

Tequihpanolli ica Tlaxcala

A Re-examination of The Spanish-Tlaxcalan Alliance During the Conquest of Mexico.

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# Thesis Approval Page

In partial fulfillment for a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Integrated Studies with Religious Studies and History emphases, we hereby accept this Senior Thesis written by Joshua Beatty. Defended: December, 6, 2017

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Although many have argued that alliances of indigenous peoples to the Spanish were key in the conquest of Mexico, and that the Tlaxcalans were significant in their contribution, the political dissent in Tlaxcala and its consequences became the hinge that swung the door of success or failure in the Conquest of Mexico. This thesis will examine the Spanish-Tlaxcalan encounter in colonial central Mexico. The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the interworkings of the preliminary battles between the Tlaxcalans and Spaniards, the political dissent in Tlaxcala, and consequently the alliance formed between the two. An exploration of both the content and historical context of the narratives will illustrate the importance of the alliance and ultimately argue that the political dissent and structure in Tlaxcala planted the seed for an alliance to occur.

A large section of this study is focused on two scholarly secondary sources. *History of the Conquest of Mexico with a preliminary view of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the life of the conqueror, Hernando Cortes* by William H. Prescott, and *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century* by Charles Gibson. Prescott's account of the Spaniard-Tlaxcalan encounter follows similar lines to that of Gibson. Prescott gives some different details leading up to the actual encounter, including the time spent with the Cempoalans and then the three-day journey inward towards Tlaxcala. Some key details that Prescott talks about in relation to the other literature is the four messengers being sent to Tlaxcala upon Cortes being convinced by his Cempoalan friends that they should continue towards the Tlaxcalans instead of heeding the advice of the envoys of Montezuma in their party. These details line up with Cortes's letters to Charles V, explaining his precaution before entering Tlaxcalan territory.

Prescott outlines some historical context of the Republic of Tlaxcala talking about its institutions, early history, discussions in the senate- and the later desperate battles with the

Spaniards. Prescott's explanation of the government is relevant because of his description of the four divided states each ruled by a cacique who came together to govern Tlaxcala as a whole. Prescott points out that this form of government was immensely different from the surrounding nations and persisted until the Spanish arrived.

Gibson also gives a brief history of Tlaxcala and its surrounding areas, along with the “transition” of rebel groups against the Aztecs into Tlaxcalans. Much of the details of the pre-conquest social and political processes for Tlaxcala is unknown but Gibson does outline that in the writings of Cortes, there is mention of four cabeceras over the government of Tlaxcala. Gibson points out that Cortes and Diaz mainly reference Maxixcatzin, one of the four Tlaxcalan leaders, and at times another, Xicotencatl. In fact, no one in Cortes' company ever made mention of any four cabeceras or leaders. Gibson notes that Bernal Diaz wrote his account at a much later time where it was a common known fact of the quadruple political organization in Tlaxcala, yet Diaz spoke of five parcialidades, and named only the fifth-Tepeyanco, leaving the mention of other names out.

Both Gibson and Prescott provide great insight to a compilation of various primary sources including: Cortes, Diaz, Sahagun, Camargo, Torquemada, Motolina and several 16<sup>th</sup> century documents related to Tlaxcala from general archives in Mexico. Many of these primary source documents serve to further the literature, but it's important to note some of the contradictions between them. Gibson and Prescott provide some inconsistencies in the narrative between Cortes and Diaz and even that of Camargo, yet misinterpret a comparison between firsthand accounts (Cortes and Diaz) and handed down accounts (Camargo, Torquemada,

Motolinia). This misinterpretation will be addressed and analyzed through a comparison of Gibson and Prescott's work.

For further research into the political structure and social dynamic of Tlaxcala, *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of the Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala (1545-1627)* by James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, and Arthur J.O. Anderson will be referenced. The book is a collection of Nahuatl documents from Tlaxcala, translated and annotated by the authors. It provides first hand insight into the political and social dynamics during the contact along with its changes over the next 82 years. The compilation of the documents themselves is an invaluable resource but it's the annotations from the translators that provide great scholarly insight.

