

libidinous, make the penis of their husbands swell to such a size as to appear deformed; and this is accomplished by a certain artifice, being the bite of some poisonous animal, and by reason of this many lose their virile organ and remain eunuchs.

They have no cloth, either of wool, flax, or cotton, because they have no need of it; nor have they any private property, everything being in common. They live amongst themselves without a king or ruler, each man being his own master, and having as many wives as they please. The children cohabit with the mothers, the brothers with the sisters, the male cousins with the female, and each one with the first he meets. They have no temples and no laws, nor are they idolaters. What more can I say! They live according to nature, and are more inclined to be Epicurean than Stoic. They have no commerce among each other, and they wage war without art or order. The old men make the youths do what they please, and incite them to fights, in which they mutually kill with great cruelty. They slaughter those who are captured, and the victors eat the vanquished; for human flesh is an ordinary article of food among them. You may be the more certain of this, because I have seen a man eat his children and wife; and I knew a man who was popularly credited to have eaten 300 human bodies. I was once in a certain city for twenty-seven days, where human flesh was hung up near the houses, in the same way as we expose butcher's meat. I say further that they were surprised that we did not eat our enemies, and use their flesh as food, for they say it is excellent. Their arms are bows and arrows, and when they go to war they cover no part of their bodies, being in this like beasts. We did all we could to persuade them to desist from their evil habits, and they promised us to leave off. The women, as I have said, go naked, and are very libidinous, yet their bodies are comely; but they are as wild as can be imagined.

They live for 150 years, and are rarely sick. If they are attacked by a disease they cure themselves with the roots of some herbs. These are the most noteworthy things I know about them.

IB3 Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) Two letters from Mexico

The conquistador Hernán Cortés landed in Mexico on 22 April 1519, having left the Spanish base in Cuba in November of the previous year. After a series of battles and massacres in the autumn of 1519, the conquistadors arrived at the Aztec capital, Tenochtitlan, in November. By July of 1520, Moctezuma was dead and the Aztec Empire is deemed to have fallen by 13 August 1521. This left Cortés in charge of its territory, and as such, one of the most powerful men in the western hemisphere. Between 1519 and 1526, Cortés wrote five long letters – *relaciones* – to the Habsburg emperor Charles V, proclaiming both the importance of his work and his loyalty to the Spanish Crown. We include here extracts from two of them, the first and second. The first letter – dated July 1519 – has been lost, but a copy made by a notary exists and stands in for it. We include an extract here because it contains a list of gifts sent back to Charles V from the New World which must be very close to the works of art from 'the new golden land' seen by Albrecht Dürer in Brussels in the summer of 1520 (Ic2). The second letter, written c.1520 and published in 1522, contains an account of Aztec civilization based on a description of the capital city of Tenochtitlan (Temixtitlan to Cortés). In the present short extracts we have concentrated on Cortés's description of the main Aztec temple and the pyramids ('towers') and religious sculptures it

contained. He also tells of his destruction of them and their replacement by Christian images. Our extracts are taken from *Hernán Cortés: Letters from Mexico*, translated and edited by Anthony Pagden with an introduction by J. H. Elliott, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, pp. 40–45 (the first letter), 102 and 105–6 (the second letter).

THE FIRST LETTER

The gold, jewels, precious stones and articles of featherwork which have been acquired in these newly discovered lands since our arrival here, which you, Alonso Fernández de Puerto Carrero and Francisco de Montejo, who go as representatives of this Villa Rica de la Vera Cruz to the Very Excellent Princes and Most Catholic and Very Great King and Sovereigns, the Queen Doña Juana and the King, Don Carlos her son, are the following:

First a large gold wheel with a design of monsters on it and worked all over with foliage. This weighed 3,800 *pesos de oro*. From this wheel, because it was the best that has been found here and of the finest gold, a fifth was taken for Their Highnesses; this amounted to two thousand *castellanos* which belonged to Them of Their fifth and Royal privilege according to the stipulation that the captain Fernando Cortés brought from the Hieronymite Fathers who reside on the island of Hispaniola and on the other islands. The eighteen hundred *pesos* that remained and all the rest that goes to make up twelve hundred *pesos*, the council of this town bequeath to Their Highnesses, together with everything else mentioned in this list, which belonged to the people of the aforementioned town.

Item: Two necklaces of gold and stone mosaic, one of which has eight strings of 232 red jewels and 163 green jewels. Hanging from the border of this necklace are twenty-seven small gold bells; and in the center of them are four figures in large stone inlaid with gold. From each of the two in the center hang single pendants, while from each of the ends hang four double pendants. The other necklace has four strings of 101 red jewels and 172 which appear to be green in color; around these stones there are twenty-six small gold bells. In this necklace there are ten large stones inlaid with gold from which hang 142 pendants.

Item: Four pairs of screens, two pairs being of fine gold leaf with trimmings of yellow deerskin, and the other two (pairs) of fine silver leaf with trimmings in white deerskin. The remainder are of plumes of various colors, and very well made. From each of these hang sixteen small gold bells, all with red deerskin.

Another item: One hundred *pesos de oro* for melting, so that Their Highnesses may see how the gold is taken from the mines here.

