

The Importance of Spices

Why were spices so popular in the first place, why they were sufficiently sought after for traders to bring them to Europe from what seemed the farthest corners of the world? There was only the vaguest understanding of where India, the great spice source and entrepot, was located and no knowledge at all until the fourteenth century about other lands where spices grew, such as Java, Sumatra, or the Moluccas, yet the desire of European consumers for spices was strong enough to draw precious aromatic commodities from distant and unknown places.

Much of their allure had to do with the use of spices to flavor a sophisticated cuisine. Medieval European food, or at least that enjoyed by the more economically comfortable classes, was perfumed with a great variety of spices. The recipe collections of the era provide evidence of a fashion for spicier food than Europe has ever enjoyed since the Middle Ages ended.

The fierce demand for spices, however, was caused by needs beyond simply gastronomic preferences. Spices were considered unusually effective as medicines and disease preventives; they were burned as incense in religious rituals and distilled into perfumes and cosmetics. Prized as consumer goods by the affluent, spices were symbols of material comfort and social prominence.

The medieval infatuation with spices, encouraged by their mysterious origins and high prices, stimulated attempts to find the lands where they originated and to take over control of their trade. The need for spices fueled the expansion of Europe at the dawn of the modern era.

Desire, fashion, and taste move empires. If, as Adam Smith plausibly claimed, the two most important events in world history were the nearly simultaneous voyages to America by Columbus and around Africa to India by Vasco da Gama, then the European desire to find a route to the spices is among the most significant forces the world has known.

In the modern era too, consumer demand affects people across the globe, so that drug addiction in America has an impact in Afghanistan or Colombia; the value of diamonds has disrupted African countries, including the Congo, Angola, and Sierra Leone. The interaction of everyday preferences with great shifts in global economies was the background in the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries for the rise of transatlantic slavery in order to supply Europe with sugar, indigo, tobacco, and cotton, just as the demand for oil drives so much of today's political balance or imbalance of power.

Of all the world's commodities, spices most dramatically affected history because they launched Europe on the path to eventual overseas conquest, a conquest whose success and failure affects every aspect of contemporary world politics. The passion for spices underlies the beginning of the European colonial enterprise, a force that remade the demography, politics, culture, economy, and ecology of the entire globe.

The desire for spices, however, was already waning before European colonial expansion reached its zenith. By the

eighteenth century, European food preferences had dramatically changed in favor of a richer but blander taste, and spices were no longer associated with healing or the sacred. The spice trade became unimportant. Even though today spices have a role in fusion cuisine and in cutting-edge food trends, they long ago ceased to be of global economic significance. In the summer of 2004, Hurricane Frances destroyed the nutmeg crop of Granada, the largest producer of this spice, yet the world financial system did not tremble. In fact, it took no notice whatsoever. A once great commodity is now a mere flavoring. Timothy Morton put it cogently in his book *The Poetics of Spice*: "Yesterday's banquet ingredient becomes today's Dunkin' Donuts apple-cinnamon item.) It therefore requires some effort to understand why spices would have been so vitally important and so passionately desired in the past. This book is intended to depict cinnamon and other spices at the height of their fame, when they enchanted Europe and set in motion its creative and destructive campaigns overseas.

The most popular explanation for the love of spices in the Middle Ages is that they were used to preserve meat from spoiling, or to cover up the taste of meat that had already gone off. This compelling but false idea constitutes something of an urban legend, a story so instinctively attractive that mere fact seems unable to wipe it out. Actually, spices don't do much to preserve meat compared with salting, smoking, pickling, or air curing. The bad taste of spoiled meat, in any event, won't be substantially allayed by spices, or anything else.

The myth of spices as preservatives runs up against the accrual conditions of perishability. Americans usually assume that in the absence of modern refrigeration meat will spoil almost immediately, but, particularly in the cool climate that dominates much of Europe, this is simply not the case. Some meat, such as game, was in fact supposed to age before being ready to cook. Master Chiquart, chef to the count of Savoy in the early fifteenth century, instructed purveyors to get the game they had gathered to the court well enough in advance to allow it to hang sufficiently (up to a week or so) before preparation.⁴ He was not worried about freshness or a just-in-time delivery system.

In the Middle Ages fresh meat was not, in any event, all that hard for the reasonably affluent to obtain. In an overwhelmingly agricultural society, where cities were surrounded by farms without substantial intervening suburbs, plenty of animals were available. People of even moderate means had their own land in the country and kept livestock. Butchers were closer to the wholesale side of processing than are their modern descendants. In back of the store, they slaughtered most of what was sold in the front. Medieval town ordinances all over Europe denounced and attempted to regulate (with apparently only limited effect) butchers who fouled the streets with blood or unwanted entrails of animals they dispatched. Anyone who could afford spices could easily find meat fresher than what city dwellers today buy in their local supermarket.

Spices were very expensive, and meat was relatively cheap. According to the household accounts of the earl of Oxford in 1431-32, an entire pig could be had for the price of a pound of the cheapest spice, peppers. An account left by the steward of the Talbot family in Shropshire shows that the monthly cost of spices was almost exactly the same as expenditures for beef and pork combined. For the fiscal year 1424-25, the family consumed seventeen pounds of pepper, fourteen pounds of ginger, and seventeen pounds of other spices, including three of saffron. ⁶ Given the cost, trying to improve dubious meat with cloves or nutmeg would have been perverse, something like slicing Italian white truffles (currently upward of eight hundred dollars per pound) to liven up the taste of a fast-food cheeseburger.

This simple explanation for the popularity of spices doesn't work—it had nothing to do with the perishability of meat. A truer account involves the prestige and versatility of spices, their social and religious overtones, and their mysterious yet attractive origins. Versatility is especially significant because, as previously stated; spices were not used just for cooking. They were regarded as drugs and as disease preventives in a society so often visited by ghastly epidemics. "Spices were considered not only cures but healthful in promoting the body's equilibrium. In particular they helped balance the internal fluids, or humors, that affected both wellness and mood, so they were not only medicinal but luxurious and beautiful. Spices soothed and cheered, creating a refined environment of taste and comfort. They could be consumed in edible form or breathed as perfume or incense. The odor of spices wafted through houses fumigated with burning aromatics, as a kind of predecessor to aromatherapy. Churches were also permeated by the odor of resinous spices, especially frankincense, used in the celebrations of the Christian liturgy.

The symbolic overtones of spices linked fragrance to health and even to sanctity. The holiness of saints was demonstrated by the wonderful odor of spices that they exuded in life and even, contrary to the usual way of corpses, in death. As Chapter 3 will show, the Garden of Eden, the terrestrial paradise, was supposedly perfumed with spices and functioned as the true home of these wonderful aromatic products.

The location of paradise in the East, according to most Christian geographers, contributed to the already alluring images of India and East Asia held in the West. That spices came from Asia was further evidence of their magical qualities, bolstering the attraction conveyed by their expense, mystery and sacred overtones. According to medieval legends, the Three Magi who visited the newborn Jesus were kings of Oriental realms who brought with them two spices, frankincense and myrrh, along with gold as signs of tribute (wealth) and worship (sacredness). The attraction of the East as both exotic and sacred is apparent in a story told by Thomas of Cantimpre, a thirteenth-century encyclopedist who also wrote biographies of saintly contemporaries. He describes an unusually austere bishop who received a magnificent silver cup filled with nutmegs. The bishop sent back the silver

goblet, but he made an exception to his rule of refusing gifts and accepted the nutmegs, saying that he did so because they were "the fruit of the Orient."

