

Chapter 1

CHRONICLES OF THE ENCOUNTER

The first contact between Europeans and indigenous Americans, populations that had been totally isolated from each other for millennia, was among the most momentous and fascinating encounters in world history. Virtually all our direct evidence of the Encounter comes from the European side, unfortunately, yet it can still help us think about how each side viewed the other. This chapter presents excerpts of six accounts of the Encounter, all written during the 1500s, dealing with the Caribbean, Brazil, and Mexico.

This early date of writing makes these excerpts *primary sources*—the term that historians use for evidence generated more or less contemporaneously with the events they describe. This is a very rough-and-ready definition, but it captures the main point. Primary sources are the raw materials interpreted by historians and are the necessary starting points of all serious historical research. Historians believe that all students of the past should be exposed to primary sources, and so this book is devoted to them. Of course, students mostly need to read the writings of historians who have devoted years of study to particular topics. The writings of historians are termed “secondary sources” to distinguish them from primary sources.

Primary sources must be read with particular care. Often, the available primary sources offer no semblance of objectivity, and their biases must be taken into account when interpreting them. However, we cannot simply put primary sources aside because they are biased. All evidence, in fact, has a bias, its own point of view which must be considered. Bartolomé de las Casas, the great Spanish champion of

indigenous people, tended to exaggerate in their favor, while Francisco Cervantes de Salazar exaggerated his criticisms of them. If we keep point of view in mind, we can learn something from any primary source, particularly when we compare various primary sources to each other, noting where they seem to agree and disagree.

Because primary sources (which we will also call *documents*) are defined, above all, by the timing of their creation, this book arrays them carefully in chronological order. The present chapter, for example, begins with an excerpt from *The Caminha Letter* written in 1500, and concludes with an excerpt from *A General History of New Spain*, written during the middle 1500s. And because consideration of their point of view is so important, each of the primary sources is introduced by a *header* (a secondary source, written by a historian—me, in fact) that identifies who wrote the document, when, and more or less why. Students should consider the information in the header carefully before reading the document that follows it and should never confuse the two, because their status is worlds apart.

Let us turn, then, to the matter at hand. What was the Encounter like? The sources collected in this chapter help us visualize it. The first three sources describe the meeting of Europeans with semisedentary people of the Caribbean and Brazil, people who lived in villages of a few hundred inhabitants. Such people were typically exterminated by the Europeans after only a few years of contact. The writings of Las Casas, especially, provide a sense of this horrific process—a process so horrific, in fact, that indigenous peoples seem to have needed to make sense of it, afterward, by fitting it somehow into their own traditions. Both López de Gómara and Sahagún record indigenous “premonitions” of conquest that surely arose retrospectively.

The final three excerpts in this chapter deal with the Spanish takeover of the fully sedentary Nahua peoples of what is today central Mexico. Shortly before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Nahuas had been gathered under the dominion of the Aztec Empire, with its splendid capital city of Tenochtitlan. The people of Tenochtitlan—the Mexicas, as they called themselves, though they tend to be called “Aztecs” in common parlance—had developed the most impressive and elaborate urban society in the New World. Their emperor

Moctezuma (whose name has many forms: Montezuma, Mocut-ezoma, and so on) ruled in splendor and with great authority, as strongly suggested by two documents included here: the eyewitness account of Bernal Díaz del Castillo and the later account authored by Bernardino de Sahagún, who drew on the testimony of indigenous informants, thus giving us a rare sense of how the Mexicas themselves viewed the Encounter.

THE CAMINHA LETTER

Pero Vaz de Caminha

Pero Vaz de Caminha was a royal official on the Portuguese expedition that discovered Brazil in 1500. His letter dated 1 May 1500, reporting to the Portuguese king on the newly discovered territory, constitutes the earliest narrative of Portuguese contact with the semisedentary native people of what is today Brazil. To Caminha, the Island of the True Cross (as the expedition named what was not yet called Brazil) seemed a tropical paradise, an impression underlined by the fact that its inhabitants wore very little clothing. But the paradisiacal vision, no less than the jaundiced view of those who rabidly condemned the indigenous people, contained considerable self-delusion. Readers of the following excerpts of the Caminha letter should consider that Caminha wished not only to report on, but also to promote, the newly claimed territory.

We headed ashore in a small boat, and as we approached the mouth of the river, natives gathered there to meet us in groups of two or three, until eighteen or twenty of them awaited.

They had brown, rather reddish, skin and went completely naked, without any covering at all over their private parts, and they had bows and arrows in their hands. When we landed, they walked

SOURCE: adapted from Pero Vaz de Caminha, *A Carta de Pero Vaz de Caminha* (Rio de Janeiro: Livros de Portugal, [1943]); folios 1–14 contain a facsimile and transcription of the original manuscript from 1500.

rapidly toward our boat, and Nicolau Coelho, the leader of our group, signed to them to lower their weapons, which they did. There was no way to speak with them or make ourselves understood in any way, however, because of the noisy surf. So Coelho merely gave them a few small gifts, such as a red cap, a black hat, and a linen bonnet that he took off his own head. In return, one of them gave him a feather headdress, and another gave him a string of tiny white pearl-like beads which, I believe, has been sent to Your Majesty. And then, because it was getting late and there was no way to talk to them, we returned to our ship.

