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REVIEW

Tenochtitlan and the Aztecs in the English Atlantic world, 1500–1603

María Fernanda Valencia-Suárez*

This article studies sixteenth-century English views of Tenochtitlan, the Aztecs and the Spanish conquest of Mexico in the framework of the Atlantic world. It analyses the process by which English scholars and politicians collated, understood, appropriated and used information about Mexico – circulating in the rest of Europe – to produce their own interpretations and productions. This was made with the aim of promoting English exploration and colonial ventures in the New World, supporting English claims to the Americas, fostering anti-Spanish sentiments and Protestant solidarity against Spain and satisfying curiosity and desire for fresh knowledge. Paying especial attention to the investigation of a water-coloured map of the city of Tenochtitlan, produced in London in 1571, this article illustrates how the English departed from a pro-Spanish narrative of the conquest and began to use information about the Aztecs – in the framework of increasing Anglo-Spanish rivalries – to criticize the Spanish and to legitimize the fight against Spain in the Old and New world.

Keywords: Aztecs; Spanish conquest of Mexico; English and European views of the indigenous peoples; Anglo-Spanish rivalries

In 1520, shortly after the first Mexican treasure and the second letter of Hernán Cortés reached the Spanish court in Valladolid, descriptions of Tenochtitlan, a sophisticated city "comparable in size to Seville or Cordoba," and its incredible riches and wealth, drew much admiration throughout Europe.[1] In England, the news arrived promptly and the fact that Tenochtitlan, the Aztec centre of power, had been conquered by Spain and that, as a result, the Spanish crown was filling its coffers with treasures and increasing its power in Europe and beyond, struck heavy.[2]

It would be difficult to deny English concern about Spanish expansion and profitable conquests, or that the Aztecs, subsequently joined by the Inca, became in Europe emblematic of the wonders and aberrations of America; they had treasures and were civilized, but were also idolaters and practiced human sacrifice. Despite the general acknowledgement of these facts, the historiography on English expansion and colonisation and on English relations with American indigenous peoples, has neglected English views of pre-Hispanic Mexico. Most previous studies have been conducted in terms that suggest that in early modern England there was no awareness of, or interest in, the city of Tenochtitlan and its inhabitants.[3]

This article addresses issues of sixteenth-century English uses of information about the Aztecs, Tenochtitlan and the Spanish conquest of Mexico through the analysis of a substantial body of early modern English interpretations of the Spanish performance in Mexico and of the Aztec's culture, contained not only in printed books, but also in handwritten books, pamphlets, sermons, maps and letters of the

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time. Especial attention is given to the production in London in 1571 of a water-coloured representation of Tenochtitlan, a document largely unknown and absent from the most important works on early modern European cartography and representations of Tenochtitlan.[4]

I. The arrival in England of the first information about the Aztecs and the Spanish conquest of Mexico

By 1521, the year in which Cortés completed the Spanish conquest of Mexico, there was, in England – among those aware of Spain's rising wealth and its maritime and geographical expansion towards the West – a growing feeling of discontent, frustration and lost opportunity with relation to the New World. Such feelings were only reinforced by news of the wealth and magnificence of Tenochtitlan.[5] There were reasons for assuming that England had had a chance but had lost its opportunity to claim discovery of the New World. Far from being impervious to the lure of the Atlantic, English sailors had been setting sail from Bristol to explore the seas to the west of Ireland for many centuries and with renewed enthusiasm since at least 1480, eager to find the legendary island of Hy Brasil and in search of rich virgin fishing grounds.[6]

With the acquisition of lands and riches in the New World, Spain was consolidating its empire and becoming the most powerful European monarchical state. Spain was extremely covetous of its American lands and riches, and based on the Papal Bull *Inter caetera* (1493) of Pope Alexander VI, on the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), and on the right of "first discoverer," it justified its possessions and the control it exerted over Atlantic trade.[7]

In the days of the first Spanish discoveries, Henry VII had been careful to avoid any direct confrontation with Spain and kept English participation in New World exploration discreet. Except for John Cabot's explorations no other major state-sponsored expeditions were undertaken. Even Cabot's voyage was restricted by the king to lands "not known to Christians," especially avoiding the territory to the south, which was already claimed by Spain.[8] The scant financial returns of Cabot's ventures gave little incentive to English merchants or the crown, and the perception of North America as a land unlikely to yield economic benefit spread widely among the English. As David B. Quinn states, English voyages to North America "had revealed a land that was unprofitable – either because its inhabitants had nothing worth while with which to trade and showed no great enthusiasm for English goods, or because the seas were cold, their margins frozen."[9]

Early news about the Aztecs and the riches obtained by the conquest of Tenochtitlan arrived promptly at Henry VIII's court, as he was still on good terms with Spain and had a Spanish wife. Although there are no records of this first news in England, it is very likely that information was highly pro-Spanish, as the first narratives about the conquest were told by the Spanish conquerors themselves. In any case, information about the Aztecs circulated slowly in England and was limited to certain circles of English society: groups of merchants and sailors in London and Bristol, academics in London and in the universities of Cambridge and Oxford, and of course, groups of royal officers, crown ambassadors and the king.

Some English sailors and merchants heard about the Aztecs from their continental counterparts, and, in turn, circulated information by word-of-mouth

or through informal manuscript correspondence.[10] In addition, Continental travellers visiting England brought news of the Spanish conquest of Mexico into the country, whilst English subjects abroad, living in or visiting Continental Europe, communicated back to England the news they learnt in printed documents circulating in Europe, or in the handwritten pamphlets which were promptly and regularly distributed, sold cheaply or even given gratis, within the Spanish realm to spread news of Spain's recent achievements.[11]

Letters, dispatches, diplomatic correspondence and handwritten news about Aztecs circulated among the English political and commercial elite.[12] Foreign books were imported from the continent and although none of Cortés's letters were translated into English, there is evidence that at least the second and the third arrived in England very soon after their publication in Europe; copies in Latin and Italian were held by the library and constituent colleges of the University of Cambridge.[13] Moreover, it might well have been that some Englishmen abroad, particularly those with access to Habsburg political networks, visited the exhibition of Aztec treasure that was displayed in Brussels in 1520,[14] or saw the Aztec jugglers and ballplayers brought to Europe in 1528 to perform before the Spanish king in Toledo, and later before the Pope in Rome and some noblemen in the Netherlands.[15] Moreover, they could have seen the coloured drawings of these Aztec acrobats made by Christoph Weiditz, which although never published in early modern Europe, circulated in manuscript and "were very well known in interested circles."[16]

It is true that the Aztecs remained unknown to the majority of the English population during the first half of the sixteenth century. However, it is also true that news about the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs exacerbated the feelings of lost opportunity, desire and envy among those who had access to such information. Indeed Robert Thorne, who formed part of a large community of English merchants and sailors resident in Spain, wrote a letter to Henry VIII in 1527 mentioning, rather enviously, the gold and treasure that Spain was obtaining from the New World: "if only those pioneer ships of the Bristol merchants had followed the coast of Newfoundland, the land of the Indians from whence all the gold commenth had been ours."[17] Given the date of Thorne's letter it is likely that the gold and the indigenous peoples he is referring to are those of Mexico, since it was not until 1532 that Francisco Pizarro conquered the territory of the Incas and that precious metals from Peru started to arrive in Spain.[18]

Henry VIII was not as careful as his father about maintaining friendly ties with Spain. He divorced Catherine of Aragon in 1532, rejected papal authority and challenged Rome. Yet, the king showed little interest in America, Atlantic voyages or the Aztecs.[19] The English breach with Rome not only ensured that Henry VIII remained distracted with internal and continental matters, but also brought with it stricter control by Spain of the flow into England of information about the Spanish colonies. English eyes momentarily turned away from the Americas, but it is difficult to believe that England suppressed or forgot its uneasy feelings towards the New World or that English concern over the increasing power and wealth of Spain simply dissolved.

