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Article

From the Merchant Marine to the Naval Forces: Íñigo de Arteita, Captain in the Catholic Monarchs' Fleet

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Abstract

The figure of Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita exemplifies military and social advancement during the transition from the 15th to the 16th century. Drawing upon archival materials from Lequeitio, notarial records from Valencia and Barcelona, and royal sources such as the *Registro General del Sello* and the proceedings of the Royal Chancery, this study examines his multifaceted profile. It introduces his family roots in the Basque town of Lequeitio and traces his trajectory—from his roles as merchant, transporter, and pirate in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, to his service as captain in the Catholic Monarchs' fleet stationed in the Strait of Gibraltar, and as second-in-command in the 1495 expedition to Italy. His paradigmatic evolution enables an analysis of the rise of an extraordinary figure from one of the leading bourgeois families of Biscay, who—thanks to substantial real estate holdings, influential social and political networks, and remarkable nautical expertise—came to command one of the earliest permanent war fleets of his time.

Keywords: Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita; captain; fleet; Lequeitio; Biscay; Catholic Monarchs; Mediterranean; Atlantic; navigation

1. Introduction

This study traces the rise and apex of the Arteita family of Lequeitio in Biscay, as embodied by Captain Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita ¹. It weaves together two central research themes of late medieval Spain: on the one hand, the emergence of the mercantile class in Biscay—the nascent Basque bourgeoisie—as seen through this lineage; on the other, the family's significant involvement in the earliest war fleets of the Hispanic Monarchy under the Catholic Monarchs, both as a consequence and an instrument of the monarchy's own state-building policies (Escribano Páez 2019).

The town of Lequeitio, located in the county of Biscay, was a notable port for fishing, shipbuilding, and Biscayan trade (Rivera Medina 2008). The construction of its quay in 1463 and the number of ship captains originating from the town (Leniz Atxabal 2023) attest to its maritime relevance, albeit with a lower hierarchical status than nearby Bilbao. Over several generations, the Arteita family served as a political, economic, and social reference point (Aguinagalde Olaizola 2021)—first through Nicolao Ibáñez de Arteita, then through his son Íñigo de Arteita (also known as Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita) and his brothers, and later through his sons, the captains Francisco de Arteita (Ugartetxea 2023) and Juan Nicolás de Arteita (Ugartetxea 2021).

Íñigo de Arteita's human capital, forged through his long experience as a seasoned seaman, merchant, and pirate, was enlisted by the Catholic Monarchs to implement their maritime policy in both the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. He was appointed to lead the military command of one of their war fleets, following in the footsteps of many other Basques who had settled along the Andalusian coast (Aznar Vallejo 2006; Cruz Blanco 1995). This occurred during a period at the end of the 15th century marked by the proliferation of naval fleets (Ladero Quesada 2024) dispatched for a range of missions: controlling the Kingdom of Granada (Ruiz Povedano 2001) and the Strait of

Gibraltar, protecting convoys carrying members of the royal family, escorting overseas expeditions such as Columbus's voyages, and transporting exiles. Among these forces, the Biscayan Fleet (Ladero Quesada 2001; Szászdi León-Borja 1999), captained by Íñigo himself, constituted one of the first attempts at a permanent naval force. However, the Crown's shifting priorities in the Mediterranean theater led to the redeployment of resources in the following decade to Naples—where Íñigo served as second-in-command—and to North Africa (Ladero Quesada 2010). A striking feature of his seafaring activities was the use of maritime violence, a common practice in the late Middle Ages, which brought him before the courts on several occasions (Hernández Sande 2023; Ferrer i Mallol 2001).

2. Materials and Methods

This study draws upon a diverse array of documentation from various archives of the Crowns of Castile and Aragon. From the former, key sources include published materials originating from the town of Lequeitio—particularly from its guilds and municipal archive—as well as records from the *Archivo General de Simancas* (hereinafter: AGS), specifically the *Registro General del Sello* (hereinafter: RGS), the *Cámara de Castilla* (hereinafter: CC), and the *Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas* (hereinafter: CMC). Additionally, material from the Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid (hereinafter: ARCV) has been consulted, particularly the *Ejecutorias* and the *Sala de Vizcaya* collections. Regarding documentation from the Crown of Aragon, which has enabled the dating of the Arteita family's presence in Mediterranean ports, this study relies on notarial records from Valencia—especially those of notary Jaume Salvador, preserved in the Archivo del Reino de Valencia (hereinafter: ARV)—and from the Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Barcelona (hereinafter: AHPB), including the records of notaries Ciprià Boadella, Andreu Mir, and Narcís Gerau Gili.

3. Results

3.1. Family, Property, and Homonymous Figures

This sailor, shipowner, and merchant—who ultimately rose to the rank of captain in the royal fleet—was also known as Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita and lived until 1512. He was the son of the wealthy merchant Nicolás Ibáñez de Arteita and Marina (or María) Íñiguez de Ceranga. His name is occasionally misspelled as “Artieta,” and his coat of arms featured, among other elements, in the lower quarter, silver waves and an anchor with a golden ring (Labayru and Goicoechea 1895, I, p. 763). He had at least three brothers and three sisters. Among the former were Juan Nicolás de Arteita²—a graduate, notary, and mayor of Lequeitio—; Francisco de Arteita, or Francisco Ibáñez de Arteita, who died in the 1505 plague and served as provost of Tabira de Durango; and Pascual de Arteita. His sisters included Catalina de Arteita—at times referred to as Catalina Ibáñez de Meceta—María de Meceta (or María Juan de Meceta), and María Martínez de la Plaza or de Ceranga, a nun. It is possible that another sister, Auria de Ceranga or de Urquiza, was in fact the same person as the aforementioned³.

He shared his name with at least two other individuals—a ship's master and a notary—which has led to some confusion (Borja Aguinagalde 2021, p. 195). He was married to Marina de Arriaga, who died in 1493, with whom he had a son also named Juan Nicolás de Arteita, after his uncle, and another son, Miguel, who died in childhood⁴. After his wife's death, he fathered additional children: Francisco, a captain born in 1503; Íñigo Martínez, a ship's master; and Domingo. In 1514, a certain Marco de Arteita from Lequeitio appeared before the queen to declare that he was the natural son of Íñigo de Arteita—possibly the same individual under discussion here, who was already married—and of an unmarried woman named Margarita López. He petitioned for legitimization, which the sovereign granted⁵.

Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita continued his father's mercantile activity, sold his shares in the two ships of which he had been co-owner, and was responsible for coordinating the division of the estate following the death of their father, including the delivery of 200 quintals of iron to his nephew as part

of the inheritance. He also benefited from the usufruct of the inheritance division among the heirs and, together with his brothers, built his properties on lots and estates that had belonged to their father. His real estate holdings were considerable: he owned, among others, a fortified house in which he resided—now known as the Palacio Uriarte—as well as several mills, which are listed in the Hacendera Raíz of Lequeitio. In this document, he appears as Captain Ynigo Martines de Arteyta, with marginal notes also mentioning his relatives Juan Nicolás and Captain Francisco, who at some point seem to have shared some of these properties as heirs of their common progenitor.

Together with his brother, the graduate Juan Nicolás de Arteita, he was accused around 1487 by a neighbor, the widow María de Muncharaz, of attempting to construct mills downstream from those she owned, thereby harming her interests (Ugartetxea 2021; Enríquez Fernández et al. 2008, pp. 25–27). Although this document typically refers to him as Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita, here and in other instances he is called Íñigo Martínez de Arteita—a name also borne by the captain general of the royal fleets—likely due to the famous tower house mentioned as his property.

