

# The Man, The Myth, The Legend: Diego Corrientes and the History of Spanish Banditry

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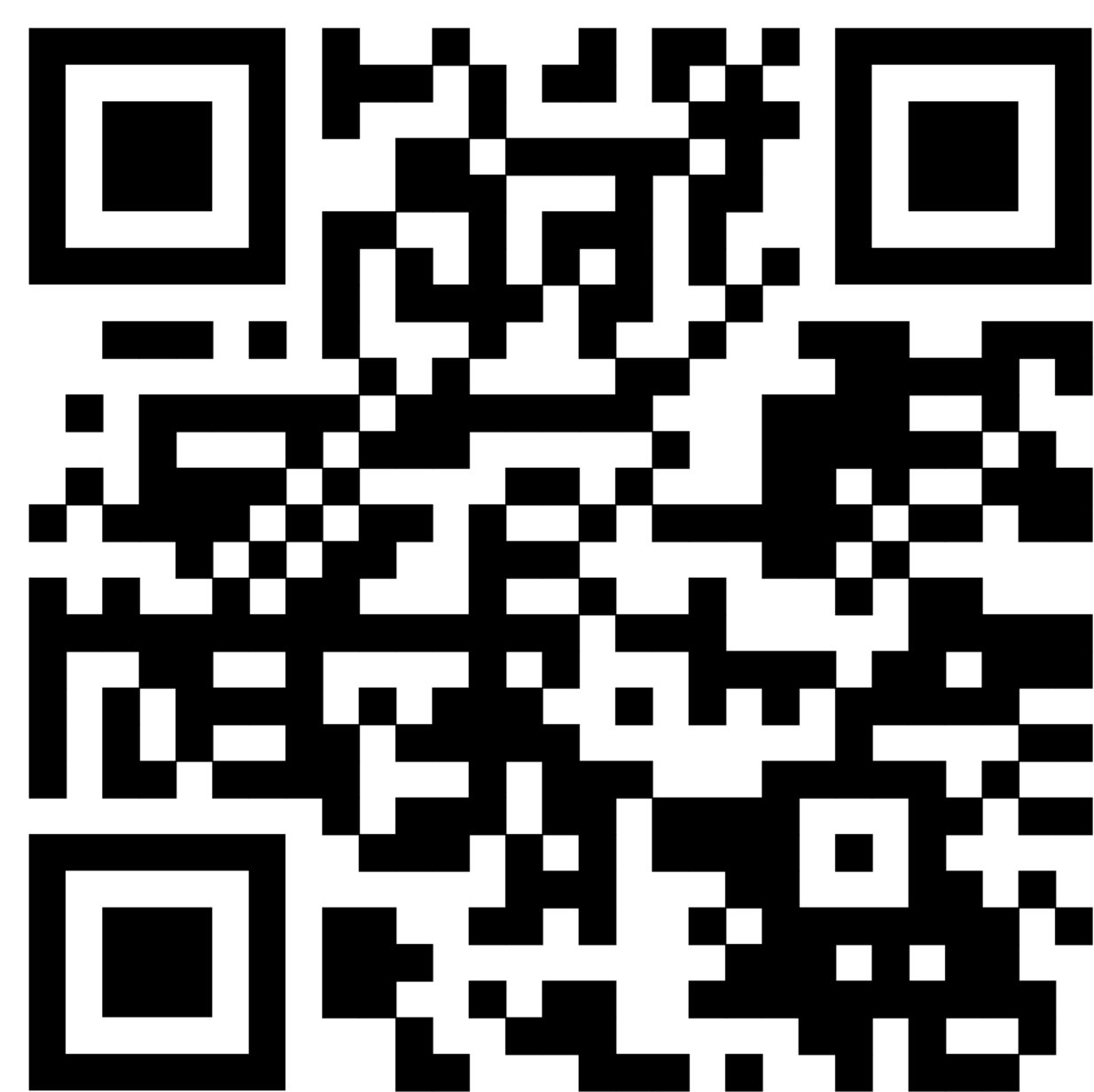
## Abstract

