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THE FRIAR AND THE MAYA



**Figure 0.1.** The Landa Statue in Izamal. The friar stares at the Franciscan convent and church built in the sixteenth century on the platform of an ancient Maya pyramid and temple. Local Izamaleños ignore him; he's just part of the stonework. But tourists, like generations of scholars, often pause to try and make sense of his image and legacy. Photograph by the authors.

# Introduction

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## The Landa Conundrum

Diego de Landa stands on a plinth in the small Yucatec town of Izamal. He looks toward a spectacular convent that sits on top of the base of what was once an ancient Maya pyramid. He appears to be frowning, his hands tightly gripping a long bishop's pastoral staff and a book of scripture (see figure 0.1). His very existence—a statue of a Spanish colonist in a nation where the invaders of the sixteenth century are seldom commemorated in public works—raises questions. Is this Franciscan friar celebrated in Izamal, revered as the founding father of the Christianized Maya town? Or does his grim expression convey a less happy reputation?<sup>1</sup>

In the 1620s, another Franciscan in the province of Yucatan, fray Bernardo de Lizana, noted how the Maya parishioners of the colony had reacted to Diego de Landa's death a half-century earlier: "The Indians of all Yucatan felt his death so greatly, that they not only showed it with tears, but wished to remain lamenting it forever."<sup>2</sup> Such a claim seems difficult to reconcile with the fierce friar standing in bronze beside Izamal's convent-church today, even more so when one considers the act for which Landa is now best remembered: a violent campaign to destroy Maya

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier passages of this introduction were delivered by Matthew Restall at the symposium on The Franciscans in Mexico: Five Centuries of Cultural Influence at the Mexican Cultural Institute (Washington, DC) in October 2017 and published as Restall, "The Landa Conundrum."

<sup>2</sup> "*Los indios de todo Yucatán sintieron tanto su muerte, que no sólo lo mostraron con lágrimas, más quisieron quedarse en lamentaciones perpetuas*" (Lizana, *Historia de Yucatán*, 77r).

religion that terrorized the twenty-year-old colony in the summer of 1562. Thousands of Maya men and women were interrogated under torture, hundreds dying as a result. Yet Lizana's assertion was not pure invention; it simply told part of the story.<sup>3</sup>

A mere five years after the violent 1562 campaign, a group of Maya noblemen wrote to the King of Spain that they owed their conversion to Christianity—their very salvation—to Landa's "great benevolence [*tibilil*] and his goodness [*utzil*]." Yet others wrote in the very same year that just hearing Landa's name "causes our entrails to revolt."<sup>4</sup> Thus did Landa's Maya parishioners unwittingly evoke the friar-bishop's paradoxical reputation, whereby five centuries later he would remain both the most famous—and yet also the most infamous—of all the Franciscans, perhaps even of all the Spaniards, who came to Yucatan to proselytize, rule, and settle beside the Maya.

Of these competing opinions, these opposing reputations, pithily summarized by the Maya petitioners of 1567 as "great benevolence" versus "great cruelty," the former predominated during the three centuries of Spanish colonial rule in Yucatan. That is hardly surprising. He was loathed in his lifetime by other Spaniards in Yucatan, especially the colonists (Governor Francisco Velázquez de Gijón remarked in 1575 that he wished he could lock Landa and his fellow friar Gregorio de Fuenteovejuna "inside a room and leave them both to die of hunger").<sup>5</sup> But Landa's ghost had the likes of Lizana to promote his reputation, as well as the larger support of the Spanish chroniclers, secular and religious, who controlled the pro-colonial message. It was not until the modern era, whose birth coincided with the collapse of the Spanish Empire and the rise of Maya studies, when the latter Landa—the cruel one—returned and triumphed. Yet the negative reputation never completely eclipsed the positive one. In the skilled hands of an historian such as the late Inga Clendinnen, an evocative portrayal of Landa emerged, with the friar above all a monastic Inquisitor, utterly convinced of his own righteousness and just authority, of his divine mandate to torture Mayas in order to save them.<sup>6</sup>

Clendinnen also imagined that for Landa, his 1562 campaign to extirpate idolatry in Yucatan had a personal dimension to it. She argued that between his arrival

<sup>3</sup> DQAY; Scholes and Roys, "Fray Diego de Landa and the Problem of Idolatry in Yucatan"; Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*; Tedlock, "Torture in the Archives"; Timmer, "Providence and Perdition"; Restall, *Maya Conquistador*, 151–68; Chuchiak, "In Servitio Dei," 614–19; Enríquez, "Exuberant Imagination."

<sup>4</sup> Restall, *Maya Conquistador*, 151–68 (Restall's translations of Maya phrases on 157, 167).

<sup>5</sup> *Pleito entre Don Francisco Velázquez de Gijón, gobernador de Yucatán, y el obispo Fray Diego de Landa*, 18 de junio 1575, AGN, Ramo de Inquisición, Vol. 117, fs. 2–3.

