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Andre Preibish

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View of Lockport, New York, drawn about 1840 by W. Wilson.
Courtesy of the Onondaga Historical Association

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Juan De Torquemada And Antonio Alcedo: Two Contributions To Hispanic Historiography

By André Preibish

The two books described here were acquired jointly by the Area Studies and Rare Book Departments of the Library and are housed in the Lena R. Arents Rare Book Room. Approximately one-half of the monographic holdings in the Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian collection of the Latin American section in the Area Studies Department are devoted to Spanish and Portuguese languages and literature of the Iberic Peninsula and the Latin American countries.

Mr. Preibish is head of the Area Studies Department of the Library and Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Bibliographer. As Assistant Director in charge of Acquisitions at the La Trobe University Library, Melbourne, Australia, from 1966 to 1969, he started the building of the first research collection for Latin American Studies in Australia.

Rare book collections are usually the pride of libraries, and visitors are shown the outstanding treasures of such collections. Why are some books considered so "rare" as to merit their inclusion in a special collection? The answers seem obvious: because they are old, because there are only a few copies extant, because they were published before a specified date, because of their intrinsic value. Some books are valuable as milestones in the development of human thought and civilization, others as examples of artistic achievement; these works certainly deserve their place in a rare book room.

The majority of librarians is possessed of a very strong collector's instinct which, coupled with a deeply ingrained sense of custodial mission, has led to the accumulation of very fine bibliographic hoards. At the same time it is important to guard against indiscriminate acquisition of curiosa or first editions which may have little or no intrinsic value. The importance of a

rare book collection in a library can, and should, be enhanced by the acquisition of works which are not only rare *per se* but also congruent with other collections existing in the library system.

The conditions prevailing on the rare book market make it very difficult to purchase works of quality at will. Nevertheless, with perseverance and knowledge of the right sources one can still acquire important additions to Spanish and Portuguese collections at Syracuse. Two such acquisitions of the Syracuse University Library are *Monarquía Indiana* by Juan de Torquemada and *Diccionario geográfico-histórico de las Indias Occidentales o America* by Antonio Alcedo.

I

In 1615 a voluminous work by a Franciscan friar, Juan de Torquemada, entitled *Monarquía Indiana*¹ was printed. Only a few facts are known concerning the life of Torquemada. He arrived in Mexico, a youth of eighteen or twenty, in 1583. Upon his arrival he entered a Franciscan monastery in Mexico City and died there in 1624 as its superior. It seems that he travelled to remote parts of Nueva España, as Mexico was then known.² He probably wrote simple religious plays known as *ejemplos* for the edification of the natives.³ These playlets were acted or mimed during sermons—a custom which survives in some villages until the present day. Only one other work, *Servicios de las Ordenes*, is known to have come from his pen.

The value of *Monarquía Indiana* as a history of prehispanic Mexico and of its conquest by Cortés is marginal. This hodgepodge of facts and fiction and of a few interesting details lost in tedious disquisitions is important for other reasons.

The publication of *Monarquía Indiana* in Spain in 1615 assured this work an early popularity surpassed only by the success of *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* by José De Acosta which appeared in 1590 and besides numerous translations reached six Spanish editions. Neither work, as we shall see later, merited such success.

¹Title page reads: Primera Parte / de los veinte y un Libros Rituales i Monarchia / Indiana, con el origen y guerras, de los Indios Ocidentales de / sus Poblaciones, Descubrimiento, Conquista, Conversion y / otras cosas maravillosas de la mesma tierra distribuydos en tres tomos / Compuesto por Juan de Torquemada / . . . en Madrid en la Oficina y a costa de Nicolas Rodríguez Franco / Año de 1723 [2nd. ed.]

²García Icazbalceta, Joaquín: *Obras t. 4 Biografías*. México Impr. de V. Agüero, 1895 p. 223-227

³González Peña, Carlos: *Historia de la literatura Mexicana*. 9 ed. México, Editorial Porrúa, 1966 p. 61



Frontispiece of Juan de Torquemada, *Monarchia Indiana*, Madrid, en la Oficina y a costa de Nicolas Rodriguez Franco, 1723, [2nd ed.]

