

How to Write the
History of the New World
*Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in
the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*

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*To Sandra, who has sheltered me through the fiercest storms.
To Sebastián and Andrea, whose eyes caress my soul.
To Claudio and Consuelo, who gave birth to me twice.*

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Changing European Interpretations of the Reliability of Indigenous Sources

Forced to choose between contradictory Spanish and indigenous accounts of the death of Moctezuma Xocoxtli (c. 1502–20 in the *Codex Mendoza*), the sixteenth-century Spanish Dominican friar Diego Durán (d. 1588), who between 1576 and 1581 wrote a history of the Mexica and treatises on their divinatory calendars and monthly religious festivities, chose the latter. Spaniards had traditionally argued that his own people had stoned Moctezuma to death. The indigenous sources that Durán had before his eyes told a slightly different story. After routing Cortés's army and recapturing Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Mexica, the natives found Moctezuma lying in a pool of blood, stabbed five times in the chest, surrounded by the corpses of several nobles, who had also been murdered. Although this account was an obvious challenge to official Spanish historiography, Durán saw himself with no choice but to follow it, for the story was recounted in native documents that used Mesoamerican script. "Had their history not said it, had the paintings that I have seen not certified it," Durán argued, "it would have been difficult for me to believe [the account of Moctezuma's death]. However I am obliged to put what the [indigenous] authors I have followed in this history tell me, in writing and painting."¹ In the historical sections of his works, Durán limited himself to translating Mexica manuscripts, often uncritically.² Durán's choice when confronted with two contradictory accounts of the death of Moctezuma, one left by Spanish witnesses and the other in documents recorded in Mexica script, typifies the great authority that European scholars accorded Amerindian historical sources in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

Durán's methods contrast sharply with those followed by eighteenth-century European scholars. While in exile in Italy, the Spanish American Jesuit Francisco Xavier Clavijero (1731–1787) had written a history of ancient Mexico, *Storia antica del Messico* (1780–81), to denounce skeptics such as De Pauw, Robertson, and Raynal and to reconstruct the many cycles of civilizations in Mesoamerica that had culminated with the Aztecs. When a

translation of Clavijero's book appeared in London in 1787, the translator, Charles Cullen, expressed high hopes for its reception in English. Convinced that "partiality, prejudice, ignorance, and credulity have occasioned [sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish historians] to blend so many absurdities and improbabilities with their accounts that it has not been merely difficult but altogether impossible to ascertain the truth," Cullen argued that not even the efforts of Robertson to find what "was naturally curious or politically interesting" in the history of the New World had been enough to bring order to the subject.³ Although Robertson had struggled mightily to "extricate facts from the confusion of different [Spanish] authors [in whose works] what is true does not always appear possible and what appears probable is not always true," the Scot had ultimately been constrained by distance, both geographical and cultural, which had kept him away from "essential documents which are preserved in archives of the New World." Clavijero, however, had been born in Mexico, where he had spent forty years and studied those "essential documents" that others had failed to consult, namely, the "historical paintings [of the Amerindians] and other monuments of antiquity."⁴

English critics, who denounced the translation for the precise reasons that had moved Cullen to publish it in the first place, soon dashed Cullen's high hopes. The year Cullen's translation appeared, an anonymous reviewer in the *London Review* declared Clavijero's history worthless. Taking his cues from Bolingbroke and Hume, the reviewer first argued that writing the "earliest part of the history" of even those nations that had once "lorded over the universe" was in itself a waste of time, an activity for pedants like Milton, whose "mighty genius and immense learning [had] sunk under the weight of the annals of the Heptarchy." Good history, the reviewer maintained, was European modern history, capable of teaching moral lessons to the present. The history of the Aztecs involved barbarians and had no moral to teach. The reviewer's second criticism went to the heart of Clavijero's historiography, for the Jesuit had presented his work as the product of many years of study and meditation on Amerindian documents housed in the Mexican libraries of the Jesuit order. "The Abbé," the reviewer maintained, had built on no better foundation than "records [of] pictures either painted or wrought with party-coloured feathers." Built on such flimsy foundations, Clavijero's work was "an enormous structure of two solid quartos [in the English translation] stuffed with impossible facts, absurd exaggerations, and such a barbarous jargon of uncouth names, as to be within one degree of absolute unintelligibility."⁵ For the reviewer, the problem with Clavijero's work lay in its historio-

graphical assumptions. Clavijero had presented the dynastic genealogies, wars, conquests and even royal speeches of the peoples of central Mexico, allegedly going all the way back to the year 596 C.E. The history of England during the same years, the reviewer claimed, was not remotely as tidy as that recounted by Clavijero for Mexico. Yet England, unlike Mexico, had written historical records. Clavijero, the reviewer maintained, had been moved by patriotic enthusiasm and had projected onto Amerindian "paintings" his own unbridled imagination. Mexican indigenous records were primitive paintings, not writings, and therefore utterly unreliable. "All the history, therefore, anterior to the Conquest by Cortés, the Abbé must forgive us if we receive with very great distrust."⁶

One might argue that having thrown out Spanish records, late-eighteenth-century critics could have used indigenous sources as an alternative, more ancient, and, thus, more reliable form of evidence. The most elementary principle of historical criticism put forth by Renaissance philologists held that historians should always look for primary sources. If it was clear that Spaniards like Durán had derived their facts about the history of the peoples of the New World from indigenous records, why did eighteenth-century conjunctural historians not follow the advice of Renaissance philologists? Why not return to the original sources to do away with the previous layers of Spanish interpretations in the same way that Renaissance humanists had cleared away the accretions added by medieval commentators from classical sources?

The English review of Clavijero's work suggests that the reason for this refusal can be found in changing perceptions of the value of indigenous systems of writing. The various Mesoamerican scripts (Nahua, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Maya) refused neat classifications: each included combinations of pictograms, ideograms, logograms, and even phonograms (the latter appeared more prominently in Maya writing systems and in sixteenth-century Mexico manuscripts [Figs. 5.8 and 5.9]).⁷ Inca quipus were even more puzzling: knots woven along strings of different colors, which in turn ramified themselves endlessly (Fig. 2.7).⁸ It could be argued, therefore, that the shift from Durán's willingness to believe Amerindian sources to the refusal of the reviewer of Clavijero's history to give them credit was the result of some major change in European perception of the reliability of nonalphabetical scripts in keeping historical records. However, the most significant reason lies somewhere else, as seen in another review in an English journal, this time of one of Alexander von Humboldt's works.

In an 1816 article in the *Quarterly Review* devoted to an analysis of the English edition of Humboldt's *Vues des cordillères*, the anonymous reviewer

treated the book harshly. Humboldt was presented as a disorganized and creditless thinker who had embraced Spanish interpretations of Mexican indigenous sources and had therefore drawn unwarranted conclusions about ancient connections between Asia and Mexico. Mexican history had been lost forever, the reviewer suggested, owing partly to the ignorance of early Spanish observers and partly to the impossibility of understanding the meaning of extant indigenous documents. Spaniards had failed as cultural translators, and no reliable interpretations of the scripts could now be offered. Yet the reviewer was not about to summon scholars to condemn indigenous writings to historiographical oblivion. In fact, he applauded Humboldt for his efforts at collecting indigenous Mexican sources. "We do not mean to deny," the reviewer said, "that the first attempts, however rude, of an unenlightened people to register events, communicate ideas, and render visible the operations of the mind, are void of interest; on the contrary we consider them as so many landmarks by which we trace, in the most interesting manner, the progress of the intellectual faculties of man."⁹

For the reviewer, the value of collecting and studying Mexican writings lay not in the information that they stored, but in what they revealed about the development of the mental faculties. Humboldt's efforts to collect Mexican codices were therefore commendable. According to this new form of understanding indigenous documents, in burning Amerindian sources, the Spanish conquistadors had robbed the scholarly world not of accurate historical records, but of tools for studying the ways in which the mind had developed its powers of abstraction over time. Renaissance scholars thought that indigenous scripts, however limited, registered historical events. Enlightenment literati thought that scripts were material evidence upon which to reconstruct conjectural histories of the development of the mind. In this chapter, I study this crucial transformation of European consciousness.

Primitive Scripts, Reliable Historical Documents

When Francisco Hernández (1514–1587) was sent to the New World by Philip II in the 1570s to collect information on new species of plants for the royal pharmacy, he had no idea that he would have to put together a massive natural history of the flora of central Mexico against the will of indigenous informants, who constantly misled him and lied about the properties of plants. In a poem dedicated to the great Spanish humanist Arias Montano, Hernández complained that local shamans lied about the names and properties of plants, and that he had to depend on his own arts and on God's

divine providence to cure the sick.¹⁰ Despite this frustrating experience, Hernández not only completed his natural history of plants and animals but also wrote a treatise on Mexican antiquities, largely based on the information collected by Franciscan friars from Nahuatl scribes.¹¹ Read from our modern perspective, one is startled by the historiographical assumptions of sixteenth-century Spanish historians of the New World. Against a background of generalized doubt about the reliability of Amerindian informants, Spaniards by and large believed that indigenous documents in nonalphabetical scripts kept trustworthy historical records.¹² Sixteenth-century Spanish historians like Hernández and Durán not only studied, collected, and translated native sources but, more important, thought that those sources contained reliable historical narratives.

