

‘Si no está mentirosa la letra’: revisiting the text of the 1492 voyage

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The journal, or *Diario*, of Columbus’s first voyage to America is probably the most important and certainly the most problematic Spanish travel book of all time. Almost everything we think we know about the 1492 voyage comes down to us from Columbus’s own pen, but the authority of the journal as we now have it has been fiercely disputed. The original log book has disappeared, and even if we had it, it would still be difficult to interpret given that Columbus was convinced he was sailing an altogether different sea. The fifth centenary saw a deluge of studies on all aspects of Europe’s encounter with the New World, but the reliability of the first eye-witness account remains fundamental. Now that a decade or more of dust has settled, the time seems right to pay another visit to this most unstable of texts, take stock of what we have learned, and ask what further work needs to be done.

When Columbus set sail for the Far East in August 1492 he decided, in view of the significance of what he was about to attempt, to make a documentary record of the voyage:

...pensé de escrevir todo este viaje muy puntualmente de día en día todo lo que yo hiziese y viesse y passase como adelante se veyrá. También, Señores Prínçipes, allende de escrevir cada noche lo que el día passare, y el día lo que la noche navegare, tengo propósito de hazer carta nueva de navegar... (Ife 1990:4).

It is precisely this desire to record the events of the first voyage (‘muy puntualmente’) that makes Columbus a special kind of traveller. Others may have got to America before him—Norsemen, Welshmen, Scots, Irish, Poles, Venetians; Leif Eiriksson, Madoc, and Brendan—, but Columbus not only lived to tell the tale, he made sure he wrote it down. But the record is much more problematic than he could possibly have imagined, and the root of the problem comes at the beginning, with the 1492 *Diario*. As I hope to show in this brief discussion, this is not just a text about travelling, a written account of a journey; no, the textual fluidity of the *Diario* makes it a travelling text in a more fundamental sense, a text with multiple avatars, each of which revisits, rediscovers and reinterprets the territory of its predecessors.

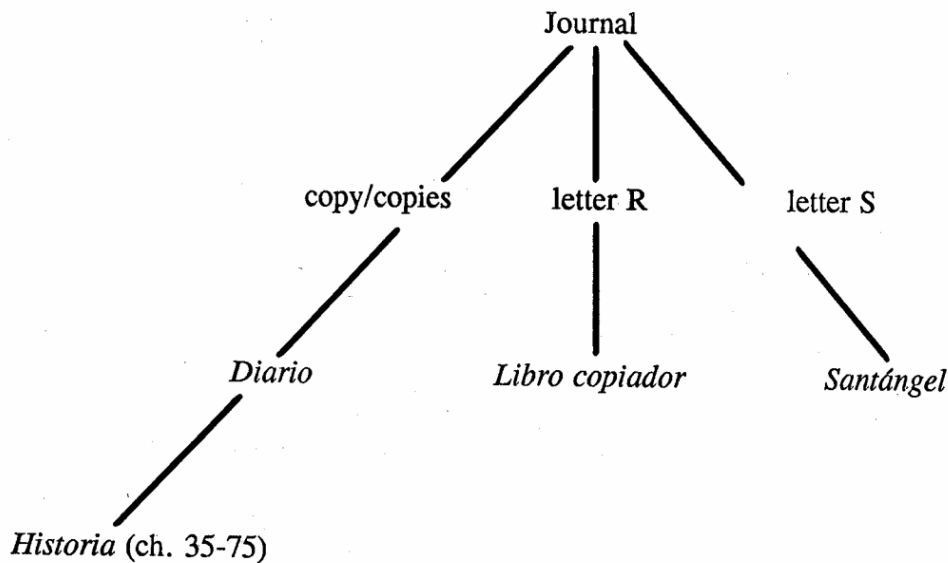


Figure 1 – ‘Stemma’ of the documents of the 1492 voyage. The four existing ‘witnesses’ are in *italic*. The *Diario* and the *Historia* are discussed in this article; the letters R and S refer to the two letters which Columbus wrote on the homeward voyage in February 1493, addressed to Ferdinand and Isabella and Luis de Santángel respectively (Ife 1992:10-15).

