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THE BEDFORD SERIES IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Victors and Vanquished
Spanish and Nahua Views of the
Conquest of Mexico

Edited with an Introduction by

Stuart B. Schwartz

Yale University

cil and of ourselves they may beg, for in addition to your Majesties doing great service to our Lord in this matter, they will be conferring a very signal favour on this town and council such as we daily hope may be the pleasure of your Majesties. . . .

Letter II

. . . Now, as I believe I wrote to your Majesty, certain of those in my company who were friends and servants of Diego Velázquez were vexed at what I did in your Majesty's service, and indeed certain of them were desirous of leaving me and quitting the land, in particular four Spaniards, by name, Juan Escudero, Diego Cermeño, Gonzalo de Ungría, pilots, and Alonso Peñate. These men, as they afterwards confessed, had decided to seize a brig which was in the port together with a certain amount of provisions in the way of bread and salt pork, kill the captain and set sail for Cuba to inform Diego Velázquez of the vessel which I was sending to your Majesty, what it contained and the route which it was to take, so that Velázquez might send out ships to intercept it, which indeed on getting to hear by other means of its departure he did: for, as I have been informed, he dispatched a light caravel after my vessel which would have captured it had it not already passed the strait of the Bahamas. These men confessed moreover that there were others who had the same design of informing Diego Velázquez of the treasure ship's departure. In view of their confessions I punished them according to the law and (as it seemed to me) the exigencies of the moment and the furtherance of your Majesty's interests. Further, in addition to those who desired to quit the land because they were friends or servants of Diego Velázquez there were others who seeing the great extent of the land, its natives, their manners and numbers, so large in comparison with so few Spaniards, were of the same mind. Accordingly, thinking that if I left the ships there they would make off with them and leave me practically alone, by which had been prevented the great service which has been done to God and to your Majesty in this land, I found a means under the pretence that the ships were no longer navigable to pile them up on the shore. On this all abandoned any hope of leaving the land and I set out relieved from the suspicion that once my back was turned I should be deserted by the men whom I had left behind in the town. . . .

3

Encounters

The Spaniards and the Mexica had contrasting ways in how they viewed and tried to make sense of each other. The Nahuatl seemed to be ambivalent, alternating between a view that the Spaniards were strange but understandable simply as a new kind of foreigner and an alternative vision of them as supernatural beings. The Spaniards looked to earlier encounters with other Native Americans and to their older traditions of diplomacy and contact with other non-Europeans. The Europeans were already creating a kind of ethnography about the peoples of the new conquest.

In the first document in this chapter, Cortés in his earliest surviving letter to the king includes a description of the land and the people. In it, he frequently compares Muslim (Moorish) customs to native customs to make sense of indigenous ways. He also concentrates on the practice of human sacrifice as a singularly reprehensible custom and one which helped to further justify the spreading of Catholicism by the extension of the king's control. This union of observation with self-serving emphases was typical of many European descriptions of the peoples of the Americas.

Bernal Díaz's account (see pp. 85–91) takes note of the exchange of gifts and of Cortés's strategies to learn about the politics and wealth of the region. His report is also sensitive to native ways of doing things. For example, he remarks on the importance of pictographic representation for the Mexica and how those images were used to communicate information.

The Nahuatl account (see pp. 91–99) presented here is more problematic. It is drawn from Lockhart's translation of the Nahuatl relations gathered by the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún about thirty years after the conquest. While its attention to certain details — the style of the capes offered as gifts, the costumes of the gods — seems authentic, the emphasis on Moctezuma's weakness and on the possible supernatural nature of the strangers indicates a "shading" of the account made by

those interviewed in order to please the Spanish authorities of the time or to criticize the failed Mexica leadership. The tendency to identify the Spaniards with a returning deity come to reclaim his kingdom—in some accounts Huitzilopochtli, patron of the Mexica, himself, in others, Quetzalcoatl, the ancient god of the Toltecs—became a standard aspect of the indigenous accounts, and later by the Spanish chroniclers and the mestizo historians. As discussed in the introduction, there were many aspects of the story that made this identification plausible. The year one-Reed in the Mexica calendar was a year associated with Quetzalcoatl; the Spanish had come from his direction, the east, and Cortés's anger when offered sacrifice seemed to reinforce the association with Quetzalcoatl who supposedly had opposed such offerings. Finally, we must recall that for the Nahua, myth, history, and propaganda were not discrete categories and none was more "true" than the others. Traditionally, for peoples of Mesoamerica, history's main function was not so much to describe events as they "really" happened, but rather to fit them into a specific vision of the past and the future. How much of this ancient vision of history influenced Sahagún's informants is open to debate.

HERNÁN CORTÉS

Letter to Charles V

The letters of Cortés were really reports that mixed self-explanations and justifications with more general information of the kind to interest a king. Religion, politics, and ethnography are combined here along with observation and assessment. How much the observations are shaped by preconceptions and previous experiences is a matter of considerable dispute among historians. It also has been suggested that Cortés sometimes "invented" facts to fit his purposes.

... In a former paragraph of this letter we said that we are sending an account of this land that your Majesties may be better informed of its peculiarities, its riches, the people who possess it and the beliefs, rites and

Hernando Cortés: Five Letters, 1519–1526, ed. J. Bayard Morris (New York: Norton, 1991), 20–25.

ceremonies which they hold. The land which in the name of your Majesties we now occupy stretches for some fifty leagues on either side of this town; the coast is entirely flat and on the sea shore there are sandy beaches stretching for miles and more. Inland, behind the sand dunes, the land is also flat, comprising very fine meadow lands and river banks, such as cannot be bettered in all Spain, as pleasing to the eye moreover as they are fertile in producing all manner of crops, and very well looked after and of easy access, all kinds of herds being found there both grazing and for use as beasts of burden.