This interpretation runs contrary to that recently offered by Walter Mignolo, who has argued that unlike the Greeks, who grounded wisdom on orally transmitted forms of knowledge, sixteenth-century Spaniards grounded knowledge on alphabetical writing and the book. Since God had transmitted his dispensation through the written word, societies that lacked "writing" were considered not only outside the pale of civilization but of humanity as well. Mignolo has argued that in the sixteenth century, Spaniards looked down upon Aztec and Inca systems of writing as primitive. Alphabetical writing was the only script thought capable of recording the voice accurately and therefore of engraving society's memories and laws. By giving room to the loose oral interpretation of scribes, all other forms of writing led to ambiguity in the transmission of historical records. Amerindian nonalphabetical scripts were, therefore, considered incapable of accumulating knowledge, which was the foundation of civilization.¹³ Moreover, not having found alphabetical records of the Roman type constituting an orderly chronological narrative in the New World, the Spaniards thought that the Amerindians had no history. Spanish scholars accorded Inca and Aztec documents the same level of epistemological validity that they accorded coins or medals.¹⁴

Mignolo has also argued that when Inca and Aztec records were seen as actual "books," they were either dismissed or burned because they recorded knowledge believed to have been dictated by the devil. Alphabetical script was perceived to be the only medium "in which truth finds its warranty."¹⁵ Since sixteenth-century Spanish scholars already operated under an evolutionary view of writing, such views led in turn to an evolutionary view of the book in which medieval meanings of "reading," to discern in an oral context, as in the process involved in reading Mesoamerican scripts and Inca quipus, and of "book" and "text," to "make," or "to weave," as in the case of the Inca quipus,

were ignored.¹⁶ Renaissance Spanish scholars had forgotten the context in which writing took place in their recent medieval past, a context dominated by orally transmitted information. Sixteenth-century Spanish authors thus misunderstood not only Amerindian systems of writing but also the history of their own cultural tradition. They classified Inca quipus and Mesoamerican "paintings" as objects, not books.

According to Mignolo, only a few challenges emerged to these views. In his *Delta historia dieci dialoghi* (1560), for example, the Italian scholar Francesco Patrizi (1520–1597) called for the creation of a new historiography that privileged images and other nonwritten sources over written ones. Patrizi's views, to be sure, went unattended.¹⁷ The Amerindians themselves, particularly those trained by Spanish humanist friars, voiced another challenge to the Spanish Christian paradigm of literacy. Ivo Nahuatl chroniclers, Francisco de San Anón Muñón Chimalpam Cuantlehuamitzin (1579–1660) and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (1578–1650), strove to show that Mesoamerican and European historical records were equivalent. They collected Mexican codices and translated them verbatim into the Roman alphabet, both in Nahuatl and Spanish. Moreover, Alva Ixtlilxochitl insisted that ancient Nahuatl historians and systems of keeping historical records (codices, songs, and rhetorical speeches) were among the most reliable and accurate in the world.¹⁸

For all his value at calling scholarly attention to the role that the ideology of literacy has played in colonial and postcolonial societies as a tool of "Western" domination, Mignolo, however, is somewhat misleading.¹⁹ Take, for example, the case of Alva Ixtlilxochitl. Mignolo presents him as an isolated challenge to Spanish views of literacy, yet Alva Ixtlilxochitl was himself a product of the very ideology Mignolo purports to describe. The Franciscan-trained Alva Ixtlilxochitl, a member of the Nahuatl nobility. Although his political interests were admittedly different from those of his teachers (to advance the claims of his Amerindian lineage in the cramped and contested space of indigenous politics in colonial Mexico), his techniques and sensibility with respect to collecting and glossing Nahuatl sources were no different out. Among Alva Ixtlilxochitl's friends was Juan de Torquemada (1557–1664), a Spanish friar who set out to rewrite available interpretations of Mesoamerican history upon a detailed reading of dozens of Mesoamerican codices. Torquemada and Alva Ixtlilxochitl not only shared the same historiographical views but also admired each other's scholarship.²⁰

There are numerous other examples offered by Mignolo himself that appear to undermine certain of his views. The work of the Franciscan friar

Bernardino de Sahagún (d. 1590), whose efforts at collating and translating Nahuatl documents written in local scripts culminated in the creation of an extremely thorough encyclopedia of Nahuatl lore, the Florentine Codex, in Mignolo's own words, showed that "alphabetic and picture writing systems were part of [a] dialogue."²¹ Sahagún organized into a European encyclopedic format the information he obtained in many cycles of interviewing local scribes. The very passages of the Florentine Codex quoted by Mignolo in which Sahagún describes his methodology reveal that the Franciscan friar took Nahuatl sources very seriously, and that Sahagún understood his task to be that of a humanist philologist working with classical and patristic sources, namely, the culturally and historically informed exegesis of and commentary on words and texts.²²

There are also passages by Toribio de Benavente, Motolinía (d. 1568), one of the first Franciscans to arrive in Mexico and a leading figure in the initial stages of the "spiritual conquest" of Mexico, characterized by large-scale Amerindian conversion. As Mignolo demonstrates, Motolinía's *Memoriales* (1536–43) classified the books of the Aztecs into five different categories — ritual calendars; books of dreams; auguries; "horoscopes" used to determine the names of children; and historical annals — only to call on friars to destroy them. Such passages appear to confirm all and every one of Mignolo's assertions. Yet Mignolo is also aware that in those passages, Motolinía spares from destruction one of the five categories of Aztec books, namely, historical annals. Mexican historical books, according to Motolinía, were not inspired by the devil; they were reliable historical narratives and told the truth about the past.²³

Motolinía's distinction between two types of documents was typical of Spanish views of Mesoamerican sources. On the one hand, there were "painted" indigenous documents that recorded religious ceremonies, divination rituals, and cosmogonies, which were to be destroyed and burned — paradoxically, out of fear, not contempt. On the other hand, there were historical annals, assumed to be accurate and associated with indigenous writing. The case of Diego de Landa (1524–1579), also studied by Mignolo, is most illuminating. Landa was a sixteenth-century Franciscan friar who, after spending many years winning the minds and bodies of the Maya for God and Spain, became the provincial of the Franciscan order in the Yucatan peninsula, and also a zealous destroyer of Amerindian books. As a Franciscan provincial, he carried out one of the harshest extirpation campaigns against Amerindian idolatry ever witnessed in sixteenth-century Spanish America. After having been informed that Maya converts had used their knowledge of Christianity

to engage in pagan ceremonies in Christian temples, which reportedly involved ritual crucifixions of infants and relapses into ritual cannibalism, in 1562, Landa unleashed all the power of the Church to prosecute the culprits, including the use of systematic torture to extract confessions, causing 155 Mayans to die and some 30 others to commit suicide. Landa, to be sure, collected and burned all the Maya ritual books that he managed to lay his hands on, twenty-seven in all.²⁴ Yet he simultaneously scoured the Yucatan peninsula looking for stelae from which to draw the history of the ancient kingdom of Mayapan. Landa was convinced that the Maya kept very accurate historical records because they had developed sophisticated calendars and chronologies.²⁵ It seems that he was able to read Maya sources, and his testimony is confirmed by another contemporary Franciscan, Antonio Ciudad Real (1551–1617), who reported friars capable of reading and writing in Maya script.²⁶ Landa's scholarship on Maya writing and historiography, which included a list of syllabic phonograms and an understanding that Maya stelae were documents that recorded the deeds of historical figures, was ignored for many generations. It has only been in the twentieth century that scholars have begun to read Maya stelae as historical documents, not as ancient cosmogonies, and to interpret Maya glyphs as Landa had originally suggested.²⁷

One problem with Mignolo's interpretation of both Motolinía and Landa is that he assumes that Spaniards thought that *reliability* was a function of the script in which the accounts were written. Yet it seems that for Motolinía, reliability was rather a function of who had penned the book. According to Motolinía, Mexican horoscopes, books of feasts, and accounts of rites and ceremonies were untrustworthy because, unlike the Gospels, the devil and his agents had written them. Historical annals, however, were documents written by Amerindians. It is true that according to Motolinía, Mexican systems of writing left room for conflicting interpretations and contradictory accounts, because they were based on an oral exegesis of "paintings."²⁸ Yet Motolinía's concern with the relationship between a script that required oral commentary and reliability lay less in his patronizing view of Amerindian scripts and more in his grasp of the age-old politics of ethnicity in the Central Valley of Mexico.

Motolinía knew that there were many competing indigenous historical narratives in circulation. Not unlike the historical records kept by most other peoples, Mesoamerican historical annals were part of elite propaganda, campaigns of dynastic self-aggrandizement and manipulation that routinely included the invention and obliteration of historical data. In fact, according to Joyce Marcus, the need for state propaganda was the prime reason that writ-

ing developed in Mesoamerica: "Mesoamerican writing was both a tool and a by-product of this competition for prestige and leadership positions."²⁹ Motolinía understood that Mesoamerican historical narratives were contradictory, because they presented the views of opposing ethnic groups. He recorded Aztlahuatl and Tlaxcalan versions of the history of central Mexico along with that of the Mexica. But instead of declaring as hopeless the effort of translating local histories into Western historiographical molds, Motolinía appointed himself as final arbiter of which version was the closest to the "truth." Motolinía was convinced that despite their drawbacks, Mexican historical records were reliable, because the natives had developed accurate calendars and systems of chronology, as well as reliable ways of transmitting oral testimonies over the generations.³⁰

The sixteenth-century Spanish approach to indigenous scripts was somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, most authors refused to grant Inca and Mesoamerican systems of writing the same authority as the Latin alphabet, which was considered ideal for transmitting historical data, because it did not depend on any oral exegesis. Yet these same authors did not hesitate to consider the historical information stored in quipus and codices as trustworthy. Bartolomé de Las Casas typifies this attitude. In his *Apologética historia sumaria* (before 1559), Las Casas defended the rationality of the Amerindians against those who sought to portray them as examples of Aristotle's natural slaves. Las Casas set out to prove that the Amerindians had been fully capable of ruling their own individual polities (monastic prudence), as well as their own political communities. Moreover, he argued that the Inca and Aztec societies had been at least as sophisticated politically and religiously as the classical ancient polities. Yet, according to Las Casas, the natives were "barbarians" because they had lacked "writing." This statement flew in the face of Las Casas's own efforts to prove that the natives had achieved all the required institutions for civilization, including social ranks, monarchies, cities, and complex religious cults. Las Casas drew generously from indigenous sources kept in writings that he denied were such. Other authors contemporary with Las Casas make the contradiction explicit. For example, there is the case of the secular Spanish priest Miguel Cabello de Valboa (1530–1608), whose history of ancient Peru, *Miscelánea Antártica*, written in Quito between 1576 and 1586, remained, like Las Casas's *Apologética historia*, unpublished for many centuries.

