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## THE LAST WORD ON "MONTEZUMA"

Benjamin M. Read

Those who read the *Santa Fe New Mexican* may recall, in its issue of May 23, 1925, my article on the origin and history of the name "Montezuma", in which I comment on the so-called New Mexico Indian traditions: that Montezuma was born at the Indian pueblo of Pecos, whence he rode, centuries ago, on the back of an eagle to the site of the present City of Mexico; that the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico are related to the Aztecs of Old Mexico; that "Montezuma" is an Aztec word which had its origin in New Mexico - the truth of all of which statements I denied in my article.

## THE NAME "MONTEZUMA" OF SPANISH ORIGIN

The word "Montezuma", in its original use, was undoubtedly pronounced differently by the ancient Aztecs from the form in which it has been embalmed by historical writers. The first historian to give us the ancient Aztec pronunciation of the name was Fr. Bernardino Sahagún, who went to Mexico shortly after the conquest by Hernan Cortés. Father Sahagún's first work in the New World was the preparation of a History of the Discovery and Conquest of the West Indies, which he recorded in the Aztec language in twelve volumes, of which the ninth volume deals with the history and conquest of the Aztec Empire. Sahagún's work was translated and published years later in Spain. In chapter one of the volume noted, in referring to the first embassy despatched by Montezuma to interview Juan de Grijálva, captain of the expedition sent by Velázquez from Cuba to Mexico, who had just arrived with

his fleet at "San Juan de Ulua,"<sup>1</sup> Father Sahagún says, in regard to Grijálva's business in the New World, that the chief of the embassy, on being asked by Grijálva who had sent him, replied that the great ruler "Mochtecuзуoma" had sent them to meet the Spaniards. Bandelier, in his article "The Montezuma of the Pueblo Indians,"<sup>2</sup> says: "There is no need of proving that the name of the Mexican "Chief of men" (Tlaca-tecuhtli) who perished while in the custody of the Spaniards under Hernándo Cortés in 1520, was Mo-techu-zouma, literally "Our Wrathful Chieftain." Bandelier then adds: "Bernal Díaz del Castillo, an eyewitness and the much-prejudiced author of the 'True History of the Conquest of Mexico,' is responsible for the corruption into Montezuma, which has since become popular and most widely known."

Further on Bandelier says:

"No mention is made of Montezuma in Spanish documents on the Southwest of an earlier date than 1664, when speaking of the (then recently discovered) ruins of Casas Grandes, in northwestern Chihuahua, Francisco de Gorraéz Beaumont and Antonio de Oca Sarmiento speak of those buildings as the old 'houses of Montezuma.'

In prehistoric times, and as early as 1440, the Indian name of the fifth king of the Aztecs was "Ilhuicamina Mochtecuзoma," but it seems that officially he was known as Mochtecuзoma only, which was, as above stated, corrupted by the Spaniards into Montezuma and Moctezuma (as claimed by Bandelier).<sup>3</sup>

The first time the name "Montezuma" was used was on the arrival of Cortés at Vera Cruz, and the first Spaniard to use it, or rather to corrupt its pronunciation, was Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who, in relating the interview be-

1. This is the name given by Grijálva to the small island opposite Vera Cruz where stands the ancient Spanish fortification known by that name to this day, at which place Grijálva's fleet had arrived on Saint John's day, June 24, 1518.

2. *American Anthropologist*, vol. V. pp. 319-326, Washington, October 1892.

3. In connection therewith see Leduc, Lara y Pardo, *Diccionario de Geografía, Historia y Biografías Mexicanas*, p. 631.

tween Cortés and the Indian chief of the embassy which the Aztec emperor sent to Cortés, stated that he was a servant of the great Montezuma, his Lord, who had sent them there to learn who the Spaniards were and what they were seeking and, further, to ascertain if they were in need of anything, and, if so, to provide them with all things for which they might ask.<sup>4</sup>

It is well to observe that in my reference to original authorities I have preferred those who either heard the name first from the lips of the Aztec Indians during the time of the conquest by Cortés in 1519-21, like Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who was not only one of the conqueror's most valiant soldiers, but was also the historian of and co-conqueror in that remarkable achievement, or who, like Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, who arrived in Mexico five or six years after the fall of the Aztec capital in August, 1521, and who was the first Spanish author to learn the Mexican language and to write, in that language, the first History of the Conquest, above cited. The next early author of the history of the conquest to be considered is no less a person than a son of one of the companions of Cabeza de Vaca during the most notable journey recorded in the annals of the New World. I refer to Cabeza de Vaca's journey from Florida to Mexico in 1528-36. This author was—

#### BALTAZAR DORANTES DE CARRANZA

Baltazar Dorantes de Carranza was the son of Andrés Dorantes de Carranza who accompanied Cabeza de Vaca across the continent from Florida to Mexico, as above

