

Mentality and ideologies in letters from the first years of contact in ‘America’?

¿Mentalidad e ideologías en las cartas de los primeros años de contacto en “América”?

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the mentality and ideology of the people who lived at the end of the 15th century in “America”: the new arrivals and the natives. We will base our research on two letters, one by Diego Álvarez Chanca (a former royal physician) and another by Michele da Cuneo (a merchant? from northern Italy). By doing so, we aim to contribute to the study of mentalities and ideologies from a linguistic perspective. We will use historical data, ecdotic tools, discourse analysis, and the concept of discursive traditions. These letters represent some of the earliest examples of colonial American textuality. We believe that the data we find in these texts allow us to gain insight into what was going on in the minds of those present and into their mentality, but not into their ideology in the classical sense of the term.

Keywords: carta-relación, Caribbean, ‘discovery of America’, Cuneo, Chanca, mentality.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es acercarnos a la mentalidad y la ideología de las personas que vivían a finales del siglo XV en “América”: los recién llegados y los nativos. Basaremos nuestra investigación en dos cartas, una de Diego Álvarez Chanca (antiguo médico real) y otra de Michele da Cuneo (¿mercader? italiano). Con ello pretendemos contribuir al estudio de las

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mentalidades e ideologías desde una perspectiva lingüística. Utilizaremos datos históricos, herramientas de la ecdótica y del análisis del discurso y el concepto de tradiciones discursivas. Estas cartas están entre los primeros ejemplos de textualidad colonial americana. Creemos que los datos de estos textos nos permiten hacernos una idea de las cuitas y la mentalidad de los protagonistas de aquellos hechos, pero no de su ideología en el sentido clásico del término.

Palabras-clave: carta-relación, Caribe, “descubrimiento de América”, Cuneo, Chanca, mentality.

1. Introduction²

In the following pages we will attempt to approach the mentality and ideology of the people who lived at the end of the 15th century and who were related to what was happening at that time in ‘America’³. We will do so by way of letters written by two men who travelled with Columbus on his second voyage to the ‘new’ territories in 1493: Dr Diego Álvarez Chanca and Michele da Cuneo⁴. Although the letters were written by Europeans who travelled to the ‘New World’ and were addressed, perhaps on commission, to men who lived in the ‘Old World’, we will explore them in an attempt to gain insight into the thoughts of these two subjects, and perhaps also the recipients of their writings. We will also, as far as possible, attempt to understand what the human beings who lived in the territories they reached would have thought. We must begin by acknowledging that this is only an attempt. It is difficult enough to know the history of facts; investigating the *ideas* of the past is a task fraught with difficulties. We nevertheless undertook this task sparing neither time nor effort, and with the utmost humility.

Why focus on this time and situation? In the early years of contact between inhabitants from different sides of the Atlantic, both those from the countries reached by Columbus’s ships that would later be known as America and those from the other side of the Atlantic would find themselves in a highly unusual situation that would be extremely interesting for the study of ideas in the period to which this volume is dedicated. The people Columbus’s men encountered experienced a constant influx of new people and realities, as well as of other languages. The newcomers –even those who believed they had landed in

² I would like to thank Christopher Owain Carter for his linguistic support and Mar Garachana for her bibliographical support.

³ We put the term in quotation marks because we are using, for the sake of concreteness, an anachronism. We will also put the words *old* and *new* in quotation marks, to highlight the fact that it is dependent on the perspective of the speaker.

⁴ Also Michael de Cuneo or Miguel de Cuneo.

Asia– were confronted at every turn with the unknown, and this despite the fact that they had embarked on a sea voyage, which presupposes the new. The inhabitants of the Caribbean islands, while not having to adapt to a new environment, were nevertheless surprised in their own space by the irruption of the new, or the strange. It can be surmised that the world of these people would no longer be what it had been up until that point, necessitating a change of their worldview to incorporate the multiplicity of new realities that included beings with whom they were previously unfamiliar. Subsequently, these events, the ideas that would be generated around them, and the realities involved, would trigger changes in the worldview of other human beings, including many who would never be in direct contact with these events and realities.

Why these texts and these authors? Among the various reasons is that they reflect the textuality of the period in question, which is not only contemporary to the events of that period, but also a way of evaluating their impact on the minds of the human beings who lived through it. Among the available texts, these are perhaps the most suitable in the 21st century. However, it certainly favours an approach to the men of the 'Old World', who are usually the authors of the available writings, and it only allows a glimpse of those of the 'New World', albeit through references which must be weighed and even questioned.

The focus of this study will be on the letters of Chanca and Cuneo, since they arrived in what would become America in 1493; that is, they were written by people who had first-hand experience with the realities of the 'New World', and this as early as 1493. This is a time which has been relatively overlooked in comparison to 1492, despite the fact that the shock of the new involved a greater number of people and realities, and in some cases, a deeper conviction of being in a 'new world'. These authors, moreover, due to their disparate origins, interests, and areas of knowledge, could illuminate forms of perception that differed from each other, and they also differed from the most well-known and studied perceptions, such as those expressed by Columbus⁵ or Las Casas. In addition, these texts, which we may term 'letters', despite being fascinating readings on events of such importance, have remained relatively unknown and little studied. Nor, as far as we know, were they widely circulated in their original form at the time. However, this is a reason to pay attention to them, as their content would have been read and, in some cases, propagated⁶. Therefore, it is possible that Chanca and Cuneo, who were among the earliest protagonists of these encounters or clashes, may have played a role as heralds of the newness of those lands, as well as in the transmission and shaping of ideas about the *New World*.

⁵ Among the very numerous works on Columbus and his letters, cf. Ife (1993), Varela (2010) and Carrera de la Red (2010).

⁶ In particular Chanca's text in *Décadas* by Pedro Mártir de Anglería. Cf. on the subject Fernández de Navarrete (1858: 347).

Finally, the epistolary may be regarded as a particularly favourable space for the expression of specific concerns and modes of thought on various subjects. It may also be used to convey information that would have been silenced in more widely received texts. However, as with every text, it is important to consider its context, its discursive configuration, and its pragmatic implications, without forgetting to reflect on the origin, antiquity, and vicissitudes of the sources we have at our disposal today.

2. Methodology

Our aim is to ascertain whether it is possible to gain insight into the mentality and ideology of the inhabitants of the lands that would later be called America during the initial period of contact, as set out in the question in the title of the article. Attempting to investigate the mentality and ideology of other humans is never a trivial task. To try to do so with those who lived centuries ago, it is possible to reflect on facts that have been preserved by history and archaeology, as well as ideas that have been expressed in discourse from the past. Alternatively, it is possible to combine both of these approaches.

