

Introduction: Father Cobo and His *Historia*

Bernabe Cobo (1580–1657) became one of the New World's outstanding historians. Born in southern Spain,¹ he spent a year on Hispaniola² before continuing on to Peru in 1599.³ He was to remain in Peru for the rest of his life, except for a trip to New Spain between 1629 and 1642.⁴ Cobo was educated as a Jesuit and did extensive missionary work with the Peruvian Indians at intervals from 1609 through 1629.⁵ During his sojourn in New Spain and thereafter in Peru, he spent much of his time in the capital cities of Mexico and Lima doing research in archives and libraries for his monumental *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, which he finally completed in 1653.⁶

In the prologue to the *Historia*, Father Cobo explains that his work contains forty-three books divided into three parts; the first part deals with pre-Columbian America, the second with the discovery and conquest of the West Indies and South America, and the third with New Spain. Unfortunately, most of the *Historia* has been lost; what remains is only the first part, composed of fourteen books, plus three books from the second part concerning the foundation of Lima. The loss of such a large portion of Cobo's *Historia* is not as regrettable as it may seem because, for contemporary scholars, the account of pre-Columbian Peru is his most important piece of scholarship. He collected a vast amount of material in Peru. This includes the judicious use of the best written sources on the Incas, which Cobo tells us he confirmed through interviews with the descendants of the royal Inca lineage in Cuzco around 1610.⁷ Cobo also took careful note of the customs of the plebeian Indians with whom he did his missionary work. This mass was then organized into the most comprehensive and lucid study of its kind. As the eminent Peruvianist John H. Rowe so aptly put it, Cobo's account "is so clear in its phrasing and scientific in its approach that it is pleasant as well as profitable to work with."⁸

The manuscripts of the *Historia* found their way to Seville, where they remained unnoticed until around 1790, when Juan Bautista Muñoz had copies made for his collection in Madrid. Muñoz's research assistants used two separate manuscripts; one was a large volume containing the ten books from the first part which deal with natural history; the other had the three books on the foundation of Lima.⁹ Today the holograph manuscripts for these two volumes are

housed in the Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla, identified respectively as MSS. 331-2 and MSS. 332-33.

There is a third manuscript including Books 11-14 of the first part; this volume, dealing mainly with pre-Columbian Peru, is located in the Biblioteca Capitular y Colombina de Sevilla; for the sake of brevity, I will refer to it as the Colombina-Cobo MS. It does not bear the author's signature, and it has never been adequately described. The first sign of it came in 1892-1893, when the contents were published by Marcos Jiménez de la Espada, but he made no reference to the manuscript.¹⁰ This was done by Philip A. Means: "The original manuscript, holograph, is in the Muñoz collection in the Royal Academy of History in Madrid."¹¹ Although Means is a very trustworthy scholar, in this case he made the mistake of using González de la Rosa (see note 1) instead of inspecting the primary sources in Spain.¹² I have personally studied the manuscripts for Cobo's works in the Muñoz collection in Madrid. These are only the copies made around 1790, and they are in the Biblioteca del Palacio Real. Moreover, this collection does not even include a copy of the Colombina-Cobo MS.

The only scholar to identify the Colombina-Cobo MS. was R. Vargas Ugarte; under the heading "Biblioteca Colombina—Sevilla," he states as follows: "416.—MSS. 83-3-36. 1 vol. en 4.^o encuad. en pergamino, 363 pág. n. Al dorso: Historia del Nuevo Mundo. 2 p.p. 1 Historia del Nuevo Mundo, la. Parte. Libro Undécimo. Cap. 1 Que la América estaba poco poblada y por qué causas. Comprende hasta el Libro Decimocuarto, inclusive. Escrito todo de una misma mano. Origl. Se trata, como el lector habrá advertido, de la obra del P. Bernabé Cobo . . ." ¹³ The only error here is the call number. When I visited the Biblioteca Colombina in 1974, the call number was 83-4-24. It should also be noted that this text is done in a clear and careful style of handwriting which makes it easy to work with.

