

**Bernal Diaz, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, c. 1560<sup>1</sup>**

*Bernal Diaz (1492-1580) was one of the band of around 600 Spanish conquistadores led by Hernando Cortes who arrived at the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (present-day Mexico City) in 1521 accompanied by their native translator Dona Marina (aka Malinche). The conquistadors stayed as Montezuma's guests for eight months. Then there was a battle and they fled the city, losing many of their men. They later returned, besieged, and conquered Tenochtitlan and the Aztec empire. Diaz wrote his "memoirs" of the expedition from his estate in Guatemala around 1560, when he was in his seventies.*<sup>2</sup>

...[When we arrived in Tenochtitlan] They took us to lodge in some large houses...where there were great halls and chambers canopied within the cloth of the country for our Captain, and for every one of us beds of matting with canopies above, and no better bed is given, however great the chief may be, for they are not used...As soon as we arrived and entered into the great court, the Great Montezuma took our Captain by the hand, for he was there awaiting him, and led him to the apartment and saloon where he was to lodge which was very richly adorned according to their usage, and he had in hand a very rich necklace made of golden crabs, a marvellous piece of work, and Montezuma himself placed it round the neck of our Captain Cortes, and greatly astonished his [own] Captains by the great honor that he was bestowing on him. When the necklace had been fastened Cortes thanked Montezuma through our interpreters, and Montezuma replied, "Malinche,<sup>3</sup> you and your brethren are in your own house, rest awhile," and then he went to his palaces...and we divided our lodgings by companies, and placed the artillery pointing in a convenient

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<sup>1</sup> Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *History of the Conquest of New Spain*, transl. David Carrasco (University of New Mexico Press, 2008), 156-179.

<sup>2</sup> Intro adapted from Kevin Reilly, *Worlds of History: A Comparative Reader* (5th Ed., Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 612-3.

<sup>3</sup> Montezuma calls Cortes by the name of the native noblewoman who was his interpreter.

direction, and the order which we had to keep was clearly explained to us, and that we were to be much on the alert, both the cavalry and all of us soldiers...

...The Great Montezuma was about forty years old, of good height and well proportioned, slender and spare of flesh, not very swarthy, but of the natural colour and shade of an Indian. He did not wear his hair long, but so as just to cover his ears, his scanty black beard was well shaped and thin. His face was somewhat long, but cheerful, and he had good eye and showed in his appearance and manner both tenderness and, where necessary, gravity. He was very neat and clean and bathed once every day in the afternoon. He had many women as mistresses, daughters of Chieftains, and he had two great Cacicas as his legitimate wives. He was free from unnatural offences. The clothes that he wore one day, he did not put on again until four days later. He had over two hundred Chieftains in his guard, in other rooms close to his own, not that all were meant to converse with him, but only one or another, and when they went to speak to him they were obliged to take off their rich mantles and put on others of little worth, but they had to be clean, and they had to enter barefoot with their eyes lowered to the ground, and not to look up in his face. And they made him three obeisances, and said: "Lord, my Lord my Great Lord," before they came up to him, and then they made their report and with a few words he dismissed them, and on taking leave they did not turn their backs, but kept their faces towards him with their eyes to the ground, and they did not turn their backs until they left the room. I noticed another thing, that when other great chiefs came from distant lands about disputes or business, when they reached the apartments of the Great Montezuma, they had to come barefoot and with poor mantles and they might not enter directly into the Palace, but had to loiter about a little on one side of the Palace door, for to enter hurriedly was considered to be disrespectful.

For each meal, over thirty different dishes were prepared by his cooks according to their ways and usage, and they placed small pottery braziers beneath the dishes so that they should not get cold. They prepared more than three hundred plates of the food that Montezuma was going to eat, and more than a thousand for the guard... I have heard it said that they were wont to cook for him the flesh of young boys, but as he had such a variety of dishes, made of so many things, we could not succeed in seeing if they were of human flesh or of other things, for they daily cooked fowls, turkeys, pheasants, native partridges, quail, tame and wild ducks, venison, wild boar, reed birds, pigeons, hares and rabbits and many sorts of birds and other things which are bred in this country, and they are so numerous that I cannot finish naming them in a hurry; so we had no insight into it... From time to time they brought him, in cup-shaped vessels of pure gold, a certain drink made from cacao, and the women served this drink to him with great reverence.

