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BOOK VI



CHAPTER I * HOW THE OPINION OF THOSE WHO BELIEVE THAT THE INDIANS LACK UNDERSTANDING IS FALSE

Having dealt with matters pertaining to the religion practiced by the Indians, in this book I intend to write of their customs and polity and government, with two aims in mind. One is to refute the false opinion that is commonly held about them, that they are brutes and bestial folk and lacking in understanding or with so little that it scarcely merits the name. Many and very notable abuses have been committed upon them as a consequence of this false belief, treating them as little better than animals and considering them unworthy of any sort of respect. Those who have lived among them with some degree of zeal and consideration, and have seen and known their secrets and their counsels, well know that it is a common and harmful delusion. In addition, little attention is paid to all Indians by those who think they know a great deal about them and who are usually the most ignorant and presumptuous of men. I see no better way of refuting this pernicious opinion than to describe their order and behavior when they lived under their own law. In it, although they had many barbaric traits and baseless beliefs, there were many others worthy of admiration; these clearly give us to understand that they have a natural capacity to receive good instruction and that they even surpass in large measure many of our own republics.¹ And it is no

1. Acosta rarely makes an explicit accusation about abuses, as he does in this chapter, where he critiques the Spanish treatment of native peoples, most likely at the hands of *encomenderos*. Moreover, he combines a critique of the Spanish with praise for the indigenous capacity for learning Christian practices. Acosta's assertion in chapter 1, which is echoed throughout book VI, shows that he finds value in some native abilities,

wonder that there were gross errors among them, for these are found even in the gravest legislators and philosophers, not excepting Lycurgus and Plato. In the wisest republics, such as those of the Romans and Athenians, we see signs of ignorance deserving of laughter; and, certainly, if the republics of the Mexicans and Incas had been described in the times of the Romans or Greeks, their laws and government would be respected. But if, knowing nothing of this, we enter by the sword and neither hear nor understand them, we do not believe that the Indians' affairs deserve repute but treat them like game hunted in the hills and brought to us for our service and whim.

The most diligent and learned men who have penetrated and attained their secrets, their ancient style, and their government judge them in a very different way, amazed that there could have been so much order and reason among them. One of these authors is Polo Ondegardo, whom I chiefly follow in things pertaining to Peru, and in matters of Mexico Juan de Tovar, a former prebendary of the Church in Mexico and now a religious in our Society of Jesus; on the orders of the viceroy Don Martín Enríquez, he made a diligent and lengthy study of that nation's old histories. And I do not mention other weighty authors who have informed me very fully, either in writing or orally, of everything I am going to recount.² The other aim that can be achieved with knowledge of the laws and customs and polity of the Indians is to help them and rule them by those very laws, for in whatever does not contradict the law of Christ and his Holy Church, they ought to be governed according to their statutes, which are as it were their municipal laws. Through ignorance of these, errors of no little importance have been committed, for those who judge and rule them have not known how to judge and rule their subjects. This, in addition to being an offense and an unreasonable

like the use of *quipus* for confession, and views such practices as evidence that the Indians "have a natural capacity to receive good instruction." This combination of critique and praise is unique for the late sixteenth century, an era that Sabine MacCormack has identified as a turning point for missionary activity in Peru, when conversion by persuasion "was supplanted by an ever-increasing insistence on the authority, not only of Christianity, but of European concepts of culture" ("The Heart Has Its Reasons," 446).

2. Here Acosta acknowledges Polo and Tovar as his primary sources on native peoples. The degree to which Acosta relied on Tovar was revealed with the 1856 discovery and subsequent analysis of the "Tovar Manuscript." While no one disputes that Acosta borrowed heavily from Tovar, scholars now agree that this practice was well within the boundaries of scholarly exchange in early modern Europe. In the prologue to the 1962 edition of Acosta's work, Edmundo O'Gorman studies and rejects a nineteenth-century accusation of plagiarism lodged against Acosta. See Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* edited by Edmundo O'Gorman (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1962), 12–23.

thing done to them, causes great harm, for it makes us Spaniards abhorred as men who are and always have been their enemies in both good and evil.

CHAPTER 2 * OF THE METHOD OF
CALCULATING TIME AND THE CALENDAR THAT
THE MEXICANS USED

Beginning, therefore, with the divisions of time and the calculations that the Indians used, which is one of the most remarkable proofs of their cleverness and skill, I will first state how the Mexicans reckoned and distributed their year and will tell of their months and calendar and their reckoning of centuries or ages.¹ They divided the year into eighteen months and assigned twenty days to each month, making a total of three hundred and sixty days; the other five that remained to fill out the rest of the year were not assigned to any month but were counted separately, and these were called days of idleness, during which the people did nothing, nor did they go to the temple. They spent them only in visiting one another and wasting time, and the temple priests ceased to sacrifice. When those days were over they again began the calculation of their year, whose beginning and first month was March, when the leaves begin to turn green again, although they took three days from February, for the first day of their new year was the twenty-sixth of February, as is evident in their calendar. Our own calendar has been incorporated into it with remarkably accurate reckoning and skill, done by the early Indians first encountered by the Spaniards. I have seen this calendar and still have it in my possession, and it is worthy of study in order to understand the reasoning power and skill of these Mexican Indians.² Each of the eighteen months to which I referred has its special name and its own picture and sign, and this was commonly taken from the chief festival that took place in that

1. To clarify the account given by Acosta, the Aztec civilization used two calendars, one seasonal and one sacred, to calculate time on a fifty-two-year cycle. The seasonal, or *xiuhtl*, had eighteen months of twenty days each plus a five-day period at the end. The sacred, or *tonalpoalli*, was made up of twenty signs matched with numbers from one to thirteen. Priests made calculations from the sacred calendar to determine a day sign, or *tonalli*, for each newborn baby.

2. Acosta had in his possession a reckoning of the Aztec day sign calendar sent to him by Tovar. The manuscript is located in the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, and was published in George Kubler and Charles Gibson, *The Tovar Calendar: An Illustrated Mexican Manuscript ca. 1585* (New Haven: Memoirs of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1951) 2:9–21. Tovar may well have discussed the calendar with Diego Durán, who wrote *The Book of Gods and the Ancient Calendar*; translated by Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971).

month or from the differences in appearance that the year causes. And they had certain days marked on their calendar for all their festivals. They counted weeks by thirteen days and marked each day with a zero or small round dot, multiplying the zeroes up to thirteen, and then began to count again: one, two, and so on. They also divided the years by using four signs, giving a sign to each year. These signs were four figures: one was a house, another a rabbit, the third a piece of cane, the fourth a flint; and they pictured them thus and used them to name the current year, saying, "In such and such houses or such and such flints of such and such a wheel, such a thing happened," for it must be understood that their wheel, which is like a century, contained four weeks of years, each week consisting of thirteen years, so that the sum of them all was fifty-two years. They painted a sun in the center, and then four arms or lines came out from it to the circumference of the wheel in the shape of a cross, thus dividing the circumference into four parts, each of them with its line of the same color, of which there were four different ones: green, blue, red, and yellow. And each of these had its thirteen compartments with its sign of house, rabbit, cane, or flint, each representing its year, and at one side they painted what had happened in that year. And so I saw in the calendar of which I have spoken an indication of the year when the Spaniards entered Mexico, with a picture of a man dressed in our style of clothing, painted in red, for that was the dress of the first Spaniard that Hernán Cortés sent.

At the end of the fifty-two years that closed the wheel they employed an amusing ceremony, and it was that on the last night they broke all the vessels they possessed and extinguished all the fires, saying that in one of the wheels the world was sure to come to an end and that perchance it was the one in which they were living, and that since the world was going to end there was no need to cook or eat, and for what did they need vessels or fire; and they would stay like this all night, saying that perhaps dawn would never come again, all of them watching very closely to see if the sun would rise. When they observed that dawn was coming they played on many drums and horns and flutes and other instruments of rejoicing and merriment, saying that God was granting them another century, which was fifty-two years, and then they began another wheel. On the day on which dawn ushered in another century they lit new fires and bought new dishes, pots, and everything necessary for cooking, and all went for new fire to the place where the high priest had lighted it, with a most solemn procession going before as a sign of thanks-

giving because the dawn had come and granted them another century. This was their method of counting years and months and weeks and centuries.

CHAPTER 3 * OF THE METHOD OF COUNTING
YEARS AND MONTHS USED BY THE INCAS

In this calculation of the Mexicans, although for unlettered men it contains much reckoning and skill, yet I consider it a flaw not to count by moons or to distribute the months according to them. In this respect there is no doubt that the Peruvians surpassed them, for they reckoned their year correctly into a certain number of days, as we do, and divided it into twelve months or moons, using up the eleven lunar days that are left over, as Polo writes, by placing them within the months themselves. They used the following device to make the year's reckoning accurate and exact: in the hills around the city of Cuzco (which was the court of the Inca kings and also the greatest sanctuary of their realms, another Rome, as it were), they had twelve large pillars placed in order at such a distance and in such a position that each month one of the pillars indicated where the sun came up and where it set. They called these pillars *succanga*, and it was there that they announced festivals and the proper times for sowing and reaping and so on. They performed certain sacrifices to these pillars of the sun, according to their superstitions. Each month had its own distinct name and its special festivals. Formerly they began the year in January, as we do; but later an Inca king whom they called Pachacuti, which means "reformer of time," began the year in December, in consideration (as we may suppose) of the time when the sun begins to return from the farthest point of Capricorn, which is the tropic closest to them. It is not known whether either group had a correct reckoning of leap years, although some say that they did. The weeks reckoned by the Mexicans were not properly speaking weeks, for they were not of seven days, nor did the Incas make this division. And it is no wonder that they did not, for the reckoning of the week is not like that of the year, which is calculated by the course of the sun, nor like the month, which is calculated by that of the moon, except among the Hebrews, by the order of the creation of the world described by Moses,¹ and in the Greeks and Romans by the number of the seven planets, from whose names the days of the week take theirs. But for

1. Genesis, I (O'G).

men who lacked books and letters it is sufficient and more than sufficient that they had the year and the festivals and times calculated with such harmony and order as I have said.

CHAPTER 4 * HOW NO NATION OF INDIANS HAS
BEEN FOUND TO HAVE THE USE OF LETTERS

Letters were invented to refer to and immediately signify the words that we pronounce, just as words and terms themselves, according to the philosopher, are immediate signs of men's concepts and thoughts.¹ And one as well as the other (by this I mean both letters and words) were established to make us understand things: words for present things and letters for those that are absent or still to come. Signs that are not arranged in such a way as to signify words, but only things, are not called letters, nor are they truly letters even though they are written, just as a picture of the sun cannot be called writing, or letters representing the sun, but is simply a picture.² Nor can other signs that have no resemblance to the thing but serve only as reminders be described as writing, for the person who invented them did not do so to represent words but simply to denote that thing. Such signs are not called, nor are they properly speaking, letters or writing but ciphers or memory devices, like those used by spherists or astronomers to denote different signs or planets such as Mars, Venus, Jupiter, and so on. These are ciphers and not letters, for no matter by what name Mars is called, the Italian, the Frenchman, and the Spaniard denote it in the same way. Letters do not do this, for, although they denote things, they do so through words, and thus only those who know that language can understand them. For example: the word *sol* is written; neither Greek nor Hebrew knows what it means, for these languages do not know the Latin word itself. So that writing and letters are used only by those who signify words with them, and if they immediately signify the same things then they are not letters or writing but pictures and ciphers. From this

1. Aristotle (O'G).

2. Acosta's celebration of the letter responded to the widespread Renaissance belief that the alphabet was superior to other writing systems. This idea has been powerfully articulated by Elio Antonio de Nebrija in his *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492) and *Reglas de ortographia en la lengua castellana* (1517). In the twentieth century, the same ideology is still at work in the influential article by Jack Goody and Ian Watt, "The Consequences of Literacy," in *Literacy and Traditional Societies*, edited by Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

we may draw two important conclusions. One is that the remembrance of history, and of ancient times, can persist among men in one of three ways: either by letters and writing, as the Romans, Greeks, and Hebrews use, as well as many other nations; or by pictures, as have been used almost everywhere in the world (since, as was said in the second Nicene Council, pictures are a book for the illiterate); or by ciphers or characters, just as an arithmetical figure can stand for the numbers one hundred, one thousand, and so on, without necessarily meaning the word *hundred* or *thousand*. The other important conclusion to be drawn is the one stated in the title of this chapter, namely, that no nation of Indians discovered in our time uses letters or writing but employs the other two methods, which are images or figures. And by this I mean not only the Indians of Peru and New Spain but also in part the Japanese and Chinese, although what I have said may seem very wrong to some, since there have been so many accounts of the great libraries and places of study in China and Japan and of their printed blocks and writing supplies and letters. But it is the plain truth, as will be understood in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5 * OF THE KINDS OF LETTERS AND
BOOKS THAT THE CHINESE USE

Many think (and indeed it is the common opinion) that the forms of writing employed by the Chinese are letters such as we use in Europe; I mean that words and terms can be expressed with them and that they differ from our letters and writing only in the fact that the characters are different, as Greek characters differ from Latin ones and from those of the Hebrews and Chaldeans. And for the most part this is not true; for they neither have an alphabet nor do they write any letters, nor does the distinction lie in the characters. Rather, their writing consists chiefly of making pictures or signs, and their letters do not signify parts of words like ours but are pictures of things such as sun, fire, man, sea, and so on. This is clearly proved by the fact that, although the languages spoken by the Chinese are innumerable and very different one from another, their writings and printed blocks are read and understood equally well in all languages, just as a single number is understood equally well in French and Spanish and Arabic. For this figure, 8, means eight everywhere, even though French expresses it with one word and Spanish with another.

