

The Broken Spears 2007 Revised Edition: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico Study Guide

The Broken Spears 2007 Revised Edition: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico by Miguel León-Portilla

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Broken Spears 2007 Revised Edition: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Introduction Through Chapter 4.....	5
Chapters 5-8.....	9
Chapters 9-12.....	12
Chapters 13-16.....	15
Characters.....	18
Objects/Places.....	20
Themes.....	22
Style.....	24
Quotes.....	26
Topics for Discussion.....	28

Plot Summary

"The Broken Spears 2007 Revised Edition: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico" by Miguel Leon-Portilla is an account of the years 1519-1521 when Cortes and his men entered Mexico and began conquering it. The tale is told from the writings and images of the people who were conquered.

The Indians in Mexico had a thriving culture. They established a city in 1325 and then set out to conquer more territories, taking captives along the way so they could sacrifice them to appease their god. By the time the Spaniards arrived in 1519, the markets and the economy were strong, the people were educated, and the architectural structures were breathtaking.

Cortes landed on the coast at Veracruz on April 22, 1519. By August 13, 1521, the Aztec capital had surrendered to him. Still, there were signs of trouble ten years before the Spaniard showed up on their shores. Strange omens appeared, making the ruler and the people uneasy. When the Spaniards arrived, the people thought they were gods and greeted with gifts and sacrifices. The Spaniards were repelled by the sacrifices.

The Spaniards moved inland. The people of Tlaxcala greeted them with gifts and friendship. They had tried to make peace with the people in Cholula, but their messenger was tortured and sent back to them. They shared this with Cortes who promised to help them get revenge. As a united force, they went to Cholula. They met with their enemy in the courtyard of the god. They shut off the entrances and massacred the people of Cholula. Those who were not killed were so filled with terror that they dove off the edge of the temple grounds down to their own death.

The Spaniards and the Tlaxcaltecas moved further inland toward Tenochtitlan. Motecuhzoma sent envoys with gold and the natives observed how the Spaniards lusted after the gold. Prince Ixtlilxochitl persuaded the people of Tezcoco to join forces with the conquistadors as they continued marching to Tenochtitlan. He became a Christian and Cortes was his godfather. His people felt their god was not as strong as the god of the Spaniards.

They arrived at Texcoco, near Tenochtitlan, and Motecuhzoma went to greet them as friends. The Spaniards told the king he had nothing to fear. He brought them into the city and they placed him under guard. The people were terrified and lost respect for their king as he commanded them to give the Spaniards whatever they needed. Cortes and his men raided the coffers.

Cortes left to fight a man sent out to arrest him. While he was gone, the people petitioned the Spanish for the chance to have a fiesta. It was an important religious ceremony for them. With permission, they prepared and began to sing and dance. The soldiers attacked and brutally killed the celebrants. Cortes came back, and the next day the Indians battled the Spaniards, driving them out of the city. When they returned from

the battles as victors, they were weakened by a plague. The Spanish attacked once again while they were weak and took over the city.



Introduction Through Chapter 4

Introduction Through Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

"The Broken Spears 2007 Revised Edition: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico" by Miguel Leon-Portilla is an account of the years 1519-1521 when Cortes and his men entered Mexico and began conquering it. The tale is told from the writings and images of the people who were conquered.

In the Introduction, the Spanish conquistadors first entered Mexico on November 8, 1519. At that time, the land belonged to the Aztecs. Don Hernando Cortes led 600 Spaniards and many native allies, arriving from the direction of Tlalpan. They were welcomed by the Motecuhzomas who thought they were gods.

On Good Friday, April 22, 1519, Cortes landed on the coast at Veracruz. On August 13, 1521, the Aztec capital surrendered to him. The events that took place between 1519 and 1521 are chronicled in various writings, although many writings are written from the viewpoint of the conquerors. The purpose of this book is to offer accounts from the conquered, some of the accounts were written as early as seven years after the fall of the city. This is the story told by the victims.

When the conquistadors came, the native culture was thriving. Artifacts show civilizations with cultural significance as far back as 500 years before Christ. By the thirteenth century, two city states achieved considerable splendor. One was Calhuacan and the other was Azcapotzalco. The people of the latter were known as warriors and administrators.

The Aztecs arrived in the Valley of Mexico in the middle of the thirteenth century. A century after establishing and founding a city in 1325, the tribe achieved complete independence and set out as conquerors, extending their rule as far south as Guatemala and from the Gulf Coast to the Pacific. Epic palaces, temples, and gardens and greeted the Spanish conquistadors. The king himself invited the Spanish conquistadors into the city, and they saw the four great sections of the city.

There were at least one quarter million Tenochtitlan in the city. They had a thriving market industry and also had wonderful fiestas. The people were very dedicated to their gods, offering sacrifices and performing other rituals in honor of the gods.