In 1551, King Edward VI and his government, aiming to foster English trade and interested again in extra-European issues, supported the private efforts of Richard Chancellor, Sebastian Cabot and Sir Hugh Willoughby, and chartered the Company of Merchant Adventurers. In 1553, Edward's court also sponsored the translation by

Richard Eden (English merchant and government official) of Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia*. This work provided English readers with their first descriptions of the New World in their own language. However, Eden omitted all references to the Aztecs or Mexico in his publication.[20]

In 1555, Richard Eden found a powerful reason to write, for the first time in England and in English, about the Aztec civilization and its conquest by Spain: the marriage of the English Queen Mary Tudor and the Spanish Prince Philip of Habsburg. In an attempt to demonstrate to English readers the convenience of the royal union and aiming to create a sense of urgency to follow the Spanish example and learn from Spain's deeds in the New World, Eden collated and interpreted Spanish sources, particularly the accounts of Peter Martyr and López de Gómara. It was not that England lacked experience in subduing and colonizing people; this was already taking place in Ireland.[21] Ireland and America were, however, conceived differently. America was not only geographically distant, but also intimately associated with the search for riches and treasures, and especially, with the possibility of competing in the emerging European struggle for power, territories and prestige. Hence, Eden stressed that "England in a few years (had) decayed and impoverished" whereas Spain had been enriched by the wealth from across the Atlantic.[22]

Neither Mary Tudor nor Richard Eden saw any reason why England should compete with Spain in the New World. In fact, Eden expected that the Anglo-Spanish alliance would open a door for the English to American riches, and that the "marvellous discoveries, conquests and empire of the Spaniards; would now become the joint heritage of England."[23] The information that Eden presented was highly pro-Spanish and warmly praised the Spanish conquest. In addition, he acclaimed the riches of the Aztecs and the magnificence of Tenochtitlan. Eden compared the beauty of the Aztec edifices to those of ancient Greece, and described the Aztecs as an advanced people, highly civilized, capable of "writing and reading," wealthy, refined and easily converted to Christianity.[24] The idolatry of the Aztecs was difficult to ignore but Eden managed to present even this as a positive feature. In his view, as the Aztecs were "for the moste parte Idolatours," they were not "hytherto corrupted with any other false religion,"[25] and therefore, could easily be converted to Christianity. Claiming that the Spaniards had released the Aztecs from the tyranny of Satan, Eden justified the subjugation of the Aztec civilization.[26] He argued that the indigenous peoples had obtained the benefit of Christianity from the conquest, in return of their lost freedom, treasures and land.

Remarkably, Eden used what he knew about Tenochtitlan and the Aztecs to emphasize the benefits of discovering and conquering cities and to imply that there were possibilities for England to increase the riches it was obtaining from the Spanish marriage with some of its own. Eden claimed that the English could explore North America, where they would likely find non-Christian peoples who would be happy to offer their land and treasures in exchange for Christianity.[27] The strongest expectation was to find a city similar to that of the Aztecs: "in this lande there are many fayre and frutefull regions. . . . Also cities and towres so wel buylded and people of such ciuilitie."[28] Clearly, Eden sought to construct as attractive a picture of the Aztecs as possible so as to spur further English exploration in the New World. The Aztecs thus became the model of what England wanted to find: wealthy and sophisticated cities inhabited by pagan and idolatrous people, who could be conquered and attracted to the Christian faith, and whose riches would fill English coffers.

No records exist of how many copies of Eden's book were published in England, but it is known that it was handled by four publishers, and that, although the Anglo-Spanish royal marriage ended with Mary Tudor's death in 1558, the book was reprinted in 1577, with a different dedicatory epistle. This suggests that Eden's reading public was reasonably large. Eden's book helped to whet English appetites for Atlantic ventures and, of course, for associated rewards. In doing so, it also evidenced the appeal that the information about the Spanish conquest of Mexico and the Aztecs enjoyed in England and revealed the convenience of using it to promote English interests.

After Elizabeth succeeded to the throne of England in 1558 and returned the country to Protestantism, the Anglo-Spanish relationship was never easy. During the first years, both countries were in a state of qualified amity, but, in less than a decade, rivalry had led to animosity. By 1570 Elizabeth had been excommunicated by Pope Pius V, who absolved Catholics from owing allegiance to the English Queen.[29] This furthered fears in England of plots against Elizabeth and increased suspicion of Spain at the English court. English expeditions to explore North America and to plunder Spanish galleons and American ports became more frequent, and this, added to the support being provided by the English crown to Protestant rebels in the Netherlands against Spain, became an important source of anger and grievance for Philip II, who retaliated by impounding all English vessels in Spanish harbours, thus suspending English trade with Spanish territories.[30]

Up to this point, information in England about the Aztecs and the Spanish conquest had been highly pro-Spanish and apologetic of the conquerors. However, in a framework of growing rivalries with Spain and increasing animosities between Catholicism and Protestantism, English views of the Aztecs were gradually transformed. Spanish sources were viewed with suspicion and the English relied increasingly on Dutch, French, German and Italian sources for information.

II. The English map of Tenochtitlan

In 1572 the first English reproduction of the Aztec city of Tenochtitlan appeared in an elegant manuscript book, entitled *Il Giardino Cosmografico Coltivato,* produced in London by the Italian exile Bartholo Sylva. The book was dedicated to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester and favourite of Queen Elizabeth, and its production involved a group of distinguished English Protestants, mostly of puritan views, which included the evangelical preacher Edward Dering, his wealthy and educated wife Anne, the Italian convert and English informant overseas, Pietro Bizzari, and the Cooke sisters: Mildred, wife of William Cecil, Lord Burghley; Anne, married to Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and mother of the famous Francis; Elizabeth, widow of Sir Thomas Hoby, Ambassador in France; and Katherine, married to Sir Henry Killigrew, a distinguished diplomat and veteran of the Marian exiles. All of them contributed to *Il Giardino* with epigraphs praising Sylva for his manuscript.[31]

There is little known about Bartholo Sylva. His only appearance in historical records indicates that he was from Turin, and practiced medicine in London under the patronage of William Cecil and Robert Dudley.[32] The events that led him to London are obscure. In his preface, Sylva mentions that he served the Spanish in the Netherlands as a surgeon, but he does not recount a religious conversion.[33] He must

have arrived in London, perhaps as a Protestant refugee, at some point before 1560, a date that records mention as the year Sylva was first reprimanded for medical malpractice. He was accused of the same charge in 1570 and sentenced to imprisonment the following year. However, he was soon released and the charges were dismissed on the intervention of Cecil and Dudley.[34] His connection with these two individuals and with the prominent Protestant group is unclear. It might be the case that he was solely hired to produce the manuscript, but it seems, from the eulogies of the dedicatory poems in *Il Giardino*, that he was well-known and respected by the puritans. The proximity of the date of his imprisonment and release in December 1571, with that with which he signed the manuscript in May of that year, may indicate that Sylva had been assisted, either to avoid the interruption of his work or because the manuscript had gained him the favour of Cecil and Dudley, and perhaps even of Queen Elizabeth.[35]

The book, written in Italian – the Queen's favourite modern foreign language[36] – with Greek, French, Latin, English and Spanish epithets, was presented as a compilation of all extant knowledge of the world. Sylva himself did not claim to be the author of all that he wrote. Indeed, he admitted not to know if he could "say something which had not yet been said."[37] The document was not intended to be innovative, but rather to present already acquired knowledge. The English growing sense of the value of knowledge, later expressed in Francis Bacon's "knowledge is power," is suggested by the opening phrase of *Il Giardino*: "Chi non conosce il Mondo, no merita star nel Mondo" (He who does not know the world, does not deserve to live in it).[38] The image of Tenochtitlan was one of the illustrations that accompanied the book. The picture resembled an average European city and contained no referents to indigenous culture and none, except the lake, of the particularities that until then had distinguished Tenochtitlan and the Aztecs in European minds: temples, idols, human sacrifice, exotic buildings, gardens, and so on (Figure 1).

In concordance with the *modus operandi* of many contemporary authors throughout Europe,[39] Sylva freely collected his information from diverse sources, none of which he took pains to quote. Fortunately, it is possible to trace the sources and influences on Sylva's map of Tenochtitlan and to situate it within the framework of extant European maps and images of the same city that circulated in Europe around at the time (Figure 2).

