

# Iconography of Interpreters in the Conquest of the Americas

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## Introduction

Information about interpreters is generally scarce in traditional historical sources. This is also true of most written documents which allow us to rebuild the history of the conquest of the Americas by the Europeans. We know interpreters were a key element in the communication between colonizers and colonized who could not understand each other (language barriers, among others, persist to this day in the Americas). We know that the *encounter*, the conquest, the colonization and the acculturation of scores of peoples took place, particularly during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, only thanks to the linguistic and cultural skills of mediators from both sides. However, most of the time interpreters are not newsworthy and are absent from the sources. What we often find is the fiction of intercommunicability between different cultures and languages.

Within the limited confines of this paper we cannot discuss the quality of the work carried out by those interpreters. We can say that their task was indeed extremely challenging, that they were often selected by happenstance (capture, shipwreck, etc.), that they received little, if any, training and that, notwithstanding all these circumstances, they performed their job and sparked communication (Baigorri, 1999-2000; Baigorri & Alonso, 2002). Their importance was recognized by the political, judicial and religious authorities and, from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a detailed corpus of regulations began to be drafted to establish ethics or rules on working conditions (Ayala, 1946; Peñarroja, 2000). These regulations, parallel to those of the dragomans

(Roland, 1999, pp. 44-51), evolved into the modern sworn interpreters' institutionalization of the profession.

Much has been argued about the visibility of the translator in metaphoric terms: "The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator," (Venuti, 1995, p. 2). If we turn these words around, we could say that the more invisible the translator (or the interpreter), the greater the illusion of communication without mediation. Venuti (1995, p. 17) refers to the role the translator plays (or should play) as receiver of a text, conceived by an author in a source language, and producer of a similar text (*dire quasi la stessa cosa*, Eco, 2003), in a target language, aimed at the readers in the target culture, that is, through a text which survives the translator. Interpreters do a similar job, but verbally and/or through non-verbal signals. Not until recently has it been possible to record voices, so we do not have the historical evidence of the interpreters' work except through indirect inference. That is, interpreters in the historical period we are dealing with are *visible*—should we say *audible*?—only through the words of others, such as the chroniclers, who recorded mediated events as they witnessed and understood them. What we wish to discuss in this paper is not so much the *audibility* interpreters have or should have as their *visibility* in real—not metaphoric—terms, in some graphic representations of the conquest and colonization. Images are thus a substitute for words, because the interpreter of this remote past cannot be heard.

Visual images are important sources of information. First, because they tell us much about the vision that both the person who produces and the one who commissions the image have about the object of representation. In our paper that vision is helpful for a comprehensive understanding of the representation (natural, metaphorical, even fictional or *imagined*) of a culture by the other. All images—like any other type of record—are by definition biased, since they constitute an ideological interpretation or view of the object in the picture. Representation in postcolonial studies means "the substitution of objective reality by a subjective image which serves the aim of domination" (Carbonell, 1997, p. 20). Most images, written or pictorial, respond to previous stereotypes. This is particularly true of images created at the beginning of the contacts between Europeans and peoples from other cultures (Alonso, 2003). The reality is twisted in order to fit the preconceived image one has of the other and, once the image is fixed, it is difficult to erase or modify that impression. What Marco Polo sees on the island of Java, on his way home from China, is,

according to his description, a rhinoceros. However, on the basis of the medieval image he had taken with him, he has an intellectual, not merely visual, understanding of the animal he has seen and *imagines* it is a unicorn (Eco, 1999, p. 55). The description of reality is a mediation between what is known and the unknown. *Piña* is the name the Spaniards give to a fruit they do not know (*ananas*), for want of a better description.

Columbus died with the conviction that he had reached the Far East through the West. And, although America was soon considered a *new* continent—new, of course, only to outsiders—the name *the Indies* (*las Indias*), without distinction at first between East or West, prevailed. The same is valid for the stereotype of the Caribbean landscape, as described by Columbus in his logbook, which gave Europeans the idea that the new lands were always green, had a mild climate and were rich precisely in the raw materials sought for by the early voyagers. That idea prevailed even after explorers had experienced terrible tempests (see the metaphorical sense of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in Cheyfitz, 1997) and discovered scorching deserts or huge barren ice-covered territories. Geographical images and place names are based on the illusion of reaching the land and the riches voyagers were seeking: Puerto Rico, Río de la Plata, Castilla del Oro... Columbus names things and places as soon as he arrives at the new-found territories (Todorov, 1987, p. 36).

