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MALAYSIA CLUB
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Perspectives - Summer School 2014

History

Letters from Mexico

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The document that will be used is Hernan Cortes' *Letters From Mexico*. These were letters written by Cortes to the Spanish Emperor Charles V detailing his account of the conquest of the Aztec empire. The extract we will be discussing relates to Cortes' initial battle in Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire and now the site of the city New Mexico. This initial attack in 1520 almost ended up in disaster. Cortes and his crew only narrowly escaped.

Instructions:

Read pages 133-145.

Note down thoughts/interpretations.

Make sure to read them again the morning of our tutorial.

You are not required to come in with an advanced knowledge of the workings of the Spanish conquest. This is not about 'knowing the facts'. What I am far more interested in is how you use the text given to you in our attempt to better understand and explore the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Think about the themes consistent in the writing, the motive behind such a letter, its trustworthiness, the words Cortes uses that reveal his frame of thinking, the way in which the military fighting connects to larger systems such as social structure, the role of Christianity in these letters, and many others. If anything pops up in your head while you're reading the *Letters* note it down so that we can discuss it.

Just think - you are reading actual letters written by the man who 500 years ago sailed across the Atlantic in a wooden boat with 230 men and conquered an Empire that commanded an army 250,000 soldiers strong!

Background reading (optional):

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hern%C3%A1n_Cort%C3%A9s

distressed me to see the harm we had done them, and would still have to do them, for I did not want to destroy so fine a city as theirs; yet still they answered that they would not end the war until I left the city.

On the following day, when we had finished the engines, I went out to capture some of the roof tops and bridges. The engines went in front, and behind them came four guns, many crossbowmen and shield-bearers and more than three thousand Indians from Tascalteca who had come with me and served the Spaniards. When we reached one of the bridges we placed the engines against the wall of a house and set up ladders with which to climb onto the roof, but there were so many people defending that bridge and the roof top, and so many and so large were the stones which they threw down at us, that they put our engines out of action and killed one Spaniard and wounded many more. We were unable to advance one step, although we fought hard from morning until mid-day, at which hour we returned to the fortress sorely disappointed. This gave the enemy such heart that they almost reached our gates. They captured the great temple, and some five hundred Indians, who seemed to me to be persons of rank, climbed up the main tower carrying provisions of bread and water and other things to eat, and many stones. All the rest had very long lances with flint heads wider than ours and no less sharp. From there they did much damage to the people in the fortress which stood close by. Once or twice the Spaniards attacked this tower and attempted to climb it, but because it was very high and the ascent very difficult, for there were a hundred or more steps, and because those at the top were well provided with stones and other weapons, and at an advantage because we had failed to take the other roof tops, every time the Spaniards began to climb they were driven back down again; and many were wounded thereby. When those of the enemy who were engaged elsewhere saw this, they became so elated that they came fearlessly right up to the fortress. When I saw that by continuing to hold that tower they not only inflicted great damage from it,

but also gained fresh courage to attack us, I left the fortress, although I had lost the use of my left hand from a wound I received on the first day, and strapping my buckler to my arm went to the tower with a few Spaniards.⁹⁰ I made them surround it from below, which was easily done, although not without danger, for they fought on all sides with the enemy who brought in many reinforcements. I then began to climb the tower with several Spaniards behind me, and, although they defended it so very fiercely that three or four Spaniards were thrown down, with the help of God and his Blessed Mother, for whose house that tower had been set aside and where we had placed her image, we reached the top and fought so hard with the people there that they were forced to jump down onto some terraces round the tower which were about a pace wide. The tower had three or four of these, and all were about five yards high, one above the other. Some of the Indians fell all the way down and they were killed by the Spaniards below. Those who remained on the top, however, fought so fiercely that it was more than three hours before we had killed them all (for none escaped); and I assure Your Sacred Majesty that the capture of this tower was so difficult that if God had not clipped their wings, twenty of them would have sufficed to hold off a thousand; even so, they fought very bravely until death. I ordered my men to set fire to this tower and the others in the temple from which they had already removed the holy images that we had placed there.

