

Indigenous Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico: reevaluating sources and current studies

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- ? . Overview of modern editions and their indigenous sources
- ? . Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex
- ? . Coloquios y doctrina cristiana
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In the typical versions of the conquest of Mexico, the Spaniards arrived to convert the barbarous Indians, who did not know the true God and religion, into peaceful and civilized Christians. The first conquistadors of Mexico such as Hernán Cortés (1993) and Bernal Díaz (1992) invariably describe the Indians from the very small tribes in the islands of the Gulf coast to the Aztecs in Tenochtitlan as a vicious and savage people who practiced human sacrifice. In his letters to the Spanish King, Cortés repeatedly condemns the Aztecs as barbarians because of their religious and cultural practices, and designates their capital Tenochtitlan as an evil city to be destroyed. By closely following the ideas of the conquistadors, later European and Europeanized historians justified the conquest as a victory over barbarous paganism and the triumph of peaceful Christianity. The famous historian William H. Prescott (1964) in the nineteenth century, for instance, eulogized the pious and unselfish Spaniards for their civilizing mission.

The history of the conquest, however, is very different in the accounts of

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the conquered. In these accounts, the Aztecs record the pious Christian conquistadors as barbarous invaders who were murdering people and were only interested in precious metals. When Hernán Cortés arrived at Veracruz in 1519, the Aztecs were closely watching these new comers. They recorded in great detail their move step by step from Veracruz to Tenochtitlan and their battles with the invaders. For this essay, I selected six books that examine or translate several pictorial or Nahuatl texts that deal with indigenous accounts of the conquest.

I. Overview of modern editions and their indigenous sources

Even long before the conquest, the Aztecs were writing their history by using pictorial glyphs. Highly trained scribes, *Tlacuilo*, were producing sacred books (*Teomoxtli*) and historical annals (*Xiuhlapohualli*) that depicted the ideas of Aztec religion, foundations of dynasties, major historical events such as conquests, droughts, and floods, etc (Brotherston, 1992: 50-51; Boon: 20-22). This pictographic tradition survived after the conquest but its practice declined sharply because the Spanish missionaries denounced it as idolatrous. There are no existing pure pictorial texts that depict the conquest. There are, however, several hybrid texts on the conquest that participate in both alphabetic and pictorial systems. Many natives—mostly the descendants of the noble class—learned the European alphabetic system in monastery schools and produced a hybrid textual forms. In general, these works can be classified into two categories: 1) mainly pictorial texts with alphabetic notes; and 2) mainly alphabetic texts in Spanish or Nahuatl with pictorial episodes. In addition, there were also solely alphabetic texts either in Spanish or Nahuatl. Most of these hybrid and alphabetic texts, however, are brief or fragmentary accounts that do not thoroughly record the entire process of the conquest.

In 1959, Miguel León-Portilla published a ground breaking work, *Visión de los vencidos*, that was a first collection of indigenous accounts of the

conquest. In this work, León-Portilla collected and edited the segments of alphabetic texts such as the *Anales de Tlatelolco*, the *Florentine Codex*, the *Aubin Codex*, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's works, the *Historia de Tlaxcala* of Diego Muñoz Camargo, the *Crónica Mexicayotl* of Alvarado Tezozomoc, the *Cantares mexicanos*, etc. On the other hand, he also included in his book some pictorial images from the *Florentine Codex*, the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, and others. Except Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Muñoz Camargo's works, all the texts were written in Nahuatl and most of them were translated into Spanish. Among León-Portilla's selections, I would like to reproduce the following poem from the *Anales de Tlatelolco* because it vividly describes the pain and agony of the vanquished after the long battle:

Los últimos días del sitio de Tenochtitlan

Y todo esto pasó con nosotros.
Nosotros lo vimos,
nosotros lo admiramos.
Con esta lamentosa y triste suerte
nos vimos angustiados.

En los caminos yacen dardos rotos,
los cabellos están esparcidos.
Destechados están las casas,
enrojecidos tienen sus muros.

