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Eyewitness Testimony in the Writing of History**



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# The Discursive Encounter of Spain and America: The Authority of Eyewitness Testimony in the Writing of History

Rolena Adorno

WHEN Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote the *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, he feared, he said, that his readers would take as fictional his accounts of ninety-three days of battle because they would seem like the tales in a novel of chivalry.<sup>1</sup> A participant in the Vázquez de Coronado expedition of 1540–1542, Pedro de Castañeda de Nájera, expressed a similar concern.<sup>2</sup> For men like Bernal Díaz and Pedro Castañeda, the challenge of writing history was not only to be believed but also to be acknowledged as authoritative. The relationship between historical testimony and historiographic authority was, without a doubt, one of the central issues in the histories and relations (*relaciones*) written by participants in the Spanish conquests in America.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *conquistador* of Mexico and *encomendero* of Guatemala, Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, shipwreck survivor of Pánfilo de Narváez's expedition to conquer Florida and governor of Río de la Plata, and Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, *ex-encomendero*, friar, missionary, bishop, and activist at court on behalf of the natives of America, not only made history but wrote it. Each of them recorded, refuted, and transmitted it, and in doing so, each played a key role in the process of elaborating the discursive encounter of Spain and America.

The episodes of this encounter occurred not on the battlefield or at court but in the library, not against the din of battle or the stridency of conciliar debates but in the silence of reading and reflection. Neverthe-

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<sup>1</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Carmelo Sáenz de Santa María (Madrid, 1982) (chap. 151), 384. On Bernal Díaz's references to works of fiction see Irving A. Leonard, *Books of the Brave* (Cambridge, Mass., 1949; rpt. 1964), 42–45, and Rolena Adorno, "Literary Production and Suppression: Reading and Writing about Amerindians in Colonial Spanish America," *Dispositio*, IX, Nos. 28–29 (1986), 15–19. Unless otherwise indicated, English translations of citations in Spanish are my own.

<sup>2</sup> Castañeda, "Castañeda's History of the Expedition," *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, 1540–1542*, ed. George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, Coronado Cuarto Centennial Publications, 1540–1940, vol. 2 (Albuquerque, N. M., 1940), 276.

less, these exercises were not merely literary. The chronicles were written for pragmatic as well as academic purposes, and even those that served theoretical ends had at stake practical goals of influencing policy or opinion.

The works in question were written and/or published in the 1540s and 1550s and took controversial stands on issues that would seem to have been settled: the justice of the wars of conquest and the characterization of the Indians in relation thereto. At issue were not the wars long since won or lost but rather the rights to the rewards of conquest.<sup>3</sup> Should royal grants to *conquistadores* endure in perpetuity? Was it legitimate to enslave Indians when they had not been captured as enemies in war? Did the natives of the Antilles owe further royal or personal service to the Spaniards or should they be allowed relief in order to rebuild their dwindling populations? These issues gained prominence at the end of the 1530s and resulted in the promulgation of the New Laws (1542) to remedy the ills referred to in these statutes.<sup>4</sup> But the New Laws provoked more controversy than they resolved, and the decade ended and a new one began with major juntas on the problems of the ongoing rights of the Spanish in the Indies. The best known of these was the 1550–1551 meeting at Valladolid, convened by the emperor Charles V, in which Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda participated. The other was a junta on the perpetuity of the *encomienda*, attended by Vasco de Quiroga, the bishop of Michoacán, Las Casas, and Bernal Díaz.<sup>5</sup> In 1552–1553 in Seville Las Casas published his tracts on colonial reform; their export to New Spain, where they provoked still more debate, is verified by Bernal Díaz's attack on one of them, the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*.<sup>6</sup>

This period of controversy on prerogatives for the future produced reflection on past events. Tied as such reflection was to present and future interests, it yielded the polemics emblemized by, but not confined to, the Valladolid discussions of 1550 and 1551.<sup>7</sup> In times of renewed urgency of the controversy on the Indies, the works considered below

<sup>3</sup> This view contrasts with Lewis Hanke's classic framing of the issues in *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America* (Boston, 1965; orig. pub. 1949), 118, and in *Aristotle and the American Indians: A Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington, Ind., 1959), 43.

<sup>4</sup> See Henry Raup Wagner and Helen Rand Parish, *The Life and Writings of Bartolomé de las Casas* (Albuquerque, N. M., 1967), 108–182, on royal and conciliar attempts at colonial reform during the period 1541–1551.

<sup>5</sup> See *ibid.*, 170–182, 210–212; Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 211), 656–658, is the only known source for the latter meeting.

<sup>6</sup> Las Casas, *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias . . .* in *Obras escogidas de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, vol. 5, ed. Juan Pérez de Tudela Bueso, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, CX (Madrid, 1958), 134–181.

<sup>7</sup> For significant new information on royal actions on the Indies question see United States Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, *The Royal File on the Administration of the Indians Restored and Edited by Helen Rand Parish from the Kraus Codex in the Library of Congress*, ed. Parish (Washington, D. C., forthcoming).

came into being and functioned as actors in, not merely reflections of, the transcendent debates.

The first of the paradigmatic encounters is between Bernal Díaz's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* (1568) and two key books he read: the *Historia de la conquista de México* (1552)<sup>8</sup> by Francisco López de Gómara and Las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552). The second case is Las Casas's appropriation of Cabeza de Vaca's *relación* of the Narváez expedition to Florida<sup>9</sup> in the former's *Apologética historia sumaria* (1527–1560).<sup>10</sup> Las Casas's own controversial essay on the Spanish conquests in America, the *Brevísima relación*, written in 1542 and published in 1552, was based on testimonial accounts that included those of the conquest of Nueva Galicia, the aftermath of which Cabeza de Vaca had described in his own work. The *Brevísima relación*, in turn, takes us back to our point of departure, for Bernal Díaz read it about the time he embarked on his own literary project and refuted it in his *Historia verdadera*.

### BERNAL DÍAZ DEL CASTILLO AND THE CONQUEST OF HISTORY

Bernal Díaz feared that more credence would be given to the works of men of learning than to his own. He expressed considerable antipathy for Francisco López de Gómara, whose authority was such that other learned writers, Gonzalo de Illescas and Paolo Jovio, followed his account.<sup>11</sup> Generally overlooked is Bernal Díaz's contentiousness against Las Casas, whom he refuted on two controversial episodes in the conquest of Mexico when the Spaniards slaughtered large numbers of natives, possibly without provocation, first at Cholula and then at the *Templo Mayor* (Great Temple)

<sup>8</sup> Gómara, *Historia de la conquista de México*, prologue by Jorge Gurria Lacroix, Biblioteca Ayacucho, LXV (Caracas, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> Cabeza de Vaca, *La relación que dio Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca de lo acaescido en las Indias en la armada donde yua por governador Pánfilo de Narváez desde el año de veynte y siete hasta el año de treynta y seys que bolvió a Sevilla con tres de su compañía* (Zamora, Sp., 1542); Cabeza de Vaca, *La relación y comentarios del governador Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, de lo acaescido en las dos jornadas que hizo a las Indias* (Valladolid, Sp., 1555); *The Account that Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca gave of what occurred in the Indies on the expedition on which Pánfilo de Narváez served as governor*, transcribed and translated from the 1542 Zamora edition by Rolena Adorno and Patrick C. Pautz, forthcoming. Original foliation reproduced.