In our case, we begin with texts, and so our subject matter is the written word. In order to gain clarity about that which we seek to know, we propose approaching these texts from various perspectives. We began by gathering all available data on their authors, on the writing, transmission, and current state of these texts, as well as on their possible recipients (sections 3 and 4). In other words, we undertake their recontextualisation⁷. For the choice of sources and for the access to sources such as manuscripts and editions, we drew on previous research and our own archival work.⁸ In this phase of the research, we rely on historical data, ecdotic tools, and discourse analysis, as well as the concept of *discursive traditions*.

Once ‘inside’ the texts, the objective is to gain insight into the ideas of the men of the time by identifying elements that address specific questions (section 4). We start with the question: 1) What are the subjects of these letters? The aim is to gain an overview of the ideas that preoccupied these men, although it must be borne in mind that the boundaries between the interests of the authors of the letters and those of their addressees can be blurred. Consequently, the focus is on the aspects dealt with in the texts that are most relevant to our topic of study and these are reflected upon in the context of the question: 2) What ideas or positions on issues related to mentality and ideology can be

⁷ We use the word *recontextualization* in the sense of Wulf Oesterreicher (2001).

⁸ The oldest copy of the Cuneo document is in the University Archives of Bologna. We are grateful to the staff there for providing access.

perceived in the authors? We complement the analysis by asking ourselves: 3) What facts related to these issues are included in these letters? To what extent do they coincide or not with the positions expressed? Despite the fact that the texts originate from a single group of people, namely the new arrivals, it seems inexcusable to attempt to gain clarity on the ideas and positions of those who were already resident in the area. We then ask: 4) What can be inferred from the accounts of the inhabitants' ideas and positions? It must be acknowledged that the descriptions and narratives in question are those of 'the others,' and that they may be the result of misunderstandings or even conscious distortions. Consequently, it is imperative to exercise extreme caution when taking them into account.

In other words, our objective is to identify and reflect upon the explicit ideas expressed in the texts, as well as to identify concerns and positions on issues and entities through the narrative content. It should be noted that we are also examining the language used by the authors. We assume that the way in which each being expresses themselves on a subject reflects a great deal about their position on that subject, perhaps more than they would like to admit, and even including that which they would rather conceal. In this way, we aim to contribute to the study of mentalities and ideologies from a linguistic perspective. However, since the two texts under consideration are so similar, their comparison forms an integral part of the analysis. The content of the texts may require the clarification that the aim of this work is to investigate the way of thinking of men of other times; it is not intended to evaluate them from an ethical perspective, however reprehensible their ideas and acts may have been.

3. The backgrounds of Diego Álvarez Chanca and Michele de Cuneo

We do not know much about either Doctor Álvarez Chanca or Michele de Cuneo. Of Álvarez Chanca, we know that he was a royal physician and that a dispatch from May 1493 arranged for him to accompany Columbus on his second voyage as a doctor; in principle, at Chanca's request⁹. Columbus records his presence on La Isabela, praises his work and requests more money for him in a *Memorial* he sends to their Catholic Majesties in 1494 (Fernández de Navarrete 1858: 373). Chanca seems to have returned to Seville shortly afterwards, however, as he married there in 1495. He was the author of treatises on alchemy and the evil eye (in Latin) and on pleurisy (in Spanish), as well as a book in Latin refuting the medical theories of Arnaldo de Villanova (Menéndez y Pelayo 1940-1967: 261). It is known that he died in Seville in 1515, although it is not clear whether he was a native of the city or simply a resident.

⁹ Real Academia de la Historia: <https://dbe.rah.es/biografias/17841/diego-alvarez-chanca>

We know even less about Michele Cuneo, apart from the fact that he lived in Savona (Liguria) and that his name may indicate a certain connection with Cuneo (Piedmont). Today, we would call him Italian. There are two different versions of his origins: he was either the son of a noble family or of weavers. He took part in the second voyage of Columbus, which means that he would have arrived in the New World in 1493, at the same time as Chanca. Like the Spanish physician, he returned to Europe relatively early, apparently in 1495, when he likely wrote his text from Savona. He left a curious trace in America, an island near the Dominican Republic called Saona (the name he used to refer to Savona), which he seems to have received as a gift from Columbus¹⁰.

The coincidences between the two characters go beyond their early and short stay in what would become America. Both wrote texts inspired by these events and situations; in fact, they frequently refer to the same events, and, to a certain extent, to the same themes. Additionally, neither character held a political function in the New World, nor did they have an ‘affective’ interest, such as the defence of the indigenous population. Nevertheless, due to his geographical provenance and the fact that he was a royal physicist, Chanca is believed to have had a closer relationship with the Hispanic world.

4. Álvarez Chanca and Cuneo’s “letters”: history, communicative constellation and discursive traits

There are many similarities between these texts. Both recount Columbus’ second voyage to the ‘newly discovered’ lands in 1493 and, above all, his arrival in the ‘new’ territories, his travels in the region and his initial experiences there. The descriptions of the ‘new’ territories included in each text encompass both those already observed by Columbus during his initial voyage and those that had been reached for the first time. This coincidence can be explained by the fact that both the authors and the recipients of these texts were motivated to gain clarity about the ‘new’ world. Both texts were sent to recipients who had not travelled to the ‘New World’ and who, for one reason or another, would have been interested in receiving information about that place and what was experienced there. In other words, they contain not only what might be of interest to their authors, but also what was – or what they considered to have been – of interest to their recipients.

In their formal context, both texts can be understood as letters, and so they have been called such; however, certain qualifications must be made. They both have an epistolary heading, with Chanca featuring a simple *Muy magnifico Señor*

¹⁰ Regarding this topic, refer to Manera (2002).

(‘most magnificent lord’)¹¹, which leaves much room for speculation regarding its recipient. In Cuneo, we find the date and place of writing: *15 October 1495, in Saona* (in Latin), as well as the name of the recipient (Hieronymo Annari) and a salutation: *noble and honourable gentleman*, as translated into English¹². The ending and Cueno’s valediction are absolutely typical of a letter of the period. In Chanca’s letter, we find the closing words “*aquí me parece bien cesar el cuento [...]*” (‘this seems to me a good point to end the story [...]’) (Navarrete 1858: 371), but no valediction. This is because the person who copied the letter in the sixteenth century deemed it uninteresting to reproduce the remainder of the document, noting that “*lo demás que venía en la carta no hace el caso porque son cosas particulares*” (‘the rest that came in the letter is not relevant because it deals with certain particulars’) (Chanca in Navarrete 1858: 372).

