

Viva Pasos Largos: The Story of Spain's Last Bandit

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Introduction & Background

By the turn of the 20th century, Spain was a nation embroiled in a late turn to modernity. Humiliated by the end of its colonial empire, looking to radical ideas around Europe, and attempting to alleviate mass poverty, Spain was running away from its medieval traditions. One of these was the long tradition of social banditry, common in the southern region of Andalusia. These bandits were not regarded as lowly criminals but rather legendary figures symbolizing traditional Spanish values of masculinity and rebellion. By the 20th century, however, the ideas which legitimized these bandits and the incompetent police infrastructure which allowed them to run free began to change. The Guardia Civil, founded in 1844, had gradually brought order to the countryside and ideologies both on the far-right and far-left condemned these activities.

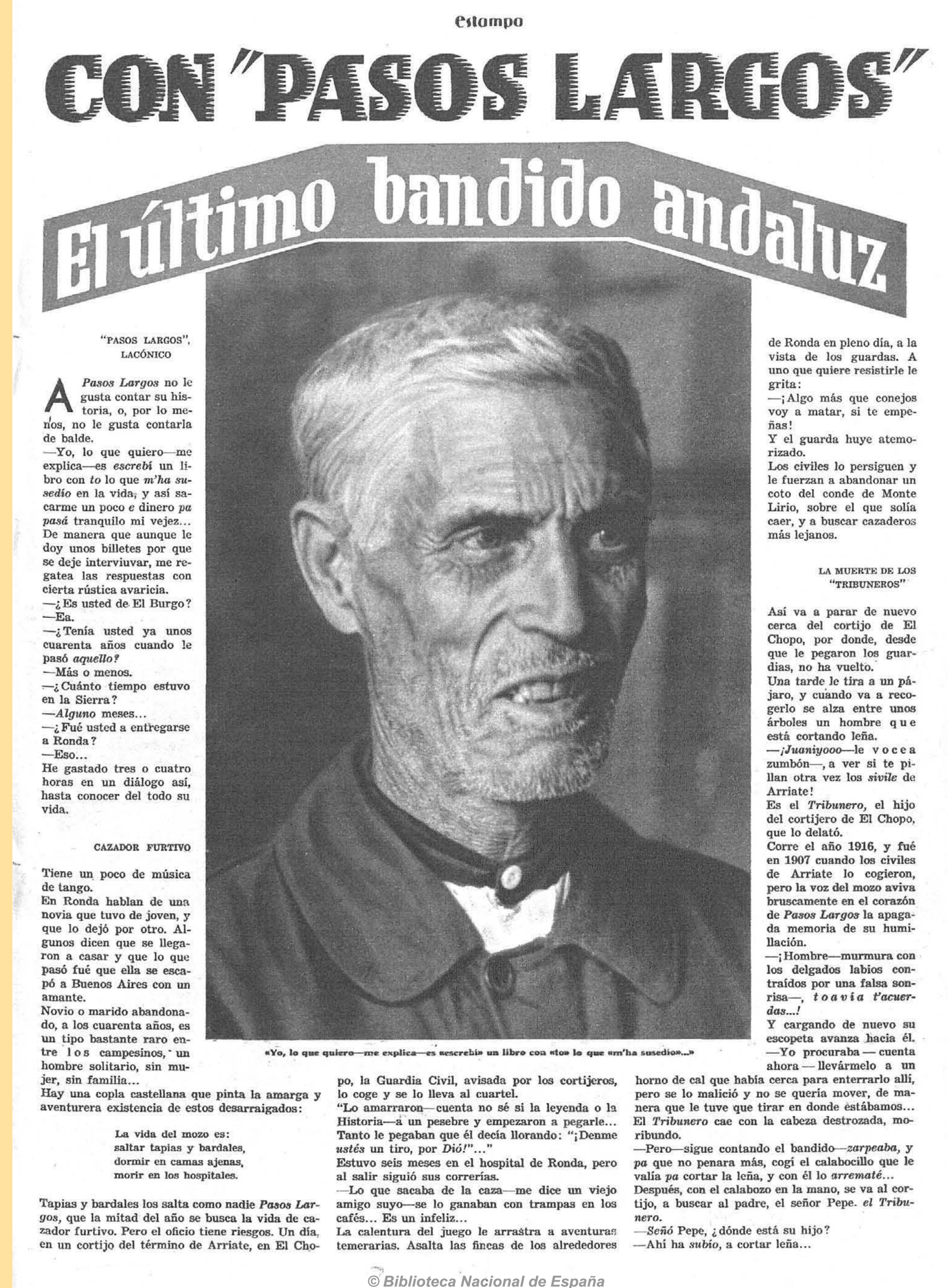
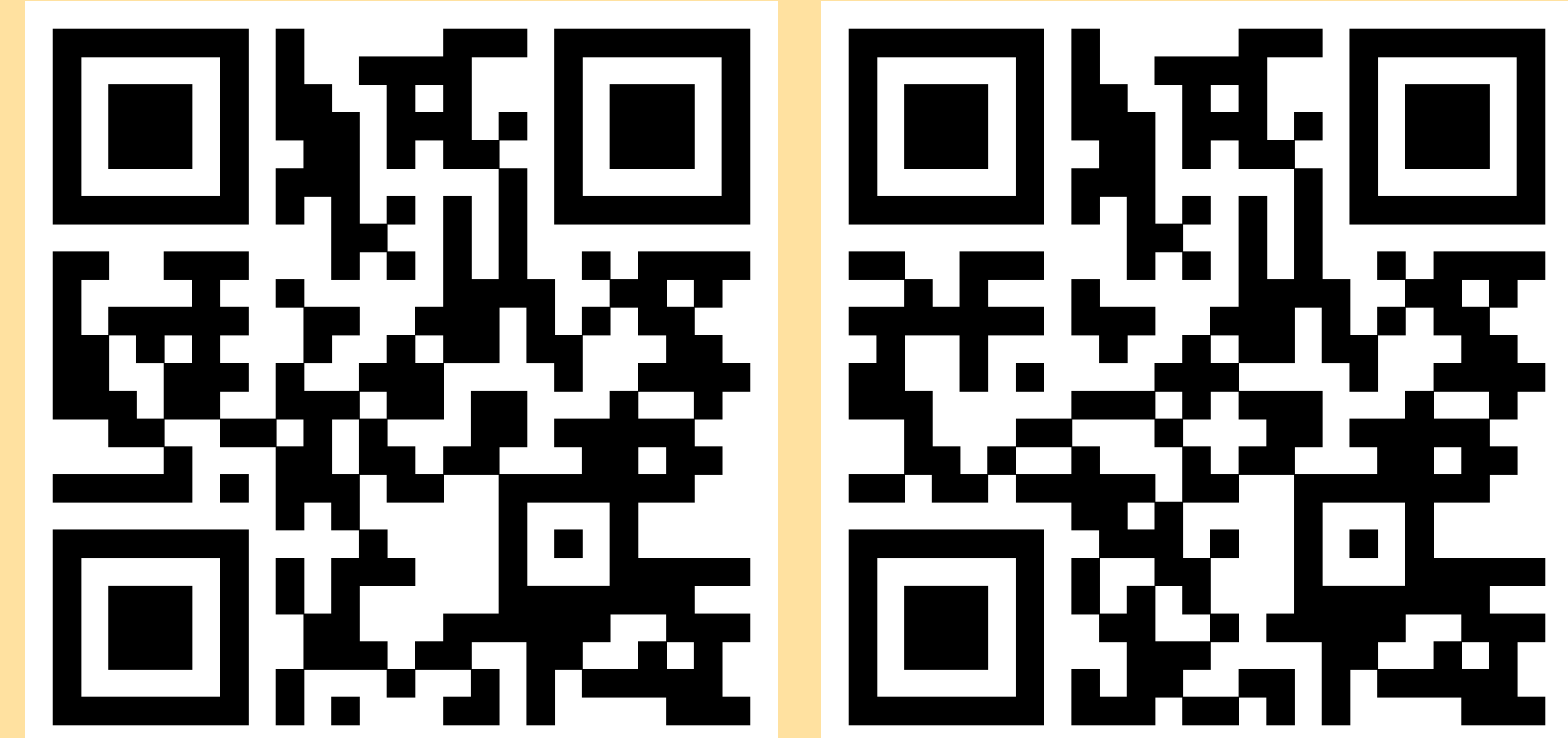
Pasos Largos, officially Juan Mingolla Gallardo, was Spain's last bandit. A veteran of the Spanish-American war, a gambling addict and a violent personality, he reflected many of the characteristics of his predecessors. Yet the circumstances that surrounded his life were unique, the mass media covered every part of his exploits and the Guardia Civil were his main antagonists. This contrast of a medieval character in a rapidly modernizing world is not just fascinating but also revelatory about Spanish culture, the psychology of a lone wolf criminal and the often-distorting influence of the media. The research attempts to piece together the different narratives surrounding Pasos Largos by looking for inconsistencies and biases. From that point, the research takes a wider lens analyzing Pasos Largos' psychology, media coverage and Spain in early 20th century.