Sylva's image was an identical copy, in colour, of a map of Tenochtitlan that the Flemish cartographer Abraham Ortelius had included in his first production, *Nova totius terrarium orbis*, printed in Antwerp in 1564.[40] Ortelius's map of the Aztec capital appeared in black and white as a small inset in the lower left-hand corner of the wall-size world's map. Although Ortelius did not cite his sources, it is possible to recognize that his map was based on a previous one which Giovanni Battista Ramusio had used in the third volume of his *Navigazioni e Viaggi* (Figure 3).[41] Ramusio, in turn, had obtained his map from one included in a letter by the so called "anonymous conqueror," a Spanish soldier who had accompanied Hernán Cortés to Mexico and who had kept a record of the expedition.[42]

The text with which Sylva accompanied the English image of the city of Tenochtitlan explained, without praising Spain, that the city "had been conquered in 1521 by Hernán Cortés under the orders of Charles V."[43] English admiration and interest in the city were expressed briefly – it was the most beautiful and rich in the

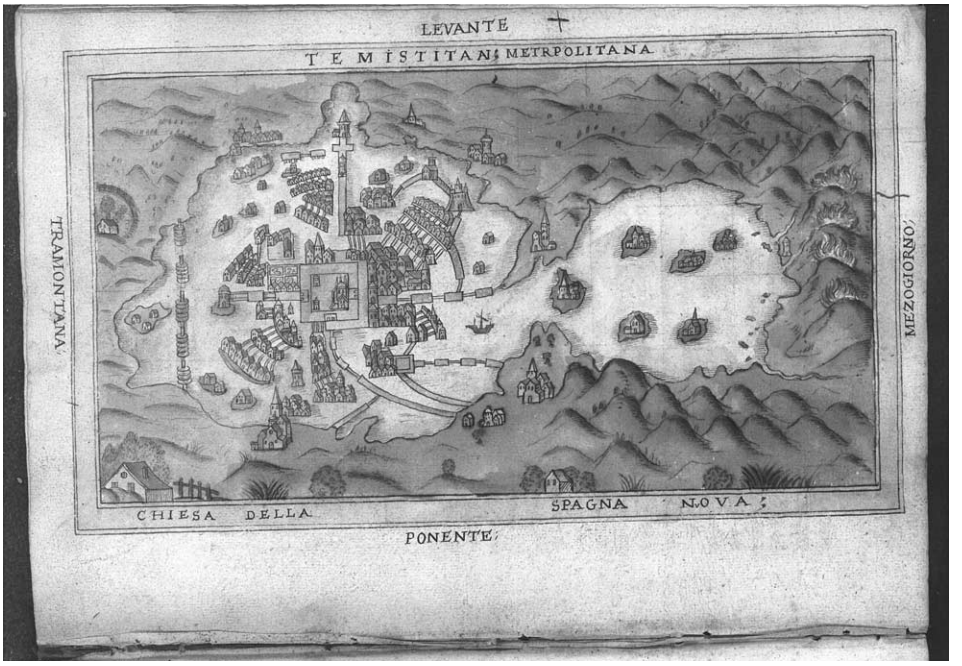

Figure 1. Map of Tenochtitlan by Bartholo Sylva. London, 1571. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library. Source: MS Cambridge University Library Ii.5.37.

whole New World.[44] Although the text was certainly not critical of the Spanish performance in the New World and did not refer to Spanish cruelties or conversion practices, it is relevant that Sylva reproduced Ortelius's map and not any other available European image of Tenochtitlan. Certainly, the increasing Anglo-Spanish rivalry and Philip II's aggressive system of control of the information about Spain's American colonies and trade made it very difficult for Englishmen – and indeed for anyone outside the Spanish royal circles – to gain access to accurate and current maps of the City of Mexico, capital of the viceroyalty of New Spain. In fact, although Tenochtitlan had been conquered in 1521 and the Spanish were rapidly transforming the city, the images of Mexico circulating in Europe, including those published with the consent of the Spanish crown, resembled the pre-Hispanic Tenochtitlan. Ortelius's map, entitled *Messigo Hispaniae Novae Metropolis,* could be regarded as the most accurate and updated available, but that does not seem to have been an important reason for its reproduction in *Il Giardino* as the image was entitled *Temistitan metropolitana* and described it only in its pre-Hispanic state.[45] It seems that Ortelius's world-map and his image of Tenochtitlan circulated widely in Europe, and there is evidence that a number of copies reached England.[46] Moreover, Ortelius was a close friend of Pietrus Bizzari, who was associated with the production of *Il Giardino* and could have suggested the use of Ortelius's map and even provided Sylva with it.[47]

Significantly, Ortelius's map had a peculiar characteristic. In comparison with other existing representations of Tenochtitlan, it was a neutral image that allowed for

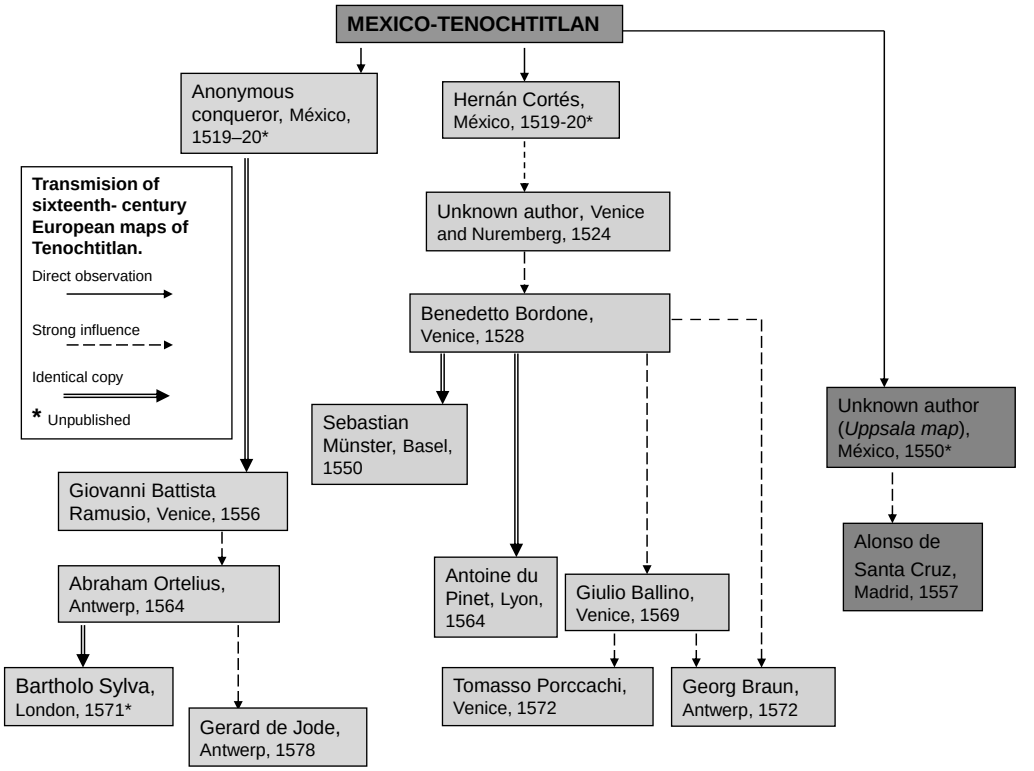

Figure 2. Production and circulation of maps of Tenochtitlan in sixteenth-century Europe.

almost any interpretation. It eliminated Náhuatl names and labels, temples, "exotic" elements, and any trace of the indigenous culture and did not recall the populated, colourful and imposing Tenochtitlan that European authors had praised, nor the prosperous city the Spanish claimed to have constructed after the conquest. Instead, Ortelius's Tenochtitlan resembled a European city, with a church, market square and surrounding neighbourhoods. Ortelius's representation of Tenochtitlan radically transformed the details and patterns that European mapmakers and engravers had followed for decades in their depictions of the Aztec capital. The comparison between the map of Ortelius and other European maps of Tenochtitlan from the same period illustrates this point.

