CHAPTER I

THE CONQUISTADORS AND THE REWARDS OF CONQUEST

Bands of warriors in the Reconquest of Spain

The men who undertook the discovery, conquest and settlement of the Indies followed methods and were impelled by collective motivations which both had their origins in the remote past. In order to understand these methods and motivations fully, it is necessary to situate them in their European historical context, even though one must still take into account certain radical modifications brought about by the geographical distance constituted by the Atlantic Ocean, and by action in lands and among races that were quite unknown.

The expansion of Europe from the eleventh century onwards was not the work of peoples, nor even of empires and kingdoms, but rather of spontaneously organised movements and groups of very varying orders of magnitude and importance: bands of Norman warriors in southern Italy; the great collective impulses of the Crusades; the orders of chivalry operating in the Levant, the Baltic and the Iberian Peninsula; companies of Catalans in the Byzantine Empire; and, finally, in Spain, the great process of Reconquest, reflected in the activities of military leaders, orders and even groups of French crusaders, working in loose collaboration with the Christian kingdoms of the peninsula. In all these cases, the recognition or explicit approval by the Church or by the States officially sanctioned, rather than created, enthusiasm for the Holy War, the eschatological motivations of which sustained the Crusades – in short, the spirit of adventure and its realisation. Moreover, similar phenomena appeared outside the boundaries of Christendom: one only has to remember the Muslim warriors of the Holy War (ahl al-ribat).

In the Iberian Reconquest, to a greater extent than in other cases, one is conscious of the presence of the State in the shape of Castile-León, Aragon and Portugal; however, even those kingdoms entrusted part of the task of the regaining of the national territory to small autonomous military forces which, however, consented to be part of a larger mission. At that time, Spain was conceived as a land to be won, with southern frontiers which were always of a provisional character, and still unpacified frontier areas – the

'Extremaduras' – which were in a state of continual warfare (Maravall, 1954). It was, therefore, quite reasonable for the kings to make grants of lands not yet in their possession, and to grant far-reaching rights and privileges to the potential settlers, who were, on the other hand, entrusted with the task of conquering and defending the territory concerned – an undertaking which the grants were designed to encourage. Promises, on the one hand, and free enterprise, on the other, were to be the distinguishing characteristics of Spain's expansion.

In 1089 the Cid persuaded King Alfonso VI of Castile and León to grant him all the castles and lands that he might reconquer from the Muslims, with the right to bequeath them to his successors. This leader had told the King that 'all that he did and won, he did and won for the King's sake, and that those knights and that company which he had in the lands of the Moors he maintained without any expense to the King...for he expected his recompense from the Moors and from their lands' (*Primera crónica general*, 561, quoted by the Muslim chronicler Ben Alcama). Another document which throws light on the Holy War in the peninsula was the privilege granted by the Emperor Alfonso VII to the Aragonese military confraternity of Belchite in 1136 (Rassow, 'La Cofradía de Belchite', *Anuario de historia del derecho español*, III, 1926): the confraternity pledged itself 'never to make peace with the pagans, but to harass and wage war against them constantly'; in return, the King granted them all the lands, castles and towns that they might capture from the Moors, and exempted them from payment of the *Quinto real* (Royal fifth), which was usually payable on all booty captured. The conquest to be carried out by the king's vassals was subject, then and for all time, to the deduction of a percentage of the resulting profits, usually the *Quinto real*, which was due to the king in token of his overlordship.

The Iberian Orders of Santiago, Calatrava, Alcántara and Montesa, and the international ones such as the Templars and the Knights Hospitallers, carried out on a greater scale this task of prosecuting a war that was both a Holy War and a drive for territorial expansion. These great monastic-cum-military organisations on the frontier subjected this warfare, which was prosecuted on a small scale by autonomous bands, to strict rules and discipline, and they also carried out a policy of internal colonisation (Bishko, 1965); but, after the phase of conquest was over, towards the end of the thirteenth century, they simply settled down to the enjoyment of their baronial possessions and privileges.

The cities and towns of the Extremaduras and the frontiers continually carried out, in Moorish lands, hit-and-run raids of the *cabalgada* or

algara type, in the course of which the participants captured horses, livestock and slaves, all of which could be used in barter-trade; the spoils were distributed in accordance with strict rules laid down in the *fueros* (customary privileges). The association of this type of warrior life with the migratory sheep-grazing of New Castile, La Mancha and Extremadura constituted a peculiarly apt geographical framework for the warrior-bands of the Reconquest, and was to have an important genetic influence on the future society of Spanish America (Bishko, 1952, 1965; Carande, 1952).