The *Codice entrada de los Espanoles en Tlaxcala* translated Jorge Gurria Lacroix provides another primary document annotated by an academic. LaCroix gives a breakdown of the Codice of the entrance of the Spanish into Tlaxcala. His commentaries align with several other comments and accounts of the entrance into Tlaxcala. He describes certain figures that pertain to the Codice. Most notable are the four caciques from Tlaxcala, Hernan Cortes, and Marina or Maliztin. LaCroix believes that Maxizcatzin can be identified as the one directly encountering Cortes, as Maxizcatzin had counseled for peace with the invaders and that they should be invited into the city. Xicotencatl the elder pushed for battles or at least a test of the invaders strength, whose orders were eventually carried out by his son Xicotencatl el Moro. The document provides a second testimony to much of what is depicted in the Actas de Tlaxcala.

The conglomerate of all these documents and manuscripts will serve as the canvas to place my thesis. It is through the portrayal of all accounts of the Tlaxcalan-Spanish encounter,

and their connection to one another, that provide further insight into the political dissension into Tlaxcala and their consequent alliance with the Spanish.

At the start of the mid fifteenth century, the Aztec empire in central Mexico had reached the height of its reign. Following several conflicts and a war, the infamous Triple Alliance was formed between the Mexica, Acolhua and Tepaneca. However, the capital of the empire landed in Tenochtitlan, a giant community placed on an island among the great waters of the central Mexico valley (modern day Mexico City). Tenochtitlan, populated by the Mexica people, became the center point for the Aztec empire and by 1502, Moctezuma II had taken position as ruler of the capital. Tenochtitlan, a place later referred to as “the Venice of the Western World”<sup>1</sup> would become the pinnacle example of a ruling empire’s capital, falling among the greats such as the Roman and Spanish empires. It ultimately became the goal for the invading Europeans in the conquest of Mexico.

At the start of the sixteenth century, just previous to the invasion of the Europeans, the Aztec empire had dominion across Mexico, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. As with all empires of history, the ability to control this dominion was always in contention, causing warring factions to rise up against the capital. As the empire grew, factions started, and wars began. It became a breeding ground for Loyalists of the Empire and those against it. Many who fought against the Aztecs made pacts among themselves, small alliances in rebellion against Tenochtitlan. Slowly, the reach of the capital receded on the its peripheries, all the while still claiming the land but having no presence in the outer reaches.

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<sup>1</sup> William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortes Vol 3.* (Philadelphia: 1873), pg. 45.

Despite a common misconception, the Aztec empire was not made up of just Mexica. This empire, like that of others, was a conglomeration of smaller pueblos. Differing indigenous peoples all fell under the umbrella of the empire and all were technically required to pay tribute- whether by force or own volition- to the Mexica rulers in Tenochtitlan. Tribute came in the form of natural resources, food, and most problematically, people. The Aztec empire in the pre-colonial period believed in sacrificial religion; Gods required human sacrifice to be appeased. Soldiers would be sent out to neighboring pueblos in search for victims for sacrifices. "indeed, the great object of war, with the Aztecs, was quite as much to gather victims for their sacrifices, as to extend their empire. Hence it was, that an enemy was never slain in battle, if there were a chance of taking him alive."<sup>2</sup>

This background of the political and culture climate is important for an analysis of Tlaxcala, since Tlaxcalans for roughly two hundred and fifty years had fought to keep themselves separate from the Mexica empire and to avoid subjugation. Although Tlaxcala labored fervently to avoid subjugation in their feuds against the Mexica empire, their culture and political structures parallel that of the empire. However, Tlaxcala's government is distinct in their structure, and understanding the background and setup of the Tlaxcalan empire and government becomes imperative for an analysis of the preceding events. Tlaxcala itself was divided into four large geographical sections, each with its respectful local governing body. Each governing body was led by a head cacique. Together the four areas, each producing their cacique, generated the governing body for the whole of Tlaxcala.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortes Vol 3.* (Philadelphia: 1873), Pg. 98-99.

<sup>3</sup> James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, Arthur J.O. Anderson, *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of the Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala, 1545-1627.* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986.)