Secondly, in the period of our study, the transmission of culture was mainly oral, since illiteracy was rampant in European and American societies alike. At that time, images were often the only non-encrypted means of communication that ordinary people were capable of deciphering. We know that the painter Albrecht Dürer went to the ports where vessels from America arrived, in order to portray exotic animals or plants, much as a graphic journalist (or TV cameraman) would do these days. *Mutatis mutandis*, those images—although they were sometimes a blend between fiction and reality—played the role of the mass media today and, in a certain way, mirrored the societies they represented to the extent of being a substitute for the real objects in the imagination of the viewers. As is typical currently, only images of what is considered important—for a variety of reasons which may change with time—make the headlines. In this sense, it is interesting to note that interpreters—not translators, though—are sometimes represented in *important* events. Marina or *Malinche* is probably the most frequently represented interpreter. A mountain in Puerto Rico and a district in

Adjuntas, on the same island, are named after Juan González, Ponce de León's interpreter.

### **Image Selections and Comments**

Images, like any other record, are in the hands of the powerful at any given time and in any given society. Native codices provide the official vision by those who were finally defeated by the colonizers and use the same type of manipulation present in any given society. The main characters (that is, usually the commissioners of the image) appear in high-ranking positions and others may appear only as complementary objects to complete the picture. This may explain why, in native codices, images representing early meetings between Cortés and various Mexican lords appear to be mediated only by Malintzin or *Malinche*, although we know that she knew no Spanish at the time and that she needed the help of Jerónimo de Aguilar as a *pivot* between Spanish and Mayan (Díaz del Castillo, 1989, pp. 92-93). She is also frequently represented as larger in size than the other natives (Arencibia, 1998, pp. 20-23). Does this imply fascination for the Mayan girl who acted as the Spaniards' linguistic ally—and language was a powerful weapon indeed, as Cortés knew only too well (Díaz del Castillo, 1989, p. 183)? Or is it because this is the image of a traitress, much despised by Mexicans after independence (*malinchismo* is a synonym for *turncoat*)? The answer may depend on the interpretation given by different viewers (“there is no neutral looking,” Lister & Wells, 2001, p. 65) and may also vary through time or space. To have a certain command of the language of the empire meant for the colonized to have (some) influence and power (Robinson, 1997, p. 35), but not necessarily in the eyes of their fellow indigenous peoples.

Spanish chronicles are usually without illustrations for strategic reasons, because information about Indians and new discoveries was to be kept secret (Sebastián, 1992, pp. 30 and 53). But European illustrated sources were not only commissioned by the conquerors, but also by their numerous European competitors for imperial dominance in those days. In some cases, images about the Spanish conquest and colonization are used to illustrate a vision of the Spaniards as responsible for the crime of genocide, where the presence of the interpreter is anecdotal. The European competitors sometimes found inspiration in the works by Bartolomé de Las Casas, whose anti-establishment pro-Indian ideas were allowed to circulate freely in Spain. In fact, with the touch of Modernity often associated with

Charles V, this monarch sponsored a debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda on the humanity of the indigenous peoples (Hanke, 1974, p. 67). We should stress here that the presence of the interpreter as the communication link is tacitly based on the assumption that the Europeans' counterparts were human, capable of an articulate discourse and of being transformed—through conversion tactics or through military arm-twisting—into good Christians, and subjects of the respective metropolises.

Images should be seen as visual representations, as records which can be analyzed both by their contents and by their formal appearance, by their representational and symbolic meaning (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, pp. 2-3). But the facts should be known in order to interpret the images. That is, if images can be used to illustrate something, they have to be explained by someone who knows the facts. “Establishing such contextual background often involves making use of indirect forms or analysis as well as considerable archival and other research” (Collier, 2001, p. 36).

We have selected six images in which the interpreter is present. These are the exception rather than the rule. We have chosen them from different sources, in order to try to better understand how interpreters were perceived during the conquest, and also to try to determine if representations of interpreters vary according to different approaches: the indigenous, the European and the *mestizo*. The images will be accompanied by a comment including contextual information, and belong to a brief historical period—between 1550 and 1619. The essential part of the Spanish conquest had been completed by then, although much of the territory was still to be explored, both in North and South America. Europeans had consolidated their presence in the Americas and a variety of customers commissioned chronicles and stories about pre-Columbian peoples and deeds. The *Lienzo de Tlaxcala Manuscript*, the *Codex Florentinus* and Poma de Ayala's *New Chronicle* belong to this genre. Two of the images are taken from De Bry's *America*, and the last one from the *Codex Osuna*.