If we consider his career path, he—or one of those who bore the same name, which is not easy to determine—served as mayor of Lequeitio in 1486, 1488 (the year in which our captain received his first royal license to bear arms), 1496, and 1512, as well as regidor in 1512, and, possibly a different individual, mayordomo of the Cofradía de San Pedro in 1514. One of them had a brother named Juan Martínez de Guilestegui ⁶, who, in 1488, protested before the Catholic Monarchs on his behalf and on that of other shipmasters against the aforementioned guild of mariners and fishermen of San Pedro in their town, for failing to uphold royal justice. This seems to have been an effort on the part of these shipowners to separate themselves from the fishermen and form an independent guild; at that time, they are believed to have drafted their own ordinances aimed at promoting and protecting commerce—though these have not survived. Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that until the 16th century, most shipmasters remained part of the Cofradía de San Pedro alongside the fishermen. In 1514, Juan Íñiguez de Arteita served as mayordomo of this brotherhood along with Lope de Endaya (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992b, pp. 641–642), two years after it had been headed by Ochoa de Anduiza and Ochoa Ortiz de Laris.

3.2. Mercantile and Piratical Activity in the Mediterranean

Íñigo de Arteita was the owner of several vessels with which he called at, among other places, the ports and anchorages of Galicia, Ibiza, Naples, Sicily, Mallorca, Genoa, Venice, Pisa, Rome, and Calais. Between 1478 and 1498, he visited the Mediterranean coastline on at least sixteen occasions (Rivera Medina 2012, pp. 351–352; Conde Mendoza 2023, pp. 169, 320, 326; Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, p. 177). The record of his voyages is preserved in a list of donations made to the Church of Santa María of Lequeitio, to which, like other seafarers, he gave 1% of the profits obtained from these journeys. This record also includes debts he owed to the institution and a series of goods purchased in its name. From this account, we know that his ships entered the following ports and coasts, transporting, among other cargoes: Galicia-Barcelona; Ibiza-Gaeta; grain to Valencia; Ibiza-Naples (salt); Sicily-Mallorca (wheat); Ibiza-Genoa; a partial voyage from Venice, Pisa, and Savona (wheat); Jacaena-Savona (wheat); Sicily (cheeses); Genoa, aboard another vessel; Cádiz-Genoa (tuna); and Ibiza-Genoa (salt). One of his ships, a 500-ton nao called María Grasa, traded in the Mediterranean between 1478 and 1484, after which he sold it in Genoa and commissioned the construction of a larger ship in Lequeitio in that same year, as will be examined below. During these voyages, he also engaged in privateering, capturing several vessels. Notably, in 1480, he seized Turkish ships headed for Apulia, thereby participating in the campaign to recapture Otranto (Ugartetxea 2021, p. 205).

We have documentation of his presence in Valencia on several occasions. On September 28, 1479, he chartered his nao Santa María to the Valencian merchant Galcerán Adret to transport Balearic salt to Gaeta and Naples, and he received 105 florins from Pedro Bemunre for shipping 210 quintals of merchandise aboard his barque, through a bill of exchange sent from Mallorca by Martí de la Cavalleria ⁷. In what appears to be one of his earliest stays in Barcelona, dated to 1479 and where he is referred to as shipmaster, he sold to the doncel Alberto de Vilafranca, a resident of Barcelona, an

eight-year-old Saracen slave named Mahoma for the price of 35 Barcelona pounds (Armenteros Martínez 2012, p. 73)⁸. His family also had ties with Valencian merchants as early as 1482, when the Florentine Juan del Vinyo appointed Nicolás de Arteita (father) and Francisco de Arteita (his son and Íñigo's brother) as his attorneys to collect a debt from a master of Guetaria for a shipping contract⁹. In May 1485, the shipmaster Íñigo de Arteita appears as a witness in a document concerning a Basque innkeeper in Valencia¹⁰. On August 12 of that same year, an Íñigo de Arteita was appointed attorney in the city of Turia by the Italian merchant Spannochì to collect his share of over 4,000 gold ducats earned by Miguel Ibáñez de Saciola during voyages to the West and East, acting as representative of the *nao*¹¹. The following day, he is referred to as a merchant from Lequeitio¹².

As an Íñigo de Arteita served as mayor of Lequeitio in 1488, the shipmaster who sailed from Valencia to Oran with a cargo of wine and clay on February 7 and returned in June must have been a namesake¹³. Again, in August of that same year, an Íñigo de Arteita was present in Valencia: on the 12th, he appointed a resident of Ermua as his legal representative; on the 13th, the Valencian merchant Luis Gil named him attorney—at which point he is described as a merchant from Lequeitio—to collect amounts owed by the heirs of Rodrigo de Jáuregui; and finally, on the 16th, he designated the lancer Juan Dossa and the innkeeper Martín de Azcoitia as his representatives, likely in anticipation of an imminent departure¹⁴. Nearly a decade later, on July 24, 1497, in Valencia, the merchant Spannochì appointed several agents—including a merchant from Eibar and another from Ondarroa—to sign a receipt (*albarán*) with Íñigo de Arteita for 250 ducats paid to the man from Lequeitio¹⁵. In 1504, Arteita named Pedro Spina, a merchant from Azcoitia residing in Valencia, as his representative to settle a debt of 200 ducats with a fellow townsman, Jacobo de la Rentería, a former shipmaster from Lequeitio¹⁶.

Íñigo de Arteita was a feared pirate in both Mediterranean and Atlantic waters. In 1482, he was accused of theft by Luis de Pejón—also referred to as Luis Peixo—a royal privateer, who also alleged that Arteita had welcomed Genoese nationals aboard his ship when they were considered enemies of Castile. That same year, the Catholic Monarchs had issued a letter of marque to Pejón, a native of Segorbe, authorizing him to wage war against Genoese vessels departing from Valencia under the royal banner, commanding his own *nao* of 600 botes along with two others. One of his targets was precisely Íñigo de Arteita, who—alongside the Pisan Mariano Zampant—was transporting cloth belonging to Ligurians from Palermo toward Genoa. Pejón demanded that they surrender the Genoese passengers aboard and the cargo owned by merchants of the republic. Declaring himself a privateer in the service of King Ferdinand, Pejón expected no resistance and full compliance, as all parties were subjects of the same monarch. However, Arteita and Zampant first denied having any Ligurians or relevant goods on board, and then actively resisted with force. This led to an armed confrontation in the Piombino Channel, near the island of Elba, in July 1482, resulting in several deaths and the seizure of Pejón's *nao*—as well as the sinking of the other two ships, whose crews were left stripped naked in Livorno, since the detained vessels proved superior in force. The total value of the seized cargo—including the Genoese cloth and legal costs—was estimated at 20,000 ducats (Caunedo del Potro 1981, p. 519; González Arce 2021, p. 341)¹⁷.

Ultimately, Arteita was sentenced to pay Pejón 1,000 ducats as compensation for his ship and rigging. In 1494, Pejón dispatched his legal representatives to Puerto Real to deliver the final court judgment to Arteita, who was at that time commanding the royal fleet and encamped in tents by the sea. However, they were informed he could not be found there, as he was currently at sea. Pejón then appealed to Arteita's attorney, Rodrigo de Betanzos, based at the royal court, to ensure payment of the indemnity—again, without success. In response, the monarchs ordered the seizure of Arteita's property equivalent to the 1,000 ducats, which would be auctioned and paid to Pejón in cash. In the end, however, that amount was deducted from the one million maravedís owed to Arteita for the Crown's purchase of two-thirds of a carrack, as will be discussed later (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 387). Nevertheless, a later ruling exempted Arteita from being held liable for court costs. Moreover, Isabella and Ferdinand decreed that the boatswain Pedro Paje; Ochoa Ortiz de Ceraga; Machín de Ceraga; Domingo de Ceraga; and several others, all residents of San Sebastián—including two

caulkers and a carpenter from Lequeitio who had participated in the assault—were to contribute proportionally to the 1,000-ducat fine imposed on Arteita, following customary maritime practice, as well as to the additional 1,000 ducats he had spent covering his legal expenses (González Arce 2021a, pp. 340–341; Ugartetxea 2021, pp. 17–18).