From this it may be deduced that, since things themselves are innumerable, the letters or pictures used by the Chinese to denote them are almost infinite in number. For the person who needs to read and write in China, as the mandarins do, must know at least 85,000 pictures or letters, and those who must be perfect in that kind of reading have to know some 120,000. This is an astonishing thing and not to be credited were it not stated by persons as worthy of belief as the fathers of our society, who are even now in China learning their language and system of writing; and they have been studying this subject day and night for more than ten years with almost superhuman effort, for the love of Christ and the desire to save souls overcome all obstacles. This is the very reason why literate men are held in such esteem in China, because it is so difficult a thing, and only they hold positions as mandarins and governors and judges and captains. And hence parents take great care to have their children learn to read and write. There are many and excellent schools where children and youths learn this; and the master at school by day, and their parents at home by night, make them study so much that their eyes are constantly weary, and they are very often beaten with canes, though not such cruel ones as are used for malefactors. They call this the Mandarin language, and by the time a person has mastered it he has attained adult age; and it should be noted that, although the language spoken by the mandarins is a single language and different from the common ones, which are numerous, it is studied there like Greek and Latin among us, and only learned men (who are found everywhere in China) know it. But what is written in it is understood in every language, for, although the different provinces cannot understand one another by means of spoken words, they do understand the writing because the letters or pictures are the same for all and mean the same, even though they do not have the same name or pronunciation. For, as I have said, they serve to denote things and not words, as can easily be understood by the example I gave regarding numbers.¹ It also follows from this that even though

1. Contrary to Acosta's belief, today it is accepted that Chinese writing does not represent "things" but indicates things or ideas (ideograms) as they build on a conglomeration of words and meaning (logograms). Acosta's perspective on alphabetic writing and scientific knowledge was based on the written word, preventing him from understanding the complicity between painting, writing, and knowledge in Chinese culture. In an illuminating article D. N. Keightley observed: "A man absorbed with writing was absorbed not just with words but with symbols and, through the act of writing with the brush, with a form of painting and thus with the word itself. To the lover of high culture, the way in which something was written could be as important as

the Japanese and Chinese have such different nations and languages both can read and understand the language of the other; and were they to speak what they read and write they would not understand each other at all. These, then, are the letters and books used by the Chinese, which are so famous in the world, and they print by engraving a wooden block with the pictures they wish to print and then stamping as many pages as they wish, just as we print pictures by engraving copper or wood.

But any intelligent man will ask how they can express ideas by means of these pictures, for it is impossible to signify the different ideas that surround a picture, such as saying that the sun warms, or that he looked at the sun, or that the day is sunny; finally, how is it possible to denote in mere pictures the cases and conjugations and articles that many languages and systems of writing have? To this we reply that they indicate all this kind of meaning by different dots and flourishes and positions. It is more difficult to understand how they can write proper names, especially foreign ones, for these are things that they have never seen, nor could they have invented a picture for them. I tried to examine this when I was in Mexico with some Chinese, and I asked them to write this sentence, or something resembling it, in their language: "José de Acosta has come from Peru." The Chinese gentleman thought about it for a long time and at last wrote, and then the others read what was indeed the same sentence, although there was some variation in the proper name; for they use the device of taking the proper name and finding something in their language that resembles that thing, and then they write down the picture of it. And as it is difficult in so many names to find a resemblance between things and the way they sound in their own language it is very difficult for them to write such names. Father Alonso Sánchez told us that when he was in China and the mandarins took him from one tribunal to another they spent a long time writing his name on those blocks they use and at last would give him a name after their fashion in a ridiculous way that scarcely resembled it. This is the kind of letters and writing that the Chinese use. That of the Japanese is very similar to it, although Japanese who have been in Europe say that they can write anything in their own language, even European proper names, and showed me some writings of theirs that seem to

its content." See his "The Origins of Writing in China: Scripts and Cultural Contexts," in *The Origins of Writing*, edited by Wayne M. Sennner (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

indicate that they have some kind of letters, although most of their writing must be by characters and pictures, as has been said of the Chinese.

CHAPTER 6 * OF UNIVERSITIES AND
STUDIES IN CHINA

The fathers of our society who have been there say that they did not see colleges and universities that teach philosophy and other natural sciences, nor can they believe that there are any, and that their entire course of study is the Mandarin language, which is extremely difficult and very vast, as has been said. What they also study are things that are found in this language, such as histories, sects, civil laws, and moral precepts taught through proverbs, tales, and many other compositions; and the degrees that exist are in these studies of their language and laws. They have not a trace of divine sciences or theology, of the natural sciences hardly a trace, with little or no method or skill but only occasional propositions, according to the intellect and study of each in mathematics, knowledge of celestial movements and stars, and in medicine by acquaintance with herbs, which they use extensively, and many effect cures with them. They write with brushes; they have many manuscript and printed books, all of them badly put together.¹ They are fine actors and perform with a great show of scenery, costumes, bells, drums, and voices at intervals. The fathers tell of having seen plays that lasted for ten or twelve days and nights, with actors never absent from the stage and no lack of audience to watch; they present different characters and scenes one after another, and while some are performing others are sleeping or eating. Moral precepts and good examples are presented in these plays but mixed with other things that are clearly pagan. In short, this is what our members tell us of letters and the exercise of letters in China, which undeniably possess great cleverness and skill; but all of it is of very little substance, for the whole science of the Chinese amounts merely to knowing how to read and write.

1. In the realm of the materiality of sign carriers, Acosta had no less difficulty in understanding Chinese writing and the organization and transmission of knowledge (science). In the West by that time the material sign carrier had already been established in "book" form, after the medieval codex and its most recent printed version. In China, "rolls" were preferred. "Chinese books" is a misleading expression, as misleading as it would have been to talk about "Spanish rolls" from the point of view of the Chinese. On the Chinese and Japanese writing surfaces and sign carriers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, see Sherman E. Lee, "Art in Japan, 1450-1550" and "Art in China, 1450-1550," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration* (Washington, DC: National Gallery, 1991), 315-27.

They do not grasp the higher sciences, and even their reading and writing is not genuine reading and writing, for their letters do not serve to make words but are little pictures of any number of things, which they learn by means of infinite labor and huge expenditures of time. And with all their knowledge an Indian of Peru or Mexico who has learned to read and write knows more than the wisest mandarin among them; for the Indian, with twenty-four letters that he knows how to write and join together, can write and read all the words in the world, and the mandarin with his hundred thousand letters will be hard put to it to write any proper name such as Martín or Alonso, and much less to write the names of things that he does not recognize. For, after all, the writing of China is merely a form of painting or making signs.

CHAPTER 7 * OF THE KINDS OF LETTERS AND
WRITING THAT THE MEXICANS USED

Among the nations of New Spain there is great knowledge and memory of their ancient customs. And when I desired to learn how the Indians could preserve their histories in so much detail I realized that, although they did not possess the care and refinement of the Chinese and Japanese, still they did not lack some kinds of letters and books, with which they preserved after their fashion the deeds of their ancestors. In the province of Yucatan, seat of the bishopric known as that of Honduras, there were some books with leaves in the Indian style, either bound or folded, in which the wisest Indians kept the distribution of time, and knowledge of plants and animals and other things pertaining to nature, as well as their ancient customs, and it was the result of great zeal and diligence. A missionary there thought that all of it must be witches' spells and magic art and insisted that they be burned, and indeed those books were burned, which was regretted afterward not only by the Indians but by curious Spaniards who desired to know the secrets of that land.¹ The same fate has befallen other things, which, because our people

1. The zealous Yucatan missionary who burned the sacred writings of the Maya was none other than the Franciscan Diego de Landa. Although Landa recognized the value of the sacred Maya books in his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán* of 1566, he had them burned in 1562 along with other sacred objects during a brutal anti-idolatry campaign. Landa commented on the burning in one of the most famous passages on Spaniards' attitudes toward Mayan literacy: "These people also used certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in their books about the antiquities and their sciences; with these, and with figures, and certain signs in the figures, they understood their matters, made them known, and taught them. We found a great number of

thought that all of it was superstition, meant the loss of many memories of ancient and hidden things that might have been of no little use. This happens out of unhealthy zeal on the part of those who, without knowing or wanting to know anything about the Indians, indiscriminately dub everything witchcraft, and say that the Indians are all drunkards, and ask what they can know or understand.

Those who have tried to investigate these matters in the proper way have found many things worthy of consideration. One of the members of our Society of Jesus, a very sensible and clever man, brought together in the province of Mexico the old men of Texcoco and Tula and Mexico and conferred with them at length, and they showed him their collections of books and their histories and calendars, a sight very much worth seeing.² For they had their pictures and hieroglyphs with which they represented things in the following way: things that had shapes were painted in their own image, and for things that did not have actual shapes they had characters signifying this, and hence were able to express whatever they wanted. And for a reminder of the time when each thing happened they had those painted wheels, each containing a century, which as I said before was of fifty-two years; and they painted these things beside those wheels, corresponding to the year in which memorable events occurred, using the pictures and characters I have described. For instance, by placing a picture of a man with a red hat and jacket in the sign of the cane, which was the century at the time, they marked the year when the Spaniards came into their land; and they did the same with other events. But because their figures and characters were not as adequate as those of our writing and letters, this meant that they could not make the words conform exactly but could only express the essential part of ideas. But they also have the custom of repeating in chorus orations and speeches made by the ancient orators and rhetoricians, and many songs that their poets

books in these letters, and since they contained nothing but superstitions and falsehoods of the devil we burned them all, which they took most grievously, and which gave them great pain" (Diego de Landa, *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*, translated with notes by William Gates [New York: Dover, 1978], 82). Historian Inga Clendinnen explores the complex character of Landa in *Ambivalent Conquest: Maya and Spaniard in Yucatan, 1517–1570* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), esp. 69–80.

2. The fellow Jesuit to whom Acosta refers is the aforementioned Juan de Tovar. The histories and calendars, again, are those that are found in the "Tovar Manuscript," also known as the *Codex Ramírez*. The critical point in Acosta's comment here is the assertion that Tovar's methodological approach, which privileges the native voice in the collection of historical sources, is valuable to the Spanish.

composed, which would have been impossible to learn through those hieroglyphics and characters. It is known that the Mexicans were very diligent in making boys commit those speeches and compositions to memory, and for this purpose they had schools, and as it were colleges or seminaries, where the old men taught the youth these and many other things that are preserved by tradition as fully as if they had been set down in writing.³ In particular they obliged the youths whom they had chosen to be rhetoricians and to practice the office of orators to learn famous orations, and commit them to memory word for word; and many of these, when the Spaniards came and taught them to read and write our letters, were written down by the Indians themselves, as responsible men who have read them can testify.

