

**'If the ancestors of the people called Indians had known writing in earlier times ...'
The Peruvian Quechua Huarochirí Manuscript (c. 1608)**

Sabine Dedenbach-Salazar Sáenz¹

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'If the ancestors of the people called Indians had known writing in earlier times, then the lives they lived would not have faded from view until now. As the mighty past of the Spanish is visible until now, so, too, would theirs be. But since things are as they are, and since nothing has been written until now, I set forth here the lives of the ancestors of the Huarocheri people who all descend from one forefather. What faith they held, how they live until now, those things and more; village by village it will be written down: how they lived from their dawning age onward.' (Translation adapted from Salomon in *Tradiciones de Huarochirí* 1991: 41-42; see Fig. 1.)

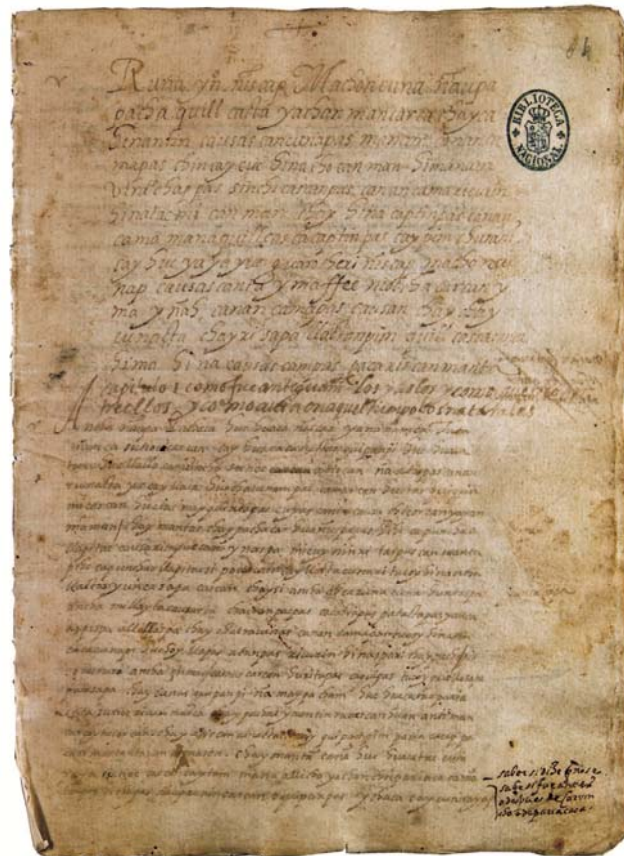


Fig. 1. First page: 'Runa yn[di]jo ñiscap Machoncuna ...', Huarochirí Quechua manuscript, bound in the larger volume *Papeles varios sobre los indios Incas, Huarochiris y otras antigüedades del Perú*, fol. 64r

¹ University of Stirling, Scotland. Email: sd39[at]stir.ac.uk; sdedenbach[at]hotmail.co.uk.

The colonial Peruvian Huarochirí manuscript, the so-called 'Tradiciones de Huarochirí', is the earliest and only known surviving comprehensive colonial text written by native authors; it dates from the beginning of the 17th century and is entirely penned in Quechua, a widely spoken language in Peru since before the Incas.

The opening lines show how important and powerful writing was - a skill the Spanish colonial masters had introduced in the Andes. The anonymous author of these lines seems to want to 'prove' that indigenous mythistory could be written down, and at the same time he made sure that the written version reflected the Bible (cf. Salomon 1994), in the ordering of the texts as well as in some of its contents, as can be seen in the narrative about a great flood (*Tradiciones de Huarochirí* [c. 1608]: ch. 3). Reflecting an Andean view of the world, this flood-myth differs from the Bible in the motivation (it did not happen because of a deity's wrath with humankind, but because the world 'wanted to come to an end'), the circumstances (it did not rain incessantly, but the ocean overflowed) and the agent (it was not a man who acted on God's command, but a llama that saved humankind by guiding a person to a high mountain top not reached by the water). However, at the end of this story, which is told in a traditional Quechua narrative mode, the apparently Christianised narrator, or redactor, says: 'Regarding this story, we Christians believe it refers to the time of the Flood. But they believe it was Villca Coto mountain that saved them' (translation by Salomon in *Tradiciones de Huarochirí* 1991: 52; see Fig. 2). This shows that the redactor (or the narrator in this role) worked his source material into a distinct form (cf. *Oxford English Dictionary* 2018: s.v. redactor).