The Reconquest led to the formulation of a system of political justice which placed great emphasis on concepts derived from the royal duty of rewarding and granting favours to men who had distinguished themselves in war. Liberality on the part of kings and lords, an essential virtue according to the ethic of nobility, was one of the qualities most extolled in the chronicles and in the manuals written for the education of princes. The king should be 'open-handed', according to the Second *Partida*; he should 'honour' everyone according to his deserts, according to the same *Partida* (X, 3), a principle which in the sixteenth century Gregorio López was to formulate more explicitly by stating that this meant making grants according to a person's merits. Prizes and rewards are regulated in detail in an entire section of the Second *Partida*. Chronicles, biographical sketches and full-length biographies written in fifteenth-century Castile indulge in interminable eulogies of the splendid generosity displayed in the granting of favours to their vassals by kings and lords.

Castilian expeditions in Africa and the Canaries

When the Reconquest of Spain's territory – except for the frontier with the small kingdom of Granada – had been completed in the second half of the thirteenth century, the great overseas expansion began. The kings of Aragon carried out military operations in Algiers and Tunis, and conquered Sicily and Sardinia. Of greater interest, however, from the point of view of this study, were the overseas conquests, in the Byzantine Empire in general and particularly in Greece, of the famous Company (*universitas*) of Catalan knights and *almogávares* (invaders). Chiefly recruited among those who had taken part in the fighting on the frontier in Spain, these experts in the capture of booty suddenly came to the forefront, from 1300 onwards, in the history of the Byzantine Empire, and their leader became a 'Caesar'. Subsequently they ruled for eighty years in Athens and Thebes, living as a Company apart from the Greek population employing both feudal and municipal forms of government; these Catalan adventurers provided,

as it were, a rehearsal of what was to take place in the conquest of the Indies.

Castile, on the other hand, expanded by 'passing the sea and going into the Realm of Africa', as Alonso de Cartagena put it in 1435: Barbary, the Atlantic coast of Africa as far as Guinea, and the Canaries. This process of expansion required financial capital to build ships, provision them and pay the men (though the sailors were attracted less by the promise of a daily wage than by that of the fruits of slave-raiding and piracy).

The commercial enterprise of Catalans, Majorcans, Basques, Asturians, Portuguese, Andalusians and Genoese secured the financial base, through the acquisition of loans and the establishment of commercial companies for each expedition, and, later on, for the colonisation of the Canaries (Wölfel, Verlinden, Sancho de Sopranís, Magalhaes Godinho). It is, however, necessary to emphasise, as does Ramos (1965), that commerce was a secondary activity and that the essential element in these enterprises was the sheer adventure inherent in them, the coastal raiding. Furthermore, enterprises of overseas conquest had been regulated in detail in the *Partidas*.

The nucleus of conquerors – the *caudillo*, or military leader, and his *compaña*, or followers – remained unchanged in this new sphere, both on the high seas and overseas. The forms of organisation and the underlying assumptions of the warrior-bands of the Reconquest are clearly recognisable: recruitment on a voluntary basis, but authorised by the State; the granting of future feudal rights over the lands to be discovered and conquered (for example, the grants made in the Canaries to Luis de la Cerda by Pope Clement VI and to Juan de Bethencourt by Henry III of Castile); the distribution of booty according to strict rules; the *Quinto real* levied on all booty captured; *Adelantados* appointed by the Crown but who nevertheless were obliged to finance the conquests, in return for a high percentage of the profits. Above all, there was no modification of the traditional notion that the participants in an enterprise of conquest had a right to be rewarded for their personal efforts and the expenses that they had incurred. In the proclamation that was circulated throughout Andalusia to recruit men for the expedition of the *Adelantado* Juan Rejón to the Canaries in 1480 – which was to be a royal, rather than a baronial, army – the 'venturers' who enlisted were promised that 'they will be given *repartimientos* there in accordance with their quality and services' (Zavala, 1935, 69); and in the *capitulación* signed with Pedro de Vera and his partners for the conquest of Great Canary Island, also in 1480, the King granted the remission of all the *Quintos* on captured slaves, hides, tallow and fish, for the term of five years, in view of 'the toil, venture and risk

incurred for their persons and property, and the ships and men which they are to supply for the said conquest', and they were also granted remission of the *Quintos* on booty that they might capture in other islands inhabited by infidels (Navarrete, I, 541). The concept of a Holy War against Islam was broadened to include the new peoples encountered on the coast of Africa and the off-shore islands; but the enterprise also had a missionary element, which had been absent in the case of Spain and which constituted an innovation. The concepts of Holy War and of Mission occasionally conflicted in the course of the fifteenth century in the Canaries, and some bishops and the Papacy attempted to restrain overt slave-raiding expeditions (Wölfel, 1930; Zavala, 1935).

