

# HERNAN CORTES

## Letters from Mexico

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With an Introductory Essay by  
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## *The First Letter*



*Sent to the Queen Doña Juana and to the Emperor, Charles V, Her Son, by the Justiciary and Municipal Council of the Muy Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz on the Tenth Day of July, 1519.*

MOST HIGH, MIGHTY AND EXCELLENT PRINCES, MOST CATHOLIC AND POWERFUL KINGS AND SOVEREIGNS:

We have reason to believe that Your Royal Highnesses have been informed, by letters of Diego Velázquez, the admiral's<sup>1</sup> lieutenant in the island of Fernandina (Cuba), of a new land that was discovered in these parts some two years ago more or less, and which was first called Cozumel and later Yucatan,<sup>2</sup> without it being either the one or the other as Your Royal Highnesses shall see from our report. For the accounts previously made of this land to Your Majesties, as to its wealth, and the way in which it was discovered and other details which have been described, were not, nor could have been true, as in this report we are sending Your Majesties, because until now no one has known any of these things. Here we will treat of the beginning, when it was first discovered, up until its present state, so that Your Highnesses may know what land it is, what people live in it, the way in which they live, their rites and ceremonies, religions and customs and what profit Your Highnesses may gain

from it, or have already gained; and by whom Your Majesties have been served, so that Your Highnesses may in all things do as You see fit. This very true and trustworthy account is as follows.

It was some two years ago, more or less, that in the city of Santiago,<sup>3</sup> which is on the island of Fernandina where we then lived, three citizens of that same island met together. Their names were Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, Lope Ochoa de Caycedo and Cristóbal Morante; and, as it is customary in these islands which have been settled by Spaniards in Your Highnesses' name to bring Indian slaves from the other islands where Spaniards have settled, these men sent two ships and a brigantine for this purpose.<sup>4</sup> We believe, although we do not know for certain as yet, that Diego Velázquez owned a fourth share of this fleet. One of the owners, Francisco Fernández de Córdoba, went as captain and took with him Antón de Alaminos,<sup>5</sup> of the town of Palos, as pilot; and we ourselves have taken on this Antón de Alaminos as our pilot and now send him to Your Highnesses so that he may further inform Your Majesties.

They continued their journey and landed on the aforementioned land, named Yucatán, which is situated some sixty or seventy leagues from the island of Fernandina and from this land of the Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz, where we, in Your Highnesses' Royal name now are. There they landed at a village named Campoche,<sup>6</sup> to whose lord they gave the name Lázaro, and gave him two spindles with a cloth of gold for a bed, and other gold articles. As the natives, however, would not permit them to remain on their land, they then sailed some ten leagues down the coast, where they landed near another town, called Mochocobon, whose chief was called Champoton.<sup>7</sup> There the Spaniards were well received by the natives, although they did not allow them to enter their town. That night the Spaniards left the ships and slept on shore. When the natives saw this, they attacked them on the following morning, killing twenty-six Spaniards and wounding all the others. When Francisco

Fernández de Córdoba saw this he fled with those who remained to take refuge in the ships.

When this same captain discovered that more than a quarter of his men had been killed, that all the rest were wounded and that he himself had received more than thirty wounds and was lucky to be alive, he returned with his ships to the island of Fernandina, where he informed the above-mentioned Diego Velázquez that they had discovered a land rich in gold; for he had seen that all the natives wore gold rings, some in their nostrils and some in their ears and in other parts; and likewise that there were buildings of stone and mortar. [He spoke also of a host of other things for which that land was renowned, and told Velázquez, if he could, to send ships in order to barter for gold, because there was much to be had.]

On hearing this, Diego Velázquez, moved more by cupidity than any other passion, dispatched his representative to Hispaniola with a request made to the Reverend Fathers of St. Jerome,<sup>8</sup> who acted as governors of the Indies, asking that they, with the powers invested in them by Your Highnesses, should grant him license to explore that coast. He added that he would be doing a great service to Your Majesties, if they permitted him to trade with the natives for gold, pearls, precious stones and other things which, save for the Royal fifth,<sup>9</sup> would all become his. The Fathers granted him his license because he knew the whereabouts of this land and claimed to have discovered it at his own expense; also because such an undertaking would further Your Highnesses' interests. At the same time, without informing the Fathers, he sent Gonzalo de Guzmán<sup>10</sup> as his representative with the same account to Your Royal Highnesses, adding that he wished to conquer the land at his own expense and begging Your Majesties to make him *adelantado* and governor of it, in addition to requesting certain other privileges which Your Majesties will have already seen from his account.

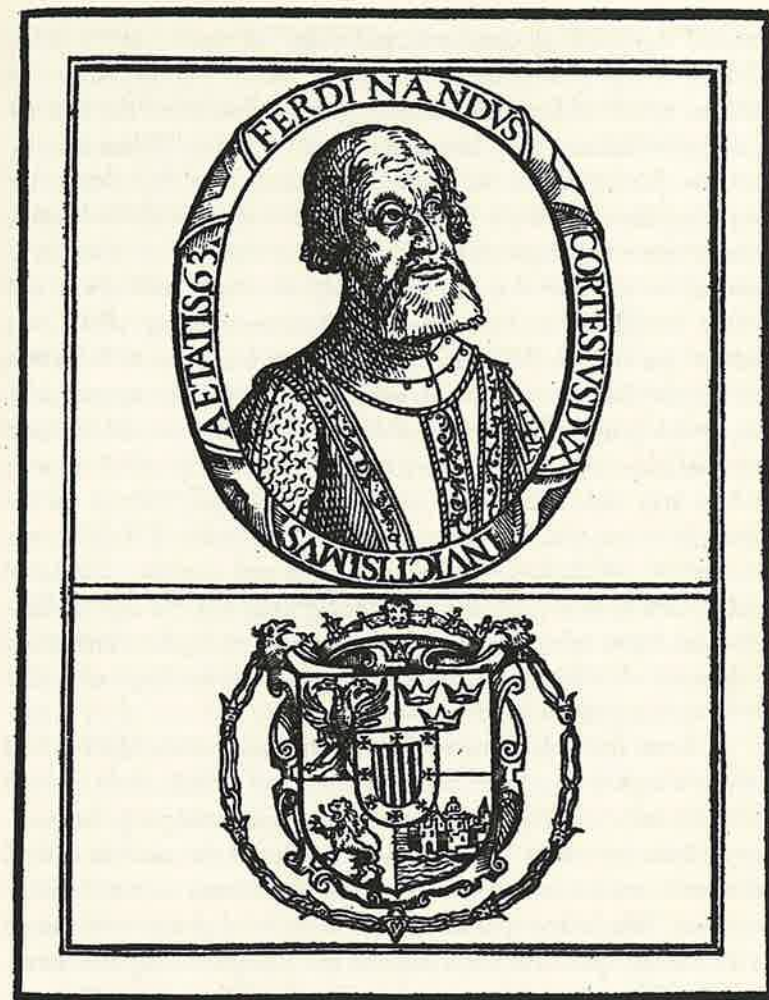
In the meantime, as he had received permission in Your Majesties' name from the Reverend Fathers of St. Jerome, he made



haste to equip three ships and a brigantine so that if it should not have pleased Your Majesties to grant the requests conveyed by Gonzalo de Guzmán, the fleet would already have set sail with the other permission. Once they were ready, he appointed Juan de Grijalba,<sup>11</sup> a relation of his, as their captain, and with him went 170 men from that same island; and some of us were among them as captains, in Your Highnesses' service. Not only did we and those others go and risk our lives, but we supplied almost all the provisions of the fleet from our own stocks, spending a large part of our fortunes. Antón de Alaminos went as pilot, for he had first discovered the land with Francisco Fernández de Córdoba.

On this journey they followed the same route as previously, but, before reaching that land, they discovered a small island to the south of it, some thirty leagues round the coast: this island is called Cozumel.<sup>12</sup> On it they came to a village which they called San Juan de Portalatina; and they renamed the island Santa Cruz. The day they arrived, some 150 Indians came out to watch them, but on the following day, as it later appeared, they all left their villages and fled into the forest. As the captain was in need of water, he had sailed off that same day, but while pursuing his journey decided to return to the island. When he landed, the villages were totally deserted, and once he had taken his water he returned to the ships without exploring the island or learning anything about it as he ought to have done, so as to render a true account of it to Your Royal Highnesses. He then set sail and continued on his way until he reached the land which Francisco Fernández de Córdoba had discovered; afterwards they followed the coast in a southwesterly direction until they reached a bay to which Grijalba and Alaminos gave the name of the Bahía de la Ascensión.<sup>13</sup> The pilots thought that bay was very close to the Punta de las Veras, which is the land that Vicente Yáñez<sup>14</sup> discovered and marked down, and which runs into the middle of that bay. And so large is the bay itself that it is thought to reach to the Northern Sea.

Thence they returned back along the same coast until they



1. Cortés at the age of sixty-three with the arms granted to him as Marqués de la Valle de Oaxaca. From *El Cortés Valeroso y Mexicana* by Lasso de la Vega, 1588. Courtesy of the British Museum.

rounded the point of that land, and sailed along the north coast, reaching the port of Campeche, whose lord is called Lázaro, to trade on behalf of Diego Velázquez, who had ordered them to do so, and also because they had much need of water. When the natives saw them approach they lined themselves in battle order to bar their way into the village. The captain then called to them through an interpreter he had with him,<sup>15</sup> and made the Indians who came forward understand that he came only to trade with them and to take water, and so he went with them to a spring which was close to the village. While taking the water he began to tell them through the interpreter how he would give them the ornaments he was carrying in exchange for gold. When the Indians understood they told him to go away, as they had no gold; but he asked them to let him take the water, after which he would go. Despite his requests, however, the following morning at the hour of Mass he was attacked by the Indians armed with bows and arrows, spears and shields. One Spaniard was killed in the fighting and the captain Grijalba and many others were wounded; that evening they embarked in the caravels without having entered the Indian village or learnt anything to report to Your Royal Majesties.

