

## El Marqués de Velada y la Corte en los Reinados de Felipe II y Felipe III: Nobleza Cortesana y Cultura Política en la España del Siglo de Oro

**Review Number:**

712

**Publish date:**

Thursday, 1 January, 2009

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**ISBN:**

9788497182638

**Date of Publication:**

2004

**Price:**

£25.00

**Pages:**

650pp.

**Publisher:**

Junta de Castilla y León, Consejería de Cultura y Turismo

**Place of Publication:**

Salamanca

**Reviewer:**

Patrick Williams

This is a book of exceptional originality and importance. Dr Martínez Hernández has written a biography of Don Gómez Dávila y Toledo (1541–1616), II Marquis of Velada, but such is the breadth of his research that his book reshapes our understanding of the courtly politics and of the policymaking processes at the Spanish court in the critically important period from the 1560s to the 1620s. Here, for the first time, we are presented with a detailed analysis of the development of court and government over the years that saw the transition from the quasi-monachal court of Philip II (1556–98) to the baroque court of his son, Philip III (1598–1621). Dr Martínez Hernández is especially informative on the personalities of these years, men (and women) who have often been little more than shadows to us.

Gómez Dávila was born to be a courtier; from his adolescent years he was schooled in the arts of the court and – true to the spirit of the Renaissance courtier – he cultivated a languid indifference to the intrigues of public life that disguised a profound engagement with the minutiae of political life. Discreet to the point of invisibility, he has generally been ignored by historians or been dismissed as a political lightweight. Dr Martínez Hernández now demonstrates that Velada became a major figure at court from the early 1590s and that he exercised wide-ranging and subtle influence until his death in 1616.

Family traditions explain the man: first and foremost, Velada was a member of the great Toledo clan and despite his apparently casual manner he possessed in full measure the steeliness of character that distinguished the Toledos. Indeed, in 1610 he subtly emphasised to Philip III that his family had served the

crown of Castile for many centuries before the house of Habsburg had acquired the crown in 1516. He glossed over the fact that the Dávilas had supported the *comuneros* who had challenged the succession of the Habsburgs! Once the new dynasty had crushed the *comuneros* and established its authority the Dávilas cheerfully supported it, and their loyalty was recognised by Philip II when in 1557 he conferred the marquisate of Velada upon Gómez Dávila I. The new marquis lived only until 1561 and since his son, Sancho, had predeceased him the title passed to his grandson and namesake who is the subject of this study. Philip II further confirmed the rise of the Dávilas by granting the new marquis a position in the household of his own son, Prince Don Carlos.

Velada took the fullest advantage of his new status. At court (and at an Academy for the sons of nobility) he cultivated a series of friendships, many of which endured for several decades. But in the immediate term, his success was short-lived, for Velada, like many of his colleagues, left court after the death of Don Carlos in 1568 and the inevitable disbandment of his household. However, he kept up his contacts with his friends through a remarkable correspondence, which is studied here for the first time. Some of the men who committed their innermost thoughts to Velada on paper became leading players in government over the next decades: Cristóbal de Moura and Juan de Idiáquez; Juan de Zúñiga; the counts of Portalegre, Fuentes and Olivares, and so on. The depth of the friendships between these men is manifest in the confidence that they showed in each other, for their letters are full of the most detailed – and, often, the most barbed – political commentary. It is a truly unique correspondence, which provides a series of fascinating insights into the private personalities of public men.

Velada's prospects of returning to court were hindered for nearly 15 years after 1568 by his kinship with the Duke of Alba, who was his uncle. Alba fell into disgrace with Philip II after his failures as Governor General of the Low Countries (and also by scandals involving his son and heir) and although he managed to retrieve his reputation in leading the army that conquered Portugal for Philip in 1580 he could never overcome the king's profound dislike of him – although it should be observed that he was not a man to try very hard to do so. It was perhaps indicative of Philip II's hostility to the Toledos that Velada was among several members of the family who were not allowed to travel to Portugal on the great state journey (*'jornada'*) of 1580–3; the marquis had to spend those years in Madrid and on his seigneurial estates. However, when Alba conveniently died in 1582 Velada himself became the *de facto* head of the Toledo clan. He immediately benefited from Philip II's determination to seek an accommodation with the family; in 1582 the king appointed Velada as his ambassador to the church council of the province of Toledo (1582–83). The marquis promptly demonstrated both his abilities and his discretion and began to win the king's favour – and in doing so he brought the Toledo family back into the centre of court life.

