

VILLAGE OF PALMA DE MICERGILIO

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The noble system in Palma is medieval in origin and was granted on September 2, 1342 by King Alfonso XI to Admiral Egidio Bocanegra in Algeciras. Some historians have thought that the reference to Micer Gilio referred to Egidio Bocanegra. He was the first lord of Palma, native of Genoa, brother of the Dux Simon Bocanegra, and served the King of Castile, Alfonso XI in the Reconquest of the Strait.¹ *A priori*, the village of Palma de Micer Gilio is a clear reference to the 4th lord of Palma, Micer Gilio Bocanegra. He was the grandson of the admiral, posthumous son of Alfonso Bocanegra with Urraca Alfonso, who used as his name a mix of Spanish and Italian, resulting in Gilio.² With this name he passed into the history of the Reconquest at the service of King Juan II: “micer Gilio, lord of Palma”.³

Other historians are inclined to believe that the name Micer Gilio is a corruption of the name Egidio.⁴ The Catholic kings ennobled Captain Luis Portocarrero as lord of Palma de Micer Gilio;⁵ and the records of the fortuitous title of the village of Palma are extensive. For the history of the Spanish nobility this is a permanent record of Egidio Bocanegra.⁶ In the General Archive of the Indies, “Palma de Micergilio” as a place of origin can be noted on the passenger lists.⁷ Now that we know Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's

¹ Manuel Nieto Cumplido, *Palma del Río en la Edad Media (855-1503). Señorío de Bocanegra y Portocarrero* (Córdoba, 2004), 56.

² *Ibid.*, 86.

³ *Crónica del Rey Juan II de Castilla*, Cap. XLVII, 51.

⁴ Joaquín Hazaña y la Rúa, *Maese Rodrigo, 1444-1509* (Sevilla: Librería e Imp. de Izquierdo y Compañía, 1909), 21.

⁵ Andrés Bernáldes, *Historia de los Reyes Católicos*, I, 189.

⁶ Gonzalo Argote de Molina, *Nobleza del Andalucía*, L. II (Sevilla: 1588), 245.

⁷ AGI, *Catálogo de Pasajeros a Indias durante los siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII*, Vol. V (1567-1577), I, (1567-1574), Luis Romera Iruela y Maria del Carmen Galbis Diez (Ministerio de Cultura, 1980), 33: “Diego de

place of birth, we ask ourselves what life was like in that village at the time of his childhood.

According to Dr. Kramer's findings, in 1532 Cabrillo declared that he was 35 years old, from which we deduce that he could have been born in Palma around 1497; at other times he says simply that he is over 30. This was a tumultuous period in Spain's history. The Catholic kings had reconquered the region with the capture of Granada in 1492. The captain general, Luis Portocarrero, 7th lord of Palma, military knight and poet, participated actively in those last battles against the Nazari kingdom.⁸

The village of Palma was repopulated in 1343 with *Mudéjars* from Castile. In 1371, King Enrique II granted protection to that population of Moors. The 7th lord, Luis Portocarrero, maintained this privilege and lordly protection until the end of the 15th century, and this was the largest Moorish *aljama* of Andalucía.⁹ This was a Muslim community, with their own civil and religious laws and a lifestyle that could be maintained in the Moorish quarter. It had baths, stores, and butcher shops; they had their own customs and traditions, and submitted to the lord of the village. The community survived until the beginning of the 16th century. The other community, smaller but present in the village of Palma, was the Jewish population. The village synagogue is documented in 1383 as being inside the city walls: a distinguishing feature of the

Frias, natural de Palma de Micergilio...”; AGI, Audiencia de México, 1090, L.7, fols. 233v-234r; AGI, Contratación, 5536, L.5, fol. 116.

⁸ Nieves Gómez López, *Luis Portocarrero VII señor des Palma del Rio. Encuentro con un poeta desconocido del siglo XV* (Córdoba: Gráficas Minerva, 2004).

