

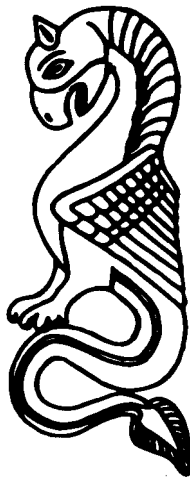
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**Authentic Moors:
Two Cases of Muslim Participation
in Sixteenth-Century European Mock Battles**

Max Harris

Along a broad swathe of Spain's Mediterranean coast, stretching from Catalonia in the north to Andalucia in the south and from the Balearic Islands offshore to the mountains and central plateau inland, *fiestas* (festivals) and *danzas* (dances) of Moors and Christians make up a large part of the annual festive calendar. Scattered examples can be found in Galicia, in neighbouring Portugal, across the Pyrenees in southern France, and in parts of Italy once ruled by Spain. Although these mock battles are now annual affairs, usually attached to the local patronal saint's day festival, they were originally occasional, performed most often in the context of a royal visit or other special event of local political significance.¹

The roles of both Moors and Christians, then as now, were played by members of the local Christian community. In late medieval Spain, a dramatic framework sometimes enacted a fictional visit of real Moors as the occasion for a *juego de cañas* or other sporting battle between real Christians and mock Moors,² but, to the best of my knowledge, such battles were never staged for real Moorish visitors. Nor did authentic Moors take part in mock battles in Christian territory.

There are, however, two exceptions to this general rule. In Naples, in 1543, and Granada, in 1561, real Moors took part in mock battles on Christian soil. The former was staged on the occasion of a visit to Naples by al-Hasan, the ruler of Tunis. The latter celebrated the appointment of the latest member of the ruling Mendoza family to the office of mayor of the Alhambra. The new mayor uniquely invited the city's Morisco population to take part. The original Italian and Spanish accounts of these exceptional mock battles are little known and have never been translated into English. As one can imagine, both situations were politically highly charged.

Even mock battles staged in honour of a royal visit by a Christian ruler to one of his own cities entailed 'a delicate negotiation of power and prestige.' Explicitly

celebrating 'the royal spectator's own military prowess and accomplishments' elsewhere, it implicitly referred to the defensive battle that the city was choosing not to mount then and there. It served, in other words, to remind the visiting monarch that his entry was granted rather than forced and that it bore with it certain reciprocal obligations to the city. Steven Mullaney observes:

Rather than lay siege to gain entry, the monarch granted an entry was entertained by the comfortably displaced spectacle of a siege, a dramatic entertainment that at once represented the potential for conflict manifested by a royal visit, and sublimated that potential, recasting it as a cultural performance to be enjoyed by city and crown alike.³

Naples (1543)

As one might expect, the 'potential for conflict' is even more apparent in Geronimo de Spenis's account of the visit of al-Hasan to Naples in 1543.⁴ On the morning of Sunday, 3 June, four ships 'loaded with Moors' [*carreche de mori*] entered the bay of Naples. The ships bore the king of Tunis, his wife, a substantial escort of Moorish soldiers, 'many other Moorish women' [*multe alte donne moresche*], horses, exotic merchandise, and two captive lions, which were later released for hunting.

The women stayed on board, but that evening the king and a group of Moorish warriors were greeted outside the city gates by the Spanish viceroy (Pedro de Toledo), a company of nobles, and 'innumerable common people on foot and on horseback' [*populari sine numero ad pede et ad cavallo*]. Carefully escorted and preceded by trumpet fanfares, the king made his formal entry into the city. He was followed by a cavalcade of fifty Moorish soldiers 'armed with spears about twelve feet in length and very long muskets' [*portandono zagaglie in mano de circa 40 palmi lluna, et scoppette longhissime*]. It must have been an impressive and somewhat unnerving sight, to which the Spanish hosts responded in kind. As the Moors approached the palace where they were to lodge, they were met by a furious barrage of artillery and cannon fire that lasted a full fifteen minutes, 'making the earth shake' [*tremando la terra*].

Although the royal Moorish entry and its Neapolitan reception were not quite as daring as they first sound, since al-Hasan was an ally of Charles V, installed as puppet ruler of Tunis after the Spanish conquest of the city in 1535,⁵ they constitute a striking example of historical conflict between Moors and Christians being

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'comfortably displaced,' to use Mullaney's phrase, by public pageantry.

