect upon their return; their claims on nobility were usually tenuous. Many were more merchants than soldiers, besides (the term *perulero* eventually became synonymous with "Portuguese merchant"), which did not help in a culture that clung obstinately to knightly ideals regarding wealth and status. To add to the insult, courtly attention was now lavished on indigenous or part-indigenous nobles such as "El Inca" Garcilaso de la Vega, author of the widely read *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* (1609).[11] Nostalgic native voices such as Garcilaso's meshed perfectly with the new culture of *desengaño*, a kind of winner's regret that also found expression in verse and on stage. Other indigenous nobles trekked to Madrid from Peru and Mexico to assert their claims. Peru's Guaman Poma de Ayala sent an extraordinary, illustrated letter of over 1,000 pages denouncing Spanish colonialism and arguing for creation of an allied but functionally independent neo-Inca state.[12] Though hardly true, to some it seemed almost easier to be an Indian in Spain than an indiano.

From the point of view of Spain's large and underemployed class of nobles, wealth gained in the Indies was déclassé from the beginning, probably stained (as indeed much of it was) with Amerindian blood, and won by provincial characters of dubious birth. The bastard Francisco Pizarro of Trujillo, conqueror of the wealthiest empire in the Americas (if not the world), was the classic case.[13] No matter what they claimed, for all anyone knew men like Vargas Machuca were nothing more than *pícaros*—lowborn charlatans, swineherds, or street hustlers—who had somehow gotten lucky and remade themselves as hidalgos. Such comeuppance was toler-

ated only in novels and plays, where it could be safely laughed off. In life, fame and infamy could not yet be confused (although that time would come sooner in Spain than elsewhere in Europe).

As it happened, the Indies-bound rogue was at the heart of Spain's new and probably most famous literary genre, the picaresque novel, immortalized in the same year as Vargas Machuca's *Milicia Indiana* by Mateo Alemán in *Guzmán de Alfarache*—a pioneering book that clearly *did* make it to the Americas, and in quantity, despite the repeated attempts of censors to stop it.[14] Of course the "smashing" petty noble, Vargas Machuca, would have deeply resented any comparison with the footloose, amoral Guzmán or with Cervantes's jealous, penny-pinching merchant of Seville, but there was no denying that the Indies left an indelible mark on all who ventured there. Indeed, Vargas Machuca and his heirs appear to have been all but cursed by the indiano stain.

The fabled era of conquistadors was ancient history by 1599, just as Spain's literary golden age was dawning. Had it all been a dream? It is impossible to say if Vargas Machuca spent time contemplating the relationship between art and life either in Spain or the American backcountry, but surviving evidence suggests an unflinching soldierly simplicity and sternness that sustained him to the bitter end. His writings demonstrate a strong preference for Plutarch's exemplary *Lives* versus "fluff" works of romantic fiction like *Lazarillo de Tormes*, or even *Amadís of Gaul*. Reflection not aimed directly at improving performance (the goal of each conquest or "punishment" being assumed righteous and self-evident) was not only useless, but a sign of softness. Who then could Vargas Machuca be, if not another Marquis of Valle, a new Cortés?

Always flexible in the face of material limitations, Vargas Machuca appears to have fancied himself a special type of turn-of-the-century councillor when he wrote the *Indian Militia*, not only a professional soldier but also an "Indian" mirror of the just-dead Prudent King, Philip II. Vargas Machuca's title-page portrait (see figure 2) reinforces such a robust self-perception, posed as he is like the young and optimistic Philip in St. Quentin battle gear. And more so the inscription below: "With sword and compass, more and more and more and more"—not three "mores," but four. Indeed, as was said of Philip, the world was not enough.

Though not to be confused with the modern, or even absolutist, nation-state, Spain under Philip II was the most centralized and globally active monarchy in Europe. American treasure, most notably at this time the vast

1 & 2
Philip II of Spain, ca. 1557, and Bernardo de Vargas Machuca, ca. 1599.
Courtesy Patrimonio Nacional, Madrid

silver deposits of Potosí, had financed Habsburg consolidation and expansion throughout Europe and the Mediterranean.[15] The conquest of the northern Philippines in the 1560s and the 1580 annexation of Portugal and by extension its vast overseas holdings made Spain the world's first truly global empire. In the midst of all this excitement and change, the imperial impulse, first felt in earnest under Philip's father, Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, opened up whole worlds of possibility for Spanish subjects hoping to advance their personal aims. Most were young men and some, like the mythical Guzmán de Alfarache, were bona fide pícaros out for adventure and a quick piece of eight. Many, like Guzmán and Cervantes, never got past Seville.

