

tions, and had lost most of its moral and political capital long before the final blows fell at Junín and Ayacucho.

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DAVID CARRASCO (ed.): *The History of the Conquest of New Spain by Bernal Díaz del Castillo*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

In one of the six essays accompanying this re-edition of Bernal Díaz del Castillo's famous "diary" of the Spanish Conquest of New Spain, which is devoted to the theme of human sacrifice, David Carrasco concludes:

The purpose of this essay is not to justify Aztec ritual killing or condemn the Spaniards for their violence or lack of understanding. Rather, by beginning with Díaz del Castillo's point of view as an outsider and harsh critic of Aztec rituals, we move to indigenous words, practices, and perspectives to see through the Spanish account into some dimensions of what the Aztecs and Maya believed they were doing. (465)

However, the seventeenth-century reader of this diary, like the present day reader, may search in vain for these indigenous words, and perspectives. What this diary of a Spanish Conquistador may well tell us about is rather the mental/cognitive constructs of the Spanish during their ventures and tribulations in the conquest of these native peoples of the New World.

As to Carrasco's most welcome second aim – to unveil some major or minor ethno-historic data out of this highly disputable source – this aim, unfortunately, has proved to be quite unfulfilled; however, his essays do try to illuminate this particular facet of this diary. This Conquistador's diary is indeed full of bits and pieces of what one may call "ethnography," but the misconstrued interpretations provided by Díaz of what his eyes saw and his ears heard, all those overshadow this goal of salvaging ethnography out of this diary. This book is, rather, a living monument to the unbridgeable gap between the two distinct mental worlds of Spanish and Aztec societies and culture during the first decades of the sixteenth century.

What the reader may also be alerted to is Bernal Díaz's sophisticated practice of veiling nearly everything that he would not want us to know. And David Carrasco promptly cautions us against this practice in his introductory essay:

These violent practices and theological attitudes, which make up significant elements of the narrative, call out for contextual information and interpretative aid. Furthermore, none of the previous abridgments seriously alerts the readers to Bernal Díaz's economic agenda for writing the book. (xvi)

Take for example, the most essential account in Bernal Díaz's "diary of the Conquest" provided between the chapters entitled: "Montezuma in Captivity" and the "Spanish Defeat and the *Noche Triste*" (184-238).

Indeed, not much could be truly trusted in these accounts, and much of what happened is deliberately left out, in particular certain episodes that would not have sounded right to a contemporaneous Spanish ear. Thus, the entire, very crucial episode of the awesome massacre committed by Pedro de Alvarado and the Tlaxcallan soldiers against the Aztec priests and dancers on the day of the great festivity of *Toxcatl* in Tenochtitlan's Great Temple is given only one brief paragraph (210). In parallel, Spanish-indigenous sources we are given lengthy, pictographic and alphabetic accounts of this massacre and we are told by these sources that this was one of the most traumatizing episodes of the Spanish Conquest that played a leading role in their first futile attempt to conquer this city, which they consequently abandoned, in the face of a fierce local uprising and daring attack against them. The fact that so many other sources have lent such importance to this episode even though their information did not rely on firsthand testimony, makes this omission particularly untrustworthy.

The re-emerging cultural memory of the great massacre is marked during the first decade of the seventeenth century by the Texcocan chronicler, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *opera magna*. The author provides us with two complementary versions coming from two different sources: one from Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia de la conquista de la Nueva España*, while the other relies upon Don Alonso Axayacátl's *Relación*. In Alva Ixtlilxochitl's *Compendio histórico del reino de Texcoco* (ca. 1608), we get a contested version to that of del Castillo: Hernando Cortés is described as consenting to Moctezuma's request to celebrate the feast of *Toxcatl*. He thereafter departs to challenge Narváez's army on the coast, as described in the Dominican chronicler Fr. Diego Durán's earlier version of 1571.

The feast day fell, according to Alva Ixtlilxochitl's sources, between 19-20 May, the first day of this month, *Toxcatl*. On the eve of the celebration, large lanterns were lit and traditional music was played; on the day itself, the dance of the *mazehualitzli* was publicly performed, and about a thousand prominent lords of the city flocked into the main patio of the *Templo Mayor*, wearing their best ornaments and jewelry. At this stage, the account turns to concentrate on the

Tlaxcalan treachery against the Tenochca: as the different sources tell, certain Tlaxcalteca who were in the city “remembered at first that on this feast day the Mexica were accustomed to sacrifice a great number of captives of the Tlaxcalan nation.” And so, the Tlaxcalans went to Captain Alvarado and informed him, “treacherously and falsely,” that they knew that the Mexicas were holding the celebration of this feast “for the purpose of ambushing the Spaniards within the patio and then massacring them.” This version thus partly fits with the schema established earlier in the version provided by Durán, in what is ascribed to the presumed Mexica plot against the Spaniards. In the two other, overlapping versions of the *Historia de la nación Chichimeca*, and in the *Sumaria relación de las cosas de la Nueva España*, it is said that what lay behind the Tlaxcaltec initiative was, in fact, the Tlaxcalan desire for revenge, and subsequent share of the Mexica treasures, not yet looted or distributed by the Spaniards. In the *Historia*, the author repeats his biased interpretation of the episode that the *Toxcatl* day of festivity was a major occasion during which the Tlaxcalans “should have been able to sow mischief among their despotic enemies, as well as avenge them.”