3.3. *The Plundering of Otranto and Resistance to Justice*

In 1487, Arteita built a new carrack in Lequeitio, which he used to continue transporting goods and engaging in privateering. With this vessel, he carried out the assault of a ship belonging to the Genoese Jorge Doria and another belonging to the King of Sicily (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, doc. 135). To offset these damages, yet another newly constructed carrack—named Santa María and berthed at the Luzaar wharf—was confiscated (Ugartetxea 2021, p. 18). In September 1487, the deputy preboste of Lequeitio, Sancho Ibáñez de Mallea, went to Íñigo de Arteita's tower residence and knocked on the door. He was greeted by Domingo de Amézqueta, a young man from Lequeitio who acted as Arteita's legal proxy. The preboste asked to see Íñigo, as he carried a royal letter from the Catholic Monarchs, accusing him of having assaulted and looted, four months earlier, all the merchandise aboard a ship belonging to the King of Naples that was anchored in the port of Otranto—valued at 60,000 gold ducats. The representative claimed that Arteita was gravely ill and bedridden at home and could not receive visitors—an evident falsehood, since records show he lived for many years thereafter and continued to commit further offenses. The lieutenant instructed the notaries present to record Amézqueta's statement and to read aloud the monarchs' letter.

In the letter, the monarchs explained that the ambassador of the King of Sicily, Lanzarote Macedonio, had informed them that four months earlier, a carrack belonging to that monarch had been anchored in the port of Otranto, loaded with merchandise, when Íñigo de Arteita seized it by force with his own nao, along with all its cargo and rigging—amounting to approximately 60,000 gold ducats. At that time, the said offender was in Lequeitio, and there were suspicions that he might flee the kingdom with all his belongings to avoid arrest. Consequently, the ambassador requested that Isabella and Ferdinand have him apprehended and his assets confiscated. The monarchs dispatched Mallea to secure from Arteita the appropriate bonds covering his civil liability for the abovementioned 60,000 ducats. Otherwise, Mallea was to arrest him and seize his property. Should the preboste fail to carry out these instructions, he himself would be held financially accountable to the ambassador for the amount Arteita owed the king and his vassals.

Following the delivery of the royal letter, Mallea requested assistance from the town council to seize Arteita's person and property. He instructed the town crier to summon the municipal council to a meeting concerning the matter. Failure to appear would incur a fine of 60,000 ducats, as the monarchs had stipulated that all public authorities were obligated to assist the preboste. The municipal council therefore assembled, including several of the town's leading residents and the preboste's own deputy, who read the monarchs' letter aloud once again and reported what had transpired at the door of Arteita's tower: namely, that his representative, Amézqueta, had refused to provide the required bonds. Mallea therefore requested the council's support in confiscating Arteita's property, fearing that those defending him inside the house might obstruct the enforcement of the royal directive.

They all then proceeded on foot to the residence of the accused. Upon reaching the main entrance, Mallea informed the delegation that he had witnessed the entry through the rear door of Arteita's brother, the bachelor Juan Nicolás de Arteita—then mayor of the town—alongside several unsavory individuals, and that he feared he would not be able to execute the royal orders without risking injury or death. As a result, he requested that the council and townsmen enter first and remove all individuals from the premises except the defendant, to ensure his own safe access. The council, mayor, fiel, and prominent citizens refused and asked that Mallea, as judge, enter first, assuring him that they would follow. It is clear that the power wielded by Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita, his family, and his allies was significant enough to cause even the local authorities to fear a direct confrontation, despite the imperative nature of the Castilian monarchs' order. So much so that even

after the preboste's threats to confiscate the property of the entire municipality, the intimidated council reaffirmed its refusal to cooperate.

Following this, Mallea withdrew from the scene and, days later, had a public proclamation issued in the town forbidding any resident or outsider from assisting Íñigo de Arteita, alienating or removing his movable or immovable property, or paying any debts owed to him. All individuals were instead instructed to disclose Arteita's assets and the debts owed to him by locals so that these could be confiscated by trustworthy parties. He likewise forbade the transfer of Arteita's new nao, named Santa María, located at the Luzar wharf within the boundaries of Lequeitio, including any movement of its sails, rigging, or contents by the shipmaster—unless it was strictly necessary to move cables, anchors, or mooring ropes (funames) to secure the vessel and prevent damage.

Several days later, the preboste issued another public proclamation, announcing that he had received reports that Arteita intended to depart aboard the aforementioned vessel with his belongings. The notice expressly forbade anyone from approaching the nao with gear, goods, or merchandise belonging to Arteita under penalty of 60,000 ducats, in addition to costs and damages, and a further 1,000 ducats, along with loss of office and confiscation of property. The only exception allowed was for the equipment necessary to anchor the ship or to bring it into the port of Lequeitio, where it had been placed under sequestration by the municipal council and whose harbor the preboste ordered it to be brought to. The response of the town council in this instance was identical to that in the previous case: that Mallea himself should carry out the seizure of Arteita's vessel and its gear, and they would assist him, but without taking any initiative or leadership role.

Subsequently, Amézqueta submitted a written defense on Arteita's behalf in which, among other arguments, it was claimed that the seizure of the carrack had occurred off the coast of Taranto, not Otranto, over 50 leagues away. (For this capture, Íñigo de Arteita declared a profit of 5,300 ducats, of which he contributed 53 ducats to the fábrica of the Church of Santa María.)¹⁸ The statement asserted that the seized carrack did not belong to the King of Naples, as the ambassador had alleged, but rather to a Muslim (referred to as a "Moor") from Alexandria, Çide Amed, a servant of a merchant and general factor of the Sultan of Babylon, who was transporting garments belonging to Muslim merchants from Tunisia and Barbary. According to the defense, there were no goods on board belonging to the King of Naples or any of his subjects, and this was said to be publicly known in Sicily, throughout the Kingdom of Naples, and in the city of Tunis, where the ship was headed. The deviation of the carrack to the coast of Taranto was attributed to adverse winds, and it was stated that the capture took place on 12 February 1486, not on the date incorrectly claimed by the ambassador, who was said to be misinformed and intent on discrediting him.

Another line of defense argued that the charges against Arteita should have been pursued through ordinary legal channels in the local rather than royal jurisdiction, on the basis that he was a wealthy man of good standing with ample legal capacity, not a fugitive nor a flight risk. To bolster this series of claims—which clearly tested the preboste's patience—Amézqueta further asserted that the vessel in question was in fact his own, constructed with his personal funds and registered in his name, and that he had a right to access and use it freely with his men from the day it was laid in the shipyard onward. This was, of course, another fabrication. Mallea responded that it was public and well known that the ship belonged to Arteita, built with his money and that of his household, and that he had provided food, drink, and wages to its builders, as well as purchased the timber, rigging, and other necessary materials for its construction.

Following a renewed request for assistance from the preboste to the local council, the latter reaffirmed its inaction and merely declared itself willing to support any actions initiated and personally led by Sancho Ibáñez de Mallea. This posture may be interpreted as prudence, cowardice, neutrality between the parties, or as a reflection of the power wielded by Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita and the fear he inspired. Consequently, the preboste left the town and returned—driven by his enmity with Arteita—with a large contingent of armed men to support him in his endeavor, some of whom were relatives or partisans, according to the Lequeitio council. They hailed from the solariegos of Zaldívar and Unzueta, as well as from other noble lineages of the County and Lordship of Biscay and

the province of Gipuzkoa. Given that these men were affiliated with feuding factions (bandos and parcialidades) and the treguas of the noble estates—therefore liable to cause disturbances and unrest during their stay—the local authorities requested that Mallea expel them from the municipal jurisdiction. In turn, the council pledged full cooperation with his efforts, or else accepted responsibility for the 60,000-ducat penalty.

As this episode reveals, the economic power of the rising Biscayan bourgeoisie—based, among other sectors, on long-distance maritime transport and trade—came to mirror and even assimilate the traditional might of the landed feudal nobility. Accordingly, in pursuit of their objectives, these elites adopted similar modes of action: relying on armed kinship networks and factionalism (banderías) to use force as a means of securing property and influence. For this reason, even public authority, in the form of the preboste—confronted with the complicit neutrality or passivity of the local government—was forced to mobilize his own family alliances and partisans, equally private, to enforce royal justice.