These people have attractive, well-made features and take no thought of covering their bodies. They seem entirely unconcerned about concealing their genitals and display them with no more embarrassment than they feel in showing their faces. They wear a bit of pointed bone through their pierced lower lips, inserted from inside the mouth, which somehow poses no obstacle to their talking, eating, and drinking. They have straight hair and wear it cut short and shaved close above the ears. One of them wore something like a wig composed of yellow feathers several inches long around the back of his head, covering his ears. It was very thick and even, attached directly to his hair with a substance like wax, although it was not wax, and it was easily cleaned without removing it from his head.

When two of them later came aboard the flagship to speak with the admiral, he greeted them sitting down and dressed in finery, with a very large gold chain around his neck. The admiral's feet rested on a piece of carpet, and others of us (Sancho de Tovar, Simão de Miranda, Nicolau Coelho, Aires Correia) sat on the carpet around his feet. We lit torches and the visitors entered the cabin, but they made no courteous gestures nor did they signal a desire to speak to the admiral or to anyone else.

One of them fixed his eyes on the admiral's gold necklace and began to gesture toward it and, alternately, toward the ground, as if saying that there were gold there. Likewise, he spied a silver candlestick and did the same, pointing to the ground and then the candlestick, as if saying that there were silver in that country, as well. Seeing an African grey parrot that the admiral had with him, one of the visitors took it onto his hand and pointed at the ground, indicat-

ing that parrots lived there also. We showed them a sheep that we had aboard, but they paid no attention to it. We showed them a hen, and they seemed almost frightened of it and refused to hold it at first, finally accepting it with trepidation. We gave them food—bread, fish, dried figs, and sweets—which they hardly touched, and anything that they did put in their mouths they quickly spat out. We offered them wine, which they scarcely tasted and liked not at all, refusing to try any more after the first sip. We brought them water, which they refused to drink, merely rinsing their mouths and spitting it out.

One of them spied a rosary of white beads and signed that we should give it to him, whereupon he played with it for a long time. Finally, he put the rosary around his neck but soon took it off and, wrapping it around his arm, pointed at it, then at the admiral's gold necklace, then at the ground, as if saying that they would give gold for the rosary. That is how we preferred to interpret his gestures, in truth. If he were actually asking for both the rosary and necklace, saying they should stay there, we pretended not to understand because we had no intention of making such a gift. Eventually he returned the rosary to its owner.

Finally, the two visitors stretched out on the carpet to sleep, face up, making no effort to cover their private parts, which were uncircumcised. Their pubic hair was neatly trimmed and groomed. The admiral ordered that cushions be placed under their heads, and the one with the yellow-feather wig carefully arranged it on the cushion so that his headgear might not be damaged. We spread a cloak on top of them, which they accepted, and they soon fell asleep.

On Monday we went ashore to get water, and the natives again appeared, a goodly number, although not as many as on other occasions. This time very few of them carried bows. At first they kept their distance, but little by little they came nearer and mixed with us. They hugged us playfully. Some disappeared after a short time, but others stayed and traded us bows and arrows for trifles such as a sheet of paper or an old cap. Twenty or thirty of our men went with them to a place where there were many others, including girls and women, and they came back with more bows and feather headdresses, both

yellow and green, of which I believe the admiral will certainly send a sample to Your Highness.

The admiral ordered a man called Afonso Ribeiro, and two other men who, like Ribeiro, were to be exiled on this shore as punishment, to go and mix with the natives, along with one Diogo Dias, whom he likewise ordered to mix with them, simply because he was good at amusing them. The three exiles were ordered to spend the night among the natives. They all went and did so. The village lay a good league and a half away and was composed of nine or ten high wooden dwellings with thatched roofs, each as long as a large sailing vessel. Each had only two small doors, one at each end. These long dwellings were each inhabited by thirty or forty people, but they were without interior subdivisions, being completely open with the exception of beams between which hung, at a considerable height, many hammocks for sleeping. Fires burned inside these dwellings and the people gave our men many kinds of food, especially manioc. But they would not let any of our men spend the night there and even wanted to come back to our ships. Our men had gone well provided with trinkets and they traded them to the natives for two beautiful large red parrots and two small green ones, as well as several feather bonnets and a quite beautiful sort of fabric woven of feathers, which the admiral is sending to Your Highness.

One day four hundred or four hundred and fifty of them came down to the beach, many with bows and arrows that they were willing to trade for an ordinary sailor's cap. By now they were willing to eat with us, whatever we gave them, and some drank wine. Not all of them were able to do so, but I believe that, once accustomed, they would drink it with a good will. They were so well put together, these natives, so carefully groomed, so striking in their body paint, as to have a pleasing appearance. They gladly helped us load our firewood into the boats. They seemed even more relaxed and self-assured among us than we did among them.

The admiral led us to the place where the large wooden cross that we intended to erect the following day stood leaning against a tree beside the river bank. He had us all kneel and kiss the cross so that they could see our reverence for it. We signed to the ten or twelve

who had come with us, indicating that they, too, should kneel and kiss the cross, and they quickly did so.