The loss of this tower so much damaged their confidence that they began to weaken greatly on all sides. Afterwards, I returned to that roof top and addressed the captains who had spoken to me before and who were now somewhat dismayed by what they had seen. These then came and I told them to observe how they could not triumph, and how each day we did them great harm and killed many of them and we were burning and destroying their city; and that we would not cease until there was nothing left either of it or of them. They replied that they had indeed seen how much they had suffered and how many of them had died, but that

they were all determined to perish or have done with us, and that I should look and see how full of people were all those streets and squares and roof tops. Furthermore, they had calculated that if 25,000 of them died for every one of us, they would finish with us first, for they were many and we were but few. They told me that all the causeways into the city were dismantled—which in fact was true, for all had been dismantled save one—and that we had no way of escape except over the water. They well knew that we had few provisions and little fresh water and, therefore, could not last long because we would die of hunger if they did not kill us first. And truly they were right, for even if we had had nothing to fight but hunger and thirst, we would have died in a very short while. We discussed many other things, each one expressing his own opinions.

After nightfall I went out with several Spaniards, and as we fell on them unawares we took a street where we burnt more than three hundred houses. Then I returned by another street, for the enemy was massing in the first, and there likewise I burnt many houses, especially some which were close to the fortress and from whose roof tops they did us much harm. They were very frightened by what had happened, and that same night I ordered the engines which had been damaged the previous day to be repaired and made ready.

To follow up this victory which God had given us, I went out at dawn to that street where they had defeated us the day before but found it as well defended as before. As we were fighting for our lives and our honor, for that street lead to the only unbroken causeway crossing to the mainland—although on the way were eight deep and wide bridges, and the street itself was lined by many high houses and towers—we were so brave and determined that with the help of Our Lord we won four of them that day and burnt every single house and tower. The previous night, however, they had erected at all the bridges many very strong walls of adobe and clay, in such a manner that the guns and the crossbows could not harm them. We filled in the channels beneath the four bridges

with the adobe and earth of the walls and with stones and wood from the burnt houses, although this was not accomplished without danger and they wounded many Spaniards. That night I placed a careful watch on those bridges so that they should not retake them.

The following morning I went out again and God gave us such a lucky victory that, although there were innumerable people defending the bridges and the very great walls and openings which they had made that night, we won them all and closed them up. At the same time some horsemen pursued the defeated enemy to the mainland. While I was repairing and closing up those bridges, they called to me to come in great haste, for the Indians were asking for peace and certain of their captains were waiting for me at the fortress. I left behind the men and guns and went alone with two horsemen to see what they wanted. They told me that if I assured them that they would not be punished for what they had done, they would raise the siege, replace the bridges, repair the roads and serve Your Majesty as they had done before. They asked me to bring one of their priests whom I held prisoner, and who was a kind of superior in their religion.⁹¹ He came and spoke to them and made agreements between us; and then it seemed that they sent messengers, as they had promised, to the captains in the field to end the attack on the fortress and all further hostilities; and with this we parted.

I returned to the fortress to eat, and as I was about to begin they came in a great hurry to tell me that the Indians had retaken the bridges which we had won that day and had killed several Spaniards. God knows how much this perturbed me, for I believed our task had been completed when we had opened a way out. I rode as fast as I was able down the whole length of the street with some horsemen following me, and without stopping I broke through those Indians, recovered the bridges and pursued the fugitives to the mainland. But because the foot soldiers were tired and wounded and frightened and saw the great danger they were in, none of them followed me, so that when, having crossed the bridges, I now

wished to return, I found they had been taken and many which we had closed up had now been dug much deeper than before. Both sides of the causeway were full of people, on the land and also in canoes, who speared and stoned us in such a fashion that if God had not mysteriously deigned to save us, we should never have escaped, and even so it had been put about among those in the city that I was dead. When I reached the last bridge outside the city I found that all those horsemen who were with me had fallen into the water and that one horse was loose. I could not cross and was forced to stand alone against the enemy, and in fighting I made enough room for the horses to pass. When the bridge was freed I passed over, although with great difficulty, for the horse had to jump almost five feet from one side to the other; but neither he nor I, as we were both well armored, were wounded but only bruised and beaten.

