The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico

Miguel León-Portilla

INTRODUCTION

On November 8, 1519, the Spanish conquistadors first entered the great city of Mexico, the metropolis the Aztecs had built on a lake island. Don Hernando Cortes, who was accompanied by six hundred Spaniards and a great many native allies, at last could see for himself the temples and palaces about which he had heard so many marvels. The Spaniards arrived from the direction of Tlalpan, to the south of the city, passing across one of the wide causeways that connected the island with the mainland. When they reached a locality known as Xoloco, they were welcomed by the last of the Motecuhzomas,[1] who had come out to meet them in the belief that the white men must be Quetzalcoatl and other gods, returning at last from across the waters now known as the Gulf of Mexico. Thus Cortes and his men entered the city, not only as guests, but also as gods coming home. It was the first direct encounter between one of the most extraordinary pre-Columbian cultures and the strangers who would eventually destroy it.

Cortes landed on the coast at Veracruz on Good Friday, April 21, 1519; the Aztec capital surrendered to him on August 13, 1521. The events that took place between these two dates have been recounted in a number of chronicles and other writings, of which the best known are the letters Cortes wrote to King Charles V and the *True History of the Conquest of Mexico* by Bernal Diaz del Castillo. These two works, along with a few others also written by Spaniards, until now have been almost the only basis on which historians have judged the conquest of one of the greatest civilizations in pre-Columbian America.

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But these chronicles present only one side of the story, that of the conquerors. For some reason—scorn, perhaps—historians have failed to consider that the conquered might have set down their own version in their own language. This book is the first to offer a selection from those indigenous accounts, some of them written as early as 1528, only seven years after the fall of the city. These writings make up a brief history of the Conquest as told by the victims, and include passages written by native priests and wise men who managed to survive the persecution and death that attended the final struggle. The manuscripts from which we have drawn are now preserved in a number of different libraries, of which the most important are the National Library in Paris, the Laurenziana Library in Florence and the library of the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City.

The Indian accounts of the Conquest contain many passages whose dramatic interest is equal to that of the great classical epics. As Homer, singing in the *Iliad* of the fall of Troy, depicted scenes of the most vivid tragic realism, so the native writers, masters of the black and red ink,[2] evoked the most dramatic moments of the Conquest. A few paragraphs from the documents presented in this book will make this clear.

The Indian chroniclers describe the beginning of the terrible slaughter perpetrated by Pedro de Alvarado in the patio of the main temple in Tenochtitlan. After mentioning the first rituals of the fiesta that was being celebrated—a fiesta in which "song was linked to song"—they tell how the Spaniards entered the sacred patio:

> They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor.
>
> They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from

behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.

They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were torn from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen, and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape.

Another passage, a masterpiece of the descriptive art of the Aztecs, shows how the Indians pictured the "stags or deer" on which the Spaniards rode. Motolinia, one of the early missionaries, wrote that the Indians "were filled with wonder to behold their horses, and the Spaniards riding on their backs." Now they present their own description, so vivid that it recalls another extraordinary picture of the horse, written in Hebrew by the author of the Book of Job. They report:

The "stags" came forward, carrying the soldiers on their backs. The soldiers were wearing cotton armor.[3] They bore their leather shields and their iron spears in their hands, but their swords hung down from the necks of the "stags."

These animals wear little bells, they are adorned with many little bells. When the "stags" gallop, the bells make a loud clamor, ringing and reverberating.

These "stags," these "horses," snort and bellow. They sweat a very great deal, the sweat pours from their bodies in streams. The foam from their muzzles drips onto the ground. It spills out in fat drops, like a lather of amole.[4]

They make a loud noise when they run; they make a great din, as if stones were raining on the earth. Then the ground is pitted and scarred where they set down their hooves. It opens wherever their hooves touch it.

The indigenous documents contain a number of scenes like these, so vivid that they seem to invite the artist to interpret them with his pen or brush. But to understand this epic narrative of the Conquest, it is important to know something of Aztec history, geography and culture. The following sketch is necessarily limited to the broad outlines, but at least it will provide a context in which the indigenous narratives can be seen more clearly.

Cultural Stages of Ancient Mexico

The grandeur that the conquistadors beheld in the Aztec capital was obviously not the result of spontaneous generation. It was the last phase of a long cultural sequence beginning well before the Christian era. In this brief review of the evolution of culture in ancient Mexico, we will attempt to correlate the various stages with well-known events in the history of the Old World.

Although man has existed on earth for at least half a million years, the first human beings to reach the American continent appear to have arrived only about twenty thousand years ago. Man is an even more recent phenomenon in the Valley of Mexico, since the most ancient human fossil—discovered in Tepexpan, near the famous pyramids of Teotihuacan—is probably no more than ten thousand years old.

The development of superior cultural forms also came much later in America than in the Old World. Egypt and Mesopotamia had contrived modes of writing as far back as the fourth millennium before Christ, but in America—specifically in Mexico—we must wait until the middle of the second millennium B.C. before we can discover the earliest vestiges of systematic agriculture and the making of pottery.

The most ancient architectural remains in Mexico, indicating the presence of ceremonial centers, date from about five hundred years before Christ, a time when the Old World had already heard the words of the Biblical prophets, and when the first pre-Socratic philosophers had already spoken in Greece. Perhaps the earliest cultural ferment of any importance in pre-Columbian Mexico took place on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico. A number of extraordinary artifacts have been found there, along with the oldest calendar inscription yet discovered. For lack of a better name, these mysterious artificers have been called the Olmecs, an Aztec word meaning "people of the region of rubber." At a later period their art, techniques and religious ideas influenced a number of groups which had migrated from the distant northern shores of the Pacific Ocean. This cultural influence was to have significant and widespread consequences.

At the beginning of the Christian era, while Rome was consolidating her empire and Christianity had begun to spread through the Mediterranean world, Mexico witnessed the emergence of what can also be called true empires. The foundations of the earliest sacred cities of the Mayas—Tikal, Uaxactun, Copan and Palenque—were constructed in the jungles of Central America. And in the central region of Mexico, about thirty-five miles north of the modern capital, the great "city of the gods"—Teotihuacan—began to rise. Its pyramids, palaces, sculptures, frescoes and inscriptions would become a paradigm and inspiration for the artists and artisans of later peoples. Many of its inscriptions and representations of the gods were reproduced in the Aztec art and codices of the Conquest period. The apogee of Mayan and Teotihuacan culture coincides in time with the fall of the Roman Empire.

During the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. inscriptions based on a partly ideographic, partly phonetic mode of writing became extremely abundant, especially among the Mayas. They testify to the fact that these cultures possessed a profound sense of time and history. The Mayan calendar is further proof, for it was slightly closer to the astronomical year than our own present-day calendar, and much closer than that being used in Europe at the same period.