Facing the threat of factional violence, the Lequeitio council finally agreed to actively support the preboste, who—complying with their demand—dismissed his partisans. Thus, the full municipal council accompanied Mallea once more to Arteita's residence to finally execute the royal order. The town mayors, Juan Nicolás—Íñigo's brother—and Martín Ibáñez entered the house hand-in-hand with the preboste, followed by the entire council.

Once inside, Sancho Ibáñez inquired with Arteita's wife, Marina de Arriaga, about her husband's whereabouts. She replied that he had departed to recover from illness and that she did not know where he was. Upon requesting bonds, which she refused to provide, she claimed the property in the house was hers—part of her dowry and trousseau, inherited from her father, Juan Martínez de Amézqueta—thus linking her to Domingo de Amézqueta, Íñigo's attorney, and herself. The preboste rejected the claim and proceeded to seize the following items: The tower house, 20 pairs of cuirasses, 17 pavises, 1 table with its bench and cloth, another Flemish table with writing desk, 20 pewter pitchers, 40 large and small plates, 3 new Tournai cloths, each 40 anas in length, another set table with its bench, 1 six-branched candelabrum, 1 ewer with basin, a set of bed hangings, 2 tar-coated tapestries (alcatifas), a chest with one fanega of bread, another containing honey pots and a sugarloaf, another with an almuda and a finely crafted Moorish pitcher (quiza), 2 pairs of breeches and 1 cloak, another chest with 3 tablecloths, 10 hand towels, and 6 sheets, another cypress chest with a trousseau of linens, silk, and cotton bedclothes, "according to local custom, when women give birth, they prepare and arrange similar beds", including 6 sheets, coverlets, pillowcases, 3 silk headdresses, and Valencian bedspreads; another with 1 sheepskin coat (zamarra), 3 Moorish scimitars, 24 Moorish arrows, and 2 simple service tapestries, another with 100 pounds of Alexandrian flax and 1 sheet, 4 service beds for household servants. In the pantry: 5 half-casks, two filled with wine and three empty, 1 store chest with 4 fanegas of seaborne wheat, 4 spear racks (foxes) containing 18 lances each. In the cellar: 2 empty vats, 1 wine trough, and 2 casks with the residue and grapes from the previous August's harvest.

To perpetuate his subterfuge, Domingo de Amézqueta attempted a new fraudulent claim of ownership, asserting that the cuirasses, certain pavises, lances, and beds in question were his personal property. These items, however, had already been seized by the preboste and placed under the custody of the embargoed man's brother, Juan Nicolás de Arteita, in his capacity as mayor—who had little incentive to return them to his relative, as he himself was now liable for them—as well as two other townsmen, Pedro Ibáñez de la Rentería and Nicolás Ibáñez de Arteita.

Moreover, the aforementioned preboste later seized from Íñigo a number of fittings and weapons stored in the town's shipyard grounds, specifically in the areas of La Arena and Arranegui: two cerbatanas (light culverins) with their caissons and carriage hardware; two iron-bound lombardas, one with its operator and the other without; one mizzenmast; one new skiff; one newly outfitted vitre bonnet; one papahígo (topsail); and two foresail bonnets along with another papahígo and bonnet. In response—and once again unsuccessfully—Domingo de Amézqueta asserted that these confiscated items belonged to him, claiming they were part of his own vessel, constructed in the Lequeitio shipyard and yard, and that at that moment it was already rigged, provisioned, and

crewed at the Luzar quay, ready to sail to Bordeaux and, from there, to whatever destination the Bordelais merchants might determine.

The goods, once impounded, were entrusted to the aforementioned Pedro Ibáñez de la Rentería and to the notary and fiel Juan Martínez de Trayna, who refused the charge, arguing there were other individuals in Lequeitio of greater standing. He also feared that the powerful shipmaster, Domingo de Amézqueta, might forcibly repossess the seized materials (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, pp. 411–433; García Fernández 2004, p. 359).

That same year, 1487, a legal proceeding was initiated in the Chancery of Valladolid between Juan de Maidana, of Lequeitio¹⁹, and his fellow townsman, the aforementioned Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita. Maidana accused Arteita of failing to report or share 90,000 maravedís obtained through the use of a caravel employed in the service of the monarchs. In reality, the profit amounted to 70,000 maravedís earned through the chartering of the vessel—an amount that, according to the initial ruling, Arteita was obliged to surrender to the plaintiff. However, in a subsequent judgment, he was acquitted²⁰.

In 1489, Arteita was appointed lieutenant to the Admiral of Castile. Between 1491 and 1499, he sailed aboard his carrack Santa Lucía—named after Saint Lucy, to whom a nearby hermitage near Lequeitio was dedicated—a massive vessel measuring between 1,000 and 1,200 tons, or 2,500 botas, on both commercial and military missions (Ugartetxea 2021, p. 205; Szászdi León-Borja 1999, pp. 552–556, 564–565, 568). The monarchs had tasked him with building a large nao of 2,500 botas, to be named Santa Lucía, which could serve in naval fleets as needed and provide protection and security for their subjects and natives navigating those seas. Arteita commissioned its construction in the uninhabited area of Leyra, near Guernica, between 1490 and 1491, and petitioned for exemption from taxation on the grounds that it was destined for royal service in the Mediterranean. Until such military use was required, Arteita was permitted to use the ship for commercial transport; thus, while it was being outfitted and armed, he used it to carry merchandise in support of its maintenance. In 1492, the monarchs granted him preferential loading rights for goods over any other vessel when in ports within their kingdoms. Furthermore, to ensure the ship's profitability, they declared that all merchants contracting its services—and their merchandise—were to be protected under royal security and safe conduct. Moreover, the monarchs addressed the Genoese residing in the Crowns of Castile and Aragon, informing them that Arteita, commander of the aforementioned nao, was engaged temporarily in mercantile activity and that there were concerns Genoese citizens, captains, or crews might attempt to board the vessel despite its royal protection. Given that Ligurian merchants living on the Iberian Peninsula were well treated despite tensions with their republic, Arteita should be accorded reciprocal treatment. The Genoese were thus instructed to write to their compatriots in Genoa, warning them not to attack him. Should any harm come to Arteita, those residing in Spain and their property would be held accountable—even if protected by safe-conduct letters. Arteita later took part, commanding the Santa Lucía, in the fleet organized by Queen Isabella I, which we will examine below. This expedition was intended to continue Columbus's explorations, and Arteita was named captain general of the fleet.

In 1496, ownership of this carrack had fully passed to the Catholic Monarchs, who instructed the town council of Lequeitio not to levy the usual local taxes (pedido and derrama) on it from its former owner, Íñigo de Arteita, a known resident of the town, as they did with other ships owned by local inhabitants. This tax, set at six gold ducats per year, had been paid by Arteita while the vessel still belonged to him. It was with this ship, the Santa Lucía—referred to in local records simply as a nao—that he sailed to Valencia, where he is identified as a resident of Ondarroa. He is also recorded in Valencia with another ship called Santa María.

By the early 16th century, he had acquired yet another vessel: a nao of no less than 900 tons, named Santa Cruz, which, alongside a 1,000-ton caravel, became one of the largest ships in the town. For this nao, he petitioned for the royal subsidy granted to ships exceeding 600 tons. He also requested that the same privileges granted to the Santa Lucía in 1492—including royal insurance and preferential loading rights over other vessels—be extended to this new ship. These privileges were

formally granted to him in 1506 by Queen Joanna, her husband Philip I, and her father Ferdinand V. This would be the great nao that he had built with a capacity of two thousand botas (approximately 1,200 tons), intended for service in the royal navy. As the Crown did not require its immediate use, they authorized him to employ it in commerce while retaining the privileges and exemptions afforded to royal-service vessels (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 111, n. 231). Although Queen Isabella had approved his proposal to arm a fleet in August 1503, the initiative ultimately did not materialize, and his service remained limited to a specific mission against the French, who at that time controlled the port of Genoa (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 340).