<sup>6</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 66–92. Landa was a "monastic Inquisitor," not an "Inquisitor," as he never held a formal position in the Holy Office or Inquisition; he was accused of usurping Inquisition authority, and only once he became bishop could he exercise episcopal inquisitorial power.

in the newly founded province in 1549 and his appointment as Provincial of the Franciscans in Guatemala and Yucatan in 1561, Landa developed genuine friendships with Maya leaders that were possibly “the most emotionally rewarding of his life.” Thus, his apparent discovery of “their secret persistence in idolatry” struck him as a profound and personal betrayal, for which the friar “proceeded to punish them, and to strive to wrench the last root of opposition out of them.” In our view, Clendinnen tends to sympathize too much with Landa—or, striving to stay objective, she appears to do so. Yet, as she herself admits, he clearly manufactured evidence that recidivist Mayas had committed human sacrifice, in order to justify his campaign and its brutality to the newly arrived Bishop fray Francisco de Toral. Maya noblemen surely perceived Landa’s true nature, understanding him to be a dangerous and duplicitous manifestation of a protracted invasion, one with whom genuine friendship was impossible.<sup>7</sup>

If Clendinnen’s interpretation is problematic in some ways, it is nonetheless significant for its subtleties, and it rightly remains at the heart of academic discussion over Landa’s legacy. Yet her nuances have tended to be lost in the popular imagination. With the twentieth century’s growth of Maya studies and the Mexican Revolution’s encouragement of a romantic view of the ancient Indigenous past, the popular view of Landa became increasingly and bluntly negative. This can be seen in various genres of expression, one of which is that of Landa portraits. Such paintings tend to use the infamous book-burning of 1562 as the favored visual trope for his image as the bringer of hell-fires to the Maya.<sup>8</sup> The best-known of these—as it has been on public display in the Palacio de Gobierno in central Merida since it was painted in the 1970s—is by Fernando Castro Pacheco (see figure 0.2). The friar’s face, grim and unflinching, is a mask of determined cruelty as he throws codices and effigies on the fire. In another example (see figure 0.3), the long civil war of the nineteenth century is imagined as a kind of revenge against Landa and his iconoclasm.

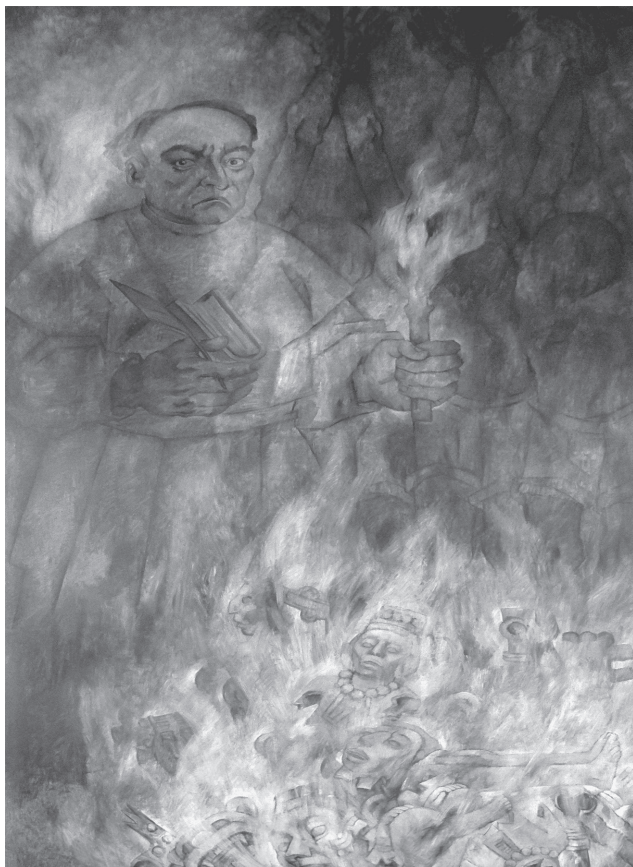
The cruel, iconoclastic Landa also features in a cluster of literary genres. In poems, novels, and even guidebooks, he is a colonialist caricature. A particularly vivid example is a 1999 novel by Rikki Ducornet, titled *The Fan-Maker’s Inquisition*, in which Landa is seen as a fitting subject for a book by the Marquis de Sade, who is fascinated by what is presented as the fear-driven perversity of the Inquisitor. Tainted by the Spanish Inquisition stereotypes of the Black Legend,<sup>9</sup> Landa becomes even more

<sup>7</sup> Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquests*, 88–92, 124–26 (quote on 123).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, the 2007 painting by Leonardo Paz, chosen to illustrate the Wikipedia entry on Land, and a prominent section titled “Inquisition: Suppression of Maya and Destruction of Maya Texts” ([en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diego\\_de\\_Landa](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diego_de_Landa); accessed June 2018).

<sup>9</sup> As a term referring to the negative depiction of Spanish colonialism by Anglo historians, “the Black Legend” (*la leyenda negra*) was coined in 1914 by Spanish historian Julián Juderías y





**Figure 0.2.** Landa's Conflagration. The friar burning Maya books and religious statues (or "idols") in 1562, as painted by Fernando Castro Pacheco. Palacio de Gobierno, Merida, 1970s. Photograph by the authors.