Nevertheless, in both texts, there is a paucity of elements that could be considered analogous to a missive, such as interactions with an addressee or the expression of wishes and hopes, such as the following examples:

- (1) Espero que á pocos viages se hallará. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 357)
(‘I hope it will be found in a few voyages’)
- (2) espero en nuestro Señor que todos se levantarán con salud (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 369)
(‘I hope in our Lord that all will arise in good health’)

Furthermore, the texts adhere to a strict chronological order and features a strong narrative voice reminiscent of an account or diary. At times, the description of natural elements evokes the prose style of natural histories similar to those of Nicolás de Ovando¹³. However, the text’s overall structure aligns with the conventions of traditional historiographical texts. There are no chapter divisions, and the style is straightforward, reminiscent of a personal missive. These texts serve to illustrate a characteristic feature of the epistolary in American textuality, particularly that of the early decades: the interweaving of non-epistolary and epistolary textual forms¹⁴. Nevertheless, we can conclude that these texts represent some of the earliest examples of a productive discursive tradition in colonial American textuality. This tradition, which Walter Mignolo (1982) refers to as the *carta relatoria*, combines elements of the personal account and the letter¹⁵.

¹¹ In Fernández de Navarrete (1858: 347).

¹² Although we worked with the manuscript from the BUB, which was written in a variety of Northern Italic, the English translation in this paper is based on the Spanish edition by Gil/Varela (1984), except for a single word which appears in Varela/Gil as <cambalo>, but which we have transcribed as <canibal>, based on our manuscript research.

¹³ Regarding Nicolás de Ovando, refer to natural histories in the colonial times.

¹⁴ Regarding this topic, refer to Guzmán (2008) and (2015).

¹⁵ Regarding this topic, refer to, in particular, Mignolo (1982).

The history of the reception and preservation of these texts also has points in common. In their original form, as far as we know, they neither enjoyed prestige nor were they published until several centuries later. They were then ‘discovered’ in the 19th century, but today, only copies remain (albeit old ones), and not the originals. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they refer to the same places and times and sometimes even describe the same events and situations, beyond their form and addressees, these authors did not write identical texts. In fact, as we shall see, there are numerous instances of coincidences and divergences between them.

4.1. Doctor Álvarez Chanca’s letter

It is regrettable that we do not have an original manuscript, let alone an autograph, but only a facsimile of approximately 15 pages made by Friar Antonio de Aspa (a monk from La Mejorada). It was created from a manuscript that, according to Martín Fernández de Navarrete (1858), was found there in the 16th century. The original would have been sent by the author to Seville, and, since he would have been there in 1495, it is probable that it was written between 1493 and 1494.

The text was not published until the 19th century, in 1825, in the first volume of the *Colección de los viajes y descubrimientos que hicieron por mar los españoles desde fines del siglo XV* [...] which we owe to Martín Fernández de Navarrete. Although Andrés Bernaldez, author of *Historia de los Reyes Católicos* (History of the Catholic Monarchs)¹⁶, asserts that he possessed in 1496 a document written by “the honourable doctor Chanca”, who had participated in Columbus’ second voyage. Various elements of its content also appear in the works of other authors, including Pédro Mártir de Anglería, as Navarrete points out.:

(3) This second voyage was written about by Pedro Mártir in Latin to Rome, and because a certain Dr Chanca, a native of Seville, went on this journey and fleet by order of the Catholic Monarchs, and from there he wrote to the Lords of the Council of Seville about what happened to them and what he saw, I include here the transcript of his letter, although it all comes to the same thing; but one recounts it as he heard it, and the one from Seville as he saw it. (Navarrete 1858: 346)¹⁷.

The document is typically regarded as having been addressed to the *Cabildo of Seville*¹⁸. With regard to the addressee, Navarrete indicates

¹⁶ *Biblioteca de Autores españoles*, by Rivadeneyra, 70. In Fernández de Navarrete (1858: 67).

¹⁷ All quotes are translations of the cited sources

¹⁸ In Fernández de Navarrete (1858[1825]: 347).

that the author “wrote to the Lords of the Chapter of Seville to convey the events that transpired and his observations” ([1825] 1858: 347), and the author of the facsimile also notes that “the remainder that follows in the letter comprises specific details that the aforementioned Doctor Chanca, a native of Seville, requested and entrusted to the members of the Chapter of Seville who were involved in his affairs”¹⁹. At the beginning of the text, however, an allusion to a singular addressee is made, namely *Muy magnífico Señor* (‘most magnificent lord’) (Fernández de Navarrete 1858: 347). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the address is rather generic and could be directed to either a specific individual or any member of the chapter who read it. Nevertheless, the text also appears to refer to a private individual rather than to members of a Chapter:

(4) Because the things that I particularly write to others in other letters are not equally shareable as those in this writing, I decided to distinctly write the news from here and the other matters that I need to petition to Your Lordship. (Navarrete 1858: 347).

Assuming it was addressed to the Chapter of Seville, it is also worth considering whether the document was addressed to the secular or the ecclesiastical chapter. Given the nature of the document as it is presented to us today, it is challenging to imagine the relevance of the narrative to the city of Seville, and it is evident that the content is not typically discussed in secular chapter meetings. It is clear that the content of the document was of no consequence to the Sevillian ecclesiastical chapter; however, it would have been of interest to Juan Rodríguez de Fonseca, dean of the cathedral chapter of Seville, who was deeply involved in the Indian enterprise in general and in the organisation of the second voyage of Columbus in particular²⁰. His contact with the text would also explain how it came into Anglería’s hands, as it is recorded that the two men had dealings with each other²¹. It thus appears plausible to suggest that Chanca may have discussed matters pertaining to his estate with Fonseca. Furthermore, the monk who penned the transfer may have erred in identifying the Chapter as the addressee, or alternatively, may have mistakenly taken an address written on a folio of the letter as the addressee. However, a lack of textual or extratextual evidence precludes a definitive conclusion as to whether Fonseca was indeed the addressee²².

¹⁹ In Fernández de Navarrete (1858[1825]: 372).

²⁰ Regarding the work of Fonseca in this context, refer to Silva (2000).