... There were also placed on the table three tubes much painted and gilded, which held liquid amber mixed with certain herbs which they call *tabaco*, and when he had finished eating, after they had danced before him and sung and the table was removed, he inhaled the smoke from one of those tubes, but he took very little of it and with that he fell asleep.

I remember that at that time his steward was a great Cacique to whom he gave the name of *Tapia*, and he kept the accounts of all the revenue that was brought to Montezuma, in his books which were made of paper which they call *amal*, and he had a great house full of these books... Montezuma had two houses full of every sort of arms, many of them richly adorned with gold and precious stones. There were shields great and small, and a sort of broadswords, and others like two-handed swords set with stone knives which cut much better than our swords, and lances longer than ours are, with a fathom of blade with many knives set in it, which even when they are driven into a buckler or shield do not come out,

in fact they cut like razors so that they can shave their heads with them. There were very good bows and arrows and double-pointed lances and others with one point, as well as their throwing sticks, and many slings and round stones shaped by hand, and some sort of artful shields which are so made that they can be rolled up, so as not to be in the way when they are not fighting, and when they are needed for fighting they let them fall down, and they cover the body from top to toe. There is also much quilted cotton armour, richly ornamented on the outside with many coloured feathers, used as devices and distinguishing marks, and there were casques or helmets made of wood and bone, also highly decorated with feathers on the outside...

... Let us leave this and go on to another great house, where they keep many Idols, and they say that they are their fierce gods, and with the many kinds of carnivorous beasts of prey, tigers and two kinds of lion and animals something like wolves and Foxes, and other smaller carnivorous animals, and all these carnivores they feed with flesh, and the great number of them breed in the house... I have heard it said that they feed them on the bodies of the Indians who have been sacrificed. It is in this way: you have already heard me say that when they sacrifice a wretched Indian they saw open the chest with stone knives and hasten to tear out the palpitating heart and blood, and offer it to their Idols, in whose name the sacrifice is made. Then they cut off the thighs, arms and head and eat the former at feasts and banquets, and the head they hang up on some beams, and the body of the man sacrificed is not eaten but given to these fierce animals... We were positively told that after we had been beaten out of the city of Mexico, and had lost 850 of our men, these horrible beasts were fed for many successive days with the bodies of our unfortunate countrymen. Let me speak now of the infernal noise when the lions and tigers roared and the jackals and foxes howled and the serpents hissed, it was horrible to listen to and it seemed like a hell...

...I will now, however, turn to another subject, and rather acquaint my readers with the skilful arts practised among the Mexicans: among which I will first mention the sculptors, and the gold and silversmiths, who were clever in working and smelting gold, and would have astonished the most celebrated of our Spanish goldsmiths; the number of these was very great, and the most skilful lived at a place called Ezcapuzaico, about four miles from Mexico. After these came the very skilful masters in cutting and polishing precious stones, and the *calchihuis*, which resemble the emerald. Then follow the great masters in painting, and decorators in feathers, and the wonderful sculptors. Even at this day there are living in Mexico three Indian artists, named Marcos de Aguino, Juan de la Cruz, and El Crespello, who have severally reached to such great, proficiency in the art of painting and sculpture, that they may be compared to an Apelles, or our contemporaries Michael Angelo and Berruguete...

...When we arrived at the great marketplace, called Tlaltelolco, we were astounded at the number of people and the quantity of merchandise that it contained, and at the good order and control that was maintained, for we had never seen such a thing before. The chieftains who accompanied us acted as guides. Each kind of merchandise was kept by itself and had its fixed place marked out. Let us begin with the dealers in gold, silver, and precious stones, feathers, mantles and embroidered goods. Then there were other wares consisting of Indian slaves both men and women; and I say that they bring as many of them to that great market for sale as the Portuguese bring negroes from Guinea; and they brought them along tied to long poles, with collars round their necks that they could not escape, and others they left free. Next there were other traders who sold great pieces of cloth and cotton, and articles of twisted thread, and there were cacahuateros who sold cacao. In this way one could see every sort of merchandise that is to be found in the whole of New Spain, placed in arrangement in the same manner as they do in my own country,

which is Medina del Campo, where they hold the fairs, where each line of booths has its particular kind of merchandise, and so it is in this great market.