Multiple sources, including Cortes himself, provide the names of the four caciques that governed together during the time of the conquest, along with the names of their territories in Tlaxcala: Maxixcatzin of Ocotelulco, Xicotencatl of Tizatlan; Tlehuexolotzin of Tepeticpac; and Citlalpopoca of Quiahuixtlan. Although these four caciques ruled together as the governing body of Tlaxcala, elder positions held more weight and their voices, at times, overruled others in council. Maxixcatzin and Xicotencatl held these prestigious positions. Their significance can be gleaned from Cortes and Bernal Diaz, who both mention Maxixcatzin and Xicotencatl but nothing of Tlehuexolotzin and Citlalpopoca, the other two leaders.<sup>4</sup> The distinction between Maxixcatzin and Xicotencatl, and later Xicotencatl “el mozo”, become the characters in the political dissention inside Tlaxcala during the Spanish contact period.

By August of 1519, Hernan Cortes started his journey inland towards Tenochtitlan, having already subdued the Cempoalans on the Mexican Gulf coast. The Cempoalans gave Cortes additional supplies, including food, men, and Malintzin, his Nahuatl interpreter.<sup>5</sup> Cortes had initially planned to head straight for Tenochtitlan, venturing at this point with 400 men, a handful of horses, and artillery. However, the Cempoalan caciques persuaded him to venture inward towards Tlaxcala, because they (the Tlaxcalans) were their friends and mortal enemies of the mexicanos (i.e. the Aztecs).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bernal Diaz wrote his account at a much later time where it was a common known fact of the quadruple political organization in Tlaxcala, yet Diaz spoke of five parcialidades, and named only the fifth-Tepeyanco. (1540's) In the works of Motolinia the quadruple division appears. However he only named two of the four lords of 1519. (the previous 2 mentioned.) historians of 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century reveal the four lords names. Maxixcatzin of Ocotelulco, Xicotencatl of Tizatlan; Tlehuexolotzin of Tepeticpac; and Citlalpopoca of Quiahuixtlan. ( thanks to Thadeo de Niza-16<sup>th</sup> century)

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hugh, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the fall of Old Mexico*. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks 2005), Pg. 171-172.

<sup>6</sup> See: Bernal Diaz del Castillo, *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva Espana*. (Madrid: 1942), pg 120.



The Cempoalans had won Cortes' trust and in so doing dispelled any doubt about heading for Tlaxcala had dissipated. Cortes mentions in his letters to Charles the fifth that the Cempoalans were "so positive about the friendship and fidelity of the people of that province, I set out for it."<sup>7</sup>

As Cortes ventured inward towards Tlaxcala, he ascended the table-land of Mexico, passing sites such as Xalapa and Xocotla. Cortes had his envoy, together with the extra aid of the Cempoalan soldiers and advisors and slowly gained more indigenous help along the way. After over a week's travel inward, Cortes approached the Tlaxcalan territory and was met by a wall of brick and mortar. It was here that Cortes made his first crucial decision. A discussion erupted between the Cempoalans and the Envoys from Montezuma. Each offered competing advice as whether to cross into Tlaxcalan territory. Montezuma envoys suggested that he proceed north, circumvent the wall, and continue onward to the capital where Montezuma will welcome them. The Cempoalans vehemently suggested they continue inward into Tlaxcala and that the Tlaxcalans are a friendly people and will also welcome them because of their friendship. Cortes, showing his confidence in the Cempoalans ultimately chose to enter the lands of Tlaxcala.<sup>8</sup>

In August of 1519, Cortes entered into Tlaxcalan territory. Cortes is traveling with a large company, a mix between Spanish soldiers, indigenous warriors, and a string of supplies and food. Cortes rode ahead of the company, taking with him six horsemen in effort to provide warning to rest if there were impending danger. After traveling 16-20 miles inward, Cortes had

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<sup>7</sup> Francis Augustus Macnutt, *Fernando Cortes his five letters of Relation to the Emperor Charles V.* (New Mexico: The Rio Grande Press Inc, 1908).

<sup>8</sup> See Cortes's letter for description of the wall drawing and his wrestle to enter Tlaxcala or not. Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).

his first encounter with the Tlaxcalans. The small skirmish killed several Tlaxcalans and wounded several Spanish and horses. As the small band of Tlaxcalans retreated, Cortes pursued them. They rounded the bend of a valley and to the Spaniards surprise, encountered large Tlaxcalan reinforcements.