4. "Y dende obra de media aora que obimos surgido vinieron dos Canoas muy grandes, que en aquellas partes, a las canoas grandes, llaman piraguas y en Ellas binieron muchos yndios mexicanos, y como vieron los Estandartes y El navio grande conozieron que alli avian de yr a hablar al capitan y fueronse derechos al nabio y entran dentro y pregutan qual Era El Tatuan que en su lengua dizen El senor y doña marina que bien lo entendió, porque sabia muy bien la lengua, se le mostró a Cortés y los yndios hizieron mucho acato a Cortés. A su Vsanza y le dizeron que fuese bienvenido. E que vn criado del gran montezuma, les enviava A saber que hombres eramos, E que buscavamos E que si algo oviesemos menester para nosotros y los navios que se los dixesemos." — Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, vo., I. pp. 105-06.

stated. Baltazar's mother was a lady of the Aztec nobility. Baltazar wrote, in 1604, a complete genealogy of all the Spanish explorers, conquerors, laborers, soldiers, etc., under the title *Sumaria Relación de las Cosas de la Nueva España*. In referring to the Aztec emperor (p. 7) Baltazar calls him "Motectzumatzin". This work was not discovered until 1902, when, as stated by its discoverer, Don Jose María de Agreda y Sánchez, it was published under the auspices of the Museo Nacional of Mexico.

#### BALTAZAR DE OBREGON

Baltazar de Obregon, well known as the first historian of Mexican nationality, wrote several books toward the close of the sixteenth century. Among his more notable works, was the *Historia de los Descubrimientos Antiguos y Modernos de Nueva España*, written in 1584. This manuscript was not known to exist until the year 1924 when it was discovered by the Rev. Mariano Cuevas, S. J.,<sup>5</sup> and, like the *Sumaria Relación* of Baltazar Dorantes de Carranza, was published by the Department of Public Education of Mexico in the year named. In his references to the Aztec emperor, Obregon calls him by the name "Moctezuma" (chap. I, p. 9), a fact showing that many of the first historians of Spanish and Mexican extraction used both the original and the corrupted name of that ruler, some employing the name "Montezuma" following the corrupted change made by Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and others recording "Moctezuma" or the original name "Mocthecuzoma". Referring to this unfortunate misspelling of the original Indian name, Bandelier says:<sup>6</sup>

"It is interesting how that misspelling has taken hold of the public mind, how it has completely supplanted the original true orthography and meaning. Meaning even is out of place here, for, while *Moteczuzoma* is a legitimate

5. *Revista Católica*, El Paso, Tex., Feb. 15, 1925, also *Western American*, El Paso, Tex., Feb. 14, 1925.

6. *Op. cit.*, p. 319.

Nahuatl word with a very plain signification, and also a typical Indian personal name, *Montezuma* has no signification whatever; and yet, in Mexico, even the Nahuatl Indians - those who speak the Nahuatl language daily - know only Montezuma and would hardly recognize the original name as applicable to him, whom they have been taught to call an 'emperor'."

Further on Bandelier says: "The confusion between those two personages had already been procreative of a mythical Montezuma in the minds of the educated people. Is it to be wondered at if that mythical figure took a still stronger hold on the conceptions of the simple Indian?"

#### THE NAME IN NEW MEXICO

We will now consider the Montezuma worshipped by our Pueblo Indians and its probable introduction here in New Mexico.

In 1882, Hon. W. G. Ritch, then Secretary of the Territory of New Mexico, published a pamphlet under the title *New Mexico, A sketch of its History and Review of its Resources*, in which (p. 11) the author makes a statement that, so far as my researches go, is not substantiated by any "written record which is to be found in some of the pueblos." No creditable present-day historian can vouch for Mr. Ritch's statement, although one well-known author, Mr. Adolf F. Bandelier, ten years after Ritch's book, appeared, published his article on the "'Montezuma' of the Pueblo Indians", above cited, which, it is fair to presume, was written by Bandelier for the purpose of refuting Ritch's story. In a statement shrouded in doubt, Bandelier tries to explain the existence of Ritch's "written record" respecting Montezuma, and, although he does not claim to have seen any such document, he says that Bishop Lamy told him that he (the Bishop) had seen it at the Pueblo of Jemez. The importance and relationship of Ritch's essay and Bandelier's article are so apparent that it justifies the reproduction of both. We will take them in their chronological order. The Ritch statement follows:

"A written record which is to be found in some of the Pueblos is that Pecos pueblo was the birth-place of Montezuma; that after he had grown to man's *state*<sup>7</sup> he showed himself possessed of supernatural powers; that he at a certain time assembled a large number of his people and started from New Mexico on a journey south, Montezuma riding on the back of an eagle; and thus riding in advance, was to his people as was the star to the wise men of the East. The sign of arriving at the site of the great city and capital of the Aztec nation was to be the alighting of the eagle upon a cactus bush and devouring a serpent. This event took place when the eagle arrived at the site of the present city of Mexico, then first made a city and capital."

