The Commercial World of Seville in Early Modern Times

Francisco Morales Padrón
University of Seville

> « Seville is one of the richest and noblest cities of Spain, the capital of the kingdom and province of Andalusia. It is a pleasant city, open and gay, full of the most respectable people and the most distinguished families. It is situated on the banks of the river Guadalquivir (formerly known as the Betis) which is so wide and deep that even the largest ships of 400 and 500 tons and more can sail right up to the city. It is one of the most active ports in Spain, and from it great fleets, ships and galleons set out every year for the West Indies loaded with every kind of merchandise. Most of the commerce with the Indies is handled by this city and merchants of almost all nations — Germans, Netherlanders, French and Italians — trade here ».

Diego Cuelbis, a German, could sing Seville's praises from his own personal experience: he lived there in 1599 and 1600. The city's greatness is also attested by an episode worthy of « A thousand and one Arabian nights » recorded by another eye-witness, Francisco de Ariño:

> « On 22 March 1595 a silver fleet from the Indies arrived at the wharf on the river by Seville. Unloading began and 332 cart-loads of silver, gold and precious pearls were taken to the House of Trade [*Casa de Contratación*]. On 8 May 1595, 103 cart-loads of silver and gold were disembarked from the flagship and on 23 May, 583 loads of silver, gold and pearls arrived overland from Portugal from the ships of another fleet driven by storms to take refuge in Lisbon ».

Actually three fleets arrived that year: in August yet another docked in Sanlúcar de Barrameda, bringing the total treasure brought from the Indies in 1595 to 2,154,308,932 *maravedís*, or almost 6 million ducats.[1]

Seville enjoyed an era of unparallelled prosperity for two centuries, two centuries which — according both to the official documents and to the eloquent testimonies of chroniclers like Morgado, Peraza, Ariño and Rodrigo Caro — constitued a golden age.[2] The city was at once the reflection and the epitome of the life of the whole country, the keystone and centrepiece of Spain's economic activity, interlocked not only with America but with the rest of the peninsula, with Africa and with Europe. Her magnificent inland port, thanks to the wide Guadalquivir, made Seville a centre of commercial interchange and long-distance trade, a major exporter, importer and distributor of goods of all kinds for over two centuries.

Within Spain, Seville was no isolated oasis. The city was the most important regional centre in Andalusia, indeed in the whole of Spain, with strong economic, political and demographic ties linking Seville with its hinterland and with lands far beyond in the interior. At the regional level, the city's commercial tentacles embraced a whole network of neighbouring communities such as Alcalá, Utrera, Dos Hermanas and the whole Aljarafe region which supplied many of its primary goods, especially foodstuffs. Nationally, Seville had strong links with Castile, Vizcaya and Galicia; internationally, with the Mediterranean countries, Portugal, France, Great Britain and the Hanseatic ports, largely on account of her direct access to America.

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1 A. Domínguez Ortiz, *El 'Thesoro Chorographico' de Diego Cuelbis y su descripción de Sevilla*, « Anales de la Universidad Hispalense », V (1942); Francisco de Ariño, *Sucesos de Sevilla de 1592 a 1604* (Seville, 1873); Archivo General de Simancas, *Contadurías Generales* 322. (I am grateful to my translator, Dr. Geoffrey Parker, for supplying the exact figure for the treasure which arrived in Seville in 1595).

2 Seville was well-served by a large number of chroniclers during its Golden Age. Of particular interest are the accounts of Ariño — mentioned above — and of Alonso Morgado, *Historia de Sevilla* (Seville, 1587); Luís de Peraza, *Historia de la imperial ciudad de Sevilla* (a manuscript in the University Library at Seville); and Rodrigo Caro, *Antigüedades y principado de la ilustrísima ciudad de Sevilla* (Seville, 1634).

The rich countryside around Seville, yielding crops, livestock and fish in abundance, made it possible to provision the city and all the fleets which sailed from it almost entirely from local resources. From the Aljarafe above all, according to the chroniclers, flowed rivers of water, olive-oil, wine and milk — the symbols, as it were, of the fertile land which produced the grapes, oil, grain, fruit and vegetables necessary for the city's normal residents and also for its enormous floating population: those aboard the boats which loaded, unloaded and took on provisions at Seville. Besides this copious produce of the land, there was the yield of animal husbandry: horses to ride and meat to eat. Local livestock kept the numerous butchers of the cosmopolitan city in business. The butchers were clustered around the church of San Isidro and they maintained fine pastures in Tabla and Tabladilla, just outside the city. There, too, just beyond the Minjohar gate (or « Meat gate » as it was often known), the municipal slaughterhouse was established in accordance with the city's Ordinances which laid down detailed regulations concerning the preparation and sale of meat. The Ordinances were described with approval by the chronicler Morgado, who then passed on to the other major aspect of Andalusian stock-raising, the breeding of horses, which made Seville « the city where more and better horses are raised than in all the rest of the kingdom ». The horses were sold in a special market held three days a week, on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays.

Then there were fish: fish from the sea and fish from the river. « In the Guadalquivir, between Seville and Triana, I have seen fish caught which came out of the water larger than two men » wrote Morgado. There was a great fish-market in the square of San Fernando and, later, another on one of the ships in the dockyard. Shad, lamprey, mullet, eel, dace, bass and sturgeon (« with a taste not unlike mutton » according to Morgado) and other species filled the fish-shops, and the overall importance of fishing in the life of the city was reflected in the long section of the municipal Ordinances which laid down the hours of work, the types of net, the permitted fishing grounds and other minor matters in considerable detail.