And I say this because some persons who read such long and elegant speeches in Mexican history will easily believe that they were invented by the Spaniards and not really composed by the Indians; but once they understand the truth they will not fail to give proper credit to the Indians' histories. The Indians also wrote down these same speeches after their own fashion, with pictures and characters; and, to satisfy my mind about this, I have seen the prayers of Our Father and Ave Maria, the Creed, and the general confession written in the Indian way I have described; and surely everyone who sees it will be astonished, because to signify the phrase "I, a sinner, do confess" they paint an Indian kneeling at the feet of a religious, as if confessing; and then for the expression "Omnipotent God" they paint three faces with crowns to represent the Trinity; and for the glorious Virgin Mary they paint the face of Our Lady and a bust of her with a child; and for Saint Peter and Saint Paul two heads with crowns, and keys and a sword, and in this way the whole confession is written in pictures. And where there are no pictures they put characters, such as in "wherein I have sinned"; from this the keenness of the Indians' minds can be inferred, for the Spaniards never taught them this way

3. The skill of oral communication was practiced as a high art form in Aztec society. Male children of the elite attended the *calmecac*, where priests trained them in literary rules and memorization of songs, poems, and histories. Young girls learned songs at the all-female schools called *cuicacalli*. Such forms of oral expression were commonly practiced at public religious and political gatherings. In some instances, pictorial codices served to jog the memories of the orators. In addition to songs and poetry, the speeches of the elders, called *huehuetlatolli*, extolled the values of Aztec life at specific junctions like birth or death or the crowning of a new ruler. Examples of these coronation speeches appear in the history of ancient Mexico in book VII of Acosta. The basic colonial source for ancient Mexican oratory is book VI of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, "Rhetoric and Moral Philosophy."

of writing our prayers and matters of faith, nor could they have thought of it had they not had a very clear idea of what they were being taught. I also saw written in Peru, in the same style of pictures and characters, the confession of all his sins that an Indian brought when he came to confession, painting each of the Ten Commandments in a particular way and then making certain signs like ciphers, which were the sins that he had committed against each commandment. I have no doubt that, if many of the most complacent Spaniards were given the task of memorizing such things by the use of pictures and signs, they would not succeed in committing them to memory in a whole year or perhaps even in ten.

CHAPTER 8 * OF THE MEMORY AIDS AND
RECKONINGS USED BY THE INDIANS OF PERU

Before the Spaniards came the Indians of Peru had no kind of writing at all, either by letters or characters or ciphers or pictures, like those of China or Mexico; but this did not prevent them from preserving the memory of ancient times, nor did they fail to keep a reckoning for all their affairs whether of peace, war, or government. For they were very diligent in passing tradition from one generation to another, and the young men received and preserved what their elders told them as a sacred trust and taught it to their successors with the same care. Apart from this task, they compensated in part for the lack of writing and letters with pictures like those of Mexico, (although those of Peru were very coarse and rough), and in part, indeed principally, with *quipus*.¹ *Quipus* are memory aids or registers made up of cords on which dif-

1. Acosta's praise of the *quipu* in this chapter is noteworthy given the fact that the *quipu*, originally deemed harmless by Spanish missionaries who only recognized religious histories in book form, became the subject of scrutiny after the Taki Onqoy rebellion of the 1560s. Indeed, the 1582 Third Council of Lima, in which Acosta played a major role, determined they were no longer to be used to decorate churches but should be destroyed. Examples of these complex memory devices still exist today.

The "coarse and rough" pictures Acosta mentioned were wooden boards painted with images that, when interpreted by a person familiar with them, revealed such information as Inca laws. Acosta's negative evaluation of the Andean images may suggest that the boards did not hold pictographic figures like those found in Mesoamerican codexes. "Figures" and "codexes" were more approximate to Acosta's notion of letters and books than these boards covered with *tocapu*, a geometric design structure that conveyed information. No examples of these wooden tablets are extant.

Acosta's comparison between Mexican and Andean forms of writing deserves further comment in light of recent scholarly comparisons. Tom Cummins observes that the adaptation of Mexican art forms for use in the

ferent knots and different colors signify different things. What they achieved in this way is incredible, for whatever books can tell of histories and laws and ceremonies and accounts of business all is supplied by the *quipus* so accurately that the result is astonishing. Appointed to possess these *quipus*, or memorials, were officials who today are called *quipucamayos*, and these men were obliged to render an account of each thing, like public notaries here in Spain, and hence they had to be believed absolutely. There were different *quipus*, or strands, for different subjects, such as war, government, taxes, ceremonies, and lands. And in each bunch of these were many knots and smaller knots and little strings tied to them, some red, others green, others blue, others white: in short, just as we extract an infinite number of differences out of twenty-four letters by arranging them in different ways and making innumerable words, they were able to elicit any number of meanings from their knots and colors.² This is true to the extent that nowadays in Peru every two or three years, when a Spanish governor is subjected to a trial of residency, the Indians come forward with their small proven reckonings, saying that in a certain town they gave him six eggs and he did not pay for them, and in such and such a house a hen, and in another place two bundles of hay for his horses, and that he paid only so and so many tomines and still owes so and so many; and all of this is accurately proved with a quantity of knots and bundles of strands, which they consider to be witnesses and authentic writing. I saw a bundle of these strings on which an Indian woman had brought a written general confession of her whole life and used it to confess just as I would have done with words written on paper; and I even asked about some little threads that looked different to me, and they were certain circumstances under which the sin required to be fully confessed.

Apart from these string *quipus* they have others composed of pebbles, from which they accurately learn the words that they want to commit to memory.

colonial period, specifically maps and genealogies, suggests compatibility with European forms. Andean art forms, on the other hand, like the *tocapu* designs in textiles or pottery, were so different that “there was an almost complete loss of Andean forms in official colonial culture.” See his “Colonial Image of the Inca,” in *Writing without Words: Alternative Literacies in Mesoamerica and the Andes*, edited by Elizabeth Hill Boone and Walter D. Mignolo (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 210.

2. Despite his general assertion as to the superiority of the written language, Acosta draws a parallel between the uses of the letters of the alphabet and the different knots and colors of the *quipu*. For further explication, see Walter D. Mignolo, “Signs and Their Transmission: The Question of the Book in the New World,” in Boone and Mignolo, *Writing without Words*, esp. 234–37.

And it is something to see quite old men learning the Our Father with a circle made of pebbles, and with another circle the Ave Maria, and with another the Creed, and to know which stone represents “who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,” and which “suffered under Pontius Pilate”; and you have only to see them correct themselves when they make an error, and the whole correction consists in looking at their pebbles. All I would need to forget everything I have learned by heart would be a circle of those pebbles. Not a few of these circles are found in the cemeteries of the churches for this purpose; and to see them use another type of *quipu* that employs grains of maize is a fascinating thing. For to make a very difficult calculation, to see how much each person must contribute, which an excellent accountant would have to do with pen and ink, these Indians, taking so many grains from that place and adding a certain number from this, and hesitating a hundred times, will take their grains and put one here, three there, and eight I don’t know where; they will move one grain to another place, switch three from elsewhere, and their account comes out very accurately, without the slightest error; and they know much more clearly how to balance an account of what each one has to pay or give, than we could accomplish with pen and ink. If this is not intelligence, and these men are beasts, let anyone who likes judge of it; what I truly believe is that they surpass us considerably in the things to which they apply themselves.

CHAPTER 9 * OF THE ORDER THE INDIANS
MAINTAIN IN THEIR WRITINGS

It would be well to add to what we have stated about the Indians’ writing, that their method was not to write one line after another but from top to bottom or in a circle. The Romans and Greeks wrote from left to right, which is the common and ordinary method that we use; the Hebrews do the opposite, for they start from right to left, and so their books have their beginning where ours end. The Chinese do not write like either the Greeks or the Hebrews, but from the top down, for since theirs are not letters but whole expressions in which each figure or character means one thing they have no need to connect some parts with others and hence can write from top to bottom. The Indians of Mexico, for the same reason, did not write in lines from one side to the other but the reverse of the Chinese, beginning at the bottom and going up; and they did this in the calculation of days and the

other things that they wrote, although when they wrote in their wheels or signs they started in the middle, where the sun was represented, and continued to draw by years until they reached the edge of the wheel. Finally, all four of these differences are found in their writings: some write from right to left, others from left to right, others from top to bottom, and others from bottom to top. Such is the diversity of men's ingenuity.

CHAPTER IO * HOW THE INDIANS DISPATCHED
THEIR MESSENGERS

To finish this subject of writing, some may rightly doubt how the kings of Mexico and Peru could receive news from all their realms, which were so great, or by what means they could send news of things that happened in their court, since they had no letters nor did they write dispatches. This doubt will be satisfied if we realize that, by word of mouth and pictures and memory devices, they were given information at very frequent intervals about everything that happened. For this purpose they had very swift runners, who served as couriers and went to and fro and were trained from boyhood in running; and they made sure that they were very well trained in breathing, so that they could run up a very steep hill without tiring. That is why they gave a prize in Mexico to the first three or four who could run up that long staircase of the temple, as has been described in the previous book. And in Cuzco the long-eared youths, in their solemn festival of Capacraymi, vied with each other in climbing the hill of Huanacauri; and in general it has always been, and still is, very common for the Indians to exercise by running. When it was a matter of importance, they carried a painting of the subject they wished to disclose to the lords of Mexico, as they did when the first Spanish ships appeared and at the time when they went to capture Toponchan. In Peru a strange importance was given to the mail, for the Inca established posts or mail stations all over his empire, which are called *chasquis* there, and of which I will speak in their proper place.

CHAPTER II * OF THE GOVERNMENT AND
MONARCHS THAT THEY HAD

It is a proven fact that barbarian peoples show their barbarity most clearly in their government and manner of ruling, for the more closely men approach

to reason the more humane and less arrogant is their government, and those who are kings and nobles conform and accommodate themselves to their vassals, acknowledging that they are equal by nature and inferior only in the sense that they have less obligation to care for the public good. But among barbarians the case is the opposite, for their government is tyrannical and they treat their subjects like beasts while they themselves desire to be treated like gods. Therefore, many tribes and Indian peoples do not allow kings or absolute lords but live in free communities; and only for certain things, chiefly war, do they raise up captains and princes, who are obeyed while that occasion lasts and then return to their previous estate. This is the way most of this New World is governed, where there are no organized kingdoms nor established republics, nor hereditary and recognized princes or kings; however, there are some lords and principal men who are like knights, of higher status than the common herd. This is the case in almost the whole land of Chile, where the Araucanos, and those of Tucapel and others, have resisted the Spaniards for so many years. It was the situation in all the New Realm of Granada, and in Guatemala and the islands, and all of Florida and Brazil and Luzón, and other very extensive territories, except that in many of them their barbarity is even greater, for they scarcely recognize any head and all command and govern together. In those places everything is governed by whim and violence and unreason and disorder, and the most powerful man prevails and commands. In the East Indies there are extensive and well-organized kingdoms, like those of Siam and Bisnaga and others, which can put a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand men into the field whenever they wish; and superior to all the others is the greatness and power of the kingdom of China, whose monarchs have lasted for more than two thousand years according to them, thanks to their splendid form of government. In the West Indies only two established kingdoms or empires have been discovered, that of the Mexicans in New Spain and that of the Incas in Peru, and I could not easily say which of these has been a more powerful realm. For in buildings and the splendor of his court Moctezuma surpassed the rulers of Peru, but in treasures and wealth and extension of territory the Incas were greater than the Mexicans. In point of antiquity the realm of the Incas was older, though not by much, and I think they were equal in feats of arms and victories. One thing is certain, that these two realms greatly surpassed all the other Indian dominions that have been discovered in the New World as to

good order and degree of civic organization as well as power and wealth, and exceeded them much more in superstition and the cult of their idols, for they were very similar in many ways.¹ In one thing they were very different, for among the Mexicans the succession of the kingdom was by election, as in the Roman Empire, and among those of Peru it was by inheritance and blood, as in the kingdoms of Spain and France. I shall deal with what seems most appropriate in these two types of government (for they are the chief and best known among the Indians), omitting many small matters and tedious details that are of no importance.