It must be noted here that a royal decree issued in 1560 expressly forbade publication of books in Spanish overseas possessions dealing in any way with their history.⁴ The establishment of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Mexico constituted a further obstacle in publishing books describing Aztec customs, religion and history. How effective this ban was can be gauged from the fact that J. García Icazbalceta in his very well documented bibliography of sixteenth century Mexican books⁵ does not list even one work of this type.

In the early seventeenth century there were only a few works published on the history of Mexico. *The Letters* of Cortés were, of course, printed immediately and received wide publicity. Cortés' apologist Francisco López de Gómara published *Historia General de las Indias* in 1552, without stirring from his native Seville; hence this work contained many errors and omissions. The famous reply by Bernal Diaz del Castillo to this eulogy of Cortés in his *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* was to remain unknown until the middle of the seventeenth century when only an incomplete copy of the manuscript was discovered. The original manuscript was not found until 1904 in the Municipal Archives of Guatemala City. A similar fate was suffered by the more erudite works of Franciscan monks who came to Mexico immediately after the conquest and who learned not only the Aztec language but recorded their history, customs, religion and social organization.

The merit of Torquemada, if merit it be, is the fact that in his compilation he quoted these unpublished chronicles, sometimes mentioning the names of their authors, sometimes plundering parts of their work for his *Monarquía Indiana*, thus saving them from oblivion. Torquemada's plagiarism of Jerónimo de Mendieta's work, *Historia Eclesiástica Indiana (1571)*, part of which he included in his *pot-pourri* without any change, proved very useful to Joaquín García Icazbalceta in his editorial work when he succeeded in locating and acquiring the original manuscript in 1861.⁶ Another instance of useful literary piracy may be mentioned here; José de Acosta, Torquemada's erstwhile competitor for fame, incorporated in his *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* a complete work of an anonymous Indian author, which later became known as *Codex Ramírez*, named after its discoverer.

⁴Text of the decree quoted in: Medina, José Toribio. *Historia de la Imprenta en los antiguos dominios españoles de América y Oceanía*. Santiago de Chile, Fondo Histórico y Bibliográfico, 1958 t. 1 p. 300. "Os informéis y sepais que libros hay impresos en esas ciudades sin expresa Licencia nuestra i que tratan de cosas de esas partes, y que todos aquellos que halláredes, los recojais y enviéis. [Let it be known and brought to your notice that books are being printed in those cities without our special permit, and they treat of things in those regions. They should be found, collected and sent (to Spain)]."

⁵García Icazbalceta, Joaquín: *Bibliografía Mexicana del Siglo XVI*, México. Rev. ed. Fondo de Cultura Económica. 1954

⁶García Icazbalceta, Joaquín: *Obras t. 3 Biografías* p. 394-5

Torquemada quoted works of other early chroniclers such as Toribio de Benavente (known as Motolinia) and Andrés de Olmos. He probably met the most famous of the Franciscan historians, Bernardino de Sahagún, who for sixty years labored over his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, writing it in Spanish, Nahuatl and Latin and making his Aztec pupils use the pictographs of their fathers to achieve greater authenticity. Sahagún was forced to transcribe his work many times when earlier copies sent to Spain disappeared or when others were taken away by local authorities complying with the decree of Philip II. Lesser works of Sahagún which disappeared completely are known to us only because Torquemada saw them and mentioned their titles: “escribió Sahagún muchos tratados sueltos, que se han perdido. Torquemada nos dá títulos de algunos de ellos.”⁷

The role of Torquemada’s *Monarquía Indiana* in establishing this very difficult bibliography, “quizá la más difícil de nuestra literatura,” is well illustrated in the biographical study of the famous chronicler written by Joaquín García Icazbalceta.⁸

If we consider the nature of Torquemada’s work, we cannot wonder that there were only two editions of this compilation. Nevertheless in a rather unexpected way his book does contribute to the early historiography of Mexico. A copy of the second edition which was printed in 1723 by Nicolás Rodríguez Franco in Madrid has recently been acquired for the Rare Book Collection.