Courtiers proverbially needed good fortune, and Velada found himself restored to favour exactly as Philip II was bringing about a radical reshaping of his government. The men who won major office in the early 1580s came to dominate court and government for the remainder of the reign: secretaries of state Mateo Vázquez de Leca and Gabriel de Zayas; the king's confessor, fray Diego de Chaves; the two men above all others who developed truly ministerial stature during these years – Cristóbal de Moura and Juan de Idiáquez; and Juan de Zúñiga, a personal favourite of the king's. Several of these men had been colleagues of Velada's in the noble Academy in the 1560s, and his friendships with them eased his way into the heart of government.

His great opportunity to consolidate his new status came when Philip II selected him among those who would travel with him on another great *jornada*, this time when in 1583 he left Madrid to travel to the kingdom of Aragon to bid farewell to his daughter Catalina Micaela after her marriage to the Duke of Savoy. Philip and his court were away from Madrid from January 1586 until March 1586 and once again a great *jornada* made and destroyed careers. Chief among the casualties were Cardinal Granvelle, who had briefly served as chief minister, and the Count of Barajas, president of the council of Castile: chief among the beneficiaries was the Marquis of Velada, who now transformed himself from a courtier into an administrator and politician.

The *jornada de Aragón* had traumatic consequences for the king himself, for while Philip II was in the mountains of Aragon he suffered a grave illness that all but killed him, and he never again enjoyed robust

health. In his growing debility he was obliged to rely increasingly upon his inner circle of ministers. These men came to hold what were in effect ministerial briefs: Zúñiga and Idiáquez dealt with foreign affairs, while Moura controlled Portuguese business and Chinchón and Vázquez de Leca concentrated on the papers of the councils of Castile, Finance and the Indies. At the end of each day, the ministers met to draw together the business that they had conducted; because of the hour at which the *Junta* met – but also because of the secrecy with which it conducted business – it became known as ‘the *Junta* of the Night’ (*Junta de Noche*). Moreover, so dependent did Philip II become upon these ministers that within two years of its inception, the *Junta de Noche* became the central institution of government, managing the papers of all the councils and acting as the supreme patron within the administration. As significantly, the *Junta* was given primary responsibility for supervising the development of the heir to the throne.

It was within this context that Velada reached the very centre of court when in 1587 he was appointed as *Ayo* (Governor) and *Mayordomo Mayor* (Lord High Steward) of the heir. He seems to have been genuinely reluctant to assume the offices, perhaps fearing that he would once again be damaged politically by being at the heart of the household of an heir to the throne. Perhaps, too, he merely wished to avoid the heavy responsibilities that conduct of the offices involved, for they required him to take charge not just of the education and personal development of young Philip but also of that of his only surviving sibling, the *infanta* (Princess) Isabella Clara Eugenia. However, in practice he could not refuse such honours as the king now imposed upon him; maybe, too, he felt that his time had now come, encouraged perhaps by his close friendship with Moura, who was a personal favourite of the king and who was named as *Sumiller de Corps* (Groom of the Stole) to the Prince in 1589. Velada now undertook to educate the Prince in the exercise of arms and in the arts of the court – in horsemanship, hunting, games, dance and music.

A central part of the changes at court involved the return to Madrid of the Archduke Albert, who was brought back from Portugal where he had served as Viceroy. Now, he took the part of the King in audiences and in other ceremonies of state. Velada’s prestige at court rose further when in 1593 he was appointed to the Council of State. It was now that he was forced into conflict with Francisco Gómez de Sandoval y Rojas, V Marquis of Denia, an impoverished nobleman who had endeared himself to the impressionable heir to the throne. Velada recognised that the growing influence of Denia over young Philip threatened to undermine everything that the King and his senior ministers were trying to achieve – that if Denia could not be prevented from establishing his influence over the Prince, it was likely that he and not the aged ministers of Philip II who would hold sway at the beginning of the next reign. In an unwonted, but perhaps desperate, act of bravery, Velada advised Philip II to remove Denia from court.

