

TEXTBOOK PASSAGE - CORTÉS AND MOCTEZUMA

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

DIRECTIONS

Please read the textbook passage below and answer the following questions.

A small group of conquistadors led by Hernán Cortés reached Mexico in 1519. They were looking for gold. Hearing of this arrival, the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma II, believed Cortés to be a god. According to an Aztec legend, the god **Quetzalcoatl** was to return to Mexico in 1519. Cortés resembled the god's description from the legend.

Thinking that the god had returned, Moctezuma sent Cortés gifts, including gold. With getting more gold his motive, Cortés marched to the Aztec capital. When he got there, Moctezuma welcomed him, but Cortés took the emperor prisoner.

Source: A 2006 history textbook titled World History: Medieval to Early Modern Times.

GLOSSARY

Quetzalcoatl
the Aztec feathered serpent god; as the god of life, learning, and wisdom, he is one of the most important deities in Aztec mythology

QUESTIONS

(1) Who was Hernán Cortés?

(2) Who was Moctezuma?

(3) What happened when Cortés met Moctezuma in 1519?

DOCUMENT A - CORTÉS'S ACCOUNT (MODIFIED)

In his letter to King Charles, Cortés describes meeting Moctezuma and claims that Moctezuma told the following story about the origins of the Aztec people:

After being seated Moctezuma spoke as follows:

“We learned from our ancestors that those of us who inhabit this region descend from strangers who came here from a very distant land. We have also learned that a prince brought our people into these parts, and then returned to his native land.

“Much later, the prince returned to this region and found that his people had intermarried with the native inhabitants. When he asked them to return with him, they were unwilling to go, nor were they willing to see him as their leader, so he left. We have always heard that his descendants would come to conquer this land.

“From what you say of the great king who sent you here, we believe that your king is our natural leader. Especially because of the direction from which you say you have come, and because you say that you first learned of us a long time ago.

“Therefore be assured that we will obey you. And you have the power in all this land to command what is your pleasure, and it shall be done in obedience, and all that we have is at your disposal. And since you are in your own proper land and your own house, rest and refresh yourselves after your journey.”

Source: Letter by Hernán Cortés to King Charles V, written in 1520.

DOCUMENT B - THE FLORENTINE CODEX

Moctezuma addressed Cortés in these words: “Our lord, you are very welcome in your arrival in this land. You have come to satisfy your curiosity about your noble city of Mexico. You have come here to sit on your throne, which I have kept for you. . . . For I am not just dreaming, not just sleepwalking, not seeing you in my dreams. I have been worried for a long time, looking toward the unknown place from which you have come. Our ancestors said that you would come to your city and sit upon your throne. And now it has been fulfilled, you have returned. Go enjoy your palace, rest your body. Welcome our lords to this land.”

Source: Excerpt from the Florentine Codex, an account of Aztec life originally written by Mexican natives between 1570-1585 under the supervision of Spanish friar Bernardino de Sahagún, whose primary goal was to convert the natives of Mexico to Christianity.

DOCUMENT C - HISTORIAN MATTHEW RESTALL

These two excerpts come from historian Matthew Restall's book *Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest*. Restall is a professor of history at Penn State University and is considered to be one of the world's leading scholars of colonial Latin American history. In Excerpt 1, Restall offers a possible explanation for why Moctezuma told Cortés that he had been expecting him.

Excerpt 1

[In royal Aztec culture], to be polite and courteous one must avoid speaking **bluntly** or directly, which requires saying the opposite of what one means. Thus Moctezuma's assertion that he and his **predecessors** were just safeguarding the rulership of the **Mexica** empire in anticipation of Cortés's arrival is not to be taken literally. It is . . . meant to convey the opposite — Moctezuma's stature . . . — and to function as a courteous welcome to an important guest.

Source: Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest, written by Matthew Restall in 2003.

GLOSSARY

bluntly
abruptly or straight to the point

predecessors
those who came before

Mexica
Aztec

In Excerpt 2, Restall offers a possible explanation for why Spanish priests said that Moctezuma believed Cortés was Quetzacoatl.

Excerpt 2

[The **Franciscans**'] concerns were more religious than political, and [their] emphasis was on the **legitimacy** and divine approval of Christianization campaigns. . . . [**Motolinía** seized upon the idea] that Mexico's natives somehow anticipated the arrival of the Spaniards — an anticipation that proved the Conquest was part of God's plan for the Americas. For this reason, Franciscans such as Motolinía appear to have invented the Cortés-Quetzalcoatl identification after Conquest.

Source: Seven Myths of the Spanish Conquest, written by Matthew Restall in 2003.

GLOSSARY

Franciscans
Catholic missionaries

legitimacy
justification

Motolinía
a Spanish missionary who wrote books on Aztec history

MOCTEZUMA & CORTÉS - GUIDING QUESTIONS

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

QUESTIONS - DOCUMENT A

(1) Who wrote Document A? _____

When? _____

(2) Who was the recipient of Document A? _____

How might this influence the content of Document A?

(3) According to Document A, what did Moctezuma say to Cortés?

(4) Does Document A corroborate the textbook account?

(5) What is one reason Document A would be a reliable source to understand what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés?

(6) What is one reason Document A would not be a reliable source to understand what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés?

CONTINUE 

QUESTIONS - DOCUMENT B

(1) Who wrote Document B? _____

When? _____

(2) Who supervised the writing of Document B? _____

How might this influence the content of Document B?

(3) According to Document B, what did Moctezuma say to Cortés?

(4) Does Document B corroborate the textbook account?

(5) What is one reason Document B would be a reliable source to understand what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés?

(6) What is one reason Document B would not be a reliable source to understand what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés?



(7) How does Document A compare to Document B?

QUESTIONS - DOCUMENT C

(1) Who wrote Document C? _____

When? _____

Based on this information, do you think this is a reliable account of what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés? Why or why not?

(2) According to Document C, why did Moctezuma tell Cortés that the Aztecs had been expecting him?

(3) According to Document C, why did Spanish missionaries claim that Moctezuma believed Cortés was Quetzacoatl?

(4) How does Document C's account of what happened when Moctezuma met Cortés compare to Document A and Document B?



QUESTIONS

(1) What is one reason why you might believe that Moctezuma welcomed Cortés into the Aztec capital?

(2) What is one reason why you might **NOT** believe that Moctezuma welcomed Cortés?

(3) Based on these three documents, how confident are you in knowing what happened during their first meeting? Explain.
