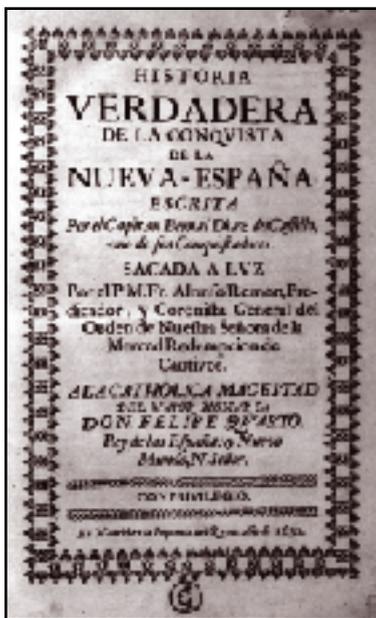


## Power & Possession

What most impressed contemporaries about the New World was not its exoticism but its rapid incorporation into the Spanish Hapsburg Empire. It was possible for Charles V in the middle of the sixteenth century to look on the work of a sympathetic cartographer and see himself as ruler of nearly half the known world. The Holy Roman Empire now dwarfed the Roman Empire.

The geographical discoveries of the Spanish helped revive theories of empire and give currency to the notion that to maintain themselves states needed to expand. For the Spanish, the incorporation of the New World was the natural successor to the Reconquista, Spain's long crusade against Moslem invaders. Theories of empire included Christian versions that emphasized an apocalyptic narrative in which the conversion of the gentiles heralded the end of time. The right to possess that which the Spanish had discovered and occupied was implicit from the beginning. Although certain formal conditions often had to be met to legitimize possession, these amounted to little more than ritual and rhetoric performed before uncomprehending peoples. The most notorious example of this is the "Requirement," a windy exhortation to the Indians to renounce Satan and convert or face the consequences. It became the self-justifying prologue to conquest.

Bernal Diaz del Castillo (1495-1583).  
*Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España.*  
Madrid: En la Imprenta del Reyno, 1632.



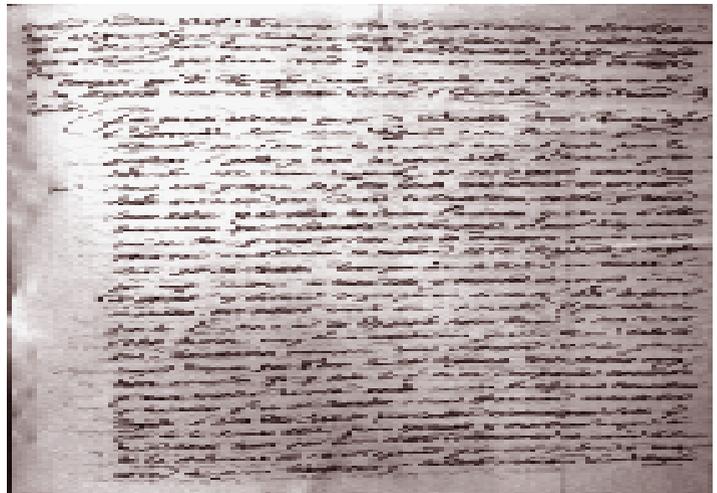
The story of the first major conquest in the New World is popularly known in three accounts: that of Cortés himself, the conqueror; that of the historian, Lopez de Gómara; and that of one of Cortés's plucky captains, Bernal Diaz. All three are retrospective accounts, and both Gómara and Diaz rely heavily on Cortés's letters to the Emperor Charles V. Cortés and Diaz were participants; Gómara relied on sources. Of the three, however, it is the spirited version of Diaz the soldier that has remained something of a perennial seller. Written in the latter sixteenth century, but not published until the seventeenth, the "True History of the Conquest of New Spain" is shown here in its first edition.