Gusanos pululan por calles y plazas,
y en las paredes están salpicados los sesos.
Rojas están las aguas, están como teñidas,
y cuando las bebimos,
es como si bebiéramos agua de salitre.

Golpeábamos, en tanto, los muros de adobe,
y era nuestra herencia una red de agujeros.
Con los escudos fue su resguardo,
pero ni con escudos puede ser sostenida su soledad.

------(166)

Along with the selections of the original texts, León-Portilla provides a brief historical introduction to each of the major indigenous works that he collected and examines several issues in the conquest such as the description of the invaders represented from indigenous perspective. At the same time, he also categorizes Alva Ixtlilxochitl and the Tlaxc altecas as a special group who were allies of the invaders but maintained different views from the Spaniards as well as the Aztecs. This book made a significant contribution to the study of the conquest because it initiated a new look to the conquest that is totally different from conventional studies.

León-Portilla (1992) revised and expanded the *Visión de los vencidos*, and translated it into English under the title of *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*. He reordered the appendix of the old version as an introduction in the new that briefly narrates Aztec history and culture. The most important change in the new version that León-Portilla made is chapter sixteen, "Aftermath." This chapter includes several important Nahuatl documents that have been produced from the conquest to the present: two letters of indigenous leaders from the neighboring cities of Tenochtitlan and Huexotzinco in the sixteenth century that ask the Spanish king to reduce the tribute imposed on them; a legal document in the eighteenth century that argues for land ownership based on indigenous genealogical traditions; a dance-drama from the eighteenth century that reconstructs the conquest; two twentieth-century Zapatista manifestos that urge the Nahuatl peasants to join the revolutionary army for the land; and finally two contemporary poems that demonstrate a Nahuatl attempt to maintain and continue their traditions in the threatening contemporary political and economic context. The following poem manifests a close relationship between the conquest and the current situation of the Nahuas:

Some Coyotes¹ are saying
that we Nahuas will disappear,

¹ According to León-Portilla (1992:169), Coyotes refer to "the astute and voracious non-Indians who take advantage of the few possessions left to the indigenous peoples."

will vanish,
our language will be heard no more,
will be used no more.
The Coyotes rejoice in this,
as this what they are looking for.
Why is it that they want us to disappear?
We do not have to contemplate this too long,
because four hundred years have shown us
the aim of the Coyotes.
They are envious of our lands,
our forests and rives,
our work, our sweat.

Truly we can assert that,
although some want us to disappear,
we Nahuas continue to live,
we Nahuas continue to grow. . . (169-71)²

With the new chapter, León-Portilla makes clear that the Western invasion to the Nahuatl population has always been an on-going action. By including Nahuatl documents from the conquest to the present, León-Portilla shows not only that the Nahuas have been suffering the conquest, but also that they have been fighting back to survive as their ancestors did and even to spread their cultures.

The second collection of the indigenous accounts of the conquest, *We People Here*, was published by James Lockhart in 1993. He selected six Nahuatl texts and translated them into English: Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex*, the *Annals of Tlatelolco*, the *Codex Aubin*, the *Annals of Cuauhtitlan*, the *Historia Tolteca-Chichimeca*, and the *Letter from Huejotzingo, 1560*. Comparing this edition with the *Visión de los vencidos*, Lockhart like León-Portilla also included the *Florentine Codex*, the *Annals of Tlatelolco*, and the *Codex Aubin*. He excluded, however, the Spanish texts written by mestizos such as Alva Ixtlilxochitl and Muñoz Camargo. This edition shows a

² According to León-Portilla, the bibliographical source of this poem is: Joel Martínez Hernández, "Quesqui Nahuamacehualme Tiiztoqueh?" (How many Nahuas Are We?), in

different format from that of León-Portilla's. It provides the original Nahuatl texts with an English translation, so that those who know Nahuatl can compare the original with the translation. Furthermore, Lockhart's commentary on Nahuatl terms makes his edition more valuable. The most notable contribution of Lockhart's edition is that the introduction discusses some major critical issues such as the degree of European influence on indigenous accounts of the conquest. He questions the indigenous authenticity of several major events described in Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex* such as the myth of Quetzalcoatl and the psychological portrait of Moctezuma. Lockhart's new look at the sources highlights several debates on the indigenous accounts of the conquest.

