

SOCIAL NETWORKS, PROMOTION STRATEGIES  
AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN 16<sup>th</sup> CENTURY CASTILE:  
THE CASE OF THE *CONVERSO* MEDICAL PRACTITIONER  
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### Introduction

«The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there».<sup>1</sup> I have chosen to begin my paper with this quotation borrowed from the novelist L. P. Harley in order to emphasize that in going back to pre-industrial and pre-modern Europe – to be precise to early sixteenth-century court medicine in the Crown of Castile, the biggest and most influential Iberian kingdom at the time – we are actually travelling to a very «foreign country» where things were done in a rather different way by comparison with modern societies. This historical approach to a rather «remote» territory is, nevertheless, intended to supply a better comprehension of the welfare systems in early modern Europe by focusing on the dynamics of family, social and institutional networks at the noble and royal court settings of the Castile Crown through the career of a *converso* medical practitioner – Francisco López de Villalobos.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hartley (1953), as quoted by Lowenthal (1985), p. xvi.

<sup>2</sup> Since the nineteenth century the personality of Francisco López de Villalobos has been dealt with by a number of historical works. However, Antonio María Fabié's studies (1886a,b) continue to be essential for any new approach to the topic. Fabié (1886b) reprints Fabié (1886a) with identical pagination (pp.1-229), supplemented by a wide-ranging documentary appendix with independent pagination (pp.1-480) and including several works by López de Villalobos, among them his Latin and Castilian letters (henceforth, CL and CC, respectively). For other studies on this Castilian *converso* physician, see the bibliography referred to in Arrizabalaga (2002).

*The Price of Life. Welfare Systems, Social Nets and Economic Growth, Cidadania*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri/CIDEHUS/UE, 2007, pp. 265-284.

Retracing the steps of this outstanding court physician will allow us to explore the patronage networks in which he plotted the schemes required not only for winning better positions in his career, but also for overcoming the structural vulnerability which he was subjected to. Villalobos's vulnerability will become particularly evident in several difficult situations he went through as a result both of controversial events in his professional life, and of the changes that the Castilian political situation underwent during the first half of the sixteenth century.

Villalobos's never-hidden and often shown-off *converso* status, and his belonging to the generation of Spanish Jews who in 1492 were obliged to convert to Christianity in order to avoid the Expulsion, not only shaped his career from its beginnings, but was also the source of several critical experiences he had to cope with in the course of his life, including an early trial and imprisonment by the Inquisition.

In general, by means of this case-study I aim to illustrate the strategies of professional promotion deployed by court medical practitioners and, in particular, those belonging to the Jewish minority, in the context of an Old Regime social system that was ruled by the «old Christians» in a way which increasingly excluded the *converso* minority in the course of the sixteenth century.

### From a Jewish family under noble protection to the court of Alba

Francisco López de Villalobos (c. 1473-c. 1549) owed his name to a modest town close to Benavente, now in the province of Zamora, where he grew up in the bosom of a Jewish family under the protection of the powerful marquises of Astorga, who were then the lords of Villalobos. According to his own evidence in the dedicatory letter of his earliest printed work addressed to Pedro Álvarez Osorio (d. 1505), second marquis of Astorga, his grand-father had been physician to the marquis' grand-father, and his father to the marquis' father before serving the marquis himself.<sup>3</sup> Given Villalobos's laudatory tone and the family custom of these local lords, it is possible that the marquis contributed to the medical studies of young Francisco at the university of Salamanca.

After having concluded these studies with the degree of *licenciado* in the mid 1490s, Villalobos began to practise medicine in the city of Zamora. This first professional decision appears to be an early indication

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<sup>3</sup> López de Villalobos (1498), fol. 3v: «... *aun hasta en los físicos ay tal concierto / que son de su casa por línea y sucesso / mi agüelo del suyo fue fisico experto / mi padre del suyo y aún suyo es por cierto / yo estoy reservado a seguir tal processo*».

of Villalobos's determined, ambitious and independent character,<sup>4</sup> although it might have been forced on him by a seeming lack of opportunity to work in his native town. Getting a professional clientele in one of the most populous cities of the Castile Crown – in 1530 Zamora had some 4,000 inhabitants, including its outlying area –<sup>5</sup> seems not to have been easy for a newly arrived doctor of Jewish origins and with no influence at all. And the contents of the letter Villalobos sent to his father in mid-August 1498, in reply to the latter's advice to guide him in these first professional steps, clearly shows the difficulties the young practitioner was having in coping with a meagre wealthy clientele and too many patients among his own acquaintances, little time to study, and hostile relationships with the informal networks of health care personnel as personified in the midwives (*matrone*).<sup>6</sup>

Villalobos also complained about his professional problems when «any magnate or gentlewoman» was involved – which suggests the occasional presence among his clientele at that early time of members of the nobility. His complaints about the servitude inherent in looking after the health of this kind of patient would be more vocal in later years once he had managed to settle as a court physician. Nevertheless, this feature of the early years of his practice reinforces the hypothesis that his move to Zamora did not imply the breaking of his original client relationship with the marquis of Astorga. On the contrary, given the latter's closest relationships with the count of Benavente, the duke of Alba and the Almirante of Castile – all of them celebrated Castilian nobles whom he repeatedly served as physician later in his career – it might be presumed that the marquis of Astorga actually acted as someone who introduced Villalobos into their courts, from where he would later jump to the royal one.

The circumstances of Villalobos's subsequent move from Zamora to a noble court are unclear to us. This professional change might have happened about mid-1506, since in July 1508 he said that he had re-encountered his family «after almost two years» of absence.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore,

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<sup>4</sup> López de Villalobos, CL x, p. 244: «*Ego itaque moris et paterne conditionis oblitus non certe vicum incolui sed oppidum, nec oppidum quaecunque sed ingentem civitatem*».

