CHAPTER TWO

THE EVOLUTION OF THE COUNT-DUKE’S APPOINTMENT POLICIES

A. Meritocratic reforms, 1621–1632

During almost the entire duration of his valimiento, Olivares held almost absolute power over appointments to the Army of Flanders and exercised powers of promotion formerly reserved for the monarch and the Council of State (or to Archduke Albert who was now conveniently dead). At first the Count-Duke used his growing influence over the King to institute a policy of premios or rewards for the general staff of the Army of Flanders.\(^1\) In fact, one of his first acts as valido was to grant knighthoods (hábitos) to thirty of the tercios’ career officers. As John Elliott has pointed out this type of honor “served as guarantee of the holder’s purity of blood and this made them highly coveted, especially among those over whose ancestry hovered a shadow of suspicion.”\(^2\)

The King made it a point to focus exclusively on merit and experience in a number of minor military appointments in the Netherlands and elsewhere. It was, as Philip announced, a policy designed to imitate his grandfather in rewarding career soldiers and was based on Olivares’ initial concern with promoting individual effort in all fields of social activity, from commerce to war. Such actions and declarations, with their implied criticism of the regime of Philip III and Lerma, would earn the new monarch and his valido the support and praise of the army’s soldados pláticos and of those aristocratic officers with converso lineage such as don Carlos Coloma.\(^3\)

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\(^1\) AGR SEG 90bis, 19 Consulta del Conde Duque al Rey en materia de hazienda, 28–11–22.

\(^2\) Elliott, *Olivares*, 137. See also AGS E 2035, 64, Philip IV to Juan de Ciriza, 16–10–21 and AGS E 2233, Philip IV to Infanta Isabella, 23–10–21.

Similar concerns undoubtedly inspired the Council’s rejection, in April 1622, in a very unusual departure from regular procedure, of the Infanta’s nominee for Castellan of Antwerp, don Manuel Pimentel, the future Count of La Feira (or Feria, as he was commonly called). Although he held the rank of Maestre de Campo, Pimentel was, in the words of the Council, “only a boy” who lacked the experience necessary for the job. A counsellor close to Olivares, don Juan Manuel de Mendoza, Marquis of Montesclaros, explicitly rejected Madrid’s former promotion practices and declared that the governorships would henceforth be “the prize reserved for white hair and long years of service.”

Another counsellor, don Pedro de Toledo, Marquis of Villafranca, asked Philip IV to return to the standards of Alba and Philip II:

Your Majesty’s appointments should be like those of your grandfather…who put Sancho Dávila, Mondragón, and don Agustín Mejía in that citadel, because this is the type of men who must be sought for such ranks and to whom those ranks belong by virtue of their long career and experience.

The same day the Council rejected the Infanta’s candidate for Pimentel’s tercio on identical grounds. The King wholeheartedly adopted their recommendations and asked his aunt for the names of other more experienced officers to fill the vacancies.5

These decisions set the pattern for a new promotion policy for the Army of Flanders. The Truce was over and the demands of war urgent. No longer would the Infanta have the luxury of naming personal favorites to important military ranks. Henceforth the monarch began to enforce a policy that would have pleased Alba himself by selecting veteran officers for the most important field and garrison posts.6 Despite accusations of nepotism later levelled against Olivares, not even the members of the Count-Duke’s Guzmán clan were exempted from this policy.7 In 1622 the Council selected the veteran Maestre de Campo don Íñigo de Borja to be the next Artillery General, even though the late

to the concern with “purity of blood” see J.I. Gutiérrez Nieto, “El Reformismo Social de Olivares: el problema de la limpieza de sangre y la creación de una nobleza de mérito,” La España del Conde Duque, 419–441.

4 Elliott, Olivares, 73.
5 AGS E 2036, 20, CCE 19–4–22.
7 For charges of nepotism against Olivares see for instance, Novoa, Historia de Felipe IV, Codoin LXIX, 53–54.