⁹ Francisco Fernández y González, *Estado social y político de los mudéjares de Castilla* (Madrid: Imprenta Joaquín Muñoz, 1866), LXXII, 389-392.

synagogue was its proximity to the lord's castle.¹⁰ In notarized documents, the names and occupations of some Jewish inhabitants are mentioned: Cag Ysrael, Cag Laparilla, Samuel Chacatilla, Axer, to name a few.¹¹ There was an important Jewish population in the village of Micer Gilio until close to the end of the 15th century.¹²

In 1473, a great number of converted Jews (*conversos*) from the city of Cordoba fled, not only in the face of persecution and the theft of their property, but also murder without remorse. The *conversos* found refuge in the village of Palma.¹³ The 7th lord incorporated this skilled workforce, who contributed to the economic and cultural life of Palma, and whose Christian population was still waging war to realize the full Reconquest of Granada. As Luis Portocarrero vanquished the Moors, he also obtained recognition, and economic and human spoils of war. For example, after the siege of Malaga in 1487, the Catholic kings rewarded the lord of Palma with an allotment of Moors, who were transferred to his village of Palma.¹⁴

Let us imagine a village where new and old Christians lived in harmony with the Moorish and Jewish quarters, each maintaining the representations of their own faith. All of this, under the long shadow of the Inquisition, which sought to secure religious unity through the imposition of royal decrees that would undermine those minority

¹⁰ Pilar Ostos Salcedo, "Documentos del Hospital de San Sebastián de Palma del Río (1345-1508)", *Ariadna, Revista de Investigación*, N. 9, 77: "Unas casas que son aquí en Palma de la çerca adentro, que se tienen con casas de don Çuleman Açequily e con casas de la Sinoga [*sic*] de los judíos". (*Some houses that are here in Palma, from inside the wall, that are next to the houses of Çuleman Açequily and the houses of the Synagogue of the Jews.*)

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63, 77.

¹² Luis Suárez Fernández, *Documentos acerca de la expulsión de los judíos* (Madrid: CSIC, 1964), 257: "Vos los dichos judíos de la dicha ciudad de Córdoba con los judíos de Palma de micer Gilio". (*You, the said Jews from the said city of Córdoba with the Jews of Palma de micer Gilio.*)

¹³ Nieto Cumplido, *Palma del Río en la Edad Media*, 117.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

communities. Every day, a growing number of people opted for conversion, and therefore every day more and more people were terrified of being denounced to the Holy Inquisition. These converts were the so-called crypto-Jews and crypto-Muslims.

The village of Palma was enjoying some years of development under the 7th lord, Luis Portocarrero Bocanegro in the year 1497, when according to his own testimony, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was born. The population at that time is estimated to be nearly 5,000 inhabitants. The majority of them were Christians, but there were prominent minority groups, whose provenance and incorporation into late medieval society we have discussed.¹⁵ The Reconquest of Granada had ended, increasing the territory of Castile, unifying the country politically and religiously, controlling and improving the status of the nobility, which, because of their economic and military support, received privileges and benefits. Luis Portocarrero, Renaissance man, chose to express his enviable position with the construction of a new manorial palace and the promotion of religious establishments. With the increase in the population, lord Portocarrero decided to enlarge the village, which at the time had only one parochial church within its walls. In honour of San Cristobal and Santa Lucia, two devotional chapels were built in the valley. A convent of Dominican friars was founded next to the wall in 1400, and continued to be expanded throughout the century. During this century, in the outskirts five brotherhood associations and hospitals were established: San Bartolomé, La Caridad, San Sebastián, Cuerpo de Dios and Santa María de la Coronada, in addition to two chapels of the Virgin of Belén.

¹⁵ Ibid., 197.

At the turn of the century, two nunneries were founded: The Order of Santa Clara and The Franciscan Order of Our Lady of Belén.