## Representations of Indigenous Authorship

[Fig. 1] “Indians presenting gifts to Hernán Cortés, who listens to their words translated by *doña Marina*.” *Anonymous Lienzo de Tlaxcala Manuscript* (ca. 1550): the daughters of the lords of Tlaxcala are presented to Cortés. Color picture taken from: [eclectic.ss.uci.edu/~drwhite/cases/lienzo4.jpg](http://eclectic.ss.uci.edu/~drwhite/cases/lienzo4.jpg) (See Appendix, p. 148)

After the Spaniards had established their colonial rule in Mexico, “the municipal government of Tlaxcala commissioned a large painting or wall hanging to show the events of the arrival of Cortés in Tlaxcala and the subsequent war against the Aztecs in which the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans were allies. The painting was to be sent to Spain, but a copy, now lost, was kept in Tlaxcala. We know it only from copies that are not exact, but which agree in overall detail” (Karttunen, 1994, p. 8).

Parts of the scenes were also represented “on loose pages from what must have been a large book” and were painted “around the same time that the big painting was commissioned, within living memory of people who had been eyewitnesses to the events they portray” (Karttunen, *ibid.*). We present here the fourth scene of that series, in which

... Cortés remains seated in his chair with his men behind him. Facing him, Xicotencatl and other Tlaxcalan noblemen stand as they give a group of noblewomen to the Spaniards. Doña Marina faces the richly dressed women and makes the finger-pointing gesture that usually accompanies speech in such drawings, while behind her a Spaniard holds a spear in one hand and makes the same pointing gesture with his free hand. This may be a rare acknowledgment of the presence of Jerónimo de Aguilar. It is at this point in the train of events that Bernal Díaz remarks that all the Indians called Cortés “Malinche” because of the inseparableness of the captain and his Nahuatl interpreter. In both the indigenous record and the Spanish chronicles, Aguilar recedes into the background and Doña Marina moves to center stage. (Karttunen, 1994, pp. 8-9)

We will add only a few comments to this detailed description. As Collier says, “drawings, paintings and other art forms ... may be used in direct analysis, providing there is adequate contextual information and the cultural conventions of the artist are understood” (2001, p. 58). It is clear that this picture intends to represent, in different layers—without using perspective—the whole scene of the friendly—and productive—encounter between Cortés and the Tlaxcalans.

This colored drawing is quite simple, almost childlike, particularly if we compare it with the complexity of European Renaissance paintings, but it is very naturalistic and rich in information. There are ethnic and gender markers, with the Spaniards bearded and dressed in hose and doublets, and the Tlaxcalans with their

*zarapes* or shawls (men) and their tunics and gowns (women). Costumes tend to fix a visual stereotype, where the uniformity of the group prevails over the individual features, with the exception perhaps of Cortés. Marina can be identified not by her face or dress but by the position she occupies, aligned with the (all male) Spaniards and facing the Tlaxcalans. Her location is, in our view, a symbol of how the painter(s) interpreted her allegiance. She may resemble the Tlaxcalans or the other Mexicans, but she is not quite one of them. “She had no people and nowhere to flee” (Karttunen, 1994, p. 22), and it is that rootlessness and her ability to adapt that allowed her survival. Her place would also represent her success “in making herself one of the men” (Karttunen, *ibid.*). When we say Marina took the Spaniards’ side we mean that her role exceeded that of an interpreter as we understand it currently, to become a fellow traveler for Cortés (in more than one sense), his adviser, his diplomat and his spy. Her job was remarkable for the Spaniards, but she was far from being neutral.

The convention for communication or speech seems to be the finger-pointing with hand and arm lifted in an attitude of “explaining.” Although there are several characters depicted in the same position, we can assume that not all are speaking at the same time, but in turns. Marina is syntactically linked with the scene through the inclination of her head, which is facing Xicotencatl, to and from whom she is supposed to be translating her principal’s words. Karttunen identifies the man behind Marina as Jerónimo de Aguilar, the other interpreter who—let us not forget—was absolutely necessary for communication while Marina was learning Spanish. This would be an exceptional occasion in which he is represented—Marina attracted all the attention—and a historic image of a relayed interpreting situation. Aguilar would interpret between Mayan and Spanish and Marina between Mayan and Nahuatl.