The idea of banditry is not a new one especially in Spanish history. Throughout decades stories have been told both orally and in writing about sly tricksters and bandits and women falling in love. One of the most famous bandits, Diego Corrientes, has lived a life that has been iconic within Spanish history. The role he has played is a testament not only to the Spanish culture and the time, but the way historical stories have evolved. To research him, I used literature and media that told the story of his life – both fiction and non-fiction to gain a better understanding of who he was and became. Research that I have done has showed that much of what is written about the bandit has evolved through myth. There is not a lot on his actual life, rather an idea of a person that has contributed to a larger literary culture. Much of what I found shows that the Spanish took a small idea of a historical bandit and used it to further an entire genre based on bandits, eventually evolving into songs, movies, and love stories. This idea is part of a larger literary culture that spans even outside of Spain that values stories with a “Robin Hood” type character – like Corrientes himself.

## Introduction

The lore of Spanish bandits, especially its most famous Diego Corrientes, is one that can be seen largely as a mystery. The hard facts that are known including where he hailed from and his ultimate demise are the only things that can ultimately tell the tale of his life. While the bandit era (which was a period of social unrest and violence that allowed for the surge of thieves and gangs deemed “bandits”) is one that is a key part of Spanish history, it seems that the facts are just as elusive as the legendary robbers themselves. What does exist through is stories. The man – Corrientes - has seemed to evolve into an elusive character through the use of various Spanish means of storytelling. From novellas, to movies, to plays and songs, there seems to be a discrepancy from the man and the legend. Throughout my research, I aim to find the balance between what is known factually and what is written in myth and bridge the gap between the two. By analyzing information from sources fiction and non-fiction, I will attempt to bring clarity on the “discrepancies” of the history and see how both sides of the story have evolved and created a lasting impact on Spanish history.

Full Biography on Corrientes here:



Diego Corrientes, based on only known description from a judge of the time, c. 1776



Fictionalized story cover of Corrientes, painting him as a “generous bandit,” 1781

## Methods

To conduct this research on Diego Corrientes and his banditry I had to analyze a multitude of media focused on his life, both fiction and non-fiction. For the fiction aspect I focused on two short “zarzuelas” which are Spanish musical theater pieces and a movie, whereas for the non-fiction I focused on two biographies as well as a birth and death record. I then analyzed the information I found through literature reviews and focused on comparative analysis to determine the discrepancies in facts between the two. By doing so I was able to focus on what exactly was fact or fiction, as the legends that have been spread tend to blur the lines. In comparing the content within the two medias the difference in portrayal is able to be seen as it becomes much more clear the difference between the legends and the true story.

## Results/Findings

After reviewing various pieces of media on Diego Corrientes, much of a similar theme was found. When I compared fictional pieces including “La Flor de la Serranía” by Alba, “Historia de Diego Corrientes O El Bandido Generoso” by DJF, and the 1959 movie “Diego Corrientes” directed by Antonio Isasi-Isasmendi to things like his basic biography, many discrepancies were found. Throughout the entirety of the fictional retellings of the story Corrientes is painted as a sort of romantic figure, framing his banditry always through the lens of a woman’s affection. His story becomes one characterized by action and claims that not only was he a man led by his heart in love for a woman but love for the less-fortunate as well. DJF and the movie portray at least one instance of Corrientes giving back to the needy – a part of the narrative that he was a “Robin Hood” type of character for the Spanish. While Alba writes about bandits who represent courage and caring for the less fortunate as well, further inspiring his future works on Corrientes. When comparing that to the actual information known about his life, it is seen that these are simply embellishments made for entrainment. There is no epic love story that defined his short-lived time as a bandit and no actual proof of him consistently giving back. What there is though is documentation of what he stole and how long he stole for, as well as his birth and subsequent death. Through analyzing both fiction and non-fiction media it is clear to see that the man and the legend are starkly different, but even so both made an impact that has lasted till this day.

## Resources

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- Pike, Ruth. “The Reality and Legend of the Spanish Bandit Diego Corrientes.” *Folklore*, vol. 99, no. 2, 1988, pp. 242–47. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1260462>