Working on the assumption that their lack of writing had cast a veil of obscurity over the true origins of native Americans, and that only indirect forms

of historical reconstruction were possible, Cabello de Valboa sought to demonstrate that they were, in fact, the descendants of Ophir. Noah's great-grandchild, and had lost the ability to write.³¹ He argued that this lack of writing was the primary cause of the plunge into barbarism of Ophir's heirs and of the spread of idolatry among the Andeans, who literally worshipped springs, lakes, mountains, and rocks as their own ancestors.³² However, in spite of his denunciations of the Amerindians' lack of writing, Cabello de Valboa also argued that in their quipus, the Incas had stored complete and accurate records of their history, going back eight hundred years before the European arrival.³³ After attempting to conjecture the travails and migrations of the lineage of Ophir, Cabello de Valboa saw no contradiction in also including in his manuscript the history of the Incas "according to the quipus and Indian annals."³⁴

For all the caveats about Mignolo's thesis, he is right to argue that sixteenth-century Spanish authors considered indigenous systems of writing primitive. He is also right to point out that one needs only to turn to sixteenth-century Spain and Spanish America to find the first conjectural histories of writing that treat hieroglyphs not as a quasi-divinely inspired system of writing but as childish, deeply flawed means of representing speech, a view that scholars have traditionally attributed to the Enlightenment.³⁵ Mesoamerican scripts, a combination of pictograms, ideograms, logograms, and phonograms, never enjoyed the reputation in Spain that Egyptian hieroglyphs had.

In the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth, symbolic scripts possessed far greater status among the learned than alphabetical writing. Egyptian hieroglyphs (and Hebrew letters) were seen as images that synthesized very economically profound truths about the nature of the cosmos and of God. Informed by a Renaissance Neoplatonic revival that posited the world as a theater of symbols in which images held magical powers and in which objects and peoples were connected by a network of microcosmic and macrocosmic analogies, scholars invested considerable energy both in decoding the occult significance of hieroglyphs and in coming up with new ones. However, in spite of the great authority and respectability accorded to hieroglyphs, Spanish scholars failed to find any Neoplatonic symbolism in Mesoamerican scripts, and by the second half of the seventeenth century, the emphasis on the occult and arcane properties of hieroglyphs had given way to a new interest in the unambiguous, open, and more democratic character of alphabetical writing.³⁶

Philology, Collation, and Translation

The work of the Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta typifies sixteenth-century Spanish perceptions of Amerindian scripts. In his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias*, published in Seville in 1590, which went through many reprints and was translated into several European languages, Acosta sought to synthesize several decades of readings of classical and patristic sources and some fifteen years of personal observations in the Indies. Mexico, and, particularly, Peru. Acosta wrote his moral history with several purposes in mind. He included a section on indigenous idolatry to help new missionaries identify and root out what he thought were demonically inspired Amerindian religions. Sections on Inca and Aztec customs and systems of government were written to help colonial magistrates to govern the Amerindians according to their own legal and political traditions, which Acosta believed revealed considerable ingenuity and adaptation to local conditions.³⁷ Finally, Acosta wrote a history of the Incas and Aztecs to prove that “the opinion of those who held the Amerindians to be men lacking in understanding was false.”³⁸ To disprove these false opinions, Acosta used examples of the Amerindians’ advanced scientific understanding. In glowing terms, he described Mexican and Inca calendars, which demonstrated that the Amerindians had known enough astronomy to adjust their years according to the true length of a solar cycle through the ecliptic (365.25 days).³⁹

Curiously, in spite of his desire to demonstrate the ingenuity of the natives, Acosta overlooked the similitude between Egyptian and Mexican systems of writing as conceived in the Renaissance; he could have easily cast Mexican glyphs as Egyptian hieroglyphs symbolizing arcane knowledge. A thinker who relished order, Acosta offered a helpful typology of forms of idolatry according to types of devotional objects. He argued that peoples commonly worshipped things (the sun, thunder, rainbows, stones, trees), animals, dead ancestors, or anthropomorphic objects. Drawing on a long euhemerist tradition, Acosta maintained that most Greek and Roman gods were in fact deified heroes, and that most anthropomorphic Peruvian gods were deified ancestors. Acosta found Mexica idolatry something of a curiosity, however, for the Mexica had many gods that seemed monstrous composites without any resemblance to human figures, creatures concocted solely in the imaginations of their worshippers. These Mexican deities, like Egyptian hieroglyphs, were not simple images but had multiple layers of meaning. The image of Tezcatlipoca, the god of penitence and sin, according to Acosta, had countless symbolic details. A golden ear painted with the glyph for speech in

Mexica writing seemed to represent Tezcatlipoca’s willingness to hear the pleas of sinners; a mirrorlike object in Tezcatlipoca’s left hand stood for his alleged omniscience.⁴⁰ However, Acosta never drew a connection between these images and Mexica systems of writing. Had he drawn such connections, Acosta would have seen that some Mexica ideograms resembled Egyptian ones. Although he found these images in Mexica books, Acosta kept the discussion of Mexica idols and of Mexica systems of writing completely separate. But despite his unconscious severing of indigenous representations of Mexica deities from potentially fruitful Neoplatonic interpretations, Acosta did not dismiss the value of Amerindian scripts in recording reliable historical information.

Acosta, it seems, worried that his readers would take as mere fables his accounts of the migrations, dynastic genealogies, customs, and laws of the Incas and Aztecs. He anticipated that readers would raise a number of difficult questions regarding his work. How, for example, was it possible to talk about Aztec and Inca “laws” when these two peoples lacked alphabetical scripts? After all, the difference between customs and laws lay in that the former were transmitted orally and were transient, whereas the latter were written, codified, and thus stable. How could one vouch for the historicity of Amerindian genealogies and alleged migrations? How could one describe the Incas and Aztec states as young, expanding empires if they lacked systems to keep communication flowing between the center and the peripheries? Without straining the credulity of readers, how could one maintain that the Incas and Aztecs had kept verbatim records of ancient speeches?

Faced with these dilemmas, Acosta prefaced the historical sections of his treatise with a lengthy discussion of systems of writing. To convince skeptical readers that keeping historical records was possible even without the use of alphabetical writing, he offered a tripartite classification of methods “to keep the memory of history and antiquities.”⁴¹ The best and most economical means, to be sure, was an alphabet, which afforded peoples great flexibility in representing foreign languages and time to spare for learning other arts and sciences. “Cifras or memoriales,” conventional symbols that did not represent speech, such as Chinese script, Arabic numbers, and astrological signs, were a second recordkeeping device. “Cifras” allowed peoples of different languages to communicate with one another. Yet they were difficult to adapt to foreign terms, and, moreover, they were extremely time-consuming to learn. Chinese scholars, for example, had great difficulty writing Spanish names and spent their entire lives mastering 120,000 characters, so that they did not have time to pursue any of the scientific and philosophical disci-

plines.¹² The third form of recordkeeping was through “paintings,” a system that Acosta thought “almost all the world has used, for as the second Council of Nicea has argued, painting is the book of idiots who do not know how to read.”¹³ Acosta did not include quipus in this scheme, but he was certain that these knotted strings of the Incas, along with paintings and other mnemonic devices, had allowed Peruvians to keep accurate historical records as well. “It is incredible what [Peruvians] achieved by these means,” Acosta maintained, “for astonishingly quipus can store history, laws, customs, and business transactions as accurately as books.”¹⁴

To satisfy skeptics who argued that lengthy speeches allegedly delivered by ancient warriors and rulers were the invention of imaginative Spaniards, Acosta maintained that the Aztecs had created educational systems to ensure the fidelity of oral transmissions, and that songs were reliable alternative records developed by the Mexica to store historical information. Skeptics “presented with the truth [about these means of accurate oral transmission] could not help but give due credit to the histories [of the Amerindians].”¹⁵ Finally, to address those critical readers ready to pose the embarrassing question of how empires could exist in the New World without systems to relay information between centers and peripheries, Acosta zeroed in on the Mexican and, particularly, Inca institution of couriers, capable of delivering fresh fish to Cuzco in only two days, along, of course, with paintings or quipus.¹⁶

For all his defense of alternative yet reliable forms of recordkeeping devices, Acosta’s history of the Incas proved disappointing. He condensed four centuries of history into some five pages and offered only very sketchy data on the last three generations of Inca rulers. Moreover, Acosta, who had obtained most of this information from an inquiry that the viceroy of Peru, Francisco de Toledo, had recently ordered as part of a larger reform of the vicereally, blamed quipus for the scarcity of historical records.¹⁷

In contrast to his neglect of the Incas, Acosta’s attitude toward the Mexica was rather respectful. He devoted an entire book to recording their migrations and dynastic genealogies, going back to the year 820 C.E. and confidently assured readers that “this [account of the ancient history of Mexico] is not unworthy of being written and read, because it is history and not fables and fictions.”¹⁸ Acosta’s differing attitudes toward quipus and Mesoamerican documents could not have been more striking, and stemmed in part from his awareness of the views of the Catholic Reformation on the historiographical value of images. Acosta also suffered, as Tom Cummins has recently argued, from the Western inability to understand nonmimetic systems of representations such as the quipus.¹⁹ In addition, his trust of Mexican scripts derived

from his correspondence with a Jesuit brother in Mexico, Juan de Tovar (ca. 1546–ca. 1626), who acquainted him with the techniques used by Spanish humanists in New Spain.