These people seem so innocent that, if it were possible to understand their tongue, or if they could understand ours, they would become Christians immediately, because it seems that they have no faith of their own. Therefore, if the Christian exiles that we intend to leave on these shores learn the language of these people well and make themselves understood, I cannot doubt that the wishes of Your Highness will be achieved and with little difficulty they will come to belief in our Holy Faith. And God willing that it may be so, because they are truly a good and innocent people and can easily be shaped by us. I believe that Our Lord brought us to these shores for that very reason.

Analyzing the Sources: Where can one detect in Caminha's report his desire to promote the settlement of Brazil? What role does religion play in it?

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE DESTRUCTION OF THE INDIES

Bartolomé de las Casas

The best-known and most efficacious of all Spanish spokesmen for the indigenous victims of the Spanish conquest of America was a Dominican friar, Bartolomé de las Casas (born in 1484). As a young man, Las Casas witnessed the devastation of the semisedentary Taíno people of the island of Hispaniola (today divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which he recounts in the following excerpt from his Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies (1552). After participating in the conquest of Hispaniola and Cuba, Las Casas became an impassioned defender of the indigenous people of the New World and spent the rest of his life working in that capacity. His most important achievement was promoting passage of the New Laws of the Indies (1542), which protected the indigenous people against the practice of encomienda, whereby Spanish conquerors received legal right to indigenous labor as a reward for conquest. Las Casas wrote the Brief Account of the Destruction of the Indies as part of that reform

campaign. Translated into many languages, it became one of the most often-published diatribes in European history.

Everything that has happened in the Indies between the moment of their remarkable discovery and the present day has been so astonishing that no one who did not see it all with his own eyes would be likely to believe it. Indeed, the happenings of the Indies seem to have obscured the fame of all other worldly deeds ever seen or heard of, however bold and notable they might have been. Some of the things that have occurred in the Indies, however, are quite terrible—the slaughter of innocent people, the depopulation of entire villages, provinces, and kingdoms, and many other acts no less horrifying. And for that reason Don Bartolomé de las Casas, after having been made a friar and finally a bishop, came to the royal court of Spain to inform our lord the Emperor, who had formerly looked with approval upon the happenings of the Indies, and when las Casas narrated the awful truth, it caused the most profound impact upon all who heard him, and his hearers begged him insistently to put these horrors succinctly into writing. And so he did. But seeing in later years many unfeeling men, their humanity degraded by their greed, ambition, and evil deeds, not content with the wickedness that they had already committed when they depopulated the Indies with the most exquisite forms of cruelty—seeing these same men petition the king for license to commit more such acts, and others yet worse (if worse could exist), las Casas decided to offer the present summary of the earlier treatise, so that his Highness would be reminded to refuse those petitions.

Las Casas has thought it appropriate to publish this summary in printed form so that his Highness might read it with greater ease. And that is the origin and purpose of the following, highly abbreviated account.

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SOURCE: Bartolomé de las Casas, *Breuíssima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (Seville: Sebastián Trugillo, 1552), pp. 2–3, 7–14.

The Indies were discovered in the year 1492. Christian Spaniards began to settle there in the following year. Therefore, it has been only forty-nine years since Spaniards in great numbers arrived, which they did first at the large and lovely Island of Hispaniola, which is six hundred leagues around. There are infinitely many other islands, some exceedingly large, everywhere around Hispaniola, all populous and filled with native-born peoples, the Indians. When we came upon the Indies, it was as well populated a land as any upon the earth. The seacoast of Venezuela remains filled as though with a beehive of people. It would appear that God set forth upon these lands an entire multitude, the greatest part of all humanity.

God made these people open and straightforward, without malice or guile, most obedient and most loyal to their native lords and to the Christians whom they serve. Of all the people of the earth, these natives are the most humble, most patient, most peaceful, the least quarrelsome or troublesome, the slowest to take offense, and most tranquil in demeanor. Hatred, rancor, and vengeance are utterly foreign to them. They are likewise physically slight and delicate, and unable to endure hard labor, perishing easily of any illness or disease. Not even the children of princes and lords raised among us are more physically delicate than the Indians, and I refer even to the humblest ones. Among nations, these people possess, and desire to possess, the fewest earthly goods of any. And, thus, they are never ambitious and never greedy. No saintly hermit ever satisfied himself with food more simple and meager than that which the Indians eat. Most go naked, covering only their private parts, and their most lavish clothing is a small cotton shawl. They sleep on straw mats or suspended in contrivances like fishing nets, and they call these “hammocks.”

These people are among the purest, the most innocent, and the most intelligent imaginable, very receptive to good teachings, virtuous customs, and our holy Catholic faith. As soon as they learn a bit of Christian doctrine, they become eager to learn more, and I have been told by many Spaniards other than clergy, men who have dwelled in the Indies for years, that they see undeniable goodness in the Indians. “In truth,” they say, “these people would be the most blessed on earth if they only knew God.”