Methods

The research focuses on the life and times of Juan Jose Mingolla Gallardo, known as Pasos Largos. But the research goes beyond studying just Gallardo's life and places a lens on the newspapers, interviews, and biographical accounts that were centered around him. The study addresses two central questions: establishing the facts about the man himself and analyzing the myths which emerged around him.

The research's procedure was structured as a literature review. Primary sources written during Pasos Largos' life like newspaper reports and interviews were compared to each other. Then, secondary sources like biographical accounts written posthumously were reviewed and compared to the primary sources. Two things were done with the analyses: a centralized timeline of his life, with a focus on the two eras where he became a famous bandit and a comparative analysis of different narratives and the inconsistencies among them. These methods create both an accurate account of Pasos Largos' life and demonstrate common biases in biographical narrative.

QR Codes - Timeline & References



(Newspaper Reports of Pasos Largos)



Biblioteca Nacional de España

Results

Key Takeaways

The timeline of Pasos Largos' life shows his development into a famous bandit, with two main stages of fame and notoriety. The first stage, which occurred in the summer of 1916, occurs after Pasos Largos murders a farmer and his son. Pasos Largos' escapes from the Guardia Civil and his brazen robberies are printed throughout Spain. This stage ends with his capture on August 17, 1916. The second stage of Pasos Largos' fame arises in 1934, quickly following his release from prison. Spain is shocked at the boldness of a bandit who now finds himself in his 60s yet manages to rob and evade the authorities. The pinnacle of Pasos Largos' life occurs on March 19th, 1934 where he refuses to surrender to the Guardia Civil and dies in a shootout. These two short bursts of reporting, in the summer of 1916 and the spring of 1934 create both the narrative and the speculation surrounding Pasos Largos' life.

Research Question/Themes

The research explores several questions and themes. What was the true story of Pasos Largos, and which parts were made up/exaggerated? What do the different perceptions of Pasos Largos say about Spain in the early 1900s? In which ways was Pasos Largos similar or different to the bandoleros of the past?

Significance of Results

The results reveal many themes that go beyond Pasos Largos' life. For example, biographies and newspapers confirm the extreme violence and brutality that characterized Pasos Largos' crimes yet Spanish media along with the locals of Ronda admired Pasos Largos. This was because Pasos Largos harkened back to earlier age where Spain was a stronger, more cohesive and powerful nation. This shows how famous criminals are seen not through their actions but rather what the ideas that they supposedly represent. These perceptions are created by individuals with no direct connection to the criminal itself leading to extreme distortions. The results also reveal much about Spanish society and culture, especially in the early 1900s. Banditry or *bandolerismo*, was seen as a traditional component of Andalusian life. Therefore, Pasos Largos was not seen as the end of a long-standing social problem but rather the last hero in a long line of traditional bandoleros.

Strengths and Limitations

The research contains several strengths that enabled it to accurately capture and interpret the subject matter. The research is centered on the unified timeline of Pasos Largos, which is made up of all available sources, including both primary and secondary texts. The research also considers the historical context which occurred in the background of Pasos Largos' life, especially the end of the Restorationist Monarchy and the triumph of the Second Republic. The main limitation surrounding the research is the fact almost all known sources have been exhausted. There are no additional known archives or libraries to have relevant information regarding Gallardo, especially with the mass destruction of judicial records following the Spanish Civil War.