The great ritual centers at Teotihuacan and in the Mayan area began to decline in the eighth and ninth centuries and were eventually abandoned. The causes are for the most part unknown. Some authors have attributed their downfall to the arrival of new tribes from the north; at least it is certain that the northern barbarians—like the Germanic tribes in the Roman world—were a constant threat to established cultures. In Europe the ninth century saw the consolidation of feudalism; a little later new kingdoms were founded within a cultural milieu composed of Greco-Roman and barbarian elements. A new state also arose in central Mexico and culturally it was also a composite, having been greatly influenced by the Teotihuacan civilization. This was the so-called "Toltec Empire," composed of people from the north who spoke the same Nahuatl tongue which a few centuries later became the language of the Aztecs.

The Toltecs settled in Tula, about fifty-five miles northeast of the City of Mexico, and under the aegis of their great culture-hero, Quetzalcoatl, they gradually extended the civilization created at Teotihuacan. A number of indigenous texts describe the Toltecs in detail: they were superb artisans, devout worshipers, skillful tradesmen—extraordinary persons in every way. Their prestige became so great that for the Aztecs the word "Toltec" was a synonym for "artist." The cultural achievements of the Toltecs spread far beyond their city at Tula; in fact their influence even reached down into Yucatan and Central America, where it can be clearly discerned in the Mayan religious center at Chichen-Itza. As a result of these Toltec influences, the Mayas experienced a major cultural renascence.

But Tula, like other cities before it, was finally abandoned, perhaps because of fresh invasions from the north. Quetzalcoatl departed eastward, promising that some day he would return from across the sea. The new arrivals adopted the cultures of Teotihuacan and the Toltecs, and a number of city-states began to form along the shores of the great lake in the Valley of Mexico. This was the beginning of another cultural renascence, almost exactly contemporaneous with the early Renaissance in Italy.

In the thirteenth century two of the city-states

The Valley of Mexico

achieved considerable splendor. One of them, the famous Culhuacan, was located on the southern shore of the lake, near what is now the University of Mexico. Much of its greatness resulted from the fact that many of its inhabitants were of Toltec origin. The other state, Azcapotzalco, which now forms part of the northeastern sector of the capital, was a mixture of a great many ethnic groups. Its people were especially gifted as warriors and administrators, and Azcapotzalco therefore became a good deal more powerful than its neighbor to the south.

The Aztecs or Mexicas were the last of the many nomadic tribes to enter the Valley of Mexico from the north. They arrived during the middle of the thirteenth century, and attempted to settle in one or another of the flourishing city-states, but wherever they appeared, they were violently driven away as undesirable foreigners. It is true that they spoke the same language as the old Toltecs, but otherwise they were almost totally uncultured. The only heritage they brought with them, besides the Nahuatl tongue, was an indomitable will.

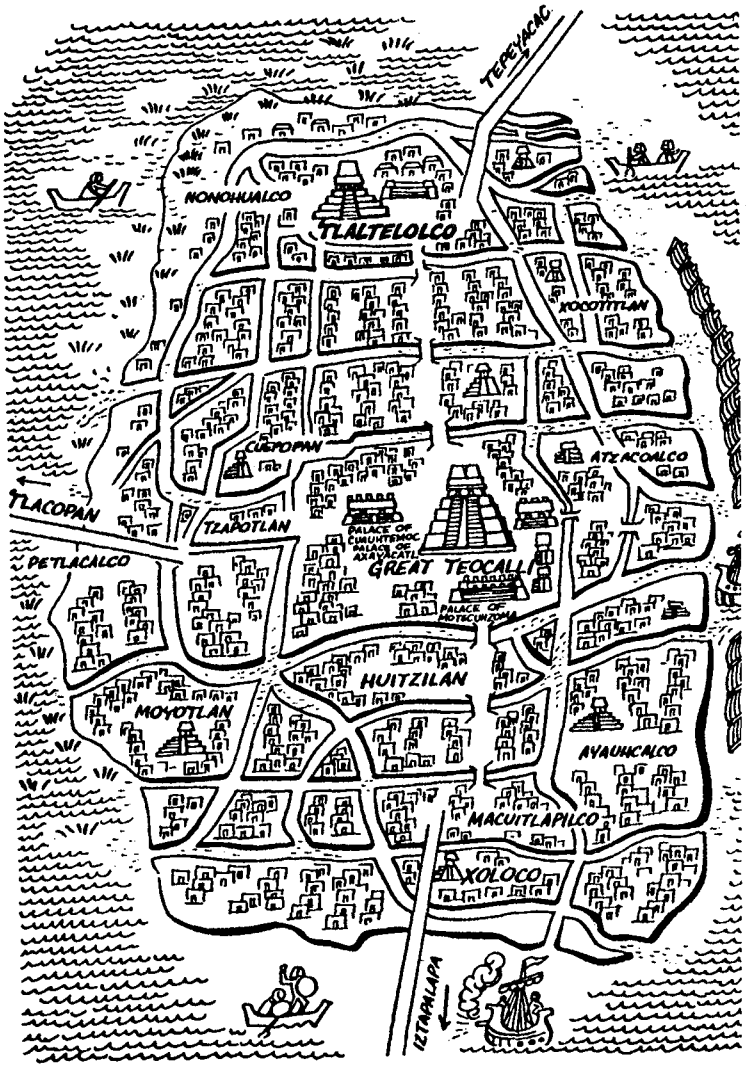
After a whole series of defeats and humiliations, the Aztecs succeeded in establishing themselves on an island in the lake; the ancient codices state that their city was founded in the year 1325. A little more than a century later, incredible as it may seem, this destitute tribe had been able to assimilate the old cultural traditions and, at the same time, to achieve complete independence. Then they began their career as conquerors, extending their rule from the Gulf coast to the Pacific and as far south as Guatemala—and again they accomplished all this in only one century. Their capital grew rich and powerful, much more powerful than Teotihuacan or Tula had ever been. Its temples, palaces and gardens were so magnificent that the Spanish conquistadors gaped in astonishment.

During this same period, however, the Old World had begun to discover new regions. Portuguese navigators reached Madeira and the Azores between 1416 and 1432—the first step toward the discovery of the New World. Other explorers crossed the Equator off the coast of Africa in about 1470, and in 1487 Bartolomew Diaz sailed as far as the Cape of Good Hope. Less than a decade later Christopher Columbus landed on the shores of America. Hence, the "explosion" which spread Aztec rule and planted Aztec culture over vast regions was contemporaneous with another expansionist movement, and the latter, with superior weapons, techniques and tactics, proved much the more powerful. When the Old World and the Aztecs in the New World met face to face on that November day in 1519, their attitudes toward each other were very different. The Aztecs, as we have said, thought the strangers were Quetzalcoatl and other gods returning from over the sea, while the Spaniards—despite their amazement at the splendors of Tenochtitlan—considered the Aztecs barbarians and thought only of seizing their riches and of forcing them to become Christians and Spanish subjects.