Upon this herd of gentle sheep, imbued by their Creator with all the aforesaid qualities, the Spaniards descended like starving wolves and tigers and lions. And what they have done for the last forty years, and continue to do, right down to today, is slay, torment, persecute, dismember, and destroy the Indians with refinements of cruelty never before seen, heard of, or read about in books, and so horribly, that on the Island of Hispaniola, of the over three million native people who lived there when the Spanish arrived, no more than two hundred remain. The island of Cuba—almost as lengthy as the distance from Valladolid to Rome—is today virtually depopulated. Puerto Rico and Jamaica, both of them large, lovely, and fertile islands, have been totally devastated. Not a living soul remains of the five hundred thousand who once dwelt in the Bahama Islands, which lie to the north of Hispaniola and Cuba, all of them more lovely than our king's gardens. These innocent victims perished while being brought to the island of Hispaniola when the Spaniards realized that the native population there was dying off. Another thirty small islands in the vicinity of Puerto Rico now lie deserted and uninhabited for the same reason. On the mainland to the south, there can be no doubt that our Spaniards, by their cruel and wicked acts, have depopulated and laid waste more than ten kingdoms, an area larger than the entire Iberian Peninsula—twice the territory between Seville and Jerusalem, a distance of more than two thousand leagues.

Beyond question, during the forty years in which Christians have devastated the Indies, more than twelve million souls, including men, women, and children, have died unjustly, and I do believe that a truer number would be above fifteen million.

Two principle methods have been employed by those who, calling themselves Christians, have annihilated these unfortunate Indians from the face of the earth. The first is war—unjust, cruel, bloody, and tyrannical war. The other method—applied after having slain all those who have resisted or tried to escape, which is to say, all the adult males, for the Spaniards customarily allow only young boys and females to live—the other method is the harshest bondage ever afflicted on man or beast.

The reason that the Christians have slain such an infinite number of souls has been the desire to take the Indian's gold, to enrich

themselves quickly, and to raise themselves up to a high social rank that bears no relation to their humble origins in Spain. This insatiable greed and ambition knows no limits. These lands were so rich and favored by God, and the inhabitants so humble and easy to subjugate, that the Christians should have respected them, and yet they treated the Indians worse than beasts (to beasts they might have been more gentle), with less regard than one treats a pile of manure in the road. I speak as a firsthand witness, for I was present during the entire time. And with like disregard have the Christians mistreated the Indians' souls, for all these millions have died without our Christian faith and without the sacraments of the Church. And it is a widely known and undisputed truth, acknowledged by one and all, that the Indians never once did anything to hurt the Christians, but instead believed them to be descended from heaven, until becoming victims of so much robbery, savagery, and murder at their hands.

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The Island of Hispaniola was the first where the Christians began their depredations, not content with what was freely given, taking the women and children of the Indians to serve them and eating the food produced by the Indians' hard work. The Indians have little, seldom more than they need, and in truth what suffices several Indian households for a month a Christian will consume in one day. The Indians soon realized that these newcomers had not come down from heaven, and some hid their provisions, others their women and children, while still others took refuge in the wilderness. The Christians struck them with clubs and seized the village chieftains. And such was their shameless temerity that a Christian captain raped the wife of their greatest king, lord of the entire island. Then the Indians began seeking ways to rid themselves of the Christians and took up arms. But their weapons are weak and ineffectual—so much so that their wars resemble a fight with wooden swords or a children's game in Spain—and at that, the Christians, with their horses and swords and lances, began the slaughter.

They entered villages and spared neither children nor old people, neither pregnant women, nor those with nursing infants. They made

bets to see who could, with a single sword stroke, slice an Indian in half, spill his entrails, or cut off his head. They ran swords through a mother and child at once, or flung infants into rivers, laughing and making fun. They pulled babies from their mothers' breasts and swung them by the feet to smash their heads on rocks. They split open women's bellies and hacked them apart as though butchering lambs. They erected long gallows high enough to dangle thirteen Indians just above the ground, putting firewood around them to burn them alive—all in honor, or so they said, of our Redeemer and the twelve Apostles. They encased other Indians' bodies in dry straw to burn them that way. If they desired to let an Indian live, they cut both his hands nearly off, but left them dangling by the skin, as an example to those who had fled and hidden themselves. They killed the Indian nobles and lords by tying them on a grate over a slow fire, to roast them little by little until they died howling in agony.

On one occasion, I saw four or five Indian leaders being burned on grates in this way, with terrible screams, and perhaps the Spanish captain took pity on them, or possibly their cries were disturbing his sleep, because he ordered them strangled, but the executioner (whose name I know and whose kinsmen I have met in Seville) did not want to take the trouble, and so he simply shoved branches into their mouths to silence them and then stirred up the fire. And because some Indians fled and hid in the mountains, escaping from this pitiless savagery, the Spaniards trained fierce dogs to find them and tear them to pieces. These hounds did terrible carnage. And because sometimes—though seldom and for good reason—the Indians slayed a Christian, the Spaniards make a law that for every Christian slain, a hundred Indians would die.

I saw all the things that I tell of here and an infinity of similar things.

Analyzing the Sources: In addition to their gruesome nature, what other aspects of the events in the Indies would presumably displease the king of Spain?