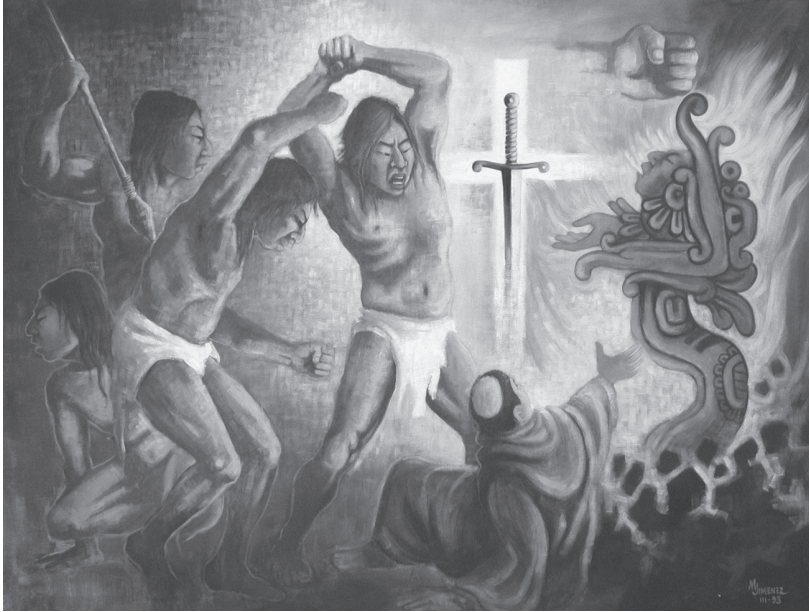
twisted than the marquis after whom sadism is named. Ducornet's semi-fictional Landa is not a proselytizer and writer, but a destroyer and a purifier. The burning of books and the execution of Mayas become one: "So great was the stench of burning flesh, of deerskin curling up like fingers."<sup>10</sup>

Few Mayanists can (or should) write the way a novelist can, but Ducornet's phrase evokes for scholars of the ancient Maya something of the agony that accompanies the contemplation of Landa's bonfire of codices. That act has made the friar a figure of loathing in modern academia, especially among Mayanists. Yet those same detractors have for a century and a half treated Landa's writings as gospel, as a sort of bible on ancient Maya culture to be quoted and cited without thought

Loyot (Restall, *When Montezuma Met Cortés*, 245–46, 250–52).

<sup>10</sup> Ducornet, *The Fan-Maker's Inquisition*, 203.





**Figure 0.3.** Retribution. A mural painting by Marcelo Jiménez Santos, in the Caste War Museum, Tihosuco, Mexico, imagines the nineteenth-century war as a vengeful uprising against Landa and the cultural invasion he represents. Photograph by the authors.

for the nature of those writings. Extant descriptions of Indigenous life in the era of Maya-Spanish contact are precious few, to be sure. Landa and his Franciscan colleagues in Yucatan apparently wrote much about the Maya and their mission among them, but none of it was published at the time and almost all of it is lost.<sup>11</sup> The lone surviving Landa manuscript, the Account (as we call it, for convenience's sake), describes Maya history, society, and culture shortly before and during Maya-Spanish contact, making it understandable that Mayanists have long treasured the Account as an invaluable source of ethnographic information (discussed in chapter 3). But the age-old paradox of Landa's reputation has thereby been perpetuated and deepened, creating what we term "the Landa conundrum."<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The earliest surviving *doctrinas* in Yucatec Maya date from c. 1620 (see Hanks, *Converting Words*, 242–76). Other late-sixteenth-century writings by Franciscans in Yucatan survive in the form of seventeenth-century excerpts or copies (e.g., within Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucatan*; or as *informes* such as the so-called Códice Franciscano, published in *Nueva Colección de Documentos para la historia de México*, 55–72). There are also letters and reports surviving archivally, a handful of them published (such as Francisco de Toral, *Avisos del Obispo Fr. Francisco de Toral* [1563], in DHY, vol. 2, 25–34).

<sup>12</sup> After Restall, "Landa Conundrum."

The Landa conundrum is two layers deep. The first layer relates to his actions and the motivations behind them. The core question is: Was Landa a monster, or was he simply a brilliant if overly zealous product of his times? Was he a leering, racist, sadist; or was his love for Maya converts and parishioners a sincere and spiritual one, albeit the impatient and unforgiving affection of a Franciscan caught up in the millenarianism of the sixteenth century?

The second layer connects his actions to his writings, specifically to his one surviving work—which modern scholars have consistently, but misleadingly, called a “book,” attributed completely and unquestioningly to his authorship. The Account was not published in Landa’s lifetime, but it has been available for the past century-and-a-half in numerous modern editions and languages, variously titled *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*, *Relation des choses du Yucatan*, *Yucatan before and after the Conquest*, and—most commonly in English—*Account of the Things of Yucatan*. The questions here, then, are: How could he write so fondly of the Mayas having treated them so brutally? Why does his “book” fail to justify the events of 1562—indeed, to dismiss them so coldly? By better understanding what kind of manuscript the friar really wrote, what parts of it were truly authored by him, and why he wrote or copied what he did, might we come closer to solving the puzzle of his actions? And perhaps most importantly, can we, as scholars, use this source more responsibly to understand the sixteenth-century Maya and their ancestors?

\* \* \*

Our suggested resolution to the Landa conundrum is presented gradually over the seven essays that comprise Part II of this book (and, to a lesser extent, the notes to the translated text that is Part I). But in order to introduce and contextualize those ideas, we outline here four ways to approach the friar and his manuscript.

