

The Aztec Account

SOURCE Bernardino de Sahagún, *Florentine Codex: General History of the Things of New Spain*, trans. A. J. O. Anderson and C. E. Dibble (Salt Lake City: School of American Research and University of Utah, 1950-1982), *Book XII: The Conquest of Mexico*, Chaps. XVI, XVII, XXIII, pp. 44-66, passim. Reprinted by permission.

And already Moctezuma met them [the Spanish] there in Uitzillan. Thereupon he gave gifts to the commandant, the commander of soldiers; he gave him flowers, he bejeweled him with necklaces, he hung garlands about him, he covered him with flowers, he wreathed his head with flowers. Thereupon he had the golden necklaces laid before him—all the kinds of gifts of greeting, with which the meeting was concluded. On some he hung necklaces.

Then [Cortés] said to Moctezuma: “Is this not thou? Art thou not he? Art thou Moctezuma?”

Moctezuma replied: “Indeed yes, I am he.”

Thereupon he arose; he arose to meet him face to face. He inclined his body deeply. He drew him close. He arose firmly.

Thus he besought him: he said to him: “O our lord, thou hast suffered fatigue, thou hast endured weariness. Thou hast come to arrive on earth. Thou hast come to govern thy city of Mexico [Tenochtitlán]; thou hast come to descend upon thy mat, upon thy seat, which for a moment I have watched for thee, which I have guarded for thee. For thy governors are departed—the rulers Itzcoatl, Moctezuma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc, Auitzotl, who yet a very short time ago had come to stand guard for thee, who had come to govern the city of Mexico. Under their protection thy common folk came. Do they yet perchance know it in their absence? O that one of them might witness, might marvel at what to me now hath befallen, at what I see quite in the absence of our lords. I by no means merely dream, I do not merely see in a dream, I do not see in my sleep; I do not merely dream that I see thee, that I look into thy face. I have been afflicted for some time. I have gazed at the unknown place whence thou hast come—from among the clouds, from among the mists. And so this. The rulers departed maintaining that thou wouldst come to visit thy city, that thou wouldst come to descend upon thy mat, upon thy seat. And now it hath been fulfilled; thou hast come; thou hast endured fatigue, thou hast

endured weariness. Peace be with thee. Rest thyself. Visit thy palace. Rest thy body. May peace be with our lords.” . . .

And when Moctezuma’s address which he directed to the Marquis [Cortés] was ended, Marina [Malinche, a native woman working for the Spanish] then interpreted it, she translated it to him. And when the Marquis had heard Moctezuma’s words, he spoke to Marina; he spoke to them in a barbarous tongue; he said in his barbarous tongue:

“Let Moctezuma put his heart at ease; let him not be frightened. We love him much. New our hearts are indeed satisfied, for we know him, we hear him. For a long time we have wished to see him, to look upon his face. And this we have seen. Already we have come to his home in Mexico. At his leisure he will hear our words.”

Thereupon [the Spaniards] grasped [Moctezuma] by the hand. Already they went leading him by it. They caressed him with their hands to make their love known to him...

And when they had gone to arrive in the palace, when they had gone to enter it, at once they firmly seized Moctezuma. They continually kept him closely under observation; they never let him from their sight. With him was Itzquauhtzin. But the others just came forth [unimpeded].

And when this had come to pass, then each of the guns shot off. As if in confusion there was going off to one side, there was scattering from one’s sight, a jumping in all directions. It was as if one had lost one’s breath; it was as if for the time there was stupefaction, as if one were affected by mushrooms, as if something unknown were shown one. Fear prevailed. It was as if everyone had swallowed his heart. Even before it had grown dark, there was terror, there was astonishment, there was apprehension, there was a stunning of the people.

And when it dawned, thereupon were proclaimed all the things which [the Spaniards] required: white tortillas, roasted turkey hens, eggs, fresh water, wood, firewood, charcoal, earthen bowls, polished vessels, water jars, large water pitchers, cooking vessels, all manner of clay articles. This had Moctezuma indeed commanded.

