

## *A Scientific Outlook of the Seventeenth Century*

Father Cobo's standards of excellence were based on the crowning achievements of early seventeenth-century Spain. To him the Spanish Baroque cathedral embodied the highest ideals in art, architecture, and music, symbolizing the only true faith, Christianity. On this basis Cobo was very favorably impressed with the Inca's public architecture, roads, bridges, irrigation system, farming methods, weaving, and metallurgy, but he found their music and dance to be monotonous and uninspiring. In comparison to Spanish houses, the plebeian Indians' one-room huts, or *buhios*, seemed primitive and dirty to him, as did their habit of going for months without either bathing or changing their clothes. Moreover, as a priest who had labored long and hard in missionary work with the Indians, he was singularly exasperated by the Indians' lack of receptiveness to the subtleties of the Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, Cobo was intrigued by the religious beliefs of the Indians.

These seventeenth-century European values did not alter Cobo's sincere desire to reveal the scientific and historical facts in his writings. He was a genuine scholar, dedicated to ferreting out the truth. In this respect, Father Cobo was at variance with the prevalent attitude of his own times.

There was still a strong insistence on the authority of the Bible, the Christian fathers, and Aristotle and Pliny. Cobo was influenced by these authorities, and, like that of the other European scholars of his day, his historical framework was strictly Biblical. The benchmarks were roughly the following: Creation, 4000 B.C.; Flood, 2300 B.C.; Solomon, 1000 B.C., etc. Nevertheless, Father Cobo drew most of his conclusions from reports by painstaking investigators such as Juan Polo de Ondegardo and from his own personal observations. On this basis Cobo found empirical evidence in ancient ruins indicating that continuous human habitation in Peru antedated the Universal Flood by centuries. How could this be reconciled with the Christian dogma which taught that Noah and those on his ark were the only survivors of the flood and repopulated the world? Cobo's solution to this theological dilemma provides a good example of his tendency to rely more on experience than authority. He theorized that the Indians were not really affected by the Flood and were not descendants of Noah. Cobo based his conclusion on the fact that neither in their physical features nor in their technology

or culture did the Indians resemble the Hebrews. Although Father Cobo was definitely opposed to introducing miracles to solve such historical problems, he made an exception in this case. He suggested that after the Flood God must have replaced the flora, fauna, and indigenous population unaltered in their original habitat in the New World.

As I have suggested, the material covered in the Colombina-Cobo MS. is the most important part of Cobo's *Historia del Nuevo Mundo* for the modern reader. The title *History of the Inca Empire* was selected because it is the focal point of the part of Cobo's work presented here. The subtitle was added to clarify the exact contents of the work. It is divided into two books (Books 11 and 12 of the *Historia del Nuevo Mundo*, which constitute the first half of the Colombina-Cobo MS.). In the first part of Book I (Colombina-Cobo Book 11), Father Cobo treats the general aspect, character, and dress of the Indians. In the second part, he analyzes several theories concerning the origin of the Indians. He concludes that they came from Asia by taking a northern route. Then Cobo systematically refutes all other theories, especially the belief that the New World or Peru was the Biblical land of Ophir. Book II (Colombina-Cobo Book 12) contains a superb treatise on Inca legends, history, and social institutions. It also includes careful descriptions of some important ruins from pre-Inca civilizations as well as Inca roads, bridges, canals, and buildings. Thus Father Cobo's reliance on empirical evidence and detailed descriptions of the Indians, their environment, and ancient ruins and monuments makes him a precursor of modern anthropologists.