For people of honor, however, or at least honorable pretenses, fortunes could only be consolidated through marriage and family formation, so noble, creole women, as Vargas Machuca quickly learned upon his arrival in highland New Granada, were at the center of any attempt to build an indiano dynasty. Studies in both Spain and the Americas have shown that throughout early modern times, when weak government and perennially absent men were the norm, women's economic importance and political power increased. This was most marked among the higher social strata, which for a time included indigenous elites.[16] Not all ranking women found their dream mates. Having married the colonial equivalent of a

knight-errant, the two wives of Bernardo de Vargas Machuca managed only to bear a few children and watch their dowries disappear.[17]

Along with opportunity, imperial expansion generated new social, political, and economic problems, among them noble resentment of imperial authority, colonial tax revolts, rampant contraband trade and piracy, and innumerable Indian wars, usually at the ranching, mining, or mission frontier. In short, there was a lot to keep track of when the sun never set on empire, and thus it is no surprise that even the most loyal and competent subjects might fail to receive their just desserts as Spain's domain bloated to the point of overstretch. Vargas Machuca was hardly unusual in "falling through the cracks" despite his years of loyal service, and was in fact lucky to get anything at all. But what really sets him apart from countless other writers of service reports is his special plea from the beginning of *Milicia Indiana* that the new defenders of the Indies, unlike the old freelance conquistadors, be recognized as a professional, soldierly class.[18] As it was, he complained, the Indies militiaman got no respect.

Spain was on the defensive by 1599, but hardly crippled. Peace was signed with the French on the eve of Philip II's death in 1598, and it followed under Philip III with the English in 1603 and the Dutch (albeit for only about a decade) in 1609. The Ottomans were a somewhat reduced maritime threat after the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, although North African corsairs aligned with the sultans kept Mediterranean and East Atlantic shipping unsafe and frequently threatened Spanish presidios all along the Maghreb. Throughout the Mediterranean, piracy and hostage exchange were the order of the day just as Vargas Machuca was coming of age in Simancas, an old fortress town just outside the Old Castilian city of Valladolid, where his father served as paymaster of the newly established royal archives.

In the colonies, challenges to empire were equally abundant. This was true despite the fact that by the mid-sixteenth century loyal Spanish subjects and administrators controlled nearly all the significant population centers, strategic ports and waterways, vast tracts of fertile land, and rich mines of precious metals. As was to be expected, the problem with a so-called *Pax Colonial* was not holding the center but expanding the periphery.[19] Native American peoples carried on unconquered all around the fringes, particularly in densely forested, mountainous, and desert regions. For them, of course, center and periphery had entirely different meanings. However deadly for each side, borders, or contact zones, were sites

3
Royal Archive of Simancas, Old Castile.
Photo by Kris Lane

of cultural genesis. This was the "tribal zone," a space of regrouping, where things (including germs) and ideas interpenetrated, yielding unexpected combinations or hybrids, "new" tribes.[20] Indeed, many tribes later considered by colonial authorities, missionaries, anthropologists, and even their own members as primordial or deeply rooted in some specific terrain were in fact forged in this outer-edge crucible of war, material exchange, and missionary endeavors.

Among the most daunting and attractive of the "conquest frontiers," at least in sixteenth-century Spanish eyes, were greater Amazonia and what is today the U.S. South and Southwest. Newcomers and old-timers alike felt there just *had* to be treasure and empires hidden in these vast and rugged regions. Indigenous informants claimed as much, usually by pointing excitedly in the direction of their worst enemies. There were many other less promising frontiers, including deserts such as the Gran Chaco of Bolivia-Paraguay, the Guajira Peninsula of northeast Colombia, and the windswept pampas of South America's southern cone. Then there were jungle and swampland zones such as the Maya Petén, the Florida Everglades, the Orinoco and Mississippi Deltas, the Colombian Chocó, and the Mosquito Coast of Nicaragua. The list could go on to include rugged

mountain zones such as Mexico's western Sierra Madre, the Guyana Highlands, and Colombia's Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. In short, what Spaniards claimed in the Americas and what they controlled were two very different things in 1599.