All kinds of hunting is to be met with in this land and both birds and beasts similar to those we have in Spain, such as deer, both red and fallow, wolves, foxes, partridges, pigeons, turtle doves of several kinds, quails, hares and rabbits: so that in the matter of birds and beasts there is no great difference between this land and Spain, but there are in addition lions and tigers about five miles inland, of which more are to be found in some districts than in others. There is a great range of very fine mountains, some very high and one in particular overtopping all the rest, from which one can discern a great expanse of the sea and land; indeed it is so high that if the day be not very clear its summit cannot be seen at all since the top half of it is entirely covered with clouds, and on other occasions when the weather is very fine one can see its summit rising above the clouds so white that we judge it to be snow: this the natives also confirm, but since we have not seen it very clearly although approaching quite near to it, and considering that this region is exceptionally hot we cannot affirm it to be so for certain. We shall endeavour to find out by personal observation about this and other matters of which we have heard reports in order to send your Majesties a true account of it, as well as of the riches of the country in gold, silver and precious stones, of all of which your Majesties may form some idea from the samples which we are sending them. To our mind it is probable that this land contains as many riches as that from which Solomon is said to have obtained the gold for the temple: but so little time has passed since our landing that we have been unable to explore the country further than some five leagues inland and some ten or a dozen leagues along the coast on either side of the place where we first landed; from the sea much more may be seen and more we certainly saw while skirting the coast in our ships.

The natives who inhabit the island of Cozumel and the land of Yucatan from its northern point to where we are now settled, are of middle height, and well-proportioned, except that in our district they disfigure their faces in various ways, some piercing the ears and introducing large

and extremely ugly ornaments, others the lower part of the nose and upper lip in which they insert large circular stones having the appearance of mirrors, others still piercing the thick underlip right through to the teeth and hanging therefrom round stones or pieces of gold so heavy that they drag the lip down, giving an extraordinarily repulsive appearance. They wear as clothes a kind of highly coloured shawl, the men wear breech clouts, and on the top half of the body cloaks finely worked and painted after the fashion of Moorish draperies. The common women wear highly coloured robes reaching from the waist to the feet and others which cover only the breast, all the rest of the body being uncovered; but the women of high rank wear bodices of fine cotton, very loose fitting, cut and embroidered after the fashion of the vestment worn by our bishops and abbots. Their food is composed of maize and such cereals as are to be found on the other Islands, *potuoyuca* * almost exactly similar to that eaten in Cuba, except that they roast it instead of making it into bread; in addition they have whatever they can obtain by fishing or hunting; and they also breed large numbers of hens similar to those of the mainland which are as big as peacocks. There are a few large towns very passably laid out. The houses in those parts which can obtain stone are of rough masonry and mortar, the rooms being low and small, very much after the Moorish fashion. Where no stone can be got they build their houses of baked bricks, covering them over with plaster and the roofs with a rough kind of thatch. Certain houses belonging to chiefs are quite airy and have a considerable number of rooms; we have seen as many as five inner corridors or *patios* in a single house and its rooms very well laid out around them, each person of importance having his own private servants to wait upon him. The wells and tanks of water are also contained inside, together with rooms for the servants and under-servants of which there are many. Each one of the chief men has in front of the entrance of his house a large patio, and some as many as two, three or four, sometimes raised a considerable way off the ground with steps leading up to them, and very well built. In addition they have their mosques, temples and walks, all of very fair size, and in them are the idols which they worship whether of stone, clay or wood, the which they honour and obey in such a manner and with such ceremonies that many sheets of paper would not suffice to give your Majesties a minute and true account of them. These private mosques where they exist are the largest, finest and most elaborately built buildings of any that there are in the town, and as such they keep them very much bedecked with

* Yuca or manioc.

strings of feathers, gaily painted cloths and all manner of finery. And always on the day before they are to begin some important enterprise they burn incense in these temples, and sometimes even sacrifice their own persons, some cutting out their tongues, others their ears, still others slicing their bodies with knives in order to offer to their idols the blood which flows from their wounds; sometimes sprinkling the whole of the temple with blood and throwing it up in the air, and many other fashions of sacrifice they use, so that no important task is undertaken without previous sacrifice having been made. One very horrible and abominable custom they have which should certainly be punished and which we have seen in no other part, and that is that whenever they wish to beg anything of their idols, in order that their petition may find more acceptance, they take large numbers of boys and girls and even of grown men and women and tear out their heart and bowels while still alive, burning them in the presence of those idols, and offering the smoke of such burning as a pleasant sacrifice. Some of us have actually seen this done and they say that it is the most terrible and frightful thing that they have ever seen. Yet the Indians perform this ceremony so frequently that, as we are informed and have in part seen from our own scanty experience since we have been in this land, there is no year passes in which they do not thus kill and sacrifice fifty souls in every such temple, and the practice is general from the island of Cozumel to the region in which we have now settled. Your Majesties can therefore be certain that since the land is large and they seem to have a large number of temples there can be no year (so far as we have been able up to the present to ascertain) in which they have not sacrificed in this manner some three or four thousand souls. Your Majesties may therefore perceive whether it is not their duty to prevent such loss and evil, and certainly it will be pleasing to God if by means of and under the protection of your royal Majesties these peoples are introduced into and instructed in the holy Catholic Faith, and the devotion, trust and hope which they now have in their idols turned so as to repose in the divine power of the true God; for it is certain that if they should serve God with that same faith, fervour and diligence they would work many miracles. And we believe that not without cause has God been pleased to allow this land to be discovered in the name of your royal Majesties, that your Majesties may reap great merit and reward from Him in sending the Gospel to these barbarian people who thus by your Majesties' hands will be received into the true faith; for from what we know of them we believe that by the aid of interpreters who should plainly declare to them the truths of the Holy Faith and the error in which they are, many, perhaps all of them, would very quickly

depart from their evil ways and would come to true knowledge, for they live more equably and reasonably than any other of the tribes which we have hitherto come across.