Once the notion of spices as not merely useful but somehow wonderful took hold, their importance was enhanced by the need to show off. As with all prestigious consumer items, spices were effective in claiming, conveying, and confirming social status, but they therefore had to be consumed in a public and ostentatious manner.

Medieval levels of ostentation could be quite impressive. In 1476 a series of banquets marked the marriage of Duke George "the Rich" of Bavaria with Princess Jadwiga of Poland. Records of the feast describe the startlingly large quantities of spices that were required: 386 pounds of pepper, 286 of ginger, 207 of saffron, 205 of cinnamon, 105 of cloves, and a mere 85 pounds of nutmeg. Some of these spices may have been given away as presents, and certainly the feasting went on for days, but the quantities are nevertheless staggering. Beyond cuisine preferences, and certainly beyond mere necessity (as in the preservation of meat), spices here represent a calculated display of wealth, prestige, style, and splendor.

The modern French philosopher Gaston Bachelard observed that "the conquest of the superfluous is more spiritually exciting than the conquest of what is necessity. Man is a creature of desire, not a being motivated by, necessity."⁹ The truth of such a statement depends on circumstance, specifically the ability to enjoy choices above mere subsistence, but the power of unnecessary desire is at the heart of any explanation for the appeal and cost of luxuries. Spices were not as conspicuous as clothes, fine horses, tapestries, and other medieval aristocratic props, but they were as important and delightful as symbols of noble graciousness and status. They were objects of desire but not simply frivolous. Just as with silk clothes, hunting accoutrements, or titles and lineage, spices were luxuries that conferred well-being but also social distinction. Only out of a kind of reverse snobbery or world renouncing simplicity could a person of high rank fail to serve highly spiced meals to guests. It was not a preference but an obligation. Spices weren't necessary for subsistence, but they were required in order to demonstrate and maintain social prestige.

Part of the gratification afforded by aromatic products arose from their fragrance, flavor, and perceived healthfulness, but they were also items of conspicuous consumption, which can be defined as the enjoyment of things that are less satisfying when consumed in private than when displayed to one's friends and associates. Jean of Hauteville, a satirical poet of the late twelfth century, criticized spices in the course of a diatribe against both gluttony and pride. A Norman who resided in England, Jean wrote his *Archithrenius* (Prince of Lamentations) as a moralistic denunciation of contemporary customs in the form of an imagined allegorical journey.

His young protagonist visits the land of Venus and then the territory of gourmandise, where the "stomach-worshippers"

live. According to Jean, the already vicious excessive love of food is made even worse by adding to it the passion for status seeking. Cooking is judged by the expense involved, he lamented, not on the basis of flavor. The best condiments are those that are the most costly, so that gluttony (a base but natural instinct) is further corrupted by arrogance or pride (a perverse, unnatural vice).

However much moralists and advocates of simple and sensible living complain, the flaunting of fashionable and expensive goods is a constant social fact. What changes is the nature of such goods. What provides status and pleasure in one historical period may not carry over into the next. True, there are some enduring forms of prestige objects, such as fine clothing or jewelry that mark class distinction even when specific fashions change: there has never been a time when rubies weren't precious. Most goods, however, rise and fall in perceived social value. Sometimes this is the result of a more generalized affluence or a price decline, so that a freezer was an emblem of prosperity in the 1950S but is no longer, and chicken is now cheap whereas it was considered a treat in the 1920S. As this is being written, flat-screen televisions are making the transition from show-off to routine items.

In some cases fashions simply change. Cuban cigars are still prized (and expensive), but most tobacco products and their accompanying paraphernalia including pipes, ashtrays, and lighters have lost their status over the past twenty years. Fur coats are not what they once were, because of changing attitudes toward animals. Hot chocolate was all the rage in the eighteenth century and has left souvenirs of its importance in fine porcelain collections, but elegance in the world of chocolate has moved to exclusive or artisanal candies, while the beverage is now mostly just for children.

Spices in the Middle Ages were marks of status and success, but they occupy this position no longer, and have not for several centuries. Serving a highly spiced meal in Europe today might show cooking skills or a willingness to try out risky dishes, but the spices themselves confer no particular social distinction. Some medieval luxuries (silk, jewels, and gold) retain their prestige in the contemporary world, while the allure of others (saints' relics or unicorn horns, for example) requires from us an effort at conceptual reconstruction. Some of the magic of spices was the intrinsic appeal of fragrances and the pleasurable flavor sensations they offered: The desire for spices was additionally stimulated by external factors, by their rarity.

Even if spices were readily available, for a price (markets, spice sellers, and apothecaries carried all manner of exotic products), they were seen as rare because they came from far away and their origins were mysterious. Above all, they were expensive, ranging from merely costly (pepper) to the fabulously expensive (ambergris and aloe wood).

In the Middle Ages in Europe, spices were aromatic items of commerce with a high unit cost (that is, price per pound) imported from distant lands. They were not bulk goods like

salt or lumber, nor were they domestic European items, such as herring or woolen cloth. Because of the time it took for spices to arrive from their usually unknown sources, people conceived of them as dry: as leaves, fruit, bark, or resins whose fragrance was not destroyed by the long voyage. This is a crucial difference between spices and herbs, with which they are often categorized both in cooking and in medicine. Herbs as well as spices impart flavor and aroma, but herbs were thought of as green and fresh even if they might be dried on occasion. Herbs like parsley, sorrel, or borage were used in both cooking and medicine. Many, such as mandrake, digitalis, or rue, were exclusively or primarily medicinal. Some were gathered in fields and woods, while others were cultivated, but they were above all familiar, literally part of the European landscape.

Spices, on the other hand, arrived in dried or semi processed form. Until the end of the thirteenth century, when Marco Polo visited India and other parts of southern Asia, Europeans were completely unfamiliar with pepper, nutmeg, or cloves in their botanical form or fresh state. Even ginger and its cousins like galangal and zedoary must have been considerably dried out after a journey that would have taken at least a year. Manuals of drugs, now often known as "herbals," contained illustrations that were accurate as far as European herbs were concerned, but completely fanciful in their depiction of tropical spices.

Because they were gathered or cultivated locally, herbs did not have great commercial value. They were sold at markets, so they were not completely devoid of economic significance, but herbs were not comparable in price to spices, which were imported, sold in special stores, and measured out in small, expensive quantities to all save those, such as the stewards of George the Rich, who could buy them by the wagonload. Chapter 2 examines spices used as drugs, discussing the curative properties of spices and how these differed from herbs. Suffice it to say here that both spices and herbs were considered powerful medical tools, but applicable to different areas of need, with herbs having a wider use in such things as love potions and poisons.

