



*Via*  
Hispania

A large, jagged red 'X' mark is superimposed over the entire background image, crossing out the scene of the historical reenactment.

*A European  
cooperation*





*How to get a pikeman to  
the Netherlands*



*Via*  
Hispania





# 'Via Hispania'

## A European cooperation





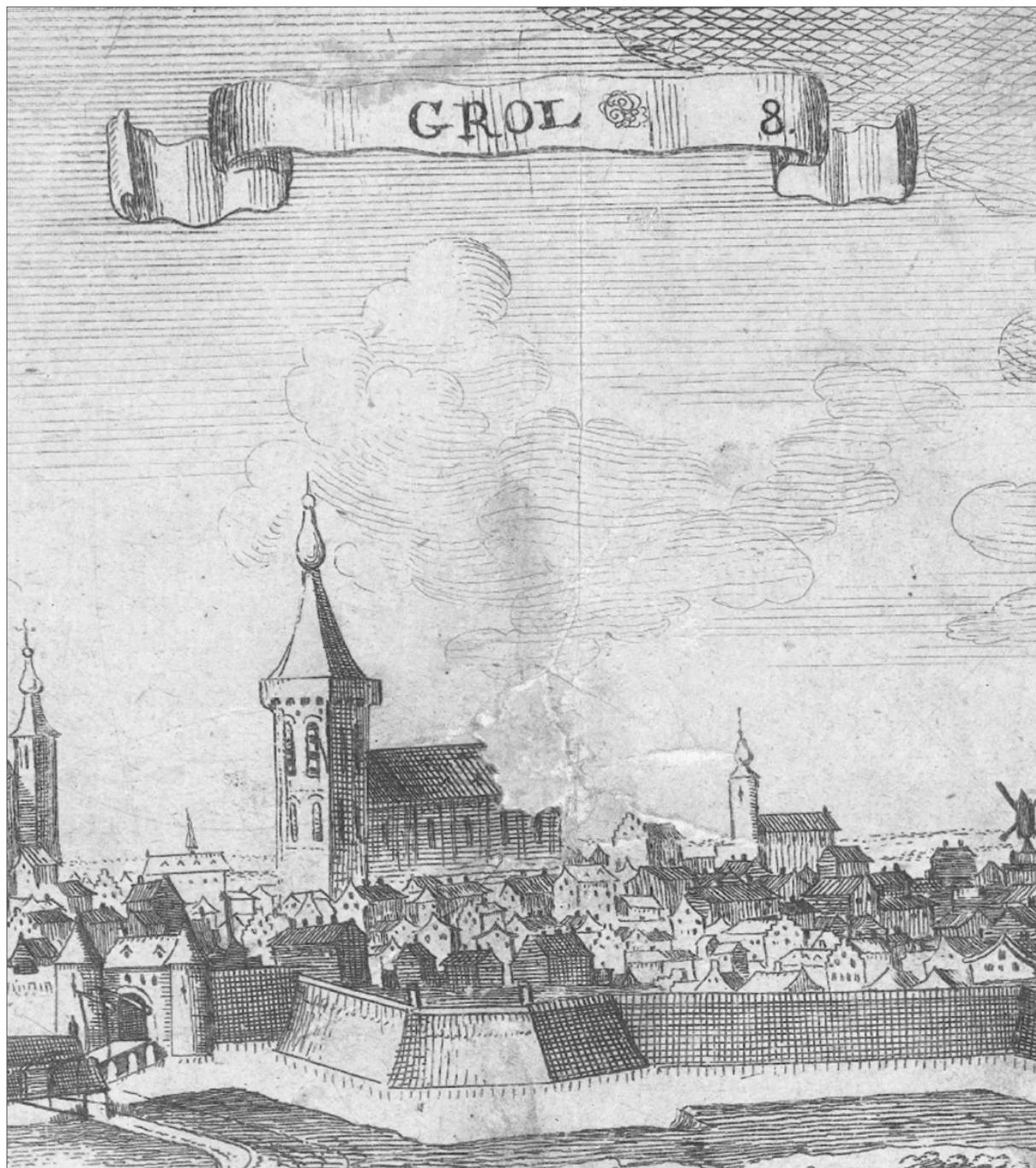
## The Spanish Road: To get a pikeman to the Netherlands

In Spain, 'to get a pikeman to the Netherlands' is a saying expressing something that is impossible to be done. It is a reference to how difficult it was to transport the Spanish armies to the Netherlands during the Eighty Years' War.