<sup>10</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética historia sumaria*, in *Obras escogidas*, vols. 3, 4, ed. Pérez de Tudela Bueso.

<sup>11</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera*, (chap. 18), 33–36. He refers to Gómara's *Historia de las Indias y la conquista de México* (Zaragoza, Sp., 1552), reissued in 1553 (Zaragoza, Sp., Medina del Campo) and 1554 (Zaragoza and Antwerp), Illescas's *Historia pontifical, y católica, en la cual se contienen las vidas y bechos notables de todos los summos Pontífices Romanos* (Dueñas, Sp., 1564), and Jovio's *Elogios o vidas de los caballeros antiguos y modernos, ilustres en valor de guerra que están al vivo pintados en el museo de Paulo Jovio*, trans. Gaspar de Baeza (Granada, 1568), according to Miguel León-Portilla, "Introducción" to Díaz, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. León-Portilla, *Crónicas de América*, II (Madrid, 1984), 18.

of Tenochtitlán.<sup>12</sup> Apart from disputing Gómara and Las Casas (who had their information secondhand) on questions of events, causes, and consequences, Bernal Díaz elaborated a narration of the war of conquest that emphasized the war's holiness as well as its justice. Revealing in this regard are the episodes he recounted and commented upon in order to contradict the writings of Gómara and Las Casas.

The centerpiece of Bernal Díaz's case for the justice of the war is his argument that the innocent needed to be protected from the outrages of barbarous peoples. This appears in his account of the massacre at the sacred city of Cholula (chapter 83), as well as in his summary of the abominations committed by the Mexicans and eliminated by the first *conquistadores* (chapter 208). It is significant that this defense of the justice of the war was made by another *viejo conquistador*, Ruy González, in a 1553 letter to the emperor: "A fourth point we can make, Most Serene Prince, so that the war and conquest of this kingdom do not appear so severe and senseless as certain ill-educated people affirm and maintain, [is] that these people [the Mexicans] were barbarous, idolatrous, sacrificers and killers of innocent people, eaters of human flesh, most filthy and nefarious sodomites."<sup>13</sup>

Defending the justice of the war they had won, men such as Bernal Díaz and Ruy González appealed to the tenets of just-war theory as elaborated most recently by Sepúlveda.<sup>14</sup> While neither Bernal Díaz nor Ruy González was likely to have contemplated the philosophical problems of the ethics of conquest, Sepúlveda's tract on just war in the Indies provided laymen with examples of the consequences of the violation of natural law (human sacrifice, cannibalism, sodomy) that made useful tools in the debate at the level on which the old *conquistadores* entered it. Bernal Díaz dramatized Sepúlveda's arguments in favor of legitimate conquest in his chapter 208, entitled "How the Indians of New Spain performed many sacrifices and bestialities and we removed them from them, and we imposed on them the holy lessons of good [Christian] doctrine." He declared that the reward and recognition for bringing the natives to Christianity belonged to the "true conquerors who discovered and con-

<sup>12</sup> See Adorno, "Discourses on Colonialism: Bernal Díaz, Las Casas, and the Twentieth-Century Reader," *MLN*, CIII (1988), 239–258.

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to John E. Kicza for bringing this letter to my attention and making it available to me; Arthur P. Stabler and Kicza, "Ruy González's 1553 Letter to Emperor Charles V: An Annotated Translation," *The Americas*, XLII (1986), 485.

<sup>14</sup> Sepúlveda outlined 4 just causes for war against the Indians in *Demócrates segundo* (1545) and reiterated them in *Apología*, published in Rome in 1550. The first was the Amerindians' presumed inability to govern themselves; the others were the need to banish human sacrifice and idolatry, to protect the innocent from injury, and to preach the gospel (Sepúlveda and Las Casas, *Apología*, ed. Angel Losada [Madrid, 1975], 61–70; Sepúlveda, *Demócrates segundo o de las justas causas de la guerra contra los indios*, 2d ed., ed. and trans. Losada [Madrid, 1984], 83–84).

quered" them; as soldiers, Bernal Díaz claimed, he and his fellows deserved this recognition more than did the missionary clergy.<sup>15</sup>

To defend the war as just, Bernal Díaz had to confront the damning accounts of Las Casas's *Brevísima relación*. Díaz's acquaintance with the *Brevísima* is directly acknowledged in his annoyance at the "great cruelties about which the Bishop of Chiapas Bartolomé de Las Casas writes and never tires of telling."<sup>16</sup> His lengthy chapter on "the danger of Cholula" resoundingly refuted Las Casas's account; the Cholula and *Templo Mayor* episodes were precisely the ones singled out by Las Casas to characterize and condemn the entire conquest of Mexico. Bernal Díaz underscored the justice of the Spaniards' actions by pointing to the Cholulan practice of human sacrifice. The Spaniards served the greater good of rescuing innocent victims.<sup>17</sup> Bernal Díaz countered the powerful moral authority of Las Casas's condemnation of the event as a massacre by citing Fray Toribio de Benavente "Motolinía," an enemy of Las Casas,<sup>18</sup> as well as a Franciscan panel of inquiry, which supported Bernal Díaz's view. In doing so, he revealed the need to confirm his participant soldier's testimony with the (noneyewitness) moral authority of religious officials.

Two military actions in particular provided Bernal Díaz the opportunity to underscore the holy nature of the war. Both accounts relied on the testimony of other soldiers, for Bernal Díaz had not been an eyewitness to the events. One was Juan de Escalante's expedition to the coast (Bernal Díaz was in Mexico) that ended with the public execution by burning of seditious *caciques* (native lords); the other was the killings at the *Templo Mayor* feast under Alvarado's orders (when Bernal Díaz was at Veracruz with Cortés, fighting off Pánfilo de Narváez).

In the first case, Bernal Díaz related the series of events that ended in the execution of the lord Quetzalpopoca and accused Gómara of misconstruing them in his *Historia de la conquista de México*.<sup>19</sup> Gómara erred, according to Bernal Díaz, by naming Pedro de Hircio as the captain in charge when he was neither a captain nor on the coast, by suggesting that the expedition was sent to settle Pánuco, when there were scarcely enough men to protect and defend themselves, much less undertake a new campaign, and by stating that Cortés ordered the execution of Quetzalpopoca.<sup>20</sup> Bernal Díaz countered: The captain was Juan de Escalante, who died later with seven other Spaniards;<sup>21</sup> his mission was to protect the settlement of Villa Rica, whose ailing Spanish inhabitants were men of the

<sup>15</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 208), 646–647.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* (chap. 83), 170.

