

Spanish armadas and Ireland

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This paper discusses Ireland's strategic position as an island in Western Europe at the beginning of the era of great European powers. In the early modern period the island was called "the back door to England" and as a result it became important in great power politics. A maxim of the day was "He who would England win, with Ireland he must begin". Spain saw Ireland as a potential means of attacking England. Furthermore, with the contemporary development of sea power, what had been merely discussed with the aid of maps now became technically feasible. The option also had a diplomatic expression and ideological imperative. Not only were Irish dissidents opposing English rule looking for outside support but these also presented themselves as persecuted Catholics seeking the intervention of Catholic powers to save them from the tyrannical government of heretics.

The paper looks at the period of the Anglo-Spanish conflict at the end of the 16th century when the possibility of an invasion of Ireland was at its height. It lays out the strategic and ideological interests of the actors – the Irish dissidents who wanted foreign intervention, Elizabeth and her officials who wanted to prevent such an eventuality, Philip II and his son Philip III who increasingly perceived the usefulness of Ireland, the Pope who though he wanted Ireland to be Catholic did not want her to be Spanish and James VI of Scotland who winked at the Irish opponents of Elizabeth until such time as they threatened, as a result of diplomatic overtures to Spain, his desire to succeed Elizabeth to the throne of England.

There were several highlights in this Irish theatre of the Anglo-Spanish conflict. The first was the return of James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald from continental exile in 1579. He had assistance from the Pope and had been indirectly encouraged by Philip as a means of annoying Elizabeth. It was a warning shot to repay Elizabeth for her assistance to Dutch Protestant dissidents in revolt against Spain in the Netherlands. Fitzmaurice attempted to promote a Catholic nationalist ideology in Ireland emphasising "faith and fatherland" but was unsuccessful.

In 1585 as a result of England's formal alliance with the breakaway United Provinces of the Netherlands, Philip II found himself in direct conflict with England and began planning "the Enterprise of England". The consequence was the Great Armada of 1588 to join up with the Prince of Parma's expeditionary force gathered in Flanders. However the Armada was defeated by the English navy in the Channel and no rendezvous with Parma was ever effected. Many ships of the fleeing armada were wrecked on the Irish coast as it attempted to return home by rounding the British Isles. The shipwreck of the Armada had interesting results. The Spaniards, who survived and subsequently escaped the clutches of the English and their local collaborators, described the Irish who assisted them as both Catholic and savage. The Irish, who had encountered the Spaniards in defeat, nevertheless regarded them as potentially puissant allies against England. The shipwreck also left an archaeological heritage, which, recently excavated from the seabed, has provided historians with new evidence for the defeat of the largest oceanic invasion force of the period.

The English drive to centralise their government in Ireland by eliminating the remaining semi-independent Irish lordships intensified after the failure of the Armada of 1588. The same lordships, led by

O'Neill and O'Donnell, responded in 1593-4 by sending an high-powered embassy to Spain and by organising an effective army in Ulster. The Irish had fought the English army to a standstill and were being offered a compromise settlement when in 1596 Spanish agents finally arrived and promised an expeditionary force. The Armada sent that year was wrecked off Galicia but the Spaniards continued to make promises and to buy the Irish up with guns and gold. The Irish fought on, winning a famous victory at the Yellow Ford and speeding the revolt to all four provinces. However their renewed calls of "faith and fatherland" held no attraction for the anglophone Catholics of the towns. Outright victory depended on Spanish intervention but that came too little too late with a landing in Kinsale in the autumn of 1601. The Ulster lords marched the length of Ireland but were utterly defeated and their erstwhile Spanish allies withdrew amid mutual recrimination.

Ireland was now for the first time wholly and firmly ruled by England though the opponents of that rule continued to look to England's continental enemies, subsequently France and then Germany. England on the other hand had consolidated control of "the western approaches" ensuring not only her defence but also her future mercantile and imperial expansion. The 1601 Armada was Spain's last throw of the dice in the Anglo-Spanish war and peace followed with England under James I in 1604.