After the gruesome battle, both sides retreated to held positions and both took their time for recuperation. Spanish sources say that 70-80 Tlaxcalans were killed, while the Spanish only lost three to four men, and two more horses.<sup>9</sup> However, no numbers are given for the indigenous allies of Cortes, however it is clear that the majority of the casualties on the Spanish side come from their indigenous help in battle. As the Tlaxcalans retreated their leader, Xicotencatl el mozo reported to the general council in Tlaxcala. To better understand the importance of his report and the social and political climate of Tlaxcala, a brief historical background is needed.

Around the time that the Triple Alliance in central Mexico was formed, circa the mid 1400's, the effects of this alliance pushed many smaller indigenous groups out of the central valley of Mexico. Several of these groups headed south, passing through modern day Puebla and landing in Tlaxcala. One of these groups were the Otomies, who settled in Tlaxcala in its second

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<sup>9</sup> Duran's version of the Tlaxcalan encounter is extremely peaceful. He mentions the attack of the Tlaxcalan-Otomi people, but places them in the light of an example of what could happen. The main decision that is made for peace is given by words from a formed council in Tlaxcala. Here one of the lords (presumably Xicotencatl, inferring from other readings) gives a speech which Duran has transcribed in his book. The speech is given in hopes of convincing the other nobles in the council that these "gods" should be received peacefully into Tlaxcala. That they should not be fought against. According to Duran, it was decided in favor of accepting these invaders peacefully. Gifts were sent to the Spaniards, and they were received into Tlaxcala.

This version of the encounter of Tlaxcala between the Spaniards doesn't fully contradict other accounts, however, large sections are omitted. The many battles that occurred according to Diaz, Prescott, Gibson are almost non-existent. Perhaps Duran is omitting these things purposely, or according to Duran this is actually how they happened. Duran depicts the Tlaxcalans as a "sacred fearful people" that upon hearing the surrender of Tecoaac, or the Tlaxcalan-Otomi people, they convinced their council and decided to not defend themselves. Diego Duran, *Historia de las indias de Nueva-Espana y islas de tierra firme*. (Mexico, 1867-1880).

phase of population.<sup>10</sup> Although the Otomies populated Tlaxcala, they were not the first ones there. The first phase of the population of Tlaxcala came from a group called the Pinome, often referred to as barbarians by the Aztec empire, being that they were a hunter-gather people, always against the empire and avoiding subjugation. The Otomies and Pinome mixed together and began to form the boundaries of opposition against the Aztec empire.

The Otomies were characterized as an uncultured people, possessing only a hunting and gathering economy, not having any architecture or religious idols. Because of later displacement, no one is sure of the time frame for their first settlement in Tlaxcala, it was possibly close to the center, but the pressure of the Aztecs caused them to force their concentration on different directions along the frontier, between the Aztecs and Tlaxcala territory. Also, it is important to note that the Otomies spoke a different language than Nahuatl, the common language among the Aztec empire. Their language was completely unrelated to Nahuatl and Otomi language remnants are still found today in small indigenous populations in central Mexico.

The next biggest population that moved into Tlaxcala came from the “Teochichimecs” or Nahuatl Tlaxcalans. These peoples were part of the great Nahuatl population of that region but were very distinct from the rest because of their political independence. Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl points out how the Nahuatl Tlaxcalans greatly enriched and enhanced the Tlaxcala territory upon arriving, bringing the first maize and religious idols.<sup>11</sup> They also brought along their knowledge of architecture, having adobe and stone construction. These “Teochichimecs” (Nahuatl Tlaxcalans) mixed with the Otomies, but upon their arrival they took a very dominant

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<sup>10</sup> For a complete outline of the population phases in Tlaxcala see: Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

<sup>11</sup> Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Obras Historicas: Tomo I*. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1975).

central position in the territory. Ultimately, they pushed the Otomies to the edges of the territory causing them to serve as soldiers and buffer guards.