After working for many years as a missionary in Peru, Acosta spent a few months in Mexico in 1586 before returning to Spain to write his *History*. In Mexico, he met Tovar, who had long worked on local antiquities and who gave Acosta a history of the Aztecs. Acosta, it seems, reviewed the work and began to suspect that it was based entirely on native accounts, for he wrote to Tovar asking two questions: “What certainty or authority does this relation of history possess?” and, “Since the Indians did not have writing, how could they preserve such quantity and variety of matters for so long a time?”²⁰ Tovar responded quickly, describing Mexican mnemonic and writing systems that had allowed Amerindians to memorize even ancient speeches. He also explained to Acosta how he had gathered his information about the precolonial history of Mexico. The viceroy, “wishing to know these people’s antiquities exactly, ordered a collection of the libraries that [the Amerindians] had on these matters.” Old sages from Tollan, Mexico, and Texcoco had responded to the order by sending many codices, which the viceroy gave to Tovar. After trying to interpret the documents alone and accepting his ignorance, Tovar turned to the local sages. “It was necessary for the wise men of Mexico, Texcoco, and Tollan to meet with me . . . [and after] talking over and discussing the matter in detail with them, I made a thorough history.” Tovar concluded the letter by explaining briefly how Mexican “writing” worked. To be certain that Acosta understood, he included a glossed ritual calendar and a pictographic and logographic manuscript in which the Amerindians had written various Christian prayers, a form of sixteenth-century document that Franciscan friar Jacobo Testera.²¹ Tovar summarized in a paragraph some fifty years of Spanish humanist techniques for studying Mexican antiquities. Acosta was so satisfied with Tovar’s answers that he copied the history compiled by Tovar verbatim.²²

Tovar’s methods were typical of those of sixteenth-century Spanish humanists working on Mexican antiquities. Many Franciscans who came to Mexico had been educated in the universities of Alcalá and Salamanca, which were at the forefront of Spanish humanist culture until the mid sixteenth century. In 1533, the Franciscans founded the college of Santa Cruz of Tlatelolco to train native elites for the priesthood. Before the college sank into oblivion in the face of the growing opposition of the Spanish colonists, the Franciscans managed to train a formidable cadre of indigenous human-

ists, knowledgeable about grammar, logic, and rhetoric, and capable of writing in Latin, Spanish, and Nahuatl in alphabetic script. Both students and teachers set out to translate classical and biblical texts, religious plays and psalms, and works by Spanish mystics in Latin, Spanish, and Nahuatl. This circle also mined the literary corpus of central Mexico.⁵⁵ In 1552, for example, Martín de la Cruz and the Nahuatl philologist Juan Badiano wrote their *Libellus de medicinalibus Indorum herbis* (or *Codex Badiano*), a typical Renaissance herbal. The herbal included a text of “pictograms” of indigenous plants and a Latin translation of the testimony offered by local shamans for the therapeutic value associated with each plant.⁵⁴

Works such the *Libellus* were characteristic of the school of Santa Cruz. The most celebrated of them all is perhaps the Florentine Codex, a multi-volume encyclopedia of Nahuatl lore that took more than twenty-five years to produce (1557–83), and that went through numerous drafts but was never completed. Although Bernardino de Sahagún was responsible for the Florentine Codex, the process of collation, translation, and interpretation of indigenous sources was a collaborative effort in which numerous indigenous philologists participated. Sahagún conceived the encyclopedia as a Renaissance polyglot text with parallel columns in Nahuatl, Latin, and Spanish. Although in the last multilingual version of the encyclopedia (ca. 1579), Mexican scripts lost their quality of “text” and appeared as illustrations to the written word, the column written in Nahuatl in Latin script still occupied the central position in all drafts.⁵⁵

Not only Dominicans (Durán), Franciscans (Motolinía, Sahagún), and Jesuits (Tovar) but city councils and universities sought to translate, collate, gloss, and annotate indigenous documents written in Mesoamerican scripts. In 1558, the city council of Mexico City commissioned Francisco Cervantes de Salazar (ca. 1514–ca. 1575), a professor of rhetoric who was soon to be rector of the University of Mexico, to write a history of the city. Cervantes, who had published and glossed the works of several important Spanish humanists in Spain and Mexico, immediately set out to collect and study native sources. The council summoned native scribes, who created a codex that Cervantes later “translated.”⁵⁶ This was not an isolated event. The will to believe indigenous historical testimony was such that in colonial courts in Mexico, where according to law “two Indians or three women presented as witnesses [were] worth one Spanish man,”⁵⁷ Mesoamerican codices were introduced as legal evidence, particularly in land disputes. When the new University of Mexico opened its doors in 1553 under royal and pontifical auspices, three new chairs were added to the traditional European liberal arts, two on native

languages (Nahuatl and Otomi) and one on native script, the latter to train court interpreters to read indigenous documents.⁵⁸

If Acosta's history of Mexico and his correspondence with Tovar unveiled the density of techniques employed by sixteenth-century Spanish antiquarians in New Spain, Acosta's sketchy history of the Incas hid, rather than uncovered, similar processes taking place in Peru. As in Mexico, missionaries in Peru used the local systems of writing for teaching catechism and prayers, and Amerindians brought quipus to Christian churches to read them aloud during confessions.⁵⁹ As in Mexico, scholars and bureaucrats in Peru also summoned local scribes (*quipucamayos*: the readers and makers of quipus) to “translate” their testimonies into the Latin alphabet.

In 1551, Juan de Betanzos (d. 1576), a Spanish resident of Cuzco, completed his *Suma y narración de los Incas*, which was to remain unpublished for many centuries. Like many other early Spanish colonists, Betanzos married an Inca princess, Doña Angelina Añas Yupanqui (or Angelina Cusimaray). She and her kin told Betanzos their history, recorded in quipus, which he poured into alphabetic writing. Betanzos's account was deeply partisan, designed to advance the dynastic interest of the Inca lineage represented by his Andean relatives. The relevance that Betanzos's *Suma y narración* has for my argument, however, is that Betanzos understood his task as one of translation, not even one of glossing and commentary. Betanzos argued that his history superseded all previous ones written by Spaniards, because his, unlike theirs, was grounded on knowledge of the language and access to local witnesses and scribes. Casting himself as “a truthful and faithful translator,” Betanzos declared: “I have been informed not only by one but by many [scribes; among them] those [who kept annals] of the greatest antiquity and credit.” Unlike other Spanish chroniclers, Betanzos did not even edit the indigenous testimonies he collected. He, for one, did not seek to cast Inca myths of origins and Inca lineages into orderly European dynastic genealogies and biblical chronologies. Moreover, Betanzos's Spanish prose included many terms of validation typical of Quechua, suggesting that he had translated the testimony of his informants verbatim. The end result was a book that faithfully captured the Amerindians' view of the past.⁶⁰

Betanzos was not an isolated figure. Twenty years after him, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa (1532?–1608?) also strove to write an authoritative history of the Incas, *Historia indica* (1572), based on the briefing of dozens of local scribes in Cuzco, Xauxa, and Guamanga. Sarmiento de Gamboa claimed to have interviewed quipucamayos, whose testimony he had verified before a notary and representatives of twelve different Inca lineages, for he

thought that a single trustworthy narrative would finally emerge from comparison of the many alternative histories kept by each of the Cuzco rival lineages.⁶¹ These representatives discussed the narrative publicly and suggested changes to it.⁶²

Betanzos and Sarmiento de Gamboa were part of a larger historiographical pattern. In the mid-seventeenth century, the Jesuit Bernabé Cobo (1580–1657) maintained that all the significant Spanish histories of precolonial Peru written in the sixteenth century (most of which, by the way, were left unpublished) had followed the same procedure, namely, one based on the extensive and intensive briefing of Amerindian witnesses and scribes. Cobo highlighted three of these compilations for their depth and significance.⁶³ The first had been compiled in Cuzco in 1559 by Polo de Ondegardo (d. 1575), at the prompting of Viceroy Marquis de Cañate and Archbishop Fray Jerónimo de Loaysa. The second was compiled at the request of Viceroy Toledo and had two components: a first, large set of interviews of provincial elites from 1570 to 1575, whose premeditated goal was to prove that the Incas had been tyrants, whom the Spaniards had therefore been right to depose; and a second set conducted by Sarmiento de Gamboa around 1572. Cristóbal de Molina, chaplain of a hospital for Amerindians in Cuzco, undertook the third great compilation of indigenous histories under the auspices of the bishop of Cuzco, Sebastián de Lartaún, around 1574. These compilations, with the exception of the tightly scripted interviews with provincial Andean elites during Viceroy Toledo's visits, represented the views of the Inca elites in Cuzco.⁶⁴

In light of the numerous contradictions among the historical accounts gathered from the natives, it is surprising that the compilations that represented the views of Cuzco were deemed reliable by the Spaniards. Like the rulers of the ethnically contested and crowded Central Valley of Mexico, the nobles of Cuzco fought among themselves. Although they all came from the same ethnic group, they were politically divided into many competing lineages, or *panacas*. Each panaca furiously vied for power, both before and after the Spanish Conquest, and lineage politics in the Inca state determined many contesting views of the past.⁶⁵ Yet in spite of the contradictory nature of the evidence collected, Spaniards did not dismiss the study of Inca antiquities as hopeless; rather, they sought to bring “order” to the narrative. Spanish chroniclers apportioned credit selectively to favor their own Inca clients and their own political agendas (e.g., Betanzos; Viceroy de Toledo's controlled interviews of local witnesses). Spanish authors also forced Andean historiographical sensibilities that allowed for many parallel views of the past into a

single chronology to fit the biblical account and European tastes. In an attempt to translate Inca accounts of the past into the European idiom of dynastic genealogies, for example, Spaniards converted the names of some Inca social and political hierarchies into historical figures. Today, there is scholarly consensus that at least the first eight Inca rulers of eleven described in Spanish chronicles were not really historical figures.⁶⁶

But despite these manipulations to make the Inca past fit European historiographical models, Spanish authors showed a willingness to let the indigenous peoples “speak.” To do so, they developed techniques to create and validate historical knowledge. Pedro Cieza de León was one of the many sixteenth-century Spanish chroniclers in Peru who strove mightily to pour the contradictory information he obtained from Andeans into available European historiographical molds.⁶⁷ He also typified the efforts of Spaniards to develop criteria to apportion credit among the many contradictory versions of the past he encountered in Cuzco.