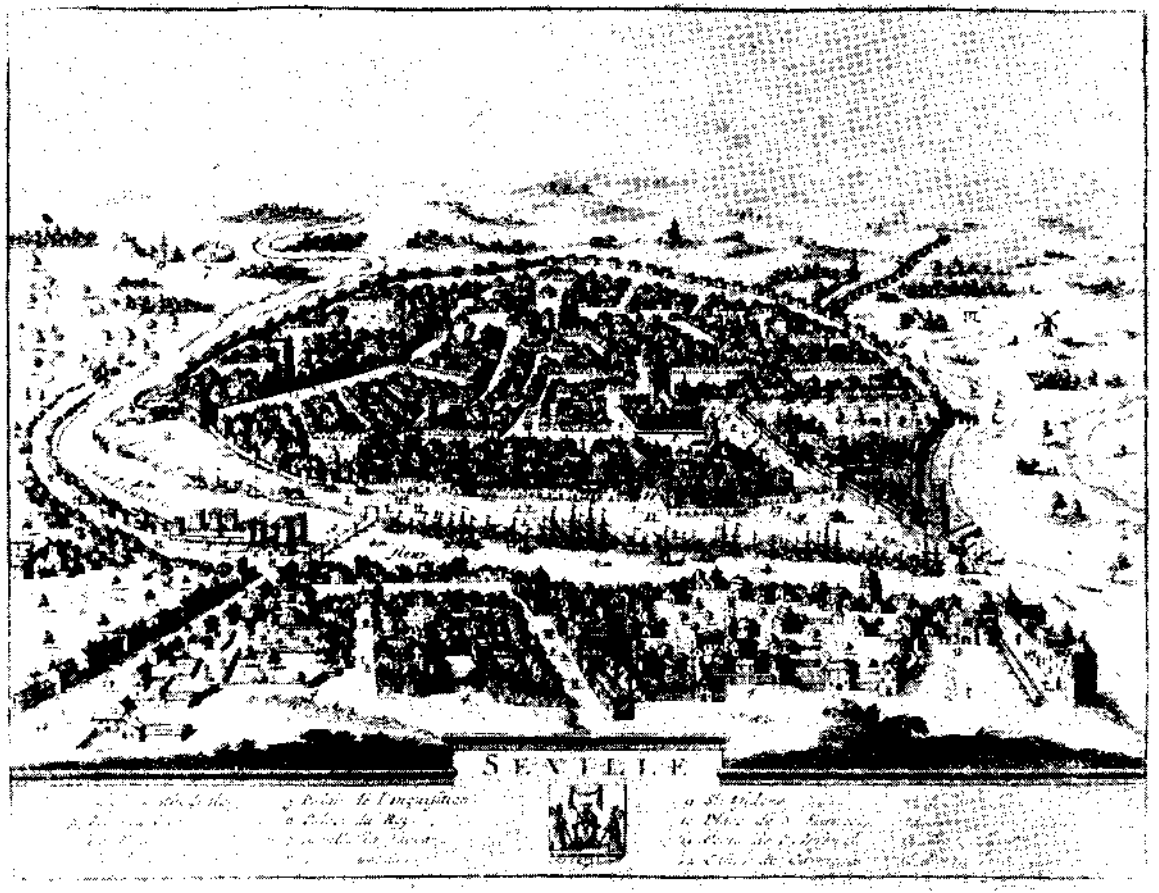

PLATE 1. — Seville in the sixteenth century, with shipping in the river and the «machine» on the right, just in front of the *Torre de Oro*.

The industrial development of Seville was greatly aided by this triple natural wealth, arable, pastoral and aquatic. The large working population of the city was grouped together in guilds and brotherhoods according to the different trades and industries. All profited from the abundance of primary goods in Seville. There were food-producing industries, what we may call « traditional » industries, and an assortment of various other enterprises.

Arable produce was used, of course, in the manufacture of flour, bread, biscuit, oil and wine. The city had many flour-mills and also a municipal granary (the *alhóndiga*) which regulated the distribution of grain and thus, hopefully, avoided any shortage which might lead to riots and disorder. The bread of Seville, praised by Rodrigo Caro as « white, fine and tasty », was made in the outlying villages of Alcalá de Guadaira, Gandul, Mairena, Dos Hermanas and Utrera. The local wines, consumed all over Andalusia and exported to Vizcaya, Galicia, Portugal and America, were also greatly admired. According to one contemporary writer: « In Seville, wine was esteemed as if it contained the essence of all the fruits of the earth », and the wines of the Aljarafe, from Cazallas, Constantina, Alanis, Bollullo and Manzanilla, flowed into the city like a second Guadalquivir. It was the same story with olive oil, extracted from the fat purple olives mentioned by most chroniclers, which was either exported to America in special earthenware bottles, like the local wines, or used to make soap. Olive oil was also an essential ingredient in the diet of men at sea, almost as basic as the ship's biscuit baked in the innumerable ovens of Seville.

The « traditional » industries of Seville were concerned above all with the manufacture of textiles, pottery, ships and soap. The city's textile production was both important and famous. Velvets and damasks, silks, veils, quilts, stockings, doublets and other clothes were all turned out by various groups of textile workers in ever-increasing numbers. Although the 16,000 looms and 130,000 workshops proposed by some chroniclers are clearly excessive, we can perhaps accept 3,000 and 15,000 respectively as a reasonable indication of the scale of the industry. The manufacture of silk was particularly important, centred on the street known today as

« Hernando Colón » and its surrounding areas, with its own Silk Exchange (the *Alcaicería de la Seda*) and its own warehouse. Many women came to be employed in this side of the textile industry, often working at home, but all stages of production, and the guilds, remained under the control of the few great merchants who gave out the raw material and bought back the finished product on fixed dates.

After 1600, partly because of this oppressive organization and partly because of competition from cheaper and more stylish foreign clothes, the textile industry of Seville began to decline. The manufacture of pottery, however, escaped this fate. Extremely important in early modern times, it survives in the city to this day. Diego Cuelbis stated that in the sixteenth century the pottery of Seville was exported to France, the Netherlands and England. We also know that it made its way to America, and at a very early stage too, since Sevillan earthenware goods have been found in the ruins of the first Spanish town in the New World, Caparra in Puerto Rico. Pedro de Medina, another chronicler, claimed that over fifty kilns existed in Triana, just across the river from Seville, and there must have been many more in the city itself. The clay soil around Tablada supplied part of the raw material for the industry and the potters brought it by boat to a special wharf in Triana from which they carried it on carts to their workshops.

The ship-building and soap-making industries of Seville both dated from the Middle Ages. Small boats had always been built, repaired and careened in the shipyards along the river. The yards at Los Remedios, just down river from Triana, and the *Atarazanas* or Arsenal of the city itself were the most important in southern Spain until their decay in the mid-seventeenth century (due mainly to the shortage of timber: the pines of Segura and Cazorla were inferior to those of the north).[3] It is easy to imagine the frantic activity of the yards, refitting and repairing the ships newly arrived from the Indies after their difficult voyage, restoring them to a

[3] The *Atarazanas* of Seville were dockyard and arsenal combined. Three of the six ships permanently stationed there still survive: they accomodate today, in all their gothic splendour, part of the Spanish Royal Artillery.

suitable condition — duly prescribed by the local authorities — for the return journey. Triana was also a centre of soap-making with a large factory producing 15,000 quintals of white soap annually. The Triana factory, together with another in San Salvador producing dark soap, consumed over 60,000 *arrobas* (about 15,000 quintals) of olive-oil every year and monopolized the supply of soap to western Andalusia and to America, with further exports to Castile, England and the Netherlands. This industry kept not only the factory-workers busy but also those who supplied the raw materials required for the process: olive oil, lime, cinders and firewood.

Other major industries in Seville included the manufacture of arms, gunpowder, salt, woodwork, leather-goods, rope, hats, books, plaster, lime, bricks and other building materials. Even the most cursory glance at the city's Ordinances reveals the wide range of activities practised, each with its own conditions of work, permitted raw materials, mutual obligations and duties laid down in detail. The trades still tended to be grouped according to medieval custom and therefore the workshops of each craft continued to be concentrated in the street which bore their name (and they continued to be so right up until modern times when they fanned out all over the city). The « Street of the Armourers », « of the Locksmiths », « of the Cutlers » and so on are a lasting monument to the ancient crafts of Seville. Some of them deserve to be looked at in more detail.