The legal instruments which constituted the 'técnica de la esperanza' – 'technique of hope', as it is expressed in Ramos (1965, 100) – were the *capitulaciones* which the Crown signed on so many occasions during the fifteenth century with the conquerors. The term *capitulaciones*, that had been used so often to denote the privileges granted to Muslim and Jewish minority groups living under Christian rule, was now used to signify the privileges granted to those who enlisted for an enterprise and committed themselves to it. The captains used to form trading firms and acquire financial loans in order to fulfil their obligations; but the basis of the human relationships was still the old Castilian *compaña*, consisting of the military chieftain and his warrior followers, who had to be rewarded with their shares of the booty.

The expeditions to the Indies

Although the initial objective of the Catholic sovereigns had been to establish in the Indies entrepôts for the trade in gold, on the Portuguese model and as a Crown monopoly, keeping overseas only a small garrison of soldiers and the indispensable minimum of settlers, the basis of the enterprises was still, originally, the personal initiative of the discoverer in possession of a duly signed *capitulación*. The legal formulae and the techniques employed in the enterprises of Africa and the Canaries were transferred to the Indies, at first without any significant modifications, until fresh geographical discoveries and previously unforeseen developments caused an immense increase in the magnitude of those enterprises.

The *capitulación* authorising the discoveries of Columbus provided that, in the event of new islands and continents actually being discovered and conquered, he would receive a percentage of the royal profits derived from commerce, trade and barter, and the same document conferred several

jurisdictional and governmental privileges. That is to say, the enterprise of discovery was broadened to include all the other possible objectives of the 'conquest', a word which was still employed in the strict etymological sense of the 'search' for something worth acquiring. Very soon, the commercial forces based in Andalusia – chiefly of Spanish or Genoese origin – were bringing pressure to bear to ensure for themselves the monopoly of the supply of goods to the entrepôt in Hispaniola, and also to obtain licences for barter-trade and discovery in lands not discovered by the High Admiral, particularly on the mainland. These efforts resulted in the voyages of Ojeda, Yáñez Pinzón, Juan de la Cosa, Americo Vespucio, Niño, Guerra, Lepe and Bastidas, between 1499 and 1504. The second voyage of Ojeda in 1502, as Governor of Coquibacoa, is of particular interest because of the personal participation in the expedition of the two merchants who had advanced the money for it, and, more especially, because Ojeda, rather than confining himself to barter-trade on the coast, wanted to penetrate into the interior and find the sources of the gold; as a base, he built some forts, which constituted the first Spanish attempt at settlement on the South American continent (Ramos, 1961). Although the expedition was a complete failure, it was, nevertheless, a symptom of a new trend towards permanent territorial dominion, based on criteria more far-reaching than purely commercial considerations.

However, the real base for the conquests, in the strict sense of the word, was to be Hispaniola, the principal nucleus of Spanish settlement – the most probable figure for the total population, that given by Las Casas for 1509, was 300 *vecinos* (*Historia general*, II, 374) – and the chief administrative headquarters. In a gradual process which took place between 1493 and 1505, the Genoese-Portuguese conception of a fortified entrepôt and a royal monopoly of the barter-trade in gold gave way to the concept of a permanently populated colony, where the Spanish *vecinos* could be maintained by Indian labour. This process has been described in detail in recently published research (Zavala, 1935; Meza Villalobos, 1971; Pérez de Tudela, 1956). There gradually developed a policy of encouraging mining operations, and lands and tax concessions were granted to the *vecinos*. Bobadilla proclaimed that kings 'were not farmers or merchants, nor did they require those lands for their own profit, but for the succour and relief of their vassals' (Hernando Colón, quoted in Pérez de Tudela, 1956, 177). Gold was obtained from the Indians not only by barter but also by means of the tribute paid by the chiefs to the king. The Spanish settlers lived grouped together in the city of Santo Domingo and in smaller towns; the instructions given to Ovando in 1501 and 1503 and the *capitulaciones* signed