To give your Majesties full and detailed account of this land and people would probably be only to include many errors, for there are many particulars which we have not seen for ourselves but only heard from the natives, and consequently we are only venturing to report those things which can definitely be vouched for as truth. Your Majesties may well command full investigation to be made, and that done, if it so please your Majesties, a true account may be made to our holy Father, that all diligence and good order may be applied to the work of converting these people, since from such conversion so much good fruit may be expected: his Holiness may thus see fit to permit evil and rebellious people having first been warned to be proceeded against and punished as enemies to our holy Catholic Faith, such punishment serving as a further occasion of warning and dread to those who still rebel, and thus bringing them to a knowledge of the truth, and rescuing them from such great evils as are those which they work in the service of the devil: for in addition to those which we have already reported to your Majesties, in which children and men and women are killed and offered in sacrifice, we know and have been informed without room for doubt that all practice the abominable sin of sodomy. In all of which we beg your Majesties to provide as may seem to them most fitting to the service of God and of your royal Majesties and that we who remain here in your service may constantly enjoy your Majesties' favour and protection. . . .

BERNAL DÍAZ

From *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*

Bernal Díaz provides an interesting view of the first encounter with the Mexica representatives of Moctezuma who begin to appear in this account as individuals. Díaz's attention to the actions of the ambassadors, to the de-

Bernal Díaz, from *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, ed. A. P. Maudslay (London: Hakluyt Society, 1908), 136-44.

tails of the gifts exchanged, and to Cortés's manipulation of the horses and artillery as a way of impressing the Mexica give a sense of the Spanish reaction to the meeting and of their desire to push forward toward Moctezuma's capital.

On Holy Thursday, the anniversary of the Last Supper of Our Lord, in the year 1519, we arrived with all the fleet at the Port of San Juan de Ulúa, and as the Pilot Alaminos knew the place well from having come there with Juan de Grijalva he at once ordered the vessels to drop anchor where they would be safe from the northerly gales. The flagship hoisted her royal standards and pennants, and within half an hour of anchoring, two large canoes (which in those parts are called piraguas) came out to us, full of Mexican Indians. Seeing the big ship with the standards flying they knew that it was there they must go to speak with the captain; so they went direct to the flagship and going on board asked who was the Tatuán * which in their language means the chief. Doña Marina who understood the language well, pointed him out. Then the Indians paid many marks of respect to Cortés, according to their usage, and bade him welcome, and said that their lord, a servant of the great Moctezuma, had sent them to ask what kind of men we were and of what we were in search, and added that if we were in need of anything for ourselves or the ships, that we should tell them and they would supply it. Our Cortés thanked them through the two interpreters, Aguilar and Doña Marina, and ordered food and wine to be given them and some blue beads, and after they had drunk he told them that we came to see them and to trade with them and that our arrival in their country should cause them no uneasiness but be looked on by them as fortunate. The messengers returned on shore well content, and the next day, which was Good Friday, we disembarked with the horses and guns, on some sand hills which rise to a considerable height, for there was no level land, nothing but sand dunes; and the artilleryman Mesa placed the guns in position to the best of his judgment. Then we set up an altar where mass was said and we made huts and shelters for Cortés and the captains, and three hundred of the soldiers brought wood and made huts for themselves and we placed the horses where they would be safe and in this way was Good Friday passed.

*Tlatoan.

The next day, Saturday, Easter Eve, many Indians arrived sent by a chief who was a governor under Montezuma, named Pitalpitoque* (whom we afterwards called Ovandillo), and they brought axes and dressed wood for the huts of the captain Cortés and the other ranchos near to it, and covered them with large cloths on account of the strength of the sun, for as it was in Lent the heat was very great — and they brought fowls and maize cakes and plums, which were then in season, and I think that they brought some gold jewels, and they presented all these things to Cortés; and said that the next day a governor would come and would bring more food. Cortés thanked them heartily and ordered them to be given certain articles in exchange with which they went away well content. The next day, Easter Sunday, the governor whom they spoke of arrived. His name was Tendile, a man of affairs, and he brought with him Pitalpitoque who was also a man of importance amongst the natives and there followed them many Indians with presents of fowls and vegetables. Tendile ordered these people to stand aside on a hillock and with much humility he made three obeisances to Cortés according to their custom, and then to all the soldiers who were standing around. Cortés bade them welcome through our interpreters and embraced them and asked them to wait, as he wished presently to speak to them. Meanwhile he ordered an altar to be made as well as it could be done in the time, and Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, who was a fine singer, chanted Mass, and Padre Juan Diaz assisted, and the two governors and the other chiefs who were with them looked on. When Mass was over, Cortés and some of our captains and the two Indian officers of the great Montezuma dined together. When the tables had been cleared away — Cortés went aside with the two Caciques and our two interpreters and explained to them that we were Christians and vassals of the greatest lord on earth, called the Emperor Don Carlos, who had many great princes as his vassals and servants, and that it was at his orders that we had come to this country, because for many years he had heard rumours about the country and the great prince who ruled it. That he wished to be friends with this prince and to tell him many things in the name of the Emperor which things, when he knew and understood them, would please him greatly. Moreover he wished to trade with their prince and his Indians in good friendship, and he wanted to know where this prince would wish that they should meet so that they might confer together. Tendile replied somewhat proudly, and said — “You have only just now arrived and you already ask to speak with our prince; accept now this present which we give you in his name, and afterwards you will tell me