Swords, lances, breastplates, arquebuses and powder were manufactured in the city in ever greater quantities in response to a demand which was at first regional (e.g. the war of Granada, 1569-1571) and then international. Triana too had its share of powder-mills. Salt, always a major commodity, could only be bought in Seville at a special municipal warehouse on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, and was produced in the salt-flats of Sanlúcar which were also owned by the city council. The carpenters of Seville, a prosperous group, used local timber — floated down the river from Veas and Segura by men who specialized in this form of bulk transport — along with wood from Galicia, England and Scandi-

navia to make casks, barrels, staves, spars and boats. Then there were the leather-workers (making sandals, boots, tanned hides and leather bottles), rope-workers, hat and cap-makers and so on. The local book trade was particularly important, serving Seville and the world. Thanks to the American market, and thanks to the wealth, the large population and the literary heritage of the city, the master printers of Seville included many famous figures — Cromberger, León, Pescioni, Maldonado, Vareda and Robertis — from whose presses flowed innumerable editions in several languages. Last but not least, America provided the raw material to occupy more than 200 men in the Seville Mint (the *Casa de Moneda*) which, according to Diego Cuelbis, was « the best in the world and the place which coins the most money ». The treasure of the king and of private individuals brought home by the Indies fleets was disembarked and minted there although at the same time, as we shall see, large quantities also went abroad in bullion. Morgado, always a reliable witness, admitted that « it is a wonderful thing to see the vast amount of treasure in the Mint, and the convoys which come out of it loaded with gold and silver coins just as if they were some sort of merchandise ».

Las Gradas, the steps of the Cathedral, were from time immemorial the public forum and open-air hub of the commercial life of Seville. Proclamations were read out there, banks were established there, and transactions, auctions and frauds took place there. Already by 1525, Andres Navagero, the Venetian ambassador, was impressed by the bustle and ceaseless activity of *Las Gradas*, an activity which even impinged upon the religious life of the Cathedral when it rained, since people came inside to shelter and continue their business in the dry. Towards the end of the sixteenth century Archbishop Don Crístobal de Sandoval y Rojas sent a protest to Philip II against this sacrilege, and it was for this reason that a special merchants' Exchange (*Lonja*) was constructed in the city between 1585 and 1598.[4] However, the principal institutions of the economic life of Seville remained the *Aduana* (the

[4] The *Lonja*, constructed according to the plans of JUAN DE HERRERA (the architect of the Escorial), today houses the *Archivo de Indias*.

Customs House) and the *Casa de Contratación* (the House of Trade). According to Rodrigo Caro, the Customs House was one of the most famous features of Seville. In the late sixteenth century it was sited on one of the ships in the dockyard, close to the city's Jérez gate and to the Mint (completed in 1585), with its doors facing the city. All imported goods had to pass through the Customs House and it was therefore always teeming with chests, bales and bundles. As many as 275 officials toiled there, collecting, among other things, the *almojarifazgo mayor de Indias*: the main customs duty levied on imports from America. The House of Trade (*Casa de Contratación*), also called the House of the Ocean Sea or the House of Seville, was established near the old citadel in 1503 to deal with the growing traffic with the New World. It was modelled on the *fondouks* of the Italian traders in North Africa, but although founded with a purely commercial object in view, the *Casa* soon acquired responsibilities which were political (control of emigration), technical (pilotage and charting) and judicial (trying commercial disputes) as well as purely economic (regulating and organizing the trade between Europe and America). We shall return to the functions of the *Casa* later.

The constricted urban area within which all these activities took place pullulated with people of all sorts. The city had 100,000 inhabitants in 1565, 150,000 by the end of the century, and 125,000 by 1650: a bustling, noisy, cosmopolitan multitude which included nobles, clergy, merchants, artisans, labourers, Jews, converted Jews (*conversos*), converted moors (*moriscos*), negroes and other foreigners. There were hordes of royal officials, travellers, adventurers, colonial explorers, thieves and young *pícaros* (rogues, swindlers) with their daggers and their *germanía* or special argot. All these groups bore witness to the economic bonanza, the luxury and the material prosperity of the city, and likewise to the moral decay, the crime, the corruption and the turpitude which wealth and well-being had brought in their wake. Their shadows still stalk the pages of the many vivid literary works of the Golden Age set in Seville: masterpieces by Mateo Alemán, Gutierre de Cetina, Miguel de Cervantes, Luque Fajardo, Lope de Vega and many others. But

the splendour of Seville did not last long. As the seventeenth century advanced, the population declined and the city decayed. The spirit of adventure ebbed away, the gilded magnificence of earlier days faded. Even the calibre of the immigrants deteriorated: the foreigners who now came to Seville arrived to perform the tasks which the native population either disdained or despised.

Of all the different segments of Seville's population, undoubtedly the most captivating are the *pícaros*: engaging ruffians like Rinconete and Cortadillo in Cervantes' story, or Mateo Alemán's anti-hero, Guzmán de Alfarache; « delinquents and opponents of honour » (in the words of Marcel Bataillon), men who were « base, vile, deceitful, lacking in honour and respect » (according to the *Diccionario de Autoridades*).[5] However we must neglect these lovable villains in favour of a closer examination of another group more germane to our study — the businessmen of Seville, the men who searched for and calculated financial opportunities, who scrutinized the movements of prices, supply and demand, who anticipated, enquired and observed, and who defended their interests tenaciously against the tax-collectors. The letters of the Seville merchants were bursting with news, good or bad. They recorded every facet of the economic situation: the latest movements of the Indies fleets, the arrival of ships from the Netherlands, Nantes or St. Malo bearing packages and chests from Rouen or cloth from Olonne, Angers and Laval. They relayed news about storms which had soaked a cargo and demanded action to recover compensation from their insurers. They reported that since the Indies market was saturated, cloth would have to be disposed of locally, or that since the harvest in Spain was bad it would become profitable to import grain. The commercial entrepreneur had to keep abreast of every development. He was not concerned with guilds, guild-regulations, masters, apprentices and workshops; his realm embraced the great companies, the big warehouses, the banks, inter-

[5] MATEO ALEMÁN, *La vida de Guzmán de Alfarache* (2 parts, Madrid 1599 and 1604). Alemán was born in Seville and spent much of his life there. MIGUEL DE CERVANTES SAAVEDRA, *Rinconete y Cortadillo* (part of the *Novelas Ejemplares* published in 1613, although this story was definitely written earlier). Cervantes too lived for many years in Seville.

national trade and finance — activities which in the Mediterranean countries were described as the « major professions » (*artes mayores*), distinct from the « minor professions » (*artes menores*) of the craftsmen.