The first approach involves a recalibration of our lens—a need both to zoom further in and to zoom further out. Let us explain. By narrowing our focus too tightly onto Landa and his writings and actions, we create the illusion of Landa as an exception, thereby fostering the conundrum. At the same time, there is a tendency to zoom back and attempt to understand Landa either as a medieval figure or as an early or proto-ethnographer (a similar debate has been conducted, but in far greater depth and detail, over Bernardino de Sahagún—and, to some extent, over Bartolomé de Las Casas).<sup>13</sup>

It may be more helpful, however, to analyze Landa as a sixteenth-century figure, without pushing him back into the Middle Ages or pulling him forward into

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, as entry points into these substantial literatures, Schwaller, ed., *Sahagún at 500*; Clayton, *Bartolomé de las Casas*; and Orique and Roldán-Figueroa, eds., *Bartolomé de las Casas*.

modern times. He lived fifty-five years in the very middle of the sixteenth century (1524–1579), a time when almost the entire Franciscan order was swept up in a millenarian fervor, convinced that the conversion of the Indigenous peoples of the New World was the pressing precursor to the Second Coming of Christ. He took his profession as a Franciscan at the impressionable age of sixteen at the convent of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo, which was controlled by the Observants—the fervently anti-Semitic, Joachimist, millenarianist branch of the Franciscan Order—and the point of origin for a great number of the most zealous missionaries to the New World. There, Landa was surely moved by the almost constant reports of Franciscan martyrdoms and their “wars against idols” (Landa’s life and career is discussed in chapters 2 and 4).<sup>14</sup> Landa was not unique, but typical, in believing that his mission was ordained and urgent; he saw it as of his time, and he was right.

More specifically, in terms of his missionary vision, he was influenced by the Franciscans who a generation earlier had initiated the conversion of Nahuas in Central Mexico, such as that mission’s founder, fray Martín de Valencia. That meant an emphasis on three goals: the baptism of converts; the development of two-way language learning (that is, young Indigenous noblemen should be taught Spanish and Latin, while friars should learn Indigenous languages so as to better proselytize “the Indians” and study the culture that they sought to erase); and the destruction of physical manifestations of Indigenous religion, such as temples, books, and effigies, combined with the punishment of backsliders.<sup>15</sup>

Viewed thus within the context of Franciscan ideology and practice in sixteenth-century New Spain, Landa’s activities seem less contradictory. They seem even less so when compared to other sources—far less known than Landa’s Account—that lend insight into how Franciscans in Yucatan perceived their mission in the late-sixteenth century. The so-called Códice Franciscano, for example, surviving only in the form of a later copy of excerpts (like the Account, but much shorter), is an *informe*, or a sort of friars’ manual. Its emphases match many of Landa’s own, such as

<sup>14</sup> The chronicle of the Convent of San Juan de los Reyes contains a record of the events in the convent during the period that Landa professed there, including reports of Franciscan martyrs like fray Juan de Espiritu Santo from 1538–1542; see *Memoriale libro ordinis minorum nostri ab anno divini 1506–1625, Convento de la orden de San Francisco de San Juan de los Reyes*, Toledo, AHN, Clero, Libro 15923, especially folios 27r–31v. For a persuasive argument that Landa equated the Maya with the Jews, see Davis, “Evangelical Prophecies.”

<sup>15</sup> See the tidy summary in Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans*, 3–5. Classic works on the topic include Phelan, *Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans*; Kobayashi, *La educación como conquista*; and Baudot, *Utopia and History*. For two versions of a book that is very far from being the definitive study of Franciscan millenarianism, but which succinctly ties the phenomenon to sixteenth-century Mexico, Yucatan, Landa, and the Maya, see Restall and Solari, *2012 and the End of the World*; and Maya *Apocalypse*. Also see Chuchiak, “*Sapientia et Doctrina*.”

separating noble and commoner parishioners for preaching and teaching, as well as building vast churches and convent complexes (so that “the ornament and splendor of the churches” can fully replace “the sumptuous temples” of the past). The Códice Franciscano also notes that the Maya are

like children, and in order to be well governed they need to have with them, as children do, their schoolmasters, who, should they fail or not take to the lesson, or commit a transgression, should therefore punish them with a half dozen lashes.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say that all Franciscans in early Yucatan shared Landa’s views; as Martin Nesvig has warned, it is important not “to flatten the considerable ideological diversity of the order” in New Spain. Indeed, the province’s first bishop, fray Francisco de Toral, stopped Landa’s extirpation campaign, successfully requested that he be recalled to Spain, spent 1563 conducting a *visita* of all the parishes, and wrote a set of *avisos* (notices) that heavily emphasized pedagogy over punishment. In Toral’s vision of the mission, there is much rigor of teaching, ritual, and due process, but no violence.<sup>17</sup>

Landa and Toral can therefore be best appreciated as individuals whose particular emphases represented variants within the Franciscan ideology of sixteenth-century Mexico and Yucatan. But, while Landa cannot be said to stand for all his fellow friars, his vision prevailed; as William Hanks concluded, Toral “failed obviously” and, denied his petition to be relieved of his post in 1566, lived long enough to see Landa exonerated.<sup>18</sup>

For our second approach, we do not need to ponder Landa’s putative sadism to understand how Indigenous peoples could be studied, valued, and protected while at the same time derided, abused, and even executed. That dichotomy had been at the heart of European reactions to the Indigenous population of the Americas beginning in the 1490s. (It is, arguably, at the heart of Western colonialism in the Age of Empire.) Most obviously it took the form of the division of Caribbean islanders into two invented races, the “good Indians” (passive converts) and “bad

<sup>16</sup> Códice Franciscano, 58–59 (“*el ornato y aparato de las iglesias . . . sumptuosos templos . . . porque ellos son como niños, y para bien regirse hanse de haber con ellos como los niños los maestros de las escuelas, que en faltando o en no dando la leccion, or en haciendo la travesura, luego los escarmientan con media docena azotes*”); also see Hanks, *Converting Words*, 63–66.