The visit was not without tension. Two days later, the viceroy's herald toured the city's streets threatening death to anyone who mistreated a Moor. On 7 June, with both sides reassured by the other's good behaviour, the king's wife landed and was escorted to the palace by a further five hundred armed Moorish warriors [*soldati morischi che sono al numero de cinquecento in tutto*]. On 12 June, a Spanish soldier who had robbed and wounded a Moor was publicly hanged. On 31 June, the king of Tunis ordered one of his own men hanged for offending a Christian.

The most intriguing feature of the visit, from the point of view of European representations of battles between Moors and Christians, took place on Sunday, 1 July. What de Spenis calls 'a Moorish joust' [*giostra morescha*] was held in one of the main streets of the city, the *strata de la Incoronata*. His brief account does not permit a detailed reconstruction of the event, but we do know that Garcia de Toledo, the son of the Spanish viceroy, and an Italian nobleman, Ascanio Caraziolo, dressed as Moors. Other similarly costumed Christians may have taken part, but the Tunisian warriors, led by al-Hasan himself, were the star attraction.

Armed 'as if for war' [*ad modum belli*], some with spears [*zagaglie*] and others with Moorish muskets [*scoppette moresche*], the Tunisians galloped to and fro on their light cavalry horses [*jomenta*]. In modern Italian, *giumenta* means a mare, mule, or beast of burden, but in the late Middle Ages and early modern period, it also meant a small riding horse and hence, in this instance, the kind of lightweight Moorish cavalry horse for which De Spenis perhaps knew no more specialised term. So mounted, the Tunisians took the opportunity to demonstrate, in the ensuing joust, their remarkable military and equestrian skills

When the game of spears was finished, the Moors and their Christian partners took up canes, hurling them at one another. Those who lacked canes dismounted to retrieve fallen canes from the ground. [*Fenito il gioco de le zagaglie pigliorno lle canduze, menando lluno ad laltro et piu destri mori, non havendono canduze in mano, se calavano da cavallo in terra pigliando lle canduze.*] This was almost certainly a version of the popular *juego de cañas* or game of canes, a form of competitive equestrian exercise originally introduced to Spain by the Moors, which required teams of some thirty riders to charge one another at full gallop, while hurling spears made of reed, rush, or bamboo canes and defending themselves with shields.⁶ For once, as Benedetto Croce puts it, 'authentic Moors' [*mori autentici*] competed in a game of canes on European soil.⁷

There is no evidence that either game was scripted, although the costuming of at least two Christians as Moors gave the event a degree of theatricality. In the

diplomatic nature of the case, the joust could not have been staged as a conventional European *moros y cristianos* in which the Moors were finally defeated. Nor could the Moors have reversed the outcome and defeated the Christians. By dressing the Christian nobility as Moors the event was ostensibly stripped of its usual connotations of ethnic conflict and presented as a competition among Moors alone rather than as a dramatic mock battle or sporting contest between Moors and Christians. Nevertheless, to have seen Moorish warriors charging through the streets of Naples, brandishing spears, firing muskets, and displaying consummate skill at their own martial game of canes, must have been somewhat disconcerting to a European audience for whom the fear of Muslim invasion was still very real. Invasion, to use Mullanay's terms, was temporarily recast as 'cultural performance.'

Granada (1561)

In 1561, Philip II of Spain appointed eighteen-year-old Luis Hurtado de Mendoza mayor of the Alhambra, the fortified Moorish palace that dominates the city of Granada. Luis was the fourth successive member of the Mendoza family to hold the office. Both his grandfather and father, who had preceded him in office, were still alive, the former serving as president of the royal council of Castile and the latter as captain general of the kingdom of Granada and as Philip's ambassador to the Vatican. In his father's absence, Luis had served for two years as deputy captain general. He was also the fifth count of Tendilla and, on his father's death in 1580, would become the fourth marquis of Mondéjar.

The single most powerful family in the former Moorish kingdom of Granada, the Mendozas governed the Alhambra, exercised military authority in the kingdom, and enjoyed the support of the aristocracy. They were opposed by a twenty-six member chancery, first established by Ferdinand II in 1505, that governed the rest of the city of Granada, regulated civil life in the kingdom, and enjoyed the support of the immigrant Christian population. The two sides clashed over the problem of the Moriscos.