A number of changes in the basic structure of economic life in the sixteenth century affected the role and the activities of most merchants. In the first place the spread of credit instruments of various kinds (bills of exchange, bank loans, bottomry loans), of contracts, mutual associations and insurance services greatly assisted commercial growth and enabled the merchant to become a sedentary bureaucrat who travelled only infrequently on matters of business. This development effectively linked the economic power of the merchant to that of the city where he resided. Thanks to increasing wealth and local standing, economic and political, merchants were able to improve their social status too by marriage or by purchase of nobility or municipal office. If the established aristocracy offered any resistance, the merchants were strong enough to fight and win, forming alliances with their former enemies and achieving assimilation in that way. In the end the nobles themselves began to share in the new opportunities for profit, investing capital, participating personally in commerce or banking, entering partnerships with merchants and forming companies based on a contract which bound the parties to a given commercial undertaking or for a fixed period.

Every commercial artifice was well-known in Seville where the German, Netherlands and above all Genoese merchants, long established in the city, introduced the techniques which they had already developed and perfected in their trading operations in the Middle and Far East — the *commenda* and *societas maris* (forms of limited partnership), the « factory » and so on. Christopher Columbus, the first Genoese merchant to deal with America, immediately thought of creating « factories » there. Columbus was the commercial representative or factor of a powerful trading company and he received economic aid (loans) from other Genoese merchants for his New World enterprise. After his death, the Spaniards in America at first operated a primitive system of barter and exchange, but as the

outward-bound cargoes increased in value they were forced to seek new capital. Once again, no one was better equipped to provide it than the Genoese and in the burgeoning trade between Seville and America from 1505 until 1520 they acted as capitalists, investors, directors and shareholders in the various ventures. The Genoese had long specialized in this sort of activity. They had frequented the city ever since its reconquest from the Moors in 1248, serving as capitalists and traders, lending money to the towns of Andalusia, buying and transporting cereals and cloth, and in due course they excelled all others in opening up the trade with America. The notarial documents are full of men whose names soon became a permanent feature of Seville: Grimaldi, Calvi, Cattanei, Spinola, Doria, Pinelo, Rivarol, Garibaldo, Pallavicini, Salvago, Loreto, Leardo and so on. When one remembers the presence of these Italian merchants, and adds to them the Germans and Netherlanders active in Seville, Santo Domingo and Venezuela, the « Spanish » monopoly of trade with America no longer seems so absolute. Even the most famous institution of the transatlantic trade was Genoese in inception. Francisco Pinelo, a Genoese merchant and magistrate (*jurado*) of Seville, was undoubtedly the author of a memorial of 1493 which advised the Catholic Kings to set up a central organism to collect and control all the goods going to or coming from the New World. This organism, the *Casa de Contratación*, was established in 1503 and Pinelo became its first Factor.

The commercial prominence of Seville was largely responsible for its considerable financial importance, even though the city could never boast more than six merchant-banks.[6] Banking in early modern times was normally a profession which was viewed with disapproval on a number of counts. First, it was an occupation which lacked tradition and was suspected by many of being some new-fangled species of usury. Second, banks tended to be founded by foreigners — especially by converted Jews (e.g. the

6 The term « merchant-banker » grew up in the middle ages to describe a man dedicated to both commerce and banking, activities so closely allied that it was difficult to separate them.

PLATE 2. — Another view of Seville, from the slopes above Triana, showing the famous bridge of boats and the *Arenal* of Seville.

Espinosa bank) — or by tax-collectors; and third and worst of all, banks almost always foundered when the crown suddenly decided to repudiate its debts or confiscate the treasure sent from America. Despite all this, however, the bankers of Seville were clearly a cut above the rest. According to fray Tomás de Mercado, a Dominican of the day who lived in Seville and wrote most perceptively about its commerce, the city's bankers were « most magnificent and aristocratic » and they served as the « treasurers and deposit-holders of the merchants » because each time the great fleets arrived from the Indies, every merchant paid the money he received into a bank. He was then able to pay his bills and withdraw cash from his deposit as need arose. Perhaps the prestige of the bankers of Seville stemmed from the « Golden Rule » which, according to Mercado, they all religiously observed: « Bankers elsewhere simply try to accumulate as much money as they can for their private trade [he wrote], but here their first concern is always to keep enough money in the till to meet all incoming bills and notes... ».[7]

There was a special area of the walled city between the citadel (the *Alcázar*) and the Golden Tower (the *Torre de Oro,* a watch-tower which both guarded the river crossing and served as the first repository of the treasures brought from the Indies). According to Peraza, a whole network of gateways led from this inner sanctum within the walls to the harbour: the Jérez gate, the gate of the Watercarriers, the Dockyard gate, the Oil gate, and the Arenal, Triana and Royal gates. The Jérez gate, at the southern end, led to San Telmo, a suburban complex outside the walls, the home mainly of sea-faring folk. The Dockyard gate (*puerta de las Atarazanas*) was also known in the later sixteenth century as the « Golden Gate » (*el Postigo de Oro*) « on account of the great quantity of treasure which came through it every day for the royal House of Trade... » (Peraza). The Oil gate (*puerta del Aceite*) was opened every day at 2 o'clock in the afternoon to allow the convoy bearing the olive oil from the Aljarafe region to enter the city. It was bought and sold in a square just within the walls where wholesalers took charge of it and stored it in their warehouses « whence

[7] Tomás de Mercado, *Suma de tratos y contratos de mercaderes* (Seville, 1569).

they sold it to merchants bound for Flanders, Bruges, England and other far-away countries». Beyond this lay the Arenal gate which (according to Peraza again) was:

> «Celebrated on account of the great diversity and quantities of goods which passed through it and were loaded on to the ships bound for the Indies. To one side of this gate is the large suburb of Carretería, where the wooden casks and barrels are made to carry olive oil, wine and other things to the Indies. This activity has made the citizens of this quarter rich and powerful. On the right hand side, coming out of this gate, there are taverns and eating-houses in profusion where foreigners can always find every kind of food to eat in conditions of complete cleanliness, served by diligent attendants. It is called the «Arenal gate» because of the *Arenal*, a strip of sand [*arena*] of very great extent which stretches before it. A multitude of artisans work there, producing the ropes, cordage, capstans, wheels and other equipment required by those who sail from Seville by sea and those who take it to sell in Portugal».

The Arenal Gate, therefore, opened on to the focus of riverine life: a level expanse of sand between the ramparts and the riverbank where warehouses, sheds and huts had sprung up to house and protect merchandise, workmen and watchmen. Further along the walls, the Triana gate led on to a bridge formed by thirteen boats (all hired) which enabled people to cross to the right bank of the river and the suburb of Triana on foot. Near to this gate, towards the end of the sixteenth century, the city council built a number of warehouses which they hired out to merchants. (See plates 2 and 3). Between the Golden Tower and the Triana bridge stretched the ancient harbour. The trade with the Indies caused this to be enlarged, and wharves and quays spread down the riverbank beyond San Telmo and Los Remedios to La Puebla and even to Horcadas, only a few miles from the sea. But the Arenal always remained the centre and focus of all marine activity, in the shadow of the dockyards and the Torre de Oro, linked to the heart of the city by all the gates already mentioned, and next to the famous «machine», a sort of wooden crane which figures prominently in engravings of this period. (See plate 1).

