4. Incentives to Study

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part II
OFFICE AND HONOR
Castile before the nineteenth century had a wide variety of students, each with different reasons for matriculating at Salamanca or Seville. Alongside grandees, few of whom bothered to acquire university titles and degrees, were the preprofessionals, grinding through the long course toward a doctorate. These two types represented opposite poles; the majority of students were somewhere in between, but it is impossible to know exactly why they went to university. Their diaries are virtually nonexistent and their notebooks are yet to be found; thus what is known about the reasons why these youths chose to study comes mainly from what others said about them. Such sources, however, are commonly distorted and exaggerated; the old, the adult, in any age, have a tendency to put forward gross generalizations, even total misconceptions about the goals and motivations of the young. But it is curious that contemporaries in sixteenth-century Castile, many of whom were university graduates themselves, shared one opinion as to why students went to university. They were unanimous in their appraisal that students were interested primarily in the jobs to which academic titles could lead. The term they used was *premio* or reward, meaning an office in the civil service or the church or merely a pension or income of some sort. If this strong sense of “careerism” existed in Habsburg Spain, it was not peculiar to the university; one historian a few years ago used the term “empleomania” in order to describe the strong preference seventeenth-century Spaniards displayed for careers in public office.¹

In part empleomania is symptomatic of a society in which the dominant upper- and middle-class values are “aristocratic” in the sense that manual labor and commercial enterprise are demeaned while that of the *rentier* is applauded, even if the rentier’s income is derived from office rather than land. Furthermore, it is symptomatic of a preindustrial, overwhelmingly agricultural economy in which the major employer of the small minority of males not engaged in food production, crafts, and other manual jobs is government, spiritual and secular. In Habsburg Spain neither industry nor trade was sufficiently developed to support more than a fraction of the nonlaboring population. Investment was limited largely to government finances, overseas trade, and, above all, land and a variety of public offices. It was toward these charges that university education led, since

real estate, finance, and trade, at least in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were never thought to require any formal education beyond that of literacy, numeracy, apprenticeship, and on-the-job experience.

Documentation for this “careerist” interpretation of university students in Castile is not overabundant, but a few quotations from contemporaries should prove the point. For example, in reference to students belonging to the colegios mayores, members of the Royal Council who were in charge of appointments to royal office advised Philip III that “they [the colegiales] see as the goal of their studies service to Your Royal Majesty and with this in mind, they spend their time and money in preparation, seeking only to be rewarded by Your Royal Hand and not by the practice of law.” These councillors, university graduates in their own right, consistently saw royal offices as the goal of the colegiales, and this view was shared by others less directly involved in the business of appointment. The Licentiate Mantilla, writing to Philip II in 1587 on the necessity of maintaining orderly self-government in the colleges, made the following suggestion: “The best means to achieve this end is for Your Majesty to dangle government posts in front of their eyes and then let them know that whatever news comes to Your Attention, the good will be rewarded, and the evil punished.” An anonymous statement in 1636, commenting upon whether the colegios mayores were under ecclesiastical or royal jurisdiction, put it this way: “... it appears that the principal aim of the colleges is more political than spiritual because most of the colegiales are training for Your Royal Service in secular posts.” Finally, Doctor Juan Queipo de Llano, president of the chancilleria in Valladolid and a graduate of the Colegio Mayor de San Bartolomé, could be said to have summed up current opinions of the colegiales when he wrote: “the love of letters brings only a few to the colleges.”

Though members of the colegios mayores constituted only a small segment of the universities, countless ordinary students shared in their aspirations. This is at least the conclusion that could be drawn from the following statement written by the Junta de Educación in 1636. “Because they [the students] direct their studies towards the ‘rewards,’ both ecclesiastical and secular, that they hope to gain afterwards, the principle that must stimulate those within the university to work and to take advantage of their surroundings must be the just distribution of the ‘rewards’. Unfortunately, students’ views on this question are difficult to obtain, but a brief reference as to why they sought academic titles may be found in a passage written in 1631 by a graduate of the College-University of Sancti
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Spiritus in Oñate: “Necessarily, I had to do some work in this noted college; but one day I knew that I had to leave it, and if I hoped to reach greater honors, I would have to imitate other great men who reached these prizes through their virtue and continuous work in their studies. In truth, I was not lacking in these motives in 1625 when I began to read a lesson from ten to eleven in addition to the obligation to read philosophy every morning and afternoon.”

Another glimpse into the student world lies in the famous 1617 work of Cristóbal Suárez de Figueroa, El Passagero. In the advice which a physician gives his son about which university career to follow, “laws and canons,” “a noble and illustrious profession, the heart and soul of the cities,” receives the highest recommendation because of its “security of promotions.” The father then comments on the ease with which the necessary degrees are earned and on the possibility of obtaining a “perpetual seat,” meaning an office with life tenure, either in the “West,” the Indies, or in one of the tribunals in Spain. These positions, the father claims, will supply anyone with all of his needs. And then hinting at the honors and riches that await law graduates who obtain the valued posts, he queries: “Is there anyone who does not want Mayorazgos, Comendadores, Consejeros, Títulos, if it is possible?” The wise father, however, soon died, and the son, a rather independent fellow, opts for theology “because of the secure rewards it customarily brings to its bearer in the competitions for professorships and high offices.”

It seems reasonable, therefore, to consider the prospect of civil or ecclesiastical office or at least a career in one of the liberal professions as a strong inducement to higher education in Habsburg Spain. Naturally, not all students, particularly the offspring of leading noble families, shared in this careerism. Yet it would be difficult to dispute that the Castilian universities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were filled with students lacking in professional aspirations. The remainder of this chapter is intended to outline the availability of such professional offices and careers, since the fluctuating prospects of employment were crucial to the changing fortunes of the universities in Castile.