GENERAL HISTORY OF THE INDIES

Francisco López de Gómara

Francisco López de Gómara (born c. 1511) was a Spanish chronicler who, very unlike Las Casas, never visited the Indies. Nonetheless, Gómara talked extensively with various conquerors upon their return to Spain, most notably with Cortés himself, whose personal chaplain he became. It is no surprise, then, that Gómara's writing was highly laudatory of the Spanish Conquest in America and of Cortés in particular. Gómara's General History of the Indies (1552) attracted many readers because of its stylistic elegance, which is evident in the following excerpts from the opening dedication and from a brief chapter on "Prophecies among the Indians of Hispaniola Concerning the Coming of the Spaniards." Gómara's distant vantage point and over-emphasis on the role of the Cortés inspired Bernal Díaz del Castillo, a veteran of the Cortés expedition, to respond with his own eye-witness account of events, which is also represented in this chapter.

DEDICATION

To Carlos, Holy Roman Emperor, King of Spain, Lord of the Indies and the New World

Sovereign Lord: The greatest event since the creation of the world, leaving aside the earthly incarnation and crucifixion of He who created it, has been the discovery of the Indies, and for that reason they are called a New World. The name comes not so much from the newness of their discovery as from their immense size, almost the size of the Old World, which comprises Europe, Africa, and Asia. This is also a New World because it is so different from our old one. The animals in general are not the same—the fish that swim, the birds that fly, the trees, fruit, herbs, and grains that grow—a remarkable thing for the Creator to have done, given that

SOURCE: Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia general de las Indias y Vida de Hernán Cortés* (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 1979), pp. 7–8, 52–53.

the elements are the same there and here. The men, however, are like us, except for their color, for otherwise they would be beasts or monsters who could not possibly descend, as the Indians do, from Adam. They do not have writing or money or beasts of burden—things necessary for the well-ordered life of mankind—but it is not so unusual that, living in a hot climate and lacking wool and linen, they go naked. And as they do not know Our Lord, the true God, they commit the great sins of idolatry and human sacrifice, eating human flesh and conversing with the devil, as well as committing sodomy, intercourse with throngs of women, and such things.

On the other hand, all the Indians who have become your subjects have been converted to Christianity, by the goodness and grace of God and thanks to the efforts of Your Majesty and Your Majesty's parents and grandparents. In preaching and conversion no less than in discovery and conquest, the people of Spain have gladly shouldered the burden of this great work and its attendant dangers. No other nation has ever extended its customs, language, and armed might as Spain has, nor travelled so far, by land and sea, to make its conquests. And Spain would have discovered, conquered, and converted even more had Your Majesty not needed to pursue other wars in Europe. God chose to reveal the existence of the Indies to Your Majesty's vassals, as many wise men say, precisely to insure the work of conversion, because the Spaniards, who have ever fought against infidels, began their conquest of the Indians as soon as they had finished conquering the Moors.

ON PROPHECIES AMONG THE INDIANS OF HISPANIOLA CONCERNING THE COMING OF THE SPANIARDS

When Christopher Columbus was on the island of Hispaniola, certain caciques*—along with the wise men who, among the Indians, conserve the people's memories—told him about what their idols in years past had predicted concerning the coming of the Spaniards. The Indians had inquired of their idols about the future and had

**Cacique* means local indigenous chieftain. The Spanish picked up the word in the Caribbean and then applied it elsewhere.

fasted for five days, without eating or drinking anything, and they had cried and mortified their flesh in supplication and burned the great quantities of incense that the ceremonies of their religion require. And finally the idols answered that, although they normally conceal the shape of things to come, and do so for the good of men, they would reveal the future in recognition of such fervent devotion. Then the idols predicted the coming of bearded men with bodies entirely covered by clothing, men who carried shining swords capable of splitting someone in two with a single blow. These bearded men would cast down the idols, they predicted, and punish those who performed their rites, and they would spill the blood of the Indians or carry them away in captivity. And hearing this horrifying prediction, the people had composed a sad and mournful song to be sung in the dance ceremony that they call an *areito*, and remembering that song, the Indians had fled from the Spaniards upon their arrival. Let each reader form his own opinion of this story, which I no more than report as the Indians told it.

However that may be, all these things did come to pass in exactly the manner foretold in the *areito*, because the Spaniards did indeed slice apart many Indians with their swords, both in wars and later, in the mines, and they cast down all the idols, so that not a single one remained, also prohibiting all their rites and ceremonies. The Spaniards enslaved the Indians and made them labor for their new masters harder than they were able to endure, so that some simply died and others killed themselves. That is why, of a hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants on that island alone, no more than five hundred remain today. Some died of overwork, others of hunger, and many of smallpox. Some killed themselves by drinking poison and others by hanging themselves from trees, women as well as men, and they found ways to abort their pregnancies so as not to bear children who would be forced to serve the Spaniards. God must have been punishing the Indians for their sins, but it is also true that the Spaniards were guilty of treating them very badly, valuing gold over the welfare of their fellow men.

Analyzing the Sources: What about Gómara's comments gains credibility since his overall purpose is to praise Spanish conquest of the New World?

CHRONICLE OF NEW SPAIN

Francisco Cervantes de Salazar

Francisco Cervantes de Salazar was born around 1514 in Spain, where he studied at the prestigious University of Salamanca and published a number of works on philosophical and theological topics before travelling to New Spain (as Mexico was called in the colonial period) at mid-century to become one of the first professors at the University of Mexico City. Cervantes de Salazar's Chronicle of New Spain (written in about 1560 but not published until the nineteenth century), like the work of López de Gómara, assigns a heroic role to Cortés, and it presents a notably negative portrait of the indigenous people, whose supposed general characteristics are outlined in the following excerpt. Obviously, the author is quite biased against the indigenous people, but this primary source is not useless if we read it "against the grain," looking for meanings that the author did not intend to communicate.