*Historic Spanish military heritage is still alive today, seen here at the 2019 Battle of Grolle.*



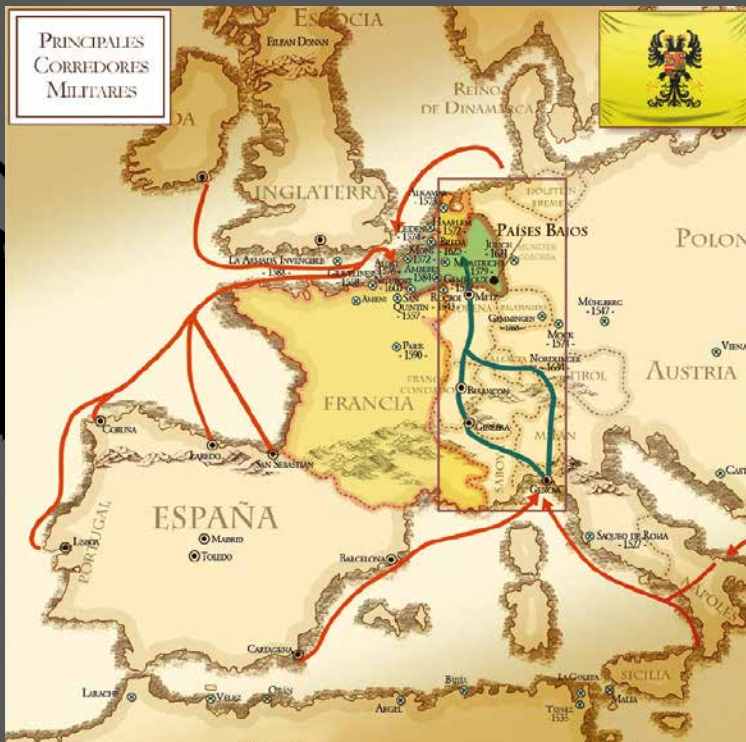






In 1566, the Netherlands were part of the Spanish Habsburg Empire. However, the middle-class was unhappy about the amount of taxes which had to be paid to the nobility. Furthermore, protestants were not allowed to confess their religion as the Catholic religion was enforced by the government. As a result, protestants were prosecuted. This unrest led to the iconoclasm; the protestants demolished many of the statues in the catholic churches.

*The Spanish Road, with the main land routes framed.*





Philip II, the king of Spain, was enraged when hearing about the unrest in the Netherlands. Consequently, the king sent the Duke of Alva to strike down the revolt. However, getting to the Netherlands had proven to be a challenge. A journey over sea was most of the time too risky because of England's sea power. Hence, the only remaining option was to travel to the Netherlands over land. Thus began the development of the Spanish Road, el Camino Español, le Chemin des Espagnols.





The Spanish road is a military corridor system with the purpose of transporting as well as the recruiting on the way of Spanish-led troops to the Netherlands. The journey, 'quasi sempre su'l suo' – almost always on own Habsburg land, would still prove to be a challenge. Spain had to find a way to the Netherlands while avoiding the enemies' territories: France to the west and the Austrian Habsburg Empire to the east. Furthermore, the army had to avoid physical barriers such as the

Alps and rivers. Therefore, the Spanish Road leads through neutral territories such as Milan, Franche-Comte, Tyrol, Alsace and Lorraine to the Spanish Netherlands. Therefore, a diplomatic system of envoys and treaties were necessary to pass independent fortified and cities such as Geneva, Breisach, Besançon and Metz. The Spanish Road marked an important step towards solving both the technical and political problems surrounding the military movements in peacetime, since they regularized the displacement of troops, enabling necessary basic services to be prepared in advance with a guarantee of permanent diplomatic protection.