II

The following passage from the introduction to *Diccionario geográfico–histórico de las Indias Occidentales o América*⁹ by Antonio Alcedo (1735-1812) indicates clearly that the time of compilations such as *Monarquía Indiana* has passed. “If one considers impartially the arduous task of reading more than three hundred books on the Western Indies, and the confusion and inaccuracies in many of them, as well as the difficulty in reconciling contradictory opinions in order to arrive at the true facts, I do not doubt that many errors or omissions which may still be encountered in my work will be excused. I shall be grateful if they are brought to my notice so that they may be corrected.” The publication of the five volume *Diccionario* was the result of painstaking work which lasted over twenty years, and which

⁷*Op. Cit.* p. 180. “Sahagún wrote many separate treatises which have been lost. Torquemada mentions some of them.”

⁸*Ibid.* p. 132-293

⁹Title page reads: *Diccionario / geográfico – histórico / de las Indias Occidentales / o América / Es a saber: / de los Reynos del Perú, Nueva España / Tierra Firme, Chile, y Nuevo Reyno de Granada / . . . / escrito / por el Coronel Don Antonio de Alcedo / . . . Madrid: En la Imprenta de Manuel González / 1786-1789. (Palau No. 6029) It should be noted that though North America is not mentioned in the title, entries for the United States and for Canada are numerous.*

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mayor de Tepozcolula en la Provincia y Obispado de Oaxaca en Nueva España, tiene 254 familias de Indios, incluso los que habitan en los barrios de su distrito en que hay muchos ranchos de labor donde cogen copiosas cosechas de trigo y maíz, que es á lo que se dedican, es de temperamento cálido, y dista 19 leguas al S de su Capital.

YOLOXINISQUILA, San Pedro de) Pueblo de la Alcaldía mayor de Teocuilco en Nueva España, tiene 224 familias de Indios incluso los que habitan en los barrios de su distrito; produce grana con abundancia, que es el único fruto de su comercio, porque aunque la tierra es á propósito para cualquiera frutos están tan cebados en el lucro que les dexa aquel que no cultivan mas que las semillas necesarias para su consumo.

YOEHUE, Pueblo de la Provincia y Corregimiento de Quillota en el Reyno de Chile, situado en la Costa cerca del rio Imperial.

YOTAHUACAN, Pueblo de la Cabeza de partido y Alcaldía mayor de Cuzco en Nueva España, situado á la orilla del rio Ver-

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de distante 4 leguas al S de su Capital.

YOTALA, Pueblo de la Provincia y Corregimiento de Yamparaes en el Perú del Arzobispado de Charcas.

YORCK, Nueva) Provincia de los Estados Unidos de la América Septentrional, confina por el E con la de la Nueva Inglaterra, por el O con la de Nueva Jersey, por el Sur con el Océano, y por el N con el pais de los Indios Iroqueses; tiene el nombre por haberla cedido Carlos Segundo, Rey de Inglaterra, al Duque de Yorck, que despues ocupó aquel Trono: la descubrió el Caballero Hudson que la vendió á los Holandeses el año de 1608, estos empezaron á establecerse en ella en 1614, y la dieron el nombre de Nueva Netherland, pero Samuel Argal, Gobernador de la Virginia, los echó de allí poco despues: el año de 1664 envió el Rey de Inglaterra quatro Comisarios para establecer los límites de aquella Colonia, y quitaron á los Holandeses la Capital que se llamaba Nueva Amsterdan, y le mudaron el nombre en el de Nueva Yorck; algun tiempo despues

assured the election of Antonio Alcedo to the Royal Academy of History in Madrid. The work presents a combination of a gazetteer with an encyclopedia; the subjects covered are those enumerated in detail on the title page. Noteworthy are entries describing the role of the Jesuits' missions, for one would imagine that this order, banned in 1767 from the Spanish colonies, would not receive such impartial treatment. The listing of various Indian tribes and the territories they inhabited gives an idea of how many of them have disappeared since the end of the eighteenth century. In the last volume one finds an administrative divisions chart of the Spanish colonies and a list of local names and foreign terms describing plants, animals and fruits.