Saffron is an exception to the definition of spices as imported aromatic products, since it grew locally but was nevertheless viewed as exotic and was breathtakingly expensive. The dried stigmata of a variety of crocus (*crocus sativus*), saffron probably originated in the Middle East (Iran and Kashmir are the leading growers of saffron now). In the Middle Ages saffron grew

throughout the Mediterranean world and was particularly associated with Tuscany, where there were major markets in Pisa and San Gimignano. At the end of the period, the eastern part of Spain started to gain the reputation it continues to hold as the source of the best-quality saffron. Unlike almost all other medieval spices, the saffron crocus was easily adapted to different soils and climates. As the English place name Saffron Walden attests, even northern Europe could produce a crop. The difficulty with saffron and the reason for its expense is in the tedious labor of harvesting just the stamen and the astronomical number of tiny threads necessary to make up a standard unit of measurement. Saffron was used as it is now in

flavoring various dishes, but also as incense, as a coloring agent, and, probably most importantly, for its medicinal applications.

A few spices were native to Europe, but usually in very restrictive ecological zones. Mastic, for example, an aromatic resin, is produced by a species of acacia that grows only on the Aegean island of Chios. Most spices, however, came from much more distant climes, from "India" as conceived in the European imagination, but, as will become apparent, that geographical term could encompass a tremendous amount of real and imagined territory.

The best impression of what exactly the term "spices" meant to medieval traders comes from handbooks of how to do business composed by experienced merchants. These compendia of weights and measures, proverbial wisdom, and market lore tend to include lists of spices and advice on how to assess their quality in wholesale transactions. The longest such list appears in a commercial manual composed shortly before 1340 by Francesco Pegolotti, a Florentine banker who had experience in Cyprus, a great center for European imports of Eastern spices. Pegolotti's *La pratica della mercatura* itemizes 288 spices (*speziere*) amounting to 193 separate substances (many come in several forms: three kinds of ginger, two grades of cinnamon, and so on). For our purposes we can leave aside some of the so-called spices such as alum (used to fix dyes so that the colors won't run), or wax (eleven varieties). Pegolotti included these because he tended to consider any nonperishable imported good as a spice. Ninety percent of Pegolotti's list consists of fragrant plants and a few animal products, some edible, some used more commonly as medicines or perfumes. Without exhausting ourselves in the minutiae of this spice directory, it is worth exploring its categories to see some of the less familiar exotics and the aura of desire and value surrounding them.

The four major spices in commercial terms were black pepper, cinnamon, ginger, and saffron. Nutmegs and cloves were very expensive, but they were also ubiquitous in medieval recipes. These spices account for a large percentage of what was imported into Europe and sold for culinary purposes, but there are many spices that were common, if not as prevalent as these, that are almost or completely unfamiliar now outside their homelands. Pegolotti mentions an astounding range of spices even by today's sophisticated culinary standards. His list includes galangal, for example, an aromatic root related to ginger, now barely known in Europe and North America, and only through Thai cuisine at that. In the Middle Ages this was an expensive but widely available spice used in sophisticated cooking, and at the same time featured in pharmaceutical handbooks. According to another commercial manual, this one from Catalonia, the buyer of galangal should make sure the root is "heavy" (meaning probably not completely dried out), yellow in color both inside and out, and, most important, that the flavor is strong when bitten into, "otherwise it is worthless." Another spice often called for in medieval recipes is long pepper, which is not in fact related to black pepper. Its dried fruit is extremely pungent, black, and rather large, the size of

dry cat food or kibble. Beyond East and South Asia it is now completely unknown, having dropped out of European cuisine by the eighteenth century.

Zedoary, another aromatic root related to turmeric, has also vanished outside India, but it was mentioned in medieval European cookbooks and its aroma was thought sufficiently attractive for it to be included among the fragrant plants in the magical garden of love at the opening of the popular allegorical poem *The Romance of the Rose*.

Among the new and fashionable spices of the medieval period was what the French called "grains of paradise," known more prosaically as malagueta pepper. Like long pepper, this spice is not in fact related to black pepper. It is sharp and peppery, dark red, and grows in West Africa. It was first mentioned in Europe in the thirteenth century, and the designation "grains of paradise" seems to be an early example of a commercial marketing and branding campaign. Grains of paradise enjoyed a tremendous vogue in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. By the time the Portuguese found the African regions where it grows, the fashion was waning; grains of paradise were headed for European oblivion by the close of the sixteenth century.

The most important new spice (that is, a spice unknown to the ancient world) was sugar, destined for a prominent life of its own as a commodity, but an expensive import during the Middle Ages. Although sugar is not exactly aromatic, it qualified as a spice according to the medieval classification of imported goods and drugs since it was exotic sold in small quantities, valuable, and credited with marvelous properties.

The Greeks and Romans had relied on honey, a much less powerful sweetener than cane sugar (obtaining sugar from beets and other plants is a modern development). Sugar began as another import from India, but by the fifteenth century sugarcane was being cultivated in Spain, Sicily, the Canary Islands, and the eastern Mediterranean. In the modern era sugar has become a cheap, fundamental ingredient in sodas, desserts, and candy, and a critical additive for processed foods from salad dressings to barbecue sauce.

In the medieval period it was a luxury, first considered a medicine but later frequently enhancing a great variety of dishes, not just desserts, which were not yet distinct from other courses by reason of their sweetness. Pegolotti lists thirteen varieties of sugar commonly sold, including rock candy, sugar scented with roses or violets, and sugar from Damascus, Babylon, and Calfa (a Genoese port in the Crimea). Sugar has a seductive flavor that retained its importance in medicine even as it was becoming accepted and later required in cuisine. Then as now, sugar disguised the bitter taste of medicine, but it was also useful as a way of preserving the often volatile ingredients of drugs. Medicines "were combined with sugar and by heating and cooling rendered into a variety of textures: gummy, hard, paste-like, soft, or chewy. These sugared medicinal preparations, known as "electuaries," are the origin of candy and many similar confections combining sugar and spice.

Beginning with the eighteenth century, sugar ceased to be considered a drug and changed from a mere food flavoring (what we understand as a spice) to an essential basic ingredient. At the same time, the end of medieval culinary practices meant that sweet dishes were separated from savory ones, so that the last course (dessert) came to be defined as sugary. In some respects, therefore, the Middle Ages used sugar more widely across the menu than now, but overall in much smaller quantities.

While medieval lore taught that every edible spice had some purported medical use, the spices so far mentioned were all most often found in food preparations. There were other spices that were predominantly for medical purposes. Lists of medicines and their uses do not limit themselves by any means to common condiments, but rather demonstrate a fascination for strikingly exotic "spices"-dried, fragrant, and expensive imports with attributed medical value. Thus Pegolotti cites among his spices two kinds of opium and a botanical known as dragon's blood (extracted from the plant genus *Dracanea*), a medicine and red dye. A commonly mentioned panacea was "turty," charred scrapings from inside chimneys. According to Pegolotti, turty was imported from Alexandria, so obviously a routine European chimney would not suffice. Turty was considered a spice as it was nonperishable, imported, fragrant (after a fashion), sold in small quantities, and expensive.

Among the strangest of Pegolotti's spices is momie, also known as mumian and informally in English as mummy. The fundamental drug handbook known from its first (Latin) words as *Circa instans* defines mummy as "a kind of spice collected from the tombs of the dead" –but not just any dead people, only those whose bodies have been specially embalmed.