²¹ Regarding this subject, refer to, amongst others, Torre Revello (1957).

²² Sagarra Gamazo (2009), for example, does.

4.2. Michele de Cuneo's letter

As far as is known, Cuneo's text was not published in its original form at the time, but rather, it was not until the 19th century that Orlando Guerrini 'discovered' the oldest manuscript available to us. The text was dated 1495 and spans the period from 15 October to 28 October. It is currently available for consultation at the University Library of Bologna (codex 4075, folios 24 r - 46 r)²³; however, it has not been digitised. As it is the oldest extant form of the text, it is the text we have used. Nevertheless, as is often the case with such materials, the *Codex Optimus* is simply the first best option, as it is a mere reproduction. While Michael de Cuneo can be read at the end of the text and the printed editions suggest a signature, the original leads us to believe that the name was simply written.

The text is written in an italic variety, as evidenced by the following fragment: "pensando fra pochi iorni esser cum epso voi [...]" ('thinking that in a few days, I will be with yourself'). This indicates that the language used could correspond to that of the period and dialectal zone of the part of Italy in which Savona (from where the letter was written) is located, as well as Cuneo²⁴. The two areas are geographically proximate, although Cuneo is situated in Piedmont and Savona in Liguria. In contrast to these fragments (but not unusual for the time), the date and heading, as well as a sort of 'title' at the beginning of his account, are in Latin, which reads as follows: *De Novitatibus Insularum Oceani Hesperii Repertarum a Don Christoforo Columbo Genuensi* ('Concerning the discoveries of the islands of the Western Ocean by Don Christopher Columbus of Genoa')²⁵. In order to facilitate the reading of this work, we will reproduce the fragments under discussion in English²⁶.

The text is addressed to Hieronymo Annari, Jerónimo or Gerolamo in the present editions, and, according to the document, is written to satisfy a request expressed in a letter of September 1495. This request was made by an apparently wealthy man and, according to Cuneo's own comments, one who was interested in American flora and fauna, perhaps for practical purposes. Additionally, he was evidently interested in the vicissitudes of the voyage and the exploration of the new territories, as evidenced by Cuneo's extensive discussion of this topic. According to his comments, he writes from Savona (Saone) on his return from the 'New' World and without the documents that he would have written there, which were still in Nice. Although the allusion to a

²³ We are grateful to the staff of the University Library of Bologna for providing access to this manuscript.

²⁴ I am grateful to Paolo Izzo for his helpful comments on historical Italian dialectology.

²⁵ These Latin fragments, in particular the heading of the story, raise the question of whether what we have here is a translation of a Latin text or whether Cuneo writes in Latin only the greetings and farewells and the 'name' of the story, which was not unusual for the time.

²⁶ We will translate them from the Spanish of the Gil/Varela edition (1984).

recipient has been employed on several occasions as a strategy for shaping and publishing a text, in this instance, there is no evidence to suggest that he wrote for someone who requested it. This is because Cuneo has no literary aspirations or ambitions to edit his text. Conversely, Annari does not appear to be a figure of such significance that addressing him would be an honour.

5. Themes, ideas, and positions in the texts of Chanca and Cuneo

The following section will be presented in accordance with the initial questions set out in the methodology. These are as follows: 1) What are the themes of these letters? 2) What ideas or positions on issues related to their mentality and ideology do we perceive in the authors? 3) What facts related to these topics do these letters contain, and to what extent do they coincide (or not) with the positions expressed? 4) What can we deduce from what is narrated about the ideas and positions of the inhabitants of the territory? We will divide this section into two parts: About the men of the 'Old World' (5.1) and about the men of the 'New World' (5.2). The first will be a much broader study, taking into account the source material.

5.1. About the men of the 'Old World'

Leaving aside the narration of the details of the journey to the 'new' territories and the displacement within them, the main themes in both Chanca's and Cuneo's texts are the description and location of the new lands, the flora and fauna of the regions, the inhabitants of the territories they reach and, to a very limited extent, the obtaining of gold or the attempts to obtain it. Despite the similarities in terms of recurring themes, the two authors differ in the space they dedicate to them, the sub-themes they deal with and, sometimes, the perspective from which they express themselves on the aspects they deal with. There is, moreover, a fundamental difference between the two letters: in Cuneo's letter, subjects such as nature are treated separately, in response to a question from the recipient, to which he explicitly alludes, see 5 and 6.

(5) Now, in order to answer the things you have requested of me in particular, I will tell you about the fruits that commonly grow on all the said islands. (Cuneo, ed. Gil/Varela 1984: 245)

(6) Now, following your request, we will talk about quadrupedal and the land animals [...] (Cuneo, ed. Gil/Varela 1984: 245)

Chanca, however, describes or suggests ideas or comments on these themes more or less randomly and without alluding to questions.

Of all these themes, the one that is most relevant to the mentality of those involved is that of the inhabitants they meet. However, before moving on, we will briefly comment on these writers' views on gold and nature, as they may be relevant to what occupied their minds and their perceptions of the 'new' environment.

5.1.1. Comments about gold

Of all the subjects discussed, this is the one that receives the least space in the text. Although there are several references to gold being 'recovered' or to its existence, it does not seem to have been an obsession, or even a fundamental concern, of these authors or their audiences. Perhaps this is because, in that time and space, the acquisition of this metal was something beyond their reach, reserved for the highest authorities, as we can see from the mutilations that Columbus inflicted on those who tried to obtain gold on their own, as described by Cuneo:

(7) [...] whoever was found to be at fault was well punished: some had their ears cut off and others their noses, which made them pitiful to look at. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 245)

This fragment, however, illustrates Columbus's position, perhaps of the time, in the face of punishment, rather than the ideas of these men about gold. Another idea that can be glimpsed in some fragments on the subject is the formation of the idea of a kind of Dorado, to which, curiously, the newcomers do not travel, perhaps to keep alive a chimera that they presumably did not find in the Caribbean; let us look at the following lines.

