

Chapter 25

THE DIFFICULTIES OF LEARNING ABOUT THEIR HISTORY

*Acosta has carefully considered the result of European searches for the history of these people of the New World. Since the natives themselves have no written records, they have relied on oral tradition supplemented by pictographs written on leather and an amazing accounting instrument, the **quipu**. It is evident that Acosta, who taught in Peru for some years before coming to New Spain, is well acquainted with various civilizations in the New World.*

Illud viri eruditi scriptis mandarunt, omnem istorum
 memoriam ad quadringentos maxime annos porrigi, ultra
 id aetatis nihil aliud quam densas tenebras ignorationis
 occurrere. Neque mirandum est sane, cum literarum
 5 imperitia veniam historia promereatur, pro quibus exacta
 illa quipoca maiorum supputatio admirationi magis
 esse debet, quod ad id usque aetatis tenax fit. Mihi diu
 inquirenti, an apud hosce barbaros notitia aliqua extaret,
 unde huc commigrarent primi auctores ipsorum, adeo nihil
 10 occurrit e re, ut potius sese in hoc orbe natos et conditos
 fere opinentur, nisi fide Catholica revocentur, ex uno
 genus mortalium omne fluxisse. Tenent vero coniecturis
 non mediocribus nobiles auctores, quam diutissime hisce
 barbaris nullos fuisse reges, nullam certam constitutam
 15 rempublicam (fuisse), sed (eos) promiscue turmatim
 habita(vi)sse, ut modo Floridi, ut Brasilienses ut Chiriguani,
 ut pleraeque gentes Indorum, qui nullos habent certos
 reges, sed prout belli pacisve fortuna tulerit, subito ac

VOCABULARY

an *conj* whether, or
constitu•o –ere –i –tum to establish, decide
diu *adv* for a long time; **diutius** longer
erudit•us –i *m* educated, learned
exact•us –a –um *adj* exact, precise
ex(s)t•o –are extiti to exist, be
fero ferre tuli latum to carry, bear, endure, set in motion
flu•o –ere –xi –xum to flow, spring from, rise
imperiti•a –ae *f* inexperience, ignorance
iste ista istud *adj* that, that particular
mand•o (1) to commit (e.g., to writing)
mirand•us –a –um *adj* amazing, to be wondered at
nisi *conj* unless, except
notiti•a –ae *f* notation, writing
opin•or –ari –atus *dep* to think, suppose
porrigo porrigere porrexi porrectum to extend
potius *adv* rather; better
promer•eor –eri –itus *dep* to deserve
promiscu•us –a –um *adj* common, haphazard
prout *conj* just as
quadringent•i –ae –a *adj* four hundred
quam than; *w superl* as . . . as possible
sane *adv* really, especially
supputati•o –onis *f* calculation
ten•ax –acis *adj* tenacious, continuing, remaining steadfast
tenebr•a –ae *f* shadow
turmatim *adv* in groups or squadrons, group by group
veni•a –ae *f* pardon

NEOLOGISMS

Brasiliens•is –is *m* a native living in Brazil
Chiriguan•us –i *m* member of an Indian tribe of Bolivia and Argentina
Florid•us –i *m* native living in Florida
quipoc•a –ae *f* a quipu (a system of knotted strings used to keep records of people and goods)

temere duces creant, atque eos mores probant, quos libido
20 furorque persuaserit. Tempore vero procendente homines
viribus et industria praestantes per tyrannidem coepisse
dominari, ut olim Nemrot, paulatimque crescentes eam
constituisse.

Rempubicam quam apud Peruentes, et Mexicanos nostri
25 invenerunt, barbaram quoque ipsam, sed a cetera barbarie
Indorum plurimum abhorrentem. Quare genus hoc
hominum silvestre ex barbaris profugisque hominibus
maxime propagatum ratio ipsa persuadet.

VOCABULARY

abhorre•ns –ntis *adj* abhorrent, horrible

cre•o (1) to choose, elect, create

fur•or –oris *m* rage

libid•o –inis *f* desire, pleasure

Nemrot (Nimrod) *indecl m* great-grandson of Noah, the first great hunter, legendary harsh king of Babylon (Genesis 10:8–10)

pacif•us –i *m* peace-making

profug•us –a –um *adj* fugitive

propag•o (1) to increase

temere *adv* rashly

NEOLOGISMS

Mexican•us –a –um *adj* Mexican, Aztec

Perue•ns –ntis *m* a native of Peru

GRAMMAR AND WORD USE QUESTIONS

1. Find and explain a metaphor in the first sentence. See Appendix 3 for the definition of the term metaphor.
2. Find a causal *cum* clause in the second sentence. Since it is causal, how should you translate *cum*? Translate the clause.
3. Translate the subjunctive indirect question which *an* introduces in the third sentence.
4. Further on in the same sentence, the *nisi* clause is evidently subjunctive by attraction. Translate this clause.
5. In the next sentence, what does the major clause *nobiles auctores tenent* set up?
6. Find and translate an example of litotes in this passage.
7. *Nullos reges* is the first subject of *fuisse*; *rempublicam* is the second. Translate these two clauses with *hisce barbaris*.
8. In the next sentence (lines 21–23), we find a present ablative absolute that was also used in Chapter 24. Translate it.
9. In this sentence, find and translate the infinitives that serve as verbs in the indirect statement.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. By the best calculations of the scholars of Acosta's time, how far back does the racial memory of the native peoples extend?
2. What is the only system of notation that Acosta has discovered among them?
3. What do the natives believe about themselves?
4. In what kind of societies do they live?
5. In the center of the passage, what five widely separated groups of New Spain inhabitants has Acosta named? How does this give weight to his conclusions?
6. What conclusion does reasoning suggest?