

William Lamport [*Guillén Lombardo*] (1610-1659), author of an early declaration of Mexican independence and self-proclaimed 'King of New Spain'

By Ryan Dominic Crew



William Lamport (1610-1659)

(*Enrique Alciati, 1910.*

*Monumento a la Independencia,
Mexico City)*

Lamport, William [*Guillén Lombardo*] (1610-1659), author of an early declaration of Mexican independence and self-proclaimed 'King of New Spain', was born in Wexford Town, County Wexford, Ireland, around the year 1610. He is more popularly known in Mexico and Latin America by his Spanish alias 'Don Guillén Lombardo de Guzmán'. His parents, Richard Lamport and Alonsa Sutton, were both of Old English descent. William had at least one sibling, John Lamport. William's family claimed relations to local nobility, but by trade they were merchants - and at times, pirates. Like many Old English in the late sixteenth century, William's family saw their traditional autonomy and their Catholic religion threatened by renewed English efforts to subjugate Ireland. His grandfather, Patrick Lamport, was among those who decided to align with the Gaelic chiefs' wars against Tudor colonisation. Lamport's ships aided Don Juan de Águila's Spanish expeditionary force that disembarked at Kinsale in 1600, and for years afterwards he was a known threat to English shipping off southern Ireland. Finally apprehended in 1617, Patrick was executed on the personal orders of James I. About four years after the execution, his grandsons William and John left Wexford, entrusted to churchmen who schooled them.

After a few years studying at a Jesuit school in Dublin, William began university studies in England at Gresham College. There he studied Greek and Mathematics. He soon fled the country, however, after publishing a treatise denouncing King James I. As he escaped to France, a company of pirates near Saint-Malo captured him. He spent several years with them and fought with them in the siege of La Rochelle as mercenaries for the French. Eventually escaping the band of pirates in Bordeaux, he made his way toward the Irish exile community in La Coruña, Galicia, Spain. There William hispanicised his name to 'Don Guillén Lombardo' and entered the Irish exile community school in Santiago, the Colegio de Niños Nobles. He won the attention and support of Irish and Spanish nobles after he converted his former pirate band to Catholicism and loyalty to the Spanish monarchy at the Galician port of

Deán. He received a scholarship to study at the Colegio de Irlandeses in Salamanca, and two years later, King Philip IV's principal minister, the Conde Duque de Olivares, placed him in the select Colegio de San Lorenzo del Escorial - a training ground for the elite servants of the monarchy.

This educational background allowed William to rise into a select group of educated Irish exiles who served in the Spanish ecclesiastical and imperial administration. He proved to be a loyal servant to powerful patrons, who led the Spanish monarchy's war efforts in Europe. He fought at the battle of Nördlingen (1634), and led Irish soldiers at the siege of Fuenterrabía (1638). A unique record of William's military and diplomatic service survives in pictorial form. While serving in Brussels in the mid-1630s under the King's representative, Jean-Charles della Faille, the famed painter Anton Van Dyck - or at least one of his students - made a preliminary drawing for a portrait of Don Guillén. The portrait itself was never completed; the drawing is now housed at a museum in Budapest, Hungary. William appears dressed as a student under his coat of arms, presenting a lengthy piece of writing to della Faille.

Returning to Madrid, William apparently served in diplomatic and espionage missions for the effective head of Spanish government, the Conde Duque de Olivares, particularly in Catalonia. While it is difficult to corroborate these claims, a published panegyric in honour of the Conde Duque de Olivares authored by William provides some indication that William became an *hechura*, or protégé, of the Conde Duque. At this time he also publicly appropriated the Conde Duque de Olivares' principal last name, *Guzmán*, thus becoming 'Don Guillén Lombardo de Guzmán.'

In 1639, William became involved in an Irish rebel scheme to seek Spanish support at Court for a reconquest of Ireland. An Irish mercenary recruiter named Gilbert Nugent, known in Spain as Don Fulgencio Nugencio, arrived in Madrid and stayed with William. Nugent operated secretly with William's assistance at Court. Their request pleaded for 100 ships, 8,000 Spanish soldiers, arms for 50,000 rebels, and 1.5 million pesos in exchange for 'three types of tribute' that the Irish would pay to the Spanish Monarchy after victory. The Conde Duque de Olivares and his secretary Don Martín de Axpe dismissed the request as 'ridiculous.' Nevertheless, they offered the exiles some logistical assistance in Northern Spanish ports. William, with the title of *Maestro de Campo*, or field-commander, was appointed to assist the secret expedition.

During this period in Madrid, William courted a woman named Doña Ana de Cano y Leyva. Evidence on her origins is contradictory, some suggesting that she was a noblewoman, others claiming that she was a Portuguese *converso*, - a descendent of forcibly-converted Iberian Jews. It is also unclear as to whether they contracted matrimony - some evidence points to scandal surrounding their unwed cohabitation. Ana became pregnant with his child around 1639 - 1640. Fleeing either a scandalous affair with this noblewoman or an unwanted marriage, William sailed on the Indies fleet bound for Mexico from Cádiz on 21 April 1640.