This confrontation, vividly described both by the conquistadors and the natives, was something more than a meeting between two expanding nations; it was the meeting of two radically dissimilar cultures, two radically different modes of interpreting existence. Spain had recently brought the long wars of reconquest against the Moors to a triumphant conclusion and was now the greatest power in Europe. The Aztec state had also reached a climax, and its magnificence was evident in its capital city and its vigorous religious, social, economic and political structure. To understand more clearly the tragic loss that resulted from the destruction of indigenous culture, it will be useful to view the great city as the "gods" viewed it before they leveled it to the ground.

Tenochtitlan, the Aztec Metropolis

The beginnings of the Aztec capital were very humble. It was founded on a low-lying island so undesirable that other tribes had not bothered to occupy it. The indigenous chronicles describe the difficulties with which the Aztecs managed to build a few miserable huts and a small altar to their supreme deity, the war-god Huitzilopochtli. But their fierce will overcame every obstacle. Less than two centuries later, the Spanish conquistador Bernal Diaz del Castillo thought that the wonders he beheld must be a dream. The Spaniards had been welcomed into the city as guests of Motecuhzoma, and a party of them—led by Cortes—climbed up to the flat top of the



Pre-Columbian Mexico-Tenochtitlan

pyramid on which the main temple was built. They were met by the Aztec king himself, who pointed out the various sites.

> So we stood looking about us, for that huge and cursed temple stood so high that from it one could see over everything very well, and we saw the three causeways which led into Mexico, that is the causeway of Iztapalapa by which we had entered four days before, and that of Tacuba, and that of Tepeaquilla, and we saw the fresh water that comes from Chapultepec which supplies the city, and we saw the bridges on the three causeways which were built at certain distances apart through which the water of the lake flowed in and out from one side to the other, and we beheld on that great lake a great multitude of canoes, some coming with supplies of food and others returning loaded with cargoes of merchandise; and we saw that from every house of that great city and of all the other cities that were built in the water it was impossible to pass from house to house, except by drawbridges which were made of wood or in canoes; and we saw in those cities Cues [temples] and oratories like towers and fortresses and all gleaming white, and it was a wonderful thing to behold; then the houses with flat roofs, and on the causeways other small towers and oratories which were like fortresses.
>
> After having examined and considered all that we had seen we turned to look at the great market place and the crowds of people that were in it, some buying and others selling, so that the murmur and hum of their voices and words that they used could be heard more than a league off. Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that so large a market place and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before.[5]

The Spanish soldier had good reasons for describing the city in such enthusiastic terms. Almost nothing remains today of what he saw, but his account is corroborated by other writings, ancient maps and archaeological investigations.

At the time of the Conquest, the area of the island on which the city stood had been increased by means of fills, until it comprised a more or less regular square measuring about two miles on each side. It was joined on the north to the island of Tlatelolco, originally an independent city, but annexed by the Aztecs in 1473. [A causeway] ran to the sanctuary of the mother-goddess Tonantzin on the northern shore of the lake. At the present day the site of her temple is occupied by the Basilica of Tepeyac, dedicated to Mexico's patron saint, the Virgin of Guadalupe.

To the south of Tenochtitlan, another causeway—the one by which the Spaniards entered—joined the mainland at Iztapalapa. The eastern edge of the city bordered the wide expanse of the lake, and only during the clearest weather was it possible to see the city of Tezcoco, home of the famous poet-king Nezahualcoyotl, on the opposite shore. Finally, on the west, another causeway joined the city with the allied kingdom of Tlacopan or Tacuba; it was along this causeway that the Spaniards fled on the disastrous Night of Sorrows.

Tenochtitlan was divided into four great sections. To the northwest stood Cuepopan, "the place where flowers bloom," which now forms the *barrio* or sector known as Santa Maria la Redonda; to the southwest, Moyotlan, "the place of the gnats," later dedicated by the Spanish missionaries to the honor of St. John the Baptist; to the southeast, Teopan, "the place of the gods," which included the precinct of the main temple and which was known in colonial times by the name of San Pablo; and to the northeast, Atzacoalco, "in the house of the herons," which became the site where the missionaries built the church of San Sebastian.

The two most important places in the capital were the sacred precinct of the main temple, with its related temples, schools and other structures (in all, it contained seventy-eight buildings), and the huge plaza in Tlatelolco that served as the principal market place, offering an astonishing variety of products from far and near. The walled precinct of the main temple formed a great square measuring approximately five hundred yards on each side. Today nothing is left of the temple except a few remains that can be seen near the eastern walls of the Cathedral of Mexico. A model of the precinct has recently been installed there.

The palace of Axayacatl, who ruled from 1469 to 1481, stood on the western side of the main temple, and it was here that the Spaniards were lodged when they arrived in the city as Motecuhzoma's guests. The palace of Motecuhzoma, facing a broad plaza, stood on the site now occupied by the National Palace of Mexico. And in addition to these and other structures, there was a large number of lesser temples and stone and mortar buildings reserved as living quarters for the nobles, merchants, artists and other persons. The streets of Tenochtitlan were comparatively narrow, many of them with canals through which canoes from the lakeshore could reach the center of the city. The capital boasted many other attractions, and the Spaniards were particularly impressed by the botanical and zoological gardens, as nothing of the kind existed at that time in their native land.

The population of Tenochtitlan at the time of the Conquest has been the subject of considerable controversy, but beyond question it must have amounted at least to a quarter of a million. The activities were many and colorful. Fiestas, sacrifices and other rituals were celebrated in honor of the gods. Teachers and students met in the various *calmecac* and *telpuchcalli*, the pre-Hispanic centers of education. The coming and going of merchant canoes and the constant bustle in the Tlatelolco market impressed the Spaniards so much that they compared the city to an enormous anthill. The military exercises and the arrival and departure of the warriors were other colorful spectacles. In brief, the life of Tenochtitlan was that of a true metropolis. The city was visited by governors and ambassadors from distant regions. Gold, silver, rich feathers, cocoa, bark paper and other types of tribute, along with slaves and victims for the human sacrifices, streamed in along the streets and canals. The Spaniards were right: Tenochtitlan was indeed an anthill, in which each individual worked unceasingly to honor the gods and augment the grandeur of the city.

The Aztec Empire

The wealth and military power of Tenochtitlan were a result of the conquests accomplished by Itzcoatl, who ruled between 1428 and 1440. He had joined with Nezahualcoyotl, king of Tezcoco, to defeat Azcapotzalco and to form the so-called "triple alliance," made up of Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco and the relatively insignificant city of Tlacopan (Tacuba).