From there they traveled along the coast until they reached a river which they called the Grijalba<sup>16</sup> and which they entered about the hour of vespers. On the following morning a great number of Indian warriors lined up on both sides of the river to defend their land; and some of us believed that there were as many as five thousand. When the captain saw this, he ordered that no one should go ashore but spoke from the ships to the Indians through his interpreters, asking them to come closer so that he might explain the reason for his coming; twenty natives then boarded a canoe and very cautiously approached the ships. The captain told them that he had come only to trade and that he wished to be their friend. He asked them to bring gold, which he would exchange for the ornaments he was carrying.

So, on the following morning they brought some ornaments

of fine gold, and the captain gave them, in exchange, what he thought appropriate. He remained there that day and sailed away on the next without learning anything more about the land. He continued along the coast until he reached a bay which they called San Juan, and the captain landed with certain of his men on some deserted beaches. As the natives had seen the ships coming along the coast, they gathered there, and the captain spoke to them through his interpreters, and had a table brought on which he laid his goods, giving them to understand that he came to trade and to be their friend. When they saw and understood this, the Indians began to bring strips of cloth and some gold ornaments which they traded with the captain. The captain then sent one of the caravels back to Diego Velázquez with all they had obtained.<sup>17</sup> The captain himself sailed on down the coast with the remaining ships; and he went some forty-five leagues without landing or seeing anything, save what was visible from the sea. He then turned back for the island of Fernandina without seeing any other thing on that land worthy of note, from which Your Royal Highnesses may see that none of the other accounts of this land can have been true, for they learnt nothing of its secrets, but have written according to their fancies.

When the ship which Grijalba had dispatched from the bay of San Juan reached the island of Fernandina, and Diego Velázquez saw the gold it carried, and learnt from Grijalba's letters of the cloth and ornaments which he had been given in exchange, it seemed to him that the profit was small, in view of the stories he had heard from the people who returned in the caravel, and in relation to his own lust for gold. He forthwith put it about that he had not covered the cost of equipping the fleet, which distressed him, and that he was ill-pleased to see how little Grijalba had achieved. But Diego Velázquez had in fact little cause for complaint, because he covered the cost of the fleet with some skins and barrels of wine and some boxes of linen shirts and barter beads and other goods which he sent with it, which he sold to us here at four *pesos de oro* for the wine, which is two thousand *maravedís* the *arroba*, and the



linen shirts he sold for two *pesos de oro* and the bags of green beads at two *pesos*.<sup>18</sup> With this he covered the cost of his fleet and even made some money. We make such a detailed account of this, to Your Majesties so that You may know that the fleets which have been sent by Diego Velázquez up to now have been equipped by him as much by ordinary trade as by proper outfitting; and that we have, although we suffered many hardships, served Your Royal Highnesses with our persons and the wealth of our estates, and shall continue to serve as long as our lives permit.

While Diego Velázquez was thus vexed on account of the little gold he had been brought, and eager to acquire more, he decided, without even informing the Hieronymite Fathers, to gather a fleet and to send it to look for his relative Juan de Grijalba. So as to do it at somewhat less cost to himself, he spoke with Fernando Cortés,<sup>19</sup> citizen and *alcalde* of the city of Santiago on Your Majesties' behalf, and suggested that between them they should fit out some eight or ten ships, for at that time Fernando Cortés was better equipped than anyone else on the island, having three ships of his own, and ready cash and being well thought of on the island. It was thought that many more people would follow him than anyone else, as in fact occurred. When Fernando Cortés heard what Diego Velázquez proposed, he, being most eager to serve Your Royal Highnesses, decided to spend his entire fortune in equipping the fleet and paid for nearly two-thirds of it, providing not only ships and supplies but also giving money to those who were to sail in the fleet but were unable to equip themselves with all they required for the journey.<sup>20</sup>

Once the fleet had been made ready, Diego Velázquez appointed Fernando Cortés captain of it in Your Majesties' name, in order to explore the land and trade for gold and do all that Grijalba had not done. The fleet, however, was disposed according to Velázquez's orders, although he contributed but a third of the cost, as Your Royal Highnesses may see from the instructions and authority which Fernando Cortés received in Your Majesties' name,

and which we now send by our deputies.<sup>21</sup> And Your Majesties should also know that the third part contributed by Velázquez consisted in the main of wine and cloth and other things of no great value, to be sold to us later at a much higher price than he paid for them, so that we might say that it is with us Spaniards, Your Royal Highnesses' subjects, that he has traded, and has invested his funds very profitably.

And when the above-mentioned fleet was ready Your Royal Highnesses' captain Fernando Cortés left the island of Fernandina with ten caravels and four hundred soldiers, among whom were many gentlemen and knights, sixteen of them with horses. The first land they reached was the island of Cozume[1], which is now called Santa Cruz—as we said above; and when they landed in the port of San Juan de Portalatina they found the village deserted as though it had never been occupied by a living soul. And Fernando Cortés, wishing to know why that place was so deserted, ordered his men to leave their ships and quarter themselves in the village. While he was there he learnt from three Indians, whom they had captured in a canoe fleeing to the land of Yucatán, that the chieftains of Cozume[1], when they saw the Spaniards land, had left their villages and fled into the forest with all their people, for fear of the Spaniards, not knowing with what intentions they were coming. Cortés then spoke to them through his interpreter and told them that he had not come to do them harm but to instruct and bring them to the knowledge of our Holy Catholic Faith, so they might become Your Majesties' vassals and serve and obey You, as do all the other Indians in these parts which are inhabited by Spaniards. On being reassured in this fashion by the captain, they lost much of their fear and said they would go and call their chieftains who were in the forests in the interior. The captain then gave them a letter of safe-conduct for their chieftains. They departed, saying they would return within five days. When, however, the captain had waited three or four days more than the agreed time, and had seen that they were not coming, he decided, in order to prevent all

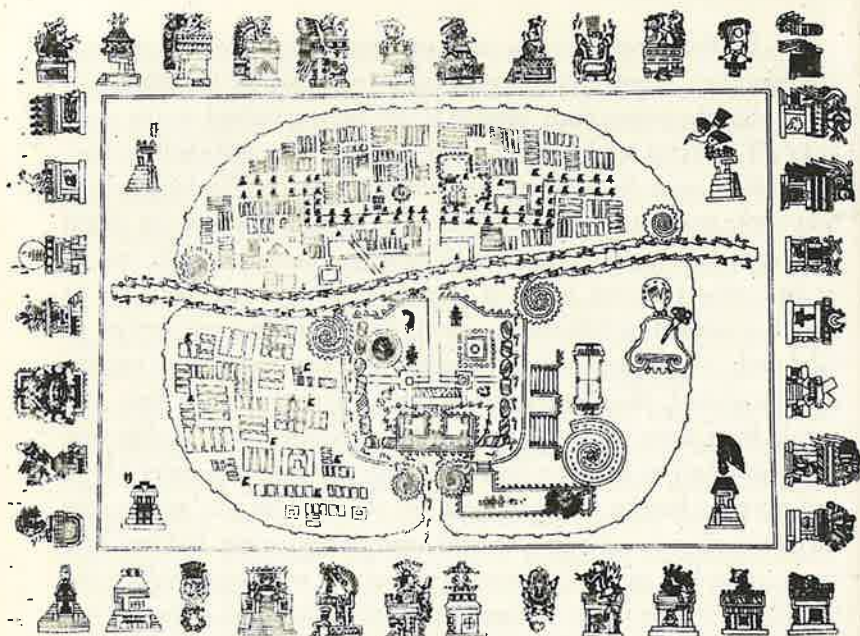


the Indians from leaving the island, to send an expedition along the coast. He sent two captains, each with a hundred men, and ordered them to go, one to each end of the island, and speak with any chieftains they might meet, telling them how he was waiting to speak with them on Your Majesties' behalf in the port of San Juan de Portalatina; and that they were to beg and persuade them as best they could to come to the aforementioned port; but they were in no way to harm their persons, houses or properties, so as to avoid alarming them and driving them still farther away. The two captains departed, as Fernando Cortés had commanded, and within four days returned saying that all the villages they had come across were deserted. They brought with them, however, some ten or twelve people amongst whom was one of rank; and Fernando Cortés spoke with him on Your Highnesses' behalf, telling him to call the other chieftains, for he, Cortés, would on no account leave that island until he had seen and spoken with them. The Indian replied that he would do so and departed with a safe-conduct to look for those chieftains. After two days he returned with one who said he was lord of the island and had come to see what the Spaniards wanted. The captain replied that he had not come to do them harm, but to persuade them to the knowledge of our Holy Faith; and they should know that we were subjects of the most powerful monarchs in the world, whom most of the world obeyed. What he, Francisco [*sic.*] Cortés, required of them was only that the chieftains and people of the island should also owe obedience to Your Highnesses; and told them that by doing so they would be much favored, and no one thereafter would molest them. The chieftain replied that he was happy to do so and sent for all the other chieftains of the island who, when they arrived, expressed satisfaction with all that Hernando Cortés had told their lord. He then commanded them to return, and so reassured had they been that within a few days the villages were as full of people as before, and the Indians went among us with so little fear that it seemed as if they had known us for a long time.