Tenochtitlan had abundant wealth and formidable military power thanks to Izcatl, the ruler between 1428 and 1440. He formed an alliance with Nezahualcoyotl, the king of Tezcoco, to defeat Azcapotzalco and forming a triple alliance which included Tenochtitlan, Tezcoco, and Tlacopan. The alliance made him very strong, and the Aztecs set out to conquer other city states that surrounded the lake. After this, they



marched eastward toward the Gulf Coast. By 1519, the Aztecs ruled several million humans.

Although the Spaniards thought the Aztec society was very polytheistic, in fact, the people of Tenochtitlan only worship one god, the giver of life. In rituals for this god, natives offered human blood to the god by the way a sacrifice. Warfare became very important in Aztec life since this was how the people obtained victims to appease their god's insatiable hunger.

All the male children in this culture had to receive an education. In addition to reading, they were taught cultural traditions, they memorized common texts, and they were taught the fundamentals of ethics and religion in addition to receiving training in the arts of war. They wrote in the Nahuatl language.

The first chapter of this book begins with a passage from the "Codex Florentino." This is the original text from Sahagun's native informants. It was written in Nahuatl. This passage is followed by two selections from the "Historia de Tlaxcala" by Diego Munoz Camargo, a man who married into the Tlaxcala nobility.

Sahagun's informants write that 10 years before the Spaniards a bad omen appeared in the sky. This omen caused great confusion and an outcry as the people looked in the eastern sky and saw a flaming ear of corn.

The second bad omen occurred when the Temple of Huitzilopochtli burned down although no one set it on fire. Although everyone gathered to put it out, the Temple burned right down to the ground.

There was a third omen. The Temple of Xiuhtecuhtli was hit by a bolt of lightning. Nobody heard any thunder, and it was raining that day.

As a fourth bad omen, fire came from the sky while the sun was still out. It shot from the West to the East and had a long train streaming behind it.

As a fifth bad omen, the wind blasted the water until it seemed as if it were boiling in rage. Houses along the bank of the lake were flooded.

During the night, people witnessed the sixth bad omen. They heard a woman weeping - crying out that her children should flee from the city.

The seventh bad omen the people found was a strange creature that they captured in their nets. It was a bird that resembled a crane. However, it had a strange mirror on its head. Even though it was noon, they could see stars on the face of the mirror. When Motecuhzoma looked at it again, he saw people fighting on a distant plane.

There was an eighth bad omen. The people saw a monstrous being, a deformed man with two heads and only one body, appear on the city streets. When the monster was taken to Motecuhzoma, it disappeared.



In Chapter 2, Motecuhzoma turned to various magicians and seers to learn more about the omens. They hadn't seen the omens, so they had no advice for him. When he learned this, he imprisoned them. When questioned again, the magicians said that the future was already determined, and the king would understand soon enough what was going on because it was coming swiftly. The king wondered whether the invasion would come from the sky so he asked the magicians what direction it would come from. Instead of talking to the magicians directly, he sent a messenger to question them. The messenger came back and told him that the magicians had disappeared. He sent his men after the family of the magicians, killing everyone including wives and children.

A few days later, a common man came to the palace to tell the king that he saw a small mountain floating on the water. The king sent the man to prison then sent messengers to Cuertlaxtlan so they could investigate whether or not the report was true. The messengers came back to tell the king that the story was true. They had also witnessed people fishing. The people had very light skin, long beards, and short hair.

This news greatly disturbed the King, and he asked them to get him the man he had sent to the prison. The man, like the magicians, was missing. The king called for some craftsmen to make gifts of gold for the new people. They made a wide, thin chain of gold with emeralds, bracelets, two feather fans with a gold center, and gold armlets with rich feathers. He also ordered double bracelets for the ankles and wrists to be made out of gold and emeralds. The artisans were to make the gifts with great haste. When they were done, he was pleased with the work. Motecuhzoma, the king, thought the strangers might be divinities returning to Mexico so he sent messengers out to give the gifts to the strangers.

In Chapter 3, Motecuhzoma gave orders to his officials telling them that they needed to keep watch on the shores of Tuzlan, Naughtla and Mictlancuauhtla, and wherever else the strangers appeared. He instructed his men to guard the treasure, warning them if anything happened to the treasure, their houses and family would be destroyed. He sent five messengers to greet the strangers and bring them gifts. These men were led by a priest.

Motecuhzoma thought the messengers were deities known as Quetzalcoatl. He sent other gifts in addition to the gold, and when he sent the messengers off, he told them to make haste. When the messengers arrived at the sea shore, the messengers were taken in canoes to Xicalance where they followed the coast until they saw the strangers. They told the strangers that they came from the city of Mexico, and they paid homage to Cortes.

Cortes chained the messengers necks and feet then fired a cannon. They passed out and were revived by the Spaniards who then gave them food and wine. Cortes told them that he had heard that Mexicans were great warriors. He challenged them to a fight. They told him they weren't fighters, but he insisted. He arranged a time for the fight and sent them on their way. They hurried to escape, heading back to their king.



Motecuhzoma couldn't eat or sleep while the messengers were away because he was so concerned. They came back to him in the middle of the night and reported all that they had seen. Their report filled him with terror.