<sup>5</sup> Apparently, these are the earliest available population figures for the city of Zamora. They come from a census of taxpayers (*pecheros*) that the Crown implemented between 1528 and 1536. The 1561 list of neighbours allows one not only to estimate Zamora's population at the time (about 8,600 inhabitants, i.e., more than twice those in 1530), but also to quantify the numbers of health practitioners: five doctors, three surgeons, six apothecaries and thirteen barber-surgeons, two of the latter having been of poor estate. See Díaz Medina (1980); Rueda Fernández (1981, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> CL i, pp. 189-196.

<sup>7</sup> CL vi, p. 224.

his crude description of April 1507 about the circumstances of his medical practice encourages one to think that he still had then a recent memory of his Zamora experience.<sup>8</sup> Nor was it even clear whether he entered the service of the count of Benavente first, and then that of the duke of Alba, or simultaneously served both of them. At all events, in subsequent years, even after he was promoted to royal doctor, Villalobos alternately provided his professional services to both lords – something which might be more easily understood by taking into account the dense network of marriage alliances between the two noble houses.<sup>9</sup>

In fact, the earliest information on the matter was related to the count of Benavente whose health Villalobos was looking after at the end of April 1507. Then, Villalobos's complaints to another practitioner (Gonzalo de Moros) about the lack of improvement in the count's health because of his reluctance to follow Villalobos's medical prescriptions, clearly reveal the servitude inherent in such a client relationship with the nobility in the context of an estate-based, aristocratic, and increasingly exclusive society where the lords behaved in an ambivalent way towards their «new Christian» practitioners who in turn accepted with resignation the growing anti-Semitic xenophobia of the well-off.<sup>10</sup> In the following ten years or so, the count of Benavente and his family were medically cared for by Villalobos in different places and situations: his eldest daughter in July 1508;<sup>11</sup> his sister Beatriz, who was married to the eldest son of the duke of Alba, in Alba de Tormes in March 1509;<sup>12</sup> and the count himself in Zaragoza in November 1518.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest evidence that Villalobos also cared for the health of the Alba ducal family dates from September 1507, five months after the event concerning the count of Benavente. Then, our *converso* practitioner informed his father – who followed his career with an understandable concern, and tried to restrain his impetuosity with paternal advice such as not to look “for victory or glory, but for benevolence” in medical discussions – about the delicate health of the duke himself, Fadrique Álvarez de Toledo, whose «endless ailments» he declared he was looking after.<sup>14</sup> Villalobos was caring for him in Santa María del Campo, a

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<sup>8</sup> CL iii, pp. 207-209.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Beatriz Pimentel, one of the sisters of Alonso Pimentel Pacheco, the fifth count of Benavente (1499-1530), was married to Garcí or García Álvarez de Toledo, the first-born son of don Fadrique, the second duke of Alba (1488-1531).

<sup>10</sup> CL iii, pp. 205-207.

<sup>11</sup> CL vi, pp. 225-226.

<sup>12</sup> CL viii, pp. 230-231.

<sup>13</sup> CC vii, p. 22; xi, p. 40.

<sup>14</sup> CL iv, pp. 211-212.

Castilian town half-way between Burgos and Palencia where Ferdinand the Catholic had recently invested the Archbishop of Toledo, Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros, as a Cardinal. It seems clear that Villalobos was there as a member of the retinue of the duke of Alba who was attending an unavoidable political event for every grandee of the kingdom. The Duke of Alba's health required Villalobos's care until the beginning of the following summer, although the duke seems to have entirely recovered, as he lived for some twenty-five years more.

### Physician of the Royal House of His Majesty Ferdinand the Catholic

On 9 June 1508, Villalobos was given the title of «physic» of the Royal House of His Majesty, with an annual salary of 30,000 maravedis.<sup>15</sup> A month and a half later, and still ignorant about his new title, he told Juan de la Parra (c.1460-1521), another court physician and friend, about the difficult professional situation in which he had found himself back home after two years in the service of the duke of Alba. Villalobos complained about the ingratitude of the duke, whom he blamed for not having helped to fulfil his aspirations of promotion to royal court physician, despite the fact that he had left everything to follow his master, and that with his servitude he had lost «native land, father [then just dead], fortune and freedom».<sup>16</sup> The fact that in March 1509, at the duke's request, Villalobos gave medical care to two ladies from his court at Alba de Tormes,<sup>17</sup> and that he only considered he had ended his services to the duke on the occasion of the duke's move to Flanders in 1520, are clear evidence that the client relationships between the two of them went on beyond Villalobos's promotion to royal doctor.<sup>18</sup>

His designation as «courtier and royal physician»<sup>19</sup> appears to have

<sup>15</sup> See Jiménez Muñoz (1977), pp. 103-104.

<sup>16</sup> CL vi, p. 226-227: «Nunc ergo doctor insignis opportune videbis qualiter impetrata immensis cum laboribus servitute ab illustrissimo duce nostro patriam, patrem, patrimonium, pariter et libertatem amissi. Ecce nos relinquimus omnia et sequiti sumus illum. Quid ergo erit nobis?».

<sup>17</sup> CL viii, pp. 229-231.

<sup>18</sup> In May 1520 Villalobos confessed to the Almirante of Castilla his difficulties in completing his services for the duke of Alba in the following terms, «Algunas persecuciones pasamos antes que tomásemos aquí [Medina de Rioseco] nuestro asiento, y la que yo sentí más grave, fue de sacar de rayz mi casa de Alba, y despedirme de la buena compañía del Duque. Él se marchó con propósito de apremiarme y forçarme para la yda de Flandes. Si Dios no socorre, por intercessión de V.S., mis fuerças no serán bastantes para defenderme» (CC xii, p. 43).