Later scholars who have used Vargas Ugarte have either been noncommittal or have not accepted his identification of the Colombina-Cobo MS. as the original. Porras Barrenechea does not say whether the Colombina-Cobo MS. is original or not,¹⁴ and Francisco Mateos indicates that the originals are missing.¹⁵ In order to remove all doubts about the matter, I have made a comparison of the three surviving letters signed by Cobo and the Colombina-Cobo MS. All of the letters were written in New Spain. The first is dated 7 de Março de 1630 in La Puebla; the second, 21 de Junio de 1633 in Mexico; both of these letters, reports of Cobo's trip through New Spain to members of the Jesuit Society in Peru, are now in the

Biblioteca Nacional de Lima.¹⁶ The third letter, dated in 1639, was written in an effort to get the *Historia* published in Seville; it is in the Biblioteca Universitaria de Sevilla.¹⁷ I have studied the entire text of the Colombina-Cobo MS. as well as the known handwriting and signatures of Cobo as found in the aforementioned letters. I have paid particular attention to the proportional size, spacing, and slant of the letters as well as the use of upper- and lower-case letters and the lack of abbreviations. There is no question that the Colombina-Cobo MS. is the original holograph.¹⁸

Now that the manuscripts have been identified, it must be pointed out that none of the originals were used for the publication of Cobo's works. The botanist D. Antonio Josef Cavanilles did the first publication of parts of the *Historia*. He used the Muñoz copies for an article that came out in 1804.¹⁹ The scientific accuracy of Cobo's descriptions of New World flora was illustrated with extensive quotations. As a botanist, Cobo was far ahead of his time, but even by the latest scientific standards of the early nineteenth century, his practical approach, with special emphasis on medicinal plants, was more valuable for ethnobotany than for natural science.

Next, M. González de la Rosa published the *Historia de la Fundación de Lima* in 1882, using a copy found in the Biblioteca Colombina.²⁰ It is unfortunate that he did not find the original, also in Seville. This work remains an important source of information on early colonial Lima because many of the documents that were used have now disappeared and Cobo is an original source for events in Lima during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Finally, between the years 1890 and 1893, Marcos Jiménez de la Espada published all fourteen books of the first part of the *Historia*.²¹ Unfortunately Jiménez de la Espada died before finishing the introduction, and he never told which manuscripts he used for this edition. However, since he was working in Madrid, he probably used the Muñoz copies for Books 1-10, and, although it has been assumed that he used the Colombina-Cobo MS. for Books 11-14, I have found evidence that he had a copy that now seems to have disappeared with the notes for the introduction. The fact that a copy was made is borne out by a number of emendations and omissions. For example, the Colombina-Cobo MS., f. 66, v., reads "vilcas," but the printed editions read "Vilgas" [Vilcas] (BAE, 92: 53); the Colombina-Cobo MS., f. 117, v., reads "Collatupa," the printed editions have "Coya-Tupa," and note 17 says "Probablemente Colla-Tupa o Tupac" (p. 90). The Colombino-Cobo MS., f. 134, r., reads "unbuhio"; the printed editions have "bujío" [buhío] (p. 102). Furthermore, the Colom-

bina-Cobo MS., f. 49, r., reads “y de los animales peregrinos, y estraños que vemos en algunas islas, como no quedo casta en otras partes?” This whole passage was omitted (p. 40). Other examples of omissions are found in the following places: Colombina-Cobo MS., f. 50, v. (p. 41); f. 76, r. (p. 59); f. 177, r. (p. 134). The list could be extended, but this is sufficient; no doubt these emendations and omissions were based on the shortcomings of a copy made for Jiménez de la Espada.

In fine, the manuscripts of the *Historia*, all located in Seville, are in excellent condition. Nevertheless, all published editions are based on imperfect copies. Therefore, new editions, based on the holograph MSS., are urgently needed, especially for the account of pre-Columbian Peru contained in the Colombina-Cobo MS.