The first journey of the Spanish army started in 1567 at Genoa, then Habsburg, led by the Duke of Alva. 10.000 men joined the Duke's cause. The journey, was challenging due to harsh weather conditions as well as the mountain passes which had to be traversed. Furthermore, food and shelter were required to maintain the soldiers as well as their wives and children who travelled along with them. After a journey of two months, the soldiers arrived in the Netherlands.







*A French rampart was recently discovered in the province of Gelderland.*



*The Lievender ES rampart was reconstructed in 2002 in the Netherlands.*

After the first journey different routes were taken because the road was influenced by political causes such as the French religious war and the Thirty Years War. In 1631, Spain lost Alsace which was an important area for the Spanish Road. Therefore, alternative routes lead through Strasbourg, Worms, Mainz and Cologne. The Spanish Road became a series of, often simultaneously used roads, leading armies, requested or led by the Spanish, to their possessions in the Low Countries.

Through the course of the Eighty Years War the Spanish Habsburg Empire struggled with its finances. This caused them to have trouble in funding the journey through the Spanish Road. As a result, soldiers coped with serious delays of payment which caused many of them to turn to mutiny. By crossing neutral territories, traversing mountain passes, the establishment of peace treaties and fixed 'étapes' and the maintenance of the soldiers, the Spanish road made the impossible possible: to get a pikeman to the Netherlands.



Parker, G. (1975). *The army of Flanders and the Spanish Road*. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.