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Ireland has a long maritime history but a very weak maritime historiography. Although many separate incidents and topics are treated, the only overall study is not by a professional historian but by a writer and activist, John De Courcy Ireland.

There is no dedicated centre for research into maritime history in Ireland. This weakness is a result of Ireland's odd relationship to the sea even though the country is an island. The lack of interest is partly, possibly largely, to do with foreign control.

In the early Christian period, Ireland had a strong maritime tradition – Irish pirates attacked the coasts of Britain, the Irish colonized Scotland and Irish monks went on pioneering voyages to Iceland and elsewhere. The Vikings founded Ireland's port towns and during the middle ages these largely independent towns prospered – trading bulk and semi-finished products for luxuries with the continent and Britain. However, under English domination from the 16th century onwards, Irish trade was increasingly carried in English ships; navigation acts and anti-Catholic penal laws hit Irish towns whilst the fisheries were exploited by outsiders. Irishmen did make a name for themselves at sea but in foreign navies and merchant fleets. When the country finally gained its independence the great days of navies, merchant fleets and high seas fisheries were on the wane. The early days of economic nationalism concentrated on agricultural and industrial self-sufficiency with scant attention paid to developing marine resources. The same lack of interest has been reflected in the want of a proper historiography of Ireland and the sea.

It is the period of foreign – English – control of Ireland which concerns us, particularly the time in the late 16th century when it was consolidated. Ireland's maritime importance at that time and in centuries to come was mostly strategic. The country was the so-called "back door" to England – a potential launch-pad for any hostile power that wished to invade England. Furthermore the control of the south coast of Ireland was a key to control of the "Western Approaches" to southern England, the English Channel and the North Sea. Ironically, during this period Ireland is best known for its association with maritime disasters – the wreck of the Spanish Armada in 1588, the loss of the Titanic in 1912 and the sinking of the Lusitania off Cork in 1915. Only in the case of the Titanic is Ireland in any way to blame as the "unsinkable" ship was built at Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast! The other two disasters were a result of Ireland's strategic position in relation to England.

The 16th century was an age in which statesmen were beginning to think strategically in the way that had not been possible before. This was with the aid of better maps which were now more widely available, first in manuscript and then in print. Kings and ministers could plan strategically with detailed maps in front of them. They could begin to construct diplomatic and military policies on a European and indeed on a global basis. Part and parcel of this shift was the development of shipping and naval capacity on the high seas. Oceanic navigation and warfare became possible with bigger, stronger ships and better cannon. Examples of both military and navigational equipment have been recovered from the Armada ships wrecked off Ireland. The same ships from the Armada of 1588 also exemplify how risky something as big as an invasion by sea was at this period. There was the problem of keeping a fleet together in oceanic conditions. There was the problem of fighting at sea. The Spaniards were successful at the Azores in 1583 against the French fleet but it was a different matter against the English in their home waters of the Channel in 1588. Then, if troops were landed as at Kinsale in Ireland in 1601, there was the problem of supply and reinforcement in hostile territory. The English in their counter-Armadas were equally unsuccessful – some financial gains were made but rarely any lasting military ones.

The strategic considerations touching Ireland also have ideological and propagandist dimensions. There were five strategic viewpoints – the Irish, English, Spanish, Papal and Scottish – in the wars of late 16th century Ireland.