There is no nation so barbarous, so riddled with defects, that some virtuous and intelligent men cannot be found in its midst. Nor, to the contrary, is there any nation so wise and politic as to harbor none who are dishonorable or inclined toward vice. Thus, although the inhabitants of this enormous land were in general barbarous, as I will indicate, nonetheless there were among them some wise men, as will become evident in my later discussion of their laws.

Overall, however, one may say of the Indians that they are gullible, pusillanimous, and attracted by any sort of novelty. They pay scant heed to their honor and reputation. They are so fond of ceremonies of all kinds, that many authorities have affirmed on that basis that the Indians must somehow descend from Jews. Most are cowardly, and although some among them are called *tiacanes*, which is a way of saying "brave," their bravery is remarkable only in comparison to the cowardice of the majority. They are extremely vindic-

SOURCE: Francisco Cervantes de Salazar, *Crónica de la Nueva España* (Madrid: The Hispanic Society of America, 1914), pp. 30–31.

tive and commonly spend in suing one another much more than the value of the object of their lawsuits. They cannot keep a secret at all. Furthermore, as servants they respond only to threat of punishment, and fear alone motivates them to do a job well, so they have little respect for any master who is not stern enough or who treats them affectionately. They are such ingrates that even when they have been raised in the households of Spanish masters from whom they have received many benefits over the years, they quite easily abandon those masters when the opportunity arises. They are so fickle that they change their minds for the slightest reason. Most of them are simple-minded and have little to say, and therefore although some have managed to learn Latin, none can advance in the study of any science requiring a higher level of intelligence. They are so greedy as to be willing, when the reward is sufficient, to take their own parents prisoner (when caught in the crime of drunkenness or some other) and turn them in to the authorities by force. They are completely lazy and tend to remain inactive whenever not impelled to labor by the need to provide themselves with shelter and sustenance, and they can easily spend an entire day sitting on their heels, as they commonly do, and hardly speaking, even when in the company of others. The cause of this behavior is a predominance of phlegm in their physical composition, rendering them excessively phlegmatic, which, while in general not a good thing, does suit them for certain crafts that, no matter how experienced the craftsman, are only done well when done slowly.

The Aztec emperor Montezuma knew his subjects very well and thus governed them more effectively than any other heathen prince. Montezuma often told Cortés that, as emperor, he kept his people in line and imposed justice principally through physical discipline and corporal punishment. They quite willingly attend dance ceremonies that last all day without a rest, and there is not a single one of them, no matter how elevated his status, who does not act proud of getting totally drunk, and scarce one who does not behave badly and even commit serious crimes when under the influence of alcohol. They are generally clumsy at everything except for archery and tend to behave dishonorably on the battlefield. They are quick to follow bad examples and slow to follow good ones. They are disloyal even

with their friends, and so much so, that all kinds of contracts suffer more frequent violations among them than among us. They eat sparingly in their own houses, but gobble up everything when eating at someone else's expense and seem never to get full, no matter how much food they are given. They earn more than they deserve to and then do not spend it on property or dowries for their daughters, but rather, on alcoholic drink, whether Castilian wine, or worse, something called *pulque*, a foul-smelling, foul-tasting wine that they make from agave. This pulque makes them drunk and senseless faster and more violently than wine from grapes, and the more that we prohibit it, the more they insist on consuming it.

Analyzing the Sources: This selection arguably tells us more about the self-image of the colonizers than about the true characteristics of the colonized. Explain by “reading against the grain.”

THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST OF NEW SPAIN

Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was among the Spanish adventurers who accompanied the Cortés expedition that entered and, with the eventual collaboration of thousands of indigenous allies, ultimately destroyed the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan (here called the City of Mexico). Díaz del Castillo was of humble background and objected to accounts of the expedition that gave too little credit to rank-and-file members of the expedition, especially the account written by Francisco López de Gómara (author of a previous selection). Therefore, in his old age, decades after the Cortés expedition, now resident in Guatemala, the aging conquistador wrote his own True History of the Conquest of New Spain, which is excerpted here. Eyewitness accounts, such as this one, have their own bias, of course.

We proceeded along the causeway eight paces wide that ran straight as an arrow across the water toward the City of México ahead of us. And because it was so sturdy and well-made, the causeway was thronged with people, some entering the city and some coming out to see us, so many that we were hardly able to pass, crowds of people everywhere, on the towers and pyramids and in canoes, people who had come from all over the lake. And it was not to be marveled at, for they had never before seen horses nor men like us. We beheld such wondrous sights that we hardly knew what to say or whether what we saw ahead of us was real—large buildings standing along the shore and many others rising from the waters full of canoes. And along the causeways were many bridges at intervals, and before us stood the great City of Mexico.

We numbered not even four hundred and fifty soldiers, and we well remembered the warnings that we had received about not entering the City of Mexico because, once inside, we would surely be killed. Let curious readers ponder what I am writing here. Have men ever shown greater daring than this? But let us go on down this causeway and continue the tale.