This was the urban landscape at the end of the 15th century, meeting the needs of a predominantly Christian society. Meanwhile, the religious minorities were becoming increasingly unsettled by royal decrees calling for the expulsion of Jews, and mass conversion of the Moorish and Jewish populations. The Inquisition was introduced by papal bull in order to carry out these programs of religious uniformity and persecution of heretics.¹⁶ The Holy Office (of the Inquisition) wreaked havoc among some of the citizens of Palma, who were accused of transgressions that threatened the prevailing doctrine.¹⁷ At the turn of the century, executions of converted Jews were carried out by the Inquisition in Palma: Alonso de Cazalla, protégé of lord Portocarrero of the village of Micergilio; María Díaz, arrested and burned in 1492. María de Cazalla, born in Palma in 1487, went to live in Guadalajara in 1510, and was accused by the Inquisition of being an *alumbrada* (an *illuminated* one, a practitioner of a mystical form of Christianity that was considered to include heretical teachings), enduring several legal proceedings and her own arrest in 1532.¹⁸ Thus, at the time of Cabrillo's birth, the Inquisition was carrying out a systematic persecution of converted Jews and Moors in Palma. Despite the protection of the 7th lord of Palma, the Cazallas were not spared from the inquisitorial interrogations. During Cabrillo's lifetime, fear was widespread throughout the population, and not even illustrious friars, mystic writers such as the author Franciscan Bernabé de Palma, could

¹⁶ *Exigit sinceræ devotionis.*

¹⁷ Álvaro Castro Sánchez, *La mala planta, diez casos de la historia de la Inquisición en Palma del Río (siglos XV-XIX)* (Palma del Río, Colepar Ceparia, 2016).

¹⁸ María Dolores Esteva de Llobet, "Las cárceles interiores de María de Cazalla. Análisis de un proceso inquisitorial", *Estudios Humanísticos, Filología*, N. 18 (Universidad de León, 1996), 37.

avoid his book *Via Spiritus*, published in 1532, from being added to the list of forbidden books. Cabrillo was born during this period of religious repression, after the Reconquest of Granada, but with a world to discover beginning in 1492, with the exploration of the New World.

And now we arrive at one of the most vexing questions of Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo's biography: Who is Cabrillo? In the documentation studied so thoroughly by Dr. Wendy Kramer, under interrogation he has told us that he comes from the village of Palma de Micer Gilio and he has also given us a closer idea of his age.

Cabrillo embarked on the conquest of the New World in 1514, with thousands of others, signing up for the journey to a land where they could perhaps find their fortune, or start a new life for any reason whatsoever.¹⁹ But we know next to nothing about his enigmatic second surname: Cabrillo. We use the adjective *enigmatic* because he combines or substitutes it at his whim and according to circumstances: Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, de Palma, from the village of Palma de Micergilio, merchant, squire. One might well ask, why?

Juan Rodriguez was a very common name in 16th century Spain, making it necessary to add another identifier for official documents. Doctor Kramer points out several hypotheses about the word "cabrillo". It could be a description of a person's trade, or a nickname or surname. In a document from the Municipal Archive of Palma del Río,

¹⁹ Ostos Salcedo, "Documentos del Hospital de San Sebastián de Palma del Río (1509-1519)", *Ariadna, Revista de Investigación*, N. 12, 78: "Alfonso López de Amor (...) dixo al dicho señor alcalde mayor quél va a tierra firme en compañía del obispo frey Juan Cabedo". (*Alfonso López de Amor (...) informed the said chief magistrate that he was accompanying the bishop friar Juan Cabedo to the mainland (tierra firma).*)

cited in this book, there is a list of three men who identify themselves by the following trades: farmer, barber and “cabrillo”.