[Fig. 2] Codex Osuna (ca. 1565) *Pintura del Gobernador, Alcaldes y Regidores de México*. (1973) Madrid: Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia. Transcribed and annotated by Vicenta Cortés Alonso. 2 vols. Color image taken from: <http://www.tulane.edu/~latinlib/osuna.html>, October 2004 (*Facsimile of 16<sup>th</sup> century Codex Osuna from the National Library in Madrid*). (See Appendix, p. 149)

This is a 39-page document written in Nahuatl and Spanish and illustrated with colored pictograms. King Philip II instructed Jerónimo de Valderrama to visit the Spanish authorities in Mexico, and the latter presented the *Codex* as record of his visit between 1563 and 1566. The

document, with text and drawings, collects the eyewitness testimonies given by the Indians about the abuses and outrages committed by mayors, aldermen and high-ranking officials of the Spanish administration in Mexico. It therefore carries legal and notarial value.

Above the picture there is a text in Spanish reading: “*La orden que tenía el visorey don Luis de Velasco en dar las varas a los alcaldes y alguaziles encargándoles la doctrina policía y buen tratamiento de los naturales.*” Below the picture there is a much longer text in Nahuatl. We gather information not only from the text, but also from the images, which represent the sort of relations the Spanish authorities had with their Mexican subjects during the colonial period.

The characters are presented along a horizontal line, which converges on the Viceroy, at whom everyone is looking. The Viceroy—bearded, dressed in dark green, wearing a hat and carrying his sword—is bestowing the staff of office upon the new Indian mayors and bailiffs, all wearing red-trimmed white tunics. The knowledge of the Spanish language was not always a requirement to hold those offices, since we can see in the scene an interpreter, called *nahuatlato*, who performed the job for the government and justice authorities. The interpreter is mediating between the group of native Mexicans and the Viceroy, and is placed in a central position of apparent neutrality. However, his physical appearance, his clothing and even the color in which he is represented, associate him visually with the Viceroy. It may only be a visual coincidence, but one could also infer an indication of a biased performance of the interpreters’ duties. These were frequently accused of abuses against the Indians when they worked for the judicial authorities, and amendments were made through the years in the colonial interpreters’ regulations to prevent these types of abuses (Catelli and Gargatagli, 1998, pp. 122-126).

### **Representations of *Mestizo* Authorship**

[Fig. 3] Bernardino de Sahagún (1576-1577). *Codex Florentinus*: Florentine Codex, Manuscript pp. 218-20, Palatine Collection in the Bibliotheca Medicea-Laurentiana, L. XII, vol. 3, fol. 29, Mexico: Gobierno de la República, impr. 1979. (See Appendix, p. 150)

This codex is the illustrated, bilingual Nahuatl and Spanish version of Sahagún’s *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. It was commissioned by Brother Rodrigo de Soquera, general commissioner



of the Franciscans, and consists of a compilation of original Nahuatl tales narrated by native Mexicans and reorganized by Sahagún and his aides in the 1550s. Book 12 describes the deeds of the Conquest in two columns, one in Nahuatl and the other in Spanish. The Spanish text is more of an adaptation than a translation. The book was illustrated by Aztec *tlacuilos*, or scribes, in a style reflecting a mixture of pre-Conquest manuscript traditions and European illustration conventions. That is why we consider this picture to be *mestizo*.

Sahagún's work did much to preserve the pre-Conquest cultural heritage, virtually destroyed by the Europeans, and to prove the outstanding intellectual abilities of the indigenous peoples. "Recent research has proved that Amerindian pictograms were in fact an instance of a very flexible pictorial language, also able to express abstract ideas. It really is a pity that Western scholars finally discovered this only some centuries after we had destroyed those civilizations on the grounds of their semiotic inferiority" (Eco, 1999, p. 68).

The illustration we present here is drawn from book 12, which tells the story of the conquest of Tenochtitlán (Mexico City), and shows Marina accompanying Cortés on the terrace roof of a house in that city, probably Moctezuma's palace. She is speaking to an indigenous character who is waiting on the street, and asking him—according to the text in the chronicle—to supply the Spaniards with food. All the characters are dressed—which is not always the case with Spanish illustrations—, but in a different manner. Cortés, bearded, wears Spanish clothes and hat. The Mexican Indian, barefoot, wears a short shawl and a feather headdress, and Marina a Mayan tunic, gathered with a brooch in the middle.

The space in the scene is symmetrically organized, with the interpreter at the center, talking directly to the Mexican Indian and looking at him. "The speech act is represented by a small, curled speech-scroll moving between people, an icon used in pre-Conquest manuscripts" ([http://www.learner.org/amerpass/unit02/context\\_activ-2.html](http://www.learner.org/amerpass/unit02/context_activ-2.html), consulted in October 2004). On her right, Cortés remains in silence, but participates with his gestures in the scene. Non-verbal communication, with all the characters acting with their hands, plays a very important role: pointing, gaze work, etc. (Van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, p. 3).