One may assume that Ritch had read the history of the conquest of Mexico, and very likely had been told that the Pueblo Indians had been brought up with that tradition in their minds. Omitting the unfounded theories of those who have given to the world the Montezuma myth, the question naturally presents itself, Where did the Pueblo Indians first receive the information about the legend? I have never been able to find any plausible answer to this question, unless we reach the conclusion that the first Spaniards who came to New Mexico had related to the Pueblo Indians the semi-historical story about the Aztecs having migrated into Mexico from the North. Be that as it may, Montezuma was not born in New Mexico, neither is there any traceable connection between the Aztecs and the Pueblo Indians.

#### ADOLPH F. BANDELIER

Referring to the probable time when the Montezuma-New Mexico myth reached New Mexico, Bandelier states:

"We now come to the time when the Montezuma story assumed a prominent position among the New Mexican Pueblos. The manner in which this happened is not devoid of interest.

"In the year 1846, when war between the United States and Mexico was imminent, a singular document was con-

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7. "Estate"?

8. *Op. cit.*, pp. 323-4.

cocted (according to its tenor, at least) in the City of Mexico. It is written in Spanish and was, to my knowledge, never printed, but exists in several manuscript copies in New Mexico. It purports to be a 'History of Montezuma'. Beginning with the folk-tale current among the Tehuas about their hero god Pose-yemo or Pose-ueve, it applies that part of the story relating to the latter's childhood to the childhood of Montezuma, and then goes on to relate the career of the latter, of his sister and mother, etc., until it makes of him a conqueror of Mexico. There Montezuma becomes connected with the Malinche. What the Malinche was is well known. The name itself is a corruption of the Spanish name Marina by the Nahuatl, who, not having the letter 'r' in their alphabet, substituted always the letter 'l', thus making "Malina" out of 'Marina'. Marina was the interpreter *en chef* of Cortés during his conquest of Mexico. The document cited makes of the Malinche a daughter of Montezuma, and, after bringing Cortés and his conquest and victory over Montezuma, concludes by marrying Malinche to Cortés, and by representing New Mexico as part of the dower which the Indian maiden brought to her Spanish husband. Such document, manufactured at a time when an American invasion of New Mexico was apprehended, written at the City of Mexico and circulated in every New Mexican pueblo [?] that could be reached, is plainly what may be called a 'campaign document', conceived in view of strengthening the claims of Mexico upon New Mexico in the eyes of the Pueblo Indians and refuting anything to the contrary that might be anticipated from the side of the United States. It is written in a style peculiarly within the grasp of the Indian, it being Spanish after the fashion in which the Pueblo Indian uses that language in conversation. Whether written in New Mexico and only dated from the capital, or written at that capital, it is certain that the author deserves great credit for the shrewdness with which he has adapted both story and style to the imagination and power of understanding of the aborigines. Since the circulation of that document the story of Montezuma has become stereotyped in the mouths of many Pueblo Indians, and when interrogated by tourists and ethnological volunteers they repeat it with greater or less precision."

We will now listen to Mr. Bandelier's statement re-

garding the source of his information on the existence of the alleged Montezuma document:

"I never succeeded in seeing it, but the Most Reverend Archbishop of Santa Fe [Lamy], during one of his official visits to Jemez, obtained permission to peruse the mysterious volume. It proved to be, as we ascertained by comparing it with a copy in my possession, a copy of the letters (*Cartas*) of Cortés edited by Lorenzana and illustrated with pictures of Mexican costumes. From this book, the existence of which was known to all the Pueblos [?], and about the contents of which they had been partially informed, it would have been easy to gather material for the 'History of Montezuma' of 1846, and it is not unlikely that it has been the source of the latter, except of the introductory portions, which embody a genuine tradition of the Tehua Indians, which was easy to obtain from any one of the more communicative members of that or of any neighboring tribe. The Montezuma of New Mexico, is, therefore, in its present form a modern creation."

We will now hear Bancroft: but I wish first to avail myself of the opportunity to express to Mr. F. W. Hodge, of the Museum of the American Indian, my thanks for his valuble assistance, for it was through him that I obtained Bandelier's interesting paper, by the loan of his own printed copy, without which this would have remained incomplete.

#### HUBERT HOWE BANCROFT

Mr. Bancroft says:<sup>10</sup>

"It is also still the custom of most writers to refer to the ruins and relics of this region as undoubtedly of Aztec origin, and to adopt more or less fully the theory that the ancestors of the Pueblo tribes were Aztecs left in Arizona during the famous migration from the north-west to Mexico. As the reader of my *Native Races* is aware, it is my belief that no such general migration occurred, at least not within any period reached by tradition; but whether this belief is well founded or not, I have found no reason to modify my position that the New Mexican people and cul-

9. *Ibid.*

10. *History of Ariz., and N. M.*, pp. 4-5.

ture were not Aztec. The Montezuma myth of the Pueblo communities, so far at least as the name is concerned if not altogether, was certainly of Spanish origin."

#### CONCLUSION

The above résumé is, so far as my knowledge of the alleged legend is concerned, all there is to the so-called tradition regarding the migration and relationship of the Aztecs, — the origin of the name Montezuma, and of the alleged flight of that ruler from Pecos pueblo in New Mexico to the City of Mexico.