<sup>19</sup> «... ego curialis regiusque phisicus» (CL x, p. 246). This letter, dated 10 October 1510 (CL x, pp. 241-248), is the earliest unequivocal evidence that Villalobos was serving as

been temporarily suspended by a denunciation of him made to the Inquisitorial Court of Córdoba that led him to spend eighty days in prison, under the accusation of having obtained the new position thanks to his skill as «magician, sorcerer and enchanter». This was a malicious story that Villalobos attributed to the envy his appointment had aroused «in the heart of miserly and stupid men».<sup>20</sup> The judge who put him into prison was Diego Rodríguez Lucero, a ferocious prosecutor of Jews who held the Córdoba Court between September 1499 and June 1508, when he was himself sacked, imprisoned and transferred to Burgos to be tried for multiple abuses in the exercise of his charge.<sup>21</sup> At all events, the denunciation of Villalobos must have happened during the two brief months between his appointment as royal physician (9 June 1508) and the date of the sentence condemning Lucero (1 August 1508), although the inquisitorial investigation might have gone on throughout the two following years, given that Villalobos's imprisonment was delayed until somewhere between 20 January and 10 October 1510.<sup>22</sup>

Despite his having left the prison «free and with honour», this inquisitorial action must have had a great impact on Villalobos, to the point that he appears to have been determined to leave the court and to renounce its vanities. Then he complained of not having thought enough about the risks inherent in his great professional ambitions, and next effusively praised his father's more modest career.<sup>23</sup> Yet his decision to leave the new charge at the royal court appears to have been merely temporary, for thirteen months later (January 1512) he was there again and boasted in his usual, coarse sense of humour.<sup>24</sup> His change of mind was probably related to the fact that at the beginning of 1511 his annual salary as royal physician had been doubled (up to 60,000 maravedis) and supplemented with 20,000 maravedis more by way of subsistence allowance (*ayuda de*

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a royal doctor, in spite of the fact that he had been named as such on 9 June 1508. During the time between these dates, there is only evidence about the continuity of his services to the ducal house of Alba.

<sup>20</sup> «Sed hujusmodi miseri status invidia succrevit in pectoribus miserrimorum atque stultorum hominum, usque adeo ut me magum, me veneficum, meque incantatorem predicarent, quasi aliter impossibile foret ad tantum me fortune iugum ascendere potuisse. Hinc inde ergo suspitione nata sacris auribus insuravit inquisitorum fama, unde captus et in carcerem missus optime custoditus fui ... In fine octoginta dierum, Dei beneficentia veritatisque patrocinio liberatus et honoratus evasi» (CL x, pp. 246-247).

<sup>21</sup> On the judge Lucero, see Lea (1966), vol. I, pp. 189-211.

<sup>22</sup> Inference from the contents of two letters that Villalobos sent to the bishop of Plasencia on these dates. See CL ix, pp. 237-240; x, pp. 241-248.

<sup>23</sup> CL x, pp. 243-244.

<sup>24</sup> CC i, pp. 1-4.

*costa*), which would reach 30,000 from 1512 onwards.<sup>25</sup>

In 1515 Villalobos went along with Ferdinand the Catholic to Calatayud, where the king was to preside at the Courts of Aragón. In a letter signed there in October, where he referred to the king's «serious illness» and to his care of the monarch's health, he confessed to his correspondent – an unidentified grandee – that it was only because of this reason that he still remained at the royal court. Villalobos went on to show his disillusion with court life, and renewed his intention to abandon its «uproar, trepidation, and uneasiness» and to reach «a port and a peaceful area where he could escape from the dangerous gulfs and storms of that sea».<sup>26</sup> This would be the last illness of Ferdinand the Catholic, whom Villalobos cared for until his death three months later. It is feasible to suppose that his new complaints of March 1517<sup>27</sup> from Madrid, the seat of the Castilian court during the second regency by cardinal Cisneros – from the death of Ferdinand the Catholic (23 January 1516) until the arrival of «don Carlos», the future Charles V, in Spain (19 September 1517) – on the grounds of supposedly new financial difficulties, were fuelled by his uneasiness in the face of the loss of his patron and by the deterioration of the Castilian political climate. In these circumstances Villalobos, who at least for the moment retained his position of royal doctor, does not appear to have been completely confused. He even mobilised old friendships, who were then very influential at the Flemish court, such as Jufre, a royal officer in charge of supplies, and Diego López de Ayala, a canon from Toledo cathedral who was Cisneros' delegate there, by asking them to mediate in order to be paid by the royal treasurer some charges which Villalobos claimed to be owed.<sup>28</sup>

### Fighting for a position at the Emperor's court

Despite the seemingly unfruitful results of both steps and, at least, of a third one in front of a colleague better positioned at the royal court – the powerful Fernán Álvarez Abarca (c.1456-1526) –,<sup>29</sup> Villalobos went

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<sup>25</sup> Jiménez Muñoz (1977), p. 104.

<sup>26</sup> «E si la grave enfermedad del Rey, nuestro Señor, no me detuviese, que sería mal caso deixar a S.A. en tan gran necesidad, ya me auria yo arribado en algun puerto y remanso donde escapase de los peligrosos golfos y tempestades deste mar; que en verdad, si toda la corte es bullicio y turbación y desasosiego, los que hacen la corte, que son los que residen en ella, andarán y bulliciosos y desasosegados» (CC ii, p. 5).

<sup>27</sup> CC iii, p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> CC iii, p. 9-11; CC iv, pp. 13-14.

<sup>29</sup> CC v, p. 15-17.

along with king Charles in his journey to the Crown of Aragón during the years 1518 and 1519 in order to be recognised as king by the Courts of its different kingdoms. His presence in king Charles's retinue – documented by at least five letters Villalobos sent from Zaragoza and Barcelona throughout the thirteen months which elapsed between August 1518 and September 1519<sup>30</sup> – appears to be justified then by his position as royal doctor at the service of Germaine de Foix, the widow queen of Ferdinand the Catholic. At the end of July 1518 in Zaragoza, queen Germaine, who accompanied king Charles in this first journey over these territories of the Spanish Crown,<sup>31</sup> confirmed Villalobos as her doctor with a salary of 50,000 maravedis plus 30,000 more as subsistence allowance.<sup>32</sup>

Among the several confidences about the atmosphere of the royal court that Villalobos sent from Zaragoza to another grandee, the Condestable of Castile, in November 1518, there is one which is particularly illuminating on the degree of his familiarity with the widow queen and on the intimate way through which our court doctor might have attempted to consolidate his professional position in those critical times. Villalobos humorously referred to the inconveniences that the bad health of his old lord, the count of Benavente – who appears now as queen Germaine's sexual partner – involved for the couple's relationships.<sup>33</sup> It seems, therefore, clear not only that his professional services went beyond the health demands of queen Germaine, but even that his old connection to the count of Benavente might have been instrumental in reactivating the queen's support in his favour in these peculiar circumstances.