That night they held those four bridges; but I had the other four well guarded and went to the fortress and had a wooden bridge made to be carried by forty men. Because I had seen the great danger we were in and the great harm which the Indians did us every day, and because I feared they would demolish that causeway as they had demolished the others, after which we could have done nothing save resign ourselves to death, and because all of my company, the greater part of whom were so badly wounded they could no longer fight, had often entreated me to depart, I determined to leave that same night. I took all Your Majesty's gold and jewels which we could carry and placed them in a room where, in several bundles, I entrusted them to Your Highness's officials that I in Your Royal name had chosen, and I begged and commanded the alcaldes and regidores and all those who were present to help me to carry it out and save it; and for this purpose I gave them one of my mares onto which they loaded as much as possible. I chose certain Spaniards, servants of mine as well as of others, to go with the mare and the gold, and the rest of the alcaldes and regidores and myself distributed the remainder among the Spaniards. Having abandoned

the fortress with great riches belonging to Your Highness, the Spaniards and myself, I went out as secretly as possible taking with me a son and two daughters of Mutezuma, and Cacamazin, lord of Aculmacan, and also his brother whom I had appointed in his stead, and other chiefs of cities and provinces, whom I held prisoner.

When we reached the first of the bridges which the Indians had removed we threw across the space, with little difficulty, the bridge which we had made, for there was no one to impede us except a few guards. These, however, raised such a shout that before we had reached the second bridge an infinite number of the enemy were upon us, attacking us from all sides both from the land and from the water. I crossed quickly with five horsemen and a hundred foot soldiers, and we swam across each of the channels until we reached the mainland. Leaving these people on the far side, I returned to the rest and found that, although they were fighting fiercely, the harm which both the Spaniards and the Indians of Tascalteca who were with us had received was beyond compare, for nearly all had been killed. The Spaniards had also killed many of the enemy, but many had perished together with their horses, and all the gold had been lost together with jewels, clothing, all the artillery and many other things besides. I collected all those who were still alive and sent them on ahead while I, with three or four horsemen and some twenty foot soldiers who were bold enough to remain with me, took the rear guard and fought with those Indians until we reached a city called Tacuba at the end of the causeway. God alone knows how dangerous and how difficult it was, for each time I turned on the enemy I came back full of arrows and bruised by stones. For as there was water on both sides they attacked in safety with no fear of those who were fleeing to the land. When we attacked them they jumped into the water, so that they received very little hurt except that there were so many that some of them fell on each other and were killed. With great danger and difficulty I led all my men to the city of Tacuba, without a single Indian or

Spaniard being killed or wounded save for one horseman who came with me in the rear guard. The people in the front and on the sides fought no less fiercely, although the worst attack came from behind where the enemy pursued us out of the great city.⁹²

When I arrived in Tacuba I found all my people crowded together in a square not knowing where to go. I therefore made haste to move them out into the countryside before more of the enemy arrived in the city and occupied the roof tops, from which they could do us great harm. The vanguard said they did not know which road to take, so I sent them to the rear and took the lead myself until we had left the city, and then waited in the fields. When the rear guard arrived I saw that they had received some damage and that some of the Spaniards and Indians had been killed; and also that much of the gold had been lost by the road and captured by the enemy. I remained behind until all the men had passed, holding the Indians in check so that the foot soldiers might take a hill on which stood a tower and a fortified house.⁹³ They succeeded without being injured, but God alone knows how exhausted I was in keeping back the Indians until the tower was taken, for of the twenty-four horses that remained not one could gallop, nor was there a horseman who could raise his arm nor barely a foot soldier well enough for action. When we arrived at the aforementioned house we barricaded ourselves in, and there the enemy surrounded us until nightfall without letting us rest for a single hour. We discovered that 150 Spaniards had died in the rout and forty-five horses and more than two thousand Indians, who had helped the Spaniards, among whom were the son and daughters of Mutezuma and all the other lords we had held prisoner.⁹⁴

That night, at midnight, thinking that we were unobserved, we quit that house very silently, leaving behind many fires; and we knew no road nor where we were going, save that an Indian from Tascalteca led us, saying that he would take us to his land if the road was free. But there were some guards close by who saw us and raised all the people from the villages thereabouts, who pursued us

until daybreak. At dawn, five horsemen who were riding ahead as scouts came across a squadron of the enemy on the road and killed several of them, whereupon the rest fled, believing that more horsemen and foot soldiers were coming up behind.