In Chapter 4, the king was greatly troubled, and he sent out his wizards, prophets, and his most gifted men with items for the strangers, trying to please them. He also sent along captives who could be sacrificed so that the strangers could drink their blood. The white men were filled with disgust and loathing when they witnessed the sacrifices, and they wouldn't eat the food sprinkled with blood.

Motecuhzoma had sent the magicians to determine who the strangers really were and to see what they wanted. If necessary, they should try to do some mischief. However, they failed in this task. When the king heard of that failure, he sent out officials, captains, and chiefs to find out what the strangers needed so that they could provide it. The people in the village became terrified. Motecuhzoma thought of fleeing, but he could not do it. He resigned himself to wait for the Spaniards to see what was going to happen to all of them.



Chapters 5-8

Chapters 5-8 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 5, even though Motecuhzoma was doing all he could to keep the Spaniards satisfied, Cortes decided to march inland with his men. This chapter includes two accounts of the arrival of the Spaniards in Tlaxcala and Cholula, including the first battle. The first version, written by Sahagun informants says that the massacre was inspired by Tlaxcaltecas intrigue. It is written that some think the Cholultecas brought destruction upon themselves by not surrounding Cortes. They also murdered the envoy that advised them to form an alliance with the Spaniards. The author notes that the second version might have been invented by the Tlaxcaltecas as an excuse for their part of the massacre. There is no corroboration for this viewpoint any of the other writings in "Historia" or "Cartas de Relation of Cortes."

Tlacoachacatl (Chief of the House of Arrows), a man from Cempoala, met the Spanish men and showed them the best routes through the lands and cities. As they traveled, they conquered the Otomies, killing them all. The Tlaxcaltecas heard about this, and they were greatly frightened. They had premonitions of their own death.

Because of this, when the Spaniards came near their city, the lords of Tlaxcala went out to greet them bringing their finest tortillas, hens, and hens eggs. They invited the Spaniards to enter their city and honored them. The Spaniard asked where the city of Mexico was, and they replied that it was only a three-day march.

At this point, the Tlaxcaltecas were enemies of Cholula. They told the Spaniards that Cholula was an evil city, and the Spaniards marched against Cholula, accompanied by the Tlaxcaltecas.

The man of Cholula greeted the ones from Tlaxcaltecas, and they assembled in the courtyard of the god. All the entrances are closed, and the people of Cholula were attacked and slaughtered. The news of this terrified Motecuhzoma when he learned of it. The strangers moved on toward the city in Mexico.

The following is the account from the "Historia de Tlaxcala." The Spanish troops joined together with the Taxcaltecas creating a formidable army. They marched out to invade Cholula. When they entered the province, the people of Cholula were slaughtered, and those in the nation were filled with fear feeling that the Taxcaltecas had formed an alliance with the gods. The Cholultecas believed so strongly in their idol, Quetzalcoatl, they thought that no humans could ever harm them. Therefore, they challenged the strangers to come and insulted them. The Spaniards invaded, calling out to St. James, and the temples were burned and idols destroyed.

Before the battle began, messengers had been sent ahead to Cholula asking for peace. They were told not to fear the white men. The Cholultecas decided they would rather die



than surrender so they flayed the face and arm of their ambassador and cut his hands so they dangled on his wrists. This made the Taxcaltecas angry, and they pleaded with Cortes, who promised them revenge.

The battle of Cholula was brutal and many who did not die in battle killed themselves by diving off the pyramid in despair. The people of Cholula felt that the god of the white men was more potent than their own god. After that battle, the Taxcaltecas began invoking Santiago when in battle.

In Chapter 6, the Spaniards marched toward the Valley of Mexico after they destroyed Cholula. When the army was in the area called Eagle Pass, it was met with envoys from Motecuhzoma who gave them many objects of gold. They observed that the Spaniards were extremely happy with the gold. They commented that they "hungered like pigs for that gold."

In the writings of Sahagun's informants, Tzihuacpopocatzli attempted to pass himself off as Motecuhzoma, upon Motecuhzoma's own orders, but the effort failed. Magicians were sent out in hopes of stopping the conquistadors. They met a pretended drunkard who showed them signs that depicted the ruin of Mexico. When the magicians went back to the city, they told Motecuhzoma what they had seen, and he was in despair.

In Chapter 7, the Spaniards continued moving forward toward Tenochtitlan. Prince Ixtlilxochitl persuaded the people of Tezcoco to join forces with the conquistadors since they were resentful of Aztec domination. This is written in the "Codex Ramirez" but it is not written in any other sources.

The "Codex Ramirez" tells several interesting and important anecdotes such as the one in which the prince's mother refuses to change her religion when asked by her son to do so. According to this source, the Spaniards came down from the mountains, led by Cortes, and they headed to Tezcoco. The prince came out to greet them, and at first, Cortes did not trust them. However, when he realized that the natives came to be friends, Cortes was pleased.

As they walked into the city, the people came out to welcome them. The king was pleased when he heard about the greeting. Cortes wanted to repay them for their kindness by teaching them about his god. He explained about the creation, the fall, the Trinity, the Passion, and the Resurrection. The Prince and his men were baptized, and Cortes was the prince's godfather.