In Vargas Machuca's time, one region stood out as the epitome of the untamed Amerindian frontier: southern Chile. Beyond the Bío-Bío River to the south of Santiago, a loose confederation of indigenous groups dominated a fairly compact and temperate region not unlike northern Spain. In this lushly forested belt of rolling hills between about 37 and 42 degrees south latitude, frontier warfare took on a special character. The Mapuche, or Araucanians, quickly embraced horses and firearms, which they acquired by raiding or barter for captives. When it came to war, however, rather than adopt the standard Spanish practice of daytime engagement of matched forces on an open field, the Mapuche kept to their traditional methods of night raids, ambushes, kidnapping, and sudden withdrawal: in short, what would today be called guerrilla warfare.[21] As a result, the Spanish soon found themselves stalemated despite massive spending on arms, fortresses, and garrisons, a situation that lasted throughout colonial times. More than even the conquest of Mexico, the Mapuche wars would prove to be a gold mine of indiano epic literature; the drama never ended. While at court in Madrid in 1599, the year of a great Mapuche uprising, Vargas Machuca proposed to end the conflict by leading a crack invasion force of four hundred handpicked soldiers, two hundred from Spain and two hundred from the colonies. They would establish a base camp in the interior and then head out in sorties to harass the enemy night and day in groups of ten until the Mapuche were simply so worn out they would be forced to yield. In return for his services, Vargas Machuca asked to be named governor-general of Chile.[22] His plan was not pursued.

There were also fugitive Africans who had escaped slavery living throughout Spanish America, sometimes accompanied by indigenous and European refugees. Unlike the Mapuche, Shuar, Navajo, and other indigenous peoples who flourished well beyond the contact zone, these rebels against colonialism's harsher aspects survived by preying on nearby plantations or mining settlements, or in the case of Panama, Cartagena, and Orizaba (Eastern Mexico), proximity to major trunk lines or ports. These were not guerrilla insurgents like the Mapuche, for the most part, but rather a more parasitical type of rebel, people happy to partake of

the spoils and even some of the trappings of empire, just not on the empire's terms. Maroons universally rejected servitude, of course, but they sometimes accepted Catholic priests. All happily consumed imported material goods such as textiles, tools, and weapons. Some maroon groups had formed more by accident than rebellion, as at Esmeraldas, in northwest Ecuador. Like the so-called Black Caribs of the Caribbean's Windward Islands, the Esmeraldas maroons' existence was traced to early colonial shipwrecks; such castaways formed new "tribes."[23] Although it remains unclear if Vargas Machuca was sent out against them prior to his stint in Portobelo (see the biographical sketch below), maroons were a constant security concern in his New Granada.

One such maroon fighter and contemporary of Vargas Machuca was Captain Luis de Angulo, lieutenant governor of the province of Antioquia, in what is today northwestern Colombia (Vargas Machuca would be named governor of this district just before his death in 1622). In his service report of 1608, Angulo claimed to have headed up and outfitted a punitive expedition, or *castigo*, that went after a band of fugitive Africans menacing the gold mining camps of Zaragoza, an isolated town on the upper Nechí River northeast of modern Medellín. According to Angulo and other witnesses, by 1604 these maroons had formed a lasting community by kidnapping or persuading enslaved African women to join them when they went out to pan for gold or fetch water. Angulo's fight with the Zaragoza maroons lasted a full four years, after which he proudly claimed to have opened new gold mines and put the captured maroons to work in them. The violent frontier quest had come full circle. Slavery and precious metals were deemed a natural pair at the imperial fringe, both yielding, in the words of this neoconquistador, "great service to God and Your Majesty."[24]

More troubling for the crown was the fact that some maroons living in strategically sensitive areas allied with northern European interlopers in exchange for weapons and other goods. In Vargas Machuca's day the foreigners were English, French, or Dutch corsairs, along with a few freelance pirates, seeking plunder. At times they organized themselves to the point of attacking major ports—Cartagena, Santa Marta, San Juan de Puerto Rico, Havana—but mostly they remained a danger to straggling ships and smaller, unguarded coastal settlements. Men such as the English West Country merchant John Hawkins and his cousin, Francis

Map 2 The New Kingdom of Granada in the sixteenth century

Drake, also sought to trade luxury commodities and enslaved Africans for gold, silver, and other products of the Spanish Indies, but this was a dangerous business with harsh reprisals for those who got caught. Spanish mercantilism was built around monopolies, so anything approaching free trade was criminalized, often punishable by death. Vargas Machuca in fact claimed his first job in the Indies was to help chase Drake as he made his way around the world via Spanish America's vulnerable coasts in the late 1570s. Vargas Machuca's last two American posts would be similarly pirate-oriented in that he was to staff and expand the fortresses of Portobelo, in Panama, and then defend the island of Margarita, both perennial objects of foreign looters' and contrabandists' desire.