If León-Portilla and Lockhart edit and translate primarily Nahuatl alphabetic accounts of the conquest, Gordon Brotherston (1995) tries to show a more diverse indigenous reaction by examining almost all the alphabetic and pictorial texts that deal with the conquest. In the chapter two of the book, *Painted Books from Mexico*, Brotherston reconstructs the Spanish invasion to Tenochtitlan based on pictorial codices such as the *Codex Rios*, the *Tlaxcala Lienzo*, and the *Codex Aubin*, and also on alphabetic texts such as the Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex*, and the *Cantares mexicanos*. Brotherston pays special attention to the role of La Malinche and the Tlaxcaltecas. By examining several pictorial codices, Brotherston shows that Malinche, who has been generally known as a mere interpreter, played an active role and established a joint power with Cortés after the conquest. One of the pictorial images that the author includes shows Spanish dogs attacking indigenous leaders. The coyote on the small mountain in the bottom center of the figure indicates that the event happened in Coyoacan (place of coyote). On the right side of the figure appear four indigenous leaders who were chained and whose hands were tied. On the top left, Cortés and Malinche are presiding over the dog attack.

For the Tlaxcalan version of the conquest, Brotherston uses several pictorial texts such as the *Huamantla Roll*, the *Tizatlan Codex*, the *Tlaxcala*

Nahua Macehualpaquiliztlitli (Joy of the Nahua People) 1983: 4-9.

Lienzo, and the *Tlaxcala Codex* that originated from the Tlaxcalan area. The author points out that Tlaxcalan versions do not show any resistance to the conquest. Rather, they emphasize their aid to the Spaniards and their contribution to the conquest, and thus they try to position themselves as conquistadors.

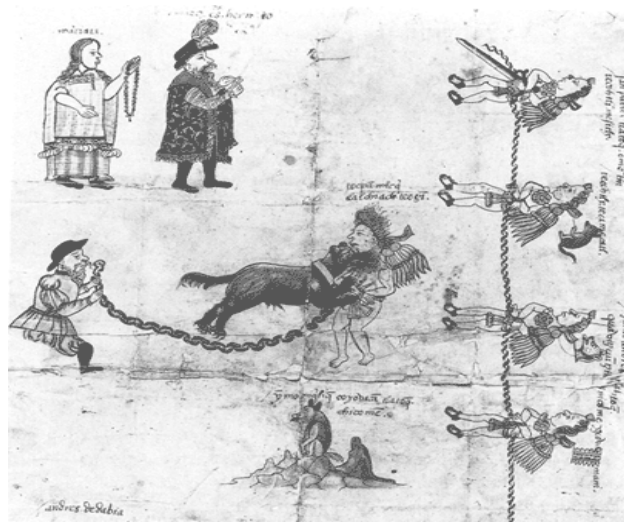


Figure 1. Dogs killing indigenous leaders in Coyoacan, Codex Coyoacan. after Brotherston. p. 35.

The three modern editions of the indigenous accounts have several features in common. First, they used Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex* as the major indigenous account that not only records the conquest in alphabetic script, but also provides vivid pictorial images from the beginning to the end. Second, they focus on the role of the indigenous allies of Cortés such as the Tlaxcaltecas and the Huexotzincas, which undermines the Spanish chronicles that focus exclusively on the conquistadors. Lastly, they try to challenge some events of the conquest that have been widely accepted, the myth of Quetzalcoatl and the role of La Malinche, for example. Based on the sources of the editions, I selected Book Twelve for a detailed review in this essay because it is the only source that describes the conquest in detail from the beginning to

the end. In addition, I will examine one more Nahuatl text, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* (1986), which none of the modern editors included in their books. The exclusion was probably due to the fact that the *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* does not record the conquest itself but a conversation between Spanish priests and Aztec leaders that happened in Tenochtitlan two years after the conquest in 1524. I believe, however, that this book is as important as Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex* because the latter shows a story of the physical conquest while the former records the indigenous reaction to the spiritual conquest in which the natives defended their own religion by rejecting Christianity, the religion imposed by the invaders.