We have already mentioned two districts of the city as being important and intimately linked to the life of the port: San Telmo and Carretería, one inside and one outside the walls. One might add the quarters of Santa María (the Cathedral) and San Vicente, with their colonies of sea-faring folk; La Magdalena, home of the sea-captains; Los Humeros, where the fishermen lived and, it seems, smoke-cured their fish at home to preserve it; and finally, on the other side of the river, Triana with its Gothic parish church, Santa Ana, the spiritual metropolis of all local mariners, and its town square, the political centre of a community « whose size is such that the title of 'suburb' is now inappropriate » (according to the chronicler Ortiz de Zúñiga at least).[8]

Gates, towers, ramparts, riverside quays and the populous quarters within and beyond the walls: these constituted the urban framework for the rich and varied life of the port. But ultimately everything depended on the river, and the river had long been a seed-bed of problems. There was the problem of the boats plying between the city and Triana, Puebla, Alcalá and Cantillana, forever congesting the waterway. There was the problem of the bridge of boats to Triana whose upkeep and maintenance was the responsibility of whichever individual happened to lease it from the city council. There was the problem of flooding and high water; the problem of keeping the river channel clear (there were several dangerous shipwrecks along its length as well as the major sand-banks — Los Pilares, Albayle, el Naranjal — and the sand bar at Sanlúcar). There was also the shortage of wharves to moor the concourse of ships, which sometimes caused them to dock at Triana, and the lack of adequate careening facilities. The last deficiency was particularly serious since, after their long voyage and their exposure to the hurricanes of the Caribbean, many ocean-going vessels needed to be careened, caulked, paved and repaired. It was not enough to smear them with pitch; their timbers had to be sealed with lead or, best of all, thoroughly coated with a veneer of lead below the waterline. It was difficult to carry out any of this reme-

8 Diego Ortiz de Zúñiga, *Anales eclesiásticos y seculares de la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de Sevilla* (Madrid, 1795-6).

dial treatment at Seville because of the tides and so the ships were sent to safer harbours, normally Puebla Vieja or San Juan de Aznalfarache, without their masters and captains. The work done there was poor on the whole, through haste, lack of materials and lack of supervision. Furthermore, since the repair work had to be carried out at low tide, several of the ships were left with their keels resting in the river bed so that some areas of the hull were neither repaired nor given a protective coating. Although a scheme to raise a galleon right out of the water by means of barrels, casks and small boats lashed to its hull was devised on paper, it never appears to have been put into practise. The rask of inspecting and maintaining the seaworthiness of the great ships, ever larger and ever more numerous, remained a permanent headache.

« Fortunate are the lands to which the mighty river's current flows » wrote Morgado and, believing as we do that the waters of the Guadalquivir flowed as far as America, let us look next at the importance of the New World in the economic and commercial life on the city.

Because of Seville's monopoly status, with very few exceptions all ships destined for the Indies began their voyage by sailing down the Guadalquivir to Sanlúcar de Barrameda. Almost all the famous expeditions of discovery started from Seville and finished their preparations at Sanlúcar before setting out into the Atlantic: the later voyages of Columbus, the fleets commanded by Nicholas de Ovando, Cabot, Magellan, Pánfilo de Nárvaez, Pizarro, Orellana and Hernando de Soto. And side by side with these voyages of discovery, conquest and colonization, a vast relay system of convoys developed, carrying merchandise, men and « civilization » overseas. They all went the same way.[9]

The famous Atlantic convoys were organized in Sanlúcar. The other European powers refused to accept Spain's monopoly of trade with the New World and, although long unable to establish their own colonies in America, they were quite capable of attacking the

[9] The archive of the dukes of Medina Sidonia contains the voluminous papers of the Captains-General of the Ocean Sea, a surviving testimony to the scale of this traffic.

PLATE 3. — A detailed painting of the *Arenal*, the focus of port life, complete with merchants and merchandise, timber and spars. The Arenal Gate is in the centre, the *Torre de Oro* on the right and the Giralda tower of the Cathedral on the left. (From a painting attributed to SÁNCHEZ COELLO reproduced in H. INNES, *The Conquistadores*, facing p. 21).

treasure ships and engaging in contraband trade on their own account. Spain was adamant however. Following the prevailing « mercantilist » notions of the day, she jealously defended her monopoly and sought to accumulate treasure. Her fleets therefore had to be protected as they crossed the Atlantic. They had to travel together and they had to be armed.

The organization of the famous convoy system was laid down in a series of edicts and regulations issued in the first half of the sixteenth century. The maximum and minimum permissible tonnage for the voyage across the Atlantic was fixed; so was the equipment and armament of each ship. The ordinances also made an escort of warships obligatory for the defence of each fleet, despite the objections of the captains, ship-owners and merchants on the grounds of cost! In 1561 it was ordained that two fleets should leave every year (in January and August) for New Spain (modern Mexico) and the South American shore of the Caribbean. In 1574 this was expanded to four fleets on account of the weather: the prevailing winds in the north and south Caribbean were different. Thenceforth the ships bound for New Spain set sail in March and April, those for *Tierra Firme* (as South America was normally known) in August and September. Each was accompanied by a naval escort.

Although not every ship went as far as Seville, and although not every ship travelled in a convoy (some went on their own as *navíos sueltos* — single vessels), all of them were examined and cleared by government officials either in Seville, in Sanlúcar, in Cadiz or in the Canaries. The examination (*visita*) was intended to ensure that all the sailing regulations were being observed and each ship underwent three inspections. The first was carried out by a Judge from the *Casa de Contratación*, the commander of the fleet and the inspectors of shipping. They had to single out any ships already banned from sailing and make sure that the rest were in a fit state to take on cargo and manoeuvre at sea. After this inspection, a licence was issued by the *Casa* and then (and only then) loading could commence. In the mid-sixteenth century, owing to the increasing size of the ships and the silting up of the river,

it became the custom to take on only a part of the cargo at Seville, loading the rest at Sanlúcar. Therefore after 1553 a second examination by a Judge of the *Casa* and the inspectors of shipping took place at Sanlúcar. This time each ship had to be checked to make sure it was not overloaded, that the goods and passengers aboard had the correct authorizations, that any repairs ordered at the first inspection had been carried out, and that everything — including the arms and munitions — was in its correct place. The ships received the final consignments of their cargo as they stood out to sea, across the sand-bar, and there the third and final inspection by officials of the *Casa de Contratación* was carried out. If all was in order, the captain presented his register of all the goods aboard the ship and the officials of the *Casa* signed it. After that, nothing more could legally come aboard.