There were those who sold cloths of henequen and ropes and the sandals with which they are shod, which are made from the same plant, and sweet cooked roots, and other tubers which they get from this plant, all were kept in one part of the market in the place assigned to them. In another part there were skins of tigers and lions, of otters and jackals, deer and other animals and badgers and mountain cats, some tanned and others untanned, and other classes of merchandise...and let us also mention the fruiterers, and the women who sold cooked food, dough and tripe in their own part of the market; then every sort of pottery...then those who sold honey and honey paste and other dainties like nut paste, and those who sold lumber, boards, cradles, beams, blocks and benches, each article by itself, and the vendors of ocote [pitch pine for torches] firewood, and other things of a similar nature. But why do I waste so many words in recounting what they sell in that great market?—for I shall never finish if I tell it all in detail.

...There are also buildings where three magistrates sit in judgment, and there are executive officers like Alguacils who inspect the merchandise. I am forgetting those who sell salt, and those who make the stone knives...and the fisherwomen and others who sell some small cakes made from a sort of ooze which they get out of the great lake, which curdles, and from this they make a bread having a flavour something like cheese. There are for sale axes of brass and copper and tin...I could wish I had finished telling of all the things which are sold there, but they are so numerous and of such different quality and the great marketplace with its surrounding arcades was so crowded with people, that one would not have been able to see and inquire about it all in two days.

...[At the top of the Great Pyramid] we stood looking about us, for that huge and cursed temple stood so high that from it one could see over everything very well, and we saw the three causeways which led into Mexico...and we beheld on that great lake a great multitude of canoes, some coming with supplies of food and others returning loaded with cargoes of merchandise...Some of the soldiers among us who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, and all over Italy, and in Rome, said that so large a marketplace and so full of people, and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before.

Let us leave this, and return to our Captain, who said to Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo<sup>4</sup>, who happened to be nearby him: “It seems to me, Senor Padre, that it would be a good thing to throw out a feeler to Montezuma, as to whether he would allow us to build our church here”; and the Padre replied that it would be good thing if it were successful, but it seemed to him that it was not quite a suitable time to speak about it, for Montezuma did not appear to be inclined to do such a thing.

Then our Cortes said to Montezuma: Your Highness is indeed a very I great prince and worthy of even greater things. We are rejoiced to see your cities, and as we are here in your temple, what I now beg as a favour is that you will show us your gods and Teules.” Montezuma replied that he must first speak with his high priests, and when he had spoken to them he said that we might enter into a small tower and apartment, a sort of hall, where there were two altars, with very richly carved hoardings on the top of the roof ... There were some braziers with incense which they call Copal, and in them they were burning the hearts of the three Indians whom they had sacrificed that day, and they had made the sacrifice with smoke and copal. All the walls of the oratory were so splashed and encrusted with blood that they were black, the floor was the same and the whole place stank vilely.

...Our Captain said to Montezuma through our interpreter, half laughing: “Senor Montezuma, I do not understand how such a great Prince and wise man as you are has not come to the conclusion, in your mind, that these idols of yours are not gods, but evil things that are called devils, and so that you may know it and all your priests may see it clearly, do me the favour to approve of my placing a cross here on the top of this tower, and that in one part of these oratories where your Huichilobos and Tezcatepuca stand we may divide off a space where we can set up an image of Our Lady (an image which Montezuma had already seen) and you will see by the Fear in which these Idols hold it that they are deceiving you.”