# The 'Via Hispania' *European project*



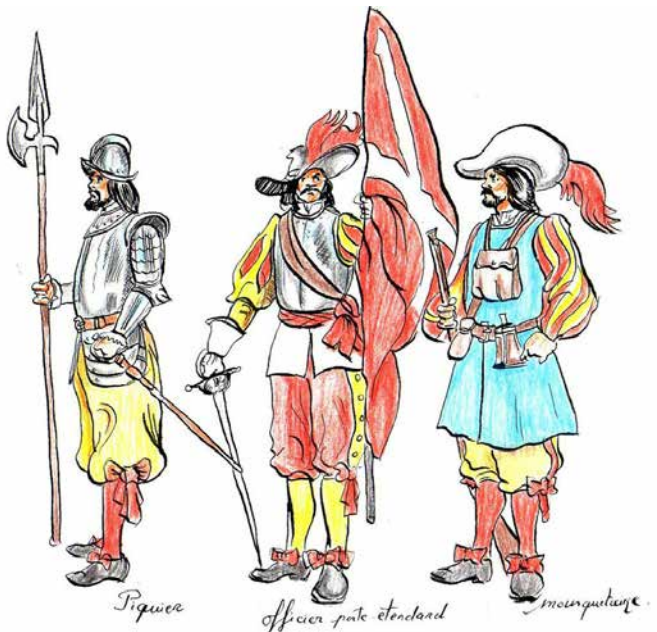


## A European conflict

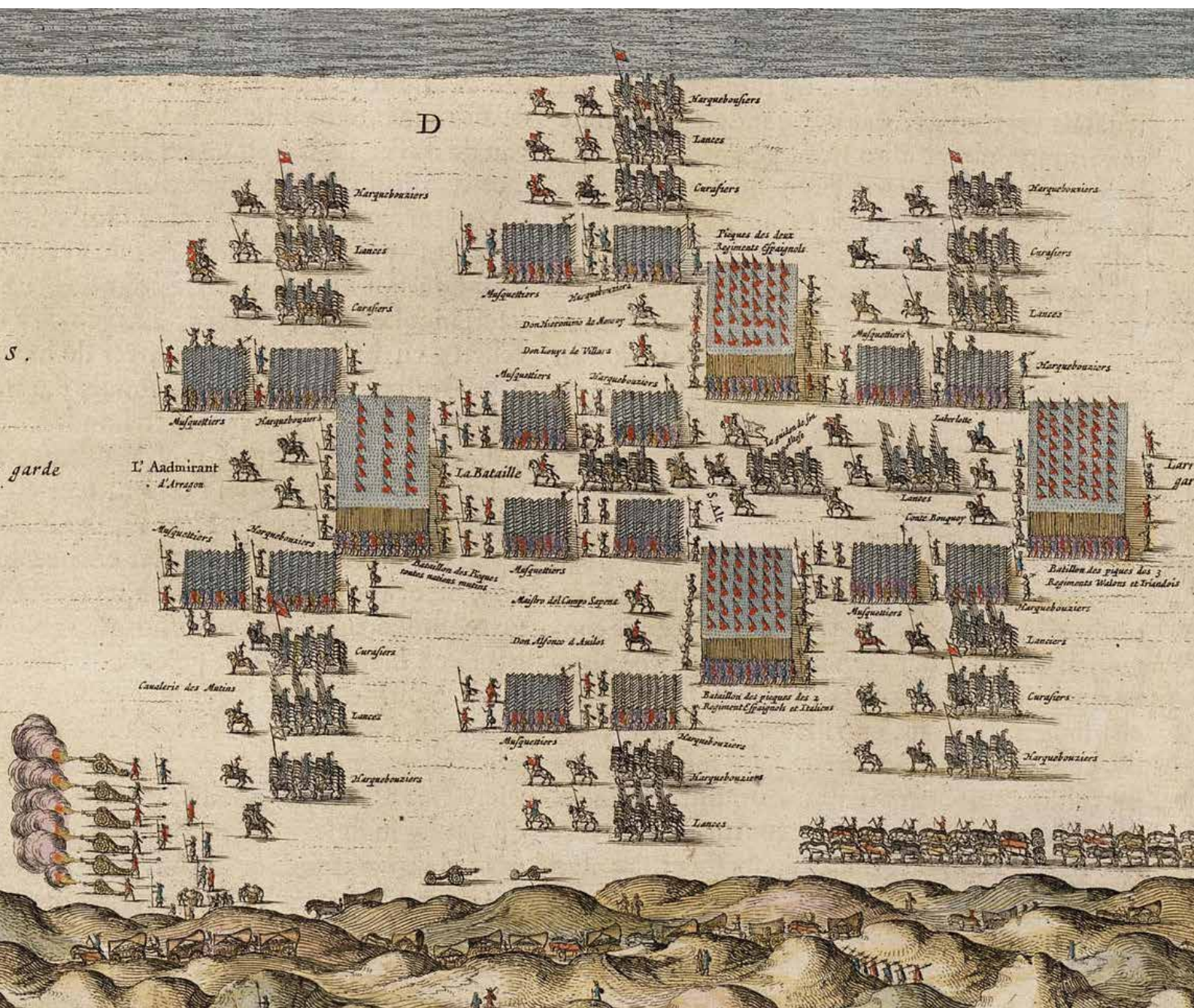
The Spanish Road system was in use for the better part of the Eighty Years' War. In this time, around a million soldiers from regions in Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, France, Ireland, England, and the south of Belgium found their way to the Low Countries to fight. In a throughout all these years ever evolving military route system, the Spanish occupation armies and European mercenary forces made their way through country, valleys, towns and cities. Every region where Spanish 'tercio's' passed through, was impacted. There was social upheaval, soldiers to billet and to feed.

*The present-day fortified city of Groenlo.*

*'Spanish tercio soldiers'*









*A Spanish 'tercio' was an independent pike and shot infantry unit and its formation a major development of early modern combined arms warfare. It is most comparable with a today's army battalion or brigade and counted approximately 2000 soldiers.*

The Spanish armies consisted of many other nationalities and were often accompanied by civilian support forces. In the Netherlands, they were an 'international' occupation force, fighting an equally international opponent, led by the protestant Dutch. Besides the influence of 100.000's of soldiers in the Low Countries, the passage of a large part of them through the 'Spanish Road' corridors, most of which were between Italy, the Alpine regions, the Rhine Valley and Lorraine, but also through the rest of Germany and France, never went unnoticed.