After some formative years of political growth and warring political factions, elite Tlaxcalan families set up power. Over the next half century, these families agreed upon heirs to take the throne. Families fought against each other, and eventual new territories were formed inside Tlaxcala. However, leading up to the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Tlaxcala became a blended mix of rulers. Tlaxcala split into four governing areas: Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlan, and Quiahuixtlan. These four towns became known as the cabeceras to which the entire province of Tlaxcala became subject. Each area had its reign of rulers and as an entire province each ruler sat near the middle of the four-way division. This allowed the four rulers to govern together and meet as a council for decisions to be made for the whole territory of Tlaxcala.

Now it has been argued by historians that modern day Tlaxcala is roughly the same size as the province existed in the 1500's.<sup>12</sup> However, the Tlaxcalans viewed themselves as a small territory, always protecting themselves from outsiders regardless of their affiliation with the Aztecs or not. They became a fighting people and a small force to be reckoned with. Montezuma knew them as a huge nuisance, causing logistical problems to the south.

Tlaxcala during the conquest was still divided into the four cabceras of Tepeticpac, Ocotelulco, Tizatlan, and Quiahuixtlan. Tlaxcala's main governing body was made up of four rulers and they governed by seniority. First was Maxixcatzin, who was over Ocotelulco. The Spanish chroniclers do most of their dealing with him and his name is the most mentioned in the encounters; he seems to be the senior member of the four. Second, was Xicotencatl, who resided

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Gibson, *Tlaxcala in the Sixteenth Century*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

in Tizatlan. Xicotencatl may not have been the senior member but his age superseded Maxixcatzin. Xicotencatl was blind at the time of the conquest and he was the second member of contact outlined by the Spanish. He had a son also named Xicotencatl el mozo who became the main character for political dissention. The third and fourth ranking elites were Tlehuexolotzin of Tepeticpac and Citlalpopaca of Quiahuixtlan. They are only briefly mentioned, but their names are not fleshed out until Thadeo de Niza in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

These four governed together and called a council of various other leaders and elites when discussing matters dealing with the entirety of the province. A council had been called previous to Cortes entering Tlaxcala to discuss what must be done with the “white invaders”. The military leaders and general council in Tlaxcala had advanced knowledge of Cortes’ march up the coast. The Tlaxcalans saw that the Cempoalans and other Indian allies were aligning with Cortes and these pueblos were subjects of Montezuma. In their eyes, this may have just been the Aztec empire coming to attack. Thus, they made preparations for war long before Cortes arrived.

Before Cortes entered Tlaxcala, he had sent four messengers into the territory to bring a message of peace, with the message of peace from Cortes and the thoughts of a foreign army entering their territory, the council in Tlaxcala discussed their options. There were varying opinions between the caciques. Maxixcatzin spoke in favor of the Spanish, wanting to accept their peace and allow them into Tlaxcala. His view was supported by merchants and with a economic interest but was countered by Xicotencatl and military council. With all the council being in somewhat of a deadlock, Temilotecutl, one of the lord nobles, proposed a strategy to appease both sides of the aisle.

Tlaxcala would offer peace to the Spanish only to first try them in battle. If the army failed to defeat the Spanish in battle, a failsafe was put into place still allowing the Tlaxcalans to

propose peace and ally with the invaders. The Tlaxcalans would place the blame on the Otomies. To add to the complexity, Xicotencatl el mozo (son of Xicotencatl) had been appointed general over the Otomi section of the army. The plan was to take this army, surprise the Spanish, and if they failed, they would blame it on the “barbarian” Otomies that live in the territory but were not Tlaxcalans. Had the Tlaxcalans won, the customary glories and spoils of war would be theirs. However, should they lose, they would gain a possible ally against the Aztec empire. The Tlaxcalans essentially developed a win-win situation.<sup>13</sup>

With the loss of the first major battle, Xicotencatl informed the council that the military plan did not work and that the white invaders have differing and new tactics in battle. The Tlaxcalans are shocked at the horses and explosive weapons, filling them with astonishment and some terror. The second phase of the plan was to be put in motion, to advocate for peace with the Spanish. After the battles on the morning of the first day, the Tlaxcalans released two of the envoys Cortes had previously sent them. These messengers were sent back to Cortes, along with other Tlaxcalan messengers. They informed Cortes that the battles of the day were unknown to them, and that the Otomies had been the instigators of the battle. Continual expressions of peace were made along with an offer to pay for the lost horses.