Montezuma replied half angrily (and the two priests who were with him showed great annoyance), and said: “Senor Malinche, if I had known that you would have said such defamatory things I would not have shown you my gods. We consider them to be very good, For they give us health and rains and good seedtimes and seasons and as many victories as we desire, and we are obliged to worship them and make sacrifices, and I pray you not to say another word to their dishonour.” When our Captain heard that and noted the angry looks he did not refer again to the subject, but said with a cheerful manner: “It is time for your Excellency and for us to return, and Montezuma replied that it was well, but that he had to pray and offer certain sacrifices on account of the great *tatacul*, that is to say sin, which he had committed in allowing us to ascend his great Cue, and being the cause of our being permitted to see his gods, and of our dishonouring them by speaking evil of them, so that before he left he must pray and worship. Then Cortés said: “I ask your pardon if it be so,” and then we went down the steps, and as they numbered one hundred and fourteen...

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<sup>4</sup> Fray: Bartolome is a priest.

### **Alvise da Cadamosto, *The Voyages of Cadamosto*, c. 1460.<sup>5</sup>**

*Alvise da Cadamosto (b. 1432?) was from a wealthy family in Venice. He sailed on several merchant ships, apparently as an archer. He seems to have also been involved in the financial side of merchant voyages; it was a common practice for each crew member to get a certain amount of storage space in the ship, where he could store trade goods and sell them “on the side” at different points along the voyage; this was a cheap way to get involved in trade, since the transportation was free. In 1454, Alvise was in Portugal trying to further his career, and he found out that Prince Henry the Navigator would help finance and outfit an exploratory voyage. He bought a ship (the specific type is called a “caravel”), hired a crew, and made several voyages down the West African coast.*

*After he came back to Portugal, he wrote at least a partial account of his travels before 1460. We have two manuscripts (hand-written copies) of his account. It was also included in many collections of printed travel accounts by different explorers like Columbus or Cabral. These were published from 1490 throughout the early 1500s.<sup>6</sup>*

### **CHAPTER XX: *The TRADE between ALOUISE DA MOSTO and the LORD BUDOMEL***

I passed beyond this river of Senega in my caravel and sailed to the country of Budomel,<sup>7</sup> fifty miles<sup>8</sup> by the coast from the said river: all this coast is low, without mountains...At this place I made my caravel fast, in order to have converse with this ruler, for certain Portuguese who had had dealings with him had informed me that he was a notable and an upright ruler, in whom one could trust, and who paid royally for what was brought

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<sup>5</sup> G.R. Crone, ed and trans., *The Voyages of Cadamosto and other Documents on Western Africa in the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century*, Second Series 80 (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1937), 35-41, 46-47, 50-51.

<sup>6</sup> From Crone, *The Voyages of Cadamosto*, xvii-xxxvi.

<sup>7</sup> The elective sovereign of Cayor is known as the Daniel. Cayor formerly extended over a considerably greater area to the north-east of Cape Verde than is designated by the name at present. The inhabitants are Jalof.

<sup>8</sup> 80 miles, in Codex Marciana (*ltd.* VI. 485).

to him. Since I had with me some Spanish horses, which were in great demand in the country of the Blacks<sup>9</sup>, not to mention many articles such as woollen cloth, Moorish silk<sup>10</sup> and other goods, I made up my mind to try my fortune with this lord...He entertained me to a great feast, and after much talk I gave him my horses, and all that he wished from me, trusting to his good faith. He besought me to go inland to his house, about two hundred and fifty [twenty-five] miles from the shore. There he would reward me richly, and I might remain for some days, for he had promised me 100 slaves in return for what he had received. I gave him the horses with their harness and other goods, which together had cost me originally about three hundred ducats. I therefore decided to go with him, but before I left he gave me a handsome young black woman, twelve years of age, saying that he gave her to me for the service of my chamber. I accepted her and sent her to the ship. My journey inland was indeed more to see interesting sights and obtain information, than to receive my payment.<sup>11</sup>

### **CHAPTER XI: *How ALOUISE DA MOSTO went inland with the LORD BUDOMEL***

...This is what I was able to observe of this lord and his manners, and his house. First, I saw clearly that, though these pass as lords, it must not be thought that they have castles or cities, as I have already explained. The King of this realm had nothing save villages of grass huts, and

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<sup>9</sup> Horses were a regular article of the trans-Saharan caravan trade. Leo Africanus tells us that in Gao, the Songhai capital, which he visited about 1513, horses bought in Europe for ten ducats and transported across the desert were selling for forty and sometimes fifty ducats (Leo, III, p. 827).