Ixtlilxochitl went to his mother to let her know that he had been baptized, and he wanted her to become baptized as well. She told him he was crazy to allow himself to be so easily swayed by the conquistadors. He insisted that she receive the sacrament, and she told him to leave her alone so she could think about it. While she was thinking, he set her rooms on fire. She decided to be baptized.

Motecuhzoma heard about all that happened in Tezcoco. He met with his nephew, his brother, and some other lords to determine how they should greet the Spaniards. They decided that it would show a lack of courage if they didn't go out to greet the Christians.



Cuitlahuac warned Motecuhzoma against this decision, telling him that the Spaniards would overcome his rule. However, Motecuhzoma was determined to welcome the Christians as friends so he sent his nephew and brother out to greet them.

In Chapter 8, the Spaniards approached the Aztec capital from the south, arriving in Xoloco, near the entrance to Tenochtitlan, on November 8, 1519. Cortes and Motecuhzoma greeted each other with speeches that were carefully preserved by Sahagun's informants.

Motecuhzoma was dressed in his finery as he and his nobles went out to greet the conquistadors. They brought along with them trays of the finest flowers as well as ornaments and jeweled necklaces. He gave the gifts to those who had come to make war, and Cortes asked him if he was the king. Motecuhzoma said that he was the king, and he invited the Spaniards into his city for rest. Cortes responded to him saying that they were his friends and there was nothing to fear. As they came into the city, the Spaniards looked carefully at everything they saw.

The Spaniards entered the Royal House, and they placed the king under guard. This they did the same to the prince but not to the other lords, who immediately abandoned their leaders. The people in the city were overcome by terror and ran. The city was filled with panic. The Spaniards asked for supplies, and Motecuhzoma make sure they received everything they needed, losing the respect of his people. The Spaniards questioned the king regarding the city's resources and reserves as well as about military procedures. They demanded gold, and he guided them to it. The Spaniards plundered through the treasure houses, grabbing all they felt was valuable. They even went through the king's own treasures. The Mexicans served the Spaniards with great fear, bringing supplies with trembling hands.



Chapters 9-12

Chapters 9-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter Nine highlights two accounts of the massacre that occurred during the Fiesta of Toxcatl. The governor of Cuba had sent a man out to arrest Cortes so Cortes went out to fight against him. The Spanish leader had been away from the city for 20 days when the massacre occurred. The Aztecs had begged for permission to hold the fiesta of Huitzilopochtli. This was their most important fiesta, occurring near Easter and similar in regards to religious importance for the people. The Spaniards wanted to see how the fiesta was celebrated so they were granted permission. The women prepared for the fiesta by grinding seeds on the temple patio. These women had fasted for an entire year in preparation for the event. As they ground the seeds, fully armored Spaniards stopped among them. Some said they were ready to kill the women if any of the men appeared on the patio.

On the evening before the fiesta, the celebrants created a model of a statue of the god to give it a human appearance. The statue was made of a paste created from the ground seeds shaped over an armature of sticks. This statue was dressed in rich feathers, decorated with jewelry, and painted. It was given a magic headdress of hummingbird feathers and it was adorned with other items of importance.

On the morning of the fiesta, the statue's face was uncovered and the celebrants gathered to offer it food. The young warriors were excited, having promised to sing and dance with all their hearts so the Spaniards could see the beauty of their rituals. They began to dance with those who had been fasting, leading the others. The greatest captains and the greatest warriors were close to the front, followed by youth and recruits. At the peak of the celebration, the Spaniards closed all the passageways and entrances and slaughtered all the dancers. Before they killed the dancers, they killed the musicians.

The Aztecs learned of what the Spaniards had done to their people and assembled, carrying spears and shields. The Spaniards returned to the palace for refuge. They shackled Motecuhzoma. At sunset, Prince Itzcuahtzin spoke to the people, bringing words from Motecuhzoma. He told them not to fight anymore because they were not equal to the Spaniards. He said the king was concerned that innocent lives would be lost. The people had no respect for their king so they did not listen to him and continued to fight. The Royal Palace was under siege. The people wouldn't allow any food to go into the palace, trying to starve the Spaniards out. The Mexicans attacked the Spaniards for seven days, and wouldn't allow them to break out for 23 days. They closed off all the causeways and tore up the bridges.

The second account of the massacre was written in the "Codex Aubin." In this version, Motecuhzoma went to La Malinche and asked if he people could celebrate the fiesta for 10 days. They said they would burn incense and dance, and it would be noisy because



of the music, but that was all. The captain gave him permission. The Aztec captains talked to their elder brothers and said that they should celebrate as grandly as possible. The elder brothers said that they would dance with all their might.

Tecarzin, the chief of the armory, reminded the lord of the events that occurred in Cholula. He thought they should keep hidden weapons close at hand. Motecuhzoma insisted that they could trust the Spaniards. The songs and dances began, led by a young captain wearing a lip plug. The Christians entered the patio and set guards at each entrance. They struck the idol in the face, and other soldiers attacked the men who were playing the drums. They continued to slaughter the rest of the dancers in the temple. All the Mexicans had to fight back with were sticks of wood.