Another important factor in the growth of Aztec power was the shrewd work of the royal counselor Tlacaelel, nephew to Itzcoatl, who instituted a number of significant reforms in the tribe's political, religious, social and economic structure. As a profound student of the cultural elements inherited from the Toltecs, he made use of everything that served his purpose—but he also gave everything a special slant, for his purpose was to consolidate the strength and wealth of the city. One of the indigenous texts in the *Codice Matritense* describes how Itzcoatl and Tlacaelel rewarded the principal Aztec chieftains with lands and titles after the victory over Azcapotzalco, and then says that the king and his adviser decided to give their people a new version of Aztec history.

> They preserved an account of their history,
> but later it was burned,
> during the reign of Itzcoatl.
> The lords of Mexico decreed it,
> the lords of Mexico declared:
> "It is not fitting that our people
> should know these pictures.
> Our people, our subjects, will be lost
> and our land destroyed,
> for these pictures are full of lies. . . .

In the new version, recorded in a number of extant documents, the Aztecs claim to be descended from the Toltec nobility, and their gods—Huitzilopochtli in particular—are raised to the same level as the ancient creative gods Tezcatlipoca and Quetzalcoatl. But most important of all is the exalted praise given to what can only be called a mystical conception of warfare, dedicating the Aztec people, the "people of the sun," to the conquest of all other nations. In part the motive was simply to extend the rule of Tenochtitlan, but the major purpose was to capture victims for sacrifice, because the source of all life, the sun, would die unless it were fed with human blood.

As a result, Huitzilopochtli ceased to be the tutelary god of a poor band of outcasts, and his rise to greatness coincided with that of the Aztecs themselves. The old Toltec prayers, most of them directed to Quetzalcoatl, were revised in his favor, and his priests composed a number of others. Since he was identified with the sun, he was called "the Giver of Life" and "the Preserver of Life." Tlacaelel did not originate the idea that Huitzilopochtli-the-Sun had to be fed the most precious food of all—human blood—but he was unquestionably responsible for the central importance that this idea acquired in the Aztec religion.

There is good evidence that human sacrifices were performed in the Valley of Mexico before the arrival of the Aztecs, but apparently no other tribe ever performed them with such frequency. The explanation seems to be that Tlacaelel persuaded the Aztec kings (he was counselor to Motecuhzoma I and his successor Axayacatl after the death of Itzcoatl) that their mission was to extend the dominions of Huitzilopochtli so that there would be a constant supply of captives to be sacrificed. Fray Diego de Duran wrote that Itzcoatl "took only those actions which were counseled by Tlacaelel," and that he believed it was his mission "to gather together all the nations" in the service of his god. It was also Tlacaelel who suggested the building of the great main temple in Tenochtitlan, dedicated to Huitzilopochtli. Before the Spaniards destroyed it, it was the scene of innumerable sacrifices of captives, first from nearby places and later from such distant regions as Oaxaca, Chiapas and Guatemala.

The changes brought about by Tlacaelel in Aztec religious thought and ritual were his most important

accomplishments, but he also reformed the judicial system, the army, the protocol of the royal court and the organization of *pochtecas*, or traveling merchants, and he even directed the creation of a large botanical garden in Oaxtepec, on the outskirts of Cuauhtla in the present-day state of Morelos. Despite his key role in Aztec history, Tlacaelel never consented to become king, even though the nobles offered him the throne on the death of Itzcoatl in 1440 and again on the death of Motecuhzoma I in 1469. He preferred to be the "power behind the throne," using his influence to realize what he considered to be the grand destiny of his people. He died a little before 1481, without suspecting, of course, that the magnificence and power for which he was so largely responsible would be destroyed in less than forty years. Considering the unquestionable brilliance of this unusual man, who has been seriously neglected by the historians, one is tempted to ask: What would have happened had the Spaniards arrived during his lifetime? The question is unanswerable, but at least it is an interesting topic for speculation.

To return for a moment to the conquests inspired by Tlacaelel's advice, they began, as we have seen, with the defeat of Azcapotzalco and the formation of the alliance with Tezcoco and Tlacopan. Then the Aztecs set out to conquer the other city-states around the lake, and one by one Coyoacan, Cuitlahuac, Xochimilco and Chalco were forced to submit. Other states, alarmed by the Aztecs' growing power, elected to sign treaties with Tenochtitlan and to deliver it tribute. Among these was the city-state of the Tlahuicas, a people with the same language and culture as the Aztecs, in the southern part of what is now the state of Morelos.

Next the Aztecs marched eastward toward the Gulf coast, where the people of Cempoala also agreed to pay tribute. It was in Cempoala that the Spaniards later took excellent advantage of the enmity the Cempoaltecas bore toward their masters.

The succeeding phase of Aztec expansion was toward the south. Sometimes the armies arrived as conquerors, at other times in search of trade, but their constant aim was to increase the power of Tenochtitlan. They dominated the present-day states of Oaxaca and Chiapas, penetrated into Guatemala and even—according to some accounts—reached the Isthmus of Panama, sending or bringing back tribute and trade goods to their capital.

The Aztecs, however, always respected the independence of their neighbors, the Tlaxcaltecas, whose state was a "confederation of four republics." There is no doubt that Tenochtitlan could have overwhelmed Tlaxcala without too much difficulty, and the reason it did not is probably that it wanted a nearby source of victims for the human sacrifices. Therefore the Aztecs maintained an almost perpetual state of war with Tlaxcala, but never actually conquered it. Also, the Aztecs seem to have regarded the frequent battles as a convenient way of testing and training their younger warriors. This situation was so hateful to the Tlaxcaltecas that when Cortes arrived they became his most loyal native allies, in the hope that with the aid of the strangers they could at last defeat their oppressors.

By 1519 the Aztecs ruled over several million human beings, who spoke a variety of languages. Their empire stretched from the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf coast and from central Mexico to the present-day Republic of Guatemala. The swift growth of their wealth and power naturally resulted in significant changes in their old way of life. The incipient social classes were consolidated, and the social-political structure became so elaborate that the Spanish conquistadors found it almost as astonishing as some of the city's architectural wonders.

Aztec Society

The stratification into social classes of what had been a mere band of nomads developed in a rather unusual way. Once the Aztecs made contact with the advanced peoples who had inherited Toltec culture, they acquired a profound admiration for them and wanted to link themselves to the Toltec world by bonds of kinship. Hence, they chose as their first king, or *tlatoani*, a nobleman of Toltec origin named Acamapichtli from Culhuacan. He fathered a great many children by various Aztec women, and his descendants formed the nucleus of the social class of nobles, or *pipiltin*, which increased rapidly both in size and importance. The *pipiltin* received a much fuller education than other persons, were allowed to own land in their own names and filled the most important posts in government; the king, or *tlatoani*, could be chosen only from their ranks.