* Cuitlalpitoc, who had been sent as an ambassador to meet Grijalva.

what you think fitting.” With that he took out a *petaca* — which is a sort of chest, many articles of gold beautifully and richly worked and ordered ten loads of white cloth made of cotton and feathers to be brought, wonderful things to see, and there were other things which I do not remember, besides quantities of food consisting of fowls of the country, fruit and baked fish. Cortés received it all with smiles in a gracious manner and gave in return, beads or twisted glass and other small beads from Spain, and he begged them to send to their towns to ask the people to come and trade with us as he had brought many beads to exchange for gold, and they replied that they would do as he asked. As we afterwards found out, these two men, Tendile and Pitalpitoque, were the governors of the provinces named Cotustan, Tustepeque,* Guazpaltepeque and Tatalteco, and of some other townships lately conquered. Cortés then ordered his servants to bring an arm-chair, richly carved and inlaid and some *margaritas*, stones with many [intricate] designs in them, and a string of twisted glass beads packed in cotton scented with musk and a crimson cap with a golden medal engraved with a figure of St. George on horseback, lance in hand, slaying the dragon, and he told Tendile that he should send the chair to his prince Montezuma (for we already knew that he was so called) so that he could be seated in it when he, Cortés, came to see and speak with him, and that he should place the cap on his head, and that the stones and all the other things were presents from our lord the King, as a sign of his friendship, for he was aware that Montezuma was a great prince, and Cortés asked that a day and a place might be named where he could go to see Montezuma. Tendile received the present and said that his lord Montezuma was such a great prince that it would please him to know our great King and that he would carry the present to him at once and bring back a reply.

It appears that Tendile brought with him some clever painters such as they had in Mexico and ordered them to make pictures true to nature of the face and body of Cortés and all his captains, and of the soldiers, ships, sails and horses, and of Doña Marina and Aguilar, even of the two greyhounds, and the cannon and cannon balls, and all of the army we had brought with us, and he carried the pictures to his master. Cortés ordered our gunners to load the lombards with a great charge of powder so that they should make a great noise when they were fired off, and he told Pedro de Alvarado that he and all the horsemen should get ready so that these servants of Montezuma might see them gallop and told them to attach little bells to the horses' breastplates. Cortés also mounted his horse and said — “It would be well if we could gallop on these sand

* Cotaxtl, Tuxtepec.

dunes but they will observe that even when on foot we get stuck in the sand — let us go out to the beach when the tide is low and gallop two and two;” — and to Pedro de Alvarado whose sorrel coloured mare was a great galloper, and very handy, he gave charge of all the horsemen.

All this was carried out in the presence of the two ambassadors, and so that they should see the cannon fired, Cortés made as though he wished again to speak to them and a number of other chieftains, and the lombards were fired off, and as it was quite still at that moment, the stones went flying through the forest resounding with a great din, and the two governors and all the other Indians were frightened by things so new to them, and ordered the painters to record them so that Montezuma might see. It happened that one of the soldiers had a helmet half gilt but somewhat rusty and this Tendile noticed, for he was the more forward of the two ambassadors, and said that he wished to see it as it was like one that they possessed which had been left to them by their ancestors of the race from which they had sprung, and that it had been placed on the head of their god — Huichilobos,* and that their prince Montezuma would like to see this helmet. So it was given to him, and Cortés said to them that as he wished to know whether the gold of this country was the same as that we find in our rivers, they could return the helmet filled with grains of gold so that he could send it to our great Emperor. After this, Tendile bade farewell to Cortés and to all of us and after many expressions of regard from Cortés he took leave of him and said that he would return with a reply without delay. After Tendile had departed we found out that besides being an Indian employed in matters of great importance, Tendile was the most active of the servants whom his master, Montezuma, had in his employ, and he went with all haste and narrated everything to his prince, and showed him the pictures which had been painted and the present which Cortés had sent. When the great Montezuma gazed on it he was struck with admiration and received it on his part with satisfaction. When he examined the helmet and that which was on his Huichilobos, he felt convinced that we belonged to the race which, as his forefathers had foretold would come to rule over that land. It is here that the historian Gomara relates many things which were not told to him correctly.

I will leave off here, and then go on to say what else happened.

When Tendile departed with the present which the Captain Cortés gave him for his prince Montezuma, the other governor, Pitalpitoque, stayed

* Huitzilopochtli.

in our camp and occupied some huts a little distance from ours, and they brought Indian women there to make maize bread, and brought fowls and fruit and fish, and supplied Cortés and the captains who fed with him. As for us soldiers, if we did not hunt for shell fish on the beach, or go out fishing, we did not get anything.