Villalobos's obvious efforts to introduce himself into the court of king Charles and to obtain the favour of the newly arrived Flemish courtiers, were temporarily rewarded when his professional services unexpectedly became indispensable. The «happy» opportunity appeared in the form of a diarrhoea epidemic that attacked the Flemish and Spanish courtiers who were spending the end of Zaragoza's torrid summer (between August and November 1518) with the monarch. And what seems to have been decisive at this point was that the influential Lord of Chièvres – Guillermo de Croy, head of the Burgundian-Flemish party and field marshal of don Carlos' court – felt entirely satisfied with

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<sup>30</sup> CC v, pp. 15-17; vii, pp. 21-23; viii, pp. 25-27; x, pp. 35-37; xi, pp. 39-41.

<sup>31</sup> In Villalobos's correspondence about these dates there are repeated mentions of «the Queen» («la Reina»). See CC v, p. 16; vii, pp. 22-23.

<sup>32</sup> Jiménez Muñoz (1977), p. 104.

<sup>33</sup> CC vii, p. 22.



his medical care.<sup>34</sup> Convinced of having recovered his fortune at the royal court, Villalobos then joked, «Neither the queen, nor the count, nor the dukes, nor the whole council were enough to recover this fortune; God wished to show that all we try is nothing, and all is filth, and He closed me the public streets, all the doors, and the walls; and He made me enter where there is no room for a small ball».<sup>35</sup>

Yet, in the course of the following year and a half Villalobos's expectation of fitting into the new court would not be fulfilled, perhaps because Germaine de Foix got rid of his services after she married the margrave Johann von Brandenburg-Ansbach (1493-1525) in late 1519, and/or because Villalobos was not prepared to follow the Emperor and his court in the continuation of his Spanish and European tour beyond Barcelona. By May 1520 Villalobos was back home, now at Medina de Rioseco, where he appears to have recently settled his family residence, after having lived in Alba de Tormes for some fifteen years (from 1506, approximately). His new move seems to have been related to the voluntary end of his services to the duke of Alba. Once more, Villalobos showed himself tired and disillusioned with his life as a court physician as well as eager to enjoy life fully with his people. Then he complained to another grandee, the Almirante of Castile, about the strong pressure the duke of Alba had put him under in order to assure the continuity of his services in Flanders, and expressed gratitude for the Almirante's allegedly decisive intervention to obtain his exemption from service to the duke.<sup>36</sup>

### Villalobos's special connection to the Almirante of Castile

Villalobos's above-mentioned letter of 1520 to the Almirante of Castile, marks a new stage in his life course as a court physician. Don Fadrique Enríquez (1460-1538), who had succeeded his father as the Almirante of Castile when the latter died in 1485, was first cousin of Ferdinand the Catholic and of the duke of Alba, as well as nephew of the Condestable of Castile (1512-1528), Íñigo Fernández de Velasco – addressee of the already mentioned letter of November 1518 in which Villalobos referred with a great familiarity to the diarrhoea epidemic that had damaged king Charles's court in Zaragoza. Almirante and

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<sup>34</sup> CC vii, p. 23.

<sup>35</sup> «No había bastado la Reyna, ni el Conde, ni los Duques, ni todo el Consejo para ello; quiso Dios mostrar que todo es nada quanto procuramos, y todo es suziedad, y cerrome las calles públicas y todas las puertas y los muros, y hízome entrar por do no cupiera un bodoque» (CC vii, p. 23).

<sup>36</sup> CC xii, p. 43. See textual quotation above at note 18.

Condestable were then the two highest secular dignities in Castile, and they would make up, along with cardinal Adrian of Utrecht, the triumvirate that governed the Hispanic territories of the imperial crown in the absence of king Charles during the revolt of the Castilian Communities. The powerful don Fadrique, whom king Charles would name as duke of Medina de Rioseco, and whose domains had their main seat in this Castilian city, shared with Villalobos a fondness for poetry. A number of preserved letters and verses interchanged by them reveal a close relationship between them from at least 1518 to 1525.<sup>37</sup> As a result of a youthful quarrel with another noble, don Fadrique had been exiled by queen Isabelle the Catholic to Sicily for three years (1481-1484). There he got in touch with Humanist intellectual circles and married one of the richest heiresses of that kingdom, the countess of Modica, Ana Cabrera. When don Fadrique returned to Spain, the Sicilian Humanist Lucio Marineo Siculo (*c.*1444-*c.*1533), who would be professor at the university of Salamanca and royal chronicler, was among the members of his retinue.<sup>38</sup>

The relationship between Villalobos and the Almirante coincides with the revolt of the Castilian Communities, of which our court physician was a privileged witness from the side of the noble faction that was favourable to the absent Emperor. Villalobos's letters kept the Almirante and other correspondents in the courts of Flanders and Germany up to date with the news from this bloody conflict in the Crown of Castile at the very beginning of king Charles's reign. Among the events that appear to have caused most impact on Villalobos were the tragic fate of his old friend Jufre, a royal officer of provisions who had been tortured and executed in Burgos by the rebels,<sup>39</sup> and the lengthy siege of Medina de Rioseco, where he was then living, during the winter of 1520/1521.<sup>40</sup> Along with those difficulties due to that armed conflict, in August 1520 Villalobos also lost his wife as a result of a difficult birth that happened while he was on the way home from Zamora.<sup>41</sup>

The financial straits about which Villalobos complained in mid 1520,<sup>42</sup> might have continued during the subsequent months, since in

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<sup>37</sup> CC viii, pp. 25-27; xii, pp. 43-44; xviii, pp. 65-66; xix, pp. 67-69; xx, pp. 71-73.

<sup>38</sup> For a biography of the Almirante don Fadrique, see De Avalle-Arce's study (pp. 13-269) preceding an excellent compilation of don Fadrique's poetry, edited by De Avalle-Arce (1994).

