

Bernal Díaz del Castillo
***The Conquest of New Spain* (1568)**
Passage referring to the Spaniards' entrance into
México City (Tenochtitlán) on November 8, 1519 (1)

Early next day we left Iztapalapa with a large escort of these great *Caciques*, and followed the causeway, which is eight yards wide and goes so straight to the city of México that I do not think it curves at all. Wide though it was, it was so crowded with people that there was hardly room for them all. Some were going to México and others coming away, besides those who had come out to see us, and we could hardly get through the crowds that were there. For the towers and the *cúes* were full, and they came in canoes from all parts of the lake. No wonder, since they had never seen horses or men like us before!

With such wonderful sights to gaze on we did not know what to say, or if this was real that we saw before our eyes. On the land side there were great cities, and on the lake many more. The lake was crowded with canoes. At intervals along the causeway there were many bridges, and before us was the great city of México. As for us, we were scarcely four hundred strong, and we well remembered the words and warnings of the people of Huexotzinco and Tlascala and Tlamanalco, and the many other warnings we had received to beware of entering the city of México, since they would kill us as soon as they had us inside. Let the interested reader consider whether there is not much to ponder in this narrative of mine. What men in all the world have shown such daring? But let us go on.

We marched along our causeway to a point where another small causeway branches off to another city called Coyoacan, and there, beside some towerlike buildings, which were their shrines, we were met by many more *Caciques* and dignitaries in very rich cloaks. The different chieftains wore different brilliant liveries, and the causeways were full of them. Moctezuma had sent these great *Caciques* in advance to receive us, and as soon as they came before Cortés they told him in their language that we were welcome, and as a sign of peace they touched the ground with their hands and kissed it.

There we halted for some time while Cacamatzin, the lord of Texcoco, and the lords of Iztapalapa, Tacuba, and Coyoacan (2) went ahead to meet the great Moctezuma, who approached in a rich litter, accompanied by other great lords and feudal *Caciques* who owned vassals. When we came near to México, at a place where there were

some other small towers, the great Moctezuma descended from his litter, and these other great *Caciques* supported him beneath a marvelously rich canopy of green feathers, decorated with gold work, silver, pearls, and *chalchihuites*, which hung from a sort of border. It was a marvelous sight. The great Moctezuma was magnificently clad, in their fashion, and wore sandals of a kind for which their name is *cotaras* (3), the soles of which are of gold and the upper parts ornamented with precious stones. And the four lords who supported him were richly clad also in garments that seem to have been kept ready for them on the road so that they could accompany their master. For they had not worn clothes like this when they came out to receive us. There were four other great *Caciques* who carried the canopy above their heads, and many more lords who walked before the great Moctezuma, sweeping the ground on which he was to tread, and laying down cloaks so that his feet should not touch the earth. Not one of these chieftains dared to look him in the face. All kept their eyes lowered most reverently except those four lords, his nephews, who were supporting him.

When Cortés saw, heard, and was told that the great Moctezuma was approaching, he dismounted from his horse, and when he came near to Moctezuma each bowed deeply to the other. Moctezuma welcomed our Captain, and Cortés, speaking through Doña Marina (4), answered by wishing him very good health. Cortés, I think, offered Moctezuma his right hand, but Moctezuma refused it and extended his own. Then Cortés brought out a necklace which he had been holding. It was made of those elaborately worked and coloured glass beads called *margaritas*, of which I have spoken, and was strung on a gold cord and dipped in musk to give it a good odour. This he hung round the great Moctezuma's neck, and as he did so attempted to embrace him. But the great princes who stood round Moctezuma grasped Cortés' arm to prevent him, for they considered this an indignity.

(1) Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of New Spain*. Trans. J. M. Cohen. New York: Penguin Books, 1963, 216-217.

(2) To see these locations in relationship with Tenochtitlán, see the following map: => [Cortés Conquest Map #2](#).

(3) Cohen footnote: Actually a Cuban word; the Mexican word was *cactli*.

(4) For information about Doña Marina, see: => [Malinalli](#).