At their surrender to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, Granada's Moors had been promised freedom of religion. Ten years later, they had been given the choice of exile or Christian baptism. Those who stayed paid only nominal allegiance to Christianity. Known as Moriscos, they managed, for the most part, to retain their distinctive language and culture in public and observe their Muslim faith in private. In the city of Granada, some 20,000 out of a total of 50,000 to 60,000 inhabitants were Morisco.⁸

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In many of the mountain villages of the Alpujarra, only the priest was not.

The chancery wanted to see an end to any distinctively Morisco culture. The Mendozas defended the Moriscos against undue persecution. There was a measure of self-interest in this aristocratic protection of hard-working merchants and labourers. Fernand Braudel has remarked that the 'feudal landlords' of Granada protected the Moriscos 'much as in the United States southern plantation owners protected their slaves.' But there is a difference: the Mendoza's opponents did not want to free the Moriscos, they wanted to eradicate them.⁹

To celebrate his appointment as mayor, Luis ordered that the feast day of John the Baptist (June 24) be observed with a mock battle that would amply demonstrate the military force, both old Christian and Morisco, at his disposal.¹⁰ The setting was an artificial island in the river Genil, created by redirecting the normal flow of water. It was joined to the river banks by a bridge at each end. On the eve of the fiesta, 'four hundred horsemen, a thousand arquebusiers, and four hundred Moriscos' [*400 de a cavallo y mill arcabuzeros y quatroçientos moriscos*] assembled in the grounds of the Alhambra.

Divided into two companies, one led by Luis and the other by two of his friends, they left the palace by different gates, an hour before dawn, to descend through the city streets to the river. Luis and his men were dressed 'in Moorish style' [*a la morisca*].

A band of fifty men playing flageolets or bagpipes (*gaytas*) and other instruments preceded the soldiers. Then came the Moriscos, wearing loose trousers, white shirts, and coloured bonnets. Some were armed with slings, while others carried small lances or spears [*luego venian los moriscos con çaraguelles y camissas blancas y bonetes de colores, paños de tocar y muchas hondas, y otros con lençuelos en las manos, y muchas vanderillas repartidas entre ellos*]. They were followed by a dozen trumpeters and other musicians wearing silken Moorish gowns. The arquebusiers came next, accompanied by many fifes and drums. There were a dozen knights, riding 'with short stirrups' [*a la gineta*]; twenty more knights armed with halberds, shields, or bows; five halberdiers 'with many feathers in their hats' [*con muchas plumas en sus sombreros*]; and twelve grooms.

Behind this escort rode Luis himself. The young count wore Moorish dress: loose damask trousers, a silken gown, and a camlet cloak, all decorated with gold and silver [*vnos çaraguelles de damasco leonado bordados, y una marlota de tela de plata blanca y leonada toda cortada y lauada con madejuelas de plata, aforrada en tela de oro amarillo, y vn capellar de chamelote blanco y leonado con muchos rapacejos de oro*]. He carried a shield and a long lance from which hung a pennant emblazoned with

Islamic crescent moons [*vna lanza muy larga con veleta de los mismos colores, y vnas medias lunas*].

Behind him came twenty foot soldiers and a mounted equerry, the latter carrying a lance and standard also decorated with crescent moons. Then came three standard bearers, six trumpeters, and, marching two by two in the wake of their captain general, 'all the people, dressed in Moorish style with many elegant Moorish gowns' [*toda la gente, bestidos a la morisca con muchas marlotas muy galanas*]. Thus, as the sun rose, Luis reached the island in the river. A great crowd awaited him.

No description survives of the opposing army. Perhaps they represented Christians, although this would have meant either that Luis, at the head of what was clearly intended to represent a Moorish army, would have lost the ensuing battle (and his Morisco supporters would have been induced to enact their own defeat) or, equally unthinkable, that the Moors would have been allowed just this once to defeat the Christians. Perhaps both sides, whether Christians or Moriscos in daily life, dressed as Moors for the mock battle, just as they had when al-Hasan visited Naples in 1543. Only thus could Luis identify with the persecuted Moriscos, lead the winning side, and still avoid representing the defeat of Christians. It was enough, under the circumstances, for him to fly the crescent moon. He would not have wanted to enact the undoing of the Christian reconquest of Moorish Spain.