Take for instance, the famous map of Tenochtitlan, which appeared in Venice (labelled in Italian) and Nuremberg (in Latin) in 1524 (Figure 4). This map was presumably based on a sketch drawn by Hernán Cortés using indigenous sources.[48] The map was divided into two parts: on the right, depicting the shores of the Gulf of Mexico and, on the left, presenting the Aztec capital in a circular form, as an idealized medieval town in which a central square was surrounded by small European-style houses.[49] The map portrayed Tenochtitlan in the fashion of Venice, the closest European referent of a city built on water. It showed the palaces of Moctezuma and Axayacátl, the square of Tlatelolco, three causeways across the water, the aqueduct to the mainland, numerous canals, Moctezuma's zoo and, toward the centre of the town, the great temple (Figure 5). The map made clear reference to the Aztec practice of human sacrifice by representing two skull racks, a headless figure and the labels (in Italian); "il templo dove sacrificano" (temple where sacrifices are made) and "le teste delli sacrificati" (sacrificial heads). The Spanish presence in the city was suggested in the map by an oversized flag with the black Habsburg eagle in the right lower corner of the lake.

Other maps produced in later years used the 1524 map as a model. In his book *Isolario,* published in Venice in 1529, Benedetto Bordone rotated the map, restored the missing head of the statue and removed the Spanish flag as well as the references to human sacrifice.[50] Later, in 1555, an exact copy of Bordone's map was used in Switzerland in Sebastian Münster's *Cosmographia* and in France in 1564, in Antoine du Pinet's *Plantz, pourtraitz et descriptions de plesieures villes et fortresses.*[51] Later Giulio Ballino (1569), Tomaso Porcacchi (1672), and Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg (1572) used similar images, all depicting bird's-eye views of the city with a similar composition and including various indigenous elements: pyramids or temples, skull racks, the central statue (with the head but in different positions), and indigenous decorative motifs around the central square. Braun and Hogenberg even included three Aztecs dressed in traditional costumes on a bigger scale in the foreground of their map (Figure 6).[52]

The map of the "anonymous conqueror" which Ramusio used was more detailed than any of the maps that used the image of 1524 as a model. It distinguished between a northern fresh-water lake and a southern salt-water lake and represented, with big burning fires at the top of the image, the volcanoes that surrounded the central valley of Mexico. The map, which as stated above was used by Ramusio without alteration, depicted the central pyramid and showed Náhuatl names for various locations.

Another detailed map of Mexico-Tenochtitlan was included by Alonso de Santa Cruz, royal cosmographer of Charles V, in his 1557 *Islario general de todas las islas del*

Figure 3. Comparison of the maps of Ramusio, 1556 (left) and Ortelius, 1564 (right). Both maps are courtesy of the Syndics of the British Library. Sources: G. B. Ramusio, *Navigazioni e Viaggi*, Venice, 1556; A. Ortelius, *Nova totius terrarum orbis*, Antwerp, 1564.

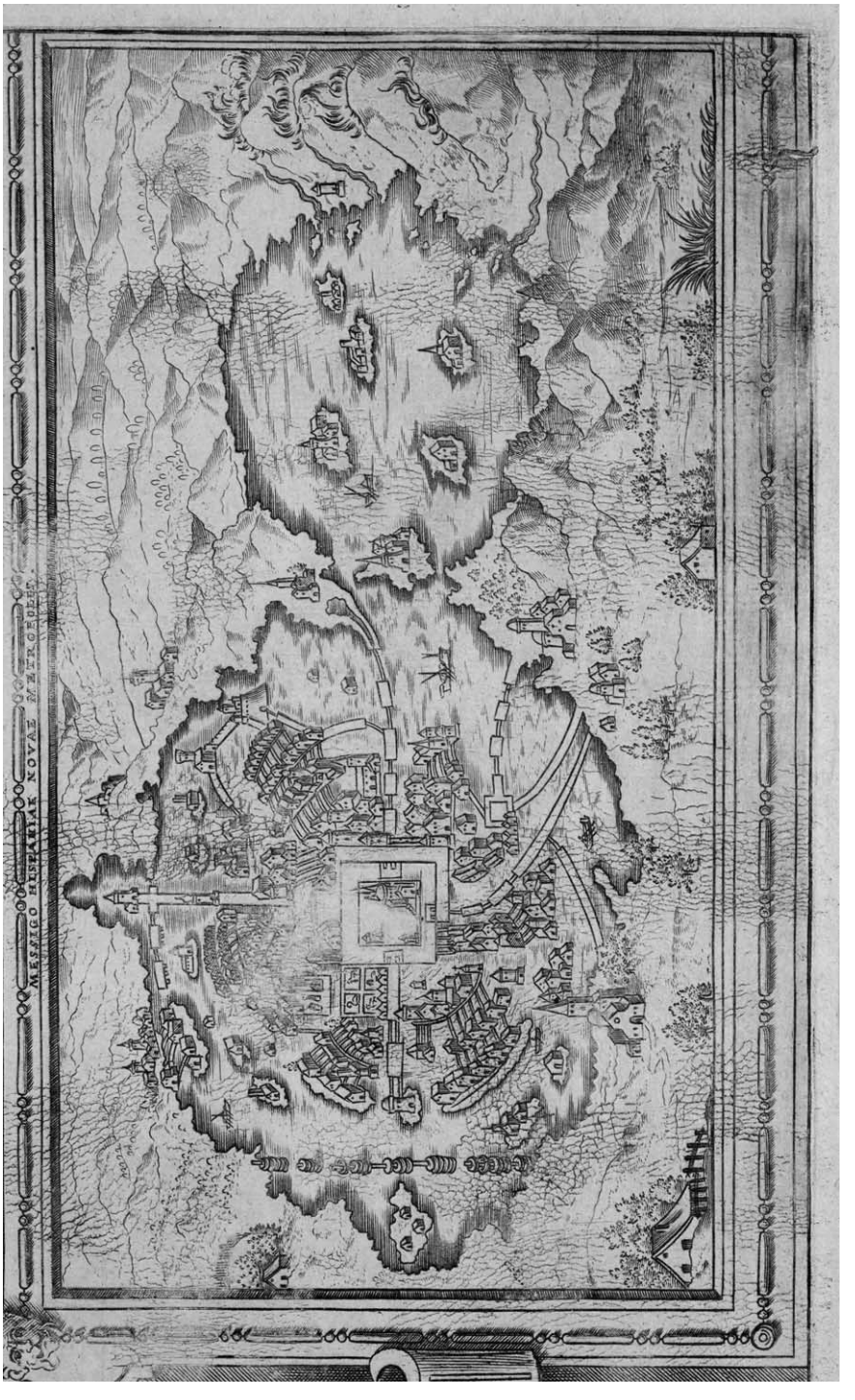

Figure 3a.