<sup>10</sup> Silk had long been an important article of trans-Saharan trade.

<sup>11</sup> It was this spirit which distinguished Cadamosto from his contemporaries, with whom commercial gain seems generally to have been uppermost.

Budomel was lord only of a part of this realm—a thing of little account. Such men are not lords by virtue of treasure or money, for they possess neither, nor do they expend any money: but on account of ceremonies and the following of people they may truly be called lords: indeed they receive beyond comparison more obedience than our lords.

**CHAPTER XXII: *The HOUSES and VILLAGES of BUDOMEL and his many WIVES***

It must be understood that the dwelling of such a King is never fixed: he has a number of villages to support his wives and families. In the village where I was, which was called ‘Casa sua,’ there were from forty to fifty grass huts close together in a circle, surrounded by hedges and groves of great trees, leaving but one or two gaps as entrances. Each hut has a yard divided off by hedges, and thus one goes from yard to yard, and from house to house.

In this place Budomel had nine wives: and likewise in his other dwellings, according to his will and pleasure. Each of these wives has five or six young black girls in attendance upon her, and it is as lawful for the lord to sleep with these attendants as with his wives, to whom this does not appear an injury, for it is customary. In this way the lord changes frequently.

These blacks, both men and women, are exceedingly lascivious:<sup>12</sup> Budomel demanded of me urgently, having been given to understand that Christians knew how to do many things, whether by chance I could give him the means by which he could satisfy many women, for which he

offered me a great reward. They are also very jealous, and allow no one to enter the huts where their wives live—not even trusting their own sons.

**CHAPTER XXIV: *The CUSTOMS of BUDOMEL and of those who HONOUR and SALUTE HIM***

This Budomel exhibits haughtiness, showing himself only for an hour in the morning, and for a short while towards evening... Such lords as he, when granting audience to anyone, display much ceremony: however considerable he who seeks audience may be, or however high born, on entering the door of Budomel’s courtyard he throws himself down on his knees, bows his head to the ground, and with both hands scatters sand upon his naked shoulders and head. This is their manner of greeting their lord. No man would be bold enough to come before him to parley, unless he had stripped himself naked save for the girdle of leather they wear. The client remains in this posture for a good while, scattering sand over himself; then, without rising, but grovelling on hands and knees, he draws nearer. When within two paces, he begins to relate his business, without ceasing to scatter sand, and with head bowed as a sign of the greatest humility. The lord scarcely deigns to take notice of him, continuing to speak with others: then, when his vassal his done, he replies arrogantly in few words: thus by this act he shows much haughtiness and reserve: if God himself came to earth I do not think that they could do Him greater honour and reverence. All this appears to me to proceed from the great fear and dread in which these people hold their lord, since for the most trivial misdeed he seizes and sells their wives and children. Thus it appears to me that his power exacts obedience and fear from the people by selling their wives and children...

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<sup>12</sup> “lascivious” means lustful or lewd.

**CHAPTER XXV: *The MOSQUE of BUDOMEL, and the manner of WORSHIP and of LIVING***

[After visiting the mosque with Budomel], he asked me what I thought of it, As he was very anxious to hear the articles of our faith recited, he frequently asked me if I would consent to repeat some of them for him. Finally I told him that his faith was false, and that those who had instructed him in such things were ignorant of the truth. On many grounds I proved his faith to be false and our faith to be true and holy—thus getting the better of his learned men in argument.

The lord laughed at this, saying that our faith appeared to him to be good: for it could be no other than God that had bestowed so many good and rich gifts and so much skill and knowledge upon us [but that he had not given us good laws]. He, on the contrary, had given them good laws, and he considered it reasonable that they would be better able to gain salvation than we Christians, for God was a just lord, who had granted us in this world many benefits of various kinds, but to the blacks, in comparison with us, almost nothing. Since he had not given them paradise here, he would give it to them hereafter.

In this he showed good powers of reasoning and deep understanding of men. He was much pleased with the actions of the Christians, and I am certain it would have been easy to have converted him to the Christian faith, if he had not feared to lose his power, for his nephew, in whose hut I lodged, often told me so. He himself was exceedingly willing that I should explain our laws to him, saying that it was good to listen to the word of God.