Bernal Díaz’s omission of the *Toxcatl* massacre scenes might be explained, on the one hand, by the simple fact that he had been out of the city when the *Toxcatl* massacre occurred, and was with Cortés on their journey to Villa Rica to challenge Narváez. Thus, he might well have explained that he “could not account for something he had not eye-witnessed himself.” On the other hand, one might also explain this omission by Díaz’s implicit intention to refrain from “overemphasizing” Spanish atrocities in his narrative, and his desire to downplay his patron, Cortés’s indirect responsibility for Pedro de Alvarado’s evil deeds. If we move back a couple of chapters, yet another example of this author’s practice of veiling is the account entitled “The Massacre at Cholula.” There, in Díaz’s account of the fourteen days of the Spaniards stay in Cholula on the road to Tenochtitlán, his narration provides an extremely realistic and convincing report of how the treacherous Cholultecas plotted against the Spaniards by luring them into their city and entrapping them and thereafter finally sacrificing them to their gods. Díaz tells of the role played by the Tlaxcalans who camped outside this city, as well as the clear signs for a preemptive plot orchestrated by the Aztec king, Moctezuma himself, to lead Cortés’s army into this trap. But there is nothing whatsoever in this highly detailed account about the brutal murder committed by both the Spaniards and the Tlaxcalans of the Cholultecan priests and councilmen within the Quetzalcoatl temple in this city; there is only the theological and military motivation for this deed.

One is able, however, to gain a glimpse into this author’s true self and his lack of veiling in all this “true” history of the Conquest in Díaz’s account of

Cuauhtémoc's garroting, when he truly mourns this unjustified decision taken by Cortés, his patron:

In truth I grieved keenly for Guatemoc and his cousin, having known them as such great lords, and they had even done me honour during the journey when occasion offered, especially in giving me Indians to bring forage for my horse, and this death which they suffered very unjustly was considered wrong by all those who were with us. (358)

In the Annal-type manuscript belonging to the former city-state of Cuauhtinchán (in the State of Puebla), *Libro de los guardians y gobernadores de Cuauhtinchan*, one finds a parallel explication and further information concerning Cuauhtémoc's death. Under the entry for the year 6 Tecpatl (1524), it says:

it was then that they hanged the *tlatoani* [tlatoque] of Tlatelolco, Don Pedro Couanecotzin, Cuauhtemotzin and Tetelepanquetzatzin; they accused them, and the Márquez was informed that these three had authorized the act of assassinating them [the Spaniards] on the road. Having heard that, the Márquez ordered them to execute the *tlatoani*. Nevertheless, this was not true, and not for this reason their souls were freed, but only that they were placed on poles, hated, and ultimately murdered.

Bernal Díaz del Castillo was a nineteen-year-old foot soldier in the army of Hernando Cortés when he was eye-witness to the first onslaught on the majestic Aztec capital, Tenochtitlán. Three years later, in 1521, he participated in the second and final campaign to subdue this city, which is the core of his lengthy narrative. Bernal Díaz del Castillo's unique chronicle of the Spanish Conquest of New Spain was written by him in Guatemala sometime between 1554 and 1584, when he died at the age of 84. A partly fabricated version of the manuscript was first published by the Mercederian friar Alonso Ramón in 1632, and only in 1904 did the Mexican scholar, Genero García, return the original manuscript from Guatemala back to its much deserved original version, which was subsequently translated and published in English by the British scholar, Alfred Percival Maudslay, in eight volumes. The distorted version of the book, as well as its corrected, English edition, acquired enormous popularity in many languages throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, what Díaz del Castillo did not tell his readers is exactly what the mestized Texcocan chronicler, Alva Ixtlilxochitl, did indeed testify to his readers, that he had not

included in his work, or had intentionally left out of his accounts “things drastically bizarre, never heard before, things hidden away/concealed or which had vanished from the memory of the natives.”

This re-edition of Díaz’s history is an important contribution that offers undergraduate scholarly readers the Spanish side of the Conquest of New Spain. These students should find it highly accessible and meticulously explained. More advanced scholars seeking to fully comprehend meanings, practices, and world-views would find the six supplementary essays at the end, which aim to clarify and elaborate certain episodes in the story as well as describe indigenous world-views of the time, too brief to satisfy such a quest. What I found most frustrating in this re-edition is the lack of a much-needed index of names and places that would have proved to be an efficient search tool for students and scholars at various stages of research on this period. Also missing is a far more elaborate, suggested bibliography for further reading, at the end of each of the accompanying essays, especially of ethno-historic works closely related to these themes. One finds in the introductory essay as well as in the six essays at the end a striking lack of any mention of authors such as Todorov, Clendinnen, Townsend, or, Serge Gruzinski, just to list four of the scholars who seriously challenged some of the ideas originating from this text. Also, when discussing the intentional cover-up by Díaz del Castillo of the enormous help given by the indigenous city-states to the minute Spanish army, Carrasco unfortunately does not link this with the most recent scholarly contribution to the historiography of the conquest of New Spain, to what is now named in the most recent Mexican and Mesoamerican historiography, “the New Conquest History.” This approach is in sheer contrast with Camillia Townsend’s much-debated essay in the *American Historical Review* (August 2003), in which she emphasizes the central role played by Spanish technological superiority, including far more effective and deadly weapons, horses, and armor, in the “success” of the Conquest, which would better explain the Aztec, Mixtec, and Mayan “surrender.”

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