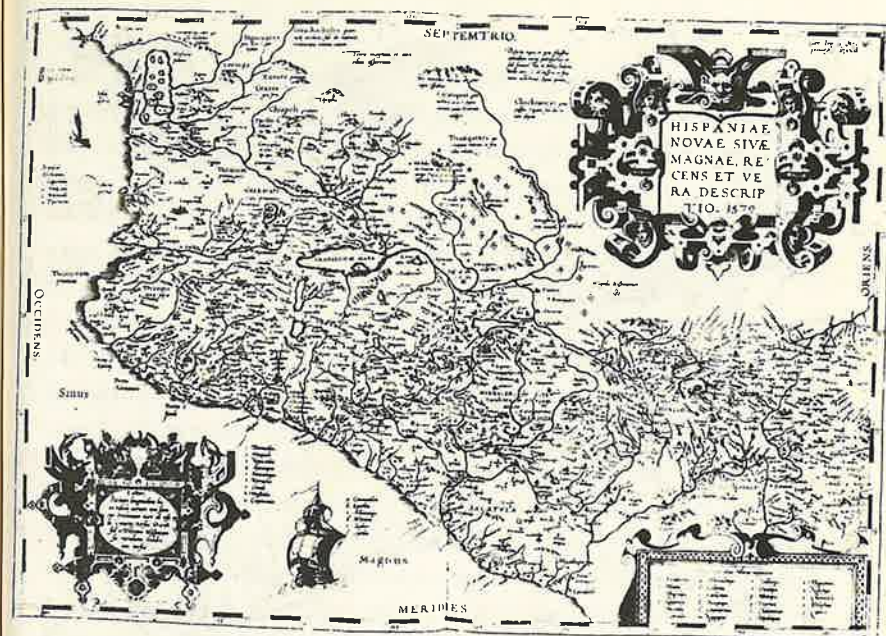
In the meantime the captain learnt that some Spaniards had been held captive in Yucatán for seven years by the command of certain chieftains; their caravel<sup>22</sup> had been wrecked in the shallows off Jamaica while sailing from *Tierra Firme* and they had escaped in an open boat which had brought them to this land where they were captured by the Indians. The captain had left the island of Fernandina with instructions to look for these Spaniards, and as he had now received news of them and where they were to be found, it seemed to him that he would be rendering great service to God and Your Majesties in attempting to rescue them from captivity. He wished, therefore, to go in person with the entire fleet, and would have done so had not the pilots prevented him, saying that they would all be lost, for the coast was very rocky, as indeed it is, and with no harbor or bay where the ships might put ashore. He therefore abandoned the idea and sent instead some Indians in a canoe, who had said they knew the chieftain who was holding the Spaniards; and he wrote to these Spaniards saying that, if he did not come himself with the fleet to rescue them, it was only because the coast difficult and dangerous to land on; but he asked them to attempt to escape by canoe and said that he would wait for them there on the island of Santa Cruz.

Three days later the captain, dissatisfied with his plans and believing that the Indians would be unable to do everything as he wished, sent two brigantines and one smaller vessel with forty men on board to that land, to recapture the captive Spaniards if they could find them. He also sent another three Indians with a letter, and orders to land and search for the Spaniards.<sup>23</sup> When the ships reached the land the three Indians were sent ashore to search for the Spaniards as the captain had ordered; and they waited six days for them on that coast with such difficulty that they almost foundered and were lost, for the sea was very rough as the pilots had said. Seeing that neither the Spaniards nor the Indians who had been sent to look for them had come, they decided to return to where Fernando Cortés was waiting for them, on the island of Santa Cruz.





2. Map of Tlaxcala. The top right-hand sector is Tizatlan, the bottom right-hand sector Quiahuixtlan, the top left-hand sector Octelolco and the bottom left-hand sector Tepeticpac. The river Atzompa crosses the city from North to South (left to right, the map being oriented along an East-West axis). From Alfredo Chavero, *Pintures Jeroglificas*, Mexico 1901. Courtesy of the British Museum.



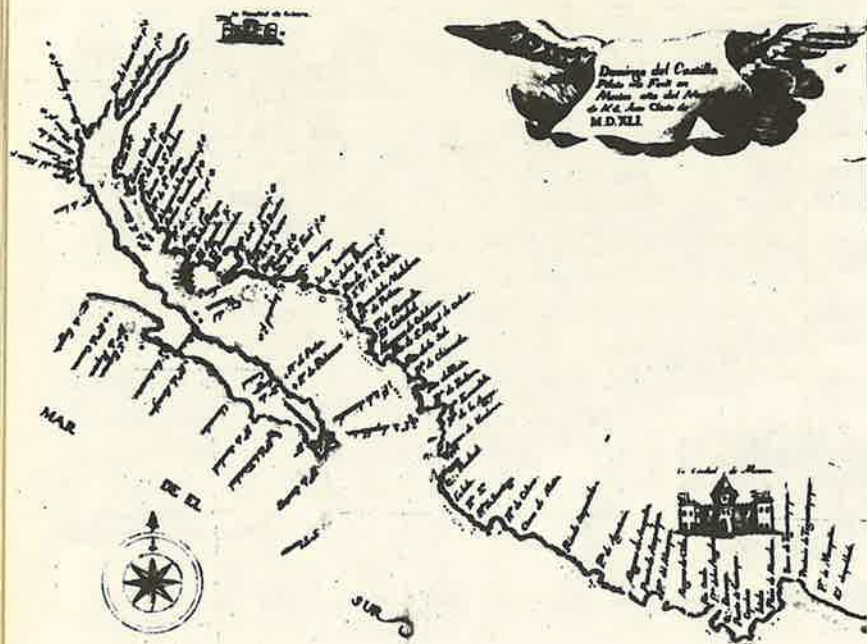
3. Map of New Spain by Abraham Ortelius. From *Additamentum Theatri Orbis Terrarum*. 1579. Courtesy of the British Museum.



When they reached the island, and the captain heard of their failure, he was much distressed, and proposed to embark the following day, with every intent of reaching that land even if the whole fleet were lost; also to discover if there was any truth in the report which the captain Juan de Grijalba had sent to the island of Fernandina, since he suspected that it was all a fiction, and that no Spaniards had ever landed on that coast or been held captive there.

With this resolve, the captain had embarked all his men save for himself and twenty others; and while the weather was most favorable for their departure, there suddenly sprang up a contrary wind followed by heavy showers, and the pilots urged the captain not to leave port, for the weather was now most unfavorable. When the captain saw this he duly disembarked the rest of his men. On the following day at noon a canoe was sighted sailing toward the island, and, when it reached us, we saw that Gerónimo de Aguilar,<sup>24</sup> one of the Spanish captives, was aboard. He told us how he had come to be lost and how long he had remained in captivity, which was all as we have described to Your Royal Highnesses above. And we held that sudden bad weather which came upon us a great miracle and divine mystery, whereby we have come to believe that nothing can be undertaken in Your Majesties' service which does not end in good. From this Gerónimo de Aguilar was also learnt that the others who were shipwrecked with him were scattered throughout the land, which, he told us, was very large, and it would be impossible to rescue them without spending much time there.<sup>25</sup>

Then, as Fernando Cortés saw that the provisions for the fleet were already running low, and that his men would suffer greatly from hunger if he delayed and remained there any longer, and, furthermore, that he still had not accomplished the purpose of his voyage, he resolved with the consent of those in his company to depart. And so setting sail, they left the island of Cozume[1], now called Santa Cruz, very peaceful and in such a manner that were it to be settled the natives would serve the Spaniards willingly. The



*Este Mapa es tomado de el Original que pasa en el Reino de el Marques de el Valle. Este es el para una Ciudad, que creyeron se creia cierta en la Monarquia de Nueva España. En la descubierta del Rio Colorado and Golfo de California para dar Rey el año de 1540 de Nueva España, y para dar el Colorado el año de 1540, quando se descubrió que se incorporaba en una Nación, entre en el Reino de California. Hecho en el año de 1540.*

4. Map of the Southern Sea made by the pilot Domingo de Castillo. From Archbishop Lorenzana's edition of Cortés letters, Mexico 1770. The legend reads: "This map is taken from the original in the possession of the Marqués de la Valle. In the upper part it shows a city which, according to all the accounts, was actually thought to exist and given the name Quivira. Two rivers are drawn in the estuary of the Colorado river in the Gulf of California. One of these is called the Buena Guía and may be the Colorado itself; the other, called Miraflores, may be the Gila. Together they merge into one current and flow down into the Gulf of California." *Courtesy of the British Museum.*

chieftains were very pleased and contented with what the captain had told them on Your Royal Highnesses' behalf and with his having given them so much finery for their persons: and we are certain that all the Spaniards who come to this island in the future will be as well received as in any of those which have been settled for a long time. This island is small, and nowhere is any river or stream to be found, so that all the water which the Indians drink comes from wells. The land consists entirely of crags and rocks and forests; the only produce the Indians have is from beehives, and our deputies are conveying to Your Highnesses samples of the honey and beeswax from the hives, for Your inspection.

Be it known to Your Majesties that the captain urged the chieftains of that island to renounce their heathen religion; and when they asked him to give them instead a precept by which they might henceforth live, he instructed them as best he could in the Catholic Faith. He left them a wooden cross fixed on top of a high building and an image of Our Lady the Virgin Mary, and told them most fully all they were to do to be good Christians; and they showed him that they had received everything with great goodwill, and thus we left them very happy and contented.

After we departed from this island we sailed for Yucatan and ran along the northern coast until we reached that great river called Grijalba, which is, as Your Royal Highnesses have already been informed, where Captain Juan de Grijalba, a relation of Diego Velázquez, landed; and so shallow is the mouth of the river that none of the large ships could enter. However, as Captain Hernando Cortés is so devoted to Your Majesties' service, and greatly desired to render a true account of all that is to be found in this land, he determined to proceed no farther until he had discovered the secret of that river and the towns along its banks, for they were said to be famous for their wealth. So he transferred all the men in the fleet to the small brigantines and open boats, and we sailed up the river until we could see the towns in that country. When we arrived at the first town<sup>26</sup> we found the people standing by the riverbank, and

the captain spoke with them through his interpreter and also through Gerónimo de Aguilar, who spoke and understood that language very well. He made them understand that he had not come to do them any harm but only to speak to them on Your Majesties' behalf, and to this end begged them to permit us to land, for we had nowhere to sleep that night save in those brigantines and open boats, in which we had barely room to stand; it was too late to return to our ships, which we had left beyond in the open sea. When the Indians heard this they replied that he might say all he wished from there, but neither he nor any of his men were to attempt a landing, for if they did so they would be repelled. Then after saying this their archers were drawn up and they threatened us and shouted for us to leave. Because the day was much advanced and the sun almost set, the captain decided that we should go to some beaches which lay in front of that town; and there we landed and slept that night.

On the following morning certain Indians came to us in a canoe bringing some chickens and a little maize, which was barely enough for a single meal, and told us to take it and leave their land. The captain then answered them, giving them to understand that on no account would he leave until he had learnt the secrets of the land and might send Your Majesties a true account of it; and again he entreated them not to take it ill, nor to prevent him from entering the town, for they were Your Royal Highnesses' vassals. Yet still they replied forbidding us to enter their town and ordering us to be gone.