The Prologue to the *Diario*, from which I quoted earlier, makes it clear that Columbus kept, or said that he was going to keep, a daily record of the voyage in a form that we would now recognise as a log book, written up twice a day, in the morning and the evening. On his return to Spain in the spring of 1493 Columbus presented this book, or something like it (perhaps a clean copy) to Ferdinand and Isabella in Barcelona. They had it copied, retained the original, and gave the copy to Columbus before he set out on the second voyage in the autumn of 1493. The original has not been seen since 1504, the year in which the Queen died.

So what happened to the copy? In 1506, on the Admiral’s death, it passed to his eldest son Diego, and then in 1526 to his son, Luis, the Third Admiral of the Indies. Luis was granted permission to publish it in 1554, though it did not in fact appear. He is thought to have sold the MS, as he did that of his uncle Ferdinand’s biography of the Admiral, to subsidise his debauchery. Whatever the explanation, it has not been seen since. So the original journal, and the only copy known to have been made of it, have both disappeared.

Fortunately, at least two people had sight of the copy before it vanished. One was almost certainly Ferdinand Columbus, whose biography of his father was published in Italian in 1571. The other was the Dominican historian Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas began collecting material for a history of the Indies as early as 1502. In 1514 he underwent a change of heart about the oppression of the native inhabitants of the Caribbean, and dedicated himself, in writing and by personal advocacy, to their cause. In 1527 he began his great *Historia de las Indias*. Chapters 35 to 75 of this book rely heavily on the evidence of Columbus’s journal of the first voyage.

The access which Las Casas had to the journal was evidently restricted. However he came by it, he was not able to take it away with him or to keep it over a period of time. And as he did

not have access to a photocopier, he did what generations of scholars and students have done ever since, he copied it out by hand, summarising most of it and quoting word for word the bits he thought the most important. Failing the discovery of the full text, Las Casas's summary, preserved in the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, is the closest we are likely to get to Columbus's original.

Not unreasonably, the reliability of this text has been frequently been called into question. On the face of it, the evidence is not encouraging. At best, it lies at two removes from the original: a digest of a copy of an exemplar which may itself have been a copy at several removes. Henri Vignaud dismissed it as a fraudulent fabrication and Cecil Jane accused Las Casas of 'deliberate misstatement of fact' and reliance on 'a memory which was either curiously defective or singularly convenient'. More recently, the *Diario* has come under attack jointly and severally from David Henige and Margarita Zamora, who each contributed an important book to the re-evaluation of Columbus prompted by the fifth centenary (Henige 1991; Henige and Zamora 1989; Zamora 1993).

The question of reliability is perhaps best divided into two separate issues. Can we be certain, in the first place, that what Las Casas records in his digest is a reasonably accurate account of what he found in his exemplar; that is, is the text itself reliable? How much of what we have is Columbus and how much Las Casas? Can an avowed champion of the Indians' cause be relied upon to summarize accurately, without distortion and editorialising, the work of a pioneer colonist like Columbus? Henige and Zamora (1989) have argued that what we have in the *Diario* is not a window on the past, but a prism. Las Casas's text is a palimpsest, and what we have to do is try and read beneath the erasures, to reinstate what we can of the original text.

But even if we were able to do this, —and this is the second issue—, would the reinstated text be reliable in any case? As Stephen Greenblatt has written in *Marvellous Possessions*, authors like Columbus were liars; 'few of them *steady* liars, as it were, like Mandeville, but frequent and cunning liars none the less, whose position virtually required the strategic manipulation and distortion and outright suppression of the truth' (Greenblatt 1991:65).

The first question —is Las Casas a faithful amanuensis?— is particularly difficult to answer because the *Diario* is not the kind of copy a professional scribe would have produced. It is largely a summary ('puesto sumariamente'), interspersed with quotations, some of them quite lengthy, which claim to be verbatim: 'todas son palabras formales del Almirante'. In all, the MS consists of 67 folios (133 pages) with a total text length of some 60,000 words, of which about 20% is verbatim text. Usually the quotes are clearly indicated, or are easily inferred, as the text moves back and forth between first and third person.