In Chapter 10, Cortes came back to the city with more troops since he defeated his enemy. After he came back, the Aztecs renewed their attacks on the palace, battling for four days. The Spaniards tried to escape during the night so that they could cross the canals carrying portable wooden bridges. They went through three canals without being seen, but they were discovered when they reached the fourth canal. The canal was so filled with the bodies of dead men and horses that those who followed behind them were able to cross to the other side of the canal by walking on the corpses. The Spaniards who remained stopped to rest in Popotla as the day began, but they heard war cries, and the Aztecs surrounded them. The Aztecs continued after the Spaniards and their allies all the way to Tlacopan, and Motecuhzoma's son, Chimalpopoca was killed in the fighting. The Spaniard's guide, Tlaltecatzin, was killed as well.

The Spaniards rested in Otoncalpulco where The Otomi offered them food and refuge. At daylight, the Aztecs sorted through the dead bodies of the Spaniards, taking whatever they wanted.

According to the account by Alva Ixtlilxochitl, Cortes returned to Tenochtitlan and was greeted by a group of knights. When the Mexicans realized that he had no intention of leaving the city, they attacked the Spaniards in a battle that lasted for seven days. On the third day of the battle, Motecuhzoma spoke from the rooftop telling his people to stop fighting, but they refused to listen to him. On the seventh day, the Spaniards, along with their allies, left the city.

In Chapter 11, back in Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs were certain that the Spaniards would not return so they continued their festivities. They repaired all their damage, chose new kings, and dressed their gods in finery.

During the 13th month, a plague broke out and lasted for 70 days. People were covered with sores from head to foot. Those who survived were left with scars. The Spaniards came back and began fighting the Aztecs, but the warriors held them off. The Spaniards tried to advance once again, but the Aztec warriors shot arrows at them from their boats until they were forced to retreat. Cortes set up headquarters outside of Acachinanco, but this time the Aztecs could not remove him.



A dozen ships came from Tezcoco. Cortes inspected all the canals to determine the best passages for his fleet. The Spaniards decided to attack Tenochtitlan once again, destroying all the people. When the ships approached, the people were terrified. They left all their possessions, which the Spaniards gathered. The Indians had built a wall to block their progress, but the Spaniards knocked it down with their cannon. After fighting with their cannons, the Spaniards advanced on foot into the heart of the city. The Aztecs took refuge in Tlatelolco. They continued fighting until the Spaniards were too exhausted to continue. The Spaniards withdrew to their camp to recover.

In Chapter 12, as the Aztecs were attacked by the Spaniards, they took 15 prisoners and sacrificed them as their Spanish comrades looked on. The Spaniards began fighting with a catapult, and the Aztecs drove the Spaniards back into the water then stoned them using the slings. The Spaniards attacked once again, and the Aztecs fought back. The Aztecs took many prisoners. They also captured the Spanish standard, although they didn't think it was of much importance. The Spaniards who survived retreated in the direction of Culhuacan so that they could recover their strength. The Aztecs took their prisoners to Yacacolco where they made them climb up to the temple platform so the priests could sacrifice them. After the sacrificing was complete, the Aztecs lined up the Spaniards heads and their horses' heads on rows on pikes. The Spaniards put up a blockade that caused many of the Aztec people to starve. Since they only had stagnant water to drink, many also died of dysentery.

The Spaniards came into the marketplace and began killing the Aztecs. They also set fire to the Temple, burning it to the ground. There were other battles wherein the Spanish attacked, but the Aztecs fought back. When the Spaniards set up their catapult, the Aztecs did not know what to make of it. When the first stone was released, it didn't hit any Indians, and this caused the Spaniards to argue. The Indians called the catapult "the wooden sling."



Chapters 13-16

Chapters 13-16 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, the writings in this chapter are taken from three different sources. The first section, The Final Omen, is taken from the "Codex Florentino" by the Sahagun's informants. In the evening it began to rain. However, it was more like a heavy dew than an actual rain. An omen that looked like a great bonfire lit the sky, wheeling around like a whirlwind. It gave off sparks and once it reached the middle of the lake, it disappeared.

The Aztec leaders gathered together to figure out what they should do, and they decided that Cuauhtemoc would go out in a canoe to meet Cortes and surrender. Again, the Spaniards began killing the Indians, and many died. The people decided that they had had enough and fled from the city. Spanish soldiers lined the roads and stopped the inhabitants who were running away. They searched them and took all their valuables. They took some of the strongest and bravest man and branded them with hot irons on their lips or cheeks. After all the fighting ceased, Cortes gathered the chiefs together to find out where the missing gold was.

The following is the second account of the ravage of Tenochtitlan. This one is from "XII Relation" by Alva Ixtlilxochitl. The Spaniards were unbelievably brutal on the day that Tenochtitlan was taken. It was the day that all the enemies of the Aztecs revenged themselves for all offenses. The only ally of Cortes who had any pity was Prince Ixtlilxochitl. The city was in ruins.