Around this same time, in 1503, Íñigo donated a juro to the Convent of Santo Domingo of Lequeitio to support a chaplain and fund construction of a chapel in which he intended to be buried. With one of his ships—the previously mentioned carrack—he exported 300 cahíces of chickpeas from the port of Cádiz, sourced from Jerez de la Frontera and its hinterland, for which he received royal license in 1504. This vessel continued to enjoy the preferential loading rights granted in 1494, as previously noted ²¹. Arteita acquired his final ship not through seizure or piracy, but by legal maneuvering in the courts—or so he was accused. In 1509, his fellow townsman from Lequeitio, Juan Sánchez de Gabiola ²², lodged a complaint before the Catholic Monarchs, claiming that Arteita had dispossessed him of his nao and other property through the use of false witnesses. Arteita appealed to the local mariners' guild, of which both men were members. This guild had a clause governing disputes between brethren, which required disagreements to be brought before the mayores, who—upon hearing both parties—would designate a jurist to issue a decision favoring the compliant party over the defiant one. Arteita, however, recused the guild, challenged its bylaws, and Sánchez formally petitioned the mayores for support and protection against the captain, citing his considerable power and influence (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1991, pp. 52–54) ²³.

Regarding Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita's vessels and the profits obtained from them between 1478 and 1498 during his voyages, we possess, as noted above, a financial account provided by the man himself. In it, he calculated what he owed to the Church of Santa María de Lequeitio, based on the 1% tithe that—according to time-honored custom—all fishermen and masters of commercial ships, both local and foreign, along with their crews, were required to pay from the profits of their catches, freights, and captures of other vessels. Moreover, ships—whether from the town or abroad—entering the port with more than 100 fanegas of wheat, barley, or salt were obligated to deliver one fanega to that same religious institution. This practice was confirmed by the Catholic Monarchs in 1488, by Joanna I in 1509, and ordered enforced by the local mayor in 1510. Therefore, to ascertain the actual revenues obtained by Arteita, one must multiply the figures in the account by one hundred. This amounted to nearly six and a quarter million maravedís—one of the largest sums documented for the fortunes of entrepreneurs of the time, rivaling those of major leaseholders of royal revenues and taxes, such as Fernán Núñez Coronel of Segovia and Francisco del Alcázar of Seville. Arteita also listed the deductions that should be applied for items purchased for and donated to the same church ²⁴.

The documentary traces that have survived concerning Captain Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita's commercial activity are relatively sparse, though some evidence remains. One example is a lawsuit brought around 1501 by the Navarrese Mojonín de Lesaca, a resident of Lesaca, over 274 quintals of iron owed to him by the royal courier Bartolomé de Zuloaga—subtracting 13,250 maravedís that had already been paid ²⁵.

3.4. Captain of the Biscayan Fleet

In 1493, Íñigo de Arteita, a royal vassal, was appointed Captain General of the fleet assembled by the Catholic Monarchs, composed of five or six vessels from Biscay, with an annual salary of 50,000 maravedís. His initial assignment was to escort the ships of Columbus's second expedition of exploration and conquest to the New World, to protect them from Portuguese threats—an intervention rendered unnecessary following the signing of the Treaty of Tordesillas with the neighboring kingdom. Ultimately, this initiative marked the first attempt to create a permanent war

fleet composed of vessels owned or chartered by the Crown, distinct from the royal galleys that traditionally operated in the Strait of Gibraltar (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 365 ff.; González Arce 2021a, p. 324) ²⁶.

The fleet was outfitted in Bermeo and comprised six ships: that of Sancho López de Ugarte, mayor of the Hermandad of the County, the Encartaciones, and the city of Orduña in 1476 (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1999, p. 557), manned by 172 soldiers, 18 cabin boys, 4 sailors, and 5 pages; the nao of Antonio Pérez de Lerzola, 205 tons; the nao of Juan Pérez de Loyola, 220 tons, with 125 crew members; the nao of Martín Pérez de Fagaza ²⁷, 405 tons, with 140 soldiers and 60 sailors; the nao of Juan Pérez or Martínez de Amézqueta, 100 tons, with 45 and 25 men respectively, belonging to Nicolao Ibáñez de Arteita; and the carrack of Íñigo de Arteita mentioned earlier, over 1,000 tons, manned by 250 soldiers and 100 sailors ²⁸. In addition, coastal support was provided for a 50-ton caravel that Arteita operated alongside his carrack, for which 20,000 maravedís were recorded (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 383). Thus, our captain participated in the 1493 fleet with his Santa Lucía carrack, exceeding 1,000 tons, which carried a total of 350 men: 100 sailors and 250 men-at-arms. The charter for three months, departing from Bermeo, was contracted at a rate of 120 maravedís per ton per month, totaling 360,000 maravedís.

If these vessels represent some of the earliest warships more or less under Crown ownership—or at least primarily in royal service—this initiative set a precedent that would continue until the establishment of fully institutionalized royal fleets. For example, around 1514, Queen Joanna commissioned Lope de Acha of Bilbao, via Martín Fernández de Zamudio, to construct a 600-ton nao, modeled on others built for warfare, which would be eligible for royal subsidies designated for large-tonnage military vessels. The queen ordered that the ship and its corresponding subsidy be entered into the royal records, following the verification of its tonnage and confirmation that it had been outfitted with the rigging and artillery appropriate to such ships.

In July 1493, Íñigo de Arteita, along with the other shipmasters, swore to serve the Catholic Monarchs, who were to receive two-fifths of all captured prizes over a renewable six-month term (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 369). Having previously purchased 4,000 fanegas of French wheat in anticipation of the fleet's deployment, he was forced to resell it at a loss when the project was temporarily suspended (Ladero Quesada 2001, pp. 371, 387). Arteita assumed responsibility for supplying rations for six months, calculated at 360 maravedís per gold ducat, and the captains collectively covered the shortfall to help finance the repair of the Santa María de Altamira de Miranda—a total of 756,000 maravedís, calculated at one gold ducat per person per month (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 382).

Earlier that year, in January, March, and April 1493, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand had contacted Arteita by messenger while he was in Lequeitio, informing him that they had entrusted the conquest of the island of Tenerife to Alonso de Lugo, governor of La Palma. Lugo had requested that the aforementioned fleet be sent to assist in the campaign. It was to include 1,500 infantry and 100 cavalry from Castile, along with another 400 infantry and 60 mounted troops from the already occupied Canary Islands, in addition to 1,000 cahíces of wheat and flour, 300 of barley, and 2,500 of hardtack, plus provisions, artillery, tools, pack animals, and other necessary supplies—all to be delivered by March of the following year. The cargo was to be offloaded in Tenerife using the ships' own boats, where it would then be unpacked and distributed on land. Once the mission had been completed and their cargo disembarked, the ships were to return and await further orders from the monarchs; they were expressly forbidden to carry return goods from Tenerife. Entrusted with these operations, Arteita was instructed to remain at Lugo's service through the designated date.

By 1494, it was reported that two-thirds of the nao/carrack Santa Lucía, originally owned by Íñigo de Arteita, had been purchased by the Catholic Monarchs, after having been appraised at no less than three million maravedís. Despite this, Arteita demanded an increase in the price, alleging that he had invested significantly more in its construction. In response, the monarchs asserted that the aforementioned valuation had already been agreed upon with Alonso de Quintanilla, the royal organizer of the fleet, according to Quintanilla's own statement. Moreover, Arteita stood to gain

additional benefits from serving not only as master of the vessel but also as Captain General of that war squadron. He also petitioned the Crown for compensation for the time during which the vessel remained unchartered, for which he was awarded 100,000 maravedís.

This episode illustrates the remarkable stature Arteita had attained, as he appeared to negotiate with the monarchs as though they were equals—mere merchants like himself with whom one could bargain. Such behavior reveals the extent to which the emergent bourgeoisie of shipowners and merchants had captured the attention of the Crown, which increasingly relied on them for naval warfare and defense, the transport of troops, weaponry, ammunition, provisions, precious metals, the movement of royal persons and envoys, overseas conquest and exploration, and even ordinary commercial exchange—activities in which the monarchs themselves were sometimes directly involved. This was true even when certain individuals, such as Arteita, engaged in excesses or even outright criminality, and did not always act in alignment with royal interests.

