

An Approximation to Banditry in Andalucia: Origins and Importance



Introduction

An Approximation to Banditry in Andalucia focuses on the origins and cultural implications that bandit activity had on the region of Andalucia throughout history. For this project, I used a historical research approach and analyzed various books and papers explaining the different aspects of Andalucian society. Additionally, using Jose “El Tempranillo” Maria as a bandit spotlight gives insight to the kinds of activities bandits were taking part in, and how the general population really saw them. This project also aims to give insight into the role played by moors and the concept of Moorishness as it is related to the region of Andalucia. Researching banditry specifically in the region of Andalucia is relevant as it is broadly considered a unique social phenomenon, and its effects can still be felt through culture to this day.

What is Banditry?

- Banditry refers to people who are characterized as thieves who may form part of a gang, attack travelers on roads, and are widely considered people of the wild.
- It is crucial to differentiate bandits from common criminals, as this social phenomenon was not that of rampant common crooks.
- For the case of Banditry in Andalucia, bandits were also considered people of the wild, who lived in remote areas, away from the law.

Methodology

- Used a historical, qualitative research approach
- Conducting research for this project mainly consisted of reading multiple first-hand and second-hand sources detailing how life was in Andalucia, and how bandits fit into that world
- Research also consisted of analyzing population and land-ownership charts, which combined the mainly qualitative analysis with quantitative data sets

Economic and Cultural Origins

- Due to the uneven wealth and land distribution, there was a high contrast between social classes, and the lower class was made up of landless peasants
- These situations of extreme poverty made the population of landless peasants vulnerable to criminal activity, especially when food ran low
- Economic disruption got worse after the Napoleonic Wars, which weakened control over the south of Spain

- During these times, reputation, bravery, and personal autonomy were seen as valuable traits; bandits who displayed them were loved by the people, almost disregarding their brutal nature.

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Santiago Omega, Dr. Benjamin Dodds

Where is Andalucia and Relevance



Figure 1



Figure 2

- Andalucia is the southernmost region of peninsular Spain, and it is around 9 nautical miles away from the coasts of Morocco.
- Due to its proximity and the history between Morocco and Spain, Andalucia has always had an important Moroccan influence, which can be seen through its architecture, population makeup, and overall culture
- After the Reconquista, many Moroccan people chose to stay in Spain and were forced to convert to Christianity, these people were called moriscos
- During times of these forced conversions, social marginalization and displacement brought many moriscos into poverty, and some into a life of crime.
- Although moriscos didn't form a majority of bandit gangs, Spanish authorities associated moriscos with banditry due to racial stereotypes

Visualizing “Latifundios”

- Latifundia is a concept of large estate land breakdown originating in Ancient Rome, that was common in the region of Andalucia after the Reconquista period
- These types of properties dominated the region of Andalucia, and split up the major cities of the region
- Latifundia meant that to travel from one city to another, there was a lot of remote farm and wildland in between them, which was prime bandit territory
- The system of latifundia also showed one of the great problems in Andalucia, extreme wealth inequality.
- The system of latifundia meant that there were few, ultra-wealthy landowners who controlled massive estates, while most of the population consisted of landless peasants who lived in conditions of extreme poverty.

Bandit Spotlight: Jose “El Tempranillo” Maria



Figure 3



Figure 4

- Jose “El Tempranillo” Maria was an infamous bandit who was active in the 1830s, who got his nickname because he started his life of crime at an early age.
- He primarily formed his gang around the “Sierra de Cadiz”, or Cadiz mountain range, and by the time he was 20, he had a well-established gang that would operate in the paths between Seville, Malaga, and Cadiz
- Widely known as a “rightful bandit”, Jose Maria is famed for only targeting wealthy travelers and maintaining close ties with members of his group
- Jose Maria later accepted a deal with the Spanish authorities that would grant him a pardon in exchange for helping keep the peace, and he was later shot and killed by a rival bandit

Conclusion

- Banditry in Andalucia was a unique phenomenon caused by a variety of social, economic, and geographical factors
- Because of the close proximity to Morocco, banditry in Andalucia was different than in other regions, as the connection to morisco identity was much more prominent, and had a real effect on the way that bandits were categorized
- Extreme wealth and land-ownership disparities led to many peasant workers choosing a life of crime, and banditry in Andalucia was a reflection of the economic conditions and social reactions

Works Cited