After they had left, the captain decided to proceed to the town, and therefore sent a captain of his company with two hundred men along a road to the town, which we had discovered the previous night, while he, Fernando Cortés, embarked with about eighty men in the boats and brigantines and anchored in front of the town, waiting to land if they permitted him to do so. When he arrived, he found the Indians prepared for war, armed with bows, arrows, lances and bucklers, and shouting to us to leave the land, but if we wanted war, to begin at once, for they were men who



knew how to defend their homes. After having read the *requerimiento* to them three times and having asked Your Royal Highnesses' notary<sup>27</sup> to witness that he did not want war, but seeing that the Indians were most resolutely determined to prevent him from landing, and indeed had already begun to shoot arrows at us, he had ordered us to fire the guns and attack. A few of us were wounded when the shots were fired and as our men were landing, but at last the speed of our attack, and the attack on their rear of our men who had come by the road, drove them out of the village. Thus we took it and occupied what seemed to us to be the strongest part.

On the following day, at the hour of vespers, there came two Indians on behalf of their chieftains bringing certain gold ornaments which were very thin and of little value; and they told the captain that they were bringing these trinkets so that he should depart without doing them further harm, and leave their land as it had been before. To which the captain replied saying that he would be well pleased to do them no further harm, but, as to leaving the land, they must know that from henceforth they must hold as their lords the greatest monarchs on earth and must serve them as their vassals: once they had done this, Your Majesties would grant them many favors and aid and protect them from their enemies. They replied that they were content to do so but still required us to leave their land: and so we became friends.

Having arranged this friendship, the captain informed them that the Spaniards who were with him had nothing to eat nor had brought any food from the ships and begged them therefore to bring us provisions for as long as we might remain in their land. They replied that they would bring it the next day and then they left; but neither on the following day nor on the day after did they come with any food, and because of this we were very short of provisions. On the third day some Spaniards asked leave of the captain to go to the farms nearby in search of food. And when the captain saw that the Indians had not come as promised, he sent four captains with more than two hundred men to search the outskirts

of the town for food. While they were searching, however, they came across a large number of Indians who shot at them with arrows and wounded twenty Spaniards; and had not the captain at once been informed and rescued them, more than half the Christians would have perished. Following this, we all withdrew to our camp and those who had been wounded were attended to, and those who had fought rested.

When the captain saw the harm the Indians had done by attacking us with arrows instead of bringing supplies as they had promised, he ordered all the men to arm themselves and ten of the horses we had brought in the ships to be landed, for he believed that those Indians, encouraged by what had happened on the previous day, would attack our camp intending to do us harm. On the next day, when everyone had thus been prepared, he sent some captains with three hundred men to the place where the battle had been fought on the previous day to see if the Indians were still there or, if not, to discover what had become of them. Soon afterwards he sent out another two captains with a rear guard of a hundred men, and he himself went secretly along one side with the ten horsemen. While advancing in this order, the vanguard encountered a large number of Indian warriors coming to attack us in our camp, and had we not that day gone out to meet them on the road we might have found ourselves in dire peril. When the captain of artillery read the *requerimiento* before a notary to these Indians, telling them, through the interpreters, that we did not desire war but only peace and love between us, they replied not in words but with a shower of arrows. While the vanguard was thus fighting with the Indians, the two captains of the rear guard arrived, and, after two hours of fighting, Fernando Cortés and the ten horsemen came up, in a part of the forest where the Indians were beginning to surround the Spaniards, and there he fought with the Indians for an hour. And so great was their number that neither could the Indians who were fighting the Spanish infantry see the horsemen or know where they were, nor could the horsemen, as they charged in

and out of the Indians, see one another. As soon as our foot soldiers saw the horsemen, however, they attacked fiercely and put the Indians to flight, pursuing them for half a league. When the captain saw that the Indians had been routed and that there was nothing further to be done, and, moreover, that his men were very fatigued, he ordered them to gather in some farmhouses that were close by; and, after they had gathered, twenty were found to have been wounded, none of whom died, not even those wounded the previous day.<sup>28</sup> Once we had regathered, and attended to the sick, we returned to our camp; and we took with us two Indians whom we had captured, but the captain ordered them to be freed and gave them letters for the chieftains saying that if they came to the camp he would forgive them their crime and they would be his friends. That same afternoon there came two Indians who seemed to be persons of importance, and said that they were very grieved by all that had happened, and that those chieftains on whose behalf they came begged him to forgive them and do them no further harm than he had already, nor kill any more of their people, for almost 220 had been killed; the past should be forgotten and henceforth they wished to be vassals of those monarchs of whom we had spoken, and as such did offer themselves, and bound themselves to serve them whenever they were required to do anything in Your Majesties' name; thus an agreement was reached and a peace made. The captain then asked these Indians through his interpreters who the people were he had been fighting with in the battle; they replied that they had assembled from eight provinces, and that according to the written records they had, there were in all some forty thousand men, for they were well able to count on such a number. [Your Royal Highnesses may truly believe that this battle was won more by the will of God than by our own might, for what could our four hundred have done against forty thousand?<sup>29</sup>]

After having all become good friends, they gave us, during the four or five days we remained there, some 140 *pesos de oro* in all, but comprised of pieces so thin yet valued so highly by them

that it seems their land is very poor in gold, for it was thought that the little they possessed had come from other parts by means of trading.

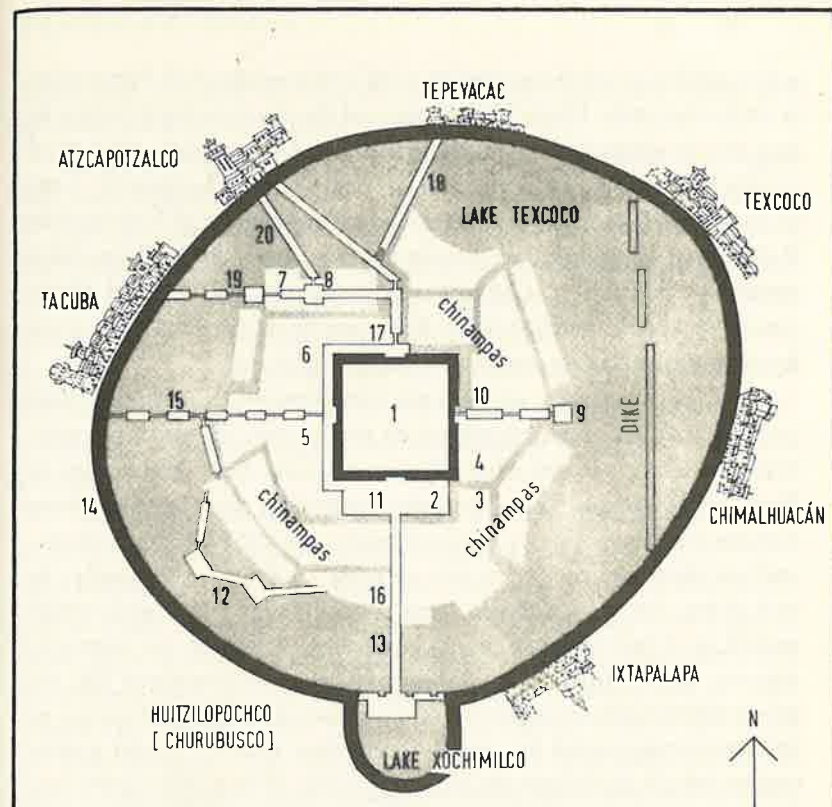
The land is very fertile and abounds in maize, fruit and fish and other things which they eat. The town is situated on the banks of the aforementioned river, up which we sailed, in a plain which has many farms and arable lands which they own and cultivate. The captain reproved them for their evil practice of worshipping their idols and gods, and made them understand how they must come to the knowledge of our Holy Faith; and he left them a wooden cross planted on a height, with which they were well pleased and said they would hold it in great veneration and adore it; thus these Indians became our friends and Your Royal Highnesses' vassals.

Fernando Cortés then left that place and continued on his voyage; and we reached the port and bay which is called San Juan,<sup>30</sup> where the aforementioned captain Juan de Grijalba had traded, of which a detailed account has been given to Your Majesty above. As soon as we arrived, the natives of that land came to discover what caravels those were that had reached their shores, but as the day was already much advanced, and it was almost night, the captain remained in the ships and ordered that no one should land. On the following day the captain, with a great part of his men, went ashore, and found there two chieftains to whom he made certain gifts of his own garments; and he spoke with them through his interpreters, giving them to understand that he had come to these parts by Your Royal Highnesses' command to tell them what they must do in Your service, and to this end he asked them to return to their village and call forth the chieftain or chieftains who were there to come and speak with him. And so they might more surely come, he gave them for the chieftains two shirts, gold belts and two doublets, one of satin, the other of velvet, and for each a scarlet bonnet and a pair of breeches, and thus they departed with these gifts.



A little before noon on the following day a chieftain arrived with those from the town and spoke to the captain, who made him understand through the interpreters that he had come to do them no harm but to make known to them how they were to be Your Majesties' vassals and must henceforth serve and give of what they had in their land, as do all who are such. He replied that he was very content to be so and to obey, and it pleased him to serve them and to have such high princes for sovereigns, as the captain had made them understand Your Royal Highnesses were. Then the captain told him that as he had shown such goodwill toward his king and lord he would soon see the favors which henceforth Your Majesties would bestow on him. So saying, he had him dressed in a shirt of fine Dutch linen, a coat of velvet and a gold belt, with which the chieftain was very happy and contented. He told the captain to wait there while he returned to his land, for on the following day he would bring things of his own that we might more fully appreciate his will to serve Your Royal Highnesses; and so he took his leave and went. On the following day he returned as promised, and had a white cloth spread before the captain, and offered him certain precious gold ornaments which he placed on it; of these and of others which were later obtained we make a special report to Your Majesties in a list which our representatives bear with them.