CHAPTER 12 * OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE
INCA KINGS OF PERU

When the Inca who reigned in Peru died his legitimate son succeeded, and the legitimate son was deemed to be the one who had been born of the Inca's principal wife, whom they called Coya; and she, from the times of one who was called the Inca Yupanqui, was his sister, for the kings made a point of marrying their sisters, and though they had other wives or concubines, the succession of the kingdom resided in the son of the Coya. It is true that when the king had a legitimate brother he would succeed before the son, and after him his nephew and the son of the previous Inca; and the same order of succession was maintained by the *curacas* and lords in their estates and offices. Any number of ceremonies and exaggerated funeral honors were held, after their fashion, for the dead man. They had one very grandiose custom, and it was that no king who entered on his reign inherited any part of the table service and treasures and possessions of his predecessor but had to establish his household anew and gather silver and gold and everything else by himself, without touching anything belonging to the dead man. All of it was dedicated to his temple, or huaca, and for the maintenance and revenues of the family he left behind, who along with all their descendants were perpetually occupied in the sacrifices and ceremonies and cult of the dead king, for then they held him to be a god, and he had his sacrifices and his statues and all the rest. For this reason the treasure that existed in Peru was immense because

1. Since Acosta had no recourse to the extensive information available today on pre-Hispanic societies, he ignored cultures that exhibited a more organized governmental structure than a chiefdom at periods prior to Spanish conquest, such as the Maya.

each of the Incas tried to make his household and wealth greater than those of his ancestors.

The insignia with which they took possession of the kingdom was a red tassel of very fine wool, finer than silk, which hung in the middle of the forehead; and only the Inca could wear it because it was like a crown or royal diadem. Other lords could and did wear tassels, but on the side, hung near the ear; but the tassel in the middle of the forehead could be worn only by the Inca, as I have said. Very solemn festivals and a multitude of sacrifices took place at the time he assumed the tassel, with a large quantity of gold and silver vessels and many small figures of sheep made of the same metals, and great quantities of garments both large and small, of the fine cloth known as *cumbi* and very well made, and many sea shells of all kinds, and many rich feathers, and a thousand sheep, which had to be of different colors; and sacrifice was made of all this. And the high priest took a child of six or eight years in his hands and, addressing the statue of Viracocha, said in unison with the other ministers, "My lord, we offer you this child so that you will give us freedom from anxiety and help us in our wars, and keep our lord the Inca in his greatness and state, and may it always increase, and give him much wisdom to rule over us." Present at this ceremony or oath taking were people from the whole kingdom as representatives of all the *huacas* and sanctuaries that they had. And no doubt the reverence and adherence that these people had for their Incas was very great, for none of their people had ever been found to betray them, because in their government they ruled not only with great power but also with much rectitude and justice, allowing no one to be wronged. The Inca placed his governors in different provinces, and some of them were supreme and close to him in authority; others had less and still others much less, with such strange subordination, and to such a degree, that no man dared to get drunk or take so much as an ear of maize from his neighbor. These Incas held it axiomatic that it was good to have the Indians constantly occupied, and so we see today roads and highways and public works requiring immense labor that they say served to give the Indians exercise and keep them from being idle. When the Incas conquered a new province, it was their practice to immediately transfer most of the inhabitants to other provinces or to their court; these people are called *mitimaes* in Peru to this day. And in their place they settled folk of their nation of Cuzco, especially the Orejones or Long Ears, who were like knights of ancient lin-

eage. Punishment for crimes was very severe. Those who know something of this subject agree that there could not have been a better government for the Indians, nor a fitter one.¹

CHAPTER 13 * OF THE DISTRIBUTION THAT
THE INCAS MADE OF THEIR VASSALS

Adding more details to what has already been said, it must be understood that the distribution that the Incas made of their vassals was so exact that they could easily rule them all, even in a kingdom a thousand leagues long. For when they conquered a province they would quickly organize the Indians into towns and communities and count them by heads, and over each ten Indians they placed one who was responsible for them, and another for each hundred, and for a thousand another, and for each ten thousand another; and this man was called *huno*, which was an important office. And in each province a governor of the Inca lineage was set over all of these, whom all obeyed and to whom they made a detailed report annually about everything that had happened, namely, who had been born, who had died, the flocks, and the fields. These governors went out each year from Cuzco, which was the court, and returned for the great festival of *raymi* and at that time brought all the tribute of the kingdom to the court, which they could not enter unless they brought it. The whole kingdom was divided into four parts, which they called *tahuantinsuyo*; they were Chinchasuyo, Collasuyo, Andesuyo, and Condesuyo, according to the four roads that lead out of Cuzco, where the court was and where general assemblies were held. These roads and the provinces that belonged to them are at the four corners of the compass: Collasuyo to the south, Chinchasuyo to the north, Condesuyo to the west, and Andesuyo to the east. All their towns had two separate divisions, *Hanansaya* and *Urinsaya*, which is to say upper and lower. When orders were issued to do something, or to bring something to the Inca, there was an announce-

1. Postconquest sources often provided a unified image of the preconquest Inca rule. Acosta duplicates such a perspective when he exaggerates the seamlessness of the Inca Empire, particularly with regard to acquiescence to Inca rule. Active resistance on the part of tribes like the Araucanians continued throughout the history of the empire. Through an analysis of local pottery styles, Thomas C. Patterson explores how native groups incorporated into the Inca Empire carried out cultural resistance. See his "The Inca Empire and Its Subject Peoples," in *The Indian in Latin America*, edited by John Kicza (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1993).

ment of the part of it that was the responsibility of each province and town and municipal division; this was assessed not by equal parts but by quotas, according to the quality and possibilities of the land. So to deliver a hundred thousand bushels of maize, for example, they already knew that a certain province was responsible for a tenth part, and such and such another for a seventh, and such and such another for a fifth, and so on; and it was the same for the towns and municipal divisions and *ayllos*, or clans. And to make an accounting of it all there were the *quipucamayos*, the accounting officials, who with their strings and knots accurately reported what had been paid, even for a hen and a load of wood, and by means of their registers reckoned instantly what each of the Indians owed.

CHAPTER 14 * OF THE BUILDINGS AND
CONSTRUCTION METHODS OF THE INCAS

The buildings and constructions that the Incas made, in fortresses, temples, roads, country villas, and the like, were many and required enormous labor, as the ruins and fragments that remain today make plain. These can be seen in Cuzco and Tihuanaco and Tambo and other places, where there are stones so immense in size that we cannot imagine how they were cut and brought and placed where they are.¹ In order to construct the buildings and fortresses that the Inca ordered built in Cuzco and different parts of his kingdom, a large number of Indians came from every province, for the toil was enormous and is frightening to contemplate. They did not use mortar, nor did they have iron or steel to cut and carve the stones, nor machines or instruments to drag them, and yet with all this the stones are so cleanly put together that in many places you can scarcely see the joining of one to another; and many of these stones are so large, as I have said, that it would be called an impossible thing were it not actually witnessed. In Tihuanaco I measured one that was thirty-eight feet long and eighteen wide and about six feet thick, and in the wall of the fortress in Cuzco, which is of masonry, there are many much larger

1. *Tambo* refers to the Inca fortress called Ollantaytambo, which was located near Cuzco in the Sacred Valley. During the Inca uprising of 1536, led by Manco Inca, Hernando Pizarro's forces faced the seventeen imposing stone terraces at Ollantaytambo — each one filled with Inca soldiers and archers — and rode away in defeat. See Hemming, *The Conquest of the Incas* 213–16.

stones.² And what is most astonishing is the fact that, although the stones in the wall to which I refer are not cut uniformly but are very unequal among themselves in size and workmanship, they fit together with incredible smoothness and without the use of mortar. All of this was done by the work of many people and with terrible travail in the course of the work, for to fit one stone with another, the way they are adjusted, they had to test it many times because the other stones were not of the same size and thickness. Each year the Inca indicated the number of men who had to come and work on the stones and buildings; the Indians made the distribution among themselves, as in other things, without injustice being done to anyone. But, although these buildings were large, they were usually badly arranged and utilized and seemed no better than mosques or other barbarian buildings. They did not know how to build arches in their constructions, nor did they grasp the use of mortar to do so.³ When they saw arches made over the River Jauja using trusses, they fled in fear as they watched the trusses being demolished after the bridge was finished, believing that the bridge (which is made of stone) would soon fall. And when they saw that it held fast and that the Spaniards walked on it, the chief said to his companions, "It is right to serve these people, for indeed they seem to be children of the sun." The bridges that they used were made of woven canes or reeds, with thick ropes fastened to the banks on either side, for they did not make bridges of stone or wood. The bridge that exists today at the outlet of the great lake of Chucuito, in Collao, is astonishing, for that stream is exceedingly deep and there is no possibility of placing any foundation in it; and it is so wide that no arch could span it, nor could there be more than one arch, and thus it was impossible to make a stone or wooden bridge. The ingenuity and craft of the Indians sufficed to make a very firm and safe bridge entirely of straw, which seems like a tall tale, but it is true. For, as was described in another book, they tied together

2. Acosta mistakenly identifies the ruins at Tiahuanaco as Incan. The buildings at Tiahuanaco were not constructed under Inca rule but as part of the earlier Tiahuanaco (Tiwanaku) civilization, which flourished in the Lake Titicaca region from 100 to 1200 A.D.

3. Although Acosta marvels at the Inca stonework he saw at Cuzco and Tiahuanaco, he notes that it is inferior to European monuments, "badly arranged," and "no better than mosques." Acosta's critiques of Inca construction reflect a European bias toward Old World architecture, the techniques of which were not always well suited to New World situations. In particular, Acosta's disdain for buildings without arches and mortar ignored the fact that Spanish constructions, like the Cathedral of Santo Domingo in Cuzco, crumbled with the tremors of Andean earthquakes while the Inca foundations and structures remained intact.

bundles of some reeds and canes that grow in the lake, which they call *titora*, and as it is a very light material the bundles do not sink. On top of these they place a large quantity of sedge and, with those bundles or rafts very firmly fastened on both sides of the river, men and beasts cross over at will. On several occasions when I crossed this bridge I was amazed by the Indians' skill, for with such simple materials they make a bridge that is better and safer than the pontoon bridge from Seville to Triana. I also measured the length of the bridge, and if I recall correctly it was more than three hundred feet. The depth of that outlet is said to be tremendous; seen from above, the water does not appear to be moving, but underneath the current is said to be very violent. Let this suffice about buildings.

CHAPTER 15 * OF THE INCA'S REVENUES AND
THE ORDER OF TRIBUTES HE IMPOSED
ON THE INDIANS

The Incas' wealth was incomparable, for, although no king inherited the property and treasure of his predecessors, the Inca had at his disposal all the wealth of his realms, which were very abundant in gold and silver as well as clothing and flocks; and the greatest asset of all was the innumerable multitude of his vassals, all occupied in and attentive to whatever pleased their king. They brought him everything he chose from each province: the Chichas contributed rich, sweet-smelling wood; the Lucanas, carriers to bear his litter; the Chumbibilcas, dancers; and the other provinces the best that each had to offer; and this was in addition to the general tribute that all had to pay. Indians designated for this service worked the gold and silver mines (of which there is a marvelous abundance in Peru), and the Inca gave them everything necessary for their expenditures, and everything that they mined was for the Inca. Because of this there was such treasure in that kingdom that in the opinion of many what came into the Spaniards' hands, although it was a vast amount, as we know, did not constitute a tenth part of what the Indians buried and hid, which the Spaniards have been unable to find despite the great efforts greed has spurred them to make to discover it. But the greatest wealth of those barbarian kings was that all their vassals were their slaves, from whose labor they profited as they pleased. And the remarkable

thing is that they used them with such organization and good government that it did not seem to them like servitude but a very happy life.

To understand the order of tributes that the Indians paid to their lords, it must be understood that when the Inca settled the cities that he conquered he divided all their lands into three parts. The first part was for religion and rites, so that Pachayachachic, who is the creator and the sun, and Chuquiilla, who is thunder, and Pachamama and the dead, and other *huacas* and sanctuaries each had their own lands; the revenue from them was spent on sacrifices and maintaining the ministers and priests, for Indians were assigned to each *huaca* or temple. The greater part of this revenue was spent in Cuzco, where the universal sanctuary was located; another part was spent in the same city where it was collected, for in imitation of Cuzco every city had *huacas* and temples of the same kind and the same vocations, and thus they were served with the same rites and ceremonies as in Cuzco, which is surprising and very well attested to, for it was verified in more than a hundred towns, some of them almost two hundred leagues from Cuzco. Whatever was sown and harvested in those lands was placed in storehouses made expressly for the purpose, and this formed a large part of the tribute that the Indians paid. It is not known what proportion it was, for in some places it was more and in others less and in others almost everything; and this part was the one that benefited first.