<sup>17</sup> Toral, *Avisos*; Nesvig, *Forgotten Franciscans*, 5. For the best coverage of the Landa-Toral affair, see González Cicero, *Perspectiva religiosa en Yucatán 1517–1571*. For a perspective on Toral’s relationship with his Nahua parishioners in the 1540s and 1550s, see Townsend, *Annals of Native America*, 102–18.

<sup>18</sup> As we shall see, Landa was exonerated in 1569; Toral died in 1571, after which Landa was appointed to replace him (so Toral did not live to see Landa become bishop, despite Hanks’s poetic claim; *Converting Words*, 67).

Indians” (the cannibals or Caribs, who resisted conversion and colonization).<sup>19</sup> That dichotomy was subsequently extended to the Maya of Yucatan, as Spaniards struggled to explain how their efforts to subdue the peninsula’s “Indians” took so long and why the result remained incomplete (see figure 0.4). We have dubbed those protracted campaigns the Maya-Spanish Thirty Years’ War, as it stretched from the first open battle between a Maya army and invading conquistadors in 1517 to the end of full-scale conquest violence in 1547 (that war, traditionally and misleadingly called “the Conquest of Yucatan,” is discussed in chapter 1).<sup>20</sup> Most of the peninsula remained free from Spanish colonial control, and it would do so for centuries; the stereotypical bifurcation of Yucatec Maya into good/bad categories persisted into the modern centuries, when they were termed *pacíficos* and *bravos*.<sup>21</sup>

But the dichotomy—of “Indians” respected/abused, seen as good/bad—also functioned on a broader plane, being central to how Spaniards viewed and treated every ethnic group encountered in the Americas. The Nahuas, for example, were slaughtered and enslaved by the tens—perhaps hundreds—of thousands and yet admired and valued, their nobles taught Latin and (for a brief while, at least) appraised for the priesthood. Nor do we even need to stop with the Spaniards: the noble/ignoble, good/bad dichotomy extended to how Europeans and Euro-Americans have seen Indigenous peoples for centuries.<sup>22</sup>

To tackle this second way of resolving the Landa conundrum, then, we need to reorient our approach, placing Landa’s perspective within the larger context of how “the Indians” were a conundrum in the minds of Spaniards. The highly complex Indigenous reaction to colonization—which has arguably been the primary focus of the entire field of ethnohistory for the past three generations—was not well understood by Spaniards, who so often distilled their own reaction down to a dichotomy of satisfaction and frustration. Therefore, Landa’s gratification over his proselytizing and parish-building campaigns of the 1550s, combined with his vexation over apparent outbreaks of recidivism, placed him firmly in the center of the larger sixteenth-century phenomenon of how Spanish friars and priests, settlers, and administrators, responded to the paradox or conundrum of “the Indian.”

A third way to contextualize Landa’s life and the Account is to appreciate factional

<sup>19</sup> For an overview of the development of this dichotomy, see Whitehead, *Of Cannibals and Kings*.

<sup>20</sup> Restall, “Wars of Invasion.”

<sup>21</sup> Good entry points for the relevant literature (especially on the Caribbean) are Bacci, *Conquest*; and Stone, *Captives of Conquest*; on Yucatan, see Restall, “Invasion: The Maya at War”; Restall, “Wars of Invasion”; Chuchiak, “Forgotten Allies”; and Chuchiak, “La Conquista de Yucatán, 1517–1542.”

<sup>22</sup> It is also reflected, for example, in the art and sculpture of the United States Capitol in Washington, DC; see Restall, “Trouble with ‘America.’”





politics in late sixteenth-century Yucatan. Much of the history of the peninsula in the first colonial decades of the 1550s–1570s, a history which justifiably is often seen as heavily Landa-centric, is in fact a story of factional rivalries within the fledgling colony—more specifically, a nexus of rivalries spread across the Spanish and Maya communities.

Landa's Yucatan years were divided into two stints. The first stretched from 1549 until he left for Spain in 1563. The provincial capital of Merida had only been founded in 1542, and invasion warfare did not wind down until less than two years before Landa's initial arrival. Only eight friars had traveled to Yucatan before Landa, and they had only founded two convents (at Merida and Mani). So, although Landa and his seven or so colleagues were the second missionary wave, there were still fewer than twenty friars facing the enormous challenge in the 1550s of converting hundreds of thousands of Mayas, whose status as Christianized, colonial subjects was tenuous, if not imaginary.<sup>23</sup>

Landa's departure from the province fourteen years later was under a dark cloud of controversy; although he resigned as Provincial in early 1563 and voluntarily crossed the Atlantic,<sup>24</sup> an order was already on its way to have him detained and dispatched to Spain to respond to allegations by Bishop Toral and by conquistador-settlers that Landa had overstepped his authority.<sup>25</sup> He was eventually acquitted of all charges (on January 29, 1569),<sup>26</sup> and after Toral's death he was appointed bishop (on November 17, 1572).<sup>27</sup> He then returned to the province for a second stint in

<sup>23</sup> These early mission years are discussed further in our chapter 2. Also see DHY, vol. I, p. 4; Lizana, *Historia de Yucatán*, 43r–57r; Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucathan*, Libro V, Capítulos V–IX; Carrillo y Ancona, *El Obispado de Yucatán*, I, 276–77.

<sup>24</sup> The claim that Landa resigned and left on his own accord, before that order reached Yucatan, comes from Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucathan*, Libro VI, Capítulo VI, and it may thus be pro-Landa spin.