<sup>17</sup> See Sepúlveda, *Demócrates segundo*, 62.

<sup>18</sup> The enmity between them seems to have centered on missionary techniques: Motolinía, like his fellow Franciscans, favored adult, mass baptism of the natives; Las Casas, in line with Dominican sentiment and official papal policy, opposed it. See Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 98–100.

<sup>19</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 18), 34, (chap. 95), 204, (chap. 141), 335; compare Gómara, *Historia de la conquista* (chaps. 87–89), 139–141.

<sup>20</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 18), 34, (chap. 94), 200.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* (chap. 18), 34.

sea, not soldiers; the punishment of the *caciques* was initiated by Moctezuma, who made his own assessment of their guilt and then turned them over to Cortés for punishment. Gómara had made Moctezuma responsible for the local lords' uprising against the Spaniards and Cortés for their execution.<sup>22</sup> Bernal Díaz, on the other hand, presented Moctezuma as innocent of plotting against the Spaniards.<sup>23</sup> After getting the confessions of the *caciques*, Cortés had them executed in front of Moctezuma's palace but not against Moctezuma's will.<sup>24</sup>

This affair ended with Aztec warriors bringing Moctezuma the head of one Argüelles, who had died of his wounds. Moctezuma asked them why thousands of warriors had not been able to vanquish so few foreigners. The Aztecs responded that their lances and arrows were of no more use than their great valor; they had not been able to make the Spaniards retreat because a great lady (*teleciguata*) of Castile had come before them, causing the Mexicans great fear and encouraging the Spanish soldiers to fight more bravely.<sup>25</sup> Moctezuma believed, commented Bernal Díaz, that this lady was St. Mary. But, Bernal Díaz wrote, he had not seen it, for he was in Mexico; rather, certain *conquistadores* who had been there had told him about it. "May it please God," he concluded, "to have happened as they told it!" His fervor takes over where eyewitness testimony cannot: "All we soldiers who accompanied Cortés take it on faith, and thus it is so, that divine mercy and Our Lady the Virgin Mary were always with us; for which I give great thanks."<sup>26</sup>

The other episode in which Bernal Díaz contradicted another historian, in this case Las Casas, also involved the issue of holy war. The event occurred during mid-May 1520, when Cortés took part of his company to the coast to meet and oppose Narváez, who had been sent by the governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, to arrest Cortés. Pedro de Alvarado was left in charge of the encampment in Tenochtitlán, and during this time, the Aztecs were to observe their customary feast in honor of Huitzilopochtli and Tezcatlipoca.<sup>27</sup> Alvarado gave his permission for the feast to take place, but once it was underway he ordered his troops to attack the unarmed throng gathered in an enclosed plaza.

Bernal Díaz narrated the events by constructing a *pesquisa* or inquiry that Cortés made of Alvarado on the matter, consisting of questions and answers of the type found in the proceedings of a *residencia*, the judicial review of an official's administration at the end of his term of office.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Gómara, *Historia de la conquista* (chaps. 87–88), 139–140.

<sup>23</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 95), 202.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* (chap. 94), 200–201.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>27</sup> See the account of this event in José Luis Martínez, *Hernán Cortés* (México, D. F., 1990), 262–266, 283.

<sup>28</sup> Robert S. Chamberlain, "The First Three Voyages to Yucatan and New Spain, According to the *Residencia* of Hernán Cortés," *University of Miami Hispanic-American Studies*, No. 7 (July 1949), 9; see C. H. Haring, *The Spanish Empire in America* (New York, 1947), 13–14, 149–154.

Alvarado explained that during the observance the Mexicans rose up to liberate Moctezuma on orders from their god Huitzilopochtli. They attempted to remove from the altar the cross that the Spanish had placed in the great temple but were unable to do so. They took this to be a miracle, and Moctezuma must also have done so, because he ordered them to leave the cross in place.

Here Bernal Díaz interjected Cortés's sharp questioning of Alvarado as to why he had ordered the attack. Alvarado replied that several friendly Aztec lords had informed him of a treacherous plot against the Spaniards. Bernal Díaz declared: "When Cortés heard this he said to him, very angrily, that it was very ill done and a great mistake and that he wished to God that Moctezuma had escaped and not heard such an account from his Idols."<sup>29</sup>

Bernal Díaz concluded this account with three more incidents designed to reveal the providential plan or at least the "many gifts that our Lord God bestowed on us."<sup>30</sup> First a cannon, loaded with one ball and many small shot, failed to fire on signal but later discharged, killing many Indians and saving the Spaniards from ruin. Then the Spaniards discovered a well of fresh water where there was nothing but saltwater all around, as Tenochtitlán was built in the middle of a salt lake connected to the mainland by four causeways.<sup>31</sup> Finally, he declared that the Aztecs again had reported seeing a great lady (*teleciguata*), who appeared and threw dust in their eyes and blinded them, as well as a great lord, who came riding on a white horse. This mounted horseman slaughtered many Aztecs but stopped short of killing them all. Bernal Díaz identified these figures as the Virgin Mary and Santiago Mayor.<sup>32</sup>

Thus Bernal Díaz insisted that the war of the conquest of Mexico had been just, holy, and fought by a valorous company of Spanish soldiers. He was greatly irritated that Gómara seemed to have assumed the first point and ignored the rest. To Gómara's thinking, the just-war question had been settled; yet his passing references to the issue had the effect of raising it anew in the eyes of readers defensive about the war, such as Bernal Díaz. Gómara made clear that the justice of the war needed no defense, for Sepúlveda, the emperor's chronicler, had written "most elegantly in Latin on this topic, and thus you will be completely satisfied on this matter."<sup>33</sup> In his version of the burning of Quetzalpopoca as the just punishment of a traitor who had confessed his guilt to Cortés, Gómara made a concluding remark in such a way as to raise, rather than settle, one of the central and controversial questions posed in the just-war debates: Did the Spanish have the right to invade the dominion of a sovereign lord who had not

<sup>29</sup> Díaz, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, 1517-1521*, trans. A. P. Maudslay, intro. Irving A. Leonard (New York, 1956), 297.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>31</sup> Martínez, *Cortés*, 255.

<sup>32</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 125), 272.