Although we know from Díaz del Castillo's chronicle that Marina used to interpret for Cortés by working in relay with Aguilar, neither the illustrations nor the text in book 12 mention the Spanish interpreter. In the Spanish text *Marina* is described as an Indian who speaks Spanish, whereas the Nahuatl speaks simply of *Malintzin*, considering that no additional explanations were needed for a Mexican reader.

[Fig. 4] Guaman Poma de Ayala, Felipe (1613-1615). *Nueva crónica y buen gobierno* (vol. 2, p. 391). (Edited by John V. Murra, Rolena Adorno and Jorge L. Urioste). Madrid, Historia 16, 1987. Vol. II, p. 391.

Title: *Conquista/Atahualpa inca está en la ciudad de Cajamarca en su trono*. (See Appendix, p. 151)

Guaman Poma de Ayala, who claimed to be a grandson of the tenth Inca ruler, "wrote and drew his vision of what Peru had been and what it had become since the Spaniards had overthrown the Inca rulers," and "his illustrations are ... the only visual record of their kind of Inca society and the conquest of Peru" (Karttunen, 1994, p. 115).

This particular image represents the encounter of Atahualpa, the Inca, with the Spaniards, represented here—according to the captions on the picture—by Pizarro, Almagro and Brother Vicente, in Cajamarca. The encounter is mediated by the young man on the right, who has a caption on his arm saying *Felipe yndio lengua*. *Lengua*, always in feminine—*la lengua*—was the most common name for interpreter at the time of the Conquest. The drawing shows a simplistic representation of the scene, with only a hint of perspective and a distribution of characters in which the Inca ruler, richly dressed in his throne, stands out from his undifferentiated subjects, as well as from the Spaniards. Pizarro and Almagro, kneeling, show their respect to the Inca. The priest, slightly smaller even if he is not kneeling, is reading a book, presumably the Bible. Felipe, the interpreter, is as large as the rest of the main characters. The artist follows the convention of representing him with his hand and arm extended and finger pointing, a symbol for interpreting. The interpreter is located in a privileged position, within earshot of the main characters in order to hear and be heard.

There are ethnic and social markers in the picture: the Incas wear ponchos and cover their heads with bonnets; Pizarro and Almagro, bearded, are dressed in their military attire, carrying spears and shields; the friar is shaved and wears the habit; and Felipe is dressed halfway

between the Spanish and the Inca costumes. The whole scene has a certain sense of a theatrical performance.

We cannot ignore that Felipe, or *Felipillo* as he was known, was one of the children captured in a previous expedition so that he could be taught the language in Spain and used as an interpreter in future voyages. All sources, including Guaman Poma de Ayala, consistently describe his interpreting performance as extremely inadequate, particularly as regards his absolute and shameless lack of ethics. He wrongly interpreted the words of the Inca on purpose with the intention of obtaining one of his women. It is widely known that the whole affair resulted in Atahualpa's death, with the Inca Empire falling into the hands of the Spaniards (Kurz, 1995, p. 4). Curiously enough, his treason is now part of mainstream historiography, while Marina's job is not usually judged so critically.

### **Representations of European Authorship**

[Fig. 5] De Bry, Theodorus (1596), *Americæ Pars Sexta*.  
Title: "Atabaliba de suo litro persolvendo cum Francisco Pizarro paciscitur" (Atahualpa negotiates his ransom with Francisco Pizarro)  
(Central Library, University of Salamanca) (See Appendix, p. 152)

The copper engravings by printer and engraver Theodorus de Bry and his sons were done at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Some of them were later used to illustrate the Frankfurt (1598) and Heidelberg (1664) editions of the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, by Las Casas. The topics of these engravings and the merciless criticism of the Europeans' behavior in the Americas contributed a great deal to disseminate the unfavorable interpretation of Spain's colonization in America, at least to a similar extent as Las Casas' *Historia de las Indias* (Lardin, 2002, pp. 1-16). This is particularly the case if we consider that De Bry was one of the most influential sources during the 17<sup>th</sup> and even the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe for visual representations of the new discoveries and their inhabitants. In fact, he was the great graphic chronicler and originator of the visual image that Europeans—especially Protestants—had of the New World. His series of publications devoted to the great voyages to the West and the East Indies began in 1590 and they include *America* (in 14 parts, with illustrations). When their father died, his sons, Johannes and Israel, took over to complete the series in 1634. The two examples we present here come from each series, the original by the father and the

posthumous work completed by the sons. Pictorially, scenes are presented in concentric disposition, reproducing “a common narrative and dramatic pattern in De Bry’s emblematic practice in the *Grands voyages*” (Conley, 1992, p. 115).

