First a preliminary remark: by order of Queen Isabella of Castile reports about discoveries and conquests in the New World were forbidden to be printed and published. For this reason Anghiera's exceptional background has to be explained.

Anghiera, born in Italy in 1457, received his humanistic education at the school of the court of Milan. Later he continued his studies in Rome, where he was admitted to join the circle of Pomponius Laetus, philologist, archaeologist, historian, and head of the Roman Academy. Pomponius Laetus’ enthusiasm for various aspects of antiquity and his humanity made a lasting impression on him. In particular, he was led to a meticulous examination of historiographical evidence, to philological precision in textual criticism, and to securing reliable geographical and scientific information.1

At that time, a war between Pope Innocent VIII of Rome and King Ferdinand of Naples caused an intervention of the Catholic Kings of Spain. They sent the Count of Tendilla as a mediator to Rome. Anghiera composed an epyllion in praise of the successful Spanish Count.

Tendilla, an admirer of Italian culture, was delighted to be honoured by a well-known Italian humanist, and pleased to be presented as a hero of peace in a poem written in Latin. Therefore he invited Anghiera to Spain in order to introduce him to Queen Isabella of Castile and to King Ferdinand of Aragon, for the count was well aware of the fact that the Queen especially intended to promote classical studies and culture at her court in order to keep pace with her European neighbours. Anghiera was glad to leave behind the arrogance of power and corruption in Rome. As

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the count’s guest at his Spanish residence, where the court was also stay-
ing, he was presented to the Catholic Kings, was admitted to the court, got enrolled in the Queen’s entourage, and took part in the fight against Moorish Granada. After the war, he was ordained as a priest, made canon of the cathedral of Granada, and was granted the title *Maestro en las artes liberales a los nobles*.

As an instructor of the young noblemen residing at the court, among them relatives of the sovereigns, and as the Queen’s chaplain, he had obtained a position of trust and witnessed all of the important events in which the Catholic Kings were involved, including the triumphant reception of Columbus (Colón) returning from his first and sensational expedition to America.

All discoverers, conquerors, and private ship-owners, returning from America, had to give Anghiera, now an influential courtier, first an oral account of their journey and afterwards a written statement. One main line of interest in his questionings was directed towards anthropological specifics. On the basis of his notes and their permanent updating, he became an expert on the Spanish colonies in the New World and was appointed Royal Chronicler.

In private personal letters, he informed various dignitaries, both eccle-
siastical and secular, including on several occasions different popes, of the discoveries. This correspondence was a diplomatic matter on behalf of the Catholic Kings, primarily because they felt obliged to contact the respective pope who was directly concerned in Christianizing the natives of America.

This steadily increasing correspondence, documenting the Spanish dis-
coveries and conquests, arranged in decades and entitled *De Orbe Novo Decades* enhanced Anghiera’s prestige.

In Queen Isabella’s lifetime any publication about the New World was forbidden. But after her death, when Ferdinand of Aragon became just prince regent (not king) of Castile, the influential viceroy of Granada, the Count of Tendilla, Anghiera’s patron, intervened for political and personal reasons. He and other Spanish grandees were indignant at the fact that the publication of Portuguese discoveries achieved great eminence, whereas the glory of the Spanish discoverers fell into oblivion. Therefore he urged Anghiera to publish his letters about the New World. They were printed in 1511, entitled *Prima de Orbe Novo Decas* and published. Obtaining this permission to have the decade published and printed was a unique stroke of luck, an event that was not to be repeated for Spanish historians writing about America after Anghiera.