How to respond to all these challenges in an era when European wars were draining Spain's reservoir of young men as fast as its treasury? In the Indies, as Vargas Machuca argues at length in *Milicia Indiana*, loyal colonists were not only expected but obliged to create militias: ad hoc, self-financed "defense" forces with broad powers to roam dangerous frontiers and even suppress urban riots. Ideally led by veteran soldiers, civilian militias of this kind fought pirates, put down traitors such as Lope de Aguirre, and also tracked and captured maroons, renegades, and apostates. Most of all, however, they fought fringe-dwelling indigenous peoples identified as "rebels" (*alzados*) and "bandits" (*salteadores*).

What was in it for the loyal militiaman besides a good chance at getting maimed, killed, or saddled with a terminal infection? In truth, not much. Indigenous captives could under some circumstances be enslaved and sold for profit, as happened in Chile, New Mexico, and parts of New Granada late in Philip II's reign and afterward, but most often this was not the case, and no Spanish soldiers seem to have gotten rich from the Indian slave trade. More often rewards were, as in the initial conquest era, given to faithful soldiers in the form of *encomiendas*, quasi-feudal grants of indigenous labor and tribute. As another aspect of the crown's "expansion-on-the-cheap" policy, encomiendas continued to be allotted at the fringes long after their disappearance at the center. In the case of New Granada, if one was lucky Amerindians held in encomienda could be made to work in gold, silver, or emerald mines, yielding cash tributes. Others wove textiles, raised livestock, or harvested cash crops.[25] It is telling that Vargas Machuca, for all his fighting and writing, never won title to an encomienda.

THE END OF EL DORADO: LATE SIXTEENTH-CENTURY NEW GRANADA

By 1599, there were few encomiendas to be had anywhere in the Indies, and the so-called New Kingdom of Granada, the core of which had been conquered some sixty years before, was no exception. New Granada was reminiscent of old Granada, in Andalusia, a rugged yet rich land populated by pockets of rebellious non-Christians. Although probed by Spanish interlopers a few years before Mexico and Peru—and quickly discovered to be rich in gold, emeralds, and pearls—New Granada did not live up to the expectations of many El Dorado seekers. Conquistadors Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, Nikolaus de Federmann (sponsored by one of Charles V's German banking families, the Welsers), and Sebastián de Belalcázar did become fabulously wealthy in land and tributaries, as did several dozen of their most loyal followers. Most of these "colonizer" dynasties proved difficult to sustain, however, and even Jiménez de Quesada went on looking for El Dorado in old age.[26] This was due largely to indigenous population decline, which quickly reduced tribute income and access to cheap labor, but also to the fact that the several dozen indigenous ethnic groups living in what is today Colombia recognized no overarching sovereign; there was no analogue here of the Aztec-Mexica or Inca Empires.[27]