The Irish were coming under pressure from the centralising English state to conform religiously, socially and culturally. Their resulting opposition, expressed in revolt and religious recusancy, meant in turn deprivation of their lands and liberties. Having adopted a conservative Catholic stance, they naturally appealed for support to Spain and to Rome. They wanted money, arms and expeditionary forces to expel the English. When they made their pitch for such support, they emphasized how Ireland could be used as a staging post to attack England. Not only did the Irish appeal to the crusading spirit of the Catholic Spaniards, they also claimed they were descended from invaders from Spain in the remote past. This was a persistent point of reference. It referred to the origin-myth of the Irish people. This story was told in *Leabhar Gabhála Éireann* – "the book of the taking of Ireland" or "the book of invasions" as it is also known. This traced the genealogy of the ancient Irish back to the lands of the Bible. The Irish themselves had been led to Ireland from northern Spain by the sons of King Milesius. Hence the Irish, or more precisely the Gaelic Irish, were also known as the Milesians. One petition addressed to Philip II of Spain in 1593 with

the aim of setting up a military order of St Patrick amongst Irish émigrés in Iberia referred to Ireland as being “populated by Spanish Biscayans” and stated that “the people are warlike and Catholic”.

The English strategy was to keep foreign enemies out of Ireland. First it was the French who posed a threat, then it was the Spaniards, later again the French and latterly the Germans. When England under Henry VIII opted for the Reformation, it became something of an international pariah state. It meant breaking with its natural ally – Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. Strategically, it was dangerously exposed in Ireland. Ironically its forward policies in Ireland created the very problem it wished to avoid there. The more it oppressed the Irish, the more likely they were to make appeals abroad. The greater the Spanish threat, the stronger the English presence was felt in Ireland. Furthermore English policies meant that displaced Irish lords and churchmen sought exile and sanctuary in Spanish territories. The English state responded to this threat in a number of ways. It fortified the Irish coast, especially the port towns of the South. It kept reinforcements ready in England to be sent for deployment in Ireland. English agents in Ireland spread the Black Legend – the stories of Spanish tyranny and cruelty against the Amerindians in the New World. This in fact made little difference to the Irish faced with more immediate English oppression. However the most sophisticated English strategists reckoned that the Spaniards were not committed to the Irish cause but only interested in distracting the English from continental involvement by sending money and arms to the Irish.

This was indeed part of the Spanish strategy – to make Ireland into England’s Netherlands. This did not require actual Spanish intervention by way of invasion. But Spanish intervention and conquest could bring other benefits. Physical control of southern Ireland would control the “western approaches” and put a stop to English and Dutch attacks on Spanish shipping and ports. It would also damage the ordinary trade of those countries. Control of Ireland itself would give the Spanish empire many more recruits for its armies. From Ireland the Spaniards could threaten and invade England. Even if England could not be conquered and re-Catholicised, at least it was hoped that they might withdraw their support from the Dutch in rebellion against Philip of Spain. The Irish émigrés in Spain and the Low Countries helped influence the hawkish elements in the Spanish government in this direction. However, getting involved in Ireland had its drawbacks – since getting involved with rebels is always a risky business. After the Dutch experience, did the Spaniards really want another native aristocracy opposing royal centralisation? Also, although the Spaniards had a good opinion of the Irish as warriors and Catholics, they still regarded them as disorganised uncouth savages – “salvajes” as Captain Francisco de Cuellar who survived the Armada disaster in Ireland called them in his narrative. Besides there was the problem of whether Ireland was big enough to support an invading army. The best province for strategic and supply purposes was Munster but in the 1590s the Irish revolt was focused in the northern province of Ulster. Also if the Spaniards conquered Ireland, would they get the sovereignty of Ireland!

The problem here involved Rome. Pope Pius had excommunicated Elizabeth in 1570 and Pope Sixtus had supported the Armada of 1588 against England though the promised 2,000,000 ducat subsidy was never forthcoming. The problem was that in the 1590s Clement VIII was not a pro-Spanish pope. He was unwilling to renew the excommunica-

tion against Elizabeth. Furthermore he was unwilling to exercise or even enter into the Papacy's historic claim to be able to make grants of islands and undiscovered places, for example the *Inter Caetera* bull of 1493 which had divided the New World between Spain and Portugal. In Ireland's case this would have entailed reconsideration of the bull *Laudabiliter* of 1155 which had granted Ireland to Henry II of England to reform its religion. Since the English monarchy had now become heretical, many Irish Catholics wanted the pope to revoke the bull and make a new prince in Ireland. Clement VIII on the other hand did not want to antagonise England and looked forward (in vain) to a regime to succeed Elizabeth which was more tolerant towards Catholics.