<sup>25</sup> The royal cedula for Landa's recall along with that of fray Pedro de Ciudad Rodrigo, fray Miguel de la Puebla, and fray Juan Pizarro was issued in Barcelona on February 26, 1564. See *Real cédula al alcalde mayor de las provincias de Yucatán que hallados los frailes los envíe a estos reinos*, 26 de febrero, 1564, AGI, Audiencia de México, 2999, Libro 2, 3 folios. The documentation created by the Toral-Landa affair is massive, mostly found in several *legajos* in AGI, *Escribanía de Cámara*, 1009A, some of which was published in transcription in DQAY.

<sup>26</sup> See *Sentencia del padre Fray Antonio de Cordoba, Ministro Provincial de la Orden de San Francisco de la Provincia de Castilla, en el caso de Fray Diego de Landa*, Toledo, 29 de enero, 1569, AGI, *Escribanía de Cámara*, 1009A.

<sup>27</sup> Landa was recommended by Pope Gregory XIII to King Philip II on October 17, 1572 (*Bula de Gregorio XIII al rey Felipe II recomendando a Diego de Landa, electo obispo de Yucatán* 17 de octubre, 1572, AGI, Patronato, 3, N.16, R.2), and Philip made the appointment a month later. Just in case there were any doubts about his lingering guilt in the case that Toral and others had made against him, Landa's agents at the papal court had requested a separate bull of exoneration. Pope Gregory XIII issued the bull on the same date (see *Bula de Gregorio*





**Figure 0.5.** Landa as Bishop. This late-colonial portrait, likely copied from a damaged or fading earlier one in the Merida Cathedral, hung in the cathedral for centuries and is the closest we have to a likeness created from life. Two copies of uncertain date survive, one in the Sala Capitular of Merida's cathedral, the other in the Museo de Arte Sacro de Conkal, Yucatan. Photograph by the authors.

1573, where he resided until his death almost seven years later (on April 29, 1579; see figure 0.5).<sup>28</sup>

What was the significance of that chronology for understanding factional alliances and conflicts in the very early colony? In both 1549–1563 and 1573–1579, Landa benefited from and relied upon alliances with other religious officials and with conquistador-settlers—while, at the same time, he also faced enemies

*XIII a Diego de Landa, electo obispo de Yucatán, absolviéndole de cualquier excomunión, suspensión, interdicto y censura eclesiástica en que pudiese haber incurrido, para evitar contradicción, 16 de diciembre, 1572, AGI, Patronato, 3, N. 16, R.2, f. 3).*

<sup>28</sup> Fray Thomás de Cardenas, Franciscan visiting commissary in Yucatan, first officially reported the death of Bishop Landa in a letter dated May 8, 1579; see *Carta de Fray Tomas de Cardenas sobre la muerte de Don Fray Diego de Landa*, 8 de mayo, 1579, AGI, Audiencia de Guatemala, 170, 1 folio.

within the Church and among the colonists. Loosely speaking, the Church and the encomendero-settler establishment were in opposition throughout colonial Yucatan's history, with governors and bishops often tied up in bitter battles.<sup>29</sup> But as soon as one looks in detail at such conflicts, the battle lines multiply and shift, determined by individual personalities and relationships.<sup>30</sup> Yucatan's first two bishops, Landa and Toral, are good examples of this: they were political archrivals with differing interpretations of the Franciscan mission and the methods required to turn the Maya into Christians.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, the Maya nobility were no more homogenous in their loyalties and political positions than were the Spanish colonists. To take Maya descriptions of Landa from petitions to the king and use them to underscore the Landa conundrum—as we did above—is in fact misleading. The Maya polities or small kingdoms that existed in the first half of the century more or less survived the protracted Spanish invasion—the period of that Maya-Spanish Thirty Years' War.<sup>32</sup> Those polities then functioned in the century's second half as clusters of *cabob* (Maya municipalities; *cab* in the singular) centered on regional capital towns ruled by dominant dynasties (the Pech, Xiu, Canul, Cocom, Chel, and so on; see our chapters 1 and 4). That survival was made possible by political gamesmanship, with Maya noblemen jostling for advantage both within their own dynastic networks and inside the world of Spanish factionalism. The Franciscans—Landa included—were part of that high-stakes political game, sometimes playing, and sometimes being played by, Maya dynastic leaders.<sup>33</sup>

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The fourth and final way to approach Landa and the conundrum he embodies is to look more closely at the Account than previous editors of published editions have done. The details of that examination will unfold in the notes and essays to come. But it is worth reiterating here that there is no evidence that Landa ever saw the

<sup>29</sup> Encomenderos were the dominant Spanish settlers, usually former conquistadors in the first generations of settlement, who were granted groups of Indigenous villagers in encomienda ("trust"); those villagers were not slaves or serfs, but they were obliged to provide labor and pay tribute goods to their encomendero, in return for the benefits of "protection" and of the encomendero's support for a church and priest (for which Indigenous communities had also to pay).

<sup>30</sup> This was true of the whole colonial period in Yucatan: on such battlelines among the settlers, see the work of Manuela Cristina García Bernal and of Robert W. Patch, as well as, more recently and most evocatively, Lentz, *Murder in Mérida*.

<sup>31</sup> See Chuchiak, "Entre la cooperación y la usurpación."

<sup>32</sup> Restall, "Wars of Invasion."

<sup>33</sup> See Restall, *Maya Conquistador*; "People of the Patio"; Quezada, *Maya Lords and Lordship*.

Account, let alone wrote it—that is, no evidence that the manuscript presented here, and published many times as a self-contained book, was conceived and composed by him as such, or that the compiled version we have today existed before he died.