Clearly the work was conceived in the spirit of the Enlightenment and the age of Encyclopedists. Its author was born in Quito in 1735 where his father Dionisio de Alcedo y Herrera was the president of the *Real Audiencia*. Alcedo senior had spent more than forty years in the service of the colonial administration, was author of several works on the countries he had lived in, and possessed a private library which served his son well in compiling the *Diccionario* as he himself acknowledges in the introduction: "una numerosa biblioteca de libros y papeles de Indias, me han dado materiales para trabajar continuamente por espacio de veinte años."¹⁰

It may seem from what has been said so far that his was a writer's or bookman's life, but there is also a military side to Alcedo's career. He reached the rank of colonel and during the Napoleonic invasion he was military governor of La Coruña, which he had to surrender to the superior forces of Marshal Soult.

Antonio Alcedo wrote another major work which unfortunately remained in manuscript form until it was published in 1965: *Biblioteca Americana. Catálogo de los autores que han escrito de la América en diferentes idiomas. 2 vols. Quito 1965* (Palau No. 6032 II). The value of this work is evidenced by the fact that it was deemed worth publishing a century and a half after its author's death. In *Biblioteca Americana* Alcedo listed not only the works which had been published or which were in manuscript but also those which had been lost or about which only vague information was available. He suggested where they might be located and how to go about finding them. Many bibliographic discoveries of the nineteenth century confirmed Alcedo's intuition.

Browsing through the pages of Alcedo's *Diccionario* is still illuminating. Let the present day tourist check the entry under Acapulco and he will be surprised to learn that because of its bad climate the small port counted among its inhabitants only eight Spanish families at the end of the eighteenth century: "porque extrañando el clima apenas lo habitan ocho familias

¹⁰ "A rich library, containing books and documents on 'las Indias' provided me with materials for a continuous labor of twenty years."

españolas.” The district was very arid and poor so that the inhabitants had to depend for food entirely upon Indians from the outlying villages: “carece al mismo tiempo de toda especie de víveres por lo reducido y estéril de su distrito.” It seems that were it not for an occasional ship arriving from China the little commerce there would have ceased altogether.

The veracity of these statements can be confirmed by another example. Describing New York, Alcedo asserts that the population of that city was 25,000 inhabitants, and indeed in such a source as *Encyclopedia Americana* we find that during the War of Independence, because of the influx of refugees, the population was 33,000 but it decreased to 23,600 at the end of hostilities. Reading further we can learn that in the City Hall was a library created in 1728 by Dr. Millington’s gift of one hundred volumes. The library was later enlarged by an additional seven hundred volumes purchased with six hundred pounds sterling collected by “varios Caballeros.”

Describing Philadelphia, Alcedo mentions that in 1732 Benjamin Franklin created a “Gran Biblioteca” which was open on Saturday to the public, while during the week only its benefactors could use it. Books were borrowed upon payment of an appropriate amount of money and if they were not returned on time fines were imposed in order to increase the library’s stock. Another library containing works of classical authors and a selection of the best contemporary ones is also mentioned by Alcedo. This one was created in 1752 from the bequest of the “sabio ciudadano Logan.”

Alcedo’s *Diccionario* presents the whole panorama of life in the western hemisphere during the eighteenth century. Its popularity extended beyond the Spanish-speaking world for it was translated and revised by G.A. Thompson and published in London under the title *The geographical and historical Dictionary of America and the West Indies containing an entire translation of the Spanish work of the Colonel D. Antonio de Alcedo*. 5 vols. 1812-1815 (Palau No. 6031). The work was published again in 1967 with an introductory study by Ciriaco Pérez-Bustamante as volumes 205-208 of *Biblioteca de Autores Espanoles*. The simultaneous acquisition by Syracuse University Library of both the new and the original editions not only assures that all works written by Antonio Alcedo can be found in the Library but it is also an example of collection building in depth. The first edition in the Rare Book Department is not an isolated eighteenth century Spanish encyclopedia, but an integral part of the author’s literary creations.