II. Book Twelve of the Florentine Codex³

This book is a volume of the enormous codex of Nahuatl culture and history that the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún edited by collecting data from various areas of central Mexico. This encyclopedic codex consists of twelve volumes that deal with Nahuatl religion, calendar system, astrology, philosophy, government, dynasty, markets, plants, animals, and finally the conquest. According to several researchers (Edmonson:4-8; Lockhart, 1993:27), Sahagún collected all the information and edited it in Nahuatl during 1547-1569. Later a Spanish version was completed around 1578-79.⁴

The last volume of the codex is titled *The Conquest of Mexico*. It consists of forty one chapters that are accompanied by 161 pictorial illustrations. This book begins with the eight omens that predict the arrival of the Spaniards and thus the destruction of the Aztec Empire. In the following several chapters, it

³ There are two available English translations of Book Twelve, the one made by A. Anderson and C. Dibble (1950-82), and the other by Lockhart (1993: 47-255). All the quotes that appear in this essay come from the former.

⁴ The Spanish version of the codex is not an exact translation of the Nahuatl text. Sahagún (1997) sometimes omitted information or summarized the original, and he inserted his judgment on indigenous culture and behavior.

describes the reaction of the Aztec king Moctezuma to the arrival of the Spaniards. Moctezuma interpreted the arrival of Cortés as the return of Quetzalcoatl who, according to an Aztec legend, was a Toltec king and would come back to claim his empire. Moctezuma was terrified and tried to stop the strangers by sending his magicians but it was in vain. Moctezuma decided to go out to receive Cortés and the Spaniards, and he made the famous speech in which he voluntarily would cede his empire to the recently arrived Cortés-Quetzalcoatl. Soon after, however, the Aztec king became a prisoner and a puppet of the Spaniards who tried to satisfy all the requests of the invaders. Meanwhile, Cortés had to leave Tenochtitlan to fight against Narváez and his Spanish army who had been ordered to capture Cortés and to bring him back to Cuba.⁵ During Cortés's absence in Tenochtitlan, the Spaniards killed many unarmed Aztecs during the religious feast *Toxcatl*. When Cortés came back to Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs had already begun a war against the Spaniards. The Spaniards had to flee from Tenochtitlan at night suffering many casualties. But they returned with a different strategy. They constructed several brigantines and sieged the city. The last several chapters of the book vividly describe the heroic battles in which the Aztecs captured Spaniards and the efforts to defend their city.

This indigenous version of the conquest clearly undermines the colonial ideology and point of view of the conquistadors. More than any thing else, this testimony seriously challenges the image of the Spaniards as messengers of the true god with which the conquistadors themselves and later European chroniclers justified the conquest. In the view of the Aztecs, the Spaniards were busier conquering people and acquiring precious metals such as gold than they were preaching their religion. The Aztecs describe the reaction of the Spaniards when Moctezuma sent gifts to them: "And when they [Moctezuma's messengers] had given the gift, they appeared to smile, to

⁵ Book Twelve does not record the rebellion of Cortés. Diego Velázquez who was governor of Cuba sent Cortés to explore the coast of Yucatan and return. But when Cortés heard of the Aztec empire, he decided to conquer it instead. Velázquez then sent troops under the command of Narváez to bring Cortés back to Cuba, but Cortés captured Narváez and convinced him to join the conquest.

rejoice exceedingly, and to take great pleasure. Like monkeys they seized upon the gold. It was as if then they were satisfied, sated, and gladdened. For in truth they thirsted mightily for gold; they stuffed themselves with it, and starved and lusted for it like pigs” (31).⁶ The conquistadors viewed by the Aztecs here were inhumane like monkeys and pigs that were hungry for gold.⁷

⁶ As a Spaniard, Sahagún (1997:733) did not translate the original Nahuatl text in Spanish word for word. Compare the following with the English translation: “. . . : allí los recibieron y presentaron el presente de oro que llevaban, y según que a los indios les pareció por las señales exteriores que vieron en los españoles, holgáronse y regocijáronse con el oro, mostrando que lo tenían en mucho” The animalization of the conquistadors in the Nahuatl version virtually disappears in this Spanish translation.