Needless to say, there were numerous irregularities — starting with the second inspection. The captains lent each other artillery and munitions; the same arms were passed from ship to ship. The abuses and frauds were even worse at the third inspection. The judge of the *Casa* who resided in Sanlúcar was unable to make the examination himself, and his functions therefore devolved upon unreliable deputies; passengers came aboard disguised as sailors; the ships did not take on enough fresh water or artillery; goods condemned by the inspector were ostentatiously unloaded on one side and then surreptitiously brought round and stowed on the other; lighters secretly ferried excess goods out to the ships... The chaos was even worse at Cadiz. Although the commercial centre and seat of the main export firms remained Seville, a growing number of ships actually set sail from Cadiz because their deep draught made it difficult for them to clear the sand-bar at Sanlúcar. Later this technical factor was reinforced by another more general one. By the middle of the seventeenth century the commercial stature of Seville had declined so far that often the ships did not find enough merchandise there to fill even one-third of their holds. They had to turn instead to the exporters of Cadiz, many of them foreign merchants who preferred this port on the open sea because it saved them from the expense of sending their imported goods

up river to Seville. However the fleets always returned to Seville in the end, even though storms and pirates might dictate landfalls at other harbours first.

The frauds committed in Cadiz led the *Casa de Contratación* to press, from 1630 onwards, for the transfer of its inspectorate there to Sanlúcar. In 1664 this was effected and the port of Cadiz was closed to American traffic, but in 1679 it was re-opened again (thanks largely to an impressive donation made by the city to the royal treasury) and from then onwards Cadiz retained its stake in the trade with the New World and even managed to extend it: in 1717 the first Bourbon king, Philip V, moved the entire *Casa de Contratación* from Seville to Cadiz. The importance of the two cities was reversed at a stroke. The Guadalquivir ceased to be the highway to the promised land.

In its heyday, however, there is no doubt that the river was an international waterway used by ships flying many different flags. Although the American connexion was largely responsible for this international character, we must not think only in terms of the New World. The foreign ships linked Seville with many different parts of Europe. Fray Tomás de Mercado, who lived in the city, wrote in his book, *Suma de tratos y contratos de mercaderes*, published in 1569:

> « In Seville almost everyone either tills the soil, which is rich and fertile enough for every crop, or else deals in cloth or in some other commodity, from which considerable profit and advantage is to be gained because the city is a seaport, thanks to the river Guadalquivir... and ships can come and go from innumerable countries, some near, some far distant. It is the principal port and gateway of the whole of Spain, and goods are brought there from the Low Countries, France, England, Italy and Venice. In consequence it is this city which furnishes the whole kingdom with all the merchandise that comes from abroad and therefore rich and prosperous merchants are always to be found there. The city is renowned as a centre of trade. In the past sixty years, since the discovery of the Indies, great opportunities for making money and acquiring wealth have grown up and these have attracted many very great merchants to the city, seeing such possibilities of making vast profits in its trade ».

On another occasion Mercado suggested that the trade controlled by the *Casa de Contratación* was perhaps the most famous and profitable in the world, and that Seville might be considered the motive force of all other markets:

> « Because, truly, whereas Andalusia and Portugal used to be the edge and end of the whole earth, with the discovery of the Indies they have become its centre. For this reason, all the best and most esteemed products in the Old World, even those of the Ottoman empire, come to Seville so that they may be carried from here to the New World where everything bears such an excessive price ».

The same writer, invaluable because he was an eye-witness, described in another part of his book how the merchants based on Seville had:

> « trading contacts with every part of Christendom and even with Africa. To the Netherlands they send wool, oil and leather goods, bringing back tapestries, books and all sorts of merchandise. To Florence they send cochineal and leather hides in exchange for gold thread, brocades, silks and great quantities of linen (which come from all parts of Italy). In the Cape Verde islands they trade in negroes, an important and highly profitable traffic. To the New World they send vast consignments of all sorts of cloth and bring back gold, silver, pearls, cochineal and hides in abundance. The value of all this trade is so enormous that, in order to insure it, policies of assurance have to be taken out in Lisbon, in Burgos, in Lyon and in the Netherlands because the amounts involved are so great that the resources of Seville — and indeed of twenty Sevilles — would not be enough to underwrite it. The merchants of Burgos have their factors here who either deal in their own name, or underwrite the dealings of others, or receive and sell the goods that come from the Netherlands for them. The Italians too need agents here for the same reason. In short, every merchant of substance today trades in every part of the world ».

The vast economic potential of Seville, with its entrepreneurs receiving, exporting and redistributing all sorts of merchandise, stands out in these quotations without any need for further em-

phasis or comment. Likewise Lope de Vega's play, « El Arenal de Sevilla », gives a vivid and definitive picture of the robust, cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city's port and dockland. Crammed with ships from all quarters, its wharves were covered with consignments of all sorts of goods: paper from Genoa, golden thread, brocade and sheepskins from Florence, skins, dates, grain and wax from the Barbary coast, fish, carpets, books, linen, canvas, cloths, timber, metalware and grain from Portugal and the north of Europe. Finally there was the annual harvest of gold, silver, pearls, hides, sugar, dyes and medicinal plants from America. A register kept in 1597 reveals that over a period of a month and a half almost 100 foreign ships entered the port of Seville, of which 38 came from Hamburg, 23 from France, 21 from the Scandinavian countries, and the rest from Ireland, Scotland and the Low Countries. Local traffic was not included in the register.

Without doubt, however, the return of the treasure fleets from America constituted the focal point of the commercial year. As the time approached, a special climate of expectancy reigned in the city. Trade was paralyzed. Debtors refused to pay their obligations until they knew the exact amount of silver they were about to receive. Nothing was bought or sold, since no one wished to deplete his stock of merchandise until the scale of the American demand could be assessed. All this reveals the fundamental instability of the Seville market: its commercial dealings depended to a dangerous degree on what came from the Indies — if it ever arrived. Sometimes pirates intercepted the fleet, sometimes a hurricane dispersed it; sometimes the ships were unable to set sail, sometimes only the fleet from New Spain put to sea. Even if all went well, the crown might impound and spend all the treasure which arrived in order to meet urgent commitments. If anything went wrong, the entire commercial community might have to wait for a whole year before the situation returned to normal, a year in which debtors were forced to flee to a town with judicial privileges which protected its inhabitants from all legal proceedings (towns like Puerta Real, commonly called « The den of thieves ») and countless transactions fell through for lack of funds. Of course debts and bank-

ruptcy could also occur even when the fleets *did* return safely. The traders and their agents not only had to sell the goods which arrived from America — they had to sell to someone who could pay promptly, and they had to be sure that any return cargo would be despatched. It often happened that a merchant would decide at the last minute not to send an agreed consignment to a foreign trader because the rate of exchange for ducats was too low and there would be no profit on the deal.