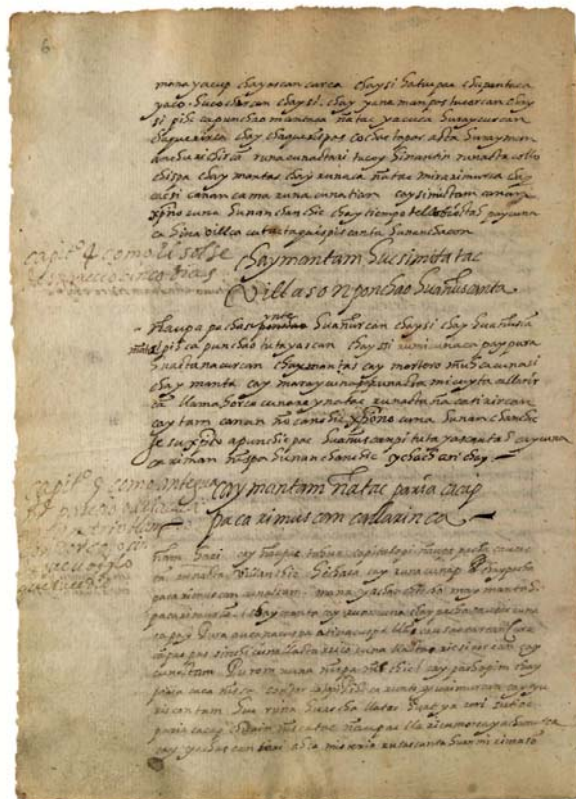


Fig. 2. Chapters 3-5, Huarochirí Quechua manuscript, fol. 66v

The Quechua text comprises thirty-three chapters which narrate myths, often related to rituals of the peoples who lived in the central Peruvian region of Huarochirí. For example, the mythical story about the goddess Chuqui Suso (ch. 6) is followed by rituals related to her: 'How those Cupara people revere the one called Chuqui Suso even to this day' (ch. 7). In some cases, the redactor compares different versions: 'some people tell another story' (ch. 26).

These examples show that the stories reflect the survival of native myths and rituals, but also that the authors/redactor integrated new materials and reworked them to reflect a conservative and yet dynamic worldview.

The manuscript is held in the National Library of Spain and the text was translated for the first time, into German, in the 1930s. Ever since then, its origin, authors and the circumstances of its creation have been subject of academic debate. The text has also been translated into Latin, French, Spanish, Polish, Dutch and English.

In the discussions and evaluation of the contents, the manuscript itself as a physical object has played an essential role. Its first page is well-worn (Fig. 1), giving evidence of its frequent usage as a separate booklet, although it has been bound (possibly by a Spanish historiographer of the 18th century) into a larger volume which includes several other manuscripts of Amerindian cultural interest (with Quechua passages). We can suppose that it was already the priest Ávila (see below) in the 17th century who collected these. However, even in each of them there are several handwriting styles and types of inks, and no detailed analysis has been made so far. Moreover most texts seem to be copies. Therefore, our knowledge about the origin not only of the Huarochirí manuscript, but also the other ones, is limited. Due to its poor state of conservation, the volume can unfortunately not be consulted anymore, but a digitised copy is available on the Internet (*Papeles Varios*) and an excellent reproduction has been published (*Tradiciones de Huarochirí* 2011).

The Huarochirí Quechua manuscript is closely related to a translation of the first chapters of it into Spanish, made - as it explicitly states on its title page - in 1608 (Fig. 3). This text breaks off abruptly after the beginning of chapter 7. In the bound volume it follows the Quechua texts. Its author was the Peruvian-born Catholic priest Francisco de Ávila (c. 1573-1647) who was in charge of the parish of Huarochirí.