Part of the reason for the ongoing popularity of Diaz's story is that far from being exotic it is utterly familiar: a rambling narrative cobbled together from classical and late medieval models in which Montezuma is a great and powerful emperor, his kingdom vast and wealthy, and his subjects numerous and fierce warriors. For the generation of soldiers like Diaz, this would have been as familiar as the Reconquista, whose long shadow was still very much in view. The material splendor of the Mexican empire made it a worthy plum for the Spanish empire, a point nicely underscored by the new name for the new land: New Spain. New and Old were represented as neat symmetries. Diaz does not need to reflect on his subject; it is all too obvious for him. Thus, there is not a whiff of doubt about the legitimacy of Spanish claims of ownership. The territories of Montezuma and his neighbors are simply proclaimed to be appropriated:

“There and then Cortés took possession of that land for His Majesty, performing the act in His Majesty’s name....” Diaz retrospectively presents the march of the Spanish through Mexico as a sort of manifest destiny. To be Christian and Spanish is to be powerful; and to be powerful is to possess.

Hernando Cortés (1485-1547)  
Power of Attorney. “Tenustitan.”  
[Tenochtitlan] 4 July 1526.  
Autograph document in Spanish.

Signed by Cortés, this letter conveys power of attorney to represent him in an investigation of his administration of the new colony of Mexico, which he himself had conquered five years earlier. Suspicious of his intentions, Charles V launched an inquiry to ascertain the nature and extent of Cortés’s power and dispatched a judge to preside over the hearing. The present letter proclaims Cortés’s inability to attend and vests power of attorney in three of his deputies. The unfortunate judge was young and relatively inexperienced; he died under mysterious circumstances shortly after this document was signed.



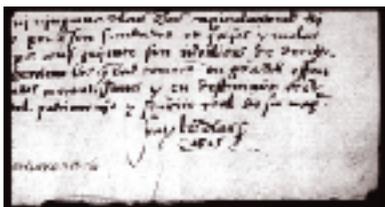
Francisco Lopez de Gómara  
(1511-1566).  
*Historia delle nuove Indie Occidentali. . .*  
*Tradotta nell’Italiana per Agostino*  
*di Cravaliz.*  
Venice: Giovanni Bonadio, 1564.

First published in 1552 in Spain, Lopez de Gómara’s history is one of the earliest synthetic accounts of the Spanish territories in the New World. Lopez’s account treats the flora and fauna as well as the deeds of the Spanish in Mexico and Peru. It is a book that looks with considerable sympathy on the Conquistadors, especially Pizarro and Cortés. This is understandable if only because late in life Lopez became Cortés’s chaplain, and the redoubtable conqueror confided much in him. However, the Emperor found Lopez too sympathetic to the grandees of the New World; he saw the chronicler as siding with them in their ongoing battles with the



*Historia delle nuove Indie Occidentali. . .*

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566).  
Autograph letter to Emperor Charles V,  
ca. 1528.  
Valladolid (?), Spain. 5 pp.



crown, and he proscribed the *Historia* in the Empire. The Emperor was not Lopez's only foe: Bartolomé de Las Casas roundly attacked him for his attitudes towards the Indians, while Diaz chided him for his worshipful stance towards Cortés. In spite of its critics, however, the *Historia* went through nearly twenty editions in the sixteenth century. It was one of the few places to which the curious could turn who wanted a broad view of the Spanish expansion overseas.

As a student, Lopez received a humanist education at Alcalá de Henares before taking holy orders and going to Italy. He was a skilled rhetorician, and he was not insensitive to the plight of the Indians. In many ways he shared more with Las Casas than the latter was willing to concede. He did not withhold humanity from the Indians. However, they were finally so many ornaments whose purpose was to serve the needs of a Christian Spain. No matter how sympathetic with the Indians Lopez might have been in the abstract, his descriptions of them were filtered through the realities of power and possession. His principal informant, after all, was the embodiment of power: Cortés himself.

The present copy demonstrates the diffusion of the text, though it only includes about one-third of the complete history. Its near contemporary owner was not an Italian but an English gentleman with material interests in the New World, Thomas Shirley. In the twentieth century, the book spent some time in Philadelphia where it was part of the famous collection assembled by Penn alum Boise Penrose.