Cieza de León, who left Spain in 1555 to join the growing ranks of soldiers of fortune in search of riches and glory in South America, journeyed from Panama to Cuzco, a trip that took him fifteen years (1535–50) to complete. Cieza kept diaries of his travels, and upon returning to Spain, he drew on his notes to write a multivolume history of the Andean peoples, of the events surrounding the Conquest of Peru, and of the bloody civil wars among the conquistadors that ensued from the Conquest. In the first part of his work, *La crónica del Perú*, which appeared in Seville in 1553, Cieza described the lands and peoples he had visited. He also hinted at the formidable civilizing force of the Incas. Most nations to the north of the former Inca empire appeared as bestial savages, given to cannibalism, sodomy, and devil worship. However, the closer Cieza got to Cuzco, peoples appeared more civilized, a testimony to the virtues of the former empire of the Incas.⁶⁸ Cieza admired the Incas so much that he devoted one of the four parts of his history to them. Entitled *El señorio de los Incas*, it remained unpublished for centuries. In it, however, Cieza spelled out in great detail the underlying historiographical critical principles he followed.

Cieza's descriptions of non-Inca peoples in his *Crónica* are atemporal natural histories of manners and customs. Only occasionally does he hint that these Andeans had a past.⁶⁹ When it came to the Incas, however, Cieza assumed they had a history that was worth knowing, and so he set out to write it. One of Cieza's main preoccupations in his *Señorio* was to show that Inca recordkeeping systems were trustworthy. Only alphabetical writing could preserve memory, he thought, and its absence made the reconstruction of the

past extremely difficult.⁷¹ Yet, for Cieza, the Incas' ability to keep "records of all the things we now hold to be certain" was a source of wonder and bewilderment.⁷² The Incas had used two recordkeeping devices: quipus, to store vital statistics and tax records, and songs, to store historical narratives. Inca quipus seemed "exact and dependable," and kept "with all truth and accuracy, without fraud or deceit."⁷³ Their songs were also reliable, made so by the high social standing, learning, and well-cultivated memories of those charged with their keeping.⁷⁴ Quipus were also sometimes used for historical records, Cieza noted. His history of the deeds of eleven Inca rulers from Manco Capac to Huayna Capac (the father of Atahualpa and Huascar, the Inca leaders whom the Spaniards had confronted) is presented as uneven, for example, because there were differences in the volume of available quipus on each. Quipu "writing" had only been invented under the ninth Inca, Inca Yupanqui (or Pachacuti Inca), and Cieza was therefore able to cover his reign and those of the next two Incas, Tupa Inca Yupanqui (or Tupac Yupanqui) and Huayna Capac, in much greater detail than the history of all the preceding eight Inca monarchs.⁷⁵

As a matter of principle, Cieza privileged the testimony of *orejones*, upper-class Incas who pierced holes in their earlobes as a mark of nobility, over that of plebeians. A man typical of his age, Cieza believed that commoners were utterly unreliable as historical informants, because they had a natural tendency to transform the past into "fables and novels."⁷⁶ Although the testimony of the nobility was inherently more valuable, however, it was not all equally valuable either. Throughout, Cieza favored the reports of *orejones* over those of the provincial indigenous nobles. When elucidating the origins of the name "Viracocha," given by the natives to the conquering Spaniards, for example, Cieza pitted the testimony of the provincials of Cacha against that of the *orejones* of Cuzco, accepting the testimony of the latter as more credible.⁷⁶ Again, Cieza chose the names of the mythical ancestors of the Inca rulers, who had allegedly emerged from caves in a mountain in Pacariqtambo, according to the Cuzco version, even though he knew that many other names were in circulation in the provinces.⁷⁷ But even though Cieza did not give much credit to the testimony of provincial elites, he nevertheless refused to pass judgment on the credibility of their historical testimonies. Confronted with the oral testimony of the Cuna to the effect that their great-ancient leader Zapana had once battled Amazons, Cieza said that only God could know whether this was true.⁷⁸

Cieza not only weighed the testimonies of indigenous elites, he also apportioned credit when the accounts of Spaniards and Amerindians con-

flicted, systematically according more weight to testimony of *orejones* than to that offered by the Spaniards, who, according to Cieza, frequently distorted history to justify their depredations. He disregarded Spanish charges that the Incas had sacrificed thousands of children to their gods and engaged in various other savage practices, for example, saying, "I know from the testimony of elderly *orejones* that the Incas were free of the sin [of sodomy], and that they did not have other bad customs such as cannibalism or engage in public vices." Claims of Inca cannibalism and sodomy were spread by some Spaniards to justify their predatory behavior.⁷⁹ Although he put great value on the testimony of eyewitnesses and derided Spanish armchair authors, such as López de Cómara, who had never visited America, Cieza was careful to check the testimony of witnesses against material evidence.⁸⁰ Here, again, he proved more prone to disregard the testimony of Spaniards than that of *orejones*. Some Spaniards, for example, had argued that one of Christ's apostles had visited Peru, and that he had left a temple in his honor in the province of Cacha. Cieza went to Cacha and observed the idols in the temples and concluded that the story of the apostle's visitation was false, for none of the idols there resembled any of the apostles.⁸¹ Numerous ruins of postal relays he found along his path, on the other hand, confirmed the testimony of *orejones* about an efficient postal service under the Incas.⁸²

Cieza thought so highly of the *orejones* that he allowed them to be the ultimate judges of the validity of their own numerous conflicting accounts. He was confronted with so much contradictory information about the ninth to the eleventh Incas (Inca Yupanqui, Tupa Inca Yupanqui, and Huayna Capac) that he argued that no human was capable of "writing down [in alphabets] all that has been written [in quipus about them]." To be sure, Cieza was aware that the testimony of *orejones* was sometimes conflicting and contradictory. The solution for Cieza consisted in using only what the *orejones* themselves called "most credible."⁸³ After summoning and interviewing representatives of the leading Cuzqueño Inca elite on the history of the Inca empire, Cieza acknowledged that there were many conflicting historical narratives, for each lineage (panaca) was charged with exalting the memory of its own dead ancestor. Unruffled by the historiographical contradictions, and in order to use the testimonies he had collected, Cieza made the conscious decision to substitute a structural, atemporal analysis of the Inca empire for the orderly narrative of dynastic genealogies he had originally set out to compile.⁸⁴

Cieza sought to explain away the more fabulous aspects of Inca history. Take, for example, his accounts of the three mythical ancestors of the Inca

said to have emerged from mountain caves in Pacariqtambo. According to the myth, Ayar Cachi had special powers that included the ability to throw stones into the clouds and to knock down mountains with his slingshot. Tricked by his own two brothers, Ayar Cachi once was left buried in a cave, but an earthquake that altered the Andean landscape set him free. Faced with such accounts, Cieza argued that the brothers were in all likelihood three ancient warriors, either from Pacariqtambo or from some other faraway place, who had conquered the neighboring lands. As for the preternatural powers of Ayar Cachi, Cieza explained them as the skills of a trickster, a demon with the power to manipulate nature.⁵³ Cieza recounted how the sixth Inca, Inca Roca, had had his ears pierced to become an *orejón*. The pain was so intense that Inca Roca fled from Cuzco to a mountaintop, where he put his ear to the ground to soothe it, in a place that had recently been struck by lightning. His ear bled, and he heard a subterranean current. He ordered a hole dug at the spot, from which sprang the river dividing Cuzco. Inasmuch as underground rivers do indeed exist, Cieza thought that the story was plausible.⁵⁶

The writings of Cieza and myriad others demonstrate that in Peru, no less than in Mexico, Spanish antiquarians thought of their work as a “translation” of indigenous testimonies stored in quipus, songs, and other recordkeeping devices. So when Acosta’s *Historia natural y civil* appeared, antiquarians interested in Inca history felt compelled to respond. The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, the son of an Inca Cuzqueño princess and a Spanish conquistador left for Spain at the age of twenty to train both as a soldier and as a scholar. Dissatisfied with Acosta’s history and other available printed accounts of the Inca past, he decided to write his own, based on indigenous sources.

Garcilaso spent some twenty years collecting information on the Incas to supersede the printed accounts offered by Spaniards. Until his *Comentarios reales de los Incas* appeared in Lisbon in 1609, Europeans had access to only very limited accounts of the Inca past. In 1552, Francisco López de Gómara (1511–1564) had published his *Historia de la Indias y de la conquista de Mexico*, but this title was misleading, for López de Gómara had little to say about Amerindian antiquities, including those of Mexico, whose myths of origins and records of dynastic lineages he quickly retailed.⁵⁷ Likewise, on grounds that the Incas had lacked an alphabet, which was what made people human, López de Gómara provided only one very short chapter on Inca foundation myths.⁵⁸ Although much more sympathetic to them than López de Gómara, Cieza did not include a history of the Incas in his 1553 *Crónica*, and his *Señorío* was destined to remain unpublished until the late nineteenth century.