As day dawned, Moriscos streamed across both bridges onto the island stage, the arquebusiers formed up in battle lines, and together 'they began to fight a valiant and fierce skirmish as if it were real' [*empezaron a trabar su escaramuza tan braua y reñida como si de veras fuera*], many feigning death on either side. Artillery boomed from the walls of the Alhambra and, after a while, the cavalry joined in, four hundred strong, with the 'gallant' [*bravo*] Luis leading the charge. It was 'something never seen before in that city' [*cosa que jamas se a bisto en aquella çiudad*] and so well ordered that, even though it lasted a long time, 'it ended without any mishap' [*se acabó sin desgracia ninguna*].

Once the battle was over, Luis led the troops in a triumphal parade back to the Alhambra, leaving the Moriscos in their own quarters along the way. All the knights who had taken part sat down to lunch at tables in the courtyard of Luis's grandfather's house. The colours of their costumes and the multitude of feathers that adorned their heads so impressed the courtiers that they declared they had never seen anything like it. Food was also provided for the foot soldiers and Moriscos, although apparently not at the marquis's tables. *Convivencia*, the capacity to live together in difference, has its limits.

I am aware of no other mock battle in Christian Spain in which Moriscos took

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part. Although it is possible that they were performing under duress, I am inclined to think that they offered a voluntary show of support for the new mayor of the Alhambra. Luis seems to have returned the favour, dressing as a Moor not simply for the splendour of the costume but to identify with his Morisco subjects and thereby to challenge the prejudices of the civil chancery.

Moorish dress was a heated political issue. The chancery would soon persuade Philip II to revive dormant laws forbidding Moriscos to wear traditional Moorish clothes. For Luis and his followers to have paraded in triumph through the city streets, dressed *a la morisca*, was a politically loaded gesture. In the process, he was able to portray himself as a powerful leader, both in the fictional world of the drama and, by his ability to summon a large and well-ordered military force, in the real world of Granadine politics.

Sadly, the Mendoza policy of tolerance towards the Moriscos did not prevail much longer. The Turkish siege of Malta in 1565 heightened Christian fears of an assault on the mainland. The increased frequency and scope of corsair attacks, culminating in a spectacular raid later that year on Órgiva, twenty miles inland from the Granadine coast, added to the tension, as did the discovery that some Moriscos were spying for the Turks and others were planning to seize control of Granada.

Encouraged by the chancery and without consulting the Mendozas, Philip revived a decree first issued by his father in 1526 but never seriously enforced. It required the Moriscos of Granada to learn Spanish and outlawed all use of Arabic after three years. It forbade the use of Moorish costumes, surnames, music, dances, wedding ceremonies, and public baths. It aimed, in short, at complete cultural assimilation. To enforce the decree, Philip appointed Pedro de Deza president of the chancery of Granada. In January 1567 Deza began his campaign of suppression by demolishing the beautiful Alhambra baths. Iñigo Lopez de Mendoza, marquis of Mondéjar, Luis's father and once again Philip's active captain general in Granada, was outraged.

For a while, the Moriscos hoped that negotiations and generous donations to the royal treasury would resolve the matter, as they had in the time of Charles V, but Philip was adamant. Tension mounted and, after dark on Christmas Eve 1568, 180 armed Moriscos from the Alpujarra trooped into the city dressed as Turks. Had there not been an unexpected snowfall, their numbers might have been greater. When their brethren in the city, sensing a fiasco, failed to join the uprising, the raiders cursed them for cowards and traitors. The 'Turks' killed a few guards and sacked a store before being driven off by Mondéjar's soldiers. In the morning, Mondéjar personally assured the city's Christians that there was no cause to worry. He was wrong. When the rumour that a Turkish army had invaded Granada reached the mountain villages of the

Alpujarra, the Moriscos there took up arms and massacred their old Christian priests and neighbours. The legend of the 'martyrs of the Alpujarra' was born. Mondéjar was forced to raise an army and respond.¹¹

As is often the case with ethnic conflict, the war produced accounts of terrible cruelty on both sides. The Moriscos are said to have desecrated churches, using Madonnas for target practice and holy vessels for chamber pots; tortured priests, roasting one inside a pig and filling another's mouth with gunpowder before blowing off the top of his head; and enslaved prisoners, shipping men to the galleys and women to the harems of north Africa. On the Christian side, after John of Austria replaced Mondéjar as leader of the Spanish troops, the war was fought with calculated brutality. Entire villages were razed, each house, fence, fruit tree, and vine being cut down or burned to the ground. Male captives were hanged or shot, women and children enslaved.