When I saw that the enemy was massing on all sides, I concentrated my people there, and from those who were still capable of action made squadrons, placing them in front and behind and on the sides with the wounded in the middle; and I distributed the horsemen likewise. In this manner we marched all that day, fighting on all sides and so fiercely that we covered no more than three leagues during a whole day and night. Just at nightfall our Lord showed us a tower and fortified house on a hill where we barricaded ourselves as before.⁹⁵ That night they left us in peace, although shortly before dawn the alarm was raised, though for no reason save the fear which we all had of the great multitude of people who continued to follow us.

On the following day I left an hour after daybreak in the formation already mentioned, keeping my rear guard and vanguard well protected; and still they pursued us on both sides, shouting and calling to arms all that land which is thickly populated. Those of us who were on horseback, although we were few, attacked them but did them little harm, for as the land there was somewhat uneven they retreated into the hills. In this manner we traveled that day close by some lakes until we reached a good town⁹⁶ where we expected to have some encounter with the inhabitants. But as we arrived they abandoned it and fled to other villages which were thereabouts. I remained there that day and the following because all the men, both the wounded and the fit, were exhausted and weary with hunger and thirsty, as indeed were the horses. We also found some maize there which we ate boiled and roasted for the journey.

We left the next day, still pursued by the enemy, who, with terrible cries, attacked us from time to time in front and behind. We followed the directions of the Indian from Tascalteca, suffer-

ing many hardships, for we were often obliged to leave the road. When it was already late we reached a plain with some small houses⁹⁷ where we camped that night, in great need of food. On the morning of the following day we began to depart, but even before we had reached the road the enemy was pursuing us, and skirmishing with them we reached a large village,⁹⁸ which was two leagues from there, and to the right of it were some Indians on a small hill.⁹⁹ Intending to take them, for they were very close to the road, and also to discover if there were more people behind the hill, I went with five horsemen and ten or twelve foot soldiers and circled the hill. Behind it lay a great city of many inhabitants,¹⁰⁰ with whom we fought fiercely, but as the ground was strewn with boulders, and the Indians were many and we were few, I considered it wise to withdraw to the village where our people were.

In the fighting I had been very badly wounded in the head from two stones. After having bound up my wounds, I made the Spaniards leave that village, for it did not seem a safe place for us to camp. Thus we left, the Indians still following in great numbers, and fighting so fiercely with us that they wounded four or five Spaniards and as many horses. One horse was killed and, although God knows how much we needed it, and how sorry we were to have lost it, for after God we had no help save from the horses, its flesh was some consolation, for we ate it, leaving neither the skin nor any other part of it. For we were very hungry as we had eaten nothing since we left the great city save boiled and roasted maize—and there was not always even enough of that—and herbs which we picked in the fields.

When I saw how each day the enemy grew in number and became more daring while we were weakening, I ordered crutches and other aids to be made for the wounded and the sick, whom we had hitherto carried on the haunches and backs of the horses, so that they could stand and walk, and leave the horses and the Spaniards who were well free to fight. And it seemed, from what happened the following day, that the Holy Spirit had inspired me in

this, for, after we had struck camp in the morning and traveled on a league and a half, there came to meet us such a multitude of Indians that the fields all around were so full of them that nothing else could be seen. We could hardly distinguish between ourselves and them, so fiercely and so closely did they fight with us.¹⁰¹ Certainly we believed that it was our last day, for the Indians were very strong and we could resist but feebly, as we were exhausted and nearly all of us wounded and weak from hunger. But Our Lord was pleased to show His power and mercy, for with all our weakness we broke their great arrogance and pride, and many of them died, including many important persons, for they were so many that they got in each other's way, and could neither fight nor run. We spent most of that day in the fight until God ordained that one of their chieftains should die, and he, it seemed, was of such importance that the battle ended. So we proceeded more easily but still somewhat harassed, until we reached a small house¹⁰² in the plain, and there, and in the fields round about, we camped that night. From there we caught sight of some mountains of the province of Tascalteca, which brought no small joy to our hearts, for we knew the land and where we had now to go, although we were not very certain that we would find the natives of that province still our friends. For we believed that on seeing us so dispirited they would seek to put an end to our lives and regain their former liberty. This thought distressed us as much as the fighting with the Culuan.