The first news of the return of a fleet was brought by a special *navío de aviso* (despatch-boat) which arrived days and sometimes months ahead of the main body of the fleet. It brought news of whether the cargo was great or small, of how many ships were coming, of how much treasure they carried, and of whether America stood in need of further supplies of wine, silks and slaves or not. Everyone was tense, restless and anxious. All waited for the silver. It was important to know what the Indies required, but it was more important still to know how much treasure was about to arrive since half of it would be needed to purchase the provisions and merchandise to be sent out on the next fleet. The cargoes of the outward-bound fleets were governed not only by the reports of what the American market wanted but by the monetary situation in Seville itself.

The general insecurity and all the factors mentioned above gave rise to many restrictive practices among the merchants. Monopolies and market-rigging, inflation and price-fixing became commonplace. Some dealers dedicated themselves to buying up all the agricultural products of the region at times of glut in order to sell them again later at a profit: in August and September they purchased large quantities of new wine, in November and December they bought up olive-oil, and in May and June they acquired grain. Naturally food prices rose rapidly in consequence. Seville was an expensive city; the cost of living there was remarkably high. Merchants also tried to corner the market in Netherlands produce, in Segovian and Toledan cloth, in iron or in silk for the sake of making larger profits.

It is interesting to follow the trail of the treasure from the Indies after it arrived in Seville (although we have only a few figures and cannot really generalize from them). According to Hamilton, between 1503 and 1660 some 181,333 kilograms of gold and 16,886,815 kilos of silver entered Seville officially. This total is fantastic and, although the greater part of the treasure did not remain long in the city, Seville certainly derived some benefit from it (and also some harm since the treasure brought in its wake spiritual and moral decline and an unparallelled increase in the cost of living). However it is perhaps rash to draw firm conclusions because so much treasure entered and left the city without being registered. In the course of the year 1568, for example, 16 ships arrived at Seville from New Spain carrying 1,500,000 ducats according to the register (600,000 for the crown), over 40,000 hides and 5,000 *arrobas* of cochineal. Later, 19 vessels arrived from Peru with an official consignment of 3,000,000 ducats. These figures are certainly impressive, yet it was believed that far more arrived clandestinely — 8,000,000 ducats was mentioned in one estimate. Of course we only know the fate of the registered cargo. In 1570, some 4,274,000 *pesos* arrived from the Indies officially, and 2,775,000 more in 1571. During the same period, albeit originating from earlier cargos, 4,295,000 *pesos* left the city in 1570 and 2,723,000 between January and October 1571. The equilibrium between the inflow and outflow of bullion is most remarkable.[10]

Where did all the treasure go? Half of it, we know, was used to pay for the goods which were needed to freight the next outgoing fleet; the other half was absorbed by trade or government activity within the peninsula or abroad. The gold went, above all, to the provinces of Madrid, Valladolid and Toledo, to the north, and to the rest of Andalusia. Of the silver, a third remained in

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10 So is the fact that silver left the city more slowly than gold. In the 1560s the receipts of treasure from the New World were 97% silver; in the 1570s they were 98% silver. The small quantities of gold were exported almost at once. Cf. J. GENTIL DA SILVA, *Desarrollo económico, subsistencia y decadencia en España* (Madrid, 1967), pp. 65-101.

Andalusia with yet more to Valladolid, Madrid, Toledo, Galicia and Portugal. As José Gentil da Silva has written:

> « The majority of the payments clearly corresponded to individual transactions. In the regions of Seville, Cadiz, Málaga and Jaén in particular, the fairs which attracted and redistributed the money in circulation to purchase, for example, the cereals, wine and olives produced locally, caused a haemorrhage of gold and silver from Seville. Even this part of the treasure did not necessarily remain in Spain. At some stage it would be exported to purchase freight for the Indies fleets or to pay for the textiles and other goods acquired in northern Europe — cloths from Rouen, linen from Amiens and so on ».

Sooner or later, the money would be lost by Spain.

Even if we admit that the reigns of Philip II and Philip III were the high point of Seville's golden centuries, we must also acknowledge that the first symptons of the coming decline were already evident in the later sixteenth century. Until 1565 the economic situation was extremely favourable, but from that date until about 1585 there was a period of stagnation. A new phase of expansion followed until 1640 but then came the decline from which there was to be no recovery.

In 1566, fires and shipwrecks took their toll of the treasure fleets and the daring of the pirates of Algiers grew so great that — not content with capturing a ship from Laredo, two frigates from Galicia, five great ships from the Netherlands, one from England and the despatch-boat from the Indies fleet — eleven of their vessels took up station just beyond the bar of Sanlúcar and tried to intercept every ship coming into the Guadalquivir. The great city, defenceless and unprotected, was petrified. In 1568 a fearful epidemic of plague broke out and claimed a heavy toll in Triana and in the densely-populated areas of the city around the Cathedral. Prices leapt: a chicken cost more than a working man's wages for a week. In 1569 the plague began to claim its victims from among the rich and spread to Sanlúcar, Jérez, Puerto de Santa María, Ecija, Córdoba and beyond. The well-to-do fled to Guadalcanal and Constantina. The entire economic activity of the region was paralyzed; the life of the city, material and spiritual, collapsed.