<sup>39</sup> CC xiii, pp. 47-48.

<sup>40</sup> CC xv, pp. 51-55; xvi, pp. 57-59.

<sup>41</sup> CC xiv, pp. 49-50.

<sup>42</sup> CC xiii, pp. 46-47.

February 1521 he asked a Galician noblewoman to mediate on his behalf<sup>43</sup> in order to be paid the assets allegedly owed to him for his services to the Almirante. Villalobos hinted at Almirante's stinginess with his closest servants and the current indifference of him and his wife for these matters as a result of their growing spiritual concerns.<sup>44</sup> Jealous of the Almirante's supposed preferences for Catalan physicians and Sicilian surgeons, Villalobos attacked all of them with virulence.<sup>45</sup> From Villalobos's inappropriate comment it can be suggested that on his return from his Sicilian exile, the Almirante had brought along with him medical and surgical servants, and that the esteem in which he held Villalobos might have depended more on their shared passion for poetry, than for the latter's medical services. Villalobos's irritation at the Almirante's allegedly negligent behaviour towards his demands now continued to grow. In April 1521, in the middle of a critical financial situation affecting the whole Castilian kingdom as a consequence of the revolt of the Communities, he demanded, in sour and hopeless language, that the Almirante fulfil some promises to him,<sup>46</sup> whose nature can only be inferred from Villalobos's vicissitudes during the following four years.

Despite the gap of information between the springs of 1521 and

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<sup>43</sup> She was Francisca Sarmiento, whom Fabié 1886a (p. 38) relates to the Galician noble house of the counts of Santa Marta. She should have been very close to the Almirante, perhaps the wife of his brother Enrique Enriquez, who was responsible for the Almirante's dominions in the latter's absence.

<sup>44</sup> «... nunca el Almirante me hará esta merced [la cobrança de mi libramiento] ni otra que valga menos, porque en saber que soy de su tierra le tengo enhastado, y esto no es sino por su gran humildad, que se tiene en tan poco, que todas sus cosas piensa que son las más ruynes de todas.

(...) ... ni quiero tampoco servir a la Condesa de Medina, mi señora, porque según la doctrina de San Pablo, es tanta su conversación en el cielo que allá aguarda todas sus cosas, pensamientos, cuydados, joyas de plata y de oro, y mantequillas de León, y todo cuanto le traen, que no podemos alcanzar cosa dellas los terrenales que somos, por mucho que saltemos» (CC xvii, p. 62). On the spiritual crisis of the Almirante and his wife, see De Avallé-Arce (1994), pp. 132-148. On the Almirante's spiritual patronage in the 1520s and 1530s, see Giordano (in press).

<sup>45</sup> «El Almirante tiene por muy buena grangería traer de Cathalunia para Castilla físicos como cuescos de alvericoques, y el cirujano ha de ser de Siçilia, y ha de cerrar todas las heridas con unos polvos de estornudar que tiene; y aunque a su Señoría hagan entender que los bachilleres comunes de Castilla tienen más letras y mejor experiencia que los excelentes doctores de Cathalunia, en ningún caso ha de aceptar físico ni cirujano si no fueren orientales. No sé qué secreto ha hallado en ellos, sino que son muy excelentes mentirosos, y así como la mentira es de muy buena digestión y no empalaga nada en el vientre, así la verdad es dura y atraviésase en la boca del estómago. Y a estos cathalanes hales parecido poco mentir de lo pasado y de lo presente, y por esso pican todos de astrólogos para poder mentir largamente en todo lo que está por venir hasta que el mundo se acabe» (CC xvii, pp. 62-63).

<sup>46</sup> CC xviii, pp. 65-66.

1525, the letter interchange between Villalobos and the Almirante of Castile during the months of April and May 1525 provides us with some keys to approach another difficult stage in the career of our court physician, which he chose to abruptly close. According to Fabié, Villalobos was practising as the emperor's doctor between 1522 and 1525, and achieved in the court «great favour for his learning, for his letters and, above all, for his witticisms». Yet, in 1524, he was involved in a new court conflict, now related to his disagreement with the medical treatment that an Italian practitioner called Narciso Ponte had prescribed for the quartan fevers the Emperor was then suffering from.<sup>47</sup> Whether this incident was the main cause of the crisis or merely the straw that broke the camel's back, the fact is that about April 1525 Villalobos withdrew from the court, probably after having remitted his appointment as royal doctor. Then he moved to Extremadura where for a while he served the marquis of Priego, a nephew of the Great Captain and one of the two most celebrated noblemen, who in 1506, leaning on the popular discontent against the Córdoba inquisitorial judge Lucero, had instigated a judicial action to eliminate him that was only frustrated by his rapid escape.<sup>48</sup> The Almirante, pretending not to know the causes of Villalobos's drastic decision to leave the court, showed him the commotion that his resignation had brought about in the whole of Castile,<sup>49</sup> and invited him to reconsider his move by offering him a new, well-paid job in Valladolid: 200,000 maravedis for serving the Almirante and the remaining «lords in the region».<sup>50</sup> In his reply from Zafra, Villalobos protested that his decision had not been sudden, and that

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<sup>47</sup> Fabié (1886a), pp. 41-42. Charles V returned to Spain in mid-July 1522 and at the end of August he fixed his court for one year in Valladolid, the seat of the Royal Council.

<sup>48</sup> Lea (1966), vol. I, pp. 202-203.

<sup>49</sup> «A toda Castilla teneys espantada, señor doctor, de la mudança que haveys hecho, porque todos los médicos cuentan por suma felicidad vivir con el Emperador y servir a su Magestad con su officio; y vos, teniendo tan buen lugar en la Corte, tanta cabida con todos los Grandes y tan buen salario en la Casa Real, haveros salido de la Corte tan determinado y desterrado de vuestra naturaleza, donde vos teneys tantos y tan buenos feligreses, por vivir en Extremadura, tierra inculta y inhabitable, aunque sea en casa de tan gran señor y tan estimado como es el Sr. Marqués de Pliego, cosa es cierto de gran misterio, y en que vos soys obligado de dar a todos razón y cuenta de tan gran novedad, para no caer de lástima en que por vuestras letras y discreción érades tenido» (CC xix, p. 67).