Cuauhtemoc met with Cortes and asked him to take his life. He had done his best to protect his kingdom, but he failed. Cortes consoled him and requested that he tell his warriors to surrender. He did so, calling to his people from a high tower. The siege of Tenochtitlan lasted for 80 days. Almost all of the Aztec nobility were killed.

The following is from the "VII Relation" by Chimalpain. When all the items of warfare were set aside, the lords were gathered together in Acachinanco. The Spaniards questioned the priests regarding the gold that had been lost in the Canal of the Toltecs.

Chapter 14 includes a summary of the Conquest in a brief form. Although it is short, it offers material not found in other documents. This account was written in 1528 by anonymous authors.

The Spaniards were seen off the coast. The Spaniards came to the palace at Tlayacac where they were greeted with gifts. The envoys made sacrifices in front of Cortes, but they made him angry. During the month of the bird, the Captain entered the city. Later, he left, leaving Don Pedro de Alvarado - The Sun in command. The people asked for a festival so they could celebrate their god, and they were granted permission. During the celebration the Spaniards murdered a chief and a king as well as participants in the



fiesta. This occurred 20 days after the Captain left the coast. When the captain returned, they allowed him to enter the city in peace, but the Aztecs attacked the next day. It was the beginning of the war.

The Spaniard attempted to leave the city, but the Aztecs attacked them. They continued to attack the Spaniards who were fleeing soon after the attacks. An epidemic broke out in Tenochtitlan leaving the population suffering from painful sores and racking coughs. As they begin to heal from the epidemic, the Spaniards marched in and began to attack. They conquered Tepeyacac then moved on to Tlahuano and Tlapechhuan before marching to Tezcoco, where they stayed for 40 days. They established themselves in the palace in Tlacopan after this, stayed a week, then went back to Tezcoco.

After 80 days they attacked Xochimilco. The Aztecs began to fight amongst themselves. The Spaniards began to wage war, attacking by land for ten days before ships appeared. The Spaniards set up cannons and fired them at the city. The fighting was fierce, and even the woman joined in the fighting. They took over the marketplace and set up catapult on the temple platform. The people began to starve. The princes were taken captive, and the people began to leave. The city was conquered in the year 3 - House. Cuauhtemoc was tortured, and the priests tried to find out where all the finery for the gods was kept. The common people came back to their houses in the year 4 - Rabbit. They were permitted to remain in peace.

In conclusion, Chapter 15 presents 3 "Songs of Sorrow." These elegies were written by post-conquest Aztec poets. The first poem was composed in 1523, the second was part of a series of poems, and the third is a recollection of the traditional symbolism of "flowers and songs." The poems reflect the deep emotional wounds that were inflicted upon the Indians after their defeat.

In Chapter 16, the city lay in ruins, the powerful leaders were dead, and the omens were fulfilled, but this chapter begs the question, "Was everything truly lost?" Surviving native sages and priests rescued images of the tragedy as well as the heroism that sustained the people. Descendants of the conquered kept the story alive through literature and imagery. The language, Nahuatl, was also kept alive.

35 years after the Spaniards took over the city of Mexico, the conquered had learned to read and write in Spanish and in their own language. They also learned about filing complaints and claims. In May of 1556, one son of Motecuhzoma wrote to the king denouncing the offenses by which the people had been victimized. In 1560, another individual petitioned to reduce the amount of attribute colonial officers had recently assessed. The communities of the conquered became involved in innumerable litigations as they attempted to defend their lands and themselves.

Throughout the centuries, the Nahuatl-speaking people expressed their feelings over what had happened to their ancestors. They did this through song, music, and dance. One of the plays depicting their story was popular even as late as 1894. The Nahuatl-speaking people also took part in the Mexican Revolution, which lasted from 1910-1918.

Emiliano Zapata spoke to the natives in their own language, encouraging them to join his cause.

The Nahuas are still very much alive today. As of the last decade in the millennium, there were over 40 million native people in the Americas. Of those, 1 1/2 million were Nahuas who were struggling to preserve their cultural identities.



Characters

Motecuhzoma

Motecuhzoma was the king who lived in Tenochtitlan. He lived in a land of great wealth and powerful warriors. A series of omens made him fearful about the survival of his people. When the Spaniards arrived, he thought they were gods. Even though others warned him about the brutality of the Spaniards, he was determined to meet up with them as friends. He sent valuable gifts to them and invited them into his city. The Spaniards tricked him, coming in as friends then placing him under guard. When he told his people not to fight the Spaniards, fearing for their lives since they weren't as powerful, he lost the respect of his people. Motecuhzoma was chained and had to speak to his people through others. He was killed by the Spaniards, but nobody knew how he was killed.