(8) one of them says that on an island called Cayre, which is the first one that we saw, and which we did not reach, there is a lot of gold. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 356)

5.1.2. Comments about nature

With regard to nature, these men oscillate between pragmatism and admiration. Cuneo's mentality, however, is above all pragmatic, perhaps because the commission he had received was to describe what useful products he found in the countries he visited. In his pages, trees, bushes, and fruits are described one after the other, never forgetting to mention whether they were edible or not, repeating the structure we see in the following fragment:

(9) There are some very thick trees that have a circumference of 25 to 35 palms, which do not bear fruit to our tastes but to that of pigs (Cuneo, Gil/Varela 1984: 245)

This author even goes so far as to detail the extent to which seeds or animals brought from Spain are or are not adapted to the region. Even parrots, which other authors may greatly admire, do not escape this utilitarian perspective. Of them he says:

(10) On all the islands, both of cannibals and Indians where I have been, there are infinite parrots of three species, namely, totally green but not very fat, green with red specks, not too large, and others as fat as hens, speckled with green, red and black; these I have eaten many times, their meat is like that of starlings. (Cuneo, Gil/Varela 1984: 245)

In Chanca's letter, although there are allusions to some natural elements that can be useful and perhaps of economic benefit, most of the mentions in this sense are merely descriptive and denote admiration, such as the following:

(11) This island is very beautiful and apparently very fertile. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 357)

(12) It is a very unique land, where there are infinite large rivers and large mountain ranges and large valleys, large mountains: I suspect that the grass never dries out all year round. I don't think there is any winter on this or on the others, because at Christmas time, there are many birds' nests, both ones with birds and ones with eggs. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 358)

(13) There are on this island and on the other islands an infinite number of birds like those from home, or many others that have never been seen there: [...] most of them are as white as snow and some of them are black, very beautiful, with shallow crests, larger than those there (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 359)

In this respect, none of the authors shows the slightest contempt for the region, and if there is a comparison with the home territory, it is in favour of the 'new' countries.

5.1.3. Ideas and positions about the inhabitants of the 'New World'

The theme of the inhabitants of the islands, as already mentioned, occupies a fundamental place in both texts. Sometimes it is a description in the strict sense of the word, sometimes it is the narration of actions towards or interactions with the inhabitants of the lands they have reached, more or less expressing the way they perceived them. Although it is a theme developed extensively by both authors, it does not seem to respond in either letter to the questions posed by their recipients. It could even be said that many pieces of

information or impressions they offer, which we will see below, do not seem to have been in response to anything more than the natural curiosity that other beings would arouse. All this tells us how important these people are to the newcomers at the level of ideas. Before continuing with this theme, it should be remembered that the inhabitants of these lands were not an ethnically homogeneous group. This is not lost on these authors, especially in relation to the difference between cannibals and non-cannibals. However, this does not prevent the texts from making generalisations, for example when discussing the religion of the islanders, and sometimes it is not possible to determine whether they are talking about one group or another.

When talking about these inhabitants, both authors refer to certain themes: their physical appearance, their religion, the cannibalism of some of the islanders²⁷, their customs (food, housing, etc.) and, to a much lesser extent, to their artefacts and war potential, which we will not discuss here. What they do not have in common, however, is the amount of space devoted to them, and the fact that Chanca devotes a great deal of space to communication, or attempts to communicate, with the inhabitants of the territories.

Although there are no evaluations made nor positions taken on these aspects, we offer some information on the linguistic situation that Chanca provides, as this is fundamental to the understanding of the interactions between people and the process of apprehension of the newcomers' environment. Although he describes some moments of impossible understanding, he describes, above all, communication through languages or translators who, as the text suggests, are indigenous people who went with Columbus on the first voyage and were brought back on the second. It is evident that gestures would serve as a supplementary means of communication, although they would not necessarily prevent the occurrence of multiple misunderstandings. The following examples illustrate this point.

(14) This all happened through two Indian interpreters who had gone to Castile on the other voyage, and who had remained alive out of the seven we brought into the port (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 366)

(15) There was discussion between six men (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 351)

(16) Then the Admiral ordered a boat with a crew to go ashore so that he could talk and find out who the people were, and also because we spoke of the need to inform ourselves of the way (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 355)

Before dealing with the sub-themes related to the inhabitants of the 'New World', it is worth mentioning a similarity between the two authors when speaking of these people. Their descriptions are characterized by an objective detachment, devoid of any emotional engagement, including empathy. This

²⁷ Regarding this subject in the region, refer to, amongst others, Keegan y Hofman (2017).

entomologist's dispassionate approach is evident even in their accounts of cannibalism. Let us now examine the ideas and positions on the themes or sub-themes related to the inhabitants of the islands that recur most frequently in the texts under consideration.

As this subject is so widely dealt with in the letters and so relevant to the ideas of the men, we will present it in several sections. Of all the matters relating to these peoples dealt with in these letters, physical appearance is the least expected, especially in the relatively large proportions in which it appears. Since it is difficult to find any practical use for doing so, as might, for example, the description of their weapons, it seems rather dictated by the curiosity of the authors, and perhaps of the recipients. But let us look at the what and how of the descriptions of the Indians' physique.

Although Chanca is a doctor, it is Cuneo who focuses more on the physical appearance in an anatomical sense; with a few exceptions, Chanca concerns himself with descriptions of the hair styles, make-up and clothing. It can also be observed that Cuneo, when describing the physique of the inhabitants, expresses himself favourably, often using positive adjectives, even to an exaggerated degree. Chanca does not focus on the bodily characteristics per se, but on the attire or 'decoration', and a certain tone of mockery prevails. Comparisons with the customs of his place of origin are frequent. The following examples illustrate this point; the first two are from Cuneo, the last two from Chanca:

(17) On the aforementioned island we collected 12 very beautiful and very fat women (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 241)

(18) Therefore, I say that the people of both sexes are olive-coloured, like those of the Canary Islands. They have a flat head and a mongoloid face. They are small in stature. In general, they have very little facial hair and beautiful legs, and they are thick-skinned. The women have very round, firm, and well-formed breasts. Usually, when they have given birth, they immediately take their children to the water to wash them and themselves, and their bellies are not wrinkled from childbirth, but are always smooth, as are their breasts. They walk around completely naked, but the women, when they have known a man, cover themselves in front with leaves of a tree or a piece of cloth. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 249)

(19) The difference between them and the other Indians in the region is that the Carib have very long hair, while the others have a hundred thousand different kinds of crosses and other paintings on their heads in different ways, each one as they please, which they do with sharp reeds. All the Caribs, like the others, are people without beards, and it's a miracle if you find a man who has one. These Caribs that they took there had black eyes and eyebrows, which I think they do for show, and with that they seemed more frightening; (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 356)

(20) All these people, as I have said, walk about [as naked] as they were born, except the women of this island who cover their shame, some of them with cotton clothes that girdle their hips, others with grass and tree leaves. Their clothes are painted, some in black, some in white and red, with so many visages that to see them is something to laugh at; their heads shaved in places, and in other places there are tufts in such a variety that it would be impossible to write about them. In conclusion, whatever a madman decides to do with his head over there in our Spain, here the best of them will consider it a great favour. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 369)

Another relevant topic for investigation is the role of **religion** in the ideas and positions expressed in these texts. The fact that Chanca deals with it is much more explicable than his interest in the hair or make-up of the inhabitants of the islands, because although these texts do not reveal any attempt at evangelisation, they played an important role in the process now called colonisation. Furthermore, it is always important to know the religion of the peoples with whom one is trying to coexist or share and whom one is trying to dominate. It is important to note that, for both authors and anyone else engaged with the subject, religion is less apparent than the physical aspect and particularly challenging to comprehend, particularly given the communication limitations between the letter writers and the inhabitants of the islands.