In this long film-like shot succession of images represented by De Bry, there are two different scenes in one picture. At the back, Atahualpa is being arrested by the Spaniards. In the foreground, Atahualpa appears in shackles *negotiating* his ransom. The young boy who accompanies the group in the front scene seems to be a character required by the script; a symbol of a necessary linguistic link, which in the picture, however, is syntactically detached from the main characters. What we see is the fiction of direct communication between Pizarro and Atahualpa.

The setting where the scenes take place shows buildings of classical size and proportions, typical of the European Renaissance taste, with no attempt to reproduce the local environment, and with a perfect mastery of perspective. The style is on a par with the pompous demeanor of the characters. These, if it were not for the way they are dressed—Atahualpa’s nude legs seem here a sort of footnote to remind us that he is *different*—, would be more appropriate in a Greek or Roman play.

It is clearly a European representation, a vision through European cultural eyes. The main scene in the picture, as the Latin text explains, shows the greed of the Spaniards, who thought that perhaps they had finally reached *El Dorado* (a *topos* and again the illusion or imagination)—the words *perú* and *potosí* in low case became equivalent to legendary riches and gold mines. (“For centuries Europe spoke about Peru without knowing it”, Surdich, 2002, p. 111). But the *negotiation* itself seems to flow according to the highest standards of civility, as if Atahualpa and Pizarro were engaged in a philosophical, almost aseptic, discussion and the Spanish soldiers—not at all aggressive—were there just because the script says so.

If De Bry’s intention was to stress the terrible deeds of the Spaniards in their colonization—understandable at a time when Spain was a military power with important territorial interests also in Europe—he does it this time in an elegant, gallant manner. The boy who presumably represents Felipillo does not seem to play a part in the

conversation except through his visual contact. His clothing features a neck ruff and resembles a young noble in a picture by El Greco.

[Fig. 6] De Bry, Johannes Theodorus (1619), *Americæ Pars Decima*.  
Title: “Dum Indiani ab Anglis inducias impetrant, duo Regis Powhatanis filii sororem suam invisunt” (While the Indians request the English for a truce, the two sons of king Powhatan visit their sister)  
(Central Library University of Salamanca) (See Appendix, p. 153)

This engraving, published in Frankfurt by De Bry’s sons (1619), is the result of a cooperation between draftsman John White and Theodorus De Bry. White accompanied Thomas Harriot, the English explorer, on his expeditions to Virginia and Carolina. De Bry engraved the illustrations in plates and distributed them throughout Europe. The picture is structured into several narrative sequences. They represent, in chronological order, the arrival of the English vessels on the coasts of North America at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The expedition reaches the lands inhabited by the Powhatan, a branch of Algonquian Indians allied to the Carolina Algonquians, and both the text and the illustration show the name of the village, Matzkot, where king Powhatan had his headquarters which appear at the back, on the right, away from the main scene. This type of representation, popularized by the illustrations by White and De Bry, “was to become the main symbol of North American Indian settlement” (Hulton, 1990, p. 409), the enclosed Indian village, coexisting with the open settlement.

When the English arrived in this region, they were more interested in trade than in conquering territories, unlike the Spaniards, who had already established their settlements a little further South decades before. The English were ready to allow the indigenous people live in a more autonomous manner and continue their productive habits providing they could trade with them, but commercial interests triggered numerous rebellions among the natives. In one of the skirmishes with the Indians, the English arrested Pocahontas (*Matoaka*, in Algonquian), King Powhatan’s daughter.

The main scene in the foreground reflects some of the negotiations that took place in that context, which would later conclude with the “Pocahontas’ peace,” because the Princess played an important mediation role between the English settlers and the Powhatan Indians. She even married John Rolfe, an English farmer and tradesman. Two different groups can be identified in the scene. On the left, the English settlers, dressed in hats, doublets and trunk hoses—not with helmets or

armour, which they could only afford later. They are armed with spears, rapiers and arquebuses. In the middle of the group, Pocahontas, her torso bare, is surrounded by armed and clothed people. On the right, is the group of Algonquian Indians, led by the Princess' two brothers. These natives are dressed in small skirts, their torsos nude. They are smaller than the English and they are armed with bows and arrows.