<sup>33</sup> Gómara, *Hispania victrix: 1 y 2 parte de la Historia general de las Indias*, ed. Enrique de Vedia, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, XXII (Madrid, 1852), 294.



offended any Christian prince? Gómara concluded that the Aztec captain and his collaborators had been executed publicly "in the new manner of justice wrought on a lord so high and in the kingdom of Moctezuma by men who were foreigners and guests."<sup>34</sup>

Gómara was not shy about declaring that those responsible for killing a captain of the Mexican lord in his own kingdom were outsiders. Las Casas argued that, as outsiders, the Christians had no right to intervene.<sup>35</sup> Bernal Díaz, like Sepúlveda and Gómara, disagreed. In their view, intervention by a Christian prince was justified in order to protect the innocent peoples from human sacrifice, to stop such practices, to force the native peoples to abandon their religions, and to Christianize them. These were the principles dramatized by Bernal Díaz in his chapter 208, and they corresponded to Sepúlveda's argument that the barbarous people's violations of natural law were sufficient cause to make war justly against them.

Having assumed that Sepúlveda's views prevailed (or at least that they would prevail among Gómara's readers), Gómara left Cortés and all his men open to the charges that were increasingly made against them in the 1540s and 1550s, as the debate over the rights to the rewards of the conquest escalated. In the meantime, however, Gómara's account added injury to insult: the insult of his omitting the names and actions of Cortés's Spanish soldiers and the injury of his raising the ethical issue of the conquest at the time when Bernal Díaz and his contemporaries would have preferred that heroism in the war, not the ethics of its execution, be the principal topic. Bernal Díaz's comprehensive assertion that the *conquistadores* were not as ruthless or destructive as Gómara claimed<sup>36</sup> suggests that the simple correction of factual errors for the sake of the historical record was not Bernal Díaz's only purpose. At stake were the personal and collective history of the *conquistadores* and their present and future economic interests.

In the first place, Gómara's concentration on Cortés left out the soldiers who, like Bernal Díaz himself, were still requesting royal compensation for their efforts in the conquest of Mexico several decades after it was won.<sup>37</sup> More irritating to Bernal Díaz was the fact that professional historians like Gómara enjoyed prestige and moral authority that were not available to him. Their stature rested on the distinction between the modalities *de re* and *de dicto*, that is, a kind of "natural truth" of the deeds and a "moral truth" of their narration.<sup>38</sup> While ideally joined together in

<sup>34</sup> Gómara, *Historia de la conquista* (chap. 87), 140.

<sup>35</sup> See Las Casas, "Tratado de las doce dudas," in *Obras escogidas . . .*, vol. 5, 486–487.

<sup>36</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 18), 35.

<sup>37</sup> See especially *ibid.* (chap. 210), 653, in which Bernal Díaz conjures up the allegorical figure of Fame. She is pleased to know, thanks to his history, about the captains and soldiers who won Mexico and whose deeds had been omitted in the works of Gómara, Illescas, and "other modern chroniclers."

<sup>38</sup> See Walter D. Mignolo, "El Metatexto Historiográfico y la Historiografía Indiana," *MLN*, XCVI (1981), 370–371, on the evolving conceptions of historical truth from the 16th to the 17th century.

any written history, their conceptual independence from one another was revealed by a seventeenth-century preceptist, Jerónimo de San José, who declared that although the mind might form an erroneous concept of some deed, the narration that communicated the deed in the manner the historian conceived it was still truthful. In this way, "we can take as truthful all historians who write what they understood to be the truth, even though they were mistaken about the facts."<sup>39</sup> If the words of the gods carried within them the guarantee of their truth, the words of men needed the guarantee of the wise. Thus historiographic treatises regularly devoted much space to considering the essential qualities of the historian. The example Las Casas gave in the *Historia de las Indias* was typical: "Neither is it appropriate that all manner of persons apply themselves to such an occupation, according to the judgment of Methasthenes, but rather only select men of respectability—learned, prudent, philosophical, extremely perspicacious, spiritual, and devoted to divine religion—such as were then and are today the sage ministers of God."<sup>40</sup>

Bernal Díaz could not assume this type of authority, given his station in life, and the fact that erudite historians such as Illescas and Jovio followed Gómara's account confirmed for Bernal Díaz that historians did not look beyond their own kind to search for truth in history. Especially galling to Bernal Díaz was the eminence granted to Gómara's views by Illescas—the learned doctor from Palencia, chronicler to Charles V, and historian of the Roman Catholic papacy—and by Jovio—the papal diplomat and bishop from Lombardy who frequented the court of Charles V and wrote extensively about Spanish deeds and men.<sup>41</sup>

Bernal Díaz made his only possible challenge to the historians' authority by attempting to supplant it. We turn here to Bernal Díaz's most significant commentary on Spanish historiography. In preparing his manuscript for publication (he sent it to Spain for that purpose in 1575) and in his ceaseless writing on the manuscript until his death around 1584, he advocated the kind of historical authority that supplied sworn testimony in an official investigation and rested on the claim of having been an eyewitness. He relied, in other words, on the developing juridical tradition in the Indies. At the same time, he insisted on its incorporation into the lofty realm of history. He dramatized the need for this approach toward the end of his work in a preamble to the recitation of all the battles and encounters in which he had participated.

In chapter 212 Bernal Díaz told how two licentiates desired to read his work to see how it differed from those of Gómara and Illescas on the

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*, ed. Agustín Millares Carlo, introductory study by Lewis U. Hanke, 3 vols. (México, D. F., 1951), I, 6; see Mignolo, "Metatexto," 370, 386.

<sup>41</sup> Manuel Ballesteros Gaibrois, "Estudio preliminar," in Gonzalo Jiménez de Quesada, *El Antijovio*, ed. Rafael Torres Quintero, Publicaciones del Instituto Caro y Cuervo, X (Bogotá, 1952), xv–xxv.

heroic deeds of Cortés.<sup>42</sup> Noting the presumption of one of them, Bernal Díaz agreed to show it to them because “something of the learned can always rub off on someone who is an idiot without letters like myself.”<sup>43</sup> The two gentlemen approved his plain style (“*que va según nuestro común hablar de Castilla la Vieja*”) but said he praised himself too much and that he should bring witnesses on his behalf. Bernal Díaz replied that he had done so; both Cortés and Don Antonio de Mendoza had written to the emperor on his behalf in 1540.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the emperor himself bore witness to his deeds through a royal letter commanding that the viceroy honor Bernal Díaz and his heirs. Bernal Díaz concluded with another reference to Gómara and Illescas, lamenting that they had not written about the heroic deeds of the soldiers. “But,” he asked, “if one did not find himself in the war, nor saw it nor understood it, what can he say about it? Who is to proclaim it but the captains and soldiers who were there? Surely not the birds in the sky or clouds that passed overhead on the days of our battles!”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, one had to act as witness to one’s own deeds; Bernal Díaz cited the writings of Julius Caesar as a meritorious precedent. Here he made the transition from witness to historian with aplomb if not daring: “Thus, lord licentiates, just see if Cortés and the viceroy Don Antonio de Mendoza and my own *probanzas* are good witnesses, and if this is not sufficient, I want to bring another witness—in the world there is none greater—the emperor our lord Don Carlos V.”<sup>46</sup>

As a *conquistador*, Bernal Díaz belonged to a generation of men whose claims to royal reward and influence in local colonial affairs depended on testimony and credentials pertaining to major episodes in the history of New Spain. Thanks to the juridical means used to assess, reward, or punish the protagonists of conquest and colonization,<sup>47</sup> the historical actor gained an authority as witness that in turn enhanced the possibility of his becoming the historian of his own deeds. Bernal Díaz meant not to correct and contradict Gómara but in fact to replace him and the authority that such learned historians represented.