In the midst of all this, there was, strangely, a partial reprise of the festivities of June 1561. When John of Austria entered Granada in April 1569, he was greeted with a mock battle in which Luis led a hundred horsemen dressed in Moorish costumes against another hundred clothed in scarlet silk. All wore cuirasses and carried lances and shields [*fue el Conde de Tendilla . . . con docientos ginetes, los ciento de la compañía de Gonçalo Tello de Aguilar con ropas de raso carmesi, y los otros ciento de su compañía, vestidos a la morisca, y todos con sus coraças, adargas y lanças*].¹²

Once again, while one side was designated by its costumes as Moorish, the other's identity is not specified. And, although Moriscos were surely absent from this mock battle, Luis did not flinch from leading the army that represented their cause. Perhaps he dressed in the same splendid costume that he had worn eight years before. Given that John of Austria was relieving the Mendozas of their command and that the family still hoped for a negotiated peace with the Moriscos, this was once again a brave public statement. The official account may say that John of Austria 'greatly enjoyed' the 'fine skirmish' [*alegraron mucho a don Juan con una vistosa escaramuza que le hizieron*] but he must also have been pointedly reminded by the 'displaced spectacle', as Mullaney puts it, of the battle he was not having to fight for command of the Christian forces in Granada.

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NOTES

Author's Note: I am grateful to John Dillon, Senior Academic Librarian in European Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for help in making sense of De Spenis's account of the Neapolitan *giostra morescha*.

¹ Max Harris, *Aztecs, Moors, and Christians: Festivals of Reconquest in Mexico and Spain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

² Teofilo F. Ruiz, 'Elite and Popular Culture in Late Fifteenth-Century Castilian Festivals: The Case of Jaén', in *City and Spectacle in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Barbara A. Hanawalt and Kathryn L. Reyerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), pp. 296-318.

³ Steven Mullaney, 'Strange Things, Gross Terms, Curious Customs: The Rehearsal of Cultures in the Late Renaissance', in *Representing the English Renaissance*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 65-92, 70.

⁴ Geronimo De Spenis, 'Breve cronica dai 2 giugno 1543 a 25 maggio 1547', ed. by Bartolomeo Capasso, *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, 2 (1877), 511-31, 519-25.

⁵ Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp. 165, 177.

⁶ *Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo Americana*, 70 vols (Barcelona: Espasa-Calpe. n.d), vol. 11, pp. 299-300.

⁷ Benedetto Croce, *La Spagna nella vita italiana durante la Rinascenza*, 2nd ed. (Bari: Laterza, 1922), p. 193.

⁸ Antonio Luis Cortés Peña and Bernard Vincent, *Historia de Granada*, Vol. 3, *La época moderna: siglos XVI, XVII y XVIII* (Granada: Editorial Don Quijote, 1986), pp. 47-56.

⁹ Gabriel Rodríguez de Ardila y Esquivias, 'Historia de los condes de Tendilla,' ed. by R. Foulché-Delbosc, *Revue Hispanique* 31 (1914), 63-131; Henry Charles Lea, *The Moriscos of Spain* (1901: reprint Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1968); Julio Caro Baroja, *Los moriscos del reino de Granada* (Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos, 1957), pp. 141-50; Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. by Siân Reynolds, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Row, 1973) vol. 2, pp. 785-90; Cortés Peña and Vincent, *Historia de Granada*, vol. 3, pp. 169-75, 185.

¹⁰ Rodríguez de Ardila, 'Historia de los condes de Tendilla,' 112-14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94-110, 116-25; Lea, *The Moriscos of Spain*; Caro Baroja, *Los moriscos del reino de Granada*, pp. 173-204; Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World*,

vol. 2, pp. 1055-1073; vol. 1, pp. 211-18; Jack Beeching, *The Galleys at Lepanto* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 99-123; Henry Kamen, *Philip of Spain* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. 128-32.

¹² Francisco Bermudez de Pedraza, *Historia eclesiástica de Granada* (1638; repr. Granada: Editorial Don Quijote, 1988), p. 243; see also Demetrio Brisset, *Fiestas de moros y cristianos en Granada* (Granada: Diputación Provincial de Granada, 1988), pp. 125-26.