However, although there was continual talk of peace, the fighting continued. Messengers relaying words of peace were nothing more than spies sent to see the Spanish and understand

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<sup>13</sup> Prescott discussed the council that met upon the Cempoalan messengers that Cortes had sent. His commentaries on the council lean more to the influence of Xicotencatl the blind and his words in creating the plan for the Tlaxcalans, which was to attack. Depending on the outcome they would blame the Otomies (technically an independent state but part of their nation). Prescott leans heavily on Camargo, even Torquemada at times. Camargo has been seen as a chronicler of some defaced truth, perhaps showing that the Spanish entered Tlaxcala a little too peacefully. However, Prescott's account aligns with Gibson and Diaz in regard to the plan of the Tlaxcalan's initially and their battles with the Spaniards. <sup>13</sup> William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortes Vol 3*. (Philadelphia: 1873).

how they might be defeated. The continuing small battles and skirmishes slowly wiped away Cortes' confidence in the peace accords with the Tlaxcalans. Cortes ultimately decided to go on the offensive. Cortes went with his horsemen, 100 foot soldiers, 300 Cempoalans and another 300 Yztacmastitans (another indigenous group that attached themselves to Cortes as he moved through the interior of Mexico) to the nearest villages. As they arrived, just before any Tlaxcalan soldier left there on duty could arm themselves, they attacked. They burnt down houses, killing and capturing the citizens. In Cortes own words, "I set fire to five or six small places of about a hundred houses each, and brought away about four hundred prisoners, both men and women, fighting my way back to my camp without their doing me any harm."<sup>14</sup>

These actions from Cortes set off the ire of the Tlaxcala. However, the issue remained complex. Although the Tlaxcalan council resented the actions performed by Cortes, they still vied for peace and a hopeful alliance with the invaders. Xicontencatl el mozo was in complete disagreement with the council and perhaps despite orders from the council, gathers forces and mounts a counter attack against the Spanish.<sup>15</sup>

The following morning, in the largest mass yet gathered of Tlaxcalan warriors, Xicontencatl falls upon the Spanish in their camp. Cortes mentions the attack in his own words, "At daybreak the following morning, more than a hundred and forty thousand men<sup>16</sup>, covering all the country, attacked our camp so determinedly that some of them penetrated into it, rushing

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<sup>14</sup> Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).

<sup>15</sup> There is a lot of ambiguity in the sources as to whether the council gave their blessing for Xicontencatl to attack. There may have been disapproval, but a general "look the other way" attitude may have been established for this first attack. Subsequent attacks by Xicontencatl were viewed as reprimandable.

<sup>16</sup> Historians have dissected many of the numbers outlined by the Spanish chroniclers and many, like Prescott and Gibson, fall on the side of exaggeration. The Spanish chroniclers may have embellished their stories in recounting them.

about, and thrusting with their swords at the Spaniards.”<sup>17</sup> The battle ensues all day, killing many on both sides, the majority on Cortes’s side being his indigenous allies. Ultimately by the end of the day, both sides give in to fatigue and retire to defensive positions for the night.

The following day, Cortes, again gathering his men, burned and massacred several villages, retreating every time as reinforcements from Tlaxcala showed up to defend their territory. Just as Tlaxcalan reinforcements would arrive, Cortes headed in the opposite direction to look for the next village to burn, playing an almost cat and mouse game all day as he killed and massacred the indigenous peoples in Tlaxcala. Needless to say the pleas for peace coming from Tlaxcala were not being heard.

Later that day Cortes retreats back to high ground in preparation for the night to come. Back in Tlaxcala, the council is still vying for peace, but Xicotencatl rejected it. Xicotencatl by this point is directly disobeying the Tlaxcalan council and was desperate to fight off and beat the Spanish. Having studied the Spanish for several battles now, Xicotencatl decides to switch tactics and decides on using spies to gather information on possible weaknesses of the Spanish.

The following morning messengers arrived to Cortes’ camp. They told Cortes that they have been sent from the Chiefs in Tlaxcala and that they wish to become vassals to the Spanish and friends. They begged Cortes to forgive them of their faults and give Cortes provisions, and gifts. Cortes informed them that he would pardon the Tlaxcalans and that they should pass the message on to the Chiefs in Tlaxcala.