But this mixture of 3rd-person summary and 1st-person quotation throws up a number of obvious questions. How accurate are these verbatim sections likely to be? How can we tell if something is an accurate copy if we do not have the original? How much of the original text survives concealed under the surface of the summary?

Here is not the place to rehearse all the arguments about Las Casas's working methods: some of them are sketched out in Ife 1990: viii-xiii, and they have been more thoroughly discussed by Henige 1991 and Rivarola 1999. The arguments turn on questions such as the extent to which the day-by-day structure of the log book has survived in the digest; the

comprehensiveness of the daily summaries, with very few omissions, even when nothing much happens; the extent to which linguistic and orthographic forms have survived differentially in the verbatim and summary sections; and the way non-native forms of Spanish and formulaic discourse are transmitted.

But perhaps the most direct piece of evidence, as always, is the material object itself. If we look at an opening in the MS such as ff55v-56r, which contain part of the entry for 13 January, we find that the *mise en page*, although lacking the formality of the professional scribe, observes a familiar distinction between text and commentary in the form of marginal notes.

Four main categories of annotation can be observed in the margins of the canonical text: signposts, observations, comments and bookmarks.

‘Signposts’ are short summaries of the matter of the text to assist in locating the more important events. Figure 3, which appears in the gutter margin of f56r, signals the first outbreak of fighting between Christians and natives in the New World (‘la primera pelea que se ovo entre yndios y *cristianos* en la ysla española’).

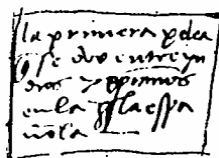


Figure 3 – *Diario* f56r, inner margin.

‘Observations’ are clarifications or explanations made with the benefit of hindsight, or indications of how Las Casas thinks a particular section of text should be interpreted. Figure 4, which appears in the outer margin of f55v, points out that the Indians mentioned in the text were not caribs and there never were any on Española (‘no eran caribes ni los ovo en la española jamas’).

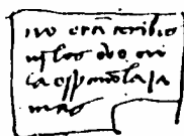


Figure 4 – *Diario* f55v, outer margin.

‘Comments’ are usually critical remarks about the Admiral or praise of the Indians, such as the example in Figure 5, in which Las Casas remarks that the Admiral did not understand the Indian whose replies are summarised in the text (‘no ap entendia el almirante aqueste yndio’)

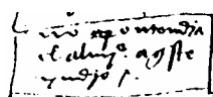


Figure 5 – *Diario* f55v, outer margin.

Notes or bookmarks usually take the form of the word ‘nota’ to indicate a point of interest or one which will require explanation at some later date (Figure 6). Many of these points were subsequently expanded in the *Historia*.



Figure 6 – *Diario* f56r, inner margin.

Las Casas's use of the margin of the manuscript as he proceeds might be taken to indicate a feeling for the distinction between fact and comment and a willingness to keep the two apart

as far as is possible. Even so, there are places where Las Casas intervenes in the text itself, unable entirely to discount his own hindsight. Two obvious examples are the references *passim* to the landfall island as Guanahani, or the mentions of Florida (12 and 21 November), which was not discovered until 1513.

It is also clear from a glance at the MS itself that it is not a fair copy of a ready-made digest. Las Casas was making the summary as he wrote. There are many corrections in the text, and in the margins. Sometimes errors were detected immediately, sometimes later, when they had to be squeezed in between the lines or put in the margin. In all, there are over 1,000 corrected errors in the MS, most of them quite legible, and a full analysis of them gives a vivid insight into Las Casas's working methods.

David Henige quite rightly complains that the importance of Las Casas's emendations has been overlooked by editors; at best only a few are recorded, where they are recorded they are relegated to footnotes or endnotes, and at worst they are ignored altogether. 'By presenting only the residue of the diario', he writes, 'most modern editions inevitably offer the impression of a manuscript unsullied by change, a finished product without blemish, and a transcriber who worked with astonishing perfection. In fact...Las Casas or someone else changed the original record more than a thousand times' (Henige 1991:69).