The aforementioned fleet, organized in 1493 and commanded by Íñigo, was deployed in royal service by 1494 near the Strait of Gibraltar and the Bay of Cádiz, after its participation in the conquest of Tenerife. At that point, the monarchs instructed their captain not to interfere with five ships that the King of Portugal was dispatching eastward with merchandise—two of which belonged to the Portuguese monarch himself (Santa María de Nazaret and Albalivar de Cecimbra) and the others to his subjects from Oporto and elsewhere (Ladero Quesada 2010, pp. 35, 353). They were not to be disturbed or have any goods seized, and were to be treated as if they were Castilian vessels. This directive, however, was reportedly not followed with great diligence (Hernández Sande 2023, p. 515, n. 2105), prompting the Catholic Monarchs to issue protective guarantees (*seguros*) for those ships. Arteita also took part in the maritime transport to North Africa of Muhammad XI Boabdil and hundreds of his followers. During this period, the Crown authorized payment for three months of service for the carrack, beginning on April 11, 1494, amounting to 2,652,000 maravedís (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 353).

Among the participants in this fleet was Pedro de Deva, a shipmaster from that town in Guipúzcoa, who died of natural causes while on duty in Almuñécar. There, he executed a last will and testament, confirming another made prior to his departure on the military expedition. Among its clauses, he directed that his body be buried in Deva, in the chapel he had commissioned in the Church of Santa María. To fulfill these instructions, he bequeathed his *nao*, which he had served aboard in the war fleet. As a result, his widow, María Juan de Deva y de Linda, sought to reclaim the vessel and the outstanding freight payments from Juan López de Loyola, its new captain.

The squadron was initially to be disbanded soon thereafter, following the signing of peace agreements with Portugal. However, its service was extended to carry out the relocation of Granadan Muslims to Barbary, a mission that concluded in September due to more pressing priorities. The monarchs thus ordered an accounting of the amounts owed to those who had participated in the expedition and guaranteed them payment, estimated at 2,205,000 maravedís (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 353). If Arteita remained unsatisfied and refused to consider null or settled the outstanding claim of one million maravedís, the agreement would remain in force, and he would continue to serve the Crown in exchange for the amount due. Moreover, as the monarchs partially owned Arteita's ship—as previously noted—they decreed that a certain quantity of tuna from the *almadrabas* of Cádiz, or other available goods, be loaded onto it with priority over other vessels, wherever it might be located.

The fleet, however, was not ultimately dissolved. Instead, its service was extended for six additional months beginning in August. The original five ships were joined by seven more caravels, each manned by 40 men, totaling twelve vessels, plus the large carrack already mentioned and Arteita's accompanying caravel—bringing the total to approximately 1,250 sailors, intended for deployment to Sicily. A budget of up to two million maravedís was allocated for this mission. In a gesture of gratitude, the monarchs granted Arteita and the other captains of the Biscayan fleet—which had initially been tasked with protecting Columbus's voyages to the Americas, later employed in the conquest of Tenerife, then stationed in the Strait, and finally sent toward Sicily (namely, Martín Pérez de Fagaza, Loyola, Ortuño Pérez, and Juan Martínez [possibly of Amézqueta])—the privilege

of riding mules rather than maintaining horses while in royal service in any town, port, or jurisdiction within the Crown's realms. Furthermore, to favor Íñigo, the monarchs ordered that a case before the royal auditors involving his brother Francisco de Arteita and the clerics of Durango—related to rights derived from the prebostazgo of that town and already nearing conclusion—be expedited and ruled upon promptly, as Francisco was expected to embark on the aforementioned voyage alongside his kinsman Íñigo ²⁹.

Within the Biscayan fleet, the ship captains received annual salaries as follows: 50,000 maravedís for the Captain General, Íñigo de Arteita—as previously mentioned—and 30,000 for the others, except for Juan Martínez de Amézqueta, whose ship was of smaller tonnage and who received 20,000. The ships themselves were chartered separately at a rate of 120 maravedís per ton per month. Onboard personnel received lower wages, except for the pilots, who earned 80% of the captains' wages, supplemented by a *mareaje* bonus that brought their income close to parity. A similar *mareaje* was paid to the surgeons (given the fleet's military nature), the chaplain, and the trumpeters—essential for communication with the flagship carrack. Sailors, as noted earlier, were paid 6,000 maravedís annually, while soldiers or men-at-arms received 5,000 ³⁰. Altogether, the Biscayan Fleet incurred a total cost of 12,876,250 maravedís, surpassing ten million even when excluding the expenses associated with the four caravels sent to the Indies (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 388).

3.5. *From the Biscayan Fleet to That of the Count of Trivento*

The new captain general of the fleet—expanded to twelve vessels as noted above—was the Count of Trivento and Palamós, Galcerán de Requesens, although Arteita retained the post of second-in-command, drawing the same annual salary of 50,000 maravedís that he had previously received in that capacity. His request for repairs to be made to the carrack (or *nao*)—which, as we have seen, was owned one-third by Íñigo and two-thirds by the Crown—was also granted, with each party covering their respective share of the expenses. In 1495, following the chartering of the new fleet, royal accounts recorded an outlay of 265,000 maravedís for the careening of the carrack (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 391). The planned crew complement of 350 men could not be filled unless the wages offered to the sailors were increased. In addition, Arteita petitioned Isabella and Ferdinand to pay the share of the freight fees owed to him for the aforementioned carrack, to which they agreed, along with settling his claim regarding a caravel of his called *Busca Ruido*. He complained that he had received only 40,000 maravedís for its earlier service. Similarly, Juan Martínez de Amézqueta had lamented that he was not compensated in proportion to the tonnage of his *nao* ³¹. This fleet under Requesens also included Cristóbal de Arteita, who commanded a caravel of 80 tons with a crew of 40; it earned freight fees amounting to 8,800 maravedís per month. He was likely the same individual recorded in Valencia as Cristóforo de Arteita in 1491 (Ladero Quesada 2010, pp. 357, 374) ³². In 1496, the caravel *Ortuño de Varqueda* was mastered by a man of the same name, who received 113,386 maravedís, and in July 1498, Cristóbal de Arteita received a final payment of 24,098 maravedís as ship captain (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 682).

As previously noted, prior to being appointed captain general of the royal fleet, Íñigo de Arteita had engaged in certain abuses and unlawful acts—including the boarding of other ships—though these did not initially prevent his rise to royal favor. However, the excesses he committed while leading the fleet may have contributed to the monarchs' decision to demote him to second-in-command under Requesens. Thus, in 1494, he was officially discharged of any wrongdoing in the assault he and other captains had carried out against a group of Jews being transported from Portugal—likely to Muslim territories—after their expulsion from Castile. The captains had seized some of their clothing. These individuals, seeking refuge in North Africa from religious persecution, carried all their belongings, including gold and silver, the export of which was prohibited under Castilian law. The confiscated garments, as penalties for illegal export, were therefore deemed the property of the royal chamber and treasury. To obtain their full exoneration, Íñigo and his men were required to pay the royal treasury the assessed value of the seized items, to be deducted from their wages, along with posting a bond of 750 ducats (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 389, n. 127). Moreover,

Íñigo not only despoiled Jews fleeing into exile but also those returning. In 1495, he was denounced for actions taken against a group under royal protection and safe-conduct, returning to convert to Christianity. Íñigo de Arteita, along with members of the fleet who entered the port of Larache, robbed these returnees—as well as the royal envoy accompanying them—of goods and jewels valued at 25,000 maravedís.