James VI of Scotland is the factor here. Scottish kings had never been keen on absolute English control in Ireland. James had enjoyed good relations with Hugh O'Neill and despite English protestations he had made no attempt to prevent Scottish mercenary soldiers crossing to Ireland and Scottish merchants selling arms and munitions there. However once the Spanish threat became real, James's attitude suddenly changed. This was because of his intention to succeed the aging Elizabeth to the kingdoms of England and Ireland. He had no wish to see the Spaniards in one of his putative kingdoms threatening his great prize of the other. For the same reason, James had a diplomatic mission in Italy sending out signals that he might become a Catholic on gaining the throne of England. This fooled Pope Clement who probably considered the recent conversion of Henry IV as a precedent, even though the kingdom he had aspired to – France – was a largely Catholic country whereas James's goal – England – was a largely Protestant one.

These strategic options coloured the build-up of Spanish political contacts with Ireland which crested eventually in actual military intervention in 1601-2. In the 1520s the dissident earl of Desmond in the southern province of Munster – emphasising Milesian links though he was himself of English stock – made overtures to Spain. Agents passed back and forth between Ireland and Spain but nothing came of the contact. The picture was different in the late 1560s when hard-pressed Munster nobles and churchmen appealed to Spain asking for a Spanish prince to be appointed as their sovereign. Even though the Munstermen proceeded with a revolt under James Fitzmaurice Fitzgerald and although the Pope's excommunication of Elizabeth coincided with a low-point in Anglo-Spanish relations there was as yet no formal break between the two powers. Fitzmaurice was forced into exile and sought and received support in Rome. However most of the troops which the Pope gave him deserted and went instead on King Sebastian of Portugal's ill-fated crusade to Morocco in 1578. Philip II permitted Fitzmaurice with a small band to proceed to Ireland. Fitzmaurice declared a holy war but died in a local quarrel soon after landing. English captains, over-reacting to the threat, provoked the whole of Munster. In 1580 Philip II permitted a larger force of Italian mercenaries to go to Ireland but they were promptly cornered by the English and put to the sword. Philip, annoyed with tacit English support for Dutch rebels in the Low Countries, was repaying Elizabeth in kind. The result was the destruction of the southern province, the confiscation of lands of the earldom of Desmond and the plantation of Munster by English settlers.

In 1585 England and Spain went to war over the Netherlands. There were plenty of Irish exiles both noble and religious now on hand to urge Philip to attack England through Ireland. Soon after a body of Irish soldiers came into Spanish service when their English

commander Sir William Stanley deserted at the siege of Deventer in 1587. There were about 500 Irish among the 30,000 men on board the 130 strong Armada fleet bound for England in 1588. The objective of its over-complicated plan was to escort the main invasion force under the Prince of Parma, the Spanish commander in Flanders, across the Channel. Harried up the Channel, defeated outside Calais, the Armada was in no state to attempt the critical rendez-vous with Parma. The Duke of Medina Sidonia, its commander, decided reluctantly to return his worsted fleet home by rounding the British Isles. The ships' captains were instructed to take a wide berth of Ireland but nonetheless twenty-one ships were wrecked, two of them on the coast of Scotland, the rest in the North and West of Ireland. They crashed more because of the stormy weather and because they had been damaged in battle than any lack of proper charts of the Irish coast. An estimated 6,000 men were casualties of these wrecks. 3750 drowned or died subsequently of hunger and disease. About 1,500 were executed by the English or were killed by the Irish. Some 750 survived.

