

A Spanish opinion why the Armada failed document 17

Don Francisco de Bobadilla was the general in charge of the Armada's military on board the San Martín. When he wrote this letter on 20 August 1588 from somewhere in the North Sea, he expressed his own theories why the Armada had failed to rendezvous with Parma's army.

I don't know who had the idea that we could join forces in a place with such powerful currents, with a shore so open and liable to crosswinds, and with so many sandbanks. . . . But I believe it is impossible to control all the things that must be concerted at the same time, in order to bring together forces that are so separated, unless one has a different sort of ship from those we brought, in the place we were instructed to join.

Letter to Don Juan de Idiáquez, C. Martin and G. Parker (112), p. 268.

The power of kings and their subjects: a contemporary view document 18

Juan de Mariana (1535–1624) was a Jesuit historian who expounded his views on royal authority in De Rege et Regis Institutione in 1599. Intended as a guide for Philip III, the treatise maintained that the King must respect the fundamental laws of the land. If he did not, the people could depose him.

The regal power, if it is lawful, ever has its source from the citizens; by their grant the first kings were placed in each state on the seat of supreme authority. That authority they hedged about with laws and obligations, lest it puff itself up too much, run riot, result in the ruin of the subjects, and degenerate into tyranny. . . . The authority of the commonwealth is greater than that of the kings. Otherwise how would it be possible, unless it were greater, to restrain the power of the kings and to resist their will?

Kings will be permitted when circumstances require to ask for new laws, and to interpret and lessen the severity of old ones; to make adequate provision, if any eventuality is not covered by the law. However, the king should believe that it is the distinguishing mark of a tyrant to lack reverence for the customs and institutions of the fathers, to overturn the laws at his own whim, to refer to his

own licence and convenience everything that he does. Nor is it consistent that lawful princes so conduct themselves that they seem to possess and use a power untrammelled by law.

Since indeed divine and human law and right are expressed by the laws in every phase of life, it is unavoidable that he who violates the laws thereby departs from justice and uprightness. What is conceded to no one is permitted still less to the king.

From Juan de Mariana, *De Rege et Regis Institutione*, I, cited by G. Lewy (92).

House of Lancaster, and upon the will made by the Queen of Scotland, and mentioned in a letter from her of which the copy is enclosed herewith. You will impress upon his Holiness that I cannot undertake a war in England for the purpose merely of placing upon that throne a young heretic like the King of Scotland who, indeed, is by his heresy incapacitated to succeed. His Holiness must, however, be assured that I have no intention of adding England to my dominions, but to settle the crown upon my daughter the Infanta.

Letter to the Marquis de Olivares, 11 February 1587, S. Usherwood (172), pp. 26-7.

Philip II outlines the Armada's objectives, 1588 **document 15**

If the Armada succeeds, either by means of fighting or in consequence of the unreadiness of the enemy, you will, when the forces from here have arrived to assure your passage across, go over in God's name and carry out the task assigned to you.

But if (which God forbid) the result be not so prosperous that our arms shall be able to settle matters, nor, on the other hand, so contrary that the enemy shall be relieved of anxiety on our account (which God, surely, will not permit) and affairs be so counter-balanced that peace may not be altogether undesirable, you will endeavour to avail yourself as much as possible of the prestige of the Armada and other circumstances, bearing in mind that, in addition to the ordinary conditions which are usually inserted in treaties of peace, there are three principal points upon which you must fix your attention.

The first is that in England the free use and exercise of our holy Catholic faith shall be permitted to all Catholics, native and foreign, and that those who are in exile shall be permitted to return. The second is that all the places in my Netherlands which the English hold shall be restored to me; and the third is that they [the English] shall recompense me for the injury they have done to me, my dominions, and my subjects, which will amount to an exceedingly great sum.

With regard to the free exercise of Catholicism, you may point out to them that since freedom of worship is allowed to the Huguenots in France, there will be no sacrifice of dignity in allowing the same privilege to Catholics in England. If they retort that I do not allow the same toleration in Flanders as exists in France, you

may tell them that their country is in a different position, and point out to them how conducive to their tranquillity it would be to satisfy the Catholics in this way, and how largely it would increase the trade of England and their profits, since, as soon as toleration was brought about, people from all Christendom would flock thither in the assurance of safety.

If the principal design should fall through, it would be very influential in bringing them to these, or the best conditions possible, if the Armada were to take possession of the Isle of Wight. If this be once captured, it would be held, and would afford a shelter for the Armada, whilst the possession of it would enable us to hold our own against the enemy. This matter has also been laid before the Duke [Medina Sidonia], so that in case of failure, and if nothing else can be done, you may jointly with him discuss and decide with regard to it.

The King

Letter to the Duke of Parma, April 1588, S. Usherwood (172), pp. 70-1.

Medina Sidonia implores Philip to postpone the Armada, 24 June 1588 **document 16**

Having experienced severe storms which dispersed the Armada within a few days of setting sail, and sensing that the expedition was ill-fated, Medina Sidonia wrote to the King from Corunna urging him to call it off.

To undertake so great a task with forces equal to those of the enemy would be inadvisable, but to do so with an inferior force, as ours is now, with our men lacking in experience, would be still more unwise. I am bound to confess that I see very few, or hardly any, of those on the Armada with any knowledge of or ability to perform the duties entrusted to them. I have tested and watched this point very carefully, and your Majesty may believe me when I assure you that we are very weak. . . . The opportunity might be taken, and the difficulties avoided, by making some honourable terms with the enemy. Your Majesty's necessities also make it desirable that you should ponder beforehand what you are undertaking, with so many envious rivals of your greatness.

Letter cited in C. Martin and G. Parker (112), p. 191.