

Marcos Lucio, an engineer from Ghent, and his adventures in viceregal 17th-century Mexico

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1. Introduction

Working with extant documents, this article presents the life of Marcos Lucio, born in Ghent in the 17th century, when it was part of the Spanish Netherlands. Lucio became a mapmaker and then an engineer specialized in fortifications in Mexico, part of the impoverished and corrupt Spanish empire in the New World.

David F. Marley is an independent historian, who has devoted his life to deciphering 17th-century documents in the *Archivo General de la Nación* (México) ('General Archive of the Nation of Mexico') and the *Archivo General de Indias* (Seville) ('General Archive of the Indies'). He wrote a few times on Dutch subjects some years ago, publishing two books with Joan Magee's Netherlandic Press: *Pirates and engineers*, and *Sack of Veracruz*, as well as an article, in this journal, on a Dutch attempt to establish their own trade route between Manila and Acapulco. It is during his archival research for these various projects that he 'stumbled upon' Marcos Lucio. Lucio served the Spanish crown as a mapmaker and obtained the contract to draw a map of a diocese in Mexico; at that time the vice-regal engineer, also from the Netherlands, died, and Lucio managed to succeed him. The article uses unpublished documents to trace the dispute between Lucio and the commandant of the fortress guarding the chief Mexican port on the Caribbean coast, a quarrel conducted in a regime of extreme corruption, which accidentally resulted in lifelong exile for a shipwrecked French Jesuit missionary.

In the present collaboration, Marley found the archival documents and helped Kingstone to translate them, while Kingstone is responsible for the text of this article.

2. Marcos Lucio

Marcos Lucio (or Marcus Lucius) was born in Ghent; we do not know in what year. Nor do we know if that was his true name. It may be that he took his given names as his full name for career purposes, judging that his Flemish surname was too hard for Spanish-speakers to pronounce. Flanders was then in the Spanish Netherlands, and his father was a “secretary to the government” (Calderón Quijano 1949, 15), and thus was able to place his son in public service – including no doubt financing his son’s university studies, presumably at Leuven. Lucio apparently described himself as a ‘cosmographer’ early during his career.

The historian J. A. Calderón Quijano (1949, 16) tells us that Lucio served the Spanish Crown in Flanders in 1635 and 1636, and that he was in the Spanish wars or Thirty Years’ War in 1639 and 1640. Then he crossed to New Spain, i.e., colonial Mexico, first to Sinaloa, and between 1646 and 1648 he observed and described all of colonial Mexico. We see him in 1649 arranging for his servant (who had been with him in all these places) to begin training as a Jesuit; the servant was of ‘good Castilian blood’ (*‘limpieza de sangre’*),¹ so the only obstacle was that he owed money to Lucio’s agent, who formally forgave him provided he completed the training and entered the order (Zambrano 1972, 263-265). In that same year of 1649, we know that Lucio returned to Spain,² and published a map of the diocese of Michoacán.³ More importantly, between 1646 and 1648 he had “observed and described New Spain (i.e., Mexico) and reduced it all to one large general map, which he then divided into six others covering the provinces of New Galicia, New Vizcaya, New León, New Mexico, and Sinaloa, with their population, distances, and altitudes” (Calderón Quijano 1949, 16). These maps were presented to the Council of the Indies (the *‘Consejo de Indias’*) and accompanied his application to be appointed engineer for New Spain⁴ (Calderón Quijano 1949, 9) on the death in 1649 of Adrian Boot, who held the position of the King’s engineer for New Spain until then and who incidentally was Dutch (Marley 1983, 74).

¹ Apparently *Criollos*, ‘colonials of full Spanish descent born overseas’, were looked down on.

² Real cédula al conde de Alba de Aliste, virrey de Nueva España, recomendándole a don **Marcos Lucio**. (San Lorenzo, a 25 de octubre de 1649.) AGI, *Indiferente* 456, Legajo A28, Fs. 148v.-150v.

³ Mapa del obispado de Michoacán, hecho por **Marcos Lucio** y grabado por Juan Noort. (Madrid, 1649.)

⁴ Consulta de la Junta de Guerra de Indias al rey, sobre la pretensión de **Marcos Lucio** de la plaza de ingeniero de la Ciudad de México. (Madrid, a 31 de mayo de 1648.)

