

# The broken spears: the aztec account of the conquest of mexico



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## Perspective on the Columbian Exchange and Effect on Information

Conveyance While most of what has happened historically is clouded by speculation and wonder, some events have been well-documented. The Conquest of the Americas by the Spanish was an event in which many aspects were recorded, which has helped historians tremendously. The Broken Spears is a historical outlook on the Spanish Conquest of the Americas that includes several different texts written by many different indigenous people.

Numerous texts are written in such a way that show the fear that the people experienced while having their towns overtaken, while other texts simply explain what was happening at the time. In Traditions and Encounters, a more factual approach is taken, conveying only facts. The Broken Spears includes facts, yet also includes the vivid emotions of the people. The Spanish Conquest introduced the indigenous people not only to the Spaniards, but also to a vast array of European diseases.

Traditions and Encounters describes the smallpox epidemic as “rag[ing] through the city, killing inhabitants by the tens of thousands. It then spread beyond the capital and raced through Mexico, carrying off so many people that Aztec society was unable to function.” The wording of this passage provides the reader with the facts, but not a lot of emotion. In The Broken Spears, the passage explains “It began to spread...striking everywhere in the city and killing a vast number of our people.

Sores erupted on our faces, our breasts, our bellies; we were covered with agonizing sores from head to foot. Both excerpts explain that many people

were killed, but *The Broken Spears* really makes the information more personal and adds a human perspective that the reader can relate and sympathize with. When describing the relations between the Europeans and the indigenous peoples, the two books differ greatly. *Traditions and Encounters* explains that the Europeans began to take the land of the indigenous people because there were no crops being grown on it, and were also attacked by the natives.

The textbook stated, "Migrants claimed that they were making productive use of the lands that native peoples only used as hunting parks." The book goes on to explain that "such justification did not convince native people, who frequently clashed with the colonists over the right to use their hunting grounds." *The Broken Spears* tells the story of many different tribes of natives, so the reader is able to empathize and see the spread of what is happening across the land.

Throughout the book, writers mention that Aztec governments did everything that they could to give the Spanish everything that they needed, and that the Spanish took advantage of them. "...he took the Spaniards to be gods; he believed in them and worshiped them as deities." The people of Mexico were loyal to those that they believed to be gods and "when they conquered the Mexica and all belonging to them, we never abandoned them or left them behind in it. Under Spanish rule many men, women and children were exploited, tortured and murdered. *The Broken Spears* captured this in great detail while *Traditions and Encounters* skims over a lot of these details.

This seems to create a gap between the two texts, making the differences

between the authors more apparent. Cortes played a large role in the <https://assignbuster.com/the-broken-spears-the-aztec-account-of-the-conquest-of-mexico-2/>

conquering of the Americas, and both Traditions and Encounters and The Broken Spears document his actions. In Traditions and Encounters, Cortes's role as captain of Spanish expeditions was detailed.

The advantage that the Spanish had over the indigenous people is palpable, with advanced technologies, immunity to European diseases, and of course the idea that the Spanish were actually gods. In The Broken Spears, Cortes played a larger role. He converted many of the royals and dignitaries to the Catholic religion, and personally took part in the baptisms for "...he wished to repay their kindness by teaching them the law of God..." By introducing the Aztecs to Catholicism, Cortes was able to unravel everything that the people had ever known and usher out everything that the people had ever worshiped.

The idols that craftsmen had spent so much time on were burned, and temples were destroyed. Traditions and Encounters does not explain this aspect of what happened at all, while in The Broken Spears is able to demonstrate the feeling of hopelessness and starting anew for the people who weren't baptized. Another major difference between the two texts is their story of what led up to the conquest. In The Broken Spears, eight omens are described, " which reveal how the Nahuas interpreted the downfall of their civilization. All of these omens were recorded separately by at least three different historical recorders and were predicted to precede the reemergence of Quetzalcoatl and other gods. The native peoples were led to believe that the arrival of the Spaniards was destined to happen and that they should be welcomed. By following these prophecies the native peoples were left vulnerable to the militaries of Spain. These omens provide <https://assignbuster.com/the-broken-spears-the-aztec-account-of-the-conquest-of-mexico-2/>

background information for what led up to the conquest of the Americas that Traditions and Encounters fails to mention.

These omens provide readers with a sense of what the native peoples believed in and what allowed the Spaniards to initially be trusted by the Aztecs. The Broken Spears provides the reader with a greater sense of what the indigenous people had to go through than Traditions and Encounters could ever. Readers can connect with the authors of The Broken Spears, while Traditions and Encounters is simply a compilation of facts that almost seems stoic, yet possesses a historical advantage.

Unlike The Broken Spears, Traditions and Encounters is able to look back at what happened during the Columbian Exchange and show how important certain moments of the exchange were more important than others. In The Broken Spears, only a small chapter was dedicated to the impact that illness had on the indigenous people when in reality bacterial and biological exchange were the driving factors that helped the Europeans conquer the Americas.

Being able to look back at what happened and to see what was really important helps to capture the gist of what happened, instead of focusing on events that were more dramatic, but less important to the overall conquest. While both books remain factually sound, The Broken Spears was written while the conquest was happening, by the individuals who had to experience everything. Reading the authentic accounts enables and opens readers up to not only learning, but also to being able to put themselves in the shoes of

the Aztecs. The writing selections in both books tell readers a substantial amount about who wrote them.

The emotion and detail that went into the writings featured in *The Broken Spears* make what happened seem more realistic and believable - not just something that is studied in school. This contrasts the information in *Traditions and Encounters*, which has been provided by historians and is much more factual and stoic. Both books have the task of teaching about what happened during the Columbian exchange, and the comparison between these books shows that the perspective of the author is able to change how the information is portrayed.