Consider the following excerpt from Chanca on the religion of the indigenous people:

(21) What seems evident about these people is that if we had their language, they would all convert, because whatever they see us do, they do as well, whether it's kneeling before the altars, praying the Hail Mary, or other devotions and making the sign of the cross; they all say they want to be Christians, although they are truly idolaters, because in their homes there are figures of many kinds. I asked them what these figures were, and they told me that they are things of Turey, which means 'of the sky.' I tried to throw them into the fire, and they were so distressed that they wanted to cry; but they think that everything we bring is something from the sky, which they call Turey, which means 'sky'. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 369)

It is striking that Chanca is much less critical and more tolerant of religion than of appearances. There is no real opposition in his work, let alone an attempt to Christianise it, but rather a tacit recognition that "they are idolaters". Although it is by no means a gesture of respect to show the intention to burn another's gods, he does not do it, and it remains an experiment (though not without cruelty) to measure the affection of the natives towards the figures. In any case, he does not seem to see any contradiction between the deification of the figures and a hypothetical evangelisation, apparently based on a broad indigenous polytheism that could include Christianity. This certainty about the

easy conversion of the Indians had been expressed by Columbus since his first voyage, and it is questionable whether he was not expressing a commonplace or an expected comment rather than a real conviction.

Before presenting Cuneo's fragment, it should be noted that, although he usually differentiates between *cannibals* and *Indians*, and here he uses the expression *canibali* (25r), it does not seem plausible that he is referring to them, because in the description of his stay on the islands of those he calls cannibals, there does not seem to be any communicative interaction with the inhabitants that could explain such direct knowledge as he claims to have. Their stay was longer on other islands, and they had access to those languages (through Indians who had been brought by Columbus on the first voyage).

(22) We were in a temple of the said cannibals where we found two graceful wooden statues that looked like the Pietà. We have learned that when someone's father is sick, his son goes to the temple and tells the idol that his father is ill and asks if he should be saved or not; and he stays there until the idol responds yes or no. If it says no, the son goes home, cuts off his father's head, and then cooks it; I don't believe they eat it, but it is true that when it is white, they place it in the said temple. They only do this to the nobles.

This fragment is likely to be related to a fragment reproduced below from Marco Polo's *Book of the Marvels of the World*, which Cuneo would undoubtedly have been well acquainted with.

(23) Know truly that if one among them falls ill, the relatives send for the magicians and ask them if the sick person will recover. And these magicians, through their spells or by means of the idols, know if they will recover or if they are doomed to die. When they say that they are going to die, the relatives of the sick person call certain men who are in charge of killing them, since they are lost. And these men come and muzzle them in such a way that they suffocate them. And when they die, they cook them, and the whole family comes to eat them. And they eat even the marrow. (Marco Polo [s. XIII] 1986)

Although it is not impossible that similar practices could take place in religions in distant places, the similarity between the two descriptions is undeniable. Thus, even if one does not believe that there was a premeditated attempt to pass off what was actually Marco Polo's as being from the Caribbean, it would have been possible to interpret what was seen with the information that was available, especially at a time when it was widely believed that they were in Asia. We also find a description of similar traditions in Herodotus (Book III: 89), when speaking of the Calatian Indians.

The second fragment appears to be more closely aligned with the Caribbean reality. It mentions the word "Seyti," which could be related to *cemi*

(a word which can refer to both the deity and its representation). However, for the author, it was not a heavenly entity, but rather the name of the idol.

(24) The idol is called Seyti, and it is represented by a man who has been given the name 'saint,' who is dressed in a white cotton mattress cover; the saint never speaks, and in their own way, they treat him very delicately; and they say that in the morning he is placed in the middle of the temple and the first woman who enters the temple lies with him; and afterwards, all the other women go to kiss her as if she were a most worthy thing, since the said saint has deigned to join with her. Except for the said idol, the said cannibals do not worship anything else, nor do they make any sacrifices to the said idol, nor do they know what God or the devil is. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 250-251)

It is not possible to ascertain from these texts to what extent Chanca and Cuneo comprehended the phenomena they observed through the lens of the customs, about which authors such as Ramón Pané, who lived with the Indians in the area and described their customs in detail, said nothing²⁸. It is also unclear to what extent they used their imagination; however, it is of greater significance to note that, at least during this period and in the works of these authors, there is no evidence of a hostile attitude towards religious differences.

With regard to subject of cannibalism, it is striking to note the relative naturalness with which Chanca comments on the subject, as can be seen in the following example:

(25) He found a lot of cotton, both spun and unspun, and items for their sustenance, and he brought back a bit of everything, especially four or five bones of human arms and legs. As soon as we saw this, we suspected that those islands were the Caribbean ones, which are inhabited by people who eat human flesh. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1958: 350)

This finding is not discussed further, nor does it appear to impede further investigation of the island inhabited by cannibals. Furthermore, it does not appear to preclude the classification of these individuals as more developed than other indigenous populations, although the author does go on to describe them as bestial (353).

(26) [...] walking through their dwellings and villages, [...] we found countless human bones, and skulls hanging in the houses as if they were vessels for holding things [...] These people seemed to us more refined than those who inhabit the other islands we have seen, although all have thatched dwellings; but these have them of much better construction, and better provided with sustenance, and there seems to be more industry in them, both male and female.

²⁸ A friar who travelled at the same time, but stayed, learned an indigenous language and described the religions of the Caribbean inhabitants.