The ordinary citizens formed the social class of the *macehualtin*. They were divided into what have been called geographical clans, that is, groups of related families living in specific localities and making communal use of the land assigned to them. Like the *pipiltin*, the *macehualtin* were required to attend the communal schools, but they were not taught reading, writing, astrology, theology or the other cultural legacies of the Toltecs. They were trained in agriculture and warfare, and some of them became members of the artisan and merchant guilds.

In addition to these two major classes, there were also the *mayeques*, who worked the land for others as slaves or serfs (though almost always for a limited period of time), and a considerable number of actual slaves. It is necessary to point out that neither the *mayeques* nor the slaves were clearly distinguished from the *macehualtin* as social classes.

In Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco and other cities there were groups of wise men known as *tlamatinime*. These scholars carried on the study of the ancient religious thinking of the Toltecs, which Tlacaelel had transformed into a mystical exaltation of war. Despite the popularity of the cult of the war-god, Huitzilopochtli, the *tlamatinime* preserved the old belief in a single supreme god, who was known under a variety of names. Sometimes he was called Tloque-Nahuaque, "Lord of the Close Vicinity," sometimes Ipalnemohuani, "Giver of Life," sometimes Moyocoyatzin, "He who Creates Himself." He also had two aspects, one masculine and one feminine. Thus he was also invoked as Ometeotl, "God of Duality," or given the double names Ometecuhtli and Omecihuatl, "Lord and Lady of Duality," Mictlantecuhtli and Mictecacihuatl, "Lord and Lady of the Region of Death," and others.

It is quite clear that to the *tlamatinime* the long list of names was merely a set of titles for a single god, but the people believed it referred to a whole pantheon of separate deities. This, along with the addition of tutelary gods like Huitzilopochtli, caused the Spaniards to regard the Aztecs as an incredibly idolatrous and polytheistic nation. But a closer analysis of the religious thought of the *tlamatinime* reveals that at least on the upper social levels, only one god was worshiped in Tenochtitlan: the Lord of Duality, the Giver of Life.

Warfare in Ancient Mexico

After Tlacaelel inculcated the idea that Huitzilopochtli-the-Sun had to be fed with the blood of human sacrifices, war became a cultural institution of primary importance in Aztec life, since war was the means of obtaining victims to appease the god's insatiable hunger. Regardless of the ostensible purpose of a military campaign—to conquer new territory, punish a rebellious vassal state, or repel an aggressor—the Aztec warriors never forgot that their first duty was to take captives to be sacrificed. This religious conception of warfare motivated the expansion of the Aztec empire, but it also contributed to its destruction by the Spaniards. On several occasions the Aztecs probably could have wiped out the Spaniards to the last man—their best chance of all was on the Night of Sorrows—but the ceremonial elements in their attitude toward war prevented them from taking full advantage of their opportunities.

As in other cities in central Mexico, military training in Tenochtitlan began during early youth. The army was made up of squads of twenty men, which were combined to form larger units of about four hundred, under a *tiachcauh* who came from the same clan as the warriors he commanded. The more important leaders were usually Eagle or Jaguar Knights, with such titles as *tlacatecatl* (chief of men) and *tlacochcalcatl* (chief of the house of arrows).

The most important offensive weapon of the Aztecs was the *macana*, a sort of paddle-shaped wooden club edged with sharp bits of obsidian. It was so awesomely effective that on more than one occasion during the Conquest warriors beheaded Spanish horses at a single stroke. Other widely used arms were the *atlatl*, or spear thrower, bows and arrows of different sizes, blowguns and a variety of spears and lances, most of them with obsidian points. The defensive weapons were shields made of wood or woven fibers—often elaborately painted and adorned with feathers—and quilted cotton armor. Some of the warriors also wore various types of masks and headdresses to show that they were Eagle or Jaguar Knights or belonged to the higher military ranks.

A war or battle always commenced with a certain ritual: shields, arrows and cloaks of a special kind were sent to the enemy leaders as a formal declaration that they would soon be attacked. This explains the Aztecs' surprise when the Spaniards, their guests, suddenly turned on them without any apparent motive and—more important—without the customary ritual warning.

Pre-Hispanic Education

For over a hundred years before the Conquest, education in Tenochtitlan was compulsory for all male children. They studied either in the specialized *calmecac*, of which there were at least six in the city, or the *telpochcalli*, which were attended by the great majority. The students in the *calmecac* were taught to read and interpret the codices and calendars; they also studied the tribe's history and traditions, and memorized the sacred hymns and other texts. So much emphasis was placed on accurate memorization that after the Conquest it was possible to record many poems and traditions that would otherwise have been lost forever. Most of the

students in the *calmecac* were sons of nobles or priests, but there is evidence that children of humble origin were sometimes admitted if they showed exceptional aptitude.

Almost every sector or clan in Tenochtitlan had its own *telpochcalli*, dedicated to the god Tezcatlipoca. The students were taught the fundamentals of religion and ethics, and were also trained in the arts of war. In comparison with the *calmecac*, the *telpochcalli* offered a more basic and practical education. As we have said, every boy had to attend one of these two types of schools, and every father had to make a solemn vow, on the birth of a son, that he would send the boy to school when he reached the proper age, which seems to have fluctuated between six and nine years.

Pre-Hispanic Writing and Calendars

The highest cultures in ancient Mexico—especially the Mayas, Mixtecs, Toltecs and Aztecs—succeeded in developing their own systems of writing, as we can see from their carved inscriptions and the few pre-Columbian codices that have been preserved. The Aztec system was a combination of pictographic, ideographic and partially phonetic characters or glyphs, representing numerals, calendar signs, names of persons, place names, etc. The Aztecs came closest to true phonetic writing in their glyphs for place names, some of which contained phonetic analyses of syllables or even of letters. For example, the sounds *a*, *e* and *o* were indicated by the symbols for water *(atl)*, bean *(etl)* and road *(otli)*. The paper used in the codices was made by pounding and burnishing strips of bark from the amate tree *(ficus petiolaris)*. The illustrations in the present book have been adapted from post-Hispanic codices, of course, but the original artists used the old modes to depict their version of the Conquest.

Like the Mixtecs and Mayas, the Aztecs had two principal types of calendars. One was the *xiupohualli*, or "year-count," based on the astronomical year and made up of eighteen groups or months of twenty days each, with a remaining period of five days, called *nemontemi*, "those who are there," that was considered extremely unlucky. Despite the additional five days at the end, it became obvious that the calendar was moving ahead of the actual year, and therefore an extra day was added to every fourth year, as with our leap year. The other form of calendar was the *tonalpohualli*, or "day-count." It was not based on the astronomical year, for its twenty months had only thirteen days each; instead it was calibrated to a fifty-two-year "century." The *xiupohualli* and *tonalpohualli* were related in various ways, but the whole topic of pre-Hispanic calendars is far too complicated to be explained in a brief space. We have kept a few of the Aztec year, month and day names in this book, with explanatory footnotes where needed.