On the following day, when it was light, we began to travel along a very flat road which led directly to the aforementioned province of Tascalteca. Here very few of the enemy followed us, although there were several large towns nearby; and those who did remained far in the rear and shouted after us from some hills. And so that day, which was Sunday, the eighth of July, we left Culua and reached a town of the province of Tascalteca, called Gualipán,¹⁰³ which had some three or four thousand inhabitants by whom we were well received; and there we were, in some measure able to satisfy our great hunger and need for rest, although they

gave us many of our provisions only in exchange for money and would accept nothing but gold, which, on account of our great need, we were obliged to give them. In this town I remained three days, and here Magiscacin and Sicutengal came to see me together with all the chiefs of the province and some of those from Guazucingo. They all seemed much distressed by what had happened to us, and tried hard to console me, saying that many times they had told me that the people of Culua were traitors, and I should beware of them, but I had not wished to believe it. But I had escaped alive, for which I should be thankful, and they would die to help me avenge the harm which I had been done, for apart from the duty they owed Your Highness as his vassals, they grieved for their sons and brothers who had been killed in my company.

In times past they had received many other injuries from the Culuans, and I might be certain that they would remain faithful to me until death. As I was wounded and all those in my company exhausted, they said we should go to the city which is four leagues from this town, and there we could rest, and they would attend to our wounds and restore us after our exhaustion. I thanked them and accepted their offer and gave them some few jewels that had escaped, which greatly pleased them. Thus I accompanied them to the aforementioned city, where we were likewise very well received. And Magiscacin brought me a finely made wooden bed with some of the bedclothes they use, in which I slept, for we had brought none with us; and he gave to every one of us all that he had and could.

When I set out for Temixtitan I had left behind in this city some who were wounded and some of my servants with silver and clothing of mine and other personal effects which I was carrying, so that I might be less burdened should anything befall us. All the written agreements I had made with the natives of these parts were lost. Likewise all the Spaniards' clothing had been left behind, and they brought nothing save what they were wearing and their cloaks.

I now learnt how another of my servants had come from the

town of Vera Cruz,¹⁰⁴ accompanied by five horsemen and forty-five foot soldiers, with provisions and other things for me; and how he had taken back with him all the people whom I had left behind with the silver and clothes and other things belonging to me and my companions, together with seven thousand *pesos de oro* which I had left in two chests, not to mention other valuables, and also fourteen thousand *pesos de oro* which, in the province of Tuchtebeque, had been given to that captain whom I had sent to build the town of Quacucalco. And there were many other things besides, worth in all more than thirty thousand *pesos de oro*. But the Indians of Culua had killed them on the road and taken all they were carrying. Likewise I learnt that many other Spaniards had been killed on the road to Temixtitan, believing that the city was at peace and the roads safe as they had been before. I assure Your Majesty that this caused us the greatest sadness, for in addition to the loss of these Spaniards and the others, this reminded us of how many had died and how much had been lost in the city and on the bridges and on the road; it also made me suspect that they might have attacked the people in Vera Cruz, and that those whom we held as allies, when they learnt of our defeat, might have rebelled against us. Then I sent certain messengers to learn the truth, with some Indians to guide them, and I ordered them to return as swiftly as possible but not to travel by the usual roads. It pleased Our Lord, however, that they should find all the Spaniards quite safe and the natives loyal. And this made up greatly for our losses, although the Spaniards were very distressed to hear of our rout.

In this province of Tascalteca I remained twenty days to heal my wounds, which on account of the journey and the ill treatment I had received had greatly worsened, especially those in the head;¹⁰⁵ and likewise to recover from the toil of the days past and to heal the wounds of my companions. Some of them died and others were crippled, for they were very badly wounded and we had few means by which to cure them. I myself lost two fingers of my left hand.