For a man of ambition, the stakes could hardly have been higher, and Velada built alliances with Moura, Idiáquez and Garcia de Loaysa – alliances that were directed in effect against the Marquis of Denia. Battle was joined when on 29 November 1593 Philip II issued the Instructions by which a Junta of Government (*Junta de Gobierno*) was established to instruct the Prince in the arts of government and perhaps even take on the responsibilities of a regency council if Philip II died before his son was capable of ruling by himself. The *Junta* was given responsibility for managing the most important affairs of state and met in the Prince’s rooms.

It was designed, in practice, as what Dr Martínez Hernández terms a ‘collective tutor’ for the Prince. In particular, Moura and Velada were given the supreme responsibility of guiding the political formation of the Prince, supervising all his activities and controlling access to his person. The grandees and titled nobility were virtually excluded from the *consejo de regencia*; Velada himself – a mere marquis – was the senior nobleman in the inner circle.

The Archduke Albert left court in August 1595 to assume control of the government in the Low Countries. His departure led to a further increase in the powers of the members of the *Junta de Gobierno*. With the accelerating countdown to the King’s death, the ministers of the inner circle locked horns with Denia for control over the Prince. Moura, Velada and Garcia de Loaysa (archbishop-elect of Toledo) advised Philip II to remove Denia from court by naming him as Viceroy of Valencia. The King duly did so.

The Prince disguised his fury, but he – and Denia – remembered who had betrayed him, and when the time

came he took his vengeance on all of them except upon Idiáquez and Velada, both of whom were able to build bridges with the heir and with his putative favourite. In October 1596 García de Loaysa assessed the Prince on behalf of the group of tutors – Moura, Velada and García de Loaysa himself – and the confessors of the King and of the Prince (friars Diego de Yepes and Gaspar de Córdoba). They informed the King that his son, who was now nearly nineteen years old, was ‘very religious, devout, honest and very moderate in all his actions’; that he was obedient to his father and affable and courteous to his own servants. The ministers made recommendations as to how young Philip’s development could be encouraged, pointedly suggesting that he should make more appearances in public and commit himself more fully to the work of government. Philip II took the hint: somewhat belatedly, it must be admitted, he recognised that his son should be prepared for the task of government.

But even now, Philip II could not let go of the reins of power: not until he had only months to live did he make his final settlement of his affairs. He agreed to marry his son and daughter to Austrian Habsburgs – the Prince to Margaret, daughter of the Archduke Charles of Styria, and Isabella to the Archduke Albert. In May 1598 Philip made peace with France and devolved the government of the Low Countries upon Albert and Isabella. Having settled his affairs in Europe as best as he could, Philip II then made his last journey so that he could die in the Escorial; so intense was his agony that it took him five days to travel the 70 kilometres to the monastery. In his final, dreadful, agony Philip bowed to the inevitable and named Denia as *Caballerizo Mayor* (Master of the Horse) to his son. He tried to balance this appointment by naming Moura as *Sumiller de Corps* and Idiáquez as *Caballerizo Mayor* of the *infante* Margaret. A number of appointments were made to the Council of State and García de Loaysa was consecrated as archbishop of Toledo.

Philip II died at daybreak on 13 September 1598. Within minutes, Philip III appointed the Marquis of Denia to the Council of State. Over the next weeks he appointed several relatives and henchmen of Denia to major positions in court and government. Dr Martínez Hernández provides here the most detailed analysis in print of the changes that took place over the next weeks and months. Most importantly, the Council of State was re-energised with a host of appointments, perhaps in an attempt to counterbalance the influence of the new favourite. However, most of the new councillors attended little and Juan de Idiáquez came to exercise a wider and deeper influence on policymaking than he had enjoyed even under Philip II. Velada also survived, if with difficulty, perhaps because Denia did not want to risk alienating the Toledo clan while he was consolidating his own power at court. But for Moura, García de Loaysa, Rodrigo Vázquez de Arce and others there was no redemption, although their falls from power were managed with courtly discretion.