After this chieftain had taken leave of us and returned much contented to his own house, we in this fleet<sup>31</sup> who were of noble lineage, gentlemen and knights, zealous in the service of God and of Your Royal Highnesses, and most eager to honor the Royal Crown, extend its dominions and increase its revenues, came together and urged the aforementioned captain Fernando Cortés, saying that this land was very good and, to judge by the samples of gold which the chieftain had brought, most wealthy also, and, moreover, that the chieftain and his Indians had shown us great goodwill: for these reasons, therefore, it seemed to us not fitting to Your Majesties' service to carry out the orders which Diego Velázquez had given to Hernando Cortés, which were to trade for as



INTERPRETATION OF THE NUREMBURG PLAN

## KEY

1. Main Temple Enclosure
- 2 and 3. Palace of Motecucuma
4. Menagerie
5. Palace of Axayacatl
6. Palace of Cuauhtemoc
7. Temple of Tlaltelolco
8. Market at Tlaltelolco
9. Temple
10. Palace
11. Square

12. Motecucuma's "House of Pleasure"
13. Fortress at Xoloc.
14. Chapultepec. Beginning of the aqueduct to Tenochtitlan.
15. Tacuba Causeway
16. Ixtapalapa Causeway
- 17 and 18. Tepeyac Causeway
19. Nonoalco Causeway
20. Vallejo Causeway.

much gold as possible and return with it to the island of Fernandina in order that only Diego Velázquez and the captain might enjoy it, and that it seemed to all of us better that a town with a court of justice be founded and inhabited in Your Royal Highnesses' name so that in this land also You might have sovereignty as You have in Your other kingdoms and dominions. For once the land has been settled by Spaniards, in addition to increasing Your Royal Highnesses' dominions and revenues, You may be so gracious as to grant favors to us and to the settlers who come in future.

Having decided on this, we joined together with one mind and purpose and made a petition to the captain in which we said: that he well knew how advantageous it would be to the service of Our Lord God and Your Majesties if this land were settled, giving him the reasons which we have set forth to Your Highnesses above, and we therefore requested him to cease trading in the manner he was doing, for it would to a large extent destroy the land, which would do Your Majesties much disservice. Likewise we requested that he should forthwith appoint *alcaldes* and *regidores* for the town which we were to found in Your Royal Highnesses' name; all this was accompanied by certain intimations that we would protest against him if he did not do as we required. When this request was made, the captain said he would give us his reply on the following day. And as the captain saw that what we asked was beneficial to Your Royal Highnesses' service, he answered us on the following day saying that he was more devoted to Your Majesties' service than to any other cause. Therefore, he disregarded his personal interest in continuing trading, by which he had expected to recover his investment and the great expense of fitting out the fleet together with Diego Velázquez, but rather set all this aside, and was pleased and willing to do all that we requested, for it would greatly benefit the service of Your Royal Highnesses. At once, with great diligence he set about founding and settling a town which he named the Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz and appointed those whose names are signed at the foot of this paper as *alcaldes* and *regidores* of the

town, and received from us in Your Royal Highnesses' name the solemn vow customary in such cases.<sup>32</sup>

This done, on the following day we assembled in council and called captain Fernando Cortés and asked him in Your Royal Highnesses' name to show us the authority and instructions which the aforementioned Diego Velázquez had given him when coming to these parts.<sup>33</sup> Whereupon he sent for them, and once we had seen and read them and examined them most carefully, it seemed, to the best of our understanding, that by this authority and instructions Captain Fernando Cortés no longer had any authority, and as it had expired he could no longer exercise the office of captain or judicial officer.

It seemed to us, Most Excellent Princes, that in order to preserve peace and concord amongst ourselves and to govern us well it was necessary to elect someone for Your Royal service who might act in Your Majesties' name, in the aforementioned town and in these parts, as chief justice, captain and our leader, whom we might all respect, until an account of these events had been sent to Your Royal Highnesses so that You might provide for what is best suited to Your service. And seeing that no person was better fitted for such a responsibility than Fernando Cortés, for in addition to being the person most suited, he is most zealous in the service of Your Majesties, and also has much experience in these lands through the Royal offices and commands he has held from Your Majesties in the islands, in which he has always given good account of himself: moreover he spent all he had to come with this fleet in Your Majesties' service and held of small account, as we have already related, all he might have gained if he had continued to trade as had been agreed, we appointed him therefore, in the name of Your Royal Highnesses, chief justice and *alcalde mayor* and received from him the oath required in such cases. When this was done, as is appropriate to Your Majesties' service, we received him in Your Royal name, into our council and chamber, as chief justice and captain of Your Royal armies, and so he is and shall remain until Your Majes-



ties provide whatever is more suitable to Your service. We desire to relate all this to Your Royal Highnesses so that You may be acquainted with all that has passed here and our present position and circumstances.

Having thus completed our business and being all together in our council, we decided to write to Your Majesties and send You all the gold, silver and jewels which we have obtained in the land, over and above the fifth which belongs to Your Royal revenues by law, for we decided that by sending You all the first spoils from these lands, and in keeping nothing for ourselves, we should serve Your Royal Highnesses and demonstrate the very great satisfaction we have in Your service, as we have shown before by venturing our persons and our possessions. When this had been agreed upon we elected as our representatives Alonso Fernández Puerto Carrero and Francisco de Montejo, whom we send to Your Majesties with all that we mention above that they may kiss Your Royal hands on our behalf and in our name, and in the name of this town and council beg Your Royal Highnesses to favor us with certain things necessary for the service of God and Your Majesties and for the common and public good of this town, as is set down at greater length in the instructions which we have given them. Which representatives we do most humbly beseech Your Majesties, with all the reverence which we owe You, to receive, and give Your Royal hands for them to kiss on our behalf, and to grant us all the favors which they, in the name of this council and ourselves, shall request of You, for besides doing a great service to Our Lord thereby, this town and council would reckon it a most singular grace such as we daily hope Your Royal Highnesses may see fit to bestow upon us.

In a previous section of this letter we said that we were sending Your Royal Highnesses an account of this land so that Your Highnesses might be better acquainted with its customs and riches, of the people who inhabit it, and of the laws and beliefs, rites and ceremonies by which they live. Most Powerful Lords, this land which we have now settled in Your Majesties' name extends for

fifty leagues along the coast on either side of this town: the coast is completely flat with sandy beaches which in some places stretch for two leagues or more. The country inland is likewise very flat with most beautiful meadows and streams; and among these are some so beautiful that in all Spain there can be none better, for they are both pleasing to the eye and rich in crops, and well cared for and well situated; and there are places to walk and to graze all kinds of herds.

In this land there is every kind of game, and animals and birds similar to those of our acquaintance, such as deer, and fallow deer, wolves, foxes, partridges, pigeons, several kinds of turtledove, quails, hares and rabbits: so that in the kinds of birds and animals there is no difference between this land and Spain, and there are lions and tigers as well.

Some five leagues inland from the sea, and in certain places less, runs a great range of the most beautiful mountains, and some of these are exceedingly high, but there is one which is much higher than all the others from which one may see a great part of the sea and land; indeed it is so high that if the day is not fine one cannot even see the summit, for the top half of it is all covered by cloud. At other times, however, when the day is very fine one can see the peak rising above the cloud, and it is so white we think it to be covered in snow, and even the natives say it is snow, but as we have not seen it very clearly, although we have come very close to it, and because this region is so hot, we cannot be certain that it is.<sup>34</sup>

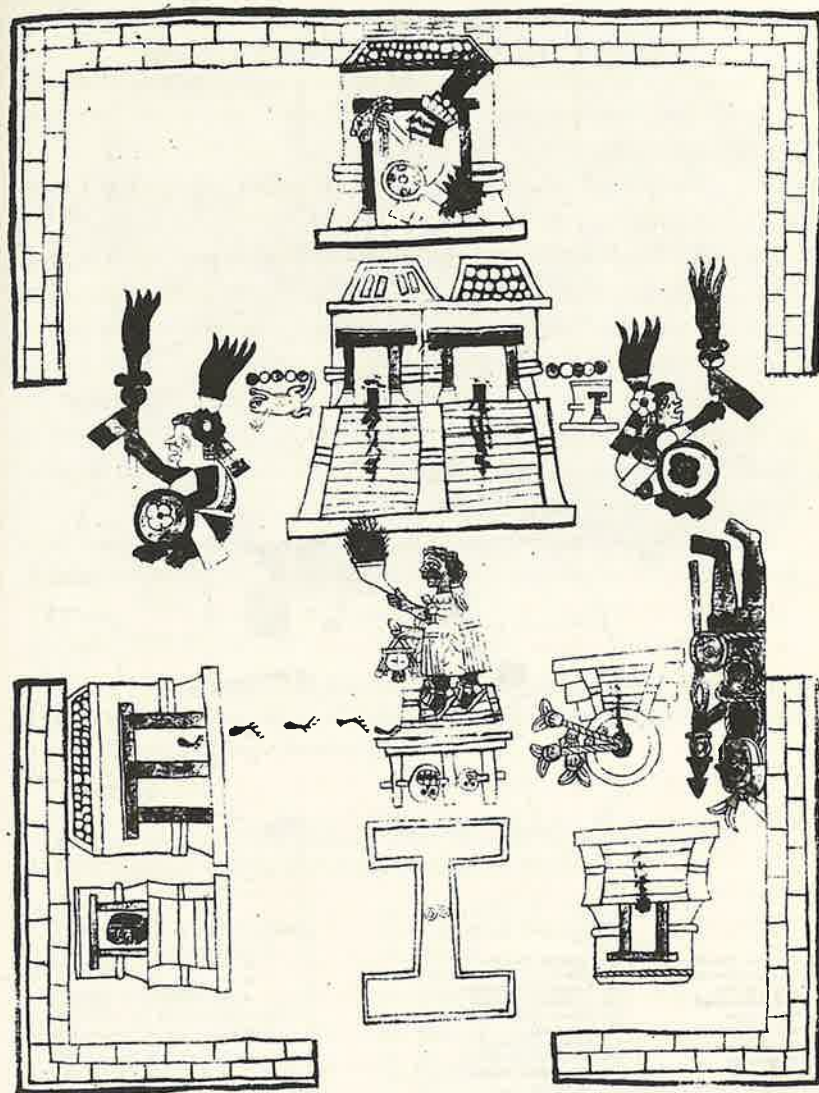
We shall endeavor to see and learn the secret of this and other things of which we have heard so that we may render Your Royal Highnesses a true account, as of the wealth in gold and silver and precious stones which Your Majesties may judge according to the samples we are sending. In our view it cannot be doubted that there must be in this land as much as in that from which Solomon is said to have taken the gold for the temple. But so little time has passed since we first landed that we have been unable to explore more than five leagues inland and some ten or twelve leagues along

the coast on either side of the place where we landed, although from the sea there appears to be much more, and indeed we saw more while sailing hither.