About that time, many Indians came from the towns already mentioned by me over which these two servants of Montezuma were governors, and some of them brought gold and jewels of little value, and fowls to exchange with us for our goods, which consisted of green beads and clear glass beads and other articles, and with this we managed to supply ourselves with food. Almost all the soldiers had brought things for barter, as we learnt in Grijalva's time that it was a good thing to bring beads — and in this manner six or seven days passed by.

Then one morning, Tendile arrived with more than one hundred laden Indians, accompanied by a great Mexican Cacique, who in his face, features and appearance bore a strong likeness to our Captain Cortés and the great Montezuma had sent him purposely, for it is said that when Tendile brought the portrait of Cortés all the chiefs who were in Montezuma's company said that a great chief named Quintalbor looked exactly like Cortés and that was the name of the Cacique who now arrived with Tendile; and as he was so like Cortés we called them in camp “our Cortés” and “the other Cortés.” To go back to my story, when these people arrived and came before our Captain they first of all kissed the earth and then fumigated him and all the soldiers who were standing around him, with incense which they brought in brasiers of pottery. Cortés received them affectionately and seated them near himself, and that chief who came with the present (who I have already said was named Quintalbor) had been appointed spokesman together with Tendile. After welcoming us to the country and after many courteous speeches had passed he ordered the presents which he had brought to be displayed, and they were placed on mats which they call petates over which were spread cotton cloths. The first article presented was a wheel like a sun, as big as a cartwheel, with many sorts of pictures on it, the whole of fine gold, and a wonderful thing to behold, which those who afterwards weighed it said was worth more than ten thousand dollars. Then another wheel was presented of greater size made of silver of great brilliancy in imitation of the moon with other figures shown on it, and this was of great value as it was very heavy — and the chief brought back the helmet full of fine grains of gold, just as they are got out of the mines, and this was worth three thousand dollars. This gold in the helmet was worth more to us than if it had contained \$20,000, because it showed us

that there were good mines there. Then were brought twenty golden ducks, beautifully worked and very natural looking, and some [ornaments] like dogs, of the kind they keep, and many articles of gold worked in the shape of tigers and lions and monkeys, and ten collars beautifully worked and other necklaces; and twelve arrows and a bow with its string, and two rods like staffs of justice, five palms long, all in beautiful hollow work of fine gold. Then there were presented crests of gold and plumes of rich green feathers, and others of silver, and fans of the same materials, and deer copied in hollow gold and many other things that I cannot remember for it all happened so many years ago. And then over thirty loads of beautiful cotton cloth were brought worked with many patterns and decorated with many coloured feathers, and so many other things were there that it is useless my trying to describe them for I know not how to do it. When all these things had been presented, this great Cacique Quintalbor and Tendile asked Cortés to accept this present with the same willingness with which his prince had sent it, and divide it among the *teules** and men who accompanied him. Cortés received the present with delight and then the ambassadors told Cortés that they wished to repeat what their prince, Montezuma, had sent them to say. First of all they told him that he was pleased that such valiant men, as he had heard that we were, should come to his country, for he knew all about what we had done at Tabasco, and that he would much like to see our great emperor who was such a mighty prince and whose fame was spread over so many lands, and that he would send him a present of precious stones; and that meanwhile we should stay in that port; that if he could assist us in any way he would do so with the greatest pleasure; but as to the interview, they should not worry about it; that there was no need for it and they (the ambassadors) urged many objections. Cortés kept a good countenance, and returned his thanks to them, and with many flattering expressions gave each of the ambassadors two holland shirts and some blue glass beads and other things, and begged them to go back as his ambassadors to Mexico and to tell their prince, the great Montezuma, that as we had come across so many seas, and had journeyed from such distant lands solely to see and speak with him in person, that if we should return thus, that our great king and lord would not receive us well, and that wherever their prince Montezuma might be we wished to go and see him and do what he might order us to do. The ambassadors replied that they would go back and give this message to their prince, but as to the question of the desired interview — they con-

* *Teules*, "for so they call the Idols which they worship."

sidered it superfluous. By these ambassadors Cortés sent what our poverty could afford as a gift to Montezuma: a glass cup of Florentine ware, engraved with trees and hunting scenes and gilt, and three holland shirts and other things, and he charged the messengers to bring a reply. The two governors set out and Pitalpitoque remained in camp; for it seems that the other servants of Montezuma had given him orders to see that food was brought to us from the neighbouring towns. Here I will leave off, and then go on to tell what happened in our camp.

FRAY BERNARDINO DE SAHAGÚN

From the *Florentine Codex*

The Nahuatl account contained in the Florentine Codex provides considerable detail of this same meeting described by Díaz: the nobles involved, the exchange of gifts, and of the way in which the encounter was reported to Moctezuma. Here the attention to detail is comparable to Díaz's account except that the focus is on different items, in this case, the costumes of the gods, reflecting the different values and goals of Nahuas and Spaniards. The descriptions of the Spaniards, their weapons, and animals have a sense of immediacy, but whether the reports of these first meetings filled Moctezuma and the people with forebodings of catastrophe at that moment is difficult to know since these accounts were collected at least twenty years after the events described.

. . . When those who came to the seashore were seen, they were going along by boat. Then Pinotl of Cuertlaxtlan, a high steward, went in person, taking other stewards with him: [second], Yaotzin, the steward of Mictlanquauhltla; third, the steward of Teocinyocan, named Teocinyocatl; fourth, Cuitlapitoc, who was only a dependent, a subordinate leader; and fifth, Tentlil, also a subordinate leader.