Mummy, which was thought to be effective in stopping bleeding, was an exudation from the head and spine of the corpse resulting from decay combined with the spices used in the preservation process. The meaning of mummy is therefore not wrapped-up corpses from the era of the Egyptian pharaohs, but rather a substance produced by embalmed but not completely dried-out corpses that were old, no doubt, but not necessarily ancient. In its way mummy was definitely aromatic, if not particularly delightful in its fragrance. Indeed, Pegolotti notes that mummy should have a foul odor and a pitch like consistency, or else it's inferior. Mummy was imported from Egypt and the East, regions whose embalming techniques were perhaps considered more medically effective.

The border between fragrance and drugs was porous and ill-defined. Among the rarest and most expensive spices listed in herbals and merchant's handbooks are perfumed substances used primarily as medicines, things like balsam, an aromatic resin from a plant native to Arabia. Its sap was credited with marvelous healing properties but also with high spiritual powers.

Balsam was called for in Christian rites involving anointment, such as baptism, the ordination of priests, and the consecration of bishops. Another Arabian resin, frankincense, was (and

remains) the principal ingredient in the censuring rituals of the Catholic and Orthodox churches. In keeping with the versatility characteristic of spices, frankincense was also used as a medicine, to scent houses, and to perfume banquets.

The most esteemed (and staggeringly expensive) medicinal perfumes were four animal products: ambergris (from sperm whales), castoreum (from certain kinds of beavers), musk (from a small Tibetan deer), and civet (from a kind of wild cat). Of these, ambergris was the most important and the most mysterious. IS Ambergris was coughed up by sperm whales and could be found washed up on Indian Ocean beaches (usually in East Africa because of the winds and tides). The connection with whales was dimly and inconsistently understood. Some Arab authorities ignored whales altogether and asserted that ambergris came from a fountain at the bottom of the sea or that it was a kind of marine fungus. In the *Arabian Nights*, Sinbad says it comes from an island spring but is then consumed by sea monsters and vomited up. Pharmaceutical manuals, such as the *Livre des simples medecines*, were more confident that it was produced by whales. Marco Polo informs his readers on the basis of his knowledge of the Indian Ocean that ambergris comes from whales, and in one version of his travels he describes whale hunting off the island of Socotra. Ambergris tends to be gray and surprisingly lightweight in relation to its mass, resembling an aromatic version of pumice. It has a compelling smell that seems to combine perfume, the sea, and some primordial animal scent. It was often confused with amber, another lightweight substance often found on beaches. The word for "amber" and "ambergris" is the same in most languages, and our term "ambergris" comes from the French for "gray amber." Ambergris was supposed to be helpful in combating epileptic

seizures, but its main use was as a hygienic perfume. According to medical treatises, it relieves suffocation of the womb and helps in childbirth just by the effect of its wonderful scent. Ambergris was especially prominent in attempts to ward off the plague by resisting the foul miasma thought to be its cause.

In all of this the mysterious was mixed with the practical. Spices were used in cookery and in medicine, but their popularity and importance went beyond utility. They were marvelous and mysterious-aspects of the world's secrets and miracles along with saints, strange animals, and extraordinary natural events like earthquakes, or mythical natural phenomena including rivers of stones or lands of darkness. The quest to discover the lands where the spices grew was practical in an economic sense, but also part of the medieval desire to fathom the secrets of the earth. The story of spices is about how people lived in the past, their views of the marvelous, and how they thought they could discover and exploit the beauty of the world.

From *Out of the East: Spices and the Medieval Imagination* by Paul Friedman (Yale University Press, 2008)

Bartolome de Las Casas, *Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies.* (1542)

Bartolome de Las Casas (1474-1566) was given an encomienda, an estate that included the services of the Indians living on it in 1502. In 1513 he was ordained priest and by 1514 had begun to be troubled by the treatment of Indians in the Americas. By 1540 he returned to Spain and was a force behind the passage in 1542 of laws prohibiting Indian slavery and safeguarding the rights of the Indians.

The Indies were discovered in the year one thousand four hundred and ninety-two. In the following year a great many Spaniards went there with the intention of settling the land. Thus, forty-nine years have passed since the first settlers penetrated the land, the first so claimed being the large and most happy isle called Hispaniola, which is six hundred leagues in circumference. Around it in all directions are many other islands, some very big, others very small, and all of them were, as we saw with our own eyes, densely populated with native peoples called Indians. This large island was perhaps the most densely populated place in the world. There must be close to two hundred leagues of land on this island, and the seacoast has been explored for more than ten thousand leagues, and each day more of it is being explored. And all the land so far discovered is a beehive of people; it is as though God had crowded into these lands the great majority of mankind.

And of all the infinite universe of humanity, these people are the most guileless, the most devoid of wickedness and duplicity, the most obedient and faithful to their native masters and to the Spanish Christians whom they serve. They are by nature the most humble, patient, and peaceable, holding no grudges, free from embroilments, neither excitable nor quarrelsome. These people are the most devoid of rancors, hatreds, or desire for vengeance of any people in the world. And because they are so weak and complaisant, they are less able to endure heavy labor and soon die of no matter what malady. The sons of nobles among us, brought up in the enjoyments of life's refinements, are no more delicate than are these Indians, even those among them who are of the lowest rank of laborers. They are also poor people, for they not only possess little but have no desire to possess worldly goods. For this reason they are not arrogant, embittered, or greedy. Their repasts are such that the food of the holy fathers in the desert can scarcely be more parsimonious, scanty, and poor. As to their dress, they are generally naked, with only their pudenda covered somewhat. And when they cover their shoulders it is with a square cloth no more than two varas in size. They have no beds, but sleep on a kind of matting or else in a kind of suspended net called bamacas. They are very clean in their persons, with alert, intelligent minds, docile and open to doctrine, very apt to receive our holy Catholic faith, to be endowed with virtuous customs, and to behave in a godly fashion. And once they begin to hear the tidings of the Faith, they are so insistent on knowing more and on taking the sacraments of the Church and on observing the divine cult that, truly, the missionaries who are here need to be endowed by God with great patience in order to cope with such eagerness. Some of the secular Spaniards who have been here for many years say that the goodness of the Indians is undeniable and that if this gifted people could be brought to know the one true God they would be the most fortunate people in the world.

Yet into this sheepfold, into this land of meek outcasts there came some Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravening wild beasts, wolves, tigers, or lions that had been starved for many days. And Spaniards have behaved in no other way during the past forty years, down to the present time, for they are still acting like ravening beasts, killing, terrorizing, afflicting, torturing, and destroying the native peoples, doing all this

with the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before, and to such a degree that this Island of Hispaniola once so populous (having a population that I estimated to be more than three million), has now a population of barely two hundred persons.

The island of Cuba is nearly as long as the distance between Valladolid and Rome; it is now almost completely depopulated. San Juan [Puerto Rico] and Jamaica are two of the largest, most productive and attractive islands; both are now deserted and devastated. On the northern side of Cuba and Hispaniola lie the neighboring Lucayos comprising more than sixty islands including those called Gigantes, beside numerous other islands, some small some large. The least felicitous of them were more fertile and beautiful than the gardens of the King of Seville. They have the healthiest lands in the world, where lived more than five hundred thousand souls; they are now deserted, inhabited by not a single living creature. All the people were slain or died after being taken into captivity and brought to the Island of Hispaniola to be sold as slaves. When the Spaniards saw that some of these had escaped, they sent a ship to find them, and it voyaged for three years among the islands searching for those who had escaped being slaughtered, for a good Christian had helped them escape, taking pity on them and had won them over to Christ; of these there were eleven persons and these I saw.