Once the Armada left the North Sea, the English began to worry that Ireland was relatively undefended. Had the Spaniards landed there in any order, the country would have been quickly overrun. However, the English need not have worried – the Spaniards were too few and too distressed and the local inhabitants at a low point in their cycle of revolt. The English soldiery were able to dispatch the Spanish survivors with impunity. Others the Irish killed and robbed. Some who landed in Irish-controlled areas managed to survive – the most famous account being by Captain Cuellar. He escaped with local assistance to Scotland and then to Flanders. Ironically, one of the worst massacres of survivors happened in an Irish-controlled district. When *La Trinidad Valencera* ran aground in the Inishowen peninsula, the soldiers of Hugh O'Neill, earl of Tyrone, killed the ordinary men and took the leaders prisoner. O'Neill then attempted to have these prisoners exchanged for the release of his son-in-law, Hugh O'Donnell, from Dublin Castle. The ploy did not work. The consequences of this first Armada were great for both England and Ireland. For England this was not the decisive battle as history has tended to portray it – the war went on for another sixteen years. For Ireland the Armada of 1588, however disastrous it appeared at the time, demonstrated that the Spaniards were in earnest and that they were a potent threat. Where possible they saved the Spanish survivors using them as servants, as mercenaries in their own internal wars, but mostly getting them safe passage to neutral Scotland.

The contemporary historian Philip O'Sullivan Beare (floruit 1590-1639) dated the subsequent climactic war in Ireland from the time of the Armada terming it the Fifteen Years War. However today it is more usually termed the Nine Years War beginning in 1593. The revolt was led by O'Neill and O'Donnell against further English encroachment (which in part exploited the strategic threat exposed by the Armada shipwrecks to push crown authority further northwards). The Irish lords sent Archbishop O'Healy of Tuam to Spain making claims about their Catholicism, Spanish origins, military prowess and strategic importance. The fact-finding mission and the exiles whom Philip II sent back foundered on the sandbars outside Santander harbour in 1594. The Irish on their own behalf were however proved unusually successful in the war against the English. By 1596 they had fought the English to a standstill and brought them to the negotiating table. Suddenly no less than three Spanish missions were dispatched – each to obtain the same result – to pre-

vent a compromise settlement by offering armed intervention. The Irish agreed and decided to fight on, requesting Archduke Albert to be made their king. The Spaniards surveyed the coast for landing sites. After the English sacked Cadiz, Philip finally acted on the Irish option. An Armada was again assembled at Lisbon, this time of one hundred ships, but it was dispersed in equinoctial gales off Galicia and thirty-two ships were lost. The following year a 136 strong fleet, this time destined for Cornwall rather than Ireland, was also wrecked.

In succeeding years Spain bouyed up England's rebellious Irish subjects with arms and money. For a time O'Neill and O'Donnell were very successful but they never had the military infrastructure and firepower necessary to take walled towns. By the time the Spaniards arrived at Kinsale in September 1601, the Irish lords were on the defensive in Ulster. This was Spain's last throw of the dice in Anglo-Spanish war. Not only was Philip III, like his father, committed to the Catholic cause but for once there were troops available and no immediate strategic threats to Spain's vital interests. Even so this Armada was smaller than the earlier ones. About 3,300 men landed under Don Juan del Águila. They lost their chance of mobility when the ships which brought them returned to Spain. They brought a thousand saddles with them but local allies and horses were not to be found in large numbers because the earlier secondary revolt in Munster in 1598 had already been stamped out by the English. Nor did they carry the much-needed excommunication from the Pope to encourage the English-speaking Catholic inhabitants of the southern towns to forsake their allegiance to Elizabeth. The invading force fortified itself in Kinsale which it had taken over and within a month it was besieged by the army of the viceroy of Ireland, Lord Deputy Mountjoy. In December 600 Spanish reinforcements detached from the original fleet in a storm off Coruña landed down the coast west of Kinsale and significantly gained overwhelming support from the native Irish lords in the region. By this time the forces of O'Neill and O'Donnell were on their way south. Having marched the length of Ireland, they hemmed the Lord Deputy's forces in between themselves and the Spaniards in Kinsale. Mountjoy's men began to die of disease and hunger, with eventually 6,000 succumbing. However on 24 December 1601 old style/3 January 1602 new style the Irish, urged on by Águila, committed themselves to a pitched battle. However in the dawn attack they utterly and completely routed losing 1,200 to 1. The issue had been decided. There were severe recriminations against Águila in Spain for subsequently agreeing with the English to withdraw though he still held Kinsale. He, for his part, complained about the inadequacies and disorganisation of Spain's Irish allies and one of his officers, Pedro de Soto, reportedly described the Irish as "this barbarous nation for which, I think, Christ never died".