⁷ This kind of reaction by the conquistadors to gold is also notorious in the conquest of Peru. In the sixteenth century, Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala records that: “Y no quisieron [los españoles] descansar ningún día en los puertos. Cada día no se hacía nada, sino todo era pensar en oro y plata y riquezas de las Indias del Perú. Estaban como un hombre desesperado, tonto, loco, perdidos el juicio con la codicia de oro y plata. A veces no comía con el pensamiento de oro y plata. A veces tenía gran fiesta, pareciendo que todo oro y plata tenía dentro de las manos. Ha sido como un gato casero cuando tiene al ratón dentro de las uñas, entonces se huelga. Y si no, siempre acecha y trabaja y todo su cuidado y pensamiento se le va allí hacia cogerlo: no para y siempre vuelve allí” (373).

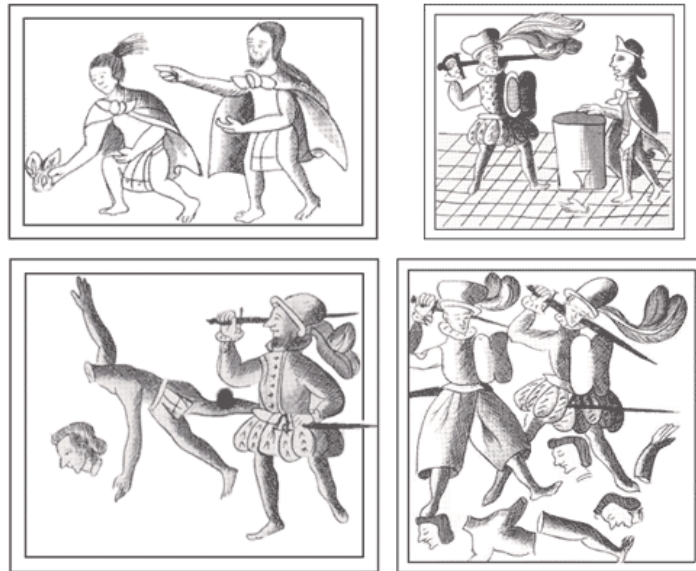


Figure 2: Massacre of the Aztecs in the feast of Toxcatl, *Florentine Codex*, Illustrations 65-68.

Book Twelve also records the indigenous point of view regarding several major events of the conquest. Among them, the most controversial is the massacre that the Spaniards committed during the feast of Toxcatl. The Aztecs record that Pedro de Alvarado, who was in charge of the Spaniards in Tenochtitlan during Cortés's absence, allowed them to celebrate the feast of Toxcatl in honor of Huitzilopochtli, but when they were dancing and singing in the Templo Mayor, the Spaniards suddenly appeared and began to slay them. Following a clockwise direction, the Aztecs were preparing the feast with flowers and the Spaniards appeared with swords when the Aztecs were playing their drum (*huehuetl*). The final two images demonstrate that the Spaniards are slaughtering the Aztecs who do not have weapons. Cortés (1993:266) simply described that the natives initiated battles against the Spaniards and did not even mention the massacre. Bernal Díaz (1992:246) records that Pedro de Alvarado decided to attack the Aztecs because he was informed that the Aztecs would come to capture the Spaniards to sacrifice after

the ceremony. He also records, however, that Cortés scolded Pedro de Alvarado for this implausible reason, which indirectly verifies the indigenous testimony. The indigenous version of the conquest provides another sight of many other controversial issues such as the massacre at Cholula, the Spanish flight from Tenochtitlan known as *La Noche Triste*, etc.