<sup>50</sup> «Si fue cosa acçidental de algún enojo o agravio que reçebistes, más cerca pudiérades tomar la satisfacción; porque si vos quereys veniros a vivir a Valladolid, que es el riñón de vuestra patria, los señores que están en la comarca, y yo con ellos, os daremos dozientos mil maravedises de salario; y quando os hubiéremos menester, os pagaremos vuestro[s] trabajos como vos sabey[s] que lo solemos hazer; y por ésta quedo por fiador de lo dicho, y os doy mi fee de cumplir como aquí digo» (CC xix, 67-68).

none of the grandees of the kingdom of León – and particularly not the count of Benavente and the Almirante himself – could pretend ignorance of the «offence I received in the Court and my determination to take out my bones from my ungrateful native land». <sup>51</sup>

At all events, what may lie behind this conflict is an unsolved problem of fitting a rather old practitioner – by that time Villalobos was over fifty – whose position had been prominent at the court of Ferdinand the Catholic, into the group of doctors that king Charles had brought along with him from Flanders. <sup>52</sup> From the terms of Villalobos's letter to the Almirante, his allegedly offensive event at the court came from some time ago, and had even become known by Aragonese noblemen of Zaragoza and Valencia who – he boasted – had invited him to move to their domains. <sup>53</sup> Some of the passages from the set of verses that Villalobos had then interchanged with the Almirante lead one to presume that he had felt particularly offended by his marginalization from the *Junta* of royal doctors in charge of the decisions concerning the Emperor's health ailments. And he attributed this marginalization to his *converso* condition and his earlier trial by the Inquisition. <sup>54</sup> In their verse interchange, the Almirante hinted to Villalobos that, by his decision to leave the court, he may not only have lost the royal protection in the face of the Inquisition – the Almirante remarked that he had returned to the same lands where he had been prosecuted fifteen years before – but also exposed himself to eventual reprisals by king Charles, his abandoned lord. <sup>55</sup> Spitefully, Villalobos declared that he felt himself very well among the people of the Guadiana valley, which was full of converted Jews, and also replied that the closeness to the Córdoba Inquisition was compensated for by a reassuring proximity to the Portuguese border too. <sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> CC xx, p. 71.

<sup>52</sup> As Villalobos complained to the Almirante, at the court «maestre Narçiso [Ponte] era caudillo de todos los médicos imperiales, mançebo italiano de muy pocas letras y de ninguna experiençia, que ha pocos días que le conocimos moço de don Hernando de Castriote, y después assentó de vivienda con maestre Luys, físico de su Majestad, y ahora exercita la prefatura y tiranía de la mediçina, tan absolutamente que en la Cámara de su Majestad no entra ni sale otro médico sino aquel que le obedeçe en todos sus desvaríos. Y si dellos no dependiesse la vida de muchos hombres, yo le obedecería, porque soy más ruín que él, mas hacíaseme conçiencia lisonjear a un hombre de poco valor, con muerte de hombres muy valerosos, y señaladamente con peligro de la vida del César, a quien él tuvo por sus errores en peligro de muerte de la más liviana quartana que en estos años havemos visto» (CC xx, p. 72).

<sup>53</sup> CC xx, p. 71.

<sup>54</sup> CC xxvi, p. 87; xxvii, pp. 89-91.

<sup>55</sup> CC xix, pp. 68-69.

<sup>56</sup> CC xxi, pp. 75-76.

### Waning years close to Empress Isabelle of Portugal

We do not know how long Villalobos remained in the service of the marquis of Priego, although in March 1526 a royal *cédula* ordered to pay Villalobos the 80,000 maravedis previously assigned to him «without detriment to his residence outside the court as he has been authorised for it».<sup>57</sup> At all events, by December 1526 Villalobos was already back at the Castilian royal court and, entirely self-confident, he boasted about receiving from the Emperor an annual salary of 300,000 maravedis, and about the well-off financial position he was then enjoying.<sup>58</sup> His special bond with the Empress Isabelle of Portugal in this new stage of his courtly career<sup>59</sup> suggests that the imperial wedding – held in Seville in March 1526 – could have given him the opportunity to shrug off the offence and to return to the court through an open door, perhaps with the help of some of the powerful Castilian noblemen with whom he had stayed on client terms. The rapprochement of relationships between the Castilian and Portuguese crowns by means of marriage alliances, had been a priority by the Castilian monarchs since the times of Isabelle the Catholic – king Charles’s grand-mother.

In 1528, his new professional duties did not prevent Villalobos from going along with king Charles to Valencia in order to be recognised as king by its Courts and, later, to Monzón when the king went to preside at the General Courts of the Aragon Crown, while the Empress remained in Valladolid as deputy governor of the kingdom of Castile.<sup>60</sup> Yet, one year later, Villalobos stayed at Valladolid along with the Empress – then pregnant – and other ladies of her retinue, while king Charles, along with all the grandees of the kingdom, went to Italy where he was crowned as Emperor (Bologna, February 1530), and later travelled through Germany, from where he did not return until April 1533.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Jiménez Muñoz (1977), p. 104: «... no embargante que no resida en nuestra corte por cuanto está fuera della con nuestra licencia».

<sup>58</sup> «...que tengo siempre mil ducados sobrados para derramar por essas calles en todo lo que a mí me agradare, y éstos no me sobran viviendo por ordinario, sino teniendo muy buenas mulas y acémilas y muchos aforros y muchos sclavos y sclavas, y con lo que su Majestad me manda pagar muy bien cada año tengo trescientos mil maravedises de salario» (CC xxix, pp. 98-99).

<sup>59</sup> Villalobos’s new position was ratified by a new royal *cédula* in Madrid in August 1529 giving orders to pay him this salary in consideration of his services «a nos [the Emperor] y a la Serenísima Emperatriz y Reyna que Santa gloria aya» (see Jiménez Muñoz [1977], p. 104). On the other hand, Fabié maintained that Villalobos was the Empress’ most trustworthy doctor (1886a, p. 104).