So, what did Landa write? Apparently, a great deal, of which almost nothing has survived, as far as we know. While working on his defense in Spain, Landa himself cataloged a long list of *memoriales*, *informes*, and other reports and compiled documentation on the Franciscan missions in Yucatan; he submitted the list to the Council of the Indies in 1565, and to his own Franciscan Order sometime in 1565–1569.<sup>34</sup> Much or all of this documentation would surely have remained in the possession of the Council of the Indies, as well as in the provincial archives of the Franciscan Order of Castile, in Toledo—where his formal ecclesiastical trial for censure occurred. It has not been found, however, and is likely no longer extant.<sup>35</sup>

There is also strong seventeenth-century evidence that the friar maintained a *recopilación*, a compendium or compilation of information on topics of interest, which ecclesiastics, chroniclers, and other intellectuals of the era often maintained. Landa's *recopilación* would have been a great compendium of passages written by him in Yucatan and in Spain, mixed with passages written or dictated to him by Yucatec informants, combined with passages copied by him from other books and manuscripts.<sup>36</sup> It probably dovetailed with the items in the abovementioned list. The *recopilación* must have been assembled between Landa's arrival in Yucatan in 1549 through to his death there in 1579, and it was probably steadily compiled over those three decades. He likely assembled some of it in Yucatan during the 1550s through to 1563, then took this work-in-progress with him to Spain and did further editing and composition there in the late 1560s. He was certainly working on part of it in 1566—the only date of authorship anywhere on the Account—in the Franciscan convent of San Juan de los Reyes in Toledo, Spain, where he had been a

<sup>34</sup> *Memorial de Fray Diego de Landa al Rey y al Consejo de Indias presentando varias probanzas y documentos para su defensa en el asunto de la idolatría de los indios*, Sin fecha, AGI, Escribanía de Cámara, 1009A.

<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, little of these ecclesiastical archives survived the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939. Diego de Landa's body itself was returned to Spain in the early eighteenth century, but his tombstone in his hometown of Cifuentes similarly was damaged during the Civil War. Reportedly, Juan Catalina García had found his tomb and bones in the later nineteenth century in the parish church of Salvador in his hometown of Cifuentes, where it was destroyed by artillery in 1936; see Catalina García, "Investigaciones históricas y arqueológicas en Cifuentes," 62–63. Catalina García claimed he discovered a funerary tombstone with the inscription: "Aquí estan colocados los huesos del Ill.mo Señor Don Frai Diego de Landa Calderon, Obispo del Yucatan. Murio año de 1572 [sic]. Fue sexto nieto de Don Iban de Quiros Calderon, que fundo esta capilla año 1342 como consta de la fundacion."

<sup>36</sup> Cogolludo repeatedly refers to Landa's various writings throughout his great *Historia de Yucathan*.

novice and where he served as Maestro de Novicios in the late 1560s. He no doubt continued to work on it, and to utilize his notes for his defense in the Franciscan order's trial for censure against him, while he served as the guardian of the distant convent of San Antonio de la Cabrera in Castile.<sup>37</sup> As Yucatan's bishop, from 1573 until his death in 1579, he continued working in Merida on his great *recopilación*. It has never been found.

There is hope that it may be found, as there is a chance that at least two copies existed, one in Spain and one in Yucatan. A smattering of references to a large Landa manuscript in Yucatan begin soon after his death, suggesting that it was deposited in 1579 or 1580 in the library of the Franciscan convent in Merida. Over the next century, Yucatan's Franciscan chroniclers mention it and clearly used it as a source. For example, fray Bernardo de Lizana, writing in 1633, drew information from Landa on Maya religion and the conversion campaigns (the "spiritual conquest"), also referring to many Franciscans and others who had written about Landa, his life, and his written works.<sup>38</sup>

By 1694, however, fray Francisco de Ayeta, who might be expected to mention the great *recopilación* just as his predecessors did, cites only another long-lost work of Landa's, his *Arte y gramática*. In the final decades of the century the *recopilación* may therefore have been destroyed or taken to Spain. If the latter was the case, it was very possibly fray Diego López de Cogolludo who took it. Cogolludo penned most of his massive *Historia de Yucathán* in the Yucatan peninsula itself beginning in the 1650s and then finished it in Madrid, where it was published in 1688. He appears to have drawn from Landa either directly or indirectly (through Lizana, for example), both from passages recognizable to us as they ended up in what we know as Landa's Account and from other passages that were very likely part of the *recopilación*.

Whether Cogolludo made copies of portions of the *recopilación* before he left Yucatan, or whether he simply transported the entire work from Merida to Madrid, he may have been—according to the written evidence currently available—the last person to use Landa's vanished magnum opus. As writers in Yucatan made no further references to the manuscript, it was likely no longer in the convent in Merida when the Franciscans were expelled in 1820; but if it was, it was either destroyed at that time or spirited away to sit in a dark box or on a dusty shelf, awaiting its discoverers. We like to think that it is buried today in a library or private collection

<sup>37</sup> The Council of the Indies turned the whole case against Landa over to the Franciscan Order to handle on January 30, 1565. See *Auto de Consejo Real de las Indias por el cual mandan que se remita al Provincial de Castilla el negocio de Fray Diego de Landa*, Madrid, 30 de enero, 1565, AGI, Escribanía de Cámara, 1009A.