In the 1570s, Bernal Díaz’s failure to publish his chronicle is hardly surprising, for the royal ban on the discussion on the conquests continued. Philip II had expressly sought to control the publication of all works on the Indies since 1556;<sup>48</sup> his 1573 statutes on conquest, the first major

<sup>42</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 212), 658.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> These letters are reproduced in Luis González Obregón, *Bernal Díaz del Castillo, conquistador y cronista de Nueva España* (México, D. F., 1894), 73–75.

<sup>45</sup> Díaz, *Historia verdadera* (chap. 212), 660.

<sup>46</sup> The royal decree honoring Bernal Díaz was among the latter’s most prized possessions; *Historia verdadera* (chap. 212), 659. The texts of this decree and others issued with reference to him are reproduced in José de J. Núñez y Domínguez, ed., *Documentos inéditos acerca de Bernal Díaz del Castillo*. Secretaría de Educación Pública (México, D. F., 1933).

<sup>47</sup> See Haring, *Spanish Empire*, 148–157.

<sup>48</sup> Stephen C. Mohler, “Publishing in Colonial Spanish America: An Overview,” *Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía*, XXVIII (1978), 259–273.

legislation to appear since 1526, designated a new official term for conquest, "pacification."<sup>49</sup> In 1571, the president of the Council of the Indies, Juan de Ovando, had ordered that the works of the deceased Las Casas be deposited with the council for its restricted use.<sup>50</sup> The topic of the conquest was, from the official point of view, best left in silence. By 1632, however, the authority of the eyewitness was recognized, so long as it served another purpose, which was to emphasize the religious character and value of the conquest of Mexico. The first printed edition of Bernal Díaz's work contained a final chapter not found anywhere in the Guatemala manuscript that he continued to work on until his death. This chapter 212 of the published edition presented and interpreted natural signs and portents reportedly seen by the Mexicans before the conquest. It confirmed the providentiality of the conquest and, as an epilogue to Bernal Díaz's chronicle, shifted the discussion from the means of the war of conquest to its ends.

Owing to such uses, eyewitness testimony gained ascendancy as the sixteenth century wore on. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Las Casas and his remarkable *Apologética historia sumaria*. Although not published until the nineteenth century, this work circulated in manuscript and was copied by writers in the sixteenth century.<sup>51</sup> From a single, extended example of Las Casas's employment of eyewitness sources we can appreciate how participants' accounts achieved authority and prestige through their appropriation by elite historians.

### BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS'S LITERARY ENCOUNTER WITH ALVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA

The eyewitness account, Cabeza de Vaca's *relación* of the 1527 expedition to Florida, was published twice during the reign of Charles V. It appeared before royal attempts to control publications on the Indies and again during the time when the rights to the rewards of the conquests became a topic of heated controversy. The success of Cabeza de Vaca's writing can be explained by the fact that it took a counter-conquest position.<sup>52</sup> That is, Cabeza de Vaca advocated peaceful conversion of the natives and demonstrated that good treatment of the Indians produced results that served both the well-being of native populations and the economic interests of Spaniards.

Las Casas was one of Cabeza de Vaca's most remarkable readers, and an

<sup>49</sup> Book IV, title I, law 6, in Juan Manzano y Manzano, *Recopilación de leyes de los reynos de las Indias*. 4 vols. (Madrid, 1973), II, 80.

<sup>50</sup> Hanke, "Bartolomé de las Casas, historiador," in Las Casas, *Historia de las Indias*. I, xxxi.

<sup>51</sup> Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 288–289; see Adorno, "Censorship and Its Evasion: The Case of Fray Jerónimo Román y Zamora's *Repúblicas del mundo* (1575, 1595)," *Hispania*. forthcoming.

<sup>52</sup> For a contrasting interpretation of the meaning of Cabeza de Vaca's work see Beatriz Pastor, *Discursos narrativos de la conquista: mitificación y emergencia*. 2d ed. (Hanover, N. H., 1988), 190–244.

exceedingly careful one. In his *Apologética historia sumaria*,<sup>53</sup> he cited extensively Cabeza de Vaca's account of the peoples and customs of Florida. Cabeza de Vaca had been a member (royal treasurer, in fact) of the Narváez expedition, five hundred men strong, sent to conquer Florida in 1527. The territory of Florida extended around the rim of the Gulf of Mexico, all the way from the peninsula of contemporary Florida to the recently settled province of Pánuco (near present-day Tampico) in Mexico. Suffering shipwreck, hunger, and the hostility of native groups, only Cabeza de Vaca and three fellow expeditionaries survived. In search of civilization the four traversed the lands from the Gulf coast of Texas south to the Río Grande, then west across northern Mexico to the Gulf of California, and ultimately south and southeast to Mexico-Tenochtitlán, where they arrived in July 1536.<sup>54</sup>

Given their inability to speak most native languages (Cabeza de Vaca claimed to have learned six),<sup>55</sup> problems of interpretation in face-to-face encounters were compounded when Cabeza de Vaca tried to interpret the experience in the remarkable narration he prepared for Charles V. He told of his band's arrival, after years spent with nomadic and semisedentary groups, at a settlement that practiced agriculture, where the inhabitants cultivated squash and beans, hunted bison in the north, and slaughtered livestock for food. At Christmastime 1535, the four survivors discovered for the first time evidence of other Europeans—a native who was wearing around his neck as ornaments a buckle from a sword belt and a horseshoe nail.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the marauding horsemen in search of natives to enslave, the unarmed Cabeza de Vaca and his companions came in peace. He recounted how they sought to resettle the lands abandoned by the natives, who had been terrorized by the other Spaniards.<sup>57</sup>

Cabeza de Vaca's account came to be one of Las Casas's many sources

<sup>53</sup> The years of composition of this work span the period from 1527, when Las Casas began the *Historia de las Indias*, from which he later extracted the *Apologética* as a separate work, through 1560–1561, when he completed the final drafts. See Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 200–204, 287–289, and Isacio Pérez Fernández and Parish, *Inventario documentado de los escritos de Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*, Estudios Monográficos, I (Bayamon, P. R., 1981), 240–251.