Most contemporary researchers (León-Portilla, 1995:122; Lockhart, 1993:28) agree that Book Twelve as well as the whole *Florentine Codex* are for the most part indigenous products. There are, however, several debates on this indigenous testimony. Among them, whether or not there is a postcolonial influence is the most critical. León-Portilla (1992; 1972) does not find any postcolonial influence in Book Twelve while Lockhart finds significant changes of indigenous views toward the conquest. In his close examination of the corpus of Nahuatl texts from the colonial period to the present, Lockhart (1994:222) divides them into three stages according to Nahuatl linguistic development. In the first stage (1519 to about 1540 or 1545), the Nahuatl language did not have Spanish influence except some Spanish personal names. In the second stage (1540-1545 to about 1640-50), a large amount of Spanish nouns were adapted into Nahuatl but indigenous pronunciation and syntax were still intact. In the last stage (1640-1650 to the present), the Nahuatl language has been substantially changed. Spanish nouns, verbs as well as pronunciation and syntax were adopted. Based on the evolution of the Nahuatl language, Lockhart argues for a postcolonial influence in Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex*.

Lockhart (1993:17; 1994:243) divides Book Twelve into two parts: before and after the feast of Toxcatl. According to Lockhart, the second part maintains an older style of Nahuatl from the first stage while the first part exhibits features of the second stage. Thus, Lockhart insists that all the events recorded in the first part such as the omens, Moctezuma's cowardice, and his identification of Cortés with Quetzalcoatl were tainted by colonial influence of the invaders.⁸

⁸ For more information on the current debate surrounding the myth of Quetzalcoatl, see David Carrasco (2000: 205-240). He supports the pre-Hispanic origin of the myth, but he also summarizes major studies on the topic.

This examination has a significant impact on the study of the conquest. The myth of Quetzalcoatl, in particular, with which so many colonial chroniclers used to justify the conquest, is seriously challenged. Lockhart partially undermines the indigenous validity of Book Twelve, but it is still the most important text of the conquest because many parts of the book challenge the history that the conquerors wrote.

III. Coloquios y doctrina cristiana

The spiritual conquest in Mexico actually began with the arrival of the twelve Franciscans in 1524. *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana* records the dialogue between these Spanish priests and the Aztecs regarding Christian instruction. Like the *Florentine Codex*, the Nahuatl version of the text is accompanied by a Spanish translation. Although this text was originally longer, only fourteen chapters have survived (León-Portilla, 1986:22). Most of them are dedicated to an explanation of Christian concepts such as the true and only God, the Bible, idolatry, and the Pope. Chapters six and seven, however, describe a bold reaction by the Aztec leaders to the religion imposed by the invaders.

Throughout the entire text, as the conquistadors rationalized their brutality in the name of the god, the Spanish priests justify the conquest as the divine punishment to the Aztecs who were serving evils and committing idolatry:

Porque muchas cosas,
de noche, de día, hacéis,
con las que le ofendéis,
de modo que vivís en su enojo, en su cólera.
Mucho, por causa vuestra,
por los quebramientos [pecados] en vuestro corazón.
por eso envió
a los que vinieran,
sus vasallos, españoles,
a los que os conquistaron,

los que os hicieron miserables,
los que os procuraron ardientes aflicciones.
Con esto fuísteis castigados,
para que terminaráis
las no pocas
ofensas a su corazón,
aquello que habéis vivido haciendo. (113)

This paragraph shows that the evangelization of Christianity was nothing but an ideological propaganda of the conquest. If the conquistadors finished the conquest in terms of military action, the priests consolidated it by trying to spiritually replace indigenous with European religion. To do that, they tried to explain that there was one true god who created everything in the world and that they were sent to teach the true god and religion to the Aztecs:

Escuchad amados nuestros,
cómo vino a hacerse nuestro encargo.
Nos encomendó,
nos confió el trabajo,
el gran gobernante en las cosas divinas,
para que con palabras divinas os enseñáramos,
os pusiéramos en alto la luz, la tea,
os abriéramos los ojos,
os destapáramos los oídos,
de suerte que pudiérais conocer,
a él, Dios verdadero,
señor que gobierna,
en todas las partes, en el cielo, en la tierra,
en la región de los muertos. (115)