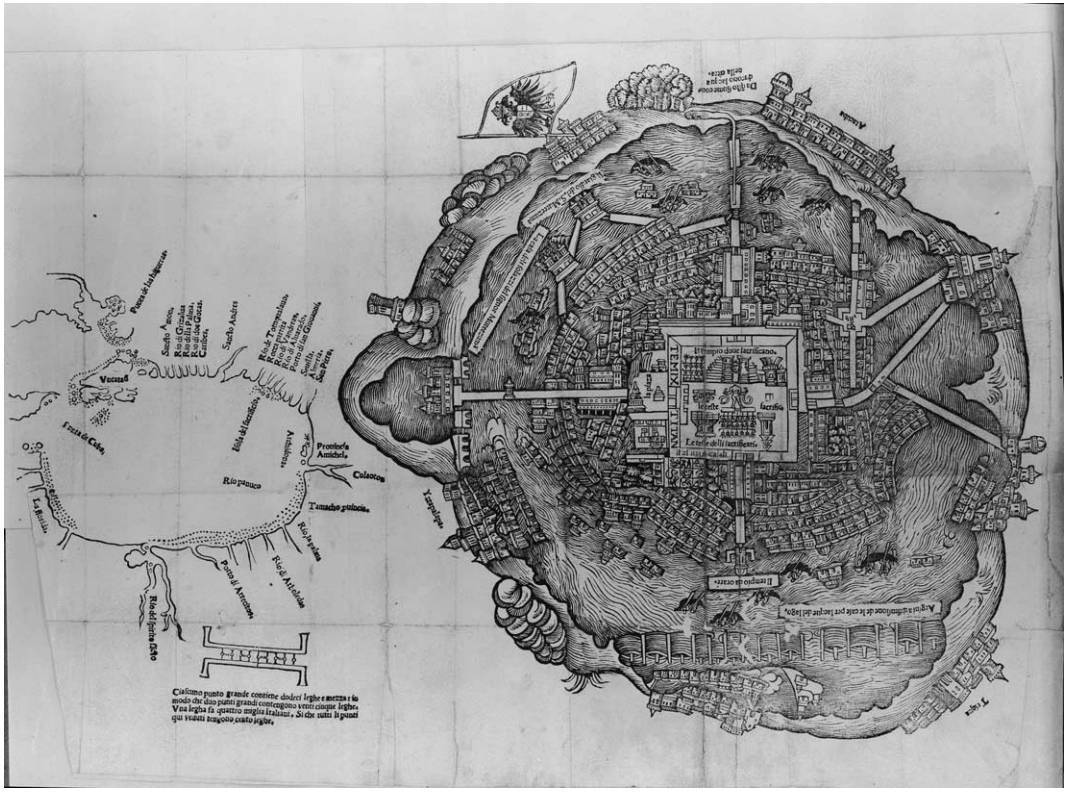

Figure 4. Map of Tenochtitlan, Venice, 1524. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the British Library. Source: H. Cortés, *La preclara narratione della Nuoua Hispagna del mare Océano*, Venice, 1524.

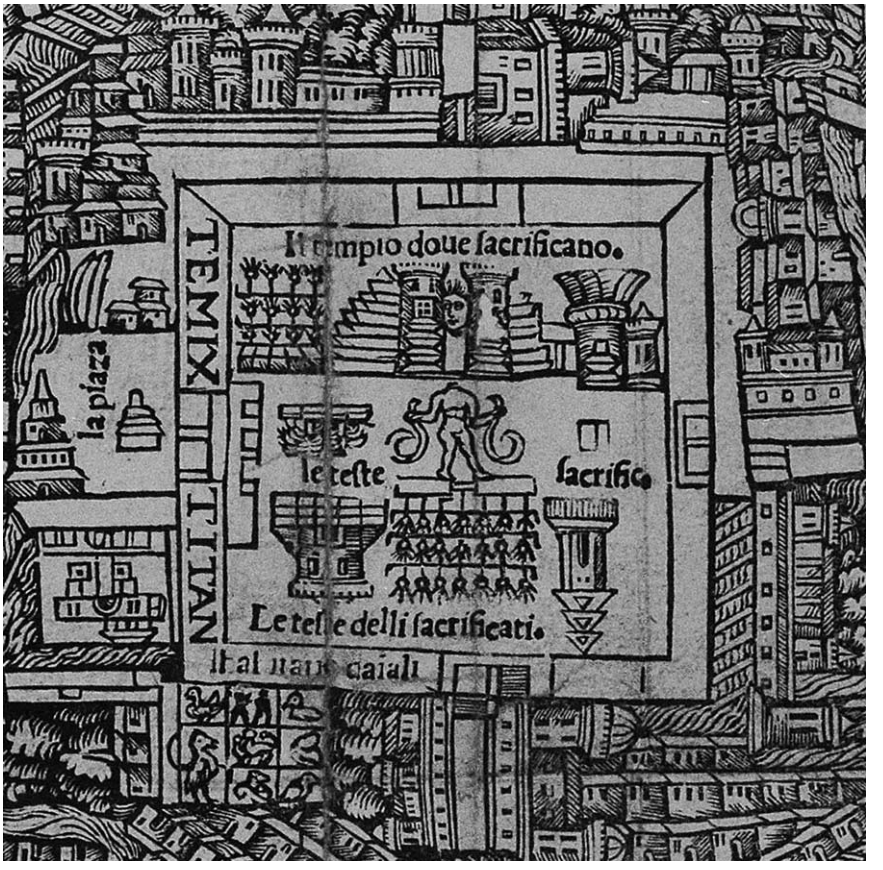

Figure 5. Detail of the map of Tenochtitlan, Venice, 1524. Source: H. Cortés, *La preclara narratione della Nuoua Hispagna del mare Océano*, Venice, 1524).

mundo.[53] It was a simplified version of a previous coloured map of the Valley of Mexico, known today as the "Uppsala map." This map was produced in Mexico around 1550 by Spanish and indigenous artists and shipped to Spain for the enjoyment of the king, who then passed it on to Santa Cruz, the royal cosmographer.[54] The latter's *Islario* circulated in manuscript form and was not printed until the twentieth century.[55] The text accompanying the map in Santa Cruz's *Islario* was highly pro-Spanish. It claimed that "Tenuxtitlan, Mexico" was an example of the righteous and remarkable deeds undertaken by the Spaniards in America, arguing that Cortes had freed the people from the tyranny of Moctezuma and had convinced them to be baptized and to become good Christians.[56] The Spanish map may be read as offering evidence for the benefits of the conquest and the success of the colonization and conversion of the indigenous peoples. It depicts Tenochtitlan in glittering colours as a great European and Christian city – with no temples or idols, only Spanish buildings and churches. The indigenous peoples are wearing traditional clothes and appear contented as they practise their daily activities of fishing and canoeing, as if unaffected by the Spanish conquest (Figure 7).

Figure 6. *Mexico, Regia et Celebris* by Georg Braun and Frans Hogenberg, 1572. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the British Library. Source: G. Braun and F. Hogenberg, *Civitates orbis terrarium*, Cologne, 1572.

Given the growing antagonism between England and Spain, it comes as no surprise that *Il Giardino* avoided glorifying Spain and the conquest of Mexico. Sylva and his readers might have found Ortelius's image much more appealing than others, particularly as it did not refer to the Aztec practice of human sacrifice. This practice was frequently evoked by Spanish authors as an argument in favour of the fairness and holiness of the conquest; avoiding this issue made it easier to question Spanish right to conquest and destroy the Aztecs.

Although *Il Giardino* was never printed, it circulated among crown officers, merchants and scholars; at least among those prominent English noblewomen and noblemen who contributed to its production with laudatory epigraphs in Greek and Latin.[57] The handwriting inscription in the last page of *Il gardino* reads "Illustrisimo Carolo Mountioyo, 1599" and is presumably by Charles Blount, eighth baron

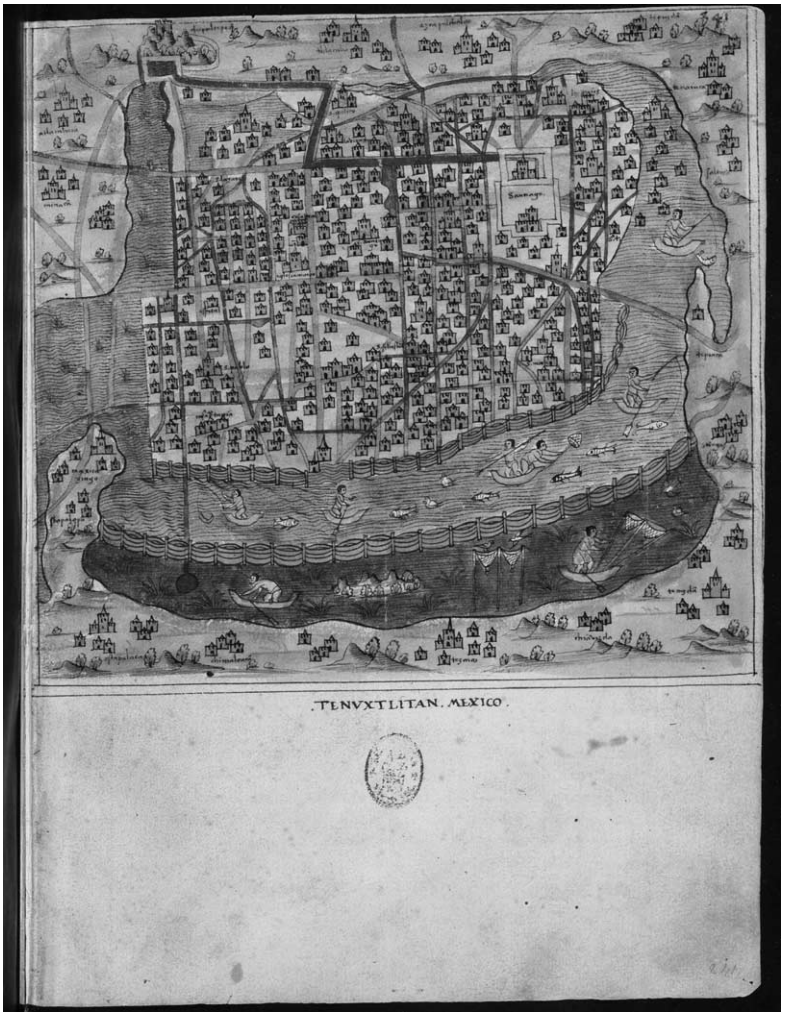

Figure 7. *Tenuxtitan Mexico* by Alonso de Santa Cruz, 1557. Reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of the Biblioteca Nacional de España, Madrid. Source: A. Santa Cruz, *Islario general de todas las islas del mundo*, Valladolid, 1557.