The meeting point between both groups is represented by the young man who acts as interpreter. He occupies a central place in the scene, linking the two groups of negotiators. The finger-pointing of his right hand accompanies his gestures, focusing the English settlers' attention on him, as often occurs in interpreting situations. The Powhatan Indians are looking at the English and at the native Princess. The boy, smaller than the rest of the characters in the picture, is dressed like the English, but he wears no hat and carries no weapons.

As compared with De Bry's engravings of Spaniards in action in the Caribbean, Guatemala, Venezuela, and elsewhere (Conley, 1992), this image is optimistic and does not show direct confrontation. The two groups are listening attentively and courteously to each other, negotiating as civilized people through the interpreter.

## **Conclusion**

The images analyzed in this paper were usually drawn or painted to illustrate texts; literacy was, thus, required to understand them, except for those who witnessed the events depicted. Most images appeared in books and this fact in itself limited the audience enormously at the time when they were published. But figures are generally more comprehensible than written texts, and when we look at them—and more so when they were produced—we see them with curiosity. There is even an element of voyeurism, because we see *the other* in them, but also because we see our own mirror image.

The images presented here vary according to the pictorial evolution of those who paint or draw them. They follow the conventions of their own cultural tradition. For instance, we find great differences between the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala Manuscript* and one of De Bry's engravings. The former is simple but naturalistic, drawn by someone who witnessed the event; the latter is very sophisticated but more distanced far from the reality it reflects.

The images—and the texts in which they are usually inserted—had different intentions. For example, Guaman Poma de Ayala or Bernardino de Sahagún, for different reasons, wished to preserve the memory and the traditions of societies that had been destroyed by the conquerors and colonizers. De Bry illustrated books which were intended to disseminate knowledge about the new territories, giving a particular version of the conquest, generally detrimental to Spain.

In all of the images, irrespective of their authorship, the figure of the interpreter represents an additional piece of information for the viewer, a sort of reminder of the linguistic and cultural gap between peoples. A symbol of a trade that in those days—and until quite recently was learned through trial and error and happenstance.

We have presented only a few images of interpreters. Other images can be found in the works we have mentioned, and surely there is much more information, written and pictorial, in books and archives, waiting to be explored and discovered. We are still far from having a clear and complete picture of the past—both remote and recent—of our profession, and this paper aims to be both a modest contribution to fill one of the numerous gaps, and an invitation to continue research in this field.

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**ABSTRACT: Iconography of Interpreters in the Conquest of the Americas** — This paper focuses on the figure of the interpreter as it appears in the visual images illustrating chronicles and other texts from the period of the Conquest of the Americas by the Europeans. The fact that linguistic and cultural mediation was necessary for an understanding between the cultures is commonly absent from the records, as if direct communication had been possible between both sides—yet another fiction of the encounter. Based on the assumption that visual representations are valuable records to understand the perception of the role of interpreter in the past, we analyze six images of different cultural and ethnic authorship, painted between 1550 and 1619. The aim of the paper is to make a contribution to the task of building the history of interpreting, following a line of research which, as proposed in the conclusion, merits further exploration.

**RÉSUMÉ: Iconographie des interprètes dans la conquête des Amériques** — Cet article porte sur la figure de l'interprète tel qu'il

apparaît sur les images illustrant les chroniques et les textes de la conquête des Amériques par les Européens. Très souvent les sources documentaires ont passé sous silence le fait que la médiation linguistique et culturelle était une condition nécessaire pour la compréhension réciproque de l'autre, comme si la communication entre les deux parties était possible, encore une fiction à propos de cette rencontre. D'après l'hypothèse que les représentations visuelles constituent des sources de valeur pour comprendre la façon dont le rôle de l'interprète a été perçu dans le passé, nous proposons une analyse de six images, d'origines culturelles et ethniques diverses, conçues entre 1550 et 1619. L'intention de cet article est d'apporter une contribution à la tâche de bâtir une histoire de l'interprétation à partir d'une voie de recherche qu'on pourrait continuer à explorer, comme nous le proposons dans la conclusion.