The second part of the lands and fields was for the Inca; he maintained himself and his servants and family, and the nobles and garrisons and soldiers, from this part. And thus it formed the greater portion of his tributes, as the granaries or storehouses testify, for they are longer and broader than those of the *huacas*. This tribute was taken to Cuzco, or to places where it was needed for the garrisons, with remarkable speed and care, and when this was not necessary it was kept for as many as ten or twelve years against a time of need. These lands of the Inca were cultivated after those of the gods, and all the people without exception went to work in them, dressed in their best and singing songs in praise of the Inca and the *huacas*; and during the whole time they were cultivating or working they ate at the expense of the Inca, or the sun, or the *huacas* whose lands they were cultivating. But old folk and the ill, and widows, were excused from this work; and, although what was harvested belonged either to the Inca or the sun or the temples, the land belonged to the Indians or their ancestors.

The third part of the lands were given by the Inca to the community. It has not been ascertained just what proportion this was, if it was larger or smaller than the Inca's or the temples' portion, but it is certain that care was taken to make it sufficient to feed the people. No private person owned any of this part (nor did the Indians ever own anything privately unless by special favor of the Inca), and it could not be transferred or even divided among heirs. These communal lands were distributed annually, and each man was assigned the portion necessary to sustain his person and those of his wife and his children; and so in some years it was more and in others less, according to the state of his family, for which there were specific measures. Tribute was never exacted from the land that was distributed to each person, for all their tribute consisted of cultivating the lands of the Inca and the temples and placing their products in the storehouses. When the year turned out barren, food was given to the needy from these same storehouses, for there was always an abundance in reserve. The Inca made the same distribution of livestock as of the lands, which consisted of counting it and assigning pastures and boundaries for the temple flocks and the Inca's flocks, and for each town, and so from all the animals that were raised one part was for their religion, another for the kings, and a third for the Indians themselves. And the same order was followed even for hunters; it was unlawful to carry away or kill females. The Inca's flocks and those of the temples were many and large and were called *capaellamas*. Those of the councils or communities were few and poor, and so they were called *guacchallama*. The Inca took great care to preserve the flocks, for they were and are the whole wealth of that realm; as has been said, females were never sacrificed or killed for any reason, nor were they captured in the chase. If any animal suffered from mange or scab, which is called *carache* there, it had to be buried alive quickly so as not to infect others. The flocks were shorn at the proper season, and each man was given enough wool to spin and weave clothing for his children and his wife, and visits were made to see if they did the work, and the negligent were punished. Clothing for the Inca and his court was woven from his flocks; one kind, the same on both sides, was very fine and was called *cumbi*; the other was coarse and rough and was called *abasca*. There was no special number of these garments, only the numbers that each requested. The wool that remained was placed in their storage houses, and so when the Spaniards entered them they found them very full of this and all the other things necessary for human life. No sensible

man could fail to be impressed with such a remarkable and provident form of government, for, although they were not religious or Christians, the Indians attained true perfection after their fashion by not having individual ownership, providing everyone with necessities, and supporting so amply all matters pertaining to religion and their lord and master.

CHAPTER 16 * OF THE TRADES THAT THE
INDIANS LEARNED

There was another particularly admirable custom that the Indians of Peru had, and it was that from childhood all were taught every trade that a man needs for human life; for there were no special trades among them as among us, such as tailors and cobblers and weavers, but everyone learned everything needful for their persons and homes and provided for themselves. All of them knew how to weave and make their clothes; and thus when the Inca supplied them with wool he also gave them clothing. All knew how to till and cultivate the land without having to hire other workers. All built their own houses, and the women were the ones who knew most about everything and did not remain idle but worked with much care, serving their husbands.¹ Other trades that were not needed for the ordinary and everyday purposes of human life had their own craftsmen, such as silversmiths and painters and potters, and boatmen and reckoners and players of instruments; and in those same trades of weaving and farming, or building, there were master craftsmen for fine work whom the nobles used. But as for the common folk, as has been said, each took care of what was needed in his house, and one man did not pay another for this; and today it is the same, so that no man has need of another for the things of his house and his person, such as footwear and clothing and building a house, and sowing and reaping, and making the gear and tools necessary for the purpose. And in this the Indians almost copy the institutions of the monks of old of which the lives of the church fathers tell us. Truly, they are folk who are neither greedy nor spoiled, and so they are content with a modest living; and certainly, if their style of life were accepted

1. Acosta's observation that "women . . . did not remain idle" suggests an implicit contrast between women's roles in Peru and early modern Spain. This remark more accurately reflects Acosta's perception of his native society than it does the reality for women in Spain, the majority of whom toiled on a daily basis. On the struggles of women to procure labor and sustenance in sixteenth-century Seville, see Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

by choice and not by custom and nature, we would say that it was a life of great perfection and even contains sufficient preparation to receive the doctrine of the Holy Gospel, which is so inimical to pride and greed and idle pleasure. But the example that preachers offer does not always conform with the doctrine that they preach to the Indians. One thing is very noticeable, that, although the clothing and costume of the Indians is simple, still all the provinces are differentiated, especially by what they wear on their heads: for in some it is a woven braid wound around many times and in others it is broad and wound only once; in another there are little hats shaped like mortars, and in others a sort of tall round bonnet, and in others something like the hoops of sieves, and a thousand other differences.² And it was an inviolable law that no one might change the costume and habit of his province even though he moved to another, and the Inca considered this very important to good government. It is still true today, though not as much care is taken about it as formerly.

CHAPTER 17 * OF THE POSTS AND *CHASQUIS*
THAT THE INCA USED

Everywhere in his kingdom the Inca had a large service of posts and runners called *chasquis*, and they were the men who carried his orders to the governors and brought messages from them to the court. These *chasquis* were placed at every *topo*, which is a league and a half, in two huts where there were four Indians. These were supplied and changed every month by each district, and they carried the message they were given at top speed until they could give it to the next *chasqui*, and those designated to run were always on the alert and in readiness. They could run fifty leagues in a day and a night, even though most of the land was very rugged. They also served to bring things that the Inca wanted very swiftly, and so in Cuzco they had fresh fish from the sea (though the distance was a hundred leagues) within two days or a little more. After the Spaniards came these *chasquis* were used during troubled times and when there was much need of them. The viceroy Don Martín placed them as couriers at intervals of four leagues to bring and send dis-

2. A comprehensive reference guide to clothing in the colonial Andes, including descriptions of native dress, is Mary Money, *Los obrajes, el traje, y el comercio de ropa en la audiencia de Charcas* (La Paz: Taller Don Bosco, 1983).

patches, which is a very important thing in that realm, although they do not run as fast as those of former times, nor are there as many of them. They are well paid and serve as couriers do in Spain, handing over the papers that they carry every four or five leagues.

CHAPTER 18 * OF THE LAWS AND JUSTICE AND
PUNISHMENTS THAT THE INCAS IMPOSED
AND OF THEIR MARRIAGES

Just as preeminence and advantages, such as lands of their own, insignias, and marriages with women related to the Inca, were given to those who served well in wars or other tasks, severe punishments were meted out to those who were disobedient or had committed some crime. Murder and robbery were punished by death and incest with either parents or children in the direct line was punished by the death of the culprit. But it must be noted that they did not consider it adultery to have many wives or concubines, nor did these women incur the death penalty if they were found with other men, except for the true wife with whom they contracted a genuine marriage, for there was only one of these and she was received with special solemnity and ceremony. This consisted of the husband's going to her house, or his taking her with him and placing an *ojota* on her foot. This is the name of the shoe that they use there, which is like a sandal or the open shoe of a Franciscan friar. If the bride was a virgin this sandal was of wool, but if she was not it was made of esparto grass. All the other wives served and recognized this one, and she wore black for a year for a dead husband and did not remarry for a year; usually she was younger than her husband. This wife was bestowed by the Inca, with his own hand, on his governors or captains, and the governors and chiefs in the towns gathered the boys and girls together in a public square and gave each man his wife; and they contracted matrimony with the ceremony I have described, of putting the sandal on her foot. If she was found with another man this wife was subject to the death penalty, and so was he; and even in cases in which the husband pardoned them he did not fail to punish them, though not with death. The same penalty applied to incest with a mother or grandmother or daughter or granddaughter; marriage or concubinage was not prohibited with other female relatives, only in the first degree of relationship. Nor was it permitted for brother and sister to have

access to each other or to marry, on which point many in Peru are mistaken, believing that the Incas and nobles legitimately married their sisters, even if these were of the same father and mother; but the truth is that to marry within the first degree of relationship was always considered unlawful.

And this lasted until the times of Topa Inca Yupanqui, the father of Huayna Capac and grandfather of Atahualpa, during whose reign the Spaniards entered Peru. For the aforesaid Topa Inca Yupanqui was the first to break this custom and marry Mamaoclo, his sister on the father's side; and he commanded that only the Inca lords, and no others, could marry a sister on the father's side. That is what he did, and he had a son named Huayna Capac and a daughter named Coya Cussilimay; and when he died he commanded these children of his, who were full brother and sister, to marry, and that the other noble families could marry their sisters on the father's side. And because that marriage was illicit and contrary to natural law, God ordained that with the fruit that came of it, the Inca Huáscar and the Inca Atahualpa, the kingdom of the Incas would come to an end. If anyone wishes to understand more fully the matrimonial customs of the Indians of Peru, he should read the treatise written by Polo at the request of Don Jerónimo de Loayza, archbishop of Lima, for he made diligent inquiry about this as well as many other things concerning the Indians. And it is important to avoid the error made by many, who, not knowing which is the legitimate wife among the Indians and which the concubine, force a baptized Indian to marry his concubine, abandoning the legitimate wife. And we can also see how little justification there is for some who have tried to say that if husband and wife were baptized their marriage would be legal even though they are brother and sister. The Provincial Synod of Lima has determined, and correctly, that this is not true, for even among these same Indians that type of marriage is unlawful.¹

CHAPTER 19 * OF THE ORIGIN OF THE INCAS,
LORDS OF PERU, AND THEIR CONQUESTS
AND VICTORIES

By order of His Catholic Majesty the King, our lord Don Felipe, an investigation was made with all possible care into the origin and rites and statutes of

1. *Concilium provinciale Limense celebratum in civitate Regum. Anno MDLXXXIII (o'g).*

the Incas, although, because those Indians did not possess writing, it was impossible to verify the matter as thoroughly as might have been wished. But through their *quipus* and records, which as has been said serve them as books, what I shall recount here was ascertained.¹ First, in Peru in ancient times there was no kingdom or lord obeyed by everyone, but there were free inhabitants and communities, as today in the kingdom of Chile, and as has been the case in almost all the places conquered by the Spaniards in the West Indies except for the kingdom of Mexico. And so it must be pointed out that three kinds of government and styles of life have been found among the Indians. The first and chief kind, and the best, has been the realm or monarchy, as was that of the Incas and of Moctezuma, although these were in large part tyrannical. The second type is that of free associations or communities, where the people are governed by the advice of many, and are like councils. In time of war these elect a captain who is obeyed by a whole tribe or province. In time of peace each town or group of folk rules itself, and each has some prominent men whom the mass of the people respect; and at most some of these join together on matters that seem important to them to see what they ought to do. The third kind of government is absolutely barbarous, and these are Indians who have neither laws nor king nor fixed dwellings but go in herds like wild animals and savages.² As far as I have been able to understand it, the first dwellers in these Indies were of this kind, as are a large proportion of the Brazilians to this day, and the Chiriguanas and Chunchos, and Yscayingas and Pilcozones, and most of the Florida Indians,

1. It is worth noting that efforts on the part of missionaries in Peru to teach reading and writing in Quechua by transcribing the native language with letters of the Latin alphabet never reached the degree witnessed in Mexico. Thus, written sources in Nahuatl far exceeded those found in Quechua, and this corpus of native-language documents influenced not only contemporary projects on colonial history but colonial investigations as well.