Mountjoy, favourite of Queen Elizabeth and friend of Robert Cecil. It provides evidence that the manuscript circulated widely at least until the end of Elizabeth's reign. Produced at an important transitional moment in Anglo-Spanish relations – when English privateers were breaching Spanish control of the Atlantic, and English writers and promoters of colonial ventures were also breaking through the Spanish monopoly of information of the Americas – Sylva's map illustrates a pivotal moment in English views of the Spanish conquest of Mexico when the English started to see Mexico through a less "Spanish" lens. In the following years, the English were to take control of Spanish narratives of the Aztecs and their conquest and interpret them to generate an anti-Spanish view emphasising the destruction of indigenous cultures and on the cruelties of the conquistadores.

III. English anti-Spanish use of information about the Aztecs

In the second half of the 1570s, Elizabethan printers and authors circulated information about the Aztecs that was motivated by a growing rivalry and a keen competition with Spain. Crown officers, among them William Cecil and Robert Dudley, but also Francis Walsingham, Edward Dyer, Henry Sidney and Christopher Hatton, made deliberate efforts to encourage and sponsor the production of materials containing information which served to foster anti-Spanish sentiments, to promote English exploration and colonial ventures in the New World, and to support English claims to the Americas.

Given that the Spanish claims to the New World rested, among other things, on having been the first to discover and conquer the continent, it is hardly surprising that a legend about a previous Welsh discovery of the Americas appeared in England at this time and that information about the Aztecs was used by authors such as George Peckham and David Powel as evidence of the veracity of the story. Peckham, in his *True reporte of the late discoueries* (published in 1583) alleged that the Welsh prince Madoc, a direct ancestor of the Tudor dynasty, had visited the Americas in the twelfth century, where he had established a realm.[58] Hence, Madoc's subjects were ancestors of the Aztecs and Queen Elizabeth had the right to claim legitimate power over them. The following year Powel substantiated Peckham's argument in his *Historie of Cambria*, providing what he asserted was irrefutable evidence of Madoc's visit to Mexico.[59] He claimed that the indigenous languages of Mexico and Wales were similar and that the Mexicans themselves claimed that "their rulers descended from a strange nation that came thither from a farre countrie."[60] Peckham lifted from López de Gómara the speech that Moctezuma gave to his subjects in the presence of Hernán Cortés as proof that the Aztecs had known of, and still recognized, their subjugation to Prince Madoc:

> Our Forefathers came from a farre countrie, and their King and Captaine who brought them hither, returned againe to his natural countrie, saying, that he would send such as should rule and gouerne vs, if by chaunce he himselfe returned not.[61]

According to Peckham, the speech showed the Aztecs had taken the Spanish to be their "forefathers," and had mistaken Cortés for Prince Madoc. In addition, Powel argued that Mexico was discovered by the English long before either Columbus or Americus Vesputius had led the Spanish there.[62] Some crown officers, predominantly Francis Walsingham, Henry Sidney and William Cecil, were heavily involved in the production and publication of the Madoc legend, and they not only sponsored Peckham and Powel, but also provided them with information relevant to their work. Doubtless, the Madoc legend was seen as a forceful tool of propaganda and was used to strengthen links between England and Wales, as well as to vindicate the English right to claim a share of American riches and lands, and to reinforce the English struggle against Spain. Conscious of its power, Richard Hakluyt, the well-known translator and editor of travel narratives and advocate for the westward expansion, included Madoc's story in his 1589 account of English voyages and travels.[63]

In 1577 two important books were published, *A history of travayle in the West and East Indies*, which was a second English edition of Martyr's *Decades* by Richard Willes, and *The pleasant historie of the conquest of the West India, now called New Spain*, a translation of López de Gómara's account of the Spanish conquest, by

Thomas Nicholas.[64] Both helped to consolidate in English minds the idea of Tenochtitlan and its people as an important source of the glory, power and wealth of Spain. Additionally, they contributed to reinforce a growing English drive to find and possess a city comparable to that of the Aztecs so that commensurate power and prestige could accrue to England. Politicians, travellers and geographers longed to make such a discovery in the northern lands of the American continent. Their hopes were fed by Martin Frobisher, who in 1576 claimed to have found gold in North America and even when the ore turned out to be "fools gold," hopes persisted.[65] The very existence of a city such as Tenochtitlan in the Americas, convinced Elizabethan English minds that it was worth continuing the search for a comparable city, which was imagined to be called either Mania or Norumbega, and was even marked in contemporary maps.[66] John Dee described attempts made to question an Eskimo that Frobisher had taken back to England from one of his voyages in 1577:

> Being asked if they in their country had any Gold or Sylver ... he woulde make evident signe that no such things were to be had in that kingdom... but all was demanded by sign to be at Mania: and pointed westerly towards it. Whereby it would appear that the city or province of Mania is rich, famous and great.[67]

Meanwhile, David Ingram – who was left in New Spain in 1569 when the English fleet of John Hawkins was surprised and defeated by the Spaniards at San Juan de Ulloa – claimed to have seen in North America, during his extended flight from Spanish hands, a city "with streets larger than any of those in London and inhabitants who wore hoops of gold and silver 'garnished with pearls, divers of them as big as one's thumb.'"[68] Ingram's story, though later recognized as not entirely accurate, was published by Hakluyt in 1589.[69] Walter Raleigh's tireless efforts to find El Dorado, a city such as that of the Aztecs, illustrate the strength of feeling and the eagerness to believe that such a discovery was possible. In his book, *A discouery of the large, rich and bewtiful empire of Guiana* (published in 1595), Raleigh stated that the English "shall performe more than euer was done in Mexico by Cortez."[70]

Francis Drake's successful circumnavigation of the world (from 1577 to 1580) increased English ambitions overseas, both in the West and in the East Indies. In this context, Philip II's acquisition of the Portuguese throne in 1581, and his consequent control of Portuguese colonies in South America, India and Africa, only reinforced English determination to prevent the Spaniards from controlling global trade and its profits.[71] Rivalries and antagonisms with Spain made it necessary and convenient to construct a negative image of the enemy. English anti-Spanish opinions and documents joined other anti-Spanish writings in Europe (particularly in Italy, Germany and the Netherlands), fuelling what later came to be known as the "Black Legend" of Spanish cruelty.[72] Within this context of anti-Spanish feelings, English interpretations of information about the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs proved useful. The more bitter the accusations against Spain regarding the suffering of the Aztecs, the more successful the English proved at canvassing support for their economic, political and religious ideas both at home and abroad. English readers learnt that before being conquered by Spain, the Aztecs had already developed their own highly sophisticated civilization, and were living in a prosperous socio-politically organized city. With the documents produced in the 1580s, it was made clear that the Spaniards had not only destroyed the Aztec civilization but also had

inflicted unnecessary sufferings and cruelties on the indigenous population. In addition, they had failed to provide them with the true Christian faith.