The majority of government positions open to letrados were in a complex of offices that for want of a better description can be called the letrado hierarchy, that is, those positions which were subject to the ten-year rule on legal study set by Ferdinand and Isabel. Its roots consisted of hundreds of lesser magisterial offices distributed among the towns of

7BUS: Ms. 1925, folio 172, letter of 27.VI.1631.
Castile, a variety of lesser judicial posts in the councils and tribunals of the crown, and what were called “temporal offices” of justice, positions in which the officers were appointed on a short-term, revolving basis. Among these temporal posts the only ones which did not belong exclusively to letrados were the \textit{corregimientos}. In frontier and rebellious regions and in some of the larger cities, corregidores were men of a military background. Known as \textit{capa y espada} officers, corregidores of this genre were obliged to have with them one or more letrado deputies to preside over matters of law and justice. Common in the early years of the sixteenth century when the monarchy was still insecure, these “unlettered” corregidores gradually disappeared.\textsuperscript{10} By the seventeenth century, jurists, both as corregidores and deputies, dominated this class of offices.\textsuperscript{11} 

More senior positions in the letrado hierarchy comprised those offices known as the \textit{plazas de asiento}, that is, offices with life tenure that provided the office-holder with retirement at half-pay after twenty years of service. They included the well-paid, influential magisterial positions of \textit{oidor}, \textit{fiscal}, and \textit{alcalde} on all royal tribunals in Castile and the New World and were monopolized by letrados. Higher up were the positions on the letrado councils situated at the Royal Court, among them, the councils of Castile, \textit{Cruzada}, Supreme Inquisition, Military Orders, and the \textit{Contaduría Mayor de Hacienda} or Auditor’s Office of the Exchequer. The Council of the Indies and the magistrates of its subordinate body, the \textit{Casa de Contratación} (House of Trade) in Seville, were also part of Castile’s letrado hierarchy, although this council, in response to demands for military expertise among its members, admitted a number of \textit{capa y espada} (literally, cape and sword, i.e., noble) members in the seventeenth century. Acting much like a council were the supreme criminal magistracies of Castile, the \textit{Alcaldes de Casa y Corte}, all of whom were letrados. The Council of Italy was also a letrado council but outside the sphere of Castilian government, as was another letrado preserve, the Council of Aragón. 

The Castilian church and the inquisition also reserved numerous positions for letrados. After the early sixteenth century most of the cathedral clergy were university graduates, and parish churches in the larger cities went also to priests holding university degrees. Judgeships on the local tribunals of the inquisition located in Spain, Spanish possessions in Europe, and the New World were for letrados as well, while the

\textsuperscript{10}In 1512 less than one-half of Castile’s corregidores were letrados (Tarsicio de Azcona, \textit{Isabel la Católica} [Madrid, 1964], p. 343), but by the middle of the sixteenth century their share of this class of offices had risen to over 60 percent (BM: Add. 28352, ff. 95-95v; Add. 28353, folio 104).

\textsuperscript{11}By the eighteenth century \textit{capa y espada corregidores} numbered only seventeen, that is, less than 25 percent of the officers occupying these posts. See Domínguez Ortiz, \textit{La Sociedad Española en el Siglo XVIII} (Madrid, 1955), p. 35. For a survey of the history of the corregidor in Castile, see B. González Alonso, \textit{El Corregidor Castellano} (1348-1808) (Madrid, 1970).
important office of Inquisitor General alternated between graduates in theology and in canon law. 12

Letrado positions in government, the inquisition, and the church were not the only public charges open to university graduates in law. These offices were unique in that they were exclusively reserved for letrados, but countless other royal and municipal offices, most of which entailed few judicial duties, might employ law graduates, although they were never obliged to do so on a regular basis. Credentials for these charges rested primarily on an individual's money and family ties as well as his "prudence, virtue, skills, and experience." University never became a formal requirement for these posts, although literacy and, increasingly, Latin were essential. 13

These "non-letrado" offices numbered in the thousands and comprised the bulk of the civil service at every level of Castilian government. Collectively they can be known as the "capa y espada" hierarchy. 14 The duties of this hierarchy were so diverse as to defy easy description: diplomacy, war, taxation, municipal government and police, and the regulation of virtually everything that could be regulated. At the top stood the Council of State presided over by the king and where leading letrado officials mingled with grandees, cardinals, and military men; at bottom was the lowly castle warden, the inspector of weights and measures in a market town, the porter in a town hall.

Few of this hierarchy's recruits were letrados. Many may have attended university, perhaps even taken a first degree, but only a handful remained for the post-graduate studies and advanced academic titles that placed letrados into a world of their own. One must keep in mind that letrados were able to acquire capa y espada offices through purchase or from the crown in return for services rendered, but for the most part the capa y espada hierarchy was not interested in university graduates, particularly those in law. Consequently, it remained open to men of diverse educational backgrounds and qualifications. The letrado hierarchy, on the other hand, set apart from the bulk of administrative offices through its special educational requirements, developed in the course of Habsburg rule a close relationship with Castile's universities, the institutions which alone supplied its personnel.

12 Julio Caro Baroja, El señor inquisidor y otras por oficio (Madrid, 1968), pp. 18–23, sketches the education and career of an "ideal" inquisitor, emphasizing his legal background.
13 Latin was certainly required for the important post of secretary of state; cf. José Antonio Escudero, Los Secretarios de Estado y del Despacho (Madrid, 1969), 2: 388–94.