Agustín de Zárate’s 1555 history of the discovery and conquest of Peru was also shallow on Peruvian antiquities. Sent out to audit the Peruvian treasury by the emperor Charles V, Zárate (b. 1514) used his time to accumulate information about the civil wars among the Spanish conquistadors then wrecking Peru. He described Andean foundation myths as sacred histories that had become garbled because the Incas lacked alphabetical writing.⁵⁹ Although Zárate thought that Inca quipus kept records of the history of “many ages,” he only referred to the Incas’ most recent past, the deeds of Huayna Capac, Atahualpa, and Huascar.⁶⁰

The history of Jerónimo Román y Zamora (1536–1597), a Dominican friar, published in 1575 was not much of an improvement over those of López de Gómara, Cieza, or Zárate. In the sections devoted to America in his *Repúblicas del mundo*, Román y Zamora offered a summary of Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Apologética historia sumaria* (ca. 1559), but his history of the Incas was disappointing. Like Zárate, Román y Zamora praised the accuracy of indigenous recordkeeping devices.⁶¹ Yet he could deliver no more than a perfunctory list of the first eight Inca rulers, and only brief references to the deeds of the ninth Inca, Inca Yupanqui, whom Román y Zamora considered the real civilizing hero of the Andes, rather than Manco Capac.⁶²

Finally, in 1601, the royal chronicler of the Indies, Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas (d. 1625) published the first four “decades” of his massive *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos* (1601–15), covering events surrounding the Conquest from 1492 to 1531. In the face of swelling European discontent with the conduct of Spaniards in the New World, Herrera was more interested in describing the Spanish military conquest of the Indies and the Spanish crown’s attempts to bring justice and law to the new frontier than in discussing Amerindian antiquities. Herrera’s sources included both unpublished chronicles such as Cieza’s *El señorío de los Incas*, which he ransacked for details, and unpublished official papers. Yet when it came to the history of the Incas and the Aztecs, Herrera had little to add to the information from López de Gómara and Acosta.⁶³

Garcilaso read these histories, including José de Acosta’s, and decided to write one that would supersede them all. He explicitly cast his history as a commentary and gloss on the available printed Spanish accounts, thus the title of his work, *Comentarios reales de los Incas*.⁶⁴ Margarita Zamora has argued that Garcilaso thought of his work as a philological commentary on Quechua terms misunderstood by previous Spanish authors, including a commentary on terms that Andeans used to describe the sacred, such as *huaca*, which Spaniards had often interpreted as evidence of Inca polythe-

ism. Although I agree with Zamora, it seems to me that Garcilaso's employment of the term *comentarios* was also intended as a reference to his glossing of prior Spanish historical sketches, drawing extensively on the unmediated testimony of the Incas' own poems, songs, and quipus.⁹⁵

Although, according to the seventeenth-century Jesuit Bernabé Cobo, Garcilaso "hardly deviated" from the information on Inca antiquities provided by the three major sixteenth-century Spanish inquiries (those of Polo de Ondegardo, Viceroy Toledo, and Marín de la Cruz), Garcilaso insisted that his commentaries were based on personal recollections of twenty years' worth of conversations with his mother's kin, particularly with his uncle, a member of a noble Cuzqueño lineage, whom Garcilaso describes as "that great archive."⁹⁶ Garcilaso often introduces transcriptions of long paragraphs of his uncle's version of the Inca past, a text clearly invented but intended to convey the unmediated nature of his information. Garcilaso also maintained that he had access to news from Cuzqueño and provincial classmates in Peru, who, responding to his constant pleas from Spain, had interrogated, transcribed, and sent information stored by quipucamayos.⁹⁷ Finally, Garcilaso acknowledged his debt to a Peruvian Jesuit, Blas Valera, who like himself had been born to Amerindian and Spanish parents and had therefore had access to unmediated indigenous testimonies. Parts of Blas Valera's manuscript in Latin on Peruvian antiquities had barely survived the English raid on Cadiz in 1596 and were given to Garcilaso by Pedro Maldonado de Savedra, a Jesuit member of the circle of antiquarians in Córdoba to which the Peruvian mestizo belonged.⁹⁸

Garcilaso's methodology led him to compose a book that although written by a self-confessed "Indian" was destined to become a European classic. In it, some four hundred years of Inca dynastic history parade in all their splendor and exquisite detail, including the deeds and battles of each of the eleven Inca monarchs up to Huayna Capac, the last legitimate ruler of the empire, as well as the civil wars between Atahualpa and Huascar. As I have already described in Chapter 1, Garcilaso's appeal lay in his ability to cast the Inca past in an idiom familiar to the Europeans. The Inca state appeared as a classical virtuous polity, with well-kept dynastic genealogies, and the Inca religion was presented as a rational prefiguration of Christianity, not unlike that achieved by pagan moral philosophers.⁹⁹

It is curious that dissatisfaction with the available printed Spanish versions of the history of Mexico also surfaced in New Spain at about the time when Garcilaso published his history of the Incas. As I have already mentioned, Acosta provided European audiences with the most complete account of

some six hundred years of the history of migrations and travails of those nations who had come to dominate central Mexico, including the peoples of Mexico — Tenochtitlan, Tlatelolco, Texcoco, and even Tlaxcala, the allies of Cortés and the nemesis of the Mexica. Acosta had made available the collation and translation of indigenous sources undertaken by Jesuits like Tovar and Dominicans like Durán. Clearly, Acosta seemed to have superseded all other writings published by Spaniards on Mexican antiquities, including the accounts of López de Cómara and Román y Zamora. His work appeared to be the culmination of some fifty years of Spanish scholarship on central Mexico. Juan de Torquemada, however, did not think so.

Like Garcilaso, Juan de Torquemada, a Franciscan friar born in Spain, but who moved to Mexico early in his youth, became dissatisfied with available Spanish printed sources on the history of Mesoamerica. He maintained that writers such as López de Cómara, Acosta, and, more recently, Herrera had not had access to the writings of Andrés de Olmos (ca. 1491–1571), Motolinía, Bernardino de Sahagún, and Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525–1604), the leading sixteenth-century Franciscan antiquarians, who had collected and studied numerous indigenous sources. As a Franciscan, Torquemada did have access to these authors and also to many indigenous documents, including the writings of Alva Ixtlixochitl and of other indigenous chroniclers who independently or under the auspices of the Franciscans had translated Mexican pictograms and logograms into alphabetic writing. In 1615, Torquemada's *Monarchía indiana* appeared in Seville in three volumes. Torquemada's second volume was merely a rewriting of the sections on Mexica religion and political institutions that he found in the unpublished manuscript of Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Apologética historia sumaria* (ca. 1559). His own contribution lay in arguing that Mexica religion, but not that of previous civilizations of central Mexico, was the product of demonic machinations, whereas Las Casas had argued that Amerindian idolatry was the consequence of innate postlapsarian fear and weakness operating on rational human minds. Torquemada's third volume was devoted to chronicling the history of the Franciscans in Mexico from the time of their arrival there.¹⁰⁰ It was in the first volume of *Monarchía indiana*, however, that Torquemada was most original, for in it he set out to supersede all available printed accounts of the Mexican past.

Torquemada's critique focuses on the assumption of writers such as Acosta that civilized societies had appeared in Mexico only about six hundred years prior to the European arrival, as the outcome of a series of ancient northern migrations into a valley originally occupied by the wild, uncivilized

Chichimecs. Drawing on numerous sources, Torquemada argued that many cycles of civilization had in fact preceded these migrations, and that the peoples whom the Spaniards had found in Mexico (the Mexica, Tlaxcalan, and Texcocan) were relatively recent arrivals. Giants, Toltecs, and other peoples had once dominated central Mexico and had created complex and grandiose civilizations. Torquemada took it upon himself to reconstruct those cycles, particularly the Toltec. He also sought to make transparent the process through which he had apportioned credit to competing indigenous versions of local history.

For Torquemada, as for Cicero, history was philosophy by example. It was also about telling the truth. Discovering the truth was time-consuming, however, because it necessitated painstaking gathering of information, and creating and validating historical knowledge also required great wisdom. Maturity and great learning were needed to weigh evidence, to apportion credit prudently, and to locate events in their tight chronological order. Finally, finding the truth required independence, putting aside self-interest and the search for personal rewards.¹⁰¹

To be true to the history of central Mexico, Torquemada suggested various narrative strategies. There were chronological gaps in the history of ancient Mexico, many of them caused by the destruction of indigenous sources by zealous friars during the first decades of the Conquest, but inventing data to fill in such lacunae was a strategy better suited to poets than to historians. A reliable and trustworthy history of Mexico required strict adherence to “either what is written or what is transmitted by tradition,” making a jumpy and sometimes confusing narrative unavoidable, given the scarcity of sources. Torquemada’s lack of narrative control and disorderly style, for which he would be criticized in the following centuries, was in fact a self-conscious technique that vouched for the reliability of his history.

The second constraint on style imposed on the narrative was Torquemada’s insistence that the history of Mexico follow a strict chronological order. He condemned authors like López de Gómara and Herrera for including native history only parenthetically, as an aside, to spice up other accounts. Histories such as López de Gómara’s and Herrera’s, he argued, were the result of a limited access to indigenous sources. These authors had written in Spain, “where they were unable to resolve the doubts that efforts to write the history of the natives engender.”¹⁰²

Torquemada repeatedly demonstrated the drawbacks of writing history away from primary indigenous sources. The case of the accounts offered by López de Gómara, Acosta, and Herrera of the marriages and descendants of

the first Mexican monarch is illuminating. When the Mexica were still a subordinate nation in the valley of Mexico, they had requested various neighboring rulers to give them a bride for their first elected monarch, Acamapichtli, “Handful of Reeds” (r. 1376–95 in the *Codex Mendoza*). One after another, their neighbors rejected the Mexica invitation. Finally, one ruler acquiesced and gave Acamapichtli a bride, who, however, turned out barren. The Mexica monarch soon obtained a new bride from another neighboring ruler, from whom he finally got two sons. The confusion originated when Spanish historians sought to identify the names of Acamapichtli’s wives, sons, and neighboring rulers. According to Torquemada, the first wife of Acamapichtli was Ilancueitl, given to the Mexica by the ruler of Coahuatchan. Although barren, Ilancueitl had never returned to her father and therefore had to put up with Cozcattliamahual, Acamapichtli’s second wife, given to the Mexica by the neighboring ruler of Tetepanco as a sign of goodwill. Ilancueitl helped raise Cozcattliamahual’s second son, Huitzililuitl. Acamapichtli’s first son, Tlatolzac, became the founder of the Mexica nobility. Torquemada used this example to highlight the errors of previous historians. López de Gómara, for example, had presented Ilancueitl as Acamapichtli’s servant, charged with raising Tlatolzac. López de Gómara had also argued that Acamapichtli had twenty wives. López de Gómara’s error was the consequence of his distance from the sources, “not knowing history from its roots.” López de Gómara had failed to realize that there was a scale of credibility in the multiple indigenous versions, and that some sources were more reliable than others. Acosta was also distant from the “roots” of Mexican historiography; he had argued that Acamapichtli married a bride offered by Culhuacan. Torquemada chided Acosta for accepting this indigenous account on the grounds that when the Mexica had elected Acamapichtli, they were not even near Culhuacan. Herrera, whom Torquemada insisted had merely drawn from others, had followed Acosta in this, falling blindly into the same error.¹⁰³

Distance from primary sources had made these historians commit an even more serious mistake, which was to assume that the Mexica were the original inhabitants of central Mexico, rather than the last in a series of civilizations. Unlike the previous civilizations of central Mexico, which had developed virtuous religious worship, the Mexica were Satan’s chosen people. Moreover, their accounts of their origins were utterly unreliable. Torquemada argued that these accounts were efforts at self-aggrandizement by newcomers attempting to present themselves as the most ancient. Historians, he concluded, should privilege the sources of those Nahuatl peoples who had migrated to the

Central Valley of Mexico before the Mexica, namely, the Aculhua of Texcoco and the Tepanecs of Tacuba and Azcapotzalco¹⁰⁴ (Figs. 2.4, 2.9, and 2.10).