2. Forms of writing and government, both discussed in book VI, constitute the basis for Acosta's classification of native peoples on a scale according to their level of civilization. Acosta's scale of civilization has been singled out as one of the earliest attempts at comparative ethnology and heralded for its influence on the late-sixteenth-century intellectual world. According to Anthony Pagden, Acosta's "insistence that barbarism described not one but several different cultural types, [that] the peoples could be graded . . . had a direct influence on a number of writers." See chapter 7, "A Programme for Comparative Ethnology," in his *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 198. José Alcina Franch's introduction to the 1987 Spanish edition of Acosta provides an insightful discussion of Acosta's ethnology. See José de Acosta, *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987), 26–30.

and in New Spain all the Chichimecas. From this kind of Indian, thanks to the ingenuity and wisdom of some of their principal men, was formed the other type of government, that of communities and free folk, where there is somewhat more order and permanence. Nowadays the Araucos and Tucapels in Chile are of this kind, as were the Moscas in the New Kingdom of Granada formerly and in New Spain some of the Otomíes; and in all these people there is less savagery and more reason. From this class of people, owing to the courage and wisdom of a few excellent men, arose the other sort of government, a more powerful and propitious one, that of kingdom and monarchy such as we find in Mexico and Peru. For the Incas conquered all that land and imposed their laws and rule.

According to their reckoning, the time that they have ruled is more than three hundred years and less than four hundred, although for a very long time their sovereignty did not extend for more than five or six leagues around Cuzco. Their beginnings and origin were in the Valley of Cuzco, and little by little they conquered the land that we call Peru, from beyond Quito as far as the Pasto River in the north and in the south as far as Chile, more than a thousand leagues in length. In breadth their kingdom reached to the west as far as the Southern Sea and as far as the great stretches of land on the other side of the Andes range, where today we can see Pucará del Inca, which was a fort that the Inca built for defense on the eastern side. The Incas went no farther than this owing to the very large expanse of water and swamps and lakes and the rivers that arise there. The breadth of their kingdom is less than a hundred leagues. These Incas were more advanced than any of the other nations of America in polity and government, and still more in arms and valor, although the Cañaris, who were their mortal enemies and favored the Spaniards, never wished to recognize this; and even today, if this subject arises, on the slightest provocation they will kill thousands over the question of who is the more valiant, as has happened in Cuzco. The justification by which they conquered and became lords of all that land was their claim that after the Universal Flood, of which all these Indians had knowledge, the world had been recovered by these Incas when seven of them emerged from the cave of Pacaritambo, and that in consequence all other men owed them tribute and vassalage as their progenitors.³ In addition to this, they stated and

3. It is clear that Acosta's use of systematic reasoning was clouded by his desire to find evidence of Christianity in Andean myths of a flood. The cave Pacaritambo, or Pacariqtambo, cited by Acosta is the "inn of dawn" in

affirmed that only they possessed the true religion and knew how God ought to be served and honored, and that therefore they were obliged to teach all the others; hence they placed enormous emphasis on rites and ceremonies. There were more than four hundred temples in Cuzco, as their holy land, and all of these places were full of mysteries. And as they continued to conquer they gradually introduced their own gods and rites everywhere in that realm. The chief god whom they worshipped was Viracocha Pachayachachic, who is the creator of the world, and after him the sun. And so they said that the sun as well as all the other gods received virtue and existence from the Creator and that they were intercessors with him.

CHAPTER 20 * OF THE FIRST INCA AND
HIS SUCCESSORS

The first man named by the Indians as founder of the Incas was Manco Capac; and they imagine that after the flood he emerged from the cave or window of Tambo, which is five or six leagues from Cuzco.¹ They say that he founded two chief clans of Incas: one was called Hanancuzco and the other Urincuzco, and the lords who conquered and governed the land came from the former clan. The first of these lords to become head of a clan was named Inca Roca, and he founded a family, or *ayllo*, to which they give the name of Uizaquirao.² This man, although he was not a great lord, was served from gold and silver utensils, and he ordered that his whole treasure should be dedicated to the cult of his body and the support of his family. And hence his successor did the same; and it was a widespread custom, as has been said,

the Inca creation myth. See Gary Urton, *The History of a Myth: Pacariqtambo and the Origin of the Incas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990).

1. Colonial sources on the Inca dynasty include Juan de Betanzos, *Narrative of the Incas* (1551), Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, *Historia Indica* (1572), and the mestizo author El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, *Royal Commentaries of the Inca* (1609). Garcilaso de la Vega, who composed his massive history of the Incas in Spain years after leaving his native Peru, had a personal as well as political interest in legitimating Inca history and culture. Both Betanzos and Sarmiento carried out their work in Peru at the behest of Spanish officials. Betanzos, widely regarded in Peru as a Quechua expert, collected oral testimonies for Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza (1551–52) and served as the translator for Viceroy Francisco de Toledo (1569–81) in his negotiations with the last Inca, Tupac Amaru. Sarmiento compiled his history for Toledo in the wake of the capture of Tupac Amaru at Vilcabamba; his account of the Inca lineage carried political ramifications for the survivors' socioeconomic status in the colonial world.

2. The *ayllo*, or *ayllu*, is the main organizational unit in Andean society. People belong to an *ayllu* based on kin and connections to land, which they hold in common.

that no Inca inherited his predecessor's possessions and house but instead founded a new house. At the time of this Inca Roca they used idols made of gold. After Inca Roca came Yahuar-huacac, who succeeded when he was already an old man. They say that he was given this name, which means "tears of blood," because on one occasion he was conquered and taken prisoner by his enemies and wept blood out of sheer sorrow. This Inca is buried in a town called Paulo, on the road to Omasuyo; he founded the family known as Ayllopanaca. He was succeeded by a son of his, Viracocha Inca; he was very rich and made large amounts of gold and silver plate and founded the clan or family of Coccopanaca. Gonzalo Pizarro sought the body of this Inca because of the rumor of great wealth buried with him, and after cruelly torturing many Indians he found it in Saqui Sahuana, where he was later defeated and taken prisoner and executed by President Gasca.³ The aforesaid Gonzalo Pizarro ordered the body of this Viracocha Inca burned, and later the Indians took up his ashes and placed them in a jar, and preserved them and made great sacrifices to them, until Polo claimed them with the other bodies of the Incas. He found them carefully embalmed and whole, and with remarkable diligence and cunning took them out of the Indians' hands, and by this means ended the great number of idolatrous acts that were being performed for them. It was not considered proper that this Inca should be titled Viracocha, which was the name of God; and to excuse himself he said that Viracocha himself had appeared to him in a dream and told him to take his name. After this Inca came Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui, who was a very valiant conqueror and a great statesman and the inventor of most of the rites and superstitions of their idolatry, as I shall recount later.

3. The practice of raiding the sacred burial sites of the Inca became quite common as the conquistadors competed for loot. For an analysis of the cultural politics of a *huaca*-looting episode near Trujillo several decades after conquest, see chapter 4 of Susan Ramirez, *The World Upside Down: Cross-Cultural Contact and Conflict in Sixteenth-Century Peru* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

The mention of President Gasca refers to his execution of Gonzalo Pizarro for instigating civil war among the Spanish in Peru. After his brother Francisco Pizarro's murder by Almagro supporters in 1541, Gonzalo Pizarro found himself in a weakened political position. He capitalized on the growing resentment of fellow *encomenderos* to Viceroy Blasco Núñez de Vela's intention to destroy the power of early conquistadors by enforcing the New Laws. A fierce civil struggle began between the viceroy and forces loyal to Gonzalo Pizarro. Into the midst of this crisis, the crown sent Pedro de la Gasca, the president of the *audiencia* of Lima, to end the war and revoke many of the New Laws that the colonists found objectionable, like the law that prohibited the inheritance of *encomiendas*. De la Gasca negotiated and fought his way to victory in the civil war for the royalist forces. Gonzalo Pizarro surrendered in 1548 only to face execution at the hands of de la Gasca.

CHAPTER 21 * OF PACHACUTI INCA YUPANQUI
AND WHAT HAPPENED UP TO THE TIME
OF HUAYNA CAPAC

Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui reigned for sixty years and made many conquests. The first of his victories was that an elder brother of his, who had exercised overlordship during his father's lifetime and waged war with his permission, was defeated in a battle that he had with the Changas, the nation that possessed the valley of Andahuaylas, which is some thirty or forty leagues from Cuzco in the direction of Lima; thoroughly routed, he retired with a few followers. When the younger brother Inca Yupanqui saw this, he lied in order to gain power and said that Viracocha the Creator had spoken to him at a time when he was alone and very sad, and had complained that, although he was lord of the universe and creator of the world and had made the heavens and the sun and the whole universe and human beings, men did not obey him as they should even though everything was under his sway; rather, they equally revered the sun, and thunder, and the earth, and other things, although these had no virtue other than that which he gave them; and he told the Inca that in heaven where he lived he was called Viracocha Pachayachachic, which means "creator of the universe." And to make the Indians believe that this was true, even though he was alone, he must not hesitate to gather supporters under this name, for, although the Changas were numerous and had been victorious, the god would give him victory over them and make him a ruler, for he would send people to help him, even though they would be invisible. And so it happened that under this name he began to gather supporters and raised a very large number, and gained the victory and became ruler, and wrested power from his father and brother by defeating them in war; then he conquered the Changas and after that victory proclaimed that Viracocha must be held to be lord of the universe, and that reverence and respect must be paid to the statues of the sun and thunder; and from that time forward the statue of Viracocha was placed higher than those of the sun and thunder and the other gods. And, although this Inca Yupanqui set aside farms and lands and flocks to the sun and thunder and other gods, he set nothing aside for Viracocha, giving as a reason that he needed nothing because he was lord of the universe and the creator. When victory had been won over the Changas he told his soldiers that it was not they who had

won the victory but certain bearded men whom Viracocha had sent, and that none but he could see them, and that these men had then turned into stones, and that they must be sought, and that he would recognize them. And so he brought together from the hills a large number of stones that he had chosen and made them into idols, and they worshiped them and made sacrifices to them. These were called Pururauca and were carried into battle with great devotion in the belief that victory was certain with their aid. And this fantasy and fiction of the Inca was so powerful that he won notable victories with it. He founded the family called Inacapanaca and made a large gold statue that he named Indiillapa, and placed it on a litter made entirely of gold, of great value; much of this gold was taken to Cajamarca to free Atahualpa at the time when Marqués Francisco Pizarro was holding him prisoner.¹

In Cuzco the Licentiate Polo found this Inca's house, and his servants and the priestesses who served his memory, and he discovered the body, which had been transferred from Patallacta to Totocache, where the parish of San Blas was founded. The body was so well preserved, and treated with a certain resin, that it seemed alive. The eyes were made of gold leaf so well placed that there was no need of the natural ones; and there was a bruise on his head that he had received from a stone in a certain battle. His hair was gray and none of it was missing, as if he had died that very day, although in fact his death had occurred more than sixty or eighty years before. This body, along with those of other Incas, was sent by Polo to the city of Lima under orders from the viceroy, the Marqués de Cañete, for it was necessary to root out the idolatry of Cuzco; and many Spaniards have seen this body, along with the others, in the hospital of San Andrés, founded by the aforesaid viceroy, although by now they are very much abused and in poor condition. Don Felipe Caritopa, who was the great-grandson or great-great-grandson of this Inca, has stated that the patrimony he left to his family was immense, and that it must be in

1. After Atahualpa's capture in 1532 at Cajamarca, the Inca ruler proposed a ransom of silver and gold that would fill the rooms where he was being kept. The Spanish readily accepted the offer, and over the next two months they watched as an estimated 13,000 pounds of gold and 26,000 pounds of silver arrived from various parts of the Inca Empire. Although he kept his end of the agreement, the Spanish accused Atahualpa of fomenting rebellion and executed him in July of 1533. Shortly thereafter, Manco Capac, yet another son of Huayna Capac, became the first puppet king crowned by the Spanish. He rebelled in 1536, however, and led the Inca retreat to Vilcabamba.

the hands of the *yanaconas* Amaro, Tito, and others. This Inca was succeeded by Topa Inca Yupanqui and he by another of his sons of the same name, who founded the family called Capac Aylo.

