

When we had already been in Mexico for four days, and neither our Captain nor anyone else had left our quarters except to visit these houses and gardens, Cortés said it would be a good thing to visit the large [market] square of Tlatelolco. . . . On reaching the market-place, escorted by the many Caciques whom Montezuma had assigned to us, we were astounded at the great number of people and the quantities of merchandise, and at the orderliness and good arrangements that prevailed, for we had never seen such a thing before. The chiefs who accompanied us pointed everything out. Every kind of merchandise was kept separate and had its fixed place marked for it.

Let us begin with the dealers in gold, silver, and precious stones, feathers, cloaks, and embroidered goods, and male and female slaves who are also sold there. They bring as many slaves to be sold in that market as the Portuguese bring Negroes from Guinea. Some are brought there attached to long poles by means of collars round their necks to prevent them from escaping, but others are left loose. Next there were those who sold coarser cloth, and cotton goods and fabrics made of twisted thread, and there were chocolate merchants with their chocolate. In this way you could see every kind of merchandise to be found anywhere in New Spain, laid out in the same way as goods are laid out in my own district of Medina del Campo, a centre for fairs, where each line of stalls has its own particular sort. . . . There were sellers of kidney-beans and sage and other vegetables and herbs in another place, and in yet another they were selling fowls, and birds with great dewlaps,³ also rabbits, hares, deer, young ducks, little dogs, and other such creatures. Then there were the fruiterers; and the women who sold cooked food, flour and honey cake, and tripe, had their part of the market. Then came pottery of all kinds, from big water-jars to little jugs, displayed in its own place, also honey, honey-paste, and other sweets like nougat. Elsewhere they sold timber too, boards, cradles, beams, blocks, and benches, all in a quarter of their own.

Then there were the sellers of pitch-pine for torches, and other things of that kind, and I must also mention, with all apologies, that they sold many canoe-loads of human excrement, which they kept in the creeks near the market. This was for the manufacture of salt and the curing of skins, which they say cannot be done without it. I know that many gentlemen will laugh at this, but I assure them it is true. I may add that on all the roads they have shelters made of reeds or straw or grass so that they can retire when they wish to do so, and purge their bowels unseen by passersby, and also in order that their excrement shall not be lost.

But why waste so many words on the goods in their great market? If I describe everything in detail I shall never be done. . . . They have a building there also in which three judges sit, and there are officials like constables who examine the merchandise. I am forgetting the sellers of salt and the makers of flint knives, and how they split them off the stone itself, and the fisherwomen and the men who sell small cakes made from a sort of weed which they get out of the great lake, which curdles and forms a kind of bread which tastes rather like cheese. They sell axes too, made of bronze and copper and tin, and gourds and brightly painted wooden jars.

We went on to the great cue, and as we approached its wide courts, before leaving the market-place itself, we saw many more merchants who, so I was told, brought gold to sell in grains, just as they extract it from the mines. This gold is placed in the thin quills of the large geese of that country, which are so white as to

be transparent. They used to reckon their accounts with one another by the length and thickness of these little quills, how much so many cloaks or so many gourds of chocolate or so many slaves were worth, or anything else they were bartering. . . . Having examined and considered all that we had seen, we turned back to the great market and the swarm of people buying and selling. The mere murmur of their voices talking was loud enough to be heard more than three miles away. Some of our soldiers who had been in many parts of the world, in Constantinople, in Rome, and all over Italy, said that they had never seen a market so well laid out, so large, so orderly, and so full of people.

QUESTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

1. How did Mexico compare to Europe, according to Díaz? Did Díaz consider Mexico civilized? Why or why not? What did Díaz think about Mexican practices of human sacrifice?
2. In what ways was Montezuma different from other Mexicans, according to Díaz? Did such differences strike Díaz as bizarre or conventional?
3. Why did Díaz find Mexico astounding, like "an enchanted vision"? To what extent did Mexico differ from what Díaz expected to find? What might have shaped his expectations and in turn his sense of wonder?
4. Since Díaz wrote this description of his entry into Mexico many years after it happened, how reliable is it? How might the passage of time and Díaz's hindsight have distorted his memory of this decisive moment?

DOCUMENT 2-4

A Mexican Description of the Conquest of Mexico

This remarkable account comes from the Florentine Codex, a massive cultural encyclopedia of the native people of Mexico that was compiled in the mid-sixteenth century under the direction of Bernardino de Sahagún, a Franciscan missionary. Beginning about 1547 Sahagún trained a group of Mexican men to interview prominent elders and to record their words in Nahuatl, their native language. Sahagún's informants had a vivid memory of the conquest of Mexico, which had occurred only a generation earlier. Sahagún published their account, in both Nahuatl and Spanish, in Book 12 of the Codex—the source of the following selection, which was translated from Nahuatl. This account reveals Mexican perspectives on the events of conquest.

Mexican Accounts of Conquest from the Florentine Codex

The Spaniards. . . . set out in this direction, about to enter Mexico here. The they all dressed and equipped themselves for war. They guided themselves, tryn