The power of the King’s favourite (*valido*) now overrode all political affiliations and the primacy of Denia and his family meant that political structures were re-written. In November 1599 Denia was raised to the dukedom of Lerma and his son and other relatives were given new titles. Within a couple of years of the beginning of the reign it was evident that a new system of government had come into being – government by *valido* and a network of henchmen (*‘hechuras’*) and members of his own family (*‘parentela’*). However, Lerma was wise enough to know that he needed to strengthen the power of government and also to introduce senior members of the aristocracy into it if he was to consolidate his power without challenge, and so the new reign saw a fascinating dichotomy between the power of the *valido* and his supporters and the re-establishment of the traditional forms of government, most notably of course, the councils of state, which now entered upon something of a golden age of their own. Dr Martínez Hernández is here at his best: no historian has written about the complex and tumultuous changes of these years with such authority, and indeed in such detail.

But as every political observer and moralist knew, no courtly power lasted for long. In 1606–7, Lerma’s authority was all but destroyed by the collapse of the financial resources of the state – a collapse for which he was in important part responsible. In 1607, Philip III was forced to agree to a cessation of hostilities in the Low Countries and then to authorise a suspension of payments (or ‘state bankruptcy’) to his bankers. The dreadful logic of failure forced him to agree to a truce of 12 years with his Dutch rebels in 1609. Philip was bitterly ashamed of these humiliations and his loyalty to his *valido* was placed under its greatest strain, and all but broke. Lerma’s opponents now threatened to overwhelm him, and for the first time in the reign they became vocal, at court and beyond. They were encouraged by the open hostility of Queen Margaret to

Lerma. Two men were prominent in the opposition to Lerma – Francisco de Mendoza, the Admiral of Aragon, a fractious and incompetent nobleman and Fray Luis de Aliaga, a low-born Dominican whom Lerma had raised to the king's confessorship and who had then developed into a formidable opponent.

It was now that Velada made his move against Lerma. He became the catalyst for the aristocratic opponents of the *valido*. He had chosen his moment well, and was able to point to Lerma's failures at court and in policymaking. His opposition to Lerma was subtle and sophisticated, and it is a magisterial piece of writing in which Dr Martínez Hernández recovers the details for us. Velada showed himself to be a master tactician, using now all the arts of the courtier that he had cultivated over the last 30 years. Indeed, so widespread were his contacts at court that he was able to take advantage of the breaking-up of Lerma's own network of family and political relationships under the impress of the financial and political crisis of 1606–9. He dared now to confront Lerma openly, while at the Council of State he worked through a growingly vocal group of militaristic councillors who resented the humiliations of 1607–9, above all the making of the truce with the United Provinces, which they presented as an unpatriotic and treasonable act.

But having declared his hand, Velada played it with enchanting subtlety; recognising that Lerma was perhaps mortally wounded and that both he himself and Lerma were now old men, he sought a *rapprochement* with the favourite. But it was on his terms: Velada understood that Lerma wished to retire from the struggles of life at court to spend his last years in a life of religious devotion to save his eternal soul. For his own part, he now pushed for the great honour that had been denied his family, of being raised to the rank of grandee ('*grandeza*'). As Lerma and Velada stretched out to find common ground with each other, they were able to patch up a basis of understanding that led to Velada calling off the war between their two houses on condition that he was raised to the *grandeza*. He made it only just in time, and died in 1616, contented that he (and his family) had been raised to the grandeanship.

It is a stunning story, and the archival work that underscores this book is truly exceptional. Dr Martínez Hernández's work is rooted in the state papers of the Archive of Simancas and in a score of archives in Madrid and other cities in Spain. He has also made extensive use of the 'Altamira' papers in Geneva and London as well as those in archives in Italy and Austria. No historian of early modern Spain has made such wide use of private correspondence as he has. The index is a model of its kind and the production is worthy of the scholarship of the book. It is a matter of the deepest regret that financial realities make it extremely unlikely that an English translation will ever be produced. In Spain, with the generous subsidies that historical works now attract from regional governments and from financial institutions, the 650 pages of this book are available at a mere 30 *euros*. In the English academic world, a dustcover costs almost that much.

January 2009

The author is happy to accept this review and does not wish to comment further.

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