<sup>54</sup> Donald E. Chipman, "In Search of Cabeza de Vaca's Route Across Texas: An Historiographical Survey," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, XCI (1987), 127–148, summarizes studies on Cabeza de Vaca's overland route, citing in particular Alex D. Krieger, "The Travels of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca in Texas and Mexico, 1534–1536," in *Homenaje a Pablo Martínez del Río en el vigésimo quinto aniversario de la primera edición de "Los orígenes americanos"* (México, D. F., 1961), 459–474, and T. N. Campbell and T. J. Campbell, *Historic Indian Groups of the Choke Canyon Reservoir and Surrounding Area, Southern Texas* (San Antonio, Tex., 1981). Still fundamental are Harbert Davenport and Joseph K. Wells, "The First Europeans in Texas, 1528–1536," *SWHQ*, XXII (1918/1919), 111–142, 205–259, and James Newton Basket, "A Study of the Route of Cabeza de Vaca," *Texas State Historical Association Quarterly*, X (1907), 246–279, 308–340.

<sup>55</sup> Adorno and Pautz, trans., *Account . . . of what occurred*, fol. 55v.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 56v.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 55v–56r.

for the *Apologética historia sumaria*,<sup>58</sup> which compilations of information about writers who made use of Cabeza de Vaca's *relación* have often overlooked.<sup>59</sup> Las Casas employed Cabeza de Vaca's work in two ways: as a source of information on native customs and as an authority on peaceful colonization. Las Casas described the purpose of his *Apologética* to "investigate, conclude, and prove with evidence that all [the peoples of the world], speaking *a toto genere*, although some more and others a bit less but none exempt, enjoy the benefit of very good subtle and natural intellects and most capable understanding and are likewise all prudent and endowed naturally with the three types of prudence described by Aristotle."<sup>60</sup> In particular, he sought to demonstrate the "universal propensity and natural inclination of humanity to seek its maker and first cause," discussing the utility of religion and setting forth the principles that characterized societies that were especially religious.<sup>61</sup>

When in chapter 124 of the *Apologética* Las Casas introduced the subject of the peoples of Florida, which he called a "great and long land" containing "immense nations,"<sup>62</sup> he made two points: European explorers discovered neither idolatry nor sacrifices there, and "the one who knew most about it was Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, a gentleman born in Jerez de la Frontera."<sup>63</sup> Anyone familiar with Las Casas's penchant for suppressing the names of men he did not admire ("*un cierto capitán*," "*un cierto vecino y procurador*")<sup>64</sup> understands the honor thus bestowed, and it is confirmed by the extent of his borrowings, for Las Casas appropriated and synthesized a great deal of information from Cabeza de Vaca's *relación* in his chapters 206 and 207 on the customs of the Indians of Florida.

At the end of chapter 206, Las Casas explains that he had taken the customs he described from Cabeza de Vaca's account and that they came from many groups, not all customs pertaining to each group.<sup>65</sup> His impressively careful reading of Cabeza de Vaca is borne out by his observation that all of the groups about whose customs Cabeza de Vaca wrote were near the coast of the "*mar del Norte*" and neighboring areas but

<sup>58</sup> Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 206.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lafaye, "Los 'milagros' de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, 1527-1536," in *Mesías, cruzada, utopías: El judeo-cristianismo en las sociedades ibéricas*, trans. Juan José Utrilla (México, D. F., 1984), 65-84; Luis Weckmann, *La Herencia Medieval de México*, 2 vols. (México, D. F., 1984), I, 337-338; Enrique Pupo-Walker, "Pesquisas para una Nueva Lectura de los *Naufragios*, de Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca," *Revista iberoamericana*, LIII (1987), 517-539, esp. 519.

<sup>60</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, I, 236-244.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Las Casas, *Obras escogidas*, V, 148, 290, thus referred respectively to Alvarado in his narration of the massacre in Mexico in the *Brevísima relación* and to Bernal Díaz in his response to the latter's petition to rescind the order to liberate Indian slaves ("Representación al Consejo de Indias contra las pretensiones de un procurador enviado por la provincia de Guatemala").

<sup>65</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, II, 248.

not very far inland.<sup>66</sup> Scholarship on Cabeza de Vaca's route of travel and locations of long stays confirms the correctness of Las Casas's assessment.<sup>67</sup> While Cabeza de Vaca identified groups with great specificity when possible, Las Casas simply referred to them as "*algunas naciones de aquellas tierras*" and tended to combine them.

In order to appreciate Las Casas's ethnic descriptions in chapter 206, we must look first at chapter 207, in which Las Casas sums up these peoples as "*barbarísimas gentes*," with the purpose of arguing that they represented the first stage of human development through which all civilized peoples had passed and that they could be brought to civil order and Christianity at least as easily as the ancient Greeks, because they were rational men with the same "qualities, dispositions, and natural human inclinations that were shared naturally and universally by all men."<sup>68</sup> Then he presented, from among peoples more and less ancient, a series of counterparts to the "Floridian" customs described in chapter 206. These included the consumption of wild fruits and reptiles and other "vile and abominable things," the killing of infant daughters in order to avoid marrying them to members of enemy nations, the ceaseless labors of women at the hearth and in the field, homosexual marriages, drunkenness, and thievery.

This chapter, in which Las Casas declared that "it is proven that many ancient peoples had customs as barbarous and more so than those of the Indians," provides the key to the way Las Casas read and reinscribed Cabeza de Vaca's account. His hopping from one of Cabeza de Vaca's clusters of description to another, as well as his reordering of the discussion, was done in order to set forth certain notorious customs and then destigmatize them with equally and more shocking historical examples. In other words, he used examples of scandalous customs from Cabeza de Vaca in chapter 206 in order to undermine them in chapter 207. But this does not fully describe his strategy. At the same time, in chapter 206, he interspersed these reprehensible practices with others that, as described by Cabeza de Vaca, were exemplary in a positive sense.

The laudable customs and traits of the Floridians were, in order of appearance, monogamy (except among shamans, whose polygamy was accepted and whose wives lived together in harmony), gift giving by a bridegroom to his future in-laws while refraining from personal contact with them after marriage, divorce by mutual agreement of childless couples and its prohibition among those with children, great affection for children and year-long mourning for their death, certain curative practices of the natives found to be effective by the Spaniards,<sup>69</sup> solemn mourning customs, sexual abstinence during pregnancy and for two years after giving birth, breastfeeding to the child's age of twelve years due to nutritional need, and the retirement of women from usual chores while menstruating.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> See Davenport and Wells, "The First Europeans"; Campbell and Campbell, *Historic Indian Groups*. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*. II, 249.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 246.