In this context the phrase 'changed the original record' is more problematic than Henige admits. The collocation 'original' and 'record' suggests that first thoughts take precedence over second, and that Las Casas's first draft has greater authority than the amendments he made to it. 'Changing' that 'original record' could easily imply falsification. The *Diario* is a working document which records the writer's hesitations and changes of mind. It is important to know that Las Casas did make over a thousand amendments, and what they were, but it is just as important to try and understand, in each case, what the sequence of thoughts might have been which led him to make those changes. A correction is as much a change as a falsification. The result is a better understanding of the *Diario* as a process rather than an outcome, a process which was taken forward in the drafting of the *Historia* and which, as we shall see, is also reflected in the MS of that work.

Figure 7, the entry for 14 September 1492, illustrates something of the circular chronology underlying Las Casas's drafting of the text, and Figure 8, a modern palaeographic transcription of the same extract, illustrates the difficulty of representing this crucial feature of the *Diario*, even when full account is taken of Las Casas's amendments.

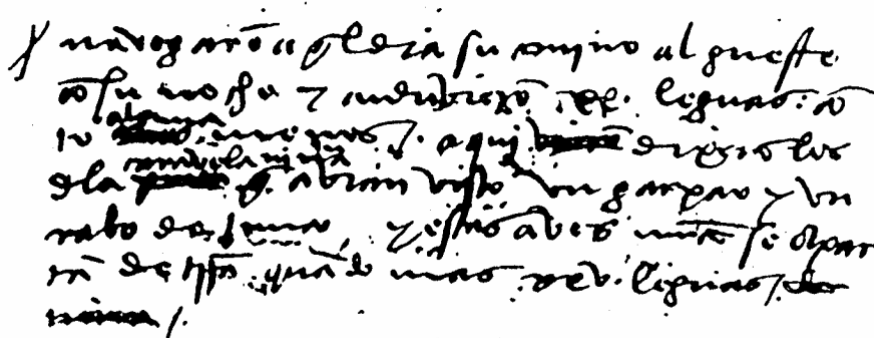


Figure 7 – *Diario* f3v, 14 September 1492.

/ navegarō aq̄l día su camino al gūeste
 cō su noche y anduvierō .xx. leguas : cō
 alguna
 to ———[?] menos /. aqui ~~vierō~~ dixerō los
 caravela niña
 30 dla ~~pinta~~ q̄ avian visto vn garxao y vn
 rabo de junco [/?] y estas aves nūca se apar
 tā de t̄rā quādo mas .xxv. leguas /. ~~de~~[?]
~~tierra~~ /.

Figure 8 – the text of the *Diario* from Figure 7 transcribed by Dunn and Kelley (1989:30)

The following lightly modernised transcription and facing translation may help understanding of the argument:

<p>Navegaron aquel día su camino al gūeste con su noche y anduvieron xx leguas; contó alguna menos. Aquí dixerón los de la caravela Niña que avían visto un garxao y un rabo de junco, y estas aves nunca se apartan de tierra quando más xxv leguas.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ife 1990:10</p>	<p>That day and night they steered their course W and made 20 leagues; he reckoned somewhat fewer. Here the crew of the caravel Niña said that they had seen a tern and a reed-tail, and these birds never go more than 25 leagues from land.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Ife 1990:11</p>
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In this short example we find four examples of self-correction, two made in mid sentence, and two made interlinearly at a later stage. Dunn and Kelley’s text is commendably accurate and typographically ingenious, but the true sense of what Las Casas is doing does not come across from the printed text. The corrections are so difficult to transcribe because they result from the author’s dialogue with his exemplar. Las Casas is not just recording what he sees in front of him, he is recording his effort to understand what was in front of him.

If we take the previous example and analyse it chronologically, the likely sequence of statements and later interventions would be somewhat as follows:

Navegaron aquel día su camino al gūeste con su noche y anduvieron xx leguas; contó [here he wrote a number which he subsequently struck through and replaced interlinearly with the more general word] alguna menos. Aquí vieron [no, he immediately realised that they didn’t see, they *said* they saw, so he struck through vieron and wrote] dixerón los de la Pinta [but he later realised it was not the men on the Pinta who said they saw the birds, hence he crossed that out and wrote interlinearly] caravela Niña que avían visto un garxao y un rabo de junco, y estas aves nunca se apartan de tierra quando más xxv leguas de tierra [then he realised he had already written the words ‘de tierra’ and so he struck out the second instance].

