

BERNAL DIAZ DEL CASTILLO: THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE CONQUEST

Cortes decided that on the second day of the Feast of the Holy Spirit a review should be held in the great courts of Texcoco. Eighty-four horsemen were present, and six hundred and fifty soldiers with sword and shield and many with lances, and from these were chosen crews to man the thirteen launches.

Let us leave the daily battles, and those others fought by Cortes, and say what an advantage we had gained by preventing food and water getting to the enemy. To interrupt these supplies, it was agreed between our three camps that two launches should patrol the lake by night and destroy all the canoes they could.

I will go on to speak of the severe fighting that was all the time going on in Cortes' camp. For he ordered that all houses should be pulled down and burnt and the bridged channels filled up. Now when the Mexicans saw us leveling the houses and filling up the bridges they decided on another way of fighting. They would lift a bridge, they dug many pits, they also drove in many stakes where our launches would run on them. One Sunday morning squadrons of warriors fell on us from three directions. They forced us to cross at where the water was very deep and they had dug many pits. We swam or leapt through the water, and nearly all our men fell into these pits.

We were to advance with all possible strength from all three camps, horsemen, crossbow men, musketeers and soldiers and push forward into the great market square of Tlatelolco.

To return to our story, as we advanced from all three camps into the city, we came to the pool from which they drew the brackish water I have spoken of, and destroyed it so that they should make no more use of it. We could now move more freely along all

the streets we had captured, for they had been leveled and our horsemen had freedom of maneuver. The message that they carried to Cuatemoc was that Cortes had a great regard for him as a close relative and that he would be sorry if that great city was totally destroyed. To avoid the daily slaughter of its inhabitants he begged Cuatemoc to make peace.

Let me say that Pedro de Alvarado's men advanced fighting till they reached Tlatelolco. There were so many Mexicans guarding their idols and tall shrines and they had raised so many barricades that it took us quite two hours before we could capture them. We climbed to the top, set the shrines on fire, burnt the idols, and planted our banners there.

Everyone agreed that all the gold and silver and jewels in Mexico should be collected together. But this seems to have amounted to very little. We captains and soldiers were all somewhat sad when we saw how little gold there was and how poor and mean our shares would be. Many interested readers have asked me why the true Conquistadors who won New Spain and the great and strong city of Mexico did not stay to settle, but went on to other provinces. Learning from Montezuma's account books the names of the places which sent him tributes of gold, and where the mines and chocolate and cotton cloths were to be found, we decided to go to these places. We realized that there were no gold or mines or cotton in the towns around Mexico, only a lot of maize and the maguey plantations from which they obtained their wine. For this reason we thought of it as a poor land, and went off to colonize other provinces.

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