**Keywords:** interpreter, iconography, history of interpretation, representation, colonization of the Americas.

**Mots-clés:** interprète, iconographie, histoire de l'interprétation, représentation, colonisation des Amériques.

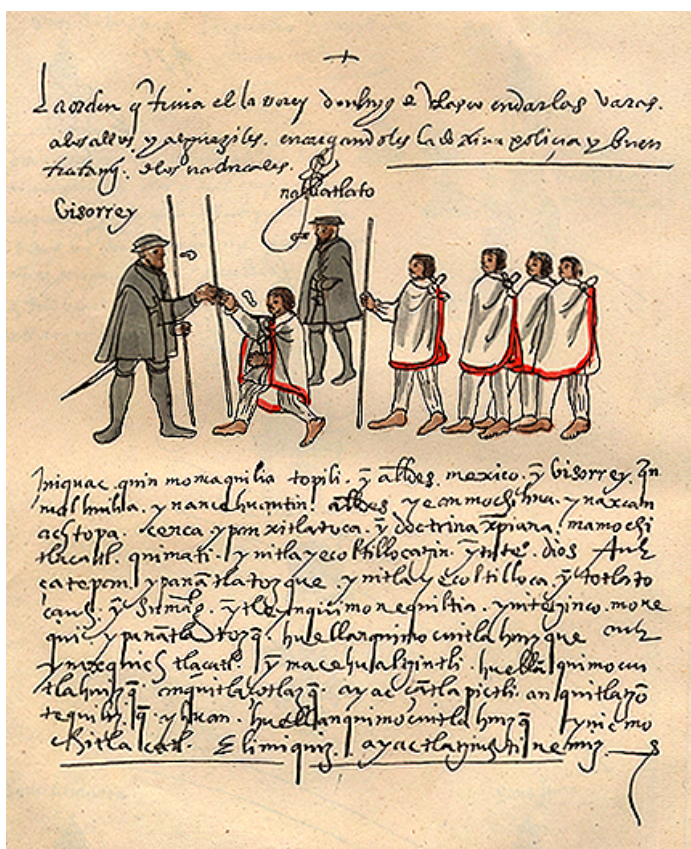
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Appendix: Figures 1 to 6, pp. 148-153.



[Fig. 1]



[Fig. 2]



[Fig. 3]



[Fig. 4]

A D C A P. IIIII.

Atabaliba de suo litro perfoluendo cum Francisco  
Pizarro pacificitur.



**M**AGNA diuitias in Atabaliba castris inuenerunt Hispani, & inter illas aureum vas ducentas auri libras pendens: sola etiam eius supellex aurea & argentea centies millenis ducatis aestimata fuit. Postridie Pizarrus Atabalibam adit consolandi gratia, grauisiter enim querebatur sibi iniectas fuisse compedes: at quandoquidem in istud infortunium inciderat, a Pizarro petit, ut bene eum habere velit. Agnosceus autem Hispanorum auaritiam, si illi compedes admittant, liberumque dimittant, pro sua redemptione tantum auri & argenti in vasa elaborati daturum pollicetur, quantum caperet id in quo erat triclinium ad lineam usque quam ipsemet in pariete duxit, quamque deinde rubrica per totum triclinij ambitum notari iussit, addita tamen conditione, ne vasa elaborata confringerentur, aut liquarentur. Pizarrus illum consolatus, hilari animo esse iubet, fidemque dat humaniter se ipsum habiturum, postremo etiam liberaturum, si pro litro id persolueret quod pollice batur.

C 2 Atabaliba

[Fig. 5]



Dum Indiani ab Anglis inducias impetrant, duo Regis  
Powhatanis filii fororem suam inveniunt. cap. 3.



**P**ostquam Angli ad principum Regis Powhatanis fidem vicum quendam Mat-kot dictum pervenissent: quadringenti barbari probe armati aditu illorum vultu verbisque minacibus prohibere sategerunt: Nihilominus Angli, licet iniquiore essent loco, in terram enituntur. Barbari verum suarum securi ne latum quidem unguem ipsis cedunt, sed sursum deorsum, hac illacque inter Anglos obambulantes, praecipuos ex illis de Anglorum rege, quo animo in istas regiones devenissent, num ferro discernendum putarent, percontabantur, interim inducias exposcenti donec ad regem res deferretur. Qua quidem certis conditionibus ipsis concessa sunt. Siquidem enim minus ex ipsorum voto Rex responsurus esset, tuba et clavicum datum viri, ut signis collatis hostiliter inter se congredierentur. Interea Powhatanus in terram delata, a duobus fratribus in viscebatur, qui optimè illam inter Anglos haberi confisicati, omnem operam apud patrem se daturos polliciti sunt, ut demum certa firmaque pax utriusque sanciretur. Atque ita Angli ab armis discesserunt.

[Fig. 6]