<sup>60</sup> CC xxx, pp. 105-106; xxxi, p. 110.

<sup>61</sup> Between these two dates, Villalobos wrote to Antonio Manrique de Lara, the duke of

On the Emperor's return, Villalobos accompanied the Empress with her children to Barcelona to receive him.<sup>62</sup> Charles V went to Monzón to preside at the Courts of the Aragon kingdom, held in May 1533, while our royal doctor was delayed in Martorell, taking care of the Empress's poor health. When her health improved, the rest of the retinue set out to Monzón, where Isabelle joined her husband, while the children remained two leagues away from this city until the closing of the Courts at the end of that year, to prevent them from catching smallpox.<sup>63</sup> Villalobos, along with two noblemen, was in charge of their two children. Three weeks later, in receiving the visit of the Empress and her retinue, Villalobos, who had recently suffered from a health ailment and saw himself as a «sad and old» (*tristisque senectus*) man, showed signs of fatigue as a result of the responsibilities entrusted to him, which he made clear he was ready to bear only because of the favours he expected to receive from "Their Highnesses" in twenty or thirty years' time.<sup>64</sup>

There is no direct information from Villalobos from late 1534 to August 1542, when in a letter from Medina del Campo, he announced to a friend – a high royal officer – that he had decided to get married, and humorously detailed confidences about his new marital life at the beginning of his seventies, with a «*hijadalgo*» young woman who, entirely ignorant about his lineage, did not hesitate to declare her aversion to the *conversos*.<sup>65</sup> Shortly after, in September 1542/1543, in writing to a court friend from Valderas – a town twenty kilometres from his native

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Nájera, three letters full of jokes and courtly gossip, that reveal the close friendship and strong male complicity between both of them. See CC xxxii, pp. 113-114; xxxiii, pp. 115-117; xxxv, pp. 123-124.

<sup>62</sup> CC xxxiv, p. 119.

<sup>63</sup> CC xxxvi, pp. 125-127.

<sup>64</sup> «...y burlan sus Altezas tan pesadillamente que si no me moviesse el interesse que spero de las mercedes que me podrían hacer, si quieren, de aquí a veinte o treinta años, yo no los podría sufrir. Mas pásasse la persona con la mocedad estas cosas, por tener hecha su senara para la vejez; y otro tanto hacen como yo, don Diego Osorio y don Iñigo Manrique, que están en esta compañía o en esta casa de orates, donde no se sabe quáles lo son más, los niños por natura o los viejos por elección; y si todos lo son igualmente, a todos ellos sobrepuja el físico que los cura, porque le podrían decir: *cura te ipsum*» (CC xxxvi, p. 126).

<sup>65</sup> «Es una mujer mesurada, y con aquella su gravedad nunca haze sino dezirme en secreto mucho mal de los confesos, y que no los puede ver más que al diablo. Yo dígole que tiene razón, porque son tan judíos el día de hoy como el día que nacieron. En este artículo se parece mucho a v.m., quando devancábades con la calentura y me rogábades que yo solo tomase el cargo de la cura, porque no os fiábades del Doctor de Almacán ni de hombre que fuese confeso. Para esta inocencia de mi mujer, yo he mandado a dos amigos que la desengañen porque no se destemple tanto, y nunca se lo han osado dezir; mas yo la desengañaré también en llegando a mi casa, plaziendo a Dios, que ella quede corrida de lo pasado» (CC xl, p. 138).

Villalobos – where he had apparently retired, Villalobos wondered rhetorically what was he doing there and, after having weighed up the advantages and inconveniences of courtly life, he revealed his plans to breed mares of good stock to produce colts, and proposed forming a partnership with this court friend.<sup>66</sup>

Although it is risky to conjecture about the vicissitudes of Villalobos's life during the almost nine years which elapsed from 1534 to 1542, there is one event that doubtless marked his last years, namely the death of the Empress in 1539. It seems clear that Villalobos took part with the *Junta* of physicians who attended her last illness, and that her death did not make him lose the Emperor's favour since, according to his own words, he was serving at the court when he was seventy (i.e., until 1542 or 1543)<sup>67</sup> when he voluntarily retired. Anyhow, his intervention on that occasion might have been, at least, controversial and raised insidious comments which could have persisted ten years after. In fact, in his letter of May 1549 from Medina de Rioseco – again, his city of residence at least from 1546<sup>68</sup> – Villalobos protested to the new Almirante of Castile – the nephew of the former one – about the manner in which he had been treated while he was taking care of the Almirante's wife, the duchess of Medina, who was suffering from tertian fevers on the eve of childbirth. He complained that a healing woman had denied him the access to the patient's room, and disapproved his prescriptions by telling him that «he will kill the duchess as he did with the Empress». Villalobos grumbled to him about this humiliation and about his sad fate – from having claims to being «the prince of medicine» at the court and city of Valladolid under the Catholic Monarchs, to becoming «the excrement and waste of all the medicine» in the city of Medina.<sup>69</sup>

## Conclusions

Thus far the biographical sketch of Francisco López de Villalobos, from the information provided by his correspondence. His career took him from the city of Zamora, where the *licenciado* Villalobos practiced medicine in the early years (c.1498-c.1506), to the Empress Isabelle of Portugal, whom he took care of until her last illness (1526-1539), via his

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<sup>66</sup> CC xli, p. 150.

<sup>67</sup> CC xli, p. 143.

<sup>68</sup> In August 1546 Villalobos wrote a letter from Medina de Rioseco to his old friend the duke of Nájera, in which he complained about the loneliness inherent to old age, and offered the duke and the duchess his professional services (CC xlii, pp. 151-153).

<sup>69</sup> CC xliii, pp. 156-157.



position of royal doctor in the service of king Ferdinand the Catholic (c.1508-1516), of his widow queen Germaine de Foix (1516-1519) and of Emperor Charles (1522-1525), not forgetting his activities as medical servant of the ducal house of Alba (c.1506-1520), nor his special connection with the Almirante of Castile (1518-1525), nor his more sporadic medical services to other Castilian noblemen such as the count of Benavente.