Don Hernando Cortes

Don Hernando Cortes was the leader of the people who arrived from Spain. He was a powerful man with a fondness for gold. He wanted to take over Mexico City. He and his men were cruel, shocking the natives with their cannons and weaponry. They were also deceitful, saying that they were friends who wouldn't harm the people then taking over. He was a Christian who called upon St. James in battle. He told the Indians about the creation, the Trinity and the Resurrection then led in their baptisms. Cortes became godfather to the prince. As Cortes marched inland, his army grew. Not accepting defeat when the Aztecs fought against them, he pushed on and attacked until he was the victor. Even when the city was overtaken, Cortes continued to address the conquered, demanding to know where all their treasures were. He was particularly interested in the gold.

Sahagun informants

Much of the book's information came from these people who were native researchers.

Tlacoachacatl

This character, also called the Chief of the House of Arrows, met the Spanish men and showed them the best routes through the lands and cities.

Prince Ixtlilxochitl

This character persuaded the people of Tezcoco to joining forces with the conquistadors. He later became Cortes' godson.



Cuitlahuac

This character warned Motecuhzoma against the Spaniards, telling him that they would come in and overcome his rule.

Chimalpopoca

This character was Motecuhzoma's son. He was killed during the fighting.

Huitzilopochtli

This is the god that the Aztecs were worshipping when they were massacred in the temple.

Diego Velazques

This character was the governor of Cuba who ordered the arrest of Cortes.

Panfilo de Narvaez

This character was coming to arrest Cortes by the order of the governor of Cuba.

Pedro de Alvarado

This character was Cortes' deputy. He murdered the celebrants during the fiesta.

Yacotzin

This character thought Ixtlilxochitl was crazy for allowing himself to be so easily suaded by the Spaniards. She decided to become a Christian after her son set her rooms on fire.



Objects/Places

Tlaxcala

This place had a confederation of four republics. The people from Tenochtitlan were constantly battling this place, taking prisoners for sacrifice. This is mostly likely why it made an alliance with the Spaniards.

Cholula

This place was the rival of Tlaxcala. The people of Tlaxcala joined with the Spaniards for revenge of the place and the people here were massacred at an assembly in the courtyard of the god.

Tortillas

These were brought to the Spaniards as welcoming gifts.

Hens

These were brought to the Spaniards as welcoming gifts.

Tezcoco

This place is where Prince Ixtlilxochitl persuaded the people to join with the conquistadors as they marched to Tenochtitlan.

Xoloco

This is the entrance to Tenochtitlan where Motecuhzoma greeted Cortes.

Gold

This is what the Spaniard lusted after, asking for more of it even after they conquered the city.

Acachinanco

This is where Cortes set up his headquarters. The Aztecs could not remove him.



Nahuatl

This is the language of the conquered. People still speak it today, and much of the history of the conquered is written in this language.

Quetzal Feathers

These were used to adorn the gods' finery.

Emeralds

These were used to adorn finery, but they weren't as valuable to the Spaniards as the gold.



Themes

The Spanish Invasion of Mexico

The Mexicans had a thriving culture long before the Spaniards arrived. They had everything one would expect to find in a city. They had hospitals, schools, temples, and a thriving marketplace. The architecture in their cities was exquisite and the Aztecs had beautiful jewels and other riches. Still, they saw numerous omens that suggested that their thriving culture might not last. These omens occurred a decade before the Spanish arrived on the lake shore.

When the Spaniards first arrived, the Mexicans thought they were gods. The white skin, strange-colored hair, and strange texture of the hair caused great curiosity as did the dogs and "stags" the Spanish brought with them. The natives greeted the Spaniards with gold, finery, hens, and tortillas. They offered friendship, but the Spaniards wanted to fight with the messengers who ran off.

After asking where Mexico City was, the Spanish moved inland. They formed alliances with some of the natives and conquered others as they made their way to the city. When they reached Tenochtitlan, they met the king and said that they came in peace. However, as soon as they entered the city, they put the king under guard. While Cortes was away, the Spaniards brutally killed celebrants during a fiesta and war ensued shortly after the return of Cortes.

The Spaniards conquered the people, taking over the city after numerous battles. The natives fought back, winning the initial battles, but eventually losing to the Spaniards. Once the people were overtaken, the Spaniards gathered all the gold they could find. They allowed the conquered to return and live under their rule.

The Importance of Gods on a Culture

The Aztecs had many different names for the god they worshipped. Due to this, the Spaniard thought that they were a polytheistic society. However, analysis of religious thought reveals that at least on the upper social levels, the people in Tenochtitlan only worshipped one god: the Lord of Duality, The Giver of Life. While they only worshipped one god, they also thought that there were other gods. This is why they thought the Spaniards were other gods and deities called Quetzalcoatl.

The Aztec ruler, Nezahualcoyotl, king of Tezcoco, was a powerful leader who created the triple alliance. He used religion for his own purposes and told the people that they needed to make sacrifices regularly to their god. To do this, they needed to conquer other people so they could offer the blood of the captives as a sacrifice to the gods.

When the Spanish arrived and the natives thought they were gods, they brought captives to sacrifice. Instead of pleasing the strangers, the sacrifices made them angry.