These were the only ones who first went to see [the Spaniards]. They

James Lockhart, *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, Repertorium Columbianum, UCLA Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 56–86, even pages only.

went as if to sell them things, so that they could spy on them and contemplate them. They gave them precious cloaks, precious goods, the very cloaks pertaining to Moteucçoma which no one else could don, which were assigned to him alone.

It was by boat that they went to see them. As they were doing it, Pinotzin said, "Let us not lie to the lord Moteucçoma, for you would live no longer. Let's just go, lest we die, so that he can hear the real truth." (Moteucçoma was his personal name, and Tlacateucth was his title as ruler.)

Then they embarked, launched off, and went out on the water; the water folk paddled for them. When they approached the Spaniards, they made the earth-eating gesture at the prow of the boat(s). They thought that it was Quetzalcoatl Topiltzin who had arrived.

The Spaniards called to them, saying to them, "Who are you? Where have you come from? Where is your homeland?"

Immediately they said, "It is from Mexico that we have come."

They answered them back, "If you are really Mexica, what is the name of the ruler of Mexico?"

They told them, "O our lords, Moteucçoma is his name."

Then they gave them all the different kinds of precious cloaks they carried, to wit, like those mentioned here: the sun-covered style, the blue-knotted style, the style covered with jars, the one with painted eagles, the style with serpent faces, the style with wind jewels, the style with (turkey blood), or with whirlpools, the style with smoking mirrors.

For all these things that they gave them, [the Spaniards] gave them things in return; they gave them green and yellow strings of beads, which one might imagine to be amber. And when they had taken them and looked at them, greatly did they marvel.

And [the Spaniards] took leave of them, saying to them, "Go off, while we go to Spain; we will not be long in getting to Mexico."

Thereupon they went, and [the local people] also came away, coming back. And when they came out on dry land, they came straight to Mexico, moving along in this direction day and night to come inform Moteucçoma, to tell him and report to him the truth [. . .]. They took the goods they had received.

Then they spoke to him: "O our lord, o master, destroy us [if you will, but] here is what we have seen and done at the place where your subordinates stand guard for you beside the ocean. For we went to see our lords the gods out on the water; we gave them all your cloaks, and here are the fine things belonging to them that they gave us. They said, 'If you have really come from Mexico, here is what you are to give the ruler

Moteucçoma, whereby he will recognize us." They told him everything [the Spaniards] had told them out on the water.

And Moteucçoma said to them, "You are doubly welcome; take your rest. What I have seen is a secret. No one is to say anything, to let it escape from his lips, to let a word slip out, to open his mouth, to mention it, but it is to stay inside you."

Third chapter, where it is said what Moteucçoma ordered when he heard the statement of those who saw the first boat that came.

Thereupon Moteucçoma gave instructions to the man from Cuetzlaxtlan and the rest, telling them, "Give orders that watch be kept everywhere along the coast, at [the places] called Nauhtlan, Toztlan, and Micltlanquauhtla, wherever they will come to land." Then the stewards left and gave orders for watch to be kept.

And Moteucçoma assembled his lords, the Cihuacoatl Tilipotonqui, the Tlacochealcatl Quappiaztzin, the Ticocyahuacatl Quetzalatztin, and the Huitznahuatlailotlac Ecatenpatiltzin. He reported the account to them, and showed them, put before them, the beads they had brought.

He said to them, "We have beheld the fine blue turquoise; it is to be guarded well, the custodians are to take good care of it; if they let one piece get away from them, [their] homes, children, and women with child will be ours."

Then the year changed to the one following, Thirteen Rabbit, and when it was nearly over, at the end of the year Thirteen Rabbit, [the Spaniards] made an appearance and were seen once again. Then the stewards quickly came to tell Moteucçoma.

When he heard it, he quickly sent out a party. He thought and believed that it was Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl who had landed. For they were of the opinion that he would return, that he would appear, that he would come back to his seat of authority, because he had gone in that direction [eastward] when he left. And [Moteucçoma] sent five [people] to go to meet him and give him things. The leader had the official title of Teohua [custodian of the god] and the personal name of Yohualli ichan. The second was Tepoztecatl, the third Tīçahua, the fourth Huehuetecatl, and the fifth Hueicamecatl eca.

Fourth chapter, where it is said what orders Moteucçoma gave when he found out that the Spaniards had returned. The second time they came it was [with] don Hernando Cortés.

He said to them, "Come, o men of unique valor, do come. It is said that our lord has appeared at last. Do go to meet him; listen well, make good use of your ears, bring back in your ears a good record of what he says. Here is what you will take to our lord."

[First] were the appurtenances of Quetzalcoatl: a serpent mask, made of turquoise; a quetzal-feather head fan; a plaited neckband of green-stone beads, with a golden disk in the middle of it; and a shield with gold [strips] crossing each other, or with gold and seashells crossing, with quetzal feathers spread about the edge and with a quetzal-feather banner; and a mirror with quetzal feathers to be tied on his back; and this mirror for the back seemed to have a turquoise shield, with turquoise glued on it, and there were green-stone neck bands with golden shells on them; then there was the turquoise spear thrower, entirely of turquoise, with a kind of serpent head; and there were obsidian sandals.

The second set of things they went to give him were the appurtenances of Tezcatlipoca: a feather headpiece, covered with golden stars, and his golden bell earplugs; and a seashell necklace; the chest ornament, decorated with many small seashells, with its fringe made of them; and a sleeveless jacket, painted all over, with eyes on its border and teased feathers at the fringe; and a cloak with blue-green knots, called a *tzitzilli*, tied on the back by taking its corners, also with a mirror for the back over it; and another item, golden bells tied to the calves of the legs; and another item, white sandals. [A third and fourth god's costume was also sent.] . . .

