

**Restoring the Illegible: the unexpected uses of alphabetic writing and the book in early colonial Peru (Fellowship am Dahlem Humanities Center, Freie Universität Berlin, von Dr. Laura Monica Leon Llerena)**

Initiative: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und Forschungsinstituten  
in Deutschland und den USA

Ausschreibung: Postdoctoral Fellowships in den Geisteswissenschaften an Universitäten und  
Forschungsinstituten in Deutschland

Bewilligung: 23.03.2016

Laufzeit: 1 Jahre

"Restoring the Illegible" offers a new understanding of the social role of alphabetic writing and of the materiality of the book in a native Andean society in the 16th and early 17th centuries. Alphabetic writing was introduced in the Americas as a tool of evangelization and colonization and its effects are often referred to by modern scholars as the "tyranny of writing". By combining historical, literary and anthropological approaches, this study argues that writing took an additional and unexpected social function when it was appropriated by natives in the Andean province of Huarochirí. Besides serving as a tool for the native and European society to become mutually legible, it also became a new means of communication within indigenous society. In this new function, writing by natives followed neither the narrative genres nor the discursive logic of western texts, becoming almost 'illegible' in the eyes of non-natives. This study analyzes what scholars identify as instances of 'illegibility' in some Colonial indigenous Andean texts, and proposes to reconsider legibility as a culturally and historically defined capacity to read and grasp meaning. The project demonstrates how in the province of Huarochirí alphabetic writing was given a non-Western social function, one that developed out of the coexistence and interaction with quipus, a pre-Hispanic system of knotted cords used to record quantitative and narrative information. "Restoring the Illegible" questions the way in which Colonial Latin American Studies are defined by the 'legibility' of the sources, marginalizing those texts that are not in the language of the colonizer or that do not follow the discursive logic of canonic documents.

**Projektbeteiligte**

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