CHAPTER 22 * OF THE GREAT INCA NAMED
HUAYNA CAPAC

That lord was succeeded by Huayna Capac, which means "rich or valiant youth," and he was both, more than any of his ancestors or descendants. He was very prudent and imposed great order everywhere in the land; he was determined and brave, and very fortunate in war, and achieved great victories. This Inca extended his kingdom much more than all his ancestors together. Death overcame him in the kingdom of Quito, which he had conquered, and which was four hundred leagues distant from his court. They opened him up and the intestines and heart remained in Quito because he had so commanded, and his body was brought to Cuzco and placed in the famous temple of the sun. Even today many buildings and roads and forts, and notable works of this king, are seen; he founded the family of Temebamba. This Huayna Capac was worshiped as a god by his people while he was alive, something that, according to the old men, was never done with any of his predecessors. When he died a thousand persons of his household were killed so that they could go and serve him in the other life, and they died very willingly in order to go and serve him, so willingly indeed that many, in addition to those chosen, offered themselves as victims for the same reason. The wealth and treasure of this Inca was something never seen before, and because the Spaniards came into Peru shortly after his death the Indians took great care to make it all disappear, although much of it was taken to Cajamarca to ransom his son Atahualpa. Men worthy of belief state that he had more than three hundred children and grandchildren in Cuzco. The mother of this Inca was greatly respected; her name was Mamaoclo. Polo sent her body and that of Huayna Capac, very well embalmed and preserved, to Lima, and thus eliminated a large number of idolatrous acts that were being performed with them.

Huayna Capac was succeeded in Cuzco by a son of his named Tito Cussi Hualpa, later called Huáscar Inca, and his body was burned by the captains of Atahualpa, who was also a son of Huayna Capac; he rose against his brother

in Quito and opposed him with a powerful army.¹ What happened then was that two of Atahualpa's captains, Quizquiz and Chilicuchima, took Huáscar Inca prisoner in the city of Cuzco after he had been recognized as lord and king, for in fact he was the legitimate heir. In consequence the emotion caused everywhere in his realm was very great, especially in his court; and as always in case of need they had recourse to sacrifices, for they could not find men powerful enough to free their lord, both because the captains who had taken him prisoner were very strong and because of the numerous army with which Atahualpa was coming. They decided, and even say it was by Huáscar's orders, to make a great sacrifice to Viracocha Pachayachac, creator of the universe, beseeching him, because they could not free their lord, to send people from heaven to get him out of prison. Having confidently performed this sacrifice, news came that certain people had come by sea, had disembarked, and had taken Atahualpa prisoner. And so, because the Spaniards who had taken Atahualpa in Cajamarca were so few, and also because this had happened immediately after the Indians had made the aforesaid sacrifice to Viracocha, they called them Viracochas, believing that they were people sent from God; and that is how this name, calling the Spaniards Viracochas, has endured to this day. And certainly if we Spaniards had given the example that we should have, those Indians would have been right in saying that we were people sent from God. The lofty aim of Divine Providence is greatly worthy of consideration, how it arranged for the entrance of our people into Peru, which would have been impossible had it not been for the division between the two brothers and their supporters and the great respect in which the Christians were held as folk who had come from Heaven; this certainly means that in winning the lands of the Indians their souls were all the more splendidly won for Heaven.

1. Shortly before the arrival of the Francisco Pizarro expedition to Tumbes in 1531, Huayna Capac died during a smallpox epidemic that swept the Andes in advance of the Spanish conquistadors. The Inca elite in Cuzco appointed his son Huáscar to take his place. His half-brother Atahualpa, however, commanded the Inca armies in Quito and decided to challenge Huáscar's rule. He neglected to travel to Cuzco for the coronation ceremonies, after which he sent his military forces south to take Cuzco. Huáscar was captured, though not executed, at this juncture. Atahualpa's clemency for his brother expired once the Spaniards imprisoned him and he conspired to preserve his reign.

CHAPTER 23 * OF THE LAST SUCCESSORS
OF THE INCAS

The rest that follows what I have said has been dealt with at length in histories of the Indies written by Spaniards, and because it is not to my present purpose I shall merely state the succession of the Incas that took place.¹ With Atahualpa dead in Cajamarca, and Huáscar in Cuzco, and Francisco Pizarro and his men having become masters of the realm, Manco Capac, the son of Huayna Capac, besieged them in Cuzco and pressed them hard; and at last, wholly abandoning the land, he retired to Vilcabamba, far away in the mountains, and was able to maintain himself there thanks to their rugged nature.² The successor Incas stayed there up to Amaru, who was captured and put to death in the plaza in Cuzco, to the unbelievable grief of the Indians when they witnessed the man whom they considered their lord publicly killed. After this came the imprisonment of others from that lineage of the Incas. I met Don Carlos, grandson of Huayna Capac, son of Paulo, who was baptized and always favored the Spaniards' side against his brother Manco Capac. During the viceroyalty of the Marqués de Cañete, Sayri Topa Inca left Vilcabamba and came to Ciudad de los Reyes in peace, and he was given the valley of Yucay, along with other properties, which a daughter of his inherited. This is the succession that is known today of that numerous and vastly rich family of the Incas, whose rule lasted for more than three hundred years, with eleven successors being counted in that realm up to the time when the line ceased altogether. In the other branch of the Urincuzco, which as stated above was also derived from the first Manco Capac, eight successors can be counted in the following order: Sinchi Roca was the successor to Manco

1. Colonial Spanish accounts of the conquest of Peru include Francisco Jerez, *Verdadera relación de la conquista del Perú y provincia del Cuzco llamada Nueva Castilla* (1534) and Pedro de Cieza de León, *Crónica del Perú* (1550). The work of Titu Cusi Yupanqui offers an indigenous Andean perspective on the same events. In 1570, Yupanqui, the penultimate Inca ruler at Vilcabamba, dictated his indigenous perspective of the history of the conquest, *Relación de la conquista del Perú*, to a priest shortly before dying.

2. Following Manco Capac's retreat to Vilcabamba, known thereafter as the "lost city of the Incas," the Inca maintained their rule despite persistent Spanish attempts to subjugate them. In 1571, under Viceroy Toledo's watch, the Inca stronghold at Vilcabamba finally was defeated. The Spanish brought the holdouts to Cuzco, where a public execution in 1572 of Tupac Amaru, the last Inca king, symbolized final defeat for the Inca Empire. The historical and cultural memory of Tupac Amaru has continued to serve as a powerful rallying point for Andean resistance to injustice.

Capac; successor to him was Capac Yupanqui; then came Luqui Yupanqui; then Mayta Capac, then Tarco Huaman; after him one of his sons, whom they do not name; and then Don Juan Tambo Maytapanaca. And let this suffice as to the origin and succession of the Incas who ruled the land of Peru, along with the rest of what has been said of their laws and government and the way in which they acted.

CHAPTER 24 * OF THE KIND OF
COMMONWEALTH THAT THE MEXICANS HAD

Although the kingdom, succession, and origin of the Mexicans, and the kind of commonwealth and government that they had, will become clear through the history that I intend to write, still I shall summarize here in a general way its most notable features, whose ampler declaration will be the history I will write later. The first way in which the government of the Mexicans seems to have shown civic organization was the method that they had, and always adhered to, of choosing a king. For from the first king that they had, named Acamapichtli, to the last, who was Moctezuma, the second of that name, none received the inheritance and succession of the realm except by legitimate nomination and election. This was at first the responsibility of the common people, although the nobles guided the affair. Later, at the time of Izcoatl the fourth king, through the counsel and orders of a wise and valiant man among them named Tlaclel, four electors were appointed; and these, along with two lords or kings of peoples who were subject to the Mexican king, namely, the lord of Texcoco and the lord of Tacuba, were responsible for the election. As a rule they chose young men as kings, for their monarchs constantly went to war, and this function was almost exclusively what they wanted them for; and so they considered whether they were suitable for military action and took pleasure in it and valued it. After the election there were two kinds of festivities, one at the time the king took possession of his royal estate, when they went to the temple and performed great ceremonies and sacrifices over the brazier that they called divine, where fire always burned before the altar of their idol; and then there were many speeches and harangues by orators, for they were very diligent in this. The other and more solemn festivity was that of the coronation, for which the king first had to conquer in battle and bring a certain number of captives, who had to be

sacrificed to their gods; and he entered in triumph with great pomp and was given a very solemn reception by the priests of the temple (who all went in procession playing different instruments and dispensing incense and singing) as well as laypeople and members of the court, who came out with sundry devices to receive the victorious king. The crown and royal insignia resembled a miter from the front and was lower behind, making it not entirely round because the front part was higher and came to a point at the top. It was the special privilege of the king of Texcoco to crown the king of Mexico with his own hands.

The Mexicans were very loyal and dutiful to their kings, and there is no evidence that they ever committed treason against them. Their histories tell that only their fifth king, named Tizoc, was killed with poison because he had been a coward and of little use. But there is no evidence that competition and ambition gave rise to dissension or factions among them, as often happens in communities. Rather, as will be seen in its proper place, there are accounts that the noblest of all the Mexicans refused the kingship because he believed that the commonwealth would be better served with another king. In the beginning, as the Mexicans were poor and lived in straitened circumstances, their kings were very moderate in their conduct and their court, but as they increased in power they increased in splendor and greatness until they reached the point of Moctezuma's opulence. Even if he had owned nothing more than his private zoo, it was a magnificent thing and its like has never been seen. For with all those fish and birds and reptiles and beasts there was something resembling a new Noah's Ark in his house; and for the ocean fish he had saltwater pools and for the river fish sweetwater pools, and food for the game birds and predatory birds, and for the wild beasts the same in great abundance, and a large number of Indians were occupied in maintaining and breeding these animals. When he saw that it was no longer possible to maintain some kind of fish or bird or wild animal, he had its likeness richly worked in precious stones or in gold or silver or sculpted in marble or stone. And for different kinds of living he had different houses and palaces: some were for pleasure, others for mourning and sorrow, and others for governing. And there were different rooms in his palace according to the rank of his lords, who served him with remarkable order and distinction.

CHAPTER 25 * OF THE DIFFERENT RANKS AND
ORDERS OF THE MEXICANS

They took great care to establish ranks for the lords and nobles, so that there would be recognition among them as to who was owed most honor. After the king, the highest rank was that of the four electors, who following the king's election were elected themselves, and were usually brothers or very close relatives of the king. These were called *tlacohecalcatl*, which means "princes of the throwing spears," a kind of weapon that they used a great deal. After these came the ones called *tlacatecatl*, which means "clipper or cutter of men." The third degree of dignity consisted of those called *ezuahnacatl*, which means "shedder of blood," but not by any means, only by scratching; all these titles were for warriors. There was another, fourth rank entitled *tlillancalqui*, which means "lord of the black house, or house of blackness" because of a certain soot with which the priests smeared themselves, which was used in their idolatries. These four ranks made up the supreme council, without whose opinion the king did not and could not do anything of importance; and when a king died, the man chosen as king had to come from one of these four ranks. There were other councils and courts in addition to those I have mentioned, and men who are experts on that land say that there were as many as in Spain, and different consistories with their judges and justices, and that there were other lower officials such as governors, councilors, lieutenants, constables of both higher and lower rank, and others of lesser degree, also under the command of these, in careful order; and all were subordinate to the four supreme princes who acted with the king, and only these four could issue a death sentence. The rest had to present a report to them about what they decreed and decided, and at certain times the king was informed of everything that was being done in his kingdom. There was also good administration and discipline in the system of taxation, for scattered all over the realm there were officials and accountants and treasurers who collected tribute and the royal revenues. Tribute was brought to the court at least once every month. The tribute consisted of everything that land and sea produced, clothing as well as food. In matters pertaining to their religion, or rather their superstition and idolatry, they used even greater care and precision, with a large number of ministers whose function was to teach the rites and ceremonies of their religion to the people. Hence an old Indian spoke well and

wisely to a Christian priest who complained of the Indians, saying that they were not good Christians and did not understand God's law. "Have the fathers," he said, "make as much effort to turn the Indians into Christians as the ministers of our idols did in showing them their ceremonies, and with half of that effort we Indians will be very good Christians, for the law of Jesus Christ is much better, and the Indians do not accept it for lack of persons to teach them." Surely he spoke the truth, to our great humiliation and shame.