When those of my company saw that many had died and that those who remained were weak and wounded and discouraged by the dangers they had endured, and being afraid of those who might very soon come, they many times begged me to return to Vera Cruz, where we could make ourselves secure before the natives of the land, whom we held as our allies, on seeing our defeat and feeble strength, could join with our enemies, seize the mountain passes by which we were to travel, and fall on us and on those in Vera Cruz. Once we were all together and had ships, we would be stronger and better able to defend ourselves, should they attack us, until such time as we sent for help from the islands. But I saw that to show the natives, especially those who were our allies, that we lacked courage would suffice to turn them against us the sooner, and I remembered that Fortune always favors the bold, and furthermore that we were Christians who trusted in the great goodness of God, who would not let us perish utterly nor allow us to lose so great and noble a land which had been, or was to be, subject to Your Majesty; nor could I abandon so great a service as continuing the war whereby we would once more subdue the land as it had been before. I determined, therefore, that on no account would I go across the mountains to the coast. On the contrary, disregarding all the dangers and toil that might befall us, I told them that I would not abandon this land, for, apart from being shameful to myself and dangerous for all, it would be great treason to Your Majesty; rather I resolved to fall on our enemies wherever I could and oppose them in every possible way.

After I had been in this province twenty days, although my wounds were not fully healed and those in my company were still rather weak, I departed for another province which is called Tepeaca, which belongs to the league and confederation of Culua, our enemies, and where, I was informed, ten or twelve Spaniards had been killed on the road, which passes through there, from Vera Cruz to the great city. This province of Tepeaca is very large and in part borders on Tascalteca and Churultecal. When we crossed

the border many of the natives came out to fight with us and defend the road against us as best they could, attacking us from strong and dangerous positions. But so as not to give an account of all the details of what befell us in this battle, which would be too lengthy, I will say only that after we had made our demands for peace on Your Majesty's behalf and they had not complied, we made war on them and they fought many times with us. With God's help and the Royal fortune of Your Majesty we always routed them and killed many, without their killing or wounding a single Spaniard. And, although, as I have said, this province is very large, within twenty days we had subdued and pacified many towns and villages, and the lords and chieftains have come and offered themselves as Your Majesty's vassals. Furthermore, I have driven from these provinces many of the people of Culua who had come to help the natives of Tepeaca make war on us and to assure that they did not become our allies, willingly or unwillingly. Thus I have been engaged in this war, which is still not finished, for there are still some towns and villages to be pacified, which with the aid of Our Lord will soon, like these others, be subject to Your Majesty's Royal command.

In a certain part of this province,¹⁰⁶ where they killed the ten or twelve Spaniards, the natives have always been very warlike and rebellious. I made certain of them slaves of which I gave a fifth part to Your Majesty's officers, for, in addition to their having killed the aforementioned Spaniards and rebelled against Your Highness's service, they are all cannibals, of which I send Your Majesty no evidence because it is so infamous.¹⁰⁷ I was also moved to take those slaves so as to strike some fear into the people of Culua and also because there are so many people that if I did not impose a great and cruel punishment they would never be reformed. In this war the natives of Tascalteca, Churultecal and Guasucingo have fought with us, and by so doing have so assured us of their friendship that we are certain they will always serve Your Highness as loyal vassals.

While I was in this province of Tepeaca I received letters from Vera Cruz, informing me of how there had arrived in the port in disarray two ships belonging to Francisco de Garay, who, it seems, had sent them back with more men to that great river, of which I have already rendered Your Highness account, and that the natives had fought with them and killed seventeen or eighteen Christians and wounded many others. Likewise seven horses had been killed, but the Spaniards who remained swam out to the ships and only escaped because they had strong legs. The captain and the others were in a sorry state and wounded, but the lieutenant whom I had left in the town had welcomed them and ordered their wounds to be attended to. So that they might recover in greater comfort, he had sent some of them to the land of a friendly chieftain that lay close by, and there they were very well cared for. All of which distressed us as much as our past hardships; but perhaps such misfortune would never have befallen them if they had joined me on that first occasion, about which I have already written to Your Highness, for, as I was very well acquainted with these parts, I could have advised them and this disaster would have been avoided, especially as the chieftain of that river, which is called Pánuco, had offered himself as Your Majesty's vassal, in recognition of which he had sent certain gifts with his messengers to me in the city of Temixtitán, as I have already said. I have written to Vera Cruz saying that if Garay's captain and his people wish to leave they should give them every assistance in dispatching both themselves and their ships.¹⁰⁸