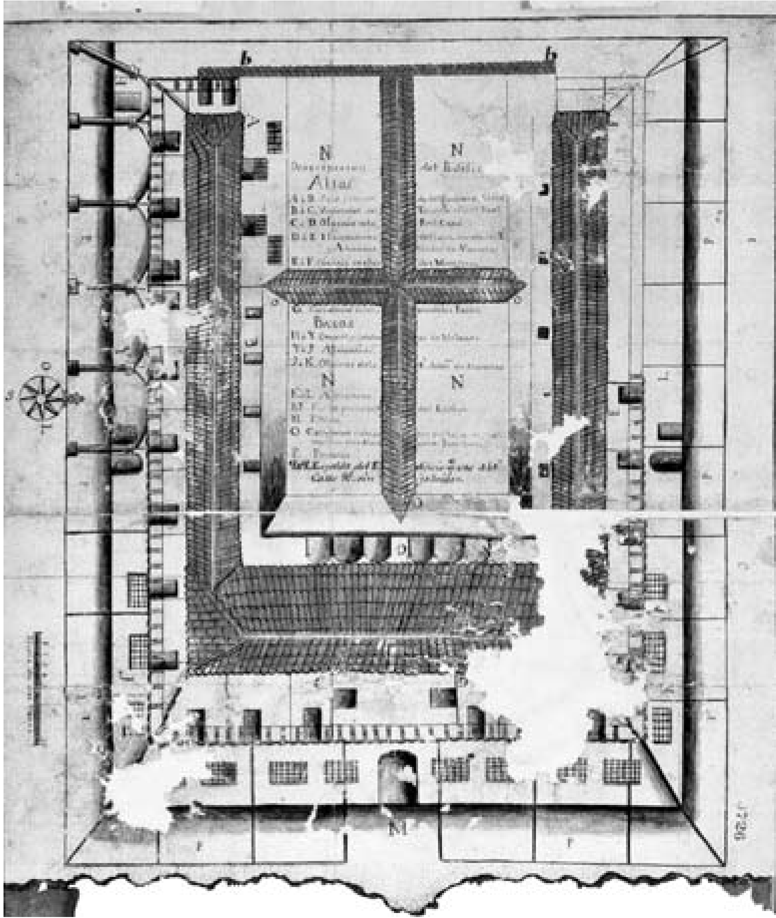
Most north Andean indigenous groups preferred instead to make periodic war on one another, a tendency that persisted well into colonial times. Those who inhabited New Granada's many and interpolated jungles, cloud forests, and hot, scrub-forest lowlands were reputed to be cannibals, besides, compounding an already fierce reputation. Evidence for this practice of "man-eating," however misunderstood, is substantial and widespread. Headhunting was also practiced in several regions, as was human sacrifice.[28] No common language was recognized, and the closest thing to a native empire was the Muisca paramount chiefdom of the high savannas east of the Magdalena River basin. Having conquered these highland agriculturalists after a short and brutal campaign, the Spanish under Jiménez de Quesada established a defensible capital abutting a steep cordillera at Santa Fe de Bogotá in 1538. In honor of Jiménez de Quesada's homeland, the surrounding highland region was dubbed the New Kingdom of Granada.

For a time, Bogotá would vie with Tunja, a colder, higher town about 140 kilometers to the north, for control of the early colony. Under mer-

4
Cathedral Square, Bogotá, Colombia. Photo by Kris Lane

chant pressure an *audiencia*, or high appeals court, was established in the former city in 1549, securing Bogotá's future significance. Tunja and the nearby Villa de Leiva nevertheless continued to be home to most of the old *encomendero* elite, and they were still surrounded by the most populous indigenous settlements as late as the eighteenth century. Technically subject to the Peruvian viceroy at Lima, New Granada nevertheless remained all but autonomous for reasons of distance, forming closer ties with Spain via the Atlantic ports of Santa Marta and Cartagena than it ever did with Lima. Interior regions such as Antioquia (near modern Medellín) and Popayán (near Cali) developed in relative autonomy as well, and jurisdiction over Venezuela remained split between New Granada, Santo Domingo, and New Spain. Thanks to trade with Peru, tiny Panama was independent enough to boast its own audiencia, and remained totally autonomous from New Granada until the early eighteenth century.

New Granada's economy in 1599 was based largely on the export of gold, and to a lesser extent emeralds and pearls, but these industries were already suffering from the twin effects of indigenous population decline and exhausted deposits. As suggested by the case of the Zaragoza maroons above, in many mines enslaved Africans already outnumbered native workers.[29] Highland tributary populations were also disappearing with alarming speed, leaving the encomenderos of Tunja, Leiva, and Bogotá with few



5
Royal Treasury, Bogotá, Colombia.
Courtesy Archivo General de la Nación, Bogotá, Colombia

sources of income to sustain their regal lifestyles. In part for these reasons, coupled with continued immigration of footloose and gullible Spaniards such as Vargas Machuca, belief in the lost kingdom of El Dorado (called variously "Dabeiba," "Meta," "Xerira," and so on) flourished in New Granada long after it faded in Ecuador and Peru.[30]

If he was not to be found in the cloud forests of the Eastern Cordillera or the jungles of the Pacific Coast, then perhaps the famous gilded cacique reigned somewhere to the east, in the Guyana Highlands or upper Putumayo foothills; as noted near the end of *Milicia Indiana*, Vargas Machuca favored this last possibility. Indeed, it was in the midst of Vargas Machuca's New Granadan apprenticeship in the 1580s that the veteran Tunja-based El Dorado seeker, Governor Antonio de Berrío, met Walter Raleigh near