In the 16th century, Spain expanded its control over many countries, including the Yucatán Peninsula. Spanish conquistadors had guns, which they used to impose their control. Guns gave them an advantage over the Maya and other people of Central America.

Spain also sent friars (members of Catholic religious orders) to study the Maya and convert them to Catholicism. One of those friars was Diego de Landa, who went to the Yucatán in 1549.

Landa and other friars tried, by various means, to convert the Maya to Catholicism. But, in 1562, Maya idols were discovered in a cave. These idols worried Landa because it meant that the Maya were still following their old religion. Landa declared all Maya texts to be “works of the devil.” He burned thousands of Maya religious books and other texts. In addition, Landa had about 4,500 Maya put in prison and tortured. Some 200 Maya died in prison. These killings were so brutal that Landa was recalled to Spain put on trial. In his own defense, Landa wrote “Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán,” in which Landa described Maya culture and religious beliefs. Landa eventually cleared his name, and returned in 1572 as bishop of the Yucatán.

Landa spent time studying the Maya people and their culture. He interviewed Maya and learned about their history, culture, and language.

Maya language had a complex system of writing called glyphs. When Landa asked the Maya about their written language, he assumed they used an alphabet much like his own. Landa is thought to have asked the Maya which glyphs matched the letters “a,” “b,” “c,” and so on in Spanish. The Maya responded by showing Landa glyphs that matched the sound of those letters. Landa summarized the glyphs in his book.

Ironically, despite Landa’s efforts to destroy the Maya culture, his book provides an important link to that culture. His record of the glyphs is still used today to help translate Maya writing.
Answer the question in a well-written paragraph. Write in complete sentences (2 pts). Make sure to include a topic sentence (1 pt) and concluding sentence (1 pt). Include at least three reasons (2 pts each) to support your opinion. It is worth 10 points.

How do you think that Diego de Landa should be remembered by Maya living today—as someone who destroyed their culture or as someone who preserved and passed on their culture?

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