In 1656, during the immediate aftermath of the English seizure of Jamaica, the viceroy appointed the cosmographer as military engineer at Veracruz during this emergency. Archival documents found at the *Archivo General de Indias* (AGI) assert:

In so far as it is proper for His Majesty's service that in all castles and ports there be people who know about fortifications and repairs for the provision and defence of these kingdoms at all times, as there are in all ports, garrisons and castles which are frontiers or principal ports or castles or keys of the kingdoms, and all the more so with the coming to the Indies of the English armada last year, which according to reports set foot on the island of Jamaica, and the king our lord (whom God protect), with the ship that he sent to this kingdom and that arrived here on the second of March this year, kindly informs me that England is going to send a fleet again to these waters;

Accordingly, given the knowledge that don Marcos Lucio has about fortifications, I hereby nominate him to go to the port and fortress of San Juan de Ulúa and reconnoitre the needed repairs that have to be made to the said castle of San Juan de Ulúa, without doing any new works or fortifications, since His Majesty's finances cannot undertake any new expenses; but he is to carry out the necessary repairs to the ruins that the weather and the sea may have caused; which the said don Marcos Lucio will do in company with the commandant and the *oficiales reales* ['Crown officers'] of Veracruz, who have represented to me that it is necessary to send a person who satisfies them, who understands the material situation in this city, port and castle.⁵

San Juan de Ulúa was a vitally important place, and also a morass of problems. It was a fortress perched on coral reefs and mud banks, and the waves were constantly washing away its foundations, and it had to defend Veracruz, which was the principal port on the Caribbean.

The Spanish *flota de Indias* ('plate fleet' or 'silver fleet') took the silver mined in Mexico to Havana, where it joined with the silver fleet bringing South American silver from Cartagena to go and refill the ever-empty coffers of the Spanish Crown. Its source of temptation for pirates and governments of other countries was obvious. The trouble was that there was no money to do the essential repairs for the fortress. One reason for this was that every viceroy was chosen by the Council of the Indies from among the impoverished Spanish aristocracy, who regarded the post as an excuse to grow rich by charging pop-up

⁵ AGI, *Patronato* 242, Ramo 2, imágenes digitalizadas 80-82.

taxes, demanding bribes from those in office if they were to continue to hold it, and the like. The worst of them all, Juan de Leyva de la Cerda, Conde de Baños, came in 1660 with orders from the king to revive trade with the Philippines, which were also part of his majesty's domain, and he did, but also kept every penny of the profits for himself. He arrived, just as the commandant of the fortress at San Juan de Ulúa, don Francisco Castejón Medrano, was making a serious effort to obtain money from the viceroy for repairs (and to pay his garrison, which had not been paid for over a year).⁶

By 1661 a dispute between Lucio and Castejón was already ongoing, aggravated by dishonest officials no doubt, especially the *jueces reales* ('royal judges'), the people in charge of collecting taxes, authorizing disbursements and financial matters in general in the port of Veracruz. We have documents from that year which show what things had come to.

Castejón seized the opportunity of a new viceroy's arrival, asking for a modest sum of 500 pesos, but Lucio declared that such band-aid solutions were "contrary to his opinions" and proposed to spend about twenty thousand. The commandant knew, of course, that any sums set aside for work on his fortress would mostly disappear into officials' pockets, and so it proved. The *jueces reales* did nothing for a while, then sent a letter to the viceroy, Juan de Leyva de la Cerda, Conde de Baños, asking for details on the proposed works, offering to release half the first tranche of the money until the governor of Veracruz province had had the opportunity to offer his opinion about the works. These delaying tactics were all part of the viceroy's efforts to oblige the commandant to go along with the corruption which marked the whole colonial administration, and undoubtedly had to do with the arrival the previous month, in August 1661, of a royal dispatch vessel with an order from the Council of the Indies – who ran the empire from Madrid, with the delays one can imagine – requiring Castejón to answer charges of neglecting the state of his fortress. These charges had been filed by Lucio, on December 1st, 1659.