In 1583, Bartolomé de Las Casas's *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* appeared in an English translation of the Jacques de Miggrode's French version (printed in Antwerp in 1579) under the title *The Spanish colonie*.[73] The identity of the English translator, who signed himself "M.M.S.," is unknown. The original text was not intended to be anti-colonial or anti-Catholic; on the contrary, Las Casas aimed to improve further Spanish colonial efforts and make sure that they would be based on Catholic doctrine.[74] Nevertheless, his work, which contained information about the destruction of the indigenous peoples of Spanish America, became, in England and elsewhere, the main source for a political campaign against Spain and a useful tool with which to inflame patriotic and nationalistic feelings.

"M.M.S." reproduced Las Casas's denunciation of the "abhominable tyrannies commited in the Citie of Mexico" and his account of how the Spanish killed Moctezuma, and "made an horrible and ghastly butcherie of the Indians, and slue an infinite of people, and brent alive the great Lords."[75] This information about the Aztecs served to reinforce the warning to all Protestants of what could happen to non-Catholic civilized peoples when conquered by the Spaniards, and urged the English to show solidarity with Protestants in the Netherlands in order to stop the threat inherent in a Spanish victory.[76]

Las Casas argued that after the Spanish conquest the Aztecs had been lost as a people, and he lamented deeply "the spoile of the spring of their ancient nobilitie."[77] English readers of Las Casas very likely considered this the end of Aztec glory, with the Aztec culture itself facing imminent extinction. In his preface, "M.M.S." gave voice to this feeling: "Places haue in all degrees bin so maruailous & incredible ... and now lie burie in oblibion ... by the slaughters and murders of these innocent people."[78] It is difficult to establish how genuine English authors were in their concern for the fate of the Aztec people, but it is likely that a society which believed itself to be threatened by an all-too-powerful Spain paused to reflect on how quickly a great civilization had been extinguished by that same power. The unfortunate fate of the Aztecs was added to the list of atrocities attributed to Spain.

In 1587, Las Casas's accounts were resurrected for English readers and given even greater resonance in a pamphlet by William Lightfoot entitled *The complaint of England*.[79] No data exists for us to be able to assess Lightfoot's readership with any degree of accuracy, but the pamphlet's very size and price would suggest it reached segments of the English population that "M.M.S."'s translation of Las Casas did not.[80] Pamphlets were not only cheaper than books, they were also shorter and simpler to read, and were therefore in great demand among people from all social classes, including the middle and labouring poor.[81] The presence of information about the Aztecs in pamphlets makes clear that English awareness of the Aztecs was becoming increasingly broad and that such information was used to promote anti-Spanish and nationalistic feelings.

Lightfoot's anti-Spanish bias crept in as he exaggerated the Spanish cruelties depicted by Las Casas. He highlighted Spanish treachery in arresting Moctezuma on the same day he had welcomed the Spaniards with gifts and hospitality.[82] Then Lightfoot went so far as to describe the Spanish conquerors as cannibals: "they killed and rosted children," "the curres came & straightwaies deuored the infant [...] cut off his arms, then his legs, casting them to his dogs for liuerie."[83] The Spanish

conquest had not only stopped to be seen as a glorious achievement by Spain, but now it was a shameful event with the conqueror portrayed not as hero but as villain. Lightfoot exaggerated the inversion still further by challenging the image of the Spanish conquerors as civilized and Christian, suggesting rather that they were barbarians, cannibals and idolaters.

In 1588, the fact that Philip II mounted the Armada campaign to invade England proved, in English eyes, that the Spanish were guilty of all the charges laid against them; whilst the rapid defeat of the Spanish navy endorsed the idea that England, and not Spain, enjoyed God's favour.[84] No sooner had the battle been won than publications in the form of pamphlets and books began to appear celebrating the victory and fuelling the accusations against Spain. A number of these documents referred to the Aztecs, and their sufferings and agonies under Spanish rule were presented again as evidence of the fate awaiting England had they not defeated the Armada.

Criticism of Spain was not exclusive to the popular press and entertainment literature. Publications such as Hakluyt's *Principal navigations* in 1589, which aimed to promote English expansion and maritime ventures, also referred to Spanish cruelties.[85] Although Hakluyt quoted from "M.M.S."'s translation of Las Casas,[86] the most important contribution of his compendium to anti-Spanish literature came from direct first-hand information about Tenochtitlan, its riches and people after the conquest. This information was gleaned by the author from four Englishmen who had been to New Spain and were thus able to provide "diuers obseruations concerning the state of the Countrey."[87] The four English travellers, Robert Tomson, John Chilton, Miles Philips, and Henry Hawks, confirmed that "Indians ... be a courteous and louing kind of people, ingenious, and of great vnderstanding, and they hate and abhorre the Spaniardes with all their hearts, they haue vsed such horrible cruelties against them, and doe still keepe them in such subiection and seruitude."[88] This suggested that English involvement in the Americas was necessary to prevent the rest of the continent, its peoples and cultures from suffering the same fate. Hakluyt expressed his concern clearly, noting that without English intervention "the Spaniards would soone dispatch all the Indians."[89]

The production and use of information about the Aztecs had given proof of its own power and had yielded, together with other English efforts, successful outcomes for the English in the Americas and in the rest of the world. England had broken the Spanish dominion of the oceans, expanding spectacularly its trade in the Atlantic, the African coast, the Levant, Russia, and the Indian Ocean, and undertaking its first efforts to settle permanently along the east coast of North America. The empathy which the English felt toward the Aztecs in the early years of the 1580s, which emerged from the perception of sharing the threat of Spanish domination, waned as England secured her place in Europe after the defeat of the Great Armada. Thereafter, England's political, cultural and economic ambitions grew. The irony of the situation lay in the fact that while Elizabethan England had eulogized the rich and sophisticated Aztec civilization and had passionately criticized the Spanish conquest, they later found expediency in the agony and destruction of the indigenous peoples. The terrible effects of Spanish conquest and the English narrative of the event saw to it that the Aztecs were now regarded as a people belonging to the past, dissociated from the indigenous present. The surviving native peoples were progressively ignored, while the Aztec past was evoked with curiosity and a degree

of melancholy: "Mexico. O wonderfull and lamentable face of things. That vnmeasurable tracte, and in trueth, another worlde, is wasted and worne away."[90] In English minds, the Aztec civilization survived only as a site of "valuable" information, while the suffering of its peoples was reduced to a rhetorical trope. Evidently, sixteenth-century English interest in the indigenous peoples of Mexico was grounded more in convenience than in a real concern about indigenous cultures or about the suffering of peoples.

Notes on contributor

María Fernanda Valencia-Suárez was born in Mexico and worked, from 2001 to 2005, as a research assistant at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). She collaborated in the Centre for Research on North America (CISAN) and in projects such as the *Great Books of Latin America* and the *Clemente Course for Humanities* in Morelos, Mexico City and Chicago, IL. In 2006, she received her M.Phil. in Historical Studies from the University of Cambridge, UK, where she stayed for the Ph.D. in History. Currently she is working on her dissertation: "The rise and fall of the Aztec Empire through the lenses of English imperial aspirations, 1519–1713."