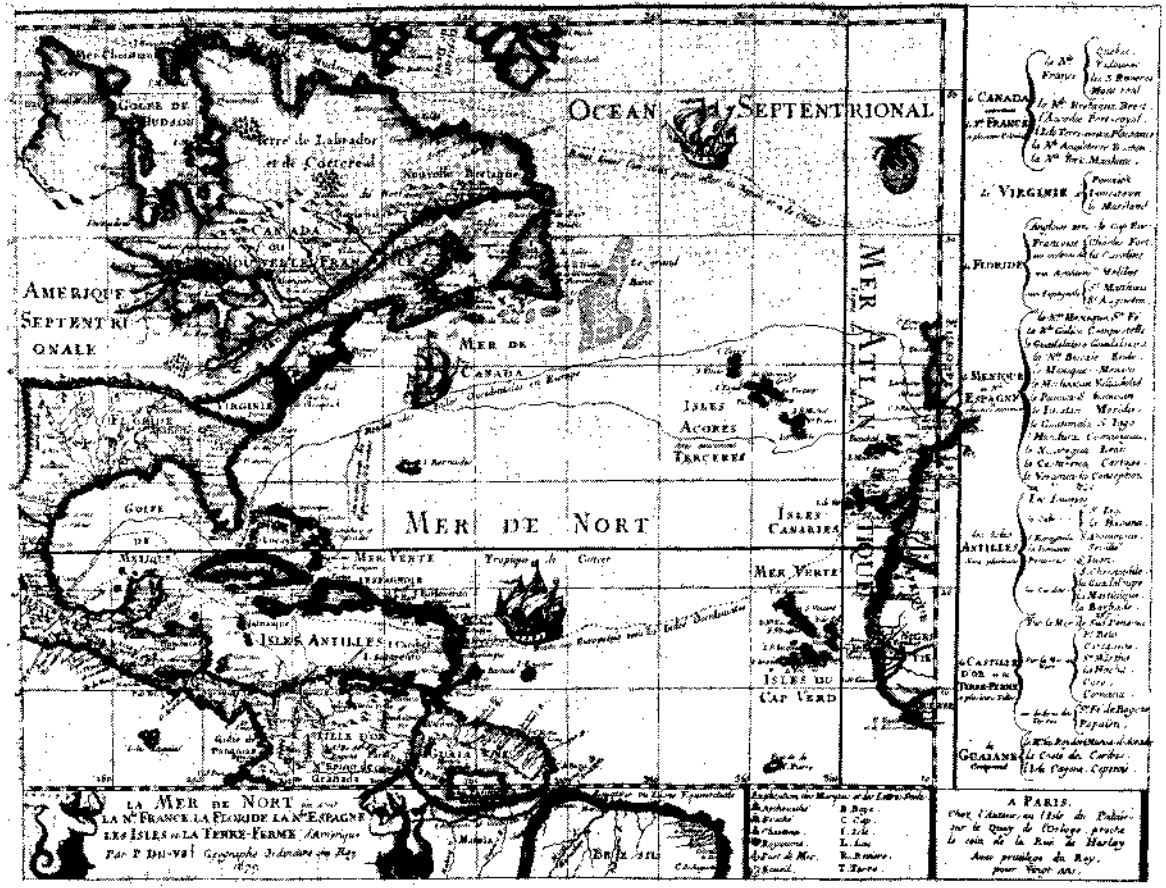

PLATE 4. — The route of the Spanish galleons to and from America: through the south Atlantic on the way out, through the north Atlantic on the way back. (From a French map of 1679).

The epidemic ended in the summer, however, and gradually Seville began to return to its accustomed rhythm and routine. The last quarter of the century was the honeymoon period with the Indies, and these years saw the construction of the *Lonja* (Exchange), the Customs House and the Mint.

The description of this period by Alonso de Morgado, a writer already quoted many times, reads rather like a fairy story:

> « It was a wonderful thing, a sight not seen in any other port, to observe the wagons pulled by four oxen which, at the time of the arrival of the fleets, carried the massive treasure of gold and silver — all in ingots — from the wharves in the harbour to the *Casa de Contratación*. It was no less wonderful to observe the great wealth stored in the many streets of Seville inhabited by merchants from the Netherlands, Greece, Genoa, France, Italy, England and other northern countries, and from the Portuguese East Indies. There was also the wealth of the *Alcaicería* in gold, silver, pearls, crystal-glass, precious stones, enamel, coral, silks, brocade, rich stuffs and every sort of fine silks and cloths. This *Alcaicería* is a quarter of the city full of the shops of silver-smiths, jewellers, sculptors, silk-workers and armourers, all of immense wealth... ».

Morgado goes on to describe the *Casa de Contratación*, of which he wrote:

> « If all the wealth which has entered it since the discovery of the Indies was used to pave the streets of Seville, the city would be paved with slabs of gold, silver and precious stones instead of its present slabs of mud ».

In 1570 Philip II came to Seville. Eight years later the Jesuit priest, Pedro de León, began his devoted work in the brothels and prisons of the city, leaving us a pathetic picture of another face of Seville, far different from the world of wealth described by the chroniclers like Morgado and Ariño. But their world was doomed. The year after the publication of Morgado's account the Spanish Armada was defeated; the very year of Ariño's fantastic description — 1596 — Cadiz was sacked by the English. The signs of weakness increased. Philip II died at the end of the century and Seville entered the 1600s crippled by administrative chaos, burdened by debt and acutely short of capital. Undoubtedly appearances could

still deceive. They deceived a German visitor to Seville in the early years of the seventeenth century, Arnold von Holten, who wrote: « Nowhere in the world has received or receives as much wealth as Seville ». It was true, but it did not remain true for long. The seventeenth century, « the age of decline flanked by a century of expansion and a century of revival » (Domínguez Ortiz) brought with it the eclipse of Seville, an eclipse which was shared by the rest of Spain and indeed, to an extent, by Europe in general.

The causes of decline were manifold. Some were general, affecting the entire peninsula; others affected only Seville. Chief among the former were the disastrous financial policies of the government, the decline in industrial production, the repeated devaluations of the currency (leading inevitably to higher prices), the interminable foreign wars (which eventually provoked the revolts of Catalonia and Portugal and — with less success — of other regions, even Andalusia), the continual loss of ships coming from America, and the extension of European conflicts to the New World (Cromwell's attack on Jamaica). Neither the sale of offices, nor the confiscation of property, nor voluntary donations, nor new taxes, nor sumptuary laws, nor the debasement of the currency could cure the financial and political malaise. Any tampering with the coinage had an immediate effect on Seville since so many important transactions took place there. Likewise the confiscation of treasure arriving from America was especially injurious to Seville, causing bankruptcies and even insanity among its merchants. Many traders simply abandoned commerce altogether. The war with Portugal (1640-68), obliged Seville to take measures to defend the near-by frontier, at vast cost to the city treasury. Failure to dredge the river and the steady increase in the size of ships prevented more and more vessels from reaching the city. Then came natural disasters. The inundation of 1626, the « great flood », « the worst in living memory », left many people homeless, pushed up prices and gave rise to speculation. The entire town council climbed up the Giralda tower of the Cathedral to display the Sacrament, hoping that its power would drive back the wind and water. It did not. The terrible plague outbreak of 1649 removed almost half the

city's population — some 60,000 people died, of whom 23,000 were buried in the cemetery of San Sebastian. The countryside was depopulated; no one was left to cultivate the fields. The merchants were gone, the guilds had no members and the town suburbs lay deserted. The universal hunger and misery gave rise to revolts, known as the «Green Banner» (*el Pendón Verde*), in several towns of Andalusia. The Golden Age was at an end.

And yet not everything was lost. Tomás Mañara, a foreign merchant who traded with the Indies and even went to live there for a time, did not abandon Seville in its decline. His son, Miguel Mañara, was born in the city and founded a hospital there to look after the poor: the *Hospedal de la Caridad* which survives even today. He devoted his life to the care of those in need, dying in Seville in 1679, the very year in which Cadiz was re-opened to the American trade. The Italian community had always played an intimate role in the fortunes of Seville. The city's grandeur was largely brought about by the activity of Christopher Columbus; its apogee was underpinned by the capital and enterprise of the Grimaldi and many other Genoese; and its decline was soothed by the activity of men like Mañara. As long as some foreigners remained, there was still hope.