Indigenous Literature

The literary "remains" that have survived the Conquest and the intervening years are not as well known as the sculpture and architecture of ancient Mexico, but they are surprisingly rich and abundant. As we have seen, the Aztecs, Mayas and other peoples had their own modes of writing, and some of the pre-Conquest codices are still in existence. In addition, the system of memorization employed in the *calmecac* and *telpochcalli* preserved many of the ancient hymns, myths, epic narratives and other literary compositions. It is true that the Spanish conquistadors—along with certain churchmen—burned almost all of the codices and destroyed the pre-Hispanic centers of education. But a few remarkable missionaries, particularly Bernadino de Sahagun and Diego de Duran, undertook to gather up whatever they could of indigenous literature. They managed to acquire a few codices that had escaped the flames, but their major accomplishment was to save a great many of the old songs and narratives that were still faithfully remembered after the Conquest. They worked out means of writing the native languages with the Latin alphabet, and this enabled them—and their Indian pupils—to record the texts in the original words.

Dr. Angel Maria Garibay K., the most important modern authority on pre-Hispanic literature, has shown that more than forty manuscripts containing Aztec literature are extant in various European and American libraries. They offer a broad range of literary types: religious, lyric, epic and dramatic poetry, and prose history, legends, moral teachings, etc. Some of them also present poems and prose narratives describing the Conquest, written or dictated in Nahuatl by persons who witnessed that tragic drama with their own eyes, and the major part of this book is made up of selections from these indigenous accounts. The Appendix gives a brief description of the main sources from which we have drawn.

Pronunciation of Nahuatl Words

The Nahuatl language, which is also known as Aztec or Mexican, is part of the great Uto-Aztec linguistic family. It has been spoken in central and

southern Mexico, as well as in various parts of Central America, from Toltec times to the present.

Written Nahuatl, using the Latin alphabet, was introduced by the Spanish missionaries soon after the Conquest. With the exception of *x*, which is pronounced like the English *sh*, the letters have the same phonetic value as in Spanish.

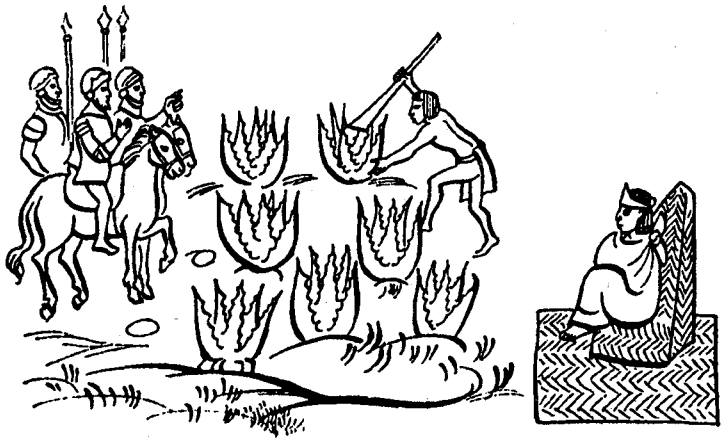
All but a very few Nahuatl words are accented on the next to last syllable. All follow the rules of Spanish accentuation: (1) Words that end in a vowel or in *n* or *s* are accented on the next to last syllable. (2) Words that end in any other consonant are accented on the last syllable. (3) Words that do not conform to either of these rules carry (in Spanish) a written accent over the stressed vowel.

Conclusion

There were a great many other institutions and customs in ancient Mexico in addition to those we have described, of course, and many of them are relevant to the story of the Conquest in one way or another. But it is obviously impossible to describe the whole panorama of Aztec life within the limits of an Introduction. Therefore the reader interested in acquiring a more detailed knowledge of pre-Hispanic history and culture, or in comparing the native accounts of the Conquest with those of the Spaniards or of later historians, is referred to the Selected Bibliography.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to Dr. Angel Maria Garibay K., director of the Seminary of Nahuatl Culture at the University of Mexico, for his generosity in permitting us to make unrestricted use of his Spanish translations of many Nahuatl texts. We are also grateful to Alberto Beltran for the many pen-and-ink drawings that illustrate this book. They are faithful representations of the indigenous originals.

Finally, we wish to make it clear that this book is not a critical edition of the native texts. We have prepared it for the general reader, and although we could not avoid the use of footnotes, we have tried to keep them to a minimum. Our greatest hope is that this modest work will create further interest in the native accounts of the Conquest. A calm examination of the encounter between two worlds, the Indian and the Spanish, from whose dramatic union Mexico and Latin America in general are descended, will help us to understand one of the most profound sources of the conflicts, grandeurs and miseries of that large portion of our hemisphere.



THE SPANIARDS ARE WELCOMED IN TEZCOCO

Introduction

The Spaniards pushed on toward Tenochtitlan, coming down out of the mountains by way of Tlalmanalco. Shortly after their descent, Prince Ixtlilxochitl of Tezcoco (brother of Cacama, the lord of Tezcoco) left his city with a group of followers to greet Cortes in peace.

The *Codex Ramirez* preserves a few fragments in Spanish of an older, indigenous account of this episode, of which the Nahuatl original has been lost. According to this account, it was Prince Ixtlilxochitl who persuaded the people of Tezcoco, resentful of Aztec domination, to join forces with the conquistadors. The same account states that Cortes then visited the city of Tezcoco, but this statement is not corroborated in any other source. Bernal Diaz del Castillo, Sahagun's informants and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl do not mention such a visit; they say only that the Spaniards marched to Ixtapalapa and from there to the Aztec capital.

The *Codex Ramirez* contains several anecdotes of interest and importance, especially the reaction of Yacotzin, the prince's mother, when her son asked her to change her religion. It also describes how Motecuhzoma responded to the news that the Spaniards were approaching Tezcoco. He ordered a last meeting of his chiefs, to discuss whether the strangers should be welcomed or repulsed when they arrived at Tenochtitlan. Despite Cuitlahuac's gloomy predictions, he finally decided to receive them in peace.

The March to Tezcoco

When the Spaniards looked down from the mountain heights, they were delighted to see so many villages and towns. Some suggested that they should

return to Tlaxcala until they could increase their forces, but Cortes urged them on, and the march to Tezcoco was begun.

They spent that night in the mountains and set out again the next day. After they had marched a few miles, they were met by Ixtlilxochitl and his brothers with a large company of followers. Cortes distrusted them at first; but when he learned, through signs and translations, that they had come out to meet the Spaniards as friends, he was greatly pleased. The Christians pointed to their Captain, and Ixtlilxochitl approached him and greeted him with smiles and obeisances, to which Cortes responded in the Spanish fashion. The prince was astonished to see a man with such white skin and with a beard and with so much courage and majesty, while Cortes, in turn, was astonished by the prince and his brothers—especially by Tecocoltzin, who was as white as any of the Spaniards.