More than thirty other islands in the vicinity of San Juan are for the most part and for the same reason depopulated, and the land laid waste. On these islands I estimate there are 2,100 leagues of land that have been ruined and depopulated, empty of people.

As for the vast mainland, which is ten times larger than all Spain, even including Aragon and Portugal, containing more land than the distance between Seville and Jerusalem, or more than two thousand leagues, we are sure that our Spaniards, with their cruel and abominable acts, have devastated the land and exterminated the rational people who fully inhabited it. We can estimate very surely and truthfully that in the forty years that have passed, with the infernal actions of the Christians, there have been unjustly slain more than twelve million men, women, and children. In truth, I believe without trying to deceive myself that the number of the slain is more like fifteen million.

The common ways mainly employed by the Spaniards who call themselves Christian and who have gone there to extirpate those pitiful nations and wipe them off the earth is by unjustly waging cruel and bloody wars. Then, when they have slain all those who fought for their lives or to escape the tortures they would have to endure, that is to say, when they have slain all the native rulers and young men (since the Spaniards usually spare only the women and children, who are subjected to the hardest and bitterest servitude ever suffered by man or beast), they enslave any survivors. With these infernal methods of tyranny they debase and weaken countless numbers of those pitiful Indian nations.

Their reason for killing and destroying such an infinite number of souls is that the Christians have an ultimate aim, which is to acquire gold, and to swell themselves with riches in a very brief time and thus rise to a high estate disproportionate to their merits. It should be kept in mind that their insatiable greed and ambition, the greatest ever seen in the world, is the cause of their villainies. And also, those lands are so rich and felicitous, the native peoples so meek and patient, so easy to subject, that our Spaniards have no more consideration for them than beasts. And I say this from my own knowledge of the acts I witnessed. But I should not say "than beasts" for, thanks be to God, they have treated beasts with some respect; I should say instead like excrement on the public squares. And thus they have deprived the Indians of their lives and souls, for the

millions I mentioned have died without the Faith and without the benefit of the sacraments. This is a wellknown and proven fact which even the tyrant Governors, themselves killers, know and admit. And never have the Indians in all the Indies committed any act against the Spanish Christians, until those Christians have first and many times committed countless cruel aggressions against them or against neighboring nations. For in the beginning the Indians regarded the Spaniards as angels from Heaven. Only after the Spaniards had used violence against them, killing, robbing, torturing, did the Indians ever rise up against them....

On the Island Hispaniola was where the Spaniards first landed, as I have said. Here those Christians perpetrated their first ravages and oppressions against the native peoples. This was the first land in the New World to be destroyed and depopulated by the Christians, and here they began their subjection of the women and children, taking them away from the Indians to use them and ill use them, eating the food they provided with their sweat and toil. The Spaniards did not content themselves with what the Indians gave them of their own free will, according to their ability, which was always too little to satisfy enormous appetites, for a Christian eats and consumes in one day an amount of food that would suffice to feed three houses inhabited by ten Indians for one month. And they committed other acts of force and violence and oppression which made the Indians realize that these men had not come from Heaven. And some of the Indians concealed their foods while others concealed their wives and children and still others fled to the mountains to avoid the terrible transactions of the Christians.

And the Christians attacked them with buffets and beatings, until finally they laid hands on the nobles of the villages. Then they behaved with such temerity and shamelessness that the most powerful ruler of the islands had to see his own wife raped by a Christian officer.

From that time onward the Indians began to seek ways to throw the Christians out of their lands. They took up arms, but their weapons were very weak and of little service in offense and still less in defense. (Because of this, the wars of the Indians against each other are little more than games played by children.) And the Christians, with their horses and swords and pikes began to carry out massacres and strange cruelties against them. They attacked the towns and spared neither the children nor the aged nor pregnant women nor women in childbed, not only stabbing them and dismembering them but cutting them to pieces as if dealing with sheep in the slaughter house. They laid bets as to who, with one stroke of the sword, could split a man in two or could cut off his head or spill out his entrails with a single stroke of the pike. They took infants from their mothers' breasts, snatching them by the legs and pitching them headfirst against the crags or snatched them by the arms and threw them into the rivers, roaring with laughter and saying as the babies fell into the water, "Boil there, you offspring of the devil!" Other infants they put to the sword along with their mothers and anyone else who happened to be nearby. They made some low wide gallows on which the hanged victim's feet almost touched the ground, stringing up their victims in lots of thirteen, in memory of Our Redeemer and His twelve Apostles, then set burning wood at their feet and thus burned them alive. To others they attached straw or wrapped their whole bodies in straw and set them afire. With still others, all those they wanted to capture alive, they cut off their hands and hung them round the victim's neck, saying, "Go now, carry the message," meaning, Take the news to the Indians who have fled to the mountains. They usually dealt with the chieftains and nobles in the following way: they made a grid of rods which they placed on forked sticks, then lashed the victims to the grid and lighted a smoldering fire underneath, so that little by little, as those captives screamed in despair and torment, their souls would leave them....

After the wars and the killings had ended, when usually there survived only some boys, some women, and children, these survivors were distributed among the Christians to be slaves. The *repartimiento* or

distribution was made according to the rank and importance of the Christian to whom the Indians were allocated, one of them being given thirty, another forty, still another, one or two hundred, and besides the rank of the Christian there was also to be considered in what favor he stood with the tyrant they called Governor. The pretext was that these allocated Indians were to be instructed in the articles of the Christian Faith. As if those Christians who were as a rule foolish and cruel and greedy and vicious could be caretakers of souls! And the care they took was to send the men to the mines to dig for gold, which is intolerable labor, and to send the women into the fields of the big ranches to hoe and till the land, work suitable for strong men. Nor to either the men or the women did they give any food except herbs and legumes, things of little substance. The milk in the breasts of the women with infants dried up and thus in a short while the infants perished. And since men and women were separated, there could be no marital relations. And the men died in the mines and the women died on the ranches from the same causes, exhaustion and hunger. And thus was depopulated that island which had been densely populated.

Source: Bartoleme de Las Casas, *Brief Account of the Devastation of the Indies*. (1542)

Richard Hakluyt, Discourse of Western Planting (1584)

Richard Hakluyt devoted supported English colonization of the Americas and urged England to confront Spain and claim territory for trade and colonization.

A particuler discourse concerninge the greate necessitie and manifolde comodities that are like to growe to this Realme of Englande by the Westerne discoveries lately attempted, Written In the yere 1584 by Richarde Hackluyt of Oxforde at the requeste and direction of the righte worshipfull Mr. Walter Raghly [Raieigh] nowe Knight, before the comynge home of his Twoo Barkes: and is devided into xxi chapiters, the Titles whereof followe in the nexte leafe.