Torquemada argued that the history of the Central Valley of Mexico was particularly difficult to write because there were many contesting versions by rival ethnic groups in circulation. The plurality of accounts complicated efforts to bring chronological order into the material, because there were many available dates for the same event, as well as contradictory sequences of events. The history of a single group, let alone that of the entire region, spawned many contradicting accounts. Many versions of the origins of the Mexica existed, which explained the differences in the narratives of López de Gómara, Acosta, and Herrera. Torquemada maintained that his own version was trustworthy, however, because he had had access to the source held by the most reliable scribes.¹⁰⁵ Given this plurality of accounts, if writing history was in and of itself time-consuming, writing that of Mesoamerica was even more exacting. "After unraveling the garbled confusion [of chronologies]," Torquemada sighed, after some six years of painstaking labor collating indigenous sources, "I felt I had left the labyrinth of Crete."¹⁰⁶ According to Torquemada, the multiplicity of accounts was the natural outcome of scripts that depended on the oral exegesis of "rabbis and scholars." Politically savvy peoples willfully took advantage of the nature of these scripts to edit and manipulate interpretations of the past.¹⁰⁷

Torquemada offered numerous examples of how the politics of ethnicity in central Mexico promoted historical distortions. The Mexica and the Tlatelolcan, the two ethnic groups who shared Tenochtitlan, for instance, had two opposite versions of who had first elected a king. The Tlatelolcan maintained that they had elected a king the year before the Mexica, a version that, according to Torquemada, Acosta had wrongly followed. Yet an impartial version of the history of Tenochtitlan offered by the outsider Aculhuas maintained that the Mexica had been first to elect a king. It was patriotism, Torquemada argued, that had made the Tlatelolcan distort the truth: "Emotions [such as patriotism] should not be mixed with truthful histories, whose majesty and gravity should never be violated."¹⁰⁸ Ethnic pride worked in even more subtle ways. The Mexica, for example, had versions that cast Acamapichtli, their first elected monarch, as a warrior who had conquered neighboring peoples. According to Torquemada, this was patently false, for the Mexica under Acamapichtli were a subordinate ethnic group incapable of expanding. Acamapichtli had ruled in peace for twenty-one years, however, laying the groundwork for the future prosperity and power of the Mexica (Fig. 2.4 and Plate 12).¹⁰⁹

Ethnic politics and a script that was open to easy editing during its exegesis notwithstanding, Torquemada believed that Mesoamerican sources held the truth about the past of the region. Torquemada often privileged the written testimony of the natives, even if it sometimes contradicted that of the Spaniards. On the origins of Amerindians, for example, Torquemada dismissed theories that took the natives to be stranded Carthaginians, because, according to the indigenous sources, they had come from the north, over land bridges connecting America with Asia.¹¹⁰ But it is perhaps in the sections where he covered the events surrounding the Spanish Conquest of Mexico that Torquemada most clearly demonstrated his willingness to believe indigenous written accounts. Torquemada again took López de Gómara and Herrera to task for using only Spanish sources and excluding Amerindian testimony recorded both in pictograms and in the Roman alphabet in Nahuatl narratives, "so well written that I wish I could imitate them one day," which had fortunately been collected by Bernardino de Sahagún, who had spent some sixty years exploring the secrets of the land and language of the Mexicans. "The error [of López de Gómara and Herrera]," Torquemada argued, "lay in making inquiries and gathering information [on the Conquest] only using Spanish witnesses and not looking for the testimony of the Indians . . . who [after all] were the ones upon whom the events of the Conquest fell and who kept very good knowledge of those experiences [because] they recorded them as history, first using figures and characters and later alphabetical writing."¹¹¹

Consistent with this view, Torquemada introduced the Amerindians' version of Moctezuma Xocoyotzin's death. Spanish accounts claimed that the Aztec monarch died as the result of a stone thrown by an Amerindian. Moctezuma had languished for two days, refusing to be treated, and before expiring had asked to be converted to Christianity. The Amerindians, however, maintained that the Spaniards had garroted Moctezuma, along with some Tlatelolcan nobles, in the palace where they were hiding, from which their corpses had subsequently been thrown out.¹¹² Torquemada also presented the alternative indigenous version of the torture and final execution of Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec ruler, who resisted the Spanish siege of Tenochtitlan.¹¹³

Torquemada's willingness to believe indigenous testimonies was based on the assumption that their recordkeeping devices were trustworthy. He thus included the speeches of the Chichimec ruler Nopalzin, preserved in songs and other mnemonic devices.¹¹⁴ Mesoamerican scripts were so reliable a means of historical recordkeeping that when confronted with claims that ap-

peared outrageous at face value. Torquemada submitted to the authority of the source. Chronicling the history of the end of the Toltec civilization at the hands of savage invading Chichimec tribes from the north, Torquemada recounted how, after first having sent a scouting party, a million Chichimecs descended on the valley. "This number, I fear, appears incredible," he explained, "yet it is not my imagination that begets these numbers but they are numbers that I have found in their writings that I assume are accurate and not lying."¹¹⁵

Images as Sources in the Early Modern European World

I have belabored the point that, notwithstanding caveats about the sophistication of indigenous writing systems, sixteenth-century Spanish scholarship on Mexican and Peruvian antiquities, culminating in the writings of Torquemada and Garcilaso, held native documents to be reliable. These views were, to be sure, not peculiar to Spain, a country that is often depicted as isolated from larger European intellectual trends. As early as the sixteenth century, European humanists began to discuss how the literary records of Rome's first five centuries had disappeared after the sack of the city by the Gauls in 390 B.C.E. European humanists realized that after the sack, Roman and Greek historians had resorted to other available public written records (annals of the clergy and of magistrates) and to other forms of storing memories, such as songs and oral accounts, to reconstruct the earliest Roman past. Although there was much skepticism about the fabulous histories of early Rome that had survived, until the early eighteenth century, historiographical discussions were not centered on the *reliability* of the sources in alternative recordkeeping devices used by later Roman and Greek historians to reconstruct the earliest Roman past. At the time when Spanish antiquarians were "translating" the testimony of Native Americans preserved by non-alphabetical means, European humanists were also drawing on epic songs and poems from oral traditions to write the histories of their own countries.¹¹⁶

Renaissance Europe was not wedded to the ideology of literacy; it was closer to the Middle Ages than to our own time in its attitude to unwritten testimony. In his magisterial account of the impact of literacy in England in the Middle Ages, Michael Clanchy has argued that in the wake of the Norman invasion, literacy became central to the business of governing, but that documents in alphabetical script were more often than not considered unreliable. Before the Norman invasion, land titles and claims to nobility had been validated by the ownership of symbolic objects (swords, knives, and

seals) and by the ability to summon numerous trustworthy witnesses in courts of law. The Normans, however, sought to undermine the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by demanding from it written records in proof of claims to land and nobility. Needless to say, written charters proliferated, as did forgeries. A state bureaucracy, including notaries, developed to validate the new written claims. But even then written documents were not considered reliable. Courts still admitted witnesses and symbolic objects to validate written titles. For many centuries, possession of symbolic objects such as swords, knives, and seals carried as much weight as written charters in cases involving landed property. Although Clanchy traces a history that is peculiar to England, it may be assumed that sensibilities about writing would not have differed widely in the rest of Europe, including Spain, notwithstanding Spain's higher rates of literacy than England during this period.¹¹⁷

In Catholic countries, the association of nonalphabetical recordkeeping devices with the reliability of testimony had its own peculiar development in the sixteenth century, which helps explain the Spanish fascination with Mesoamerican pictograms and logograms. As already mentioned, Walter Mignolo has argued that Francesco Patrizi's *Della historia dieci dialoghi* (1566) constituted an isolated challenge to the ideology of alphabetical writing as the only warranty of truth. Yet it is clear that Patrizi was no isolated figure. He belonged to a larger tendency in the Catholic Church to exalt the historiographical value of images in theological debates with iconoclastic Protestants. The Italian scholar Gianfranco Cantelli has suggested that Mexican scripts played a significant role in these debates. For example, Gabriele Paleotti (1524–1597), the archbishop of Bologna, in his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1581) insisted that images preceded letters in the postdiluvian era, when humans had lost their ability to write. Using Mexican scripts as evidence, Paleotti insisted that Egyptian hieroglyphs were historically more primitive than alphabets. According to Cantelli, Paleotti's major reformulation of Renaissance histories of writing did not seek to undermine the value of images as reliable means of communication. On the contrary, Paleotti sought to present painting as a more "natural," and thus more efficient, form of transmitting information than alphabetical writing. Paleotti and other members of the Catholic hierarchy insisted that paintings were the most adequate books for the illiterate, and that although they harbored the danger of idolatry, they also held important advantages. Images were a "natural" form of language, whereas alphabets required prior acceptance of conventions.¹¹⁸

Catholic Reformation ideas about the pedagogical usage of images had

some practical consequences for the survival of local indigenous scripts, particularly in Mexico, after the arrival of alphabetic writing in the New World. Although I subscribe to the idea that whether native scripts survived or disappeared largely depended, both in Mexico and Peru, on political calculations in Amerindian communities, the attitudes of the European conquerors may have helped retard the pace of the obliteration of local scripts. The incorporation of local scripts for purposes of conversion may have played a significant role, particularly in Mexico.

