

# The true history of the Conquest of Mexico

*Bernal Díaz del Castillo*



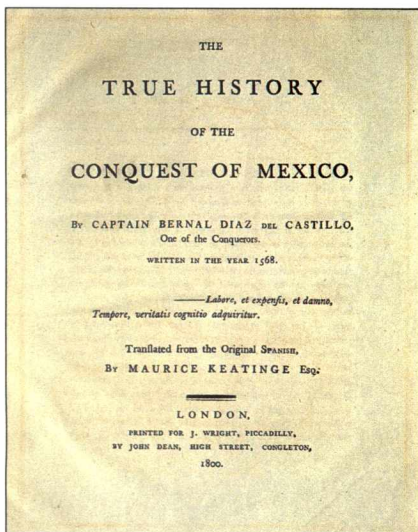
One of the first European witnesses to the grandeur of Tenochtitlan.

*Bernal Díaz del Castillo accompanied Hernán Cortés on his expedition to Mexico from 1519 to 1521. Together with the other soldiers, he was among the first European witnesses to the grandeur of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire. In his memoirs, he describes the arrival of Cortés and his men at Tenochtitlan, marveling at the buildings, canals, gardens and the overall beauty of the capital city. The English version is taken from the book The true history of the Conquest of Mexico, translated from the original Spanish by Maurice Keatinge, Esq., printed for J. Wright, Piccadilly, by John Dean, London, 1800.*



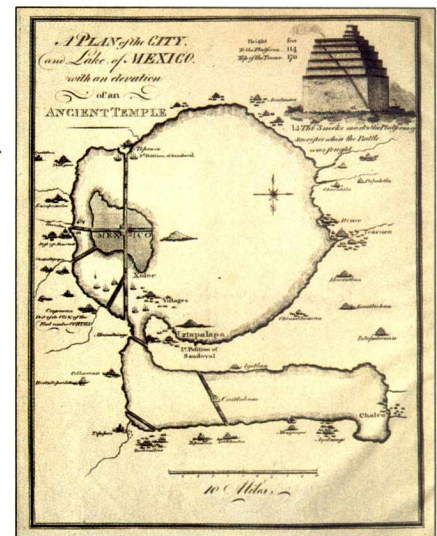
### The Spanish army proceeds on its march to Mexico

Early in the morning, when we were on the point of marching, a centinel came to inform us, that a great number of Mexicans, richly dressed, were upon the road. Cortés therefore ordered us to return into our quarters, and at that instant four of the principal courtiers of Mexico arrived, and waiting on Cortés with great respect informed him, that Cacamatzin lord of Tezcuco, the nephew of the great Montezuma, was



Mural of Tenochtitlan (detail)  
by Diego Rivera.

*A plan of the city and lake of  
Mexico with an elevation  
of an ancient temple.*



Yvonne Venegas.

Jorge González Camarena, *The embrace*, 1980.

approaching, and requested that he would wait to receive him.

Cacamatzin followed in the greatest pomp, carried in a magnificent litter adorned with green plumes, and enriched with jewels, set in the branched pillars of solid gold. He was borne by eight lords, who assisted him out of the litter, and swept the way by which he was to pass. When he came into the presence of Cortés he said to him, "Malintzin, here am I and those lords to attend you





Sergio Dorantes.

*Model of Tenochtitlan in the National Museum of Anthropology.*

to your residence in our city, by order of the great Montezuma.”

Cortés embraced the prince, and presented him with three jewels of that kind called margajitas, which are figured in different colours. We then set forward on the road to Mexico, which was crowded with multitudes of the natives, and arrived at the causeway of Iztapalapa, which leads to that capital.

When we beheld the number of populous towns on the water and firm ground, and that broad causeway, running straight and level to the city, we could compare it to nothing but the enchanted scenes we had read of

in Amadis of Gaul, from the great towers and temples, and other edifices of lime and stone which seemed to rise out of the water.

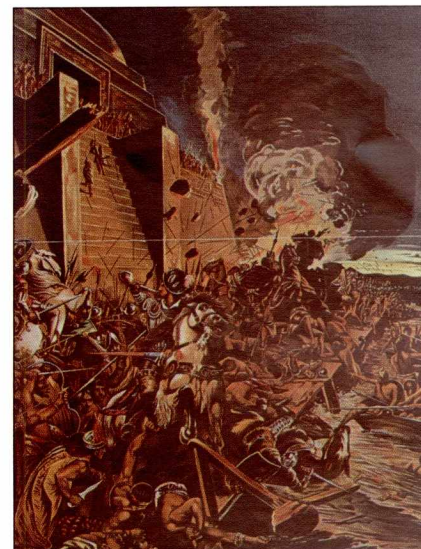
To many of us it appeared doubtful whether we were asleep or awake; nor is the manner in which I express myself to be wondered at, for it must be considered, that never yet did man see, hear, or dream of anything equal to the spectacle which appeared to our eyes on this day.

When we approached Iztapalapa, we were received by several great lords of that country, relations of Montezuma, who conducted us to our

lodgings there, in palaces magnificently built of stone, and the timber of which was cedar, with spacious courts, and apartments furnished with canopies of the finest cotton.

After having contemplated these noble edifices we walked through the gardens, which were admirable to behold from the variety of beautiful and aromatic plants, and the numerous alleys filled with fruit trees, roses, and various flowers.

Here was also a lake of the clearest water, which communicated with the grand lake of Mexico by a channel cut for the purpose, and capable of admitting the largest canoes.

*This place was so destroyed that the natives themselves could hardly know it.**Never did man see, hear or dream of anything equal to the spectacle which appeared to our eyes on this day.*

The whole was ornamented with works of arts, painted, and admirably plaistered and whitened, and it was rendered more delightful by numbers of beautiful birds.

When I beheld the scenes that were around me, I thought within myself that this was the garden of the world! This place, was at the time of which I am speaking, with one half of the houses in the water, and the other half on dry land; but all is destroyed, and that which was a lake is now a tract of fields of Indian corn, and so entirely altered that the natives themselves could hardly know it ❧