At last, with La Malinche and Aguilar as interpreters, Ixtlilxochitl begged Cortes to accompany him to Tezcoco, so that he and his people might serve him. Cortes thanked the prince and accepted his invitation.

The Arrival at the City

At the request of Ixtlilxochitl, Cortes and his men ate the gifts of food that had been brought out from Tezcoco. Then they walked to the city with their new friends, and all the people came out to cheer and welcome them. The Indians knelt down and adored them as sons of the Sun, their gods, believing that the time had come of which their dear king Nezahualpilli[6] had so often spoken. The Spaniards entered the city and were lodged in the royal palace.

Word of these events was brought to the king, Motecuhzoma, who was pleased by the reception his nephews had given Cortes. He was also pleased by what Cohuamacotzin and Ixtlilxochitl had said to the Captain, because he believed that Ixtlilxochitl would call in the garrisons stationed on the frontiers. But God ordered it otherwise.

Cortes was very grateful for the attentions shown him by Ixtlilxochitl and his brothers; he wished to repay their kindness by teaching them the law of God, with the help of his interpreter Aguilar. The brothers and a number of the other lords gathered to hear him, and he told them that the emperor of the Christians had sent him here, so far away, in order that he might instruct them in the law of Christ. He explained the mystery of the Creation and the Fall, the mystery of the Trinity and the Incarnation and the mystery of the Passion and the Resurrection. Then he drew out a crucifix and held it up. The Christians all knelt, and Ixtlilxochitl and the other lords knelt with them.

Cortes also explained the mystery of Baptism. He concluded the lesson by telling them how the Emperor Charles grieved that they were not in God's grace, and how the emperor had sent him among them only to save their souls. He begged them to become willing vassals of the emperor, because that was the will of the pope, in whose name he spoke.

Ixtlilxochitl Becomes a Christian

When Cortes asked for their reply, Ixtlilxochitl burst into tears and answered that he and his brothers understood the mysteries very well. Giving thanks to God that his soul had been illumined, he said that he wished to become a Christian and to serve the emperor. He begged for the crucifix, so that he and his brothers might worship it, and the Spaniards wept with joy to see their devotion.

The princes then asked to be baptized. Cortes and the priest accompanying him said that first they must learn more of the Christian religion, but that persons would be sent to instruct them. Ixtlilxochitl expressed his gratitude, but begged to receive the sacrament at once because he now hated all idolatry and revered the mysteries of the true faith.

Although a few of the Spaniards objected, Cortes decided that Ixtlilxochitl should be baptized immediately. Cortes himself served as godfather, and the prince was given the name Hernando, because that was his sponsor's name. His brother Cohuamacotzin was named Pedro because his godfather was Pedro de Alvarado, and Tecocoltzin was named Fernando, with Cortes sponsoring him also. The other Christians became godfathers to the other princes, and the baptisms were performed with the greatest solemnity. If it had been possible, more than twenty thousand persons would have been baptized that very day, and a great number of them did receive the sacrament.

The Reactions of Yacotzin

Ixtlilxochitl went to his mother, Yacotzin, to tell her what had happened and to bring her out to be baptized. She replied that he must have lost his mind to let himself be won over so easily by that handful of barbarians, the conquistadors. Don Hernando said that if she were not his mother, he would answer her by cutting off her head. He told her that she would receive the sacrament, even against her will, because nothing was important except the life of the soul.

Yacotzin asked her son to leave her alone for the time being. She said she would think about what he had told her and make her decision the next day. He left the palace and ordered her rooms to be set on fire (though others say that he found her in a temple of idolatry).

Finally she came out, saying that she wanted to become a Christian. She went to Cortes and was baptized with a great many others. Cortes himself was her godfather, naming her Dona Maria because she was the first woman in Tezcoco to become a Christian. Her four daughters, the princesses, were also baptized, along with many other women. And during the three or four days they were in the city, the Spaniards baptized a great multitude of people.

Motecuhzoma's Final Decision

When Motecuhzoma learned what had happened in Tezcoco, he called together his nephew Cacama, his brother Cuitlahuac and the other lords. He proposed a long discussion in order to decide whether they should welcome the Christians when they arrived, and if so, in what manner. Cuitlahuac replied that they should not welcome them in any manner, but Cacama disagreed, saying that it would show a want of courage to deny them entrance once they were at the gates. He added that it was not proper for a great lord like his uncle to turn away the ambassadors of another great prince. If the visitors made any demands which displeased Motecuhzoma, he could punish their insolence by sending his hosts of brave warriors against them.

Before any one else could speak, Motecuhzoma announced that he agreed with his nephew. Cuitlahuac warned him: "I pray to our gods that you will not let the strangers into your house. They will cast you out of it and overthrow your rule, and when you try to recover what you have lost, it will be too late." With this the council came to an end. The other lords all showed by their gestures that they approved of this last opinion, but Motecuhzoma was resolved to welcome the Christians as friends. He told his nephew Cacama to go out to meet them and sent his brother Cuitlahuac to wait for them in the palace at Ixtapalapa.

THE SPANIARDS ARRIVE IN TENOCHTITLAN

Introduction

The Spaniards continued their march toward the Aztec capital, accompanied by all the allies they had brought with them from the Tlaxcala region. The account given in the texts by Sahagun's informants, from which the passages in this chapter are drawn, begins with a description of the order in which the various sections of the army made their appearance. They approached the island city from the south, by way of Ixtapalapa, and arrived in Xoloco (later called San Anton and now part of the Avenue of San Antonio Abad) on November 8, 1519. The precise date is recorded in the *XIII relacion* of Fernando de Alva Ixtilxochitl.

When Cortes and Motecuhzoma finally met at Huitzillan, on the same avenue, they greeted each other in speeches that have been carefully preserved by Sahagun's informants. The texts then describe the stay of the conquistadors in Tenochtitlan and their greed for the gold objects stored in the treasure houses.

Motecuhzoma Goes Out to Meet Cortes

The Spaniards arrived in Xoloco, near the entrance to Tenochtitlan. That was the end of the march, for they had reached their goal.

Motecuhzoma now arrayed himself in his finery, preparing to go out to meet them. The other great princes also adorned their persons, as did the nobles and their chieftains and knights. They all went out together to meet the strangers.

They brought trays heaped with the finest flowers—the flower that resembles a shield; the flower shaped like a heart; in the center, the flower with the sweetest aroma; and the fragrant yellow flower, the most precious of all. They also brought garlands of flowers, and ornaments for the breast,

and necklaces of gold, necklaces hung with rich stones, necklaces fashioned in the petatillo style.