The people who inhabit this land, from the island of Cozumel[1] and the cape of Yucatan to the place where we are now, are of medium height and of well-proportioned bodies and features, save that in each province their customs are different; some pierce their ears and put very large and ugly objects into them; others pierce their nostrils down to the lip and put in them large round stones which look like mirrors;<sup>35</sup> and others still split their lower lips as far as the gums and hang there some large stones or gold ornaments so heavy that they drag the lips down, giving a most deformed appearance. The clothes they wear are like large, highly colored yashmaks; the men cover their shameful parts, and on the top half of their bodies wear thin mantles which are decorated in a Moorish fashion. The common women wear highly colored mantles from the waist to the feet, and others which cover their breasts, leaving the rest uncovered. The women of rank wear skirts of very thin cotton, which are very loose-fitting and decorated and cut in the manner of a rochet.

The food they eat is maize and some chili peppers, as on the other islands, and *patata yuca*,<sup>36</sup> just the same as is eaten in Cuba, and they eat it roast, for they do not make bread of it; and they both hunt and fish and breed many chickens such as those found on *Tierra Firme*, which are as big as peacocks.

There are some large towns and well laid out. The houses in those parts where there is stone are of masonry and mortar and the rooms are small and low in the Moorish fashion. In those parts where there is no stone they make their houses of adobes, which are whitewashed and the roofs covered with straw. There are houses belonging to certain men of rank which are very cool and have many rooms, for we have seen as many as five courtyards in a single house, and the rooms around them very well laid out, each man having a private room. Inside there are also wells and water tanks

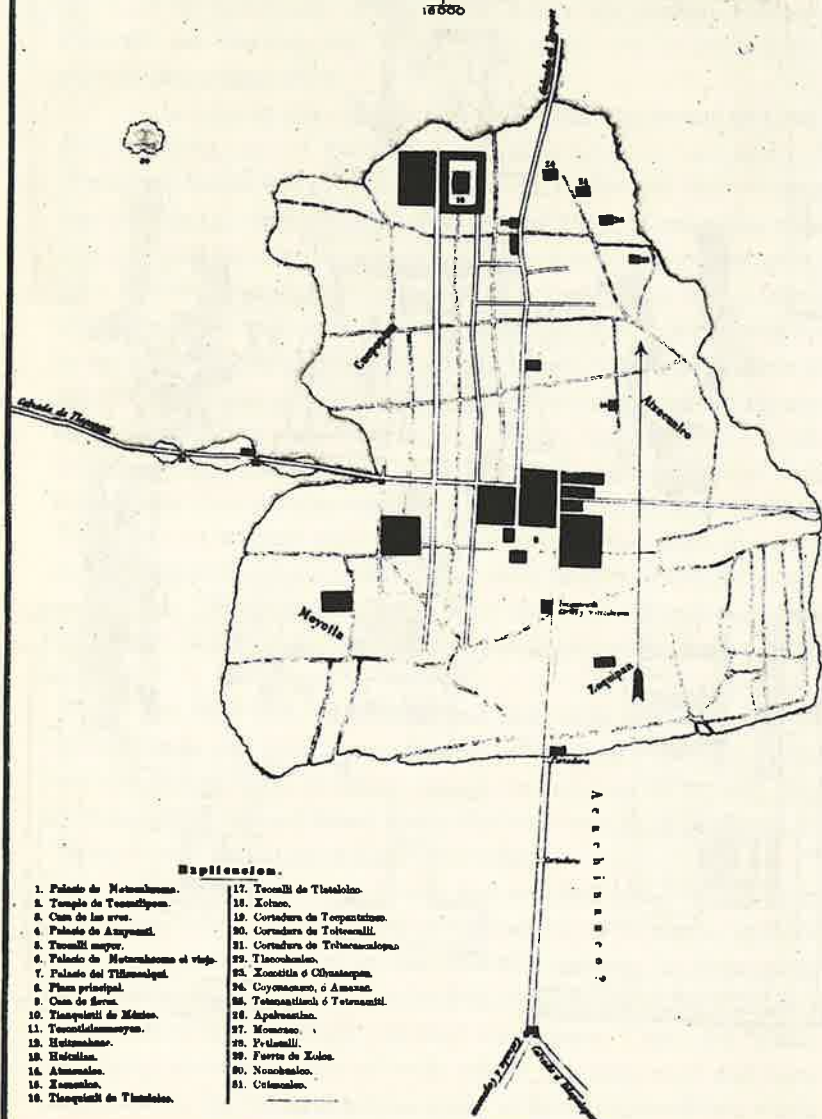


5. The Great Temple Enclosure at Tenochtitlan. From Sahagún, *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva España*. Madrid MS, f. 269.



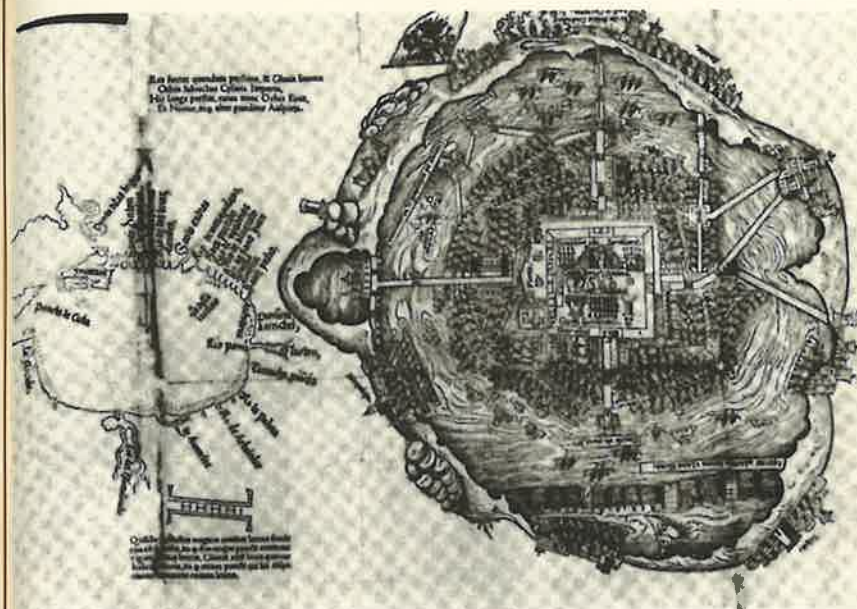
# CRÓQUIS DE MÉXICO TENOCHTITLAN.

1858



## Explicacion.

1. Palacio de Motecuhzoma.
2. Templo de Tlatelolco.
3. Can de las avas.
4. Palacio de Axayacatl.
5. Templo mayor.
6. Palacio de Motecuhzoma el viejo.
7. Palacio del Tlacotalqui.
8. Plaza principal.
9. Can de seras.
10. Tlacotalqui de México.
11. Tlacotalqui de México.
12. Huitznahuac.
13. Huitznahuac.
14. Atzacualco.
15. Xacaculco.
16. Tlacotalqui de Tlatelolco.
17. Templo de Tlatelolco.
18. Xoloco.
19. Corredura de Teopantitlan.
20. Corredura de Tlatelolco.
21. Corredura de Tlacotalqui.
22. Tlacotalqui.
23. Xocotitla o Cihuatepan.
24. Coyonacazco o Amamaxac.
25. Tetenantitlan o Tetenamitl.
26. Apahuatzlan.
27. Momoxco.
28. Petlacalli.
29. Fortes de Xoloco.
30. Nonohualco.
31. Cuicacalco.



7. Map of Tenochtitlan and the Gulf of Mexico, supposedly made on Cortés's orders. From Latin edition of Cortés's Second Letter, printed in Nuremburg in 1524. *Courtesy of the British Museum.*

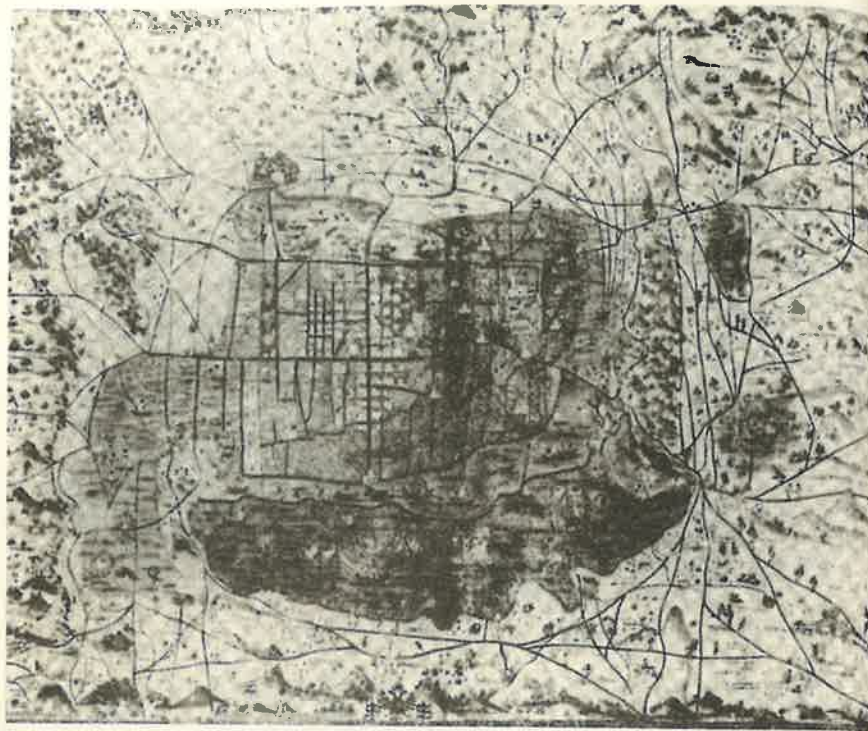
6. Ground plan of Tenochtitlan from Manuel Orozco y Berra's *Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de Mexico*, Mexico 1880.