These then were the things, called gods' appurtenances, that the messengers carried with them, and they took many other things by way of greeting: a shell-shaped gold headpiece with yellow parrot feathers hanging from it, a golden miter, etc.

Then baskets were filled and carrying frames were adjusted. And then Moteucçoma gave orders to the aforementioned five [emissaries], saying to them, "Now go, don't tarry anywhere, and address yourselves to our lord the god. Tell him, 'Your agent Moteucçoma has sent us; here is what he is giving you. You have arrived in Mexico, your home.'"

And when they reached the coast, they were taken across [a river or inlet] by boat at Xicalanco. There again they left by boat, taken by the water folk. Everything went into the boats; the goods were placed in boats. And when the boats were full, they left. They cast off and reached [the Spaniards'] boat[s], bringing their own boat close.

Then [the Spaniards] said to them, "Who are you? Where have you come from?"

Then [the emissaries] answered them, "Why, we have come from Mexico."

Again [the Spaniards] replied to them, "Perhaps not. Perhaps you are just claiming to be from there, perhaps you are making it up, perhaps you are deceiving us."

But when they were convinced and satisfied, they hooked the prow of the boat with an iron staff and hauled them in; then they also put down a ladder.

Fifth chapter, where it is said what happened when Moteucçoma's messengers went into don Hernando Cortés's boat.

Then they climbed up, carrying in their arms the goods. When they had gotten up into the boat, each of them made the earth-eating gesture before the Captain. Then they addressed him, saying,

"May the god attend: his agent Moteucçoma who is in charge in Mexico for him addresses him and says, 'The god is doubly welcome.'"

Then they dressed up the Captain. They put on him the turquoise serpent mask attached to the quetzal-feather head fan, to which were fixed, from which hung the green-stone serpent earplugs. And they put the sleeveless jacket on him, and around his neck they put the plaited green-stone neckband with the golden disk in the middle. On his lower back they tied the back mirror, and also they tied behind him the cloak called a *tzitzilli*. And on his legs they placed the green-stone bands with the golden bells. And they gave him, placing it on his arm, the shield with gold and shells crossing, on whose edge were spread quetzal feathers, with a quetzal banner. And they laid the obsidian sandals before him.

And the other three outfits, the gods' appurtenances, they only arranged in rows before him.

When this had been done, the Captain said to them, "Is this everything you have by way of greeting and rapprochement?"

They answered, "That is all with which we have come, o our lord."

Then the Captain ordered that they be tied up: they put irons on their feet and necks. When this had been done they shot off the cannon. And at this point the messengers truly fainted and swooned; one after another they swayed and fell, losing consciousness. And the Spaniards lifted them into a sitting position and gave them wine to drink. Then they gave them food, fed them, with which they regained strength and got their breath back.

When this had been done the Captain said to them, "Do listen, I have found out and heard that by what they say these Mexica are very strong, great warriors, able to throw others down. Where there is one of them he can chase, push aside, overcome, and turn back his enemies, even though there should be ten or twenty. Now I wish to be satisfied, I want to see you, I want to try out how strong and manly you are." Then he gave them leather shields, iron swords, and iron lances. [He said,]

"Well now, very early in the morning, as dawn is about to come, we will struggle against each other, we will challenge each other, we will find out by comparison who will fall down first."

They answered the Captain, saying, "May the lord pay heed, this is not at all what his agent Moteucçoma ordered us. All we came to do was to greet and salute you. We were not charged with what the lord wishes. If we should do that, won't Moteucçoma be very angry with us because of it, won't he destroy us for it?"

Then the Captain said, "No indeed; it is simply to be done. I want to see and behold it, for word has gone to Spain that you are very strong, great warriors. Eat while it is still before dawn, and I will eat then too. Outfit yourselves well."

Sixth chapter, where it is said how Moteucçoma's messengers came back here to Mexico to tell Moteucçoma what they had seen.

Then [Cortés] let them go. [The Spaniards] lowered them into their boat, and when they had descended into the boat, they paddled hard; each one paddled as hard as he could, and some used their hands to paddle. They fled with all possible speed, saying to one another as they came, "O warriors, exert all your strength, paddle hard! Let's not do something [wrong] here, lest something happen to us!"

By water they quickly reached the place called Xicalanco, where they did nothing but catch their breath, then again came running along as fast as possible. Then they reached Tecpantlayacac, whereupon they again left and came fleeing. They quickly got to Cuetlaxtlan, where they caught their breath and also quickly came away.

And the (ruler or steward) of Cuetlaxtlan said to them, "First take your rest for a day or so, until you recover your strength."

But they said to him, "No, rather we are going hurrying to talk to the lord ruler Moteucçoma, to tell him what we saw, these very terrifying things the like of which have never been seen. Should you be the very first to hear them?"

Then they quickly got on their way and soon reached Mexico. It was night when they got there; they came in by night.

During this time Moteucçoma neither slept nor touched food. Whatever he did, he was abstracted; it seemed as though he was ill at ease, frequently sighing. He tired and felt weak. He no longer found anything tasteful, enjoyable, or amusing.

Therefore he said, "What is to come of us? Who in the world must endure it? Will it not be me [as ruler]? My heart is tormented, as though chile water were poured on it; it greatly burns and smarts. Where in the world [are we to turn], o our lord?"