Friars, by and large, thought that Native Americans were by "nature indifferent to internal things and forgetful of them, so [that] they must be helped by means of external appearances."¹¹⁹ Needless to say, the friars created visual devices to help their charges memorize the basics of Christian doctrine (Fig. 2.1).¹²⁰ Fray Jacobo Testera, one of the first Franciscans to arrive in Mexico after the Conquest, was so desperate to get his Christian message across that he had live cats and dogs thrown onto bonfires to teach the natives the sufferings awaiting them in hell. He also put Nahuatl logograms to good use by creating a genre of codices that today bears his name.¹²¹ Testermanuscripts made use of phonograms to teach the natives to pray in Latin, among other things. In the seventeenth century, the Franciscan Juan de Torquemada offered a succinct description of how friars like Testera taught the "Pater Noster" to their charges: "The sound that . . . most resembles the word *Pater* is *pantli*, which is represented as a small flag. . . . For *Noster*, the closest sound they have is *nuchtl*, which among us is called 'tuna' [that is, prickly pear cactus, *Opuntia tuna* or *Opuntia ficus-indica*], and in Spain, fig of the Indies. . . . Therefore, after the small flag, the Amerindians draw a 'tuna.' . . . They continue in like fashion to the end of the prayer."¹²²

Missionaries also used native glyphs to ease problems of communication that arose during confession. The friars found at least nine different linguistic groups in central Mexico. Since only a few friars were able to master more than one indigenous language, the missionaries encouraged the natives to bring their sins written down in Mesoamerican scripts; like Chinese ideograms, Mexican pictograms and logograms allowed speakers of different languages to communicate with one another.¹²³ In the new churches, built with the bricks and stones of the old pagan temples, the friars tolerated the presence of indigenous hieroglyphs carved on façades and walls.¹²⁴ Mexican pictograms were also presented in treatises of rhetoric as good mnemonic devices to complement Renaissance palaces of memory (Fig. 2.2). In 1579, the year the Jesuit Mateo Ricci landed in Goa on the way to China, where he would deploy the pagan art of memory to hasten conversion of the heathen,

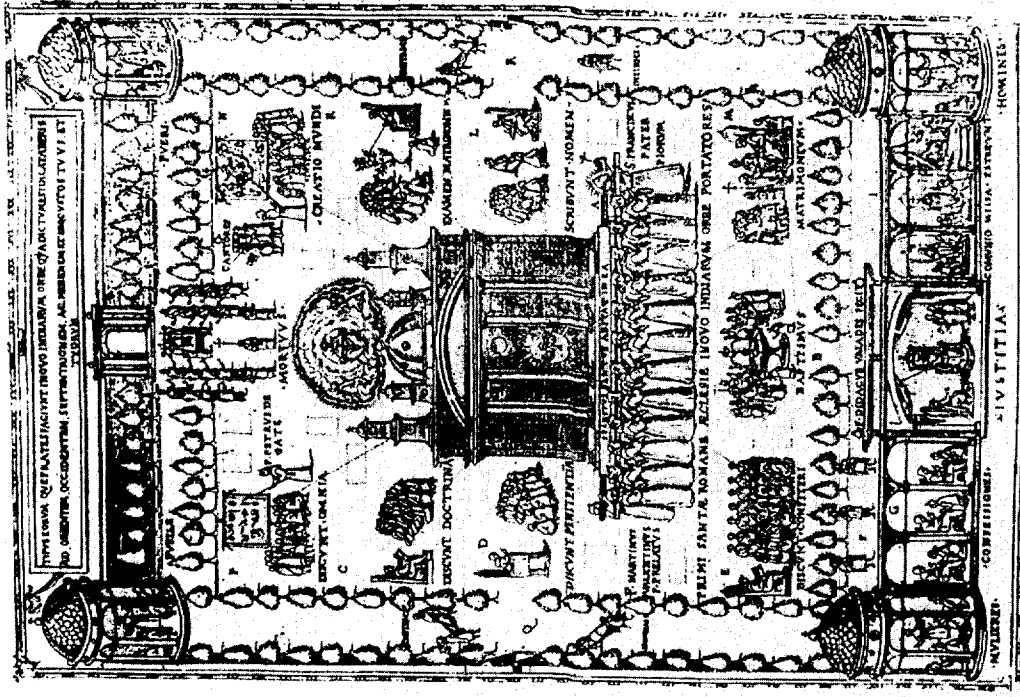


FIGURE 2.1. A Franciscan compound in Mexico. Within the compound, the natives are taught Christian doctrine, music, and writing, tended in infirmaries, given the sacraments (baptism, the Eucharist, penance and confession, matrimony, and the anointing of the sick), and buried. Under the letter P (upper left corner), Pedro de Cante and Amerindians "discuss all subjects" (*discunt omnia*), using what appear to be pictograms and logograms. From Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (Perugia, 1579).

the Franciscan friar Diego de Valadés (b. 1533), who had served many years in the province of Mexico, published his *Rhetorica Christiana*, a manual for Christian preachers in the New World, in Perugia. In the sections on memory, Valadés discussed the mnemonic value of Mesoamerican scripts and suggested that Mexican calendars could also be used as memory aids, although did not explain how.¹²⁵

Spanish colonialism in America in the sixteenth century was thus far from being solely an effort at cultural extermination. A more critical reassessment is needed of the complex dynamics of indigenous and Spanish interactions in the New World, particularly in Peru and Mexico. Like William Jones and other British orientalists in India who studied local languages and sources and translated them into English, numerous sixteenth-century Spanish friars, colonists, and bureaucrats collected, collated, and translated Amerindians' historical recollections. To be sure, Spaniards in the New World, as much as the British in India, forced the local versions of the past they encountered into Eurocentric historiographical models. Yet sixteenth-century Spanish historians in the New World exhibited greater sensibility and greater willingness to listen to the voices of non-European "subalterns" than would be the case later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Curiosities, Renaissance Humanists, and Amerindian Scripts

In the Renaissance, Europeans avidly sought to collect Native American documents written in pictograms and logograms.¹²⁶ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially in Italy, cabinets of curiosities could show a variety of Mesoamerican annals and divinatory calendars, along with samples of Amerindian ceramics, textiles, and featherwork. The Medici were particularly fond of things Mexican and put together an impressive collection through the sixteenth century. By the late 1580s, the third grand duke of Tuscany, Ferdinand II (1549–1609), had acquired Bernardino de Sahagún's Florentine Codex and hired Lodovico Bufti to paint frescos representing the New World in the Uffizi Palace. Ferdinand ordered Bufti to draw his models from the polyglot, "illustrated" texts assembled by the Franciscan a few years earlier in Mexico.¹²⁷ In 1603, the Italian naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605?) gave his cabinet of curiosities, full of objects from the New World, as a legacy to the city of Bologna, and it was later opened to the public as a museum. Between 1665 and 1677, the city received two more cabinets containing "Americana": Count Valerio Zani's and Ferdinando Cospi's. Believing it to be a *libro della China* (a book from China), Zani (d. 1696), who was a pa-

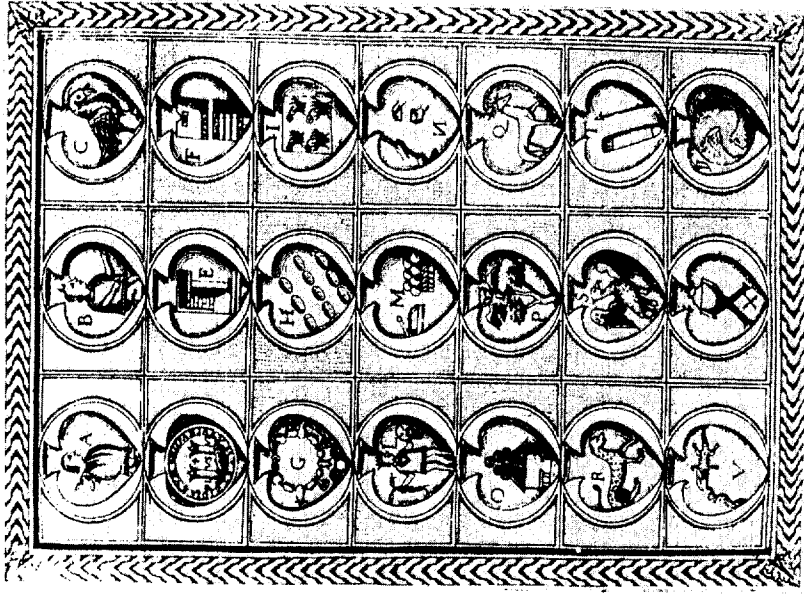


FIGURE 2.2. A chart on mnemonic images that stand for letters. In Renaissance palaces of memory, rhetoricians distributed striking mental sculptures along imagined courtyards and chambers to remind themselves of the order and content of speeches. Images of letters were hung on mental sculptures to clarify further the content of the passage committed to memory. In this mnemonic chart, the iconography is indigenous and the images appear to be addressed to rhetoricians preaching in Indian languages. The images in the chart bear a striking resemblance to Mesoamerican pictograms and logograms and represent Otomi, Tarascan, or Nahuatl words; A = *achisami* (Tarascan) = man; C = *cotocotoni* (Otomi) = non-turkey fowl; P = *pothai* (Otomi) = owl. (Thanks to David Tavárez who identified the words in the chart for me.) From Diego Valadés, *Rhetorica Christiana* (Perugia, 1579). Unfortunately, Valadés does not discuss the chart at all.