When we reached a point where another, smaller causeway branches off in the direction of Coyoacán, where there are towering buildings for prayer, we found the pavement crowded again with great caciques clad in fine mantels, each distinct from the others, all sent to greet us by the great Montezuma. And when they came before Cortés they bade us welcome in their language, and as a sign of peace each touched and kissed the ground with his hand. Then the great Montezuma approached, carried in a rich litter and accompanied by lords and caciques with vassals of their own. And the great Montezuma got down from his litter and the surrounding caciques supported him with their arms beneath a splendid canopy that was a delight to look upon, the color of green feathers embroidered with gold and silver and bordered with a fringe of pearls and other precious things. The great Montezuma was richly attired in his manner,

SOURCE: adapted from Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Alfred Percival Maudslay (London: Hakluyt Society, 1910), pp. 2:39–44.

wearing the sandals that they call *cotaras*, their normal footwear, except that the soles of these were golden, and the uppers were adorned with precious stones. And the four lords at his sides were likewise richly dressed in garments that they had donned especially for this moment. Many other lords came ahead of Montezuma sweeping the path where he would tread and spreading cloth upon it so that his feet would not touch the ground. Not one of all these caciques thought for a moment of looking their Montezuma in the face, but rather, kept their eyes lowered with great reverence, excepting only those who supported him with their arms, for these were members of his family.

And when Cortés was told that the great Montezuma was approaching, and when he saw him coming, he dismounted from his horse, and when he was near Montezuma, the two paid reverence to one another. Montezuma offered words of welcome and our Cortés responded through his interpreter, doña Marina, desiring Montezuma good health. Montezuma offered his hand and Cortés brought out a necklace that he held ready for that moment, glass beads of many colors and patterns strung on a golden cord and sweetly scented with musk, and he placed it around the neck of the great Montezuma. And when he had so placed it, he was going to embrace him, but the lords who accompanied Montezuma held Cortés back for they considered it an indignity. And then Cortés said to Montezuma through doña Marina, his interpreter, who stood close at his side, that his heart rejoiced at seeing so great a prince and that he considered it a great honor, among many others, that Montezuma had come to greet him in person. And Montezuma answered Cortés with similar courtesies, and he instructed his two nephews, who were among the lords who stood at his elbows, the Lord of Coyoacán and the Lord of Texcoco, to go with us and show us to our lodgings. And Montezuma, with the other two relations, the Lord of Cuitlahuac and the Lord of Tacuba, who accompanied him, returned to the city, and all the rest who had come out with him, all the other lords and caciques with their entourage, returned with him. And as they turned back after their prince we stood watching them and observed how they all went with their eyes fixed on the ground with-

out looking at their lords, but only following as inconspicuously as possible, with great reverence.

Thus space was made for us to enter the streets of Mexico without being so much crowded. But who could count the multitude of men and women and boys who filled the streets and rooftops and floated in canoes on the canals to see us enter the city? It was indeed a wonderful thing, something that even now as I write this years afterward, appears before my eyes as if it happened only yesterday. And such was our daring and fortunate entrance into Tenochtitlan, the great City of Mexico, on the eighth day of November, in the year of our saviour Jesus Christ, 1519.

Analyzing the Sources: What interest did Díaz del Castillo have in writing, and how is it represented in the excerpt that you have just read?

A GENERAL HISTORY OF NEW SPAIN

Bernardino de Sahagún

Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún, born in 1499, was one of the most significant of the early missionaries to the New World. During the middle 1500s, Sahagún interviewed indigenous elders in their own language, Nahuatl, to reconstruct aspects of pre-Encounter Aztec life and culture. The results of this investigation were recorded in a body of work of enormous importance, the trilingual Florentine Codex, the Spanish-language portion of which became the General History of New Spain, excerpted here. While Sahagún's works indubitably represent an indigenous point of view, readers must consider that his informants were interviewed many decades after the events that they recounted and had been raised and educated in a post-conquest, Christian context.

As the Spaniards approached Tenochtitlan, Moctecuzoma arrayed himself in his finery to go out to receive them. Many great lords and princes accompanied him to receive Cortés and the other Spanish captains in peace and with honor. They took with them large, painted trays upon which were heaped strings of beautiful and fragrant flowers and necklaces of gold and precious gems. Moctecuzoma himself placed a necklace of gold and precious gems around the neck of Cortés, and he put the garlands of flowers around the necks of the other Spanish captains, according to our customs of greeting.

Then Cortés asked him if he were indeed the great king Moctecuzoma. And the king replied, "I am Moctecuzoma," and he made a great reverence before Cortés, and then he stood proudly and moved close, face to face with Cortés, and he spoke to him this manner, saying: "Oh, great lord! Welcome! Be at home in this land, among our people, in this city of Mexico. You have come here to sit on a throne that belongs to you, a throne that I have possessed in your name for merely a few days, a throne that other kings who came before me also possessed in your name, awaiting your coming, one who was called Itzcoatl, and another, Moctecuzoma the Elder, and another, Axayacatl, and another, Tizoc, and another Ahuitzol. I am the last among those who has ruled the people of Mexico in your name. Would that the others, who are no longer among the living, could witness your presence! They cannot see you, my lord, but I can see you, for I am not asleep, nor is this a dream. I have waited many days for this occasion. For days my heart has looked in the direction of your coming, and now you have emerged from the clouds, from the mists, from the most hidden of places, to stand among us. It is just as was foretold by the kings who came before me, saying that you would return to rule over us, that you would return to sit upon your throne. And behold, it is true. Welcome! Long roads have you trod to come to us! Rest, now. You have returned to your home, to occupy your palaces. Take them and rest with these, your captains, who have made the journey with you."