The Spaniards massacred the locals in religious places twice according to this book. The first attack was in the courtyard of the god and the second was during a fiesta celebrating a god.

The Spaniards, themselves, professed Christianity. They called to St. James while in battle and told the natives about Creation, the Trinity, and the Resurrection. Cortes arranged for the baptism of the prince and became his godfather. This greatly worried the mother of the prince who was concerned over the fact that he was so easily suaded by the Spanish. The prince set his mother's rooms on fire to persuade her to get baptized as well.

The Survival of the Conquered

Many historical books describe battles, but they are written from the vantage of the conquerers. The unique part of this book is that it tells the story of the Spanish invasion of Mexico from the viewpoint of the conquered. After their defeat, the natives returned to their city, and they learned to read and write in Spanish as well as in Nahuatl, their native language. They used this knowledge to write to their new king petitioning for land and rights, citing all they had suffered and lost.

The natives were very serious about their heritage and worked hard to make sure the story of their ancestors wasn't lost. They kept the story of the battles alive through art, music, poetry, and plays. One plays that highlighted the story of their people was popular almost to the end of the 1800s. In the early 1900s, the famous leader Emiliano Zapata, attracted large numbers of Nahuas to his army in the Mexican Revolution. He talked to them in their own language.

By the end of the 1900s, there were over 40 million native people in the Americas. 1.5 million of them were Nahuas who were still trying to preserve and foster their ancestral cultural identities.

Style

Perspective

This book is written in a third-person objective point of view. It is a compilation of historical records depicting the invasion of Mexico by the Spaniards. The unique perspective in this book lies in the fact that it's an anecdotal summary of the events as recorded by those who were conquered, not by the conquerors themselves.

Events are presented according to various authors and occur in a linear progression. The reaction of the people to the events is described from the viewpoint of one who is observing the events take place. There is no insight into what the individuals are thinking. The reader only sees the people's reactions to events as they unfold without any foreshadowing or symbolism.

Tone

Although this book is written from old, scholarly literature, efforts have been made to make it palatable for the average reader. In the translator's note, it's written that small liberties were taken with the original text. The thought behind this decision was that the drama of the stories was more important than "stylistic peculiarities." Due to this, words and brief phrases were added or omitted for the sake of clarity.

The language of the story flows well, only halted by the long, multi-syllabic names of the natives and the cities, but that can't be avoided. After the reader has read for a while, the difficult names seem to develop a certain rhythm, becoming easier to read. There are some advanced vocabulary words, but they are written in context so it's easy for a reader to understand what the author is saying.

Structure

The structure of this book was obviously carefully thought out. The first page of the book includes a map, which the reader might find themselves frequently referring to throughout the book. This is followed by a Table of Contents, Illustrations, a Translator's Note, a Foreword, which is quite long, and an Introduction, which is long enough to stand alone as its own chapter.

These sections are followed by 16 chapters. Each chapter is labeled by number and with a short title that summarizes the events of the chapter. The chapters begin with an introduction that offers a brief overview of the entire chapter. During this section, the author sometimes notes that a situation is going to be presented by several sources. The reader reads the first source then reads the same story again from a different viewpoint. Some chapters only use one source. Other chapters will have the same scene depicted two or three times from a variety of sources.

The Chapters in the book are followed by an Appendix, a Postscript, a Selected Bibliography, and an Index.



Quotes

"It was the first direct encounter between one of the most extraordinary pre-Columbian cultures and the strangers who would eventually destroy it" (Introduction).

"it was the meeting of two radically dissimilar cultures, two radically different modes of interpreting existence." (Introduction).

"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" (Introduction).

"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" (Introduction).

"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" (Introduction).

"Ten years before the Spaniards first came here, a bad omen appeared in the sky" (Chapter 1).

"Motecuhzoma ordered the sacrifice because he took the Spaniards to be gods; he believed in them and worshiped them as deities" (Chapter 4).

"Then the sudden slaughter began: knife strokes, and sword strokes, and death. The people of Cholula had not foreseen it, had not suspected it. They faced the Spaniards without weapons, without their swords or their shields" (Chapter 5).

"They died blindly, without knowing why, because of the lies of the Tlaxcaltecas" (Chapter 5).

"They searched everywhere and coveted everything; they were slaves to their own greed" (Chapter 8).

"This would put an end to the kingship of Mexico, and it would be just and right, for you have already destroyed my city and killed my people" (Chapter 13).

"The "person-within" is already awakening, giving strength to the heart of the Nahuas" (Chapter 16). "

"It seemed that with the Aztec nation crushed, driven to the ground, all had been lost. But the ultimate truth is different" (Chapter 16).

Topics for Discussion

When was Mexico City established? What was its civilization like before Cortes arrived?

What were the omens? What did they signify to the people? Do you think their reaction to the omens contributed to their demise?

What troubles did the conflict of religions cause?

What did the natives think of the Spaniards as they arrived?

Why did the Aztecs consider the conquistadors to be so terrifying?

What really started the war? How was it perpetuated?

How did the plague affect the Aztecs and their cause?

Where are the descendants of the conquered today?