In 1495, the monarchs wrote to Arteita on June 28 and again on August 24, encouraging him to continue in royal service (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 381, n. 102). However, Arteita did not take kindly to having been removed from the position of Captain General, replaced by Requesens, and relegated to second-in-command. In 1496, he was criminally charged for inciting unrest against his superior in Naples—allegedly having instigated part of the fleet's crew, previously under his command, to rebel. He also faced accusations of fraud during muster, attempted murder, and conspiring to defect to the French (Ugartetxea 2021, p. 206). The case was first heard by the alguacil mayor of the fleet and a judge delegated by the Queen of Naples, before being transferred to a royal judge in Girona. As a result, Arteita was exiled, imprisoned in Carmona, and had a caravel of approximately 60–70 tons seized by a local regidor, who also served as inspector for the royal fleet. He was later allowed to return and had his possessions restored without being charged court costs. However, the official who had seized the caravel refused to return it, claiming compensation for hull cleaning and other repairs. Arteita declined to pay, asserting that such work had been unnecessary and, moreover, that the official had profited considerably from several voyages undertaken with the ship, exceeding any expenses incurred³³. The vessel ultimately sank in Almería. The careening of the royal carrack under Arteita's command, repeatedly postponed, proved significantly more expensive than budgeted. While in 1495 the cost had been estimated at 1,500 florins—slightly less than 400,000 maravedís—by the end of 1496 it had risen to 7,000 ducats (or 2,625,000 maravedís), nearly equaling the vessel's appraised value from two and a half years earlier, when the monarchs had acquired two-thirds of its ownership.

In 1497—the year in which Arteita was replaced by Juan de Lezcano as captain of the royal carrack in the fleet led by Don Íñigo Manrique, known as the Armada of the Levant (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 325)—he was in Burgos, where he met Prince Don Juan. On that occasion, he was described by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo as a man appearing to be around 55 years old, bearded and gray-haired, with an honorable and noble bearing and dignified comportment (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 35, n. 10). The vessel would later return to Arteita following the dissolution of the fleet and a period of commercial voyages across the Mediterranean—to Barcelona, Valencia, Sicily, or Genoa—after which it was brought to Pasajes for careening (Ladero Quesada 2010, pp. 331–332). Arteita regained possession of the carrack in June 1499, and shortly thereafter suffered an accident in Galicia.

Between 1499 and 1503, he received several payments for his service in the Armada of the Levant—for instance, 43,650 maravedís delivered on board the carrack to two shipmasters, or, in July 1503, an advance of 180,000 maravedís ordered by the monarchs for the maintenance (*acostamiento*) of his new carrack. In February 1499, he was paid 266,575 maravedís as the remainder of a payment owed to him for gold and silver seized during the campaign in Naples, valued at 1,003 ducats, 9 carlines, and 11 torneses. The merchant from Lequeitio had already received 319 ducats and was still owed 684 (Ladero Quesada 2010, p. 388). It remains unclear when he ceased serving as captain of that carrack.

Beyond his naval activity, the royal captain Íñigo de Arteita appears to have held interests in the extraction and export of iron ore or forged iron. In 1507, he addressed Queen Joanna to inform her that his town of Lequeitio had long maintained a *rentería* (weigh-house and customs post), located within its jurisdiction in a place called Auzoa—the exact name is illegible but may correspond to present-day Errenteria Auzotegia Auzoa—where all the iron and steel produced in the forges of the Aulestia, Guizaburuaga, and Guerricaiz valleys, as well as in the town itself, was historically unloaded and weighed. He added that the town council of Lequeitio annually appointed a man to carry out the weighing—by *arrobas* and *libras*—charging the customary duties. Moreover, according to privileges granted by Juan II and Enrique IV, it was forbidden to establish any other *rentería* or

weigh-station for measuring said iron, steel, or ore. Nonetheless, several residents of the town and neighboring localities in the valley sought to erect another *rentería* without proper authorization, an act that, if permitted, would cause him considerable harm. He therefore petitioned the queen to forbid such a development and to ensure compliance with the aforementioned royal privileges ³⁴.

In 1503, the captain donated an annuity (*juro*) of 8,600 maravedís—previously granted to him by the Catholic Monarchs—to the Dominican convent in his town: 6,000 for the maintenance of a chaplain to celebrate daily mass, and the remainder to fund the construction of a chapel intended as the burial place for his family, including Íñigo himself, who was ultimately interred there (Labayru & Goicoechea 1895, IV, p. 13; Ugartetxea 2021, p. 4). In 1510, nearing the end of his life, he was granted a one-year arms license, as he felt threatened by Francisco Adam de Zubieta and his brothers, following a confrontation stemming from the rape of his niece by García de Zubieta ³⁵.

4. Discussion

Anglophone historiography has often emphasized two pivotal developments which, in its view, marked the early ascendancy of England—and later the entire United Kingdom—in its struggle with other major European monarchies, particularly France and Spain, for control of the North Atlantic. These developments, ultimately bolstered by a series of maritime victories, including against Dutch fleets in distant oceans and theaters, enabled Britain to dominate long-distance sea trade and construct the largest colonial empire in history. These landmark achievements were, first, the organization of the first permanent royal war fleet; and second, the Crown's strategic reliance on the most skilled seafarers and naval and military engineers—regardless of their origins or social standing—to pursue its maritime expansion.

Indeed, around 1511, Henry VIII launched what is considered one of the earliest modern warships, naming it after his sister Mary, with the addition of “Rose,” symbol of the Tudor dynasty. Displacing 500 tons, it was among the earliest vessels of the modern age conceived specifically for naval warfare, alongside the *Peter Pomegranate* and the *Henry Grace à Dieu*, the latter measuring 1,500 tons. Later, his daughter Elizabeth I appointed Francis Drake—a seasoned navigator and former pirate—to the post of vice admiral in the latter half of the 16th century. These acts have been interpreted as hallmarks of modernity and of a monarchic regime attuned to the future, bold and innovative in nature.

And yet, nothing under the sun is entirely new. As demonstrated in the preceding pages, the Catholic Monarchs—particularly Isabella I—anticipated these British practices by at least two decades in the first case, and more than sixty years in the second. Around 1490, the queen commissioned Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita—subject of this study—not to convert a merchant vessel for military use, but to construct a massive purpose-built warship: the *Santa Lucía*, a *carrack* of no less than 1,000 tons. This ship, later fully acquired by the Crown, would form the nucleus of a permanent royal war fleet intended for naval operations far beyond Iberian waters, safeguarding the interests of the nascent Spanish monarchy in the Canary Islands, the Strait of Gibraltar, North Africa, and the southern coasts of Italy—a force that may be considered the earliest naval fleet of any modern European state.

To command this nascent state fleet, Queen Isabella selected one of the most experienced shipmasters of the time, the aforementioned Íñigo de Arteita, whom she appointed royal captain over a squadron outfitted in Bermeo in 1493, composed of the *Santa Lucía* and five other Biscayan vessels chartered for the task. This fleet was later expanded as needed, particularly in defense of Crown interests against neighboring kingdoms. The Catholic Monarchs paid little heed to Arteita's criminal past or non-noble origins in their selection of a commander for the creation of a permanent naval force—no longer assembled ad hoc for specific campaigns. Rather, they rightly judged that, despite his evident excesses, Arteita's exceptional abilities demonstrated throughout his mercantile and privateering career—especially in the Mediterranean—made him a fitting choice to lead the Crown's maritime ambitions. Their decision aligned with other contemporaneous appointments of men renowned more for their merit than for birth, lineage, or pedigree—most notably Christopher

Columbus, in whom they placed their trust despite his obscure origins to lead one of humanity’s most ambitious exploratory endeavors.

The career of Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita offers a vivid case study of a type of businessman who simultaneously engaged in naval, commercial, and piratical ventures, routinely skirting or outright violating legal boundaries in pursuit of personal gain. It also illustrates how such individuals relied on kinship networks, social alliances, and political-institutional clout—engaging in influence peddling, nepotism, fraudulent transfers, corruption, bribery, extortion, coercion, physical violence, and deceit.

