

The adversities of veterans of the Spanish *tercios* in sixteenth century Spain: an exploration of Diego Nuñez Alba's *Diálogos de la vida del soldado* (1552)

In 1552, the Spanish veteran Diego Nuñez Alba published his *Diálogos de la vida del soldado*. In these memoirs, Alba presents a dialogue between a veteran of the Schmalkaldic Wars in Germany (1546-1547) and a youth who is on his way to join the army. The lamentations of the veteran concerning military service precede a comprehensive description of his experience of the wars and of soldiering in general. Interestingly, albeit not surprisingly, the *Diálogos* are addressed to María Enríquez de Toledo y Guzmán, wife of the Spanish noble and (in)famous general Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, the third duke of Alba, who commanded the Spanish forces in the Schmalkaldic Wars and who is highly praised by the writer. A deep reading of the *Diálogos* demonstrates that these memoirs are not only an instructive example of the writing of life stories in early modern Europe and a testament to the literary conventions that influenced it, but also an extraordinary source of information on the motivations of early modern soldiers to write their memoirs. More than anything, the *Diálogos* present the frustration and hopelessness that often drove veterans of the Spanish *tercios* to attempt to address powerful political and military figures for financial and personal assistance and patronage by harnessing and employing established humanistic literary methods and conventions. Nuñez Alba, it seems, was desperate enough to address his former general and duke directly and in terms to which the duke could easily relate and which he could surly understand, in order to secure his financial assistance. Unlike the vast majority of his comrades, who had to go through the proper and highly inefficient bureaucratic channels of sixteenth century Spain, Nuñez Alba was able to convey his misfortune through his published memoirs.

Biography

My name is Idan Sherer, PhD, and I am a Lecturer in the History Department at the Ben Gurion University of the Negev. My main subject of interest in the military history of medieval and early modern Europe. My main contributions to the field are a book titled *Warriors for a Living: The Experience of the Spanish Infantry in the Italian Wars* (Brill, 2017) and an upcoming title *The Scramble for Italy: Continuity and Change in the Italian Wars, 1494-1559* (Routledge, 2021).