After having pacified all that which in this province of Tepeaca has now been pacified and subjected to the service of Your Royal Highness, Your Majesty's officers and I many times discussed the manner by which the security of this province was to be maintained. Seeing that the natives, having offered themselves as Your Highness's vassals, had rebelled and killed many Spaniards, and seeing that the road inland from the seacoast passes through here, we considered that if this province were left unattended as before, the

natives of Culua, their neighbors, might once again incite these others to rebel, from which great harm would follow and hindrance to the subjection of these parts and to the service of Your Highness, for the road would be closed, especially as there are only two mountain passes leading to the sea, both of which are very steep and rocky and could be easily defended by the natives. So for these and for many other reasons touching this matter, we decided that to avoid these evils we would have a town built in the best part of this province of Tepeaca, where conditions were best suited to the needs of the settlers. When this had been decided, I, in Your Majesty's name, called this town Segura de la Frontera, and appointed *alcaldes*, *regidores* and other officials as is customary. For the greater security of the inhabitants of this town, I have ordered a fortress to be built in a place which I indicated, and building materials to be brought, as these are very good hereabouts; and all possible haste will be made to complete it.

While engaged in writing this report there came to me several messengers from the chief of a city five leagues from this province, called Buacachula,¹⁰⁹ and situated at the entrance to one of the passes into the province of Mexico. These messengers told me, on behalf of their lord, that some while previously they had come and offered themselves as Your Majesty's vassals. And so that I should not accuse them of complicity, they were informing me that several captains from Culua were quartered in their city, and that in it and one league away thirty thousand men were garrisoned to prevent us from crossing by that pass, and also to prevent the inhabitants of the city or of any of the surrounding provinces from becoming Your Highness's vassals or our allies. They said that some of those would have come to offer themselves in Your Royal service had they not been prevented. They told me this so that I should remedy it, for in addition to preventing all those of goodwill from coming, the Culuans had done great harm to the inhabitants of that city and to the people thereabouts. For, as there were many warriors, their people had been greatly injured and ill treated and their women and

belongings and other things had been taken from them. If I would grant them protection, they promised to do as I commanded. Then, after thanking them for their information and their offer, I sent thirteen horsemen and two hundred foot soldiers¹¹⁰ to accompany them together with some thirty thousand of our Indian allies. We agreed that they should travel by roads where they would not be discovered, and once they were outside the city the chief and inhabitants and all his other vassals and supporters would be alerted and would surround the place where the captains were quartered, so they might seize and kill them before their people had time to come to their assistance. When they did come the Spaniards would already be in the city and would fight with them and set them to rout.

So they left and went by way of the city of Churultecal and through some of the province of Guasucingo, which borders on the land of Buacachula four leagues from the city. In a village of the aforementioned province of Guasucingo it is said that they told the Spaniards that the natives of that province had plotted with the people of Buacachula and Culua to trick the Spaniards into going to that city, where, once they were all together, they would fall on the Spaniards and kill them. As they had not yet dispelled the terror with which they had been filled by the Culuans, this intelligence terrified the Spaniards; their captain made investigations as well as he could, and seized all the chiefs of Guasucingo he had with him, together with the messengers from the city of Buacachula, and returned to the city of Churultecal, which is four leagues from there, and sent me the prisoners accompanied by several horsemen and foot soldiers to inform me of what had happened. The captain also wrote to me saying that our men were alarmed and dispirited, and that the expedition now seemed very hazardous.

When the prisoners arrived I questioned them most diligently through my interpreters to learn the truth, and it appeared that the captain had misunderstood them. I at once set them free and placated them, saying that I believed them to be loyal vassals of

Your Sacred Majesty and that I would go in person to rout the Culuans, for, in order to show no weakness before the natives of this land, whether friends or enemies, it seemed to me that we should not abandon an enterprise we had begun. To dispel some of the fear of the Spaniards I decided to lay aside all other business and the dispatch which I was writing for Your Majesty, and departed that same hour with the greatest possible speed. I arrived that day at the city of Churultecal, which is eight leagues from this city [Segura de la Frontera], and there I found the Spaniards who still believed firmly in the treachery.