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<sup>17</sup> Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).



Interestingly, these messengers were not spies sent by Xicotencatl el mozo, but are actual messengers from the capitol bringing the message of peace between Tlaxcala and the Spanish. Historically there is some ambiguity in the preceding events but the events were extrapolated together later after details are sorted out by both sides. It appears that these messengers went back to Tlaxcala and passed the information along to the council. Xicotencatl el mozo had another heavy debate and discussion with the council insisting that they should let him take this opportunity to spy on Cortes and then attack at night. Xicotencatl may have just seen the opportunity to take advantage of the messengers and spy on Cortes himself. Either way, what is clear is that Xicotencatl el mozo ultimately decided to take advantage of the situation and in so doing defies the orders from the council to not attack the Spanish again.

The following day, roughly fifty Tlaxcalans entered Cortes camp. Cortes mentions that these men, seemed to be something of consequence, not the normal run of the mill messengers that had showed up the day before. They brought with them food and gifts once again, assuring Cortes of the Tlaxcalan want for peace and alliance. Several of Cortes' Cempoalan allies noticed that many of these men are taking count of Cortes' men, his provisions, artillery, horses, and inspecting entrances and exits to the camp. They report to Cortes that these are "bad" men who had come to spy on Cortes to assess the best way to cause damage and defeat them.

Cortes was baffled by the situation. Cortes had been told that Tlaxcala wants peace and Cortes wanted it too. Cortes realized that he cannot endure much longer under these circumstances and that peace needed to be achieved sooner than later. His predicament was again between trusting his Cempoalan allies, who are advocating these messengers are spies, or to trust the messengers and leave his defensive camp into Tlaxcala. Both have potentially serious consequences, but once again, Cortes sided with his Cempoalan allies.

However, instead of killing all fifty Tlaxcalan warriors in the camp, Cortes ordered his interpreters and a couple of Cempoalan allies to capture one Tlaxcalan, without the knowledge of the others. They captured one and interrogate him. He told them that they were sent by Xicotencatl el mozo, and that he was just beyond the hill opposite of the camp, with such a great number of people, ready to fall on the camp at night. The men had been sent to observe where they might take advantage and even perhaps sneak into the camp to kill them. For they would have no artillery set up, no one on horseback, most of the men asleep, and would set fire to the camp in hopes of killing them all.

Historically, it was not customary at all to attack at night, especially in the indigenous tradition. Many indigenous tribes fought only in the day, for it was customary to see your opponent and that upon winning, the spoils of war could be taken. Even for the Spanish, night attacks were often useless. Coordination gets lost and formations get broken. This tactic, planned by Xicotencatl was perhaps nothing more than an attack of desperation. However, had Cortes not received previous knowledge of the attack, his conquest of Mexico might have failed.

Cortes made the decision to round all fifty Tlaxcalan soldiers up. He orders them to go back over that hill and tell Xicotencatl, “by day or night or at any or all times he might come, he would see who we were.”<sup>18</sup> Cortes then cut off the hands of every single spy and sent them over the hill.

Having caught wind of Xicotencatl’s plan, Cortes fortified the camp, he had all men placed battle ready and rearranges all their possessions as to render any intelligence Xicotencatl might have received useless. Cortes was starting to realize just how bad their defenses are. An

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<sup>18</sup> Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).

ambush on all sides would prove fatal, not to mention his artillery and horsemen were aiming blindly because it was night. Cortes ultimately decided to take the offensive. Within just minutes before arriving and Xicontencatl ambushing the Spaniards, Cortes decided to line up his cavalry, spread out in length, and to rush out of the woods to meet the Tlaxcalans. As Cortes received word from his front-line scouts that they see movement, Cortes orders the charge and his Calvary and indigenous allies raced from the trees.

Cortes wrote in his account, “And so it happened, that when they discovered we were coming with horses to attack them, without stopping or shouting, they fled into some fields of maize, with which the country was almost covered, and lightened themselves of some provisions which they were carrying with them, for the feast they intended to celebrate, if this time they destroyed us entirely. They left us in security that night.”<sup>19</sup>

Few sources detail the events from the Tlaxcalan viewpoint, but needless to say Xicontencatl el mozo was reprimanded severely by the council. There is uncertainty as to whether Xicontencatl was removed from his post, but Tlaxcalan Actas and the Codice of Tlaxcala outline that he lost trust from the council.<sup>20</sup> The council ultimately decided that Xicontencatl must be the one to pass the word of peace to Cortes.