The information concerning the conditions of Villalobos's medical practice reveals not only his large and distinguished clientele, but also the usually simultaneous character of his professional services in different – albeit interconnected – social spheres (city, nobility, royalty) – a feature that was facilitated by the dense network of marriage alliances among the different noble houses of Castilian *grandees*, and by their lineage links with the royal family. It can be also remarked that Villalobos enjoyed a great professional «freedom» which might be attributable to the periods when his practice as a royal doctor took place, that is, before the royal sanitary services were institutionalised, and before the courtly protocol was reorganised according to the Burgundian ceremonial in 1548, about the end of Charles V's reign.<sup>70</sup> Yet, there was a *de facto* hierarchy – with notable differences of salary and prestige – among the royal doctors in Villalobos's times.

Villalobos's career, like those of other practitioners under a noble and/or royal patronage in Renaissance Europe, not only was subjected to the inconveniences deriving from the itinerant character of contemporary courts, but was also characterised by vulnerability – always liable to the caprice of fortune and which could come to a halt at any moment and for many reasons, from the loss of a patron's favour, to a patron's economic ruin or death. Yet, the mobility of the courts and the simultaneity of professional services to different patrons allowed medical practitioners to be compensated for the eventual loss of one patron by gaining another's favour, and contributed to enlarge the number of potential patients who, at the same time, gave them more opportunities to make new, useful acquaintances for their careers. Furthermore, the case of Villalobos's career plainly illustrates that a powerful patron's support used to be also effective as a protective barrier for a practitioner from the reprisals that a former patron could take against him as a result of having felt offended.

On the other hand, it should be remembered that the gifts interchanged between a medical servant and a noble patron in the socio-cultural context of the Old Regime did not necessarily need to be translated into monetary terms. The specificity of courtly ideology at this

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<sup>70</sup> Rey Bueno and Alegre Pérez (1998).

point is often reflected in Villalobos's correspondence. Here, nevertheless, I will restrict myself to mentioning a single example of this regarding a physician-patient relationship, and emphasising the hierarchy among the royal court and the satellite noble ones as well as the close interconnection with each other. It comes from a dialogue between a grandee of Castile (a duke, presumably that of Alba) and Villalobos that was attached to a letter he wrote to the archbishop of Santiago de Compostela between 1510 and 1516. The context of this dialogue are the complaints of the grandee about the un-relievable symptoms of a quartan fever he was suffering from. Villalobos's successful intervention led the duke to propose that he abandon his current position of royal doctor and remain exclusively in the duke's service, by offering him a double salary and a less hectic professional life. Villalobos replied to the duke's offer in the following way:

«I, my lord, do not live with the king on the grounds of what he gives me, but on that of what he can give me without resorting to his purse. In fact, while I am living close to him, your lordship can save the salary which you had to give me and still resort to my service, because both of us know that you will never move away from the king, unless death moves you away from him».<sup>71</sup>

Not even the interchangeable gifts were restricted to those arising from the physician-patient relationship. As Villalobos's correspondence makes clear, the court doctor used to play not only his specific professional role, but also some other varied ones such as those of friend, advisor, confidant, messenger, partner of games, and accomplice of sexual adventures. To his friends' and lords' rejoicing, Villalobos seems to have been always ready to play all these roles with a sharp sense of humour which he translated into ingenious jokes and delightful dialogues and verses. This talent allowed him to cultivate many friendships, among which I would emphasise that of the Almirante of Castile, with whom he shared literary tastes and the facility of versifying.

Villalobos's self-referential allusions to his Jewish identity were a constant subject of his verses and jokes. A member of the first generation of *conversos*, whose lives were unavoidably marked by the Inquisition – the one known as the «generation of 1492»<sup>72</sup> –, Villalobos stands out

<sup>71</sup> «Diálogo que pasó entre un Grande deste reino de Castilla, estando con el frío de la cuartana, y el doctor de Villalobos, que estaba allí con él». See Paz y Meliá (1964), p. 208. The full dialogue including this passage was published, along with other medical dialogues, in the several printed editions of Villalobos's *Problemas* (Zamora 1543; Zaragoza 1544; Sevilla 1550, 1574), but its contents suggest that it was written during Ferdinand the Catholic's reign, to be precise between 1510 and 1516.

<sup>72</sup> Gilman (1979).

because of his awareness of the profundity of the coming historical changes, and of his understanding that the inquisitorial prosecution against Jews was permanently institutionalising the antagonism of the «old Christians» towards the «new Christians». And, instead of escaping or hiding, he chose to exhibit himself by making oral and written boasting with a coarse sense of humour. He often looked for laughter by means of word games about his own suspicious self-image, and made fun of the supposedly honourable self-images of others. This decidedly dangerous game should have given Villalobos many enemies, but it also allowed him to win the affection of many others among his courtly clientele and the tellers of anecdotes.<sup>73</sup>

With his constant effort to face this issue with ease, Villalobos appears to have been searching to de-stigmatise his lineage and to exorcise any reprisals against him for this reason. Moreover, his verses and jokes also seem to have had the purposes of self-asserting his identity and of developing social criticism towards the new state order – of a kind which increasingly excluded the «new Christians» – which the «old Christians» were imposing on Castile. Understandably, Villalobos could not avoid, however, some of the more serious consequences on his professional career of his belonging to the Jewish minority. First, his Jewish lineage might have dissuaded him from an eventual academic career, and directed his professional aspirations towards court medicine under the protection of powerful patrons – some of them with a widely-known reputation of having had Jewish ancestors – whom he plotted with. Secondly, it might also have made more credible the 1508 accusations before the Córdoba Inquisition that he had obtained his position of royal doctor by means of the necromantic arts, to the extent that he was even imprisoned for eighty long days. Last but not least, Villalobos's *converso* position appears to have been the main cause of his marginalization among king Charles's royal doctors in the years after the revolt of the Communities.

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<sup>73</sup> Gilman (1972), *passim*; Gilman (1979), pp. 94-97.

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