The Spanish Armada had as important consequences for Ireland as for England and Spain. The Anglo-Spanish war of 1585-1604 was the first major war in history fought as much on the high seas as on land. The war demonstrates the logistical difficulties of oceanic fighting and of sending amphibious forces to distant shores. Besides it highlights the element of chance in history because however well-planned the weather was always a primary factor. More specifically by securing victory at Kinsale, the English had at last obtained full sovereignty of Ireland, complete physical control of the island. However England had already lost the battle for hearts and minds – most of Ireland's population

had already opted for Counter-Reformation Catholicism. Furthermore a permanent connection with the continent had been established as the Irish responded to Spanish and later French strategic initiatives. In Spain the Irish used their Milesian origin-myth to gain Spanish citizenship and to stake a firm claim to *limpieza de sangre*. Irish churchmen and nobles obtained jobs throughout the Spanish empire and the famous *tercio irlandés* was formed in Flanders in 1605 under the command of Henry O'Neill. The French later formed Irish regiments as well. Indeed the evacuation of the Irish with the Spaniards from Kinsale in 1605 was a forerunner in miniature of the larger evacuation of the "Wild Geese" to France from Limerick after its surrender in 1691. Besides Irish relevance, Kinsale also has a larger, counterfactual, importance. The result might very easily have been different. As a consequence Ireland would have been dominoes into Spanish control at a key point in history. Spanish control of Ireland would have massively strengthened the Spanish candidature of the Infanta Isabella to the crown of England thereby threatening the Anglo-Scottish union and even more crucially it would have prevented, with the western approaches closed off, English expansion across the Atlantic. Of course there is a further counterfactual. An Hiberno-Spanish victory at Kinsale would have forced James VI of Scotland to activate his claim to the English throne early. Nevertheless the same circumstances would almost certainly have forced this Protestant contender to offer a compromise to the Catholics of Ireland. This might also have appealed to Spaniards, who having successfully furthered the Catholic cause, would have looked for English disengagement from the Netherlands in exchange for their own departure out of Ireland.

Despite these contentions about the battle of Kinsale, it is the Armada of 1588 which will always loom large in Ireland and elsewhere. It has a long-standing historiography supporting it. It too has a legacy. Some of it is merely popular myth. There is the myth that the inhabitants of the West Coast of Ireland have darker features because they are supposed to be descended from Spanish survivors of the Armada. There is the myth that the knitting patterns used for the famous Aran Island sweaters came from Spanish sailors (interestingly there is a similar claim about Fair Isle patterns where another Armada ship crashed in Scotland). Somewhat more historical are certain placenames round the Irish coast – such as Port na Spanaigh in County Antrim – which record where the Spanish ships crashed. Even more palpable of course is the recently recovered legacy of the ships themselves. Since the 1950s – climaxing in the 1970s – a number of marine archaeologists, most notably the Belgian Robert Stenuit and the Scot Colin Martin, have been involved in locating and excavating these ships. Several ships have been found and spectacular artefacts have been recovered – cannons, textiles, gold and jewellery. One of the challenges of writing Armada history is to evaluate the importance of this archaeological evidence. The amount of unexpended shot, the variability in the weight of this shot and the number of exploded gun barrels found in these shipwrecks off the Irish coast all point to Spanish technical and organisational inferiority in the vital area of cannonry being a major contributing factor in the failure of the Enterprise of England. However the artefacts are important in another respect – they are inspirational. As a young person growing up in the 1970s I was thrilled to hear of these underwater discoveries and even more when they came to be exhibited at Ulster Museum in my home town. It is one of the reasons why I came to study this period of history.