## The key reads:

1. Palace of Motecuhzoma II
2. Temple of Tezcatlipoca
3. The Aviary
4. Palace of Axayacatl
5. Temple of Huitzilopochtli
6. Palace of Motecuhzoma I
7. Palace of Tlacotalqui
8. Main square
9. Menagerie
10. Tlacotalqui of Mexico
11. Tezontlamacoyan
12. Huitznahuac
13. Huitzilil
14. Atzacualco
15. Xacaculco
16. Tlacotalqui of Tlatelolco
17. Temple of Tlatelolco
18. Xoloco
19. Teopantitlan bridge
20. Tlatelolco bridge
21. Tlacotalqui bridge
22. Tlacotalqui
23. Xocotitla or Cihuatepan
24. Coyonacazco or Amamaxac
25. Tetenantitlan or Tetenamitl
26. Apahuatzlan
27. Momoxco
28. Petlacalli
29. Fortes of Xoloco
30. Nonohualco
31. Cuicacalco

*Courtesy of the British Museum.*





8. Map of Tenochtitlan formerly attributed to Alonso de Santa Cruz, cosmographer to Charles V. Although of post-Cortesian origin, it was drawn before 1555 and is therefore the earliest extant native map of the city. It consists of two strips of parchment, joined vertically, and the whole measures 114 x 75 centimeters. The inscription in the bottom right-hand corner is apparently a dedication to Charles V, though only a partial reading of the text has so far been possible. The map is orientated along the cardinal points but has been turned through 90° so that North now lies to the right. Beyond the city itself the orientation is less exact. The easternmost region (at the bottom of the map) and the North-South axis from Amecameca to Otumba are fairly accurate, but the corresponding axis on the West side is more difficult to place since it bends visibly toward the Northeast. For a detailed discussion of this map and its importance see, S. Linné, *El Valle y la Ciudad de Mexico*.

and rooms for slaves and servants of which they have many. Each of these chieftains has in front of the entrance to his house a very large courtyard and some two or three or four of them raised very high with steps up to them and all very well built. Likewise they have their shrines and temples with raised walks which run all around the outside and are very wide: there they keep the idols which they worship, some of stone, some of clay and some of wood, which they honor and serve with such customs and so many ceremonies that many sheets of paper would not suffice to give Your Royal Highnesses a true and detailed account of them all. And the temples where they are kept are the largest and the best and the finest built of all the buildings found in the towns; and they are much adorned with rich hanging cloths and featherwork and other fineries.

Each day before beginning any sort of work they burn incense in these temples and sometimes sacrifice their own persons, some cutting their tongues, others their ears, while there are some who stab their bodies with knives. All the blood which flows from them they offer to those idols, sprinkling it in all parts of the temple, or sometimes throwing it into the air or performing many other ceremonies, so that nothing is begun without sacrifice having first been made. They have a most horrid and abominable custom which truly ought to be punished and which until now we have seen in no other part, and this is that, whenever they wish to ask something of the idols, in order that their plea may find more acceptance, they take many girls and boys and even adults, and in the presence of the idols they open their chests while they are still alive and take out their hearts and entrails and burn them before the idols, offering the smoke as sacrifice. Some of us have seen this, and they say it is the most terrible and frightful thing they have ever witnessed.<sup>37</sup>

This these Indians do so frequently that, as we have been informed, and, in part, have seen from our own experience during the short while we have been here, not one year passes in



which they do not kill and sacrifice some fifty persons in each temple; and this is done and held as customary from the island of Cozumel to this land where we now have settled. Your Majesties may be most certain that, as this land seems to us to be very large, and to have many temples in it, not one year has passed, as far as we have been able to discover, in which three or four thousand souls have not been sacrificed in this manner. Let Your Royal Highnesses consider, therefore, whether they should not put an end to such evil practices, for certainly Our Lord God would be well pleased if by the hand of Your Royal Highnesses these people were initiated and instructed in our Holy Catholic Faith, and the devotion, trust and hope which they have in these their idols were transferred to the divine power of God; for it is certain that if they were to worship the true God with such fervor, faith and diligence, they would perform many miracles. And we believe that it is not without cause that Our Lord God has been pleased that these parts be discovered in the name of Your Royal Highnesses so that Your Majesties may gain much merit and reward in the sight of God by commanding that these barbarous people be instructed and by Your hands be brought to the True Faith. For, as far as we have been able to learn, we believe that had we interpreters and other people to explain to them the error of their ways and the nature of the True Faith, many of them, and perhaps even all, would soon renounce their false beliefs and come to the true knowledge of God; for they live in a more civilized and reasonable manner than any other people we have seen in these parts up to the present.

To attempt to give Your Majesties all the details about this land and its people might lead us to make some mistakes in our account, for there is much we have not seen but only heard from the natives, and therefore we venture only to render account of those things which Your Majesties may hold to be most true and certain. Your Majesties may, if You see fit, send a report to the Holy Father, so that diligence and good order may be applied to the work

of converting these people, for it is hoped that much may be gained thereby; also that His Holiness may permit and approve that the wicked and the rebellious, after having first been admonished, may be punished as enemies of our Holy Catholic Faith. This will be the occasion of a fearsome warning and example to those who are obstinate in coming to the knowledge of the truth; and the great evils which they practice in the service of the Devil may be prevented. For in addition to those which we list above, of the children and men and women which they kill and offer in their sacrifices, we have been informed, and are most certain it is true, that they are all sodomites and practice that abominable sin.<sup>38</sup> In all of which we entreat Your Majesties to provide as You judge most fitting to the service of God and Your Royal Highnesses and that we who are here in Your service be favored and rewarded.

Among other things which we are sending to Your Highnesses by way of these, our representatives, are instructions that they beseech Your Majesties on no account to give or grant concessions to Diego Velázquez, the admiral's lieutenant in the island of Fernandina, of *adelantamiento* or governorship in perpetuity (or of any other kind) or judicial powers; and if any shall have been given him, that they be revoked, for it is not to the benefit of the service of Your Royal Crown that the aforementioned Diego Velázquez, or any other person, should have authority or be granted any concessions, whether in perpetuity, or of any other kind, in this new land of Your Highnesses, unless it be by the express will of Your Majesties, for it is, as far as we are able to judge or have reason to hope, very rich. And, moreover, were the aforementioned Diego Velázquez granted some office, far from benefiting Your Majesties' service, we foresee that we, the vassals of Your Royal Highnesses, who have begun to settle and live in this land, would be most ill used by him, for we believe that what we have now done in Your Majesties' service, namely to send You such gold and silver and jewels as we have been able to acquire in this land, would not have been his intention, as has been most clearly demonstrated by four

servants of his who passed this way; for, when they saw our intention to send it all to Your Royal Highnesses, they proclaimed publicly that it would be better to send it to Diego Velázquez; and they said other things to prevent it being sent to Your Majesties. For this we had them seized, and they are still in custody awaiting sentence; and when that has been carried out we shall inform Your Majesties of what we have done with them.<sup>39</sup> And for what we have seen of the doings of Diego Velázquez and our experience of them, we are afraid that if he should come to this land with some commission he would treat us badly, as he did on the island of Fernandina when he had charge of the government, dealing justice to no one except as it pleased him, and punishing those whom he chose out of anger or animosity rather than justice or reason; in this manner he has ruined many good men and reduced them to great poverty by refusing to give them Indians as servants, taking all for himself, and likewise by taking all the gold which they have collected, without giving them any part of it: for this purpose he has bands of outlaws at his command; also as he is governor and *repartidor*,<sup>40</sup> no one dare oppose him for fear that they may be ruined. Of this Your Majesties know nothing, nor has any account of it been sent to You, for the representatives who have gone to Your Court from that island are all of the same die, or his servants, and he keeps them contented giving them Indians whenever they ask; and the representatives who come to him from the towns on matters concerning the communities do always as he wishes, for he rewards them with gifts of Indians. When these representatives return to their towns and are ordered to give an account of what they have done, they complain that poor people should not be sent, for by giving them a single Indian chieftain, Diego Velázquez can have them do as he wishes. Furthermore, as all the *alcaldes* and *regidores* who own Indians fear that Diego Velázquez will take them, they dare not reprove the representatives who have done what they ought not to have done in order to please Diego Velázquez; and in this respect and in many others he is most cunning. By which Your Majesties may see that all

the accounts which the island of Fernandina has submitted on behalf of Diego Velázquez, and the favors which they ask for him, are in exchange for the Indians which he gives to the representatives and not because the communities are satisfied and so desire it; indeed they would rather such representatives were punished. As the above-said is well known to all the citizens and inhabitants of this town of Vera Cruz, they had a meeting with the representatives of this council and begged and required us by a signed petition that, in their name, we should beseech Your Majesties not to grant the aforementioned concessions, nor any others to Diego Velázquez, rather to order him to submit to a *residencia* and deprive him of the governorship of the island of Fernandina; for by such a *residencia* the truth of our account would be plainly seen. For which purposes we therefore entreat Your Majesties to send a judge to investigate all we have reported to Your Royal Highnesses, not only as concerns the island of Cuba but also in other parts, for we believe we can prove accusations whereby Your Majesties may see whether it is just or right that he hold Royal commissions in these parts or in those others where he at present resides.

The representatives, inhabitants and citizens of this town have likewise asked us, in the aforementioned petition, to entreat Your Majesties on their behalf to order and provide a decree and letters patent in favor of Fernando Cortés, captain and chief justice of Your Royal Highnesses, so that he may govern us with justice until this land is conquered and pacified, and for as long as Your Majesties may see fit, knowing him to be a person well suited for such a position. Which petition and request we send to Your Majesties with these our representatives and humbly supplicate Your Royal Highnesses to grant us this and all the other favors which in the name of this council and town may be asked of You by the aforementioned representatives, and that You hold us as Your most loyal vassals, as we have been and always shall be.