1. That this westerne discoverie will be greatly for the enlargement of the gospell of Christe whereunto the Princes of the reformed religion are chefully bounde amongst whome her Majestie is principall.
2. That all other englishe Trades are growen beggerly or dangerous, especially in all the kinge of Spaine his Domynions, where our men are dryven to flinge their Bibles and prayer Bokes into the sea, and to forswear and renounce their religion and conscience and consequently theyr obedience to her Majestie.
3. That this westerne voyadge will yelde unto us all the commodities of Europe, Affrica, and Asia, as far as wee were wonte to travell, and supply the wantes of all our decayed trades.
4. That this enterprise will be for the manifolde employmente of numbers of idle men, and for breedinge of many sufficient, and for utterance of the greate quantitie of the commodities of our Realme.
5. That this voyage will be a great bridle to the Indies of the kinge of Spaine and a means that wee may arreste at our pleasure for the space of teime weekes or three monethes every yere, one or two hundred saile of his subjectes shippes at the fysshinge in Newfounde Iande.
6. That the rischesse that the Indian Threasure wrought in time of Charles the late Emperor father to the Spanishe kinge, is to be had in consideracion of the Q. moste excellent Majestie, leaste

the contynuall commynge of the like threasure from thence to his sonne, worke the unrecoverable annoye of this Realme, whereof already wee have had very dangerous experience.

7. What speciall meanes may bringe kinge Phillippe from his high Throne, and make him equal to the Princes his neighbours, wherewithall is shewed his weakenes in the west Indies.
8. That the limites of the kinge of Spaines domynions in the west Indies be nothinge so large as is generally imagined and surmised, neither those partes which he holdeth be of any such forces as is falsely geven oute by the popishe Clergye and others his suitors, to terrifie the Princes of the Relligion and to abuse and blinde them.
9. The Names of the riche Townes lienge alonge the sea coaste on the northe side from the equinoctiall of the mayne lande of America under the kinge of Spaine.
10. A Breve declaracion of the chefe Ilands in the Bay of Mexico beinge under the kinge of Spaine, with their havens and fortes, and what commodities they yeide.
11. That the Spaniardes have executed most outrageous and more then Turkishe cruelties in all the west Indies, whereby they are every where there, become moste odious unto them, whoe woulde joyne with us or any other moste willingly to shake of their moste intollerable yoke, and have begonne to doo it already in dyvers places where they were Lordes heretofore.
12. That the passage in this voyadge is easie and shorte, that it cutteth not nere the trade of any other mightie Princes, nor nere their Contries, that it is to be perfourmed at all tymes of the yere, and nedeth but one kinde of winde, that Ireland beinge full of goodd havens on the southe and west sides, is the nerest parte of Europe to it, which by this trade shall be in more securitie, and the sooner drawn to more Civilitie.
13. That hereby the Revenewes and customes of her Majestie bothe outwards and inwards shall mightely be enlarged by the toll, excises, and other dueties which without oppression may be raised.
14. That this action will be greatlye for the increase, mayneteynaunce and safetie of our Navye, and especially of greate shippinge which is the strengthe of our Realme, and for the supportation of all those occupacions that depende upon the same.
15. That spedie plantinge in divers fitt places is moste necessarie upon these luckye westerne discoveries for feare of the daunger of being prevented by other nations which have the like intentions, with the order thereof and other reasons therewithall alleaged.
16. Meanes to kepe this enterpryse from overthrowe and the enterprisers from shame and dishonor.
17. That by these Colonies the Northwest passage to Cathaio and China may easely quickly and perfectly be searched oute aswell by river and overlende, as by sea, for prooffe whereof here are quoted and alleaged divers rare Testymonies oute of the three volumes of voyadges gathered by Ramusius and other grave authors.
18. That the Queene of Englande title to all the west Indies, or at the leaste to as moche as is from Florida to the Circle articke, is more lawfull and righte then the Spaniardes or any other Christian Princes.
19. An aunswer to the Bull of the Donacion of all the west Indies

graunted to the kinges of Spaine by Pope Alexander the VI whoe was himselfe a Spaniarde borne.

20. A brefe collection of certaine reasons to induce her Majestie and the state to take in hande the westerne voyadge and the plantinge there.
21. A note of some thinges to be prepared for the voyadge which is sett downe rather to drawe the takers of the voyadge in hande to the presente consideracion then for any other reason for that divers thinges require preparation longe before the voyadge, without which the voyadge is maymed.

An Aztec Account of the Spanish Conquest

The following is a native account of Cortes's conquest of the Aztecs. The first part, describing the looting of gold from Montezuma, is taken from the Codex Florentino, a compilation of oral histories by those who survived the conquest. The story of the massacre at the Fiesta of Toxcatl, an Aztec celebration to honor the god Huitzilopochtli, comes from the Codex Ramirez and the Codex Aubin. The Codexes are important documents of the Indian people of Mexico at the time of the conquest, mostly assembled by Spanish priests.

SOURCE: From *The Broken Spell* by Miguel Leon-Portilla.

The Aztecs believed that Cortes was Quetzalcoatl, god and culture hero who had departed to the east, promising that someday he would return from across the seas. It is thus ironic that when Cortes and his men entered Mexico, they were often welcomed not only as guests but also as gods coming home. The Aztec desire to honor the "gods" coincided with the Spanish desire for gold. Thus Montezuma sent out messengers with gifts. But as Cortes's forces moved toward Tenochtitlan (Mexico City), the initial "golden age" disintegrated into suspicion, manipulation, and distrust. Such distrust was often translated into brutality ...

When Montezuma had given necklaces to each one, Cortes asked him: "Are you Montezuma? Are you the king? Is it true that you are the king Montezuma?"

And the king said: "Yes, I am Montezuma." Then he stood up to welcome Cortes; he came forward, bowed his head low and addressed him in these words: "Our lord, you are weary. The journey has tired you, but now you have arrived on the earth. You have come to your city, Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, to sit under its canopy.

"The kings who have gone before, your representatives, guarded it and preserved it for your coming. The kings Itzcoatl, Motecuhzoma the Elder, Axayacatl, Tizoc and Ahuitzol ruled for you in the City of Mexico. The people were protected by their swords and sheltered by their shields

"Do the kings know the destiny of those they left behind, their posterity? If only they are watching! If only they can see what I see!

"No, it is not a dream. I am not walking in my sleep. I am not seeing you in my dreams I have seen you at last! I have met you face to face! I was in agony for five days, for ten days, with my eyes fixed on the Region of the Mystery.

And now you have come out of the clouds and mists to sit on your throne again.

"This was foretold by the kings who governed your city, and now it has taken place. You have come back to us; you have come down from the sky. Rest now, and take possession of your royal houses. Welcome to your land, my lords!"

When Montezuma had finished, La Malinche translated his address into Spanish so that the Captain could understand it. Cortes replied in his strange and savage tongue, speaking first to La Malinche: "Tell

Montezuma that we are his friends. There is nothing to fear. We have wanted to see him for a long time, and now we have seen his face and heard his words. Tell him that we love him well and that our hearts are contented."

Then he said to Montezuma: "We have come to your house in Mexico as friends. There is nothing to fear."