We can imagine Castejón's reaction. He was the victim, along with his garrison, and here he was being accused. A glorious career of many years was at stake. One thing he did was to propose several more, and incompatible, schemes for differing amounts to repair the fortifications, essentially dropping boulders around the walls of San Juan de Ulúa, thereby really confusing the officials' image of what his plans were. The other was to accuse Lucio. In a series of increasingly incoherent letters to the viceroy, from September 1661 onwards – they look to have been dictated at breakneck speed to a secretary who took

⁶ Obras en el castillo de San Juan de Ulúa, con copia de una carta del señor **Marcos Lucio**, ingeniero del castillo. (Madrid, a 20 de julio de 1660.)" AGNM, *Reales Cédulas (Originales)*, Volumen 6, Expediente 156, ocho fojas.

down what he could – he declares that Lucio is not a qualified engineer (and indeed Lucio learned the trade on the job), that he keeps suspicious company, and that he went to Havana without permission to do who knows what.

And indeed, we know that Lucio went to Havana in 1662,⁷ and again in 1664, called by the governor of that province, to see if he could raise a shipwrecked silver ship in the Bahama Channel. The first time he found he needed more equipment, the second time he recovered a small part of the cargo. (The ship then remained silted over till an American entrepreneur managed to raise it in the 20th century, making a fortune). Lucio was also consulted about building fortifications for that port. As mentioned earlier, Havana was the point at which the two plate fleets joined forces for the crossing to Spain, and as such was very tempting for foreign powers. The governor was thinking in terms of a wall around the town, which would have cost ninety thousand pesos, and this Lucio rejected as “ruinous.” (Incidentally, this shows that he was not a spendthrift with government money, and that twenty thousand nine hundred and six pesos was not ruinous for San Juan de Ulúa). Instead, he built a watch tower a short distance from town, which is still there and has become known as the San Lázaro tower. His only misdemeanour in all this was to leave Mexico without permission from the viceroy.

The third accusation, that he kept suspicious company, may or may not be true, but it allows us to introduce a colourful character whom he may have known: the French Jesuit priest Father Pierre Pelleprat, S. J. Pelleprat had come out to the Caribbean as a parish priest, and had managed to get sent to a spot on the coast of what is now Venezuela as a missionary. He persuaded the French government to give its blessing to a full-scale attempt at a colony there (France kept trying to found an empire in between the Spanish and Portuguese empires), but that attempt was ultimately unsuccessful. Pelleprat and his fellow colonists fought off a Spanish and indigenous armed attack, but once they realized relief and supplies were not coming, abandoned the fort they had built. They were then shipwrecked on Jamaica, where Pelleprat saw all his French comrades slaughtered by indigenous warriors except himself and one other Jesuit. Both were rescued by Spanish people still living on Jamaica and brought via Cuba to Mexico. Needless to say, the Mexican authorities saw him as

⁷ Copia de una carta dirigida por don Juan de Salamanca, gobernador de La Habana, al virrey novohispano conde de Baños, sobre el intento por el ingeniero don **Marcos Lucio** de bucear la almiranta Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas, hundida en Los Mimbres. (Habana, a 20 de febrero de 1662.) AGI, *Patronato Real* 242, Ramo 4, imágenes digitalizadas 29-31.

a spy, and Castejón more than once personally intervened with the viceroy to prevent Pelleprat from being allowed to return to Europe.⁸

All this frenzied letter writing was in vain, however: Castejón was arrested and died in prison. As we shall see, prisoners waiting to be sent to appear before the Council of the Indies could have to wait for years, depending on when a plate fleet was sailing. Lucio's turn came in 1669. This is our translation of the document summoning him to Madrid to be, in effect, audited:

Real cédula ['royal decree'] [dated Madrid, 17 January 1671] in which the Queen Regent informs the viceroy, marqués de Mancera, that Juan de la Peña Barrionuevo, in a letter of the tenth of November of last year 1669, written from the port of Trujillo, reports that having been a prisoner on Dominica (which is peopled by Frenchmen, who call it Martinique) for more than seven months, witnessed some of their meetings to plan campaigns and although with variation, what they mostly talked about was [attacking] Santo Domingo and different parts of the continent, such as Florida, Cabo de Apalache and Campeche, and that these variants were discussed based on a ship's chart that had been sent to them by an engineer of their nation who is in New Spain and passes for Flemish; and that what he [i.e., Juan de la Peña] had been able to discover was that his name is Marcos, who was telling them of the shortage of arms and lack of preparedness that there is, and that the people are quite unwarlike, and he also showed them the areas where there was weakness, to capture them with greater ease and without suffering harm themselves; and that he also heard that this engineer Marcos was supposed to go on a salvage-dive for silver that was lost in the Bahama Channel and that in taking it, he intended to go to the island of Martinique, [but] that because the governor of Havana had put soldiers aboard the ship, he didn't want to dive for the silver, so he went to Florida; and he also says that Dominica has a lot of people and that they drill them every day, from which one might fear that they will launch an attack on one of the places they are discussing.