They had a lot of cotton, both spun and unspun, and many cotton blankets so well woven that they are no less than those of our homeland. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 352)

Even in conveying the vision of cannibalism, a certain detached tone of objective and detailed description is discernible, along with grisly descriptions such as the Caribs eating the children of captive women, as evidenced by the following fragments.

(27) They say that human flesh is so good that there is nothing like it in the world; and it seems true because the bones we found in these houses were all gnawed as much as possible, leaving only what could not be eaten due to its hardness. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 353-354)

(28) There, in one house, a man's neck was found cooking in a pot. The boys they capture, they cut off their member and keep them until they are men, and then when they want to celebrate, they kill them and eat them, because they say that the flesh of boys or women is not good to eat. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 354)

Cuneo devotes much less space to the subject, although no less detail, as we see in 29:

(29) [...] when they capture the said Indians, they eat them as we do goats, and they claim that boy's meat is much better than a maiden's. And they are very gluttonous for this human flesh. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 250)

Just as Chanca did, Cuneo considered them more developed than the other inhabitants of the islands, stating that they are "sharper than the said Indians" (Cuneo in Gil/Varela 1984:250).

The comments on the customs of the peoples encountered in the Caribbean focus on their food and housing. It is precisely in these areas that Chanca expresses the most negative opinions and uses the harshest vocabulary, while Cuneo is more open in this respect. The following examples illustrate this point.

(30) They are such a bestial people that they have no sense in choosing a place to live, for those who live by the sea build so beastly that it is astonishing. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 366)

(31) They eat as many snakes, lizards, spiders, and worms as they find on the ground; so it seems to me that their bestiality is greater than that of any beast in the world. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 371)

(32) They eat all the brute and venomous animals, such as snakes weighing 15 to 20 pounds each; and when they encounter the largest ones, they are eaten by them. When they want to eat these snakes, they cook them [...] we, lacking food, have eaten them, and they have seemed very good to us.

In other respects, however, he is not as critical or contemptuous. For instance, he does not denigrate the weavings of certain inhabitants, stating that they are of equal quality to his own. Similarly, he does not express contempt when describing the hierarchies of the natives, even using the term “*reyes*” (‘kings’).

Cuneo’s views on the ethical implications of certain habits and behaviours are complex. On the one hand, he compares the inhabitants to beasts, while on the other, he excuses them on the grounds of ignorance.

(33) They live just like beasts; when they are hungry, they eat; they engage in sexual intercourse without any discretion whenever they feel like it, and except for brothers or sisters, everyone else is shared in common [...] they are great sodomites, not knowing, I think, whether they are doing wrong or right. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 251)

5.1.4. Mentality and ideology of the authors through narrated facts; relationship to the ideas expressed

The actions of human beings do not necessarily align with their professed beliefs or even with their self-perceived beliefs. Even without considering the potential influence of multiple motivations or filters on the ideas expressed in a text, we have limited ourselves to the facts related to some of the topics on which ideas have been expressed. Among these facts, the most relevant was the vision or perception of Caribbean inhabitants found by these authors.

On this point, the two authors we are studying exhibit different behaviours. Chanca is more sparing in the narration of facts and is rarely the first-person narrator amongst his fellow travellers, nor does he describe what the Admiral or others do. In contrast, Cuneo is considerably more explicit, possibly due to the nature of his relationship with his private recipient, or because unlike Chanca, who wrote to one or more authorities, he was not too concerned with offering an image of correctness.

There are three events between Spaniards and Indians recorded by Chanca and Cuneo: a small military skirmish, the entry into a village whose inhabitants had fled, and the encounter with the chief of the location where Spaniards had stayed after the first voyage, but were found dead upon Columbus’s return. The final event is presented by both authors in a context of suspicion and doubt towards the Indians, despite their assertion that the cannibals had killed them. The authors posit that the Indians could have killed them themselves. However, the text does not depict a violent or belligerent encounter. Chanca consistently refers to the Indian chief, whom he calls Guacamari, as *rey* (‘king’).

The confrontation previously mentioned occurred between six Caribbean inhabitants (four men and two women) armed with arrows and approximately 25 Europeans. The former confront the latter, and once the larger group is victorious, the description of the actual manner in which a badly wounded man dies is diverse. Cuneo does not spare any lurid details; let us examine the fragments of Chanca and Cuneo.

- (34) One they could not capture except badly wounded by a lance, and he died. They brought him thus wounded to the ships. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 356)
(35) A cannibal was wounded by a lance, so we thought he was dead. Suddenly, we saw him swimming; therefore, we hooked him with a gaff and hoisted him aboard the ship, where we cut off his head with an axe. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 242)

With regard to the entry into the village and the appropriation of objects, while Chanca makes reference to certain objects that were obtained in this manner, Cuneo very clearly says:

- (36) When the cannibals saw us, they fled to the mountains in the same manner as before and abandoned their houses, to which we went and took what we pleased. (Cuneo, in Gil/Varela 1984: 241)

In certain types of interactions, these authors demonstrate differences. For instance, Chanca occasionally recounts episodes of interaction between the newcomers and the inhabitants, such as the following, which are absent from Cuneo's texts:

- (37) They stayed on the ship talking with the Admiral in the presence of everyone for three hours, showing much pleasure. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 361)
(38) [An Indian] came with the Admiral to the ships, and showing him the horses and everything there, which amazed him as something strange to him, he had a meal on the ship and that afternoon returned to his home. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 366)

In contrast to this passage, there are others in which it is evident how both authors and their companions treat the Indians, particularly the women. This is exemplified by the following examples, with Cuneo's descriptions being the most cruel and stark.

- (39) They took certain native women from the island, and others who came willingly, who were among the captives. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 351)
(40) We gathered in our village 1,200 people, both women and men of those Indians; of whom we loaded the best, 500 souls, both males and females, onto

the said caravels on February 17, 1495. As for the others who remained, a proclamation was issued that whoever wanted could take them at their pleasure; and so it was done. (Cuneo, in Gil / Varela: 1984 257)

While numerous examples could be provided, particularly in the case of Cuneo, it is sufficient to illustrate the author's vision of the inhabitants of the lands he arrived in. With regard to the question of why extreme attitudes are more frequent in one author than in another, a number of possible explanations can be considered. Among the factors that may have influenced Cuneo's perception of the indigenous population was his prolonged stay in the region, which afforded him greater opportunity to observe the prevalence of enslavement. Additionally, his host's disposition towards the enslaved may have influenced his own attitudes. It is also possible that, given his worldview and personality, violence towards the people he encountered was already present at the outset of his interactions with them.