La Malinche translated this speech and the Spaniards grasped Montezuma's hands and patted his back to show their affection for him

When the Spaniards were installed in the palace, they asked Montezuma about the city's resources and reserves and about the warriors' ensigns and shields. They questioned him closely and then demanded gold.

Montezuma guided them to it. They surrounded him and crowded close with their weapons. He walked in the center, while they formed a circle around him.

When they arrived at the treasure house called Teucalco, the riches of gold and feathers were brought out to them: ornaments made of quetzal feathers, richly worked shields, disks of gold, the necklaces of the idols, gold nose plugs, gold greaves and bracelets and crowns.

The Spaniards immediately stripped the feathers from the gold shields and ensigns. They gathered all the gold into a great mound and set fire to everything else, regardless of its value. Then they melted down the gold into ingots. As for the precious green stones, they took only the best of them; the rest were snatched up by the Tlaxcaltecas. The Spaniards searched through the whole treasure house, questioning and quarreling, and seized every object they thought was beautiful.

Next they went to Montezuma's storehouse, in the place called Totocalco [Place of the Palace of the Birds], where his personal treasures were kept. The Spaniards grinned like little beasts and patted each other with delight.

When they entered the hall of treasures, it was as if they had arrived in Paradise. They searched everywhere and coveted everything; they were slaves to their own greed. All of Montezuma's possessions were brought out fine bracelets, necklaces with large stones, ankle rings with little gold bells, the royal crowns and all the royal finery—everything that belonged to the king and was reserved to him only. They seized these treasures as if they were their own, as if this plunder were merely a stroke of good luck. And when they had taken all the gold, they heaped up everything else in the middle of the patio.

La Malinche called the nobles together. She climbed up to the palace roof and cried: "Mexicanos, come forward! The Spaniards need your help! Bring them food and pure water. They are tired and hungry; they are almost fainting from exhaustion! Why do you not come forward? Are you angry with them?"

The Mexicans 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 had been absent from the city for twenty days when the massacre at the fiesta of Tuxcatl took place; he had gone out to fight Panfilo de Narvaez, who was coming to arrest him by order of Diego Velazques, governor of Cuba. Cortés' deputy, Pedro de Alvarado, treacherously murdered the celebrants when the festival was at its height. ...

At the fiesta, when the dance was loveliest and when song was linked to song, the Spaniards were seized with an urge to kill the celebrants. They all ran forward, armed as if for battle. They closed the entrances

and passageways, all the gates of the patio: the Eagle Gate in the lesser palace, the Gate of the Canestalk and the Gate of the Serpent of Mirrors. They posted guards so that no one could escape, and then rushed into the Sacred Patio to slaughter the celebrants. They came on foot, carrying their swords and their wooden or metal shields.

They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor.

They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out.

Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to pieces.

They struck others in the shoulders, and their arms were tom from their bodies. They wounded some in the thigh and some in the calf. They slashed others in the abdomen, and their entrails all spilled to the ground. Some attempted to run away, but their intestines dragged as they ran; they seemed to tangle their feet in their own entrails. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape.

Some attempted to force their way out, but the Spaniards murdered them at the gates. Others climbed the walls, but they could not save themselves. Those who ran into the communal houses were safe there for a while; so were those who lay down among the victims and pretended to be dead. But if they stood up again, the Spaniards saw them and killed them.

The blood of the warriors flowed like water and gathered into pools. The pools widened, and the stench of blood and entrails filled the air. The Spaniards ran into the communal houses to kill those who were hiding. They ran everywhere and searched everywhere; they invaded every room, hunting and killing.

When the news of this massacre was heard outside the Sacred Patio, a great cry went up: "Mexicanos, come running! Bring your spears and shields! The strangers have murdered our warriors!"

This cry was answered with a roar of grief and anger: the people shouted and wailed and beat their palms against their mouths. The captains assembled at once, as if the hour had been determined in advance. They all carried their spears and shields.

Then the battle began. The Aztecs attacked with javelins and arrows, even with the light spears that are used for hunting birds. They hurled their javelins with all their strength, and the cloud of missiles spread out over the Spaniards like a yellow cloak.

The Spaniards immediately took refuge in the palace. They began to shoot at the Mexicans with their iron arrows and to fire their cannons and arquebuses. And they shackled Montezuma in chains.

The Mexicans who had died in the massacre were taken out of the patio one by one and inquiries were made to discover their names. The fathers and mothers of the dead wept and lamented.

From Bernal Diaz's The Conquest of New Spain

Bernal Diaz (1492 – 1585) provides a description of the encounter between Hernan Cortés and Moctezuma, and the reception by the population.

When Cortés was told that the Great Montezuma was approaching, and he saw him coming, he dismounted from his horse, and when he was near Montezuma, they simultaneously paid great reverence to one another. Montezuma bade him welcome and our Cortés replied through Doña Marina wishing him very good health. And it seems to me that Cortés, through Doña Marina, offered him his right hand, and Montezuma did not wish to take it, but he did give his hand to Cortés

and Cortés brought out a necklace which he had ready at hand, made of glass stones, which I have already said are called Margaritas, which have within them many patterns of diverse colours, these were strung on a cord of gold and with musk so that it should have a sweet scent, and he placed it round the neck of the Great Montezuma and when he had so placed it he was going to embrace him, and those great Princes who accompanied Montezuma held back Cortés by the arm so that he should not embrace him, for they considered it an indignity.

Then Cortés through the mouth of Doña Marina told him that now his heart rejoiced at having seen such a great Prince, and that he took it as a great honour that he had come in person to meet him and had frequently shown him such favour. Then Montezuma spoke other words of politeness to him, and told two of his nephews who supported his arms, the Lord of Texcoco and the Lord of Coyoacan, to go with us and show us to our quarters, and Montezuma with his other two relations, the Lord of Cuiclahuac and the Lord of Tacuba who accompanied him, returned to the city, and all those grand companies of Caciques and chieftains who had come with him returned in his train. As they turned back after their Prince we stood watching them and observed how they all marched with their eyes fixed on the ground without looking at him, keeping close to the wall, following him with great reverence. Thus space was made for us to enter the streets of Mexico, without being so much crowded. But who could now count the multitude of men and women and boys who were in the streets and on the azoteas, and in canoes on the canals, who had come out to see us. It was indeed wonderful, and, now that I am writing about it, it all comes before my eyes as though it had happened but yesterday. Coming to think it over it seems to be a great mercy that our Lord Jesus Christ was pleased to give us grace and courage to dare to enter into such a city; and for the many times He has saved me from danger of death, as will be seen later on, I give Him sincere thanks, and in that He has preserved me to write about it, although I cannot do it as fully as is fitting or the subject needs. Let us make no words about it, for deeds are the best witnesses to what I say here and elsewhere.

Let us return to our entry to Mexico. They took us to lodge in some large houses, where there were apartments for all of us, for they had belonged to the father of the Great Montezuma, who was named Axayaca, and at that time Montezuma kept there the great oratories for his idols, and a secret chamber where he kept bars and jewels of gold, which was the treasure that he had inherited from his father Axayaca, and he never disturbed it. They took us to lodge in that house, because they called us Teules, and took us for such, so that we should be with the Idols or Teules which were kept there. However, for one reason or another, it was there they took us, where there were great halls and chambers canopied with the cloth of the country for our Captain, and for every one of us beds of matting with canopies above, and no better bed is given, however great the chief may be, for they are not used. And all these palaces were [coated] with shining cement and swept and garlanded.