...They eat on the ground, like animals, without manners. No one eats with these black rulers, save those Moors who teach the law, and one or two of their chief men. All the other lesser people eat ten or twelve together, all helping themselves from a dish of food placed in their midst. They eat little at a time, but frequently, some four or five times a day.

**CHAPTER XXIX: *Great numbers of WILD ANIMALS, especially ELEPHANTS and GIRAFFES***

In this Kingdom of Senega there are no domestic animals other than bulls, cows, and goats: no sheep are bred, nor could they live there on account of the great heat...There are also wild elephants, though they do not domesticate them, as in other parts of the world. These animals go in herds, as our swine do in the forests. [Of their size I shall say nothing, for I believe that everyone must know that the elephant is an animal with a very large body and short limbs. His size may be gathered from the teeth of ivory which are brought to our parts.] These elephants have two large teeth at each side of their mouths, [that is, one on each side,] like the wild boar, [but set in the lower jaw.<sup>13</sup> There is no other difference,] save that the points of the teeth of the boar are turned upwards, while those of the elephant are turned downwards towards the ground. [I must explain that these animals have knees, which they bend when walking. I say this because I have heard others who have formerly been in these parts declare that the elephant is unable to kneel down; and that they sleep standing on their feet. This is a great lie, for they lie down on the ground and rise up like any other animal...The elephant is an animal that does not attack man unless man attacks him. The method of the elephant in attacking a man is

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<sup>13</sup> This, of course, is incorrect; elephant tusks are attached to the upper jaw.

to overtake him and deal him so strong an upward blow with his long trunk of a snout, which is like a kind of very long nose, and which he can withdraw and extend as he pleases, that the man falls to the ground as though hit by a bolt from a cross-bow... They are much more dangerous when with their young than at other times. They do not have more than three or four at a time.<sup>14</sup> They live upon leaves and fruits from the trees... The trunk is on the lower jaw, and they can lengthen and shorten it at will. With it they gather all their food, and drink water, putting it in their mouths, which are in their breasts...

#### **CHAPTER XXXIII: *The WOMEN who DANCE by night***

... These blacks marvelled greatly at many of our possessions, particularly at our cross-bows, and, above all, our mortars. Some came to the ship, and I had them shown the firing of a mortar, the noise of which frightened them exceedingly. I then told them that a mortar would slay more than a hundred men at one shot, at which they were astonished, saying that it was an invention of the devil's. The sound of one of our country pipes, which I had played by one of my sailors, also caused wonderment. Seeing that it was decked out with trappings and ribbons at the head, they concluded that it was a living animal that sang thus in different voices, and were much pleased with it. Perceiving that they were misled, I told them that it was an instrument, and placed it, deflated, in their hands. Whereupon, recognising that it was made by hand, they said that it was a divine instrument, made by God with his own hands, for it sounded so sweetly with so many different voices. They said they had never heard anything sweeter.

They were also struck with admiration by the construction our ship, and by her equipment—mast, sails, rigging, and anchors. They were of the opinion that the portholes in the bows of ships were really eyes by which the ships saw whither they were going over the sea. They said we must be great wizards, almost the equal of the devil, for men that journey by land have difficulty in knowing the way from place to place, while we journeyed by sea, and, as they were given to understand, remained out of sight of land for many days, yet knew which direction to take, a thing only possible through the power of the devil. This appeared so to them because they do not understand the art of navigation [the compass, or the chart].

They also marvelled much on seeing a candle burning in a candlestick, for here they do not know how to make any other light than that of a fire. To them the sight of the candle, never seen before, was beautiful and miraculous. As, in this country, honey is found, they suck the honey from the comb, and throw away the wax. Having bought a little honeycomb, I showed them how to extract the honey from the wax, and then asked whether they knew what it was that remained. They replied that it was good for nothing. In their presence, therefore, I had some candles made, and lighted. On seeing this, they showed much wonderment, exclaiming that we Christians had knowledge of everything.

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<sup>14</sup> Cow elephants usually have only one calf.