Some of these changes are trivial but some are not. The striking out of the final two words ‘de tierra’ probably indicates that Las Casas’s own preferred word order differed from Columbus’s, but it is not clear whether Columbus wrote ‘se apartan de tierra’ and Las Casas preferred the adverb at the end of the sentence, or vice versa. In the *Historia de las Indias*, (Chapter 36, f117v) Las Casas placed the adverb immediately after the verb, which suggests,

on balance, that he was favouring his own preferred order in the *Diario*. The precision over who the birds is worthy of note, especially the way in which Las Casas underlines the third-party origin of the testimony: ‘the men on the Pinta —sorry, the men on the caravel Niña— saw —sorry, said they saw...’.

These instances are clearly changes to the ‘original record’, but they appear to be genuine attempts to get down the gist as accurately as possible. That does not mean that Las Casas always succeeds. There are other examples where he may have failed to make sense of what he saw in front of him, and where we can reconstruct the way in which his misunderstanding may have arisen. In the foregoing entry, for example, the most intriguing change is the crossing out of the number of leagues which Columbus reported and its replacement by the more general phrase ‘alguna menos’: ‘fewer’. There are a number of reasons why Las Casas may have made this change: perhaps he could not be certain that he had read the original figure correctly; maybe he could not be certain that the original figure was correct or made sense; or he may simply not have understood at this stage what the relationship was between the two reckonings he found in the original logbook.

This instance of Las Casas cancelling a specific figure and replacing it with a more general phrase —and doing this as a later not an immediate afterthought, because the ‘correction’ is interlinear— could well have a bearing on one of the most interesting aspects of the outward voyage, the question of the ‘false log’ which Columbus is popularly supposed to have kept in order to deceive his crew into thinking that they had not sailed as far as they thought.

The idea that Columbus kept two accounts of the distanced travelled is first mentioned in the *Diario* entry for 9 September:

‘He made 15 leagues that day and decided to reckon fewer than he was making so that if the journey were long the men should not be afraid and discouraged.’

The *Diario* records two readings of distance travelled until 25 September, when Las Casas talks about the two reckonings in more detail, saying:

They sailed that day about 4 and a half leagues W and in the evening 17 leagues SW, which is 21, although he told the men 13 leagues because he always pretended to the men that he was making little headway so that the voyage should not seem long; so that he kept two reckonings for that voyage: the shorter was the false one and the longer was the true one.

This explanation has been accepted by most scholars as well as popular writers about Columbus, in spite of its inherent implausibility: the crews of the Niña and the Pinta knew their ships much better than Columbus did, and knew perfectly well how far they had sailed. But if we look at the MS itself (Figure 9), we find that the key sentence ‘porque siempre fingía a la gente que hacía poco camino’ (‘because he always pretended to the men that he was making little headway’) contains a crucial ‘correction’.

mude el almy' de ser su' ruyro con el que
 se 70 fuesen vido el fudiceste mude abra
 parecido la tpa / Avria mude a el dia al
 gueste 4. leguas y media y ^{de la noche} al su
 gste .17. leguas y for. ves. pueste ^{de la}
 la gente .13. leguas y ^{siempre} fingia ^{la}
 gente y hazia por ruyro: por no les pare
 riese. largo y por manera ^{de} ~~de~~ ^{de} ~~de~~
 por dos caminos a el viaje: el menor fue
 el fingido: y el mayor el verdadero.
 ambos laman un llamo por lo qual se
 no anaden nunca marineros. vieron
 nunca serabo y otros poros.

Figure 9 – *Diario* f6r, 25 September 1492.

Avrían andado aquel día al güeste 4 leguas y media y en la noche al sud[u]este 17 leguas, que son xxi, puesto que dezía a la gente 13 leguas, porque siempre ~~dezía~~ fingía a la gente que hazía poco camino porque no les pareçiese largo; por manera que escribió por dos caminos aquel viaje: el menor fue el fingido; y el mayor el verdadero.