But when he summoned forth the noblemen, no longer did they obey him. They only grew angry. No longer did they come to him, no longer did they go to him. No longer was he heeded. But nevertheless he was not therefore neglected; he was given all that he required—food, drink, and water [and] fodder for the deer [horses].

And when [the Spaniards] were well settled, they thereupon inquired of Moctezuma as to all the city's treasure—the devices, the shields. Much did they importune him; with great zeal they sought gold. And Moctezuma thereupon went leading the Spaniards. They went surrounding him, scattered about him; he went among them, he went in their lead; they went each holding him, each grasping him. And when they reached the storehouse, a place called Teocalco, thereupon were brought forth all the brilliant things,- the quetzal feather head fan, the devices, the shields, the golden discs, the devils' necklaces, the golden nose crescents, the golden leg bands, the golden arm bands, the golden forehead bands.

Thereupon was detached the gold which was on the shields and which was on all the devices. And as all the gold was detached, at once they ignited, set fire to, applied fire to all the various precious things [which remained]. They all burned. And the gold the Spaniards formed into separate bars. . . .

And four days after they had been hurled from the [pyramid] temple, [the Spaniards] came to cast away [the bodies of] Moctezuma and Itzquauhtzin, who had died, at the water's edge at a place called Teoloc. For at that place there was the image of a turtle carved of stone; the stone had an appearance like that of a turtle.

And when they were seen, when they were known to be Moctezuma and Itzquauhtzin, then they quickly took up Moctezuma in their arms. They carried him there to a place called Copulco. Thereupon they placed him on a pile of wood; thereupon they kindled it, they set fire to it. Thereupon the fire crackled, seeming to flare up, to send up many tongues of flame; many tongues of flame, many sprigs of flame seemed to arise. And Moctezuma's body seemed to lie sizzling, and it smelled foul as it burned.

And as it burned, only with fury, no longer with much of the people's good will, some chid him--they said: "This blockhead! He terrorized the world; there was dread in the world, there was terror before him in the world, there was astonishment. This man! If anyone offended him only a little, he at once disposed of him. Many he punished for imagined [faults] which were not real, which were only a fabrication of words." And still many who chid him groaned, cried out, shook their heads in disapproval....

There arose a tearful cry [upon evacuating Tenochtitlán]. Some went rejoicing; each one; some went content, each one, as they went joining the road. And those who had

boats, all who owned boats, went forth only at night, but yet, even by day, they went forth. It was as if [the boats] struck against one another as they went.

And everywhere on the roads the Spaniards robbed the people. They sought gold. They despised the green stone, the precious feathers, and the turquoise. [The gold] was everywhere in the bosoms, in the skirts of the poor women. And as for us who were men: it was everywhere in their breech clouts, in their mouths.

And [the Spaniards] seized, they selected the women—the pretty ones, those whose bodies were yellow: the yellow [light-skinned] ones. And some women, when they were to be taken from the people, muddied their faces, and clothed themselves in old clothing, put rags on themselves as a shift. It was all only rags that they put on themselves.

And also some were selected from among us men—those who were strong, those soon grown to manhood, and those of whom later as young men they would make messengers, who would be their messengers, those known as *tamacazque*. Of some they then burned [branded] the cheeks,- of some they painted the cheeks, of some they painted the lips.

And when the shields were laid down, when we fell, it was in the year count Three House; and in the day count it was One Serpent.

And when Quauhtémoc went to give himself up, then they took him to Acachinanco, when already it was night. And upon the next day, when already there was a little sun, once again the Spaniards came. There were indeed many. They likewise came still spent. They came in battle array, [with] iron cuirasses, iron helmets, but not their iron swords, and not their shields. Only all of them pressed against their noses with fine white cloths; the dead sickened them—they, already smelled offensive; they already stank.