

THE HEROIC DEFENSE OF MEXIKO-TENOCHTITLAN

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ORAL TRADITION

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Our story begins here. On the night of August 12, 1521, [Uey Tenochtitlan](#) has withstood 79 days of siege.

Two thousand five hundred mercenary invaders, 300 horses, 12 artillery brigantines, barges for unloading with cannons, hundreds of canoes, 30 mastiff dogs that eat human flesh, 40 pieces of light and medium artillery, war machines like catapults, assault towers.

The invaders began their final offensive in the month of May. Today, August 12, 1521, they have taken the main plaza and the great [teokalli](#).

Fields of cadavers remained, like that they remained. The aqueducts of Chapultepek and Tepeyakak exploded with dynamite. Also the drinking water channels. Neighborhood after neighborhood was blasted with cannons, was burned.

They attack from the lake, from between the canoes. With their horses they continuously raze and flee. The Mexicans stand their ground in Tlatelolko and its neighborhoods. The isle is bombarded by cannon fire day and night.

Throughout the city wrecked corpses rot. They float in the causeways, the streets, the canals. All of this happened to us. The odor is unbearable. We saw it. They are thousands of cadavers. All of this happened to us, children, women, warriors, enemies. We, we saw it.

The war of extermination decimates the population. Now there is no water, there are many who are mutilated. Epidemics increase. It is not possible to attend to the sick, nor to burn the cadavers. They are thousands, thousands of cadavers.

Each Mexican faces ten or more invaders. On our side, the whole population enters combat: women and children, [Ocelotl warriors](#), [Kauhtli warriors](#). More than two months of resistance; with each assault there are fewer of us.



Click on image to examine it in more detail

Cortés and Malinche Gather Gold

Image From [El Lienzo de Tlaxcala](#) (Tlaxcalan)

Next they went to Moctezuma's storehouse, in a place called Totocalco, where Moctezuma kept his personal goods. Happy and eager, they patted each other on the back, so cheerful their heart was.

And when they arrived, when they entered the house of treasures, it was like they had arrived in Paradise. They searched everywhere and coveted everything, for, yes, they were dominated by their greed.

Then they took out all of the goods which were his [Moctezuma's] own exclusive possessions: his personal belongings, all of which were precious: necklaces with thick stones, arm bands of quetzal feathers, bracelets of gold, golden bands with shells for the knees, ankle bracelets with little gold bells, and the royal crowns and all the royal attire, without number, everything that belonged to him and was reserved to him only.

They took everything, they appropriated everything, all they snatched as if it were their own. They appropriated everything as if it was their luck [to find it]. And after they removed the gold, when they had torn it all off, they piled it up all the precious feathers, everything else in the middle of the courtyard, in the center of it.

And when all of the gold had been gathered, then Malinche summoned all the noblemen. She climbed upon the roof, on a parapet. She said: "Mexicanos, come here! The Spaniards are greatly afflicted. Bring them food, fresh water, and all that is needed. For they are already tired and exhausted. Why don't you want to come? It seems like you are angry."

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

Cortés and Moctezuma Clash Over Religion and Other Values

From Díaz del Castillo, Vol. 2, Chapter 107

I have many times said that Cortés and all of us always endeavored to please and serve Moctezuma and to pay him court. One day Moctezuma said, "Look here Malinche. I love you so much that I want to give you one of my daughters, who is very beautiful, so that you can marry her and treat her as your legitimate wife"; Cortés tipped his cap in thanks, and said that it was a great favor that Moctezuma was conferring on him, but that he was already married and had a wife, and that among us we were not permitted to have more than one wife, he would however keep her in the rank to which the daughter of so great a prince was entitled, but that first of all he desired her to become a Christian, as other ladies, the daughters of Chieftains, already were; and to this Moctezuma consented.

The Great Moctezuma always showed his accustomed good will to us, but not a day went by without a sacrifice at which human beings were killed, and Cortés tried to criticize him for this; but this did no good. Finally, he sought counsel with his captains as to what should be done in the matter, for he did not dare to put an end to it for fear of an uprising in the city of by the priests in charge of Huitzilopochtli.

The advice that the captains and soldiers gave about this was, that he should pretend that he wished to go to and throw down the Idols from the Great Temple of Huitzilopochtli, and that seeing if they were preparing to defend them, and were going to rise in revolt, that we should then demand permission to set up an altar inside the Great Temple, and place a Crucifix and an image of Our Lady there.

When this was settled Cortés sent a messenger to the Palace where Moctezuma was imprisoned and took seven captains and soldiers with him, and said to Moctezuma: "Señor, I have often asked you not to sacrifice any more human beings to your gods who are deceiving you, and you will not cease doing it, I wish you to know that all my companions and these Captains who are with me have come to beg you to give them leave to remove the Idols from your temple and put our Lady Santa Maria and a cross in their place, and, if you will not give them permission, they will go and remove them, and I would not like them to kill any priests."

When Moctezuma heard those words and saw that the Captains were rather angry, he said, " Oh! Malinche, now you wish to destroy the city entirely? Our gods are very angry with us, and I do not know that they will stop even in taking your lives, what I pray you to do for the present is to be patient, and I will send a messenger to summon all the priests and I will see their reply." At these words, Cortés made a gesture that he wished to speak privately to Moctezuma without the presence of the Captains whom he had brought in his company, so he ordered them to go out and leave him alone. When they had left the hall, he said to Moctezuma, that in order to avoid a disorder and rioting and to prevent offending the priests, who would be upset if their Idols were thrown over, he would arrange to dissuade these Captains of their plans with the condition that they be allowed to put an image of Our Lady of the Cross and a cross in a spot at the top of the Great Temple; that they will see with time about how beneficial these will be for the wealth and prosperity of their souls, their health, and their harvests.

And Moctezuma, very sad and with a sad look on his face, promised to negotiate this with the priests.

[Díaz del Castillo concludes this chapter by saying they were successful in putting the image and the cross in the Great Temple.]



Florentine Codex

brigantines attacking Tenochtitlán, from the



Image From *El Lienza de Tlaxcala* (Tlaxcalan)

This image shows a priest baptizing several Tlaxcalan women, including the daughters of Xicotencatl. The Spaniards are holding a cross and there is a painting of the Virgin Mary and Jesus on the wall in this makeshift church. While the Spaniards succeeded in baptizing women, who were given to them, men rarely agreed to be baptized and resisted giving up their idols. This drawing made years after the conquest was especially designed to win sympathy for the Tlaxcalans from the Spaniards by showing their early faith in the Church, something questionable at the time.