CHAPTER 26 * OF THE MEXICANS' WAY OF
FIGHTING AND THE MILITARY ORDERS
THAT THEY HAD

The Mexicans concentrated their chief point of honor on war, and so the nobles were the principal soldiers, and others who were not nobles rose to dignities and responsibilities through the glory of military exercise, and were counted among the nobles. They gave splendid prizes to those who had fought valiantly, and these enjoyed preeminence that no one else could possess. This made them fight fiercely. Their weapons were sharp knives made with flints set on both sides of a club, and this was so savage a weapon that it is said they could take off a horse's head with a downward stroke, cutting right through the neck. They used strong, heavy cudgels and also lances resembling pikes, and other spears for throwing, in which they were very skilled; they did a large part of their fighting with stones. For defense they used small bucklers and also shields, headpieces resembling helmets or morions, and a great deal of featherwork on their bucklers and helmets; and they dressed in the skins of tigers or lions or other savage beasts. They rapidly engaged the enemy hand to hand and were well trained in running and wrestling, for their principal way of winning was not so much to kill as to capture; and they made use of the captives, as I have said, in their sacrifices.¹ Moctezuma placed great emphasis on knighthood, instituting certain military orders and officers resembling the commanders of our military orders,

1. The main Aztec battle objective, namely, to capture and not to kill, appropriately distinguished by Acosta, has been identified by one scholar as a major reason for the defeat of the Mexica at the hands of the Spanish. See Inga Clendinnen, "Fierce and Unnatural Cruelty": Cortés and the Conquest of Mexico," *Representations* 33 (winter 1991): 65–100. Among the weapons described by Acosta, the "sharp knives" were made of obsidian. On Aztec methods of war and militarism, see Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988).

with different insignias. Among these the most preeminent were those who had the crown of their head tied with a red ribbon, and rich plumage from which strands hung to their shoulders, with red tassels of the same at the end; there were as many of these tassels as the feats of arms they had performed. The king also belonged to this order of knighthood, and so he is represented with this kind of plumage; and in Chapultepec, where Moctezuma and his son are carved on some rocks (a sight worth seeing), he is wearing the same costume made of a great deal of featherwork. There was another order that they called the Eagles, and others that were called Lions and Tigers. Usually these were the bravest warriors who distinguished themselves in war, and they always went to war wearing their insignias. There were others like Black Knights, who were not as important as the others; they had their hair cut above the ears all around. They went to war with their insignias like the other knights but armed only from the waist up; the more illustrious of them wore full body armor. All of these that I have mentioned could wear gold and silver and dress in fine cotton, and have gilded and painted vessels, and wear shoes. The common folk could use only earthenware vessels, nor could they use shoes or wear anything but *nequén*, which is a coarse sort of clothing. Each of the four orders had chambers of its own in the palace, with their titles: the first was called the chamber of the Princes; the second, of the Eagles; the third, of the Lions and Tigers; the fourth, of the Black Knights, and so on. The rest, the commoners, were below in more ordinary chambers, and if anyone lodged out of his proper place he incurred the death penalty.

CHAPTER 27 * OF THE MEXICANS' GREAT
CARE AND DILIGENCE IN BRINGING UP
THEIR YOUTH

Nothing has amazed me more, or seemed more worthy of praise and remembrance, than the care and good order that the Mexicans had in bringing up their children. For, thoroughly understanding that all the good hopes of a commonwealth consist in the upbringing and instruction of the children and youth (with which Plato dealt at length in his books *De Legibus*), they took care to keep their children from idleness and license, which are the two plagues of that age, and to occupy them in useful and honorable pursuits. To this end there were in the temples places especially for children, like schools

or boarding establishments, different from those of the temple boys and girls, which we discussed at length in their appointed place.¹ In these boarding establishments or schools there were a great many youths whom their parents had taken there voluntarily. They had tutors and teachers who taught and trained them in praiseworthy activities: to be polite, to respect their elders, to serve and to obey, giving them instruction about these matters; to make them agreeable to the great lords they were taught to sing and dance and were trained in the arts of war, such as shooting arrows and aiming at a target a dart or stick charred at one end, and handling a buckler skillfully, and wielding a sword. They were obliged to sleep badly and eat worse so as to accustom them from childhood to work and not be idle. Apart from the common number of these boys, there were others in these places who were the sons of lords and nobles, and they were given more special treatment. Their food was brought to them from home; they were entrusted to elders and ancients who looked after them and continually abjured them to be virtuous and live chastely, to be moderate in their diet, to fast, and to curb their gait and walk calmly and circumspectly. It was the custom to test them in difficult labors and exercises.

When they were grown, careful consideration was given to their inclinations: to the one whom they saw inclined toward war, occasion was given to prove it in battle; under the pretext of taking food and supplies to the troops, they sent them to war so that they could see what went on there and the travails that had to be undergone, to cause them to lose their fear by this means. Often they were loaded with very heavy burdens, so that if they showed good cheer in this they would more easily be admitted to the company of soldiers. And so it sometimes happened that a youth went into the field bearing burdens and returned a captain with signs of honor; others were so anxious to distinguish themselves that they were taken prisoner or killed, and they considered that the worst thing was to be taken prisoner, and so they outdid themselves not to become captives at the hands of their enemies. Hence those

1. Children aged twelve to fifteen, of both sexes, attended school at the temple in their *calpulli*, or district, where they received instruction in song and dance to prepare them to participate in public rituals. Each *calpulli* also had a *telpochcalli*, young men's house, where boys aged fifteen to twenty lived and worked. Sons of the nobility attended the *calmecac* during the same years. Military training and physical labor dominated the schedules of both commoners and nobles. The boys who trained in the *calmecac*, however, also learned the art of oration and might emerge with a special preparation for the priesthood.

who made efforts in this direction, who were usually the sons of noble and valiant folk, achieved their desires. Others who were inclined toward affairs of the temple and, to put it in our terms, wanted to be ecclesiastics, were taken out of the school when they reached a suitable age and placed in the temple apartments destined for the religious, also placing the insignias of priesthood upon them; and there they had their prelates and teachers who taught them everything concerning that ministry, and they had to remain in the ministry where they had dedicated themselves. The Mexicans used great order and method in bringing up their sons, and, if the same order existed nowadays in building houses and seminaries where these boys could be instructed, no doubt Christianity would flourish mightily among the Indians.² Some zealous persons have begun this, and the king and his council have showed that they favor it; but as it is not a profitable matter, it goes very slowly and is done without enthusiasm. May God lead us to feel shame, at least, for what the children of darkness did in their perdition, and not allow the children of light to lag so far behind in doing good.

CHAPTER 28 * OF THE INDIANS' DANCES
AND FESTIVITIES

Because it is an element of good government for a commonwealth to have its recreations and pastimes on appropriate occasions, it would be well to describe what the Indians — especially the Mexicans — were accustomed to do in this regard. No group of men living in common has been discovered that does not have some method of entertainment and recreation, with games or dances or pleasant exercises. In Peru I saw a sort of mock battle in which the competition between the two sides was so heated that the *puella* (for that was what they called it) became quite dangerous. I also saw any number of dances in which they imitated different occupations, such as those of shepherds, farmers, fishermen, and hunters; usually all these were danced with a very slow and deliberate sound, steps, and rhythm. There were others danced

2. In the aftermath of the Spanish conquest, formal education for the indigenous population was restricted to only a few male members of the elite, who attended schools run by missionaries, the most famous being Mexico's Colegio de Santa Cruz, run by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún in Tlatelolco. Native males received instruction in Latin and Nahuatl so they could learn Christian doctrine. Although Spanish priests expected them to become teachers of Christianity to their parents and their children, they banned the students from the priesthood based on their indigenous background.

by masked men, whom they call *huacones*, and both the masks and their movements were absolutely diabolical. Also, some men danced on the shoulders of other men, just as in Portugal they carry *pelas*, as they call them. The greater part of these dances were mere superstition and a kind of idolatry, for that was the way they worshiped their idols and gods. For this reason the priests have tried to avoid such dances as much as possible, although because a large part of them is pure recreation they still allow the Indians to sing and dance after their fashion. They play different instruments for these dances. Some are like flutes or pipes, others like drums, others like conch shells; the usual thing is for them to use their voices, all singing, with one or two reciting their poetry and the others coming in with the refrain. Some of these ballads of theirs were very ingenious and told a story; others were full of superstition, and still others were pure nonsense. The members of our society who work among them have tried to put things of our Holy Faith into their way of singing, and this has been found to be extremely useful, for they enjoy singing and chanting so much that they can spend whole days listening and repeating, never getting tired. They have also translated compositions and tunes of ours into their language, such as octaves and ballads and roundelays, and it is wonderful how well the Indians accept them and how much they enjoy them. Truly, this is a great way, and a very necessary one, to teach these people. In Peru these dances are generally called *taqui*; in other Indian provinces they are called *areitos*; in Mexico they are called *mitotes*.¹

Nowhere was there such enthusiasm for games and dances as in New Spain, where even today one may see Indian acrobats dance admirably upon a tightrope and others standing on a tall, straight pole, where they dance and perform any number of variations. Others move and raise and twirl a very heavy piece of wood with the soles of their feet and their thighs, something that seems incredible unless it is seen. They do any number of other tricks of great skill, climbing, jumping, turning, carrying heavy weights, and accept-

1. The reference to dancing in Peru, the *taqui*, recalls the messianic movement of Taki Onqoy, literally "dancing sickness," that rippled through the Andean highlands in the early 1560s. Followers were thrown into frenzied movement as native deities took control of their bodies and danced to the theme of a nativist alliance that promised to rid the Andes of Spanish culture and control. For the reports by the main ecclesiastic sent to investigate Taki Onqoy, see Luis Millones, ed., *Las informaciones de Cristóbal de Albornoz*, in *El retorno de las huacas: Estudios y documentos sobre el Taki Onqoy Siglo XVI* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, Sociedad Peruana de Psicoanálisis, 1990).

ing blows heavy enough to break iron, and very remarkable examples of all of these can be seen. But the method of recreation most enjoyed by the Mexicans is the solemn *mitote*, which is a dance that had so much prestige among them that sometimes the kings danced it, and were not obliged to do so like the king Don Pedro of Aragon with the barber of Valencia. Usually this dance, or *mitote*, was performed in the courtyards of the temples and the royal palaces, which were the most spacious. In the center of the courtyard they placed two instruments: one was made like a drum and the other had the shape of a barrel, made all in one piece and hollow within, set upon a figure resembling a man or an animal, or on a pillar. Both were tuned in such a way as to be in good harmony with each other. With them they made different sounds, and the songs were many and various; all sang and danced to the beat, so uniformly that there was no difference between one and another, all moving in unison, in their voices as well as in the movements of their feet, which were so skillful that it was a wonderful thing to see. In these dances two circles of people were formed: in the center, where the instruments were, they placed the elders and the lords and most important people, and they danced and sang standing up, almost without moving. Around these, and at a good distance from them, the rest came out by twos, dancing in unison with more movement and making various changes in their steps and deliberate leaps, and among them made a very broad and spacious circle. In these dances they brought out the most precious costumes that they owned, and many jewels, according to the means of each. They took great care in performing them, and so these kinds of dances were taught them from childhood. Although many of them were performed in honor of the gods, they had not been instituted for that purpose; rather, as has been said, they were a form of recreation and rejoicing for the people. Hence it is not a good thing to deprive the Indians of them but rather to try to prevent any superstition from becoming mingled in them. In Tepotzotlán, which is a town seven leagues from Mexico, I saw the dance, or *mitote*, that I have described performed in the courtyard of the church, and it seemed to me a good thing to occupy and entertain the Indians on feast days; for they need some recreation, and recreation that is public and harms no one has fewer disadvantages than others that the Indians might perform by themselves should these dances be taken away from them. And generally speaking it is good to allow the Indians what we can of their customs and usages (if there is no admixture

of their former errors), and this is in agreement with the advice of Pope Saint Gregory, to try to channel their festivals and rejoicings toward the honor of God and the saints whose feasts are being celebrated.² What I have said is probably sufficient, in general terms, concerning the usages and customs of the Mexicans, of their origin and development and empire, for it is a very long matter and to understand it fully would be most desirable; hence we will leave its full treatment for another book.

2. Acosta was surprisingly tolerant of these dancing rituals when he argued that “it is not a good thing to deprive the Indians” of this recreation. However, he also believed that the dances held the potential to promote idolatry and thus urged missionaries to “prevent any superstition” in the actions. Acosta’s notion that Spanish missionaries could convince Andeans how to interpret the dances represented an attempt to divorce the practice of ritual dancing from native structures of meaning. Inga Clendinnen has explored the manner in which Mesoamerican structures of meaning continued to operate through religious practices of drinking and dancing. See her “Ways to the Sacred: Reconstructing ‘Religion’ in Sixteenth-Century Mexico,” *History and Anthropology* 5 (1990): 105–41.