The Eighty Years' War and its events are depicted in many forms. Officers wrote about their time in and 'en route' to the Low Countries. Velasquez painted for instance the 1625 'Surrender of Breda'. Cervantes had Don Quichote participate in a Spanish tercio on its way to the Netherlands. Pedro Caldéron de la Barca ('The Siege of Breda'), Lope de Vega and Vélez de Guevara wrote plays incorporating the life in the tercio's. Spínola's chaplain had an official history published, with its title page designed by Rubens. Many paintings of Dutch region events found their place in the Spanish psyche, where Flemish painter as Rubens is still considered as 'Spanish'. Today even, the books of 'Captain Alatriste' by Arturo Pérez-Reverte use the Spanish wars in the Netherlands as a fertile backdrop. In present-day Netherlands and Belgium, books and comics relating the Spanish War are still in vogue today (among which Flemish Willy Vandersteen's oeuvre). Besides this immaterial heritage, many cities on the Spanish Road improved their defenses and became the later fortified cities of Vauban that we still see today. Recent European projects and conferences have cultivated the remnants of this material and immaterial heritage.

*'Rocroi, the last stand of the tercio's', by Augusto Ferrer-Dalmau (2011).*











*The Surrender of Breda, by Velázquez.*



One can say that the 'Spanish Period' is part of Europe's common history. This difficult period in European history saw pitted against each other empires, regions and religions, cities and people. They also saw alliances grow and break. Even today many frontiers in Western Europe are the remnants of the conquests and truces of the Eighty Years' War. The European aspect of this conflict becomes apparent when we discover the story of the Spanish Road. This 16th and 17th century 'difficult' heritage is the basis, together with many later conflicts and wars, of European conciliation and shared history.

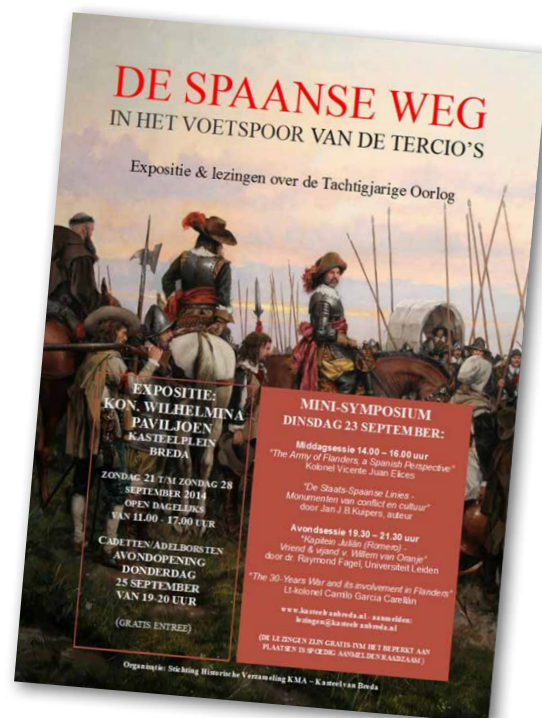
The City of Groenlo (Grol or Grolle) organises every two years a large reenactment and experience event 'The Battle of Grolle'.