And having been seen in the Royal Council of the Indies, it was agreed to send you this information so that you may be warned, and we order and command you (as I do) to look out for the said engineer Marcos with due attention, and when you find him, to arrest him and send him to

⁸ Extracto de una carta al rey de don Francisco Castejón, castellano del castillo de San Juan de Ulúa, acompañando varios testimonios sobre las diligencias que ha hecho para que se prendiese al ingeniero don **Marcos Lucio**, que incluye una breve mención del jesuita francés **Pedro de Pelleprat**. (San Juan de Ulúa, a 15 de julio de 1662.)" AGI, *Patronato Real* 242, Ramo 4, imágenes digitalizadas 13-14.

this kingdom [i.e., Spain] as a prisoner; and you will inform me that you have received this dispatch and tell me what you do to execute it, on the first occasion that offers.⁹

The *real cédula* states that Lucio did not raise the silver in Havana because the governor had soldiers on the ship to prevent Lucio from taking any. In fact, we know that conditions prevented him from raising anything. Also, we point out that the document says Martinique is the French name for Dominica, but that is in fact another island. And why would the informant have been able to hear and see French officers plotting raids on the Spanish empire (with a ship's chart supposedly supplied by Lucio)? He would not have been ignored casually like Laura Secord! Quite likely the informant had returned from captivity on Martinique and been asked what he had been doing there, and made up this story to look good, based on old rumours, which he garbled, (for instance, did he really believe Lucio was French passing for Flemish?).

Accordingly, Lucio was arrested at Acapulco, where he had been designing fortifications, needed since the Pacific coast had seen British and Dutch ships coming from Cape Horn or from Asia, whereas the Spanish had thought themselves safe from such intruders. He was held under arrest, though undoubtedly not in a common prison, till the next plate fleet left for Spain (that was all the shipping there was between Spain and its colonies, except for royal despatch vessels) and went to Madrid for his case to be heard by the Council of the Indies. A document dated 1672, indeed, notes that “the engineer Marcos Lucio [...] is waiting to be sent as a prisoner to Spain.”¹⁰

Once he got there, however, in 1675, he was among friends – arguably the Council was his employer – and the summary of his case is eloquent:

Being the engineer for New Spain, was brought here under arrest; his case was heard; he was set free; in [public] consultation half his pay for the period he was under arrest, was restored and given to him; the matter was reconsidered [in camera] and he was paid in full.¹¹

Four days later this judgment was confirmed, and he was reinstated in his job.¹²

At the same time the Council was looking into the corruption of the accountants, the *jueces reales*, of Veracruz. Lucio must have been very happy

⁹ AGNM, Serie *Reales Cédulas (Originales)*, Vol. 12, Fojas 27-27v.

¹⁰ AGI, *México* 46, Número 7, cuatro fojas digitalizadas.

¹¹ Archivo Histórico Nacional [España], *Códices*, Legajo 752, Nota 1056 [imagen digitalizada 223].

¹² AGNM, *Reales Cédulas (Originales)*, Volumen 14, Expediente 116, una foja.

to confirm the evidence he had given three years earlier against such misdeeds of theirs as paying the garrison of San Juan de Ulúa with one-peso pieces instead of the pieces of eight *reales* they had been ordered to pay, which crime he himself saw them commit (Bertrand 2011).¹³ After which he had to hurry if he was to catch the plate fleet back to Mexico. It had already left Sanlúcar de Barrameda, at the mouth of the Guadalquivir River, but luckily it had stopped at Cádiz to take on more supplies. One never knew when Spain would be able to afford another fleet and another set of crews, and indeed there was not another one for three years, by which time Lucio would have been replaced in his job. As it was, he had no time to apply for permission to make the journey, an offence which is duly recorded in the Council's records. It was lucky also that the accusations against Lucio were handled by the Council and not by the Queen Regent, since four days after his acquittal a letter was sent from the court at Aranjuez repeating the charges against him. But he made it back safely, and that is the last document we have on him.

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¹³ AGI, *Escribanía de Cámara* 295B, Cuaderno 12, ff. 5-12.