No name is more closely associated with the defense of the indigenous peoples of the Spanish New World than that of Las Casas. The combative Dominican yielded to no one in his zealous pursuit of the rights of the Indians against the policies of the Spanish. As Bishop of Chiapas, Las Casas confronted wealthy landowners, government officials, and clerics alike, as he worked to alleviate the burdens of colonialism on the Indians. For Las Casas, the Indians were innocents being led to the slaughter by greedy overlords and their violent henchmen. In this important letter, probably written in Valladolid as the Council of the Indies debated the fate of the Indians, Las Casas addresses the Emperor and indicts the Spanish for killing the Indians to obtain wealth "against the law of God. Your Majesty is compelled by divine precept and law to declare them free." Converting the Indians by the sword, importing the practices of the Reconquista into the New World were wrong.

"The settlement and dwelling of the Spaniards in the Indies is necessary as much for the conversion and good order of the Indians as for sustaining the state and dominion of Your Majesty and the Kings of Castile in the Indies. This settlement can proceed quite well without *encomiendas* or (forced) Indian labor. Nowhere in Scripture do we find support for the willful abusing of native peoples by settlers and colonizers."

Las Casas's powerful arguments, here and elsewhere, led to a victory of sorts. In 1542 the Indians were formally made vassals of the Emperor and their enslavement in turn prohibited.

Bartholomé de Las Casas.



Brevissima relacion de la destruycion de las Indias.

A series of tracts on the Indies, nine in all; the first published by Juan Cromberger, the others by Sebastian Trugillo.

- 1). Brevissima relacion de la destruycion de las Indias . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 2). Lo que se sigue es un pedaco una carta y relacion que escrivo cierto hombre . . . 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 3). Entre los remedios q dó fray Bartholome de las Casas . . . refirio . . . para reformaciõ de las Indias . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 4). Aqui se cotiene unos ausios y reglas para los confesores q oyeron confessiones delos Españolesque son o han fido en cargo a los Indion delas Indias del mar Oceano . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 5). Aqui se cotiene una disputa o controversia entre el Obispo do fray Bartholome de las Casas o Casaus obispo q fue dela ciudad Real de Chiapa . . . y el doctor Gines de Sepulueda . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 6). Este es un tratado q el obispo de la ciudad Real de Chiapa do fray Bartholome de las Casas o Casaus compuso por comision del Consejo Real delas Indias: sobre la materia de los yndios que se han hecho en ellas esclavos . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 7). Aqui se cotiene treynta proposiciones muy juridicas: en las qules sumaria y succintaments se toca muchas cosas pertineneecietas as de recho q al yglesia y los principes christianos teinen o puede tener sobre los infieles de qual quier especie que sean . . . Seville, 1552.  
[Bound with:]
- 8). Principia queda ex quibus procendum est in disputatione ad manifestandam et defendam justician Yndorum . . .  
[Bound with:]
- 9). Tratrado coprobatorio del Imperio soberano y principado universal qu los Reyes de Castilla y Leon tienen sóbre las indias . . . Frankfurt, 1553.

In 1550 Las Casas took part in official debates on the Indian question. He used this opportunity to prepare a series of nine essays that subsequently appeared in Seville in 1552 and 1553. The Dominican was keenly aware of the power of the printed word, so much so that he ignored the need to secure royal permissions before publishing these treatises. With their wide

ranging indictment of Spanish atrocities, they exploded onto the European scene. They were widely translated and frequently reissued, especially in anti-Spanish contexts. Las Casas became Spain's witness against itself. The critique was particularly powerful because Las Casas was not only a master of important traditions of Scholastic philosophy and logic—which he could use to best an opponent—he was an acute observer who reported on the existential situation of the Indians in an immediate and persuasive style. It was his descriptions of the plight of the Indians that early modern Europeans relished and remembered.

Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca  
(1490-1557).

*La relacion y comentarios del governador  
Alvar Nuñez Cabeça de Vaca, de lo  
acaescido en las dos jornadas que hizo a las  
Indias.*

Valladolid: Francesco Fernandez  
de Cordova, 1555.