<sup>38</sup> RHGY, Vol. I: 142–53 (entry discussed further in chapter 4; also see chapter 1; Lizana, *Historia de Yucatán*, 57v–77v; Pagden, *Maya*, 18, 20).

in Mexico, the United States, Spain, or Italy—in a Spanish attic, perhaps, or in the Vatican Library—but the chances of that are surely slim.

When we ponder the possibility that there were once two copies of the *recopilación*—identical or partial and different, both long lost—the plot thickens. In fact, it seems likely that Landa either left it in Spain in 1573, most likely in the convent of San Juan de los Reyes, as a copy of whatever he had compiled by that date, or he sent a copy to Spain of everything he had up to that point—prior to this death in 1579. This would no doubt have been the copy from which the royal historians extracted the excerpts that comprise our Account. There was certainly *some* written work of Landa's left in Spain, whether it was a copy of all or part of his *recopilación* or not. This is clear from the fact that several authors who never set foot in Yucatan consulted Landa's work in the decades after his death (and before Lizana's 1633 *Historia* provided readers in Spain with a biography of Landa). One of these authors was the royal chronicler Antonio Herrera y Tordesillas, whose *Historia general* was first published in Madrid in 1601–1615 and who drew on writings of Landa's that were in Spain.<sup>39</sup> Another was fray Antonio de Daza, whose *Cronica general de nuestro padre San Francisco y su apostolica Orden* was first published in Valladolid, Spain, in 1611. Daza consulted, at first or second hand, Landa's written accounts of his own activities—a smattering of which survive in the Account—and he cites Landa as an exemplary Franciscan in the New World.<sup>40</sup>

What does this tantalizing history of Landa's elusive magnum opus mean for the *Account of the Things of Yucatan*? It seems clear that the *recopilación* manuscript served as the source for the Account, which comprises a set of excerpts. But those excerpts were made by multiple scribes, in a seemingly haphazard way. They made no explicit reference to Landa's larger work, they left no clues as to its whereabouts, and they neither recorded their own identities nor told us where they did the copying work. To ferret out answers to the questions implied therein, we were obliged to analyze the object itself—its paper, handwriting, and binding—as well as its content. As we did so, we grew increasingly suspicious of the assumption of Landa's authorship by previous editors and readers of the Account. The more we pondered and uncovered the manuscript's history, in combination with its inconsistencies of content, the more our investigation turned to identifying alternative authors.

We present in detail in chapters 6 and 7 our analysis of the Account as a text that is wildly varied in topic, tone, and style, disjunctive in structure and lacking

<sup>39</sup> Herrera y Tordesillas, *Historia General*.

<sup>40</sup> Daza, *Quarta parte de la Chronica general de nu[es]tro padre*, Book 2, Capítulo 49, f. 196–198 (Daza got his information about Landa from Francesco Gonzaga, *De origine Seraphica Religionis Franciscana ejusque progressibus, de regularis observancia institutione*, part 4, fs. 1306–1307).

cohesion or coherence as a single composition. But our conclusion is too important not to be revealed now, before presenting our translation. It is this. Much of the first half of the Account does appear to have been authored by Landa, but much of it comprises passages that were abbreviated, paraphrased, summarized, and even redacted from lost portions of the *recopilación*—portions that themselves were likely a mixture of Landa's writings and his summaries of writings by others, with the famous Dominican fray Bartolomé de Las Casas a likely source. Furthermore, the second half of the manuscript mixes passages likely written by Landa using Maya informants (on Maya religion and calendrics, for example) and with segments copied or summarized from writings by others. We have identified those others as including Francisco López de Gómara (hagiographer of Hernando Cortés). Most strikingly, it seems highly likely that two of the copyists who wrote down in their own hands many of the passages in the Account were none other than Juan López de Velasco, the royal Cronista and Cosmógrafo Mayor of 1571–1591, and Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas, the Cronista Mayor of 1596–1625.

Behind the veil of Landa's authorship, then, lie multiple authors, copyists, sources, narrative voices, and intentions. Some portions are in the handwriting of royal historians, some in the hands of notaries—but none in Landa's own hand. The confounding manuscript that survived such a complex process was likely bound and given its cover in the eighteenth century, probably when it was deposited in the small library of Madrid's Real Academia de la Historia. It was still there in 1861, when it was found by a Frenchman styling himself the Abbé Brasseur de Bourbourg. It remains there to this day.

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Landa's unpublished *magnum opus*, a *recopilación* that must have comprised the writings of others as much as those of the Franciscan himself, was therefore read and cited for a century and then ignored for the next two centuries, destroyed or consumed by fire or left to gather dust until a part of it was found in that little Madrid archive. That any of it survived at all seems miraculous.

Since its discovery and first publication—a partial French edition by Brasseur de Bourbourg in 1864—the Account has become one of the most widely read and oft-cited pieces of early modern Latin American writing, second only, perhaps, to the so-called Florentine Codex (produced by another sixteenth-century Franciscan, fray Bernardino de Sahagún). The Account has become a standard reference for students of Franciscan history, of the history of religious conversion, of colonial Mexican history, of the history of Yucatan, and above all of Maya history. Yet its messy and mysterious origins in a lost larger manuscript, its ambiguous authorship (revealed here, for the first time, as a manuscript only partly written by Landa), and



its equally messy early publication history (to which we also turn in chapter 3), have only contributed to the Landa conundrum—and will continue to do so. This book is thus a response to our conviction that the Account deserves a reliable new translation, made directly from the manuscript in Madrid, with analytical packaging that explains the conundrum of how the friar—and the fragmentary manuscript wrongly attributed entirely to him—became so celebrated and reviled, so famous and infamous.