As soon as we arrived and entered into the great court, the Great Montezuma took our Captain by the hand, for he was there awaiting him, and led him to the apartment and saloon where he was to lodge, which was very richly adorned according to their usage, and he had at hand a very rich necklace made of golden crabs, a marvelous piece of work, and Montezuma himself placed it round the neck of our Captain Cortés, and greatly astonished his [own] Captains by the great honour that he was bestowing on him. When the necklace had been fastened, Cortés thanked Montezuma through our interpreters, and Montezuma replied—“Malinche you and your brethren are in your own house, rest awhile,” and then he went to his palaces which were not far away, and we divided our lodgings by companies, and placed the artillery pointing in a convenient direction, and the order which we had to keep was clearly explained to us, and that we were to be much on the alert, both the cavalry and all of us soldiers. A sumptuous dinner was provided for us according to their use and custom, and we ate it at once. So this was our lucky and daring entry into the great city of Tenochtitlan Mexico on the 8th day of November the year of our Saviour Jesus Christ 1519. . . .

So we stood looking about us, for that huge and cursed temple stood so high that from it one could see over everything very well, and we saw the three causeways which led into Mexico, that is the causeway of Iztapalapa by which we had entered four days before, and that of

Tacuba, along which later on we fled on the night of our great defeat, when Cuiclahuac the new prince drove us out of the city, as I shall tell later on, and that of Tepeaquilla, and we saw the fresh water that comes from Chapultepec which supplies the city, and we saw the bridges on the three causeways which were built at certain distances apart through which the water of the lake flowed in and out from one side to the other, and we beheld on that great lake a great multitude of canoes, some coming with supplies of food and others returning loaded with cargoes of merchandise; and we saw that from every house of that great city and of all the other cities that were built in the water it was impossible to pass from house to house, except by drawbridges which were made of wood or in canoes; and we saw in those cities Cues and oratories like towers and fortresses and all gleaming white, and it was a wonderful thing to behold; then the houses with flat roofs, and on the causeways other small towers and oratories which were like fortresses.

After having examined and considered all that we had seen we turned to look at the great market place and the crowds of people that were in it, some buying and others selling, so that the murmur and hum of their voices and words that they used could be heard more than a league off. Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that so large a market place and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before.

Let us leave this, and return to our Captain, who said to Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo, who has often been mentioned by me, and who happened to be near by him: “It seems to me, Señor Padre, that it would be a good thing to throw out a feeler to Montezuma, as to whether he would allow us to build our church here”; and the Padre replied that it would be a good thing if it were successful, but it seemed to him that it was not quite a suitable time to speak about it, for Montezuma did not appear to be inclined to do such a thing.

Then our Cortés said to Montezuma through the interpreter Doña Marina: “Your Highness is indeed a very great prince and worthy of even greater things. We are rejoiced to see your cities, and as we are here in your temple, what I now beg as a favour is that you will show us your gods and Teules. Montezuma replied that he must first speak with his high priests, and when he had spoken to them he said that we might enter into a small tower and apartment, a sort of hall, where there were two altars, with very richly carved boardings on the top of the roof. On each altar were two figures, like giants with very tall bodies and very fat, and the first which stood on the right hand they said was the figure of Huichilobos their god of War; it had a very broad face and monstrous and terrible eyes, and the whole of his body was covered with precious stones, and gold and pearls, and with seed pearls stuck on with a paste that they make in this country out of a sort of root, and all the body and head was covered with it, and the body was girdled by great snakes water made of gold and precious stones, and in one hand he held a bow and in the other some arrows. And another small idol that stood by him, they said was his page, and he held a short lance and a shield richly decorated with gold and stones. Huichilobos had round his neck some Indians’ faces and other things like hearts of Indians, the former made of gold and the latter of silver, with many precious blue stones.

There were some braziers with incense which they call copal, and in them they were burning the hearts of the three Indians whom they had sacrificed that day, and they had made the sacrifice with smoke and copal. All the walls of the oratory were so splashed and encrusted with blood that they were black, the floor was the same and the whole place stank vilely. Then we saw on the other side on the left hand there stood the other great image the same height as Huichilobos, and it had a face like a bear and eyes that shone, made of their mirrors which they call Tezcat, and the body plastered with precious stones like that of Huichilobos, for they say that the two are brothers; and this Tezcatepuca was the god of Hell and had charge of the souls of the Mexicans, and his body was girt with figures like little devils with snakes’ tails. The walls were so clotted with blood and the soil so bathed with it that in the slaughter houses in Spain there is not such another stench.

They had offered to this Idol five hearts from that day’s sacrifices. In the highest part of the Cue there was a recess of which the woodwork was

very richly worked, and in it was another image half man and half lizard, with precious stones all over it, and half the body was covered with a mantle. They say that the body of this figure is full of all the seeds that there are in the world, and they say that it is the god of seed time and harvest, but I do not remember its name, and everything was covered with blood, both walls and altar, and the stench was such that we could hardly wait the moment to get out of it.

They had an exceedingly large drum there, and when they beat it the sound of it was so dismal and like, so to say, an instrument of the infernal regions, that one could hear it a distance of two leagues, and they said that the skins it was covered with were those of great snakes. In that small place there were many diabolical things to be seen, bugles and trumpets and knives, and many hearts of Indians that they had burned in fumigating their idols, and everything was so clotted with blood, and there was so much of it, that I curse the whole of it, and as it stank like a slaughter house we hastened to clear out of such a bad stench and worse sight. Our Captain said to Montezuma through our interpreter, half laughing: "Senor Montezuma, I do not understand how such a great Prince and wise man as you are has not come to the conclusion, in your mind, that these idols of yours are not gods, but evil things that are called devils, and so that you may know it and all your priests may see it clearly, do me the favour to approve of my placing a cross here on the top of this lower, and that in one part of these oratories where your Huichilobos and Tezcatepuca stand we may divide off a space where we can set up an image of Our lady (an image which Montezuma had already seen) and you will see by the fear in which these Idols hold it that they are deceiving you."

Montezuma replied half angrily, (and the two priests who were with him showed great annoyance,) and said: "Señor Malinche, if I had known that you would have said such defamatory things I would not have shown you my gods, we consider them to be very good, for they give us health and rains and good seed times and seasons and as many victories as we desire, and we are obliged to worship them and make sacrifices, and I pray you not to say another word to their dishonour."

When our Captain heard that and noted the angry looks he did not refer again to the subject, but said with a cheerful manner: "It is time for your Excellency and for us to return." and Montezuma replied that it was well, but that he had to pray and offer certain sacrifices on account of the great tatacul, that is to say sin, which he had committed in allowing us to ascend his great Cue, and being the cause of our being permitted to see his gods, and of our dishonouring them by speaking evil of them, so that before he left he must pray and worship.

Then Cortés said "I ask your pardon if it be so," and then we went down the steps, and as they numbered one hundred and fourteen, and as some of our soldiers were suffering from tumours and abscesses, their legs were tired by the descent.