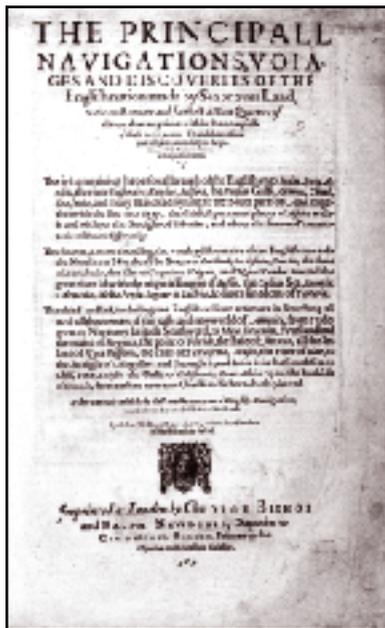
Cabeza de Vaca's moving account of his shipwreck and trek across northern Mexico in the early sixteenth century is usually read for its narrative genius or because its author was the first European to traverse what is today the southern girth of Texas. The legacy of the Reconquista ran deep in Cabeza's family, and his narrative was crafted in ways that remind one of medieval romance and chivalry. As dramatic as it is—indeed, gripping would be a better word—it is also of interest for what it has to say about Cabeza's encounters with various Indian groups in his unhappy sojourn among them.

Cabeza's misfortunes began in Florida ca. 1528, where he was one of four men out of a total of more than three-hundred to have survived a series of disasters at the hands of nature and the natives. It is not hard to have sympathy for the poor Spaniard, as he endures all manner of hardship and privation, including slavery, for a period of seven years. His captors do not appear in a favorable light. They are dirty, treacherous, cruel, superstitious, and ignorant. At the same time, however, they can also be extraordinarily generous and thoughtful, giving the Spaniard food, shelter, and protection. Cabeza is too much focused on himself to catch the contradiction, but its presence underscores the devil/angel polarity that informed Europe's early experiences of New World peoples.

The present edition of the *Relacion* is the second, the first having come out in 1542, some five years after Cabeza had returned to Spain. In composing his memoir, Cabeza clearly hoped to win the support of Charles V for an exalted position in the New World. But he was disappointed again. The best the Emperor would do was appoint him an Adelantado, with jurisdiction over the huge and sparsely-inhabited territory stretching from Peru south to the Tierra del Fuego. Moreover, the ill luck that plagued him in the past continued to haunt him in his new position. His second tour in the New World was, if anything, unhappier than the first.

Richard Hakluyt (1552-1616).  
*The Principall Navigations, Voyages,  
Traffiques and Discoveries of the  
English Nation.*  
London: George Bishop, Ralph  
Newberie, and Robert Barker, 1599.

Courtesy of the Jean and  
Jay I. Kislak Collection



“Having for the benefit and honour of my Countrey zealously bestowed so many yerres, so much traveile and cost, to bring Antiquities smothered and buried in darke silence to light, and to preserve certaine memorable exploits of late yeeres by our English nation achieved, from the greedy jaws of oblivion....” Thus begins Richard Hakluyt’s introduction to the revised and expanded edition of his *Principall Navigations*, the work of a man who clearly wants to be seen by his fellows as a committed patriot. Hakluyt’s three weighty tomes appeared during the full bloom of Elizabethan England: an atmosphere of heady patriotism fueled by the Reformation and the defeat of the Spanish Armada, a time of extraordinary cultural achievement. Hakluyt’s massive compilation of voyage narratives from the past and present is a dense homage to English genius and its navigational triumphs. It sings the Elizabethan refrain that England had arrived; that it had a glorious past, a victorious present, and a certain future; and that it was the equal of any nation. But Hakluyt was also concerned to provide a gallery of examples and reasons that would move his fellows to redouble their quest for empire and trade. The expansion of England abroad was necessary, in Hakluyt’s view, because empires provided markets and markets generated wealth. At the same time, he wanted to make Spanish chronicles available in English so that his countrymen could benefit from them and possibly use them against the wicked Spaniards.

The second edition of the *Navigations* includes foreign sources in addition to English: Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanish voyage accounts occupy much of the third volume, which is devoted to the New World.