with Luis de Arriaga in 1501 provided a legal definition for the urban base of the population. The hired colonists of earlier years disappeared, giving place to the *vecinos*, who owned town and country houses and cattle ranches, and were authorised to trade in all commodities (with certain exceptions, small in number but extremely valuable – for example, precious metals, slaves, salt and horses), and to elect the *Ayuntamientos* and *Cabildos*. The *vecinos* mined gold, and devoted themselves to agriculture and cattle-raising, thanks to Indian labour which was organised by law on a basis of personal service according to the *encomienda* system, by the *Real Cédula* of 20 December 1503, the purpose of which was to establish a convenient method for evangelisation of the natives and to encourage the settlement and systematic planting of crops on the island. In other words, the Crown was renouncing the concept of a monopolistic entrepôt on the Portuguese model, and legal definition was given even at this early stage to a specifically Castilian type of settlement, based on property-owning colonists, who paid to the Crown only its fifth share of precious metals, the customs (the *almojarifazgo*), and tithes for the maintenance of the Church.

Hispaniola was to be the starting-point for the bands of conquistadors during the boom years of the island's economy (1505–10), and it was to be men left without *encomiendas* who were to form the mass of those groups based on voluntary association which were to conquer Puerto Rico, Cuba, New Spain, Central America and Venezuela. Moreover, the men of Darien and Panama were to reach the Inca Empire and conquer every province of it. Other groups of conquistadors were to found the New Kingdom of Granada and La Asunción, at the other end of the continent.[1] These events took place in accordance with a compact time-schedule, from 1508 (Puerto Rico) to 1540–53 (Chile); the conquests of the River Plate region and the areas north of the Aztec Empire were, however, postponed as being of only peripheral importance. The process of conquest, according to Chaunu (1959), was still expanding, between 1525 and 1535, in absolute and, above all, in relative terms; between 1535 and 1540 the process of advance reached a 'plateau' as far as Spanish dominion over the native population was concerned. Subsequently, the conquest of the less densely populated parts of the continental land mass took place at a very much reduced rate (VIII, 147).

The origin of the conquistadors reflected the entire gamut of the social spectrum of Castile, with the sole exception (save for a few insignificant cases) of the families of the grandees. Of the ninety-one conquistadors who received *encomiendas* in Panama in 1519 and 1522, one finds three *hidalgos* (to which, however, one must add ten Basques and men from the hill region of

Santander, regions where everyone, regardless of origin, was considered an *hidalgo*); five squires; twelve retainers of nobles; ten men with professional qualifications or drawn from the urban middle class; twenty craftsmen; eleven farmers; three pilots and ships' masters; eleven seamen; seven described themselves as being without occupation and, moreover, declined to declare that of their fathers (this group included Diego de Almagro and Sebastián de Benalcázar); and nine gave no information on this point. To summarise the findings of this inquiry, we might say that, of those ninety-one men, forty-one small farmers, craftsmen and members of the middle class had come from a completely non-military background in Spain, but in the Indies they had become transformed into conquistadors. The remaining fifty, because they were *hidalgos*, were retainers of nobles or, because they belonged to the category of adventurers without known occupation, had already been military men in the peninsula. Not only did the *encomenderos* of Panama come from very varied social origins, but also their regional origins were just as varied. Of the eighty-eight who declared their origins, Andalusians (34.7 per cent) predominated by a wide margin, followed by Extremadurans (21.4 per cent) – the totals being twenty-nine and eighteen men respectively. Less important numerically were the men from Santander and the Basque provinces (ten), New Castile (eight men), Old Castile (seven) and León (five). Asturias and the kingdom of Aragon had only one or two representatives. Finally, there were three Italians and two Levantines, apart from four men whom it was not possible to classify (Góngora, 1962, III). A predominant place was, therefore, held in the case of Panama (the earliest settlement so far discovered of a city founded by conquistadors) by the men of Andalusia and Extremadura, and, with regard to social rank and occupation, civilians were only barely outnumbered by military men.

These figures give an idea of the trends observable if a large sample is considered. However, although men of lowly social origin from Andalusia were numerically preponderant, for the obvious reason of their proximity to the port of embarkation, Extremadura and the two Castiles had a marked qualitative advantage; particularly Extremadura, the most poor and rural province, which was largely owned by the Military Orders of Santiago and Alcántara. The encouragement of individual initiative provided by poor agricultural land, and the pattern of chivalrous conduct exemplified by the Orders (even though by 1500 this was not much more than a memory) undoubtedly contributed to this process of qualitative selection.

Around 1512 the decline in the Indian population of Santo Domingo constituted the most urgent problem in the settlement of the Indies. From

that time, therefore, bands of *rancheadores* sent by the *vecinos* began to move to the 'useless islands', or even as far as Venezuela, to capture natives for use as slaves in the principal island. In groups of fifty or sixty, *baquianos*, expert guides and trackers employed by the *vecinos* of Puerto Plata, were commanded by their *adalides*, as happened in the case of the raids on the Barbary Coast carried out at the same time.