As a scion of a wealthy family based in a town populated by shipmasters, mariners, merchants, notaries, and various council officials, Arteita leveraged familial support to gain access to contemporary markets and, together with his brothers, managed and expanded their real and movable estate holdings. Raised along the shores of the Bay of Biscay and in proximity to the port of Bilbao—then a vital commercial gateway for Biscayan mariners—the Arteitas of successive generations engaged extensively in maritime transport across the Mediterranean and Atlantic. Through this seafaring expertise, Arteita ascended to the highest ranks of the Crown’s naval hierarchy. Alongside his kinsmen, he frequented the major ports of the Crown of Aragon, contributing to the robust Biscayan presence in late fifteenth-century Mediterranean shipping. This prominence afforded him connections with many of the most prominent and influential merchants of the city of Valencia.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

AGS	Archivo General de Simancas
RGS	Registro General del Sello
CC	Cámara de Castilla
CMC	Contaduría Mayor de Cuentas
ARCV	Archivo de la Real Chancillería de Valladolid
ARV	Archivo del Reino de Valencia/Arxiu del Regne de València
AHPB	Archivo Histórico de Protocolos de Barcelona/Arxiu Històric de Protocolos de Barcelona

Notes

¹ This article has been carried out within the framework of the project “From Ship to Market: Economic Activity, Social Relations, and Armed Conflicts in the Port Cities and Towns of Late Medieval Atlantic Europe” (PID2020-118105GB-I00).

² According to the 1514 census, there existed a house on Tendería Street belonging to his brother, Juan Nicolás, who is referred to as a captain; however, it is recorded that by that year no one was residing there, as he had passed away some years earlier (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1997b).

³ Following the death of María de Meceta’s husband, Juan Pérez de Landa—owner of the Uriarte tower, assessed at 6,000 maravedís in tax value, along with other properties in the Hacedera Raíz (Castrillo Casado 2021, p. 305; Enríquez Fernández et al. 1993a, f. 89v)—the widow appointed her brother, Captain Íñigo de Arteita, as executor of the estate (Enríquez Fernández et al. 2006, pp. 296–302).

⁴ Nicolás de Arteita served the Crown as a ship's master (*maestre de nao*). AGS, CC, CED 7, 209, 5; 7, 212, 2; AGI, *Indiferente*, 420, book 8, fol. 229v. He was also outfitter for Loaysa's fleet, an official of the *Casa de Contratación*, and *corregidor* of Cádiz between 1529 and 1531 (Ugartetxea, 2021).

⁵ AGS, RGS, 1514-09, 74

⁶ In the 1514 hearth tax records, an Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita is listed as the owner of an uninhabited house on Uribarria Street (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, pp. 369–399; 1992b, pp. 547, 641, 725; 1997a, fols. 112v–113r, 115r–v, 117v; 1997b, p. 188; 2003, pp. 154–158, 231–234; Santos Salazar 2017, pp. 65–66).

⁷ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 1999.

⁸ AHPB, Andreu Mir, 234/7.

⁹ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2001, fol. 184r.

¹⁰ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2004, fol. 246r.

¹¹ ARV, Jaume Salvador 2676, fol. 89r.

¹² ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2005, fol. 484r

¹³ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2005, fols. 93v, 359v.

¹⁴ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2005, fols. 482r–488r.

¹⁵ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2014, fol. 234v.

¹⁶ ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2021, fol. 341r.

¹⁷ AGS, RGS, 148804-164.

¹⁸ This was one of the three prizes declared by Íñigo Ibáñez de Arteita in the account of his sixteen voyages throughout the Mediterranean between 1478 and 1498: the capture of the Laspixon, which was returned, both the Moorish crew and the prize itself, to Jorge de Oria (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, p. 177).

¹⁹ He appears in the shipping average records of the port of Bilbao (ARCV, Sala de Vizcaya, 1933, 2/1936, 1) as the importer of a bale from Flanders to Laredo in 1499 aboard the vessel of Martín Ibáñez de Leuzarra, sent by Francisco de Carrión. In 1511, he resided in the suburb of Arranegui in a bakery house inherited from his wife and father-in-law, valued at 1,750 maravedís. He also possessed other properties, such as a vegetable garden in Catanarras, worth 600 maravedís, and a willow grove in Idoaldegui, likewise inherited from his father-in-law, valued at 500 (Enríquez Fernández et al. 1993a).

²⁰ ARCV, Ejecutorias, 52, 27.

²¹ Enríquez Fernández et al. 2006, pp. 268–270; 2010, pp. 175–180; AGS, CC, CED 9, 240, 3; RGS, 1506-03, 24; 1506-04, 76.

²² Enríquez Fernández et al. 1993b, fols. 1r–8v.

²³ AGS, RGS, 1509-11, 450.

²⁴ Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992a, pp. 440–441; Enríquez Fernández et al. 1992b, pp. 567–568, 672–673, 703–704; Santos Salazar 2017, pp. 79–91, 94–97; AGS, RGS, 1490-09, 292; 1491-10, 175; 1492-02, 302; 1494-07, 107; 1494-10, 93 y 98; González Arce 2017, pp. 253, 282–283; García Fernández 2004, p. 360. AGS, RGS, 1509-10, 459. González Arce, 2017, pp. 253, 282.

²⁵ ARCV, Ejecutorias, 163, 4.

²⁶ AGS, CMC-I, 45.

²⁷ Ronquillo Rubio 2015, pp. 253–254; González Arce 2021a, pp. 324–325, 367–368; Caunedo del Potro 1981, pp. 477, 489; vol. IV, pp. 99–101; vol. V, pp. 658–660; Labayru y Goicoechea 1895, III, p. 484; Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 369; Enríquez Fernández et al. 1995, fols. 29v, 58r; 1996, doc. 1, fols. 331v, 12r, doc. 2, fols. 13v, 20r, doc. 3, fols. 59r, 64v, doc. 4, fol. 19v; 1997a, fol. 169v; 1997b, p. 69; 2010, pp. 169–171; Santos Salazar, 2017, pp. 121–122; ARCV, Ejecutorias, 152, 32; 175, 51; Molina, Ruiz, Carvajal y Herrero 2021, pp. 49–50, 148–151; García de Cortázar 1966, p. 412; Vitores Casado 2015, p. 161.

²⁸ Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 372. Arteita's *carrack* was armed with up to 36 large-caliber *lombardas* ("of the greater stone"), 70 of smaller caliber ("of the lesser"), 30 *espingardas*, 80 crossbows, 400 lances for combat, 800 hand lances, and 500 iron shot (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 389). This inventory reflects both the armaments supplied and those the captain was responsible for providing. Among the crew were 10 crossbowmen from the Cantabrian *Cuatro Villas* (Ladero Quesada 2001, p. 379).

²⁹ AGS, CC, CED 1, 6, 1; 1, 45, 2; 1, 47, 4; 1, 62, 2; 1, 89, 2; 1, 110, 1; 1, 112, 1–2; 1, 112, 4; 1, 140, 1; 1, 141, 1; 1, 142, 3; 1, 143, 4; AGS, Patronato Real, 295, 19; AGS, RGS, 149-01, 101; 1492-08, 150; 1492-09, 132; 1493-06, 219; 1493-12,

51; 1494-02, 348; 1496-12, 200; 1514-02, 98. Ugartetxea 2021, pp. 20-21; Labayru y Goicoechea 1895, III, pp. 383-385; AGS, CC, CED 1, 211, 1. ARCV, Ejecutorias, 221, 42; 239, 48.

³⁰ Caunedo del Potro 1981, p. 517; Ladero Quesada 2001, pp. 370-371; Labayru y Goicoechea 1895, III, p. 523; AGS, CMC-I, 1-1, pp. 198, 213.

³¹ ARCV, Sala de Vizcaya, 325, 1.

³² ARV, Jaume Salvador, 2009, fol. 469r; 2676, fol. 67v; 2686. 1491, 7 de noviembre.

³³ AGS, RGS, 1494-12, 425; 1495-09, 205; 1496-11, 133; 1497-11, 105; 1498-05, 309 y 315.

³⁴ AGS, RGS, 1507-06, 260.

³⁵ AGS, RGS, 1510-01, 455.

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