The gold, silver, jewels, bucklers and garments which we are sending to Your Royal Highnesses with these representatives,



over and above the one-fifth which belongs to Your Majesty, Fernando Cortés and the council of this town offer in Your service, and are sending together with a list signed by the same representatives as Your Royal Highnesses may observe. From the Rica Villa de la Vera Cruz, the tenth day of July, 1519.

The gold, jewels, precious stones and articles of featherwork which have been acquired in these newly discovered lands since our arrival here, which you, Alonso Fernández Puerto Carrero and Francisco de Montejo, who go as representatives of this Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz to the Very Excellent Princes and Most Catholic and Very Great Kings and Sovereigns, the Queen Doña Juana and the King, Don Carlos her son, are the following:<sup>41</sup>

First a large gold wheel with a design of monsters on it and worked all over with foliage. This weighed 3,800 *pesos de oro*. From this wheel, because it was the best that has been found here and of the finest gold, a fifth was taken for Their Highnesses; this amounted to two thousand *castellanos* which belonged to Them of Their fifth and Royal privilege according to the stipulation that the captain Fernando Cortés brought from the Hieronymite Fathers who reside on the island of Hispaniola and on the other islands. The eighteen hundred *pesos* that remained and all the rest that goes to make up twelve hundred *pesos*, the council of this town bequeath to Their Highnesses, together with everything else mentioned in this list, which belonged to the people of the aforementioned town.

Item: Two necklaces of gold and stone mosaic, one of which has eight strings of 232 red jewels and 163 green jewels. Hanging from the border of this necklace are twenty-seven small gold bells; and in the center of them are four figures in large stones inlaid with gold. From each of the two in the center hang single pendants, while from each of

the ends hang four double pendants. The other necklace has four strings of 102 red jewels and 172 which appear to be green in color; around these stones there are twenty-six small gold bells. In this necklace there are ten large stones inlaid with gold from which hang 142 pendants.

Item: Four pairs of screens,<sup>42</sup> two pairs being of fine gold leaf with trimmings of yellow deerskin, and the other two (pairs) of fine silver leaf with trimmings in white deerskin. The remainder are of plumes of various colors, and very well made. From each of these hang sixteen small gold bells, all with red deerskin.

Another item: One hundred *pesos de oro* for melting, so that Their Highnesses may see how the gold is taken from the mines here.

Another item: In a box, a large piece of featherwork, lined with animal skin which, in color, seems like that of a marten. Fastened to this piece, and in the center of it, is a large disk of gold which weighed sixty *pesos de oro*, and a piece of blue and red stone mosaic in the shape of a wheel, and another piece of stone mosaic, of a reddish color; and at the end of the piece there is another piece of colored featherwork that hangs from it.

Item: A fan of colored featherwork with thirty-seven small rods cased in gold.

Another item: A large piece of colored featherwork to be worn on the head and encircled by sixty-eight small pieces of gold, each of which is as large as a half *cuarto*.<sup>43</sup> Beneath them are twenty little gold towers.

Item: A miter of blue stone mosaic with a design of monsters in the center of it. It is lined with an animal skin which by its color appears to be that of a marten, and has a small piece of featherwork which, together with the one mentioned above, is of the same miter.

Item: Four harpoons of featherwork with their stone heads

fastened by a gold thread, and a jeweled scepter with rings of gold and the rest of featherwork.

Item: A bracelet of blue jewels and, in addition, a small piece of black featherwork and with other colors.

Item: A large pair of sandals of leather whose color resembles that of a marten. The soles are white and sown with gold thread.

Furthermore, a mirror set in a piece of blue and red jewelry, with a piece of featherwork and two strips of red leather attached to it, together with a skin which seems to be from those same martens.

Item: Three pieces of colored featherwork that belong to a large gold head which seems to be that of an alligator.

Item: Some screens of blue stone mosaic, lined with a skin which by its color seems to come from a marten; and from each one of them hang fifteen small gold bells.

Another item: A mantle of wolfskin with four strips of leather that look like martenskin.

Another item: Some fibers placed in some colored feathers; the which fibers are white and look like locks of hair.

Another item: Two pieces of colored featherwork that are for two helmets of stone mosaic which are mentioned below.

Furthermore, two pieces of colored featherwork which are for two pieces of gold, made like large shells and worn on the head.

Furthermore, two birds with green plumage and their feet, beaks and eyes made of gold. These are put on one of those pieces of gold that resemble shells.

Furthermore, two large ear ornaments of <sup>44</sup> blue stone mosaic which are for the large alligator head.

In another square box, a large alligator head in gold, which is the one mentioned above where the aforementioned pieces are to be put.

Also, a helmet of blue stone mosaic with twenty small gold bells hanging round the outside of it with two strings of beads above each bell: and two ear ornaments of wood with gold plates.

Also, a bird with green plumage and with feet, beak and eyes of gold.

Another item: Another helmet of blue stone mosaic with twenty-five little gold bells and two beads of gold above each bell, which hang round it, with some wooden ear ornaments with gold plates; and a bird with green plumage and feet, beak and eyes of gold.

Another item: A reed container with two large pieces of gold to be worn on the head; they are made like gold shells with ear ornaments of wood with gold plates. Also two birds with green plumage and feet, beaks and eyes of gold.

Also, sixteen bucklers of stone mosaic with pieces of colored featherwork hanging round the outside of them, and with a wide-angled board of stone mosaic with its pieces of colored featherwork. In the center of this board is a cross inside a wheel made of the same stone mosaic, and lined with leather the color of martenskin.

Furthermore, a scepter of a red stone mosaic, made to resemble a snake with head, teeth and eyes in what seems to be mother-of-pearl. The hilt is adorned with the skin of a spotted animal, and beneath this hilt there hang six small pieces of featherwork.

Another item: A fan of featherwork in a reed adorned with the skin of a spotted animal, in the manner of a weathercock. Above it has a crown of featherwork and finally many long green feathers.

Item: Two birds made of thread and featherwork. The quills of their wings and tails, the claws of their feet, their eyes and the tips of their beaks are of gold, each placed in its respective gold-covered reed. And below some feather



down, one white and the other yellow, with some gold embroidery between the feathers; and from each of these hang seven strands of feathers.

Item: Four pieces made after the manner of skates, placed in their respective gold-covered canes. Their tails, gills, eyes and mouths are of gold; below, on their tails, are some pieces of green featherwork, while toward their mouths each has a crown of colored featherwork, and in some of the white feathers there is some gold embroidery, and beneath the handle of each one hang six strands of colored featherwork.

Item: A small copper rod lined with a skin in which is placed a piece of gold in the manner of a piece of featherwork, which has some pieces of colored featherwork above and below it.

Another item: Five fans of colored featherwork, four of which have ten small quills covered with gold while the fifth has thirteen.

Item: Four harpoons of white flint, fastened to four rods of featherwork.

Item: A large buckler of featherwork trimmed on the back with the skin of a spotted animal. In the center of the field of this buckler is a gold plate with a design such as the Indians make, with four other half plates of gold round the edge, which together form a cross.

Another item: A piece of featherwork of various colors made in the manner of a half chasuble, lined with the skin of a spotted animal. This, the lords of these parts, which we have seen up to now, hang from about their necks. On the front it has thirteen pieces of gold very well fitted together.

Item: A piece of colored featherwork, made in the manner of a jousting helmet, which the lords of this land wear on their heads. From it hang two ear ornaments of stone mosaic with two small bells and two beads of gold; and above there

is a piece of featherwork of broad green feathers, while below hang some white hairs.

Furthermore, four animal heads, two of which seem to be wolves, the other two tigers, with some spotted skins: from these heads hang some small bronze bells.

Item: Two animal skins of spotted animals, lined with some cotton mantles: these skins appear to be those of a mountain cat.

Item: The red and gray skin of another animal, which seems to be a lion, and two deerskins.

Item: Four skins of small deer from which here they make small tanned gloves.

And, moreover, two books which the Indians have: also half a dozen fans of colored featherwork and a perfume container of colored featherwork.

Furthermore, a large silver wheel which weighed forty-eight silver marks, and also some bracelets, some beaten [silver] leaves; and one mark five ounces and forty *adarmes*<sup>45</sup> of silver; and a large buckler and another small one of silver, which weighed four marks and two ounces; and another two bucklers which appear to be silver and which weighed six marks and two ounces; and another buckler, which likewise appears to be of silver, which weighed one mark and seven ounces, which is in all sixty-two marks of silver.

#### [COTTON CLOTHING]<sup>46</sup>

Another item: Two large pieces of cotton richly woven in white, black and tawny.

Item: Two pieces woven with feathers and another piece woven in various colors; another piece woven in patterns of red, black and white, and on the back these patterns do not show.

Item: Another piece woven with patterns and in the center a black wheel of feathers.

Item: Two white cotton cloths woven with some pieces of featherwork.

Another cotton cloth with some white cords(?) attached. A peasant smock.

A white piece with a large wheel of white feathers in the middle.

Two pieces of gray cord with some wheels of feathers, and another two of tawny cord.

Six painted pieces; another red piece with some wheels and another two pieces painted blue; and two women's shirts.

[Twelve veils.]<sup>47</sup>

Item: Six bucklers, each one with a gold plate covering the whole buckler.

Another item: A half miter of gold.

The which things, and each one of them, as is laid down and established by these declarations, we, Alonso Fernández Puerto Carrero and Francisco de Montejo, the abovementioned representatives, do acknowledge that it is true that we have received them and that they were entrusted to us to take to Their Highnesses, from you, Fernando Cortés, chief justice for Their Highnesses in these parts, and from you, Alonso de Ávila and Alonso de Grado, treasurer and *veedor* for Their Highnesses. And because it is true we sign it with our names. Dated the sixth day of July in the year 1519.

—PUERTO CARRERO, FRANCISCO DE MONTEJO.

The things above-mentioned in the said memorial, with the aforementioned letter and account sent by the municipal council of Vera Cruz, were received by the King Don Carlos, Our Sovereign, as already stated, in Valladolid, in Holy Week, in the beginning of the month of April of the year of Our Lord, 1520.<sup>48</sup>