Notes

1. Cortés, *5 Letters of Cortés*, xii, 86. Cortés's first letter to the Emperor, written in 1519, contained no information about Mexico-Tenochtitlan. It was sent from Veracruz before Hernán Cortés marched towards the Central Valley of Mexico. This first letter was never made public and its contents have only been reconstructed using other documents that make reference to it.
2. The term "Aztec" will be used here to refer to the Nahua indigenous peoples, who called themselves "Mexica" and lived in the area of Mexico-Tenochtitlan in the Central Valley of Mexico, during and shortly after the Spanish Conquest in 1521. It is true that the name "Aztec" was not used by fifteenth or sixteenth-century indigenous people in Mexico, nor by early modern English scholars who rather translated and adopted the term "Mexicanos" used by their Spanish contemporaries. It was not until the nineteenth century that Javier Clavijero, Alexander von Humboldt and William H. Prescott used the term "Aztec" to name the peoples of pre-Hispanic Mexico-Tenochtitlan and the domain they extended over their neighbouring peoples. From then on, this meaning of the term was popularized and adopted widely, particularly after the independence of Mexico in 1810 when it served to distinguish "modern" Mexicans from pre-conquest Mexicans. There have recently been remarkable efforts from scholars in Mexico and Spain to substitute "Aztec" with the more accurate term "Mexica"; however, this word has not yet acquired the appeal, the wide international recognition and the secure hold on the imagination that the term "Aztec" enjoys. Likewise, the option of using the early modern European designation of the indigenous peoples of the Central Valley of Mexico as "Mexicans" would prove rather confusing since its current usage refers to the citizens of present-day Mexico, the country. On the controversies and current debates on the term "Aztec" see León-Portilla, "Aztecas," 307–13; and Barlow, "Some Remarks," 345–9.
3. The only author who has referred specifically to the Aztecs in the context of early modern England is Benjamin Keen in his book *Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 166–72, 206–16. However, Keen left considerable territory unexplored as well as many questions unanswered.
4. Apenes, *Mapas antiguos*; Kagan, *Urban Images;* and Wolff, *America*.
5. Arber, *First Three English Books*, xxi; and Hakluyt, *Principal Nauigations,* 208. Evidence of this sentiment can be found in the works of John Rastell and Robert Thorne.
6. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 47.
7. See Muldoon, *Americas in the Spanish World Order*; Muldoon, "Discovery, Grant, Charter, Conquest, or Purchase"; and Mackenthun, *Metaphors of Dispossession*.

8. McFarlane, *British in the Americas,* 13.
9. Quinn, *England and the Discovery of America*, 160.
10. McGrath, *Bristol and America,* 3–4; and Pieper, *Vermittlung einer neuen Welt*, 272.
11. Höfele, "Introduction," 12; Pieper, "México en los medios de comunicación," 76; and Pieper, *Vermittlung einer neuen Welt,* 25, 239.
12. Burke, "Renaissance Translator as Go-Between," 21.
13. Adams, *Catalogue of Books*, 316. These copies were held at Cambridge University Library, Clare College and Trinity College.
14. Keen, *Aztec Image in Western Thought*, 69.
15. Honour, *New Golden Land,* 58–9.
16. Hampe "Introduction," 22. The first publication of Weiditz's drawings of the Mexican jugglers appeared in Berlin, in 1927.
17. Hakluyt, *Principal Nauigations*, 208; and McGrath, *Bristol and America*, 11.
18. Fritze, *New Worlds,* 215–6.
19. Mancke, "Negotiating an Empire," 236.
20. McFarlane, *British in the Americas*, 14; Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 56, 66–7; and Münster, *Treatyse of the Newe India.*
21. Canny, "Ideology of English Colonization," 575–98; Pagden, "Struggle for Legitimacy," 34; Armitage, *Ideological Origins,* 24–9; and Ohlmeyer, "Civilizinge of Those Rude Parts," 130–43. Ireland had been regarded as part of the English realm since the Norman Conquest. However, England faced problems in effectively reducing and controlling the Irish. Elizabethan England undertook various attempts of conquest and colonization in Ireland.
22. Martyr, *Decades,* 2, 7.
23. Arber, *First Three English Books*, xxxix.
24. Martyr, *Decades*, 7.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 4.
27. Ibid., 16.
28. Ibid., 17.
29. Williams, *American Indian*, 153.
30. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 122.
31. Sylva, *Gardino cosmografico*, v recto-viii verso.
32. Pelling and White, *Physicians.*
33. Sylva, *Gardino cosmografico*, II verso, III recto.
34. Pelling and White, *Physicians.*
35. Drake, *Secret Memoirs*, 31. The *Secret Memoirs of Robert Dudley* mention that it was an Italian surgeon who, by administering some poison, assisted Dudley, in 1573, in permanently removing from the scene the husband of his lover, Lady Douglas Sheffield, who he later secretly married. There is no evidence that Bartholo Sylva was this Italian doctor, nor is there any evidence that Leicester arranged for Sheffield's demise. However, this being true it would explain Sylva–Dudley's bond and the protection that the latter gave to Sylva.
36. Schleiner, *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers*, 40.
37. Sylva, *Gardino cosmografico*, iiii recto. (Translation is mine.)
38. Ibid., i recto. (Translation is mine.)
39. Burke, "The Renaissance Translator as Go-Between," 26.
40. Ortelius, *Nova totius terrarum orbis.* See detail in left corner of plate 8.
41. Ramusio, *Navigazioni e Viaggi*, Vol. 3, 307.
42. Bustamante (ed.), *Conquistador Anónimo,* 9–11.
43. Sylva, *Gardino cosmografico*, lxxxxi. (Translation is mine).
44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Shirley, *Mapping of the World,* 133.
47. Binding, *Imagined corners*, 126, 255.
48. Mundy, "Mapping the Aztec Capital," 13.

49. Cortés, *Preclara narration*, attached map. Scholars have frequently thought the map to be oriented with the Gulf to the left and Tenochtitlan to the right. However, the map was displayed as shown here, following the setting of a copy, held by the British Library, which maintains the original orientation.
50. Bordone, *Isolario*, Libro I, x recto.
51. Münster, *Cosmographia Universalis*, 1535; and Pinet, *Plantz, pourtraitz et descriptions*, 297. The map of Tenochtitlan, included in Münster's original was not incorporated in its translation into English in 1550.
52. Braun and Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis terrarum,* plate after p. 58.
53. Santa Cruz, *Islario.*
54. Linné, *El valle y la ciudad de México*, 165.
55. Santa Cruz, *Islario*, 523.
56. Ibid., 524–5, 36.
57. Sylva, *Gardino cosmografico,* v recto, viii verso. Among them were the evangelical preacher Edward Dering, his wealthy wife Anne, Pietro Bizzari, and the Cooke sisters: Mildred, wife of William Cecil, Lord Burghley; Anne, mother of the famous Francis Bacon; Elizabeth, widow of Sir Thomas Hoby, ambassador in France; and Katherine, married to Sir Henry Killigrew, a distinguished diplomat.
58. Peckham, *True Reporte*, 23–4.
59. Powel, *Historie of Cambria*, 229.
60. Ibid.
61. Peckham, *True Reporte,* 24.
62. Powel, *Historie of Cambria*, 228.
63. Hakluyt, *Principal Nauigations*, 134.
64. Martyr, *History of Trauayle;* and López de Gómara, *Pleasant Historie.* Willes enlarged and completed this second edition of Martyr's *Decades* after Richard Eden died in 1576 leaving his work unfinished.
65. Parker, *Books to Build an Empire*, 69; and McCann, *English Discovery of America*, 155.
66. McCann, *English Discovery of America*, 159.
67. Taylor, *Tudor Geography*, 275–6.
68. Honour, *New Golden Land*, 18.
69. Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 192.
70. Raleigh, *Discouerie of Guiana,* 9.
71. Danvers, *Portuguese in India*, 34–7; McCann, *English Discovery of America*, 135; and Appleby, "War, Politics and Colonization," 62.
72. Juderías, *Leyenda negra.* Juderías, a conservative Spanish crown official, coined this term in 1917.
73. Las Casas, *Brevísima relación*; and Las Casas, *Spanish Colonie.*
74. Scanlan, *Colonial Writing*, 20.
75. Las Casas, *Spanish Colonie*, 46.
76. Ibid., p. 1; and Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*, 88, 124–5, 224–6. The Protestant revolt started in 1569; the following year, Philip sent troops under the command of the Duke of Alba to occupy the country. The revolt persisted even after the death of Philip II in 1598, and was finally crushed in 1621.
77. Las Casas, *Spanish Colonie*, 45.
78. Ibid., 8.
79. Lightfoot, *Complaint of England;* and Watt, *Cheap Print*, 264. Here the word "pamphlet" is understood to be a small, unbound book.
80. Levy, "How the Information Spread," 15.
81. Watt, *Cheap Print,* 3.
82. Lightfoot, *Complaint of England*, 56.
83. Ibid., 57–8.
84. Maltby, *Black Legend in England*, 76; and Rowse, *Expansion of Elizabethan England*, 181.
85. Hakluyt, *Principal Nauigations*, 174, 447–81.
86. Ibid., 174.
87. Ibid., 447.
88. Ibid., 481.

89. Ibid., 468.
90. King, *Lectures vpon Ionas*, 178.

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