Another item: In a box, a large piece of featherwork, lined with animal skin which in color, seems like that of a marten. Fastened to this piece, and in the center of it, is a large disk of gold which weighed sixty *pesos de oro*, and a piece of blue and red stone mosaic in the shape of a wheel, and another piece of stone mosaic, of a reddish color and at the end of the piece there is another piece of colored featherwork that hangs from it.

Item: A fan of colored featherwork with thirty-seven small rods cased in gold.

Another item: A large piece of colored featherwork to be worn on the head and encircled by sixty-eight small pieces of gold, each of which is as large as a half *cuarto*. Beneath them are twenty little gold towers.

Item: A miter of blue stone mosaic with a design of monsters in the center of it. It is lined with an animal skin which by its color appears to be that of a marten, and

has a small piece of featherwork which, together with the one mentioned above, is of the same miter. [...]

Item: Some screens of blue stone mosaic, lined with a skin which by its color seems to come from a marten; and from each one of them hang fifteen small gold bells....

Furthermore, two pieces of colored featherwork which are for two pieces of gold, made like large shells and worn on the head.

Furthermore, two birds with green plumage and their feet, beaks and eyes made of gold. These are put on one of those pieces of gold that resemble shells.

Furthermore, two large ear ornaments of blue stone mosaic which are for the large alligator head.

In another square box, a large alligator head in gold, which is the one mentioned above where the aforementioned pieces are to be put.

Also, a helmet of blue stone mosaic with twenty small gold bells hanging round the outside of it with two strings of beads above each bell: and two ear ornaments of wood with gold plates. [...]

Item: A large buckler of featherwork trimmed on the back with the skin of a spotted animal. In the center of the field of this buckler is a gold plate with a design such as the Indians make, with four other half plates of gold round the edge, which together form a cross.

Another item: A piece of featherwork of various colors made in the manner of a half chasuble, lined with the skin of a spotted animal. This, the lords of these parts, which we have seen up to now, hang from about their necks. On the front it has thirteen pieces of gold very well fitted together.

Item: A piece of colored featherwork, made in the manner of a jousting helmet, which the lords of this land wear on their heads. From it hang two ear ornaments of stone mosaic with two small bells and two beads of gold; and above there is a piece of featherwork of broad green feathers, while below hang some white hairs.

Furthermore, four animal heads, two of which seem to be wolves, the other two tigers, with some spotted skins: from these heads hang some small bronze bells....

Furthermore, a large silver wheel which weighed forty-eight silver marks, and also some bracelets, some beaten [silver] leaves; and one mark five ounces and forty *adarmes* of silver; and a large buckler and another small one of silver, which weighed four marks and two ounces; and another two bucklers which appear to be silver and which weighed six marks and two ounces; and another buckler, which likewise appears to be of silver, which weighed one mark and seven ounces, which is in all sixty-two marks of silver. [...]

THE SECOND LETTER

This great city of Temixtitan is built on the salt lake, and no matter by what road you travel there are two leagues from the main body of the city to the mainland. There are four artificial causeways leading to it, and each is as wide as two cavalry lances. The city itself is as big as Seville or Córdoba. [...]

There are, in all districts of this great city, many temples or houses for their idols. They are all very beautiful buildings, and in the important ones there are priests of their sect who live there permanently; and, in addition to the houses for the idols, they also have very good lodgings....

Amongst these temples there is one, the principal one, whose great size and magnificence no human tongue could describe, for it is so large that within the precincts, which are surrounded by a very high wall, a town of some five hundred inhabitants could easily be built. All round inside this wall there are very elegant quarters with very large rooms and corridors where their priests live. There are as many as forty towers, all of which are so high that in the case of the largest there are fifty steps leading up to the main part of it; and the most important of these towers is higher than that of the cathedral of Seville. They are so well constructed in both their stone and woodwork that there can be none better in any place, for all the stonework inside the chapels where they keep their idols is in high relief, with figures and little houses, and the woodwork is likewise of relief and painted with monsters and other figures and designs. All these towers are burial places of chiefs, and the chapels therein are each dedicated to the idol which he venerated.

There are three rooms within this great temple for the principal idols, which are of remarkable size and stature and decorated with many designs and sculptures, both in stone and in wood. Within these rooms are other chapels, and the doors to them are very small. Inside there is no light whatsoever; there only some of the priests may enter, for inside are the sculptured figures of the idols, although, as I have said, there are also many outside.

The most important of these idols, and the ones in whom they have most faith, I had taken from their places and thrown down the steps; and I had those chapels where they were cleaned, for they were full of the blood of sacrifices; and I had images of Our Lady and of other saints put there, which caused Mutezuma and the other natives some sorrow. First they asked me not to do it, for when the communities learnt of it they would rise against me, for they believed that those idols gave them all their worldly goods, and that if they were allowed to be ill treated, they would become angry and give them nothing and take the fruit from the earth leaving the people to die of hunger. I made them understand through the interpreters how deceived they were in placing their trust in those idols which they had made with their hands from unclean things. They must know that there was only one God, Lord of all things, who had created heaven and earth and all else and who made all of us; and He was without beginning or end, and they must adore and worship only Him, not any other creature or thing.