An enterprise on a larger scale, with the participation of conquistadors acting on their own account, has been described by Bernal Díaz del Castillo in the first chapter of his famous work: a group among those who had reached the mainland and found themselves out of employment through lack of opportunities asked Pedrarias Dávila for authorisation to go to Cuba, which from 1515 onwards was beginning to acquire importance economically, 'because there was nothing left to conquer', since Balboa had already completed his task. In Cuba, Velázquez, the *Adelantado*, promised to assign Indians to them, but time passed and he never fulfilled this promise; thereupon they decided 'to join forces, one hundred and ten of us comrades who had come from the mainland and others who were in Cuba but who had no Indians, and we enlisted under a *hidalgo* called Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, who was a rich man and had a village of Indians in that island, who was to be our captain; to set out on our own account to search for and discover new lands, thus to find employment for ourselves'. They had refused, according to Bernal Díaz, to become mere slave-raiders in the employ of Velázquez; they bought three ships (one of them acquired with a loan furnished by the *Adelantado* himself), ships' stores, glass beads to trade with the Indians, enlisted a chaplain and a *Veedor* (the official responsible for collecting the *Quinto real*) and finally set sail from San Cristóbal, Cuba. This is a classic description of a voyage of discovery carried out at the *costa y minción* of the participants. The collective motivation was obvious enough to Bernal Díaz: the surplus of men, in relation to the *encomiendas* available, was the impulse underlying this venture, this migration, from one land to another. It should be added that the same outlet was sought by *vecinos* indebted or ruined by the death of their Indians, like those who went with Velázquez himself from Hispaniola to Cuba in 1511 (Las Casas, *Historia general*, II, 506). The *encomienda* was, therefore, both the prize of conquest and the stimulus to further conquest; it was the mainspring of the collective movement: this was clearly recognised, even thirty or forty years later, in Peru, by La Gasca and Cañete, when they authorised fresh conquests to relieve the pressure imposed by the arrival of a new wave of Spaniards in that country. It was 'in order to rid these realms of people...who could not all find sustenance in this land', as La

Gasca put it when he reported to Spain in 1548, that he had sent an expeditionary force to Chile under Pedro de Valdivia. The Viceroy Cañete had special authorisation from Charles V to send out fresh expeditionary forces: there were at that time in Peru a thousand men with adequate means of support – according to the report of Cañete himself, made before leaving for Spain in 1555 (Levillier, *Gobernantes del Perú*, I, 252) – and there were a further seven thousand who were redundant, who 'say that they are as good as the others; there is nothing else for it but to rid the land of them and, because there are so many of them, this can only be done by means of making fresh discoveries'. This policy resulted in the steady expansion of the Empire from Peru towards Chile, Upper Peru and Tucumán, between 1548 and 1557.

In addition to this underlying tendency, however, there were actions resulting from the personal initiative of the *caudillos*. Even Bernal Díaz, anxious as always to emphasise the role of the common soldier in the conquering armies, still had to admit that Francisco Hernández de Córdoba had an *encomienda* and was a rich man before he took over command of the enterprise. The same is true of the three leaders in Panama who between 1524 and 1526 signed a contract for the discovery and conquest of Peru, and of Pedro de Valdivia, who had an *encomienda* in Porco before he left for Chile in 1540; Hernán Cortés, although he did not figure as a colonist of the first rank, either in Hispaniola or in Cuba, nevertheless had Indian servants and owned ranches, and had been Secretary to the Cabildo in Azua and an *alcalde ordinario* in Santiago, Cuba. All those men left behind their fortunes and incurred enormous debts to finance the new expeditions. The governors and *Adelantados* who did not participate directly in the expeditions sometimes contributed large sums from their personal fortunes to finance the new enterprises; and, although they sometimes had recourse to spending money which had already been collected in the Royal Exchequer during the previous governorship, their excuse for behaving thus was the same as that given by Cortés at the end of his Fourth Narrative Letter: he had indeed, up to 1524, taken 62,000 gold pesos, but before that he had spent all he had, and had incurred debts of 30,000 pesos, and the profits for the king had been over 1,000 per cent. Thus, whereas the common soldier in the conquering armies was spurred on chiefly by material need, the *caudillos* were moved to a greater extent by the urge to imperial expansion.

The enterprises of conquest, especially those overseas, required the support of considerable monetary capital. For this reason, they presuppose the previous economic development of Hispaniola and Cuba, which