The alteration of ‘dezía’ to ‘fingía’

fingia
dezia

may be one of the most crucial of the whole document, because the sole authority for the theory of the false log is Las Casas himself, and he only seems to have come to this conclusion in the very act of summarising the entry for 25 September. Three lines later, Las Casas sets down his understanding of the relationship between the two reckonings: ‘el menor fue el fingido: y el mayor el verdadero’ (‘the lower figure was the false one, and the higher the true one’). Once he uses the word ‘fingido’ (‘false’ or ‘fabricated’) he appears to go back to the more neutral word he used earlier — ‘dezía’ (‘said’ or ‘told’)— and changes it to the more value-laden ‘fingía’ (‘pretended’).

If we then look back at the earlier entries, we see that what is being said there is simply that Columbus kept two reckonings, the lower of which he gave to the men so that they would not be discouraged. It is not until 25 September that he concludes that one of the reckonings was false and the other true. Las Casas evidently found two reckonings in the journal and may even have found the explanation given: that Columbus gave the men the lower figure to keep their spirits up. But there is no suggestion until 25 September that Columbus was actually trying to deceive the men.

The evidence of the MS supports a reinterpretation of the two reckonings by the American scholar James E. Kelley Jr. Kelley (1983) argues that as Columbus was an Italian he would have been used to a shorter league than the crew, all but four of whom were Spaniards. Columbus therefore converted his own reckoning to one which the crew would have been used to. The latter numbers, as it happens, were smaller: when Columbus estimated that he had sailed 707 leagues by 1 October, he told the men 584. The psychological advantage may have been the same as working in miles and kilometres: the distances are the same, but someone used to thinking in miles always seems to get there quicker in kilometres. It may well be, then, that Las Casas quite simply misunderstood Columbus's method of reckoning and misinterpreted his motives: he did not give the men the lower figure to persuade them that they had not sailed as far as they had; he gave them the lower figure so that they would not feel that they had sailed *further* than they had. Significantly, Kelley does not refer to Las Casas's amendment to the MS of the digest. This may be because historians have not always been as fully sensitised to textual issues as they should, or simply because only one edition of the *Diario* Kelley could have used would have told him that the amendment was there.

What I have tried to show so far is that Las Casas emerges from a careful study of the text of the *Diario*, as a much more reliable witness than is popularly supposed, a copyist who tries to respect the distinction between facts and editorial comment, a man inclined to be led by the detail of what he saw in front of him as he picked his way through the journal trying to make sense of something which was often unclear and garbled, and couched in rather rudimentary Spanish. Without doubt he must frequently have got it wrong, and even when he chose to record the Admiral's very words, his selection of what to preserve must be open to the charge of editorialising and tendentiousness. But because what we have is Las Casas's own working copy, the careful application of textual and linguistic criticism can help to bring to the surface the original text which lies beneath.

We can also do what on the face of it might seem impossible: compare the readings which Las Casas made on at least two different occasions. Remember that Las Casas's objective in making the summary was to use it as the basis for part of the *Historia de las Indias*. We only have to read through chapters 35-75 of the *Historia* to see how closely Las Casas relied on this digest of the Journal. There is hardly a word of the digest which does not find its way into the *Historia* in some form, and for the most part Las Casas follows closely the order of events and the distinction between summary and verbatim transcription. This means that he frequently re-summarizes material he has already summarized, or summarizes in the *Historia* material which is given verbatim in the *Diario*, or transcribes the same verbatim text twice.