SOURCE: Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva España, 1946), pp. 3:41–45.

When Moctecuzoma had finished his speech, Marina, who was his interpreter, an Indian woman who could speak both Spanish and Nahuatl, translated it for Cortés, and Cortés replied: "Tell Moctecuzoma to have no fear, that I love and esteem him greatly, and that my men will do no harm to anyone. Tell him that we have desired for a long time to see his face and come to know him, that we are very pleased finally to have done so. We are happy to have arrived at his city, where we will have time to speak at length." Cortés took Moctecuzoma by the hand, and together they entered the city and went to the royal palace.

And the great lords who were present with Moctecuzoma on this occasion were the lord of Texcoco, whose name was Cacamatzin; the lord of Tlacopan, whose name was Tetelepanquetzatzin; the governor of Tlatelolco, whose name was Itzquauhtzin; and Moctecuzoma's treasurer, whose name was Topantemoctzín. Many lesser figures were also present, such as Cuappiatzin, Atlixcatzín tlacateccatl, Tepeoatzin tlacochcalcatl, Quetzalatzatzin ticocioacatl, and Totomotzin hecatempatiltzin, but when the Spaniards made Moctecuzoma a prisoner, all of these abandoned him and hid themselves.

No sooner had the Spaniards entered the royal palace than they placed Moctecuzoma under guard and never afterward let him out of their sight, and along with him, Itzquauhtzin, the governor of Tlatelolco. These two the Spaniards kept with them, and they let the rest go. And then they fired off their cannon, and the roar and smoke stunned the Indians, who stumbled around as if drunk and then scattered, horrified, in all directions. A mortal terror crept through the city that night, and early the next morning orders came from the palace in the name of Cortés and Moctecuzoma, commanding the city to furnish provisions of food for the Spaniards and fodder for their horses. Moctecuzoma insisted greatly that these things should be brought, and certain officials of the city did not want to obey his detailed instructions, nor to talk to Moctecuzoma while he was a prisoner of the Spaniards. Nonetheless, they did supply the necessary provisions.

When the Spaniards had thoroughly installed themselves in the royal palace, they began to question Moctecuzoma about the royal treasure, where it was located, and he sent them to the treasure

house called Teucalco, which was full of priceless feathers, jewels, and gold, and this treasure was spread before the Spaniards. The Spaniards began to tear the gold from the feather adornments and ornamental shields used in the ceremonial dances. They tore these things to pieces, and they melted the gold down into bars. They took the most precious jewels, as well, leaving the lesser ones for their Indian allies from Tlaxcala. The Spaniards also looted the royal palace, taking everything that they desired for themselves.

And having done all of this, they asked to see Moctecuzoma's private chamber, and he took them to it. The Spaniards were overjoyed, knowing that they would find much gold there, and when they arrived they looted the entire contents of the royal chamber and stripped the gold and jewels from all its feathered adornments, and they threw the feathers into the patio for the benefit of their Indian allies. Then Cortés gave orders to Marina, his interpreter, and she began to shout to the officials of the city, commanding them to bring food to feed the Spaniards, but no one dared come close to them because the entire city was so terrified. The men who finally took them food trembled as they carried it to the palace, and as soon as they had delivered it, they hurried away in fright.

Analyzing the Sources: What elements in the preceding excerpt do not appear in the text of Bernal Díaz, who was describing the same scene, and what do these differences tell us? Moctecuzoma's welcome to Cortés as a returning deity was apparently inserted decades later by Sahagún's informants. Recall it as you read El Inca Garcilaso in the next chapter.

Chapter 2

COLONIAL TRANSCULTURATION

Gradually, indigenous Americans and their new European overlords changed each other's ways and created new cultures that were neither indigenous nor European. Africans also played a role in the process, as will be documented in the next chapter. For now, however, we will explore the theme of indigenous/European interactions in South America after the Encounter, during the "mature colonial period" (the 1600s and afterwards).

The primary location of early colonization in South America was in the high Andes, especially Peru. Two things attracted colonizing energies into the Andes. Of these, large populations of fully sedentary farmers constituted the main attraction. The Spanish wanted, above all, to extend their control over prosperous, well-organized societies, and they found exactly that in the Inca Empire. Of secondary, but still enormous, importance, were the silver mines located in the same region, especially the fabulously productive "mountain of silver" at Potosí, probably the single greatest silver mine in the history of the world.

Two lengthy and valuable primary sources provide evidence about indigenous Peruvian understandings of colonization: the works of Garcilaso de la Vega (or "El Inca Garcilaso," as he is usually called) and Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala (Guaman Poma, for short), excerpted for this chapter. Both men were of indigenous descent, each having one foot in the indigenous world and one in the Spanish world. Thus both exemplify the cultural process of give-and-take that scholars of Latin America called *transculturation*. Guaman Poma (whose name is entirely indigenous) spoke the two major indigenous