It is impossible to ignore the context of Cuneo's relationship with the indigenous population when analysing his treatment of the native women he encountered. He recounts a particularly brutal incident in which he mistreated and sexually assaulted a cannibal woman who had been 'given' to him by Columbus. This incident occurred at a time when such treatment was not exclusively reserved for the women of those new lands, although it was possibly favoured by the situation of military superiority and the absence of any form of social containment. In any case, it seems unlikely that he perceived his actions as reprehensible, as he recounts them in detail and without any indication of regret or compassion.

5.2. About the men of the 'New World'

It is evident that this approach is considerably more complex than the previous one, as there are no texts in the first person. Instead, there are descriptions and narrations made by individuals who, among other things, may have been interested in offering a particular image of the people they encountered. Furthermore, it is possible that they did not have sufficient context to interpret what they observed, as they did not know the languages and cultures in question. Nevertheless, two aspects of both letters merit further analysis: the authors' attitudes towards the newcomers and their religion.

The ideas that the island inhabitants might have had towards the newcomers must be deduced, therefore, from the letters of Chanca and Cuneo, through the narration of reactions towards the authors and their companions, as well as through their interaction with them. These reactions shift, unsurprisingly, mainly between curiosity and fear. It is also possible to perceive, particularly among the captives of the cannibals who belonged to other indigenous peoples,

the idea that the strangers could be their protectors, as they escaped to join the newcomers.

The concept of fear, which is not uncommon considering that Columbus' second voyage involved more than a dozen ships and more than a thousand people, is perceptible in the numerous fragments in which both authors tell us that the natives had fled from the places they had arrived at, and even describe their flight. See the following excerpts, to quote but a few of the many examples in the letters.

(41) The Captain landed and reached the houses, where he found his people, and as soon as they saw them, they fled. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 350)

(42) And as soon as they saw the sails, they all fled. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 351)

(43) In a port of this island, we stayed for two days, where many people landed; but we could never establish communication, as they all fled like people fearful of the Caribs. (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 357)

(44) When the cannibals saw us, they fled in the same manner as before to the mountains and abandoned their houses, to which we went and took what we pleased. (Cuneo, in Gil / Varela 1984: 241)

As the expedition progressed, the escapes became more frequent, and the first to flee (and those who seem most reluctant to have any contact with the Europeans) are, initially, the cannibals. Interestingly, this constant fleeing never lead Chanca or Cuneo to consider that they were not welcome.

Quite different from these reactions, but equally understandable, are the fragments describing the curiosity of the islanders towards the newcomers, such as in the following examples:

(45) On the first day that we landed there, many men and women were walking along the beach by the water, looking at the fleet and marvelling at such a new thing... (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 352)

(46) And that afternoon, an Indian came with the Admiral to the ships, and they showed him the horses and everything there, which amazed him as something strange to him; he had a meal on the ship and that afternoon he returned to his home (Chanca, in Navarrete 1858: 366)

As observed from the end of the fragment, there is a certain camaraderie, but it is evident in the interactions that the inhabitants are at the mercy of those men who arrived by sea and cannot even decide when to share with them or when to stop doing so. Although military confrontations are very rare, an interesting passage recounting an interaction between these peoples is the encounter between Europeans and the *cacique* Guacanagarí, also called Goacanari, which is described by both authors. Since some people from Columbus's first voyage who had stayed in that area were found dead upon his return, the encounter

that takes place is very tense and full of suspicions towards the indigenous chief. He, for his part, tries to clear his people of blame, but his attitude is more one of resignation, unlike the enthusiasm and celebrations of the first encounter in 1492. Despite some captives being saved from the cannibals, the relationships described by these authors become increasingly less cordial during the expedition, and fear and attempts to escape are the tone of both narratives.

6. Conclusions

We began this work by asking ourselves whether we could learn something about the mentality and ideologies of the fifteenth century from these letters. The first thing we can conclude is that, in our opinion, the data we find in these texts allow us to glimpse something of what goes on in the minds of the people involved in them, and of their mentality, but not of their ideology in the classical sense of the term. However, we must bear in mind that the boundary between the two can be blurred and can vary according to the researcher.

As for the mentality of the inhabitants of the Caribbean, it has not been possible to gather much information, and even the little that we have is offered by two authors who do not show any empathy towards them, but rather exhibit coldness and even cruelty, and who, for their own selfish reasons, could offer a vision of the Indians that was favourable to their own, perhaps commercial, interests. However, through the lines of these texts, we can observe people whose behaviour expresses different ideas of the men who came from Europe. These include a mixture of curiosity and generosity on the one hand, and fear on the other. Unfortunately, in the period covered by these pages from Chanca and Cuneo, fear is the element that gains the upper hand.

The encounter with – and assimilation of – the new reveals some aspects of the two authors' mentality. Their immersion in the "New" World demonstrates their openness to a new space, as they attempt to explain themselves and the unknown that comes their way with that which is already known. In Chanca, for instance, we see a fascination with nature. It is, however, much more complex to describe their perception and ideas about the men they meet there. Biologically, both authors hold a positive perception, particularly Cuneo, who is not hesitant to declare them superior to beings of the "Old" World in certain respects. However, culturally, the ideas expressed do not warrant much praise. Consequently, Chanca makes light of their appearance or hairstyle. However, the most critical remarks are reserved by both authors not towards religion, as might be expected, but towards food, even though they concentrate on the consumption of certain animals.

There is little or nothing in these pages to suggest that the inhabitants of the “New World” were *noble savages*, and the attitude towards them, from both authors, is one of distance and coldness. Nevertheless, there are occasional instances of cruelty reported by Cuneo, which, despite being common at the time, were no less brutal. We do not observe an evangelising spirit in these men. At most, Chanca expresses the conviction that the Indians could be converted, due to their tendency to imitate Christian rites. However, it is important to note that religion itself is practically absent from these letters. The enslavement of others is also accepted, individually in both cases, and in large groups by Cuneo; but let us not forget that it was also tolerated in their regions of origin. In conclusion, it is important to note that the mentality displayed by the authors, despite their differences, is more representative of men from the Middle Ages than from the Modern Age.

The study of the mentality and ideology of the men involved in the first contacts between the “new” and “old” worlds through their texts is far from being exhausted in these short pages; however, we hope that this approach to two texts from the fifteenth century has contributed a morsel of understanding to the subject matter.

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