My last example shows how subtly Las Casas operated in reporting and editorialising modes. Figures 10 and 11 reproduce an extract from Columbus's first impressions of the native inhabitants of Guanahaní, one from the *Diario* entry for 13 October, and one from the equivalent passage from the MS of the *Historia de las Indias*. Note the page layout of the latter text, with its narrow central column of text and the use of the margins for later insertions. Figure 12 consists of a transcription of the relevant passage from each of the two sources corresponding to parts of the *Diario* entries for 12 and 13 October. For ease of comparison I have transcribed both the *Diario* and the *Historia* texts according to the same conventions, and I have also reproduced Las Casas's original punctuation in each case (a slash, a colon and a slash and a point), because this can help us to judge how slavish a copyist he is, and can sometimes indicate openness or closure in his thinking.

almujerats (. Sabado. 13. de octubre ..

y luego amaneció vinieron a la playa muchos
destos hombres, todos mançebos como dicho tengo:
y todos de buena estatura, gente muy hermosa:
los cabellos no crespos salvo corredíos y gruesos
como sedas de cavallo: y todos de la frente
y cabeça muy ancha más que otra generación
que fasta aquí aya visto /. y los ojos muy
fermosos y no pequeños: y ellos ninguno
prieto salvo de la color de los canarios: ni se
debe esperar otra cosa pues está leste: guaste a
la ysleta del fierro en canaria, so una línea
las piernas muy derechas todos a una mano:
y no barriga salvo muy bien hecha. Ellos
vinieron a la nao con almadías y son hechas
del pie de un árbol como un barco luengo, luego
y todo de un pedaço y labrado muy amarradillo
según la tierra y grandes en que en algunas venían
40 y 45 hombres /. y otras más pequeñas
fasta aver dellas en que venía un solo hombre.
Remaban con una pala como de fornero y

La ysleta de guanahani está en el altura que la ysleta del fierro.

canoas

Figure 10 – Diario f9v, 13 October 1492.

Luego que amaneció vinieron a la playa muchos destos hombres, todos mançebos como dicho tengo; y todos de buena estatura, gente muy hermosa; los cabellos no crespos salvo corredíos y gruesos como sedas de cavallo; y todos de la frente y cabeça muy ancha, más que otra generación que fasta aquí aya visto, y los ojos muy fermosos y no pequeños. Y ellos ninguno prieto, salvo de la color de los canarios; ni se deve esperar otra cosa pues está leste: guaste a la ysleta del Fierro en Canaria so una línea. Las piernas muy derechas, todos a una mano; y no barriga salvo muy bien hecha. Ellos vinieron a la nao con almadías que son hechas del pie de un árbol como un barco luengo y todo de un pedaço y labrado muy a maravilla según la tierra y grandes en que en algunas venían 40 y 45 hombres; y otras más pequeñas fasta aver dellas en que venía un solo hombre. Remaban con una pala como de fornero... [Ife 1990: 30] First marginal annotation (within box): La ysleta de guanahani está en el altura que la ysleta del fierro. Second marginal annotation: canoas.

<p>Diario f 9v 12 October (original punctuation)</p> <p>[...] ellos todos a una mano son de buena estatura de grandeza y buenos gestos bien hechos/. <u>yo vide algunos que tenían señales de feridas en sus cuerpos y les hize señas qué era aquello: y ellos me amostraron cómo allí venían gente de otras yslas que estaban açerca y los querían tomar y se defendían y yo creý e creo que aquí vienen de tierra firme a tomarlos por captivos/:</u> ellos deven ser buenos servidores y de buen ingenio que veo que muy presto dizen todo lo que les dezía: y creo que ligeramente se harían cristianos que <u>me pareçió que ninguna secta tenían/.</u> <u>yo plaziendo a Nuestro Señor levaré de aquí al tiempo de mi partida seys a Vuestras Altezas para que deprendan hablar/.</u> <u>ninguna bestia de ninguna manera vide salvo papagayos en esta ysla/.</u> todas son palabras del almirante/.</p>	<p>Historia f 130v Chapter 40 (original punctuation)</p> <p>[...] ellos todos a una mano son de buena estatura de grandeza y buenos gestos bien hechos/.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Ellos deven ser buenos servidores/ y de buen ingenio: que veo que muy presto dizen todo lo que les dezía: y creo que ligeramente se harían cristianos que pareçió que ninguna secta tenían [toda] etc/.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">todas <u>estas</u> son palabras del almirante/.</p>
<p>Diario f 9v 13 October (original punctuation)</p> <p>[...] todos de buena estatura/ gente muy <u>fermosa: los cabellos no crespos salvo <u>corredíos</u> y gruessos <u>como sedas de cavallo:</u> y todos de la frente y cabeça muy ancha <u>más que otra generación que fasta aquí aya visto/.</u> y los ojos muy <u>fermosos</u> y no pequeños: y <u>ellos ninguno prieto</u> salvo de la color de los canarios/: <u>ni se deve esperar otra cosa pues está leste güeste con la ysla del fierro en canaria so una línea/ las piernas muy derechas todos a una mano: y no barriga salvo muy bien hecha/.</u></u></p>	<p>Historia ff 130v-131r Chapter 40 (original punctuation)</p> <p>[...] todos de buena estatura gente muy <u>hermosa: los cabellos no crespos salvo <u>correntíos</u> y gruessos:</u> y todos de la frente y cabeça muy ancha: <i>y los ojos muy <u>hermosos</u> y no pequeños: y ninguno <u>negro</u>, salvo de la color de los canarios/ [y no se deve] <u>ni se deve esperar otra cosa pues están leste güeste con la ysla del hierro en Canaria so una línea/: las piernas muy derechas</u> <u>todas a una mano: y no barriga salvo muy bien hecha etc</u></i></p>