The Spanish priests make a major argument throughout the *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*: the Aztecs served false gods, that is, evils, and therefore were punished by the true god. The vanquished, however, did not show any indication of accepting this argument of the invaders. On the contrary, they strongly rejected it point by point. Against the accusation of their religion as false, the Aztec leaders strongly defended their religion as a true:

Vosotros dijísteis
que nosotros no conocíamos
al dueño del cerca y del junto,
a aquél de quien son el cielo, la tierra.
Habéis dicho
que no son verdaderos dioses los nuestros.
Nueva palabra es esta,
la que habláis
y por ella estamos perturbados,
por ella estamos espantados.
Porque nuestros progenitores,
los que vinieron a ser, a vivir en la tierra
no hablaban así.
En verdad ellos nos dieron
su norma de vida,
tenían por verdaderos,
servían,
reverenciaban [a los dioses].

Ellos son a quienes pedimos
el agua, la lluvia,
por las que se producen las cosas en el tierra. (149-51)

In this paragraph, the Aztecs contradict the whole colonial ideology that the Spanish priests tried to impose on them. They strongly rejected the idea that they did not know the true god and true religion. They argue confidently that they knew the gods and that these gods were true not only because their ancestors served them as true, but also because these gods made possible it to grow things for them to survive on earth.

Against the idea of the conquest as a divine punishment, the Aztecs make clear that they consider the conquest as a terrible loss rather than a divine punishment as the Spanish priests insist:

Es ya bastante que hayamos dejado,
que hayamos perdido, que se nos haya quitado,
que se nos haya impedido,

la estera, el sitial [el mando].
Si en el mismo lugar permanecemos,
provocaremos que [a los señores] los pongan en prisión.
Haced con nosotros,
lo que queráis.
Esto es todo lo que respondemos,
lo que contestamos
a vuestra reverenciado aliento,
a vuestra reverenciada palabra,
oh señores nuestros. (155)

The Aztecs don't show any indication that they agreed with the preaching of the Spanish priests. They don't relate the conquest to any religious concept but rather to a defeat in terms of military action. The Aztecs never show a willingness to follow the religion of the invaders nor would they abandon theirs.

There is a debate on the historicity of this text among researchers. Angel María K. Garibay (1971, 2:240) insists that the dialogue between the Aztec leaders and the Spanish priests described in the text is a literary creation rather than a historical event. On the other hand, many others such as León-Portilla (1986:23-26) and J. Jorge Klor de Alva (1982) argue that, even though there is a certain elaboration in the text, the dialogue was based on historical events. Both of them present several similar dialogues recorded in the colonial period, the dialogue between Cortés and the Tlaxcalan leaders described in *Historia de Tlaxcala* of Diego Muñoz Camargo, for instance. In addition, they also present several documents such as the records of the Inquisition that show an audacious reaction by the natives to Christianity. In the similar dialogue and documents, the Aztecs manifest tenacious resistance to Christianity just like the Aztec leaders show in the *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*. One of those documents even records that a native called the Spanish priests devils who were trying to destroy his religion (León-Portilla, 1974:27). Klor de Alva and León-Portilla convincingly corroborate the historicity of the text.

IV. Conclusion

As the voice of the vanquished, indigenous accounts help us to better understand the conquest itself as well as our world today. The Aztecs contradict the typical version of the conquest by asserting that it was a brutal destruction, not the salvation from barbarism that the invaders insisted. Their accounts challenge the story of the dominant group by revealing the suffering, misery, and affliction of the world of the dominated that the dominant group always hides or justifies. In this sense, the indigenous accounts serve as a model to undermine the dominant ideology. This is equally as significant in our world today where Western culture is dominating and expanding its cultural monopoly all over the world in the name of Neo-liberalism.

Abstract

Modern editions of the indigenous accounts of the conquest in Mexico revive the voice of the vanquished that has been buried for more than four centuries. By providing a counter-discourse to the story of the colonizers, these accounts help to better understand the colonial ideology in Latin America that justifies the brutal destruction of many indigenous populations from the conquest to the present.

Key Words: conquest of Mexico, indigenous accounts, Florentine Codex Book XII, Coloquios y doctrina cristiana, colonial ideology

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