Thus Motecuhzoma went out to meet them, there in Huitzillan. He presented many gifts to the Captain and his commanders, those who had come to make war. He showered gifts upon them and hung flowers around their necks; he gave them necklaces of flowers and bands of flowers to adorn their breasts; he set garlands of flowers upon their heads. Then he hung the gold necklaces around their necks and gave them presents of every sort as gifts of welcome.

Speeches of Motecuhzoma and Cortes

When Motecuhzoma had given necklaces to each one, Cortes asked him: "Are you Motecuhzoma? Are you the king? Is it true that you are the king Motecuhzoma?"

The Spaniards Melting Gold Objects (Codex Florentino)

And the king said: "Yes, I am Motecuhzoma." Then he stood up to welcome Cortes; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: "Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy.

"The kings who have gone before, your representatives, guarded it and preserved it for your coming. The kings Itzcoatl, Motecuhzoma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc and Ahuitzol ruled for you in the City of Mexico. The people were protected by their swords and sheltered by their shields.

"Do the kings know the destiny of those they left behind, their posterity? If only they are watching! If only they can see what I see!

"No, it is not a dream. I am not walking in my sleep. I am not seeing you in my dreams. . . . I have seen you at last! I have met you face to face! I was in agony for five days, for ten days, with my eyes fixed on the Region of the Mystery. And now you have come out of the clouds and mists to sit on your throne again.

"This was foretold by the kings who governed your city, and now it has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land, my lords!"

When Motecuhzoma had finished, La Malinche translated his address into Spanish so that the Captain could understand it. Cortes replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche: "Tell Motecuhzoma that we are his friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. Tell him that we love him well and that our hearts are contented."

Then he said to Motecuhzoma: "We have come to your house in Mexico as friends. There is nothing to fear."

La Malinche translated this speech and the Spaniards grasped Motecuhzoma's hands and patted his back to show their affection for him.

Attitudes of the Spaniards and the Native Lords

The Spaniards examined everything they saw. They dismounted from their horses, and mounted them again, and dismounted again, so as not to miss anything of interest.

The chiefs who accompanied Motecuhzoma were: Cacama, king of Tezcoco; Tetlepanquetzaltzin, king of Tlacopan; Itzcuauhtzin the Tlacochcalcatl, lord of Tlatelolco; and Topantemoc, Motecuhzoma's

treasurer in Tlatelolco. These four chiefs were standing in a file.

The other princes were: Atlixcatzin [chief who has taken captives][7]; Tepeoatzin, The Tlacochcalcatl; Quetzalaztatzin, the keeper of the chalk; Totomotzin; Hecateupatiltzin; and Cuappiatzin.

When Motecuhzoma was imprisoned, they all went into hiding. They ran away to hide and treacherously abandoned him!

The Spaniards Take Possession of the City

When the Spaniards entered the Royal House, they placed Motecuhzoma under guard and kept him under their vigilance. They also placed a guard over Itzcuauhtzin, but the other lords were permitted to depart.

Then the Spaniards fired one of their cannons, and this caused great confusion in the city. The people scattered in every direction; they fled without rhyme or reason; they ran off as if they were being pursued. It was as if they had eaten the mushrooms that confuse the mind, or had seen some dreadful apparition. They were all overcome by terror, as if their hearts had fainted. And when night fell, the panic spread through the city and their fears would not let them sleep.

In the morning the Spaniards told Motecuhzoma what they needed in the way of supplies: tortillas, fried chickens, hens' eggs, pure water, firewood and charcoal. Also: large, clean cooking pots, water jars, pitchers, dishes and other pottery. Motecuhzoma ordered that it be sent to them. The chiefs who received this order were angry with the king and no longer revered or respected him. But they furnished the Spaniards with all the provisions they needed—food, beverages and water, and fodder for the horses.

The Spaniards Reveal Their Greed

When the Spaniards were installed in the palace, they asked Motecuhzoma about the city's resources and reserves and about the warriors' ensigns and shields. They questioned him closely and then demanded gold.

Motecuhzoma guided them to it. They surrounded him and crowded close with their weapons. He walked in the center, while they formed a circle around him.

When they arrived at the treasure house called Teucalco, the riches of gold and feathers were brought out to them: ornaments made of quetzal feathers, richly worked shields, disks of gold, the necklaces of the idols, gold nose plugs, gold greaves and bracelets and crowns.

The Spaniards immediately stripped the feathers from the gold shields and ensigns. They gathered all the gold into a great mound and set fire to everything else, regardless of its value. Then they melted down the gold into ingots. As for the precious green stones, they took only the best of them; the rest were snatched up by the Tlaxcaltecas. The Spaniards searched through the whole treasure house, questioning and quarreling, and seized every object they thought was beautiful.

The Seizure of Motecuhzoma's Treasures

Next they went to Motecuhzoma's storehouse, in the place called Totocalco [Place of the Palace of the Birds],[8] where his personal treasures were kept. The Spaniards grinned like little beasts and patted each other with delight.

When they entered the hall of treasures, it was as if they had arrived in Paradise. They searched everywhere and coveted everything; they were slaves to their own greed. All of Motecuhzoma's possessions were brought out: fine bracelets, necklaces with large stones, ankle rings with little gold bells, the royal crowns and all the royal finery—everything that belonged to the king and was reserved to him only. They seized these treasures as if they were their own, as if this plunder were merely a stroke of good luck. And when they had taken all the gold, they heaped up everything else in the middle of the patio.

La Malinche called the nobles together. She climbed up to the palace roof and cried: "Mexicanos, come forward! The Spaniards need your help! Bring them food and pure water. They are tired and hungry; they are almost fainting from exhaustion! Why do you not come forward? Are you angry with them?"

The Mexicans were too frightened to approach. They were crushed by terror and would not risk coming forward. They shied away as if the Spaniards were wild beasts, as if the hour were midnight on the blackest night of the year. Yet they did not abandon the Spaniards to hunger and thirst. They brought them whatever they needed, but shook with fear as they did so. They delivered the supplies to the Spaniards with trembling hands, then turned and hurried away.

ENDNOTES

[1]The Spaniards spelled his name Montezuma. In present-day Mexico it is usually spelled Moctezuma.

[2]In Nahuatl symbolism, the juxtaposition of these two colors signified wisdom.

[3]A quilted cotton tunic soaked in brine. The Spaniards adopted it from the Indians because it was superior to their own armor in hot weather.

[4]The name of several different plants used as soap.

[5]Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy; paper, Grove Press, 1956), pp. 218-219.

[6]See Chapter 2, note 4.

[7]Military title given to a warrior who had captured four enemies.

[8]The zoological garden attached to the royal palaces.