To this he added descriptions of great physical stamina, high spirits, ritualized greetings and gift giving, great skill in war, great ability to suffer physical hardship, the use of women as mediators to settle disputes between warring groups, and other means of settling disputes without resorting to arms.<sup>70</sup> Appreciating Cabeza de Vaca's firsthand experience as an invaluable source, Las Casas was able to make some of his most subtle and potentially most effective arguments in favor of the "foundations and principles and natural inclinations toward the sciences and virtues" that these "very barbarous people" possessed and shared with the rest of humanity.<sup>71</sup>

Here we see—the more clearly for having reconstructed the compositional process—Las Casas's remarkable achievement. Through exhaustive comparisons of cultural descriptions, he argued that observable behavior was not a sound basis for judging one society as inferior or superior to another. He added, for those who nevertheless insisted on making judgments on this basis, that he could provide as many examples of admirable behavior among the "barbarian" groups of the Indies as among the civil orders of Europeans and the ancients. Cabeza de Vaca had provided Las Casas with a cornucopia of information that he could exploit and then make irrelevant.

Las Casas also drew from Cabeza de Vaca an authoritative elucidation of Amerindian readiness to receive Christianity that undergirded his model of peaceful colonization. Las Casas's pragmatic goal of bringing Amerindian peoples into the Christian fold is never far from the surface of his academic study. The argument that the Amerindians were worthy of Christ and capable of leading virtuous lives was essential to the *Apologetica*, and it was the explicit program of Las Casas's first major work, *Del único modo de atraer a la gente a la verdadera religión* (circa 1534).<sup>72</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 247–248.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 249. Another of the themes Las Casas had to address, "how it happened that some peoples came to eat human flesh," also prompted him to call in Cabeza de Vaca as a witness for the defense. He cited Cabeza de Vaca in order to argue that cannibalism was seldom practiced by the Amerindians and that "it was to them horrible and abominable, as it was to the peoples of Florida." Echoing Cabeza de Vaca's words, he observed that the Spaniards (on the island of Malhado) who ate one another out of extreme hunger produced such scandal among the Indians that "if they [the Indians] had seen it at the beginning, as they saw it after the fact, they would surely have killed the Spaniards"; Las Casas, *Apologetica* (chap. 205), II, 243; Cabeza de Vaca, *Naufragios* (ch. 14), 75. Las Casas added that he did not know if Cabeza de Vaca had participated in this practice but that in that "sad journey," when someone would die, the others would cut him up and consume the pieces in order to survive; *Apologetica* (chap. 205), II, 243. Thus he gently questioned Cabeza de Vaca's claim about his own comportment.

<sup>72</sup> Las Casas, *Del único modo de atraer a todos los pueblos a la verdadera religión*, intro. Lewis U. Hanke, preface and transcription by Agustín Millares Carlo, Spanish translation by Antenógenes Santamaría (México, D. F., 1942). For a newly reconstructed version of the complete work see Las Casas, *The Only Way to Draw All People to a Living Faith*, ed. Helen Rand Parish, trans. Francis Patrick Sullivan (Mahwah, N. J., 1992), 214.



On this score, it is evident that Las Casas carefully pondered Cabeza de Vaca's experience, as reported in Mexico in 1536 and at court in 1537. The former's peaceful conversion experiment in Verapaz from 1537 to 1550<sup>73</sup> followed the writing of *Del único modo*.<sup>74</sup> Las Casas's sensitive readings of Cabeza de Vaca in the *Apologética* attest both to the importance he ascribed to Cabeza de Vaca's experience and to its potential impact in orienting future missionary efforts.

That Las Casas saw powerful consequences issuing from Cabeza de Vaca's testimony is manifested by the frequency with which he cited that testimony on crucial topics: the absence of such obstacles to the faith as idolatry and sacrifice, the intuitive worship of the Judeo-Christian god under another name and the aptitude for conversion, the good treatment received by the unarmed Spaniards from the peoples of Jalisco. Las Casas's readings of Cabeza de Vaca on these issues transformed the latter's interpretation of his historical experience into a theoretical argument about the spiritual worth of all peoples; utilizing the empirical in the service of the theoretical, he constructed the theoretical with pragmatic consequences in view. Here we examine briefly this other use Las Casas made of Cabeza de Vaca's text, not as a source of ethnographic information but as an authority on the natives' readiness to receive Christianity.

Although overlooked until recently,<sup>75</sup> the efforts made by Cabeza de Vaca and his companions to resettle the native populations of Nueva Galicia (northwestern Mexico) became the outstanding lesson of his book. The use that Las Casas made of Cabeza de Vaca highlights this original purpose.<sup>76</sup> Most significant, Las Casas began his treatment of Cabeza de Vaca's experience with the latter's most comprehensive and impassioned statement to his king. Starting at the climax of Cabeza de Vaca's account in order to begin his own discussion of the inhabitants of Florida, Las Casas confirmed and further empowered Cabeza de Vaca's words. Las Casas declared:

This [gentleman], having lived and walked through those lands nine continuous years, in the report that he gave to the Emperor about them, says these words, nearly at the end: "God our Lord in His infinite mercy grant that in the days of Your Majesty, and under your power and authority, these peoples come to be, truly and with their complete will, subject to the true Lord who created and redeemed them, which we take it for very certain to happen thus, and that Your Majesty is to be the one to put this into effect, which will not be

<sup>73</sup> See Hanke, *Spanish Struggle*, 77–80, and Wagner and Parish, *Life and Writings*, 83–93.

<sup>74</sup> Appendix I, in Las Casas, *The Only Way*, ed. Parish, trans. Sullivan.

<sup>75</sup> See Adorno, "The Negotiation of Fear in Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios*," *Representations*, No. 33 (1991), 163–199.

<sup>76</sup> Gómara commented, in reference to the failure of the Narváez expedition: "Whoever fails to populate the lands does not make a good conquest; without conquering the territories, the people will not be converted. Thus, the maxim of the conqueror must be to people the land"; *Hispania Victrix* (chap. 46), 67.

difficult to do, because two thousand leagues that we walked over the land and over sea in the boats, and ten other months when, after leaving our captivity, without stopping we traversed the land, we found neither sacrifices nor idolatry." These are his words.<sup>77</sup>

The immediate context for Cabeza de Vaca's remarks was his description of the resettlement of war-ravaged Nueva Galicia, the conquest of which by Nuño de Guzmán in 1530–1531 was detailed in Las Casas's *Brevisima relación*.<sup>78</sup> Cabeza de Vaca did not discuss that conquest per se, but his account of coming upon the first signs of Christians, at the Río Yaqui, is immediately followed by a description of devastated lands and peoples; settlements had been burned, men, women, and children carried off into slavery, agricultural lands abandoned.<sup>79</sup> The Cabeza de Vaca party's reunion with their countrymen produced a dispute with one of Guzmán's lieutenants, Diego de Alcaraz, who was capturing Indians for sale as slaves. Subsequently, the governor Melchior Díaz enlisted the four newcomers in efforts to resettle the inhabitants of Culiacán.<sup>80</sup> After baptizing the children of the lords, instructing the people to build churches and adorn them with crosses, and securing a promise from the *alcalde* that there would be no more slaving, they left Culiacán and went further south to the settlement of San Miguel. There Indians were waiting to inform them that natives had resettled; two weeks later, Alcaraz arrived and made the same report.<sup>81</sup> At this point in his narrative Cabeza de Vaca addressed the emperor with the words that Las Casas repeated verbatim, as quoted above.