Figure 12 – transcriptions from figures 10 and 11. *Italics* represent verbatim text. Underlined text is different from or missing from the parallel text. ~~Strikethrough~~ text indicates an amendment by Las Casas.

Several things are notable from a comparison of this text in its two states: the omission from the *Historia* of the mention of the wounds on their natives' bodies and the explanation given for them; the omission of Columbus's suggestion that he intended to take some of the natives captive in order that they might 'learn to speak' (presumably speak Castilian...); and the omission of Columbus's comparison of the natives' hair to a horse's mane. These are clearly editorial omissions designed to spare the Admiral's memory.

However, equally notable are some examples of scholarly fastidiousness on Las Casas's part. There are several silent linguistic corrections and updatings of what we might now presume were Columbus's original spellings and preferred word forms: initial *h* for *f*; *correntíos* for *corredíos*; *negro* for *prieto*; and a corrected verb form *están* for *está*. Changes, certainly, but changes which appear to support the view that what Las Casas recorded in the *Diario* text was what he saw in front of him while he was transcribing. Only when he came to write his own account in the *Historia* did his own native command of Spanish oblige him to 'correct' Columbus's non-native efforts.

But perhaps the most telling evidence of Las Casas's scholarly conscience comes in the way he struck out the word 'toda' after the phrase 'ninguna secta tenían'. He was clearly about to write 'todas estas son palabras del almirante' as he did immediately afterwards. But not before he had written 'etc' to indicate that, although these were all the Admiral's words, they were not *all* of the Admiral's words. Even the journalist in Las Casas could not fail to note that he had been economical with his quotation at this point.

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Henige's (1991) view that several authors contributed to the text of the *Diario* is indisputable in many ways, but a detailed and systematic study of the several surviving documents which derive from the missing log book could support a more positive construction than Henige puts on the evidence. Henige professes to be a sceptic and his analysis of the texts under review is helpful to that extent. But I wonder if his scepticism stretches quite far enough to admit that Las Casas may have been equally comfortable as a scholar and an advocate, understood the difference between operating in these two quite different modes, and was more than capable of at least trying to keep them distinct.

More interesting still is the fact that the two MSS Las Casas left behind illustrate between them that the question of fidelity in the *Diario* is the wrong question. Even the very few examples discussed in this article show what a challenge these texts represent to editorial practice. There simply is no text of the journal of the first voyage. On at least three different occasions over a period of 30-40 years, Las Casas read and re-read the events of the first voyage. Each time he turned his latest reading into a new text, and as we can see from the MSS themselves, each new text was provisional, subject to multiple erasures and reinscriptions. The only way this process can be captured editorially is through the construction of a hypertext edition, in which a layered representation in typography can be tied back to the MS images. Conventional editorial practices simply cannot do justice to the fluidity with which these travelling texts were constructed and transmitted.

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