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A Spanish view of the Irish from the letter of Captain Francisco de Cuéllar who was shipwrecked in Ireland in the Armada of 1588.

Gallagher and Cruickstank, pp. 237-9

The chieftain sent four of the savages in his service and a Spanish soldier – he already had with him ten of the survivors who had swum ashore – and seeing me without a stitch of clothes and covered in straw, felt very sorry for me, as did everyone with him, and his women even wept to see how badly I had been treated. They fixed me up as well as they could with the sort of blanket they wear, and I spent three months there, becoming as much of a savage as the savages themselves.

My master's wife was extremely beautiful and was very kind to me. One day, she and other female friends and relatives were sitting in the sun with me, asking me what life was like in Spain and other countries and, in the end, they came up to me and asked me to have a look at their palms and tell their fortunes. Giving thanks to God, since I could hardly fall lower than to be a gypsy among savages, I set to examining each one's hand, telling them a great deal of nonsense, which pleased them so much that there was no other Spaniard better than I, nor any whom they held in higher esteem. And by night and by day men and women would pester me to tell their fortunes until I found myself under such pressure that I was forced to beg my master's leave to depart from his castle. He declined my request, but gave orders that I was not to be annoyed or my life made a misery.

Typically, these savages live like beasts in the mountains, some of which are very rugged in that part of Ireland where we were shipwrecked. They live in thatched cabins and are all big men, handsome and well-built and fleet as the roe-deer. They eat only once a day, and this has to be at night, and what they normally eat is oaten bread and butter. They drink sour milk, for they have no other drink. And they don't drink water, though it is the best in the world. On feast days they eat some kind of half-cooked meat, with neither bread nor salt, for such is their custom. They dress accordingly, in tight hose and short loose coats of very coarse goat's hair. They wrap up in blankets and wear their hair down to their eyes. They are great travellers and can endure any hardship; they are continually at war with the English garrisoned there by the Queen; against these they defend themselves and don't let them into their lands, which are all flooded and marshy: the whole area is more than forty leagues long and wide.

What these people are most inclined to is thieving and robbing one another; so that not a day passes among them without a call-to-arms, because as soon as the people in the next village find out that in this one there are cattle or anything else, they come armed at night and all hell breaks loose and they slaughter one another. And as soon as the English from the garrisons find out who has rounded up and stolen the most cattle, they are sent in to seize them. All that these people can do is to retreat into the mountains with their women and herds, for they have no other property, furniture or clothes. They sleep on the floor, on fleshly-cut rushes, full of water and ice. Most of the women are very beautiful, but badly turned out: they wear no more than a shift, and a shawl that they wrap round themselves, and a piece of linen on their heads which is folded several times and knotted at the forehead. They work hard, and are good housekeepers in their own way.

These people call themselves Christians: Mass is said among them and they observe the rules of the Roman Church. Nearly the majority of their churches, monasteries and hermitages have been demolished by the English who are garrisoned there and by those from the region who have joined them, who are as bad as they are. In short: in this kingdom there is neither justice nor reason, so everyone does as he pleases.

These savages liked us Spaniards very much because they discovered that we had come to fight the heretics and were great enemies of theirs. And had it not been for them, for they looked after us as they would their own selves, not one of us would have remained alive. We were well disposed towards them for this, though they were the first to rob and strip those of us who came ashore alive; and from us, as from the three ships of our Armada carrying so many illustrious people who all drowned, these savages obtained a great wealth of jewellery and a lot of money.