Las Casas then carefully reiterated how, once united with Spaniards in the territory of "the kingdoms of Jalisco,"<sup>82</sup> Cabeza de Vaca had conversed

<sup>77</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, I, 428. Las Casas here confirms that it was the full *relación* that Cabeza de Vaca gave to the emperor in 1537—that is, the text that was published in 1542—rather than the shorter, undated *relación* in the Archivo de Indias (*Colección de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquista y colonización de las posesiones españolas en América y Oceanía*, 44 vols. [Madrid, 1864–1884], XIV, 269–279). Furthermore, Las Casas's (*Apologética*, I, 431) reference to the peaceful settlement of the River Plate and 400 leagues all around, as well as the disposition of its people to accept Christianity, suggests that he was working from the 1555 edition of the *relación*, which was published with Pero Hernández's *Comentarios* on Cabeza de Vaca's experience as *adelantado* and governor of Río de la Plata.

<sup>78</sup> Las Casas discussed in detail and condemned those conquests. One principal episode in Nuño de Guzmán's conquest was the torture and execution of the Cazonci, the lord of Michoacán. Las Casas's account was gathered from sworn testimony taken shortly afterward (*Brevisima relación*, 154–155); "Fragmento del proceso de residencia instituido contra Nuño de Guzmán, en averiguación del tormento y muerte que mandó dar a Caltzontzin, rey de Mechoacan," in Alvarado, *Proceso de residencia contra Pedro de Alvarado*, ed. José F. Ramírez, paleography by Ignacio López Rayón (México, D. F., 1847), 264.

<sup>79</sup> Adorno and Pautz, trans., *Account . . . of what occurred*, fol. 57r.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 59r–61v.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, fols. 62v–63r.

<sup>82</sup> Las Casas uses the indigenous name here, but in chap. 210 (*Apologética*, II,

with the natives of this area and discovered that they worshipped “a man who was in the sky” whom they called Aguar and to whom they attributed the “creation of the world and everything in it.”<sup>83</sup> Here Las Casas took advantage of Cabeza de Vaca’s interpretation of the shared identity of the Indian and Christian deities. Las Casas told how Cabeza de Vaca had assured the natives that Christians worshipped that same deity, that the Christians called him God, and that the natives should do as well, to which the natives agreed.<sup>84</sup> Thus Las Casas was able to make one of his central arguments about the ancient, intuitive knowledge that the Indians had of the Judeo-Christian god by relying on Cabeza de Vaca’s account. He concluded: “Great and very great is the propinquity, aptitude, and disposition that those peoples have to come to the knowledge of their and our true Lord.” He suggested that every true lover of God would relish the opportunity to serve in the evangelization of those “starving and ignorant and well-disposed peoples.”<sup>85</sup> In this light, the reasons for Las Casas’s praise of Cabeza de Vaca are clear: both Cabeza de Vaca’s knowledge based on firsthand observation and his experience of peaceful colonization made him an exemplar of Las Casas’s ideals. The information provided by Cabeza de Vaca’s interpretation of his experience with the natives of Florida became for Las Casas not only eyewitness testimony but also moral authority, which he put to the service of his own far-reaching philosophical arguments.

### CONCLUSION: FROM TESTIMONY TO AUTHORITY

The literary practices examined here were never a matter of simple textual citation, for the need to insist upon or to graft on precedents of experience preserved through interpretations fixed in writing yielded both productive and subversive results. Many times it led the protagonists of history to take pen in hand on finding their role in historic events ignored or distorted in the writings of others. Thus we have seen how Bernal Díaz recalled his decades-past experience in light of the way professional historians had appropriated it and given it new meanings, as he sought to recover those that had been lost. Yet in recovering his own experiences he colored them according to his current self-interest. When he took issue with Gómara and Las Casas, it was to dismiss their accounts, undermining them in his own “true history” of the conquest. When Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca wrote his final report to the emperor on his years of travail in North America (although quite close in time to the events recorded), he

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258) he gives the colonial name, not without a barb: “The third not very small province and kingdom is that of Jalisco, which the Spaniards named Nueva Galicia, much more worthy of being praised than the old Galicia.”

<sup>83</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, I, 428; compare Adorno and Pautz, trans., *Account . . . of what occurred*, fol. 62r.

<sup>84</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, I, 429; Adorno and Pautz, trans., *Account . . . of what occurred*, fol. 62r.

<sup>85</sup> Las Casas, *Apologética*, II, 126 (chap. 168).

did it with the knowledge of the conquest of New Spain and New Galicia. His original account of his experience was already mediated by the reports he had heard of those events. There is no doubt that he was truly moved by what he had heard and seen in Nueva Galicia and that his literary effort was motivated by a vision of compassion and justice much broader than the narrow needs of his own failed conquest experience.

When Las Casas appropriated Cabeza de Vaca's convictions and observations into his own, he too performed acts of reinscription that served purposes consonant with his long-held views on the Amerindians and the best ways to evangelize them. In Las Casas's myriad verbatim borrowings from Cabeza de Vaca, the latter's authority is cited again and again, although not always in the ways we are accustomed to seeing it in modern scholarship. More than exploiting an author's work, this type of textual borrowing reconstitutes it, either as evidence to be displayed or as testimony to be refuted in the second author's work.

In the case of the chronicles of the Indies, this practice had two sources. One is the model of erudite written histories; the other is the written proceedings that accompanied and constituted the work of the Royal Council of the Indies and the Audiencias. Authority and the notions of evidence and testimony are pertinent to both the historiographic and the juridical traditions. Erudite works such as Gómara's history and Las Casas's *Apologética* are exemplary and novel because they draw the traditions together, relying on ancient authority and contemporary eyewitness testimony. The discursive encounter of Spain and America was characterized by this conjunction of history and law, the confluence of historical authority and juridical testimony. In that fluid zone there was room for movement, and distinctions blurred. Thus, even though in his prologue to the *Historia de las Indias* Las Casas had roundly eliminated from the noble realm of the historian's art all but the most learned, reserving the domain preferably for priests, we find that in the *Apologética historia sumaria* he privileged not only the testimony but also the authority of one who would have been so categorically excluded. By 1632, the publication of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España* revealed that the old dichotomy between testimony (*de re*) and authority (*de dicto*) was breaking down. A century of writing on the Indies had shifted the boundaries of the discursive encounters and made possible the incorporation of authors undreamed of a hundred years earlier.