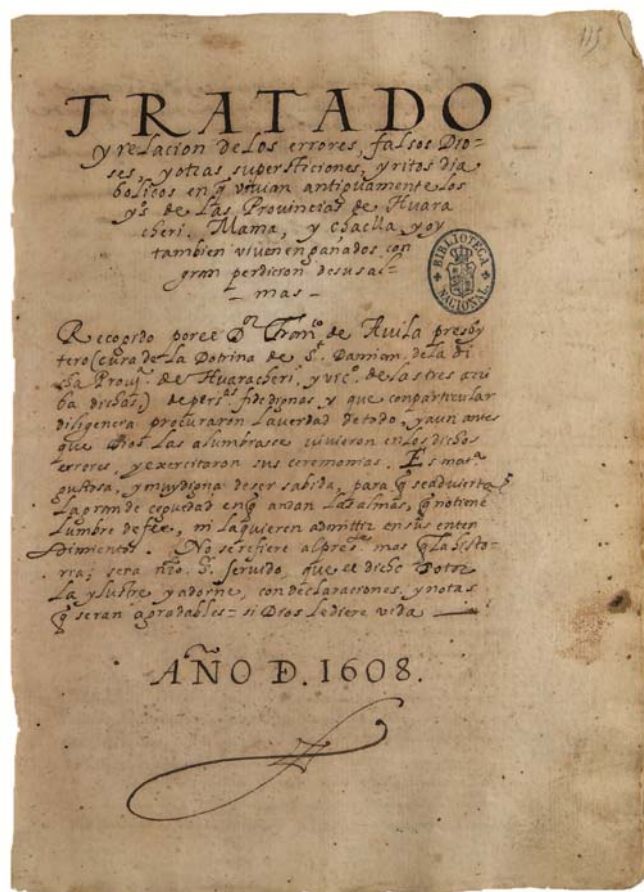


Fig. 3. Title page: 'Tratado y relacion de los errores ...', Huarochirí Spanish manuscript, fol. 115r

Studying the notes in the margins, certain text passages, the reference to other parts of the work, the whole setup in chapters and the comparison with Ávila's partial translation (and comments) suggests that both texts, the Quechua and the Spanish one, were created on the basis of an unknown earlier Quechua manuscript, a text 'X' which has been lost (or destroyed).

Due to the similarities and proximity of both, the Quechua text has always been related to this cleric, but whilst early scholars supposed that he was the author, it has now become clear that the Quechua texts are multi-layered and represent several voices. They have their origin in oral traditions which must have been narrated in their cultural context. In their written version, produced by one or more anonymous native Quechua speakers, they are 'remembered' after the invasion of the Spanish, but we don't know if they were still narrated in the same way they had been before the conquest. And, as is apparent from several types of corrections, the existent text is a copy.

There is no doubt that the responsible native writer/redactor was somehow related to Ávila, who probably taught him to read and write Spanish and Quechua (which was widely used by the early missionaries for conversion purposes). This anonymous

writer/redactor may have been Cristóbal Choquecaxa who worked for Ávila (and whose conversion to Christianity covers two chapters in the Quechua manuscript, chs. 20-21), but acquired a sceptical attitude towards the priest in later years. Whoever was the one who laid the traditions down in writing, not only did he write down what had been collected (by him and/or others), but - as we have seen in the examples of the combination of traditional stories and Christian comments - he also modified it through additions and possibly through changes which are not perceptible anymore.

This complex multi-facetedness of the contents is also reflected in the layout of the text itself which is divided into chapters - a structure known to the redactor obviously from European readings. Many chapters not only have a Quechua title, but also include a Spanish one which was clearly inserted later (possibly when the translation into Spanish was begun) (Fig. 3). Marginalia are found on several pages, but are difficult to assign to a particular person due to the lack of an analysis of the handwritings. Some observations in Spanish seem to indicate a priest's interest other than in the collection of indigenous traditions. For example, a marginal note points to its writer's, the priest's (?), wish to identify 'this place where Sullcayllapa [crossed out; replaced by:] Choq[ue]huampo is. It is beneath Tu[m]na between Sicicaya and Sucya. I have to see it and know what it is called.' (Fig. 4). This seems to reflect a sinister reason, especially when we take into account that Ávila himself - after having experienced severe problems in the communities due to his abuse and exploitation of native people - became a fervent 'extirpator of idolatry', documenting in his letters that he had burned native statues and shrines. He could have identified those through details of the rituals and mythical stories which indicated place names, e.g. an area where, so the manuscript reads, some people secretly still followed ancient rites (ch. 7).



Fig. 4. Chapter 8, Huarochirí Quechua manuscript, fol. 73r

Thus this manuscript is a document of Andean native belief, influenced by the recently imported Christian religion. It consists of multiple layers of writing which reflect and give expression to the ever-changing knowledge and objectives of indigenous intellectuals who played varying roles in its creation, a phenomenon particularly characteristic of the colonial world.

Description

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(<http://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/biblioteca/Santa%20Cruz%20Pachacuti%20Yamqui%20Salcamaygua,%20Juan%20de> [accessed 19 December 2017]):

- Forms part of the manuscript volume *Papeles varios sobre los indios Incas, Huarochiris y otras antigüedades del Perú* (174 fols.)
- Quechua text (*Tradiciones de Huarochirí* [ca. 1608]): 50 folios (31 chapters and two supplements)
- Spanish text (Ávila 1608): 14 folios (the first seven chapters translated)
- Watermarks in the volume suggest ca. 1570-1720 (only first and last folio 18th century baroque)

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