William travelled to the Viceroyalty of New Spain (present-day Mexico and parts of North and Central America) in privilege, on the same ship as the newly-imported viceroy, the Marqués de Villena. William later claimed that he travelled to Mexico with a special appointment from the Conde Duque de Olivares to spy on his behalf on the social situation in Mexico. There is some reason to lend credibility to this claim: In early 1640, the Conde Duque received a message from the sitting viceroy that the *criollos*, or Mexican-born descendants of Spanish conquerors and settlers, were on the verge of revolting against Spanish authority. William's mission, he claimed, was to spy on elite *criollos* in Mexico City and report all rumours and evidence directly to his patron in Madrid.

In Mexico City, William established relations with the *Escribano Mayor* (chief clerk) of the Mexico City government, Don Fernando Carrillo. Carrillo was a prominent elite *criollo*, who had been involved in recent protests against Spanish tax and revenue policies. William tutored Carrillo's son, Sebastián Carrillo, and rented a room in their home. Through the Carrillo family, William became acquainted with local *criollo* politics - indeed it appears that he became embroiled in a *criollo* conspiracy against Viceroy Villena led by the Bishop of Puebla, Juan de Palafox y Mendoza. William aided the overthrow by sending a long report to Madrid denouncing the actions of the viceroy. As a result, the Conde Duque de Olivares dispatched a secret order to Bishop Palafox that authorised his takeover of the government. With troops in tow, the Bishop deposed Viceroy Villena in June 1642.

William sought a post in the Bishop-Viceroy's new regime, but to no avail. In the summer of 1642 he met an indigenous petitioner who had come to the Carrillo household seeking legal advice, named Don Ignacio. William began to meet frequently with Don Ignacio and assisted him in preparing a legal brief denouncing abuses against indigenous workers in the mines of Taxco. On one occasion, the two consulted the future through *peyote* (Central American cactus containing mescaline, used as a psychotropic sacramental drug) and Don Ignacio predicted that William would lead a rebellion in New Spain and that the miners of Taxco would support his movement. This prediction, combined with William's sense of self-importance and his uncertain future in the turbulent politics of Mexico City, coalesced into his plan for Mexican independence in the summer of 1642.

Increasingly secluded, William drew up a plan that sought full sovereignty for Mexico and broad social change in this colony wrought by deep ethnic and class divisions. His tactical plan included the formation of a militia composed of indigenous rebels, enslaved African people, and disgruntled *criollo* militiamen. After assuming control of the government of New Spain, William would call for general assemblies in all the plazas across New Spain. There, all parts of society - Spanish, indigenous, and African - would proclaim him 'our liberator, our Emperor and King of New

Spain'. There would follow a period of radical social reforms: Freedom would be granted to all those slaves who co-operated with the rebellion, co-operative indigenous towns would be relieved of *repartimientos* (forced labour drafts) and tributes, and free trade would be established with Europe and China. With Mexican silver now remaining in Mexico, instead of being sent to Spain in the form of taxes and the *quinto* or 'royal fifth' rights to all silver deposits, William believed that this New World sovereign power would rise to prominence among the nations of the world. Finally, William's regime would not be an absolute monarchy; he proposed a limited monarchy, with himself 'or whoever the people choose', as a king who would rule in consultation with an active parliament.

Rumours surrounding William's plan eventually landed him in trouble. In October 1642, he was jailed by the Mexican Inquisition. He was charged with heresy, principally linked to his use of *peyote* (his independence plan, representing a crime of treason, would have fallen under the civil law). During his seventeen-year incarceration, he resisted the Inquisitors' logic with wit and intelligence. Those years in prison have left us with several extensive treatises, a memoir, and a collection of 900 Latin psalms which he wrote on his bed-sheets. He made a vain attempt to escape in 1651. During his last years in solitary confinement, he slipped into insanity. Lamport was sentenced to be executed in the *Auto de Fé*, or public execution by the Inquisition, in 1659. Defiant to the end, he managed to hang himself on the stage before the executioner reached him, robbing the Inquisition of his own death. Thereafter, his body was burned on a pyre.

Since his death, William Lamport has occasionally appeared in history and myth. Mexican historians in the nineteenth century debated over the place that he should occupy in the history of Mexican independence struggles. More recently some speculation has emerged as to whether William's life could be the source of the 'Zorro' myth. In his historical context as an Irish exile, William was a privileged yet marginal observer of Mexican society. His remedy for his adopted society, with its promise of freedom on a new sovereign soil, continues to intrigue historians both as a possibility and as a mirage.

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