**Staats-Spaanse Linies**

West-Vlaanderen | Oost-Vlaanderen | Zeeuws-Vlaanderen

*The EU Interreg project 'Staats-Spaanse Linies'.*





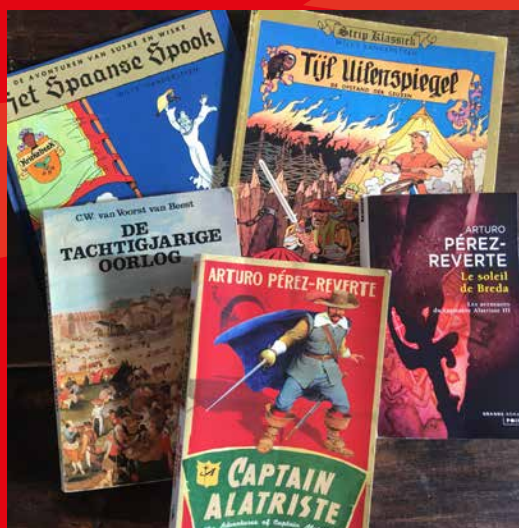


## ‘Via Hispania’

### *Vision*

Together with today’s European cities and regions where 300 years ago passed the Spanish pikeman, the City of Oost Gelre with its historic fortified Groenlo (Grol) has known its share in the Dutch war of independence from Spain. Supported by the Province of Gelderland and the European Federation of Fortified Sites, it seeks to remember and develop this European heritage and set up a European project, discovering this shared heritage and developing its historic and touristic value.

For this, project partners are striving for European cooperation. They are connecting the old warring regions, developing innovative shared or own products and augmented reality devices to show common history to present-day Europeans. Together with the establishment of national historic routes, a European Spanish Cultural Route project : ‘Via Hispania’ will come to life.



## *Mission*

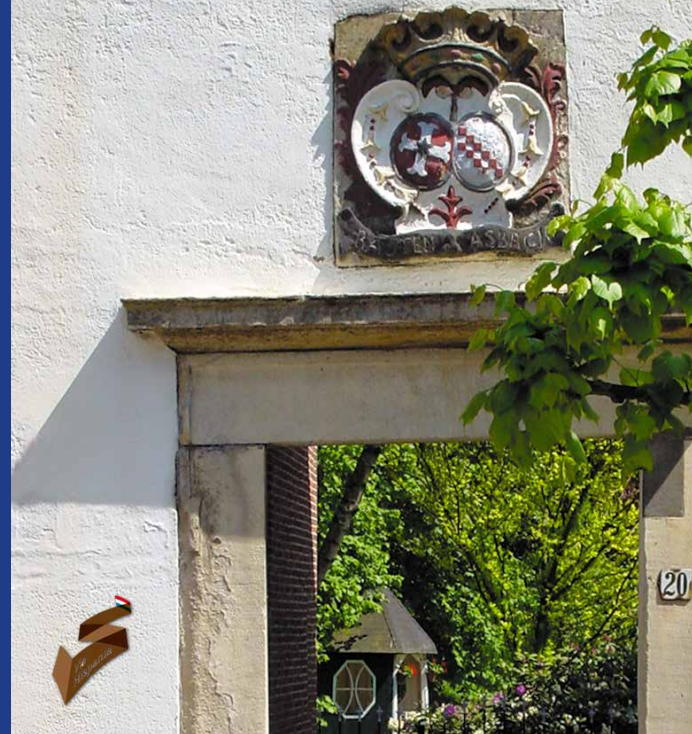
‘Via Hispania’ strives for first time in European history, for the linking of regions, cities, museums, and interested parties, preserving memory and implicating future generations, especially the young, in the common European heritage of the Spanish Road, showing to all generations its significance for Europe’s origins and future.

‘Via Hispania’ seeks to enhance diversity and dialogue through access to this former war heritage, and to foster a sense of identity, collective memory and mutual understanding with between people. The project wishes to involve all interested stakeholders in a European project, through which research, events, education, publications, training, funding alternatives, defense of common interests and linkage to fortification, material and immaterial heritage can be developed. At the same time the preserving of this heritage can foster historic and touristic purposes on a European, regional and local scale.



‘Via Hispania’ wants to bring about a structure by which the common European heritage that is the Spanish Road -through its remains in many European countries, regions and cities - can serve as a witness of the perennial need of shared heritage, history and belonging, and of European values.





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# ‘Via Hispania’



*This document is initiated by  
the fortress city Groenlo in  
cooperation with EFFORTS*