Around the end of September, Xicotencatl el mozo along with fifty of his men, entered Cortes’s camp. He told Cortes who he is and that he comes with his word and the word of Maxixcatzin (the eldest leader in the council) that they would accept them as Spanish subjects

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<sup>19</sup> Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).

<sup>20</sup> James Lockhart, Frances Berdan, Arthur J.O. Anderson, *The Tlaxcalan Actas: A Compendium of the Records of the Cabildo of Tlaxcala, 1545-1627*. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986.) Jorge Gurria Lacroix, *Codice Entrada de los Espanoles en Tlaxcala*. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1966).

and pardon them of their ways for they did not understand who they were and were so use to constantly defending their homeland that it was their instinct that made them fight.

In fact Xicotencatl said that “we have exerted all our forces, not only by day, but also by night, to escape being subjected to anyone, since at no time had this province ever been so, nor had ever, been subjected to any master, on the contrary, we have lived free and independent since we can remember, and have always defended ourselves against the great power of Montezuma, of his father, and grandfather who held the country subjected.”<sup>21</sup>

Cortes remains in his camp another six-seven days, all the while the Tlaxcalans are beseeching him to come into the city, to speak with the chiefs, for they were now welcome there. The events of the previous week had Cortes doubting Tlaxcala and their peace messengers. It took Cortes an entire week to finally muster up the courage to take the Tlaxcalans on their word and enter the city. In fact, Cortes didn't believe them until on the seventh day the Chiefs themselves, what can be assumed was Maxixcatzin and one other, came to his camp to convince them of their peace and want for them to enter the city.

Cortes met with the caciques in Tlaxcala. They discussed their alliance together and talk of supplying and helping Cortes with his journey inward and battle against the Aztec empire. In exchange, Cortes offers them promises. These promises will affect Tlaxcala for years to come. Cortes promised they will not be subjugated and will be treated as allies with the Spanish. He promises them they won't be taxed and that they may directly address the Spanish government

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<sup>21</sup> Hernán Cortés, Francis Augustus MacNutt, John Greenway, *Fernando Cortes, his five letters of relation to the Emperor Charles V [1519-1526]*. (Glorieta, N.M.: Rio Grande Press. 1977).

through appointed indigenous leaders. Cortes also grants that they may keep their names and, for now, their religious practices, if they accept Christianity into their pantheon.

Surprisingly, these promises are upheld for much of a century. Cortes, along with many other Spanish conquistadores, made promises to indigenous groups in order to achieve their immediate goals. However, these promises were usually never upheld and once the indigenous political structure was thwarted, a reprisal of “said” promises were issued.

These are huge promises, and their effects on Tlaxcala and the future history of central Mexico’s indigenous peoples are underappreciated. Tlaxcala for the next half a century becomes the driving force of indigenous help to the Spanish. They become the deciding factor in the fall of Tenochtitlan, a military launch point for wars against other warring indigenous groups, and the first to address the Spanish government with appointed indigenous leaders.

Furthermore, these promises shape the future social and political climate for Tlaxcala. As social differentiation creates rifts between commoners, nobles, lords, and rulers, drastic changes are made to the Nahuatl *Altepetl* (Nahuatl word for community/pueblo) in the Postconquest Era. Religious life, language, and ways of writing and forms of expression are all influenced and changed by the effects of the conquest and alliance with the Spanish.<sup>22</sup>

Although the invading Spanish made multiple alliances throughout their conquest of Mexico, their alliance with Tlaxcalan is unprecedented. The events leading to the alliance, along with its overreaching affects in the years after the conquest truly shape Mexico’s history. It is

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<sup>22</sup> See: James Lockhart, *The Nahuas after the conquest: a social and cultural history of the Indians of central Mexico, sixteenth through eighteenth centuries*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1996).

through the exploration of the events and the historical context of the narrative that Tlaxcala's importance becomes distinguished.

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