The trade at which Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo excelled was as a shipwright in the construction of ships, and he was also a good caulker, adept at the use of *pez* for tarring, which is a product of the distillation of turpentine from conifers and was used as pitch to be spread on a ship’s timbers.²⁰ In the history of New Spain it is thought that the first ships for the conquest of Mexico were built in 1521 by carpenter Martin López and four Spanish collaborators, one of them Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, who knew how to prepare the tar or pitch from pine woods nearby. This was an extraordinary naval odyssey that consisted of the mobilization of thousands of indigenous inhabitants to cut down trees for the construction of the thirteen brigantines, and the transportation of all the structures for the vessels from the mountain to the lagoon. But apparently only one person knew how to make the essential tar: Cabrillo. A young man who knew the 16th century port city of Seville, the wharves and dockyards that employed a prosperous population that could dream of the journey to America. The populations bordering the riverbanks of the Guadalquivir were well acquainted with the trade of ship building, and were employed in rowboats, barges and other port activities for the transport of goods from the towns of Palma, Peñaflor, Lora, Cantillana and Alcalá, to the metropolis of Seville. And here again appears Palma de Micergilio.²¹ There are many references to the economic potential of the prosperous village of lord Luis Portocarrero, rich in agriculture and livestock, from

²⁰ Ibid., 100: The trade of caulker was noted in Palma del Río in the early 16th century, “Cristobal García, galafate”.

²¹ Enrique Otte, *Sevilla siglo XVI: materiales para su historia económica* (Sevilla: Centro de Estudios Andaluces, 2008), 131-132.

which young adventurers would arrive in Seville in order to ship out to the New World.²² It is most likely that young Cabrillo started learning the trade of ship building between the rivers Guadalquivir and Genil that flow through the village of Palma. The transportation of wood down the Guadalquivir, in the form of rafts, had taken place from time immemorial. The pine trees reached Palma, carried by the waters of the river, and continued on to the port of Seville. Shipwrights and caulkers were needed to build and maintain wharves, ports, water wheels, wells, riverboats, fisheries, and even wool, dye, and fulling mills on the banks of the Genil and Guadalquivir rivers.

But if Cabrillo was not the name of a trade, perhaps it was a nickname, although we doubt it. However, the use of Cabrillo as a nickname did occur in some areas of Spain.²³ After his death, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was sometimes referred to as "*el viejo*", the old one, to differentiate him from his oldest son, who had the same name. The evidence exists: Cabrillo was used as a surname, and certainly Juan Rodríguez used it as such.

Cabrillo was a medieval surname that, although not used extensively, to our surprise it was used by Moorish families in several regions of Spain. On a list of Moors and their interactions with the Cathedral chapterhouse of Toledo, a certain Ferrand Ruis Cabrillos appears.²⁴ We also found a powerful *morisco* (converted Moors) lineage with

²² Enrique Otte, *Sevilla y sus mercaderes a finales de la Edad Media* (Sevilla: Universidad de Sevilla, 1996), 48.

²³ Dionisia Gómez-Sánchez, "El habla y las tradiciones populares de Fuente-Álamo", *Al-Basit, Revista de estudios albacetenses*, N. 56 (Albacete, 2011), 242.

²⁴ Miguel Fernando Gómez Vozmedio, "Delincuencia y conflictividad morisca en tierras toledanas (ss. XV-XVII)", *Anales Toledanos*, N. 37 (Toledo: 1999), 98.

the surname Cabrillo in the Eastern region of the Iberian peninsula (the Levant) and evidence of their preference to intermarry with other *morisco* families in the region.²⁵

After the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, there followed the decrees of 1502 directed at the Moorish population, giving them the stark choice between exile or conversion to Christianity. Slowly but surely this community started to disappear, succumbing to their stigmatization. It is certainly surprising to find record of the surname Cabrillo amongst this scarce Moorish population. The records of this surname in the 16th century are extremely limited, and until now in the list of Spaniards in the Indies there has only been one, namely the conquistador, *encomendero* and explorer, Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo - this being the very man who crossed Dr. Wendy Kramer's path.

²⁵ Enrique Pérez Cañamares, "Aplicación de una herramienta informática al estudio antropológico de la cuestión morisca", doctoral thesis supervised by Honorio Manuel Velasco (Uned, 2015), 154-155.