On the following day I slept at the town in Guasucingo where the chiefs had been seized. The next day after having agreed with the messengers from Buacachula as to where and how we were to enter the city, I set out an hour before dawn and arrived there just before ten o'clock. When I was still about half a league distant certain messengers from the city came out to meet me on the road; they told me how everything was prepared and how the Culuans knew nothing of our arrival, for certain inhabitants of that city had seized the spies which the captains from Culua had placed on the roads, and likewise those who had been sent to the walls and towers of the city to survey the countryside. The enemy was therefore unprepared, confident that they were well protected by their spies and scouts; and so my advance would pass unnoticed. Thus I hastened to enter the city without being discovered, because we were marching across a plain where they could easily have seen us. When the inhabitants of the city saw how close we were they surrounded the houses where the captains were quartered and began to attack the others scattered throughout the city. When I came within a crossbowshot of the city they brought me some forty prisoners, and I made all the more haste to enter. There was a great uproar throughout all the streets of the city. While fighting with the enemy I was guided by a native to the place where those captains were quartered, which I found surrounded by more than three thousand men who had captured the roofs and high places and were

fighting to get in. But the captains and their men fought so well and so fiercely that although they were few they repulsed their attackers. For not only were they most valiant men but also the building they were in was very strong. As soon as I arrived we entered, but so many natives came with us that I was unable to save those captains from being killed almost immediately. I had wished to take some alive in order to learn of the affairs of the great city and who was lord now that Mutezuma was dead, and other things besides; but I was only able to capture one, more dead than alive, who informed me as I shall hereafter relate.

Many of those Culians who were quartered in the city were killed and the rest, as soon as they heard of my arrival, began to flee to where the others were garrisoned; but many of them died in their attempt to escape. The disturbance was soon heard by the garrison, which commanded a height overlooking the city and the surrounding plain. They came to see what it was and to help, almost at the same time as the others arrived who had fled from the city. They were more than thirty thousand men and the most magnificent we have ever seen, for they wore many jewels and much gold and feathers. As the city is large, they began to set fire to it in the place where they had entered; this was soon discovered by the inhabitants, however, and I went out with only the horsemen, for the foot soldiers were very exhausted. We broke through them and they retreated to a pass which we took and then pursued them, overtaking many on an upward slope so steep that when we reached the top of the hill neither the enemy nor ourselves could either retreat or advance. Thus many of them fell suffocated by the heat without receiving a single wound. Two horses also fell, one of which died. In this manner we did great harm, for we had with us many of our Indian friends who, as they were refreshed and the enemy half dead, killed many of them: so in a short while the battlefield was empty of the living, though somewhat cluttered with the dead. We reached the quarters and shelters they had recently built in the countryside: these were in three groups, each, it seemed, as

large as a small village, for in addition to the warriors, there were many servants and supplies for their camp, because, as I learnt afterwards, they had had some persons of high rank with them. All this was plundered and burnt by our Indian allies of whom, I assure Your Majesty, there were more than a hundred thousand altogether. Having with this victory now driven the enemy from the land to beyond some difficult mountain passes which they still held, we returned to Buacachula, where we were very well received and accommodated by the inhabitants; and in that city we rested for three days, for we were in great need of rest.

At this time there came to offer themselves in Your Majesty's Royal service the inhabitants of a large town called Ocupatuyo,¹¹¹ which stands two leagues above the hills where the enemy camp was, and at the foot of that smoking mountain. They said that their chief had fled with the Culuans when we had pursued them, believing we would not stop at his town; and that for some while they had desired my friendship and would have come to offer themselves as Your Highness's vassals, but their chief would not permit it, although they asked him many times. They now wished to serve Your Majesty; and there remained behind a brother of that chief, who had always been of their opinion and still was. They begged me, therefore, to approve his succession, and that if the other lord returned not to receive him as such, for they themselves would not do so. I told them that as they had until now been allied with the Culuans and in revolt against Your Majesty's service, they deserved great punishments, which I had intended to execute on their persons and possessions; but as they had come and told me that the cause of their rebellion had been their lord, I, in Your Majesty's name, forgave them their past errors and admitted them to Your Royal service. But I cautioned them that if another such crime were committed they would be punished; promising them on the other hand that if they were loyal vassals they would be much honored and assisted by me in Your Royal name.

This city of Guacachulla [*sic*] is situated in a plain bounded