Then [the messengers] notified those who guarded [Moteucçoma], who kept watch at the head of his bed, saying to them, "Even if he is asleep, tell him. 'Those whom you sent out on the sea have come back.'"

But when they went to tell him, he replied, "I will not hear it here. I will hear it at the Coacalco; let them go there." And he gave orders, saying, "Let some captives be covered with chalk [for sacrifice]."

Then the messengers went to the Coacalco, and so did Moteucçoma. Thereupon the captives died in their presence; they cut open their chests and sprinkled their blood on the messengers. (The reason they did it was that they had gone to very dangerous places and had seen, gazed on the countenances of, and spoken to the gods.)

Seventh chapter, where is told the account that the messengers who went to see the boat gave to Moteucçoma.

When this was done, they talked to Moteucçoma, telling him what they had beheld, and they showed him what [the Spaniards'] food was like.

And when he heard what the messengers reported, he was greatly afraid and taken aback, and he was amazed at their food. It especially made him faint when he heard how the guns went off at [the Spaniards'] command, sounding like thunder, causing people actually to swoon, blocking the ears. And when it went off, something like a ball came out from inside, and fire went showering and spitting out. And the smoke that came from it had a very foul stench, striking one in the face. And if they shot at a hill, it seemed to crumble and come apart. And it turned a tree to dust; it seemed to make it vanish, as though someone had conjured it away. Their war gear was all iron. They clothed their bodies in iron, they put iron on their heads, their swords were iron, their bows were iron, and their shields and lances were iron.

And their deer that carried them were as tall as the roof. And they wrapped their bodies all over; only their faces could be seen, very white. Their faces were the color of limestone and their hair yellow-reddish, though some had black hair. They had long beards, also yellow-reddish. [The hair of some] was tightly curled. And their food was like fasting food, very large, white, not heavy, like chaff, like dried maize stalks, as tasty as maize stalk flour, a bit sweet or honeyed, honeyed and sweet to eat.

And their dogs were huge creatures, with their ears folded over and their jowls dragging. They had burning eyes, eyes like coals, yellow and fiery. They had thin, gaunt flanks with the rib lines showing; they were very tall. They did not keep quiet, they went about panting, with their tongues hanging down. They had spots like a jaguar's, they were varicolored.

When Moteucçoma heard it, he was greatly afraid; he seemed to faint away, he grew concerned and disturbed.

Eighth chapter, where it is said how Moteucçoma sent witches, wizards, and sorcerers to do something to the Spaniards.

Then at that time Moteucçoma sent out emissaries. Those whom he sent were all bad people, soothsayers and witches. He also sent elders, strong warriors, to see to all [the Spaniards] needed as to food: turkey hens, eggs, white tortillas, and whatever they might request, and to look after them well so that they would be satisfied in every way. He sent captives in case [the Spaniards] should drink their blood. And the emissaries did as indicated.

But when [the Spaniards] saw it, they were made sick to their stomachs, spitting, rubbing their eyelids, blinking, shaking their heads. And [the emissaries] sprinkled blood in the food, they bloodied it, which made their stomachs turn and disgusted them, because of the great stench of the blood.

Moteucçoma did this because he took them for gods, considered them gods, worshiped them as gods. They were called and given the name of gods who have come from heaven, and the blacks were called soiled gods.

After that they ate white tortillas, grains of maize, turkey eggs, turkeys, and all the fruits: custard apple, mammee, yellow sapote, black sapote, sweet potato, manioc, white sweet potato, yellow sweet potato, colored sweet potato, jicama, plum, jobo, guava, *cuajilote*, avocado, acacia [bean], *tejocote*, American cherry, tuna cactus fruit, mulberry, white cactus fruit, yellow cactus fruit, whitish-red cactus fruit, pitahaya, water pitahaya. And the food for the deer was *pipillo* and *tlachicaztli*.

They say that Moteucçoma sent the witches, the rainmakers, to see what [the Spaniards] were like and perhaps be able to enchant them, cast spells on them, to use conjury or the evil eye on them or hurl something else at them, perhaps addressing some words of wizardry to them so that they would take sick, die, or turn back. But when they performed the assignment they had been given concerning the Spaniards, they could do nothing; they had no power at all. Then they quickly returned to tell Moteucçoma what they were like, how strong they were, [saying,] "We are not their match; we are as nothing."

Then Moteucçoma gave strict orders; he scolded and charged the stewards and all the lords and elders, under pain of death, that they see to and take care of everything [the Spaniards] might need. And when [the Spaniards] came onto dry land and finally started moving in this direction and coming along the road toward here, they were well cared for and made much of. They were always in the hands of someone as they came progressing; they were very well attended to.

Ninth chapter, where it is said how Moteucçoma wept, and the Mexica wept, when they found out that the Spaniards were very strong.

And Moteucçoma lamented his troubles at length; he was afraid and shocked. He told the troubles of the altepetl. And everyone was very afraid. Fear reigned, and shock, laments, and expressions of distress. People talked, assembled, gathered, wept for themselves and for others. Heads hung, there were tearful greetings, words of encouragement, and stroking of hair. Little children's heads were stroked. Fathers would say, "Alas, my children, how is it with you, that what is about to happen has happened to you?" And mothers said, "O my children, how is it with you who are to behold what is about to happen to us?"

And it was told, presented, made known, announced, and reported to Moteucçoma, and brought to his attention that a woman, one of us people here, came accompanying them as interpreter. Her name was Marina and her homeland was Tepeticpac, on the coast, where they first took her. . . .