

Essay on broken spears accounts

[Parts of the World](#), [Europe](#)



The Aztecs formed a great and wealthy empire in the ancient civilization. The ancient world knew them for their bravery and persistent will. They believed in conquering and success. Don Hernando Cortes recognized this fact and wanted to see for himself by wanting to fight Aztec messengers upon arriving at the shores of the Mexican city. Once a destitute tribe, the Aztec managed to build and establish their empire in Central America through hard work. They built a great city-metropolis on an otherwise uninhabitable island. The organization of the empire was so rich, magnificent and orderly. Upon entry into the city, the Spaniard soldiers described the city in amazement. "Some of the soldiers among us had been in many parts of the world, all over Italy, Constantinople, and in Rome agreed so large a market place full of people and so well regulated and arranged, they had never beheld before."

The Aztecs foresaw the landing of the Spaniards in Mexico as a bad omen. In their accounts, many omens occurred as a sign of future misfortune. Among the omens was appearance of flame in the sky, burning of the Huitzilopochtli temple, a lightning bolt striking the Xiuhtecuhtli temple, a fire stream in the sky during the day, strong winds and violent waves, a voice of a woman weeping at night and capturing of strange creatures by the fishermen as accounted by Sahagun's informants. These events preceded the arrival of the Spaniards in 8 November 1519. King Motecuhzoma felt threatened by the arrival of strangers in his kingdom. He thought that they were gods returning to the land from the sea (Portilla, 13). The city was confused on how to treat the strangers. After attempts and failure to drive them away through magic, the king finally decided to welcome them by sending gifts

and gold. This provided an easy avenue for the Spaniards to gain access to the Metropolis.

As soon as the Spaniards entered the city, they were amazed by the civilization that existed in place but to them greed for gold was more important. They made it their aim to destroy the city and loot all their treasures. They were able to achieve this through the help of the Aztec's neighbors such as Cholultecas and Tlaxcaltecas who feared and hated them. They provided the Spaniards with proper maps, food and shelter as they attacked the Aztecs. They placed the king under arrest, seized all his treasures and shot canons that instilled fear among the residents (Portilla, 65-66). Welcoming of the Spaniards placed the Aztecs at a disadvantage. The Spaniards took advantage of their hospitality and attacked them. They staged a massacre on unarmed Aztec warriors during a festive celebration of the sacred patio (Portilla, 74). The killings were as vivid in the minds of the Aztec as described in the account. " They ran in among the dancers, forcing their way to the place where the drums were played. They attacked the man who was drumming and cut off his arms. Then they cut off his head, and it rolled across the floor. They attacked all the celebrants, stabbing them, spearing them, striking them with their swords. They attacked some of them from behind, and these fell instantly to the ground with their entrails hanging out. Others they beheaded: they cut off their heads, or split their heads to piece. No matter how they tried to save themselves, they could find no escape."

This attack on the Aztecs prompted a fierce retaliation over murder on their people. The Spaniards had an advantage over the Aztecs in many areas.

First, they managed to conquer Aztec's friendly empires that could have come to their aid such as the Cholula. They also enjoyed the help of empires that were enemies to the Aztecs. They received military support, food and directions from them. The Spaniards had superior weapons such as canons and guns. In addition, they marched on horses. On the other hand, the Aztecs used crude weapons like stones, arrows and spears. Aztecs had not seen such weapons before as they described them as "strange" while horses as "stags". They did not escape the suffering from plagues such as chicken pox that weakened them and made them susceptible to defeat from the Spanish soldiers.

Contrary to the opinion that the Aztecs stood no chance against the Spaniards, Accounts from the broken spears show that they were not defenseless and that they exhibited excellent military capabilities. They had their own colonies conquered through war, serving under them long before the Spaniards arrival. They were able to recapture Tenochtitlan city during "the night of sorrows" through military discipline and competence. To demonstrate their skills and ability to adapt in combat, the Aztecs came up with a zigzag run when they were under heavy fire from canons. This move was able to minimize death toll among their soldiers (Portilla, 94). Spanish retreat and massacre at Toltec proved that the Aztecs had a fair chance in defeating the Spaniards. They caught up with them at the canal forcing them to jump over the cliff. They died in large numbers such that they filled the canal to form a bridge. The Spaniards who came later stepped on corpses while crossing the canal. The accounts from broken spears prove that the

Spaniards defeated the Aztecs only due to the advantage of the guns and canons.

The accounts compare with the Columbian exchange in that they show the negative and positive culture influences that the European culture had on the Native American culture and vice versa. The invasion of the Europeans on the native America introduced diseases such as small pox, which killed many natives than war itself. The Europeans also acquired diseases such as syphilis, which terrorized and killed many of them. Through the exchange, the European armies intentionally infected the natives with small pox.

Biological warfare emerged because of such actions. An example is the defeat of the Aztecs due to the small pox plague. The exchange also brought some positive influences such as medication, farming and introduction of Christianity among Native Americans. The Columbian exchange account only covers the events from the colonizers view. The broken spears account on the other hand maybe skewed towards the natives view and feelings towards their colonizers. The gaps that exist in the broken spears account is objectivity and broadness in covering both sides of the narration of events. The Columbian exchange has a gap in driving the real experience and voice from the natives. The overall advantage of both the broken spears and Columbian exchange accounts is that it has lead to advancement in medical fight against small pox and other diseases, as well as documentation of the effects of cultural exchanges.

Reference:

Leon-Portilla, M. (2006). *The Broken Spears*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.